

...With an old house, the work is never done, and you don't expect it to be.

America is an old house. We can never declare the work over. Wind, flood, drought, and human upheavals batter a structure that is already fighting whatever flaws were left unattended in the original foundation. When you live in an old house, you may not want to go into the basement after a storm to see what the rains have wrought. Choose not to look, however, at your own peril. The owner of an old house knows that whatever you are ignoring will never go away. Whatever is lurking will fester whether you choose to look or not. Ignorance is no protection from the consequences of inaction. Whatever you are wishing away will gnaw at you until you gather the courage to face what you would rather not see.

We in the developed world are like homeowners who inherited a house on a piece of land that is beautiful on the outside, but whose soil is unstable loam and rock, heaving and contracting over generations, Cracks patched but deeper ruptures waved away for decades, centuries even. Many people may rightly say, *"I had nothing to do with how this all started. I have nothing to do with the sins of the past. My ancestors never attacked the indigenous people, never owned slaves."* And, yes. Not one of us was here when this house was built. Our immediate ancestors may have had nothing to do with it, but here we are, the occupants of a property with stress cracks and bowed walls and fissures built into the foundation. We are the heirs to whatever is right or wrong with it. We did not erect the uneven pillars or joists, but they are ours to deal with now.

Any further deterioration is, in fact, on our hands.

Unaddressed, the ruptures and diagonal cracks will not fix themselves. The toxins will not go away but, rather will spread, leach, and mutate, as they already have. When people live in an old house, they come to adjust to the idiosyncrasies and outright dangers of skulking in an old structure. They put buckets under a wet ceiling, prop up groaning floors, learn to step over that rotting wood tread in the staircase. The awkward becomes acceptable, and the unacceptable becomes merely inconvenient. Live with it long enough, and the unthinkable becomes normal. Exposed over generations, we learn to believe that the incomprehensible is the way that life is supposed to be.