“Going home
Without my sorrow
Going home
Sometime tomorrow
Going Home
To where it’s better
Than before”
- Leonard Cohen. Going Home

“Jim, he just sat there yesterday afternoon crying.” Adeline pointed to the black naugahyde couch next to the glass egress doors in the entry waiting room outside our unit’s office next to her desk.

The image of a slight, eleven year old with dark bangs drifting across his forehead bawling his eyes out made me sick to my stomach.

“He wouldn’t tell me what was wrong.” “He kept crying and asking me to find you.” “Please find Mr. Cuddy, I gotta’ talk to him.”

I’d disappeared for the afternoon.

“When I told him I didn’t think you were coming back, he just kept crying and asking me if he could sit at your desk.”

“I didn’t know what to do.”

“Jane came out and walked him back, he sat in your chair, Tony started joking around, after a while he got Dana laughing, then Jane and Jan (Hurley) walked him back to his cottage.”

“I’m sorry Adeline.”

Fuck, what a dark time this was. I was literally still in the state of shock following last week’s Administration meeting with
our Ad Hoc Committee. We’d heard nothing yet about a follow up meeting. Based on what happened last week at the Forand Building why would I ever want to meet with those motherfuckers again.

Dana was being discharged tomorrow. I’d finally persuaded his aunt to take him. She’d get a foster care check, Dana’d get his own room. After a few home visits which I’d arranged over the last six weeks to make sure in his aunt’s words that “he wouldn’t be a bother” she’d agreed to take him in.

I’d made a present for Dana and planned on giving it to him this afternoon, making sure he packed it with his few belongings and then figuring we’d find a place for it in his bedroom at his aunt’s house.

I knew what had happened or at least thought I did. Not a big leap. Dana had been increasingly jittery about Mr. Montanaro, who had taken to turning up the belittling and demeaning volume on his non-stop diatribes, lately directed at Dana.

A sampling:

“You’re not going to make it.”

“You’re just like your brother.” (currently at the Training School).

“Your aunt doesn’t care about you. She just wants a check.”

“You’ll see I’m right. You’ll be back here in a month.”

About a week ago, right after Dana told me, in tears, about what was going on, I marched over to O cottage and confronted Montanaro.

I had to give the fat asshole some credit, he didn’t back away when I planted myself two inches from his ugly face.

“What the fuck is wrong with you, leave my kid alone.”
“You can’t talk to me like that. I’m going over to the office and tell Mr. Spinelli you’re swearin’ at me in front of the boys.”

“You do that, I’ll go with you. You’re a fat useless piece of shit.”

My anger had morphed into gale force winds, threatening to blow us both away.

“You say one more word to Dana before he leaves and you’ll see me again, Montanaro. It won’t be here either.” “Watch your back asshole.”

Leaving the cottage, I got the anger shakes. I’d never lost it with any of the houseparents like that. I guess my ‘cool’ and affable demeanor even with the ‘abusers’ was melting away, especially in the face of what I saw as the Administration’s indifference.

Later, after getting control of myself, I returned to the cottage, knowing that Montanaro had left and Miss Jones was now on duty.

Stuff had grown a little tense between us. Miss Jones had refused to write a statement for the report. After my third attempt, in early July, which crossed the line into badgering, she got pissed at me.

“Mr. Cuddy, you’re a young white man with a Master’s Degree. I’m a 58 year old Negro woman with a grandson and a nephew to raise.”

We hadn’t said much to each other since. Two months later she was still pissed at me.

Miss Jones greeted me with “I told you last spring, Mr. Cuddy, not to let him stay here long. This place is bad for boys like Dana.”
There was, however, a faint, closed mouth smile at the corner of her lips, her tone was lighter than her words. I knew she’d been told what went down earlier between Montanaro and myself.

“Hey, Miss Jones, I want to show you the book I made for Dana. I’m trying to help him understand who he is and what happened to him.”

We sat at one of the dining room tables and I walked her through a little book I’d put together using construction paper and pictures of families ripped from magazines I’d shoplifted from Delta Drug Store earlier in the week. The words tried to explain that while Dana couldn’t live with his mom, he would be going to a place where people would love him. “This is the best I could do Miss Jones. I don’t have any actual photos of anyone in his family.”

“This is real nice Mr. Cuddy. Thanks for going the extra mile with him.” I noticed the same tear in the corner of Miss Jones’ eye that I’d seen in Adeline’s eye the day before when she told me about Dana’s anguish.

Everything went as planned. The next day Miss Jones and I helped Dana pack up his belongings, then we drove to Central Falls to his aunt’s, set up his room. Then we sat on the bed and I read him what I’d written and told him the pictures of beautiful people taken from a magazine represented his family. We then put the book in the top drawer of his bureau. I hugged him and said goodbye letting Dana know that he would be getting a new social worker. Dana grabbed my arm and started crying.

“Come on, my man, let’s take a walk.”

As we walked, I talked, “Dana, you know what that place is like. I gotta’ help other kids get outta’ there like I got you out of there.” “OK?” Well it really wasn’t, but it was enough for that afternoon.

My placement activities ended with a long talk with Dana and his aunt in their living room.
The following week I transferred his case to the Pawtucket Area worker. Not before I had a rather intense conversation with Bill that began with “I’m not transferring him to that shithead, he’s a lazy asshole who won’t pay any attention to a kid who needs lots of it.”

Bill’s attempt to mollify me consisted of, “Jim you don’t have the time.” followed by “Jim this is part of the new protocol.” and finally “OK. I’ll talk to Irene” (area casework supervisor).

Our conversation ended with “OK, you don’t mind if I have a little chat with John (caseworker), do you?”

“Not at all.”

So I had a chat with John, who I was still pissed off at for ducking me when I tried to get him to submit a statement for the Report 3 months before. He had two kids at the Center, during the time we were putting the Report together.

After the professional part of our conversation which consisted of school adjustment, family constellation relationships, support for Dana and getting him a Big Brother, I delivered a threat, not a veiled one either.

“If I ever see Dana at the Center again, I’m going to come looking for you. Do we understand each other?”

Right before I left CWS one of the houseparents I’d grown close to told me Miss Jones was functionally illiterate and too embarrassed to share that with me. He also told me that when she brought her nephew and grandson to Church every Sunday she would first pray for the children living at the Center and then she would pray for me.

It was my turn to cry.