

2000

The Glory Files (Original writing, Fiction).

Laura A. S. Page
University of Windsor

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholar.uwindsor.ca/etd>

Recommended Citation

Page, Laura A. S., "The Glory Files (Original writing, Fiction)." (2000). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. Paper 4017.

This online database contains the full-text of PhD dissertations and Masters' theses of University of Windsor students from 1954 forward. These documents are made available for personal study and research purposes only, in accordance with the Canadian Copyright Act and the Creative Commons license—CC BY-NC-ND (Attribution, Non-Commercial, No Derivative Works). Under this license, works must always be attributed to the copyright holder (original author), cannot be used for any commercial purposes, and may not be altered. Any other use would require the permission of the copyright holder. Students may inquire about withdrawing their dissertation and/or thesis from this database. For additional inquiries, please contact the repository administrator via email (scholarship@uwindsor.ca) or by telephone at 519-253-3000ext. 3208.

INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

Bell & Howell Information and Learning
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA
800-521-0600

UMI[®]

THE GLORY FILES

by **Laura Page**

A Master's Creative Writing Project
Submitted to the College of Graduate Studies and Research
through English Language, Literature and Creative Writing
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Arts at the
University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

2000

© 2000 Laura Page



National Library
of Canada

Acquisitions and
Bibliographic Services

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada

Acquisitions et
services bibliographiques

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file *Votre référence*

Our file *Notre référence*

The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

0-612-52729-8

Canada

THE GLORY FILES

CONTENTS

DEDICATION	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
Escape Velocity	1
Road Not Maintained	92
VITA AUCTORIS	160

The Glory Files is dedicated to everyone who seizes an opportunity
to help maintain the road between youth and adulthood,
to everyone who tries to monitor the speed at which it is travelled,
to everyone who takes a chance.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Each of these novellas is a work of fiction. Virginia Woolf said it best in *A Room of One's Own*: "*Imaginative work is not dropped like a pebble on the ground... fiction is like a spider's web, attached ever so lightly perhaps, but still attached to life at all four corners*". Like Sage, I too subjected my family's cottage log to my uncensored opinions and ranting interpretations of what it was like to grow up. Like Emerson, I have worked in girls' residential camping for years, and thank all my campers and colleagues for teaching me to understand the noisy Northern Ontario sky. And like Andie, I too struggled with finding a satisfactory definition for the word *rescue*.

If you drive down the Old Songis Road from Redbridge, Ontario, you'll see a sign that reads, "Road Not Maintained, Use at Own Risk". On the edge of the lake, at the end of a similarly obscure road, is our cottage. I'd like to thank my family for introducing me to the wonders of life on a lake, and to acknowledge the words of my grandmother, Arleen Furgala, in the story of the man I renamed Wayne Reynolds. This story is based on the summer of 1975 when my grandmother held the family together and documented every word of what she called the 'largest manhunt yet', a story our fellow cottagers will tell and retell for years.

I would like to acknowledge the inspiration of the 1998-1999 Graduate Creative Writing workshop at the University of Windsor, a talented group of writers from whom I am sure we have not heard the last. Thanks especially to Nancy, Kim, Bernadette, and Lisa, for standing by while I shattered my characters and built them back up again. I thank also the leader of that group of writers and my Advisor, Di Brandt, for inspiring and allowing me to write on the edge of risk. For their valued input and commitment, thank you also to my committee members, Dr. MacKendrick and Dr. Senn. To Rosie, Lindsay and my father, Stewart, thank you for your influence and understanding throughout this process! I must also acknowledge all the fascinating people with whom I've camped, for bringing many of these tales to life! I'm especially grateful to Sandy, for listening patiently to each chapter and allowing me to derive pleasure from making her cry. Lastly, to my mother Susan, for discussing and affirming my ideas and new twists, and for engaging in such rich conversations over lunch about people who do not actually exist. Cheers, and thank you.

ESCAPE VELOCITY

~ The speed necessary for an object to escape the gravitational pull of another object; to break orbit. Anything that moves away from an object with more than the Escape Velocity will never return. ~

ESCAPE VELOCITY

1 Andrea

The idea is developing slowly, and I wonder if I'll be able to defend myself when I'm sued. A flood of arguments sweeps through my mind and it's hard to hear what's going on, sitting very still in my chair, watching the girl on the talk show stage. Our eyes met briefly when she first walked out. I have a feeling that I will know her well. The audience gapes at her with open mouths, as if trying to swallow all the light from the stage. They are feeding off each other, gathering speed, gathering momentum as they follow her running, whirling downward.

An older woman beside me is shaking her head and as she turns her head, her disdainful glance brushes past me. "Kids these days," she mutters bitterly. Apparently I have been removed from this category and she believes me, a twenty-three year old student, to be a worthy ally in discussing her despair for children. She does not know me very well.

I wonder why I thought this would be an interesting thing to do while spending time in Detroit. It was free.

The host again draws our attention to the stage. Catherine is a small girl, thirteen years old. Her face is painted with a placid, faraway glaze and her lips are sealed in a

tight purple line. Her mother sits beside her, a frowning, disagreeable woman clutching a box of Kleenex and shaking her head slowly.

I focus my attention on the girl while the talk show host buzzes through a list of her offenses, addressing Catherine's mother:

"So she's been in front of the judge 5 times, and she's 13 years old, wow, that's sure a lot of times! What else, she has physically struck you. She loves the thrill of shoplifting. She has run away from home seven times. She is an alcoholic. She smokes. She skips out of school at least three days a week. She's sexually active and involved with gang bangs, whoa, um, wow. Let's stop there and talk to Catherine a bit."

The girl's mouth moves, yet her eyes face directly forward, straight ahead. "It's Rinn."

"Yeah," her mother shakes her head more quickly, "She insists on being called Rinn. I give her this beautiful name and now it's Rinn. But of course, I still call her Catherine; that's the name I gave her! I'm calling her by the name I GAVE her!"

Applause.

"Well, we'll stick to Catherine on the show too then."

Applause.

"Now, Catherine, we've already had some problems with you on the set. Do you want to tell us what happened?"

"It's Rinn. Well, some chick came up to me backstage and told me I looked like a slut. So I fucking yelled at her, of course."

Her mother winces. "Watch your language! You're on TV! The whole world is watching you!"

“You think I don’t know that?”

I hear the audience snickering around me. In front of a judge five times and they’re picking on her language? I remember the first time I gathered enough nerve to swear in front of my mother. She looked at me calmly and said, “No daughter of mine will use such language in front of me. That’s the way it is.” I can’t help thinking that Rinn does not look thirteen. She is wearing platform sneakers, tight black pants with white lines running down the sides, and a shiny black bra with a see-through purple shirt loosely draped over her shoulders. My eyes ache. I look closer. She has a striking face, high cheekbones emphasized with just the right amount of make-up and a flattering hairstyle that gathered the sides of her thick blonde hair into a sparkling clip in the back. With the slightest of motions, she pulls the sides of the shirt closed.

“So, Catherine, are you really sexually active? You know you’re only 13. How many partners have you had?”

“It’s Rinn. Enough.”

“Like 5 or 10? Oh my. Do you use protection?” The host sounds whiny.

“No.” Rinn’s face does not move. It’s almost too still.

“Why not?”

“My friends say it’s not as much fun.”

A sustained groan.

Her mother looks anxious to speak. “You know what else? She even had oral sex with her friends watching!”

“Catherine? Is that true?”

“It’s Rinn. Well, it was their house, why shouldn’t they watch?”

A dramatic gasp.

“Do you always let them watch?”

“No, I mean, damn it, it was just one time because they didn’t know how to do it. How the hell else are they gonna learn?”

An audience member, excited to be on television. “Kid, why don’t ya stop being ignorant to your mother, and stop it now!”

Cheers.

Rinn smiles calmly. “To be ignorant doesn’t mean to be rude, it means not to know something. There’s lots of things my mother doesn’t know.”

The talk show host is confused, aghast. She smooths her hair and grins into the camera, which consumes her gleefully.

“Okay, let’s change the subject. Your mom says you love the thrill of shoplifting. Is that true?”

“Sure.”

“What do you steal?”

“Clothes, you know, and food when I’m away from home--”

Her mother shifts again in her chair and interrupts again. “You know, I am thinking of changing my locks and taking away her keys!”

The host pauses. “To lock her out or in?”

“To lock her out! She’s causing so much trouble, she steals, she hits me—” She begins crying.

“Changing the locks doesn’t work, remember Mom? People can always get back in.”

A threatening boo.

“Is this true, Catherine? Do you hit your mother and run away?”

“Is running away bad if she’s trying to lock me out? Nice question. Where’d you learn to interview?”

I cannot hide a smirk and Rinn grins very slightly and then reconsiders. She catches my eye for a moment and I quickly look away. Glancing from side to side, no one seems to have noticed her look at me. I’m probably imagining it; there’s no way that those stage lights would allow her to make out faces in the audience. Suddenly I am ashamed to be here. The room is stifling and the audience is now booing loudly. I cover my ears. The host mutters something about smart remarks.

Her mother recovers. “Oh, she’s very smart, too. She’s got an amazing voice and she wants to be a singer. She could be anything—She’s a genius. Her IQ’s 130.”

“Wow, Catherine. That’s amazing. You want to be a singer? Don’t you want to stay alive long enough for that to happen? Then why do you do all these things? You must know that this stuff isn’t working.”

“It’s RINN, goddammit, FUCK!”

I don’t have time to think over my plan, I just have to act fast. Very fast. She’s not going to make it up there. Standing up, I mumble something about using the washroom and climb over the two women between me and the aisle. Annoyed, they strain to see the stage around a tall man sitting in the next row as I block their views. I slip quickly out of the studio and run around the outside of the building to the stage door. Just as I thought, after about twenty minutes, Rinn bursts through the door in

tears. Without thinking, I remove my jacket and sling it casually over one arm. The street is busy this afternoon and I lean up against the building, watching as she angrily tears through her pockets for Kleenex and wraps her see-through shirt tightly around her chest. Before I can think of an intelligent way to approach her, she turns to me.

“You were in there.”

She recognized me.

“Listen—”

“You’re sick. They’re all sick, coming here for entertainment, for fuck’s sake.

SICK!”

“Then why the hell did you come?” I surprise myself with that comment, yet it seems appropriate. She doesn’t even wince.

“The money.”

“You get paid for this?” Of course I knew they were paid.

“Are you crazy? You think I’d come out here and whine about my fucking problems for free?”

“Actually, it seemed to me like the host and your mom were doing most of the whining. My name’s Andrea, by the way. Um, anyway, you looked good up there.”

“Fuck you, Andrea.”

“Some of your answers were very interesting.”

“Don’t fuck with me.”

“Well, how else *are* people supposed to learn how to perform oral sex?”

Our eyes meet again and her forehead wrinkles as she looks up at me. The whites of her eyes are a pale pink from tears and she tucks her hair behind her ears.

Then we both burst out laughing. Instinctively, I reach out an arm to console her, but change my mind.

“That’s not true, you know. No one ever watched me.”

“I didn’t think so.”

“I don’t have a clue where my mother got that. Must have been eavesdropping on me on the phone and heard me say it, but not seriously, you know? I don’t know, but she just looked so shocked—”

“Well, I thought you looked good up there. Very composed.”

“Fine! I get the point. Listen, what the fuck’s your name? Andrea? Nice cheerful name. Yeah, well, I don’t know where you came from but you better leave me alone. You don’t know me any better than the rest of them. You think I’m some nice, cute kid who you can help, but you know what my mom said to me right before the show? Someone asked her about going on a holiday and she said *any* time away from me would be a holiday! Maybe I’ll give her just that, again. Anyway, they made me leave until I ‘stopped carrying on’—I’m surprised they haven’t come out to yank me back inside yet. So leave me alone. Why haven’t they come out here? That’s surprising.”

“Hey, you gonna go back in there crying?”

“Damn it. I swore I wouldn’t do that! Fucking friends’ll be watching--”

“Oh, save it. I can’t listen to all these problems anymore. So you know, that’s why I had to get out of there. I’m in some really, really deep shit myself. Have to try to figure out what to do. Came out here to think.”

She looks up at me again. Pulls out another Kleenex. Dabs her eyes. Rinn has brought quite a supply of Kleenex.

“Oh yeah? What’s your problem.”

I’ve been focussing on her face, not thinking. “Uh, the mob’s after me.”

“Yeah right. I’m not a kid anymore. Fuck, I’m thirteen years old, you know.

I’ve been to court you know—”

“Well, I’m twenty-three you know, and the mob IS after me. But I won’t tell you about it then. You better get your ass back in there—I can hear them cheering.”

She takes a step closer to me and drops her Kleenex on the street. I raise my eyebrows and look from side to side. Standing beside me on the sidewalk in her platforms, she is at least three inches shorter than I am. “What’s going on?”

“Shh,” I remain serious. “There’s people around. These guys in my neighbourhood, well, they got some money, okay? Won some huge bet. So they wanted to have this big-ass celebration about it, and I was supposed to arrange the entertainment. But the singer just called my cell and backed out. Said she can’t make it. And it’s tonight!” There is no way a kid with an IQ of 130 is going to believe me. Unless she wants to.

We look each other in the eyes, hold the gaze. I feel like a kid again, having a staring contest, in which the first person to laugh or look away loses.

“I can sing.”

“You can sing?”

“I’m good.”

“You’re just a kid.”

“Fuck you.”

“I don’t know. It’s probably not the kind of crowd you’re used to—”

“I can take it.”

“You sure?”

“You going?”

“Yeah.”

“Yeah.”

Suddenly muffled noises sound behind the stage door. Rinn glance at it and then back at me. “I’m coming with you,” she announces.

“Wait—”

“I’m coming with you. I can sing. Really. I’m good. Take a chance. I’ll only stay a day, I promise. Kinda like a holiday, think of it that way. For everyone. But I’m coming no matter what you say, so you might as well let me. I open my mouth to say something, anything. It feels like she can see right through me, like she had this more figured out than I do.

“I know what you’re thinking,” she says quietly.

“Really?”

“That I can come if I call my mother. You think I haven’t thought of that? Of course I’ll call! It won’t be a big deal at all! C’mon!”

We hear cheering and clapping through the stage door. I’ve had enough. She feels like it’s her idea now. Instinctively, I drape the jacket I’m holding around her shoulders and she slips into the arms as she runs quickly after me down the street.

We drive from Detroit into Windsor. At the border, Rinn pulls out a Canadian license and birth certificate, claiming she’s 19. I don’t question it. Just in the States for

dinner, that we were. She grins. I can't believe we weren't followed yet. No one from the show emerged from the door as we pulled away. Rinn leaned over the front seat staring out the back window the whole time. I try to hide my surprise.

“Guess they were teaching me a lesson—you know—don't give a bad kid too much attention.”

We stop at a Tim Horton's in downtown Windsor. We sit still for a moment, and then Rinn slams her fist down on the seat beside her.

“I KNEW they'd never follow us.”

“Rinn, I'm sure they'll start looking—they're probably looking now. Why don't you call now?” I hold my cell phone out toward her.

“Sure, I'll tell my Mom. But do you think she'll worry about me? Do you think she'll even look for me? She'll think I've run away again. And you know what? The police don't always look for runaway girls, especially the third time. Mom will wait for me to come home. That's what they always tell her to do, probably. Anyway, I'll call as soon as we get to your apartment.”

Rinn runs inside to buy two coffees. I grab my cell phone and frantically dial the first friend who comes to mind.

“Oliver? It's Andrea. You got a pen? This is what I need.”

2 Rinn

On the phone in the car she said I was her cousin why did you say that I can't believe she's lying already! Everyone lies. Probably thinks I didn't hear, because I was wiping up some coffee I spilled on her dashboard. Didn't even yell. Anyone else would have yelled. I would have yelled. We don't really look alike I'm surprised she wanted to be related to me wow but wait I guess who would want to say 'this is the delinquent kid I borrowed from Detroit just to make some money at a club'. This is lie number one and you better just watch Andrea I like you but I can pick up lies real easily. I'm a good liar too. It's easy, lying, you just think of what you want to happen and pretend it did. Thin line between lying and imagining. Creativity is supposed to be a good thing. Sometimes I lie to myself, and it works.

I can't even stretch out my arms it's small in here and so stuffy and she left me alone. Didn't even really talk on the way home just said some guy named Oliver is coming over and I can't smoke. At least she has her own place the last thing I need is someone else's mother around but she's way too old to live with her mother, she's twenty-three! Darcy has her own place too. She's a bit older than me but she likes me well enough to be my best friend at home in Toronto. Said that once to her, "Darce, you wanna be my best friend? You should, okay?" She just laughed. "You could be my little sister," she said, "but that's all anyone would ever believe." Damn, I can barely breathe and she says I can't smoke. I think it's easier to breathe through smoke plus you

get damn used to being grateful for every bit of air when you breathe through smoke god
I need a smoke right now.

You better not think you can tell me what to do, Andrea! I'm tougher than I look. Gotta be tougher than you look if you want people to look and you want to make it! Where the hell am I going to go to smoke maybe I'll just open a window and stick my head out maybe I'll sit in the windowsill I wonder how high up we really are I mean, really? Thought I'd die on the plane ride down. So stuffy. I spent the whole ride tapping a pen on my armrest and a guy leaned over and made a joke about me smoking. Wonder how he knew. People think they know everything just by looking.

Strawberry-scented soap coming from the bathroom, where she is taking a shower. She said I could have something to eat, anything I wanted. Yeah right. Probably nothing there, or else there's a couple of things that I could have and the other stuff would make her mad if I touched it. Probably a trick to get mad at me an excuse that's it no one would really mean that I could eat anything she just wants a reason to throw me out and I've only been here for an hour. She's too nice I can't figure it out.

Wait, there is food in here! Two jars of strawberry jam, a pitcher of iced tea, four yogurts in small containers, chocolate milk. Probably past their best before date—that's what I hear about students they eat what tastes good and never call home and due dates and deadlines don't mean much. She has a jar of pickles, mustard, ketchup, a package of hotdogs, applesauce, mayonnaise, five limp carrots, two bruised apples and one kind of healthy-looking orange. In the bottom of the fridge, a mysterious Styrofoam takeout container. What's inside? Whoa, dinner from a couple of nights ago, looks like what used to be fettuccine Alfredo and shrimp. Gotta be from a date who really had money

to buy shrimp for themselves! I'll take the orange she can't get mad at that plus I could just get her another one if she did that way she couldn't get mad.

I wonder who she went out for dinner with. Does she have a boyfriend? Of course she does. She's twenty-three years old, almost twenty-four, she told me. If she didn't have someone, that would be pretty sad. Who's single to hang around with, anyway. Most of my friends have boyfriends by now. Plus, she's pretty enough. Of course, she could dress a lot better. I wonder if there are any pictures of him around though it's probably this Oliver guy what kind of name is that anyway, Oliver!

I'm gonna look around she can't stop me I mean if I'm going to stay here I might as well try to get to know her. Take a deep breath, Rinn. Inhale, exhale. Gotta stay calm and in control and I've got to slow down my thoughts. Slow. There.

The first things I see are big black and yellow letters over her door, A.P.G., like the kind you'd see advertising on a sign in front of a mall. Wonder how the hell she got those? That's kind of cool. Gotta find pieces of her around gotta figure this out wait, here's some pictures. That'll be a start.

Andrea's smiling face shines back at me. Her blonde hair is tied back with a purple bandana and she is standing on a beach in a tank top and shorts. Beside her is a woman, a bit older, I think, with tanned skin and simply-cut shoulder length brown hair and bangs. She has a very friendly face, and holds a straw hat and a stack of plates and glasses, maybe from a picnic. On the other side is a younger girl with very short dark hair, holding what looks like a pile of thin notebooks. I wonder what the hell she's doing with notebooks in the middle of the summer! She looks very serious, and is holding up her other hand to shield the sun from her eyes. Wonder where that was taken. Looks

like a beach or something. As I put it down, I hear a crash from the bathroom, something falling.

“Damn!”

“Are you okay?” I call out, not thinking first.

“Yeah, thanks. Just dropped my shampoo.”

She’s shampooing her hair. Means she’ll be out in about fifteen minutes. At least that’s how long it takes me. I don’t know how long it takes Andrea to shampoo her hair. She has shorter hair than me. I don’t know anything about her. Slow down. Don’t think so fast.

Looking back at the picture, she silently thanks me for checking that she is okay. It’s all right. I’m crashing with you, the least I can do is make sure you’re not dead. Although you could get some better food for god’s sake. See, I can be thankful. My mom doesn’t believe that, but she isn’t always watching. All right. Fifteen minutes.

Andrea looks a bit younger here in the second picture, maybe nineteen or twenty. I think. It’s hard to tell grown-ups’ ages and they can never tell mine! A older, tall man with dark straight hair stands beside her, one arm around her shoulders. They are dressed for a formal, a dance or something. The label underneath says, “Alex”. I wonder. Maybe it’s her prom. Her dress is just nasty. When I go to the prom in high school I’m actually going to finally get noticed I want to be the one everyone looks for to be in pictures I want people to know when I’m in the room and when I’m not. I want to wear a long black dress really tight so I’ll have to be careful with what I eat around then and have a slit real high up the side so I can walk and dance and dance and dance! And if I wear my hair pinned up loosely like this picture in I saw in Glamour I could look

really sexy I know I could. Andrea is wearing a short blue dress with a flared skirt and her hair is all curly and down around her shoulders she looks like she's a little kid looks way too relaxed and not sexy at all. She has a shy smile on her face and a deep tan not much makeup. I wonder if she went tanning or if she went somewhere on vacation. The man is smiling down at her. He looks almost proud. Actually, he looks old, almost thirty! Whoa! I wonder!

In a pile on the shelf are a couple of snapshots of Andrea and various groups of children. Some of the kids look like they're my age. In one, they're in a canoe, wearing life jackets hanging open and sporty sunglasses. One girl, a little older than me probably, leans over the side of the canoe, trailing her hand in the water. That kinda looks like fun, though she probably fell in after the shot, the way she's leaning over the edge like that. In another, they're sitting on a trail in the middle of the woods, leaning back on backpacks, wearing brightly-coloured bandanas, and drinking from water bottles. This one's funny. Andrea is lying in a hammock between two huge pine trees and two kids are waving or fanning her with pine branches or spruce I could never tell the difference. She's laughing. There are no boys in any of these pictures how boring I wonder how they got all the girls to go without any boys or why they wanted to! Maybe it's like when Darcy and I are trying to get ready to go out and we're actually having a conversation about something and some guys just barge right in like we owe them sometime yeah, now that I think of it, there are time when it's nice to be alone without having to try to impress anyone, not that I'd know what that feels like.

Another one was taken at night. Andrea and four young girls are standing up in a line, their sleeping bags zipping right up over their heads, only their faces showing

through. One red, one blue and two little purple statues smiling out at the night, and a low, smoking campfire off to one side. Looks scary.

Three pictures are together in a fancy triple frame, with little labels underneath: 'Lucerne, London, Vimy Ridge'. Andrea must be really into travelling. Not like me. I like knowing where I am. I wonder if she's leaving on any trips soon. In the Lucerne picture, Andrea is standing in a ridge on a mountain covered with green and little patches of snow. She's wearing shorts and a T-shirt but she's holding a snowball in her hand! That's so crazy! Where on earth can you wear shorts in the snow? Maybe she's not as smart as I thought. And she's all alone, unless, oh, she must have been about to throw it at the person taking the picture. I've never heard of Lucerne. Maybe it's in Switzerland, or Austria, or Germany, how am I supposed to know? I laugh to myself—I'd know if I ever listened in Geography class, but my teacher is a complete bitch. I'm not just saying that. She completely hates me. Every time I get used to working next to someone, she gets mad at me for missing classes and moves me to another seat. So I don't go for a couple of days.

I recognize the London one, it's Westminster Abbey. I've seen pictures of that church before. I think my mom has been there. A long time ago, of course, way before she met my Dad and then I came along. No more travelling then! There's graves of famous poets there, like Lewis Carroll and William Blake—I'll bet my English teacher doesn't even know that. I wonder if Andrea likes poetry. I like Alice in Wonderland. The magic, the idea of falling down into another, a different place. I used to wish there was a rabbit hole in my room so I could just jump down when I needed a break from everything. My babysitter Heather read it to me when I was a kid. I used to look

forward to her coming every day she said as long as I didn't cause any trouble, she'd read me the next chapter. Then one day I called her the "Mad Heather" to my mom. I thought it was clever, anyway, I was a kid, I didn't know what it meant, but my mom got real mad and yelled and apologized to Heather for having to put up with me and she never came back. So I finished the book myself when no one was around.

As for Vimy Ridge, this picture is kind of scary. It's a gray day, raining probably, and there are a lot of people just standing around, not doing anything. They all look really serious and sad. Andrea is standing in some sort of trench with sandbags on the sides, and in the background there's a giant white statue with big blue tarps and construction all around it. Looks like they aren't done building it or something. There is a Canadian flag blowing in the distance. I don't know what this is, but I don't know if I should ask her about it—she looks really depressed in the picture.

She'll still be in the shower for a little longer. I had better use the phone while I have the chance. I hope I remember the number but what's going on why is my hand shaking calm down Rinn, calm down, you can do this it's one phone call and it's one day and one night in a bar and god it's better than that studio anything is better than that studio. I'll call Darcy first. She can tell the others because I gotta tell them where I am you can't just drop a group of friends like mine. That would not work. Besides, they know more about me than anyone does, or at least they think they do.

I dial Darcy's cell phone slowly. Some guy gave it to her. It's long distance. Who cares.

"Hello?"

"Yeah, it's me."

“Shit, Rinn, where the fuck are you?” There is loud laughter and music in the background.

“I take it you’re not at work, eh?”

“Hell no. I’m at Jeff’s. You shit, you’re supposed to be here too. There’s all kinds of guys here, I mean, how many reasons do ya want? There’s Devin and Jared and—”

“Listen, I had that talk show thing this morning in Detroit—”

“Right! Sorry, I forgot. You hangin’ in Detroit? Damn! How’d it go? Did ya show ‘em—”

“Well, I guess you could say I showed ‘em. I ran away. I’m in Windsor.”

“Windsor?! Where?”

“At this, uh, this other girl’s house. I met her at the show and she needed someone to sing at a club tonight. I’m doing it, ya know, for the money.”

“Shit! That’s fucking cool. Nice place? D’ya find anything?”

“Huh?”

“I mean, she got like pot or anything? She’s like grown up! She could have pot around any time she liked! Could ya try to bring some home? You know, for the group to celebrate for you?”

“No, well, not yet. I’ll see.”

“Well, you know ya can’t stay there forever. Your mom’s going to call here, what am I supposed to say?”

“I called my mom. Don’t want to cause some big thing.”

“You called your mom?”

“Well, I’m going to. I called you first.”

“Rinn, c’mon. You’re supposed to be here with us, not in Windsor with some pothead chick. You like her better than us?!”

“I never said anything about pot!”

“Shit, that’s four hours away, Rinn!”

“Are you even listening to me? Whatever. My mom’s probably glad I’m gone. I’ll bet no one’s looking for me.” I’m talking way too loud my voice is echoing in my head gotta keep my voice down. “Darcy, I can take care of myself. Listen, just tell the others, like Mar and Devin and Shawn and them, that I’m just um, just trying this out for a while, ‘kay?”

“Sure. Whatever.”

“And Darce? If anyone like, is trying to find me or anything, like if there’s an ad in the paper or something, call me here.” Andrea’s number is right there under the phone thank god. “But hang up if I don’t answer.”

“Well, be careful. And remember, you’re thirteen. You need us! And hide your money and ID and stuff at night, you never know, ‘specially if ya just met her and stuff.” Sure. What money? Andrea was going to steal my ID. The receiver slams down. As if it would ever cross Andrea’s mind that she might want to *be* me.

There are a two small side tables by the couch, but nothing interesting in the drawers: a telephone book, a picture of two old people (must be her parents, who cares) and an address book. Wait, in this drawer there’s a journal! Should I read it? Of course I should read it I have to figure her out I have to know why she cares about me at all but

wait, the water in the shower just stopped. The shower curtain opening, brush dropping into the sink. She's going to come out soon. Remember the journal.

I sit back on the couch and try to look bored. Across from me there are a bunch of milk crates stacked on top of each other, holding books. They are all thick books, textbooks, a couple of novels here and there. I kneel down in front of the shelf. Personality and Adjustment in the 90's. Social Psychology. Abnormal Psychology. Experimental Research Methods. New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis. Statistics. Understanding Childhood Behaviour Disorders. Adolescent Females: Search for a Voice.

Oh my God. Why else would she be interested in me?"

The hair dryer stops and it is very quiet. My hand is shaking again I wish I could stop it stop thinking so fast just calm down. The answering machine. Mom doesn't even want to talk to me wait—she's probably not even home yet. I wonder what she did with my plane ticket oh my god I never even thought of that. They're going to be looking for me for sure now. Well Mom will have a message waiting when she gets home if she goes straight home at all. Hello answering machine how are you today do you know how I feel I hope you listen to me and listen good!

3 Andrea

Rinn spends an hour in the bathroom after I am finished my shower. I knock on the door every fifteen minutes or so to make sure she's okay, which she says she is. I had to talk a camper out of the washroom at a camp I worked at once--it took me over an hour and I hope I don't have to go through that again! There's always the risk that you won't be able to do it. I hear my drawers opening and closing and, when I press my ear up to the door, the sound of makeup cases clicking and brushes dropping on the counter.

The knock on the door startles me. Oliver, just on time, stands in my doorway, giving me the 'you can't be serious' look.

"Andrea Patricia Gartner. Please tell me that you did not steal a child from Detroit. TELL ME!"

I have to laugh. Oliver shakes his head dramatically and then braces himself in the doorway. "I'm not setting one foot in this apartment until you tell me it isn't true, Annie!"

"Damn, don't call me Annie."

"Why? I always call you that."

"Well, you're the only one. It sounds ridiculous, she might—"

"Oh, gotta sound like the big hero saviour, right? Sorry, Miss 'I'm too cool for my glamour-name'. Whatever."

"Oliver!"

He strides into the apartment. “Where is she? Where’s your souvenir?”

“She’s in the bathroom. And don’t you dare call her that to her face.”

“You fuckin’ stole a child from Detroit. You can’t do that! God, you think you can do anything, don’t you. Damn!”

“I didn’t steal her, Oliver. And her name is Catherine, but call her Rinn.”

“So she’s missing, then?”

“She is NOT missing, she’s right here!” I yell a little too forcefully.

“Whoa, sorry, how’d you do it, then?” He sits down, shaking his head.

“I told you, I talked to her outside behind the studio, and she agreed to sing tonight at what she thinks is a big mob party. I had to outdo her, and the mob sounds like it’s the only thing she hadn’t appeared in front of a judge for. Um, did you organize it all--”

“What the hell do you know about the mob, Andrea? You crack me up. Honestly. But I told you, it’s all set up. I’ll tell you both when she comes out.”

“God, Oliver, do you have to be so dramatic?”

“Well, it is her gig, I figured she has the right to hear first!”

“It’s not serious!”

“I know, I’m just teasing you. Jeez, sorry. So what I don’t understand,” he continues, leaning on the fridge door and pouring himself a glass of chocolate milk, “is why she agreed to go with you if she’s such a bad-ass rebel type. Hey, does she have like, green spiked hair?”

“No!”

“Tattoos on her face? Pierced nose? Belly button ring? I like those!”

“No!”

“Well, why would she agree to go with a nice-looking academic type like you? I mean, no offense or anything, but you don’t look like you have the first clue what court would feel like.”

“What? I could appear in court. In fact, I probably will after this. It’s funny, though, I didn’t even think of it at the time. And why do I look so nice? I’m wearing ripped jeans—”

“And a nice blue sweater that fits you nicely, and hiking boots, An-drea. You’re wearing hiking boots. Hiking boots are just so not intimidating.”

“I’m not trying to intimidate her! Anyway, my hair’s messy--”

“That doesn’t do it. Your hair’s always messy.”

I walk over to the hall mirror. This morning I tried to pull my shoulder-length blonde hair up into a clip, but as usual there were several non-conformist curls that refused to stay in place. I tucked them behind my ears and shrugged my shoulders.

“Who cares what I look like?”

“You’re just, well, too cute. You’ve got freckles, giant green-blue eyes, ringlets instead of hair, dimples in your cheeks—”

I most certainly do not have dimples. Oliver rambles on while I rummage through the fridge for a snack for all of us. I have perfected the art of tuning Oliver out. I nod and say “Uh huh” at just the right times, but my mind is so busy these days and I have that feeling again, that it is going to get even busier. Ever since I met Oliver, which was a couple of years ago in first year Psychology, this is exactly what he has been like.

He's very dependable, and can pull any event together in a second, but he insists on carrying on and on about whatever small aspect of a plan catches his interest.

A couple of months ago, he called me up on a Friday afternoon and said he had an extra ticket to a Red Wings game, and would I like to go with him. I made up an excuse about having to finish a paper for Developmental Psychology, and then remembered too late that he was in the class. He ranted on for about an hour about people who start papers too early—do you think you already know everything in the class? Don't have to even attend classes? Think you could write the term paper in the first week and get perfect? Is that what you're like? He yelled that they were playing Vancouver and to look for him in the crowd on television, and then hung up on me.

There really should be a warning put on all University Abnormal Psychology classes. They can be very dangerous. Just a simple warning, "All the disorders you are about to study are serious and must be diagnosed by a professional. Do not be your own professional." Students think they have everything. They've done studies on that. Last spring I heard of some girl from class signing herself up for counselling, convinced she was suffering from a compulsive disorder. She had a couple of thoughts about her house burning down in a terrorist attack. There really was no risk, I mean, it made no sense. It's just like saying, "Don't think about a green elephant" or cheering someone up by telling her that she has a beautiful smile.

I even caught myself last year, measuring my stress level against the scale in my Adjustment and Personality in the 90's book. I fell into the moderate risk category; I am a full-time student, with a part-time job, whose marks are average, who has perfected the art of procrastination, whose parents divorced when she was young, who once had a

high responsibility job caring for children at a camp in the summer, who has no romantic interests at present, who has four outstanding speeding tickets, who is quick to anger and quick to trust, and who feels quite alone in a storm of friends.

The door opens and Oliver is quiet.

“Who the fuck are you?” Rinn stands in the doorway of the bathroom, her arms folded across her chest. Her sheer shirt is hanging open and the platform sneakers are still on. Her white-blond hair hangs smoothly around her face, the sides half-shielding her eyes, which are a faint pink from tears. Her makeup, however, has been perfected. “You’re out of mascara, you know that, right Andrea?”

“Oh yeah. Thanks. I don’t really wear makeup that often. This is Oliver—”

He gasps. “As if you told her my real name!” He is taking this mob thing a little too seriously. Oliver runs across the room and guides Rinn by the elbow over to the couch. She shrugs off his arm, but follows. Oliver sits beside her, facing her and looking intently into her eyes. He runs a casual hand through his dark hair and tosses it slightly. Then he has the nerve to take her hand. What the hell is he doing? I open my mouth to speak but he is faster.

“You,” he says to Rinn in a smooth, deep voice, “are absolutely beautiful.”

Her jaw drops visibly and I can feel her struggling for a response.

“Now I know why Andrea never invited me over to see you before. You are just *stunning.*”

“Uh, thanks, whatever.”

Oliver continues to stare into her eyes. When his gaze never once shifts to her chest, Rinn begins to look noticeably uncomfortable. Then she turns a pale shade of red and pulls her shirt closed.

“She’ll definitely do, Andrea.”

Rinn looks up at me angrily.

“I’ll *do* what?”

“Rinn, Oliver is one of the friends I was talking about.” I wink at her. “The friends who are throwing the party tonight. At the bar. Oliver, can you give us some more details?”

Oliver launches into a well-rehearsed speech, describing his choice of bars in the county outside Windsor, who is going to be in attendance, how long Rinn should sing, how she should sing, how long we should stay, what kind of clothes she should wear, what music he has selected for the night. Rinn listens intently, not saying a word.

“Can you sing me something now?”

Rinn refuses.

“But if you can’t sing in front of me—”

“I’ll be fine, you’ll see.”

“So we’ll see you there at eleven, not a minute late.” Oliver stands suddenly and turns to me. His eyes are wide and his forehead wrinkled in a confused frown. He shakes his head slightly and, his back to Rinn, mouths the words, “This is not going to work.”

I frown back at Oliver and close and lock the door behind him.

“Andrea?”

“Yeah, Rinn?”

She is sitting on the couch, my afghan draped over her shoulders, and fiddling with the remote control between two fingers.

“Why’d ya say I was your cousin?”

What do you want me to say, ‘here’s the kid I stole from Detroit because I was overcome with guilt and rage at modern society and the look in her eyes...’ Quick answer. “I don’t know, Rinn, to tell you the truth, I’ve always wanted a younger cousin.”

“Why?”

This is all happening too fast. I haven’t been able to think of what I’m going to tell her. That’s why things that surprise even yourself are very scary. First thing that comes to mind. “Well, I’ve worked a lot with kids, kids around your age, sorry, young people, but they always go home to their own families. I’m an only child. No cousins I know. So, I don’t know, but the idea of just having a cousin like you was kind of cool. Plus, then Oliver won’t ask any questions. The idea of meeting my family scares him.” Hopefully that will change the topic.

“Why, you two dating?”

“Nope. He’s just Oliver. He’s like that.”

“Well, Andrea,” she fiddles with the remote control, turns on the television, and then flicks it off again. “I hate to tell ya, but he’s totally lying to you.”

“You think Oliver’s lying? About what?”

She tucks her hair behind her ears. “I mean, he’s a great guy, he’s hot, but there’s no WAY he’s in the mob. No way at all.”

I take a deep breath, and grab a chair from the kitchen with one hand, sitting on it backwards, facing the girl.

“You don’t think he’s really in the mob?”

“You’ve been screwed, Andrea. There’s no way at all. Guys in the mob,” she said matter-of-factly, “do *not* drink chocolate milk.”

4 Rinn

Why the hell does everyone have to lie in this world I can't believe Andrea didn't realize Oliver was lying and when I told her she wasn't even upset. Maybe she doesn't want to admit it but he's totally lying, you see, I can just tell these things. You gotta be on the lookout for lying and friends are not supposed to lie to each other I can't even imagine where my life would be today if friends lied. Caught Darcy in a lie once. Screamed at her not to do it and she cried. First time I ever saw her cry. Only time. Family members lie. Teachers lie. Doctors lie all the time. The world would be insane if friends lied too. I'd better keep an eye out for Andrea's friends I guess.

A teacher lied to my mom once, told her that I was acting up in class in order to get attention Mom had to come in and the teacher turned out to not have any ideas to help. Teachers hardly ever know how to help. I'm sure I have a higher IQ than my mother I'd never really say anything but she likes to brag about how smart I am. One day I overheard a teacher say that 130 is really not that high. Of course it's not.

I'm tired. I want a smoke and my mind is tired because I can't decide if I can call Andrea a friend yet. I'm not really sure what she is right now. But the looks on those children's faces in those pictures I can't forget them the looks of kindness of simple happiness sometimes they're even holding hands or they have their arms around each other. They trust her. They are out in the middle of nowhere with her, and they trust her. I wonder.

Oh God, we're here. I was hoping it would take longer.

The only lights in front of the bar are cars' headlights and the sharp flicker of cigarette lighters in clouds of smoke. Oliver steps out from the doorway and leads Andrea and me into the dark haze of the club. Why are they taking off their coats already? Of course, a coat-check. I didn't notice. I have never been in a bar before so this is what it's all about I hope it doesn't show. My eye-makeup is making my eyelids feel damp and heavy. If I can just keep my eyes on the back of Oliver's head I hope he remembers I'm here thank god he is tall. I pass two old men who sneer and smile at me. Look away. Just keep walking. A waitress stops me with a tray of what something. "Which kind d'ya want, honey?" Glowing blue and yellow tubes like test tubes from science class. "C'mon," she croons, orange lips pursed. What am I supposed to say?

Andrea turns around and takes my arm. "She's performing," she says, "And she's already had enough to drink."

I haven't had anything to drink why did she say that does she think I'm always drunk I hate this already I have to get out of here! The woman laughs and cackles and rolls her eyes and turns away. Andrea steers me ahead of her, almost pushing me into Oliver's back. He looks annoyed. Andrea is following me now we're almost at a table this one's good this one's good why why do we have to sit so close to the front?

"Okay, Rinnie," Oliver says, "Here we are. You ready? Hey, Rinnie, what's your last name, so I can introduce you?"

"No WAY!" Introduce me? I wonder if she's serious. I wonder if Andrea really expects me to sing.

"Oh, it's not worth it, Oliver. She won't tell me either," Andrea says quickly.

My fingers are freezing. I clench my hands into fists to try to warm them. I can feel sweat stains forming under my arms, and I hunch over in my chair, folding my arms across my chest.

My sheer shirt used to smell a bit like my mother's perfume, but that's gone now. She was sitting really close to me on the plane ride this morning. I wonder if she had the seat to herself on the way home, or if she's still in Detroit. I am not going to call. My toes ache inside my shoes. I should have worn black heeled shoes this is a bar after all but I don't have any other shoes with me. I don't have any other fucking clothes with me. I don't have anything. I probably look like a little kid dressed like a ridiculous slut and stop looking at me a man just looked at me and I wish I could just go home and change. Andrea is laughing and leaning on Oliver's arm. He shifts in his chair, reaching an arm around her, and then changes his mind. He glares at me when he sees me watching them. I'm so cold.

"Andrea?" I say out loud. Why are these guys all looking at me?

She doesn't hear me. "ANDREA!"

The bass in the music makes me almost choke what's going on I can't even swallow. She can't hear me. I wonder if she'd even notice if I left. Why am I here? I slide her jacket off from the back of her chair and put it on quietly. She glances at me and says nothing.

They both turn to me slowly. "It's your turn next, Rinn."

Forget it. I just want to go home and I can't believe I just thought that. I fold up the collar to Andrea's jacket, hiding my mouth. If I speak I think I'll probably cry. Why is she treating me like this? If she works with kids, she should know better. She's

ignoring me, treating me like I'm her age. I'm not her age! I'm younger! I'm 13 years old, and I don't understand what the fuck is going on here. If I sang, I could show them that I'm good, I could tell my friends I sang at a bar. I sang at a bar. Well I can still tell them I sang at a bar, they'll never know. I am a damn good singer but no one will ever know 'cause I'm not sure I'll even make it to the stage.

5 Andrea

I'm not doing this any longer.

Oliver says I should be tough. Don't give her much attention. At first I thought he might be right, but I have a gut feeling against this. I can't trust my instincts with one kid, it's just not going to work.

"C'mon," I whisper to Rinn, standing up quickly. "Come with me for a second."

I lead her back through the thick crowd of the bar, and I see Oliver get up to talk to the band on the stage. I don't stop walking until we're outside in the gray alley behind the club. Rinn walks slowly, leaning forward, almost stumbling. She hasn't had a thing to drink tonight, I know that, because there's no alcohol in my house and we just got here. She keeps mentioning cigarettes. Oh God, has she had enough to eat? I close the door to the club and pull up a milk crate for her to sit on. She falls down onto it, knees bent in toward each other, hugging them to her chest. She is still wearing my jacket.

"Rinn, are you cold?"

"No."

"Can you tell me how you feel?"

"Can't describe... ever... you know." Her voice is barely audible.

Yes, I know. And that's it, we're leaving.

6 Rinn

In the car.

Heading home.

Home...

Hungry.

Andrea knew what I was thinking. I didn't even know what I was thinking.

That's never happened before, not with anyone.

But I have no idea what she's thinking. I guess 130 isn't that high after all. I remember that she keeps a journal. I wonder.

Tired. Oliver driving. Andrea leaning her head back on the seat. Oliver glances over. C'mon, Andrea, do something. Smile at him. She's ridiculous. She doesn't even know he's looking at her. Or if she does, she doesn't care. Oliver has a strong back, nice neck, with thin chain around it. Collar of black jacket turned up slightly in the back by mistake. Want to reach out and fix it. Too far away. I hate seatbelts. He drives carefully. Fast, but careful. He's about to turn left, quick shoulder check, there it is. Signal, quickly, lane change. Polite wave to driver behind who let him in. My mother drives as if the road knows what she's thinking. Awkwardly, busy, yet not fast enough. She never does that shoulder check. She's been in three accidents. Of course I've always been with her. So I guess I've been in three accidents also. And I'm only thirteen. Imagine when I'm Andrea's age!

Once a guy bumped into us from behind. We couldn't even see him coming. He just came up to a stoplight and didn't stop. Probably wanted to hit us. That was on a Monday morning I remember and my neck ached until the next weekend. The other two times we bumped into other people at stoplights. See, I told you my Mom doesn't pay attention. Blamed it on the city in the winter. They didn't clean up all the ice, so she can slide around the rules.

Car is stopping suddenly.

“Hey! What's going on?!”

Oliver turns around, putting one arm across Andrea's seat. “Rinn, it's okay, there's just a train.”

“Shit. I want to go home.” Did I say that out loud?

Andrea and Oliver look at each other quickly.

“What?” They're talking about me AGAIN!

Andrea says, “Nothing.”

“No, you two just looked at each other and made a face. What do you mean?”

Oliver. “Nothing. Don't worry.” Exchange another look. Do they think I'm stupid? Wait, of course they do.

“Fine! Don't tell me. You're probably dying for me to be out of the way so you can talk about me, or whatever else you do when you're alone. Oh, wait, you're just friends, right. Sorry, I forgot.”

Andrea. “Rinn, slow down, there's nothing wrong. Let's just wait this train out and get some sleep, okay? There's nothing much we can do tonight. We might as well just relax and worry about stuff in the morning.” She yawns.

Whatever, then. She knows what's wrong with me. She's got all those thick books those books of theories and ideas and answers and they've probably fixed so many people I know and if she's not going to tell me anything I will learn I WILL I will find out for myself.

7 Andrea

My bed is really soft tonight. I love the feeling of just falling into bed when you're really really tired. Of course, my mind is racing with unanswered questions. Do I listen to Oliver and report her to children's services, risk getting sued, but return her to her family? Do I simply pretend I don't want to spend any more time with her and send her out alone into the world? Do I set up rules for her to follow, like the ones she ran away from? What does she need from me? Am I completely at fault? Does she like me? Does she like me? Does she like me?

Tomorrow. If I can't do something about it right now, there's no point worrying about it, right? Tomorrow. I need to talk to someone. Emerson would be the perfect person. She is a friend I used to work for in the summer, however, we aren't really talking that much anymore. Sometimes you just need a break, a space of time without someone in your life, to prove you can make decisions on your own. She was starting to mother me and there's no need for that. No, much as I'd like to call her, I'll use my professional resources. Gotta be independent.

I'm going to talk to Dr. Fischer about it. She'll know what to do. Dr. Fischer even offered last semester that if I ever needed someone to talk to, I could go to her. I need some advice now, that's for sure. I'll go talk with her. Maybe Rinn and I can go somewhere for lunch first, and have a good talk. I need to know what she wants, if she wants me to help, if she wants me to take her home. I could easily rent a car and drive her home to Toronto, or Oliver could drive us. I wonder if she'd let me call her Mom,

but I don't even know her last name! She won't tell me. Too many possibilities, and I'm really tired. The possibilities are all blending into each other—my mother always says don't make important decisions by the light of the moon.

Rinn is asleep in the other bedroom. First she gulped down two bowls of cheerios in about fifteen seconds. Then, I gave her the choice of some of my pajamas, and of course she picked the one nightgown I have that could be considered slinky. Oh well, it doesn't make any difference. Rinn fell right into bed without even washing off her makeup. Surprised me. Oliver has to spend the night on my couch. His headache was so bad he couldn't drive anymore. That's really not good. I want some time alone with Rinn. Of course, he spent about half an hour trying to persuade me to let him sleep with me. Just in the same bed, Andrea, he said, just sleep in the same bed. With my luck he's in love with me. And that's the last thing I need to deal with right now. I'm trying to help someone. But it would be so comforting, so warm, he said. My thoughts are crowded enough—I need room to sleep and space to myself.

I turn on a quiet CD and program it to play through once and then turn off. Try to concentrate on the music. If I think too hard I'll never sleep. At least it's not too quiet. I hate it when it's too quiet. I try my mother's old trick of tensing each muscle in your body separately and then relaxing it. My toes ache. Tense. Relax. My legs are stiff. Tense. Relax. My quads. Count backwards from one hundred by three's. I'm frustrated, should be able to do this. One hundred, ninety-seven, ninety-four, ninety-one, eighty-eight. Eighty-eight sheep jumping over my apartment building. That's funny.

8 Rinn

They were talking forever while I was changing for bed why are they talking about me I know they're talking about me they're ganging up on me. I take up too much room. I should go on a diet I'm too large I'm just too big for this apartment I'm in the way jutting out into the space that should be wide open there's no room left for air and I'm going to suffocate us all. There was no air in the airplane air all around but none inside although maybe that's the way it's supposed to be I've never been on an airplane before. Mother next to me squeezing my hand fingers turn white then red again let go, Mom, let go. Practice questions for the show. You know, Catherine, they're going to ask you about skipping school, eh, what will you say? You know, Catherine, they're going to ask you about drinking, eh, what will you say? You know, Catherine, they're going to ask you about running away, eh, what will you say then? Running away to let others fix the problems. New hair-do to be on TV. We can afford that. What are you going to say if they ask you if it's your fault, Mom? You know they always blame the parents always blame them for not paying enough attention to their children even though the problem is children paying too much attention to their parents I know the truth and I can't sleep stop talking outside my room I can't believe Andrea has a guest room no one has guest rooms anymore guests are always in the way. Pillow's too fluffy beat it down beat it down flatten it suffocate it before it suffocates me damn fucking sheets are too tight can't move my feet legs ankles knees trapped can't move or walk or get anywhere.

Jump out of bed. Silence. Middle of the room is still and soft quiet whispering walls all around would they stopped if I screamed really loud?

Take a deep breath. Suck all the air out of the room. Breathe it back slowly. I'm keeping you alive, walls. Without me you would fade away and fade away and maybe even die. I can control you. I'll breathe back little puffs every once and a while to give you a little more life. So tired so tired so tired. I can make myself faint. I'll be the first girl ever who breathed life into walls. The whispering walls will not be quiet. Shhhh. His voice is too loud, peeling wallpaper away, ripping, tearing it into shreds. Be quiet. Hush. I'll make you hush.

9 Andrea

From the hall outside my room I hear a thud, like the sound of a book hitting the floor. I leap out of bed and stand motionless in the middle of my dark room. Reflexes. My nerves are just insane lately. Another softer sound. Shuffling. Door closing. I hit the stop button on the CD player and stand very still. I can barely make out voices in the living room.

A light airy voice. "Oliver, are you awake?"

A deeper voice, clearing throat. "Uh, yeah, what?"

"It's me."

"What? Huh?"

I walk quickly across the cool floor. What could she need? Rinn has been in bed for all of about an hour. I nudge the door open just a crack so I can see the couch in the living room. Rinn, dressed only in my blue silk nightgown, stands in front of the couch on which Oliver is lying, still wearing his khaki pants and a T-shirt. His dress shirt is draped carefully over the back of my armchair. What the hell is she doing? I strain to hear her light voice.

"Hi Oliver, can I sit down?"

"Uh, yeah, is everything okay?"

"Well, Oliver, I've got tell ya, I'm not Andrea's cousin, you know." Of course Oliver knew. I just didn't want to embarrass her—

"Um, okay, Catherine, you're not her cousin. Now leave me alone, I'm tired."

“Hey, my name’s Rinn, you know that.” She stands up briefly, angered, and then sits down lightly again, leaning over him. He sits up abruptly. “Listen, Oliver, I’m going to tell you the truth, but first you gotta tell me something.” She moves over to the coffee table, perching on the edge and facing Oliver. Their knees were touching. She puts her hands on his knees. Oliver turns a pale shade of red and he looks confused.

“Oliver, how much do you like me?” She leans in, staring him in the eyes.

I grip the doorknob. Should I go out? I am not eavesdropping. I am in my room, sleeping. I told her I was going to bed. She must believe me. Plus, Oliver’s a grown man, he can take care of himself with a thirteen year old girl. But what the hell is she doing?

Rinn’s body leans forward, she must be, wait, she’s sliding her hands up his thighs, and then back down to rest on his knees.

“Listen, Rinn, you should go back to—”

“I wanna know, Oliver, do you like me? You don’t know anything about me, anything that’s true anyway. But you lied also. You said you were in the fucking mob, not that I’d fall for that, but you lie too. So you can’t get mad at Andrea. I’m not her cousin, but I’m not telling you who I am until you tell me if you like me—”

“Of course I like you, Rinn.”

“Why? I don’t get it. What’s there to like in a kid like me?” Is she trying to be coy? I can’t tell.

“Hey, don’t talk like that.”

Damn it, Oliver!

“You’re very, um, likable. Andrea likes you a lot--”

“I don’t care about her. What do you think of me?”

“Well, uh, you’re smart, Andrea told me you were, and you’re uh, very pretty, and I’m sure you can be a very nice girl. I’ll bet you have lots of friends too.”

“Yeah, but none as hot or sexy as you, Oliver. None as hot as you.” Her voice grows softer as she runs her hands up his thighs again. In one smooth movement, she climbs forward onto his lap, one knee on either side, and wraps her arms around his chest. Kissing him on the neck, she hugs herself to him. Her straight blonde hair falls around Oliver’s face and I can’t see his expression. Then she arches her back, sighing softly, and leans her head back, one hand on the strap of the nightgown.

Oliver holds her by the shoulders and pushes her away gently but firmly. She stumbles backward and sits awkwardly on the coffee table again. “Okay, you know? This is not a good idea, not at all, I mean--”

“Don’t worry, I’ve done it before, you know.”

“That doesn’t matter. I don’t want to--” Oliver’s voice strains.

“Sure you don’t.”

“I don’t! Damn, listen--”

“You’re gonna to tell me you don’t want to fuck me.”

Please, Oliver, be patient.

“NO!”

“You said you liked me!”

“I like you! That’s true! Damn it, but I’m not gonna, listen, I’m not gonna have sex with you!” He tries to keep his voice controlled and quiet. His forehead shines with

beads of sweat and he nervously runs a hand through his hair. She sits very still and her face is bright red.

“But you said you liked me! You said I was stunning!”

“Oh fuck—No, I mean, Rinn, I still do like you. But you don’t have to do anything. I’ll always like you. But Rinn, God, you’re just a child—”

“I’m just a child.” Her voice is oddly without tone.

“Shit, I shouldn’t have said that. Listen, Rinn, you’re a wonderful girl. But you’re a girl. You’re still so young, you don’t need to be worried about this stuff yet!”

“You don’t know what I need to be worried about.”

“God, I’m so sorry. Rinn, listen, it was just a misunderstanding. Rinn, it’s okay.”

“I’m sorry I bothered you, Oliver. But nothing’s okay. I’m fuckin’ far from okay, and if you can’t see that now—Forget it. Sorry.” She stands up, shaking, one hand holding her hair back and the other wiping her eyes. Her black eye makeup is smeared in two black tracks across her face, but Oliver does not mention this. He simply stands also and gathers her in a firm hug. Then he holds her at arm’s length and pats one hand on the top of her head to smooth her hair.

“Go to bed, Rinn.”

She leaves the room quickly, not looking back.

I don’t care about being quiet anymore. The door slams lightly behind me as I run into the living room. Oliver stands in the middle of the room, staring at nothing in particular, mouth slightly open and hands clasped. When he looks at me his eyebrows wrinkle slightly. He shakes his head slowly.

“You did the right thing. Oliver, don’t worry. You did nothing wrong. In fact, you probably really helped her.”

“Sure, just like you’re helping her.” Oliver angrily gathers up his shoes and shirt and slams the front door as he leaves. I know she can’t stay here. She has been transplanted. She used the tricks she has already and has failed. All I can do is mastermind.

10 Rinn

“What are you going to do, Rinn?”

Andrea doesn't waste time. She sits across from me at the kitchen table, wearing plaid pajamas, her hair tied back in a purple bandana. Her hand is glued to the side of her face and she hugs her knees to her chest. She looks almost as old as my mom right now. Except my mom's hair is a lot grayer. She might start dying it. I don't know. We were going to go to the drug store to pick out hair colours on the way home from the talk show. I wonder if she still got the hair dye. It's too quiet in here way too quiet I hate it when it's too quiet.

“What are you going to do?”

My cereal is getting soggy. I want to dump it down the sink. I can't answer. Somebody better tell me what to say. Don't know what to say. She is so fucking calm I wish she would just yell or scream or anything!

“Rinn?”

“What the fuck do you mean? You're the one who brought me here, I mean, didn't you have a plan? Didn't you know what the fuck you were getting into?”

“Listen, I meant—”

“WHAT? What did you mean to do? I don't know why the fuck I came with you. Did you not have a plan? You just enjoy stealing kids from talk shows and messing with their minds screwing them up making them think that you've got some clue of how to help them and you really DON'T!”

Andrea stands up and angrily grabs her coffee cup. What have I done I've made her mad she's fed up with me now I better start thinking of a way to get back to Toronto but I don't even have any money. What's she doing now? Opening up her journal that was hidden from me in the side table but I already found it. I look away quickly and then glance back. She opens it, puts on a baseball hat, pulls it low over her eyes and begins writing very quickly.

She's writing about me she's complaining about me stop it! "What are you doing?"

"Writing."

"I can see that. What are you writing? You making a list of just how fucked up I am?"

"No."

"Making up stories?" About me. I'm sure.

"I don't make up stories. Never have. I'm writing about myself."

"Oh." She's writing about herself. That's just great. I watch the clock count out fifteen long minutes before I let myself talk again. She doesn't say a word to me. I wonder what the hell she's planning on doing today. Of course it's Saturday. I don't even know where she works. I wonder what'll happen Monday morning. I can't stay here alone—what if Oliver comes over. I'd have to face him alone.

"What are you writing about yourself? I mean, what do you write?"

"Mostly whatever comes to mind."

"That would never work for me."

"Oh really?"

“Nope.”

“Why not?”

“I’m way too screwed up. Way too many problems.”

“You know what, Rinn? I don’t even have a clue what all these problems are. You keep talking about them, but you haven’t told me a detail and I don’t really care—all I see is a girl who is away from home and sometimes jumps to conclusions about what other people are thinking, like me.”

“You’re wrong! People jump to conclusions about me!”

“Not fair, is it.”

She’s taking notes about me, probably to analyze me later. There’s nothing I can do.

I let the clock count out twenty minutes this time.

“Andrea?”

“What, Rinn?” She looks up slowly.

“Never mind.”

Andrea puts down her pen and looks up. “Are you okay, Rinn?”

“No.”

A pause. Her face softens. “What could I do, Rinn, what on earth can I do right now, to make you feel better, just for a minute?”

There is a look in her eyes, like they cover over with a thin little mirror so I can see my own face. Heather, my babysitter, used to read me *Alice in Wonderland*. She’s the last grown-up I remember looking at me this way. When people look at me this way I speak and sometimes I don’t even hear the words I say.

“Um, a story, you could read me a story—” I can’t believe I let myself say that out loud.

“Read you—” She looks down at her notes.

“No, I mean, you could tell me a story.”

“Yeah, I think I could do that.” Andrea almost smiles as she stands up, closes her journal in one hand, her finger between the pages. “You know, a lot of people say I’m a pack rat. But when you need a story, all my things come in handy. Point to something, and I’ll tell you the story of where it came from. And promise you’ll finish your cereal?”

“Okay. I will.”

“What will it be?” Now she is smiling for real why is she smiling I just interrupted her and she’s probably just keeping track of what I say I wish I could figure this out.

“Something from your big thick textbooks over there.”

Andrea looks over at the tightly packed shelf. The titles leap across the room. Personality and Adjustment in the 90’s. Abnormal Psychology. New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis. Understanding Childhood Behaviour Disorders. Adolescent Females: Search for a Voice. A search for a voice.

Andrea looks surprised and then sad.

“You know what, Rinn?”

“What?”

“I’ve read about a chapter in each one. I don’t even know if I could remember anything from those books. I’ve never been good at reading and remembering things. It takes years and years and years to learn and understand it all.”

“Sure, and I’m good practice, right?”

“Does it seem like I’m practicing?”

“Well, you just asked a question back to me!”

“See, you are pretty smart. But really, the books are for school. I need a break, and I don’t want to talk about school. Don’t be silly and pick out a real story!” She is really smiling at me. Really smiling.

“Any of the text books good?”

“Some. Some are good. Some have good ideas. But I like storytelling better, as long as the stories are real. In fact, you can have all the textbooks if ya want! They’re yours! When you go home I’ll just pack ‘em up and you can have them forever and ever.”

I picture myself walking into Darcy’s apartment with a pile of University textbooks. I smile and wipe my eyes on the back of my hand. Why do I always have to cry! Okay. Calm down. “I know, tell me the one about that picture of you at Vimy Ridge?”

“Eat your cereal. Classic first line of any story. Eat your cereal, by Andrea Patricia Gartner.”

I laugh, and she continues. “It was raining and very foggy when I went to the Vimy Ridge War Memorial in France.”

Her voice sounds so much like Heather's I choke briefly on my cereal. She stops reading.

"Now, if you're going to laugh—"

"NO! I want to hear it. Go on, please."

"I was on a whirlwind European tour and when we reached France I was very tired and the first thing I saw when we hit Calais, near the North, was a Canadian Flag blowing in the wind. When our tour bus stopped, a French Guide stepping on board and asked how many people on the bus were Canadian. I raised my hand, along with a couple of other people. He walked down the aisle and handed all the Canadians a souvenir colour photo book and a pin. 'I'd like to welcome the Canadians here,' he said with no traces of a French accent, 'and to thank you and your ancestors for your brave efforts in 1917 in the victory at Vimy Ridge by the Canadian Corps. All Canadians are asked to proceed to the main gate. You are entering Canadian soil.'

"So all of the Canadians walked to this little booth at the main gate and the first thing I recognized was the brown uniform that I always see on National Parks Canada employees. I'd been away from home for a long time and that uniform, let alone the pride I felt, almost made me cry. A woman stood behind the desk and opened a large wooden-covered guest book. She smiled up at us and handed us a pen. 'Welcome home,' she said. That's when I actually did start crying. I couldn't help it. I could see the others walking slowly through the remaining trenches, staring up at the giant white towers in the monument, reading signs warning people to steer clear from areas that were still dangerous. It was all so real, and although I don't know a lot about World War

I, even our efforts in it, I felt so strangely at home. I felt like I belonged and I was really overwhelmingly proud.

“She explained that it is their policy that no Canadian should visit without being personally guided through the bunkers and the shell-marked walls, and we set off for our tour. See, it’s things like that that make the topics you learn in school really come to life. So that’s when I took the picture. So what you do think?”

“That was a good story.”

Andrea laughs.

“What, it was a really good story! I don’t know much about World War One either, but we take that next year in school, I think. I’ll learn.”

“That’s right, kiddo, you will.”

“Hey Andrea?”

“Yeah?”

“You think I should dye my hair? I was thinking of dying it darker. About the colour of your friend’s in that picture, the one of you and your two friends on the beach. See, like this girl’s short hair. You think?”

“Keep it, Rinn. Your hair is fine.”

I take another few bits of my cereal. Andrea sips her coffee. She looks far away again. “Listen, why don’t you just give me a little bit to finish writing, maybe take a walk outside?”

“You don’t want me around, that’s what you mean.”

“Rinn, do you ever just want a space of time to think by yourself, maybe a couple of minutes—”

“Yeah, but someone always barges in. Forget it. I’ll go outside.”

I shut the door behind me and stop in the doorway. This room is really stuffy.

Out of the window, I can see a small park across the street. A tall woman, about Mom’s age, sits on a bench, wearing dark sunglasses and reading a book. She has beautiful red hair, short and curly. I wonder if my hair would look good that colour. She looks almost like a movie star, like a famous person in disguise to walk around in public. She turns toward me. Never mind, she is practically my mom’s age. There is also a group of guys playing with a Frisbee and a couple walking a dog, and even a couple of girls about my age, sitting around watching the guys with the Frisbee.

“I’ll be back in a minute.” I yell to Andrea.

“Fine.” No questions asked.

11 Rinn

The woman with the movie-star hair walks up to me. “Is the rest of this bench taken? Mine’s in the shade and it’s kind of cold this afternoon!”

“Uh, whatever, sure.”

“I’m sorry, are you new around here? I thought I knew everyone in this area.”

“Sure, I’m new.”

“Did you just move in?”

“Yeah, I moved into a big house with my family a couple of um, streets over that way.”

“What’s your name?”

“Um, Kat.”

“Is that short for Catherine?”

“Yeah, that’s right.”

“Neat name. Actually, it suits you.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, it’s a fun name, young and sharp. And you’re young and stylish, I don’t know, but it just suits you. I don’t know about mine, my name is Meg, Meg Fischer. I don’t think it goes with the red hair. Meg’s such a snappy name, and I just don’t think it goes. Red is much more exotic. You think I should dye it blonde, like yours?”

“Mine’s not dyed!”

“Of course not, but I like your colour. You think it would look good on me?”

“Well, sure. I mean, you’re not that old.”

“Why thank you! I don’t *feel* old at all. And you, let me guess, you’re say, 16?”

“I wish! I’m only 13.”

“13 is the greatest age. I loved being 13. This is a great park too, I used to come here a lot when I was younger. I ran into a friend of mine here just a little while ago, actually, her name is Andrea—oh my GOD, that Frisbee almost hit me in the face! *Here you go, boys! Be careful with that thing!* Hey, Kat, did you see that? One of those boys just winked at you.”

“Meg, guys don’t *wink* at people anymore.”

“Well, I think you better tell him that, because now he’s smiling at you!”

“Leave me alone! Can’t you see I’m trying to have a conversation? Go back to your game and mind your own business!”

“You tell ‘em, Kat!”

“So your friend, Andrea, is she, um, your age?”

“No, she’s only about early twenties or so. I could be her mother! But she’s a great friend of mine. Such a fun person.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, she takes kids from our area of the city camping every summer, just for fun. She’s one of those adventurous types, you know, always travelling or doing something neat like that.”

“I’ve seen someone like that around—”

“But you just moved in, right.”

“Yeah, that’s right. I, uh, moved here by myself.”

“Really? Your mother must be really worried about you!”

“Yeah, well she hasn’t even phoned!”

“Did she not know where you were moving?”

“Um, well, she knows, but she hasn’t called yet.”

“Well, look at me carrying on. I’m sorry to chat your ear off, I’ll get back to my book now. Nice to talk to you, Kat.”

The wind calms.

Pages turning.

The Frisbee sails by.

“Damn it!”

“What is it, Kat?”

“Sorry – I’ll let you read.”

“No, what is it?”

“It’s these stupid boys, they keep staring at me, and I mean, well, I’m not even dressed up, I’m wearing, um, my friend’s shirt!”

“Well, I don’t really know you, but I have to say you’re a very attractive girl. Of course they’d be silly not to look, but it would be great if *they’d LOOK BACK TO THEIR GAME AND LEAVE YOU ALONE*, wouldn’t it?”

“Wow! Meg! You scared them!”

“Yeah, it comes with the territory. I can be quite terrifying!”

“Um, what do you do?”

“Work?”

“Yeah.”

“I teach Psychology.”

“Oh, well then. Um, that’s cool, I mean.”

“Yeah, well, it’s a living. And I happen to love it, so it’s all quite good. Sorry, I must be just talking your ear off once again. I’ll leave you alone.”

The wind picks up again.

The Frisbee cannot keep up.

“Did ya read a lot? I mean, did ya have to read tonnes of books to learn how to be a psychologist, or did ya just watch like talk shows and stuff?”

“What? Talk shows?”

“Yeah?”

“Books, Kat. I read books but more importantly, I spent time with children and learned how they work.”

“Good, ‘cause I don’t really think that talk shows are all that great, I mean, I think their idea of how to solve stuff sucks. I mean, they make you feel like shit!”

“How do you know that?”

“Oh, well I was on one. Just a couple of days ago, actually, the taping.”

“You were?! Well, you’re incredibly brave.”

“Brave?”

“Well, you’d have to be, going on television talking about all your experiences. They must have asked you a lot of difficult questions.”

“Yeah, and they kept calling me by the wrong name, too. Kept calling me Catherine!”

“Kat’s easier. Much shorter.”

“Yeah, but my mom was more interested in it than me.”

“Was your mom more interested in the show than you were, or more interested in the show than in you?”

“Yeah.”

“I know what you mean.”

“So what did they call your mom?”

“Mrs. Tamrack. Deserves respect, ‘cause she’s older, of course. They kept yelling at me to respect my mom, yelling at me, screaming at me, and no one in that whole room respected me at all.”

“They were all concerned about you respecting your mother, right?”

“Yeah. It’s like they just cared about her, not me. I honestly don’t do anything purposely to make Mom mad at me. I just want her to leave me alone, stop trying to interfere with my life and let me make decisions on my own!”

“I hear a lot of girls who have that problem with their mothers. Mothers care so much about everything, don’t they?”

“Yeah, sometimes I think she’s more interested in my life than I am! Anyway, I kind of just left the taping. I couldn’t take any more of the shit.”

“No way! You just left, ran away from the show?”

“Yeah!”

“That is also very brave.”

“Yeah, I don’t know if my friends would think it’s brave. Well, it was a risk, I guess. But that’s what they like to say about me. Like to talk about how I take risks all the time.”

“Wow, what a story to tell when you get home! Everyone’s going to want to hear about it and how you just showed those people how you really felt!”

“Yeah, I can’t tell them everything, but I’ll tell them exactly what that show was like! It’s not all glamour, you know. The lights were really hot. They were burning my eyes. And it was so hot on that stage, I could barely breathe. And I was so scared to leave the show with mom, I was scared she’d be even more mad at me after it. But now, I guess, well, I am going to tell them all what it’s really like.”

“I think it’s about time someone did. You could really make a difference, you know, you could really change the way people look at the shows. And you’ll have plenty of time for that when you get home.”

“Yeah, I guess so.”

“Kat, I was wondering, why were you worried that your mom might be more upset after the show?”

“Well, I don’t think she had a good time either.”

“Was it her idea to go on the show?”

“No, it was my dad’s.”

“Your dad’s?”

“I don’t want to talk about it.”

The Frisbee fades away.

The boys follow.

The sound of thoughts echoing

“When I was your age, my dad had to move away. He got a new job in the states, one that he liked a lot better than his old one, so he decided to take it. It was really

difficult for my brothers and I to get used to, and I realized as I grew older that it hurt my mother the most.”

“My mom and I handled it fine when he left.”

“So your father had to leave also?”

“Yeah, but believe me, that was NOT a bad thing.”

“When did it get hard?”

“When he came back.”

“Oh, Kat, that must have been very hard. When did he come back?”

“Last Christmas. Just showed up after school one day, when Mom was still at work. I mean, he was gone for a while. He moved out when I was in kindergarten or something, and Mom and I were just fine. And then there he was. He was carrying one paper bag of groceries and standing there in the snow on the front porch. He just said ‘Hi, Catherine’, and then made me unload another two bags of groceries from the car. Then he asked me to make him dinner, dinner for him and me and my mom. Inside the bags there was bread and a couple of steaks, but no vegetables or anything like fruit, and of course there were two bottles of wine. Gotta have the wine. Or whatever else. Then he went upstairs and after a while I heard the TV. I couldn’t do anything. Then when Mom came home from work she yelled at me for letting him in and then said she was sorry for yelling at me. She does that a lot now.”

“I can imagine it will be very hard for her, but she’ll work through it.”

“Yeah, that’s great, but what about me in the meantime? There’s no one to notice anything about me anymore. I mean, things were so just getting better for me and

then he shows up and all kinds of things go wrong and Mom is always worried about him.”

“Why is she worried about him?”

“Cause he’s a lot to worry about.”

“Why is that?”

“I don’t want to talk about it.”

A deliberate pause.

The sun grows dimmer.

“Of course, you remember, that his answer to fix all the problems Mom and I were having—sending us to the talk show. I think things would have gotten better. She was going to let my friend Darcy come over for dinner next week.”

“That’s great! It’s hard to imagine that your dad would do that! Did he think it was a good idea?”

“He thought the money was!”

“Did you want to go to the show, Kat?”

“No.”

“Do you think your mom wanted to?”

“No, but I think she thought I did.”

“Why would she think that?”

“Cause I said I wanted to go.”

“But you didn’t?”

“Not the show, but I don’t know, a trip with Mom to Detroit. Didn’t sound too bad.”

The sun is fading.

The wind grows colder.

“What do you like to do, Kat?”

“What do ya mean?”

“I mean in school, after school, what do you like to do? What interests you most of all?”

“Well, I love to sing.”

“Really? Are you in the choir at school?”

“We do have a jazz group, I think, I’ve never really thought of that.”

“Wow, jazz! I think that’s exciting.”

“Yeah, it’s kinda cool.”

12 Andrea

“Hello?”

“Andrea! It’s Oliver. I am so good. Are you impressed? I mean, I’d be impressed with me if I were you! I’m sorry, but I had to do something.”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

“Dr. Fischer! Isn’t she there?”

“No, she’s not here—Oliver, what the hell do you mean?!”

“Well, then I don’t know what happened to her. Andrea, I’m sorry, but I *had* to do something. This whole thing is starting to make me angry. It’s like you’re obsessed, and I don’t get it! So anyway, I ran into Dr. Fischer when I was coming out of another class and she asked how you were doing, and I just had to tell her. Anyway, she said she’d come by your apartment right away, said she was in the neighbourhood—”

“God, Oliver, you’re not serious!”

“I just told her you had this kid staying with you, this runaway, and you thought you had a good handle on helping her, but you know, things are never as easy as they look, and she just wasn’t fitting in!”

“Do you THINK I don’t know that?! Where the hell is she? Wait, just a minute.”

Rushing over to the window, I can see the small park below. Sure enough, Dr. Fischer sits with Rinn calmly on a park bench. The two look to be talking easily.

“Yeah, but listen, Andrea, she wasn’t too impressed. Dr. Fischer, I mean. She made me explain the story about three times and then she said that she’d need to talk to you.”

“They’re talking, Oliver, you idiot, she ran into Rinn first. They’re talking in the park right outside the building. I can’t believe this.”

“Shit! Well, she knows what’s going on now. Damn.”

I drop the receiver gently onto the coffee table, Oliver expertly explaining to the cool plastic how he knew that everything was better this way. Rinn was right. I had no control over the situation and I am staring to wonder if I ever did. She surely knows now that I never had a plan. I thought I’d grown past thinking that risk was a good thing.

On the other side of the glass, Rinn and Dr. Fischer sit talking. Dr. Fischer is laughing and waving her hands about as if conducting a choir. Rinn smiles brightly. Dr. Fischer came into my life with an unusually warm summer wind and instructed classes that taught me intricate lessons, and quickly. She expects a lot of her students and I expect she knew exactly how to direct Rinn. Dr. Fischer looks up at my apartment window and I don’t shrink back against the curtains. She sees me and her gaze sears across the park, up through the air and right into my eyes.

I lift the receiver and say in a cool tone: “Oliver, if you can, do me this one last thing to help. Come over and keep Rinn company in the park so Dr. Fischer can come up and talk to me. Can you do that?” I listen for the muffled yes, and then I drop the phone back in its cradle.

I hold my journal in damp hands and the pen has bled all over my thumb and index finger. Rinn eyed my journal more than once. I wipe my hands on my pants and turn the page.

Fresh sheet of paper. Careful composition.

I read it over four times, but never make it quite to the end without starting over from the beginning.

The knock on the door comes as soon as I fold the journal back together and lay it gently on top of the side-table.

Dr. Fischer stands outside my apartment. I could say she is shaking her head at me, but it's more than that. Her eyes are angry, frustrated, caring, and confused at the same time. She walks quickly into the room and straight into the kitchen, where she pours herself a glass of water and drinks the whole thing before saying a word. She's disappointed in me.

"You know, Andrea, I'm involved now."

Shaking my head quickly I clench the doorknob with my hand. "You know? I didn't call you, so you can just get out of here. I can handle it."

"Andrea, there's no need to cry—"

"Just get out of my apartment. I don't care. No, wait. Why don't you just storm in here and pull down exactly the textbook you want to cite. I've got them all! See! They're right over here!"

She tries to grab my shoulder as I run across the room and pull the textbooks off the shelves. "Can't even fucking lift them in one hand—they're so dense, even denser than my biology books, that's right, I was in pre-med. before I switched to Psych. Pre-

MED! And now I've just got years of knowledge, years of sixty-plus men in starched collars sitting in offices that reek of cigar smoke, oh yeah, and all the hotshot young professors in Chanel suits—that's what they say, right, Chanel returned female strength to the workplace, reclaimed the look of a woman with the woman's power suit, so everyone can sit around together and PACK all these studies into these books, these books that SHE SAW!"

"Andrea, please, just take one deep breath. Listen to what you're saying. Good. Good. Why are you trying to say?"

"She saw the books on my shelf. And now she has met you. She thinks I just want to study her."

Dr. Fischer pours me a glass of water and sits on the chesterfield, leaning forward, hands beside her knees. "Did you ever talk to her about the books? I'm sure Kat knows why—"

"What? Who?"

"Oh, dear. Andrea, she told me to call her Kat."

"What?! Her name's Rinn!"

"Really, it's quite common to change—"

"I can't take much more of this! It's common for thirteen year old girls to notice Psychology text books and ask with fear lining their faces how much I've read? It's common for thirteen year old girls to try to seduce men in their twenties as some sort of desperate effort to belong somewhere, even for a night?"

"Oh, that's not good. She tried to seduce Oliver?"

"Yeah. Last night."

“That is not good at all. Trying to claim what’s yours?”

“Oliver most certainly is not mine!”

“All right.” She pauses and sips her water. “What on earth did he do?”

“Well,” I replayed the past night briefly in my mind. “Well, he told her she didn’t need to worry about these things yet, and he got the hell out of here.”

Neither of us speak for a moment, and then Dr. Fischer suddenly laughs under her breath, and quickly tries to cover it up with a discreet cough. I catch her eye. Then, we both break into a clear laughter that releases all the tension that was waiting, lifting in the back of my throat.

“I’m sure he did get the hell out of there!” Dr. Fischer laughs loudly.

“Not a second to waste. I’ll bet he didn’t brag about that when he called you!”

“No, he did not mention that at all! Listen, Andrea, and it’s not that I haven’t noticed this in you before, but you’ve really outdone yourself here. You launch your whole heart into things, don’t you?”

I nod, the laughter sliding away and leaving behind a surprisingly hopeful sense of peace.

She continues. “Andrea, they call you, right? Right. Andrea, your determination is very, very admirable. But it’s been almost twenty-four hours now. A child has been missing for almost 24 hours.”

“She’s *not* missing. She called home. Her mother knows where she is,” I say quickly, cutting myself off. I know she left her mother a message. Plus, she’s not missing. She’s right here. How can she be missing? Missing is when you don’t know

where she is. Missing is when there's no one there to help. When someone is missing, they're not safe. And there is nothing in the world you can do fast enough.

“Okay, let's talk about what happened, then. The Oliver situation, for example. Why do you think Rinn tried to seduce Oliver?”

“She told me that she can always get a guy to do what she wants. That's all she said about it. Didn't seem to want to talk about it.”

“So we have a girl who used a tried and true method of hers to get someone to respond and failed. That alone would shock her, and also we don't even know what she wanted Oliver to do, what she wanted. It has to be more than the physical element.”

“I know.”

“She is going to need to talk about that more. She may bring it up.”

“I can do it.”

“Andrea, you know you can't solve this. You know that, right? You can't close this door so you shouldn't be trying to prop it open any wider. What we need to do now is concentrate on getting this child home. She'll find ways to deal with the obstacles she faces, but she needs to find them with someone who'll be there, and for now, that's her mother.”

“What the hell kind of mother would bring her kid to a talk show like that anyway? What the hell kind of mother would let her daughter get so angry that she would do all these terrible things, and get in all sorts of trouble--”

“Andrea! Do you honestly believe that she has really done all those things the show listed? Really! I don't think so! You have no idea what has been going on in her life, and you have no idea what has been going on in her mother's life!”

I study the surface of the water in my glass. “You’re right, I know.”

“Have you considered that the show might have encouraged her to act the way she did? You have no way of knowing if she is as negative as she looked up there. As I said, you do NOT know what has been going on in her mother’s life. Rinn, on the other hand, probably has a very good idea of how her mother feels, and the amount of pressure she is under. It’s very very hard for children to see their parents struggle.”

“Dr. Fischer, she never told me much of anything about that.”

“I’m not surprised. You gave her a break from everything, a deliberate pause. She didn’t have to talk about anything difficult, but whenever she was in a stressful situation, she couldn’t handle it. Like the show. That’s all. I have no doubt that her mother is trying very hard. And Rinn is lucky to have you as a contact, now, a friend. That’s all.”

I remember last night in the bar when Rinn couldn’t even walk toward the stage to sing, her face when she selected the slinky blue nightgown from my drawer to wear.

“Andrea, when is the last time *you* spoke to *your* parents?”

“I don’t know, I talked to my dad the other day, probably not often enough for him though--”

“We know her last name now.”

“She told you her last name?”

“Yes.”

Dr. Fischer offers me a sip of her water, and I finish the glass easily, standing up to fill it. As I pass the window, I see Oliver striding across the park, leaving Rinn sitting on the same bench, her knees hugged up to her chest, drawing her pen rapidly across a

piece of paper. She suddenly looks very small. Looking back at Dr. Fischer, she is slowly wiping a water stain off the rough cover of my journal, which is sitting invitingly on the side-table. She taps it with her index finger twice.

Ultimately, she makes me feel young, a quality I was beginning to feel was leaving me.

13 Rinn

I had a very strange daydream while I was talking to Oliver. I can't believe he just found me in the park he just walked up and once again I wished I had that rabbit hole to just jump down. I never do anything right. Andrea says she writes things down, so I'm trying to write down the daydream it was so weird so almost scary and I don't understand it. Maybe the big textbooks can interpret it for me. I guess that was the most helpful thing he did, leaving me with a pen and paper, even though I practically had to beg him for it. Now I'm trying to remember what the daydream was about, and trying to write it down.

I've had daydreams before, lots of them. I used to hear it all the time from my teachers: "Catherine, stop daydreaming and pay attention to the class." Miss Beals, my Grade seven teacher, used to catch me looking out a window at least three times a day, and make me come up to the front of the room to solve a math problem as punishment. Of course, I usually solved it right. Miss Beals was a very easy teacher, and there was really no one interesting in the class to talk to. One day I came to school early for some reason and heard Miss Beals whining to the Principal, her hand on his shoulder, dabbing her eyes with a Kleenex. "She doesn't pay attention, Jim, and there's nothing left that I can do. She just stares at the boys or daydreams out the window, and then when I ask her to do something, she always gets it right. She acts like she already knows everything I'm teaching, at least that's how I feel, and I can't take it anymore, Jim! It's like she's

trying to mock me or something! But she really is a damn smart kid. Anyway, there's no way around it now. Catherine belongs in Mr. Markus's class." Or something like that.

Grade eight! They skipped me half way through the fall term because Miss Beals cried on the Principal's shoulder. They were probably having an affair. I don't know why else she would call him 'Jim'. She's the only person I've ever met who could whine 'Jim' in two syllables. Anyway, the Grade eight room was really different than Miss Beals'. The desks were in a circle so everyone had to just sit and look at everyone else, and the kids wore all different kinds of pants and skirts. The kids in Grade seven all wore jeans. I was wearing cut-off jean shorts. Not one of the girls smiled at me of course so I sat down between two tall boys. They were probably laughing at me over my head, but at least they weren't mean right to my face. Mr. Markus introduced me as the 'genius kid' from Miss Beals' class and everyone laughed. I settled down low into my desk for another quiet year.

About a half an hour ago when Oliver was sitting across from me, the sun was at his back and the bright light turned his face and body into a dark shadowy cut-out, like you see when someone is standing in front of the light in a picture and you don't have your flash on. I started thinking about how I have fair hair, and lots of it, and how I was facing the sun, but I still couldn't reflect enough light to light up even his face. I couldn't see the expression on his face and, that lost, I gradually stopped hearing what he was saying to me. The rays of light around his shoulders bent and dipped whenever he moved gradually, and they started to look like little fairies, like the ones you see in those dark serious paintings in the museum.

I saw one once with a blonde girl who looked a lot like me was standing in a pond where the water was sparkling. When I looked closer, I saw that it wasn't really sparkling, each little sparkle was a little person down in a little world deep below what looked like water. I stopped and looked at the painting for a long time. Each little fairy was looking up at the girl with the happiest expressions on their faces, the happiest looks that I had ever seen. Here was this little girl stepping into their homes, and she was a giant girl to them, and they looked like they just adored her. I wanted to buy a postcard of the painting (sometimes you find those in the gift shop) so I ran away from my school group and sneaked down to the gift store. Of course, I couldn't remember what the painting was called and the clerk marched me right back up to good old Mr. Markus, who exiled me to the bench in the lobby until the class was done the tour.

My mom was so mad at me that day after the field trip. I remember she yelled at me about getting second chances or something, and then slammed my bedroom door so hard that the light fixture on my ceiling came crashing down. I sat on my bed and watched it for a while before I cleaned it up. Lightning, thunder, and then a rainstorm of glass.

The weightless fairies on Oliver's shoulders today looked very different than the happy ones caught in the painting. That painter must have been very lucky to see such happy, lovely fairies. The ones I saw were different. Some were grinning, and some looked like they were teasing me. Some would strut lightly up to Oliver's ears and kiss them, then turn around and run back down his arms, laughing and shrieking. All of the others would applaud. They were making fun of me.

Some fairies would dance with each other, whirling their partners around and around until one of them would swing dangerously close to the edge and fall off his shoulder. One was pretending to sing. She had a microphone in one hand and kept extending her other little arm out dramatically like an Opera singer. Then she would pause and lean closer to me and make a terrible, horrible face at me. Their laughter looked like it was getting louder, but I don't speak their language and they live in a slower world than I do.

I'm suddenly very hungry. How long has it been since I've eaten? I'm not sure. I used to do that at home, forget to eat. My mom used to remind me to eat lunch. I'd walk in the door and hear, "Hi Rinn, don't say a word until you eat something." For some reason that never made me mad or frustrated. It should have.

Looking down at the paper I am holding, I see that instead of a nice description of my daydream, the paper contains only scratchy drawings of freakish-looking fairies with oversized eyes with lines in them and sneers on their distorted faces. I crumple it up and toss it into a nearby garbage can. I better find something to eat. My mom would always say, "Rinn, you have a fast metabolism. You should be glad, but you have to eat often or else you might get very tired or even sick." I have to eat now.

Of course, that's going to mean going back up to see Andrea. Well, I think, taking a deep breath, I'll have to sometime. I don't think she is still upset. Standing up, I look over to her apartment building and find her window. There are two people standing there, talking. It's Meg! She's talking to Andrea! She must have gone to visit her. I can't go there now! What is Meg *DOING* talking to Andrea? Why do grownups

always always always have to stick together! They're probably talking about me right now I can't believe this.

I wonder if Andrea can whine my name in two syllables.

Actually, I have never heard Andrea whine at all.

It's cold out here but I'm not leaving until I see Meg leave. Get out of there. Doesn't she have her own home to go to? She's just walking back and forth, to the kitchen, out of the kitchen, gestures with her hands, sits on the couch. I can't see the expression on her face. Finally, she leaves.

I creep across the park and sneak back into the building, up the stairs and knock on the door. Andrea opens it and does not mention Meg. Andrea looks a lot older than I remember. Her hair is pulled back into a messy twist in the back, blonde curls falling out all across her forehead. I wonder if she tried to make it look messy on purpose; that's the style these days. It might have been an accident. You never know. It's dangerous to be stylish by accident.

Andrea looks me right in the eyes. Hers are clear yet very alive and bright at the same time. She looks right at me, but her eyes don't distort like the fairies' did. Instead hers line right up with me and she doesn't look at me the way most adults do. I hate the way most adults look at me. Their eyes slide way down their faces and their pupils stick out, almost touching their eyebrows. Oh my god. They start to look just like the fairies in my daydream. Then their foreheads grow at least two inches closer to me and their heads tilt dangerously over to the side and shake slowly slowly slowly from side to side and back again.

This time Andrea raises her chin slightly and tips her head slightly to the side as she frowns with the sides of her forehead. It's a different look. My mom sometimes looks at me this way, but sometimes her head must get just too heavy because she can't hold it up. Sometimes it just falls down and she slips into the wrinkled eyebrows and scrunched forehead fairy look, head shaking slowly slowly slowly from side to side. The difference with my mom is that she cries too. Andrea's eyes are a pale pink, painted with a wash of forgotten tears, and touched up with makeup, maybe for my sake. She parts her lips slowly as if to start speaking. Then she changes her mind. What if she doesn't know what to say? I sometimes have trouble thinking of what to say but I always thought I'd grow out of that. My mom always told me it would get easier.

I drop my jacket on the back of a chair and step into the room. She moves to the side to let me pass.

"You're probably hungry, I'll bet, Rinn?"

I have to eat something how on earth did she know that?

"Fine, don't answer, but it's seven o'clock," She lets out a deep breath, "And I'm hungry and you should eat something too. I'm put a lasagna in the oven about five minutes ago. Do you like lasagna?"

It's my favourite food. How could she know that?

"And I think I'll make some Caesar salad too. Do you know how to make garlic bread?"

She stands facing me, holding lettuce in her hands, a confused look on her face.

I used to make garlic bread every day when I arrived home from school because for a while, it was the only thing I knew how to make. Then my mom pulled me into the

kitchen for a lesson on cooking, said I'd have to be able to cook for myself some day. She said I'd have to be independent, I'd have to take care of myself. I'd better get started, she'd say. It's hard to take care of a child do you KNOW how hard it is to take care of a child and see, I can't do it because look at you, you keep running away and you won't tell me what you're thinking about what ARE you thinking about, Catherine, some day you'll have to take care of a child too, what if she's just like you? And then I'd wonder and think she's right, some day I will have to and imagine if I couldn't do it. None of my friends ever talk about what would happen if we had kids but god, they were just having sex all the time what would I do if I actually got pregnant it scares me so much because I don't even enjoy sex at all, you know, not at all, and there's probably something wrong with me I'm so scared I wonder if I'll always be scared or if I'll ever grow up or if I'll get stuck one day all grown up and not ready not ready at all and I won't be able to make anything all right or even be able to cook anything or find anyone who doesn't already know all about me or hate me and maybe I'll never be able to do any of the things that I'll need to keep me alive.

14 Andrea

“YOU TALKED TO MY MOM!” Rinn is screaming. “YOU TALKED TO MY MOM! YOU TALKED TO HER WHY WHY WHO DO YOU THINK--”

I drop the glass of water I’m holding and rush over to her. “No, Rinn, honey, no, listen—”

“You talked to my mom without me! I can’t believe I followed YOU anywhere, you’re just like everyone else I can’t believe this! You HAVE to tell me what she said! Tell me what she said and you better remember every word ‘cause I’ll know if you’re changing the words!”

“God, Rinn, no, I never called--”

She falls down onto the couch. I sit down quickly on the edge, the pillows sliding down. Putting a hand on her forehead, she is sweating but feels cool. I run into the kitchen and pour her a glass of orange juice, which she drinks shakily and a faint smile peers out from its hiding place behind her large eyes. I hand her a couple of graham crackers which she also begins to eat quietly.

I take a deep breath. “Rinn, the lasagna will be done in 15 minutes.” She nods and unclenches her fists, rubbing her hands together slowly. Her eyes look heavy, and I pull a blanket over her. “Are you okay?” I say. She nods again.

“Happens all the time. I’ll be fine, I know though, I just need to eat.”

“Rinn have you been to see the doctor lately about how you feel when you haven’t eaten enough?”

“Yeah, I almost passed out once last week said it was something about sugar I think Mom made me an appointment for me. It’s on the tenth.” She takes another bite of a cracker and seems almost content.

She mentioned her Mother. I feel tears pounding behind my eyes. No, I gather myself together. That’s Monday. The today is the eighth. I am going to be strong now. She is not lost. I am taking her home.

I am worried about leaving her alone but she seems to be all right. “I’m going to jump into the shower really quickly, okay, Hon? Listen, it’ll be okay. Here, finish off my water and then just rest. When I’m done, the lasagna will be cooked, and we can eat. We can talk a bit while we eat. It’s okay. We can talk about what you want to do. Will you be okay out here for a minute or two?”

15 Rinn

Strawberry suds, I can smell them again. They're back. Water pounding and the shower curtain scraping on the metal rod. The click of the shampoo bottle and the steamy smell of hot water. A thin curl of steam twists out from under the door like the wisps of light around Oliver's shoulders. Shards of daylight sneaking in through the window like glass, sharp light, I can feel it.

I pull myself up to my elbows, and right there, on the side-table is her journal. It sits quietly there, looking at me with its rough blue cover and a black pen resting on top. She wants me to read it why else would she leave it just sitting here on the table especially when there's a kid over kids can't be trusted especially kids with problems like me oh well you know I didn't know better. The journal is slightly warm in my hands. I flip the pages automatically, steadily from the back until I find the curled corners of the most recent entry:

"Rinn's outside going for a walk, or maybe she's talking to the boys who were down in the park playing Frisbee. I'd be surprised if they didn't try to talk to her; they'd be excited about a new girl in the area, especially one as special as her! I hope she tells me the story. I like listening to her. But there's so much I can't really say, 'cause I don't want to tell her what to do.

"What I wish I could tell her is how incredibly brave I think she is. I want to be able to persuade her that everything still can turn out all right, that she has control over this. Everyone is going to be so excited to hear her story when she sees them again at home. They will listen to her because she's got such magic about her..."

“I don’t know why I made up the story about the mob and the bar scene—I guess I just wanted Rinn to think I could handle life at the edge of the allowed, the edge of permission. It was all I could think of was how to get her away from those people on that show. All I could see was her shrinking into her chair. I was scared for her, and then I got so angry.

“I should have taken her to talk to Dr. Fischer by now. She is so good at explaining things. I know what to do but I just can’t explain it right. That’s always what they tell me. They say, ‘Andrea, you know? You always do know just what to do. You always want to help. You have such good ideas but you can’t say them right and you end up either scaring people away or not saying things in time.’ Not saying things in time. Letting things go. Missing things, clues, anything.

And I know everyone’s worried about her, and I know that her mother misses her, but she’s not missing! She’s right here. How can she be missing? Missing is when you don’t know where she is. Missing is when there’s no one there to help. When someone is missing, they’re not safe. And there is nothing in the world you can do fast enough.

I don’t care what I sound like—I don’t want to tell her what to do. But I don’t care. There’s tonnes of time to send her life in any direction she chooses. And I’m older, right? I’m supposed to know more. Her world moves quickly and she more quickly in it. The speed is dangerous but it slows down. It always slows down. As soon as she asks, I’ll drive her back to Toronto.

16 Andrea

It's Sunday morning, and as we pass the Oakville exit off the 401 highway, Rinn is asleep in the back seat of Oliver's Dodge Stratus, sprawled out in her tight black pants and one of Oliver's old sweatshirts. She looks very peaceful. We'll be in Toronto in twenty minutes, I think calmly to myself as Oliver quickly glances over his shoulder and smoothly passes a large transport truck. Rinn doesn't move and I don't want to wake her up until we're there. She agreed late last night over a slightly-burned lasagna that it was time to go home. She explained that some person named Darcy is having a party and needs her to be there. Apparently Rinn is singing at the party. Oliver laughed when he hears this. He glances over at me.

"Andrea, aren't you going to read me the email?"

I'm fumbling absently with a piece of paper. "You'll never believe it."

"Well you obviously want to read it to me, you've been playing with it since we passed London."

"Oh, Oliver, you just won't believe the audacity of some people!"

"Come on, you want to tell me!"

"Yeah." I know I sound distant. I'm good at it. "Anyway, forget it. I'll show you later," I say, stuffing it into my back pocket and pointing to Rinn in the back seat. Oliver rolls his eyes and then nods.

"Fine, tell me after we drop her off."

Neither of us speak for about fifteen minutes.

“Could be diabetes, you know, Andrea. Do you think?”

“Well, I’m not a doctor, Oliver, but juvenile diabetes is usually diagnosed at a young age.”

“Well, she’s 13. Is that young?”

“Old for a child,” I think this over, “but yes, it’s young.”

I talked to Rinn’s mother on the phone after she fell asleep late last night. She had already called the police and informed me that they’d just launched a search in the Toronto area. I was not surprised to hear that. What I was surprised at is that she didn’t yell at me. In fact, she didn’t say a word for a long time except to swear softly as I told the story. She listened to me and repeated a few phrases back to me. “You thought you’d just take her for a bit of a break.” “She was going to run away anyway.” “You didn’t like the way she looked up there on the stage.” After a while I realized that the vague explanations were not helping me at all. And eventually even I was starting not to understand what I meant.

“When I heard Rinn’s message, Andrea, I checked my machine from the Studio in Detroit, anyway, I called the Police anyway. You know what they told me? They said they’d see what they could do. They said it wasn’t kidnapping, that she ran away again. And they’d keep her on their list of runaways. But you know what I told them? I didn’t know who you were. I don’t know how you got her to call me, but I thank you for that. But I didn’t know who you were. Who the hell did you *think* you were! I took the plane home alone. Alone. I didn’t even cash in her ticket because up to the last second at the gate I thought she might run up to me and decide to come home. Things are going to be easier for her. I know they are. For lots of reasons that I’m not explaining to *you*.”

“I don’t know why I thought I could help,” I said, “But I know I did.”

“The show wasn’t my idea,” Rinn’s mother began in a trembling voice.

“Mrs. Tamrack”, I finally cut in, “Catherine wants to come home.”

“Andrea?” she said quietly. “Can you call her Rinn, please? It’s a nickname she likes better.”

Mrs. Tamrack insisted that if her car wasn’t in the shop she would drive down immediately and pick Rinn up herself, until finally I convinced her that Oliver and I driving her home was actually Rinn’s idea. I gave her every piece of contact material I had: phone number, address, cell phone, e-mail address, in a vain attempt to build some sort of credibility with this woman. Her mother read out directions in a voice that became calmer by the word.

“Andrea?” A small voice sounds from the backseat and I turn around to find Rinn with her hands and nose glued to the window. “That’s the street where you turn. That’s my street.”

Oliver steers around the corner, one hand on the wheel, the other resting lightly on my knee.

“Hey Andrea?”

“Yes Rinn?”

“Was that Alex guy your last boyfriend?”

How on earth—she must have seen my pictures. “He was a friend, Rinn.”

“I was going to ask you too—who were all those kids in the camping pictures?”

I grasp Oliver’s hand and his eyes widen in surprise. “Well, they were some children from the camp I used to work at. I never forget friends.”

“Those kids were your friends? I mean, you could actually keep in touch with them?”

“Sure,” I start carefully, but I won’t have to finish.

“Andrea! There’s my house! There it is. And that’s my mom, on the porch. That’s my mom. There’s only my Mom! Just my Mom. And a policeman, too? Why is there a policeman? Oh yeah...”

Never mind. I recognize the woman from the talk show and she approaches the car with a very different look in her eyes. A very different look than the one that overtook her eyes two days earlier in the studio. Her daughter walks toward her. The emotion stirred is rich. This fire is burning still.

17 Rinn

The house is quiet and I'm surprised Mom left me to myself I'm standing in my own house it's the same as I remember it but it feels a little different. I'm thinking more slowly. My thoughts are slower. I can hear doors slamming in the driveway and voices growing calmer. My dad is not in the house, and Mom said that she'll explain where he is, but that he will not be coming back until next Christmas, for a short visit. Apparently he packed up his things and left as soon as we left for Detroit. So I'll see him quickly at Christmas. That's a while away still. And that might actually work.

I already said my good-byes to Andrea and Oliver. And I HATE saying goodbye. There's no need to do it again. The cop talked to Andrea for a long time and gave her a piece of paper. Oliver talked to my mom, who just shook her head a lot but she didn't cry. I stop on the landing at the top of the stairs and sit just around in the corner, in a little alcove in the wall, a place where I used to hide and read when I was little. Reaching in my pocket, I pull out a crumpled piece of paper that I saw fall out of Andrea's pocket when we were walking up to my house. I unfold it. It is the printout of an email. Oh my god. The email is from the talk show.

"To Andrea Gartner. We are working on a follow-up show for the 'My teen is a terror' program that you attended a couple of days ago. We work quickly, as you can see! We have learned that you have become involved in the case of one of the guests from the show, a troubled young teen named Catherine Tamrack. We also heard that there was a degree of controversy around this involvement. Please contact the show if you are

willing to share your story—we're sure it would really benefit others, and we're sure our audience would be interested in what happened. We like to keep a record, especially when things turn out good, you know, for our 'glory files'! Of course if you contact us, we'll be able to work out some sort of agreement..."

I stop reading and before my breathing can get any faster I dig in my pockets again for the small card that Andrea gave me before she left. Her cell phone number was on the back. I grab the cordless phone from downstairs and run back up to the landing. I dial quickly, just as I hear the car pulling out of the driveway and my mother's footsteps in the kitchen.

"Hello?" Her voice sounds surprised. I run up the rest of the stairs and fling open the door to my room, running over to the window. I can see the car driving down the street, back toward the highway. It is falling slowly and slowly away from me. I strain my eyes to see the figures inside. They are two gray shapes behind the glare of the back window.

"Hello? Hello?"

"Andrea?"

"RINN! Are you okay? What's going on?"

"Um, yes, I'm okay." I think the car slows down just a little bit. Maybe they'll turn around?

"Rinn, honey, do you want something?"

"I found, found this message, this email, I think you dropped it."

"You found the email? I didn't even realize—"

“Don’t worry, Andrea, if you want to do the show, I mean, I’d, well, do you want to?”

“Well, Rinn, do you think I should?”

“No, Andrea, it wasn’t a good idea. Really, Andrea, don’t do it. No, don’t. You won’t feel any better. They’ll try and tell you it’s a good idea, but you know, it’s really not.”

“That’s what I was thinking.”

“Really?”

“Really.”

“You’re not going to do it, Andrea?”

The car is now a small black smudge on the glass, falling away down the street.

“ANDREA!”

“I’m still here, Rinn.”

“Andrea, am I ever going to see you again?!”

“Of course, Rinn. I was thinking,” There is a pause. “Maybe when you’re finished high school, we could take a trip to France, just like we talked about. How about that? Go see the Eiffel tower?”

“And that Vimy Ridge thing you told me about!”

“Sound good?”

“Yeah. I’ll go for sure. I’m actually not too bad at geography.”

“I heard you were a smart kid. Rinn, I’ll call you tomorrow at four o’clock, just like we said. Why don’t you go talk to your Mom, now, okay? She said you were having lasagna for dinner!”

“Yeah, that’s right. I’ll talk to you tomorrow at four o’clock.”

“Good-bye, Rinn. Don’t forget to help with the garlic bread!”

“Andrea?”

“Yes?”

“Are you going to get in a lot of trouble? Are you going to get arrested for this?”

“Do you think I will?”

“Well, I’ve been in trouble before, and it usually turns out okay in the end, all right? Just ‘member that. It’ll be okay. Remember that.”

“I will, Rinn. I will. And France. When you’re finished high school. We’ll see what we can work out for a trip of a lifetime!”

The car falls out of sight.

I stare now at the glass.

My window looks different. It’s cleaner, and the curtains have been hemmed to the right size. One used to be longer than the other. My room feels different. The blanket on my bed is new. The pillows look softer, bigger. The framed picture of my father that stands on the dresser has been dusted. The shoeboxes in my closet are organized but when I lift one of the lids, I see that the scraps of papers and notes and things inside are just the way I left them.

The overhead light in my room is new. It’s a bright rounded fixture, with a red, orange and yellow sun painted in the centre. It has a stronger light bulb, too, one that lights up the whole space, the walls, and all around, instead of lighting up the centre and leaving gray shadows to creep into the corners. I run to the doorway of my room, turn off the light, and then flick it on again. My mother’s voice sounds from the kitchen. She

is calling me to come and prepare the garlic bread, the way I like it. Her voice is sounds stronger and for me, the sun is shining. Outside, the day is still and the moon is hanging in the dusty air, as if no one has decided whether or not it's time for night to come.

ROAD NOT MAINTAINED

*They shut the road through the woods
Seventy years ago.
Weather and rain have undone it again.
And now you would never know
There was once a path through the woods
Before they planted the trees.*

Rudyard Kipling
The Way Through the Woods

ROAD NOT MAINTAINED

At this very moment, and with great difficulty, a loon is attempting conversation with a motor boat. The boat answers reluctantly, hemming and hawing and refusing to start. I wonder what the loon is saying in reply: Watch out, my children are near, or Damn you, you woke them up and they needed their sleep.

I can see this from my chair on the edge of the lake. It's a wonderful Adirondack chair, the kind that scoops you up in a giant cradled hand and holds you in its grasp for hours.

With a sudden screech of glee, the boat departs with two teenaged girls cheering and shouting over the wind. The loon swims away, head shaking. Misunderstandings frustrate me too.

It's good to be back. A year is too long to stay away.

Friday, August 28, 1996
Sage Albright

Where are the stories? We lift them out of life with a smooth, cupped hand and fingers gently separated just enough to hold them by the tips. We rip them out of races between people between hours and years, against solitude and in and out of fears. We tear them out and yes, tears often hurt. Stories are stories so we can tell them over and

over, relive them, retell them, feel again what we felt, share what we wish we knew, force others to see and understand our point of view when we need to be understood.

YET

when I sit on a granite ledge at night under dim clouds that hold the day's heat around my shoulders like heavy wool, listening to the water stroll around the edge of the rock and the loons call and wolves on the rim of the interior, with pine needles pricking my back softly as I lean, as if to tell me something, when I finally wait and listen to the waiting, that is when I tear my paper to shreds. Then slowly, I lift my pen and wait, wishing I could scream or cry but it's too quiet. I need to find them but I'm looking so hard. I'm straining my eyes and they are starting to ache. I am a writer, but where are the stories? Are the stories there?

THE STORY

is a picture

MY TASK

is to describe the life that hangs suspended

between the scrape of the pen and the soul.

Sage was the first who asked to come. She ran up to me, out of breath, on the last day of the season at our summer camp and announced that she was simply unable to return home. "I've just got to find my story, Emerson," she said with wide eyes and a wrinkled forehead, "I will suffocate if return to the city without it. Please can I come to your cottage with you, just for a few days? I promise I won't get in the way, I'll just canoe over to some shoreline somewhere and write and write and write, I promise!"

Of course she didn't know that I had already decided that this is exactly what she should do. It's too dangerous to land at top speed in the city. You need to coast in on softer ground and ease in if you intend on making it safely.

I thought it would be a good idea to speak with Sage's parents about the week first. She did have the week before school started, but I wanted to be sure they were comfortable with the idea of her spending the week with me. I have never met them. I called both Mr. and Mrs. Albright at home and at work but no one returned my calls. Sage claimed that they "couldn't care in the slightest" what she did. Apparently they were each off on a holiday somewhere exotic and had already arranged for Sage to spend the week on her own at home. In the end I left messages on all the Albrights' various voice messaging services explaining where their daughter was and how they could reach her.

To help start her off, I gave her the job of keeping my family's log. It's quite infamous, the Tanglewoods' Cottage Log. We have been keeping it for over forty years now, and when I took over complete maintenance and ownership of the cottage three years ago, I decided to keep up the tradition. Every day, at least one entry is recorded in the little notebooks we use for the log. I used to be very confused by that, as a little girl. I used to wait and wait for the day when my writing would be good enough to record the daily entries during my stay at the cottage. Sure I was allowed to write in it when I was little, but someone always came along and commented on "Em's cute writing", and wrote a "real, grown-up entry".

My grandmother used to record the weather, the grandchildren's ages and everyone's occupation, level of school and place in life. When I decided to continue the tradition, I kept all these criteria. And I added state of mind.

Friday, August 28, 1996 (cont.)
Sage Albright

Apparently my last entry does not comply with Em's grandmother's specifications, so here we go again:

At the cottage this week, there are three of us. Oh, before I forget, extremely sunny and hot right now, about 27 degrees. Too hot for me to bake in the sun, which Andie is doing right now. I'll explain, for posterity's sake, as Em puts it. I'm sure you all know Emerson Tanglewood (who reads this, anyway, Em's family?) She was my boss during this past summer at the children's camp that we all worked at. She is a fantastic person, very insightful and wise for 26. And she's a very caring boss too, always noticing things, fixing things before they got out of hand. She describes the job of camp director as that of a fire fighter. Maybe I'll get her to explain that in the log sometime.

My name is Sage Albright, and I'm 17. At the moment I am attempting to carve some little niche for myself as a writer, so I'm going to try to write as well as I can in this log to practice. I was a lifeguard at the camp, but I'm not really a lifeguard kind of person. You know Baywatch and all those shows? Just picture the main characters jogging along the shoreline with bouncing breasts and golden hair and a cheery laugh for all the men along the way and that's about the opposite of me. I have short brown

hair, very short at the moment, and I have been described as quiet and shy, but I'd rather say I'm always thinking.

Andie Gartner, the last member of our party, is also always thinking, however she does it out loud. Always chattering. And she's always 'Andie'. "Andrea's a grown-up, stick-in-the-mud," she always says, "And that's not me!" She's twenty years old and this summer she was officially our camp First Aider and unofficially our social director. Been here for two days now and Andie's still recovering from being in charge of so many social events. She tried to organize activities for us at our bonfire last night. Emerson and I had to remind her that it wasn't really necessary. In fact, I'm not exactly sure why she decided to come. She's really spontaneous, always doing whatever seems fun at the moment. I'll bet she just thought she'd come along for the ride. I, however, have work to do this week, and Andie can be a handful. But I adore her. She's the most fascinating person I know. And at times she scares the hell out of me.

“HEY EM! HEADS UP!”

The boat whizzes past. Andie is standing on the bow deck of the motorboat, waving her arms around wildly to attract my attention.

“You're just too brave for the rest of us, Andie!” I shout back.

Satisfied, she falls dramatically back into the boat. Sage is sitting at the motor, the rip cord attached safely to her life jacket so that if for some reason she falls out the boat will not turn on her in an instant of unexplained revenge. She is steering in deep circles, crossing the waves she creates. They look peaceful together. During the summer, Sage followed Andie around a bit too much for her liking. Andie is so independent that she

automatically holds people at an arm's length. Sage, frustrated, followed her nonetheless, often stumbling to keep up, but running after her, always trying to keep up.

Scattered pin-pricks of laughter dot the shoreline. Children leap off docks at spaced intervals and for the most part, the lake rests at its usual calm. Andie puts on her sport sunglasses and leans back, ankles crossed on the middle seat and arms folded behind her head.

Andie calls over to me. "We're gonna fly past the Lennox's, 'kay Em? David better just watch out!"

Sage is now the one shaking her head slowly. Andie announced this morning that David Lennox, who lives three cottages down from ours, was to be hers by the end of her short stay here. Her plan, she claimed, was foolproof. Sage, who was buried in the old cottage logs at the time, looked up, her short brown hair not quite hiding the frown on her forehead.

"Why bother, Andie," she said with a mild sneer, "You're leaving in a week."

"Might as well make it an enjoyable week!"

Andie was fidgeting in her seat like a fighter jet about to take off when she finally leapt off her chair and ran to her room to dress for her conquest. She reappeared fifteen minutes later in tight khaki shorts and a black tank top, and a bright purple bandana holding back her unruly ash blonde hair. Sage and I exchanged a subtle smile about the ever-present bandana and Andie picked it up.

"Well, my hair's crazy. What do ya want me to do? He can *deal* with the bandana!"

It's not because I want to see if she really does meet up with David Lennox, but because I need to relax out on the lake that I decide to take the canoe out for a quick trip. In fact I've never really been too fond of David Lennox, or any of his family for that matter, but I don't want to discourage her. There's no point, and it's harmless. Andie needs a crusade. She can turn anything into a crusade. She used to say that she thought she was living in the wrong era, thought she should be a daring knight from medieval times. I reminded her that she would actually not be able to be the knight, that she would have to sit at home and wait for the knights to find her, or else she would have to become the master of disguise and play the adoring page boy following her love to battle. 'I'll bet that happened more often than we think,' was Andie's laughing response.

I can hear the distant whir of the motor around the bay as I solo smoothly across the lake to Beaver Bay. I'll have to remind Sage to jot this down in the log. My grandmother likes to hear of people going on trips to her favourite place to gather driftwood. That's right, my eighty year old grandmother collects driftwood. She'll see a wonderful piece and miraculously get it home from wherever on earth she sees it, neither size nor weight is an issue.

Today I don't see any pieces on the colourful shoreline and my imagination is tired. When I was a child I could conjure a piece of driftwood into anything, a horse, a unicorn, an elephant. Anything. I had a nightmare once as a child of Granny at her funeral, lying in a twisted coffin with large pieces of birchbark twirling and wrapping around her, bringing forth her spirit. I think I woke up crying. That used to happen a lot at this cottage; at night it's dark and very, very quiet. In fact, I worried a bit for that

very reason about bringing Sage here. Sometimes it's too quiet. The girl seemed upset at times this summer, however, she was desperate to come with Andie and me. Hopefully her writing will keep her driven and motivated.

It's calm right now, but not quiet—the afternoon is resting. I once heard someone deem the most perfect phrase in the English language to be 'summer afternoon'. I think I agree. I can hear the distant murmurings of cottagers out early with their fishing poles, sitting with ultimate patience, staring defeat in the face and praying that a fish might decide to accompany them home. I am completely at peace, yet with every small noise I look up briskly. They call it the 'northern shudder', the edge on which we live, the pleasure we take in the chilling vastness of our landscape.

I laugh softly to myself. If someone took a picture of me now, it could be a poster for the great Muskoka out-of-doors, outdoor recreation specialist finds refuge in Beaver Bay. I'm also sure that to anyone else, this moment would look too crafted, manufactured. The simple truth is that I had to stretch out with a flourish because my knees are cramped from paddling and a lower centre of balance is easier to manage, and the sunglasses are just because the sun is in my eyes.

If the Lady of Shalott had learned to helm when the sea was rough, and prepared for more than simply meeting Lancelot's eyes with grace, could she have sailed away alive? And if Ophelia had tested the water first before leaping headfirst? If only I did not identify with women who saw life as a richly layered tapestry and refused to stay on the surface—

Friday, August 28, 1996 (cont.)
Sage Albright

Decided to take the log down to the beach tonight. Emerson built a huge fire and we're sitting around it now. Correction, Emerson and I are sitting on these smooth pieces of driftwood she found, and Andie is bouncing back and forth—beach, dock, beach again, trying to see the Lennox's cottage. As we drove the boat past the Lennox's beach this afternoon, she yelled, "Hey David! You should c'mon over to campfire tonight!" Just like that, over the side of the boat! Almost died of embarrassment. You'd think she was twelve years old. And she's older than me. That's the best part. We'll see if he comes.

Before I left camp, I got a letter from a friend of mine who says that the stars are aligned for a great change some time this week. Don't know how much I believe about that astrology stuff, but I could certainly use a great change! My life these days seems to frustrate me with every new curve ball it tosses me and I can't seem to keep up or catch anything in time. Don't know why, that's just how I feel. I can't take these sudden changes, from responsibility for peoples' lives, to no responsibility for anything but myself. It is very hard.

Just took some time to explain to Emerson and Andie the change that is coming in the stars. We all took pieces of paper and wrote down one thing we'd like to change about our lives and then threw them into the fire. Emerson just smiled and tossed hers in. Andie tried to explain hers to us, but I said that she should just throw it in. She wanted to rewrite it, said she didn't really understand what she had written, but I told her the fire would know what she meant.

And no, I'm not going to tell you what I wrote. You are a cottage log. You are read by Emerson's family. I don't think so.

There comes a time at which every good writer must lay down her pen to coax the fire back to life. I fight dark with fiction and I fight fire with words. The fire understands. It is sparing my book its hot sparks and ashes and for that, I am grateful.

Friday, August 28, 1996
Andie Gartner

Well hello Cottage Log! Why are you called a log? Who knows? It's great to see you, I just stole you, actually, Sage stood up to stoke the fire and I thought, why not say hi to the journal she's been attached to for two days? So hi!

As I'm sure you've heard, I'm Andie and I'm burdening dear Emerson with my overwhelming presence this week. I can be kind of a lot to handle some times, but for some reason Em puts up with me. Everyone's always telling me to talk less. People are always trying to calm me down. Em pretty much just listens whenever I get carried away. She is a very patient person. She helps everyone. The girl who can't say no. And no, she's not too old to be called a girl. I knew her when she was younger. As for Sage, I haven't known her for as long, maybe a couple of years. She was a lifeguard at our camp. She works really hard, I mean, really hard. Almost too hard. She was really stressed out this summer. I think she needs a break, but now all she does is read all these old logs. Hope she finds some good stories to make it all worthwhile!

So this is what is going on in my world today? David Lennox. Give me a break, I worked at an all-girls' camp all summer, and I deserve a little fun! David is my age, I

think, and he has the greatest dark wavy hair and wide smile. Wait, you probably know him! Was he a cute kid? Bet he was! Anyway, I saw him pass by in his motor boat the other day, off to go fishing. Everyone I talk to, including Em, says that's all David Lennox really does—fish. And party and drink down at the North River Lodge, but I won't worry about that. He hasn't gotten to know me yet! Yet if it's fishing he likes, fishing I can do. Might as well. Actually, he might be coming over tonight. I invited him, but it's early yet. Not much else to do and I have to keep busy. Yes, I have to keep busy.

A light in the distance pulls Andie away from the log and throws her haphazardly onto the end of the dock. She shakes visibly with excitement and points at the light.

“See? He’s coming! Excellent!”

A boat pulls up to the dock, and instead of a dashing young man, Avery Lennox, David’s father, takes off his fishing hat and waves it happily. “Hello, Tanglewoods!” he calls brightly. “I was so glad when Martha told me about your invitation! I was just saying to Martha, I should go over and see the Tanglewoods, see how they’re doing, make the yearly visit.”

Andie’s eyes desperately search the rest of the boat and rest on Mr. Lennox’s face.

“Sorry Davey couldn’t come,” he says as he climbs out of boat and stamps the water out of his shoes on the dock. “He’s down at the North River Lodge, some sort of music concert going on tonight.”

Andie quickly grabs the rope and loops it over the dock post, round turn, two half-hitches. Mr. Lennox chuckles.

“Hey, you even know the right knot to use!”

“First time boating on *your* lake doesn’t mean first time ever, Mr. Lennox!” She snaps.

“Please, it’s Avery.”

Andie shuffles back down to the beach with Avery in tow. “This is Sage, my friend from camp this summer. She’s kinda quiet, I mean, doesn’t say too much, but she’s always thinking, right Sage?”

“I don’t know what the hell you’re talking about, Andie. Hello Avery. Yes, I am capable of speech, but you’ll see, Andie’s the *nice* one.” Sage doesn’t hide her sarcasm.

“Yes, and this is Emerson, our gracious host—“

“Emmy! Wow, look at you. How old are you now?”

I haven’t heard anyone call me Emmy in years. Sage perks up at the nickname and tries to hide a laugh. “Old enough to know I can be vague with that question! It’s good to see you *again*, Avery.”

“How I used to love going fishing with your father! Yes, Marty was a great fisherman! We used to park ourselves right over there in Beaver Bay and let those fish just hop into our boats. I’m telling you, they’d be lining up for me and Marty! What did that Titanic movie say? We were the kings of the bay!”

Sage and Andie snicker quietly.

“Well,” Andie says quickly, “There’s not much else to do around here except fish, it seems. And, of course, go to concerts at North River Lodge, of course. Great.”

“No, Andie, you just wait, dear, this is a truly exciting lake, I’ll tell ya.”

She frowns. Andie, relax, I want to say. Just relax. I can hear her thinking of ways to escape, to hop into our motorboat, to fly across that lake to the Lodge. She knows she has to stay now. But she loves sitting by the fire, always has. You don’t have to change for him, please, don’t try to change. I think of you during the summer, your calm competence, always first on the scene of an emergency, or arriving quickly with just what was needed. Andie Gartner, doctor-to-be, always ready with a freezie or Popsicle for the casualty and the complete medical instructions for her leader, relayed in a voice that always gave the camper hope. She has always said she wanted to be a doctor; I think she’d make an excellent Psychology student instead. But I’m not going to try to sway her. And now here she is with no script for behaviour, maybe just too good at being in situations in need of help.

Avery is still rambling on about the utter excitement of catching a two pound rock bass and the northern pike or muskie that wrestled him half-way out of his boat. He reaches over to put out a spark that leaps out of the fire and he brushes his plaid coat against the charcoal-covered logs in the woodpile. Muttering under his breath, he shakes his curly graying hair out of his face as he leans down to wipe off his jacket.

“Hey, Emerson, what have you told these girls about our lake? Let’s tell some stories, after all, what are campfires for? Why don’t I tell them about Wayne—”

“No, Avery, it’s quite all right. The lake’s not too dull; we’ve established that, why don’t you tell him a bit about the summer, Andie?”

Andie glares at me through the centre the fire, the centre of the flame where the heat is transparent and white hot. “What, I’m sure he doesn’t need to hear about the

crop of scratched knees I had to deal with, oh, yeah, and expired asthma inhalers, that's about it."

"Don't be ridiculous, Andie," Sage jumps in. "Your job was extremely important, one of the most important at the camp!" She pauses for a moment to let Avery ask her more. He is attempting to balance two charred logs in a teepee formation in the fire. "Why don't you tell him about 'stick in the leg'?"

"What?" Avery exclaims with the appropriate surprise, and Andie relaxes.

"Well," She begins, "What are campfires for, eh?" A dramatic pause. "I like to refer to the camper by name, not by 'stick in the leg!'"

"You remember her name?"

"Of course I do. I remember all my campers' names."

"Well, tell the story!" Sage snaps back. "It's about a girl who got a stick embedded in her leg, about half-way into the skin above her knee—"

"I don't want to talk about camp, fuck, you'd think that's all we ever talk about and that's exactly what I was scared of! We're done, god, can't you guys leave it behind! Too late now to change anything anyway." Andie folds her arms and rests her head on her knees.

Sage looks at me, a frustrated astonishment across her eyes. "I'm sorry for the language," she says to Avery, looking directly at Andie.

No one speaks for a moment. Sage suddenly jumps out of her chair and runs over the rock wall just behind the beach.

"Guys, I just heard that snake, I think." She peers in among the rocks.

Avery stands up, clears his throat and strides up to the wall. “Naw, just a field mouse. They’re everywhere this year, can’t get rid of ‘em!”

Andie pulls her bandanna off, wipes her eyes quickly as she shakes her hair out, looking up. “Tell me about it! They were everywhere in our kids’ tents!” Andie ties her bandanna tightly back around her head. “Well, there you go! Even *I* can’t get away from camp stories. There you go, you got me.”

“Yep, too many damn mice,” Avery says, “I caught one last night dragging a mousetrap by one leg, just inching and pulling itself along toward this hole in the baseboards near the kitchen. Thought it could escape! Oh well, at least now I know where they’re getting in for sure. Covered it over with some steel wool. Should be tight now.”

“That’s what you get for moving into the mice’s territory, right? What the hell—Em, why don’t you tell your mouse story? It always makes me laugh.”

“What?” Sage is appalled. “It’s a horrible story!”

“Oh, go back to your logs, kid. I love this story!”

Sage gathers up the cottage logs with a strained smile, and shakes her head in Andie’s direction.

“Well,” I begin, “A couple of years ago, one of my campers had a bit of a close call with nature. I was a leader on the site, and was inside our building with some other staff members cleaning up some dishes when there was a knock on the door. ‘Emerson, Emerson,’ a little voice said, ‘You gotta come, Megan found baby mice in her sleeping bag!’”

I paused to let Andie enjoy the look of horror now crossing Avery’s face.

“That’s right, the first girl stepped aside to reveal our young camper, Megan, standing in the doorway with tears in her eyes. ‘I thought it was a wet sock!’ she cried.”

“Ah!” Avery stifles his moan of disgust a little too late. Andie chuckles softly.

“She was such a good kid. It’s funny, we called her the *Cosby* kid; her mother was a lawyer and her father was a doctor. And she was really so down to earth, overall just a very happy, well-adjusted, *nice* kid. Anyway, so another one of the leaders and I took the kids back to their tent and we lent Megan a spare sleeping bag for the night. We took her bag and as soon as we were out of sight of the kids, we ran to the edge of the forest and opened the bag inches at a time, laughing and dropping it as we came closer to the bottom. Finally we stared at the heap of material on the ground and saw six little babies all lined up in a row in the very corner. No mess, nothing except two very neatly chewed holes, a front door and a back. The mother must have dragged them in after they were born. They were dead, and there was nothing else we could do except leave them in the woods. I remember saying, ‘Some raccoon is going to have a feast tonight!’

“We walked back to Megan’s tent to make sure the girls were asleep, and sure enough we heard Megan’s voice as we were approaching. ‘Are the mice alive?’ she asked, ‘Because if they’re just partly alive, you should kill them, so they’re not suffering, okay?’ I explained carefully that they were dead by the time we found them, and that there was nothing left we could do. ‘Good,’ she said, ‘Cause I wouldn’t want them to be in pain.’”

“At least she didn’t want ya to do some sorta mousie resuscitation!” Avery is proud of his joke.

“That is *so* not the point of the story,” Sage is infuriated. “She was concerned for the mice, putting herself in their place, that’s advanced thinking for a child of that age!”

“I know, Sage!” Avery laughs. “Smart kid. We certainly got enough mice already in the world. Smart kid.”

Friday, August 28, 1996 (cont.)
Sage Albright

I used to keep journals of my thoughts and feelings and revelations so that people could one day read them and remember all about me, what moved me, what I was like. I would plan out elaborate schemes for hiding the journals and little bits of paper so that they could be found at just the right time. But a little while ago I realized that no one will really be looking. No one in my family is really very interested in writing, in poetry, in thoughts on paper. No, in order to unlock the true selves of those who write things down, you need another writer. So that is why I've decided to include my little thoughts and scribbles in here from now on. I'll try to keep them legible, and logical too. From what I know of Emerson, her family is much more likely to read back through the journals than anyone else I know. And I trust her.

After Avery Lennox left, which, thankfully, was not much longer after he finished pondering exactly what to do with the excess of mice in the area, Emerson said she was really tired and she went up to the cottage to go to sleep. Andie, who I don't think had recovered from inviting a boy to campfire and having his father come instead, was sitting out on the dock with a blanket around her shoulders, swinging her feet off the end dangerously close to the dark lake. Sometimes I can get Andie talking, sometimes I can

get quite a lot out of her. She looks desperate these days and she's way too loud about everything except whatever's bothering her, but if she won't tell me there's nothing I can do.

I could imagine it, but what if I'm wrong? I played a game once with some campers where I had them make up imaginary friends. We went around the circle and asked all the children what their imaginary friends looked like, what they liked to do together, where they lived. After countless answers of eating ice cream and living next door, one eight-year old girl—can't remember her name—looked me in the eye and very seriously said that her imaginary friend lived "somewhere north of nowhere."

"Really," I said, turning the phrase over in my mind, "Where exactly is that?"

"Just above somewhere south of anywhere."

"Really!"

"Yes. And we like to um, eat ice cream together."

Eight years old. The phrase was too clever, so I stole it. I'm a writer. I have to be on the lookout for bits of wisdom from eight-year old girls. I scribbled it down on a napkin and shoved it in the back pocket of my jeans.

Why was she at camp? Will she someday be a great outdoor recreation leader, someday after sometime? Or did her parents just want a break, a space of time without her? I'd say at least one child in every thirty was there this summer for that exact reason. Who knows? That's what imagination is all about – she comes here to imagine and we imagine why she's here.

I can see Andie now tracing her toes quietly in the dark water at the end of the dock. I took her a plate of chocolate chip cookies. It felt ridiculous, but they're her

favourite. 'Comfort food', she calls them. I sat beside her for a while. A while of talking, a while of quiet.

This is what I remember thinking:

*You like haunting nights for serious talks you ask me
if I'm scared of the dark even though you know I'm not
you know what else makes me strong I say it's children
they rely on you so you just can't be scared*

*tonight the docks are damp unfriendly cold yet
the moonlight on your face is warm as if the earlier sun
had forgotten to tell us something
what do ya wanna be when you grow up I ask
you fascinate me I want to say but I am afraid
looking up you say you want to travel just roam never
let down roots if we were meant to stay in one place you laugh
we would have been born with roots like trees you want
someone who amazes you inspires you sees right through you
you want a hell of a lot*

*leaning back on hands describing this perfect creature
this person you want all of your own and when
you look at me all I can do is stretch my arm*

*and skip the chocolate chip cookie I am holding
across the still lake you stop talking we follow
the rings that appear one by one by one
by one after four small dives it sinks into silence*

*You are currently connected
do you want to disconnect now?
I'm sure you remember how I seldom wish on the northern sky
it overwhelms me leaves me flat on my back staring up
and anyway how could I choose just one star to carry the burden
of my hopes I wouldn't do that to a star*

*I just brushed away a spider who would have startled me if I met him
inside yet he belongs out here so its okay and I let him crawl across
this page I say this aloud to him to you to the one star that hangs
between the wires whose light pales to that of my candle
if I could hold fire my written word could touch you
with the same warm smoke I feel now*

S.A.

It's about eleven o'clock in the morning on Saturday and Andie and I decided to have brunch down on the end of the dock. We slept in, missing the perfect time in the morning when the lake is absolutely still. The late morning brushes light ripples across

the surface, ones you can really see in a photograph. Now we sit in silence, eating blueberry pancakes and my Aunt's 100% pure maple syrup that she made from Sugar Maple trees in her own backyard. The closest I ever got to being that crafty was when I tried to whip up some maple sugar by pouring maple syrup into a pot and boiling it for hours. I ended up with a thin sugary film on the bottom of the pot and was so upset that I threw the pot in the garbage. Andie finds this hysterically funny. Laughing, she suddenly tosses a little piece of her pancake into the lake.

“What on earth are you doing?”

“Watch, Em, shhh!” Slowly, a small congregation of young rock bass gather beneath the pancake. They freeze in their tracks and then look to each other, back and forth, and then at the largest of the small fish.

“See,” concludes Andie, “He must be the oldest, and they're seeing if it's okay to eat the pancake. Is it safe, big fish? Can we eat it? See, they'll send a younger one up any second to grab it. See? I was right! Excellent! There he goes, up to the surface, and grabs it! Wait. Fine, let it go. I wouldn't want a soaking wet pancake, either.”

A door slamming.

“ANDIE!” Sage's voice calls down from the cottage. “PHONE!”

“I'm NOT HERE!” She answers quickly.

“Andie,” I add with a grin, “The person seems to know you're here. Who has this number?”

“Oh, I don't know, I gave it to my parents, that's all, I swear!”

Sage arrives behind us. “Andie,” she starts, catching her breath, “It’s Fran Baxter from camp! I don’t know why she’s calling you here, but apparently she wants to talk to you for a minute. I guess she got the number from your parents.”

“I’ll kill them!”

“Well, she’s waiting on the line, why don’t you just talk to her and get rid of her quickly. Anyway, she’s actually really nice, I like her, I talked to her a lot this summer.”

Andie storms up to the cottage and Sage and I heard the sound of the door slamming again echo across the lake. Sage looks back up toward the cottage, where we can see Andie through the large front glass windows, pacing back and forth across the living room, the phone cradled on one shoulder, and talking expressively with her hands.

I’m surprised Fran didn’t want to talk to me.

“What is Fran’s official job, anyway, Emerson?” Sage asks.

“Well, she’s the health and safety manager on the board of directors for the camp, which means she handles all calls regarding first aid and health during the camp’s off season, and I dealt with her whenever there was a problem during the season. She’s a very level-headed person—“

“Well then why on earth would she need to talk to Andie at the cottage? Did something happen?”

We both look back up at the cottage, where Andie is now sitting calmly in a chair, and appears to be just listening.

“Hey Sage, what do you want to do today? Any ideas?”

“I know, why don’t I spend all day driving Andie around in the motorboat hoping to catch a glimpse of David Lennox in his goddamned fishing boat!” She

manages a weak laugh. “No, really, today I’m going to do some writing, for sure. I’m going to bring a towel down and lie in the sand on the beach and just write whatever comes to mind, all day!”

“That sounds wonderful, Sage, I’m jealous.”

“Yeah right. You’re jealous of me.”

“I think writing up here on this lake would be great! You seem really upset, Sage, I don’t understand. Is there anything you want to talk about? Really?”

“No. It’s just Andie, I guess. First she’s my friend, then she doesn’t even notice I exist. I don’t get it. I want to be her friend so badly. I don’t even know why I bother. And then she acts like such a ditz about this whole David Lennox thing. Why can’t she just be herself like she was this summer?”

“Oh she just needs a break. I think you just have to let her be. Andie likes to have a mission. You can’t change her mind.”

“Tell me about it. Sometimes I just can’t control my temper with her.”

I wish I could tell Sage that it will all get better, or tell her to cheer up, or that things aren’t so bad. It’s all in how you perceive things, I guess. I have to remember that. She’s been so difficult these last few days—one minute happy, the next terribly upset and often without reason that I can figure out.

“Are you going to be around this afternoon, Emerson?”

“Oh, actually, I have to drop by the Lennox’s cottage for a short time. Avery reminded me last night. You want to come?”

“No.”

We hear the cottage door slam again and Andie runs back down to the dock. She is smiling. “What’s this about you going to the Lennoxes? Em, what’s going on!?”

“Well, I have to go make the yearly visit to see Martha. It’s not a big deal, though, you can both stay here and do whatever you like. I think Sage is going to write.”

“Of course she is. Sage, honestly, this writing thing is getting to be such a bore! Well, Em, I’m comin’ with you, but I’ll bring my own boat, and if David isn’t there, I’m out of there!!”

“Oh, that’s mature.” Sage stands up and angrily grabs the plates still on the dock from our pancakes. “You’re so mature, Andie, I can’t honestly believe you’re three years older than me. Go have fun with your little boy. I couldn’t care less. Walk right up and throw yourself at him, why don’t ya? I’m *sure* that’s exactly what he wants in a woman, oh sorry, a girl.”

“Maybe that’s what I want!”

“Is that what you want? I’m sure he’ll really want you to sit in his fishing boat and theorize about health care and wellness and all your goddamn crusades, he seems just like the type, eh, judging from his dad! Fine! I hope that’s exactly what you get then. And no more!”

Andie doesn’t move. Sage walks slowly away, glancing over her shoulder every few steps. I silently urge Andie to say something to her but they are both quiet. Sage begins to run. She is holding the plates in one hand and the log in the other. I will have to remember to look at what she jots down this morning. The cottage door is growing tired of being slammed.

Andie begins to cry. She is a very calm crier, the kind who just lets the tears stream endlessly down her face, as if summoning up all her frustration and sadness and desperation into liquid and silently willing it to drain from her body. Her face grows slowly redder and she smooths the flyaway strands of blonde hair out of her eyes.

I do not jump to hug her. I don't moan or whine at her to stop, nor do I gather her up in my arms. She does not like to be touched.

"Andie, you know she's really upset."

"What the fuck does Sage have to be upset about! Forget it, I don't want to know. Don't even answer, 'cause I could top it and I don't want to. Fuck her. I'm not even mad at her. I'm not even mad. I don't even care what she said."

"I think *that's* what's upsetting *her*, Andie."

"I don't fucking CARE about Sage! She's so young and smart and has such amazing potential, why doesn't she just write the goddamn book she keeps talking about and leave me alone for a change! That's not even why I'm crying!"

Andie rips off her ever-present bandana and blows her nose loudly with it. She ties her hair quickly back in an elastic that she was wearing on her wrist.

"Andie, I'm not going anywhere. Talk to me."

She is crying harder now, leaning way out over the dock, tears dropping gently into the lake and the biggest of the small fish does not know what to make of them.

"It's that kid who came at the beginning of the summer, Trisha Campbell—"

"Tell me."

"Well, a letter from her parents arrived at the office and she just wanted to let me hear it, I guess."

I have read the letter. I asked Fran to send Andie a copy, but I guess she wanted to read it to her over the phone. I wonder why she chose to do that? Well, it doesn't matter now, I just have to see what made her so upset. From my understanding the story ending quite positively.

"Tell me, Andie."

"It worked out, Em. Everything worked out. It couldn't have gone better—the end, I mean. How can it be that sometimes things just work out so easily because of something you think would be a good idea and then you think, 'Oh my GOD, what if I hadn't thought of that, would it have been all right? Why were people so surprised that it worked out?' Because they wouldn't have known what to do? It's just scary to think about. You know what I mean?"

Saturday, August 29, 1996
Andie Gartner

This log seems to be full of stories. And all of them true. Well, it's great to hear about the two pound pike so and so caught, and how long each grandchild was up on water-skis, but I was just eating my lunch on the dock when I heard the outcome of a story that really affected me.

You see, I was the camp First Aider at this camp, and so I was often called on to handle different types of situations, and you're always scared, well I am, when the kids go home, that you've done something wrong. I just got a phone call about a girl named Trisha.

You want to hear the story? Might as well. Not much else to do. It's dangerous to be alone with your own thoughts for too long.

She came at the beginning of the summer and was placed in a tent with 5 other younger girls. She was young too, nine years old. Anyway, she had a little trouble controlling her temper, especially during times of the day that nothing was happening, unstructured times. She apparently went through the other girls' things one day when they wouldn't play a game that she wanted to play, and then spilled juice all over a girl's sleeping bag. One girl, Morgan, fought back and began calling Trisha names and kind of rallying the other kids against her. So one night, Trisha became really angry at Morgan, and threw a small knapsack at her. One of the clasps on the bag hit Morgan directly, and cut her right across the shoulder. It bled a lot, and ran right down her arm, which really upset all the other girls. Morgan was crying in the tent, two girls ran to the their leaders, Trisha ran to the outhouse and locked herself inside, and the leaders walkie-talkied me.

I ran right over and the first thing I did was take care of the cut—direct pressure, clean bandage, elevation—the works. I had another leader continue to calm Morgan down, and we took her to the hospital for stitches. She needed two. Two stitches, and an hour and fifteen minutes back at camp for me to talk Trisha out of the outhouse. I tried every technique I'd ever been taught. Finally we made a deal. I radioed Emerson to phone her mother and ask what Trisha enjoys at home, what is she good at, what actually makes her happy. We had to phone home anyway, to inform the parents about the incident. I guess her parents weren't very surprised, said she was having difficulty at school getting along with the other kids at recess. They said they were sorry that this had happened and apologized all over the place. Then 'computers,' her mother said at last, 'Trish loves computers'.

So Trisha and I decided that she would come with me to my office and help me fix my computer. She walked grudgingly beside me away from site. As soon as we came to the office, we talked. We talked about why she threw the bag at Morgan, what else she could have done instead, how to get through the rest of the week.

From the moment both kids returned, the problems became worse. Morgan soaked up all the sympathy of the group, and recovered quickly from her injury. Before long, she was joining in with other campers and taunting Trisha again. The campers were impatient with her, they antagonized her, it grew worse and worse. I debriefed both the girls many times; we tried everything. And we saw them all through the week. And the week ended. And the girls said uneasy good-byes to each other and despite the encouraging leader I asked to sit beside Trisha on the bus, she cried the whole way home.

I phoned her parents after I figured she had been home for about an hour, long enough to have a snack, but not to upset her parents greatly, and I closed the office door. I explained all the steps we had taken. I explained why she had locked herself in the outhouse, and how I had coaxed her out, how we had held Trisha back from the overnight trip to the island, the consequences we set when she hit and yelled at another girl. Both parents were very concerned and apologized over and over again. There is no need for apologies. Instead, as I had worked out with Emerson, I asked if Trisha would like to come back to camp. Both parents were surprised. I told them six weeks was a long time in the life of a nine-year old girl. I said I wanted her back the last week of camp. The parents both agreed on the spot.

What's frustrating is that often the campers leave and we never hear about them again. Camp can be such a warm, comforting place that all kinds of things often come

up and although we're trained to deal with them, often the children themselves are surprised at how they act, and how they let their guards down. God, I sound like a textbook. This job grew me up real fast and now I'm tryin' to slow down! There. That's better.

The first day of the last week of camp, I was waiting outside on the grass when our buses pulled up. Trisha shuffled off in the middle of a crowd of happy campers anticipating a great week. She stopped in front of me. 'Hi, Andie!' she said with a huge smile on her face. She had a new camp sweatshirt for August weather, a different colour than the camp T-shirts she brought in July. Her hair was cut short, and looked very flattering, in a bob with curling bangs. She handed me a note from her mother and was scooped up into a group by one of my strongest staff members. I had arranged for her to be in a completely different tent group, in a different area of the camp. I read the letter carefully.

During the last six weeks, Trisha's parents had taken her to anger management workshops, to seminars with specialists in Child Psychology at Western. They had worked out signals for her to give to her leaders when she felt that she was feeling overwhelmed. Trisha now understood the boundaries of what was acceptable and what wasn't, and had practiced the skills she needed. Her parents expected her to succeed, and so did I. No one on her site expected anything else, campers included. To this new group of girls, Trisha was just another camper, with a stylish short haircut. I checked on her tent group every day. Monday morning I arrived at her site just as they were leaving on a hike, so I walked along for a bit. Two girls immediately took Trisha's hands when they were asked to choose partners. Trisha grinned right at me. I casually asked her

leaders how things were going and they laughed openly about how Trisha was certainly a busy camper: it's hard to keep up with her energy, they said good-naturedly.

At the end of the week, I jotted her a quick note congratulating her on a great week and I told her I'd look forward to seeing her next summer. And as she climbed on the bus, she grinned at me again and said, 'See Andie, I told ya I could do it.' And if I didn't know better, I'd say the kid winked at me.

So this letter that the parents sent. You want to hear it? I wrote it down. It's a fax, actually, and addressed to me at the board of directors' address: "Dear Andie. This is to add to your glory file. Trisha has just finished a scrapbook of her pictures from camp for her group at Western. Your letter is on the last page, folded carefully, with the caption, 'My favourite adult.' Of course, my wife and I teased her and she said that she picked you because she could never choose between us. You see, we tell our daughter every day that we love her. We tell her that she is important and that she is a special person in the world. However, she's a very clever child, and she had come to the conclusion that we just have to say this because she's our daughter. And now you, someone apart from our family, tells her the same thing and treats her as though she is special, too. And ever since she returned home, she has started to believe us again."

Here's the problem. I don't actually have a glory file.

I don't have a glory file at all.

If I did, it would consist of this letter. That's it. This summer, I dealt with so many other cases, and they didn't end up on any glorified notes. No, they ended with confrontations. They ended with disappointment. Two ended with the Children's' Aid Society and me learning policies on fast-forward. Or worse, they just ended. Parents

like Trisha's might assume that I have a list of wonderful stories like this one. But I do not. I do not. Not at all. Emerson probably does. But not me.

We're leaving for the Lennox's now. I haven't had time to change because I've been writing. Oh well. I'll let you know how it goes if I can pry you away from Sage and her persistent carrying-on.

I wonder if Emerson told Fran to call me about that letter. Glory file indeed.

Andie and Sage both seem to be using the log for very different purposes. It's more a log of who was here than what has taken place over the years. Andie seems much calmer after writing out the story about Trisha. I suggested that she could write the child a letter if it would make her feel even better but she laughed and told me that she'd been productive enough and it was time to work on her tan or take the boat out. Andie has a short attention span, something she likes to refer to instead as a "vast attention *range*". That always makes me laugh. I do want to see the last thing Sage wrote, however. Here we go:

Saturday, August 29, 1996
Sage Albright

*It's a transplant the weather overtakes you you grow accustomed
to being able to step outside and face a wild that's so much larger than you
you can get lost in it what is that noise what is it? my hand grips my forehead
can't make a fist my skin clings too tightly to its form red fingerprints*

I am losing my voice a slow dissolve air seeps away to mix with the breath

recycled in and out of those around me and I add N O T H I N G

*what is it that I am supposed to add? can I breathe a gentle scent of peace of mind
or the sharp cold of a question W H A T do I question W H Y do I disagree
when I think and not when I speak?*

*The silence burns there is flame in empty space heat, fuel and oxygen
break it down into parts last night I had to make a list of parts of me
I had forgotten and now lies the task of replanting them
into their proper places to shock when appropriate to surprise when safe
to agree when unnecessary to dispel conflict so that there is room
for all and no empty spaces where the heat could build up
and of that I am most afraid.*

*Sometimes in life it's healthy to take on too much bite off more than you can chew
as long as you have an escape route that's what they always say isn't it
whenever you enter a building find out how you would get out if there was a fire
what if you're already outside? if you're already out and the fire is only a potential
source of heat and you wish it would let you in on its secret
where does fire live before it's lit?*

*We were sitting on a dock at night and the sun was still warm on your face
as if trying to tell us something and why didn't you listen why didn't you know
what I meant why don't I know what I mean why am I afraid to think*

*I can't pass up this mindset hovering on the edge of a shadow grasping
at creativity and breathing words like smoke I had my whole existence planned
in a simple map with a legend and you have all burned it down
I can't read the curling charred corners the paper disintegrates at my touch
How could I expect any of you to direct me through the blaze to a patch of air?
Scatter my ashes far above the remainders of highway house home
and may you breathe them through rain and wind and light for years to come*

What do you make of that? I'm not really sure what to think.

Sage walks back into the room and asks for the log. She sees me holding it. "Did you just read what I wrote?"

"Yes."

She tries to smile. "You're probably all worried about me now after reading that, aren't you."

"Well, Sage, I'm not sure what to think."

"Please, Emerson, don't worry. We're here to relax and you totally need to. I just worked through some angry thoughts and now I'm fine. Really. If you don't want me to write in your log anymore, I won't."

"It's okay, you know that. But you can talk too if you want—"

She jumps in and says that she is going to talk to Andie and "straighten things out" and she heads down to the beach. I watch them both from the window for a few moments until the phone rings, and Mrs. Lennox reminds me that any time would be

good for a visit. All across the lake I can see specks of colour, children swimming, boats dotting the blue of the lake and sky. The pace of the world slows down here. Sage and Andie are talking on the beach. I feel like running down and tossing them both off the end of the dock and forcing them to unwind and enjoy themselves. Maybe I'll go tell them that I demand that they have fun. Isn't that the power of this little corner of the world we've secured here?

Saturday, August 29, 1996
Sage Albright

Log's all mine again.

I went for a walk around the lake all the way to the driveway of the North River Lodge. Didn't feel like sitting around on the beach anymore. And you, the log, are now with me on the road. These roads are rather worn, it's funny, there's a sign just before our bend that says, "Road not maintained; use at your own risk". Wish someone had told me about that before I agreed to come here! It's the only way in. Your own risk. I wonder where it goes? I wonder if there is a way out.

So I just had a bit of a temper tantrum, I guess you could call it. I'm just so frustrated with Andie! She's got such potential, and she can be so wonderfully professional and such a dependable friend at camp and now look at her—fawning over some boy she doesn't even know. I bet she has already forgotten everything she has done to actually make a difference in other peoples' lives at camp. She took care of so many things. I bet that means nothing to her. Is she still being true to herself? God, I thought we were getting to be friends. Doubtful.

So I went down there to talk to her, try to be friendly again, try to explain how I thought she was selling herself short. All she did is roll her eyes at me and tell me to relax. I hate it when people tell me that. Do they ever think about the fact that I might want to do anything but? It makes me so angry and I just left them getting changed to go over to the Lennoxes and grabbed you, the log, and ran and ran and ran and ran away from that cottage. That's right, Emerson made some joke about Andie not changing first and Andie ran right back up to the cottage to find some new, more revealing shirt. I wonder if they even noticed that I left. I wonder if they'll look for me. I wonder.

I was so angry I just tore into the woods. I've been really good at handling anger lately—I wasn't pleased with myself—but hey, a few lapses are all right, I guess. I just tore into the woods, and ripped down piece after piece of birchbark, jumping up to grab the nice ones, right off the trees. That's really bad to do, you know. But it made me feel so good. It made me feel so good. And then I did what I promised Emerson—I wrote the first thing that came to mind.

Rooted in tradition lie the words "if you peel away its bark the tree will die".

(Writer tears into environmentalist through an innocent piece of birch bark.)

The surface is rough, wet from rain and stiff from years of holding form against the wind and spiders' webs. It is already inhabited.

To hold my words I need the soft, clean layers just below the skin. Don't go too deep -- the blood of the tree stirs and churns ideas through currents of life every so often sending a tedious thought dangerously close to the surface and then sucking it back down deeming it not ready to be exposed.

The soft red ground slopes beneath me. I jump, clench teeth and pull a perfect strip from the upper trunk. I examine it, trim it with scissors, fold it into a plastic bag, and suck out all air.

The tree is torn, leaves behind a crimson gash, wet from rain and spiders hide in sticky white webs clinging between layers of bark – do not upset them – they are hidden for a reason, safely cocooned between the heartbeat of the silverbirch and the lightning outside.

Rocks on all four corners pinning it down, I draw words on the bark to hide the spiders' webs traced perfectly on the flawless soft skin just under the surface. The webs will entrap my thoughts and release the ones ready to share.

S.A.

There is something very wrong with that poem. I don't know yet what it is. I wonder if the tree dies suddenly when you rip away the outer layer, or if it is more of a slow dissolve, a gentle clotting of the underlying flesh. Maybe it just fades quietly into the backdrop of so many others like it and then one day grows so thin that you can't separate it from the ones on either sides. Of course, that's only if there are others close around.

I walked alone in the woods holding the poem, which I had scrawled on three different pieces of birch bark to be pieced together later. I was alone until I turned around one bend and saw an old man walking toward me. Instinctively I looked down

and watched my feet choose careful steps around roots and rocks and dips in the pine-needled road, but as I passed him I looked up. He wore a green fishing hat and a white nylon windbreaker that was three sizes too big, the sleeves hanging inches past his hands. His face was so fragile and lined, his steps slow, his eyes big and round. I felt tears stinging the back of my throat as our eyes met quickly and he shook his head, the lines on his forehead and between his eyes deepening.

“It's going to rain, you know,” he said, “why don't you kids ever bring jackets with you anymore? You'll catch your death.”

I stopped walking and turned gradually to watch him as he trudged by. I've never felt so isolated from another person in my whole life. Somehow we both ended up on the same cottage road, in the same place, at the same time, yet we were from completely different worlds. How could I possibly dream of imagining where he was coming from, what he had experienced in his life? Andie and I used to play a game in the summer; whenever we found ourselves waiting for a bus, or waiting in line somewhere, to pass the time we would make up stories about people walking by. If I tried really hard to be creative I could usually make her cry. It was a lot more effective than trying to be funny and make her laugh. I'm not too good at that.

If she was here I would say, “Look at that man. He's walking down the cottage trail for the last time because he has decided that life just isn't worth fighting with anymore. You see, he got a letter from his daughter today saying that because their kids are now going to a fancy private school, he wouldn't be getting any more money from her. He's in so much debt he is going to lose his cottage. His greedy son-in-law is waiting to seize it and they're going to send the old man to live with his son, who has an

eighteen year old wife and lives in California. The man loves the North and just wants to stay in his cottage and fish every day in the hat that his beloved second daughter bought him with her allowance when she was nine. She was killed in a car accident the Christmas after." That would usually be enough to do it. I don't know why I did it—it was interesting to see the effect I could have on her, though. "Good thing you're in writing, Sage," Andie would say, "It's the only way you're getting away with this!" Then she would laugh and run off to do something else. Andie can make herself laugh things off. It's a rare gift.

Who was this man? He does not approve of me. He thinks there's something wrong with me. Is he happy? Is he really as sad as he looks? I know absolutely nothing about him. Am I reading everything wrong? And I'll bet he knows where that old road through the woods leads.

And so, log, that is what my little trip on the roads around the cottage inspired me to write. It's almost dinner time. I don't know where the time goes. And I don't know how I ended up heading in the direction of Lennox's cottage, but I did.

Mrs. Lennox likes each member of my family to drop by at least once each time we come up to the lake. She knows that I'm here, and she is probably very curious as to who Andie and Sage are and what on earth I'm doing inviting two unknown kids up to the cottage. They know that I work at a camp in the summers, but they don't really know what else comes along with it, the sense of responsibility, the unending urge to help others, to fix situations, the compulsion that you can't do enough. I have experienced this mindset all too often. I'm sure Mrs. Lennox would be much happier if I

brought a stunning young man up to visit, and appeared on her beach with a sparkling engagement ring and visions of children swirling around me, barely visible.

Andie and I pull up to the Lennox shore at the same time. She jumps out of her canoe first and pulls it safely up to the beach in one strong sweep of her arm, and then runs over and heaves my canoe onto the sand. I hold on to the gunwales and try to keep my balance as I climb over the seats and jump out onto the beach. Mrs. Lennox has seen us coming and scurries down the pine-needled path from her cottage to the beach in bare feet, a flowing beach cover-up, an oversized straw hat and a cigarette flailing from one hand. She is attempting to balance three lawn chairs under her other arm and Andie jogs ahead and takes the lawn chairs from her, setting them up as she motions to the beach. Mrs. Lennox nods in approval.

“Emerson!” She coos immediately. “Look at you, child, you are just as charming as I remember you! Who’s this little angel?”

“I’m Andie.”

“And you are just a dear!”

She looks Mrs. Lennox straight in the eye, refusing to blush, and then it is as she suddenly remembers David and coos right back.

“It’s wonderful to meet you, Mrs. Lennox! What a, um, great hat!”

I hold back a grin and step into the conversation as the older woman looks slightly puzzled and Andie sets up the lawn chairs.

“Mrs. Lennox, I hope that Avery enjoyed himself last night—“ I say quickly.

“Oh, well you can be sure of that! Stories around the campfire with three pretty girls, well, I’m sure he’d be quite willing to enjoy that! It’s the pretty girls that keep these

boys interested these days, isn't it? Why, just this afternoon, Davey set off to see some little girl he met over at the Lodge last night."

Andie clears her throat loudly and begins to trace a deep trench in the sand with her toes. Martha looks slightly flustered.

"So did Avery tell you lots of stories about the lake last night, Andrea?"

"Stories everywhere you go, eh, Emerson?"

Martha looks at me questioningly.

"Well," I explain, "Our other friend who is visiting us, Sage, is working on a writing project for school. She was hoping that the outdoors would help inspire her to write up some new ideas."

"Yeah, and she won't *do* anything but roam around looking for ideas! I was hoping to find someone who might want to get a little *fishin* in—" Andie looks up hopefully at Martha, who unfortunately is still thinking about stories.

"Oh, that's wonderful, to come to the lake to dream and imagine! Have you told her all about Wayne Reynolds—"

"No, I don't think that's the sort of story that she's really trying to write, Mrs. Lennox."

"Who's Wayne Reynolds? Is that the story Avery was going to tell—" Andie is cut off by a now very excited Martha.

"Oh, girls, that story still sends chills up my bones! To think of what your poor grandmother had to go through that summer, ooh!"

"Em, how come you never told us about him?"

"Well, I don't know—"

“Emerson! Tell them the story!” Martha is quite agitated now. “It’s the one thing that really put us on the map, I’m telling you, people *knew* where Whiskey Lake *was* after that! And how very brave everyone was!”

“All right, Martha, why don’t you tell us the story now?” I say carefully.

“What?!”

“Um, I was wondering,” Andie rephrases politely, “If maybe you could tell us the story of Wayne—“

“Goodness! I can’t possibly! Imagine you, girl, thinking I could relive that story word for word at my age, goodness gracious, no, I couldn’t possible *tell* the story, but I think it should be told, oh yes, it should be heard, but oh no, I couldn’t possibly be me!” She stands up, quite bothered, and collects her chair again under her arm. “Now enough of this silliness. You should both come up to the cottage. I will show you the new rock garden I’m planting near the front of the cottage. It’s quite a masterpiece! I asked Davey to stop on his way home from the Lodge and try to find me some nice rocks. I think there are lots on the road near your cottage, actually, Yes, there should be lots of nice flat ones on the road between the Lodge and your place. It’s a shame though, the shambles they’ve let that road become--”

“Martha,” Andie says quickly, “It was nice to meet you, but um, I need to get back to our cottage. I’m um, making dinner, and I left the chicken in the oven! I’m such a good help to Emerson, and I’ve been working on my cooking skills all summer!”

I roll my eyes in her general direction.

“Bye, Em! I’ll see you when you get home, not too long, right? Dinner shouldn’t be long! Bye Mrs. Lennox, I mean, Martha, it was great to talk to you!”

“Andrea, it was a pleasure to meet you. Have a lovely chicken dinner! Emerson and I will have a nice visit by the rock garden, and I’ll have her home in time for the meal. When will you be eating?”

Andie cringes and then throws on a pleasant expression. “It’s *Andie*. Well, Emerson, dear, we shall be dining around five o’clock, and would appreciate your presence!” She runs down to the shore and wades into the water, pulling the canoe with her. Waving to me, she climbs into the boat and paddles away. I can see behind her a wake of pure determination as she effortlessly glides toward our own beach.

At five o’clock, Andie stands nervously in the kitchen wringing her hands through oven mitts. She swears under her breath at the half-frozen chicken in the oven. Having invited themselves to Andie’s self-proclaimed masterpiece of a dinner, Mrs. and Mr. Lennox flit about outside commenting on the skill with which the children’s treehouse was constructed, and I am perfecting the art of the smile and nod. Leaving them inspecting the knotwork on the drop-down ladder, I run inside to the kitchen. Andie’s face is flushed yet pale, and her hair stuck haphazardly to her forehead.

“And the chicken?” I take a chance.

“Rock hard and I don’t care anymore. She’s not home yet.”

“Are you sure she’s not sleeping?”

“Em, she is not *here!*”

Mrs. Lennox’s nose peeks around the corner. “Something smells dee-licious!” She sings. “I do hope David hurries!”

“David?” Andie and I say in unison.

“Ooh yes, I left him a note to come over and join us if he gets back from his precious Lodge soon! Call me when it’s ready!” She scurries back outside where Avery is beckoning her to examine the fine choice of sand under the treehouse.

“Great.” Andie mutters softly.

“There’s no note anywhere?”

“There’s no note, Em. She is not here!”

Sunday, August 30, 1996
Andie Gartner

Well, since anyone last wrote, two outrageous things have happened. First of all, and I don't know how to say this, but Sage didn't come home last night. You can probably tell because I'm writing in a new log-book. She must have the other one with her, because we can't find it. Second of all, I came very close to being sexually violated last night. Yes, I'm okay now. And if I sound cold or unfeeling it's because that's what I've just been accused of being. So I might as well write that way.

Okay, so issue number one. We still don't know where Sage is. Now, it's only morning, see, it's still early, and the only reason I'm really writing is that Emerson is on the phone and I don't feel like thinking. Now, Sage is a skilled tripper, so she's probably just off trying to prove some point by surviving on her own for the night. She probably just took her little tripping tent (we can't find it in with her gear, but we can't even remember if she brought it!) and some food and set up in some nice little clearing in the forest. And then she'll come home today, probably any minute now, and brag about how she's such a master of the wilderness. She'll have all kinds of stories about how she picked blueberries for breakfast and made friends with wild squirrels and chipmunks. I know her. She probably just did it for the story. Well if she didn't find it, I've got one for her!

Hey Sage! You can write about how we ate the goddamn chicken two hours late and how Em finally got fed up with me and made me entertain the Lennoxes with first aid stories from camp while she whipped the chicken into shape and threw together some semblance of a meal. And you can add a bit about how they talked about their golden boy David all night and he never actually showed up. When they tried to phone him at

the cottage, no one answered the phone for a while and then he finally answered and said he was too tired and had decided to go to bed early. So then by the end of dinner when Emerson couldn't explain where you were, Avery started to get upset too and decided that we should search the woods. What a fun story, eh?

Do you KNOW how scary it is at night searching a woods with three flashlights! We did a round of the property's edge, me and Avery and Em. We checked all along the paths up from the cottage, all the way to the North River Lodge, and then back again. Lots of trampled leaves and brush, but lots of deer as well. The woods are deep between the lake and the road, Avery pointed out. We looked for a good three hours and found nothing. Then Avery had the bright idea of checking the shore from the lake, but Em almost had a fit, saying that there's no way that you'd go out on the lake by yourself at night, besides, the two canoes were both on the beach and the motorboat was happily slamming against the dock in the night wind.

Finally I got tired of listening to Em argue with Avery and I ran out and climbed into the motorboat and did one quick circuit of the lake, yelling your name at all the small islands and all over Beaver Bay. The four way echo is still there—why didn't you hear me?!

After about fifteen minutes, I could see lights flashing back and forth and lots of noise from our beach so I drove back. Nothing. No sign of you at all. How on earth did you hide your tracks so well, that's what I want to know! Em said that she was glad you'd been camping since you were a kid, but I told her I didn't think your early camping experiences were overly positive—remember, you told me a bit about that one camp you were sent to, but not much. God, Sage, you don't tell me much of anything, now that I

think of it, but you just said the other night on the dock that I was your closest friend! How am I supposed to decode this one? I can't even think of where you might have gone—it's so frustrating! Then Em said she was glad you're a life guard. I told her that was the most ridiculous thing I had heard all night. We were discussing the plan, whether to report you missing or to wait, whether you'd just left on that solo trip you were talking about and forgotten to leave a note or whether we should really be worried. Sage, dammit, I can't read your mind!

Anyway, because I have the worst timing in the world, I got a migraine and almost blacked out about ten minutes after I returned to the beach. Well, I guess it's good that I had returned to the beach, because I could barely stand up it hurt so badly. So Avery finally had to take Martha home as she wasn't helping the situation, flitting around the beach in a panic. Avery promised to do continual searches of the roads in the area, and the shoreline and the trails, and I was sent to bed, which is exactly where I went, something Em would comment on the next day and really make me angry! Apparently, she spent the whole night on the beach listening to the night.

The next thing I remember is waking up in the middle of the night and hearing a small noise at my window. It was a gentle tap, like a soft hand or the branch of a sapling sweeping by the window pane. I sat up instinctively and my head was pounding and spinning with leftover pain. The noise repeated, over and over, and I was in that strange hazy stage of sleep at which I couldn't tell whether it was literally my head making the noises or if I was dreaming it, or if something was really out there!

Then the noise sharpened from a fuzzy scratching into a voice. 'Andie? Andie, can I come in?' I heard. You had come home! I was so happy that I reached out in the

dark and somehow fumbled with the window enough to unlatch it at the top and let it fall open. A figure climbed awkwardly through the window and fell over the dresser onto the foot of the bed, knocking over a bottle of sunblock in its way. It swore under its breath and I forced my eyes open wide in the pitch black, trying to see you.

'Why the hell are you climbing in the window?' That's the first thing I remember saying as I reached my arm out toward you.

'Sorry I'm late! I didn't want to startle Emerson. She's on the beach,' said a rough voice. I shook my head and tried to hear through the ringing in my ears.

'Sorry you're LATE?! We looked EVERYWHERE!'

'I know you did.' A strange laugh.

'What the hell took you so long? Where were you?'

'That's just what I was thinking! I heard what you guys were doing, trying to run into me.'

"Trying to run into you?! What the hell? God, we were so worried, you idiot!"

The voice was too rough, too deep. I was getting scared. The figure shifted toward me and two hands gripped my shoulders and pushed me back down onto the bed. I felt the weight of another person pressing slowly down over me, legs across my legs, chest meeting mine. That's when I completely woke up. I remember my eyes springing even more widely open and locking immediately with the brown eyes of David Lennox.

The room suddenly didn't seem so dark and seemed darker, all at the same time. I threw an arm across my face and my other hand slammed his forehead away with a force and I opened my mouth to yell—

'Isn't this what you wanted, Andie? I heard you were totally into me!'

'What are you, some kind of lunatic?'

'She said you liked me! You wanna really get to know me?' He grinned and leaned over to kiss the arm I had flung over my face.

'Who said—what the fuck—NO!' I said, my breath caught in my throat. 'NO!'

He sat up instantly and turned on a small flashlight. I scrambled to the other end of the bed, sitting up also and wrapping the blankets tightly up around my knees and under my chin. Sure. Add this to my glory file.

'Oh shit.' He frowns.

'Give me one fucking reason why I shouldn't scream my head off right now!'

'God, Andie, I'm so sorry. It's just that she said you wanted me to come over!'

'WHO?'

'Your friend, that Sage girl with the short hair! She came to see me about it.'

I was totally awake now. 'You talked to Sage?' Just looking at his face repulsed me. 'Just get away from me. Don't fucking leave until I say you can but get the fuck away from me.'

He stormed over to the window and stood angrily in front of it, arms cross against his chest.

'I can't fucking believe this. David, you better answer me. Do you know where she is?'

'Who?'

'Sage, you jackass.'

'No, why, is she missing?'

'Yes, she's missing.'

'Oh shit, Andie, I'm so sorry.'

'SURE! Yeah, well that doesn't help much. What did she say to you?'

'Well, she said that you wanted to see me, that you were really into me and you wanted me to come over and meet you at 3:30 this morning. She told me I could just sneak in the back bedroom window, that you'd be expecting me! God, she made it sound so good!'

I'm sure she did. What were you thinking?! Well Sage, give yourself a little pat on the back. Plan worked beautifully. Remind me to thank you when you come home. And could you hurry?

This morning, Andie decides to accompany the police on the search. They disagree at first, fight her off, say that there is no way that she will be any help, that she will only be in the way. Anger rises in her eyes like no anger I have ever seen before and she speaks with certainty, at the level of voice that lies between a condescending reprimand and a desperate scream.

"I will go with you," she says, "Because when you find her you will not know what to do."

These are the words that will come to mind when I hear Andie Garner's name in years to come, or Andrea, as she will come to be known.

I cannot go as well because I have to stay here. Someone has to be here, just in case. This is the home base. I must answer the officer's questions. Our operation has turned on its own goal.

David Lennox's name comes up as someone who might help and she shakes her head fiercely. She has grown quiet and conversation has begun to break down as finely and smoothly as the few leaves that decide to abandon the tree at the first chance. It is not yet September. From the beach I watch the boat speed away, Andie standing in the bow and someone then yelling at her to sit down, Andie sitting uneasily in the bow, ready to leap over the front any second, gripping the painter rope in her right hand.

And so the day continues.

Sunday, August 30, 1996 (cont.)
Andie Gartner

You wanna relive this with us? Here you go.

We circle the lake too many times to count.

The policemen are idiots. They yell at me to hold still, sit down, be quiet. They try to 'calm me down' by holding me by the shoulders and I scream at them. They are going to miss her. We have to look closer, more carefully. They are idiots.

Right before dinner we call Sage's parents.

It is easier to tell this in point form.

Her father is not able to be reached.

I cannot dial the phone. One of the police officers does it.

Leaves are starting to fall off the trees.

It's only August. I just saw four or five leaves fall.

Her mother will be arriving at the cottage by midnight.

That is how long it takes to get here from her home.

She didn't even know Sage was here. She is frustrated. She is too far away.

Another six leaves fall.

And the police do not divulge details over the phone.

Night has fallen. She has been missing now for just over twenty-four hours. Karen Albright called from her cell phone to let us know that she was just passing Huntsville. She'll be here in less than two hours. The policemen are busily sending shifts out and coordinating things from their home base in North Bay. One of them, named James, smiled at me in the kitchen after we ate dinner. I think he may have actually winked at me. He said the spaghetti that I made was the spiciest and tastiest he had ever eaten. I couldn't even smile at him. Then I caught him smirking at me across the room with another younger officer named Alex. Alex cannot be more than thirty years old and he has the most serious face of them all. He seems mildly concerned. Andie may be right. They just may be idiots.

Andie comes to me and announces that she cannot take it anymore. Earlier she had to physically stop herself from climbing back into the canoe and paddling all over the dark lake herself, shouting Sage's name. I had to hold her shoulders and lead her back inside. She sat at the window and looked out across the lake. She has the same look in her eyes right now.

"Emerson?"

"Yes, Andie?"

"I think Sage wrote a poem about me in the log. Is it there?"

“No, she must have taken that one with her. This year isn’t here. She wrote a poem about you?”

“Yeah. I think so. I saw a line as I walked by her once, something about sitting on a dock, and we were sitting on a dock. I think she was trying to tell me something and I missed it. I’m the idiot now.”

“Andie, when she gets back, you should ask to read it. That will make her happy. She just wants to feel like someone is listening to her.”

“Okay.”

I silently will Andie to sit quietly. It lasts ten minutes.

“Em?”

“Yes, Andie?”

“Is that a rifle above the door?”

“Yes.”

“Do you know how to shoot it?”

“Yes.”

“What is it for, hunting?”

“Yes, Andie. Hunting and emergencies.”

“Is this an emergency?”

“Once, oh, Andie, you’d never believe it, but once my brother ran outside to use the outhouse and there was a bear standing right there by the front door--”

“This is supposed to make me feel BETTER?!”

“Oh God, no, well, sorry. It’s just why we have the rifle there. Just in case.”

“GREAT!”

“Dammit, Andie, you’re OLD ENOUGH!” I immediately regret yelling at her. She turns to me with flames in her eyes.

“You enjoy scaring me? You want to tell me that fucking story you were afraid to let me hear?”

“What story--”

“Oh, don’t give me that. That Wayne story, the one that Mrs. Lennox tried to tell me, the one that you’re supposed to tell over campfires that you avoided twice already.”

“Andie, you don’t want to--”

“You know what, Emerson? Why don’t you just let me figure out what I do or do not need. The least you could do is help me keep my mind off everything for the length of one damn story.”

“Andie, it’s not that kind--”

She looks up at me suddenly, slamming her mug of hot chocolate down onto the table, splashing some onto the cards on the table and the small pile of popcorn in front of her on a paper towel. “Please tell it, Em? Please?” Her eyes fill with tears. “My mind aches, Em, I can’t think anymore. It hurts.”

I can’t tell this story without my Grandmother’s words. It is her story. I was only about two or three years old, and safely tucked away in the city with my mother. I reach for the cottage logs, which sit in a neat pile beside the pancake griddle, both untouched since Sunday. Andie does not comment as I flip through the older, faded issues to the summer of 1975.

“Here we go. August 3, 1975. This is my Grandmother speaking.”

Andie leans her head down on one arm and I smooth her hair for a moment before beginning. She blinks her eyes rapidly and stares intently at her own sideways reflection in the front window.

“At 2:15, Steven’s car came down the road and it looked like Edna and Frank were coming with Steve and Sara to make their yearly visit! But no, they told us a tale we thought could never happen in our vandal-free, peaceful Whiskey Lake.

“6:00am. A young girl knocked on the Chandler’s door and asked Edna for a battery booster. Edna, just waking, shooed her away and said no to all her requests as Frank was out for his morning stroll. Just then, as he entered the yard, Frank was pushed back into the cottage with a gun barrel at his back, and an escaped convict (two murders!) behind the gun! He had the battery-booster girl (one of his hostages) get the rest of the hostages from the stolen, unserviceable car parked behind the cottage.

“His name was Wayne Reynolds, age 37. He wanted a gun to add to the two he already had so he could kill five police officers who had put him behind bars and who were to testify at his trial coming up shortly. Apparently he had escaped from holding in North Bay! He had Edna prepare breakfast for all of them and he drank half of a case of beer! (I think she made scrambled eggs.) Steven tried to reason with him, and after finding Steven’s rifle under his bed, he decided to tie everyone up. He even tied Steve’s one leg to the bed post and his hands behind his back and made him lie in bed! (Steve lost his leg in an accident at work the year before). Edna and Frank were tied together on the chesterfield and he tied the hands and feet of the other four and made them sit on the floor. One young 12 year old boy had been taken from a motel room, where parents had left him to sleep.

“After three hours tied up, they were all finally joined by our cousin Sara, who left our cottage to go to get Steven instead of waiting here after he was three hours late to meet her for a fishing trip! She was met at the door by Reynolds and his gun, and sent into Steven’s bedroom for the explanation of it all. Reynolds tied her hands and feet also after searching her purse and removing her pocket knife. He finally decided to leave, telling them all they were to stay quiet and tied up for an hour after he left with Frank’s car. He returned at two different intervals to check on them -- making sure they followed his instructions.

“Frank Chandler finally got loose and told Mr. Samson who asked Peter Cox to go phone the OPP while he watched the house “armed” in case of Reynolds’ return. Cox finally got through after three tries and finally paying \$1.00 to Janice Keele at the North River Lodge! (Janice held the receiver down like she always does!) The police arrived and questioned all. They took the other hostages back to town and the Chandlers brought Sara here for her bag as she will have to stay in town tonight. We missed the 9:00pm mass at the Cathedral--he might have tried to stop our truck on the road!

“Needless to say, we are all pretty upset. I hope they find him tonight. Chandler’s cottage is closed and two policemen were left there to guard it. And I have a cottage full of children and guests and cousins from out of town and we are five short minutes away in a canoe. Five short minutes. Somehow we got our roast beef dinner on, then the Dawsons and the boys arrived and spent the evening, along with the kids from next door, and we all had popcorn and tried to play card games. Helicopters searching for his car during the dinner hour. Waving a gun in his hand, Mr. Samson

chased a confused friend, Pete Lennox, away from Chandler's dock, yelling, 'Keep away from here! There's trouble!' We left the outside lights on. Rifle within reach. Hard to get to sleep tonight."

Andie holds the her empty mug in two hands and her eyebrows are wrinkled in a thin line of concern. "What happened, Em?"

"He was captured on September 2nd. Every day until then, my Granny wrote about how she wished 'today would be the day he was caught', about how 'things like this don't happen on our lake'. They put a price of \$5000 on his head, I think. They called it the largest manhunt in the area ever. There were hundreds of men searching and roadblocks all over the place. My Granny still continued to write every night. She wrote about the ten pound pickerel that Stevey caught, or the new motor on the Lennox's boat, and every night the crowd at the cottage seemed to grow, and she mentioned tea and aspirin and commented that it was difficult to fall asleep.

"She even kept the string—see, here it is in the front of the log book—the string that tied Steven Chandler's leg to the bedpost! Can you believe it? And remember, it was many years ago. Mrs. Chandler couldn't let a young girl in for a battery booster because Frank was out for a walk. After that, things changed. 'That's when things changed, Emmy,' she'd say. Grandfather was a pilot and was away so many nights, she would remind me. So many nights.

"Then one night when I was young, I heard a deer knocking its antlers on the side of the cottage, just knocking away, pounding and pounding. We don't know why. But the next day, we found bear tracks outside the front door and she taught me how to shoot a rifle. I was ten years old."

Sunday, August 30, 1996 (cont.)
Andie Gartner

I'm writing this right across from Sage's mother and I feel sneaky somehow writing about her. She doesn't know what I'm saying. If Em's grandmother can write in the log in the worst of times, then dammit, so can I. And this isn't so bad. It's going to turn out okay.

Mrs. Albright does not seem to be able to speak. She arrived just as Em finished her story and we were all clapping and she glared her way in and looked very confused. Since then she has just sat there staring out the window. Didn't even try to talk to any of the policemen. Emerson has been quietly and calmly questioning her. They're talking at the table right now. Has she shown signs of being upset before? You recently went back to school? How did Sage react? Your husband lives in Ottawa? Psychology, that's what you're studying? Em looks frustrated. She is running out of things to say. Mrs. Albright murmurs one-syllables in response and stares straight out the window some more. Em looks like she wants to scream and cry at the same time. She keeps tucking her hair behind her ears.

Come to think of it, Sage's mother actually looks a bit like Emerson. Wait, she looks exactly like Emerson! They could be sisters! Wow. Mrs. Albright has medium length black hair, shiny and straight, that hangs straight down and rests just above her shoulders. Em's is lighter, and her smile is wider, but other than that, they look very similar. That's creepy.

"Andie, what the hell are you grinning about?" I'm going to transcribe the conversation. Nothing better to do.

"Nothing. It's just that you two kinda look alike."

Em glares. I shut up. I don't know why I talk sometimes.

It's too dark to see whether leaves are falling anymore. That was a good diversion. It really seems early to me. Maybe I'll check back through the logs and see if anyone else was desperate enough to notice leaves falling. Sad.

More time passes. Nothing to say. Nothing to think.

“You know what, Emerson, I'm not going to write in the log book any more it's IDIOTIC. Just so you know. No one will ever have a clue what this is like. Hard to get to sleep tonight. Sure. I'm not going to do it.”

I silently will Andie to be quiet. Please.

James and Alex, the two police officers, cannot think of anything helpful to say.

“Fine, Emerson, don't answer me. You know I'm right.”

More time passes. I can feel Andie jumping within her skin yet she grips the sides of her chair and holds still.

“GOD, MRS. ALBRIGHT AREN'T YOU GOING TO SAY ANYTHING?!”

“Hey, Andrea, want some hot chocolate?” James says quickly.

“Fuck off, James, you know her name is Andie.”

Andie turns around. “Who the hell said that?”

Alex, who was looking down, says quietly. “I did.” Andie looks almost pleased and touches her hair absently.

James laughs out loud and throws a magazine across the room at Alex.

Two other nameless policemen swear loudly.

Suddenly, the CB radio screams loudly.

James answers it and immediately the colour leaves his face.

The radio begins to pick up speed. Muffled voices run back and forth and I can't separate any of the words.

Mrs. Albright starts crying and Andie looks at me with eyes pleading for help.

There is a drone of voices and sound and sudden movement that probably knocked at least ten leaves off the trees that shelter the cottage from the wild.

“ANDIE!”

Alex is standing in the doorway calling the girl's name.

“ANDIE!”

Mrs. Albright's face, which was buried in my shoulder, now turns to me, a pale shade of grey.

“ANDIE GET OVER HERE!”

Alex pulls open the door and with one sweep of his arm he grabs the rifle from above the entrance way and pushes a confused Andie outside and slams the door behind him. More noise follows them, spilling out from the crack under the door.

James motions to hand me the radio and I wave it away, pointing to Karen's head which is shaking violently again on my shoulder. I lean over awkwardly and hand her Kleenex. My head has turned to stone and feels like it's about to shatter. I whisper quietly.

“Sh, Karen, let's get the details. Let's find them out, okay?”

James mutters a few closing phrases and sits down at the table across from Karen and I. He folds his hands on the table in front of him. Two more policemen turn down

their radios and stand behind him, arms crossed. Karen looks up and faces him. She speaks for the first time.

“I can’t talk to her, you know, to Sage. I just can’t talk to her. I could talk to her very well when she was seven. She was a beautiful child at seven. Just beautiful.”

I can hear Andie’s voice from outside:

“See, that’s the beauty of it, Alex, you don’t know me at all. I could be loud, I could be quiet, I could grab you and kiss you right now for no reason, I could jump on top of you, I could run screaming around in circles. You don’t expect anything of me. Everyone who knows me expects me to be a flighty, silly girl. But I’m not. I’m fucking intelligent. But no one knows because I try to hard to be fun, to be happy and energetic. You know? And where does that get me? I end up all alone!”

“When Sage was eight she was quieter. But she was still as beautiful.”

“I’m sure she was, Karen. She was a beautiful girl.”

“She didn’t get talkative again until she was older. Much older.”

James clears his throat and glares at me. His forehead wrinkles and his eyes glaze over with a melancholy of nothing but completeness.

Andie’s voice again from outside:

“I have to go to this goddamn formal in the fall, and I have no one to go with. I’m in my second year of Pre-Med. in University, not that I really want to talk about it,

but I am. I'm going to be a doctor, even though Emerson thinks I should be a psychologist. I don't know why. I couldn't help anyone with anything.

"Although, the more I think about it, I understand exactly why things happen, why people do what they do. Sometimes I just don't want to admit it. Maybe I just want other people to fix things. I think that drives Emerson crazy. You know?"

"But anyway, someday I'm going to really raise hell. I'm going to make a hell of a wave in someone's life and she's never going to be able to erase me from her mind. She is going to say to herself, 'That Andie Gartner. What in the world would I ever have done without her. And the words 'too late' won't be in our vocabularies. And she's going to tell me so herself.

"Wait, Alex, why are you holding that rifle?"

"If you don't tell me the goddamn truth now—"

"Mrs. Albright, Emerson," He clears his throat again and one of the gruff-looking men behind puts a hand on his shoulder lightly and then thinks better of it.

"Mrs. Albright, there appears to have been an accident, and Officers Grant and Wilder have located the body of your daughter. It, yes, seems to have been an accident.

"They found her in the cove far around the lake. She must have hiked through the forest, or on an old road, all the way around the lake, and then come out to a clearing with lots of sharp rocks around shallow pools of water, the kind that form in outcrops of Canadian Shield. We suspect she must have hit her head on one of the rocks, and you know it only takes a few inches of water—Oh God—"

He coughs and looks away from Karen toward me. “The only thing she seems to have had with her was a small notebook in a large Ziplock bag. Apparently, Emerson, it has your family’s name in it. They’re bringing her back now.”

Alex strides toward the beach and Andie runs after him. He stops at the foot of the dock and stares out across the lake. There are faraway sounds and the moon is strong and full of light, the kind of moon that sends a shiny black sheen across the water, making it look so smooth you could slide right across and never slow down.

The crickets and cicadas hush for a moment.

A light is seen on the edge of the water, just out of sound’s reach.

The sheen disappears. It is replaced by gradually building ripples.

A whistle sounds.

Alex turns his back to the lake and raises the rifle toward the forest. Shouting at her to stay back, he fires shot after shot into the sky over the shaking trees until the gun refuses to make a sound. The boat is pulling closer and I can now hear deep voices sounding across the water. Standing on the cottage porch, I cover my ears. Andie falls into the soft sand beside the campfire circle. Alex shakes the empty gun and throws it down. For hunting and emergencies.

My legs and feet begin to move. As I reach her side, Andie lifts the rifle and stands up, gripping it against her chest in folded arms, planting her feet firmly in the sand, and painting over her face with one of pure determination.

Sunday, August 30, 1996
Sage Albright

'Welcome pine trees. Welcome cedars. Welcome tamaracks. Welcome spruces and welcome silverbirches. Gather round crickets and grasshoppers and rock bass and deer and beavers and chipmunks and muskrats and herons. Hush cicadas. Hush loons. Quiet owls. I'm out on my own and it's quiet tonight and the stars are too busy to look up at so I'm going to ignore them. Only fucking stars I know are too hidden to find, they're hiding in the noise of the rest. That's right, there's comfort in groups. Tonight, just for a little change I would like to be the star. I AM going to be the star. Here we go. Let's stage my life story—a documentary all about ME! Imagine it! Now how would it start—welcome to the life and times of Sage Albright, age seventeen!

'It all began in a textbook. Quiet owls, listen. A textbook case, they said. Sage Albright isn't getting enough attention from her parents. Or so I've heard it explained, anyway. Before too long, Albright stopped spending time on homework all together, and started spending time on the most creative ways to explain having homework done. She gave an outstanding performance in Ms Weston's geography class just last term. We have a clip: Oh, Ms Weston, Ms Weston. No, I don't have my assignment done quite yet. You know why? Because I love your Geography class so much that I spent all day filling out forms to enter us in a contest to win a trip to Paris! That's real geography, right? Travelling. We would get to go to Paris, Ms Weston, imagine Paris! Yes, that's right, with the Eiffel Tower and Notre Dame and stroll along the River Seine. Can you just imagine that? That's where you had your honeymoon, isn't it, Ms Weston? And, if I'm not mistaken, your husband ran into his old lover, didn't he? That's what I thought.

Yeah, that must have been hard, being in the city of love, surrounded by lovers, do you know the percentage of people who propose marriage on top of the Eiffel Tower each night? It's a great place to watch proposals. Did ya know that they also put up nets the whole way down, from the north leg to the south, from the east to the west. Apparently it's also a great place to watch for suicides...

'Sure enough, she ran screaming from the room and took the next week off school. And tricking the sub was even easier than tricking Ms. Weston.

'After Sage Albright's fourth or fifth teacher complained, things got started. She slipped in with a bad crowd, or so they liked to explain it. And she got shipped off to camp. Ironic, actually, for Albright does believe that she actually might have liked camp if it weren't for the leaders. They greeted her the first day with pity in their eyes. She was an "at-risk youth" and was to be treated as such. The Albright family found out later that the camp they had chosen had a less than stellar reputation, if you know what I mean. Ya gotta be careful who you trust with your kid these days. So at night, while the leaders of the camp were all coupled off in tents screwing or getting high or whatever they did, Albright took it upon herself to organize the younger campers into some activities. One game she made up is now a favourite among campers; it's called 'Don't Get Burned'. You have to light a wooden match and hold it with the tips of your fingers. Then you have to answer as many questions as are fired at you until the flame reaches your hand. Truly amazing.

'Amazing, what fire does. I loved to watch it. After the little kids were asleep, I would just light fire after fire. I would let them burn right down to the coals, the hottest part, and then hold little twigs and paper up to the glowing embers and wait for them to

catch. You have to be very patient and they catch quite well. Then I would build the fire back up. It never failed. It would always come back to life; all I had to do was give it a bit more wood to gobble up and plenty of air to breathe. You could never get tired staring into a fire. I remember one day at lunch, the leaders were real impressed with how fast my group lit their fire. They actually asked me to demonstrate how I could do it with just a bunch of sticks, a roll of birchbark and one match. Then one damn kid had to go and spoil the whole thing, said, 'Oh yeah, she never even sleeps, just plays with fire all night too. I saw her, I did.' Little shit. I almost killed him. The leaders looked mad and right then and there I just whaled on him. I hit him and punched him and screamed at him. And got sent home. Found lots of places at home to light fires, though, and I never got sent anywhere for that.

'I loved how fire itself was so unpredictable. It always burned upward, but you never knew what direction, exactly, so I could be unpredictable when I played with it. I remember when they told me I was going to have to switch schools, how I couldn't find anything to burn. I ended up burning the ends of my own hair. I got real excited about it, I'd light a few pieces and then blow them out until I had this great fringe look. That was IT, they said, they wanted me out of my school. First step toward a fresh start, I guess. I shoulda known. That was around the time when my Mom came home with a Psychology textbook—she was taking a class. She shoulda known too. It's funny, actually. They always say that depressed people need friends. So I thought – if I'm depressed, they'll need to keep me with my friends. Not like I had lots of friends, but I did have this one group and I was going to host a book bonfire with our grade school notes after classes

one day. They called me the firestarter, like the movie. That was cool too. So I looked it up in the textbook and tried everything on.

'Disturbed sleep, it said. I screamed and screamed in my sleep; my parents would come running -- I yelled "Oh my God, the house is burning down! I'm trapped!" And my damn Mother had to go and say, 'Look, Hal, she's feeling trapped in her school because of all the trouble she's gotten into lighting fires!' So I tried changing my activity rate, as the book said. I would jog the whole way home from school and fall into the house panting. Then for days I would lounge around the house doing absolutely nothing. It's the best I could do; I didn't know what the hell it meant. I had no trouble with 'difficulty concentrating' -- I would make my parents repeat things, I'd forget things, I'd have trouble making decisions. I walked in my sleep. I fell asleep at meals. I put myself down. I swore. I swore already, so I swore more. A lot more. 'Anxiety', the book said. I tried that one on too. I cried, I worried out loud. I worried a lot. I worried about nothing.

'And you know what I realized? I realized that the BOOK didn't know a THING. THE BOOK KNEW SHIT! You know why? Because my parents didn't get it. They didn't put the pieces together. I mean, I WAS A TEXTBOOK CASE and if you can't recognize a textbook, hell, how much easier does it get? They sent me to a new school. Right there, in grade nine, I get ripped out of the school and sent to a new one. But I never fuckin' got there, so don't even think about asking how it went. So one night I checked the last thing on the list under 'adolescent depression', and there it was, 'reckless behaviour,' my last chance. I ran away in the middle of the night that very night. I just ran and ran and ran and ran. I had decided to set fire to the school.

'Maybe I was too used to the textbook list, 'cause then some other symptoms set in. Symptoms I knew. Ones I remembered, ones I had been good at. I started to cry. I sat there on the steps to the school, with a can of gasoline that I stole from our garage (I think it was for the chainsaw) and I just screamed and cried at the top of my lungs.

'Sage Albright didn't even realize that she was pouring the gas in thin circles around herself. Around herself. She just stood there, held her arms high and was about to drop a match onto the gas ring around her when the fire department showed up. We suspect that a neighbour must have seen it, or that's how they explain it. She had the control to set things out of control—that might be how they explained it. But they didn't really explain it. They didn't really explain how taking her away from all her friends would help. They didn't explain why the fact that there were more trees and more to see would be helpful. They didn't tell her what would happen if it didn't work. And they sure as hell didn't tell her what to do if she actually returned to a new camp as STAFF, if she actually found people who liked her, people in important positions, the director for God's sake. The director and the first aider. The director and the first aider. And they didn't tell her what THEY WOULD DO if she were actually GOOD AT IT. Instead, she suspects her family has a fear of open flame.'

I saw a bear yesterday walking slowly out of the undergrowth

I walked the other way

It seemed to work

S. A., 1996

VITA AUCTORIS

Laura Page, born in the fall of 1975, grew up spending three seasons in Windsor, Ontario, and summers in the “Near North”, also appropriately known as Ontario’s “Cottage Country”, or the “Land of Lakes”. She graduated from Catholic Central High School in 1994. At the University of Windsor, she completed a Combined Honours B.A. in English Literature and Creative Writing and Psychology (1998), and is now finishing her M.A. in English and Creative Writing (2000). Laura is returning to her hometown of Toronto to pursue doctoral work in Human Development and Applied Psychology at OISE/UT, and promises to treat her many Psychology textbooks with more reverence than do her young characters in this text.