

Trouble

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I enter the school bus with a practiced remote attitude. I have carefully curated me for this occasion, posing hours in front of mirrors my sisters left behind. I wear a worn chore coat, black boots, and a thick belt cinched around tight jeans. My hair is long. Well, longer than any other boy here. I clutch a binder scarred with drawings of mean bikers and hip musicians I crafted with purpose for this day. Long ago I vowed to draw better than any kid I ever meet again. It's all I have. Easy enough here it turns out. I will soon learn the school I am off to attend, Oswego High, ignores its lackluster art program. I walk towards the back of the bus, past the rumbling, past the stares. I find an open spot where I sit down, relieved because I have avoided a fight—for now.

Oswego, Illinois is a deeply conservative farm town. Its schools are now mostly populated (and funded) by the flourishing suburban communities sprouting ugly across the cheap land here in the valley near the Fox River. Just North is Aurora, a gritty town west of Chicago where my father was recently transferred by the railroad. Aurora is an industrial city with two large diverse high schools that have strong art programs I hear, yet my supposed liberal parents opted instead for this all-white enclave we now call home, Boulder Hill. Its snaky streets, meant to confuse outside rabble, are decorated with big rocks pulled from the ground of the old horse farm it is built on. Our split-level blue home is same basic design as ever home here. Live in Boulder Hill, you go to school in Oswego.

Over the summer, after the move, more than once I collapsed weeping in my basement room. My mother would console me, then drive me to the record store and let me pick something out. Records ease my isolation. We came here after just two years in Hannibal, Missouri. I had finally acclimated there, was happy. More than happy. Left behind is my first real girlfriend, a

curvy smart self-assured girl with long straight blonde hair, and a toothy smile. We fell into a spree of beginner's guiltless sex, easy and luscious through a thick haze of pop music.

Now, here I am alone, left with these thoughts, itchy horny and so broken hearted. I walk the strange sterile blocks around my new home morose, sighing in the thick industrial air. All the girls I see look starchy and out of touch. I labor over aching letters to the lost girlfriend. My parents are relieved at our separation. They treated her alright but at times they questioned me like sniffing dogs who knew what's what. My prairie born Grandmother always eyed the girlfriend with a chilly reserve she saved for snakes and preachers.

Oswego High School is in a newish building, single floor scrubbed clean. *Sports are big here*, they tell me during my registration. *I hate sports*, I mumble ready for the worst, yet to my surprise, my first week goes more than well. Tim Hellberg, a handsome droll tall boy with long black hair and a sardonic laugh, approaches me right off. He cuts through my wariness, and we sync fast. He introduces me to his friends, providing an instant small tight knit gang. They point out the jocks and "Rickies", the word for local county boy hoods who seek fights with guys like us. I rebound, dimming on the Hannibal girl, enamored with Tim.

I like how Tim and I look together. Tim stands straight, he is dark and hawkish. I am skittish, curly blonde with extreme light skin. I gesture when I talk. Tim speaks in measured tones, does impersonations in a goofy deep voice. I bleat my thoughts in storm of improvisation. He nicknames me Stanley. A dumb joke, true—Tim is not bookish. He does not follow politics close as I do. It's OK. He is smart enough, and clever. He is a keen observer—a people watcher with an insightful read. When he plays acoustic guitar and sings his guard falls away and his venerable side emerges, the studied tough exterior recedes. He reveals this to me slowly during our long talks, as we become inseparable. My over sensitivity, always close to the surface,

becomes part of our connection. There is an electricity between us other notice. Together we accumulate respect from others, neither of us can garner alone.

We take to lazing around Tim's parents Boulder Hill home, listening to *The White Album* on a fine stereo console sneaking booze and smoking. His moody younger sister watches us like a cat tucked up on the Afghan covered couch. I avoid his obnoxious clown older brother. Tim's father is a deep voiced local DJ, on an afternoon show. Nothing we listen to, but quite a local celeb. Tim's mother is attractive as far as mothers go. She is funny—disses her husband often as she drinks herself slurry. Problems are heating up between Tim's parents. This is a good place for us to get in trouble.

It is 1969, troubles easy to find most everywhere. There are culture rumblings all around. The first wave of serious drugs just reached kids like us in the Midwest. The student movement is spreading across college campuses. Protests over the war in Viet Nam and for civil rights sprouting all over. The draft is in full swing aimed at boys our age. The stakes are high. There is a monster president to hate. Active Black Panthers and the original Rainbow Coalition to admire. Nearby Chicago, post the riotous Democratic convention, is ground zero for action. Back west my sisters are now full tilt bad-ass hippies, as are all my old friends in Colorado. I am ready for what's next. I have a seasoned hatred of authority in general, school specifically. I am fixated on outsider collectives, like beat generation writers and the Warhol scene in New York.

Being out on the streets is not easy for many these days. Being different from the white mainstream, which includes having long hair as a boy means real danger, means facing potential violence wherever you are. The police are more than hostile. Random men wait, come out of nowhere ready to kick ass. Stupid old men with beer guts, young muscle heads ex-military, and

the many industrial and railroad workers that roam the bars all over the region. Tim says we should travel in packs, maybe consider weapons. He says he's not afraid of a fight. I am.

One night we are driving back from Aurora with a group of friends. Tim and I in the back seat. A car pulls up beside us on the highway dangerously close. The windows roll down.

Pull over, motherfuckers, a red-faced man screams leaning from the car. There are a group inside gesturing obscenities. They throw something, maybe it's a tire iron. It misses our car. I slide down in my seat as I see Tim roll his window down and scream back as both cars barrel ahead. Others in our car rage back, snarling too.

Our driver knows not to stop—instead slows down a bit, then speeds up. The other car stays to the side of us lurching. More insults and threats are traded in the roar of the wind. I am shaking. I am no warrior, not like this. Never have faced boy violence well, and I have faced my share. They swerve their car suddenly, so it hits the front of ours, glancing off. I hear a grinding metal noise and gravel as our car starts to spin out on the shoulder. Somehow, we get back on the road. Everyone is shocked. The other car races ahead, moves away lights get smaller. We turn sharp to the right quick and speed into a Boulder Hill side street entrance we know. Once we are sure they are gone, we pull over. All the guys are swearing, full of bravado. Tim too. I am silent, numb—the threat embeds deep. I never mention it to my parents. Never mention it again. It isn't silenced—comes back in dreams.

Soon after at a local burger hangout a group of older boys from Aurora high school catch me alone, walking by with a girl.

They start with the usual insults, *hey faggot...fairy...bitch.... queer*

I am embarrassed in front of the girl, so I walk towards them. I decide reason will work.

Let's talk, I say.

I have no problem with you, I say.

There is a moment of silence. The girl watches from a distance. A big kid named Ray steps forward from their huddle. He has a pitted round face, a crewcut. He squints his eyes.

Play froggy and jump, he says in a rural twang sing song voice.

I never have never heard this term. I think he is trying to be funny, so smile. Ray hits me in the face with a right balled fist so hard I'm knocked back across the trunk of his car. Time detaches. Blood is everywhere, running down my face, soaking my shirt. I hear laughter. Someone older intervenes. I am pulled to my feet sputtering and taken back to a business office by an employee, who hands me a towel to soak up the bleeding. The police arrive.

Looks like your nose is broken, a cop says casual, a wry head nod.

Just boys. I wouldn't press charges, says the other, sort of solemn.

Might make life much worse for you out there, they both say.

On the phone my father concurs. Even the girl agrees. I am filled with fury and humiliation as I am driven home. I push past my parents. My mother expresses concern, then seems to stop herself. My father at her side, is steady but refuses to make it a drama. In Junior High, when I chose to *be different*, he told me my coming fights were mine to face alone.

Fuck that peace shit, I tell Tim when I see him next. He goes with me when I buy a wicked curved knife with a four-inch blade at a hardware store. Now, I nest it inside the lining of my coat pocket any time I am out in the city.

The Oswego High School Board of Education president is a fleshy flat faced Boulder Hill resident named Harley Swanquist. He is a conservative Baptist, a Republican NRA member linked to the ultra-right John Birch Society. The school board are all men of similar background and outlook. Swanquist also serves on the local Oswego Plan Commission. Due to him and his

cronies, and past generations of men like them, the freshly built surrounding neighborhoods they call home avoid compliance with The Civil Rights Act of 1964. There are no residents of color here, unlike nearby Aurora and in Chicago which contain large Black and Latino populations.

The school board decides Oswego High is a place to further impose their conservative beliefs—though there is no student rebellion that causes conflict, none that causes disruption. There is just a generational change in appearance and what students discuss with teachers. The board views my new friends—and now me—as visible proof of the rabble and permissiveness they wish to quash. A dress code is in order, they decide. After the school year begins, they strategically convene a handpicked panel to deliver the recommendations they desire. They implement a stringent dress code that will control those students they find objectionable. The new dress codes states, among other things, boys can't have hair that covers their ears or touches their shirt collars or goes down to their eyes. The board claims they need to maintain order, cleanliness, and *to be able to tell boys from girls*—they gender it all up tight and creepy. Then they tie it to grades by including—*each day a student is removed from school for dress code violations, they will lose points off their final semester grade*. This means if expelled for a short time a student will fail for a half a year. A draconian move aimed to banish undesirables.

I go home elated. I have been waiting for this fight for years. In the past, schools knew how to stay within law, and offer counter positives that kept me on board. Also, I am now 16—I can legally leave school. *Let's fight, take this one as far as it will go*, I say to Tim solemn. He agrees, serious like we just joined some big international resistance.

In a carefully planned speech, I tell my parents I want to find a lawyer to file a lawsuit. I proclaim that our family, as depression era leftists who fought for unions, are my inspiration. I have never had an easy communication with my father. We are very different. The world of art I

aspire to is foreign to him, my sensitivity often confuses him. He scared me as a child, with his gruff manner and quick rules. When he laid down the law then I listened. But now, my siblings grown and me older he's mellowed. He tries to talk to me more, which sometimes works and other times not. We are at a crossroads. I reject controls. He no longer demands them.

My father slumps back in his big brown faux leather chair, his head hangs in thought as my worried mother, thin hands fluttering, chatters on about *just getting though, just getting to college*. They both express support for me, sympathy—but not for war against a public school. My parents are from the first generation to get high school provided for free. They see it as a privilege. My father worries over what this might mean at his job. His bosses are not going to be sympathetic. They live near too. My mother worries about heightened danger I will face and my future. I remain resolute, demanding, and bratty in my rebuttal, all bluster defiance. My father sighs. I know this sigh. It used to be rare. It happens more now. He gives in, with a speech.

You can do this if you want, but I don't agree with it and will never say I do. No money. I won't pay for it, not a penny. You can do this, but you'll pay the price. On the other hand, understand—just listen, if you just stick it out, I am saving for college for you. College paid for, he says. This offer is new. It is a big deal to him. He grew up dirt farmer poor in the Ozarks, rode a horse to school. Worked his way out. First through the Civilian Conservation Corps, then slowly as a lifer with the railroad. For most of my family's life he was a blue-collar worker, often gone six to seven days a week. He had no money for extra then, no money to help my siblings to college. Now he is in upper management—white collar and proud of it. He believes in the promise of this country. I am the youngest child by many years. Though I confuse him, my father has hopes for me, for my bookish and creative obsessions. I avoid and dash his hopes at every

turn. I don't mean to. I know my parents mean well, are kind. I'm just cold to their desires for me. *No*, I say hard. My mother goes quiet, teary— and gives in too. I am shocked.

I don't gloat over my parent's surrender because I am frightened. I am dug in too serious to admit fear. Instead, I push the worry away. *I am not interested in collage* I say in a huff. True, I view all school with disdain, but the real thing is I am already running the streets with Tim, hooked into a whole new level of crazy ferocious life. There is no shutting this down.

My parents say they don't believe any lawyer is going to take this ridiculous case anyway, not for free, not for a couple of 16-year-old kids. Tim too gets the go ahead but with an angrier father. They also refuse to participate but won't stop us either. It creates a bigger rift between his parents.

A group of allied students meet. Tim and I announce our intent. No one else has parental support—but all endorse the cause. Tim and I will be the face for our group. One kid has a well-known lawyer father who won't touch the case but says there is a new young lawyer named Patrick Dixon who might. We get his contact info and schedule a meeting.

Pat Dixon sits on his desk beside his legal partner, each in nice suits. Both look ridiculously young, even to me. Pat has a bright winning smile, and reddish curly hair cut proper. Tim and I present our story. Pat accepts the case immediately, pro bono. He will represent us only—not our parents. We are silent. I'm surprised, then excited. Pat quizzes us about why we wear our hair the way we do. *To attract girls*, Tim says, glib. Pat pauses, then explains the political subtext and free speech issues involved. He goes over recent cases that have been won for high school students— how each proved their rights had political motives rooted in self-expression. He goes into the connected constitutional law. After we leave, I find and study anything I can find on the topic. I discover Pat's right. We have a case— better than I realized.

Pat Dixon attends the next board meeting scheduled soon after. There he informs the seething board that unless they drop the dress code in full, and all other infringements on students' rights, they will be sued—fast. Dixon reveals he has contacted every school in the region, and all have dropped any similar student restrictions that might cause litigation. Oswego High's attorney had advised them to acquiesce, said they will lose. The board fired him and acquired a high-powered local lawyer, a sleazy geezer with oily grey hair to match his fancy mob like suits. He tells them what they want to hear, for a price. Oswego High goes it alone.

The coming months everything changes. Tim and I go to school when directed by Dixon and are repeatedly denied admittance. We are out for two months. Students stage a walkout over a fired teacher who got mixed up in supporting us and handing out papers on the student's rights movement. Tensions are high. Tim and I plod the now wintry streets in freed abandon, marked as troublemakers. We drop in at local coffee shops— hog a booth for hours, eating sugar donuts and smoking. We hold court. We start talking legalese, especially giddy when our names appear in newspapers, mocked. We show up for the legal wrangling depositions where I watch my beleaguered father admit he disagrees with me, wants me in school, yet refuses to condemn me. He remains true to himself, and to what he told me. I admire him and try and do the same. He leaves quietly alone. We don't discuss it.

In an early court meeting Pat brokers our readmission on a technicality. If we tie our hair back, then pin it up with bobby pins and nets we get admission. Our mothers oversee this embarrassing intervention. Back in school many teachers tell me off the record *so sorry*. No matter— this peace is doomed. Tim and I are like animals back from the wild. We kick and rattle and snarl. We are insufferable little stars now. I spout details, everything I have learned from Pat. Brag all over it too. Tim is now sick of the whole thing, he says *it's stupid, man*. We become

expert in forging our parents' signatures and ditch all the time. The school watches our every move, they create confrontations. As the months tick by the case works its way to court, the school racks up serious legal bills. We pay nothing.

I get my driver's license. Afterwards, in our driveway, my father hands me the keys to the family car and walks off. He's letting go more and more. I drive away fast, ready for some fun, then bothered I turn around and come home instead. I choose to sit quietly close by my father in our living room. He makes popcorn, as he always did when I was a kid. We share it as we watch Johnny Carson together, laugh some. We barely talk, words seem to not go anywhere. I don't know what to say to him. He smiles before he plods up the stairs for bed. I know something is ending. *You are on your own now, you know that right*, I imagine him saying. I figure he knows this path, walked a version of it himself once.

I take acid for the first time at Tim's. Over a game of pool, the green felt ripples as I slip into heavy synesthesia that links to the music. The room roils and can see through my veiny hands. Everyone turns extreme lovely. Later at home, the Supremes writhe on my bedroom ceiling synced to my radio playing *Baby Love*. Under the influence the world binds together pulsing gorgeous. That trip was so good, Tim and I decide to try acid again the next weekend at a tiny flop apartment a group of us rent secretly in downtown Aurora. This time my stomach clenches and then fear comes on fast, dark spirit horrible like. It was a street drug— maybe laced with poison. Someone brings a nasty little monkey in the apartment. The wicked thin thing jumps around, chatters demon faces at me and shits everywhere. *Let's get out of here*, I plead. A few of us escape outside in the night, a snowstorm raging as we drive around in a barrowed car trying to shake the demons off with some alcohol. In a parking lot, our whacked driver races over a cement curb, bringing our car to a metallic grinding halt. The wrecked car, parts shaved

from the bottom, won't move. As sirens approach, we stagger back more than a mile through the storm. In the apartment overcome with paranoia and visions, I escape by laying on a large heat grate on the floor. I pull my wool jacket over my head, shuddering, and wait. Finally, the darkness slithers away and I come down. The orange sun slips up through the front broken window I stand up to light a Kool. The monkey is there still, staring. It chatters a burst of gibberish that starts to make sense. I leave fast and go hide at home. Traces of the drug don't wear off for weeks. I fear my brain is broke. No more hallucinogens, I vow. Just drink instead.

Meanwhile, the school's lawyer is out there stalking us. Tim and I are arrested downtown Aurora after a businessman calls us names, then turns us in as vagrants. It's a minor trumped up charge that Pat Dixon gets thrown out, but the school lawyer shows up in court too—gathering information. Pat pleads with us to calm down. A friend in Aurora tells me her parole officer knows me, says the cops do too. Their sights are set.

As the school year gets closer to an end, my parents announce another sudden move. This time to Omaha. Another promotion for my father, which means more money. He is glad to get away from here. They beg me to come—to start over. I refuse. *I'm going to finish this*, I tell them. Besides—*Omaha? No way. I'm staying here*, I say.

Finally, the case comes to trail in front of a judge. It is July of 1970 at the big U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois, the same court where the infamous Chicago Seven trial has been.

Tim and I attend, with our mothers. Reporters are there, and some fans in the back we don't know. I want to chat with the fan girls, but my mother grips my leg and glares at me. The District Court is overseen by Judge Perry. He is old, in his 70's—ancient to me. He strains to hear and is agitated. Dixon presents our case. He is precise and impressive. Tim and I are called

to testify. The court room feels immense, it smells old mildly moldy, lights are harsh. When I am called to testify, I am presented with color pictures of me taken at the deposition months ago. I look sad in them. I am asked the usual questions about my hair, then about absences, my behavior. The judge is harsh in response, sitting above us in his robe. I panic, then gulp it, keep my answers short. The school's lawyer puts into evidence an excuse turned into the school he believes my mother wrote for me for the day I was arrested. He is wrong—I forged it. I say so. My mother stares at me, eyes locked in. When I sit back beside her, she won't look at me. Tim is up next. More back and forth, more revels of our dishonesty and rowdiness when away from school. Tim is harsher in response; he does not hide his contempt for the lawyer, for the school. His demeanor starts to bother me. Dixon notes that there are no recorded instances of disruption caused in school, by us. No complaints from teachers...no other disciplinary action except for the dress code. He clarifies no one has had difficulty in telling the difference between boy and girls.

The Judge, frown frozen, calls a sudden recess and tells us all to meet in his chambers. No one knows why. We speculate he is going to press both sides for a settlement, get this case out of his court. Instead, he shows everyone large mastodon bones he has on display. The fossils were discovered in 1963 on his property when digging a pond, he informs us. Everyone chats him up pretending to care. I watch the judge, now small—diminished, prattling on and on. He is animated, smiling more than anytime in court. I watch everyone playing the game. I stand back, uncomfortable in a cheap suitcoat. I look at the loaded bookshelves, dark wood, and expensive black leather chairs—the flags, the many photos. I know everything about mastodons, I was obsessed as a child. It sinks in for the first time—we are going to lose this case.

In his decision issued that month, Judge Perry writes there is no merit to our lawsuit. He says we are spoiled boys. He blames our parents for our lack of discipline. Says, that by God, teachers have the right to know the difference between boys and girls, that hell yeah, we might sneak into girls' bathrooms— that nope, this is *not* politically motivated free speech, and the Federal Court should not be nosing around in public school decisions. The court denounces the recent trend outside organizations meddling in the law these days—an overt swipe at the civil rights cases of the past decade. The newspapers announce the loss, thrilled.

My parents move to Omaha in August. My father makes me drive with him there and help them move in. He hopes I'll change my mind. I don't, so he gives me a train ticket to return. My parents drive me to the station, my mother weeping in the car. When I get out my father shakes my hand, then I turn and walk coldly to the fast train that takes me back to Aurora. There I sleep on a friend's couch on the third floor of an old house and find work first as a cook. I have a new arty girlfriend, a factory girl I adore who makes jewelry and paints. We met at House of Omar's, a local hangout down by the river. We move in together.

Tim and I are still close, but not like we were. There is something festering in him. I find his lack of awareness irritating, his aloofness a bother. Then he falls for my new beloved partner, at a moment she and I are having problems. She goes for him, and I discover them together. The betrayal wounds me deep, more than I have words for. I vow to never speak to him again. She and I try and work it out, on repeat. He comes around late one night drunk and belligerent asking for her when we have just reconciled. I throw open my backdoor to confront him. As he lunges at me, I pull out the knife we had bought, ready to gut him. Then reality slips back in and I throw the knife across the room and swing for his face. As I connect, Tim grins. We embrace in an ugly brawl that leaves me on the dirty kitchen floor bloody. Not long after she dumps us both.

Pained by recent losses, I plan a new path. I go into Chicago more. Art is the balm, my hope. Catch the latest action. Tim takes the hard guy local route. He becomes a hulking biker nicknamed Sluggo. He plunges into alcoholism. His parents separate, and his father claims Tim is not his son; no, the result of a long-ago affair by Tim's mother. It's possible. He doesn't look anything like his brother or sister, or either of his parents. I am told Tim buries these wounds hurt deep.

He's a real bastard. He has it coming, I say bitter when asked, shrugging. I don't even want to hear his name.

One night, I see him at an outdoors party on a farm. We opt for an uneasy truce. Hardly speak—don't discuss our shared past, not school, not the case, not the woman. We are cautious about the present. He was stoic before, now is tight lipped shut down—clutching a bottle. Late that night beneath the stars in a cornfield full of stoned locals listening to a band we hand beer out together from behind a keg. He quietly asks me if I remember that kid who broke my nose at the hamburger place.

Yeah, I say.

Taken care of, he says in a near whisper filtered through the booze. No eye contact between us. Is this an apology? Who knows. I don't ask, don't care. It's the last time we talk. I have new friends who have never set foot in Oswego High School or lived in Boulder Hill. Who can talk for real and seek out something more than this dead town offers. Those who are not satisfied with a factory future, who are aware of the big city an hour east. To me Tim is now a hick, a dim lost boy who threw his promise away. He still plays the guitar they say, but he's not going anywhere with that. Colorado calls me. I figure I have a future, and it's there. I seek a brave new woman to go with me. I need an ally see; I may be wounded but I still believe.

A year after the first court judgement, I attend the appeal alone, the courtroom feels more manageable this time. I am learning the ropes. The Chicago chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union took up the case when we lost. I listen to the two extremely able ACLU lawyers present a deeper revised version to three judges of the United States Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit. Pat Dixon was good, but these are seasoned pros who play on a national stage. They shred Judge Perry's ruling fast. The appeals judges listen serious and intent.

The Appeals Court ruling is issued soon after. They reverse the decision in our favor. It is a measured, tight, scathing rebuttal. They state the schools' actions are unconstitutional. The court notes the founding fathers, cited so often by the school, could not attend the same school due to their appearance nor could the appeals Chief Justice due to his facial hair. They refute the schools so called experts. They repeatedly state personal appearance, including hair length, is a fundamental freedom of expression. They cite a ruling that allows for generational differences in dress, and the current cultural situation. They write *discipline for the sake of discipline is not compatible with the melting pot formula which brought this country to greatness*. I am taken by the detail in the court's examination and conclusions. The words are lofty, better than I ever hoped for. No financial award is given but the court orders the school to drop all its dress codes, to expunge the files, and return any points removed from grades. The case changes the rights of students in the region and influences cases elsewhere. I read it and feel blank.

I should feel redeemed, but the damage is done, my anger is broader. I see injustice thriving everywhere. Chicago is a warzone, the police an occupying force— race and class the battleground. I am living another life now. I have a new job working with residents recently released from savage state institutions. They have also been liberated by recent litigation. We make art together, a paid pleasure I take up gratefully. *These are my people now*, I say.

Soon after, on a cold low cloud grey day, I drive out the long road following the churning snaky Fox river to the school. I walk in alone, though empty halls. The office feels small and foreign. An amiable office worker slides my revised school records across a counter. Just one sheet now. The many detentions, expulsions, all the pages and pages of “infractions” are removed. I stare at this scrubbed new document and note it says I graduated that 10th grade year. A miracle considering the turmoil. A miracle now meaningless to me. The file includes a black and white photo of me from when I transferred. I note how young I was, baby-faced with a crooked smile— hopeful even. I notice how short my hair is in the photo, nearly conforms to the dress code standard. Far shorter than most now, and typical of the many of the older men around town these days. It is not the me I recall at all. I’m interrupted by the rat faced vice-principal who used to lecture me in his dank tiny office before escorting me out.

You can come back, he offers. Another part of the court order.

I never wanted to be here, I don’t say. I leave. Climb in my Plymouth Fury III. It was my father’s car, the one he used to teach me to drive. He gave it to me when he left. I roll down the window and embrace the icy winds rushing in from Lake Michigan. I push the accelerator down and aim the car towards anywhere out of here.