

*When old man Smithson died in January,
I scanned his terse obituary, then
I beat out all the preservationists
to buy his farm. First I logged the oaks,
twenty wild turkeys scattered, screeched in circles,
as I yanked the last few stumps and blasted ledge.
My grapple jawed the gable roof for days,
next I stripped the clapboard skin, pulled out
the sash, twelve over twelve, grainy old glass
with oval whorls like someone's fingerprints.
A dealer hurried a hundred miles to salvage
the wide front door, a double door hand-planed
as smooth as a man with careful hands could manage.
Roof, boards, sash, doors, by March, I had exposed
the bones. I thrashed the chestnut frame until
the skeleton gave way. Down. And then
I swung the wrecking ball hard at the chimney,
hit thirty feet of stone, floor after floor,
A pistil after the petals go. That's Frost,
you know, I memorized his stuff in school
but masonry is nothing like a flower.
After the hearth, I hauled off the foundation—
ten granite blocks about the size of coffins—
and dragged front steps away as tulips rose
through rubble. I deal in the space of the dead.
A builder measures possibility.*

The
B
u.
i.
I
r
e
a
d
I
r

Dolores Hayden