

## **The House at the End of the Road**

We were drenched with sweat, our faces flushed with exertion and our hearts were pounding in anticipation. The shrill shriek of the whistle cut across the street and we were off. I raced towards the slightly dilapidated soccer ball which had been kicked to the end of the street. My small legs pounded on the scorching asphalt and my eyes were locked onto the black and white pattern of the ball. The goal loomed closer and I could taste victory on the tip of my tongue. I kicked the ball and it flew. It went high, over the makeshift goal and soared higher still. It landed. My stomach dropped.

A silence filled the street as everyone saw where the ball had landed. Harsh glares were pointed in my direction and the acrid taste of fear filled my mouth. "Well, go get it!" Tommy spat at me. My legs were immobile and my head was slunk down in shame. The ball had landed in the grounds of the house at the end of the road. No one dared to linger by the House. Teens shuffling to school always picked up their pace when they neared it. Adults crossed the street before they encountered its rickety iron fence. Something about the unkempt bushes and the shambling porch created a repellent force field around the property.

I move at glacier pace down the street, shuffling every step, taking every moment to rethink the decision but when I looked up the face filled with either contempt or pity forced me on.

I reached the wrought iron fence. The hinges of the gate were covered in rust. The long screech of the gate cut through the silence. I crept slowly into the yard and the overpowering odour of decay filled my nose. The lawn had an array of rusted garden chairs. I scanned the yard and to my far left I saw the ball. I hastily made my way towards it, weaving around the table and chairs. Then I noticed the strangest thing – a delicate powder-blue tea set perfectly balanced on the table. As I got closer I saw, inside the perfect porcelain cup, freshly poured tea...

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