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I'm Tired

by Lesley Dawson

I'm tired of words. Over the years I have heard so many of them, promises given, suggestions made and forms filled in, all of which have come to nothing. I wrote these words after leaving the latest church service where I was made much of and then allowed to walk out into the dark night alone. They all knew I was homeless but nobody offered me even a sleeping bag or a flask of hot coffee to take with me.

If I hear one more Christian saying "May God bless you" or one more humanist telling me "It is a tragedy that Eastbourne has no accommodation for homeless people. We are doing all we can to persuade the Council to change its policy" I shall scream. Despite all these professions of support, I am still sleeping in a shelter on the seafront.

Life wasn't always like this. Once upon a time, many years ago I was like all the other normal people in Eastbourne. I was part of a happy family, mum, dad and me. We laughed a lot and had fun together. Then tragedy struck and my wonderful dad was killed in a fight outside our local pub. After that everything changed. My mum found she couldn't cope without him and began to take too many sleeping pills and tranquilizers. She took up with this nauseating man she met at a support group and before you could say Jack Robinson, I had a new dad; except, he wasn't my dad.

It was obvious that he didn't really want me around. He wanted mum all to himself; except when he tried to climb into my bed. I suggested to him that he had lost his way and come into my room by mistake. At this he smiled without it reaching his eyes and mumbled something about "Keeping it our secret and not telling mum."

There was only so much of this I could take and as soon as I could I left home, staying at first with my best school friend. This was ok until her mum was sectioned and put into a secure unit and Susie went to live with her aunt in Hull.

After that I shacked up with various boys I had met at the job centre but finally no one would have us in their house. I think this had something to do with my stealing from any purse I could find.

This morning on waking I wandered into town hoping to beg money from gullible people shopping in the new Beacon Centre. This older woman went past me, and then backtracked and I thought "Great. Here comes another sucker". She grinned at me and instead of putting her hand in her pocket offered to buy me a coffee and a burger at MacDonald's. I explained that I was banned from MacDonald's so she brought the food and drink out to me. As she was leaving she said "Have you been to the Matthew 25 Mission"? You can get food there all day"

"Here it comes" I thought "I will have to go to a religious meeting before I get anything to eat" and prepared to swear at her to make her go away. However, she didn't say another word, just gave me a card with an address down Seaside. My feelings about Missions were so strong that it was three nights later when putting my hands into my pockets to keep warm, I found the card. Next morning my stomach was so empty that I decided to chance going to the place. After all I had become very good at tuning out the sermons.

I found the place and walked into this small building in front of the church attracted by the tantalising smell of frying bacon. Now that was a breakfast. And believe or not, nobody said anything to me after asking me if I wanted a breakfast. I sat there all day in the warm, drinking endless cups of coffee and nobody tried to chase me out or convert me. I think I might go again.