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## Loved Houses

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*Chelsea Rathburn*

## LOVED HOUSES

If I mapped my childhood, it would be dotted with houses my parents wanted to buy but couldn't afford. They pointed to them out of car windows, certain that this was the way that wealth was made: the cottage by the park in Jacksonville they looked inside when they were newlyweds, a steal if they'd only had a down payment; a run-down studio on Ocean Drive before South Beach became, well, South Beach; and a dozen derelict low-rises on the bay my father swore would be worth a fortune someday, if we only had the cash and the time—we didn't. (He was right, of course, and still likes to say so.)

The worst lost house we never drove past. It sat on a slip of land in a Key West trailer park. My grandparents let my mother and father stay a few days there for a honeymoon, perhaps the one nice thing they ever did, and my father said then he'd buy it the minute they wanted to sell. They sold it in secret for less than it was worth instead, a grudge he still carries. In Key West, my mother wanted to tour the Hemingway House but couldn't afford the tickets, so they looked over the wall, through the opulence of palms, at the arching windows and delicate balcony to imagine what wealth and luck might buy.