

Over the distant, blocky horizon, few streams of golden light spill out across the hills. Houses dot the skyline facing you. Each one is white and rectangular with the same dark red roof and two windows on the top floor. The left light is on. The right light is off. Each one has a small garden with three large bushes and two small ones. The houses are empty, or at least nothing in them has moved for hours. The temperature is stagnant and the clouds are unmoving and wind has not brushed your skin the entire time you've been here.

You have been hiking up to these houses for several hours. The sun has not moved from its position, sinking or perhaps rising the entire time. Your calves ache as you approach the garden of a white house. Branches snag you as you pass by a bush. Closer now, you notice how the leaves are too shiny and monochromatic. You reach out to feel one, and instead of touching a soft, slippery plant or a velvety pad, your fingers meet hard and slightly moldable plastic. You move your hand to the next bush to discover that it is the same. Firm, rubbery plastic. You slowly step away, ambling to the alley between two houses.

The houses are smooth and shiny with white paint. As you walk, you try to chip a piece off with your fingernail, but you can't get at a good angle to do so. You emerge in the front yard to find, placed on the lawn, an empty hard wood dining table surrounded by four glossy, finished dining chairs. The table is set with minimalistic glazed ceramic plates, smooth glass cups, upside down wine glasses and white fabric napkins folded into the same abstract origami shape at each seat. You watch them for a moment and then begin to walk down the clean sidewalk, scanning row after row of empty tables with no food and no people. The hairs on the back of your neck begin to stand up, but you shake it off. You glance from window to window at each house. None of the lights are on here. Each door is painted shiny red.

The street stretches on. There are no cars on the road and you notice quickly that neither are there driveways to park them. No house has a pathway of any kind up to its front door. You keep walking. The sun continues to paint the street in golden light and cast long shadows across the road. The entire distance, the street remains parallel to the sun. The path down the middle created by the road disappears beneath the horizon before it turns.

With no semblance of time, you decide that now is as good as any to take a rest. Pivoting to a house, you march up and consider pulling out one of the chairs to sit, but it feels rude, somehow, like disturbing a grave. You take a seat in the pokey grass. Peering down at the dirt, you scrape your hands across it. You note that the grass is plastic too. It's not the kind of artificial grass that they have on football fields. Turf, you recall. It's longer and thicker and somehow it seems to be dug deep into the little plastic pellets that make up the dirt. You try to tug on a strand but it just pulls against your skin like a rope. "Ouch," you say, and laugh a little to yourself, shaking your hand out.

You lie on the fake grass and wonder if it really is plastic afterall. It certainly feels that way, but here that means nothing. Perhaps it is organic in this place. You haven't seen anything living. Maybe animals are plastic too. An image flashes through your head--a family of realistic plastic mannequins sitting down for dinner on the lawn, their rubbery mouths only able to wiggle like one of those crying baby dolls you were always so scared of. You shudder and peer over your shoulder, imagining a dead-eyed doll staring through the glass, silhouetted by the dark. Time to leave.

You pick yourself up and continue down the street. Or maybe it's up the street. It all depends on how you look at it, you think, chuckling. The ribbon of asphalt stretches on. It's another

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hour, or what you think is an hour, before you see anything new, but you're determined. If there's anything that this place hasn't done, it's let you down. In the distance, you begin to see a pit blocking the road. As you approach, you can tell that it's much longer than you thought. "That's an issue," you say to yourself and then you laugh in that way that you do to make everything a bit brighter. You keep walking towards the pit and as you get closer, you learn that it is, in fact, not a pit at all. Large concrete slabs slowly lower themselves into the Earth, or what is more likely something very far removed from it.

At this moment, you can't see where they lead. You look into the dark and wonder. Maybe the answer to the meaning of life or the Fountain of Youth. You laugh again and begin to take the steps down. These steps are not as clean as the sidewalk. Dirt has been ground into the crevices on the cement. It's not long before you disappear into the dark.