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THIS IS JOE CASIMIR'S story. But if you're going to understand what happened when he got on a bus and came down southwest across the state to visit a town called Midville, you have to know about Mr. Boulderwall.

Mr. Boulderwall was very important in Midville. He'd lived there for a long time—long enough to grow from a watchful little boy, newly arrived from a village in faraway Poland, into a man with a head full of plans. And he made those plans come true. He did it all with his invention of a thing called a

“swervit,” a thing to be used in engines. It’s hard to say where he learned so much about engines, but never mind that. The important thing is that swervits started out unknown, like Mr. Boulderwall himself, and after ten or fifteen years, they were a necessary part of every car, bus, and truck in America. And they made Mr. Boulderwall rich. Very rich. In fact, he was worth millions.

When you’re as rich as that, you can afford to live on the best street in town. Every town has a best street. Everything on it is big and beautiful: the houses, the gardens, the trees, even the grass—wide, sweeping lawns of grass, not just patches. Here in America, we like things to be big and beautiful. That’s the way the land was in the beginning. That’s the way it still is.

Midville’s best street was High Street. It was up on a hill. Not much of a hill, to tell the truth, but in that part of the state, the flat south-central part, hills are not taken for granted. Everything on High Street was big, especially the trees. There were a lot of trees, and they were big and very beautiful

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indeed. But in spite of all that beauty they were like most other trees: In the fall, they dropped their leaves all over everything, making a deep, dry rustle of a mess that had to be raked again and again. *They* didn't care, and why should they? They had their own rules, after all. And anyway, a few of them were so old they'd been on that hill before there even *was* a High Street. Trees don't pay attention to streets. But people do.

Here's the reason why: In America, we like to think we'll own a piece of land someday, maybe even a piece on a street like High Street. If you own a piece of land, you *belong*. Belonging is good, and belonging to what's big and beautiful is about as good as it gets. At least, that's what most of us believe. So we wait and watch and try to find out how to make it happen. Because it *does* happen, all the time, to lots of other people, in lots of other ways besides swervits. So why not make it happen to us? It's all in the knowing how.

There was a lot to learn if you were watching Anson Boulderwall. And by the way, that wasn't

the name he was born with. When he was born, in Poland, he was christened Anselm Boldivol. But his mother and father took him away from Poland to escape the endless wars in that part of the world, and they came across the wide Atlantic Ocean, like many thousands of others, to America—where they would be safe. And when he arrived, the first thing he had to do was be taken off the ship at a place called Ellis Island, with everyone else, where he could be weighed and measured. Well, maybe he wasn't exactly weighed and measured, but he was certainly looked at, up, down, and sideways, before they let him come in and be a citizen.

But the people in charge on Ellis Island didn't always pay attention to names. Or maybe they were just so busy looking you over they didn't really listen when you told them who you were. To them, *Anselm* sounded like *Anson*, and *Boldivol* sounded like *Boulderwall*. They wrote it down like that, and that's the way it stayed.

So now, here he was, a long time later, living on High Street with his wife, Ruthetta. She had married

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him when he was only beginning on the making of swervits; he wasn't rich yet. But Ruthetta—well, let's just say she had a knack for seeing into the future, and for getting what she wanted. When swervits took off in the world of engines and the money was flowing in, she urged and won the move to High Street, and she put all her waiting and watching to the best possible use. She made a few small changes in herself—not unlike the changes a rosebush makes between December and June—and she arranged it so that their only child, a girl they named Ivy, had the necessary extras to guarantee a stylish life: the right schools, the right clothes, piano lessons, and a pony. It worked. Ivy grew up to marry a man who had plenty of money of his own. However, though he didn't object to the fact that Ivy would inherit the Boulderwall fortune someday, he had no interest at all in swervits.

So, what would Mr. Boulderwall do with the factory when he got too old to run it himself? Sell it out of the family? To a *stranger*? Certainly not! It was much too close to his heart. But if not that,

then what? The question was always in the back of his mind, and sometimes it even took over the front. That's where it was on the very day when Joe Casimir came to Midville. For it was Mr. Boulderwall's birthday, and he was seventy-one years old and worried about the future. Life always seems to have worries, even if you own a big and beautiful house on the best street in town.