

Paper Route

Scott Stenson

Sabbath afternoon in summer sometimes feels like those February mornings I'd wedge the damp butt of each newspaper in friend's saddle pack clouded gray with his indistinguishable fingerprints. Their buckling mouths a smudged bouquet of garden flowers. Small-town headlines and pictures of distorted figures in frames stuck twisting under tangled and torqued rubber bands meant nothing to me. Not a worry or concern, outside of time and task. Too innocent to care about more than these things. But then, preliminaries accomplished, I'd tremble while smearing the bulging canvas sacks over my side-cocked head and neck, the weight wiping away my cap and silly pom-pom, pulling the hair of my head until I wanted to wake the sleepers. Once I'd lifted the sack into position, I'd lower the cargo suspended by hyperextended thumbs, dropping the load onto my shoulders, jolting my knees as if kneeling to pray at an altar. Banging the storm door with their news, and without a view of my shoes or other obstacles before me in the world. In faith, I'd shuffle-step over threshold into faint porch light and slow snowflakes in season, thick silence falling. In unplowed street, all labor, strain, and sound—before, now, after—absorbed and covered within the shimmering walls of dull-sloping cliffs, insular drifts, which much softened and dressed in laundered robes

yesterday's dingy carbon-stained ridges. Even leaning out to listen intently for the neighbor's raspy windshield ice scraper, the one buried in brake light and billowing exhaust, seemed impossible in this transfigured place of peace and rest, feet from entryway where I stuffed another's bag for one bite of an apple or one experience with midwinter.

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