

ON DANGEROUS GROUND

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8:46 pm.

Three shots are fired.

The concourse at Toronto's Union Station is packed.

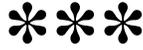
Near the juice kiosk, a woman lies unmoving. Her flowered headscarf has unfurled. By her side is a damp mop. The oranges, imported from Florida, roll off the counter and softly thud to the ground.

A broad-shouldered man is crumpled on the floor. Twisted around his neck is a silk tie, pulled taut against his shirt collar. His breath is syrupy with whiskey, but you can't see that.

Lying flat against the cool marble tiles is a teenage boy, arms outstretched, nose peeking out from under his hoodie. Unlike the others he is moaning. His leg spasms.

The shooter stands his ground, feet planted in front of the new customs preclearance facility. Behind him, the gold paint on the archway has barely dried: *Welcome to the United States*. At his side are two other American officers from border patrol, in their matching Homeland Security uniforms.

Under their feet, the subway rumbles.



9:03 pm.

A man is shouting.

The hostess at the uptown café moves towards him. “Sir, you need to leave.”

He shoves her. Not very hard. But hard enough.

She steps back.

He drops his bag and sticks his hand into his pocket.

Within minutes, two cops arrive. A 50-second standoff ensues. “Take out your hand.”

“No.”

“Now, buddy.” The officer raises his pistol. “Take it out. Now.”

Silence creeps across the café. The man sways, his nose jutting towards the barrel of the gun.

“Take one step closer and I’ll shoot.”

The man glares and raises his foot as if to take a step.

The cop shoots. Once. Twice.

The man falls, hitting his head hard on the floor. “Pussy!” He shouts, with a rush of adrenaline, half-rising off the floor.

The senior officer grabs at her taser. She pulls the trigger.

tick tick tick tick tick tick tick tick tick tick

“No. Don’t. Don’t kill me. Help—.”

Two barbed probes surge into the man’s chest. Wires crackle. The man yelps. There is a whiff of burning. It is like wasps are buzzing under his skin.

His heart stops.

The espresso machine whirs. The smell of ground coffee fills the air.



One night. Two shootings. Three deaths.

It's a night that changes everything, and nothing at all.





Outside Café Americano, cars coast along the main street. In the bicycle lane, food couriers dodge and weave, their bright pink cooler-bags strapped to their backs, while kids in cargo-bikes droop in their seats, exhausted from the first week of summer holidays and the car fumes that waft around them.

A crowd is already gathering. Police are herding people behind yellow caution tape. A few break free and walk off into the night. They might have to get home, or it could be they are still anxious about being in large groups—although the pandemic is at bay, everyone knows that the viruses are still out there, mutating. Some of those who stay pull masks out from their pockets, hooking them over their ears. But most people don't bother anymore.

Inside the café, officers navigate past marble-topped tables and spindle chairs. Orders are shouted out.

“Stand back.”

“Over there.”

“Come here.”

“Sit down.”

The police dust. They scrape. They swab. A long stand of curly hair is carefully lifted from the dead man's jeans. Photos are taken. Measurements are recorded.

Professor Edith Grant watches it all from where she is seated, in full view of the front door. With her are three of her PhD students, whom she insists call her Edie. Most people do. Except her mother, who calls her Ditty, and sometimes Ditsy, occasionally with love, more often with exasperation. Her father hardly speaks to her at all.

This evening, she has been regaling the table with gossip from her latest conference travels. She will talk with her students for hours about work, but she will say little about her personal life, even as she pries intimate details from them, as if this were a program requirement.

“Did you hear about so-and-so?”

“Really?”

“Are you sure?”

“I can't believe it either. But it's all true.”

Engrossed in her own stories, Edie was one of the last to notice when the police arrived. Now she rises slightly, so as to get a better look at what is going on. Her wooden chair scrapes against the floor, as if it too had been injured in the shooting.

“Please, everyone, stay where you are. We will need to get statements from each of you.”

Sitting back down, Edie takes another sip from her long-stemmed glass. The cool liquid bites her teeth, then warms her throat. Her face glows. She has grown into the face she can afford, luxuriating in high-end serums, chemical peels, and microdermabrasion. Every morning she pops multi-vitamins and collagen pills, and chugs fresh-pressed kale juice, with a dash of cayenne. She spends hours at her condo’s fitness centre, so that she can wear sleeveless tops that show off her muscled arms. Only the soft folds of skin that bunch around her neck give away her real age; you can count them like the rings on a tree.

Turning fifty hadn’t been as traumatic as she had anticipated. *What’s in a number anyway?* That’s what Edie teaches her students: numbers are weapons wielded by those in power. The build-up had been much worse than the day itself, which was like any other. It was only a week later that the bad omens arrived, in office-white envelopes with reminders to go for breast, cervical, and colon screenings. Statistically speaking, her risk of getting cancer has soared.

All around her are tables full of other academics, who stop off for lunch, or like her, for drinks after work. She nods at a few familiar faces, and they nod back, with thin smiles that seem to say, “Isn’t this awful. I hope you’re ok.”

In the middle of the room, three large tables have been pushed together, where the Dean sits, surrounded by people from his office. Edie scowls. “Look at them all. Can you believe it?” she says out loud, but to no-one in particular. Over the last decade, the number of administrators at the university has surged, their only distinction being their ability to acquiesce to money and power. Edie scowls again.

When she was young and just starting university, she had thought she was entering a world of open-minds and radical thinking. They were all there to change the world! But nothing could be further from the truth. Most of Edie’s colleagues no longer want to rock the boat, if they ever did; all they want now is a holiday cruise—that would be nice.

Someone at her table gestures over to the corner window. “Hey, look. There’s Jared. I didn’t see him earlier.” There is a ruffle of excitement among the students. A celebrity in their midst! Edie looks over too.

Jared, had arrived a few years ago, lured from the United States to take up a distinguished Research Chair in her department, in the hopes that his cutting-edge research would help boost their international rankings. Sitting with him are a couple of other men, all in their late thirties, wearing designer T-shirts and skinny jeans. They look more like magazine models than the frumpy academics of Edie’s generation. She wonders, not for the first time, if she was born a decade (or two) too soon.

Yet she is also disdainful of these younger colleagues. They drip with entrepreneurialism, investing in their own branded websites, preparing research and teaching portfolios as if their ideas are stocks to be traded, counting citations as if they are money in the bank. Although she has only spoken to him a few times, Edie knows that Jared is of this ilk. He is the kind of person whom she imagines will soon find a place in the Dean's office. Just give him a couple of years.

The whole time that she has been watching, Jared has been tapping away at his phone. Without looking up, he reaches for the last piece of focaccia on his plate, and mops up a pool of artisanal tomato sauce, flecked with goat cheese and a trace of arugula. It's his favorite item on the menu.

How can he eat at a time like this? Edie shakes her head dismissively.

But Jared looks in her direction, she half-waves. If there is one thing that Edie has learned over the years, it's that who you know is just as important as what you know. Maybe more important.

His face remains blank. Her hand hovers in mid-air. *Does he even see me?*

Off in the background, the police are busy trying to identify the dead man. Prints from all ten of his fingers have been scanned and are being uploaded onto a laptop. The officers peer expectantly at the machine as if it is a crystal ball.

If only they had looked inside the victim's pocket. It holds a brown wallet, chafed at the edges, with a few small bills inside, a Georgia drivers' licence, and a smart-chip Common Access Card, issued by the Department of Defense.

Donovan Wright, Lieutenant, Army.

“Oh shit. He's American. A GI. Fuck. What's he doing in Canada? Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.”



Once the victim at Café Americano is identified, the American Embassy is called. Within fifteen minutes an FBI agent is on site, extracted from an undercover investigation. He saunters into the café, waving his badge at the door, and immediately tries to take charge.

“You have no authority,” he is chided. “You are here only as a courtesy.”

He snickers and walks over to the body, avoiding the puddle of blood. The forensic officers turn away, less interested in him than in their new toy: a laser scanner that will map the entire scene in 3D. (The models that they produce will later be crucial at the trial.)

With their attention averted, the FBI agent reaches into his pocket and pulls out a set of blue latex gloves. Crouching and turning his back to the room, he reaches discreetly for the victim’s cellphone, which lies by his side, already sealed into a zip-locked evidence bag. Holding the dead man’s hand gently, as if on a first date, he presses his index finger against the screen.

The phone unlocks.

The agent scrolls through, taking pictures of its contents with his own phone. He glances up a few times to see if anyone is watching, but the police are busy interviewing the witnesses.

- Did you see the man enter the café?
- How angry was he?
- How hard did he shove the hostess?
- How big was the weapon in his pocket?
- How did the police de-escalate the situation?

The questions are leading, to be sure.

Some of the witnesses are told to hand over their phones. A few give them up willingly. Others need some convincing. Several refuse outright.

“I need you to hand over your phone, sir.”

“No. It’s my property. Sorry,” replies the customer politely.

“This is a crime scene, sir. Your phone could contain crucial evidence. You need to hand it over.”

“Sorry. No.”

The back-and-forth goes back and forth for several minutes, but the customer refuses to budge, muttering something about privacy rights.

The cop rubs at his high-and-tight haircut, as he considers his next steps. He is startled by the clank of the espresso machines, which the café staff have turned back on. Pastries are extracted from the glass display-case and arranged on trays to be handed around the room. As the officer reaches for a brownie, his witness walks away, palming a croissant.

Eddie grabs a vegan-peanut-butter-chia-energy-bar. Her students choose cream puffs and carrot cake. She looks on them protectively. They are a little like the children she never had. She is motherly, in a way, but also distant. Perhaps that is like some mothers.

“How are you all doing? Are you ok?” She looks at them intently.

The students murmur and nod, mouths full.

“Who is that man? Did you see what happened?”

They shake their heads. They had been listening to her.

The young woman has a daub of jam on the tip of her tanned nose. She has just arrived back from Mexico, where she was interviewing people who had been deported from the United States. She licks powdered sugar from her fingers. The man in the middle, the one poking his tongue at the cream-cheese icing, is obsessed with border drones. He is pale. He barely leaves his office, preferring to do his research at a distance. The third is another young man, who sips at an espresso. He can’t settle on a topic, unable to decide which project is most likely to change the world and his fortunes, not necessarily in that order. He refuses to listen to Eddie’s advice: he is a lot of work.

Two other students are off doing fieldwork, including her favourite. Is she supposed to have favorites? It’s not who they think it is.

Eddie’s phone buzzes from where it rests on the marble table: a new message from Samir. Her heart skips. She will reply later. It’s ok. Samir will wait. *He always waits.*

She is transfixed. By the noise. The lights. The smell of fear. Of blood. Of coffee.

The more she looks at the lifeless body, the more alive she feels.

For decades Eddie has been researching border security, but this is the first time that she is witness to a live investigation. It’s bound to be helpful for the book that she is writing—the book on

borders that she can never quite finish. Finishing her book would be a highpoint of her otherwise middling career. But the goal remains merely that: a goal, not an accomplishment.

Edie watches as two officers are separated out from the others. Constable Frank Fiore shakes with energy. “It was me. I shot him. I killed him. Me,” he boasts, loud enough to be overheard. He places his hands on his hips so that his biceps bulge, straining at his short-sleeved shirt, thick with body spray.

The senior officer, Constable Tatiana Ivanova, is quiet as she is led away. Thin strays of hair hang down from her ponytail and stick to her pallid face, now sweaty with worry. She had promised her daughter that she would be home before breakfast. It’s a promise that she makes every time she’s on the night shift.

The FBI agent, now finished with the dead man, saunters over to the other side of the café to speak with the manager, who sits at a table near the kitchen, staring off into space. One of his hands rests on his distended belly, while the other fiddles with his mother-of-pearl buttons. He is distraught. Maybe he shouldn’t have called the police? Too late: a man is dead.

The agent briefly feigns interest in the manager’s concerns, but it is not long before he starts making his own demands. He needs access to the café’s security footage. Immediately.

“I’m sorry. I can’t do that,” the manager replies, as he tugs at his buttons. “I need to get permission from the owner.”

“Don’t be difficult,” the agent barks. “Failure to cooperate in an international investigation is a crime. A crime worse than murder.”

But it will turn out that no permission is required, from either the manager or the owner. The security company is headquartered in the United States. If needed, American anti-terrorism legislation can be invoked. But even this won’t be necessary: most security companies don’t bother to ask questions—they surrender the data as soon as it is requested.



While the investigation is unfolding at Café Americano, firefighters arrive at Toronto’s Union Station, brandishing pickaxes and sledgehammers. They are joined by the city police, who fan out in all directions. Next are a team of special investigators. Even the federal police show up, although they take their own sweet time.

Ashley Cunningham leaps out of a taxi and runs across the forecourt. Her cameraman struggles to keep up, weighed down by his camcorder.

“Come on!”

The automatic doors slide open, and she plunges into the Great Hall where the vaulted ceiling soars to a height of eighty-eight feet. Despite the building’s multi-million-dollar renovations, a tired old smell of diesel lingers. Frantic cries ping off the walls, cutting through the usual weariness of the commuters, mouths parched and tongues furry from half-sleep, stale carriages, and quick goodbyes.

“Come on!”

Ashley usually covers the entertainment beat, which she loves, but Jared, her boyfriend, has been urging her to take on more serious topics. With so many people away for the holiday long weekend, this is her first big chance.

The content of her stories matters little to Ashley. What she wants is money and fame.

The promise of celebrity is what lured her away from the small town of her childhood, a couple of hours east of the city. It was once a bustling lakeside town, before it became a little seedy, only to be revived in the last few years by housing developments that have sprawled into the surrounding farmland.

Her parents still live in the grand old gingerbread house where she grew up, in the historic downtown, not far from the beach. All her siblings live nearby, on suburban plots where the landscaped trees not much taller than a toddler. Her brother will soon inherit the family store, while her sisters have married into other local businesses. All of their children will grow up in this same town, as will their children’s children. And so on.

It is precisely this inevitability that Ashley has sought to escape.

Paramedics are attending to the teenager who lies on the floor, still breathing, thanks to the oxygen mask strapped over his face. A gurney is readied to take him to the hospital. Others will also be whisked away by ambulance, but he is the only one with life-threatening injuries.

A flock of first responders drape the dead woman with an orange tarp, pulling and tugging at the canvas until she is mostly covered, except for the trail of her yellow-flowered headscarf. Wearing blue hazmat suits and plastic slip-ons for their shoes, they step around the debris from the smashed flower stall, smashed vases, and upended pots. If the woman were still alive, it would have been her job to mop everything up.

The dead man, lying just a few metres away, is the first to be identified. In his breast pocket is a sterling silver case that holds a neat stack of business cards, printed on textured paper, embossed in company blue. They are a little old-fashioned, just like him and the whiskey on his breath.

Peter White, Vice-President, Infrastructure, RMBK.

It will be a while before his name is released to the public, but word quickly spreads that the deceased is a bigshot executive. Ashley is excited. *This is going to be huge!*

From her purse, she pulls some parchment cloths from a thin cardboard package very similar to the rolling papers that she used in her teens. That time seems so long ago, and yet the memory fills her mouth with a hot hit of tobacco. She blots at her forehead, damp with sweat. People tell her that she has peaches-and-cream skin, yummy enough to eat. But most people don't remark on her skin colour at all. She is white. It goes unsaid.

She applies another coat of mascara. Then one more sweep of lavender eyeshadow to heighten the jade green of her eyes. Powder is brushed across her perky little nose to dampen the glare of the cameras. She carefully checks her whitened teeth for scraps of food, carefully so she doesn't smear her red lipstick. Only then does she don her pink tortoiseshell glasses, which she doesn't really need but she wears because she thinks that they make her look smart, because they make her less pretty.

Ashley grabs at the arm of her cameraman, as he attaches a microphone to her buttonhole, threading the wire underneath her designer blouse. "Look at all the guns!"

"Yes. Impressive."

"What are they? Do you know?"

"Sure. There's a whole arsenal here. We have polymer Glocks, the 17s, 22s, 35s and a few of the new 47s. Then there are the semi-automatics: the Beretta PX4 Storms and the H&K P2000s."

"So, lots of different kinds?"

"Yes, there's something for everyone." He drops his voice, and points. "That one is my personal favourite: the Smith & Wesson 594s—with its retro, two-tone stainless steel. Fantastic."

“Great. Thanks,” says Ashley, moving slightly away from him. To her, the list of names means nothing, but neither does she know what to make of his enthusiasm.

Off to the side, the K-9 handlers mingle, as if they are at the dog park. Shepherds, Beagles, and Retrievers wear flak vests, emblazoned with the logos of their respective agencies, and nip playfully at each other’s heels. Some of them have been trained to detect explosives, others drugs, or smuggled goods. Only the Belgian Malinois of the border patrol know how to sniff out terrorism, but they are aloof, snapping and snarling at the others.

Ashley walks gingerly past the dogs, past the information desk (which is unoccupied), to the ticket booth where some security officers are stationed: their job is to deflect journalists like her. But she is sparkling. She shakes out her glossy, almost-blonde hair, lifting the wavy curls from her face with both hands, so that her breasts bob beneath her blouse, which gapes open, revealing the curve of her bra.

The information she wants drips off their panting tongues.

All that she needs now is a little background information from the internet, as well as someone to interview. Most of the witnesses have been taken downstairs and are sitting in the darkened food court, wrapped in mylar blankets that have been pulled up over their heads like shrouds, slumped in garish green plastic chairs, sniffing at the smell of stale multiculturalism that hangs in the air: shawarmas, panang curries, pepperoni pizza and doughnuts.

Among the few people who remain upstairs, Ashley eyes a middle-aged woman, a little frumpy, who rests her elbows on her lap, holding her head in both hands. Ashley taps her on the shoulder gently. “Excuse me. Hello?”

They talk briefly. The woman’s expression slowly relaxes, until Ashley is able to nudge her over towards the camera. “Marisol? Please. It’s important that we hear from people like you. Please. For your mother.” If nothing else, Ashley knows how to get people to talk.

The cameraman positions the two women close to the new archway, so that the letters in shiny, gold paint shimmer behind them: *Welcome to the United States*. A solitary hard hat lies on the ground, comforted by oil-smearred work gloves, folded as if they are in prayer. Behind them is a plastic barricade that blocks off a small area, and a large placard emblazoned with the name of the company in charge of all the renovations: RMBK.

Ashley throws back her shoulders and begins:

On this holiday long weekend, the city has been rocked by violence. I’m at the scene of a multiple shooting at Union Station. Two people are reported dead. Their names have not yet been released to the public, but I have reliable information that one is a prominent Toronto businessman. Several other people have sustained injuries, including a teenager who has already been taken to hospital in critical condition.

Reports are that the shots were fired by someone in uniform, but it is not yet clear whether the shooter was Canadian or American.

It was only a few months ago that the US customs preclearance facility opened at Union Station so that American border officers could perform customs checks on passengers before they board trains for the US—just like the preclearance that has been in place at Canada’s international airports for decades.

With no more long delays at the border, the Maple Leaf train to New York City has been revived. Cheaper than flying, it takes less than 8 hours to get from one downtown to the other, while passing through the beautiful gorges of the Finger Lakes.

To understand the impact of tonight’s events, let’s speak with Marisol, who was on her way to New York.

—Marisol, please tell us what happened.

—It was horrible. The sound was like nothing I’ve ever heard. And that metallic smell: I’ll never forget it. All the screaming. I was so scared!

—And what did you see?

—Not a lot. I saw some people fall over, and then there was blood everywhere.

—That’s sounds upsetting. And why were you at Union Station?

—I was going to visit my mother in New Jersey. She’s not very well. This might have been my last trip to see her. Now, I just don’t know...

—That’s very sad. Thank you, Marisol.

Clearly, the incident at Union Station will have deep repercussions for Marisol, and for thousands of other travellers.

For decades customs preclearance has been crucial to facilitating cross-border travel and trade. The arrangement is a tribute to the great friendship and deep cooperation between Canada and the United States.

But big questions loom ahead: After this incident, will customs preclearance change? Will the border be closed again, as it was during the pandemic? Only time will tell.

Marisol’s tears sparkle in the glare of the camera lights.

Ashley is smiling.

It won't be long until other reporters appear, but it's only the alternative media that digs a little more deeply.

Eyewitness accounts confirm that the shots fired at Union Station were by an officer of the United States Custom and Border Patrol. Over the last couple of years, the presence of US border officers has grown as preclearance has expanded to bus, trains and ferries across the country.

Concerns have been raised about preclearance, not least because of all the new powers that have been entrusted to the US border officers. For example, they can perform strip searches if the Canadian authorities are unavailable or unwilling. They can detain travelers indefinitely. They are allowed to carry guns. And they are authorized to use force, if there are reasonable grounds for doing so.

Other concerns have been raised about the downtown sites where these facilities are located. For example, Union Station is Canada's biggest transport hub, and the second largest in North America. Over 300,000 people pass through there every day, with this number expected to double, if not triple, over the next few years. There are also more than thirty retailers on site, and many, many more in the surrounding area, as well as hotels and office towers.

Is it a good idea to have armed preclearance officers in these busy locations? Is it a good idea to have armed American officers in Canadian cities at all? In the wake of the shootings at Union Station, greater scrutiny will surely fall on these extraordinary new preclearance arrangements.

Ashley texts her boyfriend Jared to let him know what is going on. She is full of excitement.

It turns out that Jared has witnessed another shooting uptown, at a café near the university, where he has been meeting with some colleagues. He texts her a few details: *Random man was being aggressive. Cops arrived. He was shot. Blood everywhere. A real mess.*

She is mildly interested, but also a little deflated. Will the café shooting become the big story of the evening? She hopes not. She wants the lead.

But she can't focus on that now. There is still too much unfolding all around her.

And she doesn't want to miss what happens next.



An hour has now elapsed since the shootings, and suddenly hundreds of people are arriving at Union Station. Some are on their way home from the nearby baseball stadium, in white and royal-blue t-shirts, while others trickle in from the soccer match, wearing red jerseys flanked with corporate logos.

Among them is Tarek Al-Khalifa, who is there to pick up his mother. Sensing that something is wrong, he pushes through the crowd until he sees two lumps under orange tarp. One is surrounded by police officers. The other is on its own, indistinguishable except for a yellow-flowered headscarf peeking out. It looks just like his mother's. It is his mother's!

Shouting out her name, he ducks under the police tape. The reporters, huddled on the other side of the hall, prick up their ears. Ashley instinctively turns towards the noise, but at that very moment, someone grabs at her arm and pulls her back.

“Hey, Ash. How are you? Long time no see.”

“Huh??” she says, trying to shake off the man's grip, before she sees that it's an old friend. She opens her arms to give him a big hug.

In those few minutes, with her back turned, Tarek is grabbed by the American border officers, who pull him around the security cordon, under the gold-painted archway, and over the invisible border of the new preclearance facility, where they claim jurisdiction. He is marched out of sight.

The two victims from Union Station are loaded into an ambulance so they can be transferred to the sprawling new coroner's complex in the northern part of the city. Engraved into the stone at the entrance gate is their forlorn motto: *We speak for the dead to protect the living.*

The corpses are unloaded and taken to the autopsy suite, with its cool steel and cold storage. From the ceiling hang electrical wires, twisted like coiled snakes. Warm water drips into the stainless-steel sink.

Donovan Wright is already lying on a trolley, having been recently brought in from Café Americano. One of the taser barbs was so deeply wedged between his ribs that it had to be snapped off.

The two bodies from the train station are parked next to him, ready for the coroners who will poke and prod, slice and saw, and the relatives who will wail and whimper.

Stuck in a bare office, Tarek al-Khalifa is roughly patted down. The Americans who guard him remove his shoes, empty his pockets, and confiscate his watch. Digital fingerprints and iris scans are taken, so that they can be checked against domestic and international databases.

The verification is instant. All of Tarek's details are already on file. It is the same for all refugees. As soon as they apply for asylum, their biometrics are taken, so that they will always be haunted by their data doubles, no matter what they do or where they wind up.

The Americans want Tarek to be strip-searched. The Canadian police are summoned, but they hesitate. So, the American officers proceed, revelling in their new preclearance powers.

“Take off your clothes.”

Tarek begins to undress.

“Hurry up.”

Turning him around, they check for identifying markings—birthmarks, scars, tattoos—but they find nothing.

“Bend over.”

They roughly pull apart his cheeks. He is forced to stand, folded over, while someone's latex fingers pull at his skin. Another checks his clothes carefully, inside and out, before they are tossed onto the table. His jersey drops to the floor.

“Sit here. Don't move.”

Then he is left alone, on a metal chair, which gets colder as they turn up the air conditioning. He is not sure whether he should get dressed, but he grabs his red jersey, smoothing it down over his lap, picking at bits of dust. His fingers are icy cold, but his face is flushed and throbbing.

He can't shake the image of the orange tarp and the trailing headscarf. How will he tell his family? His younger siblings will surely be asleep by now, although his eldest sister, Hana, might still be awake, reading in the faint light of her bedside lamp. And his grandmother? He knows that she will be up, perched on one of their three big couches, with the TV on, tuned into the satellite, streaming shows produced in distant lands, as familiar to her as her own friends.

She will be worried. She always worries. He worries about how much she worries.



The shooter has been taken to his supervisor's office, where he is greeted with a warm handshake. "So, how's the family?"

"Alright I suppose. Although it's hard for them with me here. The wife says she's lonely." With his barrel-chest and hair cut close to his skull, the shooter casts an imposing figure, except for his dewy feminine lips. All he can think about is his family, who have stayed back in El Paso while he has been temporarily relocated to the northern border.

"Three kids?"

"Four. They're a lot for her to handle on her own. Johnny is acting up. But Bobby, well, his team won a baseball tournament. I sure wish I could have been there."

"Baseball. That's swell. I'll bet you are really proud."

"Mighty proud. And the girls are growing like crazy. Good looking like their mom. We'll have to lock them up soon." He chuckles. "How about you?"

They continue to chat about the weather and the boredom of being posted to this strange country. Her pen sits untouched on her desk. She does not ask many questions, and anyway, all he will say is: "I had reasonable grounds to suspect an imminent act of terrorism. I was doing my job."

She nods sympathetically. "Terrorism. What a disaster that would have been. What else can you tell us?"

But he refuses to say another word.

She cautions that the Canadians will likely want to ask him some questions. There might even be an investigation. He is surprised. Don't they have limited immunity? Wasn't that part of the new preclearance agreement? "No way. Forget it. I'm not sticking around here for a moment longer. I need to get home."

Then he is left alone in her office. He paces, his nostrils tingling from the new mint-green paint on the walls. When he thinks of Bobby and baseball, he feels good. When he thinks about how long it might be before he can see his family again, he punches the wall.

Hidden away in the staff room, the two other frontline border officers await further instruction.

The man is Latino, relieved to be working at the northern border where his main targets are not people who look like him. Out of the fridge he pulls a bulging paper bag which contains a white-bread sandwich, layered with slices of processed cheese that stick to the roof of his mouth.

The woman turns on the kettle. A blue, round tin of butter cookies sits on the table, which she eyes but doesn't open. She is the newest addition to the team, fresh from military service. She dislikes her macho co-workers, who have harassed her daily, in awe of her two tours of duty.

They don't seem to like one another either. They act friendly, but in an unfriendly kind of way, hurling obscenities, making raunchy jokes, and slapping each other on the back so hard it hurts. The shooter calls the other man "Beaner," which he hates, but grins as if he doesn't mind. They are a team after all.

When, over an hour later, the shooter is brought to the staff room, the woman is sipping another mug of milky tea.

"Alright?"

"I suppose."

"Any news?"

"There's some talk of a local investigation."

"No way."

"They can't! We report to Homeland."

"I know."

"Well, I'm not sticking around for that."

"Me neither."

All is quiet for a few moments, except for the hum of the fridge, until one of them makes a suggestion.

"Let's leave!"

"The door is locked."

"How do you know? Have you tried it?"

The woman tries the door.

It isn't locked.

So they take a chance. They remove their starched black shirts, and fold them neatly, as they have been trained to do. They untuck their white tees, civilian-style, which rumple at the bottom like a frill. Still wearing their unit-issued dress pants and boots, they slip out into the hall and make their way to the exit. The woman's car is parked in the rear lot, behind the train station. The shooter jumps into the front seat beside her, while the other man grumbles as he folds his long legs into the back.

The car pulls out into the street, and heads towards the island airport, only fifteen minutes away. While she drives, the men book their flights to Washington, departing in just over an hour

They board the ferry that will take them across the narrow channel to the airport. Most people take the pedestrian tunnel—it is faster—but the ferry still runs regularly for cargo and utility trucks, and a few tourists with time on their hands.

The border officers are pressed for time, but they have something they need to do. About halfway over, they reach for their H&K P2000s, and drop them over the side. The semi-automatics plop into the lake and sink quickly, the ripples on the water disappearing in the wake of the boat. Then they turn to admire the city skyline, feeling the morning sun on their faces.

When they get to US customs they are not stopped. All it takes is a nod and a wink at their friends on duty, and a flash of their government IDs. They are waved through.

Not so for the Toronto police who have been in hot pursuit. They are detained. Suspicious behaviour is always grounds for suspicion: darting eyes, sweaty hands, tapping feet.

When the border agents find out that the police are not registered as on-duty and that they have no travel documents, they are put in a holding room. Though the police try to argue their case, feebly alluding to Canadian sovereignty, this only angers the Americans, who call for back-up.

Phones are confiscated, and their social media is scoured. A holiday photo of one of the policemen is found: he is on a dock at a cottage, smoking a joint. Perfectly legal in Canada. But just the mention of drug use can get you barred for life from the United States. Their guns are seized, and they are put in an airless room to wait. The door is locked and bolted from the outside.

In the departure lounge, the three border officers munch on oily muffins with a cinnamon-crunch topping that melts into their coffee cups. The banter and back-slapping has resumed. The men laugh as if they are leaving on holiday. The shooter is especially delighted, thinking of his wife and kids. *Bobby and baseball!* The woman is happy too, but nervous, her heart pounding.

“We did it.”

“We got away.”

“We got away with it.”

Within minutes their plane is ready to board. As they claim their seats, air traffic controllers in padded earmuffs are already readying for takeoff. It’s one of those beautiful summer mornings, bright with possibility, as their batons are twirled up to the sun.

As the plane rises into the sky and veers out across the lake, the state of New York comes into view. There is a sigh of relief from the Americans on board. No more milk in plastic bags. No more ketchup-flavoured chips. No more poutine. The right kind of Smarties®. Beer will be measured by mass, distances in miles. You will be able to get a penny for your thoughts. Or buy health care. Bear arms. Vote for Presidents directly, but not necessarily with a majority. You don’t fucking have to hear the word sorry all the time.

It is a narcissism of small differences. But it is enough. They are almost home.

The escape will be a nightmare for bilateral relations. The Canadians will be angry. The Americans will be smug. (It’s usually the other way around.)

It won’t be long before the streets erupt in protests.



“Get dressed. What’s wrong with you? Pervert.”

Three American border officers have entered the room where Tarek is being detained.

Tilting his body away from them, he pulls up his underwear, and asks, “Where is my mother?”

No reply.

“Why am I here? What reason do you have to detain me?”

Sitting on the other side of the large table, the officers talk amongst themselves, ignoring Tarek. News of the escapees has spread quickly, and they are placing bets on whether their colleagues will get away.

Tarek grows more and more nervous, until, without warning, they turn on him, as if a silent alarm has been tripped.

“What were you doing at Union Station?”

He breathes deeply, believing that all he needs to do is answer their questions as clearly as possible. “I was picking up my mother after the soccer game so that I could take her home.”

“Is that it?”

“Pardon me. What do you mean, is that it?”

“Just answer the question.”

“Yes, I was picking up my mother.” He looks at each of them in turn, each impassive. “That’s all I was doing.”

There is a shuffling silence, as some documents are moved from one side of an open manila folder to the other.

Tarek can’t bear the silence. “I have done nothing wrong. You have no right to hold me here...”

They say nothing.

“Where is my mother?”

“That’s enough. Be quiet.”

And then his phone is pried out of his hands, his fingers pulled back one by one. His head is banged on the table for effect.

What is going on? What do they think I have done? Rubbing his forehead, Tarek chases these questions round and round until the words no longer make sense, even to him. He breathes deeply. *Where is my mother?* He is sure he knows but can't bring himself to answer his own question.

“What’s your passcode? You won’t get to see your mother until we can access your phone.” But that’s all they will say about his mother.

Pausing, he weighs his decision carefully. He is not completely sure, but he suspects that they can’t force him to give up his PIN. But he knows that it won’t help him if he doesn’t. As Tarek wrestles with his options, the officer sitting directly across from him raises the phone lightly into the air, as if swatting away a mosquito. A brief moment is all it takes for the facial recognition to kick in, and the phone is unlocked.

Deciding he has nothing to fear and everything to lose, Tarek blurts out his four-digit number, but the officers barely glance at him. They are already scrolling through his data.

“Here, kid, sign this form.”

He takes the pen and affirms that he has not been pressured into giving them access to his phone. In other words, he lies. It’s the kind of lie that can get someone into trouble.

Tarek does not know—how could he?—that his troubles are only beginning. They will download all the data from his phone onto a hard drive, before uploading Cyclops spyware. All of his passwords will be hacked. His location will be tracked. Every keystroke will be monitored. Texts and photos will be scoured. His calendar scrutinized. They will access his apps, follow his web searches, turn on his camera, and listen in on his conversations.

It is only several hours later that Tarek is told he can leave. All this time, the Canadians have feebly insisted that he be released, but have done nothing to make this happen. It is only after his bowel movements are observed that the Americans let him go. Not one person suspects him of smuggling drugs, but that’s not the point, is it? They don’t even bother to examine his runny shit before they flush it away.

As he is heading out the door, his phone is returned. “Keep it on you at all times. We might need to get in touch.”

Outside, the sidewalks are still closed off by yellow tape and a few remaining police cruisers. From the top of the telegraph poles, surveillance cameras pivot towards him as steps out onto the sidewalk. Perched on the roof across the street, a lone police sniper tracks his movements.

It is going to be another hot, hot day. But Tarek shivers, still cold.

The subway won't open for several hours on this holiday Saturday morning. So Tarek wanders off to find a bus that will take him on the long journey up Yonge Street.

As he walks, the dawn light shimmers on the gold-plated windows of the bank towers, which appear to float above the sidewalk, as insubstantial as the paper currency in their vaults. The street lights switch off. For a moment, happy to be outside, Tarek feels free.

The feeling will not last.



At home, Tarek finds his grandmother, Jamal, right where he had pictured she would be. Every night it is the same. She sits on the couch, her feet tucked into beaded slippers, listening to the family breathe. During the day she dozes, while everyone else is out at work or school, and the apartment is empty. Back in Syria, her days would have been filled with visits from friends and neighbours who would stop and chat. But in this country, such visits are infrequent. Everyone is in a rush to be somewhere else. “Slowly, slowly,” she tells them, using one of the few words that she knows in English. Her efforts elicit smiles, but nobody slows down.

Seated next to her is Tarek’s older sister, Hana, who shares their grandmother’s worry. When Tarek arrives, she gets up, and hovers around him.

He collapses into a couch, sinking into the velour upholstery, soft except for the few rough patches stained by the previous owners. The dining table has been pushed up against the wall, its cloth topped with pink plastic flowers in a vase. At one end of the room is a large flat-screen TV that is always on: all that changes is the volume.

Hana brings Tarek a cup of thick boiled coffee, which she sets down on the crochet tablecloth, eyeing his crumpled clothes. She has seen the early morning news, and knows, without asking, without putting it into words, what has happened to their mother, who has not come home with him. She can see it in Tarek’s eyes, which look both sad and angry, depending on which way he angles his head. She winces at the stubble that is sprouting on his usually clean-shaven face.

Tarek is crushed at having to tell them what he knows. The room is spinning.

He is not sure how much to say.

It is better to be completely truthful, or to soften some of the facts? It is a question that haunts every story.

As his siblings awaken and join him in the living room, Tarek loops back over some of the details: their mother’s inert body (he doesn’t mention the orange tarp), his detention (he omits the strip-search), and the interrogation (he is vague about the bump on his head).

Jamal sits, rocking rhythmically, back and forth, tearing a tissue into tiny pieces. Her hand is covered in streams of blue veins, which ripple as she dabs at her milky eyes.

She was never keen to move to Canada, and now this?

Tarek’s brother, Hassan, younger by almost five years, draws his arms more tightly across his chest, holding in all of his anger. His sister Yara is furious and kicks at the mahogany frame of the couch.

“How could this happen?” asks Hana, the eldest.

“Why our mother? What could she have done?” asks Yara, eyes blazing.

“What did you do?” asks Hassan, turning to his brother.

“Nothing. I did nothing.”

Hassan is insistent. “I mean, what did you do to get detained?”

“I didn’t do anything!”

“You must have. They don’t just detain anyone!”

“I swear. I didn’t do anything. I was just standing there.”

Tarek and Hassan have always been extremely close—Hassan dotes on his big brother, especially after the death of their father. *If my own brother doubts me*, Tarek thinks, nervously, *I am in deep trouble*.

Yara paces back and forth, clenching and unclenching her fists, saying nothing.

Nahla, the youngest at only ten years old, is the last to join them in the living room. She often wakes up in the middle of the night and makes her way to her mother’s bed. It is another reason her grandmother spends the night on the couch: to make room for Nahla. Of all the grandchildren, she is the most anxious.

When she hears the news, she cries and cries until she can barely breathe. *What does it mean to be dead?* All she knows is that her father is dead, and that she barely remembers him. Her best memories of him are the ones that have been told to her by others. Will this be how she remembers her mother? It was only yesterday that she was right here. She misses her already.

Hana enfolds Nahla in her lap, while watching Yara carefully, worried by her silence. It is unlike her. She expects her sister to explode at any minute.

Tarek’s whole face trembles, as if he is on the verge of tears. While he has been thinking about his mother all night, it is only now, at home, that the weight of her absence presses against him. He had held out a small hope that it wasn’t her body under the orange tarp, that it wasn’t her headscarf peaking out, the yellow one with tiny blue flowers.

But already the police are gathering downstairs. Isn’t that confirmation enough that their mother is dead?



Eddie struggles awake. She has slept fitfully, despite last night's wine at the café, and the piece of cannabis chocolate she let melt in her mouth when she got home. Usually this is enough to knock her out, but this morning her head is still woolly from counting sheep, ears bleating with tiredness. Her days are divided into those when she feels rested, and all the others, when she has skimmed in and out of wakefulness all night. Today will be the latter.

She reaches for her phone, which is blinking. There are a few texts from Samir, to see if she is ok. She will write back in a minute, after she checks her social media, which she sees has exploded overnight.

@PrimeMinister: Our thoughts and prayers are with the victims of this evening's tragic events. We could not have a better friend and ally than the United States @POTUS

Rising, Eddie tugs open the drapes, dusting the floor with the heavy cloth that hangs in folds from the nine-foot ceilings. She peers out the window. It is still quiet on this holiday weekend. Most people are sleeping in, except for those with pets and young children, who are oblivious to clocks and nationalism. And sure enough, there is one man walking his dog across the dewy grass, and a mother, running after her daughter, their ponytails swinging as they race to the playground.

@MinisterPublicSafety: Canadians are deeply saddened by the death of a US citizen on Canadian soil. Border security is on high alert. Keeping our borders open is crucial for a thriving economy. #SmartBorders #SecurityProsperity #BeyondBorders

When Eddie had moved into her midtown condo more than twenty years ago, she was sure she had overpaid. But since then, its value has more than doubled.

She has come to love this area, with all its amenities. Cafés and restaurants abound, with little boutiques of high fashion and home furnishings. Nearby is a liquor store, housed in a repurposed railway station, which stocks vintage wines, imported from countries that have borne the brunt of European colonialism. Adjacent is a gourmet grocery store, where the fruit and vegetables are stacked in neat pyramids, shiny with wax, deliberately twice-the-price of anywhere else in the city, as if their cost is an assurance of value, of both the produce and the consumer. Several top schools are in the catchment area too, although they don't really matter to Eddie, except for the resale value that they promise.

@TorontoMayor: The city is in mourning. Our hearts go out to the victims. We commend the prompt actions of our first responders who displayed courage and professionalism. #TorontoStrong #TorontoResilient

Eddie shouts at her phone: "You politicians are all alike! Shut up with your empty platitudes."

Yawning, she heads to the ensuite bathroom. She brushes her teeth, and then her hair. She rubs her chin, to check for the thick hairs that appear overnight as if by magic. Tugging at them with tweezers, she rips out bulbous black roots which she holds up to the light, consoling herself that most of her friends are too short-sighted to see them. It's her students that she worries about, with their hawk eyes and predatory instincts.

At the touch of a switch her computer awakens. As it hums through some security updates, Edie wanders into the kitchen to start up her espresso machine. The sea-green tiles of her backsplash remind her of a high-school trip to Italy that ended badly, but which is so far in the past, she now remembers it fondly as a time when she could still easily fall in love.

Within minutes the smell of coffee fills the air. She feels slightly sick, overcome with memories of last night. Grabbing a mug, she returns to her office, the sash from her kimono robe trailing behind her.

The rows of unread emails are ignored as she diligently writes to each of her students, to make sure that they are still ok. But she can't focus, and she picks at the skin around her cuticles.

Returning to the living room, she flicks on the TV, which is fitted into a custom-built bookshelf, filled with trinkets from decades of conference travel. She drops into a chair to watch the news, all the while scrolling through her phone. The police have issued a short press release: *Man Succumbs to Medical Emergency under Police Custody*.

"What the fuck," she moans. "He was shot!"

The news programs are filled with camera footage sold to the broadcasters by savvy onlookers. The same scene is repeated over and over, from different angles. Edie barely recognizes what is going on. *When did the police arrive? Why did they shoot? Wait—is that me in the background?*

Then the news switches over to the Union Station shootings. It's only now that Edie realizes that a second shooting had taken place. Ashley Cunningham's face fills the screen. Her report has played and replayed all through the night.

But when Ashley refers to 'great friendship' and 'deep cooperation,' Edie makes a gagging noise. "Oh come on. Don't be suck a suck-up. Where is the analysis?"

She is doing this more and more. Talking out loud to herself and shouting at her screens.

It is not that she is lonely. She has learnt to love her solitude and to prize it as an achievement. It is only when she is unwell that she laments the absence of a live-in family, whom she imagines would lavish her with care. (Clearly, she has never been married nor had kids.) But as soon as her health improves, she kills them off, deliciously plotting their demise.

She drains her coffee, crunching the residue of bitter grounds at the bottom of her cup. And then she picks up her phone. "Hello. Samir?"



Across the city, Ashley's phone comes to life. Her boyfriend, Jared, has been awake for some time. But he knows better than to call her too early. She needs her beauty sleep, otherwise she scowls throughout the day—not a good look for TV. Letting her sleep is one of the few things that he concedes to her without argument.

“Good morning honey. Are you up? Have you heard the news? About the shooting?”

Ashley mumbles.

“What? What did you say? Yes?”

“Yes, Jared, I know about the shooting. I was there, wasn't I?”

Jared is conciliatory. “Oh no, honey, not that one. The other shooting. The one I was at. The one I texted you about.”

Before she can answer, he launches into a monologue about his night at the café. *Random man was being aggressive. Cops arrived. He was shot. Blood everywhere. A real mess.*

She puts the phone on speaker, as she stretches out from the clammy pillows, which she has been squeezing through the night. The New York twang in Jared's voice still turns her on, reminding her of the summer tourists who used to visit her small hometown, with their naughty teenage sons in bright surf shorts and shaggy haircuts, who stole looks and small items from the family's antique store.

She turns on the TV, muffling the click of the remote under her duvet, and quickly reduces the volume.

“Yes, Jared, I'm listening.”

With one hand Ashley caresses her breast through her nightie, her fingertip tracing the edge of her nipple, which hardens. In the other, she holds the plastic remote and clicks through the channels, until she finds her own image reflected back at her. She inspects her image: every strand of her hair, every greasy pore, the swoop of her eyeshadow, the gloss of her lipstick, her misshapen tooth, a protruding nose hair, the tug of her earrings, the droop of her blouse, its colour against her skin.

Demoralized, she walks over to the bathroom where she props her cell phone against the soap dispenser.

“Yes! Still listening.” Her tone is curt.

She looks at herself in the mirror, haunted by her on-screen image, and pulls at her cheeks like dough, pokes at a little red spot on her nose, slaps at the double chin that grows bigger day-by-day, feeding on her vanity. She pulls up her nightie on one side, and stares at the small belly mound that she can never quite get rid of, which softens towards a neat triangle of curls and dimpled thighs.

Turning the tap on quietly, she dips her toothbrush into a faint stream of water.

“Ash, what are you doing?”

“I’m listening. I promise!” she says as she swallows some minty foam. “I heard every word. It sounds like it was an exciting night.”

“Yes, it was.”

“Mine was too. You should have seen the chaos at Union Station.”

“I did. I saw you on TV.” Jared pauses, and Ashley sucks in her breath waiting for him to ask her about it. “Ok. Gotta run. I’m late.”

“But...What about my night? Don’t you want to hear...”

“Sure, honey, but I have to go now. We can talk more later.”

“I thought you would be pleased. I got to cover the lead story.”

“Yeah, that’s great, honey. It will be good for you.”

Good for me? “Ok” is what she says.

And then, almost as if it is an afterthought, although it might have been the very reason he was calling, he says, “Don’t forget. I have Ronin tonight. We need to eat early. So that we have time for the Canada Day fireworks.”

“Yeah, I remember,” she says, sullenly. She will try to put on a happy face for Jared and his son. But the planned fireworks are nothing like the ones she used to enjoy as a kid, when the whole town would gather by the big park along the lakefront. Children would run around on the beach, until it got pitch black, giddy at the chance to stay out past their bedtime. Only then, exhausted, would they find their parents who were stretched out on wool blankets, sipping wine out of a thermos. They would all look up into the night sky, as the coloured lights crackled and exploded. With the smell of sulphur hanging in the air and the coloured smoke running across the sky like clouds, they would walk back to their cars wearily, shouting goodbyes into the darkness.

Lighting sparklers in the back yard, while it is still light out, for just the three of them, holds little appeal for Ashley. But she will try. For Jared and his son.

“And one last thing” he says before hanging up. “Just while I think of it. I know I’ve said this before, but you were doing it again last night. Try not to grin so much on camera. Be pleasant, but a little less bubbly. You want people to take you seriously. You’re not covering fluffy stuff anymore.”

“Uh, right.”

“Love you.”

“Bye. Love you.” *I think.* These last two words are thought rather than spoken.

Ashley’s phone is flashing. Three missed calls, including one from her mother. She knows exactly the kind of thing she will say:

I saw you on TV! We all saw you! That was a pretty blouse, but maybe not for TV? Right? And darling, that city is not safe. I’ve said it over and over. Every time I hear about all the guns, I go a little more grey, and it’s all your fault!

I’m fine mom. Stop worrying. Stop fussing. Just stop.

Her relationship with her family has improved, made possible by the highway that separates them. Whenever she thinks of her childhood, Ashley is overcome with the smell of pine and sawdust, from the family’s antiques store. On weekends, she would rub honeyed wax into every corner hutch, every sewing table, every steamer trunk—preparing their family heirlooms to be sold off for the right price. The rocking horse that she played on as a child is long gone. The harvest table where they did their homework is now in a bespoke clothing store, where it is used to display the latest fashions. Her great-grandmother’s stoneware crock, which stored salted meat and—briefly—her grandfather’s ashes, was bought by some newlyweds to display their kitchen utensils.

Her past has been sold off, but she remembers it all.

Some scars are invisible. Others darken and ridge the skin but fade with time. Ashley strokes at hers like a haughty cat, who feigns disinterest in your affections and saunters away.

Within the hour, Ashley is at police headquarters waiting for the Chief to make a statement about the shootings. He arrives right on time, in a crisp short-sleeved shirt, decorated with colourful ribbons, his gold-braided hat under his arm. Positioning himself behind the podium, he straightens his clip-on tie, then rustles the notes in his hand. He has a lot of explaining to do.

Good morning. This national holiday should be a day of celebration, as we honour this country's Confederation. But today we are grieving two unfortunate events that took place in our city last night.

Shortly before 9pm, police were alerted to an incident at Union Station. Three people were shot. One of the victims has been taken to hospital. Kareem Agarwal-Syed is fourteen years old and in critical condition. His family has been notified and is with him at his bedside.

Two other victims are deceased. At this time, because of an ongoing investigation, we will not be releasing the name of the woman. The male victim has been identified: Peter White, age 58. He is—was—one of the country's most important executives. This is a huge loss for his family and the business community, but also for the arts, which he and his lovely wife, Penny, supported generously. My thoughts go out to her and their three children. I ask that the family's privacy be respected at this time.

I will now comment on the incident at Café Americano, where shortly after 9pm, the Toronto police responded to an incident. The staff and customers were threatened by an armed man. The police attempted to de-escalate. The man did not comply. Their lives and those of others in the café were threatened.

As you know, the man succumbed to his injuries. We can now release his name: Donovan Wright, age 34. He was an American citizen, who had been living in Toronto for several years. It is not clear what his status was in this country. Since the police were involved, the Special Investigations Unit has been called in. The names of the officers will not be released while the review is under way.

I am asking you for your patience, and for your support. We urge anyone who has information about either of these incidents to get in touch. A special hotline has been set up.

For the public's safety, we are increasing the police presence all around the city. This will continue until we are sure that there is no remaining threat. Thank you for your cooperation.

The back of the room is flanked by a line of TV cameras on tripods, operated by men in sagging cargo shorts and dark T-shirts. In front of them, reporters are slouched in their seats, sullen and sweaty in their summer jackets. Only Ashley shines brightly in a magenta cotton dress.

When the prepared remarks are over, the room comes alive, and the reporters shout out their questions. Ashley catches the eye of the Chief, her bare arms glistening in the lights. "Is it true that a terrorist plot was disrupted?"

"We cannot comment while the investigations are unfolding."

A barrage of other questions ensues:

“Why did the US border officer shoot out into the crowd?”

“Why was the American soldier in Canada?”

“How many more police will be put on the streets?”

The Chief of Police expertly dodges them all. “No comment, no comment, no comment.”



Since early morning, a cruiser has been parked outside the Al-Khalifa's building. This is not in itself unusual. Years ago, the government designated the area as a priority neighbourhood, in need of more resources and services, which has been overrun with police instead.

As the morning unfolds, more and more police vehicles arrive.

Many of the building's residents are relaxing outside, grateful to be out of the heat of their cramped apartments. Mothers are clustered in small groups, rocking babies in strollers while toddlers play nearby in the grass. Kids' bicycles are strewn about, daring someone to snatch them up; like the lone fish swimming around the edges of the shoal, the bikes that are the furthest away are most at risk.

The older boys play soccer on a patch of dirt, where the grass refuses to grow. There are goalposts, not obvious to the naked eye, but each boy has their own precise understanding of where they are located. Sometimes the younger kids try to join in, but they are shown no mercy, and rarely last long.

The young girls stay close to their mothers, but they run around too, laughing and squealing, as they chase after empty plastic bags that scurry like squirrels across the grass.

Standing off in the near distance are the men, some of them smoking cigarettes, mostly hand rolled, the methods for which they can argue about for hours. Even those who don't smoke have an opinion. They watch out over the parking lot, near the metal dumpsters that brim with household garbage and pigeon shit, checking out every vehicle that passes by. Only a few of them own a car, which they discuss with pride, as if they are their most accomplished children.

They watch as reporters start to appear, having been tipped off by the police. A helicopter judders overhead.

The six Al-Khalifas had landed in Canada almost seven years ago. Rima stepped off the flight, her first, into the unknown. Her face was drawn and pale. She looked more than a decade older than she was, as she braced herself against the cold, pulling Nahla, who was then only three, closer. It wasn't clear if the gesture was for her youngest daughter's benefit, or for her own.

Their arrival was bittersweet. Rima was glad to escape the refugee camp in Lebanon, but she had expected to arrive with her husband. He had died just a few weeks before in a freak motorcycle accident. So it was just her, her four children, and Jamal, her mother-in-law, on the plane.

It would be only after many months in Canada, when they had found an apartment, when the kids were in school, when she got a handle on their finances, when her mother-in-law's nagging ebbed, and when she learned a few words of English, it would only be then that some of Rima's joyfulness returned.

At first, she had been convinced that the move would be temporary: they would soon return to Syria to be with all the family they had left behind. After a year, she no longer knew. And as the years accumulated, the decision became even more difficult. The children were happy. They could imagine their futures here. She had a job: it was menial, but it was a start. Even her mother-in-law seemed to be a little more comfortable, although she would remain adamant to the end that they would eventually return to the only place that she called home.

In her new neighbourhood, Rima made many friends. Some were from her hometown, although she hadn't known them previously. Now they are as close as if they had grown up together. Others hailed from around the world. She would meet them in the building, at school, or at the mosque. Connecting with these different people has been one of the joys of this new land.

Still, there are things that she hates: the cold and the coldness of the city.

There is the way that time is clocked, as if every minute needs to be scheduled, or it will be seen to be wasted, like garbage.

The cost of housing is exorbitant. She doubts that she will ever be able to own a home, or live closer to downtown, in one of the red brick, bay-and-gable houses with large gardens where their immigration sponsors live. Surely, they do not have to deal with bedbugs.

But do you know what Rima hates the most? It is the constant demand that her family prove its neediness to the government, so that they can qualify for tax rebates, energy discounts, after-school programs, or free dental care for the kids.

Endless forms have to be filled in. Boxes ticked. Phone calls made. They are required to stand in long lines at stale government offices—as if they have all the time in the world to wait, as if they have all the time in the world to waste. Official petty-bureaucrats demand that they share intimate details of their lives. They are monitored, assessed, admonished, and sometimes denied. And even when they are successful, Rima is made to feel that she has done something wrong.

As soon as the cruiser with the warrant pulls up, the police begin their march up the driveway, weighted down by their gear. Their bulletproof vests alone weigh thirty pounds. That's like carrying an average three-year old. One hundred baseballs. A small pit-bull. 4480 tea bags.

Once inside, the officers block off the long corridor with its roll-up vinyl carpet that stretches down to the laundry room. Garlic and spices fill the air, mixed in with cleaning fluids, and skunky weed.

The police take command of the elevators and they are lifted up to the ninth floor. They file down the long hall, creaking in their tactical gear.

There is a slight knock at the Al-Khalifa's door, but already, before they can open it, the officers are entering the apartment. They do not remove their boots. They trample over the shoes scattered inside the doorway and bump up against the bird cage in the hall, which tips out the seeds as the parakeets flutter and squawk.

A quick sweep of the apartment is made, and the two eldest sisters are brought back to the living room, tucking their hair under their hijabs. The police pat down the boys for weapons. They check the contents of their pockets (even if they are not supposed to). For the second time in twenty-four hours, Tarek is handcuffed. So is sixteen-year old Hassan.

Yara tries to intervene, but she is pushed out of the way. "This is for their safety," she is told.

The police ask a lot of questions, starting with ten-year old Nahla, who is scared, her eyes still red from crying. An officer bends down towards her, speaking in an overly empathetic tone, like a teacher might.

"Hi. What's your name?"

"Nahla."

"Ni-lla? That's a nice name. Ni-lla. Like vanilla. Right? Hmm." He rolls the sweetness around in his mouth, like cupcakes and ice-cream.

"No. Nah-la."

"Oh," he looks at her with disappointment, as if she has made a mistake. "Do you live here?"

She nods as her eyebrows scrunch towards her nose in a frown.

"This is a nice room. There are lots of couches and chairs. Do you have meetings here?"

Nahla is not sure what he wants to know. *Yes, sometimes friends come over. But meetings?*

She shakes her head.

"Do you have your own room?"

She shakes her head again.

“Oh. That’s too bad. My kids each have their own room.”

She tilts her head to the side as she considers what he has said, not sure whether she should respond.

“Can you show me around the apartment? There’s a good girl.”

Nahla is doubtful that this is really a question. Sometimes adults ask questions to which there is no correct answer. Or, really, there is only one right answer, but they’re not even asking you to say it out loud, just in case you get it wrong, which would be worse than saying nothing at all. She thinks that this is one of those times.

She turns and walks down the same hall from where her sisters have emerged, past the boys’ room, past the girls’ room, to the last bedroom: her mother’s.

Officers follow and spread out into the bedrooms as they pass. An old laptop is seized. So is a bulging folder of schoolwork, which includes an essay that Hana wrote on citizenship revocation, for which she received an A+. There are some maps and blueprints from Tarek’s engineering project. (His grades aren’t quite as good as Hana’s.) Also confiscated: two 9-volt batteries and several bottles of nail polish.

The police scour the kitchen. From underneath the sink they pull out pieces of steel water pipe in various lengths that were lined up carefully next to the pot scrubbers.

Next, they rummage through the wooden buffet which holds all their important documents, leaving the drawers hanging open. A Koran is removed and added to the one retrieved from the bedroom. They open the hutch, its shelves covered with gold laminate cloths, which hold a few precious objects: a large silver plate, a brass tea samovar, a cluster of cut glasses. None of these can make up for the generations of family photos left behind in Syria, the lost wedding bracelet, the missing family.

A couple of the officers step out on the balcony, through the open sliding door. The deep red drapes flutter in a breeze that will stiffen as the day unfolds. Then they rifle through large plastic storage boxes filled with winter clothes. Scarves and gloves are left scattered in the July heat.

Back in the living room the family’s cell phones have been collected. There are five of them, all refurbished, pinging with messages. Mostly they are used for internet streaming, when it is available. Only two are actually used as phones: one is Hana’s, and it is taken away, while Tarek’s is returned to him, after they remove his handcuffs.

“Keep it on you at all times. We might need to get in touch.” The echo from the night before makes him shiver.

Yara can’t take it any longer. “You know that our mother is dead, don’t you? Have you no respect?” Her grandmother remains on the couch, understanding almost none of the words that are spoken, but knowing exactly what is going on.

“What are you taking? What have we done?”

Another officer, the one who had been speaking to Nahla, stops and turns towards her. “It’s not what you have done that we are concerned about. It is what you are planning to do.”

“But we aren’t planning anything,” exclaims Hana.

The officer, who was just a few minutes ago pretending to be friendly, is suddenly vicious. “That’s enough. Don’t say anything more, or life will be made difficult.”

“Are you threatening me?”

“It’s not a threat. It’s a prediction.”

The police load the boxes into an unmarked white minivan that will deliver them to forensic services. Already they are on the phone to the Americans to let them know what evidence they have found.

Once the police are finished, it will be the media’s turn to swarm the building. But none of the residents will talk to them. Only the landlord will go on the record. He tells a reporter that he hasn’t seen much of the family. “It’s too bad,” he says, “that these people don’t integrate better. They isolate themselves from the rest of us. It’s not uncommon in this neighbourhood,” he complains, in his own thick, European accent. “It didn’t used to be like this,” he adds, forgetting that it has always been like this, for someone, somewhere.



Ashley taps her fingers excitedly on the steering wheel as she cruises along the highway, music pumping through the car speakers. Covering the news is turning out to be far more interesting that she had anticipated.

She is on her way to Peter White's house in the suburbs, where he lived with his wife Penny and their children. Ashley has completely forgotten their names, but she remembers the names of the cats, Cacio and Pepe. She had met them all last summer, which was the first time that she had visited their house. They Whites are—were?—notorious for the parties they hosted to celebrate emerging artists. Last summer, it was one of Ashley's best friends who was being fêted. She had been reluctant to go at first, not least because it was so far from downtown. But she couldn't really say no. She was that kind of friend. It was that kind of party.

Ashley turns down a side street, which has been named for the trees that were felled to make way for the stately houses. Streets with names like Oak Lane, Oak Row Crescent, Oakglade Crescent, Oakhill Road, Oakington Place, Oakview Road, Oakwood Avenue.

There. That's the one. Oakwood Avenue.

The White's heritage farmhouse is freshly painted in creamy alabaster. The adjacent barn has been turned into a garage with sliding doors that roll along imported ball bearings. A midlife-red sports car sits mostly unused. Underneath, oil drips onto the floor, measuring the passage of time.

Ashley wanders around the side, and peers into the sprawling back yard. The wrap-around deck leads to an in-ground saltwater swimming pool with matching hot tub, next to a cabana. She can almost feel the plush terry beach towels folded neatly inside, scented with laundry soap. A muscled young man in a white polo shirt trims the edges of the lawn; blades of grass stick to the soft fuzz of his legs like Velcro. His arms are bronzed from the sun; or maybe they are brown all year long. Ashley is too far away to know for sure.

When her cameraman arrives, she rings the doorbell.

It is Penny White herself who appears, propped up by a wall of air-conditioning.

"Hello, Ms. White. I am sorry for your loss."

Penny looks at her askance, her gaze as cold as the air-conditioning that bursts out the door. Ashley seems to look vaguely familiar, but she can't quite place her. Until the party is mentioned. Yes, *that* party. Ashley reminds her of the fawning blog that she had written afterwards, which she knows had pleased the family.

“Hmmm, yes, now I think I remember,” Penny says finally.

“Could I speak with you about your husband? Dozens of reporters will be showing up here soon. The only way to get them off your back is to get your story out there. You can do that with me: someone you’ve met and someone you can trust.”

Trust may be taking it too far, but nonetheless, Penny invites them in.

Years of practice have shaped the way that Penny walks, skimming the floor, head level, as if she is being poked in the back by an old woman. *Stand up straight!*

In the living room, while her cameraman sets up, Ashley sinks into an armchair and tucks her magenta dress over her knees. Her hostess sits across from her, in ironed jeans and a tailored white cotton shirt, with its collar upturned slightly so that it frames her face. Her lip gloss glistens. Diamond studs, which had been an anniversary present, rest in her pink earlobes, like the chocolates left on your pillow in a hotel.

The interview begins well. Penny speaks of Peter and their life together fondly. Their families had known each other for years, part of the same wealthy, North Toronto community whose paths would cross at church (where they went for special occasions), and at the sailing club (which they attended religiously).

Peter’s family could be traced back to the early Irish settlers, who had faced poverty and famine at home, but who accumulated wealth and influence as soon as they stepped off the boat. The family’s legacy is recorded on buildings and plaques around the city, although a lot of the details have been left out.

Penny’s forebears were more recent immigrants, arriving in the early part of the last century, in time for the biggest race riot in the city’s history, when Greeks were not yet considered white. Her great-grandfather had opened a Hellenic restaurant, which was among those looted during the three days of violence. Her grandmother Penelope—after whom she was named—would recount tales from that time. But with her gone, the stories have mostly been forgotten. The next generations prefer to forget, just as the city has sought to expunge its past by hosting an annual street festival featuring souvlaki and saganaki.

Ashley is not very interested in all this backstory. She wants to know about the couple. It turns out they had been high school sweethearts. She wore his sweater when it got cold, which he argued gave him the right to feel under it. When they set off for university, they separated, but reconnected several years later. A beautiful love story, if you shrug off all they got up to in the gap years—which Penny does—and of course she says nothing about any of this to Ashley.

In fact, Penny knows exactly what to tell Ashley, as if she had been rehearsing for this moment for some time. Even more importantly, she knows what *not* to say. In the same way that she and Peter had learnt what not to say to one another. The disappointments. The dalliances. The dejection. They learnt how to dodge and twist around their own silences; to do otherwise would have upset the finely calibrated balance that they had crafted.

“We moved out to the suburbs for the kids,” Penny continues, as the Siamese cats—one the colour of parmesan, and the other pitch black—enter from the hallway, and strut past them towards the windows. “There are great schools nearby, and large parks and bike trails. It’s only a short walk to the lake.”

She had loved the house from the first time that she set eyes on it. “It was perfect!” Since then, she has spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on renovations. She gestures around the room where they are sitting. It is a new addition, with steel-framed windows that reach up to the twenty-foot ceiling to waffled wood beams. Along one wall is a stone-clad fireplace.

Ashley would be quite happy living in a place like this. *We could be sitting within the pages of a magazine.* She looks upon Penny with admiration.

Upstairs there is the sound of footsteps, then the slamming of doors. Ashley raises her brow quizzically and asks Penny if she needs to pause.

“No, that’s fine. It’s only the girls. They’re always squabbling.”

“Ok. And don’t worry. We can edit out any interruptions. The technology is really excellent these days.” Ashley pauses to listen for more noise, but hearing none, continues. “Tell me a bit more about Peter’s work.”

“Well, he joined RMBK right out of university. He really didn’t know much about engineering, but someone in the family got him a job. Despite his lack of experience, he managed to rise to one of the top positions in the company. A lot of hard work I suppose.”

Ashley is not so sure about this, thinking of all her friends who are persistently under-employed, and about her own struggles to land her first job. Instead she says: “Impressive. Were there any projects he was especially proud of?”

“Yes, he was overseeing the new border facilities at Sarnia-Port Huron. A huge project. With a multi-billion-dollar budget. It’s going to be a game-changer when it opens.”

“And clearly he—and your family—have done well?” Ashley’s eyes linger on the museum-quality carpet.

“Yes. We went through some rough times with the financial crisis and then the pandemic. Peter’s bonuses were put on hold. We had to cancel at least one family holiday. That was hard. But the company always seemed to bounce back eventually. Actually, it all seemed to work out better for us in the end...” She looks around the room, eyes resting on the new landscape painting that she has mounted on the wall.

Ashley is about to say how lucky they have been, but she is interrupted by a thud from upstairs. They are both still for a few moments, listening. “Should we continue?”

Penny shifts slightly in her chair, re-crossing her legs. “Yes. Sure...” The cameraman widens his angle so that he can pull both of them into the frame.

“Tell me, what was your husband doing at Union Station?”

“I told the police everything last night.”

“Ok. But tell me again. People will want to know more. And not the police version.”

“Well, there’s nothing much to say. He was on his way home. It wasn’t unusual for him to stop off for a few drinks. He would call me as before he boarded the commuter train and I would pick him up at the stop up the road. Sometimes he’d walk, but not when he’d had a few...” Penny’s voice trails off.

“Have the police said anything about the shooting? The reason for it? Why Peter?”

But before she can answer, there are heavy footsteps on the stairs. Two girls pop into the room, one a shade taller than the other. Aside from their height they look very similar in their very short shorts and cropped tops. Their bodies are angular, like elongated children, rather than the teens they have become.

They are shouting. Penny tries to quiet them, but the girls will have none of it.

“She took my skirt again.”

“You told me we could share!”

“Mooommm!!!”

“Please, we have visitors.”

“Visitors. Now. Why? Why now?” The two girls suddenly turn to peer at Ashley and her cameraman as if they had been invisible until this very moment.

“It’s an interview for TV. About your father.” Penny glares at the cameraman, who slowly angles his lens to the floor. “Why don’t you go to your rooms?” It’s a question, but it sounds more like a command. “We’ll sort your clothes out shortly. I won’t be long.”

“Can’t we stay? Can’t we be on TV?”

“I want to be on TV.”

Now, Penny turns to glare at them. When they were younger one of these stern looks was enough to cut them off. But not anymore. Now they are goaded by them.

“Why can’t we speak to them? He was *our* father.”

“At least he loved us!”

Ashley shifts uncomfortably in her chair.

“You didn’t even love him!” The youngest one always feels the need to up the ante. “You’re such a hypocrite.”

That’s how it is with teens: they are blunt and unforgiving. They delight in exposing your secrets and your lies, so they can direct attention away from their own flaws, which they can no longer avoid, as obvious as the pimples on their oily skin.

Penny sighs.

Whatever thoughts were going through her head are interrupted by her eldest child, who emerges out of the basement. His face is young, but his body is that of a man’s, broad shouldered and thick from football. He holds a video game controller in his hand, headset dangling around his neck. His eyes are glassy, his voice heavy.

“Hey, what’s going on? I’m hungry.”

“You always have the munchies,” his little sister says knowingly.

“Little brat,” he retorts, flicking away his shaggy bangs.

A half-smile forms on Penny’s lips, which is not really a smile at all; it pulls sharply at her eyes as they narrow and dim. A slight flush rises to her neck, as if someone had suddenly splashed her with cranberry juice. Suddenly she is fed up with Ashley and all her questions. Speaking directly to her she says, “We’re done here. It’s time for you to go.”

At the sound of car doors slamming, they all turn to look out to the street. Other reporters are arriving and are making their way down the front path.

Ashley collects her things and realizes that, for the first time this morning, Penny seems upset. She had looked tired, with darkened patches beneath her eyes. But not distraught. Had she been crying? Her eyes are not puffy, nor reddened by tears. Not all deaths are mourned.

Penny shuts the door behind them. The lock clicks into place.



Marco Lopez is sent by his boss to get the backstory on Donovan Wright. He is chosen not because he is an excellent journalist, although he is. And not because he is an expert on police violence, although he is that too. Most importantly, he is not white. The optics are good.

We all know what the calculations must have taken place in the newsroom: one Black interviewer + one Black interviewee = newsroom Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (™). Marco is aware of this as much as anyone. Resentment festers. But he is also intrigued: Why was Donovan in Toronto? And why was he killed?

And so Marco finds himself in the north-west corner of the city, heading to Donovan's apartment on the #32 westbound bus. He watches as a man in a fedora speaks in hushed tones to the small boy seated next to him. "See over there?" The little boy stretches his neck to gaze out the window, as a convoy of police cars race past, their lights flashing, followed by a few other vehicles, unmarked but unmistakable.

Sweats drips down his back, past his collared-shirt into his dress pants, as the bus shudders along streets noisy with jackhammers that rat-tat-tat over the Canadian patois. For years Eglinton West has been in disarray, ever since the new light rail line was announced with great fanfare. The need for better transit was undeniable. But the construction has been drawn out for more than a decade, with the street held hostage by diggers and loaders, blocked off by miles of steel fencing bearing the logo of RMBK, the company in charge of the project.

In the ongoing disarray, over a hundred stores have shuttered. The food mart is hanging on, but the bakery, which has the best coco bread in the city, is one month away from closure. Only the payday loan store is bustling; the big banks abandoned this area long ago.

The last time Marco was in the neighbourhood it was with his father, many, many years ago, when he was still in his early teens. They used to make the trek almost every weekend, so that they could hang out at the record stores, listening to reggae on old vinyl. By that time, his elder brothers were long gone, off doing their own thing, and he cherished this time with his father. Each week, they would have lunch in the same small restaurant. The fried fish was not quite the same as his dad remembered from his own childhood, but that it came with rice and plantain made all the difference.

As the men reminisced, Marco listened closely to their stories of youthful adventures in far-away lands, or their current troubles, mostly to do with love and work. Through their stories, especially his father's, he came to know the world differently—or, he came to know that people lived in different worlds. He often wonders if that's where his interest in journalism began.

From out of the window of the bus, he tries to identify the places he and his father used to visit, but with all the construction, the streetscape is unrecognizable. It becomes even more so as the bus continues further west towards the suburbs, to a part of the city unfamiliar to him.

On the south-west corner where Marco disembarks, twenty-minutes later, there is a sprawling new box-store pharmacy, surrounded by an enormous parking lot that stretches across the whole block. He cuts through to reach Gilbert Avenue which rolls gently down the hill, with its hodgepodge mix of bungalows, small apartment buildings, and light industry.

Police cars are parked end to end, surrounding the place where Donovan lived. Officers wave Marco back impatiently as he approaches. Tension is in the air. After last night's shootings, the city is on high alert.

Marco joins the cluster of reporters that has gathered, who are talking quietly amongst themselves. A few bits of information about Donovan are shared, but so far, they know very little about him. All they know for sure is that the victim's widow, Tanisha, and his two daughters are inside.

They refuse to come out.



There is no real reason why Edie *has* to go to the university on a Saturday, especially on a holiday weekend, but she tells herself that she needs one of the books from her office. It's no coincidence that she has to pass by Café Americano on the way.

People have been gathering outside all morning, standing back behind the orange pylons. Impromptu memorials have popped up: heart-shaped ornaments; spinning pinwheels; helium balloons in red and pink; a few teddy bears. A single white cross has been stuck into the concrete planter. Piled on the ground are bunches of flowers, as bright as giggling girls—roses, lilies, violets, dahlias, irises.

The café's large blackboard, which usually carries the day's specials, has been placed outside, propped up on a bentwood chair, with a box of pastel chalk. On it, several messages have already been scrawled:

RIP
 ♥♥♥ Love for all ♥♥♥
 #TorontoStrong
 #OneLoveToronto

Edie is moved, despite herself, but she cannot entirely resist her own inner cynicism. *Can you love someone you don't know? Can you love a city? This city?* Her eye twitches.

Across the way, she spies her new colleague, the one who had been at the café last night, sitting in the corner with his friends. Jared is chatting with some young women who could easily be their undergraduate students. They are petting a trio of therapy dogs, which are usually brought to campus for stress-relief during exam period.

Jared looks up and Edie waves, in what she hopes is a welcoming kind of way. He begins to walk over, bearing a smirk that challenges all of her interpretive skills.

"You were here last night too, weren't you? I saw you."

So he *had* seen her. "I saw you too. Over by the window."

"Yeah, I couldn't really see much from where I was. How about you?"

Is it just Edie, or is his tone accusatory? "What about me?"

"You were sitting quite close. You must have seen everything."

“No, not really. I was deep in conversation.” She looks up and sees his disappointment. And then she adds hastily, “I mean I didn’t see how it all started, but sure, after that. How could I not? I was really close.”

“And how are you doing today?”

“Fine, thanks. Really, I’m ok. Nothing that therapy dogs can’t fix,” she tosses off sarcastically, nodding at the young woman who is petting a Labrador.

Jared frowns. “Edith, you need to take student mental health seriously, you know.”

“Sure. Mental health is very important, Jared. I’m just not so sure about the dogs... A little infantilizing, don’t you think?” She pauses, but he says nothing. “Maybe we need structural change rather than pets?” Still nothing. Edie sighs. “Alright. Too soon, I suppose. Maybe I am being flippant. Sorry.” She says sorry in a way that makes you think she is anything but.

In the uneasy quiet that now pushes them apart, they peer inside the café where the staff is mopping the floors, wiping the tables, and scrubbing every pot, pan and utensil, as if the shooting last night had unleashed another invisible virus.

Edie observes all that is happening, but impersonally, as if everything had happened to someone else, or was a program on TV.

Jared turns his thoughts to Ashley, wondering whether she has managed to interview the White family, as she had hoped. He is delighted that she is taking on new challenges, as he has pushed her to do, but hopes that she is up to it. He has a nagging feeling that it all might be too much for her.

To break the silence, he makes a stinging comment on heteronormative masculinity and violence, as if he is already drafting his next academic paper. In fact, he mentions a few articles that he has recently published, and another book—his third!—that is almost done. When Edie feigns interest, he promises to send her some of his writing, which he never does, for which she is grateful.

They are interrupted by some angry voices off to one side, where a handful of people stand together, bearing hastily-made placards:

*Stop police killings.
Donovan Wright. Say his name.
Abolish the police.*

Then the chanting starts. “No justice, no peace. Hands up, don’t shoot. I can’t breathe.”

The mood shifts. Some of the bystanders are drawn to the activists, and their numbers swell. Others bristle at the change in tone and start to walk away. The police, who up until now have

been relaxed and mingling among the crowd, regroup in a defensive line. Taunts are lobbed back and forth. Faces stiffen.

As the protests draw near, Edie's bravado starts to falter. Last night a man was shot right here in the café. He is dead.

She suddenly feels vulnerable, and very dizzy. Reaching out to Jared, she grabs at his arm as she stumbles, before blurting out something about a meeting. He tips his head in surprise, doubtful that there are any meetings taking place on campus on a Saturday, on a holiday weekend, but he says nothing. Her face has gone quite pale. He stares at her for a few moments, blankly. She releases him from her grip.

Why didn't I say I was going to meet a friend?

She mumbles a goodbye and turns away from the crowd, with what she hopes is a haughty swing of her hips.



As usual, the first thing Edie does when she enters her office is to turn on her computer. She hadn't planned to stay, but she sits down at her desk and then, again out of habit, opens her email. It is already late afternoon in Europe, and despite it being the weekend, her colleagues have been busy shuffling the contents of their inboxes into hers. Exhaling deeply, she rubs at the fingerprints that are smudged onto her glasses. *If papercuts were the bane of twentieth-century office life, today's casualty is one's eyesight, scorched by liquid crystals.*

She opens a separate browser so that she can catch the news. There is a live broadcast of the Prime Minister, speaking in her honeyed voice. Some adore her dulcet tones; others find her supercilious. Edie is among the latter. The only point upon which everyone agrees is the beauty of her wavy hair, the colour of maple syrup, which is left loose, instead of being pinned up as is expected of women of her age.

She begins her speech by extending her condolences to the family of Mr. Donovan Wright, casting her eyes downward in respect. A full investigation has begun, she asserts, tossing her hair decisively. There will be consequences, she threatens, as if she is the mother of a toddler who has grabbed another cookie.

She switches easily from English to French, which she speaks very elegantly, according to everyone outside of Quebec. To conclude, she affirms the importance of strong bilateral relations.

Just the other day, I was speaking to Joe in Oshawa, who is worried about his job. We've seen how, during the pandemic, border closures disrupted supply-chains and closed productions lines. We can't let that happen again. *Nous ne pouvons pas laisser cela se reproduire.* Joe's family, and middle-class families like his, need the border to remain open. This is crucial for the growth of our economy.

Our government commits to working for all of you—*pour tous les Canadiens*—to strengthen our security and our prosperity. None of this is possible without the cooperation of our most important partner and ally, the United States of America!

"Are you serious?" she shouts. Edie has had it with these politicians and their sucking-up to the United States. She can't stand all the appeals to the country's middle classes, and all those who want to join them—one of the government's favourite catchphrases.

Edie opens another browser and finds a live broadcast of the US President who is making his first official statement about last night's events. He grips the podium for effect, flanked by American flags and framed by the plaster columns that adorn the White House pressroom. He's a year-and-a-half into his second term, and he still can't keep the childish smirk off his face.

He is not the worst President in American history. Much worse has preceded him. But not being the worst, doesn't make him the best, either. *That's the kind of thing that Samir would say.*

Eddie swivels in her chair, chewing absent-mindedly at her cuticles, until she tastes blood. Meanwhile, the President continues with his remarks, extending condolences to the family. A sentimental patriarch, he knows what it means to bury your kin.

Lieutenant Wright was a soldier who fought for our country in Iraq, to defend American values. He was a good man. A family man. An American hero. It is a terrible tragedy that he lost his life in Canada. A tragedy.

Reporters shout out their questions. "What was Donovan Wright doing in Canada? Was he AWOL?"

All I can say for now is that he was an enlisted soldier, killed on foreign soil. What his status was there is unclear. But mark my words: if he wasn't meant to be Canada, it's their fault. They are too lax with immigration enforcement.

"What about the other shootings at Union Station? Is it true that US border officers were involved?"

Yes, our people were involved, and we are grateful that they were. We have reliable evidence that there was a terrorist attack being planned. Our officers stopped it in its tracks. We should all be very proud.

"What impact will these events have on Canada-US relations?"

The relationship has been through some difficult patches recently. Listen folks, we have to face facts: Canada has a lot of work to do. If they want to keep the border open to trade, they are going to have to ramp up their security. In the meantime, we are going to increase our own border patrols. Ok, that's it. No more questions. Thank you. God Bless America.

Eddie is enraged at the President's comments. As she wanders down the empty hall to the office kitchenette, she wonders what Samir will have to say. She thinks of him everywhere, even here, at the sink, reaching for a mug from the cupboard, hovering over cracked porcelain. She can't wait to see him.

Even though it was over twenty years ago, Eddie clearly remembers the moment when she and Samir had first met. She had woken up without knowing what the day would hold. It began like any another, but it turned out to be a day unlike all the rest.

They met in a bookstore. Each of them had picked up the same bestseller from a display table. It was about star-crossed lovers who overcome family and class so that they can marry, have children, and be just as miserable as everyone else. Or something like that. He snapped the book shut and sputtered: “Overwrought tripe.” She concurred: “Sentimental drivel.” They laughed. It was flirty. He asked for her number. Not in a million years did she think that she was a) the kind of young woman with whom men flirted; and b) that she would give a stranger her phone number. But he did and she did. And they fell deeply in love.

She was immediately drawn to his warm skin and his long, elegant fingers with nails that shone like pearls. His eyes were soft and sometimes sad, but would light up easily, which she was all too eager to make happen.

On their first date they went for a walk in the Beaches, and then for dinner, and then back to the boardwalk underneath the stars. They talked and talked. About everything. First it was books. Of course it was books, for they had met in a bookstore. They quickly found that they appreciated the same things in fiction. Politics and plot twists. Unusual characters. A little romance, but not too much. Some humour and even a dose of satire. What could be better than a novel like this?

Then she and Samir had talked about the state of the world: the Gulf War, the Oka crisis, the LA riots, the Bernardo murders, the Yugoslav Wars, the Rodney King beating, Anita Hill’s testimony, the World Trade Center bombing (the first one), the Chechen War, the Rwandan genocide, NAFTA. Those first few years of the decade were riven with violence, and there was much more to come.

They were relieved to find that they agreed on much. Not everything. But enough.

Holding hands, with the moon above and sand below, their conversation shifted to the ongoing sex wars, and the viscous debates about misogyny, rape, birth control, abortion, pornography, trans rights, safe sex—everything old that is new again today. As they walked and talked, they clasped their hands more and more tightly.

That night, as they said goodbye, Samir kissed Edie, lightly, placing his hands on her upper arms, and drawing her towards him. His head hovered above hers, and he bent in to press his lips against her forehead. She was surprised at the intimacy of the chaste gesture. It made her want him even more. Tucking two fingers through the belt loop on his jeans, she tugged at him. He looked at her in the eyes, and said, “Remember this moment. It is special. *You are special.*”

It was not for another few weeks until they kissed on the lips. It was worth the wait.

Back in her office, Edie picks up some papers from her desk, grabs a random book from the shelf, turns off her computer, and shuts the door, double-checking that it is locked.

On her way back to the subway, she passes by Café Americano again, which has already reopened. A couple of police officers are positioned along the sidewalk, idly watching today's crowd. A long line-up snakes outside the entrance. Death is good for business.

She slows down to look, but doesn't stop this time, heading straight to the subway station. The westbound platform is sweaty. Black soot clings to the grout between the tiles on the wall, while the smell of brake dust fills the air. After six stops, Edie steps out from the stifling heat of the carriage and climbs the stairs. Outside, she turns to the right and heads north as the flowy pleats of her skirt swish around her legs. Her heart skips when, in the distance, the tall smokestack south of Samir's building comes into focus. The late afternoon sun is warm. She undoes one more button on her blouse, and then another.



Samir's loft is in a former metalwork foundry, now a heritage building—almost anything in this city can be designated as such, if it is older than your grandmother.

When he had moved into the area almost two decades ago, Edie was surprised. The neighbourhood was not the least bit desirable back then. But Samir was intrigued by the dilapidation: of the buildings and of the residents.

Samir did not foresee how his investment would crack open the area's future transformation. But the developers did. They were prescient, anticipating the future that they then set out to create.

The coffee shop down the street is now permanently closed. Traces of sticky tape can still be seen on the window, where hand-written signs with the day's specials used to be posted. It's not the kind of place that Edie would have ever ventured. But Samir used to go there often. Coffee bubbled in a carafe on the warmer, and fresh donuts were lined up in rows, glossy with icing, although no one ever seemed to eat them. Samir would ease himself into one of the vinyl-covered booths, thick with the smell of cigarettes, even though indoor smoking was banned years ago, nodding at the other men, almost always men. Sometimes they would nod back, or even strike up a conversation. Or they sat, lost in their own thoughts, while they sipped slowly, until only a teaspoon of their double-double was left, which they would nurse until they were gently asked to move on.

A block away, past where the road curves, the low-slung mall with its dollar and discount stores has also recently closed, as has the recreation centre. They are being replaced by a new master-planned lifestyle-community, which will have its own private amenities: yoga gardens, gyms, spas, indoor and outdoor pools. Two of the three stages are completed. The third is sold-out, but construction has stalled since the pandemic.

Meanwhile, the renovations at the nearby apartment buildings continue on schedule.

Despite the heat, Samir's sky-blue shirt is without a crease, hanging neatly over chino shorts, the colour of damp sand. They show off his slim dark legs, mostly hairless. He has a large gin and tonic waiting. "Thank you. Thank you."

When they had first met, he was clean-shaven, with a big mop of dark brown hair. Now, it is the inverse: his head is bald, but he sports a bushy grey mustache and beard. His prominent eyebrows are silver, but otherwise unchanged. "How are you?" he says as he bends down to kiss her, a quick peck at first, but harder as she pushes against him. He is still muscular, but with a

slight paunch. She holds onto his rounded shape tightly, as if he is a balloon that might fly away. The windows are open, and a breeze wafts in.

The ingredients for dinner are laid out. Edie perches on the counter, watching him chop vegetables, trying not to gulp her gin. Her hands are shaking, although they will steady as she starts on the wine. She reaches for a long piece of red pepper from the bowl on the counter, dipping it into the labneh and pistachio dip.

“Pasta?”

“Spicy linguine with clams. And a green salad.”

“Yum. Is that fresh bread?”

“Still warm.”

She blows him a kiss. “You’re too good to me.”

He opens and closes the stainless-steel fridge, which matches the exposed ducting. “Can you shave the fennel?” He pushes the mandoline towards her. “Please?” Picking up the tomatoes from the counter, he breaks them from the vine, before squashing them in his hands, letting the pulpy mess drop into a bowl, into a layer of olive oil.

She reaches for another piece of red pepper before wiping her hands. She loves these moments, when they are working side-by-side in the kitchen, Samir the chef, she his helper. They have a comfortable routine. Why does he want to change everything now? Why has he asked her to move in?

When she was younger moving in together was all that she wanted. She dreamed about them finding their own place. But now? She likes the arrangement they have, with their separate homes.

She looks around the room. Samir’s condo is always tidy—very tidy—and stylishly bare, warmed by a few kilim rugs, a sectional leather sofa the colour of red ochre, and a single burgundy armchair.

Against the far wall an old oak desk has been placed between the two windows. Samir had bought it during the pandemic when Edie had effectively moved in. It was easier—and safer—than her traipsing back and forth to her own condo, even though Samir offered to drive. And, as much as they were each used to their independence, to their own separate homes, they had, to their own surprise, really enjoyed quarantining together for months on end.

On the side table, a vase of fresh flowers sits beside a solitary black-and-white photo, in a moulded silver frame, which Edie had bought for him for his birthday many years ago.

In the picture Samir is nine, and looks tiny next to his brothers, both well into their teens. He is barely as tall as his parents, who are seated on either side of him in wicker chairs. One of his sisters, about half his size, leans against their mother's lap, where their baby sister is sitting. His father looks directly at the camera, back straight, as if he is alone.

Eddie has met each of them, but only a few times. Samir doesn't talk about them much. And she has mostly stopped asking. He seems to prefer it that way.

"How about a glass of wine?" Samir pulls his reading glasses down from his bald head, where they have been perched, leaving little round indents. He reads out the label. "A complex, aromatic depth, with an impertinent finish." He might have been speaking about her.

Grabbing some herbs from the fridge, he asks how she is doing. "That must have been horrible, witnessing that shooting. How are you doing?"

"It was awful. But I'm ok, although still a bit shaky."

He wipes his hands, and steps towards her to hold her in his arms, then tells her he wants to know everything about the events of last night. It's all that anyone is talking about.

What had Samir seen in Eddie when they had met? She was 24, and he was 36. At first she thought it might have been her youth. But he has continued to love her, perhaps even more so, as the years have passed. So surely there is more to it than that.

She doesn't make heads turn, but is pretty enough. Funny, although not always as funny as she thinks she is. Curious. Smart. They have excellent discussions. Maybe that's all that there is to it.

She knows why she loves him. He makes her think. He is agnostic, unlike her colleagues at the university who worship their isms and schisms. With Samir, she can say anything. They don't always agree but they trust each other: their instincts are the same. And the best part is that he seeks out her opinion, and really wants to know what she thinks. It's intoxicating.

He is also honest about his feelings, and teaches her to be the same, which goes against every instinct trained in her since childhood. Samir says things to her like, "I want to be with you twenty years from now so I can see who you have become." Who says that kind of thing and can make you believe it?

With Samir, Eddie also learns to say "I love you" out loud.

With Samir, she learns how to feel.

Eddie turns her face away from the window's sun. She has slept deeply. Samir is standing over her, with a mischievous grin. He holds two drinks in his hands: a glass of freshly-squeezed grapefruit juice and a cappuccino that he has made himself, just the way she likes it. "Thank you," she says, as she draws the hot mug to her lips and blows gently at the thick froth. He slips back into bed.

Lying face to face, she traces her fingers across his ribs, pausing at the constellation of moles on his chest. She examines them carefully to see if they have expanded, darkened, reddened—divining his and her future from their slightest change.

She presses her hand firmly into the spongy flesh by his bellybutton, so firmly that her own fingertips turn white. She looks into his eyes as he talks, but slides her hand lower and lower until his eyes close and he moans. He reaches out to stroke the breasts that he knows so well, as they swell and ache each month.

"I meant what I said before," he tells her. "You could live here, you know. Full-time. I want you to live here with me."



For the second time, Marco is standing outside Donovan's apartment building, the boxy three-story walk-up in mud-yellow brick. But today, his widow, Tanisha, is going to let him in. It turns out they have a mutual friend whose kids are at school together; she has helped to arrange an interview.

Tanisha welcomes him into the basement apartment, which is at the back of the building, mostly below ground, with a view out onto the wheels of the cars in the parking lot. The ceiling is so low that she can touch the mottled edges of the stucco with her fingertips. Donovan, who was well over six feet, would have had to crook his neck underneath the doorway.

Marco sinks into the creaky sofa bed, while Tanisha sets up crayons and paper in the bedroom to occupy her daughters, D'arcy and Deonne, leaving the door ajar so that she can see them.

And then she begins. Donovan had been in the military, joining up when there were no jobs to be had in Atlanta. He wound up doing three tours of Iraq. The last really messed him up, and he refused to go back. That's when he came to visit a friend in Toronto, and decided not to leave, finding under-the-table work in construction. Tanisha joined him a few months later, reluctantly at first, leaving all of her family and friends behind.

"I hated it. Oh my God, I hated it. But after a while, things got a bit better. Donovan was happy, relaxed. We made friends. Got work. Then the girls were born, and we no longer talked of going back. I was going to find full-time work in the Fall, when they would be in school all day ..."

Her voice starts to trail off as she looks over at them. "Now, I don't know what we'll do...."

"You don't think you'll stay?" As Marco turns to look around the apartment, he hopes that staying in this place is not their only option. The living area is tiny, and opens into the kitchenette, just steps away, where the floor changes to vinyl, and where clean plates are neatly arranged on the drying rack. A lingering smell of cooked broccoli hangs in the air.

With her thumb and forefinger she rubs at her wedding ring. "Well, I don't think we *could* stay, even if we wanted to. We applied for refugee status. But the applications were denied."

"Denied?"

"Yeah, we were shocked. We thought that Canada was a safe haven for war resisters."

That they had believed in these national myths about Canada does not surprise Marco, given how much work is put into sustaining them. But it had been more than half-a-century since war resisters had been welcomed across the border. Back then they had been mostly white, middle-class and university-educated. "It's not a safe haven anymore," he says out loud. "Not when it's people like me or you."

“What are you saying?”

“Racism. It’s much more in-your-face now.”

“Yeah. Although actually we didn’t realize it right away. All the forced politeness. Until Donovan had some problems at work. He was picked on a lot.”

“Sounds familiar.”

“It got under his skin. All he wanted was to do his job....” Tanisha looks over at her girls in the other room. “And did you hear about the nooses at the construction site up the road? That was scary.”

Marco nods, as he scribbles in his notebook, while sweat beads on his forehead. He is wearing his usual outfit—light dress pants, and a thin cotton-shirt with collar. A standing fan whirs in the corner, but it’s barely enough to keep the room cool. Tanisha seems oblivious, even though she is wearing faded jeans and a long sleeve shirt.

“The company didn’t do anything about it. They treated him like a dog. Worse than a dog.”

“I’m so sorry.” He says, his voice lowered. “And did that make him angry?”

“Angry?” Tanisha pauses, shaking her head. “He just got on with it. We needed the money.”

“This might be a hard question,” Marco says, raising his eyes to hers, “but have you seen the videos that have been posted online? It looks like Donovan might have pushed the waitress. Has he ever done something like that before?”

Tanisha is quiet for a moment. “No. Never. Something was not right that night at the café. I don’t even know what he was doing there, except that he said he had a job downtown that day.” He can hear a catch in her throat, as if she might cry.

“Do you want to stop?” Marco asks. Now it is his turn to look over at the girls, still in the bedroom, still colouring. He knows that sometimes, to get the full story, you have to hang back rather than push.

“No, I’m fine,” she says bluntly. “Just sad. And I don’t know what to do. The girls were born in Canada. I don’t even know if I can take them back to live in the US.”

“Do you have any other options to stay?”

“I don’t think so. We put in a second immigration claim, this time on compassionate grounds. We were hopeful. We’d been here for nearly a decade, we were both working, we have friends, we go to church. The kids are citizens. And we were sure that Donovan would be persecuted by the military if he returned. We ticked all the right boxes.”

“But that didn’t work?”

“Nope. Last week we got our final notice.”

“And?”

“We were rejected again.”

“Assholes.” Marco stops writing for a minute, to look over at her. Despite everything, she remains composed.

“I think this means we’ll have to leave.”

At that moment, D’arcy and Deonne sidle up to her, each with a drawing in their hands, which they hold out to their mother. She looks at them blankly. “It’s so hard to know what to do. And we can’t even go outside, what with all the police and journalists there.” She reaches out to put her arm around D’arcy, and looks at her picture, of a house, green grass, flowers, a tree, and a smiling sun in the sky. And four people—father, mother, and two little girls—holding hands.

“I am so tired. Why Donovan?”



From where she sits in Jared's front room, Ashley can see out to the front garden, which has been planted with ornamental grasses. Before Jared had bought this bungalow, the front yard had been completely redone to heighten its curb appeal. And he has big dreams for renovating the rest of it, as all his neighbours have done, adding one more storey, or perhaps two. That way there will be plenty of room when his son Ronin is with him. Like this weekend.

The boys are preparing Sunday brunch in the kitchen. Ashley can hear the clatter of pots and pans, the whistle of the kettle, the hum of the juicer. She can almost smell the gluten-free pancakes, which are for Ronin. Ashley will have a goji berry and hemp acai bowl, with fresh fruit and a splash of oat milk.

Ronin's voice carries throughout the house. "Why?" he asks. "Why do I have to stop? Why is maple syrup so sticky? Why don't you and mommy live together anymore? Why can't I pick my nose? Why is *she* here today?"

Jared's hair has grown long in the last few months, ever since the teaching term ended. He wears it tousled, but smooths down his beard with aromatic oils, so that it doesn't frizz in the summer heat. His clothes are carefully curated for the weekend: salmon-coloured chinos, a pristine white short-sleeve T-shirt, tucked-in except for one corner, where it impishly hangs free. A geometric tattoo peeks out whenever he raises his arm. Around his wrist is a single silver bracelet.

He pulls out his phone, while Ronin fusses as he is coaxed into position. "C'mon little man. Just one smile. For your fans." Jared uploads a few images to his social media before calling out to Ashley. "Readyyyyy!"

The food is laid out in the kitchen, on the laminate table the colour of turquoise. It is usually easier to eat meals in here; the formality of the dining room brings out the worst in the kid. But for the moment, Ronin is focused on his pancakes, which are soggy with maple syrup and squidge against his fork.

Ashley looks at Jared. "Do you want to hear more about what happened at Union Station?"

"Sure," he says, distracted. "Ronin, sweetheart, eat your food properly. There's a good boy." He uses the fake, sing-song voice that Ashley hates as his son pushes his finger deeper into the stack of pancakes.

"There were so many police there," Ashley continues.

"Hmm? Were there?"

“Jared, you’re not really listening.” Ashley pouts slightly. As she shrugs, her slip of a dress glides over her shoulders. Now she has his attention. “I’ve never seen anything like it. All those police.”

“Were you scared?” Jared asks.

“Yes,” she says in a small voice. “Yes. I was scared. Once I had time to think about it.”

“Scaredy-cat, scaredy-cat, scaredy-cat.” This is how his father teases him sometimes, and Ronin delights in being able to throw the words back at someone else. Especially her.

“Ronin, stop. That’s not nice.”

His son blurts out: “I don’t want her here.”

“Ronin! Don’t say that. That’s mean.”

“But I *mean* it.”

“Finish your food, little man. It’s Ashley’s turn to talk. Go on, Ash.”

“I’ve never seen so many guns.”

“Really? How many?”

Who cares how many? “I don’t know exactly. I didn’t count them.” She arches her eyebrows and shakes her head. “But there were police everywhere. I’ve never seen so many at once. Two people were killed you know. They think a terrorist attack was planned.” She shivers a little with these words.

Ronin has stopped playing with his pancakes and is watching her carefully.

“Ash, maybe we can talk about this another time. It’s not really stuff he should be hearing, you know...”

“Shit, you’re the one who asked how many guns there were.”

“Shit, shit, shit” says Ronin with delight.

“No I didn’t, Ash. And please don’t use that language.”

She stares at him, angry at being admonished in front of the kid. But also at his denial. He doesn’t seem to know what he says half the time. If only she could record all their conversations...

“And Ronin, you too. Don’t use that language. It isn’t polite.”

“But she said it. Shit, shit, shit.”

“Stop. NOW.” Softening, “Thanks, little man.”

The boy looks directly at Ashley: “I don’t like you.”

“Oh, be quiet.” Does she say this or does she will it?

“C’mon. Be nice,” says Jared, although no one is really sure who he is talking to.

“Jared, this is ridiculous. We never get a chance to talk. Can’t he leave the table?”

“No, he’s still eating. He has to finish.”

“Well, when do we get time for us?”

“Ash, I don’t know. Please. I am trying. It’s only every other weekend.”

I just want things to be ok again. Why can’t everything be like it was before? These same thoughts occur to each of them at once.

Ronin, who has been fidgeting in his chair, suddenly jumps up and pushes away his food, in one elongated move. Then he collapses into a ball on the floor, with the agility of a folding chair. “I don’t want any more. I’m not hungry!”

“Hey kiddo,” says Ashley. “You need to eat or you won’t get big and strong.” It’s the kind of thing her mother would have said to her brother; the kind of thing she promised herself she would never say to a child.

“No. No. No. I don’t want any more.” The boy shakes his head. “I don’t have to listen to you. You’re not my mother.” He sticks out his tongue.

“Ash, you’re making it worse. I’ve got this,” says Jared.

“You never support me,” says Ashley, placing her cutlery down on the table.

“That’s it. I’ve had enough of both of you.” Jared stands up sharply and bangs his plate into the sink. He stomps out of the room. A door slams.

Common wisdom holds that children grow up to be like their parents—a chip off the old block; the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree; like father, like son. But what really happens is that becoming a parent turns an adult into a child. *What about me? When do I get to come first? Nobody ever listens to me. I hate you.*

Ashley and Ronin look at one another and shrug. Ronin grabs a large pancake dripping in syrup, which he eats greedily as he heads for his room, trailing his sticky fingers along the hallway

wall, muttering to himself about this woman who has come into their lives, whom he blames for the move to Toronto, and for his parent's separation. She is responsible for neither, but the nuances are too difficult to explain to a five-year-old. By the time he learns what really happened, so many years will have passed that it won't matter in the least: the bitterness will have calcified in his bones.

Ashley heads to the backyard and sits on one of the plastic chairs, next to planters of overgrown weeds. Jared has big dreams for this space too, with a large deck and outside lounge area, and a treehouse. But all of this is on hold until the economy recovers. The alimony payments are a killer.

A few squirrels scamper over the back fence and disappear. Why are they headed, she wonders.

Jared emerges from his study soon enough. He is calmer now. After his anger erupts, it dissipates quickly, like a storm that moves through the house, cleansing the air, but leaving much damage in its wake. Most people don't see this side of him. He is mostly pleasant in public. But the anger emerges at home, more often when Ronin is over, which is often enough.

Contrite, he tries to make it up to Ashley. This part she doesn't mind. Each time she calculates whether she should cash in on the argument immediately or save up for something special.

This time, Jared already has his own idea for reparations. "Hey honey, do you want to do another interview about the shootings? I could put you in touch with one of my colleagues." His tone is ingratiating. "Edith Grant is an expert on border security. She was also at the Café Americano shooting. So she might have interesting things to say about what is going on..."

It's a great idea. But instead of saying yes immediately, Ashley stalls, pretending to mull it over. Jared squirms on the deck chair beside her. She knows that he is contrite because he has sat down without dusting off the cushions. Later he will catch sight of the dirt on his trousers, and some of the morning's anger will return.

"Oh, ok." Ashley says grudgingly. "Let's see what she has to say."

Jared is grateful when Edie answers his email right away. Within a few minutes an interview is scheduled for later that afternoon.



Kareem Agarwal-Syed's parents have been sitting by his side for more than thirty-six hours. Their son was severely injured during the shooting at Union Station. He is recovering from surgery. It's touch and go.

They have barely slept, keeping watch over their fourteen-year-old, who is lying between them on the hospital bed, as if to shut their eyes will mean that his will stay shut forever.

Husband and wife had met in Toronto, decades ago. Their forebears had criss-crossed the Radcliffe line to escape religious violence, until they fled the region altogether, finally settling in Canada, where their lives had become mostly secularized. Yet as they sit in vigil, they recite their own separate childhood prayers, hers Hindu, his Muslim. They have never been so alone while so close, touching hands across the topography of the rumpled bedsheets.

The family has issued a statement: 'We are focusing on our son's recovery. We ask that you keep him in your thoughts and prayers, while respecting our privacy at this time. Thank you.'

Mostly they have been left alone. Several reporters still hang around in the hospital lobby, hunched alongside other visitors. But they quickly lose interest. They are not really concerned about the boy anyway. Not as long as he is still breathing.

Only one reporter tries to find out more about Kareem and his family. It is Marco again, who has this time insisted to his bosses that he be allowed to cover the story.

Driving in his boyfriend's car he heads out to the suburbs north of the city, passing through some of the densest traffic in North America, which he keeps at bay with the air conditioning. Usually, he likes to have the window open, but the day has turned hot and sticky.

He is on his way to Browntown, or Bramladesh, Singhdale. The epithets are all familiar to him, although he would never use them himself, certainly not out loud. His friends do though, the ones who live here, who make jokes about their fresh-off-the-plane parents who followed the off-ramp signs at the airport, believing their promises that 'All roads lead to Brampton.' But the nicknames aren't funny when it's an outsider using them.

Marco wonders what it would have been like to have grown up in the suburbs. When his parents had arrived back in the late 1970s, most people from Latin America were living downtown, in parts of the city that were then a little downtrodden, but affordable. Spanish was spoken

everywhere in the neighbourhood, alongside Portuguese and some Italian. Kids at the Catholic school that Marco attended quickly learned to swear in multiple languages.

Drumming his fingers impatiently on the steering wheel, Marco stares out at the suburban landscape, unfamiliar to him. New housing developments loom up out of the ground like pink-brick stalagmites. Sidewalks begin and then end abruptly. Instead of multi-story buildings there are low-rise strip malls, built as if the closer to the ground you are, the closer to the gods you will be. Some are bustling with retail outlets. Others lie vacant, awaiting divine intervention.

The Agarwal-Syeds were among the first to move into their suburban community, on a street called Whitewash Way, near Native Landing Parkette—the problematics of these names is not lost on the residents.

Kareem’s father considers himself luckily that he was hired at the RMBK power plant nearby, which pumps natural gas to the city all the way from the Alberta tar sands. True, his work as a security guard did not call upon his graduate skills in mathematics. It’s a disappointment. But it is something. They have been comfortable, if not content.

Now the community is bustling. On summer weekends, families congregate at the little park, moving in and out of the shade of newly-installed gazeboes, where they set up their picnics and wickets, their saris and shalwar kameezes sticky in the humidity. The nearby strip mall is full of stores offering remittance services, English classes, Ayurvedic healers, and Bhangra lessons. At the supermarket, a sun-worn government sign hangs in the window celebrating South Asian Arrival Day, while voices chatter in Punjabi, Urdu, Gujarati, and Hindi. If you don’t want to cook, there are several family restaurants to choose from. Stepping between one door and the next, you can travel hundreds of kilometers to sample morsels of chicken braised in slightly different spices.

At the house, Marco rings the doorbell. Nothing. He rings a second time. Still nothing. He tries knocking. Once. Twice. “Hello? Hello?” There is no movement on the other side of the door’s frosted glass. He steps back down the stoop to the front path, so that he is standing in the shadow of the two-car garage, above which several satellite dishes are perched. Gazing up past the windows towards the gabled roof, he sees that no lights are on. No drapes flutter. No sounds can be heard. He turns to look at the neighbouring houses, their top floors clothed in the same vinyl siding, but nothing moves in the midday sun, not even the shadows. The streets are empty. Only one car drives by slowly and then disappears.

When he gets home, Benjie is getting ready to go out. This week he is on night shifts at the hospital, which means that they can go for days without seeing one another. In the few minutes that they do have, they share a quick coffee and some laughter. Marco has no idea how Benjie can deal with so much blood every day, while Benjie wouldn’t dream of hunting people down for an interview. But each respects the other’s passion to make a difference.

“And what did you find out about the family?”

“Not a lot... No one was home. I went all the way out to Brampton for nothing.”

“How’s the kid doing?”

“Not great. But he’s hanging on. I’ll visit the hospital again soon.”

“Do you think he was involved in some way?”

“Nah. I doubt it. Wrong place, wrong time.”

“Well, don’t hassle his parents with questions. It must be really difficult for them while he’s on life support.”

“Don’t worry Nurse Benjie. It’s true I can be ruthless, but not when it’s a family in distress.” Marco squeezes Benjie’s hand from across the table with the same impish look that Benjie has seen many times before, with its promise of fun and possibility. They sit, holding hands quietly for a few minutes. There is not enough time for them to go back to bed, but they enjoy knowing that they both want to.

“Marco, do you have any idea of why the boy was shot?”

“No. But we know now that it was an American officer.”

“But he has taken off?”

“Yup. The three frontline officers hightailed it back in the US. We’ll probably never know what really happened.”

“Assholes. Fucking Americans.”

“Yeah, they think they can do what they like and get away with it.”

“And what about the widow you spoke to?”

“Tanisha?”

“Yes, her.”

“She’s doing alright. She’s a pretty remarkable woman. Very thoughtful. Very composed.”

“Do you have any more sense of what happened to her husband?”

“No. Nothing. I feel so bad for them.”

“So what’s next?”

“For me? I want to look into RMBK more deeply. The company’s name has come up a bunch of times over the last few days. It can’t be a coincidence.”

“Well, if anyone is going to be find out the dirt on them, it’s going to be you.” Benjie knows how determined Marco can get with his investigations.

As Benjie leaves for work, already wearing his royal blue scrubs, he kisses Marco’s neck, exposed by his cropped curls. Marco tilts his head appreciatively at the affection. But he’s also pleased to be left on his own: he has work to do. He opens his laptop on the dining room table, where there is room to spread out. Their whole lives are crammed into the first floor of an old Victorian rowhouse, in an apartment they can barely afford, even in their grimy neighbourhood. With Marco working on contract, his income is never guaranteed. Benjie’s job is secure, but he is still paying off his student debts; each month he also sends large amounts of money home to his family in the Philippines.

Marco places a beer on a coaster to protect the wooden surface. From where he is sitting, he can see straight through the elongated living room and out the bay window onto the street. For a few minutes he sits and sips, as he watches people wander by, some scraping their feet, their heads weighted to the ground, others jaunty in their stride, open to what is coming around the corner.

Then he gets to work.

RMBK is the country’s largest engineering and construction company. Peter White, deceased, was an executive there, while Kareem’s father works at the company’s power plant in Brampton. RMBK is also in charge of the renovations at Union Station and the light rail transit development along Eglinton Avenue where Donovan had been working. This can’t all be a coincidence?

Although RMBK’s name has become ubiquitous, it’s hard to find out much about them. Sure, there are countless stories that extol the company’s corporate philanthropy, community programs, and environmental initiatives. A glut of press releases is available on their website, promoting their projects around the world. But a lot more digging is required to find anything beyond their own publicity.

Marco finds some first clues, which he will continue to chase up over the next months. He is tenacious. And what has he found out so far? There are intimations of corruption, from bribery to fraud, money laundering to kickbacks. And that’s just in Canada. Abroad, the company is heavily involved in mining and mineral extraction. Company personnel have been accused of assault, rape and murder. While these stories sometimes break the news, they quickly disappear, as do those making the allegations. They are the disappeared.

When he next looks up, darkness has settled into the corners of the room, and his skin has turned blue, bathed in the glow of his laptop. The only other light comes from outside, from the house across the street, from the lamppost, from the pale distant moon, from a few dying stars. Marco saves his notes, stretches, and cracks his neck before rising to make something to eat.



Eddie was surprised when she received Jared's email asking if she would agree to an interview. *Maybe he likes me after all?* She had no idea that his request had nothing to do with her, and everything to do with his need to make it up to his girlfriend.

Any doubt that she had about being on air was brushed away by Samir. He encouraged her. In fact, he insisted. "You need to do this. As you've said so yourself, people need to hear about your research on the border. You have important things to say."

She rises to his flattery. Samir has always made her feel special. He is her biggest supporter. Her number one fan. She trusts him more than anyone, even more than herself.

And Samir is right. Getting the public's attention is exactly what she wants at this stage of her career.

How can Eddie love Samir so much, yet feel such dread at the thought of moving in?

For almost twenty-five years they have lived happily in their separate homes. It has enabled them to have their own space, and even their freedom. It has made it easier to have an open relationship.

Being in an open relationship was not Eddie's idea. In fact, at first she was aghast. And surprised. Their first year had been perfect. Only the two of them. But then...

He raised many important points for her to consider. Monogamy is a social construction. It is too predictable. It is not natural (which led to a long side debate on the meaning of nature). He told her firmly that they would always be the most important person in one another's lives, just not the only one.

"The heart's capacity is not limited," he told her, "but can expand infinitely."

"But what if you find someone to take my place?"

"You are irreplaceable."

"What if you fall out of love with me?"

"Not likely, but then we could fall back in love all over again."

“What if I need my space? What about me?”

“That’s the beauty of what we are doing. We can both have everything. Life will be far more interesting this way.”

Eddie agreed with it all, in principle. She has promised herself: *I will never be bored with life. I will never be boring.* The last thing she wants is to become like her parents, who have settled into their unhappiness. Eddie has no idea why they are still together, except that they have been together for as long as she has known them.

And so, she gives it a try. He likes this about her. She will try anything.

And she likes that Samir refuses to conform. He is not boring. Not in the least.

But knowing these qualities about one another didn’t make things easier, especially not at first. Although that part of the point wasn’t it? They had to work at it.

The second year was tumultuous, filled with Eddie’s hateful words and hurtful acts. They hit rock bottom when one day, in a rage, she blamed Samir of wanting a harem. It took a long time for them to get over that, but they did. (Although how can you ever fully get over a comment like that?)

Since then, their relationship has been mostly great: about 87% of the time, which is better than most couples. Yes, there were times when Samir would withdraw a little, although even then, he would never completely disappear. He was always there when she needed him. Always.

Eddie has met other men, and a few women, mostly when she has been travelling. It was sometimes—often—fun. And best of all, she has never doubted that Samir loves her. Of this she has always been absolutely sure.

So, as he had promised, they both have everything they need. Why does he want to change up it all up now?

At the television studio, makeup artists fuss around Eddie and attempt to dampen the shine of her oily skin. They struggle with brushes, pencils, powders, and gels to make her look as if she is wearing no make-up. Several layers of ultra-pigment concealer are needed to cover the spots that have spread across her face as her body flirts with the idea of menopause.

Ashley asks her a few questions while they fix her blouse and adjust her necklace. The two women quickly develop an easy rapport. Eddie looks upon her fondly, a bit like her own graduate students, who are not much younger in age. This is one of the reasons why she later feels so betrayed.

The women are placed into winged armchairs, in a studio set up as if it is a living room, or a study. You can imagine a roaring fireplace just out of view. Perhaps a vase of flowers. A puppy. A cigar.

The cameras roll.

The first part of their conversation is fairly dry, as they talk about the Café Americano incident and Edie's account of what she saw. Edie has a few pointed things to say. But it's only when Ashley shifts tack that the conversation becomes heated.

"Edith, I'd like to ask you an important question, and one that is on everyone's mind these days: are there terrorists in Canada?"

Edie is taken aback. "Yes, I am sure that there are. What does that have to do with anything?" Edie narrows her eyes, blinking quickly. The camera lights are drying out her contact lenses.

"Isn't that concerning? The US President has said Canada is not secure enough. He has accused us of being too soft on terrorism. What do you think?"

Edie pauses. *Where are these questions going?* "It's nothing new. It's not the first time the Americans have criticized us for not spending trillions of dollars on security like they do." Edie pauses deliberately, to underscore her next point. "It's true that there have been some threats and close calls. But people forget to mention that these plots were all thwarted before anything happened."

"It's scary to think that attacks were being planned," she shivers. "Thank goodness nothing happened. So, this proves that there are risks?"

"Yes, there are risks. There are always risks," replies Edie, frustrated. "But my point is that no terrorists have ever attacked the US from Canada."

"There haven't been any attacks *yet*." Ashley stabs her pen into the pad of notes on her lap. But you mentioned some planned attacks. What would have happened if they had been carried out?"

Edie is dismissive. "We don't know what would have happened. Because the plans were thwarted. That's the take-away. Nothing happened." The last two words are said with emphasis. She blinks her eyes several times quickly.

"Isn't your approach a bit Pollyannish? To say that because nothing *has* happened that nothing *will* happen?" Ashley uncrosses her legs and then crosses them again, leaning in closer.

Edie watches as Ashley's sheer stockings sparkle in the overhead light. "Isn't it a bit alarmist to conjure up fictitious attacks?"

"Maybe. But just because the other attempts were not successful, it doesn't mean that the next one won't be. Shouldn't the police act if there is a threat?"

“Yes, of course the police need to act if there’s a threat. But only if the threat is clear and imminent. As of yet, we have no evidence of such.” Edie looks down at her hands, shutting her eyes for a moment, hoping to moisten her contacts so that they stay in place.

“But you have already said that there is always a threat of terrorism. And we know that there are Muslim terrorists here.”

Edie is getting angry. “Wait a second. Yes, terrorists are in this country. But I didn’t say anything about Muslim terrorists. Why are you singling them out?” She digs her fingernails into the upholstery, as if it will stop her from lunging out of her chair.

“The police have said that there was a Muslim terrorist plot underway.”

Edie notes the belligerence creeping into Ashley’s tone. It doesn’t help that both women are competitive, especially with other women. “This is fearmongering. Plain and simple. To answer your question: yes, there are surely Muslim terrorists in Canada. But it is racist to single out any one community...”

“With respect to the evidence, isn’t this a matter of national security? Isn’t that why the government is keeping quiet. To protect us?”

“That’s what they say. But too often national security is thrown up as an excuse for secrecy and repression. I don’t buy it.”

“I suppose that means that you don’t agree with all the extra security measures at the border, either?”

“No, I don’t. It’s going too far. More security will just lead to more insecurity. It’s always the same: the people who are most *at risk* are treated as if they *are* a risk.”

“Well, a risk is a risk. We need to be careful. There is nothing more important than being safe.”

“You’re not listening to me. What I want us to ask—what I think we *must* ask—is why borders have become so securitized. Who stands to profit? Who suffers the consequences?” Edie gesticulates animatedly with her hands.

“Important questions, Edith. And no doubt some people will be asking them. But in the face of immediate danger, do we really have time for your armchair Sociology? The police need to be able to act quickly. Thank goodness those border officers *did* intervene.” Ashley’s tone has hardened.

Edie looks at her watch. “Look, we’re going around in circles here.”

“Ok. This seems to be a good place to shift the conversation a little. How would you say that Canada-US security cooperation is unfolding?”

“Well,” starts Edie, “there is a great deal of cooperation, and has been for decades. Our security agencies are deeply integrated.”

“It sounds like this is a very strong and important partnership.”

“It is. We have to work together. But it’s not without its problems. In fact, I think that there is too much cooperation. The shootings at Union Station are just one example of this. Having US security on Canadian soil is very problematic. People have died.” Edie’s tone is not unlike the one that she uses when she’s lecturing. *Cooperation*. There she has identified the problem.

Ashley is irritated. She feels like a student who is being corrected. It’s not a feeling that she likes. “You are making cooperation sound like it’s a bad thing.”

“No, I wouldn’t say that. Cooperation is good. We learn this in kindergarten. Sure, let’s play nicely with the Americans,” Edie says, a little sarcastically. “But when you are dealing with a bigger partner, who, quite frankly, is known to be a bit of a bully, cooperation can quickly veer into capitulation.” Edie tries not to show it, but she is delighted with her own turn of phrase. *Cooperation, capitulation*.

Ashley looks surprised. “Is all cooperation capitulation?”

“No, I didn’t say that.” Edie is indignant. “The question is: *how* we cooperate. Canada capitulates too easily, all in the name of trade. And what this does is make us complicit in their xenophobic border policies, even as we pretend otherwise.” Edie sits back a little in her chair. *Cooperation, capitulation, complicity*.

Ashley asks Edie a few more questions, but the interview soon draws to a close. She thanks her for her time, and for her ‘cooperation’. They laugh wryly, but there is tension in the air.

As she is heading out the door, Ashley calls out: “The interview will be on the news tonight. Watch it and let me know what you think!”

Edie will watch it, but she won’t let her know. In fact, after tonight, she will never want to speak to Ashley ever again.



Ashley arrives back at Jared's house in time for dinner. He can make a few things, which he showed off in the early days of their relationship, but those days are long gone. When Ashley doesn't cook, they order in. This solves some problems but creates others. Why do they always have to order something that Ronin likes? The kid will only eat plain rice and chicken. No sauce. And even then he eats only a little, so they are forever dealing with his bland leftovers.

Jared serves Ronin first, who frowns at the beige lumps on his plate. Then he reaches over to Ashley, with some shrimp green curry hovering on the serving spoon. "You like this," Jared tells her. "Here. Let me give you some."

She hates it when he does this. On another night she would chastise him. "Don't tell me what I like—ask me what I want."

And then the arguing would begin. "I thought you wanted me to think of you? Damn it. No matter what I do, it's never right."

But tonight she is too tired to say anything. She sees that Jared is already on edge. Ronin has been whiney all day. And now that Ashley has returned, he will likely only get worse.

She lets him drop the shrimp curry onto her plate. "That's enough," she says tersely, and then, begrudgingly, "thanks."

After dinner they argue anyway. About loading the dishwasher. Whose turn is it? Jared says that he has to put Ronin to bed. But why does that mean she has to do more around the house? She knows that if she was the one with a kid, this wouldn't happen. She has no proof. But she just knows. She scrapes the remains from the plates into the compost bin. Maggots slither inside the plastic container. She slams the top shut and leaves it for Jared to deal with later.

Oh, you should have seen them when they first met! It was at a bar on Ossington, not far from where Jared lives. He was taken with her at first sight, in her flowy v-neck dress, with spaghetti straps. She looked familiar, but he couldn't quite place her. He was delighted to learn she worked in television. Ashley didn't know Jared at all, but she knew his type. Sexy, smart, successful.

Their conversation was lively as they sampled the various cocktails, their artisanal ingredients lovingly described on the menu, with their prices written out in artful italics, with no dollar sign attached, as if the figure is part of the concoction.

As they talked, it quickly became apparent that they had much in common, including their shared belief in love at first sight.

That's maybe where things started to go wrong. From the start. For a belief in fate leaves no room for hard work and compromise.

But on this first summer night, their troubles are all ahead of them, as they sit on tall stools, side-by-side, at a counter that stretches along a large window facing the street. Beautiful people like them stream past, tanned and fit. They are sitting so closely together that the hairs on their arms wave and almost touch, like the tentacles of sea anemones swaying in the tide.

Jared tells her a little about his academic work, and his research on masculinity. "We have to move away from narrow stereotypes about male identity," he tells her.

She nods in agreement. "How wonderful. And so important," she says.

"Yes. I want to make a difference," he continues.

She is enthralled, especially by what he says next.

"This means being the best person I can be," he continues. "If we all just try to do our best, and maximize our own potential, we can change ourselves, and the world."

"You're so persuasive," she coos. Unlike other forms of activism, radical self-care is something Ashley can embrace. "

"Listen, you should check out my website," he tells her. "I had it professionally curated. It's got tons of information, and some nice pictures too."

Within days they are officially a couple. They attend film and food festivals. They race to pop-up restaurants where they try varieties of fermented cabbage and plant-based burgers, and sip maca smoothies or craft beer. On the weekends they shop in quaint boutiques, and hunt down old vinyl. They run half-marathons, and then donate their T-shirt swag to charity boxes. When the cherry trees blossom in High Park they are there, taking selfies.

Ashley has lived in Toronto for almost a decade, but all of this is new to her. Paying off her student debt and condo mortgage has kept her from much of what makes the city livable. It's not that Jared is dripping in money—what with his bulging line of credit and his child payments. But he has more than she has ever had. She loves the way that this opens up the city. She associates this joy with being with him, which it is, in part.

Jared is a more skeptical explorer. To him, the city is livable enough, but dulled by an undercurrent of moralism that shapes the by-laws and behaviours. It's not the kind of place that gets under your skin, lingers in your dreams, irritates and intoxicates. If the city has any magic at all, it sneaks in slowly, formed by layers upon layers of memories, but it takes time and patience for these to accumulate, and Jared has neither.

Toronto is nothing like the Brooklyn of his childhood. His parents still live in the stooped, two-storey brownstone where he had grown up. While many of their neighbours had decamped to the suburbs, his parents had stayed in place and watched as the community changed around them. That suited them fine: they loved to brag about the diversity in their midst, as if the mingling of Calypso and Chabad hipsters was their own personal accomplishment.

They also clearly adored Sakura, Jared's ex-wife. While Ashley seemed pleasant enough, this was the first time they had all met. And it was a bit of a nightmare, according to Ashley. They talked about Sakura constantly. Ok, they were mostly talking about their grandson, but they did praise her for being a wonderful mother. The only thing they didn't seem to like is the way that Ronin is being punted between two homes. That, and the fact that he is an only child—that might be even worse.

Despite all the tensions with his family, Ashley loved her time in New York. She knew right away that one day she wanted to move to this city, and it is Jared's dream to return. Whatever else, they have this in common.

But the dream is complicated, because Sakura, having grudgingly followed Jared to Toronto, now doesn't want to leave. What does this mean for him? He won't be able to move, unless he leaves Ronin behind. Maybe that's what he will do. He hasn't decided yet.

It was only many months after they had met that Jared told Ashley about Ronin. It always struck her as strange. Why had he waited so long?

It's not that Jared doesn't like having a son. He does. A lot. It's the fathering part that he has trouble with.

Like tonight. Jared emerges from Ronin's bedroom in a mood. It has taken him much longer than usual to get his son to bed. Two stories weren't enough. He had to sit next to him. Then he wanted water. He complained that his stomach hurt. This led to a lecture about not snacking before dinner. Even Jared knew that this was not the right moment to scold him, but once he started, he couldn't stop.

Finally, once the kid was asleep, Jared could sneak out of his room to watch a movie with Ashley. She dozes through it, but wakes just-in-time for the late-evening news, which features her interview. She is delighted. But as they watch, Jared has a sinking feeling. He knows that Edie will hate it, although this also makes him strangely excited.

Lying in bed in the dark, Jared nuzzles into Ashley from behind. He reaches his arm around her waist, and lightly rubs her clitoris with his fingertips. She can feel him grow hard.

He finds a space under her neck, where he can thread through his other arm, and he cups her breast.

She shifts slightly to open her legs, and he lingers, his fingers tangled in her hair, tugging, before he presses his fingers against her labia, and then lightly inside.

She has always loved sex with Jared. She feels his desire.

She shifts again, as his cock pushes against her from behind.

“My stomach hurts. A lot.” It’s Ronin. In the doorway.

“What?” Jared turns to look over his shoulder at his son, pulling his sticky fingers up over her stomach.

“I’m going to be sick.” His stomach gurgles, and he gags.

Jared jumps out of bed, stumbling in the darkness, and quickly leads his son into the ensuite bathroom. Ashley listens as Ronin heaves into the toilet bowl. She groans as the smell of bile seeps through the room.

“I want mommy. Where’s mommy?”

“She’s not here. You know that, little man.”

His son swivels around to look at his father, who turns away slightly, trying to hide his fading erection, naked except for the single silver bangle around his wrist. Ronin whimpers and won’t stop.

Minutes later, Jared is clutching his phone to his ear, as he talks to his ex-wife, knowing already what she will say. The last time they had agreed on anything it was about choosing Ronin’s name. Japanese for wandering samurai. Hebrew for song of joy. The name of Irish saints. The kid is destined for greatness.

All Ashley can hear is Jared’s part of the conversation. “Ronin was sick... Only once, but it was a lot. Otherwise, he seems ok... No, no temperature... No sore throat, no coughing... He says it’s his stomach... He says he wants you... Are you going to come and get him?... Well, fine, I can bring him to you... Why not? I know it’s my turn, but he wants you... I have things to do tomorrow... Fine. Be like that. I’ll tell him you don’t want him. It’s your fault if he cries...”

Jared throws the phone on the bed. “Hey little man, you need to stay here.”

Ronin starts to make retching sounds again.

All Ashley wants is for Ronin to go back to bed. But she also thinks Jared is being unfair. Out loud she says, “I need my sleep. I have interviews to do tomorrow. What are you going to do?”

“Do? What can I do? You heard me. He’s stuck with us.”

The boy turns his face away.

“You shouldn’t say that kind of thing in front of him. I’m going to the basement, to the pull-out bed.”

“Fine, leave it to me to do it all.”

“He’s your son! You told me not to interfere.”

Jared glares at her.

Ronin clasps his stomach.

Jared pulls his son’s dirty top over his head, and then pushes him, gently, towards the bed, and the crumpled sheets with their musky smell. He heads back to his room to find another set of pajamas.

Ashley heads downstairs and pulls at the metal frame on the pull-out couch until it snaps open. It takes several minutes to make the bed. Finally, she is cozy under the covers, eyes closed, on the verge of sleep, when she hears Jared’s feet on the squeaking stairs.

“What are you doing?”

“Laundry.”

“Now?”

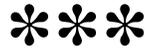
“He’s asleep. I don’t want his green jammies to stain. They’re his favourites.” Jared throws in the clothes, and slams the lid closed, much harder than is necessary. He turns the dial and listens for the water to gush through the pipes.

Then he heads upstairs, without saying another word.

Ashley is wide awake. She wonders whether she wants her own children. She thinks she does. Or at least, she has never really thought about *not* having children. Until now. But she realizes that she mostly doesn’t like them, although—surely—she would love her own?

It’s the step-parent thing that is the problem, she tells herself. And she knows that she shouldn’t think this, but it bothers her that Ronin doesn’t look like either of them, with his straight black hair and dark eyes. She can see a little of Jared around his forehead, but you have to look closely. She is sure that his mother keeps the kid’s hair long deliberately. When Ashley and Jared are out with him, she feels people watching, wondering who the kid’s parents really are.

It is a long time before Ashley can fall asleep, while the laundry tub clatters.



After her interview at the TV studio, Edie makes her way to the small, family restaurant uptown where she is meeting Samir and another couple. They used to get together often. That was, until the pandemic upended this couple's lives: first, some of their family became ill, and a few died. Then, their adult son lost his job and turned to alcohol and drugs, with which he still struggles. Their business closed, temporarily at first, and then for good.

Everyone has aged rapidly over the last few years, but their friends look more than a decade older. You can see it in the glances that pass between Edie and Samir, as the thick summer humidity settles under the yellow umbrella of their patio table.

Like everyone else in the city, they talk about the shootings. Edie launches into a description of what took place at the café, elaborating on a few details here and there, and inserting her own commentary about cross-border relations. They are captivated.

Too soon, and Edie and Samir are wandering back to his loft along the busy road. Many of the storefronts they pass are boarded up. In one doorway a couple is sleeping under a blanket, the lumps of their bodies undulating like waves. Without thinking, Edie grabs at her purse. You never used to see the homeless in this part of the city.

“Dinner was nice...”

“I really like them.”

They veer south, along residential streets that wind and curve through the only hilly part of the city. She loops her arm around his waist. He rests his arm across her shoulders, his hand trailing down her shirt, lifting and falling with their steps, his fingers brushing against her breast. This is them at their best.

When they arrive back at his condo, Edie retreats to the bedroom. The middle dresser drawer is full of her things. Her toiletries fill one shelf in the bathroom. Changing out of her clothes, she slips into a pair of men's pajamas that she first borrowed from Samir years ago, when they were closer in size, but not height. The arms and legs have been rolled up so many times that the folds of cotton are frayed.

Samir is already on the couch, fiddling with the TV remote. He is excited, waiting for Edie's interview to be broadcast, and delighted that her work will finally be getting some recognition.

Edie leans over to kiss his shoulder, glancing at her watch. Instinctively she calculates the time out on the east coast, one hour ahead, where her parents have retired so they can be closer to her sister, and the grandchildren whom they adore, as if love grows stronger when it skips a

generation. They will all surely be asleep at this hour, tucked into their old fisherman's cottage with its views out onto the ocean.

They wouldn't have watched her interview anyway. Her parents don't take much interest in what she does, and her sister claims to never have time. She speaks with them all once-in-a-while, but not very often. When she calls her mother, her father might come on for a minute or two, but mostly he lingers in the background, inserting a pointed comment here and there. He is a difficult man, and a difficult father. Her mother is difficult too, but in her own way.

It's not that they don't love her. They do. Just not in the ways that Edie wanted.

Her father had grown up in Vermont, and it is probably from him that she learned her anti-Americanism. A draft dodger from the Vietnam war, he was warmly welcomed into Canada, and quickly found a job, a wife, and a house, which he filled with two daughters. Her mother has always seemed content, so much so that Edie rarely thinks about her past. But her father has never been happy. She has always associated this with his American origins, not realizing that he attributed his melancholy not to his roots, but with where he wound up.

Does she like her parents?

Is she like her parents?

Her musings are cut short when the news starts. There is the usual litany of headlines: the lingering aftermath of the pandemic—still always the pandemic. It's not until half-way through the newscast that Ashley appears. It is only then that Edie finds out that their interview has been heavily edited.

“Edith, I'd like to ask you an important question, and one that is on everyone's mind these days: are there terrorists in Canada?”

“Yes, I am sure that there are.”

“The US President has said Canada is not secure enough. He has accused us of being too soft on terrorism. What do you think?”

“It's true that there have been some threats and close calls.”

“Thank goodness nothing happened. So, this proves that there are risks?”

“Yes, there are risks. There are always risks.”

“Shouldn't the police act if there is a threat?”

“Yes, of course the police need to act if there's a threat.”

“The police have said that there was a Muslim terrorist plot underway.”

“Yes, there are surely Muslim terrorists in Canada.”

“This seems to be a good place to shift the conversation a little. How would you say that Canada-US security cooperation is unfolding?”

“Well, there is a great deal of cooperation, and has been for decades. These days, our security agencies are deeply integrated.”

“It sounds like this is a very strong and important partnership.”

“It is. We have to work together.”

“Thank you, Professor Edith Grant, for your insights on borders and terrorism, and the real fears that we face. We should be deeply appreciative of the American border officers who disrupted a terrorist plot. There is nothing more important than being safe—”

Ashley says a few more things, but Edie doesn't hear what they are. She is yelling so loudly at the TV that the words are indecipherable. Samir looks confused.

“That's not at all what I said!”

“What do you mean?”

“It was all edited.”

“Edited?”

“Yes, edited. Everything I said has been twisted.” Edie stomps back and forth in front of the TV.

“All those comments about Muslims and terrorism... That was unlike you.” Samir is trying very hard to believe her.

“Exactly, Samir. I would never say such a thing. You know I wouldn't.” She folds her arms over her chest. “My point was exactly the opposite. I said that singling out Muslims was racist! I can't believe that she did this to me.”

“What? You think it was deliberate?”

“It had to be. The interview was completely edited.”

“Hmm,” he says, in a quiet voice. “It didn't seem like it was edited.”

“But it was! You have to believe me! They have all kinds of new editing tech. I knew it. I should never have trusted Jared.”

“Jared?”

“Yeah, Jared. My colleague. I told you about him. He was the one who asked if I would do the interview. God, I hate him.”

“Let’s forget about him for a minute. Edie, we need to think about your response. What are you going to do?”

“Do?”

“Yes. Do. You can’t sit back and do nothing.” Samir continues to rub her back.

“But what can I do?” She wails, her top lip reddening.

“Call the studio to complain.”

“What’s the point of that? They’re going to love this. It’s going to be an absolute shitshow. I’m telling you now. Their ratings will soar.”

“Maybe,” he says, a little exasperated. “But you never know. Maybe they will issue a retraction. Or at least a clarification.”

“I doubt it.”

“You’re probably right. But there must be something you can do. You have to distance yourself from these remarks. I’ll help any way I can. I’m here for you. Always.” And with that he pulls her close, holding her in his arms with such tenderness that her breathing steadies.

As expected, the interview is like a match that hits oil and catches fire.

All through the night, social media is alight. Memes proliferate. One is of Edie, eyes closed, looking like a zombie, proclaiming that there are Muslim terrorists, which is used both by her detractors—the people she would have hoped would have been her allies—and her new friends among the alt-right, who sicken her.

When, the next morning, Edie is contacted by the national news network asking if she will join their evening panel, she hesitates. “Samir, won’t this make things worse? Shouldn’t I just lie low?”

But he urges her to do it. He insists that she needs to set the record straight. “You can’t let this go, Edie. You’ve seen what people are saying: that you’re accusing Muslims of being terrorists. If you say nothing, you’ll just make it worse. You need to tackle this head on.”

Reluctantly, Edie agrees. She has always trusted Samir. She trusts him more than anyone, even more than herself.

But her eye twitches. She has a bad feeling about this.



In the sliver of time between when the pubs close and trucks make their early morning deliveries, all you can hear are sirens, rising and fading into the distance. During the day, the streets in this eastern part of the city are crowded with people. But in the middle of the night, as it is now, they are mostly empty.

A car pulls up outside a converted office-building that used to be occupied by a Christian sect—or cult, depending on your beliefs—until it was bought out a few years ago, and turned into a mosque. Fundraising efforts have transformed it into a striking masjid. On the ground floor, black and white Islamic archways frame the vaulted windows and doors. Above, a minaret soars eight-five feet, nestled alongside a pine-green glass dome lit against the sky.

Tonight, there is a full moon waning. A single star shining brightly.

The driver of the car is a youngish woman; her passengers are all youngish men. She stays at the wheel, looking over her shoulder, while the others jump out and spray paint the walls.

Fuck islam

syrians go home and die

kill the muslim terrorists

They grab stones off the back seat, where the driver has carefully laid newspapers to stop her mother's car from getting dirty.

They smash the mirrored windows on the ground floor. Shards crinkle at their feet.

They speed off as if in a car chase. But no one is chasing them.

The vandalism is the first in a series of hate crimes that take place across the city.

A young woman is sworn at and threatened.

A teen is punched and kicked to the ground.

Slurs are hurled at seniors sitting in the park.

Racist posters are stapled to utility poles.

A bag of shit is left on a man's doorstep.

A garage is set on fire.

A dog is killed.



This time, when the police arrive at the Al-Khalifa's building, they have a warrant. With them is the Emergency Task Force, who ride up in their armoured van, with gun slots and turret—they aren't used to being called in to situations where no one gets shot.

The Canadian Border Services also appears. Only a few weeks ago they had partnered with the police on a joint training exercise. "It's nice to see you again."

Officers sweep through each floor, knocking on doors, rousing families from their sleep. It's not that the cops anticipate any trouble. It's the spectacle of power that they enjoy.

At the Al-Khalifa's they don't knock, they just barge in, without any warning.

Jamal, sitting on the couch, can barely look up as the officers handcuff her eldest grandchildren in their crumpled pajamas.

Tarek shouts "What have we done?"

Yara tries to grab at Hana to pull her away, but the police are stronger.

Hassan stands to the side, watching everything, so that he can remember every detail.

The littlest, Nahla, still sleepy, is speechless. Once the officers leave, that's when she begins to scream.

The Al-Khalifa siblings are taken to the Immigration Holding Centre not far from the international airport, out in the suburbs. It is a low-slung building, encircled by layers of chain fencing, topped with coiled wire and barbed prongs. Inside, there is room for up to two hundred immigration detainees, although most days, many more are crammed within. Most are detained on their own, but there are always a few families. It is the young children who stare at the two new arrivals as they are escorted to their rooms in separate parts of the building.

Tarek and Hana have been issued with Security Certificates: they have been accused of being threats to national security. If the allegations hold, they will be deported.

A statement is read out by the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. He is himself a former refugee, who was born in Afghanistan—or was it Pakistan?—before gaining asylum in Canada. For some, this kind of imprecision on your immigration documents can lead to deportation—but for others—like the Minister—it doesn't matter. It all depends on who your friends are.

This is a grave matter of national security. We have heard a lot in the media recently about Muslim terrorists in Canada. We need to be vigilant. The arrests this morning are an excellent example of our security agencies hard at work.

We are already putting more security on the streets to keep everyone safe. I would especially like to thank our American counterparts, for none of this would have been possible without their cooperation.

In his speech, the Minister alludes to a possible terrorist plot, and mentions explosives and bomb-making equipment, but he refuses to say more. In closing, he re-affirms the government's fulsome support for immigration and refugees. But he insists that newcomers, like everyone else—like him and his family—need to obey the law.

When the US President issues his press statement, he makes it clear that the arrests are important, but that they are a sign of failure, not of success.

He calls the Prime Minister. "C'mon Canada. C'mon you guys. What's going on up there? Your security is weak. Your immigration policies need to be fixed. In the meantime, we will have to increase border security. I don't have to tell you what kind of impact this will have on trade."

She listens demurely while the President threatens and rants, as if they are lovers having an argument. She appeases. She flatters. When he has finally calmed down, she pleads: "I need you to know that I am doing everything you asked. And I will do more. I can't emphasize it enough: we are your strongest ally. We are your friends. We are like family."

More patrols are sent into the streets. Snitch lines are set up. People are detained. In the emergency meeting with her Cabinet, the Prime Minister exclaims, "What choice did I have? There is no alternative."

But all of these efforts come to nought. American border security goes on high alert. More drones are sent into the skies. Not just the small ones, those quadcopters and fixed-wing models, which can be launched at any time from the back of a patrol truck. No, the big boys are called in. The drones that are 36 feet long, weighing 10,500 lbs. The ones that can fly as high as 25,000 feet, with infrared full-motion cameras and electro-optical radar. These are the Predator B drones that the US Air Force flies across the Middle East and beyond, loaded with laser-guided bombs and Hellfire missiles.

We are told that the drones sent to the border are not weaponized. But they could be.



Should she go and see the place where Donovan was killed? This is the question that Tanisha turns over and over, as if it were a smooth pebble on the beach. On the one hand, it might be too upsetting; on the other, she is worried that she will regret it if she doesn't.

Finally, she decides that she must go, so that she can try to understand what went on that night. What if her daughters have questions for her when they get older? She might not have any answers, but at least they will know that she tried. Surely, she thinks, it is better to try than to do nothing.

Knowing that it will be too much for them, Tanisha drops the girls off at a friend's house, a few streets over. They cry when she leaves, not really understanding where she is going. For now, it would be worse if they knew.

The #32 bus will take her eastbound along Eglinton Avenue, all the way to the subway station. She grabs a seat at the back, always at the back, where the smell of diesel surrounds her, as the bus stops and starts in the mid-day traffic. She pokes at the blister forming on her ankle from the leather strap on her sandals, which she is wearing for the first time this summer.

Why am I so numb?

Looking out the grimy window, Tanisha stares at the rows of squat duplexes, blank-faced, except for a few small windows, and occasionally an aluminum awning over the front porch. This stretch of the road is mostly residential, until they get closer to the old cemetery.

Where will Donovan be buried? Will it be someplace like this?

The memorial park sprawls over several blocks, with winding paths which some people are bouncing along in their athletic gear, in the shadows of the willows and pine trees. Others bow solemnly by weathered tombstones, where they place flowers, some plastic, some freshly-cut.

What happens to you when you die? Is there a heaven, or a hell?

These are the kinds of questions that Donovan would ponder, while thinking of his friends who had died during their military service. *What is death?* he would ask. But Tanisha never had much time for this kind of reflection. She would brush him away and insist that he focus on the present. To her, death was always at another time: past or future. Not now.

Except death *is* now.

And she is unprepared.

What she can't quite grasp is how much her life has changed so quickly. She should have seen it coming, she tells herself. She knew that Donovan had been getting more and more anxious.

Could he have hurt someone?

Tanisha doesn't think so. *But how can I be sure?*

She reaches into her purse, filled with the clutter of motherhood: used Kleenex and shriveled Band Aids, broken crayons, and a few half-melted hard candies. She pops one into her mouth, where it rattles against her teeth.

As the bus continues east it slows, caught in a bottleneck caused by the construction for the new transit line. Lanes on both sides of the road are closed, boxed in by chain-link fences, behind which Donovan used to work, the dust rising into his nostrils.

The heat from the idling vehicles smears the air. Tanisha looks out over the grilles across the store windows, some shuttered by heavy drapes and thick cardboard. At least their favourite restaurant is still bustling, where Donovan would sometimes stop after work. The kids would snap open the Styrofoam lids almost as soon as he stepped in the door. Inside was oxtail and jerk chicken, coleslaw and mushy rice and peas, lukewarm, but still delicious.

As the bus nears the subway terminal, the streetscape changes yet again. Stubby storefronts are replaced by quick-build condo towers, so new that their presentation centres are still open, with posters of happy families in starkly-lit rooms, painted white, decorated in neutral colours.

The bus revs as it veers into the station. Tanisha climbs down and heads for the subway platform, above-ground, and open to the outdoors. Pigeons fly from perch to perch above her head, scattering when the train pulls into the station, and then again as it pulls out, heading into the darkened tunnel, wheels screeching.

When she emerges from the dusty heat of the St. George subway station, Tanisha has to shade her eyes against the light. Only the silver maples along the sidewalk cast tender shadows. Though the shootings happened several days ago, there are still a few police officers on site, standing underneath the thin foliage.

Two of the university's Special Constables ride up on bicycles. Their light blue helmets are jauntily unstrapped at the chin, while the buttons on their police-style uniforms are casually undone at the neck. Dark blue shorts rise above their knee, exposing calf-high socks and practical black shoes with excellent arch support.

They swagger onto the scene offering their assistance, but they are ignored by the police. They know that the constables have been trained to deal with drunk students and library flashers—not

criminal investigations. They know that they have experience dealing with student suicides—not murder.

Tanisha distances herself from all of the uniforms, blending in with the small number of gawkers who continue to gather every day. She glances over the mementos that have been left: plush teddy bears and pinwheels that spin lazily in the breeze, deflating balloons and wilting flowers.

Not for the first time, she is filled with anger.

Stepping away, Tanisha turns to look at the café behind her, full of people. She watches through the floor-to-ceiling windows, as they take selfies, while the baristas in the background look haggard. The big display case of pastries is almost empty.

It is not the kind of place that Tanisha would have ever entered. Too sterile. Too expensive. Too European. No one inside looks like her. She would have felt out of place the moment she tried to pull open the heavy door. Even if it does smell good.

Why was Donovan here that night?

What was he thinking?

Why did he push that woman?

Tanisha has watched and re-watched videos that have been circulating online, despite how upsetting they are. She can see what everyone else sees. It is a light push. Hardly anything. But it is something.

Still, no matter what he did, he didn't deserve to be killed. She looks over at the police, furious.

Those bloody cops better be locked up.

She turns back to the memorial, focusing now on the children's drawings of hearts and teddy bears. Stuck in amongst them is a sky-blue envelope, with "The Family" scrawled on the front in loopy cursive. She reaches over.

The police are watching, and begin to approach, hands tucked into their bullet-proof vests.

Tanisha tears open the flap and begins to tug out the card.

"Hey, what are you doing?"

"I'm opening the card. It's addressed to me."

"Pardon?"

“Donovan was my husband. The father of my children.” She taps at the writing where it clearly spells out ‘The Family.’

“Everything here belongs to the city.”

“But it’s addressed to me! The family!” Tanisha slips the unopened card back into the torn envelope and drops it into her purse.

“Give it back. That card is city property.”

The police step closer. The crowd steps back.

Tanisha feels the stares.

“Don’t make me do something I will regret,” says one of the officers as he reaches towards her.

She frowns, and for a few seconds her hand hovers over the opening of her purse.

You fuckers. You fucking killed my husband. And now this!

Grinding her teeth, she pulls out the card, and hands it to the policeman, before turning her back on him.

The next morning, Tanisha and her daughters leave the country. They won’t be back.



Eddie is nervous. This time her TV appearance will be broadcast live. A relief, in a way, as they won't be able to edit out her comments. But being live on-air brings other worries.

All day she has been reviewing everything she knows about border policies. She has read media stories, government statements, and even glanced at some statistics. She has gone back over some of her own published articles—*not bad*, she thinks to herself, *not bad at all*.

Eddie is more knowledgeable about borders than most, but none of this will help her tonight.

She is the last to arrive at the studio, which makes her even more flustered. At centre stage there is a large oval table. Camera lights beam onto those who are seated there, while behind them large screens flash images at a dizzying pace. The show's theme music is pumping through the speakers.

Set out in front of each guest is a clear glass of water, poured to exactly the same height. Alan Bridgely, the host, rises slightly out of his chair, while the others nod in her direction.

“Hello, you must be Professor Edith Grant.”

“Yes, hello.”

He runs through a few logistics, while someone emerges from the darkness of the wings to touch up her makeup. She has worn a dark blue jacket tonight, overtop a light blue blouse. Her only piece of jewelry is a favourite pair of silver earrings that dangle from her ears like talismans.

The countdown begins.

Ten, nine...

Eddie takes a seat.

Eight, seven, six...

She takes a quick sip of water, spilling some of it on the table.

Five, four...

She looks around frantically and sees only worried faces. An assistant is looking over, waving her arms, wondering if she has time to rush over with a cloth.

Three, two...

Eddie mops at the water with the sleeve of her jacket.

And...

“Good evening.” The host swivels his head dramatically, speaking directly into the camera. “Over the last several days, Canada-US relations have become very tense. Concerns have been raised about our border security. Our immigration polices have been criticized. The threat of terrorism hangs in the air. We will discuss all this and more on tonight’s panel.”

As the theme music fades, Alan turns his head to the man at his right. “Regular viewers will know our political commentator, Stephen Friesen. So great to have you with us, as always.” Stephen nods and smiles at the camera, looking very professional in his starched white shirt and suit jacket, even without a tie.

“We are joined by three other guests. First is Edith Grant, a university professor and an expert on the Canada-US border—she is trying to finish a book on that topic, isn’t that right Edith?”

“Thank you for having me,” Edie says, through clenched teeth.

“Next is Sondra Smith, a social worker who has been a tireless advocate for her community, and for all immigrants and refugees.” It is Sondra’s turn to smile at the camera, which she does warmly, folding her hands in front of her, her silver bracelets jangling against the dark wooden table like wind chimes.

“And last, but certainly not least...ah... ahh...ah...” the host stumbles “is Lise or is it Liz Peltier—did I get that right? Your name is originally French isn’t it?” he asks, covering his awkward ethnic pause with a jovial tone, and then continuing, without waiting for an answer. “Liz is an Indigenous educator and activist.”

“Miigwech. But my name is Lise not Liz—Lise-Anne in fact. And I am not French. I am Anishinaabe, from the Wiikwemkoong Unceded Anishinabek Territory on Manitoulin Island. And I am also a university professor, like Edith.” She looks sharp in her dark green suit jacket and beaded earrings.

“Of course, of course you are. Now, shall we proceed? So, in the last few days, two shootings have taken place in Toronto, both of which have directly involved Americans, at either end of the barrel you might say. What are the possible repercussions? Stephen, let’s start with you, since you always bring great insight to our discussions.”

“Thanks, Alan,” begins Stephen. “It is always a pleasure to be here with you. These tragic incidents have potentially huge implications for our relationship with the US. Our economy is entirely reliant on theirs, and anything that endangers it is deeply troubling.”

“So you think that trade could be a casualty of these recent events?”

“Yes, absolutely. For decades the US has criticized our security and immigration policies. We’ve made a few changes, but clearly not enough. This could be the last straw.”

“Oh, I see,” says Alan. “I’m sure you’re right.”

Stephen continues. “We must do everything possible to address their concerns. And the best way to do so is by deepening our cooperation. For example, let’s expand our border preclearance programs. They are the envy of countries around the world.”

“Great points, Stephen. Edith, what do you think? We know that in a recent newspaper article you advocated for closing the Canada-US border. That’s not really ‘cooperation’ is it? Ha, ha.”

They are off to a bad start.

“Thanks, Alan, but let me begin with a correction. It’s not that I want the border closed. In fact, I’m all for open borders. No, the point that I was trying to make about borders is that we can’t just prioritize the economy. We need to address human rights, racism, xenophobia, etc. If the Americans don’t like it, that’s their problem. As we learned during the height of the pandemic, the border can close, and we will manage just fine.”

“Surely you’re not saying that you want a return of pandemic shutdowns?” Alan is looking at her like she is a little mad. “Isn’t it, as Stephen said, in our interest to cooperate with our closest friend and ally?”

“Look, I definitely don’t want another pandemic lockdown. But there’s that word *cooperate* again,” says Edie, shaking her head. “Listen, I’m all for cooperation. But cooperation is about partnership, about playing together nicely; not about being bullied in the sandbox. Even kindergarteners know that much.”

“Stephen, do you want to respond to what Edith has said?”

“Thanks, Alan. I have to respectfully disagree with Edith. The border needs to remain open. Our trading relationship is crucial: we need secure access to US markets. I am very worried that the shooting at Café Americano will harm our superb cross-border cooperation.”

“And what about the Union Station shootings?” Edie interjects.

“What about them? We should be grateful that the US border officers took decisive action. No doubt lives were saved. This is precisely why we need more cooperation.”

“Lives were lost!”

“Don’t be so naïve, Edith. A terrorist plot was pre-empted.” Stephen’s tone is dismissive. “Those Al-Khalifa siblings who were arrested this morning? What a disaster that could have been. Many, many more people could have died. We should be grateful to the Americans.”

“Grateful? I don’t think—” Edie begins to reply, but is cut off by the host.

“Thanks, you two. You’ve both made some interesting points,” Alan says, nodding at Stephen enthusiastically. “But now, let’s bring someone else into the conversation.” He swivels to his left. “Sondra, how about you. What do you think about these border issues?”

“First,” says Sondra, “I agree with some of the problems that Edith has identified. Border policies need to be about more than trade. We need to consider how the border makes people vulnerable...”

“Exactly,” says Edie, nodding vigorously.

Sondra continues. “Please let me finish.”

“Sorry.”

“Second, we shouldn’t presume that Canada isn’t part of the problem. Canada definitely *is* at fault. We have brought our border policies almost completely in line with the US. They didn’t force us to do this. We did it willingly.” Lise-Anne nods in agreement.

“That’s what I was trying to say,” says Edie plaintively.

Sondra continues, ignoring the second interruption. “And, my third and last point is: we have to be especially vigilant not to scapegoat people around border issues and security.” She stares at Edie.

Edie looks as if she is about to speak, but Alan jumps in. “Would you care to elaborate?”

“Well, take Edith’s TV interview yesterday, for example.” Sondra’s tone has changed, as she gestures towards Edie but is no longer looking at her. “I am sure we have all seen it—otherwise, why else would *she* be here? Anyway, in her interview yesterday, she singled out Muslims as terrorist threats.”

Edie tries to interject. “Let me explain—.”

But before she can, Alan interrupts her. “Wait Edith, it’s not your turn. Sondra, continue...”

“Edith’s comments have stoked Islamophobia. This is incredibly dangerous. We’ve already seen hate crimes skyrocket across the city.”

Edie frowns, and Lise-Anne jumps in. “Thanks for making that point, Sondra. Alan, can I say something now?”

“Yes, Lise-Anne, I was going to call on you, although Stephen has also been waiting patiently. But yes, why don’t you tell us about how these issues impact Indigenous peoples.”

“I can certainly speak to Indigenous issues, but that’s not all I can or will talk about,” she glares at Alan. “I will begin by saying that a big problem with the discussion so far is that all of you are presuming that there is a legitimate entity called Canada. I’d like to remind you that Canada and its borders are colonial constructs, rooted in the theft of land.” Sondra nods. Stephen is looking intently at his glass of water. “At the core of these issues is racism, no matter what side of the border you are on.”

Sondra chimes in: “And there is also the racism at the heart of the Café Americano incident. Yet another example of a Black body being shot down by Toronto police. One more death in our community.”

Eddie nods vigorously. “Yes. I know. *I was there.*”

Sondra snaps. “I’m not talking about you. That’s not what’s important here. We’re talking about police violence.”

“Yes, the shooting at Café Americano was a horrific incident. It’s an example of exceptional police violence,” Eddie replies, trying to make it clear where she stands.

“There you go again. The violence is not exceptional. There’s a pattern. More than 20 Black men and women have been killed by police in Toronto in the last two decades. There’s an epidemic of violence here, like we are seeing in the US.” The bracelets around Sondra’s wrist jangle as she bangs the table for emphasis.

Stephen sits back, bemused at the unfolding fracas, delighted to be left out.

Eddie nods her head. “Yes, yes. The police violence is very concerning. But are the comparisons with the US necessary?”

“Sure. Why not? The comparison helps to show how police violence is systemic,” replies Sondra.

“Ok, but...” Eddie hadn’t planned to say what she says next, but the conversation has veered well away from where she had anticipated, and her thoughts are muddled. “But the situation in both countries is quite different. The number of police killings in Canada is comparatively low. Much lower than in the US. And yes, we have a smaller Black population in Canada: only 4%, compared to almost 14% in the US. But even if we take these demographics into account, it’s clear that the scale of the violence here is different.” She looks at Lise-Anne and then Sondra. “But it doesn’t mean that there isn’t racism here too,” she adds, hurriedly.

“Oh, so you want to play a numbers game, eh? What differences do your statistics make to those who have been killed? Or to their families and communities?” Sondra has raised her voice.

Lise-Anne adds: “These are real people we’re talking about. Your attempt to reduce them to statistics is dehumanizing.”

“Sorry. I’m not trying to dehumanize anyone ,” asserts Edie. “I just want to make sure that we don’t erase the differences between the two countries. We need to be clear about the context.”

Lise-Anne looks aghast. “Context? Context! This isn’t context. This is death by numbers!”

“Just like the genocide of Indigenous peoples” says Sondra, grimly. And now Lise-Anne is the one nodding her head.

Stephen stares off into the distance. Edie throws up her hands, feeling the wetness of her jacket sleeve rub against her wrist. Speaking quietly, almost to herself, she asks “Where is this conversation going? I thought we were going to talk about border security.”

“Why,” snaps Lise-Anne, “do you want to distract us with numbers? What can they possibly tell us about the lived experience of police violence and racism?”

“I’m not trying to distract,” says Edie softly. “I want to talk about the issues. I want to be a good ally.”

“It’s not all about you, and what you want or need” replies Lise-Anne. “We’re talking about structural oppression.”

“Why are you ganging up on me? I’m on your side.” Edie feels a tear gathering in the corner of her eye, ready to slide down her face. One tear. Which she brushes away. But a second one gathers weight...

“Oh great. You’re crying” Sondra shrugs her shoulders in exasperation. “Just what we need. More white women’s tears.”

Lise-Anne interjects: “We are not ganging up on you. We are having a conversation. And your tears are not helpful.”

Edie snuffles. “I am not the problem here.”

“Well, what we are saying is that maybe you are.”

Finally, Alan steps in. “Well, this has been a lively exchange. We’ve covered a lot of interesting ground. But we have only a few seconds left and need to wrap things up. Stephen, you have been quiet for a while. Why don’t you have the final word?”

“Thanks, Alan,” says Stephen, placing both his hands on the table and leaning in. “I’d like to reiterate the importance of an open border for trade. And I think that what you ladies have been trying to say is....”



Each would remember the argument somewhat differently, but neither would ever forget it.

“What was that about?” asks Samir angrily, as he turns off the TV. “You can’t tell me that that was edited!”

“Yeah, exactly. What was that about? Those women ganged up on me!” Edie is pouting.

“That’s not what it looked like to me.”

“Really?”

“Yes, you seemed to say all those things of your own free will.”

Edie is staring at him in disbelief. “Can’t you see how they were trying to twist everything I said?!”

No. He looks pensive.

“And that woman pretty much blamed me for the detention of that brother and sister...”

“Did she?”

“Well, it felt like she did.”

“Your comments have stoked a lot of anti-Muslim racism.”

“Samir! You know that wasn’t my intention.”

“So you say.” He is trying to believe her. “But now there are cops everywhere. It’s unbelievable!”

“I know. I know. I never wanted this to happen. Listen, Samir, you have to believe me. You know me. Better than anyone. So you of all people should know that my words were taken totally out of context.”

“Ok, Edie, if you say so. But what about those stats? Why did you bring those up? What were you thinking?”

“I don’t know. It was stupid.” Edie is on the verge of crying. “But I couldn’t think what else to say... After everything that’s happened, I can’t think straight anymore.”

Samir isn't listening. "You can't just reduce race to a percentage." He is shaking his head disapprovingly.

"I know," she wails. "But the broader point was an important one to make."

"What point?"

"About the differences between Canada and the US."

"Why?"

"Because the two countries *are* different. We're not just a mini-version of the US. Racism is different in both places."

"Is it?"

"Isn't it?"

"It's more similar than you seem to think."

"But it is different..."

"How would someone like you know?"

"Oh, no. Not you too."

"What?"

"Someone like me"—you're saying that I can't talk about race because I am white." Edie is getting flustered. Is she mad at herself, or at Samir? She is suddenly very teary.

"No, Edie, that's not what I'm saying. You can certainly talk about race and racism, but I'm pretty sure that you wouldn't have brought up stats if you weren't white. It was a distraction. Just as the discussion was bringing out some important points about race, you sidelined it."

"I thought you didn't believe in race?"

"I don't. It's a human construct. But that doesn't mean there isn't racism."

Edie is quiet for a minute. "It wasn't my intention to sideline the conversation." *Don't cry.*

"Maybe not. But that's what you did. I don't know how you can't see this."

Edie is quiet.

“Saying nothing would have been better,” Samir continues. “You of all people should know how words can get twisted.”

“What do you mean by that?” Now she is getting defensive.

“Never mind.”

“No, tell me.”

“You know what I mean.”

“Are you bringing up that other interview again? I’ve told you over and over: my words were twisted! It was all edited!”

“So, you’ve said.” He doesn’t sound convinced. “You probably shouldn’t have agreed to go on that panel.”

Edie wails even louder. “But it was your idea. You’re the one who told me to do it. All of this is your fault!”

“Nonsense. You agreed to it, Edie. Stop trying to blame everyone else for your mistakes.”

She glowers but says nothing.

“Look, when I told you to say yes to the panel, I didn’t think you would make things worse. It was just a suggestion. The decision was yours to make.”

At Samir’s tone, Edie starts to crumble. “There you go again. You always do this.” *Don’t cry. Don’t cry.*

“Do what?”

“Step back and act as if you are blameless.” Her voice rises as she says this. “No matter what happens, you always think you are right.”

“That’s not quite fair, Edie. I don’t think I am always right. Not at all. But maybe this time I am. You shouldn’t have said what you said.”

Don’t cry.



The trip to the Islamic Centre takes them nearly two hours, as the Al-Khalifas switch from bus to bus, heading north, then east, deep into the suburbs. Their heads loll into their chests with the heat and all the stops and starts. When they finally arrive at their destination, they step off, groggy.

As they walk north, Jamal holds tightly to her granddaughter's hand, so tightly that it hurts, but Nahla doesn't mind as it focuses her pain. Her grandmother shuffles her old legs slowly, falling behind Hassan and Yara who are up ahead.

They are preparing to bury their mother.

That morning the mortuary services had retrieved Rima's body from the coroner's office and deposited it at the Centre, which, on the map, appears to be just a few steps from the bus stop. But it takes them another twenty minutes to walk past low-slung warehouses, a sprawling automotive store with tires piled high outside, and fields of grass, parched in the midday sun. Bells peal from the Tamil gospel church nearby.

As they approach, they see a sprawling complex surrounded by parking lots on three sides, packed full of cars, their roofs reflecting the sun like ripples on a moat.

Once inside, Yara and her grandmother will enter a small room, where they and some other women volunteers will help wash their mother three times. Her hair will be braided. Some short prayers will be recited, and they will say their intimate goodbyes. Her body will be shrouded in five pieces of unsewn cloth, as white as the fresh-fallen snow they endure each winter. Then their mother's body will be tied with ropes, before being placed in a sparse wooden casket, as is required by Canadian law.

While Yara and Jamal help prepare their mother's body, Hassan and Nahla wait separately in the main prayer room, surrounded by hundreds of others, all of whom recite silent prayers for the deceased. Almost none of them knew Rima. With the Centre so far away, very few people from their community have been able to join them.

Jamal is inconsolable. She gulps back deep sobs that shake her body. She had never wanted to come to Canada. She had never even wanted to leave Syria. But with no other family able to look after her, she had no choice.

Even so, she has always believed that the family would one day return to Syria. But now that her daughter-in-law is to be buried here, will they ever be able to leave? Will her grandchildren ever be able to leave their mother behind?

And what about Tarek and Hana? Where are they? How are they?

She wonders when she will see them again. It is almost too much to bear. Nahla has her worried, as she has been overcome with grief. She used to be so chatty, but in the last few days her youngest granddaughter has barely said a word.

Hassan is also despondent. With his brother gone, and their father before him, he feels the responsibility of being the eldest man at home: a responsibility that he has never wanted or expected, certainly not at the age of sixteen. But most of all, he misses Tarek, whom he adored. Like Nahla, he too has grown quiet, not knowing the right words in either of the languages he speaks.

Yara is different. She shouts and stomps, lashing out at everyone within range. What makes it worse for her is how quiet the others have become, retreating into their own thoughts. She wants to shake them back into the shape of the family they once were, loud and lively.

She wants their lives back.

After the short prayers, cars are organized for the trip to the new Muslim cemetery, located even further east, in another town, thirty kilometers away, where land is still cheap enough to bury the dead.

The Al-Khalifas are distributed among the vehicles, which, at first, created a bit of a fuss. Jamal insisted that they could not be separated, but no car was big enough to take them all. It was only when she was assured that she could stay with Nahla that she relented.

Setting out along the main road, the convoy drives through clumps of residential communities, before reaching farmland. The family is mesmerized by the flat monotony of the landscape. Long-stemmed bulrushes and Queen Anne's lace line the road, broken here and there by fields of corn, and scrawny flowers in muted yellow and purple. Through the open windows they can hear the hum of cicadas.

The landscape stretches on and on. Back home, if they had travelled this far, they would already be in another country.

And the farther they drive, the more they realize how difficult it will be to ever return.



Ashley heads to City Hall on two summer-hot streetcars, on her way to the first of the day's ceremonies. Hundreds of people mill about the forecourt. Already there are long line-ups at the food trucks, radiating with the heat of fryer oil. Young children chase pigeons around the concrete pond, while weary mothers stand next to empty strollers, leaning into the handles with one arm. The benches near the fountain are full of people, who bend their faces into the spray.

It could be any other summer day, except for the number of police. As Ashley walks towards the iron-framed grandstand, she passes a line of officers, who make her a little nervous, although she is also relieved that they are there.

She nods. "Keep up the good work"

The Prime Minister sits demurely up on stage, flanked by Canadian and American flags that flap and snap in the breeze. On each side of the podium are wreaths of red and white roses, threaded with wisps of blue delphinium. She is wearing a tailored pant suit the colour of cooked oatmeal and plain brown loafers. Her hair has been cut short in a bob that hangs at her chin. It is flattering: she has the cheekbones to pull it off.

Seated at ground-level are the invited dignitaries, in folding-chairs arranged over a red carpet that has been rolled out for the occasion, hemmed in by a velvet rope that swings between gold stanchions.

Ashley pushes her way to the front where the other reporters have gathered. "Excuse me, excuse me," she says, pushing through until her legs press up against the velvet. Knowing very little about politics, she has to ask around to find out the identities of the special guests.

"Who are these people?"

She is told that the US Consul General is in the front row. (It had been hoped that the Ambassador would attend, but he is too busy preparing for the afternoon's parade.) Sitting next to him is the Consul General of Israel, who leans in closely to express her deeply felt condolences. Will he be going directly to the afternoon's ceremonies? Can she catch a lift? Of course she can. They are such good friends.

And that man over there? He is a delegate from the United Kingdom, who has insisted on sitting on his own. Across the aisle is a representative from the European Union Chamber of Commerce, impassable behind sunglasses. Behind her are several men in keffiyehs: they are the very distant relatives, three times removed, of the Saudi and Emirati royal families, who whisper as they compare notes on their latest arms deals. The Iraqi Minister tries to listen in, while pretending to check his phone messages. He is in town for the US ceremonies later that afternoon and is biding his time. Ditto for Turkey.

Envoys of the General Delegation of Palestine have driven in from the nation's capital, and make it just in time, having left Ottawa before sunrise. But they are refused entry into the red-carpet area. It's one thing to softly bemoan Israeli settlements, but it's quite another to recognize Palestine as a state.

A few other VIPs are scattered about. Representatives from Mexico and Venezuela attend, but that's it from Latin America. Mali and Niger bring greetings from the whole of the continent. India's Minister of Commerce and Industry shows up at the last minute; he just happens to be in town. South Korea has sent a bouquet of flowers, wrapped in crinkly cellophane; a business card is attached, but there is no greeting. China is boycotting the event. The Australians have slept in.

The organizers had been hoping that more seats would fill, but they cannot delay any longer, and so they begin. The emcee extends a few words of welcome before reading out the city's official land acknowledgement, verbatim from a script.

We acknowledge the land we are meeting on is the traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. We also acknowledge that Toronto is covered by Treaty 13 with the Mississaugas of the Credit.

Even though he has read out these words many times before, the emcee still trips over several: Anishnabeg (ah-nish-naw-bek), Haudenosaunee: (hoodt-en-oh-show-nee). People think they know how to pronounce Wendat—it seems so easy!—but it always comes out oddly. Where do you place the emphasis? On Wen, or dat?

It doesn't matter. The moment passes. The piece of paper flutters to the ground, where it will be covered in footprints like faded pictographs.

Next, is the national anthem, sung by a choir of refugee children.

O Canada!
Our home and native land!

And then, before they can turn to the main event, there is a procession of religious leaders who pay tribute to the main Abrahamic religions. (There is never enough time for the whole pantheon of gods and goddesses.)

The Prime Minister rises from her chair as threatening clouds roil across the sky, and thunder rumbles. She draws her summer suit jacket more tightly across her chest.

Ashley is mildly fascinated by this woman. She is tall, svelte, and light on her feet like a boxer. She wonders what it would be like to be her, imagining that a Prime Minister is like a modern-day Cinderella, cleaning up other peoples' messes. All she needs is a Prince Charming who will find her a glamorous pair of heels! *Her brown loafers are ugly.*

Her daydream is interrupted when the speech begins.

We are gathered here to recognize and celebrate our most important friend and ally, the United States of America. This is a day weighted in significance for their country. *C'est un jour important pour leur pays.* For it was on this day, twelve score and six years ago, that our neighbours declared their Independence. We join them in celebrating this historic occasion, as they gave birth to a new republic, in charge of its own destiny.

She looks directly at the US Consul General, who glances up from his phone and gestures vaguely, a gesture that would be difficult to take as a sign of approval, unless you were desperately optimistic.

We also send our deep condolences to the family and friends of Donovan Wright. We mourn the loss of an American life in Canada. His death is a great tragedy. *Sa mort est une grande tragédie.* I would like to assure you that a proper investigation is under way.

In her enthusiasm, the Prime Minister nods her head vigorously. Ashley looks enviously at her hair, the colour of maple syrup, which lights up in the sun as it moves in and out behind the storm clouds.

Onlookers have gathered near the reporters, wandering over from the tourist buses that idle along the main street, curious about the ceremonies. A young boy licks the mustard from a foot-long hot dog shiny with grease. The scent of cooked meat fills the air. Ashley gags; she has not yet eaten, it is not yet noon.

Suddenly, there is a little commotion to one side. Boos and shouts fill the air. From where she is up on stage, the Prime Minister can see a small group of angry people. A few signs are lifted into the air.

Already the police are making their way over.

Ashley strains to see, lifting herself up on her tiptoes. Sweat drips down her back. "Who are those people?"

"Bloody idiots, if you ask me," says someone.

"They're one of those right-wing anti-immigration groups."

"They want closed borders, and more security."

“Hmm. All seems to make sense to me,” replies Ashley quietly. *What can be wrong with wanting to feel safe?* She clutches at her purse.

Once the police have contained the convoy of protesters, the Prime Minister takes a deep breath and resumes her speech.

I know that the incident at Union Station is on people’s minds. The loss of life was unfortunate, but we have good reason to believe that national security was at stake. *Nous sommes profondément reconnaissant aux Américains pour leur aide.* We are deeply grateful to our American partners for their assistance.

The US Consul General does not look up again.

The United States is our most important ally and a vital trading partner. We will continue to work together so that we can ensure the quality of life of the middle class and all those who want to join them.

With these last words, the Prime Minister stretches her arm towards the illuminated TORONTO sign on the forecourt—a big hit with the tourists. People clap as it lights up in alternating red, white and blue. There is also some relieved clapping among the dignitaries, as they realize that the speech is drawing to a close.

The emcee returns to the stage as another menacing clatter of thunder growls overhead. The distinguished guests stretch and rise from their chairs, which the stage crew rush to pack up, worried it might start to rain. The Prime Minister is hustled away.

In the background, there are a few more boos, but most people are leaving. Ashley shakes her head dismissively. She has never understood protesters, of any kind. *Why bother?* Still, no matter how boring they are to her, she might need to mention them in her report. How, then, to make it entertaining? She decides to focus on the Prime Minister’s new hairstyle and speculate as to its hidden meaning. Does it augur a change in policy: a shift from long liberal locks to blunt austerity? It is the closest that Ashley has come to a political analysis.

But her efforts are half-hearted. Even Ashley knows that this morning’s ceremony will be overshadowed by the military parade that afternoon. She is excited. She is heading there shortly, right after a quick detour to the mall to check out the summer sales.



At first, the Canadian government had refused. No military celebrations! Public opinion polls have shown that 53% of Canadians are moderately opposed to overt displays of militarism. But when the university offered up their stadium for the ceremonies as well as a space for the reception afterwards, all at no cost, the authorities conceded. And the plans went ahead.

Edie is fiercely opposed to the military's presence—in fact, to the whole idea of a parade. She is among the first to sign the several petitions that are circulated. And yet, she has completely forgotten that it is taking place this afternoon.

To forget is unlike her. But she is still rattled from the shooting at Café Americano. Loud noises startle. The smell of coffee makes her heave. Every crumpled paper towel, every rumped dishcloth, reminds her of Donovan White's body, lying covered on the ground.

It is only when she bumps into Jared at work, with his son as his side, that she is reminded of the parade.

"Hi Jared," she says frostily, holding him at least partly responsible for the disastrous interview with his girlfriend. But, knowing that they could be colleagues for a long, long time she tries to be civil. "Is that your son?"

"Yes, this is Ronin. Say hi to Edith, little man."

Ronin shakes his head.

"Shy, I guess."

"Yes, sometimes. With some people." Jared looks beyond Edie, as if trying to figure out the best path of escape down the hall behind her.

"I'll bet." Edie squints, trying to decide whether there is any resemblance between Ronin and his father. "What are you guys doing inside? It's summer." The overhead florescent lights flicker.

"I was dropping something off in my office We're on our way to the parade."

"Oh. Is that today? I'd forgotten."

"Yes, of course, it's today. It's July 4th."

"Right." Edie pauses. "But I'm surprised you're going. Aren't you critical of military nationalism in your work?"

Ronin looks over at his father quizzically.

“Sure, Edith, I have raised questions about military masculinities—but not about the military *per se*.”

How can they be disentangled? She bites her tongue.

“Indeed,” he continues, “it’s also important to celebrate history and tradition. Everyone needs to know where they come from.” He pats Ronin on the head. “We should go. I want to make sure that the little man has a good view.”

She can’t help herself. “But a military parade? Won’t it reinforce gender stereotypes?”

Ronin watches his father carefully. Jared glares. “Look, you’re one to talk. All your writing on borders and racism, and you’re the one inciting xenophobia.”

And with that, he turns away and walks down the hall, with his son at his side, as if an invisible wire holds them together.

She grumbles as she turns down the hall. “What an idiot. Fucking military. Go back to your own bloody country.”

But at least he had stopped and spoken to her. All day, her colleagues have made a point of scuttling away whenever she approached, afraid that if they get too close, the fallout from her TV interviews will contaminate them.

Edie knows that she said some things she shouldn’t have, which she regrets. Yet, even so, she also feels somehow wronged.

Why haven’t the border officers been charged?

Is it really my fault that those two kids were detained?

And what about the police who shot Donovan?

Leaving her office, she makes her way up to Bloor Street, avoiding the road closures, and stops at the light. On her right is Café Americano, and across the street, the subway station. As she waits for a green signal, people stream past, on their way to the parade. Marco is among them. He is frowning. Even before he gets to the stadium where the final ceremony will be held, he knows that he is going to hate everything about this afternoon.



Jared finds a prime spot for viewing the parade, near the museum. He throws Ronin up onto his shoulders, so it is the boy who first sees Ashley, standing out in her new, emerald-green dress.

“There she is!” he calls out, excitedly, as if he has won a game. But his excitement slips away as she draws near.

“How are you feeling today kiddo?” she asks. He still looks fragile, although some colour has returned to his face.

“Fine,” he replies, turning his head away.

“You’re doing much better now, aren’t you little man?” says his father, tugging at his clammy hand. “You want to stay and watch for a bit, don’t you?”

“Yes, daddy. For a little bit.”

“How was the memorial event this morning, honey?”

“Boring. A few speeches. A small audience. Not even worth talking about.”

They chat for a little while, navigating Ronin’s interruptions. “Hey, don’t.” Jared pulls Ronin’s dangling legs away from his chest, so that his shoes don’t dirty his shirt.

Before too long she tells him that she has to leave, so that she can find her place at the stadium, where the parade will culminate, and where the main ceremony will take place.

“Do you have to go? The parade hasn’t even started!”

“Yes, it’s my job.”

“It will be boring.”

“Probably. But I still have to show up.”

“Are you going to be on camera?”

“Yes. I’m always on camera.” She flips her hair.

“I don’t think the colour green suits you, honey. It will make your skin look yellow.”

“Well, I like it. It goes well with my eyes.”

“Ok, suit yourself. I’m only trying to help.

It doesn’t feel like help.

Jared looks into the distance for signs of the approaching parade. “These days it seems like you’re always working.”

“You only notice when I’m working when you’re not.” Her retort comes out so quickly, as if she has been saving it for just the right moment, which is now.

Jared sputters, “It’s like you don’t want to spend time with me—with us—any more.” He sticks out his bottom lip, in a way that she might once have found endearing. “You’re always finding excuses.”

Ashley scrambles for an excuse as to why she finds excuses and realizes that he is right. She does not want to be here with them. Something has shifted, although she isn’t quite sure what.

“Shit, Jared, I have a job to do. Why aren’t you being more supportive?”

“Shit, shit, shit” Ronin sings out loud, from on top of Jared’s shoulders. People stare, which only gives him more courage to continue, although he lowers his voice when his father turns his face up to his.

“Stop it, Ronin. Right now.” Jared scowls at the people around him, in an accusatory way, as if it is their fault that his son has been swearing. To Ashley he says, “I wish you wouldn’t swear in front of him.” He pauses. “Anyway, my point is, I want to spend time with you. You should take that as a compliment.”

It didn’t sound like a compliment. “Ok. We can talk about this later. I have to go.” She is already rearranging her purse on her shoulder.

“What time will you be back?”

“I’m not sure.”

If she had known that this was the last time that she would see Ronin, she might have given his leg a pat, or squeezed his hand gently. But she does neither.

Jared is about to say something. To tell her not to stay out too late. To be careful. To behave. But he catches her glare and stops himself. He pecks her cheek and calls her honey one last time. Ashley smiles at him, with the same smile that she practices for TV, before she walks off.

There comes a time in every relationship when you realize that the person that you fell in love with is not that person at all. If you are lucky you will find that you still like them anyway, perhaps even more so now that the burden of your expectations has been lifted. But more often

than not, a decision will need to be made about this person that you realize that you don't even like and will eventually come to hate.

“Shit,” says Ronin.

That morning, a small military convoy had set out from Fort Drum, in Jefferson County, up-state New York, about 30 miles from the border with Canada. The vehicles rumbled along the four-lane highway, across scrubby, flat farmland at the edges of the Adirondacks. They crossed a string of four steel bridges, painted in sage green, spanning the St. Lawrence River.

At the border, the vehicles were waved through customs without delay.

Then they veered west, merging with the four-oh-one highway. Half-way to the city, they were joined by a small procession of Canadian military vehicles that joined them from the Trenton airbase.

The convoy kept rolling until they reached the parkway that would take them downtown. Arriving at Bloor Street they came to a halt. Troops jumped out and gathered in formation behind the vehicles. From there, the parade would begin, heading west, towards where Jared and Ronin are standing.

“Look, daddy, look!” Ronin points to the approaching vehicles.

“Those are Oshkosh LATVs—Light Armoured Tactical Vehicles, Ronin. They're also MRAPs. Do you know what that stands for?”

“No, daddy.”

“Mine Resistant Ambush Protected. Can you remember that? They weigh about 4,600 kg and are fully wired. And see on top? You can put a gun turret there and load it with Hellfire missiles or laser weapons.”

“Wow, daddy. Cool.”

“Cool indeed. We use them at our military bases around the world.”

Jared takes a few photos with his camera. He is pleased that his son is showing some interest. “And see that man in the Growler there? That’s the US Ambassador to Canada. Wave to him Ronin.”

His son does as he is told, and waves as the Light Strike Vehicle passes. The Ambassador waves back, or at least Ronin thinks he does.

“What do you think, Ronin, would Ashley be impressed?”

Ronin snorts and turns his head away.

“Hey, little man, look! Here come some Strykers! They’re armoured personnel carriers, ready for combat. Equipped with machine guns and missiles, and some cannons too. I think parts of them are made in Canada...”

“Wow. Awesome. And what are those?” Two LAV IIIs the colour of desert sand roll by.

“Oh, those must be some of the Canadian vehicles. I don’t know much about them, Ronin. Nobody really does. It’s as if they don’t exist, although clearly they do.”

“Why, daddy, why?”

This would be a good place for Jared to launch into a long digression about the invisibilized Canadian military-industrial-complex, but like Ronin, he gets distracted by the advancing platoon, rifles to their shoulders, marching past in their pixelated, concrete-grey camouflage, specially designed for urban warfare.

They are followed by the second-string of the US Army Old Guard Fife and Drum Corps. One-step. Two-step. Goose-step. Ronin giggles at their white waistcoats and linen pants, covered by long regimental coats in red with blue trim. From under their black tricorn hats, white wigs peek out. They are playing a familiar tune. Ronin shrieks with laughter as he sings along:

*Yankee Doodle went to town,
A-riding on a pony
Stuck a feather in his cap
And called it macaroni*

Jared begins to explain the song’s origins, until he realizes that his son is not interested. Few people are. Who can blame them? In both countries, historical amnesia is taught at school. (A shrewd strategy when your past is steeped in violence.)

So Jared abandons his analysis of the song’s lyrics—which pillorize the effete American soldiers, who lost against the French troops in 18th century Canada—and thus foregoes an opportunity to lecture his son about irony, masculinity, and war. But it does give him an idea for the next article he will write.

Jared takes a few more pictures, humming along with the band, snapping at the colour guard of the Department of Homeland Security that passes by in front of them. They toss their bayonets in the air, which twist and twirl. Ronin is enthralled. Jared is too, but he can hide it better.

“Look at those guns, daddy!”

“Those aren’t guns, Ronin, not strictly speaking. They’re classic M14 rifles, long-range, battle-ready.”

“Cool!”

Trailing at the end of the parade is the marching band of the Royal Regiment of Canada, which has arrived from Fort York, an old armoury near the lake, now a tourist site, which was built as a defence against the Americans, who burnt the place down in 1813.

The marching band wears their ceremonial dress, their scarlet tunics tied with a white belt and shiny gold clasp, with bearskin caps on their heads. “Those tall hats are silly,” Ronin whines. “I don’t feel so good. I want to go home.”

Now, Jared regrets having brought his son. The only thing that gives him a tiny bit of pleasure is thinking about the expression on Sakura’s face when Ronin tells her they were at the parade. His ex-wife will be furious. Not only did Jared take him out when he was sick, but she abhors any displays of American militarism. Jared can’t wait.



The military convoy continues along Bloor Street, past Jared and Ronin. Just before they reach the block where Café Americano is located, the LATVs veer sharply to the left, down a narrow road to the south entrance at the stadium pavilion.

One armoured truck drives onto a back field, which is so muddy that it sinks deeply, so that it will remain there permanently. Each year, during Orientation, the Engineering students will paint its turret purple.

Once the ceremonies are over, two armoured trucks will be driven over to the nearby provincial parliament buildings. They will be parked on the lawn as a temporary tourist attraction, but as bilateral tensions worsen, they too will remain permanently in Canada.

At the entrance to the stadium, security guards scrutinize the attendees, who wave their invitations. Ashley breezes through, flashing her press pass, tossing her almost-blonde hair. “Have a nice day!”

Marco gets stopped. “Are you really a reporter? For which organization? Do you have any other ID?”

Before reaching into his pocket for his wallet, he double-checks with the security guard. The plastic cards that he pulls out are inspected carefully, as the guard looks him up and down. Holograms are twisted this way and that. Finally, Marco is allowed to enter.

He walks over to the trade-show canopy that has been set up, emblazoned with the RMBK logo. Company representatives stand in the shade, ready and eager to meet with prospective investors. For years they have been trying to break into US markets. Today could be the day.

Marco is not surprised to see the RMBK name. When he can find time, he has continued his research into the company. None of what he has learnt is good. The gold mining companies are especially troubling. From the display table, he grabs a few ballpoint pens, not bothering with the golf balls.

An announcement is made: “Please take your seats, everyone.”

The morning’s clouds have completely disappeared. Shafts of sunlight beam down, like spotlights from the sky. It’s like the gods are taking sides. (As if one needed another reason to be an atheist.)

Marco joins the press section, off to the side of the stage, just as the Prime Minister is climbing the stairs. Before taking the podium, she stops to shake hands with Penny White, who sits demurely in a black dress, face shaded by a sunhat of braided straw with a thick black ribbon.

“My deepest condolences.” She shakes the hand of the President of the University, “Thank you for everything.” She shakes the hand of the US Ambassador to Canada, who has just arrived with the procession, “So great to see you again.”

It’s a full house. All along the blue-rubber track, plush chairs have been set up for the most honoured guests: the diplomats, company executives, and major university donors. Gilded programs, embossed with the RMBK logo, have been lain on the seats. Gold mining is a varsity sport at this university.

In the grandstand, mid-range donors sit nestled among a curated group of diverse students decked out in collegiate swag. In the very back rows are the low-level academic administrators who invariably show up to these kinds of things.

In her opening remarks, the Prime Minister repeats much of what she had said earlier that morning. And why not? Very few people were at the Canadian ceremony. Only Marco seems interested, scribbling into his notebook.

The US Ambassador to Canada is up next. He is petulant, having had to cancel his annual Fourth of July celebration in Ottawa, which is a highlight of that city’s social calendar. His remarks capture both what he loves about his homeland, and what he dislikes about his country of exile. But his main task is to introduce the President, which he does with great gusto.

The President is not here in person, of course; he has far better things to do in Washington on the Fourth of July. He is streaming live on the videoboard. With a flick of a switch, his skeletal head lights up in high definition.

Good evening, Canada. Good evening, folks. The First Lady and I send you greetings on this momentous day. Today we recognize the founding of the United States of America as an independent nation! We fought hard for our freedom from the British empire, and for our God-given right to democracy. Happy Independence Day!

Today we are celebrating. But let me be clear. We are also mourning. We are mourning every soldier who has lost their life abroad while protecting American lives at home. We pay tribute to all those who have made the ultimate sacrifice.

We remember Donovan Wright as a decorated soldier who completed several tours of Iraq, before being killed in Canada. His passing is a tragedy.

Nevertheless, our nation is strong. We are the envy of the world. We have won the war against the pandemic. And we will continue to fight for our freedoms, and triumph over our enemies!

In closing, I want to express my sincere hope that North America remains one of the world’s most competitive regions for trade. More policing and better border security is crucial to this goal. We call on Canada to take up this challenge.

God Bless our two countries. God Bless America!

The crowd applauds wildly, chanting “USA! USA! USA!” with enthusiasm. Even some of the onlookers join in, peering in from outside the fence.

There hasn’t been this much excitement at this stadium since that wild September night in 1969, when John and Yoko performed live on a makeshift stage—give peace a chance.

Ashley, who is standing close by, tilts her neck towards the skies as the Hornets scream overhead. “Wow!”

Marco looks askance.

Ashley continues, not talking to him specifically, but anyone within earshot. “You have to give it to them. These Americans really know how to put on a show.”

“Don’t tell me you like all this warmongering?”

“Warmongering? There’s no war. This is entertainment.”

Are you fucking kidding me? Marco stares at Ashley in disbelief. *Entertainment?* Has she no clue about the interventions still underway in the Middle East? What about the decades of occupation in Latin America and Asia? And then there are the wars on Crime. Cold wars. Proxy Wars. Wars on Poverty. Drug Wars. Culture Wars. Wars on Cities. Wars on Terror. Each war with its own targets, weapons, casualties.

Should he say something? Saying nothing seems like a cop-out, although he also knows, deep in his bones, that nothing will be gained by trying to set her straight.

When Ashley turns around, Marco is gone. Instead, walking past is a young executive, radiant in a charcoal grey suit. She reaches out to grab his arm. “Hi. I’m Ashley. What is your role here?”

He is amused at her forwardness. “Hi. I’m Brandon Chen, one of the junior executives at RMBK. My company is a main sponsor for this event.”

“Sponsor? But wasn’t one of your Vice-Presidents killed by a US customs officer?”

“Yes, but we are pretty sure that it was all in the line of duty. We need to rise above this tragedy and keep the big picture in focus. The US is our company’s most important market opportunity.” Brandon is soft-spoken but firm. His eyes light up while he speaks to her.

“Interesting. Would I be able to interview you about this? I’m not sure that other Canadians understand the economic significance of today.”

He hesitates, but looks into her jade green eyes, and agrees.

Ashley is delighted. Even before they get started, she knows that the interview will be a success. How could it not be? He is enchanting.

“Thanks so much. That was great. Your comments were so clever, so thoughtful. Thank you.” She reaches out to hold his forearm and doesn’t let go.

“My pleasure. It was a pleasure speaking with you. I hope this won’t be the last time...”

Ashley blushes. “I hope so too.”

When the band begins to play a World War One classic, they stop flirting for a minute to listen to the lyrics:

Over there, over there
Send the word, send the word over there
That the Yanks are coming
The Yanks are coming
...
And we won’t come back till it’s over
Over there

The videoboard zooms in on the President, who spreads his arms wide as if to embrace the audience. “Thank you! THANK YOU! I have done all of this for you!” he seems to say.

Post-game fireworks shoot out from behind the goalposts. A score suddenly appears on the videoboard. Home: 0. Away: 100. It’s all a bit over the top. But that’s the Americans for you.

As they gaze out at the trail of smoke from the fireworks, Brandon places his arm lightly around Ashley’s shoulder. She is a little surprised. It is a friendly gesture. But could it mean something else? She leans in slightly, revelling in the moment, drawn to this taut man in his skinny suit. His warm breath is on her earlobe as he whispers something indecipherable. She leans into him a tiny bit more, not caring what he has, or has not said.



At the end of the ceremony at the stadium, the distinguished guests make their way from the stadium to the newly built Cities School, where the reception is to be held. Strolling along the path between the colleges, they avoid the packed main streets, breathing in the smell of cut grass, laced with diesel from the trimmers that endlessly buzz in the background. They cross over the old creek, the one that was turned into a pond and then a sewer over a hundred-years-ago, and which now lies buried deep underground, alongside thousands of years of Indigenous history.

The new building looms up before them, with its gilded façade. The angular, gold slab design anchors the diamond-crystal entrance of the museum next door, the equivalent of an architectural wedding ring.

Something old (*the adjacent heritage buildings*)
 Something new (*the starchitecture!*)
 Something borrowed (*lots and lots of money*)
 Something blue (*the university's official colour*)

Entrance to the reception is by invitation only. The public building has been entirely closed off, and security is heavy at the door. Ambassadors and foreign diplomats arrive, along with commanders and generals, executives and investors. Then there are the politicians, who begged for invitations: the Minister of Middle-Class Prosperity was the most convincing, even though this event is a little out of his league. A few local celebrities round out the mix, and a couple of artists, but only a couple—you know how disruptive they can be. Several other semi-important Americans are also in attendance, but not much can be said about them: libel laws are in place.

The media has not been invited. Marco is nowhere to be seen. But Ashley saunters in, clamping onto the arm of her new friend, as if in a bear trap. She is radiant.

As guests step out of the elevator onto the top floor, they walk past red, white and blue bunting that has been draped along the walls, as if adorning a white picket fence. Stepping into the room, Ashley marvels at its transformation. Candelabras with globed lights hang from the ceiling. Large Persian carpets are laid out across the floor. Blue silk damask curtains with gold trim hang at either end of the floor-to-ceiling windows, framing the dramatic views of the skyline.

The theme—if you haven't already guessed—is plantation-style Americana, in honour of the US Ambassador who hails from Louisiana, and maybe even has Acadian roots, as his French surname would suggest. The quaint nostalgia strikes just the right note against the post-pandemic anxiety outside.

The new friends sip on the patriotic red-white-and-blue cocktails handed to them at the door, made with layers of grenadine, vodka, and blue curacao. Flutes of champagne are being passed around on polished silver platters, as shiny as the foreheads of the wait staff. The bar has everything else you might want, with various bourbons and rye, and whiskey for the ex-pats. Also available are homemade lemonade and iced tea for the teetotalers, but these can be spiked.

The wait staff offer up trays with small bites of boudin balls, chicken and waffle sliders, and a shrimp and grits cake, each of which has been arranged into a tiny modernist work of art. Elegant fingers, muscled with baubles, reach out towards the rustic serving trays. Maybe it's the boozy punch, or the artful presentation, but even the thinnest of women are eating tonight.

Ashley has tried several hors d'oeuvres, encouraged by Brandon. Both are on their second drink, and stare into one another's eyes.

“What is your favourite colour?”

“Green.”

“Where did you grow up?”

“Here.”

“What is your favourite food?”

“Har gow.”

“Where would you like to travel next?”

“Back to Hong Kong. But really, anywhere with you...”

She learns that his family had immigrated to Canada from Hong Kong, when he was little, too young to remember, although they have been back regularly. He had mostly grown up in Toronto, in one of the city's eastern suburbs, where his parents still live, in a post-war bungalow, with a brother, and a pet fish—not the puppy that they had yearned for.

There are other things that she learns too: his recent falling out with a friend; that he loves film, but not literature; and that he plays the piano. And what she also learns, just by watching, is that he is an up-and-coming star at RBMK. He says nothing about this, but you can tell from the way he is greeted around the room, as his colleagues stop to speak with him, each affirming their own self-importance by calculating the number of minutes that he lingers.

Ashley is in awe of this man.

When a toast is announced, the new friends wipe their greasy fingers on the dark blue napkins, imprinted in gold with the RBMK logo.

The university president, the tallest in the institution's nearly two-hundred-year history, makes some rambling introductions as he stares down onto bald patches and greying roots. A new scholarship will be created, he tells the audience, named after Donovan Wright, whose tragic death took place so close to campus. Ashley and Brandon raise their near-empty glasses.

Then the President of RMBK takes centre stage. His family has a long and storied history with the company. In fact, it is they who put the 'M' in RMBK. But nobody talks about the founding fathers anymore—celebrating family legacies doesn't sit well with the company's embrace of meritocracy, and their insistence that success is earned, not bequeathed.

In a booming voice, President M. expresses his deep condolences to Donovan Wright's wife and children. But he also pauses to lament the loss of the company's own Peter White, Vice-President, Infrastructure, who was overseeing several new construction projects. "What a visionary! What a leader!"

It's a great show, for Peter was neither and already has been replaced. Out of respect for the family, the public announcement won't be made for several days, but his successor is over there, smiling to himself. By the end of the night, he will ensure everyone knows of his good fortune.

Finally, as his speech draws to a close, President M. announces a multi-million-dollar endowment to create the new White Chair in Canada-US Border Infrastructure, named after the deceased. The university president is beaming, eyes alight at the dent that this will make in the just-launched fundraising campaign. The Prime Minister, also chuffed, is making her way over to congratulate him in person, as if she is somehow responsible for the university's opportunism.

After the speeches, it's time to eat. Long picnic-style tables have been set up with retro fare, such as hot dogs and hamburgers, with lashings of ketchup, mustard, mayonnaise and pickles. (Each of these condiments was slapped with tariffs in the most recent bilateral trade war, but it would be impolite to mention such disputes this evening.)

Brandon encourages Ashley to taste everything. "There's also whiskey ribs, blackened chicken, and fried oyster po-boys! Try one of these hot sauces—this one has mango. So many kinds of potato salad!" Save room for dessert. Star-spangled apple pies. Banana Fosters. Bread pudding. Cajun cake. King cake. Pecan pie. Pralines. Beignets.

"How about another cocktail?"

All this time, Brandon has not stopped being kind and attentive. He places his hand on the small of her back as they move through the room. It rests there for a while, slipping ever so slowly downwards.

"You are beautiful in this emerald green," he says, as his fingers briefly trill across the ridge of her G-string, where it meets the long zipper that runs down her back. Looking deeply into her jade eyes he tells her, "Green is my favourite colour. But you would be beautiful in anything." Ashley's cheeks flush in a beguiling way as her peaches and cream complexion darkens to strawberry shortcake.

“Delicious,” he whispers in her ear. “You look good enough to eat.”

As they wander around the room, he tells her stories about the people they meet, outrageous stories that can’t possibly all be true. “See that woman over there? You’ll never believe it but...” Ashley is enthralled by everything: by the attention that he lavishes on her, the ease with which he circulates the room, and the glimpse he provides onto this secret society. Fragments of conversation wash over her like lines of experimental poetry that she can’t quite decipher:

...unicorns and decacorns... ...ramen profitable...
 ...buy the dip... ...jump the shark... ...boil the ocean...
 ...honeypot... ... dead cat bounce... ...lipstick on a pig...
 ...one throat to choke... ...open the kimono...

She asks Brandon to explain, and he does, but she is too excited to take it all in. The whispered promises of inflated stocks, derivatives, and dividends are enough to make anyone giddy.

Then the band, stationed inside the entrance, switches over from soft jazz to blues and zydeco. Without warning, the party flips from reserved to bacchanalian.

Well, not quite bacchanalian. This is Canada, for goodness sake. There are no orgies. No debauchery. No Saturnalia. What a shame. But as things go, it got pretty good.

More drinks are served. Ties are unloosed. Lipstick is smudged. Buttons pop. The memorial wreath is knocked over.

Standing in the corner, hidden in the folds of the heavy damask curtains, Brandon whispers into Ashley’s ear. “I want to kiss you. May I kiss you?” For the second time that night, she feels his warm breath on her skin. All she manages is a nod. His lips touch her earlobes, gently, as he tongues the golden hoop that hangs from her ear past the curve of her neck.

Outside the windows, the lights in the skyscrapers dance on and off, sparkling like the plastic particles in a snow globe.

He wraps his arm around her waist and tilts his head towards her, kissing her softly at first, then deeply, poking at her gently with his moist tongue. Ashley is surprised, but much of this day has surprised her.

Does she want more? Of course she does.

We all want more.



Late the next morning, Peter White's funeral is held at the downtown Anglican Cathedral, although it's not late enough for all those who stayed at the party until sunrise.

The RMBK old guard are the first to arrive. They are the long-retired plutocrats whose portraits line the boardroom walls. Next are the current wielders of power. This is the generation that Peter knew best: the men and women whom he might have considered his friends. Their exhaustion is creased into their brows, despite the Botox. Bloodshot eyes are hidden behind tinted sunglasses.

Last to arrive are the up-and-comers at RMBK. They are soft-skinned and fresh-faced, and despite their lack of sleep, they look rested. Brandon is amongst this group, almost more radiant than he was the night before, still sporting the same skinny, dark charcoal suit—make of this what you will.

As they enter, the guests speak in hushed tones, until they spot friends and colleagues to whom they call out greetings. Men reach out to the women and clasp their forearms tenderly, in an intimate way that would surely incite disapproval at the office.

Promises are made to meet under different circumstances. "Let's do lunch!"

Peter's successor, whose hands tremor until they are grasped tightly in a handshake, is sitting in one of the pews near the front. As he had hoped, word of his promotion has spread, and he beams as both friends and foes stop to congratulate him.

All rise as Peter's wife and kids enter, with Penny leading the way in a simple black dress and a single strand of pearls. The girls follow, dressed in clingy black Lycra and tipsy heels—not their mother's idea. Behind them is her son, the eldest, clearly uncomfortable in his suit, perhaps one of his father's, his bangs soaked in so much pomade that they stand up rigidly, exposing the acne on his forehead and his glassy eyes.

The family's long walk down the aisle cuts through the thick smell of lilies. Penny looks up and down the rows of pews, but only a few of the faces are familiar. None of these people were their friends, not really.

She imagines herself anywhere else other than here: at their condo in Barbados, or at their house in France. *Maybe I should take the kids away on holiday.* Penny reaches out to her youngest daughter, who deftly sidesteps her mother's embrace.

"Mooommm!!!"

In the front rows are members of the extended family, many of whom work at RMBK. She sometimes sees them at company functions, but rarely are they all gathered together as they are now. She marvels at how people have changed, especially the children, who are almost unrecognizable. But if you look closely, turning from face to face, you can see the family resemblance, as if slowly twisting a kaleidoscope.

“I’m so sorry.”

“You look well.”

“My how they’ve grown.”

In the chancel, to the right, a large stock image of Peter is propped up, pasted onto posterboard. He is heavy-set with corporate power and influence, with sagging jowls and drooping eyes. A skin tag pokes out from his left eyelid. His full head of salt-and-pepper hair is not quite long enough to conceal the thickening folds around his neck, like the pleated ruffs of times long ago.

When he was young, Peter had spent many weekends at the cathedral, singing with his school’s choir. If you look closely, you can also see his family’s name throughout the building, stenciled on the wooden frames of the stained-glass windows and imprinted on the embossed plaques screwed onto the backs of the pews.

On a table near the chancel steps, not far from where Peter used to sing is a simple urn, filled with most of his ashes.

He would have been horrified at the cremation, but Penny had gone ahead anyway. It’s more environmentally friendly, she might explain, despite all the heat that is required.

The bone fragments were cooked to a temperature of 1,999°F, and then ground into ash. The ash was poured into an urn—the one in the chancel—except for one generous cupful, which Penny measured out and emptied into a zip-lock bag. The bag was then sealed tightly, packed into a box, and couriered to a company in the US, where the ashes would be lab-grown into a synthetic diamond in aquamarine—the colour of Peter’s eyes.

Seven months from now, she will have the diamond fitted into her wedding ring. Each time the blue crystal catches the light she will smile. Briefly, she will wish he were still alive, so she can show him how beautiful he has become.

Peter’s daughters read a cloying poem. His eldest brother reminisces about their childhood, eliciting a few small laughs. A few colleagues reflect on his life at the company, but most of these stories are dry, like the eyes of the mourners.

President M. stands to say a few words. He begins by clearing his throat, in the way that men do at his age. Then he recounts Peter's contributions to the company, re-stating the importance of the new border facilities at Sarnia-Port Huron. He closes with a mention of the White Chair in Canada-US Border Infrastructure that is to be endowed at the university. An appreciative murmur echoes throughout the cathedral. Money is a religion worthy of their devotion.

Penny remains demure throughout, every so often pulling at invisible threads on her dress, dabbing a handkerchief at her eye, popping a white pill. She stayed at the reception late last night, but not as late as everyone else. She was home early enough for people to remember that she is mourning; late enough to look suitably fragile for the service, with puffy eyes and blanched skin.

And then, all of a sudden, it is over. Prompted by the deep chords of the organ, the congregation stands for a hymn. Penny pulls at her hem, and smooths out her linen dress, which has creased like a piece of origami. She grabs at the hands of her daughters, and for the first time in weeks, they let her.

Brandon rises to his feet with the rest of the congregation. He has learnt more about Peter over the last two hours than he had in the last two years. While they had worked closely together, they were not close. Yet most of his thoughts were focused on Ashley and last night. He can't get her out of his head. The smell of her perfume is on his shirt, the taste of her skin is on his tongue.

He fiddles with the program. Never having been to an Anglican funeral before, he is unfamiliar with all its conventions. But he recognizes the final hymn from TV, and tries to follow along with the printed lyrics:

*All things bright and beautiful,
All creatures great and small,
All things wise and wonderful,
The Lord God made them all.*

The cathedral—always keen to keep up with tradition—also includes the original verses, which are less familiar to the mourners, but they stumble through them as best they can, and ultimately, with some exuberance:

*God made them high and lowly,
And ordered their estate.
The rich man in his castle,
The poor man at his gate*

As the organ continues to play, people head outside into the midday sun. Some of the older attendees follow the procession to the crematorium, wobbling like black crows, but Brandon hangs back on the steps, feeling the midday sun on his neck.

The homeless who are camped out in the adjacent park watch them emerge, not so much out of interest, but out of boredom and bitterness. Passerby slow down and peer at the line-up of black

sedans parked along the main road, guarded by beefy men, with radio wires peeking out of one ear. *Is this a film shoot? Are there celebrities inside?*

Others have arrived with intent, outraged at RMBK and its sponsorship of the military parade. The police are doing their best to hold them back. But they are determined. In a few days, a few blocks away, an even larger group will gather. That's when people will get hurt.



Donovan's corpse has been stored in the freezer at the Ontario Coroner's office for the last five nights. Now, it is being readied to be flown home, at the insistence of the Americans.

First, a Toronto funeral home needs to embalm the body. In a sterile room, the mortician washes Donovan with disinfectant and the blood is drained from his veins and arteries. His organs are emptied of gas and fluid so that the formaldehyde and other chemicals can be pumped through.

Only then is the body allowed to be transported. It is placed in a special air freight tray, cast in aluminum so that it won't leak, then topped with an honour cover—a reinforced cardboard shell that is embossed with the US flag, with the Department of Defence seal at both ends.

At the airport, the body is transferred to an army cargo plane, and shipped to the military mortuary at the Dover Air Force base in Delaware. All soldiers who die abroad rendezvous there.

A team of six soldiers greets the plane. They wear carefully ironed camo uniforms, with coyote-brown shirts. Each officer's name is embroidered onto their patrol caps in thread the colour of spice. When they unload the transfer case, their white-gloved hands, open and close over the handles, like the flapping of dove wings.

The tray is unloaded, feet first, into an unmarked dark grey van. At the mortuary, the body is unpacked and dressed in a fresh, clean uniform. Three service medals from Iraq are pinned above Donovan's heart, so that his military biography will be buried with him.

Only then will he be sent back to his family for burial. A military escort is required by law. At the airport, they board a commercial flight—the soldiers in economy, Donovan in cargo.

When they land in Atlanta, Tanisha is waiting, alone. She cries when his plain gold wedding band is returned to her, as brightly polished as it was on the day they married. The family has refused the offer of military honours, so the local funeral home retrieves the body. This did not please the President, who had wanted to make a big show of Donovan's return. But Tanisha refuses. No honour guard will carry the casket. The flag won't be folded in religious tribute. There will be no bugler, no three-volley salute.

The Canadian government has agreed to cover all the expenses. Shipping the body home costs over \$10,000. On top of that, each dependent is given \$5,000 as an *ex-gratia* payment. It's the very least they can do.



Music plays in the background, while Samir makes dinner—a complicated dish of lamb and couscous that his mother used to make. It’s not a special occasion, but when he is troubled by something, as he is tonight, he likes the distraction of being in the kitchen.

He is aghast that the military parade went ahead. So is Edie. It is about the only thing that they agree on these days.

He can’t stop thinking about her interviews. He wants to believe her. He really does. But it is hard in the face of the evidence.

Samir cooks the onions gently, until they are transparent, before adding chopped garlic, with some tomato paste and harissa.

She really said all those things, didn’t she?

Granted, she had always been adept at saying things that made people uncomfortable. It was one of the things he admired: her scathing treatment of any perceived injustice. Her predisposition to skewer those in power. Her unwavering support of the underdog.

But now, to be inciting racism and violence?

It doesn’t make sense.

Where has the old Edie gone?

Samir measures out tablespoons of grounded seeds—coriander and caraway—and tosses them into the pot, before adding the other spices.

The lamb is added next. He stirs it in carefully, to ensure that every piece is glossy with sauce. Water is put on to boil for the couscous. *It’s all a big mess*, he thinks to himself, as he chops the vegetables: potatoes, turnip, carrots and zucchini.

Can you choose what you remember? Samir thinks so, although Edie doesn’t agree. *It’s like lying to yourself. What has happened has happened—you can’t change it. A fact is a fact.* To him, she says simply: “This is what you desire: to be able to choose your past.”

But Samir would argue that everyone tells their story in their own way. This is a choice.

If he were choosing to tell his own story, he would begin with his father: the celebrated surgeon who had trained in France, and then returned to Tunisia six years later, with a French-Moroccan wife, a young son, and another on the way. Nine months after Tunisia declared its independence from France, Samir was born, a post-coital souvenir of liberation.

The decision to immigrate some years later was his father's alone. It was by then the late 1960s, shortly after Canada opened an embassy in Tunisia, and immigration policies were slowly starting to change. His father managed to secure a job in one of the teaching hospitals in Montreal. And so they moved, with the two little sisters who had since joined them, hauling their French language from one colony to the next.

Life was mostly fine for the Mahmouds, if you could embrace the nationalism in the air. Samir's father was oblivious, delighted with the work that kept him busy. His mother paid no attention either; she mostly stayed at home and focused on who and what she had left behind.

Samir, however, could not ignore the politics unfolding around him, as the kids at his school reminded him, with insults and fists, that the revolution underway was not his. Indeed, he and his family were part of the problem, he was told. By the time he had turned eighteen, Samir had fled to Toronto, looking for his own opportunities, as his father had done before him. It was only happenstance, Samir would tell himself, that he too became a doctor.

Eddie knew about his siblings and had met all of them a few times. One after another they would pass through Toronto. But their stays were brief, and fraught. Only once did she and Samir travel together to Montreal for a wedding. It all ended in arguments and recriminations. Samir was the only one who had left the city—and whenever he returned, he reminded them too much of the pain of their own displacement. It didn't help that they didn't like Eddie.

It was easier for everyone if they stayed away.

They found lots of excuses not to visit. Eddie went to conferences around the world; Samir travelled for humanitarian work. It was on one of those medical missions, several years ago, that he made his only trip back to Tunisia. The country was on the verge of revolution.

When he returned to Canada, his father, semi-retired, barraged him with questions; now that his days were no longer so full of work he missed his home country deeply. Father and son spoke on the phone often then—talking more than they had in years.

He told and re-told stories of his own youth, stories that his son was only now hearing for the first time. Samir was filled with regret. Why had he known none of this about his father before?

“Is it really happening? Are they going to achieve independence?” his father had asked him. “I wish I could be there, to be part of it.”

“You would join the protests? *You* would get out on the streets?” His son is surprised. He hadn't ever known his father to be political.

“Of course. I would do everything I could. Samir, don’t make the same mistake as me. Don’t keep running from your past.”

“Running? You were running? From what?”

He never found out the full story. His father died shortly thereafter. No one was really sure if was the shock of the uprisings that hastened his demise. Cancer would have struck him down soon enough. His mother died shortly after, for reasons unknown.

But the new knowledge he gained was enough for Samir’s understanding of himself and his family to shift. This is why he tells Edie that memory is a choice, for he knew, as well as anyone could, that memory is selective. A choice, but not necessarily of one’s own choosing. Just as memory is crucial to survival, so too is forgetting.



One hundred and fifty-three hours have passed since Hana and Tarek were placed in detention. The Immigration Holding Centre where they are being held was formerly a hotel, and the layout has mostly remained the same, but the rooms have been redecorated. No expense has been spared to make them as grim as possible. Box-springs swathed in goose-down quilts have been replaced by mattresses that lump and sag, covered with thin woolen blankets. Fitted beveled cabinets have been removed and replaced by flat-pack dressers. The artwork is all gone. The carpet has been torn up. The windows are barred. Austerity is a lot of work.

Thousands of detainees are held in these facilities each year, as they wait for a hearing, or to be deported. The building is so close to the airport that it shudders as the planes take off. Each morning, the detainees look around to see who has gone missing in the night.

As per section 82(1) of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, Tarek and Hana have their Security Certificates reviewed within forty-eight hours of being apprehended. This was hardly enough time for them to prepare their defence, especially since the government does not reveal—does not *need* to reveal—what evidence they have against them. All they know is that a few household items were removed from their apartment: nail polish, batteries, kitchen pipe, school assignments. It doesn't amount to much.

But it has been enough to convince the Federal Court judge to uphold the Security Certificates.

A removal order has been issued. The siblings are to be deported within thirty days. But to where? They were born in Syria, but that country is still in too much turmoil for them to be returned there. Lebanon, where they had lived in a refugee camp for several years, refuses to take them. So, they will wait, in detention, until a solution is found. It could take days, months, even years.

Tarek is considered to be a high risk and so they move him to a maximum-security correctional facility, newly built in the city's west end. Hana is transferred to a super-jail in a small town, about two hours away. It is the only high-security institution in the region that admits women.

If they are still in detention six months from now, there will be another review of their cases. In the meantime, they will wait alongside a few other immigration detainees, and hundreds of prisoners.

No criminal charges have been, or will ever be, laid against them. Nor do they need to be. It's not so much what they've done, but what they might do that is of concern.



Ever since the shootings a week ago, the city has been tense. Now the whole country is on high alert. Something is about to happen. You can feel it.

By the time Marco arrives at City Hall, people are gathering in all directions, in all shapes and sizes: tall and small, fat and thin, young and old, left and right. Later, their numbers will be both minimized and aggrandized, depending on the source of the information.

Some hand out pamphlets. Others hold signs. Outside the main doors to the building, a group has gathered, to confront all those who come and go. Hands clutch megaphones, fingers pressed into the pistol grip. One woman's red lips are stretched into an O almost as wide as the horn into which she is shOOOuting.

*Keep the immigrants! Deport the racists!
Defund the police!*

Under the overhang to the main entrance, the building's security guards wait in the shade, out of the glare of the thick summer sun. As Marco dodges through the crowd, stopping to ask people questions, he is eyed warily.

“What brought you here today?”

“What change do you want to see?”

“Are you ready for what comes next?”

Lining up in the near distance are the police. They stand at ease, but on alert, thumbs tucked into the waistband of their trousers, stretched tight after their bacon three-egg brunch, greasy-over-easy, their walky-talkies buzzing. They talk amongst themselves. And laugh.

Abolish the police!

Parked in the delivery lane, out of sight, is an unmarked grey van. Inside, the techies are working on a stingray operation: cell phones are being pinged to a fake transmission tower so that their metadata can be captured. They are also pushing some phones to malicious browsers so that the police can download spyware onto them. That's what happens to Marco's phone. There is a brief battery drain, but he doesn't notice. It's an old phone.

Some plainclothes officers take pictures and use facial recognition imaging for identification. That's how they identify the woman in the bespoke T-shirt with revolutionary slogans. Only one artisan makes designs like that. The police find the company's website, and notice a review from a Toronto shopper, whose handle leads them to a LinkedIn page, which features her photo.

Within minutes they have her full name, know where she works and where she goes to school; they can even access her health and financial records, which they will hold onto for future use. Then the police scroll through her social media, which she keeps forgetting to make private. That's how the three friends with her are also identified. A few days later, some other friends will be arrested on unrelated charges.

When the protest puppets arrive, the children are mesmerized. They stop playing tag long enough to gaze at the wizened face of the giant sun, with its sad papier-mâché eyes. Long ribbons trail from its outstretched arms like rays of sunlight. As the puppets dance, the children sway with them, while voices swell with hope and possibility.

“We want to hold space open for all of you,” they incant.

“Another world is possible,” they encourage.

“It gets better,” they promise.

Marco wanders around, making notes. Sometimes the self-righteousness of the activists irritates him. *It gets better? Really? Not in his experience. Where is the nuance?* Yet, as much as he is critical, he knows exactly with whom he would be standing if he weren't working.

It would not be with the small group forming off to the side, made up mostly of men, mostly white, mostly in their twenties and thirties, although there are a few who are decidedly older, their long pointy greybeards jabbing in front of them. The young ones are dressed in neat polo shirts and chinos, with crew cuts, as if this were a golfing convention—only the tattoos on their biceps betray their intent. Others are in bloused combat pants, with camouflage tactical vests that have plenty of utility pockets. The Kevlar gloves on their hands are overkill, especially on this warm sunny day, but there's much about these men that is hard to understand.

*Blue lives matter!
Support our troops!*

They carry flags too, both Canadian and American. A couple of Red Ensigns flutter in the warm breeze. Racial slurs are muttered below bad breath. As they stomp closer, the taunting and heckling grow louder.

The police stand back.

The two groups square off less than six metres apart, their spittle moistening the air. At the height of the pandemic, a face-off of this kind would have been lethal. But today, other violence prevails.

Over the next days and weeks, there will be a lot of speculation about how the fighting started. Some blame the young woman with the lumberjack shirt tied around her waist. Others point to a tattooed man in black. But those who were watching closely would have seen the three men mingling with the crowd, their hands clamped tightly around bricks, goading the others. They were otherwise unremarkable in their bland shirts and chinos, except for their tactical boots, which are exactly the same as those worn by the provincial police. This is not a coincidence.

The pushing and shoving turns into kicks and punches. Bricks are held high. An apple is whipped through the air. Two people are stabbed.

Marco, no longer able to stay impartial, sits with the wounded. He cradles the head of a young man in his lap, urging him to stay awake, while blood soaks his shirt.

He is reminded of the first big march that he attended with his parents—the first of many. He was just a kid at the time, but they had insisted. The first Gulf War had begun, and they were aghast at Canada's participation. "Troops out now!"

Marco remembers his father cradling someone's head that night, just as he himself is doing.

The fighting goes on for what seems like hours. It's as if the police don't want it to stop.

Dozens are hospitalized. Some will not fully recover.

Hundreds are arrested and taken away by repurposed school buses idling at the ready.

The Prime Minister makes a statement: "The Incident Response Group has met. A crisis is being declared. Canadians can tolerate a lot. We are very tolerant. But we cannot and will not tolerate these kinds of acts. These people are not patriots, they are traitors. *Ces gens ne sont pas des patriotes, ce sont des traîtres*. They are a threat to Canadian security and sovereignty." (Which people she means is never made clear.)

"We are in a state of emergency. The Emergencies Act is being invoked. It is our job to protect your safety."

In the following days, more police are sent into the streets, and the military is called in. A few checkpoints are set up. Limits on gatherings are announced and a national curfew goes immediately into effect.

The suspension of civil rights has many people worried.

"How far will you go?" the Prime Minister is asked by a startled reporter.

"Just watch me," she replies, smirking.



Eddie tries, tries, tries to write an editorial for the newspaper. Something that will fix everything. If only she could find the right words.

For days she has been criticized, attacked, condemned, pilloried, cancelled.

Why me?

Feeling a little sorry for herself, she has decided that she needs to try to clear her name. She needs to prove that she is not racist. She also needs to make things right with Samir.

What is wrong with him? He's never been like this. We have never been like this.

And then there is all the racism that has been unleashed. Can she fix this too?

She sits at her desk in front of her computer. The blinking cursor on the blank page does not inspire. It's impossible for her to push away the voices that barge into her head.

Eddie is angry with all her accusers. But mostly she's angry with herself.

All around her, her study is in disarray. A few hours earlier, in a fit of anger, she had upended everything. Books were pulled off the shelf. Papers were strewn about the room. She dumped out the contents of a desk drawer. The garbage bin was kicked over. And the blue-glass whale that Samir had brought her years ago from one of his trips lies broken on the floor. She never liked it anyway.

The study is a mess. It's no wonder she can't think.

Pulling her laptop out of its leather case, she sets herself up in the dining room, at the pine table.

Still nothing.

She moves over to the kitchen island.

No success.

Her stomach grumbling, Eddie makes herself a salad with heirloom tomatoes, which she sprinkles with feta, a little oil, and salt and pepper. Holding her plate in one hand, Eddie moves out onto the terrace, settling at the teak table under the arc of the purple clematis, where she lays out some pens and paper. She picks up her fork.

If only I could find the right words.

Salad finished, bone-tired, she tips her head back against her chair, shutting her eyes, feeling the sun on her skin, which will redden and burn.

She dreams.

There is chaos around her. Lots of police. And the military. She hears the neighing of horses. People are shouting. Shots are fired, off in the distance. Tear gas fills the air.

“Eddie, where are you?”

“Is that you Samir?”

“Eddie?”

“Samir! Samir! I’m over here!”

“I can’t see you.”

She falls, hitting her head, hard, on the concrete pavement.

A figure draws close, a shadow through the tear gas.

“Is that you?”

“You need to get up.”

“I can’t.”

“You can’t just lie there.”

“Can you help me? Please help me.”

“You need to do something.”

“Please help.”

“Are you there?”

“Can’t you see me?”

“Get up.”

“Is that you? Are you there?”





THE WHITE HOUSE
Washington

July 8, 2023

The Prime Minister of Canada
Parliament Hill, Ottawa

Dear Ms. Prime Minister:

Let's work out a good deal! Your country is in crisis and you need to deal with it. If I have to, I will close the border. I don't want to be responsible for destroying the Canadian economy. But I will. You know what happened during the pandemic. It could get much, much worse.

I have worked hard to help you fix some of your security problems. But you need to do more. Your activists are out of control. Your immigrants are dangerous. The threat of terrorism is everywhere. You need to take charge! Do not be weak!

I am including a confidential proposal for you to consider Keeping the border open depends on your cooperation. History will look upon you favourably if you get this done the right and humane way. It will look upon you forever as the devil if good things don't happen. Don't be a tough little lady! Don't be a fool!

I will call you later.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Donald Trump".





42° 93' 51.73" N, -82° 43' 81.64" W

Hovering in the sky, at a height of fifteen metres, you can see the workers in their yellow hard-hats and steel-toed boots. They step over clumps of frozen mud, while icy winds sweep snow into their faces, half-hidden behind collars turned up against the cold. From here it's impossible to know which of them are undocumented, although you will usually find them doing the most dangerous jobs.

Zoom in closer and the bolts and rivets that hold the building's steel skeleton are visible. The precast concrete flooring has been laid. The walls will be next. It won't be long before the new border facilities at Sarnia-Port Huron will be finished.

Pull back, way back, to a height of 125 metres, and the whole expanse of the complex comes into view: the twinned border facilities, with a new American customs preclearance office. A detention facility is also being built, which will hold up to five-hundred people. Around the perimeter are kilometers of steel fencing, affixed with RMBK's bullet logo, patrolled by police.

Turn a little to the west, and you can see the concrete membrane of the new bridge, soaring above the St. Clair River, whose waters are warmed by the liquid runoff from the chemical plants along its shores. From the bridge's towers, fan-style cables will run down to the deck. Soon they will be decorated with coloured lights that will flicker in the waves, alongside the burning flares from nearby refineries.

Out of sight, one hundred metres underwater, a tunnel has been bored. Large oil and gas pipelines are being installed, replacing the old ones that lie sunken into the riverbed, bent and twisted, covered with debris, poised to leak at any moment. At ten-feet wide, the new tunnel will easily accommodate future pipeline expansion. That's all part of the plan.

On the opposite shores of the St. Clair River is the United States, where the ground has been broken for the new US customs plaza. (There are no Canadian facilities being built on the American side.)

Staying on this side of the river, and panning to the north, are smokestacks that pump grey clouds into the sky, nestled in among cylindrical tanks filled with chemicals and piles of dark aggregate in the shape of ancient burial mounds. The thick sludge in the adjacent tailing ponds lies still, indifferent to the cold wind that blows in from the river.

Beyond the industrial buildings lies downtown Sarnia. The city itself is small and suburban in style, dotted with bungalows and business parks. The only high-rises are the condos that lie along the lakeshore, built for the company executives who stream through during the summer months, when the nearby golf courses are fully booked.

Turn to the east and you will find marshes and woods, and rectangular plots of farmland that lie fallow beneath the snow. Keep turning, just a little further, until you are facing due south.

There.

Stop.

Can you see the blockades now?

Zoom in a little closer.

And all the police cars?

Churchill Road has been barricaded by a makeshift assembly of abandoned trucks, tree trunks and empty oil barrels.

*Hey hey, ho ho
RMBK has got to go!*

RMBK insists that an eight-lane highway is needed, to accommodate the traffic that will be redirected to the new bridge. But the Aamjiwnaang refuse. This is their land: the land where their ancestors are buried.

Groups of environmentalists are also on site, and some people from the wider community. For decades, the area has been treated as a sacrifice zone, with the country's highest density of plastics and rubber facilities, pipelines and oil refineries, which spew toxins, including (but not limited to):

AlCl₃ – Aluminum chloride
 NH₃ – Ammonia
 Mg₃Si₂O₅(OH)₄ – Asbestos
 As – Arsenic
 C₆H₆ – Benzene
 C₂₀H₁₂ – Benzopyrene
 Cd – Cadmium
 CO – Carbon monoxide
 Pb – Lead
 CH₃Hg – Methyl mercury
 Ni – Nickel
 NO – Nitrogen oxide
 C₂Cl₄ – Perchloroethylene
 C₁₂H_{10-x}Cl_x – Polychlorinated biphenyl
 C₈H₈ – Styrene
 SO₂ – Sulphur dioxide
 C₇H₈ – Toluene

But even if you were to zoom in even closer, as close as you can get, you wouldn't be able to see the poisons. All that is visible is their effect, with the higher-than-average cases of:

Ceaphalgia
Dermatitis
Psoriasis vulgaris
Epistaxis
Asthma
Spontaneous abortions
Intrauterine fetal deaths
Anemia
Hypertension
Chronic kidney disease
Endocrine disruption
Alzheimer's
Autism spectrum disorder
Cardiovascular disease
Cerebral Palsy
Multiple Sclerosis
Atherosclerosis
Acute myeloid leukemia
Mesothelioma

And all kinds of other cancers, many of which you will have never heard of

People are getting sick and dying, just from breathing.

The community has had enough. They have had enough of smokestack flares bursting into flames, filling the air with the smell of rotten eggs and dirty socks. They have had enough of wailing sirens that warn of chemical leaks. They have had enough of the shelter-in-place orders. Too many times they have been told to evacuate.

The road expansion will only make things worse.

*When our land is under attack,
What do we do?
Stand Up, Fight Back!*



Marco scoops up his lentils and cabbage with a spongy piece of injera. The restaurant is one of his favourites, just a few blocks from where he grew up, as the neighbourhood changes, with maize making room for wheat, unleavening for fermentation.

On the extra-wide TV behind the bar, a soccer match is being replayed from earlier that day. When a hand ball is called in the box, the men sitting around Marco gasp in unison. Exhaling, they reach for their domestic beers, \$2 dollars cheaper than the imports.

Bottles clink. “Happy new year!” This greeting will be shouted out for another few weeks, as people struggle to adapt to the new calendar year. 2024. How time flies.

Thick winter parkas, damp from the snow outside, are draped over the back of the bar stools. Puddles of grey mud are forming underneath. A few still wear their beanies inside to ward off the cold that drifts in, every time the door is opened. Along the walls, last month’s Christmas lights blink to an inaudible tune.

Benjie is on the night shift again, so Marco is eating on his own. Mopping up the last of his spicy beef stew, he looks across at the refrigerated case filled with layer cakes. If Benjie were here, he would order him a slice of chocolate, wrapped in glossy fudge. But Marco won’t. He has never liked sweets much; the sugar makes his head hurt. Benjie’s sweetness is all he needs.

To the side, on a much smaller TV, the news channel plays on endless repeat. Marco glances over. The volume is turned off, but the closed captioning is on, with statistics about the economy flashing like tickertape along the bottom. It’s all part of the government’s new strategy to emphasize the importance of cross-border trade to the country’s economic health. Imports and exports are minutely tracked, with tables and graphs produced on a daily basis, as if they are recording viral case counts or hospitalizations.

All of a sudden, Ashley appears on screen, at one of the military barricades, her eyes sparkling in the lights of the emergency vehicles all around her. Police cars have become ubiquitous all over the city, all day, all night.

He squints with disapproval at the image. “I can’t believe these checkpoints are still up,” he says, to no one in particular.

The man next to him grunts.

“I can’t count the number of times I’ve been stopped.”

Another grunt.

Ever since the Civil Assistance Plan was put in place six months ago, barricades have been set up and American troops have been stationed across Canada.

Even though the Civil Assistance Plan had been agreed to over a decade earlier, almost no one had heard of it, including Marco. As he and others would soon learn, it's a bilateral agreement between Canada and the United States that enables troops to cross the border in the event of a civil emergency. To be precise, section 1(a) states:

The purpose of the Canada-United States Civil Assistance Plan (CAP) is to provide a framework for the military of one nation to provide support to the military of the other nation while in the performance of civil support operations to the primary agency (e.g., floods, forest fires, hurricanes, earthquakes, and effects of a terrorist attack).¹

CAP was invoked about six months ago, back in July of last year, long before the snow appeared. It was shortly after the Prime Minister declared a national emergency and implemented the Emergencies Act: civil liberties were suspended, checkpoints erected, curfews imposed, fines levied, bank accounts frozen, cars confiscated, and property seized.

Marco was outraged. *Were these extreme measures really necessary? To deal with a few protesters?*

The strict security measures were supposed to reassure the US that everything was under control. But none of it was enough for the President. He sent the Prime Minister a stern letter. You might have seen it: it went viral.

CAP was invoked by the Prime Minister: it was the only way, she said, to reassure the Americans that there was no threat. Behind closed doors, she would lament, "I had no choice. There was no alternative." It was a lament for a nation.

In public, the government made the most of a bad situation. "We need to keep the border open," the Prime Minister repeated, wherever she went, to whomever would listen. "Our economy depends on it. *Notre économie en dépend.*" And then, for the sake of their neighbours, "The Americans are our closest ally, and largest trading partner. We are so grateful for their generous support."

"We are here to help" the Americans replied, "as long as you need us. What are friends for?"

Operation Northern Resolve began smoothly. Nothing was smashed. Nothing was broken. The door was opened and the American troops stomped right in. They arrived mounted on Strykers and Joint Light Tactical Vehicles, or in Blackhawk helicopters. The two tanks that had been on display at the Ontario Parliament were recommissioned.

At first, most Canadians were tolerant of the American troops. Toleration is a national pastime.

¹ Canada-US Civil Assistance Plan (CAP), CANUS CAP-08. Established February 14, 2008 (renewed January 25, 2012). <https://www.hsdl.org/?view&did=28652>

And they became easier to ignore as they became more circumspect. A few academics were enrolled in their missions, to help them learn about the local culture. The military ventured into underserved communities, playing games with the kids, and sometimes handing out chocolate or soccer balls.

Then, the US soldiers faded into the background, shifting their attention to covert activities like surveillance and intelligence-gathering—the Canadian Armed Forces were sent to the frontlines to take their place. They became the ones who were watched.

Everything was fine while the economy was booming. But when cross-border trade began to slip, when the value of the Canadian dollar dropped, when interest rates rose, and unemployment crept up into the double digits, the public mood began to shift.

An end-of-the-year poll, with a margin of error of ± 3.6 percentage points, 19 times out of 20, showed that 67% of Canadians want the American troops to go home.

The settlers want their country back.

The government is also anxious to cut their costs. The financial arrangements for CAP were never clearly set out in the original agreement. Canada keeps getting billed for the military expenses of the Americans—and everyone knows that occupation costs an arm and a leg.

Yet the Americans refuse to budge, insisting that they are still needed to help keep the peace. It's their manifest destiny to provide assistance, they might have explained in a different era. And anyway, there is still plenty of time before the 3-year Status of Forces Agreement expires. So, what's the rush?

For now, the two countries agree to disagree. The American troops remain. What more could go wrong?

Marco is about to find out.



What has the new year brought for Edie? She has taken up an administrative role in the Dean's office. The appointment is only temporary, while a colleague takes an unexpected paternity leave. No one is more surprised than he is at his sudden departure. (It's a bit of a sordid story.)

As the Acting Vice-Dean of Knowledge Mobilization, Edie will be responsible for boosting research impact by promoting academic research among the public. It is a fairly new position within the already bursting Dean's office.

Edie was chuffed at being asked. But she didn't really want an administrative role. Or did she? Perhaps it is all she has ever wanted.

As she walks down the street towards her new office, she can smell snow in the air. Outside the main building, a few scraggly oak trees struggle against the cold, bereft in their square planters. *Velut arbor ævo*. Brutalist concrete terraces step up to the main doors. In the 1960s these terraces would have been revolutionary: an invitation for students to assemble. Now, spontaneous rallies are against university policy.

Inside the central hall, a few customers line up at the coffee kiosk, which is flanked by the university's Special Constables, whose presence on campus has quadrupled. Behind them, the utilitarian, cinder-block walls have been softened with stripes of muted pastel paint, the colour of bubble gum and cotton candy, colours that are used in prisons to subdue the inmates. Everything you need to know about how pedagogy has changed over the last several decades can be inferred by this small redesign.

Edie climbs the stairs to the second floor, through the glass doors, past the elevators, and into the decanal sanctuary, which has been artfully renovated with warm wooden finishing and ambient lighting.

Letters in envelopes are rare these days. But there is one—just one—in Edie's new mailbox. She pulls out a sheet of textured paper, as creamy as the soft-serve ice-cream that she would order every summer, on their way home from their annual camping trip. Two weeks in the backwoods was their only regular family holiday. Two weeks spent in sticky heat, broken only by a few thunderstorms. Two weeks lathered in layers of sunscreen and bug spray, which dripped down their sweaty faces and into their eyes. Two weeks stuffed with undercooked hot dogs, stuffed into mildewed tents, into sleeping bags stuffed with down feathers that caught between their lips. Two weeks that made her and her sister perfectly happy to spend the rest of the summer at home.

Eddie glances back at the letter.

She smooths down the folded paper, so that the Great Seal of Canada is facing outwards on her desk. She is being invited to participate in a Royal Commission.

When the US border officers had refused to return to Canada to stand trial, the government called a Royal Commission on border preclearance to examine creeping US influence in Canada. It's a trick as old as Confederation. Take intractable problems and transform them—*abracadabra*—into flaccid policy recommendations.

Eddie knows exactly what types of people will attend. Government sycophants. Policy wonks. Careerist colleagues. She cringes at the thought. But it might be helpful for her book. The book on borders that she still can't quite finish. Maybe she should say yes...

She sighs, and turns away from the window, back to her computer, ready to begin the backbreaking work of sitting at her desk all day. But before she can get started, she is interrupted by one of her fellow Vice-Deans, who stops by to welcome her. He leans into the doorframe, ready to gossip about performance indicators, research metrics, and quality assurance.

As he speaks, the cream-coloured letter catches his eye and he is begrudgingly impressed by all it portends. She can tell because he thrusts his chest forward and begins to reel off a list of his recent publications. *It's always the same with these men.*

And that's when Eddie decides that she will go to Ottawa. She must go to Ottawa. And why not? She has never been part of a commission before. She will try anything once.

It will give her a chance to talk about the new border facilities at Sarnia-Port Huron which she has begun to research. What she has uncovered so far is quite concerning, and bound to make an impact. It's exactly what her new position calls for: KMB: Knowledge Mobilization.

"Eddie?"

"Hmmm?"

"Earth to Eddie!" he chides her. "Where did you disappear?"

"Oh, I don't know. I'm just thinking about how much I have to do."

"Welcome to the world of administration," he chuckles. "I hope you're up for it."

"Sure. I think so."

"Well, I'll bet you developed a thick skin last summer," he chuckles again, thinking back to the outrage that followed Eddie's two television appearances. "What a mess that was!"

Eddie's face falls a little. "Oh, it wasn't so bad," she tells him, although it really had been quite horrible.

"Really?" He relaxes against the door frame.

"Yeah, and anyway, I think it's all water under the bridge now." She feels like she is burning up inside, as if the blood in her veins is boiling, bubbling up to her skin. This is another thing that the new year has brought: hot flashes.

"Probably. But I'll bet it's why you got picked for this interim position."

"What do you mean?"

"You're famous! I'll bet people remember your name, but nobody remembers why. It's a perfect example of KMB."

"Well, the 'why' of my research is important too. Border security is still a pressing issue. I plan to continue with my research over the next few months." Beads of sweat are forming on her reddening forehead. She picks up the creamy letter and fans her face, wishing it were ice cream.

"Sure. Of course you will still do your research. That's what we all think." He chuckles again.

"Anyway, at least you're only here temporarily. What difference can six months possibly make?"



To celebrate her new appointment, Samir heads over to Edie’s condo. Usually, she will go over to his place—since it’s slightly bigger—and she, more than he, likes keeping her own place to herself. But tonight calls for something different. Edie wants to have dinner at her favourite neighbourhood restaurant, where she often meets up with her friends.

Samir has only been here a few times. It is not his style. A little pricey. Too trendy. But this time he is making an effort. For Edie. For Edie who loves this place.

As she swoops through the front door, the wait-staff say hello, calling out to her by name. “Edie, so nice to see you again!” They laugh and flirt. She giggles. Samir stands back, both bemused and annoyed.

Deep into the restaurant they find two tables, which have been moved together, already filled with some of Edie’s friends, who shriek their congratulations, and then lean in for hugs and kisses, first on one cheek and then the other. They shake hands with Samir. “You don’t mind if I call you Sam, do you?” He does. Is Samir really so much harder to pronounce? No matter. They barely speak to him again. They have sized him up, while cutting him down. They are the kind of haughty Torontonians he most despises.

The conversation rambles loudly.

“I’m glad the Emergencies Act has finally expired. What a drag.”

“It all seemed a bit excessive.”

“Yeah, all those police raids. The curfews...”

“I heard that people were detained, although that never happened to anyone I knew.”

“I didn’t like the idea that I could be stopped at any time.”

Samir looks around the table at all the pale faces nodding in agreement. *Of course you didn’t get stopped. Of course you weren’t detained.* He looks over at Edie with his lips pressed tightly together, willing her not to say anything. He has no interest in talking about his experiences with these people. But he doesn’t need to worry. She is oblivious, chatting away with the man sitting next to her, the one that Samir already hates.

“But at least they got those terrorists. That brother and sister. Think of all the harm they could have inflicted. Thank God they were arrested.”

A few knowing looks are directed towards Edie who, now feeling their eyes upon her, pauses her conversation. Most of her friends have remembered that the Al-Khalifa detentions are a touchy subject with her, although they can't quite remember why.

Samir waits for Edie to say something. Over the last six months, they have vilified the security measures and the presence of the American troops. The shared antipathy has been one of the few things holding them together, displacing their disagreements about Edie's interviews last summer, which smoulder under the surface.

But tonight she says nothing to intervene and turns back to her own private conversation.

"It's still weird having the police all over the place. They're everywhere."

"And what about the American troops?"

"It's a bit odd, isn't it? That they're still here, I mean."

"It's all been good for the economy. So I guess it's alright."

"Yeah, and at least they aren't so much in your face now. I hardly notice them anymore."

"I kinda don't mind having them around. They make me feel safe."

A petite woman has spoken these words in earnest. Samir's stomach turns. He takes another sip of wine, to stop him from saying something else, something that he (or Edie) might regret.

He badly wants a cigarette. Samir quit years ago, but he still misses it sometimes. It would give him an excuse to join the small group outside, bracing against the January cold. Someone would offer a light, another a warm smile. One of the waiters—there was always a waiter among them—would make them laugh with his stories about awful customers, glancing over at Samir sympathetically. Then a young woman would bring a cigarette to her lips, before passing it to him shyly. He would take it, puffing slowly, savouring the heady mix of tobacco and lipstick.

Instead, wedged in at the table, Samir plays with his knife, pushing it into the white linen, imagining that the creases are the folds of skin around that man's wrist—yes, that man, the one talking to Edie, the one he already doesn't like—imagining that the droplets of red wine that have spilled are... It's unspeakable what he imagines.

As the people around him continue talking, Samir turns his gaze to the tables nearby. Across the way are an elderly couple, immaculately dressed. They sit quietly. In fact, they are absolutely silent, not saying a word to one another, even when the food arrives. Samir wants to point them out to Edie—look at them!—so they can laugh lightly later—imagine that, not a single word! And they promise each other that they will never be like this couple, knowing that no matter what problems they might have, not having anything to say will not be one of them.

When the food arrives at their table, Samir finally manages to claim Edie's attention for a few minutes as the chattering subsides. She is radiant. He smiles. She smiles back. She is having a wonderful time. She pours more wine into everyone's glasses, until some are half-full and some are half-empty, and some are just right.

A couple of bottles later, and it's time to go. Edie insists on paying for everyone. If there is one thing that she has learned, it's that the further she drifts away from the research that she loves to do, the more she gets paid. She might as well make the most of it, savoring in the generosity that her temporary promotion makes possible.



“Are you sure you want to be stuck in administration?” Samir asks, gently.

They are back at Edie’s condo. She is plumping up the large vase of white orchids that Samir had presented to her before dinner, which have now opened, lips spreading, in the heat of her living room.

“It’s only for one term. And I can’t really back out now, can I?” Edie replies, ever-so-practically. Still buoyant, she has tried to ignore Samir’s use of the word ‘stuck’. “You know why I’m doing this, right?”

“Not really...”

“It’s my way of trying to atone for everything that happened last summer. This is an opportunity to make a difference. To do something right, as you suggested...”

“But is being in the Dean’s office the right thing to do? Will you really be able to make a difference?”

“Well, it’s the only option available to me right now. And now that I’ve agreed to do it, I’s not going to back down. You know me: when I say I am going to do something, I do it.”

When she was 10, Edie missed her sister’s birthday party. Turning 7 was no big deal, she would tell herself later, as if to justify her absence.

She hadn’t planned on missing the party. But she was out playing with some friends, and they egged her on, begging her to stay outside with them on their bikes. A little while longer. Please!!

Delighted at how much they appeared to want her around, delighted that they wanted her in a way that she never thought they would, she stayed to play. She would go to the party—or so she thought—just a little late. Her sister’s friends were all babies anyway. They didn’t even know how to tell time.

But she was out too long and didn’t make it back home until the party was finished.

“Where were you?” Her mother shouts.

“With my friends.”

“You promised, Edie!”

It didn't matter that she had picked a few daffodils for her sister on the way.

“I'm sorry. I'll make it up to her.”

“You were supposed to be here. Do you know how much I worried? You ruined everything.”

“I'm really sorry.”

“Not good enough. How can you be so selfish?”

Her sister's words were even more harsh. “I hate you.”

The anger and hurt lasted for months. It may even have been then when her relationship with them started to unravel. For by the time that she had realized how important it was to her sister that she be there, it was too late.

Edie turns back to Samir and tries to change the subject. “Hey, I haven't told you yet about the letter I received. An invitation. To participate in the Royal Commission. You know, the one about US customs preclearance.” As if there is any other commission happening right now.

“Are you going to accept?”

“Why wouldn't I?” She steps towards him and reaches for his hand. “It could be interesting.”

He tries to choose his next words carefully. “Sure. But do you think it's a good idea?” He massages her fingers within his.

“What do you mean?”

“Will you be able to speak freely?”

“I still don't know what you mean.”

“You were very quiet at dinner when we were talking about all the police in the streets...”

“Sure. I didn't want to start an argument with my friends. Not tonight anyway.”

“And not because you're in admin now?”

Eddie can hear the doubt in his voice. “You don’t approve of anything I’m doing anymore, do you?” She lets his hand drop, and walks over to the kitchen counter, where the morning’s dirty dishes are piled up. *What is his problem?*

“I’m just trying to have a conversation. Don’t you want to talk about it?”

“Not if you’re going to be so negative” Here they go. The wine has settled, and with it Eddie’s ability to hold her tongue. “You never support me.”

Samir pulls at his beard. “That’s not true. I do support you. All the time. But if I don’t agree with something, I am going to say so.” Shifting to the kitchen island, he moves some of her clothes from the stool so that he can sit down. He rubs at his forehead, feeling the wrinkles of his brow, quite aware of how this conversation could spiral. “Aren’t you worried about putting your foot in it again?”

“Let me remind you: being on the panels was your idea.”

Samir throws up his hands. “We’ve gone over this a thousand times. Yes, I encouraged you to speak on the panel. But I didn’t tell you to say what you said. That was your own doing.”

“So basically, you think I am a fuck up and I shouldn’t go to Ottawa.” Some of her words are slurred.

“Eddie, that’s not what I said. I just don’t want to see you get hurt.”

She looks up from the counter where she has been banging things around, as if tidying up. Her eyes are fierce. Her tone is sharp. “Don’t worry. I’ve learnt how to protect myself.”

He looks over at her hardened face. “Yes, that’s what I’m worried about.”

“Worried about? Why? I’m a Vice-Dean now, aren’t I? I must be doing something right.”

“Hmpf. It wasn’t so long ago that you wouldn’t have considered being in the Dean’s office a measure of success.”

Rage bubbles up inside her. “Meaning...?”

“Meaning that up until now, you’ve been pretty disparaging of everyone in administration.” In fact, her cynicism is one of the things that he loves most about her.

“Maybe. But this is a great opportunity...” Eddie’s voice trails off. Her eyesight is too blurry to see the clock above the stove, so she doesn’t know that it is only a few minutes that pass until Samir speaks again. It feels like hours.

“Listen,” he says, his tone sorrowful. “It’s late. Let’s stop arguing.” He is overwhelmed with sadness, “We can talk more tomorrow. Let’s not ruin a lovely evening. Come. Let’s go to bed.”

Maybe if they had been at Samir's, where they had a routine to follow, their nightclothes neatly folded, their toothbrushes aligned in their stainless-steel holder, the side tables holding matching glasses of water. Maybe if they had been at Samir's, him on the left, her on the right, tucked into the familiar duvet, with its downy weight and musky smell. Maybe if they had been at Samir's, what happens next wouldn't have happened.

Or maybe it was because of the wine? Or the arguing?

Samir goes limp in her hand.

There is nothing she can do to make him hard, not even by taking him in her mouth. She does try, for a little bit. But she is put off by the sourness that seeps through his aging skin. She used to love his taste and smell.

They cuddle until Samir begins to snore. Then she pulls away, and crawls over to her side of the bed, where the sheets are still cool. She likes the room to be cold while she sleeps; he loves the heat. This used to be the only regular argument.

She takes a piece of cannabis chocolate out of her side drawer and teases her tongue over its earthy taste. Then she reaches over again to pull out her vibrator and lull herself to sleep.



As of today, January 12, 2024, Tarek and Hana have spent 186 days in detention. They have no idea how much longer they will be held. At least if you have committed a crime, you know how long your sentence is. You can count down the days. Not so with immigration detention. You can only count upwards, waiting for your release, which might be indefinitely deferred.

The Al-Khalifa siblings are at the new Federal Court, where the six-month review of their Security Certificates will take place. The building's design is meant to reflect the judicial values within: the stability of concrete cladding; the transparency of glass windows; the openness of a soaring atrium. But what if these features are only optical illusions?

The guards stationed up and down the hall outside the courtroom doors watch the brother and sister warily. Tarek and Hana can only manage a small wave.

Neither is really sure why they have been detained. All that they have been provided with is a short summary of the evidence against them. Anything that might impact national security or reveal the identity of the informants has been omitted. It is a very slim file.

Tarek's case is heard first.

Only his counsel is allowed in the room with him. Already inside are the prosecuting lawyer, and the Judge, who acts as cross-examiner, jury, and arbitrator all at once. It's a special arrangement particular to Security Certificates, and contrary to most principles of Canadian justice.

The Judge begins promptly. "Last July, several hours after you were detained at Union Station, you called Syria. Can you please tell me why?"

He mumbles something about calling his family to tell them the news, although the days after his mother's death, right up until his arrest a few days later, are a blur.

"Are you sure that's what you talked about?" The Judge points his finger at Tarek, his hand mottled with age.

"Yes. Absolutely sure."

"You weren't planning something?" he asks, peering up over his bifocals.

"What do you mean?"

“We found all kinds of blueprints at your apartment.”

“You took my blueprints? Those were for school!” Tarek is astonished that they would find them interesting.

“For school?” the Judge asks, looking up from the documents in front of him. His reading glasses slide further down his nose, making him look slightly startled. “What school?”

“I’m in the Engineering program at the university.” Tarek remains calm, trying to reassure them that he is not a threat.

The Judge smirks. “How can you afford that? Aren’t you a refugee?”

“Yes. Exactly. There are some special scholarships for refugees. I received one.”

“Hmm, and why Engineering? What were you planning on doing with your degree?”

“To get a job as an engineer?” Tarek’s statement comes out more as a question. He is learning to be Canadian.

“Ok. But why were you hanging around Union Station?”

“My mother worked there. I wanted to pick her up on my way home.”

“And last January... You went to the station and spent several hours there, before returning home. That was unusual. What were you doing?”

Tarek thinks back: last January? A year ago? Why would they care about back then? Have they been following him all this time? “I’m not sure which trip you mean.”

“This was Tuesday, January 31, 2023. According to your phone records, you were there for over 5 hours...”

My phone? Tarek thinks back. “I can’t remember the exact date, but I think I know what you are referring to. I was there to do some research for a project on transportation. That’s why I had the blueprints. But all that was almost a year ago.”

“You weren’t snooping around so that you could blow the place up?”

Tarek is startled. “No. Not at all. I would never do anything like that.”

“Are you sure? Because we’re not only interested in what you’ve done, but what you *might* do.”

“What I *might* do? How can you know that? I don’t even know for sure what I might do.”

“Well, just a minute ago you were very clear about what you were *not* going to do. You said you would *not* blow anything up.”

There is confusion on Tarek’s face. “Yes. I know that. I am not a terrorist.”

“And yet you are exactly the kind of person who fits our risk profile: a military-aged male, Muslim, and originally from Syria. Explain that.”

“I can’t explain who I am. I’m just me.”

“Well, then, we have a problem,” he pauses, “with you.”

“What problem? What evidence do you have?”

“It’s all in the summary.”

“There is almost nothing in the summary.”

“Look, instead of being a smart-ass, I would focus on convincing us of your innocence.”

“Aren’t I supposed to be considered innocent until proven guilty?”

“No. This is not a criminal trial. This is an immigration hearing.”

“So, there is no presumption of innocence?”

“No.”

“And I don’t have a right to hear the evidence that you have against me?”

“No. Not when it’s a matter of national security.”

“Then this shouldn’t be called a ‘hearing’,” Tarek mumbles, but loudly enough that he is heard.

The Judge whips off his glasses, and holds them out, jabbing at the air “That’s enough,” he says. “That’s enough of your insolence.”

Tarek looks at him defiantly.

The Judge continues, “My job is to make a determination on the reasonableness of your detention. What do you have to say to that?”

“There is nothing reasonable about any of this!” Tarek blurts out in frustration. As soon as he does, he regrets it. The Judge glares at him. The ‘hearing’ comes quickly to a close.

Hana is up next. Things proceed in much the same way, albeit with a lighter touch. Without access to the contents of her phone, the authorities have less to work with, other than the few household items that they have found at the family's apartment, including her (A+) school assignment on citizenship revocation, as well as her association with her brother, who is now looking more and more guilty.

Yet she deflects all their questions easily, keeping her eyes lowered in a gesture of compliance that she has learnt works well in this country.

As she is being led out of the room, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration enters, accompanied by his counsel and administrative assistants. Now it's the Judge's turn to be deferential. This is a Minister after all.

The proceedings move *in camera*. Not even the siblings' lawyers are allowed inside. Only their Special Advocate can attend, but even she can't tell them about the content of what she hears. Her only role is to make sure that the evidence against them has been acquired through legitimate means—no torture, no blackmail, no honey traps.

After a short exchange, the Judge announces his decisions:

- 1) In the case of Hana Al-Khalifa, the Judge finds her to be suspicious, but not an imminent threat. She is to be released on house arrest.
- 2) In the case of Tarek Al-Khalifa, the Security Certificate is upheld. The Judge affirms that national security is at stake. Tarek is to be returned to detention, until he can be deported.

In other words, Tarek has retroactively been deemed inadmissible to Canada, based on something that he might do in the future.

"You are being deported," he is told. "It doesn't matter how long it takes. My decision is final. There is no possibility for appeal."

When Hana is returned to the courtroom to hear her fate, the Judge is ready. He has found it hard to believe that the demure girl in front of him could be a threat. "Listen, young lady, you are being given a chance. We are going to release you. For now. But you will be under strict house arrest. You will be monitored 24/7. You will wear a GPS monitor on your ankle at all times. All it will take is one wrong step and you could be deported. Just like your brother. What do you have to say?"

Hana is not quite sure how to respond. "Thank you?" she says, more as a question than an answer. She too is learning to be Canadian.



After the hearing, Tarek is returned to the new Toronto South Detention Centre. The \$1 billion project was completed just a few years ago, designed to meet the highest environmental standards. It's all part of a government plan to make incarceration more sustainable.

From the outside, the complex looks like a sprawling community college, albeit sheathed in bulletproof plexiglass, surrounded by spiked walls and razor wire fences, with CCTV cameras on watch night and day.

In the reception area, natural light pours in from the skylights, in defiance of the fluorescent bulbs that flicker throughout the rest of the facility. Only a few feeble rays of sun seep into the cells, muted by frosted glass and metal bars. In solitary confinement there are no windows at all.

Even though he has been under police escort the whole time, Tarek is patted down when he returns from his hearing, paraded past sniffer dogs, and made to pass through a full body scanner. He is then pushed into a box-like chair, so that his insides can be x-rayed to ensure that he has not ingested any metallic contraband. The inmates are especially hungry for Sim cards.

Tarek lies on a thin mattress on the bottom bunk, breathing in the bleach from the sheets that barely disguise the smell of mold. He feels gravity sucking him into the floor, through the pit of his stomach. The room is hot. Particles of dust from nearby industrial facilities flicker in the air before they tickle his throat.

The facility is in lockdown again. Meetings with lawyers have been cancelled, the library is closed, and job training is suspended. Tarek usually can't access any of these resources anyway. The plan is to deport him—so no one cares about spending money on his rehabilitation. When Tarek complains about this unfairness, he is told that he can leave detention anytime. All that he has to do is to leave the country.

He will likely be forced to leave at some point anyway. The words of the Judge repeat in his head, slowing down and then speeding up: "You are being deported. It doesn't matter how long it takes. My decision is final. There is no possibility for appeal."

Would I ever plan an attack?

At first Tarek was sure that he knew the answer to this question: he would never, ever be part of a terrorist plot. But now that he has been accused, and presumed to be guilty, he thinks about it often. How can he know what he might do in the future?

Maybe I should live up to their expectations?

With the future too difficult to imagine, and the present bleak, Tarek retreats into the past.

He thinks of his mother. He can't stop thinking about her, his orange prison jumpsuit a constant reminder of the last image that he holds of her, a lump under the tarp. He thinks of how much he loved her, which he should have told her more often. He thinks of how much he misses her, which he has no one to tell.

He thinks of his siblings and wonders how they are doing. There is so much he still needs to talk about with his little brother, Hassan. He wouldn't know where to begin.

He then thinks of his long-dead father, who he last saw leaving their refugee compound in Lebanon, on his way to do some odd jobs for fast money, smiling and waving at his children as he pulled away on a friend's motorbike. Two hours later, he was dead.

What would his father do if he were here in detention? Tarek is ashamed that he doesn't know.

His thoughts push even farther back, to Syria, where he spent much of his childhood. It was a joyful period, although Tarek doesn't remember it very clearly. But he knows that he cannot—must not—be returned there. He will be seen as a traitor. He will be detained, and likely tortured. Surely the Canadian authorities cannot—will not—return him to a country where his life will be in danger?



All that is missing when Hana returns home is Tarek. And her mother. And one parakeet.

Everything else is much the same. Outside, police cars are stationed in front of the building. Inside, are the same three large couches, with the throws neatly folded, pillows plumped. The samovar and glasses are arranged in the open hutch, where their official documents are stored, the ones that make them legible to the authorities.

And yet, Hana feels as if she has put on the wrong glasses, and the room is distorted. None of it quite makes sense. The couches are bigger than she remembers, dwarfing her grandmother. There are shapes impressed into the cushions that she does not recognize. Who has been sitting in them? The dining room table has shrunk. The kitchen faucet won't stop dripping. What is that smell?

She looks out the windows. The fittings are loose, and there are no safety screens, despite the property manager's months-old promises. She stares at the drifts of snow that have formed. The last day she was here, the sun poured in. Now, the cold seeps through cracks in the sealant, as the panes shudder with the winter wind.

It reminds her of seven years ago, the winter when the family had arrived in Canada, shocked by the cold. Matronly women with greying hair had wrapped them in heavy parkas, as if weighting them down to this new land.

In the bathroom, she puts on one of the sets of slippers inside the door, and eyes the mop sitting in the bathtub. The lid is raised on the toilet, but at least there is a lid. She peers into the mirror: it's been more than six months since she's seen a clear reflection looking back at her. She looks as tired as she feels. She breathes onto the mirror until it fogs.

Her family is thrilled to have her back.

The first day they beckon her to sit. "Here, Hana, sit here please. Would you like some tea?" Sweets are brought out on a tray, and the family relaxes a little, and there is some laughter.

The second day is much the same. "Here, Hana, sit here please. Would you like some tea?" They bring more sweets.

But the third day is different. “Hana. Hana? What’s for dinner, Hana?” The family is hopeful that she will step into their mother’s shoes. They have rallied these last six months, but it has been a struggle.

The neighbours were very helpful, at first. They visited and brought food when they could. But as the siblings remained in detention, they stayed away. It became harder and harder to shake the allegations. No one wanted to be guilty by association. It didn’t help that the police would come by regularly, knocking on their doors.

Now, the Al-Khalifas are nearly out of money. In a few weeks, when she turns 18, Yara will age out of her child-benefits. They tried contacting their refugee sponsorship group, who had fussed over them like dolls when they had arrived, but they have long since scuttled away to the next shiny cause.

Left in charge, Jamal relented to all of her grandchildren’s demands, even though she used to nag at Rima for not being strict enough. Hassan, in the twilight of his childhood, keeps to himself. He misses his mother deeply. And his brother? He can barely think about him, stuck in detention. He shuts himself into the cramped room that they shared. His clothes, which used to be folded into a plastic bin, now lie scattered all over Tarek’s bed, as if to cover over his absence.

Of all of them, he is the one who struggles the most with school. He can speak English well enough but finds reading hard. He has missed out on some core years of maths. And all the history and geography that he is learning is unfamiliar. What is a deciduous forest? (*He has never seen one.*) Who was the Family Compact? (*Were they like the mafia?*) When was Confederation? (*Really, so recently?*) No one at home can help him with the answers, although his sisters try. Luckily his teachers mostly like him, although that might change after some recent outbursts.

Nahla, the youngest, is Jamal’s favourite. She is the one most like her absent father. She carries her body just like he did, and screws up her eyes in concentration, tilting her head to the side as she considers an issue carefully before making a decision. The resemblance is eerie, as Nahla barely knew him. He died before she turned three.

She will sit at her grandmother’s feet, as she listens to stories while her hair is brushed and plaited, a butterfly clasp on each side. They will stand side-by-side in the kitchen, cooking family recipes. It also helps that she is young enough that her problems can still be soothed with food. As her grandmother plumps her with treats, her legging stretch until they are sheer.

Her siblings love Nahla and fuss over her, but they also tease her mercilessly, envious of this closeness with Jamal.

“You never really knew our father. But we did.”

“You can’t really be Syrian—you have no memories of home.”

“Your skin is so light because you’ve grown up in the snow.”

They are mean in the way that only siblings can be.

They do not realize how difficult things are for her at school. Her teachers pretend that nothing has happened, but they treat her differently from her classmates, even though most of them look like her. The other children don't understand why their tone of voice changes, the soft looks in their eyes, why she gets patted on the head. It leads to resentment.

Yara is the opposite of Nahla: she is the spitting image of her mother, Rima—and sometimes Jamal glances up and thinks that she sees her daughter-in-law, there in the kitchen, scrubbing the pots and pans. Yara is the quickest to laugh. And the first to anger. Jamal knows exactly what it was that her son loved about his wife, but these very same qualities fill her with dread.

Yara is the kind of person who follows her passions; she just doesn't know what they are yet, or the kind of trouble that they will bring.

And none of them realizes, not yet, how Hana's conditions of house arrest will affect them all. A security camera will be positioned outside their apartment door. Every phone call, text, and letter will be scoured. They could be raided by the police at any time. All visitors have to be vetted in advance—no more impromptu visits, which used to be the highlight of the day.

One of Nahla's best friends will no longer be able to come over. She has just learned that her family is undocumented, having overstayed their visas years ago. They cannot risk being caught. In fact, her parents tell her that the girls can no longer be friends at all.

Hana has to wear her ankle bracelet 24/7. She is allowed outside only with prior approval, and even then, only once or twice a week, only for a few hours at a time, and only with a planned itinerary. She may or may not be trailed by the police. Every place that she stops has to be cleared in advance, and every person she speaks to has to be pre-authorized. There can be no last-minute decisions to stop for coffee, or to talk to a neighbour who happens to pass by. She quickly gets a reputation for being rude.



Ashley looks over at Brandon, wrapped in a towel at his waist, muscled chest exposed, his wet hair dripping down his back. His clavicle is knobby like a stick, jutting out from his sleek chest. He is nothing like Jared, who was more like a burly bear under his clothes. It is still soon enough since their break-up that the comparisons come easily.

Brandon is smart, super-smart when it comes to business.

Jared was smart too, but book-smart.

Brandon is sweet and kind.

Jared was kind of sweet, but also a pain.

Brandon loves her for who she is. Or who he thinks she is.

Jared loved her for who he thought she could be.

Breaking up with Jared was easy.

Breaking up with Jared was hard.

Both these statements are true.

Even though it happened months ago, Ashley still remembers it all clearly. She wishes it hadn't ended as it did, but she is glad that it is over.

They were at her condo, picking up some things for her to wear. As she rummaged through her closets, she threw a few things on the bed, knocking over some of the stuffed animals, neatly arranged by her pillows. Most she had left behind when she moved out of her parents' house, except for this bear, that pink giraffe, and her favourite puffin, with its striped beak.

Jared was waiting, impatiently, for her in the living area—he loved it when she looked done-up, but not when the preparations happened on his time. He paced across the long and narrow room, which Ashley had carefully furnished with mirrors to open up the tiny space.

Outside the windows are dozens of other, similar condo towers that have sprouted up nearby, minutes from the lake, in an old industrial district. Sometimes she looks out and wonders who

lives opposite, peering out at the blinds that open or close at all hours. And then there are the many windows that stay dark most of the year, storing money for international investors.

“Why don’t you want to spend time with me anymore?”

“I do want to. I’ve just been so busy.”

“Always work,” he grumbles. Jared loves her new-found fame, but not the ways it makes her unavailable to him. “It’s like you don’t want to spend time with us.”

“Us?”

“Me and Ronin. I know you don’t like him. Is that it?”

“You know I like Ronin. What a silly thing to say.” Although even as she says this, she knows that she doesn’t sound convincing. It’s not that she *dislikes* him. He is only four after all. Or maybe five. Anyway, he isn’t the main problem.

“You don’t show it,” continues Jared. “You’ve become really distant.”

She hesitates. For weeks she has been seeing Brandon on the side, for coffee, for drinks, and most recently for dinner. He is waiting to find out what she is going to do.

Jared is not deterred by the silence. “Do you want to break up?”

Yes, is her answer. But she hadn’t planned to tell him right away. There had been something delicious about knowing that she was going to leave, while he was oblivious. Every time that he did something that she didn’t like she could whisper to herself, ever-so-lightly, *I am leaving you I am leaving you I am leaving you*.

“I asked you a question. Do you want to break up?”

“Yes.”

“Yes?”

“Yes. I want to break up. YES.” The vehemence with which she spits out her third yes startles them both. It is the most honest she has been with him in months.

Jared is incensed. Even though he had a sense that this might be her answer, he now regrets that he has pushed so hard. Three-and-a-half years down the drain.

“I knew it. You have been planning this, haven’t you? That’s just like you. You’re so manipulative. When were you going to tell me?”

“I am just making my mind up this minute.”

“Sure, you are. I’ll bet you have been thinking about this for weeks.” He is shouting, even though he is standing right next to her.

“And what if I have?” Ashley is both drawn to and repulsed by his anger. She is also a little frightened—in fact, this is one of the reasons that she has delayed leaving him.

And the sex. The sex has been very good—very, very good. It’s the way he fits inside her. Most women are polite and say that size doesn’t matter. But it does. It does to Ashley, anyway. But an extra inch should not enough to warrant staying together, even as it makes it hard to leave.

She shrinks back, but her eyes are shining. There is a way that hurting people can make you feel both small and powerful.

“So this is the thanks I get.” Jared is pacing the room. “Don’t forget, you were a small-town wanna-be until you met me.”

“That’s unfair.”

“Well, it’s true, isn’t it?”

“Your attitude is precisely why I need some space, Jared. I need to go on my own journey.”

Journey? What journey? Even though Jared had used this same language himself a few days ago, it infuriates him. “Fuck your journey.” He shouldn’t have bought her that self-help book for her birthday.

Eventually, drained, when they are doing nothing more than repeating the same accusations, with slightly different words, they stop.

As he is leaving, Jared punches his fist into the wall. The plaster is undamaged, but the framed photograph is loosened from its hook and falls.

When he slams the door behind him, the shards of glass jump around the floor.

All that is behind her, as she stands with Brandon in an aisle full of hammers. Claw hammers and sledgehammers, ball peens and cross peens, mauls and split heads.

He thought he had some tools stored away, but he can’t find them. So, he has decided he needs a new hammer, although he’s not sure what kind. He places three in the shopping basket, with a couple of boxes of different-sized nails.

“Do we really need all these? To put up one picture?” Ashley is laughing. His delight is all over his face.

They look around in the hopes of finding a store clerk, but there is no one. Only a couple of security guards patrol up-and-down the aisles lined with floor-to-ceiling shelves, while industrial-size shopping carts clatter along the concrete floor.

Brandon unwraps his cashmere scarf from around his neck. Ashley unbuttons her winter coat and stuffs her red leather gloves into her purse.

When she was young, she had spent a lot of time in small-town hardware stores, accompanying her father, who would invariably need supplies for their antiques business. Ashley loved to wander around, touching everything. One aisle was filled with tightly coiled cables and chains. Tugging at them slightly, they would rumble as they were unrolled, until she was told off by one of the staff. Then she would move over to the open bins filled with nuts, bolts and washers, and plunge in her hands. She had no idea what the little pieces were all for, or even what they were called, but she loved the smell of metal on her fingers.

At the check-out counter there was a wall of adhesive letters, black on a reflexive gold background, which people used to spell out their names on their mailboxes. Ashley would finger a large “A,” begging her father to buy one, just one letter, but he never did. So, instead she would pull a candy from the dish on the counter—orange was best, green was second—and slowly unwrap the plastic while she stared at the notices on the community bulletin board.

“Let’s go look at the washers and dryers, sweetheart” says Brandon, interrupting her memories.

“Sure. For your new place? But doesn’t it already have appliances?”

Next month, Brandon will move out of his condo into a new house. He has been made a senior manager at RMBK, in the Infrastructure division. His rise at the company has been meteoric, but almost everyone agrees that his promotion is well-deserved. He is a hard worker and likeable, which is more than can be said for most of them.

“Yes, there’s a set. But they’re a couple of years old. I want to see what other options are available. My friend has a fancy new one in stainless-steel.”

Finally, they find a staff-person in a bright red polo shirt who can assist them, while they pretend to be newlyweds.

“We want a significant piece,” Brandon tells the clerk.

“In a washing machine?” The clerk looks doubtful.

“Yes, a talking piece.”

“Ok sir. Whatever you want. Let’s look at this model over here.”

“Oooh. I like the colour. Fire-engine red.” Ashley giggles.

Brandon adopts a serious tone. “What features does it have?” He wants all the bells and whistles, even though he gets most of his clothes dry-cleaned.

The clerk tumbles through a description of the settings.

Looking at Brandon, Ashley asks: “Do you—I mean ‘we’—do we really need all this?” She runs her fingers tenderly over the illuminated controls that look more complicated than a cockpit.

“Sure. Business is booming with all our new American contracts. We might as well make the most of it.” Turning to the clerk, he asks: “How much is the set?”

He blurts out an amount that Ashley finds inconceivable. She glances over at Brandon. “Can we afford it?”

“Yes. We’ll take it.”



Samir has decided to walk home, hoping that the cold will revive him after a long day in his office. These days, he goes in only a few days a week, as he phases into retirement. But they are long days.

For decades he had worked in emergency rooms, and for long stretches, on medical missions abroad. Until ten years ago, when the constant crises started to weigh on him too heavily, and he shifted tack, buying shares in a private eye clinic with a few colleagues. Moving into the private sector was not how he thought his career would draw to a close, but ownership did give him more time for other things.

Without really thinking about it, he finds himself outside Café Americano. Inside it is bustling. The smell of baked butter wafts out the door. A few people slow down as they pass by, but this might only be Samir's imagination. Last summer's shooting has mostly been forgotten, except for the police patrols that pass by more regularly. And the plaque that has been installed, paid for by the university, tucked in between the bike racks. None of the memorial items remain. The teddy bears were donated to the children's hospital. The candles were given to a church. Children's drawings have been stored in the city archives. The fresh flowers were composted long ago.

Samir pulls down the peak of his cap and tightens his parka against the chill before he sets out again. Since the arrival of the American troops, he has to be careful about what route he takes, but tonight he has been distracted. He knows that Edie has gone through a lot over the past months, but this doesn't salve his misgivings, which are accumulating like ants in the crack of the sidewalk.

Edie.

Oh, Edie.

What should I do about Edie?

He no longer enjoys being with her with.

He can't imagine his life without her.

Samir falls deep into his thoughts as he walks. If Edie hadn't been on his mind, he would likely have seen the spotlights at the intersection, and the concrete meridians set up to filter traffic. He would have noticed the impromptu Do Not Enter signs, and the uniforms. But tonight, he is oblivious until it is too late.

He circles around the traffic cones and saunters up to the checkpoint, flashing his new biometric ID, which everyone over the age of sixteen must now carry at all times. A couple of Canadian soldiers stand at alert, their M4s in high ready position. One peels off a glove, reaching for the plastic card in Samir's hand, angling his body slightly, so that the assault rifle on his shoulders drops between them. The soldier swipes the card through a small machine to download the data stored in the magstripe. His image is checked against the millions of others in the database.

“Ok, old man, you're free to go.”

And then Samir is on his way again, compliant on the outside, screaming within.

As he hurtles towards 70, to a future that inevitably promises fewer days than the number he has already lived, he cannot escape the changes to his body. Everything takes more time. In the morning, he must stretch out in bed so that his vertebrae can click click click into place like falling dominoes. He needs to stand at the toilet for several minutes before his pee trickles out, or sit, straining for a bowel movement: a good one is almost as good, if not better, than an orgasm, as long as there is no blood.

And then there are the simple things that are more difficult, like bending over to tie his laces, reaching past his thickening waist, climbing stairs, or any incline, really. These small changes might be unnoticed by others, but Samir feels them viscerally, like the cold that takes over his body, which he can't shake.

All of this is what has prompted his proposal that he and Edie move in together. It's not that he expected her to look after him, not exactly. But he did like the idea of having someone around. There is nothing worse than feeling sick and vulnerable, and being on your own.

But now, he is no longer sure. Not after what happened last summer. Not after all their arguments.

For another block, Samir continues along the main street, past shuttered storefronts and deserted cafés that haven't reopened since the pandemic. Only the cannabis stores are thriving, anchoring every corner, taking over that role from the banks of yesteryear.

Veering down a residential street, Samir changes direction and heads north. Large stretches of the sidewalk have not been shovelled, and he keeps an eye on the blue snow that crunches beneath his feet, fearful of losing his step. Passing by houses, he peers inside the brightly lit windows. This is his favourite time of day to be out: that time in the early evening when the drapes are not yet drawn, when people carry on with their lives unaware that they are being watched by people like him.



Ever since Tanisha returned to the US with her children, Marco has made a special effort to keep in touch. Yes, she assures him, they are doing well, as well as can be. The girls still miss their father deeply, but for now, it is easier for them to live in a place where they have no memories of him. Their citizenship status is still uncertain, which means that they can't leave the country, but Tanisha is hopeful that everything will be sorted out soon.

With the trial for Donovan's murder drawing closer, she and Marco have been texting and talking more and more.

To everyone's surprise only one of the cops is facing trial: Constable Ivanova has been charged with second-degree murder, while Constable Fiore has been exonerated. An internal report by the Special Investigations Unit, issued just weeks after the shooting, established three things:

- 1) Donovan Wright was agitated. He did not comply with Constable Frank Fiore's demands. Constable Fiore was therefore acting appropriately when he discharged his weapon: he was defending his life, and the lives of everyone in the café.
- 2) The two shots fired by Constable Fiore did not kill Mr. Wright. One pierced his upper arm. The other severed his spine. Mr. Wright would never have walked again, but he would have lived.
- 3) Death was caused by electro-muscular disruption, followed by cardiac arrest. In other words, it was the taser used by Constable Tatiana Ivanova that killed Mr. Wright. This was confirmed by the autopsy.

When she found out, Tanisha was furious. She wanted both cops to be charged. Now, she is adamant that Constable Ivanova needs to be found guilty. She can think of nothing else. As she tells Marco, "This is so important to me and the girls. It's the only way to clear Donovan's name."

"Sure," replies Marco. "Justice is crucial. But I am a little worried at how fast things are moving. It is no secret that your government is putting the screws on so the trial proceeds quickly." It is scheduled for May, only a few months away, and just under a year since Donovan's death.

"The sooner the better, as far as I am concerned."

"Even when it's the result of political pressure?"

There is silence at the other end of the line. "Whatever it takes," Tanisha says finally. "This is about police accountability for a brutal killing. There's no time to wait."

Marco thinks carefully before he says what he says next. “You know, things are pretty tense up here, with all your soldiers still on the ground. We’re a little sensitive about American pressure.” He throws in the word ‘little’ to soften his comments, but everyone knows that the concerns are not so ‘little’ anymore.

“Marco, as I’ve told you, I am no big fan of the military—and neither was Donovan. That’s what messed him up. But it’s not my problem. Whatever it takes,” she repeats.

“Ok. I get it.”

“No. I don’t think you do. An innocent man was killed. A fragile, vulnerable man.”

“Was he fragile?” Marco asks softly. “I don’t remember you saying that before.”

There is another long silence. “Yes,” says Tanisha, with some relief. “Yes. Look, this is just between me and you.”

“I promise, Tanisha. I won’t say a word to anyone.”

“Donovan was having a hard time. As I told you, we had run out of money, and then our immigration application was rejected. The pandemic was devastating. And he was terrified of coming back to the US and being thrown in jail for being AWOL. It was all too much.”

“So, he was fragile. Was he angry too?”

Tanisha’s voice is quiet. “Mostly sad. And depressed. But maybe also a bit angry.”

“Angry enough to push that hostess?” It’s as if Marco hadn’t heard her also say sad and depressed.

“I guess so.” Now, she is almost whispering. “It looks like it in the videos I’ve seen. But it doesn’t make sense to me. He never did stuff like that.”

“He never was violent with you?”

“No. No. Never. When he got angry he would retreat into himself. He wasn’t a violent man in any way. That’s one of the reasons he hated the military so deeply.”

They talk for a little while longer. “Please. Promise me you won’t say a word about this. I don’t want it to be held against him.”

“I promise.” But Marco hangs up feeling confused. This is the first time that he has heard that Donovan was struggling. Why hadn’t Tanisha mentioned this before? But more importantly, why did Donovan push that hostess?

Marco sets down his phone on the window ledge, and turns to Benjie, who has been busy making dinner.

“Everything ok?” Benjie asks. He stirs the pot a few times.

“Sure. Fine.” Marco stares off into the darkness of their backyard, out over the rooftops still covered with snow.

Benjie has fried up some chopped garlic, black peppercorns, and red-pepper flakes in a thin layer of coconut oil, before adding the chicken pieces, which have been marinating overnight in garlic, vinegar, and soy sauce. Once they are browned on all sides, he adds in some coconut milk, a little more soy sauce, bay leaves, and enough water to cover it all. He then sticks the cast-iron pot into the oven. It’s a slight variation of his mother’s recipe, but it’s the way Marco prefers.

“Can you make the salad now?” Benjie asks him. “The rice is nearly ready.” He sets out some cutlery on the table.

“Hmmm?”

“The salad? You said that you wanted salad with the Adobo.”

“Right.” Marco is still staring out the window.

“What’s up Marco? Where are you?”

“Sorry. Just thinking.”

“About the trial?”

“Yup.” Benjie starts tearing the lettuce into bite-sized pieces, a little annoyed. It wasn’t his idea to have salad.

“Do you want onions in it?”

“What?”

“Onions, Marco. Red onions. Where are you? This is one of our few nights together.” He tsks. “You’re too invested in that woman.”

“That woman has a name: Tanisha. And yes, I’m invested. This is important.”

“We’re important too.” Benjie turns on the tap.

“Oh Benjie. Of course we are. But do you know what Tanisha told me about Donovan? That he was fragile. And he was angry. She has never said anything like that before...”

“And?”

“Well, all this time, I had presumed that Donovan was innocent. That something must have happened in that café that we didn’t know about. But now...”

“Now, what?”

“Now, I don’t know. Maybe he pushed her. For no reason.”

Benjie stops chopping for a minute; the diced onion is making his eyes teary. “And what difference does it make?”

“It means that he started it.”

“Ok. And so what if he did?”

“It changes everything.”

“How so?”

“I thought he was innocent. Maybe he’s not?” Marco scrunches up his face with worry.

“It doesn’t matter. Whether he pushed her or not, he didn’t deserve to be killed.”

There is a long silence, until Marco finally pulls himself away from the window. “Yes. You’re right. You’re absolutely right. Whether or not he pushed her, he didn’t deserve to be killed.” He steps over to Benjie who is standing at the cutting board, wedged in against the toaster oven. “Thank you, Benjie. Thank you. I needed reminding. Fucking police,” he says, then wraps his arms around him from behind. “Ok. I’m ready to help now.”

“Oh, so now you’re ready,” says Benjie teasingly, “now that everything is almost done.”

“Sorry,” he replies, pulling him into a kiss.

All this time Marco’s phone, which has been resting on the window ledge above the sink, has been recording what he has said. Not just his conversation in the kitchen with Benjie, but the phone call with Tanisha too. Ever since the police installed the Cyclops spyware last summer, they have been listening in on everything.

When they hear what Tanisha has said, they will come to their own conclusions about Donovan’s state of mind.



Work has been stressful. What better antidote than a mid-week drink? On her way home, Edie stops at a pub, the something & something, not far from campus. (Ferrets? Firkins?) It's in a converted Victorian mansion, which smells like wet carpet. The faun leather-covered stools are lined up neatly, except for those at the far end of the bar, where two men sit, strangers to one another and to themselves. They gaze over silently as Edie bursts in from the cold, pulling off her woollen hat.

With her is Vijay Rao, one of her new colleagues from the Dean's office. In the last six weeks, they have spoken a few times in the hallway, but more importantly, they have developed their own shared language of quizzical looks and discrete eye rolls.

They check in with the security guard at the door before the hostess seats them at one of the booths, where they order a few drinks and a plate of fries to share.

The banter is playful. He is being very attentive. *Wait, is he flirting with her?* Edie can interpret a text better than most, but decoding body language continues to elude her.

Samir has been distant of late. He has been around, but not really there. And when he is, they often end up in an argument. For the first time ever, she feels him slipping away.

She also feels the impact of her new administrative position on her body. Unable to get to the gym everyday, her shoulders are rounding, her upper arms are sagging, her waist is thickening. It's doesn't help that her hot flashes come and go at random.

Vijay is craving attention too. It's not uncommon among fathers of young children. He shows Edie pictures of his kids on his phone, which she glances at, just to be polite. A picture of his wife pops up, which he scrolls away quickly. Instead, he lingers on a picture of himself, taken quite a few years ago, in the era that he jokingly refers to as BC (before children), when he still had his boyish looks.

Edie changes the subject and asks him a few questions about his research. He earnestly describes how his international team is pumping aerosols into clouds, in the hopes of lowering ocean temperatures, with the aim of saving the coral reefs. They have been piling up research grants, and he doesn't forget to mention their dollar value.

"The project is getting a lot of attention," he continues. "I'll be coming to you soon to talk about KMb."

She doesn't know if he is serious or not about KMb. "Great!" But the whole thing sounds a bit far-fetched to Edie. Yet she puts on her best smile and purses her lips mischievously. "So, you

are trying to offset global warming—but can technology really solve the problems that technology has created?”

“You always ask such good questions,” Vijay says. “In our meetings, you’re fearless.”

She is flattered: nothing could make her happier to hear. She knows that this isn’t true, but she rises to his praises, and makes a few pointed criticisms of the Dean, which get bolder as the ice rattles around in her glass.

On her way to the bathroom Edie places her hand on top of his, which is stretched out towards her on the table, while he fiddles with the extra beer coasters. It could just be a friendly gesture, but she lingers long enough for it to be ambivalent.

When she returns to the table, he has ordered another round. Always a good sign. “Last one,” they say in unison, clinking glasses. He has taken off his tie, which snakes around the salt and pepper shakers. Under the table his legs hang open.

“Your research is on Canada-US relations isn’t it?” He must have looked her up on his phone while she peed.

“Yes,” says Edie with enthusiasm, although she really focuses on border politics, but there is no need to get hung up on small differences this late in the evening. “It’s a pressing subject these days, with all the security that’s been put in place.”

Vijay barely seems to be listening. “Hey, did you hear about the new Chair in Canada-US Border Infrastructure that RMBK is funding? The White Chair?” He picks at the basket of fries, now lukewarm, dipping one deeply into the mound of ketchup. “We’re having a big donor-recognition ceremony in a few months. Why don’t you make one of the speeches? Your research is right on topic. You’d be perfect.”

“Sure,” replies Edie, delighted to be asked, always worried that it will be the last time.

“I’ll talk to the Dean. It’s going to be a big deal. We’ve timed it to coincide with the anniversary of those horrible shootings last year. Killing two birds with one stone, so to speak.”

She shrugs her shoulders at the mixed metaphor but what can you expect from scientists? Out loud she says “sounds great.” She then launches into a more detailed description of her research, until she feels him slipping away. “You know,” she says, changing tack, “I have a first edition of a very famous book on the Canada-US border. It’s quite old, and really quite fascinating.”

“Wow. I’d love to see it one day,” he says, hedging his bets for future opportunities.

“Why don’t you come and see it now? I have it at home.” She places her hand on top of his, leaving it there. “It’s only a short walk from here.”

He pauses, but only for a second. A first-edition book is like bees to honey for most academics, even the scientists. “Sure. That would be great.” And he asks for the cheque.

Eddie pulls the curtains closed to the stars, while Vijay opens a bottle of wine. “The glasses are in that cupboard,” she calls out. He has taken off his dark jacket, and she sees that the colour of his shirt is not champagne, but beige. Beige is not the colour of romance, of travel, of adventure. She dims the lights.

Then she leads him over to her bedroom, where her special books are stored in an antique bookcase. Reaching up, she pinches at a thin volume and gently tugs it from the shelf, wrapped in a protective cover of clear mylar, which she pulls off slowly. He inhales deeply as he caresses the embossed leather. Using both hands, he cracks it open, being careful not to break its spine.

She bends over, and her skirt rises up over the back of her knees. Leaning into the bottom cupboard of her side-table, she reaches into a family-size box of condoms. She pulls out a handful, and tosses them into the top drawer, within easy reach, sparkling in their bright plastic wrappers, like assorted chocolates: flavoured, ribbed, super long, extra hard.

Vijay is trying to focus on the book, but the pencilled inscription is faint, his eyesight blurry.

He sets it down carefully, turns to her, smiling, and says sheepishly “What an amazing....” And then he leans in towards her, off-balance, kissing her on the lips.

“Amazing...” she says, as she feels his arms around her back. She presses into him.

He is hard.

“Do you like this? How about this?”

“Mmmm” she moans.

She is wet.

“Can I touch you here? How about here?”

“Here,” she moans, as she reaches for his hand. “Touch me, here.” She knows she is supposed to appreciate his solicitude, but why can’t he just get on with it? “Here and here” she says, opening her eyes, and pointing to her breasts, as if she is in class, explaining how to complete an assignment. *Here and here. Fill in the _____.*

Once he is done with his questions, once they are both done, they lie together for a while, chatting, their legs entangled. Edie feels better, and then she feels worse. As they talk, she realizes that they have very little in common. She might not even like this man.

He slips out.

Shutting the door behind him.

He has to get back to his wife.



Tarek has been in detention for 223 days. Others have been detained much longer. For years. Decades, even. But knowing this is no comfort.

Hana cannot go to visit him herself, because of her house arrest, but she makes arrangements for the rest of the family to do so. She is worried. When she last saw him at the Security Certificate hearing, he looked gaunt.

She calls ahead to register them as visitors. Then she writes down all the instructions. They will need to take a bus to the subway station, board a westbound train, ride 20 stops, then take another bus. The whole trip will take around an hour and a half, each way.

She hands the piece of paper to Hassan. Her hands are cracked and dry from washing endless rounds of dishes. Her mother had a special knack of getting everyone to help, and they all pitched in when Hana was in detention. But now that she is back home, they refuse. She winds up doing everything herself because it is easier than the endless nagging. And anyway, what else can she do, stuck at home all day, with the monitor lashed to her ankle?

“Yala, yala,” Jamal says faintly, “let’s go.” She is resigned to their adventure, but also excited at the prospect of seeing Tarek.

Hana watches as her grandmother and siblings leave. She is desperate to see her brother too but is already savouring the rare hours when she will have the apartment to herself.

The family take the #25 bus, which roars down the street, past rows of boxy apartment buildings full of multi-generational families. Half-a-century ago, these mid-rise towers were showpieces of modernist planning, but now it is as if they are going through menopause: tired, sullen, bloated, leaking.

On the right is the Catholic church, built for the Eastern Europeans who were among the first to move into the neighbourhood, who have since given way to Filipino caregivers. Out behind is a large field piled high with snow, cut through by a line of transmission towers. In the summer, the grass is flecked with yellow dandelions, so bright it’s as if they are illuminated by the electrical currents overhead.

The road loops around past the elementary school. Nahla looks out from the greasy smudges on the window and imagines she can see her class inside, fidgeting at their desks, her best friend in her pink party dress, the one with the white sash, the one she insists on wearing as often as possible. On her feet will be the hated running shoes she wears inside, which were retrieved from the lost and found, dark blue and scruffy. They were probably boys’ shoes, which squawk when the Velcro is ripped open, which is one of many reasons she loathes them.

The traffic light turns green, and the school fades from view. Nahla wonders whether she would rather be there or here, the coolness of the window against her forehead.

Across the main intersection, they pass by the high school on the left, which both Hassan and Yara attend. Flags from around the world flutter in the lobby as student lockers bang open and shut between classes, releasing the smell of warmed-up lunches and sweaty gym clothes. At the door is a security guard, who searches their bags. He smiles sometimes, but he is not friendly.

Hassan and Yara catch one another's eyes as they pull past. Both know where they would prefer to be, and it is not inside their stuffy classrooms.

Twenty minutes later and they are at the station, descending to the concourse, teasing Nahla. She had been so scared of escalators when they first arrived in Canada, so scared that she had to be carried. The rest of them had loved running up and down, bumping into people as they passed. "Sorry, sorry" they would shout, practicing their first Canadian word.

Nahla's stomach grumbles, and she pleads with her grandmother for some chocolate. At the kiosk, behind rows of confectionery and magazines is a middle-aged man, who looks not unlike their father, or what their father might have looked like had he lived another decade, cut his silver hair short, gained twenty pounds, and had his skin turn sallow.

They buy two chocolate bars, which Hassan insists on choosing. Each is split in half, although Jamal makes sure that Nahla's piece is slightly bigger. Nahla would not have chosen nuts. She likes the creamy caramel best. But her brother insists that they will fill her up. She glowers as she takes a bite, rolling her tongue over the salty lumps.

One more escalator takes them down to the platform. Their nostrils flare as they descend, filled by the tarry smell of the railroad ties.

It has been a long time since they have been out together like this, and never without their mother or Hana or Tarek. They cluster together on the platform, cutting off the path to other passengers, who swear under their breath.

Some transit police walk by and tell them to move. Then they are asked to show their ID, everyone except Nahla, who holds on to her grandmother tightly.

"Where are you going?"

Yara takes charge. "We're going to visit my older brother."

"And where is he?"

“He has his own place, across town.” Instinctively she knows that it’s better not to give them too much detail. She frowns at Nahla as if to tell her to be quiet.

They are given a caution—about what, it’s not exactly clear. “We have rules here, which need to be followed.” His tone is patronizing. Yara wants to punch him.

And the police move on.

A few minutes later the train screeches into the station. The eldest and the youngest find seats, while Yara and Hassan hold on to the rail overhead. Jamal chatters nervously to Nahla as the subway picks up speed.

A few stops later, a man with a small child gets on, pushing past, rudely telling Yara to move. People nearby turn to look. The boy, who must be about five, has wrapped himself around his father’s legs, looking out at Jamal from under his blond bangs. She keeps talking to Nahla, although she has lowered her voice. The man looks at her. “Why don’t you speak English?”

Jamal understands the meaning of his words, even though her grandchildren refuse to translate. The boy reaches out to pull at Jamal’s hijab, which hangs down, outside her winter coat, but she snaps it away from him.

“Poopy face,” he says.

The tension rises.

In a muted voice, Hassan tells them that they will get off and catch the next train. He does not want to give in, but he looks at his little sister’s anxious face and accedes.

Yara is furious. “Don’t back off. We have every right to be on here.”

“Yara, it’s not worth it. Please.”

Behind them, the subway’s high-pitched chimes sound—ding-dang-dong—to warn that the doors are closing. The man inside, his son still wrapped around his leg, has a big grin on his face as he lobs his supersize plastic cup at them. “Terrorists” he calls out.

The cup is not thrown hard. It is not meant to hit them. They watch in disbelief as the lid pops off and some of the sticky brown liquid sprays up at their ankles, while the cup rolls around in slowly decreasing half-circles. The subway pulls out of the station.

Yara shouts at the man in Arabic, shaking her fist, as the train pulls away. She can see his grinning face inside, which only enrages her further.

When it arrives, the next train will be standing-room only.

The family is exhausted by the time they get to the jail where Tarek is being held. They are too late for the 11am visiting hours, so they are made to wait until after lunch, dozing in the hard, plastic chairs of the waiting room, bathed in natural light. When their stomachs rumble, they fill them with water from the stainless-steel fountain.

Shortly after 2pm they are called to the counter. Their government ID is checked at the reception, where they are chastised for not being there at the scheduled time. But luckily there is an opening, as some other visitors have been refused entry for wearing too much perfume.

The family locks away all their personal belongings in a side room, before they approach the metal detector, and then the ion scanner which checks them for drugs.

When they finally are able to see Tarek, it is by videolink. They had no idea that after travelling all this way across town that they would only be able to see him on a screen.

They pick up the phone when Tarek's image appears before them. They have twenty minutes.

He looks wan and fragile. He might as well be half-way around the world.

He seems to barely recognize them, although of course he does.

Yara starts telling him about the subway journey, but realizes she is upsetting everyone, so she stops. Instead, they talk about the weather, and school, until Jamal starts to cry, and then they all do.

They cry so much that little more is said.

And then their time is up. They retrieve their locked-up belongings, leave the building, and brace themselves for the long journey back to the apartment. Seeing Tarek has made them even more sad, for as they tell Hana, they know now, without a doubt, that the longer that his detention continues, the less likely it is that he will ever be released.



Shortly after the visit from his family, Tarek is deported.

The Judge has refused Tarek's petition not to be returned to Syria, arguing that while it might be dangerous for Tarek, the threat to Canadian security is even greater. But Syria refuses to cooperate. At least officially. Tarek's citizenship will neither be formally acknowledged nor denied. The authorities delight in knowing that this will cause political problems for the Canadians, who are part of the coalition that has been bombing their country.

So, the Canadian border agency turns to an arrangement, off-the-books. A private fixer is hired: a smooth talker with dubious diplomatic connections who will sneak Tarek back to his country of birth. For a price. He finagles some spurious travel documents. Flights are booked: Turkish airlines have the best deals, good food options, and a cooperative government.

Tarek will be accompanied by two Canadian border officers, who will stay with him at all times. He will be wedged between them on the flight, with both his wrists handcuffed to the armrests, except for when he eats, when one hand is released, and the sole time he is allowed to go to the washroom, supervised, with the folding door left slightly open so he is always within sight.

In Istanbul, they will meet up with the fixer and catch another flight to Beirut. There they will pick up a car and a chauffeur who will drive them to the border, only a few hours away.

The fixer carries wads of cash in case he needs to bribe any officials. His briefcase is full of US dollars, and he also has thousands rolled up in his socks, which he hopes he can keep for himself.

Nothing goes quite to plan. It never does, does it? They have trouble in Istanbul and then in Beirut, but nothing like the problems at the border. The Syrian officers are immediately suspicious of this motley group, and barrage them with questions, while the face of the President looks down upon them from posters all along the wall. "Are you sure this man is Syrian? Are these documents real?" The vague replies don't help.

The fixer disappears into the crowd. The Canadians try to escape too, begging the chauffeur, promising to double his pay. Only when they have deleted all the messages from their phones do they begin to relax. They will lie low for a few days, then emerge at a four-star hotel, where they will stay for another week, bathing in the Aegean Sea, swimming in the pool, lounging in the spa. When they finally return to Canada, they will show up at work as if nothing has happened, looking rested, their bodies cleansed and tanned.

Nothing has been heard from Tarek since.



The snow on the plaza, which had been downy last week, has turned slushy, as dark grey as the wet concrete, except for the corners, where slivers of ice sparkle in the glow of the digital billboards.

A small group of activists is gathering at Dundas Square. The smell of damp wool fills the air, as they beat their mittened hands against their sides.

The police are busy checking everyone's biometric IDs. A handful of extra private security guards, hired by the property managers, are on patrol. Down the side street, just to the south of the plaza, almost out of sight, are two US Strykers, with half-a-dozen American soldiers standing-by. Combat-tested drones circle overhead: they are almost undetectable—smaller than the pigeons that strut across the square in the summer.

Ashley has arrived to cover the protests, which have only just been allowed again, and only under stringent conditions. The permit has to be applied for weeks in advance. Off-duty police need to be hired. No more than fifty people can participate. And any contravention of these rules is now a criminal offence.

Her body is wrapped in a full-length, plum parka, filled with real poultry down, and a coyote-fur trim. She blows on the tips of her leather gloves and bounces on the heels of her insulated boots, as she looks longingly across the street at the mall where Spring fashions are already on display.

Eddie catches sight of her as she walks towards the mall. She wants to buy a new blouse for her trip to Ottawa in a few weeks. She hadn't expected to encounter protesters, and certainly not to bump into Ashley.

"More fake news?"

Ashley turns. "Huh?" At first she can't quite place her. Then it all comes back. This is Jared's colleague whom she interviewed last summer—the interview that launched her career.

Eddie doesn't hold back. "You set me up deliberately, didn't you?"

Ashley is coy. "I really don't know what you mean."

"Our interview. It was edited. Everything I said was completely altered. You made me sound like an asshole."

"Of course it was edited. We couldn't possibly run the full interview on prime time. I thought you knew that in advance."

“I had no idea that you would twist the meaning of everything I told you.”

“Look, I didn’t make anything up. You said what you said.”

“But—” Before Edie can say anything else, she is interrupted by the activists, who are blowing air horns, ringing cowbells, and shouting as they raise their placards in the air.

*Stop the deportations!
Bring back Tarek!
Keep the refugees. Deport the racists!*

At 1pm exactly, thirty-two people march into the busy intersection. The thick lunch-time traffic is stopped in all four directions. They have been allocated fifteen minutes.

The police start counting.

0:23. The chanting begins.

3:15. Brief speeches are made.

6:38: *What do we want? Justice! When do we want it? Now!*

9:27. Cars honk. “Get out of the way assholes!”

11:54. The phalanx tightens. People shout.

13:47. Feet stomp. “Fucking idiots.”

14:53. Hands on guns. And then, at the last second, the protesters disperse.

Edie only stays to watch the first few minutes. While she is sympathetic, she is in a rush, so she sneaks to finish her shopping. She is meeting Samir later and doesn’t want to be late. They don’t need yet another thing to argue about.

When Ashley next turns around, Marco has stepped into Edie’s place.

“Hey. What are you doing here?”

“Same thing as you. Covering the protests.”

“It’s all been pretty contained, don’t you think? The police have done a great job of keeping us safe.”

“Safe. From what? What do we need protection from?”

“From the protesters, obviously. They are so annoying. And angry. Who knows what they might do?”

“Not everyone feels safer when the police are around.”

Ashley shrugs. “Whatever. But I do. I feel safer. And the police have a responsibility to me too you know.” She stamps her feet a little, to keep them warm, and to hurry the conversation along.

“Sure. But you’re not the only one entitled to feel safe.”

“It’s not just about me. It’s about protecting our freedom.”

“What freedom?”

“Freedom from disruptions. People just want to get on with their lives.”

“Get on with their lies, you mean.” Marco says under his breath.

“Hmm? What?”

“Never mind.”

Ashley gestures to the motley group of activists. “What’s with all these hokey protests anyway? It’s not the Sixties anymore.”

“Aren’t you curious about the issues that they are raising?”

“Not really. They are just a bunch of sanctimonious losers who having nothing better to do than complain.”

“They are exerting their Constitutional rights!”

“If they want real change, they should vote. That’s what a democracy is all about.”

“What does voting have to do with anything? We were talking about protests—the right to protest.” Marco throws up his arms in frustration again. “Peaceful assembly is a Constitutional right. The freedom to associate is a Constitutional right. There’s nothing in the Constitution about freedom from disruption, or freedom to shop.”

“Economic freedom. So important. It should be in there.”

“So, being able to shop is your idea of freedom?”

“Sure. It’s about having choices. It’s about economic security. The police and military are doing a great job to ensure our freedoms.”

“But at what cost?”

“Cost doesn’t matter. You can’t put a price on safety.”

“I don’t mean economic cost...”

“As a woman, I can tell you that making the streets safe is hugely important.” She looks him up and down. “It’s not all about people like you.”

“People like me?”

“Yes, you’re a man. What about my rights as a woman? I have rights too. But I suppose you can’t possibly understand what I mean.”

Marco has had enough. “I think we are done here.”



From where Marco is lying across the bed, he can see a long line of houses, much like the one in which he lives, all of which have been converted into apartments or rooming houses. Dotted around the edges of the neighbourhood are medium- and high-rise tower blocks that stand like ramparts. These buildings popped up decades ago, after the expressway cut off this west-end neighbourhood from the lake, and the wealthy families decamped to other parts of the city.

The sheets are tucked in where Benjie has not been sleeping. On nights such as this, when his boyfriend is working, Marco tosses and turns against the empty space beside him, worn out before he even opens his eyes.

The room is alight from the reflection of the new snow outside, which blankets the angled roofs. Marco reaches out to touch the wall and the cold seeps through the brick and plaster. He should have moved the avocado plant away from the window last night. A few yellowed leaves have fallen to the floor.

The pipes clank as the old furnace pumps hot water through the radiators. He can hear his new neighbour upstairs thumping around, opening and shutting cupboard doors, as if making noise will make him feel less lonely. He moved in a few weeks ago. Marco wonders if he is either homophobic or racist, like the last tenant, who was both.

Outside the house is the car that was parked there yesterday. Marco didn't notice it then, nor does he today as he leaves for work. The car is ordinary enough: a silver Honda Civic. The man inside is also non-descript in his civvies. The only thing that might give him away is his keychain, swinging out-of-sight below the steering wheel, bearing the agency emblem of blue palisade, red maple leaf, and gold crown.

On his way to the streetcar, Marco walks along the main street, tightening his shoulders against the cold. It is still early. The stores have not yet opened for the day. Most are still family-owned, but some have recently given way to art galleries. A few hipster coffee shops have opened. So has a new tattoo parlour. Next will be a yoga studio. As soon as the vegan café opens it will be game over for the neighbourhood.

Over the next few months, sessions of the Royal Commission will be held across the country, but most of the public proceedings will take place in the Toronto hotel ballroom that Marco has just entered. Rows upon rows of stackable metal chairs have been set out in anticipation, under cut-glass crystals that hang from the gaudy chandeliers. A few of the lights flicker, enough to give one a headache.

Marco sits on his own. He knows quite a few of the reporters in attendance, and while they nod their heads in recognition, they keep their distance. One of Marco's recent columns had caused quite a stir: it criticized the political appointments of the Commission's two Co-Chairs.

The first of them is George Oakes, a semi-retired Mohawk lawyer, originally from the border community of Akwesasne, where most of his extended family still live, although he has moved out to the west coast, where he has been working on treaty negotiations. At least he has some personal investment in border issues. And he seems jovial enough, with laughing eyes.

The second Co-Chair is Professor Emeritus Jean-Charles Langlois, who retired some years ago from one of the Quebec universities. He is the author of a riveting book on Confederation, no small feat in and of itself. It was written forty years ago, and hasn't aged well, but he won't hesitate to remind you of its historic importance. He is an old-hand at federal appointments, and glides easily into his new role.

Marco scans the room, bouncing his feet, struggling to stay awake as the speakers drone on. Very few others in the audience are paying attention either. Except for one young woman at the back of the room. She stands out against the crowd of dark suits in her mauve headscarf, and long grey cardigan. She is almost still except for her eyes, which skip from face to face.

Yara is an expert at waiting. Every day she is told to hurry up and wait: at government offices, in line at the food bank, for the bus, for the snow to thaw, for visas for their extended family, to hear any news about her brother, Tarek.

Marco is intrigued. *Who is she? Why is she here?* He will soon find out.



The border services agency is the first to give testimony at the Royal Commission. Two spokesmen have arrived, as if out of central casting. Imagine any generic looking security officer, in a navy-blue uniform, with cropped hair and heavy boots. Then imagine two of them. That's who sits down at the oblong table, directly across from the Co-Chairs, their assistants, and the lawyers who will be asking the questions.

The first thing they are asked is about the history of border preclearance. "It all started back in the 1950s, when an informal arrangement was negotiated with the airlines. This was formalized in the 1970s with a bilateral agreement, and there have been a few updates since then."

"And why was it introduced?"

"Going through US customs in Canada means you don't have to when you arrive in the US."

"And why is that important?"

"Because it saves time once you arrive. You can get right to work or start your holidays immediately. And, if you are catching a connecting flight, there are no delays."

The second officer jumps in. "And it means that travellers have more options: you aren't limited to international airport with their own customs facilities. You can fly directly to any domestic airport in the US."

"So it's about convenience. Anything else?"

"The arrangement has been really important to keeping the border open, which is crucial for the Canadian economy."

"How so?"

"It's an important security measure for the Americans. They can stop any suspect travellers *before* they get on a flight."

"Oh, I see. Security helps the economy run smoothly."

"Exactly."

"And now customs preclearance has been expanded—so it's not only at airports, right?"

"Yes. We have preclearance facilities at train stations, bus stations and even ferries."

The questioner scrunches up his eyes with concern. “And should we be worried about the proliferation of US officers in Canada?”

“No. They are there for our security. Threats do not only exist at airports: as we learned from the Union Station event.”

“Sure. But airports tend to be isolated, out in the suburbs. Isn’t it a different situation when you are in a downtown transit hub, with lots of people around? Aren’t these spaces more volatile?”

“Yes, but I would argue that it is precisely for this reason—because of the volatility—that there should be—in fact, needs to be—additional security on site.”

“Right. So,” he says, looking down at his notes, “preclearance sounds like an excellent arrangement. But if there are so many benefits, why doesn’t Canada have a similar program in the US?”

“That’s a great question.” He looks over at his colleague, who shrugs his shoulders. “But we don’t know the answer.”

“But even more collaboration is planned, isn’t it? Like at Sarnia-Port Huron?”

“Yes, sir. That will be a wonderful bilateral facility, with state-of-the art technology, and US preclearance—all on the Canadian side of the border.”

“And it’s nearly finished?”

“Yes, the detention facilities have just been completed. They should be operational soon.”

“And they will hold up to 500 people? Correct?”

“Yes. And they are absolutely needed. The number of suspicious people who present at the border has skyrocketed.”

“That’s definitely concerning. Thank you for all your work on keeping the border secure. And congratulations on the new facilities at Sarnia-Port Huron. Ok, let’s break for lunch.”

Yara is already pulling some food out of her school bag when Marco approaches. On her lap she balances a plastic container of rice and chickpeas, pita bread and cucumber.

She has been attending the Royal Commission as much as possible, but that means usually only once a week, sometimes twice. She can’t afford the transit fare to come more often. And it also means skipping classes.

At first, Yara is surprised at how boring much of it is. In that sense it's not much different from school, but at least she has made a decision to be here. And what does she care about her studies? The teachers have already decided that she won't get very far, although of all her family, she is the one who loves learning the most.

When Marco asks if he can sit down beside her, she nods, putting her hand up to her mouth. She has become shy about her teeth. Marco's are white and straight, thanks to years of free dental care. Hers are uneven and brownish, stained from her years in the refugee camp.

Marco has a plain ham and cheese sandwich with him—*why ham today?*—and an apple, cored and cut into quarters.

“What are you doing here?” he asks.

“School project,” she answers, before she even knows what she is saying. “On the role of government in Canada. I want to learn more about how the system works.”

“Or doesn't work” says Marco wryly.

Yara looks at him quizzically, but she knows immediately that she likes this man. “Law, order and good government. That's the Canadian way, isn't it?”

Marco groans. “You won't find much good government here.”

“No? Not even with this Commission?”

“Especially not the Commission!” *What are they teaching them in school these days?* “They pretend that inquiries will fix things, but they only ever lead to compromises, masked as solutions.”

“Compromise—that's what Canada is known for, isn't it? Finding the middle ground. Right?” She is teasing him, although she is not sure if he realizes it yet.

“Sure,” he says, “Canada likes steering a middle course: taking the middle ground, acting as a middle power, playing both ends against the middle, being middlebrow. But you know what they say? Being at the middle-of-the-road means that you can be hit by cars coming from both directions.”

“Ha. I hadn't heard that.” Yara looks at him with a big grin, keeping her mouth closed. He is treating her like any other grown-up. She is going to learn a lot.

Marco is intrigued. *Who is this young woman? And why is she here?* She offers nothing that would help him place her. He can't even figure out how old she is but guesses anywhere between 18 and 28. Is she at university? The book in her bag looks more like a high school text, thick and battered, but it's hard to tell.

He is about to ask her a question about her background but she jumps in first. “Are you from Toronto?” she asks.

“Yup. I was born here. I grew up here,” he says sheepishly, as if this might be a problem.

“Oh. And your parents?” she asks.

“My parents immigrated in the mid-1970s.”

“Where are they from?”

“Ecuador.”

“You don’t look like you’re from Ecuador.”

“What do you mean?”

“Your skin is black.”

“And Ecuadorians don’t have black skin?”

“I’ve never met an Ecuadorian before.”

“Well, there is a whole mix: Black, Indigenous, Spanish...”

“And you?”

“All of the above,” he laughs, “my dad is Black, and my mom is a mix of Inca and Spanish.”

Yara is thoughtful. “Was it easy for your parents to immigrate back then?” She is thinking of all the people she knows who would like to join them in Canada but who can’t get visas.

“Yeah, pretty easy, I think. They arrived as tourists, found jobs, filled in some forms, and that was it. Some of their friends did the same thing. They knew what they were doing at the time, but they didn’t really plan it either.”

“And they liked it here?”

“They were young. And they found work. It was also pretty quiet. So it was better than back home at the time. And then my brothers were born here, and that was that. By the time I came along, the decision to stay had already long been made.”

“Are you glad they stayed?”

“Sure. It’s all I know. But it hasn’t always been easy.”

Yara is pensive. “Have you ever thought of going back to El Salva...?”

“Ecuador,” he corrects her. “It wouldn’t really be going back for me since I was born here.”
Yara is quiet.

Marco continues, worried that he might have sounded too curt. “It’s not like I haven’t thought about it. It’s a beautiful country: the mountains, the beaches, the fun. But I grew up here. There, I would be an outsider. What would I do?”

Yara plucks at pieces of sticky rice on her polyester trousers. She wonders whether Marco also feels like an outsider here, but she is too shy to ask. It seems too personal. And she doesn’t want him to ask her the same question. She wouldn’t know how to reply. That’s not true. She knows what she would say. But it might be too much for a first meeting.

Instead, she asks him where all the others have gone. The room is almost empty.

Marco tells her that they are eating lunch somewhere fancy, with linen tablecloths and leather banquettes, crystal glasses and silver cutlery. “They have steaks almost two inches thick,” he pinches his thumb and forefinger to show her. “With Japanese knives that can cut through meat like hummus. A ruby red bottle will be chosen from the wine cellar.” He holds out his hand as if he is pinching the stem of a glass, swirling a small amount of liquid inside. “Dishes will be brought to the table stacked high with organic vegetables, arranged architecturally into a tower, and garnished with fresh herbs,” he balances an invisible plate in front of him. “More glasses of wine will be poured—maybe another bottle will be ordered. And then” he says dramatically, “and then, for dessert, they will enjoy a strawberry simulacrum composed of a strawberry macaroon, strawberry tuile, strawberry ice cream, in a pool of strawberry coulis, but not a single fresh strawberry.”

Yara has no idea what some of these words mean, but she gets the picture. They are spending a lot of money on themselves. “Wow. You must go to these kinds of places often.” She pulls an orange out of her bag and digs into the tough white pith, with a thumbnail thick with hot pink polish. She pulls at a segment until it is released, and pops it into her mouth. The smell of citrus hangs in the air, as juice dribbles down her wrist.

“No. Never. I never go to places like that.”

“Why not?”

“Can’t afford it. I am only imagining what they are like.”

“You have a vivid imagination.”

“Perhaps. But no corporate account. These kinds of places are not for people like us.”

It has not gone unnoticed to Yara that Marco has said ‘us.’ She will turn the word over and over on her way home, relishing in what it means to have a new friend. But for now, her thoughts are

focused on those who have left the room. Who are these people who can talk about trade and detention all morning and then spend hundreds of dollars on lunch? She thinks that she knows everything about them that she wants to know.

After lunch, people trickle back into the room, lethargic. Some have large snowflakes in their hair that have not yet melted. They squeeze themselves into chairs, which have shrunk since the morning, rubbing at their distended bellies.

“Let’s turn to the events on the evening of Saturday June 30, 2023. We know that a US customs officer shot into the crowd at Union Station. What do we know about him?”

“Not too much. He was an experienced officer, who usually worked at the US-Mexico border. He was on temporary re-assignment in Toronto.”

“Re-assignment? Why?”

“There was an incident in El Paso. He shot and killed a teenager, firing across the concrete culvert. He was in the US; the kid was in Mexico. The courts ruled that the officer couldn’t be held accountable, because, while he was in the US, his victim was outside the country, and beyond their jurisdiction. The Mexicans were furious. So, it was decided to relocate him for a while, at least until tensions calmed.”

“So, effectively, being re-assigned to Toronto was his punishment?”

“Well, I wouldn’t call it punishment,” replies the second officer, emboldened by the wine at lunch. “He was working at a brand-new, top-of-the-line border facility at Union Station, right in the heart of the city. It seems more like a promotion to me.” He grins. “And anyway, it was only temporary. His family stayed back in El Paso.”

“And he is back there now?” asks the lawyer.

“Yes, we believe he has gone home, and is back at his old job.”

“Hmm. We might come back to him. But first, is it true that under the new preclearance agreement the US customs officers have more expansive powers while they’re in Canada?”

“Yes, that’s right. They can perform strip searches, detain travellers, carry weapons...”

“Right. Weapons. And what does the legislation say about the use of force?”

“The 2016 Preclearance Act is very clear. I’ll read out the relevant statement—for your reference, it’s article 16(1):

A preclearance officer is, if they act on reasonable grounds, justified in doing what they are required or authorized to do under this Act and in using as much force as is necessary for that purpose.²”

“So they are explicitly *justified* in using force?”

“Yes. *As much force as necessary.*”

“But only if there are ‘reasonable grounds,’ right?”

“Yes. That’s what the legislation states.”

“Who gets to decide what is ‘reasonable?’”

“I suppose that is a matter for the courts.”

“But the US officers aren’t making themselves available to our courts.”

“True. But that’s also in keeping with the terms of the agreement.” The officer taps the table for emphasis. “Under the Preclearance Act, the Americans are encouraged, but not required, to participate in our investigations.”

Marco is pleased that some of the core problems with customs preclearance are emerging. Use of force. Powers of detention. Overlapping jurisdictional authority. Failures of accountability.

If only the Co-Chairs were listening! They are dozing. Not uncommon for men their age, especially after such a generous lunch. They each have perfected their own style. Oakes has folded his head over his elbows, which rest on the table, his head slightly turned from the speakers. You could be forgiven for thinking he is deep in thought, except when he startles himself awake. Whereas Langlois sits up straight, but lets his head drift to his chest, closing his eyes hidden behind his bifocals, which slide down the bump on his nose. A soft snore, more like a wheeze, can be heard.

The second officer interjects: “Homeland Security has promised they will undertake a review.”

“But more than six months have passed, and no review has been initiated, isn’t that right?”

“Yes. That is correct.”

“And what about the terrorist allegations? There was that young man who was deported. What’s his name?” He looks down, ruffling through his notes. “Uh, yes, Al-Khalifa. Mr. Tarek Al-Khalifa. Evidence against him must have been tested in courts. Right?”

“We really can’t comment on that. It’s not our area of responsibility. You should ask the police.”

² Preclearance Act, 2016. Government of Canada, Justice Laws Website. <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/P-19.32/FullText.html>

“We will. We will be speaking to them next.”



Yara leaves home early, before her sister can ask any questions. She resents the way that Hana is smothering her. She turned 18 a month ago—isn't she officially an adult now?

Being early means that she has time to spare when she gets off the subway, exiting into the Eaton Centre. She makes her way through to the atrium, where she sits down on a bench by the marble fountain. Water bubbles out of the spouts until the basin is full, and then stops. Everything is still for a minute, and then the water drains away with a huge sucking sound, until all that is left behind are wet coins and soggy wishes. Just when you think it is broken, columns of water shoot into the air, reaching up to the third floor, before the whole cycle begins anew.

Other than the fountain, which she loves, Yara hates the mall, and all the shops that seduce people into buying things that they don't need, and that she can't afford.

This early in the morning, the international, name-brand stores are closed, with grilles pulled down over their window displays. Only the cobbler and coffee stall are open. A few guards keep watch from the new security booth. *Wait—are they looking at me?* Yara gets up to leave.

Outside, she pulls a woolen scarf more tightly around her neck. The bells on the clock tower of the Old City Hall strike nine. Rounding the corner, she comes face-to-face with the cenotaph dedicated to soldiers killed in action: "To the glorious dead."

What is glorious about death? Yara thinks of her father, her mother, and maybe of Tarek.

As she stands there, in front of a small patch of grass covered in frost, she is stopped by two police officers, who ask her for her ID. Reaching into her purse, she grabs her wallet, where the new card is visible in the plastic insert. But they want it in their hands. So she removes one glove and pries it out of its tight casing. It is swiped through the hand-held machine, as if she is making a payment. "Hmm," he says, frowning, before he hands the card back.

Do they already have information on her? On her family? Will they contact her sister? She will be in a lot of trouble if they do. The officers let her go, but she is shaken. *Why me?*

When Yara arrives at the conference room, Marco is already there, looking around for her. The Royal Commission is so much more fun when she attends. She is curious about everything, says what she thinks, and makes him laugh. She is different from everyone else he knows.

Yara tells him about the mall security and about being stopped. He frowns. “The police are out of control these days,” he says.

Yara nods. She wants to hear more of what he has to say, but the session is about to begin.

“Good morning, everyone. Let’s get started. Today we will be continuing our inquiry into the use of force at the Union Station preclearance facilities. We will be speaking to the police about their investigations into the terrorist attack being planned. We’ll begin with a summary of the evidence retrieved from the Al-Khalifa apartment. Officer, could you please tell the Royal Commission what you found?”

“Sir, we have collected a considerable amount of hard evidence: two 9-volt batteries; several bottles of nail polish; and three lengths of water pipe.”

“Yes, yes we have heard about all of this,” the Commission’s lawyer replies dismissively. “To be honest, none of this seems particularly incriminating.”

The policeman continues. “Perhaps not on its own. But I can now reveal that there was other derogatory information at the apartment, including maps and blueprints for Union Station and an essay on foreign fighters and citizenship revocation.”

“Ok. This is starting to add up. Anything else?”

“We confiscated an old computer. There were many, many searches on it about the civil war in Syria, as well as the Russians, and the Chinese. And searches for flights to Lebanon. Travelling abroad to engage in terrorist activities is a crime under Canadian law. This is a serious concern.”

“Was a flight booked?”

“No, but we can surmise that some travel was being planned.”

“Ok, I see. Yes, this is concerning.”

“And, if I may, it was also suspicious that there was only one computer. How could a family of seven have only one old computer in this day and age?”

“Good point,” he is told. “Surely they are hiding something. We will keep this in mind.”

On the days when she is able to attend, Marco and Yara make a point of having lunch together. They talk about the inquiry, and Marco fills her in on what she has missed.

Meeting Marco has been the best part of attending the Commission. Yara might have stopped going if it weren't for him. She is delighted by her smart, new friend—a friend whom she has all to herself. She has never thought about friends in this way before: as someone you would keep from your family. The secrecy excites her.

But today Yara can barely eat. She is furious.

“What is it?” asks Marco. “Are you still pissed off about the police stop? Racial profiling is their speciality—you should know that!”

“It's not that,” she replies. “Or that's just one part of it. Did you hear what that police officer said: only one computer? How can these people use our family's poverty against us? And is that all they have on us? A few household items?”

“Us?” asks Marco. “Us?”

Until now, Yara has said nothing about her personal connections to the inquiry. She has told Marco about her arrival in Canada, and a bit about her family, but much of it has been vague. She hasn't lied to him; she just hasn't been very forthcoming.

The whole story comes spilling out. The death of her mother. Tarek's deportation. Her sister's house arrest. Hassan's trouble at school. Nahla's overeating. That her grandmother barely leaves the couch and seems to be losing her mind.

Marco has always suspected that there were things that she was not saying. *All in good time*, he had told himself. But this is not what he had expected. *Why didn't you tell me?* He is angry and hurt, even though he sees how upset she is. “Let's go talk outside.” There are not many people remaining in the room, but still.

The outside air is bracing. “The evidence is all circumstantial,” he tries to reassure her.

“Exactly. And yet my mother is dead. My brother has been deported.” When she is nervous, she pulls at the joints in her fingers. *Crack*.

“I was at the protests few weeks ago, but I didn't know they were about your brother.” Marco still can't quite get his head around what he has learnt. “He was deported on the grounds of national security—is that right?”

“Yes.”

“And you don't think that that he was involved in anything criminal?”

Yara shoots him a withering look.

“Yara, I'm sorry, I have to ask these questions. That's my job. I believe you, but I still have to ask.”

“Fine,” she says, although it’s not really fine at all. “Fine” she repeats, as if saying the word twice will make things ok. “No. He was not. Absolutely, not.”

“I can’t believe that this story hasn’t received more attention. Why hasn’t there been a public outcry?”

“You tell me. This is *your* country.” *Crack.*

The comment stings.

Yara continues. “They will do anything to keep us in our place. They want to crush us to keep us quiet.”

“Yup, you’re right, they do. But I’ll bet most of the time they don’t think of *us* at all.” Marco stresses the word *us*, trying to reassure Yara whose side he is on.

Crack. Crack. Crack.

“Let’s continue. What other evidence do you have?”

“Thank you, sir. The next thing I will mention is the information that was found on Mr. Tarek Al-Khalifa when he was detained by the US officers at Union Station: a handwritten saying in Arabic; a pack of matches from a shisha lounge; and a receipt for money paid to the mosque.”

“And what do you make of these?”

“Arabic sayings are commonly found in the pockets of terrorists; shisha lounges are where conspirators meet; and the mosque money could have been a diversion for financing terrorism. All of it is incriminating.”

“Yes, indeed. This is very troubling, very troubling indeed. The evidence is certainly adding up.”

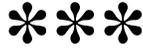
“And there is also Mr. Al-Khalifa’s phone. It contains a lot of derogatory information.”

“And how did you get access to his phone?”

“It wasn’t us. We were provided the information by the federal police.”

“And how did they get access?”

“You will need to ask them.”



Yara teases Marco about the notes he is taking. “Are you going to write about me and my family?” It has taken some time, but they have returned to their playful banter.

“There is a story here, yes. But these are background notes for my own purposes. I would never exploit you like that.” Marco reaches into his bag for his lunch. “Hey, aren’t you eating?”

“No. It’s Ramadan. But you go ahead.”

Marco stops fumbling. “No, it’s alright, I’m not really hungry.”

“Are you sure?” she asks him teasingly.

“Yes. I had a big breakfast,” and even as he says it, he wonders if that was the right thing to say. *Has she eaten at all?* He needs to brush up on his knowledge of Islam.

Yara shakes her head laughing. “It’s ok, you know. You don’t have to hide your food. Anyway, what were we talking about? Oh yeah. What if I ask you to write a big story on my family?”

“Ha. Really?”

“Yes. People need to know what has happened.”

“Yes, they do. But are you sure that I am the right person?”

“Why wouldn’t you be?”

“Don’t you think that you need to find someone more like you?”

“You mean, a terrorist?” She raises her eyebrows.

“No, silly.”

“You mean: a refugee, a Muslim, and maybe even someone from Syria?”

“Yup, that’s pretty much what I mean.”

“You mean someone with skin more like mine.” She doesn’t try to mince words or look to find his approval. She just says it.

“Yes,” he jokes, “because my skin is far too dark.” He holds his forearm out against hers.

She laughs, but then is serious. “Because only someone like me would understand? Because only someone like me can truly tell my story?”

“Exactly.”

“But isn’t that just another way of keeping us in our place—of saying that our story is only understandable to people who are similar to us? Shouldn’t others have to take responsibility for dealing with what is going on?”

“Hmm. I hadn’t thought of it that way. I was thinking that someone more like you would be more familiar with your experience.”

“Maybe.” She pauses. “But you more know about the problems that we have faced than anyone else. And anyway,” she pauses again as she watches him think. “Isn’t writing about opening yourself to the world? About engaging with and learning about people who are not like you?”

Marco is pensive. *How did she get so smart?* He looks over at her, her school bag open at her feet, with her high school textbooks poking out.

And what if,” Yara continues, “what if it’s you who I want to tell our story? What if I think you are the best person to do it?”

The public relations officer sent by the federal police takes her place, tapping the printed notes that she holds in her hand, so that the edges are flush, and then lines them up on the table. Above the neat stack of paper, she places two ballpoint pens, one in blue ink and one in black, evenly spaced as if ruler marks had been etched into the wood.

“Thank you for coming today. We understand that your agency was responsible for the Al-Khalifa investigation.”

“Yes, that’s right. When it became clear that this was a matter to do with terrorism, our agency took over, working closely with the other agencies, including the Americans.”

Yara studies the woman, looking for signs that might reveal some of her character. She is stocky, with her jacket pulled tightly across her breasts, tugging at the brass buttons. There is a scratch down her cheek, a burn mark on her hand. Yara imagines that she lives alone with her cats, eating re-heated, take-away meals while distracted by the TV. She will never know if she is right, but that’s not the point.

“Is this kind of cross-border cooperation unusual?” the lawyer asks.

“Not at all. We cooperate extensively on border issues.”

“As with customs preclearance?”

“Yes, but that’s just one part of it. There’s all kinds of information sharing between us—for example, the biometric data we collect on immigrants and refugees, and our no-fly lists.”

“And the deliverables?”

“Efficiencies. Cost-savings. Security.” She lists them all from memory, in a sing-song voice.

“I suppose that this kind of collaboration is especially important when there is a security threat. Is that right?”

“Absolutely. Especially when it comes to terrorism.”

Marco comments under his breath. “This is all a bunch of bullshit. What terrorism? The only terrorists in this country are the Americans.” Yara glances at him nervously. She might think something like this but she would never say it out loud, even in a whisper, even to Marco, and certainly not here in this crowded room.

The lawyer continues. “And we know that there are threats of terrorism, right? Experts have affirmed this.”

“Yes, sir. As we’ve heard the experts say over and over in the media this past year, the threat of terrorism at the border is high. Particularly from some groups of recent immigrants. Hence, the need to work together has never been greater.” She touches one of the pens in front of her, adjusting it by a few micrometers, as if it had been trying to escape.

“Let’s turn to the shooting at Union Station on June 30, 2023. We’ve heard evidence that there was a clear and imminent terrorist threat. Is that correct?”

“Yes. There are reasonable grounds to believe that Mr. Tarek Al-Khalifa was plotting a medium-size attack that would result in mass casualties.”

“And this was proven in court?”

“Yes, in a hearing overseen by a judge. This is all that is required when a Security Certificate has been issued for reasons of national security.”

“And what did the judge rule?”

“The Judge confirmed that there were reasonable grounds to believe that Mr. Al-Khalifa posed a potential security threat. As a result, he was ordered deported.”

Yara whispers to Marco: “So there wasn’t a full trial. This is different from a criminal case, right?”

“Yeah,” he replies. “I’ve been looking into this. When you commit a crime, you are presumed to be innocent, and the court has to prove that you are guilty beyond a reasonable doubt. But not with a Security Certificate: the judge only needs to believe that there are reasonable grounds that someone poses a threat.”

Yara shakes her head. “In other words, Tarek had to try to prove his innocence. Shit.”

“I’ve never heard you swear before!” Marco raises his eyebrows in surprise, but his eyes are also sparkling before he gets serious again. “But it gets worse. The accused—your brother—didn’t even know what evidence they had against him.”

“That’s ridiculous. Then how could he defend himself?”

“Exactly. He couldn’t.”

“Shit. Shit. Why didn’t my sister tell me all this?” Yara is sitting very still. Her stomach grumbles. As they turn back to the proceedings, Marco whispers again in her ear. “Last point: the government is using immigration policy as an anti-terrorism tool more and more—precisely because the threshold of proof is much, much lower.”

He pulls himself away from Yara and sits up straight so they can hear the next question.

“As we have already heard at this Royal Commission, there is ample evidence against Mr. Al-Khalifa. But we have a question that no one else has been able to answer yet,” the lawyer states, with a furrowed brow. “How did you get access to the data on Mr. Al-Khalifa’s phone?”

“It was provided to us by the Americans.”

“And how did they get access? Did they tell you?”

“No. They didn’t say. But as I’ve already mentioned, we regularly share sensitive information across the border.”

“But surely there are protocols around accessing and sharing phone data that need to be followed?”

“Yes. Absolutely. We asked some questions, but we were satisfied with their answers. Not least because the phone data confirmed the evidence we already had.”

Marco hisses “Where’s the oversight? And did you hear that? They believe the information is accurate because it confirms what they believe!”

The lawyer continues. “And this information explains why the US border officer shot into the crowd at Union Station?”

“Yes, we’re quite certain that he was responding to an imminent threat of terrorism. All the evidence points in that direction.”

“So, in other words, it has been affirmed that the US border officer had reasonable grounds to use his weapon?”

“Yes. Of course, the collateral damage was unfortunate. But our assessment is that there were reasonable grounds to believe that Mr. Al-Khalifa posed a severe risk to national security. It wouldn’t be surprising to find out that his mother was involved too.”

“That’s impossible!” Yara exclaims.

The lawyer looks up from his papers before continuing, but hearing nothing further, continues. “But this is still only speculation, right?”

“No. Not really. We have some other evidence which makes our conclusion watertight.”

“Proceed.”

“We know for a fact that Mr. Al-Khalifa was on the US terrorist watchlist. In fact, he had been for six months, going back to January 7, 2023, which is the date that his name was entered into the records. Clearly, he was already a person of suspicion.”

“Bullshit!” Yara cries out. Marco places his finger on his lips, as a few people tilt around in their chairs. There is a pause, as the lawyer gazes out at the room again. “Quiet in the audience please.” He nods at the officer to resume.

“We also know that back in January, he spent several hours at Union Station, scouting the place out. He claims that this was for a school assignment on transportation, but that seems like a bit of a stretch.”

“I see.”

“So, to summarize,” continues the officer, “it is an irrefutable fact that Mr. Al-Khalifa had been on the US national security watchlist since January 7, 2023. The preclearance officers would have known about the watchlist since they have access to these databases, thanks to our cross-border information sharing agreements. We can therefore conclude that there were reasonable grounds for the use of force by the American border patrol.”

“I see. Do you have any understanding as to why he was put on the watchlist?”

“I’m sorry, I can’t say.”

“You can’t say why he was on the list, or you can’t say how you acquired this information?”

“I’m sorry, I can’t say either way.”

“So, Tarek’s listing on the national security watchlist is really the linchpin in all this?”

“Yes, we can confirm this publicly now.”

“Thank you for your testimony. And I’d also like to thank you for the excellent work of your organization, and for your collaboration with our most important ally and neighbour to the south. Our country thanks you.”



National intelligence is the last agency to testify in Toronto. They send a man in a dark grey suit, with the agency emblem pinned to his lapel: a shiny blue palisade, red maple leaf, and gold crown.

“Thank you for your participation in this Royal Commission.”

“It is our pleasure. We are pleased to be able to cooperate fully.”

“Your agency is responsible for national security intelligence, isn’t that right?”

“Yes, although in recent years we have taken on some responsibility for policing matters too.”

“It seems that there is a lot more fruitful collaboration across all security agencies these days. That’s wonderful.”

Marco is livid. “It’s not wonderful!” he hisses. “It’s function creep, you idiot. There’s no way an intelligence agency should be involved in policing.”

A few people turn to stare as he talks to himself. *Where is Yara?* She was meant to be here today. He was looking forward to seeing her. They are now fast if incongruous friends, despite the more than dozen years that separates them, and their very different backgrounds.

But he can’t stop to think about her now. The questioning continues. “Do you also work with the American troops who are now stationed in Canada?”

“Yes, of course we do. Cooperation is crucial.”

“Can you tell us anything about it?”

“No. This is a matter of national security. I’m afraid I can’t say anything at the moment.”

“Hmm. Ok then. Let’s change tacks. Let me ask you a few questions about border collaboration.”

“Yes, absolutely. Ask us anything.” The man has his hands calmly folded on the table in front of him.

“Well, we understand that the relationship with the Americans has deepened significantly in the past few years.”

“Affirmative. We work very closely with our allies.”

“And this includes information sharing?”

“Yes. Our agencies share intelligence on a regular basis. All of this is detailed in the written report that we submitted last week.”

“Yes, but that report was confidential. I would like there to be some information presented today—for the public record.”

“I’m afraid I can’t say anything further. Our collaboration with the Americans is a matter of national security.”

“I fully understand the importance of national security. But is there nothing you can tell us publicly? How about with respect to your adherence to information-sharing protocols?”

“No. No, I’m afraid not.”

“Alright, we will review the written report again as we proceed with our deliberations. Thank you very much for your time.”

“It is my pleasure. We are pleased to be able to cooperate fully with your inquiry.”

It’s a little-known fact that the freedom of information process is slow in Canada, among the slowest in the world. It is thus many, many months before Marco’s request will be processed. When he does finally receive a copy of the report, it is heavily redacted, and not very helpful, as the cover page reveals. And obviously, the redactor was someone with a sense of humour.

February [REDACTED], 2024

Dear [REDACTED],

We are pleased to submit this report to the Royal Commission on Canada-US Border Preclearance. This report contains detailed findings on cross-border information sharing between Canadian and American border security agencies. Some of the key facts that are included are:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

This information has been crucial to verify that [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

As a result, we will [REDACTED]

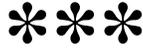
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

I hope this helps.

Yours sincerely,

[REDACTED]



“I can’t believe you have been skipping class. Why?” Hana is shouting at her sister. Here she is, stuck at home, unable to go to school, get a job, or plan for the future, and Yara, who can do all these things, is throwing everything away.

All day Hana has been getting things ready so that they can eat once the sun has gone down. Her fingers are stinging from chopping onions and lemons. More and more her hands are becoming like her mother’s, their blue veins popping.

Her memories of her mother have softened, but now there is the pain of forgetting. On the few occasions that she goes out, she aches when she catches sight of someone who reminds her of her mother. The angle of her shoulder. The line of her nose. The way she swings her arms.

But what is worse is that Tarek doesn’t appear to her at all. Does this mean that he is still alive somewhere? Or only that he is gone forever, and that she is forgetting him?

Hana spends every spare minute on WhatsApp connecting with family and friends in Syria to see if there is any news. She is businesslike and efficient, but cries after every call. She has found out nothing except for empty rumours and false leads.

At home, she can barely mention her brother’s name out loud. It feels too intimate. His absence is too great. Not knowing what has happened to him makes her fear the worst: is he dead, or being tortured somewhere? What would be worse?

“Why?” Hana shouts at her again.

Yara glares back. “Because the inquiry is important. It’s all about us. Our family. And anyway, it’s a way better education than anything my teachers have to offer.”

“Don’t be disrespectful” says Hana instinctively, speaking the words her mother would have said if she were here, even though she understands Yara’s dislike.

“I hate being at school. I should get a job. We need the money.”

“You need to stay in school. So you can get a better job.”

“But I hate it. All the police in the halls, watching us...”

“Keep your head down, and they won’t bother you.”

“Tell that to Tarek. Tell that to our mother. And how about you? They don’t bother you? What have you done wrong?”

Hana reaches down to the itch the skin where her GPS monitor is strapped to her ankle. Wearing it is like wearing a hard, plastic apple. A plastic apple that gets heavier through the day. A plastic apple that needs to be recharged daily, for fear that a dead battery will summon the police. A plastic apple that vibrates whenever she steps outside of a 900m-range, cutting into her skin.

Hana knows that Yara is right. But she does not want Yara to stop going to school.

“You wouldn’t believe what they are saying about us. At the Commission. It’s horrible.”

“Like what?”

“That Tarek was a terrorist. That we are all terrorists.”

At the mention of Tarek, Hana stiffens. “That’s ridiculous. Why would they do that?”

“It solves a problem for them. It helps legitimize the presence of US border officers in Canada. It’s all about trade and the economy, you know.” As she speaks, she can hear Marco’s voice in her head.

“You really think that they would go to those extremes?”

“Yes, Hana. Without a doubt.” And Yara, who has been so tough for so many years, suddenly starts to cry. “I don’t know what to do.” It has been ages since Hana has seen her like this. Not just silent tears that squeeze out of the corners of her eyes, but deep sobs that make her nose run.

The background noise of the TV thrums from the other room. Their grandmother has not woken up, despite all the shouting and crying. It used to be that when she was awake she was chatty, but in the last several months she spends most of her day faintly snoring. At least when she snores they know she is still alive.

“You need to wait. Things will get better,” says Hana, doubtfully.

“You know that’s full of shit.”

“Yara!”

“What?”

“You don’t need to speak like that.”

“Don’t get worked up about me saying ‘shit.’ Shit is nothing. You have no idea how angry I am.”

Hana is thoughtful for a moment. “I think I do.”

“I want everyone to know what has happened to our family. I am sick of being quiet and pretending that everything is ok. Because it isn’t.”

“We just have to be patient,” says Hana, not believing her own words. *Is this what it’s like to be a mother? To hide your own feelings?* She isn’t ready for this. She never asked for this. She doesn’t want to be like this.

“I’ve asked Marco—my friend the reporter—to write a story about us. To get the word out.”

“Won’t that bring us more trouble?”

“People need to know.”

“Is he going to do it?” Hana shakes her head, uneasy about the possible attention.

“Yes. He’s working on it. But I don’t know how long it will take. He has to do it on the side. His bosses at work aren’t interested.” Marco has tried to explain to Yara that ever since the Americans have been stationed in Canada, the media has become much more cautious. It’s not that they were ordered to back down. Not directly. They didn’t need to be.

“Hana, I am fed up with waiting. Aren’t you? What are we waiting for? A future that will never come? Shit, Hana. You can sit around here and wait, but I’m not going to.”

Yara stomps off, slamming the door of her bedroom. As soon as she spits out the words she regrets them. For staying in place and waiting is all that Hana can do right now.

But then she laughs. For if she doesn’t laugh, what will she do? She will just start sobbing again, and what is the point in that?

The sound of the slammed bedroom door throbs in Hana’s head. The parakeet is squawking, still lonely in its cage. She decides that she has to get out of the apartment, and grabs one of the full baskets of dirty clothes. Laundry is her only escape.

Clunking and whirring noises run up and down through the shaft while she waits for the elevator. When the doors finally open, she has to wedge herself inside, next to three others who only grudgingly make room.

The main foyer has a marble finish, in a mottled grey-brown of moth wings that hides the wear and tear. Not so the particle-board walls that lead down to the laundry room, which are covered in smudges from dirty fingers, and indentations from where they have been banged. A scuffed carpet, which hasn’t been cleaned for months, stretches down the long corridor towards the smell of fabric softener.

In the laundry room she sets down her basket, checking the pockets of all the trousers, before throwing the clothes into the industrial-size machine. As she steps away to see if any of the dryers nearby are empty, she feels a buzzing against her ankle.

There is nothing she can do. She has stepped out of range of her monitor. The border agency will be alerted and the police will already be on their way to check up on her. Pulling open the washing machine, which rumbles slowly to a halt, she throws all the wet clothes back into the basket, which is now almost too heavy for her to carry.

Nahla has arrived home from school and is in the kitchen. Hana starts to tell her sisters what has happened, but already two officers are pushing through the front door.

They know that they can enter and search at any time. These are the conditions of her house arrest.

Hana orders Yara and Nahla into the kitchen to prepare tea and sweets, even though they themselves are fasting. They head to the kitchen, murmuring to themselves.

The police sit down on the couch across from Jamal who is startled awake. She has become more used to having the police in their apartment, but she still gets stressed when they are there, especially when they are as stern as the woman in front of her. She calls out to her granddaughters in Arabic.

“Speak English” scolds the policewoman.

The sisters bring out a few trays draped with bright cloths, and glasses of cold water with ice cubes that bob as they walk into the room. Yara had thought of spitting into the teapot, letting her saliva melt into the hot liquid. But she stopped herself at the last minute. Another time, perhaps.

“Shukran,” the policeman says, showing off the one Arabic word that he knows when Nahla places the tea in front of him. “Shukran” he says, pleased with himself.

Nahla sits down next to her grandmother, so close that their legs press together, as the child leans into her familiar smell. She screws up her eyes as she glares at the two officers.

“You should be grateful that we are not taking you back to jail,” says the policewoman, as she reaches for a piece of baklava, which she pinches between her fingers tightly, dropping chopped walnuts onto the carpet. “We can deport you at any time,” she threatens. “Any time.”

Hana sits down across from the officers and in a strained voice begins to explain what happened. She is resigned. Nahla is anxious. Jamal is confused. Yara is furious.

“What was it like in detention, Hana? Tell me.” Yara has returned with the clean laundry, and they are folding sheets together in the bedroom, as if in a dance, as they match up the corners of cloth, from end to end.

“It was exhausting.” And she had no other words, like soldiers returning from war who grow silent.

“Exhausting? How? You weren’t doing anything. All you did was sit in your cell. I don’t understand.”

Hana wonders how she can explain: what it meant to be always on alert, always vigilant against minor infractions. Being wary of her cellmates. Having too much time to think. The constant worry, about herself, about Tarek, about the rest of them. The fear of deportation. The unease of the unknown.

Yara looks at her expectantly. After a few moments, when it is clear her sister will say nothing more, Yara comments: “You’re different now, Hana. Sometimes I barely recognize you.”

Is she? In what way?

Yara is different too.



Eddie looks at the window as the plane gathers speed, shuddering down the tarmac, past the heron who stares out at the city, poised on one leg like a weathervane. Up into the air they climb, rising past the skyline of condos and bank buildings that surround the CN Tower. Down below, cars stream along the curving highways, which are elegant from up above, as if they had always been designed for an aerial view, and not for life on the ground.

The early morning flight from the island airport to Ottawa is nearly full. It almost always is, with corporate-execs and government-types on their way to the capital city for a day of meetings.

Eddie warily eyes the man next to her, his freshly-shaven skin pink and raw, as the stewardess places a coffee on his fold-out table, which sloshes in its cup when they hit turbulence. He ignores her as he scrolls through his tablet.

Pulling her suit jacket down further over her shoulder, she angles her laptop away, wedging it towards the window. Lowering the blind, she shuts out the glare of the rising sun. The chair in front of her has been reclined so that the burly man can grunt and groan in his half-sleep. Morning smells of milk and eggs seep out of the pores of the sleepy bodies around her. Someone needs to brush their teeth.

Eddie tries to focus on her presentation, which she is desperately trying to finish. She has completed some preliminary research, and what she has uncovered about the new Sarnia-Port Huron border facility is even more damning than she expected. But she hasn't found time to write it all up. Her new position in the Dean's office takes up all her time, with endless emails, reports to read, forms to sign, and back-to-back meetings. Instead, she fiddles with making some notes in a PowerPoint presentation. She will have to ad-lib the rest., for already the flight attendants are clearing up the garbage as they prepare for the descent.

Since the last time she was in Ottawa, the new rapid transit line has been finished, and Eddie climbs aboard, noting RMBK's name on every carriage. Between long blinks that are halfway to sleep, she stares out at the sprawling bedroom communities that have popped up outside the city since she was last here. Around her, passengers doze, heads lolling, fingers splayed across leather briefcases on their laps. Others are hunched over their phones, already immersed in the day's business. Only a few of them have an overnight bag, as does Eddie, which rocks at her feet with the movement of the train.

From the transit stop, it is a quick walk to the hotel. She drops off her bag at Reception before making her way to the conference room, which is already nearly full. To her left are rows upon rows of black winter overcoats, with a few bright scarves peeking out in paisley and plaid.

Across the room is a table laden with trays of rubbery *pain au chocolat*, sprinkled with icing sugar that will flutter onto your clothes, and up your sleeve. Some cold bagels, previously frozen, have been cut in half. Beside them is a solid slab of cream cheese, punctured by a few broken

plastic knives. Fanned out on a platter are two kinds of cut melon, in orange and green, that are different only in colour and not taste, accompanied by wedges of pineapple, a few grapes, and some not-quite-ripe strawberries, white around the husk.

At the far end of the table are the usual large urns of coffee. Under the spouts, brown stains seep into the cotton-and-polyester-blend tablecloth. Scattered nearby are warm plastic pods of non-dairy creamers that have yet to see a mammary. Another urn of hot water is surrounded by ripped tea sachets in bright colours, each promising a different state of wellness: relaxed, revived, renewed, restored!

Eddie grabs a lukewarm coffee, which slops in the white porcelain saucer and will later leak onto the inner thigh of her trousers. The meetings are about to begin.

As the morning sessions wind down, lunch is laid out at the back of the room, on long tables covered with buns filled with ham and cheese or roast beef, as well as hummus wraps with roasted vegetables, all covered with layers of plastic film, held together by frilly toothpicks. There are chubby bowls of pasta and quinoa salads, plates of assorted cookies, and platters of fruit for the virtuous and the constipated—travel will do that to you.

It's the kind of lunch that Eddie has picked over countless times before, in hotels just like this, designed to make you forget when and where you are. She takes a few bites, making some inane small talk with the person standing next to her. As usual, it is someone whom she doesn't find particularly interesting. She looks around the room imagining that every other conversation is sparkling, and nods at a few people she vaguely knows, from other meetings like this one. Some move their heads slightly as if they recognize her, but no one makes their way over.

Eddie is getting used to being ignored. When the television interviews were broadcast last summer, she had been considered toxic by many of her colleagues, who kept their distance. A few denounced her publicly. When she moved into the Dean's office, however, some people went out of their way to be nice to her again. She was dizzy with the double takes and U-turns. Now she no longer knows who to trust, if anyone at all.

She feels the heat rising under her chest, creeping towards her cheeks. Another hot flash. Eddie extracts herself from her conversation, so that she can retrieve her suitcase. Unlocking the door with her keycard, she steps into the standard room, with its king-sized bed. A painting is affixed to the wall above. Its abstract lines and muted colours infuriate her. It's not really art if it matches the carpet.

She lifts out the contents of her suitcase and hangs up tomorrow's clothes before making a break for it. Outside it's one of those horrible March days that is cold and dreary. Officially, it is almost Spring, but you wouldn't know it from the snow that has fallen, thick and soft all at once.

The morning's presentations had been disappointing. The first speakers were all government bureaucrats, who did nothing but toe the party line about the importance of trade and working closely with the Americans. The academic panel that came next focused on some obscure clause in a side-agreement that mattered to nobody but them.

Eddie is happy to be outside where she can clear her head. She has made her way to the canal, which is an angry blue of melting ice and snow. Sitting down on a bench for a minute, she adjusts her shoes. Her bunions are rubbing against the frozen leather. She sighs as she envisions a future of practical orthopedics.

She thinks of Samir, and how he would like it here, sitting on this bench, looking at the water, especially if it weren't so cold. He would have a few arcane facts to share. For example, the canal was built in the early 19th century as a military defence against the United States. She knows exactly what he would say. The irony is not lost on her, either. Today, security infrastructure is not about defence, but about collaboration. What a difference a couple-of-hundred years makes.

She takes a deep breath before rising to leave. It is far too cold and damp to linger long outside, and anyway, the afternoon presentations will be starting soon. She loops back towards the conference hotel, this time heading towards Parliament Hill. As she draws close, she spies a US military vehicle, with six men in uniforms nearby, and two German Shepherds on long leads.

A checkpoint has been set up with temporary bollards. Pedestrians are being stopped and asked for their ID. Some vehicles are waived through, but others are stopped and searched thoroughly.

Eddie sucks in her breath in surprise. In Toronto, she has almost stopped seeing the troops, mainly by avoiding the streets where she knows that they patrol. It's funny how quickly she has become used to them. (Not ha ha funny.) But here in Ottawa the presence of the Americans is jarring, and not only because they are controlling access to the Parliament buildings, although that is a big part of it.

Changing course, she ducks down the pedestrian-only street which is dotted with yellow caution signs warning of falling ice, signs that are as common here in winter as umbrellas are in spring. Outside the Valour building is a contingent of US soldiers, standing beneath a row of stars and stripes that hang from the flagpoles—this must be where they have set up their local headquarters. They eye her as she passes.

Eddie scampers quickly back to the hotel, fingers tingling from the cold. She needn't have hurried. The afternoon's presentations are much like the morning's. The only surprise comes with the closing plenary. The Indigenous leader who had been invited has had to bow out and has sent his young niece in his stead. Eddie had expected a repetition of the morning, with the hand-picked presenters echoing government policy. In fact, she had planned to sneak out, to get some work done before the evening's reception, but she mistimed her exit and got stuck in place. But she is glad she stayed.

The young woman is fierce. She does not mince words. The country is built on theft. The government is corrupt. Businesses are extractive and exploitative. The population is ignorant and compliant. She looks out onto the audience. “And you do nothing about ongoing colonialism. I am talking to you, to each of you in this room. Each and every one of you is the problem,” she says, looking Edie straight in the eye. And with that she walks out of the room.

Edie is buzzing. The reception is not. It is as if the last plenary had never happened.

By the time she has picked up her third glass of wine, Edie’s zeal has also dulled. She joins a rowdy group in the corner, where a man from the United Arab Emirates is regaling them with stories about the customs preclearance facility that he oversees in Abu Dhabi. She listens attentively. It could be important for her book. It doesn’t hurt that he is charming.

There is some talk of dinner, but no one takes charge, and then someone orders another round, and no one can find the energy to leave. Edie is peckish, but also bloated from the hors-d’oeuvres at the reception, with their international selection of cooked dough: spinach quiches; beef wellington; spring rolls; veggie samosas; chicken empanadas; mushroom strudel; smoked salmon pinwheels.

She should really go back to her room to prepare her talk for tomorrow. But realistically, if she were going to go, that decision should have been made at least one glass of wine ago. And she is enjoying herself now, with all the chit-chat, although a few of her comments have made people uncomfortable. Maybe that’s all part of the fun.

“Where is the critical research at this workshop?” Edie asks the group.

“Critical, like critical infrastructure?” Someone replies.

Edie shakes her head. *No, not like critical infrastructure.* That’s a term used to designate national security projects, which are protected under the Anti-terrorism Act. And as she will explain in her presentation tomorrow, critical infrastructure is part of the problem. She sighs again.

The group is quickly shrinking. Her new friend from the Emirates has left, pleading jet lag. With him gone, Edie prepares to leave, until a group moves over to the hotel bar, and she follows out of habit, never wanting to miss out.

There is no way that she would get any work done now anyway. All she would do is scroll through all the email lists to which she subscribes, or the social media feeds, or the many video streaming platforms that she pays for. *I am no longer a subject, I am a subscriber.*

Before she knows it, there are just two of them left, Edie and another woman, who oversees border preclearance at Calgary’s international airport. The stories that she tells are funny, and they laugh together at the tales of traveller mishaps.

For the first time in a long time, Edie relaxes. And then, as she has done countless times before, she places her hand on the knee of the person with whom she is sitting as she gets up to go to the bathroom. Let's see how her new friend responds.

Another whiskey is on the table when Edie returns. "Last one," they say to each other, clinking glasses.

Edie wonders whether or not she is slurring. (She is.) The drinks are thickening her tongue. Her cheeks are growing heavy. She is trying to recapture the warm glow of several hours ago—as if that feeling could be preserved, like a wet specimen in a jar.

The staff begin to spray disinfectant onto the tables all around them, which burns their nostrils. The bar is closing. It is still early. But this is Ottawa. The capital always shuts down early.

The women stumble towards the elevator, and they reach out to push the same button. Their rooms are on the same floor. A coincidence, or a sign?

Inside the elevator their lips are slack, and they kiss sloppily.

Edie's face is on fire. Her new friend smiles knowingly.

The elevator doors open. They get out, and stumble down the hall towards Edie's room, pausing as she searches in her purse for her keycard. She vomits a little in her mouth. The keypad flashes green and her door unlocks.

The door clicks shut behind them. Edie slides the chain lock into place.



The next morning, the alcohol has settled in Edie's pores. Her eyelids droop with the weight of wine and whiskey. She lies face down on the mattress—not too hard, not too soft—and listens to the sound of her eyelashes scratching against the ironed pillowcases. Thrusting one foot out from under the hypoallergenic duvet, she moves her hand from where it has been crushed under her chest, throbbing with pins and needles. She counts down the minutes until her alarm will buzz again, when she will have no option but to get up.

She doesn't always mind the hangovers. They are like an unstoppable force, to which you must submit. At other times, it's as if her mental anguish finds an outlet in bodily pain. She also likes the way that a hangover can be used as an excuse. If she underperforms, she can laugh it off. "Too much whiskey last night. LOL. Silly me."

Even so, she swears that this is the last time. Not like the last time. Or the time before that.

Edie looks out over the king-size bed and sees that she is alone. Where is the woman from last night?

There is a short note on the hotel stationery. *That was fun! I've gone back to my room to change my clothes. See you later today! XO*

What was her name?

The stink of Edie's pee is dark yellow. She puts in her contact lenses, surprised once again that she had managed to take them out and nestle them into the blue and white plastic case.

There is the sound of rushing water as she turns on the shower, then lathers her body with soap, avoiding the large bruise on her thigh. *Where did that come from?* She squirts shampoo into her palm. No matter how much she rinses, her hair will fall flat against her head as if her follicles are punishing her for her excess. She doesn't bother to shave her legs. There's no time.

From the hanger she pulls off an elasticized skirt, ready to stretch taught against her bloat. She puts on her new blouse.

Stepping out from the elevator onto the second floor, Edie makes her way to the restaurant, following the tinkling of cutlery and clatter of porcelain. The smells from the buffet make her nauseous, but breakfast is included. After years of austerity as a graduate student she still can't resist anything that is 'free.' Two cups of coffee later, and she is ready to peck at a slice of toast, some squeaky scrambled eggs and runny baked beans.

Sipping her coffee, sweaty and clammy, she stares out at the tables around her and wonders if any of these people will be at her meetings today. None of them seems familiar. They all look the same. When someone catches her eye she smiles, just a little, just in case.

Edie has creaked through the morning, neck heavy. But now, after lunch, her nose has stopped dripping, her tongue has shrunk back to size, the ringing in her ears has dulled, and the smell of alcohol has mellowed under the floral perfume of the hotel soap. Lemon verbena.

She sits at the front of the room, on a platform, and picks at the cuticle around her thumb, trying to yawn discretely while her co-panellists speak. In her mouth is one of the mints that she grabbed from the candy dish on the table. A handful has been jammed into her bag for later, along with some pens and pads of paper with the hotel logo.

Listening to the other presentations, she reflects again on what she misses most at this point in her career. It's that feeling of being bowled over by a new idea. When she was in graduate school, each conversation was a dopamine hit, opening up a new way of thinking. No more. Now there are ideas that sometimes catch her attention, but they pass like fads.

She doesn't miss the panic attacks that used to plague her before presentations. Her heart would race. Her chest would ache. Her hands would shake. Inevitably she would spill coffee on her blouse. It's one of the reasons that she now mostly wears black.

Yes, she still gets nervous, but not like that.

From where she sits at the front of the room, Edie scans the audience, wondering if she has any allies out there. *Where is the woman from last night?* Edie hasn't seen her all day. *Is she ok? Should I ask someone?* Probably not. She likely wouldn't be her ally anyway.

Earlier that morning Edie had ruffled a few feathers in the question period when she accused one of the panellists of trying to force technical solutions onto political problems. The comments did not go over well among the managerial types.

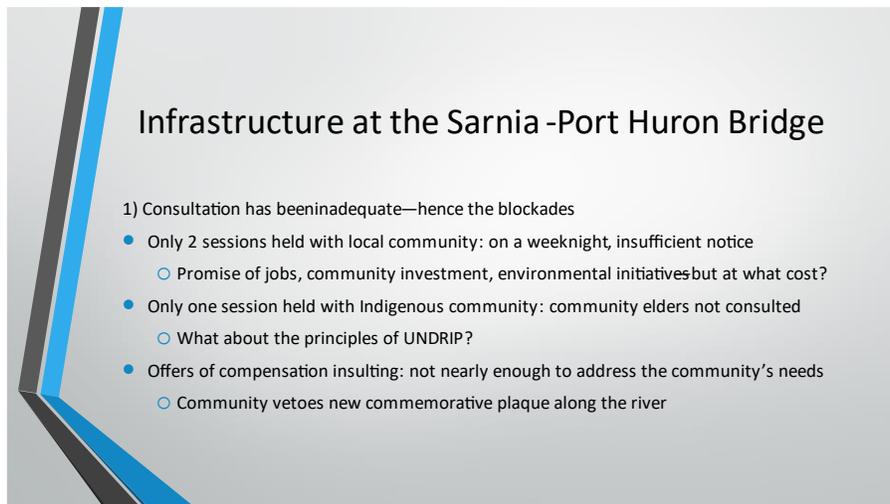
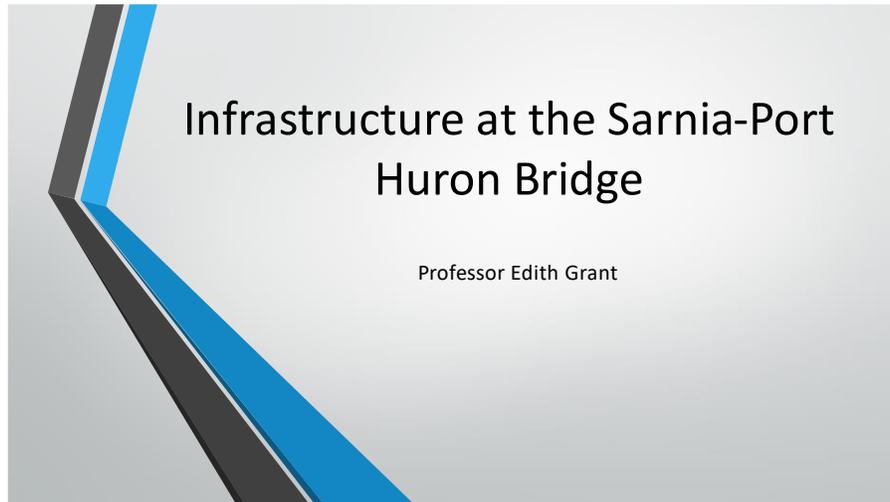
Now it is Edie's turn to make her presentation. She steps up to the podium, presses a few buttons on the console. Her PowerPoint slides pop up on the two large video screens angled on either side of her, as the room is bathed in Havelock-blue.

"Infrastructure," she intones. "Why has it become such a hot topic?"

In academia, infrastructure is a sexy keyword: its very plasticity is what has made it so popular. It can be everything and nothing at the same time. But for most of the people here, infrastructure is their bread and butter. They are not at all interested in Edie's fancy wordplay, or the theoretical arguments that she has up her sleeve.

It is only when she starts talking about the new preclearance facility at Sarnia-Port Huron that she gets the audience's attention.

She has three key points to make, each with three easily digestible sub-arguments, laid out beautifully in Calibri font:



Infrastructure at the Sarnia -Port Huron Bridge

2) The public -private partnership model of the new border facility is flawed

- RMBK's record is very problematic
 - Eg: corruption and government contracts, election donations, etc
- Private sector interests predominate —all about profit-making
- Health and environmental factors are being ignored
 - The whole area has been a sacrifice zone for decades: dubbed Chemical Valley

Infrastructure at the Sarnia -Port Huron Bridge

3) Critical infrastructure is being used as an excuse to implement more securitization

- Canada's revised Anti -terrorism Act: includes the protection of critical infrastructure
- Ramping up of border security infrastructure
 - Surveillance towers, biometric systems, full body scanners, radiation x -rays, etc
- Contracting to US defense companies: hardware and software

Eddie closes with a few forceful statements, and then it is over. There is some feeble clapping, but mostly out of habit. There are no questions.

Eddie collects her papers, checks that she has retrieved her memory stick and walks over to the refreshment table. People slide out of her way, calling to imaginary friends and colleagues across the room. She makes some tea, ripping open the small red package. (Reviving!) Sipping slowly, she stands a few paces away from the table, looking out at the attendees, and then down at her phone. She finishes her tea. It's time to go. There is no rule against getting to the airport early.

Over the last year, she has become hardened to being rebuffed. Perhaps it is one of the advantages of that she has been through in this past year. She pops another green-striped mint into her mouth and heads out the door.



At the airport, long lineups twist around the stanchions at the security check-in. Kids pull at the retractable belts until they snap off, only to be scolded by distracted parents who suddenly pay attention to what they are doing.

When it's finally her turn, Edie lifts her overnight suitcase up into a plastic bin so that it can be rolled along the conveyer belt to the x-ray. She removes her laptop from her purse, and places both into another bin. Taking off her shoes, she places them in a third bin, with her jacket folded next to it, alongside her cellphone, passport and ticket. Double-checking that her pockets are empty, she waits her turn to pass through the body scanner, as she has done so many times before.

Not for the first time she wonders how these invasive technologies became so ubiquitous, so quickly, as she imagines them looking at the contours of her naked body.

Once through, two customs officers walk past her in their Homeland Security uniforms, M4 rifles dangling from their necks. Another two stand on alert outside the concrete archway: *Welcome to the United States.*

Is the military here too? It's so hard to tell the difference these days.

Edie buys an over-priced bottle of water, and some gum. There are a few people already waiting at the gate. In one corner, kids clamber over the hard plastic chairs. She shakes her head scornfully. *Where are their parents?*

Across the waiting room, she spies Jared. *What is he doing here?*

She half-waves, but maybe he doesn't see her, focused as he is on his phone, occasionally glancing up at the kids. It's only a few minutes later, as she continues to stare, that he looks her way. He nods in recognition, and she half-waves again. She rises, and wanders over, curious about what has brought him to Ottawa.

"Hi, Jared."

"Hello, Edith."

"What brings you here? Were you giving testimony at the Commission?"

"Hmm? Commission?"

"Oh, I guess not. I didn't think I had seen you."

Ronin runs over, no longer content to play on his own now that his father is talking with someone. “Hey, little man.”

“Is this your kid?”

“Yes, this is Ronin. I think you’ve met.” He pulls his son close. Ronin’s hair has grown very long, so that he is constantly swishing it out of his eyes, as if he has a nervous tick.

“Could be.” Although Edie can’t remember. “So, what were you going to say? Why are you in Ottawa?”

“It’s March Break—the school holidays” he adds, seeing the blank look on Edie’s face. “So I thought we’d have an adventure.”

“In Ottawa?” She is skeptical.

“Yes. I wanted Ronin to see Parliament Hill. He needs to learn some of the history of this country, while we are living here. And we also went to the Science and Technology Museum. That was fun. All those pyrotechnic demonstrations, right little man?”

“Don’t forget the War Museum, daddy. That was really cool. All those tanks and weapons.”

“Right.” He pats Ronin on the head firmly, as if to tell him to be quiet.

Ronin scowls and tugs at his father’s hand. “I need to pee.”

“Ok, little man.”

Edie ignores Ronin. “Hey, Jared, congrats on your new research grant. That’s the second one this year, isn’t it?”

“Third, actually. But thanks.” He grabs at his leather backpack and swings it onto one shoulder.

“Wow. Impressive. And I see that your new article is getting lots of attention.”

“Which one?” He pauses, a little more interested now. “A few have recently come out.”

“Oh, I can’t remember the title. It was in that big theory journal, I think.”

“Yes, the citations are really mounting up. Good for my impact factor!” He shifts his backpack to his other shoulder, while Ronin steps from foot to foot. “And good for you too, right? KMb? Knowledge mobilization? Isn’t that your thing these days?”

Edie is about to explain that KMb is about public engagement, not just about citations (although no one would argue that citations aren’t important). But Ronin jumps in first.

“Daddy, I really need to go.”

“Ok, little man. Just a sec. I have a quick question for Edith.” Turning to her he asks, “What’s happening in the Dean’s office? I heard that there’s a big reorganization planned.”

“Really? That’s news to me.”

Jared looks at her suspiciously. “C’mon. You’re part of the team. You must know something.”

“Really, I don’t.”

“Hmm. If you say so, but to be honest, I find that hard to believe...”

To be honest? Edie hates that turn of phrase. Are there times when he is dishonest? Undoubtedly. In his case, she bets he’s dishonest most of the time. “My position is temporary. Maybe they don’t tell me everything.”

“I guess not.” Edie looks genuinely surprised, so he doesn’t push it. “Alright,” he says, looking down at his son, who is tugging at his pants. “Let’s find you a washroom. See you later, Edith.” He pulls at Ronin’s arm, happy to have a reason to end the conversation.

“See you. And congrats again.” Edie cringes at her own words. *Why am I being so ingratiating?* Her own behaviour surprises her sometimes. But she is rattled after the conversation. What are the changes being planned? Why hasn’t she heard anything, not even the rumours?

The plane is nearly empty. Edie is delighted that she has two seats to herself, although it always surprises her that the flights to Ottawa are almost always full, but the ones heading back to Toronto aren’t. Where do all the people go?

The flight attendant offers her a glass of wine. *Moderation. It’s all about moderation*, she tells herself. *Not abstinence. Not all-or-nothing*. She relaxes with the cool rush to the back of her throat. *Just one*. It’s complimentary after all.

When she reaches his condo, Samir has a drink waiting for her. For a second she hesitates, but she doesn’t want to refuse, and seem ungrateful, or have to explain why not. She doesn’t want to start an argument.

Also, there are reasons to celebrate. In the time that she was up in the air, two newspaper editorials have been published online, both focusing on her presentation. True, they tear her to pieces. But you know how the saying goes? There is only one thing in life worse than being talked about...

It's just what she needs: KMb: Knowledge Mobilization.

Samir passes her the hummus he has made from scratch. It is full of flavour, but the crackers he has bought to go with it are not. He gets them from the health-food store, where they specialize in negative freedoms: the crackers are free from preservatives, gluten, sugar, dairy.

“Samir, you would have been proud. I did it. I exposed RMBK.” She pauses. “And because of that, no one would speak to me afterwards.”

“Hmm. Is that such a big loss? I thought you didn't think much of your co-panellists.” He reaches for the raw chicken breast, which wiggles as he pulls a knife through against the grain.

“True, but it's lonely sometimes,” she replies, as she gulps her wine, steeped with minerals and citrus. Edie had hoped for a little more support. She fans her face with her hand, and stares over at him. Usually, he exudes an inner glow. But today, he looks different. Regular. Like anyone else.

Is freedom about losing desire, or being consumed by it?

“Ok, I'm impressed,” he says, feeling her stare. “You made your points.” He reaches for some mint to chop. “You probably didn't change anyone's mind. But at least you stood up to them. What if no one did that?” He mixes the mint into the farro and arugula salad. “Here, try this.”

The dressing burns her lips. *He always puts in too much lemon juice.*

She had been excited to see him, but now she feels deflated.

It's a lot of work to stay in love.



It would be a stretch to say that Edie’s presentation in Ottawa brought about real change. But to be fair, it was the start of something. And anyway, how is it that change happens? A small act? Protests? Perseverance? Happenstance? Violence?

Journalists swoop in to investigate RMBK, with Marco at the head of the pack, his months of research behind him. He contacts Edie, and she agrees to talk, off-the-record. They share what they have each uncovered: worker abuse, rapes, murders, land grabs, and more. What is most astonishing is how RMBK has managed to keep these stories buried for so long.

Marco reveals what he knows about the new border facilities at Sarnia-Port Huron. Million-dollar kickbacks were part of the deal. “Did you hear that the son of a former US President was gifted a penthouse suite in Toronto—with its own infinity pool!”

“Outrageous.” Edie tells him about the detention centre, which will be used to meet the government’s deportation quotas, surreptitiously introduced about five years earlier—up to 10,000 people a year. “People will be held at the new RMBK detention facilities—the company has negotiated a profit-sharing agreement with the government, modelled on the US system.”

“Assholes. Every one of them.”

Their conversation turns to the demonstrations that have erupted across the country in support of the protests on Aamjiwnaang territory, where, in light of the new evidence against RMBK, there has been a doubling-down on the blockades. In response, the federal police have ramped up their raids, claiming that ‘critical infrastructure’ is under attack, and maligning the violent extremists intent on harming the state’s petro-economy.

When the issues are raised in Parliament, the opposition parties are outraged! (Although everyone knows that they would have done exactly the same thing to support RMBK if they were in power.) A debate ensues which devolves into a shouting match. Demands are made that the executives be prosecuted, but the Prime Minister refuses. Not a chance. The company has threatened to relocate offshore. Thousands of jobs are at stake. International contracts hang in the balance.

The government insists that the future of the company cannot be jeopardized. RMBK is too big to fail.

Instead, a deal is made. RMBK will pay out millions of dollars in fines. They will donate monies to a few, select social causes—with a focus on Indigenous healing—all of which will be tax deductible. And sure, they will be under probation for several years, subject to third-party monitoring, while they tinker with regulatory compliance and implement ethics training. But the criminal charges will be dropped. No one will stand trial.

When the details of the arrangement are announced, RMBK's stocks plummet. Only the brokers are ecstatic, as they buy and sell, but mostly sell. But then, after a few weeks, the shares rebound and then surge. The company is stronger than ever. The shareholders who hung on couldn't be happier.

Meanwhile, the Royal Commission has continued with its fact-finding mission, criss-crossing the country, gathering evidence, and hearing depositions. The process will be drawn out for many years. But George Oakes's resignation as Co-Chair is effective immediately.

He is back in Vancouver, where he has consulted with his family and community, before calling a press conference at his downtown offices, which overlook the skyline, nestled between mountains and the sea. Sitting at a large oval table in the boardroom, on a leather swivel chair, he introduces himself in Kanyen'kéha but quickly, to the relief of the journalists, switches to English:

I am here today to make an announcement. I am deeply frustrated with the Commission. We have been looking at border preclearance programs, and it is clear that not only is RMBK deeply involved, it is deeply corrupt. Just look at what is going on at the Sarnia-Port Huron border.

We cannot ignore the demands of the Aamjiwnaang who will bear the brunt of the new border infrastructure. For decades, their land has been treated like a sacrifice zone: a dumping ground for chemicals and toxins. People are getting sick and dying, just from breathing!

RMBK needs to be held to account. Otherwise, they will just keep doing what they've always done.

But the Prime Minister has told us that corporate crimes are not within the Commission's mandate. Once again, we have a government that promises to act, but then uses procedure to block any structural change. The result? A few policies will be tweaked, some fines will be paid, but everything will go on as it has before.

I refuse to be part of this charade any longer. Effective immediately, I am resigning from the Commission. Enough is enough.

The reporters leap in with their questions. "The Royal Commission is about creeping US influence, not RMBK. Shouldn't that be its focus? US imperialism?"

"Listen, you're talking to someone who has a pretty good understanding of imperialism," he laughs knowingly. "All of these problems are interrelated: border controls, land grabs, lobbying,

tax evasion, bribes, kickbacks, worker abuses, etc. It's all connected. We can't fix one part of it and hope to make any real change. We need to dismantle the whole colonial system."

"RMBK has been hit with a large fine. Why isn't that enough?"

"The fines are just a distraction. RMBK has so many subsidiaries, it's like a game of whack-a-mole. Knock one down, and another will pop up. Don't let them fool you. Accounting does not mean accountability. And without some accountability, the violence will never stop."

"We usually associate this kind of corporate wrongdoing with the US. Are you saying that things in Canada are just as bad?"

"Yes. Just as bad. All that Canada is better at is maple-washing."

"So, tell us, after all that you've learnt, what do you think about Canadian justice?"

George Oakes grins mischievously. "Well, to paraphrase another disheartened Indian, 'I think it would be a good idea.'"



After Oakes's resignation the government is forced into damage-control to quell the dissent. The Prime Minister calls in a crisis-communications consultant to try to change people's minds. (It's usually cheaper than making changes to policy.) The importance of trade—for the middle-class and all those who want to join them—is stressed over and over.

Press conferences are held across the country, with Professor Emeritus Jean-Charles Langlois at the Prime Minister's side. RMBK is a Montreal-based company, and he knows where his alliances lie. He knows who pads his pocket. The Co-Chair blathers on about the importance of innovation and infrastructure to cross-border trade, nodding his head vigorously at every word spoken by the Prime Minister, his Adam's apple wobbling under his broad chin. He might have been handsome once.

The President of the United States, however, is outraged. "What is going on up there? C'mon folks! Canada is on the verge of collapse! And who knows what might happen next? Let me be clear: we can't sit by and let anarchy unfold on our doorstep. Our homeland is at stake. Security is out priority!"

And that is only the beginning of the scaremongering.

The Presidential election is just six months away. Nothing could be more politically convenient than making the US look strong by making Canada look weak. As Samir would say, fear is a time-tested re-election tactic.

And so, another couple of battalions are sent across the border. Additional checkpoints are set up. More drones fill the skies. The snitch lines are re-opened. Curfews are extended.

The irony is obvious to almost everyone. The objective of the Royal Commission was to counteract increasing US influence. It has only grown stronger.

"What choice do we have?" asks the Prime Minister plaintively, as she bends over backwards to cooperate.



It is while crisis engulfs RMBK that the trial for the killing of Donovan Wright begins.

The clerk reads out the charge. “What do you plead?”

Constable Ivanova speaks softly: “Not guilty.” Her mousy hair has been brushed off her face to reveal pearl drop earrings, the shape of tears. Her face is bare except for a few lashes of mascara, and some soft pink lip gloss. She wears an off-the-rack pantsuit, shiny with age, and a little long in the arm.

Not so with the lawyers, for it is they who shine, not their suits, which are finely tailored, measured by their thread count. The more tightly woven the fabric, the more tightly wound the person.

The prosecution is the first to speak. Grace Wiwa, the crown attorney, addresses the room: “This trial is not about determining who did what. We know what happened on the night of June 30, 2023, at Café Americano. Constable Tatiana Ivanova tasered Mr. Donovan Wright as he lay bleeding on the café floor.” She pauses, letting her words hang in the air. “So, our task is not to ascertain what Constable Ivanova did. What we need to know is *why*. Why did she taser Mr. Wright? What was her intent?”

Turning to the jury, Grace continues: “My job is to show you that, beyond a reasonable doubt, Constable Ivanova intended to kill Mr. Wright that evening. He had already been shot twice. He had been immobilized. But she discharged the taser none-the-less. And as a result, he died almost instantly.” She pauses deeply before concluding. “Constable Ivanova needs to be held accountable. Justice is in your hands.”

Marco makes a few notes on his phone before texting Tanisha. He has promised to send her regular updates, since she refuses to return to Canada. The Crown’s opening statement is strong, he writes.

Ashley is there too, sitting at the front, near the jury. She has been watching them, wondering about what they were thinking, that is, until Grace began to speak. Ashley is instantly mesmerized by this woman, who is ruthless and fierce, for which she is both praised and reviled, depending on where you stand vis-à-vis the case in question.

She is stunning in her light grey pantsuit, cut perfectly to her petite figure. Her hair is cut short in an undercut bob. Stylish glasses, handcrafted in Italian acetate, the colour of butterscotch, rest boldly on the bridge of her nose.

Constable Ivanova’s lawyer sits across from her, impassive. The only sign that he is listening is the light drumming of his long, white fingers on the wooden table. Until he rises, he has a

bemused look on his face. With exaggerated calm he takes the floor, buttoning his jacket over his broad shoulders, and stretching his arms until his light pink shirt pokes through. That fateful night,” he begins, “Mr. Donovan Wright presented an imminent threat to the police, and to everyone else at the café. People were afraid. Lives were at stake. Constable Ivanova had only seconds to act, and she did so according to all of her training. She was only doing what any one of you would have done in her situation.” Here he stops, and looks at each juror in turn, swiveling his body to the left and right, and then back again, like a fan on a sweaty afternoon.

“Amateur video recordings of the events have circulated widely online, and because of this, people—people just like you—think that they know what went on that night. But you don’t. *We don’t.*” He says with emphasis, to the room full of people. “*We* can’t possibly know because we haven’t yet heard from the person who held the taser. So, I will be calling Constable Tatiana Ivanova to testify. We need to hear from her, first hand, to know exactly what transpired that night.”

The gasp is audible. No one expected that the defence would call Tatiana to the stand. It’s a risky move. But before it’s her turn to speak, many others will need to testify first.



“And what is your job title?” the crown attorney’s question is directed to the witness box, where a woman in uniform sits.

She replies in voice that you know means business. “Forensics officer.” Over the next several hours she will lead the jury on a 3D architectural walk-through, lingering over the gadgets and their wizardry: the fingerprint readers, the latent digital photos, and the algorithmic ballistics. Juries everywhere love the whizz-bang of technology, believing it to be more reliable than the witness statements, which can be inconsistent and imperfect—they are only human, after all.

Ashley is bored. The reconstruction was interesting at first, like a video game. But once the lawyers began to dissect every small detail, she quickly lost interest. This will be nothing like the slick trials she has seen on TV, like the ones that she and Brandon will watch together tonight, on his new flatscreen, in his new multi-million-dollar home.

She adores his new place: one of those stately mock Tudors, which has been completely gutted and modernized, with heated floors, bathroom spa, entertainment centre, wine cellar, home gym, and outdoor kitchen and hot tub. And everything is high-tech and can be controlled from his phone—from the lights to the sound system, from the climate control to the alarms, including the one on his doorbell, which she had insisted he get.

Ashley has become obsessed with security. The more she acquires, the more she worries about what she has to lose.

How long will it be before Brandon asks her to move in? Or maybe even to get married? She can’t believe how lucky she is. He is everything she has been looking for. Not only is he smart, sexy and rich, but he dotes on her. He loves her more than she loves him. This is exactly what she has been looking for.

Ashley looks over at the prosecutor. *Is Grace in a relationship?* Today, she is wearing a black skirt suit with a bright red shirt and matching red cat’s-eye glasses. Her six-inch stilettos are to die for, as they click click click across the wooden floor. If a case were to be determined by the height of a heel, the sharpness of its point, or the shine of the patent leather, Grace would have already won.

But who is she? Despite doing some digging, Ashley has found out little about Grace’s private life. There is one interview, back from when she was an intern. Even then she was reticent. All that she revealed was that her parents were originally professionals from Nigeria, but that she grew up in Toronto. She went away for her undergraduate studies but returned for law school. That’s all. Ashley is dying to know: does she have a boyfriend? A girlfriend? Neither? Both? All of the above? No one seems to know.

Over the next several days, the jury watches as the amateur video evidence of the killing is played and re-played.

Ashley watches Grace.

Marco watches Ashley.

He is glad that Tanisha is not here to see. She would want to smack Ashley—Marco is sure of it—with the sulky look on her face. Tanisha would also be outraged at the re-playing of the footage, even though he knows she will have already seen most of it online. The pushing. The shouting. The two police officers. More shouting. The sounds of sirens. The shots. The taser. The smirk on Constable Fiore’s face. Constable Ivanova’s blank look. The deep quiet. Then the whir of the coffee machines.

Grace stops and starts the videos to make sure that the jury hears Donovan Wright’s last words over and over. “No. Don’t. Don’t kill me. Help —.”

Finally, she plays the CCTV footage, which is being seen publicly for the first time, having been recovered from the American authorities who had confiscated it after the shooting. The angle of the camera, affixed into the ceiling, provides a clear view of the café’s front entrance and the arrival of the police. What happened just before that, however, is not visible, hidden behind on the room’s supporting beams.

So Grace focuses on the taser: “Watch how the barbs spring from the device, which is cocked like a gun.”

Tick tick tick tick tick tick tick tick tick

Donovan’s body convulses. Then stops.

The jury is visibly shaken. One man covers his eyes. A woman brings her hand to her mouth. Others look away.

Constable Ivanova sits demurely as she watches what she has done.



The snow is long gone, but the air is cool. The sun is out, but its rays are thin.

The bus shudders down Lansdowne Avenue, past lines of brick rowhouses. Clumps of crocuses and bluebells encircle the trunks of the wispy locust trees. Even this early in the morning—and it is still quite early—people sit on their concrete stoops or on vinyl-covered chairs angled to the street, rosaries in hand. The women wear flowery housecoats, and the men are in undershirts that are not as clean as they used to be.

Eddie steps off the bus at Queen Street, and trips over one of the many potholes in the road, bracing her fall with an outstretched hand. Someone calls out and asks if she needs help, but she waves them away, more embarrassed than hurt, as she picks gravel out of her palm.

She waits for the streetcar, which will take her to the courthouse for her testimony in the trial. She, like so many who were with her at the café that night, has been called as a witness.

Grabbing a seat near the back doors, she opens the window to the pale breeze. A few passengers sit nearby, dozing gently, their heads nodding forward, while others sprawl across the empty seats. When Marco will arrive at this same stop, in just over an hour, it will be standing-room-only.

As they pass under the Dufferin bridge, the smell of chocolate wafts in from the factory nearby. A few police cars drive past.

Holding her throbbing hand, Eddie looks on as the buildings grow taller the further they travel east. Old Victorian-era storefronts are being replaced by new buildings, sheathed top-to-bottom in sterile plate glass that reflects the streetcar as it passes, shimmering as if they are travelling underwater.

When she was young, this section of Queen Street was still a developer's wet dream. Back then, street-life was geared to the needs of the community, with grocers and hardware stores, barbershops and laundromats, travel agencies and video rentals. The only restaurants were local greasy spoons, with coin-operated machines where teens would sneakily buy their cigarettes.

Now, this is one of the hippest parts of the city, chock-a-block with cafés and clothing stores, boutique hotels and art galleries, and several speciality butchers, of which at least one sells no meat.

When she was in her teens, Eddie used to hang out on this same street, but further east, where she is heading now, where the road widens and the sidewalk broadens. On Saturdays she would stride up and down for hours. (Sunday shopping was still illegal back then.) Panhandlers claimed the street corners, wedged amongst the newspaper boxes and telephone booths. Above their

heads, electricity thrummed across trolley wires and utility cables so thick in number, it was like walking under a spiderweb. Edie would pause in front of hydro poles stapled with posters, breathing in the creosote-treated wood, while she read about upcoming gigs and sex shows that she was curious about, but would never attend.

There was a long stretch of brownfield (now in-filled), where carts lined up to sell jewellery, leather cuffs, crystals and hand-painted T-shirts. Boom-boxes blared as if there were a battle of the bands underway, while buskers danced. There was always at least one hot dog stand, shaded under a wide green umbrella, and a red bicycle cart, which sold roasted chestnuts and sticky candy apples, while helium balloons bounced on thick rubber bands. In the summer, pimply teenagers lounged on Dickie Dee trikes, peddling popsicles and ice-cream bars, their legs hanging open over their pedals, leering at the skinny women in miniskirts—almost everyone was broke and skinny back then.

Thinking back, Edie knows that her ramblings along the street were all rather tame, but it was an escape from her mother and sister. This part of the city was also an antidote to what was happening elsewhere, as the city lurched between puritanism and prosperity. Already, old buildings downtown were being torn down to be replaced by skyscrapers, while on the waterfront, the first condos were starting to appear. And Yonge Street, sleazy Yonge Street, with its bars and bawdy houses, was being cleaned up. No more cocktails. No more cock tease.

At the nearby Eaton Centre, preppy teenagers like her sister hung out, shopping for poufy blouses with shoulder pads, designer jeans and legwarmers, penny loafers and topsiders. Whereas on Queen Street, rebellious youth (like Edie tried to be) rifled through vintage clothing, and wore Dr. Martens and more kinds of leather than an abattoir.

As she wandered, Edie would often stop outside the taverns to listen to the music that burst onto the street when the doors opened. At that time of day, in the middle of the afternoon, everyone was heading inside; no one came out. Too young to enter, and too fresh-faced to pass for 19, she would lean against the brick wall, tapping ashes onto the sidewalk, trying to be as disaffected as everyone around her, as if it were her choice not to go inside.

Most of her time, however, was spent in the dozens of second-hand bookstores, where she was left alone to browse, while the staff would busy themselves writing their own angry poetry. Aisles were piled high with books. To crack one of them open was to unleash the heady smell of dust and mold. Their yellowed paper was so translucent from exposure to the sun that you could read both sides of the page at once.

Her most-favourite place was the independent bookstore, where she and Samir would meet for the first time, when she was a little older. They stocked new releases by local writers and international authors, which couldn't be found anywhere else in the city. Inside the front door were racks of magazines, with their glossy smell of fresh ink, and stacks of newspapers as thick as encyclopedias. Up by the cash register, small-press chapbooks and home-made mimeographs were available for impulse buying. The rest of the store was filled with slate-coloured bookcases and signs in eggshell-blue that directed you to sections on cultural theory, native studies (sic),

and graphic novels. A whole bookcase was devoted to publications by Semiotext(e). That's all you need to know to understand what a gem this place was.

Eddie dreamed that one day she would write a book that would be displayed on the front tables, fiction or non-fiction, or maybe one of each, where she would nonchalantly sign copies for her admiring fans.

But the bookstore had since closed, succumbing—like most of the stores from that era—to rising rents and the onslaught of international brands and fast fashion—as if the Eaton Centre, two blocks over, were sprawling westwards.

Eddie stares out the window of the streetcar, sucking at her throbbing thumb. She does not want to go back to her youth, when she was awkward and lonely. But she misses what this street once used to be, or what she thought it was back then, or what it might have been. She misses who she thought she would be.

Stepping off one stop early, she ducks into a hip coffee shop, avoiding the multinational chain across the street. The barista's face is open: warm and welcoming. Eddie is at an age when people don't completely ignore her—she isn't 60 yet, for Christ's sake. But while she flirts lightly with the young man behind the counter, he wears a filial expression.

Cradling a skinny turmeric latte capped with a bright red lid, she steps past someone slouched in the entrance to a clothing store that has yet to open for the day, a sleeping bag pulled up around their waist. A black rottweiler lies on a piece of cardboard the colour of his paws. Eddie walks past them, muttering “sorry” under her breath, not stopping when they hold out their hand.

With time to spare, she pops into the drugstore to pick up some toothpaste. Sipping her coffee, she dawdles in front of identically-sized rectangular boxes that promise to whiten and brighten. Eddie settles on no choice at all. Balancing her coffee and her phone, she grabs at her usual name-brand with her throbbing right hand. Several boxes fall to the floor. She slinks away.

The cashier asks whether she qualifies for the senior's discount. It starts at age 55, she is told politely, if she has a loyalty card, which she does. It's there in her wallet. Fifty-five is only a couple of years away, but still... Neither she nor the cashier is happy with how the exchange ends.

Dropping the small plastic bag into her purse, she makes her way to the door. The security guard looks at her grumpily. “Find the toothpaste you were looking for?” Eddie nods, embarrassed, as she pushes past him and heads to the courthouse.



In the waiting room, Edie sits nervously. There are a handful of others, also fidgeting in hard wooden chairs like hers. As is so often the case these days, she looks around the room and sees that almost everyone else is younger than her.

The policewoman standing guard must be in her thirties. It is not clear if her job is to watch over them as they wait, or to protect them from outside harm.

Some of the others in the room look like they are still in school. Wait, is that one of her own students across the room? Yes, it is. Edie tries to get his attention. *Is she allowed to go and talk with him?* She doesn't think so.

He nods curtly in her direction. Edie has been meaning to get in touch with him—with all her students—but the last several months have been so busy that she has kept putting it off. Did she even respond to his last email?

His name is called first. He passes by, saying nothing, his head slightly turned.

Before Edie has a chance to get comfortable in the witness box, Grace launches into her questions. “Professor Grant, please tell the court, what did you see that evening?”

“To be honest, I didn't see much until after I heard the shots. I was deep in conversation.”

The crown attorney pretends to be surprised. “Your table was only steps away, but you are telling the court that you did not see how the incident started?”

“That's right., I did not see what was happening. I've seen the videos, of course, but that was after.”

Grace raises one eyebrow. “And so you did not see Constable Fiore shoot the victim?”

“No.”

“Did you see anything at all after he was shot?”

“I saw the policewoman lunge towards the victim with a taser.” She looks over at Constable Ivanova who is looking right back at her, impassive.

“And were you surprised?”

“Yes, I was surprised by everything that happened that night.”

“Did you see Mr. Wright with a weapon?”

“No. I did not.”

“Did you see him reach more deeply into his pockets?”

“No. I did not.”

“So, in other words, you saw nothing. Is that correct?”

“Yes, that is correct.” Edie feels like she has done something wrong. She would like to be able to incriminate the police. That’s where her politics lie. But she can’t lie, can she? She can’t pretend to have seen something that she hadn’t?

“And did you do anything?”

“Pardon me?”

“Mr. Wright was injured, blood pooling around him, having been shot twice. He was just steps away from where you were sitting. Did you do anything to help?”

It occurs to Edie that in all this time, she hasn’t thought much about Donovan. Sure, she has read about him in the news. Illegal immigrant. AWOL from the military. Construction-worker. Married with two children. But she hasn’t really thought about what he might have been thinking or feeling, or how he might have been helped.

She pauses to consider the question. Did she do anything? What could she have done? What should she have done? All she remembers is that she finished her wine, but surely that is not the kind of answer that the Crown is looking for, nor what she wishes to say out loud.

“Professor Grant?”

“Yes?”

“Yes? Yes, you did something to help him?”

“No. I mean no.”

“No?” Grace raises her left eyebrow again. It would go unrecorded on the court transcript, but Grace could carry on whole conversations just with her eyebrows.

“No. I did nothing.”

“That’s everything. Thank you.” The crown attorney has remained cool and professional, almost aloof. But as she sits down, her eyes crinkle into a smile.

Next, it is the turn of Constable Ivanova’s lawyer. It’s not the first time that he has defended a cop on trial. In fact, it’s his speciality. “Being a lawyer,” he is often heard to say, “is not about truth or guilt, but about winning. And when you defend the police, it’s hard not to win.”

This time the stakes are a little higher. The Americans have insisted, over and over again, that they will not be satisfied unless there is a guilty verdict. He has no interest in pissing them off, but he is at a stage in his career where he likes a challenge. Bring it on!

He saunters up to Edie, in his pinstripe suit and dark brown oxfords, hand-sewn in full-grain Italian leather. Peeking out are the colourful socks that he is known for. They have become a talking point in the media, as pundits debate their meaning. Stripes for jail? Polka dots for hope? Only he and his wife know that it is she who chooses them each night, as she lays out his clothes for the next day. It’s the little things that keep couples together.

The lawyer begins by asking Edie a few questions that are not unlike the ones she has already answered. He is not really interested in what she has to say. Her only value to him is that she will help him prove that each witness has a different recollection of what transpired that night.

Wining a case is not only about whose story can be believed, but about who and what can be discounted.

All of this comes out in the statement he makes to the press afterwards. “What we have so far is trial by social media. But you can’t believe everything you see. Seeing is not believing. In fact, what we have heard over and over again is that the witnesses saw very different things that night. And, as I have said—as I have said so many times already—it is only once we have heard Constable Ivanova’s testimony that we will know what really happened that night at Café Americano.”

He is smug. It is not his fault that Mr. Wright is not around to tell his side of the story.



“Come on. Let’s go. I can’t sit here any longer.”

They have been watching the clouds change colours as the sun sets. Edie would prefer to stay in the park a little longer, but instinctively rises off the bench at Samir’s words, like she used to, back when she loved him too much.

From the park bench where they are sitting, she takes one last look around her, at the planting beds full of red and yellow tulips, their petals closing for the night. The thick smell of hydrangea lingers the air. Already the magnolia trees are starting to drop their flowers.

“Ok. Fine. We can go. I have some work to finish anyway.”

The evening is warm, but Samir stomps his feet. “Let’s go.” The light is fading quickly now, and the birdsong is quietening, as if the looming darkness is tightening around their throats.

“Are you alright?” Edie reaches out to help him up. He brushes her away. Leaning on the arm of the bench to steady himself, he rises, and stretches out his back, click click click.

Once standing, he grabs her hand to pull her close so that he can kiss her forehead. His lips are dry, like moth wings scratching against her skin. She pulls away.

They wander home, too close to hold hands, bumping up against each other while the blades of bright green grass are flattened underneath their feet.

“There’s something else I wanted to ask you.”

“Go ahead,” says Edie.

“I was watching the witness video from the café again....”

“Hmmm....”

“I think I saw you.”

“Yeah, I was there. You knew that.”

“Yes, but you were right there. I didn’t realize how close you were.”

“I told you that I was there.” Edie is miffed. *Doesn’t he ever listen?* “I told you the whole thing unfolded right in front of me.”

“But you were so close. And you just sat there? Why didn’t you do something?”

Edie is quiet. *Him too?* Samir turns to look at her, waiting for her reply. “I was paralyzed, I guess.” And then she gets defensive. “No one else did anything either...”

“That’s not the point. You sat there. You didn’t even try.”

We all know that this is how relationships unfold and unfurl. Questions become criticisms. Replies are reprisals. It’s not the big fight that ends it all: by that time, it is already too late. It’s the small things that accumulate.

“You could have done something. You should have done something.”

Edie still loves Samir, very much, but her love for him feels different now.

Samir wonders whether what he feels for Edie can still be called love.



Each morning Marco walks past the Emergency Response Unit stationed outside the courthouse. Their armoured trucks have been inherited from the army, as if they are a pair of hand-me-down trousers passed from one brother to another.

Tactical support has been called in for public safety, but also to show support for one of their own. It's not often that a cop goes on trial.

Marco heads towards the line-up reserved for the media. Someone calls him back. Wagging his fingers, he is admonished: "There's a line here, man. Get in line." Marco flashes his press pass, but the other man is not convinced. "There's a line," he complains, as he looks around for support.

None of others who joined the press queue were questioned. But now all eyes are focused on Marco. He shrugs but stands his ground.

Entering the building, he is stopped again. For a random security check. There is no pattern to the randomness, except for its repetition. When the security guard's skin is as dark as his own it is especially galling, but not unusual: he knows that people who look like him are expected to be twice as ruthless.

He is asked for his biometric card, which the officer scrutinizes. "What kind of last name is Lopez? Are you sure this is you? What other ID do you have?" He has been here every morning. They know who he is.

Finally, he is waved through. The court is almost full, so Marco must find a seat at the back. The room is airless, but if you listen carefully, you might hear the chanting that wafts in from outside: "shame, shame, shame," and rising above it:

*Indict, convict, send that killer cop to jail
The whole damn system is guilty as hell*

He looks around the room. The place is buzzing. It's been busy every day but today is different. It's Constable Fiore's turn to take the stand. For the first time, he is going to be required to speak publicly about the events on the night of the shooting.

Marco sends Tanisha a text to reassure her that he is there, and that he will let her know what happens.

"Thanks. It means so much to me that you are looking out for us."

Constable Frank Fiore has made it clear that he doesn't want to testify. But he has no choice. He has been subpoenaed by the Crown.

"Let's go back to that evening," Grace begins. "Why didn't you try to de-escalate?"

"I did. I presented my weapon—which *is* a form of de-escalation. That's what we are taught. I ordered the victim to remove his hands from his pockets. But he chose not to." He pulls at his cowlick three times, as if a religious ritual.

"So, you drew your weapon rather than asking if he needed help? Or asking if there was someone you could call on his behalf?"

"Before I could do anything else, I had to ensure that he was not armed. The café was full. It is a tight space. Anything could have happened."

Grace raises an eyebrow. "Lethal violence is only supposed to be used as a last resort. Why did you discharge your gun?"

Constable Fiore is defensive. "I am not on trial here. I have been exonerated."

"Please answer the question."

"I wouldn't have used my weapon if I had another option." He checks his watch and fiddles with his shirt, brandishing his gold cufflinks as if they hold superpowers.

"What about your taser?"

"I didn't have a taser. Only senior officers carry tasers."

"Your senior officer was right there. Why not let her respond first?"

"I needed to take charge of a tense situation." The overhead lights of the court room catch the dark circles under Constable Fiore's eyes, as they flit around the room, not settling. His hair has grown longer at the sides, but with a side-part so fierce it looks like a thin white scar.

"Why? Please explain."

Constable Fiore stammers as he chooses his words carefully. "I wasn't sure that she could handle it. I didn't always find her very.... effective."

"Effective?" Grace raises her eyebrow again, then crosses her arms, while holding his gaze. He is the first to turn away. Surreptitiously, she draws her finger across her thigh as if notching a point: she has won the staring contest.

“Yes, she could be indecisive.” He almost looks over at his former partner, but then changes his mind. If he had looked, he would have seen her bow her head to her chest, letting her hair flip over, shielding her face.

“So because you didn’t believe your senior officer would take charge, you shot Mr. Wright. Is that right?”

“Yes.”

“Was it your intention to kill the victim?”

“No, I was responding to an immediate and credible threat. All of this has been confirmed by the internal investigation. I am not guilty. I didn’t kill him.”

“But didn’t you, at the time, brag that you had killed him? We have heard testimony from witnesses who heard you boasting.”

Constable Fiore acknowledges that yes, he did believe, in the heat of the moment, that he had killed the victim. “But I wasn’t *trying* to kill him,” he insists, as he gets more and more twitchy.

“So why were you happy when you thought he was dead?” Grace’s tone has changed too, hardening, but she remains calm.

“I wouldn’t say that I was happy... I was relieved that he was no longer a threat. We were protecting the lives of all those in the café.”

“So you weren’t trying to kill him?”

“No!” Now Constable Fiore is almost snarling. The vein on his forehead bulges. As he speaks, he bangs his hand on the wooden rail in front of him, and then looks up and down at the room aggressively. “No. I have told you again and again. I didn’t try to kill him. And I am not on trial here. I have been vindicated.”

“So you’ve said, Constable Fiore. Thank you for your time.” Grace has accomplished what she set out to do. She has made Constable Fiore appear to be the hothead and bully that he is. She is about to turn away, when she stops. “Sorry, I have one final question, Constable Fiore.” She looks at him with contempt. “Do you believe that Mr. Wright posed a threat after you had shot him?”

“Absolutely not. There was no way—absolutely no way—that he could have gotten up. He was no longer a threat to anyone. I made sure of that.”

Constable Fiore still has to contend with Constable Ivanova's lawyer. He is expecting that these questions will be easier: he's on the side of the police, is he not? But it doesn't take him long to figure out that making him look bad is one of the ways that the lawyer is going to make Constable Ivanova look good.

"Do you have any remorse about shooting Mr. Wright?" the lawyer asks.

"No. I didn't kill him."

"Ok. But wouldn't he have had life-changing injuries?"

"Perhaps. But I didn't have a choice. As I have already explained—many, many times—lives were at stake. I had to do something."

"So you still feel that you acted appropriately?"

"Yes. Absolutely. They were good shots. Clean shots." Clean. As if they had been washed of all impurities. "And as we all know, the victim was a threat. He was AWOL from the military. He was living in Canada illegally. And he was frantic. Anything could have happened."

"But you couldn't possibly have known any of this information about the victim before you shot him, could you?"

"True. I didn't know the specifics. But I could feel it. I could feel it in my bones. You just know these things after being on the force for a while." He nods over at the other officers in the room, who are there to show their support, taking over the front rows of the gallery.

"So it won't be a surprise for you to hear that Mr. Wright was dealing with mental health issues? We now have reliable evidence that he was a troubled man and had become more agitated in the weeks before the shooting. Does that surprise you?"

"No, I am not surprised at all. A cop's instinct, you know?"



Tanisha is shouting at Marco from the other end of his phone. “How could you record what we said? How could you?”

Marco is not surprised at Tanisha’s anger. As soon as his conversation with her was played in the courtroom, he knew that she would be furious. But he didn’t expect her to blame him. “I promise, I didn’t record what we said. I swear.”

“I don’t believe you. How else would they have access to our conversation?”

“I don’t know. I really don’t know. Maybe my phone was hacked.”

“Yeah, right. By whom? Your incompetent police?”

“It wasn’t me. I’m so sorry.”

“You Canadians are always sorry. Sorry. Sorry. Sorry. What a useless word. Saying sorry doesn’t fix anything.”

“I know, I know. But I *am* sorry.”

“I’m not interested in you and your feelings. I’m interested in what this means for the case. What are you going to do about it?”

“I am going to look into this. I promise. I will find out who accessed my phone.”

“How is that going to help? Will that clear Donovan’s name?”

“Probably not. But it is an important story and could help to build a case against the police.”

“Not interested. All I want is for someone to be held accountable for Donovan’s death.”

“Ok. Ok. I hear you.” There is a clicking sound.

“Are you kidding me, Marco? Are they recording us now?”

“I don’t know. I really don’t know.”

“You don’t know anything, do you?”

“It’s not my fault,” he says quietly. “You can trust me.”

“Trust you? How can I trust you? You Canadians are all alike. You act like you’ve got the moral high ground, all goody-two-shoes. But it’s all bullshit. What a joke.”

“But Tanisha, I didn’t do anything. I’m on your side. I’m trying to help you.”

She continues talking, as if she hasn’t heard him. “I am so glad that we left your fucking country. You’re all a bunch of hypocrites.”

Marco is no nationalist, but Tanisha is starting to get on his nerves. “Look, I know you’re angry, but I don’t think you can blame the whole country for what happened.”

“Why not?”

“It just doesn’t make sense. And anyway, you know that your troops are still on the ground up here. It’s not like you Americans are without reproach.”

“Not my problem. And anyway, that’s a totally different issue. Your government asked for our military assistance, so don’t go blaming me. If your country is falling apart, what do you expect?”

Marco doesn’t know what to say. Is Tanisha the kind of person he thought she was? And what about Donovan? Was he angry? Was he being aggressive? What really happened that night at the café?



When Constable Ivanova is brought into the court she is escorted by plainclothes officers, but she is the one who looks plain, with her pasty skin and mousy hair. The room, buzzing with people, grows so quiet that you can hear the silence, as she steps to the front of the room.

Her lawyer begins by going over her record, which is unblemished, after more than eight years on the job, with a short absence for maternity leave. As he tells the court, she had been poised for promotion, but that all ended with the death of Donovan Wright.

“We’ve watched the video evidence play and replay. From some angles it looks like Mr. Wright was about to pull his hand out of his pocket as ordered. Is that what you recall?”

“No, sir, that is not what I recall.” Constable Ivanova’s voice is quiet but firm. “He was not compliant. You can tell by his stance, and from what he was shouting.”

“And what did he shout at you?” he asks.

“No. Don’t. Don’t kill me. Help”

“Before that.”

“Before that?”

“Yes.”

She pauses, and in a soft voice says “Pussy.”

“Pardon. I couldn’t hear you.”

“Pussy.” She turns her head away from her lawyer, embarrassed.

“I’m sorry. I still can’t hear you.” His tone is menacing, which she didn’t expect. Wasn’t he supposed to be defending her?

“Pussy” she says, louder. She is clearly uncomfortable, but she stays calm. She seems small and vulnerable, but also in control. The lawyer has nailed it.

“Right. You must have been afraid. Very afraid. I will remind the jury that Mr. Wright was muscular and athletic, and he stood 6 foot 2 inches tall, almost a foot taller than Constable Ivanova. Did you feel threatened, even after he was shot?”

“Yes.” Constable Ivanova tells the court.

“Is that why you used the taser?”

“Yes, sir. I was afraid for me, but it wasn’t about me. It was about protecting everyone else in the café.”

“We know,” the lawyer says, turning to the jury, “we know that the police are authorized to use their weapons if they feel threatened. So why not use your gun, like Constable Fiore did?”

“We are trained to neutralize a threat, not to kill. A taser is meant to incapacitate. To gain control of a situation. Firearms are to be used only as a last resort.”

“But a firearm had already been used, hadn’t it?”

“Precisely. He had already been shot. I didn’t need to shoot him again. I didn’t want to kill him.”

“And you used the taser according to your training?”

“Yes, sir, absolutely. I am up-to-date with all my training. And I have used a taser many times. I know what I am doing.”

“So to summarize, what you are telling the court is that you were using a taser because you didn’t want to kill Mr. Wright. Is that right?”

“Yes, that’s right. Sir, my only intent was to make sure that no one else got hurt.” Her eyes are soft but not quite teary. She hunches over in her chair to show that she is not threatening, in the hope of convincing the jury that she would / could never kill anyone, at least not intentionally.

Manslaughter, not murder. Not guilty would be even better.

It is the Attorney General’s turn to cross-examine. Grace is going to go in hard, knowing that juries tend to believe the police, no matter what they say. “You were the senior officer at the scene. Why didn’t you try to de-escalate?”

“Well, ma’am, as this court has already heard, we are taught that pulling out a weapon *is* a form of de-escalation. If we believe that the suspect is armed, that is what we are required to do.”

“So there was no point at all in trying other things? Like making a connection with him? Talking him down?”

“Constable Fiore had already tried to talk to him, but as I’ve said, the victim didn’t comply. He failed to surrender. He was making bad choices.”

Grace sucks in her breath. She wants to strangle this woman, who, just like Constable Fiore, is trying to blame the victim for what has happened. It is at times like this that she questions the value of the work that she is doing. But here she is, in this courtroom, in this moment, so Grace pushes these thoughts aside. “So, are you saying it was his choice to get shot?”

“No, ma’am. But he had choices to make. It was his choice to push the hostess. It was his choice to keep his hand in his pocket. It was his choice to step towards us.”

What is all this “yes ma’am, no ma’am bullshit?” “And what was your choice?”

“What do you mean?”

“Why did you choose to use your taser?”

“I thought that he was trying to get up off the ground. I thought that he was still a threat, and....”

“And what?”

“We all know now that he couldn’t get up, that he was too badly injured, but I didn’t—I couldn’t—know that at the time. I had to make a split-second decision.” Constable Ivanova knows full well that the law makes allowances for police judgment.

“So you made a mistake about whether he was getting up. Did you make any other mistakes?”

“What do you mean?”

“Did you make any other mistakes that night?”

“No, I did everything according to procedure.”

“Even with the use of your taser?”

“Yes, ma’am. Everything was done exactly according to my training.”

“So let me ask you, how long does each jolt of the taser last?”

“Five seconds.”

“Five seconds. Are you sure?”

“Yes ma’am. Absolutely sure.”

“And, in your training, how long are you told apply the taser?”

“One pull. Five seconds.”

“Five seconds. Right. And how many pulls on the taser did you make?”

“One.”

“Are you sure?”

“Absolutely sure.”

“Do you know how many seconds the taser was engaged?”

“I haven’t counted, but since I only pulled the trigger once, I expect it was five seconds.”

“But you’re not sure? You don’t know for sure?”

Constable Ivanova shakes her head. Grace raises her eyebrow. “That is a surprise, since there are so many videos circulating on social media, which I am sure you have seen. Anyway, let me tell you how long you held down the taser. It was ten seconds. Yes, ten seconds.” Grace calls out to the clerk, “Please, let’s replay the CCTV now, right at the point at which the victim was tasered. And let’s time it this time.”

tick tick tick tick tick tick tick tick tick

Grace counts out 10 seconds. *I got you.*

Constable Ivanova’s brow is furrowed. “I know that I only pulled the trigger once. I did everything according to procedure. I always follow procedure to the letter. No matter what. That’s the kind of police officer that I am.”

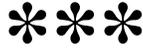
“Really? Then why do you think the taser went off for twice as long as it should have?”

“I really don’t know,” Constable Ivanova shakes her head. “The trigger must have jammed. It must have malfunctioned.”

“A malfunction would be highly unusual, Constable Ivanova. Here’s what I think happened. You felt undermined by Constable Fiore’s quick response. He was demonstrating the leadership that you should have. Then you were mocked by Mr. Wright, who called you ‘pussy.’ I think you lost your cool and you wanted to prove yourself. So, even though Mr. Wright was immobilized on the ground, in obvious pain and distress, you pulled the taser twice. You wanted to hurt him. You wanted to kill him. Tell the court, is that what happened?”

Constable Ivanova is shaking her head no. Grace raises an eyebrow.

“No,” says Constable Ivanova. “No, ma’am” she says softly. “I never intended to kill him.”



Hana takes her coffee out onto the balcony for some air. From eleven floors up she can see Yara, off in the distance, walking back from the plaza, with a grocery bag in her hand. Hana does the main shopping, once a week, scheduling the trip with the police well in advance. But they always find that by mid-week there is something else that they need, and it is mostly Yara who goes to get it. Sometimes Hassan will go, but he has started working at one of the fast-food restaurants nearby, and they barely see him, except when he dashes home to change out of his brown and orange polyester uniform before meeting up with his friends.

The grocery store caters to the culinary needs of all the new arrivals in the community, with Halal meat, various kinds of soy sauce and hot sauce, and 10kg bags of cross-cultural rice. Boxes of couscous occupy half a row, imported from distant countries, alternating between toasted and roasted, in different shapes, sizes and textures, all stacked together with no concern for geopolitics. No two-aisle solution here.

When she gets home Yara complains to Hana while they make dinner. “People can be so awful.” After the sisters had their big fight a few weeks ago, they have become very close.

Yara describes what happened. When the cashier rang through her items it was clear that the money in her hands was not enough to cover her purchases. Yara began checking all her pockets. The teenager at the till was indifferent to the delay, but the women in line behind her muttered and glared. Finally, just as she was about to put back one lemon, Yara found a two-dollar coin in her outside pocket, and she paid for everything in full, placing her items in her cloth bag. The women behind her would not stop grumbling. When she was about to leave, she turned on them, and said angrily, “Next time it could be you.” Which is exactly why they had made all the fuss.

Hana listens carefully, while she prepares the yoghurt, swirling in herbs and spices, but says nothing. The world beyond the apartment has become strange to her. But rather than saying anything about this to Yara, she mumbles something about ignoring the ignorant, and they get back to work.

Nahla is visiting a friend who lives two floors down. More and more, she avoids being at the apartment. She can’t stand the constant scrutiny of the surveillance cameras. But it’s the absence of her mother and her brother that really hurts. And then there is her grandmother, who dozes all day long, barely waking up, except to take small bites of food at odd hours, and a few sips of water.

The sisters hear a loud yelp and hurry into the living room. Jamal has been crying out more and more regularly, as if in pain. But, as usual, she is already back asleep.

They change the channel on the TV, flipping to the news. Ashley’s face appears on the large screen.

“This journalist is awful,” comments Hana. “I think she is more interested in what the witnesses at the trial are wearing, than what they say. What an idiot. How do these people get their jobs?”

Yara leans into Hana and wraps her arm around her. *Hana would be an excellent reporter if she were only given a chance.*

She squeezes her sister more tightly when she sees Marco in the background on the news.

“That’s him! That’s my friend the reporter. The guy I was telling you about!”

She wonders what he thinks about the trial. Ever since the Royal Commission moved its hearings across the country, she has not seen him much, although they text often. She misses him.

Yara lowers her voice to a growl. “I want that cop to be convicted. I hate them. So much.”

Hana grunts, saying nothing, but clearly in agreement. She knows that the police could be listening.

They step out onto the balcony.

“As much as I want it to happen, I doubt that she’ll be convicted.”

“Me too. It takes a lot for a jury to find a cop guilty.”

“It’s too bad. That prosecutor is *so* good. But it probably won’t matter.”

“I get so angry with this country sometimes. No accountability. No shame.”

Yara, now thinking of other things, says, “I miss them so much.”

“Me too. I still can’t quite believe it.”

“There is so much that I want to change.”

“What do you want to change the most?”

“A lot of things.”

“Like..?”

“Holding the police accountable. Ending deportation. Getting rid of the Americans. Bringing Tarek home...”

“So, what are you going to do?” asks Hana. She is desperate to do something, and more and more desperate the longer Tarek is missing. But the conditions of her house arrest make it impossible for her to get involved. She would put in jeopardy any group that she joined. But her sister could do something.

“I have some ideas,” Yara replies. “I’ve been thinking about...” Just then, her phone beeps with a message. “It’s out, it’s out,” she shouts. “Shit, it’s out!”

“Yara! Language!”

“It’s out!”

“What’s out?”

“The story about us,” she says, smiling broadly. “Marco’s story. It’s about our mother, about Tarek. And about you and your house arrest.” She cups her sister’s chin. “I told you that Marco would do it. He promised.”

The article has been posted online, which is where they see it first. In the first hour, thousands of people will read the blog, and tens of thousands after that. It won’t be long until Marco’s bosses do an about-face and agree to publish another version of the story, once they see how much attention it is receiving.

Hana grins at Yara. It is a brilliant piece of writing. Marco has shown, without a doubt, that the Canadian security agents made a clerical error. The Americans abbreviate their dates—month/day/year—unlike most other countries, including Canada, which usually start with the day, followed by the month, and then the year. Tarek’s name was, in fact, entered into the US national security database on July 1, 2023—the day after the Union Station shootings, when he was being detained by the US border officers. This was registered as 07/01/2023. The Canadians misread the notation and jotted it down as January 7, 2023.

It was an easy mistake to make, but one with enormous consequences. For it was upon this date that the case against Tarek hinged.

With this piece, Marco’s career gets the bump it deserves, and he is offered a number of permanent jobs.

But what else does his article accomplish? What can words ever achieve? Do opinions shift? Do policies change? Will they finally find out what has happened to Tarek? Will it bring him back? This is what his family hopes for most.



It's pouring on the day that the verdict is announced. One-hundred-year storms are more and more frequent these days. Pedestrians brace themselves as they lean into the wind, tottering in heels, or stomping in camel-coloured trench coats that billow in the wind. It rains and rains until the water overflows out of the sewers and pipes, runs off into ditches and drains, fills potholes and sinkholes. The playgrounds are flooded, and baseball diamonds submerged. All day the city is trapped under a massive cloud, which hovers until it finally slides off into the lake.

The rain has no bearing on the verdict. The weather is just a coincidence. It would be foolish to think otherwise. Just the same, people do get wet.

The lawyers are respectful with one another, knowing that they will meet again. In another court. On another matter.

“You played your hand well.”

“So did you. Until next time.”

It's not the first time that a police officer has been exonerated by the courts because of a malfunctioning weapon, and it probably won't be the last. The verdict has hinged on a technicality. Or rather, a technology. And technologies are always poised to fail.

Marco texts Tanisha. Again and again. But he never hears back. It is one of his life's regrets.

Outside the courthouse, people are incensed.

*Racist courts free killer cops!
Say his name!
No justice. No peace.*

As the protests grow, the riot police are called in, expecting the worst. They march towards the crowd, banging carbon steel batons onto plexiglass shields to clear the streets, while the Americans watch from a distance

In a gesture of appeasement, a full review of police tactics is ordered. The result? Same old, same old. More police on the streets. More money for police toys like body cameras and CCTV. And all officers will be authorized to carry tasers—not just the senior command.

And what about the Americans? They are incensed.

The Canadian government tries to reassure. “Our two countries were founded on the principles of freedom and democracy. The judiciary must be independent.”

But the Americans aren't interested in high-minded arguments. They want results. Immediately.

More troops are ordered into Canada.

“What choice do we have?” asks the Prime Minister, not for the first time, as she nervously fingers a bullet-proof vest.



“You’re not really going to go through with it are you?” Samir is frustrated. He hates driving in the city at the best of times, but especially not in summer when road repairs are in full swing. It’s one of the few times that he is sure to lose his temper.

What Edie hates is having serious conversations in the car. There is no escape. She can’t flounce off to the other room when things get uncomfortable.

“Well, are you?” Samir asks again. “Don’t tell me you are going to go ahead...” He looks over his shoulder as he edges out the nose of the car so that he can switch lanes. “Fucking traffic. Get a move on!” But nothing moves, not even when the light changes. They sit, jammed in by cars all around them, the heat of their engines melting the air.

On the radio is their favourite Sunday afternoon program, with its host who deftly coaxes engaging stories from her eclectic guests.

Edie tries to turn up the volume, but when Samir reaches over to lower it, Edie knows that he is serious. He asks her again, “Well, are you?”

“Why are you trying to start an argument. Why now?” Edie is rubbing the leather upholstery in the car, back and forth, as if a genie will appear and grant her wish to escape.

“I’m not arguing. I’m trying to have a conversation. This is important.”

Edie shifts in her seat so that she can look out the side window. When Vijay had asked Edie about making a speech at the RMBK-recognition ceremony, it was before she had begun her research about the Sarnia-Port Huron border facilities, and well before the other revelations about the company hit the news.

Given everything that she has learnt about RMBK, she can’t really go ahead, can she? She has been mulling over this question for days but resents Samir’s grilling.

“Don’t turn away from me.”

“I’m not,” she says, angling slightly back towards him. “Anyway, I’ve made my decision.”

“You can’t be serious that you’re going to go ahead. After everything we know about what they have done. And what about Oakes’s resignation from the Royal Commission? As you know, the Indigenous protests are still ongoing. Does none of this mean anything to you?”

“Of course it does...”

“And ‘White’—why does it have to be called ‘White’?”

“You know why. It’s being named after that RMBK guy who was killed...”

“Sure, sure. Name it after some corporate asshole. But you and I both know why they are naming it after him: it’s a dog whistle to their donors. Just think: if the guy’s name had been Black they wouldn’t have named it after him. No matter who he was. And don’t try to deny it. You know I’m right.”

Turning the corner, they drive straight towards a US checkpoint. Samir clenches his teeth. Ever since the verdict at Constable Ivanova’s trial, the Americans have brought in more troops. Everything is back to the way it was last summer, perhaps worse. The number of checkpoints has doubled. Snitch lines have been re-opened. Nights on curfew are broken by raids and detentions.

Samir is always anxious when he has to present his ID, which shows his place of birth as Tunisia: all that he has to protect him is his age. Edie is worried about all the frozen groceries in the trunk.

The officers are unpleasant, but they are eventually waived through. All is quiet in the front seats for a few minutes as they pull away, a little shaken. Deep down, Samir still blames Edie for the increased security, even though she knows that this was never her intention.

As soon as they have turned the corner, Edie blurts out: “I can’t stand having the Americans here. When are they going to get out?”

“Don’t change the subject. What were you going to say? About the award?”

Edie sighs. “I know the situation is not ideal. But I made a commitment.”

“Not ideal? That’s an understatement.”

“Right. But I said I would do it, and so I am going to do it. You know how important keeping my word is to me.”

“Hmm. You think you’re being so principled, but actually, your principles are getting in the way of doing the right thing.”

Edie scowls. “Samir! What difference would it make if I stepped down now? The ceremony is only days away. It will go ahead regardless!”

“Sure, but if you step down, you will have at least taken a stand. You will have said no. Somebody has to say no.”

“Believe me, it won’t change anything,” she says ruefully.

“Please Edie.”

“Look. I understand your concerns. I really do. But I need to do this. And anyway, it’s not all bad. The money will help support lots of needy students.”

“That’s all bullshit. I don’t believe all this blah blah blah about the students. If you really wanted to help the students you would take a stand. Be a role model. But no, you won’t do that. Because you don’t need to. That’s what privilege is, Edie. Doing nothing. And knowing that everything will still be alright for you in the end.”

Edie is taken aback. He has never spoken to her like this, not even in their many arguments over the last year.

She picks at her cuticles. “Look, I have only a few weeks left in the Dean’s Office. So this is what I am going to do. I will go ahead with the presentation because I said I would. I want to be known as someone who keeps her word. But then I will be done. No more administration. I promise. We can put all this behind us.”

“It’s not only about you and your career, you know. And anyway, you won’t be able to put it behind you. It will change everything. If you go ahead, people will think you’re a sell-out.”

“And you?”

“Me?”

“Yes, you.”

“Well, since you ask: me too.”

“You’re not being fair!” Edie wails. “Anyway, you’re one to talk.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, you went from being a humanitarian doctor to owning an eye clinic.”

“Don’t be stupid. That’s not the same thing at all.” He glares at her, before turning back to look at the road. “And as you know, we do a lot of pro bono work,” he says quietly.

“Sure, but you’re still part of the private system that you rail against. But I suppose it’s one rule for you, and another one for everyone else.”

“Look, we weren’t talking about me. Why do you always do this? You always turn it back on me.” He scowls. “And, as you well know, I went into the private sector only after many, many years—decades even—of working on the frontlines. I couldn’t keep up with the pace of the international work. Don’t throw my age in my face.”

“No matter what, you’re always in the right. Typical.” She looks over at Samir, and all she sees is an old man sitting next to her, stooped over the steering wheel, the creases on his forehead

stretching up to his bald head. At moments like this she has sudden flashbacks to when he was fifty, when she thought they would be young forever. She stares out the car window, and says, softening, as if talking to herself. “Just a few more days, and it will be all over. It was only temporary. It’s not such a big deal.”

But he will not concede. “You’re deluding yourself. You have been since the minute you agreed to be a Vice-Dean. And now the problem is even bigger: you have the opportunity to take a stand, and you refuse to do so.”

The rhythmic ticking of the indicator fills the car. Samir eases the car into a parking space along the main road. Edie stares out the window.

Samir shakes his head wearily. “I don’t know how come you can’t see any of this. It’s not like you.”

“That’s enough, Samir. I’ve had enough.”

“I really don’t understand how you can’t see it,” he continues, not listening.

“Enough, I said.” Suddenly, she is screaming. “Fuck you, Samir. Fuck you.” She flings open the door. Pauses. But he says nothing. All around her is the sound of honking cars stuck in the slow-moving traffic as she slams the door and walks away.

Samir stays in place. He turns the radio up a few notches and lets the soothing tones of the host wash over him, catching the last few minutes of an interview before they switch to the news.

He sits for a long time, thinking.

Then he starts the car again and navigates back out into the road. When he gets back to his condo, he unloads the groceries on his own.



Samir is not the only one who has called Edie out for making the presentation. Just a few days ago, she had been at work, leaning against the warm photocopier, tossing flyers from academic publishers straight into the recycling bin, when Jared walked in.

“Hi,” she said warily.

Jared headed straight to his mailbox, with barely a glance. “Hello.”

“How are you?”

“Fine.” He grabbed some manila envelopes and a few small packages, wrapped in brown cardboard, which he unwrapped.

“New books? For your research?” Edie has always been curious about what others are reading, fearful that she is missing out on the latest thing. She tried to read the titles on the spine, but he was already putting them in his bag.

“Yes.” He stepped over to the photocopier. “Are you done with this?” Edie nodded. He set the books to the side but extracted one and placed it open onto the platen glass. With a press of a button the fluorescent light appeared. She glanced away, instead staring at his feet, noticing how the hem of his trousers was turned up, precisely one inch above his ankles.

“Jared?”

“Hmm?” He was closing the lid of the machine and turning towards the door.

“Will you be attending the ceremony next week?” Edie assumed that he would be there—he is the type who never misses an opportunity to network and be seen.

“No way. Not a chance.”

“Really? Why not?”

“Are you serious? Why not?”

“Yes, why not?”

“You, of all people, should know why not. There’s no way that I want to be seen showing any support for RMBK. And frankly, I can’t believe you’re going to go ahead with it.”

“With the presentation? I have to. I agreed to do it some months ago.”

“Even after everything you’ve said about them???”

“Yes. Especially because of this. They shouldn’t be able to hide from the criticism they have faced.”

“Edith, can you really be so naïve?”

“Naïve? What do you mean?”

“If you go ahead, it’s like you’re condoning what they’ve done.”

“Don’t be silly. The ceremony is not about them, but about recognizing an important source of funding for our students—and for faculty research. We are facing dire times, with all the government cutbacks.”

“You may be right about the cutbacks,” Jared laughed, but not in a friendly way, “but taking RMBK money is like saying everything is ok: it’s business as usual.” He shook his head clutched his photocopies more tightly against his chest. “It’s always the same with people like you. You’re weaselly with your principles.”

“What do you mean? I have spoken up! Look at everything I’ve said about RMBK.” Edie’s tone is whining, even if she hadn’t intended it to be. “Anyway. I actually think the problem here is that you’re jealous.” *Where did that come from?*

“Jealous?”

“Yes, jealous: that I was asked to give the presentation, that I was promoted—”

“Edith, you couldn’t be more wrong. You’re making a big mistake.” Not waiting for an answer, he disappeared out the door.

She stood there for a few minutes, staring at the spot when he had been standing. She is not naïve, she wanted to shout at him. “It’s people like you who are the problem: all talk and no action,” she said, talking to the photocopier. “I’m the one taking responsibility, you’re just making excuses. And I’ll bet you wouldn’t turn down an RMBK research grant if one was offered to you.” Of that she is 100% sure.

Over the day she would think of several other stinging retorts, but only once Jared was long gone.



Ever since his article on the Al-Khalifa family, Marco's career has exploded. But he still makes time to follow up on Kareem. He is the teenager who was shot at Union Station, and for the last year has remained in hospital, in an induced coma. Most people have forgotten about him, but not Marco.

Kareem's mother has quit her job so she can be at his side, while his father has taken on extra shifts at the power plant to make ends meet. His brother and sister, both older, have been coping as best they can. All they want is to have things back as they used to be, with their parents at home for dinner, but immediately feel guilty because that will only happen if... They push the thought away.

A year later, what more do we know about Kareem? Not much. People pay attention to those who die, not to the living dead. All we have are a few details that Marco uncovered last year. Kareem hated school and wouldn't eat fish. He liked soccer and skateboarding, and music of all kinds, the louder the better. He had a crush on a girl in his class, but he hadn't told her yet.

The saddest day for his family was just a few months ago, back in March, when he turned 15. They gathered at his bedside, on one of the rare occasions when they could all be at the hospital together. There was birthday cake, slathered with icing and piped rosettes, mostly uneaten. A few helium balloons danced against the hospital window, fluttering above the air vent. On that day, on that day especially, they hoped against hope that Kareem would wake up. But he didn't.

So his mother continues to sit next to him. She crochets to pass the time. A ball of white cotton spins in her hands as her eyes flit between her son and the smudged window, fringed with polyester curtains. The clicking of the needles measures time like a metronome, while the nurse injects liquid into her son's body, which courses through translucent tubes.

She thinks back to how things might have been different. If he had missed his bus, and caught the next one, twenty minutes later. If he had lingered at the kiosk, buying a snack for the ride home. If he had bent over to tie his shoelace, which had come undone. If he had paused for a second to take her phone call.

These are the thoughts that fill his mother's head this morning, which begins as does almost any other. Large bins full of garbage are being rolled out to the parking lot. The rush-hour traffic is heavy. The coffee shop across the street is full of weary customers, coming and going, not knowing which is which. Nurses banter as their shifts change over, sharing a laugh and a few tears that cut through the smell of antiseptic and disinfectant.

It is like any other day, except that Kareem briefly opens his eyes. He turns his head slightly towards his mother while she is looking out the window. He gurgles. Then closes his eyes for the last time.



The presentation of the White Chair in Canada-US Border Infrastructure is being held at the Cities School, which has quickly become the premier space on campus for hosting exclusive events. The building's gold sheathing sparkles in the sun.

Eddie walks into the room that, months ago, was decorated like a southern plantation house, but which is now arranged theatre-style, ringed with upholstered chairs in front of a raised platform on which rows of chairs have been set out.

Amongst the guests, she sees a few familiar faces. Some look over, while others ignore her. She has still not gotten used to the whims of her colleagues.

She spies Vijay Rao coming towards her and grabs a glass of wine from the passing tray to boost her courage. "I don't think I can do this" she says to him, which is the most she has spoken to him face-to-face since their night together many months ago.

"Wow, not even a 'hi' first?"

"Hello."

"So, you don't think you can do this, do you?" He looks at her with narrowed eyes. "But I remember you agreeing to it pretty eagerly." He almost chokes on the word 'eagerly.'"

"No I can't. I really can't. Not after all the revelations about RMBK." She reaches out to clasp his arm, but he twists away.

"So you want to withdraw, just because there's a whiff of controversy."

"It's more than a whiff. It stinks."

"Ha ha. Nice one. But I don't think so, Eddie. You can't back out now." He reaches out to the passing server, who is holding the tray of hors d'oeuvres at the height of her breasts, as if this will make her offerings more enticing. He grabs two thin rounds of potato galette, topped with crème fraiche and little nubs of caviar, artfully arranged in a yin-yang design. "You knew what you were doing. Right from the start. You were on to RMBK long before everyone else. If you were really worried about all this, you wouldn't have said yes in the first place." He swallows a galette without chewing. "And anyway, a deal is a deal. It's too late to back out now. Your name is on the program."

"But does RMBK even want me to make this presentation, after what I've said about them? I'm sure that they would prefer me to disappear."

“No, not at all. They are delighted to have you on board. It will help with their re-branding.”

“Re-branding?” She groans and shakes her head. “I don’t want anything to do with that. I really don’t think I can do this.”

“You have to,” he says, pinching her arm so hard between his thumb and forefingers that there will be bruises there tomorrow in a constellation of purple stars. If the glass of wine in her hand weren’t already nearly empty, it would have splashed all over her dress.

“Edith,” Vijay continues in a menacing tone. “It was me who put your name forward. Drop out now and you will make be look bad. And you don’t want to do that. You really don’t want to do that.”

They lock eyes angrily until he hears someone calling out “VJ! VJ!” It’s the Dean, who is always dropping the vowels in his name, as if this means they are the best of friends. Vijay scampers off.

The honoured guests are starting to take their places. There are a handful of people from RMBK already on stage. Penny White is front and centre as the evening’s special guest of honour. She nods to the crowd, relishing in her new-found celebrity.

Senior administrators from the university are climbing the steps to their seats, including the very tall university president. He stops to talk to Penny before sitting down. *What a lovely woman!* A few undergraduate students stand around awkwardly in the outfits that they will wear again to their convocation in a few weeks time, when they will be magically transformed into alumni (and potential donors).

Edie is making her way to the stage, but she is intercepted by Vijay. “Edith, I’d like you to meet Brandon Chen. We’re delighted that he’s been able to be here with us today. He has recently been promoted to senior manager at RMBK, in the Infrastructure division.”

“Pleased to meet you,” replies Edie, unconvincingly, although she does look him up and down with approval, and much less surreptitiously than she thinks. “I’m Edie Grant, Vice-Dean of Knowledge Mobilization.”

“*Acting* Vice-Dean,” Vijay interjects.

“Right,” replies Edie. Turning to Brandon she asks, “So you’re at RMBK?”

“Yes, in Infrastructure, like Vijay said. I’m charge of the new bridge project at Sarnia-Port Huron. I think you are familiar with it, aren’t you Professor Grant?”

“Yes, of course I am,” she replies, brusquely. “Are the blockades still up?” She knows full well that they are. Indeed, over the last few days things have been getting more heated. Helicopters flybys have been ramped up. More police have set up on site, and raids are happening regularly. Over one hundred arrests have been made. Dozens have been hurt. The military is on stand-by.

Brandon frowns, so Vijay jumps in quickly. “Edith’s research is on Canada-US border issues, you know.”

“We are all quite aware of Edith’s work,” says Brandon coolly.

As he continues talking, RMBK’s President M. wanders over, as self-important as if he runs a country, not a company. The President nods. “You must be Professor Grant—or can I call you Edith? You’re one of the ones making the presentation today, right? Thank you. We at RMBK really appreciate your support.” He shakes her hand vigorously.

Support? “Yes, I will be making the presentation. I am always ready to support student awards and research.”

“Wonderful,” continues President M. “And yes, we’ve heard about your research. It’s had quite an impact. All the more reason for you to be seen to be on our side.”

Vijay sees that Edie’s face is beginning to crumple again. “Impact,” Vijay repeats. “That’s what we like to hear, isn’t that right, Edith? It’s all about impact. Making a difference.”

“Yes,” she agrees, reluctantly. “Research impact. Information transfer. Knowledge mobilization...” Edie speaks as if she is watching someone else say these words from afar.

“Although,” replies President M., turning to look at Edie, “we all know that the best research is grounded in real evidence and not in false accusations.”

Before Edie can respond, a photographer approaches. Yes, of course they want their picture taken, President M. insists. He extends his arm around Edie’s shoulder in an all-too-friendly way, and Brandon and Vijay take their places on either side.

Images of the protesters at Sarnia-Port Huron run through Edie’s head. She feels sick. She leans into President M. so that she can speak to him quietly. “You know that your company can’t buy us off with your money, right?”

“Edith, we wouldn’t dream of it” President M. says, confidently. “We know the rules. We have been fully briefed.” She relaxes slightly. His hand drops from her shoulders to her waist, and he presses his fingers into the fleshy bit above her hips. She tries to shake his hand loose, but the photographer admonishes her to stay still. Out of sight of the camera, President M. rubs his fingers along the seam of her dress.

“Camembert!” the photographer calls out to them, “a runny one! Haha.” Their smiling faces will be featured on page 3 in tomorrow’s newspapers.

Once the photographer has moved on, they are beckoned to take their places on stage with the others. President M. turns to Edie, and leans in. “Don’t you worry, Edie, we know the rules. But we’ve also made it very clear what our expectations are. Don’t you go fucking this up. We’re watching you.” He looks at her with his cold eyes, and then he climbs the stairs to take his place on stage, in the front row, shaking hands as he goes.

Vijay pulls Edie along with him. She feels woozy. Was that a threat? Of course it was.

She begins to sweat. The scent from her underarms wafts up to her nose. Her panties moisten and she breathes in her own dank smell. She should not have had that second glass of wine. Her face is on fire. She desperately needs to go to the bathroom, but there is not enough time. Vijay is pointing her towards a chair, on the aisle, at the back.

The emcee approaches the podium to get the ceremony started. He has a few prepared comments that elicit some laughs, before he launches into a fawning history of RMBK’s philanthropy and good deeds. But Edie can’t focus on what is being said.

Is Samir right? Should I back out? Does this mean that Jared is right too? Fuck. Are all these men fucking right? How can I be seen to be supporting RMBK? After everything I’ve said? Fuck fuck fuck.

The heat spreads under her skin like molten lava, as a hot flash takes over her body. Looking out at the room, she sees all the very-important-people in their neatly arranged chairs, while the overhead lights are reflected off all the eye-glasses in the audience, from bland executive frames to browlines, rounded and flat top. If only Edie’s vision were 20/20.

One of her colleagues from the Engineering faculty—someone she knows only by name—stands up to make a little speech and glorifies the importance of infrastructure to contemporary society. Where would we be without roads, rail, bridges, water, electricity, oil? Just think of the progress that has been possible! Just think of the importance to civilization! That is why we need companies like RMBK, he continues....

Edie squirms. Even in her state of agitation, she can’t help but think of what is left unsaid: the land expropriation, indentured labour, human rights violations, murder and rape, pollution, privatization and profiteering, offshored money and tax evasion... All the things that RMBK has been accused of. All the things that *she* has accused them of. And the list goes on and on.

Bile rises and sears her throat. She feels like she is going to throw up.

I can’t do this!

Vijay is sitting right in front of her. She taps him on the shoulder, and hands him the glossy gold folder, embossed with the RMBK logo, which holds the speech prepared for her by the advancement office. “I can’t do it. I just can’t. I don’t feel well.” She scuttles off the back of the stage.

She does look a little peakish. Her face is bright red.

Vijay quickly rearranges the look of anger on his face as he turns back to the audience, then rises to his feet and to the occasion. The presentation is artfully made, as he extols strong bilateral relations, efficient borders, expansive preclearance facilities and, last but not least, the role of the RMBK in making all of this innovation possible. “Building critical infrastructure for resilience!”

And then, in amongst the clapping, he decides to go off-script. Vijay invites Penny White to join him at the podium. He flirts with her. She is enchanted. Her blue eyes sparkle. By the end of the ceremony, almost everyone in attendance will have forgotten about Edie’s disappearance. But not everyone. Some are watching closely, very closely indeed.



Eddie texts Samir: Can we meet up? We need to talk.

Samir texts back: I can't stand by you anymore.

I can't stand you anymore.

And that is that.



When Edie receives Samir's text she is devastated.

It will be days before she stops crying. She doesn't go outside. She barely eats.

The words from Samir's text follow her everywhere.

I can't stand by you anymore.



In the midst of the chaos, Edie reflects back on the last year. She couldn't be happier that this chapter of her life is coming to a close. Today, Sunday, June 30, 2024, is the last day of her six-month term as Acting Vice-Dean of Knowledge Mobilization. Tomorrow, she will be free.

She will go back to teaching and trying to finish her book. The book on borders that she can never quite finish.

If you were to ask her now, she would concede that taking on the administrative role was a mistake. She wouldn't do so again, although it's not as if anyone has asked. A relief, but also a bit of a disappointment, though Edie would never say so out loud. And certainly not to Samir, if he ever speaks to her again.

From where she is positioned behind the chain-link fence, she can see the makeshift stage in the distance, which has been set up on the forecourt at Union Station, under the shadow of the colonnade. Off to one side is a carry-deck-crane, parked next to a large object, hidden under burlap.

The Prime Minister is back in town, and is about to begin her speech, likely among the most important of her career. The next election looms, and her ratings have plummeted.

Good afternoon everyone. We are gathered here today at Union Station to remember the tragic incident that took place on this site almost exactly one year ago today. The lives of two—sorry, three—people were cut short. We pay tribute to them and to their loved ones. *Nous leur rendons hommage ainsi qu'à leurs proches.*

Some of the dignitaries clap their hands solemnly. There are rows of American and Canadian government types, and a surplus of RMBK executives, including President M., who waves at the audience that has gathered, directly in front of the stage, ready to join in the celebrations.

Jared is among this group. "This is about the future of our two countries, little man," he tells Ronin, who stands at his side. He brushes the long black hair from his son's eyes, which he immediately shakes it back into place. "This is an historic moment," he continues. "Something you'll be able to tell your grandchildren about. That you were here, on this site, when the monument was unveiled."

Jared is trying to stay calm, for his son's benefit, but he is getting increasingly worried about the angry people gathering behind them. He had assumed that today's event would be small and festive, and that the attendees would be mostly sympathetic. (Given all that's happened this last year, he probably should have known better.)

Gathering behind them, on the other side of the chain-link fence, are groups of protesters. That is where Edie is, only a few metres away from father and son. But she can't see them, nor they her,

with the fence in between them, at a height of three meters and anchored in concrete. Jared's first thought was that this was overkill, but he has since changed his mind. *The more important the event, the taller the fence.*

At the same time that we mourn, we also want to celebrate with our most important ally and closest neighbour: the United States of America!

"Idiots," Edie mutters, as people continue to arrive, jostling up against her. A bump on her arm. An elbow in her back. A shoe on her foot. Hundreds of people are turning up, if not thousands. Definitely thousands. There is a nervous energy in the air. Something big is about to happen.

From some distance away, Edie hears drumming. She turns and tries to peer over the crowd to see where the sounds are coming from, but she is not tall enough to see much, other than the red warrior flags that are held high in the air.

*When our land is under attack,
What do we do?
Stand Up, Fight Back!*

This is the first major rally that Edie has attended in years. When she was in high school, she regularly marched in the streets. Almost every weekend there was a demonstration of some kind, opposing Apartheid or Free Trade, or in support of nuclear disarmament or access to abortion. When the Yonge Street riots took place, Edie was there, pumping her fist in the air, demanding justice not only for Rodney King in LA, but for all the Black men killed by Toronto police. Eight in the previous four years in that city alone. And that was back in 1992.

No justice, no peace.

Thirty years later, little has changed. Edie feels the same anger. She hears the same chants. She sees the same slogans.

It's enough to make her feel dizzy. She feels sick.

This is the first time in weeks that she has ventured from her condo.

The ground beneath her feet is unsteady.

Samir still refuses to answer any of her texts. She has tried calling, but he won't pick up.

Edie still cries, but not every day, and mostly at night, when she is alone.

A few days ago, she had decided that enough is enough. Over this last year, she has wasted too much time fretting over her mistakes rather than owning up to them, spent too much time regretting who she has become and who she might have been, instead of looking to the future. It's time for change, she tells herself. Time to move forward. And if she must, it is time to forget about Samir.

Easier said than done.

She fans her face. Her forehead is burning. It doesn't help that it is another one of those hot, hot summer days, when the sky is clear blue except for a few trailing clouds, which seem to make the sun shine all the more brightly. Even the birds are still, perched above the building's portico, tucked into the shade among the cornices.

The health of Canada's economy depends on trade, and the United States is our number-one trading partner. We will continue to work closely with our closest neighbour so that we can ensure the quality of life of the middle class and all those who want to join them.

The Prime Minister gestures to the mass of dignitaries behind her, sweating into their summer suits, including the American Ambassador, who nods brusquely, his face itchy from the sun. There is some loud clapping out in front, where Jared is standing with Ronin, but boos and jeers erupt all around Edie, from where she is on the other side of the fence.

Ensuring efficient cross-border trade requires security and innovation at the border. Customs preclearance is an excellent example of both, and is a cornerstone of our excellent cross-border relationship, which is the envy of the world!! *Nous sommes l'envie du monde!!*

"Idiots" hisses Edie. And then more loudly, "This is bullshit."

There are murmurs of agreement around her. "Fucking bullshit!" she repeats, more strongly now. She draws energy from the crowd, moving in tandem with the people around her. Her fist pumps the air, and she stomps her feet. Her body is remembering the thrill of rallies like these, even if she has forgotten why, years ago, she stopped marching.

There is some dissonant noise to her right. Other chants are filling the air. A group of counter-protesters is forming. They are smaller in number, but make up for it with enthusiasm, with their own flags and placards that they jab angrily into the skies.

Canada First!
 * *True North Strong and Free* *
Make Canada Great Again!

The two groups are corralled behind the fence so that they are kept from the stage and the dignitaries, while they are being kept separate from one another by police lines, four helmets deep. Over their heads, insults are being shouted back and forth.

Who are those assholes?

On Edie's side of the police lines, the numbers continue to grow. Bodies press up against her, glistening with sweat and coconut oil, laced with the smell of weed. As the crowd swells, she is pushed up even closer to the front, up against the fence, closer to the police, and further away from Samir.

Yes, Samir is here too. The tumult of the last year has unsettled him. He has been stopped too many times. He has been detained more than once. He has seen others get hurt. What would his father want him to do? He raises his fist in the air.

*Americans go home!
Troops out now!*

With him are two younger women. He bends towards one of them, as if to brush his lips against her forehead as they talk conspiratorially, cringing at the Prime Minister's words which waft out over the speakers.

“How can she live with herself?”

“Such a hypocrite.”

“How do people like her get away with it?”

Samir stares into the distance. Is he watching the Prime Minister? Or has he spotted Edie in the crowd?

Edie hasn't seen him. It would upset her deeply to see him with these young women, even once she realized that one of them is his sister, visiting from Montreal, her first visit in too many years. *What is she doing here?* Edie would crumble inside, realizing how quickly Samir's life had become disentangled from her own. *And who is that other woman?*

Today is not about politics, but about friendship and partnership. *Aujourd'hui, il ne s'agit pas de politique, mais de l'amitié et de la collaboration.* It is about working together, across borders, to preserve our trade and our quality of life. It's about trust and cooperation.

Yara is outraged at the Prime Minister's words. Everything is about politics, she wants to scream. *Everything is political!*

This is the first time that Yara—or any of her family—has been back to Union Station since her mother was shot. If she were to go inside, she would see that no traces of that night remain. The bullet holes have been filled, the walls replastered. Another layer of gold paint has been applied to the sign: *Welcome to the United States.*

But Yara has no interest in going into the building to see where her mother died, and where Tarek was first detained. *But what would Hana do, if she were here? Would she be curious to look inside?*

Hana can't be here, of course. She's still under house arrest, with her movements monitored night and day. But at least now she is fully aware of what her sister is up to. In fact, it was she who suggested Yara get involved.

Yara was only too eager to comply. She asked Marco about groups she might join, and he made some introductions. He also came to help, when he could, and brought Benjie too, when he wasn't working. For the last several weeks, the three of them have been at countless workshops and planning sessions. Together they came up with slogans and designed placards. They posted details on social media and listservs. They helped to write the manifesto that will be released later this afternoon.

Everything that she learned, everything that she did, she shared with Hana. They whispered out on the balcony of their apartment, letting their words flutter in the wind before they could be recorded by the police. Hana took great pleasure in helping to make some of the protest signs being used today.

Bring back Tarek!
No fences, no borders!

Doing something, anything at all, gives Hana a tiny bit of hope for the future. She wasn't sure about what she had to be hopeful about, not precisely, but there was hope nonetheless.

Little Nahla had helped too, colouring in hearts and rainbows, understanding far more than her sisters gave her credit for. Even Hassan showed some interest, when he wasn't at school or working, which wasn't often. Only their grandmother kept to herself, dozing on the couch.

Yara looks over at Marco, brows furrowed, as he scans the crowd, making mental notes for the article he will write about today's events. After his article on the Al-Khalifas, he was finally offered a full-time position at his newspaper, with a regular column. He is trying to get Yara a job there too—perhaps a paid internship for the summer. It's not clear that this is the career that she will want to follow, but it would be excellent experience.

The Al-Khalifas are deeply grateful for everything that Marco has done. After his article was published, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration was forced to resign. The Minister of Public Safety has been hounded with questions; it won't be long before she also steps down. And all the pundits agree that the government is not likely to survive the next election.

And the implications for the family? Hana's Security Certificate is being reviewed, and there is a good chance that she will be exonerated. But as for Tarek? They still have yet to hear anything about how or where he is.

“There are so many police!” Yara exclaims. Marco looks over at her with affection. She is unmissable, in her yellow headscarf with tiny blue flowers. She is radiant, beaming into the crowd. Some people are like this: beacons in a storm. Her dead mother had been like this.

Her gaze is on the riot squad which has lined up in their paramilitary gear, gas masks at the ready. Their feet are jammed into weaponized tactical boots, with steel toe reinforcements. Thick gun straps are slung around their necks, their MP5A3 sub-machine guns at the ready. Laced through their belts are rings and rings of plastic handcuffs.

“And the military is here too.” Benjie points to lines of soldiers in uniform around the rim of the crowd.

“Canadian?”

“Yes, but also American. You almost can’t tell the difference anymore.”

Then Marco points to the helicopters circling above them. “Blackhawks,” he tells Yara.

“That one is flying really low.”

“It’s to intimidate us.”

“Aren’t you worried?”

“Yup, but that’s exactly why we’re here.”

The Prime Minister finishes her speech, and steps aside to make room at the podium for the American Ambassador. As the people on stage move into a new formation, Ashley suddenly comes into view, holding on to Brandon’s arm. They are among the group of RMBK executives, who are there to commemorate the death of Peter White, while also celebrating the company’s recent inroads into American markets.

It is Ronin who sees Ashley first. Tugging on his father’s trousers, he shouts out “There’s the bitch.”

“Ronin! Please! Don’t use language like that. It’s not nice.”

“But that’s what you called her!”

“Shh.” Embarrassed, Jared turns around to see if anyone has heard his son but is relieved to see that all attention is focused elsewhere. He wonders when he should tell Ronin about his new job back in New York city. He will be moving soon. The details are yet to be worked out, but he thinks that they will be able to visit on weekends, at least on alternating weekends, or perhaps once a month. He pats his son on his head.

Up on stage, the American Ambassador starts to speak, wiping his brow with a white cotton handkerchief.

Good afternoon, everyone. As you know, a year ago today, an American border officer successfully disrupted a terrorist plot here at Union Station, and the risk to the public was neutralized. National security was secured. We are grateful to him—and to all our border officers—in Canada and around the world, for their hard work and their vigilance.

Yara boos and hisses. She yells out ‘liar’ and ‘murderer’ but her words get lost in the noise.

Jared can't keep his eyes off Ashley. Something is different about her. She looks happy—as if she has eaten a big meal and is sated. He has an aching feeling, laced with anger.

Standing to one side of her is Penny White, who is clapping along with the rest of them. She is one of the guests of honour, laughing as if being a widow is the best thing that has ever happened to her, as her aquamarine diamond sparkles in the sun.

Customs preclearance is a crucial component of the strong relationship between Canada and the United States. Today, we are installing a glorious new monument in tribute to this partnership, and Canada's ongoing cooperation.

The Ambassador gestures dramatically to his right, to the 'Monument of Multiculturalism.' Erected over thirty-five years ago, the bronze statue is almost as old as the official policy itself. It features a naked man surrounded by doves that carry ribbons in their beaks, which encircle the figure like the meridians of a globe.

The boom of the carry-deck-crane swings over to the statue. A chain is lashed around the man's naked body three times, fastened under his outstretched arms, and then attached to the hook of the crane. The truck's motor strains with exertion. The smell of petrol fills the air. Finally, the statue breaks free from the plinth, and hangs suspended, creaking gently as it rocks back and forth.

All eyes shift to the hulking shape nearby, as the burlap cover is pulled back to reveal the new statue.

Ashley gasps. "It's beautiful!" Brandon puts his arm around her, and squeezes her tight, as people around them cheer.

A bronzed bald eagle is revealed, with outstretched wings, beak agape, and beady eyes that narrow as if ready to attack. One set of talons grips an olive branch; the other clutches arrows. Words are etched around the base of the bronze statue: on the front, "Children of a common mother" and on the back, "Brethren dwelling together in unity." The eagle will be set onto a classical-style, fluted stone plinth, on which are carved the letters R-M-B-K. It is they who have paid for everything after all.

As the new statue is revealed, the protesters around Edie begin to chant, and she joins in.

Hey, hey, ho, ho
RMBK has got to go

"What a bunch of losers!" Ashley points in the general direction where Edie is standing.

"Not so loud please, sweetheart."

"But it's ridiculous," continues Ashley, without lowering her voice. "Why target RMBK? After everything your company has accomplished."

“Don’t worry, Ashley. It will all blow over. It always does.”

“But those people are ruining everything,” she whines. “I’m so fed up with this social justice warrior bullshit. Aren’t you?”

“Hmm...”

“They scare me.”

“It’s ok. The police are here.”

“Thank goodness.” Ashley looks out appreciatively at the military equipment that has been parked at the end of the street. Several armoured trucks are at the ready, one topped with a water cannon. A Hummer loaded with a Long Range Acoustic Device is on stand by. Soldiers have their assault rifles at the ready.

“Those people have the right idea,” she says as she points to a cluster of counter-protesters, with their ‘Unite the Right’ t-shirts.

Brandon looks over to where she is pointing. “Really? Them?”

“Yeah. They’re not afraid to stand up to these idiots. To stand up for our rights.”

Brandon doesn’t have much time for any of them, but he can’t ignore the signs that this group of group are carrying, with messages like ‘Migrants Not Welcome’ and ‘Immigrants Go Home.’ “Ashley, I’m not sure that those people are interested in my rights...” *I am standing right here! Can’t you see me?*

“Oh, they don’t mean you. You’re one of us. A model of success. You’re not a threat.”

He looks at her quizzically: it’s the first time he’s heard her say anything quite like this. He lets his arm fall from where it had been draped around her shoulder, and steps back a little. In this moment he sees her so clearly, he can’t believe he ever looked upon her in any other way.

*What do we want?
Justice*

*When do we want it?
Now*

As the chanting grows louder, people grab onto the fence and rattle it fiercely.

From behind, mounted officers yell orders while their Clydesdales whinny and snort. “Move back! Stand down!”

Yara shouts out, along with the others around her, as they surge closer, knocking over some plastic orange bollards that have been set up, and pushing into the police.

“Fuck RMBK! Fuck the police!” Marco and Benjie shout in unison.

A few metres away, Edie joins in. “Fuck the Americans. Fuck RMBK.” She says quietly. She likes how the words feel in her mouth. “Fuck the police,” she says, a little more loudly.

The officers tighten their fists around their batons. They grip their shields. They are being squashed on both sides by the protesters and the counter-protesters, who continue to hurl insults over their helmets as they push towards their opponents.

The police pull the tinted visors down over their faces.

Then a plastic bottle, heavy with water, is thrown over their heads. And then another.

The response is quick. The police push forward. Without warning, they start grabbing at people who are within their reach, dragging them away towards waiting vans, dark grey and unmarked.

Yara is filming everything. But she stops when she sees Marco. He is holding onto someone’s leg while the police try to pull him away, tugging at his arms. Benjie grabs at Marco, trying to pull him back. As she watches, another officer tackles him from behind, intent on knocking him over. Yara screams, and lunges towards them both, holding out her phone, and kicking at his shins, over and over.

The cop stumbles, gripping at his baton, but releasing Marco, who slips back into the crowd.

Yara falls, scraping her hands, and bashing her knee. But she jumps up quickly to start filming again, her phone now sticky with blood.

Edie watches as all this unfolds, stuck in place as if time has slowed down and sped up all at once.

She begins to scream, more loudly than she thought possible. “Fuck the Americans. Fuck RMBK.” Before she knows it, she is right up front, banging on their shields. “Fuck the police!”

The police adjust their visors, putting on their gas masks, tightening their straps. Tear gas is shot into the crowd. Smoke billows. Skin burns. People gasp for breath. The taste of gas is on their tongues. A few of them throw up—they will never fully recover.

Marco shouts out, warning people to cover their mouths and eyes. Edie is standing close by, but she can’t hear him. His words are tamped out by the tear gas, and the cries of pain.

The police fire rubber bullets into the crowd. The man next to Edie is hit in the groin; he doubles over. Someone else has their eyeball ruptured.

Eddie is hit in the arm. The force is enough to knock her down.

She falls, hitting her head hard on the concrete pavement.

Yara reaches out to help, a shadow through the tear gas.

“Is that you?”

“You need to get up.”

“I can’t.”

“You can’t just lie there.”

“Can you help me? Please help me.”

“You need to do something.”

“Please help.”

“Are you there?”

“Can’t you see me?”

“Get up.”

“Is that you? Are you there?”

I’m right here. Where are you?
