

estuary

acadia's creative arts magazine

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Heather Frenette

Iron

Tackling a shirt, steam burns my fingertips
straightening the cloth beneath the buttons.
Mum pours yet another cup of tea and lights
a smoke on the far side of the ironing board.

A weekend morning, my mother pushes
porridge around in her mouth like it's
something unpleasant, frowning into her
bowl, divining fatal prophecies.

Over this narrow barrier we talk about
abortions and sex and how to say no. Our bibles,
Reader's Digest and *True Confessions*, and I
make promises unintentionally with no intentions.

Noon and not well, Mum is in flannelette
pajamas, sleeves deeply creased, the top
button missing, replaced carelessly by a
pin; life's too short for mending.

The sudden faltering of her heart leaves lives
dangling like bare bulbs in the darkened room
where six children and a husband pray for
recovery on an unforgiving linoleum floor.

Back at the board, I glide my
hand back and forth, back and
forth, the smooth motion mesmerizing
me like a child on a swing.

I flatten the bouquets of fiery
foxgloves and purple zinnias printed
on Mum's best flannelette nightgown,
pressing the still warm cloth to my cheek.

Liesel Carlsson

Cape Breton August 2001

gentle crash
of salty swells
lapping
 smashing
into blueberry peaks
covered in thorns of green,
dinosaur eggs
all over the
 steep beach
throwing swells to crests
to crash
to smash
my laden craft
in the roar
of gentle
salty swells
 lapping.

Liesel Carlsson

lunch with two old men

Nothing but the humdrum-fizz-fuzz
fucking fridge buzz
that drones on no matter how
silent
we are.

Svein leaking sounds of
indistinguishable grumblegrunts
until finally
a splutter of Norwegian nonsense
spills out
muffled by a mouthful of bread
and stale cheese.

He picks his nose and
flick
loud coffee slurp. burp.
I leave. soundlessly. revolted.

Sally Christensen

Stanzas

I can see you looking at me
stroking each curve with admiring eye
following each line with gentle finger
silently mouthing subtle letters
tongue rolling over slick syllables
my soul, my words, spread out –
consumed, line by line

Alexis Morris

Untitled

And as I walked I
Scoffed at the work of men
At the worthlessness of a road
The fickle beauty of a 747
When compared to hummingbird
splendour
And I saw the earth smothered
Tear smeared as refuse on her face
And my mind cried out
For real beauty
And then
In it all I forgot
The green whisper of crushed grass
Giving way beneath my feet
And never noticed the light brush wind
Or the cloud leading a smoke trail to the
sun.
I was angered there to see
That people didn't praise
And I poured out my soul in heart
And I prayed that everywhere
Men would know
Though I never knew
As I walked...

Tiffany MacDonald

Three Bruises on My Knee

All the while horses have gone ahead.

Tori Amos, "Winter"

I.

the police came. it was
a sad day.
the neighbours
told us we
were in their
prayers and
to put it in His hands.
and she would be okay.
she would be. just a
little trouble. just a little
trouble. And
with that, the police car
drove away
and we all watched as her
dim head
bobbed. the car rolled over
the bumps in our
driveway, and her dim head
bobbed

like a puppet's would.

II.

the fireman came. I couldn't
help but cry because
i bought my first bra that
day. it was black. a training
bra.
and the fireman told me

that it was so close
we were so lucky
it would have been fast
BO O M
just like that. and I watched his
dim head bob
as he nodded
as he told me it was going to be
okay
and
i took his hand and s
hook it

because I was older.

III.

the ambulance came. i
didn't know it would be
so tough to fall
so hard.
i gathered myself up
gathered up all the
pieces scattered
i stepped out of the car
i walked onto the road
barefoot
and my head bobbed
dimly
on my whiplashed neck.
i looked around me
in circles and circles
and cried out for someone
to listen.
they brought me a blanket and
told me it was shock.

and i yield to that current
as sure as it yields to no one.

Steven Fortune

Joker's Rhapsody

The red flecks of Hoyle
froze her vision in the air
where he thawed it with his own

The visitors
shuffle in, out and around
like cards in a deck
Trios are odd double-dates occur

Sometimes a wild card
waves through a window
augments a group
and a conversation

but the groups stay small
for the most part

Pairs are predominant
all look different
not enough though
to elude the parallel
of a uniform identity

Pairs shuffle in and out
inevitably being split
maybe being brought together
maybe many times

Members of a pair
are visible together notable
alone

She was here before
many times a visitor

many times alone

now she shares a corner
with this casual dealer
young faithful fair
like an upright jack of hearts

He turns no apparent tricks
merely prodding cards with his fingertips
as his palms would with coins
(those compact disciples of chance)

But the coins stay the same
for the most part

(he employs a modern deck
where the upright
and the upside-down
bleed into co-existence)

One jack of hearts

A pair of visitors

The red flecks of Hoyle
froze her vision in the air
where he thawed it with his own

She looks around
and thinks he shuffles people...

Tegan Zimmerman

End of Apple Season

The gnarled trees expand
Across the fields, across the fields, across the fields,
the wind swells in through the car's open window
We pull over, careful not to hit a mongrel that lays in the way
Another season is upon us
Passing from table to table
From fresh tomatoes to the apples
just brought in from the fields.

The bag is heavy
10LBS I place the apples on the counter
the smiling cashier takes the crumpled bills
as you carry the bundle out to the car like a child
cradled deep in your arms
you fumble with the weight,
laying the bag preciously down in the trunk
I notice the deep lines on your forehead
And the way you stop and think
Before shutting the trunk

Kamia Creelman

The Pinch of Dawn

This morning I watched a woman
sitting on the pebbly, man-made beach
that meets the lapping waters
of the man-made lake
where my family takes a cottage each summer.

I saw her stare carry to a group of rocks
huddled together to block against
the waking water's half-assed slapping
as it lazily broke some morning waves.

I watched her and sipped strong coffee
until I woke a needling pleasure
that reveled in the spreading ripples
rocking me and this shared morning dawn.

Kamia Creelman

Trout Lake Watershed (Mired in such Depths)

This morning I watched the water break against
that fat family of rocks
jutting up out of Trout Lake.

I saw those barren mountains
form a wave fed watershed
that spilled the lake's deep breaths
down either side.

And I sympathized
as my swell of children
rolled down from our sleepy cabin
and crashed broadside into me.

Andrew Atkinson

How to Empty a Pen: A Discussion with Carol Bruneau

Early in November, I had the chance to sit down with Acadia's Writer in Residence, Carol Bruneau. Writing out of her hometown, Halifax, Carol gives her readers glimpses of Maritime life. Her latest novel, *Purple for Sky*, has been warmly received by critics and readers alike. Carol previously published two collections of linked short stories. After the *Angel Mill*, her first, is set in small town Cape Breton. *Depth Rapture*, her second, is less linked than the first collection, yet has reappearing characters and developed symbols.

However, this time spent with Carol was not aimed at critiquing her work, but, rather, at examining her method, with the hope that some of her magic might rub off on us. Having just read the title story to her collection *Depth Rapture*, I was impressed by Carol's ability to further acquaint me, a student, with my surroundings. The story involves a biology student in a lab, and it is filled with scientific terminology. I assumed that in order to write this she had to have a science background, but this was not the case. Carol's response shocked me: she "had to start at ground zero and totally research the topic." She attributes her proficiency with research to her training and experience in the field of journalism.

She offered this word of advice through: "People don't understand jargon. I was very aware that if I wanted to use scientific terminology, I had to make it accessible to the common reader, science background or not." She added that as a journalist she was taught to "assume the reader is stupid," but she chose to elaborate on this, saying, "although I don't like the way they word that, I do think the principle is noteworthy. I prefer to think of it this way – assume the reader doesn't know."

Carol has a Masters degree in Journalism from Western, and holds both Bachelors and Masters degrees in English from Dalhousie. Knowing this, I asked her what value she gives creative writing education in the role of a writer's development. She said, "It's good to

take a course,” indicating that the key lies in brushing shoulders with other writers and their critiques. As for further education on writing, Carol advises, “The only way you can learn to write is to write. Just do it. Find a friend who writes, and write for fun. That’s how I started. A friend and I just tried to write things that would make each other laugh. It also helps to read widely, and to read writers you love.”

Knowing that many readers would be wondering how she structures her writing projects, I asked her for specifics. Carol simply stated that she doesn’t plan out a book from the start; instead, she begins with characters, and a hazy premise. To explain, she used an idea she learned from reading Anne Lamott, a writer on creative writing: “Writing is like driving in thick fog, you can see three feet ahead, but not much beyond that. You begin to sense the next chapter as you finish the one you’re on. And you don’t know the end until it is finished. If you don’t do it that way your characters end up doing things they shouldn’t do; they feel concocted.” Some other tips I took from her were: “It’s important to finish a project you start. It’s not very satisfying to have fifteen beginnings stuffed in a drawer;” and the profound “Words are powerful but disposable, don’t be afraid to revise.”

Carol’s writing is character driven – plot outlines work for some people, but not for her. She has to write what her characters permit, stating, “I think part of the reason I love to write is that I am a control freak. When you start to write a novel you have control of your own little world, that is of course until your characters gain control over themselves and dictate what you make them do.” Later she added, “It’s characters that get me started, and characters that keep me with it.” Then her motherly side came out, “But you need to love them as you write, because if you can’t love your own characters, your readers never will.”

From writer to writer, Carol shared some humorous moments about the reactions writers received from their friends as they began to emerge. “The world has a hard time understanding us. Our society is practical, logic driven, while creative writing is illogical. We are very willing as a society to pay someone to hold a sign of work in a factory, but quite hesitant to pay the story teller, the writer, who holds

a pen.”

But do not let our society’s attitude scare you. As writers, we all have to come out of the closet some time. Carol told me a story about her favourite writer Alice Munro. “During [Alice Munro’s] first years as a writer, she’d tell neighbours that she spent so much time inside because she was busily making curtains. She just couldn’t face the looks on their faces when she told them the truth.”

I’ll conclude as we concluded, by talking about her favourite writers and greatest influences. Alice Munro plays a huge influence in her style and Bruneau has been greatly inspired by Munro’s writing. Carol states about Munro, “Her writing makes you stop your train of thought and go wow, how does she do that?” Two other Canadians follow in her list of influences: Margaret Laurence, and Alistair MacLeod. Two American authors have had a strong influence on her: Lee Smith, a little known champion of vernacular and an inspiration for *After the Angel Mill* and William Faulkner. Faulkner’s book, *As I Lay Dying*, taught her that “you don’t have to follow the rules; you can have freedom in writing. Don’t become oppressed by the classics; you have to search for you own voice.” What more do you need that permission from one of Atlantic Canada’s hottest authors to neglect the rules? Go ahead and write as though it is an unruled page.

Carol Bruneau

Excerpt from *Purple for Sky*

The wind bloweth where it will, Grampa Silas used to say. And though you can hear it, you might as well have mud between your ears trying to figure out where it comes from, or where it goes. Just like the traffic this morning, up and down the road out front – it reminds me of the wind, this wicked wind stirring up a gum-wrapper confetti with each gust. What you can see for the paperwhites in the window, jars of them meant for Christmas. Already they're leggy as sprouted onions. And the smell! like used Depends mixed with scorched wire.

Ruby's idea, forcing bulbs. An expression that makes you think of 911, some kind of emergency, and setting off fire bells. Forcing bulbs for Christmas. Forcing them for Jesus. You can almost picture that line in the *World Weekly News*, underneath the real-life one in last week's issue: "Astronauts hear God's voice in space." Amen. Grampa would've approved. He'd have answered.

Getting back to things more earthly, I should go out and pick up the litter. But doing so would cut into my knitting; and that wind is colder than a buggie's hand at midnight, excuse my French; colder than the quarters from Uncle's pockets when he kept his coat in the porch. The breeze would drive grit into your eyeballs like splinters; I have trouble enough already reading prices.

And though Lord knows where that wind is headed, presently it's like a bobcat stuck in mid-pounce, scaring the blue jays from the birches out back. Even with the blare of Ruby's tv show, I can hear the squawking, that cry like a clothesline pulley in need of grease. You ask me, that wind won't die quickly enough – never mind which direction it's from: north, south, east, west. As with the cars, I wish it would slow down. It reminds me of folks in a race. Somebody's got to be first, Grampa used to say, in that stuffed-pigeon manner of his that put some people off.

Oh, Grampa was full of sayings. "What can I do you for today?" – his favourite. Lord knows how many customers heard him use that one over the years, his idea of a joke. A catchy pitch. And how many times have I said it? I can't stand to think.

Beats the hell, though, out of “How may I help you?” – Ruby’s line, like she’d gladly get down on all fours and lick dust off your shoes – and fat chance! But I guess whatever works; why, just the other day I heard her say that, never mind all the fellow wanted was a pack of smokes. It was just last week – or maybe last month, that’s right; now that I think of it, it was around her birthday.

Her ninetieth, can you believe it? My old Aunt Ruby, standing behind the cash in her pale moss dress, a string of pearls, a powdery pinkness to her cheeks – looking for all the world like a full-blown hydrangea. “How may I help you?” she asked, and the customer, some scrawny young man in a ball cap, said, “What?”

“Be with you in a sec,” is my line. Don’t make me get up, especially if I’m sitting down. Wait’ll I finish this row, I always feel like saying. Don’t interrupt my knitting. My reading. Both at once, I might add, not meaning to brag. But I regularly do both, knit and read; always got something on the go – a mitt, a sock. My *World Weekly News* propped against the register, needles going like mad. It keeps me sane.

It doesn’t take long to get the rhythm – one pair of mitts today, for charity. ‘Tis the season, Christmas, and I’ve got time on my hands. Oh, I can knock off a pair in a day, so long as Ruby’s not too demanding – or the *News* too racy, if you catch my drift. Customers aren’t the issue.

Now would you look at that – *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse Photographed in Arizona*. Lord love a duck, there’s something good to knit to. A shadowy picture of some fellows on horseback, look like they’re wearing bags on their heads. Knit one, purl two.

But my aunt, now, that’s the kind of story grabs her. Anything religious gets her going – pooh-pooh this, pooh-pooh that. A throwback, maybe, to her adolescence, all those years under Grampa’s roof, his churchy ways.

“Don’t go believing in things you hear but can’t see,” she told me once when I was small, a long, long time ago. Denied it later, of course, but by then I suppose the damage was done. Not that I’m a disbeliever. But look what religion did to Gran – Grampa’s views must’ve driven her off the deep end, I’d expect. Politics and religion: I say what you see isn’t always what you get. Like these crazy tales; four horsemen, indeed.

And guess who’ll have my *News* spread out later, studying it like gospel? And when I come in, quick – quicker than her old father used to shut the till – turn the page, point out some ad for wart or fat removal.

“Don’t say `ain’t,” she’s always been quick to correct me, my aunt Ruby. “Don’t say ain’t or your mother will faint,” she used to rag; I would’ve been around eight. But she always left off the part at the end, “Your father will fall in a bucket of –”

Paint! Now there’s something this place could use a coat or two of, inside and out. A sight, it is. The ceiling used to be so pretty: stamped tin, dots and swirls like the frosting on a McCain’s frozen cake. But about the same shade now, pissy yellow, as those flowers in the window. “What is that?” this fellow wanted to know last week, meaning the smell. He was a stranger, nobody I’d seen around before.

Then there’s the floor, a sag like the trough of a wave. Makes you sea-sick going up and down the aisles, dusting shelves. And creak? Why, with a mob in here the sound’s like a three-storey barn in a gale-force wind. Not that we get that too often – a mob, I mean.

Unless you count these kids, a whole horde of them from up the school. They congregate here each recess. You have to laugh, how they dress these days: big baggy jeans, show their cracks when they bend over, the tops of their underpants – ‘the crack problem’ I call it. Lord knows who dresses them. Not their parents, you can be sure. Well. If I had kids, you could bet your life they wouldn’t go around like that, the saucy pups; good thing I don’t.

“Break it, you buy it,” I’m all the time telling them.

“Linger and play, you’ll have to pay” – I think that’s Ruby’s line, or something to that effect. She used it now and then when she was in charge, before handing things over to me.

Oh, you can call me Lindy, most do. Lucinda L. Hammond, proprietor, that’s my real John Henry, never mind the sign out front saying “Clarke’s” – that is, if all the rain lately hasn’t washed it off.

Ruby had a fellow come in one time wanting credit; when she told him to put down his John Henry, that’s exactly what he wrote.

Stupid, you know. That was Ruby’s reaction; disdain, I think is the word. Me, I found it funny – sad, though, almost as sad as if he’d signed an X on her old I. O. U.

Takes all kinds, you don’t have to tell me. Not after forty-odd years behind this same counter. Oh, I’ve seen folks who’d give you the shirt off their back before they’d stiff you a dime; others who’d rob you blind in the time it takes to open a roll of pennies. The honest ones I tell not to worry, pay the tax next time you’re in. But then you get the unrelia-

bles. But there’s something about an act of kind-

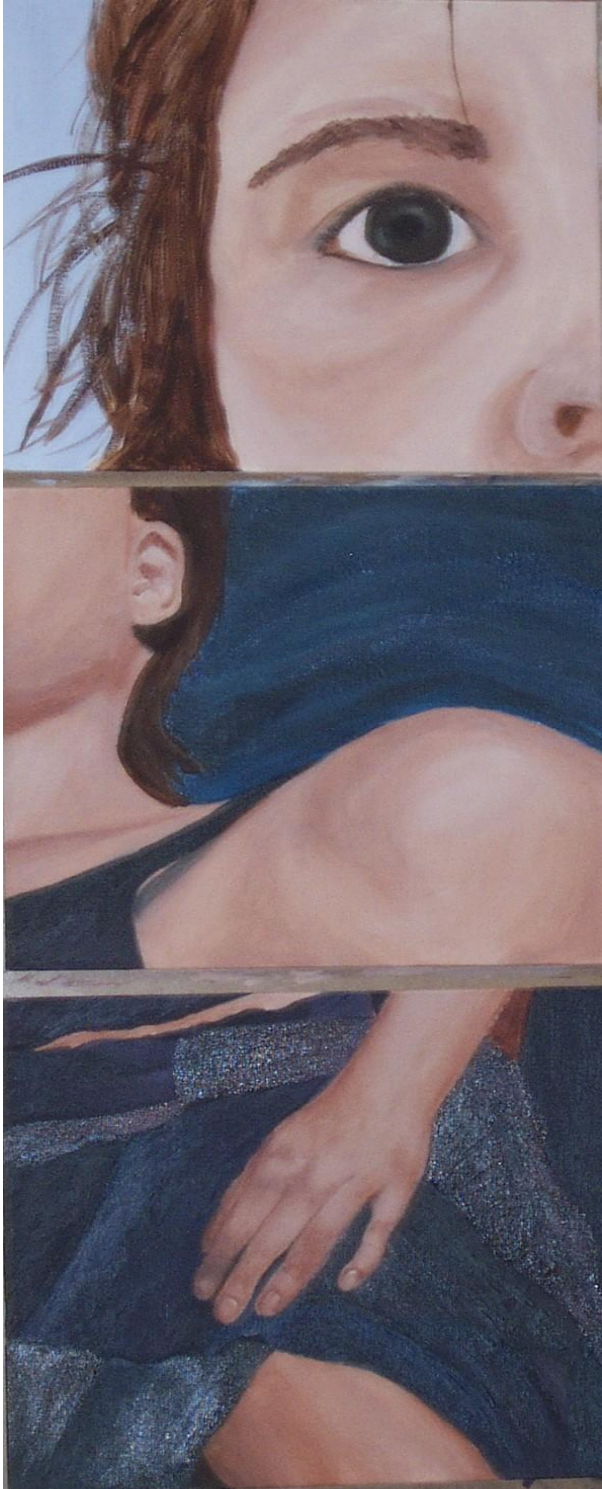
Monique Ouellette

Lady with Dog



Devon Folks

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