

## YOUR NEW HAUNTED HOUSE

Your buyer's remorse is sanding out  
raccoon prints tracked in paint through the kitchen  
and out the back door.  
You will ask the wallpaper not to pull off  
the plaster. You will put hands  
in between floors  
to replace leaky copper pipes.

You move into your investment,  
starting with you  
on an air mattress in the living room  
until you finish a bedroom.  
Then renovate the next room  
like young newlyweds who don't believe  
in ghosts, oblivious to waking  
malevolent phantoms  
in the walls and left-behind furniture  
stored in the basement.  
Except there is no couple.

You're on your own.  
Instead of voices piercing the silence  
with "Get out,"  
they're enticing you  
to swallow the bitterness.  
You're tempted, but roll up your sleeves  
to get your new haunted house cozy enough  
to let the ghosts  
you brought from the last house  
mingle with the ones  
already living in the solitude.

## EATING HABITS

He wiped it with the cloth and bit into it. Dry and almost tasteless. But an apple.  
He ate it entire, seeds and all.

—Cormac McCarthy, *The Road*

I bite into apples  
with wrinkling skin, lost crisp,  
that brown with every bite.  
The apple's wisdom tells me

to stop short  
of finishing off  
the whole core, so I can always  
recall tastes that once  
teased my tongue,

the knowledge mislaid  
in my gaping stomach.

I practice  
for meager times  
just in case.

## THE GREAT FLOOD

It sounded like someone taking a shower  
when the water heater's seam popped  
to unleash enough water  
to snap a prideful town's houses and bridges  
into shambles  
of muddy brown.

We thought about vengeful deities sending  
awesome waves.  
We drowned mops. We littered the floor  
with dirty towels.

We smacked wrenches against  
the empty tank in vain.  
We stood in  
wet clothes, guiding the Shop-vac  
on the soaked rug,  
trembling mad when touching soggy drywall  
with defeated hands.

We cleaned  
every angry inch of the basement  
on achy knees and wished  
for time to stockpile  
soggy books and blankets  
like animals  
huddled in an ark,  
adrift at sea.

## STANDING AGAINST THE TREES

Because the elm must be lonely  
in a field's wintered landscape,  
featured in the tree poems I routinely see  
in a journal that's rejected me five times.

Because the tree stands for decline  
and the nobility of aloneness, I resent it.

I've talked my share of students out of tree poems,  
especially the ones featuring a tree house they feel  
guilty outgrowing. These are my selfish aversions.

I've cut down the evergreens, dying in the middle,  
but I never thought to eulogize them.  
I'm not the hippie  
who offered to do odd jobs but refused  
to cut them because they were still alive, man.

Maybe I'm wrong and the poems and the trees  
are one. Maybe that's why I'm afraid of them burning down  
and taking me out in the process.

## HANDYMAN CHECKS FOR ALLIGATORS IN THE SEWER

It was Lennon and McCartney who said all you need is love, and  
I would agree with that. As long as you keep the gators fed.

—Stephen King, “Why We Crave Horror Movies”

I descend to where gators must be flushed  
after outgrowing novelty houses.  
I can smell the bite of violence brewing  
in stale water and waste. I am walking  
against the rat traffic until tunnels  
grow too small, search until the water gets  
too dark, the light too weak. I approach  
the flickering eyes above water,  
jaws flexed. Offering myself to the reptile  
that sent me colliding with sweating mains,  
I sadly search into the slick grime,  
the teeth crushing through the bones change my mind,  
tugging me back through the labyrinth of pipes.  
I surface and slide the manhole back in place.

## HOW TO DISMANTLE A MIRROR

Behind my reflection, I slide  
a putty knife to loosen the glass.  
I chip through clear epoxy. I pull forward  
with caution to extend the rift between  
wall and mirror, optimistic  
I can salvage it as a single sheet  
until the first pop snakes and cracks  
up the middle. I fracture it more  
as I contort and bend the mirror, still tempted  
to explode and smash it all down.

I never looked at myself in the large shards  
that could free-fall and make  
my vital arteries and limbs  
hectic reds as seen in slasher flicks with enough gore  
to make me turn away. I've always respected  
broken glass and I already have a tab of seven bad years.  
I count myself lucky to be sweeping up  
dots of mirror off the floor, wrapping then breaking  
the bigger flakes into a cardboard box,  
and fooling myself into thinking I survived  
all the horrors reflected around the house  
with only yellow bruises and scrapes  
I don't remember placing.

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