



Down to This: Squalor and Splendour in a Big-City Shantytown

Shaughnessy Bishop-Stall

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For some young men, climbing Everest or sailing solo into polar seas isn't the biggest risk in the world. Instead it is venturing alone into the deepest urban jungle, where human nature is the dangerous, incomprehensible and sometimes wildly uplifting force that tests not only your ability to survive but also your own humanity.

One cold November day, Shaughnessy Bishop-Stall heads out on just such a quest. He packs up a new tent, some clothes, his notebooks and a pen and goes to live in Tent City, twenty-seven lawless acres where the largest hobo town on the continent squats in the scandalized shadow of Canada's largest city. The rules he sets for himself are simple: no access to money, family or friends, except what he can find from that day on. He'll do whatever people in Tent City do to get by, be whatever bum, wino, beggar, hustler, criminal, junkie or con man he chooses to be on any given day.

When he arrives, he finds a dump full of the castaways of the last millennium, human and otherwise. On the edge of the world, yet somehow smack in the middle of it all, fugitives, drug addicts, prostitutes, dealers and ex-cons have created an anarchic society, where the rules are made up nightly and your life depends on knowing them. Not only does Bishop-Stall manage to survive until the bulldozers come, but against all odds his own heart and spirit slowly mend. An astonishing account of birth, suicide, brawls, binges, tears, crazed laughter, good and bad intentions, fiendish charity and the sudden eloquence and generosity of broken souls, **Down to This** is Bishop-Stall's iridescent love song to a lost city like no other.

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