

Nowhere

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A house. A house in the middle of the countryside, in the middle of nowhere. A big old house with big windows and few lamps. A big house with high roofs, it's cold at night. A big house and down the path there is a stable with no life. A big house with a cat that's not mine. A big house with all these things but none of them belong to me.

Not even the lawyer knew why he bought the house. Why didn't he live in the city like any normal being? Maybe he inherited it too, maybe he bought it knowing one day it would belong to you. No, that can't be true, I laughed, because he didn't even know me, I didn't know him. He smiled an awkward smile. Never mind the papers I had to sign, never mind the lawyers that talked and talked, the house wasn't mine and now it is and I don't know what to do with it. I called everyone, I even called that distant aunt, people whose voice I didn't even recognize, those people who knew me before I was me but now they don't anymore. They didn't want the house. The big house with big windows wasn't what they liked. Didn't he leave you any money? they asked. No. Oh.

So I went to the house. I drove, I got lost, maybe because I didn't use the GPS, maybe I wanted to lose myself. I thought of calling my friends, letting them know, what's the use though. I thought of driving away, driving till I see the sea, driving till I see the fish but no. I stopped. Got out of my car like a feather, I didn't have baggage, at least not with wheels. And I saw the house. The big house. And I saw that the door was big too and I thought of the parties that he threw and how all those people would fit through all that door. We never went to those parties, mom was busy or she didn't like him.

I lied. He did know me, I did know the house, I had met the horses before they passed. When I moved out of my home, when I began to write (oh it was so long ago) I received a letter (who even writes those anymore) and it was from him. I asked my mom, she didn't give it too much thought. In the letter he invited me to visit him, to see where he lived. You'll love it, he assured, but how could he be sure? I would have told him I was busy but the letter didn't give me a chance. It was written in ink, it was written in stone, there was no refusal, I had to go, writing back would cost me more. And so I drove but this time I didn't get lost, I was young, so young, so young I had never lost.

Hello, he said with a smile on his face and I didn't smile I was thinking if we should hug or shake hands or maybe just smile and stand still in front of each other, in front of someone we knew so well and not at all. So he invited me in, I don't remember if we hugged but I remember his perfume so I know we were close. We went to the kitchen, he made coffee. I looked around. Looked at the perfect kitchen, as if made for a photograph. He leaned his back on the table and looked out the window. I looked out the window. It's beautiful, I said, it must be beautiful living here. What's a beautiful life in a beautiful place without someone beautiful to live it as well, he wondered. I was silent. Why did he say that? And what should I say back? I didn't open my mouth but my thoughts swirled around. I thought: if I had this beautiful house, living in it alone... I wouldn't mind (I suppose when I inherited it I thought otherwise). But he didn't seem to be someone who had always lived alone, in his eyes I could see he had known love and lost.

We drank (coffee), we talked (about everything and nothing), we even laughed (I didn't do that often, I must add), and honestly I had a good time. I wish I could say there

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was more, I wish I could say we knew each other back then. But then three hours passed and the moon appeared in the sky. When the crickets started singing and the birds stopped chirping: well I should probably go home. Yes of course, we should do this again. Yes, what a lovely home that you have, thanks for the invitation, it's been nice. But we never did it again, and I didn't see his face until it was white like the moon.

I don't know if he was sick, no one could tell me. All I know is that he is gone but I don't know what happened before. If only he had had someone to love, someone who could tell me what went wrong, someone who could have called if he was sick so I could visit. On second thought maybe not. Maybe it's better this way. I hate hospitals anyway. When I was young I could say they were even kind of fun. When I swallowed a coin at three in the morning that's where I had to go and, reluctantly, the next day my mom let me stay home. But now those places don't feel fun. They're empty and quiet except for the people crying in silence, except for the tears on the floors. No matter why you are there it is always sad, it is always bad. If everything's alright and the doctor says it with a smile, you look around and the misery makes you feel bad. If the doctor has a hard time saying the news, if death lingers in his euphemisms, you see other people smile and laugh and you just feel worse because why did it have to be you who got the worse. And the smell of medicine, the smell that pretends everything is clean but people there don't remember the last shower they took. So maybe it's better this way. Yes, I know it is, it must be. I didn't get to say goodbye but maybe he didn't need that. A farewell could only please myself, make me feel like I did my best, like I finished the chapter of a book. But for him it would have been the same, he's dead either way. Or maybe it would have been nice to know that he was part of my book, that I cared.

I didn't look through the whole house, it felt like spying on someone, it wasn't my right. I wondered why he left it to me, maybe I was his only family. How sad. Maybe he remembered how much I liked the view from the kitchen. I was just being polite. I slept in what I assumed was the guest's room. Wasn't I nothing but a guest? Wasn't that my place? I didn't know how long i would stay, maybe till i sold it away, maybe forever. It's not like I was busy, like I had something to do, someone to see. I was in a house that wasn't mine but it was also the only thing I had. When I woke up I knew what I wanted to do. I cleaned the whole house and put all his things in the attic doing my best not to look at them. I didn't know him when he was alive, and I don't want to know him now. The house was filled with dust, I wondered if he had lived his last days here. Or maybe he had been so long in the hospital that this was never cleaned. Never mind. I went out and mowed the grass, it made me want to plant plants, make it look nice. So I went to the nearest town but I didn't drive. It was a long walk but I liked looking around. I entered the store and looked at what they had pretending I knew something about plants but really just hoping for the guy to offer me a hand. Is there something you need, he asked carelessly. Yes please I'm looking for flowers and plants and things i could put in my garden. He realized I didn't know what I was talking about so he put his book down and helped me around. Never seen you before, are you new in town? You could say that but I don't really live here, I live in the countryside. Oh that's a beautiful place to live, although strange for someone so young. Yes I know but I don't know if I'll live there for long. You see, the house belonged to a family member and I inherited it but I don't know what to do with it. You'll sell it? Maybe, but I haven't made up my mind. Are you sure about that? If I were selling a house I sure as hell wouldn't buy it plants.

When I got to the house it was already dark outside. I went to visit the stables, the only place I hadn't checked out. There was food for the invisible horses and I wondered why. It was probably old but nevertheless strange. I figured if I was going to stay to fix the

garden I might as well sleep in the main room. After all, what kind of guests fix their hosts' garden.

Apparently, planting flowers and making them grow wasn't as easy as I thought. But I wasn't annoyed when I realized I needed help from the guy in the store. So I went there, took the car this time, god knows it was too long a walk for small talk. I asked for help, of course he would get paid and he agreed in an instant, a coworker owed him the extra hours. We drove to the house and it was less awkward than I thought. We talked and it was nice, I suppose.

All day he helped me with the garden and it was the first time I had fun in that house. I loved the smell of the fresh cut grass and the dirt in my bare hands and the sun that blinded my eyes and the feeling of my skin being tanned. What about that stable? He asked. I don't know, I have no idea what happened to the horses, but it's empty. How sad, he replied, looking at it with longing eyes. You should either buy a horse or turn into something it is not. I am not buying a horse, it's too much responsibility, and what would I turn it into, I don't know. Well, think about it, I used to work in construction so if you figure out what you want it to be i can help you accomplish your dream. We laughed.

Later that day. He looked at me in a way... it was strange I must say. Not strange in a bad way, more in the sense of something unknown, never seen before. I'm not only good with manual work, he stated, I also sing at a club, some days, not all. Anyway, I was wondering if maybe you'd be free and if maybe you wanted to come see me. Or hear me. Well, both really. I smiled. Is it tonight? I asked. Whenever you'd like. So tonight it is. I'd come pick you up but I have to get ready before the show. It's no problem, I can walk. I would love to pick you up. To make sure I know it's a date? To make sure you get there safe. Don't worry, I can take care of myself.

And so the day turned into night, the light turned into a warm breeze and my jeans turned into a red dress, maybe too fancy for the guy I was going to date. Under the dress, sneakers on my feet, I was ready to walk the night away and maybe even dance. I got to the club, I thought there'd be more air but the large crowd consumed it all. Every chair was taken except for a lonely little couch right in front of the stage, right under the mic. I sat there alone, staring at all the people I didn't know and a part of me wanted to go but no. Then the lights turned off and a man in a suit walked on and he looked for something in the crowd, he was ready to give up hope, until he looked down at me and we smiled and his eyes turned into stars. And when you could only hear a cough or two, the sound of the people getting comfortable too, the band began to play and everything else faded away. Call me irresponsible, call me unreliable, throw in undependable too. His voice started to sing, what a beautiful tune. Do my foolish alibis bore you? Well, I'm not too clever, I just adore you. And he looked at me like he meant the words he was singing. Call me irresponsible, yes I'm unreliable, but it's undeniably true that I'm irresponsibly mad for you. And he said that everyone knew this song, c'mon and sing along, but nobody dared, they were too busy listening to his voice float through the air.

And at one point he got off the stage, I can't remember well. Someone else took his place as he took my hand and we danced. And I don't know if we were supposed to, I don't know if anyone followed our moves but we danced and at each other we stared and I learned what Frank Sinatra was singing about, he was singing about us. About our flourishing love.

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with a cat named René, he's old but he'll live a bit more with us. A big house with all these things and they all belong to me. And I don't know why, I don't know how, I don't know when it was that the house became my home. And I'll never know the man who lived here before, his things in the attic are untouched, but I know the man who lives here now, he is more my home than this house.