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1939

Bill and Carl

The car had been traveling for an hour. The windows were closed and inside, two men smoked cigarettes; Lucky Strikes. The air was thick from the smoke but they didn't notice, didn't care. The night had a cool dampness from rain that had fallen earlier. It had been the silent soft kind of summer rain that nurtures fields, replenishes a rich scent of wet grass and corn. Summer sweet corn, humid warmth, even late in the evening. The fog was not too thick to drive. Still, they had to go slower than they planned.

The road was slick. No street lamps, dark fields on either side of the road, fields of corn; mile after

perennial mile. Rich smell of summer rain outside, heated sweat and cigarettes inside.

They'd left Philadelphia after darkness fell, at around eight-thirty. They stole money from a bakery and corner store but between the two, it wasn't enough to do any good; nobody left much money in the drawers anymore, not anymore. Everyone knew; there wasn't much to be had in July of nineteen thirty-nine. What little they got wouldn't last long enough to get to Canada.

Maybe things would be better there. Both men thought it might be, figured it had to be better than Germantown, the section of Philadelphia where they lived.

The night before, the bakery job had gone badly; the baker lived right upstairs. He must have heard them moving around. They'd gotten out but didn't know if the baker was alive or dead. They'd left him behind the counter by the open drawer, bleeding on the chipped tile floor, his twitching hand gripped around a crowbar. Black and white tile in small circle patterns, the white mostly worn, the black tiles faded, cracked grout with blood spreading toward the counter.

Bill Foster drove north. No lines of worry troubled his brow, no wrinkle in his clear skin marked any thought

of the man he'd left for dead. His eyes were still crystal blue, no hint of worry or conscience to fade his urgent intent to quit the country. His blond hair was just as it had been, not a hair out of place, combed back off his angular face. His nose was straight, straighter than his morality, in which department he sorely lacked by the standards of his priest and teachers. His strong chin and dimpled cheeks gave away no trace of a callous heart, hardened not by hatred but by years of indifference until now, in his twenty-second year, he left everything behind. Not a backward glance, not a thought of either his future path or what might have been.

He wasn't worried about the baker. He was more worried about the damned road ahead of him. It was dark and he couldn't tell from the fog which way the road would curve up ahead. As if that wasn't enough, if Carl didn't shut the hell up, he would make him get out and walk to Canada. Nah, he couldn't do that either. Carl had a big mouth and a small brain. What the hell, at least they could split the driving.

They'd been doing this ever since they were eleven. Bill Foster and Carl Parkinson grew up in the same neighborhood, two streets apart. They were chums in school,

got into trouble since they were eight years old. The teachers all knew them, the principal and neighbors knew all about them. None of them liked them much, nor had they ever hesitated to remind them of that fact every day of their stinking lives. They never caught a break, not from anybody, not even their folks.

Folks, ha! Bill thought, that's a real yuck.

Bill never got nothing. Never. He would come home from working all day, sometimes ten or twelve hours, tired and stiff. He'd plop on the couch and the other kids would jump all over him until dinner. He'd let them, because they were his family and also because he was too tired to chase them off. He liked the kids all right but there were too many of them and they were all so...needy. It was as if he was the father. He had no desire to be the father, no desire to be anyone's father; not now, not ever.

Anyway, he'd come home dead tired and what would happen? His mother would put out her hand and tell him he'd earned his keep for another meal, for another night. That's it. Nothing else. No smile, no motherly hug; she was too tired also, from taking care of her eight brats and from scrubbing other people's floors to put food on the table.

He'd give his mother the money he'd made that day and she would put it into the pocket of her apron. He went into that apron and cleaned it out before he'd left. He also cleaned out the tin in the kitchen cabinet, the drawer in her otherwise empty jewelry box and the shoebox in her bedroom closet. Nickels and dimes mostly, some one dollar bills and that's all, nothing else worth taking. He'd have taken her wedding band but she'd worn it that day for some unknown reason, maybe she sensed that something was about to change.

Anyway, he'd let the kids climb on him, yelping and hollering and then it was time for dinner, the last one he'd spent in that stinking dump of a house on Rosemead Street, in Germantown, in Philadelphia. Dinner, that was a real yuck, too. Potato soup. Again. God, he would be glad to be rid of potato soup. Forever, he hoped.

They could have it! Man oh man, he was scram city!

It was better this way. At least it would be one less potato she'd have to worry about.

Carl Parkinson never knew the meaning of having a family, not since he was five when his dad disappeared. He got so drunk one night that he beat up his kid brother.

That was when his mother finally told him to get the hell out.

Carl couldn't understand what the big deal was. The creep was in his stuff one too many times, had it coming. He was always in his stuff, his private things; the nudie pictures and the ribbon he stole from Marla Grimes down the street a few years back. He liked to sniff that ribbon on occasion; it smelled like clean fresh flowers and was the only thing that he had in his miserable life that made him happy, the ribbon and the smell of Marla Grimes.

He'd gotten caught trying to kiss her. She screamed and told on him. He'd gotten whipped good for that one and since then he'd come to hate the girls with their stupid little games that they liked to play on him and the other chums. They were brats, all of them; they teased and then yelled when someone called them up on their stupid games.

Oh boy did he ever get even with Marla Grimes, yes siree bob! He sure did! It started out small with just an ice cube down her pretty little blouse. Nevertheless, his joke turned into hers and she'd put a tack on his chair in school in the fourth grade, the last grade that he'd completed. After that, he found other ways to get even; like when he cornered her one night by the bakery on the

way home from the movie theater and shoved his hand up her dress.

He'd felt the warmth that was in there and smelled the good smell of her skin on his hand all night after it was over and told her that if she ever told, he'd tell them that she opened her blouse for him, told him to take a little peek at what he was missing.

Oh, how he loved that ribbon. He took it out of her hair that night and from then on, he looked at girls differently. They were mysterious and fun to touch.

Since then he'd found other girls who'd let him touch them, girls who liked to touch him, too.

Then that night, his brother the creep took the ribbon. That's when he beat the shit out of him, when his mother told him to get the hell out and not come back.

Fine with him. Billy Boy was much more fun anyways.

The small jobs were no big deal at first, once they got started with the plan. They would just break in, quiet as mice in the middle of the night and take whatever cash was in the drawer. The places they hit were easy jobs. If the owner was stupid enough to make it so easy to get in

then they deserved it. They took other things, too, like cigarettes, a cake, or a pocketknife.

Once a week was enough to get them what they needed and they were careful not to yuck it up too much. They'd been lucky, they hadn't gotten caught yet, nor had they gotten enough money at one shot to be stupid about it. They didn't spend it all over town. Usually they lost it in card games. Bill had even gotten a gun from one of the guys at a game one time not too long ago, had won it from some jerk that had no money with him. Now it was Bill's gun and he carried it everywhere as if he was Wild Bill Hickcock or something.

That had been going on for years. Every neighborhood had corner stores and bakeries. They were smart enough not to take too much or blab. They hit different neighborhoods at different times; Logan one night, Strawberry Mansion another night, South Philly in the spring, North Philly in the summer.

Then the jobs dried up, things got tough. Even the rotten, no-good jobs. Delivering ice from the truck. Sweeping the front of the bakery for that miserable Gunther guy. No more jobs, no more fun. No more card money. No

cigarette money and no way for Bill to give his mother money for the kids.

That all changed when miserable Mr. Gunther came into the bakery from upstairs. He knew them, didn't like them to begin with. Then out of nowhere, he came at them with a crowbar in the middle of the night with no inkling of whom it was that he was swinging at, not that he would have stopped if he'd realized it. By the time he did, it was too late.

Thinking back on it now, as Bill drove north, he didn't mean to shoot to kill, not really. He really didn't think he was the sort to off the guy. He was just being a big shot. It just happened. Mr. Gunther looked like a bear on a good day. He was built solidly with a thick neck and big shoulders. On a bad day, he was more like a charging buffalo. They didn't stand a chance. Mr. Gunther would of made mince meat of them. Bill shot the gun while Carl headed for the door. It just took a second for the thing to be done, for the gun to go off and for the jerk to go down and then, bam! That was all.

Then something weird happened, something else kicked in, something that really sent a tingle up the spine. A

thrill. The adrenaline was a boost that Bill hadn't known before in his life. Not drinking, not girls, not card games, not fighting with the kikes in Logan, nothing came close to the pumping juice in his veins as when he saw that blast and smelled that smell of death enter his nostrils. It went right to his brain and stayed there like cheap whiskey on a bad Sunday night in the middle of winter. It rolled around in his mind and lingered there where he could almost taste the blood, the smoke, the death it caused. He could almost make his heart do a jig just by thinking about it as he envisioned the bullet smashing through the muscles as they tore and shredded. He could see the carnage that the bullet caused, loved the sight of the blood as it spread on the tile floor like maple syrup that he'd eaten with flapjacks years ago when his father was still alive.

If that was good, how good would it be with a knife, with poison? Did death always feel so...satisfying? He felt like he knew a huge secret, like the first time he jacked off or the first time a girl put her mouth around his sergeant at arms or the first time he plugged an easy squeazy, as they called them girls down around the naval shipyard.

And old Mr. Gunther? The fat old slob was history.

Maybe.

If he was alive then they were goners. Gunther had seen them after a bit. He knew it was Bill that shot him, knew that it was Carl that was by the door. Sure, Carl said that Bill could say that it was self-defense, but he had no business being there in the first place.

So they left; the store, the no-good rotten neighborhood, and the city of brotherly love.

"Yuck, yuck, yuck." Carl said.

He tossed his straight dark hair off his face again, just as he did at least three times a minute. It drove Bill crazy that he did that all the time. Good thing he was good company, Bill thought, or for sure he'd have shot him by now.

Bill looked over at Carl who sat next to him in the car smoking a cigarette. His hat was down on his face; his thin build was lanky, tall, and too tall to be comfortable in the seat. He was slunk down, let smoke curl around his nose and face.

Bill replied, "You're just a yuck a minute, Carl, old chum."

By the time they decided to lift the car, Carl was so hepped up that Bill found himself telling Carl to shut up

almost twice a minute, more times than Carl flipped his filthy hair. He wished he could shoot Carl, too. Maybe he would, maybe he would at that. Not now, though. They still needed each other.

Carl laughed half way out of the city in the car they lifted from that old geezer school teacher guy, took it right out by the library while the gent was in there buried in his books like usual.

Bill thought he was probably making time with the principal's wife right in the history aisle.

"Now that," Bill told Carl as they headed out of town, "was a real yuck yuck. Just imagine him, Carl old chum, with that snot box Rose, with her dandy hanky dabbing at her nose all over the Civil War Chronicles!"

They got a good yuck out of that one.

They drove. North. They stayed quiet for a little while they smoked their cigarettes. Neither knew what Canada was like, but heck, it was better than what they had, closer than Mexico, that was for sure. If old man Gunther was dead, sure as all hell they'd be looking for them.

They were on a road about twenty miles north of Philadelphia, going through a town called Hatboro. They didn't know how to get to where they were going, they were just going. They knew to go north and they knew how to get more money. Every stinking town had a bakery like Gunther's, and every bakery had a place to keep the moolah.

"Hey Bill, how long do you figure it'll take to get to Canada?"

"The way this hunk of junk is crawlin' it could take us three years, but it shouldn't be more'n a couple days. First we have to get the hell out of Pennsylvania."

"We wouldn't have to go at all if you hadn't changed the rules, Billy Boy."

"I couldn't help it if Old man Gunther was comin' after me. I didn't want to kill the son of a bitch!"

"I still think we shoulda gone to Mexico."

Bill smirked. "That just goes to show ye how much you know about geography. It would take us a week and a half to get there."

Around midnight the July air got too thick to drive so they looked for a place to take a break. They knew to drive only at night but they needed sleep now and were not yet used to changing their clocks to the night shift.

They'd also need fuel for the car tomorrow. This car had enough to go another few miles, but that was it. Bill knew that the money from the last two jobs would last two or three days, maybe four if they didn't eat too much. Most of it would be spent on gasoline. They would have to get more money at some point. But not yet.

They found a field that was overgrown and the night fog would hide the car well enough. They slept in the car. The windows fogged after a bit from the heat inside and the mist outside.

They woke to early morning fog and rolled the car onto the road as quietly as possible. Crunching grass and corn. It was hotter than a campfire in Hell, Carl said, and Bill croaked from laughing so hard. Even in the early morning breeze, he could tell it would be a scorcher. Bill pushed the car from the running board while Carl steered. They went into town, got some gasoline at the filling station and some rolls at the bakery. They immediately sized the place up in a silent communication between them, but Bill knew that they were still too close to home, still had some money left. He tilted his head to the door and ushered Carl out. Carl just shrugged his shoulders, knew it would have been so easy.

Then they headed east toward the Delaware River. It was quieter there, less people around. They drove through the few towns, if you could call them that. Mostly there were farms, some houses, fields and forest.

They found a back road, pulled off the road into the trees and slept until the afternoon began a slow descent. When they woke, they shook the sleep from them, found a creek, splashed water for a while and drove some more.

The day was brutal, hot, humid. Too hot for July. It felt like August, late August. And the car wasn't working right, either. Damn, just what they needed, a run down hunk of junk. Wasn't that old, either. It just seemed like it was too hot for the car to go past ten miles an hour, too hot for the car to work right. It sputtered, stalled, lurched and refused to cooperate.

Bill coaxed it along with grunts and groans, tried to push it onward with a loud and vicious, "Come on, you mother humping whore!"

They passed through small towns; Cornwells, Bristol, Fairless Hills, then went west past Peddler's Village, Lahaska and then east again. They got lost so many times on the small roads that they lost all sense of direction. They couldn't tell north from south, couldn't find the river

again, made no progress in the hazy heat. Between the forests and the fields tall with corn, each road looked like the last.

They spent most of the day backtracking. They went in circles, big wide circles that always ended up at the same place. They finally wound up back at the York Road and cursed the fields and the misty humid air that made every road look alike.

By nine that night they were miserable hungry, looked for any place to feed them. The Hog's Head is where they washed up in the men's room, bought some dinner and stuffed their pockets with rolls and bread. They drank beer, planned their trip and whiled away the hours. When they were ready to leave Carl stole the knife, of course. He chortled about it for half an hour. Bill wanted to shoot him. They were on the road again by midnight.

By four o'clock, they were bleary-eyed.

"The damn fog is lasting for days."

"Don't I know it, Carl, don't I know it. I'm drivin' through it."

The clouds clung to the ground instead of the sky, made their driving very slow. They should have been a hundred miles further north but each night the air

thickened until it was like a wet hot towel smack! on their faces.

They found a barn that looked about a hundred years old. It was. They hid the car, closed the windows, slept.

They had no idea where they were. They could have been in New York or back in Hatboro, or in Jippip for all they knew.

When Bill and Carl woke it was high noon and the car was all steamed from the heat. They opened the windows, but the barn was closed tighter than a coffin. They coughed, shook themselves out and stretched.

They were near a river. They had gotten to the Delaware River, where they didn't know or care. They could smell it.

They looked around the barn for signs of life but found none. Reassured that they were safe, they walked a short path through a field behind the barn, through some trees to an overgrown path that was sheltered by a canopy of tree limbs, low and tired. They took the path to the water. They stripped and jumped in. Clothes heaped in small piles, belts dropped, buckles clanked on rock.

The trees and shrubs wilted from the heat, without energy enough to bother, full bloom three weeks past.

There had been a recent storm; broken branches and limbs. Heat and humidity remained. Bill mentioned that it felt like 97 . It was 99 . They went back to the car, got last night's stale rolls and went back to the water. They ate, swam, and then dozed in a secluded patch near tiny lapping river surf.

When they awoke, shadows were long. The day was waning. Barking from somewhere off to the left. It was across the river. They looked at each other, sat up but didn't worry too much. The river was narrow here, more like a creek, but Bill knew that it got much, much wider further north. They stayed in the trees and saw a boy of about ten years old. He was across the other side of the river. He had pockets full, removed an object and tossed it in the river. Skimming stones. His dog splashed after them. It was a setter, and he stopped, lifted his nose, and sniffed in the direction of Bill and Carl.

Carl made a motion to leave, but Bill held his arm out, freeze. With his other hand, he put his index finger in front of his mouth, silence!

The Setter sensed them but the boy did not. He threw stones. The dog lost interest, went about his game with the laughing boy.

Bill and Carl waited for interminable minutes then slinked back to the lane. They dressed, went back to the barn, to the car. They didn't breathe or speak until they were in the car.

Carl laughed his dumb laugh and Bill knew he would have to shoot the jerk sooner or later. He hoped it would be sooner. He also knew that every moment meant a bigger chance of becoming noticed. They checked around the front of the barn and seeing nothing of interest, opened the door and rolled the car out. Bill smoothed out the dusty ground of the barn with his shoes to erase the markings of the tires and closed the barn door behind them.

Carl stubbed out a cigarette and dusted over it with the toe of his worn old shoe.

They were on a small road, heading North on Route 17. It passed farms and fields of corn. Lots of Corn. It wasn't quite ready for harvest but as the shadows blended to mix with the dust, they didn't care if it was ripe or not.

Mostly it was untended as though the farmers hadn't watered the crops in days, which they hadn't, probably couldn't pay the water bill. It would be what it would be, rotting past smelling sweet.

Darkness was imminent. They stopped the car, got out, shook out the dust and sweat, ventured into the corn. Picked, tore down and ate, picked, tore down and ate. Carl threw down the ears as if he might have a rock on caps. He didn't bother to shuck; merely pulled and chewed, spat out silk and raw kernels. Bill pulled the skins down diligently, removed silk. He then kept the cobs so there was no trace that he was there. He noticed Carl molesting the tall stalks and throwing down the cobs.

"Hey, you want the whole county to know someone's been here? Pick 'em up and stop makin' such a mess a things!"

"Um...sorry," he grumbled, mouth overflowing. He picked up what he thought was enough of his mess and stuffed the pockets of his jacket and trousers. Husks stuck out of everywhere.

Bill laughed himself silly. Hey, you look like a freaking' scarecrow!" He almost fell over from it. Carl looked caught, embarrassed, then laughed, spraying the stalks with half chewed mush.

They picked a dozen more.

"Don't take it all from one place, Carl. Spread it out." Carl couldn't talk. Too much in his mouth, too much in his clothes and arms.

Back through long tall aisles of green and golden corn toward their car. Raped what they mowed down.

"A cold drink would be nice right now, wouldn't it, Bill?"

"Sure would. Maybe we'll see someplace ahead soon. We better not eat too much of this crap too fast or we'll have a heck of a problem, eh, Carl?" He elbowed Carl's arm.

Carl spilled half of his load, sneered. "Don't even think about it, Billy. We have no paper with us. I'll be right back, anyway." He dumped the corn in the back seat and walked up one of the rows, unbuttoning his pants.

"Now, don't go pissin' all over that corn, Carl." Bill laughed good and long.

They got on with putting distance between them and the cornfield. It was dark. The road stretched ahead. A winding, meandering blackness, a black ribbon that sliced through field after field of corn, vegetables, berries. They were broken up by dense forests and a few scattered areas with homes tucked back into the woods.

They stayed near the river, headed north. New Hope emerged from the big nothing in between. They stopped. The New Hope Inn was hopping. They spoke to no one, guzzled,

used the john. Back in the car. It struggled along, coughed and sputtered but chugged along into the night.

They could have gone into New Jersey over the Lambertville bridge from New Hope but didn't. Instead, they drove into the darkness of a narrow road, into the night.

They came to a town ten more miles up River road, on the Pennsylvania side of the Delaware River. A sign laid out in modern script, "*Welcome to Maple Grove*" and "*We love our Children.*" Under that, "*Celebrating 200 years ~ 1739 - 1939.*"

The first sign of civilization was a row of homes, tall and narrow. Most were Victorian; all were weathered with age and neglect. Some were stone. Some were brick. Most needed tending. Trim lawns with fences. On the porches were chairs and tables that were perfect for sipping lemonade on a hot night. Not this summer, not this night. Too humid for most to tolerate. Most just went to sleep, hoping tomorrow would be cooler.

Maple Grove was a quiet place. Not much happened that disturbed the universe of rural isolation. The five hundred or so people who lived there had families that could be traced to all of the town's two hundred years.

Settled between the Delaware River on the east and rolling hills on the west, its primary reason for existence began so farmers and trappers in the early 1700's had a place to commune. It was on its way to becoming a decent sized town when the last century was born. People actually moved to Maple Grove. The scenic view of the river was romantic. The school became too crowded. Maple Grove High School was built in 1924 and was the jewel of the town.

Commerce flourished. The great war sent many away and then the depression shut the town down. Now the school and town hall were all that was left. A small hotel, a bakery and mercantile.

Maple Grove's most notable event was the celebration of Independence Day each year. Preparations for the parade began after Easter. This year's "Festival of Colors" was not much different than most. Except that the day got hotter as the sun got brighter. That day was the recognizable start of the heat wave that hadn't yet let up some two and a half, almost three, weeks later.

By the middle of July, 1939, the streets of Maple Grove were too hot to walk on, the steps too sticky to sit on, and the houses were too hot for rest or sleep. Even when the curtains shut out sunlight, they couldn't shut out

heat. Fans only moved hot air from here to there. The fog just kept it all there, in place. No one could get cool, not even at night. No breeze for days. The air developed a scent that would long remind one of that hot, foggy, sultry summer.

No one tried to look adjusted, there was no adjusting. They only tried to remain dry. Two elderly citizens died in the second week of July. It was blamed on the heat.

In Maple Grove, the bad years of the depression stretched into desperation. Would they ever pass? Except for the farmers and the doctor, most were out of work. Even the farmers faltered; no one to buy the crops and no way to tend them. The mill closed three years ago and put half the town out. People stopped asking each other how they were.

The children still played, but slower. The couples still walked down the maple-shaded avenues but without a lilt to their step. Everything slowed to a crawl.

For most, the depression finally ended with the war. For others it never ended. Poverty became the norm and never changed. For some, the heat of that summer and the depression ended them.

Taylor's Mercantile had been on Broad Street for years. A small establishment, it had always been there,

simple as that. No one could remember before Taylor Mercantile. Some said it was the first business in the area, the reason Maple Grove was. They always had the right inventory; fans in the summer, gloves in the fall. They also had enough of them to appear prosperous, even in bad times. Truth be known, it was more due to over-buying in the good years than to success in the bad years. It just took longer to run out now. Nevertheless, the appearance remained as true as the owner, Blanche Tucker. Her husband, Charles, died four years ago last August. Blanche ran the store faithfully and in accordance with Charles' doctrines.

In the summer, her only daughter, Natalie, helped out. They were good company for each other, if a little bored.

In her second year at Maple Grove High, Natalie had already decided that her legacy would not be to turn the "Merc", as she called it, into a first rate dry goods store as her mama wished. She had other visions, but in the summer of 1939, it was enough to last out the day, what with the heat and the darned humidity.

It was the end of July. The heat wave hadn't let up. The only difference was the fog and mist at night. That started a few days earlier and came back every night by eight. Blanche and Natalie would close up at six as usual.

They could have closed at three, but someone usually strolled in for a rope of licorice or a new potholder. At least that meant some conversation.

Mr. Miller had been in earlier for a new pot. He said that he forgot that his old one was on the burner. It exploded. After he left, Blanche and Natalie laughed long and hard, imagined what Rose Miller had to say about that one!

Natalie was going on seventeen but looked every inch near twenty. She was a flower among all of the weeds and that was not to say that she was strictly beautiful. What she was, was so full of life, the expectancy that every day would be an adventure, that to listen to her dreams and ideas was to forget that there was no luxury in life or even a decent meal. She couldn't wait to start her "real" life and she dreamed of all that she would accomplish.

Natalie wanted to teach. She loved children and wanted to have three of her own someday. She loved her mama, too, but it got lonely with just the two of them. Natalie knew that if she was around children, lots of them, she wouldn't be lonely any more.

In her loneliness, Natalie could often be found with a book in her hands. When she didn't have a new book from the

library, she would walk to the Grove Hotel and look at the magazines at the newsstand that was run by nice old Mr. and Mrs. Potter. They ran the hotel also, lived down the hall from the lobby on the first floor.

Sometimes, if Natalie didn't have the thirty cents to buy the magazine, Mrs. Potter would tell her that if she kept it real nice she could look through it and then return it. She would always wink and say that it was their secret. Natalie loved her for it.

Natalie favored two magazines. One was about the Stars and Hollywood. The other was a picture magazine, *Look*. *Look* took Natalie to places unlike Maple Grove. Natalie was always thinking of these exotic places, places that were beautiful to her. She dreamed of one such place, a place with cobblestone streets and long lanes of brick homes all in a row, row after row. It was a dream that she had time and time again throughout her life. She didn't know why, though. The only cobblestones that she had ever seen were in New Hope and they were not the streets of her dream. The streets in her dream were older with longer histories behind them. There were streetcars and miles of row homes and she knew it was not New Hope.

She had seen a pictorial view of Philadelphia in *Life Magazine* once and there it was! She had found the streets of her dream. She bought that issue, took it home with her. She kept it under the rest of her magazines on the shelves in her room. She would take it out when she felt lonely and look at the pictures of Philadelphia. She felt warm, at home in those pictures. The lanes opened up their arms to caress her. Her imagination, anyway.

She could look at those scenes and feel the pages open themselves to her just as if she could walk right into them. Then turn left and know what she would see. Then turn right and know what would be there. She knew that she was familiar with that place but not why or how she knew it. She only knew that someday she would be in Philadelphia. Her dream told her so.

Then she would get scared, slam the magazine shut like a last resort and put it back on the shelf where it belonged. She would take it out again when she needed its peacefulness and reassurance. For right now though, just getting through another hot muggy day was enough.