The Mayor of Portland was sitting in his office, his work which piled high on either side of him. His attire was far from business formal, his wiry, disheveled hair escaping from beneath a gray, knit cap. He was mumbling to himself about this and that, frantically trying to piece together the intricate web of conspiracy that had overrun the city.

“Landmines in Peninsula Park…melt down the bottles for Kevlar…1, 2, 3 pigeon feathers…”

He reached into the pocket of his musty, dusty coat and retrieved a mixed handful of coins, small stones, a paperclip and a small bronze statue of Shiva. With the thumb and index finger of his opposite hand, he carefully placed the statue of Shiva on the ground atop a 4”x6” replica of an ornamental rug which was already adorned with bits of bone, a polished cut of agate tarnished with tiny scratches and a piece of tree bark with a small patch of moss on it. Then, with the same intentional movement of his thumb and forefinger, he placed everything but the coins back into his pocket.

One by one he counted the coins, organizing them into small stacks based on denomination.

“Thirty-five … forty … sixty-five miles to freedom. Seventy-five … eighty-five … rain on the plain who can complain? …”

He paused, got to his feet and started digging through a neon pink fanny pack strapped to a toaster in the front of his shopping cart overflowing with life. He unzipped the front pocket and retrieved two slips of paper. After analyzing them, he resumed counting the remainder of the coins.

An affluent-looking man on his way to the grocery store on the corner approached the alcove between buildings where the Mayor’s office was located. The Mayor bowed deeply and greeted the man with a smile, “Welcome to City Hall! Would you be able to…” The man sped up his pace, suddenly fascinated by his own shoes. Unfazed, the Mayor returned to mandala of hidden truth which undulated between chaos and divine clarity in his head.

A pair of women passed the Mayor’s office en route to the coffee shop on the next block. He was frozen, mouth agape in pensive thought, contemplating the vast, interconnected everything. The women exchanged a look of mild disgust, catching a whiff of his unwashed clothes and hurried away before the guilt of their privileged lives could ruin their plans. The Mayor noticed them a moment too late and called after them, “Beg yer pardon!” Though clearly still within earshot, they did not acknowledge him.

With a shrug he retrieved a pen and a small notebook from his breast pocket. Flipping past pages and pages of illegible secrets of the universe until his found a blank section, he scrawled, “Ancient satellites in the bus circuits.” He circled the words and shoved the notebook back in his pocket.

A young man was crossing the street and waved hello to the Mayor, who he’d spoken with on multiple occasions. The mayor bent down and scooped the coins he had counted earlier and with striking lucidity, asked the man, “Please, can you do me a favor?”

The young man asked how he could help and the Mayor responded, “They won’t let me in the grocery store anymore…could you pick me up some bread and margarine?” He pointed toward the store on the corner and proffered the stacks of coins and the slips of paper from the fanny pack which turned out to be coupons for bread and margarine. “I finally have just enough money!”

Moved by compassion for the childlike innocence of this man whom society had failed so miserably, the young man replied, “Of course I can do that for you. You can keep your money. I’ll use my food stamps.” How could he deny such a simple plea for human decency? “What’s your name, my friend?”

The Mayor looked at the boy with a puzzled smirk on his face, “I’m the Mayor of Portland! Don’t you recognize me from the news?”

“I knew I’d seen you somewhere before,” the young man replied. “Wait here, Mayor, I’ll be right back.”

He walked to the grocery store and purchased two loaves of bread and a container of margarine. With a light heart and a pep in his step he swiped his food stamp card and exited through the automatic doors to deliver the payload. As he turned the corner toward City Hall, he was stopped by a police officer. “Whoa, kid. Street’s closed. Crime scene.”

“Oh, okay,” the young man replied. “These groceries belong to the man who was sitting in that alcove right over there. Did you see which way he went?”

The officer motioned backward with his thumb to the long black bag lying on the ground. “Drive by. Prollie a gang initiation.”