

Outside the Perimeter

by

John Thursday

I.

John could barely make out the voice coming down the hall from his mother's bedroom as he opened his eyes one January morning, remembering talk of snow the night before. Looking out of the window he saw a fresh cover of white reflecting the morning sun and a steady flurry of flakes still falling. In long-johns and socks, he raced down the hall toward the Pied-Piper sounds of his mother's green-plastic radio and listened as the DJ read down the list of school closings. A thermometer, placed there the year before by his great grandfather, hung just outside the second story window of the master bedroom overlooking their large front yard. His mother was sitting in front of a vanity mirror applying makeup as he sat down on her king-sized bed and listened to the radio.

"Atlanta City Schools, Fulton County, Gwinnett County..." The radio announcer was going down the list of counties. John couldn't make out any order to the announcement. His older brother Lane walked into the room wearing only the gym shorts he slept in and a smile that betrayed the generally cool demeanor he typically tried to comport.

Have they said us yet? Lane asked, looking over his mother's shoulder and into the mirror, striking a bodybuilder pose he had seen in one of his magazines. John stared at his brother. Lane had begun shaving his forearms to accentuate the progress he was making in the weight room, a place John didn't care to go.

Not yet, their mother replied, finishing her face with a light dusting of powder before standing up and putting on her coat.

Cobb County, Paulding County, Cherokee, Forsyth, the DJ continued. Matthew and his brother looked at each other in anticipation of the great announcement and silently planned a day of unsupervised shenanigans. For John, this meant taking the trucks off of his skateboard to make it a snowboard. For Lane it was walking the few streets over to Shelly Smith's house in the hopes that her mother would be at work, leaving her to fend for herself against the motley crew of neighborhood boys who had taken interest in her over the past year.

The boy's mother, Susan, walked toward the small green radio mumbling to herself about how she didn't get a snow day when the DJ finally came clean with the news that Dekalb County schools would be closed. The boys shouted at the top of their lungs in Saturnalian celebration as their mother exited the room and made for the stairs.

Don't forget to feed the cat! she yelled as they listened to her distinctive footsteps against the carpeted stairs heading down and out to work.

The green radio was now playing the pop-rock hits of 1986 as Lane exited the room. Matthew walked over to the window where the thermometer hung covered in sickles.

It's only seven degrees outside! He shouted to an empty room. Lane was already in the shower getting ready for his big day.

Shuttering from the cold, Susan jumped into the car and closed the door. Without letting it run, she shifted the ten-year-old Beetle into gear and made a sharp

turn in reverse out of the garage and down the steep driveway, deftly navigating the slight curve without turning around to look. Her mind focused easily on the voices of the zany morning talk show hosts coming from her FM radio. Dionne and friends sang *That's What Friends Are For* as the newly forty, but longtime single, mother of two pulled to a stop at the top of the cul-de-sac in the eleven year old subdivision of Dunwoody, Georgia. Now, with a only a flurry here and there, the sky was a pregnant grey blanket laid over the city as she made the same left turn out of her street that she had been making five days a week for the last twelve years. Through divorce, illness, and car trouble, Susan had never once been late to work, much less missed a day. As much as she loved the boys, she loved her reputation as a dependable employee of the Southern Bell System. The car had still not warmed up by the time she made it to the first traffic light, just down the road from the street she lived on, but warmth, or lack of it, was not the kind of thing of which Susan took note.

Lane was in the shower thinking about wrestling. His team - led by an unhinged former drill sergeant and veteran of the Vietnam war - was headed for the State Championship again this year and he had dreams of winning his weight-class. John knocked on the door.

Hurry up! he shouted before picking the lock and busting in.

Get out of here, John! Lane yelled angrily. *I'll be done in a second!*