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HE SPENT the first two nights in the supply closet at work. He pulled some boxes of paper towels away from the back wall and hid behind them. Flat on his back, pressing his body down, he kept out of sight. He was sure the night crew would find him, and the smell of bleach mixing with other cleansers gave him a pounding headache. He was awake most of these two nights, listening to footsteps and voices out in the hall, sleeping only for a few minutes at a time.

He had been hired by Building Services to do painting and renovation—preparing empty suites for new tenants, sometimes work outside. The yellow curbs for reserved parking, these were always freshly painted. On the third day he was assigned to a stairwell, a fire exit for the building. He painted the railings, making his way up to the roof where he worked his way around the perimeter. On the roof there was a billboard advertising the name of the executive office complex where he worked, Arroyo West. The sign spanned the entire back of the roof, but at a slight angle so it faced the highway down below. There was a narrow gap at one end, and when he peered around this edge, he saw an empty space behind the sign. It looked like a long hallway, about three feet wide at the near end, opening up to about six feet

across the far end. He turned and went back to work, but as he painted, he thought about the space behind the sign. It seemed better than the supply closet.

He finished work and cleaned up, making large piles of used paper and plastic drop cloths, empty buckets of paint filled with used rollers. As the new guy on the crew, he had to stay behind to drag their garbage down to the dumpsters. His boss gave him a key to get back into the stairwell from the loading dock. He kept the key.

After his shift was over, he washed up in a bathroom then sat in a stall for forty minutes, waiting for his coworkers to go home. Then he went back upstairs. The roof was covered with white gravel that crunched underfoot and radiated the desert heat, even with the sun low in the sky. He squeezed behind the sign and entered the place where he would live. Behind the billboard the air was perfectly still. He was in shadow, but he could feel the day's accumulated heat coming off the back of the metal billboard. The space was a narrow triangle, one side made by the sign, and the other sides were blank stucco walls about ten feet high.

He sat down, leaning against one of the walls. He had two bottles of water and some granola bars. He watched videos on his phone until the battery died, then he stretched out on the gravel to sleep. The heat was still intense. Sweat ran down his back, soaking his shirt and reducing what little padding it provided. He rolled on his side and felt his back cool slightly, but with his weight concentrated on his shoulder and hip, the sharp gravel was unbearable. He stood up and rubbed his shoulder for a minute, not sure what to do. He drank the rest of his water and shifted his weight from side to side, eager to lie down and sleep. Finally, he took off

his uniform shirt and spread it out on the gravel as flat and wide as possible. Then he took off his T-shirt and arranged this on top. Removing his pants, he laid these down, too—a double layer of fabric now between him and the roof. He removed his socks and shoes, trying the shoes as a pillow. He lay down on his back, arranging himself on top of his clothes, distributing his weight as evenly as possible. His shoes smelled awful, so he set them aside. The socks weren't much better, but he eased his head down onto them for his pillow. If he didn't move, the gravel was now tolerable, just a few small jabs to his bare feet as he settled them into place. His bare skin dried in the desert air. The three walls of his enclosure made a long sharp frame for the night sky. On the far side of the sign, the building's air conditioner cycled on and off, and the billboard lights made a slight hum. He listened to these things for a while, then fell asleep.

The corporate office campus where he worked and now lived was a large mass of interlocking six-, eight-, and ten-story buildings. The law firms, accountants, and financial services companies came and went, and even with a team of painters, he saw that the renovation work would be steady. Some firms closed abruptly, others slowly drained of employees, their footprint in the building shrinking, until they closed, too. Contractors removed furniture, then he and his coworkers ripped out the partitions, dividers, and carpet, and repainted. They returned the room to its neutral state, a shell that the new designers would fill with new partitions, furniture, and carpet. And always new colors for the walls: Navajo White, Antique White, Santa Fe White, Cool Dawn, Amber Mist.

He liked the work. The spaces were quiet and empty and he could work unimpeded. Patching, smoothing, repainting. With the furniture and dividers gone, they spread out in the space. Drop cloths quickly stretched out in the morning, and everywhere large glass windows with views of the parking lot and the arroyos that surrounded the complex. With the air conditioning off, or nearly off (no tenant paying for the service in here), he learned to paint the south-facing offices early in the day, then retreat to other rooms.

At the end of his shift, he dropped off the garbage, then made his way back up to an empty suite on the fourth floor. He found a bathroom, stripped down, and washed his hair, then his entire body, with hand soap. With the office vacant, there were no paper towels, so he walked back and forth, waiting to dry, and then put his clothes back on, sure that his coworkers had left for the night. He refilled his water bottles, squeezed them into his pockets, then went down to the loading dock where he had seen some broken-down boxes leaning against a dumpster. He grabbed the cardboard and entered the stairwell. Up on the roof, he slipped the flattened boxes behind the sign and arranged them on the ground. Much better. It was a few minutes before the heat of the roof worked its way through the cardboard, making it warm to the touch. He sat down, drank some water, and ate a bag of peanuts from the vending machine. He was still hungry. Even though it was past the time when he could plausibly still be in the building, with his uniform on he could pass for someone on the night shift. He slipped out from behind the sign and went down to the break room.

He stared at the vending machine for a long time. Each