

Springhouse Ink

For the fifth time in as many years the neighbors have chosen to harvest ALL the corn instead of creating a corn maze for the enjoyment of *Springhouse* staff.

In fact, our field investigations have so far discovered zero evidence a corn maze ever has existed in rural Junction, Gallatin County, Illinois. The magazine's editorial staff is once again in a state of seasonal chagrin.

The days are getting shorter and soybean dust has choked the air. Walnuts dot the road. The sun shines, but the yard is brown from lack of rain. The lawnmower sits idle while the grass relishes Hurricane Nate's relief. The burning bush is blushing.

The old pear tree is trying to get into the seasonal spirit. Once a landmark so well-known the school bus would stop to allow riders to pick a pear for a snack, the tree's remaining bough broke in a 2014 windstorm. Three years later, the new limbs decided to again grow fat pears, but these seem to rot on the limb before ripening. Red wasps enjoy their tart juices. Maybe next year's crop fruit will be more hardy. Meanwhile, the backyard pecan tree seems to be producing a bumper crop of nuts.

Speaking of nuts, the house up the road is haunted. Whether or not lost souls exist between planes of existence inside is unknown. What is known is the planes of "inside" and "outside" have become muddled since someone broke out all windows on the lower floor, opened both front and back doors, stripped copper wiring from its walls and ripped its electric meter from the outside wall. Vicky spotted the problem the other day when a curtain appeared to be blowing outside an open window. We investigated and found the damage. We learned the damage had been done about a month prior and the absentee owner declined filing a formal complaint to the sheriff's department. However, the sheriff is aware.

This house is haunted by the spirit of selfishness and meanness that exists in the hearts of those who committed this crime, only a mile or so from our happy abode. The knowledge that people have committed such acts so close to home raises goosebumps larger than any otherworldly scream or mysterious late night bump. The house is now haunted by malicious, destructive intent and the complacency of its owner. It now emanates a darkness that no one in the neighborhood welcomes. Because of this act, strangers are now regarded with suspicion, joyriders are regarded as threats. That's a bad attitude to have when living near a rural cemetery visited by people from across the region.

The house is haunted, seen now as an invitation to dark

deeds rather than a stately old home built on a hill steeped in history. Diligence is required to keep property and minds healthy. Few gestures invite danger like the shrugging of shoulders.

The planes of "predator" and "prey" also seem to converge, as the snake in my yard the other day can attest. There came a rustle in the weed patch growing beneath the backyard nut-heavy pecan tree. I turned my head in time to see a hawk fly from the weeds toward Leavell Hill with a snake clutched in its talons. The hawk was taking off with the snake that provides *Springhouse* rodent control! These snakes help keep the back issues from being chewed up. They keep the disease-carrying droppings off the stove and the kitchen counters. Of course, the hawks help out in this task as well, but that hawk could find food most anywhere now that the harvest is nearing completion. We want our snakes fat around here. I walked out to a clearing to see where the hawk was flying, but it was gone. What was in the air was a bald eagle soaring, reminding everyone who was boss of this here food chain.

Looking back at my notes I see the following words, "Millstone — art and imagery. 2:25 p.m. Sept. 13 shriek-howl-howl-howl-howl" and recall a strange series of sounds echoing down the hill immediately following my phone conversation with Mark Wagner. An Internet search confirmed my suspicions it was the alarm call of a fox. A couple of weeks earlier I'd spotted a gray fox on the road just a few yards south of the mailbox. It was a surprise because, while red foxes are not uncommon, I don't think I've ever seen a gray fox. I didn't think they were even around our area, but they are, though fairly rare. Red foxes are more adaptable to human habitation, living around farms, fields, cemeteries and parks. Gray foxes mainly stick to woodlands. This fox disappeared into the soybean field, no doubt with a sense of what we call "field crop confidence" or "soybean bravado." Now that the beans are gone, the fox will probably remain scarce. Chase the rodents, fox, and if you know what's good for you, keep out of the neighborhood chickens.

The grass is brown and covered with leaves blown down by the season and the remnants of Hurricane Nate. Perhaps Nate's rain will green things up, alleviate the fire danger and keep the vandals away from windows and copper wiring.

We don't need a lot of extra excitement right now. We have plenty to keep us on our toes, and that's not a comfortable way to stand for any length of time. We want our feet back flat on the ground.

... The adventure continues.