

# Shine

Garrett Lockhart

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We'd only moved in recently.

A two-story farmhouse, on a piece of property bookended by trees. The bulk of our boxes still piled up in the living room, a cardboard effigy, a tinder I try to spread throughout the house. The bed's set up, there's some dishes already in the sink. I carry a box to the bathroom, to the office, and decide which memories to commit to the attic.

It still smells like whoever'd been here before. The cabinets, the closets, the attic, the basement, the yard, from the nooks to the rooms. I unpack. I'm sick of feeling like a visitor, so I chase their dust around, trying to evict these stubborn tenants. I clean each room, I reassess. Do they follow me when I'm not looking? I swear I'm going nuts.

I get on my knees to smell the floorboards; I take a knife to scrape between the slats. I unscrew the fixtures, vacuuming the electrical pots, and with steel wool scrub the walls down to the primer. I remove the hardware, I soak the door handles and the locks in vinegar, I clean the screws, I excavate the grime from within the doors and between the window panes. I'm exhausted and wide awake, these people haunt me. It's our Days of Heaven.

In the morning I'm sick to my stomach. This room always stays so cold. I remember yesterday, and wonder if it was just my nose. I tiptoe down the stairs, careful not to disturb the dust, to reanimate their ghosts. The kitchen lies under the bedroom, to the rear of the stairs, and I reach it less hungry than fearful. There's still dust on the ceiling. I'm hopeful but the milk tastes like darkness and smells of mothballs. My composure belittles itself. I leave it on the counter, and fall to my knees, crawling blindly to the living room in a hurricane of tears, a storm that feels seeded just for me. I feel singled out and undeserving, pulled over for speeding when I'm just following traffic. With this luck I wish I'd played the slots.

Moments in and my tears have already worn away bits of the floor varnish. I'm in disbelief. Emboldened. On my feet I find a hammer, and with its claw I attack the floor. I resound to renovate.

Hours later; in the yard an eternal flame burns, ebbing to the rate that I can replenish its fuel. By the light of the fire I see the floorboards, the drywall, bits of paint and chunks of melted plastic, wiring, metal, insulation, lumber. I wonder if after this is done, will I find a new type of rock in its place, some unknown agglomerate? This buoys my mood. I strike through the outer wall from the spare bedroom on the upper floor. It's the only thing I can do to see, the wires in the fire took with them the lighting. I look around me through an orange hue and see a room bereft of anything but its skeleton.

I wake at the dawn of the second day. I rush to my feet panicked at the dwindling fire; I take a sip from the toilet bowl to calm my nerves. The house feeds the flame. I can't find the hammer so like a rat I nibble at the wood, and some hours later with a broken tooth I lumber to the garage. A sledgehammer. Step by step I now take the stairs, the hallway to the front door collapses. Outside and away from the fire, our things huddle under a tarp. I remember to breathe; the air is molten.

The smell of burning makes me hungry, so I suck on bits of leather shoes. In the clarity my stomach realizes this isn't about renovation, but exorcism, and I pile a bridge from the fire to the house. The skeleton is alight, the wind cries fate. I wonder why I'm alone, and quiver until the fire dwindles. I read my palm, but it tells me nothing. I fall asleep dreaming of rain; In the morning I mourn the ashes.

Tenants, written by Marlon Kroll



Garrett Lockhart is an artist investigating the home, the body, and the heart.

Recent solo exhibitions include The World Awake at South Parade (London, UK), Wrinkle at Hunt Gallery (Toronto, CA), Relay at Pumice Raft (Toronto, CA) and Wrought Bundle at Afternoon Projects (Vancouver, CA). Recent duo/group exhibitions include To pluck eternity along the lines of circadian rhythm at Susan Hobbs (Toronto, CA), a little, left over at Weatherproof (Chicago, USA), Doing Time at South Parade (London, UK), Dawn Draws, Dusk Drops at Joys (Toronto, CA), A word for underfoot; the sun at Hunt Gallery (Toronto, CA), and Poem Objects at April April (Brooklyn, USA).