

Ed Soren looked out his second-floor window as another day turned into another night. A man of about sixty, he turned around after one more view of the South Chicago streets. After a long, degrading day just like any other, he slowly drifted off to sleep, awaiting the arrival of the next. Around 6:00 AM, Ed woke up to the one bedroom apartment that he alone had called home for almost ten years.

The man then checked his calendar, as he did every day, to see if it was one of the coveted days off he had been granted. July 14th, 2028, it read, not circled in red pen as he had hoped. After taking the elevator down, he emerged from his resident building in fear, as he always did. Though it was only a five block walk, Ed always prepared for the worst as he began the daily commute to the fruit stand which he operated.

Ed remembered what it was like before. He lived happily with his wife and three children in a suburb of Upstate New York, although it was so long ago he could barely recall the town. Of course, suburbs like that had been long gone ever since the takeover, and everyone had been repopulated in cities. He remembered that like it was yesterday. His only wish now was that he could have stopped it, an ideal common in most people. Nobody dared say anything like that out loud, though. Nobody wanted to risk being heard.

After his journey through memories, he arrived at the job which had been assigned to him, and began selling a day's worth of fruit. He knew there was no clean food or water anymore, or at least none available to the commoners. However, he couldn't simply stop working, or else he would have even less.

The July sun beat down on Ed for his daily rigorous 12-hour shift. At 7:00 in the evening, when he usually got off, he closed up shop for the day, and ensured that his stand was prepared for tomorrow. It had been a reasonably productive day, not that it mattered at all to him. Regardless of how much he sold, Ed, and everyone else kept next to nothing. Almost all of the proceeds from their labor went to the state, now.

He then commenced the usual five block walk home again, just like any other day for the past ten years. It was often on these walks that Ed reflected, involuntarily of course, on the horrors he saw during the takeover. He was one of the few that saw it coming in the years before, but it seemed the more he talked about it, the less anybody would listen. The only good fortune

to come of his intuition was the basic precautions he took. As a result, he and his family were safe, even though separated.

Ed woke up the next day and continued the decade long routine. He walked out of the cramped apartment, alone as always, and walked the five blocks to the fruit stand. As he approached the small market he ran, he came across a note that appeared to be left on top overnight. He recognized the print on the note almost immediately, and he read in horror, as his worst fear for the past ten years had become a reality.

The slip of red paper left on the stand was his termination notice. Ed's job was to be taken over the next day by somebody more fitting, as it read on the sheet. It is well known that this meant you were not working as fast as they would like you to. Ed couldn't understand this happening to him. As much as he hated it, he always worked his hardest. But whatever the reason, Ed Rosen was forced to face what he wished he never had to: being unemployed in the world he now lived in.

The next few days were hard on Ed. Since all working positions were controlled by the authorities that fired him, he had no hope of finding a new job. Ed managed to ration the food he already had for a week, unpleasant as it was. But after he ran out of food, he came to a sudden realization. He saw for the first time that it didn't have to be this way, and that he could do something about it. He would become the hero that he had hoped for.

Ed looked out his window on this night, not feeling despair as he usually did, but for the first time in ten years, it was hope that consumed his thoughts. The desolate wasteland that was once part of a free world had long destroyed feelings of hope in many people, including Ed at first. However, after being separated from his family, put in a demeaning job, and then having that job taken from him after it was the only thing he had left, he knew that he could be the one to revive hope in himself and everyone else.

He then rummaged through his closet looking for anything that could help him. He didn't have many possessions left. Nobody did. Nothing Ed came across seemed to be of value, but he finally saw something that he immediately knew would be almost all he needed. Ed used to be an

avid skier, and he stumbled upon a mask he had once worn for warmth. It was a dark blue, and covered the whole face, with the exception of two eyeholes.

Immediately, Ed knew what he would do. With the ski mask on his head, his identity would be protected. In this world, anyone who took any steps to bring about change would never be seen again. Ed knew that it was too much of a risk to not hide who he was underneath. The mask would shield his name, and therefore, his life.

With no food or water in the small apartment he called home, Ed had to act quickly in order to survive. He considered his options on what he could do, and how he could do it. It was a given that flat-out violence would never work. Anything that could possibly be used as a weapon was confiscated at the beginning of the infamous takeover. Public protesting never worked either. Any form of public opposition, violent or otherwise, was brutally laid to rest. As Ed began wondering if there truly was anything that he could do, he finally saw what would lead him and Chicago on the long path to freedom.

Ed, and the whole world, for that matter, knew that there was no viable actions directed at the authorities. However, if he could help people like him, and give them all something to hope for, something to believe in, then he could get the whole city on his side, person by person, one by one.

So Ed went out that night, and begin helping everybody who he saw that needed his help, one way or another. Should anybody have known his name, his entire idea would have been pointless. To the people of Chicago, Ed Soren would simply be another fool putting his life on the line simply to give somebody a hand. But without a name, or a known purpose, people wouldn't know a thing about him. All anybody would know about him was that he was willing to stand up for what was right.

As Ed walked the lonesome and dark city streets of Chicago what he saw was a wave of people looking for something to believe in. Many people had given up hope on that, but some of them were still waiting. They were still waiting for somebody to stand up for all of them.

Ed's first moves were simple. When he saw somebody, anybody, who needed his help, he helped them. As small as the action was, whether it be giving someone a hand with a heavy

package, or giving a word of advice on how to survive, Ed saw the results that he was hoping he would see. It wasn't long before people recognized him, and were sitting on the edge of their seats to see what he would do next.

Over the next several weeks, Ed watched as controversy erupted in Chicago about the masked man who began exposing the truth, and helping other people when they were in need, just like he once was. Ed's actions seemed to have started a fire that kept spreading and spreading until everyone in the city was ready to stand up for their freedom as Ed did.

The people of Chicago met resistance in their struggle for freedom led by Ed Rosen, but when they unified together for their common cause, it wasn't long until the city was the first free one in ten years. As Ed saw this all unfold, he thought back to just weeks earlier when he had been deprived of a job, food, and everything else he needed to survive. As Ed began anonymously protecting people, many supplied him in return. He was still shocked that just several actions of helping protect people against injustice could lead to all this.

Ed's inspiration kept spreading, and his presence was while known throughout the world soon enough. For safety reasons, nobody could know his name, however nobody ever asked it. All they needed to know was that there was somebody looking out for them, who had taught them to look out for themselves. With a smile on his face, one sunny afternoon, Ed addressed the public with this message: "Today, Chicago; tomorrow, the world!"