

Three Houses Down

by Cynthia Hawkins

I left my shoes behind, broken-in canvas shoes, slouched in the grass of my front lawn. I was seven. My soles ached against the sun-baked pebble sidewalk, and Rene Frasier said, “faster, this way,” as her undone shoelace dragged behind her. The lace’s aglet drummed at the pebbles. *Tickety tickey tick.*

“Come on!” she called.

But I walked on hot coals. She got ahead of me. The pink pompoms on the backs of her ankle socks jostled against the lip of her shoes. Her hair flew out like a hand splat, and just past her a car idled at the turn.

“Wait!” I said.

A red sports car, small and squat, a squashed play ground ball. A silhouette inside angled the rearview mirror. *Tickety tickety tick.* Rene’s long shadow withdrew from my toes and slipped after her. A gleam shot around the car-door panel just before it opened.

“Wait, Rene,” I complained and stopped and drew my leg up to brush off a loose pebble pressed into my instep. It left a dent. A dent and a sting. The backs of my hands fitted against my hips as I stood straight again.

Rene was gone. The car was gone. The pebble sidewalk stretched and twisted on a turn.

“Rene?”

The sound was gone.

