

"Uncharted Lands"

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Abstract

"Uncharted Lands" is a collection of three short stories, each of which could be described as *ethnic* but should be considered *Canadian*. The Afterword explains why, examines the process of writing ethnicity through memory, and explores the position of ethnic minority literature in the evolution of Canadian culture.

"Terres inexplorées" est une collection de trois nouvelles dont chacune pourrait être décrite comme *ethnie* mais qui devrait être considérée *canadienne*. La postface explique le pourquoi, elle examine le processus d'écrire l'ethnicité par mémoire, et elle étudie la position de la littérature ethnique minoritaire dans l'évolution de la culture canadienne.

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Uncharted Lands

The Saturdays of my childhood were filled with dusty maps and oranges. Each Saturday we went to Ukrainian school--*ridna shkola*--where we sat in old desks with the chairs attached, learned to write in spidery script, and studied tattered maps hung carefully over the blackboard. There were topographical ones, showing brown bumps of mountains and green river basins, political ones of counties or *oblasts*, and historical ones, indicating in jagged colours where the border had been drawn and redrawn over the centuries. Over the centuries, yes, for Ukraine was very old. Canada had just recently turned one hundred, but one century was nothing compared with centuries *plural*. Hundreds of years, we learned, of kings and cossacks, invaders and imperialists, tsars and hetmans, and now communists.

The newest, shiniest map we were taught to despise. It was the same one I'd seen everywhere, in every atlas and on every globe, where Ukraine was shapeless, swallowed up by the red blob of the Soviet Union. *Sovyetsky soyuz*, my Ukrainian school teachers would spit. *The Red Menace*, I heard on television, and imagined the blob imperceptibly oozing over the globe.

We learned to read and write in Ukrainian. We studied the geography and history of a country we'd never seen, the literature and culture of a people with whom we were somehow connected. Twelve years of Saturdays. Only eleven for my sister Marusia, but I had to repeat the first grade. It took me forever to learn all thirty three letters in the Cyrillic alphabet, and even then I kept mixing them up with English ones.

School lasted only until twelve-thirty--any longer and the whole day would've been spoilt. We did have recess, though, a welcome break which I usually spent by the drinking fountain behind the stairs with my sister and

Roxanne, whose father owned a bakery. We'd exchange homework answers and hastily review historical biographies or significant dates, trying to guess what questions we'd be asked.

"What's the main tributary of the Dniepro River?"

"Easy. The Pripyat."

"When was Ukraine baptised?"

"In 988 A.D., by Prince Volodymyr the Great. Ask me something hard."

"What did Prince Oleh do with his shield?"

"He did something with his shield? What, used it in a battle? I don't know!"

"He nailed it to the gates surrounding Constantinople."

"He did? When? How come I can't remember reading this? She's not going to ask us something so minor, is she?"

"It wasn't minor. It was symbolic. He did it after he conquered the city."

"Why can't I remember reading that? Oh, does it really matter? I mean, it was just a shield!"

For recess snacks, my mother always gave us oranges, unpeeled but cut into sections and secured in sandwich bags, and we'd eat them while trying to memorise things we should have learned. Sometimes, if Roxanne brought extra plum doughnuts or crispy pastries, Marusia and I would share. Even now, whenever I peel an orange and smell the sharp, cool spray from the rind on my fingers, I feel as though I'm crouched by the fountain again, staring at my books and anxiously awaiting twelve-thirty. And I can picture those dusty old maps very clearly, their garish colours unfaded by the passage of time.

It was my father's wish that we attend Ukrainian school. Marusia and I could speak the language well enough-- it was the first we had learned and the

only one spoken at home. I imagine that my mother would have been satisfied with that, and with the way we prayed and printed our names as she had taught us. She was born here, in Toronto, and everything she knew of Ukraine she had learned from the stories and histories of her immigrant parents. It was unofficial knowledge, folksy and familial, and, for my father, not satisfactory. For us, he wanted more; from us, he expected more. It became necessary for us to learn everything about Ukraine, as though the entire country could be liberated by our knowledge of it. Perhaps he felt that we could not understand him without understanding the place he had left but never forgotten. Like so many other DPs, my father had chosen Canada: rumours of a land vast and rolling, untainted by history, unspoilt by tyranny, welcoming and accepting, had been carried by the winds across the ocean. But when he stepped aboard the ship and turned his back on Europe, it was with the resolve to keep his homeland carved forever into his heart. He could embrace Canada, but he would always love Ukraine.

Maybe I've romanticised this. Maybe he loved Canada once, but became disenchanted after not having found his dreams, whatever they may have been. A peasant's son, no education, no skills, unable to master the unruly tongue of Englishmen, stuck in a factory job "with blackies and pakis," working endless shifts plus overtime to pay for his house, his promised piece of Canada. A wife less patriotic than he. Two daughters, no sons. Maybe Ukraine became the promised land because it was not Canada. It was the country over which he had gazed when his future had lain intact before him, and which still held his hopes and desires, ever unrealised but preserved by the grace of time and memory. Maybe he looks at Ukraine on the map and sees what might have been. *If it had not been for the Poles . . . for the insatiable avarice of imperial Russia . . . for Marx and Lenin . . . for Stalin . . . for Hitler*

and the war . . . If it had not been for history. Things may have worked out differently.

I could never wholly comprehend the roots of my father's fervent Ukrainian patriotism, of his unshakable adherence to beliefs brought across the ocean, for the simple fact that, to this day, I know so little about him. All his marvellous stories--of a simple childhood among carts and horses and villagers in Volhynia, of a difficult youth under Nazi occupation--never revealed anything about him as a private, thinking person. I only know him as I would familiar characters in a novel: the happy shepherd, the mischievous but well-intentioned son, the diligent student who read by light of a candle, the louse-infested, starry-eyed DP. Then he became the Ukrainian abroad, exiled from his beloved country and intent on preserving it forever through a glorious bequest to his displaced children. We were to have both the purity of his past and the lost opportunity of his future. My sister and I could but bow to his wishes.

We studied dutifully for the first few years, quietly grumbling about missed morning cartoons but otherwise accepting the amended Saturday routine. Then the work became more complicated, the teachers more demanding, and my sister and I had had enough. But Marusia continued to endure silently, stolidly advancing through the grades, stoic in her unquestioning acceptance of parental demands. I followed one year behind, wildly aggravated and wishing she'd make some complaint. She never did, of course, and I was left to do so for myself.

I knew I had to get out before my parents enrolled me in the fifth grade. I knew what the fifth grade held, that once I was in it I could never escape: I would be in Ukrainian school until the very end, seven interminable years

away. Marusia had gloomily warned me, and I knew exactly what to expect: Pani Holowata was going to be my teacher.

"I don't think I need Ukrainian school anymore," I announced on the morning of registration, my blood pounding in my ears as I slipped into my place at the kitchen table. Marusia raised her eyes from her cream of wheat and stared. "I can read and write good already."

"Read and write *well*," my mother corrected me. "But if the way you speak is any indication . . ."

I shook my head stubbornly. "Marusia says that you spend more time on history and literature than grammar in grade five. So, really, I don't see how useful it will be . . ."

"When did history and literature stop being useful?" my father demanded.

"Um . . . well . . . it's not really anything I have to know for English school and it's so hard to remember all those dates and names I can't understand and it's not really important and I read enough stories anyway and . . ."

"How do you know what's important? You're just child!"

My resolve was fading. All my arguments, so perfect when rehearsed in my mind, had failed. Short of saying "I want to quit because I don't want to be in Pani Holowata's class," I had nothing left.

"You presume to tell me you know enough about your fatherland to leave school? Absolutely not." My father pushed his chair away from the table. "I'll be waiting in the car."

It's not my fatherland, I thought. It's just a place, it's not even a country. I scowled and poked my toast with the jam spoon. A blob of strawberry, red like a bloodclot, fell onto the bread. It was over. Marusia kicked me under the table and mouthed "I told you so." "Shut up," I mouthed

back, and then sighed, already resigned to the fifth grade and seven years of Pani Holowata.

Every child in Ukrainian school knew Pani Holowata. As the school's principal and director, she was the one who greeted your parents when you were registered and assured them of the quality education you were about to receive. You stood there, quiet and ignorant, a lump of clay waiting to be worked upon, while she patted you on the head and told you how lucky you were to have such a mother and father, such wise parents who cared about their culture. She would enable you to fulfill their expectations, and you would never disappoint them.

I spent twelve years of Saturdays in Pani Holowata's school, enrolling as a small child and emerging almost ready for university, yet she never seemed to change as I did. She did not shrivel and soften with the passing years, nor allow for an easy familiarity with her returning students; she was always exactly the same, as though she had been preserved, like an unsmiling face in a sepia photograph. She smelled of chalk dust and stale perfume. She smelled like the dusty old maps in the classroom. Her hair was raven black, coarse and shiny and shot through with streaks of silver. Her face was pinched and narrow, her skin very pale, and as dry and wrinkled as old tissue paper. She looked out at her students from behind square mannish glasses, the colour of her penetrating eyes disguised by smoke-tinted lenses. It was rumoured that she had been married once and that her husband had died years before. "She probably put a spell on him," Roxanne said, and called her *Baba Yaga*, after the ancient she-fiend of Ukrainian folk tales.

I can only understand Pani Holowata by imagining that her actions arose from a belief that children are spoiled by indulgence and prone to idleness

unless disciplined repeatedly. Her intentions were admirable, but her teaching methods, outdated and uncompromising, were as brutal as they were effective. We were all afraid of her. A few parents complained, expecting that their children would learn folk songs and stories without rushing home in tears each Saturday morning. Pani Holowata answered by referring them to different Ukrainian schools in Toronto, ones without her standards: "Those parents just want a babysitting service. They don't want an education."

She was relentless in her desire that we succeed. Every week, she would descend upon different classes and randomly quiz the students to ensure we were fulfilling our part in her parental promise. We would hear her footsteps outside our classroom, the loud *clack* of her shoes echoing through the hall, and hold our breaths while praying for them to pass by. Sometimes they did, and we'd feel the blessedness of prisoners pardoned on the eve of execution. Other times we were not as lucky.

"None of this," Pani Holowata would always say, waving her arms at the maps and books scattered throughout the classroom, "is worth anything unless you try. Or else we might as well go home and forget about Ukraine and about who we are. Why should I struggle to run this school if nobody cares? Now then," her eyes would travel up and down the rows of grimacing children, seeking out signs of guilt and ignorance, deciding who had earned this opportunity for humiliation, "please conjugate the future indicative of 'to cry,' Olga." You would expect her to fly into a rage if you couldn't answer one of her questions, yet she never screamed or shouted in displeasure. Her methods were more subtle and terrifying. She would sigh a martyr's sigh and slowly shake her head, as though she found your ingratitude incomprehensible. "Is it really that difficult to conjugate that verb? I think you are just lazy, maybe. No? Then what, you didn't have time to learn it?" She would cluck her tongue

and fix you with a look, pitiful and disdainful. "If you can't find a minute to learn this verb, how do you expect to speak Ukrainian properly? Or do you not care about learning Ukrainian, you'd rather fool around or watch television? That is very bad. Bad for you, bad for Ukraine, and bad for Canada. Remember, children, to be a good Canadian, you must first be a good Ukrainian." It didn't matter how trivial the question, whether it was the elevation of the Carpathian mountains you forgot, or the second verse of Shevchenko's *Zapovit*. The real transgression lay in your indifference. Pani Holowata inflicted upon you the guilt of a thousand oppressors, as though your apathy was erasing Ukraine from the maps, as though you were no better than a Turk or a Pole or a Russian. You weren't even a Canadian. You were nobody.

Amidst her countless administrative duties and frequent classroom inspections, Pani Holowata also found time to teach. Whether from a lack of funds or teachers, she herself taught grades five through eleven. This was, by far, her least challenging task. Most children only endured a few years of Saturdays, long enough to learn to read crudely and write in simple sentences. And those who remained were already cowed into obedience. You could count the pupils in Pani Holowata's class on your fingers, and I had become one of them.

We were called by our proper names in Ukrainian school, meaningful and unapologetically unanglicised. Danylo, not Danny. Mykola, not Nick. Hanya, Yaroslav and Volodymyr instead of Janet, Russell and Walter. It was the one place, besides church, where I didn't feel my own name to be freakish. *Olga*. I hated it. Out of the mouths of English school teachers it sounded coarse and awkward, I cringed when they called me in class. My friends all had

nice names that everyone could pronounce: Joyce, Leanne, Ariella. I complained about this to my sister, who pointed out that my friends weren't Ukrainian: Joyce was Chinese, Ariella Jewish, and Leanne was just plain Canadian. Of course their names would be normal. And the boys made me loathe mine all the more: *Oily. Ugly. Ogre.* In Ukrainian school, nobody mispronounced it, nobody made fun of it. They said it *Olha*, with a soft *l* melting into the *h*. My mother told me that Olga had been the name of a wise and beautiful queen who ruled over Ukraine a thousand years ago; more importantly, she had been the first Ukrainian convert to Christianity. I tried to explain this to my classmates in English school, but they laughed and said queens aren't called Olga, but Elizabeth and Victoria and Mary.

While I raised scowls and frowns over my name, my sister loved hers. "It's neat," she said. "We have three Kims in my class, and Jennifer Brady and Jennifer Margolyes and Sarah Wiseman and Sarah Douglas, but I'm the only Marusia." She stuck her tongue out at me. "I got the nice name, *Ol-guh*." I wanted to hit her.

It didn't help that every year in Ukrainian school, in every grade, we had to listen to the story of Marusia, the child heroine who selflessly sacrifices her life to save her village. My sister would always sit up very straight during the story, obviously pleased with her literary namesake. We used to have it read to us, but in the older grades we would take turns reading aloud, tripping and stumbling over the words in turn. By the fifth grade, we all knew the story by heart and were tired of it--the novelty had worn off even for my sister--but we found it in our homework assignments all the same. I preferred reading cossack stories, full of blood and horses, or funny folk tales about talking animals, but would never dare to neglect my homework.

Because I knew the story so well, it began to play like a movie in my head, rich with colours and smells and voices. Some details, little ones, like Marusia's face or the sound of her voice, were fuzzy, as undefined as faces in a dream, but the landscape was enduring and familiar. I could see the meadow, broad and grassy, rimmed with round green hills and speckled with red and yellow wildflowers. The sky is very blue and scattered with puffy clouds. Marusia is wearing sombre-coloured rags and a very clean, very white apron embroidered with poppies and cornflowers; her feet are bare and brown, her arms filled with blooms, and her hair braided around her head in thick dark coils. She has flowers stuck in there, too. Suddenly, the ground begins to rumble, a cloud of dust rises in the distance, and, as the rumbling grows louder, a great herd of men on horseback appear over the green crest of a hill. Tartars! Marusia drops her clutch of wildflowers and clasps her hand to her breast, and then they are upon her. "You, peasant girl, take us to your village!" The leader is fierce, his face dark and proud beneath his peaked, fur-trimmed little hat, his nostrils flaring and his eyes scornful and cold (a little like Yul Brynner in *The Ten Commandments*, I always thought). Marusia bows her head, smiles a secret little smile, and nods silently. They leave the meadow, the grass now trampled beneath the hoofs of a hundred horses, red and yellow flowers crushed and torn, and slowly wind their way through woods and wide golden fields. The sky begins to cloud and darken, and the wind whips Marusia's skirts around her legs. "How much farther?" The leader, impatient to begin the kill, asks three times. "Just a little way more," Marusia replies calmly each time. Then they reach a grove, shadowy beneath the thundering sky. Marusia pauses for a second, raises her eyes to Heaven, and enters. The Tartars follow. No one ever emerges. Stories are told the next day. "Tartars burnt the village over the river and slaughtered all the inhabitants!"

"Marusia's nowhere to be found!" "I saw her in the meadow over yonder, but that was yesterday!" Then someone runs into the village clutching a peaked hat, trimmed with fur and stiff with dried gray mud. "A Tartar's cap, found in the quicksand grove!" And everyone would know that Marusia had saved their lives.

I told this story to my friends at English school. It was a rainy lunch hour and the gym, in which we had been penned like cattle, was unbearably noisy. The Thanksgiving weekend began with the end of school that day, and the atmosphere was one of chaos and anticipation; even the teachers had given up the fight for order and stood by the windows, weary and defeated. My friends and I were huddled at our usual lunch table, shouting over the din and describing our plans for the holiday. But neither Joyce's apple-picking expedition nor the visit of Ariella's grandmother could rival the simple beauty of my weekend: Thanksgiving meant no Ukrainian school. It was a rare and delicious chance to sample the life of a normal child.

In her determination to suck the fun out of life as though it were a kind of poison, Pani Holowata had assigned double homework for the holiday. "This will keep you out of trouble," she had said when she wrote our assignments on the blackboard. "Copy it down properly, no mistakes. Grade eights, don't forget the test on Ivan Franko, and grade sixes, you have that oral dictation to review for. And everyone, be prepared to discuss *Marusia* when we return. There may be a quiz, but I haven't yet decided." We groaned in chorus, and she glared back in reply. "What, perhaps I haven't given you enough?"

I described this scene at the lunch table, mimicking Pani Holowata in a painful accent, pleased when my friends dissolved in horrified laughter. Then I recounted the famous *Marusia* story in the goriest of details. I had considered telling them the heroine's name was Olga, but decided not to; it just did not

match. My friends listened attentively and approved of the reference to Yul Brynner, in particular, as we all thought he was the best thing about *The Ten Commandments*.

"Except for Joshua," Ariella said. "He's great. And he's Jewish, too."

"What are Tartars?" Leanne asked, thoughtfully chewing her tuna sandwich. "Did they invent tartar sauce?"

"Or cream of tartar?" Ariella added.

"Yes," I guessed blindly. "Originally. A long time ago. See, they were a tribe from Mongolia, and centuries ago they roamed all over Asia and parts of Europe conquering villages and capturing peasants to use as slaves. They were very brutal."

"Mongolia's a province in China," Joyce offered. "Genghis Khan, was he a Tartar?"

"I don't know. Anyways, he's not in the story."

"Why do you have to read it every year?" Leanne wanted to know. "Did it really happen or something?"

"I know Genghis Khan was real," Joyce spoke through her drinking straws.

"It's not about Genghis Khan. It's about loyalty to your family and beliefs and stuff." I was certain of this. It was explained to me every year. "Marusia would rather die herself than let her family and neighbours be killed." I pretended to stab myself with my carrot stick.

It was gruesome, thrilling, romantic, we agreed. It would make a good movie. We dissected the story and allocated roles to our favourite actors and actresses until the bell rang and we were herded back to class. And we had decided that, despite the heroism of Marusia's actions, a last-minute rescue by a brave and handsome shepherd would be infinitely more appealing.

Because of Ukrainian school, holidays became extra-special. The luxury of a free Saturday was, in fact, almost too much to bear. I wanted to do everything Saturdays were meant for. I'd lie in bed on the Friday night before and plan my day: should I sleep late? wake early and gorge on cartoons? go skating before the rink gets crowded? go to the library for the Saturday morning movie? I wanted to fill my day completely and not waste any of it. Marusia was different; she did not want to do anything. "That's what makes it special," she always said, "not *having* to do anything at all."

Sometimes my father would take us shopping. We would leave early, not for the supermarket where my mother went on Fridays, but for the delicatessens in Bloor West Village. I loved going there, and Marusia, for all her desire to do nothing, would never refuse. It was so European, so like the streets of faraway towns I'd visited in books. The shops were always crowded and the sidewalks filled with people, most of whom were immigrants like my father, most of whom my parents knew from church or the cultural centre. Nowadays, the Village is still a bustling place, but the crowd is a different one: younger, trendy, affluent. The landscape has changed likewise; expensive boutiques and bistros are set amongst the cheese shops and bakeries, potted plants hang from the lamp posts, and coffee bars stand on every corner. There's even a McDonald's and a KFC. Marusia and I sometimes meet friends at the cafés for lavish weekend breakfasts, but otherwise we rarely go, and only once in a while do we see a familiar face.

But my father was forever halting our shopping trips to greet a friend and comment on someone's funeral or on what Brezhnev or Trudeau were doing, and we'd hang onto his arms, silently willing him to hurry up, to get on with our day. We didn't care much for politics--that complicated world of shouting men--but I liked to listen to my father because he made it all seem

very clear: some people were good, others were bad, a few were evil. "That is the way things are; that is what history teaches," he always said. I liked to hear my father speaking to his friends because he sometimes used words that we never heard at home, like *son of a gun*. A whole stream of Ukrainian words and then, suddenly, *son of a gun*. I wanted to laugh, it sounded so funny, but I didn't dare in case I'd heard something I wasn't supposed to.

When he would finally remember us and say "Well, it looks like I've got some hungry animals to take care of," Marusia and I would cheer. We'd follow him to the greengrocers and pick out baskets of sun-warmed peaches and corn on the cob from bushels, then to the delis where we'd buy thick brown sausages and thin ones the colour of oatmeal, blocks of cottage cheese for *varenyky*, and sometimes a slab of freshly-smoked back bacon, the skin still crisp and hard and scored into squares. My father would let us tear off a square or two each which we would crunch noisily, our lips and fingers shiny with grease.

On the Friday evening before Thanksgiving, Marusia and I were drying the dishes when my mother sat down by the kitchen table and began to prepare a shopping list. My sister and I exchanged grins; we could guess what joy our Saturday would bring.

". . . a little smoked turkey . . . Hungarian salami . . . headcheese for sandwiches . . . maybe some of those dark purple grapes, if they have them . . . McIntosh or Courtland, whichever look better . . ."

"Bread?" I reminded her helpfully.

"Three ryes."

"No caraway, write that down," I instructed. "He bought ones with last time." I made a gagging noise.

"Olga, don't," my mother winced.

"Sorry."

"Four kaisers . . . you want an egg bread?"

"Okay. Hey, could we get some cows?" That was the name I gave my favourite candies--creamy, crumbly fudge from Poland, wrapped in yellow-striped paper and decorated with a picture of a cow. I loved them more than anything, and you could only find them in the delis on Bloor. "Please?"

"Well . . . we haven't had any in a long time, have we?" My mother was deeply suspicious of sugar--we never had frosted cereal or even packaged cookies when we were growing up--but she knew how we adored the toothsome sweets. "Okay, then, but only a few!"

"Thank you!" Marusia and I chorused, and I waved my dishcloth in triumph.

My father entered the kitchen. "I just spoke with Pani Holowata." He indicated the telephone, and I felt a stab of panic, wondering what I'd done to merit a phone call home. "She changed her mind and decided to have classes tomorrow. Thanksgiving is a Canadian thing, she said, and we don't have to celebrate it. You girls better start that homework, you might get it done by midnight."

My sister and I stared at each other, jaws agape. My heart plunged to my shoes. "But . . . but," I spluttered, "she can't!"

My father looked very stern, and then his face cracked into lines and wrinkles and he began to laugh. "I'm just joking!"

I looked from him to my sister, and back again, not knowing what to believe. My precious Saturday had been snatched away so callously and then returned in a matter of seconds, all for a lark? "That's not funny!" I began to hit him with my dishcloth.

"Ha ha!" he cackled, fending off my harmless blows. "You should've seen your faces!"

Marusia joined me in attacking him, and my mother was aghast at the sudden uproar in her kitchen. "What is wrong with you all?! I'm making my list! You want me to forget something?!"

"Alright, girls, quiet down and stop bothering your mother," my father laughed.

"You started it!" Marusia and I shrieked, outraged.

"Yes, okay, it was just my little joke. But it was a good one, eh?" He was still chortling.

"Yuri," my mother shook her head and smiled.

"Seriously now, Pani Holowata did call." He picked an apple out of the fruit bowl and began polishing it on his shirt. "There's something wrong with her car and the garage won't have it ready until after the holiday. She asked if we could take her to the supermarket tomorrow, and I said 'Better yet, why not come with us to the Village?'" He bit into the apple and looked pleased. The Good Samaritan.

I watched my father's face and waited for the laughter, but this time it did not come. Pani Holowata was to spend my Saturday with me in my favourite place in the whole world. Even if it meant a stolen holiday and long night of homework, I would have preferred this second announcement of my father's to have been the joke.

It was not yet noon and already the shops and sidewalks were swarming with the Saturday crowd. People were everywhere: hurrying to complete errands, pausing to sample a freshly-baked pastry, clutching shopping bags in one hand and a screaming child in the other. And inside the shops, the

butchers in splotted aprons were busy with their cleavers, and the fat ladies in hair nets were smiling from behind their counters. Everything was as I had anticipated in my little corner of Europe. Almost everything, for though the scene was the same as always, the feeling it gave me was different. It was gone.

Pani Holowata had disappeared into one of the delicatessens with my father. Neither Marusia nor I joined them and chose instead to sit on a bench outside, guarding the baskets of grapes and McIntosh between us. Neither one of us spoke.

As expected, the presence of our teacher had cast a pall over the morning. It was as though a giant shadow had fallen over Bloor West Village, changing the tint of the air and making every footfall on the sidewalk before us just a little out of step. I knew that the special Saturday morning ritual with my father would never be the same; the significance of this place had been changed forever. Pani Holowata had changed it.

She had climbed into our car with a formal "Good Morning" and an apologetic air, as though she had anticipated our feelings of resentment and inconvenience. "When the mechanic said 'after the holiday,' I didn't know what to do," she had sighed, wringing her hands as though to emphasise her suffering. "My children are coming to visit on Monday, but how can I prepare anything if my cupboards are empty? I am really grateful to you."

"It's no trouble, really," my father had replied. "We were going anyway, right girls?"

"Yes," Marusia had mumbled.

I had refused to speak and sat, morose and hostile, glowering at the back of my teacher's head. Neither my sister nor I wanted to be there. Both of us had lost our desire to go after my father's Friday announcement, but my

mother would not let us back out. "Just go and enjoy the morning as you always do. Just pretend she's not there."

"Pretend she's not there?!" I had cried. "Are you serious?!"

But my mother had stood firm. "She's not going to ruin anything, Olga. She's not poisonous, for Heaven's sake."

So Marusia and I had been awakened early, as always on a shopping Saturday, buckled into the back seat and told to smile and have fun. We had dutifully followed our father and Pani Holowata from store to store, as silent as shadows. And now we sat glumly on the bench, waiting for the morning to come to an end.

"Finally!" Marusia said, yawning, when we saw our father and Pani Holowata emerge from the delicatessen. "I think there's only the bakery left."

Pani Holowata stood before us. "Here, girls, these are for you." She awkwardly thrust out her bony hand, offering me a paper bag.

I took it hesitantly. "What is it?"

"A little something. You both have been very polite and well-behaved. It is a pleasure to see, especially among today's children."

I opened the bag and peeked inside. "Cows! Look!" I showed them to Marusia.

"Thank you, Pani," she said.

"Yes, thank you," I echoed, dazed. "Do you think we could have one?"

Pani Holowata laughed. "They're yours, you don't have to ask me!"

"Go on," my father nodded. "Thank you, Pani Holowata, but you shouldn't have."

She shrugged. "It's only a trifle. I appreciate you coming to my aid as you did. And your girls have helped to make my morning so nice, as they do in school each Saturday."

Marusia and I exchanged looks of surprise. Pani Holowata liked us? Impossible. She didn't like anyone; she was *Baba Yaga*. I sucked on the candy, its intense sweetness almost hurting my teeth, and listened to the conversation between my father and teacher. The feeling of discontent which had persisted all morning had grown stronger. Something was not quite right, and it wasn't just that Pani Holowata had invaded my world. She seemed different herself, in a way that my picture of her could not accommodate.

People are so complicated, I thought. How is it that my father could make things simple, and easily refer to people as good or bad or even evil? How did he know? To me, it no longer seemed reasonable to decide that anyone was good or bad exclusively--it was possible that they were all of those things. Just because you only knew a person in one situation did not mean that they were always the same.

Outside the classroom, the Pani Holowata I had known was sapped of her power. *Baba Yaga* became just a woman, a widow, somebody's mother. Perhaps she had just been misunderstood. Perhaps if I remembered her as she appeared today and tried to like her, the next seven years would not be so miserable after all. I felt ashamed for having misjudged her. I walked carefully along the crowded sidewalk, the bag of candies weighing heavily in my hand.

Marusia nudged me. "Hey, Olga, isn't that Ariella?" She pointed towards the opposite side of the street.

"Where?" I asked, turning my head. "I didn't know her parents came shopping here!"

"I didn't think they could do anything today. It's their Sabbath, I think. David explained it to us when we did World Religion." David, Ariella's older brother, was in Marusia's class in school.

"Maybe they're just window-shopping. Look, that must be their grandmother. Ariella said she'd be visiting."

Ariella and her brothers led their procession, as Marusia and I did ours, and behind them came their father, pushing a baby stroller. Her mother and a gray-haired lady--her grandmother, I guessed--followed arm in arm. They weren't carrying any bags or baskets, they were just walking, looking into shop windows and pointing at the bushels of potatoes and cabbage that spilled onto the sidewalk. Ariella was wearing a nice red coat--nice like my Sunday best--and she looked as bright as a strawberry. I wanted to catch her eye, to wave across the street and say "Look! No school today, I'm free!"

"Oh!" Pani Holowata exhaled sharply. "A *zhyd*," she narrowed her eyes and nodded her head towards the other sidewalk, "with all his *zhydnyiatka*."

A Jew with all his little Jews.

Ariella's family.

"What are they doing here?" my father said. "Son of a gun, are they creeping into this neighbourhood, too?"

I grew cold all over, my tongue frozen in my mouth. *A Jew with all his little Jews*. The words were meaningless. I knew Ariella was Jewish, and that was the reason David, Adam and their father were wearing those little skullcaps. Pani Holowata could have said *a lion with all his cubs* or *a frog and his tadpoles* and it would not have made any difference. It was her manner of speaking, and my father's ready assent, that made the words so terrible. Neither of them even knew Ariella's family, and yet they spoke with such unqualified loathing. Their contempt was something tangible, as clear and solid as an icicle, the word *zhyd* pointing like a jagged icy spear across the street. I was more confused than ever and could not speak.

And then I noticed a blur of red. Ariella, in her strawberry coat, was waving from across the street. I couldn't hear her, as her voice was lost amidst the din of cars and people, but I could see her through the crowded sidewalk, as bright and silent as a beacon.

"Olga," Pani Holowata tapped me on the shoulder. "Do you know that girl?"

I looked from Ariella to my teacher. I could feel her scrutinizing me through those glasses and, unable to meet her gaze, fixed my eyes on the bag of candies instead. "No, I don't."

"I didn't think so," she snorted. "She's confused you with someone else."

My inside felt hollow. I could hear my heart thumping and echoing throughout my chest, rattling my ribs and shaking my lungs, making my breath ragged. I sent silent messages to Marusia. *Please don't say anything. Please don't say anything.* And she didn't. She just looked down at the sidewalk as we walked towards the bakery. Behind us, my father and Pani Holowata were talking about rye bread.

It was with relief and not dread that I greeted the Saturday following Thanksgiving. Usually, I thought the holiday too short and the return to school too quick and sobering, but now I had found myself longing for the established weekly routine. It was not Ukrainian school which I had missed, to be certain, but rather the familiar patterns of my life into which were woven that musty classroom, that desk with its chair attached, and those ancient tattered maps.

I returned to school no longer as afraid of Pani Holowata. It was not because of the gift of cows--they had gone uneaten after Saturday. I did not fear her presence in school anymore because I could be certain whom I would

encounter: the eternal, incorrigible *Baba Yaga*. It was beyond the walls of her classroom that she had left me stunned and shaken.

When Ariella told me that she had seen me on Saturday, I had tried my best to look surprised. "Why didn't you say 'Hi' or wave or something?" I had asked, forcing a smile.

"I did, but you didn't see me."

"No, I didn't. That's too bad." I felt terrible after I had spoken, guilty and treacherous. I hated telling lies--it always left me feeling weak and oily, a cheap imitation of myself--but I was unable to think of the truth fast enough. It was as though the world had no more rules and I had been left to improvise. The return to my Saturday routine let me imagine that nothing had changed.

"You have all read it, I assume." Pani Holowata waved her well-worn copy of *Marusia* in front of the class. "Have you thought about what she does? Have you considered her courage?" Yes, a million times, I thought. "She knows the right thing to do, and she is not afraid of doing it. Would any of you do the same? Victor? Lydia? Tell me, Olga," she said, tapping my desk with a corner of the book, "would you?"

I sat quietly. The expected answer was, obviously, "Yes, Pani, I would." But I could not say it. How could I save my village? I don't live in a village, I wanted to say, I live in a bungalow. And there are no Mongol hoards threatening to rampage through Toronto. How can I be a heroine without a village and Mongol hoards? And then my name is all wrong. How could I be a heroine with a name like Olga? *Oily*. *Ugly*. *Ogre*. Even my beloved Queen Olga was lost in the murk of the past, her wisdom and beauty so foreign to my wretchedness that my own name was bled of meaning. "I don't know," I half-shrugged, picking at the corner of my notebook, avoiding Pani Holowata's eyes behind their smoky lenses.

"Hmph!" she said triumphantly. "What kind of answer is that? Would you forsake your people? Answer me, Olga."

"No."

"Remember where you come from before anything else. Remember what history teaches. And may God help you if you ever forsake your people!" She opened her book. "Who is going to read first? How about our own Marusia!"

The movie began with my sister's voice. I saw everything before me, as always--the sky, the meadow, Yul Brynner--but something felt terribly out of place. I'd given the wrong answer. Suddenly, I was Marusia. Her face, for once clear and distinct, was mine, but I was changing the story. I was leading the Tartars to my village. I was running through meadows and brambles and shouting "Follow me!" I was swirled in clouds of dust, surrounded by towering horses and spears, and choked by a rage so incomprehensible that I could only taste its bitterness. I shook my head, trying to dissolve the picture into harmless colours and sounds, and looked around the room. My sister read quickly and steadily in a small, breathless voice, watched by the sharp eyes of Pani Holowata. Lydia was sharing her book with Tamara, who always followed the words on the page with her finger, Victor was yawning, Adrian was trying to stick a pencil in Roxanne's braid undetected. Nothing was different, and yet I sat there with my face burning, thinking everyone could see that my movie was all different now.

Legacy

The announcement fell out of the sky like a meteorite. They were going to Scotland. They were going to spend four weeks in places named Glasgow, Fort William, Oban, and Aberdeen, and Billy and I were not to go with them. We were instead being sent to St. Catharines, in the green Niagara valley, to stay with our Baba.

It was the end of June when they told us, and school was about to break for the summer. They would be gone for half of July and half of August, stealing those weeks which had always belonged to the cottage and sentencing us to a month alone with our grandmother. Billy was despondent; "Why can't we go, to-oo? Why do we have to go to Baba's? Why can't you take us with yoo-ou?" he would bleat feebly. I could not share in his peevish disappointment, for I didn't feel as much excluded as I did betrayed. How long had they been planning this? Why hadn't they told us earlier? Did they think we wouldn't mind? Hurt and enraged, I imagined them plotting their voyage in secret, shaping their scheme through whispers and glances; while Billy and I had gabbled on about swimming lessons and other rituals of summer, they had been thinking of Scotland.

Glasgow. Fort William. I repeated the names, rolling them around on my tongue as though they were candy. *Oban. Aberdeen.* These were the cities and towns of my mother's family: aunts, uncles and countless cousins, one brother, one grandfather even, ninety and drooling and tucked away in a home by the sea. These were the people my parents were going to visit, that collective known as "the Stewarts" or "Mum's family." Some of them had visited Canada, a brief stay at our house distinguishing them from an otherwise anonymous mass of relations. I liked meeting them--those people I'd

only known from snapshots and Christmas cards—even though their visits meant I'd have to give up my room and share with Billy.

Their visits always turned our house upside down. They would bring us presents: shortbread and fudge, silver brooches, bottles of whisky for my father, toys for Billy, glossy posters and books for me. They would tell fabulous stories: scandalous tales of relatives back home, anecdotes about my mother's childhood, accounts of football matches and hernia operations and holidays in Penzance. I loved their stories; I could almost see Scotland before me as I listened, the shapes of words transformed by Scottish tongues and assembled into a fabulous jigsaw in my mind. Even my mother would begin to sound different, a tiny accent, a gentle lilt, creeping into her voice when she spoke. And they were loud, very loud; everyone whooped and roared, as though the ferocity with which they laughed and reminisced could make up for the years lost between them. But these visitors never stayed very long, just a week or two, during which we would drag them around the CN Tower, the Eaton Centre, and City Hall. Then they would go back to their homes in Scotland having seen Toronto and "Alice's family," and our house would be quiet and still once again. But I liked the idea that people living so far away knew of our existence; even though there were thousands of miles between us, I felt as though we became more real, and less alone, because of them. Our mutual acquaintance was like a gossamer thread spun across the ocean, stretching and quivering where once, I felt, there was nothing.

My mother had been born in Scotland and had spent her childhood on the lip of the Great Glen, in Fort William. It was a place she recalled as spectacularly hilly and perpetually rainy and grey. "I grew up almost at the foot of Ben Nevis but couldn't see it half the time for the fog," she would say. "It always seemed to be raining up there on the mountain." She had a

photograph which she would show, almost as proof. It was of two children dancing in the rain in a dripping green garden, laughing with open mouths, utterly oblivious of the camera. My mother and her brother, aged eight and ten. When she was twelve, her family had moved to Canada. They had chosen to settle in Vancouver, perhaps because the drizzle, the wetness, the green and rocky rising peaks were consoling and familiar. She had last seen Scotland almost fourteen years ago, just before she married my father and made Toronto her home. Her brother, my uncle Neil, had gone to Glasgow to study and had ended up falling in love, and my mother had returned for his wedding. But fourteen years was a great span of time; she would be returning to her homeland much changed.

Not once that summer did I think my mother might have felt anything but pleasure at the prospect of a journey back to Scotland. I imagine my lingering sense of betrayal made it impossible for me to see my parents as anything but self-satisfied and faintly tyrannical, anticipating their voyage with ruthless delight. My view of the world then was still a childish one, brilliantly coloured by contrasts and extremes: good and bad, light and darkness, life and death, truth and lies. There were no compromises; before that summer, nothing was dappled, shady, bittersweet. I agonised over my ruined summer before the holiday even began, hating my parents, certain that a month of misery lay just beyond the shadow of their airplane. I resented them, their callousness, their absolute power over my happiness. I never even thought to ask "Why now, after fourteen years? Why suddenly now?"

It wasn't until after their voyage that this suddenness was explained to us: my uncle Neil was found to have cancer, quick and spreading, and that summer offered my mother one final chance to see him. We had been kept in

ignorance, our summer holiday deliberately unmarred by thoughts of death. He died that October, two months to the day following their return.

It was only an hour's drive to Baba's. I had told myself that if she lived further away--further west, perhaps, like Alberta--my parents would have had nowhere to leave us, and we would have gone traveling with them. As it was, St. Catharines made a sorry substitute for Scotland, and my sour old grandmother could not rival the lively relatives I had once met and longed to see again. She wasn't funny or outrageous as they were, but reticent, seemingly dull, shamefully old. She would groan and mutter whenever she sat down or stood up, as though she threatened to rupture from the effort. She had a peculiar smell, musty and garlicky, like the cupboard under the sink. You couldn't breathe when she hugged you; you'd be smothered by her enormous breasts, and stifled by her heat and smell. And she never told stories like those I had heard from my mother's family, but if she ever did, you probably wouldn't have understood them through her thick Ukrainian accent.

"Hedderr . . . Beelee . . ." I would breathe in heartless parody, and stagger heavily around the living room with outstretched arms, "kom end geev Baba a keess."

I was twelve then, and perhaps my unforgiving cruelty was no different from that of any other adolescent. I saw her as embarrassingly foreign, ludicrously outdated, a fossil washed ashore from distant seas. From the Black Sea, to be precise, from the grim and dour Soviet Union. Whenever I thought of the Ukrainian S.S.R., images of tanks and peasants and cabbages paraded through my mind; there was nothing sweeping and romantic about it, nothing dramatic or noble; it was a land made grey by the bleakness of communism and the vague and terrifying shadows of nuclear weapons. What I knew of

Ukraine I had learned from newspapers or the television. My grandmother revealed little, my father rarely spoke of his family's background, and, before that summer, I had never been curious enough to ask. Rather, I remember being annoyed with him for not having been Scottish, like my mother. I remember thinking that if he were, I could feel that I truly belonged to that marvellous place and shared more than a few drops of blood with those distant relations I had met and liked immensely. Instead, I was split, torn between two countries and living in a third, and feeling as though I did not belong anywhere.

I would not have minded as much if my father had come from a different country. Sometimes, I imagined how sophisticated I would be if I were half French or Danish or Italian. Swedish would also be good, and Russian or German would make me seem imperial and coolly elegant. But being Ukrainian was like being Hungarian, Polish, or Czech: sadly second-class. I didn't care for it, not at all. I did not want to inherit the messy histories of Eastern Europe; I did not want to be tarnished by such oppression and drudgery, such obvious foreignness, but I was, indelibly. Half of me had been marked, as though by a scar, and it was something I could not disguise however earnestly I tried. It appeared in my own last name--Kowalyk--the name of my father's family. But he was himself a Canadian, born in St. Catharines, raised in the house which became my home for the summer. My grandmother was one remaining Ukrainian, and I was ashamed of her and of the world to which she bound me. After my mother's parents had passed away in Vancouver, she was the only family we had in Canada, but I felt like the distance between us was further than the drive from Toronto to St. Catharines.

That July was endless sunshine. It fell upon the earth relentlessly, burning through the hazy film spread over the summer sky and smothering the land below with unbroken waves of heat. The air was moist and thick, almost too thick to breathe, and it clogged the Niagara valley, faint summer breezes gasping and dying before they could rise. It left us stale and weary, and searching the sky for the smallest sign that a change would come.

Billy had wanted to sleep in our father's old room, but it was the biggest one after Baba's and so became mine for the summer. "Heather is older," had been her simple reply to his grouching. "You are a little boy, little enough to sleep in the closet. You will have the room next to me." I had remained silent as she spoke, determined not to reveal how much her decree had pleased me. I did not want her thinking I felt grateful and kindly towards her; I wanted her to see how much I would prefer to be in Scotland. Billy had made a face, unsatisfied. If we had been at home, he would have continued complaining, making tragic eyes and droning on dispiritedly, but he knew things would be different at Baba's. She had her own rules, and we had been firmly instructed not to cross her.

Although she wasn't particularly tall, Baba cast an imposing shadow. She was stout and solidly built, with strong arms and legs and a thick waist, above which hung her generous bosom. Even her name sounded sturdy: Vera, which, she said, meant "faith" in Ukrainian. Around her house, she wore light and colourful shapeless cotton dresses with large patch pockets which bulged perpetually with kleenex and clothespins. They made her body resemble a rectangle, a solid block of flesh out of which four limbs protruded. She looked like a fortress: impenetrable, silent, enduring. It was impossible to imagine that she could ever have looked any different.

I would wake early each morning, the cries and calls of songbirds filtering

through my windows, my bed a tangle of sheets kicked off in the night, and peek through the curtains at the sky already washed in blue and grey. I would see Baba below, working in her garden before the sun got too hot. She would be wearing rubber boots and one of her summer dresses, with a wide-brimmed straw hat tied under her chin. Sometimes she would be picking raspberries, which we would later find on the kitchen table and sprinkle on our cereal. Other times, she would be strolling barefoot over the lawn, slowly walking back and forth and around the trees. Dew, she insisted, was healthy to walk in first thing in the morning. It was something they had done in Ukraine. Once, when I had ventured outside just after rising, there she was, out on the softly glistening grass. She had held out her hand, inviting me to join her, but I shook my head and clung sleepily to the porch. She had shrugged and continued her simple morning ritual, leaving dark footprints over the silvered lawn.

Baba's house was an island in a sea of green. It stood in the middle of a wide and grassy yard which was dotted here and there with cherry trees, the remnants of an ancient orchard. At the very back, furthest from the house, Baba's vegetable plot stretched for the entire width of the garden; she tended to it as though it grew children, and was rewarded with lush sorrel, fat tomatoes and beets, and tangled vines heavy with cucumbers and zucchini. There were the raspberry bushes growing by the fence along one side, as well as clumps of current and gooseberry shrubs and spreading fans of rhubarb. The rest of the garden was given over to flowers, which grew in masses of pinks and violets and scented the summer air with their spicy-sweet fragrance.

The house was set far back from the road, the front lawn rolling gently and endlessly in between. On summer afternoons, most of it would be speckled with shade from the oaks growing in a row along the periphery, or from the large magnolia which rose up before the house, its trunk cleaving into two

brown branches which twisted up towards the broad green leaves above. The house itself was big and old, a solid, red brick farmhouse with narrow windows and gingerbread trim painted pale green to match the shutters. There was a large porch in the front, and its posts and railings breathed with ivy and dark purple clematis. That's where I liked to spend the long afternoons that summer, lost in my novels or notebook, concealed in a bower of cool creeping vines.

Inside the house, it was always gloomy and dark, even in the daytime. Baba kept the drapes closed and the windows shut, to keep the summer dust and heat outside, opening them only in the evening after the sun had almost set. There was no air-conditioner, not even a ceiling fan, so the air in the house would fill my lungs and make me choke. Every room felt this way. Each one held the same kind of heavy dark furniture, as though every piece had been carved from the same immense tree. And everything was overlaid with a cover: scratchy woolen blankets lay atop the beds and sofas, and crocheted doilies or elaborately embroidered mats were spread over tables and shelves, which themselves were scattered with knick knacks and dozens of photographs on display. Even some of the framed pictures on the wall-- Byzantine ikons of stern-faced Jesuses and sorrowful Marys--were draped with similar embroidered cloths, hanging like little mantles. Everything in the house felt close. Everywhere I felt hot and crowded, although the house was large, the rooms wide and ceilings high, and there were only three of us ever about. I escaped to the porch whenever I could, and sometimes just sat there, gasping in the hot summer air and staring at the wide stretching sea of grass, or at the magnolia with its brown arms upturned in supplication to the sky.

My father's old bedroom stood in a corner of Baba's house, and two of its

walls yawned bright with windows. I could either look over the big green backyard, or out at the row of tall, noble oaks which bordered the side lawn like a row of sentries, and, if the blinds were up, I could even lie in bed and see the sky. But if I looked the other way, above my head, I could see the ikon which hung on the wall over the bed, and a very sad and disapproving Jesus would look back down upon me. There were similar ikons in every bedroom, draped in their little mantles with pussy-willow branches balanced on top. The first day we were at Baba's, Billy had gotten in trouble for knocking his off the wall with the end of a mop while trying to get the pussy-willows. I left mine alone, and grew accustomed to having Jesus looking over me as I slept.

At night, my room was wrapped in silence. Billy's and Baba's bedrooms were on the opposite side, facing the front lawn and far enough away so that their steady snores and mumblings melted into the muted creaks and sighs of any old house. The only perceptible sounds were those of occasional cars passing by on the road far away, the lonely chirping of crickets, and the whispering from the garden as the breezes brushed through the trees. I liked leaving the window blinds rolled up so that the curtains would billow gently over me, the night air smelling clean and faintly damp, touched by dew, so different from the crushing, withering heat of day. The night always seemed so much darker here than in Toronto, and the stars looked hard and bright, like bits of broken glass glittering against the inky sky. I would lie in bed and look at them, and at the shifting slivers of moon, and could almost believe myself alone in the world.

In the dense quiet of the night I would tell myself stories. Exciting, melodramatic stories, as real as anything I had ever seen or read. Only at night was this possible; the world in daylight was filled with noise and clutter, and I was imperceptible, my being no more significant than that of a bug. But

at night, the world became mine. I was the noise and the light; I put words into mouths and made bodies move; I made everything connect. People would dance before my eyes, flesh-and-blood mingling with figures I'd met only in books. Places I'd seen would melt into those I'd created. I would imagine everything so clearly, so intricately, that I sometimes felt as though I could step into my stories and find that they were real.

I loved detail: weather, clothing, music, plates of food and goblets of wine, even sunshine and moonlight would all be imagined exactly. Sometimes, I would become so involved in arranging the minutiae of people and places that I would begin drifting off before the story had even begun. Already half-asleep, I would feel my mind wandering as though in a trance of its own making, sometimes melting my stories together, and other times dissolving them entirely, replacing them with images of downy clouds and soft grass fields and the warm sinking feeling of slipping through consciousness. Rarely did I return to an unfinished story the following night; I usually began anew, and filed the old one away in my mind to recall when the mood which had formed it returned. I was my own private, endlessly expanding library.

My father appeared in many of my stories that summer, not as I knew him then--a solid, reticent pillar of a man--but as he once had been--a gap-toothed, scrape-kneed, sturdy little boy. As I lay in his old bed beneath his old ikon, I could not help but think of him; the room inspired me, as though I could perceive invisible imprints of his childhood lingering in the corners, under the bed, drifting in the darkness. In Baba's living room, there were photographs of him on the television which had surprised and impressed me: dressed as an altar boy, swimming in gold-spangled vestments; wearing a sunhat and digging a trench in the sandy shore of a bay; smiling shyly from the green porch steps. I knew so little about his childhood that the figures caught by the camera were

all foreign ones, small male strangers who shared only my father's eyes. At night, they would reappear before me, and I would make up stories about them.

Unlike my mother, my father rarely spoke about his childhood. When he did, all he offered us were scanty bits of information, as colourless and dry as sawdust: he had grown up without any brothers or sisters, his parents had spoken only Ukrainian at home, he had gone to school on Saturdays, his Christmases had come in January. No stories, no anecdotes, no rollicking shouts of laughter. No aunts or uncles stopped by to reminisce--there were none--and no cousins, either. There was only Baba, and she never said much about anything and hardly ever laughed. Repulsed by its inevitable association with her and Ukraine, I had never cared enough about my father's past to ask for details. I was drawn to my mother's side of the family instead; I was awed by her relatives, enchanted by their dreamy tales of Scotland and centuries of Stewarts, intoxicated by the idea that I was like a tiny knot at the end of a long thin thread stretching far back into the past. But in spite of their stories, or perhaps because of them, I felt only half-formed. Dizzy with history, I considered my father's past only enough to wish it were different. My unwanted Slavic half remained unknown to me, and part of my past was left blank, smooth and lifeless, as cold as a sheet of ice.

In my stories about my father, I made up what I did not know. I was weaving an elaborate tapestry, taking those bland scraps of my father's I knew to be true and embroidering them with brilliant ribbons of colour: carnelian, cobalt, aquamarine, glossy luminous strands of silver and gold plucked from my imagination. The results, I thought, were beautiful.

My parents sent us postcards. We would find one in the letterbox every few days and read them to Baba, who was always anxious to hear how

everyone was. They were all sent from Glasgow, mostly describing the weather and listing relatives my parents had seen, and included cheery hellos from Uncle Neil and Aunt Alison. They also contained instructions--*Remember to make your beds* and *Heather, make sure Billy puts his toys away*--things we'd heard a hundred times in the weeks before the trip.

We waited for the postman each day at noon. Already wilted from the midday heat, we would loiter on the porch steps until we saw him. "When are they going to Fort William?" Billy would ask me each day while we were waiting; he had been promised a special souvenir from the town that shared his name. When the postman finally appeared at the far end of the driveway, my brother would brave the blazing sun and run eagerly to the letterbox, as though the card would vanish if not read immediately.

Almost two weeks had passed since our parents had left us at Baba's. While I had expected the month to linger for the length of eternity, the first half had slipped by quickly, unnoticed. Days and nights slid seamlessly into each other, all distinction blurred by the unchanging weather and unbroken rhythms of our daily routine: sleeping, eating, helping around the house, waiting for the postman. We tidied our rooms. We scrubbed potatoes in the steamy kitchen. We swept the porch and struggled to mow the endless rolling lawn, which had begun to yellow in patches from the sun. We were slowed and stilled by the summer heat; every action was sluggish and deliberate, as though we were moving underwater. Baba worked in her garden in the mornings, then, as the sun rose higher in the hazy sky, she would settle into her chair on the porch with her embroidery. I would hear her softly counting stitches under her breath as I stretched out beside her and devoured my novels.

Billy was the only one not bothered by the heat; he would run and play as though immune to it. He generally occupied himself arranging noisy

intergalactic altercations between his Star Wars and G.I. Joe figurines, demanding that I join him under the trees in the yard or amidst the leafy plants and soft cushions in the living room. His requests made me tired and cross. When my chores had been finished and the day finally became my own, I was not willing to waste any of it playing with my brother. I never did at home, but because there were no children his age around Baba's house, I was expected to keep him amused. But I resisted, preferring the quiet company of books and their undemanding, perfect people. Baba would sometimes suggest that I give in and join him, that I might regret not having done so when I grew too old to play, but I would scowl and shake my head, resenting her implications that I was still of playing age, wishing more than ever to be left alone. She would shrug and offer to play with him herself, but he would scamper away, leaving us in silence on the porch.

At least once a day, the summer stillness would be shattered by cries from the backyard--"Come down from there! You want to fall and break your bones?! Then what will you do?!"--or, from some unseen corner of the house--"Put that back! That is not a toy!" Billy was everywhere. He was a comet, a cannonball, a colliding force of nature; irrepressible; exhausting.

Baba tried to make him take afternoon naps.

"But I'm not tired!" he would wail as she shepherded him up the stairs and into his bedroom.

"Yes you are," she would reply firmly, directing him towards the bed. "Now shush. I will wake you up in half an hour."

"Half an hour?!"

"Yes. Don't you want to grow up big and strong? For that, you need sleep. Half an hour is perfect." She would close the door behind her with a great sigh. "Peace and quiet! At last!"

But even that was fleeting. Billy would periodically open the window in his bedroom and call mournfully to us, like a fairy-tale prince imprisoned in a tower, as we sat on the porch below: "Is it half an hour yet? . . . You won't forge-et, will you? . . . Can't I come down now? Ple-e-ease?"

My mother had once said that Billy was a Stewart through and through. "He's a character, that one," my father had agreed. So am I, I wanted to say, but next to him, I wasn't; I was too quiet, too boring. Not in the least like anyone in my mother's family, that was certain. But my brother was a little sparkler: bright and dazzling, pure energy impossible to control. He charmed everyone, and even Baba could not stay angry with him for long. He was like a rambunctious puppy, altogether too adorable to scold.

Billy was small for his age, and skinny--all knees and elbows. "He makes you want to feed him," Baba always said, gathering him up in a hug. Unlike me, he was usually very pale, in the summer darkening only enough to look dirty. He had the clever little face of an imp and eyes like shiny brown buttons, perpetually inquisitive, stubborn, and sparked with mischief. And his hair only added to his elflike appearance. It was light brown and straight, and fit around his head as neatly as a mushroom cap. But in the front it swirled into a cowlick, and two clumps of hair stuck straight up out of his bangs like a little pair of feelers. They would bob and sway whenever he shook his head, and if he was cold they'd tremble, too. He never seemed to notice or care--not until later, that is, when he discovered girls--although everyone else was bothered by them. "Time to get your horns trimmed?" my father would say whenever he'd enter the kitchen to find my mother brandishing a pair of scissors and Billy bound in an old towel and perched on a chair. It didn't matter how often she attacked his head with a wet comb or how heavily she plastered his bangs to his forehead; as soon as the hair dried, the antennae would pop up again.

Baba left his hair alone. "As long as he's clean, I don't care what he looks like," she said. She concerned herself with our diet instead. We had brought along a box of our favourite foods, prepared by my mother with the intention of making the month a little more pleasant for us and a little less demanding for our grandmother. But Baba had her own ideas. "No wonder that boy is wild!" she had snorted, sorting through the box contemptuously. Peanut butter, saltines, and cheese slices she set aside; the rest she put away to send back home with us: packages of hot dogs and sliced bologna, macaroni and cheese, tins of chicken noodle soup and chocolate pudding, sugary cereals, creme-filled cookies: "Nobody eats *that* in *this* house." Instead, she fed us rolled pancakes filled with cottage cheese, tomatoes and cucumbers from the garden, crunchy pickles, stewed rhubarb, pork chops with mushroom sauce, and, so cool on the hottest summer evenings, dilled potatoes doused with creamy-cold buttermilk. We had wrinkled our noses the first night at dinner, when Baba had placed before us bowls of bright red soup dotted with tiny islands of sour cream. She had told us that it was a sin to refuse it when thousands of starving people in the world would be very grateful for such a nourishing bowl of *borscht*. "They can have mine, then," Billy had muttered, inspecting a sliver of cabbage dangling limply from his spoon. But Baba had put an end to our griping with one severe look. We ate.

It was at Baba's that summer, in the delicious, fragile quiet of morning, that I first began to write. It was something I had never done before, even though my head was filled with stories and peopled with figures so real that I could almost feel them breathing. I would try sometimes, on those days when I felt clever and confident, but I could never completely transform the scenes I had formed in my head into simple words on a page. I could never capture the

feeling of what it was I wanted to say, and would throw down my pencil in a rage, choked by frustration and stung to tears by my own ineptitude. Writing appeared so natural a process, so delightfully simple (books read so easily--surely it was not impossible to write them?), so engagingly pleasant a task. But I was impatient and savagely critical. The right words were as slippery as eels, and they eluded me; I could sense them, I could feel them, I could not catch them and make them speak for me.

I had brought my notebook with me to Baba's. It was small and thick, never before used, with a cover as hard as a turtle's shell. It was brightly bound in red-and-white plaid, and had come from a stationer's in Glasgow; Uncle Neil had brought it for me on his last visit. Billy had laughed as we opened our packages--"Heather got an empty book!"--and shoved his smirking Loch Ness monster in my face. But I had liked it immediately--all those creamy bare pages, waiting to be written upon.

"That's Dress Stewart," Uncle Neil had said, tapping the hard cover. "It's your tartan, Heather."

"I'm not a Stewart," I had replied, embarrassed. "I'm a Kowalyk."

"Ach, there's plenty of Stewart inside, I know it."

This had greatly pleased me, almost as much as the notebook itself. But I had been reluctant to use it, afraid of pressing it open and cracking its spine, unwilling to spoil its pristine pages with my simple scrawl. It demanded elegance and drama. It deserved a tale worth telling. I possessed none of these, and had been saving my notebook for the day when I suddenly would.

And that summer, I began, cautiously, precisely, painfully, to write.

I wrote mostly from boredom at first. It was at the start of our third week at Baba's that I grew weary of my novels. I had always looked upon books as my escape to another, more wonderful, place, but when I had time

enough to read all I wanted, my novels became tiresome and I became distracted. But there was nothing else with which to pass the time: the crackly black-and-white television only caught three channels, I did not want to learn embroidery, and I was not about to play with my brother. The days began to grow very long; the sun would creep in its half-circle through the sky and the lingering hours would stretch before me in countless empty minutes. It was too hot to invent fresh distractions to devour each day, and writing was something I knew swallowed days whole. And one morning, I pulled my lovely plaid notebook out of my suitcase, and, wincing as I smoothed open its pages, began to write a story about my father.

It seemed the easiest topic to tackle, as I had been thinking about him the whole summer. I wrote by the little table on the porch, furtively hunched over my notebook, afraid that someone would peek over my shoulders and laugh at my efforts. Baba would frown and tell me to sit up before my spine grew crooked and my eyes crossed, but I would ignore her. I wrote slowly, agonising over every word, unwilling to mar my notebook with blotches of ink, crossed-out letters and misspelt words, although I invariably did. It was not the elegant beginning I had envisioned upon first opening my notebook, but I was finally writing.

I had wanted to write a story about my father as an altar boy. It was my favourite photograph of him. He looked so funny--dark-eyed and sombre, draped in a glittering golden robe like a tiny gilded butterfly--that I desperately wanted to include him in a story. But I couldn't: I didn't know what altar boys actually did. And I couldn't remember the church well enough to describe it accurately. We had only been there once, when I had been Billy's age, and I could only remember it in pieces: soaring painted walls; sombre, staring ikons like the one in my father's bedroom; gold and crimson, gleaming warm and rich

in the semi-darkness; candles glowing like stars. Not enough, I felt, to write about.

I remembered the service more than the church itself, but even those memories seemed very faint, segmented and blurred around the edges like old photographs. It had been a memorial service for my grandfather, one year after his death. It had been my first time in a church, since my parents had allowed neither me nor my brother to go to the funeral, and I could remember being afraid, although of what I could not recall. The priest had spoken only in Ukrainian, and the congregation, including my father and Baba, had repeated phrases after him. We had each been given a candle, and I had watched mine burn while the voices had hummed and droned around me. I could remember Billy screaming shrilly in the middle of the service--his candle had dripped melted wax onto his little fingers--and being carried out of the church by my mother. I could remember standing between my father and grandmother, and being determined not to cry if the same thing happened to me.

What I remembered the most clearly was that everyone in the church--the priest, and all of Baba's friends--had called my father Taras. I had only heard Baba call him that before; my mother and everyone else called him Terry. But no, he had said, Taras was his real name, like that of the famous Ukrainian poet. He rolled the *r* when he said it--*Tar-r-ras*--and made it sound very dignified. I had not been able to imitate him; I felt like I was chewing marbles; my tongue would not make the proper sounds. My father had laughed and said "See? That's why I let everyone call me Terry."

I could not blame my father. I always felt sorry for those classmates of mine with unusual names--Srikrishna, Zbigniew, Olena, Tariq--which nobody could pronounce and everybody ridiculed, but I felt worse when I learned that my own father had once been among them. It didn't matter that a name

meant something significant in another country; beyond those borders, it became just a jumble of sounds, another shameful marker of difference. My father had probably been teased for spending his Saturdays in Ukrainian school and Sundays in church, and for celebrating holidays at the wrong time of the year, and surely his name had only made things worse. I imagined the taunts of his classmates:

"Hey, *Tar-Ass*, don'tcha know Christmas came last month?"

"Nah, he's just a little behind! Get it?!"

"Whatcha askin' Santa to bring ya, *Tara*? A new dress?"

Although still said *Taras Kowalyk* on his birth certificate, my father had become Terry to everyone, except Baba and that small scattering of people from his past. In my story, though, his name would still be Taras; I began to write about the day he decided to change it.

I wrote mostly in the mornings, when my mind was as fresh and clear as the day itself, and when I usually had the porch all to myself. Baba would still be in her garden, watering plants or gathering vegetables, with Billy squirming and scratching by her side. She would send him on little errands to the house and back, to refill the watering can or heap the collected vegetables on the back porch, hoping to tire him so that he would sleep during his nap. I furtively shared her desire, knowing that a quiet afternoon without my brother would offer me another opportunity in which to write.

It was the last day in July when Baba's wish, and mine, was finally granted.

I was sitting on the shady porch steps after lunch, trying not to move, hoping that if I kept very still the heat might become almost bearable. I didn't need to listen to the weather report on the radio to know that it was the hottest

day of the month, as though the thirty previous ones had only been a stifling prelude to a suffocating end. I could tell by the fact that I could barely breathe, as though the heat had swollen the humid air to the consistency of moist cotton and left me gulping and gasping like a dying fish, by the fact that my skin was filmed in a sticky sweat and a fine layer of dust, although I had barely moved all day, and, most significantly, by the fact that Billy had actually fallen asleep.

I had listened for the sound of the upstairs window scraping open, and the first pitiful cry from the prince in the tower, but heard nothing. The hazy afternoon air was alive with the squawks and twitters of unseen birds and the piercing siren scream of a cicada--summer sounds so common and constant that you stopped hearing them unless you concentrated. There was a pair of soft brown mourning doves perched on the magnolia, cooing drowsily. The screen door banged lightly behind me, and I heard Baba cross the porch and settle into her chair, making little grunting noises as she sat. "It's so hot that I can't bother to sew," she said.

I nodded mutely, thinking that I could very easily spend the afternoon with my eyes closed against the glare, undisturbed, floating on the blanket of sounds from the garden. But the absence of a scraping window could not be wasted. I would get my notebook.

I crept up the stairs on tiptoes, trying to keep to the less-trodden edge of each step, not wishing to disturb my sleeping brother. But the old wooden stairs still groaned and creaked beneath my feet, announcing my ascent with every step. I cursed them violently, certain that Billy would be awake and ready to pounce when I reached the top. But the upstairs was quiet. I glanced towards my brother's bedroom, to ensure that he was still resting, and saw the door suspiciously ajar. I peeked inside.

"Billy?" I whispered, and strained my eyes against the gloom. His bed was empty, the coverlet slightly ruffled and the pillow depressed with a head-sized hollow. "Hallo? Where are you hiding?" I waited by the door, half-expecting him to pop out of a darkened corner like a playful shadow, but he did not appear. He must be in the bathroom, I thought, or else he slipped downstairs to play. I turned back towards my room.

I heard him before I even reached the door. He was stretched out on his stomach on my bed, his back to me, his head pointing towards the ikon on the wall, mumbling quietly, unsteadily, as though he were reading or praying.

A wave of anger rose within my chest like a sudden flood. "Hey!" I shouted, and burst into the room. "What are you doing?!"

"Nothing!" Billy cried, startled. He leapt off the bed as though it had caught fire. "I got tired of napping and just wanted to . . . to look around."

"You know you're not allowed in here." I advanced across the rug towards him, intending to drag him out of the room, but he backed away from me with every step. His hands were hidden behind his back and he was grinning furiously. "What are you hiding?"

"Nothing."

"Liar. Show me."

Billy showed me. It was my notebook.

The flood swelled and broke. I shrieked. I snatched the book away from him, strangled with rage. "How could you?! My notebook! How could you?!" I could hardly speak, I did not know what to say. My stories had been read. My thoughts had been invaded and scrutinised. I felt more than naked; I felt dissected, as though some part of me hidden deeply, darkly, within my being had been wrenched out and held up to the light. "How could you?" I repeated numbly.

Billy stared at me, uncomprehending. "It's just a book."

"No it's not! It's private!" I clutched the notebook fiercely to my chest.

"You had no right to read it!"

"Why is it such a secret?"

"It's not a secret. It's just my own business, that's all. It's private, and you shouldn't've read it."

"I only read a little," he raised his hands imploringly. "Just a little about Taras. Honest."

"Get out!" I tried shoving him towards the door but he laughed in my face and skipped away from me.

"Why do you keep it under the bed?"

"So nosy-parkers like you don't read it."

"Why? Who's Taras? Your *boyfriend*?" He leered and danced in front of me, his little antennae waving wildly.

"No, stupid," I hissed through clenched teeth. "It's Dad. Don't you know anything?"

"Dad?!" Billy stopped, surprised, his eyebrows raised in alarm. "Why are you looking for him? Is he lost?"

It was obvious he had understood nothing. I had presumed too much, I had forgotten that my brother was only an eight-year old boy. I sighed and sank down on my bed, overwhelmed by my outburst and slightly ashamed. "No, you dork," I said gently. "It's only a story. I'm trying to find out who he *was*. You know, when he was little."

"Oh." Billy looked confused. "Wasn't he the same as now, only smaller?"

"I don't know. He won't tell me anything."

"So how do you know what to write?"

"I make it up."

"You're making up *lies* about *Dad?!'*" Billy's antennae trembled with horror.

"Not lies. *Stories.*"

"What's the difference?"

I didn't know exactly, and was irritated by my brother's simple morality.

"Look, smarty-pants, it's complicated, but there is a difference, okay?"

"Why don't you just ask Baba?"

I snorted. "Yeah, right. She's too old to remember anything."

"Oh yeah." Billy sat down next to me. "She's ancient."

"And besides," I turned on my elbow to look at him, "we're only here because they had nowhere else to leave us. It's not like I want to be her friend, and if I start asking her questions she might think that I do."

"Grandmothers aren't friends," Billy observed shrewdly. "They're just grandmothers."

"Exactly."

"And ours is mean."

"A bit, yeah. But mostly just . . . well, *weird*," I started to laugh. "Like, not from this world. Hey, remember that jellied meat thing she cooked last week, and the green soup?"

He pretended to retch strenuously in reply.

"I mean, how could she actually *eat* those things?! Doesn't she know *normal* food?"

"I like her pickles."

"Yeah. They're pretty good," I agreed. "But still, she's one weird woman."

"She smells." Billy screwed up his face emphatically. "And she walks funny."

"Like a duck with a lead bum!" I screeched. We collapsed shrieking on the bed. Grotesque and comical images of our grandmother loomed like phantoms before us. We had gone too far, I knew it, and felt a small, uncomfortable prickle of regret as we lay there laughing, but it had been impossible to stop. Words had spilled out effortlessly, a torrent unleashed, and I knew with a fateful certainty that I could never take them back.

"You better go. You're supposed to be sleeping. Don't let her find you out of bed, or she'll make you nap all over again." Still giggling, I pushed Billy out of the room and into the hallway, where I suddenly froze, my hand like a claw on his shoulder. My laughter caught in my throat and choked me. Baba was standing in the hall just beyond my door. She had come up to wake my brother. We had not heard the staircase creaking for our laughter, and I could not imagine how long she had been standing outside my door. My face burned and my stomach prickled. I could not imagine how much she had heard.

I awoke the next morning to the sound of the sky splitting. It was dark outside, the blackness repeatedly slashed by silver, jagged shadows thrown over the lawn only to melt into darkness once again. I reached over to the bedside table and checked my watch: five o'clock. It was the hour when the birds began their singing, but all I heard was thunder crashing and the wind tearing through the trees. It had not yet started to rain and the world beyond my window was both quiet and raging.

I had expected a confrontation. From that terrible endless moment in the hall upstairs, I had been waiting, agitated and anxious. But minutes melted into hours, and Baba had not said anything. At dinner, she had been her usual dry, deliberate self; Billy, too, had been as chattery as ever, as though nothing had happened. Only I had sat mutely at the table, barely able

to swallow, not even tasting what I ate. The evening had passed much as always, and I had begun to think that perhaps Baba hadn't heard us, after all, or, if she had heard, that she hadn't understood what we had said; perhaps I was fretting over nothing, overreacting as I had done with Billy and my notebook. But then I would remember the wounded look in her eyes as she stood there in the hall, and I would sicken again.

The words which had spilled out of my mouth rang like an echo in my head, and they would not let me sleep. The wind, cold and raw with the promise of rain, rushed into my room in sweeps and gusts and tore at the curtains vengefully. Shivering, I knelt on my bed and pulled the window shut. There was a sharp flash of lightning and, for an instant, my room glowed blue and clear. I saw the ikon on the wall behind the bed and felt the weight of Jesus' stare, sad and disappointed, fall upon me. I wanted to say something, but I didn't know how to pray. I whispered "I'm sorry . . . forgive me." It felt useless. I crept into bed and buried myself in the covers.

I had always loved thunderstorms in the night. I had always found it strangely comforting to lie tucked into my bed, listening to the mad symphony of the sky and watching benign objects in my room transformed by fiendish tricks of lightning. It had always made me feel that everything in the world was in its proper place, that I was warm and dry and sheltered, while outside nature raged upon the earth in a concentrated fury. But without the steady pounding of the rain, the storm became terrifying: the entire living world suddenly seemed on the verge of a cataclysm, and I was all alone. I thought of Billy and Baba, silently sleeping in their rooms on the opposite side of the house while I was on my own in the midst of the wind and thunder and the obliterating night. I was about to step out of bed and run to them like an anxious child

when I heard a few drops begin to thud here and there against my window. Then the rain fell.

"It will rain all day," Baba said.

Billy and I were sitting at the kitchen table eating breakfast. I had my cornflakes with granola, which is how I liked them best, while Billy had his with three spoonfuls of sugar. This was an invention of mine, to make up for the fact that our cereals had been confiscated and replaced by ordinary ones, like cornflakes, granola or porridge. "That way, you can pretend they're Frosted Flakes," I had told him. But there were no raspberries that morning on account of the rain.

Baba had come into the kitchen from the back porch carrying a large white cardboard box, which she carefully set upon the counter. Something inside clinked. "It's good, this rain. Just what we need. Hot weather makes us lazy, but today will be a good day to be inside the house. I have some jobs waiting for you."

Billy looked at me, worried. "Jobs?" he repeated, wrinkling his nose.

"After you finish eating, Heather, you will clean the house." Baba sat down heavily next to us and sighed. "Oh, that's better. Yes, the vacuum and duster are in the closet under the stairs."

"Haw haw, Cinderella!" Billy laughed, his mouth full of cereal. His antennae shook.

"And Billy," Baba turned towards him and smiled, "I have a special project waiting just for you."

"For me?" he asked, his eyes widening with surprise and pleasure. "Why me?"

"Because you are perfect for it."

He stopped chewing. "I am?"

"Yes. It is very important. It is not something a little boy can do. Only a big boy like you. Can you help me?"

"Sure I can," he grinned.

"Good. And don't smile like that when your mouth is full," Baba said. "After you finish eating and we wash the dishes, we begin." She stood up and took our juice glasses to the sink, and then disappeared to the back porch again.

Billy quickly spooned up the rest of his cereal and picked up his bowl in his hands, draining it in two gulps. "Done!" he said, wiping his milk moustache with the back of his hand.

"Here, give me your bowl. I'll wash it." I hated cleaning the house and was trying to linger over breakfast as long as I could. It was a task I loathed even at home, and our house was only half the size of Baba's. Her living room had all those knick knacks and frames to dust, and doilies and mats to shake out, and I expected the vacuum to be some wheezing old Hoover from the fifties. But I accepted it as my punishment, and squeezed soap onto the kitchen sponge listlessly, wondering about Billy's special "project."

Baba soon returned to the kitchen carrying a large bushel. Billy was following her on his toes, trying to look inside. "Is it clean?" she asked me, indicating the sink with a tip of her head. I nodded, and she emptied the bushel into it. Billy and I peered over her shoulders, both of us itching with curiosity. A great pile of cucumbers tumbled out. We looked at one another, puzzled.

"Today, Billy and me, we are going to make pickles."

Billy blinked. "This is the special project?" I had to bite my lip to keep from laughing at the expression on his face.

"Yes, sir," Baba said smartly. "Pickles don't grow in the garden, you know. Somebody has to make them."

"But . . . why am I perfect for it? I don't know how to make pickles!"

"You're a natural!" Baba picked up one of his arms and waved it vigorously. "Little skinny hands with no arthritis! Perfect for filling pickle jars!" she cried. "I should rent you out to my friends!"

"Heather's got skinny hands, too." Billy suggested, looking at them pointedly.

"Heather is a big girl, not a little boy who only plays with space monsters and bothers his sister and climbs my trees when I say *Don't climb my trees!* Also, you are messy and she is clean, so she will make my living room nice. You will be a good helper for pickles. Now, plug in that kettle. We have to clean the jars first."

I left them in the kitchen and sought out the cleaning supplies. Poor Billy, I snickered quietly. It sounded like tiresome, tedious, awful work, making those pickles. I could hear Baba's instructions as I dusted. "Pretend like you're making a puzzle! . . . See how easy?" Billy had to arrange the cucumbers in neat stacks and rows according to their size, painstakingly fitting them into each jar, before Baba could add the rest of the ingredients: dill, spices, tiny dried red peppers, split cloves of garlic and, finally, the pungent, steaming marinade. And she had guessed correctly: his little hands were the perfect size.

I cleaned the downstairs first. The dining room and the hall were easy enough, only a few tables and the china cabinet to dust, and some heavy chairs to shift before I could drag around the recalcitrant vacuum. I dampened a

sponge and wiped the leaves of the dieffenbachia and rubber plants, as I had seen my mother do, until they shone greenly in the pale grey light.

I deliberately left the living room for last. It overwhelmed me each time I stepped into it, and, now that it was mine to clean, I was afraid it would consume me utterly. It was a cavernous room, heavy with drapes and carpets, crowded with furniture and clusters of cushions stuffed to bursting. And everything--every table, every shelf, even the mantelpiece over the fireplace--was cluttered with ornate objects: china figurines, wooden carvings, intricate Easter eggs, miniature ceramic or silver scrollwork boxes, and countless photographs in fancy frames. It was Baba's museum, a lifetime of mementos arranged around the room. But to me, it was just a chore which needed doing: four walls filled with countless pieces of wood and pottery, each demanding the attention of my dustcloth. I would have to move each one as I cleaned it, shake out the little mat which lay beneath, wipe the furniture, and finally replace everything as it was. And then I would have to bring in the vacuum. Even though it was no longer oppressively hot--a cool breeze was blowing through the open windows and the air smelled clean, rain-washed--I still felt cramped and stifled, defeated by an army of tiny foreign objects filmed in dust. I sighed heavily, and started with the fireplace.

Except for a set of carved wooden candlesticks in the centre, the mantelpiece was covered exclusively in framed photographs, as though by surrounding herself with pictures of people Baba could forget she was alone. It was like looking at an audience, with all these faces gazing back expectantly. I recognised a lot of them. There were my parents on their wedding day--my mother in an slim white dress and tiny veiled hat, my father with terrible sideburns and a full head of hair--the same photograph we had above our fireplace at home. School pictures of my brother and myself. One of me at

Hallowe'en, the year I had dressed as an angel. Billy, adorable in his Cubs uniform, the jaunty beret strategically placed to hide his antennae. I examined each photograph as I wiped its frame and laid it on the sofa. There was an old black and white one of my grandfather on the beach; he was grinning and hefting a big rock in one hand, the muscles in his arm bulging impressively. I could barely remember him. I placed the photo on the sofa, ashamed.

I couldn't recognise any of the faces in the last picture. It was a slightly unfocused black-and-white image of an old man lying in an open coffin, his head wreathed by wispy hairs, his sleeping face solemn, as though intent on dreaming. His hands were thin, the fingers bent and bony, like claws, and they were neatly crossed over his chest. The coffin was surrounded by people standing very stiffly and looking sombrely at the camera: women in kerchiefs, men in dark hats and coats, even a few children. The grimacing, shriveled faces of the oldest men looked like collapsed and shrunken Jack O'Lanterns.

There was a sudden noise behind me, startling me back to the present. It was Baba.

"Time for break," she said. "Billy has to go *really bad*." She imitated him perfectly in voice and gesture, except for the ever-present accent--*rreelee bed*. She stood beside me and surveyed the room. The candlesticks lay on the floor, the fireplace was bare, and the photographs were spread all over the sofa. My dustcloth lay at my feet incriminatingly. "You were busy."

I felt myself blush, caught dawdling instead of cleaning. "Um . . . I was just looking at these pictures."

"You are interested in your family's past?"

"Sort of," I shrugged, and quickly put the photograph on the sofa with the others. I felt both hot and cold and could not look at Baba. The silence filled my ears.

Baba picked up the photograph and examined it. "That is my *dido*, my grandfather," she said mildly, pointing to the man in the coffin. "And, look, see that one there? That is me."

"That's you?!" I could not resist. Here was an image of the unimaginable: Baba as a little girl. I scrutinised the face indicated by my grandmother. It was that of a fiercely scowling child framed by a knitted cap, held in the arms of one of the weary kerchiefed women. "Why do you look so mad?"

Baba laughed. "That was sixty years ago! Do you think I can remember?"

"I wouldn't forget it if I saw a dead body."

"I was too young then, just a baby. But you know, it was not so strange to see someone die. We did not have all the miracle medicines you have. People got sick or had accidents on the farm, babies were born weak, and in there was no hospital in the village. Death was everywhere." She spread her arms wide, as though to indicate death's reach. "It was natural, a part of life, like breathing."

Life in Ukraine. I shuddered. "It sounds creepy."

Baba shook her head and smiled. "It is different here. It is strange for you to see such photographs, yes? Such old photographs from Ukraine?"

"A little, yeah." It's like looking into another world, I wanted to say.

"Wait here," Baba said suddenly. "I will be back in one minute." She disappeared from the room. I heard her speaking to Billy--"I hope you washed your hands"--and then slowly ascending the stairs with her heavy tread.

I pushed the dustrag along the edge of the mantelpiece, worried. I imagined her rooting around in her closet and pulling out a suitcase full of black and white photographs, intending to show me each one and explain every tiny

detail, expecting me to be interested. But she was confusing me. Why was she so nice to me when I had been so cruel? Maybe she really hadn't heard anything after all. Maybe I had only imagined her reaction. I was hopelessly lost, but knew that I could not refuse her offer, even if it meant that I'd be trapped for hours in the company of dead relatives.

She returned almost immediately and was carrying only one object which she wordlessly offered me. It was small frame, not much bigger than the size of my palm, made of smooth brown wood elaborately carved into leaves and tiny perfect rosebuds. The picture inside was old and grainy, like the other, but without its grim severity. It was of two girls standing beneath the shade of a tree and smiling broadly--almost laughing--for the camera. They were holding hands, and wore matching dark dresses and clunky shoes. One was clutching a bunch of daisies and had a funny expression on her face, like that of someone about to burst into laughter. The other, taller one held a book in front of her, as though it was a treasure on display. She regarded the camera with her head bent to one side and her chin lifted elegantly, a marvellous satisfied smile playing on her lips. Something about her face, her expression, was strangely familiar.

"Oh!" I cried, a shiver running up the length of my spine. "She looks like me!"

"No," Baba said, "you look like she did."

"Is that you? No, wait, it isn't. You're the smaller one, right?"

Baba nodded. "I am the little one who looks like a monkey. The other one is my sister, Nadia. She was thirteen in this picture, I think, and I was nine," she sighed. "Nadia and Vera."

"You have a sister?!" I asked, incredulous. "I didn't know that!" How could I not have known? My mind reeled. Perhaps I had once, and since

forgotten. But no, that was not possible. I was sure that Baba had never spoken of a sister; unlike my mother's relatives, I had never heard her mention anyone in her family at all. If she had, I certainly would have remembered hearing about someone who looked exactly like me.

"You have similar nature, too," Baba was saying. "Both of you smart and quiet. Both of you stubborn like donkeys."

There she was in the photograph: my twin, flesh and blood in black-and-white, undeniably real, holding hands with the giggling girl who would one day become my grandmother. I examined the photograph, trying to memorise every detail. I was amazed that my sturdy, silent old Baba had once been someone's funny-looking little sister, as annoying, no doubt, as my own little brother. I started to laugh. I could not help myself. "You do look like a monkey! What happened, do you remember?"

"Oh yes, that I never will forget! It was the last day of school before the summer, the day we got our marks for the year. Nadia finished first--she did better than all the boys--and the teacher gave her that book as a prize. It was a book of poems by Lesia Ukrainka--you know of her, maybe?" I shook my head. "Well, Lesia Ukrainka was Nadia's favourite poet, and she also wrote a lot of poems herself. . ."

"She did?" I was impressed. Writing stories was excruciating, but writing poetry--being lean, restrained and precise with unwieldy words--seemed almost impossible.

Baba nodded. "Yes, nice poems. About flowers, about the little woods near the creek, about the stars . . . a funny one about our mean old pig was my favourite . . . So long ago, it is hard to remember, but . . ." she paused for a moment, and sighed, ". . . but it almost feels like yesterday. I can almost believe I am still that ugly little thing," she smiled ruefully, and looked up to

meet my eyes. I quickly looked away, back down at the photograph, embarrassed to be caught staring at her. Yes, that was really Baba, in two places at once, both frozen in black-and-white and standing breathing next to me. While her body had changed, grown wrinkly and old and weary, her bright eyes were still those of the little girl in the picture. Time had passed and the world changed, but Baba was both so very different and exactly the same.

"But you want to know about the photograph. Well, the teacher asked for Nadia to stay after school that day. The director of the school had a new camera, one he brought all the way from Kyiv, and he wanted to take a photograph of the best student. Do you how special that was?" I shook my head. "It was not like today, where everybody has cameras, it was special. My sister and I were waiting for the director, and Sergei Mazurkewicz, who was the son of the doctor and was always first in school before then, came up to congratulate Nadia. He gave her those flowers, there," she pointed to the daisies in the photograph, "and then he kissed her. He did! Just like that!. I saw it and started to laugh--I was so silly--and he and Nadia turned red like beets." Baba paused to catch her breath from laughing. "When the teacher and the director came outside with the camera, Sergei was gone and Nadia and me, we were giggling like a pair of geese. Nadia gave me the flowers, probably so I would not say anything and embarrass her. They took one photograph of her alone with her book--the school kept that one--and then they took this one, and he gave it to us when school began after the summer. I will never forget it: he said I look like a little doll and cameras love dolls, so I had to be in a picture too. That was nice."

I couldn't take my eyes off the photograph. "Where's Nadia now? Is she still in Ukraine?" It felt very strange to say that. I had never before given half a thought for anyone living in that faraway land, and had even tried to ignore

my connection with it, as though it might vanish if I didn't think about it. If I had inherited anything from my father, it was his shame in being Ukrainian, and had once believed that nothing beyond my name would ever link me to that place. But I was wrong; history was stronger than shame; history endured. And there was a piece of it, in my own hands. I was staring at my twin. Everything had changed.

But Baba shook her head. "She was sixteen when Germans came to our village. I was twelve, a child--you understand?--but Nadia was a young woman, very beautiful, too. German army was moving towards Russia, and soldiers would come to our houses for food, blankets, cows and pigs, everything for the army. They would take what they needed, we could do nothing to stop them. They were always in groups--three or four of them would come into our houses and threaten to kill us if we did not give them what they wanted. I was afraid of them, with their terrible uniforms and revolvers and the ugly way they shouted at us in a language I did not understand. The day after they came to our house, the same soldiers came back with an officer, and they took Nadia."

"Took her where?" I asked stupidly.

"Away. With them. God only knows."

"What happened to her?"

"I don't know." She looked down at the photograph. "That was the last time I saw her."

I felt as though I had been struck. "But she's your sister," I protested.

Baba only nodded in reply.

"You mean, you don't know where she is?"

"No. No one saw her after that day."

I could not understand. To live without knowing what happened to your own sister . . . I could not imagine it. But Baba's eyes told me everything. Her

sorrow was as visible to me as the wrinkles on her pale and tired face; her eyes revealed a pain which time had not lessened, but instead had woven tightly into her soul. Her grief, exhausting and private, was something I could not share, but some small part of her loss was mine, as well. For a brief moment, as I had gazed in stark wonder upon my face in the photograph, I had felt something pulling me towards a distant, unthinkable part of the world, the slenderest of threads skimming across time and the ocean to link me to an existence that was both utterly strange and strangely my own. And then it had snapped. I felt cheated, robbed of something I had never known I had. In discovering Nadia, I felt as though I was grasping after part of myself. And that, too, was vanishing, as though her image had been nothing more than a camera trick, a shooting star, a mirage.

"Isn't there some way you can find out?" I persisted. "Aren't there--I don't know--some records or something? There are always records, aren't there?"

Baba looked at me tenderly. "My dear Heather," she said, softly. "You are so blessed. You know nothing of the war, do you? Those were black days, when death and the Devil walked over the country like this." She clasped her hands together tightly and shook them before me. "People disappeared all the time. Sergei--they said Germans took him to a work camp. And my parents--I don't know what happened to them." She paused. "There are no records, Heather. No one would know, or care, what happened to one peasant girl from one small village in one small part of Ukraine."

I care, I wanted to say. I want to know. I felt as though I'd been turned inside out. It wasn't good enough, not at all, but there was nothing beyond what Baba could tell me, in spite of my need to know. The truth about Nadia did exist, palpable and very real, I was sure of it. But it had been obscured

forever, hidden away in darkness before I had even been born. I was left, once again, with nothing but scraps of the past and my consoling imagination.

"Maybe she's in Germany somewhere," I offered hopefully, images appearing even as I spoke. "Maybe the officer took her to Germany and married her, and now she lives there and maybe . . . maybe she's a grandmother now, like you." The more I spoke, the more real my images seemed, until they had become a kind of truth keeping Nadia from drifting away. I wanted to believe that she was somewhere in the world, thinking of her past and wondering what had happened to her little sister Vera.

The thought that she may have been dead did not even enter my mind. I didn't know anything then. I didn't know about war, rape, murder, the savagery of humans. I didn't know about death. I didn't know that Nadia was only one of hundreds--thousands--of girls and women torn from their families. I could not have imagined her fate as anything so tragic, so unfair, as a life stolen at sixteen, a body brutalised and left to rot within a hundred miles of her home.

Baba was silent. "Maybe," she said finally. "Maybe she is in Germany. Or in Ukraine. I want to think that. I want to think that she fell in love and married a nice man and a family, and now has a granddaughter like you. That is my *nadia*. Do you know what that means? *Nadia* means hope." She smiled sadly. "And I can think this way because I don't know--you understand? Without the truth, there can be no lies. There is only *nadia*."

I nodded, confused, still unsatisfied, but unable to press any further. There were too many questions. There was so much that I did not know. Something was looming before me, as shapeless as a storm cloud in the night sky, illuminated by flashes even as lightning breaks through darkness. I could see only in glimpses: disembodied hands and moving mouths; faces like ikons;

snapshots stilling time; sisters and brothers, brought together and pulled apart; stars arranged in clusters by an unseen, cosmic plan. I felt blind, groping. I looked at Baba and, not knowing what to say or do, gave her back the photograph and slipped my hand in hers.

Duet

It was the first time my parents had used the classifieds. "Piano. Upright, good condition, newly tuned, bench incl. \$500." For weeks, I had been begging and begging, almost bursting out of my skin with desire, for a piano. I had watched every week, entranced and enraptured, as Liberace played on television--all mauves and sparkles and feathers and Beethoven--and repeatedly made the necessary promises: I will practise every day, I will fill your lives with music, I will make you so very proud, I will truly be happy, if only I could have a piano.

"You want a piano because of that *peacock?!?*" My father had pointed in disgust at the television, where my hero smiled winningly and tinkled the pearly keys of his candelabra-topped baby grand. My mother had only shaken her head. I had cried. I knew I was asking for a lot: we still had the mortgage, the dentist was recommending braces for Luba, and my father was already working six--sometimes seven--days a week at the factory. But my parents relented. We pored through the ads in the *Toronto Star* and finally bought a piano.

I was six then, and the first time I had slid breathlessly onto the bench behind the keys, my feet were barely able to reach the pedals. I had been waiting in agony, anticipating the unimaginable moment when I would sit on that bench and command music to pour forth from the piano in shimmering streams. The keys had stretched silently before me, white and black and gleaming like teeth in a gap-toothed grin. I had pressed one experimentally, then another, and another, and the notes had jarred and bounced around the living room like hard rubber balls. "Well?!" I had shouted, partly at the piano, partly at my own hapless hands. "Now what?!" I had been expecting the

Moonlight Sonata. I got a scolding instead, was told not to yell like an Indian and to keep away from the piano until my lessons began.

My mother took us to see Mrs. Anderton, who lived in a big white house on the next street and taught Conservatory-standard piano to a handful of children in our neighbourhood. She had been recommended by Mrs. Hall from next door, whose own children--sullen Ryan and stupid Amy is how I remember them--had once been students of Mrs. Anderton's, and had done very well on all the exams at the Royal Conservatory downtown. "Exams!" I had cried, alarmed, feeling annoyed with and slightly betrayed by Liberace; not only was the piano impossible to play, but it apparently came with exams as well. But it was too late to turn back then, and we found ourselves in Mrs. Anderton's dusky blue living room, drinking milky tea and arranging for piano lessons.

Mrs. Anderton was the first person in real-life whom I heard speaking with a British accent; I marvelled at her vowels, at her crisp *ts* and swallowed *rs*, at how much she sounded like the Queen. My mother's command of English was not very good then--it improved as Luba and I grew up, and more and more English words began to creep into the Ukrainian we always spoke at home--and Mrs. Anderton's accent only confused her. As had happened so often in the past, I became her interpreter. It was a task I loathed, one which shamed me irredeemably and made my mother into someone dumb and graceless. I saw myself chained like a small animal to this large woman--one whose hair was already greying but whose face wore the anxious, eager look of a concentrating child--and having to see-saw clumsily between languages. It happened sometimes in banks, in shopping malls, in parent-teacher interviews, and was happening once again in Mrs. Anderton's elegant living room. And, once again, I felt ashamed of my mother, embarrassed by her language, by her polyester pants and too-bright lipstick. I squirmed as she fed me questions, and kept my

eyes in my teacup. Luba sat across from me, dwarfed in an enormous wing chair, and quietly nibbled on a cookie; she was the timid one--as shy as a sparrow--and that excused her from everything. I was younger, bolder, the one my mother depended on to stand between herself and the world.

When Mrs. Anderton left us to fetch copies of the music books we would have to buy, my mother leaned towards me and said "When she comes back, tell her we only need one copy of each."

"Only one?"

"Why do we need two copies of the same book when you and Luba can share?"

"But . . ." I looked from my mother to my sister, who gazed back at me silently, her eyes as dark and round as chestnuts in her pale smooth face. How could I be so selfish? How could I say that I didn't want to share? It was true, though--I didn't. Playing the piano had been my idea, and I had never intended to share any of it. But it had been taken from me, inch by inch; I had had to give everything away: my piano, my music, my lessons, and now my books. I turned back to my mother and scowled, wondering why nothing could ever be mine but knowing better than to ask.

"We're already paying three dollars per lesson for each of you!" My mother prodded me. "Tell her. And I forgot my wallet, so tell her we'll pay for the books at your first lesson."

"No." I grumbled. "You tell her."

"Larisa!" My mother's voice was stern.

I could not understand. Luba did not even want to take piano lessons. She wanted to play the violin instead, and said that she would rather play nothing at all if she could not play the violin. But if my parents had spent five hundred dollars on a piano, both of us had to learn to use it. They did not have

to tell us this; Luba and I already knew, in the same, instinctive way I knew I could never refuse my mother, as much as it might displease me to do as she bid. We waited without speaking until Mrs. Anderton returned with two books for each of us. "There you are, girls!" she said, and stood back, smiling.

My First Music Workbook and *The Piano Songbook for Little Fingers*--the music books that would never be mine. They were brand new, their covers crisp, uncreased and brightly coloured. I wanted desperately to open them, to look at the music I would soon be playing while it was still unknown to me, each note a foreign language. But I felt my mother's eyes upon me, and the books grew heavy in my hands. I held them out to Mrs. Anderton. "Is it okay if we buy only one of each? We're going to share."

"Well!" Mrs. Anderton exclaimed. "Of course it's okay, my dear. How unusual! I've found that children like to have their own--makes them feel important--but if you and your sister want to share, that's fine. I think it's marvellous, actually." She smiled warmly at me as she took back the books.

"And . . . is it okay if we bring the money for them when we have our first lesson? My mother didn't bring her wallet."

"Certainly, my dear, no worries. Next week, then?" She turned towards my mother. "What lovely girls, Mrs. Bodnarchuk! It will be a pleasure to teach them, I'm sure!" She spoke loudly and expressively, as though my mother were deaf.

"Thank you," my mother beamed. "Next week, girls start."

My mother used to say that I have "piano hands"--long, delicate fingers, spider-slim. It was because of my hands that she resisted my father's requests that we sell the piano until long after Luba and I had both stopped taking lessons. She would look at my hands and sigh, saying that I could not

ignore them, that they would bring me back to the piano as though possessed by a will of their own, but I would shake my head, no, no, I had had enough.

I spent five years with Mrs. Anderton. Every Tuesday at four o'clock, I would sit at her piano and demonstrate how much, or how little, I had practised that week. I could never lie at the piano. There were some pieces that I played endlessly, repeatedly losing myself in the music which rose, note by note, from my piano and swirled around me like a flock of tiny black birds. Then there were others that I hardly breathed upon, and Mrs. Anderton would make fretting noises as I stumbled through these on her piano. But I did not care; I played to feel the music, and did not want to bother with pieces that left me bone-dry and bewildered.

Luba's lessons followed mine directly, and I would hear her at the piano as I prepared to go home. My mother had predicted that Luba would forget the violin and grow to love the piano once she began her lessons, but if this ever happened, you would not have known from watching her play. She sat woodenly upon the bench, her body rigid, her expression resigned and heavy, like that of a sinner toiling in purgatory. She jabbed at the keys as though they threatened to snap off her fingers; she pecked at them the way a chicken pecks for grain in a farmyard. Mrs. Anderton would tell her to relax at the keys, to enjoy the music, to play boldly and with feeling, and Luba would ask with what kind of feeling should she be playing? But my mother's prediction was partly realised: my sister never mentioned the violin again.

It was inevitable that, at some point during our lessons, we would experience the exams of which Mrs. Hall had spoken, but Luba and I had agreed never to mention them with the faint hope that Mrs. Anderton might forget. She didn't, and more than once we found ourselves sitting glumly on the subway with our mother, rattling downtown towards the austere and ivy-

draped Royal Conservatory of Music next to the university. Mrs. Anderton considered the exams a necessary part of our education, significant not only for music, we had been told, but for growing up: they would teach us the importance of working towards a goal and of meeting standards and expectations, and would reward us with the sense of achievement that can only arise after effort and struggle. "And, after all," she had said, "what else is there in life?"

There were two types of exams which we had to take, one for musical theory and one for performance. Theory exams I did not fear, for writing them was exactly like taking any test at school: we sat in numbered desks in a classroom full of other children, and were given an hour and a half to answer a sheet of questions. Performance exams were endlessly more excruciating, perhaps because we would do them utterly alone. During the test, there were no other nervous children about, no sister whispering "Good Luck!" across the aisle, only a piano, foreign and unforgiving. We would have to wait on hard wooden chairs until our names were called, when we would be led to tiny, soundproofed cells to play with trembling hands for silent, sour-faced adjudicators. We would emerge shaken, memory magnifying each error into a sin. We would spill onto Bloor Street spent and relieved, reassured to see cars glinting in the daylight and people hurrying along the sidewalks, as though our ordeal had been nothing more than a bizarre dream, insignificant in the real world. After each of our exams, we would stop on the way home and buy doughnuts--a rare treat, and my mother's special attempt at making us forget the pains of our immediate past. It's ironic, then, that to this day, nothing brings *back* the quivery feeling of waiting in those drab, dimly-lit Conservatory corridors quite as strongly as does the taste of sugar-dusted lemon-jelly doughnuts. But we would forget, and then weeks would pass and our exam

results would suddenly appear in the mail. My mother would have to open them and read our marks aloud because we could not bring ourselves even to touch the envelopes.

I was seven and Luba eight the year we discovered the particular pain of performance exams. We counted ourselves fortunate that, unlike other teachers, Mrs. Anderton did not believe in annual testing--it was a needless expense, she had said, and too many exams were only likely to frighten tender young pianists from music forever. So we waited until we had finished the second grade to take our first exams, and the results had not disappointed our mother. "Oh, what wonderful marks!" she had exclaimed after examining the contents of the envelopes. "Two equally good pianists in one family--Mrs. Hall should have been so lucky!" But she had been mistaken. We were not equally good: my marks had beaten my sister's by one.

It was the first time I had finished first in anything. I had grown up a perennial second, a hand-me-down child, always following where my sister had led. I got her old books and clothes and even her old teachers, who, having taught her only the year before, would mistakenly call me "Luba." Comparisons were inevitable, inescapable, infuriating, especially when they came from my mother. Why could I not do better in math? Why could I not try harder at Ukrainian school? Why could I not be more polite? More obedient? More like Luba? It had never been a question of competition: until the piano, I felt as though I had been bested by my sister before I had even tried. Then an envelope bearing the round blue crest of the Royal Conservatory of Music appeared like the first March robin, the harbinger of change to come. There was an entire mark between us, and I was ahead. For once, I was free and taking wing on a breeze to soar I didn't know where. The piano had ceased being merely a piano, a clumsy wooden box of sounds and

thunder. It became my instrument, my tool, my weapon, the medium through which I would grasp something within myself that nobody knew I possessed.

Luba insisted that the exam results didn't prove anything, that we were equally good pianists, that she was just a little more nervous. And since she had beaten me on our first written theory exam, she claimed that she was, in fact, the better musician. But I knew better: theory was just theory; it was playing that mattered, and I would prove it.

I already had my goal in sight: the grade five performance exam. It was still years away then, but I could see it razor-sharp in the dim and hazy future. It was the important exam, we were told, the one which distinguished brilliance from mere discipline, and genuine musicians from the hopeful pretenders. It would prove my talent, my skill, my worth, irrefutably.

Mrs. Anderton had been a schoolteacher before she retired, and she arranged her piano lessons according to the calendar which had once governed her life, and still governed ours. She offered no lessons in the summer--they were months for freedom and families, she said--and only warned us to be cautious playing sports or camping or engaging in other dangerous activities, lest we break arms or sprain wrists or are otherwise prevented from playing the piano. We were also supposed to practise the pieces we had learned that year, and run through our scales to keep our fingers nimble, but our piano would go for days untouched, my own resolve sagging like a limp balloon. My mother would become cross, having grown tired of asking us to play only to be told, with a tortured sigh, "Later, Mama." She would point to the piano and remind us that we didn't buy it just to have another thing to dust. I would play dutifully for an hour, and my sister for a little less, and then we'd leave the house in silence for another stretch of days.

September brought a return to routine and a new year of lessons, which ran almost uninterrupted until the end in June. There was only a brief break at Christmas time, which began with Mrs. Anderton's annual recital for her pupils. There were fifteen of us, at the most, and we would gather in her living room to play Christmas carols on the piano; we would sing, too, which I loved and did loudly, but Luba thought her voice ugly and would only mouth the words. After caroling, we would be ushered into the family room, where we would eat pigs-in-blankets and crumbly cookies, and pluck gumdrops off the candy Christmas tree which Mrs. Anderton made each year. We would also play games for musical prizes--harmonicas, kazoos, or keychains in the shape of music notes--arranged to ensure that each child went home with something. As we filed out the door and were swallowed by the clear, cold night, we would hear our teacher calling after us, imploring us to think of our arms and wrists and avoid ice-skating or tobogganing recklessly. One Christmas, the prizes were parchment-coloured mugs, resembling music manuscripts on which were sketched the faces of famous composers; I got brooding, wild-haired Beethoven, and went home deliriously happy. I still have it--it's on my desk holding pencils --and every time I see it I think of those parties, so long ago that surely they seem more marvellous than they could ever have been.

The final event of the year was the real recital--the one in front of our parents, the one that really mattered--held each June in the basement of Our Lady of Peace church. Each of us had to perform a song or two, and when our names were called we'd approach the stage with leaden legs, as though the piano were a gallows. But, like everything else, it would come to its inevitable end, and then there would be lemonade and tiny cakes and sandwiches for all. Amidst the clicking of cameras, Mrs. Anderton would present us with certificates confirming that we had endured another year, passed another

grade and all of its trials. Only then could we laugh about our pre-performance nerves and exchange nightmarish accounts of our exams, already remaking the year's events into an assortment of amusing anecdotes. And then there would be nothing left but crumbs and dirty cups, and we would scatter like starlings for the summer.

Luba and I had always performed duets at these recitals: she played the steady low part while I carried the melody above. For the first one, when we were still beginners, we had played a simplified, two-minute rendition of Tchaikovsky's *Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy*. My mother had dressed us in identical red-and-white striped pantsuits which she had sewn herself; intentionally or not, we had ended up resembling two little candy-canes and the audience had been delighted. My mother never forgot this tiny triumph, and each year insisted that we dress alike for the recital. "You're sisters and you're playing together--why shouldn't you dress the same? You always look nicer than anybody else," she would say. "I sit in the audience, so proud, and want everyone to know those are *my* two girls up there." She always left us unable to refuse.

After our first performance, it was obvious that my sister and I could play very well together, and, for four years, we did exactly that. Yet our practises were terrible. We could never play in unison and would accuse one another of playing too quickly, of dragging the tempo, of skipping bars or ignoring pauses, and then end up fighting over who was the better pianist and who should dictate the duet. My father would pick up his newspaper and leave the living room whenever we began to practise together, saying that he knew what was coming and that he would prefer to wait until he was dead to hear the music of the damned. Even my mother, who thought everything we played to be brilliant, would cringe, repulsed by our spectacular cacophony. Humiliation

seemed inevitable: we would crash and scrape our way through practises while the weeks, days, hours until our performance dropped away, minute by minute, like leaves falling from a tree. Time never cared whether we were ready or not; the recital would happen. With racing hearts and prickling stomachs, we would climb onto the stage and sit side by side on the bench, feeling every eye bearing down upon us with the awesome weight of expectation. I would still be trembling in my legs by pressing one of mine against hers on the bench, and I would feel hers grow steady, too. Then we would play, and the music would unfold like wings around us. When it truly mattered, we made a perfect duet.

Everything changed one April Tuesday, when Mrs. Anderton said, "I've decided that you and Luba will play separate pieces for the recital this year." It was that simple; the decision had been made for us.

I didn't know what to say. At last, I would be performing alone, no longer sharing my spotlight with my sister; everyone's eyes would be focussed solely on me, and I was both thrilled and terrified. I had often dreamt of that moment--my music rising from the piano like coils of coloured smoke, mesmerising the audience and awing even my own parents. But only in dreams was everything as it should be: there were no nerves, no errors, no chance of humiliation, only beauty so complete that the world paled by comparison. I was afraid of my dream being spoiled, of being left with nothing. I did not know if I could play for a crowd of strangers without my sister by my side. I bit my lip, and, sensing Mrs. Anderton awaiting my response, asked "Why?"

"The Salter twins are doing a duet, you see, and so are the Pinellis. There was someone else, as well . . ." she frowned, and tapped her forehead with her pencil. "Oh, yes! How could I forget?! Wendy and Warren Mitchell, of

course! You've not seen them play--they're new. Warren is only six--just a tiny wee thing--but he's an absolute marvel."

"Oh." Little show-off.

"And so you see, I have three duet numbers already--that's six students taken care of--so I thought you and your sister might play separate pieces this year. In fact," she scrabbled through a pile of papers stacked on the little table by the piano, her knobby hands brown-spotted and green-veined against the creamy sheet music, "I already have two pieces in mind. How would you feel, Larisa dear, about a little Beethoven?"

"The *Moonlight Sonata*!" I gasped, the prodigy forgotten, the duet dulled and fading. It was the music I had been waiting for. It had been so long since I last had heard it--Liberace was no longer on television very often, and we didn't have a record player--that I could barely remember how it sounded, only fragments of it lingering like fingerprints in my mind. Yet I knew that it had left me breathless. And here was a sudden glimpse of glory: I began to envision the crowded church basement stunned into silence by my magnificent Beethoven.

But Mrs. Anderton began to laugh. "My goodness, you're still in grade five Conservatory! No," she chuckled, "not the *Moonlight Sonata*. I was thinking of *Für Elise*, actually."

The vision vanished. My heart tumbled, as heavy as a stone. "What's that?"

"It's quite a well-known piece." She played a few bars of the music very sprightly, still smiling, oblivious of my disappointment. I recognised the tune, although from where I could not recall. "It's also rather difficult, but I do believe you could do it."

I was not impressed. "What's Luba going to play?"

"Well, I was thinking of Brahms' *Lullaby* for her. Surely you know that one!"

I shrugged, but after a few notes, I began to hum along with her. "Oh, I know! It's from that commercial for cold medicine, isn't it?"

"Ye-es, I suppose you could look at it that way."

"Is it as nice as *Für Elise*?"

"Well, you can't really compare them, my dear. They're both very nice. Of course, the Beethoven is more challenging--you have to be a better pianist to play it."

That was all I needed to hear. I would do it. I placed the ivory-coloured sheet music in between the pages of my workbook as though it were made of gold, already thinking of my performance, certain that I would be playing the next best thing after the *Moonlight Sonata*.

We were to have new dresses for the recital.

I had not yet finished telling my mother the news when she had cried "My girls, all grown up and playing solos!" and clasped me to her bosom, smothering and silencing me. I was left to swallow the details--the three other duets, the odious Warren Mitchell, my Beethoven, Luba's Brahms--as she announced her delight. "How I loved seeing you on stage together! You looked like perfect little twins and always played so wonderfully! But everything has to change, doesn't it, Lara? Oh, I know you will each be just as wonderful on your own. But first--and very important--you have to look just right." I held my breath, but no mention was made of matching outfits. We were finally free.

My mother took us to Fabric Land and told us to choose whatever pleased us. She would sew while we practised our pieces on the piano, and that way, she had said with a satisfied smile, she would stitch herself into each

performance. My mother sewed a lot of our things then. Apart from hand-me-downs, most of my skirts and dresses were homemade, although I never minded because she was such a meticulous seamstress that nobody could ever tell. I only hated the measurings and fittings, having to try on outfits piece by piece while she crept around me, tucking and pinning and asking if, for once, I could manage to stand still.

I wandered through the shop among the colourful arrangements of cloth, lost in a kaleidoscope of print and hue and texture. One corner was dark with rolls of winter knits--plaids and tweeds and woollens--and next to them lay long thin bolts of brocade and chintz, ready to be fashioned into heavy drapes and curtains. The corner by the window glowed with fancy wedding fabrics: cascades of icy white, streams of chiffon in sherbet shades and opalescent gauzy things, luminous and glimmering. I knew to avoid all of these, but still there was too much; each way I turned, there was something appealing. It would be impossible to choose only one. I felt panicky, caught, deceived by my promise of freedom. I wanted someone to help me, thinking how much easier it would be if my decisions were made for me, knowing that then I would not suffer so, and that if I were unhappy, someone else would be to blame.

"Over here, Lara." My mother waved at me across the store. Luba was next to her, scrutinising something pink, and, relieved, I turned to join them when something caught my eye, something blue shimmering beneath the bright shop lights. It was a fabric unlike any I had seen before, iridescent, as dark as the ocean, shot with streaks of deeper blue and swirls of glistening violet. I held my breath and brushed it with my fingertips, afraid of spoiling it, my touch like that of a butterfly's wing. The colours moved, liquid in the light. The fabric felt soft and slippery, as cool as night against my skin. It was perfect.

I sensed my mother suddenly next to me, and, smiling, held up the fabric for her approval. "This is the one I want."

"You must be joking!" she snorted. "That's silk!"

"Please? It's so beautiful!"

"Of course it's beautiful--it's twenty-two dollars a metre! Certainly not for ten-year-olds! Forget it, Larisa."

"But . . ."

My mother shook her head. "I said no. Why do you have to be so impossible? Look at Luba--do you ever hear her complaining as you do? Now, come with me and pick something from one of those cottons there, or I'll pick for you."

The silk rippled from my hand. I scowled and crossed my arms as I trudged after my mother. She directed me towards a cluster of fabrics and then stepped back to watch me choose. I glared at them mutely. I didn't understand; I had made my choice, I had found what I truly wanted only to be denied and told to choose again. The freedom I had was only an illusion--worse, I felt, than none at all.

The bolts of cloth stood before me like sentries awaiting inspection, and I glanced over them half-heartedly. There were speckled fabrics and striped ones, bold florals blooming in jubilant colours, pale frosted pastels and solids as dark and rich as jewels. Nothing was as nice as my silk. I could see Luba across the store, her choice already made, flipping through the giant books of patterns, probably looking at the pictures of wedding dresses and evening gowns as we always did. I despised her for being so uncomplicated, so simple to please, and I wished that, for once, she would be the difficult one.

"Well?" My mother was waiting.

I looked at the fabrics once more. "That one." I pointed to a smooth,

almost shiny, sea-green cotton.

My mother raised her eyebrows. "That one? That green one? Are you sure? Don't you want something with nice little flowers, like Luba's? Here, look at this one, so delicate . . ."

"No."

"How about this blue one--look--how pretty! You like flowers!"

"No."

"You're sure you want that one? Once they cut it we have to buy it, you know."

"Yes, I know."

"Okay, if that's what you want." She shrugged, pulled the bolt of fabric from its metal stand and carried it to the measuring counter, where Luba's pink floral print already lay. "Go wait with your sister. I'm going to look for something to cover that cushion for your father's chair. And come back when I call you, in case the salesgirl doesn't understand what I want."

I looked dubiously at my choice of fabric, oddly viridescent and lying like a clump of seaweed next to Luba's pink-petalled flowers. I sighed. It would have to do. I would not change my mind now, I would not give in. I wove my way through the mottled islands of material towards my sister, fingering fabrics as I passed, lingering over my beautiful indigo silk. I was being unreasonable, I knew it, but everything seemed so disagreeable, and I felt so obstreperous, that I would cut off my own hand if my mother told me not to. And there was Luba, quietly looking through a book of Burda patterns. I went up to her and pinched her on the arm.

"Ow!" She turned, surprised and angry. "What was that for?"

"For being such a pain in the you-know-what."

"You're the pain." She rubbed her arm and frowned at me. "You're the

one who's never satisfied. You're the one always wants what you know we can't have."

"Shut up!" I did not need my sister telling me what I already knew. I began to tear through the pages of a glossy catalogue.

"I'm telling Mama you pinched me."

"I don't care." I felt reckless. "Here, crybaby, tell her about that, too." I stomped on her foot, my running shoe leaving dirty prints on her white sneaker.

"Mama-a-a!" Luba scurried off across the store, leaving me to simmer on my own. I could not wait until the recital. Everything would change then. I would show them, and everything was certain to change.

The green dress hung on the back of my closet door, waiting to be worn. It had been ready weeks before the recital, before my rendition of *Für Elise* had become even remotely recognisable, and every time I saw it I would grow numb, thinking of the performance I would have to give.

Für Elise was the hardest piece I ever had to learn. Mrs. Anderton had called it challenging; I considered it impossible. The first bit was easy enough, but after that, everything fell apart. The tempo seemed too fast for the number of chords I had to play; I could either creep through it slowly but accurately, or haphazardly smash out notes at the proper speed. "It's too much!" I would shriek, slamming my un-cooperative hands onto the keys, cursing the day the unknown *Elise* had inspired Beethoven to produce this work of madness. And the more I thought about performing, the worse I played and the harder the piece became. Meanwhile, Luba doggedly churned through her *Lullaby*, and the time remaining until the recital shrank away more quickly than I would have wanted.

Sometimes, in those weeks leading up to the recital, I would think back

to previous years, and would linger over memories of duets with my sister until I felt a dull ache rising somewhere inside me. I did this compulsively, the way I would sometimes pick at a scab, knowing the wound would bleed again and leave me with a familiar and strangely satisfying pain. I thought of our horrible squabbling practises and coordinating outfits, and of the numbing, ever-present fear of failure which was somehow lessened for being shared. But most of all, I thought of our performances. It seemed as though our differences dissolved when we were on stage together, or perhaps it was because of them that we could play with such simple, seemingly effortless harmony, like songbirds in a summer garden. And all of it had been lost to the past, existing in the present only as memories which filled me with an irresistible, nameless longing and left me feeling very much alone.

On the afternoon of the recital, I was lying on my bed and imagining, as I often did, that I had overwhelmed a crowd of strangers with my brilliant performance on the piano; I was besieged by praise and flowers; the piano was covered in roses and the splendid concert hall rang with shouts of "Bravo!" and "Encore!" But something was different; it was not as satisfying as my dreams once had been. I could not completely surrender myself to my imagination, conscious as I was of the impending recital, knowing that I might never again be able to believe that my dream could come true. I would find out that evening; *Für Elise* would be the test. My dream would either be marvellously realised and my hopes preserved, intact and unspoilt, or else brutally dashed to pieces, and the awful inevitability of such extremes left me shivering in dread and anticipation. Either way, something important and irreversible would happen that night.

"Lara?" There was a tap on my door and my sister's voice floated in from the hallway outside.

"What?"

"Are you sleeping?"

"No." I sat up, and saw her peeking her head into my bedroom. "What do you want?"

"Nothing." She came in and sat next to me. "Are you nervous, about tonight?"

I nodded, visions of the concert hall slowly dissipating, replaced by the spare, wood-panelled basement of Our Lady of Peace Church. "Kind of, yeah."

"Me too." She traced the pattern on my bedspread, the paisleys like twisted teardrops beneath her fingertips. Her brow was furrowed; she looked as though she was concentrating on following the print, but when she looked up, I saw that her eyes were wet.

The church vanished.. "Luba? What's wrong?" I asked. My sister did not cry very often; she was like my father, placid, rational, even-tempered. My mother and I were the opposite: we wore our emotions just beneath our skins.

Her face suddenly puckered. "It's you. It's always you."

"What's always me?" I cried in alarm. I had never seen her so grief-stricken. "What have I done now?"

"You didn't do anything. It's just that you're . . ." she paused and swallowed, and shook her head as though to clear it. Her voice became as sharp and cold as a knife. "It's always *Why don't you play like Larisa? You're just not trying, look how well your sister plays! Why are you so shy? You should be confident, like Larisa! Why are you afraid to speak up? Be brave, like Larisa!*" She choked and fell silent.

I stared at her, uncomprehending. "Who says that? Mama?!"

Luba nodded.

"When?!"

"Oh, always." She waved her hand vaguely. "Especially now, though, before this recital. And I'm scared that I just won't be good enough."

I felt as though I had been eavesdropping and had heard something never intended for my ears--that my mother wanted my sister to be more like me. My head was filled with a muddle of voices from the past, shrill and strident, repeating the rebukes I'd collected like stamps over the years. The loudest and most insistent were the comparisons with my sister; they were the ones which stung the most, and which I recalled most clearly. But that she should have endured comparisons with me . . . It did not make sense, and I did not know how to reply. I wanted to show her that I understood, but my mother's words still echoed loudly in my head and would not let me think. Luba was ten times more afraid of performing than I was, I could see that, but our fears were not the same: I wanted to impress the audience, she was worried about disappointing our parents. I tried to smile and, not knowing what to say, began to repeat what I had heard my mother say so often, the words sounding hollow even as I pronounced them. "Don't worry, Luba. Be confident and don't worry, and you'll be good."

"That's easy for you to say. But I can't play like you do--I never could and I never will. I'm not just not as good as you, I know that."

And like that, she had admitted it, she had given in, and everything suddenly collapsed around me.

It was what I had wanted--her honest acknowledgement that I was better than her at something--but it felt all wrong. It was not supposed to happen this way. I was supposed to play marvellously at the recital, and then triumph in our grade five piano exam in the fall. It was what I had dreamt of for five years: I had wanted to demonstrate my superiority indisputably: I had wanted to crush her. But with one sentence, she had changed everything. I

felt like a bullish prize fighter who had trained relentlessly only to discover that he has already won, that his opponent would not step into the ring. I should have felt victorious, my ruthlessness vindicated and pride well-deserved, but all I felt was a sudden wash of shame, and an ache, like pity, pecking at my heart.

Luba's voice quavered and her words were barely above a whisper. "I didn't mind before, because it didn't seem so bad when we played together, but now . . ." She bent her head sorrowfully.

I sat mute and motionless beside her, conscious of the pain inside with each beat of my heart. I could not understand why nothing in the world was as I had imagined it to be. In the span of a minute, everything had become complicated and I no longer even knew what I wanted, except to put the clock back and start over. I wanted things to be simple again.

Beside me, Luba slowly drew herself up, very tall and straight, like a flower rising towards the sun. "I can't do it." she said, wiping her eyes.

"Yes, you can, Luba. You have to. You just think you can't." I could not bear to hear anymore. Each time she opened her mouth, she was altering my carefully organised world, changing what I thought was inevitable, and I only wanted her to stop talking.

She shook her head. "No, you don't understand. I don't *want* to do it."

"Well, it's kind of late for that now, isn't it? We have to."

"Why?" she demanded.

"Why? . . . Well, we just have to, that's all." Her question surprised me. We were not supposed to ask why. I tried to think of all the reasons I could to show her how useless it was to try changing things that were supposed to happen, but all that came to mind were my own reasons for wanting to play that night: to be admired, to be praised, to prove to everyone something significant about myself, although what that was I no longer knew. Surely

these could not be my only reasons; they were weak, empty and selfish; surely there had to be something else. I tried to picture myself playing *Für Elise*, as though that might salvage my noble intentions, but the image which formed in my head was a strangely silent one, as though the piano at which I was seated was clogged with cotton balls or heaps of downy feathers, the insides of gutted pillows. It was like watching television with the sound turned off. I could not hear any music, not even a single quivering note, as though the music itself was not even part of my performance. And I knew then, with a terrible certainty, that it would be no different if I replaced *Für Elise* with the *Moonlight Sonata*. Playing the piano had ceased being about music. I had betrayed myself.

There was only one real reason left. I looked at the streak of green on the back of my closet door and sighed. "I guess because they're expecting us to."

Luba took my hand and looked at me, unblinking. "Let's not do it."

"What?!"

"Let's not go to the recital."

"Are you crazy?!" I could not believe what I was hearing. This was not my sister sitting next to me; this was a determined, spirited, unknown Luba, brimming with an energy more directed than my own. My hand was frozen between her burning palms.

"Let's just tell them that we won't do it. What can they do to us? Yell at us? Tell us how we've disappointed them? Who cares?!" Her dark eyes were shining and her face flushed, as pink as her new dress. She gripped my hand tightly. "Come on, Lara! Let's just tell them no."

We would rebel together. Her plea was intoxicating, and I could barely think to answer her. Everything was in scraps and tatters, but I was certain

that how I played no longer mattered. I did not care about a mark on a piece of paper. I did not care about impressing the audience or proving to my teacher that I was worthy of Beethoven--I knew, painfully, shamefully, that I wasn't. I did not want the admiration of my fellow pupils. I no longer even wanted the praise of my parents. I simply wanted things to be the way they were once, when only the music mattered and I was free to feel each note rippling through my soul. I squeezed my sister's hand and nodded.

There was a cry from downstairs. "Girls! Do you want me to touch up your dresses with the iron? Just to make sure they're perfect?"

A grip of panic seized my stomach like a cold metal hand. Luba and I stared at one another wordlessly. The glimmer in her eyes was gone, vanishing as suddenly as it had appeared, replaced instead by a familiar look of quiet desperation. I felt as though they mirrored my own.

"Girls?!"

Afterword
"Being Canadian":
'CanLit' and
Perspectives of Ethnicity

(I)

I will begin with a confession: the complicated relationship between ethnicity and Canadian literature was something I had never thought about, until I found myself in the midst of it.

I could, simplistically perhaps, claim ignorance in the matter: apart from an undergraduate course in Modern Canadian Fiction, and one at the graduate level focussing on the works of Michael Ondaatje, my formal exposure to Canadian literature was shamefully minimal. I preferred to study British literature, with its intoxicating history and dazzling array of writers and genres, and occasionally dipped into the exotic, losing myself in Dante's *Commedia* or passionately devouring the great Russian novels. From my limited and decidedly Eurocentric perspective, homegrown alternatives made for an unhappy contrast. The selection of works defined by the unappealing label of 'CanLit' seemed skimpy, at best, and I approached them hesitantly. Perhaps fearing disappointment after the glories of Dickens and Shakespeare, I read only the works of those writers I knew and admired: Davies, Munro, Atwood, Gallant, Findley. That, for me, was Canadian literature, and it, too, was something marvellous.

It was only when I began thinking about the kinds of stories I write that my conception of Canadian literature suddenly became puzzling and problematic. When I tried to describe my own stories, I found myself at a loss for words. I wanted to call them Canadian stories, because they are mine and I am a Canadian. But that tidy definition did not seem quite right. My stories

are not the kinds which Alice Munro or Mavis Gallant might have written, the unpolished products of their earliest writing days. My stories are a bit too, well, *ethnic*.

It was a terrible realisation to make. Having grown up in an ostensibly multicultural society, I had never before felt so excluded, and all because of a factor--my Ukrainian background--I had been encouraged to celebrate. But if Canadian society is truly multicultural, why is 'CanLit' so frustratingly un-ethnic? Surely there are other voices in the ethnic wilderness--voices beyond those accepted as tokens of 'the immigrant experience' or the 'Montréal Jewish experience.' Surely their stories are as genuinely Canadian as my own.

This Afterword is the result of my search for these voices and their place in the changing landscape of Canadian literature. The fact that writers such as Matt Cohen, Rohinton Mistry, Janice Kulyk Keefer or Frank Paci represent different ethnic minority backgrounds in no way detracts from the 'Canadianness' of their writing; rather, it enables them to depict perspectives of being Canadian unavailable to the Atwoods, Findleys or MacLennans, the traditional ethnic majority whose perspectives have been validated by the cultural history of this country.¹

It need hardly be stated that literary expressions offering different perspectives of Canada and Canadians can but enrich us culturally. By focussing on the act of articulating such expressions--on writing ethnicity, as it were--I want to consider how this might occur. One thing common to all ethnic minority writers, as Eli Mandel reminds us, is that they live simultaneously within the influences of their own and another's cultures; while to live in such "doubleness" is difficult enough, "[t]o articulate that doubleness simply intensifies the pressure, the burden" (91). And yet it is a burden of great creative potential, for what it produces belongs to neither culture exclusively.

It is a hybrid, an invention (Siemerling 2). It is an "interweaving of cultural threads from different arenas" (Fischer 230). It is an original perspective. And it is through such acts of writing ethnicity that Canadian culture is offered the prospect of evolution and renewal.

If my approach in this Afterword deviates from the cool, detached and professional one favoured by literary critics, it is only because I found myself and my stories implicated in my discoveries. I am my own example of a writer struggling with the burden of her ethnicity, attempting to create something out of the cultural confusion in which she is caught; the three stories in this thesis can thus be seen as examples of my fumbling attempts at a kind of ethnogenesis.

(II)

Ethnicity is a multifaceted and vexatious term, one which is central to current discussions of culture and multiculturalism. Although it has often been considered synonymous with notions of race and has even been appropriated for exclusive use in racial discourse, ethnicity applies across the racial spectrum.² Francesco Loriggio defines it as "a process by which individuals identify," voluntarily or otherwise, with "a group that ascribes to itself or has been ascribed by others certain characteristics, and that is seen as occupying a certain position when compared to other groups" (25). It is, by its very nature, a "relational identification" which exists through references to another culture (Siemerling 2). The fact that identification can be voluntary or involuntary is an important one, suggesting the existence of multiple and, perhaps, conflicting perspectives: ethnicity may be embraced by some and rejected by others, in the attempt to be seen as different from, or the same as, everybody else. It also points to the reality inherent in a multicultural society

such as Canada's, namely, that ethnicity can be, and often is, an assigned quality, where 'ethnic' is a label applied by some to others.

In her introduction to *Others Solitudes: Canadian Multicultural Fictions*, Linda Hutcheon explains that the etymological origins of the term 'ethnic'--from the Greek root *ethnos*, which means 'nation' or 'people'--would suggest that it properly applies to all Canadians, including those from French or British backgrounds, and "the fact that it is *not* so used points to a hierarchy of social and cultural privilege" in which "'ethnic' always has to do with the social positioning of the 'other'" (2). Mordecai Richler, never one to mince words, calls it "a pejorative WASP term" (Richler 42). Indeed, common usage of the term 'ethnic' is undeniably linked to less favourable associations: earlier, with 'pagan' and 'heathen,' and most recently, with 'foreign' (Hutcheon 2). It is a label circumscribing its subject within definitive boundaries, in which the individual may not be seen for the group, or, as Loriggio puts it, "[t]he existential is conjugated with the social" (26). Quite simply, it is a 'we/they' term of reference, dividing by emphasising differences.

In discussions of Canadian literature, 'ethnic' and 'ethnicity' function in precisely such a divisive manner. Enoch Padolsky suggests that this division most likely arose in the 1960's, from critical attempts to create a body of national literature through the search for "national unifying theses" either "thematic, mythopoic or environmental" in nature; any works which reflected minority rather than mainstream concerns were "relegated to critically peripheral subcategories" which included, among others, "'ethnic,' 'immigrant,' 'multicultural' or 'non-official language' writing" ("Diversity" 112).³ He concedes, however, that the assumption of a "preference for universality" does not preclude the possibility that there may have been "biases on the basis of ethnicity and minority status" at play ("Minority" 374). Certainly, the realities

of power and status cannot be ignored; those in control of "the Canadian literary institution" were not generally themselves from ethnic minority groups, and the concerns they chose to reflect were their own. Although decades have passed since the beginning of the "national institutional emergence" of Canadian literature (Siemerling 10), and a number of ethnic minority writers, such as Michael Ondaatje, Mordecai Richler or Rudy Wiebe, have been accepted into the mainstream, Padolsky argues that "the fundamental marginalization of minority writers cannot be said to have changed, and their presence has neither altered the literary historical categories nor fostered their particular concerns" ("Minority" 368).

That the division lingers today points to the continuing existence of a misguided premise that there is one type of writing which speaks for the nation, and another which speaks for various ethnic groups. Writing about minority interests is somehow seen as incompatible with writing about Canadian ones. When Matt Cohen decided to begin exploring Jewish themes in his writing, rather than continue in his previous focus on rural Canada, he was seen by critics as having "betrayed [his] Canadianness by writing about being Jewish." Such a response, he explains, "tells you something uncomfortable about people's conception of what it means to be a Canadian" (Cohen 175). Or, for that matter, what topics are acceptable as material for Canadian writers, for minority interests are not considered those of 'real' Canadians.⁴

In an interview with Kaarina Kailo, Robertson Davies offers a further example of such narrow-mindedness; when asked for his opinion on federal funding for a collection of Finnish-Canadian immigrant stories, he suggests that such projects should not be given "hand-outs" because "literature depends on what people wish to hear, and if writers wish to say what Finnish people want to hear, they should have stayed in Finland" (Davies 363). This remark

is startling for its sweeping dismissal of the immigrant perspective in Canada, as though the stories of Finnish immigrants could only be meaningful to Finns back home. Davies does not even entertain the possibility that such minority works might interest other Canadians, regardless of ethnic background, or, indeed, that the whole of Canadian literature and culture might benefit from the perspectives they provide. Apparently, being a Canadian means being 'un-ethnic.' Being a Canadian writer means writing 'un-ethnically.'

Unfortunately, neither Davies nor Cohen's critics are alone in their opinions. Padolsky suggests that they are shared by the literary "gatekeeping establishment" comprised of "journals, publishing houses, university departments, libraries, awards committees [and] learned societies," all of which continue to "reflect the dominant discourse of the traditional canon in Canadian literature" ("Diversity" 375). Their apparent unwillingness, or, at least, reluctance, to admit a diversity of voices into the Canadian literary mainstream, and thereby elide the division between majority and minority writing, raises questions about the existence of prejudice even in a supposedly multicultural society such as our own. For in spite of the fact that, like other Canadian writers, minority writers work in all forms and genres, use a wide range of styles to explore myriad literary, thematic and political concerns, and address issues apart from the ones of ethnicity explored by Cohen or Kailo's Finnish-Canadians, their writing does not always manage to escape the marginalising 'ethnic' label (Padolsky, "Minority" 365). Francesco Loriggio suggests that something as subtle as an author's name alone tends to "colour interpretation" and constructs a "preliminary signature" which affects the perception of his or her work. "Whether the writer writes about ethnic themes or not," he explains, "to recognize him or her as ethnic is to bring to bear on his or her work the fore-knowledge arising from the world of group relations," as

well as stereotypes and "conscious or unconscious" ideologies (30). Perhaps something as simple as that "preliminary signature" can explain why minority writers are inevitably seen as having ethnicity, while majority writers are seen as lacking it (Padolsky, "Diversity" 115). And, in most cases, minority voices become lost, existing in the ethnic netherworld outside of the Canadian literary mainstream.

As a Canadian writer aware of his own marginal position, Frank Paci does not shy away from suggesting that exclusion such as his own is the result of readers "who aren't ready to concede their mainstream ethnic biases--i.e., British--to 'marginal' ethnic cultures" (233). The readers to whom he refers include not only the critics so reviled by Enoch Padolsky, but the general public, as well, for biases are not restricted to the literary institutions alone. We are most of us guilty of harbouring prejudices towards writers of various ethnic backgrounds, and I myself am no exception; for years, I clung to my blinkered belief that British writing is best and only recently began to explore the literature of other cultures, including my own.

Perhaps the primary reason behind the persistent belief that 'Canadian' and 'ethnic' writing are all but mutually exclusive lies in the fact that the divisiveness inherent in the labelling of 'ethnic' and 'mainstream' extends beyond literature and literary criticism and into society itself. The existence of racism and more subtle, but by no means less insidious, forms of prejudice and discrimination should not be overlooked as factors affecting responses towards cultural artifacts, including literature, being produced in Canada. And this reality, if anything, points to the urgency of encouraging even greater artistic expression from all ethnic groups. Without denying the complexities of intolerance, I would argue that works of art--particularly those concerned with questions of ethnicity--hold extraordinary potential for Canadian cultural

evolution and offer us the means through which we can grow to understand one another. For if we read about different ways of 'being Canadian,' how can we deny the validity of such different perspectives without first questioning our own?

(III)

When we narrow the focus from 'ethnicity' as a cultural concept to the act of 'writing ethnicity,' the emphasis shifts from groups to individuals. And because ethnicity and identity are so finely and inextricably linked, it becomes impossible to generalise and paint all ethnic minority writers with the same broad brush stroke; while there are a number of common elements, every writer has a different manner of struggling to articulate the doubleness in which he or she lives. That is not to say that the process itself is not worth exploring, only that it must be done with the awareness that there are as many ways of writing ethnicity as there are writers. And, ultimately, I can only do so in reference to myself.

To explain what I mean by writing ethnicity, I begin by returning to Francesco Loriggio's definition of ethnicity: "a process by which individuals identify with a group . . . that ascribes to itself or has been ascribed by others certain characteristics, and that is seen as occupying a certain position when compared to other groups" (25). He emphasises explicitly the fact that ethnicity has everything to do with group identification, namely, with how one sees oneself and how one sees, and is seen by, others in relation to different groups. Michael M.J. Fischer describes the nature of this identification as a bifocal one: "seeing others against a background of ourselves, and ourselves against a background of others" (199). But to identify with a group, an individual must perceive points of connection between herself and that group,

and to perceive these links, she must have a grasp of her own identity. What happens, then, if she is aware of a number of distinct and equally valid identities, and, as a result, cannot wholly identify with any group exclusively? What if she sees herself as belonging to both "ourselves" and "others"? This is ethnicity from an individual perspective; this is the reality of a split sense of self. While it is a situation shared by individuals from all cultural backgrounds who live in the midst of a different culture, it is not necessarily experienced identically or explored by everyone to the same degree. As Fischer so eloquently explains, "only some feel ethnicity as a compelling force, only some have an ear for the music of its revelations" (230-31). Only some attempt to understand it through the act of writing, and I am one among them.

It is difficult for me to explain precisely why I write. I suspect that it has something to do with my perception of the past, with memory, with a feeling of dislocation, with a search for coherence among my many selves; my motives are not clear even to myself, and I will not invent one simply to prove a point. What I do know, however, is that it has something to do with my awareness of my ethnicity, which keeps appearing in my stories whether or not I so intend. Eli Mandel might suggest that because my stories exist "at an interface of two cultures," each one could be an example of "a form concerned to define itself, its voice, in the dialectic of self and other and the duplicities of self-creation, transformation, and identities" (99). That is, my writing could be seen as my attempt to define myself out of the cultures which seem to define me. This quest for self-definition would explain why I draw on the past for inspiration, for it is by looking back to the past that one can construct a sense of self. Perhaps by describing how my ethnic awareness arises from my sense of the past, I can begin to explain what it is I am trying to do when I 'write ethnicity.'

Since ethnicity is "something reinvented and reinterpreted in each generation by each individual" rather than "something that is simply passed on from generation to generation, taught and learned," the quest for understanding ethnicity as an facet of identity is a highly personal one (Fischer 195). But the fact that it is not passed on from generation to generation does not imply that ethnicity has nothing to do with the past. On the contrary, as Fischer reminds us, it is only from understanding the past that we can hope to find meaning and coherence in the present and "an ethic workable for the future" (196). That the past is the locus of identity suggests that an engagement with history, both personal and collective, should be a signal aspect of writing ethnicity.

Indeed, a concern with the past is central to Janice Kulyk Keefer's assertion that "literary ethnicity" explores perspectives that are not merely bifocal, but Janus-faced, as well (92-93). But while she refers to the absolute necessity of looking back to the history of one's "ethnos" for a sense of one's identity (101), I would argue that a fundamental awareness of one's ethnicity can likewise be achieved through a more immediate and individual history, one which has been transmitted by others or personally experienced, and preserved through the arts of memory. This is not to suggest that I am ignoring or undermining the crucial role played by a national or cultural collective history in shaping one's sense of self; in fact, I agree with Keefer's claim that "a connection with history, past and ongoing, is . . . the prime constituent of significant as opposed to symbolic ethnicity" (94). But the past need not be one of cold facts and historical figures to be vital in shaping one's awareness of ethnicity, and, here, I speak from my own experience.

While my grasp of Ukrainian history is shamefully feeble--I have but a scattering of dates and names rattling around in my mind--I have never doubted my Ukrainianness. My parents gave me the strongest sense of my

ethnicity, not only by insisting that I learn to speak and read in Ukrainian, but by telling me stories--sometimes nostalgic, often painful, always charged with emotion. They spoke vividly of a foreign, distant, almost dreamlike past, and these stories--these *histories*--became mine, as well. Fischer describes this vicariously acquired aspect of ethnicity as "a historical reality principle" which has nothing to do with individual experience but is nonetheless part of one's identity (206). Because of their stories and, later, an awareness of history proper, I grew up conscious of being connected to something beyond the borders of Canada, something larger than myself that somehow defined my being. It was an utterly unshakable feeling, often uncomfortable and even unwelcome, but not one that I ever thought about or tried to understand at that time; I just accepted it as a part of myself, the way I accepted being Orthodox instead of Catholic, tall instead of short. It is only now, from my present perspective, that I realise the significance of this feeling in my understanding of who I am; it acquires a meaning of which I was unaware then. According to Ben Xu, this exchange of meaning between past and present is precisely how memories provide us with a sense of self.

In his essay exploring memory and the "ethnic self," Xu suggests that memory is the nexus of experience and identity, and that it functions as an interpretation of the past that "goes beyond the actuality of events to the determination of their cogency as an existential situation" (263). That is, rather than remembering things exactly as they happened, we tend to assign meanings to those happenings which give them a purpose as fragments of our past. These fragments are seen as parts of a larger story which we tell ourselves, and which explains who we are. As Xu explains, "[o]ur sense of what has happened to us is entailed not in actual happenings but in *meaningful* happenings, and the meanings of our past experience . . . are constructs

produced in much the same way as narrative is produced" (262). It is only from the perspective of the present that the past becomes meaningful, and because of the meaning contained in that past, the present can be comprehended. This relationship, almost symbiotic in nature and functioning as it does through memory, supports a critical coherence between past and present and enables us to discover a sense of self out of the totality of our experience.

And yet, because of the stories told to me by my parents, the totality of my experience includes memories which are not mine but, rather, theirs. It is through their memories that I, as a Canadian, am inextricably linked with a Ukrainian past. I had a definite sense of my Ukrainian identity without having thought about it, as though it had been given to me. Fischer explains that ethnicity, as "a deeply rooted emotional component of identity," is not necessarily acquired "through cognitive language and learning" but is often transmitted "through processes analogous to the dreaming and transference of psychoanalytic encounters" (195-96). I would include storytelling among these processes. For when I look back upon my memories, I find that, thanks to the stories of my parents, my sense of self begins even before my own birth. But it is muddled together with my own experiences; their legacy of Ukrainianness is jumbled with my undeniable Canadianness; my memories are marked by a persistent linguistic, cultural, even historical dislocation.

I suspect that my impulse for writing arises from this muddle.

(IV)

I am aware that "Legacy," "Duet," and "Uncharted Lands" would undoubtedly be categorised as 'ethnic' stories, as the experiences they describe are those of a cultural minority within the Canadian landscape. And yet I

think of myself as a Canadian. The fact that I write about what are considered 'ethnic' themes does not lessen my Canadianness; on the contrary, I am never more certain of my Canadian identity than when I am writing. However my stories might be categorised, they express whatever it is I am trying to say--about my sense of self in relation to my past, my culture, and my identity--from a firmly Canadian perspective.

In trying to relate these three stories to the process of writing ethnicity, I can only begin by stating that I am not able to analyse and dissect my own stories as I can those of other writers. It seems almost pornographic an exercise, as though I would be violating the very integrity I hoped to have given them. As a result, I can only discuss my stories obliquely, and propose to do so by describing a number of what Xu would call "meaningful happenings" which have fed both my writing and my sense of self. They are vignettes, snippets of the past which I recall just as I present them--that is, unconnected by a single coherent narrative, but unquestionably linked both to each other and to my stories. By doing so, I hope to illustrate the point I have been trying to make about the importance of memory to my writing: that I define myself by telling stories about the fragments of my past. The themes explored in my three stories--the split between cultures, languages, and identities; the duty to remain "one of us" set against the longing to be "one of them"; the expectations of family and community; the fascinating, terrifying burden of history--exist throughout the breadth of my past and the depth of my self-understanding, and, consequently, are evident even in these short pieces:

My parents were both immigrants to Canada: my father arrived after the Second World War, as a Displaced Person via England, the only member of his family to have escaped the

ravages of the war and Stalinism, and my mother via Argentina, the country to which her parents had fled when she was all of three years old, before the war had even begun. While I don't remember being ashamed of my parents for being Ukrainian--I was never ridiculed for my unpronounceable last name or for celebrating holidays at different times of the year--I do remember being ashamed of them for being so much older and poorer than the parents of any of my friends.

Ukrainian was meant to be the only language spoken at home. It was the first we had been taught, and my sister began senior kindergarten without knowing a single word of English; when I was enrolled in junior kindergarten one year later, however, I could speak English quite well, having learned from her and from watching "Sesame Street" and "Mr. Dressup" on television. And, gradually, inevitably, in spite of repeated reminders that Ukrainian was our mother tongue, English became our primary language. My sister and I invariably spoke in English amongst ourselves, and were frequently castigated for it. "*Hovoriteh po nashomu!*" our mother would say, which translates literally to mean "Speak our way!" Yet my thoughts formed themselves in English, incompatible with "speaking our way" except by translating them in my head before I spoke. It was a bizarre inversion of the immigrant experience.

My sister and I were sent to Ukrainian school. While not always a pleasant experience, I did not find it too unusual, as

most of my friends went to Greek or Cantonese school or belonged to Serbian dance troupes or Polish youth clubs. What I found uncomfortable was the relentless urgency with which were taught.

It was during the early 1980s, before *glasnost* and Gorbachev. While Ukraine's history had been one of brutal oppression and colonisation, none seemed as iron-clad and utterly demoralising as the Soviet domination endured since 1922, which, for all we knew at that time, would continue interminably. We were seen as the last hope for preserving the language, culture, and history of Ukraine for the future. It was our obligation to the past, and to refuse to learn would be to spit upon our ancestors.

My father was the youngest of five, the runt of the litter, the only one in his family ever to have experienced freedom. He was thirteen when the Second World War began, fifteen when the Germans swept through Ukraine, eighteen when he last saw his family. It was 1944, and he escaped with the retreating German army, a refugee choosing exile over the poisonous politics of Stalin. To this day, he is uncertain whether or not his own parents knew he had survived the war.

These are the kinds of stories I grew up with.

I imagine that it would be the same in any ethnic group.

When a Ukrainian made it big, everybody won. On the national scene, politicians and athletes were championed for conquering Canada on our behalf. "*Vin yeh nash!*" people would

say excitedly--"He's one of ours!"--and he would glow like a jewel in our eyes. There was a comparable scale of success within our parish: those children of immigrants who became doctors, dentists and lawyers were sources of similar pride, and their parents swelled to heroic stature.

Meanwhile, my sister had decided to study Military History, and I had chosen English.

The summer of 1993 was a remarkable one. Most of it was spent in the country which had so captured my literary imagination: I was at Oxford, on a partial scholarship to study Victorian and Modern British Literature with a focus on Victorian Fiction. It was my summer of dreaming spires. I lived at Exeter College, listened to lectures given by Kate Flint and Terry Eagleton and Christopher Ricks, wrote essays in the Radcliffe Camera, attended concerts at the Sheldonian Theatre, and jogged in Christ Church Meadow. I spent countless afternoons wandering through the narrow, twisting streets and peeking into ancient colleges, always conscious that the air around me hummed with ghosts and history. I made side-trips to Stonehenge and Salisbury and Bath, and went on pilgrimage to Stratford-upon-Avon and the Dickens House Museum in London. I spent the summer in a dream.

At the same time that I was at Oxford, my sister was at Harvard, also on a scholarship, studying Advanced Ukrainian at the university's renowned Ukrainian Institute. Before each of us had left, we had endured endless reminders to send postcards to

those family friends who knew we were going away, and to these, my sister added our former Ukrainian school teacher. It was her way, I suppose, of demonstrating to our teacher that the years of Saturdays spent trying to educate us had not been completely in vain.

The day following my return home, while I was still marvelling over the fact that thirty hours before I had been in London, our teacher telephoned. The conversation began with her shrewd, and undoubtedly accurate, observation that my Ukrainian accent was terrible, that it had become "too anglicised" and was certainly not as strong and pure as once it had been. She then told me how much my sister's postcard had pleased her, and how proud she was that a former pupil had not forgotten her heritage. Only then did she ask how I was and how I had spent my summer. I told her that I was fine and that my summer had been nothing special. I could not mention Oxford.

Recently, I have found myself increasingly drawn to Ukrainian literature and history. Ukraine's history is long, complicated, and bloody; to understand any of it, I must read about it in translation. But poetry I only want to read in the original. It is a struggle sometimes, but I want to feel the language the way it was written.

I find my situation ironic. Years ago, when I was in Ukrainian school and everything was forced upon me, I would squirm and groan and guiltily digest enough to pass the exams. There is no pressure now; there are no tests to pass. More

importantly, Ukraine is finally independent. I have nobody to study for now, nobody except myself.

Although I write out of the past, reinventing and reinterpreting such "meaningful happenings" as these in various ways, there is always a vital connection with the present. Each story is a retrospection; each consists of someone's memories; each may be about children, but the narrators are aware of more than that allowed by a childhood consciousness. This awareness is significant because it demonstrates an exchange of meaning between past and present--an auspicious achievement, to be sure, for it establishes a vision for the future.

The culmination of the search for coherence in the past, and the symbol of a workable sense of self for the future is embodied by what is perhaps the defining characteristic of writing ethnicity: namely, the creation of an identity straddling the cultures of which the writer is a part. This "communal identification" is the product of "ethnogenesis": original, hybrid, unique (Siemerling 2). And it is in this "restructured self" or "fictional being" that the writer finds the resolution to the intercultural imbroglio which had initiated her act of writing (Mandel 95).

As evidenced by the stories in this thesis, my personal "restructured self" is neither strictly Ukrainian, like my heritage, nor traditionally Canadian, like my environment; it is Ukrainian-Canadian,⁵ something for which there is no pattern, something that did not exist until I made it. It lives in Olga and Marusia, Larisa and Luba, Heather and Taras, and offers a glimpse into a different perspective of being Canadian. If we widen the focus to consider literature as a whole, we see the inarguable social and cultural value of writing ethnicity. For the implications of creating such cross-cultural hybrids cannot

be denied: it is they who offer a multiplicity of perspectives and articulate a truly "textured sense" (Fischer 230) of being Canadian.

(V)

Canadian culture is something that all of us, as Canadians, share, and it offers a point of intersection between the many and various groups in our celebrated ethnic 'mosaic.' Ideally, Canadian culture would accept and accommodate the plurality of perspectives offered by artists from all ethnic backgrounds, and promote a fundamental recognition of both the diversity and commonality of experiences of 'being Canadian.' As a result, Canada would be multicultural in more than just appearance. While the lingering division between 'ethnic' and 'mainstream' Canadian literatures illustrates that we are still far from realising this ideal, it is something towards which we must continue to strive. Like the process of evolution itself, the shift towards acceptance and inclusion can only happen over time, and only if we continue to "grant everyone access to the material and cultural conditions that will enable the many voices of contemporary Canada to speak--and be heard--for themselves" (Hutcheon 16). For in the act of writing ethnicity, in the struggles to define a self split by culture, language and history, Canadian minority writers venture into undiscovered territory--into "Uncharted Lands"--and what they produce is a truly multicultural, and truly Canadian, literature.

Notes

¹ The terms "ethnic majority" and "ethnic minority" are Enoch Padolsky's. He suggests that they should replace the current "mainstream" and "ethnic" terminology used in Canadian literary criticism, thereby approaching Canadian literature from a pluralistic rather than unicultural perspective. "The advantage of this terminology," he suggests, "is two-fold. First, majority writers are no longer treated as if ethnic issues were not applicable to them, and new emphasis is put on the fact that, socially, they are in a majority position. Secondly, minority writers are no longer marginalized into categorical 'ghettos,' but are fully comparable on the basis of ethnicity and status to majority writers" ("Diversity" 113).

² Janice Kulyk Keefer provides a compelling examination of the complex relationship between ethnicity and race in Siemerling (90-91).

³ Padolsky offers a broad, historically-based survey of the critical reception to minority writing in Canada in his article "Canadian Ethnic Minority Literature in English." He suggests a number of guidelines, or "Research Needs and Policy Implications," by which such literature could become fully integrated into the mainstream, and by which the mainstream could, in turn, become more reflective of the population. See Berry and Laponce, 361-86.

⁴ If minority interests are not those of 'real' Canadians, what, then, do Rohinton Mistry's comments on the expectations placed on immigrant writers reveal about how Canada sees them? He explains that immigrant writers experience what Dagmar Novak calls the "tyranny" of multiculturalism: the audience, the critics and the establishment expect such writers to have "profound observations about the meeting of the two cultures" and must write

about racism and multiculturalism, in spite of the fact that such topics may not interest them. "[T]he writer may just want to write without any of this agenda of cross-culturalism." See Mistry, 258-59.

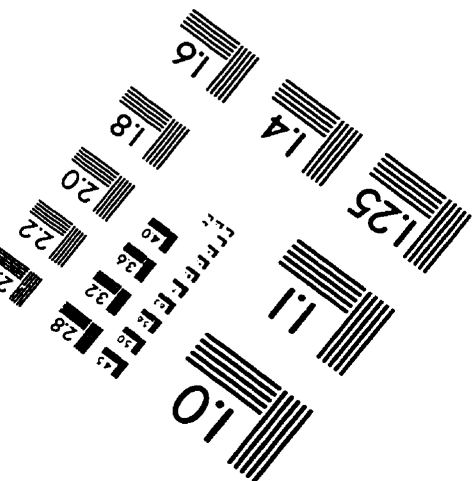
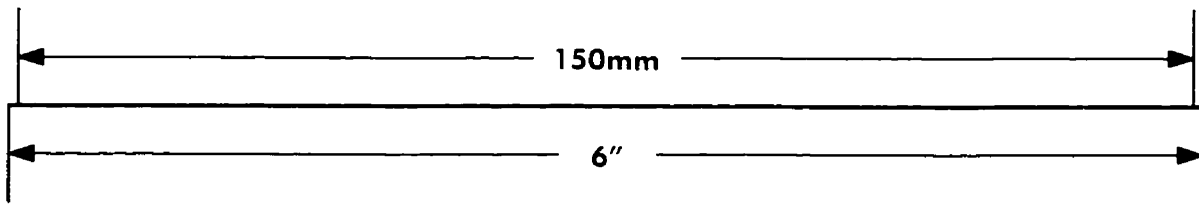
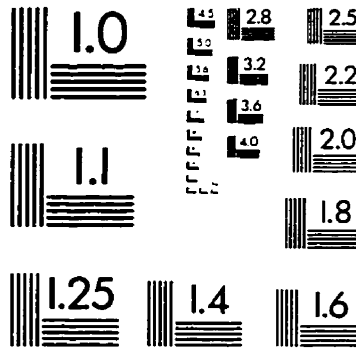
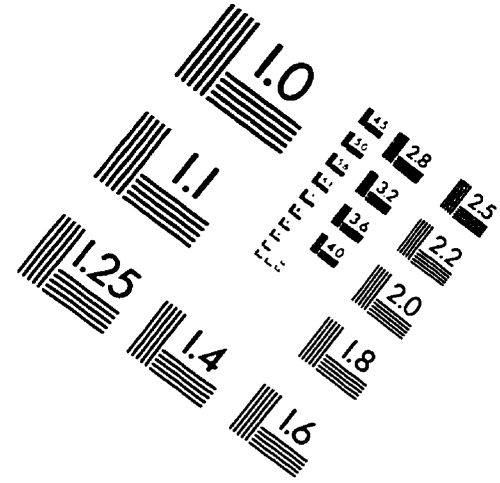
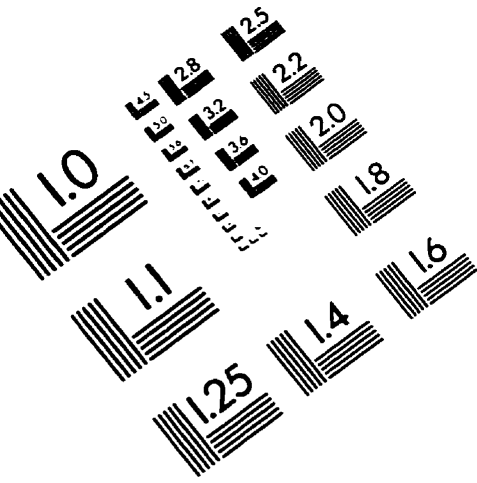
⁵ Although I dislike hyphenating myself--I consider myself simply "Canadian" or, if asked to specify, "Canadian of Ukrainian descent"--I can think of no better way to describe the "hybrid" which emerges from my writing. For a thought-provoking discussion of hyphenated identities, see Haas et al, 135-54.

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