

## YOU MAKE YOUR DECISION

... To the woman (God) said ... (Because thou hast eaten of the tree of which I commanded thee not to eat) I will greatly increase thy travail and thy pregnancy; with pain thou shalt bear children; and to thy husband shall be thy desire, and he shall rule over thee.

... And to Adam he said, because thou hast hearkened to the voice of thy wife ... curst be the ground on thy account; with toil shalt thou eat (of) it all the days of thy life ... In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, until thou return to the ground ...

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Once upon a time, there was a farmer and his wife. Everyday they argued over the same thing, the division of their labor. The farmer didn't understand what his wife did with her day, she didn't know how to carry out his. She complained of the children, chores ... baking, washing, ironing, cleaning. And so the husband provided his wife with the best of modern conveniences: washer, dryer, dishwasher, Hoover. But in spite of all he'd provided, she wasn't satisfied; the old complaints were simply replaced with a new problem: leisure time. The farmer tried to teach his wife to mend fences, milk the cows, bring in the harvest, but she was impossible. And so she turned to foolishness: quilting bees, bake-offs, visiting other farmer's wives who had the same problem: leisure time.

And there another tale begins ...

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Laughing her head off, the secretary ushered the young woman into the Dean's broadloomed office. (Not *really* laughing her head off; it only seemed that way.)

Laughing his head off, the Dean gestured to a chair in front of his massive oak desk. "Have a seat, have a seat," he said.

What have I done to deserve your laughter? the girl asked with her eyes. She didn't understand then, nor did she in the years that followed. (I remember the humiliating self-doubt.) But why *laughter?* a steel-booted kick, a private joke with herself the victim.

*Think how she must have felt* that sunny southern-Indiana afternoon in August 1956 far from home (Toronto), seated in his sound-choked office, surrounded by walls of weighty music texts and bound scores, *the butt of derision*. He hadn't answered her unspoken question, not immediately, only smiled back, a stupid pasted grin (that's how it appeared), didn't answer until she brought up the letter. Three-paged, typed, single-spaced. Remember? she jogged his memory.

That jogged his laughter. Why should he grant her money? He'd found it amusing that she'd spill out *she wants, needs, (dies) to do thus and so*, would utter such melodramatic desires, beginning naively with one's name, introducing oneself. Who starts a letter that way?

She hadn't intended to be amusing. These outpourings expressed childhood fantasies, youthful ambitions. Everyone wants to be a great something, the Man commented. But she'd *written* "fine;" *fine* pianist; fine was not great.

It all began long ago, she explained (intensely serious), in her grandfather's Cabbagetown home where she listened to her mother, a raven-haired beauty, playing on an old player piano ... *Listen*

*to the Mocking Bird ... listen to the mocking bird, oh the mocking bird is singing all the day ...* singing with quivery voice, a warbler, and joy tinged with the melancholy of generations of *hasidic* cantors and mournful fiddlers from the *shtetl*.

He found this amusing too. What had all this to do with the present? he seemed to be asking, his fingers forming a tent at his (smiling) lips.

She tried another tack.

One evening, no longer a child, but a young woman of sixteen, she'd climbed, breathless, to the uppermost heights of Massey Hall to hear the great Giesecking. *Schumann, Arabesque ...* a sound, simple, hushed, serene, floated upward, reached with, oh, such effortless clarity and resonance her insides trembled, the bridge of her nose tingled. *Debussy, Chopin ...* At the Bechstein, he brushed the keys with fine, elongated fingers (spanning an octave), causing a spontaneous unteachable thing to happen not simply *to* the notes, but *between*, something rhythmic and sonoric, moving forward and holding back, cheating and robbing, giving and adding; something called beauty and genius. All, liquid, each tone, phrase, shift in sentiment, flowed one from the other without jarring or angularity, the keyboard an orchestra. When he'd finished, gauzy tone-clusters lingered, cocooned in a profound silence no one was willing to break, dying their own death. She knew then what path she must take.

That is how she expressed herself.

But the Dean had his own story: *The tale of the farmer and his wife ...*

"You understand?" he asked.

His unlined face and faded blue eyes made his gaze appear genuine, the question innocent. She turned quickly from him. For a moment, until she could regain her composure, she concentrated on the treed grounds outside, the great limestone buildings, students everywhere. When she turned back, her glance settled on his expensive grey suit, held fast by its sheen.

"You understand?" he repeated. *I'll bet on the men, who make careers; women make bambinos."*

There followed a chasm of silence (I remember to this day) through which she fell, plunging downward through light-years.

He smiled (once more), and glanced at his watch, then stood, taking up all the space. "Come now, my dear," extending his huge hand, "You made your decision the moment you said I DO."

On her way down the long corridor, she imagined him singing a song about a mocking bird, and laughing his head off.

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*You play very well, my dear, but what have you been doing all these years?*

She's crying her head off. Not really; it just feels that way to Jenny.

Standing in their family room (anywhere down South) amongst empty, open boxes (boxes, boxes ...)

- Must we go?
- We're going, Jen. (Kindly) Can't be helped.
- Three years, we're never more than that *anywhere*.
- Jenny, if I want the promotion, we move.
- But to *Alberta*?
- To Alberta. The Company says that's where I'm needed, it's as simple as that.
- But my trio ... We're just now sounding like an ensemble.
- (Gently admonishing) Jenny ...
- The conservatory ... the wisteria, all purple and tumbling over the portico ...
- I can't afford to turn it down, Jen.
- Our house ... the iris ... pink and purple and yellow ...

- Our *family* needs it, Jenny.  
 - For your career.  
 - For my career.  
 - What about mine?  
 - It's portable, isn't it? You can teach anywhere, play anywhere?  
 - But I keep starting over, spinning wheels. And with the children ...  
 - Jen, we don't go, I don't go anywhere in the Company. Everything we've worked for levels out. It's for us, for the kids, down the road.  
 - But can't you tell the Company ...?  
 - You don't *tell* the Company anything.  
 - (Long pause. Subdued.) We go round and round about it, Jenny. Every time you say o.k. you'll try, it reverts back the next day. There doesn't seem any way out of it and we can't keep this up, so ... I guess we stay; I'll work it out.  
 - Well I don't want to be responsible for taking you out of the line of succession. It's too heavy.  
 - Then what *do* you want, Jen?  
 - I guess I wanted it to come from you, at the beginning.  
 - That's expecting too much -- I can't tell what's in your head. Look Jen, you can't have it all ways. I said we won't go, doesn't mean I have to be happy about it. You *can* play anywhere.  
 - We'll go.

\*

She is crying her eyes out. Really.  
 Surrounded by dark green walls and floors, wine-purple venetian blinds, Jenny sits at the dining-room table in their rented Hampstead terrace house. Not *really* almost-black walls and blinds; it just feels that way. By British standards it's a good home, solid middle class. Under the cold light from the overhead, her head in her hands, Jenny cries her heart out.

Her friends say how lucky she is, a year in London, on the Company. After so many years you get a sabbatical; it's a new policy. Ira said to rent a Steinway, not this Broadwood upright, this toy; so *what* if a baby grand would take up the whole of the living room, so what if it costs a lot, they can afford it. Why does she worry about things like that?

She's working on a Bach Prelude and Fugue, a good way to get her fingers moving again. Exaggerating, lifting each finger high, she follows the Theme through the three voices and repeats the last eight bars over; and again and again. Bach has never gratified the cravings of her heart, not *totally*, but it's the fingers she's interested in just now.

Her mind is elsewhere; all over the place. Didn't used to be that way. Used to be she could concentrate for hours on end. The technique comes back easily; the talent somehow matures even when its not in use; the *focus* slips away.

It's raining, the usual warm drizzle. Ira is out looking at Saabs and Audis and Karmen Gias; Jenny wanted him to buy a used London taxi, big and black and no-nonsense, but he wanted something sexier. She ought to be out *doing* something too, after all she's in *London* for the year, and here she sits repeating the same bars, the same Theme turning this way and that, to what end? That question would never have entered her mind at one time. Perhaps she ought to go poke around in Harrods, or have tea in Fortnum and Masons, or spend a few hours at the Tate.

This cut-off feeling, adrift with no land in sight, no markers, won't leave. Oh, some of it *is* wondrous -- the chaos of roses all yellow and pink and velvety red in the front garden, the vegetable

patch in the back, even the Alice-in Wonderland rabbit she and Ira had promised to care for, always digging out from under the picket fence, running away; if they were lucky, Ira said, cursing, the damn thing'd get lost or run over.

So much disorienting newness; and she hasn't even the excuse of speaking Hindi or Farsi, or Arabic. She takes too long in the queue at the butcher's deciding between cuts of meat; sawdust ... bloodied aprons ... hanging carcasses ... at Loblaws she would've grabbed some pre-packaged fillets. At the green-grocer's she forgets to bring her own brown bag; in a cab she panics predicting the fare - how much is two pound ten pence *really*? In and out twisty streets, their names falling away from one block to the next, is she being *bad*? Will she ever dare drive the circuses? Even the ring of the telephone is strange -- two short rings at once, a high-up *bring-bring*, loud and assertive. And no friend's voice at the other end. No one who's been on leave ever tells you all this. Oh, so much, her head feels all foggy, like a constant allergy. Ira seems to find none of it upsetting. He's busy going to the theatres and museums and looking for a car.

She'll go to the knit shop, take her "brolly" and walk. Not certain why it's so comforting, she's taken up knitting. Perhaps there's some security in even stitches and row upon row of predictable sameness. But she keeps dropping a stitch and having to rip out and start over. Maybe she'll finish this sweater for Ira before the year is out. Maybe she won't.

Ira pulls up in front in the green Lada their landlord left for them. Ira says it drives like an eighteen-wheeler (true); it needs a three-point turn no matter how wide the street and the two of them together pulling on the steering wheel. He curses the rabbit and the Lada equally.

Jenny watches Ira walk through roses grown wild and up to his shoulders; his long, tough-lean frame (his hair incorrigible as the garden growth) disappears through the gate leading around to the back. Seconds later she hears the back, kitchen door slam.

"God-damn rabbit's dug out under his pen for the tenth time!" Ira shouts. "Shit! Now I've got to hunt up and down the street again for it. Got the whole neighborhood looking for that rotten rabbit."

"Oh, come on Ira! Rabbit's not that bad. It gets us to meet people, like children do. Wait until Steve gets home, he'll look for it."

"Real estate agent call?"

He's been asking everyday if there's been a call from their Toronto agent. She shakes her head, no, doesn't look at him ... back home, *finally*; eight years in *one* house ... funny, how attached ... half the boys' lives, all their adolescent years, growing up ... *our* lives. Jenny sees Ira watching; his black framed glasses make him look severe.

"I thought it was decided, Jen. You'll love Ottawa!"

... why *not* move? ... fine promotion (for Ira) ... kids grown, going off ... house too big without them ... Toronto expensive ... traffic congested ... new Condo market hot ... Now's the time ...

"I found us a great place. You *liked* the plans!"

(Had she?) "I did promise to try it."

"I don't know what more I can say, Jen. Come on, it'll be terrific. I know it's not Toronto or Lawrence Park, but listen, it's a chance to choose exactly what you want -- jacuzzi, bidet, whatever. And ...," Ira goes over to Jenny and takes her by the shoulders, "it gives us a whole new freedom. Just you and me again, like we were." Ira can be romantic.

"But what about the kids? If they have to come back to live in the house again? That's happening these days, you know. Besides, *Toronto's* their home. And what if Marty doesn't 'find himself' this year?"

"Either he'll be in school or out working and in his own place."

"It's too soon ... I mean, we still have years of, well, kids and their friends, and ..."

"Do we? Or is it wishful thinking? You're not going to buy a house as big as the one we own now, are you?" incredulous.

"But the new place isn't designed for a *family*, Ira. Oh! I don't know why we're arguing about the Condo. It's moving to Ottawa that's ..."

"And I've got a chance to move up to the number two spot in the Company, and the top spot in Ottawa. That offer won't come again." Ira's voice has turned sharp, then convincing. "It's a chance for you too, Jenny; you can *really* commit yourself to your music, like when you started. What's to stop you now?"

"Start again? In a strange place?"

"There're plenty of musicians in Ottawa, Jenny."

"Businessmen and Bureaucrats. That will be our circle. Besides, Ira, you're missing the point ..."

"Look, if you don't want to do it, speak up now." Ira looks exasperated. "We have to stop going around and around. I already told you how important it is to me. If we stay in Toronto, after all we've worked for ..." He shrugs with his hands and lets them fall heavily to his sides, a gesture of futility. "Well, you'd better decide soon because the Company expects me to take over in Ottawa by the end of the year ... July ... August the *latest*, soon's we get back from London. And I'm expecting the real estate agent to call with an offer any time now. *They* think we're selling our house, you know."

Jenny nods; it says I know, I know. This is what happens after their discussions, more like persuasions; she sees the logic of the situation and calms down, but her insides begin to churn just *thinking* about giving up the Lawrence Park house. Why is it she finds it so impossible to say yes unconditionally, or no, I don't want to?

Once she managed to say, "Ira, don't we have sense enough to know when we've found a place we're happy and stop looking elsewhere? We've got a good life right here in Toronto," and Ira'd said, "Fine, if that's what you want, we'll forget it," then taking the copy from his desk, with expansive gestures tore up the condo Offer-To-Buy. "I'll call the Ottawa agent straight-away and tell her not to turn it in," and with that he (dramatically) threw the torn pieces, confetti, into the air. Jenny's heart fell along with the paper-bits. "That's it, done!" he finished.

"Ira!"

"Well you don't expect me to do what you want and still be happy about it, do you? Must I agree with you when I don't?"

"I'll try it," she consented.

Ira goes out to look for the rabbit. Jenny watches him walk down the block. Next door, the two elderly Misses Johnson help their older sister from the Wheel Transport Van and up the walk. That's another strangeness, Jenny thinks. All the old people on the block. Miss Johnson, eighty-eight, taking care of Miss Johnson, ninety-three, looking after Miss Johnson just turned one-hundred. Yesterday, Jenny saw a limousine pull up, delivering birthday congratulations from the Queen. Back home in Toronto the Miss Johnsons are kept out of sight; to have it otherwise is as rare as shopping at the butcher instead of Loblaws for the plastic-wrapped stuff.

Jenny picks up her knitting and goes into the living room. She'll knit-one, pearl-two for a while and wait for Steve to come home and Ira to return with the rabbit. And for the phone to ring.

When the phone does ring, it isn't their agent. It's their eldest son Marty calling (collect). He'd decided not to join them in London this year. They'd given him the choice, but Ira said not to

dissuade him, it was best he sort his life out on his own (away from his father; there's the rub). Jenny thought it best they *all* stay home.

"Let him grow up," Ira said. "Give him space," Dr. Miller advised. "You're not going to leave him alone, are you!" Jenny's mother exclaimed. Steve asked in a pout, "Why's he always spoiling everything? And how come you and dad're always talking about *Marty*?" "Your brother needs our support right now. He's having a tough time finding himself," Jenny answered, (she's always explaining one to the other).

Every word over the phone with Marty tugs at Jenny. As if a TV camera were transmitting a Trans-Atlantic picture, Jenny sees his sad eyes, large and dark like Ira's. Last evening she dreamed he came to visit and didn't say a word the whole time, just made the bed he slept in, kept tucking in the covers and smoothing them down. When he was about to leave for Toronto, she grabbed him by the shoulders and shook and shook him, all the while shouting, "Get your act together! Make up your mind what you want to do and *do* it," and, "What's the *problem*?" But he just looked at her with those sorrowful lost eyes, his long, sensitive face pained, black curly hair all loose and falling about like a sheep dog, and drew away.

She hears his voice through the receiver; it's breaking up, something about quitting his job, and loneliness (killing him) and how much he misses everyone (even Steve). "Steve's so pushy," is Marty's on-going complaint. "That's what younger brothers do to get their family's attention. He's only showing his love," is Jenny's answer.

"Did you send the application to McGill yet?" she shouts through the phone, but she can't make out Marty's answer. Before hanging up Jenny tells him please write, the phone bills are enormous, then worries she shouldn't have discouraged him from calling.

Steve and Ira come in together, no rabbit.

"Good," Ira says, "Maybe it's lost forever. Real estate agent call?"

"No, just Marty."

"How is he? Did he send in his application yet? There is a deadline, you know. He'll wait until it's too late, and then ...," Ira says without waiting for her answer.

"Don't jump to conclusions, Ira. Marty knows about the deadline, he just needs time to work things out." (She's always explaining him to Ira.)

She doesn't tell Ira anything about the quitting part or the dying from loneliness part. It will just start up everything again and she'll say she knew they oughtn't to have abandoned him and he'll point out Marty had himself decided to stay behind, and what about Dr. Miller? And wasn't it the same as if the kids went off on their own?

"Steve?" Jenny asks abruptly. She's just caught a glimpse of him as he walks away and starts upstairs. "Steve ... what's wrong with your eye?"

"What's wrong with his eye?" Ira asks, turning to look at him.

"Ira! How can you miss a black eye? Steve, turn around!" Yes, how could he miss it, a purple-greenish-black ringer around incredibly light blue eyes, strawberry-blonde curls framing the shiner, underscoring its incongruity. "And scratches all over your cheek!"

"It's an Irish Pub, Mom. There was a helluva fight with this punker, drunker'n hell. Man, did he put up a fight! They offered me a job. Not just servin' up beers. Bouncer! Man!"

Steve turns and takes the stairs two at a time.

At eleven-thirty that evening the call comes; the high-up *bring-bring* echoes down the long narrow hallway and into the living room. She and Ira both hate this room, its one redeeming feature being the French doors opening directly out to the back garden; not one comfortable chair, not one decent light. When the phone rings, Jenny's mind is still back at the South Bank, the London

Philharmonic, Orff, *Carmina Burana*, its haunting power. She pearls-two, knits-one, remembering the lights of small boats along the Thames, the brisk air as she walked over the bridge, the outline of Parliament and Big Ben. Mid-stitch, Jenny stops and looks sharply over at Ira. He's engrossed in the telly. The BBC is doing their usual in-depth news analysis -- the Social Democrats have just split from Labour.

"I'll get it," Ira says, getting up quickly. Jenny follows him to the phone. "It's our agent," he mouths.

She looks at him, questioning with her eyes, but he holds up his hand as if to say "Hold on," and keeps nodding his head, "Uh-huh, Uh-huh ..." Finally, "Right. Just a minute." His eyes are bright and he's smiling, a big excited smile, his hand over the mouthpiece. "They got a buyer! Looks good, Jen. A doctor. He's got the money, solid bank account, no problem, closing date's perfect. Our price, no haggling. What do you say?"

"I didn't really expect an offer so soon ..."

"Quick Jen. Make up your *mind*, she's waiting! I thought we decided. What am I to tell her, is it yes or no?"

"I ... I guess. Everything's been put in motion ..."

"It's a GO!" she hears Ira exclaim into the receiver. "Congratulations, honey," he says after he hangs up. "Now all we have to do is wire confirmation.

Somewhere she remembers learning about a law of physical properties in motion; that's what she is, some kind of flying object that continues in its trajectory, picking up speed, unable to stop itself.

That evening, Jenny falls into a fitful sleep. It must be near morning when she dreams because she can remember it vividly upon waking. It's Christmas time and she's on the top floor of a high rise. In jeans and an old sweat-shirt, no make-up, her auburn hair in need of cutting, Jenny looks a mess. She doesn't care. In fact, she's pleased, likes the unadorned frankness of her eyes (green, with gold flecks), the unhidden tiny freckles across her cheeks and nose. Through a wall of floor-to-ceiling windows Jenny looks out on a fairy-tale of trees and buildings outlined with tiny white lights, and nearby on a lawn of glittering snow, a furry Spruce twinkles red, blue and tinsel. The apartment is bare except for a small menorah, all eight candles aflame, placed in a corner on the dark-stained floor, and an elaborately set dining table. Ira is there, but he seems to be *visiting* her and the boys who are quite young. In the midst of serving the turkey, Ira says something about saving enough to bring back to Margaret (Ira's live-in girlfriend, Jenny supposes). Suddenly the scene changes and they're all in the kitchen of their Lawrence Park home, but all else picks up as before. Jenny's carving hand freezes and the next thing she knows she's screaming "Let Margaret worry about her own fucking turkey." (This is out of character for Jenny but she likes it.) "Technically, it's *my* turkey," Ira is saying, "It's a gift from the Company." Now Jenny, standing in their doorway, heaves the turkey-turned-rabbit at Ira running through the rose garden toward the parked Lada. "Take your fucking rabbit, Ira. Take it!" Jenny is shouting. Across the way the eldest Miss Johnson peers out from behind lace curtains, and next door the two younger Miss Johnsons step outside to see what's going on. "Oh, Merry Christmas, Misses Johnson, Merry Christmas," Jenny says sweetly, smiling broadly. "Ta, Jenny," the eldest Miss Johnson calls from across the way. Jenny turns back to screaming at Ira and the disappearing Lada, slams the door and with the bang, wakes up.

Jenny hears Steve storm out the front door. He and Ira have just had an argument over the earring Steve is wearing in his left ear. That's very important, which ear, Steve tried to explain,

because the right is a signal you're gay. He bounded down the stairs, into the kitchen, the shiner still a proud purple-green, and turned his profile to Ira.

"Do you like it, Dad?" Steve asked (naively).

"I HATE it!" Ira answered without hesitation.

"I thought you'd like it." (How could he think that?)

"Well, now you know."

"But don't you want to be more liberal?"

"NO!"

*That* door closed with the slam of the front door behind Steve.

"What's the matter with that kid?" Ira calls in to Jenny. (She begins to explain him to Ira, but gives it up.)

Surrounded by dark green, almost-black walls (not *really*), Jenny sits at the dining table, her head in her hands, and without warning tears well up. Why is she crying? Fights between father and son are not unusual, especially at Steve's age. What does she expect? This is the age of rebellion, spiky hair (aubergine and orange), earrings for boys, open sex. But suddenly she's weeping, and Ira is standing beside her, incredulous.

"My God, *what have I done?*" Jenny asks aloud. "What *have* I done?"

What?" Ira asks, "*What* have you done?" He looks helpless.

She's weeping uncontrollably now, the sobs coming in great heaves, it seems her insides will erupt, "Oh, God ..." Her face is buried in her arms folded one upon the other, a nest, on the table, out of Ira's sight. He places a hand kindly on her shoulder, then withdraws it, looking truly puzzled.

\*

Jenny looks out the window of the Wardair 747, but she sees nothing, no landscape, only a cotton of cloud. She's flying home to Toronto, to Marty who's in a bad way. The year's almost over; he hasn't a job or plans; he's vague about his McGill application, meaning he hasn't sent it. "Dad'll be pissed," Marty'd said. "Upset," Jenny corrected, "He thinks it's some kind of rebellion against him. And he's worried you're hurting yourself." (She's always explaining Ira to Marty.) Both Steve and Ira said to let him work it out, but Jenny knew what she had to do when she asked over the phone, "Do you need help, Marty?" and he answered quietly, "Yes."

Steve has stayed behind with his father to pack up; they'd reached a silent, grudging accommodation on the earring. "What's his problem?" Steve asked. "Give him time. A son with an earring takes a while to get used to," Jenny told Steve, (explaining Ira). But Ira surprised them just before she left for Toronto -- a gesture to Steve: one gold earring.

Steve has decided if he can't remain in Britain he won't go away to University, he and his brother have been *schlepped* around enough; neither have any desire to explore. All of which means they'll be at home next year. (Where's that?)

Most people on the plane are watching the movie, but Jenny has closed her eyes, listening on the headsets to the first movement of one of Bach's Brandenburg Concerti (No. 2, f minor), its piercing Baroque trumpets, hooty recorders and moving strings. She'd thought to work on Ira's sweater; it's stuffed into a plastic bag under the seat, three-quarters finished; doesn't make sense not to get it done, but she's lost interest. Maybe she'll finish, maybe she won't.

Behind closed lids Jenny sees herself standing in the midst of boxes stacked one upon the other in a room of the Lawrence Park house. One stack is labelled with heavy black magic-marker, TO OTTAWA, another, TO LONDON, another, TO GOODWILL; a fourth, in red, reads STEVE, and the last, MARTY. She'd organized all that before they'd left for England.

The stewardess is tapping her arm, asking if she wants more coffee. "No," Jenny indicates, annoyed at the interruption. Tchaikovsky's Fifth is coming through the headsets, but Jenny doesn't

remember hearing the rest of the Brandenburg. When she re-settles and closes her eyes again, she's in the center of an empty room, the living-dining area of their new condo. It's smaller than she expected from reading plans, and the walls she and Ira thought would be so dramatic look simply crazy; not one ninety-degree angle in the place. How on earth was she to place furniture? The fireplace is at an odd angle and too near the entrance hallway; and she'd have to take a circuitous route to get from kitchen to dining area. Looking out at the city, her chest tightens; trapped, boxed in. *What if there's a fire?* Down the hall Jenny checks out the bedrooms. Where will Steve and Marty stay? Their future wives and children, where will *they* stay? What could she and Ira have been thinking? Oh, she's screwed up everything. "Royally."

Tschaikovsky blasting through the earphones, Jenny's eyes fly open, her heart skips a beat.

"What's that, dear?" an unbelievably old woman next to Jenny is asking. Jenny takes off her headphones, blinks at the woman, twice; it can't be! *Miss Johnson?*

The 747 begins its descent. As they come out of cloud, the Toronto landscape opens up -- muted pre-Spring brown patches shot through with veins of tired white, the last of Winter. Jenny leans back against the headrest, her heart still racing, and thinks of Ira ... the way he tells her she has great legs ... that he loves when she smiles and her eyes light up. And the *talk*. What *is* it they talk about so much? Rain, sun on the Heath, daffodils in Hyde Park, swans on the Serpentine; movies, baseball; Turner at the Tate, his turbulent seas and splendid skies; Arrau playing Beethoven; Olivier, Richard III; *her* music, his career; punkers, pubs; Rabbit; Quebec, will it separate?; her mother, his mother; Marty, Steve ... She smiles, remembering the earring, Ira's awkward gesture.

Without him?

To lie in the dark, so vulnerably *horizontal*, a solitary figure, solitary bed, solitary room in a house of empty rooms ... the hollow space, its weight ... hurts. The only sounds are imagined: a distant trolley, its clanging bell; a far-off siren; the tread of a foot on the stairs ... Seen from a mountainview, a long sleek train winding its way deep inside a canyon of dark evergreens and silence; if there's a train whistle, she wouldn't hear it.

Jenny sits forward, peers out the window at the lake below, the long stretch of harbour, Expressway, railway yards; TD Centre ... campus ... Queen's Park ... searching for her first glimpse of the airport.

Her whole being is wired, a switchboard of criss-crossed emotions. Trepidation, for one. Elation for another, on the edge of *becoming*, not unlike that high anticipation charging mind and body just before a performance.

The risk ... I'll take it ... Whatever Ira's answer the Steinway will be there, always ... Chopin, Schumann, Brahms, filling the spaces of her soul.

"What's that again, dear? You don't hear so good when you get older," the frail old lady says.

"Not when you're younger, either," Jenny smiles.

She braces herself for contact with the runway.

I'll call Ira the moment my feet are (firmly) on the ground.

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