Senior Division, Short Fiction

Mark Finch, St. John's

Island Crossing (an excerpt)

WHAT'S THAT? Is that one?

Michael took his foot off the gas. Clutching the wheel with both hands, he pulled himself toward the windshield, eyes squinting needlessly. Darkish shapes disappeared and reappeared in the forest. *Is that another one?*

About an hour back, the moose just appeared on the highway, running in tandem with his car. Approaching its rump, he remained somehow composed, pumping the brake. No veering. No abrupt stops. He just slowed, allowing the moose to gallop in front of the car, its four cartoonish hooves leaving the ground all at once. Seconds later it ran back into the trees. Michael continued on well below the speed limit.

And now, *is that another one?* Michael imagined the moose crashing through the windshield. The car halting violently. The moose's heavy body pounding his face and shoulders. Everything broken—a mess of glass, antler, and blood. His last ridiculous sensation would be the feeling of its bristly hide in his mouth, tickling his nose. The moose and Michael, stranded on the highway.

But none of that would happen. It's just how the sparse Trans-Canada gets to you out here in the centre of Newfoundland. The nine hours or so across the island can be spooky. The mangy trees and low, crisp-dry brush. The rutted roads, cracked and lined with tar snakes and cracked again. Endless grey. Massive road signs—*Slow Down! Moose Have Killed Drivers! Arrive Alive!* It all accumulates.