

# The Little Things

*by* Tim G. Young

He saw them on the street all the time. He liked to assign them to a specialized container he had created near the front of his mind but recently decided must be pushed back into a more or less far away corner because after all it was not created for anything nearing the size of a big idea but for the little things. Obvious things, out on the street like short, squashed cigarette butts, discarded plastic bags, paper coffee cups, broken and mangled umbrellas, carelessly tossed aside postcard sized fliers from the neighborhood fortune teller and health club, crumbled pages from a notebook, empty ice-cream wrappers, broken glass and myriad other assorted wrappers. And then also for the more interesting but less obvious such as a penny, dime or nickel sunk solid into the macadam of the street, hand prints and foot prints, names and initials frozen in the hardened cement of the sidewalks. And in the cracks there paper clips, hairpins, and toothpicks. Like that. The point being not only to fill to the brim this specialized container but to remember the items which might trigger a particular type of response in a clutch moment if needed. The reason being, what he liked to think the reason being, would be the accumulation of apparently insignificant items just might at some undetermined future moment turn into very significant, perhaps even life saving pieces of information. Point, reason and above all hope were the names of the folders slid under the specialized container. They were color-coded and each stuck out a different distance from under the container so as to be easily seen, identified and extracted when the correct time would arrive. He liked to think there was some value attached to these collections; he liked to think there was some value attached to almost anything. He knew even the garbage picked up by the city and numerous other garbage pickers were valuable. If it weren't

then people would not have to pay for its removal and removal was not a little thing.

He enjoyed a cloudless day with a hint of a breeze attached; mellow temperatures and a memory activating scent in the air. After all in another not so well attended corner of the mind was the plainest looking of boxes intended for storing just such scents but scents were not easily contained even if tossed briskly inside and told to behave they would, of course, drift out again on their own path. However, they couldn't help but to leave behind a trace of their former selves. The slightest remnant of a once proud fully formed odor would remain and if one had the capability to view the bottom of such plain box then one might see the various traces in there scurrying or better squirming like worms on a hook desperate in their attempt to find an exit.

It might have been just one such cloudless day that brought about such a memorable incident that he had to stop almost in mid stride to think and locate yet another corner in the mind to create yet one more let's say this time, safety deposit box, because items such as major incidents must or at least should never have a chance, a moment, an opportunity to slither elsewhere.

As stated it was a cloudless day. He was finishing off the last bite of an ice-cream sandwich, tossing the wrapper into the city trash and into his special container while he licked the last smudge of chocolate from his fingers. He looked at the traffic light, which had just turned to green. A pick up truck in that last second had run the light but in its haste had dropped a red plastic traffic flag in the middle of the avenue. He finished wiping his hands on the front of his pants and made big strides to reach the middle of the avenue to pick up the flag before anyone else could. As he neared the flag and reached out his arm he could see a large black stripe of grease running from one edge of the flag to the other. This repelled him. The thoughts running through his head in the most recent past few seconds were that if the flag were pristine like the sky up above then

he would pick up the flag and hang it on the wall in his apartment. He also was attempting to decide whether or not the flag might be somewhat too large to be classified as a little thing. As he continued to reach for what he could see was now a flag inappropriate to hang in the apartment he did also realize that the flag was definitely not a little thing; but it wasn't a big thing either. So instead of his fingers grasping hold of the handle of the flag they appeared to short circuit and grab for the strip of black grease so when he moved the flag up to eye level his fingers slipped and the damn thing fell right back onto the street. Meanwhile the lights had changed and oncoming traffic was beginning to bear down on him, of course, much faster than he anticipated. Ah but inside the closeted brain, the protective skull, time had chosen to slow. Later he described it best as a crawl. A crawl on the belly fingernails scraping and clawing through the dirt hindered further by the weight of loaded backpacks feeling like bricks of iron tied most uncomfortably everywhere. Yes, time had slowed which now sparked the intense search through the contents of every file and container he could locate. He knew precisely this was not the time to linger over his collection of cigarette butts and other detritus but to touch on a real solution to the very immediate possibility of his being squashed like a fly by cruising, totally unsympathetic traffic. But what was it? Incredibly he began to picture in his mind a scene not related at all to his frenzied search but of a huge plate of apple pie a la mode with the vanilla ice cream melting in streams like cool lava down the side of the pie and off of the plate. Even more beyond belief was the moment he thought he could squander to dip his fingers and hands into the molten cream so as to place some in his mouth. Then in the most fractioned of a fraction of whatever time was left as the hands and fingers drew as close to the lips as possible without ever touching them a red, grease stained flag popped up in the middle of the scoop of vanilla ice cream atop the apple pie but instead of the black streak lying there like something dead it sprang to life and formed several words and the words said, "run you idiot." And he did and as he did the contents of all his carefully compartmentalized

mental containers spilled, splashed and were no more. He now literally crawled up to the curb where a kind pedestrian offered a hand to help him up. He could still feel the motion and hear the sound of the wind slicing by his ears from the racing traffic. The helping hand smiled at him then paused for a second as she looked at his back and noticed a red, plastic flag smeared with something black stuck to his shirt. She said excuse me and peeled it from his body. He looked at her and began to cry. "What's the matter," she asked. "It's the little things," he said.

