Digging

by Andrew Kenneally

I came to a field where, scattered around, were quite a few men digging holes, all observed by greater or lesser populated groups of onlookers, though there seemed to be a process of shifting favour: one digging man, extravagant of movement, would lose observers to another, perhaps equally extravagant, if not more so, or maybe less so; the faces of the deserters expressing disappointed hopes or, in the more extreme cases, even scorn: "That I could have ever expected anything from that old fool."

One workman, noticeably less extravagant of movement than the others, though no less busy, was all the time gaining more observers than he was losing, and from among the gathered group was one offering something of a running commentary. "See how he digs. Such refinement of movement. All is focused on the task. Nothing is superfluous, not an ounce wasted."

He received an occasional withering look from the digger, though this seemed to, if anything, please him. An acknowledgement of his existence, I suppose.
"Such remorselessness in his seeking."
"What is he seeking?" I asked. This statement of ignorance met with general puzzled surprise, though the faithful commentator condescended to inform: "He is looking for the light."
"He won't find it down there."

And this was met with such disdainful and pitying looks- though I felt there was far more disdain than pity, and not much truth in the pity. It got no spoken response; it evidently too stupid to deserve anything more than it got.
After much time the digging man, deep down now in his dark hole, ceased in his work, raised his bent back, and matter-of-factly, somewhat morosely, and yet with only the faintest hint of actual

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disappointment, uttered: "There is no light." The underlying tone, I felt, was that this had merely confirmed his expectations- though even that is too humble- the foreknowledge rather, that this absence of light would of course be so. It was, no doubt, a mark of his humility, his lack of presumption, that he had dug so far.

A deep and solemn silence followed. The truth sunk deep into their hearts, but a truth which they, like the digger, had always really known.

And then . . . he resumed his digging. "I'd better not ask," I thought.