

Prologue

Dangling from the last rung of the fire escape, staring down at the short drop to the scruffy Brooklyn sidewalk below, afraid to let go, my nine-year-old brain raising fears in the night (Suppose I slip when my feet hit? Suppose it's further down than it looks? Suppose I land on my face?), my twin cousin Sally-Boy calling to me from below ("Come on, Mikey, I done it, so you can do it! It's nuttin. Just let go, you drop, you land. Just let go, Mikey."), so I finally do it, I release my small fingers slowly, I feel the brief emptiness of space and summer's suddenly cool air, and I fight back a brief gasp when I fear the sidewalk has disappeared, and then my feet absorb the impact of the concrete, my knees bend slightly, I hold my balance, and Sally's laughter echoes, "Hahahaha! Mikey, we did it, Mikey, we did it! We made it all the way down! Hahahahaha! I knew we could do it, I knew it!" and I laugh with him as we punch each other lightly, and then I see the blackness of the street except for a few flickering lights in the tenements surrounding us and a distant street lamp shining its yellow-tinged glow, so I sit on the warm sidewalk with him, doing nothing, talking the idle chatter of two nine-year-olds who feel the rush of having broken yet another rule, and I look up at the fire escape all the way to the top and beyond into the starry sky, and suddenly I think, but I do not ask, "Where do we go now, Sally-Boy?"