Chapter 4 – Orphans with homes

Halloween is always grey and rainy but it's still celebrated like an official state holiday in Southeast Chicago. Steve Dahl, the morning DJ on the classic rock radio station, a man my mother calls the 'voice of fat slobs everywhere,' is having a one way conversation with his side-kick, the not-fat Gary Meijer, about how Halloween isn't the same since the Tylenol scare. "I mean, kids used to be out *all hours* with pillow cases," he implores. "Now ya practically haveta have each pieca candy screened by the FBI. I got agents sittin' at my house now."

Nothing has changed about Halloween since the Tylenol scare in our neighborhood. After all, we are the land of second and third shift working parents, a land where thirteen-year-olds are constantly sneaking liquor out of the basement bar and sixteen-year-olds are seeing what different combinations of prescription pills do to idle minds during idle times. Screw the fear the news has started to sell, it's Halloween and me and my friends and we aim to stomp door-to-door until the evening news comes on. 11:00 is the unwritten curfew on Halloween night.

Parents in the neighborhood who feel uncomfortable about the possibility of razors or pins and needles are welcome to have lunch mothers screen the loot the next day in the Eleanor Roosevelt Elementary gymnasium. The local police district even volunteers to put the candy through a metal detector if the suspicious eyes of Davina Mulder's mother aren't enough.

And by the way, a month after the ceremony to rename the school even the older people in the neighborhood are calling the school Eleanor Roosevelt now. Although I think they think their beloved alderman chose the name, not me.

I've spent the day in school without a costume, a minor point of shame for any kid.

"Why don't your mom just give you six bucks and by one of them plastic costumes at the Jewel?" Tony Greenfield asks me. I tell Tony that my mom was supposed to sew something, like she did in years past, but I hadn't decided on anything because most of the patterns at the fabric store were for little kids. So what, I didn't have a costume. What was it to him?

"You can't go out without as costume!" his brother Jeff implores in the middle of our speed reading lesson. "Them old ladies won't give you nothin'! Tommy did that after his costume got ripped up by some teenagers stealing his candy last year and he got turned away at half the houses."

"But Tommy looks like he's in seventh grade!" I say in a whisper loud enough to stir up a scolding from the monitor watching the room while the teacher stepped out for a smoke break.

"Jonah does have a costume," Gina chimes in. Here it comes. She's like Don Rickles on the Hollywood Squares. "He's the husband of a *girl* Quaker Oats box."

In third grade gossip, Emily Baer and I are going on our one-month anniversary as boyfriend and girlfriend. I do not even talk to Emily Baer. I do however, during reading comprehension, sit in back of her and stare at her amazingly thick and lustrous blonde hair. I think about how I have never seen hair like hers, almost as thick as electrical wire – only soft.

As I return from thinking about Quaker Oats' hair to speed reading, silently watching the white light move across the text on the roll down screen, I began to think about what I might do to create an ad hoc costume once I get home.

I thought about the costume in the days before Halloween as much as my friends bugged me about it. All of them, all my friends except Gina Torricelli, bought their costumes at Toys R' Us. Flame retardant plastic sheets that barely hid the clothes they draped over accompanied by a hard plastic mask with elastic bands that, after two hours, dug painfully into the crevices behind the ears, scratched the wearer's cheeks with their rough edges and made the entire face sweat like it was stuck in a sauna built for the head.

Because these costumes are usually characters from the most popular cartoons on TV, they are also always more desirable than handcrafted disguises. Besides that, it's the strange kids like Emily Baer who wear homemade costumes. Emily's costumes, in the words of Tony Greenfield, were 'always from some retarded girl book.'

I never told Tony or any of my other friends, whose hierarchy of desirable feminine traits were slowing diverging from mine that, I am very jealous that Emily Baer dressed as Harriet the Spy this year and that, under Gina Torricelli and Leticia Cortez – but way under Gina Torricelli – Emily is the next girl I might be able to have a crush on if I can describe what a crush actually feels like. I wonder looking at her red sweater and big round glasses that look just like the illustration in the book if Quaker Oats knew I ate tomato and mayonnaise sandwiches because they were Harriet the Spy's favorite food?

Kids who are able to buy those realistic rubber masks make themselves the envy of everyone. First of all, the masks were usually modeled after creatures found in Fangoria, the horror movie magazine, and to double the envy, they were usually taken from creatures only featured in R rated movies.

Tommy Pulaski, whose father has the money for almost anything because he is a truck driver for Roadway, did not just get the cheap $12 rubber masks where the blood dripping from the mouth looked like red spray paint and not real blood, he buys the $50 masks from the costume store for his son. This year, Tommy was a werewolf. I couldn't remember from what movie it was from but it's definitely a werewolf I've seen in Fangoria before. It certainly scared a kindergartener when Tommy jumped out at him this morning from behind the milk cooler in the hall between the principals office and the gym. I am glad I had a chance to see the mask before Tommy gets sent to the Mr. Jerez' office.

Other ambitious children, in a recent Halloween's past, have attempted to make their own costumes based on the contemporary entertainment culture. Most of the time, it became the first time that innovative child discovered white Elmer's glue and felt do not hold together. No costume worn to school is OK but a wearing a costume falling apart at school, well, that was worse than being teased about being the boyfriend of a third-grade girl everyone called Quaker Oatmeal, (although maybe the smell of health food store that wafts off of Emily like a revolting yet intoxicating perfume smells like oatmeal to someone who has never been in a health food store).

In order to avoid this pitfall, I go to the second most reliable source for a boy's imagination, or at least my imagination – history books. They haven't failed me in winning the school-renaming contest so I mentally go down the list of books I own searching for a source. I can't be an Abraham Lincoln because I didn't have a stovepipe hat – construction paper hats were lame – and no one would recognize Teddy Roosevelt or William H. Pierce. Last year, at party I went to with my father, several of his friends (who also knew the Greenfield's Uncle Jerry) showed up as assassinated presidents. Uncle Jerry, of course, showed up as Nixon for that party, who, in his words 'should have been assassinated.'

From time to time, while studying at the Greenfield's kitchen table, Uncle Jerry likes to remind me that his costume caused a huge scene with a Republican in attendance at that party, a Republican who thought it was a distasteful commentary on the attempted

assassination of Ronald Reagan. “Can you believe it, Jonah? A Republican social worker! A costume in itself!”

As the brain under my black puff of curls churns through lunchtime, working overdrive in picking a historical figure for a costume to go trick-or-treating in, I do so without the sense of history that had formed the mental existence between the anonymous brick bungalows for the people Uncle Jerry refers to as ‘old timers.’ I live in the now that smells of black weekend grease that doesn’t quite come off the fingertips of a father’s gracious hand giving out sugar doughnuts to his daughter and her friends. Increasingly, that smell of now that fills the walls of homes is one of corn tortillas.

As I page through the history books, looking for a costume everyone would recognize and finally decide on being someone from World War II, I never take into account all the other names ending with –ski in the neighborhood, besides Tommy Pulaski. As I think about whether to focus on the uniform or the facial features I can create with Cover Girl make–up stolen from my mother’s drawers to make the costume – all the while wishing my dad had an old GI uniform somewhere in the basement – in my thinking, I am not intentionally laying designs to continue my private war with the men on the barstools at Warsaw Tap. I simply chose my costume based on what is easiest to make and who is the most recognizable person from the era for people who may not appreciate or recognize William H. Pierce, or if I chose to use my hair as an automatic asset, Fredrick Douglas.

In school I'm an angel. Outside of school, I'm like every other kid who lacks adult supervision. Tommy Pulaski's dad calls us 'orphans with homes.' My brown skinned body isn't the only one lighting paper bags filled with poop on the doorsteps of retirees, ringing the doorbell then running away. With my brown body, I stood out to our victims. Like so many other things, I mean no harm, but the costume I am about to put on the doorstep of my elderly neighbors is a 100 paper-bag-of-poop bonfire.

When I arrive home, I throw my books on the living room couch and make a beeline for my bedroom, pilfering my closet for the stuff I'll need to construct this absolutely brilliant costume I've thought up during school instead of paying attention during our mini–Latin lesson. My mother is not home yet and I am anxious to get out. Her worship of health food has increased and this night of sugar surprises is remedy to a year of breakfasts made of wheat germ, yogurt, and orange concentrate to flavor the two mixed together.

Also, Jeff and Tony Greenfield are coming over in an hour so we can all go out Trick or Treating and I know if I'm not ready for them, I'm left in the dust.

My dark blue Cub Scout shirt is the first part of my costume. New to Cub Scouts and not very industrious in the badge-earning department, to me, the blue shirt could be a *tabula rasa* for world military history. Then, without permission, I ruffle through my mother's old scrap fabric drawer to find a wide swatch of red fabric long enough to wrap around

my upper arm. I find one and in the exact color I need. Folding it neatly and carefully in case she needs it for something else, I make an armband and safety pin it to the arm of the Cub Scout shirt.

All this takes about twenty minutes, so I choose a more conventional grade school material, off-white construction paper, for the final piece of the costume. Cutting out the most perfect circle, I dab on glue for about three minutes then adhere the circle to the armband, pressing so hard the wet glue seeps through the folding fabric all the way to the other side of the Cub Scout shirt. Thank god for Sobo fabric glue and the fact I know the difference between it and Elmer's glue or my work of genius might never have been realized.

And then, yes, I do exactly what you might have guessed: with a black permanent marker, I draw a black swastika in the white circle and then, looking in the bathroom mirror with the same permanent marker in hand, I scribble a tiny square mustache on my lip. Finally, I use my mother's most expensive hair mouse to comb my hair back into a wavy helmet. I have just created a Hitler with the most melanin the world has ever seen. If television desensitizes children then I have PBS to blame.

When Jeff, Tony and Tommy come to the door, I'm in full regalia. "That's almost as cool as anything from Star Wars!" Tony exclaims. Even Tommy Pulaski in his $80 werewolf mask gave me a 'fuckin' a!' of approval.

“What if the mustache washes off?” Jeff asks.

“I used permanent marker!” I tell him.

“Great idea! That’ll stay on all night!”

Let Halloween begin. I did mention most of the ‘old timers’ are Polish immigrants?

My ingenuity and inventiveness are further confirmed when we knock on the door of our first house, my next door neighbor Susie. She comes to the screen door, vodka tonic in her left hand, passing out candy with the other, she tells me, “Isn’t that the cutest little costume! Cutest little costume! I can’t believe you made that yourself! Can’t wait to tell Bill! He loves old war documentaries! Aren’t you the cutest little shit! Look at that little mustache! What a *clever* little boy.”

Most other women who are home this Halloween afternoon are not drinking vodka tonics and watching classic movies on their new VCR. Most women at home that afternoon were older than Susie and most of their husbands had fought in World War II or their families had been affected by the Nazi invasion of Poland, even if they weren’t there themselves.

Many of the young mothers were also far less gracious than Susie. They shook their heads and ask, “Does your mother know about this outfit? Does your mother know where you are?” As if the two have anything in common.

At other homes, Jeff, Tony and Tommy received compliments and candy while I’m refused because my costume is ‘disrespectful’ or ‘smart ass.’

“Understand, I don’t have anything against you because you’re black,” one lady says after refusing me. “but dressing up as Hitler for Halloween is mean and tasteless. Maybe because you’re black, you don’t understand.”

“He’s Puerto Rican! Give ‘em candy!” Tommy yells as she shuts the screen door with a sad shake of the head.

At 5:30, we go to pick up Gina who was at piano lessons all Halloween afternoon. We enter through the kitchen door where her father is sitting at the table cutting up potatoes. In a moment of shock, he almost slices off a finger. “What the hell kid? Whoa! You’re a smart kid. You tryin’ to be funny?” Then he laughs hysterically. “Kid, might as well dress up in KKK member white sheets and trick or treat in a black neighborhood. At the same time, they gotta be confused with that afro of yours all pasted down,” he says. “You in that costume. It works. Me, I wear it, I’m on the evening news.”

I don't know what feeling is stronger at this moment, the feeling that my costume is not as cool as I thought or the feeling that I am offending people and ruining the spirit of Halloween. And if I'm offending them in a way children can't comprehend, then I've obviously got something wrong with me.

"Gina's still getting ready," Mr. Torricelli says. She's wearing her perfect Princess Leah costume for the third year in a row. Because her father fabricates custom motorcycle seats and also makes custom leathers for his customers who are members of bike clubs, he can sew better than most mothers and make things from his head, without a Simplicity pattern. "Can't buy no patterns for skulls at JoAnne fabrics," he always says when people are amazed.

"If you want me to make you a Halloween costume, Jonah, tell me a month ahead and make sure they have a Simplicity pattern for it," my mother had told me in September. I guess in all the school renaming chaos, I forgot.

As Gina's older sister finishes twisting Gina's little hair buns, Tino Torricelli sits me down and pulls my chair close to him. "Let me explain to you a couple of things about this costume, cause I know you're just a kid, smart as you are."

In the Halloween dusk, in the waning light before treats began to give way to teenager tricks, Gina's father gives me my first real adult lesson in racism. Being Tino Torricelli, the lesson is meandering.

"See, you got your people who just says nigger and then you gots the people who don't want their daughter to marry one," is how he begins. "Then you got people like me, who'd feel uncomfortable with it but have the mind to get over it realizing a lot of black guys are better than the assholes running around this neighbor hood," these were things I already know but can't map with any certain sociology. Each one of these things, ideas is a place I don't ever want to stand in, I want to be outside of all of them.

"You got cops that won't work with 'em." He pauses for a moment and gives a look of regret parents give when they are consciously not trying to pass mistakes like hereditary traits down to the next generation. "I mean they won't work with black people." He pauses again and looks at his eldest daughter who hasn't noticed the slip.

"Then you got your people who'll burn down the garage of a black person or a Mexican if they move into the neighborhood. Heck I know guys who sit who say they in their windows with a shotgun saying they're ready to shoot any fuckin' black guy who decides to deliver papers on their lawn."

Finally, Tino Torrecelli explains that Adolf Hitler 'is worse than all of these types of guys who don't like black people. "What he did back them makes all that anti-black stuff seem

like nuthin',” he advises. “Unfortunately, the only thing some of the old Pollacks see is the fact we were at war against this guy. For what and why, it's not important.”

Then Gina's father says something that is typically frank but against-his-brusque-sensitive style, “We live in days where everyone knows what they're against, that ain't unlike Hitler's days. Your job, son, my daughter's job is to know what they're for not what they're against. If we still had that down here, things wouldn't be slippin' away like they are down here. I see 'em slippin' away every time a guy has less money to put in a bike. But people only know what they're against.”

“Dad, can we please go now?” Gina whines and rolls her eye.

“Dad, I don't even know if this poor little guy knows what you meant. *I* don't know what you meant,” Simone adds stroking my moused-hard helmet head that is slowly curling itself back into a natural shape.

“I for one like your costume. It's smart,” Gina says. “If they don't get it, fuck 'em.”

“Gina!” her father yells. “Don't think I won't make you stay inside tonight.” A facile threat. Gina calls all her father's warnings facile threats because 'he loves me too much.'

“Oh, she just heard that kind of language in some movie. She doesn't mean it,” Simone says. “Now you guys get out there and bring me back some candy.”

As we bustle down the front hallway, I hear Mr. Toricelli ask Simone ‘what happened to the diet’ in a kidding voice. Gina turns to Tommy and asks, “Think we should tell Quaker Oatmeal about his get-up?”

“Nododontdontdontdothat!” I blurt out as I let the door slam behind me. Oops.

“So she *is* your girlfriend!” Tony teases with a growl.

“You know she’s not!” I snap back.

“Com’on man. You know she ain’t,” Jeff tells his brother, taking my side. Jeff had to endure a similar month of mockery with Davina Mulder as the (everyone else’s) imaginary girlfriend which is worse because even though Davina Mulder is cool by most people and her mom wears low-cut black Neil Diamond T-shirts with silver-sparkles, most people everyone knows she picks her nose, eats it or stores her boogers on the inside of her homeroom desk.

“If Quaker Oats isn’t your girlfriend Jonah then why would you care if I told her about you being *Hit-ler* for Halloween,” Gina chides.

I try to change the subject by asking everyone which block we should start on for the late night half of our run. “Pulaski, remember when your dad brought us to the rich neighborhoods last year?” I ask.

“Answer the question, DeJong. Is she your girlfriend or not?” he replies to my change-the-subject reminiscing.

“Why do you call her Quaker Oats anyway?” Tony asks.

“Like duh! Because she’s a Quaker, like the guy who lives on the oatmeal box!” Gina says. “You’re like in fourth grade so you should *know* what a Quaker is Tony Greenfield!”

“Yes, because that information is sooo useful. Like I’m sure that’s the first thing they ask you when you want to be a doctor. ‘What’s a Quaker?’ She’s not in my grade so *I didn’t know.”*

“So big whoop, just tell her!” I say, aggravated. “Tell Emily Baer that I was Hitler for Halloween. I’m sure she’ll like cry about it or something.” I’m getting exasperated with this month-long involuntary girlfriend even if she does have what I imagine might be called flaxen hair. Plus, I have not landed a single full-size candy bar all night. “Let’s focus on trick or treat, not Quaker Oats,” I say in a defeated voice.

"Quaker *Oat-meal,"* Gina corrects. She came up with this nickname for Emily and she acts like she's someone from Saturday Night Live for inventing it. If we ever get married, she's going to have to stop acting like her jokes are the best jokes the school has ever heard. That won't work in a marriage.

As the night wears on, people notice the Hitler costume less and less. It's dark and adults are growing tired with every handful of Tootsie Rolls tossed in a bag. The handfuls also get bigger as the night wears on. We are just another gaggle of kids in a blur of costumes. When Jeff Greenfield's mom sees the Hitler get up, she calls my mom to mumble about it. "Your son has some pretty odd ways of showing his ambition," I overhear her say. Both take it as a historical, yet hysterical, misstep but I can tell Ms. Greenfield sees the costume as the mistake of a detached mother, not a brilliant young mind misunderstanding the lead-weight of history.

By 8:30, the temperature is dropping below 50 degrees we're all getting bored if trick or treating. We start doing things like watching from a far as Tommy Pulaski jumps out from behind a tree to frighten a group of five and six year olds. When he can't run away fast enough, one furious father catches him by the back of his shirt collar and lectures him in a yelling voice the whole street can hear, "what if I had a gun, huh? What if I had a gun to protect my kids for robbers? Then what would you do? You'd be shot. Maybe that would teach you to frighten five-year-old. What are you? Twelve? Thirteen? F-ing Punk."

Tommy's response, as he is let go and running away again is 'my father would sue you first then shoot you back.' This made the angry father's children start to cry even more. Soon after that back and forth, which is an indication the night could hold other problems such as teenagers beating us up for our candy, we decided to call it an early night and haul our candy back home.

The Halloween before this year, a group of teenagers chasing us up and down the Greenfield's side of the block finally caught up to Jeff and me. Holding us by our arms like vise grips, they decided it might be funny to put a lit M-80 firecracker down one our backs. I twisted away and escaped in a moment quick enough for the explosion to blow the skin off the palm of my captor. Staying out too late on Halloween means getting mixed up in something you didn't want to get stirred into or getting picked up by the cops just for being in the wrong place at the right time. Our neighborhood seems to be brimming with wrong places and wrong times waiting to combine.

Mr. Jerez asks the next morning at school as we're lining up to go inside, "Jonah, what's the black stuff all under your nose?" Jeff explains to him that it's permanent marker, a remnant of my Hitler costume. Its only time I've ever seen him psychologically jump back and accidentally swear under his breath.

"You have to watch more cartoons, *mijo* and stop reading so much," he said patting me on the back. "I'm surprised you're alive at school today after that stunt."

I assure him in a mumbling voice it wasn't a stunt. He gives me a 'sure it wasn't' pat on the back before walking away.

At dinnertime, when I get home, Basil is over and my mother has nothing more to say about the costume except that she will not be buying me another Cub Scout uniform after I ruined the shirt with her Sobo glue. "But Ms. Greenfield said you liked the costume idea?" I ask, hopeful.

"I'm not talking about whether I like the idea or not, I'm talking about ruining a $16 shirt with expensive fabric glue I use for sewing."

While I'm thinking about the last time my mother actually sewed anything, Basil pipes in and scolds me by saying that fascism and genocide are not things to be taken lightly. "Even at your age, they're not to be taken lightly."

My mother responds with a ;oh please, just shut up and eat' sigh.

My mother has never cooked frozen vegetables before. The beans were bland enough to keep my mind off the taste and bring my thoughts to some of the things Mr. Torricelli had said about 'for and against' the day before, on Halloween. Basil knew what he was for more than what he was against but know what he believed in didn't seem to get him far with my mother, especially and suddenly, in the past week or two.

I always compare my father to my mother's boyfriend of the moment, especially since he's met Basil. But dad isn't coming back to Chicago – coming back for longer than a weekend plus four days out of the entire month – so I can't ask him if he knows what he's for and what he's against.

All I know that night is the beans certainly are bland, limp and the empty taste of the meal mimicked a new distance I'm starting to feel in my home and maybe even in my general sense of place.

Then, in mid chew, I wonder if Gina actually told or will tell Emily Baer I dressed like Hitler for Halloween. The annual Eleanor Roosevelt Elementary All School Saturday Field Trip is in two weeks and Emily Baer's dad is chaperoning the same group as my dad.

"Oh, Shit!" I think out loud.

"Jonah! No swearing at the dinner table," my mother says with disinterested disapproval. The voice in my mind shoots back with a "but it's important." This is something I have to ask my father about.

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Hank DeJong Part I

"How do you think I felt waiting all night?" my dad says with nostril's flaring, dark curly hair made bramble in his anger, looking at me from the driver's seat. "I'm so pissed I can't even drive." To punctuate his pissed-and-can't driveness – we've pulled over to shoulder at 67th Street on the Dan Ryan Expressway. We sit on the narrow shoulder with the engine idle, as trucks whizzing by feel like monsters about to whip the car up in to a tornado of traffic that'll crush us.

"I'm so pissed I can hardly sit here in your fuckin' car!" I say back with nothing else sensible to say. How could I have forgotten about my Dad' s plans for us on Halloween? Not to play it plain selfish, there was no other way I would have been able to buy a normal costume. "And what if your friend Bernie saw that costume?" my dad says, adding another layer of guilt. "Did you know his grandmother is a Holocaust survivor? What in the hell were you thinking?"

I turn and look directly at Hank DeJong, (when I am mad at him, I think of him as Hank DeJong, not my father). "Yeah? What do you think? I wanted to dress like Hitler? I would have rather dressed like Strawberry Shortcake. What kid would turn down a new costume. Can't you see your ex-wife is a fucking, god damn liar?"

And then it comes across my face, like the whip of a jellyfish stinger – Slap! Then everything is silent, there's even a gap in the sixteenth notes of traffic zooming past. I hold my breath, partially to keep myself from crying and to keep myself from saying something else all smart-ass, up-in-my-father's face, (a trait I've acquired from Gina.) I

can tell Hank, my dad, isn't happy about what just transpired with his hand. He made a special trip all the way from the State Capitol, Springfield – or better known by me, the absolutely most boringest place in the word – just to spend two days with his son. According to his adult sources, his son blew him off to go trick or treating in an offensive costume. Truth is, I had no idea he was sitting on a co-workers couch that night, waiting for a phone call so he could take me to a three-story haunted house. I swear to everyone his former wife never told me.

Dad finishes lighting his cigarette with the car lighter, steadies in his trembling hand and then takes off, zooming straight into the center lane as if he were some teenage boy playing chicken with oncoming traffic and not the guy who regularly boasts about never having been snagged by a single traffic ticket.

Hank, or Dad, depending on how I feel about him for a split second, will smoke down a cigarette then act as if nothing happened once we pass under the 35th Street overpass.

"How you feel about going to Lincoln Park Zoo?" he turns and asks me when the moment of peace finally comes right before Cermak Road, the turnoff to Lakeshore Drive.

"Fine by me." I'm actually sick of the zoo and think it's too cold to walk around outside and look at seals but after the Halloween fiasco and the rage back at 87th Street, I'm not going to pretend this relationship is some sort democracy. We're going to end up at the

zoo every weekend because, first of all, it's free and second, Dad is fascinated by a baby polar bear recently born into captivity at the zoo. It appears he wants to monitor the cub's progress in the captive world on a visitation-with-his-son-by-visitation-with-his-son basis. The vigil of the baby polar bear is not metaphorical for me in any way. It is, quite simply, tedious.

"Fine by me? That doesn't sound like you *really* want to spend time with your father at the zoo." Crap almighty. This is one of those days for him. Reading high school textbooks for yucks during silent study period in the library, I've encountered and retained, in vague ways, the concept of subtext in literature. I think it applies to conversations in real life, too. However, in my experience, third and fourth graders do not speak with subtext nor do they respond with implied meaning unless they are demon-children in 1970's horror films.

"Noooo dad!" I put on the whiney baby-begging voice I hate so much in other kids. "I'm glad you're here and wish we could have gone to the haunted house on Halloween…And I'm sorry I dressed up like Hitler." Perhaps he thinks I'm a demon-child, anyway. Possibly I am and I just can't see my glowing red eyes.

Between the point we turn off onto northbound Lakeshore Drive until we drive over the bridge with the treacherous S curve rounding the two giant, darkish warm-grey, cylindrical lakefront towers (I imagine myself living in one day) right before Chicago Avenue, I put my father's mind at ease four or five times about my non-demonic

intentions. Yes, I'm definitely grateful to be spending this Friday school holiday with him. For sure I know how far Springfield is from Chicago and I empathize with him because as his grammar-school aged son know how tired he gets traveling around the state from office-to-office all week. It must feel similar, as far as tired is concerned, to going shopping with my adopted mother the day the Social Security check from my birth mother arrives in the mail. I know this routine of reassurances like saying the Lord's Prayer in church or like I can align my inner compass to this zoo, my dad's all time favorite zoo of zoos, from any point in Chicago I've never been to before.

Parking the car, dad asks me to assure him of one more thing: "You promise on all the chocolate éclairs you will never have for the rest of your life – unless you want to get as fucking fat as your friend that Pulaski kid – you promise your mother didn't tell you about me coming in Chicago for Halloween?"

"Promise on all the X-men comics in my comic book collection," I say putting one hand up in the Cub Scout oath and the other on a non-existent Bible. "Dad, did you know my comic book collection is worth $680 dollars already?" None of my friends even know this and I will never tell them, especially Tony and Jeff because I've bought comics from their Uncle Jerry for 50 cents that are worth eight bucks according to the official comic collector's guide in our school library.

When we pull in the zoo parking lot, a dusting of lakefront November down feather snow on the ground, dad gets out of the car, lights a cigarette then starts walking for the black,

paint-chipped wrought iron zoo gate not even paying attention to the trouble I'm having keeping the door locked on his orange, Volkswagen Rabbit he bought last week without saying anything to me. When I haven't spent time with dad for a while, I forget he sometimes lacks normal human protocol. He does stuff like notifying other people that he's actually ready to get out and not just sitting in a metered space for the sake of smoking a cigarette or telling people who accompany him to the supermarket to turn down the cereal aisle before he makes a beeline for it and looses them. He wanders in his own world sometimes and forgets to talk to me about important decisions he makes regarding cars, a sign of respect other boys with a father in their life are given. Mr. Pulaski would never even think of going to the car lot or looking at an antique abandoned in some farmer's field around DeMotte, Indiana without bringing Tommy along.

Finally locking the door, I watch him in his still sometimes endearing out-of-touch world he meanders in and chain-smokes in from a distance. His unkempt curly hair that makes him look like a sidekick to Woody Allen in one of his films, grey wool jacket, Levi jeans sagging off his Dutch-flat ass and cork-bottomed sandal shoes worn with thick hiking socks that get wet in the winter. He doesn't dress proud and like Tommy Pulaski's dad or rough like Gina's dad or in the latest cool adult clothes from Marshall Field's like Ryan O' Maley's dad. He looks like a really smart slob but not nearing the eccentricities of the comb-over king, mom's old boyfriend Basil. Everyone else says my dad looks like Judd Hirsch from Taxi with lighter hair. When he comes to our school White Sox outings Bernie's dad – Bernie being only one of two Jewish kids in our school (who is moving to Arizona anyway) – always leans over my dad and jokes with Emily Baer's dad saying,

"You sure this guy ain't a Jew? Inverses his sentences like a Yid. He's cheep and he sure dresses like my brothers from Philly." I can see what Bernie's dad is talking about when we got to the North Side and walk around the zoo or the neighborhood surrounding the zoo. To me all that stuff Bernie's dad says about my dad are compliments. Even if my Poppa Hank is an insufferable, skinflint asshole with an emotional epidermis thinner than a second-grade snitching girl, (I robbed emotional epidermis from Uncle Jerry), my dad does something better than all the other handful of dads in the neighborhood who make 'nigger jokes', have shitty, fading Sailor Jerry tattoos and also wear polyester shirts from Sears tucked into jeans fitted so tight you can see the shape of their nut sack – and that is to try and love me as best as he can. If I had to pick a dad in the adoption lottery, it would be Mr. Torricelli, hands down. But Hank is a good dad in a different way, a more distant way.

After he's walked exactly 15 parking meters ahead I make a dash for his side.

"So you want to see the polar bears first?" He asks me.

"Naw, I want to go to the ape house."

"What about doing what I want to do for a change? Do you ever think about what I might want?" He says this to me in a hurt voice, as if I've refused to spend Christmas with him.

We end up walking to the polar bear exhibit. I don't tell him we actually always do what he wants because I don't think he'll ever believe those pouting threats he does to getting things his way as any sort of an interruption of our relationship. I also never tell him I wish he would be like Tommy Pulaski's dad every once in a while, the kind of parent who doesn't mind doing non-PBS Channel 11 crap on TV. The kind of dad who doesn't mind maybe just going to McDonald's or the toy store or a water park would be nice. But observing Tommy's parents, one of the few who weren't divorced, against other parents, I've come to the conclusion most divorced adult are real childish pains in the ass and that's why they're divorced – unless it's a case where one of the parents just up and ditched the family.

After we spend 45 minutes (I count the minutes we spend satisfying his obsessions sometimes) watching the polar bears, I make the mistake of asking, "Can we go to the gift shop?"

"Maybe after we see a few more animals, Jonah," dad says. Thank the Lord he's spared me one of his speeches about consumerism. I really only asked because it was the closest inside place for us to duck into after spending half-a-century in this, drizzly early November wind. One way I can tell I'm adopted for sure is my dad hates shopping. I love it and that's why I'm always finding ways to make money on my own.

Instead, we go to the monkey house, my first suggestion. “Dad, did you know I have a paper route on Wednesdays now?” He doesn’t answer me right away as we enter. He waits until we’re sitting down on a bench in front of the orangutans.

“Your mother told me. That’s great. Next time you’re going to treat me to something at the gift store, right?” he says.

“Yeah, sure. But I don’t really make a lot. Do you know how much people with paper routes make?”

Dad begins laughing hysterically. “I know you can barely even save up to go to community college with that kind of money. I was only joking. But I’m still proud.”

“But, dad, I am saving for college with the money – $10 a week. I make $18 with my paper route.”

He nearly falls off the bench. “Who the hell put that idea in your head? I know it wasn’t your mother.” I think this shocks him so much, he’s decided to put the unlit cigarette in his mouth and let it dangle for a moment. I love when my dad does this because it makes him look like a greaser tough guy from a 1950’s movie, only he’s in the comedy version of that movie.

"Mr. Torricelli. He makes Gina and Maria and Simone save half of everything they make or get as gifts." Looking at him in a way I usually don't look at people, like a doe-eyed innocent little kid who doesn't see adult subtexts in everything, I expect him to say something wise-ass.

"Just goes to show you, Jonah. Tino – Mr. Torricelli, excuse me – looks like he's a member of the Hell's Angels or sumthin' but ya couldn't ask for a better role model. If I could tell you about some of the other parents at that school, in the neighborhood versus him…"

"How do you know he's better? Tell me!" I'm sure by saying 'better' he means Tony and Jeff Greenfield's asshole dad and some of the lunch mom's who show up to school functions with their breasts strategically pushed out and up of their too-tight black lace shirts.

He motions for me to get up and go back out side of the monkey house. I know his "I need a cigarette" body language, he doesn't have to move much. Between Mexicans and my Dutch father and other Dutch people I know, although stereotypes do amuse me as they do the people I'm growing up with, the Dutch have to make significantly less movement in their body to communicate the unspoken. Once we're outside standing in the door way to escape what has become a dreary sleet, he makes a super-solemn face, turns to me and says, "You may hear a lot of talk about what I do for a living from people in the neighborhood – how I give free money to lazy niggers and other bullshit. But let

me tell you, I've seen some of those same people who accuse black people of being freeloaders come into my old office to get food stamps and then I've seen some of them get arrested for collecting benefits while they worked off the books."

Then dad tells me one of my favorite social worker stories, a story that makes me feel like my dad is the most important and honest man in the world: When Hank began his career as a social worker, he had Frank Zappa's first wife as a former client. According to my father, long before Frank became the famous Zappa, this guitarist every teenage pothead in our neighborhood loved took off of Los Angeles to seek his fame in the music industry. He left his former wife and children in living in Harvey, a place I can honestly say is one of the crappiest suburbs on the face of the earth – the whole place practically smells like a cat litter box or looks like it should smell that way – and never sent a dime back after he became famous. Every time he tells the story, I ask my dad if the kids Frank Zappa had by his mystery first wife had weird names like Moon Unit. He would answer, "Does it matter? Taxpayers are still paying for the children of a wealthy rock star to eat."

He always finishes the story by saying "I can't listen to the guy's music after that." I would tell Dad I can't listen to that guys music anyway but he would only get steamed then say I was trying to get the final word.

"I'm just glad it was Frank Zappa and not Mick Jagger," I say resolving the tragedy against the moral behavior of my favorite band. "I don't know what I'd do if you couldn't

listen to the Rolling Stones, Dad, because Mick Jagger or Keith Richards had some illegitimate kids somewhere."

"I'm sure they do have illegitimate kids somewhere," Dad advises in a voice brimming with wisdom. "But there's no doubt in my mind Mick Jagger's the kind of guy who pays child support, just like John Lennon."

In this reoccurring Frank Zappa conversation and others like it, Hank makes up for all his short-firecracker-fuse temper. From these man-to-man talks, I know my dad respects me as his almost equal. Why else would he entrust me with such a deep, dark secret about the adult side of his world? He even uses the word 'illegitimate.' Now that's someone, in my estimation, who really loves his son, even if he's constantly dragging that son outside of the ape house for smoke breaks just when the chimpanzees start doing something interesting.

Hank DeJong, Pt. II

If my adopted father had followed the path of "his people," the Dutch people or the path of his family then he would have never ended up in Southeast Chicago and maybe he would have never been my adopted father at all. He purchased the house mom and I live in now – the house where he also first lived when he and mom were married – because it was ten minutes to the office where he started his career as a social worker. I call it the welfare office but he always corrects the term 'welfare', calling in AFDC – Aid to Families and Dependent Children. He thinks welfare is undignified, slightly racist and 'very Reaganomics.' I tell him the lunch mothers at our school call it welfare and they collect food stamps. 'So what's wrong with calling it welfare?' I ask and he simply answers 'stereotypes.'

While my father lived with us, he certainly enjoyed the company of the people in our neighborhood more than my mother Marilyn even did – or does to this day. She never stops feeling tepid about her surroundings and would sometimes blink in rapid succession when certain people who lived in surrounding blocks or certain active parents from Eleanor Roosevelt Elementary were mentioned in conversation. Southeast Chicago worked for Hank as a place to call home because he liked to savor salt of the earth type of living. Hank's father being an important person in the Dutch community, if not one of the most important who did important things and corresponded with people of dignity out side of his community, somehow drove Hank's desire to do the exact opposite or what

young Hank deemed the exact opposite. (I've decided during while daydreaming during speed reading deemed is great word we all should use.) "

My father would say from time to time, "If Jesus was here, he'd be in a bar having a beer with regular folks." Not many Southside Dutch saw things that way. God to them was pretty much a guy with a beard smiting people, (and in the opinion of most people in that community, from what I learned, Black people were number one on God's smote shit list). Jesus was a boring white guy looking to the sky on a blue back ground, definitely not some hippy in a bar as my dad and Uncle Jerry seemed to see the Walk on Water Guy. Once Hank repeated his Jesus-drinking-Old-Style homily to his mother-in-law, Marilyn's mother, at Sunday dinner and this grandmother I rarely saw started bawling. "Marilyn, you even do your hair differently since you got married!" She said, according to my dad. I conclude from mom using money from the social security checks the government sent me every month to buy herself clothes at expensive boutiques, she always thought dad's dedication to the rough-hewn masses was a passing college fancy.

As I grow older, Hank always predicates all his memories of living in our Southeast Chicago home by saying 'Back in the seventies…' as if the period in his life were a forgotten history book everyone needed to be reminded of.

"In the seventies, a lot of us were jealous of the steel workers and the auto workers. They had pay and benefits that you wouldn't believe. People out here lived good then."

"In the seventies, a lot of these people had more money than they knew what to do with and gave their kids everything; that's why I think their teenage kids got into drugs."

Sometimes, when he talked about the seventies, I wanted to clue him in on the fact that people around us were still living good – maybe everyone around us except for me and mom and the Greenfield's.

Some money and lots of middle-classed-ness ran in dad's family all the way back to the Netherlands – doctors, professors and theologians. "*Theologians*, not pastors," dad would distinguish, as if the run-of-the-mill Christian Reformed preacher was a only step above the Tarot card reader. One of my grandfather's uncles even founded his own denomination I'm told, (you learn the word denomination before kindergarten when you cross through the community my father came from.) His family line was as far away from the average South side Dutch onion farmer as New York is from Chicago but the legacy of semi-greatness ended with my father's father. While Hank was still in high school, his mother died of cancer and in his last year of college, his father became wheelchair bound and spent the next fifteen years of his life 'rotting in a nursing home' as my father would say. Luckily, Hank had finished college well before the time his father became a convalescent, so there was still money for him to pursue a knock-about liberal arts education. His younger brother's weren't so lucky. They were left to fend for themselves with only the family name. Fortunately, the family name got them in on the ground floor of the emerging, corporate medical profession in the dying days of doctors paying house calls. My father's brothers and sisters never visited my grandfather so I rarely intersected with them when we did.

Most of Hank DeJong's brand of Dutch don't live in staid South Holland, a town whose white water tower has a baby-blue painting of Dürer's praying hands with the motto "A town of churches: painted under it. My father's brand of Dutch, the kind who work in offices instead of hauling garbage, live in the bright new, greener-than-green lawn subdivisions of western DuPage County or in the Lakefront neighborhoods. They intermarried with Catholics and could explain why Carlos in Highland Park was considered the best French Restaurant in the city. These were sincere Rockefeller Republicans who sat on the boards of storefront missionary black churches, read James Baldwin in neighborhood book groups and even prayed regularly that God would guide their anointed emissaries from the shiny churches towards solving the social problems of inner city families. Some of them even disliked our current president Ronald Regan as much as my father did, although they expressed their feelings with far fewer swear words than dad. "Your mom's people," Uncle Jerry would say, "think that son of a bitch is the second coming." Uncle Jerry called the rest of the South Side Dutch, the son's and daughters of onion farmers 'your mom's people.'

He kept telling me to read some book written in the 1930's called So Big to "really understand where they're coming from – against the grain of the natural world."

My father's father, the grandfather I barely knew, was New Jersey Reformed Dutch not Grand Rapids or Chicago Dutch, which meant that he wasn't devoutly religious and his family line shared some connection to the founding Dutch elite of New York City. After World War II, Hank' father found his way to Chicago via Walter Reed Army Hospital – don't ask my dad how because his version of the story doesn't make sense – and once he

got here, he decided to set up a private practice in one of the old city neighborhoods populated by the Onion farming Dutch people who did not have many educated people among them to serve as doctors or accountants and what not.

My father, like many other children of reasonable privilege figuring themselves out on the early 60's college campus of America without a GI bill backing them, became a radical. Becoming a radical in Hank's a priori life situation really meant something much like the smell of the first slices of strong cheese being cut in closed room because Daad first started his education at a Calvin College, a conservative Christian liberal arts school in Grand Rapids, Michigan. It was a place where social upheaval generally meant 10% of the student body skipping mandatory Sunday service rather than free love and racial intermixing.

Remembering those days, Hank would regale stories of traveling to New York City from Michigan in a car without heat just to go see Dylan play in some small spot in the Village. He engaged in these rebellious acts with Marilyn's younger brother and a fellow student named Paul Schrader who eventually wrote the movie Taxi Driver. He told stories about 'how Paul in college', published ribald parodies of Christian Reformed Church religious periodicals like the Banner. "Man, if I had a copy of Paul's 'Banana–ner' today, I'd bet it'd be worth something," my dad would exclaim, punctuating his nostalgia. Hank DeJong never says certain things directly but I knew these stories had sections left out, parts of the story which eventually led to him getting kicked out of Calvin College and finishing his degree at Michigan State University where he was able to meet up with a far

more pungent strain of radical and more important to Hank's future, radicals who questioned the role of God in the universe and daily life.

After college, my dad became an organizer – 'a paid activist' as he puts it – working for the Southern Baptist Coalition. He was placed on the far South Side of Chicago, integrating schools and helping to build inter-racial churches. One of the school districts he helped guide through desegregation was South Holland's high school system. This was a place where, when a black family tried moving into this suburb in the 1970's, residents proudly boasted legend that – truthfully or projecting – the mayor of the town himself burnt down their garage. Many of the onion farmers whose children had been delivered by Hank's father, my grandfather the doctor, thought he was 'bringing niggers in just to soil his father's good name." (Little did they know Grandpa DeJong ran the first practice in Chicago that ever hired Jewish doctors.)

After marrying Marilyn, renown as a former Goldblatt's department store model and one of the most beautiful women in the Dutch community anywhere from Chicago to New Jersey, then moving on to building up haystacks of ill-will for his role in desegregation, Hank stayed on the Southside but not the Dutch parts. After helping to found the Southeast Community College, he became a social worker and he's been one as long as I can remember. Long before my first memory, I'm sure. These activities, along with adopting me, led Pete our neighbor to categorize my father as a "full on nigger lover." To Susie and other parents whose teenage kids often ended up in a place where they had no other hope besides the community college, Hank DeJong was a saint and a "god damn good drinking buddy" as Mr. Torricelli would say when I mentioned my father's name.

Everything that happened between the years 1962 and roughly the time Nixon resigned for people like my father constitutes not just a bunch of years where stuff happened, but a movement. I believe my father even called my childhood poops B.M. because the acronym included the word movement. My father was forever becoming involved in all sorts of movements, the Puerto Rican Independence movement, the integrated church movement and the open families movement, (I never knew what it was but I know it has nothing to do with sex). As he became more involved in the movements, my mother began a movement away from him, until she finally made motions all the way towards divorce. As a reaction to mom removing herself, Hank began other various movements with co-workers and selected female students at the community college where he had been teaching a weekend first year English course since the time the school was just a bunch of trailers in a parking lot.

A year after the divorce, my father reaped a promotion in his agency and relocated to Springfield, the Illinois state capital hallowed as Abraham Lincoln's birthplace. For as long as I can recollect my father with those cohesive memories of conscious childhood, the time when you first think adult-ish thoughts, he's spent most of his week traveling from one small Illinois town to another. On weekends, he comes back to Chicago to see me but he doesn't really have his own place. He rents a room on the North Side from some guy I've only meet twice before, some guy in politics who knows the alderman for our neighborhood like most people know the A&P clerk and according to my father always orders coffee at Greek restaurants saying, "I like it black, like my mayors," even though he is white for shock value.

Ryan O'Malley's dad says he'd run naked down Michigan Avenue before voting for a black mayor. According to my dad and this guy who is friend's with the alderman, some of the people who hang out at diners would do worse. Evidently, that is why 'black, like my mayors' coming from him is so funny.

I never meet my Dad's girlfriends with the same regularity I meet my mother's boyfriends. I wish I would because according to Uncle Jerry, who runs into my dad at adult parties on a regular basis, "they're total babes – total 9's and 10's."

"If you're dad can score women of that caliber and he looks like that Jewish guy on Barney Miller, just think what you're gonna do when you get older with those big brown eyes and nice skin of yours," Uncle Jerry always advises me with a whistle and a snap of his finger.

"Jerry, that's no way to talk to a child about his father," Ms. Greenfield would say in a voice of scoffing correction. By the tone of her voice, I think Tony and Jeff's mom has taken my mother's side of the divorce, even though she has never expressed to me what her side exactly is, except with an occasional tisk-tisk or frown.

One thing for sure, everyone seems to love my father. I wish I knew why a little more but then again, I'm glad he left when I was too young to have developed any idea of what it would be like to have him around all the time.

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Best Friends and Rock T-shirts

In homeroom this morning, we've been handed our group lists for the all-school field trip. This year, it's the Field Museum in the morning then the Museum of Science and Industry in the afternoon. Spring all-school trips are better because we usually go to a White Sox Game.

"You're getting married for sure!" I hear Gina scream from behind me in the hall at the beginning of indoor recess. "Your dad and Mr. Quaker Oats himself are chaperoning the same *group*. Where are you guys going? Not the mooo-seum! The Chapel of Love?"

"Gina, you're in the same group. My group. Is that where you want to go?" I say, irritated with her never ending jokes about Emily Baer.

"I know. I just think it's funny. Like a funny coincidence… or destiny." She sings destiny like a really bad opera singer. Gina's maturity goes out the window when it comes to the elementary school dating scene.

"We're a small school. Coincidences are more little things that happen in the mist of something huge," I say, "Like me being adopted and of all the places I could live, I end up getting stuck with you as a partner."

"In the *midst,* not mist. Mist is for mountains." Gina pretends to pick her nose and flick it at me. "Good one DeJong. But not as good as me." I notice she's wearing one of Simone's shirts with the little alligators. It fits her like a hospital gown. "Does Simone know you have her shirt on?"

"No. Does Quaker Oatmeal know you get bad grades on spelling tests? Better share everything with her or mind your own business about what I borrow from my sister." She's also wearing her sister's feathery roach clip earrings.

I tell Gina I'll mind my own business if she stops making Quaker Oatmeal jokes about Emily Baer. I tell her she is beginning to sound like a second grader. It stings for a moment and right when I feel like she's going to lash out with something really mean, she says "I guess you're right. Besides, she didn't seem to care if you had dressed up as Hitler for Halloween so I got nuthin'." You got nuthin' was one of Simone's many phrases Gina has picked up and repeats to no irritating end.

"And if you start again about Quaker Oats – I mean Emily, Gina, I'm going to start calling you Don Rickles, in front of everyone." Evidently Gina feels like we're brother and sister and therefore, she needs to give me a hard time. I change the subject by asking her about our magazine project.

Genius kids have to make their own magazine as a quarter project. We do project stuff in quarters, not semesters like normal kids, (we're not supposed to use labels), because our

classes are accelerated or something weird like that. Jeff Greenfield thinks the assignment is 'gay' but I think it's the best thing since Rainbow Cones since we get to use the photo copier in the teacher's lounge to make the final copy of our publication.

Gina answers my question saying something totally unrelated. "Omar Haddad is worried he will get beat up if the older kids see him using the copier."

"I could care less about Omar Haddad or anyone in the Haddad family, Gina. Omar has been getting beat up since he thought Star Wars was a TV show." I sigh, exasperated and wondering if I should give up on Gina and go for Emily Baer anyway. She's always nice and serious not sarcastic like Gina. "So are we project partners on this? Remember our idea?"

Gina and I have been kicking around an idea for a magazine dedicated to the acting career of Philip McKeon who plays the son of Alice on the TV show Alice. "Alice isn't on this year but no one knows he sings like Leif Garret," Gina always advises her older sisters. When Simone laughs and says 'uh-huh, I've heard this," Gina tells her the McKeon's are an 'acquired taste' and that she wouldn't understand. I have dreams that by time I get to sixth grade, his sister, Nancy McKeon will show up to our elementary school in a limousine and whisk me away from Chicago to Hollywood to start my career as a child actor. I have never told Gina that daydream, a dream I've played in my head so many times, I'm 95% convinced its going come true by the sixth grade.

She puts her hand on my shoulder, imitating Mr. Jerez. “Jonah,” she says deepening her voice. “I’m sorry to tell you, we have to pick new partners for this quarter project. Work with someone you’ve never worked with before.”

“Who told you this?”

“Omar Haddad.”

“Some reliable source. Remember when you asked him if he saw “The Empire Strikes Back” and he said ‘No. What channel?’ *after* already getting beat up for the Star Wars thing?”

“Give the guy a break.” She flicks another fake booger at me. “He was in America for like, two seconds, when second grade started. And we’re talking school not movies. He pays attention to what’s going on with school unlike most of these yahoos in *Eleanor Rooosevelt*.”

“Gina, does it ever cross your mind that you’re kinda mean?” It suddenly comes out and I’ve never asked that before I’ve never asked her that before.

“I’m your best friend, so what the hell do you care if I’m mean or who I work with? You just have to get a new project partner.”

Wow. I've never considered Gina my best friend. Up until this point, I've always called Jeff Greenfield my best friend. Simone says girls can have one guy best friend and one girl best friend. Does the same go for boys?

"So then, Gina, what are we going to do about the Philip and Nancy McKeon fan magazine?"

"You can have it. I've grown tired of him. Besides, it's not so original anymore and magazines like Tiger Beat are for babies. And you may be able to find someone else who likes your idea."

"It was our idea," I remind her.

"Your idea now. Knock yourself out." Gina needed to stop saying all those little adultish things like "knock yourself out." She sounds like she belongs in a Little Rascals episode. I would tell her but now that she's my best friend, I'm going to go easy on her.

For the last three minutes of indoor recess, Gina and I discuss the pros and cons of outdoor recess. What I don't tell her is, since I've started sweating more than sixth graders do and sometimes, even her dad, I prefer indoor recess because I don't come back to class with giant, wet rings of sweat under the my arms of my T-shirt. I also don't tell her this is why I have started wearing black rock band T-shirts from Hegwish Records. I

actually don't know that many songs by the Kinks, their T-shirt was on sale for $5.99 and it hides sweat.

When we return to the library for third period, Dr. Jenny Ryan, the genius program coordinator has set up a display of magazines past classes had done for their quarter project. There is a magazine about horses, one about insects, one about log cabins, two about women scientists and one really depressing magazine about kids who had cancer. Dr. Jenny Ryan seemed to really love this particular magazine project. I think to myself, "I get really grossed out by goiters. Should I do a magazine about goiters? That's like cancer."

But I've got bigger things to think about than choosing subject or finding pre-research about strange growths on old people, I have to find a new project partner and someone whose parents will let me work at their house over Thanksgiving.