

It was morning or perhaps noon. Time was not important anymore. The man wandered through the empty streets, an unease creeping through the serenity. He was being followed, by who or what he did not know. What he did know was that he could not stay. Not for long. The man entered a store on the end of the block. Its windows dusty and foggy from the dank condensation. There seemed to be nothing upset at this place. He crossed the threshold, the swollen wood sagging under his weight. The shelves and cases still full of all their goods. A house untainted by greed. Alarmingly enough, this was not the only house that the man had encountered. It seemed that anything necessary for human existence was left undisturbed. Yet in the quiet gloom, there was a creeping horror. The absence of that human spark left a decaying silence that cut hope, scattering the broken fragments of the soul to the gluttonous wind. In the back corner was the office. A place where perhaps the husband or a busy wife kept records or paid bills, now no sign of disturbance could be found. Cabinets and papers undisturbed as they had been there for all time, undisturbed and unmoved. Upon the rich mahogany desk was a book. Dusty and falling apart. Times grip slowly dismantling the consistency of its pages. But the pages were blank. A moment of hesitation had left them barren of any thought. A pen lay near, lonely in the room, finding no solace in the company of the empty book. The nakedness of the pages frightened the man. Something stirred in his calloused heart and he moved away from the office. There was a deafening silence in the house that made his blood chill. Old houses such as this should have noises, a character that makes one feel safe, this house has none. Almost as if to match the barrenness of life outside. The man turned to exit the house but had to pause for a moment before walking out. A staircase right outside of the front door stretched up into the dark gloom of second story. The stairs were decaying after years of neglect and a mercilessly fluctuating climate, so much that there were holes in many of the planks. He stood there at the landing for a long time, peering up the stairs, wondering. Debating whether or not to ascend and investigate or leave the house and continue down the seemingly untrodden path that stretched eastward out of the town. The man felt that whatever was following him was getting closer, how close he could not know. It seemed pertinent that he leave soon, yet something about this

house felt familiar. Acting against what he thought be the better judgment, the man turned and started to walk up the stairs. They groaned beneath his weight, frail as the man was. He slowly and labouriously dragged his shivering body up. One stair at a time. Leaning upon the swollen wall for support. The man thought that perhaps a railing existed as some point, yet saw the brackets that once held it, long since rusted into nothing. The texture of the wall long since eroded into nothing, leaving a smooth trail for the man's rough hand to follow without guidance. Yet something felt familiar about the wall. Dismissing such a notion as exhausted wanderings of the mind, the man leaned away from the wall, he had arrived at the top of the stairs. Looking back he saw how warped the staircase truly was. The entirety of the structure seemed to jut out from its designed form at least three feet right, how it was still standing, the man would never know. Atop the stairs the man could see now a better layout of the house. Three rooms stretched out to his left and two to his right. At the far end of the right hallway was a ladder that looked to lead to a crawlspace in the ceiling. The sight of such a crawlspace frightened the man, more so than the creeping chill coming from the street. Whatever was following him was catching up. The man felt drawn to the left side of the hallway, something stirred in his memory that he could not cast aside. He moved slowly but deliberately towards the corner bedroom. The floors creaking with each footstep, seemingly about to give way. The man came to the doorway of what appeared to be the master bedroom of the house. The feeling of grandeur and happiness wafted over him for but a moment in time till it was replaced again with decay and despair. In the room stood a impressive four poster bed, its upholstery lay tattered and strewn across the floor. More twinges of long forgotten memory shuffled into his minds eye. He knew this bedroom, he had been here before. He crossed the room, delicately placing each step so as to avoid the fabric, as if it were the only surviving relic of a time long forgotten, and stopped before the main dresser. Above which was mounted a beautiful mirror. Its glass not disturbed. Untainted as the day it was brought here from the store. The man cautiously looked upon his reflection in the mirror. And the sight he beheld brought him to tears. Tears of joy and of fear. He saw not the tattered jacket and shabby clothes. Not the dirty beard or yellow teeth, but he saw himself as a young

man, full of spark and life. He saw in the mirror the room behind him restored to its grandeur. But he also saw something else. A dark creeping coming from the doorway. It seemed nothing more than a mist, billowing in on the heels of the draft he felt upon his neck. He turned quickly to face the door, the knot that had been building in his stomach tightening its grip, the force that had been hunting him seemingly in the room with him. Yet in the doorway there was nothing. No mist, no dread, no despair. Just the room, with its tattered bed sheets, and peeling wallpaper, its serene existence. But something was wrong. He needed to leave. The man left the room with haste, bounded down the stairs with what speed he could find and left the house in a blur. Stumbling out into the street. He felt something around his leg, some twist of weed. He couldn't keep his balance and he fell, face first into the dust. But when he turned his body around he saw that the lawn was as barren as a desert. No weeds. No tendrils reaching towards his leg. And then. The man was dragged back. Back into the house. And the door slammed shut.