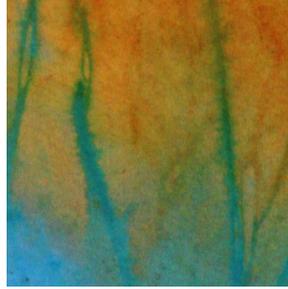


# Water Street

by Scott Laudati and Ronald Ennis



I.

Harvest time for rats under the piers is short—after the earth has done its hula-hoop around the sun, when the pink glow of twilight concedes to the gaslights of Manhattan’s streets. The young rats venture out in late afternoon, their blood cooling, becoming vulnerable to small boys with long handled nets. The young rats have not yet learned the art of escape. It is now, at twilight, that the older rats will emerge, risking exposure for a chance to gnaw at the watermen’s leftover scraps. Yet these are the rats in highest demand. The larger the animal, the higher the wage they will fetch. And if the rat is sharp enough, the time to scamper away will not run out on him, allowing him another day to become brighter and more imaginative than his hunters.

Mike McInnes watched five young boys waving their nets along the bottom of the pier, silhouetted in the shadows cast by the falling sun. He knew they were chasing rats. It was still early—anything they caught would be sold that evening to fight in the pits of Water Street.

“Hi yeh, Mike!” The boys called out to him. “Gonna git some big ‘uns tonight, Mike. W’ort seven penny.”

Mike smiled at the novice rat catchers.

“Stay still,” he advised them. “Let all dem big ‘uns git out.”

About this time last year, in the softness of autumn’s dusk chill, Mike had spent several months teaching these boys the trade. If they hustled hard enough as the light of dusk faded, right before the Celestial king turned off the light switch, they could sell enough rats to keep their bellies still.

Mike McInnes pulled a small hard cigar from his pocket that had been cut earlier in the day. Its black ash marked his hand like he rubbed it in dirt. He lit the cigar with a single match, and after the initial pull, which was especially harsh from being mashed out and pocketed, he looked past the piers into the river. Up and down, the endless masts of sailboats and riggings of ships rose like tall reeds around the island of Manhattan. The river was alive with tugs and sloops, schooners and lighters. Mike watched the shadow of a ferry move with a limp towards Brooklyn, towards the blue and yellow

fires and clouds of colorless smoke pouring up from the foundry’s giant chimneys on the other side of the water. To be on that other side. Mike looked at the green rise of the heights speckled with brick and white mansions, and laying before them, the East River, orange with the reflection of the setting sun. Two giant legs were being erected from the banks of each side’s edge, the sum of America’s perseverance—anything could be accomplished or conquered. Atop these two legs would sit a wondrous bridge, spanning Brooklyn to Manhattan, and back again. Worlds would be linked. Mike imagined bridges spanning everywhere, across oceans, across continents. Standing there, in the cooling breeze and the hymns of the slapping river waves, Mike felt somehow a part of it all, and triumphantly, he puffed his celebrity.

Mike and his dog, Billy McGlory, were having an exceptional run in the pits. The number of rats killed in one fight was nearing the big time, and Mike enjoyed the backslapping hoots and smiles of the men who had bet on his dog. In the pits the regulars knew his name, and in his pocket he held more money than any McInnes that had lived to his age.

Two years ago, Mike’s father had traded his LeMat revolver from the war for a newborn pup. He gave it to Mike for his eighteenth birthday. “Too short and t’ick fer da pits, he is,” Mike’s father had warned him. But Mike could see that Bill McGlory’s instincts were strong. During the dog’s first trip to the beach, he picked up a piece of driftwood, and summoning some inward instruction he shook it playfully, simulating the snapping of a rat’s neck.

It became daily routine, Mike and Billy McGlory going down to the empty piers. Only here could they find the solitude necessary to train for the rat pits. To strengthen Billy McGlory’s jaws, Mike lifted a log and twirled the dog by his teeth. Billy McGlory hung on to the wood, wriggling and snarling happily in the air. To train the forelegs, Mike buried rats in the rocky soil on the banks of the East River. Billy McGlory would dig like a starving beast until only the stub of his tail was visible above the ground. When he found the prize, he’d snap his neck back, toss the dead rat into the air, pick it up, and toss it again. The first time Mike placed a live rat in front of the dog, Billy McGlory didn’t hesitate, and the rat was dead in seconds. Six months ago, when the dog turned eighteen months old, Billy McGlory entered the rat pits on Water Street.

The boys on the docks stood with full sacks. Their canvas rat holders were tattered. Mended patches were sewn over holes that the vermin had tried to bite through. Mike nodded his approval at these boys.

“Dese some big ‘uns, Mike.” A boy said.

“Wor’t every bit of seven penny.” Mike answered.

“Even ten penny, Mike.”

Mike waved at the boys as he left. Some of them had fallen off the pier chasing the rats. Mike could hear their teeth clicking as they shivered out of their wet rags. The sun had now accepted its fate and disappeared behind the looming statues of Manhattan’s cityscape. There were still about four hours until Billy McGlory’s fight, and Mike decided to take the long way home. For several blocks, he walked along Water Street.

The smell on Water Street was particularly strange that night. It was peculiar to Mike because he realized he hadn’t caught a scent like that for longer than his memory allowed. There was always a stink emanating from Water Street. He could smell the sewage blowing off the river and the garbage rotting in the alleys, the bubbling urine pools and puke-lined gutters. But this was something refined; it was the perfume of a woman. It had been a long time since Mike visited the brothels, but there was a distinct difference between this and the night women and the cigarette smoke glued to their skin. No, this smell was a pleasure to every sense. It added color to a soulless street. It was pleasant to Mike in the way an old hat is pleasant. It was familiar. In its density, it smelled...hopeful. Mike read it as a sign that good fortune was on his side.

2.

In the long mirror on the wall of the Knickerbocker Club, Lindsay Smithfield Devery studied his reflection. He had spent nearly an hour this morning at his new house of Fifth Avenue, looking in the mirror while trimming his beard. It should be thicker down the line of the jawbone, shaved closer under the chin, with the mustache, as if chiseled, connecting smoothly with the sideburns. He was thinking about the enormous amount of time he spent each day on his appearance, perfuming his whiskers, checking the sharpness of the crease in the cuffs of his trousers. He wore a black bow tie, a black vest, and the long gray mourning coat altered by the family tailor. Lindsay looked the height of fashion—the proper attire for the future president of the Devery Import & Export Co. It was part of his job, his father told him, and one he excelled at, to stop at the Knickerbocker Club for a drink and a cigar after his day at the office ended.

The Import and Export Co. was founded thirty years ago by Lindsay’s grandfather, the first of its kind. They owned no goods or ships, but served as a broker between manufacturers seeking to distribute goods, mer-

chants wishing to buy them, and the seafaring trade in between. It took the war to build the Devery fortune. Sides were never chosen for business, the merchandise went to the highest bidder. Of course, this was only possible with the Devery’s assurance that whatever cargo they were dealing would guarantee the buyers extermination of his enemy. Now, almost thirty years later, the Devery name was synonymous with the elite of New York society. Lindsay, at twenty-seven, was the oldest of the Devery sons, and the heir to the family fortune.

Lindsay found the tedium within the paneled walls overbearing. The room was full of well dressed men, knee-slapping with laughter under their stovetop hats. They discussed politics—the Tweed Ring, Grant’s ineffectiveness as president. They discussed business—the money that could still be had from rebuilding the South, and the money to be squeezed from the teeming masses of immigrants that bulged, day by day it seemed, in the city of New York. Lindsay disliked this old generation of money, these men of local distinction, not only for their unnerving pomposity but also their lack of color, their lack of life.

In the mirror, Lindsay watched one of them, Edward Harrington, walking toward him. Harrington wore his usual snake grin, a smirk that suggested to the world he had some private knowledge that they weren’t invited to know. Harrington had been a classmate of Lindsay’s at Columbia. They had both studied the classics, but for no apparent reason. They both understood college was a just a task set forth by their fathers, and upon its completion, they would enter the family business.

“Devery, my boy. How’s that head of yours feeling?”

“Much better, Harrington. Thank you,” Lindsay told him.

“Quite a nasty blow you got,” Harrington said. Harrington chewed the end of his cigar, loosened tobacco flakes getting caught in his teeth. The way he held it out from his face made sure Lindsay noticed how much larger it was than his own.

“Nothing you couldn’t handle, I’m sure.” Lindsay smiled.

It had been just two weeks ago, as Lindsay walked along Water Street on his way to the rat pits. Whispering females dropped hot ashes on him from a second story window, and as he stumbled around the sidewalk, disoriented and calling for water, a shadow appeared and clubbed the back of Lindsay’s skull. He was half-conscious and didn’t fight back as his attacker rifled through his pockets. Seconds later, the shadow disappeared, leaving Lindsay to be ridiculed on the cobblestones.

“Tell me, Devery,” Harrington asked. “Why do you keep going back

down there?”

Lindsay pulled his lips up to smile on just one side of his face. He knew Harrington wouldn't get it. Still, he said, “There's life there.”

Harrington's whole face wrinkled up. “A squalid life. Full of beggars and rakes, don't you think?”

Lindsay gave him a real smile now. “Life none-the-less, my boy Harrington. There is still a beating heart under this old city.”

3.

In the doorway, Mike could feel the tavern's breath move by him on its hurried way onto the Bowery. Inside, the ale house was noisy and crowded. Wet sawdust on the floor smelled of stale beer. At tables along the back and side walls were varying tragedies of men, some silent, with mouths submitting to another pint glass of beer, others shouting across the tables at one another in mock battle, taunting until someone took their challenge. Then the two would compete, face to face, with a tray of shots, while betters and on lookers threw money and kept count until only one man was left standing.

In two or three criss-crossing queues, men shouted orders over the wet bar, and huge German bartenders, long since tapped on liquor and beer, filled glasses with any sort of liquid they had at their disposal. Half filled with beer foam, the rest of the glass filled with dish-washing water, shoe polish, whale oil and the scuzz of pints others had been too drunk to finish before they collapsed onto the inviting mattress of sawdust blanketing the floor. This glass full of gurgling black poison was sold by those large German bartenders for a few cents. To a drunkard active in the saloons of the Bowery, this was a fine way to finish off the evening—a concoction that would send them blind and frothing back into the civilized world, and make the pain of sleeping in a cobblestone alley go unnoticed, at least for another night.

Mike scanned the room. The shadows in his eyes had a hard time adjusting through the yellow haze of tobacco smoke. Yet, even with this handicap, it was clear his father was not in the tavern. Mike's father, Sean McInnes, would be easy to find in any crowd of men. He wore a black patch over his right eye. The rest of his face had healed, but in the way that a lizard's tail will eventually regenerate, more like a cauterized amputation than a reformed limb. During the draft riots he and some other men were setting fire to a black residence when a soldier, fresh from the fields at Gettysburg, fired a shot through his face. In a downward trajectory, the mini ball had en-

tered at the corner of his eye, tore away his cheekbone and exited just below the lobe of his ear.

Mike last saw his father eight months ago. There had not been a large domestic disturbance, like the ones that so often echoed through the walls of his tenement building on Catherine Street. Sean McInnes had not stormed out in a violent drunken rage like other poor Irish fathers. He simply got up from the kitchen table and walked out the door. The cumulative burdens of his failures, the ones that reflected hideously in the eyes of his wife and children, stole his hope away from him. He had nothing left but existence. The weight of shame in his family's eyes proved heavier than the shame of leaving them alone.

Almost nightly, Mike searched the Bowery dives for his father. He wanted to tell him it was alright to come home. He wanted to tell him nobody blamed him for conceding to a city that thrived on the under classes misfortune. In truth, Mike had no idea what he would say if he found him. Mike was beginning to think it would be best to leave his father lost among the multitudes that fade into the streets of New York.

4.

After leaving the Knickerbocker club, Lindsay changed into the clothes he purchased the week before in thrift shops along the Bowery. He loved the way the floppy hat dipped over the corner of his eye, and his tattered jacket gave him more life than any suit he had ever purchased in the fine haberdashery shops on Broadway. It was important not to draw attention to his wealth. He could not have another incident. The Devery Import and Export Co., his father had said, could not handle another scandal. Several of the newspaper rags were quick to question his purpose on a street full of opium and prostitution.

On his way to Water Street Lindsay walked slowly through the Centre Street Food Market. He liked to begin at the top, and eat his way down to the bottom. Several hours had passed since sundown and the air had the sharpness of an autumn night, but the stalls were still occupied as they would be past midnight, only to open again before dawn. Crowds of people bargained with vendors, and fingered through meat, fish, fruits and cheeses they were buying for themselves or the city's restaurants.

Several of the butcher's stalls had open air fires. From one, Lindsay purchased three pieces of meat skewed with a thin wooden stick. He had already eaten two pheasant legs fried in lard and flour, and strips of mutton spread over a piece of bread, and Lindsay's favorite—a dozen saddle rock

oysters. The saddle rocks had been pulled out of Manhasset Bay just that morning, and they were as big as Lindsay's palm. He walked by the vegetable stalls and saw that the cabbages had been sold down to the soft flattened heads at the bottom. He watched the old Irish women begging the peddler for the better deals they needed to make their family's stews.

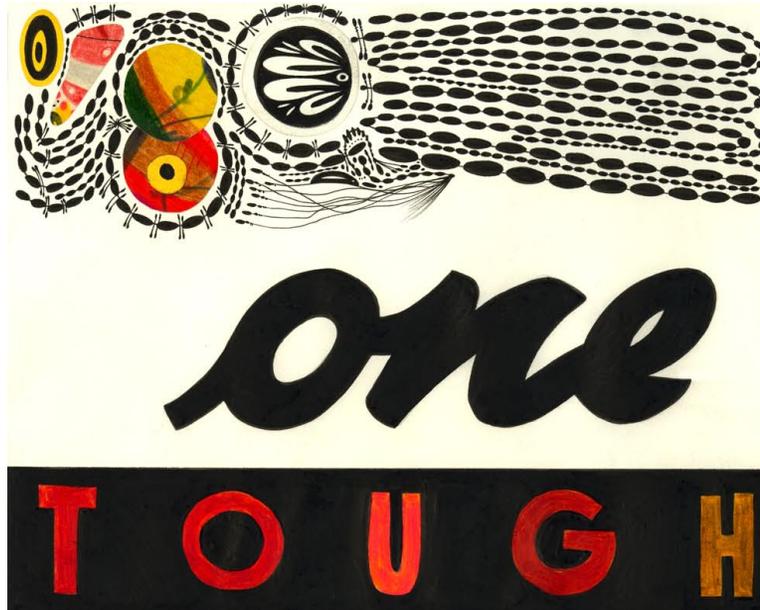
There was such an energy to this place, Lindsay thought, and places like this, filled with people all clustered together in a brutal and beautiful struggle for survival. The haggling over the weights of freshly killed chickens surpassed

the most elegant debates at the Knickerbocker Club, and it made Lindsay think of the poet Walt Whitman. Whitman knew the real Manhattan, *a kosmos-turbulent, fleshy, sensual, eating, drinking and breeding.*

At first, Lindsay viewed his obsession alone and from a distance, but each time he came down here, he felt closer to it, to them, to Whitman. What motivation did he have to be at one with them, and they with him, equal parts of some divine whole? To truly arrive there Lindsay knew he needed to make a closer connection with one of them. He needed to let one of them into his world, to receive an introduction into theirs.

With his stomach full, Lindsay headed toward Water Street. The first fights in the rat pits were still hours away. After eating this much, he liked to walk the old streets of lower Manhattan. He walked down Centre Street to Canal, turned down Mulberry, too close to the borders of the Five Points, cut quickly to Bayard, then Mott, then Pell, then the narrow Doyers to Catherine Street. Chinese men sat in wooden doorways, sipping tea to keep themselves warm. When Lindsay whispered hello they were unresponsive, so he turned the corner at Water Street.

Water Street was alive with disgraceful men and graceless women. Lindsay could feel the three, four and five story buildings sweating from his



position in the street. Not sweating from this October night, but from the fresh and ancient excretions splashing their filth against the walls of the narrow street. The street smelled of guilt and it smelled of sin. It smelled of garbage, vomit, piss and feces. It smelled of death, and the death clung around it, and down the narrow alleys where shadowy figures wrestled in the shade of the night. Forty nights of rain couldn't wash away the death, the same as it couldn't wash away the film that clung to the cobblestones. And yet, Lindsay thought, it smelled of life.

At Water Street and Dover, Lindsay saw a young prostitute standing on the corner. As he walked toward her he felt a certain pulse, a terror move through his limbs, and he thought again of Whitman. *Closer yet I approach you.* Her hair was bright red under the gas lamps, and her white shoulders reflected brightly into the chilling night. Somewhere within her sordid struggle on Water Street, she managed a freckled smile. Their eyes held in the shortening distance. The fear thickened in his loins. She lost her smile. Like the eyes of many other passing strangers, Lindsay felt that terrifying connection of souls embracing. *I consider'd long and seriously of you before you were born.*

5.

Mike McInnes stepped into the Kit Burns's Sportsmen's Hall, his small dog stiff and powerful under his arm. Mike's eyes reacted to the smoke, and in defiance he puffed harder on the small cigar in his mouth. Billy McGlory struggled to free himself. He could smell the rats, live ones and those buried under the bleachers of the amphitheater. The muscles in his back tensed, and bulged like slabs of concrete. Billy McGlory was ready.

"Hey Mike, Mike, Mike. 'Ow's old Billy doin'? 'Ow's he feelin'? Huh?"

The little dog snarled at the man.

"He's ready, Elijah. Feels strong."

Elijah had lost his dog in the ring some weeks before. Like his owner, the dog had too many extra movements. He spent far too much time on a single rat's neck. He didn't have the same cool killer's joy of Billy McGlory. When the bet was upped to eighteen rats, the dog couldn't handle the onslaught. Elijah had jumped into the ring to save his dog, stomping the surviving rats. The fox terrier lay limp and dying in his arms. A side of its face was gone, his neck and genitals lay open and bleeding. Elijah borrowed a gun from one of the guards and shot his dog in the courtyard behind the Kit Burns's Sportsmen's Hall.

"Doin' a hun'erd tonight," Mike told Elijah.

"Oughta be big bettin' on dat one, big crowd. I'll bet a bunch myself on dat one, I will. Maybe enough to get mes another dog, I will, I will."

As quickly as he came, Elijah rushed away. Mike pushed his way through the street floor of the hall. There was already a fight in the pit and Mike heard a cheer rise over the men exchanging money under the cigar smoke and poor lighting that hung in the amphitheater.

Kit Burns's Sportsmen's Hall featured only rat-baiting now. Five years ago, when Mike first came here with his father, the sportsmen's hall had two rings, one for dog fighting and a second for cock fighting. Before the Civil War bear-baiting was a main event, but the population of Manhattan had pushed itself through the forests and hills of the island, and habitat loss made the bear-baiting spectacle unreliable. For a while dogs were pitted against raccoons, but rats were so plentiful in the city that rat-baiting became the cheapest method of gambling.

Mike tied Billy McGlory to the leg of a table, and waited his turn. It was the first time Billy was doing all one hundred rats. The terrier was now two years old and needed to step up in class. Billy McGlory had done well as a novice—first six rats, then twelve, then eighteen, and several times

at twenty-four. There was always a lot of betting and excitement when a dog did the standard one hundred rats. It was often the time when a dog was killed. If Billy McGlory could kill all one hundred in less than forty-five minutes, the purse could be near two hundred dollars. If Billy McGlory took longer than an hour, or was killed, Mike would get nothing.

6.

Lindsay awoke on the third floor of Kit Burns's Sportsmen's Hall. He had been asleep only a short time, but his disorientation upon awaking was long and frightening. As his memory returned, he checked for his wallet in the jacket hanging from the bedpost. He had fallen asleep to his young prostitute's confessions. She told of a long trail of woes that had brought her to him, under these conditions, and how, with God's help, she would change it all. At the start, he thought he could be that change in her world. With just a small portion of his money this woman could get a new dress, a new place to lodge, the foundation for getting a head start in this part of the world. The power of Lindsay holding this girl's fate manifested itself into a cruel tangle of lust and compassion, one that ebbed only with the release of his energies. She was gone when he awoke. She would not be the one he would take away from all of this.

His wallet was safe in the pocket of his jacket. In the short time Lindsay had been asleep, the vibrations in the building had changed. Lindsay could feel it seeping up through the floor boards from two stories below.

Two hundred men crowded in the bleachers surrounding the rat pit. The ring was an unscreened box, with zinc-lined walls eight feet long and four feet high, just tall enough so a rat could not jump out the top, and just low enough that the spectators could cheer on the dogs, or the rats, in full view from any seat in the house. The gamblers had several ways to bet. They could bet against the dog, betting the rats would survive over an hour or the dog itself would be killed. Side bets were held on what five minute interval the last rat would be killed, their odds increasing in the lessening of minutes. A good dog could kill all one hundred rats in between thirty and forty-five minutes. The record was set a year before by Little Augie McGraw. He slew all his rats in fourteen minutes, twenty-eight seconds.

Lindsay took a seat halfway up the bleachers. It was just high enough to see the four corners of the pit. In the closeness of the bodies, the squalor of the room, and the genuineness of the decadence, Lindsay tried to articulate the excitement. Even in the solitude of his own mind, he could not do it. How indeed could he explain this to Harrington, or the other men

at the Knickerbocker Club? Whitman would understand. A novice dog was about to move up in class. He would face one hundred rats for the first time.

7.

Mike tried to steady his arm as he held Billy McGlory next to the pit. The dog was stiff with an ancient rage. His growling had taken on a groaning hum, the pitch not unlike the straining sound of ropes holding giant schooners to the piers. A strange pressure built up behind Mike's ears, and he opened and closed down his jaw several times to release it.

A large black man carried a wire cage into the pit now alive with the huge water rats that lived in the piers. Smiling at the crowd, the man put his arm into the cage and pulled out a rat by the tail. The animal climbed backwards and latched onto the man's thumb. Holding his grin, the man bit the rat's head and ripped it from his body. Then he spit the two pieces into the cheering bleachers.

"Jus' ninety-nine tonight," the black man said, smiling at Mike. Mike had seen him do this before, a gimmick for which he usually charged a dollar.

The black man dumped the wire cage into the rat pit. The animals scurried to the corners, piling atop one another, their cumulative height reaching half way up the walls of the pit. Mike held Billy McGlory tightly in both arms. The dog's growl had changed to a desperate whimper in his struggle. Now that the time was here, events were moving too quickly. Mike had no time to think through the images and the sounds that bounded at him from every direction. The timekeeper nodded, and Mike leaned Billy McGlory over the side of the pit. The dog leaped in delight from his master's arms.

Billy McGlory needed none of the usual encouragements. The dog was upon the rats in an instant. Still, the bettors called out from the bleachers, "Hi! Hi! At 'em! At 'em!" They were used to dogs that pranced around the pit at first, sizing up their competition before setting in. In the time this usually takes, Billy McGlory had four rats dead on the floor of the pit. This is quite a dog I have, Mike thought.

Billy McGlory's legs were shorter and thicker than the fox terriers that usually inhabited the pits. His head seemed to be oversized and his short front and hind legs were thick with visible muscle. It gave the dog a dwarf-like appearance at rest, but in motion Billy was a beautiful rat-killing machine.

With a nearly feline grace, Billy McGlory leaped upon a rat, seizing

the animal with his powerful forelegs. In an instant, like the strike of a wolf hound, the dog had the rat precisely at the back of the head, near the base of the skull. You could see the pleasure the dog derived from the kill in his quick, lethal shake—two short, savage and graceful movements of its head. The rat's neck would be broken, dead only a moment in the dog's mouth, until Billy McGlory would drop it, and move on to the next.

As tactical as a prized boxer, Billy McGlory fought a wise fight. At the start he stayed close to the middle of the pit, catching rats scurrying to and from the corners. Too often a dog would attack into the piled corners. If a dog made the fatal mistake to view the rats as single entities instead of one razor toothed mass, the vermin had their chance to overwhelm the dog.

When the scurrying dwindled it was better to strike quickly at the fringes of the pile, and pull a rat back to the middle. Other rats would scamper to the other three corners, and when Billy McGlory returned the pile would be shorter and more manageable.

At twelve and a half minutes the bettors against Billy McGlory had their time to cheer. The pile of rats was too large for the depth of the dog's penetration. Before he could snap the rat's neck in his mouth, two others latched onto the same hind leg. It was here that Mike knew the true worth of his dog. As Billy McGlory whirled around to face his attackers, fast and unafraid, the rat in his mouth flew over the side of the pit into the front row of the bleachers. The two rats that had attached to Billy McGlory's leg were dead in a blur.

To the regulars the geometry of the dog's endgame was astonishing. Rats littered the floor of the pit, and Billy McGlory leaped over their bodies to catch the next one, carefully cutting off their exit routes with his own body and the wall that was forming with dead bodies of other rats. The men were cheering hard as Billy McGlory closed in on the time of their bet. "Drop it! Dead 'un! At 'em! Hi! Hi! At 'em!" Billy McGlory was tiring near the end, his tongue hanging out the side of his mouth between the last six rats. When he seized a rat not at the base of the skull, but in the middle of the back, the rat curled around and fastened itself onto Billy McGlory's nose. The dog spent a long time shaking the rat loose, but still, the last rat was dead in twenty-nine minutes, twelve seconds.

In the center of the rat pit Billy McGlory stood like a statue except for the intense panting of his tongue and mouth. As the crowd cheered he dipped his head down and up as if in a bow, and his panting was so wide that it seemed he was smiling.

Men pounded Mike on the back in appreciation, while others threw

pieces of paper in the air. Twenty-nine minutes, twelve seconds! Depending on the gate, such a time would bring close to three hundred dollars, more money than Billy McGlory had earned in all his previous matches combined.

Mike carried Billy McGlory to the same table where they had waited. Back at the amphitheater the bettors were waiting for the last rat-baiting match of the night. It was well past midnight. Mike slumped in a chair, Billy McGlory wet with rat spit in his lap, their bodies filled with pleasant exhaustion. Twenty-nine minutes, twelve seconds!

“That’s quite a dog you have there.”

Mike looked over at the man, who, without asking, seated himself at the table. Mike had noticed this man earlier. He had sat quietly in

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the bleachers and didn’t get caught up cheering with the crowd. The only man in the house, it seemed, to have some grace about him.

Lindsay held out his hand.

“Lindsay Devery,” he said.

Mike took the man’s hand and shook it. Billy McGlory growled. Lindsay leaned over and offered the dog the

back of his hand. To Mike’s surprise, Billy McGlory sniffed it.

“What do they call you?” Lindsay asked.

“Mike. Mike McInnes.” With small eyes, he looked at Lindsay.

What did this man want? Why was he here to disturb their victory? He was not from this side of New York, but Mike knew there must be racket men all over the city.

“Mike. You have done a marvelous job training your dog. He’s the best dog I have ever seen kill his first one hundred rats.”

The sharp-edged manner of the man’s speech made Mike aware of his own, so he said nothing. Instead, he lifted Billy McGlory in the air and examined the dog’s underside for wounds. There were just a few bite marks on the inside of his hind legs. Billy McGlory had a cut on the top of his snout, and another inside of his left ear. The wounds were small enough that Billy McGlory could heal them himself. Mike tied his dog to the leg of the table and Billy McGlory lay still on the floor, panting less strenuously now.

“You must be very talented to train this dog so well. How many dogs have you trained before?”

“None. Jus’ Billy.”

“That’s quite amazing.”

“Whadda yeh want?” Mike asked Lindsay.

Lindsay smiled. Mike had never been handed anything in his life but a dog, and here he was, making something of himself in a world built to shut men like him out. His instincts were stronger than most of the men Lindsay had known at Columbia, or at the Knickerbocker Club. He would be the one, Lindsay thought.

“I want you to work for me,” Lindsay told him. “I need a good man to work the docks. I need someone to negotiate the prices with the merchant ships.”

“I don’t know nothin’ ‘bout workin’ the docks.”

“I’ll teach you.”

The manager of Kit Burns’s Sportsmen’s Hall walked over to the table. He counted out the purse in front of Mike.

“How much did you make?” Lindsay asked.

Mike quickly put the money in his front pocket. He couldn’t control his smile. “Tree hundred and t’irteen dollars.”

Lindsay took out his wallet. He counted out bills on the table in front of Mike. “Here’s three hundred and thirteen more, as an advance towards a future salary.”

The two men nodded at one another.

“I see you like cigars,” Lindsay said. “Here, try one of these.”

Mike held the large cigar. Even unlit, he could smell the rich tobacco. It had life. When he pressed it between his fingers the cigar retook its shape upon release. For Mike, the beauty of this cigar represented how much world there was beyond Water Street.

Lindsay handed Mike a book of matches. “Of course,” Lindsay said. “We keep fighting Billy in the pits.”

“Of course.”

The cigar caused Mike’s tongue no bitterness. The cheers at the pit were dying down. Men were leaving the amphitheater. Mike leaned back in his chair, puffing, watching the rich smoke circles dissipate in the lights above his head. No more rats would die tonight.

8.

The next morning Mike walked out of his tenement building onto Catherine Street. It was the sharpest, clearest autumn morning he could remember. It made even the sordid streets of the Fourth Ward pleasant to walk. He had not slept long but the mid-morning sun had forced his eyes open. He felt for the money in his pocket. It was still there.

The intersection of Catherine Street and the Bowery was swelled with the usual myriad of people walking quickly, walking everywhere, walking nowhere. Canvas-topped storefronts sold their goods on the sidewalk, and Mike walked by shoes and coats and hats and gloves; tomatoes, cabbage, onions, and squash; brooms and brushes; loaves, rolls, and soda bread; live chickens, dead pigs and quartered cows hanging from the ceilings; pipe tobacco, snuff, and small hard cigars; pickles, pickled onions, and pickled tomatoes; snapper, river bass, carp, cod, eel, mussels, oysters and quahogs for chowder. In every storefront, the merchants wore the same tired but friendly smile. Mike felt a particular affection for them this morning, an affection greatly exaggerated by his perceived distance from them. Mike defined this distance by the six hundred and twenty six dollars in his pocket. He walked briskly up the Bowery, without pausing at all the burlesque theaters, or all the penny arcades that promised cheap glory. When he reached Houston Street, he turned west toward Broadway.

At the corner of Broadway and Houston Street Mike could see all the way down, near the tip of Manhattan, to the spire of Trinity Church. The spire dominated the lower end of the island, rising far above the five-story brownstones and even above the cast iron columns of skyscrapers eight and ten stories high. Broadway was wide all the way down to the tip of the island, the street of parades, the street of ladies, one of the most glorious streets ever laid upon the earth.

Before today, before this moment, Broadway was never part of Mike's world. It represented something far beyond his existence, beyond even his hope. Now indeed, it was his. For the first time in his life, all of New York was his.

He could walk down Broadway and be part of its splendor. He could walk up Broadway, see the spectacle of construction bounding northward, building his city—his city!—to the sky. He could go East or West, to the tall masts on the shores of either river. He could go across continents, across oceans. He could walk by old buildings and feel their past. He could walk, one with the crowds and the generations of crowds before him, and the generations after. He could walk back down Water Street, and it wouldn't matter. Indeed, his city!, his world!, had changed. He could walk in any direction, and it would be right.