

Slightly Damp Clothes In the Morning

by S.H. Gall

I've never approached the man. If I want to really know his story, the one that connects him to the world, any facts would be a barricade. So I let others befriend him and learn whys and hows. I want to know the truth.

It begins with his positioning. He can be found most mornings seated somewhere between the liquor store on Barnes Street, and the CVS around the corner on Second Avenue. Regardless of the season or the severity of the weather, he dresses for the conditions and sits with his back to the wall, knees in the air. He doesn't beg for change. He just sits, watching people from behind and between his bony old knees.

He's been doing this vigil thing for about a year now. He's quite thin, gaunt really; he wears a trim gray beard and there is a tranquility in his gaze that befits his ascetic tendencies. There are a handful of regulars that chat him up, bring him coffee or a sandwich, or offer to cash his monthly check at the check-cashing place across Second Avenue. The checks are in recognition of some time spent in the armed services. Now he's clearly off the grid, without the identification required to collect his own war money.

I'd likely cut my hand on his cheekbones if I cared to stroke his face. His eyes reflect the sky. Having never seen him indoors I can't say what color they are.

He typically arrives at his spot early in the morning with a jumbo-sized duffel bag containing, one would assume, his earthly

belongings. Despite his preference for sitting between a pharmacy and a liquor store, I've never seen him enter or emerge from either one.

You might think that something once happened to the man at this location, something requiring that he honor or deface it with his presence. But this isn't the case. It just happens that he belongs here, innately. And when he disappears in the afternoon, it's to a different place where he also belongs. Mornings are for here, afternoons are for there. This is a man who has pared his existence down to the minimum: simply belonging where he is.

This is why I don't need to know what he says when he talks to those who approach him. When I get dressed in the morning, putting on my slightly damp clothes, I imagine the envelope of my flesh as the flesh of the man, and I am grounded.

