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As my car rolls down the steep hill, I spot my destination through the windshield. It’s like all the other houses on the block: tall and slender, with a wide front porch, narrow driveway, and a modest front yard. But this house glows with love. Fresh flowers dot the front porch, surrounded by a freshly cut and neatly manicured lawn. Rocking chairs sway in the breeze as I climb the stone steps of the porch.

I open the thin screen door and knock loudly on the crimson metal door beneath. I am greeted by an embrace from a friendly face, who ushers me into the house with delight as if I were a distant relative visiting for the first time. I carefully remove my shoes so that I do not contaminate the pure, preserved white carpet of the dining room before me. I look around this room and follow an elegant pattern that dances from wall to wall, running behind a china cabinet that seems to be watching us indiscreetly from its hiding spot in the corner. An intricately patterned couch and plump chairs occupy the rest of the room, postured as if they are reserved for the president himself.

As I venture further into the house, I hear a tremendous noise coming from a living room packed with my cousins, all crowded onto a single black leather couch, entranced by the video game characters dancing on the screen of their worn television. I am drawn deeper into the house by the unmistakable oily smell of fried meatballs flowing from the kitchen. I am warmed by the heat of the stove as I grab a fragrant meatball from the enormous bowl and take a bite: the simple taste of parmesan cheese, olive oil, and, of course, ground meat fills my mouth and my mind with a craving for more.

I slowly maneuver my way outside to the back porch, down a carpeted staircase that feels like a slimy sponge soaked with chlorinated water. Shrieks of delight grab my attention as more of my cousins play in the pool in front of me. The younger ones tiptoe tentatively around the deep end of the pool, as if it were deeper than the ocean, while my older cousins swim around freely and playfully, creating loud and messy splashes of water. The rough concrete surrounding the pool feels hotter than the kitchen stove, making my feet beg for relief from the cool pool below. Conversation between parents, consisting of gossip from their tightly-knit community, is hosted on the large deck beside the pool. Here, rocking chairs and sprawling outdoor couches sit atop the splintering wood of the deck for company to share.

As the day ends and the company leaves, the house begins to quiet. Swaying in a rocking chair outside under the moon, I am now accompanied by mosquitos and the occasional stealthy skunk sneaking through the backyard. I recall the day with feelings of joy but also of nostalgia, because when there are visitors in this magical house, I never want them to leave. I wander into the dark kitchen and sit alone at the empty table, thinking about the inevitable day when I must return home and leave this house. I feel the warm energy of my family in this cold kitchen, as if their spirits are soaked into the furniture and countertops around me. This house, like me and so many others who have walked its floors, treasures the moments that family shares together within its walls.