

Fixer-Upper

We hire guys who drywall, paint, and spackle.
 We hire guys who arrive in hazmat suits to pry up the asbestos.
 Inside the air-con ducts, there's a decade's worth of dander;
 the duct guys snake a hose, wide as a tree, up the south wall,
 through a window, and screw it to a ceiling vent. *Poof*—
 outside, in the yard, a three-story grime cloud scatters.

The men who come to clean the gutters
 find dead squirrels, dead birds, packed inside the rotting sod
 like a clan of dolls in one cradle. Elsewhere, plastic saints,
 ceramic shamrocks, stacks of old clothes, a rocking horse,
 a walking stick—all left behind. We get rid of it. The ragged rosebushes
 we dig up, and pile curbside. Clearing away rancid leaves
 and a knee-deep riot of creeping vines, we find a phone,
 a ring of keys, and, buried upright under coarse, tough weeds,
 a lawn sign from a long-lost presidential campaign.

What seems irreplaceable, we set aside,
 in case the previous owner ever does call back. Poking around
 in the overgrown grass, we find a hunk of cement,
 embedded with irregular bits of colored glass
 arranged around a pair of handprints, small and big.

The girl's bedroom is now where our son sleeps.
 He rolls his fire engines across the windowsill.
 Opening a closet door, we find, written inside,
 in felt-tip pen, in a child's hand,
This is the O'Malleys' house.
The O'Malleys lived here.

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