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Trilling Park

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Trilling Park

Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"On a warm day in mid-September, Anthony Cambiato, dressed in black, bell-bottomed jeans, a glowing green sport shirt, blue denim jacket and white sneakers, stood across from the tallest building on North Avenue, cupping in his dirty hand a small shred of paper which prescribed his entire future, from the present until the day he died. His legs ached from the long walk and a single drop of perspiration slid down his side, hiding in the elastic band of his underwear. Had this been a normal autumn, he would be queued somewhere in a foul-smelling hall, clutching those multicolored administrative forms, which when filled out and filed, endowed him with the right to learn. But that was a thing of the past - fourteen years was enough. He spat on the sidewalk and flattened the white foam with his heel."

Cover Page Footnote

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Trilling Park

a novel in progress

by Robert DeRosa

On a warm day in mid-September, Anthony Cambiato, dressed in black, bell-bottomed jeans, a glowing green sport shirt, blue denim jacket and white sneakers, stood across from the tallest building on North Avenue, cupping in his dirty hand a small shred of paper which prescribed his entire future, from the present until the day he died. His legs ached from the long walk and a single drop of perspiration slid down his side, hiding in the elastic band of his underwear. Had this been a normal autumn, he would be queued somewhere in a foul-smelling hall, clutching those multicolored administrative forms, which when filled out and filed, endowed him with the right to learn. But that was a thing of the past — fourteen years was enough. He spat on the sidewalk and flattened the white foam with his heel.

The building was wedged between two older, red-brick structures which it rendered anachronistic by its advanced architecture. It stood back from the road, at the edge of an asphalt driveway which, in curving to the street like a sagging moustache, enclosed a large crescent of intensely green grass. The sand-colored brick facade paled in the afternoon sunshine, accenting the gilded rails of symmetrical balconies which protruded like so many drawers from a giant cash

register. On either side of the wide, glass doors, fountains sprayed pyramids of water into the air, perpetually dampening the concrete entranceway, which was covered by a large canopy. Behind the glass, the doorman waited.

The summer had been particularly hot for Tony. He had begun an affair with a divorced barmaid, who locked her four small children in a walk-in closet whenever he came to call. "I don't want them screwed up about sex like their father was," she would say as they rolled naked across her large bed. "They're not old enough, yet. When the time comes, they can watch."

"Maybe you should at least turn a light on for them," Tony said once, as she was kissing his neck.

"What for?" she said. "They can't read anyway."

It had become a ritual. When they finished, regardless of the time of day or night, she would don a white, terrycloth robe while moving into the kitchen to fix bacon and eggs. On her way, she passed the closet and Bryan, her eldest at nine, who had learned to stutter rather than speak, would bang on the door. "B-B-B-Bitch!" he would yell, pounding. She would grin and kick the outside of the door repeatedly, until they cried from the resounding thumps. When she opened the door, they would run to her, blinking into the light and then, gathering them close to her, she would tell them that everything was all right. She wiped

their moist faces with the ubiquitous lump of Kleenex from her pocket, then sent them out to play. By this time, Tony would be coming down the stairs, buttoning his shirt. They always embraced and she would say, "I'm not bad, am I?"

"Gettin' old," he warned, and she would run sniveling into the kitchen. He always watched her go, clucking his tongue at her beautiful ass.

He stuffed the paper deep into his pants pocket and strode across the street. As he reached the glass doors, an old man, dressed in a brown uniform with gold epaulets, moved to the door. Tony watched the tones of his own shoes, carefully avoiding the uncomfortable eye contact which often accompanies first meetings. To Tony, he resembled a myopic eagle, thick glasses perched on a hooked nose which separated the two slits of flesh that were his eyes. "Deliveries in back, fella," the old man groaned, jerking a crooked thumb.

"I ... a .. I'm here for the job," he said. "I've gotta see Mr. Goodman."

The doorman stepped to one side, held the door, and as Tony walked by, his eye caught the gold emblem on the old man's jacket: *TRILLING PARK*.

He was impressed.

The outer doors opened into a vestibule which was carpeted with rubber mats. Wooden benches,

One of the rare half-Finns, half-Italians in captivity, Robert DeRosa, now a senior, plans a career as a professional hypochondriac.

sculptured like the pews of a Gothic church, faced each other from the opposite, swirled marble walls. Another set of glass doors, somewhat more transparent, separated this hall from the lobby within. The old man said nothing, stepping to the telephone mounted on the wall to his left. Tony looked around as the doorman pushed some buttons on a console; his eyes stopped on a camera which was scanning the entire vestibule. A single red light blinked beneath the lens. Tony lowered his eyes as the lens scanned his face. If this was some means of intimidation, it was working, for that he was. His palms dripped as he strained to hear the old man mumbling into the mouthpiece, but it was useless; he seemed to be speaking a foreign language.

Through the second set of doors, Tony gazed into the lobby at the patterned carpeting, green and gold, stretching as far as he could see. Immediately beyond the doors was a large area, above which was suspended a huge chandelier, its crystal tears dancing. Directly ahead, carpeted stairs led to a long, raised hallway, only partially illuminated. To the right of these stairs, another set of steps descended to a level below arranged in much the same manner. The scheme resembled a giant, horizontal Y, its crotch twisted grotesquely. On the left of the lobby proper was a counter of dark, paneled wood, which provided access from the waiting room to something beyond. It was to this place, Tony presumed, that the phone call had been directed. He craned his neck until his cheek touched the cold glass, attempting to peer through the doorway behind the counter, but it was futile. Shoving his hands deep into his pockets, he stared at the floor.

The doorman replaced the telephone and reached for the set of keys which dangled on a long chain from his belt. He fingered them as if he were handling fine silk, ultimately choosing a large, brass-colored one from the middle of the ring. With this key, he unlocked a black box, the door of which swung open to reveal a panel of switches, dials and rubicund lights. The old hands worked like flying birds, and, with a loud click, the large, glass doors popped ajar. Tony was motioned into the lobby and the door slammed behind him.

He watched the doorman reverse



the process to reseal the door, then looked to the office. The door behind the counter was closed.

Tony looked back out to the doorman, who shrugged his shoulders and shook his head. My God, he's a robot, he thought, for the old face was convoluted and frozen like a mask: it had never changed expression, a face molded in stale clay. A lobby smelling of stale piss and bananas. What a fine place for me to spend my days! he lamented.

When the door behind the counter swung open, he almost swallowed his tongue. A thin, greying man in a short-sleeved shirt and narrow tie stood in the doorway, looked both ways, and, with giant steps, moved to the counter. The man moved with an air of apprehension, as if neither sure of his destination, nor certain that he wanted to arrive there when he did. Furtive. He peered across the counter and motioned around to the side, where Tony entered the sequestered area through a swinging gate and followed the man inside the doorway.

They walked through a small office, carpeted and furnished in much the same manner as the lobby, where a middle-aged, red-haired secretary sat behind a large desk. Tony returned her smile as they passed, but no introduction was offered, nor was one forthcoming. The man held yet another door open and Tony passed through it into what he hoped was the final office.

Behind one of the two desks, Goodman (a wooden name plate and a green blotter were the only things on his desk) slumped in a leather chair. The older man was breathing heavily and had already loosened his tie. On command Tony sat and waited for Goodman to speak.

A comfortable room with carpeting red and more plush than the green outside, identical heavy desks faced each other in its center, telephones, tape recorders and a small monitor crowded the top of a third. A chiaroscuro sketch of a large cat hung on the wall between two lamps with transparent shades that revealed small, Christmas-like bulbs. The wall on the left appeared to contain windows, but heavy, cerise curtains fell from the ceiling,

so that only delinquent knives of light showed below them.

"They're always after me for something or other," Goodman blurted, having caught his breath.

Tony wondered who *they* could be.

"But that's not your problem. I suppose you're wondering about the job." He pushed a small, white pad toward Tony and took a pen from his pocket. "Just give me your name and address. We've dispensed with formal applications here. You bonorable?"

"I guess," said Tony. He'd never been asked before.

"Good," (a pause). "Here's the thing. There's a lot of money in this place. I guess you've noticed. Security is foremost at all times. There are five entrances to the building, including the garage. All of them are locked all of the time. In the event that you're hired, you'll be issued your own key." He kicked his feet onto the desk. "They like to sleep late, as a rule," he continued, "but you'll get around to meeting most of them in the course of a day. They're always coming and going. Some of the penthouses are empty for most of the year. Nine hundred bucks a month and they use them two ... maybe three ... months a year. Believe that?"

Tony answered, but Goodman was reconnoitering the cat.

"All right, look. I'll give you a call in a day or so, after we've done some checking. It's necessary, you know. Can you find your way out?"

"Sure."

"You'll be hearing from me."

He passed the red-haired secretary again. No need, yet, for an introduction; just a quick wave, a tight smile. He noticed her legs.

The old man was holding the door for him as he went out. Getting out was much easier; in fact, no problem at all. How could it be any other way?

The bus was coming and Tony won the race to the blistered pole so the driver had to stop quickly. Tony jumped on and stumbled toward the rear. He fell into a seat and soon was sleeping. He awoke from a dream about the red-haired secretary. The bus was on Main Street and he was dripping with sweat.

A college fag. They had determined that Tony was an egghead, maybe queer, but of that they were not sure. The younger one, about eight, pretended he was a famous juggler, tossing two small rubber balls in a small arc before his chest. They boarded the bus at Carter Square, meandered down the aisle and sat across from him, sending swirls of dust cascading into the sunlight. The older one, no more than twelve, carried a brown, paper bag which obviously enclosed an irregularly-shaped object. The boy held the neck of the bag tightly, as if it contained his very soul. Tony closed his eyes again, but images of that bag danced in his head. These were city kids, unpredictable as hell, as he had learned long ago. What if the bag did contain a gun? He worried about an accidental misfiring, with the bullet lodging in his hypothalamus. From then on, he peeked occasionally out of one eye.

They continued questioning his sexual habits, then moved on to bigger and better things, unaware that he was listening to their every word. Did he have a dog? Was it a bitch? Was he a bastard? He dressed like a bum, according to the juggler. Tony wondered if Goodman had thought so. He reconstructed the entire meeting with the man, whom he had now labeled an arrogant bastard. The more he thought about it, the more he wanted to go back and squeeze Goodman's face like a giant blackhead. He was full of loathing but had no idea why.

When he could bear it no longer, Tony jumped from his seat, grabbing the bag which contained the gun. He wrestled it away from the boy, who screamed and aimed a shoe at Tony's groin, missing by inches. He tore the flimsy paper away and examined the weapon. It was a miniature pinball machine, plastic, with small, silver balls. "You crazy, mister?" said the older one who was standing by Tony's side. He handed the toy back to the child, who attempted to reconstruct the bag around it.

Maybe I am, Tony thought, and at the next stop, still miles from home, he jumped off the bus.