

THE CLOSET

Bradlin was walking home from work one day from a factory in Michigan. A bureaucrat at the Department of Agriculture, he had just finished inspections on the tires of farm equipment to ensure that they met the minimal federal standards for tread count and depth. He had been working at this factory for the entire month and was quite thankful for an assignment within walking distance of his home. On this particular day, he took a different route than he usually had.

As he paced moderately along Mudric Street, he noticed a park on his left. It was quite an unusual park; inside, there appeared to be a playground, but, on closer inspection, it was merely a pile of equipment which had clearly been used somewhere—but which had not been setup. Though it was obviously under construction, there was no fence around it nor any sign indicating that this was the case—as is required by law in Detroit.

Bradlin continued forward, and ahead of himself, he saw four dirt paths which each intertwined with the others, taking slightly different courses toward the summit of a small hill. Each path was lined with leaves and small rocks, and it appeared to Bradlin as if these trails had once cut through a forest. However, instead of seeing a small canopy of trees, some bushes, and brush, he instead saw an area devoid of its natural elements—a hill which was littered with tree stumps and hundreds of bundles of logs, each tied together neatly and stored between the paths.

Is someone building something here?—he wondered.

Again, Bradlin looked for some sign indicating construction or some proposed outcome, but he found nothing.

On the other side of the park, Bradlin arrived at Quincy Avenue. Three blocks ahead of him, on a part of his normal route, stood a laundromat at which he had left his clothes the previous day. Bradlin had always liked the Quikwash Laundromat. They had always folded his clothing crisply and compactly, and his load would nearly always be ready the next day. Bradlin waited for a moment at the light, crossed the street, and walked up to the door.

Much to his surprise, the door was blocked. He looked into the windows and saw bags and boxes of clothing stacked on top of each other, covering almost all of the space in the aisles. Against the wall, he saw machines, but they were not running, had no clothing in them, and they appeared to be turned off. They too were stacked on top of each other. Bradlin checked his watch—6:15. The sign on the door still indicated that the store was open until 10:00 PM. He looked for some sign that the business was closed, was undergoing renovation, or that it was out-of-business. But he found nothing—with the exception of a small flip-sign which read “Open”. He looked inside and saw no one, so he wrote the phone number in the window on the back of a card inside his briefcase and carried on.

He now needed to use the restroom, so he walked into a McDonald's across the street. Before approaching the counter, there was a small one-person bathroom on his right. Bradlin opened the door and was hit on the head with a roll of toilet paper which had fallen from the top of a very tall cart

containing cleaning supplies. Behind the cart were three other carts just like it, and one could not get to the toilet without first dragging two of the carts outside of the restroom.

Bradlin walked up to the counter. He asked, “Do you have any other restrooms in here? I really need to go.”

The cashier looked at him quite strangely and said, “Well we have the employee restroom, but I can't let you in the kitchen because of health regulations. I'm sorry.”

I can hold it until I get home—Bradlin thought, but he also realized that he still needed to get dinner for his wife and himself. However, he didn't want to order McDonald's, so he walked another two blocks toward his house and stopped at Amiglo's Pizza.

He first looked at the menu which the store had posted outside and decided that he would order a meatball sub and a few slices of pizza with pepperoni and mushrooms. However, as he opened the door, he again witnessed a bizarre sight. All of the tables and chairs were pushed to one side of the restaurant, in such a configuration where it would be impossible to sit, and the ovens were lined up along the other.

Having become quite frustrated by this point, he shook his head and went back to McDonald's.

Bradlin saw that the chairs were hanging upside-down from the tables. It had clearly closed in the time which it had taken to travel only four blocks. When he left, the staff had

just taken an order. Now, there was no trace of any movement—only a few boxes of condiments were visible on the counter.

Screw this! I'll just go home and make a sandwich!

He no longer felt like walking home, so he instead walked one block out of his way in order to take the train home. He walked down the stairs, looked around, and saw two subways—each parked on the tracks facing the platforms, switched off, and empty.

Miserably, he hobbled up the stairs—well aware that he still needed to walk ten long blocks to arrive at his home. He pulled his phone out of his pocket along with a pair of headphones so that he could listen to a song or two along the way. After choosing a song from Pearl Jam's *Yield*, the phone displayed a message:

*Not enough memory to perform this function. Please connect to a computer, upload your files, and delete files from the phone to clear memory.*

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As he rounded the corner of the street on which he lived, he saw the pile of bricks in his front yard which he had never used to build a path.

He opened his front door, and, in the living room, there was a large pile of boxes covering the entire footprint of the space. At this point, however, Bradlin was determined to get in anyway. After all, it was his own house—where else

could he go? He climbed on top of a box which he thought contained a number of heavy items. Very carefully, he made his way to the center of the room—making sure to avoid boxes labeled fragile.

In the corner opposite the door sat Bradlin's wife, who was sitting on top of a large box as if it were a couch. When she saw Bradlin, she smiled and said, "Hello, dear! How was work today?"

"Horrible! I can't take it anymore! Every damned day, I look at the same machinery—checking that the tires have deep enough treads and that all of the harvesters have hooks in the correct shape. I feel like I'm not really doing anything—like someone's paying me to go in and do a bunch of busywork."

His wife nodded.

"And you know what's really strange? I feel like no one else is really doing anything either. Just earlier, I was at Macarthur Park, and the playground was in ruins. Granted, I don't know what it looked like before, but all the trees were tied up in piles. What was even more strange is that no one declared any intention to do anything about it. There were no signs, no fences, no one on the site—nothing! The trains at the station were parked and empty. I couldn't even buy you a sandwich because Amiglo's was stacked floor-to-ceiling with chairs."

He took a deep breath.

"It's okay, dear. I'll make some dinner tonight."

"Thank you," Bradlin said. "I appreciate it. I just feel like I can't do *anything!*"

His wife nodded again and sat silently for a moment.

"I feel like the whole damned world is a storage unit!"

Instantly, his wife realized what was bothering him. "So Bradlin, what do you see around you?" she asked.

"Stuff. Just heaping piles of stuff—everywhere."

"Resources, perhaps?"

"No. Not resources. Just a bunch of garbage."

"But what about those logs you saw in the park today?"

You could build a house! And the trains—you could convince someone to buy the company and run them again."

"But I have to go to work. We need to eat. With one salary, we'll only be able to pay the rent."

"You went to work today. Have we eaten yet?"

"Well—you have a point."

His wife smiled. "What are all those resources except garbage if we're not doing anything with them?"

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The next day, Bradlin went into the factory and quit his job. A few weeks later, he found a job working at a local music studio where he could help aspiring musicians to prepare demos to apply for work.

Within a few weeks, the boxes in his house had disappeared. He now lived in a home—no longer a closet. When he was finished with his first shift, he took the subway to Quincy Avenue, walked in to Amiglo's, and ordered a large pepperoni pizza for take-out.