

Hard to tell now, because people have redone things, repainted, knocked down, rebuilt. But yes, there were five model homes and you just picked the one you liked and they built it for you. You could choose some colors, and you could decide things like if you wanted the closet here or there, but mostly they just built it from the model. It was no big deal that your house looked like a lot of the other houses. It was a new house! You were living in Bright Houses. It was like stealing second base. You were safe.

They were magic times. Kids running ragged everywhere, skinning their knees, catching beetles. Lemonade stands. All the fathers pulling into the driveways at five-thirty sharp in their Belvederes, their Furies. Kids running up into their arms. Our arms.

And two Saturdays a month in the summertime were the Noontime at Night dances. They'd light up the pavilion with all these colored lights and you'd dance till you had blisters on your blisters. Everybody's shoes tossed off to the side. All outdoors! Nobody had any money. We all doubled up on babysitters. We'd pick up little Walter and Katie from the floor of Ed and Shirley's house at two or three in the morning sometimes.

I mean, not everyone was living this life. It was 1968. But the whole country wasn't hippies. Most of us were just living like this. *(he looks at KENNY and SHARON's house)*

Roger was my niece Donna's son. I never got to know him all that well. Donna never quite settled down—Roger was her son with her first husband,

and then she had two girls with the man I think she's still with now. I don't think they married.

I knew Roger best when he was nine years old. We would have them over for Thanksgiving. I took him fishing for perch a couple times—there used to be a pond, you know, at the end of Feather Way, where they keep the bulldozers now.

He was a good kid.

I heard about his trouble in high school. At first the arrests sounded like typical boy stuff—graffiti, cheap wine. Even when his son was born, when Roger was seventeen, it seemed like it was going to be okay. He was working for a construction company. His girlfriend, the mother of his child, cleaned houses. Sometimes those things work. Sometimes a child focuses you toward your life.

**BEN** We didn't know he had a son.

**FRANK** Well, to be honest, I stopped keeping track the last five, ten years. He was my great-nephew, and I wasn't even that close with his mother, my niece Donna. She moved to Nebraska years ago and seemed to want to . . . separate herself from us. She's a high school guidance counselor.

But I know Roger's had troubles. Drugs. And I think a spell in jail. Spells in jail. And when Roger came to me with this new girl all dressed up to ask about staying in the house, I told him I'd think about it and give him a call.

And I never gave him a call. It was a can of worms I thought best to keep closed.

They got in through a back window, I guess. I bet he fixed it right away. Roger always was a handy guy. Got in through the back window and then probably never locked the door.

MARY They really didn't have much of anything in the house.

FRANK It's spooky in there. There's just a mattress and a coffee table and some dirty laundry. A few dishes. Sheet-rock's all banged up in the bedroom. I think there's blood too.

MARY He went by Kenny. He told us his name was Kenny.

FRANK Kenny, huh? No, it's Roger. It's always been Roger.

Well, I'm going to put padlocks on the front and back doors and the big windows. I'll be back in the next few days to clean the place out. I don't think they'll come back, but if they do, I can't let them in. They've done enough already.

BEN They weren't bad people. They were trying.

FRANK Mm-hmm.

MARY We enjoyed them.

FRANK Ma'am, they burned your house down.

*The sounds of Bright Houses: cars, the hum of air compressors, kids in the distance, etc.*

FRANK To be honest it hurts my heart to come back here. Half the houses falling apart, the others so fancified they seem untouchable. *(he indicates a large house across the street)* I mean, how are you going to ask for a cup of sugar from someone who lives in *that* place? You'd have to buy a new pair of shoes just to walk up their driveway. This is not what the develop-

ers intended. They wanted you to have neighbors. They wanted you to be in it together.

Do you two have some help?

BEN What?

FRANK Help. Family, friends? To help you clean up, rebuild?

BEN Oh yeah, we have insurance. For this sort of thing.

FRANK Insurance isn't going to bring by a home-cooked casserole.

MARY Well, we're in a hotel tonight.

BEN Our parents might come. And I have a brother.

FRANK Well, I wish you the best. I really do. And, well, here. *(He takes a couple of bills out of his wallet. BEN and MARY are like "no . . . no")* No, really. I would like to give you a little something. I feel like I participated in this somehow. I'd like to help. *(BEN takes the money)* **end**

You know, someone should really start an archive about this place and the things that happened here. I'm going to get my granddaughter to help me go on the Internet and help me find people who lived here over the years. My granddaughter—*who!* She can find anything on the Web. She helped me get driving directions from Dublin to Galway in *Ireland*. Like that! *(he snaps his fingers)* She could help me, I bet. Find people and ask them for photos. It's easy now to get copies made at the machine in the drugstore, and they could mail them to me parcel post and I could put them all into one big book. Maybe with memories written out next to each one.

I think my sister Lois had a picture of herself standing right there, planting that tree, come to think