

THIS IS THE HOUSE THAT LUKE BUILT

by © Violet Browne A Thesis submitted

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ABSTRACT

This Is the House that Luke Built is an exploration of grief and its aftermath, with underlying themes of love, aging, memory, sacrifice, and reconciliation. The story is set in Newfoundland and spans the twenty-five years following the death of a fisherman, Luke, and the resulting grief and how it impacts his wife Rose and daughter Emily, as well as Rose's other children and family. It will explore the premise that love never dies, through annual visits between Rose and Luke, in the house that Luke was building for Rose when he died, and raise questions about the assumption that unending love is only good. As the story moves around in time, reflecting the disjointed nature that Rose's life has taken on, we watch as she reconciles herself, not only to her own grief, but to the damage it has inflicted on Emily. In recognizing herself in Emily's longing for her father, Rose realizes the impact, not just of Luke's death, but of her own grief. Ultimately, Rose's love for Emily—and her wish to spare her daughter the inheritance of the burden of mourning—forces Rose to come to terms with her grief and its aftermath and, finally, to let go.

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Table of Contents

October.....	1
Molecules.....	3
Mermaids.....	9
Meringue.....	11
Leaving.....	15
Dandelion.....	16
Odds.....	20
Gathering.....	23
How to Build a Boat.....	28
Hitchhike.....	33
Tall.....	36
Santa.....	39
Sea Over Bow.....	41
Etiquette.....	46
Slide.....	48
Rose's Pet.....	50
I Slept with your Father Last Night.....	55
Immortal.....	63
Snowflake.....	65
Record.....	67
Tree.....	71
Compensation.....	73
Rhyme.....	76
Out.....	79
Iceberg.....	81
Totem.....	85
Together.....	87
George.....	89
Lack.....	95
Safe.....	98
Lucky.....	101
Sever.....	105
Sixteen.....	109
Little Pond.....	113
Gap.....	117
Reminder.....	120

Clock.....	123
Floored.....	127
Heart.....	129
Muffins and Fries.....	132
Profile.....	136
Façade.....	149
Bed.....	154
Genes.....	155
Janeway.....	159
Happy Birthday.....	164
Thread.....	168
Dave.....	170
Nails.....	178
Fractal.....	182
Shoes.....	184
R is for Rose.....	188
Thin Air.....	192
The Girl in the Red Sweater.....	197
Rut.....	204
Abracadabra.....	210
God Forgive Me.....	214
Unspoken.....	218
Crash.....	223
Cross.....	227

OCTOBER

The first time Rose walked through the wall was two years after Luke disappeared. Rose steps through into the living room and Luke is propped on the couch, his legs stretched the length of it, covered in a purple patchwork quilt. He pulls his knees up and throws the blanket aside for Rose. She strips to her undies, pink and baby blue flowers against a dark background, the bra trimmed with lace. She has a pedicure, nail polish in the same powder blue. Rose wiggles her foot in Luke's direction.

See my toes.

You have nice toes Rosie. Lovely toes.

Rose plumps her pillow opposite Luke, settling in, and he reaches to give her big toe a tweak. She aligns the pads of her bare feet flat against Luke's and they push sole against sole, each bending to the pressure of the other's forward thrust, like pedaling a bike.

Myself and Cela could do that for hours when we were kids.

Sure you're still only a youngster hun.

Rose sips a glass of Merlot, dark and bitter as coffee. She cracks a piece of Luke's orange Aero bar and pops it into her mouth.

See, you still have your sweet tooth even. Barely out of your teens.

Luke shifts position, his feet pointing towards his own pillow, his head nestled in Rose's lap. She feels the weight bearing down, the warmth of his hand burrowing into the space between his cheek and her thigh. As he settles, Rose sweeps

her fingertip slowly along the path of Luke's lashes, traces the curve of his brow. Her fingers hesitate at his temple, absorbing his lines. Luke slides his hand upward, pushing the flowered polyester out of his way. He tattoos her hip with his lips, whispers hieroglyphics onto her skin. Every October, he up-ends her life with his breath. Luke pulls Rose beneath him, her body arching to meld with his. Become a part of his muscle and his sinew and his bones.

MOLECULES

2013

Every day since her fifty-third day, Emily's body has been gripped by a buzzing vibration at the molecular level—there appears to be something about certain combinations of matter that sparks sentience within the molecular structure as a whole; take water, add some carbon and nitrogen and a couple handfuls of trace elements and these molecules may, as in Emily's case, spend the equivalent of a human life in search of paternal origins; her body ignores the dictates of physics, biology, logic, in favour of a genetically driven, atomic keening—Emily is compelled to map its surface in piercings and tattoos.

There have been lip, and venom, and nose rings, surface piercings, microdermals. It started the day she came home flaunting the shiny ball above her lip, her friends trailing behind.

You've punched a hole in your face.

Now mom.

Emily, you have a hole punched through your top lip. What do you expect me to say? Oh, I can't wait for you to get more? Oh god, Emmy, do you have more?

No mom.

I will strip search you in front of everyone if you don't tell me the truth.

Knowing her mother, Emily shows her a double tongue piercing, a belly button ring, and a tattoo on her left hip that she got in someone's basement.

Rose Googles it all. Every time there's an addition to the swelling collection of piercings and surgical steel and script and emblems, Rose goes to her laptop. She swears through clenched teeth as pictures scroll past, a forceps with handles like scissors that clamp a tongue in place, impaling it manually with a needle, leaving the tongue swollen, double its normal size. It impairs Emily's speech for days.

The dermal punch is not as scary. A surgical instrument used in biopsies, the punch is a sharp metal circle, like a cookie cutter. It removes tissue to allow an anchor to be implanted in the dermis of the skin, inserted like an inverted T, with interchangeable jewellery screwed into a threaded hole at the top. Large holes in its base encourage tissue to grow through and around the openings, making it harder to reject. The body always fights to repair itself, though, the metal intrusions into skin. It rushes to fill the space left by a tongue ring dislodged while Emily sleeps, healing it before morning.

Rose sees tattoo guns, small drills driving ink into skin with needles, in and out, in and out, eighty to a hundred fifty times a second, forcing pigment into the dermis. The immune system's cells engulf the intrusive particles like an oyster creating a pearl. Deep in the skin, granulation tissue forms, the dye trapped at the dermis-epidermis border.

Emily could be practicing self-expression. Or she could be self-mutilating. Either way, she's exerting control over her body. And didn't Rose know that already. She learned that people, even sociologists and psychologists, won't name the phenomenon. She learned that it's as painful as it looks. And didn't she already know

that too. She'd run her hand down the curve of Emily's back more than once, when she crawled into bed with Rose late at night, a bottle of aspirin on the nightstand. Rose wishes she knew what to do, to ease the loneliness that wafts like scent off Emily's skin.

Before she discovered the first piercings, she found a tiny plastic bag of white crystals left on the bathroom countertop. She knocked on Emily's bedroom door, her heart like a trapped bird. Emily promised her mother it was nothing, then accused her of overreacting to every little thing, then finally opened the bag to calm her. The white crystal was a sea salt blend, used for cleansing and purification. Rose learned that part of the attraction to body modification is the pain itself. Some people need the pain. It releases pressure, provides a path to the surface for the forces welling deep below.

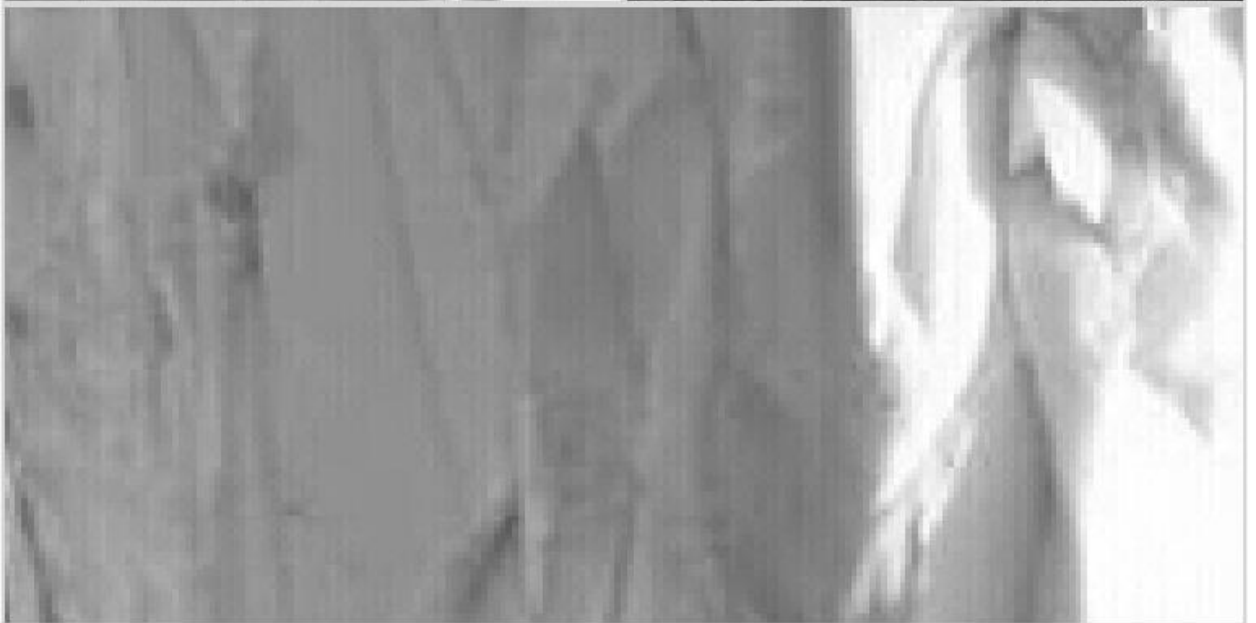
Rose goes with Emily sometimes now. Holds her hand. Watches Emily lie prone. Face down. Watches the man's surgical precision as he preps the surface. Watches the needle pierce Emily's skin, pierce her skin, like a sewing machine piecing her together. Hears the long, whistling intake of breath as blues and greens plume across the back of Emily's neck. Feels Emily's fingernails lodge in the flesh of her palm, like a hook into fish's gills. Smooths her hair when it's over. Exhales.

And sometimes Emily has to go and do it alone. Rose learns that Emily will wander down Prescott St. again and again, and come back, a boat or a rope knot forming a scab on her skin. Exhausted. Assuaged for a while. Sometimes she sleeps for two days. And Rose goes to her laptop.

The microdermal is Rose's favourite now—two silver studs embedded in Emily's clavicle, just above the words 'So it goes....' The hip tattoo is covered over with a boat's steering wheel set among waves. Homeward Bound. When Rose saw Emily's tattoo she wondered why the font was different. It took her seconds to realize that Emily only knows Luke's tattoos through Rose's own memory. There are other tattoos for him—an anchor on the vein of her wrist, a sailor's knot above her thumb, a miniature boat in full sail on her left arm.

There is the peacock feather that extends from the nape of her neck halfway down her trapezius muscle—a peacock feather symbolizes immortality. There's the quote on Emily's right ribcage about feelings lingering even after memories fade. An owl—intuition—in shades of grey on her right quad. A sugar skull on her ankle. Google says sugar skulls are used in ceremonies remembering the dead. A Cheshire Cat grin above the words 'We're All Mad Here,' follows the curve of Emily's foot. And an unfinished tattoo on her left thigh. Alice is framed in a mirror and is falling through the rabbit hole. Aside from her red lips, she is waiting for colour.

Emily's topography is moulded by the dictates of her core, welling up, welling up. It's not only the heart that wants what it wants.





MERMAIDS

1994

While there are no reports of mermaid sightings at 47° N, 51° W that night, this is easily explained by the fact that the other vessels were tied up or in the lee of the land, when Pat Coates's crew goes down.

The top of the wheelhouse is forced up and over, from port to starboard. The sea surface is five degrees Celsius and the ambient air temperature is eleven. The chance of survival in five degree seawater is high and a man can help himself for up to thirty minutes. For up to an hour and a half, he has a fifty percent chance of surviving if rescued. These averages vary, depending on age, physical condition, injuries, and weather. The crew members are all considered experienced fishermen; one is an accomplished swimmer, another can't swim, and the other three can make a few strokes. During the next few hours, boats risk themselves in the severe weather to recover debris, including the wheelhouse top with a section of the front, pieces from the port afterside, boxes, dory parts, rope and twine, net-marking balloons, the upright inflated life-raft, a brown suede sneaker boot. A section of the vessel's keel, with pieces of ribs attached, drifts away.

Mermaids watch as they always do when these things occur, but they take no ownership in the disaster at sea. They scorn the reputation they've heard men repeat, blaming their own banshee wails aboard sinking boats, on beautiful women with fishes' tails.

As the waves surrender their prize to the ocean, the men descend slowly in water that is colder, denser, darker. It is quieter. The calamitous surface is forgotten as Luke's body drifts in slow-motion with the plankton; a tuna darts by, attracted by the sound of the sinking craft. Downward through seaweed and jellyfish, schools of dogfish, dolphins and mermaids hovering as he falls away, wary themselves of the sharks, who will no doubt happen by before the dust settles.

There is no personal animosity towards the bodies because of their intrusion here. No thought given to families or unfinished houses. These men will be forgotten and other men will take their place: grow from boys whose mothers will always mourn their belonging to another woman, into men who leave their wives and children on wharves as they cast off; marvel at the pull of the water that takes them away from everything they own and brings them to backbreaking labour and heartbreaking freedom; love and be loved and bicker and argue; hunt and be hunted and chop wood and put logs on the fire; live; and die. It's just the way it is.

Ceaseless movement for the scraps of fishermen that churn in Davey Jones's locker; everything here circulates in a more-or-less clockwise motion, in an expanding circle, like the ripples of a stone skipping across the water's surface, moving outward and downward simultaneously, settling eventually if luck holds, and becoming a particle of the continental shelf.

MERINGUE

1990

Cela's babysitting while Rose goes on her first daytime date with Luke. Rose lays the lemon meringue pie on the table, Cela standing close to the window to catch a glimpse of him when he gets here. Rose warned him he would be sized up, but Luke is not the type to come knock on the door and introduce himself. And anyway, Rose wants to be sure before he meets Maggie and Liam, who are eyeing the pie themselves.

Mommy has pies in the fridge guys. Aunt Cela will get you some when I leave.

Rose was delighted when she asked Luke what foods he liked and he said baked ham and lemon pie. She was getting ready for him her whole life. Her favourite meal to make is baked ham with raisin sauce, buttery mashed potatoes and pineapple carrots; the aroma of the cloves mingling with sweet brown sugar. Rose buys her pie crusts because she knows to concentrate effort where it's needed, and the deep dish shells in the yellow box are perfectly fine. She fills the shell to the top edge with tart lemon filling, then heaps a thick layer of meringue, perfectly peaked, on top; droplets of caramelized sugar form on the browned meringue as it cools.

Luke's pickup rolls to a stop, hugging the sidewalk close. Cela stands just left of the window, to stare without being seen. Luke is clean shaven with a mop of curly dark hair, and he is smiling towards the house.

Looks good Rose. Looks good.

Rose wipes her right index finger across her front teeth.

Any lipstick.

She bares her teeth at Cela.

Nope you're good.

Quick hugs to Maggie, Liam, and Cela before she balances the pie on one hand and heads out the door. She catches Luke's gaze as she closes the front door behind her and walks around the front of the truck. He leans across the seat and opens the door.

What's this. A pie.

Yep. I remembered you said lemon was your favourite.

I think you might be my favourite too by the look of this.

Rose lays the pie down and pushes it gently across the seat so that it sits close to Luke, then hoists herself up into the truck and pulls the heavy door closed.

No need to sit so far away Rose.

Luke revs the engine to life. Rose feels like a teenager. Luke stretches his arm across the seatback as Rose gives a little hop closer, then another. On the second hop, Rose's bum lands squarely on the lemon meringue pie, flattening the aluminum foil pan and squishing its contents into the crevices of her jeans and the seat.

Oh my god.

Rose lurches for the door handle, her feet on the ground again as her cheeks flush.

Give me a few minutes. Sorry, I'll just be a minute.

Luke lets her go without a word, hiding his laughter behind his raised hand as he watches her hurry up the steps and through the door.

Oh my god. I sat in the goddamn pie. I sat. In the pie.

Rose's eyes start to water.

I climbed in the truck and sat in the pie.

Cela stares until a piece of meringue, weighed down with lemon, plops onto the floor from Rose's jeans.

Some sweet Rosie.

Jesus Cela.

Just trying to make you laugh.

Well help me with these will ya.

Rose peels the jeans to her ankles and steps out of them.

Go on, I'll get the mess. Grab my new jeans out of the bag there.

Rose gives herself a quick wipe-down in the bathroom and slips into the dark wash boot-cuts, grateful that they button. Rose is always trying to lose ten pounds.

I gotta call Abbey and tell her this one Rosie.

Rose heads back to the kitchen, quick hugs all around again before she makes another go of it. She opens the front door, a metal roaster balanced under her arm. Rose catches Luke's gaze as she retraces her steps and pulls the truck door open. She lays the roaster on the seat and pushes it gently towards Luke before she climbs in and makes two little hops on her bum to get closer. Luke reaches down, raises the cover, and peeks inside. He grins at the lemon meringue pie nestled among dish towels in the bottom of the pan.

You needn't've run off so fast with the last one Rose. I would've kissed your
arse for it.

Rose feels her cheeks go hot.

Oh you and my sisters will get along. Just fine.

LEAVING

1981

Rose clicks Jon's seatbelt in place and kisses him on the nose.

Off you go. What an adventure.

Abbey is moving to Alberta with her husband for work, taking Jon away from Rose.

Jon is six. Rose is afraid that Jon won't remember her, afraid she'll forget the smell of him. She closes the door, slamming Jon away in the back seat among bags and boxes crammed into every crevice. There is a rack attached to the roof that is piled high, weighing the rusty Gremlin down. Two one-gallon buckets of Old Port salt beef cling to the rack, tied in place with heavy cotton rope.

Hold on Abbey, I have to go get something.

Rose goes to her bedroom, takes out the small patchwork quilt she's working on for Home Ec, and brings it outside, its reds and yellows bright in the sun. Rose opens the car door again and leans in.

I was making this for you baby boy.

As she squeezes the unfinished quilt into the seat beside Jon, Abbey's husband says we don't have room for anything else Rose we have plenty of blankets. Jon fingers the firetrucks and spaceships crowded together on the patches and smiles at Rose.

See. It's tucked in already. Not taking up any room. I made it for him.

Rose offers one last peck on Jon's head and gives Abbey a quick hug before she sprints up the steps into the house, while the others say their goodbyes and wave as the car pulls away and down O'Reilly St. Rose can't watch him go.

DANDELION

1991

Rose and Luke are getting married in a week, and Rose is having a quiet meltdown in the wrought iron bed in her sister's blue bedroom. What if she still loves Bill. She can't go marching into another marriage headlong like there's no tomorrow. There is a tomorrow and a tomorrow after that. There's forever. And Rose is twenty-six and she has a four-year-old and a five-year-old who are depending on her to make the right decisions. What if she's making a mistake. Rose knows what marriage is and she knows what forever means. She needs to be sure. Love doesn't dissipate like fog. Love is more like a dandelion.

A dandelion is a weed really. Its dominant root thick and tapering, it grows straight downward, its taproot system spreading away like veins. The roots grow deep quickly. The dandelion is a common colonizer of disturbed habitats. A single plant can produce thousands of seeds a year, spinning through the air like tiny parasols. Dandelions have fed and healed people since prehistory, a whole world of pharmacology hiding in their leaves. Being deep-rooted, dandelions are hard to uproot and if the taproot breaks off near the top, the part that stays in the ground often re-sprouts. Love is like that.

Rose thinks about the first time she laid eyes on Maggie and Liam's father. Bill was the prettiest thing she ever saw: navy Levi's, which lay folded neatly in a bottom drawer for months before being worn, because you don't wear new jeans to go out; perriwinkle collared polo shirt with three buttons, the top one left undone;

grey suede and fabric jacket with a fastener on its stand-up collar, left unzipped; thick brown hair cut very short, with a side part forcing the strong waves across his head; dimpled chin below full lips that smile without revealing teeth. Sitting on the railing that ran around the dance floor, thumbs tucked into belt loops, one high-top sneaker balanced on the lower rail, the other planted firmly on the dirty carpet. She saw him watching her but they'd never have spoken if she hadn't gone and said hello. Rose never really knew what shy was.

And Luke. Rose is out dancing, her and Bill fell out again and she's sick and tired of wanting him to stop leaving every time she throws a plate. Luke circles the bar a few times, criss-crossing his way back, slowing as he approaches, and moving on again, until he stops while Rose is ordering a drink, her back facing the crowd. He stands beside her, leans in.

Don't suppose a pretty woman like you would dance with the likes of me would ya.

She turns and sizes him up, as if she hasn't noticed him until now. Faded jeans and a white t-shirt left untucked. His dark hair is curly, his hairline receding before its time. He smells like soap. He is a burly man, and when he smiles at her the right corner of his mouth arches higher than the left. A strong friendly face. Handsomest man Rose had ever seen.

Rose thinks about the night they were out a few months after they met. Luke had too much to drink and got a cab back to Rose's house early. Bill was out that night too, and he watched Rose and Luke together, and he offered Rose a ride home

when the taxis stopped running. He walked her to her door and they could see Luke through the window, snoring deep on the couch. Bill lingered on the doorstep and she told him to go on, she was fine, and she encouraged him to call the girl from down the shore who was interested in him. When he protested and she asked him what was wrong with her, Bill said she's not you. And Rose told him she'd wanted to hear words like that for a long time and now it was too late. And that was as much as Rose would ever hear from Bill about any of it. And her throat hurt.

Rose thinks about how hard it always was to squeeze Bill's love out, even though she knew it was there, and how easy it's always been with Luke. From the night she and Luke met a year and a half ago, even before he gave up drinking when Rose said I'm too old for this, and I have children who I will not raise like this, so you can have your drink or you can have me, but you can't have us both. And he laid down the bottle.

Luke is carved on the palm of her hand, etched into her muscles and her sinew and her bones. Rose's body hums when Luke is near and her chest hurts when he is far away. She thinks about Bill and she thinks about Luke, and she knows that she loves them. And Rose knows that Luke is her forever.



ODDS

1994

Rose is behind the wheel of the Camaro, hugging the center of the road to straighten out the curves, while Luke sits in the passenger seat and banters with Barry in the back. They communicate in low grunts and hand gestures, lost in the insular language of the water. Barry's nose is redder than usual.

Looks like you're coming down with something, Barry.

Yes, Rose, my dear, I'm half smothered all week.

Hope you don't make my man sick while you're out there.

Luke winks at Rose and turns to look directly at Barry's massive hulk in the back seat of the two-door vehicle.

Oh, I'll heave him overboard if he even sneezes in my direction.

Hmmph, you wish.

The last few minutes pass in friendly silence, punctuated by sniffs from the back seat, until the car pulls onto the community wharf. Luke stretches as he rises out of the car, then pulls the seatback ahead and reaches his hand towards Barry, who grasps it and hoists himself forward, tumbling out into the cold morning air. They offload their bags onto planks that are scarred with engine oil and fish offal. Rose pushes open her door and steps out, as Luke saunters around the car and wraps her in his arms, kissing the top of her head. She leans close, absorbing his heat, feeling the chill in the air all the more for it.

Okay, hun, off you go. Take your time driving.

I will. Have a safe trip. Love you.

Ditto.

He heard that in a movie. Rose misses him saying I love you but he thinks he sounds like Patrick Swayze so she leaves it. She climbs back into the car and pulls the heavy door closed as the men heft their bags onto their shoulders and amble toward the long-liner. She revs the engine and Luke blows a kiss over his shoulder. Rose touches her hand to her mouth and releases it. She makes a tight U-turn, easing the car off the edge of the wharf and back onto the winding road.

In the hour that the men spend in final preparation—loading groceries, securing nets and reviewing weather forecasts, checking fluid levels and gauges—Barry protests that he shouldn't be going out on the water when he's this sick. Luke wonders if the extra pair of hands will be worth listening to Barry complain for nine or ten days. While he jokes about heaving him over, Luke is the best one aboard to manage Barry with a grain of salt and an arch of his lip. It's no coincidence that Luke is the one who bunks with him.

A coincidence is a remarkable event with no apparent cause. It is inevitable and less extraordinary than it appears when studied closely. While it's impossible to predict results of random events, when individual events are influenced by other unknown factors, certain patterns arise that can be predicted, despite the events themselves being unpredictable. Even though cause and effect is not established in studies of coincidence, it can appear that there is some cause. Luke says Barry is a magnet for coincidences. Luke glances at him and decides that it's not worth it.

If you're feeling too miserable to go, you really should stay home out of it.

I think I will Luke b'y. Can't seem to shake this feeling.

Alright then. You're better off. We'll see you when we land.

Barry stands on the pocked wharf with hands lazing in the pockets of his navy work pants, his green logans squelching on the dock. He watches Luke and the others grapple with securing wooden boxes and the dory, as seagulls shriek obscenities above his head. When they're ready to cast off, Barry unties the *Elizabeth Coates* from the bollard, and tosses the bow line to Luke. Luke extends both hands as the coiled rope unwinds in the air, landing haphazardly at his feet. He grabs the frayed end of thick yellow nylon, and raises his hand in a wave to Barry, before turning away.

Gathering

1980

Rose fished herself once. Another pair of hands was needed, so Rose spent the day on the water with her father and his share-man. Up at four o'clock, out into cold darkness and the eternal caw of seagulls.

They walk the narrow path single file, grass trodden to a muddy rut along its center, past Gary's shack with its careless clothesline, to the squeaky wooden walkway that leads to her father's fish stage, its walls of raw board worried by weather. Down over slippery rungs into the skiff, which is always kept freshly painted. Boats are respected. Bright white, grey trim; not the ugly shade of battleships. Creamy grey like a cashmere sweater.

The Rose—a replacement for the boat that her father had built himself and trimmed in dory green that burned the year she was built. Her father commissioned the Grandys in Fortune to build *The Rose*. Couldn't go through that hurt again. He said that's what he should have called the boat he built, the work of his own hands, and he chastised himself over it. As if that could have saved her.

The Rose's length meant she had to be registered with the provincial government, and it was plastered across her arse in the same colour as her name, branding her as an outsider in the bay. *Registration: St. John's*. Rose wondered if the city's name emblazoned on his boat stirred memories of Prescott St. for him, where he boarded as a young man working in town, a world away, before he was theirs.

The engine coughs awake, then roars over the seagulls. Rose settles onto the tawt back aft, goosebumps surfacing as her bum contacts the damp wood. Gary

releases the ties and they head out of the harbour past the breakwater, into quiet. Of a sort. The engine becomes a part of the quiet. Black water lapping the bow, lulling Rose to sleep in the dark, shivery, quiet of a sort. Boat on water. Like a Pratt painting.

Two hours steam brings them to the banks. They fished New Bank and the White Sail. Rose expected the banks to be different somehow, to stand out, but they look the same as the whole trip there. Water. Predawn black baked green as the sun rose higher. Pretty Mediterranean green. Big and empty.

Except for *The Rose*. They cut the engine and a new quiet rises—big and empty. The boat follows the groundswell, barely noticeable on the water's surface, but swaying Rose till she stumbles sideways. She adjusts her stance to the movement, looks around, feels small.

Nothing to do but start the process, among the business-like small talk that accompanies the hunt. Gary up front on the deck. Her father in the middle, casting the cod-jigger through the wheelhouse door. He leans on its frame, bibbed navy-blue hat and brown woollen plaid coat bobbing to the rhythm of the hand-line. Rose back aft where she'd ridden. Empty locker staring her in the face, asking to be fed. Rose doesn't want to. She's never given a codfish a second thought before in her life. But now she doesn't want to see one. The closest Rose had ever come to concern for fish was when she was a child and her father took them for a ride around the island in his old punt. She dropped a string with an empty hook over the back of the boat, trying to catch a connor, and snagged one just as they pulled away from the wharf. His mottled turquoise belly, like a glazed flower vase, flopped along on the white wake spreading

behind them like a fan. Rose wanted to pull the connor aboard to save him the torture he was in, but she was afraid that he would die out of the water. So she left him to suffer in the spray. Once around the island. Twice. Rose had never wanted a boat-ride to end. But she longed for it. Longed and hurt with the fish.

Rose tosses the jigger over the side, watches the lead weight rush down into green water, the barbed points of its twin hooks glistening, luring its prey to death. She pulls the hand-line up and down slowly, as the others are doing vigorously; hoping not to catch anything at the same time that she grows impatient with the vast emptiness. Nothing here. They restart the engine, move a few hundred feet along the bank, cut the engine again. Choruses of jagged sound interlaid with smooth verses of calm.

A bite. Rose pulls hand over hand on the line until the fish comes into sight, hauls him over the side, his silver-and-ivory-mottled skin bristling at the indignity of being chatteled. She pulls the hook from his lower lip as she's been shown, the little flap of skin under his chin like a goatee quivering in response. Rose lays the fish in the empty locker and tries to ignore him until he lies still. Just as she thinks he has drawn his last breath of air, he gives another flick, trying to propel himself out of this dry hell. They turn wide eyes toward the wheelhouse but are granted no relief. Rose's father laughs at her, nicely, when she asks clemency for the fish. Another bite. The process repeats and so it goes for a portion of the morning.

The first half dozen fish object and cajole, gasping for water in the empty locker. As suddenly as Rose became attuned to their feelings, she becomes deaf to

their rhetoric. Desensitized. Or sensitized. Rose coaxes the jigger down to tug into flesh. Swims it back to the surface. Hand over hand. Preens as she pulls a large, writhing cod over the gunnel. The process repeats.

When Rose's locker is half-full they break for lunch. Fish gury on her hands joining the flavours of potted meat, homemade bread, butter. One of the best meals she's ever eaten. Her father laughing.

Hunger is good sauce.

After lunch, on they come. Hundreds of pounds of grey-and-beige-speckled meat, combined with her father's and Gary's, becoming thousands. Thousands of pounds.

Nothing left but the return journey and the gutting of their catch on the way home. Hadn't occurred to Rose that they'd gut on the way in. She's squeamish again. Rose hoists herself down into the center locker, opposite Gary, knee-deep in codfish jumbled around her mother's rubber boots.

Gary pulls a knife from where it's tucked behind a rib of the boat, its blade curved the shape of a new moon, thinner at the center and slightly fatter where it nestles into its light wooden handle, fitting his palm perfectly. In what looks like a single motion, he grabs a fish from the locker, slits its throat, runs the blade down through its belly and slides the fish across the wooden cover of the locker as if he is passing Rose a salt shaker. Laughs at her turning her head away as she sticks cotton-gloved fingers into the wound he's opened. He shows her how to wrap the entrails around two fingers and pluck, just where the slices of the blade intersect under the gills. Rose feels it squishing through thin cotton between her fingers, like raw egg.

She struggles to right herself against the heavy rocking of the boat. Gulls appear to gather leftovers as she guts and tosses, guts and tosses. Gary and Rose take turns cutting the throat and pulling the gut and throwing it to the birds.

Two hours of this and they're heading into the harbour. The three lockers yield roughly eight hundred pounds apiece, gut out. Twenty-four hundred pounds of fish. Gutted. Rose's locker holding the single biggest fish of the day.

How to Build a Boat

1978

Something of substance is going up in slips of smoke; no one bothers to burn trash around here. The smoke rises over the stage-head, reverberating around the harbour. A burning boat. Every man's heart gives an extra beat. Every wife's hand freezes mid-air. Every child's ear jumps to the raised octave of adult voices. Jesus-Christ-Almighty.

Someone shouts a name. John's boat. Rose sprints over the tattered bridge that crosses the brook, a part of the rocky path around the harbour, past summer cabins that used to be family homes painted yellow and green, a wooden walkway on pilings stretching across dirty shallow water, her eyes never leaving the smoke rising in the background. Cela close behind, their feet barely touching down as they fly over the flakes to the wharf.

Fire licking the wheelhouse door, smothering the view through the window. But not as bad as Rose expected. Aside from the wheelhouse—which she's not fond of anyway because of the smells—the boat looks the same as it looks on any other day. Rose grabs a bucket and jumps down aboard her, bailing water over the gunnel and tossing it in the direction of the wheelhouse. Half the harbour shows up and immediately starts throwing opinions into the mix. They take to shouting that Rose has to get up out of her before she blows. There is swift decision-making. This is a boat tied up alongside other boats. Never mind the winter's work that went into putting her on the face of this earth. She's a threat.

Within minutes, the boat is cut loose, a funeral pyre drifting out to the middle of the narrow harbour. Rose doesn't know where her father is standing. And she

doesn't know who let the boat go. There is serenity in her movement, as she slips backward away from the wharf, the flames eating her. The crowd eventually disperses, secure in the other boats' safety, and Rose's father retreats to their house to watch. It takes her hours before she tips her bow skyward and goes down. Mushrooms of black black smoke rising until the men from the Bight show up to see if everyone is burned alive. And Rose's father standing in the kitchen window, his hand leaning on the sill. Three times, the hand darts to the mouth to try and smother a sound that betrays him. Unable to pull himself away.

In the coming days, the boat is stripped of her resting place, dragged along the harbour floor and hauled up in the cove, where gulls comb her empty shell for leftovers and wind and salt air pick her clean. The boat could have been saved; Rose is sure of it. She should've been saved.

Rose had never seen work of his hands before. Or if she had, she didn't recognize it and certainly never felt the weight of it. She recalls vague references to his carpentry, watching him slip his cigarette pack back into his shirt pocket at the kitchen table on his lunch-break. He was the foreman on a job, building a house for the barber, when he decided to quit smoking—forty-five years and decided on his lunch-break, to stop. Never smoked another cigarette in his life, though he carried the package in his pocket until the tobacco dried and fell out of the tubes. Rose doesn't know if he was ever really the foreman. She only knows he used to laugh and call himself that, then he'd say there were only two of them working the job. And Rose remembers a winter when her mother was excited because he got a real job in Nova Scotia and he flew over

to go to work as a carpenter. Turned out the company doing the hiring hadn't bothered to tell the Newfoundlanders they'd be scab labour, and he flew home with not a cent earned, minus his tools that were stored in a work-shed that the strikers burned to the ground.

The boat was something Rose knew from its conception. Her father cut the wood for the stem, quarter knees, dead wood, transom, and the timbers. He bought the planks from Lannon's sawmill. There was talk for a long time about the day he found the perfectly curved log for her bow. Rose has no idea where he actually cut the trees, but every time she heard the story of the bowed log, she pictured him combing the hills across the gut, like a hunter. She was mesmerized to think that without his stroke of luck that day, the boat would not have been.

Rose's winter passed visiting that boat in Mr. Corcoran's big back garden, dark stripes of oakum and pitch wedged between seams in blonde wood. Her father stood at her stern on a homemade scaffold, moulding her proportions to fit the picture of her in his head, wood shavings tumbling around the garden, littering the snow. He had the piles all winter from shinnying her keel. Rose and Cela took turns cutting through gardens and yelling over Mr. Corcoran's fence to tell him when dinner was ready. In the spring, a section of fence had to be removed to get her out and a few council workers trailed the behemoth to the water on a Monday. The launch was delayed for days because it was bad luck to put her in the water on a Friday and the town council did not work on weekends. She was herded along Wakeham's narrow lane and through the streets to the slip past the breakwater. Someone brought a camera to get

pictures of her maiden voyage, Rose, and Abbey with Jon in her arms, up forward as she made her way down through the gut. Cela still cries when they talk about it because she showed up at the last minute and got left behind in the rush.

Rose was old enough to be embarrassed by her father's procrastination in cleaning up the garden, until Mr. Corcoran tired of asking and did the job himself. Her father was scraping a living, and not having owned much of value in his own life, he didn't quite understand caring for 'stuff' (the only car he'd ever owned was given him by his brother, which soon after being gifted was demolished by Abbey's husband. Rumour was that he'd been tailgating Abbey in his own car. Rose's father absorbed the loss so that their insurance didn't go to hell).

But then the boat. Because she would fall under stricter Coast Guard rules and regulations if she was forty feet, he built her thirty-nine feet six inches long. She was eleven feet wide, and about seven feet from the bottom of her keel to her gunwales, with about a three-foot draft. She was painted a bright white with a dory green trim and was skirted up to her waterline in red ochre. She looked tall and skinny because her house, instead of extending straightway across her width like other boats, stopped short a foot or so on each side, allowing safe passage from forward to stern.

For six weeks, she was the fastest skiff in the harbour. She could do eight knots easy, a sprinter compared to the others. When he took them for rides around the island, Rose's father would open her up and watch the water shiver in her wake. He wasn't supposed to push her until the engine was seasoned, but a few times he couldn't resist and he'd grin like a boy as she responded to his commands. He'd shout

over the engine, pointing at the froth she was leaving behind and Rose laughed along with him, out of the sheer glory of seeing him so excited. On workdays, he came home as happy, the top catch more often than was good for a man's reputation in a small harbour.

And on a quiet afternoon, fishing done for the day, smoke slipped up and over the stage-head and ascended higher over the rooftops of the stages themselves.

HITCHHIKE

1991

Rose finishes a crazy night and heads home late, at nine-thirty. No Luke. He's somewhere on the highway. Tried to reach Rose but the phone was busy for an hour. So he called her mother to let Rose know he was leaving Bay Bulls by foot. Well. A ride to the turnoff and dropped off on the highway. Barry's woman wouldn't drive out for them on a night like this. So Luke and Barry decided to hitchhike, to get a night home, instead of staying aboard the boat. Hitchhike. Grown men. In fishermen's clothes. Rose waits until ten then calls her father.

Can you come with me? I have to go look for Luke. Mom will have to stay with the kids.

Rose and her father get aboard the Z-24, Rose still in her work cape, stinking of the perm solution that she's been squirting onto hair wrapped in endpapers all day. Two translucent papers sandwiching the tips of women's hair, rolled onto coloured plastic rods and held in place at the scalp by a black rubber band. The smell gives Rose a headache, to top off the aching feet. They stop for gas before heading out to look for two grown men hitchhiking from Witless Bay Line in the dark.

An hour after they climbed out of Pats's pickup truck and started strolling with their thumbs out at the approach of every vehicle, Luke and Barry are sorry for their bargain. The air is as dense and as wet as rainfall, and cold. The sky fades from indigo to inky blackness the colour of squid juice, the kind of unbroken darkness that causes men to stumble. They curse every car that lights their path, only to plunge them back into darkness, as the driver passes without even lifting his foot from the pedal. Luke accepts Barry's offer to share his coat, and shrugs into the heavy green

canvas, the heat from Barry's body lingering in its folds. Luke pulls the two sides of the coat together in front, overlapping the fabric on his chest and crossing his arms to hold it in place, burying his hands in his armpits, until his shivers subside. Luke and Barry take turns shrugging in and out of the coat at fifteen-minute intervals, each absorbing the enduring warmth of the other.

Rose and her father drive through dense sea fog, a thick, London, pea soup, wall of wet smoke that the car penetrates, despite Rose's doubts. The kind that gives you a chill that lasts for days. They crawl forward, Rose imagining the white line at the road's edge, her father's eyes straining to capture figures that might appear before them. On and on they inch, while the men curse their own foolishness as they cross to the other side, giving up any hope of flagging down a stranger on a night like this, wishing for a road sign that will tell them something. On the left, walking towards traffic, they see the headlights coming. Her father catches a glimpse of them.

There they are Rose.

Rose's heart jumps and she exhales the stale breath in her chest, her eyes welling with relief. Her father heaves open the single heavy door on the passenger side, and leans forward to allow the seat back to fold ahead and let the men squeeze in, refusing to get out into the cold dampness to give them access to the back seat, as he grumbles at them.

Get in ye foolish shaggers.

Luke slips the coat off and hands it to Barry, then wedges himself behind her father.

I told Barry you'd come looking for me Rose. I knew you'd come.

TALL

1992

Rose and her father think Luke is wrong about his height; maybe he's forgotten or maybe he was last measured when he was a boy. Her father brings out his measuring tape which has lain dormant in a toolbox for many years. Luke removes his shoes and stands straight against the door frame, feet together and heels touching the wall. Five-eight and a half. Rose and her father laugh in a way that suggests that the tape measure is wrong too.

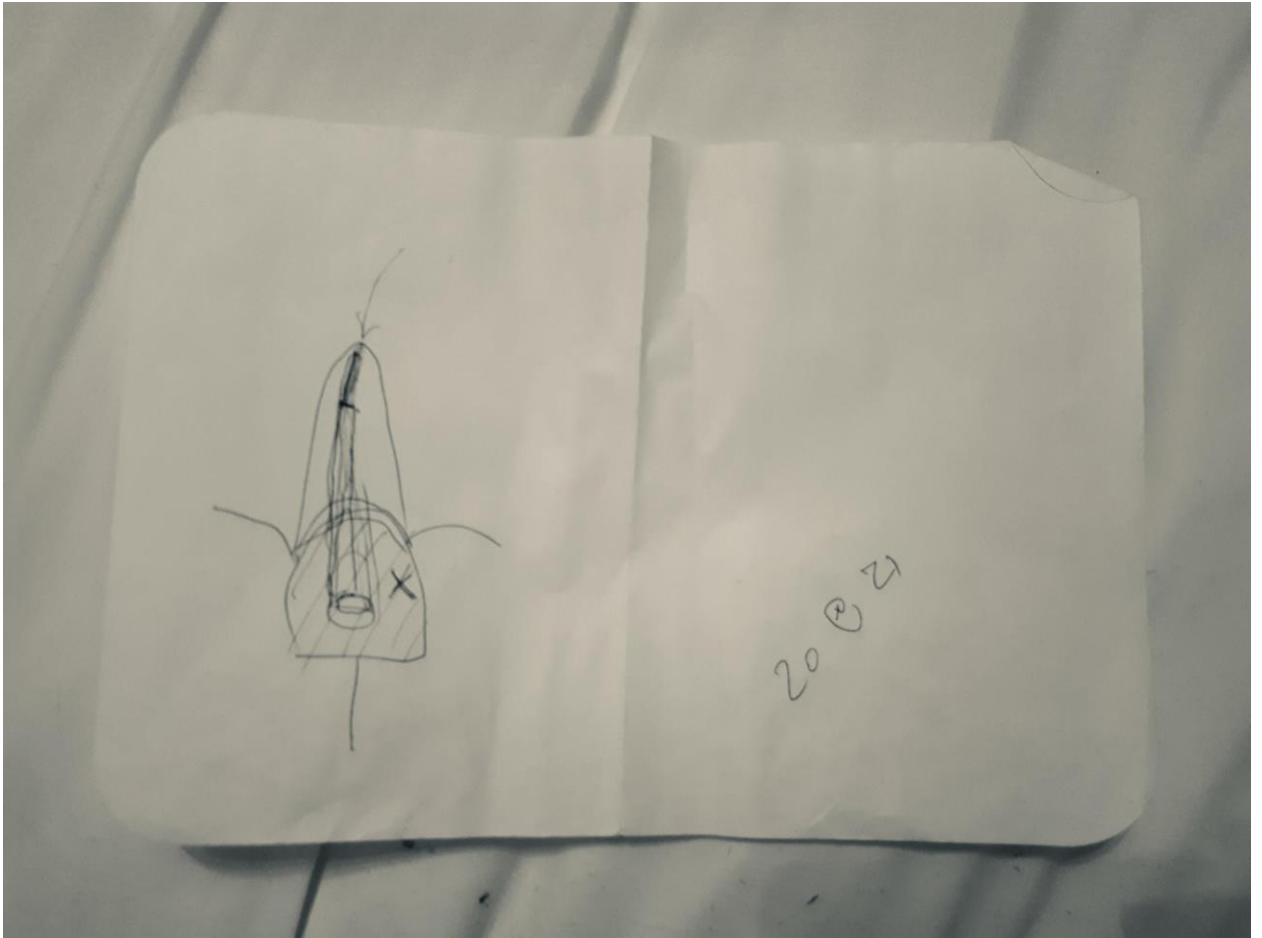
His dark curly hair has started to recede, two semicircles carving themselves either side of his forehead. Not the type to bulk up at the gym; the closest he came to exercise was when he went running once with his brothers, who are weekend athletes—he vomited on the last mile but still kept pace. Rose wonders if Luke was afflicted with Bells' Palsy as a teenager and if a trace of the symptoms can linger, because of that arch in his mouth and the tiny droop in his left eye, which also happens to be somewhat lazy. Rose figures that the lazy eye affects his depth perception, which is why he finds her so attractive—he thinks I'm a nice width and kind of flat, she likes to joke. The handsomest man.

Along with the baked ham and lemon pie, Luke loves the water. He is a natural at things like math but he sometimes embarrasses Rose when he slips up and uses the wrong word for something—he told a joke among a crowd once whose punchline should have been awesome for the guy named Johnny, but in Luke's telling, Johnny had a great organism.

A month after they met, Rose bought Luke a gold chain with an anchor pendant for his birthday, and gave it to him early because she couldn't wait. He didn't

know what to say when she handed him the little vinyl box. He wore it every day and bought a new chain for the anchor after the boys broke it rough-housing at his bachelor party. Truth be told, Luke was likely the instigator of the roughhousing. He used to walk into his mother's kitchen, lift her into his arms, turn her upside down and shake her till loose change fell from her pockets, then lay her gently back on her feet with a "thanks mudder" and head down to the shop for a Pepsi.

Luke takes to Rose's kids like they're his own and brings his son Nate to visit on weekends. He lies on his belly on the floor for hours while Liam runs dinkies over his back and Maggie fastens hair buckles among his curls. He watches *Road to Avonlea* with them on Sundays. And when Emily comes along he is smitten. He hasn't held a baby in years, Nate being older than Maggie, but he tries his hand at diapers and lays stiffly with the baby on his chest, on the couch. Luke tells Rose to go out for an hour; she can use the break and they'll be just fine. Liam likes to wear Luke's big shoes around the house. Luke is five-eight and a half but he stands taller.



SANTA

1992

Luke is sitting at the kitchen table sipping coffee after a late supper, when the porch door opens a few inches and a sliver of Barry appears. His head, with its thick powdered beard, juts into the kitchen as he leans on the doorknob, a wad of tobacco in his cheek.

Where are you coming from dressed like that now?

Just on my way down from the Manor. The seniors had their Christmas party and I did them a favour.

You didn't even need stuffing. In your glory this evening I'm sure.

Ho ho ho.

Barry coughs on the last ho and Luke laughs and shakes his head at the red polyester straining across Barry's barrel chest and protruding belly. Even the fleshy nose looks the part, the broken capillaries that extend away from it blending with flushed cheeks. They chat about tomorrow morning's road trip to drop off the last load of nets for the winter. Light footsteps patter towards the kitchen from the hallway and Liam appears in his pajamas.

Can I ge...

His words catch in his throat and he stares at the doorway, not trusting his eyes with the spectre before him, his eyeglasses left sitting on his night table. He gapes at Barry with his mouth open before he pulls his eyes to Luke's face and back to Barry's, then to Luke's again. Luke winks at Liam before he comes to his senses, turns on his heel, and dashes back the way he came, thrusting himself across his room and into bed as

quick as his legs can carry him. He lies on his back, straining to hear the voices through the wall, until they die away and Luke appears in his bedroom doorway.

Liam is frozen in place.

You kn-know Santa?

Yes, my son, I knows Santa all to pieces.

Liam stares at Luke as if he is another apparition, wiping his eyes as he reaches towards the bedside table and slips his round lenses over his nose.

I can put in a good word for you with him if you promise to be good for your mother.

Liam nods his head without breaking eye contact.

Do you promise?

Yes. I promise.

Luke walks to the bed and bends to pull the covers over Liam, tucking him snugly away.

That's a good boy then.

Liam pushes the covers away and wraps both arms around Luke's neck, hugging him.

I'll make sure Santa knows, buddy.

He rumples Liam's hair.

Good night Liam. Sleep tight.

Good night Luke.

Luke closes the door behind him and Liam stares at the ceiling. Luke knows Santa.

SEA OVER BOW

1994

Rose supposes this is how it happened. They were on their way in from the Grand Banks in a boat that should never've seen the banks, pushed along by a storm straight out of the history books. The waves rose up to their full height—a rogue wave maybe—fifty-five feet high, charging at them. And they sitting there—or lying in their bunks down forward—in a fifty foot boat that should never've seen the banks. Anyone who knows anything about physics—which Rose doesn't—knows that a boat can only withstand waves up to its own length. Fifty-five foot waves.

Rose got up late to answer the phone.

Hello.

Hello? Rose? It's Peggy. Peggy Coates.

Oh. Hi Peggy. How are you?

Good my dear. Luke asked me to give you a call because the reception is bad on the radio. I hardly heard a word Pat said. They're making decent time now though. They'll be landing at six in the morning.

It's the only time Luke didn't call Rose himself. They haven't spoken since she left him at the wharf nine days ago. Him and Barry, who had the good sense to develop a flu before they untied and was left standing on the wharf to find his own way home. Luke always calls Rose on the way in. Rose's father called her over and over in the three days before they were due.

Did you hear from Luke yet.

Did he call.

Did you hear from him yet.

Like a metronome.

He and her mother are getting Maggie and Liam off to school and taking care of the baby till Rose and Luke get home. Rose spent way too long in the shower, thinking about Luke until the water ran cold. She's running way behind. They'll be landing by now and she's not out the door yet.

When Luke calls tell him I'll be there by seven-thirty.

It's raining, and Rose is driving fast. She decides to stop and get a little lunch for Luke at the gas station. It'll make him smile, that lopsided smile. The five minutes it takes will be worth it. He probably ran out of Pepsi days ago. Rose arrives at the wharf but they're not in yet. It's seven-thirty. She pulls out onto the head of the wharf. Sits there. Drives up the hill. Back down again to the wharf. Up the hill again. Pacing back and forth the narrow road. At nine-thirty she calls Peggy from the pay phone in the porch of the IGA.

Why didn't you call me before you went out there, to see if I'd heard from them?

You said they'd be in by six.

Well my dear I never goes out till I hears from Pat.

Luke usually just calls me the night before.

Why don't you go the office and see if Bud's heard from them?

Rose doesn't know Bud from Adam and has no interest in checking with him for messages from Luke. Up the coiled road to the top of the hill again. She parks on a

point to watch the harbour. When she spots them, it will still be forty minutes or so before they land. Shit, Rose thinks. Why didn't Luke let me know he'd be late. So she drinks the Pepsi she bought him and she eats his orange Aero bar.

Winds down the hill again. Back to the IGA to call her father. Going to be late. He'll get lunch for Maggie and Liam. But they're expecting Rose and Luke to be home. Up the hill again to the point to watch. The rain beats a worried refrain on the windshield. Rose sings along.

Precious Lord, take my hand, lead me on, let me stand, I am tired, I am weak,
I am worn; through the storm, through the night, lead me on to the light, take
my hand, precious Lord, lead me home.

Rose wonders what made her think of that song.

She finally goes to the office to speak to Bud at 10:30, because she can't sit all day watching an empty harbour. Rose opens the door to the fish-plant, assaulted by the smell of fish guts and booming echoes of the building that are second nature to Luke. She asks a group of men where the office is, walks up the narrow stairs, crosses the large room to the desk, asks to speak to Bud Byrne. The secretary takes her name. She disappears and out he comes. He isn't a bit surprised to find a wife standing in the plant office who he's never laid eyes on before.

I'm Rose.

Rose. Nice to meet you. Don't go worrying now about the boys. I'm not even concerned. Coates is a seasoned fisherman. Wouldn't be out there if he didn't think he could handle it.

Rose nods along as he talks.

Do you want a cup of tea.

She follows him to the kitchen where he leaves her and sends the secretary to serve tea. People come and go. Small talk. Quiet. Then an old man comes in and sits down, introduces himself—he used to run the plant before he turned it over to his son.

So who are you, now.

Rose. Rose Tremblett. Luke Tremblett's wife.

No glimmer of recognition.

He fishes with Pat Coates.

The old man looks her up and down in her chair.

Well my dear, you better get down on your knees and start praying to Jesus if your husband is out there in this with Pat Coates.

The radio is turned off. There is no window in the kitchen. When her cup is empty, Rose's father calls.

Cela is coming out to wait with you.

Why.

No reason. Just don't want you sitting there all day by yourself.

Pat Coates's son comes and goes. At twelve o'clock Rose goes back out to the office to see Bud again.

Oh, I'm not too concerned. If it was anyone else I would be, but Pat...

Rose tries to focus on his face when she realizes he's still talking.

If they're not in by five o'clock I'll start to worry.

Rose wipes her nose in her fist.

If they're not in by five I'll be in the mental.

Cela had woken early, before daylight, and Luke was the first thing on her mind. Rose's father and mother spent the afternoon at Rose's house, and her father walked to school to meet Maggie and Liam. Many of Ed's and the other men's family and friends gathered at *The Lighthouse* and whittled the day away together. The lift bridge across the gut did not cease its rise and fall, its methodical releasing of boats into the bay under its tutelage and gathering them back again.

At five-thirty Cela and Rose leave and drive to St. John's to wait for Luke. Someone brings Maggie and Liam and Emily to Rose. And Rose and Cela stay up all night, huddled together on the couch. The baby swaddled in her chair, with its little white puffs of cloud floating in blue sky. And between phone calls to Abbey they talk and tell stories and laugh. Between watching the rain pelting the picture window, staring out into the impenetrable black, and startled jumps every time the phone rings. Rose spends three parts of the night getting second hand news. And standing in the window praying that Luke isn't freezing. And then standing in the window, praying that Luke is freezing. She can warm him when he comes. And at five o'clock in the morning Rose gets sick of it. So she calls the Coast Guard herself. And she talks to someone named George.

ETIQUETTE

1992

Rose loves Christmas. Spends hours hanging balls and stringing garland, till she's happy with the perfectly aligned ornaments. The tree is the only place Rose likes symmetry. Every year she changes it. Yards of popcorn strung with needle and thread while it's still warm. Clear plastic balls that Rose bought at the craft store and filled with moss and miniature birds in hats. Personalized ornaments that say "Merry Xmas Love Mom" with the year engraved. Now Rose pays extra to add "and Luke" to the love. Rose lets Maggie and Liam help decorate the tree and rearranges their handiwork when they are tucked safely in bed.

Gifts are always boxed and wrapped in matching paper. Rose is willing to use gift wrap with Santa faces and trains, but they are interspersed with stripes and snowflakes, and all have solid backgrounds in coordinating colours. Santa doesn't get much of the credit in Rose's house.

Rose serves turkey on her grandmother's white platter and ladles sides onto matching serving dishes. Water is scooped from the vegetable pot into a dipper, where cabbage is boiled alone, to keep everything else clean. The potatoes are whipped. Creamery butter, salt, milk. Pease pudding is peppered, buttered, and mashed. Carrots, turnip, and parsnip on a single platter. Cabbage alone. Gravy in boats with stands. Cranberry sauce sliced and fanned. Not a speck on stovetop or cupboard, Rose cleans as she goes. The full platters warm in the oven until family arrives and everyone gets out of their boots. Her father's eyeglasses steam as the kitchen heat hits them and Rose hugs him before wiping his lenses with the hem of

her apron. Christmas is Rose's favourite time of the year. Rose seats Luke at the head of the table.

Oh, she's letting me be the boss today, Granddad.

Rose's father hides his laugh with a cough.

Would you mind saying grace before we start, saucy-face.

Luke bows his head. Then, before he begins, an explosion of gas erupts from beneath the table.

Luke! For Chrissake!

Liam's head swivels from his mother's face to Luke's, and back. His eyes are saucers behind his round lenses.

What makes you think it was me, hun?

Because no one else would do it! I'm mad Luke. It's not funny.

Luke looks at Maggie and Liam with a straight face.

Sorry hun. Now guys, we need to remember that we can't fart at the dinner table. Especially on Christmas day.

Liam concentrates his energy to his cheeks and bum, trying his best to fart, Maggie makes a mental note to hold her toots except when she's alone, and Rose prays for patience, before adding a quick thank you.

SLIDE

1993

Rose is late finishing the last of her Christmas shopping and really wants to get it done. She was held up at Fabricville when she came across a bolt of faux fur zebra print fabric that she has no use for but can't leave behind. Rose maneuvers the entire roll into the Colt, its end jammed over the headrest of the passenger seat. She'll find something to do with it. In her excitement, Rose forgets to buy the Christmas fabric she went for. The roads are slippery as Rose pulls onto Kenmont Road, but she has to stop at Woolco, and then whatever she has she has. Nate wants a GT Racer but his mother says to get him a snowsuit and good winter boots.

Rose chooses a navy blue two-piece snowsuit with red patches on its elbows and knees. The patches are reinforced with a hard, flexible liner and extra padding. She gets the same for Liam, and a pink and purple one for Maggie, with white fur around the hood. Half an hour later, Rose's cart is brimming as she heads to the checkout line.

Nate opens his presents when he visits on Christmas Eve. That's the rule in Rose's house—any gifts you're given before the twenty-fifth are fair game then and there.

Cool Dad. That'll keep me some warm. Hope I don't get mixed up with Liam's—he'd get lost in mine.

Well I guess we'll have to put your initials on your coats—wouldn't want to go losing Liam on his mother.

Oh, Nate, I almost forgot. There's something else there for you.

Rose goes into the hallway and is back in a second with a large box wrapped in Santa Claus paper. Nate claps his hands together and rips into Santa as soon as Rose lays the box on the floor in front of him.

Awww Dad. Ya never. Thank you thank you.

Don't thank me, my son. You can thank Rosie for that one.

Well I figured what's the use of a snowsuit and good winter boots if you have no slide to break your neck on. Just promise me you'll be careful Nate, or I'll be the one in trouble with your mother.

Nate gives Rose a hug, patting her on the back like old men do.

You're a hundred Nate.

She squeezes him and kisses his head.

Rose's Pet

1993

Not two months home from Jon's funeral, and Luke's sister tells Rose that she got the look of baby on her, as she smiles for a picture with Luke in front of the tree. Rose says absolutely not, think I'd know before you would if I was pregnant. Abbey jumps to her mind, and Rose's chest tightens. Sure enough, a week later, Rose is throwing her guts up in the toilet, shoo-ing Maggie and Liam out of the bathroom, squeaking out Mommy's alright, between heaves. How in god's name is she going to tell Abbey.

*

Rose remembers when Jon was born, the day before her tenth birthday. That made him hers, in her childish mind. She loved him. Went to Abbey's house every day after school, even though everyone knew that the house was haunted, to look at Jon, and hope, on the off chance, that she might get to hold him. Once, when she was there late, she held him while Abbey slipped into her work uniform, and said Rose, wanna go for a drive with me. And in a singsong voice, with a broad smile, unusual for Abbey, I need to go get him home from the Legion, but I don't want his buddies thinking I'm nagging, so I'll say I need him at work. As they drive, Abbey chats to her from the front seat, while Rose coos to Jon in his car-seat, the quietest, happiest baby in the world. Rose is happy too.

Abbey says, when we get to the beach before the Legion, remind me and I'll tell you how many miles we drove. Abbey says, do you like your teacher this year. Rose likes her teacher, Abbey knows she always likes her teacher, but she just nods in the darkness. When they leave the Legion without him, Rose reminds Abbey that she didn't tell her how many miles.

Oh sorry, I forgot.

How did you forget, Abbey.

That was just a distraction Rose.

Rose remembers the sunny afternoon that Abbey let her take Jon for a stroll. She strapped him snugly in his seat and warned Rose that he was not to be taken out of the stroller. Jon had just started walking, and Abbey had managed to scrape together enough money somewhere, to get the special boots he needed. The boots were ugly but would support Jon's ankles and keep them straight. Rose didn't dare unstrap his harness, but she unlaced the boots from his poor little feet, and tucked them alongside him in the dark canvas seat. Jon gurgled away, twisting his head to look up and back at Rose as she hummed to herself, imagining that he was really hers and that they could walk as far as they wanted. Jon curled his chubby fingers around one of the boots and chewed on its nose. Rose was afraid he might damage it, but she didn't have the heart to make him cry, so she left him to suck on the brown leather.

Rose stumbled on a loose plank on the boardwalk, and when she looked up again, the boot was sailing through the rungs of the wooden railing, into the black water between the pilings and the trap skiff tied up alongside. Rose sees long trails of

thick kelp, or eels, shooting out from the creosote logs that bolster the walkway, as she strains to watch the boot's swirling trajectory in the dark water. Rose does not cry. Her mind races with ideas to save the boot—if she yelled to the man steering the speed boat up through the gut, he might hear her, and come and rescue the boot. She could jump over herself, and retrieve the boot from the bottom, but how would she manage to surface, and how would she keep herself afloat. And then, with wild relief, she realizes that she cannot leave the baby alone on the boardwalk, and that she will not be diving into the inky, dirty water today.

Her heart is heavy as she perches her arms on the rail, staring down into the water, until Jon fidgets in his seat, willing Rose's eyes to come back to his little face. The baby is safe. That's all that matters, she tells herself as she hoists the stroller's hind wheels into the air, and turns it back the way they came. It's a slow walk, Rose trying her best to hold Jon's gaze as he stares up at her, which is more than she manages with Abbey, when she gets back to the house. In the following days, Abbey's husband will whisper to her that saucy Rose threw the boot overboard out of spite, and Abbey, in her grief over the loss of the boot, will let it seep in. Even at ten, Rose knows that she doesn't like her brother-in-law, and he dislikes her right back. Rose doesn't care as long as she gets to see Jon but sometimes, after the boot, there are long spaces between visits.

*

Rose, I think they are telling Abbey that Jon has a ten percent chance, just to prepare her.

Rose stares at Cela in the darkness.

No, Cela, he's eighteen. This can't happen.

Cela braces herself and barks.

Yes, Rose, it can. And I think it will. Now calm down. I need you to listen to me. I need you to help me when we get there. And I need you to know this is happening.

I've always felt like we had a protective barrier or something, around us, Cela.

Well we don't, Rose.

Neither of them know how long they sit in the car, quiet, before they climb their father's steps. They'd left earlier, deciding that everyone needed to get some sleep while they waited for more news. Rose was always afraid of motorcycles. Her fingernails hurt the warm softness of Cela's palm, as she grips tight. After a loud knock, their father opens the door in his plaid bathrobe and moccasins, and stands there, framed in the doorway, staring at his daughters. Rose blurts.

He's alive, Dad, he's still alive.

Cela and Rose spend a long night, whispering hope to their parents, until, at daybreak, the telephone rings, piercing their cocoon. Rose reaches for the receiver and brings it to her ear.

He's gone, Abbey screams into the phone, and slams it down.

*

Rose is mad at herself as she rises from her knees in the bathroom. How could she have forgotten about Abbey. Drinking wine from a paper cup, in Luke's truck, like a teenager. They tumbled into bed without brushing their teeth, and Rose hardly noticed her father's kiss on her cheek, and his assurance that the kids were well settled, on his way out. Never mind Abbey. Jon not cold in the ground, and she, like a deer in rut.

I Slept with your Father Last Night

1993

Rose and Cela board the plane together, the worse for wear, their mother having gone before, wanting nothing to do with the deceit. For the best anyway, as it turned out, they having made quite a spectacle running through the gates behind the ticket agent, who decided they would be making this flight, whether they knew their own birthdays or not. The other passengers gave them little smiles of victory or threw sighs their way, depending on how aggravated they let themselves get about the ten minute delay in leaving.

Abbey's brother-in-law, Jerry, several people ahead of them in line, had nodded and done small half waves as he wound his way to the Air Canada counter. Rose has about as much regard for Jerry as she does for his brother, Abbey's husband, who is a wedge between her and her sister. Jerry is short. Balding. Brutish.

Hey Rosie. Come. Skip through.

Then surveying the line as he rises on his stacked heels, talking to no one in particular.

We're heading to a funeral out West.

No no, Jerry, you go on. We're alright. I have to say goodbye to the kids anyway.

Rose had let Maggie and Liam come to the airport, against her own better judgement.

Please mommy please. I promise I won't cry.

Yes you will Maggie, my darling, you can't help yourself.

No mommy, I promise-promise I'll be good. I will not cry.

Rose kisses the top of each of their heads as Luke picks Maggie up, body and bones. She turns back to Cela as Luke wedges himself, Liam, and Maggie—stiff as a poker in his arms—through the sliding door. Already back to worrying whether she can pull this off, Rose wonders if Jerry's ticket agent has heard too much.

Please, dear sweet baby Jesus, let us get a different agent than his. She counts the people in line, trying to determine who will fall where at the counters, sweating in her sensible layers of clothes. Cela leans in to Rose as they approach the counter of Jerry's ticket agent.

Just let me do the talking, Rose.

Rose is more than glad to let Cela handle it. Her nerves are shot already.

We'll have two standby tickets please. Edmonton.

You know twenty-four is the age limit for purchasing a standby ticket?

Yes, we know.

Rose and Cela have a birth certificate and a social insurance card each. Not a thing this missus can do about it. What's five years anyway. They hand the identification across. The agent takes the cards and punches at the keyboard, while Rose steadies herself with her arms folded on the counter, her chin trying not to quiver. The agent glances down at a birth certificate.

When is your birthday Ms. Donovan?

November second.

Cela steps closer and places her hand on the back of Rose's neck, rubs back and forth.

Stephanie, honey, you know your birthday is November fourth.

The agent glances at the birth certificate.

It says November fifth.

Rose puts her head in her arms to wipe the tears and snot away. Not going to get there.

Cela looks the ticket agent in the eyes.

She's just upset. She knows her birthday.

Not everyone has eight thousand dollars lying around, just waiting to be spent on two last-minute tickets to Alberta. Cela puts all of her hope in the ticket agent.

Our sister's son...

You're with the gentleman in the yellow sweater? Going to his nephew's...

No. Not with him. Well...yes...same nephew.

The agent looks back to the screen.

Do you need to check bags?

She hands the cards back quickly.

No. Just the carry-ons.

Good. We need to get your boarding passes done. They've finished boarding.

What's the initial for Donovan, again?

Rose steps in to help out.

D.

And what's the initial for Brennan?

B.

Rose is not impressed, but at least it appears she's getting them on this flight. The attendant grabs the passes as they print.

The doors are closing. Come with me. We'll have to run. They'll need your IDs, keep them out.

Cela grabs Rose's hand and they run full tilt through the tiny airport behind the woman with the Air Canada badge. She rushes them through security and to the gate.

We made it. Show them your ID.

The Air Canada woman pushes the boarding passes in front of the gate attendant, and waves Cela and Rose to the walkway.

Go. Good luck.

As they run the last few feet, Rose glances back and waves.

She is breathless as they board the airplane together, and Cela gives her hand a squeeze before she finally lets go. When they have taxied down the runway and are well into their ascent and levelling off, Cela looks at Rose, her hands clenched onto the armrests.

Rose, I thought you had us finished when you gave the wrong initials for the names. We're M and S. Marilyn and Stephanie. Where in God's name did you get the 'B' and the 'D.'

Rose looks back at Cela.

Cela, I swear to God I thought she was testing us to see if we knew the initial for the last names. Brennan and Donovan. Because I got...

Rose stops and does air quotes.

...”my” birthday wrong.

Cela laughs loudly, drawing another indignant stare from the woman across the aisle. They dissolve into titters like twelve-year-olds, before sinking back into their seats for the long flight, thinking about their sister Abbey.

Rose had settled the kids’ things and the hamster in at Granddad’s house before they left for the airport. She laid out a set of clothes for Maggie and Liam for each day of school while she’s gone, not trusting Luke after the fiasco that time Maggie showed up at school in a flowy “skirt” that the teacher discovered had sleeves. Luke said that the kids liking their outfits was more important than wearing skirts as skirts and blouses as blouses.

Rose had decided not to leave her father alone, and Luke could use the help with the kids anyway, so Maggie, Liam, and Luke would bunk out with him all week. Her heart hurt seeing her father stand by the china cabinet in the grey, suede moccasins she bought for him, the fox trim cut away with blunt scissors because the flyaway fur stuck to his pants-legs like cat hairs. His head is lowered and his hand is resting on the cabinet’s edge, to steady himself. Rose stops to kiss his cheek and tell him she loves him before she rushes out the door. Those words rarely pass between them, but she has never left his house, without leaning in and placing her lips on his cheek. And she has never left his house without feeling the unspoken words. His hand rises from the cabinet’s edge to his mouth, an unconscious attempt at composure.

That’s our problem sometimes Rose honey. We loves too much. She hugs him and tells him Luke will come straight back from the airport.

Rose's father and Luke establish a pattern. Luke dozes in bed, while her father sits in the living room, watching his shows, late into the night. When it's bedtime, he rouses Luke, who moves to the couch to settle in until after daylight, when they both get up to get Maggie and Liam off to school. Rose's father makes them a breakfast of milk and buttery toast piled high—like he did for Rose years ago—while Luke wrestles with ponytails and tucked shirts and brushing of teeth. Granddad doesn't know why youngsters don't like warm milk anymore.

On the third night, Rose's father decides it's not sensible to be hauling Luke up out of his sleep every night.

You can stay in the bed Luke. Only foolishness for you to be sleeping on the couch.

No b'y, that's alright, I don't mind it one bit.

Luke imagines the night he'd have, trying not to roll into his father-in-law's back, in the old water bed.

Suit yourself.

On the fifth night, Rose's father gives Luke the heads up before ducking into the bathroom.

On my way in a few minutes, Luke, wake up.

Luke half wakes, then dozes off again before John finally comes to bed.

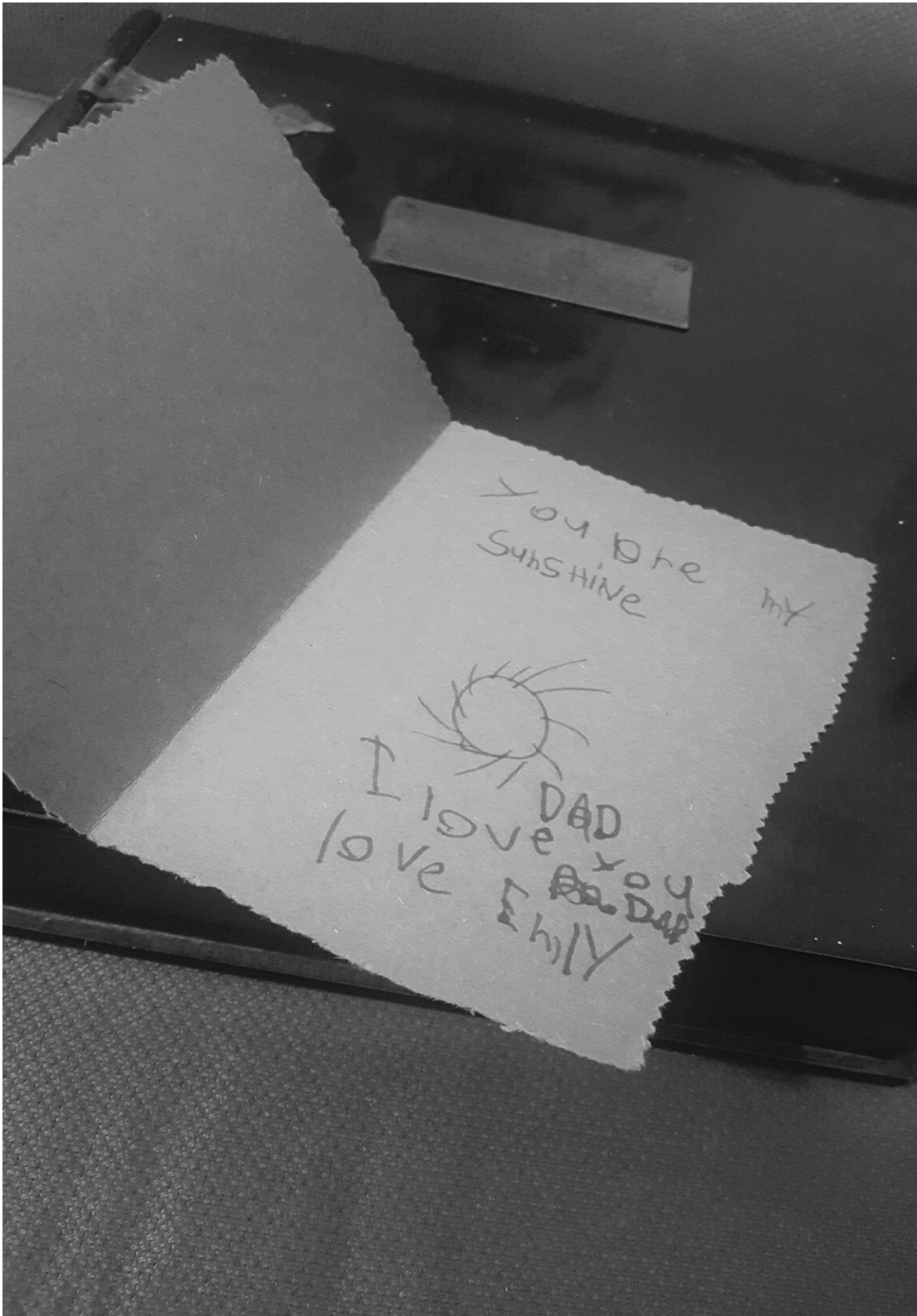
Luke. Get up if you're getting.

No answer. Ah well, John thinks as he slips his feet out of the moccasins, using his right toe to push the slipper down over his left heel. He slides his suspenders down

his shoulders, unbuttons his shirt, and drapes it across the back of a chair, his belly big and round and hard. The suspenders dangle from charcoal-coloured Haggar dress pants that Abbey sent him, as he lays them across the shirt. Finally, he kicks out of his socks, leaving them bunched into balls on the floor. He sits on the navy, polyester velvet side-rail of the bed, his cotton boxers reaching halfway to his knee. He lowers himself into the waterbed like a scuba diver easing himself over the side of a boat, back first, the water in the bed's bladder rising around him as he settles down and down. Luke shifts in his sleep, absorbing the ripples as John's body displaces the water, but Luke does not wake.

When Rose makes her daily call in the morning, Luke grins into the phone, the right side of his mouth rising higher than the left.

Guess who I slept with last night, hun.



IMMORTAL

1994

Rose had to tell the kids that he's gone. Maggie and Liam in the one bed. Still in their clothes. She'd put them to bed like it. In a little single bed in the basement. So they wouldn't be kept awake all night. Two of them lying together. Rose teetering on the edge of the bed.

Guys, we think Lukey is gone.

Liam looking at Rose then turning away. The quietest thing.

Young people are immortal. They lose their immortality one of two ways. Either quickly, by dying, or slowly, by living, mortality getting heavier by the year. Luke and Rose were immortal when they met, but they'd lived enough to know they wanted better, and could get it if they were serious about it. They were serious. They made love two nights after they met and then wondered why they waited so long. Luke gave up drinking and Rose settled down and they made it.

Luke and Rose were building a house. The day they started it, Luke pegged the perimeter and dug holes for the foundation, which he would fill with cement pylons poured into fibreboard forms. When Rose surveyed his progress that first day, the grass was still thigh-high, except where Luke had tamped it down with his footprints, and she couldn't imagine their house growing within the twine outline. It was too much to take in. As Rose wandered within the parameters of her home, the grass swished in the wind and the first drops of a torrential downpour hit her cheeks.

The next day Rose cried because a mouse had drowned in one of the rain-filled holes overnight; it bothered her that the mouse died in their house.

When Luke wasn't on the boat, he was at their house every chance he got. It was late summer before the second floor was added and he would hoist Liam up the ladder to see his bedroom. Maggie was afraid of heights and decided she'd wait for a staircase. She satisfied herself by sitting on the rough wood floor of their living room and peering up through the spaces in the ceiling, catching glimpses of Liam as he ran between what would be their bedrooms. By the time they clued up with the fish, Luke should be ready for windows and doors.

Rose was anxious to get it over with. Their last trip for the fall. They were hoping for a couple tuna to recoup the losses on the coast of Labrador. But the trip was disappointing. They were heading home with six thousand pounds of turbot and two leftover tuna tags. For days before they left, Luke wondered if he should bother to go. All it would have taken was one word from Rose and he'd have stayed home. She kept her mouth shut.

Rose had to tell the kids that he was gone. Liam had just started calling him Dad. Maggie and Liam in the one bed.

Guys, we think Lukey is gone.

Liam looking at Rose then turning away. The quietest thing.

SNOWFLAKE

1994

Rose is sitting on the edge of Maggie's bed, tucking the pink patchwork under her chin, while Maggie's hands dart out from under the quilt again and reach for her mother.

There's a big girl now. You can fall asleep without Mommy lying down with you this once, can't you?

Rose is wearing a black sequined dress and heels, her bump barely showing. They don't get a night out very often and she's hoping to stay until their friends are carried out of the hall on the men's shoulders.

I don't want you to go.

Yes, darling, but Mommy and Luke will be home before you know it.

Will you come kiss me again when you get home? Will I still be awake?

I'll come kiss you. I promise.

Luke pokes his head around the corner of the half-open door, and immediately the hamster's cage falls into his line of vision. He half whispers at Rose.

Uh-oh. Hun, the hamster's dead I think.

Maggie sits straight up in bed.

Snowflake!

Rose stares at Luke and speaks in a soothing voice.

No. The hamster is just sleeping.

No hun, I think he's dead.

Rose holds Luke's gaze and switches to an insistent sing-song voice.

No, Luke, the hamster is not dead. The hamster is asleep. Of course it's asleep. Like all good little girls.

Luke looks at Rose as if she's lost her mind, pushes the bedroom door open, reaches the cage in two strides. He eases his big hand through the tiny door, picks the hamster up by his nubby tail, and takes it from the cage. He raises his hand to eye level and shakes the hamster as if he's ringing a child-sized bell.

Look, hun, I told you. It's dead.

Maggie looks from the hamster to Rose and her face crumples. Rose heaves a loud sigh in Luke's direction as she pushes off her shoes and lies beside Maggie in the single bed, cuddling their heads together on the pillow.

I'm sorry Maggie. I thought your mom...

Rose shoos Luke out the door and he closes it gently. He grabs the ends of the unknotted necktie dangling down his chest as he heads to the living room, and folds into a chair to wait. Luke shakes his head. He hopes Rose gets Maggie to sleep.

RECORD

1994

Rose sits in her father's living room and waits for the police officer to arrive. She understands that this is standard procedure and that it won't take very long. Rose is in no hurry. She has nowhere, really, to be. The baby is sleeping, and Maggie and Liam are in school, to keep them occupied. They have no need to witness all this mayhem. All this adult upset.

The policeman is escorted into the living room and Rose rises and shakes his hand. He introduces himself and mumbles something about her troubles. Rose sinks back onto the couch, knowing that he doesn't expect chit chat or tea. He is not company.

Do you mind if I ask you a few questions...Rose.

No, that's fine.

Thank you. I guess we'll start by asking if your husband had...has any identifying marks.

What do you mean.

I mean like birthmarks. Or scars. Tattoos.

Oh. Well. He has a tiny dark spot on his lower left side. Hardly big enough for a stranger to notice though. His mouth droops a little when he smiles.

The young police officer shifts in his seat, touches the pulse in his temple.

Scars. Tattoos.

Yes. He has four tattoos. On his arms.

Can you tell me about them.

He has one on each of his upper arms and two on his forearms.

Rose and the officer sit looking at each other. Rose turns the questions over. The answers. It feels like she is doing something. Like she's contributing. The officer looks down at his notepad and draws.

Can you describe the tattoos.

He has one that says Mom. In a heart.

And where is that located.

On his left arm. Up here.

Rose feels like an actor. This is not real. She's part of a search party looking for a missing person, combing through underbrush for signs that they passed this way.

Okay, good. What else.

He has one that says Death Before Dishonour. With a skull. On his right arm.
Down here.

Oh. Was he in the Marine Corps.

No. Why.

It's their emblem. I just thought...

No. He was never in the armed forces.

That's fine.

He has one that says Charlene. In a ribbon. On his upper right arm. I colour that one in with black pen sometimes.

The police officer scribbles in his notepad again. He writes 'Charlene' in small letters.

Please tell me about the last one.

Homeward Bound. With a ship. On his lower left arm.

The officer does not look up.

Does he have a dentist. Would he have dental records.

I've never seen him have so much as a toothache. His teeth are good. Yes, I'm sure he'd have dental records. Dr. Greene.

The policeman rises from his chair a little more abruptly than Rose would expect for a man discussing potential dental records. Identifying marks. He is anxious to be gone, Rose notices now. Restless to get back to his office, to log details of tattoos and dental records that may come in handy. Paperwork.

Rose understands the policeman's need to be useful. His rush to get out of the room she's sitting in, to get to the dentist's office. In case one of the bodies washes up from fifty miles offshore, so bloated by the time it reaches home, that dental records will be the only way of knowing which of the men has shown up. The policeman will have everything in hand. Rose understands.

Rose wants Luke to know that she misses him already. Every action is carefully orchestrated to insinuate it. She walks slowly through the drag of heavy air in every room she enters, her muscles and her sinew and her bones participating in the protest. She draped herself over Luke's car in his mother's driveway—was that only two days ago—stroking the warm bonnet, and noticed the neighbours watching. Sat

in the passenger seat when they left the Tremblett's driveway, Cela at the wheel, stopping in the lineup of cars, waiting for the fishing boats to pass under the lift bridge, so they could head back home. Sat in the passenger seat behind a lineup of cars, exposed. Feeling like the car was transparent and everyone—walking by with their hoods tied tight against the wind, or glancing in rearview mirrors as salt water sprayed over their windshields, or raising corners of lace to look out their kitchen windows—could see Rose's toes clenched inside her socks, her heart clenched inside her coat. Rose prayed that Barry's wife wouldn't push her curtain aside and see Rose, see that Rose knows that Barry is still alive. Rose doesn't know the things that she will learn, that lie dormant for now, in her stilted movement, her going through the motions. She only knows that Luke is gone and she misses him already. As indelibly as if it were carved into her skin.

TREE

1995

Rose walks in the back door and heads through the kitchen into the living room. She feels like something is different. The Christmas tree is missing.

Love of Christ. Who did that now? Haven't even got a picture of the youngsters in front of it yet.

February's over Rose. You said you'd take it down in February.

I know February's over. Who took down the goddamn tree?

Mom came over and did it.

Well Mom had no business. Did she take a picture?

She was only being helpful Rose.

She thought she was.

We can get a picture.

Okay.

Cela pulls on her boots and a sweater, traipses out the front door, around the side of the house through snow halfway to her knees, grasps the tail end of the dead tree, drags it back around and in through the door again; it is curled inward on itself, scraps of tinsel clinging to the arthritic branches as it is forced through the doorway arse foremost, dry needles abandoning ship and scattering to the far corners of the hallway.

There. We'll set it up and snap away.

We can just decorate the bottom and sit them on the floor.

Cela sets the tree back in the green metal stand in the corner and tightens the screws. Rose rifles through dog-eared cardboard boxes and adds some homemade ornaments and a string of red plastic beads to the lower branches, while Maggie changes into her dark green crushed velvet lounge pants and tunic, and Liam voices an objection to the debacle before him that falls on deaf ears. Maggie strolls back into the living room clasping a gold chain-link belt around her waist, sits in front of the partially decorated tree, and scoops Emily into her lap on the floor. Rose cajoles Liam to join in the effort and he finally scoots a little plastic yellow chair in front of the tree and plops down in his t-shirt and jeans. The frame of the camera captures Maggie smiling straight into it, Emily bouncing in her sister's arms, a few leftovers from months ago hanging on the bottom quarter of an unadorned, dead tree, and Liam slouched in his seat trying to sit still, tears streaming out from under his round lenses.

Alright my babies. Let's have some ice cream.

Rose exhales as she rises from her crouch.

COMPENSATION

1994

Rose doesn't know what the rush was, for the man from Worker's. She wants to tell him they're not cold in their graves yet. But she supposes they are. Rose sits at Bee's kitchen table, who was nice enough to offer her house for the meeting. She sits beside Trish, across from Bee and the man. The women attempt small talk, but they don't really know each other, and no one has slept in days. There's not a trivial thought among them. The man is here to walk them through the process; he rustles the documents and forms that he's brought for the women. They watch him as he talks, not absorbing a single word; he shuffles his papers again. Trying to get them to focus is useless. Easier to just run through his spiel, then fill out the forms himself, and have the wives sign. They lay their husbands' birth certificates and social insurance cards on the table in front of him, each in their turn, like children. He wishes he could go outside for a draw.

When the man packs his things into his briefcase and shakes each of their hands, the women sit still at the table, and watch through the window as he leaves. They glance at each other, fish for words to share. The women breathe their husband's names, forgetting to use past tense. Bee says Ed, me and Ed might have our rows, but if he was here now, he'd know he was loved. Bee is tall, and substantial, and hates her thick ankles. She inhales deeply, and exhales. He'd know he was loved. It's the first time that Rose has been inside Bee's house. She's turned the

car around in the driveway of the pale mint saltbox a couple of times, dropping Ed off after a trip.

*

Run me on down the hill now, Rose, like the good woman you are.

Where to, Ed.

The shop.

Ed is as salty as they come, with his ruddy complexion, but his ginger blonde hair, and perpetual grin, round the rough edges.

You can go on, Rose. I'll walk back up the hill.

Don't be so silly, Ed. I don't mind waiting.

God bless ya, my darling, if you believes in 'em. I'll just be a minute.

The bell on the glass door jingles as Ed pushes his way back out through it, a half dozen Black Horse under his left arm, a gaggle of small, brown paper bags, clutched in his right hand.

He squeezes into the back seat of the Camaro, behind Luke.

Candy. For the youngsters. There's a hundred up on the hill, like gulls. They expects it now. Some vexed if I came back without it.

He chuckles, and hugs the beer case close to his body, on the back seat.

Ed eases himself out of the car, ducking under the belt strap, then tucks his head back in, for the beer, and gives a wink. When he straightens to his full height

and strolls away toward his house, his blue, plaid flannel jacket catches the children's eyes, and they flock to him, squawking.

*

Rose shifts in her wooden chair, looks Bee in the eye.

Yes, Bee girl, I'm sure Ed knows that he's loved.

RHYME

1995

My father went to sea sea sea
To see what he could see see see
But all that he could see see see
Was the bottom of the bright blue sea sea sea

Oh, Helen had a steamboat
The steamboat had a bell
When Helen went to heaven
The steamboat went to
Hello, operator
Please give me number nine
And if the line is busy
I'll kick you from
Behind the old piano
There was a piece of glass
And Helen slipped upon it
And broke her little
Ask me no more questions
I'll tell you no more lies
And if you don't believe me
I'll punch you in the

Rose's eyes can see the gravel-topped school grounds from when she was Maggie's age, her ears flooding with the chorus of childhood ditties, chanted like war cries over the teacher's clanging bell. She is reading aloud from the little baggie book lying open in her lap, the short phrases rising off the paper like an incantation—the bottom of the sea, is a lovely place to be—lulling Maggie into rapt attention, as she nestles beside her mother on the couch. A baggie book—because it is for primary readers and fits in a plastic zip-lock bag—is small, lightweight, and colourful, with

few words, and knockout graphics to keep the child's attention (all the better to make good readers of them, my dear). Rose imagines the teacher filling the baggies each day, that are labelled with names as pretty as the pages themselves—Maggie and Hazel and Samuel and Zacharia—methodically removing and replacing soft-covered booklets, like an assembly-line worker, so accustomed to the rhythmic repetition that she can do it without thinking. The easiest part of her day.

The colours and shapes on the page swarm in Rose's vision. Treasure troves of fish and sea shells and pirate chests, all brimming with turquoises and blues and greens that look like they are shot through with light, purples and golds to rival a king's robe, and yellows the colour of sunbursts and lemon peels. The pages look backlit, a halo effect over everything. A deep-sea diver—in a beige and brown suit, childlike, helmet with an iron cage over the glass front—is suspended at the heart of the action, dull against the vibrant backdrop, tubes and hoses snaking up beyond the edge of the page.

The fishes swim past, we're having a blast. Rose is back in the schoolyard, chanting, chanting. Clapping games are an important part of play for primary-school-age girls, especially girls like Maggie, whose age group has absorbed the culture of the playground. They've watched older children and have practiced the clapping and the rhymes. The clapping acts as a timekeeping device, and the words and melodies fit in around the rhythm.

The friendships that are made are a form of sanctuary for the girls and the games and rhymes reinforce the solidarity of the group. Material passed on orally

must, by its nature, be memorable, and some features of oral narrative are the use of mockery, and the subversive nature of some of the rhymes. The lineup waiting to go back into school after recess can often be made shorter by clapping and chanting. A vast amount of learning occurs in these informal games.

Rose finishes reading to Maggie—the oysters are girls, for they’re wearing pearls—turns the last page, and closes the tiny book.

Here darling, pass Mommy the baggie. I’ll sign the paper so Miss knows that I read your story for you.

Rose slips the book back into the zip-lock bag and turns to pick up Emily, who is propped on pillows on the couch, beside Maggie. Rose claps her hands close to the baby’s face and Emily blinks, before Rose takes her in her arms to feed. As the baby sucks, Rose rocks back and forth, back and forth.

And your daddy’s at the bottom of the sea sea sea
And your daddy’s at the bottom of the sea.

OUT

1996

Cela enters through the front door into the living room and heads into the kitchen where she hears Rose. Rose looks up from the table and lays down a black octagon-shaped plate and a fork.

Hi. How was work?

Good. I got a couple free tickets for a whale-watching tour. Don can't go. I'll take you. Oh, and Mrs. Brent went through the coffee table.

What.

Planked herself on the edge of the glass top to gossip with Mrs. Barrett and I guess her bum is heavier than she thought. She leaned back and next thing you know she's legs up.

Oh my god.

Yep. You know the bar across the middle of the table—brought up in that. Looked like a turtle flipped on its back. Little arms and legs flailing. She wails 'Cela help me' and we laughed so hard at the poor soul we couldn't get her out.

Seriously.

Swear to god. Then when we all got calmed down enough to get her out and get the glass swept up, I brought Mrs. Barrett in to shampoo her hair. I ease her back in the chair, fit her neck into the curve of the sink, my face inches from hers. Right meek and mild she looks up at me and says 'Mike'll be a month picking glass out of her arse.' Girl, I almost died.

Cela puts the kettle on to boil and Rose picks up the dinner plate again, scraping it into the garbage bin that sits directly in front of her at the table's edge. When she has the plate scraped clean of food, she lays it carefully into the trash can, picks up another, scrapes its contents into the bin, then lays that plate on top of the last in the garbage can.

What in the name of God are you doing?

Throwing out my dishes.

But why.

Because I don't want to wash them Cela.

Cela looks her in the eye, holding her gaze.

Rose, girl, it's time to start thinking about getting back to work or something.

We need to start getting you out and about.

Cela sits on the chair next to Rose, scoots it close, and holds Rose's hand. They sit quietly, staring at the neatly scraped and stacked plates in the garbage bin.

It's almost two years Rose honey. You need to get yourself out of the goddamn house.

ICEBERG

1996

A piece of time, dislodged, floats down from Arctic iciness, through latitudes that soften it and make it come undone—it catches your breath in your ribcage, sweeps away every vestige of your old ways of thinking about white, reconfigures neural pathways; here is a white that makes you shiver.

The iceberg is older than Jesus—in fact, two thousand years of ice has melted off its surface since it began its slow drift south. Rose and Cela are heading out through The Narrows aboard a tour boat operated by a man who met Luke once. It is a sunny summer day and they snap selfies in their t-shirts, looking for all the world like tourists in their big sunglasses and matching open-mouthed poses, a Rubik's Cube of houses propped on cliffs in the background.

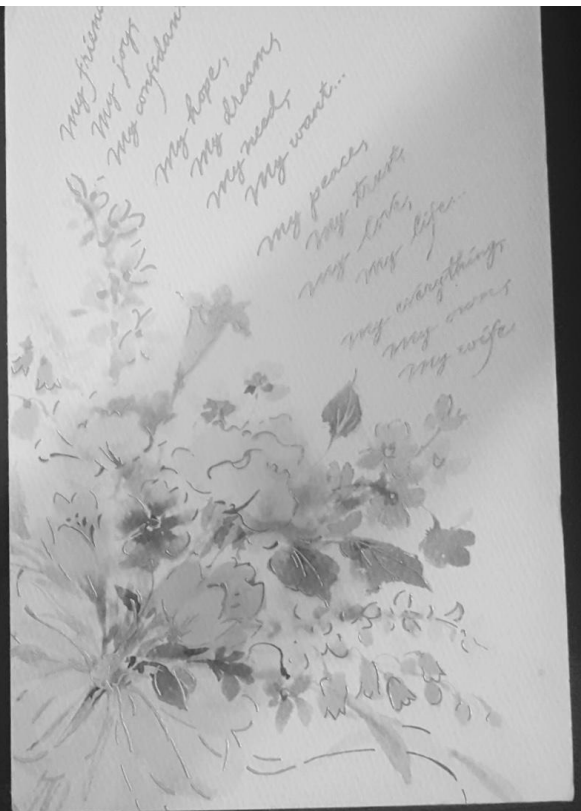
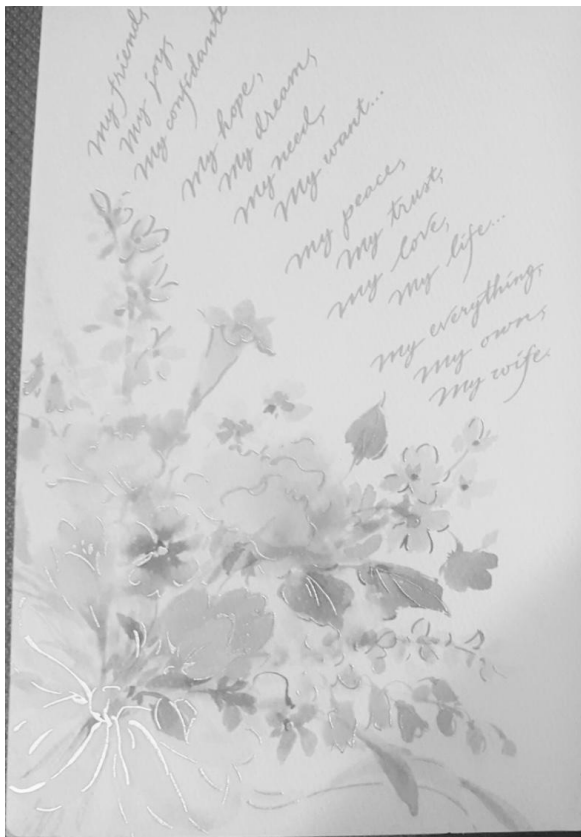
The tide is high so the long-liner steers around Chain Rock and steams away from the berg towards Quidi Vidi, Rose imagining the boom that stretched across the harbour to keep submarines out during wartime. Whole worlds exist beneath waves that crash against rocks in countless high-spirited succession, each as different as fingerprints, few catalogued in human memory. The boat's engine drones as the skipper slows the throttle and eases in through The Gut; Rose thinks she could touch the shiny grey-green rocks to port and starboard if she leaned far enough over the rail. They circle the gut's circumference, their eyes devouring the images of towering glass-walled houses juxtaposed against shacks whose clapboard siding barely remembers red, waving at raised hands on stage-heads and front steps fashioned on

pilings that plunge into fathoms of impenetrable black. Icebergs have been known to ground themselves in the gut's entrance, causing headaches for boat owners and havoc for the tour operators, until high winds and rough seas blessedly coerce them into breaking up, rolling over, or moving on their way, leaving behind pieces of time and gouges in the ocean bottom; the wounds will still show in a thousand years.

As they head back towards the iceberg, they are greeted by whales and schools of porpoises who are ensuring that the tourists enjoy their day. Rose has spent much of her life on or around the water but has never seen it in such a playful mood, tossing its secrets up for them to grab and take hold of like brass rings. A whale breaches close enough to look Rose in the eye, then as quickly thrusts its body beneath the surface and throws its tail into the air, causing Rose to cry out “look, look,” in need of witnesses to the leviathan's thrall.

The skipper is pulled endlessly in circles around the shoreline by the schools of ocean dwellers, the charter filling itself up with stories of the intelligence of mammals, and questions of whether that fin belongs to an angel shark, or that tail is attached to a long-haired siren. All eyes are drawn upward as an airplane turns and loops in over Signal Hill, cresting the tip of the iceberg in the distance; Rose wonders if Orville Wright is standing on The Lookout guiding the plane to its touchdown. She looks across the Battery at the fence, in the far distance, that runs down the incline of Southside Hill, and wonders about man's insistence on compartmentalizing things—the only animal Rose can imagine being contained by the fence is a goat, and she wonders if Paddy McGinty is a local boy.

Rose clenches and releases her hands repeatedly in her lap as the last of the photos snapped by the passengers become silhouettes in the sinking sun. And then finally, they come within a breath of the iceberg—time immemorial crawling into the fabric of Rose’s being, its chill emanating like a light into her darkest recesses. It is not a remote cold—it is more like a balm that spreads its comfort into her muscles and her sinew and her bones. She stares into its multi-faceted faces, dances on its planes, gets lost in its crevices. Rose comes unmoored.



TOTEM

1996

Rose's upper body leans across the arm of the couch, palm propped beneath her chin, memories flitting among the flowers out the window. When Rose's eye catches a flutter of blue-green in the white peonies by the fence, the whirl of colour accepts the invitation in her gaze and swoops across the garden, flashes of changing hues as its feathers catch the sun, like an oil slick on water, until it is an iridescent jewel at the open window, eye level with Rose, hovering amid the tiny swirls of vortexes whirling in the air between them.

Where is your joy.

Rose leans forward and whispers to the tiny bird.

I don't know what you mean.

The fluttering wings of the hummingbird move in the pattern of an infinity symbol. Timeless and knowing, it seeks the sweetest nectar. Hummingbirds travel thousands of miles when required. A hummingbird maintains vibrational frequencies in a state of well-honed, regulated balance, instead of frittering away energy. In the world of totems, a hummingbird is a messenger and a stopper of time.

Don't waste your vitality on fear. Seek your happiness.

The bird hangs in the balance, suspended in time, its highly evolved visual processing centre reading imperceptible cues, before it changes the angle of its wings and darts laterally to the window's edge, stepping aside to make room for Rose. Rose rises from the couch, glances down at neatly pressed jeans, smooths her black tunic,

pulls a slender white tube from where she has it tucked into her bra and glosses her lips. She raises one leg and rests her heel on the sill, stoops low and folds herself out the window, heedless of the mesh that closes around her as she passes through the screen.

TOGETHER

1996

Rose does an incantation—muscle sinew bone, muscle sinew bone—and steps through the windowless wall into the living room. Luke is standing there. Like he was expecting her. She knows she is bartering the tail end of her life but she doesn't care—the same as she paid no heed when she used to use laxatives to purge as a teenager, against her mother's warnings that she'd be sorry when she ran into bowel trouble later, not really believing in forty at the time.

Luke stretches his hands towards her as she crosses the room and fits her body to his; he's solid. She wraps her arms around him just below his chest, her fingers splayed on his back, as he folds her to him. Rose leans her nose right into the center of his chest, where the curly hair is flattened under his sweater, taking him in until she nearly smothers, then turns her head to breathe. They stand like this for a lifetime, then Luke leads her upstairs.

Rose lies on her back, right hand resting across her bare belly, stretch marks hidden under the duvet. Luke reaches over, deliberately rearranges her hand spread-eagled, one finger at a time, as if she is being fingerprinted, click, click, click, click, on her stomach. Places his own fingertips in the webbed sections where her fingers meet her hand, and slides them into the spaces he has erected, friction of finger against finger.

They lie easily together, legs entwined, like there is nothing else needs doing. Whispers and smiles, and cheeks cupped in hands. Low laughter and pulling of

blankets, and fingers tracing spines. As the day wanes Rose stretches to kiss Luke's temple before she eases her arm from under his sleeping body and pushes herself out of the bed, into her clothes, and down the stairs. Rose repeats the words—muscle sinew bone—then steps through the living room wall, and comes undone.

GEORGE

1996

As her left foot comes to rest inside the wall, Rose feels the vibration of her body as it splinters. She feels her blood disperse, like bubbles rushing to the surface. Rose's biological clocks spin out of control—the five minutes eight seconds of disintegration required to make the transition costs her much more. Every atom recalibrates. Rose stares at the telephone in her hand.

Hi, I'm calling to ask you about my husband, Luke Tremblett. He's aboard the *Elizabeth Coates*.

There is a pause at the other end of the line. The man clears his throat.

Yes, ma'am. I know who your husband is.

Okay, good. I need to talk to you then. I need you to be frank with me. I need to know what's happening. And I would appreciate it if you can just be honest.

What's your first name again?

George, ma'am.

Thank you. It's five o'clock in the morning George. I haven't been asleep yet. I've spent all day sitting in a fish plant and all night sitting by the phone.

Yes, ma'am, I imagine you have.

And I can't do it anymore. No one calls but Abbey. And Luke's brothers. To see how I am. To ask about the kids. To share some rumour they heard. But no one knows what's going on.

Good to have family, Mrs. Tremblett.

I'm tired of getting second-hand news George. Do you know anything? Do you know what's going on? It was a bad night. These men are a day late George. They're missing.

Ma'am.

George clears his throat again.

They're missing aren't they, George?

Yes, ma'am, they're missing.

You know more, don't you?

Is there someone there with you, Mrs. Tremblett? You're not there alone, are you?

No, George, I am not alone. But I need you to tell me. You promised you'd be honest with me.

I did.

George pinches his nose with his thumb and index finger, then exhales deeply into the receiver.

I'm afraid you don't have good news for me, do you George?

No, ma'am, I do not.

I can't take it anymore.

Ma'am.

Just tell me George. Please. Anything is better than this.

At this point, Mrs. Tremblett, the Coast Guard is conducting a salvage op...operation.

Salvage.

Yes, ma'am, salvage.

Rose turns the word over, feels it somersault in her head, ricochet off her skull, like shrapnel.

What does that mean, exactly?

I'm very sorry to have to say, Mrs. Tremblett, but we do not expect to find survivors at this point. Very sorry. I can have my supervisor call you when he gets in, if you'd like.

There is silence, and Rose realizes that George has stopped speaking.

Thank you George.

Rose lays the phone slowly back in its cradle, as if her hesitance will preserve the connection. She wishes she could go back to the seconds before she told George that anything is better. Stay there in the not knowing. Rose stares at her hand as she hangs up the telephone.

When she breaks through into the night air, her shoulder catching as she passes through the wall, she picks her way to the car parked out front. Rose pulls open the heavy door of the blue Z-24—the most ridiculous car a woman with three children has ever driven. Luke sold his pickup truck when the moratorium started and when his brother asked what he was getting next Luke said a good pair of sneakers. When he got back from Labrador, Luke got a great deal on the Chev and now Rose is left with a two-door car, with sport rims and a car-seat. She gets in and leans her

forehead on the steering wheel, shivering. Sits there for a long time. Goes for a drive to settle her breathing.

When Rose gets back home and enters through the front door, her father is sitting in the kitchen, Emily on his knee, patting her back. Liam and Maggie are in bed but call out “Mommmmy” in unison as soon as they hear the door. Rose doesn’t say a word, takes the baby from her father, switches off the light, heads straight to the bedroom and crawls into her bed with Liam and Maggie. She stares at the ceiling forever, trying to doze off, her right arm across her forehead. The children lie still, waiting. Her father sits at the table in the dark kitchen.

Rose thinks about when she was Maggie’s age and her own mother took turns with her father getting herself and Cela off to school on winter mornings when fishing was done for the year. One stayed in bed while the other toasted homemade bread on the stovetop, turned it by slipping a butter knife under its middle and flipping it like pancakes, piled it with butter, and filled mugs with hot sugary milk. A tower of toast that Rose and Cela stretched their plates across the table for, her father serving four slices to each of them and himself, the girls hoping for slices that were not scorched. There were usually a couple of each, though her father was a little more careful than her mother to not burn the bread. Rose placed the best slice at the bottom of her stack, pulled each slice in half, ate the soft middle of the bread, and made a ring around her plate with the crusts. She dreams about Luke making toast for Emily, the bread stacked so high it breaks through the kitchen ceiling, rising into the sky.

When she wakes, Rose pushes herself out of bed to get Liam and Maggie off to school. She supposes it is a school day. As she dresses them and brushes Maggie's long brown hair she wonders what choices people would make if they were in control. Would a mother give up a child to save a husband. Would a child know which parent was the right one to keep. How much would any one person sacrifice. She wonders how she'll make it through a whole year before she can visit Luke again. Rose finishes Maggie's ponytail, then herds them into the bathroom to brush their teeth. She glances in the mirror and notices her first grey hair, leans in closer and spies a dozen or more. Rose pushes her hair aside and heads to the kitchen to make toast for Maggie and Liam. Her father is asleep at the kitchen table.

Lack

1997

Rose is still not very good at real life. She stays up all night. Sometimes there are no clean clothes for the kids. Maggie and Liam wake early every morning, but they play quietly together because they know that if their mother doesn't wake until eight or later, she won't make them go to school. They are just settling back in after summer and they've already missed a day.

Rose is watching news clips of a funeral on TV, with two and a half billion other people around the world. Princess. Nothing can protect you from this. Doesn't matter who you are.

There's nothing to eat.

Warm something until I'm done here honey.

Cela bought Maggie a microwave oven for her tenth birthday, so that she could heat things without having to use the stove.

Warm some for Liam too please.

I don't want anything.

If you don't eat you'll die.

The coffin passes St. James's Palace, her brother, her ex-husband, and her sons, joining to walk behind, black suits, white shirts, black ties. Her ex-husband's suit looks navy blue. On top of the coffin are three wreaths of white flowers from her brother and the boys. Tucked underneath one of the wreaths is a card addressed to Mummy.

That's something. Them poor youngsters. Having to trail behind their mother like that. They're only babies. No one to look after them now for sure.

The coffin stops at the door of Westminster Abbey, its thousand year old towers rising two hundred-twenty-five feet into the sky. Inside, the coffin comes to rest. At the High Altar, the great pavement is inlaid with stone of different colours, sizes, and shapes, made out of onyx, purple porphyry, green serpentine, and yellow limestone, with pieces of opaque glass—red, turquoise, cobalt blue, and bluish white—mixed in. Her brother gives the eulogy.

It is a point to remember that of all the ironies about my sister, perhaps the greatest was this—a girl given the name of the ancient goddess of hunting was, in the end, the most hunted person of the modern age.

Rose calls out to Maggie. She comes back into the living room, licking her finger.

Did you get anything.

I made an angel-food cake in a mug. There's nothing else there.

I'll order some Mary Brown's or something.

Aside from milk, Mary Brown's is the only thing keeping Liam alive. He refuses to eat. When it gets too bad, Rose will pile everyone into the car and go get chicken strips and fries. Then she drives to the hospital and parks outside, threatening that if he doesn't eat, he'll have to go in. Liam will not be cowed by his mother, but Maggie is afraid he's going into the hospital to die. She sits in the back seat, her hands clasped in her lap, praying that Liam will eat.

Rose clicks off the TV and stands up.

Come on guys, get your duds on. We're going for food.

Safe

1998

Rose's mailing address is printed in large block letters, with a black marker, on unlined white paper, and plastered to opposite sides of an empty Dirt Devil box, with reams of clear tape. Rose stows the box in the trunk of her silver Buick, where it sits for years. She retrieves it from time to time and rummages through, or adds to it, before resealing it, and returning it to the trunk. Rose used to think her mother went overboard with doing up parcels to send across the country. Now Rose understands the security that comes with swaddling the contents, to protect them against the rigours of Canada Post.

Rose, honey, you need to stop this. You need to stop thinking he was God. Rose knows that she makes no sense to anyone. She herself thought Trish was mad, or plain stupid, to think that Gerald was going to swim fifty miles in out of it. But Rose also thought that they must surely have been run over by a foreign trawler and hauled aboard, that Luke was even now learning Russian, to get by until he could get away. How does she tell someone that the first time she kissed Luke, she imagined the home they would live in. How his kisses made her think about the purple patchwork quilt, with thick batting and the new plush backing you could buy. How when she told him that, he was hurt, wanting, she supposed, to stir something different in her. How his body crushing into hers made her believe in god. How the smell of orange chocolate makes her sick with missing him. How buying a new

winter coat that she loves—navy and beige and Aztec—makes her feel like she’s cheating on him. How she doesn’t have a picture of him with the baby because she was always waiting for him to get cleaned up or have a shave. Rose can’t shake the urge, every day, to crawl under something and lie down. Go deep into the woods to lick her wounds. She hates having to decide for herself that he is not coming back in through that door. No matter how long she waits. Rose thinks about the smell of Luke fading from the bedsheets, that she has tucked away in the top drawer of his highboy.

Rose remembers packing the contents of the drawers into brown cardboard boxes to give away. Luke had not even taken the tags off of one of the new pairs of jeans, and they mean nothing to her. She couldn’t even imagine his smell on them. The bedsheets, and the denim shirt, and the emerald green silk, she keeps for herself. The jean shirt had been waiting to be washed, but never was. Sometimes, when she gets Maggie and Liam off to school, and Cela has done her visit on her way to work, Rose makes a little mound in the center of the bed with the sheets and the shirts, and lays the baby on it, then lies down and curls herself around Emily, burying her nose in the pile.

By the time Emmy is four years old, she has her own box of valuables, where she keeps her most important belongings. She knows that if their house burns down, or something else requires that they leave in a rush, she will not be allowed to stop and collect her things. She has to be ready to go. Emily does not know what the something else might be, but she is ready. Each night, she takes her teddy from the

box, and nestles him into her bed. Teddy is a Beanie baby, his weighted bottom allowing him to sit upright, where he gazes at Emily from the pillow, as she sleeps. Emily calls Teddy she, despite the red tie around his neck, and his striking resemblance to Fozzie Bear. Each morning, Emily opens the box, and slips Teddy back inside, among her bracelets, and hair combs, and half-eaten lollipops, before sealing the cover tight on the green box with pink cabbage roses, and going about her four-year-old day.

Rose writes a smaller note, neatly, on the front of a pink envelope, and signs it carefully. Before she tapes it securely to the end of the vacuum cleaner box, Rose slips two twenty dollar bills inside, licks its tongue, and seals it tight. The note and the money are insurance—if the car is ever stolen, Rose is depending on the thief's good nature to do what's right.

To Whom It May Concern,

This box contains my special things, photos of my family, and pictures and cards my children made.

I keep it here to protect it.

I truly do not care about the car.

But PLEASE send this box back to me. There is money inside for postage.

Sincerely,

Rose Tremblett

LUCKY

2000

The bus passes through the tiny hamlet that is really an outskirt of town, without stopping. It ambles along the narrow road, taking the twists and turns painfully, rattling on the pocked pavement, until it reaches the outskirt of the hamlet itself, a stretch of road bordered on one side by an inlet, which continues many miles inland, past the steel lift bridge spanning its mouth. Through the bus's left windows, the driver glances up a sheer incline, surveying the boulders balanced precariously along its face, that defy the Department of Roads and Transportation sign, warning vehicles of falling rocks. Rose stands at the bottom of the stairway and calls up to the kids.

Emily. Liam. You've got five minutes. The bus just passed.

Halfway along the stretch of road there is an outcrop of land that houses a single two-story fishing stage. The driver presses his boot on the brake and edges off the road, before he swings the steering wheel with all his might, throwing the hulk of noisy yellow metal into a clumsy u-turn alongside the stage, then eases it back onto the road the way it came. Somewhere in the recesses of his brain, the driver is thankful for this makeshift turnaround.

Emily walks slowly down the lane and a few feet along the road to wait. She was upset when her sister went to high school in September because Maggie always took care of her, but she's glad that Liam still takes her bus, even though he doesn't sit with her because he's in grade eight this year. He stands beside his friend Peter as

they wait outside the bus stop shelter that Peter's father built for them. Maggie is relieved to be rid of the responsibility—she had to grow up fast. Maggie changed Emily's diaper when she was nine. And her mother won't stop dressing them alike. When she was six, Rose still ordered matching outfits for her and Liam out of the catalog, Ronald McDonald labels and black houndstooth bottoms with red sweatshirts, and teal and white polka-dotted shirts. When Rose took them to Disney, she bought safari outfits, lions hiding in leafy trees, colourful parrots with their heads cocked to one side. Maggie and Emily had one-piece short sets and Liam had khaki shorts with the patterned shirt, a grey plastic canteen hooked to his belt. They all wore straw hats with a black brim that Maggie stuffed into her backpack. This year, after finishing shopping with Maggie, her mother 'coincidentally' bought Emily a baby pink sweater and grey pants for the first day of school.

They hear the bus before it comes around the last turn and whines to a halt, like some great leviathan heaving a sigh as its door flicks open long enough to allow the three children to shuffle up the steps, before it swallows them and lurches away. Morning Mr. English, Liam mutters as he reaches the top step. Morning Mr. English, Emily thinks to herself, but she doesn't look into his weathered old eyes and she wonders why he has the word cat, in capital letters, across the front of his worn baseball cap. Mr. English was a heavy equipment operator before he retired to driving school buses. Liam and Peter jostle down the empty aisle to the seats at the back of the bus. Emily sits alone a couple seats ahead. But Liam walks Emily to her

classroom every morning and waits until the teacher arrives, often sprinting up the stairs to his own classroom as the last bell shrieks through the echoing hallways.

The bus stops once more in the hamlet before it staggers up Devil's Bit, Mr. English's boot nervously massaging the brake pedal as the bus heaves down the other side of the steep hill. Emily counts each stop along the way, until she reaches four, and her belly flutters. She stares out the window at the man and the girl waiting. She knows who they are, knows he fished with her father. Knows he had the flu. The man's name is Barry and the girl's name is Kayla. He has a full beard and a huge gut and he always wears big rubber boots. Barry stands on the side of the road with his hands lazing in the pockets of his navy work pants, which are stuffed into his green logans. He went back to fishing a few years ago because he had no choice. His hand rises from his pocket in a small wave as Kayla motions at him through the closing door. Emily's fingers graze the dew on the windowpane.

Barry stands watching the bus as it eases into a lineup of cars waiting for the lift bridge to lower and let them be on their way again. Kayla is in grade four, and she is a girl who looks like she doesn't give a fuck. She has straight, dirty-blond hair that creeps down each shoulder from a centre part, without any trappings of buckles or bows. Blue eyes full of devilment in a chubby face with a high forehead, her two front teeth looking very adult among the smattering of baby teeth that are still hanging on. She wears grey sweatpants, white socks and sneakers, with a hint of pink in the Nike flash across their side. As she takes her seat, her fall jacket swings open over a grimacing Hulk Hogan face on a yellow t-shirt. There is nothing special about

her appearance but she is the girl with a whole world that makes Emily's belly flutter every time she sees her. Emily stared at Kayla's face as she approached, clear skin and red cheeks. Not a freckle to be seen. She doesn't know how lucky she is.

Kayla's is the last stop before school. The kids who live on the other side of the bridge are walkers. The bus eases into a lineup of vehicles and stops, waiting for the lift bridge to lower. Emily feels the same way her mother did years ago, like she is on display, her fingers worrying themselves in her lap and her toes curling themselves inside her brown suede boots. Her eyes are fixed on the expanse of blonde hair now sitting three rows ahead of her.

Sever

2001

The first string Rose cuts is the salon. On a Wednesday in July, Rose concludes that it's time to go to school if she's ever going. On Friday, she decides to sell the salon and all its contents, to the girls she works with every day. No soft place to land in case she falls. At the end of August, Rose takes a black cape, two grey combs, and the oblong case with dragons and fans spread across the red cover that holds her scissors, and locks the salon door for the last time.

Emily is going to grade two, big, and strong, and independent. Rose is registered for two courses at the university, and has an old house rented in the city. She promises Maggie and Liam that they will all come home again for school next year, if they're not happy. Rose gets a job tending bar, four nights a week,—the tips are good—drops the kids at three separate schools, and sleeps from late morning until two.

Just as Rose is rushing in the door from school, the cable guy comes by to get her hooked up. It is an unusually hot September day, and the overweight man is already sweating as he climbs the stairs to Rose's bedroom, the humid air stifling in the old house, whose open windows do little but stir the sheer panels that are pushed aside. The man swelters through the installation, grumbling as Rose encourages him to finish, propped on the double bed behind him, thinking wow, cable guys really do have cracks, as he pulls on his belt buckle and swipes at his forehead with his sleeve.

Rose feels bad for the man, but she wants him out of the way so she can get back to the breaking news alerts that are screaming from every radio and TV in North America. Every television around the world.

Rose was sitting in psychology class with three hundred other students when the professor announced that the World Trade Center had been hit by an airplane. Silence. Stunned. Then people whisper to each other.

Is this a test.

This is some kind of psychological experiment.

I don't think he should be allowed to do this.

I am telling you this is not a joke.

Rose is transfixed by the images flashing on her television screen, black clouds billowing from the tower. Frozen to her bed, another plane bursting into flame as it slices through the far side of the second tower, lower than the first strike. Rose has no idea how long she sits there, but she looks away when the anchor announces that the debris falling from the buildings is actually people.

Rose decides that she needs to get her shit together. She'll put Emmy in an after-school program at day-care, and Maggie and Liam can bus home, allowing her an extra hour or two to rest during the afternoons. She needs to be serious about this. The first day that Emily will attend daycare, Rose gets a call from Hazelwood Elementary at two forty-five.

Mrs. Tremblett? You forgot to pick Emily up?

Rose bolts upright, wide awake.

The daycare didn't pick her up?

There was no one here from a day-care to pick her up. She is still waiting for you.

The daycare was supposed to pick her up. I'm sorry. I'm sorry, tell her I'm coming.

Rose backs out of the driveway without looking both ways and honks her horn at the car crawling up Topsail Rd in front of her. Mommy is coming mommy is coming, she says loudly to the car. When Emily sees her mother push through the glass door, her tears come and her backpack stops tugging at her, weighing her down.

I'm sorry Emmy, mommy is sorry. You won't have to go to daycare again. When they get home, Rose calls the daycare to demand an explanation.

She wasn't on our list for pickup today. Are you sure you had it arranged.

I had it arranged. I was in there only three days ago and the owner squeezed her in for me herself. Emmy spent an hour there and I came and got her.

A long hour, Rose wants to say; Emily was not happy to stay there without her mother, not happy with people she didn't know.

Well we didn't have her on the list. Of course, you won't be charged for your first visit, or for today.

Rose spits her fright and anger into the phone.

I won't be charged? I, won't be charged? You'll be very lucky if I don't have you charged. I wouldn't bring my child back there if you paid me. Not one penny will you ever see from me. And I'll be telling people too.

Rose slams the receiver into its cradle. How dare they risk her child like that.

Fuck sakes. Proves if you want anything done right.

Rose is early at Hazelwood every afternoon now, waits in the porch, to make sure that Emily sees her when she gets out. To prove that she's a good mother. At the end of the school year, Rose packs up and goes back to the bay. No sense making the kids unhappy. Maggie will finish high school at home, in their house, and Emily will be better able to adjust when she's a little older. Liam is not in love with St. John's anyway, and school even less so. Rose will spend the next couple years driving the highway, loving school enough to ignore the dark circles under her eyes, avoiding psychology. Pat Byrne tells her not to listen to the student advisors, do English for herself and worry about a job with her next degree. Rose likes people who think the way she does. She laughs through his classes, watching him get a rise out of the eighteen-year-olds.

The oxford comma is, as my poor old father would say, like dry shit on a blanket. Neither harm nor good.

He doesn't blink as the teenagers stare at him. Stunned.

SIXTEEN

2003

Rose gets Liam a dog for his sixteenth birthday—he's had a rough couple years, spent the last half of last year living with Rose's parents. Couldn't stand another day at I.J. Samson, so Rose let him go home with them to finish the school year. Liam says it's not that he wants to walk for miles when he leaves early every day. He just can't stay there. When Mr. Pitts makes a comment in the hallway to embarrass Liam, Rose goes to the school. The principal says they will get an apology and Rose tells him an apology only means something if it doesn't happen again.

Rose names the dog before she brings him home. She doesn't want another Daisy the Terminator—that's what you get when two kids are old enough to name a toy poodle. When Rose arrives at the pet store in Carbonear to pick up the dog, she questions whether he is only eight weeks old, legs long and lean like a thoroughbred. He and his brother are looking for homes and it's all she can do not to take both. They are Heinz 57, one white with brown patches like a beagle; the other, black and white—he's friendlier, not as shy. Rose chooses the dog with the brown patches, his intelligent eyes telling her he's the one. Harley Yafucker Tremblett. Sebastian for short. Rose uses her children's first and middle names when she's angry at them or giving stern orders. Liam says every time his mother sits at the computer, the dog will think she's mad at him.

But eight weeks or not, Harley is no more than a puppy for sure. He flies around the house pouncing, chewing up everything he gets his paws on. He eats one

of Maggie's pink stilettos she bought out of her first check from the hotel. Maggie sits Harley down and tells him she is very upset. Seventy dollars. Do you know what it takes to earn seventy dollars. A whole Saturday. I know you're only a baby, but you have to learn better than that Harley. Maggie tucks the second shoe away in her closet because she can't bear the thought of throwing it away. When Harley races into the living room, Rose and Maggie grab cushions for cover, knowing that Harley will take a single leap and land squarely on top of one of their heads.

Liam still doesn't eat enough to keep a bird alive. He has a low tolerance for variety in foods. When Rose finds something that he likes—which is only ever some version of chicken strips or pizza—he eats it every day for months, sometimes for six, until he turns himself from it. Then Rose spends weeks finding a replacement. The worst is when he's coasting along and the company decides to make a new and improved version. Rose is already aware that it is not ever going to be an improvement. Liam also doesn't take well to other teenagers, especially ones he doesn't know.

Sounds are amplified for Liam. Rose walks into his bedroom and he is watching a TV show, the characters having a heated argument, but there are no discernable voices to be heard. Liam has the hearing of a dog. The noise from a crowd of teens is like gongs beaten over and over. The sound seeps into his skin.

Once, on a Saturday evening, Liam's friends from elementary coaxed him to go to the track with them. Rose spent more than one night hanging out on the track herself, but these are good boys who she's known since they were five, and she

encourages him to go. It'll be nice Liam. Just be careful. She slips some money into his pocket.

There are more people than Liam expects and he stands on the edge of the crowd, sipping a Molson Canadian, watching. Embers from the fire crackle and fly into the air as more wood is thrown on, tree branches and wood chunks and pieces of broken board. Suddenly, someone yells run and the crowd disappears into the trees.

Rose opens the knocking door and Liam is standing there, flanked by two men in dark bomber jackets and jeans.

Hello Mrs. Tremblett, I'm Officer Lannon and this is Officer Boucher. Is this your son.

It is.

His name.

Liam.

He's not in big trouble or anything; we just broke up a little party that your son says he doesn't know much about, so we thought we'd bring him home to you so you know.

You scared me. I thought something was wrong.

They say a few more words that Rose doesn't hear and give their goodbyes. Rose touches Liam's arm as the mounties walk away.

They said they were cops Mom, but they didn't show any badges. I didn't have a clue. It could've been anybody locking me in the back of their car.

Rose tends to be protective—when Liam gets a girlfriend she's happy for him, but within a month they break up, and Rose tries not to think she's a bitch. An hour after he's dropped off at her house, he's back. Liam doesn't answer his mother's questions, but she hurts for him. Months later, Rose finds out that the girl told Liam she loved him, and he broke up with her and walked all the way home.

Liam loves Harley. The dog lives in his bedroom and follows him around. Liam housetrains Harley, shows him the ins and outs of giving his paw and high fives, and teaches him to stay.

LITTLE POND

2004

Maggie is crying uncontrollably when Rose gets home from work, her pink pillow sham stained dark with tears and snot.

Oh my. What's going on.

They won't let me walk with Mollie.

Who won't let you walk with Mollie.

In the Grand March. They won't let us.

And why won't they let ye now.

Oh Mom, I don't know. Ani said yes it was fine, but then Mr. Pitts said absolutely not, and he's the one in charge of the prom committee.

Is he now. So Mr. Pitts is the boss is he.

Rose rolls her eyes and heaves a sigh, exhaling deeply. She knows this one is not going to be resolved in a day.

Rose spends the next week campaigning for the girls. She meets with the principal, who asks her to put her concerns in writing, which Rose does the same evening. After several more meetings and conversations, Mr. Hickman tells her this is not something he can make a decision on and would she be willing to talk in front of the school council if he invited her to their Thursday meeting.

I'll speak in front of whoever I have to, Leonard.

Alright then, I'll get it arranged.

When Rose arrives on Thursday evening, the group is already assembled, and they all know the details of Rose's grievance because everyone has been talking about it for days. That's fine with Rose, she doesn't mind playing their game. She slips the letter she wrote out of her bag and reads it to the assembled judges. Rose talks about how Maggie has always been an active member of the school community, stepping forward to volunteer for whatever needed to be done. Rose names a few of the extra-curricular and other activities that her daughter participates in: she is vice-president of the student council; sits on the recycling, library, and just about every other committee there is; helps with the school lunch program; advocates for special needs students; volunteers at the hospital; is passionate about the rights of students and equity for all. She knows the difference between treating people equally and treating them equitably—everyone has different needs and different starting points. Rose goes on and on.

When she's finished, they sit staring at her as if she's just served them a bowl of gruel. All towing the line. Rose attempts to cut through the condescension.

What do you think Mary.

Well, I can't really go against the decision that's been made.

Oh. Well then. I guess I'm wasting my time. I thought I was invited here to have a discussion that would lead to consideration of what's being said. My mistake.

Rose's voice trembles. It drives her crazy that tears are so close when she's fighting for what she knows is right.

We're talking about letting a couple girls walk together in the Grand March. It's not rocket science guys.

Mr. Hickman intervenes.

There's no need for anyone to get upset here, now. There are other considerations to be taken into account here. For example, there's some concern that this could make some of the other students feel uncomfortable or left out. What about the girls...or boys...who haven't been asked to walk.

What about them indeed, Mr. Hickman. This would do the exact opposite of what you appear to think it would. This would allow kids who haven't been asked to walk, to feel more comfortable, not less. Maybe other girls would like to walk in pairs.

Well that's part of it too, actually. If too many girls decide to walk together, there won't be enough partners for the boys.

Are you serious. You're serious. You expect an exodus of the whole female student population do you. Because of two cousins, who've been best friends since they were born, and who decided when they were twelve that they'd walk together for prom. You all know these kids. They're not trying to cause a riot. It didn't even occur to them that this would be an issue.

Our decision remains unchanged.

Well I'll just say one more thing before I go, Leonard. I hope you all realize how very lucky you are that this is Maggie and Mollie. Because you could find yourself in serious hot water, I think, if this request was being made by a young same-

sex couple. I'd suggest that you take that into consideration if you're ever faced with this situation again. Because you very likely will be. We can't live in the dark ages forever.

Rose drives home with the radio off. She can't believe this, just can't believe it. Like the goddamn Harper Valley PTA. Rose sits for a long time in the car before she goes in the house to tell Maggie. Next morning, Maggie calls her mother from school at break time.

I came in this morning, Mom, and Mr. Pitts came and told me that we can walk together in the prom.

GAP

2004

When Maggie graduates she decides to go to Universite Sainte-Anne in Pointe-de-l'Eglise because she is accepted into the immersion program and will be sorry if she doesn't go. She's been playing with the idea of staying home. Worrying it like a dog with a bone. But she's a grown-up now and she can't just change her life plans because she's not ready to go. Maggie teases her mother that it won't be cooked meals she'll miss—every takeout french fry she eats will make her long for home.

Rose is done here too. Zero reason to drive the highway every day and it'll be good for all of them to get back in town. She's excited for Maggie. Rose books two tickets to fly to Halifax and rents a car to drive from there. She'll see for herself where Maggie will be settling in. Maggie spends her last night in Newfoundland in St. John's with her friends and Rose stays behind to pack the last of her things into boxes to ship. She'll pick Maggie up on the way to the airport. Rose gathers jeans, shoes, boots, purses and belts. She slips each of Maggie's sweaters off their hangers and folds them into the long low box on the floor. The last sweater is one Rose bought her at Gap the Christmas she was in grade eight. A bulky slouch knit, stripes of red and lime green and royal blue running in circles, interspersed with rings of heavy ivory wool. Still Maggie's favourite. She wears it often to keep toasty, its big turtle neck swallowing Rose's little girl. Rose spreads the sweater atop the box, folds the body in thirds lengthwise, tucks the sleeves, arranges the neck to lie neatly at the center. She places the colourful sweater on top of the others and stares at Maggie's

belongings. Now what is she supposed to do. She kneels down and runs her hands over the contents, lies down across the clothes in the box, hugging it tight as she buries her face, the sounds that escape her muffled by the red and green sweater.

As winter blows across the island from Nova Scotia, Rose finds a house in the city. Not a sensible house. Not a suitable house for a woman on her own. Cela's eyebrows arch when Rose tells her she went and looked at a two hundred year old house. The oldest house in St. John's.

Leave it to you.

Cela I really just need you to talk me out of it. Come see it with me. Tell me what you think.

I can already tell you what I think.

Just come with me. Say hello.

Say hello to a house.

You know what I mean Cela. Just come. It has such personality.

Rose calls the owner again and pretends she is a serious buyer so that she won't have to wait. He gives her the combination to the lock box and Rose and Cela shovel their way in to the yellow house with green and red accents; the crust of snow scatters as the metal tip of the shovel pierces its skin.

Cela has to admit there's a certain appeal, peaked roof trimmed in gingerbread that is outdone by the skinny icicles dangling from its front eave like crystal garland strung on a Christmas tree. Cela peeks in the porch window while Rose jiggles the

key, pine floors with age-spots marring the shellac, a path worn to bare board along the middle of the narrow hallway.

The rooms are bigger than Cela's first glance implied, a fireplace in the dining room and a spacious living room through the adjacent doorway across the hall. There are three fireplaces in all, two in bedrooms on the second floor, either of which would make a respectable master. Cela decides the one furthest from the bathroom is the winner—its ceiling is better and the original double doors to the shallow closet add an air of authority, a silver tassel hanging from the marble doorknob. The fireplace has a die-cut metal surround that follows the curve of the hearth, a matte black tool set nestled in the corner.

Cela follows Rose up the second flight of stairs. The higher they go the dizzier she gets. Rose could do things with this place. The third floor has sloped ceilings and a dormer window looking out into the back yard.

That whole space doesn't belong to you does it?

There are three gardens he's willing to sell with the house.

That's quite a parcel of land.

So are you not talking me out of it?

Cela hunches her shoulders.

You have to get it I guess Rose. It just screams you, doesn't it.

REMINDER

2005

Rose has a memory box that she bought at the mall when Wicker Emporium was still there. Maggie hated when her mother got sucked into the Emporium every time they tried to pass by. So many breakable things that she wasn't allowed to touch. Barely enough space to walk, between rows of wavy-coloured glass vases on glass shelves, gold cushions with fringes and tassels, so many piled in the armchairs that Maggie was afraid they'd fall out if she brushed against them as she squeezed by, and dark wooden four-poster beds festooned with even more cushions, fat and fringed and sequined. Maggie was forced to trail behind her mother, who wouldn't let her sit on a bench just outside the door, even though it was within eyesight, or look into the mirrors with flower garlands across their tops, or get too close to the sparkly picture frames that stood in a long line on a skinny black table. Maggie was relieved when her Mom asked her if she liked the shiny brown box that looked like a book, with a hiding place under the cover. It meant they'd head to the checkout and then finish their real Christmas shopping. A small brass plaque to attach to the box's cover was included, and Rose got it engraved at a little shop before leaving the mall.

Luke Tremblett
April 25, 1961 - October 13, 1994

The engraver used a hyphen instead of a dash, to separate the dates. It's the one thing that bothers Rose.

Rose still goes to the mahogany box when she can't sleep, or when she's cooped up in the house too long. The fleur-de-lys brass hinges are green and the

plaque is dappled with corrosion—the hyphen has disappeared and the tiny screws have haloes of tarnish. Rose opens the cover and fingers the poem she wrote, sitting on top of the pile.

First Son

I wonder
Which brother'll cut enough wood
To keep the stovetop red this winter
Now who'll tackle
Trying to please the ol' man
D'ol man
That's the only thing I ever heard him called
D'ol man
He'd grunt
The old man stands on his sagging front step
Wind and rain lashing
Slack suspenders on his back
Gnarled hands and face
Turned up to the deaf black sky
There's a faded photo somewhere in a box
The old man young
Standing on that front step
Smiling
His first baby son in his arms

Underneath are pictures of Maggie and Liam and Emily. Rose still tucks things away in there every now and then. A small journal that Maggie gave her. Maggie brings journals to her mother as gifts. Rose tries to use them but she doesn't want to spoil them with her jot notes. The parchment sheets of the journal are pristine.

There are pages torn from tiny spiral notebooks with birthday messages to Luke, and scraps of paper with love scribbled down. I was home at 430 to 530 gone to do a net Will be home at around 8 Love you Luke Hope you had a good day Love Luke. Snaps of the house before it was finished, the wood still a bright blonde, wishes

printed on paper four-leaf clovers by Maggie and Liam, a Fishing Master IV Certificate in a navy blue hardback cover, the newspaper clippings, and two identical birthday cards, bought three years apart. The cards were pure proof, according to Luke, that he meant every word, having paid for them twice.

There are loose leafs and bright construction paper and graph paper crisscrossed with lines. As Emily grew she added her own sheets to the box, raising the lid and slipping her pictures and notes inside. A pencil drawing of a mommy and a daddy and a little girl, straight lines of hair traced over and over. Her first printing on a page with broken lines. A A A. Everyone sending messages through space and time. Are you in Love with me Love Luke.

CLOCK

2006

Muscle sinew bone, muscle sinew bone—Rose steps through the wall and Luke is not waiting. She heads through to the dining room, where he is slouched in the armchair by the window, watching her walk towards him.

I have something for you.

Well give it here.

Rose bends and places her lips at his right eyebrow, straightens as if bowing, bends and kisses his left. Luke puts his arms around her waist and she leans her forehead to his.

You have to go get it yourself.

His mouth arching.

It's in the closet Rosie.

Rose moves the length of the galley kitchen and feels Luke's eyes follow her. She opens the folding door. The washer and dryer are bare, the water boiler oblivious beside them.

I don't see anything. There's nothing here.

Look harder.

Rose glances each end of the closet and finally sees a large flat box slid behind the boiler. She pokes her head inside the door and reaches in for the box. She is glad the door shields her face as she catches a glimpse of the picture on the front. It is a plastic wall clock. A brown, plastic, "faux wood" clock.

Happy birthday hun.

Luke joins her in the kitchen and kisses her upturned lips while she pulls the clock from its package. The brown plastic is accentuated by metallic gold columns running the length of each side, and a plastic swinging pendulum hanging between two circular cut-outs in its lower section. There are three small clear plastic bags taped to its side, which contain more gold accents that the new owner can use to adorn the clock at her leisure. There are two semi-spheres which, on closer inspection, reveal themselves to be half globes that slide into slots at the top of the columns, and a rearing horse, resplendent in its unabridged wholeness.

A grandfather clock. You've always wanted a grandfather clock.

Rose looks from the clock to Luke's face twice. The sincerest face.

I love it. Thank you.

It matches the jewellery box I got you. Almost exactly.

It does. Exactly. Thank you my darling.

Rose hugs him tightly as she pictures the tiny plastic ballerina twirling to the music every morning when she raises its lid. Rose is a woman who has learned to appreciate absurdity.

And what's this Luke.

Rose's gaze falls to the countertop.

Flour.

Flour.

It's flour. You've always promised to make me bread sometime.

Luke sounds as if this is another gift that Rose will be powerless to resist.

I have always promised. And today is the day. You'll have bread for supper.
Now find batteries for the clock while I get started.

Luke takes the clock, the arch back in his lip, and busies himself with getting it hung while Rose reaches for the bag of bread and roll mix and reads the directions on the back. Luke rummages through drawers and underneath the sink, assembles a hundred necessary tools, and implores Rose's opinion and approval, through nods and murmurs, as he tries one spot, then another, then another, before settling on the perfect placement on the wall that allows the clock to be viewed from all angles. By the time he stows his hammer and level away, Rose is sprinkling flour on the counter and kneading the dough, turning it in clockwise motions and pressing her fists into its centre as she remembers watching her mother do. Luke half-whispers into her hair as he encircles her waist from behind.

Aren't we the two old fogies?

Yeah, the only thing missing is the underwear Mom used to wear on her head to keep the hairs out of the pan.

Rose allows herself to fold into his body. The afternoon passes with sporadic attention paid to the rising dough and the lowering sun, until the day is spent and the smell of fresh bread reaches up and drags them downstairs to the kitchen again.

Suppertime.

Luke stretches the word out as he glances at the clock. He pulls the bread from the oven, wincing at the hot crust as he stands the loaf on end with his bare hands and

cuts thick slices to toast. Rose boils the kettle and prepares two mugs of sweet, milky tea, as Luke piles a tower of buttery toast on a plate for them to share.

Is there anything you can't do?

Luke bites into the soggy toast as if it is light as a cloud.

Nothing, with your help.

When they've finished their toast and tea, Luke lays the plate on the table beside the armchair, settles back, and scoops Rose onto his lap. She wriggles until she's comfortable, nestles her head into the spot where his neck meets his shoulder, and listens to his heartbeat. She lays quietly until his head dips and his breathing becomes measured, before she gets up to go.

FLOORED

2006

Rose whispers, muscle sinew bone, muscle sinew bone, and steps back through the living room wall. As her left foot comes to rest inside the barrier, she feels a violent vibration, her body splintering. Every atom recalibrates. She sits staring at the handle of a car door.

Rose climbs out of the car and stands at the low-slung gate of the house she grew up in. She extends her hand and it pushes open, places one foot in front of the other on the red brick walkway that leads to the step, reaches for the green wooden handrail, and walks in the front door before she stops. She fills her chest with air as she takes in the flowered wallpaper and a white closet rod that spans the width of the small porch, coats hanging on wire and plastic hangers. The rod is secured on opposite sides with pieces of two-by-four nailed to the walls, semicircles carved at their tops. There are shoes piled in a wooden box beneath the coat rack. Rose opens the door into the dining room, the same garlands of flowers running around its walls, and rounds the corner to the living room without breaking stride.

When she sees her father's face, framed by the ugly khaki of the plaid couch, her knees give way, and she crawls the remaining distance to the centre of the living room, where she lies flat on her back on the beige linoleum and pulls her feet toward her, her knees jutting to the ceiling.

I don't know what He was thinking. I can't do this.

Her father pulls himself from his seat and kneels above Rose's head, cradles her temples in his hands, and kisses her forehead.

You are stronger than you think.

Rose reaches and tucks her hands into her father's, digging her fingers into his palms.

I don't want to be.

He squeezes her hands tightly, then lies beside her on the cold floor.

After staring at the ceiling until Rose's breathing calms, her father tells her the story of the only trip he made to the Arctic. It happened the year after him and Mom were married, when Abbey was four months old. He was the last in line, crossing the ice at dusk with three other men, heading back to the ship. They walked slowly from the cold, a fair distance between them, to distribute their weight on the ice, with fault lines criss-crossing it, like their cracked palms inside their gloves. He took a step and the ice gave way beneath him. Disappeared. The cold jolting his body like electricity. Encasing him. Water surging around his eyes and his ears and his nose. How his throat scalded with the thought of her mother getting the news. Ice above his head. No footing below. Breathing water. He does not tell her the story of his rescue.

He was thinking about you and the baby, Rosie. He was thinking about you.

HEART

2007

Maggie is Rose's first child. Her glossy dark hair is long and she ponytails it a lot. It is as fine now as when she was a baby. And her tears are as big. Rose thought she'd grow into her tears, but they've grown with her. Maggie is a cliché—bright and bubbly and caring and beautiful. She loves dressing up and high heels. Rose tells people that she is as nice as she is pretty. Her high-school friends still call her when they need someone to talk to. Maggie has a therapeutic presence. She is the kind of person who will save the world, if she's not crushed by it. The kids who bullied her—who found her girliness irresistible and teased and taunted her every day, Maggie forbidding her mother's involvement—she says made her strong. She lobbied to allow special-needs students to attend prom. She wishes she were taller. She wants to be a teacher. She is happy at university. She loves hard and she plays nice.

Emily is the baby, and still uses that to her advantage, even though she's thirteen years old. She is Rose's only redhead—a true melded auburn in winter, her hair shatters into reds and browns in summer sunshine. As a small child, watching her mother apply colour to a client's hair, Emily told the woman that Jesus gave her foils. She spends hours with flat-irons, erasing all traces of her untamed curls. Her skin is so fair that tiny blue veins show just below the surface around her eyes, but she never gets sunburned, contrary to red-haired convention. Emily knew all the words to Don't Cry for Me Argentina before she was three, and belted it in her baby soprano, every chance she got. She played piano but laid it aside and is learning to play guitar, even

though no one belong to her has a note in their body. As a baby, she would toddle over and climb into her mother's lap for a back massage. She still crawls into Rose's bed and whispers as she falls asleep, rub my back. She's torn between the pride of honour roll, and the embarrassment of nerd. There are early indications that she will give Rose a run for her money.

Liam is Rose's second child. As young children, Liam and Maggie were best friends. When they came home from the playground, Maggie told Rose that Liam talked to everyone there, while she sat and waited for him. And he was brave, she said. Once Maggie ran all the way home and got Granddad to come with her to rescue Liam from the top of the jungle gym. Rose's seventy-two-year-old father had to scale the bars to reach Liam, balancing himself on his hands and knees while he persuaded Liam it was safe to climb down. As teenagers, Liam and Maggie reversed roles—Maggie the social butterfly and Liam pushing himself to attend family functions, sometimes. He dresses in a uniform of oatmeal or shades of grey, t-shirts and hoodies, baggy jeans so long that his runners have scooped out ragged half-moons at his heels. He keeps his brown hair clippered with a three-quarter inch guard over his entire head. He likes to leave the traces of sideburns and whisker that have appeared on his face. He is brilliant, and tolerant, and full of anxiety. Rose's kisses have lost their healing power. Liam's height is checked by his rounded shoulders, his head bent slightly forward and down. He looks like a touch would make him curl in like a caterpillar.

Nate is Rose's stepson. In ten years he will be older than his father. He is already a father himself. When he visited as a teenager, Emily would hide by the end of the couch and ease her way out as she warmed up to him. Nate lived with Rose for four months to finish high school and work for the summer, after his mother moved to town. Nate and Rose did not remain as close as they would have expected, but when he comes home they see each other, and Nate's wife confides in Rose and keeps her updated from time to time. When she needed someone to talk to she said, Rose I'm glad I have you. The older Nate gets, the more like Luke he becomes, the same fire in his beard and in his heart. Nate had a baby before he was twenty and he went through some rough patches over the years, and made some really unhealthy choices that Rose attributed to his father dying, and Rose worried about him, worried that he missed so much by losing Luke, but Nate stuck it out and grew up and learned that family matters most. Rose writes Nate a letter and tells him how proud his dad would be of him.

MUFFINS AND FRIES

2009

Emily wants to go to PWC. The better school she says—not that she cares too much, but why should the fries be the only ones allowed to transfer there. Rose is happy to oblige her by telling the lie necessary to get her in, even though she’s not in french immersion. Yes, my daughter lives with my sister on Thorburn Road. The girl on the desk says yes, I understand. She knows what’s going on. You’ll just have to bring in a piece of mail with your sister’s name on it, and a note indicating the arrangement. Cela will roll her eyes over this. Rose and Emily drive home together, satisfied.

Rose is relieved. Not that she believes that only the smart kids are in the bilingual program. Or that one group is better than the other. Or that it’s the friends’ fault when a child steps out of line. But PWC is the better school. Emily keeps her two groups of friends completely separate—her french fries, as she calls the immersion girls, and her English muffins, who are not in the immersion program so do not attend PWC, because they’re zoned for Holy Heart, and not all mothers are willing to bend the rules to get their daughters what they want. It doesn’t hurt that this means Emily will spend her days with the fries, who happen to be a more conservative lot of girls.

But Emily continues to straddle the fence, hopping back and forth between the muffins and the fries. And being at PWC doesn’t make her anxiety go away. She still misses way too much school, and spends too much time in the guidance counsellor’s

office when she's there. The counsellor is advising her about which subjects are best for her to do each semester. Rose doesn't agree with his decisions, but Emily is happy to take the easy options, giving little thought to what she'll do when she graduates. High school was easier in the bay, without the choices, all students studying the same core subjects, and the only big decision being whether to do honours or academic math.

Emily keeps a journal because writing stuff on paper helps to calm it down in her head. But she leaves some of it clanking around in there because she worries that her mother might get in her space. Emily asks Maggie what she did to keep her private things private. What happened if Mom learned her secrets.

Mom will never read your diary. Never Emmy.

How can you be so sure.

Because I know. I didn't used to trust her either but I tested her. And she was serious when she said all she wanted was honesty and she'd never invade my privacy. She said she just had to take my word for it because what's the use of anything if you don't have trust.

Yeah she says the same thing to me.

She means it. Mom is lots of things Emmy, she drives me nuts too, but you can take her word for it. She won't touch your diary.

Emily shares different information with her muffins and her fries, but if she ever really needs advice she usually goes to Maggie. And she tells the guidance counsellor what he wants to hear. Her mother is content as long as she knows where

Emily is most of the time, and if she is managing at school. Emily is smart like Rose was--never cracks a book, crams everything in at the last minute, and she's restless with the constraints of teenage-hood. Too much like her mother for either of their good.

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CHEQUE

Emp#	Date	GROSS PAY	DEDUCTIONS	NET PAY	INSURED VACATION
384	09/11/93	2876.63	894.65	1981.98	745.00

EARNINGS - DEDUCTIONS	QTY	P.T.D	M.T.D	Y.T.D
05 FISH PURCHASES	1.00	2876.63	4118.30	6317.43
01 U.I.C. PAYABLE		22.35	44.70	67.05
03 INCOME TAX PAYBL		575.33	823.66	1373.44
07 ACCOUNT RECEIVABLE		276.97	339.71	621.50
10 WAGES PAYABLE		1981.98	2870.23	4195.44
11 NON MEMBER PAYABLE		20.00	40.00	60.00

Z 6002 600

PROFILE

2010

hey_by

Smart. Funny. Just left of normal.

Looking for same.

I like:

Old houses

Dictionaries

Bailey's

Laughing till I cry

Pubs

Sunshine

Sisters

Neat beards

Smiles

Scrabble

Straight shooters

Stand-up comedy

Hammocks

High heels

Holding hands

Bear hugs

I dislike:

Intolerance

Cold

Standing in line-ups

Parking metres

Screech-ins

Walking alone in the dark

Parallel parking

One-word introductions

LOL-ing when nothing funny was said

Not much beats good company and great conversation. And sometimes a cold beer and laughter is all that's needed to make an evening.

Hope everyone finds what they're looking for!

Cela says that online dating is the way to go. Rose is uncertain as to how Cela acquired this knowledge, given that she's still married to Don, who she started dating when she was thirteen years old. Cela offers something about a friend of a friend who met the love of her life there. Everyone seems to be doing it. Cela and Don cajole Rose into putting up her own profile and Rose returns the favour by regaling them with online stories whenever she gets a chance. Rose is not entirely comfortable with having her picture online but Cela says she has to put herself out there and the site says she will get ten times more responses with a picture. And even more than that if she smiles. Cela says do not be judgemental, and be nice to people, so Rose tries to answer all the messages.

your conversation with heyletschat5555

heyletschat5555

What turns you on creatively, spiritually, or emotionally?

hey_by

hmmmm...had no idea there was gonna be a test

- 1) I'm an interior decorator (of sorts) and get my creative release there
- 2) belief in something
- 3) intelligent conversation

heyletschat5555

□ □ □ □ □

hey_by

:)

That's as skilled as Rose gets in the emoticon department and she moves on.

your conversation with ready_to_go_again

ready_to_go_again

Hi gorgeous

I had to stop in and tell you that

Wow

I hoping to be moving to town in a week or two

Maybe we'll run into each other

:)) Lol

hey_by

ya never know who you might run into : -)

Rose shakes her head. She will have to keep her eyes peeled for ready to go again.

your conversation with keeptruckin

keeptruckin

hi

hey_by

hi :)

keeptruckin

how are you

hey_by

i'm good. How are you?

keeptruckin

im good too

Rose thinks it's great that keeptruckin got 'too' right. But she doesn't think she has the chutzpah to develop these types of messages into conversations. When

they get marginally better, she agrees to go bowling with a guy. Rose bowled once when she was a teenager. She arrives at Plaza Bowl five minutes early because she believes in punctuality. As the door swings closed behind her, she sizes up a man's back who is perusing the bulletin board at the top of the stairs. His faded brown hair dangles over a denim collar, above narrow shoulders that taper to narrower hips. The shirt is tucked into jeans above a black leather belt that is pocked with shiny silver studs. The jeans are tucked into red genuine crocodile skin cowboy boots.

Jim?

He turns slowly, revealing a long goatee and thin cheeks topped off by a sliver of silver eyeglasses. Sometimes a camera adds more than ten pounds.

Rose?

Yes.

How did you know it was me Rose?

I just had a feeling.

They shake hands, then descend the steps into the bowling alley, where they rent multi-coloured lace-up shoes and drink beer while they keep score on the overhead projector. In the coming days, Rose figures a way to refuse further bowling dates while appearing fair minded and nonjudgmental. Rose is not convinced she is cut out for this.

your conversation with justlookin320

justlookin320

Hey I'm actually only 24 I made this account because I'm attracted to older women.
Would you ever Fck a 24 year old

hey_by
when I was 24

justlookin320
Lol how bout now I'll make you feel like you're 24 again ;) you look amazing btw

hey_by
i already feel like i'm 24...and i find older men more attractive.
But thank you :)

justlookin320
So I got no chance of fckin you? , I really wanna Fck an older woman, it turns me on
lol , I could make you feel good ;)

hey_by
not a snowball's chance in hell...but if i think of any friends who might be interested
i'll let them know you're looking : ///

justlookin320
Can you think of any now for tonight ? ;)

hey_by
hahaha no
good night

justlookin320
lol worth a shot , good night

Rose does not feel like she is twenty-four, but Cela has insisted she keep things light. This is the way of things now. Cela may as well have told Rose to take her brain out and put it in soak in a bowl on her bedside table, like dentures. Rose knows wit, appreciates it, but insolence is hard to abide. It is only the twinge of

flattery stirring somewhere in Rose's belly or her brain cells that saves the boy a tongue-lashing. And for every one of those kinds of messages, there is one that baffles Rose even more.

your conversation with propertyboy

propertyboy

hey there...were you drinking when the white dress photo was taken?

hey_by

you mean the pic of me with a drink in my hand??

: P

propertyboy

yes the one where you look hammered?

hey_by

well I was having my first drink of the evening...maybe you just don't like my look?

propertyboy

or that particular picture...

hey_by

okay?

propertyboy

actually I was looking for a classy lady but obviously I haven't found one

Rose tries not to take these things personally. As she also does when insipid men ask probing questions about personal proclivities that she wouldn't even discuss with her sisters.

your conversation with buff_santa

buff_santa

I think you are a beautiful woman.

hey_by

and i like your taste so...

buff_santa

And I think you might be totally awesome :)

hey_by

and i can't disagree...

buff_santa

What amazes me is that you don't have someone.

hey_by

i keep finding someones...but i guess i'm more of a catch and release kinda person...never keep em very long : / but you shouldn't be so amazed...i might be a b***** in person...you really have no way of knowing...i mean i'm not haha but you don't know that

buff_santa

That blows my mind. Do you keep meeting them here???

hey_by

why does it blow your mind?

I've never met a man in a bookstore or a grocery store or a library.
here is just a macrocosm (if that's a word) of there...wherever there happens to be...I mean it absolutely gives people permission to be whoever they want to be for a little bit...but it's fleeting if it's a façade...no different than the real world really except the machismo is heightened initially...so you're married?

buff_santa

why do you say that?

hey_by

your profile says not looking for a relationship or any kind of commitment...just assuming that's because you already have one

buff_santa
brains too :)))))

hey_by
so what the hell do you get out of being here????

buff_santa
I love my wife very much.
I'm here for a good reason actually. Besides being lonely when I'm away for work.
I am a geologist and work in the woods a lot.
The best way to find out when there is snow in the woods is to touch base with people in the area I will be visiting and ask them.
Actually I'm going to be deleting my profile here. Too much bullshit and disrespect.
I'm a very discreet guy and respect women more than most of the assholes here. But I like you and would like to stay in touch but will leave that up to you. If you feel the same, send me a friend request on my facebook page. Hope you do. :)

hey_by
added the weather network app to your phone did ya???

Rose blocks him before she gets herself embroiled in complex explanations of how discretion does not equal respect and how, in fact, his discretion is nothing more than self-preservation. It is not Rose's job to fix every broken man on the internet.
Not tonight.

your conversation with markymark

markymark
you have a beautiful smile. come here often?

hey_by
thanks :)
when i'm single...usually about once a year :)

markymark
single every year?

hey_by
haven't found one that lasted longer than that yet...haven't found 'the one' i guess :)

markymark
well hopefully i'll be making you smile two years from now :-)

hey_by
haha that's a really good comeback

markymark
it is very hard to keep females engaged here. Successful and fun conversation one day does not translate into a connection the next day. It is like Groundhog Day in here for me.

hey_by
yeah it's a weird alternate reality isn't it?
engagement is key though
i'll lose interest if a person can't make me smile every time we chat
probably not fair but nature of the beast i guess

markymark
I can make you smile every day but I need to be made smile also. It should be a two way street.

hey_by
oh.
i mean i honestly try to engage the other person too.
that's why i end up with so goddamn many LOLs and HAHAHAs
to be sure people get that i'm not being serious...the body language missing is a big piece too right

markymark

For years now I have preached that social media is the destruction of being social. I am very tired of adding the lol and : -) so people know my mood when I type something. Face to face is the only true way to know

hey_by

i agree 1000%

on the face to face being the only way to know i mean

but social media is here to stay so how do we find a way to make it workable becomes the question right? i mean not that we need to find an answer tonight
HAHA LOL :-)

markymark

HeHe this is true. We have the rest of our lives together to figure it out sure. lol it's a pleasure to be typing with you.

I'm Terry. No pressure to tell me your name honestly : -)

I'm off to bed. I will be here again tomorrow :- (

Would love to make you smile again :-) lol

hey_by

Rose

Good night Terry

:- D

markymark

:- P



After a week of chatting, Rose and Terry met for drinks and it went very well.

And it goes well for several months. And they are exclusive. Rose is supposed to

bring him to dinner for Cela to meet him. She doesn't want to let Cela down, but

Rose doesn't think she can take one more minute of it. Terry is a perfectly good man,

but she cannot imagine turning in to him every night, a wastebasket full of tissues in

the corner of her bedroom for the rest of her life.

He wipes the tip of his bird with tissue Cela. As soon as we're done. He keeps a box of tissues on his night stand.

Rose that is normal. Normal people do that.

Oh Cela please. If Luke did that we wouldn't have lasted anyway.

Everyone does it Rose. Don does it.

Oh my god Cela. I can't unhear that. Ew. Just ew.

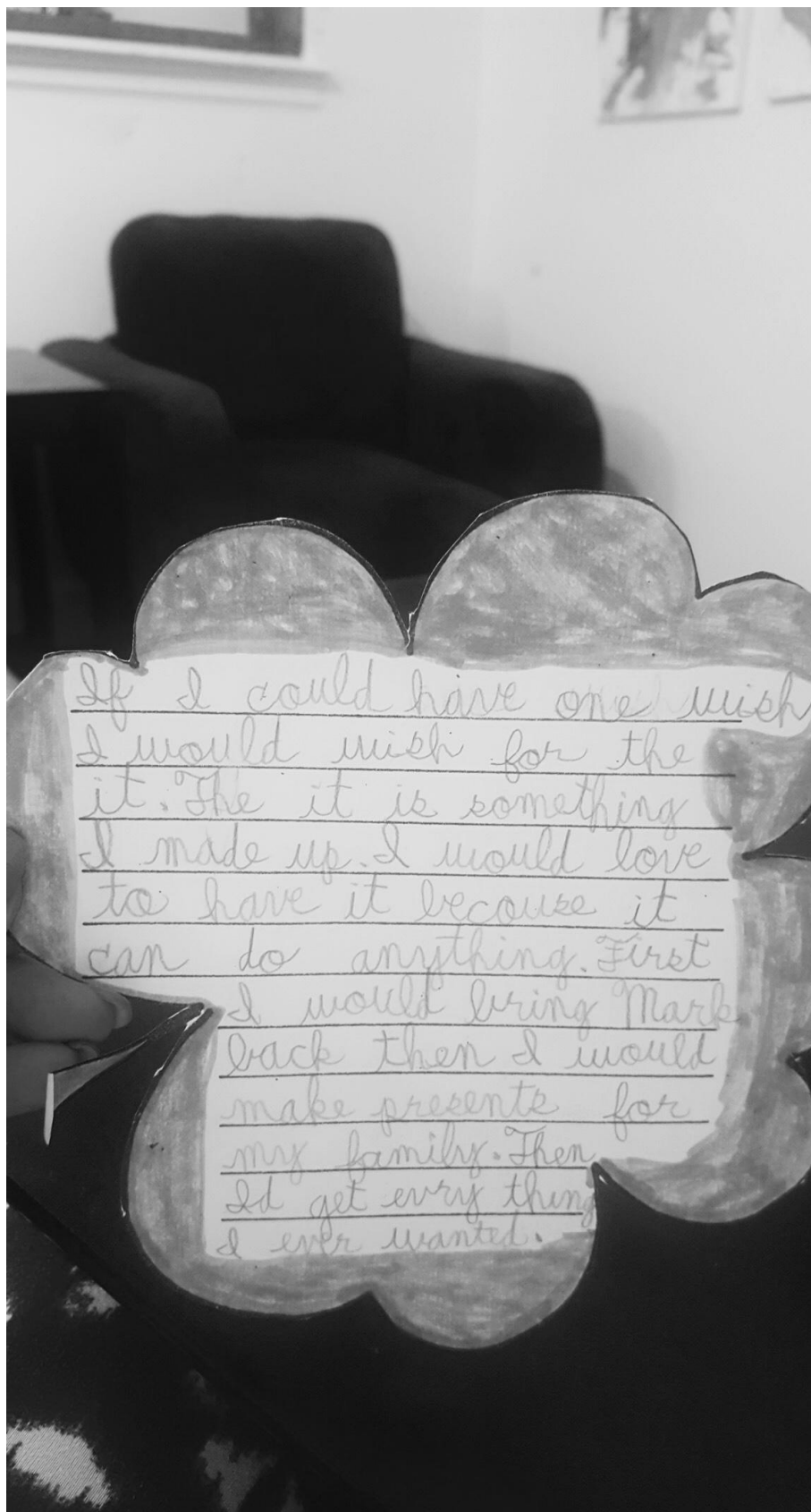
Rose, get over yourself. You're acting like a child. You're just looking for an excuse.

Rose sticks her tongue out at Cela and mimics an uncontrollable shudder, shaking her shoulders and grimacing.

Not happening Cela. Can't do it.

Cela makes an exaggerated attempt at rolling her eyes, but she's disappointed. Again.

Good stories though, Cela.





FAÇADE

2010

Rose reclines in the chair, staring up into Dr. Long's face. She will brace her eyes against the glaring light, glancing from the fingerprints on its chrome perimeter to his yellow eyebrows and wrinkled, steel-blue eyes, until the job is well under way. For a man who works with such precision, Dr. Long has shabby blonde hair, and a leftover hippie look about him. He wears navy deck shoes with leather laces left untied, and a short-sleeved plaid dress shirt, thin lines of red and blue intersecting on a white background. The shirt puckers above a small paunch—which persists despite his twice weekly yoga sessions—revealing white, hairless skin. He has a pale, freckled face and a skinny red moustache. He looks like an evening drinker. His assistant is young. She wears a hospital uniform—turquoise pants with a flowered print tunic.

So, Rose, I'll start your root canal today, and we'll make an appointment for a couple weeks from now to finish it. It'll let me implant the ceramic post I need, to rebuild a front tooth for you. The ceramic is bright white, so it won't show through the tooth like a metal post would. I swear Rose, you have the teeth of an 80-year-old, I hate to say. I don't know what's wrong with them.

Dr. Long shakes his head. During the root canal, he will remove the pulp of the tooth and carefully clean and disinfect inside, then fill and seal the tooth with gutta-percha, to settle before the final work is done. Dr. Long explains each step he will take in a low, soothing tone, like a grandfather shushing his baby to sleep.

The post will act as an anchor to hold the new tooth in place. Like this.

He turns to the adjustable side table at his right elbow, pushes the neatly aligned tray of tools slightly to one side, and uses the paper liner on the table to ink a crude sketch of his work. He draws the tooth and its root, arrows and x's pointing to the details he's explaining.

So this is the very tip of your root, right up here, and it will be filled with cement. I'll drill into that and install the post...it'll stop about here, and then will extend down here and I'll rebuild, basically a whole new tooth for you. It'll be lovely.

Rose wishes everything was so easy. Dr. Long turns from his drawing and slips on rubber gloves, like second skin. Pulls the tool tray back in place, surveys it. Front surface reflecting mirror; DG16 endodontic probe; Western probe; endo-locking tweezers; long shank excavator; flat plastic, artery forceps; endodontic syringe; plus clean stand, file stand, measuring device, sterile cotton wool rolls and pledgets.

He picks up the mirror and leans close over Rose, as she opens wide. Pokes around with his fingers.

Feel that?

No.

Prods and pushes with a probe.

Feel that?

No.

He roots harder, sprays a hard stream of water into the fissure, droplets flying up and catching the light.

That?

I feel you doing it, but it doesn't hurt.

Rose doesn't know if he understood a word. Dr. Long straightens as he lays the water jet aside.

This is all dead here. Nothing alive. It's startling really.

That is exactly how Rose feels some days. She looks normal on the surface.

You said that about my teeth last time. You did fillings with no needle.

He scoots his wheeled seat to the counter and glances at Rose's chart. Shakes his head again. Pushes back to Rose and busies himself in her mouth again.

We won't be doing this without a needle. Won't take that chance. First, I'll have to drill through what's left of your natural tooth—there's only a fragment really—and up into the root as far as I can. Don't worry, I'm leaving the old filling in place for now. I won't send you home looking like a hockey player.

Rose looks at this performer of miracles. Just build a new one of whatever is broken. If he only knew. If anyone only knew. Rose has taken good care of her appearance but it's showing. She's older every time she comes back from a visit with Luke. She trusts Dr. Long. Her lips attempt a smile around his fingers, as she thinks about the masquerade she's built. Some days she wonders how she does it, and other days she forgets why.

But no steak or nuts, or anything hard, for the next couple weeks. Only food as soft and mushy as you can handle.

Dr. Long lays his probe on the tray.

Okay, I'll do a liquid diet only. Vodka and cranberry for two weeks.

Rose makes no apologies to anyone for the Iceberg Vodka she keeps in her freezer, the Bailey's in her pantry cupboard beside her pots and pans.

Okay, let's get a needle in you. That'll take a few minutes to take effect and then we can get down to serious business here. This will only pinch. I promise.

Dr. Long inserts the needle, gently, leaning forward then back, as he removes it. Only a pinch. Rose doesn't feel anything.

I really don't know what the hell is going on with your teeth, Rose. The inside of your mouth is at least fifteen years older than you are. It's the damndest thing.

Don't worry though. It will look just like your own. No one will be any the wiser.



BED

2010

I love you.

Luke mumbles as he turns over in the bed, burrowing deeper into sleep.

Ditto.

Rose stands watching Luke for minutes, or hours, her feelings balled together. She doesn't know what the knot in her gut means anymore. It gets harder every time she comes. Rose closes the door gently as she leaves, steps lightly down the stairs.

Muscle sinew bone. Muscle sinew bone.

Rose steps back through the living room wall. As her left foot comes to rest inside the wall, her body vibrates violently. Every atom recalibrates.

Her head touches a pillow. She wakes to a clean slate, for two seconds or nanoseconds. Then a word, 'Luke,' like a neon sign, over there, off away in the upper left corner of darkness, behind her lids. The reality of the sign, of why the name is in lights, is like a flicker, before the word is flooded, swept up in the dread, the sign flashing now, in the time before her eyes open. They blink open—the bedroom looks like it did yesterday—and close. Refuse to open again.

Rose passes through the outer layer of wall into the night, gasping. So hard to breathe.

GENES

2011

Children who lose a parent before age eleven have a fifty percent chance of developing mental illness. Fifty.

Rose's Aunt Jane—who gave her a card every year because their birthdays were a day apart—had a big house that was chock-full of children. The house was riddled with craziness. She always had bad nerves herself, and her kids—who are much older than Rose because really, Jane is her mother's aunt—got the depression/anxiety/bipolar/manic-depressive gene and passed it to their own, lava glowing as it turned the branches of their tree to ash. Rose was not close to these cousins but felt she knew them because of Jane, and as she grew up, she wondered how a whole family was so sick, and how they survived siblings and children deciding not to live. Rose had the presence of mind to thank god it was them and not hers.

Although no one has pinpointed the exact cause of most mental illnesses, research shows that many of them are caused by a combination of biological, psychological, and environmental factors. Some mental illnesses appear to be related to the abnormal functioning of neural pathways that connect different brain regions. Heredity plays its part; it's common to see specific illnesses run in families. Susceptibility to mental illness is what is actually passed on through genes, but that susceptibility doesn't necessarily guarantee mental illness. It's also contingent on psychological and environmental factors. An important early loss, such as the loss of

a parent, is a recognized psychological factor that is associated with the development of certain types of mental illness. Environmental stress may also trigger an illness in someone who is susceptible to it.

Rose sits in a little waiting room like an office—at the Janeway Emergency Department—with baby coloured walls of pale pink and green. The shiny grey, speckled floors, run up the bottom edge of the wall to form a baseboard. There are two chrome chairs with black padded seats and backs, a hospital-bed table that raises and lowers by turning a handle at its end, and an intern who isn't quite sure how to get rid of this woman and her teenage daughter with the scowl.

The intern is wearing the style of Crocs that masquerade as shoes, with tan coloured footlets peeking over the top, like a grandmother. She looks like her body wants to apologize for the space it occupies. Rose wants to tell her she's worthy. Wonders how she got here. The intern questions Emily, determines that this is not a life-threatening situation, because Emily is not considering self-harm at this time, and tells them that she can be placed on a list for follow-up if they are interested. Rose apologizes to the young doctor.

I understand that this is not your fault. I already know the system way too well.

Thank you.

Don't thank me yet.

Rose is battling apathy in a white lab coat. Waging war on the calm decorum of the children's hospital and the young, inexperienced students who are left to face the madness. Yes, she understands that it is not their fault.

You know, I get that this is not a priority for you. I get that. But we're not leaving this room, do you hear me. We'll set up house in here if we have to.

Mrs Tremblett, I don't think you understand.

Clipped, precise English. Devoid of the charm of any accent. Rose wonders if the doctors are nice to her.

No, I don't think you understand. We're not leaving here until we have an appointment to see a doctor this week.

I do...I don't think we can do that. There's a waitlist.

Rose pounces on her timidity. Adds another cut to her wounds. Survival of the fittest and all that. Or survival of the one with the fittest mother. Whatever it takes.

Oh we'll do it. We'll be the squeaky wheel. Because it's not normal for a tiny teenage girl to turn over bookshelves taller than herself. And to smash mirrors that I had to wrestle with, to hang above her makeup table. My little girl. So, you see, this is the most important thing in the world. And we're not going anywhere.

The intern stares at Rose, then leaves the room without another word. She stays away for a long time, eventually returning with a business card that has an appointment scribbled on it for Friday morning, with the head of Children's Psychiatry. Rose wants to pat the girl's hand. Wonders if she had a mother to fight for her.

Thank you my dear. You have yourself a good day.

Rose bundles into her coat, and whisks Emily out into the hallway, as she tucks the card safely away in the zippered compartment of her wallet. The intern stands still, until she hears the outer door swing open and shut, before she leaves the cramped room herself, and forces a smile to her face.

Rose spends the next months watching Emily's hatred for the head of Psychiatry grow. Rose tries to get Emily to like her, then she tries to get her to at least tolerate her, then she tries to get her to at least go to her appointments. Because they need that doctor like an IV line.

Rose only found out when it hit her own little family that it wasn't just Jane's crew. But Rose's own crowd don't believe in illuminating such situations, and are more fortunate than Jane's are, in that it hasn't been forced into the open in the Obituaries of the Sunday paper. Between the genetics and the dead father, Emily didn't really stand a chance.

JANEWAY

2012

Lying on the floor in the bathroom off the admissions ward, at the Janeway Emergency Department, in July—her cheek conscious of the cool grey tiles, her eyes moving up to the curve of the toilet bowl, then running over the plumbing that is jutting out of the wall under the sink—Rose gives herself ten minutes to stifle screams and ask why me before she has to get up and go out there and face the fact that she yelled at the dog for pissing on the floor and then yelled up the stairs at Emily to come down and clean it up, and she came groggy and plastic-faced. She heard a familiar sound, just as her eyelids were drooping, and she rose from the bed and followed it.

Groggy and plastic-faced. Looking at her mother but not looking at her. Her feet seem to be leading the way, but even they change their mind, and Emily sits halfway down the stairs and says I'm sorry. I'm sorry, slurred. Rose stares at Emily's face. It is stripped of everything that is Emily. Its edges and hollows are puffed, rounded, and its eyes are like flat pebbles. Empty. Rose is paralyzed. She wants Emily.

What have you done.

Pills.

What pills.

Dun-no.

What pills Emily.

I don't. Know.

Go back and get the bottles.

Emily sits there.

Go back and get the bottles. We'll need the bottles.

Rose thanked god that Cela was visiting and sent Emily back up the stairs to get the bottles—sent her child back up the stairs—while she yelled to Cela to come help, and they piled Emily into the front seat of the truck and Cela made Rose get out of the driver's seat and Rose wished for Luke all the way up Prince Philip Drive. Rose finds it hard to look at her daughter's face when she's missing from it, and her eyes dart around the truck and out the windows, looking for something to focus on. She leans her forehead on the back of the driver's seat, behind Cela. Her mind screaming, screaming. She feels bad for the rabbits that Luke used to snare.

Sometimes Rose's love is a frantic flurry of words and offerings. Sometimes it is like cymbals in her head. Rose has lived without Luke long enough that she has adjusted to it, and doesn't miss him or need him now. October is usually enough for her. But some things require more than one person. Some things require more than one heart.

Rose eases herself up from the bathroom floor, splashes cold water over her face, and pats her swollen eyes with a government-issue paper towel. She pulls the heavy door open, feels the tug of resistance from the hydraulic door hinge, listens to the quiet whoosh before she heads back to the curtained bed that holds Emily. There is only one other patient inside tonight, so the ward is calm, and the women in

uniforms, that are festooned with puppies and bunnies and clowns, bustle around Emily and Rose and Cela, creating chaos behind the curtain, in their attempts to soothe.

Youngsters. You don't know what they're going to get up to.

One of the nurses clucks as she brushes Rose's forearm with her fingertips.

She'll be alright.

Rose knows the face. Has probably sat at the same table with her at a meeting or a convention. Rose is certain this nurse does not require a response.

Another one is inserting an IV into the back of Emily's wrist. She prods the needle, to lead it where she wants it to go, pushing it to one side, pulling it back a little, then pushing it further, under Emily's skin. Emily grimaces, but she is not aware that a needle has punctured her epidermis, and is being taped to her arm. Needles make Emily dizzy. Even with all the tattoos. This nurse is all business, while the others appear to be bystanders. Rose appreciates her brusqueness. Appreciates that she is not distracted by the air of camaraderie that the others offer.

Please step outside the curtain. I need to insert a catheter.

Rose clenches the white cotton drape and opens a narrow gap that she and Cela slip through. A hand on the inside closes it, and Cela and Rose stand frozen, murmurs and moans wafting through the flimsy veil. Rose has never had a catheter. She doesn't know what to do for Emily. She looks at Cela, but Cela doesn't know either.

The business nurse pushes out through the curtain.

Okay, you can go back in.

She motions them inside as she scurries away. She returns with a glass full of thick, grey liquid. It looks like molten ash. The nurse catches Emily's eye, to make her focus.

This is charcoal. You have to drink it without throwing up, or you'll have to start over again.

Emily drinks a quarter of the glass, glances at the nurse, drinks some more.

You can take a little break. Give it a minute. Slow and easy.

Emily rests the glass on her leg, burps, takes a sip, drinks again. When the heavy business of soaking up hydrochlorothiazide, perindopril, and sertraline, and eliciting pee, is well underway, a young, male doctor with black hair, pushes the curtain aside. He glances at his clipboard.

So Emily, how're we doing? I'm just going to ask you a few questions now that I want you to answer to the best of your ability. Nothing too hard.

The doctor fixes a smile and sits on the edge of Emily's bed, his clipboard resting in his lap.

What is your full name.

She looks at him, then at her mother.

It's okay, darling, just tell him your name. You remember it, don't you.

Emily Luke Tremblett.

Okay. What year is it.

It's twen...I think it's 2012.

Yes. Good.

Where are you?

Emily looks around her, at the busy uniforms, the bedpan on the side table, her mother.

I'm at the hospital.

She will be staying for the night. Emily is not to be left alone. She is not allowed anything that could pose a danger. These things are discussed in front of Emily, as if she is not there. As if she has not just proven that she is conscious. That she is still here. When the commotion settles, and Rose and Cela are left to sit with Emily and one nurse, Emily gazes at them with mounting recognition.

I s'pose they'll still let me have my birth control. I can't swallow that.

Cela half rises in her seat, then sits again. Confusion and panic flit across her face.

She's joking Cela. It's a joke. She just gave up the pill. She switched to Nuvaring. She can't swallow that. It's too big.

Rose pats Emily's hand and beams, as if she is a kindergartner who has gotten her alphabet right for the first time.

She's joking Cela. She's just joking.

Happy Birthday

2013

Emily's favourite meal is baked macaroni. To the point, even as a young adult, that it has to be served at every function of any importance that she has any say in—including her annual not-to-be-taken-lightly-by-anyone-who-loves-her-celebration-of-self. Her birthday. And god forbid Rose alter the process. She must keep it simple. That way, Rose saves herself the eye-rolling condemnation that comes with suggesting that perhaps a more adult version of the delicacy might be appropriate. She finds it easier to face the embarrassment of serving it, or to embellish the meal without sullyng the baked macaroni itself. Rose mimics Emily's voice in a singsong as she pulls the steaming casserole from the oven.

Godsake. Don't add lobster or white cheese to the baked macaroni.

Rose doesn't remember when the macaroni became a party staple, but Emily was pretty young. Then, she knew what she wanted. Knew who she was. When she was three years old she would fold her little body like origami onto the living room window bench about a foot above the floor, lay there quietly until Rose's interest waned, then hurl herself onto the hardwood, laughing every time her mother did a startled jump in an attempt to catch her.

Rose has an old hard-drive stored somewhere with Emily's baby rendition of "Don't Cry For Me Argentina" recorded on it. Rose keeps the hard drive because she doesn't know how to save the song to her laptop. Emily is an atheist now, but then,

she'd toss her auburn curls across her back, the light from the window shattering them into browns and reds and golds, and she'd say oh, Jesus gave me my highlights.

Emily loved to visit the salon, especially on Christmas Eve, when Rose let the kids open gifts, after she'd sent the last customer on the way and locked the door. Emily still loves Christmas. Another me day. She has captured so many pictures of family lined off in front of Christmas trees, or surrounding birthday cakes, or gathered on the patio, everyone grinning at her standing behind the camera, being ridiculous— sticking her finger up her nose, or burping long and loud, or pulling her shirt up and slouching down to form a paunch—to make them laugh.

Emily was seven when they moved to town for Rose to go to university, and they moved back out when she was eight. To Mt. Pearl when she was ten and Maggie had finished high school, into the heart of the city when she was twelve, to live in a rambling old house that Rose fell in love with--Rose spent her time renovating and decorating the house, rescuing it from years of neglect. She transformed the dining room ceiling into a canvas for family memories, and covered the living room walls with zebra fur--when she found it years ago she knew she'd use it someday, and the bolt of fabric made every move with them until it found a home. Rose kept the house when they moved out to the bay again for a year when Emily was fourteen, then came back to their downtown home to stay. Emily taught herself to love being the new kid at school and always dragged home a houseful of friends before the end of September. When Emily was in high school, she got into the piercings and tattoos and blue hair.

Emily's birthdays are as important to her as macaroni. They range from gaggles of five-year-olds to family-only-affairs to this year's over-the-top-eighteenth-birthday-carnival-themed-extravaganza-to-rival-Thomas-Amusements. It was a surprise party in August. That Rose told her about in April. Rose spent days over the spring and summer with her bedroom door closed and furniture pushed against the walls, creating backdrops to transform their home into a wonderland for a day. A kissing booth where Emily collected thirty-eight dollars and felt like the most popular girl at the fair, even though the money came from her aunts and her cousins and her grandmother and she could laugh at it because she is popular in real life too; a kaleidoscope of plastic flowers larger than life on every wall; a photo booth that took up the whole living room with bureaus full of costumes and props—hats and boas and moustaches and umbrellas and too outrageous sunglasses; the patio festooned with more plastic flowers and sunrises and trees and birds and butterflies and bubble wands the size of walking sticks; a ball toss with tent top and baskets of tennis balls and prizes tied to the rafters with twine; checker games and three-legged races and silver trophies and joy spilling over the fences. Rose told Emily the plan months in advance. In case she wasn't here. Or hoping somehow, that Emily would want to stay alive.

And the macaroni. Rose made it with elbow pasta, cheese whiz, Carnation milk, bread crumbs, and salt.



THREAD

2014

Emily gave Rose the first embroidery piece she ever sewed. She is just finishing her hairstyling and aesthetician program, which Rose always swore Emily would do over her dead body. Rose wants more for Emily. She doesn't like Emily's new boyfriend, but Rose gives him a lift to the graduation party, and she drapes her arm across his back for a picture, because she and her daughter have been through a lot together, and Rose is not about to let some little asshole get in the way of what they've worked so hard for. This too will pass.

Rose spent days combing the jewellery stores at the mall, to find perfect diamond studs for Emily, that wouldn't bankrupt her. Emily slips them into the second hole in her earlobe—below her industrial, whose barbell impales the cartilage either side of the top of Emily's ear—she's afraid she'll lose the petite carbon squares, perfected over a billion years of pressure, but she doesn't want to disappoint her mother. She's wearing the long black sheath that Rose found at Winners but didn't really expect Emily to agree to. The silver beading—little reflective rectangles punctuated with glass balls, like shiny exclamation points encircling her—cover the halter bodice and form a sash around Emily's wasp waist, the dark fabric hugging her before it swishes away at the tail. Rose chose it because her daughter did not attend prom and she wants to make it up to her, even though Emily absolutely refused to go. Emily loves the dress.

Rose drives to Michael's and buys a square white frame with a white mat. Abbey told her to get a self-stick mounting board, but Rose chooses a heavy paperboard and Heat n Bond, for the "strongest bond possible," after consulting with the girl who comes to rescue her in aisle sixteen. There is more than enough in the Value Pack of heat-activated adhesive to do a couple practice runs on a pillow case, before committing embroidery to board. Abbey is the cross-stitcher in the family.

Rose retrieves the ironing board from behind her closet door. It squeals as she releases the lever and lowers its legs. She lines her supplies up neatly on the plain grey padding—sharp scissors, pencil, cardboard, sticky backing, frame. Removes the glass and sizes everything behind it, centering the picture before tracing careful straight lines around its perimeter. Rose lays the frame and glass aside and assembles the piece: places the material that displays a single word in black thread, facedown; presses it until it is wrinkle-free; positions the bonding agent, paper up, steam rising from the edges of the hot iron; peels the paper backing, flips the square and sets it precisely on the hard board; repeats the process of bonding layer to layer. She reassembles the frame with its contents—square white wood, non-reflective glass, white mat, bonded embroidery, frame back, protective cover.

Rose attaches 3M velcro strips to the back of the frame and to her living room wall, more paper backing, more layers bonded together. Emily's artwork is centred above a table, to the right of a studio floor lamp. Rose surveys the project, claps her fingertips. Navy blue paisley on ivory fabric, displaying the word—shit—in cursive.

DAVE

2014

September fifth is the last time Rose saw Dave. They'd spent the night at the Delta before he drove to Argentia to catch the ferry. Rose lingered in the parking lot, telling Dave to drive carefully with that old Harley propped up like that in the back of the pickup. You don't know potholes till you drive that access road. When the first drops of rain fell, Rose said okay love this is it I guess. Give me a hug. Dave stepped close and wrapped his arms around her. This is not it Rose. It's not goodbye. I'll be back before you know it. Rose buried her head into his shoulder and hugged him tightly.

Before Rose met Dave, she and Cela used to laugh about how Rose was too hard on men, how they didn't stand a chance. Every time Rose and Cela broke open a second bottle of wine together, they knew they were in for a night of solving Rose's man problems.

You're doing it wrong Rose. You don't need to look for someone you can spend forever with anymore. We both know you're not spending one day more than a year with the man. So just look for someone you can stomach for a year.

Rose would tease Cela about her good fortune. Cela has Don. Doesn't have to do the online dating thing like Rose.

Imagine, Cela, a man you've only known for a couple months, grabbing you by both ankles—right in the middle of it just grabbing you by both ankles—and lifting them up behind your ears.

Cela reaches for the wine bottle and tops up their glasses.

How do you think you'd feel Cela? Not sexy I'll tell you that. Because, you know, you're probably a little too distracted because your left tit has somehow managed to get itself firmly wedged in your armpit and you're finding it a little hard to breathe. Uhhhhhh. Then he pushes harder. Yeah baby. Yeah. YEAH. Uhhhhh holy shit. And at the same time you're trying to wrangle your tit loose you're also trying to keep your chin up so you don't look like Alfred Hitchcock.

Cela chimes in.

And suck your belly in so it doesn't double over itself in the middle.

Yes, and the more you wriggle to try to get your tit undone the more excited he gets and the harder he pushes until about two hours in he gives a great big heave and the tit comes flying out of your armpit and you're right relieved. Ahhhhhhhhhhh. Throwing her head back, Cela squeals.

AND HE MOANS BACK.

Yes. He goes Ahhhhhhhhhh even louder. And it's done. Not all it's cracked up to be Cela. Not all it's cracked up to be.

The women clink their glasses together, then fall back on opposite ends of the couch. They decide that Rose will do a man the courtesy, now, of letting him know that he has one year, at the outside. If he can keep her ankles below her ears.

That was before she met Dave. Dave was different. They met for the first time in December at the Grapevine and he called her "dude" and they drank Coors Light together and they clicked. And they talked about things that are not the weather or

traffic or how Rose's mother's doctor supports her hypochondria. And the hours flew and they both had to work tomorrow and they strolled together up the sidewalk, filled up and proud of each other's goals and accomplishments and grandkids and before Rose got home Dave texted her and told her what a great night he had and that he wants to keep in touch and one month later there will be a handful of dates while he's in town and two hundred twenty nine emails exchanged.

When they hang out at their favourite pub—they have a favourite pub because this is so very new and Liam and Emily are still at home and Dave lives in company housing—strangers, young men and middle-aged women, come up and comment on their obvious happiness and compatibility and a young guy high-fives Dave, and Dave asks Rose if anything like that has ever happened in the world before, and he's laughing because she's lied through her teeth to the people about their history and said they've been together for twenty eight years but then she feels bad and goes to the woman's table and tells her the truth so that the woman doesn't feel weird about being middle-aged and single and the truth is that they barely know each other but they cherish each other—Rose cherishes Dave, even though he's a mainlander.

When Dave tells Rose he wants to see some real culture she takes him to the Crow's Nest on a Tuesday for a Storytelling Circle and it's new to both of them and it's amazing and she decides to herself that it can't be so hard so she'll have a go at it and she puts her name on the list on her way back from the washroom and when it's her turn Dave looks a little stunned sitting there surrounded by World War II memorabilia and ships' bells and strangers who are sharing their table because the

room is packed but he scoots out to the edge of the bench to let Rose go and she stands in the circle in the middle of the bar where couches and comfy-looking chairs have been arranged around a low table and a stool for anyone who prefers to sit while they share their stories of fantastic journeys and hockey games and strangers who became friends. And she tells her story of resettlement—how her mother took her cupboards from her abandoned house and hauled them across the bay and made them the centre of their new lives and painted them and covered them with wallpaper and painted them again and Jesus is hanging on the wall watching them eat supper and wondering if he's in hell and those cupboards could tell stories if they could talk. Dave's expression is exactly the same as her father's the day he found out that she finally got her own shop. And his nose is the same too. And Rose and Dave are caught in each other's eyes and right there among the crowd and the noise and the heat Dave rises to his feet and he claps and he claps and he claps.

When Dave finds out her birthday is coming up he asks for her work address to have flowers delivered and she says oh no but she secretly wishes he would find the address because everyone loves to get flowers at work but she insisted no. And he wanted to take her shopping but she said oh no that would be too awkward. Not one to be thrown from a goal Dave asked for one half hour of her time on her birthday and he brought her a bag filled with their brief intimate history: a birthday card with a picture of a woman with obvious attitude and hair standing at crazy angles that reminded him of her mother making fun of her hair; a Montreal Canadiens keychain to herald her bullshit bravado about being a “sports buff” that dangled from her keys

for the whole hockey season and led to many sheepish admissions to coworkers and acquaintances that she did not in fact know very much about the game; a bag of assorted single-serving chocolates to maintain the “voluptuous” curves which was her favourite word she had ever heard coming out of a man’s mouth; some one-ounce bottles of coconut rum that she liked to smuggle into movies to spike her sprite; a gift card to her favourite scent shop because he loves the smell of her; a plastic potted bouquet of tulips that was also a lamp and still sported the Value Village price tag—an homage to her courage in going to Value Village for the first time with him and braving the penetrating eyes of people who might know her, as well as a bow to her gifts from Luke that were all plastic and tacky and lights and chimes that used to mortify her but that still hung on her walls—and somehow Dave knew that was the right thing to do. And she sat in his truck with him on her birthday for one half hour and she laughed and she cried.

When Dave tells her he’s a gasoline addict, she has no clue what he means, but he looks so happy she still wants to hear all about his love affair with anything on wheels that is old and has integrity and makes him be a gasoline addict. And he shows her a picture of his ’71 Buick that was the first car he ever owned that both he and his son drove to their proms. And he tells her about his old truck and his old van and his bikes which light him up. The bike that he built himself after he found it in boxes of bits and pieces in some guy’s barn and called his dad and bought it for five hundred dollars. And he and his buddy spent ages putting it together and Dave talked to some other guy out west who knew about bikes and when he mentioned that the

serial number looked scuffed the guy got excited and Dave sent pics of the serial number in the mail so the guy could confirm whether the bike was authentic. This was in the days before email and electronics and instant gratification. And Rose has no clue whether the '67 is the Harley or the British one or the one that Dave built but she thinks it's the British one and she thinks that he built it and she looks at motorcycles differently now.

When Dave requests a little flowered summer dress with buttons and fishnets and high heels and the best she can do to oblige him—and she's willing to oblige him because he waited four months before he booked a nice hotel room and asked her to stay—the best she can do is a short black cotton button-front dress with orange geraniums and sleeves that can be rolled up and a pair of stilettos that she could never wear in public but she darts over to see him in because he's holed up in an old lady's dive that he calls “the condo” that the old lady rents to tourists during the summer when she's in St. Mary's Bay that he got because it's in Georgetown and in fact is just around the corner from Rose and when he sees her coming he whistles like a 50-year-old voluptuous woman is god's gift to men. And they spend that evening and many more in harmony at the condo with its outdated apartment-sized furniture and its tiny television with no cable, laughing and talking and raising the neighbours' eyebrows late into the night and into the early morning hours.

The condo is sometimes the scene of debate about feminism and euthanasia and abortion and they commiserate about poor old Latimer and Dave catches his breath at some of the things Rose says given her regular refusal to take a political

position or even to vote and her faith and whatnot and Rose finds out that he is as passionate about things that matter as she is and he insists that Rose is too smart to be putting off her mammograms and his father would never have wanted to live like an invalid in a diaper and Dave doesn't ever want to be a burden and his daughter had an abortion that he wanted some say in—because he's her father, even though it's her body and he found out two years after the fact—and by the time the sun is thinking about coming up Dave finds himself nodding when Rose says it's necessary for all people to be feminists and that there are no “women's” issues.

Dave slips a couple times and calls her wife but they both know she'll likely never be his wife because she's sworn up and down that there'll never be another wedding and meant it—even though she's been known to tell a good-looking man that he looks exactly like her third husband and when the poor man can't help but gasp and ask how many husbands she's had she says two—and Dave's only ever gotten married once in the dead of winter in Western Canada far from home at Christmastime but that was mostly to cheat the tax man and also of course to save his baby and future kids the same fate as him by giving them their father's name. And Dave said when he was drunk one night that he never thought he'd ever get married again but it'd be kinda cool to have all his grownup kids in his wedding party. And when wife slips out they both ignore it but he squeezes her hand a little tighter.

Things happen. Not always her fault, but things happen. September fifth is the last time Rose saw Dave. They'd spent the night at the Delta before he drove to Argentia to catch the ferry. Rose lingered in the parking lot, telling Dave to drive

carefully with that old Harley propped up like that in the back of the pickup. You don't know potholes till you drive that access road. When the first drops of rain fell, Rose said okay love this is it I guess. Give me a hug. Dave stepped close and wrapped his arms around her. This is not it Rose. It's not goodbye. I'll be back before you know it. Rose buried her head into his shoulder and hugged him tight, drew his scent deep into her lungs. She'll leave it at that. But October is coming.

NAILS

2014

The girl picks up each hand in turn, loosely clasps the fingers in both her own hands, runs her thumb absently across the knuckles, rests it back on the black vinyl pad.

You like gel or acrylic?

Rose hasn't had artificial nails before, but she's finding it harder and harder to keep up appearances, to not feel like she could be Luke's mother.

I have no idea. What's the difference?

Acrylic better. I do acrylic.

Rose feels like her own mother just left her alone at school on her first day. Like she's in over her head.

Okay.

The girl immediately reaches into a drawer, withdraws an industrial looking nail clipper, and cuts Rose's paper thin nails to the quick.

Like my grandmother's. We start over.

Yes, Rose thinks. Every day. A flash of teeth as the girl pulls a white surgical mask over her bare mouth and nose, her eyes blinking. She reaches down out of sight and produces a drill the size of an electric toothbrush, with a sandpaper tip like a sphere, which she guides deftly across Rose's nail plates, raising a plume of microscopic cells that scatter and settle. Rose watches her push the cuticles back and snip away strands with a pincer. Nothing is easy. The girl opens a translucent plastic box that is divided

into two-inch square compartments, hundreds of oblong acrylic tips of varying widths contained within its walls. She squints at Rose's hand, picks a tip from the box, drops a spot of glue onto its back, and holds it securely in place where the frayed end of Rose's nail used to be. Over and over the girl does this. Rose's fingers don't know what to do, as the girl pushes Rose's index finger down, or her ring finger up, out of the way, when they jut into her line of operation. They push back. Finally, Rose laughs at her hands, spread on the table with fingertips extending forever, like the pictures in the Book of World Records when she was a youngster.

Wait I finish.

I will.

You like long?

Short. Please.

Rose doesn't want to look ridiculous. The girl takes a sharp scissor from a drawer and snips the nails back to a length Rose can live with. She picks up a small brown bottle, unscrews the cap, and dabs the brushful of primer—a concoction of methacrylic acid that will burn if it makes skin contact—on each of Rose's nails where they meet the plastic tips. Rose rustles a little in her chair as the girl anchors Rose's wrists to the vinyl pad again. Rose wishes she had asked her name but now she thinks it's too late. She wishes she knew how to prepare for things. The girl folds a crisp paper towel under Rose's hands, pours liquid acrylic into a glass bowl, and reaches for a crystal container filled with white acrylic powder, which she sifts and checks for lumps, with

the wooden handle of a brush she pulls from the tension arm of her lamp. She looks into Rose's eyes and cradles her hands in her own palm.

Just relax.

Rose looks into almond-shaped eyes and exhales. Black hair skims the girl's shoulder as she tilts her head. The brush is held securely by the girl's thumb, cutaneous veins prominent in the back of both their hands, as she repositions Rose's wrists and begins to fill the nails, lunulae to tips.

You going vacation?

No. Yes. With my husband.

Nice.

The girl dips her brush in the pink liquid, wipes it against the rim of the bowl to remove the excess, then runs its tip through the heart-shaped jar of powder crystals, until a small, moist ball collects on the head of the brush, like a pearl. She places it on the nail of Rose's ring finger at the smile line, where the tip meets the nail, then smooths it nimbly over the entire surface, leaving a gentle curve in its wake. Rose is a natural hugger, and her fingers curl around the girl's hand as she moves from ring, to middle, to index. Rose's fingers move in unison with the girl's now, a touch here, a pressure there. Dip. Pearl. Smooth. Dip. Pearl. Smooth. The girl tweaks Rose's pinkie as she completes the final sweep of the nails, and buffs them to a supple finish with a flourish. She points to a sink that stands on a wall in Rose's peripheral vision.

Go and wash. Then pick your colour. Something cheerful for you.

Rose washes her hands in warm water with a sudsy, cucumber-scented squirt from a bottle, and pats them dry on a white finger towel. She chooses a coral shade that is soothing like peach schnapps and settles back into her chair. The girl murmurs her approval as she makes languorous strokes on each fingernail, base to tip. Then she places Rose's hands into two lighted plastic domes, like miniature Sprung green houses. Warm and bright.

What your husband do?

He's a fisherman. He's younger than I am now.

Rose stammers.

He's younger than I am.

The girl's eyes crinkle at the corners. She's used to hearing women's secrets. This one wants to be young forever.

Lucky you.

When the lights go off the girl takes each of Rose's fingers again, and with a soft, wet cloth, polishes the finish to a shine.

Your husband like these.

Rose stares at her hands. Veins rising like hills, the valleys crisscrossed by lines that amble off, fingertips like sunshine. They smell clean.

I hope so.

FRACTAL

2014

Rose's worlds are leaking into one another.

I just don't feel like it Luke.

Rose rises and slips into the bathroom, turns the shower faucet to the wide red setting, lets the room steam before moving it back a notch and sliding her body into the spray. The force of the scalding water pelts against her sagging breasts, light splintering like rainbows caught in the droplets that splash up and away, bombarding her mouth and her cheeks as they escape.

A girl Rose knew in high school lost her husband this morning, and Rose can't shake it. She closes her eyes as she turns away from the torrent, tipping her head up and back into the flood, water running down and over the sides of her head, engulfing her. She listens to the roar, like the ocean in her ears, as she sinks down and down into her thoughts.

Lie in it.

You will spend the rest of your life laughing in the arms of strangers.

Ham baked until it sizzles, carved to keep the protective layer of fat on the outside, mashed potatoes whipped into a frenzy.

Perpetual loop.

Music is the universal language. Amelia Curran's band is introduced with some joke about the bass player's looks but if he was ugly it would not matter.

Smarties are all about the hard brightly-coloured shell.

Twenty years will escape in a low moan.

Meringued lemon pie.

Try not to run people over with your car.

Liam looking down through the raw boards, trying to entice Maggie into Luke's big arms to bring her safely up the ladder.

Throwing dishes away.

You will dote on your grandchildren alone.

The boardwalk around Quidi Vidi lake is a smooth shade of grey, weathered like an old woman's face. Footfalls on planks of uniform length and breadth that look like they were born that way. Shortened steps to accommodate the narrowed end of boards where they're cut to fit the angle of the turn. But the timber was never intended to be that way.

Christmas tree in March. Liam's balled fists and slouched shoulders.

You made the bed.

Incessant tapping on the inside of skulls, like hailstones beating against old window panes.

Old film developed that was sitting in a basket in a cupboard for eight years. Falling apart in a parking lot under the full glare of the sun.

Things you won't absorb that will come into focus in the nighttime.

Love does not require a body.

Eaves whiter than a baby's first tooth. Serrated lines of dots and dashes extending into peripheral vision. Lying in bed staring at the ceiling. Six inches lower than the adjoining sitting room. Just case that in.

Fresh meat loves salt.

You will pour yourself out. You will not find him.

Luke opens the shower door and steps in.

Are you crying.

He hugs her as she slouches against him. Luke holds her up, water running into his eyes and his ears. Judy's husband died this morning. Rose never really knew her.

Knows her intimately. Now.

SHOES

2014

Muscle sinew bone, muscle sinew bone. Rose steps through the living room wall. As her left foot comes to rest inside the barrier, she feels the violent vibration of her body splintering. Every atom recalibrates. Rose stares down at Luke's shoes on the floor.

She is dressed except for the bare feet. She has combed the house and cannot find a pair of shoes to wear. For the life of her, Rose can't imagine why she has no shoes. She can't remember where she leaves anything. Rose sits on the floor in the entryway, takes Luke's black dress shoes in her lap, and runs her fingers back and forth over the laces. She lays the shoes neatly back on the floor, stands up, slips her bare feet into them, and walks out the door, gripping the soles with her scrunched toes to keep them from slipping.

After a long drive, the car pulls up to the front of the church, and Rose steps out.

She tilts her head skyward and takes in grey stone as high as she can look without toppling over. The Basilica is built of grey limestone and white granite quarried in Galway and Dublin, and sandstone from St. John's and Kelly's Island. It is two-hundred-sixty feet long and two-hundred-twenty feet wide; its towers rise one-hundred-fifty feet in the air, and contain nine bells between them. The St. John Bell, in the East Tower, was the largest ever cast in Ireland, and won a Gold Medal at the Dublin Exhibition of Irish Manufacturers in 1850. The steps span the entire front of

the building, with handrails spaced along their width to guide the faithful inside. When it was finished in 1855, the Basilica was the largest church in all of North America.

Rose wanders up the steps, into sanctuary. She is standing just inside the massive doors, waiting to be told what to do. Entering the church feels important. Holy elegance.

Rose's eyes are pulled to the ornate High Altar at the far end of the aisle, and upward to the magnificent ceiling. The ceiling design, dating from 1903, consists of twelve raised panels in a circle at the intersection of nave and transept. The circle's circumference is two hundred feet. The panels have elaborate floral designs and contrived decorations, each one dedicated to a special virtue of the Virgin. There are six pendant drops embellished with a profusion of gold-leaf highlighting. Sunlight filters in through twenty-eight stained glass windows taller than houses, which sit high up in the white walls of the main area; the jewel-toned designs of the Fifteen Mysteries of the Rosary were fashioned by Irish, English, and French craftsmen. Rose's eyes drop again to floor level.

The church is full, translucent faces looking her way. But the aisle is empty. There will be no droning incantation over caskets, no incense wafting to heaven and burning the eyes out of everyone unfortunate enough to be seated in the front pews. Rose wonders where everyone supposes the souls are, and what the priest's job is now anyway, without bodies to bless and perform rituals over.

Rose surveys the crowd, then feels a hush in the air, the faces turned towards her fading away. She scans the sea of kneeling bodies and her eyes stop. Wayne. Luke's best friend. He is crouched on a wooden kneeler, in the middle of a pew about three-quarter ways down the aisle to the left. She catches his eye. He nods and tries to smile. Rose walks toward him without breaking eye contact. Wayne watches her approach, then rises and floats across the people in the pew. He steps into the aisle and holds his arms wide with outstretched hands. Within reach, Rose hesitates, then walks through Wayne as he reaches to wrap her in his arms. She stands alone in the aisle, quivering. Rose would not be able to stand the touch of him.

She feels a presence behind her, easing her into the second pew from the front, on the right. Rose sits on the edge of the pew. No interest in *Thy Will Be Done*. She looks around. There must be every eye colour in the world here. So many eyes. She can see through the people. There is a woman's familiar face, shimmering, a few pews behind her. The woman was the skipper's sister-in-law, who came to the salon for years, but Rose mistook her for his wife, who would, of course, be sitting in the front pew.

As she straightens herself, Rose watches the outline of a man approach, shimmering in the light streaming down from the windows. He stops in front of her. Rose remembers the face from the fish plant. He looks different. He is very tall. He owns the plant. He was not worried.

Rose grips the pew in front of her as the service begins. One of the largest pipe organs east of Montreal, with sixty-six stops and four-thousand-fifty pipes,

almost two pipes for each person who can be seated here, churns out music that swells and rises, the melody lifting to the rafters until the high ceilings are filled to the brim and the flowered panels drive the chorus back down again; it moves outward over the congregation in waves, before crashing upon white walls, only to rise to the rafters again.

If you pass through raging waters in the sea, you shall not drown

If you walk amid the burning flames, you shall not be harmed

If you stand before the pow'r of hell and death is at your side, know that

I am with you through it all

Rose glances over her shoulder to see how far away the door is, steps out of the pew, turns her back to the altar, and runs in a halting gait. She runs past three-hundred-twenty-two pews without looking into any of the transparent faces. She does not look at the skipper's wife or his sister-in-law, she does not look at Wayne, she does not look at Bud.

When she reaches the vestibule Rose does not stop. She pushes all of her weight against the heavy, panelled door, until it heaves outward and she plunges into sunlight. Rose gulps fresh, stinging air, filling her burning lungs with oxygen, and stumbles down the wide limestone steps, in the oversized shoes.

R is for Rose

2014

Maggie gave Rose a pink book for Christmas. What I Love About Mom. Fifty sentences, with blank spaces she filled in:

1. I love your smell.
4. I love when you call me darling.
6. I'm thankful I got your optimism.
18. If you were a superhero, your super power would be bright light.
26. I love that you encourage me to do whatever I'm doing.
31. I owe you an apology for all the times I am mean to you.
47. You have the most beautiful intentions.
50. I wonder if you know how comforting you are.

Rose hugs the book, then turns back the pages.

38. If you wanted to, you could easily be satisfied.

Satisfied. Rose doesn't even know how to make a proper 'R'. She's spent most of her life trying to form the letter with some semblance of reason. For a while, Rose made her Rs by forming a loop, like a raindrop, with a perfect circle attached, and an elegant half loop for a leg. It looked composed, but it was her mother's 'R,' borrowed from school forms and the writing on birthday cards. She couldn't keep up the pretence for long, even though she longed for an initial that did not taint everything she attempted.

Handwriting analysts are said to be capable of producing a personality profile of a writer, by examining the characteristics, traits, and strokes of an individual's

handwriting. Some practitioners claim that beyond personality traits, many things are revealed, including health issues, morality, hidden talents, and past experiences.

The pressure that Rose applies to her handwriting indicates that she is healthy and forceful with high emotional energy. The right slant of her words means she responds strongly to emotional situations and is caring and outgoing—her heart rules her mind. The dot of her ‘i,’ high above the stem and to the right, says that she tends to act hastily, has an active imagination, and focuses on tiny details instead of the big picture. The long stroke of her ‘t’ indicates that she is determined, enthusiastic, and stubborn. A person’s signature, which most people practice and develop over time, is their ‘stamp,’ and often reveals what the person thinks she is like (or would like to be like). Rose’s signature has changed many times over the years, but the ‘R’ remains unsatisfying, a thorn in her side. And Rose herself is always in flux, trying on some or other piece of life, then sloughing it off like dead skin. Nothing fits like the satisfaction of sitting next to Luke.

Emily was seven when Rose decided she couldn’t wait a day longer to go back to school. Back. As if she’d ever been ‘at’ school. Rose dropped out of high school in grade eleven. Never returned after Christmas. Not one call even from the school to see where she was. Rose was smart, too smart for her own good sometimes, and she was saucy too. And the principal, Brother Williams, was at his wit’s end trying to counsel a teenage girl with a rebellious streak, too big for her small town and the small expectations attached to her and raging at her world. She’d never

opened a textbook in her life but always made honour roll. And now she was out of his hair.

The first time Rose walked across the stage at Memorial University, she wore a long-sleeved black dress under her gown, and black, patent-leather, pointy-toed shoes, with a skinny ankle strap that flattered her leg. She wished that Luke was sitting in a chair next to the kids, watching. He would have ignored the instructions to the audience, to hold their applause until the last graduate had walked across the stage. Luke would have risen from his seat and shouted her name. Way to go Rosie. I knew you could do it. Rose believed in Luke, and the degree, and the shoes.

Rose goes through changes—houses, relationships—like other women change their lipstick. She bounces from Placentia Bay to Topsail Road, and back to Placentia Bay again. Mt. Pearl to Monkstown Road, a detour into Trinity Bay, then back to Monkstown. And she dates—Ron, Don, Roy, John, they all have the same name, Cela says.

The second time Rose walks across that stage, she wears a sleeveless summer dress, still black, and a pair of sturdy suede flip flops. Her hair is big and meticulously messy, each layer flipped in a different direction. It sweeps her shoulders and the large silver hoops in her ears. Rose looks like she has her shit together.

But it all unravels every time the ‘R’ flails across the page, no more a representation of Rose, than the pieces of her that are still scattered among the debris of the *Elizabeth Coates*. Rose is afraid to be satisfied.



THIN AIR

2015

Rose works with a woman whose daughter disappeared. Not a trace. The pink plaid shirt and grey jacket she wore tumble in the woman's dreams, swooping and somersaulting like kites with their strings cut away, gone to wing. The woman rolls from her belly to her back, her back to her belly, her belly to her back, the blankets twisting around her, pinning her down. When morning comes, the woman puts one foot in front of the other. Her whip straight hair is dark and shiny as a crow, and her wide smile—white white teeth behind crimson lips—never wavers.

Every time Rose flies, she holds on, to keep her fists from clenching. She is suspended in air, insides bottomed out, like walking through a cemetery alone at night. Eight tons of metal pierces the clouds—no more than a gannet breaking the surface, in the scheme of things. Rose is hurtled into another world, topsy-turvy.

Levelling off at seventeen thousand feet, a new layer of life unfolds, animated by Rose's presence. She releases her grip on the armrests, relaxes into her seat, and stares out the porthole at the drifts of cloud banks. Like an expanse of frozen ocean, mounds of snow dispersed along the craggy surface as far as she can see. No man-made structures—no roads leading to nowhere, no houses containing people behind drawn curtains, no fences hemming in the stark calm. Arctic bright light. Rose wouldn't be surprised to see a polar bear slouching towards the plane. Extending high above the cloud ceiling below her, blinding clear sky causes Rose to squint towards the white sun sitting on the eastern horizon.

Clouds crawl across the sky beneath Rose and off away in the distance, breaks appear in the consuming white, as Rose stretches the limits of her vision. She watches gaps form, closer to the plane. Glimpses of black, green, blue. Air and ground. A hole in the cloud underneath her opens wide, like the corner ripped off the edge of the sky, exposing the world below. World layered upon world. Rose feels like she might fall back to earth.

Gazing down at the land, its topography of natural and man-made scars, Rose thinks of Emily's scars. Of her piercings and tattoos. The earth is pitted with rivers and streams, valleys and dams, buildings, farms, roads running in parallel lines. Fawn-coloured square of a quarry, its delineation severe against the surrounding greens that blend into a single shade. Aftergrowth marking people's intrusion into forest, scattered yellow dots of deciduous trees clustered along gashes of highway, like pushpins on a map. Wounded and healed a thousand times.

There are no straight lines, except the man-made ones. The human marks look composed, more contained than the land's birthmarks. More ordered than nature. The scars are uniform, deliberate, clean. The birthmarks—dark green hills smudged with grey, black lakes and ponds bordered by dirty brown shores, rivers snaking like varicose veins, one a serpent with an arrow head—are all irregular shapes with uneven edges, like cancer. Rose nods.

She walks downstairs through the cloud cover into her living room on Monkstown, which has a bathroom, and a yellow line that is running through the middle of O'Reilly Street, where she grew up. It's dusk. The zebra print walls are

shrouded in fog. Very little traffic; a blue Z-24 cruises past, before a motorcycle shimmies up the road, so slowly Rose wonders how it is staying upright. The driver looks like Luke, but Luke knows Rose would never want him riding a bike. Rose yells to him over the growl of the engine as he goes by, her finger pointing and waving towards him.

You forgot to turn your headlight on.

The driver slows to a dead crawl, takes a sharp left turn around the corner of Rose's bathroom, and heads back her way, behind the wall. Rose rests her hand on the facing of the bathroom door, waiting. Listens to the guttural snarl as he rounds the final corner, back into her living room. He draws a gun, balancing himself and his bike with both feet, extends his arms in front of him, joins his hands, cradles the revolver. Rose ignores the chirping birds on the telephone wires overhead. She makes a quick jerk to duck into the bathroom, when she catches a glimpse of Emily for the first time, through the corner of her eye. Emily is sitting cross-legged on the floor, watching Law and Order. Rose lowers her hand slowly from the doorway, eases sideways, one step, one step, one step, her back to Emily. Positions herself between her daughter and the biker, becomes the middle point of the straight line separating them. Rose bristles to her full height. Faces the biker squarely.

Rose opens her eyes. Peering down, she wonders if what she sees is what's real. Wonders about reality. From a distance, everything is deceiving. Motion is suspended in the space between the worlds Rose is straddling. Like time standing still. Whitecaps on rivers like wisps of hovering cloud. Ripples on ponds like solid

zigzags scribbled across a page. Waterfall still as a photograph. Sunshine the only movement discernible to the eye, running like quicksilver, liquid mercury poured from the heavens, bouncing from one body of water to the next. It reminds Rose of the shimmer on the reflective, crunchy fabric she had sewn into a costume for Emily, the iridescent glimmer of her mermaid tail.

Goosebumps rise on Rose's arms as the ground hurtles past below her, closer, time catching up. The airplane heads out over water, out over the edge of Newfoundland—a sheer wall of dry beige earth dropping away, pocked with clusters of boulders and snarled tree roots, ripped from its origins, its wounds scabbing over. The plane dips and turns back towards Cabot Tower, towards land. Rose thinks about the water when she could see bottom. All the pretty greens.

When Rose was ten years old she would lean her chin on the gunwale, looking at the rocks on the bottom of the shallow harbour. Shiny turquoise and teal shades, the rocks spotted with lichens that Rose thought was moss. Rose loved the water but it scared her. Scared to death of drowning. Never afraid coming down through Paradise Sound, in water so rough that the boat smacked off the wave bottoms like a baseball cracking on an aluminum bat. So rough Rose didn't dare lean over the side, or she'd be swept away. No point. The waves an impenetrable black. Her poor old father frightened to death the lot of them were gone; Rose and Cela and Abbey corralled into the bow, grinning from ear to ear, Rose not yet grown into her front teeth, salty hair plastered to their freckled faces by the roiling seawater. Rose never

gave one thought to drowning then. Only thought about it when she could see bottom.
All the pretty greens.

Rose stares down onto the tracts of flat earth rushing by, yielding clusters of trees that yield straight lines subdividing the land into neighbourhoods that yield rows of houses like dominoes waiting to fall. Rose draws back her vision and the wing comes into focus. The wheels drop down and the trees rise up. The landing gear always startles Rose, appearing much sooner than she expects, when transport trucks are still dinkies on the ground.

Dogberries are heavy on the trees. As they make landfall, Rose peers through the small window, looking up. It is the same sky; only the foundation has changed. She feels the shift. Rose averts her eyes and scans the cabin. Eighteen people. Rectangle above the adjoining seat. NO SMOKING. Tiny squares of weak light cast a pall over the group. White baseball cap above a neat beard and a small silver hoop in the left ear of 5B. A single newspaper folds, jackets and backpacks scoop from underneath cramped seats.

Rose takes up the rear of the passenger line, shuffling forward to deplane, laptop bag full of grey file folders weighing on her shoulder, one foot in front of the other. She gives the copilot-flight-attendant a wide smile—white white teeth behind pale lips—the smile she perfected in her bathroom mirror.

THE GIRL IN THE RED SWEATER

2015

Six thirty-nine p.m. Rose drives past her own house and there is a girl, a woman really, standing in the dining room, angled arms raised above her head, crossed at the wrists, stretching languorously. Rose sees, or imagines, the nub of the girl's sweater, close, dense, blood red wool, tightly woven, sleeves a quarter way up the bent arms, loose turtle neck collar skimmed by a dark bob, blunt bangs capping her brows. Smiling into the face of a man whose back is to the window. Looks like she owns the place.

Harris Cottage was built in 1833, set back from the road, five-sided porch, the only one of its kind in Georgestown. William Harris, master builder, created a more modest home for his own family, than many of the houses he constructed for the merchants in St. John's. It is one of the few structures to survive both of the great fires, its location deliberately chosen to avoid the downtown core, where buildings clung to each other, cannibalizing their neighbours when the flames came. It has always borne the brightest yellow clapboard, dory-green trim, crimson accents, bobbing its way along in a sea of sober colour, on Monkstown Road. In the early nineties, during a face-lift to restore its original character, a baby's high-heel laced boot, was retrieved from between its walls.

Rose saw Harris Cottage for the first time, in the winter of 2004. Crossed the road and knocked on a neighbour's door to borrow a shovel, and dug her way in. Rose was trying her hand at real estate that winter, while she attended MUN, and was

shopping for a friend who was moving back to Newfoundland. Rose knew this house would not suit her friend, but she wanted to pop by and say hello to it. The house was chilly, but it was the dead of winter and Rose was very impressed with its ability to hold what little heat eked from the radiators. It had three fireplaces and remnants of a fourth, with dead embers still lying in the grates.

On the night Rose and the kids moved in, Cela and Don brought fried chicken, and they ate on the varnished, two hundred year old pine floor of the master bedroom, the only room fit to have food in. The kitchen sat at the back of the house, stretching the width of the main footprint, flanked either side by additions that house a laundry room and a walk-in pantry. It has a short stretch of orange oak cabinets along part of the far wall to the left, and a dilapidated refrigerator in the opposite corner by itself, a container of something still pushed to the back of its metal shelf. There is shamrock green linoleum, its underside a quarter-inch of what looks like compressed sawdust backed by jute, anchored with the understanding that it will never be removed. It was gruelling to pry up, but beneath it were the original floor boards, with patches of old, ingrained scraps of newspaper from New York, one dated August twenty-first, Emily's birthday. Rose lacquered the dark wooden floor, paper and all.

Once, on a bright summer day, as Rose cemented stone tiles in place over the crumbling concrete that was the front step, two old couples stopped on the sidewalk. One of the women had grown up visiting her uncle in this house, and what a lovely job Rose was doing too, in keeping it up. She told Rose stories, winter mornings in

front of the fireplaces, when the coal was plentiful, and before long, four strangers are squat together with Rose, in her front porch.

As Rose turns the creaky knob and they enter, the glass of the transom window glints, spilling shards of colour onto the narrow staircase before them—its softwood treads dipping at the centre from two centuries of footsteps. The old woman's eyes follow the light's path, peering up the stairwell, at the ghosts of memories permeating the house. She is back home from the States and what luck to have stumbled upon Rose in the front garden. She is a Harris, and Rose's family is only the second, to own and live in this house.

The large living room is swathed in zebra print fur, its long wall lined from floor to ceiling with oversized gilded mirrors, some only leaning against the wall, because they are too heavy to hang. A square coffee table—big, chunky, distressed—that Rose bought the year Luke died, sits at the centre. The room's life, and its other parts—linen couches, silver tables, a fireplace with blackened bricks and white, embossed wood—radiate from it. The old woman reaches out, her hand grazing the plush wall.

They shuffle into the dining room, whose chandelier—all shiny chrome filigree and glass teardrop pendants—is corralled inside a large circle of wooden mouldings. Rose stole the wood from under her aunt's shed, where it lay after being rescued from the rubble of a church. Inside the circle, printed on cotton paper, are the names of all of Rose's family, living and dead, who came by blood or marriage. Maggie, Liam, and Emily, are in the centre, around the chandelier's base. Beyond the

moulding, the ceiling is swathed in black and white family photos, printed on the same cotton paper, to last. Melding Rose's history with the house. The old woman's hands flutter to her lips.

Your very own Sistine Chapel.

The stone tiles kept Rose in the front garden for much of the summer, and there was always someone stopping to talk to her dog, feeling obliged to say hello to her, as well. Harley held court from a tree stump, where he sat as still and grounded as the house itself. One day a man, who knew Rose's house, stopped and complimented the tiles, then told her he was making a movie, and her house would be perfect. The overgrown back garden—he was nice about it and called it rugged and wild—would be ideal to film a harrowing scene, where a cat is put down, in the woods.

The crew came at seven-thirty, and stayed until well after dark, the house bustling with impromptu sound stages and dressing rooms and dozens of people. Liam was responsible to oversee the comings and goings. They asked to pull the kitchen range away from the cabinets, to use the outlet, and Liam said sure, as long as you sweep up the mouse shit. They set up a buffet in the driveway for the actors and crew, and the people and the food and the noise spilled onto the sidewalk and into the street. When they packed up, and left Rose and Liam to rearrange their tables and their chairs, and sweep away the leftovers of the day, Liam said Mom, there must be a quicker fuckin' way to kill a cat.

And once, when the back garden was still an overgrown tangle of ferns and mile-a-minutes, and maple trees gone wild, and before Harley was buried beneath the oldest and largest of the maples, they danced on the sidewalk, during a going away party for Maggie. None of the neighbours complained, and they wished her well and hoped her flight was uneventful. Maggie came running back home from Alberta before Christmas, and tumbled into Rose's bed at three o'clock in the morning. And Rose and the house hugged her tight.

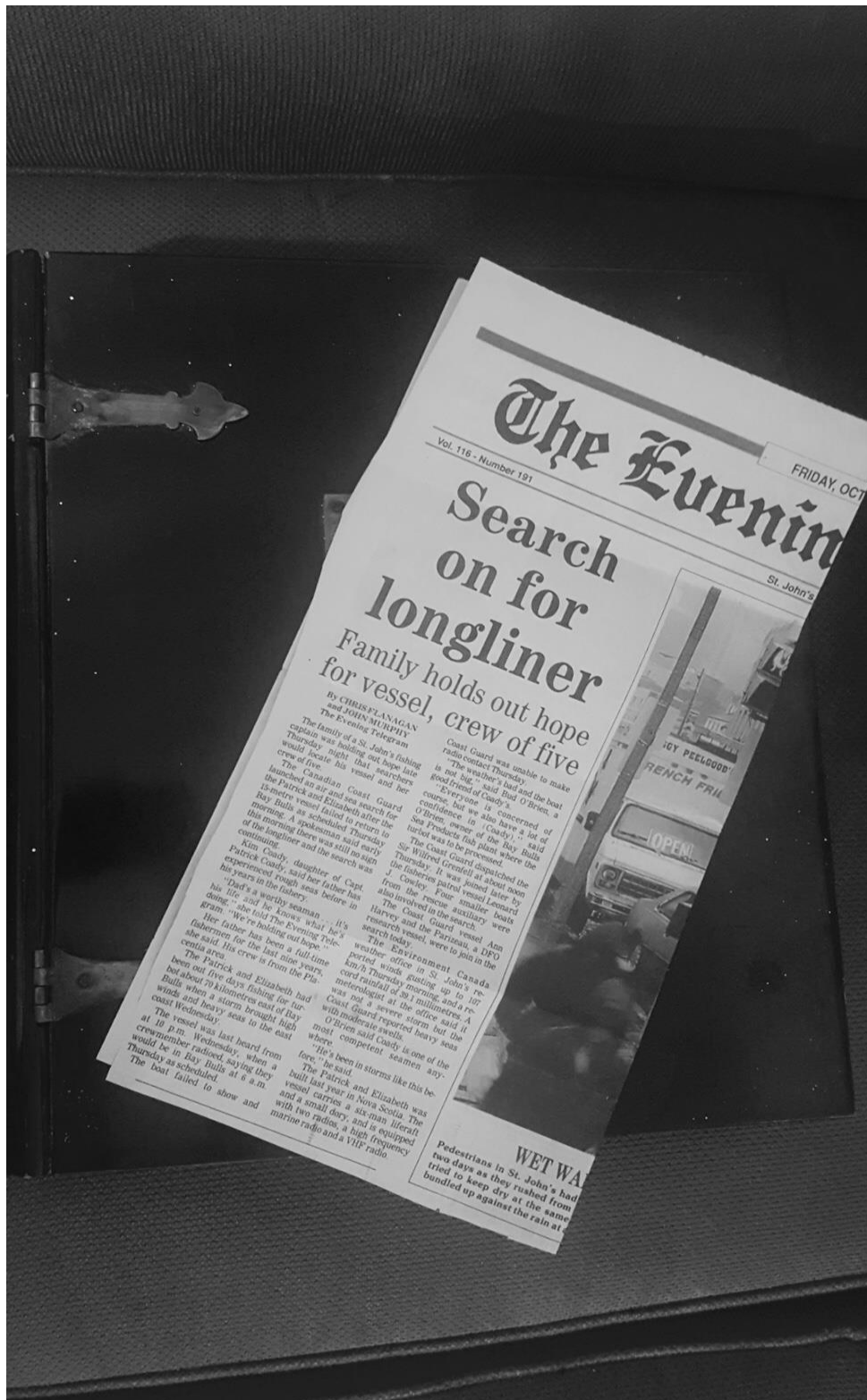
And when the back garden was tackled and tamed enough to build a patio and lay some heavy sods where the mile-a-minutes still poke through, they danced out there instead. But then, they had to dig a hole under the biggest maple tree. For five days, Liam walked the neighbourhood with Harley, as often as Harley wanted, stopping to say hello to strangers, which is not Liam's way, but everyone knows Harley, his colouring like a beagle, his shape and bearing like a miniature greyhound. They strolled while Harley sniffed every bush in Bannerman Park, absorbing memories, cocked his leg slightly and dribbled on fence posts, as they walked slowly home. Liam slept on the living room floor with Harley when Harley couldn't climb the stairs anymore, a blanket covering both their bodies, until he had to call the vet and tell him it was time. Harley's collar still lies on Liam's night stand. Rose dusts and lays the collar back, when someone is coming to look at their home. Rose made one concession, replacing the zebra print with linen-coloured burlap wallcovering, to help it sell.

Rose is leaving. She is moving to a white house—white walls, white ceilings, laminate floors. Cela asks Rose why she's leaving another house behind.

Like Trudeau says, Cela, because it's 2015.

It's the only answer she has. A white house with white walls and white ceilings is clean. Like a new sheet of paper. She's poured herself into Harris Cottage, but it still wants so much. Maggie says it's been her mother's partner for the last ten years. Rose was struck by a realization when she spent her summer painting the outside of the house--nine gallons of yellow, four gallons of green, and two gallons of burgundy, all applied with an extension pole, balancing unsteadily on the porch roof to get to the eaves, overreaching. She can't do this anymore.

The girl in the red sweater stretches her neck back, gazing at the people on the ceiling, as she lowers her arms.



The Evening Telegram

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St. John's

Search on for longliner Family holds out hope for vessel, crew of five

By Christine Langan and John Murphy
The Evening Telegram

The family of a St. John's fishing captain was holding out hope late Thursday night that searchers would locate his vessel and her crew of five.

The Canadian Coast Guard launched an air and sea search for the Patrick and Elizabeth after the 15-metre vessel failed to return to Bay Bulls as scheduled Thursday morning. A spokesman said early in the morning there was still no sign of the longliner and the search was continuing.

Kim Coady, daughter of Capt. Patrick Coady, said her father has experienced rough seas before in his life, and he knows what he's doing. "We're holding out hope," she said. His crew is from the Placentia area.

The Patrick and Elizabeth had been out five days fishing for turbot about 70 kilometres east of Bay Bulls when a storm brought high winds and heavy seas to the coast Wednesday.

The vessel was last heard from at 10 p.m. Wednesday, when a crewmember radioed, saying they would be in Bay Bulls at 6 a.m. Thursday as scheduled.

The boat failed to show and

Coast Guard was unable to make radio contact Thursday.

"The weather's bad and the boat is not big," said Bud O'Brien, a road fryer of Coady's.

"Everyone is concerned of course, but we also have a lot of confidence in (Coady)," said O'Brien, owner of the Bay Bulls Sea Products fish plant where the vessel was to be processed.

The Coast Guard dispatched the St. Wilfred Grenfell at about noon Thursday. It was joined later by the fisheries patrol boat, the J. Cowley. Four smaller boats also involved in the search.

The Coast Guard vessel Ann Harvey and the Pariseau, a DFO research vessel, were to join in the search today.

The Environment Canada weather office in St. John's reported winds gusting up to 100 km/h Thursday morning, and a record rainfall of 30.7 millimetres. A meteorologist at the office said it was not a severe storm but with moderate to heavy rain.

O'Brien said Coady is one of the most competent seamen anywhere.

He's been in storms like this before," he said.

The Patrick and Elizabeth was built last year in Nova Scotia. The vessel carries a six-man liferaft and a small dory, and is equipped with two radios, a high frequency marine radio and a VHF radio.

WET WA

Pedestrians in St. John's had two days as they rushed from bed to keep dry at the same bundled up against the rain at



Rut

2015

Easing the strap off doesn't help. Decades of support has made a permanent impression. Rose slides both hands behind her back, undoes the clasps, and slips out of the bra, dropping it to the floor. She massages the indentation in her shoulder. Her right thumb creeps down the slope, into the valley, up the other side, then retraces its steps.

Rose watches her hand in the floor length mirror, as it moves lower, slower, rising with the swell, skimming her nipple. The hand stops. Catches the areola between index and middle fingers. Squeezes. Rose feels the nipple react to the touch. Sees it harden. She teases it with the fingertip of her left pinkie. Three babies, the satisfying latch of their mouths, the fullness inoculating them. Rose slips her hand under the breast, cups it, her fingers splaying to hold it close, apologizing for complaining of the heaviness.

Rose's bosom has missed men, been groped and cradled and valued and desired and broken by them. It held Rose's heart when it was raw. Grief surfaced every day. Twenty-one years later, she is sometimes finished her shower before she remembers.

Rose's breasts have longed for Luke's touch, and been mollified by her own. They have brought her to the brink of ecstasy, when she's in the middle of turbid emotion that mixes and merges with the sensation of tongue flicking against skin. And they have scared Rose, a nurse examining them and hesitating. The nurse talks as

she writes and makes markings on her diagram. This is what will be sent to your doctor. See. I'm indicating it here. Upper right quadrant, at ten o'clock. Twelve centimetres from the nipple.

Time ticks as Rose waits to see the doctor. She begins to dream. Or remember her dreams. She is visiting with her dead husband. Her cell phone rings.

Can you come sleep with me.

Rose had just smiled at him. He smiled back, lopsided. His cheeks are fuller than she remembers, and peppered with freckles. Rose gets up and goes down the hall to Emily's room, have a little chat. Quiet voices.

I was just in the middle of a visit with your dad.

Oh, sorry Mom.

No, don't be sorry. I probably wouldn't remember it in the morning if you hadn't woken me. He must have popped by just to see how you're doing.

Do you believe that stuff Mom?

Oh I don't know what I believe. But he hasn't visited me in a dream in twenty years.

He's visited me Mom. I dream about him lately.

What do you dream.

Oh nothing really. He just introduces himself and says he's so happy to meet me. Has on that green t-shirt he's wearing in the picture you have.

What else happens.

Nothing. It's like one of those dreams that you have the same over and over.

He just reaches out.

He reaches out.

Yep. Just reaches out.

Rose gives her shoulders a shake as they hunch.

Chilly in here.

Very odd that Emily is dreaming about her father. Now. Luke coming while she's asleep, coming to see Emily in her sleep.

Time settles to a semblance of normal, but Rose is bothered. She keeps going back to the nurse's sentences, wondering if she will ever be able to go back to before. She threatens to cut them off if they turn on her, if they ever even think about the C word. Rose and the breasts are spared. This time.

Rose gazes at her hands slipping down her sides, following the curve of her waist, resting at her hips, gravitating to her stomach. She glances up, looks herself in the eye. Stares at a face that she's taken credit for over the years, as if she really had anything to do with its arrangement. Pretty enough for its age, but older than it should be. Her eyes fall back to her belly, the extra ten pounds. Rose lived so close to the abyss in the year after Luke died, drowning herself in food. She started eating at the food court. When she ate ice cream she could hear passersby think, *you wonder why you're so fat*. When she ate salad or a sensible sandwich she could almost hear them whisper, *as if that's what you eat when you're at home*.

Strangers kept sending Rose money in sympathy cards and she swears she spent the whole six thousand dollars on jersey toffee and poutine. Cela would get Rose tipsy and they'd take silly pictures together, and they'd laugh but they never talked about it. Until Rose decided she had to get herself together and take control of the scale. Rose still has the hunger, but she doesn't take it so literally anymore. The bit of pudg now doesn't bother her unless it starts to sneak well past the ten. And she eats her Hag n Daz in private, slipped away.

Rose kneads her belly with her fingertips, turning slightly to her left to size up the side profile. Her hand inches lower, grazes the stubbled hairline, comes to rest. Rose was surprised the first time, that it wasn't itchy as it grew. Luke didn't know what to think of it. I grew up when it was all about the bush Rosie. But he was game. As long as Rose kept a patch on the little rise above her vagina. Don't want you to look like a child. Sometimes Rose wishes the hair was thick, to sink her fingers in and pull when she lies awake all night, waiting for October.

Rose tells Cela maybe she'll grow it back and dye that purple too. When she sold the house and moved into her white walls with white trim, Rose felt like something was missing. Like she'd left her personality behind. So she gave herself a pixie cut and dyed her hair purple, the colour of the irises that grew in the bog behind their house when she was young.

Rose doesn't mind wanting a man, but she thinks that needing one is a sign that something's wrong. She asked Luke's brothers if it was okay when she was ready to start dating, but Rose is not good at relationships. She doesn't make plans

anymore. Happiness is not some big solid block, full of happy. Some days, the silver hoops dangling from her ears are the only things that keep her hanging on. Rose used to have a relationship with god, but she knows she can't change one goddamn thing by kneeling down.

She has spent her whole life waiting. Rose follows her hand in the mirror as it returns to her shoulder, massages it, pulls the indentation taut between index and middle fingers, trying to smooth away the rut.



ABRA CADABRA

2015

Rose goes back to work before the healing is complete. The bruises under her eyes are beginning to fade to yellow but the edges further along her cheekbones are pink stains rimmed in tones of grey. Taking so damn long to disappear. Everyone whispers. Both eyes. Rose's girlfriend comes into her office and closes the door.

What's going on.

Nothing Kris.

Rose.

I swear to god Kris. Nothing. You know me better than that. I just had a little injection.

Are you sure.

Swear.

Are you sure you're sure.

I'm not even dating anyone, much less letting a man put his hands on me. Kris's body exhales and she squints into Rose's eyes before folding her into a hug.

I couldn't see it honestly, Rose, but couldn't imagine what else it'd be. You didn't say anything.

Well, I didn't really feel like announcing it to the world. I mean it's not a big deal. Just a little pick me up.

No big deal trying to keep up with time. Rose knew going into this. But it's like everything—you don't really know until you know. Then it can't be fixed. Rose

can do as she pleases, there's no rewind button. She traded time. She knew what she was at. Luke was always worth it. But now she has to cover up the fallout, try to keep the extra years hidden. She's only touching the surface. Like Cela used to say when they had the salon. I'm a beautician not a magician. There's only so much Rose can expect. The best she can do is control her weight, colour her hair, ignore the hurt in her muscles and her bones. And now this. There's no magic here.

Lacey says Rose you are by no means old, you just have prematurely aging skin. We can fix you right up. Make this practically vanish. Lacey swishes her hand in front of Rose's face. She calls botox a medicine but all Rose can think about is botulism. It is injected into the muscles that cause wrinkles between the eyebrows and the lines that corrugate the corners of Rose's eyes. Rose googled it. The botox paralyzes the muscle so that it cannot contract, but after about four months it wears off and the muscle becomes active again, creases forming on Rose's face with every squeeze of the orbicularis oculi. It nearly made Rose look her own age without anyone else even noticing, but Lacey says botox only works on the active wrinkles. As opposed to the inactive ones, Rose supposes, caused by the accelerated erosion of her skin, the topography of her face changing before her eyes.

Rose schedules her next visit while she's on vacation. Juvederm. At her consultation, Lacey describes the procedure and tells her she can expect mild to medium pain for a couple days to a couple weeks afterwards. A needle will be inserted under the skin, taking care not to hit a vessel. Watch for white patches on the skin and call immediately if they occur. There is an antidote that can be used if caught

quickly enough. This is very rare. Lacey has only seen it a couple times in her fourteen years of practice. She doesn't look more than thirty to Rose—it must work.

The day of, Rose takes four advil for the pain a half hour before her appointment. She turns off her cell phone in the lobby, as instructed by the welcome sign on the door, says no thanks to coffee and sinks into the tan leather couch with a copy of Elle Decor while she waits. The girl on the desk brings Rose a clipboard and pen with papers for her to read and sign. When she's escorted into the treatment room, Lacey asks how her day is going and explains the risks that Rose has just consented to. Common side effects are redness, tenderness, and pain, but there are more serious things that Rose needs to be aware of. Complications can include permanent scarring, vision abnormalities, blindness, or stroke. Just this week a woman in Toronto went blind, and she's been having it done for decades by the same doctor. But like Lacey said, this is rare. Just keep an eye and call if you have any questions or concerns.

Ready?

As ready as I'll ever be.

We'll be done before you know it.

Lacey leans in and Rose catches a glimpse of the needle before it punctures her skin. She feels the stainless steel tip probing the recesses of her cheek, a crunching feeling but silent. Lacey massages with her left index and middle fingers as she maneuvers into the muscle around invisible veins.

You bleed easily?

No, why?

Do you take a blood thinner?

I took some advil before I came?

Oh. That's a blood thinner. Looks like you'll have some bruising. A little more than normal. Some swelling. That's not unusual though.

Rose has a high pain threshold but low tolerance, especially when it's self-inflicted. By the time Rose plumps her pillows and piles them three high to prop herself up in bed for the night, her cheeks are mottled and puffy, the swelling in the right side of her upper lip blossoming like an ugly purple rose, its edges already wilted into a lopsided pout. She'll have to be invisible while she's off. The price you pay, Rose thinks. The price you must pay. Pennies. In the scheme of things.

It's all smoke and mirrors. Everything in the world.

GOD FORGIVE ME

2015

I was a nutbar wasn't I, Cela. I used to be mad at people for still hanging out their clothes, go around picking out people and wondering why it wasn't them.

Yes, Rose, you were.

Yeah, I remember driving up the road one day, going to Sobeys or somewhere, because I was on the long stretch with no houses either side. I remember focusing on the back of a man walking on the opposite side of the road, facing traffic, my eyes boring into his back. And I remember, very distinctly thinking, why wasn't it you, what's the good of you. I think it was that hard ticket from out the shore, that Davis guy.

No Rose, it was Desmond White.

No girl. It couldn't be.

It was Desmond, Rose.

Oh my god.

Rose had carried the partial memory with her, foggy, insistent, tugging at her, like a homeless man begging for loose change.

Oh my god. Please don't tell anyone I thought that Cela. There's something wrong with me.

The fog dissipates, and the man comes sharply into focus, long hair on the top of his head, parted in the middle and combed down.

Rose had found Desmond to be an unlikeable teenager. Although she never knew him very well. He was younger than Rose, around Cela's age, when four years seemed like a lifetime. Desmond was poor looking, a crooked front tooth combined with an overbite, and a belly like an old man, though he was not much more than a child. He talked incessantly, and his squealy voice created a whistling sound through his front teeth, that grated on Rose. She found everything about him irritating, even though he was said to be very smart in school. No doubt his mother hung on his every word, and he fully expected the world to do so, as well.

Desmond's mother knows that Desmond is not pretty. She knows that people talk about him behind his back. Desmond is her only child, a late baby, after she thought she'd run out of time. When Desmond was sixteen, his speech began to slur, the spittle that always accompanied his hurried outbursts, becoming drool.

Desmond's mother took him to doctors and more doctors, unable to swallow, while they sat together, waiting for news. Benign. Desmond's mother spends all of her time before the surgery, and a long time after it, thinking about that word. How grossly wrong it is.

be-nign

adjective

: of a gentle disposition

: showing kindness and gentleness

: of a mild type or character that does not threaten health or life; especially: not becoming cancer

: having no significant effect

Neither gentle nor kindly, this thing will be with them long after it is dissected and sent to the mainland, to be studied by pathologists and discarded as harmless. Its tentacles will never be rooted out, its grasp continuing to strangle them.

Benign. But the rumour was they'd have to drill a hole through the side of Desmond's skull, cut into the bone, chisel it away like an old man whittling a stick, on a Sunday afternoon. When Desmond came home after a month, he had two bald patches, that ran from his ears to the upper reaches of his scalp, the long hair that was left on the top of his head, parted in the middle, and combed down both sides for camouflage, only serving to make the picture worse. The hair would never grow in. Desmond recovered, but if Rose was being honest, the residual effects only accentuated his negative traits for Rose, and she liked him even less than she had before.

Desmond swells his mother's heart. She makes spaghetti for him as often as he wants it and buys video games for him every time she goes to town, disregarding the warnings and grumblings from his father, whose empty Blue Star beer cases piled in the corner of the porch, fade into the periphery.

I was Home AT 430 to 530.
Gone to DO A NET. ~~8:00-10:00~~
WILL be Home AT AROUND 8 or 8,3

Love You

MARK

Hope you had A good DAY
IN ST John Love MARK

X X X

Unspoken

2015

Subject: Infinity

<rosetremblett@gmail.com> wrote:

So this guy last night...infinity...on and on and on about infinity..haha...get it...on and on and on haha...

So he's going on about how weird infinity is, and telling me about the "truths of infinity." And he's talking about googols and 10 to the 100, and how a googolplex is the EXACT SAME DISTANCE FROM INFINITY As THE # 1.

And did you know that HALF of infinity is INFINITY????

And also if you fully grasp infinity then you don't understand infinity and if you are not blown away by infinity then you don't understand infinity.

duh...

So of course i'm sittin there thinkin infinity is how when you're dating frogs and you come to the realization that either you are insane because you keep hoping that this frog will be different, or you have come up against the certainty that frogs are, infinitely, frogs. and i decided that either way this is gonna go on forever. That's KIND OF like infinity : ///

Subject: Re:Infinity

<cela_2000@hotmail.com> wrote:

Wow....speaking of pot...

Ribbit ribbit??

Subject: Re: Re: Infinity

<abbey_b@yahoo.ca> wrote:

Why the hell do you need to date frogs into infinity?!

Subject: Re: Re: Re: Infinity

<rosetremblett@gmail.com> wrote:

abbey it's called the spice of life. Haha

Subject: Re: Re: Re:

<abbey_b@yahoo.ca> wrote:

I just don't see it.

Subject: the dance

<cela_2000@hotmail.com> wrote:

Abbey, the French have a concept called la danse. It's not about the relationship, or whether it will work or not, or how much it will work. It's the dance, the unthinking naturalness of it. Just "la danse."

Or you know...garth brooks...the dance

For a moment all the world was right

How could I have known you'd ever say goodbye...

Our lives are better left to chance

I could have missed the pain

But I would've had to miss the dance

Subject: Re: the dance

<abbey_b@yahoo.ca> wrote:

I totally, totally, totally agree with that! That's beautiful! If I wanted to miss the pain of losing Jon, I'd have to miss the dance of having him for 18 years, and I couldn't let go of that to avoid any amount of pain!!

Father Jerome gave us a poem after Jon died, and it said basically the same thing. I'll have to try to find it again.

Subject: Re: Re: the dance

<cela_2000@hotmail.com> wrote:

I know a guy in a wheelchair who grew up with polio, who says he would go through it all again, all the pain, misery and heartbreak, to get where he is now, to be who he is.

Subject: Re: Re: Re

<rosetremblett@gmail.com> wrote:

Me too, Cela, whatever that says about me.

Subject: Re: Re: Re:

<abbey_b@yahoo.ca> wrote:

Me too.

Subject: Re: Re: Re:

<rosetremblett@gmail.com> wrote:

Abbey, do you mean even losing Jon?

Because I know the easy answer is “of course I would take it all back to have my son.” Or my husband, or my legs, or whatever.

But I’ve asked myself that question.

And haven’t had the nerve, in the deepest most secret part of my recesses (yes, I DO have them haha), to answer the question, even in a whisper to myself.

But I know the answer. I would not change who I am.

And I know that if it were my child instead of my husband, the answer might be different. And it’s not even a question that needs answering. But still, we subject ourselves to the question, over and over. Or I do anyway.

ps

Does anyone else think that it is ironic that one of the biblical plagues was toads and that we also refer to men as frogs? I mean ironic in the Alanis Morissette sense—not ironic at all but a little bit odd or funny or something. Or maybe Ben Franklin called toads a plague, I’m not sure. Haha

Subject: Re: Re: Re:

<abbey_b@yahoo.ca> wrote:

Rose, you made my breath catch with that question. I can’t for the life of me answer it. I never looked (outside my heart) at that question before—I always thought of the other side “that I wouldn’t give up the pain of losing him, if it meant I had to give up the 18 years of having him.” But when asked if I would give up who I am now, who my children are, to have him back again????!! That’s too big for me...

If I didn’t believe that everything happens for a reason, and those reasons we don’t know until all is said and done...If I didn’t believe that everything is as it should be...

If I was willing to give up the last 18 years (yes, he’s been gone 18 years!), and ask for him back again, I don’t know...It would change everything about who my kids and I are today. You know? Don’t think I could do that now...he’s been gone 18 years and the others are here and are so precious and it’s non-negotiable that I would interfere with their lives.

Amazing!!! But I guess that’s my answer! I feel guilty about that, but that’s what’s truly in my heart. I know because I’ve often thought about it (inside my heart), just didn’t have anyone ask me before, and never dreamed I’d have to admit it out loud. Even to myself.

Losing Jon practically killed me. I wouldn’t ask to go back now though...

And I know you have deep recesses, because you couldn’t ask me the questions you do, or get me to think like you do, if you didn’t. I love you.

Subject: Re: Re: Re:

<rosetremblett@gmail.com> wrote:

There it is.

Justification.

That I'm not the only one who feels this way.

Not sure why I can't see the screen through the blur.

And aware that if I was faced with the choice at this moment, real choice, I might answer differently. But I'd be torn.

Whatever all that says...

Subject: Re: Re: Re:

<cela_2000@hotmail.com> wrote:

Rose, it only says that you believe that the pain and the heartbreak are part of what makes you you.

Unfortunately, it's the pain and the loss that defines so much of us. It has to, or we wouldn't be able to carry on. We cope, we make it a part of us, and we go on. It's kind of like Aunt Teish said after Luke died, "it gets better, Rose honey." But then as she went out through the door, she looked up at me and said, "but sometimes it's some fuckin' hard, b'y."

But it's one of the astounding things about who we are. We typically wouldn't change it.

Subject: Re: Re: Re:

<rosetremblett@gmail.com> wrote:

Yes I agree. But it's forcing ourselves to admit that about tragedy that astounds me, to use your word, Cela. Everyone would say about the everyday ordinary that they wouldn't change it. But when you contemplate, even force yourself to admit, that you wouldn't change wheelchairs and lost lives, it's pretty surreal.

You know, there's the distinct possibility that we should be locked up.

Subject: Re: Re: Re:

<abbey_b@yahoo.ca> wrote:

I loved Aunt Teish....still miss her when I come home...she used to be right disgusted with me being away...she said one of these days you'll come home and I'll be dead...she thought everyone should stay home : (



CRASH

2015

I want to see Emily.

You what.

Rose feels a tsunami of panic wash over her, seismic waves sweeping outward from the hypocenter in her gut, spreading into her muscles and her sinew and her bones. Her breathing becomes rapid, and her heart lurches in her ribcage. Luke watches Rose's face as she opens her mouth.

You know.

How did you think it could be happening without my participation Rose, my love?

I don't know. I don't know. Did you know that I have to relive that day every time I come here to visit you. Did you know that too. Did you know that and let me do it anyway.

Yes, I knew. I do too Rose. I relive that day every time I come here to visit you. I do too.

An aftershock sweeps through Rose and she folds onto the floor.

How could you do this. How could you not tell me this. Have you tried to contact her.

She's mine too Rose.

Rose thinks about all the times she'd wished Luke was there with her. That first winter he was gone when the power went out for four days. When Emily was in grade

two and she came home from school on Father's Day with a card for Rose. When Rose walked across the stage at the university and Cela sat in the audience with Emily and Liam and Maggie. When Emily lost her way in the world and trying to live for one more day was sometimes more than she could manage. Rose thinks about lying on the floor in the bathroom at the Janeway. And she wished for Luke all the way up Prince Philip Drive. She wishes she had asked him to stay home from that last trip to the Grand Banks.

You can't have her Luke. Do you know that every visit cost me a year. Do you know that. A year that I don't have to spend with Emily, Luke. Emily and Liam and Maggie and our grandkids. I won't let you do this to Emily, Luke. I won't let Emily do this.

She pulls herself to her feet, steadies herself against the wall.

Rose listen to me.

I won't come back here again Luke.

Please don't do this Rose. Please. Please Rose. I want to see her. I need to see Emily.

Rose turns her back on Luke and steps toward the door, Luke reaching for her left wrist as she goes.

Rose. Don't do this!

Rose shakes free of Luke's grasp and stumbles toward the door. She turns the knob hard and jerks it open without looking back, the hinges giving way with a screech that is drowned out by Luke's wails.

Rose! Rose come back here! Come back!

His voice reverberates through Rose's body as she slams the door behind her and launches herself down the steps. She takes two long strides before her knees give way again, and she crawls the remaining distance to the edge of the garden, where she lies flat on her back and pulls her feet toward her, knees jutting to the sky. She wants to crawl under the blades of grass. She wants her father. Rose feels tremors sweep from her feet to her head.

Luke is frozen to the floor as Rose pulls away from him and stumbles toward the door. She turns the knob hard and jerks it open without looking back, the hinges giving way with a screech.

Rose! Rose come back here! Come back!

The slamming of the door becomes a murderous roar of water as Luke stands at the boat's steering wheel and watches the wave rise to its full height—as tall as a six-story building—and crash down upon him. The top of the wheelhouse is forced up and over from port to starboard, galvanized pipe stanchions sheared off like aluminum foil. The whole boat disintegrates at once, fragments scattering as if smashed and pushed aside. The water's surface is littered with flotsam: pieces of the wheelhouse, port afterside, and forecastle floor; wooden slatted boxes; green and yellow dory parts; rope and twine; a section of the keel with ribs still attached. And five men. The yellow life raft explodes from its fiberglass canister on impact,

inflating as it sheds the shell and bobs on the ocean's surface, like a buoy marking their location. Luke screams at the ocean as it swallows him.

EMILYYYY.

The mermaids watch as Luke's body slowly descends in water that is colder, denser, darker. It is quieter. Luke's body drifts in slow-motion with the plankton as tuna dart by. Downward through seaweed, jellyfish, and schools of dogfish, dolphins and mermaids hovering as he falls away.

Emily. Emily.

CROSS

2015

Emily sits straight-backed, chair pulled close. Her hands are prostrate across the table's surface, but they are not resting. Emily can still feel the wood caressing her finger last night, as she ran its tip the length of the tiny stipes and left to right across the patibulum. Her mother gave it to her to take with her today, but Emily felt Rose's resistance, that she tried to cover by pulling her close, planting a kiss on the centre of her forehead.

I love you. Remember that.

She ran her flat palm down the back of Emily's hair and hugged her tight to her body, clinging on.

I need to know, Mom.

No sedicula to support the weight of outstretched arms. No suppedaneum to rest the feet of limp bodies. This is not a working cross. It is not expected to suspend men in space and time. This is just a token. Carved from a stolen scrap of salvaged boat wreckage. Not more than an inch high, it has sat in a dark drawer for twenty years.

*

Rose and her sisters went to a huge Coast Guard warehouse with Luke's family and the other families to see the remains. The warehouse door pulls wide, the raucous grating of steel on steel piercing Rose's muscles and her sinew and her bones. Rose reaches for Cela's arm and squeezes her eyes shut as they are herded to

the centre of the building. The cavernous echo of voices and movement and the smells of iron and people and closeness make Rose feel like she is stranded on a busy street corner far, far from home. When the assembly stops in unison Rose unclenches her eyes and finds herself confronted by large red tarps spread on the floor to contain the sundry remnants of Thursday.

There is the entire wheelhouse top with a section of the front still in one piece; a radar scanner is intact but its dome is missing. There is a searchlight still attached to the wheelhouse; its shaft is slightly bent but its lens is not broken. White paint is scored to bare wood in places. Rose wonders if the boat required painting on Wednesday. Two exterior lights fitted to the grey underside eave at the front of the wheelhouse are whole. Rose thinks she would like to have one to install over their new front door. The wheelhouse top had been fitted with a guard-rail, consisting of rails running through pipe stanchions which had been screw-threaded into base plates; all of the rails are missing. Eight of the ten galvanized pipe stanchions are sheared off. The afterwall of the wheelhouse is intact but the door is missing. The white wall is lying flat on the red tarp. Smaller bits of the wheelhouse and pieces from the port afterside are strewn among the debris alongside worn wooden boxes, green and yellow dory parts, a section of the forecastle floor, ropes and twine, orange net-marking balloons, and a tiny section of the keel. To one side is an inflated yellow life raft with seawater sloshing in its bottom as Luke's brothers walk its perimeter, touch it, disturb it. One kneels and dips his cupped hand, then raises it and lets the holy water run through his fingers and up his arm, rivulets coursing their way through the

wiry curls in his armpit, melding with the sweat there. There is a flurry of hands and voices and speculation and denial as a pair of eyeglasses pass between brothers' hands.

Whose are they. Are they Luke's.

Are those Luke's glasses.

No. No they're mine. The glasses are mine. I dropped them.

The brother places the glasses on top of his head, and walks straight towards the gaping warehouse door, past the boat's broken skeleton, pocketing a shard of forecastle floor as he passes. A tiny piece of wood. Nothing. In the scheme of things.

*

Emily parks on a side street, walks around the back of the house to a door as she was told to do. There is a sign with a smiley face that says You're in the right spot, don't knock. Please come in and take a seat. She opens the door and descends steps that lead to a basement. Emily opens another door and she is in a small kitchen with a large round table and two chairs that sit opposite sides.

Emily sits straight-backed in a chair that she pulls close to the high table. A woman enters the kitchen and remains standing behind the second chair. She looks like she owns a fanny pack.

Hello. Before we get started let me explain a little how the session will work. It is energy based. The more open you are the more that can come across to me, and sometimes spirit shows me things that you may not understand immediately. Please take these things away and look for validation after you leave here.

She is swaying left to right with her eyes closed.

Tell me about a female who passed when she was still young, thirty, maybe forty.

Emily tries to correct her and explain that no females close to her have died; she visualizes the cross in her pocket in hopes of redirecting the woman. But she continues.

I think she was an aunt.

Emily takes a deep breath and looks down at the table to hide her disappointment.

She let you get away with stuff your mother never would.

Emily decides to let the woman go on.

You spent many nights at her house drinking and smoking pot together.

Emily had tried pot a couple times but it made her so anxious and paranoid that she didn't touch it again. She smiles at the thought of lighting up with Cela or Abbey. Yeah, no.

Your aunt was an average built woman, dark hair and nice long eyelashes like your own.

Emily thinks about the sixty dollars it costs her every two weeks for those lashes. The woman presses two fingers between her eyes. She explains that her headaches usually mean the passing was an accident or was unexpected. Like a car accident, or an illness. Emily wonders how else a thirty-year-old might die.

The woman feels a male presence, and Emily sits up straighter, paying attention.

A grandfather. Your father's father. Tell me about your father.

He's dead.

Oh, that's who you came here hoping to hear from. I think it's him. What was he like. Was he stern.

I don't know. I was a baby.

What did he look like. Tall. Dark hair like yours.

My hair is red, I dye it.

Well I don't know who that is then. Possibly an uncle. So your grandfather, your father's father. He was a sweet man. Caring. You were one of few, if not the only granddaughter, and you were a favourite because of that. He has left a pair of thigh high rubber boots somewhere for you that he wants you to find. He left money after he passed that you will find. Spirit sees you getting married down south in the near future. But don't wait on him forever. If he's not ready after all this time then cut him loose. You deserve better than that.

Emily is twenty-one. She and her boyfriend just broke up. The woman walks around the table and hugs Emily's shoulders from behind.

Your father is not here.

She lays a business card beside Emily's trembling hand on the table, and leaves the room.

Emily places both palms on the lip of the table, fingers splayed upward, and pushes herself out and up. She does not glance at the card. She cradles her belly and

feels a kick as she crosses the narrow space to the door and climbs the stairs, her fingertips slipping into her pocket, grazing the edge of the miniature cross.

