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## Dispositions

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*Homer Mitchell*

## Dispositions

When my father died years after my mother—was it winter?  
spring?—we descended dutifully as Dickens’s pickers upon  
their house of acquisitions—rooms, closets, drawers,  
depressed, overwhelmed by property—ancient golf

clubs in a flimsy canvas bag, forty years of hats far too small  
for me, piles of scuffed Armstrong, Richter, *The Sound of Music*—  
collapsed shelves of books, most unread, damp and sticky  
from mildew’s creep—suits and shoes, dresses and pumps,

robes and slippers, stacks of blankets, musty sheets, yellowed  
bills and balances, die and cards, capers, cloves, and cumin,  
framed relatives and yellowed Remingtons, the plug-ugly giant parrot  
tapestry, strange tchotchkes and bric-a-brac from the Maritimes

and Roatán, photo albums of Bermuda and Mom’s first fall,  
of Banff—the Kodacolor old and red and wrong, a smiling pickaninny  
(said the postcard) preserved with swivel sticks and a Western Union  
cabin reservation from their post-war Florida honeymoon.

We tackled closets, my sister claimed the desk—its leather top  
etched by late-night smoking burns—opened the center drawer, and saw  
inside among lists, pencil stubs and dead pens, our father’s hands  
or heard him clear his throat—and abruptly left for home.

My wife and I thought we understood, joked about the challenges  
of Hercules, the river outside pushing its own weight to the sea,  
and I promised then in growing vacancy to dispossess myself  
so long and loudly my sister could have heard his laughter.