

West Side of the Tracks

by Matt DeVirgiliis

"And I promise that your tax dollars will never get diverted to the West side of the tracks again!"

The crowd, holding signs that read *Otto for Congress*, hoots and hollers. Campaign music blares as Otto steps off the stage - handshakes and hugs. Then his manager escorts him to the tour bus, complete with a wet bar.

The bus heads west on Route 36, toward the next stop — Howell, New Jersey. After driving ten minutes, and after crossing the tracks, the bus gets a flat.

Otto gets off the bus and sees a young kid sitting on a stoop. Tattered shirt and worn-kneed jeans, the kid hops off the stoop and walks up to Otto. "Hey, mister. Wanna play a game?"

Otto looks at the stoop and at the house behind it: shutters falling off, boarded windows, and graffiti — a building, not a home.

"You have to throw a rock and land it in that box over there," explains the kid. His small hand points to a warped cardboard box on the corner of the sidewalk.

Otto turns to his manager. "We have to get more money over here," says Otto.

"This is the West side of the tracks, sir," says Otto's manager.

"All politicians break promises."

The kid hands Otto a jagged rock. "Visitors shoot first," says the kid. Otto tosses the rock and it lands wide to the right by about one foot. The kid sinks his shot right away. They play until dark.

