

**Waukesha Reads ~ THE BIG READ**  
**2013 Flash Fiction Contest**  
Adult Division Winner  
Trevor Huskey

THE JOURNEY THAT NEVER HAPPENED

Thinking of his trip to the coast, Caleb could almost smell the salty ocean air but realize it was probably just the perspiring fray of people below him. Descending the stairs, he looked about him, studying the throngs of humanity bustling to and fro. Suddenly someone bumped into him.

“Pardon,” came a voice, a man’s voice. Knowing it was probably unintentional, Caleb initially dismissed it as an accident. But then he remembered that he was in the city. And at the train station. A place where so many people were looking about trying to orient themselves among a sea of fellow commuters all crushing together. This provided the perfect hunting grounds for a pickpocket. Without checking for his wallet, he swung around and saw a cloaked figure slipping intently into the stream of bodies. Wouldn’t a decent person try to make eye-contact and be sure no offense was taken? Caleb followed the dark grey coat and hat, feeling for his wallet as he did so. He was right; it was gone.

Now the pace of footsteps took on a completely different meaning, and the thunderous clattering of hundreds of feet smacking pavement around Caleb exploded in his ears. Quickening his strides, he pushed forward with authority and righteousness, heart pounding and eyes narrowing on his target. As though aware of Caleb’s pursuit, the thief darted to the left, cutting across several parallel travelers as if he were a dancer in perfect choreography. Not allowing himself to be lost, Caleb fought his way into, around and beyond all who unknowingly

opposed his mission. The dance continued in this manner as prey and hunter weaved through endless bodies that countered or belied their endgame. Sweating and growing increasingly stern and frustrated, Caleb decided to rush his quarry. Tensing his muscles and anticipating the line of the grey hat, Caleb lashed forward but was deflected by an innocent train seeker who yelled “Careful, mate!”

Twisting off this person and momentarily disoriented, Caleb panicked as he scanned every figure in his immediate vicinity. Where? Where was he? He thought to himself, don’t look for someone or in a direction; look for the style of how he moves. Turning his head, forcing himself to be calm, Caleb perused the colors, shapes and movements surrounding, wishing he could smell his nemesis. A second stretched and Caleb took a deep breath as his senses magnified. Popping into his consciousness like fireworks, a dark grey hat sliced across commuters without disrupting anyone. There, there it is. Caleb’s eyes magnetically locked onto the hat, and he plowed through the jostling people like a juggernaut, no longer caring about civility or right of way. Stepping on their feet, barging into them, sometimes knocking them down, it just didn’t matter. He was relentless in his determination to get his money. He had worked for it, worked hard. Now, nobody and nothing was going to get between him and his money.

He felt bold and strong and didn’t care what happened around him. Those bodies that he brushed aside were in his wake now and the voices demanding “look where you’re going” were sucked into the train station cacophony of whistles, announcements and engines. Finally, the hat went hard right and straight into the men’s room. Caleb’s eyes sparked as he knew this was his golden opportunity. Desperately, he rumbled to the men’s room and burst through the door.

Once inside, the door swung closed behind him muffling the rush hour outside. Standing there, Caleb was surprised to find only one other person in the men's room, the thief who was standing hunched over at the sinks apparently washing his hands. Or acting like it. From directly behind, Caleb could only see the top of the hat and wondered if the man was waiting for Caleb to approach him and then ambush Caleb. But Caleb wanted his money. No, he demanded his money. Rage flared again in Caleb, and the thought of someone having his money squashed his anxiety. He leaped forward, grabbed the man by his grey coat and spun him around to face his assailant who undoubtedly perpetrated countless other crimes. But Caleb found himself staring in the mirror, seeing his own face braced in anger which slowly melted into disbelief. He twisted around looking for the man with the grey hat and coat, but the room was empty. Sweating more profusely, Caleb considered his sanity.

Patting himself down, he found his wallet in his coat pocket, but it was stuffed with even more money than before. What had happened? Was he dreaming? Images flooded his mind of all his "ventures" and how he used the title of businessman to convince people he was legitimate. Now these thoughts ate at him for the first time, and his head swirled and stomach ached.

Caleb looked up and into the mirror again, seeing his image and flinching involuntarily as if he had a tick. Hands shaking and his throat suddenly parched, he pulled back from the mirror and smashed it with his hand as he cursed. No, he would not let this...this...this change him, make him soft. It's a hard world. And if you're not hard, you get crushed. Caleb splashed water in his face, stood up straight, unruffled his jacket, and turned away from the spider-web mirror. Opening the door, he rejoined the harried travelers and thought "No, today is not a good day for a journey after all," and left the men's room in his grey coat and hat.