

When I was in first grade I had to walk past the brewery on my way home from St. John's. I knew the way because I had practiced it. From school I turned right and went across the busy street, being careful to look both ways. I walked under the ramp for the expressway and across another street. Then past the big, big, big, really big castle where they made the beer. Then straight down the street, keep walking past my friends Phyllis and Debbie's till I arrived at the building where my aunt was staying. Even though we were in the city, crunchy leaves crusted the sidewalk, rustling as I shuffled through them. I picked up a big red one and tore it along the yellowed vein lines. Other kids were walking home, too, but I forgot about them as I smelled the crisp air and the gust of moldy earthy odors. Suddenly I heard the unmistakable sound of snarky kid whispers. Do you think he will come out? I don't know. I heard he got someone again last week. I looked up. Oh, no! How had I forgotten the house with the tall blue windows. And now I was nearly in front of it. Yeah, said one of the older kids. I heard they only found her bones. He ate the rest! This was accompanied by guttural gagging noises and gestures that sealed the gruesome threat. I looked up in panic at the windows, taller than a man, that were painted a solid blue from top to bottom on the inside of the glass. I froze where I was. Should I cross the busy 12th Street in the middle of the block? That way I would have more time to run away if the scary giant guy came out of the house to get me. But I had been warned about crossing in the middle of the block, too. Which was more dangerous? With tears in my eyes, I made my legs move. I looked one way, then the other way. No cars were coming. But no monster was coming out of the house, either. I crossed the street, running as fast as my scrawny six year old legs would carry me. I forgot about the crunchy leaves. I forgot about the crisp air and the bright blue sky. I just ran. Behind me I heard the howls of laughter from the older kids. I mistook them for the growls of the mean giant guy and ran even more determinedly. When I crossed the street to the door of my aunt's apartment, tears were streaming down my face. But I was safe. I did not want to tell my aunt about the mean giant guy. Her kids had to live there, near him. I did not want to scare her. So I did not tell. But I never again forgot to walk on the other side of the road. Years later, I was still scared when we drove past that house on the way to anywhere. I asked my dad why that mean guy who lived in the house with blue windows would want to eat little girls, and why they let him keep the windows blue when everyone knew what he was doing in there. He did not understand the question until I showed him the house next to the brewery, where the barrels and bottles of beer were aged in darkness behind the blue painted windows.