

Senior Division, Short Fiction

Deborah Whelan, Hearts Delight-Islington

Unearthed (an excerpt)

Sadie wanted to be in Greece, or Egypt, anywhere but this nowhere place on yet another barren coast in Newfoundland. No romance or mystery to it, she thought. She soon learned that no matter where the dig, the work was long hours, actual digging interspersed with meticulous mapping, sifting, brushing. The preliminary mapping, staking and gridding had been completed by the A-Team, as she called them – the three archaeologists who had acquired funding. Then there were the worker bees: Ten students who like her had signed up for a summer job at the Boyd's Cove site. Four quit after two weeks, exhausted from physical stress, sunburn, mosquito bites, wanting Mommy.

But Sadie thrived. Every small discovery, every painstakingly recovered iota of Beothuk life, fascinated her. Her mornings started with the dawn. She inhaled her meals and worked until the last shard of sun allowed. Her skin turned a deep bronze, her shoulders stronger.

It was on one of those ordinary mornings that everything changed.

It was at the far end of the meadow, past where the sweat lodge had been unearthed. Rain had come down hard and without warning the night before. Without tarps in place, the site was muddy and the team decided that after breakfast, they would work on inside projects as they waited for the area to dry. Sadie packed her thermos of coffee and a muffin and skirted the dig, climbing atop a boulder near the excavation. This was where she sat most mornings at dawn, drinking in the peace, but also simmering with the anticipation of what discoveries her day would bring. This morning, though, her attention was diverted. Something glistened, as white as pearl, on the downslope on the periphery of the dig.