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The Couch: Postmortem
Erika Stonehouse
oil paint on canvas
I’d only been living in the city a month
when I retreated to this cabin
to participate in isolation, rather
than watch it gather in pools around me.

And yet, climbing the hill behind, phone up like a cross
coaxing feeble bars. Reminding myself
I chose this. At night the thing humming
with sheer connectedness.

Drawing a map of the cove between solitude
and loneliness, years of expeditions
nuance of coastline, trust and isolation penciled in
but when the fog rolls in, damned if you know which shore you’re
on.

On the first day, enormous data bill. Compulsively
checking. By the fourth, a pattern emerging.
Bring the wood in. Keep the stove lit.
Hum along to the melody of silence.
Entangled
Jenna Short
coffee on rag paper
Ode to the Woodstove
Heather Nolan

Coaxing fire from drug store fliers
to cold junks. Odes to
wilderness slaughtered,
making place.

Later when it finally catches,
the heat ravenous.

The wind a psalm
to the Anthropocene.
Nonconformist
Jenna Short
mixed media on paper
Drinking Lava
Jeremy Wills

It’s the dead of winter,
and your heart is cold and still,
so take this mug of lava,
take a tiny sip,
it will not burn,
your mouth is cold as Lucifer!

Take this mug of lava,
Earth has offered you her milk,
and who are you to turn it down?
Ungrateful child!
This drink will give you bones of granite,
do you want to grow up small and weak?

You know your father loves you,
don’t you want to make him proud some day?
This drink will give you wings of flame,
and when the burning makes an ember of your heart,
you’ll tear the winter skies apart,
and you will be the one who spreads the clouds in Heaven.
Lines
Faune Torres
ink on paper
Ochre
Kyle Howe

(as I get older
I tend to over apologize)

you start to realize
    slowly
    eventually
hopefully

that the things you touch
have no buttons
just a plain pane of glass

no window into no world

I used to get lost in my hometown
around the public schools

A fool
I was
a crybaby

I could be found
    crying in the corner
of the playground
sobbing into a wall
    My face as red as brick
if only I knew

no Lilly
upon the ground
lays
    to sleep!
asleep! for me a dream,
for you too

I wish you could see
me then
I wish you could see me
now.
Root Cellar Meditation #14
Carol Bajen-Gahm
mixed media
Root Cellar Meditation #10
Carol Bajen-Gahm
mixed media
Clay Fish
Bernard Wills

It’s lovely. . . . Urve Manuel made it.
It’s a sculpin of some sort and it is poking out its tongue.
A strange slow moving fish
that rests on the muddy bottom where it dwells:
that is the sculpin in case you are wondering.
I used to catch them as a boy.
They would bite at anything in full confidence that, ugly and inedible,
they would be thrown back with dispatch
but now I’m told, in media vita and lost in a dark wood
that I should poke my tongue out, like this sculpin would,
serene in his power to frighten and repulse
and even, having for back-up, two venomous horns
to cow such fishermen as, over-eager for their bait,
might lay a thoughtless hand upon his finny pride.

I have watched the sculpin with some care.
He will not stir for the choicest morsel
if he judges it to be a millimeter out of range.
He is not in a hurry. Food will come. It always does.
His gills will flare out. His thick lips part.
He will bolt it down. Having lunged
no farther than he must he will settle once again
blending into the seaweed, rock,

the plastic, crumpled cans and swales of turgid muck…. What need has he to bite his thumb at anything?
To flip the sky a bird? To cock a snoot?
His range is narrow but his vision focused.
He isn’t mad at anything: does one thing but does it well.
He makes himself a kill if not a killing:
Detachment and a diffident air would seem to suit him best.

See, if you nestle in your murky bed and wait
those little scraps of flesh just drift right down
and you can snap them up, astounding even yourself,
with the speed at which your indolent hide
can hustle simply to grab a modest bite
though some of these are hooked and barbed
and you have to keep your head
lest they hoist you up into a world of ache,
of needled shafts and finely whetted blades of light.
Drowning in Port--After Antipater or Sidon
Bernard Wills

There are many oceans yet there’s only one where drowning is concerned. Why bother railing? Calling curses down on Pontic, Adriatic or the middle sea? Why scourge those waves with words instead of whips? Same harm’s in all. I should know. I’ve plowed them all. I’m Aristagoras that blood-hound of the heaving seas. I’ve skimmed across an even blaze of blue silk, stood tall by breakers piled to thunder-height. I’ve skirted round the frozen wastes of Thule: ran clear with a ripping ice wind at my back . . . So. Wouldn’t you know I’d drown in Skarphe harbor, my skiff flipped over as I nosed her into port!
I dare say lads our enemy Poseidon washed his briny hands of that disaster!
Autumn Flare
Kelley Power
digital photography
A Forest Fire
Shealyn Varnes

For
years, I dated Ease,
Calmness,
Mature Discussions.
Routine took me to dinner and Clockwork brought me home.
Ever taste vanilla sex? I mean, have vanilla sex?
Comfortable and safe
Comfortable but safe
Then
A forest fire caught my eye
The entirety of the woods was engulfed in heat and smoke
I knew my skin would burn
I knew the pain would ruin me
But I sprinted into the flames
Feeling
As though I’d be woken from a
deep slumber
Skulls Contour
Jean Wills
ink on paper
Armistice
Joshua Pittman

Leg flanks left,
Elbow dug in between
Neck and pillowcase,
Fingernails chase and tussle
Out-of-place hair idly -
Please don’t knee me in the crotch again.

Orders muttered over a breath
Of wire.
The night pinned down by bedsheets,
Tired lives cling to one another.

Reveille! yet again,
Re-arrange the mattress perimeter
REM sleep victory
Glimmers across lidded retinas.

In a twin bed:
  1 sock
  2 cushions
  4 ankles.

Lines drawn shift, you sleep
With the solemnity of a machine gun,
And yet,
Tired lives cling to one another
In search of armistice.
On the Way Up,
Joshua Pittman

It’ll be a thousand times today,
a thousand times tomorrow, too.
We lost count way, way back
before we were concerned
we had forgotten, and now the tally’s off.

We’ve retraced a hundred months,
a hundred orange Octobers
sticking up like
fence posts in a widening field:
after a dozen we lost all direction.

There are scores of true norths
and scores of parallels.
They splice us up,
those lawn-chairs, those chain-links,
flattening tires and barricading entrances.

There’s a couple years left to find it,
a couple years to get out and find it, I think.
Beyond the yellow straightaways
past the ash-stained map
to the sharpest, sanguine peak

It’ll only take a second to know,
we’ll only need a second to justify
the whole damn journey,
all the bruised knees and rockslides,
when we get there we’ll know:

We can begin again.
Untitled
Diana Chisolm
digital collage
Sledding As an Act of Revolution
Joshua Pittman

In the soggy winter of 1976,
Fidel Castro went sledding in Gander.

I can only imagine how it must feel
to step away
from that impossible place,
from sand packed and heated by revolutionary feet,
and sink into 10 inches of snow.

The trees are encased in ice.
The soil bites.
The bedrock is impenetrable.

Everywhere he sees the totality of earthly powers
brought to bear on a little people.
Everywhere he sees life:

Cigarettes traded for Cubanos,
Strong whiskey and somehow stronger tea,
Meals hunted and prayed over,
Dogs as big as black bears,
Women who still wear a knife on their hip,
And men with seawater in their eyes.

“This place is no good for fighting,”
he might have said.
“The terrain is rough,
el puto viento is rougher”
But he sees the dirty fingernails
and the determined smiles,
and he knows that they will fight anyways. Because, very much like himself, they are stubborn bastards And this is their home.

And so a man who led a country into the hearth (for better or for worse) Rides a child’s toboggan downhill, capsizes, and tumbles the rest of the way.
Melissa Taylor
Fine Line
powdered graphite on paper
Dia de Las Velitas
Maria Dussan

7th of December, “el día de las velitas”
Virgin Mary will come to the candled lawns
of the Latin American world
where children learn to play with fire
In forgotten neighbourhoods
while they wait to see a spectral Virgin
bringing hope to these asphalt corners
and I am afraid of her sight
If she looks me in the eye she will know
that I was never a good kid.

Up the opposite hemisphere
other kids got tired of playing in the snow
and I am oblivious to their power
as they were never praying the “Ave María”
their night is not ignited by a hurt holy ghost
hunting for premature rascals
threatening the sacrificial heart of the son
crying blood at the front of the church
looking down on your young soul

we learnt to suspect the holy ground
in our school’s perfect white starch collars
the undaunted nun snatched me the poetry book
the only thing at church that made me feel holy
and I stared blankly at the golden altar
and the only way to salvation is looking down
so I looked in and the young kid is furious
as the Father preaches the miracle of conversion
I have converted to a losing path
and the night of December 7th
the candles look beautiful.
Blanketing
Erika Stonehouse
ink on paper
Poem for the Silent Path Up the Hillside
Ashley Hemmings

You try to see the small things first; two bumblebees on the same goldenrod flower, a hole between roots where an animal could live, a standalone purple flower in a patch of rocky earth. You see a bush of blueberries, and thinking that they’re blueberries, stoop to put one in your mouth. When you bite and find that it’s hard and tastes like a Christmas tree, you spit it out and spit again, realizing it must have been a juniper bush. The sun gets hotter the further up the path you go, but you do not make this remark out loud. By the time you get to the meadow at the top of the hill it is cold again. When you look out over the ocean you can see the denser air in the distance moving towards you. You see the big things last; the hungry waves beating the coastline, the fog on the red mountains in the distance, the pile of moose poop on the path back down the hillside.
Reality
Melissa Taylor
powdered graphite on paper
Are You the Ocean?
Sam Westcott

after the untitled monoprint by Ashley Hemmings, 2017.

That night at Cape Spear, we lay on flat Earth, and stared up into the world.

A dark space lit by incandescent little wonders. Stars and planets and those bursts bleeding light. The annual meteor shower.

I had said something funny; mispronounced “baby,” started us laughing and couldn’t stop. An idea dipped in all of it - looking up, opposed to down. There was nothing between us and those stars but light years. And in the summer’s oceanic breath
we could almost
sense all those years peel away,
reverse; collapse. Decompose.
If we pulled off the fabric
of this night, we'd find a worker's table:
dried leaves appearing skeletal. Their veins
forming miniature versions
of the trees they fell from.

And strands knit taut, hung in flux.
Dancing undone; of no scarf or mitten.
But the fabric held.

Our sight unfurled, soaked
like stems in a dark periphery
to catch light falling
some ways away from us.

And when the light died, those rocks stole
from our sight, grew unseen, but later, were dreamt upon.

Then the joke we still carry now like a souvenir –
are you the ocean?
12 Ways of Looking at a Photograph of Your Past
Sam Westcott

I
Like old relatives
lingering in faded photos,
those woods
have scampered into
the past now. Gone.

II
And whatever
happened to those wheels?
Left rusting into nothing. Us
perched between them,
and sprouting.

III
We are so small, Kate
and I. Mom glancing
away, a shroud of
blonde hair. But we stare
intently, as if past the lens.

IV
What would I say to them
now? What would we
talk about? Enjoy it
while you can - too
obvious. Pat on the head.

V
The trail going so far
back there. Crazy to think
we blundered through
our backyard, woods,
and into here,

VI
a green dream world. I
want to say the sky looks
so ’90s, nostalgia spreading
somewhere inside
of me. But can I?

VII
No: dad’s Pentax is jamming
the sky into those blues.
It would have looked the same
then as it does now – right? -
free of these past 20 years,
it might appear lucent,
daydreaming.

VIII
No memory of it evaporating, the meadow. The woods.
All of it.
He looked, it was there. Glanced away and grew;
now the years of chemical jokes passed by
those root systems underneath,
go unheard for the
ulcer upstairs,
ushering cold through it’s
creaks and cracks in the floorboards.

IX
This must’ve been the fall.
Or late September. I wonder
if it was the field’s last – decaying to freeze and then de-thaw into destruction/construction. Nightmare. Born again and chopped up as backyards; sprinkler going off as someone barbeques from their stained wooden deck. Pulling air through their lungs, to melodize, whistle Dixie.

X
What if those wheels started turning, where would they carry us? Further into the field, or squeaking into now?

XI
Wish I could tell that kid to catch me some more memories while he’s there. Like someone going to the store, bring me home a Pepsi and the newspaper. My past ebbing forward, sneaking out of these Kodak frames.

XII
Darting into a field, accompanied by the wind’s autumnal chords. The uncut grass. The click of a camera, running into past and future, Together.
A collection of plastic pots, in plastic buckets, mostly red.
Invert
Alyssa Leahy
acrylic on board
No Hope
Nathalie Pender

Don’t get me wrong,
I know, it does sound bad,
But in truth, having no hope is not being hopeless.

No hope is to refuse to live in the future,
No hope is to take a stand that life is worth living as it is,
No hope is to live your life and not dream it.

I do not hope for love, affection, attention,
I live it day after day,
As I live with sadness, sorrow, and pain.

I do not want to hope for anything,
Life is too short.
Everyday is made of moments,
Every moment brings feelings,
Every feeling is worthy of us as we can’t know joy without
sadness,
Every day must be lived at its fullest.

No hope for me please! I want to be happy.
Pipeline
Megan Bush
film photography
Atop a Hill
Erica Keough

I sat atop a hill
Under a tree.
I waited for you.
As the grass rustled
Warm air kissed my cheeks
And I watched birds
I waited for you.
I know you won’t come
Not because I know
For a certainty
You don’t love me
But because
I didn’t invite you
Nan’s Ashen Hair

t/l

A color you cannot replace,
Nothing could ever be as fair.
Curls so perfectly ‘round her face,
Nan’s ashen hair.
Her grey hair, nothing can compete,
Not fog, not silver, nor a ring.
Not one thing is by far as sweet
Not anything.
Press
Olivia Wong
watercolour
I saw death at age 20
until then
it did not have a name or a face.

She was surrounded by beauty and photographs
and people who loved her
and me

(who did not know her very well)

The lack of connection
did not make the sight of her frail body
any easier to understand

Sharp angles of shoulders and crossed hands
not a wrinkle out of place
no movement

In a blue suede casket with the aroma of flowers
doing little to cover the chemical stench of death

The hardest thing to accept was how real she was
there in front of the room
looking peaceful, asleep
and me

waiting to see her move

Alice
Jessica Warford
blink
breathe
But seeing nothing.
2018
Erica Keough
ink on paper

Oh My

Would you look at the year
Fret or Fetter
Emma Croll-Baehre

Fret or fetter? I wield both as rosaries.
If I die, when you see a fish, it will be me.
Predictable exoskeleton. Lungs that are never truly damp.
Opalescent flesh like the Virgin’s hands, unmarred by t.b.
My dream is a placebo. It aches
in Montréal’s black winter. Unbreathing.

I have had my lovers. Writers of frenetic letters,
erotic poetics of my avoidance, or my crane’s throat or
“Your mother won’t tell me where you are”.
Ain’t that a bite. You are the final cig I have forgotten in a silver case.

The sun makes me sneeze. Les habitants. Writhe below,
placated hymenoptera. I follow Him. The Father.
I have viewed the bubblegum pink wristwatch,
snoring within his sleeve. How droll is he!
My girl’s heart pops for Him, as
I collect paper. Yellowed pizza coupons,
half-void scribblers from medical school.
What turkey will recall, otherwise?

Not even He could be as pedantic.
I don myself in cobalt blue, (which I may add, I am allergic to).
It is the colour closest to dreams, of expo sixty-seven skies and mum’s habitat, where my breath could finally rattle with familiarity.

I have fished my niece from ice. I have walked from her in snow.
In kid gloves, I choke as my sister delivers my herbal tea.
With long white fingers I will pull Him back to my casket,
so that He may break the spell on me.
Larva
Jenna Short
watercolour and ink on rag paper
Untitled, Unwritten
Rachel Moore

I’ve got it!
hidden away
in a notebook
maybe 80 or so years from now
a skinny kid with wide eyes
will read it and proclaim
“this makes no fucking sense”

there must be
brilliance,
shoved away
in a closet in my mother’s house,
or maybe it’s in a diary I’ve thrown out
and in just a few months
in a room
full of tweed and low heels
that squeak
and dry bread paired
with weak coffee
they will be saying my name
so they can take a photo,
hand me a plaque,
“Good work, congratulations”

it’s got to be out there
in a youtube video
or coming from a harsh man
with kind eyes

for now, though
I will keep looking
through the notes on my smartphone
in the margins of books I haven’t finished
won’t finish
in songs
and stories
and poems alike
in my near and dear friend; avoidance
until someone very kind
says to me
“Maybe this just isn’t for you.”
Lament for the Poor Astronaut
Quinn Anderson

They are very expensive
Those gravity boots
Guess I’ll float for awhile
Wave #2
Emily Clark
photogram
Plastic
Quinn Anderson

When we found out that plastic
Was the secret to space travel
We cleaned up the oceans
Once the mysteries unravelled

“Bring your bags, bins, and buttons”
If you scrimp, if you save
The possibilities are endless
For those who are brave

We tore up our houses, our cars, our toys
When plastic fuels the portals to worlds unknown
No one cares about this planet
The one we call “home”

While this was now many decades ago
Portals throughout with plastic are lit
And Earth is finally shiny, clean
With no one around to see it.
Tyrone in New York, 2017
Rachel Moore
photography
King of Devon Island
Ryan Duffy

(a self-hymn to be sung while shivering)

I am the King of Devon Island,
My throne is built on stone and ice.
I have no subjects, no towns, no trade,
One head of state; I am its Christ.

I am the King of Devon Island,
Autonomous and absolute.
The Queen can try to take it from me;
But she’s already got Resolute.

I am the King of Devon Island,
But Truelove Lowland’s where I reign.
“Cold” means nothing to me up here,
When there’s no warmth to contrast the pain.

I am the King of Devon Island,
I must attest—I’m all alone.
The air and sky are clean, although
I have no friends, but a NASA drone

I am the King of Devon Island,
It reached fifty-one below today,
And all I had for lunch just now
Was a stirred up berry and arctic hay.
I am the King of Devon Island,
And there’s just one place I wish to go:
I’ll find someone who’ll warm my heart
Back down in southern Ontario.
Vera Vera 3
Faune Torres
film developed in humber river water
BEEP-boop, BEEP-boop, wh-THUD— the glass door’s alarm chimed as it opened, slamming against the outside wall of the car dealership from the whipping winds, making snow feel like sharp glass for the walking customer. The security guard inside dropped the watering can to help the man close the door. After regaining composure and warming up for a few seconds, he patted his hand on the hood of the silver showroom vehicle and walked to the service counter.

“How well’s th’ car swim?” The disheveled middle-aged man, slouching in his layers of dirt-smeared winter and protective gear slurred.

“I’m sorry?” said the salesman, a good twenty meters away from the door, standing nobly behind the counter.

“I’m sayin’, how well’s it swim? I’m not sure where your fadder’s from, but Carner Brook’s winters aren’t like most winters. Navigatin’ ‘doze roads – those soupy aqueducts of gasoline-stinkin’ filth – that’s why they call’em potholes, don’tcha know? A big shit soup for the pedestrians to eat and eat and – You know, on the best of days, I’ll be walkin’ ‘round Broadway when the bars close, and the only cars running are the taxis, and the fresh fallen snow is laid upon the intersection’s holiday glow, and the barking of the hounds is the only ‘ting echoing ‘trew the drowned out January night—there are no sounds on this bitch of an earth for once—but ‘den it turns into ice pebbles, ‘den Play-Doh, ‘den soup, ‘den hell-on-earth-frozen- over and repeat, always bein’ kicked up from the tires, gettin’ in every nook and cranny in the bowl—stuck to the sides of the curbs like white gristle on a plate.” He barked the last word. The nervously grimacing salesman discretely made a hand-across- neck, head-shaking gesture towards the security guard, who had lowered the watering can and tensely neared the customer before getting the signal, backing off, and returning to his watering. The three souls
were the only ones in the cold, large Hyundai dealership. There were two infinitely sparkling cars inside, on either side of the entrance. One was a silver-coloured sedan; the other, a burgundy convertible. Most of the remaining space in the large building was taken up with plants; palm trees, maple, flowers of the wild, all lined up in a grid-like fashion around each car. There were far more plants inside the building than there were cars outside on the lot (perhaps a solid twenty, while the plants inside numbered in the hundreds). Green ivy ran alongside the interior walls of the automotive cathedral; a strand of leaves bounced listlessly—pat—pat—pat—against one of the three large three-pronged glass ceiling fans as it spun 10 RPM—pat—pat—pat.

The salesman notched the lapel on his white seersucker suit before furrowing his bushy brow. He was a stately man with a mysterious smile, appearing as though he could be either fifty or eighty-five—the creases in his face appeared like an obfuscated Markov chain. “I assure you, Mister …?,” The customer squinted angrily, denying the salesman his name.

“Sir, as you know, the burden of global climate change does not rest on the shoulders of a single local-level car dealership.”

“Luh,” the customer grunted, scowling and puckering his face as to spit on the floor, but resisting, “you knows I don’t give a shit about Yankee climate, it’s cold here and it’s always been cold here, and I’d be back on my truck iffd’yurn’t fer that South China Sea shit jackin’ up d’h’oil over ‘ere. Friggin’ Trump and hiz fourth term, he’s shittin’ he’self in a wheelchair and expects to win.”

“Hmm”, the salesman smirked, chuckling, “then we are on common grounds. You can understand that Hyundai is none too pleased with his rhetoric. Might I interest you in a coffee? I may have a vehicle that you’re interested in.”

“Sure,” the customer (whose Ford Nation t-shirt was stuck to his clammy skin) acquiesced, sighing and sitting reluctantly on the brown dachshund-shaped couch. He flipped through the literature on the table: a 2003 Guinness World Records and a Good
*Housekeeping* from November ’86 with Princess Di on the cover dazzled him, each by the holographic material on the *Guinness* cover, as well as the Lady’s hypnotic gaze.

The snow outside was so intense that they could no longer see the 2030 Hyundai models lined perpendicular to the road, while the coffee machine sputtered the darkest beany froth. “Got any’ting more current? B’ys wouldn’t wanna be spreading fake news ‘bout the wrong title-holder of World’s Longest Fingernails, wouldya?”
Snowday in the Battery
Irene Duma
oil on canvas
“How’s your mother getting on this morning?” Steve said, rolling his snow pants over top his rubber boots.

“No different,” Art said.

The two men had arranged this the night before, when the snow started to fall in heavy blankets. They switched to water and hit pillows early. There was money to be made after snowstorms. They’d been shoveling driveways together since grade ten.

“She talk to you about Rick?” Steve said.

Art handed Steve his coat, eager to get started. His brother Rick had been incarcerated again on Monday morning. “Rick can do no wrong in her mind, Steve,” he said. “He could burn that place to the ground and she would think he’s friggin’ a hero.”

They stepped out into the electric white. Art squinted at Steve.

“Where’s your shovel?”

“Don’t have one.”

“Here,” Art said, pulling his shovel from where he’d lanced it into a snowbank. He handed it to his friend.

“Where should we start?”

“Lydia’s,” Art said.

“Right.”

She opened the door and into her porch fell a pile of snow. She wore pajamas and a t-shirt. No bra. Art’s eyes strained hard to look only at Lydia’s face, which sagged with atrophy, especially near her mouth. “Here to do your driveway, Lyd,” he said. Steve waved from the street.

“Thanks,” she mumbled. And tried to close the door.

“Uh, Lyd?”

She stopped. Art couldn’t look her in the face for this part. He looked down.

Down at the fuzzy and pilled Simpsons characters on her pajama
bottoms – the knees and arse of which were faded almost white.
She had been his sister-in-law. She still was, technically. These
weren’t snowstorm pajamas. They were everyday pajamas.

“Haven’t got another shovel, do you?”
She gestured toward the snow-covered deck. “Out there somewhere.”

She closed the door. Art made a half-effort to kick around under
the snow on Lydia’s deck, looking for her shovel but found nothing.

“Guess we’ll take turns,” Steve said. He already had a fine swath
of snow cleared; the heavy stuff left by the plow. They shoveled with
gusto in one or two-minute shifts, and at that pace Lydia’s car was
excavated in no time. Not that she was likely to drive it. But now at
least, if she had to, she could. Art scooped a shovelful of snow out
of the side of the bank and sat in the seat it made. He reached into
the inside pocket of his coat and lit two cigarettes, handed one to
Steve.

“Imagine if Corey was still around,” Steve said.
“I do,” Art said. “Every fuckin’ day.” He took an emphatic draw
on the cigarette.

“Sorry,” said Steve. “I was thinking about Lydia. And Rick.”
Art leaned back against the snowbank. He looked up at Lydia’s
curtained window. “Well,” he said, “he ain’t.” He spit. Stood and
stepped on his cigarette. “Come on, Phil Brown’s next.”

Phil Brown paid them twenty dollars each, which they knew
he would. It was double what they’d expect to get elsewhere. His
driveway was twice as big as Lydia’s, but Phil Brown had extra
shovels too. Art took the blue one with the curved handle, and with
the two men able to work together, the job was half complete before
Steve looked up and asked Art for another cigarette.

“We’ll go to the North Atlantic after this and I’ll buy a pack,”
Steve said.

“Don’t worry about it.”
The low rumble of the plow approaching turned their heads. Art
waved and the t-shirted driver cut wide in front of Phil Brown’s

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driveway, lessening the snow his blade deposited there.

“Your mother tell you who Rick got?” Steve asked.

“Judge Hynes.”

“Bastard.”

Art shrugged. Examined the ash on his cigarette.

“Think she’ll let him move back in?” Steve said. “After, I mean. After he gets out.”

“Rick could come back from Her Majesty’s tomorrow, Steve, and she would already have a friggin’ cake baked.”

Steve put his gloves back on and tossed more snow onto Phil Brown’s lawn. “Did you get a chance to see him?” he said.

Art’s expression soured. He busied himself with the snow too. He said, “I know what he looks like.”

After Phil Brown’s they moved on up the street, passing two men snow blowing their driveways. And only theirs. Art felt strangely thankful for their lack of neighborliness. He spotted a curtain moving, and behind it saw a young woman standing with a baby on her hip. He recognized her, but didn’t know who she was, or who her people were.

“Hang on,” he said to Steve.

He had to hold onto the rail to climb her front steps; the snow so thick he could only guess where they hid. Steve stood on the road and watched. Art was better at talking to people. He smiled at the baby and waved to the toddler that appeared at the woman’s side. He still had the shovel in his hand: the blue one. The woman spoke and Art’s face darkened. The door shut and he yelled at its snow-stuck cold side. “Yeah? Well your youngsters are fuckin’ ugly!”

“What was that about?” Steve said.

“Stuck up cunt. Come on.” Art didn’t slow down to answer Steve; he stomped further up the street before turning around suddenly.

“You try to do something nice for someone and that’s the way they treat you. What’s she think I’m gonna do?”
“What’d she say?”
“It’s not what she said, it’s how she said it.”
“How’d she say it?”
Art trudged on.

Next they stopped at Anne Bishop’s. They shoveled without prompting or announcement. They cleared the walkway and ramp in silence. When they were almost finished Art rang the doorbell and waited for Anne to make her way to the door. She was surprised to see them, like always.
“God bless you,” she said.
“Haven’t got any salt for these steps, do you?”
“No,” she said. “Do you want a glass of water? Tell your friend to come have a glass of water.”
“Okay,” Art said. “Thank you.” He yelled to Steve and nodded for him to join them on the step.
Anne Bishop came back to the door holding two small glasses, sloshing and spilling the whole way, her hands shaking, held out in front of her.
“Thank you,” Steve said.
“You’re welcome, my ducky.”
“ Haven’t got any beer, do you?” Steve said, smiling. Art shot him a hard look.
“No, my lover, I haven’t got any beer for you.”
“He’s just joking,” Art said. They gulped the water and continued on.

“ Took Phil Brown’s shovel, did you?”
“He had three there,” Art said. “I’ll probably bring it back later.”
“Beats taking turns.”
With three driveways cleared and only forty dollars earned between them they moved to a more achieved neighbourhood. They dug out SUVs and this-year’s- models instead of compacts and rusty old trucks.
“You know that fella Rudy?” Steve said.
“What you think?”
“How about Rudy? He’s all right.”
“He was telling us the other night this story about his grandfather. How his grandfather had this big secret that he held over the family – all his youngsters. Rudy’s father told him about it. Said that the old fella didn’t approve of the way all his kids drank. How half of em were on the dole. He didn’t want to be tied up with such a lazy, drunken lot like the ones he’d gone and made, right? So, he holds this secret over em: gold. Says he knows for a spot, miles from nowhere, and there’s enough gold to make em all rich. He’s too old now to get himself that deep into the woods, but he says if the rest of em straightens up he’ll draw em a map.” Art continued to shovel while Steve talked into the middle distance. “Rudy says that’s what he remembers most about his old man: that story about the gold. Says he wants to get a few fellas together and go have a look for it.”

“Where?”
“He don’t know where.”
“How about?”
“Stephenville area, he said. Somewhere out that way.”
“And how’s Rudy getting out there?” Art said. “Rudy’d be lucky to find his way to Mount Pearl.”
“I don’t know.” Art stopped shoveling and turned to his friend.
“You believe that?”
“I don’t know. Could be true.”
“Gold. In Newfoundland. And no one’s found it yet? That’s the biggest load of shit I ever heard.”

Steve returned to clearing snow. Art lit his last cigarette, crumpled and tossed the empty package into the snow-covered street. “Gold,” he said. “Only thing precious to come out of Stephenville is hash oil.”

“Not Stephenville, just out that way,” Steve said. He tossed a pile of snow onto the crumpled cigarette package in the street. Art tilted his head back and blew smoke straight up. “Rudy ever tell you
what happened to his old man?” Steve tossed another load over his shoulder and nodded.

The snow deepened to an inky blue and shadows stretched as the two friends finished the last driveway. Art counted their money and divided it in half: sixty dollars each. Steve crumpled the bills and stuffed them into his pants pocket.

“You be home later?” he said.
“I’d say,” Art said.
“I’ll be by, once Grace is in bed.”
“Figured.”
“I don’t know when that’ll be. Told your mom it’d be around eight, but who knows.” Art pulled the cellophane string off of a fresh pack of cigarettes. When he let go the wind carried it and the attached plastic into the air and around the side of the gas station.
“You sure you don’t mind?” Steve said.
Art shrugged. “It’s not for me to say who she shouldn’t be seeing.” He flicked the lighter and lowered his face. “There’s worse out there than you.”
Steve put his gloves back on. “Okay. I’ll see you later.”
“Here,” Art said. He held out another twenty-dollar bill. “If you see Rudy, get me a gram of hash oil.”