

Senior Division, Nonfiction

Matthew Hollett, St. John's

Between Seasons on the North Head Trail (an excerpt)

Spring into Summer

The trail wriggles out of the city like a plant sprouting from pavement, the prickly stem of the Narrows blooming into a broad horizon as you ascend. I'm drawn here partly by its changeability: arpeggios of boardwalk slats cut to fit the rocky slope, cloud shadows somersaulting down a hillside, a lattice of light glinting from the harbourfront. Bee loves its steadfast remoteness, often jogging up by herself after dark. We weave the bright thread of the trail into our lives, making it part of the patterns we inhabit.

Sometimes it feels as if I come to the North Head Trail to confirm that the horizon is still here, that this place hasn't lost its capacity to enchant. That we're still on an island. Bee and I feel our way along this wrist of Atlantic rock, two fingers taking a pulse. On colder days the trail's heartbeat is sleepy and solitary, while on the first warm afternoon in May its pace picks up, palpitating with a steady flow of footsteps and the rhythm of runners negotiating uneven ground.

Today we walk slowly, almost an amble. We pause often at the bottom of staircases, to let others pass. The trail itself wheels and dives at a seagull's pace, but we take our cues from more distant objects: a tanker's laborious progress through the Narrows, the lazy-eyed lighthouse at Cape Spear. We stop to rest on a little footbridge below the first tall crevice in the cliff. Bee says this spot feels like a threshold, the place where you pass outside the reaches of the city. Peering inside the dark crevice feels like pressing an ear to the earth. We can hear the throb of ocean waves slopping through the artery below, pigeons mucking about deeper in its veins.

Listening attunes us, and we press on up the trail paying more attention to the hollow plod of boots on boardwalk, or the cacophony of crows, pigeons, and gulls. [...] I walked here a few weeks ago on a day when you could hardly see the harbour, and a lone voice bobbed up through the fog: *Last but not least, on our right hand side, we have Fort Amherst. Trust me.*