

## *The Forgotten Life*

I MUST HAVE LOOKED EVERY bit the vagrant as I stared at the imposing Upper West Side Gothic apartment adjoining Riverside Church. What was I—a 21 year-old poor, undereducated, orphaned immigrant—doing in front of the home of America’s most influential clergyman, whose weekly sermons were broadcast nationwide on the radio? I reread the handwritten note I was holding: “Dear Mr. Nakashian; Miss Comstock has told me that you attend our church, and I would be delighted to make your acquaintance. Please visit me at my home at 8 PM Thursday. Suggest another time if this is not convenient. Otherwise I will expect you then...H.E.F.” It was clear. I had been invited and it would be inexcusable to turn back now. Swallowing the lump in my throat, I strode up to the door of Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick and rang the bell.

Dr. Fosdick himself opened the door. It was 1936, and he was then about fifty years old, of medium stature, with stentorian voice and emphatic gestures. I especially noticed his small and uncalloused hands—so different from my own brutish farm boy’s hands. He greeted me cheerily. “Hello Nakashian,” pronouncing each vowel and consonant, “How good to meet you. Let me help you out of your coat.”

I couldn’t believe my ears. Never had anyone offered to assist me in shedding my coat. Up until now my encounters with those of higher social status—in the Children’s Aid Society, the schools and farm families I had known—had been for the most part pleasant, but never had I received such an enthusiastic welcome