The Moment of Stillness

B Alan Bourgeois · Opening excerpt · 1 of 2

It started with numbers. Not small numbers. Big ones. Grim ones. They marched across the TV screen day after day like soldiers in a silent war. 2020 had brought uncertainty. 2021 brought grief. But it was 2022 that broke Samuel Whitaker.

In 2021, a new president was elected. For many, it was a turning point, a sliver of hope in a fractured country. But for Sam, it was too late. The damage had already been done. The cascading effects of Trump's presidency had rolled over the lives of ordinary people like a flood, and Sam was among the wreckage.

He sat in his van most mornings, curled under a tattered sleeping bag, watching a flickering screen from his phone until the battery died. The death toll from the pandemic had passed a million. Not that anyone seemed to care anymore. Flags didn't lower. Voices didn't quiet. Instead, politicians talked louder, angrier, and with less sense.

Especially the one with the orange skin and smug smirk who called it "a beautiful success." Sam had once scoffed at the man. Now, he could barely breathe when he saw his face. Hearing him speak was worse—every syllable reopened wounds that had barely begun to scar. He would shut off the screen in disgust, only to turn it back on minutes later. The horror was addictive.

Reading sample — continued

He had lost his retirement savings in a single quarter. Book sales tanked. Speaking gigs evaporated. Friends either drifted away or died silently in hospital beds he couldn’t visit. And the final blow: the apartment he’d once called his sanctuary was gone. He couldn’t afford rent. Couldn’t keep up.

He lived in his van now.

Parked behind an abandoned strip mall just outside the city, the van had become both shelter and cell. The driver’s seat was his desk, his bed stretched across a sagging mattress in the back, and a stained thermos was the closest thing he had to a kitchen. A curtain—once a tablecloth—hung crookedly behind the front seats, separating him from a world he no longer trusted.

The gym pass was expiring soon. He counted the showers left like rationed breaths. His meals were whatever he could find at the dollar store—cheap beans, stale bread, a bruised banana if he got lucky. He ate in silence, chewing slowly, trying not to think about the meals he used to enjoy, the dinners he used to host.