

JENNIFER L. THORNBURG

ALL SOULS

Daddy hung the plastic pumpkin over the porch light so its bright orange glow lit all of the porch and part of the night. "Go out my little goblins!" he said. "Don't come back without the witch's broom!" A ghost, a pirate and a bum trooped solemnly down the steps and narrow sidewalk where leafless lilac branches transformed into gnarled, reaching hands. I looked back at my father who stood in the circle of light, his white shirt gleaming orange, his black hair shining, and wished he would come with us. Anything could happen on a night like this.

No street lights graced our corners, beaming out safety, as they did farther up Third Avenue. It was dark where we lived, all ten of us Vosens, on the south side, almost out of town. Our hundred-year-old house stood, implacable, its three stories towering above cracked sidewalks. It endured the seasons' howling arctic winds, torrential rains, and baking summer heat, eaves rising to a pinnacle in the cool autumn air. Across the street, the abandoned China House loomed, its turned up roof corners suddenly strange and leering, its boarded upstairs windows staring blankly. And though we had explored each aged room, climbed each dusty staircase, yes, even though we had thrown the rocks that left the windows jagged, this Halloween night the house turned sinister, lurking in its weedy overgrown field. Shivering in the night air, we hurried down the gravel road toward the paved streets several blocks ahead where bright houses stood in rows, bathed in the light of street lamps. We wanted to trick-or-treat in the nice part of town.

In those days we lived on the South side of the railroad tracks in Glasgow, Montana, enduring the inevitable small-town judgment of a family whose father drank too much. Once, walking home from school with a friend, I saw my father across the street, stumbling toward downtown. My friend pointed, "Look at that man. There's something wrong with him. He's not walking straight." I froze. What could I say? She would never, *could* never, understand.