

A Reaping That Happened Last Winter

So it happened last winter. I'm standing by the bridge one evening, leaning over the slippery railing and chewing on my hoodie strings. I'm not doing much, just looking out over the river with its ferries steaming across the surface of the water that constantly swirls with putrid black petroleum. It's foggy outside, like it always is in Seattle, and like I said I'm just standing there when this guy shuffles up beside me. He's wearing this damp black hoodie that's in such a revolting condition that his mother would beg him to wash but he never does because the laundromat is a full block away from his dinky apartment. He's got the giant hood pulled way over his head. I'd have thought he was the Grim Reaper if I couldn't see brown hair peeking out from under the hood. His hands are shoved deep inside the pockets of his baggy sweatpants, and I'm not gonna lie, I get a little paranoid that he's about to pull a knife on me in front of all the cars that are crawling by in the rush-hour traffic. But he just stops next to me and starts talking. It sounds like he hasn't spoken to anyone in at least eight days because his voice is so gruff it could scratch glass. At first he's all like "what's up man," and he's facing me while he's speaking, although with the hood I can't really see his face all too well – just those tufts of unkempt hair. Then he really starts laying into his main points, and I'm thinking, *Damn it, I should have left when I had the chance.* You see, he's in a weird situation in which he's way behind on rent (aren't we all though, I think). But it gets weirder because he's positive his landlord sleeps with his girlfriend of nine months, which really sucks because that just confirms his deepest fears that his girlfriend never actually loved him. The guy's got real insecurity issues, I'll tell you that. Now not only is he about to lose his money, he's about to lose the only girl he's ever actually connected with.

At this point I'm really not sure why this hooded guy is spilling his guts out for me on the sidewalk, and I'm about to leave him and walk back to my apartment to burn a candle because my jerk of a landlord has cut my electricity. Before I can ditch, the dude gets to the point and he's asking me to call his mom for him – she's always telling him to call but he never gets around to it. By this time I'm getting pretty fed up, since it's late and the fog is really coming in thick, drowning out even the yellow glow of the streetlamps. I try to tell the guy I can't help him, I gotta go, but now he's really starting to beg, I can hear desperation in the way his voice

rises and splits, but for some reason this only stokes my anger. I admit I could get a little violent – a feeling only made worse by my suspicion of the way he keeps shrinking into his hood before I can see his face, as well as the fact that he’s a random, bummy guy asking me to call his mom on a dead winter night in Seattle. He won’t quit the wheedling though, and before I know it I’m grabbing him by his hoodie, grappling with him as I’m trying to wrench off his hood. I accidentally step too close to the railing, and there’s one last shove before the guy pitches over the slick surface, hoodie strings streaming out behind him as he falls down, down, down. And then I’m screaming as I feel the wind cutting into my skin, my stomach dropping into my throat, and I realize too late that I’m the one falling when I finally hit the icy, petroleum-black water.