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POST

by

Michael Murphy

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

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

2007

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ABSTRACT

Post deals with issues regarding the act of reading, writing, and the inevitability of imaginative erasure. Using two distinct, yet fundamentally related, narratives, *Post* splits the reader's focus between a dysfunctional kid in an unfriendly city, trying to uncover the origins of a mysterious list of addresses, and the creator of said list, a misanthropic collector, who hopes to conceal the absences and injuries of his past by mimicking, and living through, the lives of his others (i.e. people who share his name). By erasing certain facts that contradict their perspectives, and by projecting themselves onto the people/objects/events they investigate, both characters portray the acts of reading and writing as always already flawed pursuits, prompting the reader to question the very means by which he or she processes texts.

DEDICATION

For collectors

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Post Post: Investigating the Investigators

In the good mystery there is nothing wasted, no sentence, no word that is not significant. And even if it is not significant, it has the potential to be so—which amounts to the same thing.

Paul Auster, *City of Glass*

Tracings

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari write that “a book” is “necessarily a tracing: already a tracing of itself, a tracing of the previous book by the same author, a tracing of other books however different they may be, an endless tracing of established concepts and words, a tracing of the world present, past and future” (1608). Within such a reading, books are assemblages of tracings, capable of cross-pollinating, spreading infections, mutating. They are rhizomatic, dynamic, composed of multiple influences, both inter- and extra-textual in nature. In the inter-textual sense, books constantly shift and play upon repetitive themes and gestures. For example, in my novel and thesis project, *Post*, one finds numerous references to other works, notably Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Purloined Letter” and “The Man of the Crowd.” All three narratives critically examine the act of investigation and question the reliability of detective logic. In the extra-textual sense, books are not merely determined by the words they contain, but the words they provoke, the multiple tracings they encourage. In either case, the book depends, at least in a quantitative sense, upon the subject doing the retracing: the reader.

Within my thesis project, *Post*, a number of possible narrators occupy the position of the reader as investigator, each one a different type of reader, a different type of writer. Two narrators in specific present alternating sections: “the kid,” who is unnamed,

manages to record virtually every aspect of his life on a handheld tape recorder; Morgan Wells, a man who doggedly chases after and observes the lives of his “others” (i.e. people who share his name) takes painstaking, though quite confusing, notes in a series of notebooks. Each of these two characters struggle, in the kid’s words, “to wade through [the facts], make [them] make sense” (224). For example, forced to live in a city he dislikes, with a brother he hates, the kid spends the final days of the summer trying to subdue or alleviate his boredom by walking the streets of Toronto in search of the origins of a hidden list of addresses. After discovering the list of “Morgan Wells” addresses in the back of a drawer, the kid goes to each of the addresses and speaks to a number of different people, hoping to find a link between the addresses, and the imagined possibility that his brother is cheating on his wife. The kid reads, as does any literary critic, for the narrative that will supply the “truth” for which he searches. On the other hand, Morgan Wells, the character about which both the kid and the third-person narrator base their investigations, investigates without purpose. After his wife “disappears,” Morgan finds himself with too much time on his hands. He fills the void with distractions, which include recording his thoughts onto Post-its, painting a map of Toronto on his living room wall, walking the streets excessively, and finally, stealing mail from people who share his name. Eventually, he begins spying upon his “others,” breaking into their homes and creating tremendously detailed lists of their possessions. He records his observations in notebooks, in no apparent order and for no apparent reason.

Although their methods and intents differ, each of these two readers/detectives attempt to control the narrative by implanting their own voices within the artefacts they observe, be it a list of addresses, the lives of others or a collection of notebooks. In order

to make room for themselves in the “texts” they read, these characters essentially cut or erase the facts that do not fit within the critical perspectives they inhabit. Their patchwork tracings, their readings, are often exercises in blank filling, in projecting their own personalities into the object(s) they purportedly investigate.

Frames

Post relies quite heavily upon the notion of tracing, and offers a portrayal of reading/investigating texts as a potentially misleading pursuit. As Barbara Johnson makes explicit in “The Frame of Reference: Poe, Lacan, Derrida,” readers, especially interpretative or analytical readers, are not objective witnesses to the text(s) they encounter. On the contrary, readers tend to trace or frame a text in a manner that suits their own tastes. By offering diagnoses that often erase or eliminate the multiple paths of a book down to a single tracing, readers unconsciously remove parts of the texts they are supposed to supplement, thereby limiting the book’s capacity to germinate, fluctuate and evolve.

My thesis project puts the act of tracing under investigation, and asks whether or not readers can ever analyse a book, or a text, or any cultural artefact, without simultaneously deleting or cutting aspects of that text that do not correspond to the reader’s predetermined theoretical perspective. According to Johnson, reading involves “*the filling in of a blank*, which then becomes [a] new injustice” (her emphasis 466). The injustice to which Johnson refers is the aforementioned act of textual transference. Specifically, she refers to Derrida’s “The Purveyor of Truth,” a deconstructive assessment of Lacan’s psychoanalytical assessment of Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Purloined

Letter.” In this essay, Derrida claims that Lacan frames Poe’s text in a way that merely suits his own critical position. As Derrida puts it, “psychoanalysis evidences itself” (124). Yet, as Johnson herself demonstrates, Derrida, consciously or unconsciously, commits the same “injustice” as Lacan, by using Poe’s text to validate or support his pre-existing deconstructivist method, and by excluding aspects of Lacan’s writing that contradict his own argument. In this sense, the act of tracing results not simply in acts of projection, but in acts of erasure and removal as well. The supposedly objective reader, imagined in Derrida and Lacan (and in my own thesis project) as a detective, thus becomes a kind of literary criminal or fraud, tracing over and replacing the book with a rough facsimile of it, a copy of a copy. While the kid and Morgan Wells (and Morgan Wells’s narrator) attempt to think objectively, to supplement the texts they investigate, they ultimately fail to deliver, and leave the reader hanging, unable to trust the narratives they present.

The Kid is not Alright

In what I shall call the first narrative of *Post*¹, the nameless teenage narrator is sent to live with his older brother, Dave, for the last two weeks of summer. As the invitation did not come from his brother, the kid is left to his own devices, which includes curbing boredom by keeping a constant record of his life. In his own words:

I do not always tape the conversations I hear. But I have come to understand that words are important. There are times when I forget the simplest things, like

¹ Although the kid’s narrative appears first in the narrative, it does not precede the other narrative in the imaginary time frame of the story itself. According to Abbott, “when we read a narrative, we are aware of, on the one hand, the time of reading and the order in which things are read, and, on the other hand, the time the story events are supposed to take and the order in which they are supposed to occur” (14). Although the kid’s narrative appears first in the text, Morgan Wells’s story precedes it by two years. Initially, this chronological imbalance causes the reader some confusion, but soon the timeline becomes clear, and readers “detect” the appropriate timeline by reading (and imagining) both forwards and backwards.

setting my alarm clock or when my school assignments are due. I am too young to have Alzheimer's, which is what my grandfather had. But I do not have a good memory for conversations. I forget the words that I have spoken with others, forget the things people have told me. More and more, I worry that I am repeating the same things, again and again. (30)

Overtly, the kid's desire to document his life stems from his fear of forgetting. More subtly, however, the kid wishes to make the unseen seen. Once the kid happens upon a "mysterious" list of addresses hidden behind a kitchen drawer, he uses his tapes as a means to record and study his observations on what he calls "The Mysterious Case of Morgan Wells" (2). Every day he records conversations, thoughts and images that concern his "investigation," and each night he returns to them. Yet, his methodology and motives are flawed.

His methodology is flawed in the sense that he adopts what Poe's Detective Dupin might consider an illogical and inadequate approach. According to Paul Auster (or Auster's Quinn, in *City of Glass*) the "detective is one who looks, who listens, who moves through this morass of objects and events in search of the thought, the idea that will pull all these things together and make sense of them" (8). While the kid intends to make sense of external objects and events, as would any self-respecting reader/investigator, he merely walks from one address to the next, knocks on the door and hopes for the best. He rarely discovers anything he considers significant to his "case." For example, he cannot come up with a way to contact Morgan Wells until someone tells him to look in a phonebook (149). At one point in my novel, the kid unwittingly refers to Poe's "The Purloined Letter," stating:

I read this story in English class once about a guy who steals something from someone else, but no one can find out where he's hidden it until this detective goes to his house and finds it in the most obvious place, right there on his table. Or something like that. It's not a very good story. I don't even remember the name. And it seems stupid that the thief would just leave the stolen goods right out in the open. (61-62)

Ironically, the kid misses the point of Poe's story. In "The Purloined Letter," Poe's Detective Dupin relates the tale of a schoolboy who consistently outsmarts his schoolyard opponents in a game of even and odd. The clever schoolboy tells Dupin that when

I wish to find out how wise, or how stupid, or how good, or how wicked is any one, or what are his thoughts at the moment, I fashion the expression of my face, as accurately as possible, in accordance with the expression of his, and then wait to see what thoughts or sentiments arise in my mind or heart, as if to match or correspond with the expression. (248)

Thus, when Dupin recovers the stolen "something from someone else" (a letter stolen from the queen) he finds it in an obvious place because he has a thorough knowledge of the thief, and knows precisely where to look. In contrast, the kid does not use any such method of investigation. He simply waits, to a certain extent, for the clues to fall into his lap, relying upon an irrational investigative approach to solve the mystery of the list of addresses.

The kid's flawed methodology is matched equally by his flawed motives. As Wolfgang Iser points out in "Interaction between Text and Reader," "the reader ... is

drawn into the events [of the narrative] and made to supply what is meant from what is not said. What is said only appears to take on significance as a reference to what is not said” (1676). Essentially, the kid wishes to skew the facts, to ignore what is said or apparent (a list of addresses), in favour of what is not even implied, by the list of addresses or otherwise (that his brother is cheating on his wife). When at night he returns to his tapes to analyse the evidence, he does not truly make discoveries based upon fact, but injects speculative discoveries into his recorder, stating: the “list of addresses seems to me a peculiar piece of evidence. But what does it mean? It means something. My brother hid it for a reason. Obviously. To keep it from Val? He’s probably having an affair. Why would he cheat on Val?” (66). Here, the kid reveals that he does not simply wish to uncover the origin of the list of addresses, but to incriminate his brother at the same time, to use the list of addresses to “frame” his brother, so to speak. To “fill in the blanks” with his opinions, hopes and wishes. To, like most literary investigators, create a mystery rather than solve one.

Not only does the kid regularly fail to draw the line between objectivity and subjectivity, he also fails to act as a reliable source of information for the reader. He is, in all senses of the word, a bad tracer. In *The Cambridge Introduction to Narration*, H. Porter Abbott claims that one important advantage in using an unreliable narrator is that “narration itself – its difficulties, its liability to be subverted by one’s own self interest and prejudices and blindnesses – becomes part of the subject” (69). Indeed, the unreliability of the kid’s narrative certainly reflects the unreliability of any tracing that attempts to limit or reduce the multiplicity of the book. Abbott claims that there are two types of unreliable narrators: “those whom we trust for the facts but not for their

interpretation ... and those whom we cannot even trust for the facts" (70). Of the two types of unreliable narrators distinguished by Abbott, the kid has the most in common with the first. He seems to have the facts straight, but doesn't know what to make of them. The reader, then, never entirely trusts the kid's narrative, never knows for certain what has been excluded from the text. For example, the kid constantly fantasises about the ways in which he might die, and presents his numerous death scenes in the same voice as the rest of his story. In doing so, he blurs the opposition between death and detective logic, the line between truth and fiction, reality and fantasy:

I left the bus station at around five and headed home. The sidewalks were choking. The streetcars weren't operating, the subway was shut down, there were stranded commuters everywhere, briefcases and backpacks. I've never seen that many bodies all in one space. The traffic lights were out. The bodies, the cars, the metalised air. I walked the whole two hours to the Beaches, thinking about weapons of mass destruction and the Middle East. Remembering the time I was captured by terrorists in Iraq. They grabbed me off the street, beat and starved me. They pissed on me and published pictures of me on the internet and Al-Jazeera network. Eventually, Abu helped me escape. But I got caught. Had my head beheaded. I recorded a video on the internet to say goodbye to my mom before they killed me and slung my corpse over a bridge, the words 'Get out US' carved into my chest. (22-23)

Here, the kid erases the distinction between fiction and non-fiction. By excluding the facts and replacing them with fantasy, the kid inadvertently confronts the reader with the possibility that he invents and erases more than he records. Unlike Poe, who, according to

Larry Vaughn's "Poe and the Mystery of Things: A Remembrance," attempted "to discover the course of things ... sought to get a grip on death itself, surround it with calculation and catch the culprit in the fine mesh of detective logic" (98), the kid prioritizes death, and fails to objectively capture the world "beyond" the self. Ultimately, the tracing the kid provides does not adequately portray or represent the truth. He does not solve anything. At best, he reinscribes the reader's desire to interpret, while simultaneously, though unconsciously, representing that desire as flawed and misguided.

Morgan (Un)Wells

As the kid's narrative demonstrates, the reader's desire to interpret, to trace, is, at least in part, facilitated by the act of erasure. The same statement might be made regarding Morgan Wells's narrative. Like the teenage narrator from the first section, the protagonist of the second half of the diptych is also representative of the reader as detective/investigator, as someone limited to tracing. Unlike the kid, Morgan Wells does not suffer from a desire to overinterpret. Instead, he fails at offering interpretations, creating, rather, lists of facts without context or purpose. In "The Limits of Reason: Poe's Deluded Detectives," J. Gerald Kennedy asserts that the typical "detective hero ... not only restores law and order to the world of mundane human affairs; he also explains the seemingly inexplicable, thereby demonstrating the ultimate comprehensibility of the world beyond the self" (185). The reader's urge to identify with the man/woman capable of mastering the facts stems from his or her desire to control the text—to authorize and become authorities over the unknown. For similar reasons, when Morgan Wells spies on other people who share his name, he records his observations in chaotically

organised/disorganised notebooks. He attempts to make sense of his others (whom the narrator refers to as his namesakes) through a written investigation of their boundaries, the places in which they live, the lives they lead. He also walks the streets of Toronto “to make sense of his surroundings,” to give himself a “sense of being there” (6-7). Although Morgan Wells wants to make the unseen seen, the unknown known, he uses, like the kid, a flawed and misleading methodology.

Just as the kid wishes to disentangle the mystery of the list of addresses, so too does Morgan Wells struggle to discern the personalities of people who share his name. He follows them around, breaks into their homes and takes incredibly descriptive notes on what he sees. He embodies the reader as investigator, yet, he wishes not simply to observe his namesakes, but to become them. For instance, after he steals the first letter from a namesake’s mailbox, he writes a reply to the letter’s sender. After writing it,

Morgan read through the letter. He thought he captured the essence of the other Morgan Wells. Leeman and Welsh was a firm Morgan had made up, but he thought it sounded believable. He also assumed that Heidi York wasn’t the type to over-investigate letters from lost loves. At first he was going to sign-off with something casual, such as “later”. This Morgan Wells was certainly the type of guy to finish his letters with a “later” sign-off. Especially where it concerned an ex-girlfriend. But then he remembered that Heidi had signed her letter with “Gerberas rule.” It must’ve been a thing they did, a reference about which Morgan could only speculate. Perhaps those were her favourite flowers? Or the type of flowers he used to buy for her? (94)

In writing the letter and attempting to inhabit the thoughts of the other Morgan Wells, Morgan essentially replaces his other with a modified version of himself. He projects himself into the texts he reads, fills in the blanks, the things that are not said, with things that he might say, thus revealing his inability to read or understand people without mimicking or internalising their personalities.

Another faulty aspect of Morgan's methodology surfaces in the manner in which he stalks his namesakes. Like Poe's narrator in "The Man of the Crowd," Morgan Wells falls prey to what Kennedy calls a failure to "maintain a critical detachment" (188). The narrator of "The Man of the Crowd" maintains a supposedly unbiased air, even as he fails, repeatedly, to remain objective when observing his double. Kennedy points out that "rather than flee his malevolent counterpart, the narrator of "The Man of the Crowd" actively pursues his double, seeking knowledge of the man's inner nature through a detective-like scrutiny of his outward appearance and behavior" (186). The narrator of Poe's story ultimately "falls under the influence of vague sensations ... irrational impulses" (188), and learns nothing of the man he follows, other than that he spends a great deal of time walking. The same might be said of Morgan Wells. He too wishes to learn more about himself through a constant study of his others. Similarly, he lacks the ability to maintain a critical detachment and loses his sense of purpose as his narrative comes to a close. Near the end, he enters the homes of his doubles out of habit, recording unimportant, trivial details, such as the type of food they keep in their cupboards ("Chickpeas: Firestone, Kraft Dinner: Fallingdale, Tofu: Threadneedle" 206). Rather than learn anything new about them, he merely turns them into lists of information. He erases their personalities, and replaces them with objects. As the narrator points out,

The namesakes disappeared into their belongings and Morgan continued to operate upon their homes. He measured their walls, crawled under their beds, did a load of laundry, ate their food and read their books. Where he'd searched for contact, for knowledge, he found nothing but belongings, things heaped upon things ... Morgan Wells on Lockheed became a closet full of WWII memorabilia. He was a collection of curled and faded Tarot cards. His face was a drawer of disorganised photographs. His insides were the contents of his drawers, his cupboards, the cubby below the stairs. Lockheed Morgan was a rusty Mustang under a faded brown tarp, a basement full of unused tools, blocks of half-chopped wood. A singing Elvis fish. (182-83)

Morgan's tracings tend to erase more than they engrave. His narrative cuts away the very people he intends to investigate, and thus, by the completion of his story, the reader realises that Morgan is a bad reader, capable only of listing facts. Whereas the kid made numerous, though unsuccessful, attempts to characterise and interpret his text, Morgan Wells remains incapable of even qualifying his observations, of saying what they mean. He fails to, as Auster suggests, make sense of the world, to help the reader experience "the proliferation of its details as if for the first time" (8). Morgan's failure as an investigator demonstrates the faultiness of any tracings that attempt, as most tracings do, to control or limit a text. Like both Lacan's and Derrida's readings of "The Purloined Letter," some facts get overlooked or erased, all for the sake of verifying one's predetermined perspective.

Certain/Uncertain

Within the rhizomatic, supernumerary structure of *Post*, the reader finds not one story, but two; not two stories but three? four? five? distinct narratives that ask the reader to inhabit multiple perspectives; distinct tracings of previous books, previous stories, previous words. However divided these narratives may at first appear to the reader, they ultimately work towards a similar end. If Dupin is Poe's representative of strong reading and trustworthy analysis, the kid, Morgan Wells (and the final, third-person narrator) can only be the opposite. They do not truly wish to understand the external world, but to authorise it, create it as they see fit. In this sense, though they attempt to reveal, to make the unknown known, the multiple investigators of *Post*, as representatives of tracing, merely misinform, and leave the reader to question the truth-value of what he or she has just read. In the kid's narrative, the act of reading or investigating comes across as a flawed and illogical act. Rather than seek the "truth," the kid merely creates and instigates scenarios, hoping, at least at first, to prove that his reviled older brother is having an affair. Although Morgan Wells initially wishes to understand his others, his namesakes, in the end he merely replaces them with dead words, lists and facts. By reducing the multiplicity of the external world to a single, seamless narrative, the kid and Morgan Wells commit Lacan's error, forcing the reader to become conscious of the frame, the act of tracing, and the means by which stories necessarily eliminate some, even as they embrace other, interpretative possibilities.

In effect, the kid and Morgan Wells attempt to counteract the multiplicity of narrative by reducing its components, just as I have here reduced the components of *Post* to a summary of the two main points of view. In reducing, the reader limits meaning,

conceals the unknown, and favours the clear-cut and the finite over the tenuous and the infinite, the certain over the uncertain. Yet, the act of tracing necessarily cuts away conflicting perspectives, hides or conceals “unrelated” information, and so tracings are not quite as certain or sure as they at first appear. For example, I could have approached this essay from a number of theoretical perspectives. I could have included a section on the third-person narrator of Morgan Wells’s story. I could have made an argument regarding the double in *Post*, about portrayals of trauma and death, the meaning behind Morgan’s Post-its and maps, or even the certainties and signposts through which readers discover stability within the narrative. The narrative, like most narratives, allows for such discontinuity and breaks. It encourages the reader to frame the text, to find some means of accessing it; to trace its paths, its lines of flight; to reduce its multiplicity down to one simple solution, even though, as the story itself suggests, such actions are fundamentally misleading and limiting, in that they excise more from the story than they add to it.

As Johnson points out, “if the letter [the word, any signifier] is precisely that which dictates the rhetorical indeterminacy of any theoretical discourse about it, then the oscillation between unequivocal statements of undecidability and ambiguous assertions of decidability is precisely one of the letter’s inevitable effects” (504). The text—even when dissected, cut to pieces, or “objectively” explained—ultimately refuses to be completely dismantled or erased. It remains, as Deleuze and Guattari assert, an assemblage, with multiple roots, in constant flux. *Post* puts the “would-be reader in a vertiginously insecure position” (Johnson 457). It steals its content from the outside and draws lines around interpretive possibilities within the object itself. *Post* creates its own analytic zones of reference. Yet, even within these zones, there is room for new maps to

be drawn. The reader/investigator has merely to trace and/or retrace his or her steps, to redraw the boundaries, the assumptions, the approach. The act of reading/tracing/investigating necessitates the act of erasure. Any type of interpretation necessarily reduces the complexity of the book down to a single tracing. Yet, as Deleuze and Guattari point out, a “rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo*” (1609). In parenthesis, in constant rhetorical oscillation, the book remains multiple, “composed not of units but of dimensions, or rather directions in motion” (1605), even as the tracings that attempt to make “everything be[come] clear” (192), come “together in a confused plot of fragmented recordings” (161) throughout the text.

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THE DEAD MAN

November 26, 2003, Evening:

I am dead. I am a dead man. I am a fraction of a second. Life comes and comes and goes. Then goes.

Jesus. I don't know what I'm thinking.

I've been shot ninety times. The man holds the gun. He takes my money and puts a bullet in my gut. It's happened twenty-two times in a convenience store, a place with dirty floors and bright clean lights. The gunman pulls the trigger. I hear a popping sound. I watch myself receive the bullet on the store camera, in grainy security greens. A light goes through me. That's the shot. My breath catches against my teeth. My dead body collapses onto the ATM machine, casing the screen with a thin sheen of blood.

I've had this death so many times. I prefer it above my other deaths. A death of light and blood and triggers. I also like knife death, cancer death and car accidents. Those are the big three, after gun death. Less preferred methods are poison death, shark attack death and any form of self-mutilation or suicide. Even less preferred methods are being buried alive, starvation, burning and drowning. There are so many different deaths. I suppose they all work.

The first and only time I drowned I was eight years old, on the Scotia Prince with my family, going to the States. Another family vacation on some cold New England beach. My father took me on deck to check for dolphins. He left me by the rail to go have a cigarette with my uncle, who drove a bright red Toyota called Honda. I climbed onto the bars to see farther. The dolphins weren't swimming beside the boat like they do in the

movies. Maybe they were a few miles off. I leaned out to get a better view, and my foot slipped against the sea-damp metal. I toppled headfirst into the water and was knocked unconscious as soon as I hit the surface. I didn't even make a sound. I just hit the water and sank, upside down, air pressed out of my lungs. What little air remained escaped in tiny bubbles. Breathless and sleeping, I drifted into the frozen black belly of the ocean, where the whales sleep through winter.

My mother blamed my father. My father blamed me. Five days they searched for my body. Some said the boat was in a warm gulf stream when I went over. I might've survived the temperature, as long as I survived the fall. Of course, the authorities knew I was dead. The Coast Guard knew I was dead. My parents knew I was dead. The media knew I was dead. The entire country knew I was dead. Still they searched for my corpse, hoping to find some material leftover, something they could put in the ground, or burn to ashes. I don't know why they held out so long. My body was deep in the Atlantic and I wasn't thinking of them at all.

I've been stabbed in the gut twice. I've never had my throat slit but I have died in a plane crash. Four times. I've been in thirteen car accidents. Two train wrecks. I am dead. I do not need a name to tell of this story. But if this story needs a name, I want it to be known as *The Peculiar List of Addresses*. Or *The Mysterious Case of Morgan Wells*. Not *His Story* and not *The Stolen Letters*. And absolutely, definitely not *Post*, which is about the most uninteresting name ever given to a story.

POSTPONE

Morgan Wells's story begins with a postcard. It begins before the postcard, but we needn't postpone ourselves with extraneous details. In one of his notebooks, Morgan wrote: *I am nothing short of a series of deferrals, a stretch of contingencies, one piled on top of the other.* What were these contingencies? These delays? We cannot answer these questions with any degree of accuracy. It would be inaccurate, in fact, to speculate on Morgan's origins, for his notebooks begin in 2000 and end a year later. We can never know for certain what came before or what came after those dates. Does it matter that we don't know where Morgan came from? That we can't say for certain why Morgan and his wife separated? These details are peripheral, on the margins, and do not belong to the subject of our investigation. Let's say he was an only child. Let's say his father didn't love him. These possibilities do not matter. All we have to look upon are the facts in the centre: the notebooks. The truth.

But if we insist on providing back-stories, on postponing the inevitable, then we might as well begin:

Misled is the word Morgan Wells settled upon when he spoke of the disaster, which is the word he used to refer to his relationship with *her*. For the first twenty-three nights after she disappeared, Morgan lay awake in his bed, compiling a list of his ex-wife's shortcomings, which he would later call "The Disasterologies."

3. Verbalises everything she thinks.

26. Takes the best seat every time.

172. Double Mocha Foam Latte w/ cinnamon stick and chocolate shavings.

For twenty-three nights, Morgan rehearsed a conversation that would never happen. An invisible audience listened at the foot of his bed.

“You misled me.” That’s how his imagined correspondences always ended. Sometimes, that’s all he’d say.

One morning she was there. The next, not. For months, Morgan struggled with the implications of her absence. With others he laughed it off. With Parker, for instance, he referred to her in body parts, to which Parker grunted his solemn and long-suffering approval. Parker himself could only refer to things in synecdoche. Women were legs, asses. Men were hands, arms. Morgan created a list of Parker’s replacement words in his notebook.

Houses:roofs.

Cars:wheels.

Cigarettes:smokes.

The list goes on.

When he was alone, Morgan thought of his mistakes. No body parts mentioned.

He thought of her when he pulled the covers back to an arctic wasteland, stretched exploratory limbs across the tundra of his empty bed. He thought of her when he moved the alarm clock from her side to his. He thought of her when he cooked for two and ate for one, and threw the remains in the trash. He even thought of her while he slept. His notebooks do not mention sleep, but if he could think of nothing else during the day, why stop for dreaming?

His apartment suddenly smelled differently, had more space. A wide openness he couldn’t contain. The newspapers piled up on the coffee table, still folded, crosswords uncrossed, crytoquotes encrypted.

*AQFWFC FA EXC OGCCSW, OMC FT FA
YXUGCFUS, PYSPSGA CYS AXMU FA PSFLYCSV,
G KSECSW XJ LWGYFCR.*

VSUSMIS GEV LMGCCGWF

He cancelled his subscription to the *Globe*, decided he no longer needed to know about bombs in Israeli cafes, or child labour in China. Rearranging his furniture couldn't remove the carpet indents from her chair. He took the pictures down, which did nothing to conceal the loss, not to mention the space.

Possibly the greatest change was the amount of free time he now had. But there was nowhere to put it. He bought a gym membership but wasn't comfortable with the abundance of mirrors, each one spotlighting *his* body parts. He started a model of a World War II battleship, but couldn't get past the top deck. She'd taken the television, or he could only assume so. Sometimes he wondered if they'd ever owned one to begin with. He could listen to the radio for an hour, but he couldn't put himself in a foreign country, couldn't see the use of it, couldn't stay focussed long enough to know the conflict, the outcome, the purpose of it in the first place. The idea was to clear his head, not clutter it up with more information.

So he started walking. It might've begun with pacing. Pacing around his kitchen, eating food over cupped hands as he paced and considered and reconsidered the nutritional content of enriched white bread. Pacing around his bedroom, checking under the bed, moving it first to the left, then to the right, then back to where it was to begin with, and pacing some more. Pacing around his apartment, finding the dips in the carpet, the ingrown nails, the mysterious footprint on the ceiling, the missing window latch, the

receding hairline—and then, once winter thawed, and he'd uncovered and recorded the secret designs of his home, if not on paper, then at least in mind, venturing outside, into austere streets of concrete and glass.

He walked up and down the block, travelling east to west and east again. Gradually he started making turns, braving unfamiliar avenues, tree-lined, wolf in the woods kind of streets, full of motors and horns, strange faces, front porches. The jug-jug spat of urban sprawl. One street with its reggae, another with its loud conversation. One street with its dog-walkers, another with its school children. One street with its parking spaces, another with its square jaw entrances, scarred pavement, grassy sidewalks. He kept track of the street names, though initially he did not have a system. He imagined diagrams forming as he walked, dotted lines following him around, generating triangles and squares in his wake. Footprints in the slush. McGrath intersects with 32nd. Harding intersects with Chestnut. One night, on his way home from work, he purchased a chintzy black notebook with "Journal" written on the cover. He also bought a large map of Toronto, 5x7, upon which he sketched his paths over the next several weeks. No patterns emerged. Nothing significant. Red lines, blue lines and black lines. A child's drawing.

Morgan walked to make sense of his surroundings. He'd been living in Toronto for ten years, but each time he stepped outside, the city seemed impenetrable, just as foreign as the day he arrived. But when Morgan walked, the city fell apart, revealed itself and all its idiosyncrasies beneath his feet. The buildings collapsed, flattened out, grew to amazing proportions, or seemed to become transparent, just a collection of cells, cells upon cells, bricked and mortared hives of unseen energy, or simply dead, and all balled up in Morgan's ankles, like he wasn't walking, only the city was moving beneath him,

treadmilling, transferring one name for another. He could turn up any street, turn randomly, could walk for an hour and never see the same thing, the same house, the same person, the same tree twice. But he had to tell himself it was changing, it was different, if only to promote the illusion of progress. A sense of being there.

Sometimes he lost himself in the pavement. He couldn't tell if he was backtracking, walking in a loop, or getting farther and farther from his point of origin, which was always his doorstep. As a result, he decided to write unfamiliar street names into his notebook. When he came home he studied the map, put a check mark beside each new name. He bent close to the wall to inspect the streets. Line by line, name by number, his finger traced his invisible arcs through the night. He'd been walking, moving, making the progress he worried he'd only created in his mind. He circled the names with a yellow highlighter. The ones he found. The rest he committed to a list, stabbing his pen at random points of the map. Places to remember. Places he would find without looking.

Smith-Cobb St.
Jacobian St.
Cumbersome Lane.
Gros C'oques Ave.

Each night, Morgan crossed a name off. Each night, he added more to the list.

Each night, he made the city his own.

By the end of the second month, he'd developed a system of rules for walking. In his notebook, he listed the rules under "Do not:"

Do not bring money.
Do not ask for directions.
Do not walk for less than an hour.
Do not stop moving.
Do not take the same route twice, not even in reverse (except once, if no other available option).

Though he spent over a dozen hours a week walking, the walking itself wasn't a full-time occupation. Some nights he stayed in, cultivated other gardens of attention. Using empty pages from the notebook, he created a new alphabet for the English language, doing away with every vowel but E. He constructed sentences using this new system, though it became apparent right away that it was an impractical idea. The purpose of his experiment was obvious: most vowels made approximately the same sound, so why waste time and energy using them all? For three days, which approximately five journal entries, he stayed committed to his system, and at the bottom of each page recorded the number of times he used 'e', as if to prove the effectiveness of his system. But in the end he abandoned the project. He liked that he sounded like he was speaking with an accent, but he didn't appreciate the way the words looked on paper. He sometimes had trouble differentiating between them, all strung together in his haphazard cursive. And why E? Why not I? Inible ti crift i siitibli inswir, hi mivid in.

Instead of using only one vowel, Morgan decided to get rid of them all together, except when they were absolutely needed, such as at the beginning or end of certain words. In some cases, this method was more conducive to his needs, more time-saving. But of course, he slipped up often, so would end up with what he considered a mutant grammar. The letters were all in the wrong place. The idea required more effort than it was worth. And why bother? To save time? If anything, he should've been developing styles that took *more* time, alphabets with extra letters, ones that incorporated symbols from archaic texts, or math language. But he didn't know enough linguistics to develop his ideas further. Just some loose speculations.

He produced the outline for a new dictionary, one based on numbers. A was the first letter in the alphabet, the first letter in his book. Pneumonoultramicroscopicsilicovocanoconiosis was the new zymurgy. In more complex versions, each letter was assigned a numeric value correspondent with its place in the alphabet. A was 1, Z was 27. There was no lexical equivalent for 13. Morgan figured that if architects were suspicious of 13, there was probably a good reason. And the evidence suggests that he saw his new dictionary as a kind of building, something that grew up from the ground where no words existed, to the top floor where the word was the largest number in the alphabet. And he imagined all the words producing a magic sum, too great for him to comprehend. Some insane arithmetic of postponement.

He developed the habit of always reading signs backward. *Pots. Sub Pots. On Gnissapsert.*

While Morgan's numerous projects came and went, the only constant in his life was walking and keeping notes, adding to his chronicle of unguided steps. The weeks fell apart, the weekends slept, or drifted away. He existed only for the nights, which didn't last. Only built themselves into his ankles, his hands catching the air in open palms. He focused on his map, and imagined his map focusing on him, mapping itself onto him, fusing the geography of his desperate city onto his own desperate head. But still she, the absent-she, the she of loss and dissolution, *the* she—he tried, but she remained even when she was not.

She remained in the cupboards with the mugs they'd purchased together. She remained in the window with the broken roller blind, the one she'd pulled too hard. She remained in the brand of coffee he continued to purchase. She remained in his magazines,

the triangular coffee table, the toilet seat cover, the watercolour painting they'd stained with pasta sauce, the collection of single tea bags, the pile of keys that opened nothing.

He found her in the cupboards next to the bags of free trade rice he'd never eat. He found her in the drawers, in the white-handled cutlery. He found her in the empty side of the sink where she used to spit. He found her, or she found him, or she was always there. Her absence itself was present.

One night Morgan was out walking as usual. He found himself in a semi-upscale residential area, a tree every twenty feet or so. He was thinking of her, or thinking of not thinking of her, when he noticed a camera flash to his right, which he initially mistook for a firefly. A family was in their living room taking pictures of each other. The blinds were up. The father was trying to keep the kids contained on the couch, two boys. The mother was laughing on the couch, one hand on her pregnant belly, threatening to burst at any minute. The camera flashed and flashed. Morgan found it somewhat tragic that this family wanted people to see how happy they were. Why else would they leave the blinds up? For whom else the photographs? He went to the window, taking no precautions, not caring who saw him. He was there for a minute before the woman noticed. Her shock caught in her throat. She stood up, threw her hands out, as if to push him away. Her husband didn't notice. By the time she'd grabbed his arm and coughed up an alarm, Morgan was already gone.

On his walks, Morgan often imagined himself as another person, a person whose wife still loved him. He saw himself holding down his steady job, coming home to kids in the suburbs, driving a car. He sometimes drew these scenarios out, sketched plots in his

notebook. Imagined himself talking to her, remembering their conversations. Their arguments. But the exchanges were flat. And he was always losing the fight.

He: Italian cuisine is more popular than French cuisine.

She: The word cuisine is a French word.

He: So?

She: The French are world famous for their cuisine.

He: And?

She: It's pretty obvious.

He: You always need the upper hand.

She: You think that?

He: I do.

She: You realise what you're doing?

He: Right now?

She: Yes.

He: Why don't you tell me?

She: It's obvious.

He: Is it?

She: This is why I disappear.

He: You misled me.

It couldn't be helped. Each time the dialogue ended, her voice had already disappeared into the text. He couldn't find her, or she wasn't there to begin with. Either way, she was gone.

Morgan continued his search for distractions. He cleaned his apartment every other day. On his knees, lemon yellow gloves and special devices for cleaning the cracks, removing the dead skin and the hairs. He bought a pack of post-it notes and stuck words of advice all around his apartment. He invented rules for himself, some soft, some hard. The rules became his diet, something he could rely upon. Rules for washing dishes. With hot water only, right hand always. Rules for opening doors and windows. Both hands secured against the frame. He could not always rely upon his ability to follow the rules, but at least he knew they existed. In his notebook, on every third page, he wrote a rule in the margins. Rules for waving. Rules for entering a room. Rules for brushing teeth. Rules

for ordering take-out. Rules for writing rules. The rules themselves became their own diversion. He spent hours cataloguing. But then one day, he decided to let the rules make themselves. He stopped searching for diversions. One day, it seemed, one found him.

It arrived in the form of a postcard from France.

BLACKOUT

November 26, 2003, Evening:

I'd like to recount how I came upon the infamous sheet of addresses. If I was not recording this on a live-feed, I would probably go back to the beginning and recollect things differently. Needless to say, I was mistaken to begin with the dead man stuff. Confusing. This aspect of my story certainly does not come until the very end. If it comes at all. That part about the drowning? Let me begin then, by speaking of the blackout, the day Val sent me searching for the candles in the dark.

I was only in Toronto for approximately twenty-four hours before it happened. Since no one really knew how to deal with me, I was pretty much on my own. I spent the afternoon at the Eaton's centre, getting some batteries, minitapes, the essentials. As far as I'm concerned, there's nothing else to do in that stupid city. Where was my brother? Where was his wife? I hate her so much. I don't know what she sees in that loser. It really cuts me up, though it must be said, she has the eyes of a wolf and sometimes I think of her without clothing.

Val is an elf. She speaks Spanish and is a fluent Mexican. Only she's not from Mexico, but Arizona. Everyone calls her Val. I think her legal name is Valeria, which I find a much more beautiful rendition of her personality, even though it rhymes with malaria. Malaria Valeria has deep-fried brown skin. She and Dave have a six-year-old named Luis. He speaks Spanish to Val, but Dave can't understand a word. He's developed some kind of complex because of it. Whenever Val and Luis talk, always talking to each other so fast, at the table, in the car, my brother gets this look on his face

like he's about to put someone in a headlock. He's always putting me in headlocks, so I know the look quite well.

Dave is twenty-eight and Val is thirty. I love her anyway. I want to make her sweat blood like Jesus did. During the agony in the garden. My mom sent me to a Christian camp one summer and this guy did a one-man play about Jesus's crucifixion. He played Jesus. He said, "I'm sweating blood, can you imagine my pain? Scientists in 1996 will prove that it is physically possible to sweat blood, and they will equate that pain to the pain of childbirth." I know that's ridiculous. I don't believe the crazy one-man Jesus. But I would truly like to make some agony in Val's garden.

I'm an idiot. If he knew, Dave would put me in a headlock and then twist.

I've tried not to love Val, but how can I not? That is a question I asked myself as I sat in the food court at the Eaton's centre and weighed the pros and cons of buying a burger. Val had recently got me thinking of burgers and E. Coli, and a death of tubes and plastic and rubber. She came into my room, or the room I was staying in, the room in which I stayed, and talked to me about her plans for Luis's birthday party. She talked about food. I recommended burgers and she made a face. I don't know exactly what she said because my recorder was turned off. She definitely wanted me to kiss her.

Except that she didn't. She might be older than most people I know. And she's married to my brother. But I think if I kissed her, she might change her opinion on that matter. I'm guessing she smells like lavender, though I'm not sure how that smells. Purple, maybe.

Val thinks burgers are evil. Meanwhile, she eats burritos like it's nobody's business but God's.

She mentioned something about scientists creating scents artificially. She said that burger meat has no nutritional content, and is injected with pheromones and hormones, fake smells and flavours. Val's lecture made me wonder if anyone has patented rotten corpse smell. I'd like to market rotten corpse scented deodorant. That way if someone told me I smelled like a rotten corpse, I could say, "I am one," and they would leave me alone.

Val met me at the airport. She looked quite nice. Might've been wearing a purple shirt with a neck like a V. About her attire I cannot be sure. She was with Luis, who I hadn't seen since he couldn't speak. He was dressed like Spiderman. A full body suit, feet included. He kept throwing his hands out in front of him, and singing nonsense lyrics to the Spiderman theme song. Val gave me a hug when I came through the sliding doors, though I didn't know what she was up to at first. She came at me smiling, with her arms opened up, her Mexican breasts swinging purple in the middle. I looked away but when I looked back they were still there. She hugged me and I could feel them push against me. This might be when I fell in love with her.

She has such a wonderful voice. When she speaks, she has no accent, even though she only makes spicy food. Only when she talks Spanish is she in her element. She and Spiderman rode in the front on our way back from the airport, and they said things in Spanish to each other the whole time. Unlike Dave, I am okay with that. Sometimes Val will translate, but it's unnecessary. I prefer not to speak.

Val does have a mole on her forehead, something I have grown accustomed to over time. I would never kiss it, but I love her still.

My brother is the next person I should mention, not because I like him, but because it's not possible to avoid him. Without Dave, I did not come to Toronto for the last two weeks of summer. Without Dave, I was not sent searching for candles when the power went out. Without Dave, I am not physically manhandled on a daily basis. Without Dave, there is no Val. I've tried to cut my brother out, but there are holes that need filling, and he's the only one who fits. So his name is Dave. He does not listen to music. He hates movies. He says reality programs are products of lazy writing. He thinks that constantly reading detective stories and comic books, which he calls graphic novels, makes him an authority. He sometimes falls asleep on the couch watching golf, wearing idiotic tear-aways, or worn out jogging pants, his hand tucked under the elastic. It's not uncommon to find his marbled tighty-whities on the bathroom floor, and only mildly shocking to see them elsewhere in the apartment.

Dave works for some internet company, and I don't know anything else about what he does with his time. Why should it matter? He wears a suit, like our dad wore a suit. He's gone most of the time, and when I see him he's usually unpleasant. He smells like Tex-Mex. The odour has nothing to do with Val's cooking. There's nothing else to say about this man. He might weigh 300 pounds. He might not weigh 300 pounds, but when he sits on me, I certainly feel 300 pounds. He will sit on a person just to prove his point. He sometimes takes my hands and slaps them against my face, over which he says "Stop hitting yourself," over and over.

Dave is probably the worst person I've ever met. Not only do I hate his guts, I hate his face, arms, legs, skin, internal organs, his curly blonde hair, his disgusting half-beard, his stupid glasses and the fact that he lives and has guts to begin with.

Who else needs to be spoken of? Of whom else should I speak? I can talk about Ross, who is regretfully alive and well, and who was the main reason for me coming to stay with Dave. These two people do not have anything in common except that I hate them both. Funny, because they also do not like one another. We are a triangle of hate, although I dislike my brother less than Ross. He might dislike me less too. Probably because he can pin me to the ground and put his face really close to mine and say things like, "Does my breath stink?" If I say yes, he makes himself burp and blows it into my face as punishment. If I say no, he says, "Then I guess you won't mind if I do this," after which he proceeds to burp into my face. I'm thinking that if my brother could do this to Ross, who is my mother's husband, then he might hate him less, and focus the excess hate onto me, because I do look a bit like him. In my own experience, physical similarities are enough of a reason to hate someone.

It was not a particularly nice day on the 13th of August. In fact, it was far too hot. I have always been reluctant to step out on hot summer days. I burn quite easily, and when I burn I itch. My doctor informed me that this is an allergic reaction. I am not hypoallergenic though. Nor am I generally fearful of going outside and speaking with people. Only my skin stays the same shade of pale all year round, and this is something of a problem for me. If I could have skin like Val's, then the problem would not be mine. Dave does not have this problem, for which I am thankful. We do not have very much in common, other than our shared lineage, and perhaps the general configuration of our faces. Our faces are probably only fifty percent the same. Possibly less.

One other thing: Dave spits in the kitchen sink. Spits for no good reason. He'll be standing there, talking about some stupid website he'd found recently, some trivial piece

of information. Expeditions to Antarctica. Plans to build a Moon Base. A list of wartime Prime Ministers. Then he cleanses his throat and spits into the sink. Just like that. Sometimes he turns the water on when he spits. Most of the time, he just aims for the hole.

If I had a choice, I wouldn't have gone to stay with Dave. Let me say that at the beginning of August, I heard my mom and Ross speaking in the kitchen. They were talking for a very long time and I know they were talking about me. I don't know what they said. I could hear Mom's voice. She never changes her tone. Ross is a nervous talker. His voice goes up and down and I'm never sure when it's going to erupt. When it does, it goes higher. He sounds like a girl when he's excited. At some point, Ross's voice got high, and I kept hearing my name between small pauses. Then I puked all over the table and fell asleep.

This is the essential thing I learned the following morning: Ross decided to send me away until school started again. He paid for my ticket. He offered to drive me to the airport, but my mother intervened. She bakes the best banana bread I've ever tasted, but I hate her choices. Our conversation on our way to the airport:

August 12, 2003, Morning:

"Do you have everything you need?"

"Yes."

"With only one bag? Do you have enough clothes?"

"I don't need a lot of things to keep me happy, mom."

"That's good honey."

“Do you?”

“No.”

“I’ll bet.”

[I left this where it lay. She knew I was thinking that Ross is a very wealthy man.]

“Are you looking forward to seeing your brother?”

“No. *Jesus*. Are you looking forward to dropping me off?”

“Sweetheart.”

[She left that right there. I knew her mind as well.]

“What if I contract SARS?”

“You won’t contract SARS.”

“How do you know?”

November 26, 2003, Evening:

I carry a tape recorder with me at all times. It’s my refrigerator. It belonged to my father, who used it when he worked. I would listen to him at night. He’d sit in the red room with his files opened on the table, mumbling into his fist, reviewing his cases. But I use it to maintain a record of my thoughts. Sometimes I turn it on when people are around. Sometimes they are aware, like when I put it right on the table, though sometimes I keep it in my pocket and secretly press play. I never turn it on when I’m not around. That’s the only rule. Unlike Morgan Wells, I don’t spy on people unless they know I’m there. Or could be there.

I’m thinking that I would like to buy a digital voice recorder, probably a Sony, which is the best technology company in the world. The Japanese are a brilliant people. I

once had a Japanese friend who came to stay with us on an exchange one summer. His name was Toshihiti Takazawa and he came from Yokohama. In reality, he was Martin's age, my other older brother, who doesn't live with us anymore, and so was actually his friend. He had a very big head and we told him so. He was unimpressed by our unimpressive rollercoaster rides. He liked to swim in the lake near our house and pull his pants down underwater and say in his Japanese voice "white whale" before dunking himself underwater, only to replace his big head with his naked ass. He also liked to pull other people's pants down, an aspect of his personality that I did not like so much. When I think of Sony, I think of Toshi, who owned one of the first Gameboys ever invented. Dave says I'd need a computer to make my Sony digital voice recorder worthwhile, so I would probably get a Sony of that too. My plan falters, however, when I remember that I need money, which is always my problem. I don't have any money. The extreme poverty of youth is probably the second worst thing about my life.

When we got to the airport, my mom parked the car to go inside with me. Not because she wanted to see me off, but because she didn't trust me. We spent ten minutes looking for a meter that already had time on it, and all we found was the worst location possible and five free minutes. It took five minutes just to walk from the car to the terminal. I was no longer recording our conversation. Later, when I was about to leave, she stopped me by the arm and said, "I'm not sending you away. I hope you don't think that." As a matter of fact, I was thinking that exact thought. "Look at me honey. This is just for a couple of weeks," she said. I said nothing. These were my mother's last words to me, before my plane crashed into the mountains.

There is nothing else to say about myself. Now I can speak of the sheet of paper with addresses, of which I previously hinted, and about the day that followed, when I proved again and again that it's impossible to fold a piece of paper in half more than seven times.

On the day of the blackout, as soon as I came back from the Eaton's Centre, Dave flicked the back of my head and said, "Hey little brother. Where were you?"

Dave never uses my name. When either Val or Luis is around, he calls me "little brother." When neither Val nor Luis are within earshot, he calls me "little fucker." Val was UV-bathing on the front step. We were in the kitchen.

I told Dave I was downtown buying the special little tapes for my recorder, which is true. These specific tapes were brand new, though sometimes I buy them at garage sales and flea markets. Used tapes are great for two reasons: they are cheap, and interesting. I like to see what the previous owners recorded on them. In this way, I share a novel commonality with Morgan Wells.

The Eaton's centre was evacuated as soon as the power went out. Security guards directed us outside. They couldn't tell us anything. Everyone was in single-file, but it might've been different had we known that the entire city—and not just this one building—had lost air conditioning. Some people might've started pushing. We could've been trampling each other. I was reminded of this bar fire that happened a few years ago. Apparently, a smoke machine exploded. People in the audience had their cameras and they caught it all on tape. I saw online footage of a burning stage, people trapped in the doorway, stuck there, burning. 76 casualties. Most died of asphyxiation. A fire marshal told reporters that if everyone in the bar had only remained calm and exited in an orderly

manner, everyone would've lived. Except the band, who died as soon as the smoke machine exploded.

I am a fan of standing in single-file. It's the most efficient social invention since capital punishment. I think I've read that somewhere.

Airports are a series of lines. When I picked up my ticket I stood in a line. When I walked through the security checkpoint I stood in a line. When I boarded the airplane I stood in a line. When I disembarked I stood in a line. When I waited for my luggage, which wasn't much, just a backpack, I stood in a line. It's the people who fail to learn this simple skill that end up going to jail, or having bad jobs and ugly friends. Dave, for instance.

Once outside the mall, we stood near the entrance, holding shopping bags close to our legs, confused. Hot. We lined up right there on the sidewalk, waited for someone to give orders. When no one did, I imagined myself walking into the centre, raising my voice, pushing my hands into the air. Smiling. Confident. Leaderish. I was thinking of this long after we disseminated.

I made my way to Union Station. The trains were melting, congregating with the tracks. I watched people congregate with their luggage, their boxes, their laptops, their purses, their coffees, Arrivals and Departures. Thousands of people. I talked to a man who was on his way to Montréal. He told me his name but I forgot it instantly. This is typical.

I left the bus station at around five and headed home. The sidewalks were choking. The streetcars weren't operating, the subway was shut down, there were stranded commuters everywhere, briefcases and backpacks. I've never seen that many

bodies all in one space. The traffic lights were out. The bodies, the cars, the metalised air. I walked the whole two hours to the Beaches, thinking about weapons of mass destruction and the Middle East. Remembering the time I was captured by terrorists in Iraq. They grabbed me off the street, beat and starved me. They pissed on me and published pictures of me on the internet and Al-Jazeera network. Eventually, Abu helped me escape. But I got caught. Had my head beheaded. I recorded a video on the internet to say goodbye to my mom before they killed me and slung my corpse over a bridge, the words “Get out US” carved into my chest.

I showed Dave the bag from Radio Shack to corroborate my story. He tried to grab it from me but I predicted his movements.

August 13, 2003, Evening:

“I got batteries too.”

“Good for you. Was it crazy down there?”

“Where?”

“Where do you think?”

“Oh. Same as usual.”

[4.8 seconds of silence.]

“You’re such a fucking smartass.”

“Dave.”

[My beloved heard us through the window, and saved me from a certain headlock.]

“What?”

“You know what.”

“No. What?”

“Talk about being a smartass.”

[I remember smiling broadly. Normally, I do not smile. Only when I am attempting to cause Dave to erupt. It is most efficient social invention since capital punishment.]

“Val, I’m only having a conversation with him.”

“You’re calling him names.”

“I’m not calling him names. Thanks for refereeing though.”

“Would you cut it out?”

“I’m not calling him names.”

“Yes he is.”

“Don’t provoke him.”

[Dave pushed past me and opened the fridge door, muttering. I didn’t want to look at him then, because he does the grossest thing. He drinks from the carton, and when he knows I’m looking, he rubs his tongue against the lip, just to torture me.]

“Val, we’re out of milk.”

[So I turned around, only to see Dave drinking from the carton, tongue lapping frequently.]

“I just bought two litres. Look harder.”

“Ah!” [Dave left the milk on the corners of his mouth and smiled at me.]

“Is it warm?”

“The power hasn’t been out that long you idiot.”

“David!”

“You’re such a dick.” [I did not say this loud enough for Val to hear. Dave can read lips.]

“Come out here. Both of you.”

[The two of us followed her voice outside. She was sitting so wonderfully in her chair, like a Buddha, the sun reflecting off her body as though it were wrapped in aluminium foil. Luis was on the step, leaning against her legs, which were bare. He was colouring a giraffe green. He can speak two languages, but he might also be the worst colourer I’ve encountered yet.]

“Can I ask you for a favour?”

“Ask whom?”

“Can one of you please go find some candles before it gets too dark? The little tea lights.”

[Dave opened the mailbox and looked inside.]

“Anything interesting in the mail today?”

“Were you listening to me?”

“I’m listening.”

“Could you go find some candles?”

[Dave closed the mailbox.]

“How about a flashlight?”

“I’d prefer tea lights.”

“Where are they?”

“They’re in the guest room. Should be in the top right hand corner of the desk. There’s a whole pack of them in there.”

“How many do you want?”

“Por lo menos tu padre es útil para algo.”

[Val and Luis laugh.]

“What? *Padre* what?”

[More laughter.]

“Just bring them all out Dave.”

“Okay. Sure. You heard her, little brother.”

“What? You said you’d do it.”

[I looked at Val. She shrugged.]

“Apparently, Dave wants to be a big baby today. Would you mind filling in for him?”

[My gut response was to say no. She wasn’t my mother, but the way she asked me made her sound like she was, or like she thought she was. So I said “Go fuck yourself” and went inside.]

“Jesus. Okay. I’ll get them.”

November 26, 2003, Evening:

There is only one window in the room where I slept. This window is rather high on the wall, and lets in insignificant light. I was so stupid as to try and turn the light on when I entered the room, even though all I’d been thinking about for the past however many hours was the blackout. As it was already well past seven, I could barely see

anything in the desk. I checked the drawer that Val mentioned but nothing. I looked quickly through the rest of the drawers. Nothing. So this is when I decided to look in the closet. It is probably the most well-organised closet I've ever looked for candles in. I mean, the most well-organised closet in which I've looked for candles. There were no loose items. Just boxes and boxes on top, two large blue Rubbermaids below. Each box was labelled. Tax Returns. Winter Clothes. I looked for anything that might signify the presence of candles. Textbooks. Bank Statements. I checked the Christmas Stuff box, and found a little half-burnt Santa Claus candle. This would not do. Wedding. Manuscripts. Tax 2002.

I gave up on the closet and went back to the desk, rolling the Santa between my leg and my palm. I researched each drawer carefully, starting with the bottom. I found a half-empty pack of AA batteries, one pearl-beaded rosary from Italy, a broken one made of wood, two decks of unopened playing cards, Old Spice, a tourist money belt stuffed with valueless currency, a pile of change, mostly pennies, and a dead flashlight. I found a two-year-old movie stub, faded and curling, three undeveloped rolls of film, a felt box with a tube of Krazee glue in it, a cigar box with just the cedar paper in it, little needles with the multi-coloured balls on the top and a pile of pens, most of them dried out. But no candles.

It was then that I decided that Val must've been wrong. Or maybe she'd lied about the candles being there, just to make Dave go away. Either way, there were no candles in that room. But I didn't want to go back empty-handed. It was frustrating, because all I wanted to do was tell both of them to die. But Val would've been

disappointed, which would've made Dave happy on two levels, first that I had failed, and second that Val had been proven wrong. I couldn't let this happen.

Moving as quickly as I could, I checked the living room, and then the bathroom, and then the kitchen. I looked through all the cupboards, and drawers, and was this close to giving up. I was so frustrated with not finding the candles that I pulled the drawer with the knives and forks and things right out of the counter. It landed upside-down, spilling everywhere. Of course I screamed "Fuck!" Unnecessary, but I do not regret it.

My terror alert went from yellow to orange. I waited for someone to yell at me, but the front door was closed so I assumed no one heard. I picked up all the forks and spoons and knives and things and put them neatly into their plastic tray. Then I put that on the counter, and pushed the drawer back into its place. But it would only go about halfway through. I took it off its hinges and gently tried to slide it in. Nothing. It wouldn't go all the way through. I pushed and pushed, "Fuck, fuck, fuck," but eventually had to pull the drawer out. I set it on top of the counter and looked into the slot. It was dark, so I couldn't really see if anything was blocking the tracks. For a brief moment I imagined there was a spider or a snake or dead rat in there, just waiting to give me rabies or the plague. I pictured myself foaming at the mouth, my pupils dilating, and then I'd fall to floor, shaking and writhing and dying under the table, my groin swelling with buboes. I reached into the hole and felt around. I moved it around randomly at first, hoping to scare whatever animal was hiding in there. Then I patted the area down, felt along the tracks until I came upon what I first thought was a box. I grabbed it and pulled it out, only to discover I was holding a book.

The book was called *A Description of the New World Called a Blazing World*. On the inside of the jacket, someone wrote “This is the second time I’ve given you this book. Don’t lose it this time! Love, Maria.”

I put the book on the counter and carefully replaced the drawer. It slipped in easily. After putting the cutlery tray into its proper place, I carried the book into my bedroom. Even though the guest room was darker, it had the supplementary advantage of privacy.

The book was old, with a soft cover and no picture on the front. Just the words. The pages were yellowed, soft and worn. *A Description of the New World Called a Blazing World*. The author’s name was P.T. Graham. I opened it to the first page and read.

*a description of the new world called a blazing world
a description of the new blazing world called a world
the new world of a blazing world called a description
the called description of a blazing new world a world
of blazing new description called a world the world a*

I found P.T. Graham’s writing quite boring. I mainly like Choose Your Own Adventures, which might be the very opposite of poetry. It’s certainly more interesting. So I skimmed ahead, and I’m glad I did. I flipped through and caught my thumb on page 74. The book fell open to a piece of paper. It dropped to the linoleum, a dead thing.

I closed the book and placed it upon the bedroom desk.

I then recovered the piece of paper, unfolded it and flattened it out against the wall. It was too dark for me to read, but I could tell even then that it was a list of addresses. The addresses covered the back and the front. I asked myself if it was a mailing list, which is a term I’ve heard before, though I don’t know what it means. I

noticed that the addresses were without names, just numbers and streets. Who were these people? Did the list belong to Dave? If so, why was he hiding it in the back of the kitchen drawer? It didn't take long for me to decide to copy the addresses onto a new piece of paper. The hall was light enough. I wrote the addresses down, then slipped the original list back into *A Description of the World Called a Blazing World*. I put the duplicate in my pocket, then went out to the kitchen and strategically dropped the book back into its original position, behind the kitchen drawer.

When I went back to tell Val and Dave of my failure, Luis called to me from the living room. "Are they still out there?" I asked.

"Yes. They are having a private discussion."

"Private?"

"They sent me inside. Do you want to colour?"

"No thanks." Knowing that he wasn't very good, I would've felt guilty for showing him how it was really done.

He nodded and went back to work. I went to the door, but it was closed and I couldn't hear anything. Just muffled sounds, barely voices. So I put new batteries and a brand new tape into my recorder. Then I strategically placed it next to the kitchen window and pressed record. A good idea but it didn't really work in the end.

I do not always tape the conversations I hear. But I have come to understand that words are important. There are times when I forget the simplest things, like setting my alarm clock or when my school assignments are due. I am too young to have Alzheimer's, which is what my grandfather had. But I do not have a good memory for conversations. I forget the words that I have spoken with others, forget the things people

have told me. More and more, I worry that I am repeating the same things, again and again. On our way to school in the mornings, and church on Sunday, I think my mom and I say the same things to each other a lot. I have taped several of our conversations and mostly they do not differentiate between takes.

January 12, 2003, Morning:

“Did you shower this morning?”

“Yes.”

“Why isn’t your hair wet?”

“Mom.”

“I’m just asking.”

“No, you’re insinuating.”

“You mean I’m implying.”

“I mean what I mean.”

[She was right in this regard.]

“Don’t bark at me.”

“I’m not barking.”

“It’s just that something smells.”

“Maybe it’s you.”

“Maybe it’s you.”

“I showered, okay?”

March 22, 2003, Morning:

“Sweetheart, didn’t you wear that yesterday?”

“What? My jacket?”

“That shirt.”

“I have lots of black shirts mom.”

“But isn’t that the same one?”

“No.”

“There’s a stain.”

[2.7 second pause.]

“Hmm.”

[5.8 second pause.]

“Did you shower today?”

“Yes”

“Did you use shampoo?”

“Jesus mom!”

“It’s just that it smells like scalp in here.”

“I used shampoo.”

“You need to rub it into your scalp. Really rub it in.”

“Don’t you think I know that?”

“Okay.”

November 26, 2003, Evening:

These are two examples, among many. To her credit, I may or may not have been the cleanliest person I know around that time. My doctor informed me that I have

seasonal affective disorder, which Dave claims is a fake disease. He says that any disease with an acronymic name like SAD can't be real. For making fun of my weakness, I sent a virus-encrypted email to him. He did not open the attachment.

After Dave and Val came inside, I collected my tape recorder from the windowsill and went to my room. I plugged in my headphones, rewound the tape and listened to it from the beginning. I tape everything that I hear. I taped the city on my way home. The whole time walking. I taped the day. I taped the voices, the people talking on their cell phones. I taped my own complaints. I tried to tape Dave and Val fighting. I taped Val telling me to get the candles. I taped our game of Boggle. And before I went to bed, I taped my own voice talking. This is what I said:

August 14, 2003, Evening:

“Val is much better than I am at Boggle. She has a mole on her forehead, for which I have forgiven her. I hate Dave.”

August 14, 2003, Evening:

“Toronto still has no power. I hope its back by tomorrow. I'm so bored.”

August 14, 2003, Evening:

“On my way home today, I nearly knocked over a person, who looked so terrified, like a bird in a box. I felt an urge to hug him, maybe help him out, but when I said Hello he gave me a weird look. I felt ashamed.”

November 26, 2003, Evening:

I read somewhere later about a tourist from Hong Kong who, during the blackout, being new to the city, had no friends, and couldn't speak English, and how he broke into tears in the lobby of a Best Western, begging to use their phone. They finally let him and then he cried when he heard his friend's voice on the other end. He called it his best terrible experience in Canada, and I liked how he put those two words together, best and terrible, and how they make sense together. I wonder now if he was the man I almost knocked over.

I recorded these messages in relatively quick succession. Then I undressed. It wasn't until the following day, when this story truly begins, that I remembered the piece of paper in my pants pocket. And when I first became intimate with the important list of addresses that once belonged to Morgan Wells.

MISDIRECTION

On the morning of February 20, 2000—asterisked in his notebook, bookmarked with a 6x4 picture of the Eiffel Tower—Morgan awoke dry-mouthed and damp with sweat. He rolled over and turned off his alarm. Then he drank the last drop of water from the cup on his bedside table. Through the slats in the window blinds, the chalky sky hung heavy like a headache. Half-lit and dripping.

His mornings progressed by quarter-hour intervals. Another one of his rules. Fifteen minutes to get out of bed, fifteen minutes to get cleaned up, fifteen minutes to eat and read the paper, fifteen minutes to make it to work. Twitches is what he called them. First lying in bed. Twitch. Next sitting up. Twitch. Now getting dressed. Twitch. The kettle warming on the stove, a box of dried oats beside it.

Twitch.

Morgan stood in the centre of his living room, on a morning already two twitches old, and scribbled ‘mirror’ onto a post-it note. He stuck it over the couch. So he could remember. It seemed that the harder he forced himself to forget her, the more he tended to forget other things. Perhaps it wasn’t that he was forgetting, but needed to be reminded that he was. Strings around fingers didn’t work, and he cleaned his hands too often for ink. So throughout his apartment, on the walls, the floor, the ceiling, the cupboards, the coffee table, the coffee maker and the blinds, the Post-its built a fragmented yellow brick road of facts.

Bedside lamp: new light bulbs.

Closet door: do stalactites point up or down?

Next to telephone cradle: the phone is missing.

North facing living room wall: paint blue?

Refrigerator: eggs.
Refrigerator: cheese.
Refrigerator: new filter.
Over sink: did she take dish rack?
Front door: computer?

Words filled his apartment, creating space, he thought, where space did not previously exist. Or at least the tension of space, the illusion of moving forward. The Post-its kept him balanced. After thumbing ‘mirror’ onto the living room wall, Morgan became suddenly conscious of their presence, the way they whispered when he moved. He became conscious of the way they folded out and away from the flat surfaces of his home, like butterfly wings. One in particular, in the corner, drew him in, a drawing of a body with an illegible script scrawled above its oval head. *Sossk? Zomic?* He pulled the image from the side of his bookcase. He pressed it into a ball, rolled it against his palm.

The phone rang. A dead line. He didn’t answer it.

The door held the most Post-its in the house. From the waist up, on the wall next to it, covering the eye in the centre. Covering each other, layer after layer, and in a way taking on the characteristics of a single organism. Breathing and growing.

Pick up schedule.
Did she take both umbrellas?
Notebook.
Movies.
Anti-bacterial hand soap
HW

When he ran out of yellow Post-its, he used green ones for back-up. On the door there were about thirty green Post-its that stood out from the rest of the otherwise yellow skinned creature. Blemishes. Defects. And each one reminded him to buy new Post-its. Each one said, “Yellow Post-it.”

The green Post-its bothered him, but not enough to make him remove them. That would be counter-productive. Eventually, he would cover them up completely, would forget about them. But he didn't want to pull them down. Not from the door. Other places didn't matter. If they lived, they lived a microbial life. The door was different.

Morgan released the balled up paper into the kitchen trashcan, a stainless steel bucket with a broken foot pedal. They had to remove the top a week after purchasing it, though on occasion he'd press the button anyway, just to feel the pressure, to watch the springs dance.

Side of trashcan: the trashcan is broken.

The kettle clicked. Morgan unplugged the cord and made his oatmeal, in the same way he'd been making it for as long as he could remember.

Step one: Pour a drop of water into the bowl and roll it around until the bottom of the bowl is wet.

Step two: Pour one half-cup of oatmeal into bowl, beginning in the centre and moving out, clockwise, to the edges.

Step three: Pour hot water into bowl for two seconds. Stir until mixture thickens.

Step four: Pour rest of oatmeal into bowl, beginning along the edges and moving, counterclockwise, toward the centre.

Step five: Pour hot water into bowl for three seconds, then stir eight times clockwise, eight times counterclockwise, four times clockwise.

Step six: Add two tablespoons of brown sugar into the centre of the bowl.

He would usually eat standing up, but this time he sat down, having twisted his ankle the night before.

He'd been walking by the waterfront when it happened. Observing. A smothering of jackets and hats, purses, shoes, ties, shopping bags. Morgan imagined an exhausted old man breathing into a very large tube somewhere in the depths of the city's underground.

He characterised the streets by their houses. He noted whether the windows were shuttered or closed. He counted the trees. Some had overgrown, patchy lawns. Some had landscaping trucks parked out front for weeks at a time. Most were lawnless, concrete blocks. He tended to notice these neighbourhoods the most.

He was moving with the crowd, the tourists, the watchers. He'd been noting their behaviours. Some carried themselves with pride, and had the tight-faced smiles of entrepreneurs. The children looked like their parents. Morgan discovered that the corporate face was inherited genetically. He could tell the lawyers by the way they held their hands, a quarter-inch from their sides, fingers clammed together. The deskites travelled in packs of loosened ties and powdered necks. He found the teenage punks boring, but for a while he was caught up with the face of one of them, a girl with pink hair and a t-shirt that had "Fuck the Consensus" written on the back in blood. He liked the way she supinated when standing still. He imagined himself starting a conversation with her. But first he needed a reason. He decided that she would drop her purse. He would pick it up, deliver it to her and ask for her name.

She: "Elizabeth."

He: "I'm Morgan."

She: "Nice to meet you."

He: "What kind of music do you listen to?"

She: "What? That's the first question you would ask me?"

He: "Yes. No. I'd ask you if you were visiting."

She: "Wait. Where are we?"

He: "We're here."

She: "How did this start?"

He: "You dropped something. I picked it up."

She: "What did I drop?"

He: "Your wallet."

She: "I'm carrying a wallet?"

It was true. The punk girl carried nothing in her hands. She had nothing to drop but a cigarette. She would probably notice if she dropped something like that. And if she did drop it, how would she respond to Morgan retrieving it for her? He let her go. The crowd swarmed. His foot slipped against a raised board, sending tubes of fire through his ankle.

He limped along for another twenty minutes or so, until he made it to a bus shelter. The notebook was in his hand before he sat down. He flipped to the Do Not section, and hesitantly added another rule. His pen floated above the page, unsure. He hesitated. Then, beneath “Do not take the same route twice, not even in reverse,” he wrote, “Do not stop walking, even if you’re hurt.” He pushed his notebook back into his pocket and, with a renewed sense of dedication, finished his undetermined route on a sprained foot.

The phone rang again, or hadn’t stopped ringing. The cordless was lost and the locator button no longer located. Whenever someone called, the cradle lit up, the volume cut. Morgan could’ve unplugged it, but there was no point in reducing his distractions.

He wondered who was on the line. Who’s voice? On what street? In which city? The last time he’d answered the phone—when he still had a phone to speak of—a man named Isaac tried to sell him life insurance. Morgan hung up, without speaking. Was Isaac still trying to get a hold of him? Had he elaborated the perfect pitch? Or was it someone else? Was it her? Wouldn’t she know that the phone was gone? Was she calling just to make it ring? Did she picture him searching frantically through the apartment for the dead receiver?

Morgan spooned the oatmeal into his mouth, and wrote ‘get a phone’ and ‘get an answering machine’ on two separate post-its. He then posted them on the phone, one on top of the other.

Twitch.

Morgan limped across the hall and gathered the mail from the doormat. Picked up a few fallen memos while there. He scanned the names. He’d been living in his apartment for three years and still received mail for the previous tenants. A few bank statements, grocery coupons, a million dollar prize giveaway. Two envelopes for her. A missing child whose name was Melissa. In the picture she held a toy truck. A letter from Covenant House.

Morgan thought about the word ‘combine’ for three minutes and wrote it on the letter repeatedly, until an entire corner of the paper turned black and started to tear. Then he moved on, having satisfied the word.

A Visa statement, some subscription reminders from the Globe, an IKEA catalogue. A letter from his landlord. A bunch of flyers from the A&P. These last reminded Morgan of a story he’d heard on the news a few days before, about seven postmen being fired for not delivering junk mail. “It’s what the people want,” said one of them. “They tell us not to drop them off. And now we’re being fired for doing what our customers tell us. It doesn’t make sense.” The mailmen sued for wrongful termination, but lost.

The postcard was directly beneath the flyers. He’d almost overlooked it, thinking it was just some gimmick, a “Wish You Were Here” from a local travel agent. Then it occurred to him that it might’ve been from her.

A change in the usual twitch. A disruption. 0.4 seconds long.

On the front: the Eiffel Tower in broad daylight, and, in the foreground, a man wearing a beret, giving the camera the finger. Above him, “Vive la France!” in what amounted to the ugliest typeface Morgan knew of, Copperplate Gothic. Morgan tucked the mail under his arm and flipped the postcard over. The handwriting was slightly familiar.

Hey Morgan,

There's a million of them out here, they all look like you! Or a mix between you and Haley (remember her? remember the light of sound?) Haha! Was out on the Champs-Elysees the other night, saw this postcard, decided you were worthy. Bonjour, bonsoir, bon nuit, and other French greetings. I have about two thousand photos. Tell Nat I said Hi, or bonjour, whichever.

K.

P.S. You better put this on your fridge ma merde! See you in Sept.

Morgan checked the postmark. January 21, 2000. Then the address. The street name matched his, but the number wasn't clear. It might've been 233. Or 237. Or 732. Maybe 723 if he looked at it hard enough.

He wondered who sent it. Who was K? An old classmate? Morgan poured another cup of coffee and read the note again. Nat? Nathaniel? Natalie? He knew a Nadia once. She smoked menthols and burned candles until they melted down the sides of her tables and chairs. But she wouldn't know where he lived, and wouldn't write if she did.

The only thing he could be somewhat certain of was K's sex. The cramped, heavy cursive was an easy tell.

And Haley? Ma merde?

K? K for Karen? Katie? But it had to be a man. Kevin? Keenan? Or a last name? Someone who went by last name only. Krieger? King? He used to work with someone named Kasaday. But they never spoke. Kelsey?

Morgan pinned the postcard to the fridge. An anomaly. A gift. He didn't know which. His coffee tasted like dirt. He was thinking of nomads when he poured the rest of it down the drain.

Twitch.

In his bedroom, struggling with the zipper on the back of his work clothes, a pair of light blue coveralls with "Shred it!" airbrushed on the back. A contortionist's pose in the full-length mirror, shoulders testing the boundaries of skin. He had to move quickly due to lost time.

Twitch.

On the front step, locking the door, the rain falling lightly against the back of his neck, his key in the slot, his hand, that precise movement of pulling back, shaking, shaking. The sledge of the deadbolt sliding into place.

Twitch.

In the van.

"Where are we going?"

"1200 Ossington. It's a school."

"A school? What school?"

"I don't know. Grade school I think."

"I don't want to go in."

"Okay."

"I need a break."

"Sure."

"Good."

“Turn here.”

“I can see.”

Morgan worked for a document shredding company. For thirty-six hours a week, he drove around the city in a big white van with “If you don’t want it read, give it a shred!” written in two-foot blue letters on the side. They had commercials on television too.

Parker had his window down, to keep the smoke circulating. The man smoked two packs of Rothman’s a day, tended to cough into his shoulder, a kind of heaving breathless whimper. He must’ve been two years from death. “Getting on with it,” was how he put it. The dash was cluttered with empty packs and burnt matches, old road maps.

“I can’t believe this weather.”

“I know.”

“Just when you thought it was getting nice.”

“Yeah,” spit Parker. A sudden spasm overtook him. Followed by whimpering. Morgan watched Parker shake, huddled over the steering wheel. He watched him spit, and wipe the excess from his lips. The conversation ended there. Like faucets, turning on and off again, a dry drain, a wet drain. Stops and starts.

They knew they were close when they saw the first cluster of children walking down the sidewalk. A minute later they parked in front of a small, brick school, fenced in. Morgan opened his door.

Parker lit a cigarette. “I’m going to finish this cigarette. Let me know if it’s more than you can carry and I’ll come help.”

“I’m sure I can handle it.” Morgan got out of the van and closed his door. “Just a couple bags anyway,” he said to the window. He returned a few minutes later, and Parker helped him toss the bags into the back. Transparent sacks full of old class lists, outdated, confidential student files. A few computer disks.

“Jesus, these are heavy.”

“What do you think they are?”

“Who gives a fuck? I dunno.”

Morgan heaved the last bag into the back.

It took about a week before Morgan did anything about the postcard. Before he found out who it really belonged to. Before he committed his first federal offence.

Each day he saw it there, stuck to the fridge, ringed in yellow Post-its. And each day he stuck another memo on top of it, another question, another lead. It got to the point where he couldn’t see the picture underneath, couldn’t see half the questions, only the fluttering of wings each time he opened the fridge door. And then on Saturday morning he walked into his kitchen and discovered it stolen.

He didn’t notice that the postcard was gone until he went for milk. In the space where the questions had once been, there was only the magnet that had held them, a smiling tooth magnet he’d taken from the dentist’s office. The postcard had fallen from the door sometime in the night. Under the table, writing-side up.

On the floor around the fridge, a few post-its were scattered like leaves.

*The light of sound?
Haley’s Comet?
Check your email.*

Morgan swept them up and put them in his pocket. He examined the writing on the back of the postcard. The numbers could've easily been miswritten, or misinterpreted. 238? 232? What if another Morgan Wells lived on the same street as him? The chances were absurd. But then again, why not? In a city of five million, there had to be a few Morgan Wells's around. The chances of two of them living on the same street wasn't any more coincidental than winning the lottery with the first six prime numbers.

He went to the computer. The hard drive was gone. Another missing item. The monitor remained, a closed lid. It took him an hour before he found a phonebook. He scoured each drawer in his house. He found the same collection of pens and papers everywhere. Some photographs of her. He wrote "spring clean" on a Post-it.

Finally, he found the phonebook under the bed. He saw the phone under there too, but when he pulled it out into the open it became a sock.

Morgan flipped through the phonebook, turning the pages in chunks. Benson. Brock. Campsail. Cornell. Davidson. Devitt. Doones. Dower. He found Wells, trailed his finger against the page. The blinds were drawn in the room so he turned on the bedside lamp. He clicked the button a few times, then noticed the Post-it. He wrote another, and put it on the other side of the lamp.

Other side of bedside lamp: Get new light bulbs.

In the guest room, under the desk lamp, he opened the page to Wells and was shocked to see that there were ten people in the city called Morgan Wells. He hadn't expected this many others. He found himself wondering how many Morgan Wells's were in the world. And how many came before him. How common was his name? What were the others like? Like him? The thought depressed him terribly.

There was no other Morgan Wells that lived on his street. He closed the book. The cover was a picture of the CN Tower. Morgan looked at the picture for some time, thinking of the Eiffel Tower. Wondering about the other Morgans. Wanting to meet them. He didn't know why. He opened the book and counted them. Ten exactly. The same name, repeated line after line. Then their addresses, phone numbers, the numbers and places that defined them. But none lived on his street. Not even his name was listed. He put the phonebook on the table and glanced at the cover. 1998 was written in bright blue letters on the top-right corner. The phone book was two years old.

Morgan put on his shoes and went straight to the gas station down the street. Perhaps straight isn't the right word in this case. For trips like this, Morgan allowed himself to bend the rules slightly. Since the store was directly North and on the same street, there was no reason to take the round-about way, especially if he couldn't afford to. He compensated for this minor grievance by randomly crossing the street, back and forth, the whole walk there. It was a loophole he became aware of within the first week of walking. He rarely took advantage of it.

Twitch.

In the phone booth. The phone hung upside down, its jaws smashed out. The phonebook had been torn in half. The remaining pages had been pasted together by the rain.

Though worn, the book was at least recent. Morgan flipped carefully to the back, to Wells. He found the other Morgan Wells. He was about to write the address on a Post-it, but tore the page out of the book instead. The other names were valuable too.

On the way home, Morgan counted his others. This time there were seven. What had happened to the other three? Had they moved away? Dead?

By the time Morgan was home, he'd crossed the street twenty-two times. He decided to return the postcard the following afternoon. To get to the address, he'd have to find some way that he hadn't already taken. He didn't want to break his own rules too often and too close together.

It took two hours before he'd found one he hadn't already taken. In all, it would take about an hour for him to make it there. He copied the path into his notebook. This was the slightest difference, this writing in the book before walking. This predetermining.

But there was no reason for him to leave immediately. He'd held onto the postcard for this long, why not keep it longer? In some way, he'd grown used to seeing it on his fridge, had become attached to the questions he attached to it. The postcard happened to him. He didn't happen to it. So he would take his time, deal with it when he felt ready.

And the other Morgan Wells. The copy. The repeat. He would deal with him too.

MAP OF ADDRESSES

November 27, 2003, Evening:

I was just thinking that what I'll have to do with this whole recording is write it down. Will Ross let me use his computer? Maybe I'll start a Blog.

I'll probably have to delete parts. Maybe add certain things.

Maybe this sentence will be one of the things I'll erase. But I can't imagine I will. I hate it when movie stars are interviewed, and they swear and then say, "You're going to bleep that out right?" Or, when they say something completely vacuous and dumb and follow it up with, "I'm guessing you'll probably just edit that." Inexplicably, of course, the TV producers keep the scene. To show them being "human"?

What should I do about the ums, ers and ahs?

So I asked my brother for a ride downtown. The day after I found the list. He said no. I wasn't surprised, and in fact saw myself choking him to death at that very moment. Even before I asked. I saw myself choking him with my arm, and standing behind him like he does to me when he puts me in headlocks. And I'm shaking him and saying right into his ear, "Does my breath smell bad?" I choke him until his face starts to bleed through the pores, until his eyes pop out of his skull, which is something I've taken from a movie. Personally, I've never died like that.

I had no choice but to walk. Staying home with the power out was worse than usual. The radio had batteries, but all they talked about was the blackout. Over and over, the same stupid conversations, different writers and analysts and critics and politicians

and stupid jerks with a telephone and nothing better to do. Sit and complain. Complain and say “The power is still out” and “They’re working on a solution.”

August 15, 2003, Morning:

“Someone has to take action. Whether in Ottawa, or here in the region...”

“Here in the re—?”

August 15, 2003, Morning:

“Our office is twenty-two floors up. When the power went out, we filed down the stairs. We all thought it was just a usual power outage, nothing serious. It wasn’t until we were at street level that we realised the extent of the blackout. I’ve never seen so many people walking. People directing traffic. M—”

August 15, 2003, Morning:

“Hi, I’m Asha. I just graduated grade seven. Our family moved here from Calcutta and our biggest experience in Canada so far was last night’s blackout. A lifetime memory. Me and my sister, she’s nine and a half, were both excited when we discovered the elevators didn’t work, so we had to take the stairs, which we never did, so we did. Many people in our building placed candles along the stairway, so we could see, which was dangerous, so we blew each of them out as we went up. By midnight, if we stood on the balcony we could see lights, but out of my window only darkness. It was a lifetime memory, I will never forget.”

November 27, 2003, Evening:

With the radio on repeat, alternating between complaints and eyewitness accounts, I had to get out of the house. Val invited me along on some errand with Luis but I hate errands. My mom sometimes takes me on errands, and she spends an entire afternoon at the bank, and I sit in the car and listen to the radio and wonder why I said I would come along. I suppose I could've spent more time rummaging through Dave's office while they were out. Dave's desk, his bookcase, his things. Val's stuff, her drawers, her bedside table where she keeps a prayer book and a package of loose tea leaves.

It's not that I mind walking. Since the government deems me too young to drive, walking is my only option. I could take a bus, but who has the money for that? I used to own a bike, but someone stole it from me and my mom won't let me get another one. A year from now and the story might develop. Mom says I can't drive Ross's car, which causes me great suffering, because it's the only one we have. I've driven it before. Without them knowing. Lots of times. But one time Ross found out. He hides his keys now, because he "distrusts" me. Also, because he's Ross. Anyone who combs his hair when there isn't any left doesn't need a reason to be an asshole.

In Mom's incredibly twisted world, one joyride equals one trip to confession. She's a hardcore Catholic. She's always sending me to confession. Better than grounding. All I do is go into the little box, kneel there and tell the priest a whole bunch of nonsense. The priest is this white-haired Polish man who says "Bless you son, in the name of the Father and the son and the Holy Ghost." He does not know how to make small talk. He will sometimes try, but then will stop, clear his throat, and jump full swing

into Jesus. He loves Jesus so much, it's an amazing thing. He talks about Jesus like they're roommates, old pals from college. He also speaks English like no other person I know. And he's partially deaf. Luckily, most of the pew people are blind.

October 12, 2002, Afternoon:

"In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost."

"Forgive me Father for I have sinned."

"Bless you son."

"It's been two weeks since my last confession."

[3.3 second pause. Breathing.]

"In that time, I've... [this is where my voice gets shaky on the tape, but it's really all an act, to sound sincere]... disobeyed my mother. I've taken the Lord's name in vain. I've been jealous. Called people names. And [a real long pause, 6 seconds, makes it sound like I'm thinking really hard] ... I think that's it."

"My son. It's very much vital to obey your appearance. Very much. God is your fodder. In heaven, but on earth. He cares for your motor very much. She is doing God's plan. That is why you must help round. Very much. Even if you take out trash, or put dishes. Show your motor your love. Jesus loves, so show motor your love. The smallest hiccup is a gift very much from God. Pick up floor. That kind of thing?"

"Okay Father."

"Do you pray? Every night?"

"Yes."

"What?"

“Yes.”

“You need to pray. Pray very much for your motor.”

“I will.”

[Clears his throat.]

“Good. Say three Hail Marys and say Our Fodder. Know you Act of Contrition?”

“No.”

“Do you know Act of Cont—”

“No.”

“Okay. Ask to the Lord. For forgiveness. Tell Jesus.”

“Oh.”

“Yes.”

“Right now?”

“Yes.”

“Out loud?”

“Not loud.”

“Um. Okay. Sorry God.”

November 27, 2003, Evening:

I don't always have to say the Act of Contrition. But I always say four sins. I can't believe he hasn't caught on yet. One of these times, I want to go in there and tell him what I've really done. About the time I slipped in the shower and broke my neck against the handrail. They found my body contorted in the tub, and people laughed at my funeral. What would Father Ryszard say about that?

There was one time when I actually did have to tell Father Ryszard the truth. Happened after stealing Ross's car. I had to tell him because my mom took me to the old guy's house, which is right there beside the church. She sat next to me and cried while I talked. Not loud crying, but she had tears, which is awful. Father Ryszard was wearing normal clothes and sipping tea. He looked like a person, and I decided I was really talking to his twin brother, that they were playing all kinds of tricks on the congregation. I looked around to see if the real priest might be hiding, behind his desk, or in the closet. I thought that they could get people in the confessional, hear a confession, and then, as the confessor stepped out of the box, the real priest could be standing there, arms crossed, saying, with no accent, "You are not forgiven!" Or, maybe better, "Gotcha!" Or just, "God works in mysterious ways, eh old chap?" *Jesus*. There would be so many mothers dying of heart attacks. Not necessarily a bad thing, considering their souls would be pure.

I confessed to stealing Ross's car, and the evil twin ate it up. The evil twin, the one who robs the collection plate. Until I did my altar service, I didn't know that Jesus came in sealed bags from a company in Milwaukee. I used to think the priests baked the bread themselves.

I wonder if that would make a good television show. Two identical priests, living with Jesus, baking parts of his body every morning before mass.

The twin's evil brother smiled too much. His teeth were crooked, and discoloured. And when I finished telling him what I'd done, he said, "Do you feel bad?" Where were the prayers, the blessings? He sipped his tea and I think we stared at each other for a while. He didn't even mention Jesus.

My confession to the priest's brother was different than other confessions. For one, I couldn't make things up, with my mom sitting right beside me. I couldn't look at her and I hated her for being there. She watched me the whole time while I told the evil twin about jacking Ross's car. I told him that Martin and I used to take the car all the time. How Martin would let me drive when he didn't feel like it. He'd smoke my mom's cigarettes, the ones she hid behind the washing machine, and I'd drive. I explained that I was a safe driver, and really it was only a matter of lacking the proper credentials. I decided I could trust the twin with this information, and a few times I thought he winked at me. Like he knew that I knew he was up to something, like we were just acting for my mother's sake. The whole time I talked I was expecting the real priest to come walking in with a pie in his hand. He'd throw the pie into my face. It would taste like lemon. And that would be my penance.

Father Ryszard said: "Would you excuse?"

My mother nodded and took her Kleenexes and left the priest's office. Then Father Ryszard stood up and went to the closet. I thought for sure he was going to open it and let his twin out. Instead, he opened it, entered, and came out with a brown cardboard box in his hands. He put the box on his desk and opened it. Then he took a book out of the box. He flipped through the pages, then placed the book back into the box. He dug around for another two minutes, humming to himself, and finally he found what he was looking for. Found for what he was looking?

The book was called *Peter on the Shoreline*. Father Ryszard handed the book to me, saying "A present." On the cover of the book was a picture of footprints in the sand, and I cringed. I'd read "Footprints" before. The thought of a grown man carrying me

down the beach crept me out. I put the book on my lap, knowing already that I'd never read it. Father Ryszard resumed his seat across from me, and started talking.

July 23, 2003, Afternoon:

“You know economic?”

“Sure.”

“You know death?”

“Death?”

“When persons borrow money, they come in death.”

[He was saying debt, but it sounded to me like death. I didn't realise he was saying debt until a few hours later, when I listened to the tape.]

“Yes. You are in death to Jesus. You are owing him. Very much. For what did he.

Like bunk.”

“Bunk?”

“Bunk.”

[He was saying bank, but it sounded to me like bunk.]

“You pain your motor, you come in greater death, no?”

“Greater death?”

“Yes, death. In red. You know to cancel death?”

“Pray?”

“You pay, yes. Very much.”

“Okay.”

“But you want no death, no?”

“I guess not.”

“Better to be owed than owe.”

“Sure.”

“So read book. It will save from death. To God. Very much. See? By little mounts.”

“I guess so.”

“You guess?”

“Is that my penance?”

“Yes. And help your motor. That is always the easiest path to avoid death.”

November 27, 2003, Evening:

That was my original penance. To treat God like a banker. But then my mom came back into the room, and she suggested that I sign up for altar service. Two weeks hard labour for St. Matthew’s Church. In a white robe, carrying the cross up and down the aisles, singing for alms, getting the sacraments from their hobbit hole, pouring the water on the old man’s wrinkled hands, pouring the wine, the blood, wiping the golden cup with the napkin, holding the candle and singing. I sort of liked it. But then Father Ryszard asked me to stop serving. I couldn’t remember when to ring the bells. I also thought the Eucharist was a musical instrument.

It took a lot longer to get downtown than the day before. At least it felt that way. Maybe I walked slower. Though my watch is always on my wrist, I sometimes forget to look at it. Or sometimes I time myself, but then forget to check the stopwatch when I

stop, and so ruin the whole idea. I do know that I was in Nathan Phillips Square at 2:05pm. Before that, I could've been anywhere.

August 15, 2003, Afternoon:

“I’m halfway between my brother’s place and downtown, I’m just walking, and it’s hot and I’m dying of hypothermia. I’m completely losing control of my body. My lungs are disappearing. I’m going to die right here, with too much heat in my chest, suffocating on summer. The traffic doesn’t help. I can’t believe how many crazy people live in this city, how many times I’ve crossed the street to avoid the men with grocery bags. Their nasty dogs. Terror alert yellow. Look out for human feces and stray pizza boxes.”

November 27, 2003, Evening:

Every conversation I overheard back then was about the blackout. I stopped at a magazine store to get some pop to cool me down. They made me stand there forever, the guy behind the counter and a cab driver. Why some jackass decides that he can’t help himself, just has to explode like a change machine on the fritz, is really something I can’t figure out. “Gold pennies! Silver nickels!” A kid in my class does this, just starts talking, as if he knows more than anyone else. No one cares except Ms. Rossbach. Even she looks bored. She often takes her date book out in class and scribbles things down. When she’s bored, she spends a lot of time trying to crack her neck. It’s amazing how she does this. Her hair is quite short, and black, and her skin is white and you can just see her neck twisting, the bones clicking. I feel bad for her. It’s too bad for people like the cabbie and

Anthony. Wasters. They act like they're important and seem to forget that they know nothing.

August 15, 2003, Afternoon:

"I had this one woman in the cab, and it was a killer rush hour. Even before it happened. Just me and this woman, caught on Bathurst. Worst, the worst I've ever seen. And she wouldn't stop talking."

"Damn."

"Said she was having hot flashes her car was stuck in a parking garage. Said I don't need this, I don't need this. Crazy, I said. She wouldn't stop about terrorists. They're going to kill us. I don't want to die, I don't want—, and she was like, The phones aren't working, I need to call my husband, it's so hot, oh God. And of course all the traffic lights were out, people in the middle of the street telling us when to go when to stop. I'm just two seconds away from pushing her out. She was like They've taken the power we're going to die."

"No kidding?"

"Of course! Lately I've been having some trouble with the radiator, and I'm running out of gas, and here's this woman complaining, like it's my fault we're stuck as though I'm the fucking terrorist. I have the AC on but she's still on me."

"I just read about a Canadian girl who was in New York when it happened."

"Yeah?"

“She was on the subway, and said it was so dark down there, and not even the emergency lights worked. People were screaming, banging on the doors. Some were crying. They thought it was a terrorist attack too.”

“My friend. I thought *I* was going to die.”

“I don’t know what’s worse, a stopped train or a menopausal woman.”

“*I* know.”

November 27, 2003, Evening:

Even after he paid for his stuff, the cabbie stood there and gabbed. He stood there until I spontaneously combusted. It took three minutes before the clerk finally noticed me and let me pay. Then, as I walked out of the place a van that was driving 70 km/hr skidded out of control on the main road and came and I put my hands up and then that was it and the last thing I saw was the driver’s face, stupid father type of guy, glasses and wide face and mouth smooth like an O. Like he was yawning. My face and hands were completely destroyed as soon as the minivan hit. My body was crushed, flung back against the store window, a lump on the pavement. Big shards of glass stuck in my back, my neck. I pictured Dave driving home, seeing my bloodstains on the ground, continuing to live, and driving around, maybe whistling to himself and scratching his balls while the paramedics scraped my body off the sidewalk.

The taxi driver and the storekeeper kept talking about the blackout, as if there was nothing else to say or do. I waited there for someone to notice me. When no one did, I did the logical thing and left without paying.

As I left, I dug my hand into my pocket to put my change away. This is when I rediscovered the list of addresses. *Jesus*. After putting some distance between myself and the store, I took a break at a park, which wasn't so much a park as it was the front lawn of an apartment building. I sat in the shade next to an empty beer bottle and unfolded the paper.

There were seven addresses listed. I don't have the list anymore, but I still remember a few of them. 17 Fallingdale. 22 Threadneedle. 99 Unsworth. Immediately, I recognised one of the addresses. 232 Mortimer. My brother's. On closer inspection, I saw that one of the addresses was on the same street as Dave's. And at the bottom of the list, I identified a street, Euclid, which I had passed the day before. From what I could remember, it seemed relatively close by. I folded the paper, finished my drink and proved again and again that it's impossible to fold a piece of paper in half more than seven times. Then I walked on Danforth for about ten minutes, until it became Bloor. Another ten minutes and I turned onto Jarvis, keeping an eye out for College.

It seems pertinent to clarify just how extremely, amazingly, unbelievably boring Toronto is. At home, there are more important things to do than walk to random houses and knock on doors. But in shithole Toronto, lame-ass capital of Canada, there is nothing to do but sit on the couch and watch TV. And then the blackout interrupted that.

Other things that get old quick: playing Scrabble, five games of Boggle and Trivial Pursuit all in a row; throwing things at the wall; looking at my face in the mirror; thinking of Val; snooping through my brother's magazines; his hockey cards; looking out the window; talking on the phone to Amy; timing how long I can hold my breath under

water (1.43 minutes); lying on my back on the kitchen floor; wandering around; and other things, things so dull I can't even remember doing them.

I decided to walk to 505 Euclid. It was something to do.

Euclid was about thirty minutes away, farther than I'd previously guessed. Old drunks and creeps were bumbling around near almost every intersection. With their fleabag dogs and their shopping carts. I mingled with them. I've been homeless before. My mom kicked me out of the house. I lived under in a doorway, scoured dumpsters. Begged for food. One night, I jumped from the MacDonald Bridge into the harbour. Broke my neck on impact. My body floated out to the narrows, and that's where they found me. Face down in the sewage.

College. On a particularly sweaty day such as this, it's hard to remember details. Everything was covered in cement. The pavement seemed to travel up the sides of the buildings, and the shapes reminded me of Tetris. Not many trees, but dirt in the sidewalk, a tiny square with a skinny shrub in the centre. Tied straight with chicken wire to skinny metal sticks. The house I remember: Square. Brickish. Tetris.

Euclid and Ulster. The steps: two huge slabs of concrete stacked on top of each other. I grabbed the steel hand rails and walked up slowly, concocting a plan. With each step I came closer and closer to forming my story. It was easy. I'd lost my dog, and was out looking. Her name was Sammy. The name is particularly significant, being the name of a girl from school, who resembles a German shepherd. It's too bad her parents gave her a name that also sounds like something one might call a dog. Especially worth knowing is the fact that her older sister is on the swim team, and when I did community service at the Y, I would watch her through the windows. She was a synchronised

swimmer. Her legs looked magnificent, thick and muscular, white and wet, protruding from the water like legs of ham. You just want to bite them. If Sammy is a dog, then her sister is most assuredly a fish.

So I knocked on the door. No one answered. I knocked again, then waited for about a minute. No answer. I peeked through the window. The curtains were made of lace. The living room looked relatively normal, with white cloths on all the surfaces, school photos on the wall, what looked like a giant platter nailed over the fireplace. I just knew a family lived there. I went back to the door and knocked again. Checked the knob. It turned. I pushed the door open.

“Sammy?” I called out as I walked inside. “Sammy?” I said this just in case, but my alibi was beginning to wear thin. It’s one thing to knock on a stranger’s door looking for a lost dog. Quite another to break in looking for it. I stopped walking. I was in the entryway, standing next to a hat rack and a chair piled up with old newspapers, a few magazines. *Time. Maclean’s*. Of course I checked the little white box with the address. They were addressed to someone named M. Wells. At the moment, this meant absolutely nothing to me, so I pretty much forgot that piece of information instantly. But I did put it on tape.

Five days later I’ll listen to the tape and suddenly remember seeing this name, and then many advancements will be made. That happens when I am about to give up too, which is usually how you realise things in the first place. I read this story in English class once about a guy who steals something from someone else, but no one can find out where he’s hidden it until this detective goes to his house and finds it in the most obvious place, right there on his table. Or something like that. It’s not a very good story. I don’t even

remember the name. And it seems stupid that the thief would just leave the stolen goods right out in the open.

So the floors were wooden, seemed to glow. Over in the corner of the living room, the stereo looked light, easy to carry off. I would have to leave the speakers behind. The television was far too large. But the stereo I could carry.

Before I even know what I'm doing, I'm unplugging the cords in the back, dismantling a bomb, first the white one, then the red, and now, desperately unscrewing the black. I'm pinching it and turning it to the left but the person who put it there must've used a fucking wrench. It won't budge. Fuck. Now my heart is beating and it's right inside my ear. I mean, I can hear blood moving past my ear drum. Too much. The little knob won't turn. I wrench the thing hard and it goes flying out of my hands. What the fuck? It's only now that I realise I'm not even taking the PA. I'm unhooking the stupid DVD player. D. V. D. It's some cheap piece of shit from Zeller's too. Now it's smashed on the floor. I start towards the stereo. I hear a person's voice. "Who are you? Hello?"

Terror alert red.

"What the fuck?" The woman was younger than my mom, but older than Val. She wore a housecoat and a pair of sky blue slippers. Her hair was wet. "Who are you?"

"I'm looking for my dog."

"Your dog?"

"Yes, I..."

She looked at me over her glasses and raised her eyebrows. "I'm calling the cops."

"I just..."

“Stay there!”

She turned her back on me. I walked after her, but she turned suddenly and, seeing the red and white cords from the DVD player in my hands, and thinking I was going to strangle her, she grabbed a rather heavy marble paper weight and brained me with it. The paper weight crushed the left side of my skull, left a big dent in the side. I fell onto the sofa, and my vision started to fade and I plunged into a coma, from which I did not emerge. A month later, my mom stood at the foot of the hospital bed. She wept when the machines made that flat sound. Dead line. Ross put his arm around her shoulder.

Even as I'm drifting into death, I'm walking down the street, hands in my pockets, rubbing my fingers against the list. Then I'm choking my brother. One time he wrapped his arms around my gut and shook me until I puked. I was a kid then, and he could still pick me up. Now he can barely pick me up, and so resorts to sitting on me.

I did not go into the idiotic house on Euclid Avenue. Breaking into houses in the middle of the day is not a symmetrical situation. Not a safe one either. I'd been standing on the porch for too long. Someone might've identified me in a line-up.

After wasting my time in Tetris Land, I went to Nathan Philips Square. I sat and watched the rollerbladers rollerblading. Bunch of bottlefuckers. I looked at the list of addresses, and folded the paper in half seven times, and the buildings collapsed all around me, and the skater kids and rollerbladers got pulverised. As I witnessed my nuclear bomb death, I got the idea to buy a map of Toronto. Another important similarity between me and Morgan Wells, who happened to have a rather large map collection himself: we both appreciate a good map. Again, it seems pertinent to note just how much Morgan Wells and I have in common. We think in similar circles.

I bought the map at a magazine store, which was also a diner. The guy made me buy food, because you can't sit there unless you're eating. So I bought a donut and took it to a seat near the back.

I swiftly located the street names on the map and checked them off the list. It took me about 23 minutes to find them all and eat my donut. When I had them plotted, I drew imaginary lines between the different points, to see if they created an image. When I found one that worked, I used a marker to connect the dots. Here is a photograph of the map I used:



August 15, 2003, Afternoon:

[Barely audible music, faint conversation. Sometimes the sound of dishes clinking.]

“The addresses form a three. Or an M. A W?”

August 15, 2003, Afternoon:

“The list of addresses seems to me a peculiar piece of evidence. But what does it mean? It means something. My brother hid it for a reason. Obviously. To keep it from Val? He’s probably having an affair. Why would he cheat on Val?”

August 15, 2003, Afternoon:

[Two men arguing in the background.]

“I’m only speculating, but on the inside of the book where I found the list, there is a note from Maria. It’s possible the M could belong to her. But what’s with the different addresses? More than one person is involved in this. Who could it be? I wonder if Val knows.”

November 27, 2003, Evening:

After recording my observations, I went to the Sony store and wished I had a superpower that allowed me to put my hand through glass without cutting it. The store man followed me around, as if I planned on stealing a five thousand pound TV or something. I just stood in front of the display case of digital recorders, and he tried to stand inconspicuously behind me, but I could see him in the glass, looking at me. So I took out my dad’s tape recorder and said, “It really cuts me up when people with chin-straps forget they have chin-straps, and try to act like they’re better than other people.” I don’t know if he heard me, but I left anyway, knowing I’d never be able to purchase the technological device of my dreams. Not with only ten dollars in my pocket.

Eventually, hunger dragged me back to Val's and Dave's. I stopped in at one other address on the way back. I was starving, but I figured the donut would hold me over. And it was only thirty minutes out of the way.

Unsworth Avenue. A white house, hundreds of years old, which was also the age of most of the people in it. The owners were selling. I'd noticed the estate sale signs a few blocks before, but I wasn't expecting so many people. I didn't even know what an estate sale was. The doors to the house were wide open and full of wonderful ladies wearing Chiffon scarves and turquoise pendants. One in particular looked like an old Hollywood actress. I wanted to take her hand in mine, maybe kiss it. She seemed like royalty, just in the way she held her arms. Perpendicular to her body, wrists limp. I've never seen a woman of that particular vintage look so exquisite. She smelled like perfume and booze. As I entered the house, she hardly noticed me, so I didn't bother asking for her name. If I were forced to name her, I'd have called her Sophie. Or Virginia.

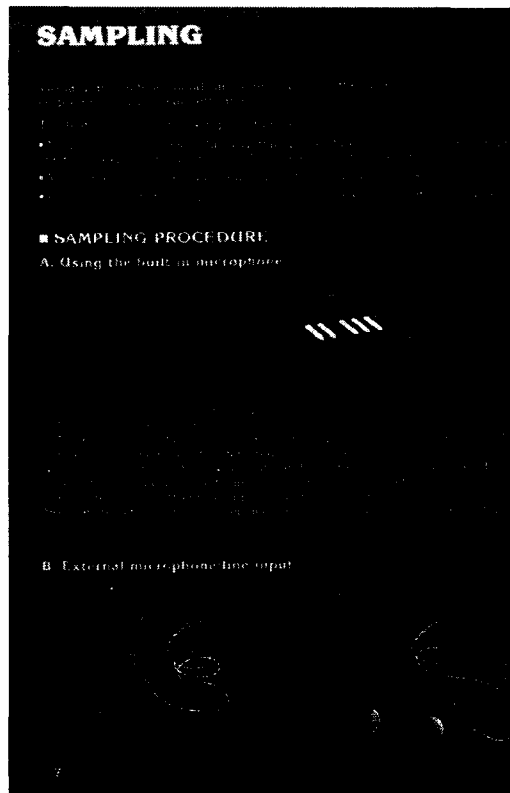
The place smelled like one hundred years of dampness. In the wood, the brick, the carpet, the wallpaper, the furniture. The stained blinds. Green shag carpet and pinkish-purple wallpaper. An Elvis fish on the wall. It flapped its tails every ten minutes, singing "Love Me Tender." An electronic organ in the corner of the living room, a box of records. A bookcase full of mystery novels and reference books. In the kitchen, a green food processor, a yellow mixing bowl with a crack in its side, even old food, canned goods, brown bananas and mouldy bread. I didn't go into the basement, but upstairs I found a room full of army things. "Authentic World War II paraphernalia," as someone downstairs put it.

There were two uniforms hanging in the closet, but only one helmet. A bunch of field manuals and reports were laid out on a small white table. I sorted through them, and found one of particular interest. This is the cover:



On the inside cover, “You’ll need this where your going” was written in pencil. I felt a strong urge to correct the grammar. Instead, I bought the book for \$3.50.

I also bought an old operation manual for a Casio SK-1. They sold it to me for 50 cents, which isn’t much, but felt like a swindle considering the thing was basically useless. This is a page from the book:



It took about a half hour to get home. Val was in the living room, on the paisley armchair, reading. Her legs curled up under her. Something I have noticed about Val: she reads all the time, and never the same book. The covers change from day to day, and I used to think she was the fastest reader on the planet.

Val stopped me as I passed through the living room. “Hey,” she said, without lowering her book. “I need to talk to you.”

I tried not to look at her brown, brown legs and her bare sunburnt arms. “Yeah?”

“Come here.” She closed the book on her thumb and used it to wave me over.

I didn’t want to go. I wanted to go to my room and examine my map. But her chair was suddenly next to me. Lavender.

August 15, 2003, Evening:

“What do you think of pirates?”

“Pirates?”

“Yes.”

“They’re okay. Kind of dumb.”

“No. I mean, for a theme. For Luis’s birthday?”

“Ahoy.”

“He wants to be Johnny Depp.”

“Then it’s probably a good idea.”

“I guess so. Hey, can I ask you a favour?”

“What?”

“Can I trust you? Can you keep a secret?”

“Yes.” [I sound so adult when I say this I almost believe it was someone else speaking.]

“It’s Luis’s birthday in a week. I want you to buy him something.”

“I don’t have a lot of money.”

“Don’t worry about that. I’ll give you money.”

“What should I get?”

“I’ll give you twenty dollars. Get him something he’ll like.”

“How’s this a favour?”

“It is. Believe me. Promise not to tell your brother I gave you money.”

November 27, 2003, Evening:

I had no problem lying to my brother. Especially when it involved getting money for nothing. So that was Val's plan. For confiding in me, I had to bite my tongue not to tell her my own plan. I wanted to whisper my plan into her lips, tell her about, first of all, finding the list of addresses, about the two houses I visited that day, about how I had located each place on a map and was going to visit them over the next two weeks. I wanted to tell her, but couldn't. The most I could do was show her the army book I'd bought. She laughed at me and said it smelled like mothballs.

Val is not someone I even pretend to understand. I couldn't tell her about my plan. Instead, I asked her about her book.

August 15, 2003, Evening:

"Is that the same book as yesterday?"

"No."

"Really?"

"Yes."

"You finished it? Already?"

"Sort of."

"Sort of?"

"I didn't finish it. But I am finished with it."

"Oh. So it wasn't very good. It didn't look very good." [The cover had a photograph of a man holding a baseball bat and giving the thumbs up.] "You should really try reading Choose Your Own Adventures."

"Is that so?"

“They’re all good.”

“You’ll have to lend me one.”

“Why didn’t you like the other book?”

“I liked it. It was funny.”

“Then why’d you stop reading?”

“I don’t like finishing books.”

“What?”

“I know how it sounds. But I only like the first fifty pages. They’re the only fifty pages worth reading.”

“Really?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“Just are.”

“That’s not a good reason.”

“It’s my reason.”

“*Jesus.*”

“It’s mostly voluntary. I don’t trust endings. I can always tell exactly what the author is doing. Even the good ones. I’ve never read a single book that has made me believe in the end. They’re so contrived.”

“What does that mean?”

“It means they’re forced, not realistic.”

“But beginnings are?”

“I couldn’t have said it better.”

“Why only fifty pages?”

“Fifty is the cut-off point. It stops beginning after fifty. Then it’s just a plot.”

“You don’t like plots either?”

“Plots are the whole problem. They’re artificial.”

“If you don’t like endings, you’d probably hate Choose Your Own Adventures.”

“Why?”

“That’s all they are. There’re probably about twenty different endings for each book.”

“Yikes.”

“But if you make the right choices, you can usually be finished in less than fifty pages.”

“I see.”

“I think ‘The End’ is the most important part of a story.”

“Maybe. Middles are definitely the worst.”

November 27, 2003, Evening:

That night I couldn’t sleep. I stared at the ceiling and counted the little sticker stars someone had put up there. I lost count three times so gave up. Since Amy keeps late hours, I decided to call her.

On this particular night, we talked for the first few minutes about the blackout, but I was really sick of that topic. Then Amy told me about a party she went to, which sounded boring. She said it wasn’t. She said the music was good, and lots of people were there and it was too bad I couldn’t have been there with her. She kept asking when I was

coming home and I told her maybe never. She started to sound irritable, so I decided to play a game, which sometimes keeps her listening.

I was in bed. Amy was somewhere in her house, I don't know where. I closed my eyes and pictured her lying next to me.

August 15, 2003, Evening:

“Amy, I’m going to tell you about my four major scars. I have more than that, but I’m going to tell you the stories behind four of them and I want you to tell me which one is false.”

[2.9 seconds of static.]

“Is this a test?”

“No. It won’t take long.”

“Are they all true?”

“No.”

“Is there only one false story?”

“Yes.”

“Go ahead.”

“Okay. I have a scar on my knee. That’s the first one. It’s small but wide. It happened when my brother used me as a bike ramp.”

“Which brother?”

“Martin. I was too young for a bike. He told me to lie on the driveway in front of our house. He walked his bike to the other side of the street and told me not to move. I shouted that I was ready and he came pedaling at me. I wasn’t worried. We’d been

watching the pros jump shopping carts all afternoon on TV. I didn't watch him come. I could hear the wheels spinning on the gravel. The sky was huge. I waited for the moment when my brother would soar above me. But I turned to look. When I saw his face, I was suddenly convinced that he intended to kill me. He claims I moved at the last second, brought my knee up and that's why. I don't know what happened exactly. The next thing is my parents taking him to the hospital, shuffling him into the station wagon with a broken arm, tears on his sleeve, his nose running and dripping. They didn't notice the gash on my knee, which is why the scar is so wide. I sat in the backseat picking the rocks out of the blood."

"Hmm. True."

"Maybe."

"What's the next one?"

[2.5 second pause. The pause is a figurative pause, representing the years that passed between the scars.]

"Hello?"

"The next scar is a surgical scar. Happened when I was eleven. I had appendicitis."

"My sister had that."

"Lots of people get it."

"What side is the scar on?"

"This kid in my grade got it the same year I did. Except his happened during the school year. Mine was in the summer. The day he came back, after being out for weeks, everyone congratulated him. They all wanted to see his scar."

“What was his name?”

“Joseph.”

“Last name.”

“Stewart.”

“False.”

“But I haven’t even told you about it.”

“That’s okay. It’s false, isn’t it?”

“I can’t tell you. It would ruin the rest.”

“I’m tired.”

“Have you ever noticed the scar on my forehead?”

“No.”

“It’s above my right eye.”

“False.”

“Don’t answer yet. You wouldn’t notice it because it’s pretty faint. A drinking accident. My brother and I decided one night to break into a neighbour’s house to steal booze. He knew they didn’t lock the garage door.”

“Which brother?”

“Martin.”

“Right.”

“So we just walked in and went straight for the liquor cabinet. We found a bottle of whiskey and were about to leave when my brother decides to look around. So I just stood there in the kitchen while he rooted around in the living room, making a ton of noise. Then there’s this loud demand in the dark, asking us what the fuck we think we’re

doing. A man standing there in his underwear, and we're scared so shitless Martin and I actually run into each other as we head for the door. My forehead slams right into the doorframe and I'm suddenly stumbling against the kitchen table, blood on my hands and face. I don't feel the cut, don't even notice it till we're in the clear. But first I have to fight with this old man who's grabbing onto me. I'm hitting him in the face, pushing him off me. He's strong. I can't shake the old fucker and I realize that he's got me. He's telling me he's going to call the cops. He's got me pinned to the floor. Can't see anything, right? Now I know I'm done for but I don't stop struggling. He's cursing at me, knees on my shoulders. Then he's quiet. I hear this smash and I'm free. The old man's on the floor beside me and I don't know how he got there but I don't really care. My brother pulls me up and then we're outside, laughing and running. When we're far enough away, I asked for a drink of whiskey. That's when I found out how he got the old man off me."

"False."

"You don't know that."

"Why do you waste my time like this? You're so full of shit."

"They're all true Amy. Amy? I still have another one."

"I have to go."

"Do you want to listen to my tapes?"

"No."

"Amy?"

"..."

November 27, 2003, Evening:

I pressed the end call button and dropped the phone. Then I picked it up again and called her back. How stupid to forget to tell her about the list, the addresses, which is possibly the whole reason I called to begin with. The reason for which I called. The phone was in my hand and I was dialling her number. She didn't answer. I left a message. Only I didn't say anything. I just breathed into my palm until the machine stopped recording.

It's okay. I do this all the time. She doesn't mind.

REPLACEMENT LETTERS

The phone rang at least once a day. Possibly more, but he couldn't account for the time he spent away from home. Working or walking. The phone rang, and each time he'd ask, "Where's the phone?" A question without connection to either location or object. A repetition. Of course he knew where it was. But it was easier to ask than answer.

She'd taken it. Perhaps not on purpose. Although Morgan could barely remember the days following her sudden departure. He could place the loss of the phone around the same time as losing the chair, the photo frames, the polished brass Buddha and the small end table that once held it. Almost certainly.

Like her, material objects in his apartment could also disappear without notice. One day he went to work and pulled his coat from the coat rack. When he came home that night, the rack was gone. Other items went too. With regularity, maybe once or twice a week. He lost a silver pen, his polished rock collection, the doormat. Who would take a doormat?

Sometimes he wondered if maybe he'd never owned these things to begin with. He could remember them, in the sense that he'd reach out with a handful of change and drop it onto the floor, fully expecting to hear the coins fall into the standing ashtray that had, he'd thought, been there only moments before. He'd lean over and watch the coins scatter about his socked feet. He'd dropped his change on the floor before. Too many coins for one hand. Where had the cointray gone? Had he ever owned a cointray? He couldn't remember. But the Post-its helped some.

The Post-its helped, at least, to slow the traffic. Beneath each object in his house, a Post-it.

Under the coffee table: *coffee table*.
Under the kitchen table: *kitchen table*.
Under the fridge: *fridge*.

He ran into problems immediately. One night he came home from walking and saw, posted on the floor beside the couch, the word “Lamp.” He had a single moment of lucid self-congratulation. Then a question: Did he put the Post-it there to remind himself that a lamp once stood there, or did he put the Post-it there to remind himself to buy a lamp? Did his word denote a lost lamp? Or had the lamp ever been there in the first place? Did the lamp come before the word, or was it the other way around? Did the word come first?

He recorded each of these questions in his notebook and created an elaborate and simultaneously quite dull dialogue between two fictional philosophers, bearing equally fictitious Greek names in order to answer them.

Polysyphilis: Something for your metaphysical mind to ponder.
Aristotantes: My friend, I am all ears.
P: Alas, if only we could be. For the ears do not deceive as well as the eyes.
A: But do the eyes deceive? Do they not illuminate? Is not seeing the very act by which the world becomes known?
P: That is what the metaphysicians would have you believe.
A: Are you suddenly beyond the metaphysicians?
P: Quite the opposite.
A: A physician then?
P: Merely a man who distrusts his eyes as much as his hands.
A: A man who distrusts his hands? Or whose hands distrust his eyes?
P: Another day friend. We were speaking of the ears.
A: No. We were speaking of the eyes.
P: Rightly so. Rightly so.

The dialogue produced a muddling back and forth between the one philosopher, who argued that there is no such thing as presence, and the other, who claimed that the

absence of the thing is that which illuminates its essential qualities. Morgan wrote two pages of dialogue, but stopped abruptly when one of the philosophers suddenly and quite unexpectedly asked, “But what of the lamp?”

Again, the question mattered. Not the answer.

But the phone. It rang constant. Constant, a question. Morgan wanted to answer. The speaker, now covered completely in Post-its. But the Post-its couldn't mute the ring.

Eleven days after he received the postcard, Morgan finally went to the other Morgan Wells's house. He took an indirect route, limping on his now swollen left ankle. The trip lasted twice as long as planned. He saw no reason for feeling nervous. To him, returning the postcard was necessary. The postcard didn't belong to him. It belonged to him in the sense that it had been delivered to him. But it didn't belong to him. He was not the intended receiver.

While he walked, Morgan realised that he'd have to say something to this Morgan Wells, would be forced to comment on the coincidence of their shared name and street. Would he say “Hello, I'm Morgan Wells?” How would this other Morgan Wells react? An odd scenario occurred to him as he came closer and closer to the end of the maze he'd drawn in his notebook. He imagined knocking on the door only to discover that this other man was him. Or a look-alike. He pictured the other Morgan coming to the door, maybe a screen door, wiping his hands with a dish towel, eating peanuts, eating slowly, walking slower and slower as he approached the door. Maybe he'd have a beard. Maybe Morgan wouldn't recognise himself. He wondered if he really knew what he looked like to others.

A ridiculous idea. The man would look nothing like him. He was just another man in a sprawling city, dubbed as he was dubbed. The name meant nothing. The person who owned it meant nothing to the name.

Morgan cut through a number of side-streets and parking lots before finally getting back onto his street, twenty metres away from the house. He was disappointed when he saw it. Students lived there. He could tell by the couch on the front porch, eaten by the weather. Years of cold Toronto snow and frequent spring rains had worn the upholstery. Balls of cotton puffed out from the arms and cushions.

Morgan pulled the postcard out of his pocket and checked the address on the back. What would he say?

*What are the chances?
Odd, isn't it?
Imagine, two M. Wells's on the same street.*

Nothing sounded right.

He was standing between two parked cars, waiting to cross the street. Then the front door opened and a man came out. Roughly Morgan's age and height, though he dressed better. For a brief moment, Morgan wondered if this man also walked like him. Did he know the streets the way Morgan knew the streets? He certainly walked with confidence, shoulders up, chin back. Unlike Morgan, he wasn't limping.

They looked nothing alike.

The man had a squash racket over his shoulder. He didn't notice Morgan standing on the other side of the street. Someone in a blue sedan was idling beside a "No parking" sign. As the other Morgan approached, the person in the car leaned over and opened the passenger door. The other Morgan threw his racket into the back then climbed in. Morgan

didn't move. He waited until the other Morgan and his friend were a block or two gone before crossing the street.

Morgan's boots thunked against the steps. He stood at the top, leaned against the handrail, favouring his left foot. One of the windows was open just a bit, and he thought he could hear talking. A woman's voice. A one-sided conversation. It drifted out in thin rivulets, barely audible words mixed with the odd pitch of laughter. He took a quick look inside. He saw a red room, with a vacuum cleaner by the fireplace, a retro television set sitting on top of a milk crate, and someone's knee, poking over the top of the couch.

Morgan stepped away from the window to knock, but couldn't. He wanted to knock, but didn't want to meet the knee, or the face, the hands, the eyes to which the knee belonged. She was talking on the phone. He didn't want to interrupt. What would he say to her? He didn't have to personally hand the postcard over. Unless *she* was Morgan Wells? He peered through the window again, and this time caught a glimpse of her hand. Out of habit, Morgan pulled his notebook out and flipped it open to the first blank page. He copied the following in a shaky hand.

"... other day I was in the wash ... blood in the sink. He was well-dressed. I really liked his tie ... Yeah ... Coughing. I don't know ... notice ... Enough ... Like...? Bullshit. You wouldn't ... Maybe ... TB. Not ... wouldn't have ..."

Morgan stopped writing. She wasn't Morgan. Obviously. The postcard had mentioned that the man on the front looked like Morgan. Morgan Wells was a man.

He pushed his notebook into his pocket and opened the mailbox, a tin vertical chamber, with red and green flowers painted on the front. He dropped the postcard in with the rest of the mail and closed the lid. But did he have the right address? 2339? He

checked the number on the door. 2389? He pulled the entire bundle of mail out of the box.

Monday mail was always the fullest, especially near the end of the month. An entire weekend's worth of letters, and deals and pizza flyers. It had a particular weight to it, the other Morgan's mail. Morgan balanced it in his right hand, feeling it tilt first to the left, then the right. One envelope fell from the pile, slipped through his fingers. He caught it. His name was printed in the little text box. Morgan Wells. He had the right address.

Morgan lifted the top of the mailbox and replaced the letters. He was about to close the lid, but hesitated. He felt that closing the top of the mailbox was more than simply closing a mailbox. If he closed the mailbox, something would be lost. He couldn't name that something. A new distraction? Morgan was stuck, his fingers loosening flakes of rust.

He flipped the lid open a third time, wondered if he was being watched. He turned around, expecting to see the real Morgan Wells standing behind him, squash racquet raised high above his head. But was he an invader? Hadn't the postcard once belonged to him?

Morgan removed the mail from the box a second time. He decided that if anyone was to catch him, he'd better be ready for it. He sat on the front step and flipped casually through the rest of the mail. If he was returning the postcard, he deserved something in return. One letter. Maybe two. After seeing his name printed there so many times, he began to wonder if he'd ever seen this much mail waiting for him in his mailbox. The other Morgan Wells received every catalogue and newsletter service available.

The woman inside laughed thinly, and then shouted abruptly. From the mail, Morgan assumed that her name was Natalie Greenway. Nat. There was a moment of silence, and then laughter. Morgan tilted through the entire packet. Most of it was standard fare, but near the back, he found one letter, hand-stamped. Sealed by a human tongue, dropped in a little red box. It stood out from the rest, a white dove in a flock of Kraft brown sparrows. From someone named Heidi York. The “from” address was stamped, but the “to” address was written in ink, bright and bloody blue. Who was this Heidi York, writing to this other Morgan?

Heidi York. The name sounded vaguely familiar. He knew a Heidi once. Not well, but he knew her. Perhaps she’d married and changed her name. Morgan rubbed his fingers against the triangle on the back. He could almost push his fingers beneath the paper.

Morgan looked around, then stuffed the letter from Heidi into his coat pocket. Not that it mattered if he was being watched. He would’ve stolen the mail even if the other Morgan Wells had been standing two feet away.

It wasn’t hard. Not that he’d planned on stealing the mail in advance. But when he saw it there, he knew he was expected to take it. Perhaps Morgan Wells had left it there for him? Perhaps Morgan Wells had mailed the postcard. It was unlikely, but possible. Just as plausible as two Morgan Wells’s living on the same street in a city of 5 million people.

All those unopened envelopes, all addressed to him, belonging to him, it was easy. Morgan opened the mailbox and returned the rest of the letters to their place. But before closing the top, he pushed his fingers against the envelopes, and squeezed a few

tight between his knuckles. He pulled only envelopes addressed to Morgan Wells out and put them in his pocket with the letter. He had no trouble taking the mail. A natural theft, like he'd taken something back. If the post office could wrongly deliver a postcard, perhaps these other letters were also misaddressed. Misdelivered.

Before leaving, Morgan stood for a moment at the top of stairs, listening for the woman inside. He couldn't hear her voice, so he took another look through the window. The room was crowded with bookcases, most of them empty.

No Natalie.

Morgan walked home, taking a different route than before. His left foot was starting to throb in his shoe. He would have to see a doctor. That's what he thought as he followed his return path home, already forgetting the postcard he'd left behind.

A few days passed. Morgan split his time between walking, working and, his latest project, drawing the map of Toronto on the largest wall in his living room. He started in pencil, then Sharpies, and eventually moved on to watercolours. He wouldn't finish the map, and it would later be painted over by the apartment's subsequent tenants. The wife would insist that they paint the living room a kind of mocha brown, even though the husband wanted to keep the map. It had character. The wife said it was too "undergraduate," and painted over it one day when the husband wasn't home.

Eventually, though, Morgan read the mail. He spent two hours preparing the table. He put down a fresh table cloth, still heavily creased. The table cloth was brand new and, along with the file folder, had been purchased for this purpose. He placed the file folder

in the centre of the table and opened the lid. He arranged the tools side by side to the left of the folder. Scissors. Matches. Lemon yellow sink gloves.

Morgan pulled the gloves over his hands, snapping them into place like he'd seen on television. He didn't imagine he was performing surgery, but he recognised the element of opening, of prying, of tearing into and examining, and moving, and replacing. A mortician of sorts. An archaeologist. He was dealing with death, the past. He'd finally replaced the light bulb in his bedside lamp, which he'd brought into the kitchen. He unplugged the toaster to make room. The light bulb came from a rarely used socket in the hallway. Post-its were still stuck to the lampshade.

Morgan switched the light on, removed the shade and worked under the bare bulb. The first letter he opened was a visa statement.

VISA Classic

MORGAN WELLS 4512 xxxx xxxx xxxx
STATEMENT FROM APRIL 02 TO APRIL 29, 2003

NEW BALANCE: \$4,104.23
MINIMUM PAYMENT: \$93.00
PAYMENT DUE DATE: May 13, 2003
CREDIT LIMIT: \$5000.00
AVAILABLE CREDIT: \$895.77
ANNUAL INTEREST RATE: 18.50%
AMOUNT PAID:

APR 04 RED DRAGON RESTAURANT TORONTO ON	\$34.00
APR 04 BELL MOBILITY INC MISSISSAUGA ON	\$67.63
APR 07 DUPONT SUPERMARKET TORONTO ON	\$15.17
APR 10 HOME DEPOT TORONTO ON	\$134.11
APR 14 GREYHOUND LINES TORONTO ON	\$15.52
APR 14 MCCORKS LONDON ON	\$78.00
APR 15 COLES #451# LONDON ON	\$51.24
APR 16 GREYHOUND LINES LONDON ON	\$15.52
APR 21 FOODSMART TORONTO ON	\$32.12
APR 25 LCBO TORONTO ON	\$22.34
APR 27 PC#4197 TORONTO ON	\$62.50
APR 29 PAYMENT - THANK YOU / PAIEMENT - MERCI	-\$150.00

What was in London? A job interview? Maybe that's where Morgan was from. Apparently, he liked Chinese food and Irish pubs. Seventy-eight dollars seemed like a lot. He must've gone with friends. Was he the type of guy to buy the rounds? If so, thought Morgan, he couldn't be married. Then who was the woman in his apartment? Nat?

Morgan wondered what the other Morgan would think when he realised he hadn't received his monthly visa statement. Would he say something to the person on the couch? Would he call Visa after a couple of weeks? Not if he was still a student. He probably wouldn't even notice it was missing. He would never suspect stolen.

In his notebook, Morgan wrote his observations in point form, numbered and subnumbered, lettered and sublettered. He was surprisingly inconsistent, though he would gradually perfect the process, adopting a blend of both numbers and letters, with the latter being subordinate to the former. He wrote Morgan's address at the top of a blank page. After opening the bank statements, he also wrote his account numbers down. When he wrote the numbers down, he was reminded of his alphabetic-numeric project. Could the numbers on the visa statement also correspond to letters? If so, what kind of words would they create? Beside the first Morgan Wells's savings account number, which was 126-543-96, Morgan wrote this sequence: *ABF-EDC-IF*.

In the margins, he tried a number of letter combinations. *DEAF-BC-IF*. *F-DICE-FAB*. *I-C-A-FED-B-F*. The last combination he recorded, the one he settled upon, was *FIB-FACED*.

Morgan opened the rest of the three envelopes he'd squeezed between his knuckles. There was one from a local politician, one from Blockbuster threatening legal

action (the other Morgan had an outstanding balance of \$11.00), and another announcing that Morgan Wells had just won a Carnival cruise.

After scanning through the junk, Morgan put the letters into the file folder and scrutinised Heidi York's white envelope. It was post-dated April 28th. She lived in Brampton.

Morgan used a butter knife and carefully cut along the crease. When he opened the envelope, along the short edge, he wondered how the other Morgan Wells opened his mail. The long edge? The short edge? The folded paper inside the envelope was neat and crisp. Morgan expected the letter to have a sweet smell, like women's perfume, scented oils. Currants. He tried to remove the letter using his fingers, but the rubber gloves made things difficult. With the visa statement, he didn't worry about tears. But this letter was different. It deserved the same care its sender had obviously put into it. So he pulled the letter out of the envelope using a pair of tweezers. He then put his nose deep into the envelope and breathed. It smelled like glue and fibres, and made him feel cold.

Morgan put the envelope down. He unfolded the letter, massaged its creases between rubbery fingers. And he read.

Dear Morgan,

Hi! I've been trying to keep in touch with you, but I couldn't find your phone number. I tried emailing, but no luck, so I'm thinking it probably went into your junkbox. I hope you still live at this address.

How are things? I'm back in Brampton now. Obviously. Montréal didn't exactly work out. I can tell you about that some time maybe?

I'm working for my father. Yes, what progress eh? I've been in contact with OCAD and will probably go back to school, finish up, maybe even as early as June.

What about you? Still studying economics? How's your collection of old textbooks? Last I remember it was massive.

Well, I wanted to say hello, because it's been a long time and I'd love to see you again. I wrote my number on the envelope if you want to call, or you can

just write. Personally, I like letters, even though they've not practical. Bit of a time waster really.

Don't feel pressured to respond.

Gerberas rule, Heidi.

Don't feel pressured to respond? Until he came across this line, Morgan assumed Heidi was just a friend. But wouldn't a friend say just the opposite? You better respond, or I can't wait to hear from you. Only an ex-girlfriend would provide such a disclaimer.

Morgan read Heidi's note again, and as he did, filled an entire page listing the keywords in the letter.

Touch

Phone number

Address

Brampton

Montréal

Maybe

Economics

Textbooks

Love

Practical

Respond

Talk

He next defined each of these words in his own words.

Touch: tactile tactility tact hush to connect or link or form a chain

Phone number: commune, communiqué, penumbra

Address: place of residence, place of being, speak to

Brampton: one-hour drive

Montréal: four-hour drive

Maybe: with doubt, with uncertainty, with hope

Economics: with doubt, with uncertainty, with hope

Textbooks: miscellany, missals, missiles

Love: with doubt, with uncertainty, with hope

Practical: c a lip cart

Respond: to address someone at his or her place of residence

Talk: awk awk ask ask ask

He scratched these discoveries out, lightly, with his pen.

Morgan tried to surmise how long it had been since Heidi had last spoken with the other Morgan. Obviously, they were students when they met. Was Morgan still a student? If Heidi had taken some time off, apparently to become an artist in Montréal, would that have given Morgan enough time to graduate? A degree in economics? That made sense. He played squash.

She didn't lose his phone number. Of course she still had it. If she was an ex-girlfriend, then she was making excuses. There had probably been lots of times when she sat next to the phone with his number already dialled, her thumb on the hook. Squeamishly debating the pros and cons. His response, the tone of his voice, would tell her too much too fast.

If she was too afraid to call, Morgan could only assume that she was somehow in the wrong. Perhaps she'd broken up with him, maybe she'd cheated. Maybe she'd disappeared.

An image of Heidi began to take shape, realigned the letters on the page to form more words, more descriptions. "There's not much else to say," became "I have so many things to tell you, I don't know where to start." "I like sending letters," became "I'm too afraid to call." "Don't feel pressured to respond," became "If you don't respond, I'll decide this letter got lost in the mail."

Morgan realised that when he tried to picture what Heidi York looked like, the first image that came to mind was that of a small animal, a hamster or a guinea pig, running in a lab maze. He copied this observation into his notebook.

Morgan used his magnifying glass on the letter. Near the bottom, he found a pen scratch, an inch or two below her signed name. Had she planned on adding a post-script?

Or had her pen randomly grazed the page in thinking. If so, that would mean that she had spent some time putting this message together, which further evidenced his ex-girlfriend theory. Either way, a scratch or an unfinished post-script, the hesitation hinted at uncertainty. He knew now, she wasn't an old friend. She was Morgan's university girlfriend, interested in reigniting their failed relationship.

Beyond the picture he gained of Heidi, a more nuanced image of Morgan also emerged. An economics Major. Probably finished now for a year or so. Not a student, which made more sense. He was still quite young, but he carried himself like a man who worked, made money, believed in time-management. A banker? Young entrepreneur? He'd probably graduated a year or two before. This person still owned his textbooks. He was the type who saved everything, from kindergarten to now, any assignment, test or scribbler he'd ever owned. The type of person who buried a time capsule when he was ten years old, and still remembered where he buried it. Morgan could see the inside of this other Morgan's closet, boxes and boxes of old report cards, photographs, and textbooks, the man's entire history in two metres cubed. His squash racquet, and pictures of his friends on his bedroom wall. Nothing under the bed, not even a sock. A modest collection of Bette Davis postcards.

Morgan folded Heidi's letter back into its envelope. A few moments later, he found some paper and wrote:

Dear Heidi

Hi! It's been so long. I didn't expect to hear from you at all. But I have to say, this is quite a nice surprise. I definitely remember you and

Morgan crumpled the page and started again.

Dear Heidi

Hi! Yes, the textbook collection is alive and well. As am I. I was happy to hear from you this morning. Are you happy to hear back from me? Are you happy?

Morgan stopped. Should he agree to meet with her? Tell her he was too busy with his new life, new girl? Of course, he knew which direction he would take, but it seemed worth debating.

He pulled the other stolen letters out of the folder and taped them onto the wall in front of him. He re-examined the bills, and jotted some adjectives into the margins of his notebook.

*Stylish.
Thrifty.
White.
Educated.
Athletic.
Drinks imported beer.
Neo-conservative.
A fan of Peter Mansbridge.
Keeps in touch with his grade seven science teacher.
Calls old friends to brag about promotions.
Feels most comfortable in golf shirts.*

After writing the list, Morgan attempted to draw Morgan Wells from memory. He wasn't a particularly gifted artist, but the sketch helped.

Two hours later, Morgan finished the letter. In the end, it was less than five lines long.

Heidi
It's good to hear from you. I'm glad to hear you're pursuing the artist thing. I'm working in the marketing department for Leeman and Welsh. I make pretty good money, and get to travel lots. I'm not sure which email address you have, so I'll have to give you my new one. We should get together soon.
Gerberas rule,
Morgan

Morgan read through the letter. He thought he captured the essence of the other Morgan Wells. Leeman and Welsh was a firm Morgan had made up, but he thought it sounded believable. He also assumed that Heidi York wasn't the type to over-investigate letters from lost loves. At first he was going to sign-off with something casual, such as "later." This Morgan Wells was certainly the type of guy to finish his letters with a "later" sign-off. Especially where it concerned an ex-girlfriend. But then he remembered that Heidi had signed her letter with "Gerberas rule." It must've been a thing they did, a reference about which Morgan could only speculate. Perhaps those were her favourite flowers? Or the type of flowers he used to buy for her?

One thing was missing from his letter. An email address. He could include his own, but Morgan hadn't checked his email since *she 'd* taken the computer. Even if it was still up and running, it was probably overrun with spam. He'd have to use the internet at the public library to activate a new hotmail account. Also, the other Morgan didn't seem like the type to use conjunctions. He'd have to correct that on the final draft. Finally, if Heidi had dated him, she would likely remember his handwriting, probably owned a few old love letters and might even double-check if she became suspicious. He would have to type the letter before sending it. Just to be safe.

Morgan packed up his kit and put the loose tools in a Tupperware with a melted cover. He spent the rest of his evening walking and thinking about Heidi. On his walk, he passed a used clothing store and saw an old typewriter in the window. A Smith-Corona Coronet Super 12 with a half-full cartridge. He bought it for \$6.99.

A LOST DOG AND THE DISCOVERY OF IMPERITIVE MARGINALIA

November 28, 2003, Evening:

My mother is listening at the door. That's my fear.

She's not listening. She is in bed. Ross is in bed. They're probably fucking.

Gross.

The following four days were a waste of time for me. Also, they were incredibly dull. I cut my wrists twice just to sharpen things up, which isn't normal for me. Once in the kitchen and another time in the bathtub. In the kitchen, there was so much blood. I couldn't believe how much there was. The blood just spurted out like a fire hose. I painted the cabinets purple before falling to the floor. In the tub, I stuck my wrists underwater when I cut them open, and saw the blood move through the water, a current under the sea. My death sounded like a Jacuzzi, and then the water turned so red I could see my own reflection. I passed out thinking I was bathing in Kool-Aid.

Boredom alert red.

I went to the address down the street a few times, but no one was ever home. I pretty much forgot about the other addresses. It's not that I didn't have the time. No. I didn't forget about them. But I could see from my map that each address deserved its own visit, its own day, and the prospects were enormous. I couldn't unfold the map each morning and then trek off. Partly it had to do with conspicuousness. It would've been disastrous had my plans become too obvious to them. Dave and Val. My brother and his idiotically idiotic wife. I wasn't particularly ready to explain. Which stems, possibly, from my inability to explain it to myself. To self-explain.

At any rate, it seemed fruitful to wait until I'd thoroughly investigated and strategically questioned the residents of the house down the street. In a two-day span I went there three, maybe even five times. But no contact. I say three/five because the first two times I went I didn't actually knock because I was with Val and Luis, and knocking on the door was simply impossible with those two accomplices. With Luis and his singing, and Val singing with him.

August 16, 2003, Afternoon:

“Day-O!”

“Da-a-ay-O!”

“Daylight come and me wanna go home. Daylight come and me wanna go home.”

November 28, 2003, Evening:

But I did look at the house both times we passed, and it's too bad that they were with me. I could see that someone was home. It would've been worth it, perhaps, to lie to Val and say that the grocery store wasn't my thing. She and Luis would've continued on their merry way, I would've waited, and then conducted my lost dog act. But there was no guarantee that Val would've gone to the store. And suddenly I'm stuck back in the house with the two of them. Another game of Trivial Pursuit? Plus, to truly make the situation a no-brainer, Val wore a purple tank top with spaghetti straps and I could see her shoulder blades wincing against her amazingly deep and textured brown skin. Which is the softest skin spot I know of, that piece between the shoulder blade and the spinal

cord, when the blade is flexed, and the skin suspended there, like a tarp, glowing in the sun and perspiring just the right amount. Amy has let me touch this spot on her back several times, but it's not the same. Touching Val's skin would murder me. I'd be electrocuted. Nevertheless, I spent most of that walk a few steps behind Val, glancing at the spot, and then at her calves, and then at the spot again until I put my hands in my pockets and pulled my shirt down with my thumbs and moved up front to clear my head.

We went to the grocery store to pick up some things for Luis's party, even though it was still more than a week away. Some snack foods, which, thanks to Val, were without sugar and salt, and mostly made of vegetable or fruit or bread. A brick of bread that cost \$6 and was made out of brown rice. Val calls them treats and it blows my mind that Luis also thinks of them as treats. Treats? Gross. I've told him many times about chocolate bars, Wunderbars in particular, but he just looks back at me like I'm speaking Chinese. I seriously wonder if he knows what I'm saying. Martin used to say that Luis was a genius child, but any kid who requests rice cakes for his birthday party must be slightly brainwashed.

August 16, 2003, Afternoon:

[Background noise sounds a bit like an ocean breathing, and now and again is punctuated by someone yapping into a microphone: "Susan P. to customer service, Susan P. to customer service please," and sometimes: "Attention shoppers," or "There's a blue Toyota parked in the handicap zone." And also a quiet hum of radio music, the type of songs you can't hear unless you turn the volume up full blast and zone out. Occasionally, the sound of a can hitting the bottom of a shopping cart.]

“¿Cuáles quieres?”

“Estos.”

“¿Estos?”

“Sí.”

“What do you think?”

“What are they?”

“Delicious. They have coconut in them.”

“Whatever.”

“No importa.”

“¿Tomamos arroz con leche también?”

“Yo quiero tapioca.”

“¿Tapioca?”

“Sí, por favor.”

“¿Con pacanas?”

“Sí, ¡riquísima!”

“Would you mind getting some tapioca mix?”

“Tapioca?”

“It’s right ... No, is that....?”

“This stuff?”

“Can you reach? Great.”

“Here.”

“Thanks. It’s one of his favourites.”

“What is it?”

“You’ve never had tapioca?”

[I’ve never had tapioca, and even on Luis’s birthday I didn’t have tapioca. I didn’t have anything but cut-up apples and fistfuls of melonballs.]

“Okay, I’ll get the soy and would you mind...?”

“What?”

“Well, I was thinking some yogurt would be nice but ... do you know the difference ... you know, I’d better get it. Be right back”

November 28, 2003, Evening:

Val started towards the dairy section with her arms pointing out in front of her. I stood there by the shopping cart for a while. Boring. So I walked to the deli counter, the displays of meat glowing in fluorescent light like some school science fair exhibit. Wrapped and stamped, neat and tidy. I’d heard Val talking to Dave about her disgust with the meat industry. Another conversation of theirs that ended with a discussion on tones, overtones and undertones, levels and volumes. How can so many conversations end like that without either of them aware of it? Is there a purpose behind a conversation that always ends on the topic of tones? Why do they bother to speak to one another when they always reach the identical conclusions? Don’t raise your voice and don’t talk to me like that. They must know the conclusions they will come to. To which they will come.

Although I do not often share any thoughts or opinions with the onion-faced Dave, I think it worth noting that for this particular conversation I had to side with my brother. I also am a wonderful fan of meats and in the end I do not care how I get it, or how it gets to me. I like chicken, and beef, and pork, in that order. Chicken is famous for

its versatility. Beef for its constancy. Pork for bacon. Even Val admitted that everyone loves bacon.

I was standing near the meat display and imagining the meats didn't come from farm animals, but from human bodies. I imagined my own body being cleaved to pieces by the butcher, and the meat being pulled from the bones and slabbed onto Styrofoam plates and wrapped in Saran. I was thinking that it's too bad Val didn't eat meat – but would she make an exception for me? I was picturing Val cutting up parts of my brain on a plate and spooning blood soup into her mouth when I noticed Luis standing a few feet away, and then the thing that he did, so disgusting that I couldn't even tell Val about it. And this again attests to his possible lunacy.

He was wearing a blue shirt with red sleeves and a stupid little kid hat, and he reached forward into one of the fridge sections and rubbed his fingers against a butterball, a big turkey that might've weighed more than him. Yes, and he rubbed his fingers against the ice crystals on the outside, like he was scraping up snow. Then he looked at me and put his fingers in his mouth. Stuffed his mouth with turkey frost. He swallowed. *Jesus*. He smiled as he rubbed the remaining wet against his lips. So he was Dave's kid after all. I felt like taking the turkey and possibly dropping it on his stupid curly head. But before I could, he went ahead and scooped up another mouthful, which was too much for me, so I had to leave and go straight down the closest aisle. I ended up at the magazine stand. But I didn't intend on going there, only I had to get away from Luis, whose actions were this close to making me fall in front of a bus.

As a result, we had to spend an extra twenty minutes in the grocery store, because Luis lost himself. Val came back to the cart and couldn't find him, then she found me,

without Luis, and nearly lost herself. She's like my mom in a way, because even though I could tell she felt like putting me in a headlock, or at least screaming at me, she remained calm, and only told me, after we found Luis eating green beans in the vegetable section, that I'd been "pretty irresponsible." Dave would've surely massacred me right there. He would've taken the butcher's knife and stabbed out my eyes. He would've ground me up and made burritos for Val. He would've surely massacred me after the fact if Val had told him what had happened. Only she did not.

When we finally got home, Dave was in the kitchen talking on the phone. I helped unpack the groceries.

August 16, 2003, Evening:

[Val and Luis are getting supper ready, clanging pots and pans and talking to each other, probably in Spanish but it's hard to tell, because their voices are so quiet compared to Dave's, who seems always to speak louder when a phone is next to his mouth, as though he has to yell across some great distance, though it's really because he doesn't get many phone calls, so when someone actually calls him he makes the most of it and lets everyone know that he's on the phone, finally ... and being loud and laughing as though his friend is the funniest person he's ever met, when it's probably not his friend but some telemarketer or survey man or sometimes, it's possible, no one at all.]

"OH! NO! NO! NO!"

[Raucous burst of laughter]

"Then what did he did do? What did he do? Omigod! That's fu... that's ridiculous."

[6.2 second pause]

“Well it doesn’t surprise me. He’s had that coming. Oh definitely. Yes. *Yes.*”

“Val, where does this go?”

“Top cupboard. Right above the sink.”

“This one?”

“The left.”

“Are you serious? You know, he’s been mouthing off to just about everyone person he’s ever met, so it was only a matter of time. I mean, he’s aware of his size, right? That’s what it is. He’s aware of his size. The guy’s a fucking—”

“Dave!”

“—liability, sorry, and... well no kidding. No, he’s a liability. I went out with him once for a ... just a quiet pub for a beer, but he was already... no, one of the Firkins I think. Let’s say it was one of the Firkins. The King’s Head? Anyway, I show up and he’s already been ... yeah? I don’t ... I don’t doubt it. I don’t. Well, so we were, I mean ... he was there for about two or three hours, completely gassed, just wasted. You know how he gets. Meanwhile I’m sober, and he tries to pour me a drink but spills it all over the table, and then, I wasn’t there for ten minutes and he throws the pitcher, a half-full pitcher at this trio of girls in a booth and ... yeah, a kind of overhand lob. Exactly. It landed right in the middle of the table, beer spilling out and these girls cursing, completely pissing their panties... you’re not putting onions in that are you?”

“Just a bit.”

“Val.”

“Dave.”

“Not even half, please.”

“Oh excuse me? Are you cooking dinner?”

[4.4 second pause.]

“Dave?”

“Anyway, so we got kicked out, but only after he threw a second pitcher. I know. I know. I don’t feel bad for him. I bet no one does. Why should they? I mean, he’s a great guy, but let’s face it, he’s a total fucking asshole. Maybe this will—”

“Dave!”

[3.9 second pause.]

“Hey, I’m gonna switch phones okay? Just a sec.” [Dave puts the phone down.]

“Hang up when I yell little brother.”

November 28, 2003, Evening:

Dave has a phone in his office, where he works. He locks the door most of the time, though he sometimes forgets. I think he locks it because he’s looking at weird bestiality sexsites. Only once did he allow me in there. The day before I went back home. He works for an internet company. He told me his job is to basically surf the web all day for dead websites. It seems like such a ridiculous and pointless job, but apparently there are millions of unused websites out there just floating around in cyberspace. Mainly, he finds ones that haven’t been updated in 4 months? 8? 23? I forget how long it takes. He told me this right after he claimed that he’s the one who invented the term “splash-guard.” That’s when you push the lip of your coffee cup lid into the cup, so when you’re driving the coffee doesn’t splash around and spill outside of the cup. I say this now only

because it strengthens the argument that Dave is ramrodded fuckerhead, and not my enemy simply for being my lookalike by a fifty-percent margin of error.

He might just be the biggest complainer I've met in my time on God's green earth.

For instance, later that evening, Dave had a cold and wouldn't stop complaining about it. The power was back on, but the blackout was on the news constantly. My brother sat on the couch and blew his nose into toilet paper, and left the wads on the coffee table, and mentioned every ten minutes that his throat hurt. I excused myself and went for a walk.

It was still overtly hot. I had to wear a long-sleeved shirt and jeans just to keep the setting sun off my skin. I considered taking Val's umbrella, but I am not a fan of extremities.

I was sweating by the time I arrived at the house down the street. It had a large porch that seemed to sink in against the foundation, and I wondered if the wood was rotten. Being eaten by termites and large wood eating city rats. Not the country rats that I sometimes see in my mom's backyard. Three days since I'd bought the map, and this was the closest I had come to knocking on the door.

I knocked. No one answered. I tried the door. Locked.

The next day, I went back, earlier this time. Val and Luis were at the beach. I refrained from going with them on account of my pale skin condition, which Val doubts. The condition is bad. A few years ago a group of government agents tortured me by strapping me into a tanning bed and giving me a horrific, skin-blistering sunburn. They then pulled me out of the bed and proceeded to slap my purple, swollen skin until it

cracked and bled. But that wasn't the worst of it. That was only pain. It was afterwards, a day later, when the burn started to itch that I truly lost it. I writhed against the wooden board they'd strapped me to, screaming and crying for ointment. They videotaped the whole thing, and for a while the tape circulated on the internet. It didn't include the part where I confessed to knowing top secret terrorist information. I was then a king of plots. They knew sunburns were my greatest weakness, the only sure way to get answers. After they were finished with me, a man in a blue suit came in and shot me in the head.

I knocked on the door. I could hear someone inside. Then a small woman with red hair was standing in front of me, holding a newspaper in her hand. There were beads drooping off her neck and down her shirt. She wore a ring with a giant blue stone on it, and for a while I couldn't look at anything else.

August 19th, 2003, Afternoon:

[Sound of a door opening. You can hear the chimes on the front making music.]

"Hello."

"Hi."

"How can I help you?"

"I'm looking for my dog."

"Your what?"

"My dog. Sammy."

"That doesn't sound like a dog's name."

"It's *my* dog's name."

“Do you have a photo?”

“No.”

“You don’t have a photo? You should.”

“I don’t.”

“You really should.”

“I don’t.”

“What kind of dog is it?”

“I don’t know.”

“How can you not know? Do you at least know what she looks like?”

“She’s brown.”

“Gee, that narrows it down. Is she big or small?”

“Both.”

“I can’t help you.” [Chimes.]

“What’s your name?”

“Pardon me?”

“Your name?”

“Why do you want to know my name?”

“Mom told me that I have to ask each person on this street if they’ve seen my dog before she’ll give me the money to print posters. So I need your name to prove I was here.”

“What?”

“I just need your name. That way I can prove that I spoke to you. Perhaps also your favourite colour.”

“Your mother won’t help you print posters?”

“She thinks Sammy’s dead.”

[4.4 second pause.]

“She told you that?”

[I think I nodded, or maybe just looked at the woman’s amazing ring.]

“Hang on a second.”

[She closes the door here, but not completely. I push it open the whole way.

Chimes.]

“Here, come in. Close the door. I’ve got an idea. My husband has a printer. Why don’t we just print a few off right now? I’m Sara by the way.”

November 28, 2003, Evening:

Bookcases lined the walls in Sara’s apartment. They were in the foyer, along the stairwell, and even in the dining room. Sara led me into the living room, also encased in bookcases. Even beneath the windows were shorter bookcases. Other than that, there was only a couch, a desk and one chair. As far I could tell, Sara did not own a television.

The centre of the room was completely bare, and I remember thinking it would be a good place for dancing.

August 19th, 2003, Afternoon:

“Make yourself comfortable.”

“Thanks.”

“Did you want a glass of water or anything?”

“I don’t get thirsty.”

“No?”

“No.”

“Why not?”

“I have a certain gene.”

“Hmmm. That’s interesting.”

“I know what that means.”

“What what means?”

“Whenever someone says something is interesting, it only means they can’t come up with a nice way to say it’s not. Interesting means boring.”

“That’s not true. I think lots of things are interesting.”

“Like what?”

“I think the fact that you’re a complete stranger and you’re standing in my living room is interesting. I think the fact that we’re about to make posters for your dog is interesting. If I found these things boring, then I wouldn’t be doing them.”

“You must be the only person in the world who doesn’t do boring things.”

“I think there are probably lots of people in the world who don’t do boring things.”

“I haven’t met any.”

“Maybe that’s because you’re boring.”

[5.3 second.]

“That was a joke.”

“Okay.”

“Why didn’t you laugh?”

“I don’t laugh.”

“Another genetic mutation?”

“Just a bad sense of humour.”

“You don’t need a sense of humour to find things funny. Do you know what the key to comedy is?”

“Telling a good—”

“Timing.” [Chimes] “So you lied.”

“I wasn’t laughing.”

“You smiled.”

“So?”

“That means you found it funny.”

“No. I found it interesting.”

November 28, 2003, Evening:

The whole time we spoke, Sara was booting her computer. She had to reboot twice until it finally came on. Then she brought up Word and asked me again for a description, and this time I gave her one in a bit more detail. A brown dog of medium size. With three white dots on her nose and a yellowish trail down her neck. Responds to the name Sammy and wears a blue collar. We used Daves and Val’s phone number.

I was surprised at myself for coming up with the details, considering I hadn’t planned on going this far with the story.

Sara asked me to verify the document with my own eyes. It was adequate. Then she pressed print.

August 19, 2003, Afternoon

[The sound of a printer printing posters, which also sounds like knuckles cracking, but only if the volume is turned up until the sound gets distorted.]

“And there you go.”

“Thanks for helping.”

“No problem.”

[Printer sounds.]

“If you don’t mind me asking, why won’t your mother give you the money? Even if something happened to your dog, it’s still worth putting up posters.”

“There’re lots of reasons for my mother’s behaviour. But I don’t know any of them.”

“That can’t be true.”

“Why not?”

“A know-it-all like yourself?”

“I’m not a know-it-all.”

“Then you’re ignorant?”

“No.”

“So which?”

“Which are you?”

[The printer seizes up, and the computer beeps that there has been a paper jam.]

“Oh shit. It always does that.”

“Is it broken?”

“No. Can you pull the paper out? Yeah, yank it all out.”

“What if I break it?”

“You won’t break it. Pull harder.”

“It’s not... it’s not coming.”

“Just yank it.”

“I don’t want to break it.”

“If it makes you feel any better, I hope you do.”

“Okay.”

[I pull really hard, and then there is the sound of paper being torn. 4.7 seconds later, the printer starts printing again.]

August 19, 2003, Afternoon:

“Perfect. You know I had a dog before. I was ten. How old were you when you got your dog?”

“Same age roughly. Might’ve been nine.”

“His name was Peanut. My little brother named him. Do you know why?”

“No.”

“Because he loved peanut butter.”

“Interesting...”

“We had him for fifteen years. How much is that in dog years? It’s a lot. Near the end, he couldn’t walk up the stairs. My mom would carry him. But we couldn’t put him down. Even though he smelled and was in pain. I don’t know what was wrong with us.”

“What do you mean?”

“We should’ve put the poor thing down.”

“But you loved her?”

“Him. I think it might’ve been less out of love and more... You know, we wouldn’t even pet him near the end.”

“Why not?”

“The smell. As soon as you touched him the smell would be on you. For hours. I used to wear an oven mitt sometimes and pet him with that, but it’s not the same. I think he could tell. Could tell we were just patronising him.”

“That’s a shame.”

“It is.”

“What happened to her?”

“Him. When he died, we buried him in our front yard. Gave a little ceremony.”

“That sounds sweet.”

“It was. My brother said, Peanut, you were a good dog. We’re sorry.”

“That’s nice.”

“Actually, we laughed.”

“Then what happened?”

“Then? Nothing, really. Well, I guess we forgot about him for a while. But then that spring we had some really heavy rainfall. We’d buried him on a slight decline, and

the rain pushed the soil down the hill ... do you know what it's like to see your dog like that? Literally skin and bones? He looked like an old blanket. Ugh. It still gives me shivers."

"*Jesus.*"

[2.2 seconds.]

"I'm sorry. This is an awful story. Here, the posters are done."

"They look good."

"They'd be better with a photo. Why don't you have any?"

"Because we only moved here recently. We had to move in the middle of the night, and we couldn't take everything with us. I didn't need a photo of her until she got lost."

"I suppose. But that's why you take pictures, right? In case things get lost?"

"I don't know. I don't own a camera."

[The phone rings. Sara picks it up.]

"Hello? Oh hi honey ... yeah? Well, nothing right now. Actually, I'm printing posters ... for a lost dog ... for this ... hey, what's your name by the way?"

"Dave."

"For Dave. He's a neighbourhood kid. Lost his dog and ... have you seen a brown dog, mid-range size, wandering around? With a red collar?"

"Blue."

"A blue collar?"

"I should go."

“Just a sec. Well, that’s why we’re printing posters. No. No. I don’t know. I haven’t heard of it ... sure, sure, whatever... yeah, whatever you want is fine by me. Well how long? Okay. Okay. Yeah, no, I’ll tell you about it when you come home. Where are you anyway? Where? Where? Okay ... okay Morgan ... okay. Love you too. Bye.”

November 28, 2003, Evening:

I left Sara’s after the phone call. If I learned anything from that visit, it was that her husband’s name was Morgan. A name that starts with the magical letter M. Still, it meant nothing. The whole time I talked to her I was looking for clues in the bookshelves that held nothing but books and sometimes speakers. Idiotically, I did not even try to trick her into leaving the room, which is what a truly great detective would’ve done. She even asked me if I wanted water. The problem, as I remember it, is that she ended up tricking me. For a while, I thought I really was looking for my dog. I recorded a note to myself, reminding my brain never to lose focus, even when the person I’m speaking with just happens to have a magnificent set of teeth, regardless of the gap between the big ones. I did not like her hair, however, because I have a thing against red hair.

Val made burritos that night for supper. Dave came to the table late and complained that his food was cold. Even though that’s the only time Val will cook beef, and Dave had been complaining for days about the lack of red meat on “his” table.

August 19, 2003, Evening:

“I can’t taste anything.”

“I know. I added more spice but I can’t taste it either.”

“Why not?”

“I have a cold too.”

“Obviously not as bad as mine.”

“Or maybe I’m not complaining about it as much as you.”

“If you had this cold you’d be complaining. Believe me. It’s August. This is ridiculous. Does Luis have a cold? Do you have a cold little brother?”

“No.”

“You must’ve brought it here.”

“I said I don’t have a cold.”

“Did you have one before you came?”

“No.”

“Right.”

“Dave, can you pass the beans?”

“You can reach. What kind of wine is this?”

“Australian Shiraz.”

“Hmmm.”

“It’s good.”

“I can barely taste it. I don’t like Australian wine.”

“They make some of the best wines in the world.”

“You think?”

“It gets really high ratings.”

“Let’s say it’s popular.”

“Let’s say it’s good.”

“I can’t taste it.”

November 28, 2003, Evening:

I could only eat one burrito. Val was serious when she added the extra spice. Gave me a horrendous case of indigestion, and made my night a hell storm.

Nothing really happened the next day. Val made me take Luis to the park for an hour. I sat on a swing and listened to my recordings. Luis kept bugging me to push him, and after a while I did, not because I felt like it, but because I could listen to my tapes and push him at the same time. I kept rewinding my conversation with Sara, listening to it again and again. I felt an incredible magnetism toward her voice, especially when she laughed, which reminded me of falling water. I pushed Luis on his swing, and looked towards Sara’s place, wondered how likely it would be for her to come walking into the park. Without her husband, of course. I thought about the list of addresses, and wondered if Sara would help me. My mistake was that I hadn’t shown it to her right away. She seemed trustworthy. Then again, I didn’t want to blow my cover.

Although I listened to the conversation with Sara about a million times at the park, I wasn’t listening with the right kind of ears. It wasn’t until a few hours later, listening to my tapes in my room, that I made an important discovery. Everyone else, along with Brenda and Mark, friends of Dave and Val, were in the living room, waiting for Dave to light the barbeque, while Luis and Brenda and Mark’s kid Wilson or William or some W-name did stupid dances in the middle of the floor.

I prefer the company of my tapes.

August 19, 2003, Evening:

“I went to the house down the street. A woman answered the door and bought my dog story. She invited me in and printed posters for me. I wonder what Dave will think if the phone starts ringing with sightings of his lost brown dog.”

August 19, 2003, Evening:

“I do not like people with red hair. Their eyebrows do not exist, a deconcerting trait. Disconcerting. Sara was sexually titillating. Is this the woman that Dave is sleeping around with? She’s nowhere near as enviable as Val. I do not think a woman of Sara’s deposition would touch someone like Dave with a metre stick, let alone an actual part of her body. Which is nice, if a little rakey. Then again, Val touches Dave all the time. What goes on in her mind?”

August 19, 2003, Evening:

“I wonder why she’s on the list. And who is her husband? She called him Morgan. Is he the M the map design refers to? The M to whom the map refers? I’ll have to investigate further.”

November 28, 2003, Evening:

After listening to the above observations, a thought came to me. Or, rather, I rolled over and noticed the WWII field manual on my desk. I turned off my recorder, put it on the nightstand and opened the book. I remembered reading the name Morgan somewhere before, but I couldn’t remember where. I opened the cover of the manual but

was let down. No names were written inside the book. The only writing was the dedication, “You’ll need this where your going.” Again, I had to fight to urge to correct the mistake. From now on, I saw the book as evidence. I couldn’t say what of, but I knew it meant something.

Although the field manual yielded no advancements, it did remind me of the book of poetry in which I’d found the address list to begin with. *A Description of the World Called a Blazing World*. What an idiot. How could I have forgotten about it? I’d put it back behind the drawer where I found it, not even realising it’s significance. I quietly went out into the hallway. I could hear Dave telling his story about the time he ate fifty-six chicken wings and won some pub competition.

I sneaked down the hall, slipped quietly past the living room, and then Val and Dave’s bedroom. I thought I saw Val sitting on the edge of the bed. My mind started to wander into uncharted territories when I thought of Val waiting in there for me, possibly in her nightgown, or just completely naked and Mexican. But the bed was empty and then I remembered what I was looking for. For what I was looking?

In the kitchen, I used my best thieving skills to silently open the right drawer. I pulled it forward, but for some reason the thing wouldn’t come off the tracks. Using my intelligence, I then removed the plastic cutlery tray and placed it on top of the counter. I swept my hand over the interior of the drawer and pulled out other loose items. A jar top. Some loose pieces of paper with recipes written on them, smudged with jam. An oven mitt with a whole burned in the centre that reminded me of Sara’s dog. Bread crumbs, an old wishbone, four pennies. A few odd packages of take-out Soy sauce. An opened chicken bouillon cube. A broken crayon.

After cleaning the drawer, I tried again and again to quietly unhinge it. But it wouldn't come out all the way. Even though I knew I had to be silent, eventually I became frustrated. Quite frankly, I was pissed. Also, I thought back to the first time I pulled the drawer out. It seemed to me that the only way to pull the drawer out was to yank on it with all my strength. So I stood square in front of it, put both hands on the front of the drawer and pulled like I was the anchor in a tug of war.

Immediately, the face of the drawer broke away and I landed on my back, beneath the kitchen table.

I lay there for a while, feeling as though I'd just dropped a bomb in the middle of the night. I've seen bombs explode before. I was on a subway once and I watched a man tape an explosive device to the bottom of his seat. Sweat gathered instantly under my arms and around my neck. I couldn't move. I listened to the sound of the timer ticking away the seconds. I saw the bomb go off in slow-motion, watched the fire expand from beneath the seat, a brightening light, an exploding heart of fire. It overtook the subway car seat by seat, person by person, until it hit me, a hot flash of blood enveloping everything, and I felt my skin blister and liquefy, a splash of white against the melting plastic, the swollen steel, and death swallowed me up in jaws of twisted metal.

No one heard me. They were being loud and laughing at Dave's story. If they heard me, they didn't care enough to investigate. I picked myself up off the floor and tried to put the front of the drawer into its original spot. The nails went into the holes, but it wasn't a very sturdy arrangement. Either way, I decided to just reach behind the drawer and retrieve the book. My hands and arms are relatively skinny, so it wasn't so hard. I only wished I'd thought of it sooner.

I pulled the book out of its hiding place and placed it on top of the counter. Then I swept the drawer things back into their place, and put the cutlery tray back. I had to take it out two seconds after I put it in, because I put it in backwards. But once I reversed it, I closed the drawer and crept quietly out of the kitchen. Dave and his friends were laughing, and Val was asking if anyone needed any drinks. I walked stealthily past the living room door as she walked out. I sneaked back into my bedroom. I closed the door and listened for anyone coming down the hall. The hall was silent, so I put the poetry book onto the desk and opened it to the first page. And there, on the top right corner of the first page, a few inches above the note from Maria, was the name Morgan Wells.

Morgan Wells? How could I have missed this the first time? In some sense, I figure I must've been distracted by the woman's writing, thinking it was clearly addressed to Dave. The book did not belong to Dave, but to someone else. Another man. Sara's husband. Was he sleeping with Val? If so, then who was Maria?

August 21, 2003, Evening:

"Morgan Wells. That's his name. He's the one who collected the addresses. But who is he? And why the list? He might be a friend of Dave's, but I no longer feel as though Dave has much involvement in this. Of course. This is much bigger than Dave, more than a simple affair. There's something else going on. I need to check my tapes. All of them, from the day I arrived until now. The name sounds familiar. But am I sure Sara called him Morgan?"

November 28, 2003, Evening:

I went back to my tapes. Not only had Sara called the man on the phone Morgan, but I also found out that the person who lived at the first house I visited, the house on Euclid, had the last name Wells. I'd recorded this observation soon after my brief entrance. Obviously, the first address was where Morgan Wells lived. But what was Sara's connection? Although I'd initially regretted lying to her about my real name, I now knew that I'd made the right decision. I knew for sure I couldn't go back to Sara's place unless I knew for certain that Morgan wasn't home.

I decided to continue with the plan as planned. I finally had a name, a suspect, a lead. I still had no idea what all the clues meant.

Who was Morgan Wells?

CORRESPONDENCE

The weather reports called for rain.

Although it wasn't storming outside, Morgan's gut was getting unpredictable, creating a squall any weatherman could predict. His stomach turned, a bellyful of rats, thinning out as he followed the woman down the hall. She kept looking at Morgan and Parker, to make sure they were keeping up. Could she tell he was feeling ill? Could she hear the rats scuttling in the walls of his stomach?

The office walls were panelled in fake wood. They reminded Morgan of an old station wagon his parents used to drive. He reached out as he walked and touched it. It didn't feel the same as the car door. Real wood. Morgan stopped walking and tapped his hand against the wall. Partly to test it, but also to concentrate on his insides, to keep himself contained, stoppered. Supported. At least for now.

"What are you doing?"

Parker had come in on this trip. The downtown offices—the barristers, the corporate divisions, the information centres—were always the most demanding. It seemed to Morgan that their bags weighed more than most. Parker was especially hard to work with when he had to deal with businessmen and deskites. He possessed some kind of animal hatred for people who wore ties, and responded to office environs like a caged animal. Cagey eyes, cagey movements. Like everything else, he referred to businesspeople in synecdoche. They were suits, cases, assholes.

Parker stopped a few feet ahead of Morgan. The woman noticed the two of them standing there, but she kept walking and speaking into her shoulder.

“It’s wood.”

“So what?”

“It looks fake.”

“It’s not?”

“No.”

“Why are you telling me?”

“You asked.”

“Morgan I don’t like coming in here. Not *my* fucking job. Right?”

The woman was waiting around the corner, next to an open closet. She turned the light on and waved her hand over the bags.

“Here they are. There’s also the box, but it’s pretty much empty.”

“We’ll take this, no more. Leave the box for next time.”

“Okay.”

“Thanks.”

Parker lunged through the doorway and stepped back with three full bags of paper and CDs in his hands. He groaned as he wobbled away.

They’d only completed two pick-ups that day, and lunch break was an hour away. After two trips up and down twenty-four floors, they walked the block and a half to their van and delivered their cargo to the warehouse on Hendrick Street, a non-descript building near the lake. The building, one sector of what used to be an old cotton mill, looked like an oversized pink cardboard box, fitted with rusted fire escapes that didn’t touch the ground. Three large poles jutted from the building’s northern face, pointing towards Lake Ontario with no apparent function. The only functional feature of the

warehouse's exterior was the company's sign posted over the front entrance. The motto flashed on and off, but Morgan never understood the point. *If you don't want it read, give it a shred.* The only people who would ever read the sign were employees.

After unloading the morning's pick-ups, Morgan went around to the front office. He needed to speak with Cranley. If he didn't speak to him soon, his whole plan would fall through. He could already feel the tempest stirring, and wondered if anyone could see signs of the coming storm in his face, the way he moved. Each time he opened his mouth he had to take deep breaths before speaking. Steady the winds.

"Hi Tabitha."

She was on the phone, doodling on the back of an envelope. Morgan looked at the postcards. Tabitha had at least 60 postcards pinned to the inner wall of her desk, and taped against the drawers. From Cancun, Vienna, Jerusalem, Ibiza. Crumbling cathedrals, bikinis, busts and skylines. The Statue of Liberty. Big Ben. An enormous effigy of Christ on the cross. Hanging. Morgan spotted a post-it pasted on Tabitha's calendar. It read: *"cancel Friday. Cancel Mon & do Thurs? Talk more about states. President's Choice Baby Brussel Sprouts."*

"Tabitha, can I—?"

"Just a minute."

"Exactly a minute?"

"What?"

"Exactly a minute? Or more?"

She shifted her weight in her chair. Changed ears.

"Tabitha?"

“Less.”

Morgan walked to the front door and surveyed the parking lot. He kept his hand tight against his stomach. Soothing it. Holding it. Two blue cars, one red, four silver, two white. The word miscellaneous came into his head, and he remembered hearing the word for the first time in school, and knowing its meaning before it knew him. Miscellaneous cars. Miscellaneous documents. Miscellaneous lists. The miscellaneous items seemed to outnumber the identical. He would've liked to see them in order. To spread open the assorted and the varied, to categorise them, put them in neat rows and columns, under auspicious letterheads and file numbers. In some fact book, the exact number of white cars and blue cars and red cars in the world could be found. The number of fruit sold in a particular store. The number of letters delivered by the nation's postal service on a daily basis, to which addresses, which cities, which countries. The number of people in the world with the same name as him. The facts were there, conceivably. Morgan imagined a book in which all the miscellaneous items in his life were recorded. The book corresponded to an underground bunker of shelves, closets and long corridors. An underground bunker that might also be *her* new garage. An old baseball, a rocking horse, a washer he found at the park, a modest collection of pins. Some photographs, a few snapshots of her: the one of her on the beach, smiling in shock, the subzero lake water frothing around her waist; or maybe the photos from their trip to Montréal, the one he took at the Biodome, the two of them standing in front of the penguin tank, a penguin to her left, looking as though it was floating in the air. He wondered if that photo had been taken in Montréal. Was it from their trip to San Francisco?

Morgan moved from the door. The wall to his left boasted a Monet print, and two feet from that a television played the company's TV commercial repeatedly.

"If you don't want it read, give it a shred!"

He switched the channel. There was a show about cops on channel four, home decorating on channel nine, sports news on channel fifteen. On channel twenty there was a sitcom about rich singles living in America. On twenty-one, an entire city had just been destroyed by an earthquake. On channel twenty-three a car commercial. Channels twenty-four and nine were playing the same program. People were helping a devastated family rebuild their home. Sad music played as an overweight, middle-aged white mother cried about her daughter's debilitating bone disease. Now and again, she prodded her pink, swollen eyes with a white, red-laced handkerchief. Her daughter's name was Lynn. On channel thirty, the weather. On channel thirty-one, a life insurance commercial. On thirty-two, an entire city had just been destroyed by an earthquake. On thirty-six, a man selling steak knives. On forty, a commercial for fast-food. On forty-three, an entire city had just been destroyed by an earthquake. On forty-four, canned laughter. On forty-seven, people running. On forty-nine, a Milk commercial. On fifty-three, an entire city had just been destroyed by an earthquake. On fifty-five, football. On fifty-six, Hollywood celebrities. On fifty-eight, hair products. On sixty, an entire city had just been destroyed by an earthquake. On four, *"If you don't want it read, give it a shred!"*

"Change it back to the VCR please." Tabitha switched phone ears and kept gabbing.

Morgan switched on the VCR. It had definitely been longer than a minute. Maybe two, possibly three.

To his right, three immobile fish, named by Tabitha—one Oscar, one Wally, one Sam—floated inside their self-contained environment, feeding without moving. Morgan was drawn towards the fish, and though he knew not to, he tapped his fingers against the glass, trying to draw their attention. None of them moved. He flipped the lid back and dipped his hand into the water, watched the warm ripples spread out in concentric circles. He stirred the water around. The fish were still. When he reached for one, it glided away unblinking.

Morgan's stomach moved against his ribs. He wished he could speak to Cranley. He pictured himself in the office, hoping to get his mind off his roiling guts. He pictured the portrait of Cranley's family. The faded photograph looked to have been hanging in the fluorescent glow for as long as the company had existed. In the picture, Cranley had a full head of hair. That's probably why it remained the main attraction on his wall. His children, one boy, one girl, were carbon copies of one another. Cranley's wife was too massive to fit inside the photo. Her left arm disappeared beneath the frame.

Wiping his hand on the back of his pants, Morgan closed the tank lid and wondered if he'd just contaminated the water. He was reassured by the hum of the aquarium's power unit. There was no need to worry. It wasn't really a self-contained environment, he thought, looking at the tank, no longer thinking of the fish. There were lots of other variables. The tank might've existed in itself, but it only existed because of what happened outside, the multiple tubes, timers and lights. The fish existed only because Tabitha fed them. If Tabitha did not exist, there would be no fish. Morgan scratched his chin. As he did so, he caught a whiff of his hand. It smelled like a moist dish towel.

Outside, the rain broke against the windows—a thousand falling light bulbs, popping in sync.

Did the rain trigger his vomit? Or was it the smell of stale water on his hand? No time for consideration. Morgan looked for a safe place to deposit the contents of his belly. He couldn't make it to the door. He pushed his hand against his mouth and tried anyway.

Tabitha was looking in his direction, asking “What? What’s wrong?”

Morgan held his hand in the air. He opened his mouth to say “I don’t feel good.” What came out was a pound or so of processed waste.

“Oh Jesus, Wells!”

The true violence of vomit isn't its smell or its consistency, or even the way it looks. According to Morgan, the true violence of vomit is that it reveals what we, for the most part, pretend is not inside us. In our bodies, we are everything but a set of organs, a system of nerves, railways of arteries and veins, overpasses, membranes, chemicals, stopping points. Our bodies are carriers of waste. Disposal units. Of course, we know what's inside us. But the vomit pushes the reality upon us. The vomit becomes our insides, and makes about as much sense. The vomit is the reversal, the taking back. Its display is the leak: we are not our minds. We are our bodies. As Morgan put it, this idea *“can never be anything but violent for a race as fixated upon the myth of the soul as our own.”* Just what he means by myth and soul are not divulged within the pages of his notebooks.

Included in the mess that now pooled around Morgan's knees, the mess that continued, in spurts, to spill out of his body and onto the carpet, was a single breast of

raw chicken. He'd eaten it that morning along with his usual bowl of oatmeal. He needed the afternoon off. Although he wanted to save the episode for Cranley's office, or even just when Cranley was around. On his knees, coughing and spitting waste, pulling the phlegm from the back of his throat and drooling it out, practically choking on the bile, the burning battery acid on his tongue, he wondered if Cranley would still feel bad enough for him to let him go early.

The gallery was small, about thirty minutes from Brampton. Heidi York and her friend (fashionably attired, carrying purses the size of their torsos) moved around as one, arms linked, from one exhibit to the other. He loved her face. Dark curls, small Irish nose, a laugh heavier than her size would indicate. Caffeinated brown eyes, an uneven row of yellowish teeth. Not a single piece of jewellery on her neck, hands or face.

Morgan stood at the bar, drinking ice water. He'd already had three glasses, could feel it sifting in his stomach. Warming. The bartender wouldn't stop about the weather. She had to come to him. These rules weren't written, but he knew they existed. So Morgan went to the nearest exhibit. The painting was ten feet high and five feet wide. A naked woman in a swimming pool, a swirl of blood willowing from her knee. Her mouth covered with white cloth. Upon closer inspection, Morgan discovered that the entire work was painted over old newspapers.

Most of the other pictures played upon a similar theme: a woman encased in liquid, leaking fluids, face concealed. The artist, Sing, was standing reservedly beside one of her paintings, smiling while her fans or friends took photos.

Cranley had given him two days off, though he was encouraged to return sooner. In fact, all Morgan needed was that day, Thursday afternoon. Heidi had invited him, or rather, Morgan Wells, to an art show. He didn't want to let her down.

Within the first few emails, Morgan knew an invitation was coming. He could tell she wanted him to ask her out, but that went against the rules. The day after he mailed his first response, he wrote a list of "Do Nots" in one of his notebooks, under the heading "Rules for Redistribution of Information":

Do not write letters by hand: they must be typed.
Do not meet with subject.
Do not mention too much about yourself.
Do not respond to more than one letter at once.
Do not use paper method more than once.
Do not ask for photograph.

Morgan made a number of amendments over the months that followed. He eventually scratched the sixth out. He added "unless necessary" after the fifth. The third and fourth and first rule remained unchanged, but the second rule had "'meet' meaning to speak with or formally introduce – following allowed" tacked on in parenthesis. He changed this rule with a black felt tip pen, a few hours after the first time he went to Heidi's apartment. What was following but just another type of walking? Besides, it wasn't her he was after. She was peripheral. It's not that he needed to know where she was going, only that he wanted to be taken there.

He followed her all day. He walked to her house, stood safe on the other side of the street. By this time, he'd written two emails. For him, the emails created a new habit, a new means to categorise the miscellaneous. The Post-its continued to pile up, but now they rearranged themselves. Now they were notes about her, and about him, *the* him,

ideas he collected from her emails, punctuated with clues, pieces of an identity that was not his own. Perhaps could have been?

On the cereal cupboard door: *Size 11 running shoe.*

On the radiator: *Losing his hair?*

In the oven: *Only child.*

Sometimes he made things up. In college, Morgan Wells had a thing for short-haired women with black nails. When he was younger, he owned a VW Rabbit, in which he lost his virginity to an Indian girl named Sansa. The car kept breaking down on the highway. He eventually sold it for \$520, plus a coffee. These are the things Morgan invented when he didn't have his files in front of him, or when he couldn't write his observations in his notebook. But mostly he collected the facts.

At work, during those times of the day between pick-ups, driving with Parker, consciously monitoring his breathing, doing his best to filter the smoke, he puzzled details together, conformed her words to the facts presented in Morgan's mail. He went back to Morgan's place at least once a week, sometimes to steal mail, but mostly to observe. Of course, it only made sense to go to Heidi's too. She was his greatest source of information. Bank statements were useful, but after he'd seen one he'd seen them all. Heidi was his teacher, and he wanted to learn.

He waited outside her house until just after supper. She came out around seven, wearing a red jacket and a sideways hat. She didn't move quickly, seemed to meander a bit, a sleepy child up past her bedtime. He had trouble maintaining an appropriate distance. Once or twice she might've noticed him, either on the other side of the street, or behind her. But she didn't turn around, didn't change her pace. As though she wanted him to keep up.

If only she would drop something. Anything, even a loose receipt from her pocket. It would be an excuse to speak with her. According to his rules, he was not actually allowed to speak to her, but there were times when he felt willing to make an exception. Why refuse evidence – for the sake of consistency? Not a good reason.

Morgan followed Heidi to a strip-mall, watched her eat a burger combo in the food court. She asked for three extra packages of mayonnaise, and spread liberally on each individual fry. He followed her into a clothing store and lurked near the jewellery, told the clerk he was buying for his wife. When Morgan stopped responding to the clerk's questions, she left him alone. Morgan watched Heidi from across the room. She sorted through the racks, held shirts up and turned them around, held them against her small body and looked herself up and down. When she looked at herself in the mirror, he noticed that she turned her head slightly to the left, her jaw open against her collar.

She picked out a green dress and asked a saleswoman if she could try it on.

“How's the lurking?”

Morgan felt the hairs spearing up on the back of his neck. He turned his head and saw a man in a black sweater standing a few feet away, carrying a baby.

“Pardon me?”

The man smiled. “Lurking. That's how I feel whenever I go shopping with my girlfriend. That's why you're here?”

Morgan said nothing.

“Behind thirty percent of the women in here is a guy forced to tag along. And for some reason, we always walk about three feet behind them. It feels like you're lurking. Don't you think?”

Again, nothing.

The man pointed to a woman with puffy blonde hair and bright lipstick. “That’s my girlfriend over there.” The baby made sucking noises. “Yours?”

“Changing.”

“Ah, the change room. That makes it even worse. Then it seems like you’re here alone. And...”

The man’s girlfriend called to him from across the aisle. He walked away in mid-sentence, no apologies.

Morgan didn’t wait for the man to return or for Heidi to step out of the change room. But once she told him about the art show, he had a feeling that he’d be seeing her in that green dress. Now here she was, hair pulled back, smiling with teeth, and constantly looking. He knew the exact number of times she looked around, looked toward the door. Fifteen. He noted the way her right hand clasped her purse strap, while her left hand hung loose at her side, only moving when she spoke. She spoke infrequently. Her friend seemed to carry most of their conversation. Morgan wondered if Heidi was keeping silent out of nervousness. Or was she always this reserved? Had she told her friend her ex-boyfriend was coming? Were they expecting him? What did they expect? He recorded each of these questions in his notebook.

About twenty minutes after her arrival, Heidi and her friend finally unlinked arms. Heidi touched her friend on the shoulder, and started off towards the outer hall. Morgan followed about ten steps behind. He followed her through a pair of glass doors, until she went into the washroom. He stood next to the door, pushed against it until it opened just a crack. But he couldn’t push it any farther. What if her friend came looking for her? He

moved his hand against the door, just beneath the Ladies sign. It would take the slightest push. But what would he say when he saw her in there? What would she say to him?

She: I've seen you around.
He: I've seen you.
She: Do you like seeing me?
He: You're all I see.
She: What else do you see?
He: Nothing?

Morgan drank from the fountain, washed the pitiful conversation from his mouth. The vomit taste hung heavy on his tongue, something his toothbrush couldn't work off. He was sinking, he knew that now. The water on his tongue was the water at his throat, taking him under. The plan was poorly conceived. The other Morgan Wells was still a mystery. Most of what he knew he'd invented. So what would he tell her? The afternoon was shot.

"You must be thirsty."

The voice came so unexpectedly, Morgan coughed on the metal-tasting water and hit his teeth against the metal spout. He stood erect, hand to his lips, water dribbling down his unshaven chin. A spot of blood came off on his fingers.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to ... to scare you like that."

"That's okay."

"You're bleeding?"

"No. It's fine."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

"Okay."

She stood there looking at him for a moment, as if she expected him to say something.

“Do you mind if I ... could I step in there?”

“Of course.”

Morgan stepped away from the fountain. She pushed her thumb against the handle, let it run for a moment. Morgan turned away, not wanting to see the water gushing into her mouth, her throat working it down. He started to walk, but changed his mind. What if he told her everything? Why not? Who would it hurt? If he didn't tell her, then she would spend the rest of the night waiting for someone who hadn't even received that first letter. At the very least, he could offer himself. It was early on then, he could still claim innocence. It could be funny, something they'd laugh about, later that night, the following day, years down the line. He turned back just as Heidi finished drinking.

“Are you Heidi?”

“Yes. And you...?”

“Morgan Wells.”

“Excuse me?”

“I'm Morgan Wells.”

“I don't get it.”

“I—”

“Where's Morgan?”

“I am Morgan.”

She laughed through her nose, then wrapped her arms around each other. When she smiled, she pushed her lips together, and seemed to kiss the air.

“Are you are a friend of his? ... I guess I didn't realise he would bring a friend. I suppose that makes sense ... it makes sense. I mean, has he told you anything about me?”

“All I really know is your name.”

“Yeah, well, we were friends in university. Lived in the same dorm. How long have you known him?”

“Not long.”

Heidi nodded, but was looking over Morgan's shoulder, as if she expected the real Morgan Wells to step out from behind him. He ached to write these observations in his notebook, afraid of forgetting. He repeated the thought again and again. *She's not looking, she's not looking.*

“I'm here with a friend too actually. She's not impressed. Andrea thinks the paintings are too graphic. But she's terrified of germs, and makes a big deal of scrubbing her hands, and carries an antibacterial soap dispenser in her purse at all times. I think she finds the idea of bleeding frightening. She's always scrubbing and cleaning things, even though two months ago she was the messiest person I know. She recently found out about the whole microscopic bug bacteria thing. But anyway all this is just a phase. Another two months and she'll forget about the germs, and suddenly develop some kind of throat infection.”

“I have a pain in my leg.”

“You do?” Heidi tilted her head, waited for more.

“From walking. I got this pain.”

“Do you walk a lot?”

“Yes.”

“Where do you go?”

“What do you mean?”

“Where do you go when you walk?”

“Around. Everywhere.” He laughed like he was coughing.

“So you don’t own a car?”

“I don’t need one.”

She didn’t say anything, and again the silence invaded.

“Is Morgan here?”

“No. Not yet.”

“Oh. Then let’s take a look around? I’ll introduce you to my friend.”

Morgan clenched his hands tight against his sides, afraid that if he let himself, he might reach for one of hers. They crossed the floor to a large painting of a woman’s face, wrapped in blood-soaked rags.

“Andrea, this is Morgan’s friend... I forget your name?”

“Morgan.”

“Your name is Morgan too?”

“Yes.”

“This is Andrea.”

“Nice to meet you Morgan.”

Andrea gave him a look. She seemed let down. “What do you think of the art?”

“I don’t think about art.”

“You don’t have to. That’s what art is.”

“Here she goes.”

“Not here she goes. It’s true.” Andrea pulled a glass up to her lips and took a slow sip of purple. Morgan enjoyed her polished chrome fingernails, the metal in her lip, the metal in her eyes. “There’s no place for the intellect in art. It really just depends on, first of all, if it makes you feel, and then how it makes you feel. You have to agree with me that art without feeling isn’t really art.”

“Blah, blah, blah.”

The two women started walking towards the next display. Morgan lagged a foot behind, unable to see their faces. He wondered if they were making eyes, talking about him with their lashes, the creases in their foreheads.

“Any piece of art can be intelligent, or witty, or even politically relevant. But those are usually things you have to dig up, things you don’t see on first impression. That’s how you tell, no listen, that’s how you tell great art from not so great art. It’s all based on first impressions.”

Although she wasn’t speaking directly to him, Morgan felt Andrea’s comments about first impressions were subtle ways of telling him to leave. Did she dislike him? Was she suspicious? But how could she possibly know? Unless she’d spotted Morgan standing outside Heidi’s apartment, she would have no way of knowing. And if she had spotted him, wouldn’t she have said something right away?

“For instance, this Sing woman is obviously a smart artist.” Andrea held her purse arm out, wrist facing the high gallery ceiling, waiting for a razor or set of sharp teeth.

“A smartist?”

“You can tell from each individual piece that she has a message, that she isn’t just painting for the sake ... I hate it when people mash words together like that.”

“I think it’s funny.”

“Anyway, it’s obvious that she knows her stuff. The blood, the water, the bandages, the fact that their eyes are always closed. So I can commend her for that, and maybe she’s doing a good thing. She’s consistent.”

Heidi looked at Morgan and winked. She turned back to Andrea. “She’s here.”

“So?”

“So keep your voice down.”

“Would you relax? She’s on the other side of the room.”

“Still.”

“My point is, these paintings don’t make me feel anything, other than physical revulsion. Bloody women, old war bandages, tubs of water. It’s not great art, it’s not even good.”

“Stop talking like you’re some kind of expert. You’ve taken, what, maybe one art history course?”

The three of them moved across the floor, stopping now and again to examine a painting. Heidi spoke more now than she did before Morgan joined them, but she continued to look towards the door, waiting. He felt her words were waiting, as though she kept silent because she wanted to save her best sentences for Morgan, her Morgan. Morgan couldn’t open his mouth at all. The words weren’t there, or if they were, they weren’t the right ones. He hung close to Heidi’s side, wanted to take her away. He had questions. His hand grazed her left elbow, then squeezed that bit of skin protecting it.

Heidi turned, still smiling. For the first time, he realised her eyes were blue.

“What?”

Her thoughts burned holes in his cheeks, his ears, and then he wasn't thinking, only knowing that he couldn't tell her the truth, couldn't confess, couldn't stay. It was too late. Had always been too late. And maybe she was beginning to wonder about him. Would she call the police if she found out? She would have him arrested. He could tell from the hands she kept curled tight around her purse strap that she didn't trust him. A different kind of touch. Her mouth swallowed her smile.

"What's the matter?" Heidi stopped walking.

Andrea kept moving until she noticed she was alone. "What's up?"

"I have to go."

"Really?"

"Yes."

"What about Morgan?"

"He's coming."

"You're not going to wait for him?"

"I have to go."

"But..."

"I have to."

"Wait."

"Sorry. Tell him I couldn't."

He heard the women talking about him as he left. He heard Andrea say, "Who the fuck was that?" and he heard Heidi say, "I don't know" and he heard Andrea laughing, and he thought he heard her say "You know how to pick them," but by that time he was too far away to know for certain.

Outside, the rain continued its parade, marching down his neck as he walked home. His fever only just beginning to subside, he took pleasure in the moisture. The rats clawed his throat twice before he cleared the parking lot.

In the days following his botched interaction with Heidi York, Morgan received two emails from her. Both ended and began with a string of question marks in the subject line. He left them unopened. He could no longer maintain their correspondence. Meeting with her was a mistake. Had he trespassed against some unwritten stalker's code? Maybe. He felt like he'd cheated. Whatever the prize was, he no longer deserved it.

As for the Morgan Wells that lived down the street, his mailbox contained no new surprises. It was always the same mail, again and again. Bills, junk, the same junk he found in his own mailbox. He hadn't come across a hand-stamped envelope in weeks.

And so he flipped back a few pages in his notebook to where he'd copied the addresses of each Morgan Wells in the city. Streets and numbers. For each address a mail box, a slot. A new collection. A new story.

He could see no reason why the man down the street should be the only Morgan Wells worth investigating. They all shared that common bond. The man who lived in Rosedale had as much to tell him as the man in Scarborough, or the three that lived downtown. And the people they knew, the ones who still wrote letters. The ones who sprayed perfume on paper before folding it. The ones who used their tongues to seal their notes. All the Morgan Wells's he'd found in the phonebook were within walking distance, which for Morgan meant within a two-hour radius. All seven of their mailboxes were waiting for him to arrive.

When he purchased five new file folders and set them up on his kitchen table, Morgan realised that he'd always known it would come to this. The idea had just cracked its shell, but he'd been bathing it under heat lamps, holding it in his hand, sculpting its smooth white surface. He thought of Heidi York as a test-run. A walk. He'd worked out the kinks in his system. Now it was time to run.

He told himself he would only steal letters from one house a week.

He told himself he would respond to one letter at a time.

But even then, he knew stealing letters was no longer enough.

UNA FIESTA DE CUMPLEAÑOS Y LA REVELACIÓN DE CIERTAS VERDADES I

November 29, 2003, Evening:

Who was Morgan Wells? That's where I left off last night. I say that like I know him now. I say that like I've learned anything about him, when all I know are lies. I shouldn't have said was, but is. Who *is* Morgan Wells? I still don't know for sure. The only source I have is faulty. Full of speculation and false proofs. That might be the only reason I'm recording my voice right now. Might be.

Two days before I left, or the day of Luis's birthday, I was stuck at the beach with the Val and Dave show. For days I'd been heading out to visit the addresses, walking and recording, demystifying the clues. I missed supper twice. I spent the money Val gave me on food and subway tickets. I bought two more tapes. Because I was leaving soon, and also because it was Luis's birthday, Val demanded that we all spend a day together. A full day. She did not democratise the event, otherwise I would've certainly voted against the beach. There is no need to spell out my misery, but of course the awful happened.

As soon as we arrived, before we even put our towels down, Val removed her clothes and made me wonder why I had been avoiding the beach. Dave removed his clothes which practically cancelled her out. I could not watch him rub the sunscreen onto her skin with his hairy sausage fingers. I was drinking salt water when she rubbed the cream onto his back. Afterwards, her body gleamed like a shell. A soft, Mexican shell. But I couldn't get rid of the image of Dave's fingerprints covering her skin.

I was sitting there for maybe twenty minutes before I started to sweat.

August 31, 2003, Morning:

“It’s hot.”

“You’re wearing a shirt. What do you expect?”

“I don’t want to get burned.”

“So put some sunscreen on.”

“It doesn’t work.”

“It doesn’t work.”

“It doesn’t.”

“I’m sure. Actually, I’m not surprised. Of course you wear a shirt to the beach.

Fits you perfectly.”

“Whatever.”

“How’re your armpits?”

“Dave? Do you have the lotion?”

“No.”

“Can you check?”

“Checked. Don’t have it. Ask little brother.”

“Do you know?”

“I don’t know. Why would I know?”

“You need more?” [Dave opens a can of beer, hidden in a blanket of napkins.]

“I reapply every thirty minutes.” [Val looks under her towel.] “Found it.”

“*Jesus.*”

“You should put some on little brother.”

“I don’t need any.”

“This stuff is really good.” [Val clicks the lid open and squirts the cream into her hand.] “Guaranteed you won’t get burned.”

“Val, don’t worry about him. He’s got it all worked out.”

“What does that mean?”

“Have you ever taken your shirt off?”

“Of course.”

“In public? Do you wear it in the pool?”

“I don’t swim.”

“That doesn’t surprise me either.”

“I take my shirt off.”

“Do you do anything athletic?”

“I walk.”

“You have eczema don’t you?”

“Shut up.”

“Dave?”

“Yeah?”

“Leave him alone.”

“He knows I’m joking.”

“You can use this stuff. I swear you won’t get burned.”

“I don’t... No. That’s okay.”

“Oh c’mon. You don’t want to sit there sweating all afternoon.”

“I can’t put it on.”

“I’ll do it. Take your shirt off.”

November 29, 2003, Evening

I did not intend for Val to apply my sunscreen. But when she offered, I could not refuse. Which is not to say that I enjoyed the experience. The opposite, actually. My skin is quite pale, and as soon as I took my shirt off Val said, “*Dios mio!* You’re practically invisible.” I did my chest on my own, but when she did my back, I wondered if she was disgusted with me. The cream was cold and sticky. I couldn’t see her face but I could tell she was disgusted by the way she rubbed the stuff on as quickly as possible, like it was some kind of medicine. It reminded me of Baghdad. Our unit was on foot patrol in a marketplace when a man stepped in front of me and exploded. The skin fell from my body. I flew thirty feet into the air and landed in pieces next to our jeep. At the hospital, two nurses tried to sew me back together. A useless expenditure. My face obliterated, I couldn’t even see the person who put the Vaseline on my lips. I died ten minutes later, having forgotten my name, Mom, Ross, Dave, Val, Luis. And the bandages too.

Ten minutes later, I was lying in the sun without a shirt on. Wrong but more comfortable than wearing a shirt. I plugged my headphones in and listened to my tapes. I had been searching for answers to the Morgan Wells question for eight days. I was only aware of one thing by the end of those eight days: that I am a poor investigator.

It’s not easy to get strangers to talk. It’s especially hard to do that in the world’s dumbest city. The conversations and observations I recorded told me nothing more than my memory could tell me. But they had helped me before. I pressed play, closed my eyes and draped my arm over my face. Even with my eyes closed I could still see the sun.

The first place I visited was the old person's house on Unsworth. The estate sale had ended and no one was home. The whole house was boarded up. Not with actual boards. But with pieces of paper in the window. A big "Sold" sign decorated the front lawn. A neighbour, some eagle-head, was washing his car and watching me the whole time I monitored the house. He watched while I knocked on the door, too. The mailbox said: The Wells's. No one answered.

I stood there until the man with the hose got down on his knees to scrub the tires. Then I flipped open the mailbox. I didn't even have to remove a letter to verify my suspicions. They were all addressed to someone named M. Wells Jr.

Junior?

I heard the hose stop spraying behind me. I turned around and saw the bald car washer looking at me. He waved me over.

August 22, 2003, Afternoon:

[Birds in the background. Light traffic.]

"Are you looking to buy?"

"Excuse me?"

"You don't look like a buyer."

[He smirked.]

"I was here last week. At an estate sale?"

"Estate sale's over."

[The man started to scrub the rims of his tires.]

"I was ... excuse me?"

“What?”

“I was wondering if you could you tell me who lives here?”

“No one lives there. They sold it.”

“Who sold it?”

[Hose stops spraying.]

“Why?”

“I’m working on a school project. About houses.”

“Houses?”

“Old ones.”

“Old houses?”

“Yeah.”

“Do you know how old that one is?”

“How old?”

“I have no idea.”

“Oh.”

“That’s why I asked you.”

“I don’t know.”

“Do you know how old my house is?”

“40 years?”

“Try 168.”

“That’s old.”

“What’s your project about?”

“Old houses. Mostly.”

“Right.”

“Is there a way to get in touch with the house’s owner?”

[Hose stops spraying. Water dripping from sponge.]

[2.4 seconds.]

“Sure.”

“How?”

“Use a phonebook.”

November 29, 2003, Evening:

Even geniuses stumble. They say it takes time. For example, sometimes when I’m looking for a CD in my mom’s CD collection, I’ll scan the sides of the cases for an hour looking for a specific band, or album. I’ll even put my finger against the plastic, and run it down the columns, just waiting for the name to pop out. But it doesn’t. I’ll find ten other CDs by the same band, but not the album I’m craving. I’ll find five Willie Nelson albums, but no John Denver. I’ll find “Tea for the Tillerman,” but not “The Greatest Hits.” I scan through the cases again, and almost knock the whole case down just to find the right CD. Finally, after I’ve just about given up, I’ll look on the very top of the rack and find the CD I was looking for. The CD for which I was looking. Right there at the top, the easiest one to find. When I find it, I feel a mixture of satisfaction and disappointment. I want to listen to the CD right away, but I also feel like plucking out my eyes with a spoon, or melting them with my step-father’s Zippo.

That’s often how I felt whenever I discovered something new about the Morgan Wells case. As though my eyes were so useless they were expendable. Nevertheless,

unlike looking for CDs, finding the answer to the Morgan Wells question wasn't all that urgent. Although I was disappointed with my own idiocy, I didn't immediately find a phonebook. In fact, I didn't look until two days later. The man with the hose was too logical. My plan was not. The truth is, I was wasting my time. If I solved the problem too soon, I'd have nothing to do for the rest of the week.

The next house I visited was in Hillcrest Village. Threadsdale and Clansman. I had to take the subway to get there, and so I broke the twenty Val gave me. Once broken, I forgot where the money came from. The twenty dollar bill went from being Val's money to my loose change to nothing. After another two minutes of useless conversation, the man with the hose told me that Morgan Wells's father died two years ago. Dave and Val had moved into the apartment two years ago. If the book was in their apartment then the young Morgan Wells had once lived there, and probably moved out after his dad died. Or he knew someone who lived in the apartment and left the book of poetry there by mistake. But that seemed unlikely. The book had been hidden there with sinister intentions. The list of addresses was a secret that Morgan Wells himself had overlooked. Or, forgotten.

As I travelled to Hillcrest, I waded through the information, talking constantly, barely taking a break, even when I saw people were staring at me.

August 22, 2003, Afternoon:

[Subway announcer sounds like he's sleeping.]

"His father was an old army man."

"*Bathurst. Baaaaaa-thurst.*"

“Morgan used to live in my brother’s place? Has Dave met Morgan?”

August 22, 2003, Afternoon:

[Same noises as above. Doors swinging open, people moving in and out of the car.]

“Could the list of addresses be a list of Morgan’s enemies? It’s possible that Sara owes Morgan money. But aren’t they married? Unless ... why would Morgan live in that place? All those bookcases. He can’t be very wealthy. Or Sara was talking to a different Morgan. But Morgan is not a common name. I know only one Morgan in my whole school. But it’s possible.”

“Summerhill. Summmmmmmmerhill.”

“The book. If it’s true that Dave has no connection to the case, perhaps I should remove the book from the drawer. Val and Dave weren’t happy when the front part came off. Dave nailed it back on. Luis says it comes off all the time. I don’t think Dave is connected. Morgan used to live there, and moved out when his father died. But why move out to a place just to sell it? That doesn’t make sense. Cheaper rent?”

August 22, 2003, Afternoon:

“Is there a way to prove that Morgan Wells used to live in my brother’s apartment?”

“York Mills. Yoooooooooork Millllllllls.”

November 29, 2003, Evening

I missed my stop. I was too focused on recording my annotations. I had to spend even more of Val's money to get back to Hillcrest. Then I bought a bottle of water from a pharmacy. As I paid, a man in a black sweatshirt stepped up from behind and started shouting demands at the clerk. She didn't move, just stood there staring at the guy, even though he demonstrated his need for drugs and money quite convincingly. He fired a shot into the ceiling, releasing a stream of dust, particles of gyp-rock. I started to run away but the butt of his handgun left a sizeable cut on the back of my head. Another scar to tell Amy about. I crawled against the tiles, tried to pull myself up using a chip rack. It didn't hold my weight. The woman behind the counter refused to move. The man shot her in the knee, popped the cap. He jumped across the counter and emptied the cash machine. On his way out, he stood over my body, shrouded in chip bags. The blast of light was so bright, I could barely see it. The bullet didn't kill me. It was the blood in my throat that finished me off.

THE LIGHTED ROOM

Each week, a new Morgan Wells. Each week, a new piece of mail. Each week, a new campaign of following, tracking, studying. Each week.

The second Morgan Wells, or namesake, as he liked to call them, lived on Sheppard, next to an Indian grocer. The path was straightforward enough. In walking to the homes of his namesakes, it was acceptable to take the same path twice, as long as he didn't also take the exact same route in reverse. Thus, he devised two ways to get to Morgan Wells's house, and alternated their directions on a day-to-day basis. That way he could bend the rules without mocking the system.

The first time he went to the place on Sheppard, Morgan refrained from checking the mailbox. It was well after dark. He stood outside the house and observed. The upper floor window cast a dim light. The rest of the house was dark, asleep but for a blue glow coming from what Morgan guessed was the TV room. After an hour's worth of steady observation, noting no comings from or goings to the house, Morgan walked home.

It had been eight days since the art gallery episode. Morgan was still recovering from the raw chicken, and hadn't had a good night's sleep since. He found himself awake at 5 in the morning, working on his map. His living room existed between two walls. One covered in Post-its, the other mapped. Mapping. Stretching over the windows, climbing up the wall, reaching out, white lines, yellow lines, black words, red dots, post-its. An organism like the post-its, living and breathing on its own.

Eventually, the map stalled. The streets discontinued, the city stood still. Not because Morgan didn't want to finish it, but he'd run out of paint. He didn't know if he'd

run out of paint, or if the paint had been removed. He hadn't thought to mark them. Did she steal paint? Had she seen the map? Morgan planted four post-its on the floor beside the map.

Black
Yellow
White
Red

The second time Morgan visited the place on Sheppard, he left his apartment at 3am. In the dark, he walked beside the house, touched it. Every window was dark. Except for the window on the top floor. The light spilled through its frame, and now it seemed brighter. More light in the dark. But why was it on? He went to the garage to get a ladder. Locked. He stood in the driveway and looked up at the light. Was someone in that room? Some invalid or child. Sleeping with the lights on. Or not sleeping at all. Sitting awake on the edge of the bed, staring through the window. At what? At the roof of their neighbour's house?

For a brief moment, Morgan thought he could see someone in the window, a figure peering down at him. The shadow disappeared into the light. Although he couldn't see into the darkened windows of the house, someone inside would see him quite easily. He moved closer to the window. The security spotlight flashed on. Morgan pulled his hand to his face and walked away from the house, toward the bushes and the safety of shadow.

The following day Morgan stole a letter. He arrived at the house only ten minutes before the postman arrived. He watched the man swing his bag against his hip. Full of letters, freshly travelled news, bills, postcards.

The postman reached into his bag and pulled out a stack of mail. Morgan watched him flip the lid of the box and slip the letters into place. The postman moved down the street, shuffling a new pack of envelopes in his hands. The man's back was perfectly straight. He wore knock-off Nike sneakers and a Timex watch. Morgan scribbled a string of words into his notebook.

Post is posted.
Assemblage. Assemblage.
Carrier carries.

He scratched each of these words out. He wrote beneath them: *a letter always arrives at its destination.*

After watching the postman arrive at and depart from the doors and mailboxes of each house on the street, Morgan wrote "*Do Not stand still in front of the house*" in his notebook. From then on, whenever he observed a namesake's home, Morgan moved like the postman. At first he carried free newspapers with him, ones he'd taken from a convenience store. When these ran out, he delivered company brochures from his workplace, pamphlets on the process of off-site shredding.

- 1. Consoles furnished by us.*
- 2. Consoles conveniently gathered by our document management trucks.*
- 3. All material channelled into shredding machine and shredded into unreadable particles.*
- 4. Particles recycled.*

Morgan used the brochures only as a back-up plan, and moved like a postman up and down the street, an action he repeated in the spaces of his notebook.

At home, Morgan scoured his namesake's mail. He sat at his kitchen table, which he now referred to as his "post office," a place for dividing and selecting, ordering, numbering, labelling and storing. He replaced each stolen letter with some of his own.

Although there weren't any personal letters, the mail revealed that the other Morgan Wells purchased 24 beer a week at the beer store. Was he an alcoholic? He had \$1344 in his Savings. He made several calls a week to someone in Vancouver. He'd recently had a few blood tests.

The letters weren't enough. Morgan knew that the odds of finding another letter like Heidi's were slim. He calculated the odds at around 0.22%. He went to the library and downloaded a number of How-to articles on lock picking. At the hardware store, he purchased a lock identical to the namesake's and practiced for hours until he could pick it in less than twenty seconds. Hand-drawn lock diagrams creep throughout his notebooks. Drawn with a mechanical pencil. No rulers.

He knew when they were home. On average, everyone in the Sheppard residence left by 9:56am. The place was vacant until 1:02pm, when the other Morgan's wife returned. At 10:07am, Morgan strode up the steps as if he lived there and removed his lock pick set from his bag. He'd bought the set from a pawn shop for \$35. The tools came in a worn leather case, with the initials J.D stencilled on the fold. The clerk told him they'd once belonged to a local locksmith. Morgan inserted his inherited instruments into the lock, and for a brief moment felt the hands of the locksmith guiding his own. Then the feeling faded, and his hands felt as though they'd been squeezed too hard. He pushed the torsion wrench hard, but it wouldn't turn. After two minutes, Morgan had to reach into his bag for the instructions. He'd printed them at the library, so the paper was of poor quality. He accidentally tore two of the pages as he yanked them out.

Morgan lined the instructions out in front of him by pinning the pages beneath the lid of the mailbox. He read them over. He then tried to pick the lock again, this time

rubbing the pins gently, prodding them with a slow hand. It took him another two minutes, but the lock clicked open.

The house, after Morgan had closed the door and shut out the street noise, was a tomb. He walked out of the foyer, taking note of the empty flower pot that held the door open. He noted the dry dirt in the pot and the presence of a teabag. There were two pairs of children's shoes, one pair of beaten-up sneakers and a pair of rubber boots lined against the wall. Morgan removed his shoes and pushed them against the wall.

In the living room, Morgan spent ten minutes standing under the chandelier, prodding at the cups and glasses on the coffee table. He picked up a day-old newspaper and flipped through the pages. The crossword had been crossed. Morgan folded the newspaper and tossed it onto a chair. He then followed it. Put his feet up on the coffee table. Smelled the cushions. Did the other Morgan own a cat?

Morgan made a list.

A painting over every window in his flat. The paintings are windows, the windows are paintings. Some are photographs. They have two children, Brenda and Melissa, who have their mother's teeth.

In the bottom drawer of TV stand: baby picture, curly-haired, naked shoulder; digital camera cool pix, doesn't work; Gerber recoil automatic pliers; 3 screwdrivers – Phillips no. 2, yellow-orange handle with cocking on the end, 57-3491-8 no. 1; Radioshack CD holder – one blank CD; dead cell phone; comb; pen; vacuum nozzle (no vacuum in house); receipt from Minister's Restaurant for \$43.76; Pacific Western - \$56.33

Morgan made a number of lists in all the rooms in the house. In the kitchen he recorded the contents of the namesake's Lazy Susan. Lima beans. Jalapeno jelly. Aunt Jemima. He wanted to search through each of the cupboards, but he'd already wasted two twitches. He didn't have enough time. He also knew he'd be coming back.

In the bathroom, he recorded the contents of the wastebasket:

crumpled tissues; toilet paper; shreds of floss; empty pregnancy test box; negative pregnancy test; 1 torn business card; 4 subscription offers from National Geographic; bottle cap; crumpled Post-it; Q-tips; small bar of soap

In the children's bedroom, he found a year-old Grade School scribbler. A

Campfire Notebook. He scribbled some of the passages into his own scribbler.

Tuesday, September 9th

Caribou

The Caribou cafe is born in spring. The caribou cafe can die right when it is born in a snow storm Caribou milk has more protein than cows an adult caribou may eat 4.5 kg of lichens a day. they eat juicy grasses low leafy shrubs brightly coloured wildflowers. caribou have long hollow hair to help them swim The caribous coat helps them float like a life jacket a cup of a caribous blood gets sucked out of them by insects. when caribou are old enough they get new coats as they tire off there old ones as they go throw the pickers

Tuesday, November 23rd

Fayble

Once upon a time there lived a wood cutter with three children the oldest one's name was Jhon the second oldest name was peter and the youngest of them all was only Five year's old her name is Mary and she like's Doll's playhouses and she especiely like's toy plate's toy cup's toy dishes she like's the color blue red and white most of all she like's the blue well anyway it was Christmas Eve and peter never got Mary a present and he really wanted too but he didn't now what she wanted so that Morning peter asked his Farther they could go shopping and he said yes they went to the village toy shop they all wanted something Jhon wanted a train peter wanted a teddy bear and Mary wanted a set of little blue dishes they went home in four mintes peter and mary sat by the fire and talked about what they wanted For Christmas mary said little blue dishes said mary I want a teddy mary fell asleep fast But peter didn't he was still awake and he went two check his piggy bank all he had was a penny anyway he ran back to the store and asked the storekeeper what was worth a penny the storekeeper said I have a candy haert but that's all that's worth okey and he took it when peter got home he put the candy heart inside mary's stocking John ate the candy heart and said oh no I just ate Mary's candy heart I better go buy her something else so he went over to look Inside his piggy bank he found ten pennys and ran off to the store when he got there the store was just about too close when he got there he asked the storekeeper what is worth a dime he said that set of little blue dishes okey and he bouht it brouht it home and put it in her stocking went to bed in the morning

the children Jumped out of bed mary found the Blue Dishes and peter checked his stoking twice.

Wednesday, January 22nd

A sentence always begins with a capital letter.

The names of people and pets begin with capital letters.

The names of places begin with capital letters.

Days of the week begin with capital letters.

The months of the year begin with capitals.

The word I is always a capital.

Morgan walked into each room. He went into Morgan Wells's room, pulled the covers back, inspected the sheets. He slipped beneath the covers for a minute, lay on his back and eyed the ceiling. The light fixture looked like a nipple.

Morgan inspected the contents of each room. He looked through the drawers. Loose papers. Empty stamp book. A brightly coloured phone jack. He opened the closets, looked under the beds, in medicine cabinets. He created a silhouette of Morgan Wells, his trappings, his photographs, his choice of paint, his choice of toothpaste. The painted blue windows and the Grade One journal.

Morgan saved the best room for last, and by the time he opened the door he'd already spent an hour and a half in the rooms of the other Morgan Wells's home. He'd tested the water pressure in the sinks, used Morgan Wells's toothbrush, flipped through his collection of Tom Clancy novels. Tore off the back cover of an *In Style* magazine and stuffed it into his pocket. In the top drawer of Morgan's wife's dresser, he found a plastic bag filled with rose petals, wilted, drained of colour. When he squeezed the bag and opened his fist, the petals had turned to dust.

He knew the door when he found it. A thin line of light vibrated from within. Unchanging white. A spot of brightness. Lighter carpet shade. Morgan pushed his toes against the light. He wasn't surprised when the knob didn't turn.

He spent the next half-hour struggling with the lock. He hadn't researched that type of lock before, and had no instructional materials. But it was a common household lock, and within two twitches he'd successfully made it click. The door swung open to reveal a room full of Rubbermaids and cardboard boxes. A broken dresser and an old punching bag.

Storage. He'd found the storage room. A graveyard of past possessions, the things Morgan Wells no longer needed. Morgan opened a box and ran his fingers against its sides. Old baseball gloves, stiff with age. Morgan closed the box and opened another. Outdated computer hardware: yellow keyed keyboard, broken joystick, printer ribbon. Inside one of the Rubbermaids, Morgan found a set of silverware, with a piece of paper taped over the case: *Aunt Alice's Silver*. Beneath the silverware, Morgan found a collection of Coca-cola placemats, a black leather coat and a bag full of conference papers, for some weekend retreat, years old, useless but kept. As he made his observations, Morgan recorded a few questions in the margins.

Why do they lock the door?

Why the light?

Did he see it too?

Morgan did not provide answers to these questions, but he must've found answers. Presumably they locked the door by mistake. That happens often enough. Let's presume they didn't own a key, or had lost the key. Or perhaps they'd locked the door on purpose. They had a child. Maybe they didn't want him in that room.

Morgan searched through the house for keys. He found 7 in different drawers, in different rooms. Only one of them had a chain: the house key. Morgan tried the other 6 keys on the lock to the lighted room, but none of them fit. They hadn't locked it on purpose. Unless the other Morgan Wells kept the room key on his keychain. But why? The room was full of second-hand goods, cast-offs, charity items.

Morgan wrote *Did he see it too?* in his notebook. It's impossible to know for certain what "it" represents. The light? The usefulness of unwanted items? The aesthetics of debris? One can only guess. Regardless, Morgan wrote "No" beside the question mark.

That afternoon, Morgan purchased three new notebooks. At first, he ordered the notebooks according to the kind of information he put in them. One for cataloguing the letters he stole. One for his street observations. Another for the things he found in their homes. But within a few days he grabbed whichever was closest at hand. Near the end, he carried them all in his bag, having already decided that they belonged together, not in separate files. All the information came together in a confused plot of fragmented recordings.

Morgan returned to the house day after day. He watched his namesake come home from work—and kept walking. He saw him in his kitchen demonstrating some type of complaint to his wife, or trying to fly away—and kept walking. At the end of the week, Morgan had recorded 209 observations from across Morgan Wells's street and 213 observations from inside his home. He felt ready to expand.

At work, during lunch and driving with Parker, Morgan created his routes. Sometimes he copied them down. At night, he sat at his kitchen table, reading his notes, making addendums, alterations. The tapestry forming.

The phone rang, but Morgan was less and less around to hear it. His neighbours sometimes knocked on his door, but he didn't open it. He couldn't let another person enter his home. What if they touched the post-its? So he'd wait in the dark of his living room, staring at the invisible map on his wall, imagining its unfinished side. He saw himself moving across the wall, like a fly without wings, turning right, turning left, visiting the homes of his namesakes, tracking them down, one by one, as they continued to map themselves beneath his gaze.

UNA FIESTA DE CUMPLEAÑOS Y LA REVELACIÓN DE CIERTAS VERDADES II

November 29, 2003, Evening:

The address on Threadneedle was by far the nicest of the addresses. Even if I counted my brother's place. A brand new condominium, with two potted plants on the step. The blinds were down in all the windows. Whoever lived in the house kept their barbeque chained up. They'd turned it on too close to the wall. The siding next to the barbeque was melted and peeling. The barbeque looked like it was eating the house slowly.

Right now, the Milky Way is eating Sagittarius. The scientists have called our galaxy a cannibal. I saw a special on the CBC about it.

I knocked on the door. No answer. I had bought a picture of a dog at a used clothing store. It came in a heart-shaped frame. I took it out of my bag. Sammy had become a poodle. I rang the doorbell. No answer.

I went back to Yonge St. and killed time at a bagel place. Spent even more of Val's money. Recorded more observations.

An hour later, I returned to the condo. It was getting late, so I crossed my fingers and toes and knocked on the door. Whether the door was answered or not, I'd have to go home soon. I knocked and knocked and knocked. Then I heard someone yelling at me. I stopped knocking and crossed my arms behind my back. The door opened. The man who answered wore a housecoat, even though it was three in the afternoon. He did not look very sleepy.

August 22, 2003, Afternoon:

“Can I help you?”

“Hi.”

“Yes?”

“I’m looking for my dog.”

“Haven’t seen it.”

“I have a picture.”

“No. Sorry.”

“I haven’t shown you the picture. Here, take a look.”

“I haven’t seen that dog.”

“What’s your name?”

[5.5 seconds.]

“I... my mom needs to know the names of the people I ask because otherwise she won’t print ... posters?”

[2.8 seconds.]

“I was... are...?”

[Sound of door closing. And locking.]

November 29, 2003, Evening:

I’m such a bottlefuck. Stupidly, idiotically, I had not foreseen the dog story’s failure. Sara was indeed a special person. I’ve since speculated that people with red hair are actually nicer than normal people, because they know the effects of rejection.

I had intended on revisiting the house on Euclid, but now I had no energy. I went home on my feet, not yet willing to spend all Val's money. When I got back, no one was home. On the long walk, I contemplated two things: how to prove that Morgan Wells had once lived in my brother's apartment, and how to get strangers to talk to me, now that the dog story was useless. The first dilemma could wait. The second situation needed fast action, because it wasn't all that often that I had the place to myself. I could use Dave's computer if the door was unlocked. Otherwise, I would have to go to an internet café, and I only had a few dollars.

With incredible agility, I ran to Dave's office. Normally it would be locked, but on this day it was not. I didn't even think of this at the time. I just pushed the door open, went straight to Dave's desk and turned his computer on. I was going to create a survey. Like for a school newspaper or something. Dave's computer is an old desktop, and takes about ten minutes to boot. It took even longer knowing that Dave could walk into the room and boot my head from my neck. Just stepping foot into his office would earn me instant death. When a dog barked in some distant yard, or if I heard a horn beeping, I also heard Dave coming down the hall, or the front door opening. I kept getting out of my seat and looking around, looking out the window to see if Val or anyone was coming up the street.

I became bored of just waiting, so I started opening some of Dave's drawers, to see what I could see. I found a stress ball. A few copies of Dave's resumé, printed on robin's egg bond paper. I found an unopened "Learn Spanish" computer program. I also found a picture of Val, when they met, when she was 6 years younger. To my eyes, she looked the exact same, except for her hair. Her hair was big in the picture, in the style of

what people called “The Rachel.” She looked quite idiotic, but her breasts were still as Mexican as they’ve ever been. I put the photo in my pocket for safe-keeping. I figured Dave probably had a million of them.

Finally, the computer was ready. I double-clicked Word, and had to wait another 85 minutes. I created my survey, which I’d sketched out on my tape. I needed to use Word. It had to look professional, something a real surveyor might create. I’d never seen a survey before. Were they like the kind of tests guidance counsellors give Special Ed. kids at the beginning of the year? Where they point out a bear wearing a blue ribbon and ask the kid to point out the same bear in a line-up of three? I’ve never taken the test, but I’ve heard stories.

This is the survey I came up with—the survey up with which I came:

- How long have you lived here?
- Do you like this neighbourhood
- Have you ever considered moving out?
- Rate your knowledge of your neighbours on a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being “Not at all” and 5 “Very well”: 1 2 3 4 5
- Where do you work? What is your chosen profession?
- What’s more important to you? Family Financial Success
- Have you ever been the victim of a hate crime?
- Would you consider leaving this neighbourhood if minorities moved in?

I wrote the entire thing in about five minutes, worried that at any moment Dave might come barging in, swinging an axe into my face. For this reason, the survey was a bit unspecific. The second question was also missing a question mark. Nevertheless, it would buy me time, and, at the very least, an excuse to invite myself into their homes. Only one person ever felt inclined to include an additional comment. It said, “Fuck off mate.” He wasn’t even British.

With time to spare, I printed 50 copies of my survey, even though I knew there weren't 50 addresses to visit. It felt like the right number. Same as the missing dog posters. I then closed the file, and accidentally clicked "Yes" when it asked me if I wanted to save "Document 1." I had to go into Dave's Documents and Settings folder. While the surveys printed, I looked around for incriminating files. I saw one file named "Big Booty Smash Down IV." But most of his documents had pretty boring names, like "Pre-way Contact List" and "Multitasking." I imagined they were stories. I didn't open any of them. Except his resumé, in which he used such adjectives as "diligent" "project-oriented" and "leader." I closed the file. Just as the surveys finished printing, a file titled "MW" caught me. It occurred to me that M and W were Morgan Wells's initials. I heard a sound at the door.

Terror alert orange.

I could sense the headlock to come, but when I looked it was just Luis, who didn't say anything. Actually, he said, "*Hola!*" but I ignored him. I could hear Val out in the kitchen, but not Dave. I closed the folder and turned the computer off.

Sitting on the beach more than a week later, I felt a pang of guilt for not buying Luis a present. I had completely expected him to tell Dave, if not on purpose then in passing. But he said nothing. I was thinking this thought as I drifted to sleep, body completely exposed to the sun. I still had a few dollars left from Val's broken twenty, not to mention good intentions. Maybe it wasn't too late to pick something up for him.

I patted Luis on the shoulder, slipped out of the office and went into my room. I then placed the surveys into my backpack, along with my Word War II field manual, and a small pocket mirror from the bathroom. I made a trip to the kitchen, ate an apple and

did my best to act natural around Val. But she didn't respond to my questions, only shrugged from time to time, and touched her belly. So I went into the living room. The room where they kept mail that had been sent to the wrong address. They kept all their "wrong address" letters in a wicker basket on the bottom shelf of the bookcase. I took them out, removed the elastic and flipped through the envelopes. Of what appeared to be about one hundred envelopes, I found the one I had fully expected to find. I wasn't even surprised.

A subscription offer from the Globe and Mail for Mr. Morgan Wells.

More proof. My hypothesis was correct. Morgan Wells had once lived in Dave's apartment. But I still didn't know what it meant. Especially now that I had seen the "MW" file on Dave's computer. Did Dave know Wells before he moved out? Why would he keep a file on him? Was the file even related to Morgan Wells?

I decided to put up the lost dog posters. I wanted to see Sara again. Men are not supposed to contact women until after a three-day wait period. But my time in Toronto was limited, and it seemed necessary to contact her, sooner than later. She could tell me everything I needed to know about Morgan. She had contact with him. She knew him. I knew I could trick her into telling me everything. With one kiss. Maybe not a kiss. A touch on the shoulder? Something like that.

It was really hot that day. By the time I arrived at Sara's place, I was sweating like a dog, and feeling like half my brain had melted. I knocked on the door, thirsty. But when she answered the door, she looked over me.

August 24, 2002, Morning:

“Sara.”

“Hello?”

“I was just out looking for my dog again. I thought I’d check to see if you heard anything.”

“Your dog?”

“Sammy.”

“What’s your name again?”

“My name?” [I will not lie. Even though she had red hair, this question hurt my heart.]

“I’m sorry kid. I’m really busy right now.”

[Kid? *Kid?*]

“My name is Dave.”

“Right. Dave. Sorry.”

“That’s okay.”

“I haven’t... uh... no. I haven’t seen the dog.”

“But—”

“Dave. I’m sorry. I can’t talk right now.”

“I just wanted to know if you—”

“Fuck kid. What’s your problem? Can’t you see I’m not in the mood?”

November 29, 2003, Evening:

I did not wait for Sara to close the door in my face. Instead, I dropped the posters on her rickety front porch and took a hike. When I heard the chimes playing, I briefly

considered turning back setting the whole pile of posters on fire. If I'd had matches, I would have.

Except I wouldn't have.

On my way home, I noticed that a kid in a black jumpsuit was following me. He wore a pair of giant headphones, and was listening to techno at an impossibly high volume. The music kept getting louder, though at first I didn't really worry. By the time I realised how close he was, I was already too late. The blade sliced across my back, and it felt, at first, like he'd just scratched me. But then I turned around and saw the knife in his hand, the red blood sliding across his knuckles. He punched me hard in the chest, which didn't hurt, but knocked me down. I was on the sidewalk, and he stood over me and pushed the knife into my stomach. Again and again. I tried to stop him but the metal sliced through my fingers, plunged through my flesh, severed bones. The last thing I saw was the kid standing over me, sorting through my wallet, which didn't have anything in it. He slit my throat before he left, even though I was already dead.

A few days later, we were eating Chinese food and the phone rang. I say Chinese food, even though it wasn't like any Chinese food I've ever tasted. First of all, no chicken balls. No chicken fried rice. Just a bunch of weird vegetables. Val said it was "authentic." How could it have been authentic if there weren't any fortune cookies?

The phone rang, and even though Val gets mad at Dave for answering the phone during dinner, he answered it. Val said something to Luis in Spanish. To which Dave told Val, just before taking the phone off the cradle, that if it was for her, he'd tell the person to go fuck themselves. Then he answered the phone, and all he said was, "What? No. Wrong number." Then he returned to the table and told us that it was a wrong number.

We all shrugged, and then he said, “They were calling about a lost dog. From some poster.”

I don’t know if Sara put the posters up, or if someone else saw them and did a Good Samaritan. I assume it was her, and I took her actions as an apology, though I knew I could never see her again. Our love was to be a tortured one.

Although I was thinking of Sara as I gobbled down my vegetable balls, I pretty much forgot about the dog posters. I just assumed no one would see an imaginary brown dog wandering the streets. But then I remembered all the homeless people, and I started to worry. If Dave found out about the posters, he’d take a bat to my head. He says my head’s too big and wishes to pop it like a melon. If Dave obliterated my head, my plan would obviously fall apart.

I stuffed another forkful of rice into my mouth. Dave started talking to Val about some dead website he’d found promoting llamas as God’s favourite creature. I was off the hook about the phone call.

But it wouldn’t be long before he caught on. Not just about the lost dog act, but the survey, the list of addresses, everything. It wouldn’t be long until he discovered my connection to the Morgan Wells case. Until I discovered his.

If there’d been fortune cookies, if I’d received a fortune, it might’ve said, “You are the most doomed person alive.” Except it wouldn’t have said that, because fortune cookies never tell the truth.

THE MAN IN THE CROWD

Padro da Silva was the nation's first postman. A common courier, forsaking home and history, he carried a parcel between Montréal and Quebec City in July 1693. No postage stamps, no postmarks. How did he get there? He walked. He delivered. He would've carried a rudimentary map. What's so difficult about mailing a letter?

Each morning people collect and people surrender. Procedures of gain and loss.

The process begins with the envelope. Licking the seal, stamping the corner, dropping the envelope into a large red bin. The envelope is stamped a second time, shuffled into a bag, carted. Driven or walked—delivered. The process ends when the seal is broken by the addressed. Reading cuts the line. But Morgan was the unstable variable in the system, the error in the code, the virus, the mutation. He opened their bills, their refusal letters, their flight confirmations. Their birthday cards with money, their prize offers, their insurance claims. He was an archivist and they were his sacred texts. He carefully collected them, held them under a lamp. Made notes. Created graphs.

Morgan Wells had been doing his research. 62 pages of it in his notebook, 79 including questions concerning the history of Padro de Silva.

Was he married?

When did he die?

What did the message say?

Morgan identified the neighbourhoods, accumulated routes. He memorised the times people left their homes, the times the Padro da Silvas dropped by with their packages, their postal bouquets. For some, he had to leave his house at 6am. He created schedules of sleep, recording when the namesakes slept. He'd listened at the window for

the alarm. He recorded each person's time in his notebook. They appear at random in the crevices of the notebook's pages, in an almost illegible scrawl.

An invisible carpet of Post-its ruled his apartment. The power company took the lights sometime in June, so after nine it was just him and the sound of paper underfoot. Candles in darkness. He spent a fair amount of time on the street. He traversed every major intersection, and every minor intersection greeting it. Even the areas he hadn't yet visited seemed familiar. If his body hadn't crossed them, his eyes had. His maps continued to grow, to cluster. He fed their streets with dialogue and action.

Queen and Thrush. He is in a phone booth. Moves his hand up and presses it against the glass. He speaks a steady stream, and talks with spit.

Some nights he would stay out all night, going from house to house. Five of his namesakes kept late hours. One Morgan got drunk with his friends on a regular basis. They would drink, gradually get louder, until they were laughing at nothing, laughing in a vacuum, polluting the air with liquored voices. Late hour kisses. He attended one of this Morgan's parties. A wolf among wolves. No one spoke to him, but he watched his namesake dance in the middle of the dining room for twenty minutes. He watched him step on his girlfriend's toes and spill rum and coke onto his hand. An hour later he listened to them fight on the porch.

"I'm bored."

"It's your party."

"It's not."

"Go to bed."

"Talk to me for more than five minutes, maybe, before mixing drinks and—"

"I'm talking to you now."

“See?”

“What do you expect? For me to stand out here and argue with you?”

“We’re not arguing.”

“You’re bickering. You’re complaining.”

“Morgan...”

“Go home.”

Morgan preferred the sleepers. On more than one occasion, Morgan stood over their supine forms, monitoring their breaths. He would get as close as a few quiet feet. Close enough to see their faces in the shadows. Inspect the lines. He knew their sleep smells. Nightly odours. Sweat. The one on Euclid snored. His breath smelled like sour milk.

Morgan mimicked their sleep postures. Most slept on their right side. Arms curled beneath their bodies, hidden under pillows. He watched them from the corner of the room. Close to the door.

Most of the time, he came home near midnight and slept on his living room floor. He could still smell her in the creases of his bed, faded blue mattress, cold white sheets. Heard her in the springs and imagined her body lying beneath him, trapping the mattress. He flipped the mattress over. He moved it from one end of his room to the other. But he couldn’t get her out of it.

So he slept on the hard couch. And then one night he came home and found only a Post-it.

On the floor below the centre of the couch: *Couch. Not in reference to a couch that does not exist, but a couch that does exist, or did exist, both before and after the writing of said word.*

So he slept on the Post-it, and fell asleep wondering if the Post-it was written in his handwriting. Did he write the Post-it? Or did she?

The first batch of undelivereds weren't particularly fruitful. Like his own mail, it was cluttered with bills and notifications. Nevertheless, he persevered. He staggered the namesakes throughout the week. On Monday, he visited Morgan in North York. On Tuesday, he went downtown. Wednesday was The Danforth. Thursday to Lawrence Park. Friday to Hillcrest Village. He walked every day and sometimes left work early. A different neighbourhood, but always the same houses, the same buildings. The same mailboxes, the same people, the same order.

There were a few namesakes whose mail Morgan couldn't access. They lived in apartment buildings that kept the mail locked up in separate lockers. Some had their mail thrown inside, through a slot in the door. But Morgan quickly realised that relying upon the mail was like relying upon the weather. Until he discovered the times of delivery, he rarely found a full mailbox. Tracking the namesakes was becoming his full-time occupation. He observed their traffic, eye on the windows, searching for movement. If a Morgan Wells went for a walk, he followed. He needed to keep them in view. But he only followed the namesakes. Their relatives, their friends and acquaintances only cluttered their lives. And his. Like Heidi York.

Like his ever-increasing list of rules, the project grew not with purpose, but with time. The more information he gathered, the more full his notebooks became. The city

was his nervous system. The routes each of them took to work, to the gym, to school. Unlike Morgan's own walking, these Morgans travelled with direction, day after day. Within a couple of months, at any point in the day, Morgan could predict their locations, could see each of them in their proper places. Neatly stacked. In the van with Parker, he would see them ordering their coffees, using the bathroom, taking cabs, drifting. Arriving. Departing. Existing.

Sometimes he watched them leave. When he knew they were gone, when he could be certain of their distance, their destination, he would enter their homes. At first, he relied upon their negligence. An unlocked window, a key on the top of the doorframe. But not all of them were so careless. Most of them locked everything, even the locks inside their homes. Morgan could never get very good at picking the locks, especially in the middle of the day, with one eye over his shoulder, his other eye on the page with the instructions. But eventually he'd get in. For most places, he only did it once. When he was inside for the first time, the first thing he looked for was a set of spare keys. After that, he could come and go as he pleased. He spent entire afternoons in their houses, their apartments, their studios. Tracking his observations, making a note of everything he saw. When they weren't home.

One afternoon, Morgan was sitting in a namesake's house, an overpriced condo in the North end. He flipped channels, noting the number of channels his namesake had, and which ones. He stopped on the Discovery channel and watched a program called "Body Story 2," jotting down what he saw.

*A car driving down a sunny
Woman and man. British?*

Narrator Amer.

“... and Laura’s bodies ... finely balanced system of interdependent organs.”

“Laura wants to say hello.”

“Hellooo!”

“ interconnected, each organ ... all organs ... ”

“... almost certain death ... ”

Almost certain death. Almost certain hunger. Almost certain paranoia. Almost certain laughter. Almost certain drunk. Almost certain fucking.

The narrator keeps ... blood travels through art ... the organs ... blood is constantly feeding and energising ... sending signals throughout.

“Laura!”

The Road’s brain registers

blue tractor

*out out out
lumber pile*

“On impact, Laura’s spleen swings stretching ... ruptures and starts to leak.”

“severing connections disrupting sig ... stem ... ”

There are ambulances and

Morgan had become so immersed in the television, he hadn’t noticed when the front door opened. He only heard it close, and then the footsteps of a Morgan Wells coming down the hall.

He’d planned for something like this. His voice came out weak at first, barely a whisper. He remained seated. Cleared his throat.

“Hey Dan, is that you?”

No immediate reply. He could hear the namesake coming towards the room. He called out again.

“Dan? Where’ve you been?”

“Excuse me?”

The Morgan Wells came around the corner, an attaché case hanging from his shoulder. He was the one with the jar of bird's feathers on his windowsill.

"You're not Dan." Morgan stood up, closed his notebook and dropped it into his bag.

"No I'm not. Who are you?"

"Parker. Sam Parker." He offered his hand, suspended like a dead rat. He stuck it into his pocket. "I'm looking for Dan."

"Dan who?" The namesake walked toward the TV. He turned it off.

"Dan Cox."

"I don't know Dan Cox."

"He doesn't live here?"

"No."

"Really? What's the address? The address here?"

"Not Dan's."

"Oh. Sorry. He said the door would be unlocked so I just came in, I didn't even think... Are you sure this isn't Dan's place?"

"I'm positive."

"I'll ... sorry."

The other Morgan Wells followed him down the hall and stood about a foot away as he put his shoes on.

"Tie them outside."

"What? Oh. Sure. Of course."

It would be the first of two times that a namesake caught him.

As far as Morgan knew, his break-ins were his own. How could they tell? He didn't take anything of value. He was true to his science, an observer, an ethnographer. The only variables he altered were the letters.

At first, Morgan found the paucity of written correspondence as frustrating as the telephone he couldn't answer. He'd expected it, but he still hoped. But people don't write letters. Only businesses do. He tried to encourage the letters to come by ignoring his own mail. The bills, the fliers, the newsletters. They created their own pile near the door, beneath the Post-its, made invisible through sheer familiarity. He left his letters unopened, but still, the other mailboxes refused to yield.

He sometimes wished his mail would disappear, like everything else in his house. If the triangular coffee table could disappear, why couldn't the envelopes he stepped on when he left the house? Although he would lose his blinds, his pots and pans, his potted plants — the envelopes remained.

Most of the younger Morgan Wells's had email accounts, but he could only find the password for one of them, who kept an entire list of passwords – PIN number, passphrases for two email accounts – typed and folded in the top drawer of his desk. Although his hours had been cut back and he was running low on funds, Morgan didn't try to steal the other Morgan's money. But he checked his account frequently, would sometimes open emails and delete them to cover his tracks. He printed some of the emails he received and pushed them into the back of his notebook.

Dear Morgan, it was great to hear from you. I enjoyed your e-mail message Shia and deserted look forward to that tax rebate, but hope I don't meet up with a bed cat like that. It's good news to hear that you might be going to the

West to work this summer. That would be a wonderful experience for you, and on opportunity to put a little cash in your pocket.

I was going to the dig the this morning about the because of the bad weather forecast stayed home instead. The weather turned out to be better than the projected and the soul. I'm at home now trying out a new program called the Dragon naturally speaking. I'm actually using a Dragon naturally speaking it at this very moment and the instead of typing this e-mailed to you. I dictating it instead. You'll probably find the aloft of the mist spelled words and grammatical errors, but aye have to give the program to time to recognize my voice and the hopefully over time will improve. I don't have the enough experience to dictate and read what I'm dictating and see how it prints out on the computer screen. Not I'll have to proofread it later.

Your mother or just arrived and cheese I get a great laugh out of my e-mail message to you and I think you'll find it fumes as well. At least I hope you find it and not take it.

That's all.

Your mother and I send our love and best wishes. Keep up the good work, glad to hear your getting used out of your decree. I have to go into town. A plan to come back and work a little more on this new program and hopefully over time. If there were a lot of misspelled words and grammatical errors, and the EU got a little chuckle out of it good. And if he didn't get little chuckle to limit the two bed.

Lucky morgue, we'll get back to you shortly, love dead.

When Morgan responded to this email, he commented only upon its contents.

Upon the limitations of technology and the prospects of renting a U-Haul. The emails did not deliver the same satisfaction as Heidi York's letter. They provided some insights regarding that specific namesake, but in a limited sense. They were too present, too everyday. He didn't need to read some interoffice email regarding beavers in Cancun to know the type of people a Morgan Wells worked with. After a while, when he became bored with that Morgan's inboxes, he changed the passwords. From "4djh5y6" to "apple," from "firenze" to "frozen." After a few days he changed them back.

Although he knew he could learn more from belongings than from words or actions, he still sought the letters, waiting for another chance to cut open an envelope, to

spread its contents open beneath his lamp light. Months slipped by, and although Morgan continued to rummage through mailboxes, he did not find any new private dispatches.

Yet he continued to steal the mail, even the ones from the bank, the letters from funeral homes, the government notices. His favourite were phone bills. He would call the numbers listed at random. His phone was missing, so he used the payphone at the library. Sometimes he didn't speak. Sometimes he asked for Morgan, or would simply say "Wrong number." The purpose wasn't to speak, but to make contact, to hear the person's voice. Especially the numbers that had been called several times on the bill. He spoke to one of the Morgans's grandmother for thirty-five minutes. He was Morgan Wells, and she was so happy to hear from him. She spoke of hens and creaky ceilings, and her husband's arthritis. He hung up halfway through the conversation. He imagined her calling her real grandson back, asking about the cut-off.

At the end of every day, Morgan carefully added the stolen mail to the file folders, what he called the archives. In his notebook, he recorded these collections. It was less a collection of thoughts than it was a catalogue, an index of his observations, his replacements. He called his thefts replacements. With the first Morgan Wells, he left a misdirected postcard. It was an accident, but he decided to adopt it as part of the routine. Of course, he eventually took the postcard back, stuck it between the pages of his notebook. But, as he did with all the others, he left a piece of his own mail, or some other object, to replace it. Sometimes he'd tear a random page out of his notebook and slip it through the slot. His scribbles decorating the sheet. Sometimes he would leave a button or a box of marbles, an old 8 ball from his closet, a plastic straw from his drawers, a golf tee. An item for an item.

Of course, the letters weren't the only things he took away. In fact, he was more interested in the household items, the things the other Morgan Wells's owned. The obvious and the secret, the ridiculous and the mundane. If the object seemed as though it would not be missed, a rubber ball or a silver pin, Morgan would remove the ball or pin and replace it with an equally unnoticeable item. A box of matches or a lighter. A ball of yarn or a three-ring binder. A stapler or a Christmas card. Near the end, he even began trading items between homes, between Morgans, wondering if the items would make a difference. Most of the time, they remained in the same carefully selected spot he'd placed them in.

In truth, the lack of personal, hand-written letters did little to shelve Morgan's curiosity. The namesakes disappeared into their belongings and Morgan continued to operate upon their homes. He measured their walls, crawled under their beds, did their laundry, ate their food and read their books. Where he'd searched for contact, for knowledge, he found nothing but belongings, things heaped upon things. Each time he visited one of their homes, he became that Morgan. The Morgan that worked in a kitchen. The Morgan that studied Economics. The Morgan that sold real estate. The Morgan that operated upon bodies. But never the Morgan that worked for a document shredding company. Never the Morgan with Post-its and maps on every wall. Never the Morgan with a table full of files, stolen information, and an old typewriter he didn't use. Never the Morgan with no wife, no money, no friends. That Morgan disappeared into the notebooks. Never the collector, always the collected, the archived, the stored.

Sometimes it seemed as though the notebook wrote to him, told him things. As though a part of him had somehow disappeared into the words, and now the old Morgan

was writing to the new Morgan, the multiple Morgan, from within the text. Telling him about the others. The others that were slowly becoming one with the things they owned, the things they assembled, the things they hoarded.

Morgan Wells on Unsworth became a closet full of WWII memorabilia. He was a collection of curled and faded Tarot cards. His face was a drawer of disorganised photographs. His insides were the contents of his drawers, his cupboards, the cubby below the stairs. Unsworth Morgan was a rusty Mustang under a faded brown tarp, a basement full of unused tools, blocks of half-chopped wood. A singing Elvis fish.

Morgan Wells on Featherdale and Ikley became a box of old blankets, out-of-date text books, copies of essays and tests, a pencil case full of sharpened pencils, haemorrhoid medicine, winter coats, two outdated Apple computers, an electronic Yamaha keyboard, twelve pairs of light bulbs, a set of red-handled screwdrivers, about two hundred CDs, a desk calendar from 1997, some mismatched dishes.

Morgan Wells on Threadneedle became a university degree, coiled up in a golden tube. He was a file folder containing his income tax information. He was a stamp collection, a hockey card collection, a box of silverware, a rosary, a broken wine glass, wrapped in a Spinal Tap t-shirt.

“Morgan. What can I say?”

“Sorry sir.”

“Sorry? That doesn’t count. Not at this stage.”

For months Morgan had been skipping shifts and showing up late. Cranley finally called him into his office. He’d been an hour late for work twice that week. Both times

because he'd been up all night, monitoring one of his namesakes breathing. He averaged fifteen breaths a minute.

“What can I say?”

Cranley leaned back in his chair. He spun around until he came to the photo of his family on the wall. A look crossed his face. Morgan referred to this look as “a look of *bête-noir*.”

Cranley spun in his chair. Morgan kept his eyes on the back of the chair, expecting to see a new person when it revolved on the other side. When it did turn around, for a brief instant, he didn't see Cranley in the seat. Where Cranley should've been he saw a crowd of faces. A whorl of dust. Matter-energy, matter-movement. Lines of descent. The image vanished quickly, or rather, Cranley rematerialized immediately.

“You've been making a habit of this.”

“I'm sorry.”

He didn't have to say Morgan was fired. He did anyway.

“We're going to let you go. I want to get that out of the way.”

“I understand.”

“Not just for being late. You realise that we've caught you. On the cameras. Your little trick with the letters?”

A week before, Morgan went into the storage room, opened a “Shred-it” bag and removed a handful of unopened envelopes. He didn't spend much time sorting through them. The letters had already been opened, so he didn't see the harm in taking them. Table scraps. He slid them into his pocket, as natural as picking a quarter from the street.

Cranley played the tape twice. Morgan stiffened at the reappearance of his face on the screen. Is that what he looked like?

“So there it is. This business is built on trust. That’s why they send us in. You realise that? What you did was a felony. If our clients found out, they could sue. Technically, I could have you arrested.” Cranley raised his eyebrows. “Instead, I’m going to withhold payment of your last cheque.” Cranley pushed his chair back walked toward the door. “I want you out of here Wells. Immediately.”

Morgan left Cranley’s office. He didn’t know what to think of being fired. He had mixed reviews.

As he went down the hall towards the locker room, Cranley called out from behind. “And Jesus, why don’t you answer your goddamned phone? We’ve been trying to call you all morning.”

“I don’t have a phone.”

“And your landlord’s been calling here.”

“He has?”

“Don’t play dumb. Tabitha told me she’s alerted you several times, but he still keeps calling. I’ve personally told him to fuck off.”

“I’ve been—”

“I don’t care.”

On his way out, Morgan ran into Parker, who said, “You’re dead weight. You don’t even have a licence.”

“Thanks Parker.”

“You know he could’ve had you arrested.”

“Yeah.”

“He still might. Best of luck!”

Morgan was vaguely aware of the security camera in the ceiling over his head when he stole the letters from the Shred-it bag. A part of him knew he would be caught, if not by his copies, then by someone else. Someone would stop him.

Out of work and spending nearly every moment tracking one namesake or another, Morgan eventually decided to write letters to the other Morgan Wells's. He addressed his multiples by their first names, as friends. He told them of his late night visits, of the things they did when they thought no one was watching, of the love letters they hid in their drawers. A signed confession that detailed all his actions, the people he contacted. He wrote his own address on the front of each envelope and hand-delivered them, door-to-door, when he knew no one was home.

He wanted them to know. He understood them now, and he wanted them to understand him. While the clues he regularly left behind were perhaps too subtle, the letters were plates of glass, see-through. The Morgans would open them, unfold them and see his position in a clear light. Morgan craved transparency.

He'd been misled. By his wife. By God. By every person he'd ever loved. By Morgan Wells. Each day, he went somewhere he wasn't supposed to be. He'd searched for the perfect interference. But the more he learned of the others, the less he could see of them. He could only see himself. The watcher. The stranger. The letter thief.

Although he willed against it, by the end of the summer, each of his letters, his confessions had been sent back, unopened.

UNA FIESTA DE CUMPLEAÑOS Y LA REVELACIÓN DE CIERTAS VERDADES III

November 29, 2003, Evening:

We came back from the beach at around one. My entire chest was pink with the sun infection. It didn't hurt yet, but would soon. And then the itch would come. I did not speak the entire walk back from the beach, though Dave kept saying things about my back, how it now looked even whiter than before. When Val offered her sympathies, I could barely look at her. I still do not know why either of them didn't wake me. Val claims she went for a walk up the beach with Luis. Dave was laughing too hard.

The birthday party was supposed to start at two. Luis was not in school by this point, so of course he had no friends other than his parents' friends' kids. And since Dave and Val have only two friends, there was only one other kid at the party. If there is anything good that came out of the sunburn, it's that I didn't have to help Val set up. She filled the tub with cool water and mixed it with Baking Soda and told me I could stay in there until the party started. I imagined pulling her into the water with me. I don't know if I wanted to drown her or make Jesus sex to her. I did neither. I didn't even take a bath. I just sat on the closed toilet seat and listened to my tapes.

Over the rest of that week I crossed the addresses off the list. One by one, I crossed them, scratched them, put an X beside them. Most of them didn't want to talk to me. Some were simply rude.

August 25, 2003, Afternoon:

“This is a weird survey. What's it for?”

“High School newspaper. The Gazette.”

“But what’s the point of it?”

“I can’t tell you. It would influence your answers and jeopardise the legitimacy of the experiment.”

“I’m not doing it.”

“Sir, it’ll only take a second. If you like, I won’t take your name and your information will remain anonymous.”

“Anonymous how? You know where I live.”

“I’ll never come back.”

“Please don’t.”

November 29, 2003, Evening:

The house on Euclid was always empty. Only two people actually took my survey and invited me inside. One of them was a doctor. She lived on the corner of Firestone and Wellesworth. It took three hours to walk from 232 Mortimer to her place, but only five minutes before she closed the door in my face. She filled in my survey, but didn’t talk. By this time, I was used to that response.

Neighbourhood Survey

Resident's Name: *M Wells*

Resident's Age: *49*

- How long have you lived here? *6 years*
- Do you like this neighbourhood *yes*
- Have you ever considered moving out? *yes*
- Rate your knowledge of your neighbours on a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being "Not at all" and 5 "Very well": 1 2 3 4 5
- Where do you work? What is your chosen profession? *St. Michael's*
- What's more important to you? Family Financial Success
- Have you ever been the victim of a hate crime? *NO*
- Would you consider leaving this neighbourhood if minorities moved in? *NO*

Additional Comments:

When she handed me the completed survey, I immediately looked at her name. It didn't make sense. She signed as M. Wells. My first thought was that she was Morgan Wells. But of course, her name could've been Mary, or Margaret, or something else. A relative? She could've been Morgan. Regardless, she was a Wells. What did it mean? I had to keep her door open.

August 25, 2003, Afternoon:

"No additional comments?"

"Nope. Nothing to add."

"Your last name is Wells?"

"Yes."

"I have a cousin with that last name."

"You do?"

"I do."

"What's his name?"

"Mark."

“Mark Wells? Not familiar.”

“What’s your name?”

“Morgan.”

“Morgan? Really? Your name is Morgan?”

“Morgan. Yes.”

“You’re Morgan Wells?”

“I am.”

“Any relation to the Morgan Wells’s on Unsworth?”

“Who?”

“The father and son?”

“Afraid not. I’m the only Morgan in my family.”

“Well—”

“Take care.”

November 29, 2003, Evening:

She closed the door. Another closed door. At this point I was too confused to speak. I didn’t even record my observations on tape, which is rare. I walked away from the house, not even in the right direction, and got lost in some overpass wasteland. A grey area, covered in ashes. I don’t know how long I walked for, but finally I found a corner store. The place smelled like moth balls and B.O. The clerk at the counter was missing two teeth. He kept talking to a woman who was in a different room watching television. I bought a pop and some black liquorice candies, because I knew this was the only way he would let me look in his phonebook. I could’ve waited until I got home, but I needed to

know immediately. He passed me the Yellow Pages. I had to specifically request the White Pages, which made him sigh. A very depressing noise. He had to ask the woman in the other room to bring the phone book. He sat in his chair and looked out the window. I could hear the woman coming out, complaining in a language I couldn't understand. When she came around the corner I saw that she was the most beautiful woman I've ever seen. Terror alert orange. Her skin was even darker than Val's, and I could tell she was unhappy with her terrible ogre husband.

She threw the phonebook on the counter without looking at me and left, muttering. I put a liquorice baby in my mouth and opened the book. I flipped to the middle, kept turning pages until I found Wells. And the Morgan Wells's. Six of them. I took the list of addresses out of my pocket and compared the two.

My suspicions gravitised.

There were fewer Morgan Wells's in the phonebook than there were addresses on my list. But the majority matched. I copied the phone numbers beside each of the addresses and left the store, having completely forgotten my plan to put a dagger through the depressed ogre's heart, steal his wife and carry her to safety.

In the sunlight, everything became clear. Clearer? I finally understood the secret behind the notorious list of addresses. The idea didn't come to me like a bolt of lightning, which, when I tell the story to Amy, is how I pretend it happened. Instead, it just made sense. It was a list someone had copied out of the phonebook. Why? I suddenly realised that it didn't matter why. That I didn't care why. I had been searching for days. Nobody wanted to speak to me. Or they were never home. And when one person finally talked to me, she completely threw the case in a whole new direction. I'd found yet another clue

that only made my life more confusing than it was before. Is there a name for that? Is that deductive reasoning?

I now knew that the father and son were essentially no more important than Sara, than any of the other people I'd spoken to. Morgan Wells was an insignificant detail. Not one but many. A cluster of names. *The Morgan Wells* did not exist.

Except he did. At least, the one that had previously lived in my brother's apartment existed. For some reason, he'd copied down the addresses of all the people in the city that shared his name. Why would anyone do that?

I went back to 232 Mortimer and on the way the sun suddenly disappeared. It takes 8 minutes and 23 seconds for the sun's light to hit the earth. So as the flames died away, I knew that in fact our planet had already died. We just didn't know it. In seconds, it became very cold, which my hot skin initially appreciated. Then the winter storms came and I froze on the spot. Shattered into a million shards of glass.

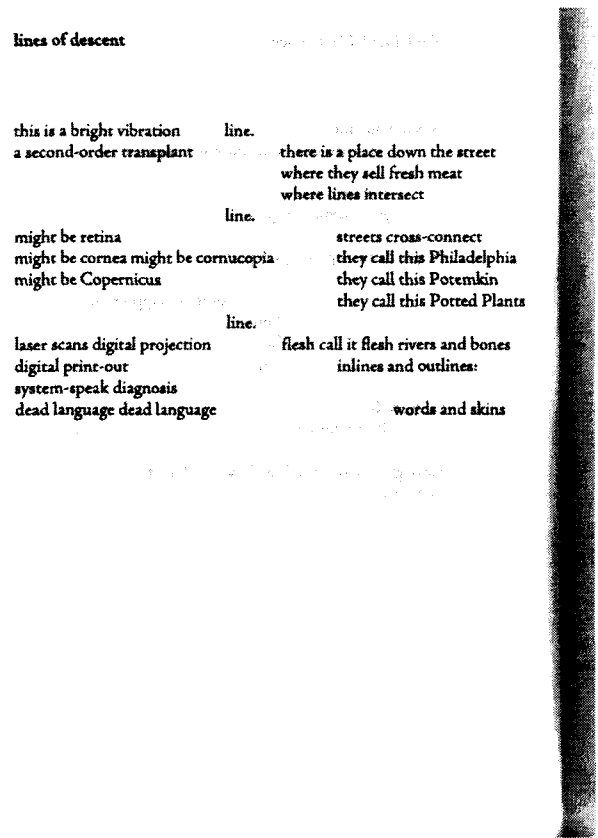
For the rest of the week, I still went from one address to the next. Except now I didn't bother knocking on the door. I would only walk to the neighbourhood, walk past the house. Then I'd go somewhere to sit and read and watch.

Some days I couldn't muster the energy to leave. On those days, I'd investigate the nooks and crannies of Dave's apartment. Hoping to find more clues. Another book. Anything. I knocked on the walls, listening for a hollow sound. Nothing. I checked the floorboards, hoping to find a loose one, thinking there might be something hidden underneath. Nothing. I peered into the grates, with an eye for letters, loose papers. Nothing. I even examined things that obviously belonged to Dave, like the books in the living room. I dug my hand beneath the cushions in the couch, but all I found was a pile

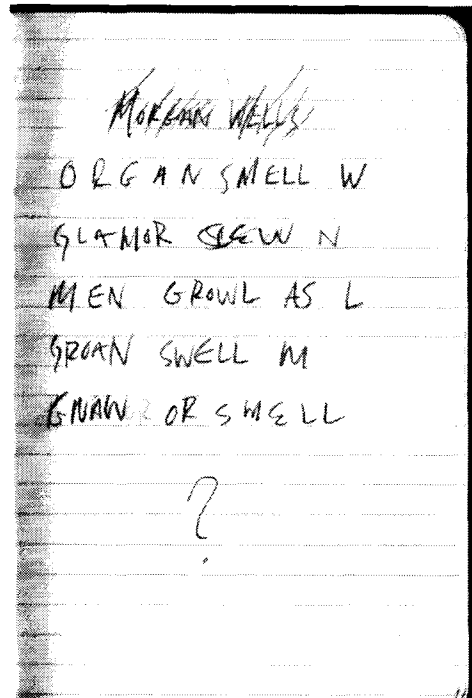
of Cheetos, 2 nickels, one dime and a golf tee. I was desperate for anything, but I found nothing.

I figured that the poetry book behind the drawer might be the final key, the last answer. The last chance. *A Description of the New World Called a Blazing World*. It seemed unlikely, but at this point I was a perpetual motion machine. Once the process had started, I had to keep looking for clues, because otherwise all I had was television, and Dave on the couch, and Luis wanting to play stupid games. So I kept the ball rolling. What else?

The book of poetry told me nothing. Only one poem really stood out, to do with streets. Though nothing about Morgan Wells, other than the fact that he read stupid books.



It must be said that I did attempt a few anagrams of Morgan Wells's name. That is what detectives generally do, at least in stories. Here are the words I came up with. The words up with which I came?



Val rapped on the bathroom door and asked me how my bath was going. I splashed my hand in the water and said, "Just fine." She recommended that I put Aloe Vera on my skin. I said I would, then went back to my tapes. I listened to my stupid observations, my stupid theories. I tried to find something inside there, but I couldn't. Of course, my main regret wasn't that I'd wasted my time, but that I'd lost a reason to waste it. For some reason, even though I knew their numbers, I didn't bother calling any of the Morgan Wells's. Every day I tried to gain access to Dave's computer whenever he went out, but I think he might've suspected my presence in there. Because for the rest of the time I was in Toronto, the greyest city in Canada, he locked the office door.

At quarter to two, Val knocked on the wall between her bedroom and the bathroom. I could hear her in there opening and closing drawers. I imagined her body entirely brown and toasty. I imagined her pulling out different bras and things, fitting them around her incredibly sophisticated Mexican breasts. And then she knocked on the wall again and told me the party was starting. A half-hour later I was sitting in the armchair, eating tofu pizza on a whole wheat crust. I couldn't finish it. Everyone was dressed as some pirate or another. Even Dave and Val. I wore an eye-patch. The whole idea seemed really idiotic, but I've always had a thing for eye-patches.

Luis was supposed to be Jack Sparrow. He just looked like a stupid kid pirate.

Fifteen minutes into the party – which was basically me, Val, Luis, the other couple and their stupid kid sitting in the TV room/birthday room, with streamers and pirate ships taped to the walls – Dave came out of his office. He sat on the couch next to Val, dressed like Captain Hook. He didn't even greet the guests, which obviously displeased Val. I could see it in her arms, something moving beneath her skin. She kept referring to his lateness, subtly, as though no one noticed. Like, “Well, I suppose we're finally ready to have lunch. I hope no one has starved to death yet.” And, “Dave likes to do his work at the craziest times of the day. Like right before bed ... in the middle of a birthday party. I suppose you could call it dedication, hey sweetheart?”

I was thankful, this time, for the presence of Brenda and Mark and the W-kid.

Dave kept his eyes on *Sponge Bob*. At first I thought it was because he didn't want to start a fight in front of their friends. A fight with Val. But I noticed him on several occasions giving me the headlock look, his death glare. Normally I would give him the finger for staring at me. But I knew he had the upper hand. He had discovered my

transgression concerning his computer. I kept thinking of other reasons he might've been angry with me, some other menial detail. I had let Val touch my back. Could that've been the reason? Had he finally discovered our affair? Had he discovered that Val gave me money to buy Luis a present? Had she told him that I'd failed to produce a gift? She'd only shook her head at me when I told her I'd forgotten to buy him something. She didn't seem like a rat. Besides, she didn't love Dave. She would divorce him to marry me.

I told myself that Dave was mad at Val. Still, he kept his eyes trained on me the whole time we ate. My terror alert elevated from yellow to orange. Dave bit into his tofuza but didn't stop looking at me, so I wondered if he was imaging biting my face off.

After lunch, Dave tried to take me aside, but Val insisted that we stay in the birthday room. So Luis and the W-kid sat around and played games, and we watched, and I had to sit there the whole time, listening to married people talk, and little kids laughing, and knowing the whole time that my brother was going to murder me. I was going to die, and this would be the last thing I remembered. Sitting in a room with people who talked about nothing. I imagined a tornado spilling out of the clouds over the apartment building. I saw it swell and drop. We were split, all split, and tumbling through space until the roof collapsed and crushed us. I felt my face explode into my throat.

By the time Val carried the birthday cake into the birthday room, I could practically hear Dave's thoughts. At one point, someone called and Dave picked the phone up within half a ring. He practically screamed "Wrong number," before slamming the receiver down. The candles were gleaming, sparkling a little, and I wondered if they were trick candles. Val started singing "Happy Birthday" and everyone joined. Except Dave. He stood up and crossed the room. My recorder was in my room. If it had been on

it would've recorded Val: "*Happy Birthday to you.*" It would've recorded Dave: "You! Come with me!" It would've recorded the sound of my collar being ripped. It would've recorded me: "I have a sunburn." It would've recorded Dave: "Does it look like I give a fuck?" It would've recorded Val, interrupted from her singing: "Dave, calm down" It would've recorded Brenda telling the W-kid to come over and sit with her. It would've recorded me telling Dave to go fuck himself, which is not something I normally say. To people or to Dave. It would've recorded Val telling us both to leave the room.

It wouldn't have recorded anyone finishing the birthday song.

It would've recorded Luis: "What's wrong?"

As Dave dragged me out of my seat and pushed me down the hall toward his office, I remember suddenly thinking of the time I nearly got into an accident, when I was in Grade Seven. I was driving with Martin. He was driving. He was smoking cigarettes he'd stolen from mom, and we were listening to Black Sabbath. He was telling me a story, not watching the road. We almost slammed into the back of a car that had stopped in front of us, without signalling or anything. I remember how I yelled out, in the passenger seat of Ross's car, "Oh fuck me Jesus!" and how Martin pulled onto the shoulder, passed the car on the inside lane and then pulled back onto the road. Martin laughed at me. "Oh fuck me Jesus?!" When I die, I'm going to scream like Ross, or say "Oh fuck me Jesus!" and then I'm going to shit myself. And Ross and Dave and even Val will laugh when I'm gone.

When we got to the office, Dave just pushed me into the door and it opened and I fell through. I wish I'd had my recorder, just in case I didn't live. Since I obviously lived, my memory will have to do.

If I'd had my recorder, it would've recorded Dave asking me if I'd used his computer. From the way he said it that there was only one answer to the question. I nodded. He asked me what the fuck I thought I was doing. He then pulled a piece of paper out of his pocket. It was a copy of the survey. He accused me of ripping people off. He asked me if I was stealing again. I said no. He punched the piece of paper into my chest. I kept my eyes closed. I fully expected a headlock. I was waiting for worse. Waiting for the punch to the face. The knife in my gut. I kept waiting.

I opened my eyes. Dave was sitting in his office chair.

If I'd had my tape recorder, it would've recorded Dave talking to me with a voice that sounded like someone else's. "Why do you do it?" he asked me. "You think you can be like him? Why do you even want to be like him?" Dave leaned forward in his chair. "You know I have to tell Mom about this." He looked at the phone. "I mean, fuck. I wanted to trust you. Going out every day. I wanted to trust you. Val wanted to trust you. But you put those posters up, didn't you? I know it was you. Why? You thought it would be funny...? I just... smarten up. When will you fucking grow up?"

During most of what Dave said, I was trying not to laugh, because he was being so serious, and had apparently forgotten that he was dressed like Captain Hook. Eventually, though, I just kept thinking about how much I would prefer getting a headlock. He sounded like my mother. I wondered briefly if he'd phoned her and told her what I'd done. The look on his face told me he had. He suddenly looked so worn out, and I wondered if I knew him. How did I know him?

At some point, Dave asked me a question. But I wasn't listening. Then the sitcom in him disappeared. Bob Saget left the room and Dave jumped out of his seat. He pushed

me against the wall, and grabbed me by the hair. I pushed him off me, and ran into the hallway. I only made it about five feet before I felt his hands on back. All three hundred pounds collapsed me into a heap, and I lay there on the floor while he pushed his hands against my throat. His face was so serious. I felt the way a popped balloon must feel. I just started laughing against his hand as it pushed against my vocal cords.

It would've recorded Dave: "You think this is funny?"

It would've recorded me: "You're ... funny."

It would've recorded Dave: "Fuck you."

It would've recorded Val: "Dave, what are you doing?"

It would've recorded me: "Fuck ... you ... Dave."

I don't know what happened to the other people, but I think they were still in the birthday room. They must've heard the commotion though. Eventually they came out to watch. Dave pulled my shirt over my face and started slapping my sunburned belly. "You'll never learn will you?" I could hear Luis crying, and the other kid started crying with him. Dave's friends were now just a few feet away, telling him to relax. Dave kept sitting on me, and talking to them like normal, as he patted his open palm against my stomach again and again.

It would've recorded Dave: "It's okay. This is the only way to teach him."

It would've recorded Val: "Dave, relax."

It would've recorded me: "Get ... off."

It would've recorded Dave: "We don't want you."

It would've recorded me: "Good."

It would've recorded Dave: "It is good."

Finally Val came over and slapped Dave on the back of the head.

It would've recorded Val: "Have you lost your fucking mind?"

It would've recorded Dave: "What the hell?"

It would've recorded Val: "Are you a child?"

It would've recorded Dave: "You know what he's been up to?"

It would've recorded Val: "Get off him."

It would've recorded Dave: "Do you?"

It would've recorded Val: "No."

It would've recorded Dave: "He's been going around the neighbourhood conducting a fake survey."

It would've recorded Val: "No he hasn't."

It would've recorded Dave: "I found the file in my Recycle Bin."

It would've recorded me: "Get off me!"

It would've recorded Val: "Let him up Dave."

Dave stopped smacking my belly and pulled his overweight tublike body up. It seems important to mention that at this point there were tears in my eyes, but not because he hurt me. For a while I couldn't breathe, and I think that activates the tear ducts. I left the room and went to the bathroom. I could hear Val apologising to their friends. I could hear their friends leaving, and Luis still crying. Then I heard Dave making his excuses. Apparently, he'd found my backpack and was trying to show her the things inside. Then I heard Val slap him. Sounded like across the cheek.

I heard Val tell him to leave. He asked if he could at least change out of his costume. They continued the argument in their bedroom, using their strange whisper

shouts. Another conversation on tones and volumes. From a distance, it sounded like they were just blowing wind back and forth. After another ten minutes of whisper-shouting, I heard the front door close.

A while later, Luis laughed in the birthday room, so I came out. Val and Luis were watching a movie. I didn't want to see Luis. I especially did not want to see Val. I went directly into my room and sat on the bed. I was going to listen to my tapes. But my recorder was gone. Tapes too. Dave had taken my bag with him.

So I just sat on the bed and waited, waited to disappear. It seemed like the only logical thing to do.

I died of cancer once. Some kind of bone cancer. My body gave out. The doctors offered scientific explanations, but I could never picture it as anything other than my body getting smaller, shrinking and disappearing into the mattress. They outlined the critical procedures, fed me enormous quantities of morphine. The operation would be a success. I slept and when I woke up, I noticed blood on the sheets. They cut me open. They kept cutting me open, and pulling things out, putting other things in. Clocks. Photos. Waterwings. I died of an internal bleed, after months in the ICU. Some suspected the nurses of being purposefully negligent. No one wanted me to pull through.

Then I heard a knock at my window.

It was Dave. He must've been standing on something. A garbage can? We looked at each other through the window for a while. I made no move to open it, and he made no attempt to force me. Then he looked down and it seemed like he was talking to someone, only I couldn't hear anything. I walked closer to the window and I could see that he was

fishing around in my backpack. He pulled *A Description of the New World called a Blazing World* out of the bag and held it up to the glass. I walked a little closer.

“Where’d you get this?” he asked me, muffled. I said nothing. He flipped the book open and removed the original address list.

“Where’d you get this? Open the window.”

I opened it.

Dave held the paper up. “Do you know what this is?”

“List of addresses.”

“Did you steal it? Where’d you find it?”

“I haven’t done anything illegal.”

Dave smiled. Then he asked me to come outside. “I need you to tell me what you know about Morgan Wells,” he said. I must’ve had a death wish. I put my shoes on and climbed through the window.

POST

The mail piled up. Every evening, Morgan returned with his latest collection. He stacked them in neat rows on the kitchen table. He turned the lamp on, pulled his kitchen gloves on, and began the dissection. He sometimes turned the radio on. Turned the volume up to fill the air. Death energy. He recorded brief observations about each article. He added them to a list of stolen articles, rated them according to importance. Let's call this list of stolen letters his canon. The hierarchy of Morgan's canon had nothing to do with the value of the mail, but with output. Mailboxes that produced the most in the article department ranked the highest. Nothing to do with quality.

Morgan's own mail was lowest on the list. Of all the Morgan Wells's, he received the least mail. So he neglected it. Kicked it against the kickers. Tried to forget it. Or simply forgot it, considering the complete lack of interest he directed towards it. Why read his mail? What more could he possibly learn from himself?

He kept the returned letters, which he called "misplaced," in a plastic Ziploc bag, which he stored in the cupboard above the fridge. With the spices he never used, and a peach basket full of loose paper clips, solo mittens, the front page of a yellowed newspaper. It was as close as he could bring himself to throwing them away.

One morning in late September, a morning already one twitch old, Morgan held an empty box of oatmeal in his hand, trying to will the oats to appear. There was nothing else to eat in his house but a bag of bowtie pasta, and a jar of capers.

Usually, Morgan could rely upon a namesake's cupboards for food. But in the morning he had to fend for himself. None of the Morgans or the people they lived with

left their homes until at least 8 in the morning. He could've "shopped" ahead, but he'd made a rule that disallowed leaving a namesake's house with food. So he pulled his coat on, having not yet felt the chill of fall, but sensing it, as though at any moment it might descent upon the city with its cold grey hands. Morgan walked for twenty minutes, crisscrossing the street every twenty seconds. Every thirty-two seconds. Every fifty seconds. Every minute. Every four minutes.

The store was closed when he arrived. He'd been there hundreds of times, but this was a first. He stood outside the door, and copied the store hours into his notebook. The place should've been open. Curious, Morgan flipped through the pages of his notebook, thinking that he'd done this before. He'd arrived at this store a few months before. He'd copied the store hours down. But his searching yielded no proof. The notebooks were, perhaps, the only thing in Morgan's life without a centre, without order.

Morgan closed the notebook and slipped it back into his pocket. He checked the store hours a second time. Then he noticed a black car parked in the middle of the street. The sun glared off its front window, its rims, its glossy, recently buffered surfaces. The driver had his window down, his head turned in the other direction. The sun glared off his bald head, so it appeared as though he had a face of light. He was backing up, but very slowly, so as to appear unmoving. Then the car stopped moving. The man tucked his bald head into the vehicle. He rolled his window up and pulled away.

Morgan wasn't sure how long he watched the driver in the black car, but by the time the man drove away, the store's electric doors were opening and closing behind him. He heard a man speaking. He turned around and saw a short, hairy grocery woman moving her mouth in his direction.

“What? What was that?”

“I said you’re either in or you’re out. You keep activating the door.”

Morgan put his notebook into his pocket and stepped into the grocery store. As he walked in, another shopper arrived, a woman in a brown tweed coat, slightly older, professional. For a moment, he wondered if the woman had given him a look. Not a look of interest, or even a look of disdain, but a look. A recognition. “*I saw you.*” He followed her into the store.

He didn’t track her for long. After the first three items, he knew what type of person she was, and lost interest. Avocado. Saffron. Mint leaves. She probably celebrated Labour Day.

Morgan wondered if she drove an SUV. He wanted to eat avocados with her on a boat in the Bahamas. He wanted to spread mint leaves in the forest. Every year they would throw their Labour Day bash, and he’d cook the meat. He’d say, “I’m on the meat. Hand me some matches.”

He knew he’d find his oatmeal in Aisle 7. Bottom row near the end. But he started in Aisle 1 and wound his way through, looking for items he recognised from his namesakes’ kitchens. Items particular to them.

Chickpeas: Firestone.
Kraft Dinner: Fallingdale
Tofu: Threadneedle.

Morgan’s stomach was snarling by the time he grabbed his oatmeal. He brought it to the counter, and saw that another person was approaching at the same time. There was only one clerk, so Morgan slowed down, let the other person move in.

It was only after he saw the groceries on the conveyer belt that Morgan realised that the man standing in front of him was a Morgan Wells. The postcard Morgan. Morgan dropped his oatmeal behind the namesake's box of Italian wafers.

From the way other Morgan Wells stood, half-facing Morgan, half-facing the cashier, Morgan got a close look at his face. He'd only ever seen it that close when the man was sleeping. To see it move, blink, speak in broad daylight was a different experience altogether. He noticed creases in the man's forehead that he hadn't noticed before. In the dark, their faces looked prosthetic. Flat, shapeless, and prosthetic.

But up close, this Morgan lost his mannequin features. He moved his hand into his pocket and pulled some money out. The bills were folded in half, had been neatly placed into the man's pocket. Exactly as Morgan had expected them to be. He unfolded the bills for the cashier. Then he noticed Morgan staring. The other Morgan stared back, and only broke his stare when the clerk handed him his change. Morgan watched him leave, step through the electric doors and disappear. He did not turn around.

When Morgan came home, he wrote "I'm invisible" on a Post-it note. It would be a reminder of his role. To sink between the lines. To disappear into walls. To fade. A ghost. Not that it mattered. It wouldn't be long before it all fell through. Before he too disappeared, like so many people in his life. At the very least, it wouldn't be long before he simply stopped writing in his notebook.

Inner Back Cover of Notebook: *I'm invisible.*

A few days later, Morgan went to the house on Unsworth. He arrived after the postman arrived, close to two in the afternoon. Nothing but junkmail. Morgan let himself

in. He'd not seen any of the neighbours. They'd seen him previously, but never did anything about it. He was just another face they recognised, another neighbourhood fixture. A man in the crowd.

Morgan closed the door softly. He locked it and put his keys into his pocket. The Morgan who lived here was elderly. He rarely left the house. But once every two weeks, he went for lunch with his daughter. Morgan removed his shoes, lined them up neatly against the wall. He went into the kitchen to make himself a sandwich. The man didn't have much besides bread and margarine. Morgan toasted the bread, spread the margarine on thinly, then sprinkled the bread with cinnamon. He ate the sandwich standing over the sink and rinsed the crumbs.

He washed his hands in the sink and dried them with a dish towel. He made his way into the living room. He imagined the namesake drinking tea. Waiting for the phone to ring. He didn't like this room in particular. It felt small, stuffy, seemed to hide corpses of forgotten pets under the rug. But he'd placed a piece of paper in the centre of a dictionary. He found the book, next to a copy of Borges's *Labyrinths*, and pulled it down from the shelf. It weighed heavy in his hands. Morgan flipped the book open.

In Unsworth's Dictionary, beneath the definition for "purloined," a Post-it: *Why do you have so many sugar bowls?*

No answer. He left the Post-it and closed the book. Morgan replaced the dictionary then went upstairs. He walked up picturing the other Morgan walking beside him. Would he hold the rail? With a firm grip? Or with loose fingers—drumming against the steel belly of the pipe? Would he lean to the right? Keep his eyes on the stairs?

Morgan limped in the way he'd watched the older Morgan Wells move. Favouring his right foot, left hand close to the centre of his chest.

Morgan noticed that one of the three doors upstairs was closed. Usually, all three were open. Perhaps he should've taken this as a sign. But he knew the old man was out. His daughter was the only company he received. He lived by her schedule.

From the landing, it took six steps to reach the bedroom, nine steps to reach the bathroom, and thirteen steps to reach the study. He visited each in that order.

The bedroom had been cleaned. Morgan pulled the covers back, and slid in. He stretched his legs out, eyes on the ceiling. He had never fallen asleep at any of the Morgan Wells's places. Trying every angle, imagining the different ways he could wake up. Eyes on the window. Eyes on the crack in the ceiling. Eyes on the pink ribbon that hung from a nail, a leftover, perhaps, from some long-forgotten Valentine's. Morgan pushed his face into the pillow. It smelled like alfalfa.

Morgan entered the bathroom. Cool blue tiles, scum in the ridges between them. But an immaculate toilet bowl. Light grey toilet seat cover. Morgan looked through his namesake's cabinet, noting any changes in his notebook. He was noting an absence of certain prescription medicines when he heard a sound. A sound of falling. Something being knocked over. A book? Had the dictionary fallen from the ledge downstairs? Had he placed it in a precarious spot? But he'd replaced it with the same care he applied to all his replacements. Hadn't he? The noise couldn't have been caused by the book. Morgan closed his notebook, then closed the medicine cabinet. He listened, but couldn't hear anything other than the achingly quiet buzz of a vacant house.

Morgan stepped out of the bathroom. He stood for a moment in front of the closed door to the study. The more he stared at the door, the more convinced he became that the sound had come from behind it. Something had moved.

Morgan examined the pores in the wood. The knob felt warm. Morgan considered leaving. It wasn't too late. If someone was home, he could still leave. But no one was home. Morgan Wells and his daughter were still eating lunch, probably hadn't even started their main course. Besides, the door to the study was never closed. He couldn't leave without seeing why that had changed. If someone was home, then maybe that's how it was meant to happen. The discovery.

Morgan squeezed the knob. The door opened. He didn't even turn it. It just opened.

Light filtered through two large windows on the right. The air thickened with the smell of dust and waterlogged wood.

The first thing Morgan saw was a body, suspended in the air. A body of sagging skin and bones, with grey whiskers, long hair and enormous white wings. It hovered motionless in the centre of the room. But as soon as Morgan's eye lit upon it, it fell towards him, feet first, giving him the nervous feeling that he was about to be kicked. He winced and fell back into the hallway, holding his hands protectively in front of his face. Nothing happened. No further noises, no disturbances. Morgan blinked, and in an instant the image of the winged man vanished. In its place, the elderly Morgan Wells hovered two feet above the floor, swinging his legs out towards the door. He was levitating. He seemed to be reaching, but then he stopped moving. In what tongue was he speaking?

Morgan realised the old man was not actually speaking. Neither was he floating. Rather, he was hanging from a rope he'd fashioned from bed sheets. It had been poorly made, but the old man's neck had certainly been broken. His limp body still struggled, in some cruel mockery of life, kicking rigidly against his nerves. Aftershocks. Morgan thought he saw bone protruding from the left side of the ex-Morgan's neck, as blood slowly milked onto his collar and down the front of his chest.

Morgan took a moment. The old man had walked off his desk and into open air. He'd stepped into the noose, wearing nothing but underwear and a t-shirt. Morgan thought the man had said something before he fell. Had he spoken? Had he noticed Morgan?

As he stepped into death, what did he see? Who did he see?

Whatever words the man spoke, he wasn't speaking now. Blood gurgled from the old man's mouth, trickled weakly like water over the dry stones of his teeth. His legs were still. He was dead.

Morgan reached out to touch the corpse, to stop it from swinging. He missed. Fingers pulled back, balled into a fist. Then a tight grip around his pen.

Morgan collected his wits the way accountants collect numbers. He started writing in the notebook. He recorded the way the other Morgan's feet pointed to the ground. The veins in his legs. The ex-Morgan's body swung back and forth on the twisted bed sheets. A movement that was almost imperceptible. Unless he stood within inches. Close enough to smell the death weight collected in the hanged man's underwear. He could see movement in the old man's toes. Morgan watched him drift and recorded the drifting:

*a fine white string
moving*

is there some other way of travelling and

a nomad without breaks or progress wooden pegs

*an organising principle
with some delay*

*accelerating through the centre
of a fine white string*

a stem

a system

astigmatism

“Dad?” called a voice across some great distance. “Dad?”

“He’s in here.” Morgan had almost spoken. He heard the answer drumming hot and sharp in his ear. A minute earlier, he’d listened to the front door open. But he hadn’t heard it. Now he could hear the woman coming up the stairs. All he had to do was answer, and then they’d know. But her? He didn’t want her to know. She had nothing to do with it. If anyone was to find him, he wanted it to be one of *them*.

Morgan put his notebook away and moved quickly, slipping out of the study and into the bathroom. He stepped into the tub and pulled the shower curtain closed. Pellets of water dropped every 5 seconds onto the top of his head. He nervously wondered if the shower curtain was see-through, if not from his side then perhaps from the other. Was he casting a shadow?

The bathroom door was half-closed. He kept it half-closed intentionally, hoping its obviousness would allow it to be overlooked. He heard her feet make chafing whispers on the carpet. She called to her father. “Dad, are you up here? Dad?” Morgan counted her footsteps.

One.

Two.

Three.

Four.

Five.

Six.

“Dad?”

Seven.

Eight.

Nine.

She pushed the bathroom door open all the way, but didn't go inside. “You missed lunch.” Her voice reverberated loudly in the small room. Morgan took short, silent breaths, leaning even farther against the tiles, until he'd practically merged with them. She smelled like something familiar. Daisies? Dove? Then it disappeared, along with her scent.

Ten.

Eleven.

Twelve.

“Dad?”

Thirteen.

“Dad? Oh God!”

Then she yelped, a sudden breathless cry. Morgan heard some inexplicable thumping in his ears, blocking out the sound of Morgan Wells's daughter plunging through the bathroom door as streams of vomit arced through the cracks in her fingers.

She didn't get there in time. From his limited perspective, Morgan watched Morgan Wells's daughter get sick all over the grey toilet seat cover.

She spent the next three minutes sobbing and heaving into the sink. Morgan knew he could let his guard down. She was too caught up in her anguish to notice him. Her face buried in the sink, water gushing into her mouth and dropping out. Still, he kept behind the curtain. A part of him wanted to touch her. A part of him couldn't move.

The tap ran the whole time. She splashed water onto her face. She turned off the faucet and shook the water from her fingers, but didn't bother wiping the wetness from her chin.

She was still crying as she returned to the room of her father's death. Morgan heard a heavy thud, which he could only assume was the sound of her body hitting the floor. Or his?

Morgan stepped out of the shower and out of the bathroom. In the hallway, he could only see the woman's feet poking beyond the entrance to the study. He heard the sound of buttons being pressed. He fought the urge to watch her. He wanted to hear the things she would say to the ex-Morgan. He wanted to listen to the 911 call.

But he left the house without locking up.

After walking in on the old man's death, Morgan didn't feel ready to go home. The men and women he knocked elbows against would never understand. The divide between them was enormous now. They'd never understand. He'd looked death in the face. His own death. And he'd lived.

The man in the crowd wandered downtown, found his way to Yonge. He fell in with the throngs. White vapour floated above the parade. It mingled with the steam from

the grates and the traffic, became a greyish-brown fog, a smudge against the sky. Morgan followed the random backs of his fellow pedestrians. As soon as one disappeared, he trained his eyes upon another face, another posture, another coat. He followed them around, taking their exits, flowing in swirls and eddies, dropping away while the cars continued slowly onwards. A many-appendaged apparatus, constantly separating and reforming, breaking links, creating them again, breaking them. Their drivers and passengers emerging and vanishing.

Morgan pursued his targets until he found himself in an unfamiliar place. The crowd thinned. The traffic noise subsided. The tourists departed. The neighbours shuttered their windows.

He was alone.

He felt like he was standing at the edge of a forest. Waiting for a faun to appear.

It didn't.

Two hours later, he arrived home to discover that his lock had changed apartments.

Morgan slid his key into the lock, his own lock, his own apartment, not anticipating the sudden stop. No give. He twisted the key two or three times. Why wasn't it working? The familiarity of the gesture pointed toward success, but the door wouldn't open. He pulled the key out to ensure he'd chosen the right one. He then inspected the make of the lock. Schlage. Had his lock always been a Schlage? Morgan tried to fit each of his six other-Morgan keys into the lock. Then he reinserted the correct house key, closed his eyes and tried again. The familiar twist. Then nothing. Locked out.

By this time, getting in wasn't a problem. Even though he could pick a lock, he still wasn't very good at it. He'd left his kitchen window unlatched. He went around to the side of the building and pulled his neighbour's green bin beneath his kitchen window. Then he climbed on top and carefully pushed against the frame. It didn't budge. The window was swollen from the heat, the hot waves of the dying summer. Morgan kept pushing at it until he half-feared his hand was about to smash through the glass. He could see he was bending it. The green bin was shaking beneath him. He had to keep pushing, and finally the window gave. Only a bit. A tiny slip, maybe five inches total. It was enough. One more push and he had it open.

A minute or two later, Morgan had pulled himself in through the open window, trying desperately to avoid scraping all the skin from his back. He clambered over the sill, and reached forward with both hands, balancing most of his weight against the kitchen counter. For a moment, he caught an image of himself in the polished glint of the refrigerator handle. Then his hand slipped and he was tumbling over the counter edge. His elbow bounced violently off the countertop as his knees fell into the sink. Then gravity pulled him down. He crumbled to the floor, using his fingers to break his fall. He lay on his back, on the linoleum, catching his breath, adjusting to the dim light.

He was home. But this wasn't his home. It couldn't be. Even in the dark he could see that his kitchen was empty. His table was missing. His file folders gone. And the letters he'd pinned to the wall. The microwave, the coffee maker. The salt and pepper shakers. His oatmeal. And the map he'd taped to the fridge. His post-its. By this point, post-its were in every room in Morgan's apartment, on the floors, the walls, the cupboards, the doors, the ceilings. But in this kitchen? No trace.

But it was his kitchen. His apartment. Morgan pulled himself onto his knees and sat back against his heels. So it had finally happened. All his furniture had disappeared. Had she taken everything? Finally?

Morgan's next thought was to put down new Post-its, to record his final loss. How to remember each item? He would need to start immediately. But where to put the notes? Where had the other post-its been? Where had his furniture been? *Was* this his apartment?

Morgan shot up and went to the living room. As he moved, he began to question whether or not he'd ever put up Post-its in the kitchen. But when he came into the living room, those Post-its were gone. His floor had been swept. The ceiling had been scraped clean. His walls were completely naked, save the odd scratch from a nail or bit of chipped paint, and the half-started map. Even that seemed diminished, fainter than he'd remembered it. The streets looked crooked. The paint had run in some places. Black paint mixed with yellow paint. Uncertain intersections.

The room seemed smaller. A closed box. A wave of nausea swept through him. Gone. All of it gone. He went into the hall. No maps. Only one shred remained, stuck persistently to the wall on a bit of Scotch tape. A two-inch triangle with a single black line on it. A scar.

Then he knew what had happened. He'd willed against it. He thought that as long as he willed against it, he could prevent its happening. His apartment was his laboratory. It belonged to him. Although he hadn't been able to pay rent for two months, maybe three months, he didn't expect to be locked out of his own place. He didn't expect to find his papers stolen.

Like knocking on wood, or throwing salt over the shoulder, Morgan searched the closet in the hall, the ones in the bedroom and every drawer in the kitchen. He opened all the cupboards, the refrigerator, the doors under the sink. He lifted the blinds in each room. But.

In the living room: *nothing*.

In the kitchen drawers: *nothing*.

In the kitchen cupboards: *nothing*.

In the closets: *nothing*.

In the medicine cabinet: *nothing*.

Nothing but one Q-tip and dust. He did find one post-it, stuck to the windowsill: *make the holes resonate together*. And another, inside the lines of a heating vent: *plug up the lines of flight*. After that: nothing.

All his research, everything he'd done over the past six-and-a-half months, all gone. His apartment seemed to bear no life, no signs, and could have collapsed at that moment. It could have collapsed into itself, onto him, having never existed to begin with.

He couldn't start over. He couldn't start.

Morgan stood in the centre of his living room and dropped his bag. It contained the final artefacts of his project: a single folded map, his lock picks, his keys, his notebooks, some sketches, twenty-three pens, all blue. Why did he leave these items behind? Perhaps he no longer needed them. Perhaps he saw through them. Either way, he left them behind. As if they belonged to his apartment, and not to him. He kicked his bag against the wall.

Another postponement. Morgan kneeled in the centre of his living room. He leaned close to the carpet, ran his fingers against the floor. When he moved his hands, crumbs and bits of dust popped up, appearing and vanishing in an instant. Were these the final traces of his project? What had his project been? Morgan stretched himself across the floor, pushed his face into his arms. He turned onto his side, facing the half-finished map. Why had he drawn it? Why did it remain when all else had been removed? Would the map continue to exist, even after he'd disappeared? His disappearance, his vanishing. He could feel it coming, could almost see himself fading into the carpet. He sat and held his hands in front of him. He could see the veins beneath the skin, the arteries, the lines of descent, the lines of flight, a body without organs, transparent, shifting, invisible. Like the city outside, a tangle of concrete streets and glass towers, glass faces and plastic bodies, motions and lights. Series of letters tangled together. Sequences, codes, programs. A world of waiting. Waiting for order, for maps to be drawn. Contact. Constantly delayed. Constantly a question, waiting for an answer. Waiting for him, or for some other him. Someone like him. To precede, to follow. Morgan but not Morgan. A tracing of Morgan, a cut-out. A tracing that needed tracing.

Not locking the door behind him, Morgan Wells went for a walk.

POST-SCRIPT

November 29, 2003, Evening:

Dave and I went for a walk. I was sick of walking. Well, the truth is I never get sick of walking. That's basically all I do. But I was sick of walking in Toronto. I was sick of Toronto, sick of Dave, sick of Morgan Wells. Of course, my desire to leave Toronto was matched equally by my undesire to go home. But home I would go. Stupid Toronto with its no good people, its useless towers. I read somewhere about a city in the US that's basically known for sucking. Baltimore? Detroit? I'd say the same about Toronto. That's what Toronto and its inhabitants do best. They pretend to be first-rate when they're really sixth-rate. But they celebrate their lesser-ratedness like they win awards every day for being number one. If I could make an announcement on a loud speaker system to the entire country, I would tell Toronto to suck its own ass. Ridiculous, I know.

When I was going through my tower phase, which was the time in my life when I only cared about towers—their precise heights and locations, costs of upkeep and the names of the designers—I was proud that Canada had the tallest free-standing structure in the world. But on one of the days between search days, when Val insisted that I do something with her and Luis, we went to the CN Tower, which I named, that very same day, the Cock-and-Nuts Tower. What a letdown. You can see the tower from the beach near Dave's place. Up close it's just a solid cock of concrete. Stupid. And this is one of the city's main achievements, besides the Eaton's Shopping Centre, which I will say is an okay place to hang out when there's nothing else to do.

If I could, I'd go to the top of the CN Tower, and speak into the world's largest megaphone. I'd like to press the squawk button to get the entire city's attention. Make their ears bleed all over their sixth-rate faces. Then I would tell Toronto to suck its own ass, right from the top of the Cock-and-Nuts. Suck your own ass Toronto. Suck it hard you bunch of bottlefucks. I'd love that.

So Dave took me for a walk. As we walked, I told him everything that I'd been doing. I didn't look at him when I talked, because I felt embarrassed. But mostly for him. I pretended I was talking to Amy, telling her the story. I imagined her walking behind me. I could hear her phone voice speaking whenever Dave spoke. I told the Dave-Amy about finding the list of addresses, about visiting the first couple of places and not finding anything. I talked about buying the map, crossing the addresses off. I talked about Sara and the lost dog posters. I talked about creating the survey, and my discovery that each person on the list had the same name. I talked about visiting the addresses, and then I realised that I didn't really have that much to say. In all, it took me ten minutes to completely sum up everything that I'd discovered about Morgan Wells. The whole time I talked, Dave walked a little bit behind me. His silence reminded me of Amy's silences, after she's fallen asleep. But I knew his silence was a listening silence. Sort of like Father Ryszard's silences, his waitingness. Waiting for me to stop speaking, so he could start condemning. I expected at any second that Dave's mood would switch back to his normal personality, the one that wanted me dead with terrible repercussions. He didn't change. Even after I stopped talking, he didn't start. I couldn't see him, but I imagined him nodding, brow furrowed, concocting up my penance. Finally, I asked him why he wanted

to know about my investigation. He stopped walking. “Let’s go in here,” he said, opening the door to a Tim Horton’s. “I’ll buy you a coffee.”

I don’t drink coffee, but I agreed. Having Dave buy me coffee made me want to drink coffee. And like it. He ordered me a large-no-medium, and this is when he told me about his invention of the ‘splash-guard.’ I thanked him for the advice, even though I can’t drive, and do not generally worry about spilling coffee. He’d been shouldering my bag the whole time we walked. He passed it over the table after we sat down and I inspected the contents. All was as it should’ve been. I took my recorder out and placed it on the table. Dave didn’t even flinch. Instead, he started talking. I pressed record.

Regretfully, the batteries died. If I owned a Sony digital voice recorder, a red light would’ve come on telling me to switch batteries. But because I was using my dad’s old piece of shit recorder, I didn’t even know. It’s too bad. I had replacement batteries in the front pouch of my backpack.

So the only thing I taped was Dave saying, “I know about Morgan Wells.” His voice gets deeper and blurrier until the last word, which is drawn out and impossible to make sense of. Impossible of which to make sense. It’s just a sound, like a monster groaning. And then nothing.

Dave expelled the mystery of the “MW” file on his computer. For the past two years he’d been writing a story based on a bag of notebooks and maps he’d found in the apartment when he and Val and Luis moved in. Morgan’s notebooks, allegedly, through which Dave learned everything he knew about Morgan Wells. He knew the who, when, where and how. The only thing he didn’t know was the why. My list of addresses, which had been torn from one of the notebooks, had given him the why.

Apparently, Morgan Wells was some kind of letter thief. He stole mail from people who had the same name as him. As soon as Dave said this, I dumped my coffee on my head. I didn't dump coffee on my head. But I almost threw it in Dave's face.

Dave told me about Morgan's separation, how he lost his job at some shredding place. He told me about Morgan's walking. His invented dictionaries, his vowelless languages, his idiotic word games. He told me about a misdirected postcard, about a letter from some girl. I don't remember the details, because he wasn't very clear. I interrupted and asked Dave what he thought of the book of poetry in which I'd found the list of addresses, but Dave said the book wasn't important. I asked why not and he said that the notebooks don't mention any poetry book. They do, however, contain numerous references to the people Morgan spied upon. In fact, Dave said that that's almost all Morgan Wells wrote about. I argued that the book of poetry must be important if Morgan kept it hidden, but again Dave shrugged. He said it didn't fit with the rest of the story.

Dave admitted that the notebooks were incredibly obfuscating, which is the exact word he used. I looked it up. I don't know why he didn't just say "confusing," but I guess he thought he sounded more intellectual. The truth is, I now also say that word from time to time, and I enjoy the response I get from classmates and teachers, which is usually obfuscation.

Heidi. I think that's her name. Apparently, Morgan Wells stalked her for weeks. But when I asked Dave how he knew this, he said her name had been written at least ten times in one of the notebooks. And that she'd sent a letter to Morgan. Dave said the letter had been stolen. I asked him what was written in that letter, but he shrugged. "I don't know," he said. "I don't have it."

I found this notion extremely obfuscating. How could he claim to know so much when he knew absolutely nothing? Again, I asked Dave how he knew she'd sent a letter, but all Dave said was "It's obvious," which is something he kept saying again and again. "It's obvious," even though I didn't think "it" was all that obvious. Not obvious at all.

Dave told me about the stolen letters. He told me about the investigation table, the charts and statistics Morgan created. He told me about the maps, the rules, the times that Morgan had nearly been discovered. And finally, he told me about the hanged man. Then he stopped.

Until Dave discovered the list of addresses in my backpack, and the fact that each person on the list had the same name, Dave didn't understand that Morgan Wells had been spying on other Morgan Wells's. In the notebook, he wrote no names. No addresses either. Just numbers. A number at the top of the page to indicate who he was spying upon. The person upon whom he was spying? So all Dave knew was that Morgan Wells was what he called a voyeur. What I call a ramrodded fuckerhead.

I really wish I had checked my recorder. Stupid batteries. I know for certain that I asked Dave a great list of inquisitive and insightful questions and queries. He told me lots, but my bad memory fails to retain water unless frozen. My recorder is my refrigerator.

I do remember asking Dave how he could be sure Morgan Wells was a man and not a woman. He just laughed like I'd said the dumbest thing he'd ever heard.

We finished our coffees and went home. We didn't talk on the way home and I wondered if Dave could tell that I was also thinking about Morgan Wells. I was just trying to wade through it, make it make sense. Part of me was unhappy that Dave knew

more about Morgan than I did. I'd provided him with the final key. And that counted for something. But we both knew that I'd solved nothing. Why did Morgan start stealing mail from people with the same name as him? It didn't make sense. What made me even more unhappy was that Dave seemed happy. Morgan Wells made sense to him, and he was obviously done explaining. When we got home, he went straight into his office. He closed the door behind him and locked it. I went to bed. Battery-dead. Although I had the answers, it felt as though I'd looked them up on some cheater's internet page. I don't like it when people use cheat codes on videogames, or make videogame characters who are one hundred percent good at everything. Having Dave reveal the story of Morgan Wells only made me want to steal the notebooks and erase the "MW" file. If he'd cheated, why couldn't I?

I tried calling Amy but no answer. I barely slept. I couldn't stop thinking of the Morgan Wells that Dave had offered to me. Some hollow pervert, spying through windows. Opening mail. Keeping obfuscated notebooks. I kept thinking that Dave must've misinterpreted the story. His wrongness wouldn't surprise me. He pees with the door open, but locks his study.

The next day, Dave drove me to the airport. That's when he told me his version of how it all ended. Val and Luis had said goodbye at the apartment. Val mashed me up against her breasts again, and I remembered the whole reason I fell in love with her to begin with. Of course, this time I was not at all happy about the hug. My skin was beginning to hurt and itch. Plus, I still blamed Val for convincing me to take my shirt off. Luis said nothing but I gave him a hug and he hugged me back. Then he said something in Spanish, and I said something in English. Then Dave and I climbed into his red Civic

and drove off. After breakfast, for which Val served organic, non-dairy, non-flavoured yogurt, I'd realised my mistake regarding the batteries, and had replaced them with fresh ones.

September 1, 2003, Morning:

[Car radio music, light, persistent beat. Sometimes a DJ's voice.]

"When's your flight?"

"Two o'clock."

"Two exactly?"

"Check-in time's at one."

"Did you check the, uh... the thing?"

"The itinerary? Yes."

"Good. And it leaves at two? Right on the dot?"

"As long as we're there by one I should be okay."

"Yeah. Okay. We should be there on time."

[5.7 seconds of silence. Radio chat.]

"Look, I'm almost finished the story. I know how it ends."

"The what?" [I knew precisely what he was talking about.]

"The Morgan Wells story."

"Oh yeah."

"Oh yeah?" [Window rolls down, and the wind comes rushing in. My window.]

"Okay, how does it end?"

"Well, I've known all along how it ends. But now it makes sense."

“In what way?”

“Let’s say he came home and found his apartment completely gutted. How do you think he would react?”

“Gutted?”

“He got evicted. The landlord emptied his apartment.”

“Does it say that in the notebook?”

“No. He’d already given up by then.”

“So you’re making that up?”

“He gave up.”

“But didn’t you say his ex-wife kept taking things? He didn’t stop spying then.”

“Yes. But she hadn’t taken anything for months. And she’d only taken things that had belonged to her, or to both of them. The Post-its, the maps, the archives, his file folder—they were his things. He must’ve come home one day and found them gone. Lost it.”

“But how do you know he came home?”

“He did.”

“But why?”

“Why? That’s a stupid question. It’s obvious.”

“Why?”

“Because he came home fuckwad.”

“Because is not an answer.”

“Something wrong with you?”

“Nothing.”

“When Val and I moved in, the landlord told us it would take a day before he could get rid of the previous tenant’s stuff. We saw it all first-hand. At least one wall full of Post-its. And this half-finished map of Toronto on the living room wall. I took a picture.”

“He was still living there?”

“No. I don’t think so. He hadn’t paid rent for months and the landlord hadn’t seen him or been able to contact him.”

“So what did he do?”

“Who? Morgan?”

“The landlord.”

“He evicted him. Took everything out of the apartment. I just told you that.”

“What happened to his stuff?”

“His stuff? Landlord probably put it in storage. Maybe he brought it to the dump.

Who cares?”

“But if Morgan was such a good thief, then wouldn’t he have gone to the landlord’s place and stolen his things back?”

“No.”

“Why not?”

“He didn’t.”

“But how do you know?”

“*Fuck*. Have you been listening?”

“Yes.”

[7.8 seconds of silence.]

“He came back because I found the bag of notebooks and maps and things. I’ve told you this.”

“*Jesus*. Calm down.”

“You must be retarded.”

“But you don’t know for sure that he stopped watching the other Morgans.”

“The namesakes.”

“The who?”

“The other Morgan Wells’s. The namesakes. That’s what I’m going to call them.”

“That’s what *you’re* going to call them? Why?”

“Because.”

“Did *he* call them that?”

“Does it matter?”

[2.1 second pause.]

“So Morgan comes home, his stuff’s gone, and then what?”

“Then what? Then nothing. It’s fucking over.”

“It can’t be.”

“It is.”

“How can you be sure?”

“I can’t.”

“Then why pretend?”

“How else could it end?”

“So you can’t prove it ends like that? You can’t prove he’s not still out there.”

“Whatever.”

“Change the ending.”

“The ending is good. That’s the truth.”

“But you made it up. What else did you make up?”

“The rest is true. That’s why the ending works, how else could it end?”

“I don’t believe you.”

“I’m telling you.”

“But if you didn’t make anything else up, why make up an ending? So you can take credit for writing the story?”

“I did write it.”

“But you stole the whole story from someone’s journals. Are you going to publish it?”

“Of course.”

“As what? Fiction? Non-fiction? Either way, you’re lying.”

“Go fuck yourself.”

“What do you mean?”

“The fuck do you think I mean?”

“If you’re going to alter anything, please change the ending.”

“Would you shut up?”

“You can’t prove that he isn’t still looking.”

“Still looking? Would you stop saying that? He left his notebooks.”

“But the notebooks are just facts. Facts and lists. You said so yourself.”

“So?”

“Maybe he didn’t care about them.”

“Maybe? Who gives a fuck maybe? Is this your story?”

“Is it yours?”

“It’s Morgan’s.”

“Not the way you plan on telling it.”

“Oh my God. Shut the fuck up.”

November 29, 2003, Evening:

I told Dave that I didn’t like the ending, and then we paid attention to the road, because we’d reached the turn-off to Pearson. I started thinking about the flight, while trying to ignore my itchy skin. Dave didn’t want to look for parking, so he just dropped me off in front of Terminal 1 and said he’d send the story in the mail when he finished. In my brain, I told him to keep his story, and to suck his own ass.

I hate Dave’s Morgan-ending. He sent me the package 29 days ago. That’s why I put together these recordings. In case Dave’s book sells, I can prove he’s a liar. Not because my ending is better. But there are too many holes in Dave’s. Too many missed steps. He calls his story a work of non-fiction. “Based on True Events.” I hate him for that. It’s not a true story the way he tells it. Plus, if he’s going to make things up, why didn’t he didn’t invent a better ending? He went for a walk? Seriously? That has to be the worst ending to a story I’ve ever read.

On the flight home, before I even read the ending Dave finally wrote, I came up with at least three alternate endings that are ten times more exciting than Dave’s. I’d been thinking that I might write a Choose Your Own Adventure. Based on Morgan Wells’s

notebooks. Could I get Dave to lend them to me? Otherwise, I'll only have secondary sources.

September 1, 2003, Afternoon:

“You are caught spying. The daughter of Morgan Wells (#7) saw you leave and called the police. They monitor the house for two weeks until you come back. They film you entering the house. You are arrested on location and sent to jail for five years. In jail, you become your cellmate’s girlfriend. He punches you in the face every time you look him in the eye. Later, you are murdered for refusing to share your cherry-torte dessert with your cellmate’s friend. The End.”

September 1, 2003, Afternoon:

“One night, as you leaned over the bed of Morgan Wells (#5), he woke up. You ran away but he came after you. He reached out to catch you, mistakenly pushing you down the stairs. You broke your neck on the third step, and slid down the stairs. The man called an ambulance, but before they arrived, he put on a pair of Doc Martens and kicked the back of your neck, twice, finishing you off. The End.”

September 1, 2003, Afternoon:

“On one of your midnight walks, you get so caught up with recording street names that you fail to pay attention to the traffic. You step into the street and a large cube van smashes your hips apart and drags you by one leg for several blocks. You heroically try to sever your knee, so that only your foot will remain caught in the bumper, but the

cartilage and bone is too tough, and the asphalt scrapes away your skull too fast. The End.”

November 29, 2003, Evening:

I stopped recording endings to Morgan Wells’s *Choose Your Own Adventure*. *Choose Your Own Mystery*? The sunburn itch was settling in. Its hot fingers crawled inside my pores. I imagined each follicle of hair coated in some toxic chemical. I tried not to scratch, bit my tongue, and hoped the teacher-age French woman in the seat next to me didn’t notice. I wished there was a way to scratch without using hands.

I thought of Morgan Wells. I’m thinking of him now. I don’t know what I’m thinking.

I thought of Morgan Wells on the plane. What did he search for in his other selves? Did he look for his own traits of curiosity? Did he search for non-ambulatory individuals? Was he just looking, the same way I was just looking? Looking for the sake of seeing. Looking to kill time. Has he given up? I don’t think he gave up. He’s still out there. Looking. He’s still watching the other Morgans, but without his notebooks. Their batteries went dead.

Has Morgan Wells seen me? Does he want *A Description of the New World Called a Blazing World* back? Does he care who I am?

On the plane, I put my head back against the seat and put my headphones on. I rewound the tape. That’s when the airplane erupted in a split-second of jet fuel and burning seats, vaporised flesh. That’s when the knife cracked my spine, punctured my heart, my lungs. That’s when the aneurysm exploded in my brain, sent blood crawling

through the tear ducts. That's when I choked on a bullet fired into my mouth. Too much blood to swallow. I could only gape at nothing. That's when I noticed the bullet had hit everyone else on the plane as well: the blackout, the death, our deaths, the end of it all. I was finally dying with company, even as the flight attendants asked if we wanted anything to drink. The other passengers were all panting and falling between the seats, clutching life vests, choking on mustard gas, peeing themselves, crashing into highway dividers, drinking themselves senseless and falling from the tops of skyscrapers. They were all clutching at their throats, blacking out. I watched the rest of them die. I saw Sara being beaten by her husband, his fists slamming against her cheeks, her ears, the blood dyeing her hair a sharper tone of red. I saw Dave burning in his apartment, sleeping drunk on the couch as the smoke choked him out. I saw Luis falling down a flight of stairs. His head exploded against the concrete landing. I saw Val choking on a chicken bone, her lips turning blue as her brain lost oxygen. I saw my mom having a heart attack, lying on the floor in the laundry room, dead for hours before anyone found her. I saw Ross being strangled in his car with a guitar string. I saw Amy shot in a convenience store, dirty floors and bright, clean lights. I waited for my own death, knowing it would be the greatest death of them all. I waited for the death of blood and fire, but it didn't come. Even though everyone else was dying around me, I could still breathe. My blood stayed inside my skin. No fading lights, no burning injuries. I saw Morgan Wells sauntering through the streets, made of light. Like me, he survived the plane crash, the drowning, the suicide, the death. The blackout. Together, we watched people we knew disappear. We kept notes, kept tabs, and recorded the departures, like doctors in a hospital, or journalists in a war zone, or detectives collecting clues.

When the great plague comes we'll rot from the guts to the skin until there's nothing left but ashes and plastic. Dust and polyethylene corpses in the corners of our rooms, floating on the ocean. Misused, misled, misplaced.

We're dead.

We're a fraction of a second.

We were never here.

VITA AUCTORIS

Michael Murphy was born on January 16, 1982 in Yarmouth, Nova Scotia. He attended Yarmouth Consolidated High School, earned his B.A. at Dalhousie University, and is currently enrolled in the M.A. program for creative writing at the University of Windsor. He has been published in *filling Station*, *The Windsor Review*, *The Danforth Review* and *All Rights Reserved*. This is his first novel.