

*When I started at a new high school, my mother went to a luncheon some of the moms were having to get to know her and the other new families. This was before all could be known by anyone, about anyone, with a few keystrokes and clicks. The moms got to talking about their boys. She told me afterward about it. "Everyone said, 'My son is a leader.' 'My boy leads from the front.' 'I guess my son's just born to lead.' When it was my turn, I said, 'Well, with all these leaders in the class, my son must be a follower!'" She was always funny. And I was always a follower—from my earliest memory.*

## **My Adventure**

It started after dinner when my brothers and sister would get in their last bit of play with the neighborhood kids. I was too young to be much more than a mascot and too easily distracted to pay any attention to what the big kids were playing. I wandered off with the dogs. They kept an eye on me but went about their routine nonetheless. While my siblings were in our yard with a handful of others spontaneously gathered for the last hour of light on a September evening, I followed the dogs through the different yards in our neighborhood as the setting sun bent into my eyes. Though I never liked that sensation of temporary blindness, it did not send me back home. I kept following up the hill through neighbors' yards because the dogs were too wise to go down the middle of a road where there might be a Buick Skylark barreling at 40 miles an hour. And the main road offered few glimpses of trash loosely tossed in a can, with perhaps a thin brown-paper bag from Finast separating it from the metal can. We had the best garbage cans around. There were three cylinders sunken into the ground with a steel turret that was flipped open by stepping on a sturdy lever. When it wasn't garbage day, it was the perfect place to lower one's small body inside, poke through the turret, and pretend to be a tank commander rumbling through the Bulge or the Russian steppe, blowing up all in one's path.

But tonight it was an overland mission. Following the scout dogs as they investigated other trash cans. Like a dog, I did not care about getting dirty or the approaching shadows turning long and loosed to darkness. I cut through the lawn of a neighbor whose name I never learned, whose house I would never go to again. Once I stopped there, sat down in an outer room, and said I wanted to watch television. They brought me a sandwich and then proceeded to try to find out where I came from. I gave them my name, rank, and serial number. "What's your name?" "Matt." "Where do you live?" "My house." "What's your phone number." They got me home. No thanks to me. And through constant repetition I was taught a sequence of symbols I have never forgotten: RO1-2779.

But as it grew darker, I would pass by the large stone house. Not realizing that I would never set eyes on it again, due to its hidden location in our neighborhood, and that it would eventually be torn down and turned into a controversial temple for a religion no one in our 1970 neighborhood had ever heard of. But I rushed past, oblivious to the future with the padded feet of the dogs clicking on the strange driveway. Our pack was

inexplicably drawn to the one place none of us should go, but no one would stop up this night. North Street. A four-lane road between Interstate 287, Bryant Avenue, St. Agnes Hospital, General Foods headquarters, and a babbling brook on both sides of the road connected by a sewer pipe. We made a break for it. Maybe everyone was home from their 9-to-5-a-day world, on their second Martini, watching *Beat the Clock*, or on a protest somewhere, but we made it across the road unreported and unscathed. The dogs set in to chase the rodents that lived in the uninhabitable swamp that the brook fed into. My shoes oozed with the foul mud of the uninhabitable swamp, overgrown with pricklers, wild grasses, and bushes. Ten, probably fifteen years later, the place would have a pompous name and the swamp filled in or diverted, EPA be damned, the scrub mowed down and replaced with rows of identical houses without a tree in sight. Young boys listening to cars hum by relentlessly, perhaps wishing they could make a mad dash to the other side with dogs now tethered to the yard. Saving their lives.

It was fully dark when we headed back. Dogs and boy, safe yet filthy. Leg bleeding from a sharp rock not seen in the dark. The Rosenaus's sheep dog leading the way. Trigby, who started every day by entering our yard and strutting his Spitzzy form as Topper barked inside, now ran close with our black dog in the night, taking the quiet street because the yards were proving too dangerous for me and the cars were all in for the night. We all knew that. The dogs broke off silently back to their homes, taking the quickest way. And then suddenly we are back in the yard. My mother's raised voice becoming louder and louder as I approach silently in the dark. My sobbing finally giving me away. Revealed filthy and bleeding, and soon wrapped in two arms. All forgotten. Topper looping away from the scene, her guardianship over. All hands back from the adventure. Mission complete.