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A short Story

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### Introduction

When I was in the SHU (the hole) at Three Rivers earlier this year I met a man named Lucky, Luckner from Haiti. We hit it off and when we would see each other at recreation time we'd talk. I told him I write, so he told me his story and he asked me to put him in my book. I said I would.

This story is another excerpt from my upcoming book, "A Wasted Life" and the character Lucky and his story in it are the words and story of the man I met in the SHU, the politics however, are all mine. Hope you enjoy it.



## Part 1

The J-Bird Club was usually empty at this time of the day, and today was no exception. He tried to look busy wiping down the bar like some old west bartender. Out of habit he looked up and checked on the three people who'd come in early. Two were guys playing pool, the other, a woman in her early twenties wearing too much makeup and not enough skirt.

A working girl. She smiled at him, the preacher's son. He smiled back, then decided to take her a drink on the house.

"Hey girl, how's it going?" He asked as he handed her the drink, a bloody mary.

"Thanks sweetie! Oh, Me? I'm fine. Little T started first grade last week," she rolled her eyes and shook her head. "Damn, Ray. It ain't easy since his daddy picked up that twenty piece in the Feds. Twenty years, Ray!" She exclaimed, her voice rising an octave. "They didn't even catch him with anything! They just had a couple guys testify that they'd been buying from him over the last three years. Then they added that 'ghost dope' all together and made it look like he was El Chapo or Somethin'. Twenty years, Ray. Twenty years!" She looked away and wiped the corner of her eye. "What am I supposed to do, Ray? I got a baby at home and one in first grade... Their daddy would kill me if he knew what I was doin' to earn a livin'."

The preacher's son took a deep breath and let it out as he looked over her head into an imaginary distance. "I know, Wee. If anybody asks me, I'll send 'em your way."

She smiled and thanked him. He turned away as two more people entered the bar, two men. They sat at the table next to Wee and ordered a couple of drinks. By the time he returned with their drinks, one of them had engaged her in conversation. He returned to the bar, wiped it down, then started wiping out clean glasses. He watched the customers and waited for their order.

As soon as he walked in, Ray noticed his shoes. They were blue. The man in the blue shoes looked around, then decided to take a seat at the bar.

"Give me a seven-seven," he said. "Hey," he added as Ray fixed his drink. "You're the guy from the park."

The preacher's son nodded as he sat the drink in front of him. "That one's on the house." Then he stuck out his hand, "I'm Ray."

The man in the blue shoes reciprocated, "I'm, Lucky. Nice to officially meet you." Then he picked up his glass, used it to toast his generosity and took a drink. "Ahhh, there we go," he said with gusto.

He sat the glass down on a napkin. "Where you from, Ray? That accent's not from around here."

"You got me there," Ray answered, "I'm from Mississippi, born and raised. Speaking of accent's, where's yours from?"

Lucky took another drink, purposefully smacked his lips and answered. "Haiti, Ray. I was born and raised, as you say, in Haiti."

A couple came in and took a seat in the corner. Ray excused himself, walked over and took their order. When he had finished with them, he headed back to the bar. A minute later, Wee walked towards the door with one of the guys from the table. She looked over her shoulder to catch Ray's attention; he took a good look at who she was with and nodded. Street life was dangerous. He relaxed when the friend of the guy who'd left with Wee ordered another drink.

"I didn't know you worked here," Lucky said.

"Yeah, sometimes. Part time actually." I'm new here, so I mostly work the middle of the week when things are slow. That's probably why you ain't seen me here."

"Probably... So what caused you to leave Mississippi?"

He explained the reason as best he could; a little about his family. " Not much to tell, really. And you, what brought you to the Americas?"

Lucky asked for a beer, took a sip, "Well my name is Lukner, hence they call me Lucky." He said with a smile. I came to America when I was sixteen. Oh man!" He said with his eyebrows raised, "When I heard I had a chance to come to the US, man, I was so excited!" He smiled a huge white-toothed beam that put truth to his words. "Like all kids, I wanted to be somebody. I didn't know what exactly, but I knew my best chance at being that person was in America. I had big dreams. Hope. But when I got here, my father put me to work in the fields over in Georgia. I worked the fields with my family for a while, but I wasn't happy. That wasn't the dream I imagined."

"Being young and wanting more than my job could provided, I started to hang around a bad crowd and eventually got into a little trouble. Just kid's stuff, but my father didn't like it, or where he said I was headed in life. I was rebellious," he reached for and took another drink from his beer. "Then one day I came home to an empty house. My family had moved away, leaving me behind. I was hurt, inside; I couldn't believe that my own father would abandon me. I was lost and left with the streets to educate me. Over the next few years I learned all those streets could teach; I was working on that dream the young me had. Then one day I woke up in the county jail facing, among other things, a murder charge. It hit me hard.

"Devastated, scared and needing some kind of comfort, I got in contact with an ex-girlfriend who rescued me, spiritually. She started to teach me about God and prayer - and love. I really believed it too, but eighteen months later, in spite of my prayers, I was indicted on a bunch of federal charges." He paused and sighed. "To be honest, I felt that God, like my father, had abandoned... Then again, maybe not. I say that because I went to court and won the murder case, but lost the other charges and was sentenced to 192 months in Federal Prison.

"After I was convicted, I began to think about my life, where it went wrong. Even though it was my actions that had landed me in prison, I couldn't help but wonder how things might have been different if I'd been put in school rather than sent to the fields. If I'd had a mentor other than the streets? Or if I'd had different parents who were professionals rather than field workers? Someone to encourage me to be more than they had been?"

Lucky took another pull from his beer. "I learned about life in prison. At first I blamed myself, but the truth is, it wasn't all my fault. I was a young kid who came to America with little or no guidance; with hope for the America dream. But the dream most available to me was the dream of the streets." He hung his head in disbelief, then in a voice of admonition said almost to himself. "That's why, later, when I had kids of my own, I couldn't love them the right way. I didn't know the right way."

The two men talked as folks do when bonded by regret, and a modicum of friendship; the friendship of commonality took hold. The preacher's son thought about Lucky's story; he acknowledged Wee when she returned and a few minutes after that his replacement and the evening waitress arrived... Just in time he thought to himself; the place was filling up. He cashed out the register, went to the back, cleaned up a little and went to the bar.

"Hey dude," he said to Lucky, "I'm waiting on my girl, you wanna grab a table?"

"Yeah, okay ... You got a girl?" He asked with mock surprise. Then added, "Just kidding. I guess even a country boy can get lucky," and smiled.

"Shit! Ray's the most beautiful man I've ever seen. He can get any girl he wants!" Wee said out of nowhere. Lucky rolled his eyes as they moved towards a table.

"How's Lilly these days? Rehab, right?"

The preacher's son looked at his feet, then back up at Lucky. "Lilly's back from rehab, but she's having a rough time. Near as I can tell she's been addicted to crack since she was, like, twelve. But, she's trying and that's a start. Problem is, the dealer's know she's an addict and they prey on her because of it ... No offense."

"None taken, I'm not like that. But I know plenty who are. Hell, I know how the game works. I see how young girls are purposefully strung out, then sold off or given away from one person, or one street family to another. It's terrible... Lilly's good people."

"Yeah she is. Like I said, she's tryin' and if she keeps tryin', eventually she'll make it. And Lala, man, she's something else," He said with pride in his voice. "She's eleven now, almost twelve... Lilly's going back at rehab, this'll her second trip. Like I said, she's really trying."

"Yeah, I really like her, it's a shame what she's been through... So young, too. Street families putting her on the corner to earn enough to support her habit."

Ray scoffed, "Street family? You mean, street gang, right?"

"Yeah. Yeah that's right."

Ray took a quick drink of beer and thinking of Lala he checked his cell for messages; looked at lucky, "Yeah, that gang shit is ridiculous. I don't know why the cops don't just come in and round 'em all up. It would take the drugs right off the streets."

"Spoken like a true country boy," Lucky replied with dispassion.

A little offended, Ray shot back, "What'dya mean by that!?"

Lucky held up his hands as if to halt traffic. "Not what you're thinking. I'm just saying that there's a deeper, more complicated problem here. One that won't be solved by just throwing all the gang members in prison. They tried. Been trying that for the last forty years. Do we have less crime now than we had in the '50s, '60s, '70s? Hell no!" The prison population has quadrupled! WE have more people per capita in prison now than anytime in history! More than any country in the world, facts would seem to prove my point: the more people you put in prison, the more crime you have. That's exactly what the statistics say. But, the average American is so brainwashed by religion and politics that they don't believe statistics; they believe what they hear.

"The 'gangs,' as you call 'em are not the whole problem. Hell man, like the junkies, they're the RESULT of the true problem. Them boys down here aren't growing cocaine in their apartments, they're not manufacturing fentanyl in the kitchen laboratories, they just buy that stuff and sell it at a profit. The real problem in this country is the money that can be made from selling illegal drugs on the street. You combine that with poor education, junkie parents and subsequently, a general lack of opportunity and you CREATE a situation where people will risk prison for what they see as their best chance to live the life of a pro-athlete, a successful musician, a movie star, or a

corporate CEO... Their only realistic chance at the American Dream." Lucky stopped his rant, a few moments of silence hung heavy in the air, and when he had Ray's attention again, he pointed to himself.

## Part 2

"You've been on these streets for a couple of years now. You know there's some good people here. Folks not from here can't see that. You can't look in from the outside and see the truth, or know what the root causes of why this neighborhood is the way it is. You can't accurately pass judgment on a lifestyle you haven't experienced, been forced by birth to live. You can't accurately make a judgment call about things you don't understand. And to make a statement like you did about putting everybody in prison, who do things YOU don't agree with, is a disappointment and unworthy of a person with a Gideon Bible in their pocket." Ray unconsciously reached up and touched his shirt pocket.

"It's not the people, it's the laws that are the problem." He looked at Ray and pointed his finger, "You listen to me on this.

"I've been to prison. I know what I'm talking about. Prison woke me up. It educated me to the truth of things and it opened my eyes to people - and the government's programmed treatment of them. Prison forced me to live in a box with all types of different people - all colors, all nationalities and all religions. And when this happens, a person goes in one direction or the other. Either you end up hating them, or you end up understanding and accepting them. Me? I chose to see the good in them, and when I stopped seeing the difference between us, I saw the commonality in us. When I stopped looking at the bad in people, I was rewarded with seeing the good in them. Or - as you would say - when I stopped seeing the Devil in them, I saw the God in them. That's when I woke up, Ray. And you know what I understood? I understood that people have reasons for the things they do.

"You wanna know why the inner-cities are on fire, full of drugs, crime and gangs? It's the war on drugs, Ray. The laws that necessitated this political agenda, called the War on Drugs, that's the reason for 99% of the crime in the US and most of the crime south of the border... It's the absolute cause; the creator of all of those street gangs." Lucky held Ray's gaze.



"When you outlaw something, people want, Ray. You create a black market for it, and that makes it hard to get and therefore the price is driven up. It makes it profitable. Millionaires are made, and every kid who wants to live above his upbringing is tempted by that profit... We have the historical proof, Ray. Look at what the prohibition on alcohol did a hundred years ago- same shit, man! It created rich gangsters, Capone, etc.. Same exact shit! They created laws that made alcohol illegal and crime and gangs and profit resulted. Same shit, different page.

"If they were to legalize narcotics, folks like Lilly wouldn't have to hustle her body to pay for their addictions and nobody would have to steal to pay for drugs. If you could go down to Trans Grocery and buy your drug of choice, I'd be out of business and so would the street gangs, AND there wouldn't be billionaire cartel leaders down south. Bro, it's all about money. You said you don't know why the cops don't just surround this neighborhood and round up all us drug dealers," the preacher's son went to raise his voice in objection, but Lucky waved him off and continued.

"Ray, it's okay to talk about this; hell I'm happy to have an open and honest discussion like this. My point is: the government won't let the police surround this or any other neighborhood and arrest all the drug dealers because they don't actually WANT to stop it. They don't want to stop it, Ray, because they are profiting from it - and MONEY Ray, is more important than people. So the government has turned the issue into a MORAL issue, i.e., it's a sin to use drugs. That's right, Ray, the average person has been duped into believing that it's a sin, that a drug addict is someone who's morally deprived. Well, unless it's the DOPE pushed by Big Pharma - that's seen as ok, which is another form of brainwashed bullshit. But the stuff smuggled into this country by the multitudes - including the CIA is taboo. If you use that, you're a deviant and a criminal. But I ask you; is it a crime to be a victim? Is it a sin to be born with a low tolerance for addiction? Is it a sin to want out of poverty? Is it a sin to try to be prosperous outside what other people see as legal?"

The preacher's son jumped in, "When a person commits a crime, they weaken the whole system and eventually it spirals out of control. Just look around. Being soft on crime is what got us in this mess in the first place."

"What about when the government breaks the law, Ray?"

A silence followed.

"Soft on crime? Trust me, Ray. This country isn't soft on crime. It's extremely HARSH on crime. Soft on crime is a mantra being used to disguise the truth. What got us here in the first place is that the prohibition on narcotics is profitable. Then add to that, that the government has found out that PRISONS are profitable."

"How the hell is running a prison a profitable endeavor?" Asked Ray. "Hell, it costs like forty thousand dollars a year to incarcerate a prisoner, how's that profitable to the government?"

"First you have to realize that the government doesn't EARN money. It mooches off the tax payer. So if the government wants to increase itself, its bank account, its power, it has to convince the taxpayer to pony up more money. Then it uses that taxpayer money to make itself bigger and more powerful - on top of that, your politicians who are supposed to be the watchdogs for the taxpayers are themselves getting rich through the support businesses needed to operate these prisons.

"Prisons are profitable, Ray. It's simple economics. You create laws that create a need for more arrests. You build more prisons to hold the people that the new laws have mandated as criminals, then you ask the taxpayer to fund the whole mess. And when the taxpayer balks over the outrageous taxes, you use sources like the news media and talk radio to convince people that they're in danger from these criminals the new laws have created. Day after day, they use these sources to pound their message home, to scare the shit out of the taxpayers, the masses. They tell the people that they are in danger, and that if they want to be safe, they need to pay more taxes for enforcement of the new laws THEY created; the new CRISIS they created. And being that people don't know the facts, they are easily tricked into believing that funding prisons at forty thousand a head is the right thing to do."

Lucky ordered and paid for a couple more beers. "Ray, I have one question or you."

Ray nodded, "Okay, shoot."

"Since the War on Drugs started, do we have more or less drug addicts?"

Ray had to admit, "We have more drug addicts now than in the entire history of the world. It's everywhere."

Lucky nodded. "Yeah, Ray. The war on drugs is a failure. It's really a war on the American People... Ray," Lucky said softly, "It's bigger than just this neighborhood. In fact, most of all of my customers are people from the other side of town. White folks, Ray. It's a lot bigger than just this 'hood."

Ray thought about what Lucky had just said, and he knew it was true. He'd seen it with his own eyes. He thought the other points Lucky had made about greed and how it had made narcotics profitable and about the destruction left behind. He remember Lala and the children from this neighborhood, children who wait a lifetime for the few, precious few opportunities for the chance at success that he had taken for granted.

He understood, had seen the violence with his own eyes, inner-city parents in street gangs or in prison. The hunger these children have for a normal life, children reaching out for a parent too high or too strung out to notice. Children growing into adults without a purpose or without personal discipline, trying to learn life while exposed first-hand to addiction, violence, to psychological disadvantages. Children trained from birth to kill for a color or a city block. Children taught anger from a life of wanting that which birth had deemed they cannot afford. Children so far out of main stream America that no one even knows they exist until they fall prey to their failed environment and steal a pair of shoes they've being conditioned, duped to believe are important. Or when they jack a car they could never otherwise afford. Or when they step across the line and kill; until they grow into a statistic in prison.

"Ray," Lucky said. "You still with me?"

"Yeah. Yeah," he smiled. "I was just thinking about what you said, and it took me out there. I'm good, go ahead, I'm listening."

"Okay," Lucky said in a suspicious tone. Then he continued. "It's all about greed, bro. It starts with the politicians who are financially invested in numerous prison related support industries, to the smallest dealer on the corner who avoids jail because he walks out the back door as a police informant.

"I mean, hell, you know the story of Freeway Rick Ross and the Mena, Arkansas CIA drug smuggling conspiracy. That shit isn't a conspiracy theory, that shit is real!" Lucky said with enthusiasm. It happened here, on the other side of this neighborhood, and people in mainstream American don't want to hear about it, they've been brainwashed into believing that the government would never be involved in something like that... And maybe they're right, maybe most of the government wouldn't be involved, but some were. Some still are! Look around you; open your eyes. The Feds are hooked into the drug cartels. That's the reason they don't shut 'em down. Hell, El Chapo's accountant admitted that they gave the President of Mexico a couple hundred million dollars! The President! Bought and paid for! Government in general, Ray, is only as honest as the people running it. The truth is, the government here isn't any better than the one in Mexico, just sneakier. The whole damned system is sick, diseased."

Lucky looked fanatical, "Look around you, bro, and answer me this. If the government isn't crooked, then answer me this: How is it okay to sell dope as long as you do it while snitching for the cops? How is it okay to give one kid thirty years in prison for selling the same dope that your informant just got little or no time for selling? People in this neighborhood know that if you're willing to snitch for the cops, you do little or no time for criminal activity. If you sell dope for the police, you go free! That's why people down here don't respect the law, or the cops, or the system. Maybe they used to be the good guys, but not anymore. Because the law and the cops and the system doesn't treat everybody the same. Hell, that's the whole problem, there

are no good guys. You're either on this side or that side, and both sides are about money. Both sides are wrong ... These people don't trust the government- they don't respect it, so they don't feel a moral obligation to follow its rules of law."

## Part 3

"You see it all the time in prison. Guys willing to destroy or steal anything, and everything they can because it belongs to the government. It's not much different out here - people will do or say anything to get a government check and think nothing about the fraud involved. They do it because they hate the government.

"People have lost respect for the system and therefore refuse to play by its rules, refuse to play the game necessary or required to win approval from those who do. In the end, they suffer because they disagree with a justice system wholly and purposefully designed to entrap them. The word 'justice' applied in a manner that would have appalled Mr. Webster."

"You wonder why, every now and then, the inner-city revolts and destroys everything it can? It's like I said, it's out of frustration and anger.

"You see, Ray. Them folks on talk radio have forgotten that the government receives its authority from the people. What they don't understand, because they've never lived it, is that the inner-cities are fighting for freedom, not from white people, but from a government that has created bad laws. From a government that has grown phlegmatic, unjust, and greedy - for the record, lots of black folks are part of it, too. Now, the government wants you, us, to believe it's racial so we hate each other instead of them - divide and conquer, Ray." Lucky stopped, pulled out a pack of cigarettes, tapped one out of the pack and offered it to the preacher's son. When he declined, Lucky pulled out a long and slim golden lighter, lit his cigarette and took a long toke, held it and blew it out with gusto.

"The federal government has overstepped its intended purpose. It's become too powerful; power-crazy. Remember Ray, this great country was established with the concept of strong, state government to prevent this exact scenario from happening. To avoid a ruling tyranny ... the Feds have become the problem, a monster eating its own children to increase its power.

"The average citizen can't see it, so they get their facts from the biased news networks. But you, you are here with us. Look around you, Ray. Look at the cities, the inner, forgotten, ignored parts that no one wants to talk about until it's election time. These inner-cities are rotting from the inside out - they're filled with violence and addiction. Look at our nation's economy, built on the back of an overtaxed working class. Look at the general lack of manners and respect among our youth today. Our country - and yes, Ray, it's my country too. Look at the civil unrest, economic and environmental catastrophe. Greed in all neighborhoods is rampant; fortunes being made by criminal organizations and political organizations and private corporations alike while children of all colors are being pushed into addiction and prostitution by one or the other.

"Something has to be done, Ray. This country is in moral and social decline. It has become ancient Rome, and like Rome, it's on the brink of either collapse or fascism. This country, like ancient Egypt and Rome has become an abomination of government and environmental misconduct, where our politicians' intended purpose is self-indulgence; to get rich off the system. Wrong has become so common, people no longer even recognize it. There's a sickness out there, Ray, and it goes far beyond the inner-cities. The average citizen has been desensitized to it, the unholy has become the new norm.

"Did you think you'd ever see a day when parents would be afraid to let their children out to go Trick or Treat? Or to the park alone, or to walk home from school? I'm not talking about just here, Ray. This is happening in rural America too! How did that happen? Can't blame that on one race or the other. And what about peace between the races? Is that getting better or worse? Worse! Crime? Worse! Teen pregnancy? Worse! Addiction? Worse!

"Face it, Ray. We're losing. We've lost the War on Drugs. The biggest drug dealers in the world are no longer in third world countries. They're in corporate America. It's all about greed and power. Drugs, whether we want to acknowledge it or not, is big money. The feds figured that out in the sixties - then went into Vietnam and Southeast Asia for it. Just like England did back in the day with India and China in the opium war."

Lucky paused for effect. He leaned forward, and in a knowing voice asked, "Why do you think we went into Afghanistan, Ray? We didn't need the oil; hell, there isn't any oil in Afghanistan. And the terrorist story is thin. We went in there for the opium, the heroin, and we stayed till when? 'Till Big Pharma created and perfected and distributed synthetic opium. Then we pulled out, giving the whole country over to our SUPPOSED enemy. Why fight to control, buy and smuggle when you can make its replacement in a laboratory production line. Hell, Ray, they're GIVING Suboxone away for free in prison! Yeah, they give it away in street clinics and prisons because it helps addicts avoid the other drugs. You take Suboxone and you don't want OTHER DRUGS, just the suboxone! So Big Pharma, along with the government approval, creates a

drug that helps you kick the other drugs but strings you out on it. And who do you think pays for it? Why the working class. So the government uses taxpayer money to pay Big Pharma to produce a drug that causes people to want ONLY that drug, and the people who don't use any drugs pay for it! WOW! Is that brilliant or what!? It's the biggest scam in the world! Fuck the lives it destroys, right!?

"It's greed, Ray. Or maybe the Devil, whatever, but there's something evil that's made money more important than human life. The world emphasis on material wealth has put the undisciplined, the uneducated, the disadvantaged, the less intelligent, at a prohibitive handicap. And the people in this neighborhood are on this country's front line. That's why you don't see the many traditional churches here, unlike the rural areas. Here they don't need traditional symbols of suffering, guilt and death. Being born here gives them all that and more."

The two men sat in a comfortable silence, contemplating their beliefs from the conspiratorial to the factual. While they talked, the club had begun to fill up with people from the neighborhood. Wee walked by with a man on her arm - again she looked at Ray. He took a good look at the guy and nodded to him, then to her. He was trusted like that; her date would know that he was seen with her. He had better keep things civil.

A man named Freddie entered the club, spotted Lucky and came over to the table. He nodded to Ray, then gave Lucky a long and complicated handshake with a smile. Lucky looked Freddie up and down. He then looked at Ray, "Look at this fool!" he said as he pointed first at the man's shoes, to the football jersey he wore, to his gold chain and finally to his Nike cap.

Freddie shook his head in disbelief. "Not again, Lucky, not more of that socialist BS... I'm outta here." He looked at Ray, "I love this brother, but he's full of shit!" He smiled and started to walk away, then he stopped and added, "Came here from some sewer in Haiti and wants to complain about this country."

He raised his arms and did a slow spin to show himself off. "You just jealous 'cause you can't look this good." Freddie walked over to a table with three girls and started smiling and talking.

"What was that about," asked Ray.

"Oh nothing really. Freddie and I go way back. Did time together, actually he's a good man. He's got a heart of gold. But... Look at him, look at what he's wearing, I call him, Freddie the fool!"

The preacher's son looked over at Freddie, then not understanding what he was supposed to see, he shrugged.



"The NFL jersey, the sneakers, the gold chain," Lucky said imperatively. With a wave of his hands, "You don't see it?"

Ray shrugged and his face pleaded ignorance.

"Here, let me help you out," Lucky offered. "For starters, his shoes cost about seven hundred dollars. Not because they're worth it, but because they have some athlete's name on 'em. But ... You know, gotta have 'em to impress somebody, right?" Again, they simultaneously looked at Freddie; he was laughing while dancing with one of the girls from the table behind them.

Both men smiled and shook their heads. "Yeah, Freddie's a character, for sure." Then in a more serious tone, Lucky added,

"You know the dude whose name is on those shoes is like a billionaire. a BILLIONAIRE! Good for him, right?" Lucky lit another cigarette. "That billion dollars came from fools like that. He used his thumb over his shoulder to indicate Freddie.

"Dude won't even set foot on a court for less than forty million a year... That don't include all the endorsement money on top of it."

"That football jersey, hell, that's not a knock-off, that's an official NFL jersey, no telling what that cost, but you can bet it cost a hell of a lot more than the ten or twenty dollars it took to make it. But he's gotta have it, 'cause he's been taught it's cool to pay, what, three hundred-fifty or more? For something worth maybe twenty dollars?"

Both men watched Freddie at the bar, picking up a drink.

"Fool has to take the city bus to work, can't afford a car, but he's got a thousand dollars in his clothes and another twenty-five hundred in that chain he's making payments on. That's how big corporate America keeps us poor and keeps themselves rich ... By brainwashing kids into wanting things they can't afford. That's only part of it.

"You see that football jersey? Well that's a team jersey, for a quarterback who was refusing to play for less than fifty million dollars a year! And a year of football is only about nine months of actual practice and games." Both men simultaneously took a swig from their beers. Ray looked at the waitress, raised a hand in the air with two fingers up, ordering two more, then continued, "let me put it this way. If the average American makes, say fifty thousand dollars a year, and one hell of a lot of people don't make that much, but let's use that number."

"I don't make fifty grand a year, and neither does my father," Ray threw in.

"And neither does that fool over there. And that's my point exactly. Most families in this neighborhood don't make fifty grand a year. Unless both spouses work, of course. But, let's assume the average person makes that fifty-grand mark. Do you have any idea how long it would take a person making fifty thou' a year to earn just ONE million? Twenty years. Yet we pay an athlete fifty million for nine months of football."

## Part 4

"That right there is what's wrong with this world. And in case you're having trouble with the numbers, let me help you. A THOUSAND YEARS, Ray! It would take a thousand years for a person making fifty grand a year to earn what that boy from Green Bay makes in nine months. ONE THOUSAND YEARS! A thousand years of labor. A thousand years of sweat labor equals nine months of athletic prowess ... That's what this world has come to. All made possible because fools like Freddie, who make a whole hell of a lot less than fifty grand a year, willingly buys the propaganda and marketing bullshit forced down our throats. Hypnotized, brainwashed by the marketing genius of Corporate America's scheme to take the money from the working class. And Ray, if a player makes fifty mill' a year, how much do you think the owners of those teams make? Billions with a capital 'B.' My point is that in this capitalist society, athletes, entertainers and corporate CEO's are valued above schoolteachers, firefighters, waitresses, roofers, welders - bartenders - and just about everyone else ... A thousand years, Ray.

"And folks wonder why the poor and the middle class have become angry, and less patriotic ... It's called social injustice. That means it ain't fair, Ray."

They sat in silence and watched the people around them; Ray yawned and looked at his watch.

"Yeah, I'm tired too," Lucky said.

"Ray, I know I sound angry, but I'm not. It isn't that. Hell, I'm not saying that it's wrong to be successful, rich even. It's not. Personal accomplishment exists for a reason. There's nothing wrong with success or a society that offers models of what a fulfilling life might look like. What I'm saying is this: If you're fortunate enough to be born a super athlete, or a self-motivated genius like Elon Musk, don't forget that

99.9% of the people on this planet were not born with that privilege. Do something with your privileged life that benefits and brings hope to the less fortunate masses."

Just then Wee walked up to the table and sat down. "I'm tired. I'm ready to get outta here. Ray, would you mind walking me home?"

"No problem, Wee. Let me call Lala and tell her I'll be ten minutes late."

Together they stood. Wee kissed Lucky on the cheek and they left. As they exited the club, Lucky took a left and Ray and Wee took a right.

Lucky hollered over his shoulder, "Ten minutes, Ray? Is that all you've got!?" And he let out a fierce laugh.

"F-U Lucky!" Ray responded, laughter in his voice.

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