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The girl was lying in her own blood, face down. She was young, in her twenties, ^{and} Puerto Rican, like many people in the neighborhood. She was lying in a very unnatural position, Alex thought to himself. He stared at her for a while and then remembered his purpose. He reached for her purse and took her money and jewelry. He took about fifty dollars. That would get him through the week, he thought.

He dragged the body behind some garbage cans and threw the tire iron over the fence. Then he wiped the blood off his hands and ran.

Alex Fernandez walked through the streets, looking at the poverty he had to live in. He didn't work because there were no jobs; but even if there had been jobs, he would not have worked. He was completely alienated from society. What money he got, he spent on booze, and if he had any money left over, he would buy a bit of food. He had no family or friends, but that didn't bother him. He had nothing to live for. Only the instinct of survival kept him going.

Alex turned down a side street and went into a dingy little bar. It was very small and had a pinball machine in the corner. That was about all there was to it, except for the counter and two tables in the middle of the floor. He sat down at the counter and ordered a whiskey and a plate of cheese and crackers. The bartender brought him his whiskey in a shot

glass and gave him his cheese and crackers on a paper plate. He downed the whiskey in one gulp and ordered another one. As the bartender filled his glass, he spread a liberal amount of cheese on a cracker. He nibbled at it, to make it last as long as possible.

After he had finished all that was on his plate, he downed his second drink and ordered another one. He sipped it slowly and thought about where he was going to stay for the night. He would wind up sleeping in some alley, in a barrel or something. Usually, he got too drunk to make it to a flop house but always managed to make it to an alley and sleep off his drunkenness.

Alex finished his drink and went out into the street. He wasn't drunk, just feeling good. His fingertips felt numb and his head was very light. He sort of floated around, not really caring where he went or what happened to him. He decided to take a walk around the city. He walked and thought. He liked to think and was fairly intelligent. He also had feelings, although he was forced to suppress them in order to survive. The way he looked at it, you can do just about anything as long as your feelings didn't get in your way. But he could never suppress his feelings completely. There was always a twinge of pain in his heart when ever he hurt anyone. But he had to survive. This thought always overcame his conscience.

Alex walked halfway around the block and decided to go to another bar. He went into a place called the Wayfarer. It was nicer than the ones he usually went into, but tonight he thought

he would be different. The bar had a pool table in an adjoining room and many oak tables around the bar. The bar was oval shaped and had a cushion around the edge. It was fairly noisy and there was a lot of cigarette smoke. Alex didn't like crowds, but he sat down on a bar stool anyway and ordered a drink. He sipped it slowly and watched the people. They were all well-dressed, and he felt conspicuous because of the rags he wore. Everybody was smiling and talking, and a few people were doing the bump, the newest dance in town. Alex noticed that most of the women were pick-ups and were probably married. The men hung around them like vultures, waiting to pick at their bodies for a night. And the next morning they would throw them away as if they were giving scraps to the dogs.

He watched these women and hated them for their worth. They were no better than he was, but if he could not respect himself, how could he respect anyone else?

Some of the men gave him very menacing looks and some just stared at him with a certain indignation. He didn't mind them too much. They seemed very ignorant. Their expressions seemed to say, "What are you doing here, you peon?" His presence irritated them, and he derived a great satisfaction from that. He smiled and gave those whose eyes met his very cold stares. They glanced away sharply, backing down like scared dogs.

There were two empty seats on each side of him. Probably because he smelled so bad. Alex laughed out loud at this thought and downed his drink very fast, spilling it down his shirt. He was surprised at first and then broke into a long

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laugh. He ordered another drink and downed it in a single gulp. That was a mistake. His head spun, and he felt feverish. He could feel the bile rising in his stomach; the sour taste of vomit was in his throat. He swallowed and fought back the sensation of getting sick. He felt very crowded, as if he were suffocating. He got off the stool, nearly falling, and reeled around the bar looking frantically for an exit. His hand was over his mouth, and thick yellow liquid was oozing out between his fingers. He bumped into people, and they pushed him off as if he were a leper. Losing his balance, he fell into the arms of a woman, belching into her face. His stomach convulsed spasmodically, bringing forth the putrid liquid. The woman screamed and her escort grabbed him by the collar and threw him out into the street. Alex called him a bastard, and the man kicked him in the face. He lay in the street spitting out teeth and blood and vomiting at the same time.

His whole body was numb except for his head, which felt as though he had caught it in a two-ton hydraulic press. He was enraged. He picked up a broken beer bottle and went into the bar. Seeing the man who had thrown him out, he lunged at him like a hungry animal about to kill its prey. He focused all his hate and anger on the man's stomach and jammed the jagged edge of the bottle into his gut. The man uttered a loud groan and sank down on his knees. His eyes were wide as saucers, and his mouth agape as if he were going to scream, but there was only a low, guttural cry of pain. Alex pushed

him down on his back and began mauling his face and neck with the bottle. The man lay there like a half-eaten antelope just caught by a leopard.

Alex stood over him, breathing hard, with flecks of spittle at the corners of his mouth, holding the bottle, which was thoroughly coated with blood and flesh. He threw it into the horrified crowd and ran.

He ran as hard as he could, panting, trying to catch his breath. The adrenalin was flowing in him as if someone had turned on the faucet as far as it could go. There were butterflies in his stomach, and he still had the sensation of getting sick. His heart throbbed in harmony with his head, and his temples pounded in rhythmic succession with his footsteps. He ran blindly into people, knocking them over.

His clothes were drenched with blood; they clung to his body like a wet suit. His mouth was streaming blood, and he coughed and spat between breaths. He thought he heard police cars in the distance. He ran harder, straight-arming people out of his path.

A policeman was standing on the corner of an intersection, directing traffic. He turned and saw Alex. His eyes bugged. Alex saw him and raced toward him with his head bent low and his bloody fists clenched.

The policeman reached for his gun and got it halfway out of its holster before Alex punched him in the face. His nose flattened, and there was a spray of blood as he fell on his back. The blood streamed all over him, in a ghastly contrast

with his blue uniform.

Alex turned down an alley and clambered up a fire escape. He heard police whistles and sirens below him. He climbed faster. Bullets whizzed past him and ricocheted off the building. He looked up, seeing the rooftop as his goal. Only a few more flights to go.

He reached the top and flopped on his hands and knees, trying to catch his breath. His eyes burned, and the blood was caked on his face and hands. He tried in vain to think what he was going to do next, but there was no time. The roof door burst open and policemen poured out.

Alex sprang to his feet and ran. He jumped over the divisions in the roof. He heard only the sound of his own footsteps. He was unaware of the shouts of his pursuers.

Alex was halted by the edge of the building. He judged the distance between him and the next building. His chances of making the jump were slim. He turned and saw the policemen running toward him. Then his instinct for survival took over. He would rather jump than succumb to the police. He backed off paces and ran toward the edge. His eyes were set on the ledge of the opposite building. It seemed such a long way off.

He leaped off the edge in a headlong dive. His arms were extended as far as they could go. He made his fingers grow twice their size in his mind.

He thought he feel short; then his knees and elbows slammed into the side of the building. He felt the most ex-

cruciating pain, and he felt himself falling, but something stopped him short. He looked up and saw his fingers curled around the edge of the building. Immediately, he began to hoist himself up. His stomach was bent around the edge of the building, and his legs were kicking his aching body to safety.

I made it, he said to himself. He lay on the roof laughing. He felt like going to sleep, but got to his feet to run to the fire escape.

He had scarcely taken a step before bullets ripped his back apart. Alex was taken completely by surprise. The pain was sharp but short. He turned around and opened his mouth to say something. Then he plummeted over the edge. The police found him lying face down in his own blood.