

The Revenant at “Halcyon”

(Elkton, Todd County, Kentucky)

by Charles Semones

In Memoriam: Joy Bale Boone and George Street Boone

Be mindful of the time and distance it's returning from, its need to feel a sense of place. Wait as it examines the front porch columns brought years ago from Nashville's replica of the Parthenon. Once inside, imagine its placing antimacassars on the backs and arms of the two matching wing chairs, unmoved from where they were, facing each other in the family room where the walls are lined, floor to ceiling, with sagging shelves of books, most of them read. See how it takes its ease and slouches there—quite unlike itself, out of character—but bolts upright when, suddenly, “Fur Elise” lilts faintly from the out-of-tune grand piano in the dated parlor where, some nights, the same ancestor's portrait falls from its nail above the mantelpiece, and will not stay put, it mattering not how many times, or how carefully, it's hung back in its place. Now take notice of how lightly it touches the serving trolley holding the liquers and Scotch in readiness for the evening's drinks. Watch how it slinks, seductive as a bride, into the wide hall and listens at the foot of the curving stairway before starting upward. Observe its pausing on each step. Consider what it hears, or does not hear, beyond the landing. Mark well how, not discomposed, it takes into account the second-story rooms—held in the hush of absence, the subtle thrall of decadence. Study how, as a bridegroom would, it selects an heirloom bed suited to the long-awaited night of love. Then ponder its wandering the lawn, imagine its admiring peonies and iris in profusion, the nods of lilac panicles at twilight, and the fringe tree's fragrance lingering at dusk. Marvel how it has come back again, how it intends to live here now for good. The irrefragable urging of blood's ancestral memory will not abandon this grand house to the vagaries of an ungracious century. A ghostly meandering turns time counterclockwise: anyone entering here would see that everything has changed, yet everything's the same. There is an ineffable presence, a sameness strangely undiminished. Should you be the one who comes, mind how in a proud family's plot in the small town's cemetery, the deft, fulgent moon of April returns and stitches an intricate tapestry of antique light to cover a new grave.