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The Anthem of Eddie Fortune

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THE ANTHEM OF EDDIE FORTUNE

By

Jordan R. Meyers

THESIS

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SIGNATURE APPROVAL FORM

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ABSTRACT

THE ANTHEM OF EDDIE FORTUNE

By

Jordan R. Meyers

In the collection of short stories which center on the experiences of one character, Eddy Fortune, the reader will observe an objectivist's journey through the corporate world, watching him rise, as he strives for success. The character follows objectivism, the philosophy developed by Ayn Rand, as his moral code, which pushes him to drive his career towards the top of the fictional company MotiveTech. In finding success, the character will find failure which results partially from his philosophy and drive for success. Within the collection, are four short stories, each of them stand alone pieces, focusing on the causes and effects of Eddy Fortune's way of thinking. However, they do come together as chapters in a larger narrative of Eddy Fortune's life, showing key moments in his rise and fall.

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This thesis follows the format prescribed by the *MLA Style Manual* and the Department of English.

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INTRODUCTION

This project started several years ago. When I was an undergraduate in an introductory writing course, I was told to write about what I know, so I wrote about the town I lived in and the company that fueled its economy. Hutchinson, Minnesota is a small town that breeds many rumors. Throughout my childhood, I heard many stories about the company and the people that inhabited it.

One of the things I found most intriguing about the corporation is that it adhered to an objectivist philosophy. When I started writing, I knew nothing about objectivism – I hadn't even read any of Rand's books. In time, I came to learn much about the subject through reading, research, objectivist meetings and speaking with objectivists. The most helpful sources were the meetings, where I sat quietly observing the objectivists, scribbling down interesting things they said. Much of what they said went against the knowledge I had been raised on, and in time, I too became partially an objectivist. I found myself asking what would Rand do or say when I came across a situation. I felt that I must always work, always strive to be strong, to be great. The philosophy made life entirely exhausting, as it awakened with me an extreme sort of perfectionism. For some reason, I felt the need to be better than everyone at everything. I wasn't able to write the story until I moved past my perfectionism and simply wrote. Now, when I look over my completed thesis, I see the main character I created striving to reach an unreachable destination as I once was. Throughout his journey through life, he rushes past things he should have stopped for on his way. Each of the four stories in the collection focuses on a pivotal moment in Eddy Fortune's life and shows the result of his endless, destructive drive toward greatness.

Converging the Atlantic

by

Jordan Meyers

Standing over a brick of pepper jack cheese, Edgar knew an argument was on its way, but he had grown riskier in his defiance and tossed the cheese into their shopping cart. Luckily, his grandfather didn't notice it, which would've created a disturbance in the middle of the store if he had. Since they'd moved from Soviet Armenia a year and a half earlier, the friction between Edgar and his grandfather intensified through a rising string of arguments.

Walking by his side, Edgar could see his grandfather judging the various patrons of the store, especially men wearing business suits and women donning expensive clothing. The old priest's eyes focused on an attractive young woman in a fur coat. Gradually, a scowl emerged on his face. "It's not even winter," muttered his grandfather angrily. "Vain – greedy, woman. Just think, Edgar, the price of fur coat could feed five starving children for weeks."

"I'm sure she or her husband worked hard for that coat, and besides, it's only April." Edgar patted the second hand jacket his grandfather had bought at a charitable thrift store. "I need a jacket, too."

"Working hard," scoffed his grandfather. "Working hard to exploit the poor and needy to buy senseless luxuries."

Edgar rolled his eyes.

His grandfather's tan skin reddened into a brownish red, like the color of clay. Then old man slammed his hand on top of a twenty-cent loaf of bread, his fingers sinking deep into its leavened flesh and coiling around it as he picked it up. "Do not mock me, Edgar," he said, pointing at him with the loaf in hand and holding it a few inches from his face. "When you study the scriptures at school a bit more, you will understand American greed."

"Whatever." Edgar pushed the bread away from his face and started walking ahead of his grandfather.

"Dammit." The old man slammed his fist onto the handle of the shopping cart, rattling the metal like chain link and lifting the cart off its front wheels for a moment. "Your mother was just like this when she left, and you know where she ended up." When the percussion of crashing metal and shouts ended, everybody in the store was looking at them. For several moments, Edgar stared at the faces of the flabbergasted shoppers gawking at them.

"What is this?" his grandfather asked. He held the brick of cheese Edgar had tossed in the cart. Turning it from side to side, the old man examined the cheesy anomaly known as pepper jack. Even though he old man must have seen it sometime in his life, he didn't recognize it. Then again, he probably never even thought to so much as look at the overindulgent luxury during his eighteen years of exile in New York City, which started long before Edgar was born.

"It's pepper jack. I thought your diet could use a little spice. You've been eating the same three meals your entire life."

When Edgar was finished speaking, he stared at his grandfather with his mouth held agape, waiting for the old man's fury to thunder out of him. The old priest's head sank, staring at the cheese in his hand. "I'll put this back," said the old man, walking it back to its place.

They were silent the rest of the time in the store. Edgar stared at his grandfather frequently, trying to say something, but not finding the words. The old man looked distant, ruminating on some deep thought or worry. It wasn't until after they left the store that the old man spoke. "Edgar," he said, placing his large hand on his grandson's shoulder. "These capitalists will infect you with greed. I know their buildings are beautiful and their cheese is alluring with its flavors, but you must be careful. One moment you're buying expensive cheese, the next your exploiting small children so you can keep buying expensive things. "

Edgar grabbed his grandfather's hand from his shoulder and held it for a moment. "Grandpa, a brick of pepper jack isn't going to bring me to exploit small children. "

His grandfather nodded. "Maybe you're right, but I know from your mother and father's experience it doesn't lead to anything good."

When Edgar was eight, his grandfather drove him into the foothills that surrounded Yerevan, the capitol of Armenia. It was spring, and blades of long green grass covered the land at the base of the Caucas Mountains. Interspersed amid the grass were wildflowers, bundles of them which hung above the fields like an ornate fog. They were nearly in the mountains when they stopped at Ziazan's house. While Edgar sat in

the car, his grandfather walked up to the old woman sitting on the porch and gave her instructions for how she should take care of Edgar while he was gone.

Low hanging clouds caught the peaks, making it look as though the snow caps were evaporating into the sky. Edgar watched the passing clouds as he listened. Ziazan, a member of his grandfather's congregation, asked, "What if you don't come back? What should I do then?"

The old man put his hands on his hips and sighed. As he contemplated the question, he kicked at something on the floor of the porch. Edgar could hear the hard rattling of a small, metallic object rolling across wood.

"I'll find a way back."

Stepping out of the car, Edgar met his grandfather as he was walking away from the woman. "Come with me. We need to talk," he said.

Together they walked up a hill in front of the house. The old woman sat in a chair on the porch, staring at them, wearing a stolid look on her face.

"She looks mean," Edgar said. The tall grass of the hills brushed against his stomach.

The old man grabbed Edgar's hand, swallowing the child's fist with his grasp. "She's just hard. The old folks around here are like that."

Edgar ran his hand across the grass. When he grabbed a purple flower, he ripped it from its stem and examined it. Violet petals splayed out in a circle, and at the center was a dark splotch of nectar that looked like a pupil, surrounded by a violet iris.

“It’s Cranesbill,” his grandfather said. “Your mother would pick these for me when she was a little girl. I told her I liked them once, and she’d come back from the hills with buckets of them.”

Edgar stopped walking. “You’re not going to leave like mom and dad.”

His grandfather kneeled so he was at Edgar’s level and hugged him. “Of course not, Edgar, you’re all I have left.”

In the concourse of the Rockefeller Plaza, Edgar sat with his professor Dr. Kovalenko. For the last year, Edgar had placed himself under the professor’s tutelage by occupying nearly all of his available office hours and much of his personal time. Dr. Kovalenko, a jovial husky man in his fifties, had taught several successful businessmen the philosophy of business, and he seemed eager to guide Edgar to esteem. While the professor corrected the false assertions Edgar had made in his speech at an *Atlas Shrugged* study group earlier in the afternoon, Edgar sipped his drink and thought about the lie he’d told his grandfather to go out that night. He’d told the old man he was studying scripture; the naïve fool still believed Edgar would become a priest.

“Sacrifice. Is the fool’s folly. Remember, Edgar, at each moment you must choose life or death. By sacrificing oneself in any manner causes one to lose their will, which is essential to life. When Reardon gives into the blackmail of the looters to keep his lover from the slander of adulteress, he chooses death not love. He gives away the formula of his miracle metal to the looters, which was a product of his will.”

“If not for love, then why does he do it?”

“Society. It was the thing that falsely asserted he had a duty to take care of his family, to stay married to his wife Lillian and to be ashamed of his affair.”

Edgar took a big swallow from his drink and looked down at the table cloth, shaking his head. “I should’ve caught that. I read that book two times.”

“Don’t be so hard on yourself. It took me as many to get that and many more to get the rest. Rand’s work is complex, and it goes against the usual codes of the immoral societies of the world,” Kovalenko said, leaning back in his chair and taking a large swig from his fifth drink. His face was flush and exuded his elevated cheer. Several of his old pupils were meeting them, which meant Kovalenko would soon get to see and boast of his successes.

All around the resplendent restaurant was success. Golden chandeliers sprinkled light onto hanging crystals. Regal rugs decorated with ancient Greek deities sprawled under their feet. Men in suits, and some in tuxedos, wore smiles exuding confidence. On their arms were beautiful women, whose dresses clung to their thin but curvy figures. Dangling from the women’s necks, wrists and ears was expensive jewelry, dappling their bodies with gold and gems. Edgar was in awe of the men and women in the restaurant. Kovalenko had told Edgar long ago that wealth indicated a man’s strength and ability, which meant the men of the restaurant were the strongest and most capable Edgar had ever seen. For some time he stared at them, watching their lips move in conversation and envying them. Ever since he was a boy, when officers in elaborate blue uniforms came and took his parents away, yelling at them with loud, shrill shouts, Edgar wanted to be strong, to stand in the men’s way and stop them, but he was only seven, too weak to even trip them up.

When the four former pupils came into the restaurant, neither Kovalenko nor Edgar noticed them. To Edgar, the men looked almost like the others, clad in expensive suits with beautiful women draped over their arms. Kovalenko, on his eighth drink, was recounting something Ayn Rand had told him a year ago, his face as red as a tomato, laughing at the woman's wit, while tears streamed from his eyes. When the men and their dates found Kovalenko, they sat and told their stories of climbing the corporate ladder, each of them making the esteemed level of an executive within empires of industry like Bell, IBM, General Motors and Pan Am. Edgar, like the unaccomplished young attractive women at their sides, remained silent and listened. Although Edgar was wowed by the men surrounding Kovalenko, he felt more and more sullen as he listened to them brag about the millions of dollars and thousands of employees they commanded. The taste of his drink, which he didn't buy, became bitter, and he was even more conscious of his clothing, a second hand suit bought from the same charitable thrift store as his jacket. Unlike the men around him, Edgar hadn't accomplished anything. Even his schooling was paid for by his grandfather's pension from the Armenian Church, and when the pension money ran out in a year or two, his grandfather would have published his book, something worth a small fortune.

The man who worked at IBM leaned towards Edgar, subtly pointed to Kovalenko and muttered, "Man, that old Kike can really blow some wind." He was tall and wiry, wearing a playful smile which had soured as he listened to the others speak with Kovalenko.

Edgar smiled, blushing, unsure of how to respond.

“Don’t look at me like that. I’m no racist. I’m half Jewish. My parents named me Noah, like the guy with the ark.”

“I don’t think you’re a racist,” Edgar said.

“Good.”

The woman that came in with him stood up and excused herself, giving Noah a peck on his cheek. “Has Kovalenko told you how many times he met Rand yet? I wonder what his count’s up to now?”

“I don’t know. He must’ve quit counting. He and I talk about her a lot though.” Whenever Edgar read Rand’s words, they gave him a strength he didn’t know he had. Kovalenko had told him that what he felt was “the power of her truth,” something he’d sensed many times during his readings.

Finishing half of his drink in one swallow, Noah looked towards Kovalenko and the men talking with him. He was different from the rest, younger, and his clothes didn’t quite fit him, his jacket too loose and long and his pants too tight and short.

“Come on. I’ll buy you a drink,” Noah said.

Edgar followed him to the bar, where Noah ordered two tall old fashions. “Tell me. Have you been with any of these protesting hippy girls at the school. Man, I’d trade anyone of these women in here for one of them. All that free spirit and sex. I imagine it has to have made them good at something.”

Edgar shook his head as he felt himself tense up. He’d seen them at the school and thought that they were beautiful and alluring, but kept himself away from them. “I don’t really believe much in their philosophy. I’m sort of an objectivist.”

“You should broaden your horizons, kid. Things like objectivists and altruists, or whatever the fuck that old kike rambles about these days, are just labels. Stupid fucking things that old bastard uses to simplify things,” he said, pointing to Kovalenko and then the men around him. “Those boring old stiffs will never make anything new. They’ll never build anything that wasn’t built before them.”

“Why not?”

Finishing off his drink, Noah smiled, his lips still wet. “They all use that damn book to make all their decisions. They treat *Atlas Shrugged* like my dad treated the Bible. People who use one book to make all their decisions don’t have any sense to call their own.”

Edgar didn’t say anything. For a year he’d been treating Rand’s books like a Bible, a guide to life, and before that, he had consulted the Bible. He sipped at his drink as Noah pulled a small, metallic object out of his pocket. It was shaped like a scythe, and his fidgety fingers grappled with it restlessly.

“I quit IBM a month and a half ago. Bought this little factory upstate to make the loopers I designed for sewing machines.” He handed Edgar the piece of metal. “Stupid thing is, I couldn’t even tell Kovalenko and the other pinheads I quit. I still give a damn what they think.” Scoffing at himself, he added, “Damn, I’m just another stupid hack.”

“You’re not a hack.” Edgar examined the metal’s contours. “You made something new. You’re an innovator.”

A smile emerged on Noah’s face. “I just got tired of listening to men like them. I wanted to do things my way, to blaze my own trail.”

Edgar nodded, handing the piece of metal back.

Noah stuffed it into his coat pocket and pulled out a card. “I still need some good people. If you’re interested in something new, give me a call.”

Putting the business card in front of Edgar, he finished his drink and walked back toward the table. The card read “MotiveTech Leading the Race to the Future” along with “Noah Greenway” and a phone number and address.

Edgar got home later than he’d told his grandfather he would, and much later than the old man would have liked. He’d probably dreamed up a million different afflictions the capitalist den of New York could inflict upon his grandson. When Edgar entered their Brooklyn apartment, the old man was sitting in his green recliner, facing the door with his head bowed over his chest and his hands folded in his lap. At first, Edgar thought his grandfather was praying. As Edgar continued from the threshold, he saw his grandfather’s lips were pressed together, unmoving, and heard the eruption of a few heavy snores before a deep breath evened his breathing. Stepping around him quietly, Edgar made his way into the kitchen to drink some milk before he went to bed. On the table was a stack of papers; the first page in the pile of stationary was full of annotations. With the carton of milk in hand, Edgar sat down over the manuscript of his grandfather’s memoir. “Converging the Atlantic by Father Malik Prazian and Henry Jenkie” was spelled out on the cover page.

“My grandson tells me that long, long ago all the land of the world was together, bringing all of its creatures into one expansive tribe. Over time the land pulled apart. The creatures separated into new species and lost their relation. Now the land is flanked by vast oceans, but only one concerns me, the Atlantic. On its eastern and western side rests the world’s greatest empires, the Soviet Union and America. Together they make

the distance, which had separated men from men for millennia, even more impassable. A distance that has separated me from my home in Soviet Armenia, where my loved ones suffered while I was in the United States serving out my exile.”

Aside from never having this conversation with the old man, Edgar could tell these were not his grandfather’s words. His grandfather wrote in the margins, accusing his cowriter of “bending the truth to fit the capitalistic greed.” On a few occasions, his grandfather even insulted him by reiterating the words, “lying capitalist swine” on several pages.

For years, publishers had been seeking the rights to his grandfather’s story, which was laden with subjects of American interests: oppression of Christianity, oppression by the Soviet Union and Gulags. Edgar remembered taking calls from executives and agents, promising fortunes for his grandfather’s words, which he’d kept buried inside himself for years. Each time he handed his grandfather the phone, the old man would bark at the caller to leave him alone. And when he received mail, he’d tear the paper into scraps.

Edgar flipped through the manuscript, only planning on reading a few pages. As he read, he saw the progression of his grandfather’s life. When he was sixteen, he became a soldier, ten years later a priest, and seven years after that he was exiled. Edgar didn’t reach his parent’s return to Armenia until almost all the pages had run out. At this point, the gaudy prose of the writer ended, and the annotations stopped. “They left, taking Edgar with them, before I could say goodbye. We fought a lot about their going. They were naïve. For some reason, they thought they could change Soviet Armenia, that protesting was as safe as it was here. It was only a year and half before an old member of

my congregation wrote telling me they were thrown into the gulags. I flew there immediately after, trying to do something, but knowing I could do nothing for them except look after Edgar. I was still wanted by the government at the time, but nobody came for me, so I stayed with Edgar until they did.”

Edgar had read enough, and he got up reorganized the papers. When the stacks of paper looked as they did before his meddling, he stopped and removed the final page from the rest. The conclusion was of Edgar and his grandpa looking down at their home in Yerevan for the last time. In the margins, his grandfather wrote, “I told you to forget I said this.”

“For some time, Edgar and I sat, looking down at the hills full of the cranesbill my little girl had once picked for me and the city beyond. I had risked my life to be in this place twice. Once when I was a soldier, and a second when I returned to be with Edgar, taking the risk that Melenkov and Khrushchev wouldn’t forgive my rebellion against Stalin. This time I’d be leaving it for good. Once the story publishes, there will be no going back for me.”

After reading the conclusion, Edgar tried to lie down and rest a bit, but couldn’t. The tumult of his thoughts kept him alert. He hadn’t thought about what his grandfather had given up for him to study in America. The old man rehashed memories he wanted forgotten, and he would give up Armenia. Edgar thought about his night with Ziazan, the old woman his grandfather had left him with. From her porch, he’d watched his grandfather drive away on the dirt road leading to her house, his white car obscured by a cloud of dust that unfurled like smoke. The old woman and he did not speak much until it was night and Edgar was in bed.

He asked her, “Where did my grandpa go?”

The old woman, who was in the doorway of his room when he asked, froze and then walked over to a chair beside the bed and sat in it. For some time, she contemplated something as her lips contorted into a sour expression. Then, out of her dry, old lips came the truth. “You’re grandpa might not agree that you should know, but adults shouldn’t keep important things from children. How else are they ever going to grow up?” She stared at Edgar for a few moments, and Edgar stared back waiting for her to speak. “You’re grandpa went to answer for a crime.”

“But my grandpa’s never done anything wrong. He’s a priest.”

The old woman ignored him. “When your mother was your age, she was playing in the church with your grandfather, after he’d just delivered his service. The secret police, I think they were call the NKVD then, came to the church to seize him and all the church’s property. When they broke down the door and charged toward your grandpa and mother, he – ” she paused, contemplating her words, then settled with, “He cracked one of their skulls. The other officer ran for help.”

“But he was only defending himself. He didn’t do anything wrong.”

“It doesn’t matter. People who commit crimes don’t always do something wrong. Sometimes the rules are just unfair.”

Standing up from her chair, she walked to the doorway, where she stopped. “Do you understand?”

Edgar thought of his mother and father. Nobody ever explained what crime they’d done and how they could be taken away without cause. He nodded.

“Good.” She turned off the lights and left him to himself.

For the rest of the night, Edgar lied awake, looking out the window, waiting for his grandfather's white car to appear on the gravel road in front of their house.

Edgar went to school before his grandfather woke up, and for an hour he lingered outside Kovalenko's office, waiting for him to come in. When the professor opened the door and let him in, Edgar flopped onto his seat. All around him were photos of wealthy industrialists in top hats and suits. Interspersed between them were a few of him with Ayn Rand and her Collective, which was composed of Rand's inner circle.

"I saw you talked to Noah Greenway," Kovalenko began. "One of my brightest students. Sharp fellow. There's no ceiling for him. I bet he'll be at the top of IBM in a few more years."

Edgar nodded and Kovalenko went on talking about all the things he had taught Noah Greenway, claiming credit for every one of his successes.

After a minute or two of half listening, the professor asked, "What's wrong with you? You look mopey."

On the professor's desk was a copy of *Atlas Shrugged* he'd taken out for their study group that evening. "Yesterday, we were talking about sacrifice."

Kovalenko nodded, waiting for Edgar to continue.

"Can it ever be okay?"

The old man leaned back in his chair and shook his head. "Remember the oath the movers of the world made in *Atlas Shrugged*?"

Edgar nodded and muttered, "I swear by my life and my love for it, that I will never live for the sake of another man, nor ask another man to live for mine."

“That’s right. You’ve been doing your reading.”

“But what if it is one person’s will to care for another?”

“Well that might be, but if that person sacrifices too much for another person, they will cease living their own life. They will end up living not for their own sake, but for another, like a serf does for his lord.” Kovalenko leaned forward on his chair and asked, “Edgar, what is this about?”

Edgar stared down at his hands, which were nervously grappling with each other and covered with a damp layer of sweat. “My grandpa. I’m afraid he’s been living for my sake. Not his.”

Kovalenko nodded.

“No matter what I do, he’ll always feel he needs to be there for me. He’ll never live his own life. The only way he’ll ever go back to his life is if I leave.”

Kovalenko sighed and crossed his arms. As he contemplated Edgar’s words, he scratched at his scruffy chin. “Sometimes doing the moral thing is hard.”

When the school year ended, Edgar had readied his departure. He’d stuffed everything he planned to take with him in one suitcase; he called Noah Greenway and took his job offer, and he bought a bus ticket. The only thing he had left to do was tell his grandfather, and that he put off until there were only a few hours before his departure.

Stepping out of his room with his suitcase in hand, Edgar dropped it on the floor in front of the coffee table where his grandfather sat. The thud of the Samsonite suitcase pulled his grandfather’s eyes from his late night scripture reading. When the old priest looked at Edgar, he was still muttering the words to himself.

“What’s going on, Edgar?”

“Grandpa, I’m leaving.”

The old man spoke a strange cacophony of syllables mixed with Russian, English and Aramaic, but the mongrel sentence didn’t amount to anything that Edgar couldn’t understand.

“This way you don’t have to sell your story. You can go back to Armenia.”

His grandpa said nothing. Instead, he began to pale and his breath became short. He leaned forward on and rested his elbows on his knees.

“Don’t worry about me. I’m fine,” Edgar smiled, trying to add proof to his statement. “I got a job. A good one with a growing business that makes pieces for sewing machines.”

“Business?” his grandpa muttered. He leaned back into his chair, looking confused.

“I gave up on theology. I meant to tell you.”

The old man shook his head and bowed over his folded hands. For a while, Edgar stood over his grandpa as the old man muttered prayers to his god.

“Stop it,” Edgar yelled, pulling his grandpas hands apart. “It won’t help. I’ve decided already.”

“I know.” The old man looked down at his lap where his hands had been folded in prayer. “That’s why I’m coming with you.” He stood up and grabbed Edgar’s suitcase.

“You can’t.”

Edgar reached for the suitcase, but his grandpa brushed him away and walked it back to Edgar's room.

"You'll never be able to go back home," Edgar pleaded.

Stopping at the doorway, his grandpa said, "I've accepted that a long time ago." He dropped the bag in doorway and walked into his room.

Edgar followed and yelled after him. "I won't let you go."

The old man said nothing. From underneath his bed he pulled two suitcases and opened them. Quickly grabbing garments from his dressers, he began tossing them in the two suitcases.

"Stop, Grandpa!" Edgar grabbed a shirt from the old man's hands and wrenched it away. "I can't let you make this sacrifice for me."

His grandfather stopped packing as he knelt over his suitcase. "Edgar, it is no sacrifice. It is what I want, to be with you."

Edgar shook his head. "That's what you think you want. You feel like you have to, but you don't. Just go home, and you'll see when you're happy there. You can even preach again if you want."

His grandpa shook his head and stood up. Grabbing Edgar's arm, he led him to the bed, where they both sat down. "Edgar, I've lived for sixty-seven years, and the good moments, the times I would relive, happened because I was with the people I loved, not because I was in a particular place or had some expensive object."

Edgar tried to brush the old man's hand away, but his grip did not break. "You'll regret it. You won't like what I become. I'll be a businessman, not a priest. You won't even get what your sacrifice was intended to pay for."

“Dammit, Edgar, would you let this sacrifice thing go?” The old man muttered to himself as he ran his hand through the thinning wisps of hair on his head. Then he sighed, appearing exhausted. “Where is all this coming from?”

“This book I read. It said to never live for the sake of another man, or let another man live for the sake of yours.”

“That’s foolish. Whoever said that died alone without a soul that loved them.”

“Edgar shook his head. “She’s still alive, and people love her.”

“People liked Stalin when he was alive, but nobody but his mother ever loved him.”

At that moment, Edgar knew he’d never be able to make his grandfather understand. The old man’s decisions were made off of impulses. His paternal instinct told him to follow Edgar, and Edgar knew the old man would never know whether it was what he really wanted until it was too late for him to go back. Then, they’d both be miserable together. “You don’t understand.”

“Those people who’ve been telling you these things, they cannot understand what it is like for two spirits to come together and then become severed, like you and I. You are just as much a part of me as I am of you. If you leave, Edgar, I will have lost another piece of myself, and I’ve already lost too many over the years.”

Edgar nodded, and said, “I see.” For some time, the old man talked about souls, god, family, love and other abstract things. Edgar tried to understand, to map out his grandfather’s argument and put it into some logical order, like his professor had taught him to do with all things, but he couldn’t find a way to do it, so he gave up.

When his grandpa finished, he asked, “Do you understand?”

Edgar nodded and stood up.

“You best get some sleep.” He loosened his grasp on Edgar’s arm. “You and I will leave to this new job of yours tomorrow.”

Edgar stood up and went to his room. He lied on his bed for hours, staring out the window at the city bleeding with light from roads and the tiny square office windows of distant skyscrapers. The light seemed to drip upward into the sky above the city, where a large pool of it collected into an amalgamation of the colors. Whether the colors were purple, blue or golden, Edgar couldn’t tell. In the middle of the luminescent pool was a faded line of darkness dividing it in two. Its source was probably the black water of the East River, breaking up the buildings and their light, save a few places where it reflected.

When Edgar heard the snores of his grandpa, he grabbed his suitcase and crept out the door. Without money for a cab, Edgar walked to the subway, which would take him to Pen Station. Inside the subway car were only a few people, all of them alone and staring straight ahead at nothing. After a while, Edgar did the same, looking ahead of him so he didn’t have to look back, but when he came to Pen Station, he looked to the east across the black water of the East River separating Brooklyn from Manhattan and Edgar from his grandfather. Soon, many hills, lakes and rivers would lie between them, eroding at their bond and reducing it to distant memory.

Broken Effigies

by

Jordan Meyers

When the call came, Greenway and I had been waiting in his office, passing a bottle of scotch back and forth and talking about the breasts and asses of women in the company. Hanging up the phone, Greenway smiled. “It’s good,” he said, beginning to pace around the room. “Their new models of hard-drives will be equipped with our suspension assemblies.” Stopping his pacing, he grabbed what was left of the scotch and poured us each a glass.

Western Solutions’ order of parts was bigger than we had ever imagined it would be, but then again, we were the only ones that made the little, metallic arm that held the read-write drive over the spinning disk of a hard-drive. I raised my drink and toasted with him. “To a year and a half well spent,” I said, taking a gulp.

Greenway nodded sullenly and chugged his entire drink within a few seconds. I had made sacrifices for the development and sale of the suspension assembly, from cutting my honeymoon short to missing holiday celebrations with my wife’s family, but nobody had given as much as Greenway. His wife had left him and took his only son with her, apparently tired of being the subject of his disinterest for so long.

By nine o’clock, the bottle had run out and Greenway and I were far beyond our way to inebriation. I grabbed the office phone to call my wife and ask for a ride home, punching the numbers until Greenway slammed his hand onto the number pad.

“No—No, Eddy,” he said, stumbling onto his desk. “This night calls for celebration.” Greenway raised his arm in the air, knocking over a stack of file folders in the process. Ever since I started at MotiveTech twelve years ago, I had joined Greenway on his nights of recklessness; they were as much mine as his. They didn’t occur often. We mostly spent our time working, building the empire that was MotiveTech, and when there was a brief and fleeting moment of rest, he and I enjoyed it completely.

I smiled and patted him on the back affectionately. Apart from me, Greenway didn’t have anybody to celebrate with. “Sorry, Noah, but I promised Andy I’d come home when I got the news tonight. She wants me to herself for a while.” This was only partially true.

“Fuck, if that’s all it takes, take a month off, just come out tonight,” he grabbed my hand and tried pulling me out the door. “Come on, you know you wanna go, you pussy whipped bastard.”

I didn’t budge.

“Would you come if I gave you something to really celebrate?” he asked. “What if I made you my VP after Thompson retires this month?”

Even though I was only buzzed, I don’t remember saying yes or following him to the company car. My intoxication came from his promise to elevate me to another pedestal, one where I was only a step away from the top. During the walk, as Greenway rambled about two women, I drifted to a future far beyond the reality I occupied, one where I sat at Greenway’s desk with my nameplate resting on the surface. There, I leaned back into his finely upholstered cloud of a desk chair and rested my feet on the

marble top of his desk. In my daydream, I wasn't doing any work; I was just sitting and staring out the window, which gave a view of the vast corporate empire I ruled.

When the dream dissipated into the dark shades of night and reality, Greenway and I had climbed into the company car and were moving away from MotiveTech to the city a few miles away. For most of the ride, I looked out the window. In the dark sky, there were two clusters of light, one from MotiveTech and one from the town, which formed a pair of large golden blooms tinged with purple. Their light outlined everything around them, drawing the shapes of buildings, mountains, cornfields, rivers, lakes and clouds. For years, I had watched as the two bulbs of light grew towards each other, the dark space between them evaporating during the time I climbed up the corporate ladder. There was only a thin strip of darkness between the two bulbs of light. There, the natural glow of the stars and moon was unfettered. When the car passed through it, I thought about how it soon would be gone.

When we stopped at Greenway's house, two girls, carrying half drunken bottles of alcohol, ran out to meet Greenway. I didn't know their names, but I recognized them from MotiveTech. One, the tall redhead, was Thompson's secretary. The other, the short brunette, was middle management of some sort.

"So, are our jobs safe?" asked the brunette. If Greenway and I hadn't landed the contract, we would have been in trouble.

"Ladies, your jobs were never in danger," smiled Greenway. "You're both irreplaceable." He wrapped his arms around them and started to walk to the house.

Inside, the girls started pouring drinks while Greenway and I sat down at the table. Staring at the two women, he asked, “Women are beautiful, aren’t they?” He took a pull from a bottle left on the table. “It’s a shame that some men only get one.”

“Andolina’s enough for me,” I said.

“Well, that’s just too cute,” he said, slouching in his chair as he laughed. “But I was talking about me.” He pointed at the women and numbered them on his hand. “I’m too old to woo them both, charm and money only does so much. Which one would you choose?”

For a moment, I had let my eyes fall on the brunette, wearing jean shorts and a collared shirt that was tied at the bottom. Much of her olive skin was showing, and it reminded me of the girls from Armenia, the country I grew up. “What do you care? You’ll get ‘em both eventually.”

Greenway smiled and pointed at the brunette, “She’s pretty isn’t she? Two hundred bucks for the first man to get a dance with her.”

Greenway always liked to compete with me. The games were fun for him and boosted his self-esteem, but I wasn’t in the mood to play that night. Standing from my chair, I said, “I’m married. Unlike you, I intend to stay that way.”

Greenway started to speak, but stopped with his mouth held agape. Without looking back, I turned and walked out the door. Climbing into the car and starting it, I sat in the driver’s seat and stared at the siding of Greenway’s house, my headlights painting it with a luminescent glow. After vacillating between going home to Andolina and going back to apologize to Greenway for a while, I decided to apologize to Greenway. I knew

Greenway was feeling alone, and I understood how that felt as well as he did. Before I married Andolina, I didn't have any family.

When I went back into the house, Greenway and his women were making their way to his backyard. Moonlight and stars painted the deck and the lake behind it with their pale light. The girls and Greenway sat on a bench swing facing the lake, and he wrapped his arms around each of them.

“Sorry, Noah, I was out of line,” I said, walking up to him.

“Water under the bridge, my friend. Come enjoy the view with us.”

I sat down, looking out at the lake surrounded by a ring of trees which separated water from sky. Beyond the trees was an endless expanse of cropland. I could hear the girls giggling and the sound of heavy petting. I looked and saw Greenway leaning over the brunette. For a minute, I wondered if he chose her because I thought she was pretty; his compulsion to compete would drive him even if I wasn't playing his game. His flaunting of his talents wowed me at times, but it mostly annoyed me.

My last annoyance with Greenway's seemingly infinite abilities happened a month ago, when I had been leaning over a workbench with a few guys from R and D. The men and I had been trying to reinforce the suspension assembly, while making sure it was up to spec. After midnight, Greenway sent them home and offered me the chance as well, but I stayed, hoping that whatever was inside of Greenway that allowed him to do the things he did would rub off on me. I watched him and mimicked his behavior, thinking I could deduce the solution if I only followed his footsteps. During a brief break, I let my eyes turn away from Greenway for a moment and fell asleep. In the morning, Greenway had shaken me awake and stared at me with a big grin on his face.

On the table, I had seen the product of his work, something I had fallen short of achieving.

As I sat listening to the perquisites of love-making, I had an annoying feeling that I lost to Greenway again. It was ridiculous, but festering, so I took my shoes off and walked to the shore of the lake, where I sat with my feet in the water. A few feet ahead of me there was a small splash of a northern pike jumping to the surface. I didn't see its figure, only the ripples of its disturbance. For a while, I looked around for another jumping fish, thinking I'd take some time to sober up before I drove home to Andolina.

When the tall grass behind me rustled, I turned. "Mind if I sit down?" asked the brunette.

"Go for it, but the petting party's behind me," I said, pointing in Greenway's direction.

"Greenway?" she laughed as she sat down, putting her feet in the water. "That's Susan's fantasy. Not mine."

I grinned and shook my head. "I'm surprised he let you go so easily. He bet me two hundred dollars he'd dance with you first."

"Susan's got him a little more preoccupied doing something else."

We sat together for a while, talking about nothing in particular. Around us crickets chirped idly, and the corn stocks from surrounding cornfields rustled with each breath of the wind. Perhaps it was the serenity of the night that made the moment with her so pleasant, or the fact that she chose to spend her time with me instead of Greenway.

The girl scooted closer to me and clasped her hand over mine, forming a two handed fist. Looking back at Greenway and his girl, I saw them pawing at each other. I

tried to stay focused on him and what his life turned into as the young girl squeezed my hand tight. Greenway's family hated him. His wife moved as far away from him as the courts would allow and only contacted him when his checkbook was needed, and as for Greenway's son, I doubted that he could actually have told me how old he was.

"Let's hop in," said the girl, stripping off some of her clothes and stepping into the lake.

Light reflecting from the water gleamed on her body, drawing lines around the curves of her figure and throwing aside the darkness between us.

The lake's current was slow, hardly moveable, creating waving ripples that resembled goose bumps. It reminded me of how Andy's skin was always cold and filled with them. When I laid next her at night, I'd run my hand over her arms and shoulders, watching the heat of my palms sink into her skin and causing the goose bumps to evaporate as if they were tiny droplets of water.

The girl splashed through the water and grabbed my hand. "Come on," she said, pulling me away from shore. I followed her slowly, as if I was being drug. It felt like something was anchoring me to the shore. The girl kept pulling, and I kept following until I had left whatever it was behind.

The lake was warm after soaking up the heat of the day, and it felt nice as it swallowed my naked limbs. When the water reached our shoulders, the girl wrapped her arms around my neck and danced with me, moving in a continual circular motion, the way my wife and I danced. Nobody had taught Andolina to dance, so she went through the imprecise movements and pretended she knew what she was doing. I never minded it. In fact, I liked it. Even her imperfections seemed wonderful to me. The girl and I

spun until we tripped, spilling our bodies into the water and continuing our dance until my debauchery was finished.

When we climbed out of the water, the girl and I fumbled for our clothes awkwardly. From my peripheries, I glanced at the petite, naked body and couldn't get over its foreignness. Even though I had just pressed it against mine in several moments of fleeting intimacy, I felt nothing towards the girl. The walk from the lake to the house seemed longer than the fifty or so feet that it was. Whatever the weighted feeling I had left on the shore had returned as I stepped up the bank and walked toward the house. My movements were slow and weary, while my hands and feet felt numb. The girl spoke about things I either don't remember or never cared to listen to in the first place. When we stepped inside, the girl jumped and grabbed my bicep. The sound of glass smashing against the wall of Greenway's bedroom erupted in regular intervals. "Get outta here you whore," he yelled. "And take your friend with you."

Susan screeched and ran out of the room.

"What's wrong with him?" I asked.

"Keep him away from us," she yelled at me, pulling her friend towards the door.

When I stepped into Greenway's room, his floor was already covered in shards of clay sculptures. Most of them were completely shattered, but a few were intact. I recognized where I'd seen them before; at one time they covered the shelves of his office. Kicking the shards of clay aside, I walked over to Greenway, who was sitting on the edge of his bed hunched over a small sculpture in his hands. It was of a husband and a wife with their hands interlocked, readying themselves for a waltz. The woman had long

black hair cascading over her bare shoulders, and the man wore a tux with a powder blue bow-tie. Their painted pink mouths were opened, flashing their smiles at each other.

“Noah, what happened?” I asked.

His body started to tremble and he clasped the statue tight. “I told her not to touch them. She had one in her hand when I tried to grab it from her.”

“Noah, are you feeling okay?” I sat down next to him and put my hand on his shoulder.

Noah brushed it away and nodded. “She dropped it, and it shattered.” He pointed to a small boy who was bringing a football into his hands. One of his legs had shattered from the fall.

“There all she left me with. Just a fucking bunch of clay,” he said. He stood up and paced, making a continual crunching sound as he walked over the broken effigies. “My wife liked to make those damn things,” he said, pointing to their remains. “Or at least I thought she did. I’d buy her supplies for them. I thought it would make her happy.”

Sitting down on the bed again, he continued, “She gave me every damn sculpture she ever made, asked me to put it in my office.” He let his head fall into his hands. “Must’ve thought I’d think of her when I saw them.”

I didn’t say anything. I just put my hand on his shirtless back and patted it.

“I never did think of her.” Greenway let himself fall into his pillow, and I helped him into bed from there. For a while, I sat with him as he muttered barely audible things about his family. When he stopped and fell asleep, I crept out of his house and took the company car home.

When I got home, the house was dark. The only light came from the dining room where two candles, which were whittled down into nubs, glowed. On the table were the remnants of an elaborate meal Andolina had prepared. The two fire's light spilled into the darkness and created shadows for everything it touched. When I went to the kitchen, I saw a note from my wife. "Got tired of waiting. If you want food, it's in the fridge. Heat it up if you want." Blowing the candles out, I walked to our bedroom, where I found my wife cocooned in a heap of blankets. On her nightstand, her lamp glowed and formed a dimly lit circle on the ceiling above her. I slid under them and put my hand on her shoulder and squeezed it gently. Rolling over, she opened her eyes, still foggy with sleep, and stared at me with her amber irises tinged with grey. When I had first fallen in love with her, I'd tried to conjure a metaphor that could do them justice, but the only thing I could come up with was two gold rings that had been plucked from the earth. Tinges of dirt clung to the rings, smudging the bright metal with specks of black and grey.

"Finally?" she said.

I ran my hand through her silky strands of hair and pulled her body close.

"I'm sorry. I should've gone straight home, but Greenway promoted me. I was too excited to sit still."

Her eyelids closed and a smile crawled on her sleeping face. "Good for you," she said, nestling her body closer to mine. "I'm proud of you."

The covers had slid below her shoulders, revealing her skin filled with the tiny ripples of goose-bumps. Running my hand over them as I always did, I stopped myself as I remembered the brunette and the droplets of water, made effervescent by the glow of

the moonlight, clinging to her skin. I tried to shove the image back into the depths of my mind, where it could be forgotten, but it was elusive. It kept playing out. I saw my how my hand had pressed against her skin covered the tiny beads of liquid. When I'd pulled it away, the tiny droplets were gone, evaporated with one touch.

Looking at Andolina, I pulled the covers from her body and focused hard on the figure of the woman I'd loved more than any other. I ran my hands through her hair and stroked her soft skin, trying to stay in the moment with her, but the memory of the touches I'd embraced that night kept coming. When I couldn't take it anymore, I pulled Andolina's head back and kissed her again and again. At first, she was still afflicted by the fog of sleep, but eventually we moved together, her in her usual gentle and graceful way, and me in a clinging, desperate sort of fashion. I wasn't sure what made me move like that, but it felt like I was losing something I once had, like it was slipping through my fingers. Still, no matter how anxiously I had moved, it left.

When we finished, sweat coated our skin and made us stick together. Andolina quickly fell asleep, and I stayed awake staring at her figure. Though Andolina's appearance was entirely different from the girl I had been with earlier, she looked as the brunette had when we climbed out of the water: Foreign. For maybe an hour, I hovered above Andolina, trying to see the woman who, only a day earlier, I had known better than myself. Time moved forward, but the result stayed the same. Andolina had become a stranger.

Quietly, I got out of bed, dressed and went to my porch where I sat on a swinging bench I had built for me and my wife to sit together. There, I stared at the dome of light that was MotiveTech. The collective force of its light exploded into the dark with a white

glow surrounded by a purple ring. No matter how many times I looked at it, I was still fascinated. I, along with Greenway, had planted it there only twelve years ago, and grew it into a giant. As I stared at MotiveTech, it pulled me towards it, like a beacon. Soon I was in the company car, driving towards it hours earlier than necessary.

Discarded Product

by

Jordan Meyers

When I walked into the cafeteria, Greenway was lying on a table, wearing nothing but his socks and underwear. Under the table rested his clothes and a few crumpled pieces of paper. He cradled a notebook in his arms, as if it were his lover, and snored loudly. Workers on their lunch breaks stared, and worst of all, a group of Japanese investors strolled in for a bite to eat after taking a company tour. They muttered foreign things, which I imagine weren't good for the company.

Greenway had been brilliant, which allowed him to build his empire, but whatever was inside of his damn notebook had caused him to misplace his mind. Whenever he had a whim to work on his project, he'd wander around the company scribbling designs onto his pad of paper. Since he was the CEO, people usually ignored the results of his growing insanity by looking the other way when he fell asleep on desks, lobby furniture or cafeteria tables.

"Where the hell is Erin?" I snapped at my secretary, who was staring at Greenway befuddled. Having tired of babysitting Greenway, I'd hired a nurse to pose as Greenway's secretary a month ago.

"Erin's not with us anymore. I meant to tell you, but—she was very upset when she left this morning, and it took a while to calm her down. "

"What happened now?"

"Greenway was sexually harassing her. When she told him to stop, he fired her."

“He’s not doing that again?” Several years ago, the sort of thing had been a problem for Greenway, but that was in the seventies and eighties when it was at least tolerated. Since Greenway began to lose his mind, though, his ability to censor his primal urges evaporated.

Approaching Greenway, I closed my eyes to shield myself from the decay that infected one of the world’s greatest industrialists. At one time, he could build anything, summon great fortunes and conquer open markets, but Greenway wasn’t that man anymore, which is why I spent much of my time avoiding him. Stupid and sentimental as it sounded, I wanted to remember him as he was, the man I’d spent twenty-nine years emulating.

When I shook him, he let out a fart and opened his eyes. Smiling at me he yelled, “Eddy. You won’t believe it.” He sat up and draped his legs over the table, kicking at the air excitedly. “I think I finally got it.”

“That’s nice. Why don’t we get you dressed?” I grabbed his clothes and dropped them onto his lap, only to have him hand them back to me.

“I have it.” Grabbing his notebook and flipping through the pages, Greenway’s excitement slowly receded into confusion. “I had it,” he whined. He began picking up the crumpled pieces of paper on the floor and unfolding them rapidly. When he realized each was a failed attempt, he returned them to the floor. After he had looked over every ball of paper and found nothing but failure, he fell onto a cafeteria chair and drooped over the table. “I was so close,” he said, lifting his head to look at me. Then his words fell to a whisper, “If I could just find it again.”

I grabbed his arm and pulled him up forcefully. “Let’s get you home.” He started to squirm, but I kept pulling at him until he tired and leaned against me.

Walking slowly at his side, I braced him and steadied his movements. He stopped when we made it to the lobby, and I couldn’t move him easily. Anchoring himself in a chair situated next to a pillar, he stared at an electronic map. The thirty inch display was partially backlit to show the portions of the earth experiencing daylight, and it was dotted by fourteen small, red circles representing each MotiveTech factory. If Greenway were to watch the map all day, he’d see that, like the British Empire, the sun never set on MotiveTech.

I let him watch the map for some time, and it seemed to revive him a bit. Gradually, his usual smug, overconfident look returned, leaving behind the weary old man I pulled from the cafeteria table. He sprang to his feet and walked briskly towards the elevator.

“I have to figure it out,” he said.

I chased after him.

Meeting him at the elevator, I grabbed his arm, turning him so his gaze met mine. “Don’t try to make me go home, Eddy. You might not think what I do is still important, but it is.”

I had started to speak, but my words eroded into breath. I didn’t put much stock into what he said and did anymore, but how could he blame me, he was losing his mind. Greenway climbed into the elevator, and I followed. “You should get some rest, let me take care of things for a while. Until you feel better.” I had already been performing several of his duties, but only those he thought insignificant enough to neglect.

Greenway grabbed the clothes from my hands and dressed himself as we climbed to the top. A bell dinged when we got to the seventeenth floor and the doors opened. Stepping out of the elevator, Greenway turned and stopped me when I reached the threshold. “Eddy, you’ve always been sharp,” he said standing in front of the automatic door for several moments keeping them from closing. “You’re probably smarter than me or anyone else in the company. That’s why I made you my VP, but running a company takes more than smarts. It takes understanding.”

The buzzer started to ring, and Greenway stepped away. The doors slid for a moment, and I caught them. “What do you mean?”

Greenway sighed. “After I figure this thing out, I’m gonna bring over a kid from Western Solution’s to replace me. He’s a little green, and he’ll need you to mentor him for a few years, but he’ll get it.”

The buzzer rang again. “You better quit holding up the elevator.”

The next few hours I spent in a daze, wandering around the floors of MotiveTech Tower aimlessly. When I stopped at the conference room of the seventeenth floor, I looked out at the industrial complex surrounding MotiveTech. It consisted of four massive manufacturing plants, a training center the size of a small school, several storage units, and at the far end of the property rested the old chicken coop which MotiveTech grew out of.

When I came to MotiveTech twenty-nine years ago, I had left my Grandfather, my only remaining family member, in New York, along with his aspirations of me becoming a holy man like him. I had wanted bigger things then, a destiny of my own

where I could become one of the great men, like Noah Greenway. His business wasn't much, but with some people, it's easy to tell they're worth more than they appear.

In the beginning, I spent all my time at MotiveTech, machining little, scythe like pieces of metal for sewing machines, called loopers. For most of the day, I didn't see Greenway at all. He had been busy with product development and managerial duties, but when everybody had gone home, after falling short of their quotas, Greenway and I were alone. There, he'd hum as he went about his work, occasionally adding some percussion to his music by tapping his tools against his workbench or a precision grinder. He seemed happy to pick up the slack of his employees. Even though I was the only one in the company who met my mark before the six o'clock bell, I stayed and worked late with him until everything was done.

One night, he turned the machines off earlier than usual and said, "You're not working late with me anymore. I can hardly afford to pay everybody for their regular time as it is, and I won't have you keep working for free."

When we stepped outside, a steady breeze brushed against the tops of corn stocks, pushing furrow into furrow and creating a rippling current of corn. The moon and the starlight was uninhibited by clouds, allowing their glow to fall onto the fields and coat its top with a pale luminescent film. Everything was serene. There was no light polluting the sky or the scenery, but Greenway was agitated. He covered his nose and said, "I hate these damn cornfields. All I smell is shit."

I nodded, even though I had quit noticing the smell. When Greenway got into his car, I slipped into the darkness, being careful to make sure he didn't see where I went. Sneaking through a patch of corn, I stopped when I reached an abandoned barn. It was

barely visible; most of its white paint had been chipped off by the elements and neglect, leaving the dark color of rot behind. I grabbed my blanket and pillow from the building and laid them out in the grass. Above me, a blank, dark space swallowed the sky. MotiveTech's exterior lighting was nothing but one floodlight situated on top of a telephone pole; it was not enough to conquer the night, but I didn't mind the absence of electricity. To me it meant the world was mine to paint. One day, I would help build MotiveTech until it filled the sky with a large blossom of light that glowed in the darkness like a luminescent flower.

“Not an ideal place for camping,” said a voice behind me.

I jumped and saw Greenway approaching. A sensation of fear exploded in my chest and sank to my gut as he drew nearer. “The smell—how can you stand it?” he asked, sitting next to me, holding his hand up to his nose.

When I sat down, he asked, “So what the hell are you anyway? You sound like you're a ways from home.”

Despite my efforts, I couldn't entirely rid myself of my accent. “I'm Armenian.”

“What brings an Armenian to this crap hole?”

“It's ridiculous,” I said.

“Any more ridiculous than sleeping beside a rat infested barn?” He reached into his jacket and produced a flask. “Here,” he said handing me it. “Take some vodka to loosen the truth.”

I took a swig, and handed it back to him.

“Nope.” He pushed it back. “You drink until it's all out in the air.” I continued to take pulls from the flask as he stood up and stared at the space around him, scanning it

like a scout or a purveyor. After a minute or two, he said, “There’s nothing here, but one day there will be. One day I’m gonna get rid of this damn corn and build buildings all the way to the city.” He pointed to the cropland around him. “Then they’ll know my name.” Greenway looked back at me and scoffed at himself. “Listen to me. I am getting ahead of myself.” He grabbed a baseball sized piece of cement from the grass, which must have come from a discarded piece of foundation, and threw it at the barn. It broke through a weak spot in the wood and went into the hollow, dark space behind the walls. “I don’t even have enough money to tear this dump down yet.”

Standing up, I walked over to him.

“Sometimes I wonder if I ever will.”

Reaching into the grass, I grabbed a piece of cement and threw it at the rotting wood. When it broke through, I grabbed another piece and another. Eventually Greenway joined in, and we filled the structure with holes. When we tired, we flopped into the grass and decided to let nature finish off the dilapidated building whenever it got around to it. Together we laughed for a minute; then we went silent.

Taking one final swig from the flask, I said, “I wanted to be great. I thought you might show me how.” I handed Greenway back the flask, and his smirk widened until he began to laugh.

Greenway stood up and offered me a hand. “Why don’t you follow me, Kid? It’s the least I can do for busting up your home.”

It was late when I made it to the sixteenth floor, where my office was located. Only every third overhead light was lit in the hallways, allowing shadows to collect in the

spaces that were out of their reach. When I got to my office and turned on the light, I found a note under the door. Greenway had left it for me. I sat at my desk and read the words on the page.

Eddy,

I'm sorry about today. You've always been a great friend and a great worker, which is why I hope you'll understand. You and I worked hard to make this place what it is today, but its future is always precarious. I can't leave it without knowing its future is ensured for years after I'm gone.

Your friend,

Noah

For twenty-nine years, I'd followed Greenway. I'd sacrificed everything else so I could rise to his level, and, perhaps, go even higher. Instead of leading MotiveTech into the future, I'd have to babysit some kid, working the same position I held for the past seventeen years until I became old and senile like Greenway. Except when I went, hardly anybody would remember who I was or what I did.

Grabbing the letter, I threw it across the room and let my elbows fall to my desk. I had a slight urge to leave, to search out a new terrain, where I could start my own empire, but I was forty-nine years old. I didn't have twenty-nine years to build something new.

Starting over wasn't an option.

I sank into my chair and sat with my head down for several minutes. When I looked up, the gold-plated back of my nameplate reflected the overhead light into my eyes. Grabbing it, I moved it to my lap where it wouldn't create a disturbance. Etched into the metal in miniature cursive was a single phrase. It read, "I swear, by my life and

my love of it, that I will never live for the sake of another man, nor ask another man to live for mine.”

It had been given to me by my professor at Columbia, just before I dropped out to work with Greenway. Except for the motto on the back, the nameplate was blank. My professor told me to carve CEO on it when I made it there. I hadn't talked to Dr. Kovalenko in years, but he had always been certain that I would be great. I wasn't entirely sure what he saw in me, but I knew the fact that he saw it made me special.

The next day, I went to Greenway's office. Hardly anyone but Greenway and his secretary occupied the top level of MotiveTech Tower. I wasn't on it any more than the janitor who spent an hour cleaning it each night. Greenway liked to keep his subjects beneath him, as if being above them physically allowed him to maintain his standing.

When I stepped into Greenway's office, he was sitting at his desk, scribbling furiously into his notebook. His shirt was unbuttoned, revealing a silver mane of chest hair that was cut-off from sight by his marble topped desk. Light seeped in through two large, tinted windows which served as walls and bore down on Greenway, giving him a glow as if he was some heavenly being.

Greenway was too busy with his work to be bothered by the light. Several balls of failure lied crumpled up on the floor surrounding his desk.

“Greenway. We need to talk?” I said, taking a seat across from him.

Greenway continued his work, moving his lips silently as he drew lines onto his paper. When his pencil led broke, he looked up and asked, “If it's about what we talked about yesterday, I'm sorry, but my decision is final.” He grabbed an electronic pencil

sharpener from his desk. “I hope you won’t have a fit about it. I meant it when I said that I need you. I wouldn’t want to lose you as a VP or a friend.”

Greenway injected his pencil into the sharpener, and I had to yell over the machine. “Don’t worry, you made yourself *very* clear.” Greenway pulled the pencil from the sharpener and went back to his work. “I’m not here to argue with you.”

Greenway resumed his muttering as he scribbled in his notebook.

“Noah – ”

Grabbing his pencil from his hand, Greenway snapped up and stared at me.

“I came here because we’ve known each other for a long time, and you’ve looked out for me ever since we met. When you passed out on the table, a group of Japanese investors saw you.”

Greenway grabbed another pencil and began writing again.

“Noah, there’s no way I can keep this from going to the board. It’s eventually going to reach them no matter I do.”

Looking up from his work, he dropped his pencil, “Why the hell not? You’ve taken care of all the other stuff for me.”

I sighed. “There’s a difference between what I can do with our employees and what I can do with our investors.”

Greenway stood up and started pacing. His legs were bare save the little bit of skin his whitey-tighties covered. “What are we gonna do?”

“Calm down. We’ll blame it on a temporary health concern. You’re older now. It’s believable.”

Greenway stopped behind his desk. “Nothing’s wrong with me, Eddy.”

“Noah, it looks bad. If you take a sabbatical, only for a quarter, the whole thing should blow over. Then everything can go back to normal.”

For several seconds, Greenway was silent as he fell into a contemplative state. When I imagined his mind, I saw a decayed mass of grey matter, littered with holes and strung together by tiny sinews. Whatever the extent of the damage was, I saw the effect of it on him in the painful contortions of his face as he searched his brain for answers that would no longer come. “Isn’t there anything else we can do?”

I shook my head. The fact he referred to me for an answer was exceptionally rare. During all the years I had known Greenway, he had made one thing clear. He didn’t need anyone, including me, to become the man he was.

He fell back into his chair, where he slowly wilted over his desk like a sun dried plant. “I just need a little more time. I’m close.”

Standing up, I walked around the desk to Greenway and placed my hand on his shoulder. “Come on Noah, let’s go.”

“Now?”

“It’s better if we deal with this right away.”

Greenway slowly picked himself up from his chair. Grabbing a folder and his journal from the desk, he started towards the door with me.

When he reached the threshold, he stopped. “Thanks, Eddy.” He gave me a hug—something I had never seen him do to anyone. He held his trembling body against mine for several moments, as if he needed mine to support it, and I stiffened from his touch. When he pulled away from me he said, “Take care of the place for me Eddy.”

The next day, I found a folder on my desk and a note on top of it.

Eddy,

I know I'm not supposed to be here right now, but I only dropped off a few instructions for you. Don't worry. Nobody saw me.

Your friend,

Noah

I opened up the folder, which contained a neatly typed schedule of the things I was to do, along with a list of things I should address, which was complete with explanations on how I should go about doing them. Placed in bold on the first sheet of paper was, "Take Henry Tatum, from Western Solutions on a tour of our facility. Offer him whatever he wants to get him here. We have some competition."

Grabbing the phone, I dialed the number Greenway had listed. Henry Tatum was out, but I left a message with his secretary, informing him the company had decided to go in a different direction. When I finished the call, I threw the folder in the trash and went about running the company.

Three months wasn't much, but I used it to turn the company in the right direction, my direction. There had been several expenses, which I had not been able to convince Greenway to cut. With him gone, I did away with several of his frivolous ventures that he insisted on continuing while he had been around. I cancelled several of his products in development, reduced our overly generous employee benefits and used some of the savings to continue development of my electronic PDA called the Da Vinci, a product I had designed on my own. It would have already been making us millions if Greenway hadn't cancelled it a year earlier, claiming, "It wouldn't take on."

By the time Greenway was a week away from his return, I had saved the company fifty million dollars and increased the stock price to a record high. Carrying my success with me as proof of my ability to run MotiveTech, I went to the board meeting to make my case against Greenway. We met on the ostentatious seventeenth floor in a large room overlooking the west side of the company. The sun poured in through the window and glared off the varnish of the mahogany table as the old men with receding hairlines filed in, helping themselves to seats made of Italian leather. For years, the events on the seventeenth floor were things I was only occasionally invited to.

Standing at the head of the table, I was armed with financial data proving my success and testimonials confirming Greenway's senility. I began to make my case against Greenway, recalling all the times I had found him shirtless or pants-less, sleeping on desks, tables or lobby furniture. I told them about Erin, emphasizing the danger of Greenway's wandering mind and hands. When I was done, I waited outside the room for them to make their decision. Outside was a dining area which donned Persian rugs, paintings that could have been in museums and furniture far more expensive than what I could afford. As I beheld the opulence, I thought about what I might add to it when I rose to the top. I felt I wanted something to leave my mark on the place, but couldn't think of anything to add which it didn't already have.

When I went back to the room, the nine men looked at me with expressionless faces. The chairmen, Harley Benton, explained their decision. "You've done great work in his absence. Believe me when I say we're all impressed by the company's recent climb, but getting rid of Greenway would make investors skittish. And besides, you

know the extent of Greenway's talents. You can't expect us to give up on him yet, at least not until we're certain he's finished."

For several moments, I stared at the old men, sitting in the plush, leather chairs with their gold Rolexes and expensive suits. They had done nothing to earn them but occasionally chime in on corporate decisions. Still, with one decision, they had decided that I'd never reach my dream.

"Thanks for bringing the matter to us," said Harley Benton. "We'll let you know of any updates to our decision."

I nodded and walked out of the room. All my life, I had heard and seen Greenway's talents. He could build new, brilliant things, he could manage and he could forecast changes in the markets, but I had worked under him for twenty-nine years learning everything I could. Who would have been better than me to take over? The truth was even a senile Greenway would win out over me.

I took the rest of the week off to wander around the halls of MotiveTech, spending much of my time on the seventeenth floor. I guess it was a way of saying goodbye to a dream. Because when Greenway came back and saw the things I had done, he'd never forgive me. Nothing was more important to him than MotiveTech, not even our friendship, making my firing imminent. On the day of Greenway's return, I grabbed my nameplate and went to sit in his office. Earlier in the week, I had decided that I'd be the CEO for the day, even if the proclamation was my own. Swapping my name plate with Greenway's, I put his inside the desk and let mine sit on the edge facing the door. All it had was my name—CEO had yet to be etched into its gold. For much of the day, I sat behind the desk that was almost mine, thinking about how it could never be.

It was evening when my secretary shoved the door to Greenway's office open. She was out of breath when she stopped in front of Greenway's desk, and a police officer was behind her. I quickly grabbed my nameplate and shoved it to the floor. Standing up, I asked, "What's the matter?"

"It's Greenway—he's on the roof. We think he's gonna jump."

With the police officer behind me, I ran faster than I believed I could. Greenway was vain, but I never thought he'd commit suicide, even if he'd been banished from his company for months. Throwing the door to the roof open, I saw Greenway from behind a massive vent, stooping over an edge, contemplating the space that separated him from his death.

"Noah, please don't do it!"

Greenway turned and saw me, flashing his usual grin, but this time it wasn't quite the same. It had lost its wry, smugness and had taken up a new quality: Defeat. The grin collapsed after a few seconds, and he looked back towards the sky, placing his hand over his eyes to form a bill of fingers. A cool autumn breeze had struck him when he took another step towards the edge, pressing his loose sweater against his chest.

"I'm sorry, Noah. Please come back. Things can be like they always were." I started to edge closer to him until I walked around the vent that obstructed my view. Sitting next to him was a massive triangular span of polyester cloth held in a frame of aluminum.

"What the hell is that thing?"

“It’s a hang glider. Haven’t you ever seen one? I’ve been up here building it all week with scraps I’ve found.” He picked up the massive span of neon green wings and held them up for me to see.

“Why?” I asked. “You’re not planning on flying it, are you?”

Greenway sighed and set his product down. “I wanted to make something. It’s been months since I put to something together right.”

“You don’t know if it works. You could hurt yourself.” The police officer had separated from me and was slowly moving towards Greenway’s blind spot.

“Maybe—but I’ll find out when I’m up in the air. Everything’s clearer up there.” He picked up his glider.

Trying to stall Greenway just a little longer, I asked, “How so?”

“I flew in World War Two, you know? Even though I was being shot at, I always knew what to do when I was in the sky.”

“Noah, that was years ago. You’re not a young man anymore. If you jump, you’ll get yourself killed.”

Greenway nodded, somberly, allowing his head to bow for a moment. “I guess you’re right, but when you’re in the sky, amid all that infinity, anything seems possible.”

Having closed in on Greenway, the police officer charged, his footfall smacking the pavement. Instantly, Greenway was alerted and began to run.

When they neared the edge of the building, the officer reached for the hang glider, but his hand slid off the smooth polyester. Greenway took a few more steps and jumped from the roof, throwing himself at the mercy of wind and gravity.

Within seconds, Greenway was suspended in the air, sailing towards a purple row of mountains on the horizon separating the world from MotiveTech. For a few moments, it seemed he could glide all the way to his unreachable precipice, but a sudden gust of wind grasped his craft and threw him downwards towards a group of flagpoles representing the twelve nations in which MotiveTech operated. Greenway tried to adjust, but it was too late. He crashed into the South Korean and Danish flagpoles and fell to the ground in a heap. From the top of the tower, it looked like discarded trash strewn about the ground. Leaves spotted the grass with dull reds, yellows and brown. Mixed between them were pieces of metal gleaming in the falling sun, There were stripes of polyester cloth and amid them was the old man, lying motionless. .

As emergency personal surrounded the pile of aluminum, polyester and old man, I watched from the highest peak of MotiveTech, which Greenway willingly dove off, losing everything he worked for and giving me what I always wanted.

The fall, which had broken both of Greenways legs, several of his ribs and did some minor damage to his vertebrae, had sent him to the hospital for two months and into retirement forever. The board had no choice but to promote me to CEO and discard Greenway. Wanting to prevent myself from thinking about Greenway's fall, I kept myself busy with work, but whenever an unwanted free moment slipped into my packed schedule, I'd see him with his large span of neon wings, cutting through the sky as he made his way towards the unreachable western horizon. As the scene replayed itself, the old emotions returned. My hope for him to sail over the purple hills, streams of sunset pouring over their eastern flanks, came first. Then a sinking feeling followed when I remembered how the wind griped his craft and threw him into the flagpoles. Finally, a

feeling that compressed the chamber of my chest and made it difficult to breathe overwhelmed me when the old man lay broken on the ground.

After a month and a half of trying to put Greenway out of my mind, I gave up and visited him in the hospital. I brought a bag of his favorite things, hoping to brighten his mood. Besides me, Greenway probably only had one other visitor. One of the board members had gone to visit him a month ago to offer the company's best wishes and to give him the news that he'd no longer be with MotiveTech.

I had to wait outside his room as his nurse removed his bedpan. When the nurse left, I stepped into Greenway's hospital room and found him sitting up in bed, staring at the flower wallpaper across from him. His eyes didn't follow my movements when I sat in a chair at his bedside; they remained fixed on the powdery prints of the flowers, which seemed to be fading into the walls. I leaned over and grabbed his arm, squeezing it lightly until his loose skin rose in the crevices between my fingers. "MotiveTech stock climbed four points today. We're on the rebound. Things are going great, aren't they?"

Greenway ignored my words and continued to stare at the pink rose prints. Time had washed away the color from their petals and reduced them to smudges.

"I know the company sent someone to tell you about the change."

Greenway didn't react. He continued looking straight ahead at the wallpaper.

"It's for the best, really. Now you can enjoy your time and relax," I said, squeezing his arm tighter to get a reaction from him. "Don't worry. I'll take care of everything from now on."

Greenway looked at me for the first time. His eyelids were heavy, and red lines forked like lightning around paling irises. “Just leave me alone, Eddy.” He let his eyes roll back into his head. “You don’t need to pretend you care anymore.”

“What do you mean?” I squeezed his arm tighter, hoping that my grasp could keep him in the moment.

“My mind’s been drifting for a while, but I have moments of clarity where I see the truth. It just takes me longer to see it now.”

My grip on his hand softened, and he pulled his arm away. His nurse came in and said, “I’m sorry to bother you, boys. But Mr. Greenway needs to eat.”

She was tall, tan and blonde, possessing the certain Barbie look Greenway desired in women. Erin, his old nurse, had the same appearance, which was why I hired her to watch over him; a beautiful woman was the only diversion from work Greenway ever pursued. The girl smiled big, flashing unrealistically-white teeth, and asked with a forced politeness, “Are you feeling any better, Mr. Greenway?”

The girl had a sort of artificiality to her: her face was loaded with make-up, her skin orange from fake tanning, and her hair had few strands of black amid its yellow curls. Having spent several nights womanizing with Greenway, I knew he liked his ladies to be the way his bits of metal were crafted, each of their compositions meticulously altered from their original state until they achieved an unnatural perfection.

“What is it going to be? Real food or an I.V.?”

“Give me the I.V.”

The girl sighed.

“Miss, he’s been having some discomfort in his leg. Could you lift it up for him,” I asked when she was about to leave. Greenway’s legs were covered in long plaster casts that extended from his feet to his groin. For her to adjust them, she would have to touch Greenway in a sensitive spot.

Leaning over him, she moved her hand to the edge of his cast, near his groin. I waited for her touch to reawaken Greenway and turn him back to what he was, as if her skin possessed the magic that could undo what time had done. Greenway didn’t react.

The girl exited the room, leaving Greenway and I to our silence.

Grabbing a notebook and a pencil, I set them on his food tray and said, “I know how important your project was to you. You should keep working on it. If you finish it, I can probably bring you back as a consultant.”

Greenway shook his head and sighed wearily, “It’s finished.”

“Where is it now?” I asked.

Greenway leaned back into his pillow, rested his head and closed his eyes.

“What happened to it?” I grabbed his arm and squeezed it, trying to get some sort of reaction from him.

He pulled his hand away. “Time killed it,” he said. He turned his head to look at me. “It’ll take everything else soon, even MotiveTech.”

“Nothing can bring down MotiveTech. We built it so big.”

“Everything that rises must fall.” Greenway slipped back into despondency.

Quickly, I grabbed the bag and yelled, “Noah, look what I brought.” I removed its contents and placed them on his food tray. There were lemon drops, his favorite candy; scotch, his favorite drink; crossword puzzles, his favorite game and several other

little trinkets, but Greenway's mind continued to slip away like a receding tide, slipping back into the sea of thoughts far from tangible reality. For a few moments, I tried to think of where it had gone, but all I could see was the vacant shell his mind had left behind.

I left the room after sitting with Greenway for thirty minutes, waiting for him to come to his senses, an event which rarely ever happened again. When I made it to the parking lot, it was snowing heavily, pouring white onto grass that had been green only hours ago. I paused for a few moments, looking into the city covered in a mist of snowflakes. Far on the other side of town, I could barely make out the beating red light on top of MotiveTech Tower. Like a healthy heart, it pulsated sixty times per minute, but from the hospital, the time between each beat was long, sometimes taking at least ten seconds for me to glimpse the red spark. During the drive home, the flurries worsened, throwing white everywhere until it seemed like everything was fading, as if the storm had brought the passage of time along with its snow.

Cubic Zirconia

by

Jordan Meyers

From inside a window on the seventeenth floor, the pinnacle of MotiveTech, Eddy stared down at the sprawling expanse of concrete, serving as the base for a stretch of industrial neighborhoods united under the same banner, a banner which Eddy controlled. The numerous halogen lights interspersed throughout the complex created a pristine sheen that coated everything with a luminescent glaze. East of MotiveTech laid Genève. Although the city and the company were connected, the halogen glaze didn't reach Genève. There, shadows and dark silhouettes were allowed to form in the early dawn as the sun boiled on the horizon, preparing its ascent.

Leaning back in his finely upholstered cloud of leather, Eddy Fortune grabbed his speech and reviewed it. "The suspension assembly is dying. There are only years left for it now. If MotiveTech is to survive, we'll be forced to adapt. The future depends on a new product line, one with an endless stream of demand, one in medical. However, success will not come without sacrifice. Cutbacks will be necessary to weather the transition."

He stopped, wondering if the last two lines were tactful, yet clear. "There will be pay cuts, lay-offs and supply cuts," is what he wanted to say, but direct speaking wasn't

allowed in an unreasonable world that demonized productive profit-makers like him, he thought. Still he hoped he could find the words to make the unintelligent masses understand him, but Eddy wasn't very good at interacting with his subordinates.

After spending a few more minutes trying to devise a way to get through to his employees, he tore his speech up and threw it into the trash, resolving to let his son, who was able to find the words to make anybody love him, take care of the issue. Eddy's belief in John Fortune had no limit. In fact, he had named him after the greatest man he could think of, John Galt from *Atlas Shrugged*, and spent his life making sure that he lived up to the name of the fictional hero. Oftentimes, Eddy wished he had all the support his son had enjoyed. If he only he did, he'd be the richest man in the world.

Eddy sighed and walked over to his bookshelf, where he grabbed *Atlas Shrugged*. Embossed onto the book's cover was Lee Lowery's Atlas holding a bronze sphere on his shoulders. His lips formed a straight line, perhaps pursed, from the great burden he carried. Eddy, the CEO of MotiveTech, often likened his plight to that of Atlas. Only a day earlier, several employees had begged him to sacrifice himself and his company to save their jobs for a few months. When he had refused, he'd found his Bentley had been keyed later in the evening.

Sitting at his desk, he opened the novel and turned through the weathered pages, marked with the previous intimacies of annotations. Eddy read at random through the novel until he forgot about the reality of his world and sank into the pages. They described the world as it should be, if only a few more were wise enough to make it so.

John hunched over a small, velvet Crown Royal bag. Its string, which normally held it shut, was loose, revealing its sparkling contents worth over twenty-five million. The diamonds were bigger than any piece of jewelry he'd ever had cut for his wife. Not because he didn't want to shower her with gems, but because Claire always involved herself in some charity or another, and the thought that any item she owned could come from a dubious source would have been too much for her naïve heart.

She didn't know the world as John did, and was ignorant of the fact that gains often came at the expense of others. Years earlier, John had learned this while working at Lehman brothers, where he met Lowell Maxim, his partner in MaximFortune Investments.

His wife stirred in bed, and he closed the bag quickly, hiding its contents from her. Feeling the need to keep Claire and his children from the shady world around them, John had hid his and others' shady dealings from his family. It was better for them to be naïve, he thought, while he quietly got ready to go to his father's company to make a speech. Before he left, he lingered in his bedroom. Sitting next to Claire, John pulled the blankets below her shoulders and brushed aside the few locks that had fallen over her cheek. The feeling gave him a nostalgic sensation he had first felt thirteen years earlier when she'd first spent the night in his apartment. For much of the night, John had held her in his arms, too happy to fall asleep and discard the moment with the day. For hours, he had ran her long strands of hair between his fingers, experiencing and enjoying the newness of her presence, a newness which was sometimes forgotten throughout his ten years of marriage, but often recalled during little moments of intimacy. Kissing her on the forehead, John grabbed the diamonds and left the house in his Land Rover.

For much of the two hour drive to his father's company, John tried not to think of the two black Lincolns conspicuously following him. Putting them out of his mind, he tried to retrace the trajectory of his life to a time and place before he became John Fortune the billionaire and settled on the night of his wedding reception, when he and his wife swooned about the dance floor, spinning into a humble, but happy, future of a family of their own. Together they would have passed through life in a way that few people would recall, and John, unlike his father, was perfectly fine with it.

When John got to the company, he found his father in the conference room, staring at a portrait of himself situated across the room from the painting of Noah Greenway, the company's deceased founder. Placed so that their eyes met each other, the subjects of the portraits were locked into a perpetual staring match. The two dimensional depiction of Eddy's face was serious and his posture erect, while the representation of Noah slouched and wore a grin exuding the confidence he gained from creating an empire.

"Nice, isn't it?" Eddy asked. "I just had it painted a week ago."

John nodded and leaned on the mahogany conference table, where he stared down at the floor. Reaching into his pocket, he pulled out the Crown Royal bag and stroked his thumb against its velvet skin. "Dad, I need your help."

Eddy continued to stare at his likeness without answering his son. "There are people who want me to leave. Can you believe that? Me, who built this damn company with Noah Greenway."

John sighed and mumbled, "Their audacity."

“That’s what I thought, but I think you’ll be able to talk some sense into them,” he said, patting John on the back.

Sliding the velvet bag back into his pocket, John shook his head, “I don’t think you want me to speak on your behalf. Things at MaximFortune won’t be going very well in a day or so.”

“What do you mean?” Eddy asked, leaning forward on the table.

“I might be a bit – toxic.”

Standing from his chair, his father smiled. “Quit being so dramatic. I’m sure you and the company will be fine. Remember when my PDAs didn’t go as planned. We still made it through.”

“I suppose,” John said. He walked over to the large windows overlooking the complex. From there, he could see one of the black Lincolns parked near the exit. For a few moments he scanned the area below him for the other, but couldn’t locate it.

“Remember my wedding reception?”

“Yeah. Why do you ask?”

“I never thought I’d be where I am now.”

“That’s because you lacked imagination then,” Eddy said, grabbing a few of his notes and packing them into a leather satchel. “You were going to throw your life away in some meaningless profession.”

“I wanted to be a therapist.” John pulled the Crown Royal bag from his pocket again and handed it to his father. “Can you give this to Claire for me? I won’t be home for a while.”

Eddy grabbed the bag and tossed it into his satchel. “Sure, but it’s time to go to the assembly.”

“Can it wait a minute, I need to talk to you,” John said, but Eddy was already at the doorway, where he called out to his secretary who’d been waiting in her office outside the room.

For the next several minutes, John tried to pull his father aside, but his secretary didn’t leave him until they were on the stage where several hundred employees waited. When she left Eddy, she directed John to a seat at the back of the stage while Eddy took his place at the podium next to his human resource director. His father and the director would introduce the problem, then send him up to the front of the stage where he’d have to make a crowd of nine hundred men and women believe that their futures were safe in his father’s hands.

When his father started to speak, he looked around the room. It had once been a huge machining facility equipped with mammoth machines coated in stainless steel. The last time John had seen it was fifteen years ago, when he toured the facility for a high school field trip. Everything had been so bright in the room then. On top of fifty foot ceilings were endless panels of overhead lights pouring onto the metal machinery, creating a glow which emanated across the entire room. The machines, the light and the glow were all gone, having left after fifteen years of decline. Only a few of the lights were equipped with bulbs, and all that was left of the machinery were the veins of ductwork that climbed the walls and the ceiling, having once supplied great machines with ventilation.

When his father announced his name, he rose and spoke. “I know all of you are scared right now. That your worries extend beyond the longevity of this company, as they should. Most of you have a family with kids to worry about and provide for. These things are enough to wear on anyone, but I’m here to tell you that there is nothing to worry about. When I was young, my father always demanded the best in me. He demanded I be great. With his employees he does the same thing. Sitting in this room is the greatest collection of brilliant people I’ve ever seen. With your combined efforts, you’ll have nothing to worry about. This place will be great again.”

John continued speaking for some time, spilling out sweet promises and hopes which would most likely never come true, but for a while, it would allow some to live in ignorance, an ignorance telling them that everything would be fine again, at least for a little while.

Eddy was the first to clap when his son finished his rousing speech. When John turned to claim his place at the back of the stage, he embraced him and said, “When you’re tired of making billions, you should become a politician.”

John gave a grin, but it quickly fell into a frown. “I really need to talk to you, Dad.”

It had taken another thirty minutes for them to get away from the assembly. When he did, he led his son to his office where they could speak in private.

As soon as John walked through the door, Eddy hugged him and said, “You know I named you John for a reason.”

John let himself fall into his father's seat and sank his hand into his long strands of black hair. "Nobody can live up to him," he said, clenching his fist, grasping a cluster of strands tightly. "He's not real."

Eddy started to speak, but found he didn't have a response. For several seconds, he stared at his son. "What's wrong? I don't understand."

"I'm not what you think I am. It's all a veneer."

"That's ridiculous. Everyone knows you're great."

"By the time the week ends, the whole world will know that MaximFortune was just a lie. We hardly ever made any investments. We just used the cash the new investors brought in to give the appearance of profits."

Eddy fell into the chair across the desk from John as numbness spread across his body and dampened the realization that his son was just a talented corporate con-artist. He thought of all the dinners he had spent with his associates, powerful men who'd built legitimate fortunes, postulating that his son was the greatest of all industrialists. For some time, he sat staring out the window of his office. It spanned across an entire wall. The sun was at its highest and poured into the room, splashing a golden aura onto him and his son.

"I need you to do something for me," John said. He leaned forward on the desk, his voice trembling the more he spoke. "The bag I gave you. It's for Claire and the kids. Don't give it to them for a while. Wait until the Feds take everything and leaves them alone. Try to turn it into cash for them, and give it to them subtly."

"Your speech—it'll ruin me."

"Dad, I'm talking about your family."

Eddy continued to stare despondently.

“Your grandkids, your son, his wife. The only people in the world who give a shit about you.”

Breaking away from his stupor, Eddy turned and looked at his son coldly.

“People love me. It’s because of me that this tower, this company, that town is here,” he said, pointing out the window toward the town that existed beyond the MotiveTech complex. “And I worked to make it happen, unlike you.”

“Love you?” John shook his head and let out a mirthful laugh. He stood and walked to the door. “They all hate you and will even more when you finally run this place under. Everybody but you can see it.”

For some time, the two men stared at each other, letting the words falling between them dissolve into the air. “John I didn’t mean –” started Eddy.

“Just do me one favor, give the damn bag to Claire when it’s safe.”

Eddy nodded and John walked away.

Within a few hours, a pair of men in suits came to Eddy’s office looking for his son. Eddy told them everything he knew, except for his son’s request. When the FBI announced their manhunt to the press, the scandal came to light, and it was only worsened by the discovery that John had fled the United States in his yacht and was out sailing the seas to avoid authorities. Hours of television and radio and weeks of print were appropriated to detailing one of the world’s largest swindles that duped thousands of people out of their life savings. Some fell from poor to poverty, while others fell from wealthy to poor. Like Eddy, they had believed John Fortune was great, and they trusted

them with their dreams, which would never come to fruition. The possibility of justice was also bleak, as John was far away amid the large blue space of the earth.

Eddy had gone about his work for several weeks, trying to forget about his son and his final request. When he could no longer ignore it, he went to his desk and opened the Crown Royal bag. In it, he found a handful of diamonds along with a crinkled note meant for Claire. It read:

Remember our wedding reception. You and I danced and drank so much you threw up outside the canopy. I held your hair back and gripped your chest, so you wouldn't ruin your dress. You asked if you looked okay. I told you that you were dazzling.

I took you home that night, which was supposed to have been the start of our honeymoon. The one we didn't go on until a week later because I went away for an interview in New York. For the whole night, I stayed awake as you slept, running my fingers through your strands of hair and watching the rise and fall of your chest under the covers. When I crept out in the morning, I hadn't slept at all. I didn't want the night, which had thrown me to a future I had always wanted, to end. I wish I would've climbed under the covers with you and stayed, instead of turning in a direction I will always regret.

Please take care of yourself and the kids,

John

Eddy sat at his desk for hours that night as the board discussed replacing him as their CEO. When his son's scandal was added to his declining success, his removal had

become imminent. Pulling out an old bottle of scotch, which had been in the desk since the days of Noah Greenway, Eddy opened it and drank. He thought about his son's note and the night of the reception years ago.

Moonlight and stars had licked the river with silver light. From the county park, the city lights had been nothing but a dull plume of gold far in the distance. Near the river, Eddy sat on a cheap piece of lawn furniture situated underneath a massive tarp roof held in place by PVC piping. Strands of Christmas lights were strewn about the structure, casting the wedding reception in red and green. On the dance floor, John held a slender body dressed in white. Together the two swooned, stumbling over each other's feet, laughing with faces red from inebriation.

Soon after the umpteenth dance, the bride's father cut in and took her from John. Slowly they floated apart, and Eddy came to his son's side, wrapping an arm around him. "Not fun having to share her is it?" he said, smiling at his son's clinginess. "Trust me, it gets easier." He led John to an empty table. Sitting down, John kept his eyes on his bride while Eddy pulled a business card from his pocket, sliding it underneath his son's hand.

"It's for Lowell Maxim, the man at Lehman Brother's I told you about," Eddy said.

Prying his eyes from his bride, John looked at the card and sighed.

"He wants to give you a position in New York. Although he didn't tell me the exact number it would take to get you there, it seemed like he was willing to pay what your worth."

"It's a ways from Boston, and I don't know if Sarah will be okay with the move. She likes where she works, and her parents are close."

“Dammit, John, it’s the Lehman Brothers. You can come back to Boston on the weekends if she’s that pissed about it.”

John shook his head, “I’m not sure I want to do finance. I was thinking I’d get into psychology.”

“I didn’t pay for you to go to Harvard for you to listen to people whine about problems they’re too lazy or stupid to fix themselves.” Eddy took a swig from his drink and slammed it down on the table. “You’re meant for bigger things.”

His son looked back at the dance floor where his wife’s arms slipped away from her father’s as the song ended. Standing alone in the middle of the floor, she scanned the crowd of party goers while a love song played in the background.

John stood up, but Eddy grabbed his arm. “I want you to be in New York tomorrow,” he said. “I have everything arranged for your interview.”

John nodded, stuffing the business card in his pocket, and took a few steps towards the dance floor and stopped, turning to look at Eddy. “When will it ever be big enough?”

For hours, Eddy sat at his desk reading and rereading the note with nothing but the bottle of scotch left by his deceased predecessor to keep him company. When his liquid companion had been drained, he knocked it off the desk and grabbed his phone to call his son. Instead of ringing, it cut straight to voicemail. Eddy called again and again to listen to the last words he’d ever hear from his son. Each time he called, he’d try to say something, but only inaudible words slipped out of his mouth—Eddy knew it was too late for words to do any good.. Eventually, he dropped the phone, and it bounced off his lap and fell onto the floor. At first he tried to reach for it, so he could still give himself

the illusion that his son wasn't gone, but he tired and slouched in his chair. Afflicted from inebriation, he couldn't bring himself to do anything but sit and stare out the window, framing MotiveTech's overpowering glow, and think of how things should've been.