

David Kherdian has an idiosyncratic concept of Armenian identity. His childhood in Racine was completely immersed in all things Armenian, like that of many Armenian children who lived in ghettos and whose fathers worked blue-collar jobs in local factories. He had Armenian playmates with whom he sometimes spoke in Armenian, "when we wanted to keep something from our non-Armenian playmates," the *odars* whom they called "Americans." And "when the Americans were angry with us... they called us Harmones, or Dirty Armenians." David could not understand that. He finally concluded it was because he and his friends were dark-complected. But he couldn't change anything. "I had no choice in the end but to begin to live with these feelings of inferiority that were being imposed on me, and there were times when I was tempted to believe the slander."¹⁰⁷ He resented those feelings and tried hard to distance himself from everything Armenian and to be part of the mainstream American crowd in Racine. Yet at the same time he envied Abby, another Armenian boy who lived in his neighborhood. Abby used to stand on the front lawn of his family's home and roar "at the top of his lungs." David did not know what it meant to Abby, but for him, it was a gesture of emancipation. "Here was someone," he thought, "reveling in his own humanity,"

... vulnerable, unsecured,
but fearless and undaunted. He was
for me the first Armenian to punctuate
the American landscape with a signature

¹⁰⁷ Kherdian, "Our Block," in *Forgotten Bread*, pp. 328–30.