

WE'LL GO NO MORE A-ROVING

THE CHURCH AT the end of the lane is closed. There's no sign or letter on the front door saying so. It is shadowy inside, even on Sundays, and the four parking spaces behind the building are five white lines and nothing else. It's not a church I went to. We don't go to church. But when Ellie and I ride our bikes, we whirlpool around the cul-de-sac, peering at it sideways, as if it might wake up. No one lives near the church, though there are—and I've counted—seven houses in the teardrop. Sometimes Ellie and I talk about the area as if it's diseased. Like maybe a sickness grew inside the church basement and spread underground to the neighboring homes. We can talk ourselves into it, then one of us, usually Ellie, stops imagining and pedals like hell.

We've convinced ourselves of many truths: 1) From the outside, the church is open, but from the inside, it's locked; 2) Time moves differently in there; 3) The organ still works; 4) There's no such thing as God.

Ellie's parents got divorced last year, and I wish my parents would. Ellie gets mad when I say this. She asks questions to prove I don't know what I'm talking about. Questions like how often do my parents fight

and when's the last time my dad slept somewhere else. I tell her it's not a checklist. Sometimes it's just too quiet. Ellie rolls her eyes, and even though she's riding up ahead, I can feel her eyeballs circling behind the lids. She tells me she used to kneel on top of her covers and pray for that kind of quiet. I tell her sometimes I shatter things to make sure the basic principles of physics still apply. When I ask who she prays to anyway, she speeds up to coast down the hill.

Identical yellow *For Sale* signs pop up in the yards of the seven homes. The real estate agent's name is Dirk Kirkpatrick, and Ellie and I costume on a low voice and pretend to introduce ourselves to potential buyers. In his picture his blonde hair flops forward across his brow. We decide his name has too many Ks to not be a joke. Ellie flops her hair forward and mimics Dirk's smarmy smile. In his photo, there is a white light that glows behind his head as if he eclipses the sun.

The grounds around the church are manicured, which only adds to its mystery. Rose bushes line the stone walkway and trimmed privet fills in here and there. In springtime the white flowers smell like rotten broccoli, and I've never understood why anyone would plant this weed. In the wild it looks startled, like if it were a gecko it would drop its tail and run.

It is on this day that we tip our bikes and creep around the church's perimeter. We hold hands and flat palm our way along the side of the church, peeking through Mary's robe and stacks of hay etched into stained glass panels. Color—we learn—doesn't shed light where there

isn't any. When we find the back door open, we worry about our other truths, many more than four. Ellie says she could live here even if the basement is diseased, and she curls up in a pew. I have to admit the dusty air and wooden beams remind me of summer camp. Now that we have found our way inside, our fear of the place feels dim and hard to draw.

While Ellie in her red heart sunglasses recites *We'll Go No More A-Roving* from the altar, I hunt down the organ to hypnotize myself with dissonant chords.

The balcony railing is soft like chenille. What was his name again? I can't remember the punch line. Surely, we're expected home in time for dinner. Surely, we'll be missed if we do not come.

UNMOORED

I'D PONY UP the midnight sun for a pulled pork sandwich. That's how Uncle Bart implied he longed to move south. King ignored the big-boned statements, afraid to dig too far into Uncle Bart's plans and strike ground water. If Uncle Bart up and lugged his whole snail shell 1,000 miles south toward Alabama, King figured he'd be the last to know.

The arrangement with Uncle Bart was only temporary while King's mother situated herself in Thunder Bay, the hometown she had drop-kicked eleven years ago after tangling with King's father. Uncle Bart was not related to King by blood. Uncle Bart had no siblings at all. There were no photographs in the houseboat to prove otherwise, and he spoke of his childhood in dingy, knotted strips.

We had a dog named Jackson. No wait, Melody was her name. Got shot once. Just below her ass. Limped like a whore.

Caught my first fish when I was three. Three years old. Hoo-ee.

I like pink. Always have. It's those damn corporations who've turned it sissy.