

Bush Man

San Francisco is a wonderful tourist spot. People come from all over the world to see the natural beauty of the Bay Area, the Golden Gate Bridge, the tea garden in Golden Gate Park and Fisherman's Wharf, home of great seafood restaurants, shops and entertainment venues. But there was one sight that tourists would rather avoid.

No, I'm not talking about the homeless, but there are many in SF. Tourists generally stayed out of their way, occasionally dropping some change into their lap. The homeless in San Francisco were creative with signs that pleaded their case, or would dance or sing (badly) for change. There was a guy who sat inside a garbage can and would pop out to ask for money from unsuspecting tourists and ask for money. His sign said '*the original white trash*' and while it was clever, it turned a lot of people off.

But my favorite was a guy known as *Bush Man*.

Bush Man would crouch on the sidewalk, between the restaurants and the bay where boats below would seek tourists for tours around Alcatraz and the Golden Gate Bridge. He held a bush in a planter in front of himself and kept very still. That is, until an unsuspecting tourist would be on their cell phone or chatting with their companion. It worked particularly well when a tourist was carrying a drink, which would inevitably spill all over themselves or others.

With a sudden jump worthy of an NBA forward going up for a dunk, Bush Man would pop up and scare the tourist silly. His smile showed he meant no harm and most people happily dropped some change or a bill into his cap. We always brought friends of ours from outside California and set them up to be scared by Bush Man. He was an original San Francisco treat.

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Years later, in Washington State.

“Aren’t you the detective who caught the guy infecting houses with ants and hornets?”

“Why yes, have you seen him around again?”

“No, but I thought you might look into a more serious problem.”

“What is that?”

“You know that pond down the street, the one where people walk their dogs?”

“Yes.”

“There’s someone selling drugs over there.”

The detective suddenly increased her attention.

“Really? How do you know?”

“Well, another neighbor and I noticed that every day between 10 and 10:30 in the morning, there’s a black Subaru parked next to the pond.”

“Yes, I know there’s only two parking spaces, but people park there and walk their dogs.”

“You’re right, but when this Subaru is parked there, no one is walking around the pond, with or without a dog.”

“And why is this suspicious?”

“Did you know there’s a small path above the pond hidden by trees?”

“Yes, I’ve seen it. Doesn’t really go anywhere.”

“Exactly. Except it’s perfect cover for someone to sell drugs up there.”

“You need more proof than that.”

“Detective, the neighbor who lives on the corner can see that spot from her house. She says the Subaru is there every day and she has witnessed a woman parking there and walking up that path for about ten minutes, then returning to her car and leaving.”

“Hmm. Anything else?”

“Yes, she has seen the woman carrying small plastic bags up the path, but returning without them.”

“And you say this has been happening for how long?”

“Over a year now.”

“Why didn’t you contact the police?”

“We did. We gave them a description of the situation, the car and its license plate.”

“Did they get back to you?”

“Yes, they said they checked out the car and nothing further.”

“Well, maybe they did more than that. Let me find out at the station.”

“Thanks, please let me know.”

The detective checked in with the officers in her station.

“Joe, do you know anything about a reported drug dealing on my street?”

“Yes, two people think there’s a lady selling drugs up there behind the trees.”

“Did you investigate? Why didn’t you tell me?”

“We didn’t want to bother you. It was probably nothing. We ran the plate they gave us and the person didn’t have any record or warrants.”

“Officer, a lot of drug dealers don’t, until they are caught. Where was the person from?”

“Tacoma.”

“Didn’t it seem a bit odd to you that someone from Tacoma was parking there for ten minutes every weekday?”

“Well, yes, now that you mention it.”

“Can we get some surveillance in that area?”

“I suppose.”

“You have those fancy cameras we got from homeland. Put a couple of them up there and see what happens.”

“Yes detective.”

“And post someone in a plain vehicle to see if that car is still parking there. In fact, never mind. I live down the street. I’ll look for the car.”

The police officers planted a couple of cameras secretly on the trees inside that path. The cameras were motion activated and would send a signal back to a police station website used for surveillance.

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The detective strolled out of her house before ten o’clock to watch the area. Sure enough, in a few minutes, a black Subaru parked next to the pond. A woman was visible in the driver’s seat. She sat there for a short while, making calls on her cell phone. Then she got out of the car, carrying a small bag, looked around and walked up the path behind the trees.

Not wanting to be spotted, the detective stayed out of sight. She continued walking past the pond, while looking back occasionally. After ten minutes, the woman returned to her car and drove away.

The detective went to the station and checked the surveillance. The cameras worked, capturing someone exchanging small packets of drugs for money. But both the woman and her buyer wore a mask, so they couldn't identify them. She went back to the neighborhood and met the person who gave her the tip.

“You're right. Someone is selling drugs up there. But we couldn't see their face.”

“Detective, have you ever been to Fisherman's Wharf in San Francisco?”

“Yes, why?”

The neighbor told her all about Bush Man.

“I see”, she said with a grin on her face.

The next day, a rookie was camouflaged in army dress and hid in the trees on the path.

Just like clockwork, at 10:15am the woman came up the path and met someone coming down the other side of the path, both hidden from the street. When the exchange happened, the rookie popped up from behind holding out his badge and gun.

“You're under arrest.” And he led the pair down to the street where the detective was waiting for them.

The woman seemed shocked and looked at the detective. “How did you catch us?”

“Have you ever been to San Francisco?”