

*Inspired by real life events*

MAN  
ON THE  
**RUN**

VOLUME II \$\$\$ HOW TO GET RICH

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*For what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world  
and lose his own soul?*

– *Mark 8:36 King James Version*

*Le secret des grandes fortunes sans cause apparente est un crime  
oublié, parce qu' il a été proprement fait.*

– *From Le Père Goriot, Honoré de Balzac*

*Behind every great fortune lies a great crime.*

– *English paraphrase of Balzac's original*

# CHAPTER ONE

“One hundred-second floor, please.”

“Yes, sir.”

I moved to the back of the elevator as three other couples crowded in. The polished stainless steel folding door was pulled shut and the porter pressed the button. I barely registered the green marble on the walls with its white veins, or the drone of the porter as he repeated the same facts to the excited tourists for the umpteenth time that day. I began to wonder why I even said which floor I was going to. There was only one stop for us from the eighty-sixth floor to the hundred-and-second.

“Smaller than I thought,” I said to no one in particular. The elevator had disgorged us. I was surrounded by glass, blue sky, and the cityscape below.

“I know, but it’s beautiful.” It was a woman with her arm linked in her husband’s. She responded to my comment but was talking to him.

I walked next to the thick glass and looked down and all around me. I didn’t know what to expect, and found

myself recoiling at first.

“Afraid of heights, son?”

I turned around, looking for the source. “Huh?” I soon realized it was the husband of the woman.

“It looked like you just saw a ghost.”

“No, I just didn’t expect it to drop away like that. There’s no opening for me to fall, but it surprised me anyway.” I blushed slightly.

“No need to be embarrassed. Is it your first time here?”

“Yes. I’m meeting someone here.”

“A girl?”

I shrugged, then nodded.

“My wife and I are here because we saw that movie last year, the one with Cary Grant.”

His wife closed her eyes and brought her shoulders up as though she was cold. “It was such a wonderful movie. We saw it twice and I cried both times.”

He put his hand on hers and they looked directly at each other, forgetting me for the moment.

“I’ll leave you to enjoy the view,” I said.

“No hurry, son,” he said. “As your gal hasn’t arrived, I hope you don’t mind us chatting. We’re not from New York.”

I had gathered that already. New Yorkers didn’t start talking to strangers.

“Me either,” I said. “And I also saw that movie. It’s what inspired me to come here.”

The woman's eyes grew wider and began to sparkle. "Ooh, see Tom? I knew it. I bet he's here to ask her to marry him."

I looked down at the floor, my face becoming hot from the word. The little box burned in my pocket.

"I met a girl," I said. "I fell in love. She lives in New York, so I thought this would be an easy place for us to reunite."

"Reunite?" The man was now looking at me. The skyline stood majestically around us through the glass but my story seemed to be interesting them more.

I shrugged again. "I haven't seen her for three months. We agreed to meet here today."

"Just like Cary Grant and Deborah Kerr," the wife said. The skin around her eyes was moist. Her hands were clutching together.

"I hope not," I said. "She got hit by a car and left Cary Grant waiting like a schmo."

The wife grabbed her husband's arm. "This is so romantic. I knew it was a good idea for us to come here."

I didn't want to ask where they came from and hoped they didn't tell.

"Listen, son. We'll let you be. If you need anything, we'll be here for a while."

"Yes, ask us for anything. I want to wait and see what happens." She was already being led away.

I nodded and allowed a smile, my fingers feeling the

outline of the box through the fabric of my trousers. I drifted next to the indifferent steel girders that held everything together. I liked being able to see the large bolts and nuts covered with layers of paint. Leaning against the steel, I looked out over the expanse of buildings that fanned out like a floor full of children's toys. My mind drifted along the lines of moving traffic until it rested on the one subject that I hadn't been able to stop thinking about since I met her.

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"You plan on going to Harvard?" I was surprised to see a girl on campus.

"Me? No. I'm here because my brother is going. He's a legacy student. My father and grandfather studied here."

"You don't want to?"

"Want to what?"

"Study at Harvard."

Her head turned so that she looked at me out of the corners of her eyes. "Are you trying to make fun of me?"

I felt a cold trickle of sweat form on my lower back. I still couldn't believe I had struck up a conversation with her. I tried not to stare at her riding pants. There were no pockets that I could see, and they were so tight, I thought they were sprayed on.

"Uh, never. Why would you think that?"



“Because Harvard doesn’t accept women students. None of the Ivy leagues do.”

Her face was slightly flushed. Her blonde hair was long, at least halfway to her waist; it was fashioned back off her face. I became conscious of her eyes and her lips. My shirt was now sticking to my back.

“I didn’t know,” I stammered. “I’m sorry. I was just trying to...” I didn’t want to say ‘talk to you’. “Hi, my name is George.”

“Barbara. My friends call me Barbie.”

Her hand slipped into mine. It was cool. I hoped mine wasn’t sweating.

“Nice to meet you, Barbie.”

“And you, George.”

Her body relaxed again and I could see her hip shifting. I forced myself to look at her eyes.

“Do you know how long this takes?” I was desperate to keep the conversation going.

“Most of the day. My father wants to introduce my brother to all of his old professors. You know, show him around. I’m not sure if this day is for my brother or my father.”

“I’m already finished. Do you need to stick around?”

I couldn’t believe I uttered the words. I had just met this girl and she was with her family. What was I thinking?

“Not really.” She looked to see if anyone was coming

down the hallway and out the windows, though I couldn't see what she was looking at or for. It was a massive campus.

"Do you want to join me for a coffee? Or lunch? We can grab a bite at the cafeteria. Will your family be able to find you?"

"I'm not a dog on a leash," she said. Her face had become flush. "I'm sure they'll figure it out eventually."

I nodded, afraid I would say something that would break this spell. I had never done something like this before. She started walking. I followed.

"What are you planning to study?" she asked.

"You're going to think I'm a geek," I said. I could feel my shoulders turning in.

"Hardly. Look at you. You probably played varsity ball; I'm trying to figure out whether it was football or basketball."

She lifted her hand to her face in mock consideration. I smiled.

"Basketball. I never liked the full contact of football."

"Smart. So what are you studying?"

"Economics, but there is something here I want to do more than anything."

"What's that?"

"Computers. You've heard about Mark I?"

"The device that helped the Manhattan Project?"

It was my turn to be speechless. She noticed and

raised her chin higher.

“What? You think I’m some dumb blonde girl? I hear things.”

“I am impressed. Most girls aren’t interested in things like that. I’m fascinated with computers, war, and money. Anyway, Harvard isn’t the best place for me to do my undergraduate. I want to be here because of the computers.”

“I like a man who knows what he wants.”

Her eyes narrowed briefly, and I felt butterflies in my stomach. My body began to shake with adrenaline. I didn’t tell her I was here on a scholarship. She held herself like a rich girl. I bet her brother didn’t need to worry about how much tuition cost.

We arrived at the cafeteria and I followed her in. She was confident in her movements. I saw the other guys follow her with their eyes as she passed. Either she didn’t notice or she expected the attention.

“I’m glad we’re not eating in the dining halls.”

“Why?” I asked. “They’re amazing.”

“Not if all you want is a coffee and a sandwich.”

“Good point.” I would have said the same thing no matter what she answered.

“Maybe you want to try something off campus sometime?”

My insides went liquid. We hadn’t spent any time together and she was asking me out. I’d never heard of a

girl asking a guy out before. It excited and scared me; I liked it. My mouth went dry.

“Of course,” I said.

“I look forward to it.”

She smiled at me and my body shuddered with an extra bolt of adrenaline. She was like no one I had ever met. She was smart, confident, and so beautiful I couldn't believe she was next to me.

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“I'm sorry, but we have to go. I hope she comes.” The man and woman were next to me and it took a while to readjust my senses.

“Thank you. And enjoy the rest of your trip.”

I shook the husband's hand and expected to nod to the wife but she also shook my hand. Hers was clammy and cool; I could feel that her skin was papery thin. It reminded me of Barbie's mother's. The smiling couple give me a final wave as the elevator's doors removed them from my thoughts.

∞

“Welcome, George. Barbie's told me so much about you.” She shook my hand and looked me in the eye.

“Thank you for inviting me, Mrs. Lexington. Your

home is beautiful.”

“Oh, you’re too kind.” She seemed to genuinely flush as she led us through the foyer and into the formal dining room. Everyone was already seated. “You can sit next to Frederick, George. Barbie, you can sit next to your father.”

I settled into my seat. I was conscious that it was antique of some sort. If I had to guess, I would say Chippendale, but I had no real idea. I decided not to announce my ignorance and to avoid any direct conversations on money, art, or investments.

“The food smells delicious,” I said instead. It was met with appreciative nods.

“Let’s say grace,” Mr. Lexington said. He bowed his head and rambled off a set-prayer piece I wasn’t familiar with.

“Amen,” I said in unison with everyone else.

“Tell me about yourself, George. Where are you from, what are you studying, and what are you planning to do in the future?”

“Dad!” Barbie said. “Can’t we just eat and enjoy ourselves? George is a friend. He’s going to Harvard, and is studying economics and computers. He’s going to be someone in the future.” When her eyes fell on me, I blushed.

“Oh, well,” he said. “I just want to get to know who you are, George. No offence.”

“None taken,” I said. “I’m just a student right now. I hope to make my mark on the world when I’m done.”

Barbie’s eyes said all I needed to know. She was proud of me. She was protecting me. It made me want her more than ever.

“You’ve been seeing a lot of our Barbara,” he continued. “I appreciate you coming from Cambridge to us so we could finally meet.”

“It’s only four hours, and since Barbie is leaving for Switzerland soon, I wanted to spend as much time as possible with her before we’re apart.”

Mr. Lexington raised his eyebrows but said nothing. Mrs. Lexington’s face became soft and I thought I could see her eyes become watery. She looked between Barbie and me. I realized I had another ally at the table. The brother said nothing, probably knowing better than to get in the middle of things.

“How did you two meet again?”

“Daddy, I told you. We met at Harvard when you and Frederick were doing your thing meeting the professors.”

“That was weeks ago. Why is it only now that I’m meeting George?”

It was my turn to become uncomfortable. I didn’t expect a grilling at the dinner table.

“You’ve had plenty of chances to meet with him, Daddy. You were always too busy or out of town.”

“And you’re meeting him today,” Mrs. Lexington

added. "I, for one, am pleased that George made the effort."

"Thank you, Mrs. Lexington," I said. I was determined to stay in the conversation. "Perhaps we can have a word in private, George, after dinner," Mr. Lexington said.

"Yes, sir. I'd like that," I said.

I focused on eating the roast beef. Everything about the meal, the table, and the room was perfect. I knew they had a staff that took care of these things, and I could see them come and go during the meal, but experiencing it was a very different thing than thinking about it in the abstract. I tried not to worry about what the subject of my conversation with Mr. Lexington would be.

The rest of the meal went as I expected. The conversation changed to Frederick's studies, the weather, the new hula hoop craze that was gripping youngsters, President Eisenhower's making Alaska a new state, and the creation of NASA. I had prepared talking points on all these subjects beforehand. I tried not to be too intrusive, nor too shy. I wanted to become part of the family.

Afterwards, when the dinner and desert were done, I knew the time had come to talk to Mr. Lexington. He caught my eye and indicated to follow him with his head. He didn't need to say anything. Barbie caught the movement and I saw her eyes dart from her father to me to her mother, then back to me. I thought I noticed

a suppressed smile, as though she knew what her father was going to talk to me about.

His study was formal, with dark wood-paneled walls. He closed the heavy door against the sounds of the rest of the house and I could understand why he created such a space for himself. It became silent and peaceful. I could smell the cigar and pipe smoke that hung in the bindings of the books and drapes. Along the wall sat a collection of cut glass bottles of whiskey and gin. We sat across from each other on two overstuffed armchairs. I was glad we didn't have his desk between us.

"So, George."

I waited for him to continue. He didn't. I didn't know what to say. "Yes?"

"Do you want a drink?" He motioned to the whiskey. I knew that was a trap.

"No, sir. I don't drink."

He nodded, lips slightly pursed. "Good. There's plenty of time to pick up vices like that." He got up and poured himself a large whiskey. "Do you want a Coke?"

"Yes, please. That would be nice. Thank you." He opened a door beneath and I could see a small refrigerator stocked with soft drinks and tonics. He removed the cap and handed me the bottle.

"Do you want a glass?"

"No, sir. I like it straight from the bottle. More bubbles."

"I agree," he said, smiling slightly. "But if my wife



offers you a bottle, say that you would prefer a glass. She's funny that way."

I put the bottle to my lips, conscious of my faux pas. I remembered a comment I had heard, something to the effect that only babies drink from bottles. I wished I had asked for a glass. It was too late now.

Mr. Lexington sat back and took a sip of his drink. He shook his hand to make the ice cubes tinkle, then took another sip. "My Barbara seems to be very taken with you, George."

I realized then that it was going to be a difficult talk.

"Yes, sir. And I, her."

"Hmm. Yes. And you seem to be a nice fellow, going to a good school. Harvard was my alma mater, as you probably know."

"Yes, sir." My hands were getting sweaty and I didn't like holding the bottle of Coke like a baby. I put it down, careful to place it on a coaster, and wiped my hands on my pants.

"I don't understand your choice of courses, though. Economics, yes, but computers, no. I can't see them being relevant or profitable in the future."

"Sir?"

"I'm merely looking out for Barbara's best interests. I don't know what your intentions are, but I don't want to see my little girl end up with a dreamer without a dime."

I stared at him. I wanted to say as little as possible.

I didn't want to correct him or argue. "I plan to study business after I get my undergraduate degree. Everything I've heard suggests that this is the future. The president wants us in space, and we need computers to do that. Slide rules aren't enough. Everything is about large volume mathematical calculations. I want to excel in that, sir."

He didn't say anything for a moment. He took another sip and put his drink down.

"Maybe I'm not making myself clear, George. I don't know much about computers or the future, but I trust Harvard and you're going to be a Harvard man. I'm sure you'll do well in the world."

I didn't say anything. I was prepared to take any compliment he offered.

"I need to know what your intentions are for Barbara." He sat back.

"I love your daughter, sir."

"That's a good start, but it's not enough. My daughter isn't some play thing or distraction for you, or anyone else for that matter."

I began to understand what he was after.

"Sir, I thought we should wait a bit before I asked you, but as you have raised the subject, I think it's only right for me to ask you now." I wasn't prepared for this, but glad that it didn't allow me time to be nervous.

Mr. Lexington sat forward, eyes intently on me.

“Sir, I would like to ask for your blessing to court your daughter and, if she accepts, to marry her.” As the words passed my lips, my body became numb. The room closed in on me and everything slowed down. My entire future depended on his reaction.

He continued to look at me, stone faced. His eyes lowered and he turned his head as if he was listening to something. He stood up, buttoned his jacket, and extended his hand. “Good man, George. I would be proud to call you my son. You have my blessing.” He smiled.

I tried to stand but needed a second try. My balance was off. I grasped his hand and we shook. We stood, both numb for different reasons, and smiled. I was relieved to feel my hand released. I was only then able to say anything. “Thank you, sir. It means everything to me.”

I felt a slap on the back and he chuckled. He seemed genuinely happy, as though he was uncertain of how the conversation would go. “Let’s get back to the rest of them before they begin to wonder what we’re up to, hey?”

He led the way and I followed closely behind.

Barbie was scheduled to leave in three days’ time. It was some form of finishing school where she would learn, definitively, how to host in three languages. She referred to it as bridal school.

“It’s to ensure I know how to be the perfect wife,”

she said, “that I don’t embarrass my husband or family.”

“I’m sure it’s more than that,” I said.

She linked her arm in mine. I felt her body against me and it made me uncontrollably happy. We had kissed for the first time a couple of weeks before and she was no longer conscious of how her body rubbed against my arm. Sometimes, I think she did it on purpose.

New York is a magnificent place when you are in love. We strolled the streets and ate hot dogs from street vendors. We window-shopped, went to movies, and spent every available moment together. I couldn’t remember a happier time in my life, and couldn’t imagine a place I would prefer to be than right there, with her.

“Do you think you’ll remember me?” she said.

“I will never stop thinking about you.”

“Three months is a long time. A lot can happen.”

“Not for me. I’ve got class and I’ve got you. I’ll be waiting.”

“But there will be parties and other girls. You’ll forget me in no time.” She pouted to make a point.

I stopped walking and held her close. “There are no other girls. You are my soul mate and future. You are the last thing I think about when I go to sleep and the first thing when I wake. I can’t stop thinking about you all day. If anything, I’ll flunk my courses and get thrown out of Harvard.”

She kissed me. “I love you, George. Promise me you

won't change."

"I can't change," I said. "You have hard-wired me into loving you."

"Oh, you're such a nerd," she said and kissed me again. I didn't mind.

I enjoyed her soft body next to me. She was slim and athletic but she relaxed into me when we kissed. I couldn't imagine a greater happiness.

"Will you marry me?" The words slipped out before I realized what I had said. She pulled away and looked at me like I was crazy.

"What did you say?"

I knelt next to her and took her hand. "Barbara Lexington, I want to be your husband and your best friend. I want to spend the rest of my life with you. I want you to marry me but don't answer me now. Meet me at the top of the Empire State Building in three months with your answer." I bent my head and kissed her hand. Everything had become blurry and I didn't want her to see me crying.

She pulled on my hand to get me to stand. Tears were running silently down her reddened cheeks. She didn't say anything. She moved closer to me and put her lips on mine. They were warm and wet from tears. I could feel the heat of her body through her sweater. She didn't stop kissing me except to breathe.

When we finally parted, I knew her answer. Her eyes

and face glowed with excitement. She was due to leave tomorrow and the thought of it tightened my chest.

“Is that what my father wanted to talk to you about?”

I shrugged. “I’m marrying you, not him.”

She held my hand tighter and we began to walk again. She stopped and turned to me.

“Come with me.”

“What?”

“Come with me to Switzerland.”

“I can’t. My classes start tomorrow.”

“Come on, just say ‘yes’. It’s romantic.” She was pleading with me like a little girl. Somehow, it made her even more irresistible.

“I can’t,” I said.

“Just for a week. Or a weekend.” She was making puppy-dog eyes at me. My body was exploding with desire for her.

“I can’t afford it.”

“Sure you can. You can miss a few classes. You’re brilliant. You’ll make up the work.”

“No, I mean I can’t afford to fly to Switzerland. I don’t have that kind of money.”

She stopped playing with me and moved her head like she was emptying water out of her ears.

“What? How? You’re going to Harvard. Just ask your parents for some extra money.”

“My parents don’t have any extra. I’m going to

Harvard on a full scholarship.”

“Oh.”

“But we’ll see each other in three months. We can begin the rest of our lives then.”

“Yes.”

I grabbed her hand and began walking back to her parent’s townhouse. I wanted to cherish these last few moments with her before I drove back to Cambridge that night. It would be the last opportunity for me to be with her before we met on top of the Empire State Building.

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“Sorry, sir, but we’re closing in half an hour. I don’t think she’s coming.”

“Thank you. Let me know when the last elevator goes down. I want to wait.”

“Suit yourself, sir.”

The city had become dark hours earlier. There was no snow yet and the lights twinkled like a magical story below me. My stomach had been complaining for hours and my joints hurt from standing, sitting, and milling about without purpose. I took one final look through each window and made my way to the elevator.

Just as I approached, the doors opened and I could see the familiar shoe, leg, and dress. My heart stopped

and an explosion of hope spread from my chest to my fingertips. I stood straighter and waited for the elevator to empty. As they filed past, the familiar turned into the foreign as the woman's face came into view. It wasn't her. I panted briefly as my body reversed its engines and I tried to recover my composure.

"Down?"

I nodded. There was no up except for a special VIP level on the hundred-and-third, but that was via steep stairs and wasn't for me. I felt my stomach as the mechanical box lowered me to the eighty-sixth floor. I got out and went to the next elevator that took me down the rest of the way. There was a further escalator to navigate past before I reached the street. Worse, there were the smiling porters, guards, and tourists all around me. I wanted to disappear.

The cold air hit my chest as I stepped onto Fifth Avenue. I didn't close my jacket, preferring to feel something other than the numbness of betrayal and loss. I wanted to go to Barbie's parents' house and see if she was back. I looked at my watch. Almost two in the morning. Too late. I decided to walk. I would need to leave for Cambridge in the morning. That left me the rest of the day to get my head around what had happened.

It was noon before I finally emerged from my hotel room. I had booked it in vain optimism that Barbie and I would have stayed there together. Part of me began to



think that I jinxed it. I had no right to think like that. Then, I reasoned, if we were going to be married, why not? I shook the hope from my head, dismissing it as fantasy. I thought about what could have caused her to miss our date—especially as it had been three months. We had decided to be romantic, like Cary Grant, and didn't write. It was to be our heart's decision. There would be nothing to stop us meeting up.

But there was.

I took a taxi to their townhouse and climbed the front steps. I heard the doorbell and took a step back. One of the maids answered. I announced who I was and she told me to wait outside. I did.

"Hello, George." Mrs. Lexington looked radiant. It reminded me how beautiful Barbie would continue to be as she aged.

"Hello, Mrs. Lexington. I'm sorry to arrive unannounced, but is Barbie home?"

"Please, come inside." She held the door open and I walked into their spacious foyer. Even the house seemed different arriving without Barbie. It seemed like a museum, populated with fine antiques. "Can I get you some tea?"

"That would be lovely, thank you."

She instructed the maid and we sat down in the lounge. I could see from her face that she was concerned about me.

“How are your studies going?”

“Fine.”

“Your parents? Family?”

“Everyone is fine, thank you. And Mr. Lexington? Frederick?”

“They are all well, thank you. I would have thought you’d have run into Freddie at Harvard.”

“We run in different circles. He’s studying humanities and I’m in economics and computer science. Different parts of the campus.”

The tea arrived and was poured. I took mine, as did Barbie’s mother, no sugar with a little milk.

“Is Barbie in town?” I couldn’t hold off asking any longer. I took a sip and put the teacup back on its saucer.

“She is,” she said slowly.

“Do you know when she’ll be back?”

“I think you need to talk to her,” she said. “When is the last time you spoke?”

I was beginning to feel embarrassed. “Three months ago. Shortly after our dinner here.”

She nodded, eyes closed. “We both really enjoyed that day. My husband particularly enjoyed his time with you and the discussion you had with him.” She paused long enough for me to understand that she knew exactly what was going on. “You haven’t heard anything from Barbie since then?”

“No,” I said.

“Not even exchanging letters, updating you on how things were going?”

I felt foolish. “No.”

She adjusted herself in her seat and took another sip of tea. “Barbie met someone, George. I hate to be the one to tell you this. You are such a nice young man.”

The words began to sink into me like a hail of bullets into a soldier. I knew they were being spoken and I felt them against me, yet they tore through me nonetheless.

“Who? When?” I managed. I didn’t dare try to take a sip of tea. My fingers had gone numb.

“A European. English aristocrat. At least that’s what she says. He seems nice enough. Oxford schooling, family title, and he asked her to marry him.”

“I... I’m pleased that she’s happy.” I wanted to get out of there as fast as possible. “I don’t wish to sound rude, Mrs. Lexington, but I can’t stay. I was in New York and needed to come by. I’m very sorry.”

She looked at me with an understanding I didn’t expect.

“Of course, George. You are always welcome here. I’ll tell her that you came.” She got up and my visit was over. I thanked her once more and left.

I didn’t flag a taxi. I walked back to the hotel where I had parked my car. I wanted to yell, then cry, then smash something. I wanted to know why. I wanted to see her and feel her kiss and body against me. I wanted her to

smile at me with her mouth and eyes. I wanted to smell her perfume and watch her walk. I wanted to talk to her and walk hand-in-hand forever.

I wanted, but she didn't. I thought back to our final moments. That perfect time of happiness where my whole world opened before me. What did I say or do that changed all of that in her?

I remembered her warm kisses and tears. I could still feel the fabric of her clothes and the way it lay against her body. I wracked my memory for what could have caused this reaction. I froze as it dawned upon me.

I was poor, or at least not rich enough. I had no substance behind me. I was a risk neither she nor her father would take.

The keys to my future lay in the same word that she found repulsive: scholarship. I was potential; she saw it and believed in me. But she wasn't going to risk her future with a man who could extinguish hers by merely getting hit by a bus while crossing the road. There were plenty of men who were worth more to her dead than alive—provided she was married to them. She wanted—no, needed—a rich man.

I looked at my reflection in the mirror as I entered the hotel. I caught a glimpse of myself in the polished brass of the elevator. As the door clicked shut in my hotel room, I glared at the man in the glass opposite me.

“You will become rich, George. So rich that girls like

Barbie will become cheap distractions. Rich enough to do what you want, when you want, and with whom you want.”

I saw myself with burning coals for eyes, their sockets blackened and tense. One corner of my mouth lifted, then the other. Soon, teeth were showing.

I would rebirth myself.