

## **CLEAN SWEEP OF UENO HOBOS Check This Morning—180 Arrests**

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During the predawn hours of the twenty-third, the Tokyo Ueno Police began to arrest those vagrants trying to avoid the cold of the approaching winter by camping in and around the underground passages of the Keisei Line, Ueno Railway Station, Ueno Park, Daito Ward, in the hopes of preventing further shootings by the long-sought criminal no. 109. A total of 180 persons were arrested in the underground passages and behind the Tokyo Institute of Culture, located within the Park precincts. They were arrested on the spot under the Law of Minor Offenses (infringement of the prohibition against loitering and vagrancy) and the Traffic Laws (acts prohibited on highways). All were taken to the Ueno Police Station, where they were photographed and fingerprinted. Four, who complained of being sick, were sent to the hospital via the Daito Welfare Office; nine were sent to a home for the aged. Those remaining were released after signing an agreement not to relapse into vagrancy. An hour later there was every indication that almost all had returned to their former haunts.

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## *My Case*

This is the record of a box man.

I am beginning this account in a box. A cardboard box that reaches just to my hips when I put it on over my head.

That is to say, at this juncture the box man is me. A box man, in his box, is recording the chronicle of a box man.

## *Instructions for Making a Box*

### MATERIALS:

1 empty box of corrugated cardboard

Vinyl sheet (semi-transparent) – twenty inches square

Rubber tape (water-resistant) – about eight yards

Wire – about two yards

Small pointed knife (a tool)

*(To have on hand, if necessary: Three pieces of worn canvas and one pair of work boots in addition to regular work clothes for streetwear.)*

Any empty box a yard long by a yard wide and about four feet deep will do. However, in practice, one of the standard forms commonly called a ‘quarto’ is desirable. Standard items are easy to find, and most commercial articles that use standard-sized boxes are generally of irregular shape – various types of foodstuffs precisely adaptable to the container – so that the construction is sturdier than others. The most important reason to use the standardized form is that it is hard to distinguish one box from another. As far as I know, most box men utilize this quarto box. For if the box has any striking features to it, its special anonymity will suffer.

Even the common variety of corrugated cardboard has recently been strengthened, and since it is semi-waterproof there is no need to select any special kind unless you are going through the rainy season. Ordinary cardboard has better ventilation and is lighter and easier to use. For those who wish to occupy one box over a period of time, regardless of the season, I recommend the Frog Box, especially good in wet weather. This box has a vinyl finish, and as the name suggests, it

is exceedingly strong in water. When new it has a sheen as if oiled, but apparently it produces static electricity easily, quickly absorbs dirt, and gets covered with dust; then the edge is thicker than the ordinary one and looks wavy. You can tell it at once from the common box.

To construct your box there is no particular procedure to follow. First decide what is to be the bottom and the top of the box – decide according to whatever design there may be or make the top the side with the least wear or just decide arbitrarily – and cut out the bottom part. In cases where one has numerous personal effects to carry, the bottom part can be folded inward without cutting, and, with wire and tape, the two ends can be made into a baggage rack. Tape the exposed part of the edges at the three points on the ceiling and at the one on the side where they come together.

The greatest care must be taken when making the observation window. First decide on its size and location; since there will be individual variations, the following figures are purely for the sake of reference. Ideally, the upper edge of the window will be six inches from the top of the box, and the lower edge eleven inches below that; the width will be seventeen inches. After you have subtracted the thickness of the base to stabilize the box when in place (I put a magazine on my head), the upper edge of the window comes to the eyebrows. You may perhaps consider this to be too low, but one seldom gets the opportunity to look up, while the lower edge is used frequently. When you are in an upright position, it will be difficult to walk if a stretch of at least five feet is not visible in front. There are no special grounds for computing the width. These parts should be adjusted to the required ventilation and the lateral strength of the box. At any rate since you can see right down to the ground, the window should be as small as possible.

Next comes the installation of the frosted vinyl curtain over the window. There's a little trick here too. That is, the upper edge is taped to the outside of the opening and the rest left to hang free, but please do not forget to anticipate a lengthwise slit. This simple device is useful beyond all expectations. The slit should be in the center, and the two flaps should overlap a fraction of an inch. As long as the box is held vertical, they will serve as screens, and no one will be able to

see in. When the box is tilted slightly, an opening appears, permitting you to see out. It is a simple but extremely subtle contrivance, so be very careful when selecting the vinyl. Something rather heavy yet flexible is desirable. Anything cheap that immediately stiffens with temperature changes will be a problem. Anything flimsy is even worse. You need something flexible yet heavy enough not to have to worry about every little draft; the breadth of the opening can be easily regulated by tilting the box. For a box man the slit in the vinyl is comparable, as it were, to the expression of the eyes. It is wrong to consider this aperture as being on the same level as a peephole. With very slight adjustments it is easy to express yourself. Of course, this is not a look of kindness. The worst threatening glare is not so offensive as this slit. Without exaggeration, this is one of the few self-defenses an unprotected box man has. I should like to see the man capable of returning this look with composure.

In case you're in crowds a lot, I suppose you might as well puncture holes in the right and left walls while you're about it. Using a thickish nail, bore as many openings as possible in an area of about six inches in diameter, leaving enough space between them so the strength of the cardboard isn't affected. These apertures will serve as both supplementary peepholes and be convenient for distinguishing the direction of sounds. However unsightly, it will be more advantageous in case of rain to open the holes from the inside out and have the flaps facing out.

Last of all, cut the remaining wire into one-, two-, four-, and six-inch lengths, bend back both ends, and prepare them as hooks for hanging things on the wall. You should restrict your personal effects to a minimum; as it is, it's quite exhausting to arrange the indispensable items: radio, mug, thermos, flashlight, towel, and small miscellaneous bag.

As for the rubber boots, there's nothing particular to add. Just as long as they don't have any holes. If the canvas is wrapped around the waist, it is excellent for filling the space between oneself and the box and for holding the box in place. With three layers, divided in front, it is easy to move in all ways as well as being most convenient for defecation and urinating and for sundry other purposes.

## *An Example: The Case of A*

Just making the box is simple enough; at the outside it takes less than an hour. However, it requires considerable courage to put the box on, over your head, and get to be a box man. Anyway, as soon as anyone gets into this simple, unprepossessing paper cubicle and goes out into the streets, he turns into an apparition that is neither man nor box. A box man possesses some offensive poison about him. I suppose there's some degree of poison even in a picture of the snake lady on a billboard or the bear man in a circus side show, but even so that can be canceled out by the admission fee. But the poison of a box man is not so simple.

For example, in your case, I'm sure you've not yet heard of a box man. Though there can't be any statistics, there is evidence that a rather large number of them are living in concealment throughout the country. But I've never heard that box men are being talked about anywhere. Evidently the world intends to keep its mouth tightly shut about them.

Have you ever actually seen one?

Let's stop fooling each other now. Certainly a box man is hardly conspicuous. He is like a piece of rubbish shoved between a guard-rail and a public toilet or underneath a footbridge. But that's different from being inconspicuous or invisible. Since he is not especially uncommon, there is every opportunity of seeing one. Surely, even you have, at least once. But I also realize full well that you don't want to admit it. You're not the only one. Even with no ulterior motive, apparently one instinctively averts one's eyes. Yes, I suppose if you were to wear dark glasses at night or put on a mask, you couldn't help being considered some very timid creature or if

not that, someone up to no good. All the more so then with a box man, who conceals his whole body; one can hardly object if he is considered suspicious.

Why, I wonder, would anyone deliberately want to be a box man? Perhaps you think it strange, but there are many amazing cases that explain why – trifling motivations that at first glance are not motivations at all. A is a case in point.

One day a box man took up residence directly below the window of A's apartment. Though A tried his best not to look, he did. No matter how he struggled to ignore the box man, he was very much aware of his presence. The first feelings that assailed A were anger and abhorrence toward a foreign body that has imposed itself, irritation and perplexity at having his territory encroached on illegally. But he decided to try and wait things out in silence for the time being. Anyway, he thought the neighborhood busybody, nagging about the garbage disposal or who knows what, would take action. But there was no sign that anybody was about to handle the matter. Unable to put up with the situation any longer, he complained to the janitor of the apartment building; but in vain. The box man was only visible from A's window, and anyone who could manage not to be seen would not deliberately move. As frequently as possible everybody pretended not to see him.

Finally A went to the police box himself. When the bored officer told him to fill out a damage report, A said that for the first time he experienced something similar to fear.

'Look here,' the officer had snapped. 'I suppose you made it clear he was to get out.'

There was nothing for A to do but take action himself. On the way home from the police box he stopped at a friend's house and borrowed an air rifle. Once back in his room, he had a cigarette and calmed down; then he looked directly out the window, and as he did so the box man turned the observation slit of the box straight toward him. There were scarcely three or four yards between them. As if perceiving A's inner confusion, the box tilted, and the semi-opaque vinyl curtain over the window divided vertically in

two. From within, an indistinct whitish eye was firmly fixed on him. A felt a rush of blood go to his head. He flung open the window, and loading the gun, took aim.

But at what? At such close distance he might get the box man in the eye. And if he did that, it would only be trouble later on. It would be enough to shoot him somewhere else just to teach him not to show his face around here again. As A was speculating about his opponent's position in the box and the contours of his body, his finger, still on the trigger, began to grow numb and falter. It would be so much better if the fellow would vacate the premises because of a simple threat. He didn't want a single drop of blood left behind. But he couldn't wait forever. If a simple threat didn't work, it would be useless to try it again. He drew a bead. Again anger welled up within him. Time overheated, burned. He squeezed the trigger. The barrel of the gun, and then the box, made a noise like that of a wet trouser cuff snapped by an umbrella handle.

At the same time, the box gave a big leap. However inventively it may be used, corrugated cardboard is, after all, merely paper. Although it demonstrates considerable strength against general surface pressure, it is weak when stressed at a given point. The lead bullet must have bored into the fellow's body with great force. But neither the screams nor the jeers he had anticipated were forthcoming. Once it had leaped up, the box, again in repose, showed signs within of an extremely slow movement. A was at a loss. He had aimed several inches below and to the left of the line connecting the lower left and the upper right angles of the window. He estimated it to be about where the arm meets the right shoulder. Had he hesitated so long that his aim had deflected? But the box's reaction had been too great for that. An unpleasant thought occurred to him. The man in the box did not necessarily have to be facing front. The lower part of his body was completely covered with canvas, so there was no way to tell exactly what position he was in. He might have been sitting cross-legged, his knees on a diagonal in the box. If so, the bullet might well have grazed the top of the shoulder and hit the carotid artery.



An uncomfortable numbness formed an oval round A's mouth. Running steps in a dream. With bated breath A waited for the next movement. The box man did not budge. No, he had . . . he was clearly moving. The inclination was definitely increasing not so fast as the second hand of a watch but faster than the minute hand. Was he going to fall over? From the box came a sound like scraping on not fully dry clay. Suddenly the box man arose. He was unexpectedly tall. A heard a sound like that of striking a wet tent. Slowly changing his direction, the box man gave a low cough and stretched. He began to walk, swinging the box slightly right and left. The position of his hips was alarmingly toward the back, perhaps because he was bending forward. A thought the box had spoken, but he could not catch the words. When it got to the street that ran along the building, it disappeared around the corner in the same position. What disappointed A most of all was that he hadn't been able to see the expression on the box man's face.

Perhaps it was his imagination, but to A the surface of the ground behind the fleeing box man appeared darker than elsewhere. Five cigarette stubs had been snuffed out underfoot. An empty bottle was plugged with paper. Two enormous spiders were crawling about inside. One looked like a corpse. Crumpled wrapping paper from a chocolate bar. Then three large, successive blackish stains as big as a thumb. Were they blood stains? he wondered. No, phlegm or spittle doubtlessly. A simpered slightly as if in apology. Well, then, he had hit the target.

In about half a month, A had almost begun to forget the box man. But he was worried about using the shortcut to the station when he went to work, and to avoid the narrow lane, he unconsciously changed his route. Yet he still continued to look out of his window as soon as he woke up and first thing when he came home. If only he had not decided to turn in his icebox, in due course he would have been cured of this habit, but . . .

The new refrigerator, equipped with a freezing compartment, was normal enough, and it came in a corrugated cardboard box. Furthermore, it was just the right size. As soon as the contents

were out and it was empty, A began to think of the box man. He heard the whipping sound again. He felt as if the air-rifle bullet had ricocheted from two weeks before. A was confused and decided at once to dispose of the box. But instead he washed his hands, blew his nose, and with great diligence, gargled repeatedly. The rebounding bullet flying about inside his cranium would doubtless set his brain functions askew. After observing the neighborhood for a while, he drew the curtains over the windows and gingerly crawled into the box.

Inside it was dark, and there was the sweet smell of waterproof paint. The place seemed very homelike. A recollection was on the verge of dawning, but he could not grasp it. He wanted to stay like this forever, but in less than a minute he came to his senses and crawled out. Feeling a little uneasy, he decided to keep the box for a while.

The following day, when he returned from work, A cut an observation window in the box with a knife, smiling bitterly, and then tried putting it on over his head like the box man. But he took it off immediately – he might well smile bitterly! He didn't understand what was happening. He viciously and resolutely kicked the box into a corner of the room, but not hard enough to destroy it.

On the third day he more or less regained his composure and tried looking out of the observation window. He couldn't recall what had surprised him so the evening before. He could definitely feel a change, but such a degree of change was desirable. From the whole scene, thorns fell and things appeared smooth and round. Stains on the wall with which he was completely familiar and which were utterly harmless to him . . . old magazines piled helter-skelter . . . a little television set with bent antennae . . . empty tins of corn beef beginning to overflow with cigarette butts . . . he was again made forcibly aware of the unconscious tension in himself by everything being so unexpectedly filled with thorns. Perhaps he should put aside his useless prejudice about boxes.

The next day A watched television with the box over his head.

From the fifth day on, except for sleeping, eating, defecating, and urinating, he lived in the box as long as he was in his room.