

The Saw House

*Triadelphia Road
June 2015*

Enter through the back door into a ballroom,
thin curtained windows, floor-to-ceiling stone
fireplace, parquet floors. Tucked in a corner,
a spiral staircase, disappearing helix twisting
between floors, its steps like a maple seed
helicoptering through a strobe light. Notice a pile
of remote controls on a built-in wall of cabinets.
Turn left into a pink room, single dining chair left
behind, stacked picture frames leaning against
the wall, an elegant cadenza. Into the dining room,
front of the house, collapsed drywall panels
and subfloor from the drooped ceiling, chandelier's
broken arm dangling. Umber flutes of fungus
sprouting from the moldering baseboard puff
spores into the stale light at the slightest tremor.
Hold your breath and scamper into the hallway:
butter-yellow paint flecked and cracked, stair
risers streaked with water stains, a Rorschach's
test of black mold splotches run the length
of the foyer wall and up the stairway.

A door swollen shut in the heat. Shoulder it. Shiny
steel medical examination tables and heavy surgical
equipment greet you like alien sentinels. Biohazard
waste buckets, wheeled x-ray machines and lights,
breathing machines and anesthesia monitors arranged
neatly. A row of cages along a wall. This was a veterinary
clinic. Breathe. There are no carcasses. No zombies.
No human experiments. A woman's bachelor's diploma
lies tossed on an exam table. University of Denver. 1973.
Metal tags never unpacked from a cardboard shipping box
on the counter of the reception room await furry necks.

Turn again into the kitchen: red Formica counters,
black appliances. Close the window someone left
open. Lock it. Do not open the refrigerator door.
Turn the electric stovetop knob to off.

Climb the spiral staircase. Now, a bedroom with new
carpet with vacuum cleaner tracks, a luxury master suite

with a screen door to the outside. *To a breezeway?*
This is another wing of the house. Take the breezeway
to a warped door, unlocked, and reenter the disaster zone.
Paint peels from the window ledges and doors in sheafs
like parchment, like sunburned skin. A ceiling fan sags
like a claw in a carnival game, poised to pluck silence
from the musty air over an empty bed frame, its flaccid
blades wilted from years of damp. This room sits over
the dining room. Enter another bedroom: weightlifting
bars, a TV remote, buckled carpet, mold. Down the hall,
a boy's room: a pile of bedding, elephants on the peeling
wallpaper, artwork from elementary and middle school
wrapped in cellophane drafting vellum. A few stuffed toys
on a closet's top shelf. So much of a life discarded.

Outside, the air begins to lift and drop the canopy of oak
branches next to the house. A storm approaches, west.
Finish up, lock the door behind you, upload the photos
and e-form. Fat drops start pattering the windshield.
Weeds and high grass bend and nod in the rain. Imagine
the waterfall down the main staircase as you pull away
from another wrecked life, into the sweltering, sticky
deluge of a mid-Atlantic weekday afternoon.

Matt Hohner