

Title: Queenie at the flakes

Author(s): Andreae Callanan

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Andreae Callanan

Queenie at the flakes

Queenie knows this sensation:
salt crusting skin, salt catching
in the throat, salt and
fishsmell straight to
the brain like a cure
for fainting. Saltfish, same
cream-and-silver boards
bought and sold by women
in the bright, brazen markets
of home.

Has she never wondered
until now just how this fish, netted
in the coldest currents of a distant
ocean, had come to grace her
breakfast plate each Sunday
of her early life? Had anyone
ever spoken of so much salt
sailing north as ballast, returning
as barrels of slab-stiff cod?

In the bowed backs of the women
and girls who clean and salt
and watch and stack the fish, who
brush away flies and rinse away
maggots, who shield their work
from ruin by rain, from scorching
by sun, does she glimpse the forms
of those who rake and shovel salt
from West Indian ponds, hands
swollen to cracking, eyes
unfixed, awed by the gleaming
white of their harvest?

And does something in her blood
know the saltfish meals of her country
for what they once were: fodder,
not food. Fish no good for winter, worse
again than the scraps these
salt-skinned folk indulge in?



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Biography

Andreae Callanan is a doctoral candidate in English at Memorial University, and author of *The Debt* (Biblioasis, 2021).