



## FACSIMILES

At night the buildings return, silvery and solid and rising, filling in the space left in the skyline. They are monsters of steel and shine, floor after floor of metal desks and casted chairs and fuzz-frothed cubicles buzzing with electricity and language.

The first time the buildings returned, I was in a yoga class, and suddenly, they were present. It was evening by then and the buildings shined in the distance. I could see them from the studio window. The smell from the fire was gone – no melted plastic, molten glass, scorched steel. The few of us who had made it to yoga class were chanting for peace, and then for true identity – we chanted, sat nam sat nam sat nam. We sat with legs folded and eyes closed.

Then, I was no longer in the room. It was not night, but the middle of the day. It was a few weeks before it happened. I was in the plaza – the enormous plaza between the buildings. There was summer heat, but not actual

sun. The sun always struggled to get its place there. The neighborhood, built almost entirely in the late nineteenth century, always looked like an old stained photograph, existed in sepia. And there, in the middle of all those fussy old office buildings, in that place that still looked as if it should have been inhabited by men in waistcoats and bowler hats, stood those 1970s slabs of glass and light, arrogant and big and so optimistic about the future. Those towers embodied the Seventies, designed by people too wrapped up in the moment to know how ugly the buildings would appear later on, how obsolete they would become soon after their construction.

But I was in the plaza at noon, beneath the buildings' hulking shadows. Everything was as it had been before, and I was waiting for Inez to meet me for lunch. I was sitting on the cement step that dipped into the plaza. And everywhere, there were people waiting, or eating hot dogs, or reading newspapers. Pigeons fluttered in for scraps. And there was a boy nearby, perhaps a college student, perhaps the son of an executive. He had tousled hair and wore a too-large Oxford cloth shirt, the tie pulled loose and the collar undone. Since it was summer, there were many interns trying out jobs on Wall Street. And there were students taking on temp jobs, jobs of frustration and photocopies.

But this boy, with his tousled hair and his expensive clothes, he was not someone who would stay there in a terrible job in the copier room. Already, he was preparing his costume. He took a cigar from his shirt pocket, put it in

his mouth, and lit it. Then, with his thumb and forefinger, he removed the cigar from his mouth, and his lips, pale and delicate, pursed with disgust. He looked so ridiculous there, as he tried to smoke, that I narrowed my eyes and grinned – this boy, with a child’s face, wishing he were a man with a cigar. I thought, this is the sort of asshole Inez will be working for one day. Ten summers from now, he will be a rising manager and she will be his assistant. And I could smell the air – that’s how real it was. I could inhale that downtown air when it still smelled like downtown: exhaust, and roast sugared nuts, and hot concrete, and, yes, just the tiniest trail of cigar smoke.

I burst into tears. It was not noon, but night; not the middle of summer, but nearly fall. And the buildings, of course, were gone, had been gone since two days before. In their place were ruins – glass, metal, bodies. In their place was rising smoke, still flames, and funeral pyres. The plaza was filled with ash. Ash was falling everywhere. Even on us, miles from there, across the river.

But the buildings, in mid-September, were present to me. I kept my eyes closed and felt the tears run quickly down my face, one after the other. And I lifted my hand from my knee to wipe my face, then regained the pose. I felt the footsteps of my yoga teacher come close, then heard her pass. I was glad she had gone and let me be.



I wasn’t a photocopy clerk by design, but had become one by default. It was the only thing that I could stand to do

and it was the only thing that my employers could stand to have me doing. Weeks after beginning work at Stevens Brothers Investing (Tower One, 47th floor), weeks after they became aware of the wrongly routed phone messages, slow typing, and ‘uncongenial demeanor,’ I was reassigned to the copy room. Down the long hallway, second left, third right, through swinging doors (not the glass doors), past the vending machines, second left again, and then don’t go *through* the next set of swinging doors – bear left so that you go past them – and, kitty corner to the ladies room (but not easy to see, because of a new row of cubicles that’s sprung up), there it is: the copy room! Because I did not have the skills required to be an administrative assistant, and because I was unwilling to wear appropriate attire for the office (opaque hosiery was excluded from the office dress code), the copy room seemed like the best place to put me.



You knew me. You used to pass me in the hall and nod and smile, good you, who even knew the names of the mailroom clerks and the boys in the copy rooms. When you saw us on the street, in the beginning of the shadowed light on Cortlandt or on Varick Street, you kept your head down and walked a little quickly, a little fearfully, especially if there was no one else on the street. And then you’d see it was one of us – from work, from Stevens Brothers Investing’s copy room or mailroom, and you’d nod and smile with relief. Because, that’s right, you knew me. You knew me, standing in there and that room with its constant shuffle of paper flying from

the sorter and dropping into its stacks, rhythmic clicking of the electric stapler, constant hum. Loud hum, loud shuffle, so that after you'd waited your turn and you'd come up to the window holding your stack of papers (you in your business suit, me in my t-shirt and jeans), you'd have to shout when you went over your order with me. *And I want them spiral bound, back to back, and – I'm sorry – but can you have it done by four o'clock this afternoon?* Pleading smile, pleading tilt of your head, pleading with me to please get it done by this afternoon, even if it meant putting your order ahead of everyone else's, so you could get back at a decent hour that night, go back to your family in Parsippany, or Harrison, or Rye. You'd give me that ingratiating smile to see if I'd help you, hoping I wouldn't do the things to your order that I did to your coworkers who I didn't like – reinvent the chronology of pages, leave the charts that are referred to out, insist the order was never brought in, and only after true panic and hysteria sets in say, *Oh, here it is. I see. Sorry.* No, I wouldn't do that to you. You were the decent one.

You knew me.

And you knew why I was never fired, why I still came in, day after day, showing my ID to security, passing through the metal detector, squeezing into the elevator as it sped up and up and up, passing my vinyl-coated key card before the double set of glass-topped doors until they buzzed open. You knew me. And I even knew you: Miriam Borchert, Managing Director of Administration for Global Fixed Income, with your dowdy suits and your gimp

foot and your speech impediment, snubbed so often you couldn't stand to fire anyone. Eventually, you were fired though, and, then I was too.



I slept after the yoga class. Inez didn't. And when I woke on Friday morning, she was staring out of the window, out at the gray that was never going to lift. From our living room window, above the forest of buildings, we'd been able to see the top of the World Trade Center, our distance from the towers shrinking them to a manageable size. Big silver rectangles, always hulking. Inside them, I was reminded repeatedly of my insignificance. Remember the blocks those buildings spanned, the offices with floor space so wide and so circuitously furnished, that getting lost was common? I hated those buildings the way you hate a drunk and widowed uncle who moves in with your family. How could you get away from them? How could you show that they had nothing to do with you at all?

I was lucky in more ways than one. After I was fired, I got a job with Downtown Copies. A lot less money, and a lot less misery, I didn't dread my workday anymore.

Inez was in the easy chair when I woke up, the old lumpy one, staring at the spot where the towers should have been, at the rising smoke, the yellow air. We both stared at the emptiness.

'Are you going?' Inez asked. 'To work today?'

'I have to go,' I explained to her. 'You know, it's crazy there now. I'm sorry, honey.'

She had her knees drawn up and a pillow clutched to her chest, was wearing an old t-shirt and sweatpants. Inez, purple under her eyes and shadowed face, still looking like a little girl in all her misery. Her hair fell in curls that always made people think she was younger, and kinder, than she actually was. She got away with everything at Stevens Brothers. The Riot Grrls 'zines I used to run off for her in the copy room were just the start of it. She kept on there after I was fired, and it caused only a little irritation between us. After all, she had the administrative assistant scam down pat. From the Stevens Brothers offices, she surreptitiously managed marketing for half the artists in Williamsburg. On the day that it happened, she hadn't made it into work yet. But I didn't know that, didn't find that out until noon, after the towers had fallen, when she made it up to 14th Street and Downtown Copies.

Crazy there.

#### MISSING

Vittorio (Vic) Genoroso

Worked for Cantor Fitzgerald

Last seen on 97th floor.

Any information please call: 917-555-3535

#### MISSING FROM WTC 1, 106th Floor

This is my sister, Shaniqua Lennox. She worked for Windows on the World. She is 5'3", and weighs 135 lbs.

You can't see it in this picture, but she has a mole on her left shoulder; her hair is shorter now. Her friends call her Shanny. She's diabetic and needs her medication.

If you see her, please follow her. She may have amnesia.  
Please call me at 718-553-2312 (home) or 917-555-6845 (cell)

Vanava Singh vital statistics

Born May 17, 1963 38 years old

5'7", 160 - 170 lbs

Has tattoo of butterfly on her ankle. No piercings.

Wearing antique gold locket, blue and green

Swatch watch, and a traditional wedding band.

Last seen 9/11/01 approximately 8 AM leaving  
from Path train to the towers.

Last wearing beige jacket, white shirt, long  
flowered skirt.

If anyone has ANY information about her, please  
call Nezam Singh: 201-555-2211 or 917-555-9332

Have you seen this person?

Javier Antonio Fernandez

22 years old

Delivering package to Stonefield Trust on 57th  
Floor.

Please!!! Call us!!! 718-555-8385

Missing

Please help

Joseph Zinzi

Globo Brokers



Please call 718-555-2142

God and Angels up above, send us home the one  
we love.

I scan their pictures into the Mac so they copy evenly with no puddling of toner – the man with the sunglasses grinning in a dark suit, the woman in a sleeveless and glittery dress at a party. I crop the picture of the woman and her sister so that only the face of the missing shows. This is what her sister asks if I can do when she comes in, voice husky when she tells me what she wants while she pulls things out of her shoulder bag. *Oh my God, where did I put it?* Out comes tape, ruffled forms to be filled out, a notebook, photos, all onto the countertop. *Oh my God. Oh my God. Here it is. You can just focus in on her face? It won't get too blurry?*

All day long, I scan and I copy. I call Inez every couple of hours. *Hey baby, you okay? Whyn't you try to sleep a little?* She says a neighbor's visiting, and I'm happy she's with someone. A copier jams. And behind us, people are lining up, waiting to make their missing posters. They go out in the rain, into the air that smells like burning plastic and rubber, and they hold the posters against the buildings with the heels of their hands and they try to make the posters stick. The sirens wind up the air and let it fall in yellow again. The rain drives down the ashes. The only comforting sound is the familiar choong choong choong of the copy machines, the choong choong choong and the paper flying out. Except that the paper keeps flying out with pleas for help to find the missing. Choong choong choong. Last seen on 86th floor. Choong choong

choong. Called and left message right after Tower One was hit. Choong choong choong. Nickname is Didi.

The door slams open, letting a gust of rubbery-smelling wind into the copy shop, where too many people have squeezed inside – there are too many people working behind the counter, and too many people waiting. A man stands just inside the doorway, wire-rimmed glasses and plaid shirt, blinking, disoriented. *You make free copies?*

*We can make posters for you if you're trying to find someone. We don't charge anything for that.* And, because he still hesitates: *You can come in.*

He enters, lets the door shut behind him.

From his ratty old backpack, he takes out a small photograph, still in its frame, of a shirtless man with dark eyes smiling shyly, squinting into the sun, ocean behind him. He flips the frame over, starts to undo the clips against its cardboard backing. Then he turns away, hands flying to his face, sobbing.



Inez is watching TV when I return, in the same t-shirt and pajama bottoms she was wearing that morning. The lights are dim. Blue television light bleats against her shadowed face. She turns to me, then pulls an afghan up that's slipped from the sofa to the floor. She asks, *Was it okay out there?*

*I've never seen anything like this, I tell her. Everyone's crying and being so nice.*

No response from her. She looks at me as if I have said all this in a language she doesn't understand.

So I try for an old line, one I use when we're out of the city and missing New York: *I just keep wishing someone would bump into me and tell me to fuck off.*

She turns back to the TV. On screen, they're showing it again: an airplane shooting into the tower, a plume of smoke blossoming, the fire beginning again. On screen, smoke is consuming the building, wind is pushing the smoke from its column. The building is gone.

Silently, Inez begins to weep.

She puts her hands over her face, convulsing. I put the bag of Chinese food I've brought onto the coffee table, slide next to her on the vinyl couch. I take her in my arms, bony, damp from tears and sweat, flannel brushing my arm and afghan crumpled between our thighs. She quivers against me, against my chest and the cotton of my shirt, then stops weeping and picks at one of my buttons, a sick little girl. *I keep wishing only I felt this bad*, she says. *I keep wishing this were just happening to me.*

*I know*, I tell her, because I can think of nothing else to say.

I look over her shoulder, out the window. And there, above the brownstones and churches of Brooklyn, over on the Manhattan side, there they are – two rectangles of steel, the buildings.

I think, this must be some kind of optical illusion. This must be some freak reflection of searchlights, some unknown effect.

And I rise.

I stand by the window, fingertips against cool glass. If I stare long enough, these buildings will disintegrate. The shine will fall away. The shape will blur.

My heart pounds. I smell moo shoo chicken. But a burning smell – plastic, bodies, static – laces underneath the smell of food.

*I know, Inez says, turning to me now. I just keep looking out there. It's like I'm trying to get that this really happened, that they're gone.*

Their geometric light cuts through the yellow-tinted air. They are there.

She falls asleep in my arms, stirs when I try to shift. So I lie there, neck aching because I can't move, me awake this time – we take turns.

I wonder sometimes if we'll ever want sex again, or if it will just be this: holding each other and being grateful I'm not alone.

It's only been four days since the world has been this way, but most of the time I feel as if there was nothing before this and will be nothing after – no jumping out of the bushes to surprise her in the park, no making fun of tourists, no laughing. And fuck all this talk about America losing its innocence. Who's innocent? It wasn't like we didn't know how ugly the world really was. We knew. We just didn't feel it every day, all the time. There was drinking cheap sake at Decibel, and scamming tickets from our friend who worked at Town Hall, and punching holes in the ice over puddles while we waited for the bus at Union Square. It wasn't innocence exactly. It was more like making the most of what was there.

Did we think about how we were exempt from what people in rest of the world were dealing with? Sometimes.

Some of us. And were we grateful that this place we lived in was safe in some way? Sometimes. Some of us. Now all of it looks like the good old days. Now all of it glows like lights on Christmas Eve. *And I in my nightshirt, and ma in her cap.* Even waiting for the St. Nicholas Avenue bus at one AM and knowing it might never come. Even stuck uptown after visiting childhood friends. Even shoved in the subway and...

I wish someone would tell me to fuck off.



On an ordinary day, there'd be me and Inez negotiating over who got to use the shower first, shoving things aside to search for clean clothes, walking wet-haired down to Fourth Avenue, clutching our scratched plastic coffee-filled cups. Fourth Avenue, where most mornings we went together to the subway station for the N, the R, and the F trains – the Never, the Rarely, and the Fucked. Seventh Avenue was suburban suck-ups, Ivy League fat asses that sat in brownstones restored to their former grandeur. They emerged dressed in t-shirts that read: Brooklyn, Only the Strong Survive. And most of the people on that side of the Slope who looked like Inez and me were pushing strollers with white triplets inside and left the neighborhood after dark. But Fourth Avenue, that was ours – with its boarded-up buildings and derelict storefronts. I was always comforted by its blight. And then Inez and I would wait for the N or the R. We always had to stand, hanging onto the pole with one hand while we shared the paper. She'd

get off at Cortlandt Street. We'd kiss each other goodbye, and I'd ride up to Union Square. And why does that seem like it was such an intimate thing, her with her morning sleepiness kissing me goodbye at Cortlandt Street?

The subways bypass that now. There is no stop, no station there anymore.

Suddenly I remember another joke: Big blizzard, 1996. Subways barely running, but a few lines still go. The Mayor has declared the city shut down. Inez gets a call from Stevens Brothers. She's expected to come into work.

*They'd expect you in the day after a nuclear holocaust, I said then.*

Haha.

I shift my arm. She stirs, pushes me back, in her sleep, against the bed.

I want to see if the towers are there, but I can't get the right angle out the window from where I lie. I can't move.



The phones. I haven't mentioned the phones. Dead silence in the building, and then, all at once, they ring. *No, no. We're fine. We weren't anywhere near it. Yeah. I know. In shock.*

An orchestra of voices: Spanish, Kreyol, Hebrew. Signaling reassurance any way you can.

Inez's mother calls from Puerto Rico. Mine's just uptown, just in the Heights, but she calls too and puts all the relatives and neighbors on.

And then, the long lost start to get in touch – emails and phone messages from people I barely knew before:

*Hi, Ani. It's Mavis. I know it's been awhile.*

*Ani, howya doin'? It's Tony. Listen, I'm living in New Haven now. You okay? You can come stay with us if you want.*

*Hey, girl. I just want to see if you're alright. Just call and tell me you're okay. Okay? I just want you to know I'm thinking of you.*

Thinking of you. Worried about you. Know that you work there. Wondering where you are. Please call. Praying for you. Praying for all of us. This isn't World War Three, is it? Missing you. So sad. So stunned. So sick. So fucked up. Praying. I just wanted to hear your voice. Crying. Love you. Please call. Praying.

CNN. The faces of the dead suspects arranged on the TV screen.

The president's inane declarations:

*We will rid the world of the evildoers. We will call together freedom loving people to fight terrorism.*

*To hunt down, to find, to smoke out of their holes the terrorist organization that is the prime suspect.*

*This crusade, this war on terrorism is going to take a while.*

*And shit, Inez, can't you turn that off? I call out to her, I'm trying to talk to my brother in Chicago.*

My brother warns me: *It's gonna get to be hell here for people like us. And lemme tell you something, you go somewhere else and say you're really Dominican, or whatever, and they won't give a shit. 'Cause you go to any other country, and you're just gonna be American to them.*

Inez, on the sofa, is rapt as she stares at the video images: a documentary on Afghanistan. The ruins of Kabul whiz by, recorded from a moving car. A woman, shot by a firing squad in a stadium, sinks beneath her burqa.

What the fuck is this? Is this propaganda, or something real?

On screen are three little girls, huddled in a corner as the reporter tries to talk to them. Three little girls, in a dirt-floored hut, with scarves pulled over their heads. None can talk. They are weeping.

It's propaganda and real – five days after the attacks.

Inez pulls the blanket around her head, weeps with the girls.

I glance out the window. I can see the buildings. I can see the towers there.



He hasn't come back.

The man who sobbed into his hands.

The fliers are still sitting there – the ones showing the shirtless man with dark eyes. They have been sitting there for two days.

Please help me find Andrew Fein.

He was on his way to a meeting at

MC Media in Tower 2, 86th Floor.

Andrew is 27 years old, 6' 2" and 180 lbs.

He had a leather portfolio with him.

Anyone who has any information please contact

me 718 555 2324

*I'm taking these*, I say when I leave at the end of the day.

I put the fliers in my backpack along with a roll of tape that's sitting on the counter. I walk west to St. Vincent's. Everywhere



near the hospital entrance, there are fliers with pictures of the missing: they are on the wall on 11th Street, on the chain-link fence, even covering the front of Ray's Pizza, which is closed.

I walk back to the wall on 11th Street.

Among the flowers, the candles, the pleas for help, there is barely any space.

And then I see it. I see you.

Miriam Borchert

Born 1947

She works for Stanhope and Partners, One WTC  
88th floor

She had polio as a child and has trouble walking.

She also has a speech impediment.

If you find her in a hospital, please call me at 917-  
555-2243 (cell)

Please tell me where she is.

The picture is of the two of you together in a rowboat, on a lake, and in the background, red autumn leaves.

Had I seen this picture before? In your office once? On your desk?

This was who you used to go back to in Rye: short hair, glasses, sturdy.

You're both grinning into the camera.

Did she ever come to pick you up at work? It was the kind of office where your coworkers would ask about her by name but never acknowledge who she was. You were not exactly closeted, but you were not out either.

Was it any different at this next place, on the 88th floor of One WTC?

I look downtown. There is nothing where the Towers should be but smoke. There are no buildings.

Around me, young guys with backpacks squint to look at the fliers. Children place flowers at the base of the wall. Men in too tight jackets murmur prayers to saints.

I hear the footfall of boots. A group of National Guardsman have arrived. They're wearing fatigues, grimfaced, some blinking back tears.

'Soldiers!' a little girl calls out.