

Senior Division, Short Fiction

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Upstairs Nancy Downstairs Nancy (an excerpt)

By noon The Shoveller has cleared an astounding volume of snow from the street. There is a giant rectangle of black pavement that stretches all the way across the road, three houses long. Upstairs Nancy and Downstairs Nancy are still hanging around; they drag a couple of chrome kitchen chairs outside and set them up on the cleared sidewalk. They are seated now in front of the boarding house; chatting, laughing loudly, smoking. They each have a chipped mug of something, steaming.

There is a festive atmosphere to the street. People walking by compliment the scarred man on his fine shovelling. He stands next to the shovel which is stuck upright in a snowbank and sips from his mug. Grinning broadly, nodding curtly. Passersby nod and wink, shout out that the City should hire him. The Shoveller says nothing but each compliment prompts a ribald response from the two Nancys, in concert they shout saucy comebacks to pedestrians and neighbors. Upstairs Nancy and Downstairs Nancy solicit compliments for the magnificent shovelling job of which they, by association and proximity, have become an integral part.

A snowplow rumbles up the street, beeping and flashing in the night. It fills in the neat pathway from the boarding house to the street. The printed scarf in the attic window twitches as it grumbles past. The stained sheers on the ground floor float gently back into place. The Shoveller stands at his own dark, curtainless window, in between.