

Percy Janes First Novel Award
Paul Whittle, St. John's
Sunflower (an excerpt)

November, the month of remembering. We all had someone in one of the great wars. I went with Pierce to the ceremony at the War Memorial, now more a gathering of stories than soldiers. Afterwards we cracked a case of India in his shed. Pierce still had his mother's Kodak on a shelf—a shrine to her. They'd recovered it from the icy pond, along with her body.

Our old English teacher Mr. Whalen came up in the talk—the one who'd told me in high school: "Go west, young man. You won't know home till you leave it". Maggie had done that.

Back home the wind around the Crow's Nest rattled like someone trying to get in. I waited for Maggie to come from the bathroom, frozen, and tuck her feet under mine. But I was alone.

The texts and phone calls became perfunctory, as if the distance was inserting itself. I wrote in my black notebook, a form of self-therapy.

In between endless walks around the old streets of the city and working on my studies, I managed a few shifts at *The Poet and The Peasant*, which had taken on the selling of second-hand books. I found one of the old texts we used in St. Pat's, *Geography of our New Found Land*, and filled in the blanks of an old quiz:

Besides cod, Newfoundland is an island rich in _____ and _____.

The right answer was forests and minerals. I scribbled in my journal:

Hapless leaders and bad deals.

Drunken fools and lonely nights.

Leaving and broken hearts.