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No Man's Land: Seattle, Washington

Brittany Violet Lucas

So I woke up at three in the morning, my heart racing, and no one but myself was around. I knew I wouldn't be able to go back to sleep, and I knew there was no way I could drink away the anxiety—the bars and clubs were all closed, and I had to pass a breathalyzer at the methadone van in the morning. No, this time I would just have to endure the DTs and take it like a man, you know?

I was going to have to go on a little thing called a journey, but this time I would have the safety of my apartment to come back to afterwards. The apartment that I have resided in for the last year and a half is in Capitol Hill.

I don't care what people say about me. I have accomplished one of my life time goals: I pay the rent on time every single month, and I live in the area I have always wanted to live in. I saved up the cash to make sure my living room looked like a mini and user-friendly computer lab, so I could type my heart out whenever I needed to. This time I wasn't going to be able to get right on the computer and start typing to feed my inspiration. I was going to have to take a journey outside in the wet, cold, Seattle night.

I wanted to remind myself of where I came from. So I put on my warm imitation leopard coat that sort of brought the lioness out in me, and I put on a pair of comfortable high quality sneakers, the perfect kind needed in case I need to start running for my life.

I wore nondescript jeans and a tee shirt underneath. This time no hat would grace my head; I needed to feel what they are feeling out there tonight. I made sure just to bring five dollars with me, and I wore a very special kind of a purse, the kind that hangs across your shoulders and is very hard for a mugger to rip from you. I made sure that my ID and cell phone were in my purse, but I left my bank card at home.

I opened the door and headed out into the rainy cold world. My last glance at the digital clock underneath my TV said it was four in the morning. Four o'clock is not the time when most people choose to conduct business even in the cultural mecca of Capitol Hill. It is the perfect time to get a taste for how things are.

I walked up towards Broadway, and though this wasn't my first journey, I was still in awe of how bare the streets were. Every so often I would spot a night security truck rolling down the streets, and they would pause and look at me with concerned eyes. I started seeing the children of the night I had come to observe. If it was a young man, he sometimes would have a predatory nature about him. He would look at me and say hi, but I would quickly cross the street to put distance between him and me. If it was a lone female, she would look into my eyes and say hi like she was trying to form some kind of alliance, like maybe she was hoping she wasn't the only one with nowhere to go at this time of night.

I got to see the people who really aren't doing the homeless thing for the fun of it. I quickly started to shiver even in my warm coat as the wetness started to get at me, but still it didn't bother me that bad because I knew I had somewhere to go back to.

Some homeless young men weren't predatory at all. When I exited a gas station, I saw an African-American man with a desperate look on his face. He pleaded with me just for a little something so he could eat. I gave him a dollar, and he was so grateful to me. It was like I had given him a million dollars. He probably wasn't used to getting hand ups.

I was in no man's land at four in the morning in Capitol Hill. This is all I have to do to remind myself how important stability is. I guess I could call it learned stability. But it also reminds me of a social service that (even in a great city like Seattle) we can't give people—some place to go when it's really cold and wet out, and it's between the twilight hours of ten at night and eight in the morning.

I really like a particular drop-in center downtown. It's the only place that stuck by me through thick and thin, but I wish it was open at four in the morning. Maybe they could come up with a late hour drop in. It wouldn't give referrals to people, but it is there to protect kids and stuff. When it's really dark, and all the places that homeless youth usually hide out in especially when it's cold are closed, people can be forced to desperate measures. Even youth shelters easily overflow, and every homeless youth has gone through at least one night like that I think.

I spoke with a girl that goes by the name C who receives services from the same drop-in center about her opinion about how she deals when she can't get into a temporary shelter. She currently is on a very long wait list to get into a transitional living program. She explained with a look of sincere worry on her face,

One night it was like one in the morning, and the Kinko's that I sometimes hide out in kicked me out because I ran out of money for the internet. I was stuck downtown with no place to go. I was really scared when this guy started following me in a car. I think he knew I was homeless, and he kept on telling me he could get me some money. I ran away really fast, but I was really scared because no one would be around if the guy straight up abducted [me]. Sometimes, even though I don't do that, especially when it's raining, I do think about going down to Denny and doing tricks. But I don't think it's gotten that bad yet. I really hope I get into some kind of housing. Things are getting really bad out there.

Homeless youth services in Seattle and elsewhere in America really should provide some place for youths to go during the night, even when shelters are overflowed. The youths probably wouldn't be able to go to sleep, but it would be at least a good place for them to stay safe, and get some clothing and something to eat. Maybe they could provide creative projects and stuff to keep everyone alert. I think it is the duty of the youth services in this city to do something about these kids who are walking around with no place to go at night.

Take it from me, no man's land at four in the morning is a very scary place for a vulnerable young person.