

côte est

a poem composed for CraftNB's Biennale exhibition, Atlantic Vernacular
Jenna Lyn Albert, Poet Laureate, City of Fredericton 2019-2020

I. We don't need much in the way of orienting ourselves, can find the *stella maris* most nights and that's enough. The men in my family worked the same fleet of tugboats *toute ma vie*¹, each vessel named for a tree: Juniper, Hemlock, Spruce. We got strong roots but roam nonetheless, home nowhere and everywhere at once.

II. We measure time in shifts and seasons. When dad was working my sister and I wore his Moosehead t-shirts as nighties, grew accustomed, as mom had, to his coming and going. She swears it's the secret to a happy marriage: *loin des yeux, près du coeur*². Shed night marked his homecoming, the garage smelling of woodsmoke, cheap lager and brine—the harbour's brume lingering on our father and his crew.

III. We know what we don't know: if floodwater will spoil the fiddleheads again this spring, contaminating the wild ferns and the Wolastoq river. If the abortion clinic will stay above water: the climate, political and environmental, unsteady. If the car'll make it through another greasy winter: rust blooming over its fenders, flaked paint like the lichen on the maples in the dooryard. *Cousse-tu veux chte-dise*³?

IV. We got stories. Of Pèpère, less mobile with age, taking the lawn tractor down to the fishing hole and getting it good and stuck. Of Mémère's earliest memory *celui de sa mère enceinte, la perte des eaux et l'arrivée de la sage-femme pour l'accouchement*⁴. She was yet the youngest of what would be *seize enfants, se souvient que l'arôme du sang, de la sueur et du liquide amniotique sent comme la marée basse*⁵.

1 All my life

2 Absence makes the heart grow fonder

3 What do you want me to tell you?

4 That of her mother, pregnant, her water breaking and the arrival of the midwife for the delivery

5 She was yet the youngest of what would be sixteen kids, remembers the aroma of blood, sweat and amniotic fluid smelled of low tide