

203 Waldo Street

Grandmother's crumbling triple-decker leans into the street, its windows' hooded eyes scouring passersby as if for rescue.

Rooted to long-ago stolen, debt-soaked ground, the old wreck harbors ghosts — husbands, boarders, sons raised and scattered.

Her scarred floors warp under the weight of secrets, truths, their jagged edges, barbed corners softening with time.

She leans into the street like a widow, veils of lace curtain sifting South Providence grit, grit not so different from a Westmeath farm's —

swept, cleared, always returning — the same old silt settling on bodies, tongues, across generations, fitful terrain.

Walking past now, a stranger, I still cannot look away. She leans into the street like a suitor wheedling a lost love home —

a quavering appeal, porch-lit eyes, waiting with all the hope allotted to a lapsing body with once-praiseworthy bones.

—Mary Beth Hines



During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, tens of thousands of triple-deckers were constructed, mostly in New England, as an economical means of housing the thousands of newly arrived immigrant workers who filled the factories of the area.