

Old Houses

by C.M. Harris

A dense forest at twilight,
Old growth oaks with moss on their bark,
All greens and blackish browns,
A tepid stream weaves into a tunnel of trees.
Malevolence in that painting above grandmother's parlor couch.
Did the artist know a toddler could get lost within it?
It was only paper and ripped when a small fingertip pressed in,
Never to tell, but surely the culprit.
In the blue-shingled house that grandfather painted,
His job to work in colored lead.
Run around that house all morning, past smoke trees and lilacs,
Playing Jason and the Argonauts,
Trash can lids for shields, paint poles our spears.
Do avoid the crumbling, mouldering garage of asbestos, won't
you?
Plenty to do. Forget the soap operas and game shows.
There's a mouse skeleton up in the attic, a dare.
Or an aunt's plentiful supply of maxipads, a wonder.
Grandfather's lime shaving cream squishes between fingers,
As he lays in bed with diabetes and dementia.
All morning, grandmother's chicken broth has filled the air,
with desire.
She of the old kitchen with the metal trim, crumbling floors,
and Hershey's chocolate milk.
Cousins play house under the dining room table,
until admonished.
Beware of the black metal grate, belching heat from dark depths!
The rocking chair will bite your toes.
But hark, the grandfather clock tings noon and noodles.
So sit, eat, gaze at the Genoese-themed wallpaper mural,
Gondolas in a distant, bleak, cream-colored sea.
This too is lost.

