Backyard Mechanics

Sara Crayne*
watching Richard strip this slant-six
engine meant for a Valiant body
he’s in love with, a cute baby blue
'vert he traded something in for, with
plus a few bucks extra thrown in.
Smells of dust, grease and pine resin drift
in on the heat, in and between the gaps of
garage siding, under his former shingle,
“Daywalt Garage,” its name and number
of the old neighborhood. Today
all is swept clean, clutter displaced
into the yard to make orderly work space.

Still, the decor and architecture speak
of early Our Gang. Old stuff, set
for the odd bud to drift in off
the street up to not much good here
in the middle of a weekday, lounging
in lonely or wanting to joke and smoke.
Red Robert, could be, his viking beard
fading over a Santa belly, otherwise
it’s Steve, from Bal’more MD still hustling
his street accents. Later they will call
in Jerry the mechanic, maybe off
the wagon and cynical, for a
six-pack consultation.
Out of the dim beyond a doorframe wide enough to drive his '51 Chevy flatbed cab inside, day blares on a *quercus alba* which is its own gnarled drawing of elegance: environs, however, strictly Detroit out of Appalachia for the moment. Objects linger beneath soaking ambiance in no sequence, a list of possible future uses rusting or rotting through their respective half-lives in ragged timeline. By the door, the oil drain pan. A barstool drools upholstery, still good to perch upon to contemplate a question. Tile saw. Disassembled Moto-Guzzi. Oil drum, Skil-saw, parts full of cardboard boxes delaminating hollow core door.

Two Peugot seats are there too, he wants to put into his customized convertible: ponder their unmatched hardware fixtures. Maybe he will find some way to make it fit together, crafting slowly wonder from junkyard parts long sought or guessed at with a spatial imagination.

He is considering thread dimensions, grumbling a random anger at the busted engine mounts he knew all about before he bought it, showing someone how none of the valves are burned, how the pistons fit within their cylinders tightly justifying him.

Cast metal swings three feet above concrete where the dog pants. Heavy heavy, hanging over his head, on its half-ton hoist from a chain ascending thickly into rafters. Rooster announcements come at intervals over the neighbor’s pickets.
The block rotates slowly under his thinking fingers, a big wheel like the one supposed to move by faith. A day-light from the circle cut to hook the chain into, spots down on him with it, the smaller wheel way up in the middle of the air, like the song says turns by faith. Arno lifts a Dobie/Shepherd eyebrow at their lingering discussion of this problem mounting, ear tipped to the sound “puppy,” as in, “How can we work this puppy?”