

Ahuntsic Park

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Abstract

Ahuntsic Park

Judy Cuggy Lapalme

Set in Montreal, *Ahuntsic Park*, is a collection of linked stories that explore themes of religion, spirituality, and faith as they intersect with life, death, and sexuality. As the character Maggie treads through her life, her unique experiences are built on her passionate interest in the historical past, her strong attentiveness to the present, her inner fantasy world, and her penchant for visions and apparitions. Accompanying Maggie are some of the people who are a part of her life, including her husband and sister. Each devises a strategy to cope with the circumstances of their lives that make it possible for her to examine the nature of communications within the context of her relationships.

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Ahuntsic Park

Maggie stirred from her reverie as the congregation stood for the Apostle's Creed. She thought that Father Lallemand might speak at Mass about what had happened that week in the news, but in his sermon he talked about the Assumption of Our Lady, and the feast day of St. Lawrence. There was a picture of St. Lawrence in her grade five religion book, a sketch of the martyr lying on a grill, where he was roasted to death, rather than deny his belief in Jesus. Maggie had always tried to avoid that page as she flipped through her schoolbook, but it would open there often enough, and each time she would shudder. Father Lallemand had not said a word about Peter Fechter, the eighteen-year-old East German shot by the soldiers after he made it over the Berlin Wall. Maggie had watched Channel Six News on the CBC that day, as Larry Henderson told how Peter died slowly of his wounds in No Man's Land, the space between East and West Berlin. *The Montreal Star* did not show his picture, but there were pictures; she had seen them in other newspapers at the corner store. Maggie already knew that people die. Mr. Tymchuk had died a few months before, right after supper while watching the news. She had seen Mrs. Tymchuk lighting a candle for him before Mass. Even Marilyn Monroe had just died a few weeks before. She killed herself, the papers said. Maggie had looked at all the glossy pictures in the *Life* magazine that came out the following week. Maggie had seen a movie once where a beautiful woman took an overdose like Marilyn Monroe did, and a phone call had saved her. The doctors pumped her stomach and she lived. Maybe

if Marilyn had called someone, someone might have helped her, and she wouldn't have died. That was the sad thing about being alone. But Peter's death was even sadder. He wasn't all alone; people watched and took his picture. No one, not even the free people of West Berlin, helped him after he was shot. Maggie had already cried three times, thinking about it. She didn't even know what Peter looked like, or anything about him except how he died. He was probably very different from Michael Semetey, whose gang took over the park at four o'clock. Or her brothers, who wrestled and punched and spit. Or her father, with his stern voice and his belt. Boys who did bad things were just the way it was, and Maggie did what she could to avoid them all. She would be turning twelve that autumn, and she was happier imagining the special people, heroes and saints mostly, who lived in stories and television, and in her head.

She heard the rustlings of the ushers at the back of the church, gathering their long-handled wicker collection baskets. Her father was there, organizing them, ready to stand in for a tardy usher. He was in charge of a group of men in dark, two-piece suits, or navy jackets over grey flannel pants, men who were balding, or had salt-and-pepper brush cuts or hair as black as shoe-polish, red-faced men with necks tightly squeezed out of stiff white collars. Mr. Semetey was there today, wearing an open-necked shirt under his dark suit. Maggie's father hated such casual dress. He insisted on the full suit and tie despite the stifling August heat. Maggie, shifting uncomfortably on the oak bench, spotted Michael and the rest of the family sitting two rows in front of them. Michael was sixteen

and his hair was a little long. He turned and smiled at Maggie during the Creed. She wanted to look away. Michael was always trying to make her blush. She eased her eyes away from his to stare straight ahead, and continued reciting the Apostles' Creed.

At any minute, on a cue from the altar, Maggie would hear the men marching from the centre and side aisles to the front, as their heels squeaked across the tiled surface. These were probably army men, like her father had been, and they knew how to march. Maggie watched the men arrive at the front of the church at almost the same time. Then they would genuflect. Casting a quick glance at each other for the timing, some ushers flexed downward quickly enough, while others sank a knee to the floor and struggled back upright. Then they turned and, pivoting on their heels, or on a dime, as her father would say, extended the collection baskets to take up the offerings. For Maggie, the men were also marching in their uniforms, and baskets became bayonets and with each pivot or turn they could shoot and fire. She would throw herself over Sally and the boys to protect them from the attack. Her brothers and sister would never forget her courage and sacrifice.

But she never understood how a person could just shoot down a person as if they weren't even people at all, both the ones who shoot and the ones who are shot. Michael would be signing up to be in the army. He had told her so while he was bragging about his BB gun. She didn't put it past him to try to shoot at her and Sally, like the janitor of St. Jude's Church on St. Denis did when she and her sister cut through the parking lot. But Michael never did. He told her about high

school and his girlfriends and the fights he got into. Maggie always listened and then she always left in a huff, as he told her a story about things that she didn't want to know about, like necking and that kind of dumb stuff.

Maggie handed out the coins to her brothers and sister to avoid the usual squabble over who would drop the money into the basket. Still, Rob managed to rap Sally's head as he lunged to be the first to deposit his nickel. Her brother, just a year younger than she was, always seemed to move in impulsive bursts that unintentionally injured. He just didn't think before he acted, their father had said. Maggie cupped her hand to cover Sally's mouth to quiet the whimpering girl and glared at her brother, who laughed nervously. She wished that she had a Kleenex to mop up Sally's sniffles. Robbie never meant to hurt his sister; that was the thing. Maggie knew that the boys just moved in ways that end up hurting people. Robbie was her favourite brother, though she felt guilty about having a favourite. He could imitate anyone and make her fall over with laughter as he mocked every neighbour and John G. Diefenbaker. Rob was usually in some kind of trouble at home for breaking things or running off, but Maggie stood up for him and she had saved him from their father's strap more than once. He didn't laugh at her world of stories, and she could tell him a little about how sad she was about Peter, but only a little. Besides, he was outside all day playing with his friends and Stevie, and she was supposed to help her mother and to mind Sally. Stevie, the nine-year-old, had no interest in anything but sports and Scouts. Like his brother

Robbie, he delivered the *Montreal Gazette* every morning, and had enough money to buy all the baseball and hockey cards he wanted.

As part of her job helping her mother, Maggie brought her little sister to the park after school for a round of swings, or the slide, or the merry-go-round. Sally was only four years younger than Maggie was, but she was the shortest girl in her class at school. If you did not know, you might think that she was in grade one. For this reason, Maggie was very protective of her little sister, and Sally was happy to be out with her older sister. Michael Semetey, the church usher's son, came by the park most days. He lived a few blocks west of her house, in a duplex with crystal chandeliers. His parents had a car, and he was going to learn how to drive it soon. He went to College Notre Dame near St. Joseph's Oratory, not St. Pius X, the high school she would be going to after next year. While she didn't mind him too much, she really didn't care for his friends, boys who were tough, smoking, loud-talkers. Not that he wasn't too, but it didn't seem to matter because at least he went to church and he was kind of cute. This last week she really did not care what the crazy boys did, because she couldn't stop thinking about Peter, the young East German who died at the Wall a few days earlier, on the seventeenth of the month. She wanted to tell Michael about Peter. In fact she did; she told him how he was a hero and didn't Michael see it on the news. But he just laughed and said that the guy was a jerk, getting caught that way. I would have been smarter about it, he said. Maggie was so angry that she nearly cried. That was a problem she always had; she would get angry and she would want to cry. She left the park that day and protected Peter's honour in her heart. He was

so different from the other boys. She didn't know what he looked like, but that didn't matter to her.

She wondered if Peter Fechter had smoked, or if he had a family, or swore, or said dirty words. Maggie knew what the word "fuck" meant. Michael repeated that word all the time. But she had not always known, and at supper, one time, she asked about it. Before she could finish her question, her father's hand flew across her face, slapping her hard, and she was banished from the table. But what does it mean, she mumbled to herself, as she ran to her room. She didn't dare tell her parents that those boys were always trying to trick her and Sally into pulling down their pants, especially Michael. Peter just couldn't have been a jerk, like that Michael.

Before she knew it, the bells rang out the Consecration, and Maggie dipped her head lower than anyone else in the pew, her straight shoulder-length hair falling over her face. Her straw hat slipped off her head, landing in the seat in front of them. Maggie waited until the final bells to retrieve it. Moments later, after Communion, Robbie started pulling at the ribbon of Sally's blond braid. Maggie didn't notice the squirming and squeaking going on as she knelt with her face in her hands. This was her time to slip into her own world, and think about Peter, and God, and the other saints and martyrs, and herself. And to pray earnestly to be as brave and good as Our Blessed Virgin and St. Lawrence, and for the souls of Peter, and Marilyn Monroe. Maggie still prayed for the dead movie star even though it seemed hopeless for poor Marilyn Monroe: it was a mortal sin

to kill yourself. A harsh whisper from Mrs. Whalen in the pew in front of her stirred her from her prayers. As she opened her eyes, there was turtle-faced Mrs. Whalen snapping a stern reprimand at Robbie. Then Maggie remembered that she was supposed to be in charge this morning. Her father was head usher and went to all the Masses, and her mother sang in the choir at the next one. Maggie leaned away from her kneeler, and frowned at her siblings, especially Robbie, then sat back in her seat.

Once the Mass was ended, after the procession of priest and altar boys had passed, she wandered down the centre aisle, holding her little sister's hand. Her brothers were off and running through the parishioners and out the doors as the organ boomed *Immaculate Mary* louder and louder. Maggie lowered her gaze and shrugged past the priest and all the grown ups, while Sally covered her ears. They passed through the large open doors into the gathering of parishioners on the steps. The bright sunlight was blinding, and Maggie and her sister stopped for a moment to adjust to the daylight.

Maggie and Sally sauntered up Sauriol Street, keeping an eye on Robbie and Stevie, who were well ahead. It was a hot Sunday morning, and the air she breathed was damp with the August humidity. These were the dog days, her father had announced earlier that morning, as he mopped his brow and then neatly folded the white handkerchief, replacing it in his pocket before he left the house. Maggie's gaze lifted to the gently swaying, tall trees at Ahuntsic Park; the treetops had found some air. It was the best park in the area, with a wonderful hill and giant old trees and grassy fields. Maggie wasn't allowed to go there alone. It

was too far from home, and too big a park for children. But, this morning she decided that she wasn't alone; she had the kids with her, and they would stay just long enough to cool off under the trees, and she would watch them. A trickle of perspiration inched its way down her back and she scratched across her shoulder blades. They would play for a while, and then she could lie under those ancient trees in the cooling shade and go back to thinking about Peter.

She tramped across the soccer field with the others, then onto the asphalt path winding towards the water fountain, stopping long enough for a drink. This park had a baseball diamond, and if it weren't so hot, Maggie would have run the bases in the rusty dust, but she joined the kids at the playground for some turns on the swings. She and her sister tried to hold down their skirts as wafts of air ballooned them up. Maggie imagined that she could stretch up to the sky and that Peter was beside her. She did not yet have a face for him; the blur just laughed with her as she closed her eyes, gripped the chains, leaned back almost reclining, to kick the clouds.

She and Steve had a good thumping on the seesaw, each sending the other flying into the air and crashing down hard. While Maggie was still aloft, Steve jumped off and ran towards the hill. She should have known better than to trust Stevie on the seesaw, she thought, as she collided painfully with the ground.

"Jerk! You stupid jerk!" she screamed after him as he ran away. He turned back and laughed.

"Maggie, come on, as if I wasn't going to do that!"

She knew he was going to jump off like that. He beat her to it. Now her bum was aching, and she remembered the story of her mother's fall while she was expecting Robbie. A broken tailbone was a serious matter. It hurts like the dickens, her mother had said, and she had to sit on a donut; that's what they called it. It wasn't really a donut; it was a red rubber ring, much like an inner tube, only red. Her mother had to sit on it again because of her stitches after Sally was born. Maggie had never had stitches, and she hadn't even noticed what the "expecting" was all about. It had just seemed like her mother got fatter for a while, and then went to the hospital to pick up the baby. In Maggie's family no one talked about it, and Maggie just knew not to ask about it too much. It was just too embarrassing. But some times she just couldn't help herself and she had to ask. And maybe their mother's sore bum made Robbie the way he was.

Maggie let go of the iron handles of the seesaw, stood up, and ran away from the sandy playground, onto the grassy stretches alongside the asphalt paths that wound their way to the bottom of the hill. She watched the boys burst ahead and climb, at first energetically, but then slow up wearily nearer to the top.

She bounded after them. Sally lagged behind, so Maggie slipped back to grab her hand and haul her up the gentle slope. She veered out of the way as her brothers started to run down the hill, in uncontrolled acceleration, then tumbled, bumping into each other to the bottom. Back up the boys went and joined Maggie and Sally at the top. The girls took off their hats and laid the bonnets down on the

dry grass beside them. Maggie could see the Pont Viau Bridge and the Back River to the north, veiled in the sweltering haze.

Her bum ached now from the seesaw, like an expecting mother who had broken her tailbone. The whole thing about babies had been worrying her, especially how they got out. The lady next door, Mrs. Fitch, had gotten fatter and rounder and walked so strangely last year. She wore dark, pleated dresses with big white bows at the collar whenever she went out in the car, usually to go downtown to see her doctor, Maggie's mother had said. And at home, she wore these tops with yellow flowers that became transparent in the sunlight as she hung clothes out on her line. Once the wind blew Mrs. Fitch's blouse up and her belly seemed to burst out. Maggie was astonished to see the swollen belly, skin stretched and taut with what looked just like purple strap marks across her waist. Maggie ran back into her house, frightened, sure that Mrs. Fitch had something terribly wrong with her. Mrs. Fitch is in the family way, explained Maggie's mother. That was the extent of the conversation. It meant that she was going to have a baby; "the family way" is another way to say it, her mother told her. Maggie recoiled, hardly believing that beautiful babies and Mrs. Fitch's belly could have anything to do with each other.

Maggie lay back on the top of the hill, looking at the sky. The scene began to unfold in her head. She and Peter. She was running with him, climbing the barbed wire fence. When her skirt got caught in the wire, Peter ripped it loose and they were over and free! But the shots rang out, and Peter panicked as she fell

before him. Then he was hit, too. Or was she hit or did she turn back to be with him and was hit then?

“Oomph!” grunted Robbie, who landed hard against her. Maggie gasped. Before she could punch him, he dashed away from her. She hated her brothers’ rough play. Especially now that she was “developing,” as her mother had told her. Her breasts felt so sore and swollen. Robbie just laughed and began to roll back down the hill. Stevie rolled into him and the pair wrestled their way to the bottom. What idiots, Maggie thought, folding her arms across her aching chest. She tried to get back to Peter but couldn’t.

Maggie had never asked her mother how Mrs. Fitch’s baby was going to get out of there, but lay awake at night wondering. At school, she quietly asked the older girls what they knew about this. Gloria Rizzutto told her that babies come out through the mouth. On so many shows and movies that Maggie watched, ladies died having babies. She guessed that maybe they kind of strangle the mother if things don’t go right. On the westerns she watched on TV, they always had to choose between saving the baby or the mother. The mothers usually died; that was the heroic thing to do. Carol Ann Temperton insisted babies were born where the belly opens up at the belly button. That’s what it’s there for. Diane Fortin, a girl in grade four, said that babies came out the bum. But there was no room, Maggie countered.

An airplane went over, and as it roared past, Maggie decided to roll down the hill, whirling, flowing, her body following the grassy slope, dizzy with

gravity. She laughed as she crunched in the straw-like grass of the dry, open slope, landing in the cool grass shaded by the giant maples. She lay still, inhaling the sweet clover, and the stale, damp scent of grass cuttings drying out in the sun-baked landscape. Peter knew that she wasn't just a kid, and when she was with him in her "stories," she was sixteen at least. She shared the sunlight with him as it filtered through the boughs. The breeze flipped the leaves into a living dark velvet canopy that shimmered sheer silver and transparent at the same time. He wanted to share her world, travelling back and forth in time and place, like she so often did. She would have to tell him that "Ahuntsic" meant Indian village. Eyes closed now, she pictured for him Indian villages and papooses, and tepees and settlers, and long dresses and Jesuits, and log houses and massacres. She had started reading *Last of the Mohicans* after she'd seen the television show with Hawkeye and Chingachcook. She had butterflies in her stomach, the same butterflies that she had thinking about Peter, when she read books about the pioneers and the natives. She reread the book about the North American Martyrs many times. The story of the Jesuit Fathers Brébeuf and Jogues and the others who died for their faith in the new land thrilled her. She could hear the crickets and the cicadas. And she knew at once that this song of the August heat was the same for all the people who lived in her head and her heart. Maybe Peter heard the whine of the cicada that summer before he died, and St. Lawrence, and Marilyn Monroe, and a pioneer girl or Indian princess, had listened to that same electric sound that Maggie heard now. Everyone could hear it unless, of course,

they were deaf. Maggie wondered who else might even be listening to it now. It reminded her of clandestine messages sent through the forest.

Many evenings Maggie played hide-and-seek with her brothers and their friends. At dusk, while someone counted, she listened to the birds chirping their young back to the nest, and the evening song of the choir of crickets, and the distant voices of parents, summoning their children back home for the night. This was Maggie's time to pretend she was back in time with the pioneers and saints and Indians, or with the French Resistance during the war. She would conceal herself, preparing for an ambush, or a daring escape from her captors. From tree to shed, under gallery, behind bushes, keeping low, creeping across the cool grasses in the pale light. As night fell, she crept silently in the moonlight while her mother shouted her name.

It was not as if she could ask her mother about the babies, or even tell her about Peter or any of the other stuff. She had to speak quietly when she spoke with her friends about the baby stuff. But Maggie didn't believe anybody's story, not even the story that Michael Semetey had told her at the corner park one day. He said that babies came out the other hole. Maggie didn't think that there was another one in front. Oh yes, there was, he insisted. She wasn't surprised that he would say something like that, and he even had some dirty names for it. He wanted to show Maggie where hers was. She left him standing there, laughing, as she dragged her sister out of the park.

She could talk to Peter in her head, and he could listen in the shadow cast by these tall maples and poplars. Old trees, their trunks wider than her

grandmother's waist. A great place for a game of hide-and-seek. And she could see herself stealing through the forest in silence. Slipping through the green ferns, bird-like, eagle-like, or fleeing across No Man's Land, arriving safely. Or running, dodging the relentless bullets, and finally collapsing with Peter in death as they fled to a new life.

She sat up, then stood, and wandered through the grass to the dry earthen base of a giant maple whose powerful roots had long since starved out all but patches of moss in its path. She grew dizzy as she looked up, and up and up. The nearest branches were at least twenty feet beyond her, and the limbs reached out across a broad expanse of the sky. She hugged the trunk for balance, and fingered its scabby surface. She drew closer and leaned her face into it, closing her eyes to listen for its heartbeat. She breathed in the woody mildew of its long life. This tree was probably wider than the tree where St. Sebastian was slain. Its bark and the earth could have soaked in his life's blood as it drained from his slumping form. She had often looked at the picture of his almost naked body pierced by arrows in her Encyclopaedia of Christian Martyrs. St. Sebastian's soft curls drooped forward across his face as he stood in gentle death. His martyrdom seemed less horrible to her than St. Lawrence's. She had prayed to God not to please not take her by fire and burning. She and Peter would have died so peacefully by each other's side. She wondered if his blood still stained the pavement in Berlin.

Maggie was appalled when her friend Susan showed her a book that belonged to Susan's older sister, Sandra. Sandra had gotten her period, whatever

that was. Maggie had begged her to stop as she explained about bleeding from down there, from the *vagina*, that was the proper word, and how it had to do with babies. Maggie had never heard of such a thing. Maggie was sure babies couldn't come out from *down there*.

"That's not nice!" yelled her mother as she slapped her for spending too long soaping and rinsing her privates. That was what they meant by an impure action, she learned in preparation for her first Confession. You had to wash yourself; only you couldn't make it feel good, Maggie realised. That was a sin. How could babies come from there?

Her fingertips followed the rough surface into the many inscriptions of eternal love carved into the tree's bark. She opened her eyes to examine the initials JL SN. It had been done recently; the light woody colour was still intact. It was not grey-black like Jimmy and Barbara, just beside it. Heart-shaped testaments marked the tree-trunk. She and Peter would have carved their names into a tree like this.

No one fell in love at the park near her house. The trees there only had "fuck" carved into them by Michael and his friends. She wondered if Michael had been in love with those girlfriends he talked about. She stepped back from the giant maple, and slipped over to the next tree. Sometimes she felt like a dancer and wished that she were, as she read the carvings in the trees. Kind of like Maria in *West Side Story*. She would call the children soon to play hide and seek in the shade here, but only after she finished here. She quickly glanced their way; they

were fine, she figured, as she read how Steve and Marie loved each other in 1958, and probably still. Sandra and Bob 4ever, and names and names, Linda, Angie, Tina, Mike, Rocco, Joanne, Michael, Carol, Dino, Johnny, Ricky, and —

“Maggie”

She spun around.

Michael Semetey stood before her, smiling.

“Look, Maggie”

It was Michael, whose father didn't know how to dress properly, who said he knew about babies, who lived in a fancy house on Grand Allée, and who had a BB gun, who smiled at her. He was still wearing the pale blue plaid shirt she had noticed in church, but it wasn't tucked into his navy pants anymore. His pants were wide open.

As he walked closer to her, she saw it poking forward, bouncing, out from his shirttails.

“Have you ever seen this, Maggie?”

She didn't answer. No, this wasn't like Robbie's that her mother had caught her touching when he was a baby. This looked like a jack in the box, a purple stretched clown. She wanted to look away.

He started to stroke himself.

“Michael!”

“Come on, Maggie touch it!”

Maggie felt her face become hot and her hands cold. She shook her head, looking down at the dry dirt under her feet. She was about to run when he grabbed her arm.

"I'm going to tell..."

"You're going to tell that you played with my cock?" he laughed. "Do you want me to show the kids?"

The kids. She was supposed to be watching the kids. Where were they? He caught her other arm as she scanned the area. She looked over her shoulder and they were still on the hill. She struggled to pull away, but he held her arm and squeezing her wrists together, cupped her hands and brought them down to the taut flesh.

It was warm, and the skin was softer than it looked. But it was ugly, and she shouldn't be here, and it was dirty. St. Sebastian didn't look like this. He was always covered. She had never even wanted to see it. He was using her hands to rub himself now, and her hands were getting slick, covered in sliminess. She squirmed and told him to let her go, but he only held on tighter. Her wrists were burning and he kept on rubbing harder. The sweat from his intent face landed on her forearm.

Then she felt warm spurts on her wrists and forearms, and he loosened his grip. It smelled like the laundry when her mother washed the whites. She broke free and ran now, ran out of the tall trees. She could hear Stevie calling after her as she raced to the fountain, beyond the hill, her hands dripping. She retched when she reached the fountain, where she rinsed her hands, her wrists, and her arms.

Why had she come to this stupid park? She started to gasp as she tried to get clean, that dirty Michael, that dirty pig!

Wringing her hands in the warm fountain water, she looked back at her brothers and sister. Across the field Robbie ran to her, Stevie and Sally following. The sun blazed high in the sky, as Maggie realized that she had to get them home. She glanced back at the trees and Michael was gone now. She wiped her hands on the grass to dry them, and called to the kids to hurry. Stevie howled about how Robbie had landed in dog shit in the field, and Robbie was trying not to cry. Her voice trembled as she gathered them up and rushed ahead. She could hear all the grumbling and complaining. Her knees were shaking as she tramped through the grass to get to Lajeunesse Street. She would just walk fast and put it out of her mind. She turned back to make sure that the kids were following, and that Michael wasn't.

She looked down at herself. She was all dirty. Her church-going dress was grass-stained, the white trim on her collar ripped. She had lost the barrette that matched her dress somewhere and now her shoulder length hair hung recklessly from the side part. Is *that* what it looks like? Flopping out of his pants as he walked towards her like jack-in-the-box? Oh God!

Screaming at them did not speed them up at all. She slowed down to push them to move faster towards their house. Now she could see that Steve's white socks were all muddied and stained. He must have taken off his shoes, but not his socks after his many collisions. Robbie, shirtless, red-faced, and dirty, marched ahead of Sally, who was too hot and too thirsty, her braids undone, with blades of

grass interwoven among her strands of hair, her once-white pinafore ripped at the waist and grass-stained. Maggie yelled at Sally to just shut up and quit complaining as she hurried them along, biting her lip as she tried to make a plan to get everyone cleaned up before her parents returned from church. She would have to really wash her hands. Her throat tightened and she clamped shut the burst of sobs that threatened to escape. That stupid thing kept poking into her mind. That idiot Michael, he ruined everything. He had just ruined everything.

Corinne

She had not always called herself Corinne. Corinne was her middle name, and it suited her, she thought, so very much better than Sally. She would have preferred to have been known as Sarah, the Hebrew origin of Sally, meaning “princess.” Sally did not sound serious enough for someone who studied linguistics and languages. She hated when her friends called her “Sister Bertrille” from the Sally Field role in “The Flying Nun” or, worse yet, “Gidget.” With her doctorate in linguistics, and a promising career in terminology, it would have been a strategic mistake to go back to Sally. Corinne thought that her sister’s name—Margaret—was miserably dated as well. Margaret was known as Maggie, which was not altogether a bad appellation, but Sally was unacceptable, and too limiting for her. After she left home to go to university at eighteen, Sally became Corinne.

Corinne had always been petite, and the business suits that she wore to her job as a terminologist at a telecommunications and fibre optics company were purchased at one of the very few boutiques in Montreal that carry size 2. Her siblings were what her mother called “big-boned,” and if it were not for her really petite aunt Lillian, her mother’s sister, there might have been some plausibility to the talk about Corinne’s parentage. On the street where she grew up in Ahuntsic, in the north end of Montreal, it was often said that the man she knew as her father was, in fact, not. She had heard that muttered as she sat playing school with Donna, Joanne, and Patty on the front gallery of the Thomas place, down the

street from her house. Not really understanding what Mrs. Thomas or the other women meant when they said such things, she asked her mother about it.

“You are just like your aunt Lillian,” she had retorted. “And look, your hair is blonde like hers. I can’t believe the kind of minds we have around here.” At nine, Corinne was not sure why, but she smugly nodded in agreement. The ladies on the street were very “common,” according to her mother.

As Corinne poured water into the kettle for her tea on this particular Friday morning, she observed a spider walking across her kitchen counter, and immediately thought of the saying she had learned in French from Marie-Soleil at work: — *araignée du matin* — *chagrin*. It did not really translate into English, but it meant that seeing a spider in the morning did not bode well for the day. August first, and the spiders were wildly spinning their webs everywhere, even trying to move into her kitchen. The arachnid escaped from the crinkled Kleenex that she was using in her attempt to crush it. She did not have time to make a notation in her on-line dictionary/journal about the spider/*araignée* but before she grabbed her purse, her lunch, and briefcase, she scribbled those words and the word “*chagrin*” on a Post-it, and stuck it to her kitchen table. She could consider this omen later. Heading towards the front door, she looked back, and decided against an umbrella, then dashed out of her apartment, and click-clacked her way down the narrow staircase of the triplex to her car and made her way to work.

At the last “all hands” meeting, almost a year earlier, Corinne and the various writers and translators of Client Education Services had listened to their

group leader, Magnus Lognare, announce that the firm was planning to sell off the division as soon as a buyer could be found. Corinne, standing in a forest of tall people, nibbled on a Timbit, the snack usually provided with coffee at these meetings.

“There is no reason for alarm,” he reassured everybody crowded in the room that Friday in September, almost a year before. “The company,” he said, “will stipulate in any sale agreement that all employees must be retained. There will be no ‘rationalization’ of the work force.”

With that, he stepped down from the podium, and another manager replaced him to answer questions. Corinne shook her head and left the meeting at this point. She had work to do. As she returned to her desk after that meeting, she noted the date — September 29th, feast of Saint Gabriel, the patron saint of telecommunications. She stretched back in her chair, and smirked at the image of the messenger archangel on her day calendar. She sighed whenever she thought about losing this job, a possibility she considered at least thirty times a day after this gathering. As a single woman, or an old maid, as the ladies of Berri Street would have called her, Corinne had to support herself. She had always tried to be financially independent. As a child, she helped her brothers Rob and Steve with their paper routes, baby-sat, and worked summer jobs and part-time jobs all through school. Even now, she took short contracts, when they came up, to bank for the future, as long as they did not interfere with her dictionary work. The dictionary project was more than a hobby for Corinne. It kept her mind off the worry about her job.

Sighing could be a stress-buster, she had learned at the yoga classes she took at the Women's Y. In the days following this meeting, many co-workers had been laid off, despite all the reassurances from Magnus Lognare, but somehow, she had been kept on. She set up a reminder on her desktop to sigh at least four times a day. She had prepared herself mentally for the moment when her boss would announce that she was being made "redundant," but it had not happened, and that boss was himself long gone in the second wave of layoffs. Her company had not been able to sell off her division, and she stayed on in her shrunken workplace and plugged away at her words.

After arriving at her desk, she skimmed through her email inbox full of announcements of babies being born, of individuals who were no longer with the company, of the latest major product sale, or the new rules concerning the refrigerators on each floor, and she viewed a "high priority" message from Clifford, her new manager.

"Can you come and see me when you get in?"

She glided her chair away from her computer, edging past the border of her cubicle, to see if Clifford was in his office, which was just across from the hive of cubicles. Corinne saw that the fishbowl, as she secretly called his glassed-in enclosure, was empty. She clicked "Reply," and typed a note saying that she would go in as soon as she saw him back in his office. She settled into her coffee and her music for the workday. She set the cup down beside the CD case of Gabriel Faure's Requiem conducted by Charles Dutoit. She favoured classical music while she weighed one word against others, and was listening to Kiri te

Kanawa's soprano solo, "Pie Jesu," when Clifford came for her in the early afternoon.

Corinne removed her headphones, and set them down carefully on her keyboard.

Seated, facing Clifford at the his desk, rather than at the round table in his office where they usually discussed terminology issues, Corinne wondered why Clifford did not use deodorant, and why he insisted on wearing a beige short sleeved shirt and caramel chinos every single day to work. As he told her that she, of all people, was aware of the company's situation, she nodded. Surely he had other clothes, she reckoned. She made a mental note to add entries for *Clifford*, *Body Odour*, and *Beige*, and also *Caramel*, into her dictionary that evening. Refocusing, she felt flattered that he singled her out for her insight.

She glanced down at her fingernails. She had trimmed her cuticles and hangnails the night before, and applied clear nail polish. She felt that good posture and exceptional grooming made all the difference for a diminutive woman. Corinne dressed "smartly," as her mother would have described her lawyer look. It was the only way to be taken seriously. Dressing smartly in Montreal was really a given, Corinne thought, unless you counted Miracle Mart as your store of choice. She had refused to return there as soon as she began to pay for her own clothing, when she was sixteen. She had her first summer job then as a filing clerk at Canadian Pacific Railways, where her father worked as claims agent, and she quickly discovered the boutiques of downtown Montreal. As soon as she was able, she opted for Ogilvy's, or even Holt Renfrew, when they

had a sale. She cringed when she thought about her old neighbour on Berri Street, Mrs. Bartlett, who regularly wore a house dress accessorized with ankle socks and fleece collared slippers that must have belonged to Mr. Bartlett.

"I've been asked to make some difficult choices in our department."

He sighed, rubbed his cheek, and combed his fingers through his shoulder-length salt and pepper hair. He had been blonde in his younger days, Corinne imagined. She was about to tell him how much she empathised, and how hard it would be to lay off another translator when he said,

"Corinne, I'm going to have to let you go. I don't have the budget for a terminologist anymore. This is very distressing to all of us here. We value the contribution."

He continued talking, but Corinne stared at him incredulously. A tremor originated somewhere behind her shoulder blades, and rapidly spread to her ribs, and her spine, and her knees, and her fingers, and her jaw. And she began to feel cold. While she watched his lips move, she clung to the notebook that she carried to record and manage the information transferred in these meetings. She had been always been most professional here, she thought. She was thorough. She was conscientious. She had been a valuable employee who rarely missed work. Not like Marie-Pascale and Annemarie, who were off for their children's ear infections and the like. Corinne was available at all times, and was not caught in the Catch 22 situation of all the working mothers who knew that it was unsatisfactory to miss work for a child's illness, but even more objectionable to

bring a sick child into the onsite daycare. Corinne saw how angry her co-workers were when Marie-Pascale's son Matthew passed on the chicken pox to Annemarie's daughter, Marie-Noelle. Marie-Pascale could not begin to apologize enough to Annemarie and the other parents of infected children. Corinne never caused these disruptions at work. She never complained about the weight she gained in her pregnancies, because she had never been pregnant. She had been a reliable employee who never even considered her biological clock, or bothered anyone with her private life. And the firm was fortunate to have a terminologist of her calibre. Corinne had arrived at the firm straight from completing her doctorate in linguistics from the University of Manchester, in England. She was fluent in English, French, German, and Spanish, and even Latin.

"I am so very sorry about this, Corinne. I would like you to read over the details of this severance package that has been prepared for you. As I said, I am really, really sorry. The company offers you out-placement counselling. I suggest you take it. It can help."

Clifford stood up. Corinne looked up at him. He stretched out his hand, the one that had just been plowing through his greasy hair, to shake hers and she avoided it. She had said nothing from the time he made his announcement. He was flushed as he walked her to the door. She held the large envelope with the details of her "package" in her hands, and stepped out of his office. She would look at it tomorrow.

Corinne did not cry. She did not cry when her brother died; she did not cry when her father died. She would not cry now. Back at her desk, she registered that her computer desktop had already been locked by the IT department. Soon she knew that Security would be up with her to make sure that, as she packed up her things, she did not make off with, or damage, anything belonging to the firm.

Corinne had been so certain that her work was important, if not crucial, to the company. She was creating a lexicon of accepted terms for engineers and writers all over the broadband world. It was Corinne who determined whether it would be *broad-band* or *broadband* or *broad band*. It was up to her to classify the multiplexers into the various systems dreamed up by the engineers and product managers. Corinne decided which words would be accepted or refused in all the company's documentation. Important work, certainly, but behind the scenes work, and thankless. And there was more to it than met the eye. She had to consider that the words would inevitably be translated. Clarity was essential. She had to choose a term that could not be mistaken in another language. How many times had writers used the word "since" in the conditional sense, and it was innocently translated as meaning "after"? This could be dangerous. Corinne cared about words; she cared about clarity.

At university, when she studied Applied Linguistics and language parsers—specifically, syntactical parsers—she wanted to facilitate terminological determination. She wanted to look at what Chomsky called language performance in linguistics, and for her, terminology was really the observable usage of language in everyday communication. Corinne wanted to understand

what we all mean when we refer to an object, an idea, or an experience. She had been lucky enough to work under John McNaught, the leading researcher in the field. The UK was a hotbed for language engineering, and she wanted to meld her interest in language and meaning with technology. Perhaps technology could help solve the problems of interpretation. Her dissertation, *A Multidimensional Approach to Classification in Terminology: Working Within a Syntactical Framework*, included important research into the utter folly of machine translation. Language, according to Corinne, was simply too complex to allow a machine to make semiotic decisions. Corinne's approach to language and translation was to limit and simplify vocabulary in texts to be translated, so that confusion and error would be minimised. This was important, she silently insisted to herself this day when the firm decided that it was not.

She began to collect her things in cubicle C-232, on the second floor of the eight-story building, recently built in the new technopark. Her cubicle was in the Client Education department, sandwiched between technical documentation and translation, but she wasn't quite either. On one side of her wall, a writer sniffed constantly. He had a chronic sinus problem, as well as an aversion to blowing his nose. He probably had no idea that the quiet lady on the other side of the wall was leaving. In the cubicle to her left, she heard the new translator chattering with someone on the telephone. It seemed that this woman was very possibly pregnant. Her period was late, and she and her lover/husband (Corinne did not know her well enough to know who exactly it was) hadn't bothered about protection one Sunday morning.

She dusted her frames —she had learned framing in one of her craft workshops — and slipped them into her bag. One contained a picture of her brother Rob, and the other encased a Latin motto - *Post hoc, ergo propter hoc* - (After this, because of this). She had always loved Latin. It was her pre-Vatican II upbringing in the Catholic church that kindled this in her. She remembered how, as a child, she had slept in the top bunk bed, and had been awakened many weekday mornings by her sister Maggie's feet kicking her mattress from below, announcing that it was time to go to early Mass. Corinne and Maggie dressed in the darkness and slipped out to the six a.m. Mass, muttered very quickly in Latin by one of the parish priests. With her sister's prompting, Corinne quickly learned her Latin prayers, and was happy to have own white leather-bound First Communion Missal to follow the liturgy. The pages in the Missals had a Latin column and an English translation, and as the years went by, she closely examined the differences in the English readings and prayers between her missal and her mother's or fathers and even Maggie's. Her mother told her that it did not matter, but it did. The words did not mean the same things to her. How could God or religion mean anything if the words could so easily be substituted? She was even more disturbed when the Mass was said in the vernacular, and the versions differed so much. She was one of the very few who was happy to study Latin in high school, and was pleased to see it offered at Bishop's University during her time there. She had even considered learning Aramaic to systematically analyse scriptures and prayers, but, by that time, neither Corinne

nor Maggie attended the Mass on a regular basis, and her interest in exegesis was broadened, or perhaps replaced, by her interest in language and technology.

In the next moments, she found herself escorted by a gentle security guard to the front door of the building. Some people said goodbye and good luck, but she wasn't able to reply. She walked to her car, carrying the white cardboard box that the guard had assembled for her.

She flipped down the mirror on the visor to see if she looked different. Perspiration discreetly beaded her forehead and lip as she studied her reflection. Her deep-set grey-green eyes, decorated with only a little mascara, stared back at her. Her freckles were no longer hidden with heavy foundation, and the lipstick had paled on her petal mouth. She looked the same, she thought, and she scanned the parking lot, filled with cars with company parking stickers. She turned the key in the ignition. She would go home now.

Corinne liked to say that she lived alone with her Pentium 4. Not exactly alone. She had Chomsky, her marmalade cat. She had never wanted a cat. Her brother Steve's children were allergic to Peanut, and no one else could take him in. That was a year ago at Thanksgiving dinner at Maggie's, not long after the Lognare announcement. Chomsky seemed not to bother about the new name; he was an independent cat, and he did not interfere with her work. He hardly took note when she arrived at night — but most cats were like that, she had learned when she discussed Chomsky with other cat owners at work. She kept him indoors, and his independence suited her just fine.

As she drove home, she considered her situation. With her doctorate and her facility with languages, she knew that she could at least be a translator. Her first plan after university had been to continue her research and to teach. However, with university budgets slashed in Britain and in North America, Corinne had found the competition very tough for the very few positions listed in *The Linguist*. She dreaded, then and now, the rounds of job talks, and the efforts she would have to make to sufficiently impress hiring committees. Back then, before this job, she had travelled to the University of Notre Dame, in West Bend, Indiana, and to the University of Edinburgh for interviews, and was offered a semantics and syntax tenure track position at SUNY in Plattsburgh. She might have considered accepting this position, though she was not keen on Plattsburgh at all, but for her meeting with a Montreal colleague of her University of Manchester supervisor. Dr. McNaught suggested that she meet the Montreal contact on her visit home to Montreal, and within days she was offered this position in terminology. No one, absolutely no one, other than the consultant who had suggested her for this job, had any idea about what she did, and what she brought to her work, or just how educated she was.

She never dreamt of calling herself Doctor Corinne McDonough. Her family had always maintained that only MDs should be called doctor. She was not the only one of her family to attend university, but she was the only one to achieve this level of scholarship. In many ways, she wished that she had gained a little more respect for her position; she did not demand it, but she would have appreciated some recognition at work. Why, even a university undergraduate

degree wasn't the norm in her office. Yes, there were all the engineers with their Bachelors, but not many went beyond that. None of her co-workers had faced the comprehensives, the years of gruelling research, the writing, and the rounds of revisions.

Corinne saw herself as the scholar who created the vocabulary that all the designers, the developers, the programmers, the testers, the marketing group, the product implementation teams, the instructional designers, the trainers, the writers, the quality assurance team, the business analysts, the database administrators, the system architects were required to use. She received no great salary or important title, but she knew that she was important. As part of her work, she dealt with project managers who created time lines for completion of all the tasks for all those working on a particular project. These project managers wanted to "scope out" her work in a timeline with deliverables and dates, as if creating a vocabulary could be scoped like a design for a wireless network. Her work demanded a different approach from that; she could not promise a thousand words a day, or even fifty, or even ten, on some days. She could only promise to do her job well.

She travelled east along the service road of the Trans Canada Highway, and headed north under the Metropolitan boulevard at St. Croix. She had planned to stop at Loblaws, and pick up some cat food, some sushi for her supper that night, and her groceries for the week. She wanted to buy some candy for herself, to have a treat, like the family did when she was a child. She reminded

herself as she walked through the automatic doors that she would think about money and her package tomorrow, not today. Inhaling deeply, then exhaling as forcefully as she could, she sent the worry to tomorrow. But tomorrow, if she did not worry about the money, no one else would do it for her. She would make entries for *Package* and *Finances* in her dictionary. She could keep busy with that when she arrived home. There was always her dictionary.

She had begun developing her special dictionary project when she was studying Linguistics and Literature at the Masters level. This was before she felt she had to become serious about her future employment potential. She had loved intertextuality and the way in which authors could communicate with each other through the ages using references to other authors and works. She focused on Shakespeare in her Masters thesis: *The Dance of Discourse and Reason: Intertextuality and Allusions in the Works of Shakespeare Interpreted through Cognitive Science, and Computational Linguistics*. As she collected data that referred to other texts in her research, she decided that she would change the way she recorded events in the journal that she had been keeping for years. Up until this point, she added daily entries much the same way that Victorian ladies chronicled the growth of their plant slips, their stitchery, and details about their lives. Corinne decided to change and construct her very own dictionary to inscribe the information: it was a cleaner, more direct approach, completely devoid of the sentimentality and self-indulgence of the journal, and undoubtedly a better way to classify experience and learn from it. She could address and embrace the ultimate subjectivity of language, and turn a dictionary into a collection of associations and definitions. It

was more honest than the Oxford dictionary, with its attempt at objectivity and decided lack of intimacy towards its readers. She wanted to opine and define and contextualize her world. The whole idea came from Flaubert's *Dictionary of Received Ideas*. He was irreverent and sublime, offensive and witty. He cut to the chase, freely dispensing his views on his works and his life and the politics of his society. She hardly agreed with Gustave and his misogynist ideas, but a dictionary suited her. She had never been much of a talker. She came from a large family where her voice was always drowned out by her brothers or sisters. So she just kept her thoughts and ideas to herself while she was growing up. She had heard herself described as a very private person because she did not volunteer much in any conversation. In her dictionary, she felt free to expound, and even better, to flip from one idea or topic to another. She could face issues of sound and meaning and spelling errors and associations as they occurred in her mind, and still be able to maintain control over what she had written. She included a searchable index that had html links into the text so that she could find anything quickly.

Sometimes it overwhelmed her — the labelling and the cross-referencing and the annotating —but she arranged her life around this task to keep up with it. She rarely missed a day of sitting at her PC, typing into the vast database of her life so far, adding more historical references. Thank goodness for databases and computers, although she realised that she could have kept written files or alphabetical booklets. It was all backed up on CD's now, and every seventh night she printed two copies of her new work. One she kept at home in her file cabinet,

and, in case of fire, the other she kept in the storage space she rented by the month, along with a copy of the CD's. As the years went by, her dictionary had grown with all the cross-referencing, bookmarking, and the obligatory html links that her imagination suggested. She avoided going away overnight, and when she was forced to, she kept accurate records to transcribe when she returned.

Corinne had considered writing a popular book on her work, and had a working title: *Subjectivity Unbound: A Terminologist's Guide to the Universe*. It would have appealed to all the crafters now interested in scrapbooking. But she hadn't had the time what with compiling all the words. She smiled when she realized the scope of her work. *She* was the language and reference figure in her dictionary, just as she had been at her job. Words were filtered through her own subjective experience of them and the meanings that she attached to them. It was the only honest way to deal with words; she knew that. If her place of work saw fit to divest themselves of her expertise and vision, she would have more time to devote to the project and begin to compile her book.

As she parked her car in a residents' parking zone in the Mile End district, in the north end of Montreal, she thought about telling her sister Maggie what had happened. She wanted to drive out to Maggie's place, and sit in her kitchen, and tell her, as she might have done when she was Maggie's little sister and she had a problem at school. Corinne had not spoken to Maggie for at least two months. They emailed from time to time because neither liked to use the telephone. Maggie lived in the suburbs, taught full time, had her boys, and Peter,

and their mother to deal with. Public transportation was very slow out to Maggie's home, and until recently, Corinne had no car. Corinne resisted the urge to panic about the car payments that she had just added to her budget.

Corinne hardly kept up with her family. She attended their Christmas, Easter, and Thanksgiving gatherings, but that was about it. And her mother's birthday, which was coming up, she realized. She erased that thought from her mind as she walked up to her flat on the third floor of the red brick building where she lived. Unlocking the door and stepping onto the hardwood floor, she dropped her keys on the sofa table in her living room, and set down the box of her office effects and the two bags of groceries on the floor. The message light flashing on her telephone caught her eye. She checked the call display, and the message was from Maggie's number. Corinne thought again about her sister, and decided to listen to the message later. She headed across the hallway to her home office.

Standing in front of her computer, she kicked off her black Mary Janes, placed them back in the entrance, then leaned over her keyboard to log on. She retrieved the grocery bags, toted them down the hallway past her bedroom, into the tiny eat-in kitchen, and plunked them down on the counter. She inspected the walls and cabinets and counters for a spider. *Araignée de soir - espoir*. That would be good, a spider bringing hope in the evening. However there were no spiders to be seen. She picked up the Post-it that she left for herself in the morning and stuck it to her tea cup. She plugged in the kettle while she put away her purchases.

In her bedroom, she stripped off her power suit. It was hot, and she turned on the fan. That morning, after her shower, before she dressed for work, Corinne

had inspected her body for signs of wear in front of the full length mirror on her bedroom door. There were no markings on her body from surgeries, babies, broken bones. In many ways, she was perfect. Her tiny breasts did not sag. There were no stretch marks. Her milky skin was still taut and toned over her hips, thighs, and bottom. She stretched her arms over her head and arched her back reaching behind her, and then folded herself forward, gripping her heels, in the opening movements of the yoga Sun Salutation.

She took good care of herself. She scheduled appointments for facials and pedicures every six weeks, for waxing her legs and armpits, and for electrolysis to eliminate the errant sprouts of hair on her chin, or just above her lip. That was fairly common, her aesthetician told her, after forty. A single woman had plenty of time to take care of herself and look attractive. And if the attractiveness led to a relationship, then the woman seemed to have less time for that because she had to spend most of her time dealing with the results of the relationship - marriage, children, and other family commitments. Her sister Maggie was running all the time with her job, and her sons, and Peter. Corinne had no idea where Maggie found the time to look as presentable as she did, though, she did look weary on Mother's Day. Some of Corinne's co-workers, like Antoinette Senecal, manager of the Information Production group, presented themselves elegantly, their hair highlighted and their tired raccoon eyes camouflaged with MAC concealer stick. Corinne's face required no artistry to maintain its unweathered glow.

Corinne stood in her bra and panties before the mirror a second time today. Slowly she removed the bra, removed the panties. This time she felt sure

that she would bear a sign somewhere. She lifted her arm and performed a breast exam on her right breast, on her left breast, kneading in arcs into the tissues. She stroked her belly, smooth and unbroken. Nothing, no change at all in her thighs, her bottom, her knees, her feet.

“Nothing,” she murmured.

She stood gazing at her image until the sound of the boiling kettle roused her. She slipped back on her underwear, and quickly pulled on her weekend jeans and a pullover.

Back at her computer, sipping from her mug of milky tea, she opened the dictionary. Chomsky had not come out of the spare room to see her. Perhaps later, she thought, and opened her dictionary application.

M for *Maggie*, married to *Peter* for at least twenty years. *Mother* to *Brendan* and *Liam*. *Maggie* was into the *Celtic* thing. Her last entry for her sister *Maggie* was earlier that month when *Maggie* sent her an email announcing that *Liam* was graduating from university, and could *Corinne* attend the *graduation* ceremony? No, she could not; she would be busy that day, but she wished *Liam* well and sent him a check for fifty dollars. It would have meant a full day with her sister and her family, and certainly their mother would be there. *Maggie* would have picked her up from the *nursing home* nearby. *Corinne* wondered if *Steve* or *Kevin* or *Patrick* would have agreed to attend. *Corinne* assumed not: coming in from *Toronto* on a weekend was a chore, especially since the ceremony was to take place on the Sunday. Their sister *Cathy* lived in *Australia* with her husband and

children and missed all these events. It was so far away that they rarely sent emails now.

After Maggie, Corinne found herself clicking the link for *Michel*. She had known him as *Michael Semetey* when they were growing up, but he became Michel just before she started dating him. His parents both attended *St. Rita's* the English church, but they spoke French in their lower duplex on *Grande Allée* in *Ahuntsic*. Their tenants, a young French-speaking couple originally from *Montreal North*, did not speak English at all. Corinne became friendly with Michel when she baby-sat the couple's baby. She smoked with him on the back balcony when the baby was asleep; he usually provided the cigarettes. Michel was much older than she was. At sixteen, she was thrilled to be with a twenty-four-year-old who was in university. He had played football in high school, and was the MVP for his senior team. He studied *Political Science* at the *University of Montreal*, instead of joining the *army*, as he had often bragged he would do years before. She knew him from the park at the corner, where he used to tease her and her sister Maggie. He knew her when she was *Sally*, the little sister. That is what she was, Maggie's little sister. Maggie was the one in charge of everything. Maggie was the only one who spoke and Michel/Michael talked to Maggie long before he ever became interested in her. When the time came, Corinne slept with Michel just like that. She thought it would be harder to do, that there would be more of a fight, but no, it was so easy to say yes to him. After all her years listening to the priests at her church and the nuns who tried to scare her about boys, she just didn't even think about it when one thing led to another.

She and Michel broke up when she left for graduate school in *England*, and he went into law at University of Montreal. Not that many people were aware that Corinne and Michel were going out. It was their secret over the years, and it would have stayed that way had Maggie not discovered them one night having a drink at the *Rockliffe Motel* just across from *Ahuntsic Park*. Maggie never told anyone, but she certainly made it clear to Corinne that she did not approve. At the time, Corinne thought that her sister was just jealous, but looking back, she saw that she had been naive to believe that her secret relationship with Michel could ever be more than a dalliance for him. Michel was not honest with her, and she found out that she was not the only one sharing his bed. The last Corinne heard, Michel was *divorced* and practicing family law. He lived in a loft in *Old Montreal*. Corinne, single, lived in the *Mile End* district and worked in high tech. At least, until today, she had worked in *high tech*.

She wondered if she could still speak to Alex, at work, about the storage of her dictionary. She used a *CD burner* to back up the volumes, something that she saw to every night, just like the IT department at work. Alex was never put off with her questions about backups and networks, and he had asked her out for pizza again only last week, but it was for Wednesday. She was taking a course in *Bibliopeggy- hand bookbinding* - and was in the process of lacing the boards onto the book (her old *Missal*) for her first project. Before going to her class that Wednesday, she had dutifully made entries for *Alex* under A, more specifically in his own file, cross referenced with his last name *Cordona*, and his title at work, *Network Administrator*, and *pizza* along with all the P's and more specifically under

the pizza entries and where he planned to take her - *Manzo's* in *Lasalle*. Just underneath this entry for pizza places was the long defunct *Miss Sauv e*. Corinne's family ordered pizza from there regularly in its heyday, in the early nineteen seventies. At least once a week, she and her sisters and brothers and her mother sat down to an all-dressed pizza. Not everyone on her street had discovered pizza then. It was a meat-and-potatoes area that was frightened of any spicy influences from food or people. She was introduced to pizza in the summer of 1969.

She always linked pizza to *Miss Sauv e's*, and back to *Ahuntsic*, where she grew up. She lived south of that district now, and never thought to return to the area. Her family had all moved from there, and married, except her, of course, and had their lives.

She had not told her family about the dictionary, and at work, only Alex knew about it. At coffee in the cafeteria with others, she wanted to explain about the words and her power over them and her life. Not that she ever said that exactly. She talked about language and words as the keepers of the subjective past. She was trying to capture as much meaning as possible with all the cross-referencing.

Her moments with Michel were hardly fraught with *meaning*. Her skirt was up and her bra was undone. That was it. No one came but Michel. He smelt of beer and *Export A* and July sweat as they thrashed about in the back room of her house, while her mother was shopping at *Steinbergs*, and Maggie was at one of her summer jobs on the assembly line, and the boys were with their friends at the park. Michel told her he loved her, and he wrote poems that he read to her after

the moments were over. It often hurt when he entered her, but she never complained, or even thought to say no. It had not been much different with the other fellows in England, or *Dr. McNaught*, or his friend, the consultant, in Montreal, or *Magnus Lognare*.

Corinne got up from the computer and went into the kitchen to heat up her tea. As she walked by the living room, she remembered the message on the telephone. What did Maggie want now? Corinne massaged her temples and took a deep breath as she clicked "Play." The message was from Peter. It was odd to hear his voice on the telephone, Corinne thought. He called her when the children were born, and that had been the last time she had heard from him on the telephone. They got along just fine even though Corinne considered him high strung.

"It's about Maggie. She went for her checkup."

Corinne made a mental note to schedule her own checkup.

"And the doctor found a lump on her breast. We thought nothing of it but she had a biopsy and it's malignant."

Malignant — that meant cancerous. Malignant tumours can invade and destroy nearby tissue and spread to other parts of the body. Corinne had done some work on medical linguistics and the semiology of medical language for a short summer contract while she was in England. Terms like malignancy are pregnant with meaning. That thought slipped out before Corinne could supplant pregnant with another term like "teeming," or laden with meaning. It frustrated Corinne when she caught herself thinking in clichéd terms.

"She'll be going in for a lumpectomy on Thursday and we'll see from there. She wasn't going to call you Sally, didn't want to worry you, but I'm sure she would love to hear from you, and I figured that you would want to know."

Why did he call her Sally? They could never get that. Her name was Corinne, and it had been for more than twenty years now. That was why it was so hard to be with them. They lived in the past as far as she was concerned.

She would have to call her sister. When she was ready, she would do it. It was probably going to be fine. A lumpectomy. She would look it up. She immediately typed in the terms for her Medline search:

Lumpectomy is the surgical removal of a cancerous lump (or tumour) in the breast, along with a small margin of the surrounding normal breast tissue. Lumpectomy may also be called wide excision biopsy, breast conserving therapy or quadrantectomy (this latter term is used when up to one fourth of the breast is removed). The procedure is often performed on women with small or localized breast cancers and can be an attractive surgical treatment option for breast cancer because it allows women to maintain most of their breast after surgery.

After adding this entry into her dictionary, Corinne clicked "Save," and started her first backup of the evening. While her computer preserved her work, she decided it was time for her sushi. Japanese women have a low incidence of breast cancer, she thought as she held her morsel between her thumb and her index finger and began to eat. She brought her plate back to the computer desktop and slipped her feet under her bottom to watch the files being copied and the hourglass twitch on her screen. Maggie wore a size 36 C, back when she and Corinne shared a bedroom at home and were close enough to know such things about each other. And Maggie was well aware of Corinne's 30 B. Corinne had not

seen Maggie's breasts, other than when she breast-fed her two sons, since the sisters were teenagers. *Breast feeding* was supposed to make her less likely to develop breast disease. *Breast disease* sounded better to her than *Cancer*. Corinne did not like that word. Her father had passed away while she was studying literature at Bishops University in *Lennoxville* in the *Eastern Townships* region, about ninety minutes from Montreal. She was still seeing Michel at that time, on the weekends when he came down to visit. Her father was stricken with *throat cancer*. Presumably from the thirty years he smoked. Corinne did not smoke anymore. Her father died so quickly that she did not have time to be with him very much before it happened. Of course Maggie was. She was the kind of person who was always there for the family, even for Corinne when she fell apart after Michel dumped her, and even long before that, when Rob died. It was easy for her to be that way. She was just like that. Corinne was able to defer her exams and came home for her father's funeral. She stayed three days and then headed back to school.

Corinne would call Maggie after she had taken care of transcribing her day into her dictionary. A cardinal called loudly outside Corinne's window. She looked up from her keyboard to follow the sound, and perhaps see the shy bird with the beautiful song. There it was, sitting on a telephone wire, just outside her home office window. She admired the brilliantly red creature, and it was gone as quickly as it had arrived. She added the *malignancy* to her entries about Maggie, linking the malignancy to cancer and then back again to Maggie and her father, adding the references to *lumpectomy*, and then *lymph node removal* if the cells had

spread from the tumour. They would definitely be checking for that at the surgery. Their father's lymph nodes had been removed from his neck, according to the letters that Maggie sent her at the time. Under *C* and *Maggie*, Corinne opened Microsoft Outlook and added *Call Maggie* to the task list, She clicked the "Reminder" check box to make sure that she did not forget. Maggie would have found herself a lumpectomy support group by now, Corinne decided as she researched on the Web and found numerous sites, including a group at the breast clinic at the Royal Vic where Maggie was being followed for her condition. If Maggie had not, then Corinne would provide her with this listing. Melanie Dufort at work passed around an Avon book, and Corinne noticed the pink ribbon brooch for \$10.00 that included a donation for breast cancer research. She would order one tomorrow. No, she wouldn't, she realised with a start.

As the evening wore on, Corinne wondered when it would be the best time to call. Maggie had to be up early in the morning for her teaching job. She did not have the flex time that Corinne had enjoyed. As long as Corinne put her 7.5 hours in, it really did not matter if she started at 7:30 or 10:30 in the morning. Sometimes when the entries and the dictionary backups were more time-consuming, keeping Corinne up after midnight, she did not rush to get out of bed in the morning. But Maggie always had to be at school for seven-thirty, as classes began at her school at 8:00 AM. Maggie often told her that she needed that half hour time to sip coffee in the classroom before her charges came in.

Did her brothers know? she asked herself. And what about Cath in Australia? Surely Peter had told them. She would call them to talk about it, but it

was already 9:45 and Steve's wife Marisa did not like phone calls late at night. She worked as a nurse and started very early in the morning and did not appreciate being disturbed. Peter would have called Steve and Marisa, especially since Marisa was a nurse. She worked on a medical floor in at Sunnybrooke Hospital in Toronto. In any event, it was most likely best to wait until the surgery was done to be sure about the extent of the problem. No point to worry if there was going to be nothing to worry about. Corinne practised her deep breathing and continued adding entries. She incorporated Peter, and the time of his call, and wondered how he was making out at his new job.

At eleven o'clock, she dialled her sister's voicemail, bypassing the actual telephone, and planned to leave a message. She held her face in a smile as she prepared to record the words. And she would say nothing about the job.

But she clicked "End" on her portable phone before she said a word. She slapped down the phone.

She was quite sure that she had signed up for her chair massage at work tomorrow and looked forward to Johanne's knowing kneading of her tight neck muscles. Her eyes watered again when she remembered. Her throat felt like it was clamping shut, and the breath quickened in her chest. She clicked "OK" to set the day's backup in motion, and walked away from her PC to find her cat.

Notre Dame de Grace

The first vision came to Maggie when she was thirty four, after a bout of bingeing and purging. Chocolate chips and ice cream spilled into the toilet bowl and splattered onto the back wall behind the toilet. The ceiling fan buzzed overhead to muffle the sounds of her retching. Maggie grabbed a rag from under the bathroom sink and wiped away all traces of what had transpired. She did not look up until she finished brushing her teeth. And that was when it happened. While she rinsed out her mouth, she glanced up at the mirror and there, staring back at Maggie from the mirror, was the Blessed Virgin Mary. Our Lady's halo glowed softly around her veiled head. Somehow, Maggie could see the B.V.M. in the mirror as well as her own red-streaked eyes and puffy face.

This has to be a hallucination, she thought, squeezing shut her eyes and then re-opening them. The holy image persisted in the looking glass, and stayed in place long enough for Maggie to examine it.

Maggie tried to identify which of the many versions of Mary that this apparition resembled. The face was not unlike the picture on the holy card she received in grade three, during the month of May, Mary's month, from Father Lallemand on his school visit. She was more familiar with the Our Lady of Perpetual Help holy picture that her mother kept over the kitchen sink when Maggie was growing up. It was Maggie's job to wash the supper dishes, so she gazed at the Holy Mother and Child countless times while scrubbing the baked-on mashed potato pots. Her mother had a special devotion to this icon that dated

back to a Lenten Redemptorist retreat that she attended shortly after she converted to Catholicism. This was long before Maggie was born.

Maggie's mother made many novenas to Our Lady of Perpetual Help when Maggie was young, but now her mother's devotion was limited to keeping the holy picture in the kitchen of her apartment.

"Don't forget to clean the side walls, Maggie," said Our Lady as she smiled and dissolved into the glass.

Maggie thought that she had already wiped down the bathroom walls, but now she noticed that she had missed the brown splash on the wall beside the toilet. She took her cue from the vision, and reached for her bottle of bathroom cleaner and a cloth. After spraying the wall and wiping with the rag, the wall was sparkling clean again. Maggie checked the mirror for any more visitors, then brushed her hair and left the bathroom.

Maggie sighed as she looked at the empty Ice Cream Parlour container on the kitchen counter, and the clear plastic mini-bin of chocolate chips that she was careful to leave half full. It was always a disappointment to her to have done this thing. She quickly discarded the ice cream container in the trash bin in the garage, and returned the chocolate chips to the pantry behind the rice. She bought chocolate chips because her husband and sons loved home-made chocolate chip cookies. Maggie was well aware of where she tried to hide them from herself, and was able to avoid temptation most of the time.

She was on summer vacation from her teaching job, and usually she would be busy driving the boys to swimming lessons and water-polo meets, but they

were away at Camp Kinkora for two weeks. She had the chance to take some time for herself, as her therapist, Clarisse, had suggested, and, unfortunately, having time to herself meant that she had gotten into the ice cream again. Normally at this point, she would promise herself not to do this again. But this time she was more concerned about the vision than she was with the bingeing. She asked herself—as she tidied up the kitchen counter and opened the dishwasher to deposit her spoon—if she was having a breakdown, or if she was schizophrenic like her cousin, and she was hearing voices. But it was not just voices. It was a face and a voice. Maybe this was worse.

As she pieced together what she had seen, Maggie felt unsure if the image of Our Lady was more reminiscent of the image on the holy card of the Madonna and Child given to her so many years ago by her Aunt Lillian, when she was still a nun. Aunt Lillian had been Sister Mary of Loreto. She had taken that name because Our Lady of Loreto was named the patron of aviators and airmen by Pope Benedict IV in 1920, and Lillian had been engaged to a pilot who was lost over the English Channel in World War II. Aunt Lillian left the convent and, later, Maggie's parents asked her to be the godmother for Maggie's baby sister Sally. Maggie had been a little jealous that Sally's godmother was once a member of a religious order. She wondered what became of all those holy pictures from Lillian. She sat down at the kitchen table and wished that she smoked, so she could light up a cigarette and think. She thought that everything was under control in her life. But now she was seeing things. And of all things to be seeing, why the Blessed Virgin Mary? Maggie had no special devotion to her, other than

that she liked looking at images or sculptures of her from time to time. But certainly not regularly, and even her mother had stopped making novenas years ago. No one went in for visions these days. Maggie did not believe in the Mary sightings or events on the news. She was astounded by reports of Mary's tears flowing in statues in various neighbourhoods of the world, even in the suburban town adjoining her own. For Maggie, this was as foolish as the annual crucifixions on Good Friday in the Philippines. With all the present day crucifixions happening in the form of murder, torture, and other assorted anguish everywhere in the world, Maggie was appalled that it was easier to re-enact a painful event in the past than to look at it happening now and address it. She had these conversations with her husband, Peter, and the children, and whoever might listen. She had even joined Amnesty International back when she was in university. She met her husband, Peter, there. She belonged to Development and Peace at the church she attended now. Maybe her subconscious was hard at work, she thought, or, just maybe, this was a true vision. But this had been no rapture or epiphany. Maggie was no Bernadette. She was a working mother with two sons and a mini-van and an insomniac husband and a dog in the suburbs of Montreal. And this was not the Blessed Mother who had appeared at Medjigore, or Lourdes, or Fatima.

This vision did not ask her to pray for Russia, or to pray the rosary. The vision that Maggie had encountered was more like the Mother of God as a figure dispensing household hints on a cable channel, right there in her bathroom. Mary was quite beautiful really, and she looked regal in the mirror. And this vision had

helped Maggie out, no doubt, making sure that all traces of her "problem" were eliminated. No one would have guessed that she had an eating disorder. She was slim, yes, but not skinny. She went to the gym five times a week, had a personal trainer, and owned every one of Anne Lindsay's low fat cook books. It just didn't make sense that she would do such a thing. Even to herself. And now she had been found out by the B.V. M. Luckily, her secret was safe. For the next several months, she avoided bingeing because she was in no rush to be visited again.

But the following spring it happened again, as Maggie had just stepped away from a steaming mound of dog poop in the tall grass of the field behind her house. Not the eating disorder, but the apparition. It was springtime and the fields were still swampy; a stagnant stench lingered over the temporary ponds after the ducks had left. Peter was not working; the company where he worked had gone out of business. Maggie still taught her grade four class, and between her salary and his unemployment insurance they were getting by, for now. There were many people in the world far worse off than they were, she insisted to herself. It seemed as if all her neighbours were paying off their houses and planning vacations. Maggie always picked up after her dog, but today the field was simply too soggy, and she had forgotten to check for a plastic bag in the pouch she carried for such purposes. She held Salome close to her. "Heel," she said, while the sun shimmered on the still sheets of water, and Maggie and her dog fled from the scene. Guiltily, Maggie wandered away from the civic violation on the grass. She increased her pace and tried to give herself permission for this lapse. She hated the selfish people who walked their dogs leaving the mess all

over the footpath for anyone to step in. At least Salome was well into the field when it happened.

While she thought about her misdeed, a voice sounded in front of her.

“Poop and scoop,” Maggie heard.

Maggie looked up from the footpath. There she was, the gentle vision, girl-like, as Goya might have painted her, glimmering over the surface on the sunlit pond, not five metres in front of her.

As the vision disappeared, Maggie noticed a Loblaws bag in the calico pouch. Turning the bag inside out, Maggie stepped back and went into the sloppy field. The mud sucked the shoes away from her feet as she neared Salome’s droppings. She gathered up what she could, leaving brown streaked tall grass, and two remnants that rolled out of the bag. Enough was enough, she thought to tell this lady if she had anything more to say. Salome pulled on her leash as Maggie glanced all around; there was no one else on the footpath. Glimpsing her wrist monitor, she saw that her heart rate had dipped to ninety-six. Pumping her arms, she resisted looking back, and pushed the pulse back up to one-thirty-five.

She had not said a word to her therapist about any of this. She had preferred to discuss Peter’s problems, and his lack of desire for her, even though she did as much as she could to remain attractive. But he had not been too interested in her at that time. He had lost his job, and had stopped sleeping, it seemed. This information had kept Clarisse busy enough with the “and how does that make you feel?” questions. They explored those issues at length, and the

hour would be up. Her relationship with Peter seemed more pressing, so there was no time to talk about apparitions during those visits.

The last thing she wanted to do was tell Peter how she felt about the distance between them, nor did she want to tell him about the visitations. He was already stressed enough. When they talked about their days, she let him speak about his troubles. She hoped it would help him sleep if he could voice his worries. She quietly reassured him, and promised that it would all work out. She had to be strong, keep her own job, and keep her mind off visions in the fields and bathrooms of her life.

It was painful to watch Peter's confidence disintegrate with each job interview. Her pep talks rang hollow to her, and she could only guess that he felt the same way. She dared not voice her feelings of helplessness. Her mother had strongly believed in prayer. She credited prayer as the only way to get through the sad times she had lived. Up until now, it had not helped Maggie much, but perhaps she was not going about it the right way. She had thought of speaking with a priest, to ask how to pray about her struggles at home. But she had not attended Mass in a few months, and did not feel comfortable speaking to the new pastor. If she told him everything, including her little "visions," he would certainly label her a nut case anyway.

Maggie had heard so much about the "power of prayer" and wondered what it takes for a prayer to start to work. She went back to the basics and had begun to pray the rosary again to help Peter. While he was gone to job interviews, she recited her Hail Marys, and fervently fingered the beads that she had received

from Aunt Lillian for her First Holy Communion when she was seven years old. It might help him get a job. Sometimes she prayed on her knees, thinking that her prayers might be answered if she were more desperate. And sometimes she wept as she prayed, begging not to see the sadness in her husband's eyes. After six months of praying like that, Peter finally did find work. But this kind of prayer had aged Maggie. Aged her so much that when she stood in front of the mirror, she tugged at strands of her greying hair, and she thought of how her vice-principal told her that she looked tired; the grey hair drained the colour from Maggie's eyes and her cheeks. She had promised herself that when Peter found steady work that she would highlight her hair. So she planned to call for her appointment. She did not want to look so tired.

She had also heard that meditation would help calm her, and perhaps smooth the furrows that worry had dug so deeply into her forehead. Maggie decided to give up her rosary for a meditation group. Once a week she joined a circle of meditators who sat and listened to "the breath," as the group leader called the cycle of inspiration and expiration.

"Twenty minutes, twice a day, practice your sitting," declared the soft-spoken woman whose life was now peaceful. She had also been able to give up her eyeglasses, she told Maggie.

Maggie inhaled and exhaled, resting her palms on her knees, for twenty minutes in the early morning. In the wingback chair by her living room window, clad in her long white cotton nightgown, she listened to her breath, and the chirping birds at the feeder, and also to her thoughts about her children, her class,

Peter and his new job, their mortgage payment, about her sister Sally, who was hardly speaking to her, about whether her sister Cathy would ever come back to Montreal, about the news of rapes in Kosovo and the Rwandan genocide, about how old her brother Rob would have been. Maggie could not begin to imagine Rob as anything but her almost sixteen-year-old brother, even though by this time he would have been in his thirties. At this point, she would need to stop. It was not working for her. Her mind was racing more than ever, so she decided that she wasn't doing it right.

"There is no wrong way to meditate, Maggie," encouraged the meditation teacher. "Just be patient and continue to sit."

Since it was spring, Maggie decided that it would be easier to meditate if she sat outside on the back deck. It was private there and more peaceful, she determined. The next morning, she moved a white chair away from the umbrella table, sat down, and closed her eyes to listen to her breath, and the birds, and the breeze as it fluttered through the maple tree in her back garden.

It was a May morning on a long weekend. It was too early for the lawn mowers, and her sons were asleep. Peter had already gone out to the nurseries to find flowers to populate the flower beds. The lilacs - white, mauve, and deep purple - breathed their scent into the morning. Her life was delicately on hold in this peaceful moment.

As she settled into the quiet, Maggie listened to the neighbours in the yard adjoining hers discuss where they would seat all their guests later that day. They dragged patio furniture across their deck. Maggie reminded herself to be aware of

the noises, but to focus on her breathing. With a deep breath, she was relaxed again. Then suddenly, Maggie heard the patio door snap open in the house next door. Shrieking and howling poured out through the screen. The voices were raised so loud Maggie was certain that the neighbours behind could hear. But they continued discussing their dinner party, without even a pause in reaction to the screaming in the house next door to Maggie. Maggie was certain that the raised voices would even wake her sons.

“Don’t make it my fault!” bellowed Natalie, the twenty-two year old daughter of her next door neighbours. Natalie’s shrieks trumpeted into Maggie’s ears. Maggie wanted to run over there, but she didn’t want to embarrass them. She was certain that they were unaware that she could hear. Natalie wailed some more, the rage surging in her voice, and then Maggie heard dishes smashing against a wall. Now, she worried that a neighbour might call the police, or that perhaps she should. Then again, she wondered if this might be how they argued in that house. She and Peter never screamed at each other. Peter never yelled at her; he just kept to himself when she suspected he was angry, and he kept to himself when she was angry. She sighed, leaned back in her chair, and became very still as she listened to how the people next door handled the parents’ break-up.

Brian had left Karen early that month. He drove away in his BMW, and had not been back since. He said there was no one else, but Maggie knew better. Natalie, the eldest of the girls, was not doing well. She came by many times to be held in Maggie’s arms as she endured parents’ bitter split.

This time last year, Karen threw Brian a surprise party for his fiftieth birthday. She went all out, hired a caterer, and surprised him, inviting the whole neighbourhood, and friends and family from all over. And now he'd left her. Bought himself a fixer-upper in Ile Perrot, and took Natalie to see it before he walked, just before she graduated from McGill. He also introduced Natalie to his girlfriend.

Maggie had to admit that she knew that Brian was going to leave; she knew the whole story. For many years, she had listened to Karen's despair about her marriage. And several months earlier, Brian had also made Maggie aware. He had not exactly told her, but she knew.

One day in the previous autumn, before the last winter that Karen and he were together, Maggie looked up from her reading as the sounds of water splashing against hubcaps in Brian's driveway almost drowned out the rabble of angry thoughts that unknowingly escaped from him into Maggie's imagination. He had been washing his car when he began venting his fury. Maggie leaned forward to watch him as he lathered up his black car. His lips were not moving, and there was no sound other than the water, but his rant flowed fast and inward across to Maggie. He was going to leave Karen because to touch her gave him a nauseating feeling that would not go away. It had grown and evolved into colitis, and he had tried to shit her out, day after day, mixed with blood and mucus, and a lot of pain. For years he had hated his wife, almost half as much as he hated his life. Karen had let herself go. He had told her plainly —don't ever gain weight— on their wedding day, some twenty-six years earlier. He had been honest, and

look at what she did, at least twenty pounds of flab on her now. How could he love that? It made him shit. It had made his business ventures not pan out. It had turned friends into conniving bastards that he just cannot trust. It had made his teenage daughter fuck boyfriends under his own roof, under his nose.

It was a desperate thing for a wife to break a promise, he maintained. Twenty pounds was quite enough to tear it all down. It was more than enough to refuse to pleasure her, a body so curdled, puckered, and dimpled. Karen wasn't even ashamed. Over fifty, and she still wanted it, looking like she did, still enjoyed it. There were plenty others lean enough and young enough for his needs. That goddamned weight. It had made him so angry, had churned that anger until it welled up and bubbled and spewed out, encrusting all the elements of their lives with its rancor. Maggie became frightened as it threatened to radiate through her as well. She couldn't breathe. She ran into the house and told Peter that Brian was leaving Karen.

"Did he tell you?" Peter asked.

Maggie shook her head.

"I just know," she told him. Peter looked into her eyes for a few seconds, and then went back to washing his paint brushes.

Brian had been sure he would be better off away from her. The business would be better. The girls would be OK, he reasoned. That was what he had thought when he left.

Maggie expected to hear Karen roar back at the end of Natalie's tirade. But she heard nothing. So many times Karen confided to Maggie that she would send Brian packing because of the insults. But she loved him, and, for Karen, marriage was forever. Brian needed her and loved her. He had his problems, but he was sick. No one could care for him like she did and Brian knew that. She told how she had lost those twenty pounds maybe twenty times, how she joined the tennis club, the fitness club, got a bike, stopped smoking, went for behavioural therapy, worked more, worked less, and took courses. Then Karen would say that Brian was sick, he was crazy, marriage was a big mistake, and she would throw him out very soon. In the end, it was he who left her and the girls.

The front door at Karen's house slammed, and a car screeched off. Maggie's breath was fast and shallow now. Another agitated meditation. She opened her eyes to try to move away from the sounds she had heard, and turned her head to the white lilacs and the sweet balm that the flowers breathed into the air. Amid the pristine blossoms, stood Our Lady, in flowing aqua robes. Our Lady of the Lilacs lifted her head and whispered sweetly to Maggie

"There's no place like home."

With this latest pronouncement, the vision smiled at Maggie, and dissolved into the satiny white blooms. Maggie rolled her eyes, then jumped up from her chair and went into the house to get herself some coffee. She heard Peter pull into the driveway. She poured them each a cup. She thought of visiting her

Karen, but remembered that she had an appointment to colour her hair in forty-five minutes. She went out to greet Peter with his coffee, and hurried him inside.

"Oh Peter," she whispered. "They are having a terrible time next door."

"What do you mean, Maggie?"

"I heard such a fight. I can't believe it. Natalie was hysterical. I'm sure that they have no idea that I could hear them."

"Hear what, Maggie?"

"Natalie and Karen. No, it was Natalie I heard."

"Maggie don't you remember?" Peter looked at his wife incredulously.

"They left for the Townships yesterday afternoon for the weekend. We saw them leave!"

Maggie stepped back.

"Oh yes, you're right. They did. I saw them leave. But I heard them," she said, hearing her voice trail off.

"You must have dreamt it, Maggie."

She must have dreamt it.

A few years went by before Our Lady of the Suburbs returned. Peter was still not sleeping well, and, now, neither was Maggie. He was working, but he was not happy, and he did not want to talk to her about it. Maggie continued to teach school. Her sons were grown up and in university, but still at home. It seemed to Maggie that life was settling down, but she felt a gnawing inside her. It was not new; she had lived with this almost all her life, or at least as long as she

could remember. If she kept busy, as she had always done, she could manage. There was no face to this torment, and no words about it that Maggie could articulate. She had spoken to Clarisse about it, to various priests, even her last meditation group. Everyone seemed to know what she was talking about, and assured her that she could be free of its dominion over her, using prayer, or relaxation, or meditation. And she had believed them. But in her moments of meditation, it threatened to overwhelm her with sadness. In her prayers, the same. It was as if this entity, this dragon, roared back when she attempted to exorcise it. But mostly, it co-existed with her as an entombed anxiety or panic in a cratered space inside her. The visions and the voices made it worse, and at night when she was meant to be sleeping, it terrorized her. She needed another strategy.

She decided to go back to school. She was not at all sure what she wanted to study, and registered for an art history course at Concordia University. She quite liked the sound of that. Maybe she could learn something about the artists whose images of the Virgin she had seen.

Returning to her studies was also a way to take her mind off her mother, who was not only not making novenas, but could not even remember what they were anymore. Maggie visited her regularly in the supervised care setting that the social worker recommended. Even though Maggie was not the only child, she was the only one who took care of her mother. Her sister Sally, who lived in the city, said that she had a hard time dealing with their mother's memory problems, and just could not handle placing her in a home. Maggie's youngest sister, Cathy,

was living in Australia with her new husband and her daughter from her first marriage, and they spoke using Microsoft Messenger about once a week. Cathy had no idea about how their mother was keeping. And Maggie's brothers in Toronto had limited their contact with their mother to visits on a few long weekend in the year.

Maggie's friends from Development and Peace had recommended an Alzheimer support group, and she had attended the meetings in the Our Lady of Peace church hall. Maggie sat among a collection of grieving spouses and broken-hearted children of lost parents, and listened to the suffering. She wondered why the Blessed Virgin did not appear as Our Lady of Sorrows, to bring hope to these sad people. Awash in anguish, she did not say much herself.

Maggie continued to take courses. The next term she signed up for an introductory course in Linguistics. Maggie could consult with Sally, who held a doctorate in Linguistics. She had made plans to call her sister for help with an assignment for her class. Perhaps she and her sister might have more to talk about now. Sitting in front of her computer screen, Maggie mused about how close she was to her sister when they were young. Sally had looked up to her as her big sister, and Maggie looked after her gladly, taking her to the park, reading her stories, being a junior Brownie leader when Sally joined. Sally had pulled away from Maggie during her teen years. She became odd then, Maggie had realized. It was not clear to Maggie whether their brother Rob's death changed Sally, or whether Sally's obsession with Michael Semetey distanced her. Maggie wished that Sally had dated anyone but Michael Semetey. Michael was a pervert; Maggie

still felt sick when she remembered her own encounter with him at Ahuntsic Park when she was little. She could not contain her despair when she found Sally with him years later. After that, Sally changed her name to Corinne, insisted on moving away from home for her studies, and wanted very little to do with the family.

Maggie continued to type her essay on the theories in *The Minimalism Program* by Chomsky. She was sleepy. It was nine p.m., and she struggled to keep reading and typing from her notes. Her eyes burned as she strained to decipher her handwriting on the several sheets of loose leaf that she positioned beside her laptop computer. She stopped again to wonder about her sister Sally, and then her eyelids fluttered closed. Her head nodded forward and she drifted. She could still hear the sounds of the television program that Peter sat alone watching in the family room. She could hear the furnace blower, and Salome snoring on the floor beside her feet. She was slipping downwards into a tunnel when the computer snapped a warning chord. As Maggie started awake, she opened her eyes to read the message appearing on the screen, but there was no message. It was Our Lady again. Too doozy to call Peter, and knowing that she would not tell him about this anyway, Maggie blinked to be sure that the image in front of her was not a screensaver. Maggie shuddered as she observed this latest apparition — Our Lady was looking up to the heavens, attended by angels and saints and a crescent moon — but she was also fascinated by the imagery before her. Crimson and cobalt in the most astounding palette. Maggie recognized this Mary as an El Greco. She had studied El Greco in her “Perspectives of Art History” course. No doubt about it; it

was an El Greco — Domenikos Theotokopoulos (1541-16). She had written a paper on his portraits of the Virgin. She had been quite certain that it was an El Greco that she had seen that day in the fields with Salome, but could not remember the vision clearly to be sure. No, it was a Goya that day, and this time it was an El Greco. Suddenly, the Blessed Virgin lowered her gaze to look upon Maggie. Maggie braced herself for the message.

“Actions speak louder than words, Maggie,” she said in a hushed voice.

The screen froze and then, pixel by pixel, the image was replaced by the words that Maggie had been typing before she closed her eyes. She shook her head, and started to type again, but the cursor was fixed in the same spot, and no amount of clicking and double clicking would revive it. She pressed Control+Alt+Delete to close the program. She had forgotten to save her work, and lost an hour’s writing. Frustrated, she closed down the computer, and joined Peter, who was now dozing on the sofa, to watch television. She set up the ironing board and pressed some shirts. The assignment would just have to wait.

A few months after the Linguistics course ended, Maggie still had not had much contact with Sally. She had called her and left messages, but Sally was too busy at her job to come out for a visit. Peter was working at another new job, and he was not sleeping much at all. The boys were really men now. They had jobs and girlfriends. Maggie decided to enroll in a Psychology summer course, “The Self in Social Context.” Perhaps she might learn something about herself. In between her readings for her class that breezy July morning, Maggie was

confounded about how best to deal with her laundry. The difficulty for her lay in doing it right. The instructions on most clothes forbade bleach, but without it, Maggie's laundry remained soiled and stained, especially the whites. Especially rugby shirts. Always mud stained, grass stained, and bloody, and no bleaching allowed. Almost every piece of laundry had tags with the red bar across the bleach symbol, and so nothing really came clean. No amount of soaking or scrubbing purified charred-looking dish cloths that cleaned crusty element pans of boiled-over chicken noodle soup, simmered by her sons while Maggie was at work. Maggie bought expensive presoaks, paste spot removers, and even dry cleaner fluid to return these garments to their original state, with little success. And sometimes she just bleached these items, the telltale odour announcing her transgression. Or she did not bleach, and then tried to ignore just how dirty some of the socks were that she threw into the machine, hoping that everything would come out in the wash. If she used the clothes dryer, the concern ended there.

It was at the point of displaying the laundry to the world, on the back yard clothesline, clearly visible to the street, that she could not bear it. This was her own self on display in the social context; she could see that. Professor Polloniuscu of the Concordia University Psychology Department might have been interested in what her mother had to say about this. Her mother insisted that you could tell a lot about a person by checking the laundry on the line. Aside from obvious information about who lived in the house, you could know how much was spent on underwear, what sizes the family wore, and most important, what kind of person tended to the washing. How organized is the clothesline? Are all the socks

together, the shirts, the pants, the towels, or are face cloths intermingled with jeans, and boxer shorts with a t-shirt? Are the socks matched on the line? How much effort was made to get the clothes clean? Did the laundress scrub and soak long enough to have a clean wash?

Maggie knew that the days of being proud of the wash were long gone, but still she felt exposed by what the clothesline could communicate. Mud and chocolate pudding and tomato sauce on shirts and shorts speak volumes. At least underwear indiscretions could be hidden by a well-placed peg. Maggie stood aghast, inspecting the string of stained dishcloths, socks, hand towels, and shirts. Not wanting to appear as one who would be concerned about this disgraceful display, she bravely pegged, imitating nonchalance with every swing of the clothesline. Then it all became too much for her, and she whisked the unclean laundry off the line and back into her laundry basket. Quickly, she burst through the back door and into the laundry room to thrust the wash into the dryer. Before she pushed the on button, after adjusting the settings for permanent press, she remembered the lint screen. And that was when Maggie met up with the Blessed Virgin again. As she lifted out the screen, Mary smiled at her, gracefully. Just as the Mother of God started to speak, Maggie traced off the lint, a reflex really, and the Virgin disappeared before she could utter a word. Maggie gasped. She tried to spread out the lint or to replace it on the filter, but it was no use. The vision was gone. The lint filter and the lint fell out of her hands onto the laundry room floor. Maggie scrambled to find a plastic bag to collect the lint. Carefully, she recovered the remains of the vision, and deposited these into a white plastic bag. Looking

over her shoulder, she stashed the bag neatly in the pantry just behind the hidden chocolate chips. She stood for a moment with her face in her hands, then slid her fingers down, stretching the skin under her eyes, her cheeks and her mouth. As she exhaled, she returned to the laundry room. Maybe the Virgin would have told her not to worry about destroying her, that it was okay. She pushed in the knob to start drying the clothes. But as Maggie walked away from the rumbling sounds of her not quite clean clothes tumbling inside on this perfect day to hang out a wash, she was quite sure that she already knew what the Virgin wanted to tell her.

St. Dismas

Before she got back into her car, Maggie took out some tissues and wiped the dust from her shoes. It was a great thing to be able to wear shoes in April in Québec. A week earlier, Maggie had not needed to wear boots to the sunrise Easter vigil service either. Her feet were not cold then as she stood outside the church in the crisp predawn air with perhaps forty others. She watched wisps and sparks of light course into the darkness from the crackling bonfire built on the rock face left exposed when the building was constructed some years before. A hum of women's voices sanctified the moments before the first light streaked the eastern sky. Then Maggie and the others lit candles from the flames and the congregation silently processed into the dark church.

Moments later in the early dawn candlelight, a voice rose in chant:

It is truly right
that with full hearts and minds and voices..

Maggie loved the hypnotic Exultet, proclaiming Easter in early morning as night gives way to day, as death gives way to redemption, as winter yields to spring. The metaphor comforted her; it was this cyclical comfort that re-assured her. The cantor repeated

This is the night when...

These things seemed to always need the night in order to happen. Why did God so love the night idea, or why did Christians so like the idea of God making important things happen at night?

—O Holy Night — Silent Night —The people who have walked in
darkness have seen great light —I am the light of the world.

Everything seems to need the night, or at least the darkness so that any
kind of light is visible, Maggie mused as she listened.

the Night truly blessed when heaven is wedded to earth and man is
reconciled with God!

The glorious marriage between heaven and earth. The night when Jesus
emerged from the underworld without his Euridice, Maggie thought. Well no, we
were probably the collective Euridice, she reasoned. And Jesus built the new
bridge between God and man. Or at least new every year, the pact to bring day
after night.

O happy fault, O necessary sin of Adam, which gained for us so
great a Redeemer!

The spin doctors were at work in the Exultet, no doubt. Now an
inheritance of suffering and night and need was a good thing. The vigil continued
until seven a.m. and Maggie was grateful not to be standing and sitting and
kneeling in her heavy winter boots. The only dampness came from the shallow
puddles where the frozen pavement had yielded its icy coat.

Now, a week later it was still dry. According to the Weather Channel that
she consulted every morning before going off to work, it had been the driest April
on record. No precipitation during the whole month. Not that it was even true
about April showers. It did not always rain in April in Canada; in fact, it snowed
often enough. Maggie sat looking out her living room window many an April
morning watching as thick flakes of snow came down from the heavens after a

long winter burying her tulips in slush. Those days she dreaded heading out to her job as a fourth grade teacher. She dreaded the sloppiness of the day and the weariness of students and teachers alike. Every year, people complained that this was an aberration, the snow, but Maggie knew that you could spend a lifetime being shocked by these so-called aberrations, or you could just realize that this is how the weather was. The excessive dryness was about as normal as a snowfall in April. By that Maggie understood that "normal" is only a word that means something else every time you use it. Her husband, Peter, did not think Easter vigils at four-thirty a.m. were too normal; he had never said that, but Maggie saw his eyes go blank when she told him that she would attend the service again. Because he did not say anything, she did not have to explain that she just wanted to be there for it, and there was no more to it than that.

Back in the car now, she was returning home from St. Dismas, just on the other side of Trois Rivières. Before she had left that morning, she had told Peter that she was going to visit her cousin in Hawkesbury just across the Québec border, in Ontario, for the day. It wasn't as though she never visited her cousin Elaine. She saw her for lunch every two months or so, usually on a Pedagogical day like that Friday. Her sons were older now and in college, and working, and did not have the same days off as Maggie. Maggie knew that Elaine had traveled to Halifax to research her book about trains, and that Peter would never remember that. His new job was his major concern at this point. Besides, he was on the road all day visiting client sites, and he was too busy to check on where she was really off to. Peter believed her or if he didn't, he didn't let on. He just smiled

and told her that she deserved some time away; if he needed anything, he would call, and don't forget to drive safely.

About twenty minutes after Peter headed to Ville D'Anjou, in the east end of the island of Montreal, Maggie applied a light foundation to her face, guided a lip pencil around the circumference of her lips, and filled in with a warm shade of peach chestnut lipstick. She decided against eye makeup for the day. Once she had blushed her cheeks and gelled her short blond highlighted hair, she glanced once more into her hall mirror to check that her lavender boiled wool cardigan hung neatly over the white blouse tucked into her black suede pants. She looked fine now. It was time to go. She turned off the Trans Canada highway at Henri Bourassa to pick up a coffee at the Tim Horton's to keep her company for the ninety-minute drive. Maggie did not love to drive. In fact, she asked Peter to drive when they went out together. She could drive very well, but her mind was always on something, and she worried that she was a distracted driver who might cause an accident. She thought about things too much. Her parents had told her that when she was young, and certainly Peter agreed. She often mulled over the news, or conversations she had heard. On many occasions, Peter had told her that she worried too much about other people.

"You are way too much into feelings Maggie; you have to toughen up. Be logical."

Maybe so, but she couldn't be anything but what she was. And he was one to talk, she thought. He often lay awake thinking at night. He had kept watch during the wee hours for many years now. Sometimes she joined him.

On this Friday morning, she couldn't tell Peter where she was going. He would not understand a need that she herself could not really grasp. She was just drawn to certain things.

It was like the Easter vigil. She had no idea why she was comforted by being there. Maybe it was the idea of the cyclical order to life, the light after the darkness, the change of seasons. Maybe it was about hope. She was hardly naive. There was no new day dawning for much of the world. And no God-human bridge for the Hutus before the machetes, or the Hindu brides before the kerosene. No one would guarantee that her sons and Peter would be safe from whatever life might pour down on them. She had been lucky enough in her life, she had decided. Yes, there were problems but nothing like what she read about in the newspapers. Perhaps that was why she needed this comfort. The lucky ones might be condemned by their good fortune.

The road was straight, and she had to concentrate to keep her speed under the limit. There were always provincial police lying in wait for drivers who could not resist the temptation to hurry along the straightaway. Between the coffee and the fear of a ticket, she stayed her course at a speed of 105 km/hr. She arrived at the site before ten.

As she drove up, she saw a cavalcade of news vans from all over Québec and Ontario, and even the States, lining the route to where the communications tower was located. She had to park a good fifteen-minute walking distance away on the side of the road. She slipped quietly among the reporters and locals who

chattered away, pointing upward as they approached the scene. She did not want to look yet. She could see the camera crews from all over set up at the base of the tower. Airplanes and helicopters hovered overhead. Reporters were everywhere. The three hundred and sixty-five foot television tower, belonging to a company in British Columbia, was the second highest in Canada. An odd sight — within a short radius, it shared space with the local school, the curling club, hockey arena, the twenty-four hour Girls, Girls, Girls bar, and the dry farmers' fields.

Maggie sat up in bed to listen when she first heard about the pilot crashing into this tower on the six a.m. CBC Radio newscast the Monday morning of that week:

A small plane lodged atop a television tower after it crashed into the fog-shrouded structure early Sunday can't be removed until today. Authorities acting on the advice of engineers decided that the 365-metre tower had been too badly damaged by the impact to attempt immediate recovery. The fate of anyone aboard the two-seat plane remained unknown Sunday night.

That morning, Maggie sat in her kitchen, sipping her coffee thinking about the dry April, and a plane entangled in a television tower with the whole world watching. They were planning to recover his body later on in the day, she heard in the next newscast. From all reports there was little else in sight when the accident happened, and the weather was fine. Did the man who took off from Ancienne Lorette Airport in Québec City want to kill himself, Maggie wondered, or was it fate? The newscasts that she heard must have repeated the words "experienced pilot" a hundred times. What could make a pilot hit a tower? All towers and tall buildings for that matter, have lights or beacons on them. She wondered how it could happen that the pilot was drawn to his death in a tower

like that? Was it like the call of the rushing waters when she looked over Niagara Falls or the crevices that invited her so often as she stood at lookouts? Maggie just said that she didn't like the heights; she didn't want to say that these were like magnets to her and she must not stay too long in their influence. Was the air space near the tower invaded by sirens whose sweet songs drew the pilot into the danger? According to the reports, it was a rogue fog that blew in that Sunday morning to shroud the geyser tower and draw the experienced pilot to it.

Authorities acting on the advice of engineers decided that the 365-metre tower had been too badly damaged by the impact to attempt immediate recovery.

They couldn't attempt recovery? A man can't lie waiting to die in a plane hanging from a tower. What kind of craziness was this to wait to recover someone? What if he was still alive? Maggie remembered those terrible stories of children falling down artesian wells. In Texas they had rescued Melissa, though she would have a scar for life from the tissue that had died as she waited to be saved. In Italy the little boy died crying for his mother. Maggie could not remember his name. All week she tried to remember that child's name. He merited at least a name in her memory. She followed both stories very closely from her television set and in her prayers. But she refused to watch the made-for-TV movie about Melissa. She had wanted to scream that it made a mockery of suffering by providing a happy ending that was not available to the Italian family who lost their baby. Maggie could not bring that kind of opinion up in too many places, especially in those places where the children are all at home, and safely in their beds.

And now, this man could not be taken down from his plane. It was not right to leave him there. Maggie wanted to call someone about this. Peter thought that the whole thing was pretty terrible too, he told her during their mid-morning check-in call to each other.

"But he's probably dead, Maggie. Think about it."

She did think about it and worried. He most certainly was dead according to a coroner who flew as close as safely possible to the wreckage in a helicopter. But for Maggie it was not enough that he was pronounced probably dead. She knew he was not at peace. She just knew those things.

Day after day that week, the pilot's corpse hung in the debris of his Cessna while authorities assembled crews to disengage the plane from the tower. The bizarre accident obsessed her. She watched the newscasts, but by Wednesday she had to avoid them. By then she could hear him moaning out to the crowds who had gathered waiting for him to be freed from the wreckage. They didn't hear him. It was always that way. She could hear the whole thing; only it wasn't the sort of thing you could tell your husband, or family and friends about. And in the past she wasn't able to go to Texas or Italy. This time she could go to Trois Rivières.

She had to go to the site to stand by the tower, to be with him until the end. He was an experienced pilot. Gilbert Paquette, "well known in flying circles," was thirty-eight. And now he was stuck, hanging almost upside down in his plane.

"Hey guys! I am hanging here! Tell my wife, get her here, please send for her!"

He hadn't yet realized that Maggie was the only one who could hear his cries. The driest April wind on record danced through the plane, parching his lifeless body. The dead man's wife couldn't hear him, and she refused to watch his ordeal on the tower. She wept at home, surrounded by her orphaned children and her family.

"The blood is running to my head! I want to see my wife!"

Maggie wanted to tell him that his wife would be there later, later. He would not listen. It is like that when we are not at peace. We just cannot hear what is being plainly said, she thought.

Maggie could understand that he wouldn't accept an airplane lodged in a telecommunication tower as his final resting place. A communication tower is not like a mountain side, or the ocean, or even a ravine that entombs its hapless victims. Maggie remembered that her friend Lisa had slipped into the icy underworld of a fjord in Norway so many years ago. There had been a memorial where her parents grimly praised their daughter whose body might only be discovered hundreds of years from now as a sidelight to a scientific mission. A glacial lake had claimed the body of Pierre Trudeau's youngest son Michel, and Maggie followed the tragedy watching it finally also claim Pierre Trudeau as well.

Maggie tried to appear different from the hundreds of gawkers who gave their opinions to the hordes of reporters. She came out of respect for the man, to be there because she understood his suffering. She could at least accompany him.

Curious onlookers from as far away as Montreal -- 150 kilometres southwest of the crash site -- waited all afternoon, armed with telescopes and binoculars.

The tower was so high that she could hardly even see the plane. Stories abounded on the ground. A reporter from *Le Soleil* sidled up to her. He offered to loan her his binoculars or his sunglasses.

"No," Maggie had said, "I don't mind the sun."

"This is really a circus," he sighed as he looked up at the plane. He put his palms together and intertwined his fingers.

"The poor devil's hands are clasped together, like maybe he was praying when the end came," he said. "I know because the pilot of the coroner's helicopter told me."

"And at the hour of our death. Amen." Maggie whispered.

The wind seemed to rock the tower, but did not shake the plane and its body loose. The same reporter told her that the plane was securely wedged into the structure of the tower. He pointed to the president of the BC company who was giving an interview to Global:

We are left with one solution; the tower is too dangerous so it will have to be collapsed to avoid the inherent risks involved, and to remove the body, said Jean-Francois Lebrun, a spokesman for WesTower, the company that owns the tower.

He apologized for his tower.

"But that just isn't good enough! Where is Marie-Eve?" shouted the pilot.

By Friday, the day that Maggie arrived, the strategy was in place to dislodge the plane. Three dynamite blasts would shear off the guy wires.

Five homes lying within a 300-metre radius of the tower were evacuated immediately following the accident. In anticipation of the explosion yesterday the security perimeter was

doubled on Thursday, resulting in the evacuation of an additional 125 homes.

The pilot's wife had pleaded with the authorities to spare him another crash, but there was no other way the engineers said.

Mr. Paquette's family had planned an attempt to get an injunction to prevent the blasting, saying greater efforts should be made to recover the body first. However, they abandoned those efforts on Friday. Mr. Lebrun made a point of saying the family did not support the decision to bring the tower down.

"Don't worry!" he called out as though his wife could hear him. "It will be ok; just get me out of here. I am so cramped. "

Before each blast a horn would sound – three short blasts, and then a long one, and a minute later, the explosion. His wife refused to be present for this.

Maggie stood as close as she was permitted, peering up through the sunlight. He would be cut loose soon. There had been two dynamite blasts. One more would do it, the reporter told her. The horns had blown announcing the final blast but nothing happened a minute later.

"Come on, you guys! Please let me out! Free me!"

It was not warm out and Maggie shivered as she waited. Finally, a car pulled up and two men escorted a trembling woman near to where Maggie stood. The woman's gaze slowly lifted, scaling the tower, looking at the barely visible airplane that imprisoned her husband. One of the men held her closely as she wailed in sorrow.

Maggie thought of approaching the widow to tell her what was happening, but the poor woman was too distraught. The men shielded her from the cameras and the throngs. But now all eyes strained to catch a quick

embarrassed glimpse of this anguished woman. Maggie turned away and looked up at the figure who by now was weeping. She does not hear you, Maggie wanted to tell him and the words remained trapped in her throat. Maggie closed her eyes, and his cries echoed in her head. In the overwhelming sadness that threatened to overtake her, softly, silently, she found her voice and she spoke to the pilot.

“At last,” he cried. “Oh dear God, At last!”

The last blast ripped through the guy wires and the tower crumpled upon itself, threatening to crumple the plane into itself, but with expert skill, the pilot tugged the plane free.

While his wife sobbed, Maggie watched the plane glide away from the collapsing tower in the April wind.

“I am flying, Marie-Eve I am flying!” he sang as his wife watched the plane soar in the blue sky. Gently the plane glided towards earth, quiet now. Maggie stopped breathing during this last flight and looked away when he landed. The dust rose up around the wreckage. She stepped back and walked towards her car as the emergency crews surrounded the shell of the plane.

There was a brief prayer ceremony to commemorate the death of Mr. Paquette.

“I am trying to lead people to the spiritual side of this, showing them the precarious nature of life and that they should lead good lives,” said local parish priest Clovis Trepanier.

“Because we can lose our lives at any time, and we should always be ready.”

Miss Sauv 

I had never tasted pizza until Robbie died. Our family, Irish Catholics living in the north end of Montreal, with more offspring than money, couldn't cope with the luxury or the spice, or so our father told us. The Cassidys, neighbours from across the street, sent it over to us from Miss Sauv 's Pizzeria, on Sauv , just east of Lajeunesse in Ahuntsic, on the day after the funeral. An all-dressed pizza with the hard hat in the centre.

The summer of nineteen sixty-nine yielded the first vacation our family ever had, not counting the vacations when I was a baby at Lake Bexis. Apparently it had been a struggle to conceive me; my parents had been trying for five years after my father came back from the war. My birth heralded a new era of fertility — me, then Robbie, then Stevie, then Sally, and the assorted miscarriages, then another dry spell after which Kevin, Cathy, and Patrick joined us. My parents practised the rhythm method, the only approved form of birth control, and despite this, they continued to procreate.

According to my mother, who converted to our Holy Mother the Church when she married my father, the problem was that her cycle changed every two years. With all the little blessings and mouths to feed, a family vacation was just too expensive for us until that summer. I had never been away camping, or to a motel, or cabin. On hot summer days I had been happy to jump in and out of the sprinkler set up in the back yard or chase the water truck when it cleaned the street. Or I headed to the city wading pools at Henri Julien or Ahuntsic Park.

Many of my friends went away to Old Orchard, to Plattsburgh, or to Girl Guide camp, but we stayed put in the veteran's house that my father was entitled to buy because of his war service. Sitting on the front gallery on a humid Saturday night sharing a bottle of Pepsi with Robbie, I watched the cars go by before going to bed. My parents called our vacation spot "balcony heights," reminiscent of the many Montreal summers they and their families spent in stuffy flats, sitting on the front balcony, ready to be graced by a breath of breeze.

The year of 1969 was different. My father's brother, Frank, had rented a little cottage at Chazy, in upper New York State that summer. It was his second year at Mousseau's Country Cottages. Frank had married a Protestant, so their family was allowed to be small. I had two cousins, Gordon and Ronald, and they seemed to have everything, including summer vacations and even a grandmother who lived with them. Auntie Beverly worked, which was rare enough at that time. She had a good job at IBM.

My aunt helped my mother get a job as a keypunch operator at IBM in early that year, despite my father's assertion that she was not employable. She worked evenings and often did overtime, sometimes coming home in a taxi at four in the morning from the IBM building which was, at that time, beside Place Ville Marie in downtown Montreal. This extra income allowed us this extravagance of renting the same cottage that Frank had.

We were accustomed to my parents' non-stop bickering about money, to menacing phone calls about unpaid bills, and to credit at the corner store. I learned to use the tab at Marché Sauriol to ensure a supply of sweets. It had

started out with adding a small pack of cherry Chiclets to the two pounds of La Belle Fermiere sausages and the pack of Players that I was sent to buy, then it grew into a Caramilk or Oh Henry heist, with a bag of Maple Leaf chips on the side, maybe even something for a friend. This was stealing, no doubt, but it was a lot easier than asking for money that I probably wouldn't get, together with the usual lecture on being greedy and selfish. I would continue to devour my ill-gotten treats until Mr. Dupont called about the bill. Luckily, my mother wasn't too good about keeping track of what she was spending, so she'd yell and accuse all of us of some wrong-doing, but could never really be sure. I'd take a break for a while. I never went hungry though, making due with ketchup or mayonnaise or molasses sandwiches to keep my belly full.

The family went to Mass every Sunday, and I, particularly holy, went every day during Lent. It had been my ambition to be a saint, and I included my younger sister Sally in my vocation. I would get her up, while my brothers were delivering the *Montreal Gazette* in the early morning darkness, and we would trudge over to St. Rita's, wet feet in the March slush and noses sniffing loudly from cold and dampness. My brothers would be there too by this time, serving as altar boys for the morning Mass. A girl couldn't do anything other than pray. I had a beautiful black lace mantilla that I held in place with a bobby pin. I almost looked like a nun, or a Kennedy. I confessed my sins to the priest on a regular basis, usually the ones to do with stealing or lying, or disobeying, or the ones I made up.

This deeply-held devotion to the Church did not last. By the time I finished high school, the Mass held no more magic for me. I even struggled with the requirement to attend Sunday Mass. Robbie would lie and say he went to the French church around the corner, St. Jude's. I often took the younger children, so St. Jude's was out for me; they would surely tell. By the late sixties, I avoided confession like the plague. I had no interest in sharing my shortcomings with an old Polish priest who could sort out my life with three Hail Marys. I did not receive communion regularly anymore either. Once my father noticed that I did not file out of the pew and join him in the queue for the blessed wafer. He questioned why I had not received communion on a particular Sunday, or when I had last been to confession. I lied, telling him that I had broken my fast in the hour before communion.

I was seventeen the summer that Robbie died, and had just completed grade twelve at Holy Names High School in Rosemount. The family was going on vacation, so I took two weeks off from my tedious summer job transcribing names from contest ballots onto mailing lists at McIntyre's. I had no love interests, partly due to the sisters of St. Anne and the Congregation of Notre Dame, but mostly due to my exceptionally full figure. My experience with boys was limited to collisions with my dumb brothers, the boys at the park, and the maulers at the school dances. My brothers' idea of fun was to punch or poke or overpower. They were strong young men who believed that physical strength and great height determined who held dominion, and they all grew to be big men, over six feet - except Robbie. Days before his sixteenth birthday, he stood squarely at five foot

ten, the shortest and probably the biggest scrapper. Once, just like that, he punched me in the stomach and knocked the wind out of me.

“Nothing intended,” he said. “You were just there.”

Of course I should have told on him for that. He might have been punished, or, just as likely, I might have been ignored. Wild tempers flared in our house for any reason- Robbie took Stephen’s baseball glove, or vice versa; my father found out that Stephen took money from my mother’s purse. And the fists would fly. I kept out of the fray. I ironed Rob’s special shirt in time for a big date, and made his and Stephen’s favourite chocolate fudge cake, and told no one that I saw Robbie smoking at the Metro station at the corner.

When we were little, I took Robbie, my freckled brush-cut little brother around with me while my mother took care of my new baby sister, Sally. He was what we’d call “active” today, and quite good at dislocating dolls’ arms and legs. My friends and I would be setting up a tea party, or strutting about in our pink plastic glitter high heels on the gallery, and Robbie would run and fling himself anywhere, knocking the melmac dishes off the tin trays that we had prepared, or tripping one of my friends. None of my friends were impressed with the three-year-old bruiser, but I always brought him along. If I didn’t, my mother harnessed him to the maple in front of the house because he loved to run out into traffic, and I felt very sorry for him. Sometimes he would agree to be the husband at our play wedding, or the baby when we played house. But, Robbie quickly grew tough and fearless, and he did not speak much. I never knew what he thought about anything, other than that he loved cherry pie and playing the card

game Rob the Pack when he was ten. He was the only one of my brothers to play soccer, and he had many friends among the Italian kids in our neighbourhood. He was always ready to take part in the English-French fights that were regular occurrences then. It wasn't so much a language issue; it was more that the boys wanted to fight. He beat up the French boy who hit me in the eye with a rock thrown during one of the debacles. At home, I tried to shield him from the punishments he brought upon himself for fighting, or talking back, or running off when he had work to do. Maybe I admired his freedom.

With all that, we were never close, at least not on his part. As he grew older, he became quieter and more secretive, and I continued looking after all the little ones in the house. No one ever asked much about where the boys went or what they did, or who they were with or when they would return. They just went out. I had to peel potatoes, carrots, run to the grocer, or look after the younger children. My father insisted that I attend the Mother House, an elite secretarial school run by the Sisters of Notre Dame, and learn the skills I would need to obtain the best job possible for myself. That I had already been given early acceptance into McGill University carried no weight with him. A high school education was plenty for anyone, especially a girl. If I could be the secretary to the President of the C.P.R., then I would be quite something in his eyes. That I was a terrible typist who dropped Typing from my course list in my last year of high school, that I loved Geometry and got one hundred percent in Algebra, and was obsessed with the picture of Lord Byron in my literature book was all my secret. I

hid in my *Jane Eyre*, *David Copperfield*, *Grapes of Wrath*, my *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and my diaries and my poems and stories.

That summer, I went along on our first vacation, grateful to be at a distance from my miserable job. My friends were all away on holidays. Robbie had tried to back out and stay with friends, but my father insisted that we go as a family.

Robbie was almost sixteen, a handsome football star, a rebellious, headstrong, sturdy young man who was forever locking horns with my father. He balked at going anywhere with the family. Earlier that summer, after insisting he couldn't join us on yet another sunburned picnic at Long Sault Park because he had to work, we saw him with his gang at D'Auteuil Park. Heads hanging over their shoulders, hands in their jean pockets, cigarettes dangling out of their mouths, they were hanging out. My father stopped the car and bolted into the park where Robbie now stood defiantly. We sat in the car, watching. I held my breath as my father swung at Robbie. But Robbie ducked, and my father missed, losing his footing as his body followed the acceleration of his fist. He lurched forward, caught himself, and aimed again as the cigarette fell from Robbie's lips and landed in the dirt, quickly ground out by the heel of his desert boot. For just a moment, I feared that Robbie would respond, his eyes piercing my father's, and his fist squared and ready. But then, my father lowered his hand, and they both headed back towards the car. Robbie's friends stood by silently, watching.

On the Friday before we left for Chazy, New York, my father went to the bank to get his travellers cheques for our vacation. Saturday morning, I helped

load up the white Strato-Chief with bags of bathing suits and jackets and underwear and other clothes and lawn chairs and only a few towels because my mother was looking forward to buying linens in the States. Patrick, the youngest son and my father's favourite, sat in the front between my parents with Cathy, the youngest, and the rest of us - me, Stevie, Sally, Robbie, and Kevin —sat in the back, fighting over window seats. Robbie got one and so did I. I played twenty questions with Sally and listened to my transistor radio. After crossing the border, we turned off Highway 89 onto the two lane road to Chazy and Chazy Landing. My father followed his brother's directions to drive past the Blue Lantern antique shop and turn right at the Texaco gas station. Then he pulled into the gravel drive, and I saw my two cousins, Gordon and Ronald, loading up their car with their parents. My father stopped the car at the cottage marked "Administration." My mother waved to my aunt. Robbie looked the other way when Uncle Frank walked up to the car. I knew that he was embarrassed to be seen by anyone at this family gathering, and I knew that I should have felt the same as he did, but I smiled. I glanced at the pool: little children, no one my age. Then my father came out with the keys, and Frank followed us as we slowly drove to our cabin. We parked, the adults chatted, Stevie, Kevin, Cathy and Patrick jumped out. Robbie stayed in the car. I got out and stood holding my right elbow, squinting in the bright sunlight.

The cottage came fully equipped: linens, dishes, cutlery, bunkbeds, everything you could ever want, except a TV. Just off the raised front gallery, the screen door opened into a large kitchen where we could all sit around the table

playing Crazy 8's and Fish after a great supper of hot dogs. There were three bedrooms, two with pine bunk beds, framed with a halved wagon wheel at the head and footboards of each bed. My parents had a double bed in their tiny room, and Robbie slept on the couch in the living room. I loved the look of the place, but my mother didn't care for the colonial style of the furnishings. She allowed that while Auntie Beverly's Vilas colonial furniture at home was expensive and solid rock maple, she preferred what she called the contemporary look for her home when the time came to discard Aunt Lillian's old sofa and tables and buy good furniture.

Sally and I and little Cathy were in charge of keeping the kitchen neat, while Patrick, Kevin, and Stevie dug in the dirt with their Tonkas and Robbie kept to himself. He wandered on his own into the woods nearby, or sat on the gallery staring into space.

The cabins, maybe ten in number, spread across the grassy grounds, near Lake Champlain, forming a perimeter around the twenty-five-foot-long pool. The beach was a car drive away, as was the marina. I spent hours diving to the bottom of the pool for quarters, thrown in by one of us or our father. We would fool around on the diving board, dancing and vocalizing the brassy Hawaii Five O television theme song, and then pushing each other off at the appropriate note. Robbie sat in his usual spot on the gallery, looking away, but he could hear the merriment and laughter. He loved that TV show, and soon he came running from his spot on the gallery, and plunged into the pool in his cut-offs, splashing us all. After his turns on the diving board, he swam a few lengths to show us what a

great swimmer he was. He had taken lessons when he was a Cub. We played with a black inner tube, pushing and pulling each other through, climbing on only to be toppled off. Robbie and I laughed. Like children. For some reason, the inner tube attracted horseflies, and my arms and legs were covered with bites. My midriff was scraped and scratched from the air valve on that inner tube.

Later, Robbie massaged the Noxema cream into my sunburnt shoulders and back. The cooling scent of camphor and eucalyptus made me shiver. My body was a like a harlequin with strips of creamy white and scarlet red based on the boundaries of my two-piece bathing suit. Robbie was not as fair as I was, and his back was well tanned. He had no need of the Noxema.

On the very few days that the sun was not out to burn my shoulders on that holiday, we shopped in Plattsburgh. Our first chance to go bargain hunting at Montgomery Ward and J.C. Penney. My mother went crazy buying linens, coloured fitted sheets, and towels. I looked at records, planning to buy some Doors, or BeeGees, but they weren't cheaper. I already had my complete collection of the Beatles at home. But I stopped in the Motown section and snapped up a Junior Walker 45 rpm. I had been haunted all summer long by the wailing saxophone refrain of *What Does It Take (To Win Your Love)*. And when we returned to Montreal, I played it over and over again on my portable record player.

Other than that, I settled for buying post cards for my friends. Robbie sauntered behind, not wanting to be seen with us in the Plattsburgh stores on Margaret Street. If he showed any interest, I would have slowed down to walk

with him. We could have talked about the expensive records, and I was sure that he liked Junior Walker too, but he looked away when I glanced back at him, so I continued walking with Cathy.

My parents took us to a drive-in. On a hot July night, with the older children, crowded in the back seat, and Patrick, Cathy, and my parents in the front, we watched "Barefoot in the Park" with the very young Robert Redford and Jane Fonda. The tinny sound from the speaker hooked onto my father's car window competed with the whine of the cicadas and chirping crickets. I scratched until the mosquito bites bled on my ankles and forearms. Robbie scratched my back for me. We watched for about forty-five minutes before my father found it too suggestive. I rolled my eyes in the back seat, catching Robbie's eye as we left the drive-in and headed back to our cottage.

While we were there, Neil Armstrong landed on the moon. I lay on my bunkbed, listening to my transistor radio, imagining the Apollo rocket travelling through the vast darkness of space. Robbie and my father sat in the living room, listening on the Phillips tube radio. I could hear my father and brother calling my mother to listen. They both really loved the space missions.

I took pictures, artsy pictures of my brothers and sisters posing along the lake, on rocks, by the pool and especially by the day lilies growing wild in the fields behind the cottage. Sally and Cathy smiling at the camera against a backdrop of Lake Champlain, Sally and Stevie looking out onto the lake. Patrick, Kevin and Stevie sitting on a big rock, Robbie standing in the tall trees, looking away from the camera. A few times those weeks I went off on my own to a shady

spot down a crumpled old road. There, with no one around, I wrote stories and poems in my notebook, usually intense, passionate pieces about a life I wasn't living. I found out much later that Robbie had passed off my poems as his. He must have found the hiding place for my notebook, and rummaged through my writing, then copied bits onto the inside of matchbox covers, as though *he* had written them, and showed his work to girls like Diane Cassidy across the street.

This vacation was expensive, my parents told us. They spent more money than planned; they went into Plattsburgh most days, bringing back bags of Three Musketeers, Tootsie Rolls and M&M's, which we couldn't get at home, as well as clothes and linens. In this time before bank machines, my father had to drive back to his bank in Montreal on our last Friday in order to settle up before we left the following day. But it had been a party. Chips and soft drinks at every meal.

On that Friday, August first, nineteen sixty-nine, Robbie drove away with Mr. Steinbach, heading for the Chazy marina. Sally and I very often took care of his daughters while he and his wife went sailing on Lake Champlain. Sally and I had never accepted baby sitting money, and so it seemed only decent to repay us by offering a sail on his twenty-seven-foot sloop. Mr. Steinbach spoke to my father, who would not permit Sally and me to go off alone with a man. Perhaps I was relieved because I had no idea about boats, and I had no idea about what to talk about with this man. I guess my father thought that it would be a chance for Rob to have some fun and he was right. Rob was sulking on the gallery with his right foot against the cedar railing when my father approached him that morning with his idea. I was perched on the side of the pool, splashing my feet in the

water, and I could see Rob look directly up at my father for the first time in ages. Rob stood up and together they joined Mr. Steinbach at his cabin to make plans. My mother was waiting in the car with Patrick. My father returned smiling and reminded me that I was in charge for the day as he got in the car, and started the Strato-Chief. As he backed out from the grass onto the gravel road, waving good bye, Robbie came running back to our cabin to grab what he needed for the sail.

“See you all later and be good!” called my father to all of us left behind as he drove away with my mother and Patrick for his visit to the City and District Savings Bank in Ahuntsic. They would be back by three p.m.

Rob sat proudly in the Steinbach Volkswagen minibus and smiled at the rest of us as Mr. Steinbach drove away from the cabin and turned towards the road to the marina. But he never came back. Sally, Stevie, Kevin, and I were playing in the pool at the time that Rob was dying. Cathy was playing with the little Steinbach girls. My parents were travelling back from Montreal. The afternoon was sunny and warm, but at three the sky turned smoky gray and lightning flashed. The skies emptied, and I was frightened as we scampered in from the flash storm. I could hear the sound of tires grazing over wet gravel and flapping wind shield wipers, as the car carrying my parents and little brother arrived back at the same time.

While I was pulling off my wet things in my bedroom, and the hard rain splashed against the window, I heard the sound of tires approaching again. I crouched down to hide myself, and lifted the muslin curtains only enough to peer outside. I had expected to see Robbie being dropped off, but instead I watched the

New York State Police patrol cruiser pull into the grounds and stop at the large property at the entrance, where the owners of the cabins lived. The proprietor followed them over to our cabin. I listened from my room as my father met them at the screen door. It happened before the storm, the police said. Mr. Steinbach was still on the scene. Mr. Steinbach dove in to look for Robbie many, many times until he could no longer search, to the point of exhaustion. The police would be starting a search as soon as possible to find the body.

“We are sorry for your loss,” announced the State Trooper. “We will wait in the car for a bit, and when you are ready you can come with us.”

I stared at Sally as I listened to my mother’s cries. I rushed to put on my clothes and ran out to where my father was hugging Patrick. Stevie started shrieking and my father turned angrily to make him shut up. We couldn’t go hysterical, for God’s sake, he bellowed. My father slapped him.

I know I cried when I heard about Rob. Part of me stepped aside and watched as I held my head in my hands and groaned, but at the same time I wondered how they could be so sure my brother was gone. We waited back at the cabin when my father went with the police. I did not ask where he had gone. Maybe it was to the marina, maybe it was to the police station. While a terror shivered through me, I helped pack up everything. We drove under cover of darkness. I lay back gazing at pole lights and blurred headlights in the rear view mirror. Sally had the window seat. Customs waved us through the border as we headed home.

People ask me, to this day, What happened? I can't say... I never really asked. I listened to the grim conversations of the older ones, the accusations, the questions. My parents fought and my mother cried and I had a dreadful earache when we got back to our home in Montreal. At night, the pain throbbed through me, in images of my brother in the cold, cold lake.

My father and his brothers, Frank and Johnny, together with my mother's sister Lillian's husband, Charley, went back Saturday, Sunday, and Monday to help with the search. I stayed home with my mother, helping to get the house ready for the funeral. I had thought that grieving meant that you cried all the time, missing your loved one. No one ever spoke about how the world and everything about it became alien. How inside my body I would squirm just trying to find some kind of ease, some way to breathe that could be vaguely comfortable. Even if I was not thinking of Robbie, I lived an endless ritual of needing to sleep, needing to get up, needing to be alone, needing to be with people. I wanted them to find him, find his lifeless body, and then I needed to believe that they would never find him; he had just taken off. I wished I had the warmest blanket to keep him from the green black cold. At least I was being strong. I did not cry when the phone call came telling us that he had been found —no, his body had been found —and I held my mother when she did. My mother called me her rock. She had lost her son.

The locals said that it takes three days for the lake to give up a body, and Monday they found him. Up he floated, and the man who found him was considered a hero. This man's picture was all over the Plattsburgh papers. Robbie

was a *Gazette* carrier at that time, and his grade ten picture was on page two of the Monday paper.

Streams of visitors carrying home-cooked treats came and went. My aunt Margaret, my mother's sister, brought us home-made vegetable soup. I had never tasted soup other than Campbells or Habitant.

The day after the funeral, a white Volkswagen from Miss Sauve's pizzeria delivered a jumbo all-dressed pizza to us. The Cassidys' daughter, Diane, had been smitten with Robbie and wanted to do something special. My father assured us that we wouldn't like it, too spicy, and probably garlicky. There could not be a worse indictment of a person to my father than to declare them "reeking of garlic." The rest of us guiltily tore away the cardboard and began tasting this exotic offering - melted strands of creamy, rubbery, burn-your-palate Mozzarella that wasn't Velveeta, mushrooms, crisp, dry and earthy, pepperoni, salty, spicy, sliding off the crust with each bite, green peppers that I somehow thought were anchovies (how could I have known that anchovies were fish?). Bread crust both crisp and soggy with tomato sauce laden with garlic and oregano. It was an all-dressed pizza, tasted for the first time, the day after we buried Robbie.

I quit my job at McIntyre's, saying that I was too grief-stricken to copy out any more names onto cards. They understood. I just knew that I couldn't go back to that smoky room of middle-aged ladies who had very few complaints about an eight-hour shift doing work that only makes time pass slowly and more hopelessly.

I did not have to go back to that miserable place, thanks to Robbie, but the world was stripped of any comforting familiarity for me. I was strong though, dry, gritty-eyed at the many memorial masses for my brother. At each one, his friends spoke and tried to come to grips with what had happened. My father became their friend, speaking often about my brother. The school put out a memorial yearbook for Robbie and we were all invited back for a special Mass and presentation. My father was delighted. I kept silent. I wanted to remind my father of all his confrontations with Robbie, but he was more concerned with whether I had taken Communion or not.

It was not long before my mother went back to work in the evenings at IBM, and I took over the suppers completely. My father wanted company at the dinner table while he drank his tea. I sat sullenly and listened as he talked about his day and how he had chatted with a friend of Robbie's. There wasn't a punk among Robbie's friends anymore. They were all fine young men like my brother had been.

I might have lingered at home in the autumn, not quite sure what to do. My friends were all in university and I knew that they were uneasy about seeing me. I think that they worried that I might talk about my dead brother, that I might cry and be depressed. Maybe that was why they did not call me to see how I was. When September came, Stevie pushed me into starting McGill. I had nothing to lose, he told me. I used my numbness to blast past my father and the Mother House, or pretend to put off the Mother House for a few years. It made no sense to me that with all my good grades in school, I could end up being a really smart

secretary for a successful man. I did not know what I wanted exactly, but I knew that I did not want that.

And at that time, we started to order jumbo all-dressed pizzas delivered to our white clapboard veteran's house on Berri Street. And more often, after my father died, three years later, while I was in my last year at McGill. I stayed out more, couldn't help out as much around the house. I gradually stopped going to church and no one seemed to notice. After graduation, I moved to an apartment in the student ghetto. As I loaded up my brother's car, my mother sobbed as though I were lost to her forever. I did visit, though never often enough to make up for leaving her. In the McGill student ghetto, Pines was the pizzeria of choice, and I never again had another pizza from Miss Sauvé.