

NICHOLAS BERG SPEAKS*

So this is New York.

So this is it.

I'm not a city man but I don't mind looking.

I'm just a man from Pennsylvania—Kunkeltown to be exact.

And it isn't that I've never been in New York before.

Actually I have.

When I was ten-years-old my aunt took me to the big city.

We drove through the tunnel.

And then we were on the streets.

And it wasn't pretty then.

People were sleeping on the sidewalks.

And there was lots of trash on the streets with empty beer bottles.

I mean that was my first impression.

And I'm a man who says first impressions count.

To me the city was filthy.

Never mind that everyone talked about the theater

And the museums.

That wasn't it for me.

You had to get dressed to go.

And I'm a take-it-easy kind of guy.

I like my work shirts and my jeans.

I always dress for work and Saturdays and Sundays, too.

When you're in business for yourself you never stop.

You know, the business I'm in: building radio towers.

So that's me. Nicholas Berg.

I like it that way.

So now what am I doing here on the streets of New York?

Well, for one thing I'm going to check out the electronic and radio supply shops down on Canal.

There are some parts I need which I could not find on the web.

The web only has the newest gizmos.

They should not discard things so quickly.

Yeah I know...

Everything is market driven.

Real buffs like me respect history.
Respect the stuff that was made a few years ago.
So, that's where I'm headed.
Because I am told, down in Canal, there is a guy who bought up the old stuff...
And now he's the only guy in the country who has it.
I like that kind of guy and that kind of entrepreneurism.
I'm that kind of guy too.
Though I'm not yet as old as he, I respect guys who do things their way.
Well, like me.

I build radio towers in third world countries.
It's a one-man business.
So let's see:
I've got to get on the A train to Canal Street.
It will take me right there to Irving Himmelstein—the guy with all those parts.

Yes, I build radio towers and I like the third world.
This is where opportunities lie for a guy like me.
I don't think I am doing anything bad by building radio towers in a third world country.
I know the people will begin to appreciate what I came here to do for them and for me.
It is my business.
We help each other.

So how did it happen?
I can't see the steps.
That here I am, my Jewish head shaved, sitting in an orange jumpsuit, about to be beheaded.
Don't they know I am a good guy?
I did not come here carrying a gun.
I came to advance their civilization.
Didn't they want radios?
What's wrong with radios?
How come they hate me and can't see I'm just Nicholas Berg from Pennsylvania?
What does this mean that I will be killed for doing nothing bad at all?
Can't they see I'm their friend?

I never got involved in wars or politics.
I am a tinkerer, a techie, a salesman, and when I go into strange lands, it feels like in days of yore.
Like when the circus came to town and showed people strange things: two-headed people, dwarfs, giants, the fat lady.

I build radio towers so they can hear new things.
Things that are strange and fascinating.
But something in these last minutes which are ticking away tells me I got it wrong.
But why and how?
I wish I knew.

I know they are televising this beheading.
I cannot bear the pain this causes to my family.
Mom never wanted me to go.
This pains me more than the pain about to strike.
And yet I wonder—
I still wish I could explain.
Even now I still think it's not too late.
Maybe they will listen...

*Nicholas Berg was an American freelance radio-tower repairman who was captured and beheaded by Islamic militants in Iraq in May 2004. A video of his decapitation was released on the internet. This imaginary monologue is a testimonial to Nicholas Berg's memory and the cruel injustice of his execution.