

## East Deep Run Road, October 2014

*Once a colt has...been...taken away,  
a part of its heaven stays here,  
wandering from ghost to ghost barn  
--"From an Abandoned Farm," Julia Wendell*

Brittle weeds in the horse pasture  
reach above the top fence rail. Wind  
chimes in the empty stables tink  
and clatter in late October chill,  
trees turned, spilling like slow fire  
down the hillside away from here.  
Across the valley, winter fields,  
emerald with cover crops, flow  
between stands of hardwoods  
and brush. The sky is a dull ache,  
a week-old bruise that won't heal.

In the last days, there was a party. A giant,  
signed card for Ashley's sweet sixteenth  
hangs from a push pin on the wall:  
*Most beautiful . . . love you hunny . . . lol.*

Strewn on the floor, a 4H poster project  
on horseshoes: steel, aluminum, synthetic,  
plastic, and on it, a Mexican proverb:  
*It's not enough for a man to know how to ride.  
He must know how to fall.*

Cowboy boots caked with dried manure  
stand frozen in a two-step by the foyer  
closet, kicked off after chores.

Outside the master bedroom window,  
a halyard lashes an American flag tight to its pole,  
stars and blue canton choking against hollow  
metal under pewter clouds, tattered  
red and white stripes now shreds flapping  
in the breeze, snap hooks' lonely ringing sound  
pinging an S.O.S. to the indifferent sky.

Puddled tire ruts in the mud: the trailer  
had backed up to the stables behind the house,  
scarred the ground with its hasty departure.

Junk and debris scattered outside  
in the drizzle speak of panicked haste,  
bored vandals, the bank's neglect:  
plaid shirt and a Carhartt coat left  
draped on a fencepost; satellite dish  
face down in the grass; an old tube  
television, screen shattered, decorating  
the driveway by the dented garage door.

Ashley's mother sang "Happy Birthday"  
knowing the locksmith was coming  
with the sheriff and eviction papers.  
The last wine box emptied and tossed  
in a pile on the living room couch. One  
final line dance on the kitchen floor.  
A quick breath snuffing sixteen years'  
tiny flames. Knife through icing.

The next morning, the moment snaked  
its way up the hill slow as a funeral.  
Two vehicles: a county patrol car,  
lights off; behind it, a service van  
full of doorknobs and deadbolts.

**Matt Hohner**