

Milkmen

by Paul de Denus

Six white bottles clink in a metal basket like stacked ice cubes sweating in a summer glass. The milkman gingerly slides them toward me with a frozen black boot.

Three and three go to numbers twelve and fourteen, he says, nodding across the street at an early row of lifeless cream-colored houses.

I tip up on my moccasins, the laces iced up to my kneecaps and peer over a chiseled snow bank, its frozen surface encrusted a dirty mocha brown like toasted meringue. From the street I can barely pick out the numbers on the houses. The blizzard whips the morning world blind and I blink in Morse code while the snow lashes at my scarf-bandaged brow. The temperature is well below zero and I wonder if milk or blood can possibly freeze solid.

The milkman waits on the crest and I move across the road, shuffling like my grandfather on cold mornings, a steaming coffee cupped in hand, a bent gnome inching along, careful not to spill such precious cargo.

