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Nostalgia for the Present

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The mansion on Wisconsin Drive has been restored, like royalty brought back to England after the plague. One look at the bright brass knobs and it's clear: All the rats here are dead. "And voilà the coffee room!" the realtor says, opening a glass door. I'm a fake, of course, nodding speculatively as if I just happened

to have a half million to blow on nine bedrooms and three bathrooms, as if I could bathe in more than one tub at a time. But I do want my bed to be invisible at breakfast, with my spoons stored far from my shoes: Distances ensure that waking and walking can proceed apace; that my life,

unlike my apartment, hasn't collapsed into a small dense cube of time and space. Better not to know too much physics, I want to tell the realtor. Better not to know who lived in this house before it was restored, when it was adrift in the world between the wars. The rich

are exactly like you and me, only their house is empty and the ring where the cat's cream sat has been sanded away. And their house will outlive us all; it is richer than any human portfolio, basking in the luxury of silence, of limestone pulled from mines in Indiana. Go to Indiana

and the holes remain: filled with water like the pools Zen monks use

to reflect on the poverty of matter.