

**BOUNDARY BAY
A NOVEL
AS EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH**

by

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Abstract

Boundary Bay is a novel that explores important areas of investigation linked to education. These fields of inquiry include: literary study and the teaching of literature, aesthetics and artistic production. The novel also investigates the nature of teachers' lives in school and university settings, the nature of institutional education, societal issues affecting intellectual and creative life, the roles of the woman poet and teacher, the social structures and conventions of marriage and contemporary women, the conflicts and paradoxes of motherhood, the issues of teen suicide and homosexuality, and the transformative power of literature and artistic forms of seeing the world. As an example of arts-based qualitative research, the "art of fiction" is envisioned as an extension of human experience. The novel or literary narrative as a viable mode of representation for research is envisioned in light of the perception that ideas can be reflectively addressed through the arts in order to enlarge human understandings. *Boundary Bay* explores the vital roles literary fictions play in our everyday lives and in educational processes. Fictions are not the unreal side of reality or the opposite of reality: they are conditions that enable the production of possible worlds. In this sense, fiction can become a premise for epistemological positionings. The writing of *Boundary Bay* is informed by narratives of beginning secondary school teachers as well as the narratives of Ph.D. candidates and university educators. *Boundary Bay* is a novel that forms a response to the debate at the 1996 Annual American Educational Researcher's Association Meeting (AERA) between Elliot Eisner and Howard Gardner recorded in "Should a Novel Count as a Dissertation in Education?" (Saks, 1996; Donmoyer, 1996). The debate between Eisner and Gardner continued as *Boundary Bay* was presented at a symposium titled "Shaking the Ivory Tower: Writing, Advising and Critiquing the Postmodern Dissertation" at AERA 1999 in Montreal. The manuscript of poetry interwoven through *Boundary Bay* was short-listed for the 1998 CBC Canada Council Literary Awards. *Boundary Bay* was a semi-finalist for the 1999 Robertson Davies Prize for fiction.

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Acknowledgments

This novel is a work of fiction; actual persons and places have been fictionalized to possible and/or imaginary lengths. Any references to historical events; to real people, living or dead; or to real locales are intended only to give the fiction a setting in historic reality. Other names, places, characters and incidents are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and their resemblance, if any, to real-life counterparts is entirely coincidental.

The writing has not been a solitary pursuit. It is a novel informed by three years of research, including dialogues with teachers, students, student-teachers, doctoral candidates, university professors and my readings of multiple texts. I would like to express my grateful appreciation to the numerous individuals whose shared stories and narratives informed my writing. In particular, I would like to acknowledge the contributions of Jamie, Grace, Sam, Brett, Evelyn, Catherine, Jordan, and others whose stories I have interwoven in the forms of composite characters through this work.

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The novel *Boundary Bay* was a semi-finalist for the 1999 Chapters/Robertson Davies Prize. Many of the poems in the novel were shortlisted for the 1998 CBC/Canada Council Literary Awards and individual poems have been published in *Grain*, *Poetry Nottingham International* and *Whetstone*.

Note to the Reader

Boundary Bay: A Novel, is a literary work of art and an exemplar of arts-based qualitative inquiry in educational research. In order to experience the novel as an art form, it may be read independently of the theoretical introduction. Therefore, you may wish to read the novel section which begins on page 27, prior to the introductory section which provides some background, context, discussion of the novel as educational research, as well as a novel synopsis.

There are many ways to read a book. Good readers are perhaps as rare as good writers, and, authorial intentions aside, there is only so much a writer can tell. Reading is also a creative act and perhaps a far more creative act than we have to date recognized.

Reading is the third moment of ethnography and it may be, dear reader, the determining one. Read on.

John Van Maanen, *Representation in Ethnography*, 1995, p.26

Prolepsis

*Towards a Theory of
Reading/Writing*

Fiction elicits an interpretation of the world by being itself an object of interpretation. It is a subtle pedagogy.

Annie Dillard, *Living by Fiction*

Why is it the novel can enter the private sphere in a way, for instance, that the essay cannot? The immediate response is that the novel is fiction. It is not true. It exists in an epistemological category of its own. Yes, it is lifelike, it evokes or even, metaphorically, creates realities; still, the reality of fiction is not to be confused with *reality*...

Susan Griffin, *The Eros of Everyday Life*

I have known all these situations, I have experienced them myself, yet none of them has given rise to the person my curriculum vitae and I represent. The characters in my novels are my unrealized possibilities.... Each one has crossed a border that I myself circumvented. It is that crossed border (the border beyond which my own 'I' ends) which attracts me the most. For beyond that border begins the secret the novel asks about. The novel is not the author's confession; it is an investigation of human life....

Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*

Boundary Bay: The Novel as Research in Education

It is the function of art to reorganize experience so it is perceived freshly. At the very least, the painting, the poem, or the play cleanses a familiar scene washing away the film of habit and dust collected over time so that it is seen anew.

Madeleine Grumet (1988, p. 81)

In *Understanding Media* (1964) Marshall McLuhan described the “art of fiction” as an extension of human experience. Regardless of the vital role literary fictions play in our everyday lives and in educational processes, they (like other forms of creative writing) remain in a stigmatized realm as “lesser” or inappropriate forms for “academic” writing. I maintain that we do not live in only one reality but in many realities. We have no single world but are continually in the process of creating new worlds from old ones or imagined ones. Fictions are not the unreal side of reality or the opposite of reality: they are conditions that enable the production of possible worlds. In this sense, fiction can become a premise for epistemological positionings.

Boundary Bay is my doctoral dissertation, written in the form of a novel. It forms a response to the debate at the 1996 Annual American Educational Researcher’s Association Meeting (AERA) between Elliot Eisner and Howard Gardner recorded in “Should a Novel Count as a Dissertation in Education?” (Saks, 1996; Donmoyer, 1996). The debate between Eisner and Gardner continued as *Boundary Bay* was presented at a symposium titled “Shaking the Ivory Tower” in Montreal at AERA 1999.

The writing of *Boundary Bay* is informed by narratives of beginning secondary school teachers as well as the narratives of Ph.D. candidates and university educators. The work is inspired by Thomas Barone’s ideas of promoting alternative ways of speaking, reading, writing in educational inquiry which he calls “critical storytelling” (Barone, 1992a, 1992b, 1993).

Barone (1993) tells us:

When we are, when we *can be*, strong readers, we participate in a dismantling of that hierarchy of writers over readers which Derrida so deplored. Indeed, as Agger notes: “Strong reading is most likely to become strong writing, hence political practice where the readers are writers themselves (and where writers read). The two practices are inseparable: one’s writing is always silent dialogue,

where one's reading intends to start and extend dialogues, thus forming *communities*. Agger's (1990) notion of a discursive community is a vigorous one, more robust it seems to me, than that which flows from, say, Barthes' (1975) definition of a work of literature as a closed system of meaning with its own "galaxy of signifiers." That kind of communication is a weaker, more bounded sort, perhaps occasionally "beautiful" or "aesthetic" (in the classical sense of those terms), but seldom disturbing or transformative. (pp.1-2)

I align myself with Barone's notion of moving the reform debate in educational research away from the realm of a closed system to a strong discursive community where the writing and reading of texts of research becomes "disturbing" and "transformative." In particular, Barone (1993) calls for "breaking the mold" in education and envisions the new student as "strong poet."

While writing this research, I was inspired by a book by bell hooks titled *Art on My Mind*. The essay titled "Women Artists: The Creative Process" begins with the following passage:

To transgress I must move past boundaries, I must push against going forward. Nothing changes in the world if no one is willing to make this movement. Everyone I know talks about border crossing these days, as though it were a simple matter not to stay in one's place, not to stand still. All this talk does nothing to change the reality that there are so many barriers blocking the paths that would lead us to any space of fulfillment that it is impossible to go forward if one lacks the will to transgress. And yet most of us seem to carry this will. It comes to us early in life, when we are really little beings and just learning a relationship to space. And we are taught over and over again that the only way to remain safe is to stay within fixed boundaries. Most often it's the boundary of family, community, nation (hooks, 1995, p.133).

Reading hooks struck many chords of reflection in me. The use of the boundary metaphor resonated with my wish to take a stance by way of the literary form of my research as a form of transgression, of boundary crossing, of blurring of genres, of interdisciplinarity, questioning the validity of standard paradigms of knowledge and pushing beyond them—"radical rethinking" as Carol Shields (1996) calls for. Shields, like hooks, calls for "saying" what usually goes "without saying"—questioning our deeply embedded social structures or what George Eliot referred to as "formulas for thinking." In hooks' text, she uses the body to illustrate this point:

To return to my body I must be willing to face indeterminacy, contingency, the reality of dying. The body has its limits. To know death is to transgress. It is to violate the taboo understanding that death is the subject we cannot speak of, the

closeted possibility, that which is shut away and not remembered—location of one's desire. (hooks, 1995, p. 133)

If a literary text affects its readers, it also simultaneously tells us something about them. Literature becomes a divining rod, locating our dispositions, desires, inclinations, and reflecting the phenomenological nature of human existence. The novel or literary narrative as a viable representation mode for research can be envisioned in light of the perception that ideas can be reflectively addressed through the arts. The novel becomes an autonomous field of aesthetic perception with its own multiplicities of meanings working through the categories of time and space. The creative act of writing/research can be elaborated using the Ricoeurian notion of action as meaningful text—therefore, the process of writing itself becomes an act of inquiry.

The fictionalizing of literature reveals a great deal about human lives, therefore, the act of writing fiction and reading it becomes phenomenological in the reconstructions and reimaginings of worlds. Additionally, literature reveals that we are the possibilities of ourselves. But since we are the originators of these possibilities, we cannot actually be them—we are left in the space between what we have produced. We are left to invent ourselves anew.

If fictionalizing provides humankind with unlimited possibilities of self-extension, it also exposes the inherent deficiency of human beings, our fundamental inaccessibility to ourselves; owing to this gap within ourselves, we are bound to become creative. As Henry James states in *Theory of Fiction*: "The success of a work of art... may be measured by the degree to which it produces a certain illusion; that illusion makes it appear to us for the time that we have lived another life—that we have had a miraculous enlargement of our experience (1972, p. 93).

Works of art have the power to move us spiritually and emotionally in transformative ways. Mark Rothko's perspectives are important to considerations of artistic forms of research. As a color field painter, the creator of massive canvasses, the artist's most fervent wish was that viewers would see something beyond the shifting pools of color, something beyond the literal. It was Rothko's hope that we would experience something mystical and profound, suggesting a responsibility for the one who experiences the art:

If I must put my trust somewhere, I would invest it in the psyche of sensitive observers who are free of the conventions of understanding. I would have no apprehension about the use they would make of these pictures for the needs of their own spirits. For if there is both need and spirit, there is bound to be a transaction.... People who weep before my pictures are having the same religious experience I had when I painted them. And if you...are only moved by the color relationships, then you miss the point. (Rothko, cited in Nusbaum, 1998)

Actual transcripts and interviews or more standard forms of writing research often fail to adequately represent human experience in all its richness and complexity; in other words, they sometimes “miss the point” of seeing things anew in ways that are transformative. I felt that fiction and poetry could be powerful vehicles for the articulation of lived experiences.

It is the mandate of my department, the Department of Language Education, at the University of British Columbia, to encourage research in broad categories of investigation in languages and literatures. In *Boundary Bay*, the form, the textual strategies, the disciplines of education, literature, art, aesthetic education, sociology, philosophy, history and geography spill over each others’ boundaries.

I envision writing as passion. As bell hooks says, “it is a way to experience the ecstatic.” The root of ecstasy—“to stand outside” is applicable to the endeavors of research in which the forms allow us a deep immersion in the acts of thinking and writing. Language then becomes a transformative force with the power to represent human lives in ways that illuminate and deepen meanings. In university scholarship, we are rarely called upon to regard the writing work that we do as an act of passion. Forms of writing research that have been established as standard paradigms in the world of academia are frequently privileged over creative forms and artistic or alternative forms of writing. Clear distinctions are often made between the critic and the creative writer and boundaries are not to be crossed. These divisions are clearly delineated as we consider the splits between English Departments, Creative Writing Departments and Faculties of Education with Language and Literature Departments.

Nancy Mairs comments on this artificial separation in *Voice Lessons: On Becoming a (Woman) Writer*:

I believe in the reality of work. Period. I do not distinguish between creative and critical writing because all writing is creative.... And all writing is critical, requiring the same shifting, selection, scrutiny and judgment of the material at hand. The distinctions are not useful except to people who want to engender an other with whom they can struggle and over whom they can gain power. And because they are useful in that way, they are dangerous...(cited in hooks, 1999, p. 37).

Refusing to accept these distinctions remains a rebellious act, one that can challenge and disrupt hierarchical structures rooted in a politics of domination both within the academy and in society. As hooks (1999) observes: “That refusal demarcates. It separates those of us who choose to write as a vocation rather than as an academic practice (p.37).”

I believe that conventional thought about the separation of genres needs to be dispelled. As a writer who crosses those boundaries continuously, using poetry, journals, fiction juxtaposed with more traditional prose in academic work, I am fully conscious of the struggle of scholars to receive recognition for their “creative” writing. I no longer accept the idea that critical writing can not be creative and I believe that writing in academia must become a more inclusive domain. The feminist movement did much to open up pathways to diverse forms of writing with the insistence that “the personal is political.” However, there is still a rather narrow prevailing perception of what academic forms of writing should be.

My decision to use the form of a novel to communicate findings from the engagement in narrative and arts-based inquiry with beginning teachers is based on the belief that this form will enlarge understandings in the field of education and other disciplines whose boundaries are crossed in the writings. My conversations with teachers repeatedly lead me back to the reading of fiction, to what Robert Coles refers to as “the call of stories.” Those engaged in teacher education programs talked about works of fiction that influenced their philosophies, affected their perceptions and their teaching worlds in powerful ways. It was the power of imaginative fiction that held them; the costly textbooks and curriculum materials and case studies were not valued but quickly discarded and rarely referred to during the next years in teaching professions. Participants in my study and many others I have engaged with in conversation, found that the readings done in professional practice training programs failed to provide understandings or insights that might have helped prepare them for the physical, philosophical and emotional upheavals that the teaching profession caused in their lives.

Narrative, Fiction and the Novel of Education

There has been a proliferation of narrative experimentation in research across disciplines, including the use of short fiction, poetry and “nonfictional educational stories” (Norum, 1997; Ellis and Bochner, 1996). In an edited volume titled *Fiction and Social Research: By Ice or Fire*, Anna and Stephen Banks (1999) present the work of a selection of researchers who use a wide range of narrative forms across the disciplines.

As a literary form, the novel of formation or education is a well-established genre with defining terms derived from German literary criticism. Known as the *Bildungsroman*, this genre denotes a novel of all-around self-development. Used generally, the term encompasses a few similar genres: the *Entwicklungsroman*, a story of general growth about self culture, the

Erziehungsroman, an apprenticeship or pedagogical “education” novel which focuses on training and formal education and the *Künstlerroman*, a novel which focuses on the development of the artist.

One of the first of the *Bildungsroman* genre is Rousseau’s *Emile or On Education*, written in 1762. Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister* (1795), translated into English by Thomas Carlyle in 1824 as *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship* is considered the prototypical apprenticeship novel. Many others have been written in English. Charles Dickens’ *Great Expectations* is considered to be a direct descendant of *Wilhelm Meister*. Carlyle’s *Sartor Resartus* is in part a parody of the genre. Other examples are Samuel Butler’s *The Way of All Flesh*, James Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and Dickens’ *David Copperfield* (technically a *Künstlerroman* as it deals with the development of a writer).

As the central literary form of the Victorian era, the novel was frequently a source of moral and social instruction. For the Victorians, the modern distinction between the literary novel and the popular best seller was not yet in existence. In a society that praised individualism, upholding the “self-made” man, the investigation of self and the reconciliation of the self to society became central issues and the *Bildungsroman*, or the novel of education and development, became a common form for fiction. For male protagonists, the primary concern of the novel turned upon whether social aspiration within a class system could be reconciled with authentic desire and moral feeling (Mitchell, 1988). This conflict in men’s lives, often with autobiographical reference is evident in Dickens’ *David Copperfield* (1849-1850), Thackeray’s *Pendennis* (1848-1850), and Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure* (1895).

The Victorian *Bildungsroman* also gave rise to the classification of the genre by gender as women writers became, for the first time, ranked as equal to men as writers in a major genre. Victorian women writers developed a specific language for female experience within a continuing tradition of women’s literature in which the female novel of development became central. The main concern for the female protagonist was the search for autonomy and self in opposition to social constraints placed upon the female, including the demand for marriage. This conflict, often with autobiographical resonance and frequently framed by metaphors of imprisonment, is embodied in novels such as Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre* (1847) and *Villette* (1853), Emily Bronte’s *Wuthering Heights* (1847), and George Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss* (1860). Informative considerations of the *Bildungsroman* and the female *Bildungsroman* are included in the following resources: Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch and Elizabeth Langlund, *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development* (1983); Susan Fraiman, *Unbecoming Women:*

British Women Writers and the Novel of Development (1993); Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), particularly Gilbert's section on *Jane Eyre*. Susan Sulieman's *Authoritarian Fictions: The Ideological Novel as a Literary Genre* (1985) includes a chapter on the *Bildungsroman* in relation to early twentieth century French novels and the creation of a hybrid genre that is both "realist" and didactic.

The pedagogical intent of Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* is overtly stated at the beginning of the novel:

Pamela or, Virtue rewarded. In a series of familiar letters from a beautiful young damsel to her parents: afterwards, in her exalted condition, between her, and persons of figure and quality, upon the most important and entertaining subjects, in genteel life. Published in order to cultivate the principles of virtue and religion in the minds of youths of both sexes. (Richardson, 1772)

Since *Pamela*, there has evolved a strong tradition of narrative particular to women-centred narratives. This tradition is one in which the act of writing is intimately related to living and being in the world; the flow of language becomes an act of life. This vein of narrative is crucial to my aims in the writing of *Boundary Bay*.

According to Northrop Frye (1984), the *Bildungsroman* has traditionally been the commonest formula for Canadian fiction. Citing examples of female novelists such as Margaret Atwood (*The Journals of Susanna Moodie*, 1970; *Surfacing*, 1972,) and Margaret Laurence (*The Diviners*), Frye points out the variations of the genre of the *Bildungsroman* in portrayals of narratives of women. In these novels, the central question is: Where are you from? The novels "trace the development of their heroines backward to its source, in an effort to answer the same question to the satisfaction of the heroine herself (Frye, p.175).

Margaret Atwood's considerations of the novel as a source of knowledge construction are relevant to the perception of the novel as research in education:

If writing novels—and reading them—have any redeeming social value, it's probably because they force you to imagine what it's like to be somebody else. Which, increasingly, is something we all need to know. (1982, p.119)

Although Atwood's novels may be interpreted as postmodernist (Hutcheon, 1988) in their interrogations of established social, philosophical and aesthetic "truths," Atwood's own statements align her with some of the same concerns of Victorian women writers. For example, Atwood does not consider writing to be purely self-expression but an evocation of an external reality as it is interpreted and judged by the writer (1982, p.348). In addresses given before and after the publication of *Life Before Man* (1979) Atwood elaborates on the moral nature of novel-

writing. In "The Curse of Eve—Or; What I Learned in School" (1978) she asks a question that George Eliot and other nineteenth century women writers might have posed (Keefer, 1994, p.163). As a twentieth century woman writer moving into the millenium, these are questions I continue to ask:

What are novels for?...Are they supposed to delight or instruct, or not, and if so, is there ever a conflict between what we find delightful and what we find instructive? Should a novel be...about how one ought to live one's life, how one can live one's life (usually more limited). Or how most people live their lives? Should it tell us something about our society? Can it avoid doing this? (Atwood, 1982, p. 217)

Boundary Bay, as a novel of education and development, follows the general form of the *Bildungsroman*: 1) A *Bildungsroman* is, most generally, the story of a single individual's growth and development within the context of a defined social order. The growth process, at its roots a quest story, is both an apprenticeship to life and a search for meaningful existence in society. 2) To spur the hero or heroine on to his/her journey, some form of loss or discontent must jar the protagonist at an early stage away from the home or family setting. 3) The process of maturity is long, arduous, and gradual, consisting of repeated clashes between the protagonist's needs and desires and the views and judgments enforced by social order. 4) Eventually, the spirit and values of the social order become manifest in the protagonist, who is then accommodated into society. The novel ends with an assessment by the protagonist of self and place in society.

As an example of a *Künstlerroman*, the journey of an artist/writer, *Boundary Bay* follows the general form of the *Bildungsroman*, departing from tradition in order to better accommodate the contemporary narrative of a woman. Rather than the story of a youthful protagonist gaining maturity, it is the story of a woman approaching middle age who traces her story back through her youth, gaining understandings and knowledge through these reconstructions of memory. In the end, although the protagonist does make a self-assessment, she does not necessarily absorb the spirit and values of society. In fact, knowledge is constructed that leads her to a rethinking of societal and educational values.

A well-known experiment in the genre of the pedagogical novel was B.F. Skinner's *Walden Two* (1948). *Walden Two* is a novel that has been frequently used in teaching educational psychology and undergraduate civics classes at universities since its reprinting in the early 1960s. Written for the general reader, unlike Skinner's technical scientific articles and books, the novel surpassed even the best-selling later work *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*, as the most popular introduction to his philosophic, political and scientific thought. Despite Skinner's

background in behavioral science and empirical experimental work, he realized that his work was not being perceived in terms of its broad social significance. Attempting to connect with some of the utopian and philosophical themes of Henry Thoreau's *Walden*, much of *Walden Two* is a dialogue between Skinner and his student Frazier, the disillusioned youth. The writing is not particularly eloquent, artistic or literary and perhaps if it had been, it might have had a stronger impact on the reading public. In addition, the work was written very early in Skinner's career (1945) and Skinner himself admitted that the novel does not reflect the later evolution of his thinking (1973). Despite this, experimental communities such as Los Horcones and Twin Oaks developed as a result of inspiration from *Walden Two*.

In the context of fiction as research, it is especially telling that Skinner resorted to a novel to convey his years of laboratory research to the public audience. In the later years of his career, Skinner generated ten general principles for a Walden Two community. Number ten was: "regard no practice as immutable. Change and be ready to change again. Accept no eternal verity. Experiment" (Skinner, 1979, p. 346).

As Skinner's novel was inspired by Henry David Thoreau's *Walden Or a Life in the Woods*, it is interesting to note the pedagogical aspects of Thoreau's work as they might inspire the researcher in education. Thoreau writes: "I went to the woods because I wish to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and, not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived" (1971, p. 90). Thoreau's words, written in 1862, speak eloquently to the contemporary researcher attempting new forms of experimental inquiry:

I learned this, at least, by my experiment; that if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours. He will put some things behind, will pass an invisible boundary; ...If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them (Thoreau, pp. 323-324).

The form of the novel as a dissertation in educational research is a new phenomenon in Canadian universities and is still relatively new in the United States. One example of the novel form in educational research is Peter Sellito's *Balancing Acts: A Novel*, accepted as a dissertation in Educational Administration at Hofstra University in 1991. In 1998, David Geelan of Curtin University in Australia, included a "novel" (quotes are Geelan's in his 1998 correspondence with me) as one part of his dissertation. While Sellito's novel stands alone as the work of the dissertation (no explanatory introduction or traditional conclusions and analysis), Geelan's

fictional section (Section Two) on science and math education is embedded within more formal positional discussion.

Writing a novel is an immense undertaking, as is any dissertation. The novel can be a vehicle for communicating research in a dissertation, providing a level of engagement and deep connection with art that can provide evidence of high quality research in education. It is my conviction that this form will enable research participants to move into the psychic interiors of readers and researchers in powerful ways. This would seem reason enough at this juncture to embark on this journey to create a work of fiction/research that enables us to see things “anew.”

Boundary Bay: A Novel

Synopsis:

Boundary Bay is a novel that explores important issues linked to education, literary study, aesthetics and artistic production; the nature of teachers’ lives in school and university settings; the issues surrounding the social structures and conventions of traditional marriage and contemporary women, explorations of the nature of institutional education, educational and societal issues affecting women’s intellectual and creative life, consideration of the roles of the woman poet and teacher, the conflicts and paradoxes of motherhood, the difficult issues of teen suicide and homosexuality and the power of literature and artistic forms of seeing the world.

Boundary Bay is the story of Evelyn Greene, a newly appointed university professor teaching in Faculties of Education and Arts. Interwoven through the novel are the narratives of marriage, love, separation, divorce, teaching and educational life, motherhood, loss, the role of recovery and the reconstruction of lives into new shapes and forms. The story begins with explorations of young love and marriage to Jay, followed by the birth of their daughter Mara. The narrative continues as Evelyn decides to leave her marriage and engages in the journey that takes her to Boundary Bay, a place where she feels “she holds the landscape in her arms.”

Evelyn is a woman whose spirit is fed by creativity and writing, by art and literature. She is a poet whose writing and intellectual worlds eventually distance her from the corporate world of her husband. Evelyn’s story takes us through her academic world as a Ph.D. student, her teaching world as a university professor, her struggles to be a poet and her relationships with the other characters in the book.

Evelyn's narrative is mediated by literature. An avid reader from childhood, Evelyn sees the world in relation to literary texts, imagining she is a character in a Virginia Woolf novel or perceiving a situation as if it were set in a novel. Evelyn's imaginings explore the socio-cultural and literary constructions of women in fiction and poetry. Her encounters with books include encounters with literature throughout her life, from childhood, through university graduate work and then through her students and the courses she teaches as a professor. Her obsession with reading and language becomes a site of struggle in her relationship with her daughter Mara, who sees the world through her art and her painting, not a world mediated by words on a page.

Location is an integral metaphor for the writing as inquiry in this novel. The setting in Boundary Bay, overlooking the ocean across the United States border at Point Roberts, provides a multiplicity of geographical perspectives and metaphoric possibilities that spill over the locations of the written and spoken narratives. The narratives of the characters move across their own boundaries, merging with the fictional constructions of my story and with the stories of the narrator/researcher, Evelyn, forming intersections in a commonplace location that is the book.

Evelyn with her newly minted Ph.D. is a novice faculty member of a Department of English at a major university. Due to new initiatives to develop a Humanities-based Interdisciplinary Faculty of Arts and Education, Evelyn is required to undertake mentorship of a secondary English teacher in her post-training year after graduation. Within this framework, institutional issues are addressed including the existing resistance and outright disdain for Faculties of Education by Arts faculties. Issues of interdisciplinarity are dealt with throughout the novel.

Relational situations between Evelyn and Grace, the teacher she mentors, between Evelyn and faculty members and with others in her life are explored in a variety of textual strategies. Some of these include Evelyn's archival research work, her ongoing writing of a book of poetry, imaginary dialogues, journal entries, stream of consciousness techniques and dream sequences as well as representations of interviews and conversations. Encounters with theoretical concerns are embedded in the narrative through the devices of Evelyn's lecture notes for English methods courses in Teacher Education and a graduate course called Women and Fiction. Devices of literary allusion are used throughout the novel to engage the reader in theoretical and pedagogical explorations. The reader encounters various writers, artists and scholars in the text in ways that invite interpretive responses. Some of the encounters are with the following: Susan Griffin, bell hooks, Carol Shields, Muriel Rukeyser, Adrienne Rich, Louise Rosenblatt,

Wolfgang Iser, Leo Tolstoy, Gustav Flaubert, painter Helen Frankenthaler, as well as characters in literary works.

The locations of the narrative move from the Maritime provinces of Canada to the Alberta prairies, to colonial and post-colonial India and finally to British Columbia and Boundary Bay on the United States/Canadian border. Throughout, the natural landscape of Boundary Bay, of the ocean, its tides and its wildlife are developed in Evelyn's life as a form of knowing the world that is ultimately redemptive and life-giving.

The novel is unique in that it presents a variety of forms within its pages, including a gay student's journal entries as well as his English teacher's (Grace's) responses. Also included are Evelyn's lecture notes and stream of consciousness musings for a course on Women and Fiction.

In addition, Evelyn's poetry about Boundary Bay is interwoven through the novel. The manuscript of these poems was short-listed as a finalist for the 1998 CBC/Canadian Literary Awards. The novel *Boundary Bay* was a semi-finalist for the inaugural 1999 Chapters/Robertson Davies Prize.

Methodology:

Boundary Bay began with tape-recorded data collection in the form of semi-structured qualitative research interviews with a group of five volunteer participants, newly graduated teachers from the same Teacher Education Program (specializing in Secondary Art and English). Specific questions were explored, dealing with the nature of the first year of teaching experience and the transition from Teacher Education training into the classroom. The purpose was to conduct a narrative inquiry into the nature of lived experiences in the first years of teaching, the integration of experiences in Teacher Education and classroom teaching and the negotiation of mentorship and educational experiences at the university level. Of particular interest was the implementation of English Literature and arts-based curricula.

Meetings were held once a month for a period of one year. Meetings were extended on a more sporadic basis in the second year of teaching and included individual meetings and conversations. The group grew to include one doctoral candidate and a full-time professor in a Faculty of Education.

Over a period of two and a half years, I realized that the narrative inquiry we were collectively engaged in had come to include some very difficult stories about the personal, emotional and intellectual impact of teaching lives at multiple levels of institutional life. I also

felt that I could convey these stories in the form of fiction, a novel which could uphold the literary traditions of the *Bildungsroman*, the novel of education or formation, and the *Kunstlerroman*, the novel of the artist's growth to maturity. In addition, as a challenge to the conventions of the male hero of the *Bildungsroman*, this novel is a woman's story, told primarily from a female narrator's perspective with a central focus on concerns about women and education.

At this point, my research methods expanded to include the novelist's use of all kinds of stories, poetry, links to other texts that moved far beyond my original intention of working with transcribed narratives. As with any work of writing and research, my own narratives of reading, writing and teaching spilled over and intersected with other stories.

As a writer of fiction and poetry and as a university educator who teaches writing processes and genre theory, the genre of the novel presented a form that could present the teachers' stories in powerful, evocative ways that could open up new epistemological positionings. The writing itself became a form of inquiry, enacting and performing theoretical evocations through narrative form.

Some Considerations From the Research:

The narrative leads to a critique of the complex relationships between institutional education and society, pointing towards numerous directions for reform. These directions include:

1. more concerted efforts to embed interdisciplinary ventures into our teacher education programs, in particular, ways in which to increase literary and aesthetic (arts-based) links to teaching practice.
2. an opening up to the rich possibilities of ecology of place as a site of knowledge.
3. a re-visioning of teacher education and of women's roles in society and in educational institutions is evoked by the findings.
4. a rethinking of the role of the woman writer in academia and in society.
5. a rethinking of the nature of teacher and student negotiations of identity, difference, and marginalization in educational environments and in society.
6. a consideration of the novel as a form that allows the "unsaid" to be said, to tell stories that might not otherwise be told, to tell stories about teaching and educational

lives in ways that convey the complexities and difficulties of lived experiences to the reader.

7. a consideration of the powerful role of literary fiction as it becomes entangled with the reading/writing of our lives as teachers and students and researchers.
8. a consideration of the novel as paradigmatic narrative for social science research.

Challenges Encountered in the Writing/Supervision and Advising Processes

Issues for the Academy:

The main challenge was putting forward a novel as a dissertation at a traditional university. This work sets a precedent at the University of British Columbia and in Canada. There are consequences inherent in any form; each form constrains while offering unique possibilities. The use of non-traditional forms, however, is still considered experimental, and questions arise for those engaged in research at academic institutions.

One of my main personal challenges as a researcher and a writer was the struggle between writing an educational novel and a literary novel. These distinctions came under consideration after a personal meeting with Elliot Eisner (1998) when he encouraged me in my endeavours to write a novel as a dissertation but told me to write an educational novel and not a strictly literary novel. In the end, I decided to aim more strongly for the literary, hoping that the work of art will speak in more eloquent ways than a more explicitly didactic form. These efforts to create a work of literature were rewarded and confirmed when *Boundary Bay* became a semi-finalist for the 1999 Robertson Davies Prize for fiction.

Another challenge was to decide how to delimit the story, the characters and the huge volume of data I had gathered. In the end I took the novelist's approach, choosing to write about the stories that moved me, that enabled me to see things in new ways: Jordan's story, the gay teenager and the stories of teen suicide and despair; Grace's story, the first year teacher; Sam's story, the learning disabled art teacher; Mara's story, the alternative, artistic teenager; Evelyn's story, the woman poet, teacher, mother and the story of the earth, the immense healing powers and epistemological forces contained in ecological considerations of landscape, oceans, gardens, winds and their links to human living and the nature of education—these were the stories that

haunted me. As novelist Janet Frame wrote: "The thing that prompts you to sit down and write must be something which haunts you." By writing about the things that haunt us, saying what must be said, we can speak eloquently as researchers, writing and speaking the voices that are often unheard.

I remember hearing novelist Jack Hodgins in a television interview, shortly after his novel about survivors of World War I, *Broken Ground*, was released and nominated for Canada's Governor General's Award. Hodgins spoke about the novelist's responsibility to go where others might not dare, to push ourselves to see and hear and write about these stories that need to be told. I challenged myself to go where I had not been before as a writer and a researcher, to the genre of the novel and to undertake the tasks of telling the most difficult stories that I had collected in my research.

Ambiguity and Unintended Interpretations

Questions about ambiguity were posed during presentations of the work. Inevitably, artistic forms give rise to heightened ambiguity and there is some risk of what Eisner (1991, 1996) calls "the Rorschach syndrome" (the interpretation can be anything). But no form can eliminate ambiguity or determine the interpretation of a text because it is impossible to predict how a reader will respond to it—misreadings are inevitable (Tyler, 1986).

We can acknowledge and work with ambiguity (Sandelowski, 1994). As Ellis (1993) suggests: "Acknowledging a potential for optional readings gives readers license to take part in an experience that can reveal to them not only how it was for me (the author), but how it could be or once was for them" (p. 726).

Questions of Audience

Questions arose about the audience for a novel as research. If we are to invite our audience in, we must offer texts (in whatever form) that are understandable. Traditional research texts have for the most part been exclusionary, that is, comprehensible only by the educated elite. This is changing in response to criticism and demand for accountability for the use of public funds; some funding agencies now direct that research be explained in a language understood by the nonresearch public. With certain experimental research forms, elitism may also lead to concerns. Wolf (1992) provides an example:

Experimental ethnography so obscure that native speakers of English with a Ph.D. in anthropology find it difficult to understand is written for a small elite

made up primarily of first-world academics with literary inclinations. The message of exclusion that attaches to some of these texts contradicts the ostensible purpose of experimental ethnography, to find better ways of conveying some aspect of the experiences of another community (p. 138).

The novel provides a more widely accessible form that can extend its findings to a large interdisciplinary discourse community, providing opportunities for multiple perspectives and multiple readings. As Richard Rorty (1982) states, the patterns connecting theory and practice can heuristically be perceived in such a way that:

the lines between novels...and research get blurred,...and we shall be able to see the social sciences as continuous with literature—as interpreting other people to us, and thus enlarging and deepening our sense of community (p. 203).

As Annie Dillard (1982) states in *Living by Fiction*: “Fiction elicits an interpretation of the world by being itself an object of interpretation. It is a subtle pedagogy” (p.155). The novelist creates a cultural product which is the writer’s interpretation of a broad range of considerations, just as every researcher’s writings are a selective interpretation of findings. All cognitive activity is selective and interpretive. All language is interpretive, as is all perception, expression and activity. The novel in turn becomes an object to be interpreted, open to the multiplicity of responses from readers.

The novel is not a critical analysis, although it may touch on theoretical concerns. The novel is a work of art that attempts to interpret the world. The artist tries to render visible the ways in which the world touches us. The novelist as artist intends to create a work of art that is open to interpretation by others. The novel, then, is not a closed system of reference and signifiers, but one which infinitely widens possibilities of response, interpretations and understandings.

Knowledge for Practice Disciplines

Questions arose about generalizability of the research. Donmoyer (1990) has argued that for practice disciplines “concerned with individuals, not aggregates, research can never be generalizable” (p. 182) in the traditional sense; it can serve only as a heuristic. He suggests that an experiential knowledge perspective provides a way to think about generalizability in the context of research use. Using a modification of Piaget’s schema theory, and the notion of vicarious experience through case studies, Donmoyer demonstrates how the reader of research can gain understandings of unique situations, individuals, experiences, and vantage points that would be otherwise unattainable. In this way, research understandings represented in art forms

offer exceptional opportunities for professionals to enlarge their repertoire of personal knowledge for practice based professions.

How Will We Know Quality?

Questions of evaluation and assessment for the academy are ongoing with non-traditional work. What makes this novel research? The value of research is determined in critical examination by the relevant research community (Mishler, 1990). But how are we qualified to critique qualitative research represented in artistic forms? On a personal level, we are able to decide if a work is believable, is satisfying, and appeals to our hearts. For private appreciation, the only qualification we need is our response. As Langer (1953) explains, "The criterion of good art is its power to command one's contemplation and reveal a feeling that one recognizes as real, with the same 'click of recognition' with which an artist knows that a form is true" (p. 405). But public discourse is required where research in educational institutions is concerned. Therefore, we need the contribution of competent critics from many theoretical perspectives to build a body of knowledge in this field. For this to happen, it will be necessary to develop critical scholarship and connoisseurship among ourselves as scholars and researchers.

The evaluation of research represented in artistic forms such as the novel will require researchers to improve their abilities to notice, experience, and appreciate subtle qualities. This is connoisseurship, an activity that may be given a public presence through criticism. As Eisner (1991) proposes, "Criticism is an art of saying useful things about complex and subtle objects and events so that others ...can see and understand what they did not see and understand before" (p. 3). This reaching beyond the surface of things in the consideration of the quality of art is precisely what Muriel Rukeyser (1949, 1974) advocates in *The Life of Poetry*: "Our poems will have failed if our readers are not brought by them beyond the poems."

As Dewey (1931) stated: The function of art "has always been to break through the conventionalized and routine consciousness." Art is what touches the "deeper levels of life" and when these levels are reached "they spring up as desire and thought. Artists have always been the real purveyors of the news, for it is not the outward happening in itself which is new, but the kindling by it of emotion, perception and appreciation" (p.184).

At this time, researchers have only just begun to use artistic forms to transform knowledge from research, so few of us have had the opportunity to become connoisseurs, and only a handful of critics have emerged. However, more and more researchers are experimenting with forms, giving rise to a strong AERA Arts Based Research Special Interest Group and a

section of Division B (Curriculum Theory) inviting research presentations using alternative practices. Eventually, through increased engagement in multiple and alternative forms of research representation as well as through increased public dialogue across disciplines, we will gain insight about the nature of excellence in arts-based and alternative practices.

In my particular case, it was of the utmost importance to me that my work be sanctioned in both the literary perspective as well as in the field of education. This novel, after all, attempts to blur the boundaries between the genres of novel, poetry and research and it encompasses my perspectives of the roles of teacher, researcher, novelist and poet.

I would propose that artistic representations such as fiction and poetry are indices of our culture, requiring readers to think and feel, to use the imagination, memory, the senses, to respond fully. Subsequently, they play a vital role in our conceptualizations and re-conceptualizations of meaning and knowledge in human lives and in the broader currents of our society.

Serious deliberation is under way in many disciplines about whether alternative representations of knowledge should be sanctioned by the academy. In education, the 1993 AERA Annual Meeting featured several sessions that employed "experimental formats," including theatre, dance, and musical performance. This gave rise to the inevitable question, "Is it research?" The program chair, Robert Donmoyer (1993) responded: "Neither substance or form should be prematurely dismissed because it does not fit outmoded, no longer defensible conceptions of what research is and what research ought to be" (p. 41).

These events inspired a discussion forum at the 1994 meeting titled, "Yes, But Is It Research?" In the 1996 sequel, discussants considered a more focused question: "Should a novel count as a dissertation in education?" Howard Gardner took the position that although we can learn much from a novel, one should not get a degree for it. A dissertation should be citable, abstractable, and a contribution to a discipline: "You can't ask what the argument of art is."

Elliot Eisner countered that the purpose of research is to enlarge understanding, and the novel can do this very well by developing our awareness: "images larger than life inform us in special ways." He pointed out that if we agree that we can learn a lot from a novel, then the issue is that the form doesn't fit current academic structures. We can create the possibility for an intellectual climate where this kind of contribution is not excluded and work out the ways to do this. He suggested, for example, that there could be an epilogue to the novel where the analysis is explained (Donmoyer, Eisner, & Gardner, 1996).

The debate continued at the 1999 AERA meeting in Montreal. In a panel discussion chaired by Tom Barone, with Elliot Eisner and Howard Gardner, I presented *Boundary Bay*, the novel as dissertation, along with members of my advisory committee, Rita Irwin and Stephen Carey. The work was discussed in a symposium with two other dissertation writers who had chosen alternative forms of research representation. Although Elliot Eisner and many members of the audience were very supportive of our endeavors, Gardner remained opposed to alternative forms and spoke out strongly against the novel as a viable form of educational research. For a taped transcript of this session see Barone et al., "Shaking the Ivory Tower: Writing, Advising and Critiquing the Postmodern Dissertation," AERA Cassette Recordings, 1999.

Given Howard Gardner's work on multiple intelligences, it is curious that he remains closed to new forms of representing knowledge. The debate continues; however, I would contend that we need to combat the fear that endorsing the work of researcher-artists will devalue our academic currency at a time when qualitative research is finally gaining acceptance in a still-quantitative world. Krieger (1991) comments on this issue:

By writing to fit in, or to blend, with what has been done in a field or a discipline, we contribute to a general climate of fear concerning what might happen were our individual subjectivities to be given more room. What would happen if the world were truly to be seen according to multiple and different points of view? (p. 33)

I would claim that if we move through and beyond this "fear" in our research, the rewards will be discovered in rich forms of knowledge representation with new possibilities for the transformation of our understandings of what constitutes knowledge across disciplines. As a researcher, a teacher and an artist, I write as an individual committed to intellectual and artistic life; I write using ideas to construct multiple perspectives and epistemologies.

My novel *Boundary Bay* is a form of epistemological work, an exploration of ways of knowing that attempts to engage in a politics of transformation. The novel as research provides me with a form to say what I could not say otherwise. As a teacher-educator, a poet and a fiction writer who teaches about reading and writing practices, I wanted my research to embody and perform the beliefs about knowledge and education that I try to embed into my teaching practice. This is my research, my act of fiction, an act of passion.

And the novel unfolds, written in the gaps between reading, teaching and the imagination, the fashioning of art and of inquiry, not as reproduction furniture, but as an extension of the notion of literary anthropology. The nature of the discourse is not to

replicate art but to imply, through language, qualities of life that are often ineffable, what cannot be said, particularly in conventional perceptions of schooling and educational life.

The reader fills the gaps with imagination, as does the writer. Writing and reading become acts of performance, intertwined acts of performative inquiry. The writer becomes the books she frequents, journeying through books and creating literature as a primary source for speaking about human experiences. The novel as research paradigm allows a questioning of conventions and the literary text holds these conventions up to the light for close inspection. Fiction becomes exploratory, explanatory, hopeful and generative in its premises for epistemological positionings. The fictional text constitutes boundary crossings transgressing over referential fields of thought and textual systems of representation.

The novel's narrative begins with language—the writing/reading of things that haunt us. It begins with reading. Our books, magazines, newspapers, our sea of texts, the infinite scripts of language, glossy pages, textured papers, woven bindings, true stories and fiction, fingere, texere, threaded through the breathing texts of living bodies. In the inscriptions, encryptions, decodings of lives as texts, we read our lives as we read books. We read cultures within the multiplicity of texts and cultures read us. We write ourselves as we read. Within these perceptions of reading and writing lies an aperture of hope. The lens opens us to the complexities, the richness and multiplicities of human nature and its possibilities, the infinitely diverse ways of knowing the world.

The novel intertwines its fictions through an assemblage of facts, tangled through the language of bones. The writer wants to write of men and women, real or invented, offering them open destinies. She wants her voice to be like a modern painting, voice and story like the colors of a Mark Rothko canvas. This is how she wants the story to be, written in the alphabet of bones and blood, trembling with light and vibrant hues, spiraling with winds, rooted in the earth, breathing with tides.

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BOUNDARY BAY



A NOVEL

Rishma Dunlop

*Now I see at the boundary of darkness
extreme of moonlight*

Muriel Rukeyser

I

The San Juan winds sweep across the bay, rippling the waters like blown ink. They are winds that make lovers restless, mothers wonder where their children are. Hot breezes spiral across the midsummer sky, peeling back layers of memory. On the shoreline, the spruce needles rustle underneath his stride as he emerges from the boundary line between the forest and the open sands. He climbs the clay cliffs to get a clear view of the schoolyard. The grounds are deserted, closed for the summer. The world of classrooms and hallways is quiet. There are no echoes of bells and talking and laughter and music that haunt the fragments of his dreams.

The familiar ones are there, standing in the cemetery, the wind fingering their faces. He moves silently down the hillside to the edge of the graveyard to watch the mourners, his stride cutting a path through wild grasses. He fixes his narrowed eyes on the young girl with the green eyes. His nostrils fill with the faint fresh scent of her. The crowd stares at the coyote and something turns in their hearts, a stirring, some ancient awakening. He sits on his haunches, raises his muzzle and begins his wild singing, sharp and piercing unlike any human music. The raw howl clasps their throats with a call they cannot answer, a boundary they cannot cross.

*

Evelyn could not remember when they had lost their private language. She knew only that she could not speak to her husband. Marriage had become a foreign tongue, spilling over her lips with idioms and clichés, currencies she could no longer negotiate.

As a young woman, Evelyn had embraced the ceremony of marriage, envisioning in it some symbolic gesture, an innocent, public celebration. She had never imagined such public ceremonies giving way to private adulteries, betrayals of spirit, soul and body. As her fortieth birthday approached, she wondered if two people were ever intended to engage in such contracts, such language of containment and belonging. *With this ring I thee wed. Like a bird on a wire...I'll save all my ribbons for thee.*

These days, the act of remembering was a curious thing. It became less and less an obsession with her own life, but a fascination with the phenomenon of memory. It began to feel less autobiographical, but tentative, aloof in its reconstructions and representations. It turns into a hunger—a hunger she had never had a name for. She knew only that she had to have beauty and history and poetry and metaphor. They transformed her and her hunger for them became ferocious. An uproar against silent hours. In remembering, she became an artist, creating each landscape from the archives of memory, until her personal world expanded, swelling and resonating beyond itself, beyond herself, into the endless recollection and intersecting narratives that are history.

She had been trying to complete her research on a history of women poets. Evelyn inhaled the scent of paper as she sat at her desk in the tiny, cramped cubicle at the University Archives. The faintly yellowed edges of papers had a particular fragrance that attracted her to the files of old newspapers and letters, here and there women's delicate pieces of blue stationery, tiny notebooks, Christmas cards, intimate diaries and journals. Here, in this temperature controlled environment, lives were frozen, preserved, a minutiae of recorded details on fragments of papers, intimate letters exposed for all eyes to see. Glimpses of the dailiness of lives, bathrobes and slippers, a woman in her lingerie, meals

shared, a writer's anguish over a manuscript, letters to a publisher, the beginning jottings, drafts of a poem being born, a bath drawn, a lover discarded, the birth of a child, a wedding, a funeral. As a researcher, she was a voyeur, immersing herself in other lives, other stories.

Intimacy. *Journals intimes*. Intimacy was not present where she lived. Her life no longer provided her with intimacy. She never felt as though her skin, or the central core of her were ever touched. In their unquiet bed, her body tosses and turns. These days only words and sheaves of paper seduced her. She began to crave touch, tenderness, and a language to articulate passion. To commit the act of touch. A crime of passion.

She was always reading lives, intertwining imagined pages into her own narratives, fictions becoming her. Once, she had believed that the story of a life turned upon some tragic moment, the tragic flaw or event that became the catalyst for a downward spiral. She knew now that it was a chain of events, sometimes imperceptible triggers that were interconnected like cogs in a gear. The way they turned and linked together would spin out what would happen.

It had begun a year ago. A lifetime ago. She had been assigned a position with the mentorship program in the Faculty of Education at the Academy. She remembered her initial disdain for the project, her dismay at this added burden while she struggled to publish articles and books, conduct research that would be counted as a notch on her cv—hungry for promotion. The Dean of Arts and Education had called an advisory meeting, establishing responsibilities for faculty members linked to new interdisciplinary initiatives. This would require Department members at the university to work as mentors to new teachers of English in the public school system who were recent graduates of the Academy. Like her colleagues, Evelyn could not understand the purpose of the Dean's initiative. She began to wish she had remained in an English Department. There, she could teach poetry and write with some modicum of respect. In the Interdisciplinary program she still taught one section of English Literature, a genre course titled "Women

and Fiction.” The courses she taught in The Faculty of Education involved teaching methods for English teachers.

In the staffroom, a longtime faculty member warns her about working within the Faculty of Education. *Whatever you do don't do workshops. Once you start calling your lectures workshops you're in big trouble.* In the English Department, The Faculty of Education was perceived to be a breeding ground of lesser beings—those who couldn't cut it in graduate school—the public school teacher mentality, union mentality. Evelyn rarely spoke about her past as a schoolteacher.

After the fall meeting of the Interdisciplinary Program Committee, Evelyn meets with the Associate Dean of Teacher Education to review her work load for the year. Robert Reed was a small, balding man who dressed in grand manner—sweeping trench coats and fedoras in the winter, Panama hats and seersucker suits in the summer. Rosewood Robbie, they call him behind his back, in reference to his huge rosewood desk. Faculty members whispered rumors about the political incorrectness of such furniture during a time of severe budget cutbacks. When asked, Dr. Reed mutters something about someone ordering it inappropriately and that he had to use it—didn't want to be wasteful of departmental resources.

Seated across from Dr. Reed on the other side of the gleaming expanse of rosewood, Evelyn receives her assignment. She is appointed to work with a newly graduated teacher, an English teacher named Grace Owen.

As a new faculty member, Evelyn was given some release time from teaching to work with Grace in a mentoring role. She was to attend Fall Convocation ceremonies at Langley Hall. Then she would be introduced to her assigned teacher. The year would be spent observing Grace's classroom and advising her through her first year of teaching with regular meetings. At the end of the year, recommendations about the integration of Arts and Education faculties were to be made in relation to Humanities based teacher education programs. Her mind and body resisted the venture; she resented it. The end of her marriage had exhausted her, left her feeling as if her skin could fracture and peel

away, thin and fragile like eggshell. She didn't know if she could support anyone. The year stretched out in front of her—ominous and oppressive.

The graduation procession march begins. Rumors and whispers, wind blows papers around the colors of many skins, breezes speak Chinese and Japanese and Punjabi and Haida, Chinook and other tongues and the double bronzed doors open and the Academy of Arts and Education follows the mace-bearer, rolling in, their gowns flowing to a wave of organ music and anthems and God Save the Queen in Vancouver. At convocation, she listens to the entrance march, watches the pomp and circumstance, the chancellor conferring degrees, the students kneeling, the touching of caps and heads. Convocation speeches usually bored Evelyn. She could not remember anything remarkable about any that she had attended. But today, the voice in the hall began to speak to her, to invade her ears. Carol Shields, novelist, poet and university professor, is introduced. The petite blonde woman speaks of her own convocation at a small all-female US college. For her graduation, Shields wears pearls around her neck, and as agreed upon with her classmates, they are naked under their convocation gowns. Shields remembers nothing of the convocation address except the words “tempis fugit,” time flies. She is dreaming of her wedding. She talks about the years that follow, through marriage, the births of babies, changing of diapers, the sense of the clock ticking. But “*tempis does not fugit,*” concludes Shields. *We are not bound by societal notions of time—there is time to try out our new selves, fallow time, shallow time. There are compensating hours if we become partners with time, not victims of it.*

Fallow time. Evelyn thinks of the farmer's fields in Boundary Bay, the furrows of ochre against the blue-gray skies of autumn. Evelyn feels her body is fallow, resting, spirit laid to rest, like Sleeping Beauty, Briar Rose, the drop of blood from her pricked skin inducing dormancy.

She hears Shields' voice as if in a far away dream. *We can see our lives as a series of highly interesting chapters. Over the progression of our professional lives, we*

need to question and deconstruct the metanarratives of our society, our social messages so deeply embedded that we forget to hold them up to the light and ask what they mean.

Evelyn imagines this. Light as a point of honour. Light moving her into new beginnings. Reading new scripts, sweetened, like an infusion of honey.

The far away voice continues. *Sometimes we repeat these social messages, what George Eliot referred to as formulas for thinking and we say "that goes without saying." These are what need to be said, questioned.*

Evelyn is remembering Jay's silences. The strong, silent type—she used to find his quietness appealing, attractive. In the last few years of their marriage his stone-faced silences made her want to force words from his mouth. They could barely find the words to negotiate the basic transactions. *Speak to me.*

I wish you the power to stay alive in your lives—to be reflective, tolerant and open to new ideas, to be able to admit that life is not simple. The poet Rilke tells us to be skeptical about the simple, to trust in the difficult. That difficulty has a beautiful face.

Difficulty has a beautiful face. Evelyn wonders about this. Fallow time, there is time for fallow time.

Time passes. You will not be overtaken by time if you befriend it. Take your sweet time, time to listen, to change, to breathe. Time is yours in all its fullness.

As the students march by in procession to receive their degrees, the air in the hall is stifling. The walls speak, words carved across the bronzed doors ART REMAINS THE ONE WAY POSSIBLE OF SPEAKING TRUTH and WE ARE YOUNG AND WE ARE FRIENDS OF TIME, *Tuum est* CONSCIOUS UTTERANCE OF THOUGHT BY SPEECH OR ACTION TO ANY END IS ART.

Evelyn hears the Dean call out Grace's name. Grace Owen, Bachelor of Education. A tall blonde woman with broad shoulders walks up to the platform, kneels before the Chancellor and receives her diploma. In the crowd, someone cheers. Evelyn

watches Grace return down the aisle to her seat between two women. Evelyn guesses one of them to be Grace's mother, the other younger woman perhaps a sister or friend.

Dead leaves swirl about on University Avenue as the procession leaves the hall. At the backside of the academy, chalk and paint graffiti is half-erased by the erosions of weather and janitors. *Mary was here. I love Joe. Stop rape.* WITHOUT VISION THE PEOPLE, past the wall with the ending line; LIVE BY BREAD ALONE. Evelyn can hear the children laughing and singing in the nearby playground. Girls singing jump-rope songs *down in the valley where the green grass grows, there lived a little girl as pretty as a rose.*

Later, at the Dean's Tea, Grace is presented with the Dean's Award for excellence in English Education. When they are introduced, shaking hands, Evelyn notices how strong Grace's hands are, her own small-boned hands engulfed in Grace's clasp. Almost six feet tall, Grace's lean frame dwarfs Evelyn. Grace has an easy laugh that ripples across her face, creasing deep-grooved lines into her cheeks. She speaks with enthusiastic anticipation about her new job as a high school English teacher. "I enjoyed your guest lectures last year," Grace tells Evelyn, "the ones on literature response and writing workshops." A model student, Evelyn thinks. She could be an ad campaign for new recruits for the Dean.

Grace mingles with the crowd, smiling, accompanied by the same young woman who was in the auditorium. When Evelyn looks at Grace she sees that her eyes are very dark, an odd contrast to her light hair. Her eyes are disconcerting to Evelyn. They leave Evelyn slightly off balance—deep pools of midnight. Evelyn cannot see into her eyes, they are opaque, veiled. Grace is not what she had expected. She hadn't known what to expect. *Difficulty has a beautiful face.*

That night she dreams of D. H. Lawrence reciting a poem to her, speaking to her:
*When we get out of the glass bottles
of our ego,*

*and when we escape like squirrels
turning in the cages of
our personality
and get into the forests again,
we shall shiver with cold and fright
but things will happen to us
so that we don't know ourselves.
Cool, unlying life will rush in,
and passion will make our bodies taut with power,
and we shall stamp our feet with new power
and old things will fall down,
we shall laugh, and institutions will curl
up like burnt paper.*

II

Poetic vocation is not simply the act of writing poetry. It is also the act of reading. Of finding poetic language in the midst of "mechanical empiricism." The vocation of responding to another language when it appears. There is the suggestion that the woman reading is woman corrupting. Wherever she goes, intentionally or not, she disturbs, corrupts, the comfortable logos that there was before.

All she did was sit and study. Why was there so much commotion in her wake?

Kristjana Gunnars, *The Rose Garden: Reading Marcel Proust*

As she drives to the Academy, she feels the warmth in her bones through the sun-warmed curve of windshield. Along Boundary Bay Road, the massive tangles of blackberry bushes are heavy with their last fruit. Evelyn composes her lecture for the course on Women and Fiction, speaking to imaginary students. She supposes she must say something about Virginia Woolf of course, stream of consciousness and Modernism. She tries to get the clatter of breakfast dishes out of her head. So where does a novel begin exactly? *She would be the first sentence of my next novel*, writes Nicole Brossard. Woman as novel as fiction as story...reading and unreading, writing and rewriting, reading again and writing again, reading anew, writing anew.

Evelyn is nervous. That same sensation every time she began teaching a new class. She wonders what the students would be like. What will they think of her...

Dr. Evelyn Greene—the name on her office door a curious thing—evidence of a dissertation. Entrance to a club. She walks by the faculty lounge, catches snippets of conversation, scholars fretting about things—topics concerned with something tremendously important, building on the work of someone tremendously important, using words the rest of the world did not find tremendously important—fellowship, dissertation, lectureship, tenure, pedagogy. *Pedagogue: from the Greek word paidagogos: pais, paidos, meaning boy and agogos meaning leading or guiding, literally boy-guiding.*

By the time she enters the classroom, Evelyn's skin is chilled under her tailored jacket. She is crisp, her voice staccato against the walls. The faces of the men and women focus on her. After she distributes the course outlines she waits for all the paper shuffling to quiet down. Then she reviews the assignment criteria and readings.

She takes a long drag of her coffee, feels it flow hot in her throat and she begins. Teaching, she is calm, her body thawing as she begins to talk about literature, the words flowing out of her towards them.

She lectures on the *Bildungsroman*...the novel of emergence or education. *Willhelm Meister, Great Expectations; The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Bakhtin's theories: *the notion of emergence in these novels is the result of the entire totality of changing life circumstances and events, activity and work. The novel of emergence can be characterized by a specific pedagogical ideal.*

When the young man in the front row asks a question, Evelyn responds by rote, trying to be succinct, knowledgeable, erudite, falling into the role of lecturer, her academic language spilling from her. *Künstlerroman...the novel of the artist... traditionally the stories of men who journey away from society only to find through their educating adventures and their learning along the way how to adapt and fit into society.*

It occurs to Evelyn that the classic form of the novel does not seem to lend itself to the stories of women. Or the stories of others who simply never fit. A woman leaving convention to pursue passion or creativity—traditionally, this story ends badly; either accept the conventions of marriage and society or disaster and death are the result...Moll Flanders, Tess of the D'Urbervilles, Emma Bovary, Anna Karenina...

Evelyn drifts away from the graduate seminar, thinking about reading novels about women. Her mind wanders, loosening the grip of theory.

Evelyn reading through nights of despair and thirst, child crying on her shoulder, heating milk to feed Mara, book in hand, nights by the intensity of lamplight in the darkening quiet of her windowless office. Reading these women, their paginated presences. Can she save them, offer them alternatives? Read them again, give them second chances, other possible lives, different fictions. She thinks, do I reject these stories as they are written? Try to rewrite them as I read them?

The heroines in Margaret Atwood's novels appeal to her, asking the question,
 Where are you from? Tracing themselves backwards to the source.

Aritha Van Herk writes about Rudy Wiebe who told her that women will never be GREAT writers because they do not set themselves great subjects. "Women write only out of their viscera," says Wiebe. Herk hears the word "viscera" in his mouth "scornful and repellent, plump with blood and bread."

Evelyn remembers struggling with her doctoral dissertation, wanting to intertwine texts of poetry and journals into the text, wanting the power and eloquence of creative work. Arguments with her supervisor about the requirements of a dissertation and what constitutes research. "You can not excel at both scholarly writing and creative writing. You must choose." Evelyn refuses to choose. She knows this refusal to demarcate, the blurring of genres, marks her in the academy. She does not care. *She wants her writing to be plump with blood and bread.*

III

*If I learn your language
something will break open*

Muriel Rukeyser, "Country of Our Waking"



In the days of Evelyn's youth, there had been a wondrous sense of freedom. In the 1960's, highschool in the suburbs, basement parties, days of pastel angora sweaters and tight blue Levis, the girls child-women in infant colours wearing colognes that smelled like babies and fruit—Eau de Love, Love's Fresh Lemon, Love's Baby Soft. The dark sweaty clutches of slow dancing adolescents, the music of Chicago playing "Colour My World." Eric Clapton's electric guitar playing "Layla," stroking desire into the open chords of their veins.

In the 1970's when she began university, she danced with young men at the Cosmopolitan Club, pulsing to the strobing rhythms of disco, the mirrorballs lighting up their bodies, fracturing the polyester uniforms and their collective gestures. Evelyn fell in and out of love a hundred times. She wanted that now, a time when the measure of love was not loss, but something that strikes a high note, smashes the glass, spills liquid.

When she met Jay, he was a sixties wannabe, in a time warp, still listening to Dylan and Baez, Hendrix and dreaming of Woodstock. He had records by Peter, Paul and Mary, Woodie Guthrie, Jefferson Airplane and Country Joe and the Fish. He smoked dope, had toke holes in his embroidered denim shirts, wore a leather-strung bead around his neck and carried a canvas shoulder bag. Long hair grazing his shoulders—he was long and lean and sweet.

With Jay, her city clothes and strappy shoes seemed out of place. Still, she never did embrace the long, tie-dyed skirts and leather thong sandals that the women in his group of friends wore.

It was his sweetness, his quietness that drew her in. She abandoned her mother's desires and threw down the mantle of expectations of middle class life in suburbia. When they moved in together everything was an adventure. They had nothing. But neither did anyone else. They were invincible in this time of pure uncomplicated light. Desire slammed them hard into oblivion. Days and nights were spent making love, submerged, coming up only for air, for occasional food—midnight toasted bacon, lettuce and tomato sandwiches.

By this time, her mother has washed her hands of Evelyn. Her daughter has escaped her. Her mother's name is Deirdre, named after her Irish mother who died while giving birth to her. From the Celtic legends, Deirdre means grief. Evelyn knows Deirdre's stories through her mother's retellings of life in Anglo-India. The young Deirdre spends summers with her father, a Colonel in the British Army. The country house in Jammu, the hill station in Kashmir, amid vast expanses of flowers, fields of blue Himalayan poppies. Kashmir is paradise with its rich green mountain regions and jewels of forests and the Indus River flowing through it. During the year she goes to boarding school taught by British nuns. The girls wear crisp blue and white uniforms. They are educated in domestic arts, sewing, fine embroidery, cross-stitch, tatted-lace making. They don't learn cooking as this is the servants' domain.

At the time of Independence and Partition in 1947, when Pakistan and India fight a bloody battle over the border territory of Kashmir, they escape the summer house in the middle of the night with only the belongings they can carry. The loss of Kashmir leaves a hollow in Deirdre's heart. A lush dream place that never leaves her memory. They are part of the contingent of British who stay after Indian Independence—India is their home.

At school, in New Delhi, Deirdre learns Punjabi, Hindi, Urdu, reads English literature and poetry—Tennyson, Wordsworth. She learns to read Sanskrit, falling in love with the poetry, Persian ghazals. When she finishes school, she asks her father's permission to attend medical school. Deirdre wants to be a doctor. Her father refuses her. He thinks it is time she got married. But she buys some time—she wants some power over her destiny, some independence. He finally agrees to send her to Teacher's College. When Deirdre meets Evelyn's father she is teaching in an elementary school in New Delhi. She falls in love with Evelyn's father when she watches him play cricket at a match between Punjabi University and the British Officer's Club. They are only married one year before Evelyn is born in Amaji's Nursing Home. *One living female child* it says on her pink birth certificate. Evelyn's mother is twenty two years old. The servants bring her fresh flowers every day. Each morning, she tucks a rose into the sleek chignon of her hair.

*

By the end of Evelyn's first year at university, she was pregnant. Writing final exams, nineteen years old. She could hear her mother's voice of shame and disapproval. She did not tell her, but she could always hear her mother's voice.

In those days abortion was still illegal in Canada. University Health Services made the arrangements. She joined other women at a clinic in New York. It was furtive; she was a traveler with a secret mission. Evelyn pretended it was important espionage, a Mission Impossible job. At La Guardia Airport the walls had huge holes torn out, its guts ripped out—Bomb Blast! screamed the headlines of *The New York Times*. She took a cab to the Holiday Inn by the airport. The check-in clerk gave her a note that had been left for her with instructions to be ready at 9 AM. Someone named Mr. Norton would pick her up in the lobby.

Evelyn found it hard to sleep. She found herself remembering high school health class, euphemistically called Family Life. What had she learned about being a woman from those glossy pamphlets the school nurse gave them? She could not remember. Like the rest of her classmates, she was well-educated in the facts of life but ultimately this knowledge had no connection to her body. She saw only the perky blonde bob of the girl in the cover photograph, her sleek hair restrained with a pink satin band. The image becomes superimposed on the skyscrapers outside her windows creating a surreal landscape.

The next morning, she waits in the lobby. A thirty-something man introduces himself as Mark Norton. He is pleasant and they engage in meaningless chit-chat about the weather. He drops her off at the clinic where she fills out forms. She pays for the services in advance, counts out the bills that are limp from her damp palms. She has trouble counting the American currency, all those green bills look the same.

She waits with the other girls and women—some alone—some with male or female companions. Her nervousness mounts as they call out her name along with three others. She follows them into a small office where a medical attendant explains the procedure with the use of colour diagrams and illustrations. There are no pictures of a foetus, only female organs in pinks and reds.

She remembers the blur of medical staff explaining the procedure. D&C. *Dilettage* and *curettage*. The French words sound romantic...*a foreign tongue*. After she has been scraped and hollowed out, she is placed in a recovery room to eat chocolate chip cookies. In an hour or so, when she feels ready, Mark Norton drives her back to the hotel.

She falls into Jay's arms when she returns, glad of the comfort of his wordless embrace. Little is said—it is enough to feel close. She begins to feel herself being absorbed by him.

Jay and Evelyn never speak about it. He has been raised not to speak of emotions, to do so would make him less of a man. He avoids conflict, confrontation at home, although he later learns to negotiate this terrain at work, where it cannot hurt him, stays on the surface. A quiet man, like his father before him, yet capable of anger. They never talk about a lost baby, or about this emptiness inside her. They are simply relieved to be able to continue their young lives.

It is only years later, when Evelyn is immense with strength, her belly swollen with Mara, the child turning in her womb, that she dreams about the lost child.

In the dream she is walking through fields on an autumn afternoon, the morning torn out of the sky by heavy rains. The child is there, a girl. As Evelyn takes her tiny hand, a fissure in the earth opens and the darkness tears her from Evelyn's clasp. The darkness takes her into the drenched earth. Thick, black roots twist her down through a gap, stirring the silence. The child does not cry out. The rain is her milk.

Then there is only silence and the throbbing pain of the raw wound on Evelyn's palm. *The root of passion is patio, which means suffering.*

She doesn't think about it too much although sometimes she wonders if the body has a memory. She knows this must be true when her dreams recur. *The education of girls.*

She distances herself from the experience—holding the lived story at arm's length as if watching herself in a movie. Isn't this what her teachers had done in school? History taught like scenes directed in a movie, the holocaust like a black and white silent film, no blood. This was a technique she perfects as time progresses. She continues the lessons

and teaches herself this. Increasingly, she does not own her stories—she becomes a voyeur of her own life—never fully entering it.

Jay had graduated with an engineering degree in 1975 but had been unable to find a job in the Maritimes. Like so much of the population he collected Unemployment Insurance. She found out later that this was supplemented by income generated by the marketing of pounds of marijuana across the Canada-U.S. border. She was oblivious to all this until she discovered he hid the pounds like bales of hay in the ceiling tiles of his apartment. She realized now that he had been stoned for the first three years she had known him. It was habitual, gave him the constant, carefree grin she found so charming. In her naiveté then, these little secrets excited her. The dope deals stopped when his partner Ken was arrested on his motorcycle and charged for possession and trafficking. Ken was given a light sentence—he was young, one of the neighborhood boys, seen by the justice system and the lawyers as a good kid gone wrong so he was given a short prison term, with day release to continue attending university. Ken finished his business degree but never continued on to his intended goal of law school.

Jay was scared and paranoid, looking over his shoulder at every corner. He figured the RCMP must be watching him so it was time to get out of the business. He followed up on an ad and landed a position at a small engineering firm in Halifax. He left to find a house and Evelyn planned to follow at the end of the university year. She had a summer job at the New Brunswick Government Translation Bureau where she spent her days translating documents from French to English, mostly complaints to the Ministry of transport from the North Shore about holes in the roads or pamphlets about potato diseases and forestry conferences. She would miss Fredericton, the elm-lined streets and graceful homes, eating breakfasts at Goofy Roofy's counter at the farmer's market—every Saturday a new surprise omelet, fresh brown bread and apple cider. She would miss the community of potters and pewtersmiths and woodworkers and artists she loved to chat with at local studios and at their stalls at the Farmer's Market.

In her last few weeks in Fredericton, dancing at The Cosmopolitan Club she met Ron, a pewtersmith with Aitken's pewter. To the soundtracks of "Saturday Night Fever,"

the BeeGees singing “Staying Alive,” they talked and danced into the morning hours. In her pre-marriage state she fell hard, her body attending to desires she had never acknowledged. Ron’s face made her ache—his eyes the most intense, piercing blue she had ever encountered—the color of water reflecting clear sky. At twenty one, she marveled at his forty years, this former accountant who had left his life in Toronto, his wife, two kids. He had changed his diet, had vitamin information taped on the inside of his cupboards. She watched him create alchemy, the dull gleaming of pewter, silvered candlesticks and curved goblets. One night he walked her home through the treed streets, paused outside her apartment. The decision not to say goodnight was hers. She was bold, longing to feel his hands creating alchemy on her body.

His body, his eyes are truths that make her afraid, make her bones supple. The smell of his skin marked her, like the tawny grammar of wilderness. A fistful of stars. His hands unbound her so that a river of secret thoughts flowed from her throat, streamed from her skull.

Her response to him frightens her, as if he was something she didn’t know she was capable of. It is a fear so strong it permeates her, seeps from the pores of her flesh. The wordless assumption that will be her marriage envelopes her, promises safety in the journey. To stay would be precarious, a risk she cannot imagine taking. Marriage is her answer. Marriage to Jay will keep her safe, shake off this mantle of fear.

She thinks about her mother’s wedding. Deirdre leaving her father’s house to live in her husband’s house. She runs away to her aunt’s house in Bombay when her father refuses her permission to marry. He never speaks to her again. He dies years later with his bottles of scotch and in the company of the Indian woman who looks after his needs.

Deirdre wearing white, her satin phrases like the scent of jasmine echoing across the lush lawns of the former officer’s club. The whispers behind her back. For the second ceremony she wears the red and gold brocade of an Indian bride, her hands and feet painted by women in intricate patterns of henna. This is how Deirdre tells it, how she imagines it. When Evelyn is older she realizes this is not how it happens.

On the last Saturday before she leaves, Evelyn makes her usual trip to the Farmer's Market. She is fascinated by the children's clothes at one of the stalls. They are stitched with the labor of hours and women's hands and she finds herself drawn to a tiny dress for a child, hand-smocked across the bodice. As she looks at the dress, Evelyn feels an enormous grief welling up inside her. She feels she must have the dress so she buys it. It is made of soft red cotton with a sash that ties in a bow at the back. Even though she has no child to wear the dress, it becomes somehow sacred, a treasure with significance she can't quite articulate. Evelyn is drawn to its beauty, the art of it.

IV

*It is like what we imagine knowledge to be:
dark, salt, clear, moving, utterly free,
drawn from the cold hard mouth
of the world, derived from rocky breasts
forever, flowing, and flown*

Elizabeth Bishop, "At the Fish-Houses"

She names her daughter Mara, like the breath of the sea. Mara had sea secrets in her eyes. Evelyn always savored words, liked to dissect them, turn them over in her mind, taste them. She heard that in Hebrew *Marah* meant bitter. Sometimes when she touched the baby, she felt as if she was dipping her hand into the ocean. Her wrists would ache, her bones would ache and her hands would burn. As if water was a transmutation of fire, feeding on the stones and burning with dark flames. Evelyn nursed her child to the rhythms of Atlantic tides. If you tasted this body of water, it would first taste bitter, then briny, then it would burn the tongue.

In those days they would sleep, Jay, Mara and Evelyn cocooned together in the antique sleigh bed that used to be Nana's. Jay would return home from work in the late afternoons. He played baseball and soccer on summer evenings with community teams, returning to Evelyn sweat-soaked and content with his days. She would taste the salt of his skin before he showered. Sometimes, after Jay and the baby were asleep she would sometimes slip out to walk the beach at night. She loved to see the ocean's offerings washed up by the tides. At night, she could inhale the scents of lilies in gardens and she could lose herself in the magical tangles of poppies that had seeded themselves on the beach. Tall pods and pink-fleshed, their stems rooted themselves in her. It was this time, this nocturnal time that belonged to her only. Here she was not mother, lover, wife. Here the night landscape teaches her to paint pictures in her mind, carrying them home in whispered songs to write poems into the light of early morning hours. The deep, sonorous rhythms of her body listening with every drop of blood to make speech out of silence.

When Evelyn's first poems were published in literary journals, Jay found it all a bit odd. Before, she had kept her poems as secrets, whispered onto the pages of her journals. Now, Jay felt, it was as if their lives were being held out to public scrutiny. Their mailbox was continuously filled with journals with strange names, *The Fiddlehead*, *The Malahat Review*, *Arc*, *Broken Jaw*, *CV2*—his wife's poems printed out like an encrypted message, a code he had no access to.

At first he had felt like he was indulging her whims, something you did as a husband, but recently he had felt uneasy about her writing. He had always thought of it as a hobby. But lately, it was as if Evelyn was prying the skin off their lives, as if she was leaking private information for circulation in a quarterly report or making public disclosures. If anyone had asked he could not have explained it—this feeling of inexplicable loss.

He wanted to turn back the years to the times when she was his alone, when they would laugh together, her long legs tangled with his on the bed, singing along to feel-good Van Morrison tunes:

*Hey, where did we go
Days when the rain came?
In the misty morning fog with
Our, our hearts a -thumping
And you, my brown-eyed girl,
You, my brown -eyed girl.*

Do you remember when we used to sing)

He couldn't understand Evelyn's love of school. His memories of school are of the stern nuns in the country school who rapped his knuckles with wooden rulers when he didn't get things right. The wrong answers, incorrect sums, the wrong definitions, incorrect grammar and poor spelling...said the teachers' red ink all over his lined notebooks.

There had been no books in the house he grew up in. Only his mother's knitting patterns. As a baby he was left outside for hours in a pram on the porch while his mother attended to necessities—baking bread and scrubbing and waxing floors. No childhood songs or fairytales read aloud to him the way Evelyn reads to Mara. Evelyn takes such pleasure in the stories and songs she knows so well. He had never felt this as a lack before—only now when his wife and daughter share this bond.

Evelyn knew Jay felt far away from her when she read her books. And in those hours she spent writing at her computer and with pen and ink in her journals, she left him,

abandoned him, living in the pages of stories and poems, traveling to places where he couldn't reach her.

He could feel her absence.

They were leaving Halifax, moving to Alberta. Jay was leaving his position at the firm, tired of making Maritime wages. It was the 1980's and he had heard that there was big money to be made in the oil industry. Trans-Oil Services had come into town to recruit young engineers to work in the Alberta oil patch. The head honchos came in their suits and ties with gleaming, slick brochures, promises of relocation packages, training, company cars, high wages and benefits.

His friend Ted Harris had left a year ago to work for Trans-Oil and Jay knew he was making a fortune. Ted had married Laura, his university sweetheart and they had just had a baby girl. In the photos they sent to Evelyn and Jay, the three of them stood proudly in front of their brand new home in Edmonton. The green and white Trans-Oil company Ford is parked behind them in the driveway. Another Maritimer makes good so Go West Young Man, Go West. Jay moved his family to Edmonton, to a neighborhood where the suburban gardens were meticulously tended with pathways like hair-partings.

Everyone had swimming pools and Mara played with the other children, her sea roots whisked away by prairie winds. Evelyn sipped coolers on the lawn chairs with the other wives and they would all follow, the good wives. Following their husbands around the province as the company transferred them to different locations—Peace River, Brooks, Grande Prairie, Fort St. John. She became used to this social life as she became used to being alone within her marriage. She held his absences in the palms of her hands, like treasures. The first summer after they arrived in Edmonton, Jay was sent to work on a rig off the coast of Newfoundland. She didn't see him for three months.

Later, he worked two weeks away, then had one week at home. They worked in teams of three—one engineer and two wireline operators. The engineers drove their company cars to job sites followed by the “operators” who drove huge computer-paneled trucks carrying equipment. Trans-Oil was hired by the big oil and gas companies to test potential well-sites for conditions that would indicate the feasibility of drilling. The men

could only work during the cold conditions of fall and winter when the soft, boggy terrain became frozen ground.

The brief summer months were the only slow times. Jay wore steel-toed boots and company issued blue coveralls, like the miners in Nova Scotia wore, down-filled in the winter, cotton in the summer.

Jay and the other young men went from site to site on 24 hour call to run hole surveys. For the first few years no accommodations were booked. They were not expected to sleep—just to move from job to job. They kept their vehicles running continuously and sometimes snatched naps in the cars or trucks while tuning out the voice of the dispatcher asking where they were. After a few years, so many vehicles got wrecked with drivers falling asleep at the wheel that the company decided to book motel rooms for their workers. Paying for this rest time was less expensive than replacing equipment, trucks and cars. It was a 24 hour a day operation, millions of dollars spent for each hour of labor.

The jobs involved lowering different tools down the holes to indicate where a company should drill the next hole, where they could test for oil and gas. The men wore radioactive badges and ran radioactive tools, lowering the long, heavy cylinders down into the holes, using neutrons and gamma rays to determine porosity and density of the land formations. They ran sonic tools that tested formations through sound waves.

The small Northern towns in Alberta were rough places, foreign terrain for Jay and other city boys like Geoff, a wireline operator who had a Master's Degree in Chinese History. They came for the money. What they got was mud and dirt and freezing cold in High Level, Rainbow Lake, Peace River, Slave Lake. In the winters, there were many weeks when temperatures never rose above 45 below. They worked cold and tired, chilled to their bones. What they got was darkness, black ice on endless highways, toiling into the nights lit up by the eerie phosphorescence of rig lights and towers in the middle of bleak Alberta prairies. What they got was danger and risk. The job sites were hazardous, zones full of metal, steel, the potential for accidents high—an inhospitable terrain pitted against the natural environment. Lonely and away from family, the men compensated by

becoming close to their team mates, buddies, a man's world, dependent on other men to get the job done.

After years of working in the cold and mud of Alberta winters, the young men got older and used up. Their bones creaked and ached with a weariness that never seemed to leave them. Their lungs always hurt as if filled with the sharp breath of frozen air. The mud never left them. It stayed under their fingernails and in their skin.

Marriages ended, men and women losing the language of love in the still ice of winter, the summer months never enough to revive connections and passions. Middle managers were being let go and operations were folding as the oil boom ended. Jay was ready for a change. As Mara grew, he was missing every new smile, every new word. Ted Harris left first, getting a job as a stockbroker. He introduced his boss to Jay and helped him get hired on with Intercontinental Securities. Jay had to take courses through the company and obtain his Canadian Securities License.

Evelyn helps Jay buy suits and ties for his new job. The coveralls are discarded for suits from Tip Top Tailors. Jay is home every day after office hours and it is a routine they have not known for years. Sometimes he brings her fresh flowers from the stall across from the office tower. He feels clean and safe for the first time in years.

This safety is lost when the stockmarket crashes. October 19, 1987, *Black Monday*. Jay doesn't come home until very late that night and for the next few months the finances are difficult. Evelyn needs to go back to work and finds a position teaching at the local high-school. When she drops Mara off at daycare, Evelyn finds it difficult to leave Mara at first, kissing her goodbye, waving to her, letting go. Her daughter has been her constant companion. But after a while she sees how Mara loves being with the other children, chattering away about her day, covered in paints and playdough. Evelyn's grip on her child loosens and she feels a curious elation at this freedom.

Evelyn begins writing poetry again, something she had stopped shortly after Mara was born. Life had just become too busy—changing diapers and waiting for Jay to come home, entertaining Jay's bosses and clients.

Jay's hours got longer as he got busier and developed a huge client account list—his "book" as it was called in the financial industry. For a long time, she helped him as

she had always done—practicing sales techniques, telephone sales, constructing idea campaigns, writing letters to clients. Sometimes in the middle of the day, he would call her, ask her how to spell something, telling her she was faster than the dictionary. After awhile, Jay never seemed to be at home much—there were always client dinners, business trips, something more that needed to be done at the office.

She got tired of waiting for Jay to be at home so she developed her own circle of friends. After work she would make supper and read stories to Mara. Then she would curl up with her own books. Jay was always puzzled by the books and magazines spilling over everywhere, off the shelves, on the floor, under the bed. And still, she could not walk by a bookstore without being drawn in, hearing the stories beckon to her. Books were an addiction, she supposed, as irresistible to her as cigarettes were becoming to Jay. Her books multiply in correlation to Jay's increase in cigarette consumption.

Every morning he would rise at 6:00 am, shave, put on his suit and tie and drive to the gleaming office tower that he worked in. In the maze of small cubicles, the brokers talked incessantly on the phones, opening and closing deals. He became one of them, Mr. Dealmaker.

One day he realized he had forgotten what his wife's face looked like, how her hair and skin smelled. It was not a sin of omission really, only a symptom of his preoccupation with the world of work. Over the years, stealing out of the office for cigarette breaks, the tobacco spreads an orange-brown stain on his fingers.

Evelyn was busy schooling herself. She had taught high school English for years but now she felt a need to immerse herself in academia, in the life of the mind again. She was insatiable, like a famished lover. She returned to university to do her Master's degree in English Literature. At a party she met a Professor from the English Department at the University of Alberta—talked for hours about literature, poetry. She had started writing again when Mara was born. The baby had stirred things in her that had been forgotten, some lost language. Then she had stopped during all those years. She was beginning again. She mustered the courage to show the Professor some of her poetry.

By the time she began her Ph.D. she was lecturing part time and fascinated by her research on women poets. She immersed herself in sentences, in books, in the plots of other lives, in poetry. It became a time in her life, as it was in her youth, when books became doorways, connecting her with other worlds. Enter at your own risk, they whispered, and she did, finding labyrinths through the melt of the earth.

She fell in love with the Professor, his melodious voice weaving garlands of words around her throat. Hunger broke down courtesy, disassembling them in the intimacy of strangers. He writes her notes with endearments, invoking Chekhov, *I kiss you behind the knees*.

After a while she realizes it is Chekhov who seduces her, not the Professor.

Intimacy. She had lived for so long in a marriage that disconnected her now from the world. Jay's increased success changes his image of himself. The Tip Top Tailor suits became shabby and cheap to him and Jay replaced them with Armani and Italian shoes. He bought shirts with French cuffs and got his hair styled and the grey touched up at posh salons.

Curling up against her husband night after night the familiar spooning becomes repulsive in the aftermath of his alcoholic afternoons at hotel bars and cocaine-filled nights at nightclubs with the other brokers in their expensive clothes, clutching their obligatory security, their cell phones, like infants with soothers, or gunmen in spaghetti westerns with revolvers. Sometimes he drives home, barely able to stagger up to the front door.

Jay now took his pleasure from buying shirts from Harry Rosen and Holt Renfrew. Under these crisp shirts, his posture slouches. Jay's wardrobe grew until his shirts and suits and shoes overflowed their closet. Evelyn was displaced.

He has forgotten about Mara and Evelyn, the sweetness of his life a distant thing. Evelyn notices the tobacco stains creeping into spaces between his white teeth and on his fingertips spreading to the knuckles. She can no longer imagine his hands on her skin. The familiar stranger. Evelyn is reading Virginia Woolf, thinks with Lily Briscoe in *To*

the Lighthouse, Who knows what we are, what we feel? Who knows even at the point of intimacy, This is knowledge?

Her skin is starving. She begins to crave touch, tenderness, and a language to articulate passion. She read somewhere that widows experience this. *Skin-hunger*.

That night she dreamed. She was lost, wandering for hours through a primeval forest. Great tangles of trees reached out their limbs, energies pulsing through verdant expanses of exotic flowerings, huge stalks of ginger flowers, tiger lilies and purple orchids. She walked for hours driven by some unknown calling, some sense of urgency. The tropical heat raised beads of perspiration on her skin, the small hairs at the back of her neck raised in anticipation.

She came finally to a clearing, where the vegetation suddenly changed. The land was desert-like, sand and dust swirling around and her throat became parched with an unquenchable thirst. She was drawn towards an adobe house in the clearing, its terra cotta walls shining red in the heat of the midday sun. She walked up the pathway to a courtyard full of flowers, hibiscus vines embracing the walls.

In the center of the terrace, by an altar-like alcove, stood an old woman dressed in black, her face grooved with age. The steel gray wires of her hair were knotted at the nape of her neck and her back was stooped as if weighted down. Her eyes made Evelyn gasp, blue, the blue of water in the desert, the blue of a baby's eyes, the blue of veins on eyelids, of sea, of sky, of life—a force that made Evelyn want to drink of it, suck it in, taste it, roll it around on her tongue, feast on its sweetness.

The old woman beckoned to her, bringing her closer to the arched curve of the alcove. There in the enclosure were two birds, so brilliant in their plumage that they were wondrous to the eyes, their feathers colored in hues that spilled into each other, infusions of jewels, emeralds and golds and ruby and amethyst. Their necks were intertwined like lovers, color dripping from them in illuminated pools. The old woman picked the birds up in unison, then held them out towards Evelyn. Evelyn reached for the birds, deep desire welling up inside her to possess this magic. She picked up one bird, a cry of pleasure

escaping her throat at its soft presence in the palm of her hand, but as she looked down the bird had lost its colors, it stared at her, plumage and eyes a dulled brown—the weight of it a cold stone in her palm.

She wakes up sobbing, her pillow soaked. She can't explain it to Jay. In the morning, she attends a lecture by Professor Narayan—a course in theory—Nietzsche—subtitled “life as literature”—no separation between the aesthetic and life—a necessary framework for perception. He goes on to discuss post-colonialism, using literary critical frameworks to decry its abuses within post-modern systems of education.

Evelyn has a hard time following the progressions of thought in the lecture. Instead, she is trying to write about Maxine Greene's notion of teaching as passion, teaching as possibility, teaching as a light in dark times, schooling the literary imagination. Evelyn imagines she is little Claudia in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, on her low stool in Big Mama's kitchen, imagining the scent of lilacs and the taste of a peach. She is scribbling bits of poems on her notepad, stealing words, snippets of phrases, a thief of words...*and I have the wind and the sea in my voice.*

She remembers sitting in her mother's kitchen soon after they move to Canada. Her mother singing and laughing, trying out phrases of French, this new language she is trying to learn. She switches back to Punjabi when she speaks to Evelyn, this mother-tongue for Evelyn slowly mixing with English. After several years of playing with the neighborhood children and the gradual slipping into English with her father and mother at home, Evelyn loses her first language.

The smells of cooking in her mother's kitchen are a multitude of memories—curries and basmati rice, whole wheat *chapatis*, her mother's experiments with steaks and hamburgers and fries. Deirdre had a new life, a life of her own, her own house, her own kitchen and she relished the adventure, creating recipes. Every birthday she threw Evelyn a big birthday party, inviting all the neighborhood children. She would bake Evelyn a different cake every year, usually an idea she found in *Ladies Home Journal*. Evelyn

remembered one year when her mother had baked her a cake shaped like a house, a gingerbread cottage, iced in white frosting, covered in multi-colored smarties. It was a masterpiece and the children and their parents exclaimed in wonder over it.

Evelyn remembered that year's party dress. She must have been about five. It was made of the palest yellow organza, dotted with tiny sparkles. The dress had puffed sleeves and it tied at the back in a wide sash. Her mother had trimmed the waist and hem border with black velvet ribbon. There is a photo of Evelyn posed in this dress in a silver frame on her mother's bureau. She has a dreamy look on her face, her dark hair cascading around her shoulders, her hands clasping a bouquet of yellow chrysanthemums, a gift from her father.

V

*It was years and years
Before I found the shoes there,
Still waiting.*

Dorothy Livesay, "In Her Cupboard"

Her mother and father always told this story about her childhood. Her heart's desire was to own a pair of red shoes—Mary Janes with a strap across the ankle. She craved beautiful things even at the age of three. They take her to the shoe shop and buy her a perfect pair of red party shoes. She wears them out of the store, walking hand in hand with her parents. Suddenly, she stops in the middle of the sidewalk and starts to scream.

When her mother and father try to find out what is wrong, she cries, "They don't tap!" She is inconsolable as the shoes never measure up to the imaginary ruby slippers choreographed in her mind to make joyous sounds—no matter how hard she tries, she cannot make the shoes echo tip-tap through the city streets.

The shoes are not scarlet—they are a soft burgundy red, like the color of her father's turbans. As a little girl she learns to hold one end of the fifteen-foot starched length of cloth, stretching it with her father, then watching him wrap it skillfully around his head. Kirpal Singh loves his daughter and his wife. The first time he sees Deirdre, with her creamy skin and dark hair, the slight scattering of freckles across her nose and those green eyes, like the emerald rivers that wind through northern India, he knows she is special. He knows it will not be a marriage well-received by his family and by the snobbish British set that Deirdre has grown up with. The British will whisper under their hats: *At least he went to Oxford... she could have had anyone she wanted, could have done much better.* According to the society they are unsuitable to each other, untouchable.

Her father is outraged at her betrayal. They escape his anger by eloping. Deirdre's father never speaks to her again. *You are dead to me,* he tells her.

Kirpal's own family is shocked. They have plans for him—an arranged marriage to a Sikh girl from a good family. He has seen her photo. So they escape their families' wrath, marrying in Bombay with only a justice of the peace. They remain there, with Kirpal working for a biochemical research company. In a year's time after Evelyn is born,

he accepts a post-doctoral research grant that has been offered to him by the National Research Council of Canada. He will take his family on an adventure.

On the voyage out, they travel to Egypt, stop in London and Paris and Italy. The moments are preserved in snapshots in frames in her mother's house. Evelyn constructs the stories from the photos—Evelyn a little girl, hair softly curling a halo about her face, hands held between her parents—her mother in her gold bracelets, her floating silks, her brilliant saris and salvars, her father, tall and lean in khakis, his burgundy turban. Riding a camel in Cairo, her father standing beside her. Her mother tells her the stories about Rome, where the old Italian ladies dressed in black marvel over Evelyn, fuss over her beauty, calling her a little Madonna.

When she is two years old her favorite bedtime story is *Little Red Riding Hood*. She wants her parents to read it to her every night. She has memorized every word, every sentence, every illustration of the book so when they are tired and try to skip a few lines or turn the page too early, she calls them on it. The ritual is fulfilled even by babysitters who marvel at her ability to read at such a young age.

Talisman, *a consecrated object (hence one with power to avert evil)*. As a child her talismans are books. She loves the feel of them, the creamy thick papers, the black letters of words in print. The stories she reads become her worlds, shutting out the imprints of her mothers' rages. Her mother calls her absent-minded, describing her to friends with a hen clucking sort of pride at her bookish daughter. She reads late into the night and awakens to dress for school reading her book flattened on the bureau in front of her. Sometimes she is so caught up in the book, she forgets she is already wearing her school uniform and pulls another navy tunic over her head. She discovers her "absent-mindedness" in the locker room amidst the giggles of the other girls changing for gym class.

In the early years after they arrive in Canada, Evelyn reads the books handed down from the British Empire, the Noddy stories, *The Adventures of Rupert the Bear*, Paddington Bear, the books of Enid Blyton, Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret*

Garden and *The Little Princess*. Dierdre reads to her daughter from Robert Louis Stevenson's *A Child's Garden of Verses*, books by Rudyard Kipling.

Evelyn travels with Dorothy to the Emerald City, weeps with Jo and Marmie in *Little Women*, imagines herself at Green Gables with Anne and Matthew and Marilla. She loves the feisty heroines of Victoria Holt's historical novels and Nancy Drew Mysteries, Nancy solving crimes with her keen wits. In book after book she searches for traces of her life, the fact, the act of reading a fierce necessity. Reading begins with the eyes, then moves to her other senses. For Evelyn, reading evokes synaesthesia, all her senses colliding at once. She can hear the train approaching at the end of Anna Karenina; she can smell the steam, see the crowded station, feel Anna's despair, see her red purse on the railway tracks. She devours books, tastes them, savors them with a voracious appetite. Reading is her only faith.

She reads the dictionary and the thesaurus, marveling over the meanings of words. When she is twelve years old she breaks her leg in track and field high jumping and she has to wear a ten-pound plaster cast from toes to thigh for three months. That hot, steamy summer she empties the small neighborhood library of books, reads *Dr. Zhivago* and both volumes of *War and Peace*.

When she is much older, before she leaves Jay, she finds herself imagining they are characters in a book. She tries to salvage things, unfold the chapters of their story as she had imagined them. She immerses herself in cooking gourmet meals, recipes she has clipped out from *Bon Appetit* and *Gourmet* magazines. She cleans the house, clips fresh flowers from the garden, attends luncheons with the wives from Jay's Rotary Club. The club did not admit female members. The wives had formed a social group of their own, the Rotary Anns. But her chest feels hollow and Jay watches her, sensing a false frenzy of domesticity.

Sometimes now when they made love, Jay had the distinct feeling his wife was writing the moment, the act, scripting it as if from a distance. He had a sensation of scorching discomfort. She writes him into her poem in the dark, the way she wants him to be. It is language that allows her distance. She makes him a poem, the lover who would

let her crawl inside his skin, leave his imprint upon her, a signature of love, an autograph,
she writes him:

your translations
of me
I could never have anticipated

sheaves of my history
torn off by your glance

I am the blue-veined iris
in your hand
your fingers dipped in me

I am signed by you
your name stroked
upon my forehead

On her birthday she has tickets to a poetry reading at the Vancouver Writers' Festival. They drive down to Granville Island on that crisp October morning but Jay decides he will let Evelyn attend alone. He prefers to sit in the car reading the *Wall Street Journal*. When she returns the air is warm with autumn sun. Jay is asleep in the car.

When she is short-listed for a job at The Academy of Arts and Education, she meets with the Dean before her interview. Evelyn asks whether members of the selection committee would be interested in seeing her teaching evaluations which she has brought along. The Dean leans forward with a conspiratorial air, replies, *in all honesty you could give them to me and I will certainly circulate them but you and I both know that what really counts is your publication record.*

The Dean continues to state that they are seeking a candidate with a knowledge of literature and that even though this is a Faculty of Education he says, *I really don't believe that there are any theories of education. Now of course, other faculty members might not agree with me. You know, we have the same kind of political conflict here as*

you have at any institution. It is rare that you will hear anyone say anything good about another colleague. Evelyn is not sure how she should receive this information.

When the interview begins, a woman on the selection committee asks about all the stops and starts on her resume, teaching contracts here and there, degrees in English and Teacher Education.

Curriculum Vitae, she had looked this up in the dictionary the other day [L., course of life] story of my life. Curriculum [L., lit., a running, course, race, career, *currere*, to run. 1. A fixed series of studies required, as in a college, for graduation, qualification in a major field of study, etc. 2. All the courses, collectively, offered in a school, college, etc., or in a particular subject.

Evelyn drifts away from the interview. *Edmonton. Jay is away for weeks at a time on business. Minus 40 chill factor, howling winds and snow. Mara's diapers need changing. The wind outside freezes the breath in seconds. She nurses the baby then leaves her with the neighbor for the afternoon. She shovels the front path and driveway, scarf tight across her face. Then she unplugs the old Honda Civic from the block heater, coaxing the engine to life to drive to the university to attend graduate classes. At the end of the three hour seminar on Victorian Poetry her breasts are leaking, staining her blouse. She looks around at the young faces in the seminar, at the fifty something professor and she envies them the simplicity of their earnest pursuits of intellect.*

She writes herself, a mother writing in white ink, white writing, writing in milk. Nursing Mara, all that's astray comes to rest, settling into morning. Sleep falls away like the folds of clean linen, awakening to a child so new that all that surrounds her lightens, rises like breath, meeting her claim on the blue drift of air and her mother's milk.

She reads Alice Walker's In Search of Our Mother's Gardens. Walker writes about the poet Muriel Rukeyser who was her teacher at Sarah Lawrence College.

Through a period of Walker's suicidal despair, Rukeyser saves her, upholds her poetry, sends it to a publisher, keeps her going. Walker speaks of Rukeyser and her incredible gift as a teacher who embedded in her lectures on poetry the importance of her experiences as a mother, the importance of the child.

Evelyn never misses a class. When Jay is transferred and they move four hours away from the university, she continues to drive to campus to complete her Master's and then her Ph.D. Jay does not understand why she continues, does not understand her writing late into the night when Mara sleeps, does not understand her obsession, her need.

She writes her poems into the early hours of the morning, red wine, tears, words, syllables spilling over. Jay was often away or working late. Sometimes she left him asleep in bed, wrote in the opaline embrace of moonlight.

Teaching English Literature and Composition at the local college, she kept her poet-self carefully contained, separate from the day-to-day, marking dismal essays, grammar, spelling. How could she teach anyone how to write? For her, writing was a visceral thing, organic as breathing, sensual.

In her doctoral dissertation she alludes to Roland Barthes' comparisons: teaching as play, reading as eros, writing as seduction.

But her students didn't see the erotic or playful or seductive nature of education. They expressed their constant frustrations. I need this mark to get into my program. I promise you if you pass me I'll never take another English class again. Notes slid under her office door—excuses for missed classes and late term papers, cats getting hit by cars, landlord evictions, other family traumas. Some bright lights, some sparks of enthusiasm but it always seemed to Evelyn that the course curricula was more about just getting through the requirements.

Colleagues around her found her an anomaly among their ranks in the small community. She was a traditionally feminine woman who stood out because of it. She

took pleasure in clothes, translated her face daily with cosmetics and lipstick, wore her large diamond. The style around her was more casual, almost a political statement in the granola plainness and outdoorsiness. Men found her attractive but a bit threatening and women hungry for power criticized her behind her back and proclaimed a dislike for her. In order to avert betrayals, she needed to be part of the pool of silent women teaching composition or teaching English as a Second Language or the Fundamentals of Something, on contract, no power, no benefits, no voice or visible presence. One semester she is allowed the privilege reserved for Ph.D.s when she is asked to teach an upper levels course in American Literature while the tenured prof is on sabbatical but when he returns she is back to her previous assignments.

She shouldn't have worn a suit. The candidate waiting in the Dean's office had commented on it. Oh, you went all out! How brave of you to wear stockings on such a warm day. The other candidate is wearing bare legs and Birkenstocks. The other women on the selection committee also have bare toes and casual, cotton dresses, floral prints and long skirts, bright colors. She is excruciatingly conscious of her tailored beige suit and leather pumps.

She had been in the process of leaving for years, educating herself, distancing herself, writing through it all. But she was beginning to wonder if there was any purpose to being a poet in this world. When she first started sending her poems to literary journals she suffered a string of rejections—the ultimate irony to have submissions returned in her own handwriting in Self Addressed Stamped Envelopes—the obligatory SASE demanded by publishers, the artist rejecting the artist, Self Addressed Self Erasure. Every trip to the mailbox offered the promise of joy or depression. She finally got a few poems published, then more and more successes. She now had a full manuscript ready to send off to a publisher.

Evelyn responds calmly to the interviewer's question, something about advancement opportunities, new challenges, seeking institutions engaged in cutting edge

research, something about merging theory and practice. The chair of the committee asks her about her publishing record. He asks about all the poetry she has included. *Do you see this as academic scholarship?* he asks. Yes, she answers and doesn't bother to elaborate. *When did you start writing poetry? It seems to be fairly recent.* She cannot tell him *when I needed it, it saved my life.* She says something about creative work and its inextricable link to the teaching of language and literacy, hoping it is an adequate response.

When she leaves Jay she knows he will not keep anything she has written—those black words on pages a threat.

Hunger

*When I realized
you never noticed
or felt joy
at the accidental beauty of things
I knew that to love you
above all others
is to know despair*

*memory insists
even in darkness
my fingers reading braille
the geography of your face, your body*

*you swallow me whole
never learning
to speak the language of my skin*

*the terrain of marriage
leaves me starving
mouth full of love.*

She is asked what she hopes to find at the institution, at the Academy, why does she want to work here. Evelyn is bored with the interview, surprises herself with her answer, forgetting her carefully rehearsed responses of eduspeak. I hope to find a home, a place, a job, a place where I can work with colleagues and where I can write and teach. A

home. She says with an attempt at humor *I want people to stop asking me what a Ph.D. is.* As soon as it is out of her mouth she feels it is a faux-pas.

In the competitive climate at the university, during the long years of research and teaching and writing to finish her Ph.D., Evelyn was marked by clouds of disapproval; her husband and mother-in-law ask: what is a Ph.D. anyway? It seemed silly, impractical, unnecessary to them. Jay learns the use of narrow remarks that become habit ; the words would burrow their way into her ears, slither like a snake down her throat to her heart, leaving her choking.

She is immersed in Nancy Huston's novel, *Slow Emergencies*. The main character, Lin, is a dancer. Lin ends up having to choose between her passion and profession and her life with her husband and two daughters. At a dinner party she meets poet Sean Farrell who eventually becomes her lover. Sean says to her: *A university, you know is nothing but a shattered universe. Each scholar has one little, brittle shard of it inside his head, and nothing else.*

They offer her the job a few weeks later and she is surprised but grateful.

When she tells him she has decided to leave, there is no sensation of surprise. Jay has lost his impulse to possess her. He has long since lost the battle of touch, the battle of the hands. The story of love ends in moments of contempt for each other. They would sit at the movies together, carefully avoiding brushing against each other. He has known she will leave for some time. Perhaps he has always known it.

But when the moving van pulls away with Evelyn and Mara's things, it seems unbearable. Jay and Evelyn lie on the bed, holding each other, their bodies intertwined, fragments of their lost selves fill the air as they clutch each other. Evelyn has never seen Jay cry before. And the rooms are filled with weeping.

There are days when Evelyn looks around her at all the women working, the bank tellers, grocery clerks, office workers and wishes she could be content with this, the world's nine to five. They looked content, didn't they? Wouldn't life be easier for Mara if she were a different kind of mother, not a writing-mother? A simpler woman. There are days when she curses intellect and education and books and literature and poetry—the seductions away from the ordinary—imagination takes its pound of flesh, exacts its price. *What good is the heat and passion of a poet's heart when it is tangled in a woman's body?*

At times she imagines herself a woman poet writing in the Japanese Heian court of the 10th century. She imagines she is Izumi Shikibu, writing tankas by moonlight. She, like other women, is accorded independence in romantic matters: able to own property and receive income in her name, a woman could refuse a suitor's advances, or, should a marriage or her position as a "second wife" no longer suit her, end a relationship through divorce or by moving away. Since all romantic encounters take place within a convention of secrecy, the opinions of family and friends about one's choices in the realm of eros could be avoided for a time. Here she could write, supported in the belief that poetry is a natural upswelling of language in an awakened and interested heart—an irresistible and effortless answering within the individual to the continual calling of the Other, natural, supernatural or human. Poetry as possessing a virtually magic power to change and improve the external order of life, softening relations between people.

Sometimes in her imagined calligraphies, she writes the parchment scrolls of Sei Shonagon's Pillow Book. She writes her own Pillow Book...A List of Things to Make the Heart Beat Faster...anything indigo is splendid, wrapping your lover in indigo silk, marks on paper in indigo ink, the veins of your heart...

The fourth finger of her left hand was white-ringed, the skin marked even in the absence of her diamond band. At the time she had received it she had envisioned the ring

as a symbol of all that was desirable, feminine, part of her love of beauty—she was ringed, banded in pale fire.

At her new job, when she teaches her classes at the The Academy of Arts and Education, her heart rate increases. When she begins work with the teachers, she recognizes in her own body, the symptoms they speak about in their classrooms. She remembers Grace talking about the terror she felt on her first days. Their bodies complain, erupts in rashes and aches. Evelyn keeps expecting blood, imagining herself a character in one of Margaret Atwood's "True Stories." The woman poet loses her husband and every time she does a reading to promote her new book, her nose bleeds.

VI



For a time, Mara and Evelyn live in a tiny apartment on campus supplied by faculty housing. One morning over coffee Evelyn sees an ad: Boundary Bay: Heritage Home for Sale By Owner, fixer upper, affordable. Open House, Sunday 2-4PM. She clips out the ad and stares at it on her desk for days. She wonders what it would be like to live by the ocean again. For nights she dreams of tides and waves and the desire for the sea is a blue light moving under the irises of her eyes.

She decides to go to the open house. The day is dark, dreary, November torrential rain. She drives the route from Vancouver, across the Oak Street Bridge, Highway 99 to the ferries exit, through the town of Boundary Bay on Boundary Bay Road. The road winds around a golf course at Beach Grove and a huge Bed and Breakfast. Years ago this had been wilderness and small cottages by the beach. Now much had been torn down and replaced by ultra-modern glass and concrete architecturally designed homes with enormous windows looking out onto the bay.

She finds the old house surrounded by suburban houses with well-tended lawns. It is bigger than she had imagined, two stories with a gabled upper level, but it is in a state of complete disrepair. Through the sleeting rain she can see the sagging front porch, groaning when she steps onto it. The door is open and she walks in but there doesn't seem to be anyone around. Upstairs in the gabled bedroom, rain is pouring through the roof. Despair grabs her. She makes her way back downstairs and is close to weeping when she notices a woman standing in the kitchen.

May I help you?

Evelyn cannot stop the tears. The owners, May and Ted, seat her at the kitchen table, place a hot cup of tea in front of her and explain that they had canceled the open house because of the rain and the leaks. May apologizes for the disrepair of the house, explains it was her parents' home, where she had grown up. After her mother died, her father had let it go, her younger brother, the last child left at home, came and went, drifting through his father's grief, painting his room black, leaving bottles of Jack Daniels to mark his presence.

The house was ninety years old, now just a shadow of what it once was. May and Ted show her a scrapbook full of photographs, Kodachrome memories, the house a blue-gray the color of the skies around Boundary Bay, trimmed with gingerbread cornices, deep red curlicues, cadmium red, flower gardens spilling over with abundance, the father, arms around his wife's waist, laughing, running after children, working, the photographer in his backyard studio darkroom, making remembrances. Stilling love in paper albums, like reading, an invisible act coded to the eyes.

Memento mori. Evelyn smelled death, the death of life, the rot of wood and paper into mildew and decay and yet, like books, this album had hope, every inscription on the pages an ordering of the alphabet marked by ceremony: Our New House, Our New Baby, May's First Day at School; May's Sixteenth Birthday; Graduation; Wedding; Grandchildren and then silence, his wife's cancer spreading thick in his throat, through his hands, they stopped preserving memory, the last section of the album, blank, thick black pages, the vellum sheets unspeaking, unspeakable.

The photos in her mother's house. Coming to Canada...Deirdre in her smart red coat, red Grace Kelly handbag, Kirpal in his grey overcoat and Evelyn between them in her blue British duffle coat with wooden toggle buttons. Her mother saves this duffle coat, preserves it to hand down to a new generation.

Photos of the tourist sites in Canada. The three of them at Niagara Falls, dressed in slickers. In front of the Parliament buildings in Ottawa in spring, in front of rows and rows of neatly cultivated tulips.

Picnics by the lake, Deirdre and Evelyn dressed in ankle-cropped pants or pedal-pushers, bottles of Coke cooling at the water's edge. Evelyn has not inherited her mother's green eyes. Hers are the deep velvet brown of her father's eyes. She has her mother's dark hair, the curls of childhood smoothed out into a glossy sheath as she gets older. Her mother's skin is creamy white, Evelyn's a light olive.

Walking in the Gatineau Hills among the fall leaves, orange, red and gold splendor, Deirdre used to collect branches of leaves to bring inside the house.

Evelyn began to think about the house in the old photos, a studio, a place to write, a gabled room looking over the ocean, a yard for Mara to play with friends, a garden. When Evelyn asked about the price of the house, she did not hesitate, didn't let fear hold her, despite the inner voice that told her she was being rash.

Evelyn emptied her savings and drew from her RRSP account. She knew nothing about renovation but she knew that this was her house, her place. When she took possession she wondered if she had made a mistake. It was a hull, a shell, the exoskeletal remains of past lives, barely breathing.

She remembers reading the novels of Edith Wharton, remembers Wharton's decorous passion for homes and gardens...As a young girl, the author used to recoil at the ugliness of her aunt's Gothic mansion finding peace in her father's library. Wharton writes the image of a woman's soul embodied in a house in *The Fullness of Life: I have sometimes thought that a woman's nature is like a great house full of rooms. There is the hall, through which everyone passes in going in and out; the drawing room where one receives formal visits; the sitting room, where the members of the family come and go...but beyond that, far beyond, are other rooms, the handles of whose doors perhaps are never turned;...in the innermost room...the soul sits alone and waits for a footstep that never comes.*

Home, to cover, whence HIDE; a building for human beings to live in; specif., 1.a) the building or part of a building occupied by one family or tenant; dwelling place b) a college within a university c) an inn; tavern; hotel d) a building where a group of people live in a house, considered as a unit e) monastery, nunnery, or similar religious establishment f. [Colloq] a brothel 2. The people who live in a house considered as a unit; social group; esp., a family or household 3. a family as including kin, ancestors and descendants 4. something regarded as a house; place that provides shelter, living space 5.a) the habitation place of an animal, as the shell of a mollusk b) a building or shelter where animals are kept [the monkey house in a zoo] c) a building where things are kept when not in use [a carriage house] d) same as living, resting etc. 6.a) a theater b) the audience in a theater 7. a) a place of business b) a business firm; commercial

establishment 8. the management of a gambling establishment 9. A church, temple, or synagogue [house of worship] 10. [often H-] a) the building or rooms where a legislature or branch of a legislature meets b) a legislative assembly or governing body [the House of Representatives] 11. Astrol. a) any of the twelve parts into which the heavens are divided by great circles through the north and south points of the horizon b) a sign of the zodiac considered as the seat of a planet's greatest influence

Some days, in the grey of autumn rains, in the wreckage of the house, she cannot get up in the mornings, her body paralyzed. Only the sounds of Mara calling her draw her up like a powerful magnet, her movement, her breath linked to her daughter's daily comings and goings. She was surprised at Mara's independent spirit. Suddenly, it seemed to Evelyn, Mara was no longer a little girl. At the age of sixteen, Evelyn's daughter seemed a wholly separate person from her mother, building her own world around her. Evelyn felt a bit cut off from her child, a strange sense of mourning and loss. As mother, she floats in a limbo space, unsure of whether she is needed, how she is needed.

She finds herself thinking of her mother. It strikes her that Deirdre must have felt this way when Evelyn had left home. Evelyn thinks of the long nights of nursing Mara as an infant. When Deirdre came to help she drove Evelyn crazy with her ancient British manuals of child care. These guides to mothering were usually written by a practical nurse and they were illustrated with black and white photographs of immaculately coifed mums, with explicit, step by step directions on changing nappies and the proper ways to disinfect all items that came into contact with infants, the proper way to bathe baby. Nothing Jay or Evelyn did to care for Mara was quite right and Deirdre became a formidable, oppressive force whenever she came to visit. Evelyn's childhood repeating itself, nothing ever quite right for her mother.

Evelyn imagines back to her wedding. It is the wedding Deirdre never had. Deirdre is still angry with her daughter for running away and living with Jay, disgracing her, not living up to her education. She has refused to meet Jay before this time and when they say they would like a marriage with a justice of the peace, she tells Evelyn that her

parents will not attend if she chooses this. Evelyn decides she will make her mother happy, although as years go by she realizes this is not possible.

She makes it clear she does not approve of Evelyn's choices and her way of life—I will not give her a wedding, she tells her friends. In the end, Deirdre will see to it that her daughter has a proper wedding. She wants to send the photos to India. Evelyn is swathed in a sari of bridal red, encrusted with gold brocade, her hands and feet painted in mendhi, henna painted in intricate designs. The henna is dark, pungent earthy smelling when it is wet, then dries an orange-red. She is weighted down with the gold of an Indian bride, dressed by her "aunties," family friends who have been part of their circle since coming to Canada. Jay wears a turban to please Evelyn's parents, despite the strangeness to his United Church going family.

They are married in the Unitarian Church that they attended in the sixties when Deirdre and Kirpal joined others in the peace and love era in a church that embraced many people of different nationalities and cultures who believed in one God. Kirpal had never really been attached to the conventions of organized religion and Evelyn had not been raised going to the Gurdwara. Without the Punjabi language, her Indianness was a fragile thing. Their minister's name was Frank Capistrano and he and his wife had ten children—three conceived in their marriage and eight adopted kids from around the world—a girl from Vietnam, a baby from Biafra, one from Bangladesh....

So they are married in the Unitarian Church with two ceremonies, although Jay's mother has never heard of a Unitarian Church. The first time they are married in a language they don't understand, Evelyn walking behind Jay, around the Sikh holy book, the Guru Granth Sahib, her head bowed and covered, guided by her father and male friends of the family. The second time she wears white, the vows made in English...with this ring I thee wed...Jay's voice...I take you, Evelyn, to be my lawful wedded wife.... They emerge from the church, the guests showering them with rose petals.

She wears orchids and lilies in her hair, tosses her bouquet into a sea of young girls' outstretched hands. Later that night, she dances with Jay, twirling with him across the dance floor, then spinning into her father's arms. Her father tells her she is beautiful.

When Mara is about a year old, Evelyn manages to join a book club with other young mothers who live in the university area. They are starved for reading and adult intellectual conversation and Evelyn looks forward to the monthly get-togethers. They read Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born. We think back through our mothers*, Evelyn hears Virginia Woolf's words.

Every day when Evelyn reaches the university, she teaches her classes as if on auto-pilot, barely registering what is said. She still thinks of Jay sometimes, her divorce a severing, as if some part of her is lost. Sometimes this lost part is numb. Other times she can feel it acutely, like an amputee imagines the aching presence of a phantom limb. Her students find her distant. She builds a wall of protection around her, an invisible barrier impermeable to pain.

She reads Rebecca West's The Return of the Soldier: grief is not the clear melancholy the young believe it. It is like a siege in a tropical city. The skin dries and the throat parches as though one were living in the heat of the desert; water and wine taste warm in the mouth and food is the substance of sand; one snarls at one's company; thoughts prick one through sleep like mosquitoes.

Looking around the old house in Boundary Bay, Evelyn remembered her home with Jay. The house in Edmonton had been spare, a minimalist icon of white walls, crisp white sheets, sleek black leather, Eurostyle glass and marble tables. Now, Evelyn found herself craving warmth and color against the grey skies of autumn. She wanted aged pine and creamy sheets the color of candlelight.

In Edith Wharton's novels, decor is as important as dialogue. Her fictional houses are extensions of the characters. The reader's sympathy is built up through the descriptions of Newland Archer's cozily furnished library: English mezzotints, Chippendale cabinets, bits of chosen blue-and-white and pleasantly shaded electric lamps...

It is the light that moves her. The light in this landscape is like the spreading of honey, like the beginning of reading. Here, past words can be replaced, made shiny and new again, spreading over the page and the days become sweet with learning. Dusk over Boundary Bay is always indigo, edged in pink and gold and silver light. In these descending dusks she walks, her mind stroked by silvered fingers spreading the forms of words across the waves as the blue disappeared from the sea and daylight faded. In the lunge of night she begins to write again, her blood and imagination stirred by the sea. She dips into her mind, re-fashioning memory into art. She writes where dreams swirl between the boundaries of shadow and light.

VII

WATCH THOU FOR THE MUTANT!
THE NORM IS THE WILL OF GOD
REPRODUCTION IS THE ONLY HOLY PRODUCTION
THE DEVIL IS THE FATHER OF DEVIATION

John Wyndham, *The Chrysalids*

Grace sweeps back a stray wave of hair off her forehead in frustration. The class is restless and noisy. These days she wasn't sure she was teaching anything about literature. Her hours are filled with dealing with classroom management problems. Jordan Merrill is one of these problems, talking continuously, wanting attention. He is a ring-leader, handsome, blonde, grinning, with a charisma and the kind of looks that made the young girls restless. The other boys followed his lead.

Grace's height gave her some advantage. She looked them in the eye with a directness and matter-of-fact manner. She hardly recognized herself these days. Her usually quiet-spoken voice had found the capacity to bellow.

She struggled to teach language, composition and useless grammar exercises, poring over the Ministry of Education's guidelines for Secondary Language Arts. What was the curriculum to deliver? Carefully laid out lesson plans, methods taught in Teacher Education were discarded after several weeks. She sometimes felt like she could not breathe, that she was barely coping, driving into the staff parking lot two minutes before the bell each morning.

Grace is constructed by language. Ms.Owen, Ms.Owen, Ms.Owen, constant repetition, driving her crazy. When the students are upset at her, dissatisfied with her, they take out their frustrations in language, mutter in the hallways, the popular insults—*she's such a dyke*. Any activity perceived as undesirable is described as "gay." Oh, that's so gay! they exclaim. She found herself wondering about the language of the highschool world. *Words to break bones with*. Words are hurled as weapons, obscenities, sharp explosions, spoken truths. One day she comes into the classroom to find the word LESBIAN scrawled over her supply cupboard in black lettering. Language becomes a violence she is not prepared for. The idealism she had felt as a first-year teacher was fast fading away. Her body was surviving the day-to-day barrages of language in this counterfeit world where she lived a fictive life.

Evelyn holds the first meeting with Grace in her office at the university. Grace had volunteered to participate in the mentorship program because of a certain level of

curiosity about Evelyn. She respected her as a professor. When she had been in her classroom as a student, Grace had enjoyed Evelyn's English Methods course. In fact, it had been one of the few courses she had taken that had some intellectual content that interested her. But now, she realized that the mentorship program would involve Evelyn's classroom observations of her teaching and she was suddenly uncomfortable. Grace begins to feel a bit distrustful when Evelyn starts to jot notes on her pad, asking her questions about her experiences in Teacher Education. Grace mutters under her breath *senseless hoop-jumping, could have taught without this program, didn't learn much. This is the rote refrain of many of the student teachers—the obligatory cynicism she has learned. As the words slither out of her mouth she wonders if they are true. It will probably be years before she knows.*

At their meetings she listens to Evelyn talk about theory, notions of authority, the authority of the heart and the ethic of care in school environments. But Grace felt that caring for the self was impossible, she was chronically deprived, spirit and body. Within the first few months of teaching her skin hurt. Her skin protested, erupting in lesions and rashes. By Christmas, a flu epidemic knocked everyone down, students and staff. The principal and vice-principal commented on Grace's white lips.

Grace has to do a unit on a novel. She chooses John Wyndham's *The Chrysalids* from the curriculum list for Senior English. She is puzzled and annoyed when she realizes the administration has ordered only enough copies for half the class. In an affluent neighborhood, she finds this hard to understand. It is important for everyone to have their own books. She wants them to be able to write in the margins, take notes. *I need to be able to get them excited about reading, respond to the work, take ownership in their engagement with the text*, she tells the Vice-Principal. The Vice-Principal denies her request. *The books have to be recycled every year. Students can share, they just have to work out a timetable with their partners.*

She sends a notice home to parents, asking for extra funds so each student can have their own book. This seems to be all right with everyone and in two weeks time each

student has a copy of *The Chrysalids*. This is your book, she says, write in it, write notes in the margins, make it yours, she says to them.

From the back of the classroom she can hear the sound of a page being ripped as a paper airplane sails across her desk. Jordan and his group of followers are going to cause trouble. Already they are talking and laughing, fidgeting with the obligation of reading the book for class. As she turns to write notes on the blackboard, a spitball misses the back of her head, hitting the board. She is uncomfortable with the observation of Evelyn at the back of her classroom. This separate Evelyn is in her professional role, reporting and fulfilling teacher supervision duties for the mentorship program. She looks all-efficient with her clip-board.

The students are acting up for the benefit of Evelyn.

Jordan asks, "Is there any sex in this book? I'm not reading it if there isn't any sex." A collective giggle reverberates through the classroom.

She laughs with them. "Yes, she says, "and many other things, love, death. It is a story set in a world that is suffering from the aftermath of genetic mutation. It takes place in a community where deviations from the norm, in the normal human or animal or even plantlife—these deviations are rooted out and destroyed. The narrator is David who can communicate through "thought shapes" with others who have the same ability. This is a deviation from the norm so he tries to keep it a secret—needs to keep it a secret."

She thinks maybe she has told too much of the story but they could read as much on the back cover blurb. The students are restless. The fall sunshine beckons to them from the school windows. It spreads a yellow warmth through the dirt-smudged panes and she knows, as they do, that the air outside is crisp and sweet and the dry leaves make a joyful noise underfoot. "Please read Chapters One to Three by next class," she says quickly. "Remember, write notes in the book and in your response journals." The bell rings and there is a mad scramble for the door.

Evelyn sets up meetings with Grace in order to discuss various approaches to teaching literature. Evelyn finds the time she needs to give to meetings prohibitive. She is feeling overwhelmed with teaching and with the work that needs to be done on the house, doesn't feel like talking, doesn't know if she can afford to hire someone to do the work. She is craving time to write poetry. But it is discouraging to live in the constant state of disrepair of her house.

When Evelyn cancels her next meeting with Grace, mumbling something about having to work on her house, Grace invites herself over. I'll come over and give you a hand, she says. I used to work for a contractor. Grace doesn't miss the expression of surprise that crosses Evelyn's face at this remark and then a look of alarm. Grace is intensely curious about Evelyn, wants to know what is under her surface. Evelyn agrees but she is uneasy. She remembers her life with Jay, serving dinner parties for twelve on their wedding china, wine poured into Baccarat crystal glasses. She has not allowed anyone into the disarray, the skeletal remains of her life. "That would be fine. See you at 11:00 on Sat. morning," Grace says smiling.

Boundary Bay. Grace is surprised by the location of the house. She had imagined Evelyn in something more urban near the university campus like most of the professors. She is unprepared for the winding road into Boundary Bay with the herons swooping near the ditches, spreading open the flashes of indigo across their wings. There is a feeling of wildness to the place that feels foreign to her, as if she has entered a strange, yet familiar land.

Grace knows nothing about Evelyn's personal life. In the English Methods course Grace had taken, Evelyn had been passionate about literature, especially poetry and she had shared this with her students. At the same time she had remained very reserved about herself; only when Evelyn talked about literature and read poetry did her students feel the fire and heat that sparked from her. In her mentorship role she again seemed somewhat distant, cool and reserved. Grace was unsure how to read Evelyn.

While she waits for Grace that first Saturday morning, Evelyn reconstructs the last class on Women and Fiction in her mind, the discussion focusing on the nature of fiction.

For Evelyn and her graduate students, certain books remain familiar and incantatory. One woman talks passionately about *To the Lighthouse*. Evelyn imagines the haunting images of Mrs. Ramsay's pleated green shawl and Lily Briscoe's impressionist painting, Lily squeezing her tube of green paint.

Another student cites Alice Monro in *The Love of a Good Woman*:
I bolted them down one after the other without establishing any preferences, surrendering to each in turn just as I'd done to the books I read in my childhood. I was still in that stage of leaping appetite, of voracity close to anguish. But one complication had been added since childhood—it seemed that I had to be a writer as well as a reader.

Snippets of Nicole Brossard: *reading the text of your project, I become aware of the extent to which our fictions intersect...let us exit fiction via fiction. We will exist in a story of our own design.*

Evelyn makes notes for the next seminar. Their stories of reading intertwine in literary geography, an eternity mapped and embodied in words and books. Aritha van Herk calls it *Geografictione*; a neologism. An addition to language, to theory of literature—place, person, memory, fiction, resignifying language. *An atlas for a difficult world.*

They will read Brossard: *As I write, I think about my next novel. She will be a character, she will astonish me with every sentence. I will handle the sentences with care. I will be fierce in language. Uncompromising. She will be patient before the world, perfectly desirable as a heroine. She will be a poet. ...I want this she alive.*

Evelyn thinks about Roland Barthes, imagines speaking to her students with his words: *étonne-moi*, astonish me.

VIII

Language is the very voice of the trees, the waves, the forest.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*

Sam Geller enters his classroom before the beginning of the grade twelve Drawing and Painting class and is surprised to see Mara lost in concentration in front of her canvas. He watches for a long time as she presses her face and fingertips onto her newly prepared canvas. Over time, he realizes that she does this at various stages of painting, touching the colors with her skin.

The art room is a place of sanctuary for students with hair dyed green or red or purple, sometimes all those colors simultaneously. The room is home for the kids with the pierced lips and eyebrows and nipples and navels, wearing their Doc Martens boots. In the art room, they feel themselves somehow authentic amidst the smell of clay and paint. This is where Mara transforms herself.

As a child, her mother had dressed her in feminine clothes, brushing her hair every morning into a Pollyana style, tied with a ribbon bow. In her childhood drawings, Mara had drawn pictures depicting all girls and women with bows on top of their heads. A crayon drawing framed above Evelyn's desk is titled My Family. It reveals stick figures, Jay with the caption Father underneath, Mara in a pink dress and long hair with pink bow on top and Evelyn, also in a dress and wearing a hairbow on top of her head. Evelyn's hair looks like the Marlo Thomas hairdo on the old TV show "That Girl" or like Mary on "The Mary Tyler Moore Show," with the ends flipped up perkily at the shoulders.

Now at sixteen, almost seventeen, her father seems a distant stranger in her life and her mother's obsession with books and language puzzles her. Her mother had told her once that the alphabet was a form of magical power, a human gift. She tells Mara about the Hebrew scholars and the Kabbalah and the conviction that each of the twenty-two letters of the ancient *aleph-beth* is a magic passageway into a sphere of existence. The Jewish kabbalists believed that if one meditated on these letters, they would reveal new secrets. *You can cast a spell with this magic*, she says to Mara, *...you must learn to spell*,

language is powerful. Sometimes at night, Mara would find her mother sitting up in bed, reading a dictionary or a thesaurus. *The Old English word spell meant to tell or recite a story.* She found it a bit amusing, her mother's eccentricities, her faith in words.

Mara struggled with language. She could not understand her mother's innate ability for spelling and her passion for writing and words. As the daughter of a writer, a poet, she felt inadequate, possessing a lack that met with the world's disapproval. She hated English class, writing essays were torture. She had been tested for learning disabilities but nothing conclusive had come of it. She thought sometimes her teachers and Evelyn simply thought she was lazy.

Only in the art classroom did she feel at home. Mr. Geller tells them on the first day that he has always had a learning disability and that he cannot spell. Most days he relies on his hand-held spell checker. Sometimes when he is in a hurry, she is amazed at some of his awful misspellings as he writes directions on the blackboard. But it makes her feel close to him somehow, hopeful about her own future. Mr. Geller makes her feel like she is an artist, always praises her for her sense of color, her sense of seeing.

One day before her seventeenth birthday, Mara cuts off her long brown hair, crops it short and dyes it red. Evelyn is stunned, tries to remember theories of adolescent psychology, some film she had seen about parents developing capable people. Streams of teenagers come and go at the house, boys coming to pick up Mara for dates, movies. Sometimes strange fears flash through Evelyn's mind. Her daughter is becoming a stranger to her, her notions of femininity called into question. Such beautiful hair, just like her own, it used to be like her own, everyone always commenting on how much Mara looked like Evelyn. Her face in Mara's face haunted her. The planes and angles of her face are there to remind her, mirror her, *vanity, thy name is vanity.*

Evelyn has been reading R.W.B. Lewis' biography of Edith Wharton. At night she dreams of being Edith Wharton, imagines her in the 1880s when interior design is considered a branch of dressmaking. She writes *The Age of Innocence* in her bed, her only refuge from the demands of 19th century aristocratic society. *She writes on a writing board. Her breakfast is brought to her by Gross, the housekeeper, alone privy to the secret of the bedchamber. A secretary picks up the pages from the floor for typing. In bed, her body is free. Out of bed she would have to dress, confining her body to the stays that bound women's garments. Here, she is free to write and to read.*

Evelyn imagines writing on her radeau-lit, a bed-raft floating in the realm of dreams.

When she was a young girl she used to read the novels of Daphne du Maurier—Rebecca and Frenchman's Creek. She imagines her, a bluff away from the English Channel in her windswept Cornwall house called Ferryside. Here, at the age of twenty three, she writes her first novel, The Loving Spirit, typing along amid howling winter gales, the sea surging, the moonlight beckoning. She writes Enchanted Cornwall: "Down harbour, round the point, was the open sea. Here was the freedom I desired, long sought-for, not yet known. Freedom to write, to walk, to wander, freedom to climb hills, to pull a boat, to be alone...I walked this land with a dreamer's freedom..."

When Grace arrives that first Saturday morning, Evelyn does not know how it will turn out. The porch steps moan under Grace's feet as Evelyn greets her. The house had once had a sort of elegance to it but Grace could sense the enormity of the disrepair, the water-stained walls, the rotting wood at the foundations.

They engage in meaningless small talk at first. Then they begin to talk about teaching. Grace finds it a comfort to talk about her days in the classroom. She needs the release and Evelyn listens attentively. Grace cannot talk about teaching at home—it is starting to be tiresome to her lover. Grace knows by the exasperated look of boredom on Lynn's face whenever Grace starts chatting about her day at school.

The next Saturday, Grace invites herself over again. It is not the monthly scheduled time they had agreed upon in the project but Evelyn agrees. This time, Grace becomes involved with the restoration of Evelyn's house. Grace has brought tools with her. Years of summer jobs with contractors had given her a certain amount of knowledge in carpentry and construction.

As Evelyn shows her the house, Grace begins to understand that Evelyn wants to return the house to its former glory, adding period embellishments. Evelyn has a vision of what the house was like and she wants to replace the moldings that were taken off when the interior was modernized. The roof has been repaired by the previous owners as part of their sales agreement. So the house no longer leaks, but the stairs sag and all the insulation and drywall upstairs and downstairs must be replaced.

The work on the house becomes communal speech between Evelyn and Grace. Mara gets used to the sight of her mother and Grace working on something—painting, hammering, mudding and sanding. Mara knows Grace as the new English teacher at their school. She has never seen her mother do such work before. Sometimes she joins in—sometimes she watches.

On Saturday mornings the “teacher talk” is interwoven throughout the day as Evelyn and Grace search for treasures from old heritage houses in Vancouver, in Shaughnessy and Point Grey, that had been marked to be torn down. With Evelyn's limited budget, they begin to take pleasure in finding cheap bits of salvage from the old houses.

Grace brings newspaper clippings from the classified ads of *The Vancouver Sun* and they find inexpensive building supplies for the house. They go together to demolition sales. At one sale, they find a house that has hardwood flooring being ripped up. Evelyn and Grace meet Tony, the Chinese project manager, who shakes his head in disbelief at the sight of the two women. Evelyn knows he sees only her tiny frame, her small arms. He says to Grace—“I bet your friend has never done such hard labor in her life!” Labor, Evelyn bristles, I know what hard labor is, remembering thirty two hours of childbirth when Mara is born. But she has never done anything like this before. Deep down, she is not sure she can, has never entertained the possibility. This has been the territory of men

in her life—a strange country she has never entered. The heft of the hammer and tools feels foreign to her. She does not have this discomfort with her writing pens, or her computer, or household appliances.

For six hours, Evelyn and Grace pry up two rooms of hardwood flooring. At the end of the day, dusk descending, they are sweaty, filthy and Evelyn's wrists and arms ache and burn. Tony decides he has underestimated them and offers to help with the last bits. He expects them to load up a truck and laughs when Grace opens the hatchback of her Honda Civic. They load up the flooring onto the roof-rack and in the back of the car, Tony teaching them to tie everything down with his special knots.

The pieces of flooring are beautiful, sensual. Blond, maple, tongue and groove. Evelyn loves the warm glow of the wood, holds a piece up to the amber spill of sunset and places it under her pillow.

*

Driving home from the university, her briefcase laden with term papers to grade, the road into Boundary Bay winds a black ribbon through the sky. Along the sides of the fields are the blue herons, emerging from their vast rookeries in the nearby bird sanctuary. Hawks sit sentinel-watch on the fence posts as she returns home to the open arms of the sea, to the smell of kelp and mists.

Mara and her friends are hanging out in front of the house, playing music, the girls painting their fingernails blue and green. Some of the kids have had noses and eyebrows pierced and they are discussing things like girl power but the next minute they are talking about the graduation dance and who is dating who.

Last year in June, just after they had moved in, Evelyn remembers them all gathered around to watch one of the older sisters get picked up for the prom. In town the young boys in their tuxedos smoke cigarettes outside the Petro-Canada gas station. The

young girls wait with their upswept hair, breathless, waiting to be corsaged. Time stands still in the amber air, such a bathing of expectancy, luminous promise, with its burden of radiance.

Evelyn drifts back in time, her mother's mouth full of pins as she hems the pale pink fabric of Evelyn's prom dress. Evelyn and her girlfriends painting their nails in pastel pinks and wearing dresses in the colors of infants, baby blue, pale yellow. They wear scents from the local pharmacy, scents of innocence and fruit, Love's Baby Soft, Eau de Love, Love Fresh Lemon.

One day after returning from her teaching day at the university, Evelyn walks on the beach and there is a man painting at his easel. She has seen him before. He has become her private mystery. She never gets a good glimpse of his face, but she is able to see the canvasses as she walks by. They fascinate her, spills of color, abstract landscapes that evoke something in her. She feels the way she did the first time she had seen an exhibit of Helen Frankenthaler's paintings, those huge soaked canvasses of sensual color, she was absorbed into their infusions. The first time she saw those paintings, something moved inside her, brought her close to tears. She imagines Frankenthaler coming back from Nova Scotia: *I came back and did the Mountains and Sea painting and I knew the landscapes were in my arms as I did it.* Evelyn had savored the titles of the paintings: The Moors; The Bay; Passport; Towards a New Climate; Blue Tide; Dawn After the Storm; Blue Head On; Mauve Exit; Nature Abhors a Vacuum; White Lilac; Night Shade; Bird of Paradise. She finds herself looking for him, her painter, tries to time her walks on the beach to find him. She constructs stories about him. She wonders if his paintings could make her weep.

*

In the seminar on Women and Fiction, Evelyn and her students discuss landscape—the topography of place contained in the body. Writers needing to find the places in the mind where imaginary places exist.

A student discusses Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter* as a perfect example of open secrets—all of the lies in the novel provide structure, the *raison-d'être* of the work—paradox—the secret is the mode of revelation to the reader. *Open secrets*.

The story told over and over again in so many forms—the hero/heroine must escape society in order to save her/his soul—Madame Bovary, Huck Finn. A student asks about Flaubert's influence on the novel as genre. Evelyn finds herself remembering reading about a lecture that Vladimir Nabokov gives to Cornell students about Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. *A book lives longer than a girl*, says Nabokov. He continues to praise Flaubert's clinical style—the transformation of the sordid makings of pulp fiction—adultery, suicide—into a poetic masterpiece with a painstaking description of bourgeois life in mid-19th century France.

But Evelyn knows that everything is caused by Emma Bovary's obsession with reading. Emma is deluded by literature. She dies because she attempts to make her life into a novel. It is the foolishness of this quest that Flaubert's style mocks. A novelist mocking a heroine seduced by novels? The writer mocks himself. Flaubert says he has drawn Emma Bovary from life—from *himself*. "*I have dissected myself to the quick*," he wrote.

"The book influences subsequent development of the novel genre," Evelyn says to her class.

Evelyn's mind wanders. She thinks about Boundary Bay, about holding that landscape in her arms, the contours of the mind like nature—thoughts flowing like water—knowledge, memory inextricably bound with the earth—the mind with its own ecology, inseparable from the body—remembrance of things past—not just the taste of things but the turning of the body in the bed—language inseparable from experience, from her skin.

IX

Sotto Voce

The foghorns moan
 across the bay
 shiplights gleaming at Point Roberts

In my room, my lighthouse
 I am reading lives
 women's diaries
 rustling with muslins and silks
 handwriting rippling across
 thick papers
 spines cracking open
 the long nerve of history exposed
 threaded through me like the veins
 of your body

Tonight
 I have your absence
 the volumes of poetry you gave me
 the red velvet of wine
 a library with hundreds of books

I want to run my hands
 along the length of shelves
 finding places
 only you can read

I am seeking a talisman
 some charm for this journey
 perhaps the tiny bird bones
 you found on the beach
 bleached skeleton and wings
 ribs still threaded to spinal column
 such delicate ivory

perhaps if I fasten them
 about my neck with ribbon
 they will become my armour
 so that only the pure of heart
 may enter

I light candles
 in the rooms of my house
 I have heard this is an act of faith
 and I imagine the scent
 of my voice lives in you
 under the skin of the
 ink-dark moon.

One Saturday for their meeting, Grace and Evelyn spend hours prying off crown moldings and window casings from an old Point Grey house. The owner sells her two stained glass windows. They have diamond-shaped panes of clear and green. In the late afternoon sun, they place them on the sills of Evelyn's living room. The light filters through them in refractions of gold and emerald rays. Evelyn imagines the windows in years past in the houses of other women.

They try out the moldings, holding them up above the windows and door casings to see how they will look. The moldings will recreate what has been dismantled to modernize the house. Evelyn is excited—her vision is slowly being realized. Tired and satisfied, Evelyn invites Grace to share some dinner and wine. Grace suddenly feels as if she should be going home. Can I use the phone? she asks. Evelyn overhears her talking—a strained conversation, yet she returns and says she would love to stay.

Evelyn and Grace cook together, fresh shrimp with vine-ripened tomatoes and garlic with angel hair pasta. As the foghorn moans across the bay at Point Roberts, Evelyn and Grace share glasses of red wine. The wine feels velvet in her throat as Evelyn imagines reading the books of other women who might have lived in a house like this. She sees their wide-brimmed hats, their dresses and their draped chambers of velvet and satin. She turns the thick pages, imagining their stories, women writing the sea and the sky, their turquoise and silver voyages, their heart's desires, their voices peeling the husk of history.

Evelyn and Grace talk about books and reading. Grace tells Evelyn about how she felt in her courses at the Academy. You were the only professor who talked about writers who interested me. I remember you reading us a poem by Adrienne Rich called "In a Classroom." Evelyn remembers this...the teacher in the poem trying to be conscious of

those who are silent in her classroom, those who may not have the standard English, the teacher trying to decide her role...*for this I came.*

Adrienne Rich is doing a reading in Seattle next week, Evelyn says. She has read the notice from the Elliot Bay Book Company on First Avenue. Maybe we should drive down. They make plans to go. Grace is thrilled at the idea.

Evelyn finds herself thinking about the notion of embellishments. Is this important she wonders, thinking about Modernist standards. Even these simple moldings exert an unexpectedly powerful effect. To trim out a window, to frame it and underline it with a sill perched atop an apron of wood suddenly makes that window so much more eventful—each window revealing a living painting, a sight line. The window frame now calls for attention to the landscape it contained, saying *come and see.*

For Evelyn, trim becomes a rhetorical device like the italics in a piece of writing. She thinks of trim as underscoring to what is important, to set off a particular turn of phrase. So the windows and doors, the places where her rooms open into the outside world, deserve these ceremonies of emphasis.

She thinks that the rhetoric of trim is not limited to italicizing or showing off. Trim also becomes the bridging of dissimilar materials and the concealing of mistakes. She thinks of the renovation in terms of composition theory. This “trimming” resembles the transitional phrases writers use to leap from one idea to another and to gloss over the absence of logical or narrative connections. These phrases can be fanciful and ornate like an old molding: *but I digress, be that as it may*—exotic and gilded like the marbled and jeweled palaces of her mother’s stories of Nur Jahan, with their towers and minarets.

Evelyn remembers her father. Kirpal’s steady hands working with his carpentry tools—a hobby after his day at the laboratories is done, fixing things, making book shelves, a lamp turned on a lathe—Little Evelyn watching him sand the wood until it

gleamed. It has to be as smooth as a baby's skin, he used to tell her. He always tried to teach Evelyn to use the tools, but she was never really interested, just liked to watch him work. He would sing in his beautiful voice—Punjabi ghazals and folksongs, sometimes Harry Belafonte—he liked to croon his calypso music—I'm sad to say, I'm going away, Won't be back for many a day...He used to sing his daughter lullabies at night, stroking the hair back from her forehead—Soja raj kumari soja, Sleep, princess sleep...

*Hush little baby don't say a word, Papa's gonna buy you a mockingbird
If that mockingbird won't sing, Papa's gonna buy you a diamond ring
If that diamond ring turns brass, Papa's gonna buy you a looking glass*

When Mara is born Kirpal builds his granddaughter a cradle of smooth pine, carves her name into the soft wood. Evelyn sings her daughter the same lullaby, Hush little baby...

Beneath each length of trim in her house is the struggle, the unflattering transcript of her education in carpentry, the ragged line of her learning curve as she learns from Grace how to master a circular saw and level and right angle. But over time, the tools were beginning to feel more comfortable, a new knowledge less foreign to her body.

The Modernists were right. Trim is dishonest, a deceit. It disguises a building's structure and rough edges in a flourish of craftsmanship. But perhaps trim's lies are forgivable lies, the sort found in social intercourse, conversation, benign deceits, pleasantries of kindness and courtesy rather than gazing at human imperfections. Evelyn is grateful for trims' absolution.

She thinks of deceits, the deceits in Deirdre's life. Deirdre's father who had always kept an Indian mistress even when her mother was alive—a young woman he had bought from a village family for five rupees.

When Deirdre's father dies, she flies back for the funeral, inhales the earth and the heat that assaults her as she steps off the plane. She has hungered for this place, the

India of her childhood is what she wants, the scent of chai and cardamom, reading legends of Rajput lords in their red sandstone fortresses, the peacocks with their emerald and sapphire plumes. She has preserved the dream like a love so perfect, like a great pearl, the Taj Mahal in moonlight, a white lotus floating, marking the routes of cranes and white egrets, said to be souls of the gods.

She weeps at the sight of the beggars and the village men in their dhotis, the scooters navigating the crowded streets, young girls riding sidesaddle on the backs, their saris ballooning past squatters in their tents, the rickshaw drivers shouting, competing for tourist fares. Visiting with her aunt in Bombay she sees the unimagined and imagined realities. She takes it all into herself:

...waves of heat; huge grey and red buildings, a Victorian London growing among palm trees and banyans, leprous walls, wide and beautiful venues, stinking alleyways, torrents of cars, people coming and going, skeletal cows without owners, creaking carts drawn by emaciated oxen, rivers of bicycles,

a leper, another beggar, a group of would be saints daubed with saffron paint, red betel stains spat on the sidewalk,

horn battles between taxi drivers and dust covered buses, more bicycles, more cows and half-naked saints, around the corner a young village girl like a half-opened flower,

a survivor of the British Raj dressed in a meticulous, threadbare creamy white suit, carrying a black umbrella,

market stalls selling coconuts and fresh pineapple, gangs of young boys, homeless boys like herds of deer,

women in red, blue, yellow, violent pinks, deliriously hued saris, improbable colors

women with amber-colored skin, hair and brows as black as crow's wings, the huge eyes of lionesses in heat, dark haired women with bracelets on their wrists and ankles, sandals made for working the fields,

public gardens overwhelmed by the heat, monkeys in cornices of buildings, shit and sweet jasmine,

*a stone statue daubed with red paint, at its feet a tribute of red faded flowers, the
 silhouette of the monkey god, gusts of stench, decomposing substances, whiffs of pure,
 fresh perfumes,
 at dawn, delicate fingers flying to pick the jasmine blooms to send to Paris perfumers,
 exporting tropical nights, the night-blooming flowers plucked before the sun's heat
 weakens their fragrant oils,
 the laughter of a young girl, slender as a lily, a legless man sitting under a statue of an
 eminent politician,
 an old man watching with a noble face,
 a magnificent eucalyptus tree growing from a garbage dump, a huge billboard on an
 empty lot announcing Bollywood's latest movie star, a creamy faced woman with light
 brown hair, a full moon over the sultan's palace balcony
 the gold and black grillwork of a luxurious villa with the inscription: EASY MONEY,
 beyond the iron gates a sumptuous garden
 in the violently blue sky, crows flying in circles, seagulls, vultures, crows, crows*

*Deirdre wants to embrace all this, hold it in her arms, to be back here with
 Kirpal, buying gold bangles and bolts of silk in the bazaar.*

Compared to prying it off the walls of the old house, putting up the molding is a slow, painstaking process, leaving long stretches of time for reflection. Nailing the strips of fir over the rankling gaps between the walls and window casings, Evelyn has time to contemplate the deep relationship between trim and human fallibility.

Grace drives home along the winding black ribbon of Boundary Bay Road, past the farmer's fields and the edges of the sea, towards the city where her lover is getting ready to leave her. In their city apartment, Lynn packs her things, disconnects herself from Grace, from the disorders of love, looking over the Vancouver skyline, the steel and glass towers a horizon of lost speech.

X

*I know you are reading this poem
late, before leaving your office
of one intense yellow lamp-spot and the darkening window
in the lassitude of a building faded to quiet
long after rush-hour.*

Adrienne Rich, "Dedications"

Evelyn finishes her teaching day and leaves the Academy to pick up Grace from Bridgepoint Secondary School. They make the trip to Seattle late in the day, wondering if it will be worthwhile. Around five o'clock, on the highway from White Rock out to the Peace Arch Border, the rain starts, then turns into snow and sleet. On the Interstate 5 in Washington the winter road conditions get worse but it is too late to turn around.

*....I know you are reading this poem
standing up in a bookstore far from the ocean
on a grey day of early spring, faint flakes driven
across the plains' enormous spaces around you.*

It takes them two and a half hours to get there, but it gives them time to talk about their days and their students. Grace talks about Adrienne Rich, reading Adrienne Rich, coming out with Adrienne Rich. She tells Evelyn that she had felt a connection to Evelyn when she had taught some of Adrienne Rich's work. The rest of the Teacher Education Program had been a bastion of conservatism. Once when she asked a professor to explain a grade on a term paper, the married, tenured professor had exclaimed with irritation.. "I see you are not married...maybe if you stopped complaining so much you might find a man!"

She tells Evelyn about her first lover. She had just turned sixteen and was helping out at her mother's restaurant and found herself attracted to a new waitress. The woman was twenty-one, very beautiful, very loving and sensual. At high school there was always the concealed identity. Grace was a jock, played every sport. She is tall and thin. She is smart and confident on the outside, fits in because she excels at sports, does well in school and attracts the attention of boys but they don't attract her attention. There is always a secret, unspoken. Always the suppressed memories of her father's cruelties, always a double life, a secret life.

Grace tells Evelyn that she has been with Lynn, a lawyer, for the past seven years. "Lynn just moved out last month," she says. "We couldn't seem to talk to each other any more. She couldn't seem to understand my teaching life."

"I'm sorry," Evelyn says. "How have you been coping?"

“I come to Boundary Bay to see you, talk to you on the weekends.”

*I know you are reading this poem
in a room where too much has happened for you to bear
where the bedclothes lie in stagnant coils on the bed
and the open valise speaks of flight
but you cannot leave yet. I know you are reading this poem
as the underground train loses momentum and before running
up the stairs
toward a new kind of love
your life has never allowed.*

By the time they get to downtown Seattle to pick up their tickets at the Elliot Bay Book Company, the night has cleared and the air is crisp and cool. Grace and Evelyn find the First United Methodist Church where the reading is to be held, sponsored by Seattle Arts and Lectures. They wait in line to get in. The church holds about a thousand people and within a half hour it is full. The oak pews gleam and Evelyn looks around at the intricate stained glass windows.

The audience is full of a wide variety of fans, lesbian couples in their fifties and sixties; many women of all ages; a scattering of men; young baby dykes.

*I know you are reading this poem by fluorescent light
in the boredom and fatigue of the young who are counted out,
count themselves out, at too early an age. I know
you are reading this poem through your failing sight, the thick
lens enlarging these letters beyond all meaning yet you read on
because even the alphabet is precious.*

Everyone rises to give Adrienne Rich a standing ovation as she makes her way to the podium. Evelyn feels the blood move in her veins, as if she can feel a collective response in the room, sensations flowing out through each other person in the audience, flowing a river of feeling through the air into the poet, into Evelyn. Evelyn feels tears in her eyes as she watches the seventy-year-old poet helped up, sees her walking with a cane and realizes she is crippled by arthritis. Adrienne Rich is frail. But her voice remains strong, resonant, unflinching, as she reads from her new book, *Midnight Salvage...a blue aperture of hope*.

And in the audience are mothers, writers and poets...And Evelyn and Grace hear her voice through an *Atlas of a Difficult World*:

*I know you are reading this poem as you pace beside the stove
warming milk, a crying child on your shoulder, a book in your
hand
because life is short and you too are thirsty.*

XI

"BY HAMMER AND HAND ALL THINGS DO STAND"

**AUDELS
CARPENTERS
AND
BUILDERS
GUIDE # 2**

A PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATED TRADE ASSISTANT
MODERN CONSTRUCTION

FOR CARPENTERS-JOINERS
BUILDERS-MECHANICS

AND
ALL WOOD WORKERS

EXPLAINING IN PRACTICAL, CONCISE LANGUAGE
AND BY WELL DONE ILLUSTRATIONS, DIAGRAMS
CHARTS, GRAPHS AND PICTURES, PRINCIPLES
ADVANCES, SHORT CUTS-BASED ON MODERN
PRACTICE - INCLUDING INSTRUCTIONS ON HOW
TO FIGURE AND CALCULATE VARIOUS JOBS

BY

FRANK D. GRAHAM-CHIEF
THOMAS J. EMERY-ASSOCIATE



THEO. AUDEL & CO - PUBLISHERS
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Invocation

The coyote stands
in a grainy sea
the fields oceans of heat
crops sucking the air dry

I am surprised to see him
watching me at midday
I thought him a nocturnal creature
his eyes burn into me
becoming me
becoming the falcon circling
the bees droning in meadows of wild flowers
the children's voices
as they pluck blackberries
from the brambles

becoming the lanes of magnolia
between fading tangerine roses and purple irises
becoming my poems
my inky letters fading
words and stories fragile
on papers slightly yellowed

in a few months they will dream themselves
reborn into the heart of an arbutus tree
spreading roots in beds of coastal rock
in rainforests near the clay cliffs

and I have the wind and sea
in my voice
I harness the crescent moon
dragging it through unfurrowed fields
whispering a ragged prayer
to heron-priested skies.

Her new book of poetry is writing herself. This writing is a haunting, something that does not call out to all others, but beckons Evelyn with its crooked fingers to enter through doorways slightly ajar. In the strange shadows, things she has never seen before become familiar. She believes writing poetry is a physical act, dangerous, excessive, necessary. She likes it this way, this inquest, slightly fearful, a journey into the melt of the world, this labyrinth of chants and fluid words and fractal glimpses revealing all.

Catherine, the next door neighbour, is an elderly woman with steel grey hair. She peers over the hedge through her thick glasses. She has taken to coming out to her backyard garden in the late afternoons when she knows Evelyn will have returned from work. As the sun fades, Evelyn sits with her coffee on an old garden bench with her writing. Finally, one day, Catherine asks, “What are you writing? Is it a diary?”

“No. I write poetry.” *The words are purposes, the words are maps to lost places, new places. Evelyn thinks of novelist Katherine Mansfield saying that it took “terrific hard gardening” to produce inspiration...the hard gardening of knowing, the pen the ink of the mind.*

“Ah, yes. I was an English teacher you know. I used to teach at the high school many years ago. I went to Bishop’s College in Lennoxville and studied Modern Languages—was one of twenty in the first class of women to graduate. Used to only admit men. After my husband got back from the war I taught at MacDonald College in St. Anne de Bellevue, Quebec. We used to read Bliss Carmen and Archibald Lampman. I used to have a friend who taught at the university and we used to talk for hours about poetry and literature. She is gone now though, most of my old friends are gone. I’d love to hear your poetry some time. I can’t read them anymore—my eyes have gotten so bad!”

"Maybe you would like to come over tomorrow evening. I'm having a book club meeting at my house. Come. You'll meet some new people. We follow some of the Oprah Winfrey Book Club picks," Catherine tells her.

"What book are you doing?"

"Jane Hamilton's *A Map of the World*. Have you read it yet?"

"Yes."

"Well then you should come and meet the others. Around seven o'clock."

It occurs to Evelyn that Catherine perceives her to be lonely. Evelyn had never watched the Oprah Winfrey show but she knew that booksellers and authors waited with baited breath for Oprah's blessing of new writing. Evelyn is wary of anything to do with talk shows and the concept of Oprah as literary guru but she feels obliged to be grateful for Catherine's gestures of kindnesses.

The next night, Evelyn goes next door to Catherine's for the book club meeting. Inside Catherine's home, she feels like she is entering a Victorian drawing room, silver gleaming, dark oak antiques, an armoire, couch in olive green velvet, books in glass-fronted cabinets. Catherine greets her, pearl drops in her ears, the smell of Earl Grey tea and molasses cake wafting from the kitchen.

Catherine surprises Evelyn, this preserved elegance among the wildness of the bay. The other members arrive. Evelyn had expected a group of elderly women. Instead, she is introduced to an eclectic group of women and men, ranging in ages from early twenties to Catherine who is 82. Catherine can no longer read the books—too much strain on her eyes so she listens to them on audiotapes. Evelyn cannot imagine not being able to see words.

Catherine introduces Evelyn to everyone as they arrive. After a bit of chatter, Evelyn finds out that Diane is a doctor and Julia is a psychiatric nurse. Darrel is a sociology instructor at the local college-tall, graying at the temples—40 something. Lea is a social worker. And then there is Sam. Sam is Catherine's nephew, an artist and art

teacher at the highschool. Evelyn recognizes him as her painter on the beach. *Sam, the body has a name.*

Judging by the ease and familiarity in the room, Evelyn senses they have known Catherine a long time. There is a strong bond between these people—a caring that fills the room. Evelyn feels suddenly alone, on the periphery of this warmth.

Evelyn begins to read from *A Map of the World: I USED TO THINK if you fell from grace it was more likely than not the result of one stupendous error, or else an unfortunate accident. I hadn't learned that it can happen so gradually you don't lose your stomach or hurt yourself in the landing. You don't necessarily sense the motion. I've found it takes at least two and generally three things to alter the course of a life: You slip around the truth once, and then again, and one more time, and there you are, feeling, for a moment, that it was sudden, your arrival at the bottom of the heap.*

Something twists in her heart, the knife plunge of loss.

Later over tea and cake, Evelyn chats with Sam. *I've heard about Catherine's new neighbor. I hear you're renovating. You sure have your work cut out for you.* Yes, she says quietly. *Your daughter is in my art class, he says, in drawing and painting.* The smallness of the community begins to close in on Evelyn. She feels claustrophobic, short of breath. She leaves as early as she can, escapes into the cool night air.

At parent-teacher interviews, she is disheartened. Mara's grades are mediocre and she is struggling with English. Only when she meets with Sam Geller does the tone change. Mara is gifted; she has an artist's eye, she should be encouraged to pursue her art. Evelyn is stunned. She has never taken a serious interest in Mara's art. Mara keeps it quite secret from her, painting in the old shed out back that she has converted into studio space.

He asks her how her house is coming along. "I'll drop by one evening soon and give you a hand," he says. Evelyn finds it a bit presumptuous, intrusive, like a bad pick-up-line heard in a bar.

The smells of the high school, the gleaming gunmetal rows of lockers quiet in the night hallways evoke ancient memories for Evelyn. Sitting in grade one class at Woodbriar Elementary School in a west-island suburb of Montreal. All the white faces of the children singing to the Union Jack, reciting the Lord's prayer before lessons begin. Geography and history. The teacher takes the wooden pointer, places the tip on the map, the faded red stain that is India, the color of her father's turbans, the mark once made by Kashmir. Such ancient history told in her teacher's London accent. Only when she grows up does she reconstruct the story. Now Evelyn wants to scratch the surface, letting the pointer fly along the contours of the parchment world, across the Himalayas and the emerald coils of steaming rivers. Under her fingernails are the scents of spices and teas, the silk phrasings of her mother's saris, the stench of imperial legacy, blood spilled from swords on the khaki uniforms, through the bodies of Sikh soldiers at the front of her Majesty's army.

But her teacher does not say, Remember this, children.

Evelyn's teacher and the other women in the neighborhood admire the crimson flowers on her mother's Kashmiri shawls, such intricate embroideries on fine wool the color of blackest nightfall. Now she knows they never could have imagined her parent's lost places, her mother's girlhood, the laughter in summerhouses, wild monkeys and peacocks in the hills, the heady profusion of flowers and fruit, jasmine and custard-apples and guavas. They cannot see Deirdre in her schoolgirl braids and proper Catholic uniform, learning from the nuns with their stern pointers. They cannot taste the sweetness of Sanskrit, of the star-flung nights of Persian ghazals. In Canada, all this gets frozen into icy winters of Evelyn's childhood, in new stories told in English on skating rinks, and tobogganing hills and ski slopes.

One weekend Grace arrives to find Evelyn trying to cut weather-stripping to block out the cold March winds rushing through every nook and cranny in the house.

Evelyn has also gone to Home Depot to buy insulation and is determined to install it even though she doesn't know how. Grace is amused at the sight of Evelyn sitting there on the floor reading a how-to-manual. She realizes Evelyn believes that everything can be learned through books.

"Where did you get those?" Grace points at the small black leather-bound books with gilt-edged pages.

"In the attic of the house," replies Evelyn. *Audel's Carpenters and Builders Guides*, published by Theo Audel & Co. in 1923. The books are beautiful, compact and pliable in the hands. They appeal to Evelyn's sense of aesthetics. She is busy learning a new language. Chapter 26: Mathematics for Builders and Carpenters. *An elementary knowledge of mathematics is essential to the carpenter...Arithmetic: By definition arithmetic is the science of numbers and the art of reaching results by their use. Geometry: By definition, geometry is that branch of pure mathematics that treats of space and its relations. Trigonometry: By definition trigonometry is that branch of mathematics which treats of the relations of the sides and angles of triangles and applies them to other figures involving or containing triangles.*

She remembers her father trying to teach her to appreciate mathematics, a subject she disliked at school. Her father's faith was in science and numbers. He liked precision. He teaches Evelyn that India gave the West its numerical system. Numbers have names in Sanskrit, he tells her. They could be remembered easily in forms of verse. Evelyn liked the idea of arithmetic poetry. Math became a little more palatable.

The new language is one of rafters and timbers and beams, joists and door jambs. It had never appealed to her before—watching her father repair things in his workshop, his meticulous carpentry. Now, it seemed, she was connected to this language through a new story, a narrative of her own making, this house waiting for her to shape it—writing home.

She finds pleasure in the slim black volumes. Inside there is an archive, a former carpenter's invoice for supplies, dated 1954. In Volume 4, she reads about elliptic stairs—*those elliptic in plan, each tread converging so that the assembly forms an elliptic ring*. The house has body parts—a *Face Mould—a section produced on any inclined plane vertically over a curved plan of hand-rail*. Nosing—*the outer or front edge of the step that projects beyond the riser*. *Irregular curves, orthographic projections. Openings and partitions, girth joints, mortise and tenon joints, hip, saw-tooth, eyebrow window, tongue-and-groove...*

Evelyn has read that ninety percent of a home's heat loss happens through the roof so she decides that is where they will begin. But Evelyn hasn't been able to find a trap door into the attic. Grace says "Ok," pointing to the ceiling, "you don't really want this hardboard up there anyway." So they pry off the sheeting on the second floor ceiling.

As they lift the sheet down, Evelyn imagines she hears hundreds of marbles rolling overhead—turns pale as pellets of rat and mouse turds hit the floor, falling on their heads. They pull the old insulation down in clumps and shreds of blackened fibres. It is itchy on her skin even though Evelyn is wearing layers of clothing, her shirt buttoned up to her neck. In less than an hour they are covered in dirt, a grimy, dusty filth. As they continue to excavate the attic, Evelyn and Grace find dead mice, rats, birds nests, wasp's nests, moss, vacated snail shells, dead larvae, entire colonies of beings who have housed under the rotting sheaves and aged insulation. Evelyn shrieks in disgust at every discovery, at first finding them grotesque. Her stomach churns at the dead rat, white and petrified as if preserved for centuries. A tiny bird foetus lies abandoned in the dust. It is Grace who unwraps dead creatures and nests from the discolored insulation, with a calm that makes Evelyn stop and watch in wonder.

There is a knock on the door. Evelyn walks to the door, leaving a trail of dirt on the stairs and hallway. She is surprised to find Sam Geller, suddenly conscious of what she must look like, her hair covered in dust and debris. Sam says hello, grins at her. She lets him in and takes him upstairs to join Grace. "Hello, Grace, how are you?"

"Fine, how are you Sam?" They know each other from the high school.

If he is shocked by the mess, he doesn't let on, just starts helping them strip more debris away. He looks around, curious, poking at the windows and walls, looking at the enormous bags of garbage they have filled. When he spots a wasp's nest sticking out of one of the bags, he starts pulling it out. Evelyn watches him in amazement.

"Can I have these?" he says.

"Of course."

He salvages the wasp's nests as if they are treasures. Evelyn wonders what he will do with them. Maybe he collects things like that or maybe he will spend hours drawing and painting them. *Strange man*, Evelyn thinks. Mara and her friends have told her stories about Mr. Geller, the teacher who brings in dead animal carcasses, bones and desiccated wings for them to draw. *You must know about anatomy, you must know how bodies are formed, how bones are connected to muscle, what lives beneath the skin, the living tissue*, he tells his students.

The next time Evelyn finds him sketching on the beach, he turns to look at her as she approaches. He paints in all kinds of weather. Evelyn has seen him out on the beach oils to canvas even in the rain, his tall frame bundled in a heavy oilskin slicker. They don't speak. She knows that Mara likes to work in silence so she senses that Sam might also need this quietness. She suppresses her natural tendency to fill the air with words. He tells her he does not usually allow others to watch him paint. As the hawk-eyed dusk descends, he invites her back to his house for a drink.

Sam's house makes her gasp, struggle for air. She finds no other word for it but *beautiful, lovely, stunning*—banal descriptors for the place. He has built it himself, a Frank Lloyd Wright wonder complete with leaded glass windows and gleaming oak everywhere. I trained as an architect he says. Worked for firms in New York and Vancouver but decided to come back to my art and to teaching. She knows there must be more to Sam's story but doesn't ask. Catherine has told her that Sam lost his wife a few years ago. *Lost his wife, how does one lose a wife? Am I a lost wife?*

In his light-filled studio, huge canvasses evoke a heat in her body she does not recognize. She wants to taste the paint, place the colours in her mouth, impasto bits of *Alizarin Crimson, Naples Yellow, Burnt Sienna, Veridian Green.*

XII

Garden...an enclosed piece of ground

Oxford English Dictionary

If you wish to make anything grow, you must understand it, and understand it in a very real sense. 'Green Fingers' are a fact, and a mystery only to the unpracticed. But green fingers are the extension of a verdant heart.

*Russell Page, *The Education of a Gardener**



The garden is a tangled, overgrown mess. It is March and Evelyn wants to clear some of the debris before spring planting. She struggles with the weeds and thorny blackberry bushes. Catherine often peers over the fence at her. The next day, when Grace arrives, she finds Evelyn frustrated, close to tears, hands scratched and bleeding from the sharp brambles. She wants to touch Evelyn's face, hold her, take away her pain, but she resists, knows it would be intrusive. Instead, she picks up the garden trowel and they work together in the garden, clearing the flower beds.

She works quietly at first, then the conversation drifts gradually to life in the classroom. The subject of Jordan comes up. He is becoming a problem in all his classes. The staffroom buzzes with teachers complaining about him. *Positive attention, negative attention, detentions, referrals to administration, phone calls home, nothing seems to work with the kid.* Many of the teachers think he is a lost cause.

Evelyn half listens to Grace but she is worrying about Mara who spends all her time listening to loud Ani Di Franco music and living for her painting and art classes. *What will she do when she graduates, what about her grades, what about college...*

All of a sudden Evelyn notices something she has not seen before. On one side of the house, attached to one of the gabled dormers is an enormous swallow's nest. It is formed by birds who return year after year, building new nests on top of the original until it is a huge structure. Evelyn decides she will leave it there. It seems to have become part of the house.

The yard and beds are being choked by morning glory. Deadly nightshade grows everywhere. Evelyn knows that in the summer it will bloom dark purple flowers with brilliant yellow centers and the berries glistening red, so beautiful, *belladonna*. Evelyn is always tempted to taste one but she knows the poison can stop the heart. The weeds send out their systems of roots shooting across the lawns, firmly attaching themselves, choking anything in their way. The roots are tough, tenacious, resist their efforts to banish them. It is slow, painstaking work, the earth cold and unyielding under their hands. As they pull up the tangled ground cover, there are huge rocks underneath. Slowly, as they pull away

weeds a stone pathway is cleared. On one side is a surprise, a beautiful, curved stone wall, covered in moss.

Catherine gets tired of staring at them over the hedges so she drops by with an apple pie. They have coffee on the veranda and she tells them stories of the bay. She has lived here for eighty years. "I came from England as a war bride and this landscape was completely different back then. Ask me anything you want to know, I've got it all up here," she says tapping her head.

She tells them, *a true garden always has good bones. There are good bones in this garden.* She tells them of the Italian stonemasons who seventy years ago designed the steep hillside neighborhood with systems of terraces and walls made of sandstone. They found their materials in the hills, where centuries of storms and earthquakes had brought boulders down from the mountains.

Catherine tells them a story about the stone wall they have uncovered. Years ago, this wall held masses of flowers along its curves. The small semi-circular bed was carved into the lawn and could be viewed from the comfort of a wing chair near the parlor window. This wall, with its curved bed, was built by the owner for his wife. He had offered her a choice of gifts: a new stone wall in the garden or a string of pearls. Being a woman of classic common sense she chose the wall. And the bed became known to the family as the String of Pearls. Friends would gather at the String of Pearls for sunset cocktails or morning coffee. As the plants within its embrace changed from season to season, the String of Pearls stood firm. *And so a garden endures* whispers Catherine.

Evelyn looks into Catherine's unflinching gaze and notices how blue her eyes are, deep pools one could drown in.

In the garden, the new tender shoots of purple spring crocuses and white snowdrops appear, their leaves reaching upward, breathing promise.

As time goes by, Catherine becomes a regular visitor, helping Evelyn with advice on gardening. Catherine loves her own garden, an English country garden with climbing rose arbors, hydrangeas of every shade, pink, lavender, all intensities of blue from palest morning sky to deepest indigo and purple. Against the fence were trellises covered with

vines of ivy and tendrils of clematis. She likens the planting and nurturing to pregnancy, a type of mothering, a sense of power to bring a seed to new life. Now, her children gone, it is her garden, working with the earth that makes her feel vibrantly alive.

Evelyn's father is a gardener. She remembers Kirpal building intricate designs in the rock garden on the hill in their backyard, tenderly creating a rose garden in a triangular bed, always telling his daughter the names of the varieties... White Prosperity, Sweet Briar Lucy Bertrams, Rosa Reine Victoria, Maid of Honour, Othello, Jane Austen,. They gather cut blooms for Deirdre to arrange.

Evelyn pores over books on women and gardens, articles from *House Beautiful*. She reads about Vita Sackville-West and Harold Nicholson's English cottage garden at Sissinghurst Castle. It is at first a ramshackle ruin of collapsing walls and roofs and a garden full of nettles. *The more instinctive visitor exclaims that it is like the castle of Sleeping Beauty*, says Vita Sackville-West in 1942. In the shell of a moated 16th-century manor house they create a garden as celebrated as their unconventional marriage.

Evelyn imagines Vita gardening all day and writing half the night in her beloved tower. Her white garden with the clematis *alba luxurians* against the grid iron gate that bloomed in May. Then the white cloud of *crambe corifolia* in June and the magnificent burst of *rosa mulligani* in early July. Harold working on his Lime Walk, clipping the lime trees that bordered, planting the spring garden he called MLW, *My Life's Work*. The gardens nourish a love that endures: *Oh, Vita, I have wept buckets for you*, writes Harold after Vita's death. Evelyn imagines Virginia Woolf, her long lean body striding up the paths to meet Vita in the Rose Gardens, breathing the perfumed air of hundreds of roses, *Sophia, Fair Bianca, Gloire de Dijon, Orlando. Body of my garden.*

Evelyn reads a book about the eighteenth century gardens: *The essential education of girls begins in the garden*, says the author. In the seaside *potagers*, the kitchen gardens of Louisberg, Nova Scotia are tended by *les filles du Roi*. In this illiterate world, greenery from the garden is a signifier hanging from the signpost of the Hotel de la Marine telling all that the inn serves alcoholic beverages.

The education of girls. She is beginning to learn the names of plants from Catherine: *love lies bleeding, the mourning bride, kiss me over the garden gate.*

Evelyn's mother used to tell her stories about the Persian Nur Jahan, an empress of the Mughal court in India. *Her mother's voice tells her the legends of the paradise gardens, the harems and court life of the Mughal Empire, and from the tales of Empress Nur Jahan. The Empress was first called Nur Mahal, Light of the Palace, by her husband Emperor Jahangir, who selected her from his harem and married her in 1611. In 1616, she was given the title Nur Jahan, meaning Light of the World. Nur Jahan was a patron of the arts and of architecture. She influenced women's fashions with her designs and made famous the perfume Attar of Roses. She was a poet and a passionate designer of gardens. She encouraged the women of the court to write poetry.*

Years later, Evelyn discovers the legends of Nur Jahan in the Asian Studies Library. From the readings she constructs a series of poems, "Gardens of Paradise." She thinks about her mother's stories, *Deirdre's voice telling stories of paradise.*

Chahar Bagh: The Four Chambered Garden

She walks in garden paths,
symmetry veiled against the world

Beyond the walls, expanses of desert blazing
hot sands mapped by marauding strangers

Arid dreams loosen her, trembling
in enclosed chambers,

the pure spill of fountains, promises of Paradise
in the flesh of pomegranates

her silks rustle, anklets jingle,
aching to be the wind.

Evelyn imagines she is Nur Jahan, walking in the gardens, the scent of lilies and orchids... Like most of the women of the court, she writes under the name of makhfi, "the concealed one," in reference to her life behind the palace (mahal) walls.

Evelyn writes her poems in secret, late at night when Mara is asleep, sends them off to journals hoping for publication.

She becomes Nur Jahan writing in the zanana, the women's palace:

When I lift the veil from my face, a cry rises from the rose; if I put the comb to my tress, a moan comes forth from the hyacinth.

Dilkusha: Garden of Heart's Delight

She walks in heart's delight
at Samarkand
composing ghazals

the morning opens blossoms
paths of white poplars
to the Turquoise Gates

In blue pools
his love turns her body
into water
eye-paint dripping into
foam

The key to her spirit
lies in his laughing mouth
masks discarded in fragrant jasmine
the scent of a king
in her black hair.

Kashmir

Wraps her
in his beloved Kashmir
in shawls of spring
embroidered with bindings
of tulips, almonds, peaches,
lilies and jasmine

preserves her in the brilliance
of scarlet roses
and the taste of sweet mangos.

“Before I married her I never knew what marriage was,” writes Jahangir. They enjoy many days at Shalimar Bagh, the garden that is The Abode of Love—the slow journeys by boat through tightly packed lotus, the air bright with kingfishers, paradise within a paradise. In autumn, the plane trees turn scarlet. In the centre of the garden is the emperor’s black marble throne. The gates and chambers are gilded and lettered with Persian script.

Kirpal bringing red carnations for Deirdre for their anniversaries, the spicy cinnamon of their scent always with her.

Jay bringing her armfuls of flowers, leaping up the path to the house, Evelyn arranging them in a glass vase on the kitchen table, the house filled with roast chicken and garlic potatoes. The house whispering, Beloved, Darling.

She cultivates the garden, fills the rooms of their house with branches of lilac, sweet damask roses, bowls of ripe peaches, fresh plums and raspberries.

Kashmir Sunset

Music floats
beyond the palace walls
in the orchid sunset
the village girls
dream of silks and jewels
parties on trefoiled lawns

princesses of dust toil
pans of sand lifted on their heads
they become dancing girls
racing the wind
as they whirl their brooms
through the gutters

other days
they braid marigolds
in their hair
dance for men in the streets
filling their brothers’ pockets
with rupees.

“Three things oppressed us in Hindustan—its heat, its violent winds, its dust.”

Memoirs of Emperor Babur

Evelyn imagines Deirdre's father buying his village mistress. She wonders if he treated her well, what she was like.

Evelyn imagines Nur Jahan when her name is Mihr-un-Nisa. Struck by her beauty and intellect, the Emperor takes Mihr-un-Nisa out of the dust, back to his court, making her part of his harem. She joins the women in the zanana, the women's palace. Already a widow and a mother, she wonders if she is too old, in her late thirties when the Emperor marries her.

Vernag

In the pavilion
surrounded by colonnades
the Empress feeds him
mangoes and guavas
ripe figs from the orchards

lamps in brick cornices
glow on pools of fish
mead after mead of narcissus
groves of cypress

she commands the servants
as dancers and musicians
prepare for the feast

under the bitter orange trees
Nur Jahan remembers
her old geography

deep in a labyrinth
the harem thrives
she knows
the clink of gold bangles
a maze of women
laboring
to please their king
in nights of iris blue
stars trapped in shards
of mirrored hallways.

The White Garden: Palace at Herat

The Joy House gardens
 bloom cream and ivory
 around a maze of rooms
 labyrinths of women
 where the emperor
 keeps his secret treasure;
vish kanya she is called
 she sips poison day by day
 until her kiss
 has the venom
 of a cobra

the *vish kanya*, the king's gift
 for those most deserving
 bestowed on a friend
 who betrays,
 enemy to be entertained

during the festivities they are
 lead by his eunuchs
 to her chambers

drawn in by the lithe
 innocence of her body
chambili, white jasmine behind her ear

the mercy of light
 breaking open the sky
 cannot save them

love becomes final
 a deadly trick.

Parties and pleasures do not change much over time...opium dens and mead for the Emperor....centuries of scotch, martinis, cocaine for the next generations.

The day she decides to leave him, he has been drinking the night before, at the tavern after a baseball game, comes to bed without showering, crawls under the sheets in his stained uniform. In the morning she awakens to see him leaning over the bed, dressed in his designer suit, crisp blue shirt, the scent of Calvin Klein on his cheek, kisses her, still sleepy. He says, I threw up in the sink, thought I'd tell you... and leaves for the office. The sight of vomit makes him sick. He never could stand it even when Mara was little and she was ill. Evelyn does the cleaning up.

The Emperor Jahangir is a heavy drinker and an opium eater. Nur Jahan tries to teach him moderation. When the Emperor dies, they send her away, afraid of her political power, her poetry, her art. They know she designed his empire, ruled his courts, looked after him after his long nights of oblivion. She mothers him. An intelligent, beautiful woman is a threat. Let her die in seclusion, a woman unseen, her voice unheard.

Bagh-I Vafa: Garden of Fidelity

Today he hunts tigers;
the sport reserved for kings
takes pleasure in the ceremony
of the kill

outside her skin
his pulse is beating

rubies at her throat
bleed rumors
through palace walls
seeping into
plots of imperial lilies

in his chambers,
bedclothes encrusted
with silver and gold
brocade loomed by beggars
smother her

she joins the ghosts of other women
takes each reflection with her,
checks the glass for imperfections
kohl-rimmed eyes watching

the weight of him,
diamond-studded,
gold and heat burning
into her flesh.

After she earns her Master's degree Jay brings her a gift, a ruby and diamond ring. Later she knows it is for the evenings spent late at the office with his secretary.

Another Garden: The Seeds of Empire

somewhere
away from his chambers
an infant girl is born
his unnamed flesh

whisked away to other gardens
embalms her cold-lipped
in marble fountains

harem mothers dream of sons
hearts steeled against
the tiny fists
hammering in their brains.

Evelyn imagines she is Nur Jahan planning the Garden of Heart's Desire. This is where she buries her husband in a tomb of her own design. She perfects the art of pietra-dura, intricate designs, inlays of semi-precious stones in marble on the walls of palaces and tombs. She commands the building of the outer sarai, a courtyard with alcoves in the walls. A tall gateway gives way to an inner garden which contains the tomb with its minarets and catafalque. Around the base intricate patterns of inlay, feminine designs of cyclamen and tulip, recalling Jahangir's beloved Kashmir. Many years later, at the age of seventy two, she is buried beside him.

Ten years after Kirpal dies, the bottles of scent he gave to Deirdre are still there on her bureau. Calèche...Je Reviens. She no longer finds Canada a hospitable place, this bitter geography... returns to India, dreaming of life in a hill station in Kashmir. In her dreams she walks with her lover, stopping each morning to pluck a red hibiscus for her hair. Here are the perfumes of Baudelaire's poetry: "perfumes as fresh as children's flesh, soft as oboes, green as meadows...possessing the diffusion of infinite things." Deirdre has no need of a tomb or temple, only the perfumed air and blue iris loud as a glorious ghazal.

XIII

If the Heart Asks for Pleasure First

My daughter emerges from
the pastel cocoon
of her room
through the ticking
of the hallway clock
floats down the stairs
into the dusk
as the stream of possible lovers begins

I still imagine her slender bones
need cradling
her body light as a dragonfly
skeletal recesses like a soft-shelled crab
an easy mark
for crushing

her face mine, ours
the tendrils of youth
still visible
her separateness a gift
tied with the full weight
of my heart-salt

as she enters the night sky
orchid and indigo
the evening news tells stories
of clipped wings, small coffins
the earth scarred with grief
hearts opened and closed

and I am reminded of what I know
that there is nothing stronger
than to be helpless before desire
knowing that moment when
the heart must answer yes
when there is no longer
any choice but assent

tonight at my desk
covered with papers
scraps of poems
every alphabet my child
my heart stops and starts in the dark
until the sound of her key in the lock
my necessary lullaby

Years ago, Mara would watch Sesame Street. *This show has been brought to you by the letter B.* Beloved. One day a man in a trench coat appears, opens up the flaps of his coat and like a seedy salesman drawls, *Wanna buy an "A." It's very useful. You can make hot into hat.*

A

A is for Adultery. Hester Prynne and the scarlet letter emblazoned on her breast.

Amor vincit omnia, Love conquers all, Chaucer's prioress, who wears:

A paire of beded, gauded al with greene,
 And theron heeng a brooch of gold ful sheene,
 On which ther was first writen a crowned A,
 And after, Amor vincit omnia

Evelyn reads about the letter A in the dictionary. *Now we read the OED.*

Abecedarian, arranged alphabetically, as the 117th Psalm; elementary; ignorant; pupil learning the alphabet; primer

Abacadabra

Anagram, transposition of letters in a word to form a new word or phrase

Analect, literary gleanings

Analeptic, restorative

Anamnesis, recollection of a previous existence

Anapest, a foot consisting of two short syllables followed by a long one

Anaphora, repetition of a word or phrase in successive clauses

Anecdote, a narrative of a detached incident

Androgynous, hermaphrodite; with stamens and pistils, both sexes

Angel, divine messenger; lovely or innocent being; an old English coin

Areola, very small area between the veins of a leaf; area surrounding the human nipple

It is the night of the blue moon, the second full moon this month. Evelyn and Mara drive home along the darkness of Boundary Bay Road. They have come from the airport after dropping Jay off after a visit.

Jay has reached a point of sorrow. At forty five, he cannot understand where his young life has gone, when everything began slipping away. He misses his wife and daughter with an intensity he had not believed possible. Now the world was slipping into a dense fog. He has no words to talk through it. He has never had the words. Now he chokes on his silences, unable to make his way back to any identity he can grasp. He lives his life like a clenched fist.

Evelyn and Mara seem happy. He feels out of place here in his city clothes. There is such a sense of wilderness about the bay. Jay gropes for words to talk to Mara. It is Mara who speaks to her father, holding his hand, making him feel it would be all right. She would still be his girl. The distance is spanned if only for a brief moment and in that moment Jay looks at Evelyn and Mara and knows that they are still somehow a part of him, a piece of history, a past that surely must have some honor in it. There is a curious peacefulness about the visit. For Evelyn there is an easing of her heart. She has few words for him, their common language gone, his presence has become an ephemeral thing in her life.

She knows now that even at the beginning of their love, her hands on his face were the beginning traces of departure. *It does not matter*, she wants to tell him, tenderly, *we are still a part at once to be treasured and turned away from*. But she doesn't tell him, just watches him wave and turn away at the airport entrance.

Returning on Boundary Bay Road, Evelyn and Mara see Jordan Merrill waving his hands. He comes up to the car window and they can see he has blood on his sweatshirt and his hands. *I saw this coyote get hit by a car*, pointing to the lifeless animal by the

roadside. *It's still alive but we have to get help.* Jordan's voice is rising in pitch almost to a desperate shouting—*The driver didn't even stop! Just drove away! Asshole! I was jogging and there it was crossing the road and I could see its eyes, bright yellow in the headlights. The coyote looked right at me just before it got hit!*

Evelyn tries to calm him down talking quietly and searching for the old blanket she keeps in the trunk of the car. "It'll be okay Jordan. I'll call the SPCA and they'll help."

She gives him the blanket and gets a flashlight. They bundle up the animal. Mara gets out to wait with him and Evelyn heads home to call the SPCA. Mara and Jordan sit by the roadside, the coyote shivering and bleeding, wrapped and held in his arms. Mara likes his kindness, the way his arms comfort the animal. She strokes its blood-matted fur. He sees how upset Jordan is so to take his mind off things she tells him about her dad's visit. Jordan tells her about his father.

"I like your hair," he tells her.

"Thanks, my mom hates it."

"Do you think the coyote will live?" asks Jordan.

"I don't know. I hope so but if a wild animal lets you hold it like this, it's hurt pretty bad."

"It's my fault. I startled him as he was crossing the road. He turned to look at me."

Evelyn comes back to get them and she joins the vigil. They wait and they wait. It seems like hours slip by. Jordan keeps retelling the story. *It's my fault. He looked right at me.* Finally, they see lights rounding the curve of the road and the SPCA truck pulls up. Jordan is covered in the animal's blood. In the truck headlights, they see the coyote open its eyes wide, deep orbs of pain in the glare of the headlights. It looks straight into Jordan's eyes, then closes them in death.

"NO!" Jordan screams, feels his heart sink, a cold stone into the pit of him. Suddenly he realizes how much he wanted to save the coyote. He is crying, tears

streaming down his face in desperation, frustration, loss. It feels like a failure in his gut. Just like everything else...he can't do anything right. Mara's eyes spill over with tears.

Evelyn touches Jordan's arm, trying to loosen his tight grip on the coyote. She gently tells him he must let go. *Come on Jordan. It's all right. Let go now. Let me take you home.*

Evelyn drives them home, the moon high and round, the night owls hunting for prey, guided by the headlights of passing cars. They are chilled to the bone and disturbed by the coyote's death so she invites Jordan over. She finds them clean, dry clothes, soaks the blood stains on Jordan's clothes. She makes hot cocoa and the three of them talk quietly. They are subdued, retelling the story, mourning their loss.

After a while, Jordan starts looking around the house, at the trim and the gleaming wood. "Wow," he says, "this used to be such a dump! We used to call it the haunted house when we were kids. We were always a bit afraid of it. It's nice to see someone fixing it up."

Mara looks around the house, as if seeing it for the first time, through new eyes. She hasn't really been conscious of what her mother and Grace and Mr. Keller have been doing. She never really thought of it as beautiful. Now she sees her mother's eyes light up as Jordan runs his hands along the window sills.

Jordan has a way of entering the heart, Evelyn thinks. Some special connection has been made through the night comforting the wounded coyote, a collective sense of loss and some deep level of trust between the two teenagers. Evelyn knows this because Mara takes Jordan to the old shed at the back of the house that Mara has converted into an art studio. Few people get invited to Mara's studio, in fact Evelyn rarely enters those doors. Mara's room is her own fiercely protected territory, her secret place.

Evelyn reads the invitation that Mara has printed in gold ink on rag paper. Arts Festival: Grad Art Students' Exhibit; Works on Paper and Canvas, Bridgepoint

Secondary School, 7 PM. Mara is very excited. "Mom you're going to be surprised," she says to Evelyn.

Evelyn looks at the fire-engine red bristles that are her daughter's hair, wondering how her daughter is going to get into university with her dismal grades. She reaches out to give Mara a hug, but she has already slipped away, grabbing her knapsack, running to meet her friends before the show. Evelyn overhears her talking on the phone to Jordan, arranging to meet him before the show. Mara has taken to inviting Jordan over quite frequently and they spend hours out in the studio together or walking on the beach. Evelyn thinks her daughter has fallen a bit in love.

Evelyn dresses carefully. She is strangely nervous about seeing Sam.

The hallways are full of parents milling about. Sam's art classroom has been transformed into a gallery space, lit with candles, decorated with glass vases of fresh flowers.

Sam is dressed in a suit and tie, greeting the parents and friends at the door. He clasps her hand, *Evelyn, come in, welcome—How's the house coming along? Mara's wonderful series is on the far wall.* Evelyn catches a faint scent from him, something like sandalwood or musk.

Mara has called her series of paintings *The Red Shoes Series*. Evelyn gasps with surprise. Cold winter nights, Evelyn tucking Mara in, telling her stories of red shoes, the ones her parents bought her, the ones that didn't tap, the tortured ballerina with her red slippers dancing to death for her art, the ruby slippers in Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*, the satin evening shoes Evelyn buys to wear with her red evening dress for a New Year's Ball with Jay.

In each painting, her daughter has taken one of Evelyn's poems, written them onto the canvas in bold black script, fusing them into brilliantly colored canvases,

abstract backgrounds like landscapes lit up with slivers of gold leaf. The last painting on the wall is titled *Red Shoes*—against a gilded background floats a pair of red Edwardian style shoes, pumps of red satin with ribbons and jewels, dancing across a star-flung sky.

Sam, Mara and Jordan are standing behind her, watching her. She cannot speak. She feels as if she can touch her daughter's heart for the first time since she had become a teenager. She can feel Mara's gift flowing into her mind and blood, the heart's tide below the surface of language. She reaches out for Mara's hand and this time her daughter stands still beside her, her long paint-stained fingers clasped in her mother's palm.

XIV

Sam

A warm nose nuzzles his ear as kisses are scattered upon his shoulder. He is born in a green room in Grace Hospital on his mother's birthday.

In preschool he calls one of the attendants "Bratfucker." By Grade Three his vocabulary of foul words has increased and he gets caught looking up his teachers' dresses. He fights a lot and rarely loses. Despite all these good things he does not like school. He was stupid, "stupid Sammy."

School is full of words. Words hang over him like swords to Damocles. He cannot read them, write them, or spell them. By the time he gets to highschool he spends most of the time skipping classes.

The summer after Grade 12 he finds himself canoeing from Whitehorse to Dawson City down the Yukon river. A three-week trip that is so boring he actually reads books...finds the beauty and the worlds created through words in poems and books.

blackness

darkness

A blackness falls over him during the next ten months in which he reads as many texts from as many places he can. He nearly dies in this abyss, this heart of darkness. It is the death of Stupid Sammy and someone new is born.

How confused our little words can become—he is now Sam.

With a Highschool Certificate earned at night school and six hundred and twenty seven dollars he registers at a Community College part time. It takes him three years to finish two but his grades go from Fs to B+s and As. He realizes he isn't stupid and he has a mind for anything he sets his sights on. He meets a new world of wonderful people and instructors.

It is a fascinating three years. He remembers crying over many an essay—all those words, arranging and rearranging words, sentences and paragraphs. His parents still help him. Just like in Highschool. Stupid Sammy.

He is accepted into the third year of a Bachelor's degree in Classical Studies at the Academy. More wonderful ideas and people. More tears but his parents help him less.

It is during this degree that he takes his first art course. After finishing his classical studies degree he is accepted into the School of Architecture. He also takes courses in Fine Arts and really starts to shine. He is given money, awards, sells a painting. He hardly sees his parents and falls in love. He graduates and supports himself slinging coffees at cheap cafés sneaking in to use studio space to paint at the Academy until he is caught and kicked out—paradise lost.

He falls in love with a woman named Casey who has just completed her teacher training at the Academy. He does not get much painting done. He finds he is working all the time to pay the bills. There are no jobs. Casey thinks he should try teaching.

Casey gets a six-month teaching contract and is consumed with a delightful new adventure. Casey brings home an application package for Teacher Education at the Academy. She fills it out, rewrites his cover letter and sends off the application. Casey crosses her fingers. Sam goes to Richmond to wash dishes.

At parties with Casey's teaching friends he hears disparaging remarks about the Teacher Education Program—*a load of bullshit, something so stupid only a real idiot could have invented it. But he knows how Casey loves the teaching. He is beginning to feel hopeful about school again...and scared.*

The summer comes to a close, Casey gets a classroom of her own and Sam is accepted into the one year secondary teacher education program with a specialization in Art. He wonders if he is an idiot going back to university again.

He cuts his long hair, sublets his studio, moves back with his parents in Boundary Bay and on Sept. 3 walks into the Old Auditorium at the Academy. He listens to the Dean

tell him and four hundred peers that they are the best that the educational system has produced.

He returns to the Academy with glowing teaching evaluations and confidence. He loved the students and the kids loved him. Casey and Sam move in together. After all this a teaching position doesn't come up but he is offered a short term contract with a large architectural firm in New York. They decide on New York and are excited by the adventure. They get married and for a while it is a honeymoon. Casey loves New York, but can't get a teaching position. Starts to get bored with his consumption with work and painting. She never sees him. She is gone in a year. Leaves him to his art, his obsessions. After she leaves, he seems to lose his creative energy.

When his contract ends, Sam moves back to Vancouver. He stays in a paralyzed, depressed funk for a long time. He is broke and floundering. Finally, he is picked up by a local art gallery and works towards an exhibition. Six months of floundering until he takes a lease on a warehouse at Hastings and Abbott. Constructs an illegal apartment, Soho style—no heat.

He is sinking amidst the walking dead outside his windows. The Aids infested junkies climbing up the pipes outside his bedroom, the drunks rutting in the alley way and the constant fighting and screaming. People with no veins picking the scabs of their bodies trying to find a place for a needle.

He is sinking...

It is May and everything is in bloom. He starts to think about the fact that he has three degrees—not bad for an L.D., a learning disabled kid. He decides to apply for a teaching job, remembering his love of the classroom and the kids. He bombs an interview with the first district—they don't ask questions about art.

When new jobs are posted he drops off his resume again, smiling politely at the secretaries. Just before the end of spring term he receives a call from the Principal of Bridgepoint Secondary at 9:00 in the morning. Sam goes in for an interview. They ask

him questions about Art, his teaching practicum, his personal experience. Words flow from his mouth. He makes the short-list of three out of thirty five applicants. Two and a half weeks later he is offered the job of Art Teacher: Painting and Drawing. Now, he is in his sixteenth year of teaching. The kids and the art room and the teaching have attached themselves to his skin like a worn coat, comfortable with frayed edges.

He reconstructs his life in the bay, building his home, buying construction materials when he can afford it, bit by bit over the years until it is complete.

He hasn't been really interested in a woman for a long time. There is something different about Evelyn, something deep and mysterious that makes him want to know her. He has a copy of her first volume of poetry that he special ordered from the local bookstore. In one poem she writes about the process of writing. He reads ...

*spitting out the heart
through the slant of tongue*

XV

Catherine



Catherine

*The Ship's Company of the "Aquitania" send you best wishes
for your happiness and good fortune in your new life in the
great Dominion, the country of your adoption.*

March 1946

Widow's skin parched
spilling memory in waves
bloodremembering
across cool, hospital sheets.

Dreams of dancing
her gnarled joints unknotted,
flesh supple,
spinning to big band music
cheek held against his rough
uniform
his wide smile spanning
the smoke-filled canteen.

She remembers
ships of war brides
with their infants cradled
in the scent of salt air,
sailing into the arms
of the harbour.

She becomes his geography
inhabited by mists,
ocean foam at her feet,
her body embedded
in fields of violets and wild berries,
endless harvests,
her blood flowing
in the veins
of new country.

Now, she resists the pull
of winter,
the deep white territory
of skin and ghosts

she insists upon another day
does not want the slow descent
into ice.

At the next book club meeting they discuss Arundhati Roy's *God of Small Things*. *Baby Kochamma's evil spirit and her intricately planned gardens. Her fierce and bitter gardens with its lush mazes and gargoyles. Baby Kochamma in her garden in her sari and gumboots.* The book club discusses the huge chasm of differences of caste and poverty and violence. Sam talks about the stunningly beautiful love scene between Velutha and Ammu, the twins' mother. *Velvet gloved in sandpaper.... Velutha drawing her hair around them like a tent. His untouchable tongue. Watching his lover dress, walking away, a rose in her hair, promising Tomorrow.*

Maya has dropped in tonight, an occasional member of the club. She doesn't get the point of the novel. She knows it won the Booker Prize and all but she is finding the books they have chosen too dark, way too depressing, she says. Even the Oprah choices have been depressing she says. She would like the group to read something lighter for spring, maybe *Bridget Jones' Diary*, just to change the pace.

The rest of the group seems to be intensely moved by *God of Small Things*, the novel, the craft of it, marveling at the voices of the twins, feeling the cruelty of the Indian caste system, the violence and the society that marks people as "untouchable." Maya says, "What a relief that such a thing doesn't happen in Canadian society!" Catherine cannot resist this remark and retorts with a lengthy lecture on the evils and poverty and marginalization of all sorts of groups in Canada. She sees Maya's comment as a blight, a disease that affects people just as blight affects her garden tomatoes and roses. In people it results in an illness that prevents logical and responsible thinking.

Evelyn thinks about the many years it took Arundhati Roy to write this novel, intricate weave, *texere*, a woven thing, a woman writing. And she wonders what it is like to be a woman writing in India now. How many tears spilled on those pages? Does any one navigate this country of pages with her? Or does it distance, alienate, cast out?

Catherine is animated and opinionated but after an hour or so she seems tired out, frail. They leave early as Catherine doesn't seem to be feeling well. Evelyn walks outside with Sam.

As they walk across the beach, Evelyn thinks about the book club. She is warming up to the idea of the club. She even thinks group members have a respect for books that

she identifies with. Evelyn is amused to find out that Diane is renowned for never bending the covers of her editions, spines are never cracked, pages never bent. She has an endearing reverence for her books, likes them to remain immaculate and new looking, preserving them. She won't read them in the bathtub, fearing the steam will curl their papers, leak out the words, the secrets contained between the covers.

Evelyn knows she could not borrow a book from Diane. It would never be the same. Evelyn lives in her books, turns back the pages, marks passages, copies quotes into journals, reads entire novels in the bathtub, falls asleep with novels on her pillow. The pages of her books are well-thumbed histories, extensions of her skin, the passages read with her hands as well as her eyes.

Catherine has cancer, Sam says quietly.

Why don't you come over and have a brandy with me.

Cancer. His words about Catherine like stones in Evelyn's chest. Death. She sees her father's death before her eyes, feels a grief of such intensity that it can strike at any time, without warning. A store window at Christmas reminding her of December rituals on St. Catharine's St. in Montreal when her father would take her in the bitter icy cold to watch the animated Santa's and elves and reindeers in the moving scenes in the store windows of Ogilvy's Department Store. The memories cut a groove into her heart.

Kirpal dies of a heart attack, a blood clot blocking an artery as he plays tennis at the Claremont Tennis Club. The ambulance is there within minutes but the paramedics can't revive him. Deirdre is at home cooking dinner—a quick game after work, I'll be back soon, he says, kisses her gently on the forehead. Her mind is on something else. When the call from the hospital comes, they tell her, not to worry, just get here. She is praying all the way to the hospital, knows as soon as she sees the nurse's face. She cannot bear it, carries the bitterness with her the rest of her life, pain turned into a knot of anger and blame she turns against her daughter and the rest of the world.

Evelyn walks home with Sam, memories streaming through her mind. They sit on his front porch with glasses of brandy, the liquid heating their throats as the sun fades into the blackness of the night ocean. With sunset the sounds of the neighborhood subside, the intermittent sounds of grass being cut, the doors closing, dogs barking.

Catherine turns out her lights and dreams of teaching poetry, dreams herself a young woman. At the end of the block is the Bayside Club where members pump iron and flex their muscles on the gleaming Nautilus machines. But Catherine remembers the years during the war when the doors of the club were flung open, the American side at Point Roberts and the Canadian side at Boundary Bay. The soldiers of both forces would dance to Tommy Dorsey and the Andrews sisters, trumpets and clarinets and the big bands, swing dancing, the girls in their red lips and flowered dresses and seamed stockings. She imagines her husband in the smoke-filled dance hall, his tall frame lanky in his uniform, her cheek against his shoulder, the feel of rough khaki on her skin.

These days Catherine's mind is flooded with memories. Sometimes, she likes to tell Evelyn these long ago stories. Evelyn seems to like listening. With the gradual loss of her sight, Catherine finds the world thick with smells and sounds and sensations of touch. She finds herself wanting to touch things, feel their shapes, know the nature of every object, every flower, every face. She thinks perhaps that of all the senses, touch, the first of senses, will be the last to burn out, only in a final departure. Long after her eyes betray her, her hands will remain faithful to the world.

Catherine finds herself remembering scents, the perfumes she wore as a young woman. Learning to place a dab on her left arm first, the warmer arm, because it is closest to the heart. *Perfumar*, through smoke. Liquid memories. Chanel No.5, Evening in Paris, Crêpe de Chine, Shalimar, such exotic promise in the drabness of war, the everydayness of life. For their first wedding anniversary, her husband buys her the Chanel No. 5 at a chemist's shop in London. The chemist has a nose for perfume. *The top note, he tells them, the one you smell first, is the man-made synthetic aldehyde, then you will detect the middle notes of jasmine, lily of the valley, orris-root and ylang-ylang. Finally, the base notes which make the perfume linger: vetiver, sandalwood, cedar, vanilla, amber, civet*

and musk. Base notes are of animal origin, the ancient memories of smell originating in forests and vast plains. It is scent that disturbs us, she thinks, as she drifts off to sleep.

In Boundary Bay at night, parents read bedtime stories to their children, then turn out their lights, measure the sanctuary of their darkness. The songs of the wilderness begin, wild nights—the pampas grasses whispering, the waves breaking on the rocks at the edge of the ocean, raccoons scavenging, sometimes fishing for goldfish in backyard ponds, the night birds calling, the crickets singing, the cows mooing in farmer's fields, coyotes howling.

Evelyn and Sam sit under the darkening sky. They talk and talk, words meeting words, thoughts flowing out to thoughts, long into the night until all the sounds have stopped and a quiet descends like a mist and the world settles into sleep. Sam has brought blankets out for each of them and they sit tightly wrapped against the darkness, the cool, clean air smelling of spring.

“Tell me about your wife. Were you married long?”

“I really loved her. We met at college. We'd never been anywhere else except here—Boundary Bay. After I finished my architecture degree I couldn't find work so I did a teaching degree. Then I finally got a job offer with a firm in New York. I was ecstatic. So we went. Once we got there, my wife took a look around and wanted a different life, the social scene, the successes, the parties, the money. It was something I couldn't give her. And I never lost my love of painting. I wanted to paint. It was in my blood. I lived mostly at my studio. I designed during the day and painted at night. Casey left me while I was working on a series of abstract landscape paintings for a gallery in Soho. I hardly noticed, hardly put my brush down until many months later. Then I fell apart. Eventually came back to the bay to start over.”

“And you, what's your story?”

I was young. I was running away from my mother. Jay was kind and sweet and exciting and different from the world I had known. At the time, it was what I wanted...

Evelyn tells her story. She has never talked about Jay and her past to anyone else.

He walks her home. She tries to tell him how she feels about Mara. She finds it awkward—searching for the right words.

“You’ve been a wonderful teacher for Mara. She comes home on fire after your classes and then spends hours painting in her studio.”

“She’s just one of those kids that you love to teach. You just have to show her something once and she runs with it. She has great ideas and is always surprising me.”

As they reach the path to Evelyn’s house, she can see the tall stalks of purple bearded irises that line the walk. Coming home. For the first time, Evelyn feels that she is at home. This is her space, her own. At home, Evelyn falls asleep with a sense of comfort she has not felt for a long time. In her living room, the air is suffused with green light, slivers of moonlight through the emerald panes of glass.

That night she dreams about irises. Catherine’s voice telling her stories: Long before the invention of calendars, Japanese farmers used floral signals to guide them in growing rice. The appearance of cherry blossoms told them it was time to start planting. The blooming of irises meant the beginning of the rainy season—time to transplant seedlings to the fields.

*Evelyn is in New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art in front of Ogata Korin’s famous Yatsunashi screen. She remembers admiring the Japanese irises, *Iris ensata*. At the time, she hadn’t seen further than the flat purple blooms against gold leaf. Now, she is in a mythic place, on the bridge of the 10th century *Tales of Ise*.*

Catherine tells her, for the courtier, the garden is a poem. Poems about the dashing young aristocrat Narihira. Narihira is banished from Kyoto because of his love affair with a high-ranking noble lady of the court. He is forced to make a long journey

into exile to the remote eastern provinces. He and his companions stop to rest by a swampy place called Yatsuhashi (Eight Plank Bridge) so-named because the river divides into eight channels, each with its own bridge. Irises bloom in the marshland, plunging the exiles into feelings of homesickness and nostalgia for the life they had to abandon. Narihira's friend challenges him to write a poem. Each line must begin with a different syllable of the word iris (kakitsuhata) in classic written Japanese. Narihira writes:

Korogoromo (I have a beloved wife,)

Kitsutsu (Familiar as the skirt)

Tsuma shi areba (Of a well-worn robe,)

Harubaru kinuru (And so the distant journeying)

Tabi o shi zo omou (Fills my heart with grief.)

XVI



The next morning as Evelyn is drinking her coffee, Sam knocks on her door. She has been thinking about him, almost as if she was expecting him.

“Would you like to see the sights of Boundary Bay? I thought I could be a sort of tour guide.”

Evelyn looks out the window at the sun, shining bright over the waves.

“I’ll get my coat.” She slips on a navy blazer and leather shoes.

Sam looks at her and says, “I think you’ll need some different gear. Do you have hiking boots? A warmer jacket?”

She borrows a heavy sweater and windbreaker from Mara’s room and her hiking boots. She wonders where he is taking her.

The air by the bay is sunny but cool. As they walk the stretch of beach towards Point Roberts the wind whips them—the fresh scent of kelp and wet sand in their nostrils. Evelyn starts to feel the ocean in her blood—it excites her and she feels as if she is seeing the world for the first time. They walk along the shoreline on rocks washed smooth and round by the tides. Along the sand are emerald ribbons of seaweed and enormous arbutus trees washed up, uprooted by the night tides. The hungry, raucous gulls swoop down to pick up clams and mussels, then drop them on the rocks to smash the shells open, exposing the tender flesh of their prey.

As they walk around the point near the United States border the wind stops suddenly. A strange, eerie quiet descends as the clay cliffs loom above them. Sam bends down, picking up pieces of clay that break off like shale. He places the cool, wet earth in her hands. Evelyn feels the magic of the place, a place for shamans and druids, of the earth speaking its open secrets.

And in Ancient Ireland the legend goes that the druid Cathbad speaks to the Sons of Uisliu. When Conor and the Red Branch were at a feast they heard an unearthly

screech. The warriors stood up, reaching for their swords. The druid says: It is the screech of an unborn baby girl, who will bring sorrow...the girl's name will be Deirdre (grief).

Beyond the clay cliffs is a small cave, lit with a soft radiance, a cool green light from the sun entering the openings low on the floor of the pool, reflecting a living color of purest, palest green borrowed from the covering of crumb-of-bread sponge on the cave floor. Here, Sam shows Evelyn an entire universe of sea creatures in the liquescent sand—sea pansies with their pink and lavender faces, heart urchins.

Further along the shoreline is another pool. Here green tubeweed rises from the floor. By some magic the pool transcends its realities of rocks and water and plants and out of these elements creates the illusion of another world. Looking into the pool, Evelyn could see, not water, but instead the landscape of hills and forests. Yet the illusion is not like an actual landscape but more like a painting of one; like the strokes of an artist's brush, the individual fronds of algae are not the literal portrayal of trees, but merely a suggestion of them. It is the artistry of the pool, like the painter, Evelyn thinks, that creates the image and the impression. In the pellucid pool are areas paved with mussels, their shells the soft, misty blue of distant mountains. The water in which they lived was so crystal clear, almost invisible to the eyes. Evelyn feels as if she could feel the interface of air and water only by reaching in and sensing the coldness on her fingertips.

By the time they reach the point, they are starving. They find the shelter of a hillside where the wind does not reach them. Sam has brought a blanket and a picnic lunch in his pack, cold turkey sandwiches and a thermos of hot coffee. Sitting there warmed by the midday sun, Evelyn writes poems in her mind, fitting words to the place. Sam sketches, starts drawing her face which makes her uncomfortable.

Before heading back Sam takes her a little further past the point, up into the hillside where he shows her a vast alpine meadow. He tells her that the meadow will soon be blooming. Evelyn imagines a multi-hued host of wildflowers. The air is luminous. *She thinks of the word iridescent, from the Latin iris, rainbow and escence, becoming. The combination of esc to a word converts it from a static form to one of movement and process—luminescence, adolescence.*

Walking home, the sun fading, they are silent. Reaching her front door Evelyn turns towards him. "Thank you," she says, "today was a gift."

He wants to kiss her, wants her, her windblown hair, the scent of the ocean on her.

"Come home with me," Sam says, taking her hand.

"I can't, not tonight. I'm really quite tired. I had a wonderful time, but thank you," she says.

She says goodnight, turns her mouth from his kiss so that his lips graze her cheek and goes into her house. As he walks home, he looks back to see her light go on in her study. He wonders if she will write.

She needs her defences, her crust of independence and indifference, the air of the practical, decisive reliability, the unroused interest, the aloof manner. She needs her protective shell against the fear.

Evelyn cannot sleep, tosses and turns in her bed as if her heart, her body are weighted by stone. Finally she gets up, dresses and walks across the beach to Sam's house. The waves are crashing and in the moonlight, the arbutus trees that have been uprooted and washed up on the shore look like bodies, with arms and limbs, gleaming red, stripped of their outer bark.

She pounds on Sam's door until he answers, the moonlight filtering blue and silver through the leaded glass in the ceiling. Wrapped only in a blanket, he opens his arms to take her into his warmth. Here in this place there were no words for Evelyn. The heart naked, armor discarded. She knows that words used by poets can create a dim monochrome of the body's love, but beyond that they fail. This was the under-Evelyn, the real Evelyn who dwelt inside, who showed herself so seldom calling gently, forlornly, her love flowing out to him, his back to her. She felt new, like an innocent baby, held and cradled and remade, again and again through endless waves. And for a time, in this letting go, there is a sharing of all the gardens of the world.

XVII

GARDENS OF EROS

The willow is in full plumage, and is no help, with its insinuating whispers.
Rendezvous, it says, *terraces*: the sibilants run up my spine, a shiver as if in fever.

Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*

... There, in the quiet moonlight
Is a garden, blooming red
The lotus blossoms are waiting...

Felix Mendelssohn, "On Wings of Song"

Prelude

In the ink
swell of night
darkness in the
still throat of water
we drink tea
and brandy
through the strains
of opera.

The scent of you is there,
laced
through the bones
of the moon
in silver infusions
of stars and Mozart

and I
slip liquid
from my skin
into the soft,
sweet taste
of dusk.

Evelyn sees that in the purple bay are beginnings, moving through time's disordered architecture, through the brink of her soul's winter. In the fields there are beginnings, green hearts bearing violets, the long night giving her the smoke of his breath, a sonata carved across the sky. She watches Sam, his hands moving as he speaks, his face luminous as the moon edges through the trees, solitary and single-minded, staking out its shadows. She thinks there is a sweetness in the plain grammar of his voice...it reaches out to stroke her, like the caress of the wind.

Song of

I am a garden. Beyond my mazes and trellises are the whispers of winds,
centuries of secrets. I offer you gifts. My gates are meant to be opened.
Unfasten my latches.

I am the new day beginning, the time of singing. I am the voices of doves, the
songs of many-mouthed birds. I am the sunlight streaming through your
shuttered windows.

I am your cries. I am the wild, discordant call of herons.
I am the nocturnal hunter, the flight of hawks.

I am the kiss of winds. In my breath are spices for your mouth.

I am the resurrection
of found objects, of dust and peeling paint,
terraces of driftwood skeletons
salvaged from the sea.

I am the moss, the leaves, the grass.
I am our bed of green.

I am the blooming of flowers,
the purple embrace of clematis
bursts of ruby, ivory, saffron,
the perfumes of lilies, jasmine,
damask roses.

Come to me hungry and I will feed you.
I will give you the comfort of apples.
I am the taste of cherry, the tartness of lemons and oranges.
I am armfuls of plums and berries, sweet juices dripping down your throat.

Come to me thirsty and I will quench you.
I am the hummingbird
deep-plunged into fuschia blooms,
drinking nectar.
I will save this honey under my tongue
for you.

I am the beating of your heart
in the thrumming of my wings

I am the dragonfly
hovering
scarlet jewel
in amber air

I am wilderness
the secret places of cliff
the clefts of rock.
My branches and thorns
will catch you in their tangle.

I am your home.
I will house you
in the roof of my mouth
with pillars of smoke
and the fragrance of beams of cedar,
rafters of fir.

I am the flow of waters
of fountains and rivers and streams
of rains cleansing you
offering salve for your skin.

I am a wall
an enclosure
the keeper of vineyards and fortresses.
Unlock my silver fittings.

I am the day fading
the going down into flame
and sapphire
I am the shadow of your desire
dark and lovely
my hand plunged to the wrist into your grave.

I am the moon
fly my banners.

I am the earth
your companion.
I will hold you in the bowl of my hands
flesh warm and tender
rooting you in the rising of new day.

I am the sun
seeded in you.

I am a garden.
Dwell in me.

Beloved

i.

tonight
 this fierce loving
 opens her wide

she knows
 she is beloved
 in oceans of time

ii.

in the glow
 of morning
 I touch your sleeping face
 my lips soft kiss
 the veins of your eyelids

each line and curve
 of bone and skin
 speaks to me
 calls my name

iii.

there is no language
 to inscribe this
 no word
 but *belonging*
 for this fit
 the coming home
 of my body
 into yours
 the curl of me
 into you

Grace reaches for her lover, her edges softened in the tumble of sheets, the warm sheltering of skin. In the hour before dawn, birds call one by one from their separate branches, the sky a dull pink over the city horizon. She reaches into the rosy air, into her lover's deep, quiet sleep, close and warm against her, whispering out of the drowse. In this gift of waking, she tries to hold the liquid promise of a body's love, clasped tight against the hours.

Unmade Bed

My black hair
 is tangled
 thousands of strands
 pillowed
 tangled, tangled
 through the trysts
 of memories
 knotted into you

Your hands flow over me
 in a river
 of blood-rememberings
 deep streams
 of want
 your gifts
 of musk and roses,
 of heat and ice
 and melting
 orchid boats

your mouth
 blesses me

shattering me

In a village in India, a star unloosens its hold on the sky and a woman with skin the color of toasted almond unbinds her glistening hair, holds Deirdre's father, rubs his skin with scented oil of sandalwood, puts him to sleep as she has for many years. While she attends to the household chores, her hands laboring, he sleeps. He dreams of streets, every street a river of memories, sweeping away loved ones in the blue of twilight. In his dreams are small blue flowers, girls in blue dresses stitching their skirts to constellations, familiar stars combing through strands of clouds. He sleeps, dreaming her, a woman with emerald eyes.

Absence

*What silk-thin difference is there
if I stay to dream or go*
Kyoko Selden

Dreams of you
of the double
lover's cup
I long for containment,
embrace,
ellipsis
in your arms,
in your careless breathing
in the weight of your thigh
tender, beloved wing
across my hipbone
writing me into
the eye of morning.

Deirdre whispers to Kirpal, her lover long gone. Shall I mourn? Wear black into eternity? Or shall I gleam and shimmer like bone, like ivory, like moonlight on the Himalayas, the scent of you like the perfume of incense on my tongue.

I gleam. I mourn.

Lingua

Mes courbes ne sont pas folles.

Henri Matisse

You travel
along the mute curves
of my nakedness
dislocating my heart
sending it
shattering through
opened veins.

Passion
is a foreign tongue.

Journey's End

The shining promise
of you
spills
into me.

You bring me gifts
of clarity
poems naked
in the sunlight.

Jordan in his waking hours and in his dreams, imagines the comfort, the heat of another's skin, love's touch. What is this longing, this heart's desire, his body whispers. In his inhabited heart, a stirring, a fierce need awakens him, something he cannot name, deep in the coursing veins of his blood, just beyond his grasp, his line of vision.

The Body of My Garden

I have always
wanted words;
they bring me clarity,
reason, shape.

But my lover
paints, wordless
and love becomes
an art that preserves me,
time pouring out of rainforests,
rivers forming veins in my throat,
my limbs and bones and joints
and heart
in colours
spilling from brush
onto canvas.

The paints dream wet
verdant, ripening gardens of
magnolias, waxy pods
blooming into full fruit,
pools brimming with water lilies
and lotus.

Against a wide sky,
I am embedded in the mouths
of orchids,
in their nectaries,
tracing the delicate calyx
creamy petals,
hues of pale gold,
sap green.

In this language of the eye
this fierce gift of passion,
I am raw
words peeled away,
my skin oiled
with impasto layers,
thick flashes of
alizarin crimson
joy.

XVIII

JORDAN

In the odor of young men there is something elemental, as of fire, storm, and salt sea. It pulsates with buoyancy and desire. It suggests all the things strong and beautiful and joyous...

Helen Keller

People in our district had a very sharp eye for the odd, or the unusual, so that even my left handedness caused slight disapproval.

John Wyndham, The Chrysalids

“Jordan! Turn your music down!” His father’s shouting from downstairs reaching for him through the roar of the hockey game on the television. Louder and louder with every beer he drinks.

Upstairs in his room, Jordan sits at his desk, trying to find some quietness, some stillness for his mind so he can write in his English journal. His mother walks through the hallways like a tiny ghost, putting laundry away, hanging up his father’s shirts, smoothing out clean sheets on the beds. She comes quietly into his room and turns his music off.

“Your father’s in one of his moods,” she says, and leaves as silently as she entered.

Jordan remembers the last time he had been around his father when he had been in one of his moods. His face heats up with a searing pain that cuts across the back of his head where they had stitched him up at the hospital. “He fell when he was roller-blading. You know, boys will be boys,” his mother explains to the nurse.

Oct. 20

I’m only writing this journal because we’re supposed to and I guess I have to if I want to pass English.

What is the setting of the story? Be specific about time, location and the nature of the society.

The story takes place in Labrador, on the east coast of Canada. It is the future and the world has had a huge nuclear war. There has been so much radiation from nuclear weapons that most people died but there are survivors. So, civilization has had to begin again. It's almost like before the Renaissance. There are only two books that have been saved: the Bible and something written after the war called Repentances. The people in the society try to explain what has happened by blaming the mutants as if they were sent by the Devil.

What is the significance of the title?

I think "Chrysalid" is like the idea of metamorphosis, the way caterpillars change into butterflies. Something beautiful forming from something ugly. The telepaths in the book are something wonderful. They have developed their powers after such a horrible war. They are like the hope for the future but the other people see them as different. The world is always scared about something different.

The beginning of this book really depressed me. There are lots of people like Sophie with six toes or other things that aren't considered normal in this world. What's normal?

What do you think of the narrator David's character?

I liked the character of David. I liked the time when he dreams of a modern city with tall buildings and machines. Next, when he meets Sophie and finds out that she has six toes on each foot he doesn't turn her in. It shows that he is a good person because he keeps her secret. He ends up protecting her because she is different.

David is different too because he can talk to the other telepaths through his thoughts. We talked about telepathy in class. I think it's cool. I believe some people are telepathic like twins, or like a mother who knows her kid is in trouble.

Nov.3

Have you ever had a dream that you felt was important like the ones David has in *The Chrysalids*?

When I was a kid I had this dream about flying. I used to fly over the trees and over the tops of houses. I felt great! I felt as if I weighed nothing and that nothing could hurt me. I don't remember how old I was when the dreams changed. For some reason I started to feel afraid. I was afraid I would fly into the electrical wires. I started to think about how dangerous flying was. I started getting paranoid and waking up in a sweat. I wonder why I started feeling afraid.

Many of the characters in the novel are rejected by society. Consider high school as a mini-society. How does the theme of rejection relate to high school? Have you ever felt rejected or witnessed someone else being rejected? How did it make you feel? Is it hard to be accepted in high school?

When I was little I liked who I was and I didn't really think about what it meant to be me. When I went to high school I became more conscious of what other people wanted me to be. You're supposed to act a certain way, or, you don't fit in. I guess you get rejected. It happens all the time at school. Remember you were asking if anyone knew where Jenny Morgan was? She hasn't come to school for two weeks. Well, her parents say she's sick, but I know she's so shy and the guys were making fun of her that day in class, calling her ugly and mean names. She just couldn't take it. She's not strong.

Grace responds to Jordan's journal, surprised at his ability to cope with the questions and the readings. From his behavior in class, his casual air of boredom, she had not expected him to be interested in the work.

Grace eats her lunch in the staff room for a change of scenery. She usually eats in her own classroom but she feels sociable today, feels the need for adult company. She is frustrated with the English class. Apart from Jordan, there is little inspired response to the novel *The Chrysalids*. She had hoped that the social issues and themes would elicit lots of discussion from the kids but the class is reserved, silent, subdued, not much enthusiasm. Evelyn even commented on it in one of their meetings. It is like pulling teeth to get discussion going and she ends up feeling like she is standing at the front of a vast room, posing questions into empty air.

She joins Sam who is sitting on his own at a table. "Hi Grace, How are you?" She thinks he is a comfortable person to be around, like a familiar well-worn easy chair. Although she sometimes feels a twinge of jealousy about his growing friendship with Evelyn. She starts chatting with him about some of the kids, expresses her concern about Jordan.

"Yes," Sam says, "I've heard quite a few teachers talking about him lately, but I haven't had him as a student." The staff room hums with the voices of teachers who have overheard Grace's comments. *He thinks everything is a joke. He just doesn't get it. My strategy is to keep kicking him out. The counselor set up a meeting with his dad. So, we'll all get our five minutes with his father.*

"Jordan has been dropping by the art room quite a bit lately. Mara and Jordan have become friends and he often comes to see what she is working on. I've also been holding Open Studios after school where kids can come and make art or just hang out. He's come a few times."

In the staff room, clusters of teachers sit together, divided by disciplines, the English teachers in one corner, the old-school macho males in another, the Special Education Assistants who work with the disabled kids in another... *someone tells a Clinton joke ...someone else talks about the latest movie they have seen...complaints*

about all the administrative meetings to attend... It's getting close to report card time and here we are again. All these students with Ds and Es in at least two classes. What can you do with these kids?

Walt Brenner is there, talking in his loud voice, swaggering around, his bald pate shining, the muscles of his forearms rippling under the pushed-up sleeves of his oversized sweatshirt. He is the Physical Education department head who believes his program is the life of the school—this is a PE school, he tells everyone, puffing up with pride for his athletic teams. He starts telling a joke to his group of male teachers: *What's the difference between a single woman and a married woman eating a banana?* Grace doesn't catch the punch line.

Grace turns to see the school social worker listening, shaking his head. Sam is watching her. "Come on, let's get out of here, Grace. I'll fix you a cup of coffee in my room." She is relieved to leave the staff room.

Sam and Grace make their way down the hallway past the cafeteria. It is loud and noisy at lunch hour and students are seated at the tables divided by cliques, everyone sitting in their respective groups. The Asian students sit in groups at the back. The Grade Eights, the young ones in the front...the in-between grades in between. The smell of cinnamon buns and French fries fills the air.

*

Grace watches the television screen with her cat curled up on her lap, a glass of scotch in her hand. On the news, a high school massacre, teenagers and teachers screaming, two young boys go on a killing rampage, shooting thirteen people. Then the killers turn the guns on themselves. It is hard to absorb such violence. Grace tries to imagine how it would feel to have one of her students killed. The raw fear of it. Someone's child. A teacher is like a mother, she thinks, mothering other mothers' children. The scotch tastes like rust in her mouth.

The next day they talk about the shootings in English class. The class is buzzing. Grace begins, "The killers acted out in violence in a small town in the United States. Right now the authorities believe that the killers were picked on and bullied and pushed around because they were different. What do you think about what happened? Could this happen anywhere?" For the next hour, the discussion is heated.

In your journals, write a response to today's discussion about the shootings.

It was horrible. Two students in trench coats walk in and start shooting. They went after blacks, religious kids and jocks. They were computer geeks who had finally had enough of being pushed around. They ended up hating everyone, including themselves.

As he writes at his desk, Jordan looks at the notes he has taken from English class when they started talking about persecution. He remembers what Grace said. *Hitler wrote a manifesto called Mein Kampf and always talked about purifying the race. He and his Nazis wiped out millions of Jews and homosexuals and gypsies. The Nazis made Jews wear armbands with yellow Stars of David on them. Homosexuals wore bands with pink triangles. Just like the book of the Repentances in The Chrysalids. The book talks about purifying the race. To the society in Waknuk, anyone different is evil.*

Jordan imagines the feeling, the weight of an armband.

Jordan thinks The Repentances are crazy, twisting meaning and the description of what a human being is supposed to look like. Sometimes when people do terrible things they call it God's will. Jordan thinks about Waknuk, where society is stifled. He remembered reading the part about David's grandfather, Elias Storm, who had a very beautiful wife. But his strict ways turn her into a withered old woman who is almost glad to die a year after David's father is born. It reminded Jordan of his mother. In the hallway, there is a photograph of her when she was young. She looked like a model, with white teeth and a big smile, always laughing in those old pictures. But now she never

smiles, just goes to church on Sundays and listens to the minister talk about the family being the cornerstone of our society and how we have to protect the family.

Jan 8

What does it mean to be different? How does this relate to the idea of deviance in the novel?

The other night I dreamed I was David probably because my father hit me. David's father is such a tyrant in the story. My dad and I were talking about a news story and I said stuff about homosexuals. I said something about how gay people were normal and how I didn't think the school board should ban the story books about families with two moms or two dads.

My Dad's on the school board so I usually keep quiet about this kind of stuff. He doesn't believe these books should be in schools. We had a big fight and I couldn't bite my tongue any more.

Anyway I started to think about that and how hard it is for kids if they are laughed at for being different. I told my Dad that banning the books was censorship and he got mad and said I was acting queer and that I better not be hanging out with any queer kids. He never raised his son to be churchgoing and have him turn into a fag. I got mad and yelled back at him even though I knew what would come next. He'd make me pay for it.

In the glow of her desk light, Grace stares at the pile of student assignments in front of her. She is exhausted from responding to all the journals. It is emotional work. As much as the journals are linked to class readings, the entries become threaded through with bits of lives, drawing her in. Jordan's journal is the most difficult. She rereads the line *then he hit me* and feels a rising sickness, the sense of fear in her gut.

Grace's memories of her own father, his cruelties long suppressed in her body, swimming up to the surface, acid in her throat, reading Jordan's stories. She remembers coming home one night in October to the news broadcasts of Matthew Shepard's death, the gay twenty-one-year old at the University of Wyoming. Grace is haunted by the boy's face, described by the reporters, tortured, beaten, left to die, his face covered with blood except where tears flowed. For many nights she dreams of Matthew Shepard and she cannot stop thinking about Jordan.

Grace drives to school early the next morning. She has not slept. She thought about calling Evelyn the night before but it was too late. Grace talks to the guidance counselor and the social worker about Jordan, about his disclosure. At the first staff meeting in September, the teachers had been warned that they were legally responsible to report any disclosures of domestic violence or abuse.

"What should I do next? What are you going to do?" she asks them.

"Don't worry. We'll look into this Grace. These things take time."

"Do you still want to have a meeting with Jordan Merrill's father?" Joe Aldred, the guidance counselor, asks Grace.

"Yes." She felt she had done her duty. Things would be looked after.

But Jordan's journals triggered deep memories inside her—stories she thought she had laid to rest as a high school girl.

Grace tries to remain calm at the parent-teacher conference. Mr. Merrill is a big man, tall and broad. He is confrontational, angry, will not speak to Grace, directs all his comments to Joe. Grace's skin burns as she starts to connect Jordan's father with some of Jordan's behavior at school. *These things take time*, says the counselor.

Dear Jordan:

Thank you for sharing your writings with me. I know that sometimes high school is a very difficult time especially when you feel a parent doesn't understand you. If you ever want to talk to someone you know you can see Mr. Aldred in the guidance office or please come by my room if you would like to talk.

You have done an excellent job with your journal responses. I always look forward to what you have to say. Keep up the good work.

Jordan reads Grace's response. He thinks about talking to her. Some afternoons, he stands outside her classroom after school, hand outstretched for the door knob, but he can't make the connection. He starts to dream about this repeatedly. In his dreams, he walks down empty corridors to Grace's room, but he can't bring himself to open the door.

*

Jordan sits in the bleachers watching some of the boys shoot baskets. He watches his buddy Tom take a shot, the smooth curve of his arm sending the ball through the hoop. Jordan remembers the conversation last night at the dinner table, Jordan's father asks him, "So, who are you taking to the prom? I bet Tom's already got a date lined up."

"Well, I'm thinking of asking Tess Armstrong."

"Oh. She's a nice girl. I always see her family at church," his mother says.

He had wanted to ask Mara. But he knew what his parents would think about her dyed red hair and her funky clothes. He knew he was supposed to go to the Graduation Dance with Tess Armstrong—she expects him to ask her and his dad has offered to rent him a tux and a limousine like all the other guys. "Girls like that stuff," says his dad. But Jordan doesn't feel the way he thinks he should about Tess. He wonders about this.

Why couldn't it be comfortable like it was with Tom? After basketball practices and games they just hang out at his house and talk for hours about everything. With Tom he felt they let each other see what's real.

He feels sick inside though because he knows Tess wants him to be all moon-eyed over her and she's pissed off because she doesn't get the attention she wants from him.

He thinks, I can never be what I'm supposed to be. I'm so sick of it.

Tess and a group of cheerleaders come laughing and chattering into the gym. Jordan's mind wanders away from thinking about Tom to remembering the summer beach parties down by Boundary Bay. All the kids hang out at the bonfire pits with their ghettoblasters, drinking beer, some of the guys smoking pot and doing ecstasy. The boys talk about girls, sex, cars, sports, sex.

Tess and the cheerleader squads...the girls talk about clothes, makeup, about other girls, *who went how far with who, who's going out with who, who's hitting on who.* The girls, if they talk about the boys, call them dumb, immature. Except for Mara and her gang, the art kids with all their funky hair...they've got their own thing going, talking about movies and alternative stuff...

Listening to the music of VIP...

It's just my luck she's got someone else in mind

It's just my luck it happens all the time

Does it have to be this way for me

Hell, Yeah

Cause it's just my luck

And Marcy Playground singing: *I smell sex and candy...*

And the police cruisers circling in the warm summer air just to keep a lid on things and the spires of the church standing guard at the entrance of town. The church's billboard message changes every couple of days—*The nuclear family is the foundation of society. It is worth preserving...If you doubt, doubt your doubt.*

After he makes sure his family is asleep, Jordan sits at his computer screen, searching the internet. Earlier, he had seen an interview show on the television. There was this really nice woman talking about her gay son who had committed suicide. Her son's name was Robbie. She seemed like such a kind and loving mother. The show leads him to a website on gay teens. He can't stop reading all their stories and he finds the story of Robbie Kirkland, a boy who killed himself with his father's gun at the age of fourteen.

March 15

Write a response to your independent reading project.

You told us we could write about anything we wanted so I'm going to write about Robbie Kirkland. Robbie has such a hard time at school because he is teased for being different and he gets beaten up. When he was young he used to go to a school called Immaculate Word. I identified with him because he had such a religious upbringing. But, his family was so accepting. I heard his mother on the television and she seemed like a really nice person. Robbie's parents accepted him the way he was. Robbie wanted to be a writer. At the age of twelve he wrote this poem:

I'm Dying and No one cares

I try to stand and walk

I fall to the hard cold ground

It feels as if to life I'm no longer bound.

The others look and laugh at my plight

Blood pours from my nose, I am not a pretty sight

I try to stand again but fall

To the others I call

But they don't care...

Then he writes, Note: A lot of stuff in here is weird. I'm not really like that.

The first time he attempts suicide, he swallows 30 Tylenol but doesn't succeed in killing himself. He just wakes up puking it all up. His mother didn't know about the attempt until she finds a note a month later that says: "Whatever you find, I'm not gay. I love Ashley.... You probably want to know why I killed myself. Cuz of all the shit I've had to go through recently. That's why! Sincerely and with a lot of love, Robbie Kirkland, the boy who told himself to smile, shut up and pretend you're happy: It didn't work."

So after the suicide attempt he writes a letter to a girl that he never sends. They find it after he dies. This is what the note said:

"Whenever I think of it, I shudder. I even wrote a suicide letter. The reason I tried to kill myself was because of stuff that happened that would take a novel to fill. I'll tell you a shortened version. 1) everyday I fear for my life. 2) I fear online. 3) something is going down with me and God. 4) I have a lot of jumbled nightmares."

Robbie went to this private church run school, a prep school for college with a big respected name but it was no different from public schools. He scored 99% on the admissions test and he had chosen to go there. He wanted the big name but he ended up living a double life. There was such a macho culture at Robbie's school like there is at ours. He wasn't accepted because the guys were jocks and hated anyone they thought might be queer. Faggot was always the word used when they didn't like somebody. That's no different from our school. Like our school, the guys had this championship football program.

Robbie was shy and quiet and wrote poetry. He found it hard to make any real friends. He dyed his hair black and started wearing baggy clothes. He got into Dungeons and Dragons and the tarot and the internet. The other boys called him a Satan worshipper.

So after Robbie's death his mother tries to make something good come of Robbie's death. She goes to talk to the school principal and some guy who was in charge of discipline at the school. His mother tries to tell them that there are other Robbies at the school and she offered to come and read something to the school about Robbie's life and about him being gay. The school politely turned her down. The principal says that "the message of the school is kindness and tolerance." He tells her that the school is planning to do a mass that will focus on the issue of suicide.

Jordan stops writing at 1 AM in the morning. He tries to imagine how Robbie felt. He stares at the pages he has written and decides not to hand them into Ms. Owen. He turns off the lights and climbs into bed.

The high school has a guest speaker from the Teen Assist Centre. The social worker speaks to them about teen suicide. Last year a girl had hung herself. A teacher had found her hanging by a belt in a shower stall. Jordan finds himself imagining what it would be like, to be this girl, what it would feel like—would it be the end of pain?

No one mentions why kids commit suicide, why they do it or what their feelings are. They don't talk about gay kids or sex or any real problems, Jordan thinks. Jordan remembers in physical education, Mr. Brenner the coach teaching them, telling the boys what a condom was and where it goes but not what it was for. In science they would be taught about sexually transmitted diseases but not what to do about them. Once a couple of students tried to stage an AIDS awareness cabaret. School authorities banned it.

Jordan has been taught to believe that being gay is the most freakish thing in the world. He used to believe that there were two gay bars in the world, one in San Francisco and one in New York and maybe five or six people to go to them. In an interview for a Vancouver magazine, the head of the school board, Margaret Oliver is quoted as saying, "The best policy regarding homosexual students is for no one to acknowledge their sexual nature." Jordan's father agrees with her.

XIX

Slippage

My neighbor's house stands tall,
 exemplary,
 a white standard
 on the tree-lined street
 where spills of children
 play in the fragrance
 of newly mown grass
 and friends gather like moths
 at patio barbecues,
 swim laps in blue pools
 of suburbia.

Behind the pristine door
 the air is scented with peach
 and lemon pot-pourri,
 imported soaps,
 Gucci colognes and
 white terry cloth robes.

One night in June
 the cul-de-sac is lit up
 red and blue lights pulsing
 in Delta Police cars

he is escorted from his home
 the marriage ended
 in restraint and order
 his throat caught in the noose of love

his raging words
 burn a path
 through his small sons' bodies
 across her lawn
 through her rose bushes

That night I dream
 of masked raccoons
 night marauders
 owls following the paths of headlights
 a falcon circling small prey
 the tattered beat of wing

I dream of consumption plants
 the choke of deadly nightshade
 stinging nettles along the Serpentine River

I dream a black fisted storm
a singular fury
lightening razoring
the neighbor's pine tree
its scent in my nostrils
crashing through my roof

In the morning
the tree still stands
outside my window
the sun rises
a warm peach
offering up seaside angelica
the air full of anise swallowtails
and red admiral butterflies

At dawn
I slip into my daughter's room
listen to her measured breaths
stroke her hair softly back
from her forehead.

Jordan didn't fit. Grace had been watching him, had her suspicions. He hadn't come to see her. He looked and acted like he fit but he didn't. Grace knew this story, his agony, his silencing, the falseness of identity—after a while it made your skin hurt. *Adrienne Rich writes: Lying is done with words and also with silence.* Maybe Grace was wrong about Jordan.

After finishing the unit on *The Chrysalids*, she had started a short story unit with the class. Jordan's responses to literature are usually rich and poetic, especially when readings seem to connect to him. She is surprised by his sensitivity in his journal submissions which seems so out of character, so opposite from the face he shows the world. Many of the other students in Senior English struggled with the writing tasks.

But by April, Jordan becomes less and less engaged with his school work. He seems to have lost interest in anything Grace tries. Although he clearly has the abilities, he doesn't do the assignments. As the months go by, she wonders how he will graduate with the end of the term so close.

*

In the hallways the boys act like black rappers on the music videos. The boys wander around with exaggerated swaggers and their lingo—*I'm all that, Oh Yeah*. One boy complains that he bombed a math test and the collective responses are: *Sucks to be you, man* or *It's all good. Oh, sweet, man. Hey Mary and Joe are going out together, they're with each other 24/7.*

*

Grace talks about Jordan and his journal with Evelyn. Grace talks about Jordan's disclosures and how he has stopped writing to her. She can't seem to get him to respond to anything they are doing in class. She remembers Evelyn in the Teacher Education classes talking about theories of reader response. *Louise Rosenblatt: it is the reader's*

transaction with the text that is important. Wolfgang Iser: The reader fills the gaps between the author's text and the reader's imagination—this is a phenomenological approach to reading.

Evelyn is confident that everything would be all right. *From what you have told me, he has intelligent responses to novels and to what he is reading. Everything we read has possibilities to evoke responses. He links his readings to his lived experiences as we all do. For a kid as sensitive as Jordan, there is always a risk that readings of literature can evoke deep memories and sometimes painful ones. Word as flesh.*

Eudora Welty writes: *the fictional eye sees in, through, and around what is really there.* Annie Dillard says *fiction is a subtle pedagogy.* Sylvia Ashton-Warner: *The reaching out for a book needs to become an organic action...Pleasant words won't do. Respectable words won't do. They must be words organically tied up, organically born from the dynamic of life itself.* Clifford Geertz: *We are ourselves this web of relationships, us/not us.*

Grace remembers these discussions about journals and possible places of change. Grace takes the risk, always one to look under the surface of things. She hadn't really thought of it as dangerous. Evelyn gives her an article by Maxine Greene who writes about pushing on the existing order of things: *Too many teachers have read their students' journals and stories and poems; they have exposed themselves to many kinds of dread and many kinds of desire...there is a sense in which imagination and desire can feed the recognition of the need to transform and, perhaps, the passion to change.*

Jordan is barely passing in school except marginally in her English class. Every day, Grace finds him standing out in the hallways, kicked out of classes time and time again.

"Hey, Ms. Owen," he grins at her.

Yet Grace knows he is bright underneath the facade. One afternoon as she is leaving for the day, she sees him waiting in the yard for Tess and Tom. She stops to chat.

"How are you doing Jordan?"

“Okay.”

He seems agitated, restless.

“Got plans for the weekend?”

“Yeah. Big grad party tonight.”

“ Well, have a good one. And remember, my door is always open. Bye.”

In the first week of June, Evelyn is a guest speaker at Grace’s school for the district professional development day. She talks to the English Department about teacher as researcher, ways of knowing and new epistemologies, the power of arts-based approaches, the importance of narratives and story-telling. *She thinks of Muriel Rukeyser: The universe is made of stories, not atoms.*

Evelyn imagines herself back in university, writing an essay on Rhetoric and Composition. Being young, Evelyn searches for euphony, digression and devices of persuasion. She rolls her tongue around the velvet phrases. Now, she thinks, how powerful, the words held under the surface of beautiful speech, words that wound like weapons still unbanished, language waiting to strike like a coiled serpent. Hatred, difference.

Deirdre never banishing her grief, waiting to strike Evelyn with her anger at every turn, her tongue turned bitter, every syllable hot with venom. She draws the curtains of her home, preserves her husband in his box of ashes, his clothes still in the drawers of the bureau, hanging in the closets for years, ten years after he is gone they are still there.

At Kirpals’ funeral, there are so many people Evelyn has never met before. Everyone at the research company is there, not just the scientists but the sales and marketing division, the managers, the librarians, even the janitors and the cafeteria staff, even the man who had been the front security officer who controlled the gate in front of the building. Every day, Kirpal would drive in, present his security pass, walk down the halls to his laboratory. Kirpal took time to speak to them all, asking about their wives, their children, their health. They all come to watch, weep, send him into ashes.

Later Evelyn goes with her mother to clear out his office of his personal belongings. As they pack up the family photos, Evelyn's childhood drawings, his Ph.D. dissertation, the employees walk by, stop at the door, say something, anything, believing that just a word will make some sort of difference, acknowledge that Kirpal was here. It is when he dies that his daughter realizes how profoundly he was loved.

In the doorway of the gymnasium, Evelyn sees Jordan standing, grinning, his frame lit up by the afternoon sun shining through the outside doors. He waves at her, turns and walks away.

Novel Response

Jordan Merrill

I am reading a new book called Prayers for Bobby. It's not really a novel. It's a true story. It's about this really religious guy from Portland. He is good-looking and all, does the macho thing most of the time until he starts to live a gay lifestyle. He can't accept himself finally and jumps off a bridge at the age of twenty three. His family and his church taught him that it was a terrible sin to be gay and that God would not accept him. He was a really good writer and there are parts of his journal in this book. He had a lot of agony and a lot of pain. My mom found this book in my room the other day. She usually doesn't say too much but you could tell she wasn't happy. She'll probably go to church and say more prayers for me.

Bobby Griffith killed himself at the age of twenty-three in Portland. He was full of self-hatred. This is what Bobby wrote:

"Gentle spring weather is around me, but a fierce storm rages within...How much longer? How much more can I survive? A million bitter tears and secrets and lies. Sometimes I would like to crawl under a rock and go to sleep for the rest of time."

Survival

"I will survive—God wants me to—to be happy. There's a difference between surviving and surviving being happy. But surviving is first. When we think we can no longer survive a choice has to be made between sinking and swimming."

*

The party is a typical Saturday night at Jesse's place. His house is chosen because his parents are away for the weekend. The basement is smoky and permeated with the smell of sweat, perfume and stale beer. Teenagers dance close, clutched to each other. The boys in Jordan's group are high on dope, punchy with beer.

Jordan is drinking fast, mixing rum and cokes with beers until he is sloppy drunk. Nothing seems to take the edge off the gnawing feeling in his gut, this worm of agony eating at him like an acid. He can't put a name to it, can't say what it is. He throws his arms around Tom's shoulders, his sloppy drunk tongue forming the words before he can stop them, spilling out, *I love you, man*. Tom trying to detach himself and Jordan's grip just getting tighter, *No, you don't understand, I really, really love you. Don't you know*. Jordan's secret desires, out of control, out in the open, his hidden self unloosed in an alcoholic stupor.

Tom realizes it is no joke. He backs away in disbelief, shaking Jordan off in contempt, pushing him so that he reels and staggers against the wall. Tom walks into the party and tells the story, as if he has witnessed some freak-show circus act, the disgust dripping from his voice. He tells the rest of them how it was, a Judas chorus, a litany, *Merrill's gay—a homo boy! He came onto me! You wouldn't believe it!*

The rest of them join in a drunken choir, jeering, calling him names that open wounds on Jordan's body. He leaves, staggers home in the dark, eyes and nose streaming, screaming his pain to a neighborhood that sleeps. He crawls into bed, sleeps dreaming of the boys' leering faces and the gaping mouths of the girls still visible in his mind's eye.

He sleeps, thinking it will just go away. He wakes on Sunday with a pounding head, puking and hung over. Every step he takes gives him pain. Monday at school will just be another day, he tells himself. He tries to call Tom on Sunday but his mother says he is out all three times when he calls.

On Monday morning, when he stops at Tom's house to give him a lift as he always does, Tom's mom answers, "Jordan, Tom left early this morning. I thought you boys had basketball practice?"

There is no practice this morning, Jordan knows, his heart sinking into a cold hollow in his chest. Tom was his best friend, his companion. Jordan had always been able to count on him when he needed him. He could always turn to Tom when his father was in one of his fits, when he beat him. When he reaches school, parks his car and enters the corridors of clanging lockers and chattering voices, he knows this day will be different.

Grace is standing in the hall in front of her classroom, telling everyone to quiet down. She wonders what all the fuss is about this morning. A hush falls on the noisy hall, whispers begin all around him. A crowd falls away from his locker, the door painted over in a slash of red—the word FAGGOT branding him. Someone breaks out laughing. It sounds like Tom. He opens his locker to get his books. Tess comes up behind him, the crowds watching him, "I can't go to the Graduation dance with you," she says to him, her eyes never meeting his, placing his basketball jersey that she always wore into his arms. She turns, flipping her glossy sheath of hair, disappearing from sight.

Grace tells everyone to clear the hallway and get to class. She can feel Jordan's pain through the corridors.

Jordan goes to his first class because it is English and he feels good around Ms. Owen. But he felt like his heart was hammering inside him, hammering at the walls of his chest. What would his parents do if they found out? In English class, they are comparing the author's use of symbolism in a short story they have read to the use of symbolism in *The Chrysalids*. As if from a distance, Jordan can hear Ms. Owen's voice floating, barely reaching him. *Rosalind and Petra cutting off the crosses stitched to their dresses. When they hesitate, Sophie tells them the crosses haven't helped them much.* He leaves half way through first period, the stares following him as he gets up.

Jordan, are you all right. Where are you going? Jordan... is everything okay? Come by my room later, Jordan... His teacher's voice a far away sound, at the outer edges of the world.

The house is empty when he gets home. His mom and dad are at work. In his Dad's gun cabinet, he sees the gleaming row of hunting rifles, his dad's prized collection—kept polished and gleaming. His father taught him how to use a rifle years ago when he tried to convince him to hunt deer—"It will make a man out of you," his father said. Jordan never had the stomach for it.

Jordan knows that behind the cabinet is another hidden compartment. He has watched his father polish and load the illegal World War II pistol many times. He bought it in the States and smuggled it in across the US border into Canada. Something special for his collection, *a thing of beauty* his father called it. A shiny luger, like the ones the Gestapo used under Hitler.

He thinks maybe he should leave a note, maybe for his mother, maybe for Ms. Owen. But he can't, his mind screams in agony. He has no words. He puts the barrel in his mouth.

XX

Outside the Merrill's home, it is 9:20 when a neighbor hears a gunshot and calls the police. During a check of the neighbourhood the police knock on the Merrill's door, find it open and discover the body. Jordan's parents arrive at the scene at the same time as the ambulance and the paramedics, sirens wailing. A seventeen-year-old boy, dead from a single gunshot wound to the head.

Jordan's mother and father wait while the coroner has gone through the scene and the police have made their reports. They watch their boy carried out, zipped up in a body bag.

When the call comes to the school principal, a chain of perfunctory emergency procedures are smoothly, efficiently put into action. In emergencies, an entire network of people is contacted, one person calls the next person on the list and so on until all are informed. Grace is new so she is one of the last ones on the list to be called, one of the last to know. Grace takes her call at home. *Oh, my God* her voice an agonized whisper. When she stops crying long enough to speak, she picks up the phone to call Evelyn.

Evelyn finds out about Jordan's death from Grace, her voice racked with tears. *Jordan killed himself.* Evelyn remembers Jordan—blonde, smiling, the young girls restless with wanting him, cutting classes. Then she remembers the last few months, Grace reading the journals he submitted to her. The English teacher *bearing witness*. The narratives of literature becoming tangled with lives. Grace weeps into the phone. *Come over. It's not your fault,* she says to Grace, *you're not responsible,* even as the dark heart of guilt and sorrow threatens to envelop them. Evelyn felt hollow, her body jarred.

In school the next morning the teachers all have messages in their boxes. They are given a prepared speech to read to their students the following morning—a message from the principal about Jordan's death, their collective loss and mourning. The form letter also lists those individuals who are likely to be upset or needing support—those who knew the victim and were close to him. They are told that social workers and grief counselors are at the school if anyone needs to talk to them.

The day after Jordan's death began like any other. In the school hallways, his death does not silence the students. They stand around chattering in clusters—the Portuguese students in one corner, the East Indian boys in another, the Chinese and Japanese groups all talking in their separate languages. When the bell rings, the crush of bodies in the halls is chaotic, the jostling, the cacophony of tongues intermingling, pouring into the hallways, lockers clanging, the air filled with smells of bodies, of sweat and the girls' perfumes—Tommy Girl and fragrances from the Gap—Heaven, Earth, Grass, Dream. They speak in the hushed tones of disbelievers. Those who had known him or who had been at the party enjoyed brief moments of notoriety as the police and school administrators called them into offices to hear their stories, to hear about what they had seen. *What do you know about Jordan?* There is confusion. They think it was a murder, something drug-related. Grace knows they are wrong.

The administration is proud of the efficiency of their emergency response system. Everyone pulls their weight, does their job. Social agencies are in place at an amazing speed. The time for the funeral service at the church is announced. Mara weeps openly. So do Grace and Sam and others who have known Jordan.

*

The sun dissolves copper in the sky as they reach Evelyn's house. After Jordan's funeral, the wind walks over their skins, an uproar that cuts through silence and grief. *She imagines her father's body, no longer her father, his cold skin engulfed in flames, dust to dust, ashes to ashes.*

Evelyn searches for words, for comfort. Language had not failed her before. She hears the poet Muriel Rukeyser's words:

*No longer speaking
Listening with the whole body
and with every drop of blood
Overtaken by silence*

Evelyn imagines Jordan's bloodied body underneath the gleaming oak of his coffin, the long nerve of history exposed, pulling at their veins. His mother's face of loss.

Evelyn wonders if a mother or a teacher could have placed some talisman around his neck, some sacred charm for the journey. Once, when she was worrying about Mara, Sam had given Evelyn some tiny bird bones he had found on the beach, bleached skeleton and wings, ribs still threaded to spinal column, such delicate, rare ivory. He had given them to her in a tiny jewelry box. Could one give such a gift to a loved one, tie it with ribbon so that it becomes a protective armor?

In the darkening rooms, Evelyn lights candles. She had heard somewhere that lighting candles was an act of prayer.

Jordan is buried at the Boundary Bay Cemetery, in mid-afternoon. The day is calm and clear, the June air scented with freshly mown grass. Although the sun is high, the moon is also present, grey against a pale blue sky.

As the minister says a prayer for Jordan, Mara cries for her friend. Mara feels the loss with the intensity of the very young, sensing her human mortality for the first time, a loss of innocence.

Sam reaches for Evelyn's hand, feels her slender bones in his grasp. Evelyn wonders if there was something she could have done. If there was something Grace could have done. Would anything have made a difference?

Jordan's mother stands beside the minister and watches her son being lowered into the ground, her spine of grief held stiff as she watches her husband shovel the first bit of earth onto the coffin. She has detached herself, floating in the words from the scriptures. *The LORD is my shepherd, I shall lack nothing...He guides me in paths of righteousness...Surely goodness and love will follow me...* The words hold her up, keep her from dropping to her knees onto the earth.

Grace watches Jordan's father and feels the bile rise in her throat. A wave of anger hits her with such intensity she is breathless with rage. *Silence is death*, she thinks. *She is plunged suddenly into pity, for herself, for Jordan, for her father who worked and slept, worked and slept, worked and drank, the dispenser of woe. She remembers her child body learning despair, learning to quake and cower, remembering the raw crimson pain given by a loving hand.*

As a child, she had grown close to wild creatures and animals, as if their souls overlapped. And the child died there.

She grieves for Jordan deep inside her skin, feels guilt at her own silences and the silences of others. She knows that one reason she became a teacher was to reach students like Jordan. She has failed.

The crowd sees a flicker of movement on the right side of the cemetery. At the edge of the wooded clearing stands a coyote, staring at the funeral gathering. It is unusual for coyotes to come out of the woodlands in mid-day. They stare at him, his sharp, wary face. He stands for a moment, then lifts his head to the sky, eyes half-closed in abandonment to his wild, frenzied song. His voice is a raw howling that pierces them with a sense of recognition, the primal sense of the voice of the wild. This is what came first, this solitary cry. When the sound dies, he lowers his muzzle, turns away and moves silently into the trees.

As a group of them return to Evelyn's house, she makes tea and coffee and prepares to put out food for everyone to eat. Outside, there are loud voices calling, people running down by the beach. Mara steps outside to see what is going on and sees some of the neighborhood children knocking on front doors, ringing doorbells, asking for help.

"What's happened?" Mara asks Catherine who is outside walking towards the beach.

"The kids found a baby seal left stranded by the tides," says Catherine. "We need everyone's help."

The tide has receded leaving a seal pup beached far out into the bay. Someone called the SPCA and was told that if the tide didn't wash the seal back in within a few hours it would die.

The residents knew that the tide would not come in for another eight hours or so. They have been told that they have to keep the animal wet. *We have to be careful not to get too close, not to touch it with human hands, or it will be rejected by its mother*, a woman tells them.

Mara goes back inside. "Mom, we really have to help."

The moon is high and the wind whips the trees. Evelyn, Grace, Sam and Mara join the group of neighbors and children, about fifty people. They walk out almost half a mile to the seal, out across the sand, grooved and furrowed by the tides. They take turns, one by one, walking out, a human chain carrying buckets of water out to the baby seal. They take turns bringing hot coffee out to each other as the cold chills their skins. Into the darkening sky, grief and pain and love are poured out, ragged prayers in silence. As they toil late into the night hours, Evelyn knows that the ocean would reveal its voice, speak her name. ...*this same silence is become speech, with the speed of darkness*. They watch the tide wash in, slowly embracing the seal; its mother is there, her slick head and the velvet orbs of her eyes gleaming in the moonlit tides, waiting as her child is returned to her.

Endpapers

*Who will speak these days,
if not I,
if not you?*

Muriel Rukeyser, "The Speed of Darkness"



The principal comes to see Grace the week after Jordan's funeral. She is being laid off, a common occurrence for new teachers without seniority. The principal mumbles something about this being the hardest part of his job and asks for her signature on the layoff notice. She hears later that one of the teachers from the elementary school wanted a high school position and because she had seniority in the district and the qualifications, she got Grace's position. Displaced.

Evelyn tries to comfort Grace, but inside she is angry at the unfairness of the hiring practices. She knows that this happens all the time. The district lays off new teachers, then keeps these teachers waiting until October, when they know their student numbers before letting them know if they have jobs in the new school year. This uncertain status can sometimes keep new teachers in limbo for years. This way the school boards can save money.

On the last day of school, Grace packs her things, a sadness pervading her spirit, a sadness so deep, a dull ache in the marrow of her bones. Many of the students tell her how unfair it is that she is going. Several of the students give her hugs, embraces. She is surprised, her skin and body unaccustomed to their touch. Filling boxes, detaching herself, art, posters from the walls, she thinks about this classroom, an entire world where she has lived with her students for a year. Jordan's empty desk and chair still a raw wound inside her, around her. Her mind registers the fact that she will probably never see these kids again.

In her hand she clasps Jordan's journal. The police brought it to her the day after he died. Inside the first page, Jordan has written: *For Ms. Owen who read my words and liked my writing.* Underneath is a quote from Bobby Griffith's journal, dated May 16:

I write this in hopes that one day, many years from now, I will be able to go back and remember what my life was like when I was a young and confused adolescent desperately trying to understand myself and the world I live in. At the rate I'm going right now, though, I seriously wonder if I'll live to be very old, that is if I will live past being a teenager.

Another reason I write this is so that long after I die, others may have a chance to read about me and see what my life as a young person was like....

In her ears, the familiar jarring of the bell signals the crush of bodies, the clang of locker doors, voices receding, their names marked on her flesh. As her throat catches, she reaches out to grasp what lies beyond their young eyes, the laughter in the hallways, reaching beyond this last day. Through the silent corridors she whispers, *all the stories of our lives are not yet made.*

Aug. 15

Dear Evelyn:

Hope you and Mara are doing well. So happy for you that your new book of poetry will be published soon. Also glad to hear that Mara got into Emily Carr College. I knew she would—congratulate her for me. It will be a great place for her to pursue her art. Had such fun at her graduation ceremonies and dance—very proud of her as you must be too.

Wonderful painting sessions in the Tuscany hills. You would love it—the colors and landscape, all amber and gold. Fabulous paintings at a gallery in London—one rare cubist work with such intense shades of blue—made me suddenly homesick. And I am remembering what it's all about—the art room and my students, the ocean, the deep blue shadows on the waters of the bay and you at the heart of it all. I imagine you there, in your garden, the calm of the place and I am ready to come home.

Be home soon. Love Sam

Aug, 20

Dear Evelyn:

Just a note to tell you I am okay. I have found a quiet cottage on Bowen Island and at first I was certain that I would not return to teaching. My faith in the world of the classroom was gone. At least I am not sure I know how to teach literature right now. The stories get so tangled up with our students' lives. My life as a teacher gets tangled up with them. They don't remain separate. The response journals were hard, emotional work. But then I remember Jordan and how much it meant to me to read his journals. I think I needed to tell Jordan that I was his story—his was a shared story. My silence torments me and I feel I have not been courageous enough. I wonder if Teacher Education could have taught us to be courageous. Jordan once wrote in his journal a quote he liked...Bravery creates new flowers.

I am trying to restore my faith in literature, my faith in myself. So maybe teaching is about finding the right fictions to read and write our lives.

I know that at the end of suffering there is always a door. You taught me that. I watched you open that door. I am hoping that I will find the courage someday to speak again in the voice of a teacher but now my sentences and cries are strung together on the page and grief still streams through me like rain.

*I am glad to hear your new graduate course on *The Novel and Education* was approved. I imagine you teaching, your voice strong and calm, embedding hooks into the flesh,*

invoking the music of language, your lyric hum, your breathing. I especially like the fact that you will be teaching Virginia Woolf and George Eliot. Thinking about Woolf though. As much as she told us in Room of One's Own, her room did not save her, those stones in her pockets dragging her down.

I think I always believed literature had such power. I remember you teaching this—your words to your student teachers—“teach your students about the power of imaginative literature, show them that literature can transform worlds.” Such idealism, but then you told us never to apologize for our idealism. I'm not sure the world sustains this kind of idealism. I thought literature and my class could save kids like Jordan, give him courage. I am full of doubt. I am not sure that a teacher can save anyone and maybe that isn't our job.

But then I imagine you, lighting your candles, drinking hot coffee in your garden, the coffee's steaming incense, your house rebuilt strong and beautiful—it holds you, embraces you and your books, your Mara and your poetry, this learning, this teaching is certainly enough for a woman's life.

Missing you. Come for a visit.

In tenderness,

Grace

...and more than once, as I was reading, it brought to me the scent of a rose which the breeze entering through the open window had spread through the upper room...

Marcel Proust, "On Reading"

Evelyn looks out over the bay. She reads the letters from Sam and Grace, their words softening in her hands. She holds them to her like flowers gathered from the perfumed sky. She hears Jordan's voice...*bravery creates new flowers*. Slips the letters into the endpapers of her copy of Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, which she is re-reading for her fall semester of teaching. She closes the book and thinks about how she will approach the novel in new ways with her students this year. From the angle of risk, perhaps...new readings, to the lighthouse and back again. In the novel, the act of thinking, the act of giving human love, the act of dipping a brush in shades of blue and green, trying to convey what is seen on paper, the act of making something enduring and permanent—these are acts made at great risk. In the novel, the word risk is the repeated refrain, the response to the question: What does it all mean?

Summer swells and ripens her garden in a deep green fuse of light. Lupins and poppies, Japanese irises, sunflowers and deep pink damask roses fill the beds with color and fragrance. She is beginning a new book of poems.

Classes will be beginning soon in the fall of a new year at the Academy. Her course recommendations for the Interdisciplinary programs in Arts and Education have been accepted and The Novel and Education course will begin in September. She has recommended to the Interdisciplinary committee that the mentorship program continue, merging Arts and Education programs.

Past the point, beyond the clay cliffs, the alpine meadow is in full bloom, a carpet of wild flowers, fragrant and humming with the velvet symphonies of bees. Down by the craggy edges of wild grasses are enormous, red poppies, as if transplanted from some mystical realm. Evelyn has these poppies in her garden. *Papaver orientale*, grown from

the seeds Catherine has given her. These will be Catherine's legacy in Evelyn's garden, continuously reseeding themselves into profusion, their vivid red petals like layers of crinkly, transparent silk centered in deep stains of black and purple velvet. *The poppies whisper Catherine's stories...ancient Greeks used poppies to decorate shrines to Demeter, goddess of agriculture and fertility. Cleopatra's contemporaries believed that poppies assured life after death. Romans used poppies in witchcraft. Poppies are magic, their language will make you a gardener and every season, your hands in the earth, you will feel their joy. You will stand barefoot on the grass and it will seem miraculous to have grown something so beautiful.*

In the distance, Evelyn hears the seabirds calling her name. The white cranes stilt across the mudflats, herons, steeple-stemmed, ankling the wetlands. The morning with its smile of light embraces her and the blue waters shine without a stain, the sea stretched like silk across the bay.

She sits in her garden, a woman writing in a citrus drizzle of petals, clematis opening, the belled-tongues of fuschia whispering stories, words that wrap her like towels after a bath, words to die in, a grammar of sighs and history. Catherine's voice...grow *rosemary for remembrance. Remember the Satukei, the early manual of garden design written by a court noble in eleventh century Japan. ...recall the places of beauty you know. And then, on your chosen site, let memory speak.* A woman writing, the art on white sheets like love. Sometimes, if she listens hard enough, she can hear her father's voice over the waters, singing lullabies in her mother tongue, the words unspooling a string of saffron lights around her heart. *Soja, raj kumari, soja, sleep princess, sleep.*

This is how she wants the poem to be, trembling with light and vibrant hues, filled with the earth, spilling through waters, dancing in the cathedrals of the wind.

Geography

I have stitched my skirts to continents
danced on the equator
dipped my hands into the Lesser Amazon
the emerald mouths of rivers

I have opened up the Atlas with my bones
found my own wild acres

I have loved places
the azure of the Adriatic
the salt and foam of the Atlantic
the sun dissolving copper on city rooftops

but questions of travel are resolved
in these wetlands
my body an aviary
for seabirds

now I see at the edges of darkness
extremes of moonlight

in Boundary Bay
the Pacific Ocean speaks my name
reveals its voice
and water becomes my mouth

I read this place
mapped in my wet fingers
thumbing me open

Literary Anthropology

Writing is an act of appropriation, an interweaving of conversations with other writers, other lives and histories, other voices and multiple readings. I acknowledge the presence of many texts in my work. The following sources are the principal works referred to in the body of the novel, as well as others which influenced my thinking on the novel as educational research:

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