

lisa allen

IN THE DOWN OF THE HOUSE OF THE MAN ON THE STOOP

I am five, maybe six, as I stop at each intersection: Cedar Street, Pine Street, Oak Street, all the tree streets — and look both ways before crossing. The man is there, sitting in the sun on his stoop on the corner of Fort Street, the only street that isn't a tree street. Whittling. I know this word — whittling — because the last time I walked by this house, the man on the stoop told me it's another thing he does with the knife, said *it's how I shape my wood*. I know this word — whittling — because it's the only word that makes the man on the stoop smile, the only word of all his words that shows me his yellow teeth. I am five, maybe more, the steps of the stoop number that many. I count them as we go. The steps at Grandma's house go up. The steps at Charlotte's house go up. The steps at the man's house go down. Is that where I lose the money that grandma gave me? Is it there in the down of the house of the man on the stoop where I —