

Excerpt from...

Tumbleweeds ***(or The Very Last Penny Candy Store on Earth)***

***Tumbleweeds** is a parable of youth, specifically about that defining moment that changes even the most stubborn resolve to think beyond years, places, and circumstances. The main character, Henry, is about to experience the trauma of moving from a place that he loved, where he had friends, and where the world genuflected to his imagination. His parents, not knowing how to break it to him, and Henry, ignoring all the signs of such a mighty move (even though packing boxes crowded every free space in his house), encounters the shock of an incomprehensible change about to happen.*

Autumn in Anaheim is the reason California exists, as it stretches summer into unusual contortions, fooling kids into thinking summer is forever. The slight chill that only adults feel seldom puts the kibosh on going outside for milk breaks and lunch and recess and another break for the sake of the day. During lunch Chuck and Mike would plot new, alas, maybe, after-school play, while my heart sunk into the ominous nothingness of



In late October, uncertainty pulled up to the school in the form of a 1958 Studebaker—a powder blue and white station wagon, the likes of which were singular and striking, like my dad—fine taste in clothes and cars, riding on a blue collar paycheck highway.

My mom strolls into the courtyard, we make eye contact, she smiles and waves, goes over to Mrs. Driscoll, whispers sweet haste for me into her ear, no doubt. What did I do? Did I forget my Zorro lunchbox? My plaid green school knapsack? My shoes? My special ability to put into suspended animation the obvious? Mrs. Driscoll comes to me as a happy bee, hovering over my hive of blissful schoolmates; I look to my mom, who looks to my dad and the Studebaker: “It’s time to go, Henry.”



The horror! "You may want to say goodbye to your friends." Class, Henry is..." I stopped hearing, my legs buckled, my arm fell into my mom's hand, my mates stared, but I only saw betrayal, deceit, sickness, something untoward lurking forward...away. There was a waving—not 'waving'—a waving—of tendrils from something in a fishtank. Karen's dabbed her eye in pigtails, Charles and Michael's lives flashed before me: dead, but undying. I was dead, too; in the caboose of the Studebaker, looking forward to getting carsick.



“Again, Henry!” getting a stern look from my mom—my look: oblivion and ennui. “I spy vomit,” my little brother blurted, smarter than any kid that age has a right to be. And so it went, so we travelled, so we stopped and ate, and I did what I couldn’t help but doing on the roadside.

One night we settled into a nice motel and watched The Everly Brothers on *Ed Sullivan*: It’s my sole, joyous memory of a trip that rearranged my stomach and attitude towards everything thereon.

“Henry!!!”

“Wake up, ‘Lil Henry. Wake up!”

“Where are you, Henry?”

Where I was, was shut down. Yet, I woke up, and I wasn’t Little Suzie, but now I knew: It was me against all of them from here on. When I saw the Welcome to Massachusetts sign, I spewed my final casserole—all over the caboose, with my older brother demanding: “ Make him walk from here.”



My dad, always understanding, pulled over and cleaned up my mess as I shrugged. Luckily, a Ho Jo's was up ahead and we bolted for the clam strips while the car aired out. With every clam strip dripping ketchup, I imagined nothing. My mom would smile: "What are we going to do with you, Henry?"

"Make him walk home, mom. He smells."

I would have gladly walked the 3,000 miles back to the Golden State to chase the sun.

