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Skinny

Ibolya Kaslik

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

English

(Creative Writing Option)

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for the Degree of Master of Arts at
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ABSTRACT

Skinny

Ibolya Kaslik

This novel explores the relationship between two sisters who grapple with emotional, physical and psychological hunger. Giselle is a twenty-one year-old, anorexic, Pre-Med student. Holly is a fourteen year-old athlete who, while trying to come to terms with her sister's anorexia, is discovering her own sexuality. In both the present and in memory, the sisters share a close yet estranged relationship with their parents, one of whom is dead.

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History, like trauma, is never simply one's own. History is precisely the way we are implicated in each other's traumas.

-Cathy Caruthers
UnClaimed Experience

After she disappeared, there wasn't much left: a scent on the hospital sheet, her books on anatomy, her clothes and her diary. Scrawled inside the cover was this message:

Part of my therapy in group is to record my feelings and thoughts about my body. And I the ever-complaint patient, doctor-to-be, I, Giselle Vasco, of unsound body and mind, promise to keep a record of these miniscule events, daily, in the hopes of mental and physical galvanization.

This is what we were then, what we are not now.

-H

The speed of a marathon runner is almost directly proportional to the enhanced cardiac output.

I drop Holly off for track early and it's raining so I sit in the truck for awhile watching her jog around as Cavalieri times her laps. He yells at her to quicken her turnover.

Holly keeps running around the track unflaggingly. I lose count of how many times she circles. I can see her breath in the light spring rain. She is the colour of a colt and her legs swing out from under her in time to the windshield wipers. The peaks of her shoulder blades stick out from under her tank top, and are somehow startling under the dim, overcast sky. They resemble brown boomerang-shaped stones skipping on water: now there, now buried in the smoothness of her back. She is tall and long, like our father was, she has even inherited his monkey arms and the wide span of his hands, which accounts for her incredible control over a basketball. Like most show-offs, she prefers to take three pointers rather than passing or doing a lay-up, and, while Cavalieri always gives her shit for this, ninety percent of the time the ball ends up in the basket.

She stops running, finally, and walks with her hands on her hips to the center of the field, kicks off her runners, and collapses on the grass. I put the truck in park and crawl through the hole in the fence, walk over the track to where she's lying. I stand above her making faces until she glances at me and smiles.

"Hi Gizzy." She shines the apple I've thrust into her hand on her wet shorts and hooks her ankle over her knee, rubbing the arch of her bare foot. With her hair cut so short and her face flushed she looks like a boy. I think she has decided to survive adolescence by sweating her way through it, by keeping her body in straight lank lines. She squints up at the grey clouds swarming above us.

"Picking up Sol?" she asks, as she munches the apple.

"Yeah, you can come. He has to go to the mall, you guys can hang out together while I go to group."

"Which group you going to? Agnes' or yours?"

"Mine."

She sprints over to Cavalieri and grabs her sweat pants from the ground. He nods and waves at me. I shiver, though it is a warm rain.

Surgical approach to the heart: Vertical sternotomy is the approach generally used. The sternum is divided longitudinally in the midline and the pericardial cavity is opened to display the heart and major vessels.

My best friend is Jen Savayo and sometimes Giselle, but Giselle doesn't count. I wear my uniform above the knee, just like Jen. Giselle gave me her skirt and kilt pin when she graduated and I like the weight of her pin there, above my left knee.

The ascending aorta and right atrium are now readily accessible for preparation for cardiopulmonary bypass.

When we get in the truck, Holly starts playing with the radio. Halfway down the block to Sol's place, she pulls her fingers through her hair and squints at herself in the mirror.

"Do I smell?," she asks.

"You always do brat," I honk and Sol runs out of his house. I can tell by the line in his mouth that he has been waiting for me, that he is slightly annoyed by Holly's presence

"Hi," he says to me, squeezing in beside Holly.

"Hi scrote," he says, giving her what I call his Diamond Sol smile.

Holly starts cackling. There is a fine line of irretrievable tension between his hairline and his brow. I want to wipe it away with my hand.

A good surgeon is able to assess the extent of organ damage immediately.

Giselle used to give the neighbourhood boys a dollar for squirrels. Fifty cents for birds. She made them promise not to hurt them and told them only to bring her road kill but I know they used to shoot them with bee-bee guns, because Giselle spent a lot of time taking bullets out of sparrows' chests. She used old scissors, tweezers, pliers and salad thongs.

One time, she stole some of our dad's special scissors from his traveling medical kit and when he found out his face went all red and he yelled at her. Anyway, dad threw those scissors out and Giselle never touched his equipment again.

I would crouch over the animal as she operated and to this day the smell of latex and hospitals reminds me of Giselle because she made me scrub and wear plastic gloves.

I'd pick flowers for the grave and we'd bury the animals in the back of the garden and have a little ceremony. She took her time stitching up the wounds in neat little grids that reminded me of the scars on Frankenstein's neck. "Come here, come closer," she'd say when she finished pinning the folds of the skin back.

"Look, see it? See the heart?"

An aseptic technique is essential, and cleansing must be carried out in an operating theater or clean dressing room.

In the nightmare, Holly's body is a small vessel that I can never save.

We are at steam baths and are waiting in line for the sauna. We stand on a clean, tiled floor barefoot, wearing only towels. Holly is much younger, maybe five, and she and I are holding hands.

In the dream it is always the same: an old woman with pendulous breasts weaves her way towards us. She grabs me by the hand and points to the red mark on my palm and asks me, in a foreign language, if I am menstruating. Annoyed, I tell her, in English, that I am not. I explain that the cashier stamped our hands when we paid to get in. In vain, I search for the word "ticket" in a language I do not know. "Where's her mark?" the woman demands, as she snatches my hand away from Holly's. "Leave us alone," I growl, trying to wrench myself from the woman's grasp.

Suddenly Holly leaps away from me and dives into the shallow bath, upsetting the calm surface of the water. The woman and I watch her swim the length of the pool. And as the pressure of her dry, old hand intensifies, I remember that Holly cannot swim.

Cardiac arrest results in an absence of pulse, unconsciousness and apnoea.

When our father had a heart attack, I sat, for what felt like a very long time, on the stairs, listening to my mother speak into the phone, she said our address in a quiet even tone. She spelled out our last name slowly, as if she were reading the letters for the first time. Then, she put the phone down gently and stood there, her whole body trembling.

I ran up the stairs and into Giselle's room and found her under the covers. She was shaking and sweating and crying on her pillow. *Giselle*, I said. *Giselle*, he

is dead. Then she grabbed me up into her arms and there was nothing inside me but a high blank wall.

She was shaking and moving and holding me so tight as if I was him, and not yet dead. As if all her life and tears could fill me up and I could become him again. So I said it over and over in her ear until it sounded like a scream while she held me like that. So that she would know that it was me and not him and that he was allofasudden dead.

All staff in surgical wards must be skilled in the First Aid management of cardiac arrest.

When I was Holly's age I thought only of ways to make myself smaller. My mother took me to the doctor when I hit a hundred and ten pounds and I hated her for her tears and wails and endless doctor appointments. "I am fine," I said, scheming to lose another five pounds in the next week. "You are *not!*" she'd shriek back. That time, at the doctor's, I had filled my pockets with rocks. The scale read 120, the magic number. One twenty, not an admirable weight for most girls but, like my sister, I am tall; anything under 135 is now considered dangerous. Both of us are just under five eleven, if we stand up straight.

Both the doctor and my mother looked amazed by the number and I started shaking with fear believing that they'd guessed my trick with the rocks. *A little underweight but nothing to be worried about.* The drive home my mother said very little. Her mouth a slash in her face.

I asked god to forgive me for lying to my mother. I asked god to forgive me for masturbating six times a day and drinking only lemon water. I asked god for a lot of things.

Many patients coming to surgery have associated nutritional disorders.

My friend Kat hates gym but Jen and I love it. Cavalieri lets me and Jen play pick-up with the guys. Kat always makes some excuse and Cavalieri lets her sit on the bench but when we start playing she miraculously recovers and starts yelling. One thing about Kat is that she can scream. As soon as Jen or I get the ball Kat starts. I think even Jen, who thinks Kat is kind of a loser, likes it.

It's nice having a cheering squad when most of the guys make you feel like you have no business playing ball at all.

When I get to take off my uniform, change into my gym clothes and sweat, and press my body up against a boy, when I snatch the ball from his hands and send it sailing down the court, I feel like I can breathe again. Like I am outside running and dreaming and I can breathe.

Medical schools seem especially enamored with the well-rounded applicant. They smile on those who appear not only to have coped with the demands of premedical education but also to have demonstrated a commitment to outside interests, real personal growth, and campus, volunteer or community activities.

I see only my own hunger in her now. She runs twice a day, in preparation for the big race on Friday, the rest of the time she is locked in her room, with Jen, laughing her head off. She complains that I am becoming more like mother since I started working at the hospital.

"How?" I ask, disturbed.

"I don't know, you look at me with that social worker look and use her voice sometimes."

I'm a paid companion at the Mental Hospital downtown. I wanted to work on an Emergency ward this summer, but neither the group nor my mother thought that was a very good idea, for now anyway. So I work with Agnes, mostly, but sometimes I get called in as a Nurse's Aid too.

Agnes is a seventy-year-old woman from Penetanguishine. Among the many things she hates about me, she hates my dreadlocks most. "What are you? Black or something?" she quipped, when she first saw me. "Can't you wash yer fuckin' hair?"

"I'm blonde, Agnes, I'm white. It's just a hairstyle, they're clean, clean as they can be," I explained, before I learned explaining was useless.

"Nobody's white! Not when girls are boys and boys are girls and blond girls make their hair up like darkies. Nobody's nothin' then!"

The first day I took her to a coffee shop she was wearing two heavy men's watches and had pink lipstick smeared all over her teeth. When she told me that they put dope in the donuts, I laughed and said I hoped so. Nobody told me that you shouldn't joke with Agnes. She swallowed a lit cigarette and fell off her chair. It's not *getting to know you* time, mother explained to me later.

Demonstrating your resolve to remain a well-rounded person is a reassuring signal to yourself that the intensity of medical education cannot rob you of your diversity.

Halfway through Giselle's first year in premed, it happened. I knew the signs. I saw her eyes dancing across the food at dinner, calculating, counting, making plans about how she could eliminate it. She had tricks, she had several. One of her favourites was to pretend she was throwing something in the garbage

and then scrape her dinner in when she thought no one was looking. But she couldn't do this for too long because I caught on early and told Mom.

When I heard the name of her sickness I went to the library and read some books about it. *The Perfectionists' Disorder. The Girl Who Thought She Had No Stomach.*

I started laughing in the library with those books spread out on the clean, shiny table. I started laughing till my throat hurt and the librarian said *Alright now Holly, that's enough.* When I read about how the teeth go rotten, how the stomach begins to eat itself, how the hair falls out. And the pictures... those girls with big heads and awful long bones that looked like they hurt poking through the skin.

When I stopped laughing, I started choking, it seemed like there wasn't enough air to breathe. And as I spat and coughed and gulped, I thought of my sister becoming a thin cold sheaf of grave noise, trying to breathe like that, underground, without any oxygen at all.

The perception of pain is subserved by both automatic and somatic nervous systems thus visceral pain is dull, deep-seated and cannot be precisely localized unlike somatic pain, which patients often describe as 'searing', 'sharp', or 'acute'. The severity of pain is often difficult to evaluate as patients vary greatly in their reaction.

Eve was my first love. After she left me, I went numb. I could imagine feeling, like one can imagine a headache; the threat of throbbing cavities remains somewhere in the mind but the sensation itself is vague, indistinct. I began to sleep around and I became a callous lover to those who did not mind the holes I burned in their sheets with my dry-ice hips. I became coveted for my lack of demands. I was subject to the generosity of my lovers; in fact, I was treated

kindly. I was coddled and stroked and given wine and books wrapped in expensive shiny paper. One man even wrote a poem about my nose.

I have nothing left to give, I would say in my awful little voice and open my hand to show them the superficial atrocity; where she had carved our initials into my palm, and where love had been drained from me. I would tell them about Eve, show them the scar sometimes, in the morning when true things are exchanged. I was frightened that they would try to love me too hard, too much, but they rarely did. They were good to me, they asked for nothing but my company and my body for a few hours, then set me free.

Until Solomon it was that way. Until he came to me in my dreams over and over wearing paper wings and jumping off the edge of a small cliff just to make me laugh. Then the numbness went away and there was Solomon, with his girl-lips, saying,

Love Me. Love me more.

A shift in pain may aid diagnosis.

I knew that there was no God after our father died and after Giselle got sick, not if all of this could happen.

Intractable pain requires careful assessment before recommending procedures which themselves may be extensive or hazardous.

The first time I met Sol, I was working as a volunteer at a walk-in clinic. I was outside of the building getting some fresh air when I saw a sheepish-looking boy, with a broken wrist and long curly hair spilling down his back, fumbling through his pockets, with his good hand, for matches. When he finally noticed me,

he looked startled. He took a step back and put his hand on the wall, as if to steady himself. Then he squinted at me and his eyes stripped me completely naked, but not uncomfortably so. It was as if I had just stepped out of a bath and he was waiting, with a towel in his hands. My hands started to shake, he undid something that was knotted in me and the feeling of releasing it was somehow painful.

I avoided his gaze, looking instead at the traffic but when he continued to stare, not being one to turn down a dare, I gawked back. We ended up staring at each other for a good five minutes, while leaves whipped around in small dusty hurricanes and while I shivered in my lab coat and he ran his hand through his hair. We challenged each other silently. I think I may have sighed with relief or frustration when he started walking towards me.

"Got a light?"

"Nope. Don't smoke."

"You a doctor?"

"No."

"Well can you take a look at my wrist?"

"I'm not a doctor. I told you."

"I thought you were too pretty to be a brain surgeon."

I grabbed his wrist and inserted two fingers under his cast and pressed down, hard. "That hurt?"

"Yeeeeow!!!Whoa! That hurts alright. I just wanted to get a rise out of you..."

"Well you did."

"Seriously, I've seen you at the Med. library. What's your specialty?"

"You really want to know?" I still had his wrist, and was digging my fingers beneath his pulpy cast, feeling the bone. He looked surprised at this so I inched them out and dropped his hand. I took a step back and then he sighed.

"Yes."

"Surgery."

"Your last name Carver?"

"No."

"Well then, I guess you'll be O.K."

He smiled and tucked the unlit cigarette behind his ear and laughed nervously. I wanted to slap the silly knowing smile from his face. I wanted to smash his beautiful teeth with my knuckles. I wanted to fight him; to let him know I would have to be dragged, kicking and screaming, into his arms.

Because what no one ever tells you about love at first sight, or lust, or sudden possession, or whatever the hell it is, is that it is *infuriating*. I felt angered by the actual existence of this bedroom-eyed, long haired boy-man, who bore no resemblance to Eve aside from the fact that he smoked. I had the impulse to smack him, hard and fast in the face. Needless to say I resisted my impulse thinking I would go insane either way, were he to stay or leave.

"When do you get off work?"

"Now."

"Would you care to go for a coffee?"

"What about your wrist?"

"What about it?"

"I mean those things are just routine check-ups, it's probably fine, how old are you? About 19? Yeah, your bones are still growing I.."

I blushed, and asked him not to make any more jokes about doctors. Then he flinched, almost imperceptibly, when I took his arm and led him away from the clinic.

Contact with patients is nearly nonexistent until the last quarter of second year Med and many students begin to wonder if medicine is really the human profession for which they had hoped.

There's a guy in my class named Marco, Italian of course, who looks a bit like Sol. He likes Kat, who, incidentally, was the first girl to get a bra and her period in sixth grade, two years ago.

There's something mysterious about Katrina, besides her big boobs and the open watery look of her eyes. Even though she doesn't like gym, she likes hanging out with me and Jen. Mr. Cavalieri has her starting on the volleyball team and she's second string on the basketball team. She plays defense, which is a good position for her because she doesn't move very fast and is tough to get through.

Anyway, someone started a rumour that Katrina 'did it' with a twelfth grader in the public high school next to ours. I don't believe it and I feel sorry for her because that rumour makes life at St. Felix pretty hard for her. On this particular day she had some biology homework to finish so she was sitting alone, but she usually sits with us. Jamie Simick noticed this and went up to Kat's table yelling "Katrina sucks cocks! Katrina, hey, will you suck mine?"

I remember feeling really awful about that, imagining Kat's chubby little white lady hands crumple up her lunch bag. But only her back stiffened as she said something to Jamie that made his face turn red. "What's that, you stupid Pollack?" Although Simick's the class clown and usually funny in his immature way, this was a really bad thing to say. Half the kids, myself included, are Polish, the other half Italian. Wop and Pollack jokes are a common currency but something in the way Simick spat that out, the strange logic of Kat being a cocksucker, and thus a stupid Polish cocksucker, something about that rubbed everyone the wrong way. Kat just sat there, blonde lashes down, her fingers

tugging nervously at the crucifix hanging off her golden necklace. The sound of chairs scraping the ground echoed through the caff as about four guys in grade eight, Marco one of them, stood up. I looked towards Jen, who was in the cafeteria line, she shrugged. She was close to Kat's table and so she heard everything, probably even what Kat had said.

Simick's little freckled face was all red and twisted up as he shouted that Kat was a fat stupid bitch. By this time, Cavalieri and Marco were both headed in his direction. Just as Simick had lunged at Kat's white neck and gripped his disgusting little fingers around it, Marco was on him. He tried to squirm out from under Marco's grip but Marco, who's almost a foot taller, was by now holding Simick in the air. "Put him down, Marco," Cavalieri said, trying not to smile. So Marco dropped him on the floor, right on his head, and made a beeline to Kat who was half-way out the cafeteria.

He stopped her at the door and asked her something, probably if she was O.K. and all that and she nodded while her hand played at her throat. Everyone was laughing by now. Jen, who was practically tripping over her feet trying to get back to our table was breathless. "Jesus. Did you see that? That little fucking worm." Jen was all pumped up, shifting from foot to foot, tugging at her baggy gym pants, looking like she wanted to grab someone's neck too. I stole some of her fries.

Jen sat down, swatting my hands away from her plate.

"I'll bet she did suck some guy off," Jen said, shoving about ten fries in her mouth in retaliation.

"That's not the point Jen."

"What is the point? That little asswads like Simick accuse you of sucking guys off? That we have four, count 'em four, more years of hanging out with these losers in high school? It's not exactly maturity central, is it?"

"Hey Jen, you'd better get the fuck outta here. Mr. Manella's coming over here to give you shit about your clothes. Go change."

"Right." Jen tipped the rest of the fries into her mouth and stood up. "Hey Hol! You like seafood" She screeched, walking away backwards with her open mouth full of half-chewed fries and ketchup.

"Very mature." I yelled, turning to cut off Mr. Manella with a question about our geography project.

If the bone ends are rigidly fixed together, healing occurs without callus formation. However, while bones, especially in youths, quickly regain a normal appearance, they take longer to achieve normal strength.

Before Holly was born I knelt in the dirt and prayed under the large soulless sunflower heads that lined the back of the garden. The balls of my feet dug deep into the ground and the soil yielded beneath my knees as I prayed for a dog or a brother.

I'd do twenty Hail Mary's, a couple of Our Father's and then just try to draw a picture of my brother in my head. My mother would scowl at me as I came in dragging my feet and combing the black and white seeds out of my hair. She was alarmed, in those days, by my religious fervor.

"Please don't drag your feet on the floor, Mother Teresa." She'd tease, half-smiling and holding her swollen belly.

When they brought her home, I didn't know she would be so small. My mother said Holly was born under Gemini and that meant she had split faces. Her masks would be quick and sure and I saw her moody eyes were already shifting colours underneath, deciding.

The ability of the circulatory system to adapt to exercise is equally as important as the muscles themselves in setting the limit for the performance of muscle work.

I couldn't stop thinking about Marco for the rest of the afternoon. I wrote his name in the margins of my notebook during biology class making the *a*'s all fancy and making the looping *o* at the end of it big and perfectly round. I thought about telling Jen even, that I *liked* him and I thought about what a nice thing he'd done for Kat, about how things would change for her because everybody loved Marco, thought he was cool.

I started to think about him differently, about how I could get him to start paying attention to me because I did see him around a lot. Sometimes the boys' basketball practices overlapped with the girls and I could arrange it, if there was a boy's game and a girl's game at the same time, so I could sit on the school bus with him. I thought about track and cross-country and how I could try to run with him, even though he was a sprinter and I ran distances. I made a list of my good points, reasons that he should go out with me.

1. nice
2. not obnoxious like Jen
3. athletic (we'd have a lot to talk about)
4. good in English and History
5. interested in French-kissing, holding hands and running my hands over the black hair at the back of his head, interested in meeting his parents, going over to his house and watching TV, seeing his bed, interested also in maybe seeing him naked...

As I was drawing black lines over this information, Kat walked in late to class and took her seat in front of me. I watched her golden crucifix bounce

between her large breasts and understood vaguely, mournfully, that Marco would never even notice me after he'd noticed Kat. I looked down at my own almost flat chest and scribbled a note to her.

-You O.K? Simick's a prick. Are you still coming to basketball practice tonight?

-I. Yes, came her prompt reply, in her funny Polish handwriting that resembled my mother's and father's. 2. I know 3. Yes

-What did you say to Simick?

-I told him if he could find his cock I'd do it. Please D. T. N.

Destroy This Note. I crumpled it into my pocket and leaned over to inspect Kat's intent, angelic expression. I touched her layered blonde hair, so lightly she didn't notice, and I forgave Kat, a little bit, for taking Marco away from me.

Immobilization of broken ribs by 'strapping' is contraindicated.

I'm not sure if Holly knows this but, before our father, our mother was engaged to a man who died four months before they were to be married. She told me about it once on a long drive. He was a Hungarian lawyer, on the fast track to becoming a judge. They had met at university and my mother, having a penchant for languages, and men as ambitious as herself, soon became fluent in Hungarian. His name was Mishi.

According to my mother, she and Mishi were at a pool party in Budapest visiting some Hungarian friends. Some high-ranking communist friends. She has never said this herself, I have come to understand it only from the inflection of her voice when she uses the word *friends*. Our father hated communism, and so Mishi, despite the tragedy, had always been a sore point between them. Our mother also hates communism, but more, I think, because of what happened to Mishka than anything else.

They were at a pool party. Now, picture this: my mother was eating a chicken leg and chatting with the other girlfriends and wives, showing off her white-gold engagement ring, which was rare in Post-War Europe. She was leaning back chewing on the greasy meat, stretching out her brown, athletic legs, showing off her pink bathing suit. She was one of the beautiful people and Misha, her equally beautiful fiancée, was doing the backstroke, gulping water and shooting it through his teeth. She looked down at her manicured feet and then looked up to see that he had sunk to the bottom of the pool.

Everyone started laughing, thinking it was a joke. My mother, who had just stripped the last of the meat from the bone, dove in after him only slightly worried. She swam to the bottom and saw that he was convulsing and swallowing water. She pulled his arms towards her but he did not move. She swam up, her lungs exploding into a scream as she burst through the water. Three men jumped in and pulled him up but he was dead before she placed her mouth on his to resuscitate him. He was dead in the ambulance and at the hospital his condition did not change. He was dead but he had won, my mother said, because no one had found out about his condition. The doctor's said he had had an epileptic fit underwater.

He was buried in the finest cemetery, the one reserved for party members, with a small red flag on his grave. Afterwards, my mother found his medication ferreted away in a locked drawer and swallowed it all, hoping to froth at the mouth and die also. The empty bottle is the only thing she kept of Misha's. Then she met our father, a doctor, who was not so proud, who abhorred communists and who, most importantly, was not so good at keeping secrets.

Neurobiology/Biophysics: Examine basic properties of excitable cells that communicate, acquire and process information. Strong emphasis on laboratory

work with a series of integrated and progressively demanding studies of membrane conductance properties. Concurrent lectures and readings assigned.

On Saturdays I play pick-up with a bunch of older guys at the courts at school. I'm the only other girl there besides Chantal, a six-foot black girl. At first they didn't want us to play, but eventually they let us.

Chantal and I are usually on opposite teams. The logic being that we have to cover each other. The guys have this weird way with us, for example, if we travel or double dribble, they won't call it. Or, if we get knocked down by a particularly good block, by a guy, they'll shout "Foul!" and one of us gets to take a shot. This 'favoritism' also has its downside. For example, they're always telling us what to do, like we don't know the rules of basketball or something.

Last week, Roy, who had just missed a perfect lay-up tried to cover it up by saying "You should always be roving the key Holly, you weren't there." Roving the key. Rove my ass. Chantal and I usually suck it up, but lately we've had enough. Of course, she and I don't talk about it or anything, we just roll our eyes at each other. This time though Chantal read my mind. "Fuck you Roy," I heard her say as their defense dribbled out, "Holly's always roving, pass her the ball for a change, make it worth her while, why doncha?"

Different neurons respond differently to stimuli; each type have different thresholds for excitation and have widely differing maximal frequencies of discharge.

After work I pick up Sol from the *Sun*. He climbs into the truck, his long lashes drooping, his eyes tired and sad. His father is the infamous Robert Bohan, the columnist for the *Sun*, that's how Sol got his job. He does research, takes

phone calls, and sometimes works on layout. He spends all day in his father's shadow, chasing other people's words and stories and then comes to me with his hands coated in newspaper ink, black streaks on his face, clutching three newspapers and bitching about margins.

He is the first man I have loved. In the beginning I thought it would be difficult, loving a man, but in the dark our bodies are not so different. When we make love it is like laughing at a hilarious joke told over and over until it is no longer funny. Not the pain of laughing so much as not being able to stop it.

His body does not fall into separate parts as I imagined it would, but is more like a primitive machine, composed of one singular mechanism. I like to put my knuckles on the motor that lies beneath his ribcage, in the pit before his stomach, and feel it course through the rest of him.

We get to Centennial track and he grabs my hand, inserts my index finger into his mouth which is warm, like the inside of a sticky fruit that's been left on a wood stove. From the parking lot, I see Holly stretching and doing jumping jacks in her running tights and sweat shirt. If she places in this race, she goes to track and field camp. On the other hand, if the team wins next week, she gets to go to basketball camp.

Sol buys one of those huge red white and blue rocket popsicles and we sit in one of the back rows of the bleachers. Sol sits up straight and stares ahead at the field, like an eager young boy.

"My dad's picking up some award next week and your presence has been requested."

"By who?"

"*Whom*. By *whom*... my parents, of course."

"You don't want to go?"

"Not particularly, but I'll go if you come with me." He turns to me making a loud sucking noise while sticky red, sugary ice trickles down his hand.

"I'd love to go."

"Good. It's on Thursday. Free booze. You got a fancy party dress?"

"Yes."

"I haven't seen you all dressed up in awhile."

"Well you will."

"O.K. I'll pick you up around seven thirty."

"Sol?"

"Yeah?"

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing, just my dad. He drives me crazy. He won't shut up about this damn thing and guess who the paper asked to cover it?" He is down to the middle, the white part of the popsicle, and wipes his hand on the bleacher. He ends up with green flecks of paint and dirt on his hand.

"You."

"Yup. They thought it would be 'cute' if junior was there, supporting his old man then writing some charming little piece on the whole schmooze-off."

"But that's fantastic! Your first writing assignment."

He looks at me as if I am the stupidest person in the world and tries to wipe his hand on me.

"Don't look at me like that, Solomon. No one's pointing a gun to your head. And for God's sake, are you an infant? Don't wipe that shit on me," I push his hand away from me and deposit it on his lap.

"You're right, sorry, something about being at a junior high track-meet brings out the idiot in me. Just come with me to this thing, okay?"

I take his sticky hand into mine and wrap my other arm around his shoulders. He bends into my embrace and his hair falls into the crook of my elbow as I kiss his forehead. I see Cavalieri eyeing us from the bottom bleachers and I try to untangle myself from Sol as he approaches us. I can see he is nervous for Holly, like me. He smiles at me weakly and coughs into his hand.

"How's she lookin'?"

"Good, good. I'm a little worried, she was complaining about her knee yesterday. We put a tensor on it. She'll be O.K. I think."

"Good."

"I hear you're in pre-med, Gizzy. Congratulations. You always were good at science."

"Yeah, well, we'll see how it goes."

We watch a couple of events. The boys' four hundred, the relay. Then they announce the fifteen hundred. I see Holly at the side of the field stretching her legs and jumping up and down. How she hates the gun. She's the queen of false starts. Always hearing it in her head a second too soon and jumping into the air like a wild rabbit. She gives the start a consternate squint and places her white shoe on the white line. The gun makes a crisp snapping sound, like sticks breaking, and she falls behind Lucy, her nemesis, who is wearing a green, mesh tank-top with faded lettering: OLPS - Our Lady of Perpetual Sorrow. She stays right behind Lucy, moving with utter detachment, holding her arms stiffly, with her thumbs and fingers circled, as if she is holding acorns. Holly is an orthodox runner, she refuses to take any risks, to expend any excess energy. One of her racing rules is to let the girl in front of her break up all the air molecules and so Lucy does all the work for three long laps around until Holly cuts in front of her in the last stretch. I close my eyes and hear Sol's breathing as if it were in my head.

Oh, he says, and, Holly.

The rhythm of her legs, broken. It is as if the white lines of the track have exploded and left her straddled out on the grass instead. Her ankle caught, her elbows are bloody and covered with gravel. She gets up without looking anywhere, skillfully, automatically, like all her life she's been stealing bases and careening into asphalt.

Oh Holly.

Lucy sidesteps her cleanly, coming in first, Holly comes in second and keeps running, her hands on her hips. Cavalieri and Sol are at her side instantly, wiping her soaking head with a towel, pulling her arm to look at where she fell. She unravels herself from them and walks to the fence where she finally sits down and drops her head to her knees.

Oh.

With a little imagination, one can readily understand the importance of having neurons with many different types of response characteristics to perform the widely varying functions of the nervous system.

Damn fucking body never doing what you want it to. And the damn wind always getting in your way. As if there weren't enough to worry about.

Role of Synapses: The synapse is the junction point from one neuron to the next. Therefore, the synapse is an advantageous site for the control of signal transmissions.

Some days it is as though I go from one mad woman to the next with only Sol in between.

Agnes and Holly are incorrigible lately.

Agnes keeps getting in trouble with the nurses for slobbering all over the speakers in the common room. She thinks music is her dead husband Ken. Mom says that Ken was her third husband, the only man who did not beat her. He was hospitalized for emphysema around the same time Agnes was institutionalized and they rarely saw each other in the years before he died. When he finally did die they gave her a box of his things: some watches, his wedding ring, a zippo and some photographs of him on the beach. I know this because she shows me the box and its contents almost every day. For some reason, she didn't go to the funeral. This was hardly enough closure for Agnes, she is still convinced that he is alive and there is some conspiracy involved: someone is not telling her something. So it's no wonder the old girl hears him in the black stereo box, thinks he is the grass on the hospital grounds, thinks he is ice-cream, thinks he is every good-looking young man we pass in the street.

Her obsession with sex is unnerving though, I have to dress in shapeless, too-big clothes or else she thinks I'm turning tricks when she looks away. Last week a patient asked me for a cigarette and her eyes got all buggy, a sure sign that she's going to start in on me.

"Go on, fuck him, I know you want to."

"Agnes, stop."

"Don't you tell me to stop, you little whore."

Mother's theory is that Ken was the only man who ever *made love* to Agnes. Who took the time to please her, who never raised his hand except to hold her. But she's got to stop putting the speakers under her skirt and sneaking them into her bed, it really upsets the nurses.

And Holly. You can't even look at her sideways without her snapping at you. She's been moping around the house ever since the race.

Now, from my window, I can see her leaning lackadaisically on a rake in the backyard under the guise of helping mom in the garden, wearing only her bra and dad's old pajama bottoms. She is sucking a chicken bone, a habit she has had since childhood and that we have been unable to convince her to break. Mom is stooped under the lilac tree ripping weeds out and nattering at her.

"For God's sake Holly put some clothes on, what do you think this is? A harem? And take that nasty thing out of your mouth. I cook all day and then you go stealing the cat food. From now on if you eat like an animal I'm just buying Purina for you that's it! Purina sandwich...ha!"

She turns to pinch Holly's butt affectionately but Holly jumps away from her and sends the rake flying into the middle of the yard.

"Don't!" she laughs as she disappears into the house.

Holly comes into my room, without knocking, and sits on the end of my bed, flipping through an anatomy textbook. She throws the book on the floor and slips on one of my shirts.

"I swear to God if you get that shirt dirty I'll kill you and please don't throw my books around. You know how much those things cost?"

"Relax!" She says, her face twisting into a grimace. She extracts the bone from her mouth and holds it in her hand, looking down at it. It is shiny and disgusting. She does not move or say anything for awhile.

"Listen, you shouldn't feel bad, you're still going to the camp."

"I don't want to go to that stupid fucking camp."

"Holly!"

"Well, come on, it sucks. Besides, I'd rather stay home for the summer."

Her face softens and she stretches out beside me, she is still cupping the bone in her hand.

"What's up?"

"Nothing, I..nothing."

"Holly?" I run my hand through her short cropped hair instinctively. I stop, expecting her to flinch, or slap my hand away, but she does neither so I continue. She looks up at me and thrusts her jaw out as she speaks.

"What do you and Sol do?"

What do you mean what do we do? What are you talking about?"

"I mean, you know, what do you *do*." She turns crimson and I realize, incredulously, that she is shy .

Holly, who insists on repeating every disgusting joke she hears at school in a loud voice at dinner. Holly, who unfailingly reports to me the thwarted sexual exploits of Jen and the rest of her teenaged friends, whether or not I respond. Holly, the raucous and crass creature who has always moved in her slim fine body

with swaggering ease and immortal confidence, is *shy*. Embarrassed. Holly is caught in her own inexperience and longing, and I am, as usual, unprepared.

I feel like laughing but I know it is absolutely forbidden. I get the strange sensation that there has been some mistake, that Holly is the older one, and I am the kid.

"Well, so what do you want to know?" I say, in what I hope is a sisterly-way, sitting up and pulling my hand out of her hair.

"I dunno," she mumbles, the tips of her ear lobes a burning red colour. "What it feels like, what you're supposed to do. All that stuff."

"You just act natural. When it happens, you'll know what to do. It's like riding a bike. Once you learn and practice you never forget. You should know though, the first time is terrible. Look at me Holly. Be careful, use a condom."

She buries her head once again and speaks into her arms.

"Yeah, yeah...don't worry, there's not exactly a million guys beating down the door. Don't tell mom eh?"

"Of course not."

She gets up slowly, stretching as she does, recovering herself as she re-inserts the bone into her mouth. I hear mom screaming her name from the backyard.

"Coming!" She bellows, her brow wrinkling as she returns to her irritated state. She pauses at the door, pushing her lips, pushing the bone out of her mouth.

"Yeah, so thanks for nothing."

"What? What do you expect me to say? What do you want? Tips?"

"How will I know what to do if you don't tell me?" She whines, in a sudden panicky, accusing tone, before she thumps down the stairs.

And I feel as though I have failed Holly, and myself, in some grey, amorphous way, as I always do when she tries to confide in me. As if in my inability to transmit my experience to her, I had not lived it at all.

And all day her bitchy little plea rolls around in my mind like a tuneless song that will not stop, no matter how loud you turn up the radio.

Remember, clearing your mind, now and then, will make it easier to achieve academically.

The world is a small tight place and when I run I climb through its skin. I go at night sometimes. Mom and Giselle don't know. I go at night where I can't see the crooked paths so they don't trouble me and when I reach my stride, when I am warm and just a single flame burns inside my gut, when something in me feels like stopping, that's when the lines of trees blur quicker and I push on. I see nothing but my legs. The hum of blood in my ears, the pounding of my heartbeat is with me like breathing, or water, or dying. Then my legs disappear and I feel my face, the light of heat I make. I make by myself.

Fractures and dislocations, unless complicated by neural or vascular injury, have a relatively low priority in the management of multiple injuries.

It is easy to be young, Holly. It is easy to know nothing and everything.

What I have to say cannot shield you in any way. What else would it be but a sparse crazed willow-stitch of a warning? What shall I propose?

Shall I say that her body will twist supine and thin as ice across a puddle upon the white sheets? Shall I say you will be amazed that she is able to coil into vine or like a small dead wasp in your arms though she is only a woman? Should I

tell you that, one day, a lover will tell you that all week she has been deciding that your eyes are the colour of the winter ocean in the East and not grey at all.

But you were the one, Holly, who pointed out to me that lesbian comes right after leprosy in the dictionary so shall I say...*he* will call your bluff, call your wolf curse, say that your eyes are too far apart not to be lonely all the time, and that your lips lie while your thighs say things your mouth never will. And that you will always be looking through the narrow caulking of these boundaries not knowing the difference between love and fucking and fucking and love.

What could I say that will not be a slap across your ears. How can I pretend you will not lose anything?

A good surgeon handles tissues and instruments gently and protects all tissues which lie outside the immediate operative field.

I sit in the tub till the water gets cold, till the skin on my toes is transparent and I can rip up the little holes in them. Shedding skin. My feet are really awful things. Mom and Giselle keep threatening to take me to a pedicurist. Once, last summer, Mom came at them with a pumice stone and a bottle of foot lotion and, after she massaged my feet, filed my toenails down and painted them a pretty shade of pink, she held them to her face and kissed my blistered soles. Of course not two days later I ran a cross-country race in the rain and wrecked them. Then I crawled into Mom's bed after a hot bath, showed her my chipped toe-nails and asked her to redo them. She said to me slowly, "I can't always be doing these things for you Holly, you've got to learn to do them yourself." But then she sighed and asked me what colour and I picked a deep berry purple.

It seems she's right, it takes a lot of time and care to keep a body together. I think I have the time but can't care enough to do it. Hair is easy cropped and short.

But I do like baths. The rest of it, the plucking, the shaving, the meticulous eyeliner application...it's bad enough having to watch Jen and Giselle do it. I remember being about seven and sitting on the hamper in our shared bathroom, watching Giselle do her makeup. She spent hours in front of that mirror. "Doesn't that hurt?" I asked her as she plucked her eyebrow at a severe angle. "It hurts like hell. Don't ever pluck or shave Hol. If anyone can get away with it, it's you."

The only thing that's really weird on me are my feet. Running trashes them, so I see no point in even attempting to keep them pretty.

So my feet are soaked enough to peel now from the water and the heat but I feel lazy so I turn on the hot water and splash it on my legs then drape them over the edge of the tub and hold my hands making a diamond around my stomach, thinking about how some of Giselle's friends have their belly button's pierced, how mine would look pretty good pierced but how Mom would probably kill me if I did something like that. Then I place my finger on the hood of my clit and slip it inside me feeling how tight and warm I am inside. I feel the tender skin around the opening of my vagina, like I do everytime in the bath, knowing that it has a name, a funny one, hymen. So much trouble and worry over such a little piece of skin that makes a woman bleed, once only. Giselle told me that in China, some women put egg-white on their vaginas to pretend that they're virgins. I like mine, I feel it open when I stretch my legs before I run. I wonder if you can find it after you've had sex for the first time. I'll ask Giselle. She'll probably laugh though and make some dumb joke. "It's not afterbirth Holly. What, you want to bury it?" Maybe, I don't know, I'll say. Because there's so much fuss, you should do something to mark the occasion.

The water is thoroughly cold now, but I still don't want to get out so, half out of boredom, half out of curiosity, I stick my finger deep inside myself, till I can move the tip of it around. When I pull it out, a jolt of pleasure. I do it again. Hey.

It's a little button, a tiny electric button. Then I spread my legs wider, my pelvis just out of the water, arched, and I rub the top again till the feeling gets more golden.

Suddenly, for some terrible reason, Sol's face is in my head, not his body or his arms but his smiling, shy face. His blue/black eyes dance at me the way they sometimes do before he makes a joke he knows I will laugh at. The more I try to erase the image of his eyes watching me the clearer it becomes and soon I stop trying to erase it and imagine him watching me in the bathtub, how sexy I look, with my knees in the air, my hair wet and slicked back. The more swollen and wet I become, the wider his eyes get until his face is wiped away entirely, or maybe swept up in the rush of blood shooting down from my brain to the top of my legs. And I wonder, is this what love is? Having someone touch you in these tiny hidden wet places, without complaint? And then it's over and I can't wonder about love anymore because there's no one left but me in this terrific yellow surge of fever, throbbing through my legs, my heart.

And something about this lonely feeling makes me feel both excited and wonderful so I smile as I turn on the cold water, and duck my head under the tap. Then I plug my nose and wade my head under the dirty grey water of my filth. I don't come up for air with my secret lonelies until I hear my sister banging on the door, begging to be let in.

A good surgical team is happy that the patient is awake, stable and comfortable.

No one understood when I was sick and had grown so hollow in my bones. No one knew or could guess while I was lying there, with tubes stuck up my nose, what I was thinking. Not the nutritionist, whose slim hands and sad bovine eyes

always put me to sleep instantly, not the other girls in the group, not my sister, not anyone. What I didn't have the energy to explain was this:

I didn't mean to lose all that weight. I didn't mean to hurt anyone except I wanted to see which way it went if I stopped. If there was such a thing as perfection I wanted it in my blood always and not with the coming and going of liquids. I wanted to stop eating, marking time, and see which way it would go. I wanted the clean feeling of unconsumed, desireless things. I wanted to make my body lank. I thought if I could erase the everyday shuffle, of carrying its weight with me where I went, I could understand why we needed private and cross-worn saviors everywhere, and I too could become uncorrupt. Because the closer I came to understanding surface anatomy, the further I left my own behind.

Because hunger becomes something like the shape of salvation, after awhile, hunger becomes a constant friend. Whose face never alters, who makes no demands.

The general pattern of the metabolic changes occurring in starvation is similar to that after trauma, but the combination of trauma and starvation accelerates utilization of body stores of protein and fat. However, important differences exist between the two states.

I can't decide if I love or hate these inner-city games. Riding on a yellow school bus all morning just to get your ass kicked by girls who can out-run, out-shoot, out-reach you, every time. They're good. They're fast. And if you try to foul or slap the ball away you're finished.

Jen gets fouled out by the second period and I can tell by all the teeth-sucking and cussing going on, on both sides, that there is going to be trouble after the game. I think even Cavalieri, who is usually clueless, can tell.

"Go on home Jen." He says.

"Fuck 'em." Jen sits down beside me massaging her fingers, thinking she's so butch, so tough.

Cavalieri lets me play in the last two periods even though my knee is acting screwy and nothing goes right. They keep slapping the ball out of my hands and we keep missing passes and start blaming each other. It's a mess, really hopeless. We lose by twenty points. I feel the hair on the back of my neck stand up in straight, sweaty spikes.

And sure enough, after the game the other team sends a messenger into the locker room to say that they are waiting for us in the parking lot. We limp outside like a bunch of cocky, moronic soldiers, Jen in front jumping around, ready for a scrap. Jane and Darlene, lagging back a bit talking about Jen, watching.

The rest of us stand in a line in front of them. Waiting. Something inside of me trembling, shaking until the guard on the other team steps forward and snatches Jen up by the collar of her coat, like in the movies.

I am tired in my eyes. The world is without colour except for the white maddening motion of the guard's jacket up against Jen. Her knuckle under Jen's chin looks like a rock and I hook my arm through Jen's thinking if I can keep her next to me it will be O.K. O.K... But there's another girl on top of me by then and the others are receding like they're running backwards, slowly, and then Jane and Darlene, out of nowhere, are over on top of us, their legs reeling up into our faces, their bodies resigned like heavy anchors over us while me and Jen, still tangled, collapse into pavement. But then I am cut from her, am alone, in the air landing on something cold and unyielding. Then Cavalieri's voice and the smell of cartilage in my nose being broken, in my eyes some warm liquid pain feeling the tread of someone's shoe on my chest. Someone grabbing my hair asking me something I don't understand.

I'm on top of a car. Can't move. Jen's face hovering and Cavalieri pulling me up by my arms and leading me to another car asking *what happened what happened what happened who started this? You girls, you girls*. And all I can do is fold my hand over my face to keep it from leaking out, to keep it arranged and contained in my hand and Cavalieri saying *Jesus, Jesus, JesusChrist...* starting up the car knowing Darlene and Jane and Jen are in the back seat all quiet except for the sound of their breathing and this gets me worried so I pull the mirror down to see if I look like a fucking Picasso painting or what and something shooting down my neck won't let me look and then I am lucky too, because in a fit of whistles and tunnels and narrow green lines, there is just black. And I am home free.

Wounds may be classified according to the mode of damage.

Sometimes I wonder how mother does it. We go there in silence, after the call, walk through the brightly lit halls with the clean smell of sick people, down to the children's section, where Holly is propped up on a pillow, stoned on painkillers. There's a bandage over her nose and she is arranged on a pile of pillows. I check to make sure they haven't strapped her ribs. She has a wan smile on her face and says "Hey!" as we pull chairs up next to her bed.

Mom's face is riddled...with what? I can't tell anymore. Perhaps a mixture of anger and relief, or simply the exhausted helpless expression of someone used to hearing bad news. She takes Holly's hand, and mine in the other.

I am the first to speak, reaching out to stroke Holly's hair.

"You O.K.?"

"Yeah." She tries to smile but her chapped lips crack and I hear mother shudder.

"Don't ask me what happened. Whatever. Don't." Holly looks straight ahead at the drawing of Winnie-the-Pooh scooping honey from the jar. He looks like a jaundiced, jovial rat.

But I wasn't planning on asking. I know, of course, I take the familiar aggression of Catholic girls in Holly's world for granted. Then Holly starts talking, slowly, her voice soft.

"I'm sorry mommy. So sorry."

Crash injuries are due to severe pressure.

Though my nose was broken, I didn't cry on the way to the hospital because I was conked out. I didn't cry when the doctor stuck his fingers in the alternately cracked and searing regions of my chest saying "this won't hurt a bit." I didn't cry when I heard I was suspended from the team until my ribs were healed and until I changed my *bad attitude*. And when I did cry, I was able to hold it back for a little while by biting into the soft flesh of my lower lip while my mother told me I was crazy if I thought she would ever let me play basketball again.

An incised wound is caused by a sharp instrument; if there is associated tissue tearing, the wound is said to be lacerated.

Sol looks stunning in his tuxedo, although he spills red wine on his shirt before we even sit down to dinner. Watching Sol and his dad interact is also an exercise in patience. His mother Natalie, a lean willowy woman who never wears shoes, shoots me a sympathetic look as they start in on their ritualistic caustic banter.

"I didn't know they were giving prizes for the hack of the year!"

"Nice stain Sol. Ever heard of personal hygiene?"

Actually, Sol thinks his dad is a good writer, although I'm not so sure if Robert thinks Sol is a hygienic person. I used to think they did this for my benefit, because Robert always winks at me, conspiringly. But then I realized it's just the way they communicate because Robert's slights at Sol are aimed at himself, in some unfathomable, father-son way, and so they seem somehow kind.

Finally, the speeches start. I keep thinking of Holly, looking so small in that blue hospital gown. I keep thinking of her nose.

Robert looks handsome and pleased. When his name is announced he looks at Natalie shyly, she grabs my hand and squeezes it. Then he looks at Sol, who is dashing towards the bar like some restless character from a Fitzgerald novel. I see that Sol has inherited his *tender-but-barbed-when-exposed* look from his father, his bedroom blue/black eyes. I see that to love a man, you have to understand his father.

They arrive back at the table at the same time, Sol holding two bottles of champagne, Robert holding a small trophy and an envelope. They look at each other expectantly, for a moment, flushed. Each seems to be watching the other's face for some cue of affection or rage. Then Sol hurriedly uncorks a bottle, catching most of the liquid expertly in a small glass. He presents it to his father, who is now surrounded by friends and colleagues congratulating him.

Robert takes the glass and places his hand on Sol's neck, pulling Sol towards him and whispering in his ear. Sol's body relaxes into a feline pose as he falls into the circle of people around him. He strokes his father's arm, as if he is searching for a pen - or a knife. Someone hands him a cigar. His father's hand releases him. *We are cut the same, so love me. We are cut the same so love.*

Vasovagal Syncope: Emotional Fainting

The hardest thing about being in the hospital is sleeping alone. After our Dad died Giselle and I started sleeping with Mom almost every night. Most nights Giselle slept turned away from me but sometimes Giselle and I would face each other, curled up on one side of the bed, our fingers locked together like two twins in the womb. Sometimes we'd spoon each other, me in the middle, and I'd scoot over close to Giselle, making sure Mom had enough room. Sometimes Mom would be in the middle while Giselle and I kicked the covers off our legs, too hot and sweaty, while my Mom, who never seemed to be too hot, sunk down in the center of the mattress, wrapped in a warm cocoon of blankets.

It seemed a natural extension of the way we had been when my father was alive. Occasionally all four of us, me tucked safely under his arm and Giselle curled around Mom's hip, would sleep in their bed. When we were camping or on holiday we'd push all available mattresses, sleeping bags and/or foams together so we could sleep as a group and my father would tell us stories until we dropped away to sleep, or he would tell weird Polish jokes Giselle and I never got, but that made Mom laugh.

Sometimes, when we were kids and we'd come climbing onto them like little animals, clawing our pink wet fingers into their soft flannel warmth, my mother would laugh loudly at my father's standard joke: here he was, thousands of miles away from his peasant upbringing, and still sleeping with his children. We'd all, especially my mother, laugh deliriously, as if it were the first time we heard it. "Dammit girls, why'd I spend so much money on beds?" he'd say, in mock annoyance, shifting his body and pulling my knees onto the mattress so my too-long legs wouldn't hang off the bed. "You know it's too bad we don't have a goat, because the goat could sleep with us too. And look at this one," he'd say, picking

me up by the ankle while I squealed with terror and delight, "Wearing socks to bed! And mismatched! One red, one green! A regular Gypsy princess."

Giselle and I were just happy that they never kicked us out of their room. Thinking about it now, there must have been times they wanted to be alone, but even if Giselle or I crept in late at night, worried about something, sick or not tired enough to sleep, they'd instinctively roll over and make room for one or both of us, accepting us even in their sleep.

Smooth muscle is involuntary.

Outside, walking towards the truck, I feel nauseated and angry. Sol is drunk, he keeps using the word 'glorious' and trying to kiss me. He smells like cigars. My head hurts, my dress is wrinkled. Also, I cannot get the image of Holly's bandaged nose out of my mind. Sol starts singing a country song at the top of his lungs. I stop a few feet in front of the truck to take off my heels. Sol sees this as his chance to molest me. I hold the shoes between us.

An abrasion results from friction damage to the body surface, and is characterized by superficial bruising and the damage of underlying tissues.

I liked the mornings best, when Giselle and I would pretend to sleep and they covered us with their blankets and whispered to each other as the sun began to light the room. The smell of my father's black espresso and the sound of my mother showering in the bathroom seemed to me the safest smell and sound in the world. He'd sit there stroking my calf, or my hair, drinking his coffee, waiting for my mother to return and, when she did, she'd move to the other side of the room to dry herself. With my eyes half open, I'd watch as she'd turn to him as she put on

her clothes. I was fascinated by the dark Caesarean scar weaving its way from the top of her pubic hair to her belly button, marking my entry into the world. Then I'd slant my half-closed eyes across the room, and hope he wouldn't notice that I saw him gazing at her breasts, her hips, her wet hair, the flush on her face from the water. I was always awake to hear him say "You're so beautiful," to see my Mother pull up her underwear shyly over the scar, shaking her head at him, smiling as she dried her hair with a towel.

Of course after he died, we didn't laugh at all about goats or socks and gypsies. Most nights, I'd just hold Mom's hand, while she cried and Giselle had her back turned towards us both. One night, after a couple weeks of this, one night, Giselle slammed into the bathroom at around two in the morning. I heard the tap run and then she came back with a glass of water and a handful of pills. She knelt beside Mom at the edge of the bed. "Take these," she said. "Please Mom, it'll help you sleep." At first Mom shook her head and started crying louder, but Giselle knelt there until she accepted the two tiny white pills from her hand. "Thank you," Giselle said stiffly, as she put the tiny bottle down on Mom's dresser and went back to sleep in her own room.

So Mom and I slept together, without Giselle, all through Giselle's last years of high school and throughout Giselle's stay in residence. And when Giselle was home, she'd sleep in her own bed. And even though sometimes I wanted to sleep alone, I never did. I spent almost every night holding my mother's firm, lined hand, watching her dress for work in the half-light, asking Giselle to replace the pills every couple of weeks, trying to fit the space of a husband and a daughter. And our mourning, which had been a sharp and stinging absence at first, became a dull ache.

When I started junior high, and playing basketball and running, I also started falling asleep on the couch with the TV on.

"I left your breakfast on the table and some money for juice on the counter," Mom would say, touching my shoulder. "It's almost eight-thirty." And I'd slip from sleep into the honey-yellow eyes of my mother each morning, a pain in my neck from sleeping in a sitting position, and whisper "Mama, why are we so sad?" Maybe she saw my father in me, his hands, my own, reaching into her dark red hair, because then she'd hold her hands to my face and smile sadly.

When Giselle came back from the hospital, still thin and pale, she looked at me strangely when I sat in Mom's bed reading one night. "Don't you think it's time you slept on your own Hol?" I shook my head and tried to ignore her. But that night Giselle, wrapped in a sheet, crawled in between Mom and I. "I'm so cold," she whispered, though it was summer. And as I stroked my sister's bony, shivering spine I felt the down, the soft white anorexic hair that had grown there to protect her when she'd slept alone all those nights away.

Knowledge of anatomy changes from a way to perform a cadaver's dissection to a practical understanding of why drawing arterial blood from the wrong site can severely injure your patient.

Once, our dad stuck Holly in a tree.

We were all in the backyard, just after dinner, eating pears. Mother was sitting on the porch, barefoot, her thin red skirt falling between her knees as she peeled the skin off the pears and cut them into wedges, then she passed them on to me or dad. They were warm and juicy and required hardly any chewing.

Holly was mucking about in the garden playing with sticks. She was wearing a pale blue dress. I used to like to watch her play in the garden. She always looked so calm and complete, a little lady, as she bent down carefully to sniff lilies. Mom and I were sitting on the top step. He was on the bottom,

shirtless and smoking a cigarette. The muscles flickered in his dark back as he turned around to accept the slices from her. We were full from dinner and I was planning how I would escape to the front of the house so I could ride my bike up and down our dead-end street without Holly following me on her tricycle. But the thought was uncomplicated and faded from me as I decided I would let her follow me that night, if she wanted.

We watched Holly going from flower to flower with the studied patience and attention of someone waiting for something very important. Then she stopped and looked up at the oak tree at the edge of the garden.

She pointed upwards and looked up and then back at us, insistently.

Dad walked over, with the cigarette dangling from his mouth, and said something to her. Holly nodded at his words seriously. Mom and I watched his thin, tanned body framing Holly's small paleness. Then he lifted her over his head so she could grasp a branch. He held her there until he was certain she had established a firm hold and then, he let her go.

As he strode back up through the grass the sound of crickets became louder. He took the porch steps two at a time and didn't turn back once. I watched his smiling face as he pitched the cigarette into a tin can by the door and wondered if he would look back at her. He didn't.

Mom and I sat there bound, suspended, sealed together by the warm August wind, watching the little slip of blue hanging six feet from the ground, swaying, back and forth.

Holly's plaintive moan was the sound of something buried or nearly lost. A curious sound, not a cry of pain or fear or worry. Mother snapped out of the spell before I did, rushed across the grass and grabbed her by the waist. Holly fell into mom's embrace and giggled, as if she was the only one who understood dad's idea of a joke.

Innate Immunity: The human body has the ability to resist all types of organisms or toxins that tend to damage the tissues and organs. This capacity is called immunity.

I am in this room and if I close my eyes long enough and do not move at all it is like I am nothing. It is not sleep, and not a quiet prayer. It is just disappearing, with no sound or heat or pain. Out of time, an absence. I am absent. In this room.

For the condition called "high cardiac output failure" the true problem is often not the failure of the pumping ability of the heart but instead the overloading of the heart with too much venous return.

Sol has bought a car, a shiny, ocean-blue hot rod. In short, a muscle car. He appears on our doorstep freshly shaven and dressed all in black, his long lashes curling out towards me.

He hands me a bouquet of purple orchids, his eyes lambent, spreading shadows, as if they were all black too.

"Let's go ladies!" He runs up the stairs to rouse Holly and mom, pumping his bowed legs up the stairs in his shredded cowboy boots. He always acts as if he is in the middle of running somewhere, saving someone's life, and he has just stopped, to catch his breath. I have often thought Sol would make a great paramedic.

I try to find a vase for the orchids. All the vases are scattered around the house, full of lilacs, fading tulips and lilies. I cut the stems at an angle, on a wooden cutting board, where my mother and I have murdered a thousand or so flowers already, and then I put them in a mason jar.

Orchids are my favourite, they last a long time. They are the fourth gift I've received from Sol. The previous three being: 1) an almost entirely black photograph of Hydro poles 2) a pencil sketch of a man with stars in his eyes, drawn by Sol on a matchbook one night at a bar 3) a bladder infection. Holly follows him down the stairs, looking dogged but pleased.

"Where you taking us Sol?"

"To the movies."

Atrial valve retractor

I see the smoke. I feel the impact of concrete, beneath my feet, before the gun is cocked. I know a thousand ways to fall. But no one told me that sometimes you land on your feet so hard the soles get cut. No one told me about losing.

The storage of the information, the process we call "memory", is a type of synapstatic function.

A curious thing happens when we get back from the movies.

A large rectangular-shaped object has been Fedexed from Germany. My name, in Eve's tall cocky handwriting, is scrawled across it. I imagine Eve shaking out Hans' pants for the money to mail it while he is in the shower.

"Open it," my mother says plainly, leaning it against the corridor wall. I shake my head before walking into the living room, leaving Holly poking at the edges and mom fitting her feet into her slippers and shrugging.

"Giselle got a painting in the mail and she won't open it," Holly reports.

Sol nods, twirling his fingers through one of my dreads, waiting for me to agree. Holly tears the paper off expectantly, like a kid at Christmas. Holly doesn't really like art, she was expecting a stereo.

"Oh," she says when she sees it, stepping back. I pick up a note that has fallen out of the wrapping and tuck it in my pocket. Only now do I get my first glimpse of what is to become a permanent objet d'art in our household.

First of all, it is abstract, a style I had never seen Eve experiment with. But then what did I know? Most of her paintings, except for the ones on display, were facing her studio wall. She could have been a Klee protege for all I knew; I only saw the commercial stuff.

In the middle of the canvas, there is a black hole. Coming out of the hole, are three Hydra-like human heads. The expressions of the faces are vague, but

agonized. The background is green and there is one vaguely feminine body connected to the black circle in the middle. One body for three heads. The first head, on the left, is in profile, the middle one looks straight ahead and the one on the right looks backwards. Sol and Holly don't say anything for awhile, waiting maybe, for mom, the art expert, to put her glasses on and shuffle into the living room which, finally, she does.

She examines it from all angles. "What a beautiful gift." She swings it up in her arms and holds it to naked white wall. The painting gives the room a distinctly creepy feel. Creepy, I think, oh Eve, creepy in Berlin, I touch the note in my pocket.

"Wow, your friend made that?" Sol asks, holding it up on the wall so my mom can see how it looks.

"Yup." (I haven't told Sol the Eve saga yet.)

"I don't get it." Holly wrinkles up her nose crosses her eyes and falls forward running out of the room. I'm with Holly. I don't get it either. I can't look at it any more either, the presence of those three beings in our living room seems to be depleting the air.

"Sol, would you like a glass of wine?"

"Sure." He nods and puts the painting down against the wall. Mother stays in the room and continues to examine it, kneeling down to touch the dried brush strokes.

"You didn't tell me Eve was a painter" Sol says, as Holly places three wine glasses on the counter. "Oh yeah and I am a ballerina!" Holly twirls on her toes with a bottle of white wine in her hands. I'm grateful for Holly's silliness tonight, for how comfortable she feels with Sol. I'm grateful for Sol, too, for his hands that are on me all night, in my lap at dinner, on my neck throughout the movie. For his steady black eyes that allow me to swing from mood to mood without

explanation. It will make it easier to sit with him tonight and explain Eve, explain All About Eve, once I have plied him with sex and wine. When Holly is at his side, I slip away. Eve's note is burning a hole in my pocket.

In the washroom, after pulling closed the worn lock on the door, I dig out the note and smooth it onto the mirror. Again, that bold, imposing handwriting:

-How do you like it? Which one is you?

Then the next line, Eve's second masterpiece of the evening, coming all the way from Germany to tear another strip out of my heart:

I am shaking in my fuck-me pumps,

Come save me, Soon.

If, for example, you fear that your knowledge of art history is slipping away, don't be afraid to apply for a job at a museum or art gallery.

I have an appointment with my principal, Mr. Fordham, a tiny man, who makes me think of nicotine stains. He gets annoyed with us for our slow responses in Church, he spends at least an hour a week bawling us out for not saying "Lamb of God, have Mercy on us," quickly enough.

He also has rotten teeth and he meets with every single one of us eighters to talk about our "High School Career", whether we are taking the right classes, etc. etc. It's pretty much an excuse for him to talk about God with us, to ensure that we will be good little Christian representatives at St. Joseph's high next year. Besides getting suspended, I have a pretty average record, I'm no nerd, like Giselle, but I do alright. But Fordham has it in for me, for some reason.

"Hello Holly, well that's nice of you to wear your uniform, seeing as you're missing the last two weeks of school." *Seeing as you smell like a fucking ape you*

toothless bastard, I think, bowing my head down and trying to put an appropriate expression on my face.

"Yessir." I think of the word scapegoat, how no one from the inner-city school got suspended and how I will be starting fresh next year. No fighting, no fucking around, even if it means being the most stellar nerd for most of next year.

"Well, lucky for you Holly, I think you've been punished sufficiently for that *incident*," he says, giving me a sick smile.

"Well, I'm glad about that sir, really, I'm sorry about everything that happened and I know that..."

He closes my folder and opens his shit-eating grin even wider, seeming to enjoy the sight of me squirming. "Well, you're a smart girl Holly, some would go as far to say a little too smart to be caught brawling in the parking lot." He seems eager to dismiss the subject so I return his wide fake smile.

"I promise I'll be fine in high school sir." I say, standing up and shuffling towards the door. "I mean, I wasn't the only one involved and..."

"Not so fast Holly, you see, there are some things I think we still need to discuss." He pats my vacated chair.

"Oh?"

"Well, to be honest, I'm a bit worried about your soul."

"My *soul* sir?"

"Yes, your soul. Be seated Holly, it's not as if you're missing class or anything like that." The nicotine smell coming from his mouth seems to get stronger, and, as if on cue, he lights a cigarette. I glance at the 'No Smoking' logo on his office door and at the small, yellowed crucifix next to it.

"As you know, I'm the principal of this school and I take a special pleasure in watching you kids grow and learn." *I'll bet you do, you perv,...* "And I've been

watching you, Holly, for these past two years and I've really noticed something special about you."

"What's that sir?" I have a feeling he hasn't noticed any of my wonderful hidden talents.

"Well, you're a sharp girl, as I mentioned, and you are very active in extra-curricular activities and maybe this is why you think you're *better* than everyone else."

I picture Mr. Fordham reduced to a waxy melting, spliced Star fruit, the kind you get in Chinatown. I imagine destroying his saccharine smile and the gush of greenish-yellow fluid at my heel.

"What are you talking about, sir?"

"I'm talking about exactly this, Holly, the tone of your voice right now, the way you are looking at me. You have, what is called an *attitude* problem and I feel that it is my responsibility to let you know that in the real world, in high school, no one likes a show-off."

I sit up straight. My hands, which are crossed in my lap, are drenched with sweat. I search my mind for things Fordham might have seen to come to this conclusion and, coming up with nothing, I look at him straight in the eye.

"Can you just tell me what this is about Mr. Fordham? Because I really don't..."

"*This*, is what I'm talking about, your disrespectful attitude."

We sit in silence for an uncomfortable stretch, I give up on the idea of trying to defend myself or speaking at all, realizing anything I say will be twisted into an example of my *problem*.

I focus on the half-inch ash of his cigarette and decide against telling him it's about to topple on his vomit-coloured tie.

"What is it about you Holly that makes you think you're so special? I mean..." he pauses and flips through my folder.

I get a queasy feeling in the pit of my gut, thinking that this folder will follow me for the rest of my life, that this man, this weasly little bible-thumper man, can write things in my folder that will affect me and my High School Career, for the rest of my life. But the not-snark, as Giselle calls it, the not-snark says: Suck it up Hol, Suck it up, don't say anything, don't ruin this with your big fat mouth, please Hol, and I wrestle down the part of me that wants to tell him to fuck off into a half-nelson.

"Ah! O.K. I see your father died when you were quite young. That you needed some special attention when you were younger. Do you think that your deserve to be treated differently because of these things Holly?"

I say nothing.

"Can you hear me dear?"

"No sir, yes sir, I hear you."

"So why, why, Holly, do I see you rolling your eyes during closing Prayers? Why do you think you may waltz in a good five minutes after the rest of us have filed into class and are ready for morning prayers? Do you think your father, up in heaven, wants to see his little girl disrespecting God, the Holy Father and Jesus Christ?"

"No sir."

"Do you know what happens to people that think they are special, Holly?"

"No, sir."

"They die in car crashes, in drug overdoses, you see, they never learn that they mean nothing at all. They think too much of themselves of their worldly needs and they don't think enough about God."

The ashen colour of his skeletal face is slightly pink and is beginning to frighten me. I'm afraid he might have a heart attack.

"You may go now, Holly, you're a good girl. I see that, so I'm only putting you on probation for *half* of grade nine."

"Excuse me?"

"Well, let's be honest, do you think I'd let you start Your High School Career, without letting the teachers know about your special needs?"

"I guess not."

"Fine," he says, rolling his office chair behind his desk efficiently, switching into another person entirely. He butts out the filter of his cigarette that's been smoldering in his shaky grip for the past couple of minutes and dashes his initials off on the transcript in my folder.

"You may go now Holly, I have other students to see."

I open the door a crack, trying, with all my energy, not to let lose the scratching wave of tears at the back of my throat.

"How is your sister?"

"Fine. Terrific."

"Tell her I say hello, is she getting married soon? I've seen her with, what's his name, Abraham?"

"Solomon."

"Of course, Solomon, that wonderful Old Testament name... Anyway, good-bye Holly."

My world moves in slow motion as I try to balance myself against the cool concrete walls of the corridor. I stay there for awhile, pressing my hot cheek against the cold texture.

Mixed pain. Some conditions cause both visceral and somatic pain.

"Tell me about Eve," he says, pulling the sheet across his legs, spilling wine on it and looking both nervous and relaxed. In his basement room, with the ceiling that looks like a pool table, there seems to be time enough for almost everything.

"What's to tell? Nothing much, girl meets girl, girl falls for girl, girl leaves for Germany, never to be heard from again...until today."

"Tell me," he says, his eyes taking on a darker than black hue, as he juts his sharp nose and chin into the air proudly, insistently.

Approximately 40% of the body is skeletal muscle and almost another 10% is smooth cardiac muscle.

I make my way down the calico-coloured floors of the school, looking in every now and then at everyone inside their classrooms. I hear the gummed sound of running shoes coming towards me and duck instinctively. It's Jen. She wraps her arm around my shoulders and gives me a friendly head-lock.

"So, how'd it go?" Her face is close to mine and, I think, for a second, how pretty she is even with two crazy ponytails coming out the top of her head like geraniums and blue sparkles all over her face. *Accessorized*, Jen likes to call it.

"Holy shit Hol, your nose is really fucked up."

"I know."

"It's okay, actually, it adds character to your face." I know that Jen doesn't really know what that means, that she read or heard it somewhere, that she's trying to be nice about the big bump on it and the yellow bruises on my face.

"Thanks, but I got bigger problems right now. I'm on *probation* next year."

"What? That crazy fuck, Fordham? Look, don't worry about it, he gave me the same 'you're going to burn in hell' lecture. Once we get out of this shit hole, it's all new."

"Right." That wave of scratching pain-tears comes back into my throat and my mouth and it's all I can do not to cry.

"You OK?"

"Yeah, fine." I say, struggling out of her hold.

"Listen," she snaps a yellow, fluorescent wad of bubble gum in my ear. The smell of piña-colada washes over us. "I got some *excellent news*."

"You lost your virginity."

"Nope."

"You....bought a new shade of nail polish."

"Shut up, no," Jen's got that mad glee look in her eyes.

"Listen chickie, guess who Cavalieri said is starting for the final game of the season."

"Me?"

"No, Magic fucking Johnson, yeah you, and me, your left hand man, Woman!"

She gives me a big crazy smile and we start high-fiving and jumping up and down, until we get too loud and someone comes out of the nearest classroom.

"You ladies have to be somewhere?"

It's Mr. Cavalieri smiling a little bit, looking pleased with himself. The shiny open pores on his nose suddenly look great. I want to kiss his pale mouth hiding underneath his little wormy mustache. He leans against the doorway casually as Jen and I pounce on him.

"Is it true, sir? You're going to let me play?"

He clears his throat, almost shyly. "Jennifer seems to think we need you."
Jen pinches me in the ass, hard.

"Ow!" I slap her hand away and she goes skipping away down the hall singing 'We Are the Champions', punching her fists into the air.

"But...um sir, have you cleared this with Mr. Fordham?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean," I look at the other end of the hall, at his office door, afraid that by just talking about him he'll appear, "I mean he seems pretty intense about not letting me play, and ah, well, my suspension from the team, from school..."
Cavalieri shrugs.

"Don't worry, I'll talk to him, you just make it to practice and keep doing your homework. Focus on your game." He leans back on his heels, looks into his empty classroom and then looks back at me, real closely, trying to read my face.

"Hey," He sticks his hand in my hair awkwardly, like a hair dresser, trying to arrange the short little tufts in front, into some kind of order and for the second time today, someone's touch makes me want to bawl.

"You O.K. Holly? Something upset you? He's looking at my nose. I get the feeling like I got when my nose was broken, the snotty, teary smell of pain but I choke it back, though he's seen the water in my eyes and he's got one hand on my shoulder.

"I'm just fine sir, thank you," I whisper, walking away from him backwards, giving him a silly little smile as he waves at me like a sad clown and goes back inside his empty classroom.

Ear knife

When I first saw Eve sitting on a plastic chair in the community center, chainsmoking and trying to hide the slash marks on her wrists, having a little love left over for either of us was the furthest thing from my mind.

When we went around the circle, telling each other our sob stories, something about the way Eve took the question so seriously made me listen to her.

She talked about her family and how she had rushed into her marriage with a painter, like herself. She described how she realized the act of daily vomiting had become a form of release, like crying. "The worst thing out of all of this," she said, to our breathless and skeletal audience, "is that I can't even cry any more."

I didn't hear what the counselor said nor what the rest of the girls said. I was too busy memorizing the look in Eve's eyes, hoping that I could recreate the shape of her arms, the way she glanced at me, later on, privately. After the meeting I went up to her and introduced myself, again. I asked if we could go for coffee or a movie sometime. Her steady, intense, vaguely East Indian eyes assessed me patiently as I babbled about how much I liked art. She looked me up and down and I saw how she was about five years older than me and small and compact. Her large brown eyes gulped me down without missing a beat, her crooked but sexy nicotine-stained teeth smile shot out as both a welcome and a warning to me.

Only later would I learn how out of character her acceptance was, how unfriendly a person she was, generally, and about how she made enemies quicker than friends. Only later would I learn the luxury of having her thick noxious paint spread over my body and the pain of scrubbing it off. Only later would I learn her monologue at the meeting was bullshit. Only later would I learn the patterns of her wordless torture and how to inflict it on other lovers. Because my first girlfriend taught me how to love and hate in equal amounts, taught me to drink and laugh and push my fingers down my throat.

She taught me other things, more practical in nature, how to paint the firm lines of a naked model, the rules of perspective, how to shoplift, eighty different ways to placate your husband, eighty ways to skip rent and move out at night. And all of what she taught me was done as her dark, defensive eyes had promised, stoically, tearlessly.

Demonstrating your resolve to remain a well-rounded individual is a reassuring signal to yourself that the intensity of medical education cannot rob you of your diveristy.

I sit on Giselle's bed while she tries to study, her head propped between two large books on her desk. As she reads stuff, she draws a picture of a skeleton, absently, then scrolls in the muscles alongside the bones and then, using her ruler, she makes lines coming out of different parts and writes down the names of the parts. She draws a heart from memory and labels it quickly, *left ventricle, right ventricle, aortic cavity....*the whole thing seems to be a waste of time; she's known the names of everything since she was seven but she seems to do it almost mindlessly, like the way some people doodle.

She's in a mood, all quiet and inside herself, but I need to talk to her, so I lie on her bed, sniffing her pillows. When she starts to shade in one area of the heart I lean over and pull on her sleeve to get her attention.

"What are you studying for?"

"Nothing really, just reading, What's up with you?"

So I tell her, first, the good news, about the game, about Jen and Mr. Cavalieri, then about Fordham, his tie, his smoking. The words come out quicker and quicker till I get to the part where he tells me that I think I'm better than everyone else and my *soul* and drug overdoses and I get so confused about all of it

I finally, finally cry. Big sloppy baby sobs. Snot bubbles drooping out of my nose. But it's OK with Giselle, I don't feel shy or stupid. But I surprise myself, getting a little hysterical, gasping at air when she sits next to me on the bed and pulls my face to her bony shoulder. I bury my eyes in her long hair.

"Hey, hey! It's alright Holly, shhhh...what an asshole."

"Ow."

"What is it?"

"My nose hurts Giselle."

"I'm sorry honey, don't cry, please."

"Do you think I think I'm better than everyone else?" I spit out.

"I don't know. Do you?" She peers into my eyes sharply, as if she could see the answer right there. I shake my head as she smooths back my hair. She holds my head in her hands watching the tears stream down with a serious look on her face.

"I know that you *are* better, at a lot of things, than most people. I know that you're loud and cocky and sometimes a little arrogant, but that's a good thing. And besides being a natural athlete, you're a natural leader but I don't think you act superior. People don't follow leaders who act like they're better than everyone else. Do they?"

"I don't know, I guess not."

"No they don't, I'm telling you they don't. They follow people who are strong and who make others feel the same way. Holly, look at me, that's why Mr.Cavelieri asked you to play next week, that's why you're the captain of the basketball team, and the volleyball team and the track team... That's why you took the rap for the fight, because you *were* responsible for what happened, because people watch you and take cues from you Holly and sometimes it sucks because if *you* make a mistake then everybody makes a mistake and if something goes wrong it's your fault. It falls on your shoulders. Like a bad play, you know, timing,

sports has a lot to do with timing right?"

"Yeh, yeh, yeeess.." I blubber as Giselle puts a kleenex up to my nose.

"Blow slowly."

"Ow." A little blood comes out when I blow into the tissue. Giselle inspects the goop in my kleenex and, without missing a beat, goes on.

"And who gets it for a bad play? Who? The bench warmers?" She shakes me a little, prompting my mumbling answer.

"No."

"The leg warmers?" She's on a roll now, I giggle.

"No, *you* do. But you love that. Don't you? Because, most of the time, you can handle the responsibility. Here, take another kleenex, please, you're causing a flood, listen to me, listen...if your timing is good you pass the ball to Jen, right? She knows what to do, she can tell you want to steal into the key, make a lay up, or shoot a hoopie, is that right?"

I start laughing, sputtering liquid out from just about every orifice in my face. Hoopie.

"OK sorry, I don't know all the technical terminology. My point is, I'm trying to draw an analogy here, whether you get the shot or Jen gets the shot, doesn't matter, what I'm saying is that it's not just about how you play Holly, it's about how you make everyone else play too. It's about team work. That's why they need you. And leaders make mistakes sometimes but it doesn't mean that they're not good leaders or that they lead because they think they're hot shit. Right? Am I right?" She rocks me in her arms.

"And sometimes things go wrong, the timing goes wrong, you miss the shot, you get pounded in the parking lot, whatever, it's hard to lead sometimes, it's not all about glory and good timing...Stop it now Holly, don't ruin your beautiful eyes crying, please, you're breaking my heart. Look at me." I do.

"You know, that principal of ours is one big asshole for making you cry so much. Goddamn Christian spirit, what's so Christian about making little girls cry? That takes a big, big man... Are you going to tell mom?"

"I'm telling you."

"I know, but I just don't think this is right, this jerk is playing with young minds, if he did this to someone as strong as you Holly, imagine, imagine what he can do to other kids..."

"You think I should tell mom?"

"Damn straight you should. Or I will, if you want. He's got no right. All that shit he said about Dad, about Sol...I'll bet you he hates Jews too...What *exactly* did he say about..."

"I can't remember!" I wail. "Don't tell her, please, I don't want to upset her."

"Holly...*nothing* he said was true. Do you understand me?"

I nod at Giselle and curl into a tiny ball on her bed, blowing my nose into my t-shirt.

"Ow, Gizzy, my nose hurts, my head hurts."

"I know, I'm sorry, here, take one of these." She grabs a bottle of pills from her dresser and gets a glass of water from the bathroom.

"Here, these will make you feel better." I try to control my breathing and let Giselle wipe the blood and snot from my nose and feed me pills. I feel the ache swimming in my head subside and sleep coming on.

Giselle peels off my runners and puts a blanket over me as I stick a twirled piece of kleenex up my nostril. She sits back at her desk and picks up her pencil, returning to her work. I hear the words she wants me to both hear and not hear as she whispers. The words fall slowly, like real prayers.

"You know this is actually a good thing that happened because people are

going to try, your whole life, to put you in your place. This is only the beginning. It's like they see something strong and good and healthy and they want to crush it and your whole life they're going to love you for it and hate you for it because they don't have *it* and they don't want anyone else to have *it*, especially a girl. But I'm telling you Holly it's the greatest gift god, or anybody, gave you, this thing this man hates so much in you. It's better than your speed, your grace and your body. And it's going to last, hopefully, a lot longer than the rest of that stuff. And I'm so sorry that it's already happening to you, but believe me, you can do *anything* with this gift. Please don't give it up, for anyone, because, and I know this, I know this better than I know myself, they're going to try to take it away and you're going to spend your whole life trying to find it again, and Holly? It won't be as honest and pure, this blind beautiful faith in yourself, trust me, so do everything you can to preserve it Holly, please keep it always, safe, tucked away inside. OK?"

Replacement of sutures with adhesive strips avoids tension.

Eve and I spent about six months in each others pockets. We went to galleries, crashed art openings, she in her paint-splattered army boots, smoking long stinky cigars, me with my plaited hair, dressed as a femme - a flowery skirt and a tailored shirt. Me, bringing us glassfuls of cheap white wine, flirting with her art friends all the while keeping a close eye on my Eve who had a tendency to sulk when I flirted. Like Sol, Eve had the gift of drawing me in with her brooding.

We went to 'films', for Eve, despite her lack of money, went to films, art films, foreign films, epic films but *films* - not movies. We drank pots of coffee and talked about men. In the middle of the afternoon, we ingested endless bottles of the Argentinean Merlot Eve favoured, paid for, like her cigarettes and cigars, with my overdrawn credit card. We went to bars and led men on, letting them buy us drinks till we were sufficiently drunk and then left, arm and arm, waiting until we were out on the street to whoop it up and break into a run

Once, on a rare occasion when she had sold a painting of Charlie Parker to a successful jazz cafe, we went to Holt Renfrew and purchased a riding outfit for Eve.

"Do you ride?" I asked, as she ripped off her t-shirt and jeans and felt the sales lady's eyes burn a hole through the other side of the change room.

"No!" She laughed at my question condescendingly.

"Then why? Shouldn't you keep it for rent?"

"Don't you think I'm sexy?" I did. The lines of the tight brown stirrup pants and the cut of the conservative jacket flattered Eve's narrow waist. Although she dressed and acted like a punk Eve *was* an aesthete and had an excellent sense of style; I should know, she spent months dressing me up. I had never wanted money for myself but suddenly I felt awful that I couldn't yet pay for the kind of clothes

and things she needed. Before I could tell her how great she looked and how I was going to be a doctor and that, one day, I would be able to pay for whatever she wanted, she burst out of the change room and demanded a whip. Needless to say the saleslady, a white haired matronly woman who looked like she still took high tea, was less than helpful.

"The mannequin has a whip!" Eve yelled, by way of being reasonable.

"The mannequin is for *display purposes* only dear." Ms. Priss definitely had her finger on the security button by this time.

"How much?!" Eve yelled slapping the stitch of leather next to a display of orange suede shoes.

Then a miraculous thing happened, as it often did when I was in Eve's company, the saleslady conceded to Eve's whim.

"Tell you what dear, that whip is complimentary, consider it a gift with your purchase. Now, will that be charge, cash or cheque?"

"Cheque," she said blinking her eyes only once to register her surprise and producing her cheque book from her wrinkled and painfully old jean jacket. I picked up her discarded clothes from the floor of the change room and, half out of curiosity and half in order to avoid the saleslady's gaze, watched Eve write out a large cheque in her tall, shaky, proud handwriting,. But I had nothing to worry about, the saleslady was classy, she wanted no trouble, only another satisfied Holt Renfrew customer. Despite Eve's performance she treated us respectfully and I liked that and, although Eve acted like it didn't mean anything, I knew she did too.

"Will you be wearing that home? A bag for your clothes?"

"Yes, thank you." Eve tossed her head back, an old nervous habit of hers from when she used to have long hair. She pointed her small arched nose into the air and, when the cheque cleared, we left smiling and looking at clothes on racks as if we were rich girls.

Maybe it was the saleslady who gave me the confidence to do what I did later, back at Eve's, with the door bolted, as the crack of her brand new whip sounded off her paintings.

Maybe it was the Merlot we drank that night, the three bottles of it, the warm Argentine sun running through my veins, giving me the strength. Maybe it was simply that Eve did look fantastic, regal, commanding, in those clothes. Maybe it was Eve's Shepards, 'Vengeance' and 'Irony', who bounded around us eagerly as we ran and tripped through the studio.

Maybe all first times are laced with that same tenacious anxiety, drunkenness and longing. Whatever it was, I wanted to be sure she wasn't just part of some strange fantasy I was having, of being happy. I wanted to clear it, in my own mind, I wanted proof that I was alive and with her.

After playing with the whip for awhile she sat on the couch and sipped her wine. The dogs, exhausted finally, flopped down on the chair across from us and eyed us warily. I sat next to her and put my hand on the sleek taut material on her knee. She lay back as I pulled my hand up her thigh and let it rest casually between her legs, though I didn't feel casual at all. She angled her glowing face towards mine for a kiss that would last ten minutes, or six months, depending on how you looked at it. Before long, the stirrups, my jeans and all our clothes were lying in a pile on the floor. Something hot and troubled, like bees, beat itself on the walls of my vagina as she took a long hungry sip of it, pushing her tongue up into me as no man ever had. I couldn't get enough of her heat, her juices, her smell and it wasn't until the night sky had shifted from black to a dark blue that we fell asleep, accidentally, with our fingers and legs tangled against her studio morning sky.

Biological transport Mechanisms: Prereq. consent of instructor; familiarity with membrane biochemistry strongly recommended. A survey of transmembrane

and intracellular transports mechanisms and their regulation. Relationships of transport physiology, metabolism, and energetics.

I dream of racing the way some people dream of showing up to school in their naked. A week or so before a race, I'll wake with the sheets soaked with sweat and knotted around my knees, Mom clucking her tongue as she tries to untangle me.

The actual content of the dream varies; sometimes I'm on the inside track and it never gets longer; no matter how hard or fast I run, the distance between me and the other runners increases with each stride. Or, I'm on the outside track, ahead of the other runners, believing in my false lead till the gun cracks and I fail to move quickly enough, my ankles buckling immediately, my legs in front of me bruised and scratched collapsing into the other runner's lane. Once, I dreamt a bird shat on me right as the starter said "One....Two!" That time I woke up laughing.

I qualified for my first race around the time Giselle came home from the hospital. She came to the race, with Mom, wrapped in a plaid blanket. Because she was so skinny, Giselle looked like all the twelve-year olds around her, but somehow like an old woman too. She wore a funny green tennis visor with a pair of big Jackie-O sunglasses (none of her old clothes fit her anymore so she was wearing my old stuff). Mom stacked the three to eight shopping bags and knapsacks, which she always carries with her, around them like a fortress. I was both a little embarrassed and proud. But I was too nervous that day to really care about how crazy Giselle and Mom looked, even with Bobbie Carpi, a pimply, stocky shot-putter, making stupid comments about how "hot" my sister was, even if she was too skinny.

I was running in a four hundred race and placed second, behind Lucy of course. Later, Mr. Cavalieri and I would agree that I was no sprinter, that it took

me awhile to warm up. My *forte*, as he put it, was endurance, not sudden speed. But I'd had the best time at our school for one lap around the track and so it was me racing that day for St. Felix. When the blank went off in the starter's gun I had a perfect lead. I didn't jump the line, I didn't collapse into the adjacent lane, I didn't make any of the mistakes I had dreamt of. Instead, my back leg shot out from under me and propelled me into a series of perfect long strides and I passed five girls in the first 100 meters. I then glided in behind a dark pony tail, just as Mr. Cavalieri had told me to, and I held tight until the last 100 meter stretch. In the last 30 meters, I passed the dark pony-tailed girl and saw Lucy's back. The same muscled back I've been chasing ever since that first race.

But what I remember about that first time is not Lucy beating me. I only remember falling in love with that feeling, the way you're supposed to fall in love with a boy or a poem or a dog or a movie or a life because maybe love is knowing that there's hope for that feeling, that you're going to have it, you're going to get to it inside you, again and again. Or maybe I fell in love with the actual rhythm, the ability to control my body. At any rate, I realized, as I was shaking Lucy's wet hand and blowing the sweat off my own nose, that it was the only thing I was good at, this concentration, my need to push my body to its limit.

Coincidentally, it was also the first day I saw my father's ghost, or experienced my first 'hallucination' as Giselle and Mom like to put it. Because, as I was running that last stretch, something distracted me from the finish line: my father, a little older than he was when he died, wearing shorts and flip-flops and a backwards baseball hat as he cupped his hands around his mouth and yelled "Go! Go!"

I saw him three times that day. The second time I spied him, as I approached the stand where Giselle and Mom were, he was standing behind them eating an ice cream sandwich, looking as if he were eavesdropping on their

conversation (which he was). Of course he disappeared by the time I got to Mom and Giselle.

The last time I saw him that day, we spoke. It would be the first and last time we would talk face to face for a long while. I was in the locker room packing my gym bag when he poked my arm in the annoying way he did when he was alive.

"Hey."

"Hi Daddy."

"Why's your sister wearing that goofy sun-visor? Why's she so small? I thought she was you at first."

"She's sick Daddy."

"So?"

"Sick, like, you know, mentally," I twirled my finger around my head, thinking maybe ghosts couldn't hear so well, that they needed sign language.

"Oh." He looked really sad and confused and I wondered if I should explain the last seven years of our lives, and I wondered, if he was dead, when did he get a beer gut?

"Great race Holly."

"Thanks Dad."

"No I mean really, did you hear me shouting?"

"I did."

He didn't hug me or touch me, which kind of surprised me; he was an affectionate man, after all, that much I remembered. He just shuffled away, his flip-flops clapping against the soles of his feet slowly as he righted his baseball cap. It makes sense to me now that he didn't touch me, because I know how difficult it was for him to even come and talk to me that day. Maybe he thought he scared me, maybe he thought he'd make his other daughter mentally sick too if he

kept visiting me like that and having little heart-to-hearts. Maybe he thought his family had enough problems without him wandering around in summer clothes and giving out hugs. I dunno.

I never questioned my father's appearance that day in the girl's locker room at the track, and I never questioned his subsequent cameos in my life. I can't remember reacting at all - I think I may have shrugged, still high on the adrenaline from the race, and stuffed my hooded sweater into my bag and ran out to the parking lot where my mother and sister were waiting for me. But I never once looked around for the plump, sun-tanned ghost.

Bone Punch Forcep

A lover I had - one plucked out of the night sometime in the months after Eve - a tall, thin, wisp of a man with a large cock and squinty eyes, told me relationships had shelf lives and when they expired, that was it. I tried to imagine what Eve and I'd had as if it were a box of Cheerios, bought on sale and left, forgotten. No milk today! Can't have Cheerios! Or perhaps we were oatmeal, but oatmeal never expired. Anyway, I tried to understand what he had said and apply it. Eve thought our relationship had expired, she must have, having left me at a Zinc bar downtown to finish both of our vodka martinis.

I thought about Eve, as this nervous fellow positioned me against the metal headboard of his bed, before sex, and, in my mind, I was transported back to a cloudy day in November. It was a day like any other, the day She Had Decided To Go Back To Her Husband.

She seemed tired and impatient that day, as she was much of the time, and she was not in the mood for my hysterics and, though she was kind, as kind as Eve could be, she wouldn't even stand there and finish her drink with me. She wanted

to go home and finish a painting, one of Al Pacino in the 'The GodFather'. *Respect*, that's what it was called. I didn't really know what to say. I was crushed obviously, but I wanted her company for awhile longer, realizing her restlessness had never, until now, been to my disadvantage. I needed to challenge her and I did so with an age-old argument. I replayed our conversation as the thin boy grunted and bore into me with his sizable member, which hurt.

"Why do you always paint men?"

She glowered.

"I can't paint women. You know that."

"Have you ever tried?"

"You know that picture you think is of Bruce Lee in the hallway?"

"Yeah."

"That's me."

"No kidding."

"Yeah, listen, drop by tomorrow. I have some pot."

"I can't there's a meeting." She rolled her eyes.

Eve had long since stopped going to meetings. Every once in awhile, in a mad dash to 'get her life together' she stopped by at a twelve-step group, the psychiatric unit and any other sort of problem group. Soon though, the people and the bonds of the group faded for her; it was more of a social event for Eve and, although she never, to my knowledge, had done heroin, she *was* bulimic, especially on bad days when her art, her husband and I, demanded too much from her.

She gathered up her bag then and hugged me quickly. I grabbed the back of her head and started crying into her neck.

"I never met anyone like you," I blubbered, as men in suits brushed up against me.

"Nor I you." In a rush of affection, she had smoothed back the hair on my forehead and looked at me, with her nose, which I loved, pushed onto mine.

"Why are you doing this?" I whispered.

"It's best," she mouthed quietly in my ear, before slipping into the wall of grey suits that had gathered around the bar for Happy Hour.

By the time I finished both our drinks I was weeping, drunk, afternoon-sickly-hard-alcohol-drunk. Feeling rotten and too free.

"I've never done that to a woman," the man with squinty eyes and a large penis said afterwards, referring to my tears, which were for Eve and for the burning inside me. He was all serious, his penis shrinking on my hip bone. *I've never done that to a woman...I've never done that...* He seemed surprised by the lack of violence, between our bodies and, for this, he held me to his chest. *I've never done....* And Eve, I wish you were there, because I thought No, You Never Did.

First Rib shear

Mom and Giselle's doctor arranged for her to go the best rehab clinic in the city straight-away, even though there was a mile-long waiting list. I'm not sure if Mom used Dad's title as a doctor to pull some strings, or if Giselle was so sick she needed immediate attention. Whatever the case, Giselle went there after her fifth or sixth 'episode' at school. No one's ever very clear about what these 'episodes' involved. I assume Giselle either passed out or lost it completely and started chucking food at her fellow residents one day in anatomy class. Anyway, school had had enough of her and she, it seems, had had enough too. I don't mean she was cooperative, because she wasn't.

When we hauled her into the clinic and watched in horror as the plastic medical band hung off her tiny wrist, she plucked at her hair absently and complained that she had a micro-biology test the next day. For someone who was apparently not eating enough, she was really hyper. She hopped on one foot as the nurse asked her questions and even had the gall to put me in a head-lock, which, while resisting the temptation to pinch what was left of the flesh on her bones, I wriggled out of. She was singing like a mad woman when an attendant wheeled her away. "So long you morons!" she screamed down the hall, mortifying Mom.

"She doesn't mean us Mom, or anybody, she's just quoting a book." I realized she was either hyped on caffeine pills or something stronger that circulated among Med students who were desperate to do well in their classes, party all night, and stay thin. Then Mom said a strange thing:

"I hope they fix her hair."

"Yeah, but I think that's her new hairstyle." She shivered. Giselle's hair which had always been neatly combed, long, and a gorgeous treacle-colour, had transformed into a yellow nest of long dreadlocks which were neatly tied-back with a large hair elastic and a piece of fabric. I liked Giselle's new hair, although it was a huge mane and shrunk her face making her look like a scarecrow.

"She seems high strung, Ms. Vasco. We're going to administer some sedatives."

"Fine." She told the nurse stiffly, as she gripped my hand.

Mom, I could tell, wanted to get away from the clinic as quickly as possible. She had trouble recognizing the healthy-bodied, long-haired, upstanding daughter she had dropped off at residence not ten months ago, and I felt she hated, or at very least feared, this wild, loud-mouthed, dreadlocked, sinewy creature posing as Giselle.

But I recognized her as the Giselle I had seen in moments of anger and fear, and I thought her brave, if fucked-up and ugly.

"Let's go," Mom said, her face darkening "We'll come back tomorrow to see how she is."

I held up my finger, telling her one minute, one minute, and dashed down the corridor into the room where they had wheeled Giselle.

She was propped up on the bed in a little hospital gown and the nurse searched her arm for a vein. She seemed a lot calmer and she smiled at me beautifully.

"This is my sister. She's twelve, " she told the nurse, as if I were famous and she was very proud of me. The nurse nodded at me and continued to feel around in Giselle's arm, searching for the elusive vein.

"How's Mom?" She asked suddenly, very seriously, dropping her crazy act.

"You've done a great job of flipping her out."

"Yeah..well.." She scratched her head again, dislodging some of the neatly arranged dreadlocks from her pony-tail and then looked at me guiltily. She looked over at the nurse, a black man, who still had the needle hovering above her tiny arm.

"Give me that!" And in one swift motion my sister pulled the tourniquet around her arm tighter, with her teeth, pulled the needle from his hand, and injected it into her arm like an expert junkie.

"Don't worry," she said, pulling a silencing finger up to her lips, "I won't tell anyone. Besides, I'm a doctor." She laughed quietly, lay back on her pillows and closed her eyes, behaving as if the drug had had an immediate effect on her. The nurse, who was very much annoyed, pulled the needle out of her hand and snapped the tourniquet off, and muttered something as he left the room. Giselle then opened her eyes really wide.

"Do you ever get hungry?" she asked, "Too hungry to eat?"

Blunt scissors

Eve slipped out of that bar, my life, and onto a plane to Germany with her husband and her two dogs. Perhaps knowing about her affair with me, and thinking maybe they needed a change of scenery, he whisked her off, away from me, using the lure of the European art scene as bait. For the record though, I never felt bitter towards Hans - he had his own reasons, and he probably loved her, loves her, as much as I do.

For a year and a half I threw myself at people and hustled my way into that job at the Medical clinic. But busy as I seemed to be, I never, for a second, stopped mourning her, I never stopped dreaming of Berlin, of scaling that crumbled wall to find my Eve. I learned incorrect German phrases and muttered them to lovers...*Du biss mien, ich bien dien*...I flipped through art magazines in bookstores, hoping to see that she'd had more success there, with her Americana style, than here. Throwing myself back into my studies was easy though.

Holly and mom were relieved when I started coming home more often and they seemed pleased by my job. And, although they never seemed to acknowledge the fact that I had fallen in love with a woman, they knew my good friend Eve had moved to Germany and that I missed her. But they must have known something at some level because one night after I had come home from a group meeting, which I attended more for sentimental than practical reasons, mom and Holly were in the living room waiting for me, with an agenda.

"We rented some movies," Holly said, digging her hand into a bowl full of popcorn and stuffing her mouth full. "Wanna watch?"

"Sure," I said, looking around the room.

"One of the nurses at work recommended this movie. It's a documentary. On lesbians."

"Doris?" I asked, without flinching.

"Doris, yes." My mother said, eyes downcast. Doris was a nurse my mom worked with, a friend of hers who rode a motorcycle and who had, for years, harbored a crush on my mother. One crazy night with Eve, old Doris had sidled up to me at a club, on dyke night. Eve, who would step aside for few people, looked alarmed and danced away as Doris bounced herself off me gleefully.

"Hey Doris!" I screeched, wrapping my arms around her girth "How's it going?"

"Good!" She yelled back over the music. "I saw your mom today". I nodded, and she pulled me in close to her. We had a laugh about how she was always trying to get my mom to take a spin on her motorcycle and how she always refused. We laughed about her crush on my little Eastern European mom. I suddenly felt weird about dancing so close to Doris, I scanned the dance floor for Eve, who had disappeared into the growing crowd.

"I like her, you know. I can tell she's been through a lot and she respects people like us, there's a lot of people who don't handle it professionally." Doris spun me away from her and smack into a pack of cowgirls doing the two-step. She then pulled me back into her iron grip.

"Listen Doris, my mom doesn't know." Her brows shot up. "Yeah, and I'd appreciate it if you didn't mention seeing me here."

"But your mother's one cool lady I don't see..."

"I've put her through enough right now and I'm not even, I'm not even a..."

"You're straight?"

I shrugged. *I have no idea what I am.*

"Hey," Doris pulled me into another bear hug. "It's okay, don't worry, your little secret is safe with me." As she said that, my little secret pulled us apart. Eve had somehow managed to insert herself between Doris and me, and was giving Doris the look of death. The good thing that came out of meeting Doris was that it made Eve jealous and thus doubly passionate in bed that night.

Anyway, I guess my secret wasn't so safe with Doris after all: my mother had rented a documentary on lesbians and clearly I was expected to sit and watch it with her, and my then thirteen-year old sister.

It was interesting enough. It consisted, mostly, of interviews with older women who, because of the times, had been unable to confront their sexuality and had remained in marriages.

One middle-aged, blonde woman, really struck me. She had been married for thirty years. She described an amiable divorce and the support of her three children in soft tones but then she paused before she went back to talking about her husband and her kids. Then she leaned towards the camera. "No, I can't say I had that much trouble with my family about my sexuality, there was no ugliness, I was pretty lucky with that." But something tugged at her eyes. "But my first relationship with a woman almost killed me. I had lived through a divorce and various heart breaks and I tell you, I was forty years old when I fell in love with Jane but I felt like I was fourteen. You've never had your heart broken, till you've had it broken by a woman."

Something about the way she said that, the sad smile that played at her mouth, brought Eve's salty taste to the tip of my tongue. I dipped down into my memory bank of Eve. I saw her strutting across her studio naked, carrying two cups of coffee, singing James Brown at the top of her lungs. I saw her in Holt Renfrew screaming at the saleslady, wielding her whip. I saw her painting drunk, flinging her arm out, brush in hand, spraying me and the dogs with black speckles

of 'royal teak'. I saw, then, the worst one, the one I had, until now, blocked out of my mind.

The night Eve, after too many martinis and too much wine, had innocently taken my hand at her kitchen table and sliced an 'E' and a 'G' into my palm. I was in shock but before I could scream or wince or tell her that she had gone too far she licked my blood tenderly and ran to the bathroom for gauze.

Sitting in front of the television with my sister and my mother, I opened my hand to inspect the new life-line Eve had so carelessly inscribed on me. And looking at the wound, while hearing this woman describe 'Jane', I knew at once why Eve had done this. I realized that what I had perceived as safe was dangerous; the slight curve of Eve's belly, the warmth of her nipple, the perfect rhythm of our steps on asphalt, the way our bodies fit so well in sleep, was deceptively harmonious. Even our quiet moments together would be tainted by sudden bruises, cuts, welts and scars. I saw then the true meaning of Eve's blood worn message, for the first time, in the palm of my hand. How wrong I had been to wear it as some romantic intaglio. The new significance of it glared at me, it frightened me. For if I, like Eve, had violence or words at my disposal, I would have carved the same message into her. *I can't heal you, I am you.*

(14) Clamps Aorta miniature

Giselle stayed at the eating disorder clinic for about a month before we took her home. Because the clinic was so popular, it had a high turnover rate, and because the doctors, nutritionists and nurses were impressed with her progress - she seemed eager to 'heal herself' and she gained back almost half the weight she had lost - Giselle came home.

But when she came back from her clinic it seemed the doctors had changed Giselle's 'behavioural patterns' so radically with their 'touchy-feely' approach to her, as Mom would later put it, that Giselle believed she was exempt from reality. The world of school and work was lost to Giselle for almost a year.

Also, my sister, like me, remains ten pounds underweight; she would never regain her baby fat, her 'sophomore fifteen'. Even afterwards Giselle remained skinny no matter what or how much she ate.

Although the clinic had taught her about food and nutrition and although she ate well, for awhile, she developed obsessive eating rituals. She'd cut up her food into tiny pieces and eat maddeningly slow, chewing every bite about thirty times and moving her plate around in circles to examine it from different angles. Still, these were the good days, as Mom and I eventually found out because mostly she just ate sugary things. And knowing Giselle's weakness for sweets, Mom stocked the fridge and shelves with all kinds of cookies, cake, ice cream and chocolate. Once, she sat down next to me at the table with a tub of ice cream which she scooped out with an oreo cookie and licked off.

"You shouldn't eat that shit." I told her. I was annoyed with Giselle in those days, she acted like a baby, doing anything she wanted because she was 'sick'. Her hair was getting bigger and rattier looking and she rarely got dressed in the mornings. Plus her skin was bad from so much sugar. The crazier Giselle looked, the sadder it made Mom.

"I" she said, pausing for effect and to grind the cookie with her teeth, "I can eat whatever I want. Doctor's orders." She grinned at me with black cookie stuck between her teeth. She was sure getting on my nerves. As I got up to take my plate to the sink she started scooping the ice cream out with her finger.

"Besides," she added, scratching her back with her sticky finger, "I don't eat it, *it* eats me. Want some?" She held out her spindly little finger and giggled.

Something dark and shapeless, larger than Giselle's hunger, than her sickness, and larger than my own anger, rose up in me as I slammed my plate in the sink.

I was smaller than I am now but still bigger than Giselle, yet I was still afraid of her, physically. But that fear evaporated when I realized I could run and jump and sweat and laugh longer and harder than my sister ever could. And I was sick of her craziness, the way she manipulated her sickness, the way she sat around all day on the couch, too tired from her sugar highs to do anything except watch TV, and the way she talked about going back to school.

I got a garbage bag from under the sink and started throwing all of her junk food into it. Then I walked over to her and snatched the tub of ice cream from her hand.

"Hey!" She whined, tripping out of her chair, "What the hell are you doing?"

"Until you eat and act like a normal person I am absconding with your food."

"Absconding?"

"Yes absconding."

"That's a mighty big word Holly, I didn't know they taught those kind of words in grade six."

"Fuck you."

"You can't talk to me like that." Giselle was standing up now, swaying uncertainly in her thin pajamas, shivering.

"Why? Because you're sick? Because you act like a spoiled brat? Well guess what Giselle? I'm not your fucking therapist and I'm not your doctor and I'm sick of your whining and I can talk to you however I want. I'm your sister and I know you and I don't care if they tell you that you can eat whatever you want. You can't. You want to act like a baby? Then I'll treat you like one. I'm sick of everyone

bending over backwards to please you and not even realizing that this whole thing is a crock of shit. You can do whatever you want in front of Mom or the doctors but not me. Understand?"

All of this shot out of my mouth in a sputter of tears and spit as I realized that I was standing there shaking my twenty year-old pimply sister, who looked younger than me, who, I, at twelve, could have thrown across the room like a rag.

Then Giselle crumpled down on the floor and covered her face as if I *had* thrown her. And as I looked down at my shaking hand which still held the garbage bag I saw the incriminating trail of black cookie saliva smeared up the side of my arm, where Giselle had bit me.

Crypt Hook

Sometimes hating missing someone collides with the hatred of loving someone in the first place. Sometimes love transforms into a fierce tangled mess; nerves and entrails exposed like split animal innards. And sometimes even the most loving and beloved spit through their teeth, demanding reparations for the damage rendered by love.

Sometimes one loses patience with love.

Mallet

Giselle wouldn't talk to me for a couple of weeks after I threw all her junk food out. It became buried, with silence.

But after a couple more days of moping around in her pajamas and lying on the couch staring at the TV, she started to eat breakfast, lunch and dinner with us.

She started dressing in the morning. She also drove herself to her group meetings a couple of times a week.

So Giselle started studying again too, and her acne cleared up and she somehow tamed her hair. She made plans, real plans, about going back to school and got a job lined up assisting at a clinic. Meanwhile, she started hanging out with her old friends from university. People started calling her, to invite her to parties, out for drinks, to weekend camping trips. Giselle, who dreamt of surgery and scars, Giselle, who barely choked down her dinner every night, rushing, as she was, to get out the door to a party, had reclaimed the shine in her eyes, in her skin, in her hair; my sister became beautiful again. And then my sister fell in love with a woman.

No new method and no new discovery can overcome the difficulties that attend the wound of the heart.

"This is the last thing about Eve, I swear," I whisper to Sol as the summer morning, a deep stained blue, creeps under the curtains.

"I love her, I still do."

He looks alarmed. "What would you do if she came back for you..if, she came back?"

"I don't know baby. It doesn't matter. I love you but she's one of my best friends. What can I do? It's different with women."

"Is it?" he says, before slamming the bathroom door.

After his shower he lies down next to me, sulking. I take him into my body, and when his moans roll through his small bedroom where we look at the green ceiling bordered with red, the 'billiard table sky' we call it, I lose time in his body, in his voice. After, we forget about Eve, we laugh, we imagine playing pool, on the ceiling, naked. He tells me about his dreams.

Sol's dreams are a thousand running streams that never find each other, never form a lake, or even a puddle. I know he is sometimes afraid to fall asleep, that he stays up and watches me a for a long time, until he sees the room only in black and white and then, when the morning light divides the world into more than two shades, he sleeps. He is superstitious, he thinks of himself as powerful. Take, for example, his idea of street lights going off when he walks by them. "Didja see that?" he'll say, when the dim orange light of a lamp pops off when we pass it. And I never have the heart to tell him lights flare on and off when I walk down the street too, that wild, staring animals come up to me bearing gifts of gnawed bones and other such mythic messages.

When I finally take my shower and gulp down a cup of instant that Sol calls coffee I run outside, pulling on my sunglasses through my still-wet hair. In the car, Sol slips his hand between my crossed legs. He drags on a cigarette, filling the already balloon-warm air with smoke, and adjusts the rearview mirror.

The city is still rising from a night of heat, emerging from its air-conditioned gloom. The street sweepers leave a mist of condensation that we follow.

I know inside his head there are armies, nations of construction-paper people and details, and facts. There are also nightmares where he forgets his name and huge clay turtles with perfect shiny teeth, the size and texture of flies, charge him hundreds of dollars to torture him with invisible ice drills. I know that when I sleep over, I forget my own dreams just as I know that, after the telling, he forgets his too.

He parks the car and we walk across the wide field, between the parking lot and the hospital, and enter the grim, green Geriatric Ward hallway through a side door. A fat man wearing an unbuttoned shirt and heel-worn slippers, shuffles down the corridor, and gives us a wild, delirious grin. Sol grins back. We stand outside the thick, steel institution doors of the unit while he continues his dream talking. I see Agnes through the small circular window, waiting for me. She is clutching a stiff little gold purse, with her customary suspicious frown and wild-blue eye make-up.

When he is finished talking he kisses my hand and hugs me to him. I smell his singular, neutral, dusty-boy, wood smell.

"Goodbye Gizzy, watch out for those crazy ladies." Turning on his heel, he walks down the hall, whistling quietly.

Unlike the basic science years, most students find the clinical years much more enjoyable.

I sit by the sprinkler, peeling skin off my feet before I put on my socks. Sol drives up. I scratch at my aching ribs, but it is a pleasurable sort of pain, like healing, or regret. I tie my shoes tightly. Sol starts doing jumping jacks.

"You going for a run?"

"Yup."

"Where's your sister?"

"Dunno."

He stops moving and looks down the street as if he expects Giselle to materialize from the quiet suburban lawns, his disheveled profile leans into his own long summer shadow, he looks doubtful for a second, lost.

"Do you mind if I join you?"

"You need shoes, you can't run in those." He looks down at his dusty boots.

"Wait."

I go into the house and find Dad's favorite tennis shoes buried under a heap of boots, newspapers and umbrellas. Stan Smiths.

Sol is spraying some shrieking kids with the sprinkler. I hold out the shoes. He smells like sandalwood and tears.

"No support, but it's better than nothing."

"Thanks Holly. Listen, she didn't call or anything? We were supposed to meet after work..."

I shake my head and, watching him bending over to tie his shoelaces, I want to touch his hair.

"Eve's in town, maybe they met for coffee or something." I realize suddenly that I may have given too much away. But then Giselle always pours her lover's ears full of secrets. Or does she?

"Oh." Sol frowns mildly but looks unconcerned as he stretches his legs.

He sprints out in front of me leaping over ditches, confident, in dead man's shoes. I move behind him counting the steps between us, planning on catching up but pacing myself because I want to run long, until time is measured by pavement, empty streets and identical houses, learned by rote. And I am thinking Today Is The Last Day of School and I am, as usual, not there. And I am thinking, I am sending her a secret telegraph to plug up her ears.

When we get home it's dark in the house, Sol opens all the kitchen windows and starts going through the cupboards searching for dinner.

"Hey, your Mom ever go shopping? How does clam chowder with WASA crackers sound Hol?"

"Great." He turns on the radio which is playing jazz.

"So, how you feeling these days Holly? Get into any scraps lately?" He watches my face to see if he can smile. I let him.

"Yeah, well they're used to sending us Vasco girls home. When Gizzy was seven they sent her home with a note that said Mom should comb her hair. I got sent home once for not wearing underwear." I shrug, Sol stirs the soup and the kitchen becomes filled with the sound of his light laughter. He Is A Man, I think, There is A Man, here with me. Then I feel weird about saying "underwear" out loud.

I empty a vase of foul smelling flowers into the sink. We reach for the tap at the same time, our hands collide for a moment before his fingers make a small bracelet around my wrist.

I drop the half-filled vase, which he catches, then he pours water over my head, still laughing. I turn the tap up and, with my one free hand, splash him with water. He is laughing and shrieking, letting me, but he is not releasing my hand, he is not releasing it. Then, he slips his wrist into my palm as if we are playing a private game of shadowing. The other hand flutters, like a dim, quiet, bird on my hip and scales the length of my wet shirt, uncertainly, as if it doesn't know whether to fly into me or away. He lets go so my arms can wind themselves over his shoulders where I feel how strong he is; how little it would take for me to buckle under him and open.

I realize suddenly that there is no water between us anymore just my elbows bending into his armpits like perfect bows and he, a slim, fine arrow, arching. In my throat, the dry echo of unthinking; where we have run, and who has left us behind while we were racing. And the salt that runs from our eyes is not sweat that he is lapping up with his hair but, like blood, it is me and my name that he says, over and over, that he is touching with his mouth, on my forehead and my cheek and my neck. As we disappear into each other this way, the sound of the front door closing rips us apart. And what feels like the first safety in weeks is broken by our leaping, my fleeing into the wooden chair on the other side of the kitchen and the sudden panic in his face as he leans his hips into the counter.

Giselle walks into the kitchen and tosses her school bag into the corner. This is what she sees when she turns to look at us: me, panting and soaked in the corner and Sol, gazing above her head, clumsily arranging bowls and spoons with his hands that were birds and now only guilty weapons.

"Hey beautiful." He flicks water at her and she looks straight into his eyes which are slippery coals now.

"This is cozy. Watersports?"

"Where you been?"

"Oh you know. Out and about. Actually, I went to the library to study."

"You sure?"

"Yeah, I'm sure."

"I thought we had a date."

"Sorry." Giselle's mouth twists into a wicked grimace.

"You hungry?"

"No."

She darts a look my way that is so practiced and so quiet that I turn away from her, and I concentrate, instead, on my shedding feet. There is a moment, just one, of peaceful silence, of believing that Giselle has not caught us at anything at all. But then it passes.

Giselle looks at the water on the floor and at the two of us, her face wrinkling, knowing, not guessing, but knowing.

"So where were you?"

"That's not nearly as interesting as what you guys were up to. I'm sure."

"Just tell me where you were Gizzy." His prodding, which is almost worse than his own lying out loud, makes me cold everywhere.

"Are you deaf? I told you, I was at the library."

Her smile is a cold twitch of pain and all of her anger and knowing cuts into him. I want to stand in the grey line of her fire to deflect it. So that she will know we were one together and not two, caught, for a second, in one cage. But before I can get between them I see that awful vein twitch in her head that is almost completely covered by her hair.

"What the FUCK Sol!!!"

He drops the spoon he has been clutching. His face shuts down. He walks down the hall and she follows him, still screaming. I grab her skirt to stop her raised arms that have begun to rain blows down on his back. I pull her from him because he is not protecting himself, he is not resisting but letting her, like he let me enter him in heat, he lets himself.

"Eat your fucking soup!" She screams, dragging me back to the kitchen on the frayed tail of her skirt, before hitting the pot into the sink with a wide swoop of her arm and burning us both.

Some sensory signals need to be transmitted to the central nervous system extremely rapidly otherwise the information is useless.

Bit my pretty red heart in two.

In group today, after everyone commented on how I looked like shit, we talked about fathers. *And a love of the rack and screw...* We were asked to read aloud something we had written about our fathers but I hadn't written anything. When my turn came I said, "My dad died a long time ago, I loved him very much." *You do not do, you do not do...*

Things were going the Sylvia Plath way, as Eve used to say. Walking out, I heard her voice in my head and laughed out loud: "My father had such high expectations of me, my father wanted me to be the perfect little girl, blah, blah, fucking blah. If every woman adores a fascist, it's her own fault." Even claimed Sylvia Plath was the patron saint of anorexics and daddy-complexed women everywhere but I've always sort of liked her poetry. It's not often that you read someone's words and their pain, which has been dead for decades, lives on to give you one mother of a headache.

My relationship with my father is slippery and inextricably linked to Holly.
At twenty I tried to die...At twenty I tried to die.

I was a chubby uncoordinated child who preferred reading to gymnastics but, one day, he seemed fixed on the idea that I should learn the perfect cartwheel. We were on the front lawn and I could barely hold up my weight each time I did the turn. When I was upside-down in the air, he held my legs.

"Straight!"

"Daddy!"

"Straighter!"

But they pulled me out of the sack.

The whole thing ended up in tears, my legs wouldn't stay straight and I couldn't even do a somersault. I am certain that when he realized how uncoordinated I was it was a great disappointment to him but this event was hardly scarring. In fact, I think he took me out for ice cream afterwards.

Then Holly came along. Holly, who could run before she could speak, Holly who could throw a baseball hard and fast and long; who'd learned the perfect backhand by age seven. Our father didn't have to teach her a thing about the physical world.

And they stuck me together with glue

The easiest way to put it is that my father and Holly were from the same planet. When she was a baby he had only to look into her big, blank eyes to get a squeal out of her. She could never get enough of him, lunging at his legs when he came in the door. He was the magnet she crawled to when she could not walk and, when she could, his hands were the pinnacle of comfort. In my memories, she is always stroking them, kissing them, somehow attached to them. They seemed, to my mother and I, twin beings, this man and his child.

But Holly, with all due respect, was an imbecile. And no one likes to talk about this anymore because it's some weird family taboo but, before the age of six, she had not uttered a word. She had not uttered a word, she did not respond to loud sounds and seemed unable to form relationships with anything or anyone except for caterpillars and her father. By the time they had established a major hearing problem and a slight learning disability, Holly's world consisted of her arms, her legs and Him.

When Holly was six, she was fitted with a hearing aid and I heard my father crying for the first time, through the thin walls of our suburban home. But it would be fair to say that Holly's 'disabilities' were counteracted by my growing brain.

When he came home from work, I tugged the instruments out of his pockets as he held her backwards and she rolled over his shoulders in the easy perfection of their trust. And certainly, together, we made the perfect daughter. Together, it seems, she and I could share almost any man.

It is important to appreciate the lessening of pain does not necessarily indicate that the underlying condition has been resolved.

I'm sorry Giselle, I am, because you're right, we don't need to share everything. But the next time you come leaping at me, I'll be ready. The next time you come swaying your bag of bones and burdens I go straight for the jugular. Straight to the teeth.

All patients are nervous before an operation.

"You can't wear black to your grade-eight graduation!"

"Why not? You wore black to Aunt Judy's wedding."

"That was different."

"Why?"

"I was in mourning."

"Stop moving, Holly, or I'll stick a pin in your leg."

Mother has her in a silken, rag-like dress, with a floral print. She is trying to figure out how to take the waist in so that Holly's lean torso will be vaguely visible.

"Why don't you let her wear my dress?" I frame the question in a mild, unobtrusive voice. I feel weak, I sit down to stop my sudden swooning. Holly shoots me a grateful look and tucks her head in to stop whatever impatient little simper is already at her lips.

"O.K."

Mom gets up and spits the pins out of her mouth; a gesture of letting the operation go. Holly bounds out of the room, ripping the dress off as she skips. Mother shoots me a worried look but smiles.

"She passed? She graduated?"

"Barely."

"Still."

"I know. It's good."

Our mother leans against her old blue sewing machine and crosses her arms. Holly clears her throat from the hallway.

"Do you have shoes?"

"Oh! Shoes." We hear her darting into my room. When she finally gets my shoes on, she clears her throat again. Mother cocks her brow as Holly slides into the room campily. I cat call and mother lets out a surprised laugh. The tight, long dress is cut up the length of her left leg. She kisses the air, swivels her hip and then, sucking in her cheekbones, struts up and down the hall.

"Holly you're a fox. Really, you are." I say laughing, thinking about how Agnes would react to it.

"Too much." Mother shakes her head. And as Holly plucks a carnation out of a vase and places it in her mouth, mother turns to me.

"You still see Sol?" She asks casually.

His name that has not been spoken, that we have not said in weeks. Neither of us. And now hearing it out loud, we both turn to look at the sound of his name, like a car crash between us.

Tranquilizers are rarely necessary.

I am playing pick-up with some guys, mostly older, at the school yard when Roy yells:

"Time-out. Hey Holly! Your boyfriend is here." And when I turn to see the source of their laughter, I see him, his arms stretching over the diamond-shaped spaces between the metal on the fence. And I am embarrassed for him, looking so diminished somehow by the large grey fence that separates us. I take my bandanna off my head and re-tie it as I walk towards him. I hear the tinny sound of the basketball reverberate in my head and I feel their half-cast eyes follow me to the fence. I aim my own eyes above the hill, behind him, so I do not catch a glimpse of his beauty or worry.

"Hi."

"Hi."

"There's nothing to say Sol. There's nothing."

"I know, but my eyes were hurting from not seeing your sister or you. You know, my eyes were hurting..."

"So get glasses. Jesus, you come here to tell me your eyes are hurting?"

I don't want to think about his damn eyes. I don't want to talk about them even though he is wearing the sunglasses Giselle bought for him and I couldn't see them if I wanted to. I remember him mock-complaining that they were too dark. But he was impressed by her gift, I could tell.

"How is she?"

"She's O.K. Actually, she hasn't got out of bed for a week."

"She sick?"

"Yeah, she's sick. Listen, I gotta go, we're losing." I kick at a pile of gravel, sending the small rocks flying, one of the rocks bounces off Sol's knee.

"O.K. Sorry Hol." He dismisses me. I am looking at him, open and shamed. Then he says something funny in a quiet voice, almost a whisper.

"This one time we were walking in the park and there was a plastic bag on the ground with a cherry pie in it. She scooped it up as if she just left it there and forgot it and we walked a little more and then sat down on a little hill. She ate that whole pie. Didn't say 'Gee that's weird finding a pie on the ground' or anything, just opened it up like she bought it herself, and ate the whole damn thing. No fork. No spoon, nothing. Just broke the crust with her fingers and started in. Didn't even offer me some. Not that I wanted any. Don't like sweets. And I hate cherry-flavored anything..."

She ate the whole thing, Hol. I can't forget that. It's strange the shit that makes you love people, makes you feel like you know them. It kills me. Those

little things. I think I can forget the big things, the ugly things and the beautiful things, obliterate them, maybe, but not Gizzy laughing with cherry pie-filling all over her face. Nothing touches that. Not sex. Not anything said or done or made in the world, but just the thought of her cramming her sweet face with somebody's lost pie makes me want to die Holly. Why is that? Why?"

He stares at me for a second, I am surprised by the pleading in his voice. He stuffs his hands in his pockets and chokes back a cough. As he turns and makes his way back up the hill, part of me is running around the fence clinging to his side and not walking back to the court.

And that part, which is at him and tangled and blurred and pawing at his back, is not breaking at all. My sister's heart is not breaking either, I swear it isn't, and if it is, she broke it, she broke it herself.

Surgery exposes patients to 4 main risks 1) the theater air 2) surgical instruments and materials used in operation 3) the surgical staff in the operating theater and 4) the patient himself.

Causality. The law of cause and effect. *What are the reasons? Why, I could count them on your greasy guilty fingers, my love.* But there is no order. No who or what. No direct factors leading up to the disappearance of my body. Medicine was once a clean, easy, causal science to me; examine the symptoms, locate the type of pain, perform bloodwork, analyze urine, take x-rays then add up the pain, listen to your patient, proceed with a diagnosis. This is how I came to medicine, why I preferred it over psychology. This is why I wanted to fix broken bodies, not broken minds. You can never get to a person's mind, you cannot know the different deeds and missions of happiness; you can't tell a scream of pleasure from

one of pain. And even in the body, the laws of chain reactions are misleading, this is why people always want a second opinion.

I want one, I want one now. Case in point: when I was with Eve I ate excessively; I'd spin generous forkfuls of pasta, covered with rich white cream sauce and shove them into my mouth. We'd devour an entire barbecue chicken within minutes then pry the greasy bones from the carcass and use them as tooth picks. I must have gained about ten pounds after I met Eve, I no longer cared or kept track of my body. We consumed constantly and spent our fuel on sex, painting and running through the city looking for more things, new things, all things to eat and taste, to lick off our lips. And yes I was happy then, there's no denying it, I loved my body, the sudden swell of my breast beneath my shirt, the new layer of flesh that covered my hips. We were well fed. We were rich with love and fat. I loved it, I loved her, I even grew to love the stretch marks that lined my thighs and belly. I'd trace them in the bathtub or bring Eve's fingertips up to them to feel the texture of the sudden growth, the birth of flesh she had made in me. When you are in love you let some things go. I guess I let my company for hunger go; in the face of Eve it was boring to starve and I needed that energy to keep up with her, and her dogs. When I was alone I tested my own energy by depriving myself, I needed to know how much of that energy was mine alone, but with Eve I needed food, I needed metabolic love.

There is a happiness to letting things go, to growing fat and content with your love and an equal, though misguided, pride in fasting, watching your bones appear in your torso.

And this thing with Sol, with him wanting Holly, it has become clear that there is no control and I, so sickened by this prospect, forget to eat. I lie in my room, beneath the fan, watching the sweat drip down my chest, and have no appetite for anything except the taste of betrayal, sour in my mouth. I am content

with my own thoughts, making a mental list of the ten thousand dollars worth of surgical equipment I will one day acquire, and I am reminded of causes, of effects too.

Something evil is happening in my stomach. That's the only word for it. It has turned in upon itself like an animal beaten for so many years with shoes, lead pipes, newspapers, pokers and logs.

I woke up this morning with undigested food in my mouth and called my mother.

The nature of pelvic pain caused by endometriosis is variable. Minimal endome in the cul-de-sac is generally much more painful than a huge endometriona within the ovary that is expanding freely into the abdominal cavity.

Feed your sister with a teaspoon, if you have to.

Watch her frame shudder at the sight of food and the blue veins take root in her face. See her fade. See her eyes grow darker.

Mom prepares the tray in the early morning. On it is a large plate of eggs, tomatoes, cheese and jam, and a steaming cup of coffee laced with brandy and cream.

When I take it from her hands and she says "Make sure your sister eats this. Watch her today. Please Holly. It is happening. I have to take Agnes to her assessment today." Mom's eyes are golden yellow, flecked with grey shale. And they are tired eyes too, reminding me that whatever strength she has left is not for me.

When I bring her the tray she is sitting up in bed, as if she has been up all night. I sit next to her and play with her hand as she tries to joke, saying:

"God Holly, I'm sorry. Your life is hard enough without me."

I put my hands on her shoulders and massage her. I roll her over, sit on her back, and push everything into her spine.

"So many people love you Giselle, why can't you, just a little?"

A good surgeon knows biochemical pathways and anatomical landmarks intimately.

"Intravenous! You're on intravenous?" Sol says, pinching the tube lightly. The first time someone said that, I thought it was serious. Now I blink my eyes at people and manage a sick little smile at the suggestion. I guess, like a junkie, the prospect of having something hooked up to me, to feed me, has become redundant.

Sol looks penitent, I mean to reassure him that it means nothing, that it means something but not for him. I try to whisper this but my arm doesn't move and there is a tube making speech impossible, in my mouth. He brings his face close to me, I can see the hairs in his beard growing in, the smooth white texture of his skin. His breath is warm and he looks tired. His lips feel soft on my brow.

"We're going to get through this," he says in his sighing, whispering way, like the time we hit a pheasant on the highway, and drove it to the nearest vet and Sol sighed all the way. He takes my hand gently and I fall into sleep before I can wonder at those tears, wonder at these new ones now.

The treatment for gastroparesis is gastric resection followed by radiotherapy

When school finishes there's always a year-end dance at St. Felix, and afterwards everyone goes to the clearing by the creek to drink beer with kids from high school till the sun comes up. I have no intention of going, but Jen has other plans for me. I have just taken a shower and am sitting on the porch watching the

neighbourhood kids riding their bikes up and down the street when she comes skateboarding down my block.

"Hey drop-out, howzit going?" She tips her skateboard up and shoves it under her arm.

"Hey."

"You're coming tonight right?"

"I don't think so."

"Oh I think so."

"I went to the graduation ceremony, isn't that enough?"

"Marco's going to be there."

"So?"

"So, come on Holly. I know you like him."

"So?"

"So, *so*, come on! Let's go." She looks at her watch and sighs. "Look, go tell your Mom you're going to be with me. Better yet. I'll tell her." Jen pounds up the steps to my house and yells "Mrs. Vasco!" until Mom appears at the top of the stairs.

"Oh, hi Jennifer, nice to see you."

"Mrs. Vasco it's O.K. if I steal Holly away tonight right? It's the graduation dance and all."

"Holly, why you didn't say anything?" Mom comes down the steps to give Jen a hug. Mom loves Jen, she thinks she's 'feisty'.

"Because I don't want to go."

"She does. She's lying."

"Oh." Mom looks from me to Jen, unsure of what is going on.

"What will you wear?"

"I could wear my black dress."

"No black dress. See that's why I'm here Mrs. Vasco, I'm stealing Holly away and giving her a makeover at my house. My sister's a hair stylist," she adds, as if this fact alone clinches the whole deal. Mom looks at me as I shake my head. "Well, let me give you some money to take a cab home after the dance Holly."

"Can Holly sleep over at my house tonight? I live close to school."

"I can't, I have to go see Giselle at the hospital tomorrow."

"No Holly, it's Okay, you go with Jennifer. I can go alone."

"Are you sure Mom?"

"As long as it's all right with Jennifer's mother."

"Sure, sure. Here, I'll leave you our phone number." Jen dashes her number off on the note pad in the hallway as Mom gives me some money.

"Have fun!"

"We will!" Jen pipes, licking her lips and rolling off in front of me on her board as I grip Mom's arm for a second and then trip down the stairs in my untied shoes.

Jen is half Italian and has one of those great houses with lots of traffic, food and activity. I always like going there for dinner and lunch and hanging out with the flow of cousins, neighbours and brothers and sisters. But tonight there's no time to learn Italian phrases and try Jen's mother's rigatoni.

"We're getting ready for the dance!" Jen shouts as she drags me through the basil-smelling kitchen.

"Hello kid, want some pesto?" Jen's Mom asks, blowing me a kiss from the stove as she is assailed by a gaggle of children begging for ice cream money.

"Later Mama, Joanne's waiting for us upstairs."

Indeed she is. Joanne, who was in Giselle's class, and who Giselle likes but

always refers to as 'that incorrigible Gina', has spread out the contents of her makeup bag and laid out her curling iron and all her hair products in front of the vanity mirror. The whole thing is making me really nervous, but Jen even has a solution for that; when I sit down in front of the vanity she pours us each a glass of her father's homemade wine and proposes a toast.

"To playing basketball next year!"

"To getting out of St. Felix!" I offer.

"To looking beautiful," Joanne purrs, slicking my hair down with a pink-coloured, clean-smelling lotion.

"We're not going to the dance?"

"No we're not going to the dance, you nerd, it's almost over anyway, but we are going to the creek. Clive, John and Darlene are already there."

"So why am I wearing all this make-up if we're not going?"

Jen grins at me, showing off her blue, wine-stained teeth as she pats down her stiff, hairsprayed hair, trying to undo the damage of her sister's curling iron.

"Quit whining, you look fantastic, Marco's going to be all over you. Besides, at least you don't have big hair."

I start giggling as Jen groans. She does have big hair, and no amount of patting down or re-arrangement seems to have an affect on the teased proportions of her head.

"You mess with that style Jen and that's the last time I do your hair!" Joanne shouts, from the bathroom, insulted that Jen is even entertaining the idea of messing with her creation.

"You buzzed?" Jen asks, pulling a baseball cap on and throwing herself down among all the clothes and makeup on her bed next to me.

"My face feels red. Is this drunk?"

"It's close. I'm bringing another bottle down to the creek."

"Won't your Dad miss it?"

"You kidding? He has so much he doesn't even know what to do with it."

"So, are we going?" I sit up and stretch, feeling the soft edges of the world bend around me. Everything feels like it could be funny or good or far away or sad. This must be drunk too.

"Yeah, we're going." She jumps up and shoves the extra bottle into her knapsack and zips it up.

"Ready Pretty Head?"

"Ready." Then we shoot down the stairs screaming our goodbyes and pound the sidewalk in our sneakers, the sound of the bottle clanking against something metallic in Jen's knapsack, like keys or a switchblade.

We run laughing, breathless, in perfect sync until there is grass under our feet. Till we hit the park and jump down the dark ravine. Till we see and smell the smoke of a medium-sized bonfire lighting up the corner of the forest, where people have gathered and have started drinking in the last shadows of the day. Till we walk right into the warm wind of summer and both feel it, lifting up our arms, our voices and making the day longer than it is.

Trashed. Jen is trashed, I think, as I watch her laughing, bending like a rubber toy at her waist and spilling the blood coloured wine onto the ground. Jen introduces everyone swiftly: "Holly that's Clive, this is John, my cousin, he's just here for some junior-high tail."

We girls sit on the log. The guys stand in front of us and crack open beer after beer. I try to keep Jen, who's straddling the log like a bucking horse, from falling off.

There's about twenty or thirty people in all, mostly older kids, from high school. Someone with a car, a beat up Maverick, has parked in the ravine and opened all the doors and cranked up the radio. Aerosmith. No graduation would be complete without it, Giselle tells me later, in a whisper. *Sweeeeeeeeeeeet*

Emoooooooootion...

Wearing all the things that nobody wears!

Saying all the things that nobody cares!

"Marco's here!" Jen slurs, jabbing a finger into the air before it falls on my shoulder. Amazing. This is friendship. Despite the fact that she is plastered out of her mind, Jen is still obsessed with 'my' Marco.

"Go talk to him!"

I look over to where the tall, long-lashed Marco stands, watching the fire intensely, surrounded by older high school guys. What Jen hasn't noticed, though, is that he's wearing a white shirt and dark dress pants, and that Katrina, dressed to the height of virginal fashion, is standing next to him. They've come from the dance; she has even got a white orchid corsage pinned next to her large left breast. They went as *dates*.

"He's sooo taken, Jen. Forget it, I don't have a chance."

"Whaddaya talking about?" Jen screams, glaring at the fire. "Get over there, you chicken shit!"

"Forget it Jen! He likes Kat." I grab the bottle from her and take a gulp.

"I gotta keep my eye on you anyway, you lush." Jen mumbles something I don't hear, before slouching down a little lower on the log, and hiccuping.

Clive and John, who, for this exchange, have had their backs turned, are now facing us again and grinning. Clive pulls a skinny joint out from behind his ear.

"So ladies, what say we smoke this," Clive says, exposing his white but crooked teeth. Clive looks so pretty, even with his teeth. He's got a little nose, and big lips. And something about the way he looks right at *me* when he says that sends a wave of joyful nausea into my stomach. Maybe it's the wine.

"I don't smoke," I say, looking at Jen.

"Right, don't want to damage those perfect pink runner's lungs, eh Holly?" he snaps, sticking the joint in his mouth, tapping John for a light.

"How do you know I run?" I scootch up behind Jen as if we are double riding a bike, partly to keep her from falling off, and partly because it's getting cold and Jen's body is always warm.

"Oh, I take a special interest in young athletes...seriously though, I'm just a good guesser." He lets out a laugh before sucking on the joint and passing it to me. It seems rude not to accept it, so I take a little puff and then cough for about five minutes.

After we smoke, I send Clive and John to ask around for some water for Jen, who is beginning to look a little green but gives us a confident thumbs-up whenever we ask how she's doing.

"That joint put me over the edge I think. What about you? You feel anything?"

"I think so. I feel like everything got quieter, more confusing."

John and Clive come back with a tupperware container of warm orange juice. Jen takes a big sip and spits it out.

"There's vodka in that!" John snatches it, sniffs and takes a gulp.

"So there is!"

I slide off the log and grab the container from John.

"I'm getting *water*, you creeps stay here and watch her."

As I'm walking through the groups of people sitting on blankets, sleek black dogs pass through the crowd. I feel flushed from my chest to my crotch, as if there is a candle burning inside me. I feel peaceful, with dogs and beers and fires, I smile at a large girl with long black hair, surrounded by candles, as she tries to clean the dirt from between her toes. Like we are all young and could celebrate forever. If only I could find some water for Jen, I think, this would be the perfect commune.

"Hey Holly." I turn, clutching the plastic bottle, as Clive trips awkwardly through groups of people; raver girls with sparkles on their faces and platform shoes, boys with baggy pants, hippies, and people from the dance dressed in various levels of formal attire. Everyone, except Clive, looks shiny. I notice how all his clothes, his jeans, his shirt, and his hair, are frayed at the ends and dusty looking. I notice how he looks like a little boy almost, a tall skinny boy, except for his long greasy hair which he tucks behind his ears in order to see where he's going. He waves at the dark-haired toe-cleaning girl and she donates her benevolent smile once again. When he finally gets to me he holds out his hands.

"Thought you might like some company. You going into the school?"

"I guess."

"This way."

He leads me through the crowd past the Maverick, which is now blaring Hip-Hop, and up a steep dark path. People are arguing about what kind of music to put on.

"You O.K?"

"Yes." I make sure I'm close to his heels because I can't see much. As I'm

about to scale the last tangle of roots at the top he grabs my hand and pulls me up, surprising me with his swiftness, his strength.

"Your school or mine?" He points through the high chain link fence at East Tech which is separated from St. Felix only by an uncared-for football field.

"You go to East Tech?"

"Yessir." He kicks at the fence. East Tech is the last resort school, specializing in woodworking, mechanics and vocational training. It is the troublemaker's school. You always hear about cars being torched and boys stabbing each other in the halls and the boundary between it and St. Felix is palpable: we are good, Catholic children and they are rowdy, non-Catholic, drug-addicts. I knew Clive went to a public school, but not *East Tech*.

"School's not my thing." *No kidding*, I think, as he shakes the fence and begins to climb it.

"Wait a minute! I can't climb that fence." After having a sizable piece torn from my leg in an effort to scale a neighbour's fence to avoid their dog when I was five, I have developed a terrible fear of fences.

"Why not?" He's sitting on the top, jiggling around a little, his jeans pulled tight around his bum, making the gap between his shirt and his pants even wider.

"I just can't."

"Oh, you Catholic girls."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Nothing, forget it. Follow me."

We walk for awhile in silence, separated by the fence, towards East Tech until we get to a small hole in the wire curled up from the ground.

"Come on." I push the plastic container through the hole and then wriggle through the bottom as Clive grabs my shoulders to help me through.

"You think it's open?" We approach a set of orange doors and all I can think about is how a guy as nice and calm as Clive managed to get himself into East Tech.

"Wait here," he says, before pulling out a small blade to shimmy the door open. He grabs the juice container from my hands and disappears into the school.

At the top of the hill, after wriggling (again) through the hole in the fence, we pause to smoke another of Clive's skinny joints.

"How old are you?"

"Sixteen."

"How'd you get to East Tech."

He looks at me long and hard before plucking the joint from his mouth and passing it to me. I take a long haul, which has some trouble making its way down my throat and stomach.

"I cussed some bitch out in my old school."

"What?"

"This woman, this bitch, in grade ten, made me read 'The Raisin in a Sun'-

"*A Raisin in the Sun*."

Yeah, whatever, anyway, she was really getting on my nerves, like pushing me...I just didn't feel like reading that day."

"So?"

"So, I don't know, I kind of flipped."

"Oh." I hand the joint back to him and look down at the hill. We'll probably have to slide down on our asses to reach the bottom. It's really dark now, I can make out Clive's small nose and his fat lips by the heater of the joint. I contemplate his prettiness, while trying to think of something cool to say.

"We have something in common then."

"What's that?"

"We both got kicked out of school."

"Yeah, John told me about that. Quite the little scrap you ladies got yourselves into."

"Yeah," I sigh, pretending I'm cool, shaking my head refusing the last of the joint. "So, I figure we slide, ass-first, down this hill."

"Just a second." He crushes the roach with his boot in the dirt and grabs my wrist. Hard.

"You're so pretty Holly." *No, you're the pretty one*, I think, as his voice gets soft, and, judging from how clearly I hear him whispering, his mouth is inches from my face. I laugh.

"Yeah, I'm fucking beautiful."

"You are!" He goes for my mouth but I turn my face and he ends up missing it and slobbering down the right side of my cheek.

"No, like this." He puts his hand under my chin and guides my face to his lips, and even in the darkness I see his eyes close as his face comes closer. At first I am nervous, our mouths are so dry from the pot I can't even move my lips, or find the right way to kiss. But then he finds me, digging in with his tongue, he finds the warm wet place inside my clumsy mouth and pulls it out with his full boy-lips that reek of pot and beer. Then he pulls my body to his and I am up against his lanky frame, my hands beneath the back of his shirt seeking warmth. We eat at each other's mouths gently as every image I've ever seen in movies spins through my foggy head at high speed. Seems that I am not moving enough or that I am moving too much...I can't decide what to do next so I try to think of the movie Sol took us to see, *Casablanca*, and I recall the image of a suave Humphrey Bogart pressing up against Laren Bacall, but as I relax into Clive's mouth I remember that

it's only us, two flunkies, tumbling down the hill, our bodies rolling, clinging to each other.

When we do get to the bottom I jump ahead of Clive, my arms and legs are scratched up and there's grass and dirt in my hair and Clive's laughing so hard he can't get up so I leave him there while my mind screams *oh my god oh my god. ...I have to find Jen. I have to tell her!*

She's safe, thank god. Someone has wrapped her in a blanket and she has long since gotten de-alcoholized liquid. She's sipping a huge Coke slurpie and singing along to 'Hotel California' with a group of hippies by the fire, which is now reduced to a few barely burning logs and embers. Jen is altogether sober now.

"You O.K.?"

"I'm great, how about you." Jen offers me a sip of her slurpie as she belches long and happily. I gulp down the liquid till I feel the pain in my nasal passages and I get a head-freeze.

"Ow, ow ow." I lean my head against her fuzzy blanket trying to recover

"Hey, don't suck too hard, but you know that already. Where'd you two disappear to?"

"Just around. We got your water."

"Thanks." She arches her eyebrow and shakes the warm container warily. I look around the crowd and see Clive is on the other side of the fire. He's got his shirt off and is hackey-sacking with a group of people. Jen follows my gaze and then pokes me in the ribs.

"Hey, stop drooling."

"Shut up."

"Looks like.."

"What?"

"I was going to SAY, before I was *so* rudely interrupted that it looks like you found someone as freaky as you."

In well-run theaters the risk of infection from instruments and other materials is slight.

There were lights inside me in surgery. I joked with the anesthesiologist before I went under. I couldn't tell their sexes beneath their masks.

"Are you a heart surgeon?" I asked stupidly, drunk with my first heady, airless breath of the stuff. I am one of those annoying patients, chatty and aggressive. I figure there's no other way to be under the knife

"No dear," the surgeon said, as the nurse adjusted his glasses, "I specialize in stomachs."

The recovery room, itself, is regarded as having continuity with the operating room, so that the anesthetist and surgeon remain aware of the patient's condition and remain available in the event of complications.

The second time I saw my father, last summer, he was disguised as a little boy, a six-year old wearing a striped shirt. I recognized his baseball cap, he was wearing the same one that I had seen him in at the track.

He reminded me of Egg, the little kid from *Hotel New Hampshire*, the John Irving book Giselle made me read 'cos Sol made her read it. I guess my Dad and Egg do have a lot in common, they both died unexpectantly. And Egg wasn't a real person, just a character, and so sort of a ghost in my mind already, I guess.

I came downstairs right after Mom left for work that day. I was doing the dishes when I looked out the window into our yard. I saw him, the boy, standing there, in the middle of our overgrown suburban lawn, which was strewn with cosmos and arching sunflowers. He was doing yo-yo tricks and would stop every once in awhile to look up at me with a serious expression as he wound up the string. His hat and yo-yo were both red.

When I finished the dishes, I heard Giselle stirring upstairs so I dried my hands and went outside. I knew he wouldn't talk to Giselle, that he would go away if she came downstairs, but that he would talk to me. As I approached him he smiled and asked me for a glass of water. I returned to the kitchen and got him one, and on the way back I used my free hand as a machete, skimming over the grass at my knees, the same grass that came to the boy's shoulder. He giggled at this and did it himself before I handed him the water. He drank it quickly; ghosts get thirsty too, I guess. He handed me the glass.

"Hi."

"What? Oh 'Hi'." he continued to cut at the grass with his hands. He lopped off heads of dandelions and milkweeds with his small child-doctor hands making 'chuuuu a chuuu' noises until I said:

"Hey, that's enough." I asked him to show me his 'around-the-world' again. He whipped his yo-yo at the grass around him. He then fit the string on my finger and moved my wrist, to show me the proper method of flicking the string to turn the yo-yo around.

"Just keep doing that," he said, stuffing his hands in his little jean pockets and 'chuu chuuing' his way out of the grass and onto the pavement.

"Thanks for the water." He waved and then ran down the street pumping his arms at his sides and making rocket-like explosion noises.

When I came inside, Giselle was stumbling around the kitchen, still half asleep, trying to pour milk into a bowl without cereal. I put the yo-yo on the table, in front of her.

"Want some eggs?" I pulled a pan onto the front element and motioned that she sit down.

"Sure, thanks." She sat there rubbing her eyes and moaning for awhile as I made breakfast.

"Why are you in such a great mood?"

"Daddy taught me yo-yo tricks," I declared in our sunny kitchen, as my sister woke up to look at me queerly. The yellow yolks bubbled as the new day's light blinded us both for a moment or two.

The fact that a patient is going to die does not necessarily mean he should be operated on.

Agnes and I are in the coffee shop facing the mental hospital, waiting for my Mom, who is late. We're taking Agnes to see Giselle. 'Galaxy Donuts', is the hot spot, where a steady string of homeless and crazy people walk in and out demanding roast beef sandwiches while the Korean girl at the counter, serene and ageless, screams "'Watt?! Cream?"

A little girl, about three, is sitting on the floor next to our stools, occasionally getting up to wrap her legs around the metal pole of my stool. Agnes mumbles about the poison in the donuts as purple jelly spurts across her cheek.

I tell her about Giselle quickly, about the operation, I tell her I'm going to be hanging out with her some days, when Mom has a lot of patients to see. I also tell Agnes that if she thinks she's going to try that cigarette-swallowing trick with me she's even crazier than anybody knows because I know the hiemlich maneuver. She bugs her eyes out at me with something that I could mistake as rage mixed with respect. As Agnes gulps down the last bit of dough and tries to wipe the white powder off her face the little girl untangles herself from the stool and starts pulling on my pants.

"Miss," she says, all polite-like.

"What?"

"Look." She points out the window, at the huge, sprawling, grey mental hospital across the street and, our little genius, she says:

"BOY! it's ugly."

A ruptured TOA or 'abcsess' is a surgical emergency; delayed diagnosis and treatment will result in significant mortality.

Once Eve read me Kafka's 'Hunger Artist' on a grey, cloudy day in her studio. It seemed appropriate; her power had been shut off and we were getting high off paint fumes and coke, in her bed.

"You're a bright thing Gizzy, but you haven't read the classics, now, would you care for the German version or the English?"

"English, please." I traced patterns in the ashtray as she read. After she had finished, Eve put the book down and said:

"So, let's discuss." She was coked up and ready to talk. "Do you identify with the Hunger Artist?"

"He's an artist, I'm not the artist, you are."

"Not necessarily."

"I like the panther, it's new, so hungry, so young...I guess I like the panther, he reminds me of you." She sighed and gave me one of her 'it's-so-hard-educating-Rita' looks. I rolled on top of her and started kissing her. I didn't want to talk about hunger, about fading out slowly, about never finding the kind of food you liked. She had laughed and kissed me back fiercely, biting at my lips and we'd made love on her dirty sheets, while the candles flickered and I fell under her cocaine spell.

Yesterday I thought of that story, about the literary discussion Eve and never had. I thought about gaps so deep that no one, no thing could ever fill. About how it can be true that you never find the thing - perhaps it doesn't exist in the world - the thing you could love, you could eat and suck up and be happy to live for. That the Hunger Artist was right: it is no great feat, in the end, killing yourself, that it is a simple act of apathy. But if you have no desire, if you do not know love, if you have no appreciation for good food, if you live only to live and live without passion, is that not a death of apathy as well?

What everyone says to me, about getting better, about eating, makes sense, at one level, but not inside where I feel empty. In there, nothing registers, I think

they are all liars and I grow larger by the day, filling up with air and longing. I have no control over this part of me, which is so unwilling to compromise.

But I am a panther too, pacing and caged. Wondering what there is in this so-big, silver-toothed world to wait for.

Typically, a vertical skin incision is required to perform thorough abdominal exploration because purulent fluid may be located between loops of bowel.

I wait until I see Sol get his coffee in the cafeteria. I hide behind the steel doors. His hair is long and greasy, his beard growing in. I follow him to his car, watch him put three creams in his coffee, set it in the cup holder, and rev his engine. He's taken to sitting by her bedside for hours, waiting, watching, holding her hand. He goes to her in the morning, before work, arrives at about five and sits there till ten to nine. He talks to her like she's in a coma and I guess she sort of is because she sleeps mostly. I don't know what he says; probably that he loves her, that he needs her back, who knows. I don't know where this sleep comes from either, maybe they're giving her drugs. Maybe she's just tired. The doctor said everyone reacts differently to surgery, the body repairs itself in sleep. Whatever.

I stop listening when words like 'gastrointestinal trauma' come up. I can't help it. Fact is, I know what's going on, I don't need to hear how and why they scraped out half her stomach and part of her womb to stop whatever it was that was happening. "Save it for Giselle," I say, and then the doctor looks at me like I'm the worst little sister in the world.

When Sol leaves I run up the stairs, two at a time, into her hospital room. I stare at her bones. Her face has utterly transformed; it's sunken in, you can make out the shape of her skull around her eyes. Even her nose, once long like mine,

droops down. Last week she hit a new low. Eighty seven pounds. Of course the surgery didn't help any.

I walk around her bed, sniff at the bouquets Sol has brought her, prop up the card with the message "GET WELL SOON!" in gold letters, superimposed on the heads of fluffy white kittens, signed 'Agnes'. Jesus Giselle, you know you're in trouble when Agnes is sending you get-well cards. I sift through the boxes of chocolates people have sent her, sucking on the caramel ones and pitching the coconut ones in the trash. Giselle hates coconut. People are such idiots you wouldn't believe it, sending anorexics boxes of Laura Secord.

I putter around the room making sure everything's in order, then I sit on the shitty little green plastic chair next to her bed and shake her.

"What?" She rubs at her eyes.

"You look like hell."

"Thanks."

"You do."

"What's new?" She sniffs at the air and then gags, sticking her tongue out in a way that always makes me laugh.

"Listen to me, they scraped out half your gut."

She winces, trying to get up in her bed and then falling back into it.

"Don't touch it!" I whip her hand off the stitches and attract the attention of a nurse walking down the hall. She pokes her head in the room.

"Everything OK in here?"

"Great thanks." I grin, Giselle looks confused.

"What's going on?"

"I'm telling you, listen to me, I don't want you hearing it from the doctor, from Mom, or from anyone, Giselle, this is serious."

"No more Indian food?"

"No. That's the least of your worries." My voice has turned into a frantic whisper.

"What did you say about my stomach?"

"It's mostly gone, look, you could have died, they had to..are you dying? Do you want to? Because if you do, you're doing a pretty good job." She looks away for a minute, clears her throat, then asks for her diary.

"It's in the drawer." I make a move to pull it open for her, but then I let her struggle for a minute. She's too weak to sit herself up and twist around to get it. Something sick in me doesn't help her. Finally something breaks in me, my sister breaks in me, my fucking sister, looking so small, like the half-dead HIV patients shuffling around downstairs, smoking cigarettes; this, ladies and gentlemen, this is my sister. I hand it to her.

"You brought my books too?" She's all lit up because we brought her doctor books: pages and pages of diagrams, charts, information Giselle devours over and over. She's jealous probably, wishing she could have operated on herself.

She opens up her diary to a clean page in the middle, and then asks for a pen. I go out into the hall and beg the nurse for the pink pen on a string around her neck and bring it back to Giselle. She writes furiously for awhile and then pauses.

"The doctor said you can still have kids, they ah... took only one ovary, he says you can still have kids. I want you to know." She looks out the window, the way the grey light from the clouds hits her face is stunning. My God even sunken and decrepit Giselle still manages to look good. No wonder Sol sits here for five hours, counting the shades of green in her face, my sister is not only skinny, but gorgeous too.

"I have a boyfriend," I say. Giselle cranks out a white, toothy smile, becoming hideous suddenly, and closes her book.

"Tell me, tell me all about him."

Characteristically, endometriosis occurs in high-achieving nulliparous women with a 'type-A' personality.

No one ever asked much about Med school. Eve, of course, always wanted to hear cadaver stories and Sol, though thrilled by the idea, always seemed a little frightened by formal education in general. Had my father lived, I believe I could have talked to him.

There was the competition of course, people hiding books so you couldn't find material, the general vitriolic tension of throngs studying the miracle of breath, of life and death. I never got lower than 95% on a test and I would watch people cry when they got a 'low' score. People who sucked at biology and got lower than eighty percent were weeded out first year. After that, it was just us hard-asses, maniacs and drones.

There was a girl in the year ahead of me who, right in the middle of final exams, contemplating a particularly difficult question no doubt, pulled out a handgun and shot herself in the mouth. The culmination of neurotic Med students everywhere, she became a martyr, legendary, mythic. Last night, I dreamt I met her blown-off head in a martini bar: A rich girl named Nicole, who had the bad fortune of living for the expectations of others. How I have always hated her.

Cervical dialation to allow an easier egress of menstrual blood in patients with severe degrees of dysmenorrhea may be helpful in rare instances but is not generally recommeded as routine.

Right after the operation, when they wheeled Giselle back into her room, I sat next to her and watched her try to breathe.

Watching her made me sleepy, I slept too, for awhile. I woke up because I heard someone in the room. It was the doctor. He lifted Giselle's sheet up and whispered something to the nurse, who was arranging Giselle's long arms into a pile on her chest. With the two tips of his fingers, the doctor called me over. I stood between them, wanting to pull the sheet back over Giselle. The nurse was rubbing an ointment along my sister's brand new pink scar as the doctor kept whispering in her ear.

It seems the doctor was admiring his work. He traced his long pale finger alongside the grease of the ointment, up the handspan length of a thin, wavering, angry line extending from the top of her pelvic bone to just under her navel. He ran his hand over her concave stomach, almost affectionately. I thought about how Sol was probably the last one to touch Giselle there.

The doctor was young, not much older than Giselle.

"You did a very good job. Thank you," I said, as he pulled her shift over her and the nurse left the room.

He looked at her chart, although the only light in the room was from the hallway fluorescent. He seemed nervous, I wanted him to go away, surely there was someone having a heart attack somewhere who needed him. I crossed my arms over my chest and stood yawning over Giselle, who was still dead asleep.

"I'll show her what a good job you did." I was afraid that he was going to give me a lecture on Giselle, but he was only interested in his work.

"I did the stitching from the inside, her skin is still young. It should heal nicely."

I nodded and toyed gently with one of Giselle's tubes, untwisting it, thinking about the cross-stitching on the inside of her stomach that would one day allow her to wear a bikini, shamelessly. I didn't have the heart to tell the doctor that my sister goes to the beach fully clothed and then runs into the water in either

her underwear or bra or else she steals my t-shirt and wades in splashing the kids. But I knew Giselle would appreciate his handy-work, his skillful pale hands and the vitamin E cream he would suggest she rub on it to speed healing.

"Goodnight. If she wakes up and needs anything, just call one of the nurses."

I smiled at him and he left the half-lit room for the too-bright hallway. Giselle's breathing seemed less laboured now. I lifted up her shift to examine the scar, to see if I could see the cruelty of the knife, proof of vivisection. To see if I could see my sister's sad, rotten ovary and part of her abdomen floating ghostly outside her, but I saw nothing, only the scar.

Hopeful, is not what I should have felt then, looking at Giselle's ribs, the prominence of her hip bones. Hopeful, her breathing wasn't. Her weight, even with the clear white syrup food feeding her shell, was anything but hopeful, and yet something about that tiny, almost seamless, line spoke to me of hope.

I memorized its proud route on her skin and saw my sister shift in her sleep, perhaps moving in a dream without colour or bravery, just cold. A dream where she was still unmarked by scars, and where she was probably too old to heal anyway.

Dear god, it's me Margaret (just kidding, it's Holly),

I never ask for anything. I know i got kicked out of school. Sorry.

(AND IF YOU ARE READING THIS!) if he is reading this Hi Dad! Hi! . You did take him away and it's not a count against you or anything like that I'm just saying, it's been pretty rotten for me, Mom and Giselle since he left...

But this isn't about him, it's about Giselle. If you could help her in some way I'd be really grateful and go to church or pray or read to blind people or do whatever you want me to do (just let me know).

See that's all i want, is for my sister, Giselle Vasco, to get better and do what whatever it is she wants.

Since you can read my mind anyway I won't even pretend to make this a selfless act because it isn't. I just feel like no one in this house can live their lives until she gets better and that it's taking my life, shabby and unformed as it is, away.

Also today my mother was on her way to work and tripped and fell on something in front of the house and she couldn't get up and just kept crying and crying until I had to drag her inside and put her to bed and she couldn't go to work because her ankle was twisted and because she thinks Giselle is going to die

Plus yesterday Giselle's hair fell out. Her long ropey blonde dreads just sort of detached themselves from her head and it was really sad to see and I tried to pull them all off the pillow and hide her hair but she woke up anyway half bald and screaming "Am I in f---ing chemo!?"(sorry again) and then she started crying and crying too, just like Mom, over her hair even though, as you know, lately she's had a lot more to cry about.

So if you could stop all the crying and let me know where I could put my sister's hair and/or make her better I'd REALLY appreciate it.

Thank you for your time

Holly

P.S. I have always loved you.

Site of wound: Surgical incisions placed in the lines of least tissue are subject to minimal distraction and should heal promptly, leaving a fine scar.

Scrape scrape goes the knife. Scrape scrape goes my life. I am a human abortion. I am nothing.

I had to send Sol away today. It was the first time he's seen me without my hair. Besides my mouth, it was my hair he loved most. He brought me oatmeal cookies. He ate one and I ate two. The doctor will be happy. This means I can go for a walk down the hall. Holly will take me.

There was a time when I had days full of things to do. So much that I couldn't remember it all and had to write it down on scraps of paper.

And there were days when I ran on nothing but a small crouching pain in my gut that ate me inside; now it's won.

There is a strict caloric rule if I want to get off the tubes: at least 3000 calories a day. I cut a deal with the doctor. Yessir, around here I bargain my way through different kinds of life-lines.

Endometriosis: Characterized by pelvic pain, dysmenorrhea, infertility, menstrual problems and dyspareunia. The occasional case produces such intense symptoms in a woman who wishes to maintain childbearing potential that bowel or bladder resection is necessary.

I'm shooting hoops while Clive smokes a joint. It has become a ritual with us; I shoot, he smokes. We don't talk much, the only thing I have to talk about, until school next week, is Giselle. And this makes me sad and makes Clive sad so we've been concentrating on hanging out and holding hands and perfecting our kiss instead of being sad.

Later we will go into the long grass behind the school where the yellow leaves have started to smell bonfire smoky, and paw at each other's sweaters. Kissing so warm you feel like you are in the person's mouth.

But now I am shooting. Clive grabs the rebound with one hand and offers me a token with the other.

"Just a small one."

"I had an idea."

"Oh yeah."

I know all about his *ideas*. Like hitchhiking up to his parents' cottage, like playing drums all day naked, eating nothing but melon and talking about Ghandi. Like fixing an old motorcycle and training me for a marathon.

He attempts a lay-up, which he misses, and then elaborates on his idea, bouncing the ball towards me.

"What's your idea?"

"We'll smoke pot with your sister." I net the ball from the three quarter point.

"Bingo, your getting that ball in the net was a check mark, like a shooting star." And I think, the confidence of the stoned individual is truly amazing

"That was no shooting star, you goon. We are NOT smoking with her."

"I think it would be great, she could relax, get the munchies, it's supposed to be really good for what she's got."

I miss the dunk and I look at him. I stick my tongue out. He runs up and hugs me, pitching his body at me, the slim autumn wind winding his hair around me, as if Clive were the girl and I were the boy.

"I think it's a great idea Clive, but we'll wait until she gets off the Meds first Okay?" He doesn't say anything, he closes his eyes and places his forehead on my neck, his hair falling down my shirt.

Many modern hospitals now also have an intermediary critical care between the recovery room and the ward called "high dependency unit."

Dear sweet Jesus my arms like pistons, my chin a scooping spoon. I only wanted a body like my sister's, strong and lean and winsome. Impervious to weather, impervious to bending and bleeding. Okay that's not true, Holly bleeds, monthly. I've seen the thick matted wads of maxi pads in the waste basket, in fact she's bled more than me in that area, until now. I asked her once, begged her, to use tampons. She sniffed at the suggestion, looked offended. "As if."

"As if what?"

"As if I would stick something toxic and phallic in me." I had a good laugh at that. Phallic was a word I'd taught her. Of course it's only me ashamed of bright red blood, of my bloated stomach. Not Holly, who'd revel in the early days of her period, slugging back a carton full of chocolate milk and moaning on the couch until she'd go for an hour long run, claiming it was the only thing that made the cramps go away. Me? I popped pills and fed on carrot sticks, devising ways of eliminating the problem altogether.

A Curette is used to scrape out the uterus.

The summer before our father died the whole family took a trip to Europe. I have a vague memory of Poland being grey and dirty and all of us staying in a small hotel room and my Dad yelling at me to stop jumping on the springless bed.

What I do remember is Yugoslavia, which is no longer Yugoslavia now, I guess, because of the war. Our parents took us to Split, where they honeymooned and where they had friends who owned a huge run-down hotel by the sea shore. Every morning Giselle and I would put on our bikini bottoms and run into the sea

and let the salt water strip our skin dry. After, we would sit with our legs sprawled in the water and ogle breasts; it shocked and pleased us that Europeans strutted around half naked.

That was the first time I saw a penis and that was the summer Giselle tried to teach me how to swim. I remember spending hours and hours wearing those floaty wings and paddling, uselessly, between Giselle and whatever grown-up she had enlisted for the job. I never learned how to swim, and the ordeal usually ended up with me crying and Giselle splashing the stinging water in my face and leaping into the water mermaid-style. She would swim away from me to do her long laps alone.

Despite the swimming, Giselle and I got along very well. The grown-ups, our parents and the loud big-boned German couple, were unpredictable as, I realize now, they were drunk most of the time. They spoke, it seemed to me, about eight different languages and most of the time it was difficult to get their attention. But as soon as we realized that we were unwanted, we did just fine.

The rest of the day would usually be devoted to tormenting the small strange salt water tadpoles and trying to make ourselves fishing poles out of whatever bits of string and branches we could find.

Our day would be interrupted only by the grownups shoving salami, cheese and paprika sandwiches into our mouths and cracking open coke bottles and handing them to us mindlessly. Sometimes we would shake our father's pants out and collect the dinars that fell from the pocket to go down to the beach store to buy ice cream. If it was raining, we'd play hide and seek in the great cold hotel room or put each other in the dumbwaiter, then run to the upper floor and hoist it up.

At night we fell into our shared bed exhausted and happy, listening to our parents' strange and mysterious languages float up from the stone terrace lit with

tiny white Christmas lights, where the two couples sat at night, after dinner, drinking and talking and smoking.

I copied everything Giselle did in those days; I wore what she wore, said what she said and did what she did. At home it was a constant sore point, but for those three weeks by the sea shore it did not seem to bother Giselle that I had to wear my matching sun dress when she did, that I repeated every Serbian, German and Polish word that she had somehow picked up. It didn't bother her that I wanted to hold her hand. Often, in fact, she would comb my hair out and smooth out my dress before we walked down the path to the beach and she would grab my hand, like Mom did, before she took us out.

And Giselle and I weren't the only ones in love. Peeking out of our hotel room on a rare night when I could not sleep, I saw my father jump up from the table of conversation, trying to distract my mother from the German woman's peeling, raucous laughter. He was tanned, and had a cigarette clenched in his mouth. He was wearing a clean white shirt which was unbuttoned half-way to expose his tanned chest. His black hair was parted on the left side. He pulled my mother into a dance, and they moved to the gypsy echo of the music coming in clearly from the nearby seaside restaurant. And the Germans were quiet for once, watching them, as I did, in that expansive, impossible cavity of joy that fills us so completely before tragedy, or sleep.

Pneumonia in the Immunocompromised Patient: Pulmonary infection is common in patients with diseases causing defects of cellular or humoral immune mechanisms.

At night the buzzing sound of the hospital keeps me awake. I can hear the gurgle of the boiler, the quiet laughter of nurses at the desk, the coffee machine plunking cups down, not to mention all the machinery keeping us corpses alive.

At night the springs twist into my spine as I feel the bed cutting into me. No matter which way I turn, I feel as if there is a constant cigar being extinguished in the center of my back. But I'm embarrassed about asking for more Meds.

At night the ache is unbearable. I stare out the window, at the street lamps, hoping that they will distract me. The ache starts out hot, deep in the crevice of a muscle, and expands out, wrapping itself around my arteries, and then burns up out of my skin. It appears as sweat on the surface though, tiny tear-like beads. A cold sweat fever. Usually, I swing my leg out from under the eight blankets piled up on me and search with my toe for the cold tile floor. But I never reach it.

Two days ago I tried and fell off the bed. I must have done a flip in the air or something. Now I'm covered with bruises. I laid there for about forty minutes before calling out to a nurse. I tried to get up by myself but the floor seemed as comfortable as the bed, so I just lay there shivering, applauding the hospital ventilation system for the Arctic temperatures it is able to maintain.

A man in blue-striped pajamas finally shuffled into my room and found me. He had longish grey and black hair, a big belly. He picked me up like a baby, held me above his head for a second, and then put me in my bed. He covered me in blankets and then did a strange thing. He kissed me on the forehead and stroked my head, saying my name over and over until even the cigar burning pain faded and I couldn't feel the bruises.

I used to be able to do one-handed cartwheels. When I was fifteen, my father finally taught me how, on the dry summer grass with a popsicle in my mouth. I used to torment my sister by pinning her down and licking her face, as she whipped her hair at me. I used to take aqua-fitness classes. After staying up all

night studying for Biology exams, I used to split a 26-er of Jack Daniels with my Scottish dorm-mate and we'd show up to those awful, boring-ass Med parties screaming "Screw Yu!" in a Scottish accent, at the top of our lungs. I used to go out for dinners with Sol and we'd hold hands and gaze at one another - The Way That Young Lovers Do. Our voices were earnest and soft, as we spilled wine on the white tablecloth and traded secrets.

These are now the memories of an altogether different person. I've traded my breath for phlegm. For cold sweat fever. I lie without resources now, am the last dog. The taste of steel and honey, the noise of this place, defeats me.

It wasn't supposed to end like this, I'm telling you, in half ghosts and half deaths and craven unkempt heroines. I was supposed to live, make survivors of us all.

Any immunocompromised, malnourished or starving patient's condition may be further complicated due to the state of shock their body is in.

We buried her next to our father on a bright sunny day in Indian Summer. It was an awful day for a funeral. Sol was holding Mom up by the arm and Agnes was chain-smoking. Sol's parents, Robert and Natalie, were there too, standing behind Mom. Clive and Jen stood behind me, their arms propping me up as I stared at the hole in the ground where they inserted her body.

The coffin was small, a child-sized one. When I looked up from the hole I saw another man in Sol's place, wearing pajamas, standing next to Mom. She leaned against him slightly, and he held her there, shivering in his thin flannel pajamas, bowing his head towards her.

Then I walked away from my father, from my mother and the hole that now contains Giselle. I wobbled on my black pumps on the wet ground until I took them off and pitched them into some bushes. I started to run, the slit ripped higher and higher on my dead sister's dress until my legs were free and sweat, brown earth and grass coated my panty-hose toes.

I ran over graves and thorns, flowers and ashes, *Beloved Son of... 1968-1981* youbelovedsonofabitch till there was blood and muck all over my feet. I pushed harder then, harder, aimed for impossible spaces between bushes, I threw myself at trees at headstones like a human pin-ball in a grave-yard machine. I bounced off death, off rock, off wood, the sun was in my mouth, a pain livid and scorching my breath, laughing, my thighs huge and burning. I careened back onto the pavement, onto the orderly path of the living.

Her name a blue swallow I nearly hit in my race against her. I fell then and rolled down a hill, lined with grey angels. I could hear the thud of footfalls behind me, boots striving to catch up with me. I heard them but they couldn't catch me

because I was tearing, flying, leaping over crosses like high-jump markers, landing in freshly dug graves, catching my dress and ripping it on branches.

I guess I was screaming too, although my voice was like the wind, too fast for sound. Still, there were those footsteps behind me but I deaked them out. I fooled them, hundreds of them, falling behind, the sound of rolling thunder. And if I can keep this up, they won't ever catch me.

I'm too fast, too bloody. I'm on my second wind now.