

Canaan's Landing

by Charles Semones

What made him let his tongue turn mean when he went down to the landing that wintry November afternoon was something he could not account for. He never meant to ruin what had been such good relations with his neighbor. Each had been the other's closest friend, or so he thought. But there on the river, men never spoke of things like that. They kept their feelings to themselves. They never would have dared divulge them to the ones who had the right to hear them. He knew some perversity had seized him, made him say vile words he would have given up his seat in heaven not to. He had never known he had such rage built up inside him—and for no reason he could think of. And so he took the long way home, planning what he'd do, and how he'd do it, since something desperate was called for. Only then could he admit to what surely had to be a wrongful love. Familiar things seemed ominous; the day was cheerless, out of joint. He couldn't help but notice that dark was coming earlier than common. Once at home, he lit the mantel lamp, a natural thing to do. What was not natural was turning his hound loose and taking the well-rope to the curing barn. His best friend found him the next morning when he came to see if there was not some way the two of them could mend their fences, knowing that the words he'd heard the afternoon before were not the words his friend had aimed to say. He cut the body down and sat beside it for an hour or more. He'd feel the weight of unmeant words the balance of his days.