
PHILIP SCHULTZ

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The Cinemascope is too big for the screen so Alan Ladd rides off into the curtains and the gangsters in the B-picture look like the men in the pool hall where Father owns peanut machines. The lights come on and we shake Father and follow everyone out to walk home under the elms and sycamores, through the crickets, fireflies and honeysuckle, Mother's hand in mine and Father a step ahead, bent under the streetlights whose shadows curl his fedora into a snake and squeeze his face into a fist. Friday nights in spring nobody talks about lugging syrup cases up factory stairs or stopping to breathe in icy alleyways or counting greasy coins until your thumbs blister or all the bills we can't pay. . . . In spring we walk under the Rochester stars, chilled and stuck-up, Father says, his lips silently answering old insults, Mother's blue eyes black with a sadness she can't say, all the way to our house on Cuba Place, where the porch light sways in the breeze off Lake Ontario and the fence needs painting and the kitchen sags under our weight, where Mother and I were born and I am the best thing that ever happened to her, she whispers, putting me to bed, back when the world was new and Alan Ladd was already too big for the neighborhood.