

## *Dear Old Golden School Days*

BOMBING DOWN THE NARROW COUNTRY ROAD, dashboard clock showing 8:15, a long stretch yet ahead and opening bell to sound at 8:30, April cranks up the car radio to blasting. The Who. Daltrey's sandpaper cockney, stuttering 'bout his g-g-generation. Drums, bass, Pete Townsend on guitar, rockin' and riffin' . . . *blam blam blam blam blaam-da blam blam*. A frenzy. Unbidden, her foot in sync presses more firmly down on the accelerator.

The VW easily manoeuvres the winding road, a pot-holed blacktop that turns into an unpaved country path several miles ahead. With still-fresh recollections of last Monday, mired in mud, and now about to face her first actual class meeting, she focuses on the countryside, trying mightily to push aside apprehension. Even Josh, with his suggestion yesterday about assigning "each little shit" a price tag, couldn't get her to lighten up.

Modest farmhouses and recently harvested fields of soybean and feed corn zip by. Dairy cows and work horses graze on patches of sun-singed grass broken by thickets of tulip poplars and jack pines. Hickory and river birch, their tinted leaves hinting of an early fall, cast reflections in the occasional pond. Their beady porkers' eyes ogling straight at the speeding VW, a chorus line of hairy hogs snout through slats of a farmer's fence. Hardly pink and baby-ass smooth, as in *The Three Little!* she chuckles, her mind descending in free fall: *Nothing's* as it seems. "There's a *hog* in the stream" . . . Black Panther jive for "Outa my way, white man!"

"Dizzy Miss Lizzy." The Beatles' cheeky sexuberance takes over The Who, and April, really into it now, all anxieties swept away to another soundtrack, smiles, thinking, Groovy. Blood pulsing to Ringo's beat, Lennon's country-yawlin', the guitar's complainin' and stompin', she at once snaps to, jolted by the sudden sharp bend in the road. She ought to have expected the curve, but not the swirling fit of Day-Glo reds and purples, blues and sun-yellows, mania of mad mandalas waiting immediately beyond it! Reflexively she jerks the steering wheel at the sight of a van parked off to the right. The Bug soars into the air, across the path and high over the field, buoyed up by the strains of "Yellow Submarine," — yellow submarine yellow submarine spinning like an ocean vessel caught in a maelstrom, as she, John, Paul, George and Ringo, sail up to the sun.

Beautiful. Floating, transcendent, her soul about to join all other souls . . . Oh, too young, too young! "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds" sinks the yellow submarine and sends the VW rocketing skyward, transporting her to a new high before arcing downward. The next day's *Indiana Gazette*, front page, flashes before her eyes:

**Fiery Redhead Flips on Trip in Flying Black Beetle, Mystery Van Vaults New Berryville Music Teacher into Space:** Ms.

April Blume, most recently of Bloomington, Indiana, swerving to avoid clashing with a mystical “psychedelic” vehicle displaying California licence plates and reported to have been holding hippies from Haight-Ashbury, catapulted into orbit in her car and perished in a tomato field yesterday morning. She was trying to reach the school in time for the early warning bell. A stack of music arranged for Band, Beethoven’s “Ode to Joy,” was found on the passenger seat. On being informed of Ms. Blume’s untimely demise, Principal Willard Denny remarked it was a “cruel” way for her to be brought down to earth.

The flying VW angles in for a landing, bumps and thumps along the ground and shudders to an abrupt halt, wheels spinning in mud. Oh, Hub, where are you when I need you? runs through her head, conjuring a vision of the strapping ballplayer as her slopeside knight. The voice of a D.J. intrudes, announces a new release by the Grateful Dead. April blinks, dazed. Not until she hears a knock on her window and sees a man glowering, gripping a pitchfork and mouthing, “You all right in there?” . . . not until then, and only on slowly taking in his farmer’s work denims does she concede this isn’t Hell and she isn’t dead.

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