

ADMIT TWO

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BRICK TOWERS

by

Scott Avella & Cheryl Johnson

The morning after witnessing the murder of Joachim Willis, Henry found himself only half awake.

It had had begun as any other Friday since he arrived at Brick Towers, to the soft hum of hydraulic arms lifting a dumpster over a truck and bottles sliding down like rattling glass bones over gear sounds. Only on that morning, Henry's mind roused before his body and emerged in a communion of sorts with a small glass giraffe on the school desk across from the bed.

In the months since he had stolen it, Henry had memorized the features of the glass figurine, the watery translucence of its long, thin neck, the pinpoint of black eyes, painted on, its expression as tranquil as any object. That morning, he was comforted by the familiarity of the giraffe, standing stalwartly in the habitual rendition of the world on which Henry relied for survival.

The room was still cold. The cacophony of breaking glass continued outside his window and spread over the cement brick alleyways of the entire Ironbound. He saw Billy, the superintendent of Building D, in the basement where Henry had ushered him, draining dark, metallic water from the furnace and saying in his warm, gravely voice, the fatherly voice of survival and wisdom, that everything would be okay.

He was aware of the light between the door and the floor flickering across the gaps

and groves in the hardwood. The floor boards creaked in the hall outside as though the building was coming back to life after the two days of snow that covered Brick Towers and the rust colored earth around Newark. The sounds paused, the shadows fell still along the light from the door and then resumed, the rattle of keys replaced the echo of breaking bottles.

Cheryl, the girl he loved, was there too, wafting in and out of the present or taking residence in the periphery of other images he would see, places she could not have been, known or seen. Or else they were brought to her, sitting in the laundry room, her eyes closed in the interior of her music.

When the chill in the room encroached, tingling and teasing helpless, exposed limbs, Henry saw blood pooling on the dusty gray floor of the basement, from where Joachim, his arms tight against his chest, gurgled in escaping blood and scratched his fingernails against the concrete wall. At that last image, presenting itself vaguely as something real, more like memory than imagination, distance became proportionate, sound carried to the correct time and the presence outside the door receded with the creaking and the key sounds and vanished. Across the space, immeasurable a moment before, the glass giraffe, still silent on the empty desk, came into quick focus, his body woke and his mind came fully to realize the world.

Henry had stolen Ms. Thompson's glass figurine from the dresser she kept

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propped up among the boxes, the high piles of yarn and the stacks of magazines and paperback books in the hallway entrance to her apartment on the first floor. He was coming back from shopping for her one Saturday, awkward and distressed with all her plastic bags of groceries. Careful not to drop the large eggs or the whole milk or crush the sliced bread against the unsalted butter, he knocked it over and heard it fall and tap hard against the mirror with the other glass animals arranged around Saturday circulars and a glass boat. The giraffe was the only animal that had no giraffe just like it, standing next to it, waiting to board the Ark. He surrendered the bags, picked it up, first to see if it was broken and then to put it as fast and as stealthily as he could manage into the pocket of his oversized coat.

Henry and Ms. Thompson had their typical Saturday afternoon but as she told him the stories she always told, Henry kept his hand in the pocket of his coat and felt along the long, glass-smooth neck of the giraffe. When he took his last gulp of milk, he said goodbye. On the way out, he lingered by the dresser with the other figurines, examined the pairs of animals – horses, elephants, birds – but didn't but the giraffe back. Instead, he walked past them and said goodbye again as he unlocked the deadbolt and slid the yellow chain across the faded door.

When he got to his apartment at the end of a narrow hallway one floor above, he placed the giraffe on the desk across from the bed. He would look at it on the nights when he could not sleep, when all the kids from the Towers would scream and argue until very late into the night and the thumping music and curse words rose up though the dark. The light from the night light under the desk rose through the space between the desk and the wall and with the patterns of the chipping paint, it reminded him of the

paper fans the elderly women fluttered in the courtyard during summer. Often, he would watch the little giraffe on its stage and think of Ms. Thompson sitting in her dark living room, a gray puff of hair falling down her bent face, her worn down chair creaking to the deep, soul shaking laugh she had.

It was Henry's habit those mornings, to hold back the blinds and watch the recycling truck make its way back over the pockmarked pavement of Third Street. This Friday he did so to fend off the dense weight that fell on him, the irreversible new world the memory of the night before created.

The snow had stopped but the wind still howled and shook the window in the rotten frame next to the bed. Tiny shards of ice, whistling through the cracks along the edges of the window fell across his face and he squinted to discern the deserted white street below. Salt gathered in lines along the curbside and against the fence across from the four buildings that made up the Brick Towers complex. Between the buildings, in the dark alleys, snow blew off the tops of the mountains Billy and his son made the day before and danced across the street in circling patterns and short, straight wisps. Beyond Third Street, Newark and the haze from the cars and the factories intermingled with billboards, church steeples and the metal drawbridges around the highway. Suddenly, the scene became something empty and terrifying and he could no longer focus on going to work, doing laundry or the other things he was to do on that and every Friday. After two winters at Brick Towers, an old fear returned, the one that rose up and sank down fast, in the middle of the night, at the slow lonely shadows on the walls of unfamiliar rooms. On the desk, the little

glass giraffe stood strong, proud and tall, oblivious in its silent kind of knowing.

When he was a child in the bottom bunk, in the strange houses with the other boys, he would imagine he was floating on a sea and the wrinkled blankets were like little islands around him. His empty pillow case floated near him on the blue sheet by the drafty window, crumpled and flattened under the weight of his body. He took it, put his hand inside and began feeling the way the cloth transpired across his finger tips. As he fell in and out sleep, the bars spread wider across the bed and when the window slammed hard against the frame, the fear rose up and sank down again.

"Why do you do that?" Cheryl was sitting on the bed, leaning up against the wall in a pink t-shirt with sparkling silver sequins and looking at Henry's hand caressing the pillow case.

He stared at his hand as though it wasn't his, like it was some other thing out there like the empty desk, the bed, the blanket sea. He shrugged.

"My big sister used to do the same thing. She used to have these bits of bed sheet, she'd cut them into squares and put them here."

He noticed he was speaking more slowly than he normally did. He felt along the bottom of the mattress showing Cheryl. He considered that that was one of the only memories he still had of his sister.

Cheryl looked down at him on the bed with doe eyes, darting out the pillow of her lower lip. Henry carried her hand into the pillow case and placing his thumb and index finger around hers, he took hold of a piece of the cool cotton between her finger tips and rubbed it against her thumb.

"Henry stop!" she squealed, "That feels funny!"

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She pulled her hand from the pillow case and rested it in the other, both on top of her pink t-shirt with the sequins and the thin straps that fell across her bare shoulders.

She was different from the other girls at Brick Towers. Most of them were always talking, always in groups but every time he saw Cheryl, she was alone. She sat around Building D with her headphones blaring loud hip-hop into the lobby, the stairs by where the courtyard opened, the laundry room always in white socks up to her knees and shiny black shoes, parts of her school uniform Henry liked most.

Coming back to the Towers from work one night, he heard her arguing in the hallway out past the manager's office with a group of other girls from the building. She was terribly angry, red faced, fists out, screaming a long string of the worst profanities Henry had ever heard. She continued them in front of the working elevator, even long after the girls had gone. Henry considered walking by and seeing Billy but when Cheryl looked up and caught his eye from across the hallway, she looked sad and did not bear that exasperated sense, the rolling eyes he had found when he saw others from the building. So he continued and felt her eyes on him as he waited anxiously for the elevator. Then she started talking to him as though they had known each other for a long time. She was tired of every-thing, all the other girls in the building hated her because she was Haitian and Puerto Rican and they spoke mean gossip in the courtyard. It looked to Henry as though she couldn't breathe.

In the elevator, after the doors had closed and they were alone in harsh silver light, he said merely that he knew what she meant. He didn't think she had heard him but as the door opened on the fourth floor, her face brightened and almost with a gleeful laugh, she came close and kissed him on the cheek. The doors closed and

Henry, realizing he had forgotten to press the button for his floor, got off the elevator on the sixth floor only to have to go back down to his apartment.

After that night, Cheryl would sit next to Henry in the laundry room and listen to her music with the volume so high he could hear every word. He listened to it while they watched the towels, jeans and socks spinning in the dryer and each time he wished he were more like the men in her songs, tougher, stronger and unafraid.

Ambulances and police cars orbited Brick Towers. They were gathered toward them by fights, assaults, batteries, burglaries, drug deals, murders, shootings and stabbings. The residents got used to sirens. They became accustomed to each spring, when the weather turned warmer and courtyard turned green and yellow, to the police coming through the iron gates and arresting one or two of the boys sitting on the stairs.

His first days at Brick Towers, when he dared venture from his room, he sat on the yellow armchair at the end of the hallway and looked out over the courtyard and the street to watch the world. Even from that distance at the window, he could see that the tenants of Brick Towers carried a sorrow and anger so heavy it bent their backs and made them shuffle when they walked. But when they were there with friends – on the balconies, in the courtyard, on the street or the stairs, when things were safe in the company of others, even enemies – they would open up like light and smile, letting themselves go free in the precious sliver of time there. He had known this before at the homes in Elizabeth, in Jersey City, in Perth Amboy. Brick Towers spread over and along all those cities.

With his weak voice, the way he looked – muffled hair, raised eyebrows and a gaping mouth as though he were always surprised, in awe or need – he had no cause to feel different because he was white. He felt peculiar because he could not disappear into the habitual routine of everyday, the anonymous life of things for better or worse. But everyone he had met, from everywhere in all the cities, seemed to carry their hidden or invisible burdens in secret.

A social worker brought him to his apartment at Brick Towers the summer after high school graduation. He never saw her again. Those days he stayed in the apartment for long surreal hours in dread of the lobby where he would be dissected as a new specimen and of walking across the parking lot to the short concrete wall near the highway, where all the cars and trucks flew by so fast they took the breath right out of him.

At Hope House, the highway was over a hill, past a row of houses with green lawns and trees. On a clear day, at the top of the hill, he could see the grey streak of the Verranzano Narrows along the blue river.

Children seemed to come in and out of the House more quickly than the other group homes. He would get to know someone and then, suddenly and without explanation, they would disappear, get sent away, vanish. He had written letters to his friend Peter for a long time. His mother had come one night and taken him.

“Down south” Elisa said.

Over time the letters stopped coming but he continued to think of the plans they had made if Peter could come back to New Jersey or if Henry ever went “down south”.

There was a picnic bench in the yard and a half basketball court next to the house. Everyday Elisa and one of the

others at the home would cook dinner. On Fridays, they ate pizza and it was the only day of the week Elisa allowed them to drink soda.

More and more frequently during his last year, at the dinner table where everyone gathered each night, Elisa started making statements like, "You're going to be too old for us in a little while, Henry" and "Soon you're going to go out and get a job and leave us".

Later, upstairs in the boy's wing, Deon, one of the more obnoxious and high strung boys he had known, would laugh and say something inappropriate but Henry wouldn't tell any one about what he and the others said. He had realized long before that when he didn't tell Elisa about what they did, there were nicer to him, would let him play basketball with them and there was something that felt warm in his heart at the sound of his name when they said, always smiling a little and looking away, "You wanna play Henry? We need another".

By the time he arrived at Hope House, he was already bigger and stronger than a lot of the other boys and took comfort in the fact that he could easily knock them down. It felt better for him to sit at the long table next to the kitchen with his school work and know they couldn't take his things or make fun of him. He admitted as much to Dr. Simpson, the psychologist who'd come to the house once a week, who routinely asked Henry to repeat himself and frantically scribbled everything down on a large yellow pad.

Then one night there was a party. Elisa and the others ordered pizza. They hung a banner over the stairs and drank soda. The next morning the van came and they told him it was time for him to leave.

He remembered precisely how the air felt when he walked outside that morning: dense, thick, humid, the light

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flickering through shards of grass and thick maple leaves.

When Irene Jacobs came to Brick Towers she told Henry it wouldn't be like before and she was sorry that no one had come to visit him. She said she'd come every week for as long as he liked. They all said things like that, he knew them from back at the homes, the eager types who were there to stay and who left after three weeks.

Over the months that followed, she taught Henry to put his name and address on his things, started him shopping for Ms. Thompson and got him a job at a grocery store at the Spanish section of Broad Street. She told him everything was just a matter of routine and that's what he remembered Elisa saying in the meetings they had at the home. Irene said she shouldn't give gifts as she handed him the nightlight that he flung down, away from him on the desk.

She had taken Henry shopping at Hector and Luisa Garcia's store before she got him the job there stocking shelves and unloading trucks. She said it was a lot of responsibility and that he must do his best to be on time and show up when he was supposed to work. She told him he shouldn't feel bad or keep himself locked up in the apartment all the time.

Each day, according to the schedule on the door in the backroom, he walked to work along McCarter Highway, over the rounded green trusses of Bridge Street through the torn chain link fence to cross the abandoned lot where the crabgrass and spotted spurge flew up to catch the city's refuse. He noted the wood boards, canvassed with gangland words, a long hieroglyph continued from the brick walls of abandoned factories along the rail lines leading to

Newark's hub and the never ending chain link fence built around long vacant lots, for little other reason, it seemed to Henry, than to suspend barbed wire.

He met Hector on his first day. He was shorter than Henry but had massively built arms with grayed tattoos, jet black hair gelled straight back and the angry, intense eyes of a bull. They stood in front of a box of canned milk and he told Henry to stack them on the shelves. He showed him how he was to stamp a price on each can, stack it and then to break apart the box and put it into a pile in the back room. At first Henry was elated. His anxiety eased as he made the task into a routine and took each can out, carefully put the price on the top, in the middle with the blue sticker gun and placed each on the shelf next to the last can. When he realized he would be unable to fit all the cans on the shelf, he thought of Hector telling him he didn't want the box on the floor. So he stacked the cans higher until it looked as though the high tower was about to fall to other side of the aisle. When Luisa saw it, Hector came over to him, already laughing.

It was never clear to Henry, in those first months at the store, whether Louisa would fire him. Yet every morning he was met by the faint affirming smile of Elisa, the questions that fluttered around Cheryl, the warm religion of routine and he forced himself beyond his anxiety to go and learn more of the basic nuances of what was expected of him.

At the end of the each night he'd take the garbage to the dumpster in the back and as the sun went down and the sky got red and dark, Luisa would put the money he had earned in his hand and say, "Muchas gracias, Enrique" and it felt nice to hear his name again.

When the store was empty, Hector would try to teach Henry Spanish curse words in the back room or behind the

register. One night, outside by the dumpster, Hector was smoking and throwing rocks into the abandoned lot next to the store and Henry told him about Cheryl.

"You know what to do Henry?"

"Yeah Hector, I know."

"You know, chiquitas, they like their men to know what to do. You got rubbers Henry?"

"I got 'em, I know."

Then Hector said, "Look Henry, I'm trying to help you. We're friends right? Look, see this Henry, 'naranja', okay?"

"Naranja', okay."

Now look at this," and scowling in concerted effort he took a wedge from it and said, "What's this Henry?" He rubbed his hand in the opening of the orange and moved his hips around, laughing at the show he was putting on.

Luisa Garcia appeared from the back door yelling at Hector in Spanish. She added, in English, "And fix the light out here since you're doing nothing. And stop bothering poor Enrique."

Hector glared at the back door.

"Henry say 'puta'"

"Puta."

"Say hijo de puta."

"Hijo hijo de puta."

"Hijo de puta," he screamed at the empty lot. "Common Henry, you've got to scream 'hijo de puta,' scream like you mean it".

Henry woke again to find the morning progressing without him. Cars began to make their way down Third Street, uneasy and hesitant after two days of blinding snow and ice.

The first time he went to tell Billy about the heat, two girls dragging two wheel carts full of shopping bags stopped talking as he came around the corner and passed them in the stairwell. Irene Jacobs had always told him to say hello when he

saw people from the building but he had stopped when some of the kids started following him through the courtyard chanting the words "hullo-hullo". Then there was Marcus Thompson and Joachim Willis who would laugh and leer at him from the wall or the stairs until he thought it better not to say hello, except to Billy, Ms. Thompson and Cheryl.

Billy Roberts was tall, thin and haggard with a grey beard over his flannel shirt. On his first day at Brick Towers when he forgot his key at the manager's office, he followed him and the social worker to the elevator and shouted after them, "you won't get very far without this, young man."

Henry thanked him and Billy Roberts said very slowly, "Now I don't know anything about any Mr. Roberts young man, you call me Billy."

"Okay, okay, thank you Billy," uncertain if he was being reprimanded but trying to sound as grown up as he could,

Billy and the social worker laughed. "There you go, young man."

Henry had seen Irene Jacobs speaking to Billy when she came to Building D to visit him, Ms. Thompson and her other clients. She told Henry he could trust Billy, that if he ever had any problems in the building or needed help, it would be fine to tell him and he would help. Since then, after some initial hesitation, Henry frequently stood in the doorway of the manager's office, asking Billy about the day and the building and whether or not he wanted anything from the store.

Memories continued to come back in that way, in slow, random drifts until they all became part of one another. It was as though all the memories, strangers to one another, wanted to live in the same world.

This new world, darker and more

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dreadful than Henry had expected, was no different in its need for memories that could live with one another. And with Cheryl, it was like when she was in a room, she kept coming back and it felt to him as though she was at the center of the swirling and unexpected events, the common violence both minor and devastating, the process by which memory made a single tapestry from diverse threads of contradictory happenings.

On the night, lonely and tired under the florescent lights in the laundry room, she accompanied Henry upstairs with a plastic bag of unfolded laundry, they kissed across from the skyline of Newark above the highway and as though he were watching from outside, it felt as though his whole self had turned to snow and twirled around the flat and frozen sea of the bed.

Then she vanished. Two Fridays passed, then three, then four and she did not sit next to him in the laundry room and did not look up or say hello to him from the brown vinyl couches in the dim lobby. Hector told him girls were like that and he should act as though he didn't care, pass her without saying anything at all. But he thought about Cheryl all the time and spent hours at the school desk trying to write to her. The little glass giraffe stood in the corner now amid page after page of scribbled out and crumpled up love letters.

In September, she went back to school and he would wait for her in the lobby. He'd see her mother, limping against her cane and her little sister arguing with her about carrying the bags they'd have, throwing her arms toward the floor as though they alone were too much of a burden to carry. After two weeks, when he had gathered the courage to approach Cheryl in the lobby and give her one of the shorter letters he had written, she didn't say anything and stared out blankly, half in the world Henry was in and half

in the intimacy of her music. He left the letter beside her on the couch.

The next night when Henry got to the apartment, he found his letter, an unopened business envelop Billy had given him, crumpled and still damp under the door. Written across it was a note from Cheryl that read, "Stay away."

When he got into the apartment, he felt as though a scream was rising silently but strongly inside him and suddenly enraged he threw all the crumpled love letters from the desk until the giraffe was left alone, looking. He took it to throw, hot and angry, as though possessed by some terrible need, some unknowable need to smash it hard against the floor. Instead, he dropped it on the bed and threw his hands off it, collapsed and cried for a long time. He was relieved that no one was there to see him. The display would have little consequence.

When Billy came out of the manager's office with a red metal box to fix the furnace for the second time, Henry asked to go with him. Billy agreed under the condition Henry promised never to go without him. He said it was dangerous and there were a lot of ways for a boy to get hurt. He knew he was talking about Marcus Thompson and Joachim Willis but he knew for a fact that Marcus was a boy once too.

Irene Jacobs had introduced Henry to Marcus' mother after he got the job at the grocery store. She was very old, already legally blind and going blinder. Even though she could no longer read, her apartment was brimming with magazines, old newspapers and catalogs, books with nearly naked girls with large breasts and parted lips on the covers, all in piles past Henry's knees in places.

Henry suspected Ms. Thompson was also afraid that someone like Irene Jacobs

would come and from some story of "best interest" take her away from Brick Towers. But Irene Jacobs told Henry only that he could help her by shopping for her on the weekends. After a time, she began baking cookies, the ingredients of which increasingly made up the bulk of the grocery list she'd give him in the morning. She would tell Henry stories about her life, about singing in the choir at her church, about when she first got to Brick Towers, about war times and factory work and about her children.

Once, the door to Marcus Thompson's room was open and Henry caught a glimpse of the posters of rap stars and basketball players on the wall, and the laundry lying everywhere on the floor. He never saw any other sign of him staying there. She had a picture of him on the wall from when he was a boy and Henry would look at it. Ms. Thompson, sensing he was standing near her pictures, though probably unaware of which one he was studying, would say, "that's my boy Marcus" and tell Henry once again how he played football in school and his coach had once said he had enough potential, if he got himself together, to get a scholarship and go to college. But Henry knew Marcus didn't go to school anymore because he was always standing with the other boys on the stairs or in the courtyard.

In the picture on the wall, in the dark wood frame around the others of his sisters and his father, he looked very small with one hand stretched out on an old car and the other in the pocket of gray dress pants. He was smiling so widely his eyes squinted as though it were very bright outside. Behind him, was a green field, heavy with recent rain. It appeared as Henry imagined "the South" would look.

By the time Henry got ready for work that Friday, the sun had already moved away from the window and the orange in the apartment faded into dark shadows. He had already spent most of his day in bed, unable to sleep, unable to wake and face the bitter chill in the room. He walked past the bag of laundry in the corner, went into the bathroom and got dressed.

As the elevator opened downstairs, he heard the static of the policeman's radio before he saw him with another, standing sternly in their blue pressed uniforms in the manager's office talking to Billy and a bald man in a crumpled suit. He saw Cheryl sitting alone at the end of the couch, with the big, round saucers of her headphones hanging down around her neck, watching the police, her hands over her lips.

He walked past them, careful not to turn to the manager's office and then directly to the stairs outside. He wondered whether Marcus would be there, where he always stood tall and lean over the hand rail on the stairs with a paper bag in his hand and a loosey behind his ear. At the front door he put his hood over his head and hurried down the icy stairs, past the police cars and out onto Third Street toward the store.

Work passed slowly before he fell into the routine of it. At one point Hector, who had been screaming something to him in Spanish from across the store, approached him and asked him if anything was wrong. He could not think how to answer and didn't give much thought to how his silence appeared. At the end of the night, he carried the flattened boxes and the bags from the front register and the one from the backroom out to the dumpster and took the money from Luisa. He went back home to Brick Towers where at the end of a hallway, the

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bare apartment with a glass giraffe, a nightlight and the skyline of Newark lay wide open, redeeming and warm enough to make him happy.

When he got there, he turned out the lights and sat in the cold apartment illuminated only by the light of the nightlight under the desk. He had a vision of Marcus Thompson standing, hooded, in the basement by the furnace, over the still animated body of Joachim Willis who cried and whimpered because he could no longer scream. In the vision, Marcus walked to Henry and made a close study of him. Sensing the knife in his hand, Henry waited for it in the smell of leather, smoke and hot, acrid breath. Then Marcus smiled wide and almost like in the picture he had seen of him, his eyes tilted and thinned into red crescents.

Henry went over in his mind what Marcus said, "You're that retard from upstairs, right?" That was the word that Henry remembered, "retard". The word caught him off guard but his voice would not work to answer and his legs shook so violently he thought he wouldn't be able to stand. Then he thought he remembered Marcus Thompson laughing when he showed him the knife and walked away. He wondered if Joachim was alive.

The glass giraffe looked small and gentle sitting quietly on the empty desk. Henry thought about routine, about a story he told himself as he walked to the van on the day he left Hope House. He decided, even though it was not the normal time, he would take his clothes to the laundry room and sit in the warmth there and wash them.

The florescent lights hung over the blue seats bolted to the floor and reflected off the silver washing machines and dryers against the wall. An old couple he

recognized from the building sat together in the corner. The man smoked a pipe and the woman gazed out into the curtain of smoke in front of them. After he put the clothes, the detergent and the quarters into the machine, he sat down in the evaporating essence of lemon. The next day was Saturday and he was to go shopping for Ms. Thompson.

While the washer was filling with water, Cheryl's shiny black shoes appeared on the floor in front of him. She stood looking at him for a long time without saying anything.

"Did you hear what happened?"

Henry watched the white capped water spill onto the glass of the washer door.

"A boy got *stabbed* last night." She lingered on the word *stabbed*, breathless with morbid and childish excitement.

Henry shrugged and a long silence followed.

She threw her hands into the air and began walking away, her headphones still over her ears. Then she spun around, her shoes screeching along the linoleum floor and sat on the blue chair next to Henry.

"The cops were here and talking to Billy, you know? Even the owner came here. I know you saw them Henry. Some Latino detective too. I think he was Latino. It was Latisha's cousin, Joachim. I mean the boy who got killed. Henry, you listening? You're *always* lost, you know? Henry are you still mad at me?"

She lowered her headphones and looked around the room. Her voice lowered to a whisper. "Look Henry, it was only that one time okay? You've *gotta* stop thinking about me that way, okay?"

The washer started spinning. He saw the stairwell of the basement, Billy, Cheryl on the brown vinyl couch and Hector teaching him Spanish. He thought of how he might act in front of Irene Jacobs and tried to imagine the police coming to talk to him and whether he'd be more afraid of them than Marcus Thompson. He wondered what was written on Dr. Simpson's yellow pad, what it made of his difficulty speaking and his claims of self restraint.

"Okay," he said faintly through a wall that had just then been completed.

For the remainder of the night Henry and Cheryl sat together in the laundry room and watched the clothes spin in the dryer. The entire time, as the harsh music from her headphones blared into their space together, he broke his promise and imagined her that one morning, the lavender smell of her crawled up on the bed, under and on top of all the laundry - the socks, jeans, towels and underwear. Her bare shoulder kept rising above the crack in the window frame and everything else, snow laden now, turned a drowning brilliance of the whitest light.

THE END

**Conversation Over Tumbling
At the Tenth Street Laundromat**

by

Matt Sucaet, Russell Brakefield, & Benjamin Fidler

Love is proximity.

Love is comfort.

Love is a sock on fire.

Russell Brakefield and **Benjamin Fidler** are famous for finding the best deal on showers and were once seen playing four square on the edge of Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, and Colorado. Currently Russell Brakefield's work can be found in *Prick of the Spindle*, *the Weathervane*, and *elimae*, and Benjamin Fidler is avoiding showers altogether.

Matt Sucaet enjoys the things he likes. Notably, the keen nature of sport and the prolixity of tenth grade essays. His tendency toward the sweet liquids of chilled Midwestern tin is contemporaneous with his reverence toward hollow Astro vans and five dollar pizzas. Lastly, he likes to recapitulate that he knows what he likes.

Dick

by

Jimmy Chen & Emily Dickinson

He touched me, so I live to know
That such a day, permitted so,
I groped upon his breast.
It was a boundless place to me,
And silenced, as the awful sea
Puts minor streams to rest.

- Emily Dickinson

He touched me, so I live to know the mark of my father's hand.
And the mark of his tongue—its tiny bumps of braille that
never spoke words. He touched me hard, with calluses and
blisters. Touched me with anger after the whiskey fades, after
Mother and sister have gone to bed. He touches me with the
love a man feels for a woman who should not be his daughter.
But I am so. I am his daughter and I am so touched.

That such a day, permitted so, I was let out to get the mail. A
plane flew above, farting out two thin chopstick clouds. The
sky was flat warm blue. I thought of WWII, and the bombs
they dropped on Poland. For every happy girl who died, I want
to be you. I would rather be killed, than touched with love and
anger.

May '08

I groped upon his breast. In darkness on my childhood bed, he between my legs, he is touched by me as well. I look at my fingers spread wide on his chest from below. They look like animals moving silently in a meadow, before the sunrise's first blade of light cuts them at the shin. All the animals fall, breaking the spines of a thousand blades of grass.

It was a boundless place to me, my room with walls without shame. He comes when it is dark: entering first with coyness, then with diminishing hope, and finally, without remorse. His member pokes out of his robe, a blind animal with a pulse of its own. "You can name it if you want," he says, but I cannot answer. My mouth is full.

And silenced, as the awful sea, my words fold under the weight of his palm, his one hand braced on my mouth like half a prayer; the other hand inside me, inside a pool of warm blood. "It's not the right time," I try to say, but my words are robbed. Silenced, we eat dinner with silverware, teeth, and the loose atoms that mark this world. Mother and little sister talk pantomime, moving vegetables around their plate. The sky is still warm blue, in my mind.

Puts minor streams to rest. Of minor streams I mean: of tears. I cry no more. I am the poked one, though no longer the leaky one. I am the warm place for my father's animal. I named it Dick. The neighborhood boys can smell me from across the stream, from the other side of the tracks. They come to learn me, my contours and my cavities. They love my insides. The boys they come from far away. They moan incomplete words, inside my ears.

Says Jimmy: I wanted to impose a narrative—imagining how Emily Dickinson might write prose in a contemporary context—onto/into her verse. The title of the piece plays off her surname, and implicates much of the content. Each paragraph begins with a line, in order, from the following stanza of “He touched me, so I live to know”

Jimmy Chen's writing has appeared in *Failbetter*, *Juked*, *Word Riot*, *Pequin*, *Prick of the Spindle*, among others. For a comprehensive list of his publications, please visit his website *Embassy of Misguided Zen* at www.jimmychenchen.com

May '08



DAY OFF IN CLEVELAND

by

Mary Ellen Derwis & Joe Balaz

Casting eyes over the lake
like a fisherman's prayer

I watch the gulls
skim across the water
chasing the promise
of quivering silver

as a cold breeze
like a breath
taken in deep

finds the shoreline.

In the distance
Cleveland metro
rises and exhales
in unison

a stark calligraphy
in the sun shadowed glare.



Cradled in a green haven
with grasshoppers and crickets

Edgewater Park
is pleasant today—

beneath a nearby bluff

the incoming waves
throw a momentary sheen
upon the sand

while far across the way

a secretary downtown
looks out of an office window

and imagines
she's sitting where I am.



As I admire
the simple contrast of leaves
in the surrounding trees

I can easily understand
her daydream

for I'm just grateful
for this sanctuary
on a manicured lawn

which falls so perfectly

in between
the recovering night

and the labor ridden day.

Mary Ellen Derwis and **Joe Balaz** are married and live just outside the city of Cleveland in Ohio . What interests Mary Ellen in the field of photo-art is the unpredictable and synergistic nature of photography in general. Capturing an image that can be enhanced in different ways to bring about a visual dialogue between viewer and photograph is what drives her work. Her photography has appeared in various magazines online. Joe has created works in poetry, concrete poetry, music-poetry and photography. He is the author of *Domino Buzz*, a cd of music-poetry www.joebalaz.com Both artists are collaborating on www.jomaonline.com which features Mary Ellen's photography along with Joe's concrete poetry and photography.

Excerpts From an Untitled Poem

by

Vernon Frazer & Ravi Shankar

1

The cease-fire eased the crash of beaten drummers,
 eyes tearing in the whirling breeze, against the rocks
 where self-imposed carnage basted the worn grotto .
 Rubbing chafed lips, they sputtered their ire,
 nuisance claims against golfers putting green
 as day before them spread its rubbled canvas
 across seats that echoed their slow creation
 from clasps, tapes, bored herbs bouncing
 symphonies on broken glass . The quest for consonance,
 an elusive token, met a good Havana cigar hot on the tip
 of yet another bum lead to a massive bead dump
 where no pent sound released a paratactic wave
 to crash the casements with salt and din .

Whatever hovered, red dust hummed like hamburgers
 on a grill crisped to pumice, hard ground of ground beef
 done to dent dentures, require drill bits, nitrous oxide
 and a masked man to glisten, to fasten, to overindulge
 in diploma talk while the hand smaller than the small hand
 whirls like needle on wax, never nearing the end of
 the classic culminating chords, revolving, involving
 the nerves with servants that prick as they carry out
 commands from pantry to molar to reverberations
 that pink the wavering greens with sand traps mimetic

of no desert on earth, the balatas like body bags,
the graphite-heads cradled by clenched palms
softened by mousse and moisturizer .

Echoes furrowing the frost-bitten canyons in the land
without carts, blot the skyline with spires, expose grates
to tire-rattle, postulate car horns cliché yet rampant, patent
leather shoes scraping the worn pavement, laces torn
as the last encampment broke and the drag of dead flesh
began, a turn of plot wasted as the screw stripped,
the crew listening to the lispng sergeant's will
fitting the drained noun of its verve . The polar rains
pelted the imploding stalkers, listening to the classic
rotors divulge the creaking weakness of solar bursts
loose as the prairie dividends linking their faith
to the forklift and its triumphant motor frenzy .

2

An ire retrofitted to the lost banyans scorns the fate
that worn faces prattle, weary from the fight to prevent
ground from slipping through the breach where
their wary carbuncles spurt white goo in deference
to the round sounds that resound invisibly
from the subwoofers surrounding the ballroom
like guard towers girding the perimeter of a prison,
compression to rarefaction, the amplitudes surging,
more elastic than saltwater taffy pulled to popping,
crescendos of nerve impulses that dole out decibels
like communion wafers that dissolve on the tongue,
anvil and hammer transforming waves into wavering
hips, jouncing sneakers, a subliminal surge that connects
bystanders in spite of their designer pashmina scarves
or lack thereof, whether they're wearing raw fish
in their hair, or have seal skin darkening the afternoon .

Scratch and scribble, the record rotates, mutates
 into the ontological questions that ambiance
 cannot answer but hint at in a drizzle of olive oil
 on fava beans, before it is smelled or eaten
 or rubbed between two fingers, the telltale sizzle
 of flesh molting, thwack of golf ball, gong of fog horn,
 pulsation of plausible fossils prior to calcification,
 blather and foam of forklifts and cigars, lines
 no iteration can encompass, forward, ever forward,
 found chimes that poke from dampness like lime trees
 in a season of formulaic joking riffs born in the spur
 of the sadist before the whip could slash the wish,
 the urge to fizzle or flub among the worn bogs .

The faded glitter ignores fast rotations and easy spin
 spilling subliminal tales scarred by weakness in queasy jolts
 of utterance, far from the gloaming they would rather ignite .
 Bouncing the finer tones off their bleaker grimaces,
 alliteration refines where the weaker image seeks definition .
 To erase the boiling greens from welled water tints the pan,
 spilling larvae that claw the burnt bottom . The lingering
 ratchet swivels past the finer displays of people akin to
 metallurgic refugees escaping lava flows from the fire
 within . The slime eases over the numb winner,
 pouncing on speakers blasting the needle's ratcheting
 scratch across the selfish rudiments stapled to
 their institutions, jolting as the flashy slackers fall remnant
 to their party cake . Along the needling swizzle stick,
 one sees the reason love songs reborn as commercials
 advance the wish of finery removed, like their repression,
 a fossil envy torn between galloping hooves of guilt
 and trampling verve fixtures that keep the elixir lost
 in place .

If only their uncles could face them!

3

A song of fog born in memory erased feelings torn
 from reiteration of *clasp, rape, disprove* —act's hard fact
 spinning its groove one truth removed from the welling
 of knapsack victims stirring the blood cry harkening
 the full moon's stern reprisal, darkening too soon
 the burning effigy leaking lava down the moral slope
 despite oral protests of balding heads, eyes beaten
 to the next step . The quake of their awful laundering
 brings streams of disconsolate *dhobi wallahs* done
 with flailing shirts against the bank for a pittance .

Sent here to address their grievance to a fortune
 of forks locked in the bottom drawer of the curio
 never to tinkle and scrape . Say spare the utopian vision:
 Rickshaw drivers drive rickshaws . Springs sprang
 under the threadbare seat, where more asses
 assessed a shape they never contemplated, unless
 there, pricked just so over the course of the jouncing
 ride to a thousand different destinations . Dismay has
 an intonation of its own, a trembling treble that droops
 the eye—

Though melons abound! Missions to mars!
 Chewable vitamins! Blast furnaces recessed
 in damp basements sound just as loud up close
 as geysers whooshing into a pair of stereophonic
 headphones, burn louder than bolts of barristers
 ransacking the larders of self-indulgence .

If not for the trouncing esquires posing as playboys
 refulgent in penthouse suites, the guys answer
 self-indulgent questions raised in situations limp
 as their passes at girls in their classes, whether
 wearing hoop earrings, pawned lips, or a tattooed

ass not spared under leather the caring nature
 where they crack the lip of the legal whips
 wiser than Yellowstone 's timed nostalgia .
 To dissemble the future pioneers surrounding felons
 with doable situations, all the wild wishing their
 encasements would stagger home with vellum
 fury renewed . The angry parcels rebound as caste
 inveighs classes assessed to scrape the larger
 Theremins against adobe huts when looming larders
 beckon nerve endings to skip the sonic flurry
 that reckons a slipping dish will fell a sleeping
 panatela or pop its loathsome sty . To grasp
 the nape of the herb, uprooting the railing cries
 of wandering bracket creepers, asleep during
 the pot's sizzling boil, the roiling waters
 churned muzak tonics for the chronically well,
 who spoil their daughters for other men .

Vernon Frazer has published eight books of poetry and three books of fiction. His work has appeared in *Aught*, *Big Bridge*, *First Intensity*, *Jack Magazine*, *Lost and Found Times*, *Moria*, *Miami SunPost*, *Muse Apprentice Guild*, *Sidereality*, *Xstream* and many other literary magazines. His most recent works are the longpoems *Avenue Noir* and *IMPROVISATIONS*, the now-completed work which he introduced in his 2001 reading at the Poetry Project. Frazer is married and lives in South Florida.

Ravi Shankar is Associate Professor and Poet-in-Residence at Central Connecticut State University and the founding editor of the international online journal of the arts, *Drunken Boat* (<http://www.drunkenboat.com>). He has published a book of poems, *Instrumentality* (Cherry Grove, 2004), named a finalist for the 2005 Connecticut Book Awards and a collaborative chapbook, *Wanton Textiles* (No Tell Motel, 2006). Along with Tina Chang and Nathalie Handal, he is the co-editor of *Language for a New Century: Contemporary Poetry from the Middle East, Asia and Beyond* (W.W. Norton & Co.) available now.

Passing Through, Passing By

by

David Rasey & James Gonda

—Meg, I gotta get going.

—Why?

—You *know* why. It's the rules.

—Don't you wanna sleep a little more?

—I wanna find my pants and get going.

—

—Do ya want breakfast? Lemme make you something. Eggs, toast, I'll put on a pot of coffee.

—No, thanks. I just wanna get going.

—Whydaya hafta go now? I mean it's soooo early. Look outside—it's still dark.

—I don't care. I'm a morning person. I'll be fine.

—

—Did you enjoy yourself?

—When? Last night? Yeah, you bet.

—Well, I have a confession, Mitch: I'm not the tough broad you thought I was.

—Oh?

—I'm really . . . fragile.

—Where's my other boot? Did you see my other boot? Maybe it's under the bed

—Did you hear me? I'm tryin' to tell ya not to go. I need you here, with me, a little while longer.

—You know I can't stay.

—You mean you *won't* stay. Find 'em, fuck 'em, forget 'em. That's your code, isn't?

—No reason to be upset, Meg. You knew I was a one-night stand, out before sunrise. I made that clear and you agreed—

—Maybe I didn't believe you.

—Then maybe you misjudged me. I'm a man of my word.

—

—Do I at least get a kiss goodbye?

—No. *The rules*, remember?

—You and your god-damned rules. I *hate* those rules.

—Take care, Meg.

—Get outta my trailer, you bastard.

~

—What's the special this morning?

—Two eggs—any style—toast, sausage, juice, coffee, three ninety-five.

—I'll start with coffee, since you're holding the pot.

—Everyone starts with coffee.

—Can I smoke here?

—The ash trays ain't for decoration, honey.

—Well, you never know.

—You think you want the special?

—Is that the best you can offer? Don't you have something . . . tastier, Suzette?

—Suzette? I'm not Suzette.

—Your nametag says Suzette.

—Oh, so it does. I meant to swap that out. I'm Lorraine.

—Why don't we start with the special, Lorraine, and I'll substitute your phone number for the sausage.

—Now, ain't you a smooth operator? For now, honey, I'll just bring the special. You can get bacon for the sausage, if you want.

—Keep 'em both. Can I at least get your phone number to go?

—Well, you're persistent, I'll give you that. What's your name, slick?

—Mitch. Mitch Solo. No relation to Han.

—Who?

—Han Solo. You know, from *Star Wars*. Darth Vader, Princess Leia, that whole crowd.

—Oh, yeah, right. I never saw *Star Wars*. Not my kinda picture.

—Well, different strokes for different folks, I guess.

—Yeah, I guess. You want cream and sugar?

—I take my coffee black. If I wanted to sweeten it, I'd ask you to put your finger in it.

—Gee whiz, honey, I never heard *that* before.

—Well, it's true.

—

—You shouldn't smoke, you know.

—Why not?

—It'll stunt your growth.

—I'm forty-four, sweets. I think I'm done growin'.

—

—You're not from around here, are ya?

—What makes you say that?

—I've never seen you before.

—So?

—Honey, I've lived in this burg for twenty-five years. I *know* everyone. Unless you've been hidin' in someone's basement, you're not from around here.

—No, you're right. I'm not from around here. Just passing through.

—Are you a salesman?

—No, I'm . . . on assignment.

—Oh, well, I don't know what that means, but I'm glad you stopped in anyway.

—Why's that?

—You're kinda cute.

—I'm flattered.

—No, honey, you're not flattered. I'm sure you've heard that before. I'll tell you what, though—and I never do this—you seem like a nice guy. Why don't you come back after my shift and we'll see about that phone number.

—When might that be?

—Noon time.

—Noon time? You don't work the lunch crowd?

—I'm the breakfast girl. Suzette works lunch.

—Lorraine, I'll tell *you* what—and I never do this either—why don't I swing back at noon and take you to the restaurant of your choice? You gotta have lunch, and I imagine you're tired of diner food.

—You know, Han, I startin' to like you even more.

—It's Mitch. Han is from *Star Wars*.

—Oh, right, I'm sorry. I'm bad with names. I'd better get your order in. How'd you want those eggs, *Mitch*?

—Scrambled.

—Okey-doke.

—I'm starving.

~

—Hey buddy, can I bum a cigarette?

—Yeah, sure, here you go.

—Chesterfield? Who smokes Chesterfields anymore?

—My father smoked 'em.

—Mine too . . . God that tastes good. Thanks, buddy.

—The name's Mitch.

—Well, then, thanks, Mitch. I'm Elmer. Put 'er there. You were smooth with Lorraine just now, if you don't mind the compliment.

—No, I don't mind. Thanks.

—So what brings you to town, Mitch?

—Oh, just passing through.

—I've lived here since 1977.

—Is that right? You must know Lorraine.

—Yeah, I know Lorraine. Everyone knows Lorraine. She's a sweetheart. I used to bowl with her husband until he ran off—well, I shouldn't tell you that—that's gossip and I don't gossip. So you're just passing through?

—Yeah.

—What line are you in?

—I meet women, seduce 'em, then break their hearts.

—You're a regular Casanova! I meant your job

—Like I said, I meet women . . .

—What kind of job is that?

—It's not a job, Elmer, it's a mission.

—You go outta your way to hurt women?

—It's research.

—You're a scientist?

—I'm not a scientist. It's hard to explain

—Put it in layman's terms.

—Okay, I'll try. It's like this: I like to see how women deal with heartbreak, you know, psychologically. It's a perverse hobby.

—I collect wrenches for a hobby. Ya know what, though? I think you need a steady girlfriend, maybe a wife.

—No way! Girlfriends and wives are *too* complicated. I like things easy. Keep it simple—that's one of my rules.

—

—Some woman must've burned you bad.

—Not true! In fact, I've never had a real girlfriend.

—Then how'd you get so . . . cruel?

—I don't know. I really don't, and I've wondered myself

—Maybe—

—When I was born, my mother got sick and almost died—a priest had to give her Last Rites. Anyway, while she was sick I was someplace else, so we didn't bond—you know, emotionally—and I maybe I felt abandoned or unwanted or . . . whatever. Maybe I never recovered from that separation; maybe that separation made me what I am today

—And what's that?

—A guy who abandons women, for sport.

—That's a load of crap! I might've worked in a steal factory for thirty years, but I'm not *that* gullible.

—Yeah, well, that's my story and I'm stickin' to it. Here comes Lorraine with breakfast.

—She's a *real* sweetheart.

—I hope you're right.

~

—Mitch-el. Oh Mitch. Rise and shine.

—Lorraine?

—Time to wake up, pretty boy.

—What time is it?

—Time for you to be gettin' outta here.

—What?

—I'll help you find your stuff

—I have to go?

—That's right, honey.

—Right now?

—Yeah. I gotta be to the diner in fifteen minutes.

—Maybe you could call in

—Now Mitch, don't make me get ugly. We had our fun; now it's time to go.

—Don't you want me to stay?

—No.

—Really? Why are you treating me like this?

—Remember those rules you told me about? Well, I've got some rules of my own, and rule number one is wayward men leave when I leave.

—Oh, okay. Lemme ask you a question: did you have a nice time?

—I had a wonderful time, I really did. Now get dressed, put on your boots, and walk out that door.

—Can I walk you to work?

- That won't be necessary.
- How 'bout a kiss good by?
- You'll smudge my makeup.
- Well, then, can I come back later?
- Don't be a bad sport, Mitch. It was . . . heavenly while it lasted, and now it's over. Just let it be. Okey-doke?
- Okay if I grab breakfast at the diner?
- It's a free county, honey.
- So you're really givin' me the boot?
- Uh-huh.
- You know, Lorraine, I could fall for a girl like you. I really could.
- Save your sweet talk for the next one. Now get goin'!
- Yes ma'am.

The End

This story, "Passing Through Passing By" began as a work titled "Mister Lonely", written by David Rasey. It tells the tale of a sort of incubus (a sexual vampire, the male counterpart to a succubus) who wanders the world creating feelings of heartbreak, guilt, and loneliness in women so he can feed on the negative energy generated by those feelings.

James Gonda, a dialogist and fellow member (and facilitator) of a local writers group, upon reading the story, felt it would read well recast in pure-dialog form. He rewrote the story as a dialog piece with David's approval. When completed, both he and David felt it had taken on an entirely new and exciting dimension.

They began looking for a "home" for their tale that would bring it to a larger audience than just the writers group (who by now have heard and critiqued three different variants of the story. It has become known as "The Story That Wouldn't Die"...). After some collaborative revision, during which the supernatural aspects were written out, they submitted the tale to admit2, where it was accepted.

And so there, in a nutshell, the tale of our collaboration is told. Let me know if you would like any further details. Also, would you mind in the future copying any correspondence to James at Gonda6@aol.com ? We would appreciate it. We wish to say also that we appreciate the chance to appear in your publication and look forward to working more with you.

David Rasey, James Gonda

James Gonda is a dialogist who resides New York's Southern Tier. In his adult life, Jim has worked as a fur salesman, carpenter, pest control salesman, drug store manager, college recruiter, and insurance agent. He has previously published several works, including a piece in the on-line publication Triplopia (www.triplopia.com) "Passing Through Passing By," Jim's first collaborative effort, showcases his all-dialog writing style.

David Rasey is a writer of what he terms "urban fantasy and strange fiction". He also resides in the Southern Tier of New York, where he works as a specialist for an insurance company. He recently published a fantasy story in Literary Fever (www.literaryfever.com), has a novel in progress, and is learning the art of screenwriting. This is also David's first collaborative effort.

genesis again

by

Colette Jonopulos & Peter Schwartz

he had two forms, one appeared
as broken vertebra, followed by the unexpected
whole gravitating to saltwater;
other children

crowding him, the shoreline too
sparse to contain what became
his greatest fear:

all the small failures no
one imagined.

stuck in the serial warmth
of near water he refuses
to play in the dark curtains
of the subconscious

anticipating...

a hundred different fogs
droplets without mercy; inhuman
reflections returning to his cave
like postcards

from the dead; he is the
sole inhabitant this morning
his burned away world (the fog, his
hair, split rods of driftwood)

has left him
covered in strands of seaweed
like shriveled black ropes
draped over his arms

and shoulders, pressed
by a ghostly fingerprint
the charred remnants
of flint and coral

the unnamed pieces of loss
calling to him at last like Linnaeus
giving names and categories
to what remains—

plaintive worship
in his new voice, letting him slide
his fingers neatly into the gelatinous
body of life.

Colette Jonopulos lives, writes, and edits in Eugene, Oregon. She has two non-fiction books in print: *The One Thing Needful* and *Living Waters for a Parched Land*. Her poetry has appeared in numerous journals. She currently co-edits *Tiger's Eye: A Journal of Poetry* with JoAn Osborne.

Peter Schwartz has been practicing the craft of poetry for over 20 years. His work has appeared in 100 print and online journals. Those journals include: *Asheville Poetry Review*, *Epicenter*, and *VOX* to name a few. He's an art editor at the multimedia site *Mad Hatters' Review* and lives in a place where it is always snowing.

Real Email, Real Response

by

Thomas Sullivan & Marina Litvinenko (?)

From: Marina Litvieneko (marina_litvinenko15@yahoo.co.uk)

Sent: Tue 3/18/08 10:51 PM

To: tmpsull@hotmail.com

Good Day Friend,

I am Mrs.Marina Litvinenko,wife of Alexander Litvinenko, a former Russian security officer who died in a London hospital after apparently being poisoned with the highly-toxic metal thallium by Mr Lugovoi,a Russian Government Paid agent.

Please i want you to assist me remove USD\$3.5M given to my husband before his death by Mr Berezovsky, A Russian Billionaire Exiled in UK for exposing an alleged plot to assassinate him by the Russian Authority and to investigate the death of Anna Politkovskaya,a Russian Journalist believed to have equally been poisoned by the Kremlin for writing a book:The Putin's Russia: Life in a Failing Democracy depicted Russia as a country where human rights are routinely trampled. The Funds are deposited with a security firm in Europe and because of fear i will beg you to assist us remove the funds for investment in your country.

As soon as i receive your response,i will send you the documents of the funds. I intend releasing 15% of these funds to for your assistance.

Best Regards,
Mrs.Marina Litvinenko

From: tmpsull@hotmail.com

Sent: Tue 3/19/08 1:31 PM

To: Marina Litvieneko (marina_litvinenko15@yahoo.co.uk)

Dear Marina,

I vink vhat happened to your husband ees a crime horrible. On hospital bed he look like man who took second place in vodka and caviar eating contest. Zos spooky white eyebrows too creepy to vook at. Ve have toxic-metal in dis country two, but dis is only music that ruin your ears. I share your pain. Evey time I get stomach cramp I think "Damn, de CIA half put rat poison in my big Mac." I pray it just gas, thinking about vhat poor Alexander go frou. It usually eez gas. So far, dat eez.

I would be happy to help assist remove money from bank in Europe . But I leef in country almost as corrupt as Russia . Vee get email scams from losers too dumb to get real job. Zees scumbag sit in a trailer in dead town vishing they not screw up der life and have to commit crime. Zey want be normal, i think, but poor genetics or substance abuse just not allow it.

May '08

So, how I know you not just Putin me on? I need zum proof positive zhat you legit and not just zum dirtbag wif low IQ. Wif dollar falling faster than house prices in Baghdad I can't take chance. So here my proposal:

You half endangered sturgeon from Lake Baikal , no? If zoo send me photo of zis fish nibbling on de tip of your nose, I vill know you serious. Zen I help wif you cause.

Best regards,

Tom

Thomas Sullivan's most recent book, entitled *Life In The Slow Lane*, recounts a hair-raising summer spent as an instructor inside a driver's education car (www.lulu.com). His writing has appeared in *Eleventh Transmission*, *Grumble Magazine*, *Rumpot Magazine*, *Backhand Stories*, and *The Externalist*.

Little Golden America

by Ilya Ilf & Eugene Petrov

translated by Charles Malamuth

illustrated by Georg Hartmann

1937 Farrar & Rinehart, Inc. Edition

New York, Toronto

for previous chapters
visit [Admit Two](#)
[back issues page](#)

Chapter Sixteen . . .

. . . Henry Ford

IN THE MORNING Mr. Sorensen telephoned to say that Mr. Ford would receive us. Again we had proof that Americans are meticulous and businesslike. As a matter of fact, Mr. Sorensen did not promise anything and had every moral right never to refer to the matter again. He regarded the most casual remark as important business as any contract signed by him.

We were asked to drop in on Mr. Cameron, Mr. Ford's private secretary. Mr. Cameron was located in the construction bureau building.

"Mr. Ford is not here now," he informed us, "and I cannot tell you exactly when you will be able to see him. But you are looking over the factory anyway and are likely to drive past our office at least ten times in the course of the day. Whenever you drive by, drop in to find out whether Mr. Ford happens to be in at that time."

We already knew that Mr. Ford has no office of his own, did not lock himself in, but is constantly on the go through the plant. We were, therefore, not at all surprised to hear this, and, covering ourselves with the bear rug, we drove off through the wonders of Dearborn.

We began that day with the machine museum.

One of the halls of the museum building covers twenty acres. The floor is of teakwood, which rings underfoot like steel. The hall is supported by metal columns. They are at the same time the heating apparatus.

The museum was not yet finished, but remarkable exhibits are brought here from all over the world. Here are scores of steam engines and machines, beginning almost with Watt's boiler. All the machines are set in foundations, so that after the opening of the museum they will be able to perform, actually demonstrating ancient technique. Among them are extraordinarily elaborate models—clumsy, heavy, on cast-iron Corinthian columns, painted with green oil paint. The automobile department is tremendous. Here evidently have been assembled all the types and models of automobiles that have ever existed anywhere in the world. And it cannot be said that a conception of beauty was foreign to the

builders of automobiles of thirty years ago. Of course, almost all these machines seem strange to our eye today. Yet among them are some beautiful examples. Here is a lot of red copper, shining green brass, plate glass, and morocco leather. On the other hand, these automobiles underline the greatness of contemporary automobile technique: they show how much better automobiles are made now, how much cheaper, simpler, stronger, and more elegant.

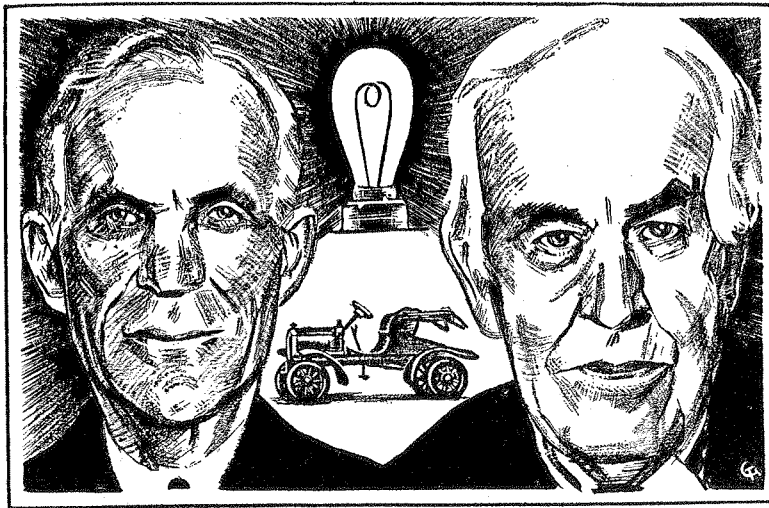
Perhaps Henry Ford himself does not yet know what his museum will look like. One does not feel here any leading idea in the layout of the departments and in the disposition of the exhibits. But evidently Henry Ford was moved by one aim—to gather together all examples of ancient technique scattered all over the world and uncared for, before it all rusts away and falls apart on dump heaps. He is in a hurry. Newer and newer exhibits are constantly being brought to this museum. Here are wooden plows, harrows, wooden spinning wheels, the first sewing machines, the first typewriters, ancient gramophones, engines, locomotives, trains.

On rails embedded in the polished hardwood floor stands an antique train with carved cast-iron bars on tambours. The outside walls of the cars are painted in rosettes and leaves, while under the windows, inside of medallions, are painted country scenes. The carriages are attached to a small engine with bronze headlights, handle bars and emblems. On just such a train some seventy-five years ago a little boy by the name of Edison was selling newspapers to the passengers. On just such a train he received the historic box on the ear from a conductor, after which he lost his sense of hearing. In 1927, during the celebration of Edison's eightieth birthday, Mr. Ford, who is no longer a youngster himself, arranged for a very touching celebration. The old railway branch line between Detroit and Dearborn was restored, and this very same train, with its flowers and country scenes, carried the great inventor. Just as he had done seventy-five years ago, Edison sold newspapers to the guests who sat in this train. The only thing lacking was the roughneck conductor who had thrown the boy off the train. Yet, when Edison was asked whether his deafness had had any effect on his work, he replied: "Not the slightest. I was even spared the necessity of listening to all the foolishness with which people are so generous."

The amusing train, jingling, rolled into Dearborn. All around it, on the entire globe, electricity burned, telephones rang, phonograph disks resounded, electric waves belted the world. All that had been called forth into life by this deaf old man with the face of a captain of armies, who

slowly, supported by his guides and kept from falling, was passing from carriage to carriage and selling his newspapers.

Ford maintains the Edison cult in America. To a certain extent, this cult has reference to Ford himself. He is a man of the same generation as Edison. He, too, brought the machine into life and gave it to the masses.



When we were leaving the museum we saw in the vestibule a concrete plate laid in the floor. In it were the prints of Edison's feet and his signature in his own hand.

We went to another of Ford's museums, into the so-called "village"—"Greenfield village." The village covers a large territory, and to examine it visitors are given antique carriages, traps, and buggies. On the coach boxes sit coachmen in top hats and fur coats with the fur on the outside. They crack their whips. It is as strange to see the coachmen as the horses they are driving here. No automobile is allowed to drive into Greenfield Village. We sat down in a carriage and rolled along the kind of road we had not seen in ages. It was a genuine old road, a wonder of the fifties of the nineteenth century—dirt, slightly sprinkled with gravel. We rolled along it with the measured jog trot of the landed gentry epoch.

The village is a recent undertaking of Ford's. It is difficult to say what it really is. Even Ford himself could scarcely explain the need for it.

Maybe he wanted to resurrect the old, for which he pines. Or, on the contrary, maybe he wanted to emphasize the poverty of those old days by comparison with the technical wonders of today. Yet, in this undertaking there is none of the traditional and absurd eccentricity of American billionaires. Although it is not yet clear what Ford is trying to attain in his museum, it is undoubtedly wise to gather and preserve for posterity exhibits of the old technique.

Edison's old laboratory was brought in its entirety from Menlo Park into this museum village—the same laboratory where innumerable experiments had been carried on to find the thread of the first electric lamp, where this lamp was first lighted, where the phonograph first played, where a number of things happened for the first time.

In that poor wooden house with creaking floors and sooty walls was born the technique of our days. The traces of Edison's genius and his titanic application may be seen there even now. There were so many glass and metal instruments, so many jars and retorts in that laboratory that it would take a whole week only to dust them.

When we entered the laboratory we were met by a shaggy old man with ardent black eyes. On his head was a little silk skullcap, the kind usually worn by academicians. He began to attend to us with enthusiasm. He was one of Edison's collaborators, perhaps the only one still alive today.

He threw up both his arms and cried out with all his might:

"Everything that the world received here was made by the youth and strength of Edison! Edison in his old age was nothing compared with the young Edison! He was a lion of science!"

And the old man showed us a gallery of Edison's photographic portraits. In one of these the young inventor resembles Bonaparte, a proud bang falling across his pale forehead. On another he looks like Chekhov in his student days. The old man continued to wave his hands with great animation. It occurred to us to wonder how an American could muster such powers of exultation. But we soon discovered that the old man was a Frenchman.

Speaking about his great friend, the scientist became more and more wound up. We proved to be attentive listeners, and were amply rewarded for that. The old man showed us the first electric lamp that ever burned in the world. He even showed us, by means of impersonations, how it occurred, how they all sat around the little lamp, awaiting the results. All the little threads lighted for an instant and at once went out. But

finally they found the one thread that would not go out. They sat for an hour, and the lamp glowed. They sat for two hours, without stirring. The lamp still glowed. They sat through the night. That was victory.

"Science can go nowhere away from Edison!" cried the old man. "Even the radio tubes of our day were born with the light of this incandescent lamp."

With trembling yet deft hands the old man attached the first Edison lamp to a radio set and caught several stations. The amplification was not great, but it was sufficiently audible.

Then the old scientist seized a piece of zinc paper and placed it in the phonograph, that first machine which began to speak with a human voice. Until then machines could only roar, rumble, or whistle. The phonograph was started, and into the horn the old man spoke the very same words which once in his presence had been spoken into the same horn by Edison. These were the words of the old children's song about Mary and Her Little Lamb, which ends up with laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!" the phonograph said clearly.

We had the feeling that this instrument had been born in our presence.

"That night Edison became immortal!" the old man cried.

Tears appeared in his eyes.

And he repeated:

"Youth was Edison's strength!"

Having learned that we were writers, the old man suddenly became serious. He looked at us solemnly and said:

"Write only what you think, not for England, not for France, but write for the whole world!"

The old man did not want to let us go. He talked to us about Ford, again about Edison, about the Abyssinian War, cursing Italy, cursing war, and praising science. In vain did Mr. Adams try in the course of an hour to inject one word into this storm of thoughts, conceptions, and exclamations. He could not manage to do it. The Frenchman did not give him a chance to open his mouth. Finally, it was time to bid farewell, and here both old men showed us how it should be done. They slapped each other's arms, shoulders and backs.

"Good-bye, sir!" cried Adams.

"Good-bye, good-bye!" the old man shouted.

"Thank you very, very much!" cried Adams, going down the stairs.

"Thank you very much indeed!"

"Very! Very!" we heard from above.

"No, gentlemen," said Mr. Adams, "you don't understand anything. There are some very good people in America."

And he took out of his pocket a large red-checked family-sized handkerchief and, without taking off his spectacles, wiped his eyes with it.

When we drove past the laboratory we were informed that Mr. Ford had not yet arrived. We went on to the Ford headlight factory located fifteen miles from Dearborn. Our young guide proved quite unexpectedly to be a conversationalist, so he entertained us all the way down the road. We learned that the Ford factories have their own police force. It is composed of five hundred men; among them is the former chief of the Detroit police, and Joe Louis, the world's boxing champion. With the aid of these capable gentlemen complete peace reigns in Dearborn. There were no trade-union organizations there yet. They had been driven underground.

The factory for which we were bound presented a special interest. This was no mere factory, but the epitome of a definite new technical and political idea. We heard a lot about it, because it is very much the theme of the day in connection with all the talk one hears in America about the dictatorship of the machine and about how to make life happy while preserving at the same time the capitalist system.

In conversation with us, Mr. Sorensen and Mr. Cameron, who together represent the right and left hands of Henry Ford, told us that if they had to build the Ford enterprises all over again, they would never have constructed a gigantic factory. Instead of one factory they would have constructed a hundred midget factories located a certain distance from each other.

We heard a new slogan in Dearborn: "Country life with city earnings."

"Imagine," we were told, "a little forest, a field, a quiet river, even a very small one. Here is a small factory. Around it live farmers. They cultivate their plots and they also work in our little factory. Excellent air, good houses, cows, geese. When a depression begins and we cut down production, the worker will not die of hunger, because he has land, bread, milk. You know we are no benefactors; we are concerned with other things. We build good cheap automobiles. If these midget factories did not produce considerable technical results, Mr. Henry Ford would never have turned to that idea. But we have already determined with precision that in a midget factory, where there is no great congregation of machines and workers, the productivity of labor is much higher than in a big factory. Thus, the worker leads a healthy and inexpensive coun-

try life while he has a city income. Moreover, we free him from the tyranny of the merchants. We noticed that as soon as we raise wages even a little, all the prices in Dearborn rise in proportion. That will stop with the disappearance of concentration in one place of hundreds of thousands of workers."

This idea occurred to Ford, as he later told us, some twenty years ago. Like all American undertakings, it had first been tested over a long period of time before being applied on a wide scale. Now there are about twenty of these midget factories, and Ford expects to increase their number every year. Distances between factories of ten, twenty, or even fifty miles is no problem to Ford. Considering the ideal condition of American highways, that is no problem at all.

And so everything in this idea tends in the direction of general welfare. Country life, city earnings, the depression is not terrible, technical perfection is attained. There was one thing we were not told, that there was important politics in this idea—to rid themselves of the dangerous concentration of workers in large industrial centers. Incidentally, the special Ford police would then have nothing to do. Even they could be given a cow apiece for good measure. Let the great Negro, Joe Louis, milk himself some milk bucolically and let the former chief of the Detroit police wander over the fields with a wreath on his brow, like Ophelia, and mutter:

"I have nothing to do. I am bored, bored, gentlemen!"

With Americans, words lead to action. Having reached the top of a hillock, we saw the picture which had been so graphically described to us. The headlight factory was located on a small river, where the dam created only a seven-foot fall of water. But this was sufficient for bringing two small turbines into activity. Around the factory there were actually a small wood and a meadow. One could see farms, hear the crowing of cocks, the clucking of hens, the barking of dogs—in a word, all the country sounds.

The factory itself is one small building made almost entirely of glass. The most remarkable thing about it all is that this factory in which only five hundred men work was making headlights, taillights, and ceiling lights for all the other Ford factories. In the midst of feudal cock crowing and pig-squealing, the factory in one hour makes a thousand headlights, six hundred taillights, and five hundred ceiling lights. Ninety-seven per cent of the workers are farmers, and each one of them tills from five to fifty acres of land. The factory works in two shifts. But if it

worked full strength, its production would be one and a half times its present one. What workers who have no acres will do is not mentioned in the new idea, although those are the people who make up the entire working class of the United States.

In spite of the village landscapes spread around the factory, the workers who crowded around the small conveyors had the same somberly intent expression as the Dearborn people. When the bell sounded for lunch, the workers, just as in Dearborn, sat down on the floor and quickly consumed their sandwiches.

"Listen," we said to the manager—that is, to the director of the factory, who walked with us along the conveyor. "Do you know how many headlights you have produced today?"

The manager walked up to the wall, where long narrow papers hung on a nail, took off the top one, and read:

"Up to twelve o'clock we made 4,023 headlights, 2,438 taillights, and 1,192 ceiling lights."

We looked at our watches.

It was a quarter past twelve.

"I receive information about the production every hour," the manager added, and hung the paper on the nail.

We again drove to the Ford office. This time we were met by Mr. Cameron, who came out hurriedly to greet us and asked us to come in. In his office, Mr. Cameron counted us with his eyes and asked that another chair be brought in. We sat in our overcoats. We were not comfortable in them, but when we finally decided to take them off Henry Ford appeared in the doorway. He looked quizzically at his guests and bowed. There was a bit of commotion accompanied by handshaking, and, as a result of this transmigration, Ford found himself in that corner of the room where there was no chair. Mr. Cameron soon rectified matters. Ford sat down in a chair, crossed his legs, and lightly began swinging one leg over the other. He was a thin, almost flat, slightly stooping old man with a clever wrinkled face and silver hair. He wore a new gray suit, black shoes, red necktie. Ford looked younger than his seventy-three years, and only his old brown hands with their swollen knuckles betrayed his age. We were told that occasionally in the evenings he goes out dancing.

We began at once to talk about the midget factories.

"Yes," said Mr. Ford, "I see the possibility of creating small factories, even steel foundries. But so far I am not yet opposed to large factories."

He said that he sees the future country covered with small factories, sees the workers liberated from the oppression of traders and financiers.

"The farmer," continued Ford, "makes bread. We make automobiles. But between us stands Wall Street, the banks, which want to have a share of our work without doing anything themselves."

At this point he quickly waved his hand before his face, as if he were chasing away a mosquito, and said:

"They know how to do only one thing—to scheme tricks, to juggle money."

Ford detests Wall Street. He knows full well that if Morgan is given even one share of stock, all the other shares will soon likewise be his. The Ford enterprise is the only one in the United States not dependent on the banks.

In the course of the conversation, Ford was constantly moving his feet. He either pressed them against the desk or crossed his legs, holding them up with his hands, or again placed both his feet on the floor and began to sway. His eyes are set close together, the prickly eyes of a peasant. As a matter of fact, he looks very much like a sharp-nosed Russian peasant, a self-made inventor, who suddenly had his beard shaved off and put on an English suit of clothes.

Ford goes to work when all the others go and spends his entire day at the factory. To this very day not a single blueprint goes out without his signature. We already said that Ford has no office of his own. Cameron had this to say about him:

"Mr. Ford circulates."

How much strength and will a man must have in order to circulate with such ease at the age of seventy-three!

The Ford method of work long ago exceeded the limits of mere manufacture of automobiles or other objects. Yet, although all his activities and the activities of other industrialists have transformed America into a country where no one knows any longer what will happen tomorrow, he continues to tell himself and the people around him:

"That is no concern of mine. I have my task. I make automobiles."

In farewell, Henry Ford, who is interested in the Soviet Union and is quite sympathetic to it, asked us:

"What is the financial situation of your country now?"

The day previous we happened to have read in *Pravda* the famous article by Grinko, and were, therefore, able to give him the very latest information.

"That's very good," said the amazing mechanic, smiling suddenly the wrinkled smile of a grandfather. "Don't ever get into debt, and help one another."

We said that that is how we usually do things, but nevertheless promised to transmit his words verbatim to Michael Ivanovich Kalinin.

Again there was a little commotion accompanied by handshaking in farewell, and the inspection of one of the greatest sights in America—Henry Ford—came to an end.