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## Smuggler's Beach, Massachusetts

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# *Smuggler's Beach, Massachusetts*

Wet feet melting  
 tight to boat-stretchers,  
 hands wrapped like  
 rope round splintered oars,  
 the shoulders ride rhythmically  
 down and up, the small boat  
 handles the incoming waves, glides  
 into the New  
 England shore quiet  
 like catspaw.  
 Voices, rum-scented with  
 remarks. Orders are given.  
 Arms wrestle cargo onto arms reaching  
 out, stolid in clothing hard from sea-  
 wear, salt encrusted stiff.  
 They move off, melt into the silent  
 sandy-wet night of the sky's endless  
 ledge of darkness, shadows absorbed.

Sounds.  
 Splashing feet pound the shore  
 line. Faces flash; a gun, perhaps,  
 fires. A body, perhaps, falls. Light  
 from sudden torches ignites legs, arms,  
 hands, the fingers of a man clutching  
 another's, red with oozing  
 broken blood, into movement, into  
 stillness dark with defeat.

Like grave-robbers  
 they are hauled away. Ropes  
 are fingered. A single tree,  
 its stark,  
 wintry branches naked  
 in the freezing coast-line cold,  
 bends, creaks  
 under the weight of  
 bodies  
 hung like empty wooden  
 kegs, wind-tossed,  
 rotting, gathering ice  
 in ill-kept beards, cold eyes  
 frosted over.

The beach lies still.  
 A distant horn sounds  
 its hollow seeping warning out  
 into the heavy listless fog.  
 The boat rocks gently as waves  
 surround it, gradually draw it  
 out. It floats away, over  
 the sludge and surf of a beach,  
 carried out into the rustling  
 darkness of the sea, into  
 the breaking-up yard  
 like the furtive men who had guided her,  
 into the memory of time, flogged silent  
 by a noisy past, falling off  
 into history, the wind  
 at their backs.

—Thomas Lavoie