

ONE

TUK-A-TUK/TUK-A-TUK/TUK-A-TUK.

It was that soothing sound he got to hear only on those rare occasions when the halls were empty, like when he went to the boys' room during class. His hand trailing behind him, he'd slide his bitten fingernails across the seams between the multicolored metal lockers stretching down the hall in front of him, their angled reflections glowing off the polished floor. Tuk-a-tuk/Tuk-a-tuk/Tuk-a-tuk.

He was making his sound now, though he wasn't headed to the

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boys' room. And it wasn't soothing him, no, not soothing him one bit. Alone in the silent and gleaming hallway, he knew that something terrible was about to happen to him, and he had to find a place of solitude that very instant. He turned the corner, tried the door to the auditorium, and to his relief found it unlocked. He rushed down the raked aisle past the empty rows of gray-cushioned seats, up on to the stage, and behind the curtain to the darkened wing that connected the stage to the music room, where he unfolded a lone metal chair leaning against the concrete block wall next to the caged-in lighting panel, there as if it had been waiting for him.

Even before he sat, the tears started from a well deep within him, at once down in the unbearable weight of his stomach, but also up in the just-as-unbearable hollowness of his throat. For how long had he been expecting this to happen? Certainly months; maybe years now. He cried in the silent darkness, heaving and rocking and gasping for breath. For ten minutes, fifteen minutes, maybe twenty, he cried and he cried. Leaning his elbows on his knees, his hands pressed mercilessly against his heated face, covering his eyes, and daring not to let out a sound lest someone hear him, he cried and he cried.

Finally, silently, barely keeping his balance, he shakily stood. His knees were weak and his head was spinning, and he had to hold on to the chair back, but yes, he stood up, and made his way back out to the auditorium entrance. As he crept into the empty hall once again, he knew he couldn't make it much further: the tears were returning. Panicked that someone might see him, he quickly walked around the corner and into the nurse's office. Mrs. Lincoln looked up from her desk. "Seth? What's wrong!?" At hearing her question, and at seeing the office was otherwise empty, he finally let out a heaving wail. She stood up from her desk. "Are you sick? Did something happen?" He shook his head. "What's wrong, dear?" and he shook his head again. "Okay, lie down here." She led him across to one of the cots with their shiny dark brown vinyl covering bolted to their wooden frames, and closed the cotton curtain

around them. She stood in silence, and then, "Can you talk to me?" He shook his head no. "Seth? Would you like me to call to Dr. Sylvan?" When he nodded, she left him alone behind the curtain and called the guidance office.

"Seth, Mrs. McCabe told me that as soon as Dr. Sylvan is back from lunch, he'll come here to see you, okay? Here, have some water. Can you wait until then?" He nodded again, sipped from the cup she handed him, and was left to be. Now alone on the curtained-off cot, it was just he and Mrs. Lincoln in the silent office as she began scratching some notes at her desk.

Moments passed. He was stifling his crying behind his hands, his face sweaty and dirty, when finally, he heard Dr. Sylvan scurry in, his dress shoes now poking through under the curtain. "Seth? Can I open the curtain?" he asked with a warm concern, and slowly, he did. "What's wrong Seth? Did something happen? Did something happen at home?" He paused, and Seth's crying became ever more intense. "Okay. Seth? Do you think you can make it to my office?" And slowly he rose from the cot.

He sat down in the orange molded plastic chair next to Dr. Sylvan's desk. "Seth, tell me. Did something happen at home? Is everything okay?" Still, he didn't answer. He just kept on crying. "Try to tell me something, okay? Can you talk a little bit?"

And then, finally, "I'm just so *tired*."

"Tired of what, dear? Can you tell me?"

"Tired of *everything*."

"Okay, okay, I see," Dr. Sylvan said leaning forward, "Look, first just tell me. Have you taken any drugs or anything?"

Riled and insulted, he shook his head no. Dr. Sylvan and Seth's family lived on the same block. Seth grew up with his kids. They'd see each other at temple all the time. Drugs?

"I just don't wanna be here anymore," he finally spat out, "I'm just tired...of *everything*."

"When you say 'be here anymore,' where do you mean?"

"Just this school, this town, around these people."

"Okay, I understand, I understand. But maybe you can tell me

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a little bit about what it is you're so tired of? You think you can do that?"

Increasingly irked at this invasion of his privacy, and of what he regarded as Dr. Sylvan's condescending intonation with its singsong lilt, Seth nonetheless mustered a few words. "I don't have any friends. I don't like anyone and they don't like me. I don't like the things they like. I don't like *anything*."

"Okay, I see," he said gently. "Well, I see you at lunch in the cafeteria, sitting with your classmates..."

"I guess so." He looked around the tiny office, windowless but for a glass pane facing out to Mrs. McCabe's desk, though all covered in oak tag; an office he'd never been in before, books and papers strewn about though looking as if they hadn't been touched in months. Just over Dr. Sylvan's shoulder on the back wall was a poster of a white kitten hanging from a branch; "Hang in there, baby," it read. On the side wall, over Seth's head, was another, with that quote from Robert Frost about taking the road less traveled by, and Seth just thought to himself, Dr. Sylvan's a jerk too.

"And I know you're working over at the library after school, right?"

Seth *hated* it there. The women who ran the library were bossy and stupid. "A child librarian who hates children," his brother once said about Mrs. Donegan. He had taken to purposely mis-shelving books because, as he put it to himself, "Who cares anymore?"

"Maybe library work isn't for you," Mrs. Donegan said after confronting him about the matter the year before, but for some reason, they kept him on. It could have been Mrs. Clark who intervened on his behalf, he mused. She was so nice to *everybody*, even stupid Seth, maybe.

"Yeah..."

"And you're doing all your schoolwork, right?" And again, Seth was insulted. "Of course!"

"Can you tell me, is your dad having any trouble at his job?" No, he wasn't, and Seth did not understand why it would matter if he were.

“Okay,” Dr. Sylvan continued, perhaps observing Seth’s increasing irritation with this line of inquiry, “What I’m getting at is, on the *outside*, from out here, things might not seem so bad. But since you say you’re so tired of everything, maybe we need to look on the *inside*, to try to understand why you’re feeling like this, and how we can try to make you feel better. Does that make sense?”

It did, maybe, but Seth gave no reply other than a dismissive shrug. “I’m not gonna feel better.”

“Okay, but maybe you can do me a favor anyway. Just tell me one thing you *enjoy* doing, okay? Just one thing.”

Seth thought momentarily. “I like the Beatles,” he said flatly.

“Okay, that’s good. Why not this: maybe when you get home from school today, you can just listen to some Beatles records? Just take a little time for yourself to enjoy that?”

“I don’t have the records,” Seth said with a tinge of annoyance, “I recorded everything when they did ‘Beatles A-to-Z’ on the radio last year.”

“Well that’s fine too. Can you do that for me?”

Seth nodded, and they sat in a silence that lasted for several moments.

“Is there anything else you’d like to tell me? Maybe a few more things you like? Or hate?”

More silence.

“All right, if you don’t want to talk now, I understand. Would you feel okay heading to class maybe? You can sit with me more here if you prefer, or would you like to go back to Mrs. Lincoln if you want to lie down more?”

“I’ll go to class.”

“Okay...would you feel comfortable coming back to talk to me tomorrow? Tell me how the Beatles went? It might be a good idea...”

Seth nodded, picked himself up, and with an embarrassment verging on shame, and with what he feared was a freakishly awkward gait, he walked past Mrs. McCabe without so much as a glance, making his furtive way back into the still-empty hallway.

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Tuk-a-tuk/Tuk-a-tuk/Tuk-a-tuk.

After stopping in the boys' room to ensure he no longer looked like he'd been crying, he quietly took his seat in Mr. Pizzuti's social studies class. Seth never had problems with his school work. It's true, back in middle school, he would sometimes call Shari Goldberg for help with algebra. Shari would take him through the problem sets so systematically. She was so clear and so organized, and she really did help him get through the class with an 'A'. Looking back, he knew he hadn't expressed sufficient appreciation for her help, though he felt unable to thank her now, so long after the fact. In high school now, all the other boys loved Shari. Everyone said she looked like Goldie Hawn.

He would spend as little time as possible on his homework, yet still, he'd earn his teachers' praise; he was always in the honors classes without giving his accomplishments a second thought. He'd recently encountered what he thought to be some clever terms that captured the difference between him and the kids in his classes: some people were "book smart," but others were "people smart." Seth regarded himself as "people smart" more than his "book smart" honors classmates like Shari, in part because he wasn't at the very top of his class, but more because he had disdain for what he regarded as their hollow intellects, their superficial concerns, and, perhaps especially, their lack of warmth toward him. The girls might go out for cheerleading, the boys might play on the tennis team. As for the dumb kids, the girls might play field hockey, and, worst of the worst, football and wrestling for the boys. And the woods. The dumb kids would go into the woods and drink beer or smoke cigarettes. And they were just so hateful, and so *dumb*, most of them. Even Shari was a cheerleader, which meant that Seth would always be suspicious of her intelligence.

After completing his homework, Seth got out his reel-to-reels, set one up on the spindle of his father's upright Tandberg recorder, put on the good Sennheiser headphones, and pressed the solenoid "play" button that now glowed green in the darkened living

room. Just as his father always did, he'd marked each tape's contents on the back of its box with a black grease pencil, the sort whose wax was wrapped with perforated paper that you could peel away in strips by pulling on an embedded string, thus exposing more: Beatles April 24th, Beatles April 25th... Having been listening to his beloved tapes practically every day for a year now, he took great pleasure—even a certain amount of pride—in being able to sing note-for-note accompaniments, to the mournful horn on “For No One,” to the dancing harpsichord on “In My Life,” to George's rare, gorgeous, guitar solo on “Something.” He delighted in accompanying the high harmonies on “I'll Be Back,” the low harmonies on “Baby's in Black,” singing the counter-melodies on “Help!” and “She's Leaving Home,” in pounding along to the guitar downstrokes on “And Your Bird Can Sing,” in doo-doo-doo-ing along with Paul's bass on “Rain,” in trying to get Ringo's incredible fills on “A Day in The Life,” wrapping his mind around his genius mockery of a drum solo on “The End,” or bashing madly to the fearsome assault of “Helter Skelter,” with its sinister and taunting false ending. He loved every consonance, every rare dissonance. He ached to befriend “The Fool on the Hill” and the “Nowhere Man,” and longed to know who were “Julia” and “Eleanor Rigby,” or *what*, even, was the elusive “Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds.” He could even tell which numbers the Beatles *didn't* write, simply because they just weren't as good. The one exception to this rule was “Words of Love” by someone called Buddy Holly, a number displaying a songcraft that genuinely rivaled the Fabs' in its sheer melodic and harmonic perfection. Still, he would get frustrated and angry with himself for not understanding John's “I Am the Walrus” or “Come Together.” Was he just stupid?

This mid-spring evening, he listened to his tapes' final stretch of songs, and, as always, cringed with condescension when the deejay Alison Steele incorrectly said that “Yes It Is” was from “that same White Album” as was the previous track, “Yer Blues”: his brother had bought the White Album when it first came out, with its embossed cover and stamped copy number, and Seth knew it inside

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out. He would also, as always, get deeply annoyed at the very end when, after “Your Mother Should Know,” a split second after the final “Yeeeah...” Steele abruptly and boorishly chimed in, “That’s it! That’s all we have!” Still, it was all such a fantastic trip for Seth, listening to these magnificent explosions of melody and harmony and beat over and over again, feeling completely certain that these four effortlessly loveable magical spacemen from another world were in direct, intimate contact with him and him alone, or at least him especially. The Beatles were Seth’s own little secret he would assure himself, knowing full well how silly that sounded. Of course he knew that everyone felt a special bond with the Beatles. It was part of their magic. But still, no one could possibly love them as much as he did...

And he laughed with disdain as he thought of Dr. Sylvan, as if Seth needed any encouragement to listen to his beloved Beatles.

The next morning, Seth made it to the bus just on time. The older buses, numbers two through seventeen, had low seatbacks lined with metal tubing around their edges. Uniquely, bus two’s interior was painted shocking blue, like a Charms Pop; bus one was retired, hence a great mystery to Seth, although some of the older kids claimed to remember it. “It ran on rubber bands and chewing gum!” insisted David Jacobs, who lived just around the corner from Seth in a big house with columns. But these newer buses, starting with shiny bus eighteen, which the district put into service when Seth was in fourth grade, and was the one everyone in elementary school hoped would be used on their route—designed with modern sharp angles rather than old-style curvy ones—these had higher seatbacks that were padded all the way around. In high school, Seth especially liked the newer buses because their seats afforded him a moment’s privacy while the other kids were yelling and acting like wild jerks all around him. Sometimes he’d miss his bus of course, and so his mother would make him walk the mile-and-a-half down the hill to school. On rare occasion, she’d now allow him to take the old green Duster that his parents purchased—

supposedly for a dollar—from the neighbors. He loved that old car. His father said that the Plymouth Duster and the Dodge Dart were basically the same car, and that it had a really good engine. Driving the old thing, Seth could actually see the road passing beneath him through the rusted-out floor. It gave him a thrill.

And yes, he went to class, and dutifully handed in his homework, and had lunch with the honors kids, just like every day. But in the afternoon, as gym was looming, he went to see if Dr. Sylvan was available. Again, he self-consciously walked right past Mrs. McCabe, and gently knocked on Dr. Sylvan's closed door. It opened to Dr. Sylvan sitting behind his desk, but there too was Dave Miller, just leaning back into the molded plastic chair; well-built, with more than the beginnings of a mustache, a black hair pick forever sticking out the back pocket of his Lee's dungarees, and, certified pothead that he was, almost certainly stoned.

Upon seeing Dave—someone Seth hadn't really known since middle school, because he was never in any advanced classes—he went flush with embarrassment. He's gonna tell everyone I was here! And what's a pothead doing in here anyway? Heads are cool kids, why would they need to talk to Dr. Sylvan?

"Oh Seth! Take a seat outside, we're just finishing up here, okay?" And moments later, just after Dave walked out and gave Seth a surprisingly warm greeting—"Hi Seth!"—Dr. Sylvan poked his head out to invite him in. "Come in, come in."

Recovering from a mild sense of wonderment at his encounter with Dave—their sudden mutual acknowledgment downright frightening to Seth, Dave's unexpected if not exactly reassuring smile—he silently walked past Mrs. McCabe once again, and took his place in the orange chair next to Dr. Sylvan's desk.

"So, Dave comes in here?" He asked tentatively, "How come?"

"He has some problems at home that he wants to talk about sometimes," Dr. Sylvan replied matter-of-factly.

"And he doesn't mind that I saw him here? He just opened the door like that?"

"*He* opened the door for you, not *me*, so I guess that's your an-

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swer. I'm certainly not going to tell him *not* to," he smiled.

Dr. Sylvan had a caring, gentle manner that veered toward the feminine, even the prissy. When he was a little boy and was over at the Sylvans' house playing with Caren, a year older than Seth, Dr. Sylvan—*Mr.* Sylvan in the neighborhood—with his soft way and his breathy voice, always seemed more like the wife, the plainspoken Mrs. Sylvan more the husband. Sitting on the bright red carpet in her messy bedroom, Caren would regale Seth with her latest crushes—Jack Wild one week, Bobby Sherman the next—while listening to records her parents bought for her: the soundtracks to “Oliver!” to “Sweet Charity,” to “Henry, Sweet Henry.” Little Seth knew that, as a boy, he was supposed to be embarrassed and even disdainful as Caren went on about her new doll that could wet itself, or her new makeup set with a mirror that could light up, but honestly, though he really didn't care for such things one bit, he was perfectly content listening to her rambling on and on. Now, now Caren was practically belle of the ball at school, with her confidence and her ostentation and her curvaceous endowments, and Seth, Seth was in pieces, sitting across the desk from her father in the plastic chair in the guidance office.

“How are you feeling today Seth?”

Seth shrugged. “Better than yesterday,” he offered.

“Well that's good to hear! Beatles good?”

“Always,” Seth mustered, and inwardly scoffed at what he felt was either Dr. Sylvan's feigned optimism, or his outright stupidity; as if something in his life had somehow actually improved since yesterday? Still, he was a bit more prepared to talk than he had been the day before.

“Would you like to keep going from yesterday? You said you were just tired of things, of being here.”

He was silent, then sighed. “I just don't think they're really my friends. They always say that I think I'm a know-it-all, that I always think I'm right. Doesn't everyone think they're right? Why would someone say something if they think they're wrong? I just don't think the same way they do, that's all. I disagree with them, and

that makes me conceited and wrong. They just don't like me, no matter what I say."

"Can you give me an example?"

"I don't know, like, movies. Last year I saw this really great movie, 'Days of Heaven.' Did you see it?" Dr. Sylvan shook his head. "I even bought the record of the music. I remember I told my parents that even though it was about America, it just didn't seem like an American movie to me. It just felt so different, had such a special look and feel to it. I told some of the kids that they really should go see it, that it was such a great movie, such great photography, and this girl who was in it, she was so good." Seth paused. He was indeed taken by that girl. Linda Manz was her name. There was an incredible picture of her on the LP jacket that Seth bought. It captured everything about her, her honesty, her naturalness. The way she spoke over the scenes of the movie, it was a sudden, haunting love Seth felt for her, like she had always been there for him and always would be. "But no one was even interested. Well, Keith Epstein finally saw it and liked it, he told me. But mostly, I couldn't talk about it with anyone. I said such good things about the movie, and they didn't care at all!"

"I remember when it was playing. Now you have me regretting I missed it."

"So they all loved 'Grease' and 'Animal House.' 'Animal House' just looked so stupid, I didn't see it. But of course they all loved it."

"And Mitch Byrd? He just lies! He'll say things that just aren't true, just to make himself look good. Everyone just accepts it and stays his friend. I challenge him, and it's me who they get mad at! They can't see he's a fake! Like when he said his father was the one who worked with the town to put in the new shopping center. He acted proud of that. That stupid shopping center? It's something to be proud of? And it wasn't even true! His father had nothing to do with it, my parents told me. I went back and read about the whole thing in the old papers at the library. In all the articles, they mentioned his father only once or twice. I knew he was lying, and I challenged him in front of everybody, but they took his side, saying

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I was being conceited and that he should know what his father did or didn't do, and that I always think I'm right."

Seth suddenly felt he was talking too much. But Dr. Sylvan continued: "And how did that make you feel?"

"Like, what's wrong with me? What did I do wrong? I was right, but they sided with him!

"So they must just hate me, that's all."

"So you were angry?"

Seth hesitated. "I felt like I was the bad guy, and that I just do things wrong."

"Even though you were right?"

"It doesn't matter." Seth looked down at his dirty sneakers. He didn't have Adidas or Pumas; he still wore Pro Keds. He was the last among his friends to get a down jacket in middle school, the last to get a "silk" polyester flower shirt back then, too. They made fun of him for it. He was too skinny, he wore glasses, and the two kids he hung out most with, Days-of-Heaven Keith Epstein and also Animal-House/Grease Michael Markus, they never let him forget it. Seth's family wasn't wealthy. His father went from job to job in the city, and his mother had been unjustly fired from her half-time teaching job, though finally won a years-long hard-fought battle—even against her own union—to get it back. All Seth knew for sure was that the honors kids—to say nothing of the regular kids, he was sure—ridiculed him for not having the latest stuff. He was unable to simply dismiss their nastiness as shallow nonsense. He took it to heart and turned their ridicule back on himself. all back on himself.

"Being right doesn't matter."

As April turned to May, Seth continued to see Dr. Sylvan every few days, for all the good it would do, he nonetheless thought. The crying bouts persisted. One day, he even had to go home early from the library; trying to stifle his tears, it just became all too much. He hid in the bleach-and-disinfectant-smelling public bathroom, in the stall, curled on the floor, and he cried and cried. He pulled

himself together enough to go out to the front desk to tell Tim, the clerk on duty who, with the press of a metal button, checked books out for patrons on the electric scanner that somehow recorded the information on their library cards like Star Trek, its bright light passing across and printing everything on the roll of greasy paper spilling out in twists and curls toward the floor. He told Tim he didn't feel well and needed to call his mother.

Tim was okay. A few months back, he had been going on and on about this new song, "Heart of Glass," by a band called Blondie. "They released this one song as a whole record! A whole record, not just as a 45! Can you imagine listening to one song for that long?" It turned out that Tim was wrong, that he'd yet to encounter the new twelve-inch single format. But anyway, now it was a huge hit with its synthetic dance beat and its soaring and ethereal vocal, and Seth loved it. Tim was in his twenties, and Seth really liked that an adult like him, an adult who made nice mistakes like that, was being friendly toward him.

His mother picked him up and drove him home, neither of them pursuing the subject of Seth's supposed malady in any real sense—he just didn't feel well, that's all, he mumbled from the passenger seat—and he went into his room, lay on his bed, and cried more. At one point, his brother, home from college for a few days, peeked in on him. Seth turned from the pillow where his face was buried, allowing his brother a quick glance at his tears, wondering if maybe he'd come in and talk. His brother stood silently in the doorway for a brief moment with a confused look on his face, turned away, and closed the door behind him.

The Monday after attending the big Three Mile Island "no nukes" rally with his parents down in Washington, Seth was back in Dr. Sylvan's office. "Oh, here's one! In middle school one time in gym class, Mr. Barbieri lined us all up against the wall and started yelling at us for something or other. At one point he looked at me and said, 'And you! I don't even know your name!' I didn't have a gym suit; I just wore a pair of shorts and a plain t-shirt without my name. I told him my name, but he told me to come forward and

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stand in front of everyone else. He yelled at me, why didn't I have a gym suit, and I just told him that I didn't need one since I can wear something else. And he yelled, 'What is it, the money? Your father can't afford to buy you a gym suit? Here, here's money for a suit,' and he took out his wallet and waved a few dollars in my face. I said 'I don't want money. It's not the money. I just don't think anyone's money needs to pay for a gym suit if they don't need one.' He went on about Rosenfeld this, Rosenfeld that, always sneering when he said my name, I remember. Then, he yelled at everyone, 'You kids! You know what gym class is for? It's to prepare you for the army! You think you could get away with that kind of attitude in the army? Not wearing your uniform because you don't feel like it?' It felt like he yelled at me for the whole class period. I think maybe he did."

"Just a second," Dr. Sylvan interrupted. We always *bought* Evan and Caren their gym uniforms. They're not *issued* by the district..."

"I know!"

"So they can't be mandatory..."

"Of course not! That's the whole point!" Seth said with increasing agitation.

"Okay, okay. Look Seth, I'm on your side on this. I just wanted to clarify. I'm listening."

"I just didn't want to buy one, since I could wear my own clothes. I didn't want to dress like everybody else. I don't even think I was the only one who didn't have a suit, but he picked *me* out of the line, and yelled at *me*.

"Oh God I remember this exactly. When we walked out of gym, some of the other kids just shook their heads at me, or just sneered, 'Rosenfeld...' just like Mr. Barbieri did. Not *one kid*, not even my *friends*, supported me, or said I did a good job standing up for myself, or anything like that. *Not one!*

"So I told my dad about what happened. He was really proud of the way I handled it, and he and my mom were *furious* at Mr. Barbieri, especially at his crack about the army. The very next day he called school from his work, and I remember this, he told me he

said to Mr. Barbieri, ‘I understand my son’s been giving you trouble in gym class.’”

Seth had been upset at the time that his father worded it like that, but his mother assured him that sometimes more can be accomplished if you pretend you’re not angry.

“And Mr. Barbieri said ‘Oh no, no, I was just concerned that I should know all the kids’ names, that’s all,’” mocking Mr. Barbieri’s dumb city accent.

Seth paused, savoring the memory of what an obsequious weasel Mr. Barbieri was, and now, finally, exposing his idiocy to someone else at school, someone with authority. Dr. Sylvan just shook his head in silence.

“Anyway, I wrote my name on my shirt in big letters with a black magic marker, and that was the end of it.

“But no one supported me, said I did the right thing, or *anything*.”

“It really seems that he was in the wrong. I’m sorry Seth.”

Seth bristled. First, he thought, Mr. Barbieri wasn’t merely “in the wrong.” To Seth, Mr. Barbieri was a complete *shmuck*, too stupid and too primitive to be teaching at the school at all. But especially, he was annoyed that Dr. Sylvan didn’t seem to appreciate how awful the other kids were to him. In front of everybody, he’d stood up to a tyrant of a teacher and held his own, and no one, now not even the school psychologist, seemed to understand it, or give him the plaudits he felt he deserved.

In high school, finally, plenty of other kids ditched their gym suits as well—especially the heads—and Seth felt a sense of victory, and a silent bond with the heads, and vindication for his refusing to wear a gym suit back in middle school. Back then, he was second string on the basketball team. Now, he took great pride in being one of the better players in the whole school—usually picked first in gym class—but absolutely never, ever, would he join the team; no, not in a million years would he voluntarily put himself at the mercy of those idiot gym teachers.

Seth actually got along with most of his teachers quite well. The

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good ones, he felt, appreciated his conscientious and oftentimes cleverly-written schoolwork, his quiet demeanor, his dry sense of humor. For his part, Seth genuinely appreciated the smart ones, like Dr. Conklin, the best English teacher by far, who had them read Kafka, Camus, Mann, and who was no doubt disappointed to be relegated to a public high school instead of teaching at a college, though he clearly had made the best of it, and also like Mr. Dante, his sharp-witted music teacher who unfortunately played favorites, Seth fortuitously being among them, and perhaps especially like his marvelous art teacher Mr. Schumann, cultured and sophisticated—Seth imagined him living off in the woods in a small glass and wood house—who, rather miraculously, inspired Seth to draw at a level that nearly rivaled the genuinely artistic kids.

He dealt fine with the not-especially-bright ones too, like the typing teacher Mrs. Stankowski, whom he felt sorry for, reciting the same mindless plonk-plonk-plonk instructions day after day, year after year, but who was genuinely good-hearted, or like his geometry teacher Mrs. Betts who constantly got confused solving problems at the board, and who regularly had to be bailed out by the students. She was so good-natured about it though, and was able to laugh at herself, and Seth and the kids really loved her for that.

But Seth had no tolerance for the dumb, mean-spirited ones, and he didn't hesitate to let them know it either, like the awful Mrs. Piel. Mrs. Piel was rigid, humorless, and seemed to have it in for Seth, who wouldn't hesitate to speak out in disagreement with her pedestrian opinions in the absolutely stultifying English class she taught. One time she described some character or other as "empathetic," and Seth ostentatiously rolled his eyes. "Is there a problem Mr. Rosenfeld?" "Well, the word is 'empathic,'" and her eyes beat down mercilessly on Seth's. The next day, just as class was about to begin, Seth silently placed on her desk a xeroxed page from the dictionary, having underlined in red ink that "empathic" was the preferred form, and then took his seat. After class, Mrs. Piel sarcastically noted to Seth that she was impressed with his unchar-

acteristically subtle method of making his point.

Although silently priding himself on not being a joiner, Seth played in the band, even though he absolutely hated marching at the football games, which he had to do all fall. His mother was not exactly thrilled about it either, his leaving the house on *Shabbos* like that. He paid not a whit of attention to the game itself, and instead, just joked around with the other band members, even joining in their chants of “Bull! Shit! Bull! Shit!” when the refs ruled against their team, to the visible and often verbal consternation of poor Mr. Dante. But yes, he enjoyed band: saxophone for football, then switching to oboe for “real” band. His fellow sax player Den Parker and he found they had much in common, and became friends despite Den’s being two years older. They both loved the Beatles, but they also both loved science fiction and Star Trek, and could talk endlessly about their favorite episodes, the best special effects, or the coolest aliens. Seth had always loved the Tholians because their glowing psychedelic crystalline bodies looked so cool; Den preferred The Organians, the way they showed up the Federation with their more advanced moral code. Upon hearing this, Seth himself felt shown up by Den’s more sophisticated analysis. Den was clearly a bright kid, but he never really asserted himself. As they became good friends, he told Seth that he was left back in elementary school because he was so socially withdrawn, which meant that he was actually *three* years older than Seth, something he found hard to believe, since Den seemed so content hanging out with a younger kid like him. Yes, Den was an especially quiet and passive person, and Seth was sometimes concerned that he was too acquiescent; that he was Seth’s friend mostly because Seth wanted him to be.

It was at a football game earlier that school year, an away-game across the river, that Seth did something genuinely momentous. Since games were played on Saturdays, Seth missed *Shabbos* lunch all fall. *Shabbos* meant chicken, chicken, chicken, and so, as those ordeals across the river always extended into late afternoon, Seth would usually bring a cold drumstick or two wrapped up in foil,

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and a little *challah* to munch on. But one Saturday, after having thought about the matter for weeks and weeks, he decided it was finally time to do it. With an almost overwhelming feeling of guilt, of shame, but also of defiance and of adventure, he walked over to the concession stand with what he felt was a visible trepidation, and purchased a hot dog; a non-kosher dog. He'd never eaten anything non-kosher before, and he knew that if he bit down on that dog, there'd be no turning back, that it would be closing the gates on his past, and venturing into the heretofore unknown world of the *goyim*, a world his mother so conscientiously kept him apart from, a world of cheeseburgers and Oreo cookies, of Christmas trees and Sunday dinners, of weekend hunting trips and shopping at the A&P. Bringing the dog back to the bleachers and sitting down amongst his boisterous fellow band members in their ridiculous ever-ill-fitting orange-and-brown marching outfits, he bit.

Treyf! Seth ate *treyf!*

And it wasn't very good, clearly not the quality of a kosher dog. But he bit again, thinking of his mother through every chew of the disappointingly bland and giving meat. Even though she didn't have a religious bone in her body, his mother steadfastly kept the traditions of her parents...and their parents...very much alive: keeping *Shabbos*, keeping the holidays (including the upheaval of dish-changing on *Pesach*), keeping kosher not only in the house, the way most of Seth's friends' families did, but outside as well (and feeling both incensed and heartbroken when Seth's father would mix *milchigs* and *fleishigs*, or have seafood, in front of the kids at a restaurant); she called herself "observant, not religious." And as all the band kids kept on their merry way, laughing and "Bull! Shit!"-ing and wholly oblivious as Seth so silently and so unceremoniously passed through the gates into their unholy realm, he bit until there was no more to bite, and he knew that his life was now fundamentally different from what it had been just a moment before.

Now, when Seth and Keith Epstein cut class and went to McDonalds, he might eat a Big Mac instead of the Filet-of-Fish that his mother had allowed him to eat, despite her near-certainty that

it was fried in lard; she somehow managed to turn a blind eye, so that Seth could enjoy being with his friends. Each and every time though, he was painfully stung by this secret betrayal of his mother; a knife in her heart.

“I’ve been meaning to tell you a story that I think you’ll find interesting. It’s about the Beatles. Well, not really about the Beatles, but related to them,” Dr. Sylvan offered on a breezy late-May day.

Both Seth’s curiosity and his incredulity about Dr. Sylvan having anything interesting to say about his beloved Beatles were no doubt apparent on his face, but he listened.

“Before I came to the high school, I worked over at the state mental hospital. This was in the early sixties, before the Beatles got here. One of the patients I was seeing was just getting ready to leave the hospital for good, and I helped him find a place right here in town. You know that little house right next to the temple, on Dorothy Bright’s property?”

Of course he did. He used to play in that abandoned little shack during services. In elementary school, Seth went to the temple every *Shabbos* with his mother. He excelled at his prayers, and had an ongoing informal but rather fierce competition with Eitan Zahav, who always managed to learn new prayers faster than Seth could, the *Ki Mitzion*, the *Yigdal*, the *Kaddish Shalem*. Eitan once told Seth that their name used to be Gold, but that their father changed it to Zahav, Hebrew for “gold,” so that they would sound Israeli. Eitan’s mother was one of the nicest people in the whole temple. She was exotic to Seth, from Syria, and whenever Seth went to the Zahavs’ old brick house over on their leafy dead-end by the commuter tracks, she, slim and elegant, or Mr. Zahav, diminutive and friendly-looking, would have a new and oftentimes remarkable activity for them, decoupage one time, plaster molding the next. One time, Mr. Zahav encouraged Seth to try his hand at the jigsaw he kept down in their unbelievably old, cramped, and scary basement, the kind that had a slanted metal hatch that opened up into the back yard, like his grandparents’ house before they moved down to

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Florida. But Seth was too cautious to use the saw. He just watched. The Zahavs would lavish on Seth his grandest birthday presents, too: a Toss Across one year, a whole badminton set another. “He’s only a social worker,” Seth’s mother once said, “I really don’t think they should be buying you such expensive things.” On holidays, especially during the interminable *Yom Kippur* service, Seth and Eitan would play in the little abandoned house next to the temple, still with a metal bed frame sitting rusted and askew in the back room off the tiny kitchen. They’d tramp across the warped linoleum floors with stray weeds growing through its holes and cracks. School would only have just started, and with summer soon edging toward fall, the leaves of the maples next to the shack, and the willows surrounding the pond out back, were still green. They ran through that shack every *Yizkor* service, until the Zahavs moved away to California shortly after Eitan’s *bar mitzvah*.

“Sure I do. I used to play in there,” Seth replied to Dr. Sylvan.

“Well, that’s the house he moved into after leaving the hospital. And here’s the interesting part. He had a girlfriend who’d visit up from the city. You know what her name was?”

Seth shook his head.

“Yoko Ono.”

“Really!?”

“She and Jim—that’s his name—they even came up the hill to our house a few times.”

“Yoko Ono was at your house!? On our block!?”

“It’s true!”

“Where was John?”

“This was before John.”

“Oh, right...

...Wow!”

“He wrote a book about it, his first novel—he’s a writer now—it’s called ‘The Cocoon’. James Heimbecker. H.E.I.M.B.E.C.K.E.R. I think the library has it.”

“Are you in it?”

Dr. Sylvan nodded proudly.

“Wow! I’ll take it out this afternoon!”

Seth could barely get his mind around what Dr. Sylvan had told him. Instantly, this made his connection to John and the Beatles all the more personal, all the more intimate, and all the more mind-blowing. He now had special knowledge about the Beatles—the Beatles!—that he could keep all to himself, or maybe, someday, share with others.

At the library that afternoon, Seth found “The Cocoon” and checked it out. Admittedly, he didn’t always check out the items he took home. More than once he simply placed items in-between his school books sitting on the bottom shelf of the metal coatrack in the little kitchen in the back room, and walked out with them at six o’clock when his mother picked him up. On a few occasions, he didn’t bring the items back. That is, he stole them: a book on the history of science fiction television shows, one on the design of sports stadiums, a record by a band that he had never heard of but had a cool-sounding name, Jules and the Polar Bears, which turned out to be really great. Quite simply, he hated working at the library, and told himself that this theft, consequently, was justified payback.

Once, as Seth was re-shelving some old National Review magazines in the backroom stacks, he hit upon what he thought was a crack scheme. His father—a left-winger, a socialist, and an atheist who only barely tolerated the observance restrictions Seth’s mother imposed on the family, and who listened to Sibelius and Stravinsky and Holst, but also to Dylan and Seeger and Ochs—Seth’s father hated William F. Buckley, calling him a dishonest debater and a typical sleazy Republican every single week, like clockwork, when he watched him on *Firing Line*. So Seth went through all the old National Review back issues stored chronologically in their upright open-backed cardboard boxes, and removed each and every prepaid subscription postcard with the plan of dumping them in the mailbox, and having Buckley foot the bill. Thinking twice about putting them in a local mailbox—since they might be traceable back to the library and even to Seth himself—he passed the whole

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lot along to his father, who, approving of his son's minor misdeed, got his own cheap kick out of bringing them into the city and placing a handful into each mailbox he passed along the street. His mother—a liberal Democrat and secular humanist who listened to Puccini and Handel and Verdi, and also to the opera from the Met on the radio every *Shabbos* afternoon, just as her parents had—Seth's mother kept mute about their petty transgression, but he was absolutely sure she thought it was a clever little scheme as well.

That very evening after homework, he started "The Cocoon" with trepidation, concerned that it would be a rough ride for him. Only a few months earlier, on a bitter cold February Sunday evening, he had watched "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" on TV, and was deeply haunted by it, especially by the suicide of Billy Bibbit at the end. He wanted so much to save poor Billy from the awful Nurse Ratched. Now, he was afraid of encountering another character that he strongly identified with, but had no way of helping. And anyway, like so many others, he harbored a visceral dislike of Yoko. After all, she broke up the Beatles, and turned John into a really mean and angry guy. And now John had gone silent, without any new songs for years. It was that Yoko. As a kid, he and his brother used to make fun of the one song they had ever heard her sing, "Who Has Seen the Wind," the B-side of "Instant Karma." They laughed and laughed at her insipid little-girl helium-fueled vocal, even harder when they upped the speed to 78.

Fortunately, the book was gently- and simply-presented. No wrist slashes, no lobotomies, at least not in the first few chapters, where Mike, the main character, was still in the hospital. With Dr. Sylvan's help (called "Dr. Lorre" in the book), Mike moves into the little house on Dorothy Bright's property, and shortly thereafter, Yoko, called Akiko in the book, is introduced, the car in which she was a passenger breaking down just north of Seth's own little downtown. He was amazed.

The next time Seth cut gym to go to Dr. Sylvan's office, they talked about the book. "I've read about half of it so far. I can't believe you're a character in it! They really came to your house? He

talks about looking out your back window seeing the houselights of your neighbors. You think he meant my house?"

Dr. Sylvan laughed heartily, "Maybe! It was a bit of a thrill to be a character, sure. He grew up down at the shore, but now he lives up here, right on the river, but we haven't been in contact in, oh, over ten years I think."

"Why not?"

"Well, a lot of people prefer not to think about their time in the mental hospital. It wasn't a good place to be, not at all."

"So you never met John?" Seth joked.

"No," he laughed, "I never met John."

"How was Yoko? Did she behave?"

"Well, she really wasn't famous back then, don't forget. She was perfectly fine, and seemed to really like Jim, and that made me happy, of course."

Seth paused, debating whether he should share his next thought; it was so very personal, so fraught with shame for him. "I saw 'One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest' on TV."

"Oh goodness, yes. I watched it too."

"Are mental hospitals really like that?"

"A lot of it was quite accurate, I'd say, though there were no Nurse Ratched, fortunately."

Seth hesitantly related some of the feelings the movie engendered in him, articulating for the first time his fascination with—and near-envy of—the patients who got to hide away in the mental hospital, and with a sickening feeling of shame and anxiety, even subtly dared hint at his feelings for Billy Bibbit.

Dr. Sylvan paused. "Seth, what are your plans for the summer?"

Embarrassed, Seth said he didn't have any. Michael Markus would of course be flying down to Disney World with his family for two weeks or more, visiting his grandparents. Disney World? Seth couldn't possibly be less interested. Keith Epstein would be working at his aunt and uncle's sleep-away camp way up in the mountains, bringing back tales of all the girls he supposedly met there; also, no thank you. Seth would be home, working the li-

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brary's reduced summer hours, going to book and magazine stores with Den, maybe playing softball on the high school diamond with his brother and his friends back from college.

"I've been thinking about maybe mentioning this, and now that you say 'One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest' had an effect on you, let me ask you. Do you know about the summer volunteer program that Mr. Richter runs?"

No, he didn't. The only interaction he'd ever had with Mr. Richter was that once, in fifth grade, he was called out of class because Mr. Richter wanted to talk to him. Seth had no idea why, and was a little scared because he knew Mr. Richter worked with the slow kids, the ones who couldn't keep up with everyone else. Was Seth slow? The two had sat down at a table in a room directly across from his class, but nonetheless, one Seth had never been in—not as big as a classroom, but not as small as an office either; more like a meeting room—where he'd seen the slow kids go in and out.

"Would you like a cookie Seth?" Mr. Richter had asked eagerly while reaching behind to the counter—there was a sink in that room, oddly enough—for a thin paper plate with some crumbs and a few sad chocolate chip cookies skittering like hockey pucks as he set them on the table.

Of course Seth wanted a cookie, but declined, still concerned about being a slow kid, and so wanting to appear mature to Mr. Richter.

"Oh no? Okay, that's fine," And he bit into one himself, leaving a crumb or two at the corner of his red-mustachioed mouth. "So, I asked a number of teachers if they could recommend a good responsible student who might want to help me on a project, and your name kept popping up."

Seth now listened with a mixture of pride and apprehension.

"I'm looking for someone who might like helping some kids with their schoolwork. You think maybe you'd like to do that?"

Seth shrugged. "Maybe..."

You'd meet with them every other Friday. You'd come out of class, and we'd drive upriver about an hour. We'd take a school van

up there, you, me, and a few other kids from other schools, and you'd work with some kids on their reading and arithmetic. How does that sound to you?"

Young Seth was not sure what to make of this offer, though now, at least, he knew he wasn't being singled out because he was slow. He knew he wasn't slow. "It's okay with Mr. Roche?"

"Sure! He recommended you!"

"Um, I have to ask my mother."

"Yes, of course, that's the first step. I chose you because a number of teachers felt that you'd be good at this job."

Seth immediately began wondering who it might have been. Mr. Jay the music teacher, who was so visibly impressed when Seth, in second grade, had told him he likes "Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky" so much? Seth remembered emphasizing the funny middle name with a thrill. Mr. Vaux the art teacher, who, when Seth's nasty and unpleasant third grade teacher Mrs. Horton came to art class one time and looked at the kids' projects, pointed out Seth's triple-tubed flower vase, and with a smile told her, "He's really got it," and tapped on his temple? Or Miss Korvin, his really hip fourth-grade teacher, who had once taken Seth aside and said she was planning on going to a ball game with some friends of hers, and asked if he'd like to join them? "Um, can some of my friends come too?" he'd asked her, quite intimidated at the prospect of being the only little boy there with a bunch of adults he didn't know. "Yes, if you'd like..." Miss Korvin replied after a slight hesitation. And after that game, in the parking lot, he was the only one among his friends who got Willie Mays' autograph. Team yearbook in hand and opened to Willie's picture, he'd forced himself through the crowd gathered around that famous pink Cadillac with the "Say Hey" plates, and after five minutes of pushing and squeezing, emerged with Willie's signature splashed across his full-page portrait. And when Miss Korvin's car pulled into Seth's driveway at the amazing hour of 1AM that heated school night, his parents were waiting outside in the driveway, somewhat frantic, but mostly relieved.

Seth got permission from his mother that very evening, and

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even conscientiously double-checked with his teacher Mr. Roche that next day. However, after that initial meeting in the slow kids' room, nothing ever came of Mr. Richter's invitation, and Seth simply forgot about it, and forgot about Mr. Richter too, until just then, when Dr. Sylvan mentioned the summer volunteer program.

Seth shook his head in response to Dr. Sylvan's query. "I don't know it. What is it?"

"It's held up at Letchworth Village. For five weeks in the summer, we send a group of volunteer students to work with the people there."

Seth knew that Letchworth Village was a state institution for mentally retarded people, but only because of a bowling benefit he had participated in back in middle school. He thought of "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest," and he thought of Billy Bibbit, of his sadness, his aloneness, and he was filled with anxiety, with trepidation, but also with connection, with curiosity, and a vague, ineffable longing.

"What would I do there?"

"Probably work in a classroom, what they call 'day treatment,' helping the teachers, and working directly with the residents. It's called 'direct care.'" Seth noted with a silent curiosity Dr. Sylvan's odd usage of the word 'residents.' "Maybe in a crafts class or something like that. These would be adults, mentally retarded adults."

Seth pondered Dr. Sylvan's words. "So are they just retarded, or are they crazy too? Will they...are they violent?"

"Well, to be honest, a lot of retarded people have additional problems. Physical problems, and yes, mental problems too. Are they crazy? Yes, sure, if you want to use that expression, some are crazy. But we've never had any problems with students getting hurt by them, I promise. Most are very sweet and would be very happy you're there to help them. They live very, very lonely lives up there." And again, that longing; somehow, a sense of identification with them, and yes, that was it, with Billy Bibbit, too.

Seth sat back in the plastic chair that he increasingly thought of as his own. Maybe he wanted to do this, he thought. He needed

to be free of the sort he was surrounded by at school, the sort that cared so much about being popular, the sort that judged and ridiculed other people just to be mean, it seemed. How could he possibly feel any kinship with the Irish boys who went on hunting trips with their fathers, and who proudly drove back down from the mountains with their kill tied to the back of their car to show it off? Or with the Italian boys who souped up their parents' old cars to make them sound like lawnmowers, and who blasted through the neighborhood late at night? Why didn't the police stop them? He wanted nothing to do with them. No, he wanted to be around people who might feel the sadness of being all alone, as he did, who might be peaceably removed from the garish social glare that he constantly had to shield himself from, around people who wouldn't judge and judge and judge him as if he were under ceaseless interrogation. Maybe these mentally retarded people could feel affection for him, for the person he believed himself, somewhere inside, to be. He thought of Billy Bibbit, and again, the longing.

"Yeah okay, I'm interested," he said with a calculated casualness.

Dr. Sylvan told Seth that the program's orientation meeting was to take place in just a few days actually, and, a bit jarred by the prospect of his summer switching from utter shapelessness to full-formed structure so suddenly, Seth hesitantly—though with a genuine feeling of excitement—said he'd be there, and that very evening let his mother know that, after all, he had plans for the summer, and she gave him her blessing.

At the meeting Mr. Richter held after school, Seth was very pleased to see the face of a girl from his class who really was a little different. Jill Alberg was half-Swedish, half-Japanese. Her father was a "good socialist" as Seth's father liked to say (insisting the expression contained a redundancy), her mother an artist; paper-folding and flower-arranging. Jill, with her red hair and her slanted eyes, successfully—and, to Seth, confusingly—trod a line between thoughtful and popular, clearly aware of the shallow nature of school life, but also—and disappointingly to Seth—embracing it far too readily. She'd attended a "no nukes" rally at the

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county seat with Seth, and it was Jill who, back in middle school, had been so incensed when a pastor was to recite a benediction at a school function, so incensed that she wrote the school board an angry letter. The school's ridiculous remedy—inviting a rabbi as well—just enraged her further. But then she'd go and date a total dolt like Richard West, who most likely had never had gotten an "A" in his entire life. "He's really sweet," Jill had told Seth, as if to apologize. Seth really liked Jill.

More surprising to Seth, however, were the several black boys and girls who were at the meeting. Almost all the school's black kids lived at what the neighborhood kids called the Home, an expansive landscape of brick and stucco buildings set behind an old stone wall in a rolling field along the winding country lane that intersected with Seth's suburban avenue. They were poor tough kids who found themselves in poor tough situations down in the city, until social services intervened on their behalf, brought them "up to the country," and put them under the priests' and nuns' care at the Home. And so it was most curious to Seth that they'd volunteer their summer time like this.

Mr. Richter talked about health and safety issues, the different levels of retardation of the residents (mild, moderate, severe, profound), about respecting residents' rights and privacy, about how to interact appropriately with the Letchworth "direct care" staff, and finally, presented a brief public relations slideshow with portraits of daily life at the institution. As he looked at the pictures of Letchworth's residents—playing ball tag on the grounds with the smiling staff, swimming in the pool, attending their daytime classes, brushing their teeth, combing their hair—a dizzying array of emotions seized Seth, an intensity of feeling that would increase over the next several days. Again, he felt a profound sadness for their secluded, empty lives. But he also felt a genuine sense of jealousy for their living wholly apart from—and so wholly uncorrupted by—the daily indignities that the likes of Seth had to endure. He felt a keen sense of excitement at the prospect of being able to make a difference in their lives, but also an embarrassment, even

shame, at his simply wanting to be around them, to be near them, to befriend them, and to bond with them.

Then, it was off down the street for pizza. As they all gathered around the pushed-together tables the waitresses had set up, the boisterous Home kids intermixed with the white kids, all girls save Seth, girls who awkwardly sat in an uncomfortable near-silence: self-control was clearly not a priority among the city kids. They laughed and shoved and stood up and reached across the table. Seth admired their energy, but it wore out its welcome almost immediately. Hovering above everyone, Mr. Richter now got down on his haunches, reached up, put his arms around the nearest boy and girl and, feigning approval of their behavior with a smile, said, "Look at all you kids shuckin'-n-jivin' like that."

So much for Mr. Richter, Seth thought as he caught Jill Alberg's eye, which conveyed a combination of incredulity and horror. Yes, Seth really liked Jill.

Dr. Sylvan had told Seth that Dr. Conklin was concerned over his missing so many classes the preceding couple of months. Seth surmised that word had gotten out fast from the guidance office, because Dr. Conklin could not otherwise have known he was ducking into the school psychologist's office, for *he* certainly hadn't told any of his teachers; he hadn't told *anyone*. "I explained to him that when you started coming to me, you were a very depressed young man, and he seemed to understand," Dr. Sylvan related.

Now, during the last week of school, Seth was still "a very depressed young man"—it almost sounded romantic to him—and he cut English this one last time.

"We had our meeting last week." "Oh, of course, how did it go?" "It was okay. We saw a slideshow about the residents," was all he dared muster, hiding away his excitement, its accompanying embarrassment, but especially, that aching, that longing. Quickly he added, "Jill Alberg was there. She's smart. But why are Home kids interested in the program?"

Dr. Sylvan momentarily hesitated, and then said, "They actually

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get paid. It's summer work for them."

Seth immediately understood that that made sense, and didn't pursue the matter further. "They're kind of loud," he noted.

Dr. Sylvan laughed. "Yes, they can be a bit loud." And then, turning more serious, "Listen Seth, I'll see you in the fall for sure, but if you want to stop by the house over the summer, we'll be around most of the time. I'd really like that, to see how your summer is going. I just want you to be happy, you know. Someone like you will find working at Letchworth rewarding, I imagine."

"Someone like you"; it stung at first, but maybe he meant it as a compliment.

So now he'd just ace his final tests, and summer would be here, and Letchworth would begin. Seth stood up and left Dr. Sylvan's office, bid his first-ever friendly farewell to Mrs. McCabe, and walked out into the empty hallway.

Tuk-a-tuk/Tuk-a-tuk/Tuk-a-tuk.