

The Tour Down 34th Street

It's so vaguely familiar, 34th street. I can feel on the tip of my tongue that I recognize the street sign at the very beginning. Looking to the left, I see a sidewalk and fence with a pristine and clear lake behind. Then, to my right are apartment buildings and alleyways compiled of wet, hot bags of trash as the cherry on top. The scenery is so surreal and liminal like the ambiguity of a song you can't remember the name of-

A snap of two fingers reels me back into reality, "Sir?" The guide begins, "We're going to start the tour now if you could pay attention, please."

I smile, "Of course."

The tour guide nods, claps his hands together, and carries on. "So, this is the tour down 34th street. I'm sure you knew that, you wouldn't be here if you had no clue what this was."

The small crowd laughs.

"I just want to give a quick warning: it's a pretty hot one out here today, so the tour may feel like an eternity!"

The audience roars with laughter. I don't understand why, but I chuckle along with them because of the whole fear-of-missing-out ordeal.

"First off," the guide points at the sign, "34th street: the road that Robert Maury lived on for 6 years. He was a kind and confident man; he was polite to his neighbors and his colleagues, and he'd pet dogs he'd see down the street. Strong and silent, if you will." The guide turns around and motions his arm. "Follow me, everyone."

We all do so, but I'm the one who falls behind, being the last one to step up to where the tour would continue. Each step through, I feel the fuzziness slowly being stripped away, like

dryer lint being pulled off your fresh clean clothes. I can't recognize everything, but I know that name. Robert Maury. Not a friend or a family member or a significant other. Nothing of that sort. He was just a guy. What kind of guy? All I have is the guide's description, which doesn't help much. Despite my obvious confusion, the tour continues.

"This here," the guide points down one of the alleyways, focused on the garage towards the end of it which could fill possibly five or six cars, "was Robert's community garage for the apartment he lived in. That's the building to the left here, but we'll get to that soon. He saw the same cars in there every single day, about four of them, to be exact. His own, a red Chevrolet, two minivans, one a silver Volkswagon, the other a black Buick. The final one to the right, he would see a convertible Tesla. God, was he pleasantly jealous of whoever owned that! Then, one particular night, he was back from his human resources job and noticed another car in the garage; a blue Ford. He was confused, intrigued. Perhaps a neighbor of his had a visitor. He hoped the neighbor and the visitor were having a wonderful time being in each other's company."

Blue Ford. I know about a blue Ford. Why in god's name do I know that? I suddenly feel uneasy. The air around me suddenly becomes more humid, maybe even ten degrees warmer, and it seems that I'm the only one affected in the group. I raise my hand, "Um... sir? Can we take a break?"

"No, sir." The guide exclaims. He quickly faces me, seeming as though he's looking directly through me. He sings like a broken record, "Nope. Nosirry nosir nada zip zero! No. It's important for you to finish this." He turns back to the garage. "Then, in front of the garage is a small trash bin. Do you all see it?"

The group all says yes in unison, monotone.

“Well, this is when Robert’s story gets pretty interesting. See, that trash bin right there is where he threw the bodies away!”

The group laughs hysterically and cheers. This time, I don’t follow along. The rancid smell of blood and meat smacks me in the face, flies fly like pests all around the front of my face as well, and I can’t wipe them away no matter how hard I hit them.

“In case anyone needs context,” the guide glances at me, “after looking at the mystery car for some time, he passed the trash bin, and walked into the building, climbing two flights of stairs. He practically sprinted up. See, that night, was he and his wife, Jennifer’s five-year anniversary of getting married! Could you imagine how insignificant that must have been after he unlocked the door and caught Jennifer on the couch while some nobody was sucking on her tit?!”

The group once again bursts out laughing, some are wheezing, trying hard to catch their breath again. One man in the front is on the ground in a ball, wiping tears from his eyes and cheeks. I try my hardest to back away and run, but my feet feel like they’re stuck on the cement of the road.

The tour guide looks at me, and rolls his eyes, “Oh, come on! How do you not find that funny? Robert was ready for a special night with his lovely girl, then he caught her cheating?!” Everyone around me laughs harder, and the guide hushes them for a moment. Wiping a tear, the guide continues, “That’s not even the best part! When Robert saw them, he ran up, basically threw the fucker across the room, and beat him senselessly until he couldn’t feel his own fists! Then, when Jennifer was on top of Robert, trying to get him to stop, he took his hand back, threw her to the ground, and fucking choked her to death!” The guide’s eyes glimmer with wonder when he faces me, “That was quite a hilarious stunt you pulled back there, big guy! Especially

when you thought you wouldn't get caught dragging them outside to the trashcan! The cops were already responding to a call they got from your neighbor who heard those fucking screams of yours! So what did you do? You charged one of the officers, and he just... BANG! SHOT YOU IN THE FUCKING HEAD! It doesn't get any better than that!"

Holy shit. I lived on this street. I went to that apartment. I got shot right there only five yards away from where I'm standing. "So, why am I here again?! Why would you take me back to this place?!"

The guide's laugh becomes maniacal, "I told you! It's a hot one down here, isn't it?!"

My skin suddenly grows red and sizzling, and the smell of burning meat becomes so intense and unbearable, and now hundreds of flies swarm my face as I watch the street contort and melt before me-

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