

# estuary

acadia's creative arts magazine

Edition 3.2

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# Andrew Atkinson

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## America's New War

There's always questions about art.  
I see a picture with two faces  
like a coin. Split down the middle,  
Osama bin Laden/George Bush Jr:  
Both Want War  
Both Unelected  
across their faces like a name on a battle ship:

It's a response that's accurate.  
Given what we're given that's a given.  
We're given: America's New War.  
Ted Turner's New Profits.  
Who is the enemy here?  
A Good Question.  
Some how when people start living above certain floors in towers  
their I becomes an obelisk, their identity a façade.  
Elevation must turn pupils, the dark center,  
the window to the soul,  
into Dollar Signs. \$ \$

Does it matter that one was elected.  
Does it matter the claim is false.  
Do they both want war.  
Is this the oversimplification muscle flexing American Style.  
These are all statements without question marks,  
news clips, if you will.

With glosses like this over my life  
how can I see the soul?  
Where is the soul, why is the soul,  
what is the soul good for?  
Is it meant to be covered with dollar signs,  
blankets against the cold encroaching facts,  
the tide turning from the west,

returning to the east because they know respect for power?  
The tide is turning.  
Given what we're given that's a given.

# Sarah Balanoff

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## Backseat Jazz

On the road  
In the backseat  
Laying down  
I close my eyes  
I hear the rain  
Pounding  
Steadily on the windows  
In blue darkness  
And the sensual sounds  
Of jazz  
The notes of the sax  
Stroking me  
Like I imagine  
His hands would do  
So I squirm and  
Tense my legs  
Squeezing them together  
To hold on to  
The feeling  
Of tension and wet heat  
I imagine I hear his voice  
The velvety tones  
Caressing my mind  
My body  
My soul  
Tendrils of heat  
Coiling in my middle  
Straining downwards  
To touch me there  
In the place  
Where I want him the most.

# Sarah Balanoff

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## Summer on the Way to Your House

I. Water striders gliding quick  
Mosquito babies waken slowly--  
Goldfish snap from down below.

II. Ants working in the warm night  
Crawling through the cracks and crevices--  
Crunching under my bare feet.

III. Underneath the shadowed porch  
It lies in wait for small animals--  
The stalking raccoon is fierce.

IV. No one's home, the lights are out  
Windows throw moonlight back at me--  
The blinds flip up and it's you.

# Liesel Carlsson

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## Birth

*Woman,  
you are a  
series of raindrops  
you are watershaped with  
soft energy and liquid  
balance.*

*birth: Ilembula Lutheran Hospital, Tanzania*

the medical assistant  
ironically named  
Angel and I  
watch over

black birth  
masked in white  
doctor's coats

stunned by some  
undertone of harmony  
and nausea  
threatens my composure  
in this crudely aseptic facility

backbreaking-back-bend  
swollen sinews, arching in  
laborious anticipation  
of delivery

her toes clenched  
curled by polio  
pushing so hard  
I see her soul seep out

as sweat from her pores  
over breasts, belly and button



as tears from her eyes  
an insoluble solution

from womb deep  
comes moaning pain  
that I know she cannot hear

so intent

on the push  
on the poverty  
that she will now have  
to share

# Sally Christensen

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## **Bird-brain**

I was born half-broken  
birth-breached wings –  
with only the will to fly.  
body betrayal  
I cannot move  
only limp flapping  
but in my mind the bird is whole  
I break the bonds of bone  
I can be I can be  
I fly the currents of my dreams within me

# Abby Crosby

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## Join Me?

If I was given permission  
to recreate the world on Wednesday  
would you play along with my fantasy?  
We could dress in vivid colours and build elaborate sets.  
Pretend it was the Elgin and, and act out scenes from Cats!  
You're busy.  
Oh, okay.  
Well, what about Thursday?  
There's a large orchestra with thirty violins, forty cellos,  
and a short, jolly conductor- and you in your taps  
dancing circles around me with a smile on your face.  
Oh, well if you can't make it. . . . .  
I've got nothing planned for Friday?  
I see sunset! I see creamscicles! I see ten-foot waves  
just waiting to be conquered and a frisky wind  
daring you to keep going.  
That's too bad.  
It would have been fun.  
Saturday, definitely Saturday.  
In the middle of thousands of sweaty, moving bodies  
All coming together for an electrifying chord  
and thunderous applause!  
Yes?

# Chris Flood

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## of university hallways

secret lingering, wafting, liting  
scents of baby powder underarms  
drifting across the space  
of intellectual hallways.  
between here and the wall across  
poorly filtered air is filled momentarily  
with the scent of new birth  
dried with talcum sweetness.  
girls reek of unattainable supple beauty,  
freshness, innocence, and virginity.

# Shannon Hughes

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## Halfway Uphill

When Thursdays end in this small town,  
the underage and just-legal students dress up  
for the bar, they pass by your room  
in their glamour; show off new shirts, miniskirts,  
hooker boots and curls. You smile, sometimes  
you take pictures as they parade by the door,  
then return to rubbing my feet  
and we talk about our income tax returns.

Twenty years old, we are halfway to mom's age, seems  
so long since I was one of those girls in the hallway,  
no cares but my drink and my makeup and whether  
my stomach stuck out too far, Now we admit  
that our love handles are there for our laziness,  
not our convenience, and we vow Solemnly:  
Next week will be different.

I'll get caught up this weekend, I'll lose those  
few pounds, we'll go to dinner, a movie, the axe  
like we used to. (Remember those days?  
No cares but our hair and our clothes and the  
cute guy from downstairs or the hot girl from upstairs,  
and whether we had money for liquor for one more night?)  
We'll devour each other once more like  
lust-crazed teenagers, none of this  
smooch-good-night eight-hours-sleep  
must-get-up-for-class-in-the-morning good  
behaviour that keeps us on our toes and  
in our clothes that came when we turned twenty.

# K. Carlton Johnson

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## Spring

Melted white came carrying  
everything by hand in nests of water,  
soaked brown pockets  
the valley layered in silver,  
sheeting green caught by rain wide clouds  
purple hills spread tree to tree  
the sound of time budding its dress  
heating the budget of space

# Art MacDonald

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## Victory

Faint close, brow hot, legs tremble, no thought  
Sweat flood, breath harsh, tape broke, new mark  
Crowd roar, smile spreads, arms raise over head  
Victory

# Stephen Murphy

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## Untitled

I

the sun creeps into the room  
tendrils like, grips my guitar strings  
makes everything a little out of tune

II

god's eyes are in the air in front of me  
i need a flashlight to see them

III

the sun tattoos my face  
scrapes years off  
and makes me need to put my glasses on

IV

columns of light make the smoke sparkle  
we cough while the sun peels stickers off my bong

V

i could do that  
enter a room  
like a sunbeam

VI

i like the shadows  
light scared me twice this year  
makes me want to turn off the windows



# Audra Tynes

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## Exposed

Walking down Apple Street  
Crunch crunch Squish squish,  
Bundled in my thermals, turtleneck  
Scarf, boots, gloves  
And cloaked in my jacket  
With its protective hood,  
I felt so vulnerable-  
I felt so. . . OPEN  
I felt so. . .  
Naked.

Undressed.  
A martyr in the midst of ferocious  
Infidels.  
The rain peck pecking  
On my jacket  
Was magnified through my hood  
To weighty pellets pound pounding  
Down on me.  
The large block of snow  
that Mr. X flung  
down from his porch  
was like the bombs  
thrown by terrorists  
scattering-  
detonating.  
The trees squeezed me in,  
The houses gawked and threatened,  
The sidewalk tilted  
to overturn me

who  
was so

vulnerable.

The shower of bullets,  
The pounding of pellets,  
The detonation of bombs,

And my enemies all

Around-

Urged me

Propelled me

Safely down Apple Street.

Me who was so. . . .

Naked,

Bundled in my thermals, turtleneck

Scarf, boots, gloves

And cloaked in my jacket

With its protective hood.

# Jenny Willis

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## the Confederation Bridge

i clutch  
at this end of the concrete rainbow  
stretching through the distance  
a pale cold ribbon separating  
this side of the frozen ocean from the other  
This Is The Atlantic  
i take a deep breath and gaze  
gingerly trying my feet at the edge of ice

I scramble over the rocks  
you go ahead they said  
we'll wait in the car  
(they were wearing heels)

We are all bound under this concrete ladder  
The freezing silence that undoes  
the suffix from is and main.

# Jenny Willis

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## carcharhinus

I watch for the sharks  
sometimes  
late at night

long and leaning  
steady elbows and fingertips  
loiter at the surface of the felt  
gouging out flecks of green lint  
with a force like rows on rows of teeth

thirsty sharks  
quenching the blood  
on bottle necks and pitchers  
preying under the glow of a light  
perched in the middle-  
the very center of darkness

there are the sharks  
interpreting the math-magical equations  
of hit-and-or-be-missed...  
and the clink-clunking after the silence  
mutters that I just doubled my nothings  
and this is a game someone must lose.

# Paul Warford

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## Grandé Latte

Stock options are a way of life.  
A closet full of turtle necks,  
Armani,  
Argile,  
Esquire watch  
Warns of a meeting in 25 minutes.  
Quickly, but politely, continue to consume the Cornish hen.  
It's marinated with olive oil and rosemary.  
The oil is bland, and the rosemary bitter,  
But it's incredibly fashionable.  
Sometimes though, you wish for a hamburger.  
Bring some home from the grocery store like an oaf;  
Like a regular.  
You're not blue-collared. Besides, Cherise is a vegetarian.  
You drive a BMW.  
It has leather interior-  
-You find it uncomfortable and slippery.  
It has a sunroof-  
-You never use it.  
It has seat warmers-  
-They make your ass sweaty.  
But you don't say that,  
You say, "It causes me discomfort."  
You don't know what kind of an engine it has.  
You don't know how to check the tire pressure.  
You don't know how to check the oil.  
If a mechanical problem occurs, Roadside Assistance is your Jesus.  
There's a knocking in the engine, so you take the BMW to a mechanic.  
You wouldn't shake his hand if he offered it,  
But he doesn't; he knows better.  
It's fixed in a day. You'd do it yourself, but you're not blue-collared.  
Your BMW would be a slippery, temperature-controlled piece of nothing without  
the mechanic,  
But if he asked you for the time, you'd hide your Esquire.

You'd keep it to yourself.  
Check it again.  
1:15, surrounded by diamonds and gold.  
Ten minutes, time to go.  
Turn off the alarm, unlock,  
Climb in, slide on the leather.  
And you're off.  
The engine sounds fine.

# Andrew Atkinson

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## The Hammer of Words: A Discussion with George Elliot Clarke

Raised in Alden Nowlan's hometown, Windsor, Nova Scotia, George Elliot Clarke is the second man to rise out of Acadia's backyard and become a big name in Canadian literature. Clarke's position in the Canadian canon has recently been solidified; he just received the Governor General's Literary Award for *Execution Poems*. Clarke's poetry is characterized by a general playfulness, but carries the bite of a bullwhip. The brutal images of *Execution Poems* snap the reader like a hangman's noose reaching the end of its topple to gravity and allude to the dark mind of a poet. However, after interviewing him I learned that Clarke, the poet, is much different than George, the man.

I came to know the man behind the poet who pens powerful lines like these found in the first poem of *Execution Poems*:

### Negation

*Le nègre* negated, meagre, *c'est moi*:  
A whiskey-coloured provincial, uncouth  
Mouth spitting lies, vomit lyrics, musty,  
Masticated scripture. Her Majesty's  
Nasty, Nofaskoshan Negro, I mean  
To go out shining instead of tarnished,  
To take apart poetry like a heart.  
My black face must preface murder for you.

As you can see, Clarke commands attention through his unique use of words, rhythm, and images. "Nofaskoshan" can't be found in a dictionary, but it carries an image-like quality in its marginalized, grotesque appearance. It reminds one of a modern sculpture growing out of somewhat contradictory plains and appearing as some alien organic masterpiece.

While Clarke-the-poet receives prizes such as "the prestigious Portia White Prize," the Archibald Lampman Award for poetry, and his above mentioned literary 'Oscar,' George-the-man began writing poetry to gain popularity with the girls. George

wanted to be a song writer, a bard, and his ambition led him to recording giants such as Bob Dylan, George Clinton of Parliament, and the Canadian to slit your wrists by, Leonard Cohen. George-the-(ladies)man told me how Clarke-the-poet convinced him that “the better song-writers are poets”: “I just realized that to get the girls’ attention you need to be popular, like a football star. I wanted to be a rock star, and I quickly realized that to be a good song-writer you have to be a poet.”

Clarke’s *Execution Poems*, which tells the story of his cousins George and Rufus Hamilton, highlighting their crimes and punishment through a montage of fractured scenes, is more easily related to film than literature. When asked about his film influences, particularly *Pulp Fiction*, George explained: “I’m glad it reminded you of Tarantino, I was intentionally going for the tone of pop-culture film ‘noir’ such as *Pulp Fiction* and *Fargo*.” In *Execution Poems* the crimes and hangings of Clarke’s cousins, are reinterpreted in poetry. George sums up his cousins’ predicament by saying: “this book is about these guys driving around with a dead guy in the trunk of their car,” a plot similar to *Fargo*.

Although easily compared to movies, this idea does resonate with literary works such as Truman Capote’s *In Cold Blood*. “*Execution Poems* isn’t consciously alluding to *In Cold Blood*, but Capote’s work is the classic true crime novel - it defines the genre.” The book haunted Clarke for years, sitting on his bookshelf until it summoned him one night when he should have been reading a book for a class he was instructing the next day. Clarke hints at some magic attached to *Blood*, claiming that “after 10 years of owning the book, I no sooner finished it and the movie came on CBS.” Clarke also praised the 1967 black and white version of the movie by Quincy Jones, along with Norman Mailer’s *Executioner’s Song*. It is works such as these that are influences for Clarke’s upcoming novel, which further examines the lives of his cousins.

“Every poet needs to do a true crime book . . . it’s fun, violent and destructive, it’s not your average poet’s ‘look at my funky apartment with its funky cockroaches.’ Poets don’t expect hammer murder,” claimed George, still very much excited about taking his poetry to a new level of grit. As he suggests, the most grisly moment of his book comes when “Georgie” and “Rue” kill a white Fredericton cabbie named “Silver” with a hammer. The poem, “The Killing,” describes the act: “The hammer went in so far that there was no sound - / just the slight mushy squeak of bone.” Further down the page Rue states:

Here’s how I justify my error:

That blow that slew Silver came from two centuries back.



It took that much time and agony to turn a white man's whip into a black man's hammer.

After asking him whether Rue's justification was in fact justification at all, Clarke was quick to condemn his cousins: "No it's not justification but yes it is. In a way they are striking back against oppression, especially in terms of trafficking wealth, and they were black, so who is going to give them a chance in 1949? Tuhis still presents a big problem: you don't get back at the distribution of wealth by robbing and killing a poor taxi driver, no, go rob a bank backed by an insurance policy: leave convenience stores, and small businesses alone - attack the real deal. Silver isn't the enemy. Rufus's justification is no justification."

Perhaps the success of *Execution Poems* partially rests on the dramatic power that criminals such as George and Rufus hold. Clarke talked about such figures through literary history, claiming that Beowulf is a great dark character hunting down Grendel the monster: "in a way Beowulf is a precursor to Blade Runner, who hunts down genetic cyborgs instead." Clarke was also fascinated by Shakespeare's portrayal of the dark criminal. The obvious character is Macbeth, who we watch fall into the deep, dark trap of murder and greed. But Clarke, whose academic work discusses the roles of many black characters and writers, is attracted to Aaron the Moor of *Titus Andronicus*. Aaron, who Clarke described as a "crafty, sly, trickster," gains some attention in one of the principle poems of the collection "Reading *Titus Andronicus* In Three Mile Plains, N.S." Clarke writes his observation into Rue's monologue, portraying Aaron as an inspiration for the oppressed black man:

Aaron, seething, demanding, "Is black so base a hue?"  
And shouting, "Coal-black refutes and foils any other hue  
In that it scorns to bear another hue." O! Listen at that!  
I listen, flummoxed, for language cometh volatile,  
Each line burning, and unslaked Vengeance reddens rivers.

As Clarke portrays him, Aaron embodies the voice that was whipped from African slaves by white men, and later whipped from African-Canadian children by their paranoid parents: paranoid of white societal repercussions on a black child who decides their rules aren't for him. Clarke stated that this was the type of environment his cousins, George and Rufus, were raised in. "These men were the great-great-grandsons of slaves from Georgia Island. At home, in childhood, they would be beat with a bullwhip, a practice aimed at beating the hell out of them so they would keep out of trouble. The bullwhip is a weapon of slavery."

After hearing the stories that George had to tell about fellow Canadians who had to struggle against racism, I am only grateful that he was able to rise out of the same hometown of his cousins and focus his knowledge of injustice into another powerful tool – the hammer of words.

We would like to thank Gaspereau Press for giving us permission to print George Elliot Clarke's "Negation" from *Execution Poems*.

# Lucas Maxwell

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## The Weight

“We can’t go back, can we Henley . . .”

Catherine’s voice floated out to her husband who sat next to her on his air disc in their model G-8394 breathing quarters. His stringy grey hair lay scattered over his skull like spaghetti and his pale brow glistened with sweat. A thick glob of spittle advanced slowly from the corner of his drooping jaw, hanging for a few seconds and then collected silently on the smooth, cold floor. In a quick flash, the tile glowed a deep crimson and the Beam-Daniels implants that bulged like tumours from their ears shook violently as a sharp whistle went off inside both of their heads followed by a high-pitched, siren-like voice:

“GERM SENSORS ACTIVATED . . . INITAITING SANITIZATION PROCESS.”

Suddenly, four thin tubes emerged from the corners of the tile and a clear liquid squirted out of them, before it could settle, a low hum could be heard as the tile was being dried from underneath, in a matter of seconds the floor was just as shiny and clear as everybody else’s in their sector. It was the era of sanitization, physically and mentally; the Beam-Daniels electronic company had produced microelectronic chips that monitored society’s consciousness. Everything was recorded and analyzed; any thoughts that threatened the security of the motherland were rooted out and eradicated. When a baby was born he or she was immediately fitted with an implant that swelled over their right ear. It did not impede one’s hearing; in fact it helped them hear better, even things they did not want to hear. If someone was unclean or allowed nasty thoughts of anarchy or rebellion impregnate their minds; the Beam-Daniels implant would emit an excruciating sound to the perpetrator, usually a bell or a whistle; rendering them mentally useless for a few seconds.

Catherine, receiving no response from Henley, had watched the procedure tiredly, sighing heavily when the glowing subsided and everything returned to normal. Her dark hair, speckled with grey was brushed aside as she lightly fingered the cold, round, heavy implant on her right ear, its constant humming creating a low vibration that echoed to the inside of her cranium and back out again, ceaselessly. She dropped

her hand and placed it on her husband's; they looked like two bird claws laid on top of each other, old and weary and faded.

Henley hadn't even seemed to notice, he was too engrossed in the program being projected from his Sony optic box onto the wall, a glorious spectacle called "Storm Troopers," a real-life drama where law enforcement officials hunted down and executed "Resistors," deviants that didn't demonstrate proper respect for the rules of society. Painted across their room in a 4x6 area displaying graphic colour and crystal clear sound, Catherine and Henley watched through an oxygen camera, floating above five armoured soldiers wearing tinted helmets and brandishing Norinco brand, high-powered, fully automatic combat shotguns as they pursued a blue-jeaned and shirtless man down an alley. The wall flashed to a different oxygen camera, one that emitted a bright red beacon and soared above the head of the Resistor, following his every move, even zooming in on his face to give the viewers at home a close up of pure terror. His long shaggy hair fell over a myriad of tattoos that adorned his shoulders and back as he stumbled blindly into soggy cardboard boxes and steel dumpsters.

Catherine's eyes drifted past the projection and over to the picture window that looked down the street where rows upon rows of breathing quarters identical to theirs stood frozen, with the same, five inch thick reinforced glass picture windows staring back at her. In the background, through the sludge and the grease that hung in the air like a grey blanket, stood industrial smokestacks and high-rise corporation buildings that sported giant spotlights on their roofs, swaying back and forth like the eyes of God, scanning for sinners. She shut her eyes and her mind soared over the tops of the smokestacks and grease clouds, past the refineries and dumps, past the Beam-Daniels news centre and penitentiary and over the barbwire sea that surrounded their sector like the rusty teeth of some living, breathing mechanical behemoth. On the wall, Henley watched as the Resistor, not watching ahead of him; ran headlong into a concrete barrier at the end of the alley with a sharp crack. He fell to the ground in a heap just as the Storm Troopers began surrounding him.

Meanwhile, Catherine was dreaming about her childhood; she was six years old again, in a field of green grass that bent and waved in perfect harmony with the warm summer wind.

"We have you surrounded! There is no escape!" The Storm Troopers had formed a tight circle around the Resistor; kicking him to the ground with their steel-toed boots.

Catherine was wearing a little white sundress and a broad brimmed hat as she walked alongside a babbling brook with her mother. Holding her hand and skipping stones across the brook with the other, the smell of grass and soft earth began to fill her lungs and the sun shone gleefully down upon her shoulders. They walked past an old truck that had been abandoned in the field ages ago, no wheels or interior, just a rust coloured shell laying obediently in the sun as the weeds and the grass wound tightly around the cracked mirrors and the bumper, holding it in place.

“Please God, don’t do this, oh Jesus please, please please,” prayed the man as the Troopers raised their shotguns. Henley was in bliss.

Catherine chased slimy green frogs and blew dandelions into the air at her mother. They chased each other in the grass, splashed each other in the brook and played hide-and-seek, zig-zagging through the forest like wood sprites. They climbed trees, gathered chestnuts and made whistles out of pieces of grass until their mouths had that strong bitter taste to them. The day was fast turning to dusk as the sun filtered into the purple mountains on the horizon, but they did not care in the least. They took their shoes off and felt the moist earth squish between their toes like pudding; soon they were both laughing, soaking wet, muddy and tired; they walked arm in arm and laughed all the way home.

Catherine was jolted out of her dream just as the Storm Trooper’s blew the man’s brains out, his blood soaking the oxygen camera that hovered behind him. As the camera zoomed in on the headless corpse, a voice cut the silence.

“If you would like to purchase the episode you have just seen, or any of the merchandise on today’s program, send a cheque or money order to . . .”

Catherine was still staring out the window as a tear slowly formed in her eye and slid down her cheekbone.

“I think I’ll order that episode,” said Henley, not taking his eyes from the wall, “That was a good one.”

As her tear hit the floor, there was a quick flash as the tile turned a deep crimson and the implants in their ears shook violently with a sharp whistle that went off in both of their heads, followed by a high pitched, siren-like voice.

# Thomas Todd

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## Casey's Rock

The water is cold, and it's deep. I touched the bottom twice. One time when cousin Michael pushed my head under the water and my feet touched the bottom, and another time when I put my water wings on my feet and jumped in the lake; that was even worse than when cousin Michael pushed my head under the water and my feet touched the bottom. I'm a good swimmer though. I tasted the water both times. It tasted like when you put tin foil in your mouth. Uncle Tom says we should say aluminium foil, because that's what it is. My mom makes me wear water wings when I swim in the lake. That's ok though, because wings can help you fly, as long as you don't put them on your feet. Casey is waiting for me. I'm almost there. Even though we're both seven, she can make it there faster than me. Mom says dogs are actually older than their age. I don't know how seven could be older than seven, but mom said so, and Casey is better at swimming than me. She's sitting on the rock already. Casey's rock is under the surface of the water, so she looks like she's sitting on the water itself. Not sitting, flying. Flying on the water. I like swimming to Casey's rock. I'm almost there. Cousin Michael can't swim to Casey's rock even with water wings. When I get to Casey's rock I'm going to fly too. Mom says we can't really fly though, but Casey and I can fly when we're on her rock. We call it Casey's rock because Casey found it first. She found it when she was two. I don't remember when I was two, but mom says dogs are older than their age. Casey is my best friend. Uncle Tom says dogs are man's best friends, but I think they can be boys' best friends too. I'm Casey's best friend. She likes me better than cousin Michael. Mom says big dogs like Casey can live until they're fourteen. That's forever to me, but mom says dogs are older than their age. I don't know how, but mom said. And I'm almost there.

# Tegan Zimmerman

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## Olympia

He could see where the ice-fishing tent had been pulled ashore like the sheets around the Canadian girl. The ice was breaking up. Large sheets drifted down the brook towards the bridge. The loggers always stood on the bridge smoking cigarettes. They threw sticks over the bridge and placed bets on whose would end up on the other side first. He could see them leaning on their strong arms over the side of the bridge. Their Finnish voices echoed in the distance there's yours Nicholas! Or is that mine? He knew he was going to have to cross the logger's bridge in order to get to the shallow end and he knew this would probably be one of the last days left to ice fish. Robertson was gone. He had come just at the right time. The bank was soft and crowded. The snow did not want to make room for him. He pushed his way through the snow and stood upon the bank overlooking the thin ice.

The ice was like a man. "It goes wherever it wants," she said waving her hands back and forth. The fly fishes were scattered all about the bed. Her black cat got up and arched its back when she pulled on one of the threads. She stroked the cat's slick black coat. The cat purred and began to lick its fur. "But where it wants to go... it never knows". He had smiled when she said this. Her face was like a slice of the moon. She pulled the sheets up to her chin, laughing.

He pulled his sled behind him. The bank fought against him, tugging at his knees and boots. His boots slipped when he first touched the ice, too much weight and not enough traction. Partridge tracks covered the surface in a drunken pattern receding into the deepest end where the ice was thickest. He had no use for the deep end. He wanted the shallow coves. In the shallow coves he would have some protection from the wind from the dark trees that grew along the bank. He pulled his collar tight around his neck. The logger's watched him. He could hear them laughing. He wondered if the ice was even going to be thick enough to hold him.

Earlier he had been standing in his long-johns looking out the cottage window. A fog had risen over the bay. The trees looked mouldy in the early morning darkness. He placed his hands upon the glass. There was a draft that was cold to his touch. He moved his fingers like a spider tap-tapping against the pane. His breath formed on the glass when he breathed out. When she spoke his back was turned towards her. "Do you promise to catch me the biggest fish in the whole wide world?" she asked

him. Her voice was a whisper. He turned to face her. She was laying on her back propped up on the pillows. Her hair hung over her eyes like a sailor's cap. He did not answer her but walked over to the side of the bed. Stooping down he barely kissed her forehead.

He did not know when he would be back. It could be hours. He watched the fog rise in clouds from the valley. It reminded him of smoke. He knew he should put on a fire for her before he left. The logs were stacked next to the woodstove. He picked up two birch logs and pushed them into the stove. They crackled when he first put them in but were soon silent when the spark died down. Her black cat wove in and out between his legs. The room in the early mornings was always cold. And he could only feel the cold wind in his ears now. He clapped his gloves down over each ear and the sound, the cold; they both temporarily disappeared. He lugged the sled behind him.

It was 5:30am. She had fallen back asleep when he had left. The cabin door had quietly shut behind him like he was a priest leaving a wake. He met his guide who stood right under their front window. He wondered what the man they called Robertson was doing crouched under their window. As if avoiding the question the man straightened up running his hands through his hair. He put his fingers to his lips and then silently began to walk in the direction of a wooded path leading to the banks. The snow groaned under their heavy boots. The two men did not speak until they reached the banks. "I suggest trying over there, that's where we camped yesterday. Caught six trout each, big ones too". He thanked the guide and shaking his hand informed him he wanted to find his own place to fish. Shaking his head, Robertson turned with his money and began walking back through the woods, until his orange hunter's cap was seen no longer.

He searched for a good place to put down his things. He didn't want to use the tent this morning. The tent was too far out of the way, pulled against the backs of the trees. He was just to going to sit on his sled and wait for the trout. It was going to be one of the last days before the ice would really go away, like miners from a gold mine camp. He did not want to be one of the old fools who stayed, stayed for nothing but a few specks of dust and glimmer. He wanted to get his share and get out. No fool's gold.

Slowly, he removed his tools from the sled. There was the auger, the chisel, and his coleman lantern. The other things could wait. From where he stood the site looked good. It needed to be right. One inch short and he wouldn't risk it. He would pack up all his things and go home. But the ice was good. It was close, it was thin, but he



knew it would hold him. He knew he could sleep in her bed every night and she would have the same look every morning. Her mouth would be slightly closed but her eyes would be almost open as if on they were on hinges. It was the way her eyes were like open doors he didn't like, it was like they were forced and there was no peace.

He rubbed his hands back and forth. He was glad he had worn his gloves with the rubber insides. He had planned everything out carefully. Everything was perfectly arranged and where it should be. A slight slush appeared underneath him. It was almost spring. He quickly walked towards the spot he had so carefully selected from the bank while listening to the loggers. The loggers were no longer in sight. The bank looked tired to him as he stood there trying to pin down the sun. Even the trees that coveted the tent were haggard. But he had his spot and he put the sled down.

The sled was not a comfortable seat but it was going to have to do. Like crusts of bread dipped in soup his slushy tracks led back to the banks. The Canadian girl bounced up and down beside him on the bed. "I want to cook you the best meal you've ever had! And I bet you'll want to brag to all your friends about how you caught the biggest fish! I can see you now flopping it down on the table, heavy in your arms, until I will want to cry "Look at the huge fish you have brought me!" Her voice echoed in his ears as he slowly pulled his pole and line next to him. He reached into his sled for the hooks, bucket and bag. He needed to cut a hole. His head ached. He had a hangover and it wouldn't go away. He had watched her pour him drinks all night.

"Just don't drown okay!" she winked.

He rubbed his forehead back and forth with the inside of his glove. He needed to think. He knelt down, auger in hand. To be sure it was sharp he dragged his thumbnail against the blade. He waited to see if it would start to shave a little off. If it didn't dig in he would somehow have to find a way to sharpen it. He didn't need any extra inconveniences. He smiled when he knew the blade was still good. He scooped the slush away from his hole. The morning sun glinted across the surface of the ice. He reached over for his bait. In one container there were pieces of cut up squid and in another mud worms. The worm's conical heads made him think of the Battle of Hastings. He held one in his hand, steady so he could slide its body down on a hook. He let the line drop a little into the hole. The water was 2, maybe 3 feet deep at most. But he needed to see the dark fish. He took a potato from his bag. Inside his pocket he reached for his knife. It was an illegal one, a butterfly, he had

picked up while travelling through the States. Its blade was the kind you could flick with your wrist, silently. He sliced the potato into thin strips while holding it in his gloved palm. He dropped a slice down in the hole. Usually he preferred aluminium foil.

He needed to be ready for when the fish would come. He had his bag sunk into the snow beside him. The trout when he caught them would have to be hidden in the snow. But his mind drifted. He needed to prepare himself and forget about everything else, the trees, the bank, and the cold. He reached inside the pocket of his jacket for his flask. Its silver body was like a mirror. How many times he had gone out alone in the earliest morning hours and drank just like this until his face was red. It was the best time to be alone. The whiskey hit his throat hard. It burned the entire way to his stomach lining. He wiped his eyes. There were biscuits in a bag beside him. He had stood watching her when she baked them. She had used a wine glass to get that perfect round shape. She pushed on the stem of the glass. Tapping the glass the dough came off in her palm, circular and perfect. He watched her do this many times until she had filled an entire sheet.

He sat with his legs slightly out in front of him. He waited. He had done everything he could do. But the real fish weren't coming. Just smelts and millions of them, like angry stars bumping into one another. Away on holiday! Taking a moment, he composed himself. He tucked the flask back inside his pocket. He could hear the logger's voices carrying over from the bridge. He tucked his chin inside his collar. His face was cold, numb. He didn't want to go to the deep end; he knew he would be no better off than where he already was. The fish were just not going to come. And what of the fish? What of Robertson? What of anything? He would have the maid bring her a bouquet of flowers. After all, did he really care if he disappointed her? Maybe, but she was after all just a Canadian girl.

Jilian Eisnor

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8 of Hearts



# Caroline Gallant

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## Countryside



# Marie-Jose Pelletier

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## Crazy Legs



Laura MacPherson

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Untitled



Mark Randall

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Untitled





# Monique Ouellette

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## Bust of a Female





Jen Shay

Untitled

