

1970

by Oliver Hunt

Radio burnin' up above

I once asked my pop if he saw MC5 at the DNC. He was in the garage, replacing the clutch on a GS 550-- not his own-- and muttering Fucking rice rocket under his breath. He groaned, nodded and said Yeah, yeah. They used to play Lincoln Park all the time, seeing them wasn't any sort of big deal. Not why most of us were there, anyway. I knew DNC was where he met my mom, and a couple of years later I was born. I had just been turned onto MC5 by some weird older dude-- a friend's dad's friend-- and hoped they might have something to do with it.

Pop called me from prison on my thirtieth birthday, relating the tale of the day I split the womb. I don't remember meeting my mother, she disappeared a little after that. I was still just an infant when she left, a little fleshpod who wouldn't remember shit. I should've grown up pissed at her but I wasn't, really. Dad said she was a crazy hippie who took shrooms while in labor and swore my dad was the devil. He said she smoked a lot of pot and did a lot of windowpane while pregnant, but he was always on reds or black beauties. He'd go Why are you taking fucking drugs when you're pregnant? And she'd go Why are *you* taking fucking drugs when I'm pregnant? He'd say That's different because it's not in *me*. So maybe she was right, he said, maybe I was the devil, I don't know. Some of my teachers and peers thought so- he was a burly old biker. I maybe gave them a few reasons to think I was some spawn of satan, but I'm pretty sure any damage I did wasn't permanent. Maybe except for that thing at Bell House, in Kansas City, but that wasn't all me. Part of that episode was the bone Creepy Jesse made us take home. I regretted showing it to him, really. There were times, after it was shown to me, I'd visit it on my own, sorta pretend it was my mom's. If nobody else was around I'd talk to it. Say what you will about that, I don't care.

Anyway, pop told me he took my mom to the hospital on his BSA Rocket 3. It was right after an ice storm, so the streets were still slick. Maybe not the best idea, he said. Master of understatement, my dad. Of course he hit black ice. Everything was shaky and blurry and my dad got out of spin in time to see my mom-- pregnant with me—slide on her stomach on icy pavement, the bike careening behind her.

In pain and shock, he limped to his bike, picked up my mom like a sack of laundry and, as she kicked, yelled and pounded, remounted his bike and rode the rest of the way to the hospital. The whole time she screamed It wasn't supposed to be today! It wasn't supposed to be today! My dad was the devil and today was not the day. Normally when she started ranting, he said, he'd tell her to shut up. That would be enough, he said, he never had to raise a hand to her. This time he didn't even tell her to shut up, he just let her scream the whole way.

He told me that it took an hour after me being born for the adrenalin to wear off, then he felt the broken collarbone he'd sustained in that bang-up. He told me it was a miracle I wasn't born deformed or retarded. I told him, thirty years later, the jury's still out on both of those. We both laughed. He told me it was really better she left. I'm not saying I was the world's greatest dad or anything, he said, but we both would've been worse if we'd stayed together. I told him he was good enough- I was alive, unmaimed, and never homeless. I don't ask for much.

I'm not sure if I was celebrating or mourning the occasion, turning thirty, but I definitely felt it the next day. I didn't all the way black out the night before but, to me, it existed in fuzzy pictures, scenes, words. I can say for sure I didn't wake up with scars, scrapes or bruises this time, and that I woke up alone in my own bed. To some that may be anticlimactic. I mostly remember talking to whoever was around. I talked about whatever came to mind, the way people do when they're tired. I turned thirty and months before it turned 2000. The world didn't end but it didn't turn all Jetson-

utopia either. All that circled around in my head, and that's mostly what I talked about.

The guy who'd turned me on to MC5 as a teenager was some crusty old rock critic. A lot of people thought him kinda creepy, maybe he kinda was. He never tried to molest any of us, if that's what people worried about. He'd once let me borrow a bunch of records-- most of them I forgot to return-- then he died. I listen the noisiest stuff hungover. It makes shit make sense a little. Noise meets the sickness. It provides comfort. I felt a little better. A hangover isn't forever, anyway.

