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LIKE BONE FROM SKIN

by

Jenny Sampirisi

A Creative Writing Project
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
through English Language, Literature and Creative Writing
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Arts at the
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ABSTRACT

In October 1983, 8-year-old Christine Jessop went missing from the tiny Ontario town of Queensville. The discovery of her body months later sparked one of Canada's most embarrassing murder investigations. Like Bone From Skin revisits Queensville in the days after Christine Jessop's disappearance and discovery, recreates the fixed image of death and public record, and focuses its lens on five fictional characters who face the challenge of looking at the events of their own lives while watching the death of a child unfold in their midst.

DEDICATION

For all things lost.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project is the culmination of six years education at U Windsor. Some skills were learned in classes and others were learned in hallways or at pubs or buried at the bottoms of books that were never assigned. These are the people who led me to those skills:

To the purveyors of the Juice poetry series, in all its murky, smoke-swathed forms for teaching me how to read what I write.

With gratitude to Darryl Whetter for giving me critical eyes, musical ears and teaching me to read as a writer; Di Brandt for giving me space to work in and time to decide what I might be; Margaret Christakos for layering sound, sweat, words, and images around me so I could see poetry on the walls of this place.

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You separate the Sunday sections and there are endless identical lines of print with people living somewhere in the words and the strange contained reality of paper and ink seeps through the house for a week and when you look at a page and distinguish one line from another it begins to gather you into it and there are people being tortured halfway around the world, who speak another language, and you have conversations with them more or less uncontrollably until you become aware you are doing it and then you stop, seeing whatever is in front of you at the time, like a glass of juice in your husband's hand.

Don DeLillo, *The Body Artist*

And you think, of course, this doesn't happen here.

Queensville Resident, *October 1983*

1.

WAITING

1.

The leaves die on the trees. The leaves should change colours but instead they die and cling to their hosts like children cleaving to a mother's thigh. The leaves hold by the thousands in the frost and no one mentions the dry brown bodies decaying overhead. They emit a subtle, dragging hiss that breaks through the air with every low wind. The hiss is the sound of the fall and of a quiet breathing in the forest that dampens all other sounds from the landscape. It carries with it a nervousness that tiptoes through Queensville like a visitor wandering the private rooms of a foreign house.

2.

Eva slumps on the porch steps. It took her too long to walk outside and longer still to sit down. She has started to measure actions in time and pain. The sliding door was heavy with both. She'd never noticed the way it suctioned the frame for just a moment and then

gave way with a tug. The way the door resisted opening. She associates the Velcro sound of it splitting open with the prying throb in her abdomen.

The sun narrows behind the trees and any remaining warmth drains into a crisp, aching coolness. She tries not to shiver, then does. What had the nurse called it? *Abdominal wall? Abdominal cavity? Is that it? That's what they cut into, or through? Walls and spaces?* A breeze sizzles the leaves and Eva notices them and then remembers that she noticed them yesterday too, from the kitchen window. She wonders how many times she has noticed them and then forgotten. They're dead but still attached to the trees and this is normal? This is what happens every fall? Or some fluke of weather has altered the natural shifting of sugars and light.

Walls and cavities. She looks to the far edge of the property where tall grass edges the now harvested cornfield. What kind of walls? What kind of cavities? Eva had once filled her sundress with hay and horse manure when she was young, pretending to be pregnant. It didn't matter what went under the dress and pressed against her bare skin, so long as it bulged. But when it came out in the mock birth she had expected it to be somehow different. Not necessarily a child, but cleaner perhaps, lighter and more formed. She didn't know what she had expected but she knew that it would change under the dress, that the combination of her tensed body and her moans and her twisted expressions of mimed pain would *do something* to the material. Instead it came out in the same clumps that it went in as. The dung stained the centre of her dress deep brown with an oily yellow fringe and the hay left long puffy scratches on her belly.

Eva had forgotten the incident until she was lying on her back in the hospital waiting for the anaesthetic to be administered. And suddenly the feeling of the manure

and the hay – that strange combination of soft and sharp – came back to her. The gauze dressings that she unwrapped carefully in the days after surgery had the same flowering look of fluid pulled across fabric.

The phone rings inside the house. Against the breeze the pulse is soft but Eva tries to dig it out of the rustling overhead. She hears Roland say hello, then nothing else. *Hello.*

Then Roland yells. Eva hears only the last word. *Here.*

3.

Today is a Wednesday.

Roland is searching the closet. He can't remember where he put the set of tools he got last Christmas. The card read *From Isabel, Andrew and Eva with Love*, though Eva had obviously poured over the catalogues, picked out the item, and finally purchased it. The tools had come in a red, metal toolbox, or was it silver? He sets aside a pair of rusted hockey skates then stops for a moment to examine the closet door. The hinge sticks and creaks when he slides the old door along the rollers. He shakes the knob back and forth. A puff of dust diffuses in the air. Again he shakes the door, tugging then pushing with his weight until it cracks and splinters. It lifts off the tracks and collapses against his chest, pushing Roland backwards and sending a thick cloud of splinters and wood dust to the dark tile floor. Roland sets the door aside and wipes his hands on his pants. That will need to be fixed too.

Roland has never been handy, nor was his father who owned the house before him. Both he and his father pride themselves on their “attempt-it-all” attitudes but the end result is an eclectic mess of unfinished projects: the banister to the staircase has never been sturdy; the dusty rose carpet is bruised with several patches of black mould and doesn’t quite meet up with the slate blue carpet at the end of the hall; the doorknob to the bathroom is loose; the black and gold wallpaper is peeling in the bedroom; the living room floor is stripped down to knotty plywood with a pile of laminate sitting dusty in a far corner.

Roland has adapted to all of these failures of craftsmanship. There is a sock stuffed into the hole between the doorknob and the door in the bathroom. There is a sliver of light-blue carpet strategically placed between the dark-blue and the pink so that the shift between colours appears almost gradual. He’s taught the kids better than to hold onto the banister when walking down the stairs. The wallpaper is ignored entirely.

All of these adjustments have suited him. Like his father, Roland enjoys disrepair; the low buzz of it in a house makes him feel quietly perpetual, knowing that so long as something needs to be fixed, he will be needed to repair. So he leaves everything half finished.

Today is a Wednesday.

His fingers tingle from the strain of the torn frame and he rubs them for a moment before moving to the next closet. The back closet is full of coats that he hasn’t seen for years. He sinks his arms between an orange leather jacket and a beige tweed and forces them apart, straining to move the wire hangers along the metal cross beam. In the slice of exposed wall a large white moth has spread itself out. He can barely see it in the low

light except for the furry grey body that narrows like an exclamation mark. He stares, forgetting for a moment why he is searching through the closet, wondering if, perhaps, he has been looking for moths.

Roland reaches a cupped hand into the closet. The moth doesn't move until Roland's fingers are over it in a dome. The fluttering feels like soft scratching and Roland's first impulse is to open up his hand and let the moth fly dizzy among the coats. His second impulse is to press harder against the wall until the fluttering stops and the wings crumble. Instead he holds the flickering wings in a claw and walks to the sliding door.

On the porch he can see a thin line of smoke over the trees and smell the dusty musk of burning hay. He flattens his palm. The moth hesitates for a moment then flies a zig zag over the broken steps. It stops for a moment on the grey bark of a tree and Roland is shocked at how white it looks against the slate. Roland sits down on the edge of the porch, his legs dangling over the side. What remains of the cedar railing is arranged below him in several pieces.

Today is a Wednesday.

He scratches his palm. Linda always calls in the afternoon. The drive out to her house would be over by now. He would be on his first cigarette watching her pour wine. Not watching all of her exactly, just her pale palm visible through a measure of the red liquid maybe. Today she called. He hated the sound of his voice in a whisper, the rattle of phlegm adding a harmonic to every word. *Eva's home.*

Roland searches the yard for Eva. He pulls the pack of cigarettes out of his shirt pocket and fishes around for the lighter. The lighter isn't in any pocket so he holds the cigarette with his lips, then his teeth, then back again to his lips.

The co-op is closed for the day. Roland closed early, partly for Eva's sake, to keep her company for the night, and partly because he'd worried that Linda would call despite last Wednesday's warning. He hears her voice through Eva's ears and his stomach flutters.

Can't you come? Just tell her there's work or that there's a shipment. Linda had pleaded, *He's gone for two days. You should come. You should try.*

I need to be here. He had yelled, and then hung up. He regrets hanging up. Linda could be unpredictable. She could call back and Eva might answer. Again he hears Linda's *Hello*, terse and indignant in Eva's ear. The kettle whistles inside the house.

4.

Who called? Eva is waiting for the tea to steep. There are two mugs on the table with half an inch of milk in each.

Oh, that was Ray. Roland tries to lean against the counter but his muscles have stiffened, *He wanted to know how soon he can order his chicks for spring. Weasel got five of his hens last night and shocked the rest out of laying.* Ray had come into the store that morning with the details. Eva doesn't say anything, just pours a hot brown stream of

tea into each mug. He thinks she looks smaller since the surgery. She's lost weight but it's more than that, something in the way she's protecting her stomach.

I'm sure most of them will start laying again in the next few days. Weasel sure left a mess though. I don't know why the weasels always slit hen's throats. Half the time they can't carry that many hens off with them, but they kill them anyway. Eva stirs her tea then looks through the window. Roland shifts on his feet, not knowing if he should sit down or stay standing.

When I was a kid my dad filled that coop back there with chicks. We had two-dozen hens and one rooster so we could keep up the chicks and I dug that fence so deep that I was sure no weasel was going to get in. Roland understands that he shouldn't go on, she's heard this story before and he's talking too much.

But one morning, it was winter, I woke up and went to refill their feed. I did that every morning. And their water too. I had to bring the water from the house in a bucket and I always slogged on my clothes and my mitts and pants would freeze when I was walking. I got to the hen house and the first thing I saw was a head. Just on it's own on the floor. The whole place was covered in blood. Must have been a few weasels I guess. And they got all but one hen who was clucking like she'd gone crazy. Her feathers were filthy with blood and there were carcasses everywhere. Roland scratches his hand. He finally leans against the counter. Eva doesn't look up. She's looking toward the coop that is now the shed. Some small bushes and trees have begun to impinge on the property and surrounded the small structure.

Damn weasels. Roland whispers then pulls a chair and sits. His sudden movement irritates him. He wishes he'd stayed standing. Now Eva is staring at him, her eyes are crisp against the ash border of her bangs.

Someone called while you were at work this morning. Roland feels the word *someone* pierce his temple. He clenches his teeth and reaches for the mug. He's ready. *It's a woman from out of town that comes to get mulch for her garden sometimes. I don't know her. She's obsessed. Obviously crazy.* He doesn't say any of it but he's rehearsed it down to the hand gestures.

He's suddenly exhausted at the effort of the day. For the first time in months he thinks, *maybe just tell her, get it over with, let it sit in the room beside us.*

A little girl's gone missing, she says. She lifts the tea closer to her lips but doesn't drink.

Roland isn't sure what she means. He waits for more but Eva turns back to the window and is quiet. His heart is still beating too fast and he's gripping the mug too tight. His palm burns.

What girl?

She lives a few blocks from the co-op. The police and some volunteers have been calling around asking if anyone's seen her. She didn't come home from school yesterday.

Roland relaxes. He almost smiles.

That's a real shame. She probably just went to a friend's house. Or she fell asleep in a hayloft while she was playing. I did stuff like that all the time when I was a kid. I slept in my tree house all night once. I got a good smack for that one.

Roland gets up and walks over to Eva who sips the last of her tea. He rubs her shoulders gently and rolls his thumb over a knot. He kisses the top of her head and wraps his arms around her thin torso.

Don't worry about it for now okay. You just take care of yourself. She'll turn up.

5.

It's two a.m. and Eva's hand is bleeding. The splintered glass is in the sink except for a small piece lodged in her palm. How easily the glass slipped from her hand beneath the sudden flow of water. The jagged edge peeking from the slit looks as though it has been tinted red on purpose; a piece of jewellery shining in the dim light. Eva is shaking but she doesn't make any noise. The shattering should have waked Roland or the kids. She strains to hear a footstep or a door creak. She hears the leaves' constant flapping and nothing else.

Eva sits down at the table with a teacloth on her lap. If she had tweezers this would be easy. There is not enough glass protruding from the wound for her to pull it out with just her fingers. Still shaking, she stands and walks to the nearest drawer, takes out a rounded butter knife and sits back at the table.

With her palm flattened out a fresh stream of blood slips over the edge of her hand onto the towel. The blood looks almost watery as it absorbs and thins into the brown material. She holds the thickest part of the knife between her thumb and fist. Slowly. The silver tip against one side of the cut. A light push using her whole arm. Then she pivots

her wrist and dips the knife down until she feels the click as it slides under the glass somewhere deep in her hand. The round tip of the knife is just out of sight. The silver reflects the tinted glass so now it seems as though she is full of glass and metal. Her hand sears with heat and a high-pitched sting. She reminds herself, *this doesn't make a sound*. Her ears feel packed and hot. One breath in, then she flicks her wrist and the glass slides upward and out. It drops lightly on the towel.

She can see the blood as it rushes to fill in the space left behind by the glass. It is black at the centre when it finally spills over. Eva puts the shard on the table then wraps her hand tightly in the cloth. The wound still feels occupied. The shard, she notices, is very small. Much smaller than she thought when it was in her hand.

Eva relaxes into the chair and looks around. Mugs surround her. There is one on each side of her like points on a compass. The closest mug is brown. It blends into the table. The tea has gotten weaker, she thinks, or perhaps she is losing her taste for it.

She has forgotten what it's like to sleep through the night. At two a.m. Eva is always here in the kitchen, surrounded by last swallows of tea and her reflection in the blackened window. Roland is asleep upstairs. Time rolls over itself and fills the crevices of the morning until she no longer remembers single nights, single reflections. She looks down at the blood soaked cloth and then at the speckled shard. Tonight, the picture of blood soaks away the static memory of a hundred teacups under dim light. She shifts the cloth and it sticks to the wound then tears away and she feels new wetness spread outwards.

Eva wonders if it will scar. She has so many now that age along her skin, shrinking, shifting, fading until they no longer resemble the once torn, the once sliced.

6.

Roland is dreaming. There's something in his hands, wet and warm and round but he can't lower his eyes to see it. He feels tall and disproportionate, as though his hands are far away and inaccessible.

The only sound is a low hissing that appears to have no origin. It's coming from the ground he thinks but he can't see anything. His hands pry at the object. First it feels like a wet sponge but the further his fingers dig the harder and sharper it gets, as if beneath the malleable surface are spikes.

Then the leaves come. Just one at first, dull brown and crisp. Then a few more on a breeze. Each one scrapes loudly across the distant ground. Roland is still. Then they flood him, piling to his waist. They are dusty and dry against his hands and arms, then neck and chin. He looks for the object that was once in his hands but he has lost it somewhere in the leaves. They crinkle in his palms.

7.

The morning light presses hard into the dusted glass of the shop windows. By eight a.m. the feed has been stocked, the tack polished, the till counted up and recorded. The co-op next door stinks of dog food. Twice per year there is the pungent waft. Roland has lost

the smell of it in his nostrils by nine. He cleans the glass that Eva insisted he place over the rotted grey wood of the counter. When she was a child she had run her hands along the edge of the counter. The splinter had been too deep for Roland's father to pull out so he'd sent her home with a hard candy and promised to fix the countertop. His father had never fixed it. It wasn't until Eva was pregnant with Andrew that the wood was covered, and even then it had been her doing.

The bing of the cowbell against the door precedes Ray, who plods heavily on the wood floor, a swallowed thud with each step. Ray puts three mousetraps and a bag of finishing nails on the counter. He leans in ready to tell a secret, one elbow pressed against the counter.

So it smells like shit again. Sometimes I think if there weren't that smell to this town you could close your eyes and forget where you were. This could be fucking B.C. or something for all the trees. But then you got that smell catching on the breeze every spring and fall. Just in time to mix with the goddamned manure eh. Well I tell you, that doggy chow is some stink. How's about you put that on my tab Roland? I forgot my cash at home. It's the damn smell. It's disorienting. He grins.

Roland bags the items then holds them up. Ray leans in further, ignoring Roland's offerings of the now free goods. *Did you hear about that girl going missing? Damn shame. Been two days now.* Roland places Ray's bag back on the counter.

Eva mentioned it. She's worried. Roland feels like he shouldn't have said the word "worried", it begs explanation. *You gonna need any firewood? Stock up now for the winter? I could send Andrew over.*

Ray squints, slides his tongue to the corner of his mouth and bites on it. *Yeah. Okay, send him on over. I guess I'll be needing some.* He pauses. His eyes narrow and his wiry, grey brows collapse. *The little woman doing okay. Surgery go well?*

Yeah Ray. She's doing just fine. I'll send Andrew over later today. He needs something to keep him busy. Ray nods breaking eye contact. He takes his bag and leaves, moving much faster than he has since he walked in. The door slams too hard behind him.

Roland feels the cool breeze enter the room and smells the dog food that comes with it. At once he can feel the chunked liver, the pureed lamb, the gelatinous gravy fold over his tongue and then nothing, not a scent except those he knows well. He wonders if he'll carry the smell on him when he sees Linda. He knows that he won't see her soon enough to hold the smell, but still, maybe the molecules of scent will dissolve in his sweat and mingle with all the smells that he carries on his body, buried under flakes of skin and in thick patches of black and grey hair and stay hidden there until a nail drags them out. *How many shirt changes? How many showers until...*

He remembers Eva.

This happens often, the sudden memory of his current life. *Current memory?* He says it out loud to the greyed wood door. His eyebrows sit low under the weight of the conflicting words. But he can't think of a better way to put it. He forgets his wife often. Not cruelly. Not with intention or resolve. In his mind he sits at the table with Andrew and Isabel. He can see them clearly. Andrew chews and cuts at the same time, his eyes fixed on the edge of his plate, on the butter, on the napkin, on the knife and fork passing each other methodically like scissor blades through thick cloth. And Isabel pushes green

beans and focuses on no one and everyone, eating only the odd chunk of steak. Roland can't see Eva but she must be there because he didn't cut Isabel's meat and he only cooked half of dinner. Eva is absent from this memory that is a string of memories, a long line of dinners. Sometimes she is present but only peripherally: a hand, a gesture, a glass placed on the table. Even when he tries to focus on her within an actual moment, to memorize her clothing, her expressions, he can only hold her briefly and then she flutters into all other clothes and all other expressions.

It is only when he's off somewhere else in his mind, as he is now – in the long sequence of showers that will lead him to Linda – that he remembers Eva. This time he hears Eva's voice and knows she is standing in the tub, shivering. Her voice is clear and low. *Roland, I need a towel. I'm freezing.* And then he is with her, standing in their bathroom: chipped tiles, stained sink, and burnt-out bulbs. Eva is shivering. He knows this because he hears the ripple of quick exhales at the edge of her words. Roland takes in the slopes and creeks of his wife's body. Her shoulders slump forward in an attempt to keep warm, to protect her breasts from freezing and her stomach from trembling. Long streaks of water roll along her hips, legs, thighs, pause to bloat, then roll again. He sees her in parts, in droplets.

It is in these moments of memory that Roland is sure he's never forgotten Eva; only that he's been somewhere else for a while, his mind cloudy and locked on Linda, or not Linda, but on his body / her body. He's been caught in the merging of Wednesday bodies and the time that swells and rolls and pauses between brief meetings.

8.

Eva spits white froth into the stained sink. *This is the only time I spit.* She watches the foam stretch out in a long string then break up into diminishing frothy clouds in the water. Specs of cereal and blood slide over the edge of the drain then disappear. She rinses the brush, rubbing the bristles along her thumb, careful not to get the bandage wet. Her hand aches. Last night, she had thought that when she woke up the sliced palm would cease to hurt, would exist as mere aesthetic. But it throbs today. And behind that, the scraping pulse of her abdomen continues. They don't compete, but exist together. She noticed it when she stepped out of bed. Her usual bend at the base of the ribs and in the knees so as to keep her abdomen the exact shape it has been for a week, a crescent. If she were to stand up straight she knows her whole middle would rip open and all the damp, seedy remnants of her abdomen would plunge. She edges carefully through the house cradling her midsection. But this morning she noticed her right hand now mimics her abdomen; it stays in a half moon. She reaches for the Tylenol-3s, her second dose of the day.

Isabel is off to school. *Did I remember to pack her lunch?* Eva shows her teeth in the mirror. Her lips whiten and threaten to split open from dryness. *Baloney sandwich? Apple? Granola bar? Juice box? Or was that some other lunch? Some long ago eaten, traded or rotted lunch?* She tries to conjure the image of the bag. *Paper. Plastic, tied. A cloth Smurf pouch with a Velcro lip. A hard plastic, yellow box with Sesame Street characters gathered on the front.* None step in as the definitive vessel of her daughter's lunch today.

Down the hall the television drifts out of the weather report and into the news. The same set of stories replays. Eva knows each story. She has heard or seen each of them several times this morning. A plane crash, twelve dead, eight missing. The majority in the crash were women, a sorority returning from a weekend visit to their west coast chapter. The next story is of a baker forced into bankruptcy after a new mega shopping mall opened; his craggy eyes, his doughy hands. Then teachers on strike in Quebec, chanting in French against education cuts. A broken water main in Newmarket, crews on the scene. And Christine Jessop has been missing for three days now. Eva lifts her head every time the name is mentioned as though she herself has been called on to answer a question at the sound of it. The picture of the smiling eight-year-old flashes periodically, a two-dimensional glimpse of a torso and face. But Eva can't see the picture. She can only hear what floats up the stairs and into the bathroom. This time she catches only the end of it, "*Sop*" and she thinks of wetness.

In the mirror Eva's hair is limp. Her cheeks are pale and sunken. Her skin is receding, making way for new edges she thinks. Eva has always been afraid of her bones. They sit just beneath the surface of her skin, sharp and hard. The cushions of fat left by childbirth have disappeared and once again her bones threaten to break through. It seems that the fleshiest parts of her, the places where she can't feel her bones, are the places that have broken first, her belly and now her palm. Soon, she thinks, her bones will slide out, chalky and meatless. The scar below her navel feels and looks separate from her, as though she has woken up with this chunk of flesh grafted to her. It is hers because it is there, attached to her body. She tries to concentrate on the short, vertical line, to make it feel hers but it remains tight and purplish, seemingly detached from the surrounding skin

and from the synched movements of her diaphragm. She feels the low ache of the spot and knows the pain is hers, but it doesn't belong to her body, it comes from the spot itself, which is separate and undefined.

It's eight-fifty. The news starts again. The plane crashes. Nothing new to report. Eva is tired. She thinks again of Isabel's lunch, makes a note on a pad of paper, careful not to flex her hand too much. *Make new lunch to take to Isabel.* Eva looks at the scribble for a minute, considers that the word "new" implies "old" and therefore suggests an original lunch. She studies the script, the slipping of her 'l' into the 'u', the muscles in her hand resisting the pen and the letters. Eva leaves the pad beside the bed and lies down, resting her hand against her abdomen.

9.

There is the first swing. Backwards. Away from the target. Then the second. The precise swing that lands in the centre of the block. And sometimes chips spray but only sometimes. Andrew has mastered the swing and the split. He feels the beat of it. One. Two. Chop. One. Two. He likes the sound of splitting wood and the pull of gravity on his hands and on the axe. Roland will be home soon and the wood will have to be piled according to the day's orders or loaded onto the flatbed to be delivered. Sixteen and already Andrew is taller than Roland. His hands are wide with yellowed callouses, hard ovals that mark where the softest flesh of the hand should be. Early afternoon on Friday

is his favourite time to chop, when the sun softens the yard until everything is too bright to look at except the shadows, stark by comparison.

Andrew watches his cool black body on the grass. His arm and his axe blend to a single form sliding through the air. He watches the way the log changes as it's cut, falling into two separate shadows while hand and axe remain singular. The October heat that holds him. It's unlike the heat of any other month; it smells of decay and a scorched dryness that sits heavy in his chest. Even in this town built on marsh everything is dry now. Andrew looks toward the front window and expects his father to be standing there sliding lip over lip, always chewing some imagined food. Instead he sees Isabel. He lifts a dirty hand to his face. The blister on his finger has popped so he sucks it gently, biting at the dead skin and milking out the last of the metallic pus. Isabel squints beneath her brown curls, then waves. Andrew waves back and watches his shadow hand wave at them both, axeless now.

Isabel taps the glass hard, her finger bending against the surface. She points. Her face is drawn down to a pout.

She hops up and down, her finger banging now against the glass. A mess of brown curls bounces in counter-rhythm to her body. Andrew can see the white pad of her index finger blinking against the glass as it connects, the blood rushing away from the tip. The dim reflection of the yard bulges and contracts. He considers picking up another log, imagines the satisfying drop of his axe and the sticky pull of his blister along the handle. He looks in the direction of Isabel's pounding finger but sees only the woodpile.

Isabel's hammering has offset Andrew's rhythm. The chop and pause of axe through log has become the rapid bang of tight glass and Isabel's muffled squeals. It's

the thought of his mother attempting to get out of bed, her body curled like a limp fern, her hand touching the banister though not actually holding it that propels Andrew toward the woodpile. *What! What do you want!* Isabel stops jumping but her pointing is still fierce in the direction of the woodpile. Andrew feels sick. He needs water. Isabel is mouthing something to him. She touches her lips to the window and Andrew thinks he sees her tongue wet the pane.

His shadow reaches the woodpile before he does. *Okay, now what the fuck do you want!* He's not facing the window and she can't hear him so he wants to swear more, to fill up whole sentences with rare words that prickle in his stomach when he says them, words that crackle in the air for the second after they're said, words like *cunt*, and *twat* and *bitch* but he doesn't. He doesn't know why he wants to say them even, only that he does and that he wants to say them to her.

Andrew dries his forehead with the bottom of his t-shirt. Part of the woodpile has collapsed. He noticed earlier and made a note to fix it before Roland comes home. Not because his father would mind. In fact, Roland would probably be more comfortable with the clumsy scattering of logs than with Andrew's neat rows. But Andrew feels an urgency to finish things. Quiet acts of completeness slow his mind, set a distance between tasks. He stretches his arms over his head, feels the weight of the axe still in his muscles. Then he sees out of the corner of his eye something that isn't wood or grass or anything that he can immediately identify as belonging to the woodpile. It's the wrong colour or shape, or angle. He allows his eyes to settle directly on the object as his arms fall to his sides.

Still attached to the jaw are five teeth, dry and dusty. Peach-toned. They look decayed but still, he waits for the blood to soak through the gums. He expects red to animate in a dark, syrupy gush. Andrew tugs his throat down to a swallow but the saliva sticks. He feels the shifting shadows of flies. Hears them settle. His stomach taps out his sister's rhythm, bending and contracting. *There are teeth here, in the woodpile.* He tries to make sense of his body, of *a* body, existing outside, bloodless and headless in the heat.

Andrew swallows finally. The moment passes. He looks again though he's never looked away. A bit of white lace borders the plastic edge of what he sees now is a doll's foot. What must have always been a doll's foot. It's half-buried in the soil, just the puff of the pad and five toes, each creased to mimic a child's fleshy counterpart. The rest of the doll is buried beneath wood chunks. Andrew feels suddenly ashamed at finding it here and somehow implicated by its presence.

Pick her up. Isabel says. She sits on the sap-spattered ground and pulls her red corduroy knees to her slight chin. Andrew is quiet for a moment, unsure of Isabel's sudden presence and of the calmness that settles around her. *How did she get in the woodpile?* Isabel shrugs with her whole body. Then she's perfectly still and fixed on the doll's exposed foot. Andrew wonders if she's made the same mistake of it. *You shouldn't play in here.* He doesn't push the point. They've all told her. He's watched Isabel tiptoe across the logs barefoot, seen her feel out loose wedges and teeter just long enough to test her sense of balance before moving on.

Andrew isn't quite sure how to go about recovering the doll. He resists the urge to rip her free from the woodpile for fear her head won't survive the tug. He begins lifting logs carefully, aware that his afternoon has turned into a mock rescue mission. He

imagines the video cameras lining up, the microphones, the rise and fall of voices describing the scene. He's expecting to see her eyes first; a human thing, he thinks, to want to see a face, even a plastic one, before any other part.

Andrew lifts the last log and finds a knotted bed of yellow hair snarled with dirt and woodchips. The doll is facedown and naked except for a tangle of white cotton and lace around her leg. The leg itself is twisted upward, in the opposite direction of her body. The other leg is missing entirely. There's a small hole drilled between her legs. A pee hole.

Isabel is standing beside Andrew's crouched frame with her hand on his shoulder. They're both looking at the exposed back and buttocks of the doll. Andrew waits for Isabel to pick it up. He doesn't want to look at it anymore. The time he's spent outside suddenly feels too long and dry. He wants his attention to be elsewhere but he can't look at Isabel. He doesn't want to know what her face looks like right now, pointed downwards at the plastic body, though he doesn't know why. Her palm presses his shoulder. He feels the heat and sweat of it through his shirt, mingling with his own until the shirt has soaked through and begun to spread and darken outwards from beneath Isabel's hand. Then the energy of his body shifts in a sickly wave. First to his abdomen where it scratches then hurts. Then into his groin. Isabel puts her chin on his shoulder. Her nose is at his neck. He feels one of her curls catch in his ear then flick away. He thinks she whispers something.

Andrew wants to stand up, wants to look away from the naked plastic child in front of him. He wants to get away from Isabel. These are things that need to happen, but his knees are heavy and Isabel hasn't moved. The weight of her seven-year-old frame

on his shoulders has replaced the axe. Andrew wonders how long it's been since he lifted the last log. And then the ground sinks away, dips like a wave at the edge of a boat and rises again. Andrew feels thick and calm and then suddenly loose. The edges of his vision palpitate with sparks of light that have separated off from their sources. He waits. Begins to turn his head. Hears himself say *Is*. Sees her face. His hand. Her shoulder.

10.

Roland takes two more painkillers. He recounts the till. The ones, the twos, the tens and the twenties are neatly set in meagre piles in front of him. He chews his lip then his tongue. Twenty dollars is missing. He opens his ledger to the day's transactions. He counts and chews. Sixty-eight dollars made today with a float of one-hundred in cash and small change. October is usually limited to feed for pigs done on credit through the farmer's union. Very little is done in cash transactions. He sold some tack. A crop. He can't remember to whom. He can't remember it at all except that he wrote it down in his ledger. CROP - \$47.89 + 7 %. And some lumber to account for the rest. Roland listens in his head for the cowbell, searching every face that comes out from behind the hollow cuff.

Linda was here today. Had he loaned her the money? Had she taken it? He burrows his tongue into the roof of his mouth, stroking the ribs and sucking gluey tobacco. Roland memorizes Linda in segments. She is a series of reflections, blocks, and parts that only imply an entirety which might be seen or known but need not be. He

remembers the cowbell, cold and empty and then her black, pointed shoes, her pale knee, her sharp chin, her ring with the stone slipped under her finger, a wisp of yellow hair against a dark and shapely brow, her baby finger wrapped around the edge of the glass. He likes her this way.

You're so fucking shy. Linda says this to him every time but then she laughs and he likes this too. He likes her unfinished. Roland closes the till and waits a few minutes, tapping the glass counter. There's a sense of guilt in the day that runs through even simple tasks now. He watches dust churn in square afternoon light of the windows and feels tired. He's late closing up. He's never late on a Friday. The day moves too slowly for delay, there's always enough room. He feels pressed behind the counter, weighted by Linda's perfume and his own tapping. The money doesn't matter. He can replace it on Monday. He resists the urge to count again.

Roland remembers Eva's doctor's appointment as a slow spill of the morning, repeated now. First, Eva's slumped shoulder at the edge of the sheets, catching a sliver of morning light. Her voice thick with sleep, coaxing him to get her some water for her pills. Then the reminder of the appointment, the time, the location, the reason. Roland doesn't look at the clock. He's over an hour late to take her to Toronto. She'll be gone on her own by now. He tries to remember if the phone rang. It must have. And now that he shuffles through his memory of the afternoon he can hear the zinging pulse of the office phone at the margins of his own clipped exhales, and Linda's watery *Ummm*.

Finally, Roland leaves the dusty confines of the counter and walks out of the store, locking the back door behind him. The front door has been locked since Linda had come in, he doesn't know how many hours earlier, but long before he should have closed.

He searches for an excuse to tell Eva. He feels the edges of the truth for something tangible, a side-road skirting the events of the day, but finds nothing. He had invited Linda in a moment of forced boldness. Linda's phone call on Wednesday had pulled back the sheets of his bed with Eva, made Roland uncomfortable in his home. So he called her house, waited for her voice, first bold and cheerful then low and nervous as he imagines his had been.

Roland waits for the traffic light to change though there isn't a single car on the street. The leaves rustle, forcing his attention upward. *Fuck you. Fall.* He laughs then walks across the street. He tries to remember his other lies this week. He wants to be consistent. Memory has become a type of mucus for him. He feels as though he is drudging up what he can from the walls of his mind, scooping it out, relieving himself of it even. He is young still, only fifty-two. He tries to think if he was this way before Linda. *There were moments. There were things that weren't quite right, but not like this, not this bad.*

The first time he had sex with Linda he forgot how to take a bra off. It had been years since he'd needed to. Eva had become accustomed to undressing in the bathroom. The thought makes him stop. He stands and tries to imagine Eva taking her clothes off. Tries to *remember* it. He can't see it. He can see her naked in flashes. Bits of flesh that might be hers, might be lifted from TV, might be Linda's. He isn't sure. He can see fragments of her clothing but can't see her undressing. He feels that it was, at one point, casual. He has a sense of her tossing clothing into a hamper. But he can't *see* her body in the action, can only feel the reverberation of the tossed clothing. *How can I forget all the images but still feel them?* Roland swallows hard then spits.

11.

Eva is always shocked at how little she knows about her own body. Other women in the waiting room chatter to mothers or husbands about treatments, progress and pills, using sterile words that exist at the ends of straight lines puncturing cartoon abdomens. Eva imagines her body as vegetative, woody and damp, or as menacing and unformed, barely held in place. She has imagined her ovaries many times, curled like lady slippers rooted to a dusted roadside.

Eva sits on the orange plastic chair nearest the door, still in her jacket though it's too warm for even a sweater. At the opposite end of the room a television newscaster chuckles politely at a co-host's joke. The room is almost full and the chattering of patrons flows in waves making the small space feel more like a banquet hall. The scraping of the nurse's window moderates the noise levels; when it opens a hush falls as the room collectively waits for a name to roll out, and for one member to stand and claim it as her own.

Eva watches the pictures on the TV change. All twenty bodies have been recovered from the plane crash now. The thin-lipped anchorwoman pauses for the clip. The dripping wreckage is hauled onto a rescue boat. A shot of several neatly lined body bags. A sobbing mother of a dead girl says something but Eva doesn't hear it.

Shame. Eva turns to face the woman beside her. She's a few years older than Eva, nearing fifty, shimmying her large girth out of a fall jacket. *Sorry?* Eva isn't sure if

the woman is speaking to her or to the jacket. *That crash. It's a shame. Things should stay in the sky when they're meant to and on the ground when they're meant to.* The woman has said this as though it's a closing argument in court so Eva smiles though she suspects the woman had anticipated a small laugh. There are pictures of several of the girls passing over the screen now. Graduation photos mostly. Some birthday and holiday pictures follow. All teeth and torsos. *They're so pretty.* Eva says it but doesn't know why. Her companion nods. The scene flips to the sorority house where wreaths, flowers and mementos are being carefully placed at the door by the shaky hands of crying friends. A tearful young woman who looks like all the dead girls says, *They were so beautiful.* The glass slides again. *Eva Fitch.* Eva stands and the room resumes its garbled discussions. Eva allows herself to think of Roland for just a second as she walks toward the door and then he's gone as she turns the knob.

The shift from the buzz of the waiting room to the sanitary silence of the white office makes Eva's ears feel cotton stuffed. *Half my life is waiting.* She thinks this but knows that she would prefer to wait than to have the door open and to watch the balding man with the sagging cheeks and spittle-soaked lips emerge into the gauzy hush of the room. She thinks of Roland again. All the anger of an hour ago comes back, finding its way first through her belly then along the rest of her body. She looks at the wall where black rubber tubes and thick nylon ribbons hang to take her blood pressure. She exhales. *Dying is sitting in rooms with your body, waiting to be told what's inside.*

Today is the first day in weeks she's bothered to brush her hair or to put on proper clothing. She lets her hair sway in front of her face. It feels cool against her cheeks. The door cracks open. A phone rings in the hall. Nurse's shoes squeak by. A clipboard

snaps. People talk in low voices that make them indistinguishable as either male or female. A hairy hand firmly grips the eggshell doorframe while Eva waits. *This is what we do, we wait.* The doctor who is about to enter the room had said those words months ago. Before he said the word *hysterectomy*. And Eva had understood then, about the waiting, about the long months spent capturing images of her body on plates for microscopes and on x-rays and ultrasounds, and about the many rooms she would sit still inside of and of the vessels that would be filled with her fluids. She was always waiting to let them see something, have something, drain, spill, cut. That was her job. To wait. To wait and then to heal, which is another kind of waiting.

Dr. Desai's hand becomes an arm and finally he is fully in the room. He closes the door and takes a seat at the grey desk. He flips through her chart, not looking at her. *Your husband is not with you*, he says. The statement catches her and she stutters a no though the reply seems neither necessary nor helpful. He makes a low noise in his throat. He flips through the pages of the chart. The thickness of it bothers Eva.

His eyes fall to Eva's bandaged hand. *How did you hurt your hand?* Eva is irritated at his boldness. *I was hanging a picture.* She doesn't understand her own lie. She wants to leave. He grunts, writes something down on the last page of her chart. Eva strains to read it.

You should avoid strenuous activity for now. For at least six weeks. This is important. For the first time in months Eva feels a childish hatred toward the man. Early on she imagined tantrums: ripping down diagrams, heaving plastic ovaries at his skull, drawing all his blood to the surface of his skin through small incisions made recklessly. He reaches for her hand and begins to unravel the gauze. She lets him.

Eva is suddenly interested in what the cut looks like, the one *she* made, in the context of the white room and Doctor Desai's puckered stare. The inch looks stitched tight with dried black blood. The skin surrounding it is raw and bloated. At one end sticky, white fluid seeps into Eva's hand. The doctor exhales mint and something sour against Eva's exposed wrist and palm. His eyes don't meet hers anymore. *This is infected.* Eva wonders when this man began exposing other people's bodies to them. She wonders if he struggled with it in medical school, with the abnormalities of freckles and of hidden, oozing cavities. Or if it came much easier and sooner, on a playground somewhere with another child's mossy cold sore; or in a bedroom, with a naked girl facedown? face up? some puffy mole or wet sore blooming for him. He scribbles on a brick of yellow prescription paper. *Here is some more antibiotic. You don't heal well. No more picture frames.* Eva laughs. It hurts so she laughs more but quietly, as though propelled by both the pain and the need to be silent with her laughing. The doctor waits. Eva takes a deep breath and stops laughing.

Doctor Desai makes his way toward the mess of blood pressure tubes. Eva imagines hanging a picture, imagines it falling, striking a coffee table or counter, tipping forward, the quick confusion, then a glass shard slicing open her hand. She starts to laugh again. It hurts more this time so she laughs out loud. The doctor sighs. *How are you feeling Eva?* The question seems experimental.

2.

SEARCHING

1.

The leaves fall.

2.

Linda pulls the covers up to her chin. *When'd it get so fucking cold?* Roland isn't looking at her. He's looking at the clock, matching the digital numbers to the blue pen marks on his hand. *I wanted to be Betty Boop for Halloween. You can't be Betty Boop in a fucking snowsuit.* She laughs. Roland has to be home in an hour. This isn't a normal Wednesday. Eva is still home. He tries to remember his excuse for being late today but can't.

He hears Linda reach for the cigarette pack then the mechanical flick of the lighter. He pretends to hold the lighter in his hand and mimes the movement. He finds himself doing this more and more lately as he forgets the names for things. *Can opener*

has been particularly hard. He makes a fist with one hand and a twisting motion with the other.

What? Linda says this as though he's accused her of something. *What?* Roland isn't sure why he's still in her house. *You said, "Can opener"*. She waits. He waits. *Oh.* Roland says. Waits. *Sorry.* He hears her sigh, watches her pick at her fingernail, the cigarette filter is lightly cradled at the base of her fingers.

Roland remembers Eva abruptly. The dark red line across her abdomen. Then she's gone. Then Roland is back with Linda in the room she shares with her husband. It smells like him. His sweat. No cologne like Roland had expected when he'd first come into the room. It's a masculine room. Black bedspread, black backboard and dressers, burgundy walls. Beneath it all, the metallic smell of yeast.

I think we should stop. Roland isn't sure for a moment which one of them has said this. He knows it was Linda, but it should have been him. He doesn't say anything. Then he says, *Stop what?* There is a certain satisfaction in drawing out the conversation. Linda sits up further than before, dragging the blanket with her. *Stop this.* She emphasizes *this*, hissing it carefully. *Stop what we do.* Emphasis on *do*.

The wine glass beside him is empty so he fills it. Waits. *You're losing your mind Roland.* There is no remorse or anger in her voice. The tone is direct and factual, the way one might read a road sign or the sodium content on a can of soup. He searches for something to say. Swallows wine in large gulps. Tips the glass deep into his throat until it's close to empty. Then leans back. *If I'm forgetting things it's only since I've met you.* Linda laughs.

Roland turns to face her. Her smile fades at the edge of his vision. He grips the edge of the blanket, focusing on it rather than her. He pulls the black fabric back slowly until her entire torso is exposed. Her muscles are tight and he feels her nails digging into the sheet next to his knee. Her breasts have fallen slightly to either side of her rib cage. He waits while her wide, dark nipples slowly contract in the cold room. *Okay, I'll go.* This is all. He stands. Finds his shirt, his pants.

3.

Eva has started watching the news on mute. She likes the silence of the images, and the contrast between the new anchorwoman – her dark, teased mane – and the sallow hospital workers, the pensive and plain gymnastics coach, the mixed bag of senior citizens. Every time Eva turns the television on there is the single moment when sound enters the room. Bright. Snapping. Maybe it's her own worry, she thinks; the worry that in that second, the name will be called, wet and crashing into the room and she'll turn to answer or not answer. So she lightly presses the mute button and the word appears at the lower edge of the screen in capital red letters. MUTE. And the room becomes it.

The photo of Christine Jessop flashes across the screen. The image has become more frequent now. It's been a week and three days since the nine-year-old went missing. Search parties have been called. There are shifts. The P.T.A. at Isabel's school (Christine's school) sent home a sheet: where to be, when, what to bring, what to look for. The where consists of fields mostly, and stretches of forest. There are attached

diagrams of the town labelled with names that Eva has never heard of before. The town is built on a concession system and most of the roads are dirt. Much of the land is named after people who haven't set foot on it for many years.

Eva glances at the sheet again. The *when*: Tomorrow. The morning. The afternoon. The early evening. They've left out the night. No one wants to look for a body at night. *What to bring*: Flashlight. Camera. Water bottle. Blanket. Something to eat. It doesn't say if these things are for the searchers or for the found. Each item except for the food implies neither a living nor a dead body. *What's the camera for?* Eva imagines herself taking a photo but she can't see what might be in the frame. She waits. *A hand curled and white against the dirt.* She doesn't know why this picture has calmly found her, only that it's there in her mind and then it's gone, replaced by the image of the drying carrot she's been peeling for twenty minutes.

Isabel is wrist-deep in a bowl of flour, squeezing and patting it until a soft cloud has formed around her arms, catching in the brown hairs. Eva has decided to make dinner as a test. If she can make dinner for her own children tonight, then she can look for someone else's child tomorrow.

It's been almost three weeks since Eva's surgery. The pain has become a consistent hiss in her day but when Isabel is in the room Eva tries not to show it on her face, tries not to groan when she sits, or to walk with too much curve. These are the things her daughter has chosen to mimic. Even now, covered in flour, one of Isabel's tiny hands does more work than the other, cupped just as Eva's is. Sometimes Isabel mixes her hands up, choosing to wound the left rather than the right, or the right rather than the left.

At first Eva had demanded to see her daughter's hands and belly. *What's the matter?* Isabel winced and cried as her t-shirt was lifted or as a hand was turned over and perfect skin was revealed. She would groan excessively from the bathroom as she attempted to sit on the toilet. Lifting a toy would suddenly become too hard and she would touch a palm to her belly and let out a low moan, then call for someone to pick the item up for her.

Though sometimes there would be days when Isabel's borrowed ills would leave her and Eva could slump back into her own curves and swells, her own mixed breathing and pain. She didn't resent her daughter for these gestures. At times they were affectionate, never intentionally mocking. But the small body that becomes her sick image often frightens her, as though what has been done to her womb has also been done to the child that came from it. Eva knows this is silly, knows that Isabel wants the same attention that she herself is getting, or perhaps, is seeking Eva's approval by miming her pain. But still, there is something that disturbs Eva as she watches her daughter carefully lower herself to a sitting position, holding her breath, a hand hovering over her abdomen but never touching it. She wonders if Isabel does this as mere gesture or if she can somehow grasp the fears and pains that exist within it. It's as if Eva's own worries of tearing open, of flowing outward into the room as a torrent of hot loam and musky compost, are inherent in the movement rather than in Eva herself.

Eva tries to peel her carrot. The infected hand is healing but she hasn't used it this much since she cut it. The ache feels good. She's finally acknowledging the hand rather than coddling it. She holds the peeler tighter and tries to feel the shape of it through the gauze.

Are you going to come with me tomorrow? Eva asks. Isabel's been too quiet, too absorbed in the flour and the crippled hand. Isabel shrugs. Eva is always shocked by Isabel's transformation when she shrugs. She's very pretty. The curls make her seem always playful and the features on her face, more Roland's than Eva's, are clean and neat; long, slim bones that curve into a petite chin, soft nose and slight forehead. But when she shrugs it seems that all the bones of her body come loose. She jangles. Eva wonders if she should bring Isabel. She sees Isabel now at the edge of the picture with the white hand, the child's long hair waving in the wind. Eva settles back into the P.T.A. letter.

What to look for: Articles of clothing, jewellery or school equipment, clumps of hair (brown or otherwise), signs of a camp, abandoned vehicles, signs of a struggle, signals for help (notes, symbols, markings, etc.).

If they had put it on the list, would I think about it less? And what if they had. This thing. This body. If the neatly typed paper had acknowledged that skin, blood, bones, and the weight of organs are what we're searching for, then what? Why not just say that there is a girl who existed in this town. Who was beautiful. Who is missing and probably dead and we, the P.T.A. of your child's school, are asking you to find her body. Hers. We are asking you to look for it. So go. Go find it in the tall grasses of this overgrown town, or in the sucking mud of the moraine, or in the mixed forests. Look for it. Not for her clothes. Not for her hair.

At the end of the letter the new rules for child pick-up and delivery at the school have been set out in bold. No one besides the parent of the child may pick him/her up without authorization. The child may not walk home alone. No lunch excursions...

Are you mad? Isabel is standing on the chair. Her brown overalls are mostly a fuzzy white now. The flour bowl is on its side and there's a halo of powder surrounding both it and Isabel. Eva looks at the mess, feels the pain of cleaning it in her abdomen, in her hand, in her shoulders. Isabel has drawn her chin down to her chest, the tips of her curls are flour-dipped and hang in front of her face. Eva wants to say yes. She wants to stand up to her full height, to not tear open, to not hurt, and hit Isabel. To feel the satisfaction of contact and to see, not Isabel's face exactly, but the particles of flour that scatter off her skin from the impact and to watch them hang in the air for that moment before they disappear. *No. Go change.*

Eva doesn't watch Isabel leave the table or look at the soft mounds of flour. She takes mental inventory. The cutlets are folded in egg in the fridge. The carrots can be cooked with their skin on. The potatoes will be roasted rather than mashed. And there won't be dessert. The news flashes sports highlights.

Outside Eva can see Roland sliding sheets of plywood out of the truck. Long, pale slips followed by two-by-fours, bags of nails and tarps. He slides each item from the truck then out of her view. His body breaks into parts at the edge of the window frame. First his left arm slips off then the low slope of his shoulder. She cranes her neck, gaining back his sleeve for a moment until he is suddenly halved. Then he is only his right arm. Then just the wood moving in measured pulls. She resists the urge to walk to the porch and ask, *What's all this for?* She doesn't move. Not because she wants to appear disinterested but because he's starting something again. Asking might dissolve the wood, the tarp, the nails. Roland has begun to over-talk himself and his days, filling evenings up with mismatched details then falling into stark but brooding silences. So Eva

stays in the kitchen and doesn't ask. What a strange thing to do or not do, she thinks, to not ask your husband why he has trucked home wood and tarp and nails.

Christine has found her way to the screen again.

4.

4'9" 40 lbs. Age 9. Brown hair. Brown eyes. Blue corduroy pants. Blue hand knit sweater. Light blue jacket with attached hood and a pouch pocket on the front. Grey and blue running shoes.

5.

Roland stabs at a carrot with one prong of his fork, aiming carefully, then attacking haphazardly. The last prong splits the blackish skin open to bright orange flesh. His plate tips and bangs against the table. The sound is thickly ceramic, yet resoundingly woody. A cloud of white powder rises from the table and churns slowly in the low light. This has been happening the whole meal. He's sick of it. It's not making much sense, this whiteness, this chalky grit hovering over the table and in the room. He thinks there's a word for the stuff, he just can't find it.

He puts the carrot in his mouth. It takes a second. An exact second and one churn of the white stuff in the air for him taste it. A caramel stickiness against his teeth then a bitter finish. It's burnt. *It's burnt*, he says then looks at Eva through the settling

white cloud. He's tried not to look at her for days now, since Linda told him they had to stop. Or was it him? Since *he* said they had to stop? Eva isn't looking at him. She's looking at her own carrots. *Yeah*. This isn't a question, like "are they?" but rather, a statement. She says it as though carrots are always burned and they've always had meals of them, whole plates of them maybe, perhaps while they were dating or before the kids were born. He wants to say, *Is this normal?* But doesn't. He says, *I fucking hate burnt carrots*. Then he eats another. Swallows it. Waits for the bitterness to make its way across his tongue.

I forgot about them. They were in the oven. I was watching the news. I forgot. She eats one stiffly, pulling her jaw down as though someone has looped a rubber skipping rope over her mouth like a bit. He looks away.

Where are the kids? He says this but he hasn't noticed their absence until just this moment, as he's said it. As though his voice is telling him that there is something missing from the room. Where are the kids? We have children. Where are they? It was something about the carrots that made him think of them. Or Eva's jaw. Or just the speaking. Just the need to say something.

Andrew isn't home. It's Friday. Roland hears her throat tense, then the fork clank against the plate. This is how he knows her now. He could go rub her shoulders. He could throw out the carrots. He eats another, chews it to a thick mush this time so he can't speak.

Isabel is upset about the flour. She's hiding. The flour. Roland suddenly notices the white mounds. Knows them now as flour, then notices the small fingerprints dotted

like animal tracks around a tipped bowl. Why didn't he notice before? What was he looking at when he first looked at the table? What is he ever looking at?

What? He looks up. Eva is looking at him. *What?* He asks back. *You said 'the flour'.* Eva looks tired, sinking, suddenly washed out. Her hair is dull and too long. Her lips are lost inside her mouth somewhere, or maybe the skin of her face has overtaken them, weeding. *Yeah. Flour.* He slides his hand through some of the cool powder and laughs.

I didn't hit her.

He stops laughing but keeps sifting through the flour. The smile still sits awkwardly on his face, or he thinks it does. The flour has coated his suntanned and calloused hand so he slaps it against his clean one and watches the white haze erupt from the loud clap, then wishes he hadn't made the noise.

Okay. You didn't. He says beneath the cloud.

Roland picks up the fork again but it no longer feels comfortable in his hand. He can feel Eva watching him as he switches. Right or left? *This is something you know. This is something your body knows for you.* Then unmistakably Linda is watching him. The smell of dried sweat and yeast. A flick of her bare knee or shoulder appears at the corner of his eye. He isn't sure which. Then she's gone. Then Eva is watching him struggle with a fork and burnt carrots. Except that there are no more carrots because he's eaten them all.

You don't believe me? Eva is shrinking. Her bones are finding their way to the surface. He sees her peripherally. He sees his plate, carrot juices, half a cutlet, some

potatoes and Eva's bones threatening to come through the blue sweater. *Don't believe you what?* He waits. A bone breaks through then slides back in. *Nothing.*

6.

Christine Jessop: Most recent photo of missing 8-year-old Queensville girl. Search scheduled for today. STAFF PHOTO

7.

Again Andrew attempts to climb the hill but the incline is steep and his legs are too sore, his joints too swollen. He stumbles closer to the edge of the crevice. There is a split in the earth and he has spent the past hour, longer maybe, climbing the dry scrub wall that slips into it. He was looking for something, but now he is only avoiding the fall into the long, thin-lipped hole that has followed him through the woods for the past mile. *There is something to be said for falling in.* The ground is too dry. This is the thing. Something about the ground that he can't figure out. The dryness that makes it impossible for his shoes to grip or for the vegetation to stay rooted when he grabs it. He makes his way upward again and slips down another step or two, this time catching his elbow on a branch that pulls loose from the tree. He climbs vertically as far as he can then he makes the conscious decision to stop fighting the incline and to let his body drain weakly into

the slit in the earth. Because he is tired. Because he went looking for something and couldn't find it. Because it is better to walk or slide into the crack now than to fall an hour later. He stumbles quickly down the dehydrated slope then over the lip. It's clumsy when he actually does it, not the smooth dive he'd hoped for.

Jesus.

This is the sound the hole makes for a single second and when it echoes in Andrew's head it is so distinctly his father's voice that Andrew tries to put it back to the first meaning, to rearrange the sound so that it is no longer recognizable, but distant and empty. He can't breathe.

Christ. Get out of there.

Andrew opens his eyes to mostly darkness with a bit of blue somewhere above him. The edge of his box-spring. His arms are pinned and his right cheek is pressed against the wall. His entire body is wedged.

How in the hell did you get yourself in there?

There's a streak of drool running down the wall. He feels it running cold, pinching dry against his cheek and lips. Somewhere in the house people are moving around. Water is running. For a second he hears a blip, a voice or a crash, then a sudden silence. He should say something but he just squirms. He feels Roland's hands grip his arms. There's a slight shake in the clench. The upward yank burns the damp skin of

Andrew's arm and he knows without looking that there will be a mark. Roland pushes Andrew toward the far end of the bed where he obediently sits, skin creased and glazed with sweat, in his boxers.

Christ. If you're going to fall out of bed, the other side's probably the better bet. Roland clucks the words. Andrew doesn't want to laugh because he feels like Roland expects him to so he rubs blood back into his cheek instead. *Sure.* The ground still feels slanted. He looks toward the slat between the bed and wall to see if it still holds his width. Roland sits down at the other end of the bed. The mattress tilts.

Andrew looks directly at his father for the first time in days. The man looks much older than he remembers. His curly brown hair is straight and oily with strands of grey scattered throughout. He is toughly tanned wherever skin might have been exposed to sun and a sickly white where his clothes have shaded him. Roland looks like a heavier smoker than he is. His belly has popped out beneath the t-shirt.

Why aren't you working? Andrew doesn't want to ask this. He wants to ask, *Why are you in my room?* but one answer is in the other and Roland is chewing his mouth in that way today, passing some ugly food around with his tongue the way he does when the truck is broken or a shipment is late.

Everyone's looking for that girl today. I thought you and I could start a new project. Roland sucks air around the words. *I brought home all the stuff.*

Stuff for what? Andrew is starting to feel the remnants of last night's vodka.

I think it's time Isabel had a tree house, eh? Roland chews his cheek, his tongue. There's a loud clap of teeth as Roland snips through some dead edge of flesh where his lips meet. *Get dressed.* Andrew waits for him to leave then slumps into bed.

Outside the sky is grey and choked with clouds. It looks cold though he wonders how it can 'look' cold. Things *feel* cold don't they? Or does a grey sky mean *cold* and a blue sky mean *warm*? There's one brown leaf still clinging to the branch by his window. He watches it flip back and forth then stop then flicker again.

We're looking for dead bodies. Andrew moves his eyes. He moves his eyes but not his body because he thinks if he moves his body something will happen. He doesn't know what. He moves his eyes only and sees Isabel smiling and holding a doll by the hand. Not the doll from the woodpile, but a new doll. A brown-haired doll with brown eyes. The doll is slumped at Isabel's side. He sees them both upside-down. *Want to come?*

Who says you're looking for dead bodies? Isabel drops the doll and jumps on the bed. She pushes her forehead into Andrew's and widens her eyes to match her grin. *Everyone. Everyone says.* He pulls away until the back of his head touches the edge of the mattress. *What's wrong with you? Why are you always touching me?* But he doesn't say this. He repeats the last question several times in his head then he says, *You're looking for a lost girl. And I can't come. I'm making you a present.*

Isabel rolls back onto her bum and narrows her eyes. *Okay.* Andrew feels like she already knows about the tree house and that this isn't a good enough excuse for his absence.

Isabel? Are you ready? Eva is suddenly in the doorway and Andrew feels his body tighten. He wishes now that he were sitting up and dressed or at least covered. Isabel tightens too. Andrew's noticed this. The muscles of her body become different, not quite her own when their mother enters a room. It's as though her body has learned to

lock into a smaller, curved figure that exists a few layers below her regular skin, somewhere deep in her muscles, where she's solid and sore. Isabel doesn't say anything in return. She leaves, forgetting the doll.

Andrew doesn't move. Eva is behind him and he doesn't shift his eyes the way he did with Isabel.

You didn't come home for dinner, she says. He waits expecting more out of this. Some explanation of the word *dinner* maybe. *What dinner?* He asks because this is a logical question in a place that has not had "dinners" in over a month but he feels tighter, more naked and horizontal by asking it. *I made dinner last night. Cutlets.* He waits again but this is all she has. *Oh.* And this is all he has. He thinks he should say sorry so he does but it sounds strange when he says it and when he finally moves his eyes she's not there anymore.

Andrew gets up and dresses with his back to the doll, picking warm clothes for a cold day because there's a grey sky. His head has started to throb. Outside he hears banging. A hammer against a nail into wood and the sound of the truck starting and tires rolling over stones. For a moment, it feels ordinary. He stretches his arms as he does before he chops wood and then goes downstairs ignoring the muted screen. He finds a fall jacket and makes his way outside.

Shouldn't we make a ladder up the tree first? Andrew stands over his father. There's a case of beer next to the toolbox, already opened. Roland doesn't look up.

Pass me the bag of nails. His voice is steadier than it was earlier in Andrew's room. Andrew doesn't move. *How are we going to get the frame up the tree without a ladder there first?*

Roland stands up and walks over to the mound of supplies a few feet away and returns with the bag of nails. He drops them at Andrew's feet. *We use our own ladder until we get the frame up. We don't know where the door is going to be yet.* Roland says the words evenly, as though he's speaking to someone writing a book on tree houses and this is just a detail, something to put in the first chapter. Andrew steps back then forward, not sure what to do with his body. Roland grabs at the case of beer and offers Andrew one.

It's eight-thirty in the morning. Andrew is pushing disgust into the words for Roland's sake and for effect but for a moment he worries he'll throw up.

We're building. Roland says, and opens the bottle for himself.

It's cold like Andrew thought it would be and he wants to work. *Okay, but if we're going to make the frame first, then we should make it in the tree. If we make it on the ground the dimensions will be wrong. You think the space between the trunks is going to be an exact rectangle or square? Not likely. And how do we get it up there? So why don't we start in the tree?* Andrew has picked up a piece of two-by-four and is rifling through the toolbox for another hammer.

Roland takes a long sip from the beer. *Here.* Andrew looks up from the toolbox. Roland is sitting down on the grass with the hammer outstretched. *What?* Andrew says. He keeps his hands hidden in the toolbox.

Take it. You show me how it's done.

Roland's lip is curled at one side to a half smile. Andrew knows that if he takes the hammer he's agreeing to something, to some yet to be revealed task maybe.

What? You don't want it now? Take it. You know all about building. So build.

Roland drops the hammer on the ground and the thud makes Andrew forget his initial hesitation. He grabs it without looking at Roland. *Hammer.* Roland half whispers, half laughs the word as Andrew walks toward the tree. *Hammer.*

8.

Tearful family: From left to right, missing 8-year-old Christine Jessop's family, mother Janet, brother Kenneth and father Robert. STAFF PHOTO

9.

Andrew knows the many combinations of tree and nails and wood. The hammer is his now and the ladder is done before he wants it to be done. He likes the simplicity of the task. The steps up the tree are even and measured, and sanded at the edges. The nails that he pounds through the dry pine into the living maple feel contractual to him, permanent. It's the sound though, the echo that isn't real but part of his memory for the second after he hits the nail, that pulls him through the morning: arm to hand to hammer to nail to tree and all the air that is pushed out in the movement. The farther up the tree

he gets the less he worries about Roland. Without a hammer Roland has resorted to wood glue and two-by-twos.

Andrew is almost done the floor. The tree has forced five walls. There are thick grey trunks spiking through the frame but this is just a phase of the tree house. It's now in the moment of being frame and tree, soon it will be both tree and house, locked together as a single living, eroding structure. Andrew has already decided to use old paneling on the interior to give it a look of a real living room. He's pulled a small bolt of rose carpet up from the basement to cover the plywood.

Then the sky dips and darkens. Andrew's hands are blackened with sap and dirt and stick to the hammer every time he tries to drop it. It's getting late into morning and Andrew wants to finish before raindrops touch wood. *That's the purpose of the house isn't it? To be outside but inside? To let Isabel escape here?* He doesn't want the rain to touch the inside. *The inside is the inside.*

The floor is done except for the carpet which will come last after the panelling is finished on the walls and after the tarp roof is secure. The frame was the hardest part; the rest is just filling the walls in, blotting out the landscape, and the house. Roland will have to help with the tarp. Andrew has screwed in the anchors and measured the rope. These are the things he's done through the morning while Roland has glued edges of wood together. The case of beer is almost gone.

Andrew climbs down the first step to get the panelling. He hasn't thought of the door yet but he will need to soon. He imagines nests knitted with newspaper shreds, flat shiny eyes, dry teeth, serrated tongues and Isabel. He doesn't see her, not all of her, but

her shoulder snapping upward to meet his hand and a curling tip of her hair. He'll design the door with a lock on the inside.

Andrew's made so many trips to the ground this morning that he knows the measure between every step. There are five and Andrew uses only four. Isabel's doll is on the ground at the base of the tree. Andrew tries not to look at it though he placed it there. He'll bring it up at the end, and the doll will greet Isabel inside, not him.

His father's seated body is bent at the neck, then deeply slouched so that he appears headless, and almost shoulderless. Because Roland is sitting and his legs are out of Andrew's view, he looks cut off from the waist too. An elbow protrudes periodically from his side. Andrew hoists the panels up the stairs two at a time under his left arm, then carries up the tarp, the rope, the carpet. He suddenly feels as though everything must be done in the tree from now on. There can be no more trips to the ground. Sweat pools at his lips and eyes despite the chill air. The wind has turned even colder than when he first began but it's kept him moving quickly and his mind in each task.

The height of the fort is four feet: two panels high. Andrew saws what doesn't fit. One wall is only half a foot in width. The first panel goes up easily though the wind keeps catching it in brief gusts, causing the thin wood to bulge and whistle.

Andrew misses a nail. Swings. Misses. Swings. Connects. He doesn't turn around but there is the sound of a man hoisting a resistant body. Then, beneath the sound of the hammer and the emptiness of pauses there is laboured breathing, more consistent than the initial grunt. Andrew misses the nail again. There are divots the shapes of fingernails surrounding the now bent metal. Then the sound of wood clacking against wood, the scrape of shoes, legs, thighs against the floor. More breathing. And then the

smell of alcohol sweating and sweated through skin. Then Roland is in the fort though Andrew isn't looking at him. Andrew can feel Roland's eyes chewing at the base of his neck.

You forgot windows. Roland laughs at his own statement, a thick laugh full of phlegm and the early cadences of sleep. *I forget sometimes. The word I mean.* Roland laughs again then coughs spurts of condensation into the air that make their way to the edges of Andrew's vision then exit through the still exposed frame. Andrew looks around the interior, skipping over the image of his slumped father at the far end. It's true. There are no windows. He hadn't even considered putting one in, let alone a quantity.

How will she know who's coming? Roland's head rolls limp against the trunk. Andrew looks over the top of the structure he's just built. The back of the house is cluttered with Isabel's toys, overgrowth of dead scrub and deposits of leaves. His bedroom window hangs off centre, overlooking the yard and reflecting the heavy clouds.

Who would come? Andrew pulls the bent nail out. Roland clicks his tongue and Andrew stops. He's never heard his father make the noise before.

People come. Andrew waits for more. Roland's mood is recent and in flux, he's inventing it as he goes along, waiting for Andrew to ask questions or not, for the day to continue, for the tree house to build around him. Andrew positions the next panel.

People come.

It's going to rain. We better get the tarp on. I can keep panelling once the roof is up. Andrew unravels the tarp halfway. There's a stack of what looks like frames beside Roland that Andrew hasn't noticed before now. Wood glue beads the sawed and frayed edges where they meet.

I had a tree house when I was a kid. It was right in the woods though. This wasn't field back then. They cleared it for corn just before I got married. But back then it was woods.

Andrew ties the first rope to the anchor then drags the edge of the tarp toward it. He threads the yellow rope through the grommet and ties it again. He wonders if he can do this himself before the rain.

I used to go out there with my friends. We'd pretend that it was our own house. Sometimes you'd make up rules. Say somebody couldn't come in unless they said something dirty or brought a magazine or something.

Andrew is onto the second anchor. The wind is beginning to lift the tarp; it spreads in veins then puffs as though the wind is searching carefully beneath it. There's a shift in his father's tone, somewhere in the word *dirty* or *magazines*. Roland is picking at his fingers.

What are the frames for? Andrew wants to change the topic, though he doesn't want to talk about the frames either. He doesn't want to talk about anything at all.

Pictures. She'll need pictures. Something. You didn't give her windows.

Andrew pulls hard on the knot and the tarp inflates. Roland kicks the still rolled end so that it moves away from him.

She doesn't need pictures or windows.

Roland shrugs, coughs. *No. She doesn't need a tree house either.* Roland reaches for the hammer and moves over to where Andrew has abandoned the panels. He lifts another one, sees it doesn't fit, steps on it with one foot and snaps it in half with the

other. Andrew is across the length of the fort in a stride, his hand on the wood, his feet planted.

Dad! What the fuck are you doing? You have to measure it. You have to make sure it fits or animals will get in. What's wrong with you!

Roland doesn't hesitate. He pulls the wood away from Andrew with one hand and doesn't swing his hand or arm but lets them drop, lets the weight of them follow gravity and wind until they connect with flesh.

Andrew doesn't remember the fall. He is standing looking at his father then he is looking at the plywood and a drop of rain hits it and absorbs, changing the wood from pale beige to light brown in an instant. He hears the word *hammer*. This time it's not wrapped in a laugh but in a sob.

Andrew attempts to lift himself but his head feels tethered to the ground. He can't see Roland. He lifts a hand to his head. His temple is hot and he can feel where the skin has split open. The blood on his fingers is dark but there's not much of it.

I asked her to come...the tree fort...was only twelve, but she was younger. Eight maybe. Pretty though...blonde...she had a tan, like she wasn't from here. She looked...

Andrew tries to move his head, to locate Roland but the wind keeps changing directions and the tarp is carrying off parts of words and sentences. Roland is sobbing.

She was sexual already. Some kids are...was always kissing... there were stories...I told her to come to the fort. She wanted to be one of the boys...we had rules...

Bring a magazine. So she said she'd steal ...brother's and I said all she'd have to do was show me that she had it.

There are more raindrops on the wood now. Bigger dots now. Andrew can feel them on his face. He turns his head to the side but he still can't find Roland. The sudden movement has made the landscape tilt. He looks straight up into the branches of the tree. For most of today he has forgotten that this is a tree. *This is a tree.*

...I brought a flashlight. Just a thin one.

Roland is sobbing.

She had the magazine...good one with younger girls and less guys. We went up in the fort and we looked through it...she wanted to go home... I had to make sure it was good.

Andrew knows that if he attempts to lift his head again he could sit up at the very least. The imagined image of his father, drunk and sobbing, somewhere in the structure is enough. Andrew stays.

She let me kiss her. She let them all kiss her. So that was her. She let me...she smiled...pretty. I told her the flashlight went out...batteries. I kissed her again...the dark.

Andrew leaves the rainwater on his face, lets it heat against his temple and then roll through his hair. There are a few leaves still clinging in the branches. He can picture the girl, he can see his father's twelve year old body. The leaves pick through the wind. The tarp is catching the rain and amplifying it, creating a sound out of it that doesn't exist anywhere else on the property except here. Andrew wishes he had unravelled the whole tarp, made a larger surface area to translate as much rain as possible into that sound.

I wanted her...and the pictures...to be like the pictures maybe...be like the stories I'd heard about her. I wanted to show her that I could do whatever the others...and she wanted to leave... then she relaxed...went limp...her head to the side...was....

Andrew is straining now to hear though the rain. He's shivering. He doesn't know why he wants to hear. He worries that if he doesn't hear the end then he'll dream it.

I was in her. Was inside her and I was scared. I was mad at her. I'd never done...before and she was... calm...young and I was older. I was supposed to know better than her. Then it stopped. I mean. I couldn't...it wouldn't work. I went soft and I couldn't...She tried to get up but I wanted to...I mean...I kept trying...but it wouldn't...and I was so fucking...I hated...

The rain breaks over the yard, loud and cold. Andrew lifts his hands to his face then to the welt at his temple.

... flashlight. Just a thin one.

9.

Eva stops at the convenience store for film. She found the old manual camera in the basement last night after dinner. She'd gone looking for it, not really expecting to find it, just hoping to conceal herself for a while well Roland drank quietly upstairs. But she had found it easily, without bending or pulling or ripping. It was sitting on top of a pile of history books that she hadn't looked at since she was in university, and even then.

Don't open the door for anyone okay? She says this sternly. She likes the tone of her voice on the words. The authority she's assumed is soothing to them both she thinks. She trusts her own voice. Isabel nods but just barely. Eva wonders if she should bring her into the store with her, considers the fight over candy. She looks around. A crowd of searchers have gathered across the street at the community hall. There are people boarding buses, there are dogs and police officers milling about, and there are Styrofoam cups full of coffee set out on card tables. It looks like a festival. *Okay. Good. I'll be right back.*

Eva walks in and the new electronic bell rings. The store is empty except for Shelley who sits slumped behind the counter as usual. Eva makes her way down the rows of canned corn and pancake mix to the front. *Hi Shelley, do you have any...* But then she sees it. There's a stack of film on the counter. Beside that there's a sign advertising two-for-one on water bottles. Batteries are beside the film. Flashlights are on the rack behind the batteries. There's a sign composed in magic marker that reads, *Something to eat?* perched above a stack of homemade sandwiches wrapped in cellophane and labelled "TUNA", "EGGSALAD", "TURKEY", "ROASTBEEF".

Eva picks up a box of film. *What? No blankets?* she says, then laughs a fake laugh from her throat so that her abdomen doesn't move. Shelley doesn't look up from the register. Her face is stern and drawn downwards as though it's slowly draining into her neck with each passing minute.

I've heard that one a few times today. You want blankets, you tell Roland to open up. Eva feels her ears heat up and her shoulders tighten. Her hand goes to her abdomen and, she thinks, it swells to meet her. It's quiet for a moment except for the beep of the

cash register. Shelley looks at Eva's hand lingering at her midsection. *Well, anyway, all the leaves are off the trees. It'll be hard to find anything out there.* Eva understands that this is an apology because it sounds like a reiteration, like something Shelley has said many times this morning, and probably this week, to other people, and now she is saying it to Eva too. Eva grabs a bag of sour candy from the shelf for Isabel. *You're probably right.*

You can ask about the bubble gum if you want. Everyone is being polite and not asking. Just the reporters do. But I don't mind if you ask, if you want.

Eva looks at the shelf nearest her. There are rows of packaged gum. They are mostly pink and red and purple rectangles with tiny cartoon children smiling beneath ready to burst spheres. *What?*

You know, about her coming in here. Christine. I was the last person who saw her. Do you want to know what she was like? What bubble gum she bought?

Shelley winces and looks at the rack of bubble gum. Eva looks again. *I didn't know she came here.* Eva says. She suddenly doesn't know how to explain to Shelley that she's kept the news on mute. That isn't something people do. She'd seen pictures of the store several times flash on the news, even seen Shelley speaking to reporters, but she has seen most of the town filter silently through her screen this week. Shelley doesn't look away from the gum.

She was really small. I've never seen a kid so small. She's come in before and every time I miss her. I hear the bell ring and then I lose her in the store you know. She doesn't hide but she's tiny so I don't see her for a second or two around the shelves. She doesn't look eight. I didn't know she was eight until it said on the news.

Eva feels ill. She needs to get back to Isabel. Leaving her in the car was a mistake. *Yes she looks small in the pictures.* Eva says, and pays for the film and Isabel's candy. She starts to walk out making her way back through the shelves.

I think it was grape. I'm pretty sure it was grape gum. Eva walks out the back door and the bell rings again.

Once Eva is in the car it takes her a second to understand that Isabel is not hurt. The window is open and Isabel's mouth is bright red and in that moment Eva knows that her daughter has been hit in the face by a fist or a rock or some other blunt object and that the red is blood and that there are teeth missing. The second passes and there is only the confusion of the open window. The red around Isabel's mouth and on her teeth is from a lollipop that she carefully holds between sticky fingers. Eva tries to breathe in and out once but can only breathe in. The exhale is stuck on the question. *Where did you get that?*

The man gave it to me. Isabel is content in her licking. There's a red fingerprint on the tan upholstery. *What man?* Eva is measuring out her voice carefully, paying more attention to the sound of the words than to the words themselves. Isabel shrugs. All her bones jangle. And Eva forgets about her abdomen, about what's missing and what's there. All charts and diagrams and degrees of swelling and vegetation and threats of spilling or untying are forgotten. Eva wraps her gauze hand around Isabel's sugar stained hand and together they hold the lollipop. Eva squeezes too tight and pushes Isabel into the seat.

Why did you open the window? I said don't open the door for anyone. I said. Don't you understand? Do you want to be a dead body too? Do you want to be in the woods and we can all go looking for you? That's what happens to little girls who open windows. Eva is afraid of her own voice. She lets go and watches the blood flow back into Isabel's hand. The candy drops before Isabel starts to cry. *I'm sorry. I shouldn't have left you alone.* Eva contemplates hugging Isabel and crying too. It's not always a choice to cry, but right now, she thinks, it is and she could cry for the rest of the morning and hug her daughter and feel better.

There is a loud bang on the window beside Eva's head. She startles and Isabel cries harder. She looks to see Ray smiling sheepishly. She doesn't move or roll down the window so he walks to Isabel's side and pokes his tanned face inside the truck.

Awe, what you crying for sweetheart? He wipes a tear off her cheek then smiles at Eva. *I guess that candy just made a mess of her eh? Sorry about that.* Eva is still silent. Ray waits for her to catch up.

Hi Ray, she says finally.

I saw your truck, thought maybe Roland was going to come to the Co-Op today. Eva tenses, feeling the strain of her earlier movements now that she is completely still. *He's busy today. Everyone's searching so....* She doesn't want to talk. She wants to get to the field on the fifth concession. The clock on the dash says 8:27.

Right, find that girl. I bet she's long gone though. Sad. Really sad. Ray doesn't look inside the truck as he says this.

Yes. Well, we should get going. Eva turns the key and starts to back up. *Roland will be back Monday,* she says. Ray yells something. She hears part of a word. *Cut.*

Maybe it wasn't that at all but something that sounded *like* cut. She smiles and waves out the window as she turns north on Queensville Side Road. Isabel is sobbing in quick clusters that pucker her stomach and her cheeks.

Eva follows the map trying to forget Ray and to ignore Isabel's low crying. There are three possible search areas for the morning shift. She has chosen her site, not at random exactly, but almost. The fifth concession sounds neutral to her though she isn't sure why. The sixth is ominous and the seventh is too protective. She isn't superstitious and this is the first time she's really given any thought to numbers in this sense. *This isn't the lottery*, she thinks but at the same time she thinks that it is. That every person who is out looking today picked a field or forest and is waiting for all the balls to line up for the winner. *This is how we do things. We section off our town and look for children where we would never look for children.*

I don't want to find a dead body. Isabel is looking at Eva. *I want to go home.* Eva pulls into the makeshift parking lot where rows of searchers are unloading backpacks from cars and busses and then flowing to the edge of the field to collect in a larger crowd. She shuts off the truck aware of Isabel's soggy stare.

We're not going to find a dead body. We're going to go for a walk and then we're going to have a picnic. As she says this she realizes that this might be true. She hasn't actually considered that she will not find Christine today, until just now, just this instant when she said the word *picnic*. Eva suddenly wants to go home too. She opens her door instead. *Do up your coat. It's cold today.*

The pain in her abdomen is both directly present when Eva steps out of the truck, and distant. It is acutely a part of her belly but also belongs to the field, the ground, the sky. She resists the urge to crumple. Then she worries that it's not an *urge*, as in an impulse, but a *necessity*; an action that must occur because her body cannot sustain its own weight. *This is the point*, she thinks. *This is the tearing*. And she expects to touch herself and to find her bones shredding through her skin among the weeds and the ferns and the moss of her abdomen. But she can only feel the thick fibres of her jacket and below that, the lump of swollen belly, intact. She takes a few steps and poises herself against a blue car, holding the manual camera in the bad hand. She tries to breathe slowly.

Are you press?

Eva can't make sense of the words. Her hand against her abdomen, her body against the truck, her abdomen against the thin shirt, then the sweater, then the jacket. This is what she thinks of when she hears *press* and *are you* but she knows this isn't something people ask about. She looks up at the blonde woman.

Are you okay? The woman asks.

Eva understands this. She looks for Isabel who hasn't moved from the truck but is craning her neck to see what's happening. Eva nods back at the woman.

Do you want some help?

7.

Linda looks up at the helicopters making slow passes over the field. She waves then sticks her tongue out. She suspects the little people inside are doing the same. The world is full of people she can't see, watching her on screens in stores while she shops or in the parking lot when she gets in her car. She always sticks out her tongue. She always waves. Sometimes she flips the finger and mouths *fuck you*. She slips her tongue discreetly back in her mouth and looks around, suddenly seated in the occasion again. There's a cop on a horse writing on a clipboard, a few nurses discussing something Linda can't quite hear, a young couple praying quietly, and a woman with a manual camera leaning against a car. She doesn't wait for her to turn around or for time to lapse or for a thought beyond her initial thought to register. She just asks the first question she thinks of, drawn from the professional look of the camera and nothing else.

Are you press?

The woman is slender and pulled tight against the car. Her shoulder blades sink then peak. It's a graceful shudder. Linda imagines that vomit will be the first thing she'll really know about this woman. Watching someone vomit toast or eggs or cereal is an intimacy she hadn't expected today. The helicopters are getting louder. There are whistles blowing and people shouting commands at the crowd.

Are you okay?

The woman recovers, or seems to. She looks around in a sudden panic. The woman is drab, her hair is tangled and her clothes don't fit her. Linda notices a child – lips bright red, eyes puffy, hair in long, dark curls – straining to see out of a truck a few

feet away. Linda isn't sure what she's just walked in on. The child is too young to be at the search, or not young enough. There are some babies here and some twelve-year-old boys clutching sticks. She isn't sure if the child belongs to the woman or if the girl is someone else's. But the truck is familiar. Not to this time or this situation, but Linda senses that on a different day, or against a different backdrop, the truck makes sense.

Do you want some help? Linda is getting tired of asking questions. She's ready to leave the woman and the sick feeling that drapes the truck that she can't place.

I had a hysterectomy. The woman's voice is soft, but not weak. A strong voice with the volume turned down. She doesn't seem ashamed of disclosing the fact to a stranger, but rather detached, as if she doesn't quite know what she's just said, only that it is meant to explain some aspect of the situation.

Linda stops herself from laughing. It's not funny but she wants to laugh anyway. She's wanted to laugh all morning and the word lends itself to laughter. Hyster. Ectomy. Instead she studies the thin woman's arched frame, her ash hair, her washed out skin, then points to her bandaged hand. *Looks like they missed.*

Linda laughs at her own joke, relieved. The woman holds up her hand, lowers her eyebrows and then looks back at Linda. Linda laughs more, wondering if the woman is actually considering the idea. Finally the woman laughs then grips her midsection and groans. The humour drains from them both.

Okay. Well, you should go home. Can you drive?

The woman changes again. Her face becomes stern. She moves to the driver's side door of the brown truck. Linda holds her breath as the woman claims both the truck and the child. She doesn't know if she's relieved that the truck belongs to the woman or

if she's more confused. The woman opens the door, attempting to hide the pain the pull causes.

I said get your coat on. Come on. Let's go, she says to the girl.

Linda smiles though she no longer wants to smile or laugh. *Okay. You're staying. Can I carry something then?* She doesn't know why she's trying so hard to help her. The woman is obviously distraught, but who isn't? The parents of Queensville have all become tense muscles and skin, needling commands at nervous children who obey because there is a new gravity in the voices that speak to them. And she knows that the children of the community are building their myths about all of this, making sense of the sudden but immanent danger that awaits them all now that one has been plucked so seamlessly from the pasture. Linda is happy today that she doesn't have kids.

You can take the backpack. If you want to I mean. The woman looks too old to have a child so young, but then the woman catches Linda watching her and blushes and the colour changes her again. She's suddenly younger, in her early forties maybe.

No, it's fine. Linda says, *I didn't bring anything they asked for. I don't know why. I guess I thought they'd have enough.* Linda takes the bag then looks at the child who has scooted over to the driver's side of the cab and is struggling with a blue coat. Her face is petite and thin boned but defined in such a way that she looks plain on first glance and then something else on a second. Something familiar and strangely attractive or sexual, but abstracted from those things somehow, a slight degree away. The girl looks up at Linda and smiles. Her eyes shine. She sticks out her stained tongue.

Linda wonders if the girl saw her or if this is just a coincidence.

I'm Linda. The girl leaves her tongue out and nods then jumps out of the car. A lollipop falls on the ground. The woman doesn't look at it or at Linda. She just pushes the door closed with a heavy exhale that quivers.

Eva. And she's Isabel.

Linda places Isabel's looks. Then hears the name *Eva* again and again. She remembers Roland as though his name were wound up in the three letters, sliding out from between the vowels.

Oh. She looks at the truck and winces. She sees it parked in her driveway. She hears the word *hysterectomy* and matches it with Roland's quick mention of *surgery*. And the daughter. She knew he had one.

Eva and Isabel are making their way toward the crowd where there are people yelling instructions off clipboards and blowing whistles. There are dogs on leashes sniffing. Linda wishes she'd taken her car rather than stepped onto the bus this morning. She could leave. Instead, she follows Eva because she's holding the backpack and that's the thread between them now. She feels obligated to continue, but it's more than that, it's the image of Roland peeling back the covers, the twinge of panic that she thought was contained in that moment has somehow carried over into this moment. The field and the bedroom feel the same.

Pair up. Take a whistle. Take a copy of the list. Blow the whistle if you see anything of concern. Anything of concern. Use the camera if you see anything questionable but always call an official.

Why'd you pick this field? Eva asks. Isabel is blowing on a whistle already.
Don't! Eva grabs the red plastic from her daughter. The girl tenses. Linda looks up at the helicopters and imagines what the crowd must look like right now. Everyone is dispersing, flowing from where they've looked to where they haven't. The crowd has gotten suddenly quieter since the instructions were given. Eva repeats the question in a whisper, *Why'd you pick this field?*

Linda shrugs, *I liked the look of the bus*, she lies but Eva smiles at the answer.
Why'd you pick it?

I don't know. It seemed in between enough I guess. Linda studies Eva who looks oddly content compared to the crippling state she was in fifteen minutes earlier. Linda thinks of her lying in bed with Roland. She doesn't want to, but she does anyway. The shape of her is so distinct that it's impossible to imagine that she's ever held another. She's never stood upright in her life. She must lie next to him this way too. Linda remembers the casualness of her own movements, the liberties she took with her own body and his, and is suddenly embarrassed.

In between enough what? Linda asks, filling the space

What?

You said in between enough. What does that mean?

Too much time has passed between what's been said and the question.

Did I say it like that? I don't know.

Isabel is beside Linda. Has she been there the whole time? She bounces up and down but stops when she sees that Linda is watching. Her face turns tight with forced

amusement. She no longer resembles Roland yet she is still familiar. Linda tilts her head to the side, unsure what to think of the girl. Isabel pulls her head in the same direction.

The newspaper said they're using a psychic. I never thought that they could, I mean, what is she channelling into? Eva has stopped walking and is attempting to load the camera.

A crystal ball?

Eva smiles politely. *What are we looking for?*

Linda looks down at Isabel who is attempting to tie her shoe beneath the smock of her hair. *We're looking for an event I guess. Something that happened. That's why they call psychics right? It's not like they're channelling the dead. They look at a moment when no one was watching.*

Eva looks up from winding the film, scans the field. *I think we're looking for a body.*

Linda resists saying, *the body is the event.* She says, *Well, where should we start?*

The field is now scattered with figures, some on foot, some with dogs, some on horseback. The idea is to spread out into the adjacent forests and fields. The sky is still a thick grey as it was when they began but the wind has picked up. Isabel's hair whips at Linda's thigh. There are leaves caught in the overgrowth of the field. Linda's boots and pants are wet from the tall grass.

We should head for the forest I guess. It'll be dryer in there at least. We'll be out of the wind.

Are you feeling okay? Linda wishes she hadn't asked but the words have already made their way outside and mingle with the rustle of their footsteps. Eva doesn't answer.

Her hand moves to her abdomen. The gesture doesn't seem appropriate. It looks maternal, as though Eva is pregnant and feeling for the kick.

She had her baby stuff cut out. Both women turn to Isabel who is looking at a horse nearby. Linda hasn't thought of it until now but for a child so young she doesn't talk very much. Linda wonders if maybe she does talk but she and Eva haven't been listening until just now when the sound of their boots in the grass was allowed to overtake. But no, the girl doesn't talk.

Linda pulls out a cigarette and a lighter from her own bag. She flicks the lighter but the spark doesn't catch. Again. Again. Both the clicks and the movement are comforting if only for the reiteration. The lighter won't catch. She shakes it and sees Isabel's hand pivot at the edge of her vision. Linda doesn't look to confirm. She puts the lighter away and throws the cigarette, unlit on the ground.

Do you mind taking the camera? We'll need the flashlight. Eva already has the camera outstretched and her other hand is gripping the backpack at Linda's shoulders. The gesture is strangely intimate. Eva is leaning heavily while Linda grabs the camera.

The camera is heavier than she expected, but she doesn't quite know what she expected. She likes the weight and the general bulk in her hands. She wants to lift the viewfinder to her eye. It doesn't make sense to hold this thing in her hand and to not see what it sees. Eva tugs at the backpack a moment longer. Linda can feel her hand inside, groping gently for the flashlight.

Can I take a few pictures? Just one or two? Linda feels suddenly ridiculous asking. *How about a photo shoot? I'm not good with cameras but I'm sure I could snap*

something. She should just walk home she thinks, or feign illness and camp out at the nurses station.

Eva seems thinner, paler. *I can't lift her and I can't crouch down.*

Linda feels the covers lift again, her nipples harden, feels her body naked and damp in a cold room and Roland's eyes looking at her but not at her, exposing one shard of her body at a time.

It will be a distance shot then, lengthwise.

Eva pulls her hair out of her face. Her forehead is higher than Linda had thought. Eva tugs lightly on Isabel's jacket without looking at her. Linda eases her eye to the viewfinder. The two look uneasy and cold in the frame. The pallid grass covers their boots and the forest seems to be an extension of Isabel's dark, whipping curls. Eva lets the flashlight dangle at her side. Linda adjusts the lens. The two smudge into the landscape for a moment then become clear again, their edges sharpening. Linda pushes lightly on the shutter button. The snap is herded away by the wind. The subjects blink then settle back into the combination locks of their muscles.

Linda hands the camera back to Eva. *Trade?* She asks, pointing at the flashlight and eager to be rid of the camera. Eva nods and the two objects pass between hands. Linda switches it on as they step through the first trees of the forest.

The wind dies down to a distant hiss above them. It's not as dark as Linda had expected but she's happy to have the flashlight to hold onto. There are other searchers nearby though they are silhouetted and are silent but for their footsteps. The helicopters still make passes above. The forest smells of wet cedar and soil.

I grew up near here. That's why I picked the field. Linda's talking but not meaning to. She's imagining the dinner conversation between Roland and Eva about her. She's listening to the phone call from Roland that hasn't come yet but will. It's funny, when you're a kid you love the woods. You even name it. Not far from here is Mushroom Alley. Linda laughs. Obviously mushroom ridden. And then the Bald Spot. We were real creative kids. Back there was actually called The Field. It was just where you ended up if you walked through the forest long enough. Sometimes we'd take a day and go there. And once we got to it there'd be nothing to do but walk back.

Eva is snapping pictures of tree bark. Isabel is kicking up leaves. The flashlight bobs ahead of them all.

But once you're older you're afraid of the woods. I don't know why. It's dark and overgrown and you don't name it anymore. You lose the identifiers maybe. I tried to take a boyfriend back to the field once and I never even got ten minutes in. A pheasant startled me. I screamed. He was from Toronto and I figured I'd lost all credit as a bumpkin once I'd yelped at a bird. So we just walked back and rented a movie. Linda laughs again, keeping her eyes on the point of the flashlight.

Eva snaps another photo, this time of a red leaf impaled on a branch. *Are you afraid now?* She asks.

Linda looks at Eva. The woman has a way of receding inside her clothes. Maybe her skin too. *Yes. A bit. But it's a different context isn't it.*

Do you have kids?

Eva has turned to face Linda. The no is inherent but Eva has asked anyway. *No.* Ever since the girl disappeared there has been a sense among parents in the community

that those with children *understand* and those without are suspect. Because Linda is female she is considered less a suspect, but rather, exempt from the event and the fear surrounding it entirely. Men without children who have always been present in the community suddenly look different, more unkempt, less friendly. Helpful gestures are sexual advances, glances are now sidelong stares. Women without children are what they've always been: excused. Linda doesn't offer any explanation beyond *no*, partly because an explanation has always been expected. Eva just nods.

I can't anymore. I've had two. When the doctors were telling me about the hysterectomy they wanted to leave the cysts in me and put off the surgery. So that I could still have babies.

Linda isn't sure how she should react. She doesn't know how to be sympathetic when it comes to reproductive organs. She's never had any sympathy for her own.

Why the hell would I want to keep cancer? Why do they think that? These doctors? They do everything possible to keep it all in you. For babies.

The last words come out as the vomit Linda had expected earlier. Linda looks over at Isabel who is holding a snail. She wishes the girl didn't do such a good job of blending into her surroundings. She must hear everything, see everything.

Is it gone?

Eva is picking apart a piece of cedar. The camera dangles by its strap from her wrist. *Yes. Everything is.*

Are you okay with that?

I don't really know what everything is. I know it was there, that there were problems with it and now it's gone. The cedar sprig tears apart in her hands. Her bandage

is stained green and brown at the palm. *Like, I don't know what was inside. I try to picture it you know, sitting in a dish somewhere or even as it was when it was in me.* She laughs and tosses the leftovers of the cedar away before plucking another sprig gently from a bough. *If you lose a finger you know what you've lost.*

The ground has been their focus for the past two hours. The long strip of forest floor in front of them is unchanging: brown leaves, moss, tree bark, dead ferns, fungi. The combinations vary but nothing is unordinary. Other searchers have begun to turn back. The dogs have pulled ahead. Eva has had to stop several times, clutching her abdomen and Linda's shoulder simultaneously. The women have stopped talking and so have sunk into the rhythm of their footsteps through the leaves. The sky has darkened and the tops of the trees sway violently.

Eva hasn't complained and Linda hasn't pressed the issue, but her body has become increasingly bowed and her pace has slowed. Linda has a hard time staying beside her. Isabel walks ahead of them both.

There's no dead girls. See. You said that's what happens! Isabel is pouting. For the first time today she looks like a seven-year-old. *Andrew said there wouldn't be any.*

Shut up! Linda hasn't heard Eva's voice in an hour except through the odd cough. The sound of it slapped into the two words makes her wonder if she's ever known the voice at all or if she's just heard some puppetted version of it all day.

Linda looks around for a distraction.

No. There are no dead girls. Stop talking like that. Her voice is calmer now and her hand is at her abdomen. Isabel has wound her own body tightly. They both stand looking at each other. Linda feels as though she's watching a replay of an episode that's happened many times before.

We should go back. Linda says, *It must be getting late.*

Just a little further. Eva is still locked on Isabel. Her tone is cold and Linda wonders if the decision to keep on is rooted in determination or vindictiveness. Isabel's pout has soured and she's begun to breathe heavily.

No! Isabel yells it at both of them, opening her mouth as wide as it will go and still keep the O shape.

Then Isabel is running back in the direction they came. Linda doesn't wait for a nod or word of permission from Eva. She sets out after her, leaving Eva behind. The flashlight bobs ahead on the ground and trees. *Isabel!* She feels guilty yelling after a child, as though this is an authority that one can possess only through maternity.

Isabel's hair is a flit of movement against the trees. She isn't running in a straight line but weaves through the landscape. A branch catches Linda's neck and instead of crying out in pain she calls Isabel's name again. Far behind her she hears Eva echoing the call. Then the blowing of the whistle.

Isabel stays just at the edge of sight. Linda can't get through the dense branches as quickly as she can. And then she's gone. Dropped it seems in a scatter of curls. She doesn't scream though Linda thinks she does. Linda hears a scream and then hears it again in her mind and realizes it's the name *Isabel* and that it's her own voice yelling it.

Isabel is sitting at the bottom of a long slope, propped up against a felled tree. Her pant leg is pulled up past a small scrape in her knee. There's another on her calf. Her knee has spilled a thin drip of blood that looks black in the darkness of the pit. She looks at Linda who has crouched down beside her. Linda rubs her back in wide circles that slowly move toward the centre and then back out again. Isabel seems in shock. She looks at the scrapes then back at Linda, her face scrunched up as though she's not prepared to ask whatever question they've posed her.

Feel better now? Linda asks, cooing.

Isabel finally cries.

Linda picks her up, feeling her thin and hot through her jacket. The girl snaps to her, takes her shape: chin to shoulder, legs wrapping hips, arms pressing her torso. Linda's positives are filled by Isabel's negatives. The first raindrops patter the leaves.

By the time Linda has carried Isabel up the hill Eva has found them. Her face is obscured by the camera. Linda feels Isabel's breath on her neck, wet and deep. The flash erupts and the shutter snaps.

8.

Light passes through, collides with salt. Then the latent image, suspended.

9.

He reaches out his hand until it's almost at her shoulder where there is more bone than flesh showing in the slice of moonlight. He says *I want to touch you because I don't touch you anymore* and she says *I don't know what your touch is like anymore*. He puts his hand on her shoulder and her bones slide from finger to finger and he's aware of the roughness of his own hands: there are deposits of dead skin on his palms, his feet, his elbows. He wears his sharp edges and she buries hers inside her skin. One excises the other. First, a light tear at the neck. She exhales and he remembers her breath and mimes the rhythm. She expects moss to spread from the torn skin, or leaves, or cedar sprigs. She expects pain or pleasure or both but feels neither. Sees nothing but her bones coming out, dusty and white in the half-light of the bedroom.

3.

FOUND

1.

She is found on her back in a wooded area beside Ravenshoe Road, New Year's Eve
1984.

2.

Roland sips his tea because it's there and because Eva is watching him. It's cold and he wonders how long ago she made it for him and who poured the milk. The T.V. is off. The black screen reflects the windows that overlook the front yard and then there is the table and at the table there are two figures, a man and woman, and this is how Roland knows that Eva is watching him, because the woman's head is facing the man's and the man's is facing the T.V.

What?

Roland looks away from the screen but not at her, just in the direction of her voice. He tilts his head along the waves of sound, listening inside the disturbed air for

some clue to the answer. He doesn't say anything because he's afraid he's already said something.

What are you always looking at?

I don't know. He laughs. She sips her tea and smiles. He doesn't know if she does smile because he's not looking at her, but he thinks she smiles. At the edge of what he can see, her face is doing something different than it usually does. This is smiling.

There's a thin skin of ice covering the snow and the trees from the storm.

Everyone's back to work tomorrow. You should open up.

Roland can't think of what she's talking about. Open. Up. Then he hears the cowbell. *Okay. Open. Up.* He gulps the last of his tea.

He sees the stack of pictures on the table when he puts the mug down. The picture on top is of a red leaf skewered on a branch.

There weren't any red leaves. Roland says picking it up. *They were all dead when they fell.*

3.

Both her hips are dislocated and at odd angles to her body. Her underwear is soaked in blood and is wound around her right foot. She's wearing two pairs of socks.

4.

That leaf was red. Eva says. She stands up. She's still surprised at standing. She expects it to hurt. *Do you think I painted it?*

No. He says. He flips to the next photograph. This one is tree bark. There's moss growing along it. The picture is fuzzy but at the edge of it there's a wisp of hair. He can't tell whose.

Where'd you take these?

At the search. Eva has looked through them once quickly. She'd forgotten taking most of them. Now that she's behind Roland, watching him look through them, she feels like she's never seen them before. He flips through a few more. Moss, cedar, mud.

Why did you take pictures of this stuff? Roland sounds genuine, actually curious in her now. She searches the photos. *I don't know.*

He flips once more and there's Eva against the forest, thin lipped and squinting. She's pale. Her hair looks like an extension of the dead grass, being pulled in the same direction, and of the same shade, but interrupted by a rigid and frail body. Beside her Isabel's hair snaps at the forest, at Eva's thighs, at her own petite face. She too looks hurt. But this was taken before? Or was this after she fell? Eva can't remember. They look like they have been pulled from each other in body shape and posture and yet they are so obviously repelled by the proximity of their bodies. They look like they've been cut from the same tree, but built into two opposing structures.

I like this picture. Roland holds it at a distance from his face and then pulls it close.

The woman we paired up with took it. I can't remember her name. Laura. Or Lynne. Or Something. Eva is rolling her tongue over the woman's possible names. She hasn't thought of her for a while. Just today with the pictures and every so often there are glimpses of her like there are glimpses of anything. Non-sequiturs that pop into her mind. Roland grunts a response. Eva feels a certain intimacy in this exchange. She kisses the top of his head.

Roland flips to the next picture.

5.

She is on her back. Her legs are spread apart in an unnatural position with her knees stretched outward. She is wearing a beige turtleneck sweater, a blue pullover sweater, a blouse from which some buttons are missing and a pair of socks with blue stripes. She is wearing two pairs of socks. Her panties are at her right foot. Blue corduroy pants with a belt and a pair of Nike running shoes are just south of her feet. A recorder with her name taped on it is next to her body.

6.

Roland studies a picture of a mushroom growing out of a tree stump. He's slow to turn to the next print. For weeks he's watched the oily edges of rooms, landscapes, bodies. He's stopped driving. Most of his eating is done at the end of meals, when the others

have gotten up or have left. He's learned to blur his eyes. Or thinks he has. Learned to *blur*. Or something is wrong with his eyes. This is possible, too. He tries from time to time to focus in on a specific object or person. Sometimes the objects are simple: the edge of the table; the doorknob to the bathroom; the tap in the kitchen. Often he tries to see Isabel. He has forgotten what she looks like and yet he hears her most often. Her voice has broken into the house, sudden and exotic. It blooms around him when he isn't paying attention or when he just doesn't know she's there with him. He startles. For so many months she was silent or he thought she was. He can't remember. But now it seems she's everywhere, noisy.

When he does see it is brief and wet, as though someone has come and pushed thick guck from his eyes. And then everything is too bright, too clear, the edges of shapes are sharp and he balks. When the guck lifts the world never looks as he expects it to look. It doesn't look as he left it. It's as though it has been touched up with paintbrushes. The colours are too bright, the edges are too perfect, the light plays on surfaces in ways he has never noticed before. But not today with the pictures. Today the world looks more as it should.

Here is a mushroom growing out of a tree stump. *Where is Isabel?* He says this and then doesn't know exactly what he means. He considers for a moment that he means where is Isabel *now* because he can't hear her. He tries again. *Where was she all day? In this picture. Where is she?* He feels Eva lift her hands from his shoulders, lifting first her palms then her fingers. Then she pulls the chair beside him and he feels her sit. He knows he could turn and see her. He has heard her body change over the past months. She moves differently. He feels that she's taller. And in the moment of pulling the chair

he knew he could look at her and watch her draw the heavy wood toward her as though it were on wheels. But he hadn't looked and now she is sitting.

I don't know where she is. It was a long time ago. October. Right after my surgery.

Why did you take pictures of these things?

Because I was looking for something.

What?

Roland flips to the next one. There is a blurred twig in the foreground, or what Roland thinks must be a twig or hair again, or some aspect of the landscape that is rigid and stripped of signifiers. The forest floor is in focus at the edges of the blur..

That's your finger? He puts his finger over top of the blur.

Eva stops talking. Roland hadn't known she'd been talking until she stopped. But now that she has stopped there is the sound of her voice going over something methodically, explaining maybe, and then a bulk of silence that hushes his last thought. He looks at his finger against the forest floor.

I wasn't very good with the camera, she says finally and he doesn't know what she means.

He flips again. For an instant the picture makes sense. He sees them all at once, as one thing. There is one head and one body but more arms and more legs than should be. There is hair flowing down the majority of the curves and limbs. The body is almost masculine, weighted heavy on top, though unbalanced, and thin on the bottom. He feels like this should be grotesque but he's calm.

And slowly they come apart. Linda's eyes become hers, tired and worried. Her hair parts off from Isabel's, the straight blond wisps from the dark curls. Isabel's body becomes outlined, small and thin against Linda's breasts and hips. Linda looks into the camera, looks resigned to the lens. Isabel looks at Linda, perhaps past her. They grip each other. And somewhere inside the picture Eva is looking in on them. And now, she is looking certainly, because Roland can feel her watching him, moving her eyes between him and his hand and the print.

What is this? He asks but she's asked something too. She asks again. *What's wrong. What are you looking at?*

What is this? He flips the picture over but the image drifts to the other side as though it's caught on his fingers. He knows it's not there. He's memorized it. He folds it in half. Shakes it. *You're tricking me?*

Like the leaf? I told you, I don't paint.

Roland feels her get up, feels her push the chair now. He turns.

You do.

He stands. He sees her only for a moment. She is upright and though he knows she has healed he still expects her to look as she did in some way, or to have retained some token of that earlier body. She doesn't. She looks healthy. Her eyes have flashed hazel and have taken on a more prominent position in the features of her face than he remembers. She has gained weight back, hiding her bones under slopes of thin flesh. Her hair is much shorter.

Then the image of her spatters. She breaks up into colours and once again he is left with only the grimy edges of sight.

You know her. You knew. Roland has lost her in the space of the kitchen. She was up against the counter when he saw her. Now she is anywhere and he stumbles.

What are you talking about? What? What!

She is still at the counter but her voice gets nearer, then farther as if she steps closer then steps back. His stumble has moved him a foot to the right.

Did she call here? Did she tell you?

Tell me Roland. Tell me what you're saying. Say what you're saying.

She's crying. He moves toward her voice but his legs can't find their balance, they haven't recovered from the initial loss of sight. Usually he sits if his sight comes and then goes. But this time he was standing, looking directly at her, and now the room is unmanageable and his body is misplaced within it. He stumbles backwards, feels the edge of something hard, a chair or the table. Then hears the sound of a glass tipping over. Liquid finds the edge of the table and patters against the floor, then there is the slow rolling of the glass along the wood, a pause, a crash.

Eva's sobs.

You knew. He says. He waits for her to say something. He hears her walk to the closet then back to him, to his side. She slips her hand inside his. It's cold. She slides his fingers over her palm. He feels a thin ridge of skin and resists the urge to pick at it with his fingernails. And then he feels something long and slim and colder than her hand. He hears the clatter and swish of the broom against the glass shards. He grips the handle and listens to her leave.

7.

On New Year's Eve and in the early hours of January 1, 1985, the storm that is predicted for the region hits with full force. Measures are not taken to protect the site or the body from the elements. Rain, sleet, ice and approximately six to eight inches of snow blanket the area including her body.

8.

C'mon! Play with me! Isabel stomps across the room then slaps Andrew's back. He doesn't look away from the mirror though he flinches just slightly. He buttons the top of the black shirt and then unbuttons it again, inspects his chest. *If I had hair, would it make a difference?*

Pass me the purple one again. He motions to Isabel who is sitting on the bed with her arms folded.

You tried it seventeen times already!

Andrew undoes the black shirt and throws it on the bed. *I tried it twice.* He picks up the purple shirt and slips it over his shoulders. He buttons it then turns to each side, examining his body from all angles. The colour makes him look bulkier and, he thinks, older.

You look stupid. Isabel flops backwards onto the bed, letting her hair cover the entirety of her face and chest. He watches her squirm under the curls for a second in the mirror then goes back to fussing with the shirt.

Why don't you go play somewhere?

She sighs loudly then kicks her feet at the bed. *Why can't I go skating too! Take me with you.*

You're not a baby Is. The winter break has worn on them, but Isabel has taken the days held up in the house with a fidgeting indignation. Andrew had thought at first that she was getting over being shy, but now he thinks she's never been shy, just quiet or observant or both. *She's gotten tired of watching us all maybe,* he thinks and undoes the button again.

I just want to go skating. Your girlfriend won't even know I'm there.

She's not my girlfriend, and I'll know you're there.

Isabel stands up and hits him on the back again, harder this time. Andrew stumbles forward, not because it hurts but because he hadn't expected the force or quickness of the gesture. *Who taught you to hit all the time? You don't hit!* Andrew turns around, grabs Isabel by the hand and pushes her back onto the bed.

Take me with you!

No. Now stop acting like a baby. Go play outside.

Its cause you want to kiss her. You want to kiss all over her!

Isabel's eyes have narrowed. Her hair has spilled over her face so that strings of it obscure her forehead, eyes and lips. She makes kissing noises and hugs herself then

falls backwards on the bed pushing her pelvis up in the air then letting it fall to the mattress again and again.

Stop it! What's wrong with you! Why are you always being dirty? Andrew can hear voices downstairs. Roland's voice getting louder and Eva's snapping at the edges of his. He hasn't heard his father's voice beyond a mumble in over a month. He watches Isabel in the mirror. She's tangled in her hair now, still hugging herself and smacking her lips, though now she's just rocking her body from side to side.

You love her. You want to have sex with her.

She hisses the word *sex* at him. He watches her squirm on the bed. He doesn't want to ask her how she knows what it means, or *if* she knows what it means. She sits up and stares at him. *You want to have sex with her don't you!*

Shut up. I liked you better when you didn't talk so much. She shakes her head and her hair puffs then settles. It's gotten longer, and more unruly lately. Combing has fallen to neglect. He suddenly wants to touch it again. This has been happening all morning to varying degrees of urgency. Sometimes it seems unbearable and now exceeds in intensity any need that he's had before but at the same matches a simple but constant want in him to reach over and submerge the tip of his index finger in a black curl. He's sure the feeling never leaves now, only gets louder or softer.

If you don't want to have sex then I can come. She's smiling now.

You just don't bring little sisters on first dates. It doesn't make for likely second dates. There's a loud crash from downstairs. Andrew waits. Then hears something shatter. He waits some more. Isabel has tensed. He walks to his open door and slowly closes it, trying to avoid the creak that always sounds at the halfway point. It creaks and

he feels something brush his hand. His stomach muscles tense, ready to propel him either from the room or further into it. His hand presses the door through the halfway point, through the creaking of the hinge and through to the mechanical snap of the door against the frame.

9.

She is headless. She is found on her back in a wooded area of Brock Township of Durham Region Dec. 31st 1984, it is almost three months after her disappearance Oct. 3. She is badly decomposed and investigators determines by knicks left on her bones that she has been stabbed at least five times in the back and chest and her legs have been wrenched violently apart. Her head is wrapped in a ball of clothing a short distance from her body. It is believed that animals have fed on her corpse and have dragged the head away. There is the likelihood of sexual assault. An autopsy is scheduled to determine the exact cause of death.

10.

Linda turns the radio back on. She listens to the tail end of the report, the same one she's heard several times today. A man and his two young daughters taking a walk in the

woods by Ravenshoe Road have found Christine Jessop. She turns it off again. She likes the click and then the silence. The announcer's voice, chill and impartial to the event, clings to the soundless space for long minutes after. So far he reiterates times, dates, locations and Linda listens and then shuts the radio off or doesn't. Sometimes she listens longer, waits through other news, foreign news, news about other towns or countries, news about teams and statistics and commercials for the station she's already listening to, information seeding through the airwaves about taxes and healthcare programs and diseases, items that she only sometimes pays attention to, and then there she is, found again, lying on her back in the woods. *A man and his two young daughters taking a walk...*

Linda sits at the table with a bowl of soup in front of her. She lets the spoon dangle inside the bowl so that it dings against the ceramic bottom then floats back to the top, carrying with it bits of carrot and celery. She made it yesterday, New Year's Eve, before the storm. Because she was alone in the house. Because she wanted to have a task. But now that the soup is made she doesn't want it and Joseph won't be back from fishing until tomorrow, and then there will be fish. She stirred the skin into the soup in the morning. She wishes it would go cold again so she could push the oily layer down into the broth. Just to watch it sink. She was making soup when Christine Jessop was found though she didn't know at the time that the girl was found. She has thought about this all afternoon. She can picture herself cutting the celery, the carrots and the onions, boiling the chicken, then simmering it all slowly. She watches herself taste it from the ladle. She sees herself add herbs. She remembers it as though she's watching it on video. And she can picture too the man and his two girls noticing something chunky and black

in the distance, something just above the tall grass, and thinking perhaps that it's debris of some kind. Garbage that someone has thrown on the lot, to be rid of it quickly and to avoid the long trip to the dump.

Linda drops the spoon inside the bowl and it dings. She reaches for the radio.

11.

She is fully intact though there is evidence of an attempt by the perpetrator to remove the head using a small knife or sharp object. The wounds are only superficial as indicated through minor knicks on bones in the neck area.

12.

Eva waits for the sound of broken glass sliding over ceramic tiles to filter through the ceiling into the basement. She can hear it in her head, gritty and domestic. But the sound itself doesn't come. She sits on a box in the crawl space with the camera in her lap. There's an unused roll of film still left from the search. Eva opens the canister, opens the camera, and snaps the film in place. She pulls the ribbon the length of the camera and then slips the edge of it under the spool. It catches. She closes the door then starts to wind the film in long clicks.

The woman was pretty? The woman was funny? The woman was tall? Blonde? Thin? Curvy? The woman was, what? Eva's hand shakes as she turns the knob. She hears Roland pull a chair out from the table. The scuff of it against the floor above her head is oddly comforting. It's not him that she likes but the presence of people in a house, other people doing other things. He's having coffee and reading the paper. The kids are playing upstairs.

The T.V. is suddenly on then off then on again then off again. There are bits of words snapping down the wooden stairs to the basement and echoing around the concrete room. *Sop. Sing. Did. Four. Shoe. ist. Girl.*

It's easy to hate him, she thinks, easy to hate him now, for this and she feels it first in her abdomen where the scar is, where her skin feels always tight. Then it peels outward to her belly and then inward, down through the layers of skin into tissue and muscle and churns her stomach and finally she remembers her bones and they seem to lift upward to meet her skin again. She'd felt sorry for Roland, for his slipping. She'd felt sorry for herself too, for having to watch. But now she is engrossed in the memory of the picture as it overlaps with memories of October. She thinks about the woman in the picture. *She looked right into the lens. She looked at him, knowing that she'd be found.*

Eva places the camera on top of a box. She pulls each arm carefully from her sweater, then lifts it over her head. She repeats the same motions for the undershirt. The air is wet and cold in the basement and she feels it more once her skin is exposed. Once her bra is off and at her feet she notices the details of the room itself, as though her clothes had created a shelter around her that made knowledge of space outside their boundary unnecessary. She unbuttons her jeans.

There are points in the crawl space that she can't see clearly. The low ceiling is strung with exposed wires and cobwebs. There is a dim light beside her with a string hanging from it. In the corner the sump pump edges as a dark hole in the concrete, covered with plywood. Far off beyond the crawl space and in the larger room of the basement she can see the washing machine and dryer, and a small dirt spackled window littered with insect remains and vaguely beyond that she can see the far end of the yard and the icy ruins of the tree house.

A chair moves in the kitchen again and Roland's footsteps move across the ceiling just above Eva's head. She is naked but for her socks. She's left them on as the last boundary between concrete and skin. She shivers. The footsteps move down the hallway and then to the mouth of the basement stairs, then hesitate. Eva lifts the camera. The sound of the steps begins again but this time ascending. He's going upstairs. She points the camera at her abdomen, holding it as far away as possible and presses the shutter. The flash drains the old shadows from the room and creates new ones. She shivers again.

13.

Mr. Patterson and his daughters walk along a trail in the tall grass towards what looks like piled trash. Her body is on its back, decomposed. Her legs are extended in an unnatural position and her knees are spread outward. Animals have eaten at the legs. Her head is pointed north and her feet south. A sweater is pulled over her head. A few

bones are scattered between her head and what remains of her legs, giving the appearance that her head and waist are not connected.

14.

Andrew presses his forehead against the cool wood of the door. His palm is still on the handle. His other hand is wrapped in Isabel's hair. Her face is pressed into his hip. She's crying. He knows he's holding her too tightly. He lets his hand roam her scalp. It's hot and damp. She squirms but he can't tell if it's deeper into his hip or if she's trying to pull away. He presses harder on her scalp, massaging her curls into knots. She whimpers. Her hands push his stomach, his back.

Isabel pleads his name. For a moment he thinks of skating and he sees it as though it has already happened. He moves Isabel in front of him, pinning her between the door and his body. He's more aware of his body than hers, or maybe because of hers. He's suddenly conscious of his shape and strength and weight as it is now. Especially his hands, which seem to swell as her mass of curls weeds out from between his fingers. He hadn't expected her scalp to be so small. He holds her body between his legs, her hair with one hand and her arms with the other. Her face is pressed into his groin, muffling her sobs. He lets go of her arms for a second and her hands again clamp to his waist. It feels like a hug but her heart pounds at his thigh.

Andrew starts to unbutton his jeans. The first two buttons come undone easily but the third is stuck. He wipes Isabel's hair from her face, careful not to get it caught in the buttons. Downstairs he hears the T.V. flick on then off. Again. Again. He stops and holds Isabel still. He shushes her. The T.V. turns off. He hears a chair move.

Andrew lifts her. He lifts her and is shocked at how easily her body moves with his. When did she stop struggling? Her head snaps back as he steps toward the bed. The door rattles. Long dark strands of her hair dangle from the doorknob. She whimpers then is quiet. He stares at the strands and holds her tighter. He doesn't move. The wisps of her torn hair float gently on a draft or his breath has just reached them. He feels suddenly angry and heavy, as though his skin were weighted.

I'm sorry Is. I'm sorry. I didn't mean...I just.

Andrew feels tears begin to edge his eyes, and his chest heaves. He rubs her back in long strokes. *I'm sorry. I'm sorry. You can come skating. You can come skating, okay?* Isabel doesn't say anything. She hangs loosely in his arms, breathing heavily. Her body is covered in sweat. He hugs her. *Hold me. Hold me back.* He says but she hangs like cloth. She is boneless. Andrew grips her under the armpits and lifts her. He shakes her. *Isabel! C'mon now! I'm sorry okay! Okay!* Her face is empty.

The door opens. Andrew doesn't look at the door or the person coming in, he watches himself and Isabel embrace in the mirror. He doesn't recognise either of them. He drops her on the floor. She lands on her feet and in a second she is gone. He pulls his shirt down over the top of his jeans. When he finally looks up Roland is staring through him. Roland's eyes are wide and gasping at the room. They stream tears though not for

crying but for lack of blinking. He leans heavily on the back of the door and labours his breathing through his mouth.

You're going to take me somewhere.

15.

May 10, 1985: 14-year-old Ken Jessop, Christine's brother, leads his parents to some of her bones not earlier collected by police at the murder scene. He tells his parents he is having nightmares because he is not satisfied that all of Christine's body parts have been found and buried. Of the bones found one is similar to a rib, and one is similar to a vertebra. One has a hair attached to it, and one is not initially recognisable.

16.

The empty house is threatening. Linda makes her way through the vacant rooms thinking about the silence that has seeped through her home. It's come from elsewhere she thinks. It's come from beyond the borders of the house or the yard. The neighbourhood has lowered its head and hushed itself it seems. New Year's Day and she hasn't heard a sound from the road. And now that there has been so little noise for so long, she is afraid to make any. It's been hours since she turned the radio on. Once she became accustomed to the silence her hand shied away from the knob, knowing the sudden intrusion of sound would expand through all the empty rooms of the house. She smiles at

herself (she is always on the verge of laughing in this silence) but leaves it off anyway. She's afraid that the sound will become trapped somehow, and that echoes of the girl's mangled body will become folded into the corners of rooms and that perhaps she'll come across them long after the radio is off. She knows this is ridiculous, but still, she is careful when she steps from room to room.

17.

This is a breastbone. The camera snaps. *This is a shoulder.* The flash sears foreground and background equally. *This is a scar.* Snap. *This is an opening.* Snap. *This is an elbow.* Snap. *This is...*

18.

The ignition sputters under Andrew's strained wrist and ankle. It chugs then finally catches. The driveway hasn't been ploughed and Andrew hopes the truck won't make the length of it.

Where are we going?

Roland is slumped against the passenger side window holding a bent picture. He runs his fingers over it and turns his head to the window, holding the picture away and to his left.

Take Woodbine towards Keswick. I'll tell you from there.

His tone is one Andrew doesn't recognise and so he says nothing. He points the truck. It breaks through the hard snow and bucks a few times on the way down the narrow driveway but makes it to the street.

Andrew tries not to look at his father but Roland is jerking in his seat and often Andrew feels his stare. He concentrates on the empty road ahead. The feel of Isabel's hair is still in his hands. He alternates between watching the road and checking his hands to see if a strand is trapped between his fingers. None. But still, he looks again. Again. He pulls his jacket sleeve down his wrist to see if one has wrapped itself there. The strands were too long. When he gets home they'll still be inside his room, snared in the doorknob, swaying.

They found her. Roland grunts. He fumbles at the glove compartment and finally it falls open. He takes out a small bottle of rye and opens it. Andrew waits for him to finish swallowing before he asks, *Found who?*

That girl. Jessop. She was out in a field by Ravenshoe. Been dead for a while.

Andrew checks his hand again then turns onto Woodbine. He feels uneasy entering the conversation and the road. The two seem caught up in each other, the girl's body present but out of view in the field and this vacant road leading him to an indefinite location.

Her brother goes to my school. In grade nine or was supposed to be. I haven't seen him. But he goes there. Andrew drums the steering wheel with his thumbs. The only other sounds are the drag of wind on the truck and shifting of liquid in his father's bottle. Andrew reaches for the radio and turns the knob and sound waves enter the cab.

The wind and liquid are still present but now they compete with a dry voice. ...*and his two daughters were walking down a tractor path near their home on...*

Turn right at Doane Road. It's the little white one on the left.

19.

wearing two pairs of socks was pointed north and south was unnatural was running shoes was found subsequently with her panties around her right foot was a road known as west to east just south of her feet was in fact a beige turtleneck was her body position was some buttons ripped off was spread apart unnatural was knees spread outward was a blue pullover sweater was identified as belonging to was notified was these clothes was walking near their property was about 56 kilometres east of the residence was a recorder with her name taped on it

20.

Eva emerges from the basement, tired but calmer. Her skin has relaxed under her clothes. She feels as though she's just exercised all of her muscles for hours. She doesn't know how much time has gone by. The wall clock in the kitchen says 4:32. The clock on the stove says 4:17 but she doesn't know what time she went down. She listens for human sounds in the house and hears the sump pump click on. The glass is still on the floor.

The stack of pictures has been scattered throughout the room. There are twigs and leaves and bark and white backings among glass shards.

She calls out for Isabel. Eva had heard footsteps and closing doors. She looks outside. The truck is gone. There are men's skates by the door. *Were they there before?* She calls out for Isabel again. Roland wouldn't have taken her with him. Not now. *Maybe they went skating?* She's started walking from room to room. *But the skates are here.* She suddenly sees Roland driving. She pictures him struggling to see the lines on the road, maybe not seeing them at all. She sees Isabel beside him. *Andrew wouldn't let him do that.*

She starts up the stairs. The air gets colder as she goes up each step until at the top she shivers. Andrew's door is open and there are dress shirts strewn about the bed. Inside, the air smells darkly of new sweat. *Did he take them?*

Her hand moves to her abdomen. She calls for Isabel knowing now that it will go unanswered. She runs down the stairs to the kitchen, to the phone.

It isn't until she is off the phone with the police that she notices that her sock is soaked in blood.

21.

Linda pushes the skin into the broth. It sinks under and flaps along the edges like the wings of a stingray then folds up onto itself and around the wooden spoon. She turns the stove on to warm the soup.

She had turned the T.V. on. A van containing the girl's remains followed by a hearse cut into all the regional stations. She tried to watch other things on bigger networks, something mindless. She watched infomercials for jewellery. The two women gasped at necklaces and gestured dramatically at each other's exposed throats. It seemed odd that they should continue to care about money back guarantees when a station away the same van cradling the dismembered remains of a child turned off the tractor path again and again. But she watched as necklaces and bracelets and earrings slipped onto bare skin and the women cooed and preened over them, claiming that each was better than the one before. She watches the soup as it begins to simmer.

Linda hears the truck long before it enters her driveway because it is the first sound of traffic she's noticed today and it moves slowly. The road has not been ploughed. It's dirt underneath the snow like all the roads in the area, a low priority for the city. When she hears it pull in she thinks that it might be Roland and doesn't know why she thinks it. She hasn't seen him in months and more likely Joseph has been chased home early by the storm. When she looks out the window and sees the brown truck and knows that it is in fact Roland, she doesn't know if she's surprised at his being here or at her prediction. She turns the stove off. She thinks maybe she's been expecting him for a long time.

Linda goes to the front doorway and watches through the bevelled glass. There are two figures in the truck and from the shapes through the glass she can't tell who they are. They look the same. The passenger side finally opens and Roland steps out. Or she thinks it must be Roland. He stumbles. Through the glass he splits apart and reconnects as he lurches along her driveway. She considers locking the door, but the presence of the

other person is comforting to her. He hasn't come for sex. He's found the picture. She had told herself soon after the search that he must have found it already and decided to do nothing. She'd rationalized that action on his part would risk revealing the affair to Eva. Then later she'd assumed that Eva had never shown him the pictures and had never mentioned the events to him. Then later still she had supposed that the film remained in the old camera and would probably stay there for a long time.

Linda! He can't find the door. She opens it. He yells her name again. His voice isn't pleading exactly, he's angry or hurt. He's spitting. The sound of his voice on her name is the only sound on the road. It pushes its way into the house and expands over the slopes of frozen snow.

Roland. She reaches out her hand but he finds the doorframe first. The other figure has gotten out of the truck. He doesn't move toward the house, just stays close to the truck. She thinks he looks young. Roland leans on the doorframe. He looks past her. He doesn't seem to see anything but is intently looking for something at the same time.

Roland's face has changed dramatically since she last saw him. His eyes have sunk against the pale backdrop of his face and in doing so have become more pronounced. His hair has grown down his neck. His chin and neck are layered with scruff. She thinks of him pulling back the covers and exposing her months before, his eyes elsewhere.

What's wrong with your eyes?

I saw you. You and Isabel. You both. Together. He spits and she smells the alcohol stronger than before. *You told Eva about us.*

Linda thinks she might not deny this. He's told now and it was her own presence there on the film that led him to that revelation and she knew it would. She remembers Eva as she was, folding into herself like the soup skin around the spoon.

You told her. She says. He's holding it in his hand and she catches a glimpse of Isabel's hair.

No! He spits again beneath the word. This time the yellowish gob lands inside the house. Roland pushes past her. Linda isn't sure that this is what he'd meant to do. He waves his arms briefly inside the entryway then stops.

I didn't say anything to her Roland. I could have. But why would I? She could barely walk. She didn't even mention you the whole time. She stops and watches him fumble for the wall. *And we were looking for a dead girl.* Linda says the last part quietly, suddenly aware that the door is still open and that her voice is carrying both out and in, echoing through the rooms of the house and over the yard. Roland lifts the picture in her direction but not quite in front of her, just to the left of her shoulder.

You were looking at me. Linda takes the picture from him. In it her jaw is set. She looks like she knew the camera would be waiting for her at the top of the slope. Isabel looks like she's always been in her arms.

I was looking at the camera. Even as she says this she knows it isn't true. Her eyes resist interpretation, they slip somewhere between arousal and hate. She is looking at Roland. She is peeling away the sheets of his bed and exposing his skin, his genitals, his nipples and waiting for the air to rim it all with gooseflesh. Linda places the picture back in Roland's hand and for a moment she feels that he sees her. He grips her hand around the bent photograph and, she thinks, looks into her eyes.

You keep it, he says and she pulls her hand back with the mangled picture still in it. He shuffles around her, his arm pressing hers, then attempts the stoop. He falls.

Linda doesn't move though she knows she should. She watches herself rush to his side and help him up. Her legs don't move. Linda has forgotten the figure from the truck until just now as she sees him stride toward Roland's sprawled figure. The teenager crouches beside him and Linda suddenly feels the cold. *It was always this cold, this whole time, standing here*, she thinks.

Get up Dad. The boy's voice pockets authority in a way that Linda has never heard from Roland or Eva. She stares at him, aware of her gawk and her lack of action. Roland groans and lifts himself to his knees. From her stance Linda sees only the back of Roland's head but the boy winces at the sight of Roland's face. She wonders if she should say something to the son. But what would she say, she thinks. There's nothing to be said. She hadn't even known he'd existed. Roland had mentioned the daughter only once in the months they were together, but the son was unexpected. She could have found out, she could have asked, but she hadn't much cared for the details. And here he was, a detail, helping Roland off her concrete step.

Thank you, she says. The young man nods and a cloud of steam rises from his lips as he positions his father's arm over his shoulders. Father and son begin to walk toward the truck. Linda closes the front door and watches the single lumbering figure through the bevelled glass and folds the picture without looking at it again.

22.

Andrew tries not to look at Roland as he drives back home. The sun has disappeared behind the clouds. The snow, the sky, the dilapidated barns and all the shadows have become stripped down to blues and Andrew wonders if this is in fact the true colour of things; if all other colours are daily impressed upon the blues and grays of the landscape and held there by the sun. He could believe this except when he looks at Roland. The streak of blood across his father's forehead unzips the cobalt and the grays and the sliding dim pallet of clouds hanging over the road. The red is just so perfectly red that Andrew isn't sure the blues reflecting off the snow and onto the surfaces of the houses and barns isn't wrong somehow. The red, he thinks, is too shocking to be limited to just a single line drawn along a man's scalp. Yet that is what it is, just a strip of blood along Roland's forehead. It looks shiny with a false wetness; the blood must have dried by now. Roland doesn't move, he just lets his head bob against the window.

23.

The glass comes out easily this time. When Eva flexes her toes the rigid edge appears through the dark slit and when she relaxes her foot, the glass slides back inside the skin. The glass is large enough for her to pinch between her fingernails but the blood has made it slippery. *Just grab it. Just pull it out.* She wants to keep looking for Isabel and instead she is looking for glass again. This time pain is almost welcome. She's missed it a bit.

On the third try she drags out the tiny shard. She feels the suck deep inside her foot and makes a deep, moaning noise that she's never heard herself make before. It feels good to make the noise. She feels indulgent, letting the cry linger in her throat even after the sucking feeling has left and is replaced by a sharp but steady pinch and an upward gush of blood.

Eva presses her torn and stained sock against the wound and calls out for Isabel. She wonders why Roland would take her. Where they would go. To see *her*? Or if Roland hasn't taken her then who has? But she is certain that something has happened in her house and that Isabel is gone.

Isabel had gotten louder and more distinctive lately. Her personality had shifted into something vibrant and healthy. Eva no longer felt intimidated by her. They had relaxed around each other, even become affectionate. Eva reaches for a picture on the floor that is obscured by glass shards and water drops. It's of her and Isabel on the day of the search looking rigid and pained.

The sound of a vehicle in the driveway brings Eva out of the photo and onto her good foot. She quickly ties a used dishtowel around the ball of her foot then pivots on her heel toward the doorway.

Andrew pulls into the driveway and for the first time in an hour he remembers his date. It's too late now but he wouldn't want to go anyway. He doesn't want to be home either. He doesn't want to see Isabel or the handle. He feels feverish. Sleep is both what he wants and what he wants to avoid. If he could just *be asleep* and not have to lie in bed for any length of time with the hairs swaying so slightly across the room then he would be okay. But there will be that space, those moments, where he'll think of her and the draft will catch the strands. He considers waiting for Roland to get out, then driving away. He could sleep somewhere else tonight and forget about school tomorrow. He could go to the bank and see how much money he has then find a hotel for a few days or go somewhere he's never seen before. Somewhere far and warm. Andrew parks the truck.

Dad. We're here. We're home. Get up. Roland sighs and sits up straight.

I know. I'm fine. You keep talking to me that way I'll ... Andrew waits for the threat, hopes for it. Roland just opens his door and stumbles out. Andrew stays for a minute then finally takes the keys out of the ignition.

Where is she?

Andrew looks in the direction of the shrill voice. For a moment Eva looks as she did months ago, her body bent and rigid, and he wonders if all this time she's been hiding it beneath her skin, but then she moves. She hobbles in the snow. Her right foot is tied with orange cloth but otherwise bare. Her left foot is without a shoe in the deep snow.

Where is she Roland! Where's Isabel! Where'd you take her! Eva weeps uncontrollably, but continues to inch closer to Roland. Andrew tries to recall the last time he's seen his mother cry and can't. The words "Where's Isabel" hit him, piercing his belly and thighs.

We didn't take her. He says it through shallow breath from the other side of the truck, more because Roland hasn't said anything and his guilt seems to bank around him as Eva hobbles closer. *She didn't come with us. We just went for a drive. She didn't come.*

Eva turns to Andrew, seemingly shocked at his being there or speaking. The hour or so he had spent with Roland had let him forget Isabel except what wisps remained on his skin. He hadn't considered it at the time, but as he had tried not to look at Roland, Roland had been unable to see him, and perhaps unwilling, and that exclusion had allowed Andrew to forget for a time. But now, Eva was looking at him directly and Isabel's body was undoubtedly visible through his.

Then where is she? Her tone is accusatory and Andrew feels she's been in his room and found Isabel's hair in the door.

I don't know! I don't know! She wanted to go skating. Maybe she went there. I don't know. I should have watched her. You should have watched her! Andrew knows he's gone too far, knows that if he were closer to her or if she could move faster that she would hit him now. He wishes she would.

I'm going to Open. Up. Tomorrow. Roland finally speaks then begins walking toward the house. Eva grabs his arm and pulls him into her.

Where is Isabel Roland? Tell me where she is. Roland looks more lost and tired now. His eyes have become bloodshot and gluey.

I took her with me, we went to see Linda. He says this with complete conviction and Andrew almost believes it's true. Eva looks back to Andrew who doesn't move or breathe. He doesn't deny it because for a moment he isn't sure that they didn't take her, or that he doesn't know where she is. Then he remembers waiting in the truck for Roland, watching him speak with the blonde woman who seemed to know him well. No. Isabel didn't come with them. He doesn't know where she is.

The sound of the police car pulling up the drive is quiet and slow like a pebble settling at the bottom of a pond. The tires rub the snow and the engine pulses but nothing is loud. Visually the car looks like it should pierce the air with a siren and break the blue hue of evening with flashing lights. But the brightest colours in the yard are the gash at Roland's forehead and the orange tourniquet around Eva's foot. Everything else is approaching twilight except that the cop car, being whiter and more reflective than the surrounding snow seems to belong to an hour earlier, when the sun wasn't quite so low.

Andrew knows they're going to take him now. Him and his father. Not arrest them, but take them away, to the station. Isabel is probably at the neighbour's or playing in the fields or hiding in the house, but one girl is dead already in the town. Andrew looks at Roland who is sitting down in the snow and has rubbed the gash back to a fresh trickle of blood. No. He will have to go and he will have to talk and explain and somewhere in the speaking they will see his hands in her hair and her face against his jeans.

How long do you hold an event with you, and how many further actions do you perform before the event and its consequences aren't yours anymore? The police car slows then stops completely and two darkly uniformed figures get out and walk toward them.

25.

she is four feet nine inches she is 40 pounds she is dropped off at the end of her driveway at 3:50 p.m. she is given a recorder she is a school bag on the pantry counter and the mail and newspapers brought inside the house she is a bicycle lying on its side in the shed she is a pink jacket hanging on a hook above her reach she is bright blue corduroy slacks and blue-grey running shoes she is a recorder she is 4:10 p.m. she is the alleged opportunity she is a kickstand and carrier she is a minute or so later she is boarding the school bus she is the 1.2 kilometre drive she is on the pantry counter she is 40 pounds she is mail and newspapers she is hanging on she inside she is lying on its side she is blue bright blue she is at the end of her driveway she is a bicycle she is alleged she is a minute she is a recorder she is four feet nine inches she is blue-grey kilometres she is 3:50 p.m. she is...

There is a police car stationed in front of the house and one driving around the block. Officers have looked through the house and called the neighbours. They have called Isabel's friends and checked the skating rink, and Linda has been taken in for questioning. There are no tracks in the snow around the house except those of the officers. Roland and Andrew are gone.

Eva has been left alone except for the car in front of the house. A nurse has looked at her foot and cleaned and dressed it properly. The glass has been cleaned up now but they took pictures of it. *Part of the scene...* When she told them about the afternoon she said she went down to the basement after the argument to find some old college books on photography and journalism. And perhaps she had gone down there for that purpose initially. Perhaps some distant thought had crossed her mind about getting back into journalism or maybe becoming a photographer when she had left Roland standing with the broom in the kitchen. And she had gone down the basement to find the outdated books and had seen the camera instead and found the film. It didn't matter. She told the officers that she had found the books but couldn't remember in which boxes or what she'd read about or for how long. But she thought about it as the hours passed. The officer's questions came in long rolling waves, one upon another until her memory of the books and the boxes and the times developed. By the time they left she knew what she had read and when she had finished reading it. The exercise had calmed her. At the end of it she considered that she could invent Isabel again as she had the books and the lost hour in the basement.

The police had asked for the picture of the two of them on the day of the search. *The most recent...* Eva had given it over reluctantly. They would be looking for the wrong girl now, the old Isabel. But maybe that's who she is. If she was afraid now, then she might be the old Isabel again. Eva feels a slap of illness hit first her stomach, then her chest. She thinks of Christine Jessop and makes her way to the sink. She wants to breathe deeply but knows if she does she'll choke on whatever is making its way up her esophagus, something dark and mossy. When it finally reaches the back of her throat it is quick and sharp and she chokes anyway. From the corner of her eye she can see herself reflected in the blackened glass of the windows and beyond that a small light blinks then disappears.

Eva pulls her boots on, wincing at the swollen foot, and leaves through the back door. She expects that an officer will check in on her shortly but for now she doesn't want to be seen. The yard isn't as dark as she'd expected. The moon has slipped out from behind the clouds making the snow shine blue. Eva looks for the police car but she can't see down the driveway.

The trek across the yard seems to stretch out longer than it should. There is only the sound of her boots crunching the snow to ground her in the forward movement and for a moment Eva wonders if she's progressed at all. She feels that she's lost all sense of time and is almost grateful for the pain in her foot. It gives her a reference point, something other than time to measure moments by.

She focuses on the tree house as she hauls her legs through the deep snow. It looks like all the other failed projects, like the piled elements of something functional. It

is no different than the clutter of boards at the base of the sloping deck, or the heap of tiles in the corner of the unfinished floor. It looks like debris. Garbage. But this pile is held up in the tree, higher than all the other bundles so that with the leaves off you can see it from the road or from the field. But tonight, in the moonlight, the structure and the tree have become a single silhouette. It looks as though the tree has grown naturally this way, with a lump at its centre.

Eva makes it to the tree and tries to see footprints but the tree has blotted out the moon. She stands at the base and whispers Isabel's name. She hears the scuff of shoes or hands against wood and a board shifts and then a loud crinkling of plastic. She climbs the chunks of wood that are nailed to the trunk. They teeter under her weight and she expects to fall. She considers that it is not Isabel above her but an animal. Or perhaps she is about to interrupt the killing of her own child. She feels vomit hit the back of her throat again as she lifts herself over the edge of the floor.

It takes a moment for her eyes to adjust. The tree house is more of a skeleton than anything. The floor is the only thing that seems solid. The walls are just frames and only half panelled with thin wood that has weathered badly. The moon pokes through jagged holes. There are boards and bags of nails, a rolled carpet, a hammer and tools and a large tarp scattered on the floor along with lumps of snow and ice. Eva can't see anyone or any animal. She calls for Isabel again. The tarp rustles. She waits with her hand against her abdomen though now it is her foot that throbs.

A head emerges from beneath the tarp and Eva steps back suddenly aware that she has in fact found some kind of animal here and not her daughter and that there is no time for her to retreat. She searches for its eyes beneath the fur but finds none in the dim light.

Mommy? Eva doesn't hesitate or consider the nails and tools that litter the few steps between her and the tiny figure in the tarp. She pulls Isabel tight to her body. She cries into her hair.

I'm sorry Isabel. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. Eva looks around the structure, holding her daughter tightly, feeling both their chests heave with erratic breath. She wants to tear the fort down or finish building it. The incompleteness of it is what made her ignore it in the first place. It's why she never thought to look for Isabel here. Eva kisses her head.

Don't worry, I'm not mad. Isabel says sweetly and kisses Eva's neck. Eva holds her breath, trying not to cry. She hugs Isabel tighter, but a sob breaks through.

Why did you run away?

Isabel pulls away just enough so that the moon catches her forehead and eyes and for a moment Eva thinks she does look like the animal she initially saw emerging from the tarp. Isabel's eyebrows are pushed deep into her eyes.

I didn't. This is my house.

Eva draws her near again and lets herself cry into Isabel's cheek this time. In the yard several lights bob and voices shout up at them. Eva kisses Isabel one last time before calling down that she's found her.

Jenny Sampirisi

Artist's Statement

Navigating the Landscapes of the Everyday:

Detail, History and the Peripheral in Like Bone From Skin

1. Exposing the Detail

When asked about her focus on prostitution and documented cases of missing women in her book Dead Girls Nancy Lee said, "Everything that happens is part of us. We all play a part in this huge tragedy. It's not as foreign as we think" (Wigston 2).

This project was not easy to write. There were times when, deep in the inkblot pages of newspaper archives or the onion-skinned public inquiry, I would discover a new and devastating detail about the state of Christine Jessop's body and want to throw the project out. I was at the computer or in the library sifting through reams of repeated information to find that exact tidbit, the one thing I didn't already know, and once I'd found it, it didn't feel right to put it in a book, to pull it apart as I knew I was going to do. To, in a sense, expose the detail.

I began this project with academic ideas of history and record as constructions that I could move within, building them up and knocking them down as I saw fit. I came out with those ideas intact, as I will explain further, but with the discovery of each detail that is placed here in this book, I questioned my motives and my morals for a moment. I questioned my need to resurrect the story of Christine Jessop; to place my readers and my characters at her dismembered side.

It was always important that I not moralize the event. I can't explain her death to you and I haven't made it my burden to reason why children are taken from their homes, raped and killed. But I do agree with Lee, *everything that happens is part of us*. At one point in the novella Linda recalls cooking soup at the time the body was found. The two actions, cooking soup and finding a dead body, become the same event within the vignette. On a larger scale the "minor" violence that the characters inflict on themselves and on each other parallels the acute violence of the rape and murder of Christine Jessop; the obvious example being the attempted molestation of Isabel by Andrew. The characters are intricately connected to the disappearance of Christine and to the body site. But I have chosen to look in on their lives arbitrarily. They are every family. If I were to choose an entirely different set of characters, they would produce similar results. There is a connection between each of us and the event. As Lee suggests, the things we are comfortably distanced from are not as foreign as we might think.

I began the novella knowing, of course, that an innocent person had been convicted and jailed for many years as a result of inattention to detail, fabricated details, lost details, poor memories and above all, the desperate need to place blame. Based on this I decided

two things. The first I have mentioned briefly already, that details would be very important to this work. The second was that all my characters would be guilty.

I am thinking about the detail as “particulars considered individually and in relation to a whole” (OED). It is widely accepted that the detail contains some truth that can be extracted and applied to a much larger context. The documentation of history is intricately tied to the detail. How much we know about our past depends very much upon the particulars of the records we keep.

But more than this, details tend to take over a history or an event. As in the investigation of Guy Paul Morin the particulars were considered individually well beyond their relationship to the whole. F.R. Ankersmit comments, “historical phenomena are never recognized in the way we recognize the objects of our daily life” (223). In Like Bone From Skin the details begin to eclipse the events, as in the Christine Jessop body site descriptions where the site is repeatedly catalogued with very little new evidence added. Also, the fictional details of the character’s lives tend to overpower the “historic” details of Christine Jessop’s brutal murder. As Ankersmit says, it is the objects of daily life that readers are more likely to recognise and cling to as they read, so I have given the reader those easily relatable details. However, imbedded in the details of my characters’ lives are the details of Christine Jessop’s murder and of the trial. The incest that occurs between Isabel and Andrew stems, in part, from trial transcripts, which revealed that Ken Jessop had raped his young sister for many years prior to her death. Eva’s sliced hand, mulched abdomen, and threatening bones draw her and the reader closer to the violence visited upon Christine Jessop’s body before and after death. And on a purely literary level, Linda’s chopped celery and boiling broth “feel” like the discovery of a dead child

because the events are so closely juxtaposed. Ultimately it is not until we care about the fictional characters that we begin to care for Christine. It is not that I wanted readers to focus their attentions entirely on fictional characters and not on the tragedy of Christine Jessop. I flipped through stacks of historical documents and I couldn't see Christine Jessop in those pages. I wanted to give my readers the uncomfortable experience of viewing Christine as a scrutinized document on one page, and then seeing her as a complex facet of their own identities on another. The result, I feel, is jarring, nervous, and horrifying, and in the end the reader sees Christine in my characters. I hope that in the last line the "her" is just slightly ambiguous or hopeful, and that Eva has "found" not only Isabel but also some aspect of Christine.

The conclusion I drew from the incarceration of the innocent Guy Paul Morin was that every resident of Queensville, and by extension, of any town, anywhere, was guilty of this crime. Everyone holds some secret, a peculiarity of mannerism or speech, or has moments of misperception that can be interpreted as guilt. Anyone can be guilty in the right light. And indeed, every character in the story has moments when their innocence or guilt comes into question:

Eva has started watching the news on mute. She likes the silence of the images, and the contrast between the new anchorwoman – her dark, teased mane – and the sallow hospital workers, the pensive and plain gymnastics coach, the mixed bag of senior citizens. Every time Eva turns the television on there is the single moment when sound enters the room. Bright. Snapping. Maybe it's her own worry, she thinks; the worry that in that second, the name will be called, wet and crashing into the room and she'll turn to answer or not answer. So she lightly presses the mute button and the word appears at the lower edge of the screen in capital red letters. MUTE. And the room becomes it. (35)

There are many moments when Eva's character is brought to the reader's attention for questioning. We don't know her relationship with Isabel prior to her surgery, but we

know that she feels the need to tell Roland, “I didn’t hit her” without being asked, defending herself pre-emptively from an accusation that never comes. Each character is given this type of moment (with the exception of Isabel), forcing the reader to constantly reassess what they know about the characters and how they have come to know it. This is not a question of “likeability” or judgement, but rather one of perception. How the characters perceive themselves and their world and how others perceive them rarely matches up.

I want to expose the “foreign” feeling that separates us from horrific events. The feeling of being comfortably disconnected from the events presented to us daily in our newspapers is one I pick apart through my use of the “public document” in the third section titled “Found”. Christine Jessop’s body is repeatedly described in multiple vignettes interspersed with the narratives of the characters. As the work progresses the boundaries between public documents and private lives begin to break down (though it can be said that they were never stable in the first place given that only the diction, not the form, of the vignettes changes from one to the next). As the novella reaches its climax, the diction that has characterized the more journalistic “Christine” sections and served to offset them from the more narrative, character vignettes becomes harder to distinguish. Reader expectations are also challenged when I place an unnamed character (who we can assume is Eva) in a scene that, due to its position in the sequence of vignettes, would normally fall to a description of Christine’s body:

This is a breastbone. The camera snaps. This is a shoulder. The flash sears foreground and background equally. This is a scar. Snap. This is an opening. Snap. This is an elbow. Snap. This is... (98)

The reader is accustomed by now to reading the catalogues of Christine's body that alternate consistently between the central narratives of the fictional characters. We know prior to this scene, however, that Eva is standing naked in the basement taking pictures of her body. The reader expectation is that this vignette, should it follow the established pattern, is about Christine. Indeed, there are elements of the body site present. Any investigation requires the cataloguing of the body, and the scene itself has the surgical air of an autopsy report. The phrase "This is" followed by a body part suggests that the body is being defined and mapped through the act of photographing and that it does not exist as a whole unit beyond the perimeter of the film. Photography and the "image" are central to my project, as I will articulate in my discussion of the peripheral. The intentional confusion between Christine and Eva forces the reader to see the two bodies superimposed.

Carlo Ginzburg suggests that narration itself emerged from a hunter society through the deciphering of tracks.

This seems to be reinforced by the fact that the rhetorical figures on which the language of venatic deduction still rest today – the part in relation to the whole, the effect in relation to the cause – are traceable to the narrative axis of metonymy, with the rigorous exclusion of metaphor (103).

For Ginzburg it is the detail itself that brings forth "story" as we know it. For me, the details were what I saw long after the books were closed and the computer screen was black. They were what told the story for me and what I felt the need to expose and question for my reader. And if, as Lee says, everything that happens is a part of us, then it is at the level of the detail that we will recognise it.

2. Novella as Public Document: News of a Town

The novella as we know it is muddled by definition, identified as “a short novel or a long short story” (OED). It is an awkward, hybrid creature that, due to its precarious length, resists placement in either the novel or the short story camps. The novella provides enough space for characters and plots to develop, for metaphors to evolve and for language to ripen, but as a form it forces an urgency that a novel does not. Like a short story, there is space and time, but only so much. Therefore the form demands concision and pacing like that of a short story. As with short fiction there cannot be too much space between points of action before the momentum is lost. But to judge the form solely on length risks arbitrariness as it implies a standardized page count for the telling of a story. What I am more interested in are the roots of the novella form.

The word *novella* originally derives from the Italian word “*novelle*” meaning *a tale*, or *a piece of news*. The etymology of the word suggests that novellas were originally “news of town and country life worth repeating for amusement and edification” (Wikipedia). The intention of the early Italian novella was to record those oral tales of rural life deemed entertaining and in the process of recording to flesh out the story with anecdotes and seemingly objective details, giving the form its most important quality, an “air of reality” (Scott xxvi).

Novellas and short fiction often rely on *framing narrative(s)* as a plot organization device: “a preliminary narrative within which one or more of the characters proceeds to tell a series of short narratives” (Abrams 287). The partial intention of the framing

narrative within my own novella is to collect news (that which has been repeated and recorded), and to locate it within the rural town it came from on the one hand and to call into question the idea of “record” itself on the other. If the novella represents “a piece of news,” then what I have before me is a document, a record of an event that occurred in an actual rural town that has been here repeated.

The “air of reality” initially ascribed to novellas is fluent in Like Bone From Skin. Christine Jessop did exist, she was abducted, she was raped and killed and found in the ways that I describe. The details of her disappearance and her body as it was found currently exist as a few paragraphs in the thousand-page report on the proceedings involving Guy Paul Morin, or for the willing, in newspaper archives. She exists in the memories of the people of Queensville, my parents, my cousins, and those who rode the school bus with her or taught her in their classrooms. She also developed as myth for those of us too young to recall the event. I remember being told quite solemnly by fellow second graders that her bones were buried under her dedication plaque in front of the school. Principally, she is a footnote in discussions of Canada’s most well-known and inept murder investigation.

It’s true that names and locations are easy enough to sever and suture anew, and that Christine Jessop might have been any name and Queensville might have been any place. I have chosen to “limit” myself to actual record because I do not believe that the concept of *record* is so sacred that it cannot be tampered with. News is subjective and fluid. Indeed, the lessons learned from the inquiry into the investigation itself revealed that the breakdown of the record, of definitive written facts, was what caused the incarceration of an innocent individual and the destruction of key evidence. I believe as the early

purveyors of the novella form believed, that news or tales can be gathered, arranged and retold in ink in the ways that best suit the audience and the time.

More than this though, I believe that Christine Jessop's murder has become an event, and that she has been lost in the reiteration of that event. News tends to sensationalize and pull apart the details of a story and then further, to repeat those details far beyond necessity. The novella as I have here defined it has the potential to be an extension of the dissemination of details, another point of distortion that the event can take.

The line between representation and reality is purposefully blurred in my text. The novella as a genre has historically lent itself to tabloid representations of reality: "As a site of adaptation, tabloids of the 1920s were remarkable in that reporters or guest novelists were often commissioned to author serialized novellas of criminal cases on which the papers were currently reporting" (Pelizzon and West, 7). The novella is in this way recognised as a vehicle of "creative documentation", likely because it is short enough to be a "quick read" and long enough to be infused with imaginative flair. This is not to say that it is more or less trustworthy than any other work of fiction, only that, in the sense I am here using it, it is a self-conscious text. That is, it is a text that is aware of its narrative function as historical representation.

There are two ways that I have viewed the past in writing this novella. Hayden White and Paul Ricoer claim, "the past is a text" (as cited by Ankersmit 209). F.R. Ankersmit in his article "Historical Representation" challenges White and Ricoer's stance that the past has "a meaning of its own" (209). Ankersmit claims this is ambiguous to some degree, as it does not imply whether the meaning within this "text" is literal or metaphoric, only that the past has been recorded. It does suggest, however, that the text

refers to an occurrence; that there are events, actions or details that exist in time, separate from the document itself (209).

In writing Like Bone From Skin I was comfortable with this notion of “the past as a text”, as something structured in time, yet malleable in interpretation. The epigraph by Don DeLillo that I have chosen for the novella expresses this interaction between reality and textual representation. DeLillo describes the play between reader and text as a “conversation” with the horrific events and human struggles that trickle into our homes through news media. To see the past not only as a text, but also as a conversation, gave me the freedom to move within the documents that I had uncovered from the trial. I was able to take whole paragraphs from the Commission on Proceedings Involving Guy Paul Morin or old newspaper articles and manipulate them to find, or make, or resist meaning within them.

Throughout the third section of the novella, *Found*, I reiterate the details of the body site. The details derive from the Commission but the order, repetition, omission and phrasing are predominantly mine. I reason that the “public document” can also be read as the body of Christine Jessop who was, at the time of her disappearance and discovery, constantly written and re-written in terms of what she wore, what her body looked like and what was done to it.

She is on her back. Her legs are spread apart in an unnatural position with her knees stretched outward. She is wearing a beige turtleneck sweater, a blue pullover sweater, a blouse from which some buttons are missing and a pair of socks with blue stripes. She is wearing two pairs of socks. Her panties are at her right foot. Blue corduroy pants with a belt and a pair of Nike running shoes are just south of her feet. A recorder with her name taped on it is next to her body (81).

To some degree I am accessing the “journalese” from which the document is derived, but I have tampered with the text. Where the original report might read, “The body was found clothed in a beige turtleneck...” I have chosen to place the text in the present tense and to refer to “the body” as “she” at all times in these segments. The characters in my story exist temporally in 1983-4. The details of the public document sections are not necessarily accessible to them as they are to the reader, though fragments have slipped into the papers. The present tense is necessary to draw attention to the document and hopefully to force the reader into a conversation with it.

Because we feel that the Christine Jessop segments are pieces of news, we have expectations for them: a) that they are true, and b) that we will be able to detach ourselves from them in some way. What I hope I have accomplished by the end of the novella is a break down of both a and b. As the action of the characters moves towards the climax, Christine’s segments begin to slip away from the stiff diction of the public record and into a more poetic, grammarless (but not unstructured) text:

wearing two pairs of socks was pointed north and south was unnatural was
running shoes was found subsequently with her panties around her right foot was
a road known as west to east just south of her feet was in fact a beige turtleneck
was her body position was some buttons ripped off was spread apart unnatural
was knees spread outward was a blue pullover sweater was identified as
belonging to was notified was these clothes was walking near their property was
about 56 kilometres east of the residence was a recorder with her name taped on it
(99)

I have here introduced the past tense “was”. Normally the past tense serves to distance or euphemise what is being said. I have used it here as a pivot. As the reader progresses through the segment, the “was” begins to transform the words around it. Details that have become overdrawn at this point in the third section suddenly sound like questions and thus the reader sees them in a new light.

My constant reiteration of details in these sections coincides with the repetition of the news stories that take place within the central narrative: “It’s eight fifty. The news starts again. The plane crashes. Nothing new to report,” (19); “...and there she is, found again, lying on her back in the woods. *A man and his two young daughters taking a walk...*” (90); “...a station away the same van cradling the dismembered remains of a child turned off the tractor path again and again” (101). Atom Egoyan’s 1989 film *Speaking Parts* also accesses the device of repeated imagery. In his introduction to the critical review of the film, Ron Burnett says, “The film ends, the show ends, characters leave but somehow the images never do. The circularity of image – viewer – image continues” (Egoyan 22). Throughout the novella I impress upon my reader that the news and the images it brings (whether actual images or written descriptions) exist along a continuum. Whether or not Eva, Linda, Roland or Andrew is there to view the images, we must assume that the images go on. Often characters resist sound, as when Eva watches the news on mute, or resist accessing the media at all, as Linda does later in the narrative. At times the news stories become fragmented as characters tune in or tune out. These all serve as reminders that the cycle of images exists independently of the characters.

3. The Peripheral: Destabilizing Perception

Last summer I read Don DeLillo’s novella, *The Body Artist*, and saw in language what many times I had considered in life but not thought to express in words: those slips of vision or judgement located at the corner of your eye that don’t indicate madness

necessarily, just a moment of indecision between yourself and the world. DeLillo writes: “The dead squirrel you see in the driveway, dead and decapitated, turns out to be a strip of curled burlap, but you look at it, you walk past it, even so, with a mixed tinge of terror and pity” (DeLillo 111).

Many of the characters in Like Bone From Skin perceive things to be there that aren't or misjudge events/images on first glance. Andrew sees a set of five teeth attached to a severed jaw in the woodpile, and then realizes that they are the plastic toes of a doll's foot. Eva sees blood on Isabel's face when really, it is the cherry goo of a sucker. Roland sees a bone slip out of Eva's shoulder. Linda watches Roland's body split apart and reform in bevelled glass. I hope to dismantle the idea of objects, people, histories, images or moments as static or tangible. I want to call into question sensory data. How we come to “know” our environment becomes unreliable throughout the novella and therefore when we are inside the subjects' heads we must question what they “see” as well as how they see it.

There is a long standing debate in phenomenology that asks, do we perceive things in the ways that we do because we already believe something about them or do we see things the way that we do because of the circumstances of their perception? (Hamlyn 35). When Andrew “sees” the teeth in the woodpile the reader interprets this in two ways. The first is that Andrew has projected some form of his own guilt into the moment of looking at the doll's foot. We are unsure at this point what that guilt might stem from. Knowing that a child is missing from the town, we can infer perhaps that Andrew is in some way connected to the disappearance. As the scene progresses, the initial image becomes resonant of Andrew's sexual feelings towards Isabel, since the violent image of

the dismembered jaw becomes tied to the body of a child. But it is also very possible that a doll's foot, alone and exposed in harsh sunlight and removed contextually from the environment in which it is usually found, might look, on first glance, like five teeth and a dusty jaw. The decapitated squirrel that DeLillo describes is a slip in perception. We are all navigating the sometimes-undefined landscapes of the everyday, and in fiction those landscapes are often conflated with the grief, or guilt or threaded metaphors of the characters that do the perceiving. Essentially, I wanted to break down the stability of perception.

The risk of destabilizing perception is, of course, that everything within the novel becomes unknowable. Objects, bodies, subjectivities, details, memories, and landscapes all become variables within the text and the reader may grow weary of the constant lack of clear definitions. Also, my attention to the detail seems to contradict the "undefined landscapes of the everyday". In a novella effectively littered with details one would expect to find an established reality. Alan Liu describes in "Local Transcendence: Cultural Criticism, Postmodernism, and the Romanticism of Detail" that the detail traditionally extends outward and combines with other details to give readers a feeling of looking in on a version of reality: "The flakes of detail fall into place, and we are charmed by their slow suspense and the crystal clarity of the scene when all has settled into mock reality" (Liu 91). Yet in Like Bone From Skin the opposite is true. It is the details themselves that I question most aggressively, whether they be the position of the body, as I have explained earlier with the "was" vignette, the weather, or the time of day. At one point Andrew looks outside and debates the weather: "Outside the sky is grey and choked with clouds. It looks cold though he wonders how it can 'look' cold. Things *feel*

cold don't they? Or does a grey sky mean *cold* and a blue sky mean *warm*?" (45). The details still serve to mimic the "real world" but I have my characters question them. Once again, I want to problematize the detail: how this detail, or that detail, brings us into definitive knowledge of our world or, in the case of Christine Jessop, of an event. As to whether or not this taxes my reader, I believe that I have paced these disturbances consistently throughout the first two sections of the book. It isn't until the third section that the break down of details begins to overwhelm, and in that particular section, if the reader is not overwhelmed to some extent, then I have failed. My intentions in the final segment of the book are to break down the remaining notions of an established reality and move my reader to question the "details" of the public documents, and by extension, of the narratives themselves.

The idea of the "peripheral" is also very literal in the novella. The definition of "peripheral" is quite simply, "perceived or perceiving near the outer edges of the retina: peripheral vision." It also relates to anatomy, "of the surface or outer part of a body or organ; external" (OED), which is an aspect of the "peripheral" that I was quite attuned to while writing the novella. The "body" becomes a landscape throughout the text. Eva is particularly connected to this "body peripheral". The boundaries of her body are breached most often; bones slide through skin or threaten to and objects pass into her body. Readers get to see Eva's body most clearly through the eyes of other characters and through her own descriptions, and she is intricately tied to Christine's body through the organic descriptions and the constant violence that her body undergoes.

Roland is, of course, the character most obviously haunted by the peripheral. Roland loses his direct sight for long stretches of time and retains only his peripheral

vision. Whether this is biological or if it is a psychological “glitch” (possibly resulting from his inability to look directly at the people in his life toward whom he feels guilt) is debateable. Nonetheless, there is an uneasiness that exists in looking directly at people or things throughout the novella. Eva asks of Roland “What are you always looking at?” which Roland asks of himself earlier in the novella when he discovers that there is flour on the table beside him that he hasn’t seen until it is pointed out. The edge of vision is not fully formed and is therefore an unreliable space. Roland has either chosen or has been biologically forced to exist within this sphere.

Christine becomes both the “peripheral body”, and the “literary peripheral” of the text. She is described entirely in terms “of the surface or outer part of a body”. She is also at the edge of our vision at all times in the story, meaning that she is never central as a character. Christine is never filled out as a character, given a history, a speaking part, or a personal conflict that must be solved. She is a body at the edge of the reader’s and the character’s view.

Themes of the peripheral and the fear of looking are challenged by the presence of devices such as the camera and the television, which are designed to look directly at moment in time (a school photo of a missing child, a family, an event, etc.) and to snip out the peripheral, while at the same time reminding the viewer that there is always something “just outside of” sight.

Around the time I was reading The Body Artist, I was also learning to use a manual camera. The viewfinder unveiled an alternate world for me, one that was mired in accidental perceptions, momentary gestures of bodies and landscapes, peculiarities of light, and fragments of objects that I’d never considered to be anything but whole. The

“image” became a central metaphor for the project, and also a structural device in the form of the vignette. As a metaphoric device, the photograph is another form of public document, a method of cataloguing the world, another turn of the “detail”. In On Photography, Susan Sontag states:

Photographs are a way of imprisoning reality, understood as recalcitrant, inaccessible; of making it stand still. Or they enlarge a reality that is felt to be shrunk, hollowed out, perishable, remote. One can't possess reality, one can possess (and be possessed by) images – as, according to Proust, most ambitious of voluntary prisoners, one can't possess the present but one can possess the past (Sontag 163).

Once again I find myself grappling with concepts of “reality” and “history”. Eva believes that her abdomen is filled with organic matter: “Eva imagines her body as vegetative, woody and damp, or as menacing and unformed, barely held in place. She has imagined her ovaries many times, curled like lady slippers rooted to a dusted roadside” (28). (Descriptions of the soil and organic decay link her with Christine). In the second section of the novella, titled “searching”, Eva takes snapshots of the vegetation that she has throughout described as part of her body. In this case it is not just an instance of “imprisoning reality” through photos but of verifying or accessing an expectation of reality. What Eva is searching for is not Christine’s body, but her own.

Photographs also work structurally in the text by way of the vignette.

Organizationally the vignette gave me room to move quickly among characters and situations, to leave Eva frozen temporally in the basement, while the reader viewed Linda sitting in her kitchen at the same moment. It allowed me to overlap time, revealing a single scene from multiple subjectivities as one might take several pictures of the same object from different angles. Each vignette can serve as a photograph. Indeed, some are

very plainly descriptions of photographs. To return to my earlier discussion of the “novella” as a “public document” or “news of a town,” the vignette acts as a snippet of news that includes images, details, documents, and descriptions of events. The vignettes are numbered because, as it is with any collection of photographs or documents, when we enter into the novella, we are entering a catalogue. The term “vignette” is also a photographic one meaning “a photograph or drawing whose edges gradually fade into the surrounding paper” or “an unintended darkening of the image corners in a photographic image” (van Walree). Essentially it is the distortion of the peripheral areas of the image so that only the centre is directly visible. We can assume, then, if the edges of the vignette are distorted and the characters refuse to look at the centre, then the view of the characters will always be, to an extent, skewed.

4. Conclusion: ReViewing the Failed Image

Henri Cartier-Bresson says of the failed photograph and of memory:

When it's too late, then you know with a terrible clarity exactly where you failed; and at this point you often recall the telltale feeling you had while you were actually making the pictures. Was it a feeling of hesitation due to uncertainty? Was it because of some physical gulf between yourself and the unfolding event? Was it simply that you did not take into account a certain detail in relation to the whole setup? Or was it (and this is more frequent) that your glance became vague, your eye wandered off? (25-6)

Cartier-Bresson's idea of the failed image is where I have chosen to point my camera.

That “telltale feeling” that leads him to believe that a photograph will be doomed to the

wastebasket, leads me to rush to the darkroom. It is the moments of imbalance, “hesitation,” “uncertainty,” or “physical gulfs,” that reveal most clearly our humanness, our utter imperfections. When the reader first meets Roland he is searching the half-built house for his tools, which he has not used since they were given to him. He parts the coats in an old closet and finds a moth:

In the slice of exposed wall a large white moth has spread itself out. He can barely see it in the low light except for the furry grey body that narrows like an exclamation mark. He stares, forgetting for a moment why he is searching through the closet, wondering if, perhaps, he has been looking for moths. (8)

The everyday moments when we pass briefly into uncertainty are the moments when we are most vulnerable. It is in the unaccounted details, and the instants when the eye wanders off, when my readers begin to understand the complex interactions between the characters and their world.

One of the big questions I’ve posed in this novella is “what are you looking at”, “what are you ever looking at”? The characters struggle with that question, as do my readers. Often misperceptions of the world are more important to character development in the novella than actual perceptions are, and it is within those misperceptions that expectations are realized or challenged. Eva fears that something has happened to Isabel outside the convenience store and so when she looks at her she instantly “sees” that something violent has occurred. “Looking” is as much about expectation as it is about the physical/biological act of seeing. We must interpret what is in front of us in ways that are useful to us.

My characters are always questioning what they’ve heard. Dizzily, the word “what” is a constant interruption to dialogue and action in the story. This is another form

of “looking” and another challenge to the expectations the characters have of each other. Like Cartier-Bresson’s failed pictures, the “what’s” that punctuate my dialogue are often signs that the eye or the mind has wandered off and the surrounding image has become hazy for the characters and the readers. But what develops in its place is a picture of the character struggling to linguistically and visually interpret the world. Roland and Linda lie in bed and Roland considers the word “can opener”. Linda demands “what.” The reader and Roland realize at this moment that Roland has said the word out loud while miming the action typical of a can opener. The “what” reveals, as well as challenges, our expectations of the characters in the scenes.

Misperception, and constant questioning of the everyday can reveal the hidden details of our lives in the same way a “failed” photo can still unveil some aspect of the world or how we see it. What are you looking at? my characters ask from inside their own picture vignettes. Meaning is slippery within the text, and interpretation of the sensory world is never simple.

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VITA AUCTORIS

Jenny Sampirisi was born in 1981 in Scarborough, Ontario. She graduated from Huron Heights Secondary School in 2000. From there she went on to the University of Windsor where she obtained an Honours BA in English Language, Literature and Creative Writing in 2004. She is currently a candidate for the Master's degree in Creative Writing at the University of Windsor and hopes to graduate in Summer 2006.