

LIGHTNING STRIKES

The Heights is where all the black people lived in Twinsburg, Ohio, in the late fifties. The adults I knew called it the colored settlement. My father and grandfather ran whiskey and beer up there and took me with them. It wasn't the kind of bootlegging Robert Mitchum did in the movie, Thunder Road, when he ran moonshine in a two-door, '51 Ford. What we did seemed ordinary. Just the same, I don't remember anybody getting arrested for anything serious before that night. Grandpa George and I would carry the cases up the basement stairs, look sideways at the police station next door, load up the trunk, and stack the boxes on the Packard's backseat. I was twelve, but I still got to sit on top of the whiskey when he drove up the hill.

My grandpa and dad both told me it wasn't just for the money. They said they took the risks because everybody had a right to drink, and no one else was willing to sell to the colored joints in The Heights that couldn't get a liquor license.

Most white folks never went there, except to pick up the help. Me, I spent a lot of time with my friend Ike, and his twin sister Ada, and some other kids. So I knew my way around. The people who lived in The Heights sat on porches, hung their clothes out to dry, and grew sunflowers in their yards just like the people in town. They had less stuff, but I didn't see as how anybody was that different.

The roads on the hill were dirt and cinder, except for the paved one that marked the east-west border and cut through to a county road on the other side of the settlement, the one Craig Dodson's mom drove us down in her '56 Woody to see Tarzan movies for a quarter. . .