

SHIPWRECK:
Stories of Cold Water Canadian Scuba Diving

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Abstract

SHIPWRECK

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This collection makes use of scuba diving as an entry point into an exploration of water as something that is both primordially familiar to human beings and at the same time an Otherworld of the kind figured in literature as far back as medieval romance and the Breton Lai. The dramatic impetus for the stories in my collection, as in romance, lies in the potential danger of the journey and by the very presence of human beings in a space that is not their own. In literature, water is often mediated by a variety of barriers and boundaries such as the limit of a boat or a submarine, or the surface of the water itself. To progress beyond these barriers generally means death. By exploring water in the context of scuba diving, these stories strip away much of this mediation and expose an experience that immerses the frail human body directly in this Otherworld. Thematically, this project is concerned with modern folklore and oral tradition, as well as wonderment, the sublime, the human experience in an “other” space, and the idea of generations connected to place (such as the Saint Lawrence) or to a medium (in this case, of course, water). These stories were inspired by personal experience, field research, and anecdotes told to me by the coldwater Canadian diving communities of Ontario and Quebec, especially the Montreal Aquanautes.

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To my grandfather, the storyteller.

*To Tom, my husband, best diving buddy, and
the one who did all the dishes while I was writing.*

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Wakefield, Quebec

With the humidity, the beach must have been thirty degrees Celsius, and Molly was wearing somebody else's winter coat. Her sweat was pouring into her eyes and she wiped at it ineffectually with the mittens that encased her hands like oven mitts and made her just as dexterous – also not her own. So maybe they weren't like oven mitts: more like three-pronged lobster claws that left her thumb and forefinger free to move, but encased the remaining three fingers in their own private hell. The rental gear hugged her like a second skin, the wetsuit clinging just right to all the wrong places. Molly knew that she should stay hydrated, had been told several times that she should really make an effort to drink more water than normal at a time like this, but moving to go get a bottle of water was just too much trouble right then. She stood there sweating.

On the beach, the heat was grinding away at Molly's nerves. She felt a sudden shock of cold water on her head that ran down her neck.

"Gyaaah!"

She whirled and her instructor was there in his still-dripping wetsuit, smiling.

"You looked like you could use a refreshing cup of water."

"Thanks. That was really lovely."

"But seriously. You have to stay hydrated and...you really should be wearing a hat," he said, plunking a baseball cap down on her head. "Even if it's cloudy, the sun is coming through and having a sunburn on your scalp is pretty much the worst. How long before your first dive?"

“Uh, I think when everyone is ready we’ll be going to see the plane.”

“We’d better get you ready then, right? Then you can go help your buddy – that’s what buddies do.”

Her instructor looked around at Molly’s scattered gear. Her fins were leaning against one of the picnic benches. Her buoyancy control device, a large black vest, and her bottle and regulator, were lying in the sand. The whole bundle of her regulator, with console, depth gauge and octopus, was gathered together and held by the BCD’s straps. Her mask was dangling on her arm and she was wearing the rest of the suit. It was like wearing someone else’s shoes. Her mask and fins, at least, were her own. They were the first thing that she had purchased on her student budget – the fins had been on sale for half-price.

In the pool, things were easier: without a wetsuit, Molly only needed about four pounds of lead on her belt to stay underwater, and she could carry that around on her hips indefinitely. Here, twenty pounds was already making for a sore back.

“Uh...what do you suggest?”

“Let’s carry it all over to the water’s edge. When you’re diving with newbies – no offense – you want to be ready when they are. If you get ready too early and aren’t able to get in the water, you’ll overheat and you’ll kill yourself with all the weight.”

Molly nodded, not wanting to appear like a newbie, knowing that she couldn’t help it. She had heard a few divers complaining about the “mudpuppies” that had kicked up the bottom of the quarry, how the visibility was poor now, and

etcetera. She knew that she was one of those mudpuppies even if she hadn't hit the water yet. She felt her cheeks grow hot.

Her teacher picked up her tank, vest and regulator and laid it in the water right near the edge. He turned on the tank, checked her regulator and her backup, the gauge and the surpressure valves. Then he inflated the vest just a little. "Okay. Now you're going to put that on as soon as you see me putting my stuff on. Go find your buddy and see if he needs help. This isn't the same stuff that you were using in the pool, so it's going to be a little harder to get used to."

Molly nodded. "Thanks for your help."

She knew that it wouldn't be the same as in the pool but she hoped that once in the water she would fall in love with diving all over again, as she had in the pool at their complex a few months ago. She had signed up for the course after a trial session. It had reminded her of the way that, as a child, she would walk herself across the pool on her hands. It had reminded her of the way she would shimmy her body through the water, pretending to be a dolphin, except this time she didn't have to come up for air. She knew that things would be different out in the open water, but she thought that it would be the good kind of different.

She found Jean-Philippe, her buddy, underneath the wooden structure that dominated the right side of the beach. Jean-Phillipe was much older than her – he was somewhere in his forties – and his wife was helping him get on his equipment. He looked close to being ready, but Molly wanted to follow the instructor's advice. It was her job to help Jean-Phillipe, and his job to help her. Maybe she should say something about him keeping all his equipment on now? She didn't want him to

overheat. She knew that the older a person was, the more they were at risk for nearly every ailment in diving – they had learned about it in class. Human tissues weakened over time.

“As-tu besoins d’un coup de main?” Her question sounded dumb, thought Molly, when it was clear that his wife had already helped him with everything.

“No, but do you? You have barely anything on!”

“Ah, I don’t want to overheat,” said Molly, but she did feel like she ought to be doing something. Getting ready somehow.

“Well, we can go in the water once we have everything on?”

“Okay. When you’re ready we can go take care of my things.”

* * * * *

Later, Molly relaxed in the cold water, her fins bobbing up and down as she lay on her back with the sun in her face. She finally felt right. The water took all the weight of the equipment. She and Jean-Phillipe had finished getting their equipment on just minutes ago, and the water felt blessedly cold. A cloud passed in front of the sun and her arms felt suddenly full of gooseflesh. By the time that the sun was out again, Molly was almost dozing.

“Are you guys ready to go?”

Molly stood up in the water, her repose interrupted by the voice of her instructor. His Divers’ Alert Network ID tag dangled in the water from off of his BCD. There were eight of them in the group, about to go out into the open water for the first time. Molly nodded and took her mask off her arm and realized that she had forgotten to treat the lenses to make sure that they wouldn’t fog up. The mask was

already wet, but she shook out the water and wiped it as best she could. Then she spit in the mask, rubbing the lenses with her index finger – the only one of her fingers other than her thumb that had its full range of movement. Molly dunked the mask and put it on, unmindful of the hairs from her forehead that were still trapped beneath it. Her instructor saw her put it on and waded over. He firmly tugged her hood away from her face and shoved the hair of her bangs back under it as gently as possible, still pulling the hair. Molly grimaced. He then resettled the mask on her face and placed the edges of her hood back over the rubber of her mask. “There you go. That would have been flooding constantly.”

“Thanks,” said Molly.

“Do you feel ready?”

“Yeah, I’m ready,” said Molly, her stomach churning.

“Did you do a buddy check?”

They had. She and Jean-Philippe had checked each other’s equipment just as her instructor had checked Molly’s before. They knew how each other’s emergency features worked and knew how much air they were both starting with: 2800 PSI for Molly, and 2900 PSI for JP.

“Yeah.”

* * * * *

Molly wouldn’t sink. She emptied all the air out of her vest and tried to go down, but it just wasn’t happening. She knew that she had on enough weight – probably too much, actually. Her instructor took off one of his ankle weights and offered it to her, but then looked at her for a moment. “Molly, are you breathing?”

“Uh...yeah...” said Molly, but she could feel a certain tightness in her chest. She was too nervous to empty her lungs entirely.

“Okay, Molly, I want you to take a deep breath, and then exhale as much as you possibly can. Understand?”

Molly knew that in a panic situation, the lung could become a sealed container. One that would expand and expand like a balloon if that container were brought up from under pressure – until, like a balloon, it reached the limits of its elasticity. They had learned about it in class. She tried to do what her instructor asked...and started to sink.

“Okay, Molly, good. Now when you want to go up or down, sometimes adjusting the amount of air in your lungs is enough to control your buoyancy. Just keep breathing, okay? And don’t forget to put your regulator in your mouth instead of your snorkel!”

Molly acknowledged him with an “okay” signal, holding out her thumb and index together in a circle, the rest of her fingers extended.

They descended through the water, and Molly fancied that she could feel the pressure increasing on every inch of her body. Fourteen point seven pounds per square inch. But it wasn’t possible – they were only going down to twenty-five feet for now.

The instructor asked the students, one at a time, to deliberately fill their masks with water and then clear it. It was an exercise in technique, but also in will. Molly always had second thoughts about deliberately flooding her mask – and now, out in the open water, it took more willpower than ever. She broke the seal and

accidentally took a little water up her nose. She coughed but then steeled herself, just slightly breaking the seal between the mask and her forehead and gently breathing out through her nose to force the water out. It worked perfectly.

After that, they got their first glimpse of the plane. It sat in only twenty-five feet of water, one of its wings just slightly hanging over the edge of an underwater cliff. The finish on the wings was mottled now, but still smooth. Molly realized how much she had been affected by tunnel vision since getting under the water – now that they were at the bottom, with something solid beneath them, the world seemed to open up. She looked up, watching her bubbles race up to the surface, getting bigger and bigger with every foot that they ascended. They swam around the plane a few times, and their instructor encouraged them to touch the plane, to look inside. Although it had been gutted, all the doors and windowpanes removed, the controls at the front of the plane were still there, and Molly and the others moved the levers around a bit, reaching through the front window. Molly wondered what lever had done what, when this plane used to fly.

After a while, the instructor checked his watch and signaled for the students to begin a safety ascent, which meant putting out their right arm with a closed fist above their head and keeping their left hand on their inflator hoses, then ascending while rotating in a slow circle to note any approaching danger. At the surface, they inflated their vests. They had just logged their first dive.

Their instructor took another group of students down to the plane while Molly and her group recovered and checked to see if they needed to change their tanks. The

other group's dive seemed to take no time at all. Soon, Molly and the others were back in the water, on their way to their limit: sixty feet – the maximum depth for open water scuba divers. If any of them ever decided to take advanced and deep diving, they would be able to go as deep as 130 feet. As they descended, Molly began to feel cold. Her lips and cheeks, the only exposed bits of her skin, seemed to take over her entire being. Then there were her feet. They felt like they were no longer a part of her body. As they headed over the edge of the underwater cliff to the next level below, Molly felt as if she was stumbling down a steep hill, her fins kicking up silt and knocking rocks down the side. She knew that she could inflate her vest more to float down away from the edge of the hill, but she didn't want to inflate it too much and suddenly shoot to the surface. She'd rather get a little tired and have to use her muscles than risk that. She'd just swim under her own power instead of relying on her BCD.

Apparently she wasn't the only one with tunnel vision: Molly took a fin to the face from one of her fellow divers which knocked her mask askew. Molly panicked for a second and grabbed for the mask, but reminded herself that she had basically an infinite supply of air coming in from the regulator in her mouth, took a deep breath, and fixed the mask. She cleared it, and flashed the all-okay at her buddy, Jean-Philippe.

Her mask had begun to slowly flood again and she realized that there must be some hair that had snuck back underneath the seal. But with her huge lobster-claw gloves, there was nothing that she could do about it. She told herself that she knew how to clear her mask, and at least it might stop fogging up with all that water

rolling around inside of it. She'd be practicing mask clearing a lot on this dive. When the instructor asked if she was okay, she continued to flash him that circle made of thumb and forefinger. She willed herself to be okay.

“Never hold your breath while ascending.”

That was what the training manual said, and Molly had read the training manual twice through. According to her console and gauges, Molly was sixty feet below the surface of the water and she was the coldest she had ever been. The world above her head was grey and silted as she looked up and cleared her mask for the umpteenth time. At this depth, Jean-Phillipe's face was as white and pale as a fish's belly. Her mask was filling up again and Molly found that she couldn't breathe. At sixty feet, or with two atmospheres' worth of pressure to contend with, she felt like she could feel those 29.4 pounds per square inch on her skin, on her chest cavity. She cleared her mask and drew panicked breath. Remembered section *4.4.1: air embolisms, 4.4.2: mediastinal and subcutaneous emphysema, 4.4.3: pneumothorax*. The pressure seemed to be squeezing her, *the decrease in pressure of only four feet...squeezing her, caving in her chest until she would spit out the regulator, panic closing the glottis, causing the lungs to become a sealed container* and she would drift up and...*decreased pressure causing the lungs to collapse*, and up, and...*Stop. Breathe. Clear the mask*. She told her buddy that she was fine, flashing the all-okay with a smile that she didn't feel. Her face felt numb. She realized that she was not fine. Molly was sixty feet below the surface, and she knew how this had to end.

4.4.1 Never hold your breath while ascending.

4.4.2 Never hold your breath while ascending.

4.4.3 Never hold your breath while ascending.

Morrison's Quarry

When I first heard about it, I thought of sunken Caterpillars and cranes abandoned in a rush when the water came on too fast. Morrison's Quarry. Actually, the water is slow, but it still wells up, freshening the quarry so that even in high summer, it's a cold place to swim. At Morrison's Quarry, I earned my instructor certification – not exactly a pilot's wings, but certainly I take people places. Deep, underwater places. Places that most people will never see. It's lovely and sometimes it's dangerous and, yes, there have been accidents.

So why do it?

Scuba diving is a whole other kind of travel. It is the closest that I expect to come to visiting another planet. They say that ninety-five percent of our water remains unexplored. I am captivated by the newness of every dive, even after having logged thousands of them. Is it dangerous? It can be, but so can stepping off the curb or leaving your house in the morning.

I'll give you the tour. Morrison Quarry is owned by Evelyn Morrison, and even in her seventies, she still runs the place. Morrison Quarry is in Wakefield, Quebec, and it is still home to an operational limestone and quartz quarry, the Great Canadian Bungee – the highest bungee jump in Canada – and a hidden body of water that's a couple of football-fields long and one hundred and twenty feet deep.

From the highway, all there is to see is a pile of rock. The parking lot is less of a lot and more of a wide drive-way. Beside the parking lot is a hill about ten feet high with stairs installed straight into the hill face. Atop the hill is a green free-standing structure with two large white doors. Inside are the restrooms. On a busy day, the

ladies' room will be frequently blocked. Some women line the edge of the seat with toilet paper, which they then flush down into pipes that weren't designed to accommodate fastidiousness.

To the right of the bathrooms is a children's playground, complete with merry-go-round and a wooden climbing apparatus that is only nominally a jungle gym. To the left of the bathrooms, down the hill a pace, is Mrs. Morrison's Chateau. It is made of green-painted wood, and when we first came there, it looked like a park rangers' refuge – rustic, and full of useful clutter. On the back wall, there is a big old cast-iron stove that has often warmed me in fall and winter.

There is a stone and asphalt path winding from the parking lot behind us to the beach area. To the right of this path is a large metal cauldron that looks like it could fit about six unruly junior scuba divers into it. Atop it is a fifteen-foot-tall chimney standing on several spidery legs. Behind the cauldron is a protected area made of stone and wood with a fire pit and a barbecue oven. This area merges into an overhang that shelters several picnic tables and an industrial-sized metal fridge.

To the left of the path is a sea of about thirty picnic tables, which are lined up differently every time we come to the quarry. In front of these picnic tables, the beach proper begins. It is a sandy beach with limestone outcroppings on the left. The beach comes in about thirty feet from the shoreline. It is a miniature bay, the mouth of which is covered by a trestle bridge with a railing on the side facing outwards to the rest of the water, painted green, and covered in rubber mats. It stretches between the two observation decks. Beside one of the decks is the second entry point into the water, where access is only permitted to divers.

And beyond that, there is water. The water is glass-smooth, interrupted by a long plastic pier, which is where the Great Canadian Bungee jumpers are brought back to shore after their jumps. I have known some divers who have finished up a day at the quarry with the pretense of a near-death experience on the bungee cord. I have pictures – some of which are very good. High above me, the bridge for the jumpers stretches out over the water, reminding me of the city skyline during the construction season. Even though this giant web of girders seems so long, I know that it reaches a point above the water that is roughly two hundred feet away. Beyond all that: sheer limestone cliffs. They are mottled white and blue and grey, and they defy my sense of scale.

And that is the quarry. Except for beneath the water, the main attraction. Once a year, we come out here to certify a batch of beginners – the size of the group depends on the year – and for two days we live in this quarry. Different schools come on different weekends – the place is packed from the end of May until mid-September on the weekends, although it is fairly quiet during the week. We come up from Montreal. Our school is a non-profit organization run out of a sports complex. We usually show up in early to mid-June with an average of thirty divers – some of them instructors, some divemasters, some rescue divers, others with varying specialties, or with no experience at all.

Some unremembered amount of time ago, workers in Morrison Quarry struck a natural spring, and the quarry filled with water. The water hasn't stopped, and this underwater spring still feeds the quarry from its depths. Along the right side of the quarry, the old quarry road descends in a gentle spiral. Along the left, there is a

shallow bottom which then drops off suddenly to different levels descending all the way to one hundred feet. Somewhere under the gray plastic dock where the jumpers are picked up, is a twenty-foot deep hole, the walls of which are lined with large rocks. There is a rubber tire there. The spring keeps the water cold, and the cold keeps the water clear. Except, of course, when those mudpuppy beginners go and kick up the bottom – but we were all once beginners – and the quarry is friendly.

Even after a full scuba course, most beginners still don't have a handle on things. The full cold water equipment, with a thick seven millimetre wetsuit and extra weights to compensate for it, is unfamiliar. Things that were simple in the pool seem impossible with gloves on, with a constricting hood restricting movement and vision. Eventually, it gets easier.

No matter which entry point is used to get into the water, there are two approaches to diving in the quarry. Divers can follow the road, or push off into the abyss. If they follow the road, the first thing they will see is a signpost standing in about fifteen to twenty feet of water. There is a bicycle chained to the post. They were both placed here recently, but they are lonely, desolate, like they have been there from the start.

About thirty feet beyond the street signs, is a six-passenger airplane in twenty-five feet of water. It has no windows. It is opened up, and we go inside from time to time. Sometimes, in October, we fill pumpkins with rocks and glow sticks and place them on and near the plane. We carve out the faces with our dive knives. This is Diver Halloween. One of the plane's wingtips hangs over the edge of the abyss. The other terminates next to a large metal box and a fire hydrant. About forty to fifty feet

away from the plane, lies a wood and metal boat in forty-five feet of water. The rims of the boat are pitted with rust. We swim through this boat, too – all thirty feet of it. The temperature changes down there – it gets pretty cold. First-level open water divers don't go further down the road than this.

The Abyss. To get to it, new divers often look like they are stumbling down a hill underwater and trying to stop themselves. This is because they hug the edge, and they bring up silt and kick down rocks. Later, they learn to control their buoyancy and float off above the blue void, slowly descending at a controlled rate. Here, in about forty-five feet of water, there used to be Canada's only known freshwater quarry shark. It had a particular appetite for divers who were helping out with rescue certifications. These volunteers often managed to get bitten by the freshwater quarry shark, despite the fact that it was stationary and attached to a block of cement, and, being hollow, had no teeth or stomach to speak of. Many a rescue diver candidate has proven themselves a hero by rescuing these victims and bringing them back to shore. This noble creature was recently replaced with a Jet Ski and an old motorboat. It hangs full of air now, restored, on a metal line at about thirty feet.

One level below, in sixty feet of water, is a yellow submarine. I tell this to junior scuba divers on the way up to the quarry, and I can tell that they are pleased when they find that it is true. But sixty feet down is cold, and I remember my first dive at sixty feet, feeling that I might die with two extra atmospheres of pressure on me. That's roughly twenty-eight extra pounds pressing on every inch of your body. But then, the next time that I went to sixty feet, I didn't even notice it happen. We

don't keep junior scuba divers down there very long. This submarine is designed for two people, and there are teeth painted on the front of it – an entire mouth, in fact, with black, white and red. It is a lipless, sharp-toothed grin. Resting on the front end of this submarine is a small lion statue of the kind that is found in Italian neighbourhoods in Montreal, but its eyes have been repainted black and yellow. Sometimes, when we visit, it has fallen, but I pick it back up again. In the silt that has settled over the submarine, we write our names.

I mentioned that there have been accidents.

Scuba diving is considered an extreme sport. The community does everything possible to ensure it is the least extreme that it can be. Standard diving practice leaves us with four options for air: our own regulator, our backup regulator, our buddy's backup regulator, or our buddy's regulator, shared between the two of us. Most other equipment failures don't result in an accident or can be controlled. If a diver loses their weights, they are in danger of an uncontrolled ascent – but their buddies can always help keep them down there, and if they can't, the divers can empty out their vests as much as possible and create drag by spreading their limbs like a starfish. If a diver damages their vest, their buddy can usually help them. A broken inflator, if it is stuck in the on position, will fill up a vest until its emergency purges go off, and could still result in an uncontrolled ascent. A broken inflator, if it will not inflate a vest, is not the end of the world – it just means a buddy needs to use their vest to compensate for their partner, and they both need to kick harder on the way up. Anything else is usually the result of a decision made by a human being.

This means that, with training, we try to make the right decision as instinctual as possible – knowledge is our armor, and all that.

Some of my divers are rescue divers. I tell them that their jobs are about seventy percent prevention. We try to stop accidents before they happen. We observe the mood on the dive site. We ask friendly questions. If a diver looks nervous, or if seems to be struggling with a piece of equipment, we talk to them about the dive, or we offer a hand. We remind people about doing a buddy check – a quick test of the purges, regulators, inflators, and other features of our buddy's equipment before we get in the water. But even so, there are accidents.

There are also incidents that never go further than that.

They are still haunting if we let them be – I often ask myself, “Thank goodness nothing came of it – but what if it did, and what should I have done differently?” I ask myself, “What *would* I have done differently if an accident had happened?” I tell myself not to think about it. These are the incidents where somebody panics, or there's an equipment failure that we manage to fix. A free flow, for example, is when the air valve on a regulator or a back-up regulator (known as an octopus), gets stuck open. Air rushes out at an unmediated rate. A three-thousand PSI tank can be emptied in seconds. But it can be fixed – we shut off the tank while the diver breathes from someone else's octopus and then we turn it back on. This usually fixes most free flows. But sometimes, divers panic if they get a free flow – they may decide to boogie all the way back to the surface, or they may decide that the regulator in another diver's mouth looks a lot better than their octopus and they may rip that regulator right out of their buddy's mouths.

I remember certifying a group of junior scuba divers. One of them was dyslexic – and I’m not sure, but I think that this contributed to his stress. During the buddy breathing exercise, in fifteen feet of water, where pairs of students practice sharing regulators and octopuses, he got a free flow. He was nervous – he wanted to go back up, but the exercise was designed exactly with this type of incident in mind, and I had him stay. I turned off his tank and fixed the problem, but he was left with one thousand pounds of air out of the three thousand he had started with, and he thought that was very little indeed. I think now that he might have thought it said one hundred instead of one thousand. I know that we had emphasized using one third of the tank getting to a dive site, one third while touring, and one third on the way back out, but we were not deep, and some of us instructors had a lot less air than a thousand. So he showed me his gauge – urgently, several times, while I kept reassuring him that it was okay, and then he shot for the surface, ripping his mask off while still underwater and dropping it. Some of the other instructors had only heard of divers ripping their masks off while underwater before then – some of them had never seen such panic. But I knew that the only remedy, so long as he was okay, was to bring him straight back down – and I did.

I remember other free flows – some of them during night dives, some of them even due to faulty manufacturing of fancy new equipment (a weak spring), but we are trained for these eventualities. Nine times out of ten, everything is all right.

I remember stories about nitrogen narcosis – about people getting *l’ivresse des profondeurs* – the drunkenness of the depths – and running out of air. I remember one guy tying the same knot over and over again, and his buddy trying to pull him

out. I remember the martini law: that for every thirty feet we go underwater, it is as if we are drinking a dry martini on an empty stomach.

I remember hearing about famous cave divers who got stuck, and didn't make it out. I remember animal attacks. I remember mistakes. I remember Steve Irwin. I remember that all men are mortal. I remember that yes, diving is an extreme sport.

But I remember thousands of dives without incident – and I remember equally dangerous things that humans do as a matter of course that having nothing to do with being underwater: driving cars at one hundred kilometers an hour – as if anyone drives the speed limit all the time, sucking in carcinogens through their lungs, overloading their livers in creative new ways, overindulging in just about anything they can find. And I also remember moments that fill me with pride: a school of divers entering one after another in perfect time to ride a current together, divers sharing enclosed space on a boat with perfect courtesy, rescue divers performing exercises on a beach just because they want to be ready for as many eventualities as possible.

The accidents – I am happy that they are few. I heard of one happening just last year – a man had a heart attack and his son dragged him out of the water where there happened to be a doctor diving. There is only one other accident that I remember.

It's the one that I can't account for. I know of only two deaths in Morrison Quarry: a woman in her twenties and her dive buddy during the nineties. The details are hazy – it was not very publicized, and this was before every news item could be indexed on the internet. I have heard different stories: that she was anxious, that

one of them had a pre-existing heart condition, that she lost consciousness. What I know is this: they both died in less than thirty feet of water, less than fifty feet from the shore.

I try not to think about it.

Ice

The ice is a clouded mirror, a barrier in time.

The ice needs to be read – it shifts. New ice. The most solid ice. It's formed after a long freeze with moderate winds. It's the clearest, even when very thick. Half-melted ice, or frozen snow makes white ice. It is milky, and it can be soft. Broken ice. The thickness varies, but when it refreezes it can be plenty solid. Black ice means that the ice is dangerously thin.

At eight centimeters, one person can stand on a piece of ice, but walking around is not recommended. At thirteen centimeters, the ice can support multiple people, and it is safe so long as it isn't overloaded. At fifteen to twenty centimeters, true safety is achieved. At thirty centimeters, the ice can hold vehicles.

Molly's family has a history with ice.

Seventy-some years ago, her grandfather worked the ice truck. Molly thought that the ice must have made him think of his father, who had broken through an iced-over brook one night in Gaspésie with cart and horse and froze there, arms broken from trying to push the cart back out again. They had found him in the morning.

Her grandfather rode the ice truck every morning during that winter, headed out from around Boucherville onto the St. Lawrence River. Molly knows this because her grandfather used to come over nearly every Saturday to have a coffee with them, and Molly would sit and listen to his stories until she knew them as well as her

own memories. She knew that he had once been in a fist-fight with a future Prime Minister of Canada, when they were boys. She knew that he used to be out on the water all the time at Port Pie-IX, long before he took the job on the truck.

The divers are at the quarry to play but their tools are the same as those of the men on the ice truck. The ice saw is brown with age, and taller than she is. It's a manual saw with only one handle at the wider end. So long as they escape the thaw that most other people hope for, the divers bring it out of storage just once a year for this one weekend. Otherwise, it hangs in the office at the sports center, a storied relic.

Molly imagines that they are actually the same instruments: their ice tongs were picked up from antique fairs, had seen hard use before they came to them, were streaked with orange rust. Somebody had used them once. Why not the members of that ice truck team, the truck that had nearly killed her grandfather? The men of the ice truck would have used the ice tongs when they were still dark and sleek. Every day, they would have used them – not for a weekend of fun and polar bear club escapades, but for their livelihood – for the business of filling iceboxes, saving food for summers before Freon, before Frigidaire. Their horse-drawn truck would have been full of evenly cut blocks, layered in-between with straw and stored in dark warehouses on the waterfront. She has even seen where the ice was stored, down on the Old Montreal waterfront. She knows, though, that they can't be the same tools because those tools from seventy years ago are at the

bottom of the St. Lawrence, somewhere between Boucherville and an island in the river.

They are about twelve for the first day of ice diving. Molly and the other ice divers pile their blocks some fifteen feet away from the hole, and when they have finished they will push them back in, allowing the ice to refreeze for whoever shows up next, if the thaw doesn't come first. Some other diving team has left one block standing upright in front of their hole – no doubt to mark it so that nobody would stumble across it before it fully froze. It makes Molly think of the ice truck.

Molly takes part in everything – she makes her own hole using the auger, which gleams, new, evenly spacing her mark ten feet apart from two other identical holes. The saw will connect them, forming the triangle that will lead them to the underside of this strange space above the quarry that is only accessible in winter. She takes pictures, and if the pictures are good, they will form part of a new ice diver's manual, to be released in the summer at a time when ice will be something that you put in your drink.

The divers take the saw in shifts, removing the blocks as they go, uncovering the triangular entrance that they will send divers and lifeline through. Once they have used the ancient saw enough for Molly to take plenty of pictures, they switch to the chainsaw, which makes the work go faster. Molly dislikes the oily sheen that appears on the surface of the water once they start using the chainsaw, but she admires its efficiency. The triangular shape is supposed to make it easy to get in and out, but Molly wonders about the strength of her forearms, knowing that she will

have to hoist herself and an entire set of diving equipment through that triangle. With all of her equipment, Molly will have about fifty pounds to lift out in addition to her own weight, all of it soaking wet.

The divers nail planks of wood with metal rings screwed on into the ice, trusting the cold to keep them there but the water wells up in the holes immediately, melting the ice around the nails, loosening the planks. They decide to try a different tactic. Out of one of many endless toolboxes, one of the instructors takes out hooks that can be screwed directly into the ice. The blocks of ice that they have lifted from the water are all around the hole, and their wet bottoms have frozen to the ice beneath them. So, they trust themselves to ice and more ice. The ropes are guided through the rings screwed into the ice and are secured to harnesses. Molly knows that this will be okay. They have read the ice, its colour and thickness. This is a science, after all, and the ice will hold them. Nevertheless, her stomach roils. Molly only hopes that somebody has remembered to tell the ice about the physical laws by which it is bound.

She tells herself that she is just nervous about disappearing beneath the ice into the shocking cold of the water. But, she has a fourteen-millimeter wetsuit and, the water, she knows, is warmer than the air right now. If the water were below zero, it would be frozen, and so she knows that it must be at least thirty-three – knows also that her instructor has already dipped his diving computer in the water and found it to be a balmy thirty-seven Fahrenheit. She considers this, shouldering on her yellow safety harness where they will attach her umbilical line, making a mess of it, and taking it off to do it all over again.

Molly wonders whether, when the icemen fell through, the ice that broke beneath them flipped back over top of them like a trap door and froze in place, or whether that one piece slid under the blanket of ice and froze there instead. She wonders about the horses.

She imagines the truck sliding out onto the ice, rumbling along like a hay cart. She imagines their conversations, their shared cigarettes. In her mind, they talk about what they are going to do with their pay, about their wives and what they want the men to do with their pay. Often, they talk about supper and the stews and mashes that their work provides the money for. In the days leading up to the accident, her grandfather would have been with them, probably talking about Colette, his then-fiancée. Colette is someone that Molly knows about not from those Saturday visits. She has been told about Colette by her father, whose only encounter with ice was when he was winter camping one time, and the campers decided to soap themselves up and jump in the freezing water. Molly's father told her that he doesn't even remember touching the water – he just remembers that he jumped back into the boat and there was still soap on his skin. For Molly and her father, Colette is a vague presence, someone that Molly's father knows existed, *une québécoise* who might have taken the place of his mother if there had been no war. Mostly, Molly is curious about her, wonders if Colette resented the British girl that her grandfather brought back with child from England. If Molly's grandfather had married Colette, if there had been no war, if there had been no war brides... Molly tries to imagine a world where she does not exist, and cannot.

Did the men on the truck banter about their job, or was it matter of course? She chooses to believe that the signs were there to read for the wary. It is less of a threat to Molly's composure to think of them as being responsible for their own fates, for failing to take precautions. If they had taken precautions, and misread the ice, then it could happen to anyone.

Molly poses with the saw as if she were one of the girls on *The Price is Right*. Her instructor tells her that she looks like Joan of Arc, off to battle. Molly thinks of having an icy ceiling above her head, impenetrable, and she feels her heartbeat quicken. She has watched YouTube videos where divers in dry suits fill their suit legs with air and walk upside down on the underside of the ice. They make her think of astronauts, and she wishes that she could afford a dry suit, only not really. She is one of two people who will complete the day's ice dives in a wetsuit – a point of pride for Molly, an outward manifestation of her lack of fear. Molly does not fear the ice. She looks forward to her conquest. She will subject the ice to her will.

Molly secures the karabiner to her harness, locks it, and slips into the water with a safety entry: she sits on the edge and reaches her left hand across her body to rest on the ice next to her right, turning on herself as if preparing to climb down a ladder, her thin wrists and forearms holding her torso and equipment away from the ice. She lowers herself in. The shock of cold makes her inhale sharply, exhaling in small, blowing bursts as the water penetrates her suit. She has seen three regulators freeze today already, and they were by far fancier than her ancient winterized regulator,

borrowed from the school, and so she waits to breathe. Beside her, her buddy enters the water, too, and lets out an exaggerated yelp – he’s the class clown, but Molly knows that he’s a good diver.

As Molly passes through the barrier from air to water, she cannot imagine the moment that the men on the ice truck went through the ice. She knows at least six ways to get into the water, and with these entries, Molly is under control. Molly expects to end up in the water. As hard as she tries, she cannot imagine that plunge. She feels that it must have been sudden, as quick as the snapping of a bone. She wonders if they heard any sharp cracking as they sped across the ice, and if they thought that it was just the ice settling, a sound that they had heard a hundred times before.

She wonders if they understood that they were drowning or if there was only blind panic. The shock is wordless like needles pricking skin. The burning lungs that swallow when they should breathe. The spots start – sizzling flashes mixed with growing darkness. Hard to move, hard to scrape at the underside of a tomb that will be gone by spring. Need to go up and up, but the weight of it...the weight of clothes and boots that are cumbersome now, nets of lead that pull her downward...downward...

Her regulator hisses and pushes air into her lungs as Molly inhales, remembering to breathe. Molly is alive. She is beneath the ice, but has three thousand pounds per square inch of air on her back. She is mostly warm, except for her toes and fingertips, with which she still manages to flash the all-okay signal with thumb and forefinger. Because it is all okay. The water is warmer than the air up

above. The surface seems far away, on another plane, but she is tethered, and she is holding the rope tightly in her hand. They tug signals to each other on the line. One tug: yes, two tugs: no, three tugs: coming home, four tugs or more: help.

Beneath the ice is clarity and surety. All the sediment in the water, so often kicked up in summer, has settled to the bottom for the winter. The visibility is one hundred feet in every direction. The underside of the ice is irregular in places, carved by contact with the water. The patterns seem intentional, and in places the sun streams through diffusely. The water in Molly's suit has had time to warm against her skin, and it is a velveteen hug, layered with the coolness of the water beyond it. They spend the first few minutes untangling the rope from their equipment and figuring out where they should be in relation to each other to avoid tangling themselves up again.

They have sixty feet of line – just enough to visit the plane, which is right beneath them and the submarine on the cliff below. This is where Molly learned to dive – the plane and the submarine are old friends, so she is much more concerned with the ice now. She is fascinated by the sudden eagle sight that she has been granted, the patterns in the ice. In places, they seem deliberate, like they were scratched out by somebody stuck underneath. Others are carelessly artful in the way that only nature can achieve.

The instructor points downward towards the submarine and she is glad. Molly is looking to test her limits. The deeper they go, the colder it is, and Molly has always found the water around the submarine glacial even in summer. There comes a point, around forty-five feet down, when just allowing herself to sink further is an act of

will. They are at the submarine for only two minutes when Martin puts his hands on his upper arms and rubs them, the diving signal for “cold” – a universal signal of cold. The instructor nods and they begin their ascent, slowly and, for Molly, with a blooming sense of relief. Her toes feel frozen, but as they ascend the water feels as warm as bath water. It is as if she can feel the sun on her face – the change in temperature elates her.

Before Molly pokes her head up out of the water, the instructor beckons her to the very top of the water, right up against the ice. For a moment, Molly doesn't understand. The instructor shows her what he wants her to do: he uses his gloved hands to push himself along underneath the ice. Molly is afraid of hitting her head, but she too ascends until she can feel the ice pushing back against her fingertips. She looks at the ice and its strange carved shapes, the diffuse glow of light that passes through it, the muted shapes of people that she cannot identify on the other side.

When they come back topside through the hole, one of Molly's buddies unclips himself from their umbilical line and pulls himself up but barely onto the ice. He flops around, making seal noises – “urh – urh – hruurh!” He slaps his fins together and continues his noise. The instructors laugh and pull him away from the hole, hoisting him onto his feet. Molly is next, and does the same. They have completed their first ice dive. To celebrate and to keep warm, they drink poorly mixed instant soup out of Styrofoam cups. It is all part of the rite of passage.

Molly still has two ice dives left to do before she will be certified, but they seem inconsequential now that the first dive is through with. Instead, she thinks of her

grandfather, her great-grandfather, her great-great-grandfather. She thinks of what her grandfather has lived with for nigh on seven decades. For most of her life, he has laughed at it during all those Saturday mornings – laughed at the luck that put him where it did on that day and so many others, the luck that kept the line from him to Molly intact. The last time that they talked about it, he wept. Because, the day before those men went through the ice, Molly's grandfather found himself a new job. Because when they dropped by the next morning to pick him up, he told them, “no thanks” and spent the day warm inside the munitions factory that was his next job. There was one survivor of the accident that took the lives of the seven other men that her grandfather worked with that winter. Molly wonders, while she warms up next to the soup pot, if her grandfather ever asked him about the experience, and somehow this is one conversation that she cannot picture. The ice is in the way.

Seasick

Rose had closed her eyes momentarily to feel the sunlight on her eyelids, to see that lovely red colour that still filtered through, even with her eyes closed. Her cheek was pressed to the cool wet platform that she lay on, partially submerged in the water. She was having a good time, despite everything. She thought she could fall asleep here, straddling the line between “on a boat” and “in Lake Huron.”

When Rose opened her eyes, she stared at the horizon and lifted her head into the wind. The nausea was much less than it had been. Her fellow divers' voices drifted in and out of her hearing. She half-heard the stories that they told each other about the things that they had seen, that they had done.

“You're wondering, 'What happens if I have to take a dump?' Well, let me tell you...”

It was Nick, a retired underwater munitions expert in the army. She didn't turn around, but imagined his lanky arms waving around a bit as he told the anecdote.

On another part of the boat, one of her teachers, Libby, was talking someone through the dive plan for after lunch. “The wreck goes to about one hundred feet, but you do a flyover at about sixty and see the top of the ship. Now, I want you to stay...”

Rose sat up and the “First Mate” (she thought of his job as “cute young deckhand”) noticed. “Want to come up?”

She nodded. “Yeah, but I can climb -- ”

He was already at the button and she felt the platform shift beneath her. Her stomach flip-flopped and she nearly sat back down again. Rose smiled at him and

walked towards the back of the boat, which had a raised upper deck with an emergency life raft and a barbecue that the ship's captain was no longer allowed to use. They had pastrami sandwiches in the cooler on the upper deck instead. She climbed up top and heard Nick continuing his anecdote below her.

“The Sarge wouldn't let Tremblay out of his wetsuit. By the time that he took it off, the shit was halfway up his back.”

“Yark! Nick - conte pas ça!”

The waves were lessened in the shelter of Bear Island, and she was able to bask in the sun for a while, watching the scuba divers do jumps off the side into the water. She didn't think she was all that afraid of heights, but staring over the edge, even though it was only about fifteen or twenty feet up from the water, she felt light-headed and had to back up. It was no problem from behind the railing, but the jumpers had to clamber over the rail and hang off the edge of the boat before jumping.

She sat on the bench and watched one of her older instructors, Pat, pull the zippers down on the wetsuits of those who were about to jump, just as it was too late for them to do anything about it. Their wetsuits flooded with cold water when they broke the surface of the lake and they let out high-pitched yelps of shock, much to the amusement of the upper deck.

Nick interrupted his anecdote to cheer, too. Then Rose heard his laughter - laughing at his own story, she guessed. “We called him 'The Skunk' for the rest of the training. Wetsuits are expensive. He had to keep the one that we painted with the white stripe.”

Rose heard laughter from the gallery as Nick finished up. She smiled. She had heard a lot of Nick's stories.

Pat turned to Rose. "Nice to see you smile. Are you feeling better? The fish must love you here, since you're always feeding them."

"Yeah, a little better. Honestly, I'm torn. I want to lie on that platform all day but I'm on this trip to hang out with you guys. And scuba dive, of course," she said.

Pat smiled back. "You're good. You just have to get your sea legs."

"I've gotten so much advice - I won't be able to tell what works because I'm just going to do it all. The ginger, the aspartame, the full belly, no sugar at breakfast, putting my face into the wind, staring at the horizon...and of course, Graval."

"Matt gets seasick," said Pat. Matt was another instructor, much younger. "He uses that patch that you put behind your ear."

"I can only stay away from that magic platform for so long, though!"

The First and Only Mate was coming up the ladder behind her and heard. "Half the time the damn thing is broken, but it sure is handy for fishing tired divers out of the water."

Her stomach lurched a little and she smiled a little greenly. Rose thought that she should eat something. Her stomach lurched a little more. She sat back down and propped her arms up on the railing, laying her head on her arms and staring out at where the water met the sky. She felt saliva start to build up in her mouth - a sure sign that her stomach wasn't happy.

"Rose, do you want some trail mix?" Pat laid a hand on her shoulder and offered a Ziploc bag full of mixed nuts. She didn't want some trail mix, but she had to keep

her stomach full. It might hasten the inevitable, but either way she could get out of stomach limbo for a while.

“Uh-huh,” she said, not even raising her head to dip her hand in the bag. She chewed slowly, her mouth drying up, her body not wanting to take more food. Pat held out a water bottle, and she took it. She drank small sips, eating a few nuts in between swallows. She tried to lie down on the bench but it just wasn't the same as being in the water.

Before long, she climbed back down the ladder and pushed the button to lower the platform into the water. Then, she stepped down onto it, the chilly water lapping the top of her feet. She willed herself to lie down in it, knowing that she would be fine once she was in. She was sun-warmed though. She knew what she had to do.

She stepped off the platform, dropping down into the water and scissoring her legs closed to send herself back up. There was a moment where she wondered why she did not shoot up, so used was her body to wearing fins and buoyant scuba gear this week. She choked a little on some water, the bright cold waking her entire body. She broke the surface. She noticed the First Mate watching her, attracted by the noise. She understood why the jumpers on the second deck did their jumps.

She hung onto the platform, letting the water well and truly chill her, her entire body cooling until it felt like the cold came from inside of her.

“You're nuts,” called Nick, spotting her. “Il est où ton wetsuit?”

“Water's fine!”

Her stomach felt immediately better. She knew what caused seasickness: the small, overactive, overexcited nerve behind her ear that just couldn't understand the

motion of the boat, couldn't be made to understand. The only thing to do was to force it to sleep or treat the symptoms. That was what the Scopolamine in Matt's patches did. She didn't have any of that, though.

Some jumpers clambered past her on their way back to the upper deck. She moved to one side. After a while, she climbed back onto the platform and lay on her side, dipping her face just below the surface, so that the motion of the water was a continual kiss on her face, soothing her.

She heard the yells of people jumping, heard the calls from the "peanut gallery," as Pat called them. "Don't try to impress the gallery," she heard him call a few times, no doubt after some of the more daring jumps. She felt like she was listening to him through a door.

She heard the wet slap of a few belly-flops, cringing. From that high up, even with a wetsuit for a cushion, she thought that wasn't too bright. She heard another wet flop. It was accentuated by the quiet that came afterward. She raised her head, her stomach suddenly nauseous all over again. It didn't feel quite the same as the motion sickness.

"Eric!"

Pat's voice, thundering. She had never heard his voice sound like this before.

"Get him to the platform."

She realized that she ought to move, wasn't sure where to move to - two divers brought Eric to the platform before she had the chance to climb up, so she grabbed the back of Eric's wetsuit, helped them sit him on the platform. He was awake but

dazed. They climbed up around him. Rose cleared the way as best she could, moving towards the right edge.

“Il a fait un blackout quand il a frappé l'eau,” said Simon, still in the water. “Son oeil...”

Rose looked now. His eye seemed to be bleeding beneath the surface of the eyeball, not enough to distend it, but enough to cloud the rim of his eye. A little bit of blood was leaking from his nose, too, and she saw blood in his mouth.

“J'ai mordu ma langue,” he said. “C'a tu l'aire grave?”

Pat came over and pushed past Rose as gently as he could, standing on the platform and pulling Eric's eyelids open wide. “Ton oeil saigne. Le capitaine est en train d'appeler le coast guard.”

Eric seemed to deflate, not responding. Rose was frozen on the spot, unsure where to move to, a part of this now, and she felt that she could not leave. So, she stayed still, sitting in front of Pat's legs. Pat shifted. “Rose, I know you feel sick but can you keep an eye on Eric? Talk to him, keep him awake. I'll see when the coast guard is coming.”

“Yeah, of course,” she said, putting an arm awkwardly around Eric, who was at least ten years older than her, as if he was a little kid, propping him up. His bloodied eye was shifting listlessly, fluttering. The blood spot moved around his eyeball.

He didn't react when she started to speak, but at least he wasn't asleep.

“Hey, Eric,” she said, knowing that he mostly spoke French. “Are you excited to dive on the Arabia? It's a really old ship, you know.”

She waited a moment before continuing. Eric's head dipped. She lifted it again. "I'll be able to dive on it next year, after my deep diving certification. Do you know that they used to drag anchor to find her? Pretty stupid, right?"

Rose felt like the dead air might choke her. Eric was unresponsive, probably had a concussion. His bloody eye came to rest on her face. His lips were faintly tinged with blood from his tongue. She felt her stomach heave and returned her gaze to the horizon. "Sorry, I get seasick."

The other divers were behind them. She could hear them talking in low voices, probably so Eric couldn't hear, but she could hear them.

"He got fancy. Tried to do a flip or something. Pat told us not to get fancy."

"Il a poigné un flat sur sa face. Ouch!"

"Son œil va tu être correcte?"

"He's going to have one hell of a shiner."

She straightened him up again as best she could while keeping her eyes on that distant line and kept talking. "So then some researchers wanted to find the ship but they thought it was pretty unethical to drag their anchor until it caught on the boat. They started to find fish with corn in their bellies. That's what the Arabia was carrying - corn! And it was still good for the fish to eat, a hundred years after the ship sank."

He turned his face towards her, a drop of blood in the corner of his eye near his tear duct. Rose recoiled but tried to keep her face expressionless.

"I...the fish...you know, they have corn from the ship at the welcoming centre that they keep under pressure."

Rose couldn't see anything yet, but she could hear the low drone of an engine. A small speedboat rounded the nearest island.

"It's the cold...and the pressure..."

She stared distractedly at the speedboat. Pat came up behind them. "It's not the coast guard, but these guys heard the radio chatter. We'll have to clear the platform so that they can take him onto their boat, Rose. They'll take him back to shore."

She nodded, that feeling of cold radiating from inside her legs as she drew her feet back up out of the water, felt them grip the diamond grid of the platform. She grabbed the railing and climbed back onto the boat. Pat was holding Eric from behind as they raised the platform.

"Eric will have to climb into the speedboat," said Pat.

The speedboat arrived and they started to ask questions about the accident and load Eric onto their boat. Rose felt nauseous and leaned out over the railing to have the wind on her face. She felt saliva flood her mouth. She knew that the platform would be busy for another few minutes yet. Rose wondered why she had come here. At home, she could be lying in her bed, reading a book. It was hard to remember what it felt like to be well.

Rose closed her eyes tightly and the nausea nearly overtook her, so then she opened them wide and fixed the horizon again. Everyone on this boat had seen it happen now, but not these strangers. They would think that her diving group were incompetent, apt to injure themselves and unable to handle the Huron. She retched.

The Ballad of the Arabia

The surface temperature of the water hit ten degrees Celsius the day that Judd arrived at the Georgian Bay.

He stopped at the side of the road, sweeping back his brown hair from his face and putting his cowboy hat back on. It was a look that he affected when he went diving mostly because he forgot to reapply sun cream on the back of his lily-white neck just as often as he forgot to put it on his face, which was always. He left Lottie, his dive buddy, sleeping in the truck. This would be the first time that they did their Lake Huron trip alone. He was of two minds. On one hand, he would miss the camaraderie of the other divers, a whole mass of people come together with the same purpose. On the other hand, he relished the freedom to do as his mood struck him rather than following the group's plan. Lottie and Judd rarely had any trouble agreeing on what to do, especially when it came to their dive plan.

Judd peeked over into the water and fancied that even there, in only ten feet of water, he could see a shipwreck. The Great Lakes were lousy with them. Some estimates said there were upwards of six thousand wrecks - one man's estimate said more than twenty-five thousand. Glancing around, he spotted a wooden bulletin board with a faded plastic sign on it. He could barely read the once-black, now pinkish letters. There was a shipwreck there, an unnamed tugboat.

He closed his eyes, thinking of the ships that he had seen and the ones that he hadn't. Many wrecks were never found. Sometimes he pictured them moving around when nobody was around, maybe in the winter when the towns around the edge of

the bay dried up and shut down when the money was gone. He imagines them shifting, visiting new places, lumbering, gargantuan, always returning to the same spot. He imagines them like whales, massive and incomprehensible to the fish around them. The ones that were the most alive to him were the massive ones, the one-hundred-plus-footers. Sometimes he thinks of them like carcasses, especially those that are laid bare down to the skeleton, the ones whose structures were visible and broken. Mostly, he thought of them as they were, historical snapshots of the day or night that they went down, only a little more weathered. He saved this odd thinking for moments like this, when he was alone, or for when he was down in the depths, picturing them when he wasn't there. He saved this thinking also for when he was drunk.

When he was down deep, really deep, he sometimes became afraid of them. Their halls held darkness. He worried that they would swallow him up. He also became afraid for them. He would occasionally start to fear touching their sometimes wooden, sometimes metal hulls and ridges. He worried that, like the tide, his gloved hand in the single spot that he touched them would only be one of thousands that wore them away. Oh, he knew about entropy, knew that nothing lasts forever. But somehow, they seemed too steeped in history not to last forever. If they did collapse, he wondered if they would wait for winter and fall quietly over, or if they would collapse on top of someone. He had seen the reinforced sides of the wreck of the Sweepstakes, over one hundred years old, like a sunken pirate ship. The Parks Canada divers had come with new boards and with metal cages that

prevented the divers from penetrating, preserving and protecting the wreck from their countless bubbles straining against the wood.

They were seductive. Not just the ships, but the depths. Everyone knew stories, had their own stories. One of the ones that scared him the most was the story of a man who got stuck on loop. He had been told to tie a knot near the surface of the water to secure an extra air tank fifteen feet below the water for safety stops on the way up. Just before they left for their dive, the knot that he had tied came undone. Another diver retied it. When they got down deep, real deep, he found a rope hanging loose on the shipwreck. He became fixated on tying knots in the rope. Judd had been told that the knot-tier was a slight man, partnered with a fireman. When his buddy tried to get him to stop playing around with the rope, the small man had shooed him away. Again, his buddy tried to interrupt his fixation. The man became aggressive, pushing the fireman away and almost hitting him. Finally, the fireman pulled him away bodily from the rope. He brought him almost straight to the surface, stopping off to use the extra air for a safety stop. When asked what had happened, the man said, "I was just practicing." He had been drunk on the depths. He had had nitrogen narcosis.

In a way, the shipwrecks were like human bodies. He thought of Lottie, who had been in a car accident. Judd could say of her, if he wanted, the same things that he did about the wrecks: look, here's where the impact happened, look, here, one of the main arteries collapsed, look, here's where she broke in half. Lottie was scarred, too. In this way, ships were like people. Some might say that the shipwrecks were like dead bodies, but Judd didn't buy that. A ship is no more alive than a shipwreck.

When a ship sank, it didn't become a dead ship, it was transformed into a wreck. The shipwrecks were just as alive - more, even, since theirs were such lively stories.

He glanced back at Lottie in his jeep. Usually, she woke when the car stopped and she was no longer lulled by the momentum. They had driven up from Montreal, and had been on the road almost fourteen hours, so he wasn't surprised that she was still asleep. She was one of the best divers that he knew, despite having to slow down after her car accident.

Here, the water was turquoise, clear as the waters down south. It belied the cold depths. Judd walked at the very edge of the rocky beach where he picked up a pitted stone about the size of an apple. It was illegal to take anything out of the marine park, but he judged that they weren't quite inside the park yet. He wanted a souvenir to put in his fish tank back home.

He walked back to the car, treasuring the crunch of small rocks and gravel underneath his shoes in place of the car pedals. It was always a long drive from Montreal, but somehow with just the two of them, it felt longer. Lottie finally opened her eyes when he shut the door. She sat up, adjusting the car seat to a sitting position. "Judd, are we there?"

"Nearly," Judd said, turning the car back on.

Lottie turned back on her mp3 player, which had a playlist lined up of songs to do with water and shipwrecks. There were few enough of those to begin with, and the trip had made them seem fewer still. Judd had punctuated the trip with talk radio and traffic reports, but in the end he didn't mind hearing the songs. They were good, for the most part, and he liked the way that Lottie threw back her head and

sang along. Her bangs would fall into her eyes while she sang, and she would try to shake them off her forehead mid-verse, creating a charming vibrato.

When they arrived in town, it was as unpolished and sincere as ever. The buildings were nice, but not too nice. They were fairly freshly painted, but covered in a thousand dead shad flies caught in spiderwebs, with some of the paint having just been painted over the dirt underneath. There was wood everywhere. Judd could tell which buildings were maintained by government money and which were owned by townspeople. There was a lot of white paint, and a lot of brown. Some of the buildings were deliberately rustic, rough-hewn planks barely sanded and varnished, or with hand-painted signs.

They stopped in for a late dinner at the Crow's Nest. He saw, with a sunken feeling, that it seemed to have changed hands. There used to be a picture up on the wall in the main bar of one of his scuba diving instructors way back in the eighties with people who still dove with them to this day. In the picture, their asscheeks were hanging out the back of the boat. Drawn, one letter to a cheek, in lipstick, were the letters "TO - BE - RM - OR - Y!" He wondered what had happened to the picture. The food was awful, as always, but now it no longer had the charm of nostalgia, even if it had been other people's nostalgia. The Crow's Nest used to seem like a pub with a history, but somebody had brought in some money, given it a paint job, and taken away its trophies. He reflected on the fact that this was a town whose livelihood depended on just a few short months, really, in which divers came, flowing through the town like the Huron that they sought. They had to do all that they could to put their best food forward, seem modern and presentable, he supposed. It was a shame

that what so attracted him to the place was that it felt like traveling into the past. In a way, it still was. The shipwrecks made it so.

What mattered to Judd, of course, was the diving. He went to sleep that night secure in the knowledge that he and Lottie had reached diver mecca. Their first stop tomorrow: the wreck of the Arabia. On the way up, Lottie had delighted in playing the charmingly (horrible) amateur Ballad of the Arabia. Its rhyming scheme amounted to rhyming each line with the one that came before. He could recite it practically line for line. It had never been properly released – a man named Hugh Stevenson, from Saskatchewan, had recorded it. He was the owner of the Crow's Nest, having moved to Tobermory in 1972 when the Arabia was rediscovered by a team from the University of Toronto. An instructor of theirs had one of few extant copies. He had managed to digitize it and email it to him after their last trip. God, it was an awful song, but it made Judd smile to hear it and think of the Arabia.

With the wind behind her

And the soul of God beside her

She sailed away

One autumn day

In Georgian bay.

With her hull full of sweet corn

And the sun shining down on

Her three masts high

Against the sky

She sailed to die.

Arabia Arabia

Arabia

It was the fifth day of October

When the fall winds were getting colder

Than they were before

When she left the shore

For one trip more.

She was bound for the highlands

And had rounded Echo island

When the skies turned grey

And beneath the spray,

The men would pray.

In the mighty sea, she floundered,

Then with a roar, she foundered

Though the men were saved,

She found a lonely grave,

Far below the waves.

*And for eighty-eight years,
The sea would play over the grave
Where she finally lay
Eighteen fathoms down
Where she had drowned
Without a sound.*

Arabia Arabia

Arabia

*Until the spring of '72,
She lay in peace and no one knew
Just where she lay
Until the day
God showed the way
When divers on an anchor line
Found the doorway to another time
And there she lay
As she did the day
She sailed away.*

Her anchors hung upon her bow.

The rigging was gone and her masts were down.

They had fallen wide

And they lay astride

Her long port side.

The stern was gone but the decking was there.

The turnbuckles and the wheel are where

They fell that day

When she died that way

in Georgian Bay.

Arabia Arabia

Arabia

And the only ones who can see her now

Are those who dare to dive her bow

Like you and I

Though some will die

To see her light

With the sea above her

And the soul of God around her

Where she sailed away

That Autumn day

In Georgian Bay.

Arabia Arabia

Arabia...

He loved that, according to the ballad, the Arabia had foundered with a roar, but drowned without a sound. There was something sincere and folksy about the song, which was what Judd supposed he had liked about the old Crow's Nest. And there was some truth, he supposed, in the heartfeltness of the song. He relished singing the awful song with Lottie, partially out of an appreciation for its campiness, partially because he knew that it had no one else to love it but he and Lottie and the other divers that had been on the Arabia, and then somehow gotten their hands on this song. It was good because so few had access to it, Judd supposed. It was their secret.

The next day, standing on the diving boat near Echo Island, Judd tried, without any real way of knowing, to figure out whether they were anchored near the Arabia's bow or near her stern. If they were anchored near the bow on the port side, they were in for a treat. He loved to come upon the Arabia from that side. She seemed to emerge out of the water looking almost completely intact. The illusion was complete, until one reached the deck. Further back, most of the boards had fallen in, and the back was a crumpled mess. The front, though, the front was the perfect vision of a ghost ship.

“Pool's open,” the captain said, drawing aside the thin chain that was across the back of the boat.

Lottie was in the water in under thirty seconds, and Judd followed within a minute or two. He was still a bit tired from the drive, but Lottie had snored the whole ride up except when she was singing, and looked fresh as a daisy. He grinned at her and tested her equipment. She checked his as well, testing the purges on his vest perhaps a little over-enthusiastically as she filled the bladders of his BCD to the point of bursting, only to have the excess air push out of the purges with a sort of honking fart noise.

Judd pushed the purge button on his inflator and let out the excess air. He put his regulator in his mouth and took a deep breath. It tasted fine. He flashed a “thumbs down” at Lottie, indicating that they should head down to the wreck below. She nodded, flashing the “okay” symbol with thumb and forefinger. They descended the anchor line together.

The wreck itself was some distance away from the concrete anchor line at the bottom. This prevented damage to the ship. Before the anchor lines had been established, some people had dragged their anchors across the seabed trying to find the ship. The boat had taken a lot of damage over the years from such stupidity. Judd still had a sick feeling when he reached the bottom and could not immediately see the wreck. Down here, in one hundred or so feet of water, their time was limited. They could only spend so long on the Arabia, and he wanted to spend every minute that he could.

Judd took off swimming and Lottie patiently grabbed at his fin, getting his attention and holding him in place. She stuck her hands out with the fingers fully spread, palms downturned and gestured thrice with them, slowly sort of flapping the hands but keeping her wrists locked. "Slow down," was what she meant. Judd signed "okay" back at her and started to swim again.

The Arabia emerged out of the murk as if it were moving towards them instead of the other way around. Judd already felt nervous about the time and his stomach knotted at the sight of the ship. Its gigantic anchor hung on the bow. *Though some will die...to see her light...*

He felt out of breath and heavy. He swam like there was a lead weight attached to him before he realized that there actually were lead weights attached to him and he had forgotten to inflate his BCD. He tried to reach the boat before stopping to adjust his buoyancy. Lottie stopped beside him, watching him. He had to remind himself not to rush - he felt like he was wasting Lottie's time on the wreck. He felt himself starting to float up suddenly, faster and faster, and overcompensated, deflating the BCD a little too much. Lottie was patient, though. Judd momentarily felt dizzy as his ears tried to adjust to being abused by his going up and down as he adjusted the air in his vest. Judd wondered what Lottie must think of him, screwing up something so simple.

Lottie nodded and asked him if he was okay with her hands. Judd told her he was fine and they swam over the wreck. With the deck missing, the Arabia looked fragile and abused. He would inflate his vest a little more each time he accidentally touched a fin to the deck. He tried not to touch anything. The wreckage at the back

was like an overfilled fireplace. There was some brick structure, but he didn't know enough about boats to identify it.

Time was already growing short and he wished that he had not had such amateur buoyancy problems. Lottie didn't seem to mind, but it was her time that Judd had wasted. He had a computer which recalculated how long he was allowed to stay down moment by moment but Lottie did not. They had planned a multi-stage dive but that still meant that they only had about eight minutes to spend on the Arabia itself. The dive tables that told them which depths were safe and for how long were forgiving because they allowed safety margins, though. He thought that they could stretch the time a little more.

Lottie gestured upwards with her neoprene-wrapped thumb. Up?

No, he signaled. Stay here. Time is okay.

Lottie shook her head, see-sawing her hand back and forth in the gesture for "not okay" or "so-so." She repeated her earlier gesture. Up?

No, Judd signaled. Time is okay. He didn't understand why Lottie wanted to go up so badly. They should look at the wreck. The Arabia was a beautifully-preserved piece of history. The cold preserved the wreck so well that when they had found it, the fish around still had 100-year-old corn in their bellies. The corn had still been edible – at least for fish.

Lottie reached over and grabbed his hand. Judd shrugged her off, annoyed. They still had plenty of time and they wouldn't see the Arabia again anytime soon, maybe for years. He turned back to the ship. In his mind, it no longer seemed like a wreck. From this angle, the ship looked whole. He heard the wood groaning as if the ship

were trying to move. Yes, the Arabia was alive. The boat's anchor was up over the side of its guardrails. Judd felt that it might take off at any moment. He wanted to watch its launch.

Judd pushed Lottie away, less gently this time. Could she not just let him watch the Arabia as it shook free the shackles that had held it to this spot for so long? The Arabia was beautiful. He would love to captain it.

Lottie came up behind him and wrapped her arms around him, holding him underneath the armpits and pulling him towards the rope. Judd was annoyed but she had him good. He couldn't get out of her grasp. Judd resigned himself to following her anyway. He couldn't leave his dive buddy, after all. At the rope, Lottie let go asked him if he was okay again.

Yes, yes! he answered.

Okay, she signaled back, seeming doubtful.

As they ascended, Judd checked his computer and his watch. The numbers didn't seem to match up with the last time that he had checked. A light bulb went off in his head. He was vaguely aware of what must have happened. Nitrogen narcosis.

Lottie laughed, but there was a nervous edge to it. "You were narc'd," she said. "I didn't know if I was strong enough to make you come if you didn't want to, so I'm glad you did."

Judd had felt his earlier confusion and irritation at Lottie dissipate as they had risen towards the surface. She had made sure that they did their safety stops.

"I'm – I'm so sorry. I kept us down there..."

“It was weird, like you didn't understand how long we had been down there. You kept staring at the broken-up stern,” she said, her voice rising an octave at the end. “It's not your fault though. You were narc'd.”

Judd felt betrayed by his own body. Lottie was right - no one would blame him for his mistake, but he still felt ashamed. He had heard stories about other people having nitrogen narcosis, but he had never been struck by it during a dive before. At least, not this way. It made sense now, his fumbling, his sense of panic at the edge of the ship.

Lottie smiled at him, gently squeezing his hand. “You're all right now. It can happen to anyone, any time. Arabia...Arabia...”

She started to sing softly. Judd closed his eyes, relieved that they were both safe.
Arabia...Arabia...

In Tartarus

The boat was anchored at the place where Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River met and flowed into one another. The Great Lakes had their own weather systems. They could be small, dark oceans when the weather was up, and the St. Lawrence drew from that wild power.

Below the surface of the water, pairs of neoprene-clad figures hung on the rope that lead from the boat down, down, down to a concrete block about a hundred feet from the surface. Scuba divers. Some of them were halfway up the line, and others were just fifteen feet below the surface of the water, doing their safety stops just in case the nitrogen bubbles in their blood were a little overexcited. Their breathing was slow and calm, and their bubbles raced up to the surface, expanding until they were nearly half a foot across when they broke the surface.

One figure rotated in a circle in jerky, sudden movements, as if trying to glance in all directions at once. After doing this for about a minute, the figure swam up towards the surface of the water, one fist extended upwards in case it hit something, still rotating in circles. The other divers watched their fellow swim up, knowing that solitude meant only bad things. Buddies stuck together, that was rule one.

When the diver broke the surface, the divemaster on the boat shielded his eyes with the clipboard on which he was recording everyone's log information and placed one arm over his head, resting his fist on head. That was the signal for "all-okay" at the surface, when a hand signal wasn't visible enough at a distance. The

diver shook his head, and then remembered that even this might not be visible when backlit by the sun, and waved his arms over his head.

The divemaster's brow furrowed. "What is it?"

"I can't find my buddy!"

* * * * *

Laure, his buddy, knew that she ought to return to the surface and report him missing, but this was a time-sensitive issue. She worried that he might stay down looking for her and run out of air, or worse, that he might be in a situation where he needed her help and she wouldn't be there. Some years ago, she had lost a good friend and diving buddy when he had disappeared during his divemaster's certification. Although she hadn't been diving with him at the time, the memory of the search for him was fresh. A long tendril of her brown hair floated in front of her mask and she tucked the escaped wisp back into her neoprene hood with a gloved hand. She couldn't shake the conviction that her buddy must still be down here. She had lost him on the way to the rope and, checking her air, was contemplating going back to the wreck just to see, real quick, whether or not he was waiting for her there. The more she thought about it, the more she became fixated on the idea. She told herself that she was alone, but experienced. Over the seven years that she had been diving, she had helped with countless rescue training scenarios and one bona fide search.

As she approached the shipwreck, she saw a bright light emanating from inside of one of the wreck's holds. Reminded of the LED flashlight that her new buddy kept in his vest, Laure felt her face flush with anger. He would get himself killed.

Unfortunately, she could not simply yell his name to get him to leave the wreck. Underwater, she'd have to be practically right next to him for her buddy to be able to notice her. She swam up to the hold and stuck her head in, looking for the source of the light. The light seemed to have moved further in. She jerked her head out and took a deep breath. He wasn't her regular buddy. Although they had planned to maybe go inside the ship together (they were both certified to do so), when push came to shove and they were down there together, Laure hadn't felt comfortable. They hadn't gone in, but Laure still had her reel with her. She marveled at his decision to go inside the ship after they had become separated. He could die. She would have to go in after him. She found herself thinking of her lost buddy, H., again. She didn't want to lose her new buddy too.

She secured her reel line outside the ship and unrolled the line slowly so that it would not snag. From the pocket of her vest, she removed a flashlight and turned it on. Unrolling the line as she went, Laure pressed the flashlight to her stomach to let her eyes adjust to the dark and tried to look for the light that she had seen before. In the darkness, the innards of the wreck seemed to snatch at her. Finally, she spotted the light. It seemed to emanate from around a corner further down the ship's hall, and she swam towards it full tilt, forgetting to push her fins sideways to avoid raising the muck on the floor of the ship. A cloud of silt rose around her and suddenly the space seemed too small. She felt her breathing quicken and she tried to back out of the hallway.

As she backed out, her regulator hose wrapped itself around a pipe jutting out from the ceiling. Her vision obscured, she hadn't noticed it, and it pulled the

regulator from her mouth, which free-flowed for a moment and smacked against the wall. Blind, she panicked, swallowing a mouthful of silt and water. She coughed and choked, willing herself not to thrash about. She closed her eyes and forced herself to reach back and follow the hose from the top of the tank to the regulator. She shoved it back into her mouth and pressed the purge button.

Free-flow! The purge button should have pushed the water from the regulator and allowed her to breathe normally once she released it. Silt must have gotten into its finer parts, and the purge valve was stuck open. Precious air was being dumped from her tank. She kept her mouth around the regulator, forcing herself to breathe the high-pressure air that pummeled her throat and lungs, the overflow shooting out around her imperfectly sealed lips. She froze, screwing her eyes shut tight as her tank emptied itself. She thought of H., her long-gone buddy.

Finally, her regulator made the sound of a straw sucking at dregs in an empty glass of soda. The sound and the denial of air were driving Laure mad. She nearly ripped her regulator out right then, but it was the only thing keeping her lungs from flooding with water. Laure felt herself spinning, angry dots and flashes passing in front of her eyes. She was coughing, the silt that she had swallowed coating her throat. Her regulator fell from her mouth and she clenched her teeth, but there was no air left in her lungs to keep the water out. Water flooded her throat and came out of her nose into her mask, burning her nasal passages. She ripped the mask off, her panicked body still trying to inhale.

* * * * *

She plunged into the pool. She was afraid. Laure splashed around, dreading the exercise where she must put on her mask and fins underwater, keeping enough to clear the mask and then come back up and clear the snorkel. She never had enough air, and with the fins on she just floated right back up to the top of the water so that her back showed before she ever cleared the mask, even with a weight belt. Her instructors had told her to keep trying. She couldn't understand why she just couldn't stay put underwater. She panicked a few times, resurfacing without even putting her fins on.

H. slipped into the water beside her. Laure's face grew hot – she didn't want anyone watching her screw up the exercise yet again. He smiled.

Exhale. Try emptying your lungs entirely.

He took her arm.

Don't worry, I've got you.

She plunged to the bottom of the pool.

* * * * *

Laure woke up with her regulator back in her mouth, *entre deux eaux*, between two depths of water. Her buoyancy was perfectly adjusted and she hung there, in the middle of a vast blue space. At first, she thought that her regulator still wasn't working – probably because her tank must be empty, but then she realized that she just wasn't breathing. Nor, Laure thought detachedly, did she feel the urge to breathe. Just to see, she inhaled and the regulator provided her with a lungful of air. She coughed it back out, spluttering. Her lungs felt strained and heavy, tender and full. Raising an eyebrow at the fact that she felt better somewhat better with no air

in her lungs, she reached up and took the regulator from her mouth. The water that flooded in was cold and soothing. It no longer burned her nose; it caressed her lungs and dulled their ache. Mystified, she let the regulator fall to her side, useless.

Next, Laure checked her depth. She was one hundred and thirty feet below the surface, the limit of sport diving. Giving two weak kicks, she ascended a few feet and noted the change in her depth gauge to one hundred and twenty six feet. She let a little air out of her vest to see just how well-adjusted her buoyancy was. After all, if she started to swim up without adjusting the air in her vest, she would shoot up and pop out of the water like a cork. Mystified, Laure watched as the bubbles flowed downwards, deeper. The depth meter might be flooded, broken. The bubbles were persuasive.

At the very edge of her vision, about thirty feet away, vague humanoid shapes were slowly descending – ascending? – into the depths. They paid Laure no mind. She was lethargic and didn't even try to catch their attention at first, but soon shook herself loose of the feeling and began to chase them. They were heading down past the limits but Laure found herself chasing them all the same. Naturally, they didn't see or hear her frantically swimming after them – underwater, it was hard to notice anything further than a few feet away, especially if you weren't looking directly at it, and especially if you weren't looking for it. Human senses were dull.

After some time, an outcropping of rock appeared out of the depths. The other divers seemed to be heading toward it. Not wanting to lose them, Laure swam faster. She was just about to round the ridge when they disappeared behind it. Laure's nitrogen drunk brain fancied that she saw the last half inch of a fin disappearing into

the rock itself. She reeled, trying to keep a lid on the panic that rose in her chest and tried to escape from her throat.

The rock face was smooth. There didn't seem to be any place for the other divers to have disappeared into. Feeling along the edges of the formation, Laure was barely surprised to see her hand penetrate through solid rock. Looking again, she saw a haze at the entrance, a shimmer. It reminded her of the look of thermocline, the space where hot and cold waters met and mingled. She pushed her hands through, then her face through, then the rest of her body. She swam through.

* * * * *

H. had been nervous before his last dive. He had convinced himself to go ahead with it anyway, with Laure's help. It was the last dive needed for his certification as a divemaster. She remembered what she had said to him.

He has been a rescue diver for five years, Laure reminded herself. He woke up from his nap in the ship's hold looking haggard, too old for his twenty-eight years. She had asked him what was wrong. He smiled wryly, worriedly.

I have a strange feeling...like something is coming for me. I dreamt that something down there...wanted me for its own. Like Dracula and Mina or something.

Very dramatic, she had said. You watch too much TV.

He had looked worried, and Laure had felt like a jerk. Remember, if anything goes wrong, you have backups. Your buddy will have backups too. That's diving.

* * * * *

Her buddy. Laure wondered what had happened to him. He might be drowned in the ship, and she was – Laure didn't know where she was. The water around her was

pervaded by a low, steady moan. At first, she thought that it might be the drone of a boat engine on the surface of the water, but then she thought better of it. She swam blindly into the blue, trying to keep herself oriented.

Slowly, shapes appeared out in the murk. Heavy strips of rusted iron seemed to form a makeshift fence around a space that Laure thought of as a courtyard. As she approached, it became clear that the iron was stripped from a shipwreck that lay further in, a dark, hulking shape. Inside the courtyard were figures that Laure initially took for statues.

The Canadian waterways like the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence were known for their wrecks. Weird topography prior to radar and other aids had made navigation chancy, and even now, in bad storms, ships were driven up onto the rocks. Laure swam closer.

As she passed into the courtyard, she realized that the figures were not statues but... bodies. Most of them looked like scuba divers, wearing torn neoprene wetsuits. They were run through with metal salvage from the wreck. Mostly, only their faces were visible – fish-belly white or purplish grey. Laure froze. They were all alive and moaning. This was the drone that led her there.

Laure wondered who had put them there but was afraid to touch them. The twisted iron, if it were removed, might cause more damage. They might hemorrhage. Her face flushed. Feeling helpless and ashamed, she swam past them. She had to help herself. The swim from the edge of the iron scraps to the dark hulk was interminable. Not wanting to touch anything, Laure didn't even pull herself along by the rocks that litter the river bed.

The hulk was the wreck of an ironclad ferry. Near the bottom of the boat, there was an opening reminiscent of a tin can opened up with a Swiss army knife. The jagged hole looked large enough to swim through, not that Laure ever would. Looking for her flashlight, she found that she had lost the one she had been using in the wreck when this had all started. Laure fished around in her vest pocket and found one of her backups. When she twisted the head to turn it on, she saw that it was flooded with water. Perhaps the seal had given out because of an old O-ring, or maybe she hadn't sealed it properly to begin with. Useless. Laure swam up to the wreck and willed herself to look into holes and portholes. Without a flashlight, all she saw were rusty protrusions, metal that had been eaten at by time and the movement of the water. Far off, she noted a light coming from one of the main holds on the ship's deck. It bobbed back and forth a little.

She needed help. The light might be the divers that she had followed there. Perhaps she had passed out and drifted down the river to another wreck. Having seen the bodies of the people in the courtyard, she knew that it wasn't so, but...the alternative was even harder to think about. She swam towards the cargo hold. If there were divers inside, she would ask for help getting to the surface.

The outside of the ship was covered with zebra mussels, the scourge of the Great Lakes and everything that surrounded them. Inside, the red iron reminded Laure only of deterioration and dust. The iron had warped in strange ways, as if it were melting and peeling, some of it covered in a fine silt that came away on Laure's gloves when she touched it. The layers and layers of paint that covered the insides of the ship must be what gave the illusion that it was peeling, even though through

Laure's mask the peelings seemed awfully thick. The rusty dust that came away on her gloves seemed darker than she could credit: redder.

Laure saw something swim by in the hallway out of the corner of her eye. She started for the corridor despite the alarm bells - going deeper in was foolish, but if there was a person in the ship...

In her eagerness, she forgot, as before, to fin sideways. Her fins beat the floor of the ship, raising a heavy cloud of silt. She cannot see anymore. The silt blocks the meager light filtering in from the outside. She was compelled to go further in. She should leave now, come back with a reel, some floodlights, and a team of people to rescue the sufferers outside. But, she wasn't sure how to leave, and she didn't think that she would ever find this place again. Besides, there is something about the place that reminded her of H., and that alone would have driven her forward. She wonders if she will be able to put him to rest. Of course, there had been no body for his family to bury. Laure didn't know why she associated him with this place. Maybe it was (nearly?) drowning herself. Maybe it was that the St. Lawrence River was so wide and so long that he could have ended up anywhere in it, or even in Lake Ontario - and when all this had started she had been at its mouth, at a place where Lake Ontario flowed into the St. Lawrence and became it. Laure felt H. all around her.

* * * * *

She remembered the first time that he had helped to teach a class, his goofy grin, smiling at her as he spoke.

This valve here that attaches directly to the tank is called the first stage. It's the one that you have to worry about getting wet when you change your tank. Down here,

there's the second stage attached by a hose - that's your regulator. It modulates the pressure of the air coming out of the tank to make sure that you can breathe it. If anything ever goes wrong with your regulator, try your backup regulator - what you'll hear people calling the Octopus. Otherwise, since you'll always dive with a buddy, you try their Octopus. If that's not working, you can share a regulator. That's why buddies are so important - they're carrying your backups, and you're carrying theirs!

In the corridor of the ship, Laure tried to let her eyes adjust, but she couldn't be sure if the shapes that she saw down the corridor were her imagination or her retinas rebelling at the dark. Things seemed to swim by, squiggles and snakes, but eventually they became less frequent. She guided herself along with the walls of the hall, occasionally putting her hand into nothingness.

One time, she put her hand onto something large and soft, and her glove came away feeling as if there was something jelly-like on it. Thankfully, she couldn't see, and just placed her hand further on, pulling herself along. The corridor seemed interminable, and she stopped to check her air before remembering that there was nothing between her throat and lungs and the water. The thought momentarily froze her up. She inhaled sharply, thinking of the boat she'd been trapped in before finding herself in this strange place. She didn't even feel the water go down.

Up ahead, she saw the dancing light and decided to make another push. This boat felt bigger on the inside than it had any right to be, but surely she must find some kind of exit soon, even in the dark. *Unless*, her brain spoke up wickedly. *Unless you have gotten turned around.*

Chasing the light, Laure found that the room that she entered was suddenly and blindingly lit to her dark-adjusted eyes. Yet she couldn't see any light sources. Instinctively, she shut her eyes, and when she reopened them, the room was full of people. It was much larger than she had first thought, more like a church hall than just a room. As her eyes adjusted, she noted that these people looked much like those outside, their skin tones ranging from that purple-grey to the fish-belly white. They were laden with scuba-diving equipment, but they were not wearing it the way divers did. Their finery was pieced together from lost fins and snorkels and weight pockets, as well as the kind of diving trinket that was meant to make a diver's life easier but often ended up at the bottom of the lake. She wondered if these people were responsible for the grotesque tableaux outside – the living sculptures.

They did not speak. Neither did Laure. They surrounded her; they stripped her of her octopus and vest. She pushed them away when they tried to take her mask and fins – that would be crippling down there. Were she not as deep, her wetsuit's buoyancy would have caused her to float upwards now, to hit the ceiling of the wreck. She batted them away from her mask and fins once, twice, five times. In a show of strength, she reached for the knife that she kept on her ankle for cutting fishing line and entanglements.

They stopped, backing away and encircling her.

Seeming to know that Laure was scared of touching them, they moved their circle around her, herding her down another dark passage. One of her strange jailors finally touched her, pushing her out into another room. The touch jolted her and she whirled around, her hand on her knife yet again. The faces of her captors were

impassive. She turned to examine the room. Her eyes were drawn to the only other bodies in the room: on a dais made of short, long crates, two figures were half-lounging, half-bent over rough-carved rock pieces arranged on a tiled grid.

One of them was facing away from her and Laure assumed that he was just another one of these strange, wetsuit-clad people who had kidnapped her. The other, Laure decided, was their leader. His improvised bangles were extravagant and heavy, with no less than ten octopus holders of various kinds dangling from his head and shoulders. He wore a necklace of neon yellow elastics and shapes meant to contour the mouthpiece of a regulator. A whistle dangled from one of his earlobes. He was also bare-chested to the hips, with torn neoprene hanging down from his waist in wide swathes. Staring intently at Laure, he rose to a crouch.

No doubt noticing that his chess partner was staring at something behind him, the other figure turned to face Laure. He turned with all the grace that Laure remembered, only remembering probably made it so.

It was H.

Laure could not have said that she knew him as soon as she saw him. So long as H. had his back to her, he was just another one of the creatures that she had somehow fallen in with. She found a last gasp of air in her system, letting out a muted "ah" that would have been something different – a panicked yell, a shout of joy? – if Laure had had anything else left in her lungs. In the silence of the ship, H. alone seemed to hear it. He swam towards Laure with ease, even finless, and she noted a tear in his wetsuit that showed fish-belly white skin behind it – not, she noted, that everyone wasn't some kind of deathly pale colour that deep underwater,

where some colours just didn't penetrate. He was unadorned. She wondered if he recognized her. The others let him through the circle and Laure looked into his face.

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Sometimes diving with you is like diving with a golden retriever, she said.

Practically hanging upside-down from the top deck, H. took a bite of one of the cookies in his hands.

Want a cookie?

Yes, Laure said.

I was just cleaning up the wreck - you know, for future generations, he said.

And for your tackle-box, she said.

We brought up that Pepsi bottle too, H. said. He swung back around with a Tupperware full of chocolate chip cookies. Quick, before the others realize that these exist.

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His face was expressionless. Laure felt that it might be deliberate. Something behind that look felt like recognition, but also seemed to scream that recognition was dangerous. Taking her by the hand, H. led her out from among them. At first, Laure took no notice of his busy hands, but soon she realized that his movements were no accident. H. was signaling her – signaling with a mix of the standard diving signals that all divers must know and the personal hand signs that Laure had not used since he disappeared. He used her hand-signal name repeatedly to try and get her attention, pretending to pinch his nose and then waving his hand subtly through the water in their signal for a fish. It was a joke – Laure always seemed to have a runny

nose, so the name was at once about how she was constantly blowing her nose, but also about the clownfish that she wore on her mask strap when she first started to dive to make sure that she could be recognized from behind. Laure is elated.

DANGER. NOT OKAY. BUDDY. THINK. YOU LEAD, I FOLLOW.

Laure was uncertain. H. repeated his message.

DANGER. FISH. NOT OKAY. THINK. BUDDY. YOU LEAD, I FOLLOW.

Laure looked around, trying to figure out an angle at which the others wouldn't be able to see her signal back to him. Her hand signals are furiously fast. Even the practiced signals of long-time buddies do not have the words to express what Laure wants to say. H., alive and in front of her.

YOU...OKAY? UP? UP! UP!

Laure jerked her thumb compulsively upwards. She wanted to take him and start climbing through the feet between them and the surface, climb through the iron overhead. The creatures around them begin to fidget, and Laure's stomach turns.

H. shook his head once briefly. *STABILIZE HERE.*

The cold water had chilled Laure. Her fingertips and her feet felt numb and hard. She cannot stand the thought of staying there a moment longer. She shook her head slightly, trying to be secret and not wanting to end up outside on a rusty spit. She wondered why and how H. had been taken in. She decided that they would leave together.

YOU LEAD, I FOLLOW, she finally signaled to him, conceding to H. in their silent discussion.

Laure watched H. return to the leader's side and place a hand on his shoulder. He gesticulated to him silently and Laure watched. It seemed to her that they had developed their own language of signals, and she could not follow their conversation. Perhaps this was why H. was here, surviving. He had found a way to communicate and keep himself out of the macabre courtyard. From beneath the ceramic tile, H. pulled a discarded bleach bottle and a pencil; a poor man's slate. The bottle was already covered in designs and pictograms, earlier conversations, but H. drew on top of those. The leader grabbed the pencil and drew angrily beside H.'s pictograms. H. tapped a picture on the bleach jug and signaled a few more times. He put the jug back down near the tile and swam over to Laure. He signaled to her, holding one hand up with the fingers together and the palm facing her.

WAIT or STOP.

He knelt in front of her and unclipped her diving knife from her leg, gentle as a groomsman with the garter. She had forgotten her knife. Knowing that it was the only thing that had kept her captors' from stealing her equipment, she tried to grab it back from him. He signaled her again.

STOP.

He swam away with her knife, which was a Wakona, a short little knife that was more of a tool than a weapon, blunt-tipped so that it could double as a pry-bar or a flathead screwdriver. There is a little hook cut into the edge of the knife for cutting fishing line. One edge was serrated, and the other was smooth and sharp. Laure took good care of her knife. H. extended the guard of the knife out towards the leader,

who snatched it away and began to examine it. He took the knife from its sheath and tested both edges of the blade, sawing uncaringly into his own flesh.

Laure turned her eyes away, and when she glanced back, H. was gone. The leader was clipping the knife around his leg, tightening the straps.

Laure felt her gorge rise and she tried to hold in her panic, which she realized that she could no longer even express as a scream.

Some of the creatures approached their leader, examining his acquisition. Others circled around Laure, curious about what they could grab now that she no longer had her knife. She was still wearing her arm slate. The rest of her emergency gear was hidden in the pockets of her BCD vest, or still in her diving bag at the surface.

The leader of the creatures finally pushed his followers away and gestured to the plank and the makeshift chess pieces. Laure nodded, unsure what else to do, and approached the dais to sit where H. had been.

The leader reset the board, leaving a few smudges of blood on the larger pieces, such as the Kings and Queens. He took two pieces, one black and one white, into his hands and proceeded to mix them up behind back. He held them out to Laure, who pointed to his left hand, still afraid to touch him. The piece was black.

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It was during her deep diving certification. H. had come along. Laure had just been at one hundred and twenty eight feet, and it would be hours until she eliminated enough nitrogen from her blood to be within the decompression limits of the dive

tables and able to go back down again. H. sat her down at a table with a towel and some trail mix.

He pulled out a mangled travel set of chess in a dusty zip-up case which he then started to set up on the table.

I don't really want to play, Laure said.

After all the trouble I went through digging through the fire shed over there? This game is an antique! Don't you want the chance to play with a piece of history?

Pretty sure it says Hasbro on the zipper of that bag, Laure said. Fine. Fair warning. I have the patience of a ten-year-old.

And the foresight of one too, I hope, H. said. As I am a gentleman, I'll give you the choice. White, or black?

Black, Laure said.

* * * * *

Laure watched carefully as the leader chose his opening moves. She recognized H.'s teaching in the way that the leader opened up the board. He was an aggressive player. That might be the thing that saved her: she knew H.'s style, and after playing enough times with him, she had eventually beaten him once or twice, once she had learned a few tricks with her knights.

She thought of herself as a slow and plodding player. She found it hard to keep future moves in mind and could rarely tell what the other player was thinking.

As Laure made her third (or maybe it was her fourth) move, her eye was drawn to the movement of H. coming back into the room. He swam up beside her with a

troubled expression on his face. He was carrying a vest, with the octopus and tank attached, in one arm. The strap of a pony bottle – an extra source of air – was slung over his shoulder. The pony bottle would have enough air for them to make it to the surface and they could also use it to inflate their vests enough to carry them there. It was lucky, Laure thought, that they had one lying around. He put the equipment down beside the chess board and, his face sombre, stood beside Laure. It became clear to Laure that H. had not expected her to start playing chess with the leader of this strange band. He seemed upset.

OKAY? she signaled to him.

NOT OKAY, he signaled back, see-sawing his hand back and forth in a "comme-ci comme-ca" motion. As the game progressed, he seemed to be growing increasingly agitated. He pointed to the chess board, pantomiming victory, flashing two circles with thumb and fore-finger for a "double-okay" as in, better than okay, as in, he wanted – no, needed – her to win.

It dawned on Laure that H. must have made some kind of agreement with the leader and that this game could cock it up if she lost. She remembered that chess was a game that was meant to simulate war. She remembered what happened to the losers in most wars. She wondered if she would owe the leader something if she lost, and realized that it actually seemed quite likely, considering the way that H. had bartered with her knife earlier for her freedom. She realized that she had been tricked into playing. If she had refused the game and waited for H. to come back, she would have been free. As she played, Laure kept glancing back at H. He signaled to

her openly, seemingly no longer afraid of being caught. With enough labour, H. was able to signal specific squares in the grid.

The game was even. Laure thought that she might be able to take the game if she set the queen up as bait. Her knights were already in position to create a fork. If the leader took the bait and her queen, Laure realized, she would have the game. She lifted the queen, twirling it in her fingers thoughtfully and examining the board carefully before placing it. Out of the corner of her eye, she noticed something about the figurine. The queen seemed to be carved in H.'s likeness. It disturbed Laure to think about sacrificing even an effigy of H. to win the game. She knew that was silly, but it bothered her. She soon realized that putting the queen anywhere else would be a disaster and would decimate her defenses.

Laure shook off the strange feeling that she got when she looked at the queen and placed it on the board. There, now she could not take it back. She could only adjust the pieces on the small board accordingly. The white king took H. and removed him from the board. The rest was just a chain reaction. Laure mated the white king. The game was hers.

The leader feigned disinterest, not bothering to acknowledge her victory or shake her hand. Instead, he unclipped her knife – his knife – and examined it, ignoring her entirely. That she had won seemed to make her invisible. The leader swam away down another corridor, and his retinue – basically all of the others, followed.

H. swam up to Laure and the equipment that he had left beside the board. He helped her shoulder off her BCD. Taking the new vest, he grabbed her right arm and

shoved it through the shoulder strap. He was not rough, but Laure felt weird having someone else dress her, especially H., after so long. He pulled the Velcro stomach straps apart, layering them over one another securely. He tightened her shoulder straps with quick tugs. She nearly fell over when the full weight of the vest, with the weight pockets inside, settled on her shoulders and chest. He did not offer Laure the regulator yet. She wanted to save it for their climb anyhow. She took the pony bottle from him, making sure that the hose from the bottle was attached to her inflator, and squeezed enough air into her vest to let herself move.

H. had a vest but no octopus. Laure told herself that he could use her emergency octopus. They would both swim strongly, and break the surface at last. Laure felt the lie catch in her throat even though she only thought it to herself.

He inhaled a few breaths of air then, using the air to fill his vest as well. H. pulled Laure from the room, which felt oddly empty. Her captors were gone, and there was no one to react to their going. In the dark, H. led her and Laure imagined the texture of the soft, strange thing that she had accidentally touched through a gap on her way in. They did not pass through the hall that Laure had first been emptied out into. H. knew a different way.

The daylight, when they were finally able to see it, burned Laure's eyes. She blinked but they didn't cease to ache. Her entire body felt empty. H. pulled her along like a jug full of air, bobbing in and out of spaces, unresisting, but awkward, apt to get caught on corners. H. never glanced back while they were in the ship, but turned to Laure immediately when they were outside on the deck.

H. threw his arms around Laure. He was as cold as she felt. She tightened her grip around his torso, and they were still for a moment. She felt H. reach behind her and grab one of the hoses - the regulator. Even without communicating further, Laure knew what he was suggesting and she knew that he was right. She had to start breathing again. She took it from his hands and held down the purge as she inhaled.

The air pushed water out through her nose. She coughed water from her lungs. Her throat strained. Her nose burned. She coughed air and water into the river, along with her breakfast and a good deal of snot and bile. Laure held H. at arms' length, gripping him so that she could keep in place. She stopped coughing, her lungs aching, her sinuses stinging. She tasted blood at the back of her throat, which felt swollen and closed.

But she is breathing. She turned and grasped H.'s cold hands briefly.

YOU? she signaled and said at the same time. She has air now. She has a voice again. It is H.'s turn. She hands him the octo. He took the octopus from her and put it into his mouth, but there was none of the coughing or straining that Laure had experienced. H., the cool one. She looked up. She couldn't even see the surface from there.

Laure glanced back at H. She signaled at him vehemently. *UP?*

H. nodded, and Laure hooked his arm in hers. Her relief was a wave of warmth. Before they started ascending, H. stopped her. *YOU EYES UP. ME EYES DOWN.*

He put one of her hands on her vest inflator, and straightened her other arm until it pointed straight up into the air - the safety ascent position, so that if they were to hit anything, it will be her fist that hits first, not her head. Laure nodded.

She inflated her vest until they started to float up, then stopped, finning gently, paying attention to their bubbles - their bubbles? H. let out no bubbles at all, and Laure remembered how good his breathing control was. She nudged him, though, taking out her second stage mouthpiece to mouth, "never hold your breath while ascending." He nodded, inhaling and letting out a few bubbles. Laure was satisfied. She watched their bubbles, never ascending faster than the tiny ones that tickled her face from H.'s slow breaths.

When they had reached a depth of sixty feet, H. slipped his arm out from Laure's arm. She stopped ascending and checked her gauge quickly before turning to him. He was right - it was time for a safety stop. She tried to compensate, filling her vest with a little more air, then letting a little out. H. smiled at her from around his mouthpiece. He inhaled the deepest that she had seen him - no doubt to start eliminating the nitrogen from his blood. If he were to reach the surface without decompression after who knew how long down in the depths, H. would probably die. As it stood, Laure thought, he would have to be rushed to the nearest decompression chamber. Still, even this was a cheerful prospect: to finally have him home.

H. did not exhale. He took out the regulator and Laure heard the low tones of his voice for the first time in years. They were muffled by the water, of course, but somehow clearer than her own vague noises when Laure had occasionally tried to do the same.

"I can't come back with you."

He purged his vest of air and Laure grabbed at him as he sunk, trying to hold onto him. He was too heavy, and the pony bottle was on her vest – his could not be easily reinflated and he knew it. He slipped from the vest and Laure was left holding it. She dropped it but could not find purchase on his smooth wetsuit. He gently grabbed her inflator and held down the button, filling the bladders of her vest. Then, he pushed off from her, and she was sent ballooning upwards in an uncontrolled ascent. She splayed her limbs out like a starfish to create drag, to slow herself before she got an embolism, or worse. He sank down, and when Laure reached the surface, they dragged her out screaming his name.

Les Escoumins

The car, like the water, is a space apart. A womb. Early in the morning, in the middle of the night, the divers flex their muscles, carrying out their bags to the car, carrying their bodies to seats cooled by the night air. Half-asleep, the car becomes their bed.

The old man teases them, tells them that they are excellent passengers, throws his head back and pretends to snore. The car rides – two hours, three, four – are unlike any other. The music is always perfect – the miracle of satellite radio – and if it isn't, the front-seat passenger will wake long enough to turn the dial judiciously, shutting up Cousin Brucie if ever he dares to speak beyond the few seconds that she allots to him.

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The truth is, the divers always say that they will get to bed early, but somehow they always manage to fudge it up, are never in bed before eleven, twelve, even when they know that they must be up at 04h10, sometimes earlier.

The divers imagine a life for their older friend, who can dive no longer, from his stories, but no doubt they are miles from the truth.

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He is a man who has lost much, seen much. Seen much, done much.

Some of it has left scars on his body, like the long one on his belly where the steering wheel column pierced him some thirty, maybe forty years ago. Some of it marks the way that he speaks – uncompromising when he states a belief, unwavering when he offers an encouraging word. One thing that he retains is oddly

innocent, oddly untouched by anything that might have befallen him: a curiosity about everything, a willingness to listen to all that is new.

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The divers vacillate between waking and sleeping, trusting the old man's steady hands at the wheel, the motion of the jeep in which they half-slumber lulling them. One of them is almost always half-asleep, the other sleeps in shifts, long periods of sleep followed by perfect alertness, and on it goes.

Sometimes a song comes on, and the old man will sing along in his deep, throaty voice, barely above a murmur as if he has long been told that he cannot carry a tune, especially if it's an Elvis song. The divers sing along too, depending on the song. Sometimes, he surprises them with the songs that he joins in on, or doesn't. "Bohemian Rhapsody," the holy of holies of sing-alongs, elicits no response, but he sings along to every word of "Maggie May."

* * * * *

This should sound all too familiar:

The old man smokes with his car window part-way down, even when the air-conditioning is on. The divers wish that he wouldn't, but they tolerate this one vice. He was told to stop smoking when he was diagnosed with diabetes, told to stop smoking when they found the bladder cancer, told to stop smoking when he had an operation on some veins in his leg. He is a lifer. He had his first cigarette at the age of twelve, in 1958, and while he has had some hiccups here and there, mostly he has been smoking since. Lately, they've given him a little white-and-blue pump to accompany his pills and his insulin. He is waiting for an appointment to discover

why he has had trouble breathing lately. This comes as no surprise to the divers. For all the good that he does in the world – educating children, running fundraisers, sharing his knowledge of the sport – he cannot do himself any good in this matter (or so he has long convinced himself).

His smile is rueful always whenever the topic of his smoking is brought up – “You sound like my son,” he says. And in a way, the comparison is apt, the connection is deep. Though he has surely shared a car with many divers, he has known this pair for some time now, ridden many an hour with them snoring gently or singing loudly.

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As they climb the hilly east of their province, the fog envelops them. The trip has the flavour of elegy: he has not been to Les Escoumins in something like twenty years, maybe more. The scummy sea of memory parts as it will. When they arrive at the visitors centre, the old man immediately makes friends with the Parks Canada parking attendant – a short man who, like the old man, needs help getting around: he has the kind of crutches that one leans their forearms on, and his legs are twisted at odd angles. The attendant lets them park for free, since it is the end of the day and since, for some reason, the pair are connected from the first time that they speak.

While the kids – adults, really, in their twenties – run around the visitors centre, collecting pamphlets and navigating through the free museum, the old man stretches his legs. He marvels at the parking lot, which did not exist in his time. Rather, the divers he brought there used to park on private property and hike and climb over a kilometer of Canadian Shield to reach the water. Now, he notes, there

are steps into the water – large, friendly red stone. There are guard rails. Some of the wildness has gone out of the place. But some things they couldn't change: the average water temperature around Les Escoumins is four degrees Celsius. "A balmy 39 degrees Fahrenheit," as his divers might say, especially the young woman, who will swim in her bathing suit at the quarry in October, when the surface temperature is eight degrees at best.

"This used to be a lot more of a macho endeavour," he tells them. "Not everyone could dive Les Escoumins. Now there are paths all the way down to the water."

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They settle in and the fog lifts. They eat dinner across the way at a restaurant that was only a casse-croute the last time that the man was down this way. The fog lifts. It is low tide, and there is a sea of boulders on the shore. They sleep, they wake, they ready themselves for the day's dives and head out to the water.

He has not been diving in six years. He ordered a wetsuit for himself, one year, hopeful, but the pain in his leg drove him back to the surface immediately. The old man was once a young man, and that young man thought that he was Superman. Finally seeing the shoreline after their long trip, the old man found that his stomach roiled, squeezed his breakfast tight. He does not envy them the cold, but he remembers the estuary floor, in the Baie des Anemones, on the walls of the reef. No bare spot was wider than an inch across - there was life everywhere, surviving against the cold, thriving in the cold.

It took the divers some time to get all their gear down. He helps them adjust last bits of equipment before they enter the water – the gloves that are always hardest to get on after everything else is done, the masks that need to be tucked below hoods. He must wait for them on the shore. He must wait on the rocky shore. He will watch, wait and remember.

He wishes that he were braving the cold with them, and fixes his eyes on the water.

* * * * *

A whale surfaces.

He is usually underwater when this happens, only gets the reports from other people afterwards. It has been a long time since he had seen a whale. This one is close. Closer than he has ever been to a whale. A smaller whale breaches beside it. Another variety? A baby?

This whole region is known for whale watching. Every second billboard tells drivers to call 1-800-BALEINE for their tickets on the next whale-watching boat. But there are no guarantees.

He thinks of dead whales. Of hundreds of whales lying dead of cancer on a beach in Japan.

"Why would a whale that had cancer beach itself in Japan even if it was sick from the reactor leak? Whales travel thousands of kilometers in just a few weeks - if anything, there should be whales beaching themselves all over the place rather than just in Japan. It's bull," said one of his students when they talked about this weird fake news story that had started to show up on the internet, claiming that so many

billions of tons of heavy water from the Fukushima reactor had leaked into the ocean, and still were. It doesn't change the images in his mind.

Another news story called whales the "stewards of the ocean" and said that they were humanity's best chance at monitoring the health of the ocean – because they traveled over more of ocean than human scientists could ever hope to, and because of their ear wax.

It smelled, they said. Really bad. And every six months or so a new layer of wax formed onto the already existing layers, forming what was called a plug. They could be over a foot long. They smelled terrible. Indescribable.

He couldn't even have imagined the smell, except that in his long years he had had the privilege of visiting the marine research centre in Newfoundland. They had a pickled baby colossal squid, and whale earwax plugs, amongst other things.

The plugs could be read like so many rings in a tree, and the chemicals found in the wax told about spikes in growth, the pollution levels of the water, when the whale was under stress, when the whale was in love.

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He had cried when he had heard about the hundreds of dead whales on the beach - cried for them even knowing that it probably wasn't true. Because the idea was so repulsive, and because he knows what humans are capable of, and even now there are ships that hunt whales down more surely than any disease.

He wishes that he had not seen the whale, knowing that any attempt to share the experience now with the divers below will only amount to, "I saw a whale. It was a whale. Big, and sleek."