THINGS LEFT UNSAID
An Examination of Memory, Representation and Death in a Work of Fiction

VOLUME ONE
SECOND STREET
A novel submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

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Declaration

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and, ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

Signed: __________________________________________

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Second Street

Sarah Schmidt
'We outgrow love like all things
And put them in a drawer.'

Emily Dickinson

Knowlton: ‘You have been on pleasant terms with your step-mother since then?’

Lizzie: ‘Yes sir.’

Knowlton: ‘Cordial?’

Lizzie: ‘It depends upon one’s idea of cordiality, perhaps.’

Lizzie Borden’s Inquest Testimony

Second Street
Lizzie
1892
Chapter One

He was still bleeding, sticking to the leather sofa like syrup when I yelled someone’s killed Father. Later when the police arrived they began taking photos of the dark grey suit he wore to work. Flash bulbs broke every six seconds. The young police photographer said he would prefer not to photograph the old man’s head. They told him to take me into the kitchen while they found a real man to finish the job.

In the kitchen women and men moved around each other, choreographed to pour more tea or to look busy. Nobody looked me in the eye.

Then questions started with ‘Where were you at the time?’

I pulled through my memories of the past week and tried to boil them down into a morning activity. ‘I was in the barn,’ I told them.

I looked towards the stairs and wondered when someone would go up them.

Sitting across from me was Bridget, her face wet with shock struggling to form words into sentences into testimony. She was able to say the house had been shut tight all morning before looking at me for approval. The note taker wrote furious, sweat forming through his thick moustache, his supervisor repeating over and over ‘Did you get that? The maid said…’

Two hours had passed. The house moved left then right as the heat grew through the ceiling. Everyone around me pulled at their necks to unloose their tightly wound clothing. I sat still holding my hands together. Upstairs I heard the floorboards give way to extra air and I thought I heard them rip themselves up and move to a new room to keep cool, sweating floor

Second Street
polish and blood hoping to get rid of anything that may weigh them down. I slammed my hands tighter together and saw that the note taker wrote: daughter praying silently, before asking me

‗Who else is staying in the house?‘

‗My Uncle is here with us but he left early this morning.‘

I could feel myself sway with the heat, heard the nails in the floorboards give themselves up and walk across each other like acrobats on a tightrope. Everything was beginning to shift in size but the house refused to expand. It punished us all by flinging the window shutters open allowing more heat to fill the rooms.

‗Somebody close the damn shutters,‘ Dr Bowen called from the sitting room ‗people will see.‘

Inside my head a butcher pounded all sense out of my ears and onto the kitchen table. My corset groped my ribs. I twisted my body through the small pools of sweat filling the spaces between my arms and legs.

I wiped my palm across my face and noticed the tiny droplets of blood sitting on my fingers, caught half way between gleam and drying. I put my fingers to my nose then my mouth—I couldn’t taste either my father or myself. When I saw bigger blood spats soaking into my blue skirt they grew into a river across my lap and became darker shades of purple. These were the rivers my sister and I had played in when we were younger, first swimming then fishing. Sometimes we were bears brown and giant, our paws swiping each other’s black noses. Emma always drew blood. Before the blood came and before I was big enough to grow my father proposed to his wife, Abby, at our river. Some people said he was looking for someone he could dominate; others said it was to mend a broken heart after mother had died.

*Second Street*
Once, when I was walking through the cemetery with a neighbour, Emma met Father’s wife. She boiled pots of tea and let Emma eat a teaspoon of sugar when no one else was looking. The wife had a sister who complained about women not being able to vote. Our father had laughed at her and told her the quicker she found a husband the happier she would be.

The day his wife moved in I thought I heard the house cry. It wept for days and couldn’t open the windows. My room became dusty and smelt childish. Then I thought I heard the house tell the wife *Abby leave Abby leave*. One month passed and she was still there and so it gave up wishing and accepted her because it was easier.

My skirt began to stick to my thighs and I began peeling the heavy fabric away. Somewhere in the background Bridget called from atop the stairs ‘I’ve found her. The poor things fainted,’ Her footsteps were timid crossing the floor, and as she rounded the bed she screamed out ‘Oh God,’

Two police officers trooped up the stairs; the young photographer stayed with me. He looked at my face and said ‘Miss you’re bleeding.’ When Dr Bowen came to look me over he felt my forehead and tried to find a pulse on my wrists. He asked ‘Do you feel alright?’ and I replied first with *yes I feel delighted* then *how long do you think everyone will stay?* but he heard ‘I do feel a little faint,’

Dr Bowen hooked his arm across my shoulders and led me outside into the heat. The sun landed on my cheeks and danced across my freckles. I smiled and Dr. Bowen asked me ‘Do you feel better?’ and I giggled and told him ‘Much,’ He cleared his throat and looked out toward Second Street and sighed.

*Second Street*
At the backstairs the door swung open. A police officer took off his hat and quietly told us ‘Abby is dead. Murdered,’ She was laying face first in a swelling pool of dark red, her arms by her side and her feet crumpled in her soft leather boots.

I thought about her hair. Was it plaited, was it rolled tightly around the crown of her head or was it cut off and tossed aside? Her hair once tasted like lavender. When I was seven she would swoosh it around my face, all those thick fibers cutting across senses taste and smell. She smelt like magic. Later her hair grew and began covering her face until she no longer had eyes I could relate to.

At night dreams let me cut her hair back until she was bald. Once at breakfast Abby leant across the table dropping single strands of hair onto my plate. They were grey and no longer magical. It was around this time that Emma and I first stopped speaking to Abby.

Second Street
Benjamin
1905
Chapter Two

James reminds himself that he is good at being other people. He stands in front of the mirror and slowly removes his clothes—first the torn shirt then grey pants, until he is down to his underwear; a white camisole and knickerbocker. He closes his eyes and thinks of her I don’t want this and pretends for the last time that her hands are tracing spider webs down his torso. He opens his eyes and she is standing beside him in the mirror. She smiles.

‘I didn’t mean to hurt you James,’ She whispers.

‘But you have.’

‘You were right. I shouldn’t have loved anyone but you.’

‘Not even her?’

‘No, not even Emma.’

James watches her in the mirror. She unbuttons her blouse and lets him see her throat. She is perfect. He wraps his arms around himself; feminine skin slowly unravels from his shoulders and neck I don’t want this until he can feel the skin beneath his right breast begin to disintegrate.

She laughs. The pull of love came out through his skin into the air, all that history he had shared with Lizzie. Oh how long it had taken him to find her! In the mirror: momentous catastrophe. Realisations. There would be no more hand holding, no more lips whispering into ears, of stars colliding into their bodies. All no more. It was harder to let go when you believed someone was born only for you, that someone had placed their hands into your soul and pulled

Second Street
you out of hiding. Knowledge of Lizzie: she had takes James from blindness, all those dark corners and brought him into being. He would make her happy; become the heart of an aging orphan. James wants to tell her ‘If only you hadn’t laughed. If only you had come with me!’

Lizzie smiles. Lizzie turns her head. James’ spine cracks under the pressure of lost lives if only I had gotten to her sooner. If only she could have seen how truly alike we really are, that we have been a part of each other’s lives, that the moon was born so that we could be brought together. if we had continued to travel along together and grown into each other’s bodies, shared skin in skin, we could have become the same person; joined dreams and memories and let our hearts bleed on and Lizzie smiles again. James knew there had been that aching of uncertainty—did they share the same hand of violence? Would they let each other in and reveal secrets long implanted inside stomachs, inside spines? James both had wanted and did not want to ask. How much should lovers know?

She laughs.

James closes his eyes and tries to forget that the change is coming. Somewhere inside of him is a past with three mothers (all dead), five fathers (all of which left him at birth), and an army of siblings (all looked alike). Beside his heart is a small seed that grows and dies and grows and remembers all the changes that have ever happened.

James reminds himself he is good at being other people and so he remembers becoming the first change, Charles.

Origins are important. Charles was conceived the year his father came home late, announced to his wife during supper that tomorrow after work, he would not be coming home. The house smelled of disbelief. His wife sucked the air around her and let go of the wild wail that grew in the pit of her stomach. Charles and his sisters watched their father eat the cold
mutton soup that had been lovingly waiting for him since the afternoon. Their father slurped. He said nothing.

‘What is wrong with you?’ Their mother asked.

‘There’s nothing wrong with me,’ He told her.

‘Then are we wrong?’ Charles looked at his father’s knuckles. They hardened.

‘You don’t say a word boy.’

And nothing was said. That night while Charles’ mother sat on her knees and crossed her chest, Charles took off his boots and walked to the Mackenzie River. The moon hid behind heavy clouds. His ears rang with anger. His heart spelt rum-pum-rum-pum-di-di-di and his cheeks were swollen from catching tears. Charles reached the river bank and walked into the water until it kissed his ankles. I don’t want the responsibility of them. He looked up at the moon. What makes him think he can go? The river lapped at his skin. Charles closed his eyes, counted the times his father had come home late, had lied to them, had made them invisible. He tried to find reason behind his father’s actions but there was nothing and so Charles, eyes opened, fell to his knees. The river circled his thighs, shocked them cold. He prayed I will not let him get away with this hoping for an answer, for God to show him the right thing to do. The moon swum across his forehead the strangest of feelings and became thick, skin heavy. Inside his head there was a tapping it’s him and Charles felt his mind open, the tapping having stopped and underneath the layers of hurt built by his father, Charles felt himself crawl out from underneath, certain that he would stop his father I need to be stronger would make his father pay. Charles stood, water rushing from his clothes, and lifted his arms toward the moon. His fingers grew longer, his hands heavier I’m a man and he hauled his body out of the river, muscles cooperating with revenge. A baptism.

Second Street
By the time Charles walked home the left side of his body had hardened. He was halfway there. He walked to the side of the house to the window where his father slept, saw him straddle his mother, his chest forcing her deeper into the mattress. Charles held his breath, ready, but his father did nothing more than stare at his wife he moves I get him.

The next afternoon Charles sat on the front steps and watched his feet become stone heavy. He waited for his father, waited to see if the threat of leaving had been real. Charles heard his mother inside the house open and shut cupboards and doors, searching for the moment her husband had disappeared from her. She found nothing.

Night came quickly. Charles’ sister opened the front door ‘Come inside now,’ but he shook his head and told her ‘Keep her company and make sure she is loved. I’ll keep watch for him,’ He sat; shoulders stiff and straight. His teeth grew large and sharp. A small twinge hammered at his knees its happening. Charles stood, knowing his father would never come home.

It took three days. A knock on the door. Charles’ uncle stood on the steps, his hat tilted low over his eyes; mouth invisible. Charles opened the door.

‘Saw ‘im on way through to Tallahassee.’

Charles ground his teeth. ‘Did he see you?’

‘Was a wedding. Many people at that wedding. Was where I saw ‘im.’

‘He a guest?’

‘Well his bride held their child.’

Charles backed away from the door; a hurricane. ‘You know where he lives?’

‘Could find out. Not hard to find anyone you want, who you want.’
Charles’ spine buried itself deep inside his muscles, electric *revenge* and he could taste the word on his tongue, a divine treat of right, and he swallowed it, allowing it to carry him out the door toward his father.

Charles walked toward Tallahassee; his body a weapon. His arms tree trunks. On the road he thought about his father’s new wife and family—how the newborn must always be crying and how his father had hated it when his last daughter had cried and cried, wishing that he could quickly make her stop without anyone knowing that she wouldn’t make another sound. His father.

Overnight God had told Charles ‘Your father is closer than you think.’

‘Where do I go?’

‘He settles North.’

‘When I hurt him - I won’t punish me?’

‘I’ll protect you.’

And he walked until his feet bled.

When the sun woke Charles finally found them just outside of Cassadaga. He had grown three feet taller and weighed the size of God. He saw them tucked behind a red fence and saw the new wife sitting on the front porch reading a woman’s palm. His father cut grass by the side of the house. Charles’ heart knocked on his ribs and he took a step backwards. When the wife had finished with the woman, his father walked over to her and kissed her on the forehead and told her ‘Gotta go get that car fixed. I’m back this afternoon,’ and he left the wife and Charles stood on the footpath and watched him take off down the street.

‘Hello,’ the wife.

*Second Street*
Charles turned and faced her.

‘Young man, you come to see the light?’

‘Excuse me?’

‘Why you’re here, why they all here. I make you see the life God intended for you. You come to see the light?’

Charles walked toward her, opened the gate and stepped into her life.

‘I’m Angela.’

‘Charles,’ the name came easy, fated to his new body.

Angela stuck her arm out toward Charles and opened her hand. He could taste the divine treat of right sucking on his tongue. He smiled. This would be how it would happen, how he would punish his father.

‘I guess you could say I been lost for such a long time it kills me,’ his voice surprised him. It had lost all childish rhythm. His voice, our voice, my voice, was hard, terse, disfigured.

Angela welcomed him and told him to follow her inside.

Charles looked at his hands when he walked inside, calloused and large, and on his way through to the lounge room he caught his reflection, saw how his jaw bulged how did I become this man? ugly, awkward, dangerous. His mother’s son was gone.

There on his cheeks were the patterns of hurt and revenge. He smiled. Inside the sitting room Angela told him to sit on the sofa. She sat beside him.

‘You look different under this light,’ she told him and her sweet voice was sickly and wet and crawled up Charles’ spine making him convulse.

She giggled. ‘You met the devil somewhere?’

‘Maybe.’

Second Street
‘We should have tea first before we do anything else.’

Their house was filled with books and furniture and in the sitting room there was a small statue with a bulging belly. Angela saw his stare.

‘Gotta make sure you cater for all.’

Angela poured tea and laced his cup with lemon. ‘You’re young to be out on your own.’

‘Don’t really have a family,’ Charles watched Angela scoop her hair from her neck. She sighed. The sitting room windows were half opened, a light breeze waltzed into the house carrying with it the smell of Sycamores and Chicory. Angela was younger than Charles had expected and wondered how it was possible that she had met his father. He forced the words pretty face from his mind. He hated her.

‘Well we can start with prayer if you like, that always help.’

‘What else do you do?’

‘I sometimes hypnotise. Sometimes I meditate to find out if there is any spirits I could talk to that may help the healing process.’

Charles laughed.

‘They all do that at first. My husband did too when I met him.’

‘Was that your husband that was here before?’

Angela turned in her chair and sat back. ‘Let’s get on with the healing.’

She closed her eyes and mouthed a rhythm of silence. Her lips were red. He hated her. Her eyes will still closed when she leant forward and took Charles’ hands and placed them on her chest. He could feel her breathe deeply, could feel the warmth of her blood pulse through her blouse.

Second Street
‘Your hands feel empty,’ she told him. She pulled them away from her and opened her eyes. ‘I think we may have to try something else.’

Angela let go of Charles and asked him to lie down on the sofa with his arms crossed over his chest. ‘Perhaps if we don’t physically interact the spirits will let me become closer to you.’

Charles did as he was told. The sofa was hard. He wondered when it would be the right time to show her what he had come for. She stood above him and held her arms out straight moving them over his body, humming quietly to herself.

‘Something is troubling you.’

‘Yes.’

Her hands floated above him conjuring assumptions and possibilities. ‘You have lost somebody?’

‘Yes,’ his voice was thick and violent.

‘They tell me your father died when you were young.’

‘No.’

Angela opened her eyes and looked down at him, her mouth caught in the middle of a lie.

‘They never tell me untruths.’

‘You’re wrong.’

‘This is why I feel such pain coming from you young man, you are filled with the darkness. Can’t you feel it?’

‘No.’

‘I can make you feel love and light. You will be free from this pain that has attached itself to you.’

_Small Street_
Charles sat. A baby cried. Angela sat next to Charles and brushed his hair away from his shoulders. Her wrists were bathed in Jasmine, his head following her scent; wanting. The baby cried.

‘My husband says that too many people are trapped in lives they can no longer tolerate. I feel this from you.’

The baby cried. Outside two women walked past the house, their heels diving into the rock and soil. Charles’ legs began to tremble. He thumped his hand onto his knee. His legs twitched and collided. Angela touched his thigh. The baby cried. She told him ‘I have never felt more reason to help somebody,’ and placed her cheek on his thigh, whispering into his knee before sitting up straight and throwing her hand across Charles’ forehead.

‘I will command your body to stop this violence to you.’

From the corner of his eye Charles could see out the sitting room door into the hall. He was looking for the back door. He felt a surge of electricity carry through his veins then skin, his hands trembling. He looked back at Angela, her eyes closed, her lips paused in a grin.

‘God is coming.’

Charles looked at her, thought stupid face. Angela snapped her eyes open, her mouth tightening like a fist. She had heard him. The baby cried and she turned her head toward the door, toward her child.

‘I have come a long way to see you Angela.’

Charles choked her hands with a tight grip preventing her body from moving away. His body shuddered and he told her ‘Now that I see you I can’t understand why he would love you.’

‘Who do you mean?’

‘Your husband.’

Second Street
‘I need to see my child now.’

Charles stood and pulled Angela into his body. She landed like a thud and he imagined how easily she might bruise if he were to do that again. He held her tight and felt her breath become shallow.

‘Did you know your husband is already a father?’

The baby cried. Angela sobbed.

‘I wanted to wait for him to be here. Share this hurt. But I have been waiting so long.’

Together in embrace they made shadows across the walls. Charles body shook loudly, his hands becoming fists from the momentum.

He threw Angela into the sofa. A sack.

‘You don’t know what you’re talking about.’

He laughed at her. ‘Your husband once told mother she was ugly because she had cut her hair too short. What do you think he would make of you if your face changed shape?’

‘My baby,’ she whispered.

‘Oh, I’m sure he won’t miss it when he leaves you.’

Angela had tried to curl herself into a ball when the first punch landed. Charles stepped back and watched her face burn red. He thought about the time his father had locked him outside the house, made him watch the family eat at the table without him. Charles looked at Angela and saw his father’s betrayal. He lifted his fist in the air and brought it down hard into her cheek, a high pitched crack escaped her face, running through the house until it landed into a wall and disappeared.

‘It’s your fault mother doesn’t smile anymore.’
Another punch; the catastrophe of love. Angela was slumped in the sofa as each fist came for her. Charles listened to his body sing from the rhythm and closed his eyes. His face felt wet. The baby cried. Everything was releasing and everything would be put right.

It wasn’t until Angela whispered ‘Please no more,’ and the front door opened that Charles stopped. Charles snapped his head back and looked at the man standing in the doorway. His father dropped his keys on the ground at the sight of his wife. Charles didn’t look.

His father came closer. ‘You.’

The baby cried. Charles’ father looked down the hall toward his child. Charles pushed past him, running out the front door and down the road. He ran and ran until he couldn’t breathe. His knuckles let out a violent scream and when he held his hands out in front of him he could see all the dried blood burning patterns into his skin.

By the time Charles had come home, his body had begun growing smaller, his face receding from the bulging jaw that had made him so ugly. It was over. When his mother saw him she looked him up and down and said ‘Police came.’ Charles knew that she had been worried for him—he must have gone longer than he thought.

He smiled at her and told her ‘Everything has been fixed. I love you.’

‘What did you do?’

‘I love you.’

Silence. The sun hit Charles on the shoulders, heat filling his body. His mother shut the front door. He stood on the bottom step, his face pulling toward the sun; a trophy. He stood there an hour before the first memory came for him. Angela. Angela with her palms pressed together. Angela’s crying child. Angela’s face stained red. Charles looked at his hands. Bruised.

Second Street
And he remembered. He hung his head low, a foul wave of regret pressed against his nostrils. His chest became tight. And from the pit of his stomach came a heavy bile, spilling out onto his shoes. *Who was it that made this happen?* Charles turned from his house and ran down the path toward the river. He sat on the banks and prayed *who would let this happen?* and he heard a whisper strike him in the ear. ‘Soon it will be over.’

‘Okay.’

‘That stranger will not exist.’

‘And I’ll be protected?’

‘Yes.’

‘And I can be somebody else?’

‘You are always somebody else.’

The sun became hotter. He, we, me, could feel our shoulders sink—Charles, the bad man, would be gone. Our hands changed shape. We smiled. We could feel a seed next to our heart grow *I am always someone else*. We smiled.

James watches himself in the mirror and tries to stop the change from happening.

‘Don’t fight it,’ she tells him.

‘I don’t want to have to hurt you.’

‘Won’t it be what I deserve?’

James doesn’t say anything. He watches her walk into the mirror and he calls after her *Lizzie* but she doesn’t hear him. It’s his knees that change next. James watches his face and tells himself *I am good at being other people and it won’t be me*. He shuffles closer to the mirror and

*Second Street*
takes a deep breath. He leans in and looks at his eyes. He can see me in the corners of his pupils. 

*I don’t want this*; his final plea, but I am already there, and he knows that soon he will be me.
Lizzie
1892
Chapter Three

The house let out a sigh as another window was opened. Upstairs police officers dragged their feet around Abby’s body, their sympathy grinding into the floorboards and bouncing off the walls. Now there were two bodies. I heard somebody mutter ‘There may be another,’ and I slipped back into my chair slightly, a child waiting for the magician to reveal his final prestige.

Of course there was nobody else. Bridget, who had found Mrs. Borden, had been taken to her room in the attic. Her hard Irish voice belted down into the dining room where Dr. Bowen and I had taken refuge. *What she has seen, what she has heard.*

‘Try not to become too exhausted Lizzie,’ Dr. Bowen whispered ‘You don’t need to be here.’

‘I haven’t left this house yet. Why go now?’

He didn’t say anything else. I watched him stare into the back of the closed door that led to my father, watched him scratch small crosses into his forehead. No matter that the door was closed—we could hear the photographer catch Father’s death poses, his body stretched at an angle, stiff and cooling. Father had stopped posing for photographs last year, too stubborn to sit for the right light. *Now he has no choice.* Dr. Bowen stood from his chair and walked into the kitchen. Inside my skin a light feather of a chuckle caressed my heart but was washed away with small regret. *I should be a better daughter.*

The door opened slightly as a tall whippish officer stepped inside the room, careful not to reveal anymore of the morning sorrow. He wiped his arm hard across his face and sighed ‘Terrible weather,’ his chest was concave, his uniform dancing with his jutting collar bones.

‘Miss, there are a few things I need to discuss with you,’ he paused. An actor, rehearsed.

‘Were you alone when you found your father?’

*Second Street*
‘No, Bridget was here.’

‘And your mother?’

‘Abby had already left the house. So did Uncle.’

His fingernails inked, were filled with information. Underneath his thumb I could see myself running throughout the house, looking for some way to stop Father’s bleeding. Bridget rushed past me as she went across the street to find help, dragging her boots across the hot stones, her hips trapped in her white uniform, begging her to stop. There I was in the house, feeling my way through ideas of how to explain Father’s accident to Emma, my words untranslatable.

Underneath his forefinger, it is the night before and I am in the sitting room watching Father’s clock. I can hear the three of them, Father, Abby and Uncle in the dining room talking about fishing trips they should take together, and wouldn’t it be like the old days if Father and Uncle went out for dinner tomorrow night before he returned home. Nowhere was I mentioned. I would have to make my own fun. I should have stayed on my side of the house tonight. Then Father remembers I am in the next room and asks me to bring them drinks. ‘Bridget’s upstairs, ask her to do it,’ I tell him, and I can hear him lean back on his chair knowing that he won’t say anything else to me tonight.

The officer asks ‘Did you see anyone unusual loitering around your house this morning?’

‘No, not this morning.’

‘You mean, there has been someone before?’

My heart skipped its beat. What is the answer?

‘I’m not sure if Father had any enemies, but he was robbed last year.’

‘And who did that Miss?’

Second Street
‘Oh, they didn’t find out. It happened just like this.’

‘Such as?’

‘Daylight. When people are around. Someone just came right inside and stole from us and we were none the wiser. Nobody was caught.’

My heart returned thunderous. *Keep going!* ‘Officer, I just remembered. There was a man a few days ago that came to the door and had an argument with Father. About money I believe,’

‘What was his name?’

‘Oh, I didn’t see him at all.’

A pain shot through my arm and I flinched.

‘Miss, are you alright?’

‘I will be. I must have carried something that was too heavy for me this morning.’

He smiled behind his teeth and said ‘It’s best that a young woman doesn’t do that. For her own good really.’

‘Father says the same thing.’

I watched the officer take notes; he nodded his head every so often until he looked like a Punch and Judy show. His eyes were nervous. His note taking took intensity. I caught myself in the mirror and saw my body from the outside. Cold and numb. A shell. *This is who they see this is who they see.* But I couldn’t feel like this on the inside. I was a pulse. *We don’t always see this Lizzie, Lizzie.* Our father had been just like this a few times in his life—stoic and silent but inside a rumbling pulse, and Emma and I wondered how it was possible to be two people at once, undetected by outsiders. I watched my eyes in the mirror and felt an inner smile manifest itself into a grimace.

‘Can you tell me more about this morning?’

*Second Street*
I was no longer there. Inside I was a fairground, cartwheels turning over and over from my stomach to my chest, excited legs running down my arms. The amusement created to keep me calm, to keep myself in the places I belonged.

I told the officer ‘I’m not sure...’ my voice carrying a conversation my ears couldn’t keep up with. The officer scribbled his notes, dripping ink into his lap staining them black and blue. The heat in the house grew across my forehead and trampled through the avenues and streets of thoughts. My temples ached. I waited until the officer drew for breath and let silence rest upon me. My temples drummed secrets into my body. Rat-a-tat-tat they’ll swarm onto you and never let you rest. Rum-pum-pum soon you’ll be able to leave. Para-diddle-para-diddle now there are holes, now there are holes. I tried to block the rhythm by blinking my eyes, but the sweat burned in and made it louder. I clenched my fingers into fists to concentrate on a familiar sound, hoping it would come and take me away awhile.

I listened. I could hear a soft whisper. I knew this voice. Emma. I felt my smile creep out over my skin and into the house.

Emma pressed gently into my ears and said Little sister come with me. Her voice snuggled next to my heart and began telling me our childhood stories. I am chasing you up and down the stairs and you keep pulling at my skirt hoping I will trip. I could see us running, Emma’s hair falling in her eyes. Her voice became louder now we are sitting on the sofa and I could see Father sitting across from us so far on the other side of the room. When is this? I ask, and Emma answers it’s from the time your skin was too big for you and folded around your wrists and I laughed and I could hear Father’s voice say your body still has a lot of time to grow into your skin, little puppy. I lean into Emma and watch everything unfold in front of us. On the sofa we are watching Father and in his hand he is holding a small leather bound bible.

Second Street
Look at his wedding ring Lizzie Emma says and I watch him spin it like a loop-de-loop around his long fingers. Why does he do that? I ask and Emma holds my hand tight and spills Father’s secret: Baby Lizzie, Mother is being laid to rest today. Emma kisses my hand and says it means that we won’t ever see her again and Father stares at us and the only sound he makes is clearing his throat. He looks like a stranger in his black suit.

I try to sit as quietly as I can on the sofa and I wonder when Father will come and hold us. I look into his eyes, those grey telescopes, and see Emma reflecting inside of them, our hands cupped together like a giant bear paw. Father keeps his hands tucked away from touch. Emma flips my palm over and traces her finger across my life lines. Father’s face is young and static. Emma’s looks like a cloud. Mine is a dream.

Emma looks at Father and asks him when can we see her? His mouth moves up and down, a wooden doll, but he makes no noise that I can understand. My eyes wander across the room to the photos above the fireplace, and I count the frames one and one and another and see the faces of men and women who belong in blood. That’s how Emma explains it—we all belong to each other in blood.

I see Mother’s face last. Her hair is pulled behind her head but I can remember when it dangled across her shoulders at night time. Emma has the same hair. Emma says Mother is in heaven now but I’m not sure where that place is. I’ve never been.

Father grabs at his knees and pulls himself to his feet and walks back and forth in front of us, an underpowered locomotive. He grumbles a lot. His face moves in and out of weepiness and anger, and Emma tells me he did this when baby Alice got sent to the angels.

Baby Alice. I remember her because Emma remembers her. She’s the tiny one in the photo with Mother who breathed before I did. She was quiet and loved all things blue. She could
even speak and she and Emma would talk all night about the animals they dreamt of. All of this before me.

‘Can you tell me more about this morning?’

Emma speaks to Father but I don’t understand her words. His face moves like wood then molasses and I try to get him to look at me but he keeps looking away and so I learn the patterns on his neck. His voice is stony and quick. We don’t like his voice like this. He hangs his head a little and I tell him sleepy but he doesn’t say anything back. Emma says *maybe Mother is there with Baby Alice now* and Father looks at her quick like a rabbit and Emma folds her arms across her chest and looks down at her feet.

It’s boring on the sofa with Emma and Father but nobody moves so I try to stay still as can be.

‘Can you tell me more about this morning?’

Emma leans into me and whispers *do you remember all the old women who came to fix your hair the morning of the funeral?*

Yes,

*And the mean craggy one that had warts on her fingers and nose and her voice crackled and she smashed her teeth together?*

Yes, *she frightened us!*

*Second Street*
She was the one that took us outside into the sun and told us that we were very pretty little girls.

And then I giggled.

And then you giggled and lifted up your skirt and I was cross with you but on the inside I laughed.

I can see the two of us darting through the pear arbor and around the barn and Uncle comes outside to tell us that the service is going to take place and that it’s time to say goodbye, and we go inside the house and sit in front of Mother’s coffin and the flowers on top of it are big and delicious. I get up from my seat and walk towards them, standing on tippy toes trying to sniff them. Someone laughs and I turn around and see Father looking at me shaking his head. He lifts up his hand and I know that it means later I will get a hiding.

Emma takes me back to the best part of the day—Mother’s brother, favourite uncle, tickling our fingertips with the brush of his top lip telling us I’ll be here when you need me. He points to the picture of his sister and smiles. Our fingers jump and squirm and Father looks towards us, his face unsure—to frown or smile—and instead he looks the other way toward the space where our Mother used to sit in the sun.

Was he always like this Emma?

Emma begins to answer me but pauses, stories of Father stuck to the sides of her throat. She was about to speak when we both heard ‘Can you tell me more about this morning?’

Emma and I turn our heads toward the staircase. I don’t remember anyone saying this Emma. When did they say it? I watch Emma lift her finger to her temple, tapping out all the conversations of that day onto the floor.

Second Street
‘Can you tell me more about this morning?’

Emma, we have to find those words! When did somebody say this?

She doesn’t answer. She throws her hands into the conversations and tosses them over her shoulder. Once I had seen Mother do this with salt, the small white rocks landing on the kitchen floor.

‘Can you tell me more about this morning?’

Emma throws a sentence towards me and I catch it in between my chubby palms and roll it around until I can hear it properly. The sentence says When Father is angry at you he’ll stop speaking and he won’t look you in the eye. Father can make you turn into a ghost. As long as we have each other we will be alright.

I look up at Emma and tell her We have each other now. We will be alright.

She squints in my direction as if I am the sun too bright. She speaks to me but I only hear silence, long and frightening. Emma pulls herself onto her feet and walks up the stairs. She looks over her shoulder at me before disappearing around the corner. I sit on pins and needles.

I hear Emma’s voice bounce down the stairs Lizzie, answer the question.

I don’t want you to leave me behind. Please stay and help me.
I am stuck in the corner of the room, my hands aching from resting underneath my knees. I pull them out from underneath me; they are no longer childish. They are longer, slender, adult. There is a small cut on one of my fingertips, blood dried around the openings.

‘Can you tell me more about this morning?’

I looked away from the cuts, the blood, and back into the room. Sitting across from me the whippish officer leaned closer, his salty breath dry. I must be careful Emma I mouthed, and he leaned closer again, shaking his ear.

I tell the officer ‘Father came home sick this morning around ten. Bridget let him in.’

‘Where were you Miss?’

Through the closed door I could hear the other men speak about Father’s body—his brutalized head and pale elderly body. From somewhere inside I heard myself say I want to be in there. When do I get to see him again?

‘Miss Borden?’

‘Outside. No. Upstairs I think. Bridget let him in,’ yes, these were the right things to say, to think.

‘Did you speak to your Father at all Miss?’

I wanted to be good, accurate. The whole morning seemed as if it had never existed, as if God had erased it realizing his mistake. I shifted in my seat and the house responded with a deep crack through its walls. The officer turned his head to the far wall next to the stairs.

‘The house is loud.’

‘Yes,’ I held my breath. Please be good I told the house Don’t say anything else.

Second Street
The officer returned his eyes to me and smoothed his fingers across his chest ‘Now your Father…’

‘Yes Yes. I did manage to speak to him, on his way in, I offered to fetch him water. He looked very pale.’

‘Had you noticed him ill at breakfast?’

‘No, I wasn’t there for breakfast. Bridget had already packed up.’

‘And your mother, where was she?’

My thighs pulled toward each other, warring with my calves which wanted to separate.

‘Step mother,’ I told him.

The officer held his pen in the air, his wrists pausing abruptly on my correction. ‘I thought…’

‘Mrs. Borden is Father’s second wife.’

‘I see,’ He flung his pen back into the ink well and pounded his fist against the yellow white paper. I tried to look past his fingers and onto the notebook. He guarded his thoughts well. I darted my eyes through cracks of ink and saw: I am yet to see the daughter cry.

Were they going to believe all that I had told them? I searched for an image he seemed to want, an inconsolable victim, but she wasn’t there. Not the person they wanted or needed. He looked up at me and my head bowed down, a long learned exchange between man and woman.

‘Has somebody fetched Emma? She would have no idea what’s happened.’

‘Your sister?’

‘She’s been away in Fairhaven.’

‘How long for?’

‘A few days.’
He wiped his forehead and for a moment his face became taut and crooked; an outline of the devil burning into my cheeks and tongue. His head flung to the side, a small smile crossed his lips - his hard work about to pay off. A missing family member. A possible coincidence.

I hadn’t kept this information from anyone—nobody had seen the sense in asking me earlier. He called over his shoulder and asked his supervisor who should send the telegram to Emma asking her home. I sank into the back of my chair and breathed from the lowest passage of my lungs. My mouth hollowed out a small O and old air rushed out and slammed against the door. Everything inside the house made too loud a sound.

Bridget was still upstairs deciphering minutes and seconds, telling her questioner ‘No, Miss Lizzie sent me out to get Dr. Bowen, but he wasn’t at home and so I quickly came home,’ She paused and added ‘It was awful all that blood.’

I latched onto Bridget’s tongue; a buoy to save from drowning. She remembered more than I could and I wondered where all my stories were going to, why I couldn’t reach them when asked. I would have to pay attention to her. I anchored my ear closer to the ceiling and navigated my way over the dust and through the wooden boundaries of my Fathers’ room. Finally I was close enough to hear Bridget, all her breaths and considerations, all the words that would have to be mine. For once she would be more than the maid.

The officer returned to his seat and took out his small notebook. ‘Your sister has been sent for.’

‘Thank you.’

We began our roles once more. This time I was prepared. I told him ‘I sent Bridget to get Dr. Bowen,’ and waited for him to catch up. When Bridget began with ‘So then Miss Lizzie sent me to go get Miss Russell and off I left again,’ I finished her sentence with ‘Mrs. Churchill came

Second Street
from next door while Bridget was out and she could see what had taken place and she went to find help as well.’

The officer quickly read his pages. ‘Miss, you were alone when all this happened?’

*Think carefully think carefully he could use this against you.* There was too much to consider, to remember. There was too much of me imprinted into the scene.

‘Yes, but soon they all returned.’

The officer flicked through his pages and said nothing. I wanted to reach over to him and pull him close and yell *Look how many times I sent for help!* but I sat stuck and stubborn unwilling to help him. He would have to catch up by himself.

‘But you were alone for some time this morning?’

Upstairs Bridget answered ‘I think Miss Lizzie was waiting for somebody to arrive home. Maybe Mrs. Borden because she wasn’t home then.’

The officer asked ‘Where was Mrs. Borden then Lizzie?’

Bridget’s answer travelled through the red and blue and greens of the wallpaper into my mouth ‘She had been sent out.’

I shook my head. Bridget had it wrong. There was something creeping at the back of my mind, a spider of memory spindling toward the top of my head. Here I could see it clearly: Mrs. Borden talking to Bridget about a fabric sale. *Another reason to spend our money.* She had smothered her neck in lavender water and had pulled her hair too tight around her temples. I could see her face becoming harsh and older and I had wanted to tell her that I hated the way she looked, that it made me feel uneasy. I wanted to tell her to stay on her side of the house, to stick to the rules. I would have to remember to tell the officer that that woman never listened to me,
that she would continually look in the opposite direction whenever I came near, that she was trying to divide Emma and me. I would have to remember to tell somebody.

I closed my ear from Bridget so I could correct the story with ‘I remember that Mrs. Borden had mentioned a fabric sale. She wanted Bridget to go with her.’

There was a long humming sound that swept across the floorboards and down the banister. It grew louder and louder until it began sounding like a woman’s voice, slow and exaggerated. The sound bounced into my chest and I tapped my arm hoping that it would go away.

The officer stopped taking notes ‘Miss, I’m not sure what you mean.’

The woman’s hum stopped. I looked toward the ceiling. I opened my ear again and tried to catch something that would make sense. The officer was confused. Bridget must have told me something different.

‘Oh?’

‘You said Mrs. Borden asked Bridget to go to the fabric sale, but then you said you told Mrs. Borden there was a fabric sale.’

Upstairs I heard Bridget add ‘And Miss Lizzie told me about a fabric sale she wanted me to go to but it was too hot to go downtown. I said I would probably go another time.’

The spider memory sang *Ding dong ding dong round and round and round you go* until I felt nauseous. I threw my hands across my eyes and waited for the rush to leave me alone. There was too much to remember.

‘I’m sorry,’ I told him ‘A lot happened this morning.’

‘You can take your time.’

*Second Street*
I pressed my hands tighter into my eyes until all I could see was black and stars, tiny gold drops raining down into my heart. I saw myself at the bottom of the stairs, the way I have stood for moons and suns and I pressed harder into my eyes to make sure that what I was seeing was what the officer needed to know. Everything looked familiar but felt like a hundred ways of life scrambling to the top of my head.

*I can see something officer. Oh yes it is very clear.*

*Yes this is how it was, officer.* I can see myself at the bottom of the stairs, rubbing my fingers across my lips, watching the three of them—Father, Uncle and her—sitting at the table. Uncle skirts around his food, a dancer, and she, Mrs. Borden sipping on her broth, too hot for her mouth, looks up at me and stares through me as if I was her ghost. I can see her tongue from here: it’s thick and grey and old and I wonder if it ever was young, if it planted itself into many mouths of men or just my father’s. I can see myself now, clutching the end of the banister, all my knuckles white and red waiting for her to finish. Father just sits at the head of the table pulling back the inky spotted banana skin. I want to scream at him *it’s too ripe! You can’t eat it you so and so fool* but being good standing at the stairs I stay silent and wait for them to finish.

*Abby you spoil everything!* Now she asks Father ridiculous questions about her sister’s property. Father wipes his mouth with the napkin and tells her not to worry and then he looks at her and I can see all their secrets seep through their eyes and onto the table. From here I see Uncle hide a smile and I see his fingers ready themselves at the edge of the table. *War war war, officer!* *That’s what I saw* and Bridget comes back into the dining room and begins removing breakfast and the three of them gather themselves up and Father once again asks Uncle to stay for dinner tonight and Mrs. Borden tells Bridget that they have a lot to organize this morning. That’s when I walk into the dining room and Mrs. Borden asks me if I am hungry and I tell her

*Second Street*
that it is obviously too late for me to have breakfast and that I shall just have to wait until lunch is ready.

Officer, Abby acted as if I hurt her feelings. What a misery she is.

I pressed my hands harder into my eyes. The black reveals me again standing at the stairs, but I walk into the dining room where everyone is and take my place at the table. Father makes a comment about being just like old times, and I tell him that it is only because we have company. Emma and I will take our meals separately again when she returns from Fairhaven. I sit next to Mrs. Borden and listen to her sip at her broth. I watch her hands. I look at mine. Mine are strong and adventurous. Hers shake slightly as they lift toward her mouth and Uncle asks her if she is going to leave the house at all today and she tells him that she will stay at home. Uncle looks at me and says ‘Quite a full house we have today,’ Father then stands and tells us all he must leave for the bank and tells Uncle that they will speak again at dinner tonight. Uncle says he will look forward to it and they shake hands and Father leaves through the front door and Uncle leaves through the back door to visit friends.

There is now only the three of us and the house becomes hotter. Conversations are had. I opened my eyes and stared at the officer.

‘I do remember what happened.’

There were a few ways I could tell this story. They happened just as they happened in my black and stars world. In the first I tell Bridget there is a fabric sale and that she should go. I found out about the fabric sale because Mrs. Borden told me about it. But then I remember that a letter came for Mrs. Borden that morning. A friend had sent for her. I didn’t see where she left the note and I didn’t see it again.

Second Street
'I came down stairs a few minutes before nine, officer. I should say about a quarter before nine. My uncle had already left for his outing.'

'And your Father?'

'Well he was there with Mrs. Borden. They had all eaten breakfast but it was already packed up.'

'Did you speak to them?'

'Of course. I spoke to them all.'

'About?'

'Just common things. I asked them how they were.'

The officer dipped his pen and lightly ran his fingertip over the nib. Above our heads the floorboards stretched out as far as they could until they reached Bridget’s ankles. Her voice pushed through her feet, out of her tight boots and vibrated through the boundary of upstairs and downstairs life. She poured over the top of me. She said ‘I heard the two of ‘em talkin’ and Mrs. Borden kept askin’ Lizzie how she felt. We weren’t feelin’ the best after breakfast.’

Then I added ‘Mrs. Borden asked me what I wanted for dinner. I told her not anything. Then she said she had been up and made the spare bed and was going to take some linen pillow cases for the small pillows at the foot, and then the room was done. She said “I have had a note from somebody that is sick and I am going out,” and then I think she said something about the weather. I don’t know.’

We were loud in memory. All the spaces between an hour, between life and death came toward me. I caught a possibility floating around my head—a day that Father might have once told me that if I was good for long enough, that if I worked hard enough, if I smiled bright enough, the world and everything in it would become a small tornado and wrap its goodness

Second Street
around me until everything became warm and safe. It would all reveal itself and I would be a majesty.

I looked toward the closed door where Father was locked in secret. I leaned forward in my chair. When I opened my mouth my tongue felt waves of vowels rising in silence beginning with the words *Daddy I want this to be true.* Then there was silence inside me for the longest while. I couldn’t think of how to finish. I closed my mouth and swallowed it all away.

Inside my little tornado I smiled and somewhere a song started out the corner of my ear

_Everything that could ever be is be is be is be. All I say is what it was and will be will be will be._

_O queeny don’t be sad no more for its over will be over over over._

There was room for possibility. There was space to be remembered. Bridget took a deep breath and said ‘After I cleaned the windows I was going upstairs but then Miss Lizzie stopped me and reminded me about the cheap fabric sale.’ There was room for possibility. I saw myself in the sitting room watching Bridget clean the windows. She looked pale, even in the sun, and I could feel some kind of panic walk toward me. I tried to look the other way as it came. It asked _do you think she will be the only one sick?_ and I shook my head and closed my eyes and tried to concentrate on something else. Panic said _it is likely that Mr. Borden will come home sick too._

_W what will you do then?_ Because its voice was beginning to carry too much heat I responded _I will take care of him of course_ hoping that it would leave me alone and let me back to life. I kept watching Bridget. She was slow cleaning, wiping her cheeks into her arms. Through the glass she looked small and tall and small again.

I could see myself clearer now. I could tell the officer anything because it would all be true. I could tell him that I then went outside and stood under the pear arbor for a short time, took a pear off the tree and then went to the barn and ate it. I could tell him that I took another pear
...and ate it in the middle of the yard, and how hot the sun felt and how I could see small beads of sweat on the attic windows. I could tell him that I went back into the barn to look for a lead sinker, that Uncle and I had decided to take a fishing trip the next day like we used to. I also ate pears again. They were delicious and dripped down my wrists, sticky and sweet smelling. Then I was back inside the house, ironing handkerchiefs in the dining room. I almost forgot I could tell the officer. I had also read a magazine in the barn. I was there for almost half an hour reading. Everything was becoming so clear. I could even see myself speaking with Mrs. Borden, although it is hard to remember everything I told her. Perhaps I would have asked her about the time she met Father and did they love each other immediately and if they did, what did that love feel like and did she think it would ever happen to me? I could tell the officer all of this because it was truth. All of this happened in the house. It shouldn’t matter when it all happened.

I was about to tell the officer that when Father came home I was ironing handkerchiefs in the dining room, when Bridget said ‘There was a knock on the door. It was Mr. Borden. I unlocked the door and he came in and he didn’t at all look well and then I heard Miss Lizzie at the top of the stairs and she laughed but I don’t know why.’

The officer clamped his fingers around his pen and said ‘I’m sorry, I’m not sure I follow Miss.’

I shifted in my seat and pulled my skirt wide. What had been said?

‘I was ironing.’

The officer leafed through his notes and said ‘You said you were upstairs when your father came home.’

‘You must have misunderstood. I was ironing in the dining room, and then when Father came home, I fetched him water and then went outside.’

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Second Street
‘Did your Father do anything before he settled on the sofa?’

‘Bridget said she saw him go upstairs. He took the back stairs.’

‘Is that usual?’

‘Well, the front stairs are for Emma and me. They use the backstairs.’

The officer looked at the ceiling to find the barrier between Father and Abby, Emma and me. His body moved away from his seat a little while he tried to understand why a family would live separated. He thought about his own family, how loving his mother and father had been to him and his three sisters and how each Sunday after church they would each lunch together and pray thanks to God as to how grateful they were to be able to share this day with each other. Sometimes at night the officer and his sisters would camp out in their backyard under the stars and salute the constellations, allowing their mother and father to make love throughout the house. The officer had vowed that when he married, he too would love his wife like this and that their children would be born with that love tattooed onto their skins, everyone whole and blessed.

I wanted to tell him *there was only so much we could take* and that when Father had decided that we were no longer his choice, that She would reign, I told Emma that we would lock ourselves into safety and make them suffer our absence.

The officer sat back in his chair so I could tell him ‘It is convenient for us to use both entrances of the house—there is always so much going on.’

‘And were both entrances locked when your Father came home?’

‘The front door was heavily locked like always, but the side door was unlocked so that we could go in and out of the house to carry out our business.’

‘And did you notice anyone at all come in through the side door?’
‘No, but wait, maybe there could have been someone. Maybe this is what he wants to hear. Tell him, do tell him! Officer, do you think it is possible that someone came by and waited by the side door until we were out of sight?’

I imagined a stranger watching us through windows, waiting until he knew it was safe to hide in the house and carry out his misery. I could place him anywhere in the house—under the stairs hiding in the cupboard, in the attic where Bridget slept only hours before. Then he was in the basement hiding his weapon, convinced nobody would search there because it wouldn’t make sense to leave evidence behind. How clever! First to kill Abby without a soul hearing her body thump to the floor, then Father in the sitting room, not allowing him to cry out for help, letting us think that Father was sleeping peacefully. How clever!

The officer shrugged his shoulders and said ‘Miss, we just can’t imagine who would do such a thing.’

I leant forward and told him in a whisper ‘Officer, I did speak with my father when he came home. I told him that Abby had gone to visit a sick friend. He smiled and said ‘She’s always looking after others’. That’s when I left him to rest on the sofa and I went outside.’

The officer reached out his hand and placed it on mine. He said ‘It must have been such a shock,’ and I told him ‘At first I did not think what had happened was real. I noticed he’d been cut, but I did not see his face properly because he was covered in blood. I was so afraid. Officer, I did not know that he was dead at the time.’

Second Street
Second Street
Second Street

Benjamin
1905
Chapter Four

James was a newborn when he discovered her. Lost in stacks of yellowed newspapers at the bottom of drawers from his last life, Lizzie shone bright and miraculous. He remembered falling asleep, blood on knuckles, telling himself that those hands didn’t belong to him, that it wasn’t him that had done violence I found the woman laying like that promising that he would make sure it never happened again. In the photo Lizzie was soft. James closed his eyes. He had been running for three days but he could no longer remember why. He opened his eyes. Lizzie looked up at him, a small smile tripping at the corner of her mouth. Somewhere inside himself James was slowing, was breathing. She made him feel like heaven.

He went to the small sink by his window and washed the blood from his hands. He dried them and put them into his suit pocket. He felt the scrunched ball of cotton and pulled it out. Inside his hand was a woman’s handkerchief, and inside that was a tooth. James remembered. It had been David. David’s hands covered in blood and bruises. James allowed himself to play a trick on his memory so that he would be able to believe it, easier to believe the new truth. David had been a boxer. He had a family—a small child and wife, and it was she that had lovingly wrapped the tooth inside the soft cotton as a good luck charm for his last fight. David had fought his opponent and won; the defeated’s body hitting the ring hard and stiff. David had returned home to find his wife and child missing, taken for ransom, and it was this, such loss and grief that had allowed James to be born, to try and forget the hurt.

The new memory buried itself into James’ bone. He sighed, relieved. There could be no more violence.

Second Street
He returned to the cupboards to look for clean clothes and saw her again, paper after paper duplicating the same image. She was young pretty face mystery playing hide and seek behind her eyes. James felt Lizzie look right through him and he prayed that she would be able to see the good that could grow inside of him. She smiled again and in the corner of his cheeks he could feel the hint of kisses. He cried. It had been too long since the possibility of love had come to his body, our body.

Her eyes told him what it was to be trapped between being and forgotten. He felt a tug at his spine making him pay attention. He hadn’t noticed the accusations of murder at first. Her photos were attached to articles accusing her violent. James looked deeply into her eyes until he hit the centre of her soul. James had known memories of violence, none of them shaped like Lizzie. He asked her ‘Show me how murder was possible,’ but he knew there would be no answer. The innocent do not have to respond. James dug deeper into the stack of photos and watched Lizzie’s face bulge with anxiety and sleeplessness until he found the article declaring her innocent I knew it couldn’t be true and somewhere inside of him relief flooded his bones and muscles, letting him know that he would be safe, that nothing would hurt us anymore. He had found his twin.

In the photo Lizzie’s eyes smiled at him from underneath her bonnet, the strength of her jaw line arching toward him. He placed the picture over his face and let her meld into his skin, their eyes locking, knowing each other. Lizzie told him ‘They had the wrong person. The real murderer is still out there,’ and he believed her because people such as he and she were always misunderstood by those around them. Lizzie reminded James of the word immediacy and he wanted to live like that forever, with her.

Second Street
Throughout the day James looked at Lizzie and read the only words he had heard her speak: ‘I wish for the chance to grieve properly for my dear father and his wife, whom I constantly think about. Please pray and hope for my sister Emma and myself so that we may continue with our lives in peace and protect the memory of our dear parents.’ Lizzie’s words fell off the page and buried themselves into James’s skin. They made their way though his bloodstream travelling like hitchhikers. Somewhere in the middle of his heart the vibrations of Lizzie’s voice cajoled him into laughter and for the first time since James had been born he understood the feeling of comfort. He let it sit in his body and tuned into Lizzie’s frequency and he knew that they were meant to be lovers, that they could play bride and groom.

James cut Lizzie’s photographs out of the papers and lined them across his lap, touching each of them; delicacies. In each of them he noticed small changes—in his favourite, Lizzie’s eyes focused off centre, staring into nothingness. If he looked at the picture at a certain angle she was able to wink at him making him blush. Lizzie reassured him—he understood her, all that loss, being told you were something that you knew you could never be. People like Lizzie and James belonged to one another, made to grow inside of themselves through each other to make love for the world.

James remembered that we had once heard someone talk about love at first sight and at first we didn’t believe it could be true. But now we were James. Different. James wondered what it was to possess someone, to have them all for yourself, to be drunk in that love. James wanted it, to belong to someone, to have them all to himself, just once. Nobody had looked him in the eye the way Lizzie had and he was sure that she felt the same way this is the first love. James wondered how many times Lizzie had loved, received love, nobody else is to love her anymore
and he could tell from the tilt of her head that she was special, that nobody was able to give her what she wanted, what she desired.

That night, the first night, James went outside and slept under a willow tree, covered in a blanket of night and stars. Her photograph bathed his heart in gold and forced all the bad memories out of his body and he went to sleep knowing that he would be made brand new.

During sleep, James’ body softened, grew out of hard, sobered skin and cocooned into a living cell full of possibility. He had felt Lizzie sleep by his side, whispering in his ear ‘Feel me. Touch,’ and James’ hands propelled alongside her rib cage and over her hips and he knew that it wasn’t enough simply to touch them. He wanted them for himself. *This softness, happiness* Lizzie’s lungs soared with each touch and James found himself matching her, becoming her equal. She sat on her knees and swept her finger across his stomach and they both watched his skin turn green and blue then purple. A fire grew inside of him stopping at his chest. Lizzie quickly touched her breasts and throat, her body relaxed and strong, and she threw her hands on top of James’ chest; a gift. Magic mixed in his blood and flesh and Lizzie smiled and told him ‘Look,’ James lifted his head from the ground and stared at his body, watched small pockets of skin quiver and explode until he could see his own breast growing over his heart *just like Lizzie* joining the intersection where soft belly met hip. He was changing, becoming whole *this is what I am meant to feel like* and Lizzie moved forward and gave him her lips ‘I like you like this,’ she told him and he knew he would never be the same.

Our past was being erased, pushed back to a time where it needn’t exist and his body sung; peaceful. In this body there would be no more running. He ran his fingers through his hair and followed the short edges that swum around his temples and as they moved across his crown he felt the strands become longer, thicker. He pulled at them. They resisted, refused to be pulled.

*Second Street*
out of home. James smiled *just like her* and Lizzie told him ‘See how easy it is to be love, to want to be yourself.’

‘Yes.’

‘And you never want it to end.’

‘Yes.’

‘And you’ll never let anyone take it away from you.’

‘Yes.’

‘You will protect yourself.’

‘Always.’

‘And be with me.’

‘And be you.’

Lizzie smiled wide; her teeth small white stones. She lowered herself back into the ground and lay by James’ side, held his hand. ‘I’ll not love anyone but you,’ James howled inside, heart skipping beats and flying to the moon. Love, all to himself.

In the morning James woke alone. He was not afraid. Lizzie would take care of him. To make sure it hadn’t all been a dream he let his fingers fall onto his body, creep along the trail; it was all still there, she was all still there, their bodies, his breast, his hips. On his lap Lizzie’s pictures sat perfectly looking up at him, and he traced diamonds across her face until his fingers became numb. There was difficulty believing that she had never been loved and he knew he was made for her. He sorted through his pictures and came to his least favourite: two sisters. Emma standing behind Lizzie, her head lowered, shoulders lifted tightly into her neck showing pain. She heightened Lizzie’s glow and James knew there couldn’t be room for Emma in their lives, that she would have to go *no room for this loveless* and in the picture James could see how little

*Second Street*
Emma cared for her sister, had abandoned her in Lizzie’s time of need she should have been stronger for her, made sure that she had been protected. Emma reminded him of someone from the past destroyer and he knew that people like her, selfish, had always tried to ruin him, ruin his time in love. James stabbed his fingers through the paper until there was nothing left, confetti, and threw it all into the wind. He reached for the rest of the Lizzie’s pictures and kissed them all before folding them neatly, placing them into his pocket above his heart no more negativity and he knew that Lizzie was calling to him, wanting him to take her out of her life and into his own.

James stood from the ground and brushed his thighs. It was time. He tucked Lizzie back into his pockets and began walking his way toward her, knowing that when they finally came together, he would be whole.

As James walked through farming towns and quiet counties he didn’t notice the blisters that had begun forming on his soft soles or that his knees wanted to pop out from underneath him. The hope of Lizzie turned any torment and pain into treasure. From time to time he would stop and watch women walk by, shifting and lifting their dresses as they passed puddles. He wondered if Lizzie would do the same and decided that she would have walked through them perhaps even on top of them yes she would have walked on top of them maybe even higher and her dresses were tyrants of red fabric our favourite colour tightly holding her neck and fitting every inch of her body perfectly. He imagined that some of her dresses had secret panels sewed into them so that if he wished, he could lift them up and peek at her underneath, he knew that his favourite places were her thighs and ankles and at times he would slip his hand inside and rest it upon her hip and press into her flesh to keep warm.

Whenever other women passed by him he titled his nose toward them breathing them in and out. Some were stale and he resented them for forcing themselves upon him. Usually they

*Second Street*
wore perfumes of lavender and rose and although they weren’t his favourite scents, he decided he would let Lizzie wear them from time to time. When they were alone at night, Lizzie would wear spices—cinnamon and sandalwood—from the new world weaving them through her hair and dabbing under each breast, wrist and ankle. Sometimes she would let James wear her, letting him match her pulse points and in these moments she would climb on top of him, weighing nothing at all, kissing his throat and running the tip of her tongue over his eye lids. She breathed into him and filled him whole.

He thought of Lizzie’s voice and tried to match her against the tone and melody of each woman that had ever told him ‘Good day,’ or ‘There are wonders that are buried inside of you.’ But Lizzie’s voice was sweeter than any of these and she only spoke in magical tongues, words that had never been spoken by anyone else in the history of life. Lizzie was not other women.

James kept walking through the night. He was surprised at how well darkness treated him. His spine had stretched making him stand taller than anyone had ever stood and from that height he knew he could touch God. Finally James came across a small farm house. He knocked on the door. Nobody answered. He slipped through an unlocked window and looked around the house. Empty. Abandoned. The house was dusty painted with dirt, a faint yellow brown growing on the walls and cupboards. There were only two rooms, a cracked door separating the house’s loneliness. In the corner of the second room, a wooden bed was held together by rope and dressed in black and blue patchwork. The pillow and mattress were flat and had forgotten how to support life. There was a wash basin at the back of the room cramped full with one cup, bowl and plate and ill matching knife, fork and spoon. Swimming in amongst the dishes, a rusting razor still held onto tiny bristles, a blunt pair of scissors lay cowering at the bottom of the sink. Everything had been reused more than they should. Chipped and bruised porcelain boasting all

Second Street
the cold dinners ever served. James knew that the fork had made every meal taste like metal. Walking back into the middle of the house James wondered when the owner had given themselves permission to be so alone and promised himself that he would never do so. He would bring himself to Lizzie as soon as he could.

James took Lizzie out of his pocket and caressed her neck before taking her to bed with him. The bed sunk and moaned but found strength to hold James tight so that he could dream. He pressed Lizzie close to his chest and made sure she could match his breath, his heart beat and when he knew there was singularity he heard Lizzie tell him ‘I am going to love you for the rest of my life,’ he smiled, unable to believe they were bonded through the same lineage of love.

James fell deep inside sleep. Once there James and Lizzie traded secrets to each other. Lizzie told him ‘Sometimes I am afraid of the dark.’

‘So am I but I know I could protect you.’
‘Would you be able to show me the world?’
‘I invented the world.’
‘Who would we let inside?’
‘Nobody. There is only enough room for us.’
‘And what part of the world would we live in?’
‘Side by side.’
‘Side by side.’

Lizzie came out from behind James’ back. They stood face to face. She had unraveled her hair and it travelled down the waterfall of her neck and the hills of her shoulders. James reached out to her and ran his fingers through her hair and he was surprised at how easy they slid through her light curls, her hair made of velvet. He bent into her and smothered his face in her hair. It
was suffocating, crimson and lilac hid between strands making him want to die; he would be happier than he had ever been, could ever be. Lizzie started to giggle and her throat caressed his neck and he pulled himself out of her and into her eyes and melted no, I will keep living.

In the small hours of morning James woke and sat at a broken kitchen table. Silence stood over him. His heart knocked on his lungs, loud and strong. Above him there was a crack, the roof opening itself up. James anchored his neck toward the sky and smiled. It was God now I can thank him for delivering a gift as precious as Lizzie. God sat by James’ side.

‘Do I have to give her back?’

‘I would never ask that of you.’ dressed in a cloudy suit God put his hands in his pockets and pulled out a small box, giving it to James.

James opened the box and stroked the small delicate necklace that was inside. The small silver rope hooked itself around a tiny drop of Heliotope, dark green married to red and yellow, and he lifted the necklace to his lips and kissed it. It was just as it should have been; cold delicate. On his lips the Heliotope pulsed through his flesh and into his body, electrical currents tickling his cells reminding him of Lizzie so lucky to have found her and he placed the necklace around his throat and smiled this is what belonging feels like throwing his arms out in front of him. He imagined Lizzie in front of him wearing the necklace. She looked down at her throat and breathed in the stone ‘It tickles when it gets inside of you,’ and James giggled with her. Lizzie stretched her arms toward James until their limbs came together, branches, slowly waltzing in small circles, finding each other through their hearts this is what it will be like when we finally are together.

Above him God sat on the wooden beam that ran across the roof.

‘Do you like how she responds to you?’

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‘Yes.’

‘You will give the necklace to her as soon as she speaks to you.’

‘And she will wear it?’

‘Abandoning all else.’

‘And she will come with me then?’

‘Just as she should.’

James took off the necklace and kissed it one last time before putting it back inside the box. God smiled down at him then climbed out of the roof into the universe leaving James inside the house alone. James stood and walked back into the room with the rusting bed. Hidden under the frame James found a small suitcase. He opened it. Inside were soft fabrics: camisole, knickerbockers, life of woman. He smiled. They were made just for him I want to show her who she has helped me become, this love and James took the underwear out of the suitcase, removing his tattered suit and layered the fabric over his breast, small chest and growing hips. His suit fit properly when he put it back on and he smiled, complete.

James closed his eyes. He could see the life that was waiting for him. Lizzie would come to him dressed in layers of cotton and lace and lay beside him. He would look down at her and she would lift her right arm in the air and whisper ‘Come to me,’ James would bury himself under the blanket and tie himself to her skin I will never understand this feeling again entwined; her body moving around his like a planet spinning. They would hold hands and when James lifted her fingers to his lips her skin would be soaked in perfume, allowing him to drink from her; nourished. Their hearts would beat unison and when they laughed their voices would register octaves soprano to hysterical. The closer Lizzie pulled her body into James the more he would feel the boundaries of skin disintegrate, blood running the same type carrying love. They

Second Street
Second Street

knew each other and there would be no more loneliness. Lizzie’s lips would stretch beyond the shapes of words and form the outline of James’ heart. He would kiss her and melt into himself.

James opened his eyes lifted his hands to his face. She was still there. His heart beat stronger knowing that the day would bring him to her, that he would be safe and there would be no more running. He straightened his suit over his camisole and noticed that his hair had grown slightly longer, had developed curls, and as he moved closer toward the mirror there was a tugging inside his bones that spread across nerves through muscle making him feel brighter than he had ever been. A fire grew inside his stomach that stretched past his thighs down into his ankles and as he looked closer at himself in the mirror, he noticed his skin begin to shine, the brightness creeping alongside his ribcage and nestling inside his lungs; happiness. If he looked hard enough he could see her, see that he could become her. He smiled. She smiled. They smiled.

Outside the house James took out Lizzie’s picture from his pocket, stroked her face between his fingers and kept her close to his chest. He began walking toward her on loose dirt and rock, his feet shuffling, cajoling the body to run but his legs wouldn’t cooperate, content in taking their time, making sure every inch of James was ready for Lizzie.
Chapter Five

It was afternoon when they left me alone in the house. In the silence my heart kept rhythm with Father’s clock. It struck three and my body ached. In the silence the house had started to bend toward the sun, cracking timber to follow warmth. Somewhere in a corner of the house I heard you must see them before they are taken away.

In the dining room Father and Abby, stiff and straight on undertakers’ boards, were waiting for the coroner to come back to them, waiting to tell him what it was to be dead. After everyone had left I opened the dining room door and lifted an eye inside the room. I held my breath. These are the things you shouldn’t see and have been kept away from I reminded myself, but there under the white sheets frightened and silent their bodies held each others’ hand like first time lovers. I closed my eyes while Father reached his arm around his wife and told her it will all be over soon.

I walked into the room and quietly pulled a chair from out under the table, and dragged it back to the corner by the opened window. There was no longer any breeze. I held my breath and wondered what should I say to them? and the answers flooded sorry sorry sorry, who would have thought that a day could turn out this way. I lifted my head toward the ceiling. Underneath the light fixture, paint crumbled into tiny flakes of yellowing white, summer snow falling on top of the sheets covering Father and Abby. Father would hate such a mess.
I hid a smile underneath my palm and tasted salt. On my wrists there was a spatter of
blood, tiny tiny droplets that were still finding their way through the house and onto my skin. *I could wash myself but they will never leave.* I licked my finger and wiped it at my wrist, erasing
Father, erasing Abby from my body.

It was when the silence became too much that I heard my voice tickle its way through my
throat and out into the open and filled the room with ‘Oh great God,’ until I felt that I was no
longer alone with Father and Abby.

Underneath the sheets like an echo I could feel Abby humming, her vibrations jumping
from table to window to chair and all throughout my body; the songs she sang when I was young
and couldn’t sleep through nights of Father’s yelling. I turned to shout at her *you are not that
person anymore* and saw that she was now lying on her stomach, her hair cut away from the back
of her head. All her soft skin was opened like a rock; hard underneath hard underneath cold. I
saw Father too, on his back tired, one arm stuck to his torso while the other reached toward
mercy, toward Abby. I saw Abby’s shoulder flex toward Father’s hand.

*No more touching! No more make believe love!* screamed through my head, a siren
warning, until I could no longer be in the room. I stood up and walked across the room toward
the door. In the corner of the door frame a flower petal clung to the wood. Bridget had missed it
in the clean up. Yesterday the dining room was covered in purple bloom until all petals had been
ripped from their stems after Uncle had told Abby that he couldn’t bear the smell of violet.

‘It reminds me of their mother,’ he had told her. ‘How do you think that would make
them feel?’

Abby said nothing except ‘John, you must be tired.’
Uncle left the room to find Father and told me ‘Lizzie, I’m sorry these things keep happening to you.’

I picked the petal up from the door frame and stuck it into my side pocket and walked through the sitting room leaving Father and Abby behind.

Outside someone yelled ‘I can see her,’ as I passed the parlour window and I smoothed my hands over my hair and walked up the stairs. It had been easy to forget that others existed.

I pulled my hand across the hot banister and it melted into my palm like taffy. Everything slowed and the walls pulled themselves away from their foundations. There was no more silence, everything loud and thunderous the closer I got to the top of the stairs. On the landing, the heat was a tyrant of rage and pushed my mouth open into a halo, forcing my breath flow fast then big until I could hear myself scream then laugh. There was nothing I knew any more. I was a stranger.

I walked into the guest room where they found Abby and saw that the police had opened all the drawers and cupboards, spreading our life across the floor until it was dirty and soiled. Father would be angry at the mess. I thought of how he would demand I clean it up and how I would turn toward him and refuse. There would be a moment when his eyes would snap open and his neck would turn thick and superior. He would knot his fingers together and say ‘You will do as I say,’ and I would smile at him sweetly and press my palms over my ears, and I would watch his mouth open open shut, open open shut and pretend he was saying ‘I am wrong Lizzie and you are right.’

On the floor the police had laid out an old towel that we used for cleaning. It was covered in boot prints, like an invisible soldier had stormed the house during the night and had rescued all of us before the enemy had time to notice anything was amiss. Just like the time Emma and I

*Second Street*
became little ghosts leaving flour footprints all over the kitchen. So long ago I tiptoed around Emma’s bed and whispered ‘Make me laugh missus chatter!’

Emma rolls over and asks ‘What do you want to do?’ and I tell her ‘Let’s be naughty,’ and we walk downstairs, me a Jumping Jack and Emma a mouse, into the kitchen where it is cold waiting for the sun and we go through the cupboards telling each other:

‘We could eat all the sugar!’

‘We could hide one of the knives.’

‘We could hide in here until someone opens it and we jump out.’

‘Let’s eat all the food except for the horrible stuff.’

And then Emma spots the flour tin and asks me ‘Lizzie would you like to be invisible?’

‘Like a ghosty?’

‘Yes.’

I say I would if it really meant no one would ever be able to see all the naughty things I would do and Emma tells me ‘No one will ever ever see you, not even when you’re old and spotty.’

We stand in the middle of the kitchen with the tin in between our feet. We take off our nighties and bend over the tin and dive our hands into the flour making fistfuls of clouds slamming into our bodies.

‘Make sure you cover my face,’ Emma says and I throw another handful at her and it lands in her eyes and she gets cranky at me and yells at me in the voice she knows scares me. She stops yelling when she hears Father walk down the back stairs unbuckling his belt. We listen to the leather slither its way through loops of material and his boots whip into the stair case. Then it is quiet. We close our eyes and become invisible.

Second Street
I opened my eyes and looked at my shoes dancing on the blood stained carpet, the last pieces of Abby’s life licking at my heels it’s an ocean, I’m in the sea yippee and at the bottom of the sea are fine strands of graying auburn seaweed, little fish swimming through it hoping to hide from sharks. I dive into the water and let the sea salt cleanse my face and when I hold my breath I float toward the top toward the sunlight. On my way up I explore like a deep-sea diver. I find hair-combs and brushes, pieces of lace—all signs of sunken treasure, a bounty stolen from pirates. I try to put as much treasure into my skirt pocket, careful not to let it sink me. I let out a deep breath and watch air bubbles fizz and pop and I kick ferociously toward the surface and when I get there, the fresh air hits me and I smile.

Downstairs a thud sounded and echoed through the house. I heard the heavy boots of a police officer thump up the stairs and I quickly pushed a piece of lace deep into my skirt pocket this skirt is always fraying walked out of the guest room across the landing into my room and locked the door.

My room was tight with heat. My head ached and all the blood rushed to my ears then forehead making everything black and solid. I stood in front of my mirror and pulled at my clothes when did they become so tight? and peeled away the layers until I was naked. I giggled. My skin was pale and opaque and caught in webs this is not what thirty-two should look like. Everything hurt. I forced my fingers onto my arms and ordered them to march. They trounced over hills and mountains, digging trenches under my arms and breasts I’m beginning to feel better and the army advanced down my rounded stomach setting up telescopes to view my groin and thigh. My skin cooled and the house dimmed its heat. With a one two left right the army continued toward my toes taking with them my webby skin until it became liquid, beautiful.

Second Street
I layered my clothes back onto my body and straightened my hair *perfect* and let out a sigh. I peeked out my bedroom window into Second Street and watched everybody finish their day. I wanted Emma to be home and inside my head I wished and wished that she would hurry *but she might be angry when she gets here and you’ll be in trouble for letting Father die.* There were many things I needed to explain to Emma but I didn’t know the words. I imagined how she would enter the house and come running for me pushing past all the men downstairs that stood between us. I would open my door for her and she would pick me up from the floor and cradle me in her lap and I would tell her ‘It was so terrible Emma, so so terrible I thought they would never stop with their questions,’ and then she would look at me with those loving eyes and kiss me on the forehead and tell me ‘I will take over from here now Lizzie, you go away and disappear and leave all of this behind you.’

And I would go sit on the floor by my bed and reach underneath it, pulling out my book of dreams and memories *because they will also keep you safe* and letting myself fall into its pages. I would walk across the big white open pages and look around *where to start?* before swimming across blue rivers of words to the page that began:

**April 1890** Abby walked through the back door with fiery eyes and stood in front of me. She opened her mouth and breathed on me, so foul and monstrous, and told me ‘If I have to tell your father what you have done you will be sorry.’ I laughed at her until she slapped me across the face.

I would keep swimming and see

*Second Street*
January 1818 In the dream I was pale and blonde and my eyes were turning white and I knew that if I waited long enough I would become transparent and no one would be able to find me. Then somewhere behind me a high voice sang *they don’t remember what can’t be seen* and I wished it to stop because I wanted to be seen and remembered but the voice kept singing and I could feel myself disappear. But I’m awake now and I can still hear that voice, still feel my eyes leaving me, still feel my skin turn powder snow.

March 1891 I dreamt of Emma last night. I came into her bedroom and straddled her shoulders and while she was still asleep I turned her face toward mine and pulled my hand into a fist. I waited for her to open her eyes and when she did, I punched her in the face going right right left left left right, and she screamed for me to stop but it felt so beautiful to be so free and I punched her until her eyes became red and blue and her nose made a snapping sound and I punched her harder making sure I aimed for her mouth and with every blow I gave her one of her teeth came out and I punched and punched until she had nothing left. When she was still and her breath became slow, I pushed myself off of her chest, wiped her blood away with my sleeve and kissed her on the lips. In that moment I truly loved my sister.

April 1891 Someone came into the house and stole Abby’s belongings. Very naughty. When Father came home he became absolutely impossible to be around and I wanted to talk to him about my plans for the house but he pushed past me and didn’t say a word. Later that night I heard Father lock his bedroom door and come down the back stairs. I came down the front stairs.

_Second Street_
and saw him in the sitting room placing the key on the mantel piece. He gruffed ‘Now we’ll know who comes and goes out of our room, Lizzie.’

I wouldn’t have liked to have read anymore negative memories about Father so I would have gathered all my strength and swam further into the book. Outside of the book, Emma’s voice sounded like God be careful not to get hurt Lizzie and I lifted my head toward her voice and waved up at her to let her know that I was having a wonderful time in here and that when I got out I would know how to be comfortable and know exactly how to be. I would shout out to her ‘Here’s something you might remember Emma!’

**September 1888** Abby attacked us yet again today and now Emma and I are deciding what shall be done. Abby seems to think that she is entitled to give her opinion as to how Emma and I should spend our time. She even had the nerve to suggest that I am leading Emma astray! And yet Emma said nothing to her and took it all like a slap.

‘Do you remember when that happened Emma?’

‘Of course.’

‘But did you see how weak you were?’

‘That’s not fair.’

We could have bickered like this for awhile but I’d keep swimming.

*Second Street*
November 1888 I saw Abby through the key hole naked.

January 1892 Father came to me last night. He was a lighthouse. He told me ‘Storm’s coming Lizzie,’ and he stood in front of me reflecting light and moon and I thought How old you’ve let yourself become Father and he came toward me moving through thick water and for the longest time there was only silence and the heavy feeling of fog. In my bed I was a rock.

July 1892 Abby’s sister visited this afternoon. I wanted so badly to run her out of my house. Ha! Let her have her last visits.

August 1892 Sometimes I want to be free of Fall River. I’m done with it. The people who live inside here are terrifying with their stupidity. I should do away with them all, slip them prussic acid and watch them all disappear. That would be what I want. Just for today.

August 1892 A man came to visit me in my dreams and I knew I had seen him before even though he was faceless. I felt him sit with me on my bed and it felt so real and he placed his hand on my leg and patted it three times, his fingers pushing tingles through the blankets up into my body, electricity swarming like a plague. Yet I wasn’t afraid—I was waiting for him to tell me the news he had for me, but there was nothing, only the visit. There is a chance that this man was God.
July 1891 I found a memory. Perhaps I am thirteen. I am waiting for Father underneath the stairs and I am filling with a million balloons and I lift off the ground just for a moment and I can hear Father treading boards in his room and I reached into my heart to grab hold of all the hugs and kisses I had saved for him and as he came down the stairs I thought I heard myself say *this is the day to say sorry, that you didn’t mean to say those things* and when he reached the last step I lunged out from under the stairs, ready for the attack, my arms wide and giddy and said ‘Daddy!’ He stepped past me and said ‘Lizzie, you shouldn’t frighten people like that.’

When I had enough swimming I would come out of the book and sit back on the bed with Emma where she would stroke my hair and we would discuss what we should do for Father and Emma would tell me ‘Lizzie leave it to me, you’ve been through enough today. You’re so brave to have been here without me guiding you,’ and I would finally relax and close my eyes knowing that I had done all I could, that I didn’t have to tell anyone anything else anymore forever and always.
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92 Second Street
(The House Speaks)
Chapter Six

1. I am pale yellow but used to be white.
2.
Sarah and Andrew wore smiles bigger than I could ever grow. When they spoke to each other they cooed into each other’s ears and let their hips touch bone to bone. The word *secret* was unknown.
3.
Men walk through me measuring all the spaces in between this height and this width. They do not like my angles and simplicity. They speak of me: Ugly.
Sometimes at night I sing myself full and all the notes bounce off my stairs and floorboards to sound like dancing.
In Sarah’s dreams she is always a child. There is the dream where she is at her grandparents’ farm. Their house is full of trinkets and there’s a cross above the front door that scares her. She can smell her grandmother in the bedroom, old vase water. Her grandfather sits in his rocking chair, smoke rising out the top of his head, his legs and arms made of wood. Walking through the house Sarah becomes air, her head a cloud and she drifts out the window and vanishes, only to reappear in her grandmother’s bedroom as an old woman, knowing she has skipped half her life.
5.

In the washroom Sarah pours fountains of water on top of Alice’s head. Alice’s giggles transfer off soap and onto my floorboards. This is how I understand hope.
6.

Alice is carried on shoulders. *Camels* she thinks, *yehaw yehaw!*
7.

Emma takes Alice out through my back door and into the yard. Under the grape arbor flower chains are flung into the sun. In among the chitter chatter I hear heartbeats louder than my own.
8.

When Alice died Andrew blamed Sarah then he blamed his God. I was cold that night. Sarah took Alice and sat tight in the rocking chair. Her fingers shook as she pulled them through all that childish hair and when she smelt her fingers her face shook her eyes sad. Emma sat at Sarah’s feet and listened to her lullabies of goodbye. Emma held onto her child sized cross and asked: *please please God send a new baby that doesn’t die and is a girl just like this one.*

I pulled my windows tighter; a prayer.

*Second Street*
9.

Sarah places Alice into a pine box. The timber on timber cracks through me and echoes back into Sarah. All that sound rattles like a lost ball inside of her. Andrew prepares for the undertaker and wipes his eyes and lips with shaking hands. A photographer sets his camera in front of Alice’s box. Alice looks like sleep sweet.
After they buried Alice, Emma crept to her parents’ room to see if they were able to hold each other. Every night Emma waited with me in my hallway. She told me how she loved/ would love her sister and that they would never part. I pushed onto my walls to sound a creak; my promise of love.
11.

A new name is whispered into the womb; these kisses for good luck.
12.

Emma pats Lizzie’s baby head with soft hands and whispers: *stay where you are and never leave.*
13.

Sarah cradles Lizzie in her arms and through the moonlight whispers *all this love is for you.*
14.

Andrew holds Lizzie for the first time but cannot understand how this child will fit comfortably in his arm. Sarah places her hand on Andrew’s barrel shaped shoulders and tells him to lift her head like this, and place your arm over her like this. He tells her: This is going to take some time.
15.

Heads pop one! two! Two smiles peering under Sarah’s dress. I buzz from being whole.
16.
Sarah is sick in the mornings but tells her daughters this is what happens when you become too happy, when your body must release the sunshine.
17.
I learnt the word *forever* first.
Sarah holds Andrew, hands plump and whole, and says *goodbye*. I ache raw.
Andrew washes Sarah’s body while Emma sits by her side. He whispers *no more loss* but decides not to cry. In the next room Lizzie sleeps in her cot; baby dreaming.
Andrew lives under my protection of secrets. In me he has two faces. The first is for his children, who are growing into puzzles. The second is his outside face. It is this face that has attracted the sympathy of women.

At night Andrew writes neat sentences of hope:

*Mary Robinson – childless, tidy hands*

*Elizabeth Joseph – older, beautiful face*

*Abby Durfree – unassuming, comfortable*

I stretch myself awake and wonder how names can make a man happy.
21.

Emma teaches Lizzie a new game. Patty Cake.
Lizzie and Emma smell like cookies and sound large and everywhere. Emma tells her that tomorrow everything will change.
Andrew brings Emma and Lizzie his new wife: Abby. He tells them that she will be their new mother and that they should love her as they would him. Emma steps forward and curtseys; mistaking a mother for a queen. Lizzie stands idle and small. I try my best to bend forward and make Abby feel welcome, but the stretching aches me and I let too much noise surround her. Abby shudders shoulders and wraps her thick shawl tighter around her back. She smiles polite and walks through me quietly, taking Emma and Lizzie by their small and growing hands. Andrew watches them with thick eyes and thinks *a full household will bring relief*. 
I am waking Abby to rescue Lizzie from this sleepless night. Abby wraps herself in a red blanket and scurries her feet over me until she hits the point of run…

…Lizzie clips her fingers over her lips like spiders and rubs her feet together for warmth. In this space she has watched the coat stand become a man with silver in his hands, the bookcase a clown’s face with heavy lidded eyes. Lizzie believes what Emma tells her; that the night lets secret lives live. In her room she counts the cracks that I am growing and wonders what will come out of them…

…Abby tells Andrew about Lizzie’s night terrors but he says: *it’s all in her head*, that *visions will always disappear once someone is closer to god*…

…Abby pushes gently on me, opening her face to Lizzie’s dreaming, blindly feeling her way to the small bed. Lizzie’s eye grows wide, owl’s sight, and pulls her arms out of heavy covers. Contact. Abby sits her lips on top of Lizzie’s forehead until the good dreams come back…

… In the other room Emma makes small echoes that bounce and bounce around each other and I listen carefully to the highs and lows of pitch until I can understand the message: *Why won’t Lizzie call out for me?*

*Second Street*
I have counted ten days since Andrew last spoke to Lizzie. I try to raise my floorboards to tell her that it isn’t her fault, but all she does is cover a pillow over her head to block out my sound.
26.
Emma finds the first letter tucked behind a cabinet in Andrew’s office. It has been folded and then crumpled each time Andrew rediscovers it. This letter was written the night he met Abby. Andrew describes her as: auburn hair/ sturdy/ bright smile/truly promising/kind to children. In his best handwriting Andrew adds Borden to her name; studies the potential of two people coming together.
Emma traces her fingers over her father’s plan of family architecture and thinks: such stubbornness.
Lizzie finds letters second to tenth hidden amongst Andrew’s undergarments. The fifth says:

Reminder to place new flowers on Sarah’s grave.
28.
Another shingle has fallen off me but Andrew decides that nothing needs to be done about it now. At night I fill with too much water.
Lizzie hears confessions. She is flat on her stomach with her ears pressed up against the doorway and through the wind hears Andrew tell Abby that *I deliberately dreams memories so I don’t not have to worry about new nightmares or visions*. Abby tells him *there is no escaping the future*. Andrew walks around the room and says *the past is always better because it is safer*. Lizzie lifts her head from the floor and wipes her eyes. Outside the wind pushes into my sides.
30.

Lizzie complains of being kept locked in a world of adolescence and Andrew tells her that until she marries this is how others will see her. Later on she tells him that *my life should be lived like it is in dreams* but he silences her with a pale palm until she gives in and turns away.
Emma and Lizzie slump on their beds, sick of feeling sweat drip freely on their bodies.

Lizzie: *We shouldn’t have to do this, this is not our lives.*

They concoct plans to ease the burden of domesticity.

When they tell Andrew that: *the house needs a maid,* he winces from ideas of spending more money. When Andrew finally agrees it is because he likes the sound of working women’s feet: affirmation that he has done well in life.

I watch Abby slump into her needlework; the agony of disregard.
32.
Many women walk into me for the hopes of work. The last one, Bridget, is offered the job because Lizzie wants to imitate her accent.
I am starting to hurt from all of these feet.

Second Street
Lizzie shows Bridget around me. I open up to welcome. Their differences are burnt into flesh. I feel it first in hands. Bridget rushes through me with a sharpness planted inside softness. She scratches neatly at her palms; relief. This I understand. Her eyes watch me opened roundness but I feel Lizzie watch me with excuses. Lizzie takes Bridget by the hand. Lizzie is leisure walking. Bridget slows her feet to match the speed of indifference. Her legs long for movement. Lizzie asks Bridget did you have to leave much behind for the voyage to America. I try to sink myself deep inside Bridget but can only smell the surface of thought. Locked inside the answer not really is truth: Only life.

All is only life.
Lizzie finds letter fifteen amongst the ruins of smoking tobacco: Abby, there shall be nothing left over, for everything I have I’ll give to you. I will tell them nothing until it is time.

Lizzie destroys her father’s promise until it is nothing but smashed memory.
35.
At night I become an open mouth, pushing out the day, breathing new air. Sometimes I moan against the heat.
Andrew keeps his cupboard locked. Lately Lizzie and Emma wait for him to leave and Lizzie giggles as they walk up the stairs. Emma slaps Lizzie on the hand and tells her *behave*. Emma picks the lock with her hatpin. Lizzie pulls the papers out. They pour their eyes over Andrew’s words and do not talk. After their silence Lizzie yells until her throat is raw. Emma forms fists. Andrew’s new secret is betrayal.
37.

Abby is called to bed. Lizzie pushes her ear against the door and shuts her eyes and waits for sound. Lizzie hears a breath and holds onto her own. The bed heaves as Andrew shifts his weight onto Abby. Abby closes her eyes and parts her lips to make room for Andrew’s thick tongue. Lizzie pushes her ear closer to the door and making a fist asks me *when it will all be over?*
Bridget’s hands are calloused and dry and are losing their youth. When she wipes her hands along my banisters and walls I feel the brittleness of labor. She thinks that life here will eventually become better. A month ago Bridget was port side throwing up all those waves that made her heavy. She remembers the voyage from Ireland to New York through a series of smell and taste. She tastes the bitterness of rotting fruit: two days before arrival. She smells the acidity of strangers and their fear. She remembers memories of dreams, dreams of dreams, memories of stories from older men and women remembering all the life and freedom that went before them and before the British came.

In the middle of these memories Bridget stops at the time she went fishing with her father at Hungry Hill. When she had asked him why Cork was so green he pinched her on the cheek and told her: *luck*. She had smiled when her father squeezed her nose between his coarse fingers: *What if I can’t smell dem fishies anymore?* Her father laughed and said: *well there’s always ya grandmas cookin’ to remind ya.*

Now inside me Bridget tastes isolation: sour and foreign.

When Bridget hums her songs tickle me.

*Second Street*
39.

Andrew erases Abby’s pain; stroking fingers. I hear the air between them pull tight.
Emma and Andrew sit at the kitchen table side by side and use their fingers to speak. Andrew taps three times *pass the butter* and Emma obedient does not forget the butter knife. Emma asks: *how will you be spending your evening?* Andrew considers *business meeting* but changes his mind and tells her *nothing.* I am used to watching this way of being between father and daughter.

There was a time Andrew used to sing songs to Emma that began: *O! The Lord he loves you so* and afterwards he would embrace her with enough warmth to keep her safe throughout the night. All the love, once.
41.

Have I ever let them know how I feel?
Anger has come to stay. I am beginning to smell like charcoal and dampness. Lizzie and Andrew argue over frivolity. Lizzie shouts: *You have no idea what this is doing to us* and Andrew shakes his head, turns his back on her reddened face. Lizzie stamps her heels into my carpet as Abby calls Lizzie a liar, telling her: *Someday Lizzie you’re going to have to grow up.*

Shock cuts though me in tiny pieces of hot breath and fury. Lizzie becomes a snarl.

When Emma comes home Lizzie tells her: *It is time to stop living with father and Abby. Tell Bridget we will no longer be eating meals with them.*

My dissection begins in Lizzie’s room. She locks the adjoining doors on the second floor and forces her way through my middle locking all doors tight. Every bolt that grinds fills me with heaviness. My sides ache with unknowing. Lizzie whistles like a bird and Emma asks if she should be acting so happy.

Abby and Andrew sit together in the kitchen. They speak with their eyes:

Andrew: [blink. Stare] *They will eventually get over this*

Abby: [eyes widen] *I cannot understand why they hate me so much*

Andrew: [stare. stare] *They have been given too much for too long*

Abby: [eyes close] *I tried. My god I tried.*

In Emma’s room Lizzie sits on her sister’s bed and looks out at her satisfied. Emma asks *how long should we stay separated?* Lizzie binds her hair around her fingers and tells her *until father changes his mind.*
43.

A split personality, I am filled with two of everything and have nothing of happiness.
44.

I have heard Lizzie and Emma, excited, trying on each other’s dresses and contorting their bodies in mirrors.

Lizzie: *O madam! So nice of you to visit.*

Emma: *Well I could never miss an opportunity such as this*

They smile. All these games they play never stop.

*Second Street*
45.

Bridget is caught between two charges: generations that refuse to admit the other’s existence.

She knows how to pretend, to make them all happy.
46.
Andrew is dreaming. He pulls at his pillows as dream faces become clearer. There’s Alice so small. Emma kisses Alice on the forehead and tells Andrew that she will look after her always always. Andrew feels his fingers tingle as he takes Alice by her five-year-old hand. I watch him lengthen his arms, his body stuck between dream and reality, and as he calls out: Alice you’re still here! he swoops his arms like tree branches around a globe of air, smiling as he carries himself through this new world.
Andrew believes there is nothing inside him. I want to tell him that a heart still beats.
Days have turned into days upon days and I am still split in two. I hurt not knowing how to make them happy. I am growing more cracks in my walls; pressure to accommodate their rights and wrongs.

I am tired.
49.

I count feelings on Lizzie’s fingers; an abacus of touch. She stops at tenderness and hides a smile. It lights my head like a firecracker, an independence day for joy. She traces her fingers over closed eyes, travels across the opening arch of lips. I travel with her like a ghost of memory. We think of future days when she is no longer held inside me. Our lips taste wine then honey, drunken sweetness this happiness. We imagine being pulled onto tall ships; Lizzie climbing towards the height of Christ. She asks me if there will be forgiveness. Always, I tell her. She clicks her tongue, a metronome of prayer. We stay climbing the masts until we taste clouds. An imagining doesn’t last long. I hear rumble beneath us. There is trouble on the way.
Andrew and Lizzie sit at the ends of the kitchen table, back facing back, to deny each other words. They wait in silence until:

Andrew: *will you ever tell us when this will be over?*

Lizzie: *it’s not really up to me. Why not ask your wife when it will end?*

Andrew: *isn’t this all enough?*

Inside Lizzie swarms like a queen bee. She smiles.
Abby reminds herself of a self; watching Bridget steady into a new life is a mirror. She wonders if this arrival signifies her acceptance. I whisper to her in sleep *oh I wish it was true.*
Bridget runs her fingers over my windows and walls and says that I am bigger than anything she could ever know in Ireland. This word calms me. I must never forget it.

Bridget crushes me with sorrow. I tilt myself to help pick her up from feeling cold. She whispers for home and takes out a locket from her bag. The engraving on its back spells: *Toward Ireland.*

All this newness weaves questions into my heart. I wonder:

What does Ireland mean?
53.

I remember:

It is morning and Abby and Lizzie walk with each other through the grape arbor, dodging low branches and holding onto their skirts. Inside I am burning smells of cinnamon and broth. In the sunshine, Lizzie looks like a giant, her shadow creeping in on Abby’s. Abby takes a step back and is confronted by the shape of a young woman who is outgrowing her. I am listening for change as I watch Abby’s eyes pour over Lizzie’s body. I hear nothing until they walk into me. Inside themselves they are loud with thoughts and sounds; a drumming symphony. Abby is the sound of wonder. Lizzie the sound of frustration. It occurs to both of them that they do not remember the last time they had a lengthy conversation. Lizzie stands in my kitchen doorway and watches Abby drag her way to the sitting room and she thinks: *why you are always everywhere?*
54.

I ask the night: what is the fault in me, why can’t they like me? I only hear my answers crawling back at me, everything sounds trapped in a cylinder.
I watch the trees grow through seasons and wait my turn. One tree brings a bird and its worm to the young. Sometimes that chirping flies up at me like happiness. I wait my turn to change but lately I’ve been falling out of myself. I push myself to become large.
Love isn’t a loud word anymore
57.

Andrew tucks his hand into his coat and feels for heart. He sighs and thinks *it's been years since.*

I have remembered a younger man.
Lizzie and Emma address Abby only as Mrs. Borden. The title digs into skin, a knife carving estrangement.
59.

I hear rules relay across rooms like a patchwork. Lizzie to Bridget. Andrew to Emma. I am complicated by words and by anger. Bridget calculates the space between error and triviality; mathematics to solve the equation: it is too late to find a new family to work for.
60.

I am covered black and blue with *no*. Lizzie’s becoming uncomfortable with this newest straight jacket. She is mercury rising.
I taste Emma from her bedroom. She tastes of salt and violet water. Emma dreams an ocean summer, her feet hot in sand, her face cool under shades of books. Her skin becomes a tingle in the sun. It all ends with the coldness of a shadow. I rub her back with all the comfort I have left.
62.

Lizzie’s eyes are changing shape. Bridget asks if anything is the matter. Lizzie tells her it’s only a trick of the light.
The night before Andrew died was filled with Alice. She was sitting on the edge of his bed patting his leg. He pulled himself up to get a better look at her. She was smiling and as he reached for her saw it was no longer Alice but Lizzie. He pushed her hand off his leg, said: *You’re not meant to be here.*
64.

In her room Lizzie complains to Bridget that I am closing in around her. The feeling in my walls is hard to explain. Sometimes I think of myself as the kingdom in Emma’s bible, strong and complete.

I look for my faults in other homes. There are features that belong to the wanted that are hard to replicate. Those homes smile forever. There’s a constant wink through the curtains. At night they hover over and above me while I feel the earth pulling at my heart.
When Andrew begins *why can’t you be more like your sister* Lizzie imagines an army of herself surrounding Andrew, kicking and screaming into his soft body until bruised and deaf. He becomes a puppet joined to her limbs, obeying the quick and small steps she takes throughout me. When they reach the kitchen Lizzie dances with the army, Siren calls, taking turns to pull at Andrews face until it becomes an erasable blank. The army takes his broken face and like delicate treats, suck at his eyes and lips until all flavour is lost. Lizzie keeps his tongue for herself and hangs it between her skirt and belt; a rabbit’s foot for luck, a scalp for warning. Lizzie commands her army to fall behind her and I watch the kaleidoscope of selves swarm like hornets to the nest. Andrew’s dormant body stands frightened, his fingers twitching as they empty out his spirit. Lizzie makes her way for his fingers and tugs at them, heartstrings without pulse, until she feels them become loose like thread. The army moves around Andrew busily, taking the tiniest corners of skin and peeling them away until they uncover muscle then bone. Lizzie thinks of ways to wear her father.

Sometimes when Lizzie feels guilty she rebuilds Andrew until he resembles someone she feels comfortable with. This Andrew smiles wider than any sky she has ever dreamt.

But Lizzie hasn’t rebuilt for months and now, after each unraveling, she sits at the kitchen table and laughs until she falls asleep.

After imagination Lizzie answers Andrew: *I am trying father, I am always trying.*

Bottled inside her heart a new and growing Lizzie beats wildly, waiting impatiently for her arrival.
I am too hot. Abby sweeps across me, her skirt following her in wide circles. In the guest bedroom Abby licks sweat off her top lip and flattens her hair with clammy palms. Her corset digs deep into her flesh. Her feet have grown tired. They itch but they used to be able to take her all places. Abby’s feet remember a carnival, an ocean, a wedding. Abby sits on the bed and leans towards the vanity mirror. Her fingers trace the outlines of her wrinkles and orbit the skin around her eyes. Abby squints and finds something that she recognises. Eleven.

Her hair was longer than she remembered but there it is reflecting a hot sun. Her mother has only just finished braiding it and Abby asks for a blue ribbon to be tied at the end.

Sixteen.

She walks with her sister who is signing a hymn. Abby tries to imitate her but becomes distracted by the boy she pines for.

Thirty-seven.

Abby remembers Andrew’s hand on the top of her head. Later when they marry she has second thoughts.

She remembers Lizzie asking for a bedtime story. Abby tells her about an enchanted sea, full of treasures and promises. She tells her about her own childhood and feels her heart filling with love for a child she knows can never be truly her own.

At sixty-four her face is stubborn with experience. She asks her cheeks how all of this has happened. She stands and straightens her skirt between her hands and faces the bed. She smiles.

Second Street
Sometimes loneliness feels like a friend. It stays awake for me until I am ready for sleep. Safety. Reliability. It is there when night covers me in a blanket; a wooden cave. It is there again when the sun peeps under my windows. We play games – open shut them. I call out to it through my doors; it answers in echoes, a threat that it may one day leave me. What replaces a nothing?
Andrew: *It will be a busy day today*

Abby: *Don’t push yourself too hard*

Light pecks on the cheek. He leaves his absence on her chest like a medal. She reminds me of
time.

*Second Street*
A thought becomes shared if it is experienced enough: *Long ago I was still a child*
Air is tight today and I smell of salt and sweat. I feel the hot hot come from underneath me. My front is aching from stares. Without curtains everything is visible. The people outside make me feel like death, my insides sucked through a portal making me smaller. I don’t fit too easily.

What they don’t know: I am filled with goodness, wanting love.
Bridget closes her eyes and sings to me:

‘Tis sweet to think that, where’er we rove
we are sure to find something blissful and dear
and that, when we’re far from the lips that we love
we’re but to make love to the lips we are near

I strain myself to pull tight into her. She is warm.
Lizzie and Emma take stock of an accumulated life. Emma wants the silver hair combs that are hidden underneath silk stockings. Lizzie considers what Abby could offer her. There are ten church dresses dating back before the marriage and before the weight of misery. Emma remembers the green one, the feeling it gave her as Andrew told her there would be a new mother. Hope. She came to them small and delicate. Emma had heard other women talk about reluctance over necessity. Riddles now understood. Emma opens the perfume box and sorts decades into scent. A small jasmine bottle, a memento to twenty-five, its scent only ever alive when Abby was alone in me. The last bottle, sixty four, is half full; the scent of their spite leaping up at them fierce. Lizzie demands it be taken out of me immediately.
Three boxes line Abby’s side of the room in desperation.
Hidden in the backs of wardrobes Andrew keeps a past. Girls from school he once considered courting live in this darkness. Andrew reaches for Louise, a firecracker with a welcoming smile. They walk to and from school holding pinkies and on Wednesdays there is toffee. He remembers her small hand/ her warm breath/ dimples in every smile.

Andrew clings to Louise, removes years from old age.
75.

Bridget is outside cleaning my windows. But nothing lets her see inside clearly. There is an energy trapped inside me that moves so quickly I cannot find it in time; it hides away from me whenever I come too close. I feel its punishment take the form of feet, tiny heels stomping purpose into my carpets. I feel something that is caught between hatred and relief.

As Abby bleeds into me I understand what it is to be forgotten.
I am covered in sound/ in fear/ in secret. Everything sticks to my walls like a disease. Everything is becoming too loud. I am scared of drowning in all of this noise and smell. How do I know how long this will last? There is already a change sweeping through me but it is hard to accommodate it all. I think of all of Lizzie’s complaints and see that I am becoming much too small. Truth is beginning to taunt; it shows all the ways it can hurt me. The cracks in my roof are frightening.

As Lizzie makes her way to her bedroom, she shakes her head and whispers *creaky old house*. Lizzie sits on her bed with knife in hand peeling the layers of a pear. The juice drips onto me like rain and cools the heat coming up from underneath me. We breathe in together and I will myself to grow larger than I ever have. Lizzie falls onto her back and stretches her arms wide above her head, she feels extra space escape her touch; she smiles and clicks her tongue and her happiness treads lightly through me like a prize. This is the feeling of accomplishment. This is the feeling of acceptance.

Lizzie hears the side door open. She bolts straight up, her lightening striking me. I am scared.
Bridget walks through my kitchen with the heaviness of life tied around her waist. Lizzie takes to the stairs and calls out *Stay there, I’ll be down with you in a minute.*

Bridget closes her eyes and thinks to herself: I’d give anything for this day to end quickly.

She hears Lizzie walk slow and deliberate down my stairs. Half way, Lizzie laughs loud and long and Bridget wonders what memory she has thought of.
There is knocking at my door. I hear: here he is

I am locked tight as a key. As Bridget unloosens me, Andrew walks into me with the force of a man unwilling to understand the feeling of weakness.

I have eaten something that has made me sick he sounds, rushing to the sofa in the sitting room.

Lizzie sits at the top of the stairs and waits. Andrew pushes his back into the back of the sofa and lets out a long sigh, then licks his lips trying to stay cool. Lizzie stands and takes the first step.
79.

There are questions asked. What does it mean to be woman?
There are times when I’m alive in the darkness. In the insides of my walls and roof are nerve endings that remember moons and suns from before I became me. I am shadows across faces and voices into ears. It is easier to be a self when backs are turned.
81.

The clock strikes its rhythm; a heartbeat I can call my own. People grow their whole lives to have one just as strong. I feel I have cheated.
82.

I return to feelings best. Such happiness this unit; Andrew and Sarah and Emma and Alice.

Tomorrow could not exist but all is perfect today and all is a smile.

Second Street
83.

Outside my front strangers surround me. A witch on a stake, I do not sink.

*Second Street*
84.

All the feet become heavy on my floorboards and I think of the point where I break. They are running through me at speeds I cannot keep up with. Their odour weaves through me and I recognise the smell of confusion.

The voices are pitched. They grow from commands to whispers so that I can’t hear meaning. Inside my middle there is pain tumbling. The smell of loss is stuck on me like a sign of guilt.

I open up but it sticks, this dirty muck. A man leans against me like a load, too heavy, and uses the names Andrew Abby Andrew Abby like riddles. He pulls their names apart from themselves so that they sink away into my walls, sink into the colours of me.
I count the smiles from Lizzie to Emma. So many so many. Numbers do not exist.
86.

Why am I always being lied to? I am trying to be good, to be that love.
A bird flies inside me. It lands and jumps like a jumping jack. Its laughter is in the shake of a feather, the bird moves high to low round then round; an eye inside an eye.

I am wondering how you catch something that moves so quickly.
88.

Bridget takes her breath deep and counts to three, her hands fighting fingers fighting skin. She tells the police *I’ll never return.*
89.

Lizzie Lizzie jump jump jump can you catch catch catch those thoughts of thinks

Emma Emma sit sit sit hands under the table make you kick kick kick
I let the moon in until I am full of float and off I go carried into my dreams. In the highest corner of myself I think *clarity*. I run to myself and dream past them all well into the night. Sometimes I feel their breath walk behind me like a fire; a heat filling around, choking.

And I am floating. In this dream they call me happiness. I wear a smile and everything inside me grows until I am stretched beyond a stretch. In this expanded me there are many possibilities: I have never had tears. I do not know what it is to be a trap. I sing because I belong to heaven. Sarah always wakes from that long sleep. Andrew smiles, eyes to Lizzie.

They call me happiness so that I am.
91.

I sink from all this death. What did I do wrong?
Andrew and Abby are carried to dining table and laid out like decorations. The doctor covers them with a sheet and they rest under the comfort of obscurity. Their bodies touch under the sheets; naughty children staying up late.

I remember the first time Abby came to live inside me. She wore red and grey and her hair was turned in on itself. Andrew wrapped his arms around her, guiding her through well-worn paths of child games and adult worries. Her footsteps, light and shivering, bounced through me like little claps of thunder striking up through my stairs and into my walls. I felt like a million lamps lighting for the first time. Andrew took his seat in the sitting room and unbuttoned his top two buttons, letting relief fill me up with deep breaths. He asked Abby to fetch water, and she smiled to remind herself that this was going to be the life worth living.

I remember the first time Lizzie and Emma sat with Abby in the parlour. Emma sat politely and worked her fingers into a knot of expectation. Lizzie stared at Abby’s face and giggled until her cheeks went pop!

Andrew and Abby’s bodies are becoming cold with fright. They look so small and insignificant. Side by side they stare upwards at me. Their eyes burn too many questions into me and it hurts all too much.

How is it possible for a body to look like it never existed?
Lizzie and Emma pack lives into trunks. They kiss each other’s cheeks and hold onto hands like latch-keys. Lizzie smiles and Emma wipes at her eyes. When they walk out of me for the last time I feel cold. Soon guilt will layer my walls like a blanket.
There is something else. Wait. Can you feel it? There it is again! It’s so loud it won’t stop! Can you hear it? It sounds something like beginning. I hear it coming for me. Thunderous this hunter. It’s coming for me. I am scared. Thunderous this hunter! It won’t stop. It doesn’t stop.
95.

I am pale yellow but used to be white.
Lizzie
1892
Chapter Seven

By the time night fell, Emma and I had placed a reward for the capture of our father’s murderer. Out on the street the finger pointing had begun.

Emma stood in the middle of the sitting room, her fingers closing over the top of her lips, staring at the sofa. ‘He wouldn’t have seen anything, anything at all. He didn’t have a chance,’ she whispered to herself. I watched her move her feet, the way she tilted her head to one side, a tear rolling across her cheek bone and wondered did I do any of these things today? Emma closed her eyes and moved her lips silently. She’s the daughter they had been looking for, o Lizzie why couldn’t you? I stood next to her and took her hand.

‘O Emma, you’re working yourself up too much. It’s not good for you.’

‘Don’t you feel that everything has happened too quickly? The morning seems too far away. I’m not sure I understand it all.’

‘But I told you everything that happened.’

Emma walked around the sitting room, grazing her hand across Father’s clock on the mantelpiece. ‘It keeps ticking Lizzie.’

‘Yes, it’s very reliable,’ I lifted her hand. Her fingers were purple and her nails short. The skin around her knuckles had become loose, her body outgrowing the last stages of youth, and she tightened her grip around my palms, trapping me into a future by her side. This isn’t how it should be.
In the middle of the room the two of us closed our eyes and listened to the house. It had become still, thinking of life without the man who cherished it and the woman he brought home to keep it. In the walls I heard Father’s voice telling us *when I am gone this will be yours* and underneath the floorboards I could hear myself answer *we don’t want what was never ours*. Arguments walked around us linking arms with memories, and the house sank through the earth underneath our history of hurt. We followed with our eyes closed, up the stairs to the door that separated Father and Abby from us, and saw ourselves jammed against the door locking it tight so that we would no longer have to put up with Father’s bad tempers and Abby’s unforgiving soul. On the other side of the door we saw Abby sitting next to Father in his study. Together they planned the division of the family, Abby in whispers on how to best rid me from the house and make Emma suffer a broken heart. Next she told Father *let’s do as planned and have everything be signed over to me first, then the girls*. Father looked at his wife and smiled and kissed her and their hands joined; a dotted line.

When Emma and I opened our eyes Father’s clock struck seven. Uncle walked into the room through the kitchen and said ‘The police are trying to keep a crowd from forming but they just keep coming. I think it’s best if we try to stay inside as much as we can.’

‘How ridiculous. I won’t be forced into this house just because there’s curiosity.’

‘Lizzie please don’t be unreasonable, it’s not safe for us. The killer might be out there waiting.’

I smiled at Emma and told her ‘No, there is no killer outside. He’s long gone,’ hoping that she would forget that there was once danger in the house. Emma wiped her brow and sighed and as she looked around the room said ‘I keep forgetting how hard this must be for you that I wasn’t here at the time.’

*Second Street*
‘Emma there would have been nothing you could have done to stop it.’

Emma cupped her hands across my forehead and smoothed my hair away from my eyes. I caught the faint perfume of rose and jasmine on her wrists and I kissed them quickly, hoping that her warmth would make the day disappear quick quick.

‘Don’t worry my little Lizzie, I will take care of it all from now on. Shall I make you some toast and tea?’

‘Of course,’ I told her. I had done more than my duty that day.

We were surrounded by the ghosts of sympathy. In the kitchen were the half full cups of tea and cream and crumbs of cookies, left over by Father’s and Abby’s friends who could no longer handle the stench of their absence. In the sitting room police had left ripped pieces of note paper underneath the table and sofa leading toward the front door; Hansels and Gretels hoping to find their way back toward home. Picture frames were knocked by absentminded doctors. On the walls, our neighbours’ ‘sorries’ and ‘terrible teribles’ were weighted to the wallpaper, stuck forever in a pattern of beige, pink and red.

In the parlour shadows of movement replayed the day. I could see myself in the middle of it all and saw the reactions on the faces of those who had surrounded me. They saw shock and disbelief as I bowed my head each time there was mention of blood. I covered my mouth when the police spoke of Abby’s crushed skull and pale body. I blacked out when the heat became too much and the idea of being alone in the house frightened me. I could feel every set of eyes watch me and knew that they all wanted to hold me and tell me it was going to be ok and that the killer would be caught in no time at all. Everyone saw this and this would be how they remembered it.

Emma was still in the kitchen when I yelled out to her ‘You can bring all of that up to my room,’ Emma stuck her head through the door and asked ‘You’re going to bed already?’

Second Street
‘No, but there are things I must take care of. I need my space.’

‘Oh,’ she bit down on one of her nails and licked her bottom lip.

‘Don’t be like that Emma.’

I walked toward the stairs and left her standing in the doorway. Her face looked small and her shoulders cringed with emptiness. I turned my back and continued to head toward my room.

At the top of the stairs in the guest room, the cooling heat of Abby’s blood at a simmer, Uncle sat on his bed that she had made for him earlier that morning, his legs crossed. He saw me and smiled and waved his hand for me to come in. I sat beside him and took his hand while he told me ‘So strange to know that the horror started in here.’

‘It could have started anywhere,’ I told him.

‘The police seem to think that the killer was hiding in this room waiting and waiting until the right moment.’

‘Yes, that sounds right.’

Uncle slid his hand away from mine and lifted his palm toward his face. His fingers were long, stick insects prancing, and had small mounds of dirt under the nail. He smelt his fingers and said ‘I didn’t think there would be so much dirt,’ and took out his handkerchief and began twisting the cotton underneath his nails cleaning away the day. ‘I should have worn gloves today.’

We were quiet for a moment before I asked him ‘Are you sure you want to stay in this room again?’

‘Of course my dear one, where else would I sleep?’

‘How long will you stay with us?’

Second Street
‘As long as I can Lizzie,’ he looked at me and smiled and said ‘You look just like your mother today Lizzie.’

‘Mostly they say I look like Father. I hate that.’

‘Today you look just like your mother.’

Inside me a puddle of unknowing swirled around my heart, thick and muddy. We stopped speaking of Mother when Abby came to live with us. Now I forgot everything Emma had ever told me. When I was younger, Emma and I used to take all my dreams of Mother and throw them onto my bed for sorting. Some of the dreams were incomplete. A few times I dreamt of Mother coming into my bedroom, carrying a blanket and a bedtime book. Her hair was long and dark and sometimes her eyes would be blue, other times green and she had soft skin like snow. Mother would sit by my side but I never wanted to go to sleep and so she would sing to me, and that’s when I would always wake up.

In the mornings I would throw the dreams onto my bed so Emma could help me find the missing parts. I wanted to hear Mother’s song and Emma would search and search until she found Mother’s lips moving and she would start to hum into my ear so that I could hear the song better and learn the rhythm of Mother’s love.

When Father discovered what we were doing he mistook my dreams for nightmares and told Emma to stop scaring me with the past. The dreams of Mother ended and there was nothing left to learn.

Today I looked like Mother. I felt all the remains of stories and memories creep forward until they joined together, threads of possibility that life could have been different.

Uncle looked toward the bedroom door and asked ‘Where’s Emma?’

‘She’s downstairs.’

Second Street
‘I don’t think she should be alone do you?’

‘There’s nothing to get her. We’re protected now.’

‘Still, I think it’s best that she join us. Just in case.’

‘She says that she doesn’t understand what happened today. I don’t think she trusts what I told her.’

‘I’m sure it’s mere shock. There’s no reason for her to doubt you.’

‘I told her everything that happened, just like I told them this morning. Today feels like a dream.’

‘Yes, a strange dream.’

‘The other night I dreamt I saw myself in a small room without windows and I could hear Emma speaking to me but I couldn’t find her until finally when I found the door, I couldn’t get out. Someone was blocking it.’

‘Did you see who it was?’

‘It was Emma. She didn’t want me to get out. But I knew if I didn’t she would soon be nothing. But she kept blocking the door.’

‘It was a dream Lizzie. Emma has always needed you.’

I looked down at my hands and traced my eye over my lifeline. Everything about us, Emma and me, was printed into my palm, Dead Sea scrolls containing the secrets of life and death and love. I tried to find all the times I might have hurt Emma’s feelings but couldn’t see them. I traced further back to a moment I thought I remembered Emma saying go away from me and never speak to me again but I couldn’t see that either. Everywhere I looked there was always love and I had always been good and happy with her. I closed my palm into a fist. There was nothing to worry about.

Second Street
'But why would I dream such a thing? Maybe God is trying to tell me something.'

'I think it’s normal to be fearful that we could lose something important. I used to feel that about your mother.'

The air around me became still and I leant into it until I could feel it cradle me. My heart climbed up my rib cage toward my throat, waiting for Mother’s life to pour into my mouth and fill up my lungs. Today I looked like Mother and I would finally know her. Uncle sat closer to me on the bed and said ‘It gets harder to remember everything that I should tell you. There’s only a few things left to remember.’

‘I don’t mind.’

‘I used to wish your mother was never born. I thought the devil invented her just to annoy me.’

‘But you stopped wishing that didn’t you?’

I watched Uncle’s mouth move into a smile, his teeth galloping up and down with story, but I couldn’t hear him at first. I thought of his devil giving birth to mother, a small ball of fire and sulfur rising from the ground, her giant mouth gaping, stealing all of Uncle’s oxygen hoping he’d stop breathing. Then his god came down from the stars, clicked his fingers and announced she is no more! and Mother was never born, and she never met Father, and Emma and baby Alice and me never existed, and Father never met Abby and there was no sorrow and there was no murder. If only little boys got their wish.

I turned my head away from him and said ‘Were you and Mother always close?’

‘It’s difficult to know. Mostly. I don’t think about that all too often because she has been gone for such a long time,’ he stopped. I saw a flash sweep across his eyes. I looked closer at them and noticed two small figures walking side by side down a winding street heading toward a

Second Street
hill. The smallest figure, a boy, looked up and saw me staring at him. He walked closer to Uncle’s pupil and as he came toward me I could see that it was Uncle as a child. The other one must be Mother. Little uncle put his hand on his hips and said:

‘This is the day I realized I loved my sister.’

‘Can you tell me about it?’ I asked him.

‘When we were very young our mother would give us a small bag of boiled sweets to take to school every Friday. Your mother was in charge of them. Sometimes I would get my fair share and other times she would give some of my sweets to Henry, the boy she liked. Whenever I would tell on her she would deny it and make me out to be the one who ate them all, so mother would take pity on her and give her extra. One day walking to school she told me:

‘Henry asked for sweets today so I need three of yours.’

‘No.’

‘Just do it John.’

‘Why don’t you give him yours?’

‘Because then I won’t get any at all—I am already giving him some.’

‘N. O.’

She pushed me hard and I fell over and grazed me knee. I’m not sure how I got the idea, but before I knew it I started barking at her. At first she paid no attention so I barked louder. That’s when she told me to stop being silly and be quiet. But I couldn’t. I ran up to her and kept barking and barking and the closer we got to school the louder I got. Then I saw Henry waiting by the school fence. I got on my hands and knees and crawled in front of her and started growling at her.

Second Street
‘Oh my lord, John stop it. Not now,’ she said but I kept going. Some of the other children laughed but I knew Henry would be laughing the loudest. She didn’t know it but I knew that Henry wasn’t really a friend to her. I looked up at my sister and saw all the blood run from her cheeks. That’s when I decided to jump up and lick her on the face. I heard her whisper something but I kept on licking and barking at her. But then she pushed me down and I could hear Henry call out ‘Yuck, the two of them are in love with each other! He kissed her,’ out the corner of my eye I saw him throw a little stone at her arm. I leapt away from her and sat on my hands and knees. She didn’t say anything then, just looked down at me and wiped her eye. That’s the first time I discovered that she was capable of hating me. Lizzie, it was terrifying.’

‘What did she do then?’

‘Nothing. She didn’t tell on me. She didn’t speak to me for almost a week. I thought she would forget who I was.’

Little Uncle took Mother by the hand and walked away from Uncle’s pupil and into the darkness. Uncle said ‘I do remember that she liked singing. She would sing all the time until someone would tell her to be quiet. I usually told her to be quiet.’

‘Did she have a nice voice?’

‘I don’t know anymore. I think she did.’

‘Abby used to sing. It was awful.’

‘Your Father would have loved it.’

‘It’s hard to say what Father loves.’

‘I knew him a long long time ago when he loved your Mother.’

‘What was he like?’
‘He was quiet. He used to make jokes but they never quite worked out. Your Mother thought he was funny. Oh! He used to stroke his beard and I remember thinking he was an old man trapped inside a young man. I don’t think I ever really liked him.’

‘But you were still friendly with him.’

‘True, but I maintained the friendship so I could still have my sister in my life.’

‘Did she know you didn’t like him?’

‘Possibly. It’s not something we talked about. Some things are better left alone.’

My heart grew impatient. It knocked loudly and demanded more of Mother. I could hear it chant you’re teasing us with this rubbish, you’re teasing us with this rubbish and the louder it got the harder it was to stop it from hurting me. I closed my eyes and tried to listen to it, to find out what it wanted to know, but there was nothing and so I had to guess what my heart wanted and hope that it was enough.

‘Tell me about a day that made Mother happiest.’

Uncle cleared his throat and reached into his memory, all the way back to the moment where his sister came home and told him about Father. Uncle showed me where he saw Mother standing on the back porch brushing her hair with her fingers, swaying her hips back and forth, a hypnotist, clicking her tongue at birds telling them ‘I am in love,’ she giggled and sat on the steps and held her left hand in front of her. Uncle walked behind Mother and taking her by the shoulders said ‘So who’s the unlucky man—should we warn him?’ Mother told him ‘I shall have to warn him of you,’ and pushed Uncle’s arms away.

They sat together on the steps until the sun finished setting and had tucked itself into bed. Uncle watched Mother’s face become giant beams of light until she was blinding. He knew then that he would no longer have his sister, his best friend, to himself and began thinking of ways to
keep her longer at home with him. He could encourage her to go on long fishing trips with him, weeks and weeks of nothing but them and the oceans and rivers and lakes. He would buy her a library for her bedroom and they could read to each other every night, inventing new worlds to explore, new ideas to imagine. But the more he looked at her on the porch, the more he knew he couldn’t keep her and that he would have to be invited into her new life, a guest for dinner, a guest for conversation.

He told me how he wondered if Mother would ever need him again, and I told him ‘But of course she did, you had to take care of us,’ and he smiled and said ‘Sometimes it’s not that easy to see how you will fit in.’

My heart slowed and said just one more story and that could be enough.

‘Tell me about the day Father came to visit.’

Uncle rested his hand on top of my head and ran his palm across my hair, uncurling loose strands and letting them pop back into the corners of my temples. He told me that Father had worn his Sunday best but he had missed a button on his waist coat, making him uneven and boyish. I imagined Father walking into grandfather’s house, stooping low to miss his head on the door frame. He had put too much cologne around his neck, and a vapour of spice lunged toward Grandfather, a punch to the nose. Then without asking, Father took Grandfather’s seat in the sitting room and said ‘I would very much like a drink of water,’ I imagined Grandfather shaking his head and wondering how it was possible that his daughter lacked judgment. They spoke about Father’s job. He was an undertaker. Yes, he thought the job was very interesting, very telling of human nature, but he couldn’t see himself working for the dead for much longer. Grandfather would have said ‘Surely you are working for the living,’ and Father smiled wide and
held up his hands and said ‘I suppose you’re right,’ and Grandfather laughed and both of them shook hands and decided to be family.

When Mother finally came down the stairs, Father’s heart stopped ticking its old rhythm and learnt a new beat. Love. lovelove. Love. lovelove. There was happiness, and it would grow daughters.

‘Your father and I liked to play cards in the afternoon,’ Uncle whispered. He looked toward the window and rubbed his hand across his brow ‘but of course, when he decided it was taking too much time away from business he stopped all of that.’

‘Maybe it’s because he knew you would beat him,’ I told him.

‘Well I guess we’ll never know.’

We were quiet then. The house swayed with the slight breeze that came through the window. My shoulders hunched forward moving back and forth with it. I watched as tiny drops of air slowly drifted into the room and formed around us, those tiny particles becoming fog, becoming a barrier. Uncle got up from the bed and stood in front of me, his arms stiff and white. Everywhere around us became thick and loud and my heart raced across my chest and into my ears. Uncle leant forward and yelled ‘Don’t think those police will find anything around the house,’ and he lifted his legs slightly to check underneath his boots.

The air thickened and landed on our shoulders with a thud then pop. A high pitched swell of noise came through the floor and bounced across the walls and door. Deafening. I cupped my hands around my mouth and shouted ‘I looked around a little bit this afternoon, and there really is nothing to be found.’

‘Suppose there will be a real mystery on their hands, don’t you think Lizzie?’
‘I should imagine so. Everything that has been said today, what I’ve seen, it really is a mystery to me.’

‘Perhaps if we hadn’t been out of the house when we were, we too may have fallen victim.’

‘It is strange that this should happen now.’

The swell circled around us like a hunter then stopped. We were quiet and sat side by side on the bed. Uncle twitched his fingers and clicked them and said ‘Your father and I used to play cards in the afternoon.’

Outside the house, the police strengthened their protection telling onlookers to go back home, to respect those inside that had lost so much. A man asked an officer if he thought the murderer was from out of town. The officer said he didn’t think so, that the killer was perhaps known to us all. The man then asked the officer how it was possible that someone could murder their fellow townsman. The officer didn’t answer him and the night carried his fear down the street and into the river.

Inside the room, a light breeze walked through the window and rested on top of our foreheads. I unfastened my braids and shook my hair loose. I looked behind my shoulder at the dressing table and saw Abby’s blood licking the bottom of the table legs and soaking deeper into the carpet. There were a few strands of her grey hair stuck to the dresser handles and I wondered how long they would be there before someone had to clean the room and make the mess go away. There were bloodied boot-prints surrounding the bed, a map of distress and disbelief. Abby had been taken all over the room, from the window to the radiator to the doorway where the boot-prints hesitated before running down the stairs, screaming that Abby was dead and she was the first to go. Her journey lead all the way into the dining room where she was placed face
first on the table so the doctor could begin his examination. That’s when the police tried to piece together her morning, tried to piece together those last moments that would make her disappear forever.

I thought the strangest of days before I could ask Uncle ‘What are Emma and I going to do now? I’m not sure we know what to do next.’

‘Remember I would do anything asked of you and Emma, I promised your mother. Anything you need me to do, I will do for you.’

I looked at him and he brushed the hair off my shoulders. Then he smiled and said ‘You really do look like her today.’

When Uncle embraced me I felt Mother jump out of Uncle’s memory into my body, rushing toward my limbs and heart. She was everywhere; all that love being transplanted into me until I was full. The memory climbed up my spine all the way behind my eyes until I could see them, Mother and Uncle, sitting under the walnut tree in their backyard. Their age isn’t remembered. Mother’s right hand was clasped tightly around a small key and she stared at Uncle until her eyes began to water. Uncle looked toward their house until Mother poked him in the ribs and asked ‘So are you going to tell father on me?’

‘Maybe. If you keep being mean to me I will.’

Mother rolled her eyes. ‘Why do you have to be so difficult? I did it for both of us.’

‘Yes, but eventually he’ll think I was the one who did it and he’ll flog me until I can’t sit down.’

‘Well, if you keep quiet now and we pretend that we know nothing, we’ll get away with it.’

Second Street
‘Then stop being mean to me and I won’t say anything.’

‘Do you pinky swear?’

‘Yes.’

I saw them link pinky fingers and shake and shake until they laughed and fell backwards. Mother looked up into the sky and smiled while Uncle kept all her secrets tucked away in his shirt pocket for safe keeping. I smiled just like Emma and me.

His memory tried to embed itself deeper into my mind but there was no more room amongst that love. I tried searching for more of Mother, all the moments that wove together to make her life, but there was nothing left. I held onto Uncle tighter there must be something more but he coughed and I knew I had to let go. He stood from the bed and I felt Mother leave, my heart being returned to me; empty.
Benjamin
1905
Chapter Eight

Before my birth James had reached heights of ecstasy. The morning he reached Fall River he was hit by the changing winds coming from the river and he longed for Lizzie to be by his side to keep him warm. He knew Lizzie would be waiting for him at the house, their house, and as he tried to find his way to her, his mind played tricks on him, making him see her everywhere. As he walked down Main Street Lizzie walked in and out of shops, first buying bread then new dresses and books. Further up the street Lizzie could be seen down by the river sinking her bare feet into its depths and she had taken her fishing rod. He had considered approaching her but she had looked so calm and wonderful and he knew that he would see her again at the house, where he would hold her properly in his arms and he could tell her about the love that he had cultivated for her.

James found himself unexpectantly lost and he put this down to tiredness. As the air around him dressed itself in heaviness, he became cold and confused, his small muscles clinging to the warmth of his rounded hips and padded stomach. Soon he was surrounded by men and women and he pushed himself in front of them, no longer willing to wait for memory to bring him to Lizzie, and asked ‘Do you know where she is?’

‘Does she have a name?’

‘Do you know where Lizzie is?’

Some of them looked at him with strange eyes others stepped away from him. A few laughed.

‘Why would you keep her a secret?’ he asked the ones who didn’t respond.

‘Because she’s not one of us,’ one woman told him.

‘That person doesn’t exist anymore,’ another cracked.

Second Street
He told them ‘But she does. She asked me to come to her,’ and they would walk away shaking their head. Some laughed. Only one person told him what James needed to hear.

‘Lizzie is at home, always at home.’

‘Second Street. Tell me where.’

The man looked at James and screwed his face, shrugged his shoulders and pointed north and told him ‘Just follow up there. You’ll see it,’ James was struck in the heart with something that felt like forever. He knew any moment that they would be united, that they would live their lives through each other with each other, that distance would no longer cause hurt between them. He shifted his shirt over the corset that hugged his ribs and walked toward Second Street.

Along the way he thought of what she might be doing—he hoped that she was making space for him, that she was standing by their bed waiting for him to climb inside and carry them both into dreams. He came to an intersection and saw Second Street to his left. He smiled. In front of him he noticed that people crossed the street, zig-zagging briefly from one side to the other what strange people and some even appeared to be holding their breath and then exhaling long and hard; relieved. Rituals. Everyone has their rituals. As he inched closer a small boy darted out in front of him crossing the road and James looked up, his breath tied to his lungs. It was the house. I’ve come home. He touched his pocket and felt the crinkle of newspaper above his heart knowing Lizzie’s picture had survived the trip. At the front of the house James stood next to the gate and looked up into the windows and watched shadows play from room to room, ducking and weaving above and below each other and he thought for a moment that he heard one of them laugh Lizzie! and he stepped up to the front door and waited.

James fought with himself not to knock down the door and force his way inside I must be polite knowing any moment that Lizzie would sense that he was waiting and come down for him.

Second Street
He imagined that he would pick her up and hold her across his chest while she kissed his neck and told him how much she loved him. She would tell him that they had the house to themselves, that she had asked Emma to leave, just as he had asked, and that this had made her heart grow bigger and stronger in love for him *yes only for me* and he would carry her inside and the house would welcome him *just as it should* and Lizzie would climb down from his height and stand in front of him, all beautiful, and tell him ‘Together, that’s us.’

He waited for Lizzie to answer his knocks but there was nothing except the sharp scraping of boots approaching the house then diverting, slowing down on the opposite side of the street. James saw a woman watch him from her house on the opposite side of the street and he waved to her, trying to be polite in case she knew how to get Lizzie to answer the door. The woman opened her front gate and came toward him, her hair pulled tightly out of her eyes making her forehead look taut and papery.

‘No one lives there anymore.’

‘Yes, she does. She told me. They all told me.’

‘She?’ The woman paused. ‘Lizzie?’

‘Yes. She lives here.’

The woman sighed ‘She doesn’t live here anymore.’

‘When did she go?’

‘The two of them haven’t been here for years.’

The two of them. Emma. He had hoped she would have disappeared.

‘But they are still around?’

‘Never left.’

*Second Street*
The two of them. Lizzie had allowed Emma to live with her. This would be a problem. He hoped that Lizzie’s heart hadn’t collapsed in size because of it, that there was room for him to move into.

‘Do you know Lizzie?’
‘Yes I did.’
‘How do I get to her?’
‘Who are you?’
‘She knows me.’
‘Who are you?’
‘And perhaps you will take me to her. She’s expecting me tonight.’
‘I’ll be leaving now,’ and the woman turned her back and slowly made her way toward her house. James understood that she wanted him to follow her, that she would take him to his Lizzie.

James followed her quietly, not wanting to break her concentration, and he ached to be by her side to touch her because she may have touched Lizzie but he didn’t want the neighbours to think that he was unfaithful to Lizzie, so he kept his distance, staying behind the woman and watched her, hypnotized. She walked without knowing time. James liked her hair the most and he thought about her hands pulling and twisting sections of hair on top of her head, mimicking the ways of her mother, exposing her neck and eyes. He considered how he would wear his hair for Lizzie and he knew that she would prefer it pulled away from his eyes ‘To see you better James.’ James loved Lizzie’s hair best when it was down, kissing her shoulders.

The woman’s aged back slumped and straightened as she made her way slowly up the street before turning toward a gate. She stood still and James knew this meant that he should catch up
to her, to stand by her side so that they could knock on the door together, see Lizzie. James skipped quickly and the woman spun around to look at him, let out a small cry.

‘What do you want?’ Her eyes became wet, glassy.

‘You asked me.’

‘Go away.’

‘Why aren’t you taking me to her?’

James could see that the woman wanted to scream but she had forgotten how, and he took a deep breath and screamed for her, to remind her. The woman held her hand across her neck and called out ‘Bill, come quick.’ James could hear someone scratching, trying to quickly unlock the door. She lied to me James looked behind into the street for safety, but saw nothing but Lizzie’s old house, waiting for him to come in. He ran quickly making sure to bypass the house first so Bill wouldn’t come for him. He waited behind a tree blocks away from where his heart belonged, waited for night to come so that he could return to Second Street, praying love would find him there and bring Lizzie.

When he arrived at the house he walked down the side and into the back yard. The barn stood like a shell and James remembered all the stories that Lizzie had told him. He could see them right in front of him, alive and wondrous, moving closer. He knew that he belonged inside of them, inside of Lizzie’s life, knew that they were twins, separated, reunified.

Across from him the pear arbor opened up to show Lizzie sitting underneath it reading a book swatting flies away from her face. After awhile she threw the book into the grass and held her hands in the air, following clouds. Her body is short underneath thick layers of cotton and silk and she sighed, becoming lost in a world hidden on her palms and fingertips. She looks up toward James and then over to the barn and he follows her eyes to where her father is standing,
his hands on his hips. Lizzie is there facing him. She is older. James remembers this as being the
time Lizzie saw her father for the first time as a man, a stranger.

They are arguing over pigeons, Lizzie’s pets, and she is on her knees at her father’s legs
begging him not to destroy anymore—he has killed them!—and he is standing over her like an
ox, killing one of them right in front of her, wringing its neck with a hard twist and pull. Its
wings become stiff and useless and Lizzie is crying, her jaw locked tight and James wants to go
to her, protect her, but he can’t move his feet and so he must watch her in that pain and listen to
her father tell her ‘These birds are dirty.’

‘But they are mine.’

‘They are breeding venom in the house.’

‘But they are mine.’

And her father steps back from her and James can see that there are two pigeons left
watching over Lizzie and she tells him ‘They are my friends,’ and her father walks into the barn
and takes a moment before walking in further and Lizzie is left howling toward the sky and
James closes his eyes unable to watch anymore hurt.

James opened his eyes and saw that Lizzie had gone. He went to the barn and tried to
open it, pulled down hard on the rusty padlock but nothing gave there are secrets in there I know
I know. On the barn door he noticed a small engraving L.A.B tattooed into the wood and he
reached out and traced around the letters, closed his eyes almost like holding hands and lent in to
kiss them, his tongue poking, caressing. He thought about what it might be like to make love to
Lizzie all you need to do is love her the ways they could touch each other, hips on hips, thighs in
thighs, their breasts colliding then melding, everything becoming unison.
James pulled away from the barn and threw himself into the ground and made angels in the grass and dirt. He rolled over and imagined Lizzie there by his side asking him ‘Remember when I used to do this as a child?’

‘I remember everything.’

‘Sometimes I wish we never had to grow up.’

James told her ‘I remember the time you fell asleep in the sun and your face cooked and was bright red,’ and Lizzie giggled and touched him on the face before pulling herself up off the ground and walking toward the house. James followed her.

As they neared the house James saw the black cat that used to follow Lizzie around the back yard. The cat came to James just as he should and wrapped its long tail around his leg tying him to its warm little body. Lizzie’s body stiffened, a viper, and she told James that ‘He only does that to me,’ her face cruel. James ran his fingers through her hair and told her ‘It’s ok, it’s our cat now. It means we are the same you and me,’ and Lizzie smiled because she knew it was true and James was relieved that she wasn’t going to hurt the cat, that she had bent down and scratched its ear and folded her hand lightly around its head and sang ‘Little cat, tiny cat such fur and fat. Where have you been hiding, hmmm?’ and James knew that he would love Lizzie forever.

There was only moonlight lighting the yard when James came to a window at the side of the house and Lizzie told him ‘Enter through there.’ It took him only minutes to coerce it to open, snapping it off its coil as he raised it. He slipped into the house like night and took a deep breath, inhaling the air that Lizzie once breathed. When his eyes adjusted to the moonlight layering itself on top of the furniture, filling in the sharp angles of the room, he realized that he was in the sitting room. He looked around, walked over to the mantelpiece and ran his fingers across the wooden ledge knowing that Lizzie had done the same as a child. James’s heart beat with triumph.

Second Street
in and out of his ribcage and it was only then that he remembered the terrible incident Lizzie had told him had happened in the room, how her dear father had been hurt and she had said ‘Someone had cut him,’ and to think they thought she did it and James tried to imagine what it must have been like to find him. In a small pocket of James’ ribs he felt something remind him of violence and he knew that’s what it took to swing that axe, over and over again until there was nothing left to hate. Sometimes it felt like love. James shook his head, wanting the thoughts to leave him and he pushed away the words Lizzie did it knowing they were wrong, that his Lizzie could not bring all that horror.

James made his way toward the front stairs and his ears filled with echoes of voices and the sound of bare feet I am not alone. As he walked up the stairs he heard the house creak and moan and he thought he heard it say welcome. The house directed him to Lizzie’s room, the door already opened waiting for him to come inside and take it over.

The room was perfect. A bookcase half filled stood idle in the corner next to a window, and in the opposite corner was a bed, single, rotted, pushed up against a door. In front of him was the door that had separated Lizzie from Emma and he heard the adolescent conversations that they shared each night. James felt heaviness bare down making him weak and he worried that he wouldn’t have enough strength to find Lizzie the next day. James went to the bed and pulled the single sheet over his body and listened to the sisters speak, their voices falling in and out of octaves and words swarming his ears with girlishness. They spoke about the way air sometimes made them feel free and James smiled knowing this was true because he had felt that freedom too. Later the sisters spoke in rushed tones, Lizzie demanding ‘Emma tell me a story.’

‘I told you one last night. I’m tired.’

‘I don’t care. I’m bored.’
‘Father wouldn’t like you being mean to me.’

‘I’m tired.’

‘Stop being a stupid face Emma.’

Emma caved in and told her sister the worst story she knew: ‘A small boy who had an appetite like an elephant asked his mother and father to enter him into a pumpkin eating contest, because his favourite food was pumpkin. Even though he was too young, his parents agreed to enter him, because they knew it would make him happy, and also they thought that maybe if he won they could use the money to buy more animals for their farm. The contest started and the little boy ate too quickly and he didn’t win, but he started feeling sick and he turned orange and yellow from eating too many pumpkins, and so he had to be taken to the hospital. But there was nothing that could be done for him. His parents got embarrassed and not knowing what to do with their orange son, took him in the carriage and drove him around until he fell asleep. That’s when they started becoming angry at their son for losing the contest. As they drove back towards their farm they happened upon a circus that was visiting the next town and they decided to drop him off there because they were sure the ringmaster would know what to do with an orange boy and perhaps the ringmaster would give them a nice sum of money. Well, the boy woke up the next morning looking for them but the ringmaster found him first and made the boy stay with him at the circus and all the other people who lived in the circus loved his orange skin and told him to only eat pumpkins from now on and so he did and everybody lived happily ever after.’

‘Boo. I don’t like that at all. New story new story!’

James smiled and nestled into Lizzie’s old bed and closed his eyes knowing that the next day would bring him Lizzie and he fell asleep listening to fighting sisters’ love each other through clenched teeth.

Second Street
That night James dreamt for the last time. He didn’t dream of Lizzie and in the beginning he wondered if it was really him dreaming, that maybe he had walked into somebody else’s, but there was something like himself in the dream that told him this is you and he saw figures and words bleed into his head: Winter. Woman. Big big barrel drums. Gun shot. Silent. No wind. What? A sound? Fist over fist coloured black blue black blue. Woman. Hate. Stairs and then a corner. Climbing but can’t breathe. Counting the numbers watching them fall and they fall. A woman. Now summer. All the same. Ouch that spine. Long legs shorter arms. Big bulk mass. Windows then doors. Would you smash? Yes. Another slap more fists - look at this. Flesh. Children coming. Flesh. Ouch that spine. What? A sound? That’s me, I see me. All of them. love. love. love.

Through sleep James held himself tight, tried to find a safe place but nothing could make it stop.

James woke wrapped in lengths of fright. He touched his chest then legs and after feeling his skin underneath skin he knew he was himself again. In daylight he could see clearly. From the bed he saw half ripped wall paper hang from the window, green and brown at the edges. There was a small blue dress stuck at the back of the bookcase and James wondered why Lizzie would have forgotten it it may have been her favourite. He rolled out of bed and went to the dress, lifting it toward the sun, still soft and delicate, and he pressed it up against his face and pulled it over the top of his head and over his shoulders until it got caught on his breast, unable to go any further at least I am wearing something of hers. James took it off and folded it neatly and tucked it back inside the bookcase. He would come back for it later. He peeked outside—people had begun their slow decent down Second Street toward the city centre and he decided that it was
time to go and find Lizzie time is getting on so that they could begin their life together. James left through the open window downstairs, careful not to disturb the houses next door.

Outside he straightened himself up and checked his breast pocket necklace still there and his hands fumbled across his body, making sure he was ready for Lizzie everything just as it should. He had found new growth—overnight his hips had rounded to their fullest shape now I am just like her and his thighs had become fleshy, soft, natural and he desperately wanted to close them around Lizzie’s, sink inside each other’s femininity just as they should.

He walked. He headed toward the hill and opened himself she will feel me coming to receiving. He would find her. Passing shop windows he watched his reflection ease in and out of itself and he knew that he had finally become full of love. A flash of dream attacked his temples and he pushed it out of his body and he wondered how it was possible for him to have such visions. He could feel his one breast rise and fall and keep time with his hips. Through the windows he saw that he was taller than he had ever been and as he continued down Main Street he watched men and women stare at his reflection and he understood what it was to have others want you just like I want her. But he didn’t care about them and he thought of Lizzie, what he would say to her. He forced his lips to practice their lines and he felt his mouth become angelic, full of perfect words and meaning. He had rounded the corner, jumping over cracks when he saw her.

She was hidden by the silhouette of her sister who had swelled into middle age. Lizzie stepped out from behind Emma and lifted her head to the sun. James stared at her neck, embraced by velveteen and silk, and his legs trembled and writhed into the crushed blue stone path. Emma stood away from Lizzie and folded her hands behind her back. Emma stared at her sister until she burnt holes in her ribs. James tried to breathe. Lizzie stood in the middle of the Second Street
path as if waiting for someone, something *that must be me* and James crossed the street and watched Emma tell her sister ‘Please, let’s go now,’ Lizzie turned to her and James saw her eyes shine and imagined himself staring back into them, imagined that they were made just for him. She didn’t say anything to Emma and continued to stand on the path forcing passerby’s to walk around her.

Emma took a deep breath and pushed it from her lungs and walked ahead of her sister *such impatience* until Lizzie decided to follow, unwilling to be left alone. Quietly following them, James tied to open his ear so that he could hear Lizzie’s voice *I bet it is as high as the angles say it is* but neither of them spoke to each other, their shoes sounding out opposing rhythms. James watched Lizzie walk and although her hips were hypnotic, she did not walk the way she usually did and he wondered if there was something wrong with her *must be because she has to catch up to Emma*. Emma set her eyes toward the ground, lowering her shoulders. Her body reacted against her legs which tried to walk faster, tried to place more distance between her and Lizzie and James thought this made her ugly. But Lizzie was golden. Every couple of strides she would smile at those walking past and James saw what it was that made Lizzie so beautiful. She was sunshine, she was life. He would go to her. He would learn to be like her. They would be happy together.

Ahead of James, Lizzie tried to slip her arm through Emma’s but she pulled back, pretended that she didn’t feel the apology stitched in Lizzie’s skin. He noticed that men and women peppered the sisters with stares with what James thought could have been jealousy. He quickened his step until he was three arm lengths behind them and as Lizzie twisted her back he caught the faint sweet smell of peony; committed it to memory. It was time to go to her. The three of them rounded the corner into French Street. The sisters headed toward a large white

*Second Street*
house *soon we will be together so soon so soon*, and James felt his heart sing from its beauty. Lizzie stepped toward the house languid and proud *just like she should be* and withdrew her arm from Emma who moved as if stuck between two thoughts, choosing neither of them. James quickened his pace and counted down the moments that he would tell his love that he had arrived, that he came just as she had asked and just as he had promised.

Behind them James cleared his throat making them stop. Emma turned first, pulling her lips tight and holding onto the brooch that stuck out of her chest. She was silent. Lizzie looked at James and his body surged, electricity creeping down his spine and it was just as he had imagined *better better than!* and stepped toward them, removing his hat so that it danced in his jittering hands. He felt himself open wide exposing everything inside. James looked through Lizzie’s eyes and into her soul and found that special place she always kept for him, where she showed just how much she could love and inside that love was a map that took them to the place they would be together.

‘Love,’ he told her.

James closed his eyes and allowed himself to travel inside Lizzie *she’s so warm* and he let the word be carried by air right up into heaven. Inside each other Lizzie took James’s hand and moved closer to him and said ‘I’ve waited.’

‘I just want to rest. A long journey.’

‘And yet you arrived, just as you promised.’

‘Just as you asked.’

‘I’m wondering where I should touch you first.’

‘Just inside of me.’

‘Just inside of me.’

*Second Street*
‘And we will be together.’

‘Together.’

‘This is how love begins.’

‘Love. That is all.’

They smiled at each other and James knew that life was about to begin just as it should and his body released bringing all the goodness and light that he had inside of him closer to the surface until he knew that he was glowing.

‘Let’s go.’

The journey to Lizzie had been long and James could no longer remember life before her. It’s always easier to forget—that’s what we always do.

‘Let’s go.’

The air around James and Lizzie grew thicker pushing everything outside of themselves into the past. They held hands and laughed. They kissed each other on the cheeks and allowed their fingers to trail down each others’ throats, their hearts racing each other.

‘Let’s go’

James felt something crawl up his back. It was hard and cold, sickly. It made its way over the top of his head and past his forehead before sliding down to his ear and nestling, making him dizzy.

Second Street
what is this? and it crawled further into his ear and when the dizziness stopped he heard ‘He might be dangerous,’ Emma’s voice attacked all the corners of James’ body and forced him out from Lizzie. He opened his eyes and saw the sisters standing apart and he knew this was the right moment to declare himself, that he had come for Lizzie and that Emma would be left, alone just as she should. He opened himself up and said ‘Love.’

James didn’t notice Emma stepping back or Lizzie pull her mouth flat.

‘Lizzie.’

James soared, everything inside of him a caress. He reached inside of his pocket and pulled out the God given box and stuck his arm out, waiting for Lizzie to take this will be our happiness. The necklace caught the remains of sunlight striking the sisters across their faces. Time took space. There was silence. James took a step closer it’s all here waiting for me.

Lizzie laughed. She held the necklace in her hands and twisted the chain tightly around her fingertips, binding blood, until they became purple and large. Ugly.

Her laugh echoed loudly and jumped into James’s throat. A punch what went wrong? Lizzie laughed again and said ‘What a creature you are.’

‘But I’m here.’

Lizzie pulled the chain from her fingers and dropped the necklace onto the ground and pulled gently on Emma’s sleeve. He saw the way Lizzie’s hand rested on Emma’s shoulder and he knew what it meant. She had love for others and would never solely be his as she promised what did Emma do to you? Why have you let her take you away from me? James had done everything that she had asked of him. And she had laughed at him. Emma made her do it and he asked her ‘Is it because of her?’

Lizzie stopped; caught in silence.
‘You needn’t love her.’

‘My sister?’

‘Only me. You remember?’

Emma pulled away from Lizzie and said ‘I shall have to summon the police,’ and she turned her back on him, leaving Lizzie alone on the path.

‘If you leave now she’ll not come with us Lizzie.’

‘Who are you?’

James’ leg pushed out from underneath him, his knee softening forgetting how to stand. He knew that something had happened to her in his absence, that Emma had tried to erase him from Lizzie’s soul.

‘You don’t mean that.’

‘Strange creature.’

‘I came for you. We can leave now and she’ll not come with us.’

She laughed and James saw her one last time, her head snapping back on her neck, her hands slamming into one another puppet before she turned her back on him and disappeared inside her house leaving a freeze behind her. Heart broken.

James was hit with a sharp pain in his head and blood rushed. He didn’t want to leave. Confusion. Behind his ear a small bone whispered this is what happens sometimes and he wondered whether he should go after Lizzie, make her explain to him what it was that he had done wrong. He would forgive her. He would give her time to say good bye to Emma yes perhaps I have rushed her. He would remind her how much he loved her, had cared for her, tell her about their nights together, that she had made him feel alive, whole, himself. He wanted to do this. James looked down at the ground and saw the necklace. It lay broken. His head was hit

Second Street
with another sharp twist, his left eye becoming unfocussed and he heard my voice seeping slowly through the cracks in his ribs, tell him ‘We have ways to make this better,’ he hung his head no I don’t want this and I began to unlock myself from his spine, spider my way though his bones and muscle.

He touched his hip and knew all that softness was disappearing becoming hard I don’t want this and he ached, wanted to cry, but I wouldn’t let him and he began to run up French Street, down Rock Street and back toward Second Street, back to where he wanted Lizzie, his Lizzie, to be waiting for him.

By the time he reached Second Street James was losing himself. He slipped through the window with his left leg elongated, his right leg trying to fold back in on itself. His head was foggy thick and blank. James crawled toward the stairs I don’t want this and called out for Lizzie. He heard the house shift above him she’s here and on his knees he crawled up the stairs and pushed his body into Lizzie’s room. He stood and walked in front of the mirror hoping Lizzie would come out and stand by his side. As he waited he heard me say ‘She tore you down.’

‘I don’t want this.’

‘But she must be punished.’

‘I don’t want to hurt her.’

‘But it won’t be you. You don’t hurt.’

‘I don’t want the change. Please make it stop.’

‘But she tore you down.’

‘That’s not true.’

‘Look at yourself, see what she has made you become.’
In the mirror James could see cracks forming across his chest, his breast already descending to his stomach *everything that was beautiful inside of me* he watched his left arm become small and narrow then become gigantic and masculine, frightening. He could see his eyes shifting shape and size and he wanted to hold onto himself, stay the person he had become in that space between man/woman, happy and whole. He told himself *I don’t want this* and tried to hypnotise his changing reflection out of being. His thoughts returned to the time he first saw Lizzie, the way she had felt when they held hands and lay side by side *someone must have stepped inside of her and changed her* hoping this would stop the change. He watched his skin become pale, ugly, and he could see his ribs move and fall into their new positions. His stomach swallowed his breast while his thighs became narrow, flesh stripped of its rightful place *I don’t want this* to make room for the violence of sinew. Unable to stand James knelt on the floor and folded his hands into prayer, his body lightly convulsing while his lungs held onto breath and his hips shrunk and disintegrated. Everything hurt. James told himself *I could protect her, take myself out of this world* but he knew it was much too late and he wept as his hair fell out and circled his feet and ankles. He fell into the floor and swum amongst his hair *all a treasure* opening suit pockets to fill them with jewels and trinkets belonging to women but each handful vanished leaving him nothing to remind him of the peace that he had felt.

‘She shouldn’t have laughed at you.’

James heard me whisper from inside of him and he looked into the mirror to find me, to see me for the first time, to understand what he was becoming.

‘You. You leave me now. I don’t want this.’

‘She shouldn’t have laughed at you. It’s her fault that you are changing.’

‘Don’t hurt her.’

*Second Street*
‘But that’s what we do James.’

‘Not me. I am different.’

‘No.’

‘I don’t hurt people.’

James closed his eyes and counted to ten hoping I would stop growing and deliver him back to self. He held his hands tighter and said ‘Protect her, protect her.’

‘Maybe if she had loved you more James, this wouldn’t have had to happen.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘She let Emma get in the way.’

‘Yes.’

‘Even though she promised all of herself to you.’

‘Yes.’

‘Maybe if she had loved you more James.’

James stood and unclasped his hands and watched his body rattle itself into nothingness.

‘Do you see how she could never want you?’ I told him.

‘But she did.’

‘It’s almost time now James.’

‘I don’t want this,’ James’ voice became loud and deep, his throat burning from the change.

‘She made you a fool. I will punish her.’

James could feel a pain sweep across his stomach, forcing everything from within up and out of his body, sticky and warm. The final change was coming. The last segments of James’ flesh and bone made war inside his body and I reminded him that we are good at being other
people. He stood in front of the mirror and slowly removed his clothes—first the torn shirt then grey pants, until he is down to his underwear; a white camisole and knickerbocker. He closed his eyes and thought of her *I don’t want this* and imagined for the last time that her hands were tracing spider webs down his torso. He opened his eyes and saw her standing beside him in the mirror. She smiled.

‘I didn’t mean to hurt you James,’ she whispers.

‘But you have.’

‘You were right. I shouldn’t have loved anyone but you.’

‘Not even her?’

‘No, not even Emma.’

‘And you shouldn’t have made me a fool.’

‘And I should never have made you a fool.’

James watched Lizzie in the mirror unbutton her blouse and let him see her throat. She was perfect. He wrapped his arms around himself and felt the remaining feminine skin slowly unravel from his shoulders and neck *I don’t want this* and disintegrate, the skin underneath hardened and calloused.

James closed his eyes and tried to forget that the final change was coming. He fell to his knees and slammed his body into the floor and cried and rocked himself gently into sleep *I don’t want this I want to be love* but he couldn’t fight his body any longer and he grew into darkness and disappeared.

*Second Street*
I wake with the sun shining in my eyes. Everything feels right. I pick myself up from the floor and see myself in the mirror—I am short and angular and my shoulders are wide and there is power building inside of them, gnawing at my skin wanting to be released. I gnash my teeth together and bark. I am running down the stairs and the house pulls itself in, petrified, and I know that I am ready. I make my way to the open window and jump out of it and I’m thinking of the quickest way to Lizzie’s house thinking how I am going to make her hurt the way she hurt James. Out the front of the house there are masses of suits and boots climbing the path and I look across the street towards a group of women laughing and flicking their heads to the side stupid face and one of the older women, her hair taut and stiff, is looking over at me and her eyes squint and I know I’ve seen that look before, and she is standing up and looking over at the house and then at me and she calls out ‘You. Why are you still here?’ what a peculiar woman I peel my face away from her and continue down the street towards Rock Street.

It’s been a long time since my body has felt this strong and I keep reminding myself this is what it feels like to be alive. I am untouchable. My legs are like leather as I round corners, side stepping cracks in the path and I can see that the streets are becoming busier and I know that I will have to be quick when I get to Lizzie’s house. My hands are thick and made of knuckles and I remember the last time I had hands like these and I know exactly what I will have to do, how I will do it. There’s a twitch inside my stomach, little fish jumping and it’s because I am getting closer and I’ll have to remind myself to make sure I do it properly. I catch small glimpses of James with Lizzie in my mind and I am laughing as they touch each other, Lizzie’s fumbling hands scratching at James’ arms and he smiles at her and tells her that it feels so good and I am laughing at them and it makes me feel better that I have been brought here to punish her. James had tried to reconcile with himself his Lizzie that was a good woman full of love, and the one

Second Street
that had laughed at him, called him creature, and whether he knew it at the time, he had called for me to come and I’ve arrived. I know Lizzie. I’ve seen my kind before and I see it all over her skin and deep within her eyes and I want to tear it out of her.

It hasn’t taken me long to remember where the sisters live, that big white house of hate, and I can see that there aren’t many people outside and it’s going to be easy to find a way inside the house, inside their lives. I am finding if difficult not to get too attached to the idea that I should present myself to her as a sales man at her door where she will invite me inside and I will have to play nice for a few minutes, finding the right moment to attack her. No. There are advantages of breaking into the house and surprising her. I want it to be as simple as possible. Down by the side of the house there is a small dip in the ground and there is a window that is open. I wish I were slightly taller. There is no ladder. I may need to run and jump up against the window pane to get inside. This may alert her. I will take that chance.

I take myself around to the side of the house and stand underneath the window and I wait for movement, try to understand where they are. I am hoping they are not together. I am hoping that Emma has left the house. I’m not sure if I can take care of both of them without raising an alarm throughout the neighbourhood. I am listening very carefully and I can hear them talking and their voices are moving through the house. They are near. One of them walks heavily and the other scrapes her feet along the floorboards like a child. One of them has opened the door into the room and they are both in there, circling each other. One of them says ‘You can’t do this to me.’

‘I can’t do this any longer Lizzie,’ and it’s Emma that has the strong voice and I know she is the one with the heavy step. I can hear Emma pick something up and take it out of the room, heavy steps first, and then Lizzie, dragging, follows and I can hear them walk the length of the house and I follow them outside until it takes me to the back of the house, all windows, where

Second Street
they are yelling at each other and I can still hear them as Lizzie sits at the kitchen table her head hanging low, and while she stares, a stone, I am trying to find a way inside without them seeing me. Emma sits down at the table at the opposite end. At the entrance to the kitchen there are two bags, red and purple tapestry, stuffed full and heavy. I hear a clock sound nine and the quiet emptiness of sisters. You could take care of them. I haven’t given myself enough time to deal with them both and over the back fence I can hear their neighbour cough and pulsate and I know I have to be quick. I tighten my fists and wait. Emma sits straight in her chair and holds her head high and tells her sister ‘Because I won’t do it any longer Lizzie.’ Lizzie looks up from the table at her and says ‘You would abandon me now?’ and they are yelling at each other

‘I can’t do it any longer.’

‘You’ve promised so many times.’

‘There’s no longer any point.’

‘But we’re sisters.’

‘Doesn’t that seem so long ago?’

‘No.’

The neighbour has stopped in the back yard and he can hear them. I can’t break in. My teeth sink into my jaw and grip tightly. I want to crawl through their window and reveal myself. I can feel my hands around Lizzie’s neck, touching her the way James had only dreamed of. I want to cover her mouth with my own, bring blood to her lips. My fists become balls and they are heavy and they want to plunge into her chest and grab at her breasts, fill her with anger and take away all that might be left inside of her. I watch her. She says nothing to Emma and I know she is defeated. This makes her perfect. Emma stands from the table and goes to Lizzie. I expect them to touch but there is nothing like that. Instead Emma yells at her ‘I don’t want you to contact

*Second Street*
me,’ she is walking to the doorway and she is picking up her bags *here I come* turns and says something softly to Lizzie but I can’t hear her and she leaves Lizzie sitting at the table, alone and fractured and I can see her waiting for the tears to fall but they don’t come. She surprises herself.

There is a loud bang from the front of the house. I am carefully twisting myself out of my hiding place in the back yard and walking slowly down the side of the house so that Emma won’t see me. I can see her walking down the path to the edge of the street and she looks happy, relieved and I wish that I could tell James that there was nothing to worry about after all, that they have separated on their own. I laugh quietly because I know it’s going to be easier to deal with Lizzie now. Now there is a tall man waiting at the bottom of the path standing by a brown car and Emma gives him her bags and sits in the back. He starts the car very slowly and takes her down to the end of the street and she doesn’t even look back at the house and I know that it is safe to carry on, to punish Lizzie.

I feel like a cannon inside. I’ve decided that I will pretend I’m selling something, just like all the other times, just for the pleasure of having Lizzie open up the door for me, allowing me in to destroy her. I can hear her faintly walk through the house and she slams the side window shut and I know she is coming and I grab at my throat holding myself back, not wanting to make a sound *it’s time* and I pull myself together and walk down the path toward her door. I walk up the front steps and notice the word ‘Maplecroft’ tattooed into the concrete *what extravagance* and I feel my anger becoming ripe and I know that I am so close to making this right. I imagine her laughing *stupid face* and I can see my fist slam against her and her voice will become elastic and my fist will pound into her face over and over, and I know that I won’t get tired only stronger, and I think about the sweetness of my fist flowing into her for the final time and she is wonderfully blue and red. I make it to the front door and take a deep breath. There is movement

*Second Street*
behind it and I listen to her heavy aging body try to lift her out of heartbreak. She is alone. I push aside all that James knew of her, all that misplaced love that he carefully grew and gave to her, and I focus on his hurt and I laugh and I can hear her muttering to herself and I laugh and I take a deep breath. I knock on the door and wait.
Second Street
Second Street
Lizzie
1892
Chapter Nine

On the morning of the funerals an old man handed himself over to the police and told them to hang him for the murders. He had brought his own noose. At sixty-two the old man’s hair had thinned and grayed, his beard cut short and ragged, his shoulders hunched from the weight of a life half remembered. When the police offered him some breakfast, the old man refused and told them he didn’t want to add to his weight and run the risk of breaking the rope. The old man’s confession took an hour and in the end, the police called for his son to take him home to bed. The old man wept and prayed that god would take him in his sleep instead.

In the dining room where Father and Abby had spent two days hidden in the heat, the undertaker placed them in their coffins and opened the door wide and presented them like two debutants. The smell from their temporary tomb raced through the house, rubbing up against the drapes as it made its way up the stairs towards our bedrooms. The smell snuck under the door and attempted to dance with us, clinging to our hands and arms like husbands. Emma opened one of the windows and took a deep breath before saying ‘At least this will all be over soon.’

For two days every conversation ended with the same wish. At least this will be over soon. Father and Abby were kept in the dining room, remaining still, exhibits of the past. Abby’s sister came by the house the day before the funeral and asked to see her and I told her she’s dead or have you forgotten? ‘It’s best not to go inside the room,’ and Abby’s sister hung her head to look at her feet, her shoes forming the same pattern of heaviness as Abby’s had and her hands were the same leathery delicate. I tried to remember the last time I had touched those hands, Second Street
before her death, before the time she was no longer mother. There were the times I had slapped them away, stopping them from pulling my hair out of my eyes.

‘So I can see you Lizzie.’

‘I can see you just fine,’ I leant into her and watched her eyes dart and slither before they focused back into me and I could see what might have been heartache. Her cheeks were red becoming rough and heavy and I made a quick prayer to God that I would never become this, lost in myself and easily despised.

The time before this Abby’s hands had traced love hearts over my shoulders. Her fingers were warm and her palms soft. She had taken me to visit her family and they made me a special cake and I pretended that I was a queen sent to seek out new subjects to join the kingdom and deliver them from misfortune. I ate too much cake and my stomach ballooned and ached and Abby sent me to her old bedroom to rest. Inside her room Abby’s old dresses hung neat and tired in the cupboard; shades of blues and greens still smelling faintly of dreams. The bluest dress had traces of Abby’s dreams that had filled her with happiness. I could see her on a boat in the middle of the widest ocean and she could see a little island in the distance. With all of her strength she paddled the boat toward the island with only her hands and when the boat finally made it she jumped over the side and dug her bare feet into the sand. There were palm trees with red coconuts and monkeys that called out her name and told her funny stories. Abby told the monkeys that she only ever wanted to have adventures and never be stuck at home and the monkeys agreed that this was a wonderful way of living and they showed her maps that would take her to every corner of the earth. There was even a map that would take her beyond earth and every part of her body screamed with joy and she danced and somersaulted across the island until the sun went to sleep and the moon came out to play.

*Second Street*
I wanted her dreams. I took the bluest dress off the hanger and hugged it, put it over the top of my own dress. It fit just as it should, as if Abby had kept it just for me and now it was mine. On the way home Abby said that the dress looked lovely on me and I took her hand in mine and I held on tight and kissed her fingers. Emma was waiting for me in my room when we got home.

‘Look what I got Emma.’

Emma looked and tried to smile.

‘It came with a dream.’

‘That doesn’t make sense Lizzie,’ Emma stood up from my bed and walked towards her bedroom.

‘I’ll let you wear it if you like,’ I turned in a little circle to show her how the dress swirled but I could see her frown and I asked her ‘What’s the matter?’ and she told me ‘It wouldn’t even fit me.’

Abby’s sister asked me ‘What funeral arrangements can I help with? There’s a passage I’d like the priest to say for Abby.’

‘It’s all been taken care of.’

She pressed her hand on the door as if waiting for Abby to open it odd creature and she let herself cry.

‘It’s best not to go in there. It’s been awfully hot. We’ve done our best to block the door.’

She took her hand away and said nothing. Uncle came down the stairs into the living room and said ‘Can I escort you home?’

Second Street
She nodded her head and they walked out of the house and past the two policemen who had been guarding the front of the house.

Upstairs Emma was stuck in tears. For days she had walked around the house touching the walls and doors, massaging her grief out of the house and toward the river. She barely spoke, choosing to scrub the house clean of Father’s blood that had crawled away from the sofa and into the carpet. When she had erased him, Emma stopped by the dining room door and whispered through the key hole, her hands stained pink and dull brown. She knelt on her knees and closed her eyes *they can’t hear you poor Emma* and after she had finished her conversation with Father, she wiped away disbelief and went outside to empty the pail of blood water. She had no time for me.

During the afternoons Dr. Bowen kept me quiet and soothed and I went in and out of my mind. Sometimes the young police officer would come to me and ask me more about what had happened, as if overnight sleep had given me answers. I told him everything I could think of and then told him I was too weak, but that Dr. Bowen or Bridget or Uncle could tell him what I had seen.

‗But we need to hear it from you Miss Borden.‘

‗I’ve said it all.‘

And then he would leave and I could settle back into nothingness. Later in the evenings Emma came to me in my bedroom with cups of tea and she would lie down next to me and I could feel all the places that she was hot and cold.

‗I want you to keep resting Lizzie.‘

‗I wish we could leave the house. There are things I could be doing.‘

I felt Emma stiffen and I couldn’t understand what was wrong with her.

Second Street
‘I wish you would tell me Lizzie.’

I rolled over onto my side and nestled into her breast, her heart beating into my ear and temple.

‘There’s nothing lovey,’ I wanted to crawl inside of her so I could make her stop thinking and feeling. Emma placed her arm on my hip but I couldn’t feel her love; her arm was a trap keeping me still. She could suffocate me if I wasn’t careful.

‘Uncle will stay a few more days Lizzie now that Bridget isn’t coming back.’

‘Why is she staying away? I thought she liked it here with you and me.’

Emma went to pull away from me and I quickly latched onto her, my head locking her down into my pillows. I can’t let her escape from me and she should want to stay here with me, her little sister who keeps her happy and forever. Emma gave up pulling away and sighed and I smiled. All that was wrong had left.

‘Bridget can’t stay here. She’s frightened that the murderer might come back.’

‘Yes, maybe he might.’

On the morning of the funeral Uncle called Emma and me into the parlour and we sat and held hands and he told us ‘My poor girls, who would have imagined.’

We heard two police officers talk outside the front window ‘Hear about the old man?’

Why would he confess to this? He wouldn’t be able to take a swing,’ they laughed under their breath. I watched them from behind the curtain monsters and behind them I could see the priest walk toward the house, weaving in and out of the crowd that was starting to gather. I could see reporters slot themselves in between strangers and I thought one of them saw me and I smiled at him, thankful that someone had noticed me, had looked me in the eye and knew that I was still here.

Second Street
When the priest knocked on the side door Uncle let go of our hands and Emma and I were left together with the empty space. Emma’s hands, wiry, began to shake and fingers fumbled with thumbs. I looked down at my own and saw their patience; there was nothing for them to do except be quiet and wait. I got up and walked toward the priest and he told me ‘We’ll start preparing for the service now,’ and I smiled at him and he gave me such a strange look and I wondered if he was able to give Father the respect that was owed to him. He walked away and a thud landed in my stomach and raced up my spine into my head.

‘Lizzie, you don’t look well,’ Uncle was touching my shoulder.

‘No. There’s an odd feeling inside. Maybe I’m getting sick.’

‘Some air will be best Lizzie. Just until you feel better.’

‘Yes, alright.’

I walked outside to the pear arbour and sat under its vines and let the fruit sweep my hair. *O feel that softness and love remember remember* and I looked into the sun and Father was there sitting on the edge with a smile and he jumped down spreading his arms like a cloud and sat next to me.

‘Look at how wonderful it all is Lizzie.’

‘Yes but I don’t always like it.’

‘You could never be happy.’

‘But I could be now.’

‘Yes, if you tried.’

‘Yes, if I tried.’

Father stood up in front of me and I took his hand and he sprung me *quick quick quick* into his arms—he was stronger than I remembered—and he hummed a long ago lullaby into my
ear and we swirled around each others’ feet and legs. I know this feeling and it was almost like flying and Father’s heart was beating into mine and we were almost the same person just for a moment and in his arms I was small and wild and my feet dangled in mid air and I knew that I wouldn’t fall. He told me about my mother and how she loved me most when I was a snuggle in her arms and that he was sorry that she had to leave me the way she did. But I didn’t want him to say that, so he started humming again, holding me tighter until I became a baby.

The funeral service started with a whisper, everyone too scared to say a word in case it brought Father and Abby back to life. Emma and I sat in front of the coffins. She held onto my hand too tightly and I could feel blood coming to the surface just like when Father died. The priest spoke of Father and Abby’s marriage and the union that they shared with their daughters who are these strangers he speaks of and Emma and I smiled, showing our family and friends that we were going to be alright, that we had lived through this love and would hold onto it for the rest of our lives.

After the final prayer, Father and Abby were taken out of the parlour and into the street. We followed them to their hearse, slipping in and out of the crowd. Emma crossed her arm over mine and her body tilted, caught off balance by the small waves of sounds crushing on top her shoulders and head. I held her tight, walking straighter than I ever had before. It was easy. Some of the neighbourhood women tried to reach for Emma telling her ‘We are sorry for your loss,’ and I smiled at them, their faces tightening into mounds of disapproval what have I done wrong? They looked over my face and body and I could see the world that had formed in their heads, made them see things that could never exist in real life.

I looked up at the house toward the guest room where Abby was found. The house caught a handful of sunlight and shone it in my eyes and there in the window I could see Abby she’s...
still here, will never leave looking back down at me, her hair tangled, falling below her round shoulders sometimes she is pretty. The house moved around her, standing by her side, kissing her on the forehead. She closed her eyes and as the house began to shut its curtains shadows poured over Abby’s face and she became so dark that her cheeks swelled into mountains, growing past her head and body until it filled the room and made it black you will disappear, become nothing.

Emma pushed into my ribs and shifted the space in between my heart and spine. Something like hurt but wait there is something else here too Lizzie danced along the edges of what felt like excitement, making it difficult to breathe. I didn’t know where it was coming from and what it would do to me and so I pushed that feeling outside of my body.

The crowd circled us and I could feel their warm and cool breaths stream down my neck and for a moment I wasn’t myself but someone else. I looked at the crowd as if they were all my friends, wanted to be my friend, that nobody was there to hurt me, and I looked to our future that was going to be full of happiness yes, no more trouble and I could see us all looking over each other’s back yard fences asking ‘How do you do?’ and they would all call me Lizbeth, a proper name for a woman, and Emma would look after us both in a grand house and we would discover the secret to a long life and live together until we decided it was time to go to heaven and see Mother.

‘Tell us who did it!’ a chalky voice yelled at my ear. I covered my hand over my face and Emma swept her arm over my back. Uncle helped us onto the carriage giving me a wink and I knew that I would be alright. We followed Father and Abby down Second Street, their coffins swayed slightly at the back of their carriage, a final waltz, and onto Rock Street where we had once all held hands. The breeze picked up slightly, cooling Emma and me, and letting out a sigh

Second Street
I took Emma’s hand and stroked it, trying to put her sad and empty face to the back of my mind. I had seen this face only once before when I had told her that I didn’t love her anymore. After she had made me promise never to say it again, she told me ‘It’s important that we’re together Lizzie.’

We arrived at the cemetery and watched Father and Abby’s coffins be taken to the undertakers’ quarters as our carriage followed the path to Mother and baby Alice. After Abby’s family had arrived and after the priest shook hands with the men, Father and Abby were finally brought to us, their coffins making their lives seem smaller than they were.

‘This is it,’ Emma whispered to me.

There was no need to answer her. I watched Father sink low into the ground and settle next to Mother while Abby came for both of them in her hard wooden cage. The priest blessed the earth and held his cross over the grave grinding prayers into the ground, his voice pleading with God to take care of this husband and wife in death as much as he had in life ah, but here they are butchered and betrayed and he prayed for Emma and me, their heaven sent children.

Emma’s feet began to move and disappear from underneath her skirt, her heavy heart pounding her inch by inch into the dirt and past the tree roots, burying her too early. Both of us stood arm in arm on top of the earth that would be our own graves, and I could feel my soul scratch at my bones, muscle and skin trying to escape the place I would one day rest.

The priest stepped away from Father and Abby and a short broad shouldered man took his place and began locking Father into eternity—the dirt bounced then thudded onto the coffins and I realized that it was now impossible to see Father again outside of dreams or memories. There would be a day when when when that I would forget what he looked like and would forget all the tiny murmurs that he had made. When Father brought us here to see Mother all those

Second Street
years ago he told us that she wouldn’t leave our minds, that she would always be right here when we needed her. But I know that he was lying. It has always been hard for me to find her on my own.

Once I dreamt that Father and Mother went to the sea and found a shell that looked like a calcified dugong’s fetus. ‘It was the rarest most precious thing I had ever seen,’ he said and they took it home and made a small bed for it and sang to it each night and Mother named it Benjamin because she wanted to give Father a son. One night after they had gone out they came home to say goodnight to Benjamin but he wasn’t in his bed. Father looked through his desk drawers while Mother looked behind books and clothes. Then Father decided to look in Alice’s bedroom. On the floor near her bed he saw the bone white outline of Benjamin crushed and ground into dust. He said he couldn’t explain how he felt seeing Benjamin, only that he understood what true disappointment might have been like. He woke up Alice and asked her why she had taken Benjamin and she told him ‘Because he is mean to me.’

I had this dream so many times that I decided that it must have been a memory, that it really had happened. The more I remembered, the more I discovered: sometimes it was me who took Benjamin, my little fingers crawling up the high wooden drawers to snatch him out of bed. I could see myself in my room swinging Benjamin by his legs teaching him how to fly, his scratching little voice telling me that he would tell Father and that I would be in trouble. It was me that threw him into the ground and stomped on him until he stopped speaking.

I remembered more.

I could see myself in our house at every age and I watched Emma grow and Abby move in and Father become a stranger. I could see the morning Emma went to Fairhaven to visit friends. She told me that she couldn’t be at the house and I asked her to stay with me but she

*Second Street*
refused, her eyes growing wide and worried. Abby told her that Bridget would help her pack but Emma refused and muttered ‘I take care of myself.’

I could see myself standing at the bottom of the stairs the morning Father died. I could hear the three of them, Father, Uncle and Abby, talk about agriculture and Bridget carried herself around the table, sweltering, pouring Abby more water and I saw Father smile at Bridget making her blush. I could see how I would have walked into the sitting room and sat on the sofa, taking deep breaths trying to stay calm in the heat. The house was already shifting you’re early this morning and Abby asked Uncle to stay for dinner and I smiled. Uncle agreed and then pulled out his pocket watch and told them ‘I’m off to my appointments,’ and he walked into the sitting room and said ‘Later Lizzie dear,’ and he straightened his collar and walked out the front door.

I could see how it was possible for all of it to happen, how it was possible that my dream had been true, that there had been brother Benjamin. Because it was possible, I could see myself walk back up the stairs to my room and shut the door taking care not to disturb the house be quiet little mouse and below me Abby and Bridget moved in and out of each other. I waited and listened to their movements and I could hear Abby come up the stairs and stop by my door wondering whether she should knock definitely not and then turn on her heel, walk into the guest bedroom and disappear.

Everything could have been. Just as I had seen my little feet dig into brother Benjamin, I saw myself back in dreams and possibilities. The night before Father died I went to bed with my head full of noise, low and high buzzing, lifting me up out through the house and into the dark. I saw everything. Father and Abby in their room sitting on opposite ends of the bed, Father smiling, Abby indifferent. Uncle was in the guest room watching himself through the mirror and all of Second Street was quiet. The noise became louder, whiter, and my head was a ball of dizziness

Second Street
and everything around me reminded me that it was impossible to be alone. I dreamt amongst the stars that night. In my dreams I heard a watch ticking from inside my wrist and I looked down to see the time but there was nothing—only my wrist ticking, the small bones moving slowly up and down the underside of my skin before stopping completely, my body finally understanding there was no need for time anymore.

From up in the stars I could see the time when I was sitting in clover, Emma creeping behind me covering my eyes with her fingers, her skin tickling my lashes and nose. After falling down with laughter and recovering in a hug, Emma told me that when I was born the doctor gave me to Mother and pinned me onto her chest like a reward. When she kissed my forehead her lips became stuck on the thin white halo that I had brought with me from the womb and it took awhile for her lips to part from me. Mother told Emma that I smelt like thinning honey and butter, and as I grew older, Emma wondered whether I still smelt the same or whether I had grown out of it and invented another one let’s see and in the clover Emma’s face came toward mine and after kissing me on each eye she took a deep breath and breathed me in. She smiled.

From the stars I could see how it was possible. I saw the morning Father died. I saw him inching toward the house in his dark grey suit, his boots dragging behind him. He came inside the house and I heard him clear his throat and it made me jump through my heart, my body becoming trapped. I didn’t feel like me anymore and I carried myself down the stairs, hoping Father could tell me what was wrong, why I felt so heavy and maybe he could tell me so much more and at the end of the stairs I saw Father on the sofa holding his head in his hands and I wanted to be inside of him, to see and hear all the thoughts that never came out to speak to me. He opened his eyes and looked toward me his body arching deep into the back of the sofa. His lips tried to move but nothing came out. There was a buzzing coming through the floor into my

*Second Street*
feet and legs travelling the long road toward my head *I am dancing heehaw!* and I wanted to tell Father what it was that I was feeling, that I didn’t understand what was surrounding me, yet I couldn’t find the words to explain. There was only a dullness that I felt when I looked at him, and my arms and hands became so heavy, reminding me of the spots that were full of hurt. I stepped toward him hoping that being closer to him would release me *I want my Daddy* and I could see that he was looking at me and I tried to see through him into a space that was the same as mine, that was me, and I wanted to tell him what it was like to feel that someone had moved on without you. Through his mind he asked me ‘Is it too late to come back to you?’

‘I wish it was before, Father.’

‘Is it too late?’

‘Where did you go to?’

‘I tried to be here.’

‘Can you tell me something from before? When there was only me and Emma and Mother?’

‘Once there was love. All love.’

‘Yes, all that love. Once.’

And from the stars I could see that Father had no words. He could only stare at me through those tiny eyes. His mouth opened and I felt only heat and confusion and the house let out a sigh and I took a step closer to Father, the heaviness in my arms wondering if maybe I could hold him to make it stop, to make it disappear. Above me the house opened up and I could feel the sun coming for me, skipping across my skin and it felt so warm and delicious that I wanted Father to be a part of it, so I made him look up to the sun and I knew that he could feel

*Second Street*
what was coming here it comes here it comes that delicious and then together we closed our eyes and waited so magical! I want to touch the sun and I raised my arms above my head.