

THE HOUSE

There are times when I can see the house in my mind, clearly picture details of it, but I cannot remember exactly where it was. I recall that it needed a coat or two of paint and that the lawn was overgrown. Sometimes I think there were boards covering the windows, but there are other times when I recall faded lace curtains behind rippled windowpanes.

I remember chilling spring rains that tore the blossoms from the cherry tree that stood in the front yard, its petals sprinkled about the ground like the confetti remnants of some somber vernal parade.

Maybe students lived in the house. Beer cans were piled in the side of the yard. But there are times when I think the house stood in the neighborhood where I grew up, an old misfit with wood clapboards in the middle of a subdivision filled with ranch homes and split levels with aluminum siding, named for the farm it had been built over. Some said the old man who lived alone in the house was a millionaire who buried his money in jars in the back yard. But those were only tales told by boys who had read too many adventure stories.

Sometimes I think I've only seen the house in passing, along the highway or on some lonely back road. There was a time when I would take our son on long drives through the country on the weekends when I had visitation. We would cruise isolated state routes through hamlets that time seemed to have forgotten, stopping to look at old brick and wood frame houses. We used to like the quiet of those old homes. They suggested something simpler, something lost and sad and gone forever.

There are things that I recall vividly about the house. I remember creaky floorboards and stairs, faded wallpaper, sunlight streaming through windows illuminating dust motes as they

floated silently through in the air. I have heard mothers calling their children home for dinner on summer evenings as I sat on the porch, drinking a beer after one of our arguments. I have stood at the bedroom window listening to the wind blow through the trees before a thunderstorm as our son slept in his crib, his breath labored by the croup.

I have dreamt entire lifetimes spent in the house, of lives longed for but never led— the linen tablecloth on the table, your old worn sandals in the closet, the cracked tiles in the bathroom, the stained glass window in the hall through which the day's last light streams. And though I failed you in so many ways, I still think mostly of you.