

Daisy Drive, July 2015

Taneytown, Maryland

Nothing blooms on Daisy Drive, two blocks off Main Street, edge of town. Every fourth or fifth home sits dark, a smile of row houses missing teeth. On each, a doorknob lock box and window paperwork: utility shut-off, eviction, vacancy, winterized plumbing. Here, plump boys chase each other with neon water guns; dogs run trenches behind rusted chain link. Unemployed pick-up trucks with stagnant mosquito pools stinking in flatbeds where tools used to rattle, leaves and sticks piled on the upstream side of their tires, languish like wrecks washed ashore in the recession tide. A gaunt woman's heavy-lidded eyes stare down her cigarette as I roll past her into this flung-aside galaxy at the loose end of time.

Previously secured. Perform interior inspection. The app says the gate's busted, mold inside, filth and grime throughout, animal feces, renovation of sliding glass doors incomplete, back yard storm damage, carpet removed. *Occupancy indicators: meters off; yard not maintained.* I tick off the wounds one-by-one, triaging the aftermath of an economic implosion. *Common areas, bathroom, bedroom.*

Afternoon sun spears into the kitchen. I ignore the holes in the drywall, get seven pictures of the gap where the refrigerator stood. *New damage: missing appliance. Location: kitchen. Estimated amount: six hundred dollars.* Outside, a round girl cradles a cat to her porch as I lock up under the shadow of a wind-bent oak cooling the cracked sidewalk where a child has chalked her dreams in pastels. Someone who cares has cordoned off her masterpiece, black and yellow caution tape waving in the breeze.

Matt Hohner

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Damage Repairs

She can still see the lump of him
on the kitchen floor next to where
we sit at the table to sign the forms
to obtain the money for the rest
of the repairs to the back rooms
where the water damage happened
when the tub overflowed after he
started a bath, shot up, stopped
breathing before he could turn off
the faucet. I ask her to estimate how
much has been repaired. She says
about three-quarters; I write 80%
to expedite the insurance company's
release of the remaining funds, but
I know the ruin is complete inside
her. Total loss. I tick the boxes:
drywall replaced, mold removed,
wiring, flooring. There is no box
for a mother's grief but a coffin.
She stares at a spot on the floor
by the sink. How does one fix
the wrecked chambers of a heart?
I imagine him fading, the ceiling
fan turning cool air down on his
face, the sound of water spilling
onto the floor in the next room.

Matt Hohner

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Woodsboro Pike

Frederick County, MD

I imagine her at these windows, looking out at fields in neat rows under a thin muslin of snow a week into the new year, emerging soft into the May air, ready for the combine in early November. She would know how the scene changes over the year, the exact angle at which the spring sun pulls the crops up out of the soil, how the summer heat ripples above the greening soybeans, how the shadows lengthen after Halloween and the tourists and commuters no longer stop for apples and pumpkins at the farm across the road. I imagine her sitting on her front porch gazing at the hills Maryland calls mountains, arching round and low, slumbering in the blue haze distance.

I picture her giving away more eggs than she sells from the coop behind the garage where the swifts come and go from nests built since the people and the chickens left. I open the garage door to enter and a pair of swept wings, all points and angles and speed, bursts in with me and circles frantically for the way out, orbiting my head and the dead air inside, its twittering protests loud and panicked, until it shoots through the rectangle of light in the doorway and flits up and out over the back fallows, dissolving into the tree line just past the train tracks.

I recall the pigeon that found its way into our house the week my wife and I moved in, my father telling us how it was good luck. I imagine a woman in this house watching the dark miles of road, waiting for headlights to slow and turn at her mailbox late at night, for the last rays of sunlight to reach back over the Catoctins, for the afternoon wind to pick up ahead of dark skies approaching.

Matt Hohner

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Evidence

My last house at dusk. I stop on the road to photograph
a pick-up truck in a driveway, curtains in a window,
bony tabby they will leave behind to fend for herself,
picking her way through the high weeds looking for mice
by the dented azure walls of the backyard pool, its black
dead eye breeding mosquitoes and gazing Godward like
a cadaver, a moving van backed to the side door, its loading
ramp a hungry tongue lapping up a houseload of dreams.
The air snaps autumn, leaves in the woods across the road
the color of fire, the color of rust. Harvester reaps the field
behind the house, dust cloud lifting behind it into the wind
like prayer, like smoke from the earth burning under their feet.
They race to beat the locksmith, the sheriff, the agent from
Wells Fargo coming tomorrow at dawn. A child's face stares
out at me from the parlor as I upload her family into the bank's
ravenous maw. I hit send, handing over a little more of myself
to the lowering darkness, put the car in gear, and drive away.

Matt Hohner

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