Annie Dillard, *An American Childhood*, excerpt

He chased us silently, block after block. He chased us silently over picket fences, through thorny hedges, between houses, around garbage cans, and across streets. Every time I glanced back, choking for breath, I expected he would have quit. He must have been as breathless as we were. His jacket strained over his body. It was an immense discovery, pounding into my hot head with every sliding, joyous step, that this ordinary adult evidently knew what I thought only children who trained at football knew: that you have to fling yourself at what you’re doing, you have to point yourself, forget yourself, aim, dive.

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He chased us through the backyard labyrinths of ten blocks before he caught us by our jackets. He caught us and we all stopped.

We three stood staggering, half blinded, coughing, in an obscure hilltop backyard: a man in his twenties, a boy, a girl. He had released our jackets, our pursuer, our captor, our hero: he knew we weren’t going anywhere. We all played by the rules. Mikey and I unzipped our jackets. I pulled off my sopping mittens. Our tracks multiplied in the backyard’s new snow. We had been breaking new snow all morning. We didn’t look at each other. I was cherishing my excitement. The man’s lower pants legs were wet; his cuffs were full of snow, and there was a prow of snow beneath them on his shoes and socks. Some trees bordered the little flat backyard, some messy winter trees. There was no one around; a clearing in a grove, and we were the only players.

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If in that snowy backyard the driver of the black Buick had cut off our heads, Mikey’s and mine, I would have died happy, for nothing has required so much of me since as being chased all over Pittsburgh in the middle of winter–running terrified, exhausted–by this sainted, skinny, furious redheaded man who wished to have a word with us. I don’t know how he found his way back to his car.