

# **The Possibility of Ruin**

**By**

**Christina Marie Penner**

A Thesis

Submitted to the faculty of Graduate Studies  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS**

Department of English  
University of Manitoba  
Winnipeg, Manitoba

© April, 2003

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FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES  
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## Abstract

The following creative thesis is composed of a novella, followed a critical postscript. The novella examines the biblical story of Ruth and Naomi, questioning why the story is very seldom read as a romantic love story between two women. It also engages with the research into the paranormal conducted by Lillian and T.G. Hamilton in Winnipeg during the 1920s, using the story of the Hamilton's research to study how haunting functions in the transmission and passage of texts. The novella studies the transmission of stories as they pass through bodies and words. It examines the ruin that lies at the very process of representation, and, while weeping over the ruin of language, the novella also suggests a way of reading and writing that listens to the 'other' who haunts the text. The novella concludes that the ruined space of writing contains a great possibility—it is haunted by the silenced ghosts of the 'other.' Both the novella and the critical postscript conclude that to understand writing as haunted enables one to read and write with a politics that is always searching and listening for the voices of the silenced, oppressed and hidden.



## Acknowledgments

My sincere gratitude goes to Dr. Alison Calder, for her direction, cogent criticism, sense of humour, and encouragement while advising me on this 'project'. As well, I am indebted to Dr. David Williams and Dr. Dawne McCance for not only reading this thesis, but also for teaching me most of the theories and strategies that line its pages.

*For*  
*David Hamilton Klassen*  
*1978 – 1999*

(...It is neither a question of giving in to playful jubilation nor of victoriously manipulating word or vocables. On the contrary, you can hear them resonating all on their own, deep down in the drawing, sometimes right on its skin; because the murmuring of these syllables has already come to well up in it, bits of words parasiting it and producing interference; and in order to perceive this haunting one need only abandon oneself to the ghosts of discourse by closing one's eyes.)

Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*

...writing always comes from elsewhere, at the behest of another, and is, at best, a short-hand transcription of the demand of the Other.

Ronell, *Dictations: On Haunted Writing*

*The Possibility of Ruin*

*You have all heard this story before. It has been written in many languages: Latin, Greek, English, French, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, Arabic, Hebrew, and German, to name only a few. You may have heard it in the most familiar of settings. Perhaps your mother read it to you as she tucked you into bed. Maybe you listened from the hard varnished chairs in a Sunday school room, watching as your teacher stuck felt figures onto a board wrapped with flannel, the characters muzzled with spray-on felt adhesive. Perhaps you were surrounded by friends and family at a wedding.*

*Some of you don't go to Sunday school, and you try to avoid weddings, and you are, in some ways, the most interesting. Like a sign on your back that you don't know is there, you carry this story without knowing that it has written itself onto your body. You think you're original, travelling to the far ends of the earth, sending back word that you've fallen in love, sleeping with women, sleeping with men. You think you're the only one who married for love, who married for protection, who left their lover for the family who cared too much. And all along, you were only following the text burned into your back, listening to the ink which long ago leached through your meninges, and slipped along your spine, until it reached the shiny, succulent folds of your brain, blinding the pupil of your inner eye.*

*Some of you will be horrified to hear this story again, to realize that stories, like dolls and puppets, don't always stay where you put them. It is upsetting, to be sure, when that soft backing wears out, and the characters refuse to stay stuck on the flannel board. It is shocking to realize that when they fell from the board, some of the characters lost their muzzles and now they won't stop talking about how tight it was, compressed*

*between the letters on either side of those tissue paper pages. Like babies with new sounds, they are elated with their fresh words, rolling them around in their mouths like a sweet candy, savouring their texture, flavour, scent. How funny it is, they laugh, that no one wrote about...and they tell stories until they are laughing so hard that tears are streaming down their faces, and they are weeping, weeping with how their captivity was translated as love, how desperation rewrote itself as wisdom, how the years of hunger, rape and manipulation could ever be described as "perfect" and "idyllicl." They weep until they have to breathe in great heaving gulps, breathing life into those spaces that were never traced with a quill, never did get typeset, are still waiting to be translated into ones and zeros and printed with lasers or a matrix of dots.*

*1923*

The room is cold, and her fingers are stiff as she adjusts the lenses of the camera. A narrow slat of light gleams into the room from the edge of the black paper covering the windows. Her husband is sitting at a small table, numbering sheets of paper in the bottom corner. A tiny woman, Elizabeth, is sitting beside him, drinking a cup of tea. "Are you ready?" she asks Elizabeth. The man stops numbering the pages, and moves closer to Elizabeth. Elizabeth closes her eyes, and starts to breathe deeply. The man glances at his watch. Elizabeth starts to brush her hands over her face, muttering about cobwebs. She is not pleased, purses her mouth and blows over her face. Elizabeth's movements grow heavy. Her hands raise slowly into the air. The man reaches up to guide her arms downwards, but they will not move. Catatonic rigidity, he notes. He glances at the camera, and his wife opens the shutter. He tries again to move Elizabeth's arms. This time they are more pliable and he can place them back in her lap. The camera shutter clicks again. Elizabeth's entire body is relaxing and the man wraps his hands around her left arm just before she slumps onto his shoulder, apparently fast asleep. His right hand is on Elizabeth's wrist, and he is counting. Pulse and respiration below normal. He puts a pencil into her right hand, wrapping her fingers around it. The room and the camera are quiet. Elizabeth's right hand begins to move. The man lifts her hand and positions it at the top left corner of the paper numbered "1."

Elizabeth's hand begins to write. For ten minutes, the only sound in the room is made by the hand of this tiny, sleeping woman, as it feverishly writes onto sheets of white paper, spread out on a table in front of the couple. The hand writes without contemplation of space or time. It writes in one long row, and it is only by the man's consistent realignment that the letters the hand is forming are caught on paper: when the



pencil reaches the far right edge of the paper, the man lifts Elizabeth's hand, still twitching with words, back to the left margin again. When the lines fill up the page, the man quickly slides her hand to the top of another paper. The shutter clicks again: *Plate 36d—E.M. in deep trance. Her hand writing automatically.*

*1992*

Winnipeg is a city of white. Any memories of green fields that ripen into purples, reds and deep yellows, have been frozen inside a fresh coat of white that paints the city from sidewalk to rooftop. Considering the prevalence of white, it is somewhat remarkable that most Winnipeggers do not comment on this colour. Like readers who have been taught to look past the white spaces of the page and focus, instead, on the letters and dots that have been carefully pressed onto the paper, Winnipeggers desperately look for anything to distract them from white. If pressed to comment on something other than the streets, which are carefully cleared of white, they will remark on the thin blues and pinks that line the sky in the late morning, when the elbow of the sun makes a brief gesture over the city, and again in the late afternoon, when it retracts its half-hearted gift.

On the one hand, this reluctance to look at white is understandable. As anyone who lives in the North knows, white can blind you. The first stage of snow blindness begins when the eye becomes tired of looking for any lines, whatsoever, and even the faintest shadows dissolve. At this point, people begin to walk with their hands in front of their body, ready to break their fall, as they have no way of knowing whether the next step will require them to sidle downwards or press uphill. The second stage of snow blinding begins, somewhat ironically, when the eyes begin to see things that are not there. A polished white expanse gives birth to lakes, suns, and birds, which dapple only the landscape of the eye. Snow blindness is generally curable—patients may need to rest in dark rooms or wear eye patches and dark glasses for a few days. Occasionally, however, these same people will close their eyes, hoping to see those lakes and suns that only exist in the memory of their blindness.

On the other hand, white sometimes arrives as relief. Yards of broken bicycles and stray bottles are painted in the same all-purpose colour as their neighbours' manicured yards. Initially the bicycles and bottles become misshapen lumps, but after a few blizzards they fade from sight entirely, rusting, frozen artefacts in a layered bank of white.

Winnipeggers, like many other Canadians, devote a great deal of effort trying to domesticate white: they wield shovels and snow blowers and plows, loading snow onto garbage trucks and hauling it out of the city limits. When Winnipeggers talk, they prefer to concentrate on the words that fall from their lips, instead of paying attention to the wilds of white that billow from their mouths. They civilize the white that they can't remove, building forts, roads, men, and ammunition. But soon the prairie wind, with its wide open arms, will welcome these white structures back, for white does not like to be domesticated—it escapes wherever possible, through chimneys, dryer vents and mufflers.

Even in summer, when Winnipeg glows green with hope, and white evaporates from memory as a forgotten dream, white continues to present itself without warning: it will show itself in the creak of a watermelon, in the gleam of a new potato pushing out of the shadowy earth, between the letters of a book left open in the sun. But most people do not remember the white of summer, as they have become so accustomed to looking over, through and away from this colour. For these reasons, it has never surprised me that the Hamilton house was painted white.

Built on Henderson Highway, across the street from the Elmwood cemetery, the Hamilton House is an old, white, three-story house which was built in 1910 for Dr. T.G. Hamilton and his family. T.G., as everyone called him, had his medical office on the

main floor, and his family lived in the rest of the house. The upper floors have since been converted into apartments, and after two generations of Hamilton doctors, the main floor has been renovated into a non-profit gift shop which is run by a group of Mennonites. The house feels like it has been renovated—there are long closets in strange places, and an abundance of narrow hallways that weave from one room to another. The front stairs are covered in green indoor outdoor carpet, which is matted and darker than the variety that is sold in stores now. The stairs feel hollow, as though it is the carpet and not the underlying boards that hold the stairs together. There is a side entrance which leads to the second floor apartments through a stairwell that smells like cat, even though there hasn't been a cat in the house for twenty-some years.

Truth be told, the house retains rumours with the same persistence as smells. If you haven't already guessed, the house is rumoured to be haunted. If you could rewind time, moving past the smiling children running backwards, watching the dead coming to life, the trees flying upright, then, just before you watched the house disassemble itself, you might pause for a moment to read the red chalk letters written on the walls of the house. "This is the ghost house." "This is the place where the spooks hang out." Kids may be cruel but they are seldom original. Had you paused just a bit earlier, you might have seen a small boy, who would grow up to take over his father's medical practice in this building, rub off the writing as soon as it grew dark, trying to unwrite his family's uncanny history. Other people have tried to do this, too; there is a picture of the Hamilton house, taken only a few years ago, with at least fifty people standing around it, holding hands. It is being de-haunted. It is winter, and the day is sunny, and the people have their eyes closed against the white house and the gleaming snow. The people

holding hands are a group of Mennonites, and they are pronouncing the house haunt-free. This is important, because they plan to run a non-profit gift store in this house, selling crafts from all over the world. For their way of thinking, a way of thinking that acknowledges only the white that comes, at least originally, from the robes of the pope and his pulpit, it is a commendable goal. It is no good to be scared while you are selling carvings from Zimbabwe, weavings from El Salvador, chess sets from Bengali, beaded moccasins from northern Manitoba.

At the moment only one of the second floor suites is occupied. The tenant's name is Ruth Reimer, and when she saw this picture, she rolled her eyes and laughed. The tenant's uncle, one of the men who runs the gift shop and who encouraged her to rent this apartment, is in the picture, his eyes closed and earnest. Ruth borrowed the picture from her uncle, and is now hard-pressed to give it back, since a couple of weeks ago, while talking on the phone, she absentmindedly drew black-marker moustaches and beards on the praying Mennonites, and Casper-like ghosts peering from the windows. She keeps the augmented photo on her fridge and occasionally feels a faint sense of horror that she, the daughter of a Mennonite pastor, has desecrated this picture of prayer. She didn't know about the house's reputation when she moved into her apartment, and some days she looks at the picture, and wishes that her uncle would have thought to inform her about the house's history before she moved in.

And yet, when I remember the day she arrived, something about her knew what she was getting herself into.

On the morning they will meet, like most other mornings, she is running late. She is already dressed, but she takes too long to fill a dark leather bag with books before strapping it to her back, before zipping her feet into heavy boots whose soles print their name, "Brown's," into the snow as she walks.

She gets in her car, and just before reversing it, her eye catches a piece of paper that is taped to the dashboard with masking tape: "Remember to unplug cord!" Plugging in cars is the first thing that amazes people who bravely, enthusiastically, desperately claim Winnipeg as their new home. They are astonished that we, who now includes them, must plug our cars into an electrical outlet. They think that you plug in lamps and TVs, toasters and curling irons, but cars? It's a simple solution: a small electrical heater keeps the oil warm on cold, clear nights, eager to turn over the engine in the morning. Ruth pulls on the parking brake, and rushes outside to unplug the car, noticing that the plastic plug at the end of the electrical cord is starting to melt.

When she turns onto Henderson highway, she catches a glimpse of a deer in the Elmwood cemetery. The cemetery is directly across from her apartment, and she often walks through it, savouring the moment when the spit and yellow of Henderson Highway is muffled by the giant elm trees, and the rush of busses and mini vans dissolves into the silence of deer and foxes. Yesterday she found a coyote fast asleep in a bed of snow between a gravestone and a tree. Now, as she drives past the cemetery and over the river into Winnipeg's downtown, she wonders whether it really was a coyote, or just a mangy dog. Her thoughts are interrupted by the flashing lights of a pedestrian crosswalk, where a string of students and business people are crossing the street.

As the University of Winnipeg is located in Winnipeg's downtown, the bankers with their briefcases march alongside the students with their backpacks. The University of Winnipeg has no distinct campus; there are no pillars to drive through, or even any street names to suggest the presence of a campus. It remains uncertain as to whether this transparency is a desirable quality. Perhaps at one point it permitted the campus to collect some charisma from Winnipeg's downtown, but at the moment, Winnipeg's downtown is dying. The stores are either moving to the suburbs or closing altogether, leaving their empty buildings behind. Those stores which do remain open feel slow and old. The office buildings drain into the suburbs at five pm sharp. And, by six pm the sidewalks begin to heave, stir and breathe with the white breath of street people, whose strange smells and unusual ways of moving are the reasons the business people and their families do not cite as to why they are so eager to head for the suburbs. Instead, they say there is nowhere to park their cars.

But despite its general state of absentness, Winnipeg's downtown has winked at the University of Winnipeg. Inside the university, with its angled windows and bright orange walls, there is a lovely feel to this campus, Ruth thinks as she checks her watch. She has only two minutes to be five minutes late. She ascends three flights of escalators, walking as they lift her upwards, and heads past the tempera-painted paper banners: Campus Christian Fellowships is recruiting new members, the Theology department will be holding another lunch hour debate—"Are ghosts real?", the gay and lesbian students are having a social, the Jamaican Students' Association is having a bake sale, and the Princeton review is staging an MCAT study session. Ruth pauses when she walks past the housing board, which is full of roommates looking for roommates, intrigued that only



half of the notices are written in English, the rest are in Chinese, Polish, Hindi. A campus, a city, of unhomed people, she thinks.

She opens the door to the library, and looks at the clock—only four minutes late. She relaxes and breathes with the library. She has always loved libraries, and this one, a relic of the early seventies, is no exception. She waves to Simone, who rolls her eyes while waiting for a student to find his library card. For as long as Ruth can remember, people have required her response to situations that annoy them. It doesn't matter if she is at work or in a class, or even in line at the grocery store, people look at her to find connection, to know that she, too, caught that social subtlety, to reassure themselves that they are the ones who *really* understand the situation, that their way of looking at the world is still intact.

Carlin, the head librarian, looks up from his computer, and nods at her, his long beard dipping up and down with the same precision as his small quick hands which have never stopped tickling the keyboard. Tickling? She questions her own metaphor. She can't imagine Carlin tickling anything or anyone in his life. But his fingers do have an uncanny ability to continue typing even while he looks at you to answer a question. Nimble. That's a better word to describe Carlin. He is nimble in his thinking, dashing between pedagogy and palaeontology, hematopathology and history, chemistry and cartography. His fingers are nimble; he must have been a whiz at card catalogues, and she can imagine the reluctance with which his fingers gave up the touch of words on paper, and learned to finger keyboards and palm mice. Even his body is nimble, as

though he executes every action with maximum efficiency. Only once has she seen him walk to a shelf, and stop, his task forgotten. She watched him from around the corner. His body stood frozen, except that the index and middle fingers on his right hand were moving, running through an imaginary card catalogue, paging through the drawers of his memory. His task must have come to him with a jolt; she remembers his body bolting to action, giving a little jump to line himself up with a journal three steps over, eager to make up for lost time.

She puts her bag down at her desk in the backroom. It would be easy to spend the morning getting caught up on her messages, but this week she has vowed to go through enough of the donated books so that the stacks of boxes no longer cover the windows that line the brow of the room. This is one of her favourite tasks, and today, in particular, she has a sense of anticipation over what titles she might find. She walks into the storage room, which is lined with boxes of books. Every time she enters the room, her grandmother's basement comes rushing into her memory, with its musty hymnals, a humming freezer and bags of potatoes with black earth still clinging to them. She sits down beside a box of books. "Basement" is splayed on its side in thick felt marker. She raises her eyebrows and smiles, to herself, and, perhaps, to the box, daring it to show its hand. The moment of possibility.

Books were her first love. She gave her heart to them freely, eagerly. Books were what compelled her to complete bachelor's and master's degrees in history. She read incessantly as a child, drinking in words with long deep draughts. She believed books that wrote about events, and she believed that if she read enough, one day a picture of what actually happened might emerge. Contradictory accounts might explain themselves once

she understood the social situation, mismatched dates might be reconciled by a rereading of calendar systems, lost years might be found in letters of dusty boxes.

Now she thinks of books as a philandering lover. She can't leave them, but she can no longer trust them. If she could think without them, she would leave, but she is caught, and she knows it. Years ago she abandoned her diary, choosing instead to record her life on scraps of papers, calendar squares, picture backs, cocktail napkins. Her life is littered with these scraps of history. "Why don't you just get a journal?" her older sister, Jen, asks, when she reaches for a glass bowl on the top shelf, tipping it forward, annoyed when folded papers land in her salad. Ruth tells her that she would never be able to find the journal when she wants it, but that's only partly true. She doesn't want to admit how much she requires written words. Little scraps, quickies, affairs in the afternoon, love nests, will sustain her without ruining her when they expose their lie. A journal could break her heart.

Betraying her mind's scepticism, her heart still beats faster when she opens a box of books. She pulls up the cardboard flaps and listens. Once she opened a box of books to movement, a huddle of baby mice curling over each other in the chewed nest of a hardcover large print edition of *The Wings of a Dove*. "I think mice are rather nice," that old childhood rhyme circled through her mind, a rhyme of necessity, as she rushed the box to the fire escape. Born into Jamesian prose. She shuddered. Another time she opened a box that had fleas in the books. The strangest thing. What were they living off of? Horse hooves in the glue of the cracking spine? Pollen from flowers pressed between the pages? The scalps of characters, long since dead, their hair still growing? She remembers watching one of the tiny flies crawl across her hand. Bookflea.

Since the episode with the mice, she has started to still, listen, pause, before delving into any box of books. She opens the flaps of the box, and then, like a fine red wine, she lets the books breathe for a moment before proceeding. And what do they exhale, she wonders? Characters? Some arch their aching backs, grumpy from being boxed in for months, years, decades. Some are just relieved to be out of the basement, attic, closet. Do the characters from one book mingle with those of other pages? What does Tom Sawyer say to Alice B. Toklas? Do they sit with their backs to each other?

Like standing in line at a grocery store, contemplating a person by the groceries they choose, she entertains herself by imagining the lives of the people who donated the books. Gardener, economist, doctor, housewife. Occasionally a box surprises her: Harlequin romances and at the very bottom, *Love Poems to God* beside *The Stone Angel*. Rilke scrambling out from beneath the longing gazes. Margaret Laurence protected by glowing biceps. Who would buy a jar of capers to go alongside hotdogs and macaroni?

She opens a box of philosophers. Carlin will be pleased. She conjures the picture of a bald man in front of a bookshelf. She picks up a collection of Freud's essays. A bobby pin holds together pages 19 to 27. The ingeniousness of bookmarks. The bald man at the bookshelf fades, and the picture develops into a tiny, white-haired woman, reading pages so worn they would have turned silently, like fine, worn leather. How did this grandma turn from Reader's Digest novels to Freud? Was it the death of her youngest daughter? A determination that in her next life it would be university and not sewing classes? Was it a grandson who forgot his reading, and upon bringing it home, could detect his grandmother's perfume on the pages, and so continued to forget books?

The morning moves slowly, heavy and bored with itself. She has been going through the books for a couple of hours, and has already used the pages of the books to clean every fingernail on both hands. This habit has grown from her inability to read a book without rubbing the bottom corner of the page under her thumb nail, cleaning it over and over, only noticing her own movement once the edge of the page breaks through the line of skin behind her nail, and her finger starts to bleed into the paper. Her family tells her that she did this from the moment she began to read. “That book must be getting under your skin,” her father would joke, kissing the top of her dark, bent head. Jen used to hate letting Ruth read her books—even the ones that weren’t marked with little dark stains always were lopsided, the bottom outside corner splayed open while the rest of the book clung together. Her mother asked if maybe she could try to stop, especially when reading her sister’s books, but it was as if the movement of her thumb over the page acted like a strange sort of piston, energizing the act of reading. During her Masters degree she only developed the habit further. She used to reward herself by cleaning one nail after every chapter, or every five pages, or every page. On particularly long afternoons she would muse over what exactly she cleaned from her nails. What would a microscopic analysis yield? A broken crumb of toast, slivers of books, the press of an elevator button, earth rubbed from last night’s potatoes, cells from her lover’s scratched back. Unaware, she is pressing history into the book, writing the story of her day in dirt and skin.

She has sorted enough boxes to see out of part of one window. Outside, it is starting to snow. She reaches back into the box, and pulls out the next book, pressing the corner of her thumb into the pages until it notches against one corner, and then she opens the

book. Page 79. Expecting even rows of black letters, she is surprised, even alarmed, at the picture her thumb is pointing at.

It is a picture of a middle-aged woman with white eyes; her pupils are rolled into the back of her head. She has heavy eyebrows, and freckled jowls and looks like she might be found in a church kitchen. But the strangest part of the picture is a white substance, it looks like polyester batting, stuck onto the woman's hairline, nose, ears and chin. In the cleft of her chin, right in the middle of the beard of white fluff, there is what looks to be a small cut-out picture of a man's face. The woman in the picture is wearing what might be a dress, black with a low scooped neckline, and a heavy necklace. Ruth is jolted by the picture, nervous. She looks closer at the page. Underneath the picture the title reads: *Plate 18—The miniature "W.E.G." face of September 22, 1929.* She wishes not to look at the picture any longer. It should be comical, it is so obviously staged, but something about it alarms her. It is the woman's eyes, no, it is the woman's thick eyebrows, her heavy jowls, the weight of her undoubtedly chapped hands, rough from working in the garden, and taking in the wash. It is the woman's credibility. She knows ectoplasms only from ghost stories and movies, but none of these stories involves a woman who looks so, she hesitates, so pragmatic, so much like one of her Dad's sisters.

She pages through the book. It is filled with pictures, plates, as they are referred to. Many of the pictures show people sitting in a circle, holding hands. Clearly it is a book about paranormal phenomena—séances, mediums, trance personalities, and ectoplasms, although the book uses the word teleplasms. She feels nervous, and tells herself that it is ridiculous to feel nervous over a book. Fiction masquerading as history,

this book is no different from the rest. Ink on paper is nothing to be alarmed at, she tells herself.

She skims through the introduction, surprised to find that the book is set in Winnipeg. The story began in 1919, when the loss of so many sons sparked an interest in paranormal communication. Intrigued by recent publications on paranormal activity, a physician, a minister, and an English professor from the University of Manitoba “dabbled” in telepathic experiments, and found, to their surprise, success. Eventually they found a woman, a nurse, who made a coffee table dance without touching it, and the group began holding séances using this nurse as the medium. One day the ‘trance control,’ which is how they referred to the spirits, asked for paper and pen. During the next séance, while in a trance state, the nurse sat at a table in the middle of the séance circle, and wrote pages and pages of words in a handwriting that was not her own. When the lights went on, and they read the words, they found that the nurse had written the unwritten memoirs of Robert Louis Stevenson.

Ruth pauses, aware that a sense of relief is washing over her. She smiles to herself. Finally, she thinks, here is a book that is honest about the ludicrousness of writing history. She smiles at the text. In a cynical way, it is refreshing to find a book of history that is so obviously fictional. She feels a sense of elation as she continues to read.

The group of experimenters, as they thought of themselves, eventually found another psychic, a Scottish woman who did the doctor’s washing. When this psychic joined the group, teleplasms started to appear in pictures taken during the séances. She looks at the pictures and, this time, laughs aloud. It appears that the most popular trance control called himself “Walter,” and he took great pleasure in providing the doctor with

teleplasms to be photographed. She will have to read more to find out which member of the circle has palmed these pieces of cotton, or sometimes pieces of what looks like a hairnet, and pasted photographs of famous people into the middle of them before sticking them onto the medium's face. She pages through the book, delighted at the creativity of the conversations between Walter and the doctor. At one point, Walter says, "We are so Scotch that the heather is growing out of our ears." Even ghosts banter about their homeland, she thinks.

She pauses for a moment, running her thumbnail along the corner of the page. She feels the same sense of elation that she used to feel over history projects. Here is a book that is too strange for words—a book of history that does not fit into the pattern of black and white letters marching through time, sometimes with a brief preface reminding the reader of the author's scepticism of language, but more often than not, acclaiming the author for his or her expertise. There is something refreshing about a book that is so clearly a hoax. For the first time in years, she feels curious about a text. She has lost faith in the history of the visible, and thinks maybe she will try reading about the history of the invisible. She smiles. She sets the book aside, planning to slip it into her bag. She has done this before, although usually only with books that that she figures Carlin wouldn't know where to catalogue, anyhow.

With some surprise, she realizes that she doesn't even know the title of this strange little book. She closes the book, her right thumb holding the page with the picture. The cover is ivory coloured with royal blue printing and little blue scrolls: "Intention and Survival." She moves her fingers, which were covering the name of the author. "T. Glen Hamilton, M.D, F.A.C.S." Hamilton. She wonders for a moment why



the name is so familiar, before it comes to her—over the front door of the main entrance to the gift shop below her apartment are the letters, “Hamilton House”. She opens the flyleaf. The fuzzy print of an address stamp is pressed on the page in blue, faded ink:

Glen F. Hamilton M.D.

185 Henderson Hwy

Winnipeg, Manitoba

She is confused. 185 Henderson Highway is her address. She lives in Apartment 2, 185 Henderson Highway. Her mouth is dry, and she runs her hand through her hair. She takes the book to her office, suddenly eager for company, even Carlin’s efficiency, especially Carlin’s efficiency, would be welcome.

**T**hey met through books, and I mean that literally. Reluctant to go through any more boxes, Ruth is working in the stacks, shelving books. She is in Philosophy, HX 39.5 D4613, to be exact, and he is on the other side of the shelf, his hand running over the spines of the history section. She pushes aside Derrida's *Specters of Marx* while he takes out *The Postmodern History Reader*, and to their mutual surprise, they are looking through the shelf at each other.

"I'm Lon," he smiles at her through the unexpected gap.

"Ruth." She laughs at the strangeness of this meeting. "Just a minute," she says, and moment later she is walking down the aisle to meet him. The man leaning against the bookcase is long and skinny. His face is pale and tired looking. As she approaches, he grins at her, and with this movement, his face is transformed from a ghost into a man whose face is alive with humour. She realizes he finds this meeting as funny as she does.

Over coffee he comments on her eyes, the bluest eyes he has ever seen. She pushes a piece of dark hair behind her ear, and tells him about the time when, while in an emergency room for a broken arm from an ill-fated attempt at snowboarding, the doctor looked at her eyes and diagnosed her as psychotic. She realizes that she is nervous around him. He seems completely self-assured. She is glad that she has seen him grin, because when he is sitting across from her, she realizes that if she were only to meet him in the hall, she would think of him as severe, almost morose.

"So, are you a librarian?" He pronounces 'librarian' in a tone that indicates he really is trying to find out if she takes her job as seriously as the librarians whom he knew as a student.

She looks at him with an expression that shows she knows what he is asking. “Actually, no. A history student who is disenchanted with history and was offered a job in the library.” She pauses. “Do you generally avoid librarians?” She slides off her shoes and pulls her legs under her until she is sitting cross-legged on her chair.

He laughs at her accuracy. “No, it’s just that you don’t seem like a typical librarian.” She is relieved to hear him laugh. His eyes change when he laughs. She looks around the cafeteria--someone must be making microwave popcorn, she thinks, observing that its strange smell of nauseating comfort is filling the air.

She looks back at Lon. “I’m not a typical librarian. I’m not even a librarian at all—I’m support staff. I do strange, unwanted jobs around the library. Today, for example, I am going through boxes of books that people have found in their basements, or, more often, their parents’ basements, and have donated to the library.”

“Ah. Found anything interesting?”

He moves his hands to his cup, waiting. She senses that he is studying her face. With a sense of relief, she realizes that she wants to tell him about her discovery. “Yes,” she starts, and then pauses. “I found a book on psychic research. A doctor who married medicine with séances.”

“Oh.” He nods and takes a drink of coffee. “Is that something the library will interested in?”

She finds it sweet that he does not act as though psychic research is anything unusual. “No, or at least I hope not, because I’m planning to pocket this one.” She hesitates, “This particular book is interesting to me because it turns out that the research was conducted in the building I’m currently living in.” She thinks how strange it is that

she feels so comfortable talking to him. It is relieving to have told someone about her discovery. The pictures seem less bizarre when they are discussed in the ordinariness of the cafeteria, the air flavoured with coffee and popcorn.

“That’s great.” He seems genuinely enthusiastic. “What are you going to do with it?”

“I don’t know.” It is too long, and too boring, she thinks to explain why this book, this history of the invisible, pleases her so much. She changes the topic. “So, what brings you, who avoids librarians, to the University library?”

“My mom’s a history prof at the University of Manitoba. The two of you could talk history.” He looks down at his coffee and grins, almost to himself. “I live nearby and she’s always sending me to the University of Winnipeg to pick up titles that for one reason or another aren’t available at the University of Manitoba.” The University of Manitoba is Winnipeg’s second, and much larger university.

“What is your mom’s last name?” She wonders if she has read any of her work.

“Lambert.”

“Lambert—I recognize the name from my high school French books. I’m guessing you’re French?”

“Oui,” he answers, as a joke, but she can sense his mouth relaxing, his throat clearing, falling back into the arms of its mother language. “Yes, I was born in Joliette, a little town outside Montreal. We moved to Winnipeg, St. Boniface to be exact, when I was fifteen years old.”

Joliette. Montreal. His tongue sounds delighted to feel these words run over it. She recalls returning home to English after a month-long language exchange program in

Quebec City, and the joy of speaking English in fast, gulping phrases. That summer she read quite a bit of French, but now the only French she reads is on shampoo bottles and warning labels. Molded into her radio alarm clock, in letters that have no ink, but are written with raised plastic, are warnings that run into each other, as if laughing over the ludicrousness of trying to reconcile two languages with something as insignificant as a mere dot. "WARNING DO NOT IMMERSE IN WATER AVERTISSEMENT NE PAS PLONGER DANS L'EAU." Not particularly necessary in either language, she hopes.

"I'm embarrassed to say that my French is strongest when it comes to swearing," she says, and smiles.

He laughs, "Well, the French Canadians love their swears." He smiles at his own observation, and she notices tiny rivers of lines around his eyes. She realizes that his face is beautiful when he laughs. She looks down at her hands and wonders if she will feel her body slip into love with this man. She is distracted. She knows that it is her turn to make a comment, but she can't remember what they are talking about. For a moment she cannot think of anything to say.

"So, do you have any brothers or sisters?" she asks, catching her sentence midstream to slow it down, to filter out her relief at finally thinking of something to say.

He hesitates before speaking, "My brother was killed in an accident four years ago. Now it's only me and my Mom. My father died of cancer when I was eighteen."

She looks at his face. He is looking at her. "That must be hard," she says.

He nods and puts down his mug. She studies his hands. He shifts in his chair. His body is too long for the chair, she thinks.

“So tell me more about you. You’re a librarian,” he pauses and smiles, “and what else? Are you married, do you have a dog, a cat, a, I don’t know, a canary?”

“Nope, nope, no, and I’m scared of birds.”

“Scared of birds,” he repeats her statement as he looks up at her face. He seems amused by her words. “How did that happen?” She tells him about the injured owl her parents harboured in the garage without mentioning it to her, and how, when she stepped down to put on her shoes, she felt a beat pulsing in the semi-dark even before she could make sense of the wings braising her hair.

“I’m very brave when it comes to birds,” he says, looking at her face. She looks down, wanting to avoid his eyes as she evaluates the meaning behind his comment.

“I’ll remember that,” she says, looking at him for a brief moment before uncrossing her legs and pushing her knees against the edge of the table.

She studies his hands as they wrap around his coffee cup. She knows how to read hands, especially nails. Her grandfather was killed over fingernails. Hold out your hands, said the Russian revolutionists, and we’ll know which of you are the real field workers. A pastor, his hands held the pages of his books. His nails were too clean, his fingers too smooth. Tissue paper skin, bookmarked and glowing with tidy half moons. Nothing like the field hands who carried lines of dry and broken land, stalked with earth-caked well beds. Or the farmers, who herded pigs with red, chafed sausage fingers. Her uncle played hymns on the piano until he bought a pig barn, and his fingers grew too wide for the keys. She looks at Lon’s hands. His nails are clean, scrubbed clean.

“So what about you?” she asks. “What do you do when you’re not hanging out at the library.”

Lon moves his chair back and leans forward, putting his elbows on the table. “I work at the HSC. I’m just finishing up my residency in anaesthesiology.” HSC—Health Sciences Center. It is the largest hospital in Manitoba, located in the center of Winnipeg. She went there to visit her aunt who died of cancer. The hospital is a strange collection of buildings, old and new, joined together with underground tunnels that hiss and groan with steam heating.

She notices a tiny thread climbing from his sweater onto his wrist. She wonders if it was hand-knit by someone he knows. “Anaesthesiology,” she repeats the word, then pauses. “I could never be an anaesthetist—I wouldn’t have a chance of spelling it correctly, ever.”

“I can’t spell it either. Of all the things I have to remember, spelling is very low on the list.” He smiles, and when he lifts his mug to his lips, she notices that he drinks quickly. She likes his bold movements. She likes his lips.

“I read an article recently, in, well, in my Mother’s copy of Reader’s Digest, about a doctor in the Paraguayan bush who ran out of supplies, and had to perform abdominal surgery on a man with only local anaesthetic. The man was a choir conductor, and he suggested that if the doctor and the nurses would join him in song, then he might not feel the pain as badly. So, they sang, and when the doctor told him the surgery was over, the man was surprised, having never felt any pain.”

Lon looks down at the table and laughs. He has beautiful lips, she thinks. They are wide and a little bit chapped. She wonders how he kisses. “There are lots of stories like that one,” he says.

“Do you believe them?”

He raises his head and looks at her. "I don't know."

She likes that he admits he doesn't know things. She moves her knees down from the edge of the table and slides her feet back into her shoes. She takes a breath, pauses for a moment, bites the inside of her cheek, and then asks, "Do you want to have dinner with me Friday night?"



She is sitting cross-legged on her bed, a sheaf of notebook paper in her lap. She writes the date at the top of the first page: January 22, 1992. She hesitates, daunted by all of the white space beneath her hand. She remembers how she used to consider writing to be her private compass—she would write while confidently reading the lines of letters as they appeared on the page, reading to realize where she was, to find her bearings. Now she is sceptical about the concept of true anything, let alone true North.

When she threw out her last journal she vowed never to start another one. The journal was depressing—the words on the page were so different from the actual events of her life. Was she scared that someone might find it, or was she scared of what she would write if she didn't censor herself, she wonders.

She would prefer to stand her ground, to put the paper back into the far corner of her desk drawer, but she cannot stop thinking about the Hamilton book and she needs someplace to record her thoughts. And this isn't exactly a journal, she reminds herself as she looks at the stack of notepaper that is permanently curled upward in the right corner of the paper, deformed from years of being pushed against the back of the drawer. It's just a sheet of paper where I shuffle my observations out of my head and onto paper, she thinks as she runs her thumb along the edges of the loose pages.

She picks up her pencil.

*January 22, 1992*

And so I'm beginning to write about the book I found today at the library, *Intention and Survival*. How strange it is to find a book of stories that happened in this very house. Who were the Hamiltons? What were they after?

On the third page of *Intention and Survival* there is a picture of a man who might be in his forties, maybe his fifties. *Thomas Glendening Hamilton, M.D., F.A.C.S.*, the caption beneath the picture reads. It's hard to tell if he is wearing glasses, and when I look closer, I realize it's because he is wearing 'glass', no 'es.' There is a lens in front of his right eye, but on the left side of his face there is only a nose piece, with no frame or lens. He has the same haircut that every man had in the 1920s: a comb over with a little ridge of hair standing up over his forehead. He looks earnest, or is it honest, or maybe just far away. There is something about this picture that attracts me to this man, and I'm not sure what it is.

It's strange to think that this man lived in this house. Almost certainly was in this room, where I sit and write. Was this his bedroom? Did he come up here to have a quick rest between seeing patients a floor below? If time were to collapse, would I look up to see him wincing because my chair is pressing into the top of his foot? I guess that if time had, in fact, collapsed, this room would likely be extremely full. Would we fit, all the people that have ever passed over these floors? Maybe I would meet Mackenzie King, or Sir Arthur and Lady Conan Doyle when they traveled to this house, where this man in the picture talked to them about his experiments. Perhaps the four of them are here right now, sitting in a row on the couch (the chair couldn't possibly hold another thing), visiting,

vaguely interested in noting what the eager rediscovery of this book will bring about this time.

Thomas Glendenning Hamilton: Family physician, surgeon, husband, and father of one daughter, a son, and, then, twin boys. I've always eaten up biographical information. Those snippets of footage at the end of the football game—when everyone else is cheering the winners, I finally look up from my book to study the players as they lunge on top of each other, patting bums, and kissing wives who hold out little children. I glean flyleaves for biographical information. Married? Kids? If there is a picture I lift it up, closer, even than the words on the page. Do they have a sense of style, a beard, pierced ears, a coy, tilted head?

This book, though, is different. The biographical information is at the beginning. I see their point—if you're going to claim that the gauze in these pictures is actually teleplasm, then you need to have some trust in the author's character. Who is the author of this book? T.G. managed and emceed the séances, T.G.'s wife (what is her name?) kept the minutes of the séances, T.G. wrote articles and speeches and then after he died his wife, Lillian (that's her name—spelled with two 'l's; three if you count the first one), and his son compiled the first printing. Later it was re-edited by his daughter. I think I have only complicated the author's identity, but that's not the point. The point is that we want to know if T.G. was a crackpot, or sought fame, or just wanted to play a practical joke. We want to know what drove him to hold séances in his basement, and why should we believe him?

*January 23, 1992*

I continue to read about T.G.'s life. So many groups of people have been introduced to Winnipeg by tragedy, and T.G. was no exception. A farm lost to drought, a daughter lost to typhoid fever and a husband lost to a heart attack, and soon T.G.'s mother's only hope was to educate the remaining children so they could make a living that did not depend on rain. A mother with a Scottish accent and five sons blew into the city, with lips and hearts cracked by drought and sorrow. T.G. became the third son to enter medicine. He was a hard worker and added many titles to his name. Doctor and Surgeon. Chairman of the School board. Husband. Father – daughter, son, son, son. Chairman of the Winnipeg Playground Commission. MLA. Medical lecturer. Founder and editor of medical journals. Public speaker, with engagements that ranged from New York's Carnegie Hall to Winnipeg's National Council of Jewish Women. Church Elder.

How strange to think that his life, all of those hours spent at meetings, sitting at desks and staring at medical texts and diagrams, standing over opened bodies, writing out speeches, falling in love... All of these moments have collapsed into a list of words, black ink on a white page.

He must have been quite courageous to risk his professional reputation by lecturing on teleplasms. I liked him the most after reading, "It was no small occasion in my life when I first spoke of my earlier work to the Winnipeg Medical society in 1926. I did not know whether or not I would have a shred of professional prestige left when I was through. As matters turned out, my audience on that occasion doubted neither my sanity nor my sincerity, and listened with tolerance and well balanced scepticism" (10). Maybe

I'm an easy sell, but I believe him. I trust him. I can see him driving to the meeting, parking his car, wiping his brow with the handkerchief that his wife has tucked inside his pocket. Breathing out. He steps out of the car, his body pretending nonchalance. Breathing in. No one around him suspects that he is as nervous as he is. They think of him as confident, talented. Some of them resent him for his nonchalance, for the way he slips sarcastic comments and slivers of humour into his medical lectures. The only clue to his nervousness is that he is humming. Although the words never reach his mouth, circling instead inside his head, their letters of comfort never leave him, weaving their curves and tails into his mind, relaxing his body when he is nervous. He hums hymns. He is, after all, a church elder.

Someone calls out "Good evening, T.G" and in a deep voice he replies, "Hello there, Cooper," and he claps his paw of a hand on Cooper's shoulder. Inside, he hangs his coat on a wire hanger, watching his hands as they know how to remove a coat and put it on a hanger. These are the same large hands which, only this afternoon, pressed a scalpel into perfectly smooth white stomach, drawing a thin red line which opened onto a glistening gall bladder, kidneys, a stomach and a swollen, misshaped appendix. These are the same hands which, later that night, will draw another red line to push aside organs in search of a large sac with a downy, slimy baby inside. He walks into the hall, takes his seat near the front, and, hand on knee, he shakes his knee up and down, waiting for his turn to speak. At the podium he clears his throat, twice, then looks out and smiles at the audience. He would really like to wipe his head with his handkerchief, but he thinks that would be too revealing. Worrier.

What was he like when he came home for dinner? I mentioned it rather briefly, but he was a father of four children. His daughter writes that the only thing she can remember about her father in her childhood is how occasionally on Sunday afternoons, they would go for rides in his big black car. It would seem that he was a negligent father. But what do you do when you're a surgeon and the neighbourhood butcher has chopped off his finger before running five miles to your office to show you a bloody stump? The finger missing, you take him in your car back to his shop and start opening packages of ham until the finger is found lying in the folds of the shaved ham, neatly wrapped in brown butcher paper. You don't tell the butcher with the missing finger that you have to go home for dinner, to your child's recital, to fix the leaky window in the attic. T.G. was written up in the newspaper for that surgery because he attached the finger without stitches. "No stitches were used, but a slender ribbon of gutta percha was wrapped about the finger to hold the patch in its place." A slender ribbon of gutta percha. It sounds like a wedding announcement.

Daughter. The word zips by. But he had one. She grew up to earn a B.A., to become a concert pianist, to publish this book for a second time, and to write another one. I am looking at her on the back cover of *Intention and Survival*— she is wearing a paisley scarf and lipstick. She looks like she would smell nice.

A daughter followed by sons. Sons—such a small word for those baby boys who grew into men and fought in wars, practiced law and medicine. Son—only three common letters to hold those days of illness, when something as innocuous as the flu turned Arthur from a boy with red cheeks who had to be told to sit still in the back seat of his father's big black car, to a slow grey kitten, in a room lined with worry and scented with sickness.

The windows wept from the stress of the January cold on one side, and the heat of Arthur's fever on the other. When he could no longer lift his head, and his breath turned from sickness to death, his father, the only one who had smelled death before, thought he was protecting his wife by not telling her, wishing to protect her from that which she had always known. When he slipped outside his fever, and T.G. carried his warm body away, his mother crawled into his bed, pressing her body into the shadow of heat he left burning on the sheets. Where did T.G. take his small dead son before his body reappeared in a box? Did he rock him on his lap, run his hand through his still growing hair, kiss his eyes, hold his hand until he could feel it turn tense? And what about all the days that followed? The hours of sitting beside a too small grave, the surprising anger when a neighbour's child took a turn for the better, the years of nights spent lying still beside his wife who has learned to weep silently? A little boy dies, and only three common letters are missing. Daughter, son, son.

P.S. I reread my notes and realized that the butcher only ran ½ mile.

**T**omorrow, I fell in love, she thinks. Ruth pauses, replaying, evaluating the sentence in her head. *Yesterday* I fell in love. Ever since she can remember she has mixed up those words. Yesterday and tomorrow. Like right and left when she is giving directions over the phone. She still has to flex the hand she writes with before she remembers “right.” She remembers her mother and her sisters trying to explain “yesterday” and “tomorrow” to her, but as soon as the words were spoken, the meanings flew off their tongues and began to wrestle with each other, one brushing yellow pollen, the other wielding blue, until, when all the explaining and repeating and enunciating was over, there were two identical green cones, holding flowers or seeds, she wasn’t sure. Do you get it? Did you catch their meaning? Do you understand? And she would nod, yup, she got it, she caught it, and she now understood. And she told herself, I will write it on my hand so yesterday I won’t forget.



Winnipeg is caught in the cracked lips of a prairie blizzard. Ruth presses her forehead against the cool glass of her bedroom window as she watches the traffic on Henderson Highway. It is dark outside, and in the glow of the street lights, the blowing snow looks like a faulty broadcast of frozen static. The air is moving with white, and only occasionally can she make out the vague grey silhouettes of the elm trees that shiver and dance around the circumference of the graveyard. She looks at the alarm clock beside her bed. He should be here any moment. It is so seldom that she is ready on time, she has forgotten how it feels to wait. Her body tightens when she notices a dark grey car slowing down in front of the house. She watches as the car blinks and turns onto her street. She takes a quick look in the bedroom mirror before turning off the bedroom light and slipping on her boots. As she runs down the flight of stairs to meet Lon, she hopes her coat won't take on the smell of the stairway.

She opens the door and gets into the car. "Hi." Her voice is slightly breathless from running to the car, and her coat is snowy just from the few steps she took across the boulevard. The car is warm and the snow on her shoes is already starting to melt. She looks over at him. She thinks he looks different than he did at the University. She is not sure what is different. Maybe he seems smaller.

"I think I saw you waiting at the window," Lon says, looking at Ruth as she looks away, trying to find her seatbelt. "Is your place on the north side of the second floor?"

Ruth is concentrating on the seatbelt strap. "It's on the second floor, but I'm on the South side." The buckle snaps into place. "If you saw someone in the North window, the storm must be playing tricks with your eyes—that suite is vacant."

They turn onto Henderson Highway and join the thin stream of cars crawling past the graveyard, and over the Red River on the Disraeli overpass. Even within the city limits, the snow is blowing over the road, transforming the dark concrete of the bridge into a swirling stream of snow.

“It must be really bad outside the city if it’s this bad here,” Ruth comments, using this conversation as an opportunity to turn her head and look at Lon as he is driving. He has just shaved, but his face still looks tired. He smells like soap.

“Yeah, I talked to a patient whose wife was stranded in Portage,” he adds.

In Winnipeg, the weather is not regarded as a lowly conversation topic. It is not possible to survive winter, to suffer the impatience of spring, to drink in the sweetness of summer or to settle into the cold of fall, without talking about the weather to other people who are living in the same conditions. In Winnipeg, weather is the stuff of pillow talk: lovers, their bodies warm and satiated, talk about the weather before falling asleep. Weather is spoken from the pulpit: pastors know that their congregations’ backs will stiffen when they describe the coldest day of winter. Weather is shouted across the streets: neighbours who have never met will eagerly shout things like “Cold today, eh?” to the bundled figure two driveways over. Weather is celebrated on public transportation: on the first warm day in spring, bus drivers are surprised to hear from even the most sullen teenager, unable to restrain himself from commenting about the scent of spring.

“You can’t even see the river,” Ruth comments. Below the overpass, the river is lost in a wail of white. For most of the winter, Winnipeg’s rivers weave through the city as frozen white ribbons. At the Forks, where the Red and the Assiniboine rivers meet, the city has developed parks on the rivers, flooding the river with ice to make even surfaces

for skating rinks, sticking old Christmas trees into the snow to act as wind breaks. Sometimes they even flood the trails along the river banks, so people can skate through the brush. Last summer, on one of these trails, she encountered a group of aboriginal youth who set up a camp on the banks of the river, reclaiming their native territory in the middle of the city's downtown. She wonders if they are still there tonight, when the docile rivers have blown themselves into a flurry of white, howling through the city as brazen, wild-eyed whips.

She watches him driving. He turns his head and catches her studying him. "You know, I've really been looking forward to tonight," he says.

She laughs and nervously presses her toes into the base of her shoes. "I must be too—I generally only get nervous when I'm looking forward to something." He smiles at her confession.

"So, I thought we'd try a restaurant in my neighbourhood— La Vieille Gare."

"The Old Station?" she asks. They drive over the Seine river this time, cross the railway tracks, and pull into the parking lot. The wind has picked up and the snow is stinging their faces. Lon grabs her arm as they stumble through the snow of the parking lot. The restaurant is located inside an old train car, and as they are seated at their table, she wonders about all the places this car has been.

As they are looking through the menu, he says, "I never asked you what your last name was?"

"Oh, Reimer. Ruth Reimer. Very Mennonite." Growing up in Winnipeg with a last name of Reimer, she has become used to seeing her last name splayed on semi trucks and meat factories. When she was working on her Master's degree, a classmate from

Boston, unfamiliar with Mennonites and their names, commented, “Rhymer—that’s a great last name. One who rhymes, a daring word player, a trickster.” Sausage factories and moving trucks slipped off her name as she threaded word plays and shards of poems onto it.

“Mennonite,” he repeats. “I like Mennonites. I remember when we first moved here, I thought Mennonites drove wagons and wore funny hats.”

“My mom doesn’t think her hat is funny,” she looks at him squarely.

He is flustered, “Oh, I didn’t—”

“I’m kidding.” She is surprised that she reaches out to touch his arm. “My mom doesn’t wear hats,” she says, smiling.

He glances away from the road and looks at her, bemused. “I’ll remember that,” he says. His eyes are the colour of lamplight, she thinks. She is relieved that they are both starting to relax. The dinner is good and they are happy, warm with wine. The blizzard is breathing curdled, ragged breaths against the glass pane.

“Tell me your strangest story,” she starts over dessert.

“Strangest story,” he repeats, before pausing and pressing the tips of his fingers together in a tent. He moves through his fingers, connecting his right index finger to his left index finger, then his middle finger to his other middle finger, and continues through to his baby finger, and then moves back. It appears as though each contact of finger to finger synapses pieces of stories, bringing memories together, until he finally stops with his index fingers together. “I was an intern on a maternity ward. A woman came in, she said her water had broken, but she hadn’t experienced any contractions. I put a fetal monitor on her, and the baby’s heart was so slow, it appeared to be distressed. It was a

high-risk birth from the beginning because the mom was very obese. So, I got the doctor, and we decided to do a C-section. Opened her up, and found out that there was no baby—she wasn't pregnant. The fetal monitor was picking up the mom's heart beat."

He finishes his glass of wine. "That story changed the way I thought about words." Ruth is silent as she watches him hold his empty wine glass to his lips. His face changes, and for the first time she can trace the historian in his blood. She watches as he replays the situation, composing consequences, causes and effects. She looks at him, expecting, waiting. "I should have studied the mother's eyes—I could have seen that she was sick." He is lost in thought. He moves the edge of the glass across his lips. "I realized that words not only describe symptoms, they can be symptoms, too. Bodies, words—they're both organic. Now I study the etiology of both before diagnosing any disease." She imagines him in the office, listening to patients while he studies their eyes, searching for anxiety, for sickness, for fatigue. Reading their complaints in the context of their body. He takes the wine glass away from his lips and moves the stem between his fingers. "The colour of lips and nail beds, the taste of babies' breath, the way skin remembers touch, the percussions of the body... They all flavour words." She studies his face. He has learned to read with his hands, his nose and his mouth, she thinks. She can envision his approach—he wouldn't believe a patient who says she isn't sleeping until his fingers read her glands to see if they hung heavy and hot with fatigue. And all the while he would be breathing through his nose, smelling for sickness, or alcohol, or nervousness.

He puts down the glass, noticing at last that it is empty. His face moves back and he is again the person she met in the library. Casual. Relaxed. He looks at her and grins. She says nothing, wondering if he will continue. "Last August," he starts again, "there was a

country car accident and the woman was covered with fluid and blood, but we couldn't find any surface lesions. Her blood was all over my gloves, and something about it didn't look normal. Finally, I smelled it, and then, just to confirm, I tasted some of it--licked it right off my hand."

Ruth looks at him, her face wrinkled in disgust. He puts his finger up to his mouth, as if to bait her. "Tomatoes." Ruth laughs, impressed with his intuition. "Turned out that the woman had just finished picking boxes of tomatoes from her sister's garden, and was delivering them to her mother when her van was hit from the side.

"Do you remember the patient's name?" Ruth asks.

"Why? If you think you know her, I didn't tell you that story." He smiles.

"Relax—I don't know her, but if I was a doctor, I would pay attention to names."

"And why is that?"

She takes a drink of coffee before continuing. "When I was six years old, we had two little kittens, a boy and a girl. My sister, Jen, named them Romeo and Juliet. I wanted to name them Jason and Nancy, after two of my friends. Jen wouldn't hear of it. She said it didn't fit, you couldn't use names like Jason and Nancy for cats, and someday I'd get that." She pauses while he laughs, puts his elbows on the table, and rests his chin on his hands, studying her face while she continues with her story.

"We couldn't agree on the names, and finally my parents told us that we could each call them what we wanted. You can imagine the confusion." She pauses while he nods.

"Anyhow, the kittens were born the same spring that the prairies were infested with crickets. To keep the crickets out of the basement, my Dad had to sprinkle cricket poison around the outside walls. Unfortunately, the kittens must have eaten some

poisoned crickets, because one day they were lethargic and smelled funny. A few days later they died. Jen felt terrible. And ever since then, I've always wondered if there is some connection between your name and your fate. How do you know the meaning of your name, and can you rewrite it?"

She eats her last bite of dessert as she adds, "That was the last time we named our pets after tragic literary figures." She pauses and looks up at him. "I'm sorry, that's kind of a depressing story."

"It's a great story." Lon takes his chin out of his hand. "So do you think its just coincidence? Could a name hold a fate?"

She watches his grin move over his face and realizes that his chin is beautiful. "I'd love to believe that, but I don't trust words very much. The only fate words hold is that of fiction. Write it down and history vanishes into fiction. I don't like that, but I believe it. The only chance we have is to try to figure out the story we're writing ourselves into."

He nods his head while studying her eyes, and with this understanding, she realizes that this is the part of her story where she falls in love. Her face shifts, her eyes look down, embarrassed when she realizes that he must be reading them.

*January 26, 1992*

*Plate 1b—Arrangement of Cameras.* The picture reveals a mask of eyes. There are thirteen lenses looking at me. Big boxes of cameras lining four rows of shelves that look as though they were built specifically for this purpose. Two of the cameras are mounted to the doorframe. I look at the doorframe again, and my stomach moves when I realize that I know exactly which corner of the basement this is. I do my laundry next to this door. I expect that if I went downstairs right now, I would see the holes in the door where those cameras were mounted. Who removed those cameras, and what did they think? Were they indignant, confident with religious certainty that they were ridding the world of occult paraphernalia, stubbornly refusing to admit that they felt the researchers laughing in the room? Maybe it was T.G.'s family, acknowledging that the cameras needed to come down if the house was ever to be sold. Who would buy a building with cameras mounted in the basement? People would suspect something sexual, but they wouldn't be consoled if told in a shocked, whispered voice, "Oh, no, nothing like that. (pause) This is where the doctor held séances." Sex or séances. Neither one, the real estate agent has told them, helps resale value.

There is a lot of effort represented in this photo. Who mounted these cameras in the first place? Who paid for them? Hired someone to build these stands?

When the book is not open to this page, when page 22 is pressed against page 23, the cameras stare at the description of the counter-fraudulent techniques that were used during the séances. All participants were to hold hands at all times. All participants were



subject to physical searches to ensure there were no foreign substances in the séance.

The medium, who I now understand was the woman with the thick eyebrows, Mary Marshall, was washed down before each séance. “In a room apart from the séance room Miss Turner helped Mary M. undress, then sponged her head, neck, shoulders and breasts and under-arms with warm water. At Walter’s request, such parts were not dried, but left moist. Miss Turner helped Mary M. dress in fresh undergarments, a low-necked, sleeveless dressing-gown and slippers, supplied by Mrs. Hamilton” (23). Did the cameras in this picture nudge each other with their elbows, and hide their smirks when they realized they would stare at this description for the life of the book? Did Mary M. shiver when she walked into the basement, her skin damp, the edges of her dress soggy? Did she enjoy it when Miss Turner would take her back to the room and wash her head, neck, shoulders, breasts, and underarms?

*January 30, 1992*

*Plate 1a—Diagram of Seance Room.* Someone has spent a great deal of time drawing this diagram by hand. The boxes are perfectly spaced out, the lines straight. Each little box has a name or label, showing where the members of the séance sat, and their positions relative to the cameras, where T.G. waited for Walter's signal before snapping the picture. At the back of the room there is a little table where Lillian, T.G.'s wife, sat to record the minutes of the séances. I am reluctant to write this, in case, somehow by writing it, it will become more true, but I wonder if T.G. really is here in this house when I'm working on this journal. I feel relieved that I must write with my hand closed against this pencil, low to the paper. Usually I feel nervous when my palms are closed, kind of like I've lost a sense, lost a particular way of breathing, of listening. But writing about T.G. in this house makes me reluctant to find out what might happen if I was able to write with my palms facing outward. I don't want to lose control over these letters.

The next week they are lovers. The first morning that he wakes up in her bed, she is missing. He walks through her apartment, surprised to find her gone. In the kitchen he finds a sweet but careful note. The apartment is surprising quiet, a bit uncertain of him, I think. He glances at the clock: it is almost ten in the morning. He presses the sleep button on the radio and smiles when he hears the CBC's arts calendar. He walks to the bathroom, and stubs his toe on the corner of a bookcase, which lines the hall, sticking its feet into the entrance of the bedroom doorway.

“sti,” he mutters, holding his toe as he stands in front of her bookcases in the hall. There are three cases, and they line almost the entire wall. She must be a fan of historical fictions, he thinks to himself, remembering her comments about history. Most of the books are about history, but scattered throughout the shelves are collections of poetry and novels, travel guides and cookbooks, dictionaries and art books. He studies the books, a puzzled look on his face. Yes, it does seem strange, at least initially, that the history books are not grouped together. One of the books, a travel guide for Spain, is only half there—its spine has been severed, the first half of the book missing. There is a battered-looking Spanish travel dictionary, and two shelves over, there is a French dictionary in similar condition. He must be wondering why she does not put all of the dictionaries together. Or the bibles: there are two bibles, each on different shelves. A children's bible is on one shelf and a leather-bound bible with gilded pages is on the next book case. He pulls out the children's bible. It has an air-brushed painting of Jesus holding a lamb on its cover. He slowly puts the bible back on the shelf. The books are placed too neatly on the shelves to be randomly arranged, but he has clearly not detected the pattern. He pulls out *Selected Writings of Gertrude Stein* and opens up the covers. Ruth is a messy reader.

There are scratches and circles and notes that have travelled out of the margins and have been made to fit between the lines of the text. Strange miscellanea, traces of her life, are lodged between the pages: a plane ticket from Winnipeg to Prague, bus transfers, an old black and white snapshot of a couple and four small children posing by an old black car, smears of chocolate, water drops. In one book there is a footprint. Wanderlust comes to rest in books. He runs his hands over the spines, then leans forward. It appears he is smelling the books. He closes his eyes. Is he listening? Maybe he is simply taken with the woman who carries these books with her, who reads with her body, whose hands have been all over these books, caressing their covers, tucked them into bed. The bottom corners of the book are rounded and wider than the rest of the book. I'm sure he is thinking that she must dog ear the pages using the bottom corner, not the top. He would find this endearing. Would probably wonder where her hands had been before touching these pages, folding over their gentle corners?

The last book on the bottom row of the farthest right bookshelf is Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion*. She mentioned to him that she was reading this book last week. He opens its cover. She has dated it January 28, 1992, and beside the date has scrawled, "reading this and thinking of Lon." He grins and pulls out the book beside it. It is dated December 27, 1991. His movements become less uncertain. He pulls out the next book—it was dated two months ago. Biographical order. She puts the books on the shelf in the order that she reads them. With the satisfaction that comes from opening a problem and revealing its solution, he smiles and nods. He steps back from the shelves and studies them, as if he is reading her life along the lines of these shelves. He moves to the far left shelf and runs his fingers over the books of her childhood. His lips are moving silently as

he reads their titles. He moves his hands over her adolescence. He finds her again in her university texts, which are measured with history texts and punctuated with months of summer reading and travel. His fingers pause the longest on the severed spine of the guide book for Spain. I've always wondered, too, who left with the other half.

He walks to her desk and finds a piece of paper. Picking up a pen, he writes to her, "A life like an open bookshelf...."

*February 1, 1992*

*Plate 9—The twisted mass and bell cords of August 5, 1928.* This small picture is the only photograph which shows all the members of the séance while it is in progress. There are three women (four if you count the medium) and three men. Why is it, I wonder, that mediums are always women? One woman from the circle is bending over so that the camera does not get caught in the spiral of her silver bun, or the back of her flowered dress. From the back, she looks like my grandma. The other five people have their eyes closed, and look relaxed and calm. It looks like a prayer meeting—the deacons of the church are sitting around a small wooden table, hand in hand. The only difference is that the woman in the center of the photograph has a stream of white teleplasm running from her nose and mouth.

There is something lacking in this picture, and I can't quite put my finger on it. I expected to sense excitement, anticipation as the camera flashed. But it's not there. In fact what I sense in the picture is almost exactly the opposite of excitement: nonchalance. Perhaps the researchers were reluctant to await, to hope, or to anticipate for fear that the anticipation might change the event. It is as if this motley crew of researchers has forgotten what they hoped for, but still sit, eyes closed, palms open to the other, open to possibility. T.G. wrote, "there must be no *a priori* rejections of any aspects of the inquiry, however bizarre or repellent they might seem." There is something hidden in that bold statement of scientific procedure. There is an insistence on creating a space for possibility.

And I wonder if those letters, *theremustbenoapriorirejections* of any aspects of the inquiry, were tossed in the air, and allowed to float down, would the spaces rearrange themselves, and spell *arthur* for a brief moment before regaining their composure, their objectivity, their scientific boldness? A little boy dead who never came back to visit his father. His father has stopped expecting him, but continues to make space for the possibility. A space for hope that still stands open, even though its velvet lining of anticipation has dissolved. That's what I sense in this picture: the memory of hope.

*February 11, 1992*

On December 29, 1930, in those days of waiting between Christmas and New Year, Walter promised the group, who is described as “restless and despondent,” that he would give them a picture. “I will try to give you a picture at your next sitting. Have your cameras ready. I am going to give you something funny...It’s a small picture just to keep you in a good humour. I’m ready. I’ll get it for you. I’ve just thought of it.” Who am I quoting? Does it matter that Walter’s words are spoken with Mrs. Marshall’s mouth? When Lillian recorded comments made by Walter through Mrs. Marshall, she attributes them to “Walter-Mary M.” A hyphen, a tiny dash to stretch between the living and the dead.

In any case, Walter was true to his (?) word. On January 5, 1930 the hand simulacrum was pictured. The sitting began as it almost always did, with music. Sometimes the researchers would sing, and often they would play music on a gramophone. Apparently “Them Golden Slippers” was one of Walter’s favourite songs. I’d like to find that song and listen to it, but I don’t want to listen to it here. As friendly as Walter sounds, I don’t want him back. Before the séance began, Dr. J. Hamilton (T.G.’s brother) and Mr. Cooper (a Winnipeg business man) pressed their hands against the medium’s head, chest and breasts as a counter-fraudulent technique. At 9:42 they reported there was nothing on her face. At 9:43 Mrs. Marshall began “hissing like a steam engine” and her hands, held by Dr. J. Hamilton and Mr. Cooper, banged on the table. There is a picture of these hands; they look heavy and fleshy. I think they would feel like heavy, warm sausages if you were holding them. They look like hands that, if



dropped, would never dream of bouncing, but would land with a heavy thud. There is something, even in this picture, that makes me, not exactly scared, but nervous, a bit alarmed, and maybe a bit reverent of her heavy hands. After banging her hands, she stood up and shuffled in time to the music. At 9:50, Walter-Mary M. knocked on the table three times, T.G.'s signal to take the picture. When T.G. asked Walter what they should expect, Walter replied, "It is something you couldn't do without. I gave you what he is clapping with" and pointed at one of the other members of the circle, Ewan, who had fallen into a trance and was clapping. Plate 5 shows the resulting photograph.

*Plate 5—The hand simulacrum of January 5, 1930.* Mary M. is sitting in the middle of the photograph, wearing a sleeveless dress. Her hands, holding the hands of two men, are stretched out on the table. The most remarkable aspect of the photograph, though, is what looks like a large white dress glove that is pressed over Mary M.'s face. The palm of the glove is over her mouth and nose, and the index and middle fingers are pressed up against her eyes. The wrist of the glove looks wrinkled, maybe gathered or shirred, like a woman's dress glove, but the glove looks too big, the fingers too clumsy, to fit on a woman's hand, even a woman with large, heavy hands.

January 5, 1930. In Mrs. Friesen's fifth grade class, you knew Canadian history if you could remember dates of battles, of signed constitutions. The one bead of objectivity that no historian could confront, at least for Canadian history, was a date. What would Mrs. Friesen think of these dates? The objectivity of dates paired with pictures of teleplasm. This is such strange history. It is a history of the unbelievable. What can be made of this history of ghosts? Of a Scottish immigrant with heavy hands, who coughs up white teleplasm in the shape of gloves.

It must not be easy to generate this type of history. Could Mrs. Marshall breathe with the white glove over her nose and mouth? Apparently she was occasionally nauseous after the sittings, sometimes vomiting what the book describes as “white frothy mucus”(27). As desperate as we are for history, pulling it off the shelves, and feeding off of it in gulping mouthfuls, we spit out the distasteful, the indigestible, and swallow the rest. History of the indigestible is not welcome.

What did Mrs. Marshall feel when that glove was over her face? Was the glove warm? Did it move when it was pressed against her face? Did she even know it was there? Did she feel someone press it against her face?

**I**t is her first time in Lon's apartment. He lives in the Roslyn—an old apartment block just south of the Osborne bridge, built along the banks of the Assiniboine river. It was built in the early 1900s, when Roslyn Road was the most prestigious address in Winnipeg. Now it is lined with pragmatic apartment blocks and condos. The Roslyn, however, is anything but pragmatic. Apparently the Roslyn's architect considered this apartment building to be his masterpiece, and designed every suite to be unique. It is rumoured that before he could complete it, he committed suicide in the inner courtyard of the building. The building can remember being beautiful, she thinks as she notes the white marble stairs and the thick oak staircase and panelling. Now the marble is stained yellow and brown, and she is reluctant to use the railing after noting greasy smears on the brass finials that half-heartedly proclaim the first stair. So many buildings in Winnipeg have this sense of loss. They remember an optimism that the city has not felt since for the last fifty years.

The building boasts Winnipeg's first residential elevator. Ruth enters its metal cage which slams shut behind her and, using hydraulics, silently slides to the third floor. When she reaches Lon's door, she realizes that he has left it ajar. She opens it further and calls inside.

"Come in. I'm in the kitchen," he calls. She follows his voice to the kitchen. There are piles of vegetables on the counter. The kitchen is steamy and smells like onions. He kisses her and pours her a glass of wine. While he is cooking she wanders through his living room. There is a drafting table loaded with the residue of his life: books, credit card statements, CDs, a coffee cup, pencils, cheque blanks, bird seed (does

he have a bird?). Her eyes rest on a photograph. A snapshot. It wasn't the woman that first caught her gaze, but rather the carelessness. Caught in a fold, the photograph is trapped between the pages of one book and pushed up against the spine of another. Even after bending it the other way, there is a wrinkle in its glossy surface, the memory of mishap. She lifts the photograph up to her face to study it closely. Lon is standing with his arm around a woman. He is still new to her, foreign. She is pleased with this chance to study his picture, to memorize the face that she has only once slept beside in the dark. She paces herself, wanting to situate him in the picture before narrowing in on his face. A systematic approach. This is the first time it will fail her.

The woman could only be his mother. Ruth is immediately drawn to her hands. Ringless, strong hands, they are mapped with veins, as though they were flexed, as though they needed more blood because they had more knowledge. One hand is resting on Lon's shoulder and her other hand is pressed against her brow, shielding her eyes from the sun. She probably meant to remove her hand before the picture was snapped. Or maybe someone called her name and she turned, not expecting the click of a camera, the lick of a lens. She is tall, as tall as Lon. Her hair is shoulder length and dark, with wiry silver-white streaks that must have been engineered by a hairdresser. They are both wearing suits, and the day must have been cool, because she has a shawl of crimson wool on her shoulders. Ruth knows how she must have smelled: scented with cashmere. Lovely. "Your mother is lovely" she says to Lon when she walks into the kitchen and kisses his lips.

He is cooking a curry. She can taste it on his lips. Later she will taste it on his hair and skin. He cooks from cookbooks and uses measuring spoons. She reads cookbooks,

too, but never while cooking. She reads them like novels, envisioning, critiquing the flavours before moving on to the next recipe, sometimes adding brief notes that have nothing to do with cooking. In her opinion, she has made her worst dishes when following a recipe. Although, when he lifts a spoon of curry to his nose, and then to her mouth, she concedes that cooking by the book might work, too.

After dinner there is an awkward manoeuvring of position as they settle onto the couch to watch a movie. Their bodies have not yet reconciled themselves to each other, to the way that couples who have been together for years feel the same authority to move their lover's leg as they do to move their own. She leans against him, her knees pulled up, the side of her foot very aware that it is pressing against the outside of his thigh.

"So you figured out my bookshelves, did you?" she asks, remembering the note he wrote.

"Biographical order." She nods her confirmation and he continues, "But, I've been thinking—what do you do when you reread a book?"

She is pleased with his question. It is evident that she has thought about this problem. "I put it where I last read it. So, really, there are gasps all over the place." She corrects herself, "I meant gaps—there are gaps all over the place. Although, I can usually tell where the book used to be, because somewhere in my scrawling I often refer to other books I read around that time." She knows that she has thought about her bookshelves more than she should admit. When she arrives home, she greets her books in the same way that other people who live alone might talk to their plants.

He gets up to pour her more coffee. When he comes back, he has one more question. "Why do so many of your books look like they have been drenched?"

“I water them regularly,” she replies before explaining that before she owned bookcases, she set plants on top of crates that were packed full of books, and walked away before she heard the water seep over the saucers and drip between the boards, washing down the pages of her books.

“Do you like reading?” she asks, realizing that she has assumed this, but never actually asked him.

“I’ve always loved stories. My mom read to my brother and me by the hour when we were little.” He pauses. “I think I chose medicine because of stories. I couldn’t believe that within every cell there is this epic of war, poems of intuition, novels about reproduction. It was just so amazing to read about processes that were happening in my own body as I turned the pages of a book.” She feels her body relax against his. She imagines him as a teenager, learning to read with different alphabets, amazed as the stories moved off the page and into his fingers.

**A**t the cabin she will leave her copy of *The Double Hook* on the dock during a thunderstorm. In the morning she will find it in the lake, lodged between two rocks, swaying as the waves lick its pages. She will press her hand through the surface of the lake. The hair on her arm will glisten as bubbles line each strand, and she will lift the book from the water. Its pages will be limp. Drowned. She will press water from its covers, seeping oozing, bubbly. Why bubbles, she will wonder? The plastic coating will remain the same size but the paper cover will swell, and the book will look as though its skin is blistered. It will take weeks to dry, and when it does, its pages will be stiff and rheumatic, and will stubbornly refuse to give up the company of each other. She will find a tiny embryo of a baby crayfish flattened between pages 40 and 41. She will wonder where this book went the night of the storm? Did it rub its pages together, eager for the opportunity to float down as a pale, papery ghost, laughing while the fish fled with fear, hungry when their sudden departure swept a baby crayfish into the swaying pages before its mother's horrified eye? Do the letters from those pages still haunt the water? Do quiet men in fishing boats inexplicably utter poems when they dip their hands into the water, while small children climb from the lake dripping with new vocabulary, strange words sparkling on their summer skin?

*February 11, 1992*

In the fall of 1929, one of the members of the séance compulsively reached out to touch the medium's face without Walter's permission. Walter became furious, chiding the researchers for not following his instructions. "I know very well that you want everything to be above board, and it shall be so, but you must leave it to me to do it in my way and not yours! Never, never again will I tell you!" Shortly after, a new control, named Black Hawk, visited the room, also speaking through Mrs. Marshall. The book states that this control claimed to be a "discarnate Red Indian." Black-Hawk requested a picture, and explained to the group that the teleplasm, since damaged by touch, was in a "very rude state."

*Plate 10—The mass of October 20, 1929.* The picture shows a ragged mass of white over Mrs. Marshall's face. It looks like she blew a huge and very thick bubble of white chewing gum, and it burst and, now hangs, deflated, from her mouth.



*February 13, 1992*

*Plate 5 – The deep-trance automatic script of April 26, 1931.* This is a picture of a sheet of writing. There is a bible verse printed at the top of the sheet, followed by several paragraphs written in a rolling script. These writing experiments began when an unknown control announced through Mrs. Marshall that Walter was “very busy working on preparations for something.” Then, the minutes show that Mrs. Marshall’s control spoke loudly through her, almost shouting, “I would like to say that you are to place a table and a chair in the center of the room with paper and pencil at the next sitting at which I will be in control of this medium. No one is to interfere. No one is to touch her. I will use her at my discretion. Place a glass of water on the table, but no other articles. You understand what I am saying to you... You must not place any interpretation on her writing. (Something to the effect that it was to be taken word for word.) That is all. Good-bye.”

The plate on the opposite side of the page is filled with writing. In bold capital letters is a bible verse: “THE LORD HATH MADE BARE HIS HOLY ARM. ALL NATIONS AND ALL THE ENDS OF THE EARTH SHALL SEE THE SALVATION OF OUR GOD. -- Isaiah III, 10.” Underneath it, written in a careful cursive script is what appears to be a sermon. Is this the way that the bible was translated, dictated by a supernatural force? Who did this writing come from? What does this writing mean? How is it possible to resist interpretation?

I have just looked up Isaiah III:10 in my bible, and it reads, “Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him: for they shall eat the fruit of their doings.” I am

confused. Did the medium give the wrong reference? After searching in a concordance, I have found Isaiah 52:10: "The Lord hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God." How did the researchers write III instead of 52? I just looked up the roman numeral symbol for 52: LII. Somewhere in translation, LII was translated as III. A tiny line gets lost in translation and a reference reverses through 49 verses. This error is disconcerting. Is all writing subject to such errors? I wonder why the researchers made no note of the discrepancy. There is no interpretation of the writing at all. Why did they follow the instructions of the trance personalities so unquestionably? Should I do the same?

**H**er head is resting on his chest. She can watch the pulse in his neck as her breast feels his heart beat. “There’s blood on your arm,” she whispers, as she rubs it with her hand. He doesn’t understand that she wants it erased, and as she turns over, he touches the streaks of menstrual blood that mark her stomach.

“I love your blood.” He strokes her hair. “You can tell so much from blood,” he notes, as he takes her hand, and presses on its wrist.

“Blood, the body’s ink,” she suggests. He kisses her forehead.

“I remember the day I learned to read blood. It requires all of the skills you learn while reading fiction—you have to have a sense of the character, and then look for what is not where it should be.” She moves her fingers over the lobe of his ear. “Symptoms, suspicions are translated into diagnosis through blood,” he continues. Glucose, creatinine, alkaline phosphate, albumin, globulin. She watches as the names slide through his mind. He has told her that he loves the exactitude of blood work, even though every test is prefaced with the percentage of error: ‘Read with caution’ bolds the printout.

“I can see the blood in your earlobe,” she says, “it’s like a soft little ruby—the blood is glowing through the skin.” He becomes, quiet, still. Then he turns his head, pressing his ear against the pillow. He takes her fingers and kisses their tips. He is lost, she watches his face as it careens through thought. “Tell me about blood,” she says, wanting to bring him back to her. She loves to hear him talk about medicine. Acronyms and abbreviations roll off his tongue, as though they have not only estranged themselves, but have completely forgotten the longer words they were once a part of.

“Let’s see. High creatinine levels whisper worry about kidneys. Too many white blood cells signals infection,” he pauses, to reposition her elbow before he continues. “If

the platelet levels are high, I check their fingers for nicotine stains, if they're low, there could be internal bleeding. High ANA levels reek of lupus, too much bilirubin and it's the dreaded Gilbert's Syndrome."

"Anna and Gilbert? You're making those up."

He laughs. "Not at all—the only thing not true is that Gilbert's syndrome is nothing to dread—it just dyes the skin and eyes yellow. But I haven't got to the interesting ones. Sometimes the red blood cells..."

"I remember pictures of red blood cells in text books. They looked like lozenges. I always wanted to hold them on my tongue, suck them like candy."

"Well, if you sucked them too hard, they would bend, and show up as Sickle Cell anaemia, which warns you to consider Moyamoya disease." He feeds her these words, knowing that she will want to try them out, will need to feel the syllables falling down her throat, calling them up just before they sink into her stomach, and rolling the vowels along her tongue. Moyamoya.

"'Puff of smoke' – it's Japanese for puff of smoke."

He pauses and she silently corrects him, thinking that you would have to translate Moyamoya from Japanese to English to get a 'puff of smoke.' She turns onto her side, facing him, and rubs her fingers over his nipple, "What happens if you have Moyamoya disease?"

"You're subject to strokes, particularly in the Circle of Willis, a bed of anastomes, intersections, meeting places, of the main arteries in your brain. People who have Moyamoya disease often have berry aneurysms, little pockets of blood that can swell and burst.

“Little swollen berries,” she whispers, and replaces her fingers with her mouth.

It is late afternoon and they are leaving Winkler, a small Manitoba city located two hours south of Winnipeg. Ruth had promised her little cousin that she would come to her first band concert, and Lon generously agreed to go along for the ride. He even claimed to have enjoyed the concert. She smiles, and, taking her hand from the steering wheel, reaches over to touch his hand. After dating for a month, she is astonished at how accustomed she has become to his presence.

“Do you realize that you’re the first non-Mennonite to be dragged to a family function?” Ruth asks.

When Lon does not reply, she looks over to find him asleep. He was on call last night and barely slept. She smiles at his sleeping frame, and runs her fingers along his hand. His long veins remind her of the highway as it stretches through the prairies. These roads are black lines on an empty white paper. Her chest feels tight when she leaves the prairies. There is an emptiness to this land, a feeling of space that Ruth has come to expect. This is not an emptiness where something is missing, but the emptiness of open arms, of breath and wind, of horizon. This is what Winnipeg has arisen from. It has been built from a land full of nothing. On this grey afternoon, even the horizon has dissolved, leeching land into sky. Occasionally they drive through little towns which have no margins, no outskirts to signify a beginning. The towns begin suddenly and end just as immediately, comic in their brevity. It makes sense, she thinks, that Winnipeg was built at the fork of two rivers—how else, in all this space, could the traders have decided on a precise location, and not over a few feet, or just a few miles to the right? She remembers when she was young, her parents fenced in the yard because they decided to raise a pig. Her uncle gave them one from his pig farm. They unloaded the pig from the truck, and

the pig planted his four hooves on the ground, and stood there for three days. Used to standing in the same spot for days, penned in with hundreds of other pigs, he was paralyzed by the space. Dying from dehydration while swimming in the largest, clearest of lakes.

The thermometer reads minus eighteen degrees centigrade, and although it is only four pm, the sky is already starting to give up its ghost. On cloudy days, there is no twilight in a winter Manitoban evening, but only a small sigh when the last light leaks from the sky. Ruth has always hated this liminal time between afternoon and evening. In the winter, she is careful to turn on lights in the late afternoon, nervous and determined not to be caught in the winter dark without the comfort of lamplight. She turns on the headlights, even though there is still enough light to drive without them. The wind is picking up, changing the dark highway into a river of snow, swirling with eddies. Fingers of snow reach up from the ditches, and start to press across the road in thin, cold drifts while they press their frozen fingerprints onto the shiny green highway signs.

Lon is waking up. "I'm freezing," he mutters as he turns up the heat in the car. She reaches over to touch his hand again.

"Your fingers are like ice." She tries to rub his hands with the one hand that is not on the steering wheel. Without warning, she stops the car in the middle of the highway. There isn't much of a shoulder to pull onto, and they haven't passed a car since they began driving. "Give me your hands." His hands are often freezing. Sometimes they turn perfectly white, almost yellow. Poor circulation, he says. She puts her hands around his. They are not nearly large enough to encase his, but she presses them against his, and brings this cup of hands to her mouth. With slow, warm air, she breathes into their seed

of palms, the deep pockets of her lungs giving up their warm air. She curls his fingers into her palms and breathes, mouthfuls of warm moist air, over and over.

His hands are humming with breath and he presses his lips into the crown of her head, smelling traces of her shampoo. "Why is it," he asks, "that I deserve you?"

"Why is it," she responds, "that I associate lungs with ravioli?"

He laughs. It's not *ravioli*, but *alveoli*, the tiny air passageways that make up your lungs. He tells her that lungs have roots. *radix pulmonis*: Root of the Lung. She loves these little buttons of knowledge, he has given her a new way of reading, a story of lungs as glowing red flowers, sinking down roots. He doesn't tell her that, in adults, lungs are grey, not red.

When they approach Winnipeg it feels long past midnight, even though it is only six in the evening. In the light of the moon, she sees a highway sign approaching. There is a strange comfort in these signs, evidence of life, she thinks. As she gets closer to the sign she smirks. In the gleam of the headlights, the green and silver highway sign reflects its bright symbols, except for those letters buried under the strange snow patterns that miraculously cling to its shiny, governmental surface. The snow is reflected, or to be exact, not reflected, as the color black, crossing out letters and numbers, leaving behind a ghostly hieroglyph. Gang symbols from the north are disrupting the neat bureaucracy of the lettered sign. "Winnipeg" becomes "Winnp". 25 km is reduced to 2 m. It looks like 'wimp' she thinks, and it strikes her that the wind sounds like a whimper. Highway signs rewritten by snow, translated by moon.



That night she watches him sleep in bed, his chest moving ever so slightly, breathing, drowsing. She imagines his cells blindly slipping past each other in sleep, his muscles yawning as they stretch out for a long rest. She imagines his stories, and those of his ancestors coursing through his blood, using night as an opportunity to play themselves in his dreams. She cannot fall asleep, disturbed by the traffic as it echoes past the Roslyn and moves over the river. Usually they sleep at her apartment. They used to alternate where they slept, but since the morning when she saw a mouse saunter from his fridge to the cupboard, she has insisted on sleeping at her place. Tonight, though, having subjected him to a band concert when he had not slept the night before, she felt obligated to let him sleep in his own bed.

She gets up and walks to the window overlooking the parking lot between the building and the river. She watches the snow falling in the light of the street lamp. It has been snowing since they left this morning. The sky is grey, mottled, and shifting. It looks like how she imagines the inside of the moon. Land locked inside a hollow moon.

She senses movement. It takes a moment to locate it, in one of the cars. Two figures, moving together. A secret tryst, encapsulated in a metal box, complete with wheels. She watches them, until the movement slows. The car turns on, and drives to the door, and a woman gets out, wearing only scrubs. Lon mentioned that one of the doctors he works with also lives in this building. Joyce or Joan, she can't remember her name. She is in her forties, with short permed hair. A person of efficiency, practicality, necessity. The car rolls away, the snow so cold it squeaks beneath its tires, and Ruth watches as the woman puts her hand to her lips, gathers together her lips, and uncurls the fingers of her hand, palm opening to the falling snow. Ruth can see her breath, a

phantom of desire, floating through the snow-packed parking lot and over the city. It is amazing to associate this gesture of delight with the short permed hair of this woman. Surprised by desire. The way its hands cover your eyes while its fingers steer your mind, your body. The way you eat until your stomach hurts, and find yourself hungry two hours later.

In the morning she can hear something on the other side of the closet door.

“There—do you hear it?” She wakes up Lon. There is a scratching noise. She stands on the bed. Sometimes clichés are necessary. He opens the closet, listens, and picks up a shoe box that is full of papers which are now chewed into flat shreds.

“Come here, you’ve got to see this.”

“I hate mice.”

“They’re not mice; they’re voles, and they’re babies.”

“Voles?” She is interested in the word. Mice, moles, voles.

“Voles. Meadow mice—they’re like mice but their ears are smaller. These are just tiny.”

Nebulously she steps onto his side of the bed to look at what he is holding. In the palm of his hand is a baby vole. It looks just like a mouse. Its eyes are sealed and its round body is quivering with breath. A ball of breath in the palm of a hand. A planet breathing in the palm of a galaxy, crust heaving, waters swelling. “Leonardo believed the planet was breathing.” She remembers that line from a collection of poetry. Historical fact, or fiction, sequestered, masquerading, arriving, as poetry.

“Come home with me,” she begs him.

She is driving across the city to the University of Manitoba campus. It often strikes her as surprising that even with two public universities, one with a student population of 30,000, Winnipeg does not feel anything like a university town. Hundreds of kilometres from any city larger than itself, Winnipeg is everything to everyone. Union town, arts center, business and grain exchange, technological hub and governmental center, university town and high risk hospitals. Some cities pound their heartbeat nosily, almost visibly from the moment you arrive. She has known Winnipeg for her entire life, and still she can not put her finger on the city's pulse. Perhaps the city has multiple hearts, all beating within inches of each other, like the earthworm she dissected in grade nine, with its grey, marinated hearts that looked like baby turtles astonishingly relocated inside a grey, rubbery pea pod. There is a Chinatown blown into the middle of the prairies, a Mennonite University, a Ukrainian cultural center, a Jewish Community Center, and, among many other examples, a building constructed by the Polish gymnastic association. At the intersection of Academy and Wellington there is a Jewish synagogue on the northern corner, a Catholic school across from it, a Lutheran church at the south corner, and finally a Shriner's Children hospital at the remaining corner. This is only a sampling of the organizations that have claimed a piece of Winnipeg's white space, and, of course, it is much more difficult to mention the buildings that have not yet been constructed, or even named.

It is impossible to name the phantoms of shrines, mosques and community centers that do not yet have room in the dreams of people who lie awake at night thinking of their homeland. These people have no time or energy to construct buildings or found associations at the moment. They are too busy trying to learn English from their

children, too uncertain of how to find employment as a marine captain in Winnipeg, too discouraged from biting their tongues when they clean hospital rooms while listening to other doctors prescribe the wrong dosages, too tired of chastising their children who insist on wearing baggy track pants instead of the fine trousers they were so lucky to find in the thrift store.

She drives down University Crescent onto the University of Manitoba campus. Unlike the University of Winnipeg, the University of Manitoba has an actual campus, complete with parking lots, courtyards and student centers. It has eleven libraries, and, most pertinently, it has an archives collection which contains the Hamilton papers.

She has not told anyone she is here. Lon already thinks she is obsessed with the Hamilton history. She walks into the library and pauses. It smells the same as the University of Winnipeg library, but just a bit fainter. Perhaps the books are still sleeping, she thinks.

The archives room on the third floor of the library is plain and square. There are tables lining the walls, and tidy bland boxes are spread around the room on tables and carts. She fills in a form, and sits down at a table, pulling a motley sheaf of papers out of her bag. The edges are dog-eared and they are held together with a large binder clip. The clerk wheels in a cart lined with the boxes she has requested. She opens the first folder, astonished at how she is permitted to add her fingerprints to the dust of T.G.'s life.

*February 29, 1992*

*A Picture of the Gallstones removed by TGH, 158.* Like a box of chocolates, laid out in neat rows, this is a picture of gallstones, also arranged in rows. The top stones remind me of the rocks that you can buy to put in the bottom of glass flower vases. (Imagine that family heirloom—Grandma’s crystal vase filled with the family’s collection of gall stones.) Does the body feel a sense of pride or horror when it produces a gleaming black, indigestible stone?

Where is this collection now? Who finally decided to throw out T.G.’s gallstone collection? Or, and I don’t like this, mostly because it seems so plausible, could I walk down to the basement, and find this collection in one of those very old boxes in the top shelves? Do these people know that they left their gallstones behind? Relics, souvenirs, digests, or rather indigests, from a different era.

I can hardly believe that I’m allowed to finger through the details of his life like this. It’s a compelling reason to throw away certain details before I die. These archives have preserved such strange details: pictures of gallstones, dinner invitations, a list of what to prepare for his wedding:

Tickets  
Ring  
License  
Roses  
Suitcase  
Cab

Who decided what to keep and what to throw away? Why did they keep pieces of his medical exams?

1. The Blood

- a) Give its physical components and composition.
- b) Give development, composition, uses and destiny of red blood corpuscles.

5. Differentiate between secretions and excretions; and name the various secretions and excretions in connection with the human body.

Did he mention teleplasm, I wonder?

She hangs up the phone and puts it beside her pillow, where Lon is not sleeping. She doesn't mind his absence during the day, but she hates the stretches of nights when he works at the hospital. She misses the way her body fits against his. She studies the way the light from the street lamp spills over the curtain rod, and into the corner of the room. In its narrow ray, she can see her bookshelves from her bed. She knows their stories by their spines. From this distance she can not make out the words, but she recognizes their shapes and colors. Some of the spines have pictures which she knows from memory. A small Indian boy balanced on top of a pole, a hooded pilgrim, the white face of a little girl cut from a photograph, men with long beards in oval openings, a stone woman's silhouette, a coyote howling at the moon. These faces are watching over her, she thinks, just before she falls asleep.

She is jolted awake by a tremendous crash. Someone or something is plundering through her apartment, she can hear her belongings smashing onto the ground. Her blood is racing while she lies frozen with fear. The noises continue, although they are growing quieter now, sliding and shuffling. Finally, it is absolutely still. She doesn't know how long she has lain in bed, her body tight with terror. Is someone standing around the corner, waiting for her? Have they found what they were looking for and left? She does not turn the lamp on, but picks up the phone. Still in bed, she realizes something is different. The glow of the streetlamp no longer reflects her books. She puzzles for a moment before realizing that an entire bookcase is missing. The far right bookcase, the one with her most recent books, which stands next to the bathroom, facing the empty space between the bedroom and the kitchen, is no longer pressed against the



wall. Her heart is still racing as she swings her feet off the bed, and sets them on the floor. She walks to the hallway, and brazenly turns on the overhead light. Her seven foot bookshelf has crashed forward—armies of books have surged from its shelves, and are now lying in lines that stretch down the hallway and into the bathroom. The bookcase is lying face down on the floor, strangely tilted in one corner, where a cluster of heavy history books is holding up that end. The floor is carpeted with books. She trips over her hardcover dictionary in the doorway, and the sudden movement causes the bookcase to shift again. She carefully steps around the bookcase and turns on the bathroom light. Two books lie resting at the feet of the tub, and another one sits at the base of the toilet. She leaves the light on and moves down the hall into the kitchen, needing to reassure herself that she is alone with her books. She moves into the living room, turning on more lights, glancing to check the lock on the door. There is no one, only her books. She sits down on the couch and starts to laugh. Her mind is relieved but her body has started to shake. She cannot stop laughing.

In the morning, she reviews the mess, and pulls the bookshelf upright, placing it back against the wall. It is even, stable. She picks up the history books from the stack, and puts them back on the top two shelves. Most of the books have fallen in lines, unwilling, even in catastrophe, to be separated from their neighbouring titles. Some of them have gone missing. Next week she will find a book under the couch, and another one behind the window curtain. Later that morning she will run a bath, and when she opens the curtain to step in, she will find a book bathing its back. She will pull it out, and press the water from its chest before setting it on the radiator. In one week it will have swollen to twice its original size. Bragging rights.

The next evening she comes home late from another evening at the archives. She unlocks the door and hears Lon in the shower. She takes off her clothes and unhooks the mirror from the back of the bedroom door, and carries it to the bathroom, setting it in the corner. She opens the shower curtain. He is surprised and turns to face her. She kisses him and runs her hands down his body, the water beading on her arms. "Don't let me distract you," she says, as she sits on the edge of the tub, her face even with his penis. She has never envied men with their penises that inform anyone who cares to look about their state of arousal. Open books. She listens to his breathing, and moves her mouth around his penis, circling it with her tongue before she begins to suck. He is leaning over her, his hands on her shoulders when he comes in her mouth. She removes his penis, and puts her hand up to her mouth, licks his cum into her palm and then holds it out to the falling water. Neither of them watch as it eddies and swirls down the bathtub, spiralling around the drain before slipping away into the sewers.

Perhaps I should have known about Lon before, but this is when it first became clear to me.

When she gets up, she remembers the mirror, her strategy belied by the steam of the shower. "I wanted you to watch, but I guess we were too steamy," she quips. She can see his vague silhouette in the mirror. She sits on the edge of the tub and uses her finger to trace his silhouette in the steam of the glass. She adds their initials to the glass, writing the letters of their love as she watches them fade into the steam.

When he is drying himself with a towel, he notices that her bookshelf looks different than before, haphazard, jagged. "Did something happen with your books?" he asks.

She tells him how they terrified her, just after lulling her to sleep. Her voice is strange. The words she is using are sarcastic, a bit funny, but she is using them bravely to cover the betrayal she fears.

"Did you put them back in order?" he asks.

"Mostly. They kind of fell down in lines, so I just picked them up and put them back in the same order they fell."

Before joining her in bed, he stands in front of the book shelf and notices that the books look jagged because several of them are backwards, their spines facing the back of the shelf. He pulls them out and studies their covers. He doesn't look at their spines, and so he couldn't notice how often graphic designers place faces and eyes on the spines of books. He puts them back on the shelf, eyes facing out.

# *Marriage*

Winnipeg is glowing with green. At the end of May the trees are covered with tiny fresh leaves. The streets are filling up with people who have not seen each other for five cold months. It is seven in the evening, and the sun is still streaming through the bedroom windows where Lon and Ruth are getting dressed for dinner with Lon's mother and Ruth's parents. After unofficially living together for four months, they have decided to announce their plans to get married.

"Ruth, I have nothing to wear, all of my clean clothes are at my place." She knows that he resents her insistence on not telling people they are living together before they are married. Having two homes also means having no home. She tells him her parents can't find out that they are living together. He says that he can't believe she is almost thirty years old, and yet still cares about what her parents think about her living arrangements. He thinks they must know, and calls their charade embarrassing. She insists that her cousins were all virgins until their wedding nights. He calls her naïve.

But soon this will be in the past, and they will live here together, blissfully indulging in the comforts and pleasures of marital coexistence, happily building their after.

"We'll stop by your place on our way to the restaurant." She senses his aggravation, and rubs his arm as she walks into the bathroom to put on some make-up.

"We're already late." His voice is growing more and more frustrated.

"I'm ready to go," she says as she opens her eyes unnaturally wide to apply mascara. "It'll just take a minute to stop at your place."

Lon's movements are fast and edgy as he pulls out the iron and board to try and resuscitate the shirt he wore yesterday.

“Come on, love me,” she says, cautiously pressing her teeth against his skin where his shoulders move into his neck. “Does it hurt?” she asks, as she licks the indents her teeth left on his skin.

“Kiss it better.” His voice is soft and warm.

They are just getting out of the car at the restaurant when Lon’s mother parks her car beside them. Ruth walks over to greet her. His mother is beautiful tonight, as always. Ruth has met Naomi several times since studying her photograph at Lon’s apartment, and after each meeting she always feels even more in awe of this woman who has endured so much, and has emerged confident and loving. Ruth feels slightly intimidated by her. She has a feeling that Lon’s mother knows more than she reveals. Lon’s mother gets out of the car and moves towards Ruth, her hand reaches out to touch Ruth’s arm, and Ruth smiles, and presses against her in a hug. While Ruth is pulling away from the hug, Naomi turns her neck to look over the car, towards Lon.

And, in that moment, in that turn of a neck, a secret romance is exhumed. Dressed in a perfectly respectable skirt and sweater, Ruth is pirouetted, flung head first into a lake of memory. Her stomach tightens and her body feels flush, weak with reminiscence. Breathless. She did not anticipate that his mother would be wearing *that* perfume. It is the scent of her only female lover. Nat. Natalie. The fourth year of her undergraduate degree. A friendship that, one night after bottles of wine, opened, opened into more. The long afternoons of skipped classes, careless brushes, stolen touches, breasts pressed against breasts. And she stops herself in time to remember that she is walking with her fiancé and his mother into a restaurant to meet her parents.

She hates herself for doing it, but, inside, she insists on helping his mother out of her coat, desperate for another hit of memory, needing to burn its flavour into her skin. She closes her eyes, and breathes in slowly. The memories come back, with all their intoxicating insecurities. She remembers the afternoon Nat wrote their story onto her arm and over her breasts, her stomach, the way the letters tickled, the shape of her “T”s, the chorus of silver bracelets that lined her arms, and moved, so sweetly, the taste of lips. She has been disarmed, disassembled by scent. An entire love affair excavated by the turn of a neck.

She excuses herself to the bathroom, leaving Lon to introduce their parents to each other. She splashes water on her face and reapplies her lipstick. When she finds them at the table, she is relieved to notice that the only empty chair is across from Lon’s mother.

They have all relaxed after dinner and a couple of bottles of wine. Ruth has met his mother before, but she has never seemed as vibrant, as alive. There is a lull in the conversation. Naomi looks at Ruth. “So, tell us. What were the first stories you told to each other?”

“Oh, Mom, what a strange question. Most parents ask if we have a song, or something.” Lon sounds annoyed, but he is smiling at her. Ruth and her parents laugh.

Ruth reaches out to touch Lon’s arm. “Remember that night at the La Vieille Gare—I asked you your strangest story, and you told me about the woman who wasn’t pregnant.”

“Yes, and then you told me about your kittens, Romeo and Juliet who died of poison.”

“Oh, Ruth, you didn’t tell him that story on your first date.” Her mother shakes her head.

“You named kittens Romeo and Juliet, and then they died of poisoning?” Naomi asks, laughing.

“We were more careful with names after that,” Ruth’s mother adds.

“I never did call those kittens Romeo and Juliet,” Ruth objects, and turns to Naomi. “And for the record, I’d like to add that this story has been drastically simplified.”

Naomi studies her face and smiles. “As most stories are.” She studies Ruth and for a moment there is an understanding between them.

“Well, speaking of names,” Ruth’s father begins, “a daughter named Ruth and a mother-in-law named Naomi... The two of you should be great friends.”

“And where does that story leave me?” asks Lon, laughing.

“Well, that’s why I waited until after the wine to mention it,” adds Ruth’s father, putting his arm around Lon’s shoulders.



The next morning they are driving to the lake. Ruth's family has a cabin at Falcon Lake, an hour and a half outside of Winnipeg. The flat even prairies are breaking up into sloughs and marshes. Rolling fields of grain are replaced with cattle and low scrub brush. Ahead, they can see a line of evergreen trees, where the prairies give way to rocks and lakes, pines and poplars. Lon is unusually quiet.

"So, I think last night went well," Ruth comments, looking up from her book. When Lon says nothing, she presses him, "Did you?"

"Yup. It was nice."

"Our parents seemed to get along." Ruth is starting to sense that his quietness is from something that is bothering him. She is silent for a few minutes, waiting to see if he will explain himself. "Are you going to tell me what your problem is?" she asks when he does nothing to continue the conversation. When he refuses to admit he has a problem, she turns back to her book, annoyed that he will not talk with her. It is only when they are driving through the town of Falcon Lake, on their way to the cabin along the lakeshore that he starts to speak.

"Why was it that you and Natalie broke up?"

She looks up from her book slowly, biding her time, surprised by the question. "I told you. We couldn't see a future together."

"So were you still in love," he pauses, "when you broke up?"

"Oh, Lon." She pauses. She hates how much he resents Natalie. "I don't know. I guess so."

His face is stiff, and when he responds, his voice is quiet and rough. "So, why didn't you just agree to marry some rich guy to please your parents, have a couple of kids, and then live together, the two of you?"

She should have known that this conversation was not over when they stopped discussing it last week. He has known that she was involved with a woman since their second date, but it was only last week that he wanted details. It was only then that she told him that she and Natalie were more than casual lovers. That they had made a life together, that they would have had a future if only Ruth could have introduced Nat to her parents. She did not want to lie to him, but his reaction has made her regret telling the truth. So it was more than a 'lesbian experience,' he asked. She refused to answer the question, calling it reductive.

She is angry at his new accusation. Her voice is tight and controlled. "If you actually want me to answer that question, you have no idea how much I love you." Her voice is starting to lose control, it is too quiet, too close to breaking with anger. "If it makes you feel any better, I haven't even seen Nat," she corrects herself, "Natalie, in two years and wouldn't know how to get in touch with her if I wanted to."

He pulls the car to the side of the road, where families carrying towels and beach bags are walking past, and leans his head against his hands on the steering wheel. He is shaking. "It's just that I love you so much." His voice is barely audible.

She sighs with relief. "Lon, I love you." She emphasizes the word 'you.' "I could be with women, but I've chosen you. I don't want anyone else." She rubs his back until he stops shaking, runs her fingers through his hair. "Plus," she adds as she kisses his ear, "you're not rich."

“Yet,” he adds, as he lifts his head and smiles at her.

Ruth is sitting at a table which is littered with photographs of a bride and groom. She looks closely at the picture of the bride. Her hair is hanging in ringlets from the humidity. Some days it seems hard to believe that their wedding actually happened. Even the weather seems so distant.

The morning of their wedding was hanging with humidity. Most prairies have forgotten what humidity feels like, they remember it only as a distant relative of their cousins to the east. But in Manitoba, there are days when the wind blows itself out, and the earth begins to steam in its absence. Deep in the days of July, it had been hot and humid for over a week before the wedding. The leaves were dark and heavy on the trees and the air was growing warm and ripe. They had planned an outdoor wedding, but when the morning skies turned black with humidity, they moved the wedding into her parents' church. Now, not even two months later, the skies have remembered winter's look of cool indifference. The dark leaves have turned gold, and the wind is blowing them cold and wet against the windows.

Lon looks better with longer hair, she notes, looking at how his hair curled past his ears in the picture. She removes the plastic cover from a picture album. This is the first time that she has attempted to store pictures in a book. Like her notes, her photographs are strewn over her life like fragments of a dream. There are folders of pictures stashed in cookbooks, filed in with her board games, stuck in the drawer under the computer. Individual snapshots get transferred from her wallet to the top drawer of her desk. She keeps a plastic bread bag full of undeveloped film canisters, and occasionally when she is going to the drugstore, she will grab a couple of films to be developed. She has always preferred this haphazard system, the surprise, the jolt of history when you are looking for

a screwdriver and find the summer that you went to Spain. Lon refuses to call her approach a system. And so she has purchased her first photo album and plans to surprise him with a wedding album.

The picture that she likes most is one of them in the rain: her wet hair is pressed against her face and there is a tiny drop of water hanging from the tip of Lon's nose as they turn, their faces together, to get into the car. She attaches this picture onto the first page of the album, frustrated when she has trouble lining up the little corners so the picture looks straight. She has found an old calligraphy pen that her sister used when she was a child. Ruth looks at the pen, remembering how her sister explained the pen to her. "It writes by itself so that your writing looks really fancy." Ruth smiles at the memory of her disappointment when she sneaked into Jen's desk to try out this pen and found that she had to direct the pen, not just hold onto it as it wrote curving loops and dips. She practices a few times before positioning the pen beneath the picture, and then writes, "Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. --Ruth 1:16". The verse they chose as their wedding vow.

**I**t is almost ten at night, and Ruth is still at the archives. The research assistant, Tom, whom she has come to know by name, walks by her desk to remind her that the library will be closing in twenty minutes. She asks if she can leave her boxes and her books on the table, as she will be back tomorrow after work. She cannot stop reading the Hamilton books. She is driven to know whether these experiments were legitimate. Where did the writing come from? How did the teleplasms find their way into the photographs? After reading the process of the film development, she is convinced that the pictures were not tampered with. But she is obsessed with the fact that Mr. Cooper and Dr. James Hamilton were almost always given control of the medium's hands. How easy it would have been to press a piece of medical gauze against Mrs. Marshall's face. But would T.G.'s own brother have compromised the experiments? And if so, for what reason? Out of childhood malice? Or maybe it was out of sympathy—maybe he wanted to encourage his brother to keep going with his experiments? Or was it Cooper? He looks shifty, she thinks. But what would he have gained? The only people who had anything to gain were the mediums. Did Mrs. Marshall, with her thick eyebrows and heavy accent, hoodwink the entire crowd, eager to keep receiving money and attention for her services, pleased with an opportunity to exercise her quick wit? Did she fall over laughing when she read the doctor's publications, or, by that time, was she so deeply involved that she started to believe in his writing, too, even though she knew she was directing the experiments? She had the most to lose if the experiments were unsuccessful. Deceitful, yes, but when your children need money for clothes and school, and a rich doctor is

willing to pay... Why didn't they see what happened if someone else held the medium's hands?

Ruth debates whether she will take her copy of *Intention and Survival* with her. Lately she feels uneasy about that book. Maybe if she leaves it at the library, she will feel more relaxed at the apartment. She wishes Tom good night, and just before she closes the door behind her, she decides to bring her book home, chiding herself for being ridiculous, and returns to her desk. Tom is looking through her book, and when he sees her, he slams it shut and stutters, "Ah, I was just going to see what you've been working at so hard. Ghost stuff, eh?" She thinks he is looking at her strangely. She takes her book, and quickly leaves.

The next evening she is back at the archives again. Tom winks at her, apparently now an accomplice in her project. She feels a certain comfort here in the archives with these boxes of relics. She is working through the boxes in order. Musical programs, letters from Mackenzie King, pictures of children. She is getting impatient. She wants to get to the boxes that contain the original photographs of the plates in the book. Box 8. The box is full of small manila folders. She opens the folder and smells the inside. Lon has taught her this. The pictures smell like any other old pictures—musty with a faint chemical scent.

She jumps in her chair. There is a hand on her shoulder. She looks behind her; it is Naomi.

"I thought your shoulders looked familiar," Naomi laughs.

"Oh, hi. You startled me." Ruth is pleased to see her.

“You must be deep in concentration. What are you working on?”

“Oh, it’s a long story. I’m surprised Lon hasn’t told you—he thinks I’m addicted to this.”

“Well, he has a lot of experience living with women who are always partially buried in their research,” Naomi says.

“I guess you’re right. I’ll have to remind him of that next time.” There is a pause in the conversation. Ruth is not certain how to begin an explanation of her project. “What brings you to the archives?” she asks instead of explaining.

“Oh, I’m thinking of teaching a class on the history of women and Winnipeg. Haven’t really fine-tuned it yet. I’m on the hunt for letters.” Naomi puts her hand back on Ruth’s shoulder. “Alright. I’ll leave you to those photos. But, why don’t you drop by my office. I’m working late, and I’ll brew a pot of tea for us.”

Ruth is flattered at her offer. She has never spent time with Naomi without Lon. She realizes she is slightly in awe of her mother-in-law.

“Oh, sure. That would be great.” She hesitates. “What time should I come by?”

“Oh, whenever you are ready.”

“Well, I’m almost ready right now. I’ll be there in about 10 minutes.” She would have preferred to follow Naomi to her office, not quite certain of the best way to find it, but she cannot bear the thought of waiting to look at the pictures for another day. Ruth turns to watch Naomi walk away. She walks like Lon, she thinks.

Ruth turns back to the photographs. She empties the contents of the folder into her hand. They are the same prints that she has seen from the books, except that these slides are stiff and wrinkly. Perhaps the prints got wet at some point, although you would think



then their dull coating would have been ruined. Maybe the paper got soaked when they were developed. There are probably hundreds of photos in the box. For a moment she regrets telling Naomi that she will meet her in ten minutes. Reluctantly she puts away the photos, noting which folder she will begin with next time.

When she reaches the fourth floor of the Fletcher Argue building she is not certain on which hallway Naomi has her office. She looks down the first hallway, and sees a pool of light at the end of the hall. When she approaches the open door, Naomi is sitting at her desk, working on her computer. She is wearing glasses, and her hair, which hung at her shoulders when Ruth saw her in the library, is pinned up on her head. She has beautiful hair, Ruth thinks. Silver streaked, thick and a bit curly.

“Ruth. Come in.” Naomi says, standing up from her desk. “Have a seat.”

Ruth sits down and looks around her office. There are some plants but no other decoration. The shelves are lined with books. She notices that there is a picture frame on Naomi’s desk, but it is facing away from her and she cannot see who is in it.

“I like your office,” Ruth comments as she sits down. “It feels, well, calm.”

“That’s a bit surprising, considering my day, but thank-you.” Naomi replies. She picks up an almost empty jug of water. “I’m going to have to get some more water. I’ll be right back,” Naomi says.

When she is gone, Ruth stands up so she can see the picture by Naomi’s computer. With some surprise she find it is the same picture that she chose for the cover of their wedding album. She is flattered, not only to have her picture on Naomi’s desk, but also pleased that they both chose the same slightly off-beat print. She lifts up the picture and

studies it, distracted by the drop of water on Lon's nose. We look so happy there, she thinks as she puts down the picture frame. She sits back down and waits for Naomi to return. She realizes that she is nervous, excited.

Naomi returns, and while she is filling the kettle, she asks Ruth, "So, is Lon working tonight?"

"Yes. He's working evenings all week. It's a long stretch."

"I'm sure." Naomi agrees. She pulls two mugs from a cupboard and sits down, placing the mugs on the corner of the desk between them. They start to talk about Naomi's classes.

"So, are you planning to get your PhD in history?" Naomi asks.

Ruth pauses before answering. "You know, some days after cataloguing books for five hours, I think absolutely. Even if just to get a more interesting job. And then other days, I look through books on history, and I realize how very incapable we are of recording history. Even the most objective historian has to use words. And, I don't know. I think I have to resolve my, well, really my mistrust of words, before I can think about writing a thesis."

Naomi nods. "Yes, you're probably right. And yet, you seem to be quite taken with whatever project you're working on now."

Ruth laughs, "Yes, well. I'm caught—I can't record things unless I write them down, and then as soon as they're recorded, I realize that I've missed something. I'm basically just keeping a personal journal on the Hamilton stuff."

"The Hamilton stuff?" Naomi asks.

“Ah,” Ruth hesitates. She looks at Naomi, and, just before she starts, she pauses again. She smiles, and laughs, almost to herself. The Hamiltons have become so close to her that she feels like there is something extremely private about what she knows about them. “I guess I’m not used to talking about it. Lon never asks any more. I think he’s pretty sick of hearing about this.” She notices that Naomi is about to tell her that she doesn’t need to talk about it, and quickly adds, “But, I’m so glad you asked. I just have to think of where to begin.” Once she starts talking, it is easy to keep going. She tells Naomi everything, starting with the initial discovery of the book and ending with her fixation on the experimenters themselves.

Naomi is an encouraging audience. “Ruth, it’s just fascinating.” She pauses, then starts in again, “You know, I’m interested in the wife. Lillian. You might want to do some research on her. Sometimes in these husband-wife duos, the wife is doing most of the work, and the husband is doing most of the publishing.”

“Hmm, that’s a good idea.” She watches Naomi take the last mouthful of tea from her mug. Ruth runs her thumb along the side of her mug, tracing the curve where the handle meets the cup. She glances at her watch. “Oh,” she is surprised. It is after eleven. “I didn’t realize the time. I’ve been talking for over two hours. I’m sorry.”

Naomi laughs and leans back in her chair. “It’s one of the most fascinating conversations I’ve had for months.” Wryly, she adds, “Maybe even years.”

“Well, thank-you so much for listening. It’s so exciting to have someone to talk to about this.”

“Keep me posted on how it’s going. We’ll have to do this again. Maybe next time we’ll get out of this office. We could go for dinner some evening when Lon is working.”

Naomi pauses, "I've never had a daughter-in-law before, maybe we should have done this earlier."

"Well, I've never had a mother-in-law before, and I don't know if we should have done it earlier, but I hope we do it again." Ruth is getting caught in her words, they are too grand, too generous.

Naomi looks at her and smiles. "Fine," she agrees. Her eyes meet Ruth's.

Ruth looks down, "Thank-you, again." She picks up her bag and puts on her jacket. "Have a good evening."

"Yes, give my love to Lon."

Ruth is humming as she walks to her car. Outside the evening is starting to whisper of winter. It is only September, but already the nights are cold and sharp. She shivers as the wind gusts around her. This is a beautiful time of year, she realizes. There is an energy to the fall night. She drives home with the window open and the heat on.

When she gets to the apartment, she notices that Lon's car is already parked in the lot. He meets her at the door.

"Where were you?" he demands, his voice angry with relief.

"I told you, sweetie—I was at the archives." She walks inside and closes the door, then runs her hand along his shoulders before removing her jacket.

"The library closes at ten—it's almost midnight."

Her voice is casual. "Oh, I ran into your mom, and she invited me for tea in her office."

“You should have called. I was worried about you.” His words are petulant.

“I didn’t think you would be home. Sorry baby.” She kisses his ear. “How come you’re home early?”

“It was really quiet. I’m still on call.” His voice has started to relax. “You know, that’s how my Mom and Dad met. He invited her into his office for tea.”

The obvious response, she thinks, is to suggest that his mom has a crush on her. She wraps her arms around his waist. “Do you know how much I love you?”

She is sitting at her desk, Naomi's phone number in front of her. This is ridiculous, she chides herself. Just call and ask your mother-in-law if she wants to go out for dinner. Remind her that Lon is working tonight. She looks at the clock and decides to call at exactly eleven o three. She has two minutes to sit in thought, to replay Naomi's face. She sits perfectly still, so as not to disturb the memory as it develops. When the clock shows eleven o five she forces herself to move out of memory, like one moves from one language to the next. An invisible pause, a switch in her mind, a calculated blink, a downward glance. She picks up the phone.

*September 15, 1992*

A trance figure who called himself Stevenson, and knew intimate details of Robert Louis Stevenson's life, "visited" the Hamiltons 420 times during the doctor's experiments, using Mrs. Poole, a nurse and family friend, as a medium. After Mrs. Poole had fallen into a trance, T.G. would pronounce the letters of the alphabet, and Mrs. Poole would slap her hand on the table at a particular letter, which would then be recorded. Even the researchers did not always know what message the hand slaps would spell out, as the séance and recordings were done in the dark. I just realized that if Lillian recorded all of the minutes of these meetings, she must have become very good at writing in the dark.

When Mrs. Poole came out of her trance, she reported the details of the vision that she had received while her hand was slapping out a message. The vision often correlated with the words she had spelled out with her hand. For example, after Mrs. Poole's hand slaps spelled out, "It was a dream of father Thomas Stevenson for son to be a great engineer," she awoke from her trance, and reported this vision:

"I was away in an old place, Edinburgh, but it was an office I was in and that round-faced man with the side whiskers was having some talk with the young man. The young man was displeased. He threw his papers down with a bang, didn't want to do what the old man asked him to. It was an office for I saw a letter-press, then a couple of pictures of sailing ships."

Lillian took on the task of literary researcher—she combed through R.L. Stevenson's work, biographical details and criticism. Of course, the above example was not difficult to discover—even I remember reading that R.L. Stevenson's father wanted him to continue on in the family trade of light house engineering. Sometimes Mrs. Poole's visions depicted R.L. Stevenson as a puppet, acting out characters from his different novels. She had one vision where he hit a sailor with a crutch and killed him.

After a few months of hand slapping, the Stevenson trance figure asked for paper and pencils, and from that point on, instead of hand-slapping, Mrs. Poole, deep in her trance, wrote pages and pages of blind writing, her hand moving without stopping, relying on Dr. Hamilton to put fresh paper under her pencil.

I wish that I could just read this and believe it. I spend so much effort trying to think of all of the possibilities of error and fraudulence that I cannot appreciate the book, even as fiction. I need to suspend my scepticism. But, I can't help thinking that if Lillian was able to find all of these Stevenson references, it would have been very easy for Mrs. Poole, or someone working with her, to tell her exactly what to say and what messages to spell out. Or maybe it wasn't nearly that calculated, maybe Mrs. Poole read R.L. Stevenson's work, and although she didn't exactly intend on duping the Hamiltons, she was subconsciously remembering moments and scenes that were based on his children's poems, and just slightly revised. Obviously the Hamiltons thought of this, too, as they reproduced a copy of Mrs. Poole's letter in the book, complete with her original spelling and punctuation:



“Dear Mrs. Hamilton

You would like to know what I know about R.L.S. Well i know nothing of him I have never read of his work nore have in of his books in my home. The first time I heard of him was through my minister.” 1917”

I think what alarms me, and what I cannot stop questioning, is where did this writing come from? Did Mrs. Poole store these stories in her unconsciousness before they leached out through her hands? Or, does writing involve a call to some being outside of ourselves?

*September 30, 1992*

We read his books with the curious sense of a haunting presence, as of some light-footed Ariel, or, in more solemn moments, of a spiritual form hovering near us. There is a body terrestrial and a body celestial; the celestial body floats very near us in the liquid atmosphere of Stevenson's best work.

—Rev. W. J. Dawson.

I found that quotation in Stevenson's biography, included in a collection of *A Child's Book of Verses and Underwoods*. It would appear as though Reverend Dawson believes there is an ethereal presence haunting Stevenson's writing, which is interesting, considering that the Hamiltons believe that Stevenson came back to haunt Mrs. Poole's hand.

I wonder, is it an uncanny coincidence that I found this quotation, or is it merely coincidence, or is it just a property of probability—if there is enough written about any one subject, then there is bound to be some connection of various topics? If it is just a condition of probability, what does this say about Lillian's research? For that matter, about anyone's research?

*November 20, 1992*

It is dark now, and I can't sleep. The light is off so I don't wake Lon, and I am writing in the dark, with only my hands to guide my letters by feel, to remember how to form them on the page. I can't stop wondering what a coup it would be if those mediums were secretly educating themselves, memorizing details from R.L. Stevenson's life so that they could carefully recite them for T.G. and Lillian.

I can envision them. The works of Robert Louis Stevenson are spread over the table. Mrs. Marshall researches Stevenson's biography while Mrs. Poole practices writing under a cloth, carefully perfecting different types of handwriting. It's not as though they began this project with the intent of duping the Hamiltons, but, they are tired after years of sittings, and there is no more energy. Or at least not enough energy to sustain the interest of the group. This research is just to tide them over, they tell themselves, just to keep the Hamiltons interested. They have become used to their frequent teas, they adore Lillian, and although they understand that their work must be voluntary, ever since they have started reading for the Hamiltons, money, and quite a bit of it, appears in their mailbox every Christmas.

Mrs. Poole suggests that they write a poem. "I think Lillian would love a poem. A poem from Stevenson, it will look as though he wrote it after his death."

"Oh, yes. Let's make it about an angel," Mrs. Marshall agrees. These women have become very good at writing prose, after reading all of this material. Now, when Lillian asks them to record, in writing, what they know about these authors, it takes a great deal

of effort for them to slip back into a vernacular writing, loosening their confident grip of the pen.

But, they have not attempted a poem before. A poem, they think. About an angel, and they start:

*The Angel*

*She was dressed in a gossamer gown.*

*Her wings were the tints of rainbow.*

*Her hair was like the winter sun*

*And her eyes the color of flowers.*

Yes, they are quite pleased. A poem for Lillian.

“Lillian loves birds,” says Mrs. Poole, “let’s add in some birds.”

**S**he wonders if she married him only to get near to his mother. She hates herself for thinking that, and writes him a note about how much she loves him. She wishes him away, and then, while studying his sleeping face, re-resolves to love him.

He suspects nothing. If only he was more sceptical, then she would have to respond to his worry. In fact, he encourages them to spend time together. “Did you have lunch with my mother again?” he asks, when he happily eats the leftover pasta she has brought home.

“Did you invite her over for Sunday?” he asks, between bites. She nods. He puts down his fork and presses his face into the soft side of her neck. “Do you know how much I love you?”

She nods, then runs to the bathroom, her stomach betraying her sanctity.

“Are you alright, sweetie?”

“I feel better now.”

“Maybe it was the restaurant. I’ll call Mom and see if she’s ok.”

She buries her head in her hands.

**I**t is rare that the library pages anyone over the intercom. She is returning from lunch, late, when she hears her name crackle through the speakers. Her heart starts to race. She cannot think of anything she has done wrong. She has been taking longer and longer lunch breaks, but she stays late to make up the time. Today she was particularly late, she notices. Should she explain to Carlin that she and Naomi were discussing her writing and they got lost in conversation? Surely a librarian would understand returning late because you were lost in a story. When she walks past the circulation desk, she notices there is no one at there, which is strange. Her body becomes alarmed. She tells herself to walk even when she is running. It's as though her body knows something that her mind has not yet heard. She sees Carlin standing at the reference desk. He looks so small.

“Come with me, Ruth,” he says, and when he takes her arm, she realizes that she has never touched Carlin before. He leads her into the back room where they have their offices and closes the door. There are two police officers standing by her desk. No one expects this moment to happen to them, but there is no one else it happens to.

She is screaming but the air is so thick with grief that she is not sure if anyone can hear her. Simone comes running into the room and kisses her head. Carlin's face is red, his glasses are wet with tears, and the side of his head is pressed against the wall. The police officers are unsure of where to stand. The library is not accustomed to such anguish unless it is typeset and bound between covers. When Carlin leads her to the exit, through the library's public area, the students are still sitting at the computers, still wandering through the reference section. A couple is holding hands as they wait for the elevator. A world collapses, and no one even notices.

At the hospital they are trying to ask her questions. “Did he ever complain about chest pains?” “Did he have cold hands or feet?” “Did he mention that he felt sick?”

“Yes, yes, he stayed home because he was sick with stomach cramps.” They will say names at her. HCM—hypertrophic cardiomyopathy. Also known as IHSS—idiopathic hypertrophic subaortic stenosis, or HOCM—hypertrophic obstructive cardiomyopathy. This disease has been given over seventy-five names in the last forty years, and she hates each one of them. The doctor who meets with her tells her that sudden death is one of the symptoms.

“Symptom?” she will ask, incredulous, reeling with disgust for medical terminology. Later she will wonder how he didn’t know he was sick. Was he really unaware of the story his own body was telling? She will stop her journaling again, remembering to hate stories, and their authors, and their inability to write about everything except for what haunts them. She will box up their phone, and store it beside the bed, taking it out only to press its buttons against her lips, wanting to taste the last touches of his fingers. She will become obsessed with imagining what he was thinking about in the minutes after calling the ambulance. How long did he wait to hear the footsteps of the paramedics as they came up the stairs? She will pray that he didn’t hear them as they struggled to break down the door.

His mother arrives at the hospital. She is wearing the same clothes she had on at lunch, but now her face is grey and she smells of vomit. Ruth cannot look at her. There is no one else to wait for. The wife and the mother are here. She realizes that she is no longer a wife, she is a widow. She realizes that Naomi is a widow, too. This is the third

time Naomi has lived through this hell. She reels at the horror of repeating this again, and again. Now that it has happened to her once, she believes anything is possible.

A nurse leads them into the room where Lon is lying on a stretcher. He is so beautiful, lying there, wearing the sweat pants she bought him and the t-shirt she used to climb inside of on Saturday mornings, pressing her breasts against his chest. Her youth falls from her body, slips from her wrist like a bracelet with a broken clasp. She will only notice that it is missing later. She understands how, after tragedy, people find their hair has turned white. She wants some way of marking her body, of writing a message to show what she feels. She is weeping, weeping, she wishes she could walk away, she realizes she is alone with him.

Everywhere he is too cold, but otherwise he is perfect. He looks like he is sleeping. She slips off her shoes and climbs onto the stretcher. She presses her body against his, like they are back in bed together. She rubs his hands, his chest, his head, warming him. “Hi baby. Did you have a good day? You know, I was so surprised by Carlin today...” And she tells him how she saw Carlin cry, how Simone kissed her head. It’s the little things that no one else will listen to. Those are the things she tells him. She tells him her story of his death.

She can not stop kissing his ear. She sucks his earlobe, then bites it and whispers. “Does it hurt?” That is their game: bite until it hurts and then kiss it better. He won’t answer. She bites harder, shakes his body, wanting a response. She runs her finger along his tender lobe, tracing her finger along the marks her teeth have pressed onto his skin. “Does it hurt?” she whispers louder, growing angry that he won’t reply. “Tell me, tell me, tell me.” She feels her teeth break through his soft skin. “Does it hurt now?” Her voice is



low and rough. She rolls over, puts her mouth against his ear and presses her teeth together as hard as she can. Her weeping is silenced by surprise. His ear lobe is resting in her mouth. She swallows. There is no taste of blood in her throat. His body has lost his stories and his words. He is already a ghost.

# *Callings*

**T**he funeral is over and the mourning has begun. Her mind is entangled, snagged in the mechanics of sorrow. In the three, almost four months since the funeral she has pushed through the gears recklessly, grinding together guilt, anger, grief, loneliness, and finally blankness. Her mind and body are numb. She has heard people comment on how the winter has been long and cold, but she has lost her sense of time. When the March weather starts to hint of spring, and the rest of Winnipeg is cooing into the eyes of their most awaited season, Ruth's eyes remain cold and detached. Despite her parents' insistence, she has not moved back home, but has remained at her apartment, where she feels the closest to Lon. She refuses to clean the apartment, not wanting to erase his traces; his fingerprints on door knobs, the oil from his hair on the pillow case, the memory of his body pressed against the couch. Some days the apartment looks cleaner than others, and if she were to reflect on it, she would remember that it looked particularly clean on the day she arrived home from work and saw Jen driving away from the building, a vacuum cleaner in the seat beside her.

She has not seen his mother since the funeral. They have agreed to this separation without speaking of it. Ruth is afraid of her. She has never seen a face so pocked with bitterness. And, it is more than fear. She hates herself for having lunch with his mother while he was dying alone in their bed. She lies awake most nights, pressing her fingers along her arms, into her thighs, watching her skin bruise. On weekends she spends the days lying on his side of the bed, willing the sheets to give up more of his scent.

She no longer goes to the archives, not wanting to go anywhere near the University of Manitoba to ensure that she will not run into Naomi on campus. It's just as well, she thinks. Ever since Lon's death she feels sick to her stomach when she tries to read.

She has forced herself to get up and go through her mail. There was a message on her answering machine informing her that her telephone service will be discontinued if she does not pay her bill. She sits down at her desk. There is a book wrapped in the manila folders that the library uses to contain fragile books. She cannot remember what book is inside. She opens the Velcro fastener and her stomach lurches. She reads the title, *Is Survival a Fact?* Margaret Lillian Hamilton is the author. The book comes rushing into her memory—about two weeks ago Carlin left this book on her desk. “Thought you might be interested in this,” was written on a note stuck to the cover. She had told him about her interest in the Hamilton family before Lon died. When she found the book on her desk, she took it home, not wanting to explain that she was no longer interested in history, in words.

Idly, she opens the book and pages through the introduction. The book is a sequel to *Intention and Survival*, written by T.G.'s daughter, Margaret Lillian Hamilton. She turns the pages of the book gently, they are too fragile to rub with her thumb. For a moment she feels a spark of interest. This book focuses on the automatic writings, especially the Stevenson experiments. But after reading several pages she is overwhelmed with nausea. Her head is swimming with letters and she closes her eyes, concentrating on not vomiting as she moves to lie down on the couch.

Lon has been dead for almost four months, she is thinking as she lies in their bed. The phone rings. She answers it, expecting to hear her sister's voice on the other end. Her heart begins to race when she hears Naomi's voice. Her body grows cold all over.

"Ruth?" Naomi's usually assured voice sounds thin.

"Hi." Ruth has nothing more to say. She was not expecting to talk to Naomi. It feels too sudden.

"How are you doing?" Naomi asks, after an awkward pause. When Ruth doesn't answer, Naomi answers for her. "Probably about the same as me."

Ruth feels something inside of her stir with sympathy for Naomi. She didn't want her son to die. She probably feels just as guilty as me, Ruth thinks. Maybe more: Lon was her *son*. When Naomi asks if she will meet her that afternoon for coffee, Ruth hears her voice agreeing.

When she hangs up the phone, she is angry with herself. She sees Naomi as the enemy. What kind of mother would be with her son's wife while he is dying? She hates herself for agreeing to meet Naomi. She catches herself in the mirror over the bathroom sink. Her eyes look hard, she thinks. She can hardly believe that she has become this person. She has placed a picture of Lon beside the sink. She lifts it up to look at him. He has Naomi's smile. She sits down on the edge of the bathtub. He loved Naomi. Perhaps she is being more loyal to him if she meets Naomi. He would want her to make sure that Naomi is alright. She runs her finger over his face as she sets it back beside the sink.

They have agreed to meet in a café. When Ruth walks in she finds Naomi already sitting at a table. Naomi is dressed in black, a long black coat strewn across the third chair at the table. Ruth leaves her coat on. When Lon died, she lost her heat. She is always cold. Naomi ignores this. After a brief greeting, Ruth has nothing to say, and focuses on adding sugar to her coffee.

Naomi watches her open a third package of sugar. "Until I was pregnant with Lon, I never liked anything sweet. But when I was carrying him, I had incredible cravings for honey- honey on toast, honey in tea, honey with ham, even honey on pizza." She laughs without smiling. "It's the only thing that got me through that pregnancy." She cups her hands around the mug, her mouth set and angry.

Don't think that you shouldn't have bothered, Ruth wants to tell her. I loved him, too. You at least got the chance to carry him, inside you. Like I used to tell him, after making love, that I wanted to crawl inside him, wanted to be closer. I told him I would sew a pouch and he could come with me while I went to the library, and he asked whether I'd prefer that he dragged his legs, or held them up at the knees. And they laughed at her staggering through the stacks, strapped with a giant man-baby. She used to press her body onto his, trying to remove all spaces. But you don't tell mothers about making love to their sons. "I don't remember ever seeing you eat honey," she says, in a voice even she can tell is stiff. They are talking about everything except for what they are both thinking about.

"Oh, I've moved on. Honey doesn't do it for me, anymore. After Lon was born, I needed something sweeter. I moved on to sugar. Spoonfuls and spoonfuls of sugar."

Spoonfuls. Eyefuls. She remembers her last birthday card. He signed it “Earfuls, Eyefuls, Mouthfuls of love”. Or was it “ear fulls, eye fulls, mouth fulls of love.” What is the difference now? She presses the heel of her right shoe onto the corner of her left toe, concentrating on the pain. Concentrating on anything but the pain.

“I knew I had to change when I found myself sprinkling sugar on top of the toast I had just covered with honey,” Naomi continued. What she didn’t add was that now she has no appetite for anything sweet. Even fruit sits in the bowl until she throws it out, unable to stomach the sweet smell of decay.

There is a pause in the conversation. Ruth makes no attempt to think of anything to say. When Naomi speaks again, her voice is softer, less bitter.

“Are you able to write?” Naomi asks.

Ruth shakes her head. Naomi pulls a manila folder from her bag and hands it to Ruth. Ruth opens the folder to find her stack of notebook papers, still bound together with a binder clip. She finds it almost funny that she forgot that she gave her writing on the Hamiltons to Naomi before Lon died.

“I made some comments. It’s fascinating. If you ever decide to do a PhD it could be a great thesis project. You should keep at it.”

Ruth’s face is too smooth, as though she is not listening to herself, bored of her own words. “I don’t think so. I can’t write. I can’t even read. When I open a book, it makes me nauseous.” She absently stirs her coffee with a spoon. “A couple of weeks ago I tried to read a sequel to *Intention and Survival*, which Margaret Lillian Hamilton, T.G.’s daughter, published.” Ruth pauses while holding the coffee mug up to her mouth. “But, I can’t read without feeling sick. I’ve vomited twice trying to get through the first chapter.”

She puts down her mug without drinking any coffee. She does not tell Naomi that she feels books and words have turned on her, have finally taken their philandering too far. She cannot bear the fakeness of the texts. She feels she can dismantle any book. If it's written flawlessly, she will argue that it only appears flawless because the reader is interpreting the world with the same fake text as the author. She sees words and stories as useless crutches in the face of real tragedy. She has pushed her books against the back wall of their bookcases, and uses the empty lips of her bookshelves to display picture frames, candles, dishes, baskets. Anything to cover up their spines.

Naomi makes a brief, tired smile. She reaches out to touch Ruth's hand, but Ruth quickly moves it back to the handle of her coffee mug. Naomi pauses, and when she speaks her voice is careful, as though she knows her words will only make sense later. "You're learning to read what isn't written. Any reader can decipher the story told in words. But texts also tell stories in cold white breaths. They're tougher to read. Hard to find, and often impossible to stomach." Her voice turns harder. "If there's one thing I've learned after burying my husband and both of my babies, is that people are most sensitive to the breath of a text after someone you love has left this world." Her voice has tuned bitter again, and she does not look at Ruth while she leaves money on the table, and puts on her coat.

They stand up from the table and walk to the door. Outside the night is frozen and stiff, only the sewers are moving, exhaling their warm breath as white ghosts which climb over the surface of the streets. Ruth walks to her car without hesitating. If she touches Naomi, she may not let go.



**T**hat evening Ruth pulls her papers out of her bag and removes the binder clip. She sits frozen with memory. Its pages smell like Naomi. It isn't fair, she thinks—just that morning she started to weep when she realized that Lon's shirts have started to smell more like the drawer than like his chest. She stares at the ceiling, willing herself not to begin crying. After a few minutes, she begins to page through the journal, amazed at her previous energy and intensity. How could she have thought this project was so important? No wonder Lon was tired of hearing about it, she thinks. Only the last entry, where she begins to write about her scepticism, has any resonance for her now. She finds it somewhat relieving that even before Lon's death she was doubtful about certain aspects of these experiments. She smiles at the entry where she envisioned Mrs. Marshall and Mrs. Poole researching their material in order to impress the Hamiltons in the upcoming sittings, gleaning knowledge from books, not specters. She reads the angel poem that she imagined the psychics composing, cringing at its terribleness. She thinks that it was quite clever of herself to imagine the women composing poetry and then passing it off as one of Stevenson's unpublished, maybe even unwritten poems. Posthumous poetry. "Now there's a thesis topic," she thinks. An original contribution to knowledge.

She shuffles the papers together, and puts them inside the folder, not bothering to clip them together. She closes her eyes as she breathes in Naomi's scent. Maybe Naomi is right, she thinks. Maybe now is a good time to try writing. She stands up from the couch, and, for the first time since Lon's death she decides to try to write. She used to write in their bed, but she knows she will start to cry if she goes there, so she sits down at her desk to write. She is wearing three sweaters and there is a space heater humming beside

her and still she is freezing. She picks up a pen and waits. There is nothing to write. She rubs her hands together to try to find some warmth, and then opens the drawer where she keeps the Hamilton books. She pages through *Intention and Survival*. The pictures make her laugh out loud. She thinks that she was a fool for spending any time with these texts. You can actually see the netting that the plaster is suspended on, she realizes, as she looks closely at one picture. These books make her feel sick. She should never have started this project. She picks up *Is Survival a Fact?* From the little bit she has read of this second book, she is beginning to realize that Lillian was not only a secretary and researcher, but also one of the principal investigators. According to this book, it was Lillian who started the experiments, and persuaded T.G. to join in. When T.G. died, Lillian continued to hold séances, communicating with several trance personalities, including the recently departed T.G. Instead of picturing only T.G. Hamilton on the first page of the book, *Is Survival a Fact?* shows T.G., Lillian and Mrs. Marshall, each in separate photos.

She is starting to feel nauseous again. She is not angry, just empty, she thinks, as she picks up the Hamilton books, and takes them to the kitchen, dropping them into the garbage bag. She sits down at the table, and realizes she doesn't want the books anywhere in her apartment. She is so used to feeling cold that she doesn't bother to put on a jacket, walking down the flight of stairs to the garbage cans beside her car. The stairs are dim. It is that time of day that she hates the most, the late afternoon, when the afternoon dies into evening. She throws the orange plastic bag at the garbage can. It misses. The plastic snags on the fence post behind the garbage cans, ripping the bag open. She watches as the contents of the bag, including the two books, spill into the snow. She turns around to walk back up the stairs.

The next morning she is unplugging her car and notices that the books are still lying in the snow. *Is Survival a Fact?* has landed on its spine, with its pages frozen open in the snow. She doesn't want to glance at the pages, and wouldn't have bent over to read the words through the crust of snow and ice that have blown into the pages, except that her eye caught the word "Angel." She digs the book out of the snow to take a closer look. There is a poem on the bottom of page 90:

*The Angel*

"She was dressed in a pearl-coloured gossamer gown;

Her wings held the tints of the rainbow.

Her hair was like winter sunshine, pale yellow and misty.

And her eyes were the colour of the flowers

Of which she was the guardian.

Birds flew around her as she came through the wood."

Her mind begins to swirl. Those words, they are so familiar, but why? In a moment, she remembers. This is the poem that she envisioned the psychics composing in order to impress Lillian. She has written these words with her hand while lying beside Lon in the dark. Her thoughts are stilted, slow, as if moving through water. There is a flutter of wings as a tree full of winter wrens rise into the air, before settling like seeds on the fence beside the garbage. She is too stunned to be alarmed by their wings. She vaguely notices herself unlocking the door, moving up the stairs. She walks to her desk and frantically searches for the folder of papers where she has kept her Hamilton writing. She turns to the last entry. November 20, 1992. She reads the poem that she imagined

Mrs. Poole and Mrs. Marshall writing. She compares it to the poem in *Is Survival a Fact?* It is identical to the one printed in this book, this book which Carlin lent to her only a few weeks ago. The only line missing is “Birds flew around her as she came through the wood. She came light-footed down the path.” She looks back at the poem she has written in her notebook and gasps when she reads her handwriting. “‘Lillian loves birds,’ says Mrs. Poole, ‘let’s add in some birds.’” Who was in the dark with her when she was writing this poem? When she was imagining this dialog between these psychics? Who was in the dark when Mrs. Poole wrote this poem seventy years ago?

Her heart is racing. She looks at the two windows at the other end of the bedroom. In that instant she knows that she was wrong to assume the séances occurred in the basement. She knows she will find, in this new book, that they happened in this room. There will be a sentence to explain that when T.G. and Lillian decided to dedicate more time to their research, Lillian moved the séances into a bedroom on the second floor and kept it locked except for when it was used for psychic research.

She lies down on the bed, the books, now wet with melted snow, beside her. She doesn’t know what to do with these books. She can not believe them, with their ludicrous, comical pictures. But she is so tired of dismantling them, of always looking for how to prove that this writing is a hoax. At the same time she can not ignore these books, or, they will not ignore her.

She misses her lovers. She misses Nat, Lon, Naomi. She misses her books, that feeling of arriving home. Everyone, everything has turned against her. She is starting to feel sick again, when, without warning, her radio begins to play. She must have set the alarm incorrectly. The music is so loud. She cannot think. She puts her hands between

her legs. She starts to rub herself to the music. She slides her hand under her panties, surprised at how wet she is already. Her mind is like static. There are three birds sitting on her window sill. She is becoming more and more aroused. She feels herself move alongside her grief. Her body is moving with loneliness, with loss, with movement that comes from deep inside of her. She can not keep debating. Waves of mourning lift her hips off the mattress. She looks over at the Hamilton books and thinks that she can see them weeping. No one has believed them, but everyone who reads them goes through the same process of wanting to believe, but not wanting to feel foolish. The books are weeping with desire for a reader who can see that they are weeping. She feels herself let go of her expectations. She does not need to know whether these experiments demonstrate the psychic realities that they explain. She feels her body build with acceptance. She can accept the possibility of ruined writing, not only in these books, but in others. One lover, at least is back, imperfect, haunted by something she knows she will never be able to name. She moves her hands over the poems—one hand on her papers, one hand on the poem in the Hamilton book. She pushes her body's weight into her palms, against the pages. She cannot stop coming.

*March 21, 1993*

Something in me has relented to this haunted space where I read and write, and I'm relieved to no longer resist it. There is a strange pleasure in acquiescing to the haunting of this house, of this book, of writing in general.

I'm reading again, although I read differently now—I have started to listen for the haunted spaces of a book when I read it. I've stopped expecting history books to be about what happened, and instead of taking notes of dates and names, I listen for what is not written into the book. I re-read *Intention and Survival* and cried for how much those parents missed their little son, and how they wished for a reader who would believe their work.

I've started to reread the bible. Not the way my father read it to me. I'm reading it listening to the spaces, and I'm stunned at what I'm hearing.

**T**hey are at Naomi's house, preparing dinner, that most ordinary of communions. It is the first warm day of spring. Ruth is wearing old jeans and sandals, which she has pushed under the table, wanting to feel the cool of the hardwood under her feet.

"Ruth." Naomi is pouring wine while she says her name. "Ruth. A Hebrew name meaning 'friend.'" She places the wine bottle on the counter and sits down at the table.

Ruth walks from the sink to the table, bare feet on hardwood. "And," she adds, "an Italian name meaning 'beloved.'"

"Who are you named after?" Naomi asks.

"My mother's sister. A sister she never met; she died when she was three years old, and my mother had not been born yet." Ruth sits down, crossing her legs on the dining room chair. "My grandparents were missionaries in India, and my grandma was at the market with my aunt Ruth by her side. My grandmother reached down to pick up a bag of rice, and when she stood up, she sensed movement. The tail of a ghost, she thought, though she already knew it could only be a snake. It was gone and her daughter was grey. She died minutes later, two tiny pricks on her foot." Be careful who you kiss, she thinks. She looks at Naomi who is looking at her. There is an empty chair between them, and Ruth pushes it away from the table so she can stretch her legs out. She reaches for her glass.

"What does Naomi mean?" she asks.

"Pleasant. Sometimes sweet." She pauses. "'May your dreams be as sweet as your name,' my father would say when he kissed me good night."

Ruth nods, and lifts her wine glass to her lips. Naomi moves her hand to rest on Ruth's ankle. Later, Ruth will replay this moment over and over. She will repeat the

conversation, wanting to remember the context of the touch. Naomi's hand is warm. She is holding Ruth's ankle as a hand. They continue to talk, ignoring the touch even though it is stealing their breath, scenting their words with desire. Ruth wonders if she felt Naomi moving her fingers against her ankle. Yes, Naomi's thumb is feeling the roundness of her bones. Her fingers move to run along her Achilles' tendon. The touch of a mother? A lover?

Ruth watches Naomi as she eats. She wants to touch Naomi's face. Naomi looks at her, and in that instant Ruth can see Lon's eyes in hers. Ruth looks down and moves Naomi's hand off of her ankle. Neither of them says anything for a long time. Finally Ruth speaks. "I loved him."

"Ruth, I know that you did." Naomi is looking at her carefully. "Ruth, you didn't marry him to meet me. When I first met you, I knew that we would be..." she hesitates, "great friends." She takes a drink of her wine. "The two of you were beautiful together."

Ruth's ankle is cold where Naomi's warm palm has left. And then, to Ruth's relief, Naomi's hand returns to her ankle, reclaiming its place. Ruth's legs are heavy, and the space between them is swelling with wet as Naomi's hand slides up from her ankle to her lower calf.

After dinner, Naomi is sitting on the couch. Ruth is leaning over a low table with a tray of tea. Ruth leans forward to pour the tea. Her hair falls across her eye. She feels the heat from her face caught between her face and her hair.

Naomi pushes Ruth's hair behind her ear.



Ruth is flushed. She sits on the couch beside Naomi and begins to speak. "My Grandma was famous for two things: tea and hand massages. She made a tea from rose hips and saskatoons. She would give it away in little plastic bags tied with a piece of wool. And she would never give me a bag without telling me to hold out my hands. And I would, and by then she would have lotion on her hands and she would take my hands between hers. Her hands were strong but her skin was always so soft, swollen from work, and transparent, like rice paper." Ruth leans forward and pours two cups of tea. "Have you ever had a hand massage?" she hears herself offer.

*Touch*

**I**t is fall again, one year later. Naomi has been living in the adjacent apartment on the second floor of the Hamilton house for over a year, and Ruth's parents are still commenting on how thrilled they are about this living arrangement. Perhaps by repeating this, they insist to themselves and anyone else, that it is not strange or suspicious. Her father applauds Ruth for following her biblical name and taking care of her mother-in-law. Her mother thinks maybe Naomi's proximity explains why Ruth's face has become less lean and drawn-out. She keeps saying it's just perfect that they each have their own kitchen.

Ruth is thrilled, too, although for none of those reasons.

**I**t is late afternoon on a Sunday in early September, and the light is bravely blazing hot through the air, only to fall behind a cloud a moment later, taking its afternoon warmth with it, as if to remind the city what to expect in the coming months. There are two women in bed together. Their bodies are warm with light, open and supple, like the way cats' bones slide open and over each other in the depth of their afternoon naps. The younger woman is leaning against the pillows, and another woman is reclining against her. Ruth's hands are open, holding, rubbing wide open breasts. Naomi's legs are spread apart, and she is touching herself with one hand, the other hand is holding Ruth's thigh.

"I never get tired of watching you make yourself come," Ruth whispers into Naomi's hair.

Naomi is heavy and slow. She gropes for Ruth's hand. Ruth finds it, wet, full, happy. She takes it in her mouth, and licks it like a mother cleaning her kittens. She moves Naomi's other hand to touch her neck so her arms are both outstretched. Her breasts lie completely exposed, and Ruth presses her warm hands against them again. "My sweetest kitten, my little turtle dove, do you remember the first time I gave you a hand massage?" Whatever else might have come through those curtains, whatever picture you might draw, there is communion here. A distant hope that somehow this might work, that impossible love might "take". Might sprout roots and flower, might find a rose wet cave to grow in.

The curtains glow and maybe smile. Naomi turns around and nestles her head between Ruth's folds. They sink down off the bank of pillows. Fingers wet and pressing. Nipples swelling mouth wet. Tongues and cunts moaning full and sweet.

*September 5, 1994*

Where does writing come from? I'm beginning to think that it has something to do with space. When I'm in this apartment, particularly in the bedroom, I feel as though I'm listening to something or someone when I write. I don't think I'm in a trance, or at least no more than I normally am when I write. I can't explain it. It seems like every time I write down what I think I'm listening to, the feeling slips away. My writing is haunted by something, and as soon as I write it down, it no longer haunts me, but there is always something else in its place.

I have come across a box of Lillian's correspondence in the archives. I am convinced that she was the mastermind behind these experiments, researching, marketing and communicating between people. Her handwriting is beautiful, messy and strong. It is full of theories, research, philosophers and poets. And then there are these poignant entries that make her so very human. I love thinking that she wrote in this house, in this city. I found a collection of letters she wrote to James, her oldest son, her "dearest dear", in December of 1934.

It has been horribly cold here too—over a week of the most ferocious weather. But today is a little better although it is still well below zero with a high north wind blowing. But the old dining room is warm and sunny and, with the N.Y. Symphony coming in, quite pleasant...

Miss Turner is back and was over for lunch on Sunday. She gives a very glowing account of their trip, and her description of meeting Mussolini in

Rome appears to have left a great impression upon her, an impression not unlike that of meeting a grizzly bear on a mountain.

I used to be careful not to write that I thought my writing might be haunted by T.G. But to be perfectly honest, I think that I'm writing beside Lillian.

Ruth is sitting on the bed, writing. Naomi is editing a paper beside her. It is late September and the night hangs heavy with the last vestiges of summer. The moon that smiled over their naked hands, mouths and breasts only last night has been veiled by heavy clouds. The air is still, holding its breath and the promise of rain. Even with the windows open, the room is too still; the curtains hang empty like ghost lungs.

Ruth stops her writing, and looks up at the bedroom walls. "So I found some pictures today that showed the séances in this room. They must have been taken from a different angle because for the first time I could see the walls in this room. There used to be striped wallpaper on them, with a floral border at the very top."

"Hmm," Naomi looks up from her paper. In the last year she has started to wear her glasses faithfully when she reads. She looks over her glasses to the window. "Is the window moulding original?"

"Yup. Lillian had the windows lined with black out paper, and in some pictures there were lace curtains hanging over the blackout paper." Ruth pauses and turns back to her writing. "It's so strange to think of them in this room."

Naomi settles back to her paper when Ruth speaks again. "Oh, and I saw pictures of séances in the living room, too. I could see the fireplace that is in the gift shop downstairs. There was a piano in the window. And a lamp with a big fringe on it. It looked nice. Except, of course for the coffee table that was moving around the room."

This time Naomi does not look up from her paper, but reaches out to touch Ruth's back as she continues to read. Ruth positions her pencil on the paper, but stops herself. The street light is buzzing into the bedroom through the open window, its electric hum strangely amplified in the humid air.

“Does it seem to you that the only time we spend together is in bed?” she asks Naomi.

“Well,” Naomi slowly puts down her pen and takes off her glasses. “I guess it has been that way a bit lately.”

“I’m going to a movie tomorrow with Simone. Why don’t you come?”

“Ruth, you know that wouldn’t exactly be, I don’t know, well, something that I want to do.”

“How is this going to work? Are we ever going to be able to go out with other people as a couple?”

“Are you sure you want to get into this right now?” Naomi asks. Ruth is silent. Naomi rubs her back. “Sweetie, I love being with you. We’re going to figure this out. But for now, I just feel that we’re lucky to have each other to ourselves.” Naomi moves her papers and glasses onto the bedside table and turns off the light.

The buzzing hum of the street light hangs in the air. Naomi is too quiet. Ruth cannot bear it any longer. She turns to face Naomi and gently pushes her fingers through Naomi’s hair. She runs her lips over Naomi’s face and down her neck. When she finds tears resting in the pools of Naomi’s clavicle, she presses kisses against her neck until Ruth’s lips are salty and wet and Naomi’s neck is dry. “Nome, we’re going to be fine.” She holds Naomi until her breathing becomes slow and even. When she is certain Naomi is asleep, Ruth steps out of bed and stands by the windows. The curtains are beginning to stir, resuscitated by the breaking calm. She stands between the two windows. This is the place where the researchers placed a wooden cabinet with a bell in it. Walter, the trance



personality, would cause the bell to ring if there was enough psychic energy in the room. She runs her hands along the window casings on either side of her.

She steps in front of one of the window panes. Outside the wind is moving through the streets. She can see the trees in the graveyard start to move, their leaves whispering messages on the wind. She presses her face against the screen, wanting to suck in the breeze, but breathing in only the smell of dust and wire. Without warning, there is a gust of wind, and the curtains sail into the room, soaring with breath. Ruth moves back from the screen and stands naked in the wind and curtains. She can hear the rain before she smells it. It begins with erratic reconnaissance drops, which splash against the waiting sidewalks, and occasionally cling to the screen. She moves closer to the window and puts her tongue against one of the drops, watching as the water spreads in a matrix over the little screen boxes. Ruth stands still with anticipation, waiting for the moment when the night's breath will carry the scent of water, the memory of oceans and moons.

And with the first gust of rain she is blindsided by grief, by the memory of weddings and wet hair and water drops. Her legs are weak with grief from losing Lon; her lungs are tight with panic over the future of her relationship with Naomi. She kneels on the floor, leaning her head on the wet window frame.

The alarm wakes them. The morning is still and overcast. Although the rain has stopped, the room still smells like it. It must have rained most of the night; the traffic is especially loud as the cars move through the water sitting on the street. Ruth moves closer to Naomi, whose eyes are slightly swollen. She buries her face in Naomi's hair. "Good morning, sweetie." She has always loved the formality of greetings between lovers.

Naomi puts her arms around Ruth. "Good morning." She kisses Ruth's forehead, then notices Ruth's swollen eyes and carefully kisses them. She is quiet as she gets out of bed. The air in the bedroom is cool. Naomi walks over and closes the window. It is a relief to muffle the sounds of the traffic. Ruth lies in bed, the panic of the night now a memory of sadness still slowly pressing against her. Naomi walks into the bathroom. She hears the metal rings of the shower curtain slide over the rod, then stop, too soon. She winces, anticipating Naomi's frustration. Naomi mutters, "Merde," moments before Ruth hears the shower curtain rod slip from the wall. She has been meaning to call her uncle about fixing the curtain rod.

Ruth lies in bed, slow and sad, listening to Naomi shower. When Naomi comes into the room, she is already dressed, and she sits on the bed beside Ruth. "I'm going to get going. I have an early meeting." She reaches under the blanket to find Ruth's hand. "Do you want to have dinner before you go to the movie?"

**T**hey are walking down Albert Street, through Winnipeg's Exchange District. This neighbourhood, which once rivalled Chicago's downtown for prosperity and enterprise, is a faint shadow of what it was expected to become. This used to be the heart of Winnipeg; for that matter, it was the economic center of the West, boasting the largest grain exchange West of Chicago. Now the Grain Exchange Building is a grade B office building. It is surrounded by beautiful old buildings that have fallen into a semi-derelict state, and serve as warehouses and garment factories. The windows on the top floors are often broken, and pigeons have come to roost in the penthouses. The street-level floors are often home to the 'alternative' companies. There are used book stores, vintage clothing boutiques, antique stores, bike repair shops, and thrift stores. It is a district of bricoleurs—entrepreneurs who celebrate lost and broken pieces and put them together again. A few years ago there was speculation that the old warehouses would make stunning loft condos, and a few eager people bought them, some even renovated them, but no one came to live in them. We don't want to live, people said, where the streets are empty. Plus, they added, there is no place to park.

“When we first moved here, one of my friends came to visit from Tokyo,” Naomi says, as they are walking to the restaurant. “She would walk down the streets taking pictures of our empty sidewalks. She had never seen an empty stretch of sidewalk before, in Tokyo there are always crowds covering them. Now I can't walk down these sidewalks without seeing the emptiness.”

“I know what you mean,” Ruth responds. “Sometimes Winnipeg feels like a party where everyone has left.” They can see the restaurant ahead of them. It looks inviting—white table cloths with little lights burning through the windows.

“Are you ok?” Ruth asks. Naomi seems quiet, distant. Ruth reaches over and runs her hand along Naomi’s back, pressing through her coat. It is undeniably fall, the last throes of summer discarded in last night’s storm.

She opens the restaurant door for Naomi. They are seated at a table next to the windows. The casements are old and thick with layers of paint. Ruth looks around the restaurant as she takes off her coat. There is a table of people in their early twenties who appear to be celebrating a birthday, a woman whom she recognizes as a doctor that Lon used to work with, and an older couple who are dressed almost formally for dinner. There is a feeling of community in this restaurant, Ruth thinks as she spreads her napkin on her lap. “And, then at other times, Winnipeg just feels full of spirit.”

Naomi pulls her glasses out of her purse and puts them on to read the menu. “Montreal is so south of here that I’ve always thought of Winnipeg as a very northern community,” she says as she opens the menu.

Ruth takes a drink of water, “Hmm. I’ve never really thought of Winnipeg as a northern city before. It does help explain it a bit. At least in the winter.”

“I think the city has a northern spirit to it.” She looks at Ruth over the top of her glasses. Outside a gust of wind snarls its way into a plastic bag and drags it over the sidewalk. “There is something wild and untameable in any city that can keep going during winters like Winnipeg’s.”

Ruth looks out of the window at the building that stands vacant across the street. The windows have been papered over, and reflect the light of the restaurant. “Yes, these buildings, the whole Exchange District, feels kind of like a ghost town.” She pauses to consider. “In fact, I think the whole downtown of Winnipeg is haunted,” she comments,

as she begins to study her menu. A drunken aboriginal woman pounds her fist against the glass pane in the restaurant door. The other tables look and then quickly turn back to their dinners. Ruth looks up from her menu only to see the woman walking away.

Carlin is beside her at the reference desk when a student walks up to the desk. It is late November, and students are frenzied with term papers. The student's backpack is hanging open, and when he talks, his voice is young and fast. She and Carlin both look up to help him. He doesn't know which one of them to address. She senses his hesitation and drops her head, letting Carlin answer his question.

"Um, where would I find stuff on the history of Manitoba?" the student asks.

"Well, you can start with the history of the Cree." She can see Carlin's body starting to vibrate with excitement, with the arrival of an audience. His voice is high and squeaky. "Manitoba, is named with two Cree words: 'Manitou,' which means 'Great Being.' and 'Ba,' which means 'Land.'"

The student nods, clearly not planning to begin his history paper of Manitoba with a study of the Cree. "I, uh, I guess I was thinking more about, well, the history that began when we started building forts and things."

Carlin appears undeterred by the student's scope, and without hesitation answers, "Well, then it might be easiest to start with a search of the history of Winnipeg. Now, you might want to start by searching the stacks. There's the classic book by Begg," he says as he leads the student to the computers.

When Carlin returns, he sits down at the computer beside Ruth, and without looking away from the computer screen, he says, "I know that they don't want to hear about the Cree, but about five years ago I was looking at some pictures in the provincial archives, and there was a picture of four Cree women standing beside a red river cart and a Cree man leaning against a post. It was taken on Winnipeg's Main street. The women's faces were blurry, either because the camera was focussed on the man, or perhaps because they

were moving. And the man was—” Carlin hesitates, “—beautiful.” He takes a breath and continues, “The man was wearing a white cloak that looked new—I imagined that he traded furs for it.” He pauses again, “They looked like they belong here. They looked regal and strong, and all the while they were being regally abused.” He turns away from the screen and looks at Ruth. “And after seeing that picture I thought to myself that I would not let students leave without at least giving them a clue to the cover-up they are participating in as they write their history papers.”

Ruth is uncertain of what to say. She retreats to facts, “I didn’t know that Manitoba was named after the Cree word for ‘Great Being.’”

This question seems to have broken Carlin’s reverie. His fingers are already moving over the keyboard when he begins to explain in his fast staccato voice, “Yes, Manitou. When a north or south wind arose over Lake Manitoba, sending the waves crashing onto the lake’s limestone shores, they sounded like a hollow beat. The Cree believed that this sound was the voice or heartbeat of Manitou, the Great Being.”

Even the pulse of our province is haunted, she thinks.

**T**hey are driving home from Jen's wedding. It was a small winter wedding, held on a Friday evening. Ruth suspects that the size and season were chosen partially to try to make it easier for her. She and Naomi went together. Her family has accepted that they often come with each other. The fact that she and Naomi have both been married, and thus confirmed their heterosexuality, makes their relationship easier than her relationship with Natalie. A young, beautiful widow. It's only a matter of time, she heard her mother's friend say, pressing her hand against her mother's arm, and sliding it away again when Ruth walked up. Ruth has her sister's bridal veil in the backseat of the car, having agreed to store it until she returns from her honeymoon. In the light from the street lamps, the veil lies faintly illuminated like a sleeping ghost in the back of the car.

"You know, I was looking at more of the Hamilton pictures, and in some of them you can see where the veils and tissue paper were attached to the wall and people. Lillian believed that the teleplasms came from spiritual activity with the body, but they were transmuted into physical objects."

"Well, in some ways that gives the pictures more validity. At least the researchers admitted that they were representations, transmutations. Because, if they hadn't the pictures seem a bit phoney," Naomi says.

"I know. I was thinking that, too. I don't really care anymore. I just love reading Lillian's writing. It's so pragmatic and intelligent and reflective, and so, I don't know, so earnest."

Naomi parks the car and goes ahead to unlock the door while Ruth piles the netted tulle over her shoulder. "Watch out, Ruth. It's dragging behind you." Naomi holds open the door to let Ruth pass, and then picks up the end of the veil so it does not drag when



they carry it up the stairs. They go into the suite that is officially Naomi's and put the veil on the bed in Naomi's bedroom. Ruth looks around the bedroom. Naomi has set up her desk in front of the room's only window. She uses this room as her study.

Ruth notices there is a message blinking on her answering machine. "You have a message," she says to Naomi.

Naomi looks at the answering machine on the desk. "Oh, I'll get it later," her French accent punctuating her words. Ruth is walking out of the bedroom, but when she hears Naomi's voice, she stops and turns to look at her. When Naomi is emotional she speaks English but sounds French. Maybe she found the wedding difficult, Ruth thinks. "I love you, Nomes," she says as she waits for Naomi to walk out of the room in front of her, and slides her arms around Naomi's waist, kissing the back of her neck.

The next morning Ruth is already over the Disraeli bridge when she realizes that she forgot her bag. She looks at the time, and decides to go back to pick it up. When she unlocks the side door she can hear Naomi's muffled voice coming from her suite. She picks up her bag from her apartment and opens the door to Naomi's suite. She can still hear Naomi's voice, speaking in French—she must be on the phone. She would walk into the room, but she doesn't want to startle Naomi. She calls out, "Naomi?" Naomi's voice halts. Ruth walks into the bedroom and finds Naomi sitting at her desk. She is still wearing her robe. "Un moment," she says into the phone and covers the receiver with her hand. She looks up at Ruth.

"Forgot my bag," Ruth whispers. "Who are you talking to?"

Naomi looks flustered, "Oh, a colleague from McGill." Her words are flaring with inflexion. Ruth walks towards the desk to give Naomi a quick kiss before she leaves. Ruth leans over Naomi, and with the hand that is not holding the phone, Naomi runs her fingers along Ruth's face.

"I love you," Naomi mouths to her. She adds in a soft whisper, "So much." She closes her eyes and kisses Ruth's lips. Ruth stands up from the desk, touches Naomi's shoulder, and walks out of the room. She does not see Naomi open her eyes. She does not see their longing turn to stone.

When she returns back to the apartment later in the afternoon, Naomi is lying on the couch. She is still wearing her robe.

“Baby,” Ruth’s voice is surprised, concerned. “Are you sick?”

Naomi does not look at her. Suddenly Ruth detects that she has been crying. Ruth does not wait to remove her boots, but sits down on the couch beside her. There are crumpled up pieces of paper on the coffee table, and a pad of paper on the couch. Naomi has been writing. She picks up the pad of paper and reads Naomi’s handwriting. It is a letter written to her. It does not make sense. The letters are moving on the page. “I don’t get it.” But as she is saying it, the realization is unfolding itself in slow motion. Ruth is stunned with disbelief. “You applied to McGill without talking about it with me?”

Naomi’s words are tight punches of meaning. Her face is terrible. Her eyes are moving but her pupils are locked and unfocussed. “I’ve loved you since before we met. Lon showed me a picture of you, and from that moment I knew we would fall in love. I never imagined it would result in a relationship.” Her words are too tight to allow in any more bitterness, but she now speaks slower, spitting each word. “I really never would have guessed that my last son would be taken from me, too.”

Ruth presses her forehead into the arm of the sofa. Her mind is numb but her body has started to seethe and sob. Naomi continues talking, her eyes pointed straight ahead.

“You will want to hate me for what I’ve done, but there was no other way. You will continue on, initially only because you will give yourself no other choice. You will find someone who loves you, and you will be able to return some of that love. You will make a beautiful mother.” Naomi’s voice catches, as Ruth’s sobbing freezes. Ruth is so furious that she can barely breathe. Naomi stops talking, waiting until Ruth’s body convulses,

forcing her lungs to inhale a heaving, ragged breath. When Naomi starts to speak again, her voice is quiet, a glimmering scalpel of something she thinks is love. "And when you are doing all of these things, please know that I am loving you." She pauses. "I have never loved anyone as I love you."

Ruth's back is heaving with sobs. She barely hears Naomi's words. Naomi has submitted her resignation to the University of Manitoba. A hiring committee is already meeting to find her replacement. She has applied to McGill; they have unofficially promised her a position for the fall. Her interview is this week. The tickets are purchased. This week she will be looking for a house. She will not come back to Winnipeg.

Ruth has no words for this loss. She is furious at Naomi for not giving her any choice in this decision. She operates as if in a dream, spiralling into a vertigo of loss. She cannot stay in this room. She stands up and walks out the door and down the stairs without saying a word. Outside it is twilight, the sky is glowing blue with the promise of a starry evening, and a mother pulling her baby on a sled looks up at her and smiles. Her body is numb, her mind too light to know if she smiled back. Two boys are laughing as they run through the snow.

Her face is blank while she walks down the street. She is reminded of the days after Lon died. The bewilderment, the nausea of grief. It is totally dark when she returns to the Hamilton house. She opens the door to her apartment. Naomi is not there. She collapses on her bed. Her body is hollow and cold. She feels as though she is filling up with snow. She is unable to move. She puts a pillow over her face and wails, her body convulsing

with sounds. There are no words for this kind of pain. The body has no energy to waste on articulating consonants.

An hour later her body lies silent. It would moan if it had enough energy, but in its place she feels a low murmuring of cold calm pulse through her blood. Her lips grow tight. She is scared of herself.

She walks into the hall. Naomi's door is unlocked. The air is dark and stuffy. There are no lights on. She still can hear the boys playing on the other side of the glass. She moves through the apartment and finds Naomi kneeling on her bed, bent over, shaking. She is dressed in a skirt and blouse. Ruth looks at her; this is the moment that she should kiss her and leave. This is the moment that she should end this, cut out this terrible love whose only future depends on cover-ups and lies. This is the moment she should give in to Naomi's insistence.

The window must not be on the latch, and the wind begins to screech through the window. Ruth gasps. There is a white figure quivering on the floor beside the bed. She reaches for the lamp. Light floods the room. Naomi's head jerks up, surprised by the light, surprised by Ruth's presence. Relief rushes over Ruth—the white figure is only her sister's bridal netting. Ruth steps onto the netting, feeling the hair comb break beneath her feet. Naomi's body is weak and old. She knows Naomi will die without her. And this knowledge moves something within her. Her movements become too fast, the room begins to spin. She will not leave. Her body will not let her walk away. Ruth's logic of love has been stripped down to one base, almost barbaric premise: neither of them can leave if they are naked. Ruth is not gentle, there is no room for caution. If she slows down, she will remember what she is giving up. She rips away her clothes, and moves to

Naomi. She pulls off Naomi's shirt, turns her onto her back and takes off her skirt. She doesn't feel her nails as they scratch along her body. It is only when she moves her eyes along Naomi's body, with her soft breasts, her round stomach, her beautiful hands, which show the slightest shadows of age spots, and are covering her eyes, that she realizes the red lines that run down Naomi's stomach are from her hands. Ruth is desperate to mark her, she grabs into her hair, and like an animal she sucks her breasts until they are covered with round bruises. Her hands are rough and she grabs Naomi's arms, leaving bracelets of red fingers. She is desperate for movement, for sound and so she covers Naomi's mouth to let it catch her groans. She cannot slow down enough to kiss her, so she bites her instead, catching her own tongue between her teeth. She puts her finger to her mouth. Blood like pomegranate juice runs into her palm. She licks their blood, thirsty, fast. She is lost in the forest, a wild gazelle without her beloved. She presses her breasts against Naomi's. Her body is tight, tense, and she presses it against Naomi's living shadow, which is shaking with sorrow, with relief. This type of love is too desperate to be beautiful. She lifts Naomi's head in her hands, and presses her face into her neck. She breathes in its sweetness. Aloe, milk and honey. It is damp from tears and so pale, tender, soft. She thinks for a minute that she could break it. Her face is twisted, her mouth bloody. She pulls Naomi's hands from her eyes and holds them above her head. When she speaks her words are thick, muffled from her swollen tongue. "I will never leave you or forsake you. Your god will be mine, and my people yours." She has got the words wrong, she has abbreviated them and mixed them up. She feels herself collapse into the body of her most beloved. She lies there, clinging to Naomi's body,

heavy and panting for breath. Naomi is silent, and, weeping with relief, she winds her leg around Ruth and holds her in her arms, stroking her hair.

*December 21, 1994*

I was looking through a photo album in the archives. Lillian has annotated most of the pictures in her scrawling hand writing. She uses a white pen to write on the black paper of the album.

In the album there is a picture that Mrs. Marshall drew while in a trance during one of the séances. It shows a picture of a man with robes and a halo. One of his hands is reaching out to touch the hand of a woman who is kneeling at his feet, and his other hand is reaching up to touch fingers with a small child who is floating above the scene. It does seem quite impossible that anyone could draw this in the complete darkness of the séance room; the lines of the hands and fingers touch with remarkable precision.

There is also a note from Lillian, this time it is typed, but still signed off with her initials, L.H. On May 28, 1932, a hand patted Lillian's hand shortly before the medium gave T.G. the signal to fire the flash. All of the sitter's hands were joined with each other. Only Lillian was outside the circle, recording the minutes.

Whose little fingers touched her sweet hand?



**I**t is dark in the bedroom. If you were to listen carefully you could hear two women breathing and the sound of a pencil scratching across paper. If you were to run your hands over and around these people, you would find them both in bed. One of them is leaning against the headboard. There is a pencil in her hand, and it is writing. The other woman is sleeping beside her.

Ruth has become very good at writing in the dark. But tonight she knows she should try something, and she is scared. She rolls her left hand over, her fingers in a tight, protective fist. Slowly she tries to curl open her fingers. She cannot open them all the way. She puts her hand under the blanket and opens up her palm. She exhales. She is fine.

Naomi rolls over and the blanket moves off of Ruth's palm. Ruth is poised in the dark, one palm closed over a pencil, one palm open to the dark.

And this is when I began to write.

*These weeping characters, their lungs heaving with relief and sorrow, breathe into the pages until the fine tissue paper becomes wanton and swollen. They are careless with their tears, which run down the rounded pages, and the letters can no longer cling to the translucent skin of the page. One by one, and sometimes in clumps, they fall from the pages into a ruined heap. Horrified at the ruin, the felt figures start to piece the story together again. The pages are still swollen, so they use their tears, their runny noses, the lines of saliva stringing from each other's mouths to stick the letters back on the pages. They are bricoleurs of ruin, building a cacophony of letters, a catastrophe of words. They work feverishly, trying, trying to remember the verses they had memorized. They never meant to destroy all of this, never meant to ruin these sacred stories. And when they stand back and look at their words on the ballooned pages, they gasp. The letters are moving. They are writing themselves. Sometimes they go right back to the old stories, and sometimes the stories have changed. There are new names. Names that were never there before. And then a hush passes over the characters, they start to listen. There is a low moan, and the characters run their eyes down the crevice of the spine, until their eyes widen with astonishment. At the edge of the book, the bottom of the spine, the book is widening, writhing with birth. The air is filled with moaning, a moaning of pain and of anticipation. Such a long gestation, and now finally, with its pages spread wide the first slimy, downy letter is pushed out, and the hush is broken with its screaming. It is fearfully and wonderfully made. Other letters are offering their first screams as well. The air is crying with birth. The felt figures weep over the beauty of these tiny letters which are waving their fists. Born into the space of hope.*

*Oh, the potential. The possibility of ruin.*

## *Postscript*

In many ways, this thesis has its origin at a wedding. The bride, my cousin, wrote the bible verses from Ruth 1:16-17 on a card that sat beside the guest book: ““Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me.””(Ruth 1:16-17). There was nothing unusual about seeing this verse at a wedding; in fact, this verse has become so popular at Christian and Jewish weddings that it is sometimes referred to as part of the traditional wedding vow (Exum 135). Before the wedding, my cousin told me she was thinking of choosing these verses, even though, she pointed out, the verses were actually spoken by one woman to another woman. I told her that I thought the verses were beautiful and fitting and didn’t think much more about them. But after the wedding I started to think further about my cousin’s comment—what was the significance of the biblical context of these verses? Why was no one thinking or talking about the fact that these words of commitment were spoken by Ruth to her mother-in-law, as she clung to her mother-in-law’s body, vowing to leave her homeland and be a companion to her mother-in-law until death?

This wedding was full of people who interpreted the bible literally, eagerly awaiting any opportunity to cite biblical scripture to ‘prove’ one thing or another. I’m not certain which verse they would

There  
is also a  
different  
beginning to  
the story of  
how I became  
interested in  
the concept of  
haunted  
writing. This  
other  
beginning also  
occurred in a  
church, but  
this time it  
was at a

cite to prove that homosexuality is a sin, but only a few months ago this church was offering “therapy,” the small print called it, for people struggling with the sin of homosexuality. Why was it, then, that this same pastor and many members of his congregation all signed their name in the guest book after reading a verse which proclaims one woman’s love for another woman?

I already know that answer—having attended Sunday School at this same church, I know that this church teaches that Ruth’s promise to her mother-in-law is an example of agape love, not of romantic love. (This is the very story, in fact, that the Sunday School curriculum used to emphasize the different types of love.) But, I did not know the answer to why this church, which interpreted so many other verses literally, ignored the desperation of romantic love in Ruth’s promise, the life-long commitment, the willingness to abandon family and country to be with the woman she loved.

I began to do some research into the book of Ruth. I was surprised by how difficult it was to find writing that addressed the romantic nature of Ruth’s promise to Naomi. Initially, the only book I could find was Fannie Flagg’s popular novel, *Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Café*, which is well-known for its lesbian sub-text. In the novel, it is obvious that two main female characters, Ruth and Idgie, are in love, even before Ruth marries her abusive husband. When Ruth sends a plea for help and love, she writes the verses of Ruth 1:16-17 on a piece of paper and mails it to Idgie, using the biblical text as a code to

funeral, not a wedding. I was reading the eulogy at the funeral of a dear friend, David Hamilton Klassen, who died tragically when he was nineteen years old. His family was distraught beyond words, and as I was known to be ‘the literary-type,’ the task of writing and reading the eulogy fell to me. Exhausted

secure her safety in the event that her husband intercepted the note.

I continued my research on Ruth, and found several collections of feminist essays on Ruth, but none of them addressed the possibility of interpreting the relationship between Ruth and Naomi as romantic. Most of them focussed on the relationship between Ruth and Boaz, while depicting Naomi as a wrinkled, eccentric old lady whom Ruth grew fond of and then committed to. However, in the preface to *Compromising Redemption: Relating Characters in the Book of Ruth*, I came across the last stanza of a poem, "Mother and the Girl" by Maureen Duffy. Intrigued by the blurring of the heterosexual wedding vow "I do," with the relationship between Ruth and Naomi, I found the entire poem, and was struck by the obvious sexual yearning that it expresses between Ruth and Naomi, particularly at the end of the poem:

And Naomi said, 'He's a good catch.  
Land him,' as if her son had never  
been born. Ruth wept a night  
and in the morning told him  
thinking how the sun  
fell through Naomi's hair  
and played on her shoulders  
and breasts as she splashed  
them with water and that  
Judah hadn't been that hospitable

from lack of  
sleep and  
witness to  
such terrible  
grief, I barely  
remember  
writing it. But  
I do remember  
the day, two  
months after  
the funeral,  
that David's  
sister came to  
me, holding a  
book in her  
hands, and  
asked me  
when I had  
read it. She  
was holding a  
book I had  
never seen  
before, and  
certainly had

they weren't that over the moon  
to see her back. "Listen,"  
she said to Boaz. "Your kinsman's  
widow, she's been like a second  
mother to me. I couldn't  
just walk out and leave her."  
And he looking at her rich  
pastures said, "Fine, bring  
the old lady if you want her."  
And Ruth said: "I do, I do."

Heartened by this poetic, romantic interpretation of Ruth and Naomi's relationship, I continued to research, and came across one essay that blatantly addressed the topic: Roberta Alpert's "Finding Our Past: A Lesbian Interpretation of the Book of Ruth." Alpert, concerned with writing lesbian midrash, looks to Ruth and Naomi as lesbian role-models. She writes,

Lesbians have had to read between the lines for centuries in Western cultures, looking for role models where all traces were hidden...We must insist on our right to find hints of the existence of women like ourselves in the past where we can. Reading Ruth this way should be considered an obligation to our nameless ancestors, to give them, too, an opportunity to speak.

(96)

never read. It  
was David's  
copy of  
*Intention and  
Survival*,  
written by  
their great-  
grandfather,  
T.G.  
Hamilton.  
When their  
great-aunt,  
Margaret  
Lillian  
Hamilton,  
reprinted  
*Intention and  
Survival*, she  
gave a copy to  
every great-  
niece and  
great-nephew.  
In David's  
copy,

This essay was encouraging, as it indicated that my reading of Ruth was not off-track, but the essay was written for personal and spiritual reflection, and I was looking for a scholarly treatment of the topic. Just as I was questioning my adeptness at researching, I found Mieke Bal's essay, "Heroism and Proper Names." Bal suggests that the book of Ruth contains a "chain of samples of sexual relations that Ruth criticizes and represses in the same move" (73). In Ruth 1:14, just before Ruth issues her famous promise, she clings to Naomi's body—"And Ruth clave unto her." Bal explains that this is the only time where the verb 'clave' is not used "exclusively with a male subject, in reference to the matrimonial bond" (72). Bal also suggests that Ruth's love for Naomi eclipses her generosity with Boaz, which consists simply of her not pursuing young men (73). Bal writes that this juxtaposition between Ruth's love for Naomi and her generosity towards Boaz and young men, can be read as "scandalous" (73). By cleverly criticizing and repressing a discussion of sexual relationships in her own writing on Ruth, Bal both proposes and demonstrates the veiled nature surrounding the possibility of romantic love between Naomi and Ruth in her essay.

Heartened by Bal's treatment of Ruth, I continued my search, hoping to find some academic writing that dealt explicitly with the possibility of a romantic relationship between Ruth and Naomi. Finally, I found J. Cheryl Exum's book *Plotted, Shot and Painted*. Exum opens the chapter "Is This Naomi?" with an experiment which demonstrates

Margaret had hand-written a message on the fly-leaf of the book.

Stunningly, her words, written in faded blue ink, were the same words I had written as the first two sentences of David's eulogy.

I began work on my master's degree only a few months after this experience,



the gender blurring that occurs in Ruth. She introduces a painting by Philip Hemogenes Calderon (1833-1898), entitled *Ruth and Naomi*. In the foreground of the painting there are two embracing figures. One of the figures is clearly a young, beautiful woman, wearing a white cloak. Her arms are embracing the other figure, and her head is tilted backwards, exposing her neck in what looks like a swoon. The figure she is embracing is dressed in a dark cloak. It is difficult to discern the sex of the dark-cloaked figure due to the loose, dark cloak and head covering. The dark figure's hands are wrapped around the young woman's waist. Set slightly back from the embracing couple is another figure, who looks likely to be a woman. The scene is set amidst a desert landscape where the embracing couple is standing next to a cactus bush. Although the title clearly identifies the embracing couple as Naomi and Ruth, during Exum's experiment she withheld the title of the painting, telling her audience only that the painting was about the book of Ruth. Half of the observers identified the couple as Ruth and Naomi, and the other half identified them as Ruth and Boaz. Interested by this mis-reading, or at least, by this ambivalence, Exum reads other cultural appropriations of the book of Ruth, concluding that the book of Ruth challenges binary notions of male and female, same-sex and opposite-sex relationships. Exum writes specifically on Ruth 1:16-17, explaining, "In a striking cultural transformation, this oath of loyalty spoken by one woman to another has been taken over as part of the traditional wedding vow, where its application to heterosexual marriage

and I have  
little doubt  
that this  
incident  
influenced the  
way that I  
read and  
thought about  
literary texts.  
It was quite  
exciting, then,  
to realize that  
there was an  
area of  
literature and  
philosophy  
that  
investigated  
the function of  
haunting in  
writing.  
In lieu  
of this  
experience of

has the effect of erasing the bond between women, especially for people who do not know its original context” (135).

But what I found the most interesting (and the most restorative to my floundering confidence in my researching abilities), was Exum’s explanation for the lack of scholarly criticism on the possibility of a romantic relationship between Naomi and Ruth. Exum writes:

Whereas biblical commentators generally acknowledge the strong commitment of the two women to each other, more radical appropriation of the Ruth-Naomi bond for same-sex relationships takes place, not surprisingly, outside of scholarly works. This may be due largely to the scholarly concern with the book’s original meaning or canonical context, but it also, I suspect, reflects scholarship’s heterosexist bias. In this case scholars do not, as so often elsewhere, engage in speculative gap filling, or ‘read between the lines’. (141)

Exum’s analysis made me realize that the absence of discussion on the romantic nature of the vow between Ruth and Naomi was not only significant to the literary interpretation of their story, but also reflective of the politics of the culture writing about this story.

I realized that in my frustrating search for biblical criticism on this topic, the very absence of criticism on this topic was revealing. I re-read the story of Ruth and Naomi in the context of the criticism I had found, and also in the context of the criticism I had not found. Instead

haunted  
writing, it  
seems strange  
to me now  
that the  
decision to  
work with  
*Intention and  
Survival* in  
my novella  
came almost  
as an  
afterthought.  
And, just as  
*Intention and  
Survival*  
contains  
surprises for  
the character  
of Ruth, the  
book  
contained  
some surprises  
for me. It was

of reading only what was written, I tried to read into the holes, spaces, and gaps where nothing was written. I realized that what is not written can haunt that which is written. I started to realize that this promise between Ruth and Naomi, sequestered and reformatted into a heterosexual context, is haunted by the lack of discussion surrounding the gender of the original speakers. When this gap is read alongside queer literature and theory, this biblical text reveals a desperate and beautiful love story between two women. The discovery of the relatively unexplored gap in the story of Ruth and Naomi was an important starting point in my thesis, as I determined to write the story of Ruth and Naomi while listening to a void of criticism surrounding the romantic overtones in Ruth's promise to Naomi.

Intrigued by the way what is not written can haunt that which is written, I began to research what would become another important topic for my thesis: how does haunting function in literature? I began with Jacques Derrida's *Specters of Marx*, where Derrida demonstrates and explains a way of reading which is always aware of the specters of the text, of the way that texts haunt events and in turn are haunted by these same events. This new 'ology', which Derrida names hauntology, exceeds the boundaries and chronologies of the living and non-living binary, and suggests that there is a spectral figure whose pulse can be heard in the gaps of the text. Next, I turned to Avital Ronell's *Dictations*, where she proposes that "writing always comes from elsewhere, at the behest of another, and is, at best, a shorthand

only after  
working with  
this text for  
several  
months that I  
had any sense  
of the way  
that Lillian  
haunts the  
pages of this  
book. I  
started to  
realize that it  
didn't make  
sense that  
*Intention and  
Survival* paid  
all of its  
attention to  
T.G., who  
merely  
photographed  
the séances,  
rather than

transcription of the demand of this Other” (xiv). She suggests that writing is always in conversation with a web of literary and non-literary texts, haunted by forces in the past and future. This is a fascinating perspective on writing and reading, especially as it allows for and anticipates movement, gaps, and contradictions in writing and reading.

Equipped with these theories on haunting, I began to wonder how I could apply them to the Hamilton texts—who was haunting these texts? I thought back to a paper I wrote on Derrida’s *Memoirs of the Blind*, where I investigated the seemingly intentional absence of women in this text, and concluded that the unwritten women were haunting the text. Hoping to remind myself of the strategies needed to locate a haunting “other” in a text, I re-read *Memoirs of the Blind*, this time paying close attention to the way that women operated in Derrida’s suggestion that the process of representation is haunted by an unworldly presence. This presence, which Derrida still refers to as a specter, haunts the process of representation at the point of visualization. This haunting means that during the process of visualization, meaning is always lost or changed when one attempts to transfer it from signified to signifier. Using the father-son filiation as a metaphor of a closed, seminal structure, Derrida uses stories of fathers and sons to explore the way vision and blindness can transmute the passage of meaning. Derrida writes, “Eli, Isaac, Tobit—all these old blind men of the Old Testament—are always in want of sons. They suffer through their sons, always waiting for them, sometimes to be

Lillian, who recorded all of the séances while hosting them in her house. This ‘rub’ eventually led me back to the archives, where Lillian’s letters and picture albums revealed the actual extent of her involvement in the séances. I read and wrote in surprise as I watched Lillian emerge

tragically disappointed or deceived, but sometimes also to receive from them the sign of salvation or healing” (21). Derrida recounts the story of Jacob and Esau to show how vision, or more specifically, a lack of vision, interrupts the heritage between father and son, writing, “Isaac’s wife Rebecca takes advantage of her husband’s blindness in order to substitute one son for another, that is, Jacob, the favourite younger son, for Esau, at the moment of the testamentary blessing” (23). Derrida also tells the story of Tobit, father of Tobias. Tobit is one of the fortunate fathers—he receives his vision at the moment his son arrives home. And yet, Derrida is careful to point out the source of this gift of vision is not the son Tobias, but the angel standing behind him. Something is incomplete in this system of meaning that passes between father and son, and, as in the case of Tobias’s angel, it seems that the missing piece is ‘other worldly.’

This focus on fathers and sons appears to exclude women from the pages of *Memoirs of the Blind*. And yet, the absence of women appears to be very intentional. In fact, Derrida hypothesizes that “the absence of ‘great blind women’ will not be without consequence for our hypotheses”, and in a footnote he explains that the absence of “great blind women” is a “*supplementary* hypothesis, a supporting conjecture [which] exceeds the other two only in order to return to and complete them” (*Memoirs* 5). In David Krell’s book, *The Purest of Bastards*, Krell recounts a conversation he had with Derrida’s friend, Michael Naas. When Krell asked Naas why Rop’s painting, *Woman*

as the woman,  
indeed the  
mother, who  
invites the  
*unheimlich*  
into her house  
and home.

I hope this  
has provided  
you with an  
overview of  
the theories  
and concepts I  
attempted to  
work with in  
my novella.  
Perhaps the  
only question  
that remains is  
to ask what is  
haunting my  
own writing? I  
realize that as

with *Pince-nez*, was not written into the text, Naas replied, ““Because it reminded Derrida of his mother, and so was the condition of the possibility of the entire exhibition”” (56).

The suggestion that perhaps Derrida’s mother is haunting this text made me wonder if the figure of the mother may also haunt the discussion of the father-son filiation that pervades the book. I thought back to the stories of Isaac and Tobit; in both cases their sons were present at the moment of their deception or gift, but also, in both cases the sons were accompanied by someone else—their mothers. Tobias was accompanied by both the angel and his mother, who stood praying in the background. Jacob’s mother, Rebecca, not only accompanied her son, but she orchestrated the entire act of deceit, substituting one son, one meaning, for another. Although both stories center on the father and son interaction, in both stories the mother is intervening and haunting these tableaux. The mother emerges, albeit only for a moment, as the figure of the “other” that disrupts and disseminates the flow of meaning between father and son.

This fleeting glimpse of the mother as the “other” who intervenes between the passage of meaning pointed, with almost an uncanny directness, to the character of Lillian Hamilton. I began to realize how Lillian, who is nearly absent from the pages of *Intention and Survival*, haunted the relationship between T.G. and their deceased son, Arthur. Both metaphorically and metonymically, Lillian emerged as the mourning m(other) who was haunting these texts.

soon as I can  
answer that  
question, that  
which is  
haunting it  
will start to  
slip away, will  
step out of the  
shadows and  
begin to forge  
its way onto  
the page, only  
to be replaced  
by a new  
haunt. And so  
I am reluctant  
to even  
attempt an  
answer. But  
this awareness  
that my words  
are haunted,  
slipping and  
misaligned

There is something eerie about thinking about the mother as the “other” of the text. It is disconcerting, uncanny, in the Freudian sense, about imagining the familiar symbol of mother as the “other” that disrupts the meaning of a text, that comes between the passage of meaning between the metaphorical father and son filiation. For one thing, it is eerie to name the mother as the haunting “other” because in doing so, it suggests that texts are always already haunted. For if the mother haunts the passage of meaning in a text, then the text has been haunted since the very beginning, indeed since even before its very inception.<sup>1</sup> As Derrida is reported to have said, the mother, this “other” that haunts the text, is “the condition of the possibility” of the text. The very origins of systems of meaning have something uncanny about them. Moreover, if the mother is that haunting “other”, it means that the process of making meaning is haunted by that which is most familiar. The house of meaning is haunted, and to make matters worse, it is haunted by the mother, the very locus of domesticity.<sup>2</sup> This metaphor of the mother as the “other” who both interrupts and facilitates the passage of meaning from father to son became an important concept as I started to think about the haunted, uncanny nature of language. I realized that the words I would use to write this thesis would, too, be haunted.

So, when I started to write this thesis, I decided to write a story that listened to the spaces between the lines of Ruth’s promise to Naomi, and to write about the Hamilton texts while paying attention to

before I even use them, has changed the way I read and the way I approach writing. And, to my delight, instead of creating a cynical and wary approach to writing and reading, this awareness of haunting has opened up a new and very political way of reading texts. For to understand writing as haunted

Lillian's haunting footsteps. The problem was that the same metaphor that led me to think of Lillian as the haunting m(other) of the text also made me realize that the language I was using was also haunted at, or even before, its origin. And so I started to write this thesis trying always to be mindful that I was transposing a story from a haunted space, and that I was writing it with a language that I knew to be haunted and misaligned at its very inception.

enables one to  
read that  
which is not  
written, to  
read for the  
stories of the  
oppressed,  
silenced, and  
hidden. And  
the muted  
echoes of  
those silenced  
ghosts are  
what I hope  
continues to  
haunt my  
writing.



## Notes

1. In Freud's essay, "The Uncanny" he writes, "It often happens than erotic men declare that they feel there is something uncanny about the female genital organs. This unheimlich place, however, is the entrance to the former Heim [home] of all human beings, to the place where each one of us has lived once upon a time and in the beginning" (368).

2. Mark Wigley, in his book *The Architecture of Deconstruction: Derrida's Haunt*, works with the idea of the haunting mother and the idea of the haunted house. Although I have tried to work with some basic concepts from this book, both when writing about the Hamilton house, and the City of Winnipeg, when I have more space (and time) I would like to further develop concepts of haunting and architecture in my novella.

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