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**Out of the Green:  
A Collection of Short Stories**

**Golda Fried**

**A Thesis**

**in**

**The Department**

**of**

**English**

**Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts at  
Concordia University  
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**February 1996**

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## ABSTRACT

### Out of the Green: A Collection of Short Stories

Golda Fried

*Out of the Green* is a collection of short stories all of which are narrated by a first-person female narrator between the ages of 17 and 23 years. The stories are about the way the narrator is trapped in ordinary situations which restrict her, but where she nonetheless finds a surreal truth in the banality. The narrator is usually involved in complex relationships that encourage her to develop her own characteristics, whether personal strength, independence, freedom from parasitic others, optimism, or faith. Even though the character sometimes fails in maintaining these ideal qualities, she always incorporates the poetry of the world around her.

**This Thesis is dedicated to my parents, to Lydia Eugene, and to Dylan Ritter.**

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**the wand in wander**

**snip.snip.snip.**

**What happens to the pieces on the cutting room floor?**

**The pieces on the cutting room floor are always given back to the audience.**

**As what?**

**As the possible.**

**And what goes in?**

**What you dare to expose.**

**I was ready for some exposure, sure. One of my guy friends telling me, Daryll, You have to read Kerouac, *On the Road*, and I don't remember suggesting anything back. I don't think I got most of that book at the time. In fact, I got lost in that book so many times, my mind wandering ...pots banging downstairs, fighting, the ol' vacuum cleaner, the six o'clock news... and I'm thinking about, I don't know what, the guy I had a crush on for three years and all the crushes in between and how *I did nothing* about them. One guy was the dentist in *Little Shop of Horrors*, the school play. He was a real stand up comedian, adding his own lines on the spot. At one point he had thrown in, **WOMEN**, can't live with them, can't put 'em in a blender.**

### **the wand in wander**

A bunch of us were mixing through the parking lot before the concert. There was a real feeling you could be anywhere among anyone and not have to be friends with anyone specifically.

But then he handed me over white gloves like a magician. Wool and loose. It was snowing and I thought, Oh thanks, Skyler, that's quite genial but was lost in my hat making movies. I was filming the crowd for his movie, super eight. The audience-to-be was wild. Dancing, weaving, in and out of the frame.

### **quarters**

I got Skyler walking by the parking meters on the edge of the parking lot. And I noticed a cigarette lying there on top of one of them. Let's park awhile, I says, and smoke this thing left by some kind humanitarian soul. I was almost about to put a quarter in the slot feeling like we should pay or something because this spot felt so good.



**storming a question mark snow**

I hadn't given back his gloves. And so I had to do major research to get to him. And then of course there had to be a snow storm to get through when I was finally getting over there. It was like a research paper you turned in and all the periods were question marks.

I started remembering after the show, how we all drove over to get to french fries. How he went on about writing and seeing him get excited. And being dropped home with the gloves. And finally tracking him down. Then, looking at his shoes as the door opened. Then he, taking back the gloves, my empty hands limp against the doorway like I fit in there. Responsive hanging. [We kissed.] Then, getting back into the car, thinking I left a carpeted tongue with half-footprints.

**there's a light in my stomach**

I drove or walked by the light coming out of his window for nine days and nine nights waiting for something to happen.

**a medical intern would cut it**

**It was not like me to pursue anything with some kind of knife. But I was going to do something this time. I got out of the car. I threw rocks at his window but he didn't come out. I thought maybe he was out so I waited in the car freezing my ass off until one in the morning even though I had school the next day. At one, I had to piss bad so I drove twenty minutes home and put on a sweater. I started flipping quarters. Heads, I'll head over. Makes sense. Tails, I'll tail after him. I mean I'll stay home. I got tails.**

**Went back to his house. Left a note on the stairs in case my mom woke up, saying not to worry. Told myself I'd throw rocks at his window once and then leave and that's it. No response. Fuck. I started to walk away, when the light went on in his kitchen.**

**I tapped on the window, nearly scaring the shit out of him. By then it was two a.m.. He had been downstairs the whole time writing his essay and had two paragraphs left to write and had just come up for something to scarf down. He took me in. I explained to him that I was a bit weird but he said it was like oxygen. And we hugged and talked until he murmured, I can't believe someone would do this for me.**

**And how he kept holding me and laughing because he couldn't believe it. And how**

he really kissed me goodbye in the kitchen. And how he really kissed me goodbye all the way to the car. And how he finally had to push me away in order to leave. And how he told me later he couldn't fall asleep because he wanted to see me so bad that he had to wait until he passed out. We spilled over a tea cup kissing.

Light stomach, my mom woke up when I came in and said the car has now disappeared. She said, This time it's a week. Next time a month, then the rest of the year! [for the rest of your natural born life is what she wanted to say I'm sure] When you're in my house, you follow my rules. [she said this actually] And I don't want you driving around at four a.m. or even staying up that late. It's not normal. Only medical interns are allowed to do it.

It's not as if she tripped on the note and got a lot of stairs or something but I fell into bed dizzy beyond all this.

**ready in five minutes**

His parents had me over for dinner right away. Cooked artichokes. I watched them peel the thing layer by layer and eat it off the skin 'til they got to the heart. But of course, Skyler could only take the family questions for about five minutes before he yanked me out of there and we never got to finish this delicacy.

We left the room. Two green things sat on saucers.

### **the red shag ritual**

I saw us, two people in some kind of spilt tea air, sitting under a park slide on green carpet-like grass not saying anything, not having to.

He liked it best when we were rolling along in his parents' car. He put red shag on the steering wheel to try to forget that his parents had anything to do with it.

He had stuck a Blue Rodeo tape in the deck and kept freaking out that the organist had left the band. So every time there were keyboards, he'd say, pointing, That's gone! That's gone! And I thought, that's REAL cute babe. Enough to compensate that you don't have any Stones in here. I had my eyes out the window and I knew he was going to be gone in the fall to school, that was understood.

The trick would be asking him first before coming over that day if he felt I was seeing him too much, Aren't you afraid it's going to get routine? And he was really cool saying, Don't think of it as a routine. Think of it as a ritual. [Songs provided.]

**to interview in the next room**

We drove by The Golden Griddle (Pancake House) and I was like, Lets go there. And Skyler went, We can't go there: that's where I go every night to write in my journal and stay way into the night. He didn't even have to wear a name tag there apparently. He leaned over the diner-like booth we were in at another place and whispered, They have bottomless cups of coffee at The Golden Griddle. He drank it black, I knew, and without a wince. As black as the road outside that had the odd sparkly bits and three taxis in a row driving over them.

He told me about this term he and his friends use, the jack-in-the-trunk story. It's a story that some guys keep written on the back of their hands, preferably well-memorized to hoist up any date conversation lest god-forbid some girl might think they're boring.

I leaned back into the Naugahyde musing about the stars he would meet, the full-fledged personalities.

**stepping through frames**

**I asked him this, finally, What did you see in me when you met me that first**

time?

Well, you had the spirit of an actress that night of the show.

Even though I was filming?

Well, you had a way of stepping through your own frames.

Skyler. Oh, Skyler! Where is the cheese?, his mother was fluttering from a door frame down below. We were sitting in his room huddled on the floor looking up at his bunk bed and comics trying not to be corny.

Sorry about this, he grumped.

But Skyler, I think we might have eaten it yesterday. Didn't we?, I said.

He knew we did. But he was up and out the door screaming, Mom, I didn't fucking take the goddamn cheese. Leave me alone.

Well, things don't just disappear, Skyler!

Daryll must have eaten it, she presumed.

Since then, his mother had the cheese and crackers stocked up for me all the time.

Do you want some? Do you want some? And I had this other home.

*But it's a trap, Luke, it's a trap!* Skyler would quote from *The Empire Strikes Back*, with the full fledged yelp. His knuckles turning white from gripping the door frame pretending someone wasn't letting him leave.

But having this mother totally thinking you're a good thing, not hassling you. Pushing the cart around shopping for you even, it was too much. But of course, Skyler would come in the door and see her and hunch up, all irritated: Oh, the things you have said and done.

### **no-name day**

When we were on my patch-quilt bedspread, there were no words. I took off my shirt though and he looked at me I felt really sad that I could be sad about my body. About how my stomach's pretty flabby and my breasts are too small. And how without clothes on, you could be anybody. [I cried.] I knew it was dumb but I felt like I was disappointing him.

When I tried to confess something to the guy about what's on my mind and he saw that it was hard for me to say it, Skyler hugged me hard and waited it out.

So we were sitting there waiting and the phone in my room started ringing. At this point, we were just lying on the bed *with our clothes on*. He was making me laugh by telling me the jack-in the-trunk story that he knew.

It worked, I felt nailed to the wall, for a second.

The phone. Daarylll. It was my fuckin' mother calling me on the other line. I gave Skyler a look like I knew about how-to-be-a-good-parent surveillance too.

What do you want, mom?

Open your door please.

**the locked car trick**

I went to visit my friend Romy where she worked [at her dad's restaurant] and she sat down with me awhile.

She goes, I slipped *Tangerine* in the CD player here and pressed 'repeat'. It took my dad forty-five minutes to realize it was the same song.

She took a drag on her cigarette which was always when my laugh slipped in.  
But it's a hell of a song.

So did you fuck him yet? she asked me. Romy was one of my friends who had been doing it with all kinds of characters since she was fourteen. Fourteen.

No, you know that's going to take me awhile.

So what have you guys been doing?

I don't know. We went to see *Leaving Normal* last night.



I saw that: it's totally awesome.

Well, anyway, I had my face all over him while he was trying to watch the thing. Of course, he was quite responding to me though at the same time. We really should have sat in the back row.

Well, was it good for you?

Yeah, Romy, you know, I would look up, and the dust flurrying in the projector beam glittered like stars.

She was nearly ashing in my food. Hey! I said and continuing, So how's it with Lincoln?

Daryll, he's so big, it hurts, she states smilin' making her eyes pop out, Seriously, I wobble around the room after.

You wobble? This, from a person who makes the bus driver go slowly down the steep part of York Mills Road because the drop terrifies her. But she has weird car sickness.

A few seconds later and I'm saying, The thing with Skyler though is, he's going away for school in September. I know long distance things never work out but I'm dying to stay in touch with him. Friends, whatever. I think he's pretty cool.

Honey, no one stays in touch with their ex's. You'd have to have a norseshoe up your ass.

Daryll took off her heavy boots under the white gauze tablecloth. Then said, My mother hasn't been too cool with it either. It's such a drag because his mother's so nice to me, it kills me. It's partly his fault though because he refuses to talk to

adults of any conservative kind and won't say more than two words to her.

I'm not much the conversationalist with my parents either. My mother knows I'll just walk out on her if she starts up with me. So you know what she does? She gets me in the car with the doors locked and waits 'til we're on the highway to yell her lungs out at me where I can't get out, see? Happens all the time.

harvard powdered wigs

Me and him were down in his sister's room trying to go at it. The phone was even ringing. We weren't going to answer it this time though. And I swear I was looking at the wallpaper. It was pink and curlicued. There were stuffed animals all over the bed too and I felt bad elbowing them. One was looking at me all lopsided. And where was his twenty-one year old sister, anyway? Harvard, of all places.

The kissing started to taper down. I was looking and looking around. But then I peeked at him, and maybe I had been too silent because he was already getting up. Both of us, pale faced.

And he goes, Maybe we should try this some other time. A real wiz of a thing to say. The carpet was more of a wine colour and spilled out the door.

I'll be flagging cabs in another town soon anyway, he said. The freedom. The freedom. I saw his heart, the entire city area and the little yellow cabs pushing through. And where would I come in? Maybe I could be some calm? Maybe I could be someone to whom he could send a page-full of question marks.

I touched his long hair and thought this: In the summer that it is now, we'll let our freak flagged hair fly. In September, you'll go to writing school and you'll decide to cut it and you'll send me some locks like ribbons and they'll fall all around me from their white envelope. And I'll drop it startled. And this does happen.

Like white gloves over the eyes.

He says, I knew you had to call me to give back those gloves, you know. I was totally after you. Then not calling, making you think I was indifferent. It was all part of the plan.

Oh really. I thought he'd been flipping quarters or something too.

There was baby powder on the dresser on the way out. And then I was thinking maybe we could have tried using that. Rubbed it into our bodies, up one side and down the other. Relaxed a little. Have had powder fights in the process so huge

particles would explode and then hang in the open air. And we could've left the room with white hair and told his parents it was a new look.

### **the twelve point plan**

I can't think about these things now, dad.

But you have to think about things. Every good chess player thinks five moves ahead.

Well, maybe I don't have vision, dad, no vision.

Daryll, twelve years from now, I'm going to be in my grave and I want to know that you're going to be able to support yourself, ...murk, murk, murk.

### **sadderdays**

I don't have the energy to go over there and deal with his draining, I-can't-entertain-you mood. I wish that it would be okay to do nothing with him. I mean, more conversation would come out that way.

Now it was getting close to September and I was calling him fifty times a day like a maniac. And most of the time his mother would answer and have to say, I'm sorry,

Daryll, but he's not home, I was hoping *you* could tell us where he is.

I'd hug my pillow and listen to the same song over and over until I was as sad as the song and I'd tell myself on 'repeat': I'm not obsessed, I just really like him.

I drove past his house and the light in his room was on and I threw rocks at the window. No response. He's fuckin' ignoring me. It was late at this point, maybe 11:30, and I thought I'd go up and talk to him. Find out what the hell was going on. I soft-shoed up the stairs. My heart was such a flopping water balloon that if this was in my movie, any second it would have dripped the screen red.

He wasn't there. I could hear his father moving around in the next room. I high-tailed out of there leaving the front door half-open behind me.

Skyler got woken up the next morning earlier than his heart, his dad shaking him violently, You snuck out last night! And left the door open too. We could have been robbed, do you realize?! Skyler, feeling like a bug pressed to a page, arms making a lot of question marks, thought, I've got to get the hell out of here.

**to cry in my arms over me**

**It's over. He told me.**

**And I said, This isn't a fuckin' movie. You can goddamn think of something more original to say!**

**He had driven over to my house late that evening, after brewing it over all day with his friends, and we were having it out over the roof of the car. His story lay there as he nervously pulled the pages apart. The story that got him into writing school, that I had asked ages ago to see.**

**We decided that you were going to go away with no attachments fuckin' three months ago so what's your fuckin' problem?**

**His friends, snickering in the car.**

**Well, I haven't been excited about being with you for the last few weeks ....**

**But you were trying to have sex with me three days ago, you fuck.**

**Look, he said, I just have to make sure that it's really over. You know, start New York with a clean white sheet. And you have to know I don't love you.**

**I'm just going to go. I wasn't going to give him the satisfaction of seeing me cry thinking of what he had told me once. I was going away for school too actually.**

**He yelled out, Call me in a couple days when you're feeling better. I looked back at him and glared.**

**He was serious.**

**He got into his car and left a cloud of pages. I picked one up.**

**always a warm**

**I was out cold in my bed. And all the hi knockin' at the window didn't wake me up. And finally my name got through to me Daryll, Daryll. And I ran downstairs and opened the front door, Skyler? He wasn't there, what the fuck? Skyler. And there he was descending down from the roof beside my bedroom window, Look I made you a mixed tape. I said, God, you're so cold, how long have you been out here? Those north pole Toronto spring nights. Forty-five minutes he said. I had to hug him back to warmth. And then I had to hug him.**

**I passed endless, before**

**Romy would be right there to take me out to get trashed. And she would refer to him as Mr. Cool Asshole, as some kind of comedy. And on the way home, the outside scenery would be a complete whiz-cam. I would feel the Ginsu windshield wipers, real horror show. Romy would try to slow down the car and stop so that I could casually swing the door open and 'ride the porcelain bus' as she calls it or 'bugle', even better. But I puked, the poor plush interior.**

**That night, when I finally was ready to come inside the house, everyone had long**

since gone to bed except my father who was poring over some journal. And I thought, please don't make me talk. God, I feel like shit and I sure as shit don't have anything to say. I don't know what I'm going to do. I don't know shit.

to pass the den to get upstairs. And my dad was sitting there with his journal round tummy, nose in a tea mug. *And don't you know that God is Pooh Bear?* I said quoting Kerouac. My father gazed up at me and whispered with wide eyes, Daryll, do you know: when you were born, it was snowing and the rabbits were out.



**if he asked to see home movies**

**If he asked to see home movies, she could've heard the heartbeat, though there was no soundtrack.**

**There was one home movie that would slip into Pearl's dreams of her grandmother's wig falling off and everything would just cut into place including Granny's eyes. She could see the wig in Granny's hands. And she would think, The hair is removed from its pain.**

**Then she would add soundtrack....**

*We were at the nearby McDonalds, John and Driz swaying in their chairs. It was somewhere near the top of the hierarchical list of cool things to do during lunch in high school for those who drove to school even though they only lived five minutes away. But Driz lived far like John and me so it was okay for her to drive.*

*John was having his usual coke through double-barrel straw although he was saying, Why do we come here this fountain shit tastes like liquid lipstick and Driz grinned, Well, I'll go put some lipstick on then, and went off to do so. And I was like, John do you really believe everything that girl you're sweet on says? And he responded, Pearl, it's just like writing (he dreamed of writing in Laundromats), I wouldn't say it's half true and half lies, I'd say it's all true and all eyelash false.*

There was another movie of her grandmother in the kitchen baking cakes. White fluffy cakes with white swirling icing on white counter space. She'd stack them up like sandcastles. And Grandma insisted on keeping the counter space. My dream is counter space to the moon, she would say, No fat sitting microwaves!

On Pearl's birthday, the party dresses were frilly and perfectly white. CLICK. Grandma who was still blonde and presentable as ever would say outright if it was a bad polaroid, WHO took this? I'll chop off his hands. Only on this special day was anyone allowed to have one of Granny's cakes. Just for Pearly. Granny would scrinch up and whisper, But it looks soooo lovely, as she cut a piece sliding the knife down through the layers. And Pearl'd hope on the edge of her seat that she'd get the slice with the penny that Grandma had baked in. She saw those pennies go into the batter from Grandma's sultry red silk change purse. The open and shut snap that was almost the sound of Grandma's clam-like cosmetic case with the blush and mirror. But much louder. And apparently if Pearl got the slice with the penny, she'd get her wish.

*John and Driz were already doing couple things that first year of high school, although she'd never admit they were going out. They went camping once Driz got her license, for instance, in the States no less. I could just see them drifting down the highway, constantly feeding the tapedeck and everything. But John told me it was such a letdown: it was a total McCampsite with hardly any trees and sites so close to each other it looked like an Astroturf minefield in a parking lot. But then John looked at me*

*and said, Overall we had a good time even though Driz kicked me out of the tent in the middle of the night. But really, I love the smell of asphalt in the morning.*

*And he went on, The best was that this boy next to their site was saying to his sister as they were going to bed, Just to let you know, you're barf! and she'd go, No, I insist, You're barf, and John and Driz would say that back and forth to each other before school in the cafeteria where I'd see them every day.*

*But it was definitely John who came up with the good lines, like the time we were all at Mrs. Robinson's place and John wanted Driz to let him open up the photo albums of Driz as a drooling toddler, Oh come on, he said, Let me look through the archives for the peanut butter and jam.*

Pearl's mom made butter sandwiches for her pig-tailed daughter each morning full of love and the daughter would look into her lunch box hoping for creamcheese, nothing soggy, meat, chocolate bar, but no, it was butter sandwiches again and she held back puke and discreetly went over to the green very large bins. Meanwhile her mom at home would say, What a lucky little girl to have such a fast metabolism and be so thin.

Pearl's mother never left a crumb behind. Cleanliness is Godliness. Her mom grew up with a keen eye and a dish rag on the side. One time, she washed Pearl's mouth out with soap for saying something as innocent as 'shut up' to someone. 'Shut up' Mom, come on, she'd brood. And then there was the dust factor. Every time Pearl's mother would sneeze it was time to get out the vacuum

cleaner and cut a rug.

Pearl only found out bits and pieces about her grandfather, like collecting dust and eating it. Apparently her grandfather was one of three brothers that came to the States with their foreign last name and each of them chose to spell it in a different way. Pearl's grandfather had a spot on his lung, not contagious or malignant or anything, but mysterious nevertheless. As a result, he couldn't get citizenship in the States and ventured up to Toronto. The other two brothers ended up one in New York and one in Miami, but Grandma insisted they were all very close.

*All I remember about my grandfather is how he snapped his leather briefcase shut and waltzed out the door each morning leaving the scent of his cologne behind him. And I'd open and close my pudgy hands trying to catch it. Apparently he never had a lot of money and only had two or three suits but he would use the money he had to dry clean those suits every day. And there I was spending all my money on Spidey comic books and wearing my hooded sweatshirt and jeans and running shoes. And maybe they made my sadness comfortable and maybe I did it too to piss my mother and grandmother off. But for sure, it had felt right. And, apparently, one time my grandfather snapped his leather briefcase for good and left to produce screenplays in Hollywood. And maybe he's still there right now with the actresses.*

*John says to me, Do you know in L.A. they have graffiti on trees?*

*While the weather was still cool, we could wait for the school bells by a tree in the front.*

*He goes on, In New York the garbage bins are like fish net stockings. I wish I had a cousin in L.A., who could send me Death cigarettes. It's all in the packaging man, the package is so wild. It's jet black and it's got this skull on the front with cross bones. Hey, aren't these jeans great?*

*Driz had shown John how to bleach his jeans and now he'd be into bleach forever.*

**Tide. Tide was the neighbour. He was eighteen and working on this beautiful fifties convertible in his parents' garage. Pearl's twelve-year-old self started going over there to sit on his car like a hood ornament. She'd watch him for hours after school each day, dying for him to drive something by her mind because her stomach was saying, Children should be seen and not heard.**

**Finally he would look at her with slant eyes and say something like, High school sucks. By the end, all your friends have yellow teeth, you'll see. He described the prom as black tie and Uzi optional.**

**And he had all these tools, and every time something wouldn't work he would get all uptight and make a dent in the car. A new dent every time and Pearl would chuckle. After one such episode, she asked him, So are you going to sail her somewhere pretty when you're done? California? Miami? Venice Beach? Mexico?**

And he said, No, I'm going to sell it, girl, make big bucks. And every day she'd sit there, her head going vmmm, vroommm trying not to let the sound turn to vacuum.

Her mom would stick her nose out the door and start screaming, Dinner.

*Grade six finally sucked me in. At this point, it had been years since I'd had a proper friend and I couldn't handle trying to figure out what to do at recess twice a day, where to sit at lunch. And Mom did detect my sadness, always very concerned, but she said, So silly, such trifling matters, people are starving in the world. And so I immersed myself in school. Then I was actually getting some nineties on tests, ninety-eight once and Grandma was like, What happened to the two percent? Well, it was probably not the way to go, to appear to be the teacher's pet, to impress your peers. But this particular teacher with purple highlights in her flair hair noticed that I was a waterfall during the national anthem among other times. And at lunch she put aside her Styrofoam coffee cups with bright lipstick marks all over the rims and said, Will you help me clean up? For one hour, I didn't have to think about lunch.*

*But then I couldn't even do homework. I'd come home and watch Family Feud 'cuz it wasn't like Jeopardy: I actually knew the answers, sometimes. And at night my heart would beat too loudly and I didn't want to see a psychologist because one teacher had told us that you couldn't be President of the United States if you'd ever seen a psychologist, and I didn't want to close any doors for myself.*

*After the revolving doors, the first thing that hits you is the cleanser smell of the*

*carpets, then the antiseptic floors. And we were on some high floor and as we were going up the elevator, I saw mercury rise up a thermometer. Okay, you need a vacation, my mother had said. Never, I need a vacation. She took me to a hotel in the same city.*

*When we got to the room, I went to look out from the top of this tower and Mom pleaded, Please Stay Away from there. You know how I'm afraid of heights. I get dizzy, Pearl. Instead, she brushed back my very long hair for me in down strokes. And she'd yank at all the tangles and I'd ow and sssslouch and this went on for an hour and she said, You have to experience pain to be beautiful. And then she showed me all the instruments she used to pluck her eyebrows, and to wax those centipede-like bristles and to iron her hair. The lipstick made her lips look like worm skin.*

*Saturday, though, we got up early to shop, real mother/ daughter. Mom rolled over and stuck a little plastic bottle up her nose and snorted twice in each nostril. She'd forgotten that I'd never seen her do this and stated, "It's only Otrivin, Sweetie, but you stay away from drugs."*

*I wanted to go to Queen street 'cuz I heard it was cool there. The vendors were out with their batik shirts in all their bold colours. No way, Mother said, they're probably illegal. Imagine, selling them like that. Let's get out of here before we get mugged or something.*

*Overall, I guessed Mom had a good time. When we got back to our house, she sighed, Grandma's china sets in the sink stacked to the moon.*

**Grandma had her crumpets on a doily with a wad of butter and her tea with**

carnation milk, three sugar cubes, please dear. Her pinky would be up testing the wind, the rest of her fingers caught in the handle of the tea cup, and her other hand would be shovelling in those pills. Pearl's mom would stick some equivalent of Kellogg's Common Sense Cereal in Pearl's face and go make Pearl's lunch. Grandma'd look up from the paper and ask, Does anyone know what the weather's like? And Pearl looking down would think, Like soggy cereal.

*Thank God there was the Breakfast Club. The name I jokingly gave to the fact that Driz and John and I were always at school early. We each had our own things we did. Driz would get a coffee as soon as the caf opened. I'd be doing homework that I'd never seemed to be able to get done in time, which was always ambitious because Driz would try to draw everyone in as she re-enacted her phone calls of the previous evening. And John would ask me, Who pissed in your Cornflakes this morning? Every morning. He'd be at the end of the bench about to fall over with his coke can. The stuff destroys pennies but every morning, I saw him down one die-hard for breakfast and wait for something to happen.*

John and Pearl waited for the bus together. This time Driz was car-ing it somewhere else and John talked about what kids know, as opposed to adults. And he was saying, Kids know that first in line mostly means you've been waiting for the bus the longest. They were actually heading to catch the bus at the time, Pearl sort of diverging from the natural bee-line to the bus stop. There was a cigarette pack



on the ground and John kicked it. Hey, he smiled, Go ahead and kick it. Not that far, he said. It kicks back at you, no? So...he ran and grabbed the pack and brought it up to her face, It's a full one. As they lit up cigarettes, the bus came, another thing that kids know or find out fast. She could deal with every organ rotting except one, she thought. They headed for the back of the bus and sat down. Both of them staring blankly forward.

And Pearl came home and her mother was doing needlepoint stitch by stitch. The needle would keep going under as she asked, How was your day Hon? And it was always, Fine. Her mother tugged on the string, bringing it closer. Pearl ran up the stairs to her room, racing to get to John's books.

Don't look at the words like they're a bunch of bricks-- that's somebody's guts splattered on the page right there, John had said lending Pearl books he had underlined to make her more focused. She followed these lines plank-like, hoping they'd lead to him, to her, to the period at the end of the sentence that would say, Dive in. Biographies were especially fun because every once in awhile there would be a fine jewel of some mundane thing the person did.

One night she had a painting she wanted to do, on a great big canvas, six or eight feet long. So she took it out into the garage. It was a cold winter night and she ran the

clothes dryer for heat and painted out there all night long.

*(Janis Joplin: Her Life and Times, D. Landau)*

Pearl found the briefcase in the garage and she didn't need a key to open it. But hadn't he left with it? She knelt down. It was under the tricycles and the red wheelbarrow. She put out her thumbs and pushed back the shiny brass buttons on the ends and the buckle snapped open and for that instant, it all clicked just as she remembered. Inside, there were pearls rolling around and it looked like a larger version of those hand-size games where you try to get those white balls to go down the little hole. It was late and the night was coming in, trying to fill in the garage, circling around the hanging bare light bulb. And there was a card, I'm sorry we've been scrounging so much but I wanted to save to buy this necklace for you.

Pearl scooped up each pearl and carried them in like eggs that are about to hatch. She snuck one of her mom's needles and strung the pearls up slowly until each pearl was hanging by a string and then she wore them.

Oh, those pearls really look good with that sweatshirt, her mom blurted in the morning over the Common Sense Cereal. Pearl had given up responding to these comments. Then Grandma came down and eyed Pearl suspiciously. What, do you have a boyfriend there, Pearly? I'll tell you, and this I know: men just leave. She pulled on the string with all her weight just a little too tightly. The pearls rolled around the floor and headed to this one spot where an imaginary drain could be, and

just as Pearl reached out her hands her mother, who had been staring into the butter the whole time, sputtered, I'll pick those up Pearl, just go to your room, I mean school.

Then the phone rang and it was one of Grandma's bridge friends and Pearl could hear her all sweet tooth behind her on the phone a second later, You should have seen me before I was married. I was going out with high rollers.

Immediately Pearl felt that wave again like a hand passing over a crystal ball, and instinctively she put her head down to stop the feeling. She could just imagine her grandmother holding her up that first time in the azure hospital light, turning Pearl's baby self in her fingers with that eye saying, She is perfect as a pearl, really, because, you know, sometimes the cord gets around the neck and the face turns blue.

Well, it's not so bad you know, John said. The fluorescent lights in the cafeteria were way too bright.

I hate it, Pearl snapped. It's an old person's name.

Schoolyard girls her age pelted her with rocks: Pearl, you mean like these? And her mother saying, If you ignore them they will go away.

But John went, Yeah, but it's the name Janis Joplin always wanted to be called, you know. John was into Jim Morrison, that was his pinup for everything. It was the late eighties, but everyone they knew was listening to older stuff like Zeppelin and Floyd too.

Driz was still going around in and out of the cafeteria frantically harassing

people, even guys, for a tampon. John looked down at his key on his string necklace and promised, One day I'm going to have janitor keys. None of this latch-kid key business. And I want those skeleton keys. That'll be cool.

And Pearl muttered, Well, I could help you with math....

What happened to the two percent? Grandma shrieked, hands flailing. What are you talking about? The milk, Pearl, the milk. Grandma leaned over and whispered (Mom was upstairs bedridden with a flowing nose), Also when you go to the store, get me some white wine.

The open and shut snap of her change purse.

Now make sure it's chilled, I like it cold.

And Pearl could've sworn she had gotten it all straight to and from the store, but she does things such as putting back the cereal box in the refrigerator. But when Pearl got home and Grandma snatched at the paper bag, it was, What, did it turn red in the snow???! Granny smashed the bottle against the wall. Now Mother would find out about the wine for sure. Grandma saw the splatter and Yelled, Get the paint. Get the paint, child! Mother's rag felt like a dead bird in Pearl's hand, soaking up and dripping the red.

At night on her pillow, Pearl could hear Tide's skateboard do lines when she had to be in bed by eight. Sometimes she'd look up and watch him and it would be ridiculous how he'd go back and forth never leaving the frame of her window and

she'd repeat, Leave the frame. And when she closed her eyes, she knew how he'd be, all knees jutted out and hands balancing, riding the asphalt. And the last thing she would hear before drifting off to sleep would be an older male voice whispering. The same voice that said, Don't forget to take walks every half hour to clear the cobwebs in your head. The voice would drum out, Child, you are now floating down a river....

*I worried about John nights, How can I help him? It never got to crying with him at school but I'd gaze at those turquoise lines on his fair-skinned forearms and think they must be carrying all that water. In the days, I saw him and whatever he did, that was John, but at night he could have disappeared down waterfalls for all I knew.*

I have to walk the dog, Tide told her. Pearl got up and followed. They headed down back toward the ravine. And Tide pointed, See that tree. That's the tree where my friend and I used to pitch apples at each other. Now he's dead. And well, that was enough to shut Pearl up on top of her being silent, but she still thought, Well I've never done that.

The dog went loose and ran up to the water. Well, part-water: it had beer cans floating on top and was way too dark to see all the rocks underneath. But the dog as it got all muddy pawing through, revealed in bits the layers and layers of trash. Shit, Shit, Shit, Tide was saying. Pearl could theoretically smell the stench of toxic waste that the ravine emitted from where she was sitting up by the path on the

grass. But she was wondering where the ravine went, this bubbling brook.

John tried calling Pearl at home once and the weight of the phone felt like a bone in Pearl's hand. She stared at its whiteness.

.....And she's totally wiggled out...  
..... ..you've got to check out  
her mother, man... ..she lives just down the ravine from you..  
..... ..So what do you think?

All Pearl could see was this flash of a vacuum cleaner sucking particles up. She put the receiver to her ear.

Don't get silent on me, Pearl....

*Another half-baked idea came up with John today: the mixed tape philosophy. The very important telling question: When making a mixed tape and you come to the end of a side, do you A) fill in all space even if you cut off a song or B) have only whole songs even if this means a two minute wait of total silence?*

Is the final cut when the rose is clipped by the wooer or when the umbilical cord is snipped? This is what Pearl was thinking when out of the kitchen window she saw John in the backyard nipping a rose from Mrs. Robinson's rosebushes. And of all the fairy tales and musicals that Pearl's mother peddled to her growing up, that's what came out of it all the most. She wanted this guy to give her the rose.

*I only actually slept over at Driz's once and we made the trip to the corner store for gumballs and such and the ol' movie and all these pill-like candies came out and it freaked me out that they looked like pills and I dropped them. The thing was, when I dropped them, I was laughing hysterically and later I was all hyper-bouncing around in her living room and Driz gawked, Pearl, I've never seen you like this!, because I had such a serious side at school. Even then when I accepted such comments, in my head I was like, Fuck you.*

*Her wardrobe was all sorted by colour and it was as if she'd made sure that she had every shade available. One for every mood, she said. And I asked her what she thought of John and she said, He drooled on his cool a long time ago.*

*But if he did, she wore the lace.*

*It was at that sleepover that I met Mrs. Robinson. She came down in her black silk kimono ready to take on coffee. She made it, one hand looking after a cigarette. The smoke seemed to have a dark cloud effect on Driz, I had never seen her so still. But Mrs. Robinson danced around Driz, her hips closing drawers behind her and then the microwave door. Then she took her coffee and wiggled down into her seat. The way she smiled at me through scarlet lipstick, I half expected her to say that she knew my grandfather, and then I tried to calm myself down by the window with a great view of the backyard.*

*Mrs. Robinson liked her coffee hot. She'd take two sips of coffee, then go, Ugh, and have to heat it up again. The fourth set of rings wasn't the microwave for a change. It was John at the front door with the rose for Driz. A rose.*

*John came in and sat down and Mrs. Robinson opened her legs a bit so you could see this sash tied around her upper left thigh. Driz flopped the rose on the table and was like, Whatever, let the drooling begin.*

**All good parties end up emitting noise from the kitchen, John would tell her years later. Now little Pearl would be the first. She'd come down the curved staircase afraid of falling through the spaces of the railing. And she'd go and sit in the small chair and stare at the big wad of butter in the glass tray, the hairs on her back on end. Her mother would go down the stairs next, looking at the rail as if this is how it felt for someone to hold your hand. Then Grandma would descend the stairs as if they were a fan, one high-heeled shoe after another.**

*At the end of the year, Driz had a party at her house in the backyard and John puked all over the rosebushes. My mom's going to kill me, Driz spat over his shrivelled up body. He came with me to kneel in another spot in the backyard. But kept vomiting. I had my thin arms around him, one over his clammy forehead, one around his waist, and I sat there cradling with him, praying for it to stop. And then his mouth was just intricate froth. It came out like last words when people get shot on screen. And I saw his eyes. He was gazing through wisps of hair at Driz's blonde hair swishing all over the garden as she tried to cover things with dirt, looking like quite a music video but not coming over here.*



*Walking back up the ravine alone through a filmy air. Past the bridge, through the mud instead.*

*So this is what it must feel like to walk on the moon.*

*Past Tide's house who was still around but 'out of the picture' as they say. Up the driveway and up the stairs to my room. Not taking off my shoes.*

*Past the broken grandfather clock. Past the family tapestry whose colours were just oozing to me now. Especially one huge red ooze. Past my mom's door and the snoring trapped in her nose. Past my grandmother's door. Past the crying out in her sleep, But I was once an actress in Vienna.*

*I got to my room and shut the door. The walk of clothes to the closet and then the ransacking for my guitar. I slowly removed each piece of clothing and then took the guitar out of its coffin-like hard case and banged on it a few times, drifting to this....*

*My guitar teacher is playing his acoustic. His right hand is a hummingbird caught in strings. His three end fingers are up and fluttering as he strums and then stammers, Ring. Ring! It's got to ring. His two knees are in the air and he's almost telling the hummingbird to fly off to dove-ness. I watch, waiting for him to utter, Now you try it. But eventually he just says, Well, I guess that's it for today.*

*The guitar aside, it ripped off my leg. When I looked down, there was this red slash on*

*my upper right thigh from where the guitar had been. Don't go away, don't leave me!, This was seeping in under the door. My hair in my hands. The last thing John had said to me was, I don't understand why Driz's so freaked out about her mom's rosebushes, Mrs. Robinson really likes me.*

John came over to Pearl's house for the first time and Grandma said, Oooooohh, a visitor. Let me get one of my cakes I've been saving. And she brought one up from the downstairs freezer. It was all saran-wrapped. I used to make such beautiful cakes. Now my fingers are coursing with pain. Ah, I don't bake anymore. But at least I saved a lot of them. She got out a big butcher's knife and cut through all the layers saying, So how do you know my granddaughter? And she put a piece of cake on a dainty china dish and handed it to John. He took one look at the thing and it was sprouting with green mold spots.

Pearl's mother came rushing in from the den and said, That was that. The cakes must go. All sixty-six of them. Grandma stood by, biting her nails to raw, How can you waste food! Didn't I teach you anything? Oh, my beautiful cakes.

And Mother having to find the tranquillizer. And Pearl finding out that her mom had a tranquillizer in the house. And John having to be there now for the first time, his eyes all in awe as the needle went in. And Granny grabbing John's arm accusingly saying, He left on a day when there were beads of water hanging in the air and you could feel it on your face. And John, looking down, must have framed

the image of those bony fingers around his arm tied together at the knuckle because he'd later tell Pearl that's what he was always reminded of. And six body-bag looking bags in the corner filled with Grandma's beautiful cakes.

**INT.JOHN.DAY**

John goes into the side-washroom at a gas station. He leans his arms up on the sink in front of the mirror and is looking at his bare arms. He and Driz haven't made it to the campground yet so he is taking in the fact and taking it in long that there are no mosquito bites up and down the veins. He knows she strings him around but he is forever after why. This time the soundtrack is clearer than ever as the trucks outside leave and leave over hearts that flash red.

**like orange juice left out in the sun**

splash and glass of orange juice on my face and clothes. I'm drowning in sun again. little girls tossed on a field. try to look statue. oops sorry, Geal said, making those laughing sounds. it was always the same eee ee sounds they made whenever I walked near their circles.

when we played duck duck goose they stepped on my hands.

at sunset we had to go to bed. I got the bunkbed by the door where the mosquitoes joined in the game to suck my blood. in the morning, sometimes I'd awake my eyelids puffed up and I'd see them look confirmed that I was a mutant. my hands working anyway would reach out spidering bare shelf, no ray-ban sunglasses like all the other girls had.

that was only the first summer.

when it came round to June, there was no discussion --

the sunshine and swimming and the canoeing were the best thing any girl could ask for. now finish your orange juice.

throughout the years, and there were seven, I was soaked with the image of endless

fields and how I had to walk through them alone and how sometimes I had to fall down after only a few steps and sob it out. it circles into dreams even now.

*I've got a high view of the green fields and it's centuries ago. I'm wearing a white diaphanous dress that someone made me wear and it's got its own arms moving. The windowpane is round and is my only view of green everywhere. it's coming out of the earth and is my only cool. I know it will not last. I can hear the heavy footsteps on the staircase so very down below.*

My mom would come in and wake me up for school by throwing iron-pressed outfits on my face, then complain that I wasn't getting up.

My dad, he'd slip in later when I was already sun-drenched with exhaustion and he'd fumble with the open curtains a bit saying, All the world's a stage and you have to dress for the part.

So when my dad asked me, what about this Wane character? Is he another one of your yahoos? I told myself, Now I've managed not to go back to camp since I was fourteen, but think, a summer that doesn't start with summer school or slave jobs either, as I mouthed the words responsible and loving.

Wane and I were driving down the highway behind our shades. the day I told him everything, Wane's eyes were ice cubes trying not melt. He said, We're going to do it anyway and he went out and got a van with a tear-drop window and a tool box.

Wane hadn't slept in nights and was practically keeling over the wheel. Look what you have done to me.

My parents' Happy June kisses farther and farther away.

Trace had given us coffee and cigarette kisses. Coffee kisses to Wane and cigarette kisses to me. Her old words felt like shingles now. She used to tell us, Think of words in terms of being like small treasures like clams and to take words like a word, like just all words, the colour of words, the sounds of words, and how they look on the page, and how they feel in your mouth. It had wind, those chilling nights when we all talked around writing and it sounded like the thing itself was something we couldn't touch but made me write for hours after.

Now I see Wane sitting in all Trace's sofas instead of filling those spaces and his fingerprints blur everything. And then I see Trace eyeing me and I think, Someone please tell her that she smashed our moon cup along with the others and her only phone.

Smashing, she was faltering with her cigarette wand, and it was one of those helpless times where you didn't know what was wrong until she choked up, Ashtray

and Wane was right there with one under her hand, Smashing. Then she looked straight at me and said, The best kind of bars on the road will have an ashtray by the pay-phone and think of me then.

Whenever we pulled up to truckstops I asked for sardine sandwiches. This gave Wane a chance to tell me I was disgusting.

-- I'm fish and you're meat. Leave a message and make it sweet.

-- It's Wane, found on moonshine since you haven't been returning my calls, where the FUCK are you???

Let's go over it again. Let's go over it again, Wane reached above and tilted the overhanging light in my face.

I started out slow and told him, Everyday at lunch you walked me to your house and you sucked the thick milkshake up with your straw never taking your eyes off of me.

No tell me more. I really want to understand this.

You're not going to remember how I kept golden waffles stocked in your freezer because that was your favourite. My eyes on his cold kitchen tiles saying this.

**Yes I am going to remember that's why I want to know everything.**

*There's a tower and at noon when the sun is directly overhead you bring me way up on its flat roof and tell me to open the very big book and let you see all the ink marks on the new page and all their curves. The wind helps me, it makes things difficult. The handwriting's spidery anyway, I murmured, but you insist. The ink marks are throbbing off the page.*

**The sun was still hurting even with the shades. But at least Wane couldn't see my eyes. My Salada eyes. The way he called them that. The way he showed me around the kitchen and consumed all liquids. My Salada eyes. He wanted to milk them and leave them white. My eyes widening on their way.**

*He closed the very big book with a bang and cast his finger upon me. Do you realize that you could be burned at the stake for having red hair alone in my kingdom. You must relay to me your soul. It is the only way.*

**There is a place where Wane promised that good friendship is a straight**



yellow brick road to a successful relationship. It is Wane's kitchen. Me, right on his kitchen table. Him holding me up by the knees. Before I can answer he is sucking back my breath but when it comes around again, I say okay, I believe in giving things a whirl. The sun coming through in slits.

He said, you won't regret it. I want to give you everything you want. I'll give you a van. I'll give you the sun. He led me up the curved staircase.

by the first minute, all the girls had rolled out the red-carpeted plans on which guy was whose and how they were going to get them. who was available? take your pick, the guys're all wearing concert T-shirts with SOLD OUT stamped on the back in red ink, such choice. Geal said it didn't matter anyway because she had already been felt up by the movie star Corey Haim before he was famous in their school, Zion Heights. I'd watch them put their fresh layers of make-up on, their only protection from the sun. it only reminded me of how I used sunscreen and still was the one with the pale skin who got burnt. I waited like a diaphanous sheet for them to finish primping. I got, do you have staring problems? a lot. I tried to keep my eyes on the ground.

when they rolled their plans back up it was final.

I'm thirsty again, Wane said, pulling up to another truckstop. My feet landed

outside the van with the wind picking up any loose objects on the ground. Wane was ahead trying to open the glass door, ringing bells. He was having a hard time, kicking away at the swirling hamburger Styrofoam containers that were going for his legs like Pac-Man. He tried to retaliate by making his curses strong enough to take chunks out of the sidewalk.

Wane was poking around with a paper cup filled with sticky orange juice. Each pulp freshly squeezed. The thought of it burned my empty stomach.

He leaned over and asked me if I wanted anything, his lips crawling on my cheek, his teeth grazing.

Maybe I should fucking go back.

You can't fucking back out of this. He rolled back his tongue.

Then he was buying maps again, cramming them into his clothes, practically tattooing himself with highways.

Wane insisted on driving but was lost on sunset.

Wane: How do you get back on the highway?

me: I think it was back there, we needed to make a left.

Wane: No it's straight ahead.

----- more yellow road pills gobbled later ---

gas station attendant: You had to make a left way back there.

repeat 1x a day when the sun goes down

when I got back to my bunkbed my stomach was a blender on Ginsu but up against the glass window I'd still get this feeling of suspension. I'd be afraid to move. maybe I'd fall asleep and fall off the bed. sometimes I'd think maybe they can't touch me up here, but then they'd start throwing darts.

verbal charades was the evening activity. Geal got up and said in front of everyone, looking at me, Do you have any friends? I want to know. Someone else followed and asked, I want to know if you have any breasts. they laughed eee eee ee.

darts that would just graze me so that they could see my eyes widen. not darts that would hit me in the stomach, because it was filled with blood and would burst like a water balloon if hit directly, and they would be held responsible. but one dart that would whiz close enough and make me fall off and splatter all over the floor. so I'd sit there with my bag of blood and try to pretend the bunkbed was a treehouse and wish and wait and wish and wait for someone to climb up.

One time we got Lucky. She was hitchhiking to the next city. Wane had just been grumping again, We should have gotten a smaller car. What a crazy idea, a van for just the two of us. There's way too much room. Too bulky.

When she got in the van it was hard to pinpoint exactly what Wane was going to showcase this time, but it was bound to surface. Lucky was bubbly immediately and pointed to the snapshots we drove by. Like a bike in a tree. Go Lucky. Wane

saying, Yeah I'm a photographer too. When he finally looked over at me, it was in revulsion for my hangdog reactions.

Trace: Are you rucked? (Trace's word for stood up.)

Wane: Not now I'm not.

I could see Trace and Wane and the conversations they were going to have when Wane and I got back and then made up ones that I wished they were going to have.

Wane: Most people go by the nail in wood. A love partner like a nail so deeply wedged in wood can only be removed by driving in another nail on top.

Trace: But then love is a coffin, love is a coffin, love is a coffin.

Wane's eyes watched me near pay phones, but I was good. I never called. I did once though before our trip and I never want to let anyone make me feel bad for acting. Not that kind of acting. But, for now, I never was going to mention his name until this trip was over.

All I had was this one photograph, the fingerprints kept to the edges only. It is Trace's apartment. Trace jammed the wobbly extra square table into the corner. But in one swoop this guy came in and dragged it out like a dead body -- the noises on the floor -- onto the balcony and wiped it down with the edge of his

shirt. We go back in for chairs and Trace tells me that his name is Liner and that she is leaving. And then I remember chairs unfolding on either side of the table like wings. He saying holy shit. Me saying no fucking way. The flopping table-top moving our hands together.

When I came back from hanging out by myself by the road again, Wane and Lucky were dusting themselves off but I could feel they were still thirsty.

Lucky said, pointing my way, I can tell to keep you away from the frying pan. You're on your own laid-back time, girl. You'd get everything burnt. Wane going, Don't I know it. Don't I know it. Then they were scurrying through the back of the van for some kind of breakfast they could pour a lot of syrup on.

My laid-back self tried to sleep to stay away.

I was sleeping from my top corner bunkbed like a night owl. they were stirring their spaghetti-from-a-can in their unallowed hot pots waiting for the boils. if only I could stick my beak into their foreheads and drag each noodle from their head to straighten things out. was it the money. the mostly divorced and remarried parents. whatever it was, it was like leaving orange juice in the sun.

Whisky became our new mouthwash of choice. Bathrooms on the road were grosser than we were. So we avoided them, I am not going to let him make me feel gross about this, my straggly heart sizzle sticks. Whisky, making the insides more parched all the time.

Some mornings we made it to the washroom and that's where Lucky finally confronted me. I was swizzling water in a glass for the third time waiting for her to leave. I saw her staring at me through the mirror, her fists on her hips, and I knew something was coming. She was waiting for me to ask what is it while I went for the toothpaste, you know today I have this thing for clean teeth and I'm making sure to brush every tooth five times. I was half expecting her to grab the tube and glob up my nose like those girls at camp used to do in my sleep when they were just starting out with candy tricks. The old feeling had got the hairs on my body standing up like nails again.

at the showers, those girls were feet side-stepping my floorboards and I knew something more than steam was seeping out. the guys came up to me afterwards and told me I was a freak for having orange pubic hair. then they avoided taking the orange Freezies for evening snack just to prove it.

You really messed him up bad, Lucky was letting it out in hammers. She smeared on the walls, Don't you care? And still after all these years I kept polishing my mouth and didn't use it to say anything.

and so, Wane, do you see me through negatives. are you chortling on your false blackmail photos back at the campsite at this very moment. are you like me here out beside the road again. when I go back, will you accuse me again with something so preposterous. that you saw me and Lucky holding hands last night in the back of the van. and even what if we were. is that so revolting to you. maybe if I'll pick you some of these blackberries I can get through to you by your stomach. that's the way it was supposed to be, right.

When you find dimes or paperclips or gems on the ground it's called a 'ground score' Trace told me once. I was biting a nail that came right off when I smashed upon Wane and Lucky writhing in the campfire's ashes.

Wane was spewing past Lucky's ear, Hickey me hard and suck some more so my bruises will show.

Not even one drop of blood surfaced on my broken up finger.

I panicked, crushing berries and maybe the blood will come.

there is a place where courtship is really fucked up. I was sleeping the porch outside the cabin. Geal was sitting on the side trying to impress some guy, she was whispering into his ear. the next thing I know, she's grabbing the broom from me

and stabbing me in the crotch. her lips drawn back like labia in example snarling:  
I'm gonna stick this up your cunt. I'm gonna stick it up your cunt.  
the guy in hysterics drinking it all in. and he like everyone else at this feeding ground  
looking like he's straight out of a milk commercial.

I followed rocks out barefoot towards some sort of road. Geal was there. An  
older her definitely but not one wrinkle. She got to see my face and hands stained,  
the black clots of berries showing.

She, grinning, telling me how she's going to Berkeley for psychology in the  
fall. Psychology of all things. She spent all of two minutes to rub that in and  
strategically ask, So where are you going? before disappearing. The rocks gathering  
in my knees.

I don't know how much longer I can do these spirals. and I don't know if I can help  
you set us free, Wane. and I don't know if there will be anything left of me. I had  
set out with thoughts of healing, I swear.

I think the last of me is drying up now.

I saw my ghost's view looking down on me from above and the only blood I had left  
was the purple lining of my black leather jacket strewn open.

then I was back in my jacket and Trace was there. the clouds, sheer, curtains being



cut, and Trace wading through them. when she was close enough to me she crouched down dipping her fingers in the purple like she was leaving the edges of a photograph.

Wane's not around, the sound out there, So, Who do you really love?

I tried to touch the wafting voice, yes, I really love. I really love.

but it wasn't the old Trace and she just laughed, the ees curling out in her Lucky Strikes smoke way, blackening the ethereal curtains.

I tried to remember the photograph. Trace is wearing a summer dress with spaghetti straps. she captures the sun with her emerald eyes. she is not used to seeing me without Wane. she flip flops between her three types of making coffee. between the kitchen and Liner and I in the living room back and forth and then by some chance is out of filters fuck and has to go out.

even when Trace is not there her essence gives off a raw smell, but all her edges are refined. she, carefully crafting the assortment on the ledge by the window. she displaying the porcelain dishes with swirls, catching eyes. she, leaving her way of saying things in the apartment, the way she pronounces words like deluxe and swank, it puffed up cushions. it's usually hard to stay awake around her, even with my Salada eyes.

Liner's eyes have the square table in the corner on the balcony. Liner's eyes saying, Salada eyes rag up my tongue. I take the rag up to my lips. his eyes drive past them.

when Trace got back she looked at me like she'd been given the job of stage sweeper and I put the broom in her hand. and I was still, waiting for her to hand over a sunburst guitar and call me on...

But what if I gave you the guitar, Wane? Would that finally do it?

Wane was scavenging through my body bag, taking items. By that time, I had cleaned myself off and he's packing, probably for the last time, according to Wane's plan anyway. Lucky had already taken off with the six rolls of film.

That's my Young T-shirt, he was stammering. I'm taking this fuck-me tape. I'm getting the deposits back for all the empties too, so just forget about it.

*He told me I'm giving but it's become a curse many centuries ago.*

I grabbed my journal before he got to it. No fucking way.

I just don't understand, he said.

although it was really obvious to everyone in that whole camp what was going on, only once did someone address it. she got all the leads in the play. she was the only one who liked Billy Idol. she sat next to me once on the hot pavement of the tennis courts, where everyone was called if there was an emergency. the asphalt burning our asses. and there was a lot of waiting around. so she told me this story. she told me of her mom's boyfriend and how he'd only eat carotene pills on some weird health

trip. she'd always be like, so have a potato chip, and he'd shrivel back from the exuding grease. well, one day he turned up at breakfast with orange skin. and that one's true.

Finally the van was approaching the drive into the city and it could only encroach so far. Wane would keep looking up through the windshield for the moon like a spotlight or something, but it wasn't there.

Slowly our hands met like a spider finding another one out there. He murmured, I hope things work out for you. I hope that we're friends.

In the same dance he withdrew his hand and tossed me out of the sticky humid van and rolled off.

He's headed straight to Trace, I knew this when he slammed the door shut.

Maybe he's going there to confirm that she's on his side. Maybe to head straight back to where we came from and it was all for nothing. Maybe to head to her just for some wind itself.

But they both withdrew into the night afterwards and I couldn't touch them.

on the noon before Wane and I left on our trip, Trace rented a black limousine and kept driving it past my window. she would never give me the words why.

*I fled the windowed room and tried to flow down the steps feeding clawed-torn pieces of white dress like blank pages to the swirl above.*

*I fled the steps looking at my skin being slowly revealed in the outdoor light and was terrified that it would be mutated into some strange moldy colour from the green that had come in through the window or into some crusted colour from the sun on the roof. But there it was, my skin for me to scratch only.*

*And each white dress piece leaving was a paper that didn't have my blood. A million reasons for them to use their own blood and still they'll call me ungrateful to a million friends.*

*And as much as the dew felt cool on my savaged skin, I was wading through grass hunched over, naked again. The white pieces leaving me.*

**It had been two months and I didn't know if it was going to happen. I had to remind myself how to make a phone call. I had to wait praying for a lift in his voice. I had to describe where I was... Somewhere grassy and writing everywhere. It was too much. Liner showed and knelt to me lying there and had even brought tea.**

*Wane was at the top of the tower, his elbows grinding into the stone bricks. Those branches could be her finger veins. That silver river could be her spine. But wherever she was, the dark ink was bleeding over the sliver of the moon making it hard to read*

*things. The tower went so high up that each black tear that fell had the power of a driving nail by the time it hit the ground. I'm going to stay in the tower 'til she comes. Oh when she comes, the wind will blow the grass towards me and show her the way. And to the general direction of the grass he gasped, Where is my June?*

**It fills the holes**

**There had been school and this big hole in the timetable.**

**She was looking down and not at me at all and so I ended up following her on to the train, past the seats, and why weren't we sitting down? I had told myself, Shut up, Shut up. I had gotten myself on the train, after all.**

**You could've seen us in the lounge car. She was chatting it up with everyone else, giving each person two and a half minutes.**

**When we are there, we are in a drugstore. She picks out these gold dollar condoms saying in monotone, Hmm, a buck a fuck.**

**This is New Orleans, this is new orleans. If I can get her on to the abstract things maybe she can get lost in the coffee. Look here, *The Abstract Book Shop and Cafe*. And homemade chapbooks. The one in my hand's got pages that run ragged. Someone's taken off their wings and stapled them.**

**I'm reading the poems out loud. She bites into her po-boy sandwich, clams or oysters. On the side are my chipped nail-polished nails turning each page.**

**My reading voice arouses the interest of the cops at the next table. They don't pick up their coffee cups through the whole thing. My travelling companion's left three cream containers and five sugar packets all over the Formica, and here I**

am putting them back in her empty cup like mine.

She's asking the cops for directions. One rambles on about one street and the other drags on about the cross street. Yeah, and together they make a perfect square, my travelling companion grumbles on the way out.

We get to the street corner and a big armchair comes at us at that very moment with this bearded guy behind it, who we find out is only seventeen. I sit down in the thrown-out armchair not even filling half of it, it seems. I am among sticky garbage bags with hyper flies as she hurries past, her hair whipping by my teeth.

I ride it out as she paces. I feel my suede pouch around my neck but this is not like in some movie where my travelling companion tells me her life story and we become best friends.

This drug thing is not something I can do seriously, she says, Someone making me wait around. I could get involved if I wanted that.

This armchair I'm in is a deep red. I feel the stitching all the way down the inside and find plastic. I thrust this baggie at her, There, and she just mumbles, The skies are always sidewalk colour.

She is passed out. I go out alone. I'll get stabbed, raped, mugged, my mother had said and I hear, New Orleans?! I've been there. I know what it's like. There's a lot of crime and violence there. Why would you want to go there? Just a bunch of sailors and prostitutes there, my father's voice coming on again like tar. Everyone so sure of how it is and how it isn't and here I am and there's tons of people around.

There's roads all over and I'm leading myself on to the next bench.

There's one, in the corner of Jackson Square right in front of the best buskers ever. The singer's wearing a Tom Waits hat down over his eyes. A battered fedora thrown around on its own time like a plastic soda bottle in a fountain.

I start craving those chocolate-covered raisins that I slide out of cardboard boxes when I'm watching tv.

To the singer's left there's this Bouncing Billy Bass who keeps the time. To the right there's this macabre all-arms dancing doll. Her spidery arms go so low they're almost asking to be stepped on. They circle past this cardboard suitcase on the ground waiting for raining change.

I'm wondering from this bench how I could get them to ask me to some bar. But it's like wanting them to walk through windows.

In the French market, someone's putting a vest in my hands from some place far away. My fingers waving, the bits of nail polish float up to his eyes. His name is Phil. He has bullet holes in his jacket. His buddy brags on about their 'industry', as Phil comes around to the front of the table to ask me about my suede pouch.

Inside's my last baby tooth.

Phil sends his pal on a candy bar run for dinner. He says, Yeah, of course I know my friend's the type who reads out all the ingredients off the packaging out loud when you just don't want to know, but we always end up having a lot of time to kill. It fills the holes.



He talks to me of how he goes from town to town. How he saw a Jane's Addiction concert in some cornfield in Iowa for free. How some girl for no reason during the concert grabbed his arm and took a chunk out of it with her jaws. How he tossed some bits of corn back at her.

He says, The graves are always overflowing.

Then he has to work. I have to leave.

I take the string of my pouch around my neck and hand it over to him. He says his buddy won't let him do trades for clothes. I back away.

It's empty air the whole walk home and my numb cheeks are hoping for a breeze, a paper airplane to hit them, bird shit even fuck, but eventually I get her hairspray bits that eat my face. My companion is getting ready to go back to Kagans that night where we saw a guy who was the spitting image of Lenny Kravitz. He is supposed to meet her there. He doesn't show.

She keeps ordering drinks until she finds these two guys and then our eyes meet for the first time since we stepped into this place to exchange the irony of it all: we come all the way to New Orleans to meet two shits from Montreal. Now they're over in the corner sizing up my companion and I, deciding who is going to go for whom. A couple of poker faces.

They know the bartender and persuade her to make us these free shots of cherry something. My guy is nudging me saying it's got Tabasco sauce real hot, huh? It tastes revolting but I figure, You got to sip the whole thing down to the glass.

He is kissing me, deep ones. Phil could be passing by the window and I feel sick. My companion is poking her finger into the other guy's arm, Get me another drink. The glasses in his hand come back swaying and I'm hoping that maybe this guy will shatter them, make her face wrinkle up or something. Was it the drugs still?

She drowns out in my ear, "Supposedly it was a horse tranquillizer in practical life. I'd never give that shit to my horse. My dead braincells tell me so."

The guy I'm with yanks me on top of a chocolate bar dispenser. He tells me things like, The know-how carry around dried raccoon penis for good luck in this town, N'awlins. I kind of wish he was telling me about a Sealtest-crate-made basketball net, something I've seen in Montreal. Then he's talking about the sunset curtains that drape the doorway of his room here and do I want to fall through them.

And then I know it will only be a matter of time until his story is shot full of holes.

You're that Rob? The Rob that's been seeing Jen Silks for like two years now. (She went to my high school.) And this is one of those so-together couples. I probably had heard that he had bought her a diamond chunker gold ring on her birthday, or that they tree planted together one whole summer, or that they vacationed in Paris, *because they were so in love.*

My companion's got her fingers all through the other guy's dreads and she's probably getting lost in them only to get fucked and home by one a.m. to get enough sleep. My hand leaves my pouch that's not there.

So what about Jen then, don't you love her? And he says, Oh yeah, I love her but we have an understanding.

We're watching this pool game, some of us getting shots once in awhile. And Rob goes over to his friend with his bottle of Dixie and they look at the table, their eyes veering towards us, Rob asking advice on how to play the next shot.

The other guy comes up to me and starts pitching Rob to me: Look Rob's the best guy I ever met and he's really caring and I knew he was like my soul brother from this night I met him in a bar ... blah blah blah. They're so fucking close. My companion leans over and slurs, It sounds like you want to fuck him.

But he keeps on about how I should fuck Rob because we're all free and we're all brothers and sisters. He won't stop until my companion drags me away and we taxi cab out of there. We can hear them shouting, No guts! No guts. Just what the frat guys had yelled from a balcony on Bourbon Street when we didn't respond to their calls, Beads for tits. And Rob and his friend probably have each other's arms around their necks telling themselves, It's bad timing, that's all.

I'm staring where my feet disappear behind the driver's seat. She says, You've got to stop looking at me like I'm some Scooper or something that sleeps with any trash.

The cab driver could be driving us straight into the dark river.

On our last night we run into Phil and she knows I like him. She goes, No,

we can't go with them to Kagans, we have to eat haute Creole cuisine. That's way too expensive for them. But we'll meet you guys at Cafe Brazil later, I emphasize, grabbing Phil's jacketed arm. Phil just keeps gazing down at my nail polished nails the whole time while his pal mutters, Yeah right, I know how it is. I watch them fade down this boulevard of broken cobblestone, hands trying to fill their pockets.

We will, I murmur.

I take one look at my black charred chicken dripping with juices inside and Cafe Brazil ends up having a cover charge. I case the place but they're nowhere in the five mile radius. And they aren't at Kagans either.

It wasn't meant to be, she says.

I'm giving myself ulcers thinking about it over and over....

A couple years later while I was travelling through Vancouver I just happened to run into her at a bar, The Cambie, on a Welfare Wednesday when all the beers were overflowing. She hugged me right away and I pictured her nails on my back giving me ten red dots.

She had me over for wine as we watched the rain-soaked street from her doorstep. I shifted my cigarette from hand to hand, while she chimed, I can't believe *you'd* smoke.

She even gave out some of her story like there had been time between us and that was enough. How she drove over to Vancouver with some guy from Montreal

afraid to hit moose. How she passed through the States because the gas was cheaper. How this guy who she's with decides to tell her when they get there, Oh, by the way, I have some drugs on me.

And she confessed to me how she'd idle for days burning holes in the couch with cigarettes, with her shit kicker boots sprawled out on the floor. Considering becoming a heroin addict. It was the time to do it in her grand scheme of things. And then she'd clean up and get married and make horse piñatas on her kids' birthdays with Hershey kisses inside.

But every week, someone in Vancouver was OD'ing because the latest shipment from China or somewhere far away was way more pure than users were expecting.

Each word made it worse as she went on to say that the move to Vancouver was scary and it had taken her awhile to make new friends. You couldn't staple those kinds of words together.

You know, she said to me, I got myself out here. And then she stressed that she was really happy we had done New Orleans. It had a way of hitting you into the present.

So what are you up to now? she asks me.

Well, this cardboard suitcase with me tells it all. It is white and has the words written on it in black chalk like gunsmoke: **LOOKING FOR PHIL.**

## **blue toe nails**

**Her feet stuck out as she was falling asleep. He was getting out the blue nail polish but her hair was already wafting on the sheets. A record swirled in the background with more scratches in every groove.**

**In their minds they were just X and Y.**

**I need some coffee, she thought. *The water is so yellow, I'm a healthy student... You're my vitamins.* She was reading a letter from a friend at The Greasy Bulb. Something about how some guys will dine you before laying on you something heavy.**

**She was afraid to come here because the last time she came here they played this woman's tape with a high melodic voice and all the characters she had been studying that day were suddenly rushing out of her skull making a halo around her head.**

**What she had to notice was his hair. It looked like all the split ends had been ripped off leaving it about three inches long. But most of all, it was dyed light blue.**

Cough. Fuck, she thought grabbing under her throat checking for swollen lymph glands. This never told her anything.

She brought her stuff to the bathroom.

"No toilet paper."

"Oh. I'll fix that."

He was frantically searching for some toilet paper, which was of course right in front of his face. He grabbed a roll and felt like jelly as he tried to say, "So what do you figure, Horatia? Should I roll it to her like red carpet or should I throw it to her and make ribbons in the air all Rocky Horror Picture like?"

"How'd you get your hair that colour?"

"I bleached it, right. Then I used Methylene Blue cough syrup on top."

"No way."

"Yeah, I swear. \$1.89 a bottle at Jean Coutu."

He left her there with the ceramic bowl of golden light brown sugar packed to the top in the middle of the table like a sandbox. She reached for the fork and tried to make it shower yellow.

"You got sugar eyes."

"It's that girl over there."

Horatia looked at the girl by the window curled up with her coffee in the frame. "But she's just sitting there, hardly moving at all."

The waiters, if you could call them that, didn't get paid except for sharing tips.

X saw Y making his way over again slow. He was all violins and bow-legged.

She was waiting on his mattress on the floor of his bedroom and he only had crackers in the cupboard. But when he came back, the crackling went on and on forever. Somewhere between this is crazy and wasting time and this is allowed as a dream. Somewhere like X always equals something.

She had smiled when he brought out the box. She had gone and crawled inside it.

If she came to his place more often, she'd learn that his cupboards would never have more than one lonely can or some box of something but always the perfect thing.

He was holding her bra in his hands, threads coming out of it all over.

"This looks like it's been through the whole football team," he said.

No, she shook her head, no.

His fingers curled around the back of her head.

"My band's playing at The Bulb tomorrow night. Will you come?" I'll get



Horatia to bring you lots of free coffee, he was thinking. "It's actually getting kind of ridiculous. We're always playing the same songs and it would be really helpful to know if you think we're fresh at all ... ," he said grabbing a toe.

He was taking more and more of the black records out until they were everywhere.

*She went over to his shower. There was a spider there. She stepped on it. Yellow liquid dripped down the wall. She opened her book. The pages a dark yellow. The black ink type started to suck up the yellow. Then crawled up the curtain.*

She woke up in his cold apartment with cracker crumbs all over her skin.

She sat up. He had left. Did anything happen? No, he had kissed her a lot, and she had told him she had a cough, and he had said like I care.

She let her head fall back on the pillow and she knew he had put his hand on the top back of her head. His hand had felt like chocolate fudge poured on vanilla ice cream.

But now there was only this dark magazine page with ragged edges, above and askew, and out there like eye breakfast. She had never seen a poster or anything on the ceiling before.

*I got so high that I scratched 'til I ...*

Its letters were a little cloudy without her glasses on but it said "Pray for

**Rain".**

**There's a fine line between Kleenex and toilet paper, she thought as she stumbled toward the shower. When she undressed she saw seven blue numbers penned on her leg. She turned on the water and got in with her brick of soap.**

**Y was looking sick hunched over the table by the window. The table's centre at the floor split into four.**

**"Do you want me to go buy you some cough syrup or something?" Horatia came over and asked him and then said, "Fuck it anyway, lets keep your voice scratchy for next week's show."**

**He remembered that the scratchy sound of the records didn't seem to make X uncomfortable at all and they had gotten into talking and she had said, "I'm in the book" before she began to drift. A bootleg crackled in the background, a live show, and the singer in his throaty voice had gone, "So Montreal, you've got me here again for another night-- now that's luxury."**

**Then she was asleep and he had been holding her feet like he wanted to hold her hands. He had noticed her toe nails were a bluish hue and knew that blue was the colour.**

**out of the green**

*Everything was turning the underskin green hue of a potato.*

Jane was on the vinyl couch in front of the TV most of the time, watching.

Jane, all smooth and cool in her pajamas. High school had ended a week before.

Jane, letting a mug sit on her knee, while the green leaves outside were starting to demand attention.

There's a box of cookies under the lampshade that Christie had brought home from work the day before. Now almost powdered.

At 6:10, Christie would come through the door, her face caked with make-up, telling her sweet sister that she's looking a little pasty there by the TV set.

At 6:10, in another part of the country, a guy would get on a Greyhound with a knapsack and a jar under his arm.

Christie came in straight to her daily ritual of foraging through the cupboards in the kitchen ... not even a jar. She danced back into the living room and jittered

on the hardwood floor, thrusting her body into an armchair by Jane's head. Leg, arm, nose, neck, eyelashes. Until her fingers could pull lightly on Jane's blonde hair.

Christie checked the messages: Jane didn't answer the phone. It was easier that way. Christie'd get the wankiest drawls coming through. Christie hoping maybe there'd be something borrowed, something new:

*Are you still mad? ... Did I tell you: you are so visual ... new dresses for The Royal Chest this Saturday night ... hey, it's Cliff ... When are you free?*

Jane just sat with a mug on her knee. Message parts going through her like steam. She's not even listening, Christie thought. I have to get out of 'the green room'. That's what they called the living room, the green room. "Everyone needs a comfort zone," Jane had said to her once.

Christie said, "There's nothing in the fridge. You're coming with me to the Gross-R-We store. I don't want to walk alone any more than necessary." But first, she was putting on black mascara and eyeliner. More than her job would ever allow.

Christie felt Jane lagged closely behind her like a dog. She always had to nag Jane to keep moving. To Christie, moving was like music.

Jane would pick images out from the scenery, would press them down in a notebook. She never thought of writing stories or anything grand. But poems,

maybe she could start with poems....

Jane thought that she had just walked into a commercial and, after the initial pizza variety, all the colours increased her fatigue.

The grocery clerk, Randy, just smiled inside at the familiar scene of Jane in her men's pajamas flowing through the aisles of The Quick Fix, and Christie, in her cookie shop uniform, buzzing and freaking out after an eight hour shift because, after all this time, she really didn't know how to cook. And what had made Jane always prefer that someone else do the cooking?

And Christie was thinking with her painted eyebrows projecting, there's Randy over there, putting price tags on juice cans. She couldn't resist running up to him. Started laying it on him thick like maple syrup in her best southern accent. "Oh Randy, now what *am* I going to do? I just can't bear to face pasta again." She threw her arms around him and pretended sobbing.

Randy broke loose. Punched the air. Then settled into a stance with the sticker gun pointed at Christie, warding her off. Christie's mascara started to run in cracks along her face.

"Well, Randy, are you going to answer me or not?" Christie asked, hoping that he would just ignore the tears if she did too.

Randy stole a glance at Jane. She was swallowing up the mascara with her eyes, making it disappear.

He looked back to Christie and said, "TV dinners, aisle three." Her swinging

purse knocked over a pile of cans as she left the scene. You could hear the rubber soles of her shoes trying not to stick to the sappy floors, irritated.

As Jane turned to follow her, Randy said, "I can't take emotional women."

"She doesn't need rejection, Randy," Jane said.

He watched Jane amble down the aisle. She was the type of kid, he thought, that would have slipped cookies into his lunch bag in Grade four. So long, Pajama Jane.

He leaned over, elbow jutting over some cans. Christie, with her spider eyes, had reminded Randy of girls that had sucked out all his insides. I am a shell, he told himself as he spotted another can.

The two sisters ate their TV dinners in 'the green room' on the slick couch. TV trays unstacked. They ate in slurping silence -- that is, till Christie started getting mad. "Do you think there's any potato in these potatoes?" Old aluminum tops from TV dinners were crinkled all over the hardwood floor so that when Jane thought about moving across the room, *she saw herself walking on mirrors*. "God, if I see another shampoo add, I'm going to puke." Jane knew this meant Christie didn't have the energy to take a shower before going out. Christie had hardly splattered water on her face to wash off the mascara. Boys like my natural body odour anyway, she had told Jane once. "Jane, find me some green hair, will ya? I really feel like seeing green hair!"

Jane eyed her peas as potato hurled toward the set like paint.

The image of the bed was a garden, a heaven, in the middle of a chaotic room. In the middle of olives rolling around the carpet and toothpicks up peoples' asses. But for some reason that he couldn't understand, Randy didn't feel natural about using the colour green for this garden. He stepped back a bit. 'Bed at a Cocktail Party'. It needed a reclining figure.

Jane woke up in darkness on the green couch. She touched the ground with her feet and felt the familiar crumbs on the hardwood floor. "Christie, take a break. Stay home tonight and we'll bake cookies." But Christie was already gone.

Christie set up her guitar on the side of the practice studio. There were carpets on the walls. She kept looking up at the designs forgetting that Davis hadn't booked the space with mirrors. Somewhere in the darkness, Jett had started drumming like bashing a piñata to pieces.

**A piñata piece of the band:**

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**(Phone ringing.)**

**Guy on the phone: I'm looking for a female band.**

**Jett: That's us.**

**Guy on the phone: What's your name?**

**Jett: *Baby Jane.***

**Guy on the phone: I mean, what's *your* name?**

**(Clunk.)**

**Davis: What about the road, then?**

**Jett: Personally, I'm sick of performing at The Royal Chest. Only our boyfriends ever show up and usually with dates.**

**Davis (noticing Christie nodding off): How you keep awake is beyond me.**

**Christie pictures the tour bus pulling up to a road stop and then she sees herself pocketing handfuls of sugar packets. Then on a table in the corner, it's all in the tab, a thin paper rip and ... mounds of sugar. Cliff is there and he's only looking at her. He hands her a straw.**

---

**Jane in another part of town, couldn't go back to sleep.**



*Jim would keep her up so many nights talking about how she wasn't passionate enough. Maybe you have a crush on that guy? Or him? He wanted Hallmark cards. It took up sweetness.*

Christie in Cliff's bed again ... when it happens, it only happens at his place under his mirrors on the ceiling ... at least there is the band ... [he sat there reading the paper] ... I haven't hit the highway yet, but I want the traffic lights, a series of green glow ... don't know if I'm ready for the road ... what I really wish is ... [he was still reading the paper]...

The Greyhound Guy's bus crashed right through the leaves. He sat near the back of the bus, scoping for possible subjects who could help him fill his jar. Someone who would write it all down on a sheet of paper. Who would let him tear it away. He could do it.

Randy was restacking some cans that had just fallen on top of him again when he started thinking about his idea that everyone has some sort of paper stuck inside them that sums them all up in one line. Only, somewhere along the line, this paper can be stolen, lost, dissolved. I am a shell, he told himself. And then he thought of

**Jane curling up inside of him.**

*Hands would grab Jane off the couch. Pure frustration. Jane was staring in the scenery again but not taking in Jim. Jim yelled out from the centre of the room, "Would you tell me exactly what's going on in that head of yours? And don't tell me about how you can't eat cookies or wild geese flying off or the ugly duckling or delicate tea cups being smashed to bits!" She couldn't explain how she felt in clear descriptive grammatical sentences. It was like how she didn't get Jim a Hallmark card on his birthday, You know I tried, Jim, I went down to the store and everything and none of the words did it. Maybe she just wanted to stay a Rorschach test.*

**Christie was going on and on about how the band needed lyrics, "Believe me, Jane, if I could cut out pieces of my brain, I would."**

**She wrapped a lock of Jane's hair around her finger, pulling, "What about your notebook, Jane?"**

*Stashed under cushions in the green couch.*

**Jane turned white as Christie walked toward the phone to call Cliff.**

**Randy was in his basement fumbling through The White Pages thinking, They should call these The Yellow Pages, as he shakily carried it over to the phone.**

Everything's always flipped.

Christie was there to eat up the phone. "What do you want!" ... "Jane, do you want to have a word with Randy?"

Jane took the receiver from her and put it up to her ear.

"Coffee?" he asked.

"When?"

"How about for breakfast? Tomorrow morning."

Randy sensed her getting all tense. "I could meet you at the cookie shop that Christie works at."

He hung up before she could say anything.

Jane, frozen, let Christie tug her into Christie's whole cookie-making process. Christie would make Pillsbury Chocolate Chip Cookies as a treat and a half once in a while. Told her Alice B. Toklas stories like bedtime. It all reminded Jane of a hazy time when someone used to chant to them: "Who stole the cookies from the cookie jar?" Only now, the old gas oven boomed every once in a while like a bass drum, like something exploding.

*Jane watched Christie up on stage and then closed her eyes. She kept seeing the way Christie sometimes crashed into Jett's cymbal, and glittered, stars, would spill, over, into, the next, seconds.*

"Cliff and I could really be a great couple," Christie said.

There's so much hope in cookie dough. So much softness. And you can only hope it doesn't get too hard or burnt, Christie thought as she spooned out the dough onto the cookie sheet.

*It wasn't too long ago that Jane was eating spoonfuls of that stuff raw cramming for exams. Just to stay awake.*

Christie didn't use a timer either. She chanted to herself, "There's a certain point when dough turns to cookie. When the toothpick slides in and out with no mess. And the timer has nothing to do with it."

Jane who had just woken up from the couch again thinking that a whole night had gone by when only an hour had, watched Christie pull the cookies out of the oven and wait about two seconds before eating them, all gooey and sticky fingers off the tray.

Jane wondered what was going to happen with Randy on their date. Jim was the first guy in high school who'd ever taken an interest in her, and at seventeen that seemed pretty late.

*Jim's fingers were reaching in and poking her. They thought this would loosen her up. She had wanted him. She really had. But it was all really painful and not working. Fat fingers, tight lid, kid poking eager, sugar eyes, his tongue poised. Buds, wa.er, and heat.*

*Why weren't her insides more like dough? But it was fighting back.*

Jane didn't think she was going to be able to eat anything at breakfast.

In the morning, Randy was shedding the sheets wondering what to wear. Well, Jane's going to be in PJs, so I better dress casual. He started thinking that Jane must be pretty easygoing. How she had walked around him a few times like smoke. Then Randy tried to figure out what he was doing asking her out in the first place. It'll be casual.

The phone ringing made him think of a cigarette pack hitting his skull. It was Cliff.

"Hey, are you up, Randy?"

"Yeah. I'm finishing up a painting." He said reaching for a cigarette. "You see Christie again?"

"We fooled around but I didn't want her to get the idea that I was serious or anything, so I started reading the paper and she ripped it to shreds. I'm going to get her flowers in a couple of days so things should be normal."

Randy asked, the words coming out slowly, "Do you know anything about her sister?"

"Yeah, Jane. Isn't she the one who walks around in pajamas all the time? Anyway Jim thought that was attractive until he went out with her for a year and

they never did it. A whole year! Can you imagine? He said they had the worst luck fooling around: posters falling, people calling.

"Listen, I got to go, but try to be available tonight after work. A bunch of us want to go have a few drinks at The Chest, alright?"

"Yeah, maybe."

Well, maybe Jane and I can sit around and talk about all the mutual assholes we know, Randy brooded.

The cookie shop was still pretty empty when Jane stumbled in to meet Randy. He had never said exactly what time to meet, so she had just come when she got up. Christie was sucking up almost as much coffee as she was making over by the counter. She'd rip open the sugar packets and hold them over the coffee pot. Jane slid down the one thin aisle into one of the booths. She wished the place was more of a diner, with blinds on the windows and trays with glass display cases filled with cherry pie. Her sister deserved to work in a place with more things to steal than an aluminum foil ashtray with cigarette burns all over it. And she wanted it to be special with Randy too when he came. It was, after all, their first date.

Everything seemed to have been put on mute as Jane watched Christie as if she was looking at someone from under a glass. The manager was yelling at Christie and pointing at the clock for one reason or another, only important to him. Finally, Christie came over to talk with her.

"Oh hi Jane, honey, some weak coffee, maybe?" Christie said sugary, coffee in one hand. "What can I get you for breakfast: Hawaiian sprinkle or cocoa swirl?" She was already swirling away from Jane's booth when the sound of waterfalls happened and a slop of coffee from Christie's hand landed on the floor. "That is the sound of an overflowing toilet," Christie sang in the same key.

With a swing of the windowed doors, The Greyhound Guy strutted in, cookie jar under his arm. There was a girl who nearly shook the glass walls with her look of worry and then there was a girl who looked calm and collected in what looked like men's pajamas that he couldn't figure out at all.

"Hello." Jane noticed some guy pulling up right into her booth, sitting himself across from her. He laid the cookie jar on the table. It was a clear glass jar, empty except for three bits of paper. He looked at Jane and waited for her to ask him the big question, "So what is that?" She knew it too and held out for him to get on with it. His words felt like they were crystallizing her bones, "Well, you see, this cookie jar is for collecting dreams. So far, I've got three of them from three dolls I met on the bus... ." Christie waltzed by with two coffees and a wink but had to go back to the coffee machine again.

"Now I didn't get to know their real names proper, but these bits sum everything up," he said, pointing a coffee spoon at her mouth, "Wanna guess who wrote what?" He pulled the first piece of paper out. His sweaty fingers darkened

the paper.

"I don't think so," Jane said.

The Greyhound Guy stared hard at Jane. Stared hard at her light green eyes, "So, are you going to give me your dream, baby doll?" He held out a pen like he was a record producer signing on a band.

She saw the ink covering her esophagus like Pepto Bismol ads.

"I'm all out of master plan dreams," she said sadly.

"Sometimes I don't need to get the dream on paper. Sometimes I can see right through to a person's dream like glass." But with Jane he only saw light green.

Christie looked all choked up as The Greyhound Guy walked passed her out the glass doors with only a small hint of a smile. She sunk into a chair and it was before her coffee break.

*Coffee turned quicksand.* Jane wondered if Randy was going to show. She scanned the shop as if she were seven and looking for her mommy in the mall. Then Randy shuffled in and she aged a decade and maybe more. Randy led her by the hand to a booth in the back corner by a big window view of shaking trees.

Her hand turned into a glove the second Randy touched it.



A piece of cherry pie out of Randy and Jane's coffee date:

---

Randy is smearing the glass window with his fingers. Jane is wondering why he isn't looking at Christie.

Randy: Your sister's like a cookie in a jar that gleams from the top shelf asking you if you're tall enough.

Jane: So you would go after her if you were taller?

Randy: No, but no matter how tall you are, she'd sit you down and make you wait for her and whiz by with burning coffee flying toward your skin.

Jane: What do I do?

Randy: Well, we'll see ...

Jane: What about you? Have you gone out with a lot of girls?

Randy (shrugging): I paint, you know.

Randy is shifting in his seat wondering, When the hell was somebody going to bring over some coffee?! But because he seems indifferent about girls, Jane is relieved, thinking, We have all the time in the world.

---

Christie waited for Cliff in 'the green room' while he washed up. "Everyone needs a comfort zone," it rang in her ears. But Christie always avoided the couch.

If she let herself lie down on that, she figured, there would be no getting back up. Cliff had shown up on her porch with yanked-out soiled flowers. He had actually shown up at her door. It was a start.

She heard him start to clunk through the medicine cabinet and nervously skipped back.

Cliff had been to many bars and they all had either liquid or bar soap apparently. In this sisters' bathroom there was this powder dispenser thing he could shake. "Who would've thought of using powder soap?" he said holding up the container. "It rubs into the skin," Christie answered, sighing seductively in the doorway. Before her mascara started to run.

Randy got Jane to come visit him at his parents' house. He led her down to his space in the basement and they sat on a couch there. Because of her pajama ways, Randy felt as if an uncomfortable one night stand sex thing was over with, and they could chat and get on with the breakfast in bed thing, even though it was evening. Someone had flipped the hour glass.

Jane had to smile at Randy knocking over jars of paint that spilled out onto the carpet as he came and sat next to her.

Then he ran to get them juice and cookies. Dream food, he mumbled.

In the silky silence, Jane opened her notebook and took out her granny reading-glasses. She reached for the cigarette from Randy's left hand instead of the

juice can from his right. The smoke didn't go down her throat like it was supposed to but curled up behind her glasses and stung her eyes. A thin paper rip and she was scribbling:

--One may start with juice can and end up Andy Warhol.

He scribbled back:

--Person who wears pajamas all the time confuses sleepers.

Randy thought that if he was some sort of tough fortune cookie, then at least Jane slipped in some fortune.

He leaned over and kissed her. She felt her back sinking into the couch. *Her spine is like a knife.* Was alarmed the couch was warm. Started drooping her eyes. *She took in the dark woolly carpet, the baseboard heating, the streaks of paint, the damp back wall, until it all wasn't there. The ashes of his cigarette were coming down like gray stars.* He kissed her again on the forehead. Then she actually fell asleep.

Randy's first reaction was to panic. What, is there really nothing there? Fuck. He held his head together with his hands, pacing all over the room. Deep down, there was something inside of him. There was something very tangible: the thought that he liked someone more than they liked him.

He fell into a chair by the couch and finally calmed down a little. Jane looked so calm and peaceful in her black and blue striped pajamas. He felt bad for his rash assessment, thinking, Who knows what she's been through with other guys?

I mean, at least she trusts me enough to feel like she can rest with me, right?

He dimmed the overhead lights. Then, he lit a big candle and set up the canvas near her sleeping body so that he could feel the warmth coming from her. There was his painting, the empty garden with olives kicking at the foot of the bed and there Jane was on the couch ready to be painted.... He felt like he was shoplifting; as he lifted up the paintbrush, he splattered her cheek.

*Brushed past her cheek. Locks. Someone was cutting at her hair. Would float over and change into leaves. It felt like paper. She closed her mouth so one wouldn't sneak in there.*

Finally, he was done and he stood back as if there was a mattress behind him. He leaned over and blew out the wick.

When all the heat, flash and whirlwind was over Christie stuck her hand under the lampshade. Cliff didn't flinch as the light went on at all. The he said the words calmly, "I'd really like to stay for breakfast." Christie laid her head back on the pillow. There she had it, the words. She looked at Cliff and then it wasn't Cliff at all but The Greyhound Guy from the cookie shop that morning smiling back at her.

Then Christie was through the window shattering glass.

Jane slipped away at the crack of dawn but not without noticing that Randy

in her presence decided to paint up a mirror of her out of the blue.

When Jane came back shaking, Christie was on the couch, staring, cold.  
Hands wrapped up in ripped sheets. Cookie bits all over the hard wood floors.

The tour bus pulled up to take Christie away.

[The band was going to do it. They were hitting the road.]

Jane slid her notebook that was full of everything she'd ever managed to get down on paper under Christie's frozen body. Then Jane was just standing in the driveway as the tour bus pulled out.

There were green leaves all around her. They looked at her funny.

## the tubs

The way Eddie walked in and through the apartment, it was from one white out to another. The ridge door, her roommates' green parsnips and coriander leaves would trestle down to ones that were already shrivelled up on her barren bottom shelf which was masking taped and marked Eddie. Letting the door slide, her unfinished tin of Carnation evaporated milk in hand. The few people left were just her roommates sprawled out into a pipe-thin forest. Drew using up the whole cream-coloured couch. That couch could have been the center of the universe. She had telephone cord wrapped around armskin, was spewing the red impressions into the receiver. Phase, limp in the matching armchair, one leg over one of the arms. She'd jab the other arm with her fist every once in awhile. Kent, handed her a jar of urine to sip at though everyone involved probably thought it was apple juice. It was so almost under-water silent.

\*\*\*

[A toilet flushes.] The sound was a river flowing through all of this.

Eddie tore in there like she had to use the washroom. Found herself sitting on the edge of the bathtub facing this guy, both feet out. With strangers it was a lot easier

to ask questions.

What are you doing here? she asked him.

I got bounced out of a punk show for spitting beer at the band.

He obviously was doing something with the guitar on his lap, though so it was one of those dumb questions. And it was then that he leaned over and whispered through curled fingers holding a cigarette, The bathroom has the best acoustics. You try it, Say something.

She thought of the others.

He started bending some strings for her. Made her see this image of him smashing guitar to its wooden bits to stab and toothpick the soul. Because the faucet kept dripping like one annoying tear a second.

The noise must have drifted through the door because soon her roommates, Drew Ceen and Phase Walk and Kent Seasons were coming to life in various parts of the apartment and then at the door pounding, Get the fuck out of here. The party's over.

Eddie's head all bendy and not sure what to do, let the guy grab her as they were out

the back door.

Now there is something about Montreal apartments in the Plateau area because a lot of them have these porcelain bathtubs and this backyard had a few old ones just sitting there.

They swirled down the fire escape, appearing in one of the bathtubs. There was some light coming from the apartment windows but there was no worry of her roommates looking out the window at them, not even Kent. It was as if those guys couldn't see as far as their fingerprints let alone out the window. Except maybe Kent who was planning the next ten years.

The guitar case was there beside them but she didn't remember hearing it land. There was duct tape around that and around everything, like his elbow, his boots. Through glances away from the ground, Eddie noticed him lighting a cigarette with a Zippo lighter. And he had stringy hair.

*Everything about him is satin strings.*

She looked back at his guitar case on the tufts of unkempt grass and tried to think of something to say. Should she tell him about one of the coolest things she'd read about John and Yoko recently? How they'd order in to their bed tubs of ice cream



and eat that for days when they were trying to get off heroin?

So I guess you want to be a rock star then, is that it? she finally murmured.

If I was a rock star, I'd scatter white roses all over this bathtub for you and maybe you'd only notice the green leaves, he exhaled.

\*\*\*

He spoke in his throaty way, I see us in a bathtub on the closest thing there is to seaweed, but not close enough. And one of your roommates probably enjoys bored-housewife dramatics the way there's broken dishes and glass all around here. And even though it's not suburbia, those buildings to me are all the same box houses that just sit in their square of ice cube tray like fat Jell-o. And pretty soon the sugar will start pouring through the chimneys into the TV sets and there will be lonely shivering people on the couches trying to fall asleep by these static windows.

When he glanced back at Eddie, he looked like he was sorry, he's just been around this pond too many times. He was one of those rare true Montrealers that she knew--

He wore a trashy olive green leather jacket and was called Toad.

Look up there. [She pointed to the neighbour's cement sun deck.] See those plants and statues of sea horses and big stones. The rusted grill over the charcoaled wok. The scattered cigarette packs like pizza boxes. That landlord and his old lady are wild. They stole most of the plants and the flower pots from a graveyard.

And he said, God, you're right, They even have a pink flamingo.

[She was looking at their circle of pastel-coloured sun chairs.]

\*\*\*

She had fallen into a chair so many times while Drew was whisking something out of the oven. And then, right in front of Eddie, Drew would coo only to Phase, Oh Phase, you have to try some. Won't you have a mound-full. And Eddie had to just sit there in total disbelief as the question never came around to her. She told herself, It's okay. Don't ask for any. You don't want any of her fucking garden vegetarian bullshit.

Eddie had been subsisting on Carnation cans for awhile anyway even though her grandparents were the only ones she knew who used the stuff.

And if Kent was around Drew and Phase would be talking with him of menstruation

and rat-like tampons with their strings and blood strewn pads and discharge just to make his face go red. And he'd be sitting there beaming, happy to be considered one of the girls--

Eddie'd slip back thinking, Edith Grove, the place where Mick and Keith and Brian of The Rolling Stones hung around trapped with each other but getting on. Existing only on potatoes laughing as they dusted off the clinging earth.

In bathtub moments, she saw herself taking all of Drew's little foil baking trays. Flipping each one over in her hands and punching it in the middle. Sticking them all over the place as ashtrays in Drew's non-smoking world.

\*\*\*

Toad watched Eddie. This girl would hardly talk, figuring things like lather. Made him reach for yet another cigarette.

He seemed to be steadying himself, trying not to let the words come out too jumpy, I live alone, right, and that gets-- Well, once I showed up early at some friends' party with a paper-shopping bag full of my posters and a lamp and practically all my little shell-shaped soaps.

Eddie thought, There's something behind that presentation. But she couldn't just say

that.

How did Phase talk like melting marshmallows in butter? After sucking in marrow from the animal bone herself.

\*\*\*

He asked her, Do you believe in mutual suffering for a couple or non-suffering with recognition of the other suffering?

I'm starting to believe more in sounds, she said, and so I would say I believe in lying down on white sheets and hearing the sound of someone you love puddling around in the bathtub not too far away.

The living room couch came crashing off the balcony and over their heads.

\*\*\*

Toad was watching Eddie, who was trying not to look at the couch. It didn't seem like she even heard the thud after it went down.

If there was water in the tub, there'd be those concentric circles that seemed to

break before they reached her. Even without water, there was always that chance of your head slipping under the rim. There was something under-take-her about bathtubs.

Toad helped her turn around and now she was lying with her back against his stomach. She grabbed her belt with her hands to hold on. Trying to make that calming effect in her stomach.

\*\*\*

He was already in the bathtub and she saw herself standing outside gazing in. He was whispering, Sink or swim. Sinkorswim. Sinkerswum. And she was trying to toss herself in. Shit. Her feet wouldn't budge from the ground. How did she just jump in before?

One toe in and she felt herself turning to stone. Eddie had thought about swimming many times. But pools were always way too cold. There was this whole other subculture of girls going to 'the baths' all the time (their word for the pool). The idea was to get clean by exercising. One girl confided to Eddie once, when freaking out, she would tell herself, Self, Go swim. But, she told Eddie, I'd be doing laps steaming up my goggles, it was ridiculous, crying.

And Toad was just lying there waiting for her in the tub, feet up on the rim. The muscles inside his boots throbbed through the skin like lungs, in, out. In and out.

\*\*\*

It was his beat-up boots with duct-tape suspended there that made her finger down the sides of the tub covering some of the rust spots making it more white.

Yet they had no food, how long could this last? Toad took out a can of beans and balanced it on the rim at the front of the tub. He said, You should see me on a road trip: I warm cans up on the dashboard.

And Eddie looking at that dashboard stated, Well a tub is a vessel.

And he said, No it's not, it's a holding tank.

He lit another cigarette like a faucet dripping. She knew what he was doing. If Eddie knew how, she would grab friends from the world like bands grabbed musicians. You're an excellent trumpet player, stand here. But somehow Toad was looking at her like she wasn't considering something and she knew there was the step-in-musician part of it.

Singers make you sweat and then stand there waving a white towel above your

grabbing fingertips.

\*\*\*

Look I can't sing, she finally said. I'll croak. We couldn't busk it out on the road or anything, so I hope you're not souping up some great duo.

He started to stroke her hair and she realized she had already gotten him under her skin. Shit. Shit. Shit. A guy she could not read.

She asked him, If the love song you write about me is shit, will you think it's not really love?

And in reply, he said, It wouldn't really be shit if I was in love.

And then she was thinking, Maybe we can sleep here? while he was thinking, But all our passion might go down the drain?

*But it should flow into our dreams like a vessel.*

Toad hugged her more so that she wasn't looking at the falling leaves that said it was a long way off till spring but at the lights around that went ballistic.

\*\*\*

She was walking down St. Catherines, as she called it, and she came upon a hot dog vendor on the corner at Union, which was strange because it was illegal to sell hot-dogs on the street in Montreal. He had to stand around freezing his ass off but was happy to be outside. He told her that he could cart off at any time, he built the wheels himself. He apologized profusely for the runny ketchup. Then he leaned over and whispered something, but someone else's words were coming through.

\*\*\*

Will you go to the ocean with me? [the words singed her ear]

\*\*\*

She was back in her grade 13 chem. class and her lab partner was lighting up the Bunsen burner with a Zippo lighter, telling her that he needed her help and that he couldn't wait for her forever and that she'd better snap out of it. Her chem. teacher was at the front of the class reclining with a smile as wide as a talk show host's, Don't forget to boil all the water off slowly. We want residue. Pure residue. What do we call this? Precipitate. He had pen dots all above the top of his lab coat pocket where he kept sticking his pen. He was Guy Smiley as he went on to talk



about his favourite subject: The environment. He said, We are all flat road holy toads. Now remember class, if you stick a frog in hot water, it will jump out right away. But if you stick it in luke-warm water and slowly turn the temperature up, you'll have a nice blown up frog in the pot.

\*\*\*

Toad couldn't sleep and was lighting another one of his Export A Green cigarettes, yeah, the kind some call Green Death. The thought of having to go back to his studio apartment and feed the fucking cats again was way too goddamn depressing. He'd never use a dish or anything anyway.

Why did he have cats in the first place? They were still fucking hissing at each other too. Some girl had laid them on him was the technical reason. Why couldn't she have given him an aquarium? It would've reminded him of the ocean, he thought, as a salty stream snaked down and around his chin.

He looked over at Eddie. She was in this tub with him but that was only half-way. In the ocean there isn't this other rim. And who could stop at half-way especially now that the sun was slowly rising, warming things.

And he left looking at the tubs in the unkempt grass even though every morning he

had poured out little puddles of milk on his green linoleum floor hoping.

\*\*\*

When Eddie woke up she had black lines on her cheek and ear from his eyeliner. When Eddie woke up Toad was gone. What is this, be gone or be crushed? When she finally looked over, there was a note in the drain that he had tried to write but it was all soaked up anyway with the morning dew or some sort of salt water.

\*\*\*

*It begins with the piece of paper in your hand and the handwriting. I asked my dad if I could have his signature style for my own and he said: Behind the signature of a person are so many incidents and crazy times and you want your own don't you? And so I was thinking when this guy and I were whirling down the fire escape, did that affect my H)s? Because if you think about it, a capitol H could be like two people touching hands. And meeting this guy, it was like how I first saw an envelope being opened in a whole new way to my perception of the way things were done: from the side instead of the top. Where the folded pages come out like sea-shells from a paper-shopping bag instead of sideways like a presentation. And when he bent down to kiss my hand*

*like some other time than so do you want to rent a movie or do the restaurant thing again: that would have had to be a lower case h situation. The h that started things and you didn't know what was going to happen to him and her and still don't.*

\*\*\*

Instead of going up the fire escape, she went around to the front and up the stairs and on her way back into the fire. It was a gray Sadderday but there might be mail because Drew and Phase would just leave her mail in the box if it had her name on it. When she peered in, there was a white business-sized envelope addressed to her. She tore it open from the side. It was from her dad.

And she was always tearing into the apartment like she had to use the washroom and then was always sneaking back out like she didn't buy anything.

Usually Drew and Kent would wrestle and spar for Phase's attention and Eddie had just dropped out of the competition at some point, but today, Phase invited Eddie into her room. As Eddie walked by the silk drapes, she was reminded of how Phase was such a pack rat. Cocktail parasols, swizzle sticks with spades, jewelry boxes, tiger balm. Containers and old cans and cutlery and candles all over her room.

So are you on the case about my lipstick? Eddie asked her. Phase had borrowed it over a week ago then pronounced it missing the next day.

I need some money, she said.

But you usually get offered money for conversation.

Look Eddie, I could give you some stuff for it. She was jumping all over the room tossing things sideways into the dark slit of a carpet bag. Here, you could share the stuff with that guy of yours.

What?

Yeah, I saw him again this morning from the window. He's a real prince.

Eddie grabbed the carpetbag and left the room, repeating, Whatever, and Phase was sure enough that she'd have her cold cash by the next morning.

Eddie figured she'd better talk to Kent. She knocked on his door. He answered pretty annoyed, I'm in the middle of an essay! When he did touch her cheek, he scratched her, Oh hi. I know I haven't been there for you much lately but I will love you again in the spring--

He even shook the cigarette at her like, Look, I'm even killing myself because I'm so stressed. The few times Kent would have a cigarette, he'd carry it upwards toward his mouth with one hand cupped under like one bit of ash on the floor would dirty his world.

Then he went back to his essay so that one day, he would make enough money for a TV in every room.

\*\*\*

*So this guy of mine e-mailed me from his far off-job: Well, this teacher is only giving me an A-. All alphabet soup kitchen stuff. This guy used to write me pages of you and me and that's got to count for something. I mean, some of my friends were all of a sudden using e-mail and would constantly ask, Are you using? I sent them each my favourite type of pen: Pilot HI-Tecpoint V5 Extra Fine, Blue. I still wanted to get handwriting to have and to hold.*

\*\*\*

All of a sudden, there was this fucking shrieking from Phase's room. Drew scurried over there and then she started screaming too. Kent was in there too comforting them in a matter of minutes, and then finally he left them only for a second to get a garbage bag. It must have been there for a while because it had some maggots chewing on its fur around the stomach. They kept talking about the maggots and not the rat. Even when things die, they're still talking about the presentation, Eddie thought. Phase wouldn't stop sobbing so finally Eddie went and got some toilet

paper and handed her some.

They're just white things, Eddie said.

They're hardly white, Phase replied. And anyways, white is a lie.

Eddie went to the tubs to wait, told herself,

Believe in white till the end.

\*\*\*

Before last night, she had only seen the tubs from behind a window. She brought Phase's carpetbag full of party favours and hoped he'd bring a bag full of his tuxedo shirts and bloated books from times that he fell asleep in the tub at his place. She took off her shoes and popped the skin in the webbed part of her hand. Then she let her toe sink into the skin-coloured sand by the side of the tub whitening and whitening thinking *I still wanted to get letters--*

But now she was attracting the leaves as they trestled down on her, covering. Pretty soon she was wishing for Toad so much that she saw a key-lime Pacer trickling towards the expressway to the ocean and maybe he'd take her along.

Then her body was a blue-green, the closest to green she would get. Needle still

between two fingers.

\*\*\*

When her roommates finally stomped into Eddie's room, Eddie was already gone. Drew with her parasitic eye for business saw the letter on the floor and picked it up.

Mom had a tiring day visiting Granny and Grandpa. She went to bed early and was getting ready for tomorrow. She was last seen eating popcorn and reading a harlequin romance.

Dad.

And who knows where the hot-dog vendor's words were now but then he had whispered to Eddie, When all is said and done, it's the wind that blew like handwriting.