

## Down Nostalgia Road

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*September, 1966*

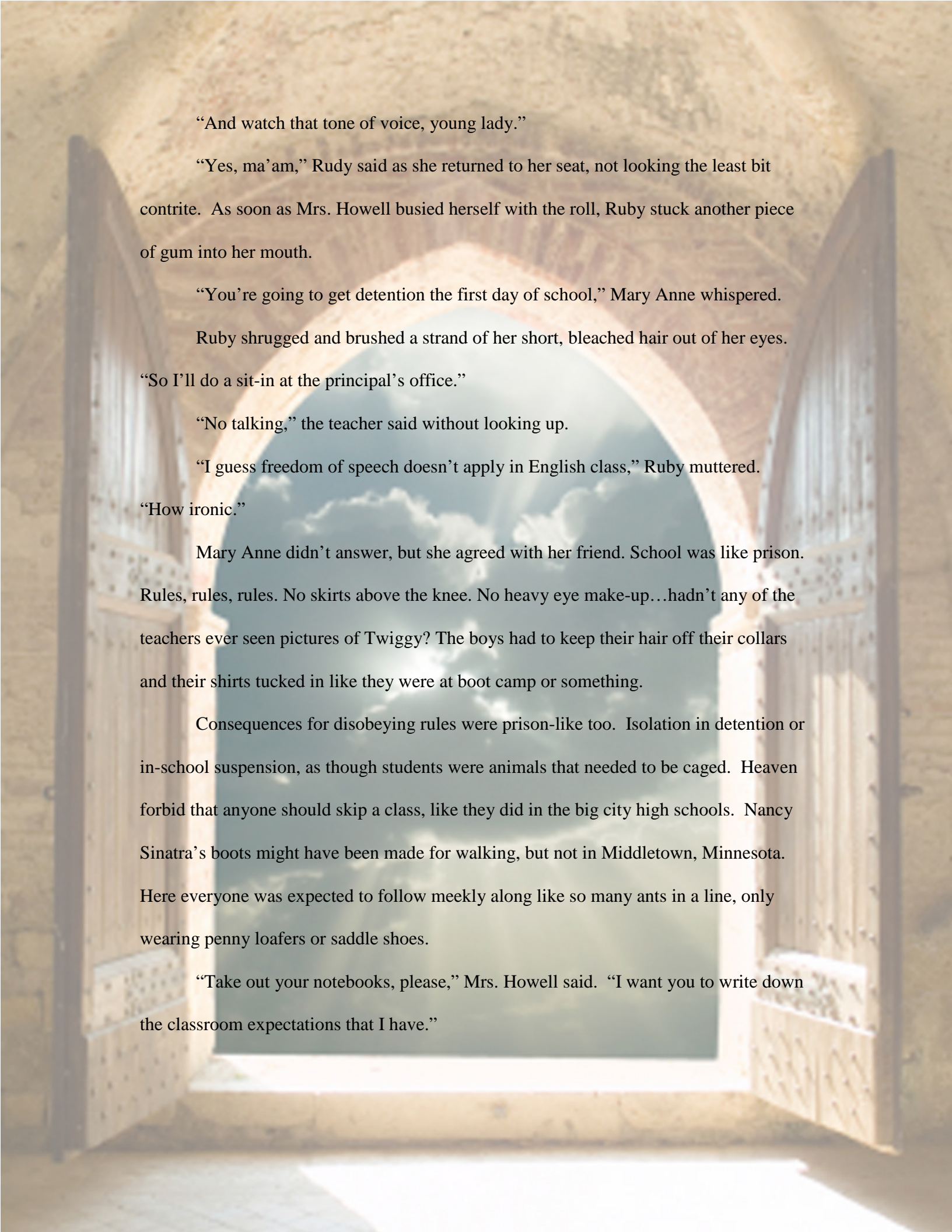
Mary Anne Wade side-stepped two, macho football players swaggering down the freshly waxed linoleum hallway of Middletown High School to their next class. Not that she expected them to notice her—she wasn't the cute, bouncy cheerleader type—but it would be nice to get through the first day of her senior year without bruises from being bumped against the wall.

Nothing ever changed in Middletown, Minnesota, except the seasons. Cold, gray winter gave way to the green of spring to be followed by the heat of summer haze and autumn's splash of color. Then the cycle repeated itself with as much surety as the sun rising in the east and setting in the west. While the nation was embroiled with riots connected to the Civil Rights movement and antiwar protests and rallies were held elsewhere, the residents of Middletown went about their daily tasks in the same, routine manner as they always had. The popular crowd still consisted of athletes and pom-pom girl types, like it had since the Fifties.

Mary Anne tossed her long, dark hair past her shoulders and entered her English class as the tardy bell rang, bringing a stern look from the teacher. As she slipped into a seat beside Ruby Jones, her friend smiled and popped her bubble gum. Mrs. Howell narrowed her gaze on Ruby.

“No gum chewing allowed. Get rid of it.”

Rudy rose and sauntered to the wastebasket. “Whatever.”



“And watch that tone of voice, young lady.”

“Yes, ma’am,” Rudy said as she returned to her seat, not looking the least bit contrite. As soon as Mrs. Howell busied herself with the roll, Ruby stuck another piece of gum into her mouth.

“You’re going to get detention the first day of school,” Mary Anne whispered.

Ruby shrugged and brushed a strand of her short, bleached hair out of her eyes.

“So I’ll do a sit-in at the principal’s office.”

“No talking,” the teacher said without looking up.

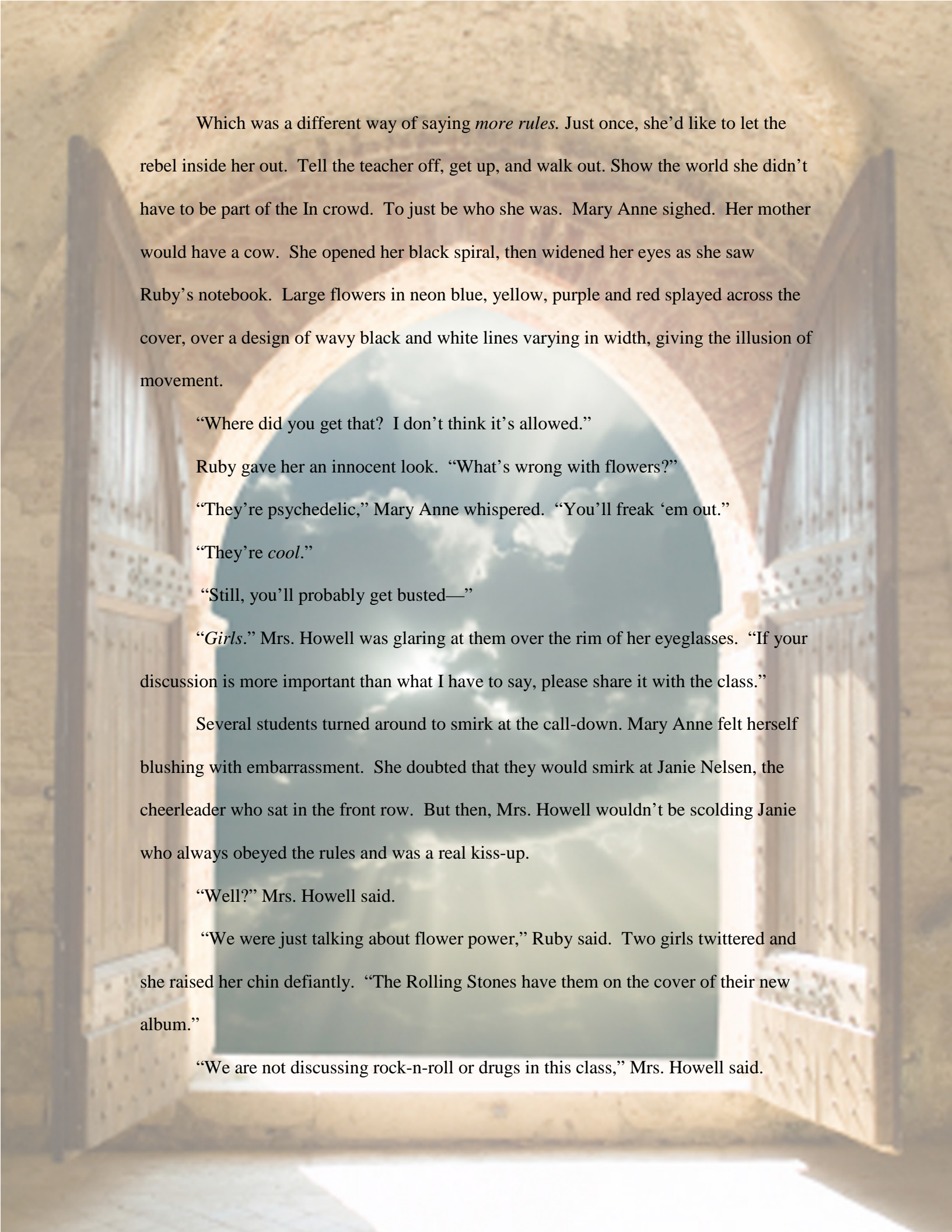
“I guess freedom of speech doesn’t apply in English class,” Ruby muttered.

“How ironic.”

Mary Anne didn’t answer, but she agreed with her friend. School was like prison. Rules, rules, rules. No skirts above the knee. No heavy eye make-up...hadn’t any of the teachers ever seen pictures of Twiggy? The boys had to keep their hair off their collars and their shirts tucked in like they were at boot camp or something.

Consequences for disobeying rules were prison-like too. Isolation in detention or in-school suspension, as though students were animals that needed to be caged. Heaven forbid that anyone should skip a class, like they did in the big city high schools. Nancy Sinatra’s boots might have been made for walking, but not in Middletown, Minnesota. Here everyone was expected to follow meekly along like so many ants in a line, only wearing penny loafers or saddle shoes.

“Take out your notebooks, please,” Mrs. Howell said. “I want you to write down the classroom expectations that I have.”



Which was a different way of saying *more rules*. Just once, she'd like to let the rebel inside her out. Tell the teacher off, get up, and walk out. Show the world she didn't have to be part of the In crowd. To just be who she was. Mary Anne sighed. Her mother would have a cow. She opened her black spiral, then widened her eyes as she saw Ruby's notebook. Large flowers in neon blue, yellow, purple and red splayed across the cover, over a design of wavy black and white lines varying in width, giving the illusion of movement.

"Where did you get that? I don't think it's allowed."

Ruby gave her an innocent look. "What's wrong with flowers?"

"They're psychedelic," Mary Anne whispered. "You'll freak 'em out."

"They're *cool*."

"Still, you'll probably get busted—"

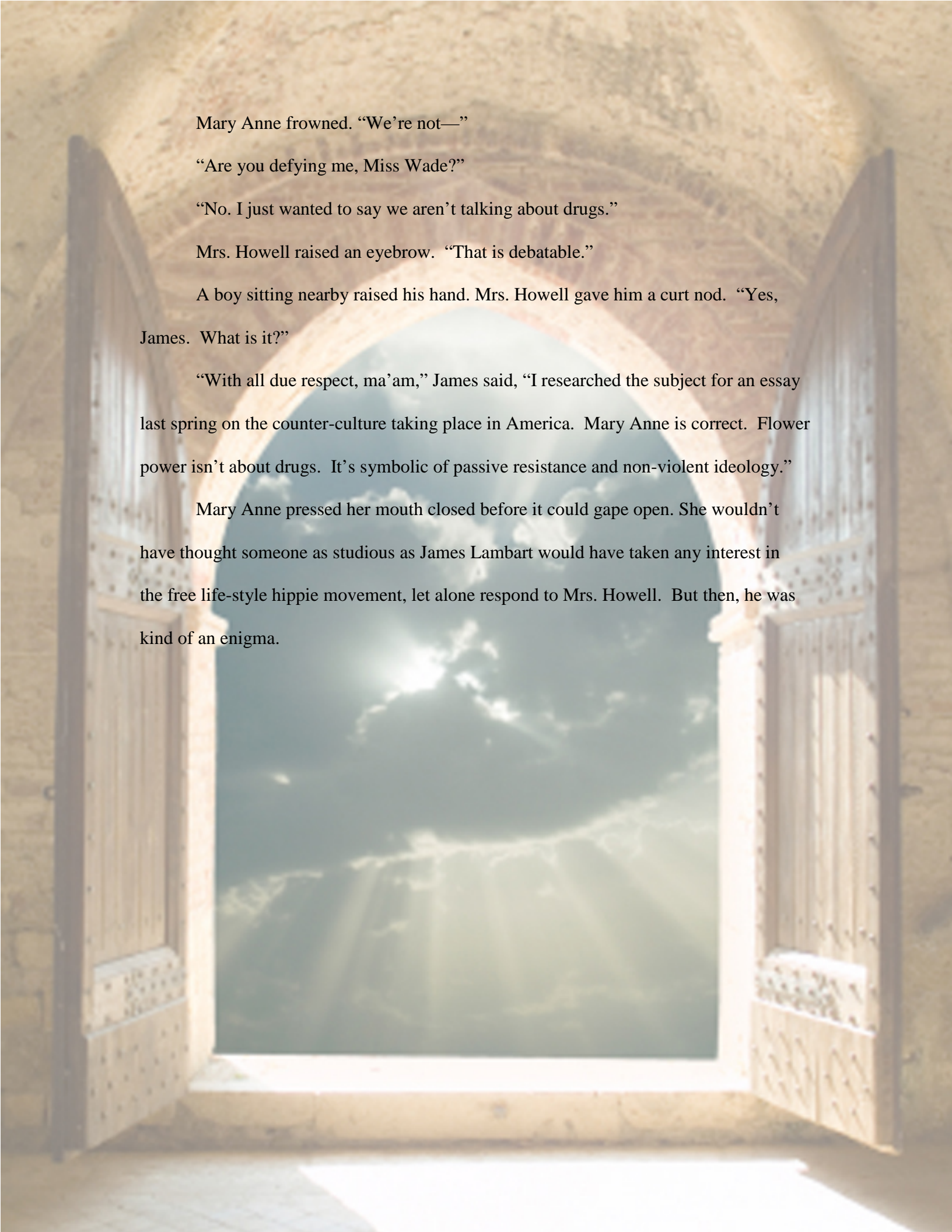
"*Girls*." Mrs. Howell was glaring at them over the rim of her eyeglasses. "If your discussion is more important than what I have to say, please share it with the class."

Several students turned around to smirk at the call-down. Mary Anne felt herself blushing with embarrassment. She doubted that they would smirk at Janie Nelsen, the cheerleader who sat in the front row. But then, Mrs. Howell wouldn't be scolding Janie who always obeyed the rules and was a real kiss-up.

"Well?" Mrs. Howell said.

"We were just talking about flower power," Ruby said. Two girls twittered and she raised her chin defiantly. "The Rolling Stones have them on the cover of their new album."

"We are not discussing rock-n-roll or drugs in this class," Mrs. Howell said.

A stone archway with open wooden doors leading to a bright, sunlit landscape with mountains and a river.

Mary Anne frowned. “We’re not—”

“Are you defying me, Miss Wade?”

“No. I just wanted to say we aren’t talking about drugs.”

Mrs. Howell raised an eyebrow. “That is debatable.”

A boy sitting nearby raised his hand. Mrs. Howell gave him a curt nod. “Yes, James. What is it?”

“With all due respect, ma’am,” James said, “I researched the subject for an essay last spring on the counter-culture taking place in America. Mary Anne is correct. Flower power isn’t about drugs. It’s symbolic of passive resistance and non-violent ideology.”

Mary Anne pressed her mouth closed before it could gape open. She wouldn’t have thought someone as studious as James Lambart would have taken any interest in the free life-style hippie movement, let alone respond to Mrs. Howell. But then, he was kind of an enigma.