

RICK PRYLL

a romantic short story from upcoming novel
THE CHIMERA OF PRAGUE

"I can feel the emotion dripping off the page."
- **BIBIANA KRALL**, author of *Escape into the Blue*

THE RIDE

The Ride

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The Ride

A Vignette

Rick Pryll

Foolishness Press

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Preface

This story is part of a novel called *The Chimera of Prague*. The novel is scheduled to come out November 17, 2017. Pre-orders for the book are available now on Amazon for the eBook version, and on rickpryll.com for the first edition hard cover and the paperback versions. Video updates on the story behind the story can be found on YouTube, and on Facebook.

The Ride

MUCH OF THE CURRENT Oatka Creek watershed landscape was formed with the northward glacial withdrawal 12,000 years ago: drumlins, escarpments, valleys, hills, and bodies of water, watercourses, and waterfalls. As land emerged from beneath the ice, trees grew up creating vast forests. In clearings near water, the Seneca developed villages and trails for connecting, trading, hunting, and conducting hostile expeditions. The Indian trails were adopted by later settlers, and some of them became major roads such as New York State Route 5.

New York State's Finger Lakes began their existence as an array of north-south ridges rising 300-400 feet above the valley floors, left behind by the retreat of the glaciers. During precipitation events, the ridges allow surface water to collect and descend to the valley floor as rivulets. These rivulets excavate softer material, leading to movement of a water-material mixture into the lower valley floor, and erosion. Over time, this erosion process exposes strata in the rock, creating seasonal streams and an abundance of small cascades flowing down the ridgelines that confine the valleys. These cascades are common; none are named, and few are known to be worth note. They can be, however, the target of enterprising sightseers, and abundant in the memories of senior residents recalling their youthful exploits.

Sam and Joseph are up early, getting ready for a 25.7-mile bike ride to Union Corners. They will celebrate the 4th of July there, a carnival with rides and games and

food not to mention fireworks, with Dani and her younger brother, Charlie. For Dani and Charlie, it's an annual occurrence practically in their backyard. For Joseph and Sam, it's a first. Charlie and Sam are the same age, and if they lived closer together, they would have been fast friends. The air is cool, for a July day in Western New York, and the ice cubes in the water bottles may not melt before they can get out of the driveway. It's a good day for riding, almost cold on their arms and knees when they wind up to top speed.

The ride should take two hours. They plan to make one stop in Attica to refill water bottles. They carry clothes, swimsuits, and not much else, in backpacks. They work together, drafting off one another, taking turns eating up the wind, like the riders do on the Tour de France. Before they leave, Joseph uses the avocado green wall phone in the kitchen to speak to Dani to let her know when to expect them. They had an argument earlier in the week. Joseph let slip that he might not wear a helmet on the bike ride. Dani won't let it go. Before she hangs up, she says, "Please wear the helmet. I'm concerned for your safety. You're no good to me dead. Enjoy the ride." She doesn't wait for him to respond. She hangs up.

He's not being reckless like she thinks. He wants to look good when he arrives, and nobody looks good in a helmet. He's going for the windblown look, a knight in shining armor, riding into town to sweep her off her feet. He imagines coasting into her driveway, stepping off the bike as it goes crashing into the yard, and embracing her in a swooning kiss. He's worn the helmet, and not worn the helmet, and as far as he can tell, there's no

difference. He hasn't needed it yet.

The first segment of the journey is the easy part, downhill, back roads with little to no traffic. Wortendyke Road to Dodgeson Road, a short jog onto Day Road, Day Road becomes Goodman Road, and out to Route 98.

Route 98 has a broad shoulder, sprinkled with gravel and glass. Not many folks bike this stretch of the highway. The traffic is light, but more cars are passing them now. Some of them move over into the oncoming lane to give them room; others do not.

Joseph is riding a mountain bike that he had gotten for his sixteenth birthday. It has the wide knobby tires and the bull moose handlebars with the distinctive triangle coming off the gooseneck, and the flat bar geometry. It's not aerodynamic in the wind, but it's rugged, and it doesn't get flat tires. It matches the way Joseph rides – muscular, rough-and-tumble, not sleek, not quick. Once it gets rolling, it punches a big hole in the air. Sam rides his 1987 Schwinn Tempo I, a racing bike. He saved his money from picking strawberries and painting houses with their father the previous summer to pay for the bike. It's sleek and quick. The teal Chromoly frame, the seat post tube painted white, is lighter and more responsive than steel, and the bike is fitted with Shimano 105 components, including the new Single Index Shifting (SIS) system on the rear derailleur. One click of the lever shifts on the down tube and the chain jumps to the correct ring. Sam has started to think about training for triathlons. The walls of his bedroom are covered with pictures of Greg LeMond, the first American to win the Tour de France in 1986, 5-time Ironman Champion Dave

Scott, and pictures of bikes like the first-ever, all carbon fiber Kestrel 4000.

Sam wears his white Bell Stratos helmet with the integrated tinted eye shield. The louvers in the front are designed to create a venturi effect that is supposed to pull air through the otherwise solid plastic shell. The sleek profile and dearth of vents generate 15% less drag. Joseph thinks his little brother looks like a spermatozoon. They are both wearing spandex cycling shorts with large chamois pads in the seat. The shorts are comfortable on the bike, but they look ridiculous just about anywhere else. Sam wears a yellow cotton t-shirt, and Joseph wears a sky-blue t-shirt. Sam is aware that Joseph and Dani have been arguing. Sam hands his brother the helmet without saying a word. It matches Joseph's shirt. The helmet is a more conventional Giro Prolight helmet with the reflective strip. Joseph puts it on. They each have crocheted fingerless cycling gloves, black, with red, white and blue stripes across the knuckles. Sam straps on his cycling shoes that snap into his TIME clipless pedals; Joseph wears the 10th-anniversary edition of the Adidas Marathon Trainer, blue with silver stripes. His shoes from the past cross-country season. They fit into the toe clips he has added to his pedals.

On Route 98 they pass through Alexander and make their way to Attica. They take the left turn onto Route 1 to cross over the Tonawanda Creek, the same creek that passes near their house and make the quick right turn onto Maplewood Road to get to Attica. This back route gets them off Route 98 and away from traffic, and it lops off a couple of unnecessary miles. They pop out onto Route 238 across from Attica High School. They stop at

the CITGO on the corner, lean their bikes against a guardrail, and go inside to refill water bottles.

Dani waits in the living room of her parent's house in Union Corners. Her anxiety fills the room, 12 feet by 12 feet. When the house was built in 1895 it was used as a parlor, it now serves as an entertainment space as it's the only room in the house with a television. The wainscoting is painted white, and above, the Waverly wallpaper pays homage to Provence in a navy and white toile. Parting the beige canvas drapes, she checks all three windows starting about an hour before the time when the boys are scheduled to arrive. It's not rational, it's a reflex. To make the time pass, she turns on the television and finds *Dirty Dancing* on HBO. It's the part where they are at dinner, and the audience learns that Baby intends to attend Mount Holyoke College. For the occasion, Dani's chosen her white tennis shorts and crisp red Izod polo shirt. Her belt is fabric, navy blue with lobsters on it, white Keds, no socks on her feet. Her hair is down, curly, with a wide red hairband holding her locks back out of her eyes. As she stands at the window, craning her neck, her hands backward on her hips, bouncing up on her toes, she feels a pang of guilt. She hasn't told him everything about how she decided on what school she's going to. On the other hand, she's already figured out a way to make it up to him.

For Joseph and his brother, Route 238 in Attica is where the climbing begins. As they take the wide bend after the railroad tracks in Attica, Joseph looks to the left and notes the tower of the prison where the famous riots happened in 1971, the year Sam was born. They both switch to the small front rings for the climb. They rock

their bikes back and forth. Sam thinks about the sharp descent they will enjoy before they get to Dani's and Charlie's house. It helps him to forget about the burn in his quadriceps at the present moment. Joseph knows that the elevation gain they can expect to overcome on this ride is over 1,000 feet – but for him, that's nothing. He gets to see Dani today. Maybe they can fulfill their plans for the falls.

Dani flops on the easy chair, in a valley of exasperation. The waiting. She's already seen the movie, she loves it, but it can't compete with the pounding in her chest. When is he going to be here? Dani, the queen of time, princess of indecision, decides. She smiles to herself.

Such a simple thing to do. Dani can't imagine why she hadn't thought of it earlier. The morning before, July 3rd, she dials her friend James and asks him to meet her for coffee. He gleefully accepts.

To compete with Dunkin' Donuts, the local delicatessen added a handful of tables and an extra server. It's a cozy space with exposed hardwood floors of mahogany and the original tin ceiling. Rumor has it that the 200-year-old building was a stop on the Underground Railroad.

Dani and James have an easy friendship. He loves to talk clothes, movies, books, gossip. Sex. He's the one who gave her a tattered copy of Erica Jong's *Fear of Flying* in the tenth grade. This time, however, her intention is more serious. James is handsome. He has hair the color of ink, wiry and wavy. Clipped short at the

temples, it's long enough to run his fingers through at the crown. He's wearing a pair of navy blue shorts embroidered with tiny anchors scattered haphazardly, a crisp white linen button down shirt rolled to the elbows. A pair of brown cordovan boat shoes with no socks on his feet.

Dani sports a lightweight denim sundress, fitted through the hips and waist, held up by pencil-thin spaghetti straps. She pairs the sundress with a red and white gingham check shirt, the tails tied in a knot positioned above her belly button. Her shoes are a simple pair of slingback navy espadrilles.

Dani walks in shaking the door chimes. James stands and greets her, an air kiss next to each cheek. He looks at her, then at himself. "Look at us. We look like the Ralph Lauren ad in last month's *ELLE*." James sucks his cheeks in and holds a pose. Dani laughs. They get coffee and sit. Dani is one cream and one sugar.

"Girl, you must be kidding me." James's response to her question, well, her half a question, is loud. They are seated at the window table of the empty establishment, a ceramic mug of coffee in front of each of them. Dani reaches her arm across the table and ducks her head down out of embarrassment.

"You know very well, Miss Daniella. Good girls do not do such things." He's so loud. He leans in by Dani's ear and without moving his lips, in a low monotone voice, he says, "Such things are reserved for very, very good girls." High-pitched, machine-gun laughter is James's thing.

Dani blushes. She giggles at James's antics. He

loves this. She knew he would. The woman behind the counter goes to church with her family, Dani can't remember her name, she lives over in Perry. Dani knows that much.

“Well, I'll be. I thought maybe you got a new purse. This is way better. Okay. I know you're serious. Give me a sec to collect my thoughts.” James takes a deep breath and feigns fanning himself.

He continues after half a beat. “Wait. Why would you ask me? You're being presumptuous, are you not?” His tone is sudden, different.

“I, uh, I didn't mean to presume. I thought, I mean, I don't know...”

“Oh please, girl, I'm teasing you. Of course, you presume. Everyone presumes I do a terrible job of hiding it.” James takes a sip of coffee, opens his Carolina blue eyes wider at her, and continues.

“Okay. Here's the thing. You are a good Catholic girl, which means you may be thinking God is watching you. That's guilt talking. I like to think God averts his eyes so we can have some fun. You're a Capricorn, right? If you want to love someone else, if you want to give guilt a rest and have some real fun, you need to love yourself first.”

Dani doesn't know how he knows this stuff. She should be taking notes. She knows he's right.

“I'm not going to talk about technique because that is not what you are asking me, now is it? You're asking me how to blow his mind, and that I can help you with.”

James leans in conspiratorially. “You might think it’s a passive, submissive thing. It’s not. You are in complete control. You can do no wrong. Get messy, make noise. Let yourself enjoy it.”

“Really? I mean, is it true that boys like it a certain way and girls may like something else?”

“That’s possible, but beside the point. Hold on – are you quoting *Cosmo* to me?” James cocks his head at her, narrows his blue eyes.

Dani nods and smiles at him. James throws his head back and laughs. Dani laughs too.

“You are too much. It’s too bad you’re not a boy.” James snorts and shakes his head.

He continues. “For me, it’s not about boys in general, and girls in general, and who likes what. You and Mr. Hunky Hunk trust each other, right? You talk, right? Which means you are in love, which means, *ipso facto*, you can do no wrong. I like to think of it as stealing a piece of his soul. If you do it right, you own him. It’s magic.”

Dani’s listening. She has a small frown on her face, a furrow in her brow. “Okay, I hear you. I’m with you. I do have one question.” Dani bites her lip.

“Girl, don’t you dare. The answer to the question you are not going to ask me is this: it doesn’t matter. You do whatever feels right. He’ll be the last one to have an opinion.” James pulls his cigarettes out of his shirt pocket. “Do you mind?”

Dani shakes her head. James puts a cigarette between his lips. It bounces when he talks.

“Like me, you have an oral fixation. Use it to your advantage.”

Cut back to Dani’s mischievous smile, her body sprawled akimbo on the easy chair the morning of July 4th. She pops up and looks out the window.

Sam and Joseph are out of breath. The climb up Route 238 is slow, it’s gradual, it’s a 900-foot gain in elevation in less than a couple miles. The payoff is delayed. First, they have to get out to Route 20A and endure a couple of smaller drumlins before that. Few are named, and none are thought to be noteworthy. Joseph’s feeling the extra weight of a steel bike, with wider tires and lesser components. He drifts back behind his younger brother a few times. He manages to catch back up. Sam has not hit his growth spurt yet; his power-to-weight ratio is higher than it should be. At least that’s Joseph’s rationalization to himself.

Out on Route 238, it hits Joseph. The houses are far apart, and the shoulder is narrow. If something were to happen to him or, God forbid, his little brother out here, they would be in trouble. His mother would be angry with him for having taken a chance, rolled the dice, with both of her babies, for an opportunity to see his girlfriend one more time. He decides he can’t let anything happen. Even if they have to go slower, even if they have to stop and take a rest.

At the left turn to 20A, an alternate version of Route

20 connecting villages and hamlets south of the main highway, they take extra care. Everyone has heard about the number of deaths at this intersection and standing there with your bike, you see why. Cars come flying over a slight ridge on 20A eastbound, they can't see the intersection, and they whizz past before they get to the downhill part into the Oatka Valley. Sam and Joseph wait, crossing when it's clear in all directions.

The slope is gradual at first. It's refreshing – Joseph and Sam don't have to pedal. The shoulder narrows and the downhill gets steeper. Joseph engages his brakes, not gripped tight, and he's flying along. His brakes and Sam's brakes are screaming. A box truck passes them from behind. It's nerve-wracking. Joseph's not 100 percent sure he could come to a complete stop if he wanted to. He follows Sam down the hill, edging out across the white line, into the road, to get away from potholes and gravel along the shoulder. The best would be – if there were no cars behind them – to get out in the middle of the lane, to avoid any obstacles. Cars are behind them, bearing down. They do their best to pick their way down the hill. It's exhilarating and terrifying all at the same time. Joseph hopes he makes it down in one piece and he is not picking gravel out of his face when he gets there.

They go zooming by Dani's house. They are laughing because they couldn't have pulled into her parent's driveway if they wanted to. You can smell brakes burning, but it's impossible to tell if that is from the cars, the trucks or the bikes. They go down a couple of streets and turn around, laughing, out of breath.

“Wait. I forgot one thing. Come with me. I’ll buy you a cola.” Joseph doesn’t want Sam to see what he is going to buy, but he also doesn’t want to not buy the thing he is going to buy. Lesser of two evils, he figures. Sam might not even know what they are.

They ride down a couple of blocks to the drug store. Joseph gets an idea. “Sam, watch the bikes. That way we don’t have to lock up, and we can get over to Dani’s quicker.” Sam agrees. He stands there with his helmet on, holding the two bikes.

Joseph runs into the store. He is not sure where to look. He grabs the cola from the cooler, thinking to himself how backward it is to get the cold thing first when you haven’t found the other things, the cold thing getting warmer in your stupid hand the whole time. Oh well. He finds feminine products, so he must be close. He finds what he’s looking for, picks the kind he knows Dani picked the last time. He picks the big box knowing that like Icarus, his hubris could be his downfall, and goes to the counter to pay. Wait. He knows the girl working the cash register. Shoot. What’s her name? She’s like a friend of a friend. Not a cheerleading teammate of Dani’s. Damn. He can’t remember. He draws a blank. He smiles. She recognizes him, he can tell by her smile. She smirks at him. Joseph thinks she’s being rude, judging him by his purchase. How does she know? He could be buying these for his dad. Gross. For his uncle. That’s not any better. For his cousin, yeah, his cousin. Then he realizes: he has his helmet on. Joseph blushes.

The cashier pretends she doesn’t notice the box of condoms as she keys in the purchase. He pulls out his

wallet. He has stashed it in a plastic sandwich bag in case it rains. Sweat is pouring down his face. She asks if he wants a bag. Joseph declines. He puts the big box in his backpack.

Sam drinks the cola off in one swig, the carbonation stinging his eyes. He tells Joseph that on the Tour, the riders prefer a de-fizzed cola over any other beverage at the end of a long hilly stage.

When they arrive, Dani meets them at the door. She watches them put their bikes in the garage, and walk into the kitchen, gleaming with sweat. Dani hugs and kisses Joseph. He made it in one piece. His hair is wet and is sticking out in all directions. He wore the helmet. She licks a rivulet from his face, to taste one of the healthy beads of sweat hanging there. He's hesitant to hug her back and get her cute outfit soaking wet.

"Where's Charlie?" Sam asks.

Dani is looking into Joseph's eyes, thinking about how happy he's going to be. "Oh, Charlie? He's upstairs. He was converting some LPs to cassette tapes last I checked."

Before Joseph showers, he remembers to grab his penny loafers off the shoe rack in the addition, by the side door. He left them there after the last day school and borrowed a pair of her brother's basketball shoes. He's careful not to let Dani see what he's up to. He wonders if she'll notice.

On the way up the stairs, he finds the step that creaks. He tries a couple of times, but like Dani has

asserted, there is no way around it. He turns left at the top of the stairs to get to the bathroom. It's strange to be in the bathroom where Dani has grown up. He smiles to himself thinking of her as a little kid at bath time. Running through the house naked. He towels off and puts on his clean clothes. He picked out an outfit with Dani in mind: navy shorts with pleats, Bermuda length, a white polo shirt and a white oversized sweater, cable knit. He brought a brown belt. Since they last talked about it, he has been thinking about pennies. In his wallet, he has stowed a 1970 brown penny, and a 1986 shiny penny. The year they met. The year they first kissed. He places the pennies in the shoes with some difficulty. 1970 in the left, 1986 in the right. Unlike Dani, he'll never change the one in the right. He has saved a department store sample of Polo cologne for the occasion, and when he breaks open the small vial, almost all of it goes into the sink before it can get on him. He wipes his hand in the sink basin and tries to salvage at least some of the scent.

He heads downstairs to find Sam, Charlie, and Dani watching one of the final scenes of *Dirty Dancing*, the part where Patrick Swayze is lip-syncing the song. Joseph's already sweating through his clean polo. He puts his fingers through his hair.

Dani has prepared a light lunch. Watermelon slices, salad, fresh squeezed lemonade. All natural, all goodness, all hand-done. It's Dani's way of loving herself. Joseph, Sam, and Charlie make a plate and sit at the dining room table together.

"After we eat, let's go to the park and get some cinnamon taffy. Have you guys ever had cinnamon taffy?"

Charlie asks Joseph and Sam. They shake their heads.

“I want a funnel cake. I can smell it from here.” Sam checks his pocket to make sure he hasn’t misplaced his money.

Joseph and Dani stroll along, holding hands. Sam and Charlie have charged ahead. “What do you want, Joseph? Does anything smell good to you?” Dani’s parents’ backyard cascades into the park, almost without a border. Developing new trails.

Joseph stops. He pulls Dani in and kisses her on the neck. “I want you, Daniella. You smell amazing. What is that scent?”

“You know what it is. It’s me. What I want to know, is what are you wearing?” Dani presses her nose to Joseph’s suprasternal notch and breathes in.

Before Joseph can answer, Sam comes running. “Joseph, you have to try this. It’s warm.” Sam has it all over his face. He looks happy. Charlie is standing behind him, laughing at the effect. For Charlie and Dani, this is old hat. They do this every year. They are reminded how good it is, how lucky they are when someone new experiences it for the first time. Joseph holds Dani in one arm and takes a piece of taffy from Sam. It’s warm and sticky, it tastes like goodness itself.

“Bye!” Sam and Charlie take off again.

Joseph and Dani continue their stroll. As they cross the grass, the pinball noise gets louder. Joseph sees an oversized polar bear that would look amazing in Dani’s

room. He walks over to the game stall. Dani trails languidly behind like she's under a spell.

Joseph gets it in his head that he can get a dime in the long-necked milk bottle, it's a matter of physics, but he fails. He changes another dollar and fails more. Dani steps in kisses him on the cheek, and whispers in his ear, "I have a prize for you later."

Joseph has an idea. He lets go of Dani's hand and walks over to a cart. He looks back at Dani. She holds her hands together in front of her and crosses her legs. Joseph can't believe how lucky he is. She's watching a vendor sift powdered sugar over a waffle. He could watch her all day.

"Sir? Your snow-cone?" Joseph snaps out of it. He takes the blue snow-cone. He walks back over to Dani.

"Ooh, I love those." Dani leans in and takes a bite before Joseph is ready. Her lips are blue.

"You know, Dani. We could fulfill the ice promise..." Joseph holds up the snow-cone as if it's an offering to the gods. He bows his head in reverence. He brings it back down and looks at Dani. Her blue lips smile. "Blue is good on you," he says.

Dani laughs. It's not what she imagined when they made the ice promise, but it could work. She plays along. "We'll see. It *is* starting to feel *nippy* out here, isn't it?"

Joseph laughs and takes a bite of the snow-cone. He kisses her, the cold fresh on his lips and tongue.

“Let’s go see what’s happening back at the house.” Dani is not sure where this is leading, but she decides to keep her plan for later intact.

Sam and Charlie must have run out of money. Charlie is carrying a mirror silk-screened with a Styx album cover on it. Sam has neon green feathers clipped to the collar of his t-shirt. They are running back to the house, ahead of Joseph and Dani.

Dani’s parents are back. The car is parked in the driveway. Joseph looks down at the snow-cone. It melts in his hand.

After talking with her parents for a bit, Dani’s mother reviews the sleeping arrangements. Sam will sleep on the floor in Charlie’s room, in a sleeping bag. Joseph will sleep on the pull-out couch in the addition. It is not the first time Joseph has stayed over at Dani’s house. Her parents are well aware of the uniqueness of the situation, allowing a teenaged boy to sleep in the same house as their teenaged daughter, but it is a conscious decision they have made in light of what little they know of Joseph’s home life. Despite her motherly reservations, Dani’s mother hands Joseph a neat pile of sheets, pillowcases, a towel and a washcloth. He sets them on the armrest of the sleeper sofa, and he smiles at the cherry accordion door to the right of the couch.

When they make it back out, the live music has started. It is Nik and the Nice Guys a local cover band, and right now they are doing a rendition of “Werewolves of London.” Joseph, Dani, Sam, and Charlie make fun, walking across the grass to the park. They sing along

exaggerating the chorus. “A-whooh!” The lead singer sports a Joe Ferguson jersey, the Buffalo Bills. Red, white and blue.

To the sound of a Bingo-caller calling out letters and numbers, Dani takes a huge bite of an Italian sausage with onions and peppers. Joseph wipes her chin with a paper napkin, to prevent a precipitation event. She offers him a bite. He accepts and looks with surprise down at his white sweater. It stays white.

The light is golden and fleeing. The park lights have come on. They illuminate from on high. The green grass glows. Sam and Charlie are playing a game with other kids, a little boy about five years old and a couple of girls their age. The smell of fresh cut grass. Joseph watches them run, one of the girls in Guess? jeans, the distinctive triangle on the back pocket, and thinks, *Careful, boys – you could fall in love on a night like this*. The little boy falls. Sam helps him up, brushes away the stray blades of grass. Charlie finds his mom. The boy is okay, but he’s crying. His mother runs over. She kneels down with her son and turns to thank Charlie and Sam. Joseph remembers that Charlie and Dani must know everyone here.

Joseph gets an order of hand-cut French fries and walks them over to where Dani is sitting at a picnic table. Dani tastes one, grimaces, and gets up. She walks over to the stand and brings back a clear glass bottle with a silver tip. She shakes the vinegar onto the fries and feeds one to Joseph. Seasonal streams.

Stuffed, ten minutes until 11 pm, they lay on the

grass. Dani and Charlie know the routine, so everything happens as if on cue. The fireworks start. Dani is lying between Joseph's legs, and he's enjoying being close to her. He buries his nose in her scalp, shampoo, the faint dew of sweat, mixed with the carnival smells. They are, for the moment, innocent, free and happy. Five weeks left, but if they are thinking about it, they never say a word. They just are. When the fireworks end – she thought they would never end – Dani grabs him by the hand. Joseph is sad it's over, he felt like the show was just starting, the colors on the sky, the people mouthing what people mouth at fireworks. The cool air filtering in, the dew already starting on the grass. Charlie and Sam head back to the house to chill out and watch some television.

Dani leads Joseph to a tree. It is a stand of pine trees, with low, broad boughs. It's like she has scouted the area out and picked the perfect one, towards the back, still enough light to see the outlines of each other. She brings Joseph down to the ground. She lays down on top of him, under the boughs. It's closing in on midnight.

"It's nice under here, isn't it?"

"It's perfect. Can you smell the pine needles? Aren't your mom and dad going to be waiting for us?"

"It's okay. I took care of it. I told my parents we were going to say goodbye to a few folks."

"Wow. You *are* good."

"Don't act surprised." Dani kisses his top lip. She lifts

up his sweater. She reaches for his belt buckle.

“What are you doing? Are you nuts? Here? There are people right over...”

“They’re tearing down the rides. It’s their job, and it won’t be done until about 3 am. They have enough to worry about. They’re not worried about us. Do you trust me?”

“Of course, I do, Dani. You know I do. I love you.”
What’s not to love?

“Well, okay then.”

The moon is waning gibbous. It is 73% visible. Neither the moon nor the stars tonight can compete with the glow of the carnival workers breaking down rides. A man-made glow that hovers around the stand of pines.

The boughs and the needles of the tree make slow motion shadow movies on the surface of Joseph. He lays his head back, wondering what mission Dani is on. Dani is above him, pulling at his zipper and unhooking his shorts. She thinks about going through the window of his boxers but decides against it. She grabs the sides of his belt and wiggles his shorts and boxers down. He lifts his hips with a groan like air leaving his lungs.

Dani positions herself over him, the way she has been visualizing all day, and puts her mouth on him. She tastes him. He is hot. He is radiating heat.

He feels the velvety warmth of her mouth, the tickle of her hair on his legs, the weight of her torso crushed

against his hip.

The stars peek out from behind the clouds and shine down on the ashes of the spent fireworks spread across the park.

She feels loose and free, her saliva thick on him, she doesn't know where it all came from, the sound of breathing and moaning and wet skin smacking and sucking. He lifts his hips and something deep in him twists and rises.

The carnival rides sit motionless, bluing in the night, losing their heat, unaware.

Joseph and Dani connect him inside her, her enveloping him, moving as one.

He emerges through the tree to the sky. High above the vast forest.

She owns him. He's trembling. She sits up, he sits up, his arm bracing, shaking, and he kisses her. He wiggles his shorts back on. Their mouths are on each other.

Crickets envelop the night.



About the Author

Rick Pryll is best known for his hyper fiction short story, "LIES". It has garnered praise from the Wall Street Journal and SHIFT magazine, and been translated into Chinese and Spanish.

In order to graduate with a Bachelor of Science, Mechanical Engineering degree, he wrote a novel as his thesis.

He has previously published two books, a poetry chapbook called *Displaced* (foolishness press, 1998) and a book of short stories, poems, journal excerpts and unsent letters called *WALLOW* (foolishness press, 1999).

The Chimera of Prague, his first full-length novel, is set to come out November 2017.

Rick lives and works with his wife, artist Holly Spruck, in Charlotte, NC. He has two kids and three cats.



Testimonials for *The Chimera of Prague*

“Pryll captures all the international sexual tension and possibility that was 1990s Prague.” - Bonnie Ditlevsen, editor, Penduline Press

“This work is fragile, strong, and poignant, yet cleanly written.” - Bibiana Krall, author of *Escape into the Blue*

“I lose myself in it. It’s captivating! I am vested in Joseph.” - Katelin Maloney, author of *Drowning*

“Diving into the brokenness in himself, lead character Joseph allows us into his delicate dysfunction as he explores a once unknown-to-him city of Prague, chasing women and trying to understand his failed marriage.” -

Josh and Crystal of SaturdaySightseers.com

“*The Chimera of Prague* embodies the raw magic of Prague felt by anyone who’s been lucky enough to live there and survive the experience. Pryll’s prose flows to expand our understanding of a Prague era much discussed in recent years - the early years following the fall of the Berlin Wall, when the city’s inhabitants took ‘liberated’ to an extreme, before any disillusion could set in.” - Jason Mashak, poet, author of *Salty as a Lip*

About CHIMERA:

Prague is full of metaphors. They’re not lost on Joseph.

He’s on a stone bridge between his old life and his future. He’s building a castle of every architectural style around his heart. He needs to throw his obsession with an elusive Czech girl out the window, in order to crystallize his sense of self. He’s a lump of clay waiting to be animated, and he’s an alchemist in search of life’s secret formulae, to be engraved on a shem and placed beneath his tongue.

About the vignettes:

History echoes. What came before is woven into the fabric of the present. That’s why geology matters. It is one of the myriad influences on the budding romance between two teenagers in the late 1980’s. Like water running downhill, the universe conspired to bring them together. They were meant for each other, motivated by forces beyond their control. They are actors on a stage

that has been set for them. Their ancestors, alive and dead, are present in their reality. Echoes of triumphs and failures filter into Joseph and Dani, filter into their experiences, and alter their choices. Joseph and Dani are free to do as they please, but they can't outrun the consequences.