

UVic Diversity Writing Contest 2012, Second-Place Poetry Winner (tied)

By Adrian Southin

The first thing you do when lost is build shelter

A campfire of peat-moss and thin branches snaps between Keven and I,
a wind descends from the pine covered hills
blowing the rotten smoke into my mouth.

Divisive as his fragmented *Anglais* and my French,
the fire accepts
another scrap of birch, casting orange light over
the boughs and foliage forming two decomposing roofs
twelve feet apart: shelters
we had built in the last rays of the September sun.
Laughter echoes over the lake from another campsite,
drawing us closer to the fire.

What would I do after this, he asks.
The word *poète* is pronounced the same in both languages,
A nose that hasn't set right bobs in the swollen bruise of his beard:
he understands, accepts it.

I shake out the cold air from my jacket,
the zipper tugging the bristles on my chin,
the last of summer's heat stolen away by autumn.

We chew our syllables through graham crackers and melted milk chocolate:
 A Quebec logging town,
 A high-school literature teacher,
 A father's music store.
A sap-ridden piece of black spruce,
hisses from the fire
at the dissonance of my over-stressed syllables
meeting his *coureur de bois* accent.

The fire separating us lies in embers,
the last birch logs consumed,
our boots descending on the ashes.

Only the darkness separates us now,
each crawling into the interlocking ribcages of our shelters.