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Airplane Pose

Lydia Clare Friesen
University of Windsor

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Airplane Pose

by

Lydia Friesen

A Creative Writing Project

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies

through the Department of English Language, Literature, and Creative Writing

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of Master of Arts at the

UNIVERSITY OF WINDSOR

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

2015

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Lydia Friesen

APPROVED BY

J. Hakim-Larson

Department of Psychology

K. Jirgens

Department of English Language, Literature,
and Creative Writing

N. Markotić, Advisor

Department of English Language, Literature,
and Creative Writing

April 27, 2015

Author's Declaration of Originality

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Abstract

Airplane Pose is a short novel told from the perspective of three different narrators, all telling the same story. Lenny, Bradley, and Mason, all “disabled” in their own way, witness a woman, Nadia, fall to her death outside their apartment building. *Airplane Pose* chronicles the events, inside and outside of the narrators' minds, following her death. By using three different narrators, questions of narrative reliability are raised, particularly when issues of reality are called into question. Lenny desires to escape to a different reality, Mason's grip on his own reality is revealed to be unsteady and unpredictable, and Bradley attempts to understand the reality in which he exists. While reality doesn't change for any of the characters, each comes to term with his or her own ambiguous reality, just as the exact cause of Nadia's death is never truly established.. This unknown reality mirrors the unknown and ever-changing ideas of disability or ability; arguably, every character in the novel is in some way disabled, whether mentally, intellectually, or emotionally, which forces the question: is anyone actually abled? As with Nadia's death, disability becomes something unknown and undefinable.

Dedication

*To T., for putting up with all
kinds of madness.*

Acknowledgements

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Airplane Pose

The Daily Chronicle of Essex County

August 17, 2014

Windsor police searching for missing west Windsor woman

Windsor police searching for Nadia McDermott, missing since Tuesday night, described as a Middle Eastern woman in her late 30s, with medium length brown hair, approximately 5'4", average build. Last seen on the corner of Riverside Drive West and Caron Ave wearing a green sweater, blue jeans, and black knee-high boots. Please report any sightings to Windsor police.

The Daily Chronicle of Essex County

September 10, 2014

Missing west Windsor woman found

Nadia McDermott, missing since August 16, found last night at Windsor Harbour by city police, seemingly uninjured. McDermott and her husband both declined to give interviews.

The Daily Chronicle of Essex County

October 30, 2014

McDermott, Nadia

Nadia McDermott passed away at the age of 39 on October 29, 2014. Survived by loving husband, Ian McDermott, and her father, Bill Abraham. Funeral visitation will be held at Families First Funeral Home on 3260 Dougal Avenue on Saturday November 1st at 6 pm. The family has requested that only family attend the funeral service.

Lenny

Despite CNN's obsession with reporting on the Malaysian plane that disappeared last March, no one's found it. He – boats are females, so I've decided that planes can be males – disappeared in the Indian Ocean, and almost a year later, no traces of him. Officially, politicians and rescue workers have given up. I'm not sure if any missing Plane Vigilantes still look, because the mainstream news and all the latest-byte websites have turned to race riots in New York after the cops strangled that guy and CIA torture and Kim Jong Un II's movie.

The world, including Malaysia, moved on. Even the families moved on, because short of going on a self-funded rescue mission, the families can't do anything. Planes disappear, it happens, right?

Except that massive aircrafts shouldn't disappear. Another plane disappeared in December, and they found wreckage within a week. Amelia Earhart's plane is still missing, sure, and even I can accept that one day we might find it, or at least parts of it – CNN thinks rescue missions might have found part of her plane in the 90s on an uninhabited island in the Pacific. 60 years later.

But how – in an age where the NSA, the KGB, Hamas, and North Korea, all watch you sleep, drive to work, skip work, sneak into your lover's apartment, have inverse 50 shades sex, sneak back out through his fire escape, go home, kiss your husband, tell him you're too tired to make dinner, order pizza, then turn him down when he asks for sex – is it possible that plane finding professionals can't find a whole plane?

I'm not a conspiracy theorist. I don't think the NSA has the plane hidden in Area 51, or the illuminati have it stored away in a secret bunker in the Indian Ocean. I'm not one of *those* people. But we're never finding the plane. I'm not insensitive. I'm not a bad person. I'm sad for all the families. But: if the plane's still here in our universe, everyone on it died. If the plane went somewhere *else*, those people might still live, and might even

have found a better place.

So much is unexplainable – no matter what Bradley says. Stonehenge, Toynbee Tiles, Nazca Lines, and Shakespeare's true identity. Scientists want to believe that everything can be explained, yet miracle recoveries, predatory animals rescuing and caring for humans, unexplained landmarks, and soul mates, all fly under our radar, because everyone in this apartment building – from Mrs. Cray upstairs who's always having something new stolen, to Emma Singh who spends her time playing a dragon slaying game when she isn't studying medicine – secretly believe in science fiction or magic. The annoying boy in the skate park who plays his music too loud wants Mount Olympus and sea monsters. Real life, normal life, the universe, so boring. People want some other place or world to exist, but no one admits it. No one wants other people to point a finger and shout “Crazy!”

My parents called me crazy. Not just, “You're acting crazy, now stop daydreaming and clean your room,” but straight-up, Bedlam, certifiable crazy. Maybe they still do think that. They don't ask me about the status of my mental health and I don't offer the information. Easier to avoid them asking me how I'm feeling, or what I do with my spare time, and just talk about work – Dave got fired for lying on his résumé, Mandy keeps tripping Raymond, the project I'm working on's due yesterday, etc. – or my dating life – no there's nobody, Bradley and I are just friends, no you can't meet him, because we're just friends so there's no point, you wouldn't like him, he's not very social, no not dangerous – or they discuss my sisters' dating lives, which tragically have not yet evolved into babies – any topic that stays far away from me jumping off a bridge ten years ago.

I didn't plan on almost dying. Maybe I felt depressed, a little, but it manifested more as writing a lot of poetry after my boyfriend broke up with me for an ex-girlfriend. But the breakup just made a not-great situation even less great. I was 15 and I started reading about Einstein and Tesla and Feeney, and I watched the Discovery Channel, and I

typed “Different reality” into google. Then, three days after the breakup, our physics teacher told us about the theory of multiple universes.

I didn't jump because of the breakup. I didn't even jump because of my poor skills as a poet. I jumped because I believed one of three things would happen: 1) I'd gain the ability to fly, which was unlikely; 2) I'd shift into another universe (and yes my parents would mourn and wonder where I went, but I could find a world of dragons and unlimited oil and my one true love who wouldn't break up with me for Natalie King); or 3) I would land, probably wouldn't die, end up in the hospital (Where I'd have to stumble through awkward questions about medications and my sex life, receive flowers from Carl in Physics who I'd later go to the prom with but that's a different story, see my mom cry, try fruitlessly to explain to my parents that I had simply tripped, get recommended to the psych ward, refuse despite several convincing speeches from Beth, the nurse with the stutter, compromise by agreeing to go on antidepressants, and supply my high school with its scandal for the first half of November till Michael Hollins and Patrick Cage became contenders for the title of Christina Farrel's Baby Daddy, even though she'd taken Claude Brouhard to the Winter semi, but it turned out that Xavier Chang was the father, even though everyone thought he played for the other team, and ironically, Patrick Cage came out shortly after Xavier and Claude got into a fist fight and Christina dropped out, and Patrick Cage ended up beating me out for biggest scandal in grade 10).

So I can't fly, and I don't know how to enter other universes. Or exit this one. Nadia couldn't either. I didn't think she would die like that. I thought she'd figured out how to get out. She landed, like I had, but she didn't go to the hospital and scandalize an entire high school. She died in the courtyard, getting blood on my yoga pants.

Why did we both fail to go where we wanted? Maybe because we tried to go alone. Amelia Earhart will be found, but the Malaysian plane maybe never. I haven't tried to get to a different universe since I turned 15. Maybe if Nadia and I had tried together,

we'd both be there now. Too late for Nadia, but I'm still here. I couldn't go alone, though.

Bradley

I can't tell many details about Nadia McDermott's fall because I didn't think to look where she fell from till she had finished falling. Ellen Garcia did yoga in the courtyard. My apartment on the ground floor allowed me to talk to her while she stretched outside. Ellen Garcia says that we're friends, but I don't agree because we became neighbours first. I like neighbours better because neighbour is easy for me to define. Doctor Herman Scrin, my therapist, explained that friends are people that you like spending time with, but that can't be a constant definition because if I just cut my finger and Ellen Garcia showed up at my apartment, I would not like spending that time with her. So we're neighbours. I explained this to her, and she put her neck at an angle, which means that she did not understand what I said but tried to, and she said that neighbours and friends are similar. I wanted to know all the different kinds of friends, but she did not know all of them.

One time I tried to do yoga with her but I did not enjoy it. Some of the poses had names that did not make sense to me. For example, the pose called Child's Pose. Children don't sit the way that you sit in Child's Pose. In Child's Pose, you tuck your feet under your bum and you lean forward as far as you can with your hands on the mat, and your nose touches the ground. Children don't sit like that, so I did not like that pose. Other poses make more sense. In Airplane Pose, you bend your hips to ninety degrees, so your back flattens like a plane, then you hold out your arms to the sides, like airplane wings and, once your balance steadies enough, you lift one foot off the ground. This pose makes sense to me. The only part that does not make sense is the foot that stays on the ground, because airplanes don't have feet, but they do have wheels, which are sort of like feet, so I tell myself that the airplane is about to land and so its wheels have come out. Doctor Herman Scrin calls this grasping for straws. I did not understand the idiom at first, but it means that you find the meaning for something in a way that does not fit perfectly. I have

gotten better about accepting straws since I see Doctor Herman Scrin, so I can accept feet as airplane wheels, but I can't think of a reason for Child's Pose to be called Child's Pose, and so I don't do yoga anymore. I just spend time with Ellen Garcia while she does yoga, and when she does Child's Pose or other poses that don't make sense to me, I write down what I think they should actually be called and pretend it's the real name. For example, I changed Pigeon Pose to Wilted Flower Pose, and Camel Pose to Right Angle Triangle Pose. When she does a pose that makes sense, I ask her about why very few people follow the speed limit or why women receive engagement rings and wedding rings but men only receive wedding rings. Sometimes she knows the answers, and sometimes she does not. She knew that most people speed because they are in a hurry to get to their destination, but she announced that the wedding rings were a meaningless tradition.

So when Nadia McDermott fell out of her apartment, I did not see her fall, but I did see her land. I did not see Ellen Garcia stop doing yoga but I did see her run over to Nadia McDermott to help her. Ellen Garcia told me to call nine-one-one to report that someone had fallen from her apartment. I called and the ambulance came and then the police came and they asked me questions.

After Nadia fell, she looked like Icarus, a mythological being who tried to fly and then fell to his death. When I was seven years old, I wanted to fly like Icarus, except without the falling. I would know to stay far away from the sun. I also would know that wax would not work well as glue for wings. Bird wings are made of hollow bones, tendons, and feathers. These are light things, and so they would make much better wings than ones made from wax. Once I tried to make wings like bird wings but it made Carole Finch angry because I collected the feathers that her parrot dropped and I made a mess. I thought that she would not mind because she often talked about how pretty the parrot's feathers were, and so I thought that she would like that I made sure they weren't thrown away, but she explained to me that feathers were pretty but messy and should stay in the

parrot's cage until she threw them away. The parrot lies beneath the earth now, like the unnamed rooster in Norse mythology. Carole Finch did not like that comparison after I told her that the rooster under the earth would crow when the end of the world came.

I never tried to make wings after that because the only way for a human being to fly is by using technology like airplanes or hot air balloons or helicopters or zeppelins and those don't really count as humans flying because the technology flies and we sit inside machines while they fly.

I like learning about mythology. I have lots of reasons why. My grandmother Janine Finch used to read mythology stories to me when my mother Carole Finch and my father Jonathan Finch would go out of town on business. My favourite stories were about Odin and his sons, Thor and Loki, and the three roosters and Ragnarock, and Odin's ravens, and the nine realms.

When Janine Finch died from a heart attack, I worried because I wanted to learn more stories, and at the time I thought that she had created the stories, so Jonathan Finch bought me a book of mythology so I could still learn, and I learned that more mythology stories existed than I ever thought, from all over the world, and that Odin was not always Odin but sometimes Zeus or Nanahuatl or Amon or Tinia. I took the book with me to school and to the dinner table and to the park for two years, except for Janine Finch's funeral. I brought it in the car but I did not take it into the church with me, even though I wanted to because I don't like funerals and I liked my mythology book. I don't like funerals because of the crying, and people that I don't know try to hug me. I don't like crying because I almost never cry and I don't know why other people cry. One time I asked Ellen Garcia what to do when someone cried, and she said that it depends on the person, which did not help at all. The only thing that she said almost always stayed true was that if a crying person wanted a hug, it would be rude to tell them that you don't like hugs, which I already knew. Ellen Garcia told me that I would not have to go to Nadia

McDermott's funeral.

When Nadia McDermott fell out of her apartment, she reminded me of Icarus, because he fell too, but he fell because the sun melted the wax in his wings, and Nadia McDermott fell because she didn't even have poorly designed wings to hold her up. That reason was my first clue that she had jumped intentionally. If she had not wanted to die, she would have made wings.

Mason

I didn't see Nadia fall. I mean, I did, but I thought I didn't, so I didn't call the cops. Worked out, since Lenny called them. Or didn't work out I guess. Nadia died. Not my fault. I don't know why my opinion matters. Not like what I say's trustworthy. Didn't lie to the cops. But I never really know for sure. I can guess, but that's worth shit all in a murder case.

Most parents get excited when their kids get good grades or make the basketball team. Mine held hands and my mom cried a little when the psychiatrist told them that I didn't have schizophrenia. We got ice cream after the appointment.

So I saw Nadia fall, but I thought it didn't actually happen. I never know what's real when I'm on the roof. The sky moves and changes. Colours change, shapes change. When everything from grocery store trips to taking my meds needs to be checked off my to do list, the sky doesn't matter.

I must have heard her start to fall, because I turned my head and there, in Hollywood slow motion, hands spread out, black hair sticking straight up as though reached for the long gone balcony railing, long dress billowing, mimicking a parachute. Snakes rained down around her, so why would I think she's real? And I lay there, my head over the edge. All in my mind, right? Then Lenny ran over, yelled to someone to call 911 and I'm back in the land of the living and holy shit I just saw someone die. Then I heard the sirens and I knew the cops had come for me.

I don't spend that much time with people. I hadn't spent more than a few minutes with one person for over a month when Lenny found me in the Sunrise Tower café. I didn't even know her name then, I just called her “Annoying Yoga Chick” in my head, if I thought about her at all.

“You were there when she fell,” she said. Who starts a conversation like that? So I

didn't say anything, I gave her my best confused and annoyed face. Usually works. But Lenny's not normal people.

“When Nadia fell out of her apartment the other day, you saw her. I know you did. From the roof. You, me, and Bradley saw, and that's it.”

“Bradley who?” I asked because I didn't know why what she had said had anything to do with me. Yes, I happened to have my head over the ledge of the building as Nadia fell. But I hadn't seen her jump, or trip, or heard her cry out, or anything breaking, at least not that I remembered. She'd fallen, who knows whether she offed herself, or tripped, or someone pushed her.

“Bradley Finch,” she told me, as though that cleared anything up. “Sunshine Towers isn't very big, how do you not know people's names?” I decided that I didn't like her, but I didn't feel like enough of an ass to just walk away. Plus I had only drank half my coffee and I sat down first.

“Not a people person. Living in the same apartment building doesn't mean we're friends.” She frowned. Good. “Besides, if you know everyone so well, what's my name?”

“Mason Pizzuto,” her nose freckled. “Mrs. Cray mentions you whenever there's a break-in on the street, and Bradley saw your last name on the mailboxes. You're not anonymous, even if you do spend all your time on the roof.”

Her comment made me feel like I'd gotten spied on in the shower. Probably lots of people knew I went up there, the roof didn't belong to me. Still.

I gave Lenny another confused and annoyed look, hoping. Instead she sat down.

“Look, I'm not creeping you. But I notice things. I do yoga in the courtyard, and I see you going up the fire escape. I don't judge, and I'm not prying, whatever you do up there's your business.”

A kangaroo leapt onto the vending machine, a problem because Lenny kept talking and then expected a response but a fucking kangaroo broke into the vending

machine. I did my best to keep a neutral face, so she kept talking and talking and the kangaroo started drinking coffee.

“So what do you think?”

“Not sure,” I gave a safe answer.

“Will you think about it?”

I shrugged. “Maybe.” Then I stood up and followed the kangaroo all the way up the stairs to the roof, and then the sky broke apart.

The Detroit Free Press

June 26, 1950

Craft Parts and Bodies Recovered

Storm and the deep waters of Lake Michigan apparently combined to doom the missing Northwest Airlines plane.

Traces of a Northwest plane – and parts of human bodies – were found Sunday night off St. Joseph.

Early in the search Sunday night there was no evidence to indicate that anyone had lived.

The ship was last heard from during an electrical storm which was lashing Western Michigan.

One theory, a result of reports from residents of the area, was that the craft might have been struck by lightning.

At least two persons reported an explosion in the sky as the storm was raging.

Lenny

A couple months before Nadia died, she disappeared. Claire, who lives on the same floor as Ian and Nadia, put posters up in the building. When I heard about this, I volunteered to help, and Claire and I spent the afternoon looking for places to post them. The police also came by twice and conducted some interviews, but not with me. Ian, Nadia's husband, refused all interviews with the press. I decided that I wanted to find Nadia so we could help each other. Ian seemed decent; he always took their garbage out on time, and he tipped the barista at the Sunrise Tower cafe; why would Nadia run away unless she wanted to get somewhere else?

Only three people saw her fall: myself, Bradley, and Mason. I didn't know Mason well. When I first moved to the building, I admit I wanted to talk to him. He ignored Claire when she tried to invite him out for coffee. I spotted him sneaking up to the roof

and I had just gone through a Nicholas Sparks phase, so I imagined him blowing kisses at the moon for a dead former lover. Fortunately, I've come a long way. But now, I knew I would need help to find out what happened to Nadia.

Recruiting Bradley and Mason didn't go as smoothly as I planned. Mason didn't listen, and when I saw him in the hallway later and waved, he didn't acknowledge me. I knew he knew something. I didn't follow him around, exactly, but back when Nadia went missing, I did see him tear down a poster on the fourth floor when he thought he was alone, which meant one of two things: 1) he was involved in her disappearance, or 2) he sensed that she slipped into another world. I had to get close to him either way.

I hadn't quite figured out how to convince Bradley to help me. I also hadn't quite figured out how we'd go about finding Nadia once I did have them both on board. I didn't know much about detective work beyond what I see on TV, and you can't believe everything on TV. I knew Bradley liked detective novels, which might work to my advantage. As for Mason, he might not be much help in the detecting department. Maybe no help at all, but I needed to find out what he knew.

My interest in Nadia's story started before she fell. When she ran from the hospital, I wanted to find her, to follow her, just in case she had found another way into another universe. And I had wanted Bradley to go with me.

“Hello, Ellen Garcia.” Bradley didn't use middle names because some people don't have one, or have more than one.

“Hi Bradley, may I please come in?” When we first met there were long periods where I'd talk about different theories and what I did at work that day and he'd listen and I'd ask every once in a while if he felt okay and he would nod, but one day I came home from work at 4 and he stood outside his apartment door, not moving. An hour and a half later, I left to get Armando's for dinner and he still stood in the same spot. I asked if he

was okay, and he said that he saw a mouse in his apartment and he did not know what to do but he didn't want to go near the mouse so he couldn't go in until he figured out how to get rid of the mouse without going near it. So I took him to Canadian Tire and picked out a few traps, then I went into the apartment and set them, mostly in the kitchen. Then we left to get Armando's and ate it in my apartment and watched a TV show about space exploration. Bradley waited in my apartment while I went to check if the mouse had been caught. It had. I disposed of the mouse and cleaned the area before going to get Bradley. Since then we visit, and conversations don't have uncomfortable silences. Silences, yes, but mostly comfortable ones.

“Yes, you may come in. Would you like a drink?”

“No, thank you. Bradley, I need your help finding out where Nadia went.”

“The police will look for her. You and Claire put up posters in the building. We don't have detective experience.”

“But what if the police don't investigate her social life, or whether she liked to read books, or if she had a religion? What if those things were important and the police overlooked them? She ran from the hospital, why? She didn't come back here. She tried to get somewhere else.” Bradley didn't know what I meant by somewhere else, and I didn't tell him.

“Nadia McDermott probably ran from the hospital because she doesn't like hospitals. I don't like hospitals either. I don't think that we will find her if the police don't.” I wanted him to say to me that he'd help me, that Nadia had escaped to somewhere better, that I could get there too. Mostly, I wanted him to say that she hadn't died. “Ellen Garcia, why does it matter to you? Are you friends with Nadia McDermott?”

I shook my head. One time last spring when I went up to do laundry, I heard some yelling in their apartment, so I knocked on the door. Ian opened it. He had a black eye.

“Can I help you?” His good eye twitched and he let out extra breath on the word

“you.” He sounded like the leprechaun from Lucky Charms commercials. First time I'd heard his voice, though I often saw him in the parking lot.

“Just heard some yelling and thought I'd...”

“Yeah we're fine. Nadia had a bit too much and now she needs new shoes or something. Thanks for checking in though.”

“You're welcome.” Laundry piled up on the couch behind him. “Hey, what'd you do to your eye?” I asked before he could close the door.

“Work. Low swinging cupboard doors and forgetful interns.” He let out an extra breath again, between forgetful and interns. Nadia quietly asked who had knocked. “Just a neighbour, love, saying hello.” He turned to me. “See you later eh? Thanks for stopping by.” I nodded.

I could've told Bradley that story when he asked if I was friends with Nadia, but I chose not to. Instead I said, “My neighbour, Bradley, just like you are.”

“But you and I live in apartments next to each other, on the first floor. Nadia McDermott lives on the sixth floor.”

“Well apartment building mates still means something.” I worried that he would ask what it meant, because I honestly had no idea.

“I'll make you a deal, Ellen Garcia. If the police don't find Nadia McDermott in one month, I'll help you try to find her. Good deal?”

No. I didn't want to wait a month. But Bradley had already turned towards the CBC news.

The police did find her in less than a month though, at the harbour, supposedly trying to steal someone's boat, though I'm not sure if that's true. Mrs. Cray says theft is a much more common crime than I believe. Nadia came back and then she died. And I asked Bradley for help again.

November 1, 2014

Sender: jvanderwall

Recipient: len_garcia29

Subject: Nadia McDermott

Hello Lenny,

I'm a reporter with the *Windsor Star*, and I'm hoping to write an article on Nadia McDermott's tragic passing. I want to include as many facts as possible. I understand that you witnessed her death; I'm so sorry, that must have been quite traumatic. If it's not too much to ask, would you do an interview with me? It would have to be as soon as possible. If you wish to remain anonymous in the article, that's not a problem. I would also understand if you're uncomfortable with the prospect of discussing what happened – just try to let me know soon. Thank you so much for your time,

Jamie Vanderwall

Bradley

After Nadia McDermott jumped out of her apartment, Ellen Garcia asked me if I knew anything about Mason Pizzuto. I did know things about Mason Pizzuto, but I don't think that I told Ellen Garcia the sort of things that she wanted to know. I told her that Mason Pizzuto lives in our apartment building, in the unit exactly 5 floors above mine. I know that Mason Pizzuto owned or leased or stole or borrowed a navy blue Chevrolet Cavalier, that he parks in the apartment lot, in the 16th spot of the row farthest from the building. I suspect that Mason Pizzuto descends from Italy or Greece because his skin tone, hair and eye colour match typical characteristics of individuals from Italian or Greek backgrounds, but I don't know for sure. I know that Mason Pizzuto either plays the piano or listens to a lot of piano music because I hear piano music coming out of his apartment when I go up to his floor to do laundry. I told Ellen Garcia these facts about Mason Pizzuto. She nodded and I asked her, "Why do you want to know what I know about Mason Pizzuto?" and she told me that she thought that Mason Pizzuto knew more about Nadia McDermott than he admitted. I asked her why and she said a hunch. A hunch is a feeling that you know a thing that you have no evidence for. So a hunch is like a guess.

But what Ellen Garcia calls hunches have an explanation she hasn't acknowledged. I don't have hunches because I like to know why I and others act the way we do, so if I feel that I know something that I don't know, I analyze why I think I know it. But Ellen Garcia likes to have mysteries to solve. So I suspect that Ellen Garcia has a hunch that Mason Pizzuto knows about Nadia McDermott because Ellen Garcia wants to know more about Nadia McDermott and does not know how to find out more information on her own.

Ellen Garcia introduced me to Mason Pizzuto after he agreed to help her. He does not think that Nadia McDermott killed herself. Mason Pizzuto believes that Nadia

McDermott's husband pushed her with the intention to kill her. I don't agree with Mason Pizzuto. According to one of the police officers who asked me questions, Nadia McDermott had a high blood alcohol level. Because of Nadia McDermott's status as an average sized female, she was very intoxicated, even if you account for her tolerance level, of which I'm not aware. Intoxication often leads to an upset in one's ability to remain balanced and steady, and may limit one's inhibitions. Additionally, the autopsy did not report any kind of injury unrelated to the fall. If Ian McDermott planned on hurting Nadia McDermott, would he immediately murder her? More likely he would have hurt her some other way first. I don't surmise murder.

I have not told Ellen Garcia or Mason Pizzuto, but I read Nadia McDermott's family history at the archives where I work. I like to read through family archives from Windsor. I don't understand people, but I understand mythology and history, so I know about lots of different people. I know that Ellen Garcia's grandmother, Esperanza Marcelina, came to Canada from Mexico in 1954. At the time she was pregnant with Ellen Garcia's mother, Gloria Marcelina. Ellen Garcia's grandfather, Diego Marcelina, did not come to Canada until 1999. No evidence suggests that Ellen Garcia ever met Diego Marcelina, though that does not mean that they did not meet, it just means that the archives don't say. The archives don't always include reunions. Ellen Garcia has never referenced Diego Marcelina to me, although she has mentioned Esperanza Marcelina. I also know that Ellen Garcia's father, Peter Garcia, married Gloria Marcelina in 1982. In 1985, Gloria Garcia had a daughter named Irene Garcia, and four years later, she birthed Ellen Garcia. Two years after that, Gloria Garcia had another daughter, whom she named Valerie Garcia. I have not met any of Ellen Garcia's family members except for Valerie Garcia, who sometimes stays with Ellen Garcia at her apartment when Valerie Garcia comes home from Western University on Thanksgiving weekend, the second week of Christmas vacation, Family Day weekend, and Easter weekend. I know what the archives

told me, and I know what Ellen Garcia has told me. She has lunch with her parents every Sunday afternoon at Palencue Fresh Mexican Cuisine on Wyandotte Avenue East. Her sister Irene Garcia does not go to lunch with them because she lives in Thunder Bay, but she always sends Ellen Garcia a Christmas card, and they speak on Skype once a month, usually on the third Wednesday. Esperanza Marcelina died last June. I did not go to the funeral.

I researched Nadia McDermott's life in the archives, after Ellen Garcia asked me to help her and even before the reporter asked me to do research for her. I learned many things about Nadia McDermott when I researched her life. Born in 1975 and married Ian McDermott in 1999. While I did not learn much about her, I learned about her family.

In 1982, Nadia McDermott's mother, Pauline Abraham, went to a rehabilitation clinic for three months. Two years after that, Pauline Abraham spent six months in an institution, diagnosed with Bipolar Disorder, previously called Manic Depressive Disorder, and went back to the institution two more times, in 1988 and 1993. Bill Abraham, Pauline Abraham's husband, divorced her in 1987. Bill Abraham received full custody of Nadia Abraham, and in 2010, when Pauline Abraham turned sixty-six, she moved into a special home for people who can't live on their own. She did not have a place to live between 1995 and 1998. In 1998, Bill Abraham offered to pay for her to have a small apartment if she stayed away from Nadia Abraham. Pauline Abraham did not “stay away,” and Nadia Abraham put a restraining order on her mother in 2000. As far as I know from in the archives, Nadia McDermott did not speak to Pauline Abraham. Both Nadia McDermott's parents still live.

I considered all this information important. Nadia McDermott had a high statistical probability for mental health problems, based on her family's history. Though this does not necessarily mean that she probably had mental health problems, it's a good indicator. Coupled with her level of intoxication, this indicates that she committed

suicide. I don't know for certain.

Mason Pizzuto and Ellen Garcia both believe for certain in their theories, though I don't know Ellen Garcia's theory. Obviously flawed. One or both of them must have reached the wrong conclusion. Until one has more evidence than the other, neither can be more correct than the other, and even then the evidence must be irrefutable in order for them to truly believe in their theories. I don't know what Ellen Garcia's theory is, but I know that it's not the same as Mason Pizzuto's theory. I have evidence. I have history and statistics. Not irrefutable evidence, but as far as I know, I have more facts than Mason Pizzuto and Ellen Garcia.

“Bradley, Mason Pizzuto. He witnessed Nadia fall too,” Ellen Garcia said when she introduced me to Mason Pizzuto.

“Hello Mason Pizzuto. My name is Bradley Finch.” Mason Pizzuto did not shake my hand, which confused me. Though I don't like shaking hands, I know it's a socially acceptable polite gesture, and I have adapted.

“Hey,” Mason Pizzuto said. “So she has you playing CSI too, eh?”

I did not know what Mason Pizzuto meant – I knew that CSI stood for Crime Scene Investigators, but we were not crime scene investigators. Maybe Mason Pizzuto was thinking of a game that had the acronym CSI, so I said “I don't know how to play CSI.”

Ellen Garcia smiled. She said “Bradley, Mason just means that I've asked you both to help me find out what happened to Nadia. He saw her fall too.”

“I know,” I told her. I did not know why she told me again. “But I don't know how to play CSI.”

“Never mind,” Mason Pizzuto breathed loudly. “So what's your opinion, chief?”

“I'm not a chief,” I told him. Then I said, “I think that Nadia McDermott killed

herself. The police officer that interviewed me said that no one has found a note yet, but she had drunk a large quantity of alcohol, which may have caused her to make a spontaneous decision. I believe that she suffered from a mental illness, possibly bipolar disorder, alcoholism, depression, a personality disorder, or something else entirely.” Ellen Garcia rolled her eyes, which meant that I had said something that she did not appreciate, so I shifted the subject. “What do you think happened to her?”

“I think her husband pushed her,” Mason Pizzuto said. I did not tell him that I did not agree with him because I did not want him to roll his eyes as well.

“Why do you think that?”

“Because he wanted to kill himself and he killed her instead. Because she screamed before the fall. Because he looks guilty as fuck,” I did not know how someone could look guilty as fuck, but I would ask Ellen Garcia later.

“I don't remember her screaming,” I told him. This did not mean that she did not scream. I could've listened to birds or cars at the time. But whether or not she had screamed did not negate my theory. She could've screamed from the exhilaration of falling, or perhaps she regretted her decision after she had already jumped.

“Well I heard her scream,” Mason Pizzuto's voice became quieter.

“Perhaps I did not listen,” I said.

“You didn't hear noise when she went over the railing? Didn't she hit the railing?” Mason Pizzuto's eyes moved quickly back and forth between my eyes and Ellen Garcia's.

“I don't think so, Mason. I didn't hear anything. She fell silently.” Ellen Garcia lifted her hand to touch Mason Pizzuto's arm but she put it back down before he realized it.

“I don't remember any sounds,” I told Mason Pizzuto. “I did not pay attention to what sounds might have occurred until she already fell.” Why did we discuss this?

“Look, if you want my help, it starts with asking Ian questions,” Mason Pizzuto

said. He changed the subject since the topic of whether or not Nadia McDermott had screamed made his breathing speed and his pupils dilated. His sympathetic nervous system turned on, so he tried to turn it off. “That asshole's guilty. I talked to him on the roof the other day. He wanted to jump, I could tell. I should have let him.”

“That doesn't make him guilty, Mason,” Ellen Garcia snapped. Mason had made her angry, I did not know why. “He could feel sad, just sad. His wife did just die. Did you ever think of that?”

“Of course I did,” Mason Pizzuto also snapped. His Sympathetic Nervous System had not turned off yet. I listened. “But he didn't look fucking sad. He looked guilty.”

“What does guilty look like?” I asked. I tried to not ask questions, but Mason Pizzuto had said twice that Ian McDermott looked guilty, so I thought knowing what guilty looks like would help me understand what happened to Nadia McDermott.

Mason Pizzuto and Ellen Garcia both rolled their eyes. I had said something wrong again.

“Sometimes you can just see guilt on someone's face, Bradley,” Ellen Garcia said after twelve seconds of silence. “It's hard to explain it. Doesn't matter, Ian isn't guilty.”

“Why is it hard to explain?” I asked. “Dr. Herman Scrin has told me about the universality of expressions. When people feel happy they smile. When they are upset they frown. If they are bored they don't focus on anything. Is guilt an emotion?” Another seven seconds of silence, and then Ellen Garcia said that she guessed so. “Well according to Dr. Scrin there must exist a universal guilty expression.”

Mason Pizzuto smiled, but not a happy smile, what Dr. Herman Scrin calls a smirk. I don't like smirks. They mean that someone laughed at a person.

“I guess you're right Bradley. I don't have an answer for you right now, can I get back to you about it later?” Sometimes I ask Ellen Garcia if she needs to get back to me, so she takes twenty-four hours to think about my question. She does not just ignore me

when I ask for information that she does not know.

“Acceptable.”

“Thank you,” she said. Mason Pizzuto's eyebrows moving. “Mason,” Ellen Garcia said, “it's possible that Ian looks guilty to you if he blames himself for Nadia jumping? That often happens when people commit suicide. Their loved ones feel guilty even if it they had nothing to do with it. Or sometimes only partly their fault. Either way, lots of people feel guilty when someone close to them kills themselves. Even though I don't believe that she killed herself, Ian might.”

Mason Pizzuto shook his head. “Possibly, but I don't think so. He insists she just had an accident.”

“He might not want to face that she felt unhappy,” Ellen Garcia replied. She twisted the ring on her middle finger. The ring had belonged to Esperanza Marcelina.

“Doubt it. But we're obviously not going to agree. Let's go question him. Together. You up for that, Brad?” Mason Pizzuto asked.

“I don't think that I'll join you,” I told him. I did not like the idea of talking to someone who I did not know about sad emotions. I did not like talking to Ellen Garcia when Esperanza Marcelina died because she felt sad, and I know Ellen Garcia well. I had found out lots of information about Nadia McDermott simply by going to the archives. I did not need to go to speak to Ian McDermott. Especially not with someone who can only remember half my first name.

October 26, 2014

Sender: jvanderwall

Recipient: bradley.finch

Subject: Nadia McDermott

Hello Bradley,

My name is Jamie Vanderwall. I'm a reporter with the *Windsor Star* and I'm writing a piece on Nadia McDermott's death. I understand that you witnessed her death; I'm very sorry to hear that. I'm hoping to set up an interview with you if possible, if you're up for it. I understand if you have difficulty talking about this sad event.

I also hoped to talk about more than just what you witnessed that day. I understand that you work at the Windsor archives – any way that you can look into Nadia's family history? Sounds odd, I know, and of course I wouldn't share any of your findings, but it might help me have a more holistic understanding of Nadia and what might have led to her death. Really more for my own personal thoughts than for the article itself. I'd compensate you any time spent on this project.

Again, I completely understand if you're unable to, but I need to know as soon as possible to get the article wrapped up. Thanks in advance for your time,

Jamie V

Mason

I had planned on telling Lenny to screw off. Normally I'm really good at getting people to leave me alone. But she stayed, like I had something important to say. I had nothing. Maybe she just wanted to listen to herself talk. She didn't know me. But, and I mostly hated this, she knew I was on the roof, which meant an alibi.

Nadia had run away from the hospital before she died. I knew she'd disappeared, but I thought she ran from her apartment. Posters throughout the building asked if we'd seen this woman. With no one around, I threw the posters out. I figured that she didn't want help. No one said abduction or murder, or suspected an extremist cult. I overheard some ladies in the café say that she ran away. Something in her life here made her run away, whether her husband, or her job, or just Windsor in general – I couldn't blame her for that. I couldn't blame her for wanting to run. Frankly, I wished I had had the balls to run away, start over in Rio or Beijing or Wellington, I don't know how I'd afford to get there. Hitchhike all the way to the coast – doesn't matter which one – and stow away on an ocean liner. Maybe that's what Nadia tried. Or voices in her head told her to. Either way, I did my part to help. She needed to do her own thing. No one else's business. Not mine, not her husband's, not Lenny's, and not the cops'. But now the cops wanted to know why I took down the posters, and where had I been when Nadia died?

I wouldn't have taken the posters down if I'd known about the video cameras in the building. Why do we have security cameras in this nothing of a building?

The cop had a hairy mole on his right index finger. The knuckle above it sprouted hairs too, making a snowman shape. It kept twisting around and judging me. It didn't believe that I didn't know Nadia or that I didn't push her. Snowman tapped his foot along with the cop's pen tapping on the table.

I used to build snowmen every winter. You're supposed to roll a ball of snow, but

it went faster if you shoved snow into a pile, and then put a smaller pile on that pile, and a smaller one on top of that. The three sections never stayed round, but still looked like a snowman, with a misshapen body and a halo of grass around its bottom. One year I gave my snowman a mustache made from grass.

The first time I shaved, I had to rescue tiny badgers from getting strangled in the seventeen hairs above my lip. I had to make sure I didn't cut one of the badgers. Except then I accidentally cut myself instead. A lot of blood squirted out of my lip. My dad thought I needed to get stitches but I didn't. Dad thought that everything needed stitches. Scraped knee, burst appendix, stubbed toe.

I only really needed to go to the hospital once, despite all the times dad brought me. I had run too far in gym class without paying attention to the wall. I paid attention to the bat flying above me, and not where the gym ended. That time I needed stitches. The scar on my forehead quivered as the knuckle snowman glared at it.

“Did you know Nadia McDermott?” The cop asked.

“Not really.” I read the name tag over and over again in order to ignore the snowman dancing along the table. Bert. Bert. Bert.

“What do you mean, “Not really”?” Sounds like you did know her.” Why did I even talk? Just say yes or no. That's the first rule.

“I mean, I'd recognize her. I saw her around. She lived on my floor.”

“Did she seem happy to you? Uneasy? Scared?” The snowman started to return to its home on the cop's finger. Good.

“I don't know. I didn't even know her full name. I remember her crying in the elevator once, but that doesn't mean anything.”

“Sounds like it means something.” The snowman nodded in agreement.

“Could've just had a bad day. One bad day doesn't mean she jumped.” I knew they wouldn't ask me these questions if they thought she jumped, but if I seemed innocent and

naive they wouldn't I know I was onto them.

“No, it doesn't.” The snowman pulled the cop's knuckle over it like a blanket so it could sleep. “I understand you saw her fall. Explain that to me.”

“On the roof, I heard a bang so I looked over the edge and she hit the ground.”

The folds of the cop's knuckle wrapped around the snowman.

“Why on the roof?”

“I like it up there. No one bothers me.” Roof's my territory, not his. And not his business.

“Why would anyone bother you?” He gently rocked the snowman to sleep, back and forth, back and forth, back and forth.

“Not me directly. But apartment noise. Kids and drunk people and people screwing and thin walls. On the roof you know it all still happens but you don't have to hear it.” I shouldn't have told him so much. I told him where I had been, and Lenny witnessed me up there, so I had a solid alibi.

I'd given her a lot of shit for spying on me, but I got lucky. Gave me an alibi, and meant I hadn't pushed Nadia. I didn't know. I never know. I couldn't think of a reason why I would have pushed her, but I could've confused her with something else, or maybe she did something to piss me off that I don't remember. Maybe she pushed me and I pushed back. Maybe she grew a snowball head and I wanted to melt it off her. But as Lenny is my witness, I didn't push Nadia.

“So why do you live in an apartment building then?”

I already broke one rule of police questioning, so why not break more. “What does where I live have to do with Nadia's death?” He underlined something he'd just written in his notebook so hard he stabbed through the paper. The snowman awoke from napping and shook his head at me, breathed loudly out of its carrot nose.

“So you were on the roof.”

“Yeah.” The snowman scanned the cop's notes to make sure everything I said lined up.

“Alone?”

“Yeah.”

“Anything else you saw that day that would help our investigation?”

“No.”

“Well then, smartass, you're free to go.”

I could feel the snowman following me out the door. Because I lied. I didn't even know for sure, I couldn't remember anyone else there, but the snowman knew.

The day after Nadia died, the old ladies and the stinky men and the annoying kids all said she had fallen off her balcony. But no one actually knew. Lenny and Bradley didn't even know that she fell till she stopped falling, and I seemed to be the only one that thought Ian did it, so he must have said he wasn't home. No one would have known if she went to the roof. She could've jumped and I couldn't have done anything, but no one would believe that. Or I could've pushed her. I didn't know. I didn't have a reason to kill her, but what if the snowman did?

Finding out someone else did the crime is the only way to ever really clear your name. Just because I got to leave the police station didn't mean that they wouldn't come back for me, just that they didn't have a legal reason for holding me. But if they didn't find someone else to blame soon, they'd sure find a reason to bring me back. So I'd have to figure it out for myself. And that meant getting Lenny's help.

I could practically hear Lenny's brain trying to wrap itself around the idea that Ian could've pushed Nadia. As far as I could tell, she had about the same amount of evidence for whatever she thought as the cop had had against me. So why did she stay so damn secretive.

When I came home from the police station, I went up to the roof. Snowmen and police officers did yoga in my head. So I let them play on the roof while I flew above them. I kept flying and the police officers turned into snowmen too. Snow everywhere. Covered in it. In my ears and my nose. My eyelids and lips froze together. I changed into a snowflake and landed on my own shoulder, and tried to shake myself awake. I made snow angels all over myself. One of the snowmen gathered the snow off my chest and turned it into a snowball. When it gathered some off my shoulder, I was carried along with it, and found myself flying through the air towards one of the police men. I landed on his back and started sinking in through the snow skin and onto his liver. I wrapped my hands around his spine to get some momentum. I made my way up the rib cage, pressing myself against the ribs as the lungs drew closer on each inhale, then allowing myself to relax as the police man breathed out. His blood started freezing. I knew he'd turn into a snowman soon too. If I didn't get out of him quickly I'd join one of millions of snowflakes inside of the police snow man. I climbed and climbed. I made my way up the wind pipe. But I clung to the outside, and only the inside of the wind pipe goes to the outside of the police officer. Frost bite set in my fingers – he froze quickly. And so I bit him, right in the wind pipe. Blood trickled down the pipe, freezing, creating a frozen lava flow among an icy wasteland. I bit and I bit. I slowly turned red from all the blood, my snowflake body burning, melting the insides of the policeman. I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I ate and ate and ate. The police man filling with blood. I cried, mixing salt water in with the blood. I burned everything I touched. I ate the whole wind pipe then remembered I had started eating it in order to get out. I crawled out of the police man's scorched body, and returned to the ice land. I scooped handfuls of snow onto the police officer, trying to cool him, but the snow melted in my hands before I could get to him. It dripped all over, sizzling away as his body still burned. I couldn't cool him. The tears wouldn't stop.

“Excuse me?” The police man's charred jaw moved. He spoke? But I'd eaten the wind

pipe! He couldn't speak. I tried to tell him as much but I couldn't speak; the police man grabbed my wind pipe and started squeezing.

“Excuse me.” I opened my eyes and saw a man next to me on the roof of my apartment building. “Sorry, didn't mean to wake you up.” I could smell my own sweat, like raisin bread and spinach. Was I still burning? “You smoke?” I shook my head. “Damn. Guess you don't have a cigarette I can bum.” I shook my head. He sighed. “Probably for the best.” I nodded. “I quit a long time ago.” Okay. “I shouldn't start up again.” No. “Just hard since my wife died.” Oh.

Ian.

“Your wife died?” I asked as though I didn't know. Even though everyone knew.

“You didn't hear?” Eyebrows raised. I decided to run with it. Maybe I'd find something out.

“No. Sorry to hear. How'd she die?” He sighed.

“No one knows exactly. I mean, she fell. Right there.” He pointed at the walkway where the paramedics had carted Nadia's body bag. She'd actually died much closer to the building. “But we don't know if she fell by accident, or if she jumped on purpose.” Or got pushed.

“That's rough. Sorry if this is blunt, but how could she have fallen by accident? Not like the balconies don't have railings.”

“The cops asked that question too.” So we had something in common. And the cops had another suspect. Good. “Ours had a few loose bars. Also possible that she drank too much. Possible she didn't even fall out of our apartment, she could've come up here.” Not good. “They haven't released the autopsy results yet, so hard to say.”

“Gotcha. Shame. So, you think, she accidentally...?” No one had actually seen her fall from the apartment. We all saw the end but not the beginning. Only Nadia and the snowman knew the beginning.

“Yeah. No note.” He started biting the nail on his right pinky finger. “I mean I screwed up a few times and she sometimes did crazy things. One time she cried for a week after breaking a bowl my mom bought us. Ugly as hell, that bowl. My mom knew that too, but she didn't want to return it. I should have broken it years ago. But Nadia tried to glue it back together, and when she tried to mix muffins in it again, it broke in her arms and our floor was covered in ceramic shards and muffin mix and her arms were all cut up. She tried to clean it up and glue it together again. Said I secretly hated her for it. I didn't. We fought, but who doesn't? Once she accidentally hit me in the head when she opened a cupboard door, but we never hit each other on purpose. She'd had too much to drink. She didn't seem suicidal unhappy. Just a normal kind of unhappy. The kind that everybody gets from time to time. You know what I'm talking about.” I didn't; I nodded.

“That's really too bad.” Ian's head hung over the edge like he'd hung himself. Hands on the brick ledge standing between us and the air.

“You sure you don't have a cigarette?” He half laughed. “I quit for her, you know. So I could be a better husband. I always got her flowers, dug her car out of the snow without complaining, even though I told her not to drive so fast.”

“I'm sure she knew you tried.” Ian started biting his middle finger. Lenny could prove I was on the roof, but could she prove Nadia wasn't? “How long you married?”

“Twelve years in April. We never made a big deal. The wedding never mattered, just the marriage. I know a lot of people say that, but we meant it. Guess a lot of people might say that too.” Fingers gripped the brick ledge. Had Ian stayed at home that day? If so, he could've killed her, but if he told the cops that Nadia hadn't stayed in the apartment, they'd look elsewhere. I needed to find out. “My mom didn't like her. Nadia didn't like kids. She said they made her feel like a freight train in a Tiffany's store. She didn't like Tiffany's either.”

“I dunno. Either way. Must suck, man. Want to go get a beer?” If he got drunk

would I get more info about his and Nadia's locations that day?

“Not today. Another day though?” I nodded. “I gotta go, my mom wanted me to call her. Sorry to spill my troubles all over you.”

He walked away, gnawing at one of the fingers on his right hand, either pinky or ring finger.

“If you think he's guilty, you should have just pushed him.” The charred cop's jaw moved again. I told him to shut up and I closed my eyes.

Several hours later, I found Lenny back at the café. Reading a book and drinking a latte.

“One condition.”

She left her thumb in her book, about ten pages in. “For?”

“For helping you do your investigating or snooping thing, whatever you're doing.”

The Singularities of Gravitational Collapse and Cosmology by Stephen Hawking.

“Which is?” She fingered the edge of the page with her thumb.

“You saw me on the roof, right?” Lenny nodded. “I need you to tell the police that. They want an alibi.”

“What? Why?”

“Who knows why cops do anything.”

“You sure you want to help?”

“You giving me an alibi?”

“Yes.”

“Then yes.”

“Good. Meet here tomorrow at 4:30.”

“Why don't we talk now?”

“Bradley's busy right now.”

“Unbusy him.”

“I’ll see you tomorrow, Mason.”

October 26, 2014

Sender: jvanderwall

Recipient: pizzutopizzas

Subject: Nadia McDermott

Hello Mr. Pizzuto,

My name is Vanderwall, a reporter at the *Windsor Star*. I’m working on an article about Nadia McDermott. I understand that you witnessed her death, and I’m hoping to get your perspective. A lot of different stories have gone around, and I want to make sure I have the facts right. If you’re up for it, I’d love to set up an interview. Obviously this is a sensitive issue, and I understand if you’d prefer not to discuss Nadia at this difficult time.

There’s something else I’d like to discuss, which I know is another delicate area. I understand that the police interviewed you and they had a few questions about your associations with Nadia. Obviously I think you had no involvement, but if you talk to me, it might help more people see the way I do. Up to you. Please let me know as soon as possible, either way. Thank you for your time,

Jamie Vanderwall

Windsor Star

October 30, 2014

Deer crashes through window of Windsor doctor office, gets trapped in bathroom

“It sounded to me like an explosion,” said receptionist Anne Klundert, who was in a small room behind the front desk when the wild animal came through the window. “As I came out, I saw a deer going toward the back of the office.”

After making its way across the busy street around 9 a.m., the frightened deer came crashing through the front window of Dr. Jack Klundert’s optometry office at 2851 Howard Ave.

The deer jumped through a front window, shattering the glass, and bounced off the front desk before making a break down the hallway toward the back of the building.

When the deer ran into a bathroom, office staff closed the door to keep it contained. The deer started thrashing around in the bathroom, knocking things over and unwittingly creating a barricade.

Windsor police officers blocked access back to the main part of the office, leaving only a route out the back of the building, then forced open the bathroom door. The deer ran outside and disappeared into a nearby bush area, leaving behind a large, bloody mess.

The bathroom door was ripped off. So was the toilet seat. Toilet paper rolls were scattered in the hallway. Blood smears, likely from a cut nose when the deer went through the window, stretched to the ceiling.

Lenny

“Hey.”

One of the most difficult questions a young adult (what does that phrase even

mean? When does regular adulthood begin? Had Nadia known?) must ask is “When will I no longer find the angsty skater boy thing attractive anymore?” Mason didn't even dress like a skater – he didn't dress like anything, really, just lots of shades of blue, and one time a blazer in a light grey. He had that skater feel, like I can tell that he used to have the swoopy hair (it still parts like it wants to swoop, even though he tries to hide it with gel), and that he once wore eyeliner and had an *American Idiot* t-shirt. Even though I sensed an unstable douche deep down, I couldn't help but wonder what made him so much of an appealing challenge.

“Hey, Mason.” His belt had stacked triangles carved into the leather. I realized that I'd stared at his junk since he got there. My mother asked 'Why can't you act more like a (young) lady?' Her voice drilled in my ear.

“Can I sit?” He didn't wait for an answer. Why did he have to be so pretty? I had really hoped that Bradley would get here first. “Listen, I don't know exactly what your deal is or why you're obsessed with Nadia. You're no detective, but I think there's something that Ian's hiding. I don't think Nadia just fell. I'm guessing that he pushed her. And I'm probably right.”

His left hand tapped some kind of rhythm when he spoke, and then it stopped when he stopped talking. “Why do you think that?” Between Bradley believing that Nadia killed herself, and Mason thinking that Ian pushed her, I felt myself losing some sort of metaphorical battle. I did a Breath of Fire.

“You all right there?”

“Yeah, it's a yoga breath, it reduces negative energy.”

“That's some weird shit.”

I glared. “Just tell me why you think Ian pushed her.”

“Something off about the whole thing. You're right about that part. Don't get me wrong – I think you're nuts.” I nodded. My mother scowled and my father chuckled and

mentioned Mason's brilliant observational skills. "But the cops don't do shit. And so if you want help with your obsession, I'll help you look stuff up or interview her husband or whatever."

"But Ian seemed so nice." Weak. I didn't really know Ian, and hardly knew whether or not he seemed nice. He didn't seem not nice. I felt defensive of Ian, maybe because I felt bad for him, or more likely because Ian going to jail meant that a judge or jury couldn't think of all the possibilities.

"Think about it – she disappears for days, and when she gets back, she's dead within a couple months. If your spouse disappeared, you wouldn't let them out of your sight so soon."

"I thought you don't care about other people."

"Doesn't mean the fucker should go free. Her husband, the cops, her family, nobody knew where to find her. Lots of posters go up and shit. I even heard those twins that dress the same talking about a hashtag for Nadia on Twitter. Then when she reappears, she doesn't go back to wherever she ran from, but she comes back to the apartment. A hospital or a crazy house or whatever would want her back. But no, she came back here. The posters got pinned over, the news reports forgot about her, the hashtag probably drifted to something different now. Like nothing ever happened. So what does that tell you?"

His left hand started tapping slowly as he waited for my answer. I rolled up the rim of my coffee cup with my thumb till my nail bent, then I pushed the nail back and forth from bent to unbent. Mason breathed. I yoga breathed.

"I don't think she ever went away in the first place. I think Ian had her locked up in their apartment. Then after she ran he had to punish her, and so he pushed her off the balcony." Tap tap tap. "I know it sounds weird, but you don't live on the same floor as them. There's always noise coming from there. Crying, arguing, late night trips to who

knows where, and they always looked tired.”

“So they had marital troubles, it doesn't mean he killed her.” Though I supposed that that would motivate someone to get to a different world, if Ian hurt her. I could work with the theory, whether or not I liked it. “Not like they had weird bruises or anything, right?” I didn't mention Ian's black eye. Low hanging cupboards and interns made sense to me – I once hit myself with a cupboard door on accident when I was looking at the sink instead of where the cupboard door was going. Ian's story felt too specific to work as a cover up. “So you'll help?”

“Look, I have my theory and you have yours, whatever the hell it is. As I said, cops don't do shit. You and I both want to find out what happened. Does it really matter where we start?” I still didn't believe that Ian had pushed Nadia, but if Mason and I – and hopefully Bradley – worked together, then we'd find the truth, and the three of us could hop through worlds till we found one that suited all of us. So I sat with Mason and my parents' opinions, and we waited for Bradley to arrive.

I talked to Ian more times than I had spoken to Nadia – when she lived, obviously. Ian's accent felt like a hug on the inside of my body. He said hello to me once in the hallway and I felt my face getting warmer despite the blood in my body rushing to my legs, till I saw his wedding ring. And my mother feels that he's too old for me.

I didn't talk to Ian much, just a couple of times in the parking lot or the elevator, and of course at his apartment that day. One time after Nadia came back from her disappearance he carried flowers in the lobby and I made a, “You must have ticked her off real good, what did you do?” joke but he didn't laugh, he just made a slope shape with his mouth, and then I worried that something else happened to Nadia, or that he had come from a funeral. The flowers smelled nice. Later that same week, when I came home from work Nadia sat in their car for a long time. I sat across from her in my car. Her lips

moved, then stopped, then moved again. I thought about honking my horn. Her car turned on at one point and I thought about following her but I didn't want her to figure out that I followed her. Would she run away again? Could I go with her? What if when she ran away she'd found a way to get to other worlds and was on her way back to them? It didn't matter, after a few seconds, she turned the car back off. I fell asleep waiting for her to get out of her car. I woke up when the sun rose, and Nadia's car sat empty.

Before she disappeared, I talked to her once in the café on the ground floor. I decided to go say hi to her because I felt bad that I sometimes imagined escaping to a parallel universe with her husband at my side. I figured if I became friends with Nadia, those thoughts would go away. That was before I envisioned her trying to leap into alternate universes.

“Hi, mind if I sit down?” My stomach shrunk and clogged my airway. She paused her iPod and cupped it in her hand between her legs.

“Okay.” She took her headphones out and crumpled them in her fist. Her judgement like a cold embrace from my bedridden Aunt Fiona. More about Aunt Fiona later. Maybe.

My father chastised 'How dare you speak about a member of your family that way'. No Aunt Fiona stories then.

“Sorry, no, I'll go...” Her finger rested on the play button, making small circles over it. I made similar circles on my right thigh.

“It's fine.” She started rubbing the button back and forth. I did the same on my thigh. “What did you want?”

I sat. “Well, I just wanted to say hi, you know, we live in the same building and we've never really talked.”

“I've never talked to that guy either.” A fat man a few tables over from us. The sausages at the ends of his hands struggled to make their way around his coffee cup.

Three or four sugar packets littered the table. A girl, probably 9 or 10, sat with him, playing on a Nintendo DS. The large man dug his teeth into his lower lip. He asked her a question, she shrugged. Upon sensing an audience, he turned to Nadia and me, grimaced, and turned back to his daughter.

“Tell you what.” Nadia's lips turned up at the duo. “If you become friends with him, you and I'll have coffee together and have a nice long chat about whatever you want. Sound good?”

By that point, I had of course definitively decided that I did not particularly want to have coffee with Nadia but she still felt like a mystery that I wanted to solve. She also scared me.

My parents got agitated if I thought about talking to her again. Not that it mattered now that she was dead. I still wanted to solve the mystery though. Ian could use company. Maybe he'd help me solve the mystery, or maybe his apartment would. And so I decided to pay Ian a visit after work. But as I waited for the elevator to come down to the lobby, the overweight man that Nadia told me to talk to that day walked into the lobby. Had I missed my chance to solve the Nadia mystery? Could this man help? If I had just spoken to him, where would I exist now?

“Hi,” I said nonchalantly. What does nonchalant mean? My palms dripped sweat, which seemed rather chalang.

His leather jacket squeaked a little when he lifted a hand to touch the up button, and again when he turned to me after I said hi. A silver chain wrapped around his neck, weighed down by something hidden under his V-neck. “Hi. Do I know you?”

“I don't think so.” I hadn't planned too well, yet again. What was I supposed to say next? 'The dead girl said that I could only get a coffee with her if I talked to you first, and even though she died and will never have coffee with her, I'm talking to you'. I didn't say that. Instead I said, “I've just realized that I don't know many of the people living

here, and after what happened to Nadia, I thought we could all use some friends.”

“Who's Nadia?” Did anyone else ever make an effort to talk to her? Well, me and Ian, obviously. The elevator door opened.

“The girl who died in the apartment. Well, not *in* the apartment. She fell. It's all over the news, and posters were around before.” Technically unrelated to her death (unless Bradley suspected correctly that Nadia had a mental disorder, in which case there could be a connection of some sort). I got in the elevator and pushed the button for the sixth floor.

“Oh. Right. Yeah I didn't see any of it. I remember hearing sirens, but I didn't realize that they came to the apartment till I saw the news. My daughter stayed with me on the day that she fell, so I was busy with her.” He took up a third of the elevator. The jacket squeaked again. Ian could wait.

“You in a rush? We could go get coffee,” I said as the elevator door closed. He raised his right eyebrow and moved his head back.

“You want to get coffee with me?” He repeated.

“If you have time, yes. I'm Lenny, by the way.” I extended my right hand. Aunt Fiona came to mind again as we shook hands and I shuddered, unfortunately in the middle of the shake.

“Sorry.” He dropped my hand. “I don't need coffee. I'll go home.”

“No, no, not you, I just got a chill.” Aunt Fiona always did have a way of ruining everything. The elevator door opened.

“Really it's okay. I have to go.” He walked out and my stomach shrunk into a ball that immediately got sucked into my wind pipe. ‘Didn't I teach you manners, Ellen?’ my mother asked.

“At least tell me your name?” Already the scenario replayed itself over and over again. I'd find a way to fix it. I'd make it better.

“Gord. See you around.” I imagined walking after him, explaining about Aunt Fiona and how she always wanted to hug even though she always has a cold sweat, but then I realized that that would imply that he had one as well, which I didn't want him to think, though he actually was sweaty, he probably didn't need or want me to tell him that, so I just played with my phone till the elevator door closed.

I got out on the sixth floor and realized how ridiculous my idea was. Why would Ian want to talk to me? I lived here. The end. My mother reminded me that 'if something bad happens to you here, you'll have no one to blame but yourself.'

But I needed to know. I needed to solve the mystery.

I couldn't see anything through Ian's peephole. I held my hand against the wood for several seconds before knocking. What would I say? Would I tell the truth? If I lied, which lie?

My mother's voice came freely with a plethora of admonitions, but no answers. I knocked. I knocked again. My mother, 'how could you be so disrespectful?' I touched the doorknob. It turned.

The apartment, though the same size as mine, seemed smaller. Piles of clothes, a pizza box, two vases full of flowers just beginning to wilt. A box of Heineken gathered dust by a rocking chair by the balcony.

I imagined what she saw before falling. Me doing a Sun Salutation? Bradley by his window, writing down a new name for the Sun Salutation? Or her eyes closed? Could she hear Bradley and me talking?

On the balcony, I tried to imagine what she saw, tasted, smelled. Sky, leaves, wind, a squirrel running along the telephone line. Then I listened, and I knew where Ian went. Right above me, with Mason. I pressed myself into the wall. Shit shit shit. My mother asked 'What the hell did you expect? You're breaking and entering. Just wait till your father gets home.'

Pressing against the wall, I breathed in for four counts, then breathed out for six, and slowly made my way down the fire escape, dreading their peripheral vision. I'd have to dye my hair and throw out the clothes I wore. I hated to admit that I wished my mother would tell me how to get out of there.

Finally on the ground, I sat at the bottom step and breathed. I slouched onto the ground into Child's Pose. Breathe in, one two three four, breathe out, one two three four five six, for ten breaths in and out and out. I breathed in deep, pulled myself up onto my arms, straightened my legs, and pushed my butt up in the air, Downward Dog. I breathed for ten more breaths, brought my butt down and arched my back upwards, pelvis on the ground, Upward Dog. Breathed five more breaths, lowered my top half except for my neck which still stretched upwards, Cobra Pose, then lowered my head to lean back into Child's Pose. Stopped because Nadia's blood stain almost touched my nose. My hands gave out and Cobra Pose turned into a backwards Corpse Pose. I twisted into Pigeon Pose away from the blood and stayed a corpse till I heard Bradley come out of his apartment.

November 1, 2014

Sender: len_garcia29

Recipient: jvanderwall

Subject: Re: Nadia McDermott

Hi Jamie,

I would love to help you. Even if I struggle a little with it, I know it's important! Whenever you want to meet, just let me know, my schedule's pretty flexible. My boss doesn't really care when I'm at the office, just that I get my job done, so whenever's good for you will work for me.

Incidentally, I'm doing a bit of investigating myself. Obviously I'm not a reporter, but I've had concerns about what happened to Nadia. I feel it's important to know what

really happened, or at the very least, to keep our minds open to the infinite possibilities. We really don't know what led up to her death, I know Bradley thinks she killed herself, but I'd like to explore all the different possibilities. When we meet we can go over each other's notes. If that's okay!

Lenny Garcia

P.S. Please call me Lenny!

Mason

Ian's apartment reeked like Venus fly traps, as though Nadia's body had been tucked in the closet. A half-dead roach under the couch moved its antennae once, when Ian sat down on the couch; the two of them in some weird dance. Maybe Nadia called Ian out on his roach affair and he offered her. A plate of cold, cooked Brussel sprouts waited for the roach's family to feast.

“Want anything?” Ian asked, though I seriously doubted the kitchen had anything edible in it. Dust swirled atop a glass of water when Lenny's leg bumped the table. The table hardly budged. It slowly poured into the crater in the carpet, its eternal resting place. The cockroach's front left leg twitched. So the table danced as well. Did Ian know?

“Didn't know you two date.” Ian pulled his blanket around him like an old woman. He reached for the glass of ancient water. I shivered. Dick almost popped out of his robe.

“Not dating. Just friends. Thought that you could use a friend too.” Mom used to set up play dates for me till I told her off. She said I could use a friend. Maybe true, but friends wanted to play Mario Kart and I'd drive off the edge of the road every time. And anyways, I had friends, just not ones she could see. Of course, I learned when I turned 14 that telling her about the bats and the snowmen backfired horribly and the next thing I knew I sat in a psychiatrist's office where he asked me lots of questions about my childhood and if I'd ever thought about hurting anybody and did I think people wanted to hurt me. I only lied on three of the questions – had I ever considered suicide (I said no), did I ever see things that others didn't (no again), and did I trust anyone (I said yes; years later, I trusted my friend Jade, I really did, until I found out her real name, and she had a husband. So I didn't trust Alice, but I had trusted Jade). I wondered what mom would have said if she knew I now had a friend – acquaintance.

“Sorry. Just assumed.” I guess mom would have called the moms of my playdates

to brag about me making an acquaintance. But I'd always had acquaintances. Cheryl at work who picks up a coffee for me when she gets herself one. Her endocrinologist wants her to cut back on coffee so she tells herself that the coffee is just a favour for me. We're not friends so much as symbiotes.

“So how are you, Ian? I can't imagine what you're going through.” Lenny shifted towards me. Caught in the gravitational pull of the crater, like the table? Should I have warned her? Dove into the crater for her, sacrificed myself for the neighbour who I could sort of call my friend? No, she wouldn't notice. Even the cockroach, far more likely to be sucked into the crater than Lenny, didn't struggle against the pull. Maybe that's why he barely lived, torn by his inability to be affected by a nuclear bomb and wishing he could just disintegrate and finally become truly one with the coffee table.

“Watched all my shows.” The curtains in front of the balcony drawn, but not all the way on the left side. A bird landed and started eating what looked like birdseed. Ian slithered to the balcony in boxers, dousing the seeds in rat poison, laughing as the bird's wings crumbled. He punted it off the balcony, and it spiralled into the pit of lava, a trail of poisoned seeds following. His robe flowed behind him.

“So sorry for your loss.” Lenny reminding me that Ian sat on the couch in front of us. Whoops. The bird flew away, seemingly without injury.

“You here when it happened?” Ian pulled the blanket lower, preventing his member from appearing. The bathrobe had a coffee stain below the right side pocket. Dried. Face covered in wiry curls, except for the space above the mouth. Bit of toothpaste clung to the hairs on his chin, aging him. The ridge between his nose and mouth shone red and raw.

“Excuse me?” Had I said something rude? Investigating. Asking Ian how he'd felt didn't help. If he said he felt overjoyed, well naturally that would indicate a problem. But even the cops would have picked up on that. No, Ian played pathetic grieving widower

convincingly – a picture frame, presumably with a picture of Nadia in it, tucked behind the TV stand, and the bedroom door had a mountain of laundry in front of it. The bird flew back to the balcony. We both knew the truth about what had happened to Nadia.

“Story's unclear – lots of different reports, and I figured you're the most reliable person on the subject. Just not sure on the details, I figured you'd fill in those details.” Bird rose up and circled till it gained momentum, then thrust itself through the glass. Curtain flew up, so high it touched the ceiling. Bird's wings grew and grew till the apartment expanded to fit them. Cockroach flew across the room, its final moments of panic overshadowed by the carnage happening on the couch before me. The bird slit Ian's throat as it decried crimes against the bird's family. Ian had punted many birds into the lava pit outside. One bird had had enough, and dragged Ian's carcass to the balcony, blood telling a story behind him.

“I don't want to talk.” Just as the bird threw open the balcony door, a volcano exploded, spewing lava and ashes into the air. The coffee table landed in the lava, swallowed into flames. The hole in the floor opened and thousands of undead birds slowly crept up through the hole, onto the living room floor, intending to destroy Ian before the lava could.

“We're so sorry; of course you don't want to discuss this.” One of the birds said as it crawled into my hand, pulling me to the door. The bird's flesh repaired itself but the feathers did not grow back. Instead, it grew tall legs and human hair. Its wings curled till they became narrow tubes of flesh with fingers on the ends, straddling my fingers. Lenny waved the lava away, back into the volcano. She summoned the table from the retreating lava, back where it belonged, to block the crater so no more undead birds could crawl through. The lava would not burn them. She then put Ian's body back together, mopping up the blood, and propped him back on the couch. Finally, she found the cockroach's body and breathed life into it. She held my hand the whole time. Then we retreated out

the door.

“If you ever do want to talk, you know where I live.” I wondered if Ian had ever killed any birds besides Nadia.

Lenny let go of my hand and walked to the elevator. I got in even though we were already on my floor. She didn't turn till we got inside and she pressed the button for her floor.

“What the hell's wrong with you?” Four doctors could tell her what wasn't wrong with me. Not schizophrenia. Not drugs. Not bipolar disorder – after reading some Wikipedia articles, I don't even know why that had ever been a theory. Not schizotypal personality disorder. Whatever was wrong with me had nothing to do with whatever Lenny got pissed off about. I pursed my lips to keep from smiling.

“What's wrong with me? You asked the most useless questions ever. Who gives a shit about his TV shows?” The lava had retreated into Lenny's eyes. I made myself stop leaning forward.

“It sounded like an investigation!” Less lava and more salsa. But really spicy salsa.

“It was an investigation!” Did I not mention that to her? Did we actually go for a courtesy call? I ran through yesterday's conversation. We'd agreed to talk to Ian. I wouldn't have agreed to go if we planned on just talking. I hate just talking. Not a courtesy call. Find out if he killed Nadia. And we'd failed. But we'd had a goal. Hadn't we?

“Yes but it shouldn't have sounded like one. If I'd known you'd do that, I would have gone alone.” Okay good. We had gone to investigate. But what had I said wrong?

“Why do you care? What the hell do you think happened? You obviously don't think she killed herself, or that Ian killed her, so what? Building's a piece of shit and the management needs to fix things, you think the balcony gave out? Then why does it

matter what her clearly ignorant husband thinks? Tell the superintendent, the mayor, the prime minister, I don't give a shit. Nothing, nothing you can gain from me or Bradley or Ian just by talking about whatever pops into your head, ask him about Nadia's family or the funeral arrangements or something and see if he squirms.” Just as I said it, the elevator doors opened and in walked a really fat guy. Lenny and I both shifted to the right. He squeezed himself into the corner after pressing the button for the lobby. He wore dress pants and his shoes were dirty.

Lenny didn't say anything for the rest of the elevator ride. Fine. She did her Fire Breath or whatever it's called. I told her to stop that and she didn't respond. She just got out on the next floor – probably to take the stairs so she could breathe however she wanted – and walked away. Once she got out, the fat guy spoke.

“Do you know her?” His right shoe dirtier than the left, but a bit of mud flowered on the bottom of the left pant leg.

“Yeah. We're friends, I guess. Acquaintances, maybe. Why? You know her?” Lenny seemed the kind of person to know almost everyone in the building. She'd smile at people as we walked by them, say hello, pet dogs, play with babies, the whole deal. Once, a little while after I moved in, I even saw her speaking to the homeless lady that sometimes begs in the park across the street.

“We talked once.” I nodded. The man breathed heavily as the elevator continued down. I'd meant to go home, not get in the elevator. I'd pretend to get a coffee in the lobby. Down, down. The man didn't say anything else, just breathed. We reached the lobby and I scooted out before I could get stuck behind him. About to walk away faster than I assumed he could walk, but I heard a pitiful “Excuse me.” I stopped and waited for him to catch up.

“I lied,” he said to the ground. It swallowed him whole as penance for his life of lies.

“Okay? What, you talked to her more than once? I'm truly hurt that you'd tell such lies.” I shouldn't have used sarcasm while standing on that floor, it could've swallowed me up too and then I'd stay with the fat guy for all of eternity.

“No, I didn't lie to you.” Had he lied when he said that he lied? Had he ever lied? Could he tell me every lie that he ever spoke? Could he really speak to the ground? Maybe the gates of Hell had actually opened before our feet, asking him to confess each of his sins. Though if you're already at the gates of Hell, probably too late for penance. Maybe purgatory and the floor calculated how long he'd have to stay there before he moved on. “I lied when I talked to Lenny.”

Had Lenny told me about her conversation with him? Did I know about it? How would he have known whether she'd spoken to me? And why did having Lenny around mean talking to so many people?

“I lied,” the man continued, “and told her that I didn't know about Nadia McDermott. And that I hadn't talked to her ever. But I talked to Nadia a lot.”

Nadia. Always about Nadia now. No one talked about her while she lived. Maybe Ian did her a favour. Since our detective work with Ian had failed, I'd see what the fat guy had to say. I had nowhere to go. I started by feigning ignorance. “Why'd she ask you about Nadia?”

“I don't know. She might think I'm the reason Nadia died.” A tear fell on the floor in front of the man. Not a good enough sacrifice to whatever guarded purgatory. The tear just sat there on the floor.

“Why would you have been the reason?” He didn't seem like the killer type, but could he have done something to make Ian kill her? Affair? Same age as Nadia, but she'd been out of Fat Guy's league. Why else? Did she call him fat?

He put a hand over his face. “Can we get coffee? You free?”

I wanted to say no, but I also wanted to find out why he took the blame for

Nadia's death. Another suspect for me to tell the cops about?

“I guess.” He ordered three creams and two sugars, I ordered a medium black coffee, one sugar.

“I talked to Nadia a few times. Usually we'd just say hello in the hallway.” That monster! Saying hello to dead women before they died. I sipped my coffee.

“I never tried to give her the wrong impression. I have young kids. Nadia even bought a box of chocolate from my son one time. The chocolate drop kind that look like a swirl, you know?” I didn't. I nodded. “So, like, neighbours. I knew she had a husband, I hadn't talked to him ever, but I just wanted a good neighbour.” The fat man hadn't sipped his coffee.

“So what happened?” When he moved his hand, my face reflected in the sheen of sweat where the hand had rested. He wiped it on his pants.

“She... one day I walked through the lobby, just going to get my mail. Then I saw her in the café, after hours, just sitting there with a water bottle in front of her crying. So I went and asked her if she wanted company. She smelled like alcohol. Or the water bottle did. It's bad to drink alone, so I sat down.” He breathed heavily. The sweat had probably seeped into the coffee. Maybe he hoped to absorb the coffee without drinking. “And then she asked me to make love to her.”

The fat man landed on top of Nadia's bloodied corpse. She'd fallen from the balcony, hair and dress flying up, and he'd landed on top of her, thrusting, her body flopping back and forth, blood covering both of them.

“She said what?” Flop flop flop.

“She really did.” He lifted his coffee as though to drink it but didn't bring it up to his lips. It hung there between his chin and the table.

“Did you... take her up on her offer?” Possible. Flop flop flop. Blood spewed from her mouth as she moaned.

“No... I couldn't.” The flopping stopped and the fat man lay still on top of Nadia. She smirked. “Like, I could've. But my kid, and her husband...” I sipped my coffee. Nadia lifted her bloodied head and waited for her lover. “But I didn't want to make love to a married woman. And I wouldn't want my kids to find out.”

“Just to clear things up here,” Nadia lay by herself in a pool of blood, finishing the job. “Nadia asked you to have sex with her?”

Blood rushed to his face. “Yes... that basic idea...” Nadia rolled her eyes further back into her head and placed a bloody hand between her thighs.

“What exact words did she use?”

I could've popped his whole head like a pimple with just a bit of pressure on both temples. “She said 'Fuck me!'” The last two words went directly into the still untouched coffee, some of it evaporated. Nadia grunted.

“That's all?” The blood in his head sloshed around as he nodded. “What did you say to her?”

“I said 'Excuse me?' but all she would say over and over again... well, asking to make love...” Nadia's grunts turned into laughter. I almost laughed with her.

“You sure she didn't mean 'fuck me' in another way?” Blood bubbled in Nadia's open, laughing mouth.

“What do you mean?” Nadia stopped laughing and died.

“She could've meant it in a... fuck my life kind of way.” The fat man lifted the coffee again. It still avoided his lips. Nadia's body started decomposing; she didn't have skin any more.

“I don't understand. She wanted sex.” Blood started leaking out. Bones began showing under Nadia's rotting muscles.

“I'm not saying that she didn't.” Bones. “I'm just trying to understand exactly what happened. There's a big difference between “Fuck me” as in asking for sex and just

saying “Fuck me” as in I'm unhappy and so fucked.”

“But why would she say that if she didn't want to make love?” Nadia's former lover stood over her skeleton, ready to flop on her once more. He lay down and thrust back and forth on the bones as they clacked around till they broke apart and started disintegrating.

“You know how back in the day, people used to say 'woe is me' when they felt upset? Like that only now they say fuck me instead.” Nothing ever grows in the spot where Nadia died and when the building contractors decide to expand the building onto that spot, at night the residents hear the sounds of bones clacking and a woman grunting at night, and every ten years Nadia's ghost pushes someone off her balcony.

“But she wanted to make love.” The untouched coffee cup waited in vain. Nadia's ghost clacked behind the fat man.

“Could be.” I finished my coffee. Nadia could've wanted to have sex with him. If she drank enough. Crazy woman and her killer husband probably didn't have the greatest sex life. 'Fuck me' felt very different from 'Make love to me', or even 'Let's fuck'. Didn't matter. If she actually asked the fat guy to fuck her, possible that someone else fucked her, and Ian killed her for it. Even if she meant her words in the 'Woe is me' way, still reconfirmed Nadia's misery. She needed to drink alone in a café and vent to some stranger, and Ian's the most likely reason for her misery. Or, the fat guy didn't like rejection and killed her.

“I shouldn't have lied to Lenny.” Lenny?

“She probably won't care but I can tell her if you want.” The coffee cup finally lost its virginity when the fat man splashed a bit of coffee onto the table.

“No don't tell her please. I just needed to talk to someone.” Coffee kept dripping off the lip of the cup, to the floor, filling it up. No telling whether the ground would open up to swallow the coffee or if the it would let us drown. Not going to take that chance.

“Sure. I gotta go. See you around.” When I stood, the coffee already reached my knees.

“I’m Gord.” He pushed himself off from the table, sending shockwaves through the ever rising coffee. Held out a hand.

“Mason.” Gord’s hand turned back into the python and wrapped itself around mine. I wiggled out and the python dove into the coffee, where I couldn’t see whether it would attack me.

“Nice to meet you. Thanks for listening.” The coffee almost reached Gord’s armpits. I retreated to the roof.

November 2, 2014

Sender: pizzutopizzas

Recipient: jvanderwall

Subject: Re: Nadia McDermott

So basically you’re saying if I talk to you, you’ll make me sound good to the cops and the good people of Windsor.

I don’t know anything about Nadia since I had nothing to do with her. I don’t know what the hell happened in that apartment. I have my guesses, but they don’t mean squat.

I’ll talk to you, but my talking has conditions, okay? My name doesn’t go anywhere near the newspaper. You talk to the cops only if they ask, and you only give them direct quotes from me. No inferences, no between the lines, just straight up quotes. And we only meet once, then we’re done.

If you can work with those conditions, then I’m down for whatever.

CBC Radio

June 19, 1946

Windsor tornado

“It's difficult this afternoon to locate a great many of the displaced persons whom we've lost this morning and last night. They have gone to the houses of relatives or friends. An epidemic of looting appeared. There are always such ghouls that infest an area that has suffered some calamity or another. It's been reported that several lawn mowers have been stolen, and others have lost things that in the early hours of the storm had been set aside. It's pleasant to see that men armed with saws and hammers have turned up to assist those less fortunate ones, to restore order out of the chaos of last night. Power has been off for the entire Windsor area, from about 6:15 last night, no elevator service in office buildings, no restaurants were operating (or at least very few), and a general air of bewilderment prevailed over the city as we counted our dead and injured. 14 is the last total of dead, with still scores in hospitals, critically wounded in the storm.”

Lenny

I didn't want to talk to Ian with Mason. Don't get me wrong, I wanted to make up for breaking into Ian's apartment, and when Mason said he'd help me I felt like I might finally make it to another world, but Mason *had* ripped down the posters. And I trusted him because I assumed that she fell from her apartment, and I'd seen Mason on the roof. But what if they had both gone up there? Why did he want to frame Ian so badly? Did he know something more about Ian? What if Mason had some reason to hate Ian? Had Mason loved Nadia? What if Mason played the villain? Or what if they both orchestrated her death and I'd played into their hands?

And yet I went with Mason to Ian's apartment, pushing my private excursion to the apartment out of my mind by breathing deep each time I remembered the view from

the balcony, Mason and Ian's voices above me, Pigeon Posing away from the blood. I had to hop to catch up to Mason. I attempted to read an expression, but the stubble on his chin told me nothing. My mother's voice trailed behind me, reminding me 'If you die, it's all on you. I raised you better than to go unannounced into single men's apartments.' To my mother anyone not married was single.

“Want me to slow down?” Of course I wanted him to slow down.

“No, I'm good.” The faster we walked, the sooner we'd have a conversation with Ian and mother would be too polite to interrupt.

“You sure? You look like you're struggling, kid.” I'm 25. He couldn't be older than 30, why would he call me kid? 'Because you don't have your life together, Ellen.' Right.

“We're almost there.” I didn't know what to expect. My father jumped in with, 'Why are you and Mason going to question Nadia's widower, instead of going on a normal date?' My mother: 'Have you fully thought through your decision to go into an apartment with two men you hardly know?'

After the incident on the fire escape, Bradley brought me into his apartment and gave me a Diet Ginger Ale. I drank it while he flicked back and forth between the news and a hockey game. Stephen Harper apparently told off Vladimir Putin. Then Montréal scored against Toronto, ending the first period with a tie. Bradley made a phone call to his father once the period ended to discuss the highlights so far.

Could Mason have killed Nadia? I'd just assumed that Nadia fell from her balcony, I didn't actually know. And how could anyone know? Bradley and I didn't see. Ian supposedly worked that day. Mason couldn't be relied on yet.

An RCMP officer got shot in British Columbia and remained in critical condition. Don Cherry had something to say about French people.

If Mason had done something to Nadia that explained why he felt he had to prove that Ian had killed her. And it explained why he cracked his knuckles like a drug addict

when he asked me for my alibi. Bradley said goodbye to his dad, then said hello to his mom.

Whatever happened to Ebola? Montréal scored in the first five minutes of the second period.

But the wings. No, Mason hadn't done it. She tried to go somewhere else. A different universe. Just like I had. Toronto got an icing penalty.

I'd gone with the idea to bring flowers and a loaf of banana bread to Ian's apartment. Mason just wanted to bring a card. I told him that you don't physically go to someone's residence to give them a card. You mail it to them, or slip it under their front door. Cards say, "I feel obligated to say something but I don't want to actually have to say it in person." Flowers and banana bread say, "I'm a friend. I'm here to help. I'm going to listen and support you." Which of course made our – or at least Mason's – actual intentions even worse. Mason wanted to find evidence to prove that Ian had killed Nadia. And me? I followed Mason because I thought he looked pretty? Creeping a decent widower just days after his wife died? Or chasing a fantasy that I couldn't let go of? Or did I have a death wish?

I couldn't decide how I felt about Bradley's decision to not come. Not a surprise, of course. Bradley didn't typically join in. He liked doing quiet research. If he could take out library books on the subject, he would. He probably already looked up statistics on suicide, homicide, and whatever else we could call Nadia's death. I could see him researching every type of mythology involving falling. If he knew anything useful though, he wouldn't tell us, unless we asked about one thing specifically. Bradley didn't learn things to prove others wrong, he learned them to prove himself right.

The Montréal/Toronto game went into its third period (4-2 Montréal) when Bradley said,

“Why did you lie on the ground, Ellen Garcia?”

“I took the fire escape down.”

“Did you fall off the fire escape?”

I wished for that answer. “No, Bradley. I freaked out and so I tried to do some yoga to calm down and it helped at first but then Nadia's blood's still there and I froze and my legs turned numb and I couldn't control my brain anymore.”

“You had a panic attack.”

“But I didn't feel panicky.” Bradley frequently diagnosed me and others with all kinds of disorders.

“Panic attacks can manifest in different ways.”

“I know that, Bradley, but I've had panic attacks before, and I know what they feel like, I know how to handle them, but this, whether a panic attack or not, it felt different. Not freaking out, but like everything around me detached from me and pulled further and further away till I couldn't feel, and I didn't move till you came.”

“But I did not make you move.” I wondered what my mother would diagnose me with at the end of this conversation. Her current guess? Selfishness. My father guessed hypochondria. And that's when I can't get them out of my head. I could never actually described breaking into Ian's apartment to them.

“I know.”

“So you could move.”

He intended to make me feel better, so I didn't tell him that he drove me crazy sometimes. We watched the rest of the game.

Mason and I reached Ian's front door. We stood, wondering what would happen, if Ian would invite us in, if we'd end up finding a body in there, if Ian would act angry or happy to see us, if he had a banana allergy. I shifted the flowers from my right hand to my left and knocked on the door.

“One second,” a voice came from the other side. Mason's stubble grew darker.

“Can I help you?” Ian's voice sounded less magical than I remembered. He hadn't shaved – and unlike Mason, the stubble looked scraggly instead of scruffy – and his face looked painted, red forehead and chin, and dark blue cheekbones. He wore only a bathrobe and his chest hair peeked out from behind black curtains. He didn't acknowledge the flowers.

“Just wanted to offer you our condolences and these gifts.” Mason spoke first. I tried to figure out if Ian had underwear on or not, and if he didn't, how I felt about that.

“Thank you.” Ian took the flowers, took the banana bread.

“You allergic to bananas?” I asked. If Mason could act more tactful than me, what did that say about my social skills?

“No. Why?”

“Ah. Well. We brought you banana bread. Hope you like it.” If here, Bradley would probably tell Ian all about banana allergy statistics.

“Would you like some company for a little while?” Mason took a step forward as though Ian had already invited us in. I followed.

“Okay. Place's mess though.” Ian opened the door a little more and showed some upper thigh. Oh.

“That's fine, we understand.” Two paths through the clutter, one to the kitchen, and one to the couch. The path to the balcony now obstructed by a reclining chair I hadn't noticed yesterday. Did Ian know I had been there just the day before?

Across from the front door stood a long leather couch. Well-worn, with a blanket shoved against the cushions. The TV played some British TV show. The blanket made it clear that the couch was Ian's spot, so Mason and I cuddled close to our respective arm rests on the love seat. A little part of me wanted to let go of the arm rest, but I didn't. 'Do you think an arm rest will save you from two murderers?' my mother asked as my father reminded me that 'Arm rests won't give me grandchildren'.

“I didn't know that you two're dating.” Did we actually look like a couple? Or did Ian just assume that because a male and a female arrived at his door together?

“Not.” Mason jumped in before I could reply. “Just friends who thought that you could use a friend too.” Where had this version of Mason been every other time that I talked to him?

“Oh. Sorry. I just assumed.” A tall blonde woman on the TV started ranting about how she wasn't a slag.

“So how're you doing, Ian? I can't imagine what you're going through.” I channelled every movie about grief that I had seen. Annoying questions stimulate conversation, right? People work that way, or so I'd told Bradley.

“I've caught up on my shows.” A curly haired man imitated the blonde woman by thrusting his pelvis. Apparently he didn't believe she wasn't a slag, or liked that she was. “Or at least I'm trying to.” The camera man panned slowly down her back.

“We're so sorry for your loss.” Ian pulled the blanket over his legs.

“So were you here when it happened?” Apparently Mason decided to ignore my earlier suggestion about us being subtle and delicate.

“Excuse me?” The woman on the TV started punching the curly haired man.

“The story's all a bit unclear to me.” Mason spoke slowly. “I'm not sure on the details, as I've heard several versions, and I figured with you here, you'd fill in those details.”

The blonde woman and the curly haired man stopped fighting and started making out.

“I'd rather not discuss that.” The man and woman started to have sex. I nodded.

“We understand.” I did, but who knew what Mason thought. “She must have been a wonderful person. I'm sad that I didn't know her better.” I wondered if my mother would approve of that tact. Silence.

“She had her moments.” The man stayed fully clothed, but the woman had stripped down to her underwear. Slag.

“We all do.” I smiled. He watched TV. I turned to Mason, who drummed on his knees.

“Crazy moments or pissed off moments or what? What was she actually like?” Mason stopped drumming. Ian either didn't hear or ignored him.

“You must hate having to cook for yourself, Ian. Let me make you dinner one night.” I didn't see anything in the kitchen to cook, but maybe he could come to my apartment. Too forward?

“I'm okay. I gotta shower.”

“Of course. Sorry to bother you. Enjoy the banana bread.” Without thinking about it, I grabbed Mason's hand and dragged him towards the door.

“If you ever do want to talk, you know where I live.” Mason said over my shoulder.

We exited, and as soon as the elevator door closed, I turned to him.

“What the hell's wrong with you?” I wanted to punch him.

“What's wrong with me?” he laughed. “Thanks to you we know he isn't allergic to bananas, so that tells us a lot, doesn't it?”

“You made it sound like an investigation!” I didn't want to look at that stupid stubble.

“Cause it was an investigation!” I couldn't rationally disagree with him.

“Yeah but seriously, what is your problem? You blew the entire thing.” He glared. My mother said 'See? A dangerous man glares!'

“My problem? You're the one who kept ogling his dick.”

The elevator doors opened and Gord walked in. I smiled at him. He smiled at my shoes. I got off on the next floor. I didn't say goodbye to Mason or Gord.

Bradley

When Ellen Garcia and Mason Pizzuto went to Ian McDermott's apartment, I did my own investigating in the downtown library archives. I went through public police files, social media pages, newspapers, photographs, and cemetery records. I found out these things about Ian and Nadia McDermott:

Two years ago, Nadia McDermott hired a divorce lawyer, then fired him a month later.

Seven months ago, police came to their apartment for a domestic disturbance. No arrests.

Ian and Nadia McDermott visited a fertility clinic six years ago. They did not go back.

Four years ago, Nadia McDermott went to a rehabilitation clinic for drugs and alcohol. She returned to her apartment after six months. She went back again two weeks after the domestic disturbance call, and returned once again to the apartment three weeks before she disappeared. I don't know for certain for what substance she went to the rehabilitation centre, but I guessed alcohol. I make this guess for reasons that I have previously stated, and while it's an educated guess, it shouldn't be treated as a fact.

Two hours after I completed my research and returned to my apartment, my telephone rang.

“Hey, Bradley?” The man on the phone sounded like Mason Pizzuto, but I did not know for certain. Many people who I have not met may sound like Mason Pizzuto on the phone. Other people who I have met, but have only spoken to in person may also sound like Mason Pizzuto on the phone.

“Yes, this is Bradley Finch. May I ask who calls?”

“Mason. Can we meet?” I did not know of any other Masons that would have my phone number, so I deduced that Mason Pizzuto had most likely called me. I would still

have preferred it if he had stated a full name, but I did not say so.

“We have already met. Do you mean can the two of us get together? If so, yes, I can get together with you.” I could correct lots of people's speech, but Ellen Garcia has told me that most people get annoyed when you correct their speech. They like to be wrong.

Mason Pizzuto sighed. This could mean that he felt frustrated with me, though I did not know him very well. I shouldn't have corrected him. Corrections frustrate people who don't know that I correct them to help them. “Yeah, I mean get together. You free now? We can grab coffee downstairs.”

Not wanting to frustrate Mason Pizzuto again, I said “Yes I'm available to get together with you and drink coffee. I'll see you downstairs in six to thirteen minutes.”

“Cool. See you in a bit.” I hung up my telephone. I went to the washroom, lifted the toilet seat and lid, unzipped my pants, urinated in the toilet, zipped up my pants, closed the toilet lid and seat, flushed the toilet, then washed my hands for 30 seconds, dried my hands with my green hand towel, then I went to my front closet, put on my shoes, went out of the front door, locked the front door, and walked down the hallway to the cafe. I ordered a coffee with one milk and one sugar. Mason Pizzuto arrived three minutes after I sat down. He ordered a black coffee with one sugar, and then sat down across from me.

“You talk to Lenny since yesterday?” I appreciated Mason Pizzuto neglecting the social protocols of saying hello first. We had said hello on the telephone less than fifteen minutes prior.

“I have not spoken with Ellen Garcia since the two of you decided to interview Ian McDermott,” I informed him.

“Ah. That. Well I pissed her off. Not subtle enough I guess.”

“What do you mean by subtle enough?”

“I guess I interrogated him. That's what Lenny said.” I did not tell him repeating what another person actually said isn't guessing.

“What did you do or say to make the conversation seem for Ellen Garcia like an interrogation?”

“You know you don't have to say her full name every time, right? I know which Ellen you're talking about.”

“You did not answer my question.” I chose not to correct him again.

“Sorry.” He did not tell me what he said sorry for. “I'm too abrupt with Ian. I asked too many questions, like about how Nadia died.”

Sometimes I ask too many questions. “That is okay. I think Ellen Garcia will not feel bad for long. She gets mad at me sometimes, like when I correct her grammar, but she stops once she has cooled off. By cooled off I don't mean that her temperature actually drops, but that she has calmed and thinks rationally and no longer feels angry, and can see that when I correct grammar I help her.”

Mason Pizzuto made a sound like laughter but he did not smile. When people actually laugh, they smile, but they sometimes forget to when they pretend to laugh.

“There's something else. Do you know a guy named Gord who lives in the building?”

“I don't think that I know that person. Do you know his last name?” Now perhaps Mason Pizzuto would see why last names are important.

“I don't know.” I would have to find a Gord on the mailboxes, and hope that only one Gord lived in our building. “I talked to him yesterday. Big, fat guy. He thinks Nadia wanted to bang him. I think she might have just been upset and said random shit, but if Gord's right, then could Ian have killed her for cheating on him?”

“You have not given me enough details about what Gord – the fat man – said to you, and so I can't answer any questions about what he could've meant or what could've happened based on what he told you.” I hoped that Mason Pizzuto did not feel frustrated

by this comment.

“Okay sorry. Gord told me that one night Nadia sat here in the cafe all by herself, drunk and crying. Gord asks her what's wrong, she doesn't tell him, she just says 'Fuck me' over and over again.” I still did not quite understand. Mason Pizzuto continued.

“Gord's convinced that she meant a literal fucking, I think she may have just complained about her life, muttering to herself, and Gord misinterpreted what she wanted.”

“Did Nadia McDermott have sex with the fat man?” I needed to find out his last name.

“Gord says no. Even if that was what she wanted, I don't think she wanted it right then, and maybe not with him. You wanna get laid, go to a bar, don't sit alone in a coffee shop. Who knows, maybe she got wasted at a bar to get laid and failed, and settled for Gord, who's too fat for sex.”

“I don't understand. Can fat people not engage in sexual relations?”

Mason Pizzuto turned away from me and started shifting his coffee cup between his hands. “Well yeah, they can, but... someone on their level. Not Nadia.”

“Nadia McDermott isn't on the fat man's level? What kind of level?” Sexual relationships is the thing that confused me most about people. I understand that sex offers physical pleasure, but I don't understand all the different rules that people do and don't follow.

“Never mind. Look, I dunno if they did anything. I don't know if anything Gord said's true. But Lenny will want to know. It's important to her. Gord might have killed Nadia, or done something to make Ian want to kill her, or even did something to make her want to kill herself, I don't know, there's something he didn't tell us.”

I did not remind Mason Pizzuto that there were infinite things that someone couldn't tell someone. “How do you know that the man didn't tell you something important? His experiences may be completely unrelated to Nadia McDermott's death.”

“Worth looking into.”

I also did not remind Mason Pizzuto about all of the potential things that we could look into. “We can talk to him. Perhaps he is as important as you think. Or perhaps he is just sad that his neighbour died.”

“Do you have any other leads? Questioning Ian got fucked up, so there aren't too many other options here.”

I don't know why I did not want to tell him about the archives. I decided to think about why later. “Right. We don't have many options. We can talk to the man that you talked to about Nadia McDermott.”

“Can you convince Lenny to come around to that idea?”

“I don't know what you mean.”

“Talk to Lenny, try to get her willing to talk to Gord. I don't think she's interested in listening to me right now.”

“I'll try but I can't make any promises.”

“Yeah. I know. Thanks, man.”

“You're welcome, Mason Pizzuto.” I didn't know if he had said everything that he had to say, so I waited for him to talk while I drank my coffee. I didn't know the social protocol for leaving a conversation while drinking a cup of coffee in the apartment building that I live in.

“Do you know Lenny's theory?”

“I don't know what Ellen Garcia believes about Nadia McDermott's death. I do know that she insists on looking at every possibility before deciding what to believe, but I don't know what possibilities she has considered.”

“Yeah but the only logical explanations are suicide, homicide, or an accident, and she doesn't seem to believe any of those. Otherwise she would have chimed in when we talked about them.”

“Ellen Garcia told me once that she likes to think outside of the box. That means that she likes to consider unlikely possibilities.” I hoped that Mason Pizzuto knew what the box idiom meant since I don't think that I did a very good job of explaining it.

“But I can't think of any other possibilities.”

“Me neither. You should discuss other possibilities with Ellen Garcia, as I don't know what she thinks.”

“She won't talk to me right now.”

“I told you that she would cool down. But if you must talk to her before she cools down, perhaps we can talk to her together.”

“Nah, it's all right. Thanks though.”

“You're welcome.” I trusted that he had finished speaking, so I said, “I'm going to return to my apartment now if you don't have anything else that you want to discuss.”

“Yup.” I had exited the conversation correctly.

I walked towards my apartment when I remembered that I planned on going to Ellen Garcia's apartment first, instead of mine. I stopped walking. I had not meant to lie to Mason Pizzuto. I had forgotten that I had changed my plans on where I planned on going after we finished with our coffee. I did not want to go back to the café. But I did not know if he planned on going down our hallway for some reason and might see me go to Ellen Garcia's apartment instead of mine. I did not want him to think that I had deliberately deceived him.

I wanted to have Ellen Garcia with me. Not only because that would solve my apartment dilemma. But she has a talent for coming up with ways to accommodate things that I don't like without having to sacrifice the things that I do like. Three months ago I did not know what to do when I went to clean my laundry and a sign in front of the stairs said that they had wet paint on them and were not accessible. Tenants were supposed to take the elevator until further notice, but I don't like the elevator. It feels cramped to me

when there are other people in it. I did not feel good about having to take the elevator. Ellen Garcia suggested that I go up the fire escape until the stairs dried. I don't think I would have come up with that solution on my own.

I decided to try to think what Ellen Garcia would do. I had told Mason Pizzuto that I went to my apartment, but I wanted to go to Ellen Garcia's apartment and I did not want him to see me going to her apartment. Mason Pizzuto lived five floors above us, so it's possible that he would not walk down our hallway, but I couldn't say for certain. It then occurred to me that at any point for the rest of the day, I could go to Ellen Garcia's apartment and Mason Pizzuto could see me and then he would think that I had lied to him because I did not say how long I would be there or what else I would do for the rest of the day.

Then I remembered the fire escape solution and realized that I could do something similar. I could go to my apartment, climb out my window and knock on Ellen Garcia's apartment window. I thought Ellen Garcia might have come up with that solution, and that made me feel that it would work.

I did not doubt whether my plan would work well until I heard Ellen Garcia scream when I tapped on her window.

“Bradley, what the hell?” Her voice sounded shrill, which meant that she was mad.

“I'm sorry. I did not mean to scare you. But I did not want Mason Pizzuto to see me going into your apartment.” Ellen Garcia gestured for me to come inside, and so I did.

“Mason? Why does Mason care whose apartment you go into?” She still sounded shrill. I did not know why Mason made her angry, or why me caring what Mason thinks made her angry. She did a Breath of Fire, which I call Loud Breathing.

“He doesn't. I told him that I was going to my apartment, but after I left I remembered that I had wanted to go to your apartment. I did not want him to think that I

had lied to him if he saw me going into your apartment, and so I decided to go the back way.” She rubbed her hand over her face and did another Loud Breath.

“Bradley, why didn't you just call me? Couldn't I have gone to your apartment?”

Ellen Garcia wore orange socks. I had not seen her wear orange clothing of any kind before. “I had not thought of that.” A hole began to form on her second biggest toe of her right orange sock. I wondered if she knew she would have to buy new orange socks soon. “Now I'll have to go to your apartment by the fire escape every time, or call you to tell you to come over to my apartment.”

“Every time? Bradley, did you tell Mason that you would never come to my apartment again?” Ellen Garcia put her hand an inch away from mine. She does this when she wants to hold hands but does not want to make me hold hands if I don't want to. I did not take her hand.

“How long do you think he expects me to stay at my apartment for?” I couldn't speak very loudly.

“Honestly, Bradley? He probably hasn't thought about it at all.”

I had not thought of that possibility. But she knew more about what people think than I did, I decided to ask her the question that I had come over to ask.

“What do you believe happened to Nadia McDermott?” Ellen Garcia blinked quickly and straightened her back. She moved her mouth like when she says the word 'what' but no sound came out.

She moved her hand away from me. “Did Mason talk about that? Why did you see Mason anyways?”

I wondered if I could sew the orange sock back together. I did not know very much about sewing, particularly not sewing socks. I knew you could sew along a seam, but the hole did not tear on the seam. “Would you mind asking me one question at a time?”

“Sorry.” Ellen Garcia's back relaxed into the couch. “Complicated. You know I like science, right?”

“Yes.”

“So I don't really know what to believe exactly, but what I do believe is that things that we consider impossible often are not only possible but turn out to be real.” I did not know what she meant. “So for example, define infinity for me.”

“Something that does not end.” I knew the definition of infinity even though I did not understand it completely. Dr. Herman Scrin says that most people have trouble understanding infinity.

“Right, more or less. And you know that numbers go up to infinity, right?”

Again, I did not completely understand, but I had heard that from several people whose opinions I trust. I nodded.

“Now, things get complicated. Do you think there are more prime numbers or perfect squares?”

The question sounded easy, which I knew probably meant that it would not be easy. “Every prime number can be squared to reach a perfect square, so I'll say perfect squares.” My head began to hurt.

“True, but the higher the square root goes, the further apart the perfect squares fall, right? Like the difference between 4 and 9 is smaller than the difference between 25 and 36.” I counted and then nodded. “But the differences between prime numbers don't consistently get bigger. Sometimes they do, but then they might go back down. The difference between prime numbers is random.”

“But there is still a perfect square for all the prime numbers.”

“Yes, but they keep getting further and further apart, and the differences between the prime numbers stays more or less random. So the difference between the perfect squares is always growing – between the 4th and 5th perfect square (16 and 25) there is a

difference of 9, but between the 14th perfect square and the 15th (196 and 225) the difference is 29. The difference is constantly growing, and so perfect squares become larger numbers faster, if you put them in order. Prime numbers, on the other hand, have no known pattern. The difference between the 12th prime and the 13th prime (37 and 41) is actually bigger than the difference between the 13th prime and the 14th prime (41 and 43), even though they are higher primes.”

I wrote down prime numbers and perfect squares side by side on a piece of paper.

It looked like this:

Prime Numbers	Perfect Squares
2	1
3	4
5	9
7	16
11	25
13	36
17	49
19	64
23	81
29	100
31	121
37	144
41	169
43	196
47	225

Ellen Garcia continued, “If you match up prime numbers with perfect squares, 2 with 1, 3 with 4, etcetera, the prime numbers stay lower than perfect squares. And so every perfect square has a corresponding, lower prime number. If there are an infinite number of perfect squares, there are even more prime numbers lower than the highest perfect square – yet each prime number still has a perfect square.”

Ellen Garcia waited for me to finish making my chart, and then she said “So more

than one infinity must exist.”

“I don't understand that.” My chart did make sense, but I couldn't completely understand infinity.

“I know – logically it doesn't make sense. But when you actually look at the theory, there's no other explanation.”

I turned the paper with my chart over. “What does infinity have to do with Nadia McDermott?” I could understand how death worked better than infinity.

“We look at her death and we think suicide, homicide, or accident. Makes sense to us. But our universe doesn't always make sense.”

“Like infinity?”

“Like infinity.” Ellen Garcia nodded and picked up my chart. “An infinite number of things could've lead to Nadia's fall, and I'll not believe anything for sure until something or someone proves it beyond a shadow of a doubt.”

“I think that I understand what you mean. I don't agree with you but I understand your theory from a theoretical perspective.”

Ellen Garcia smiled. “I can live with that.”

“Good”. I turned my hand so that the palm faced up. Ellen Garcia held it. “Mason Pizzuto said that Gord almost tried to have sex with Nadia.” She dropped my hand.

“What the hell? Why would he know that? That's not true.”

I still felt like her hand held mine, even though she had stopped. “Can you ask one question at a time again?”

“Yes, yes, sorry.” She slouched her body back into the couch. I wondered if she would hold my hand again. I left my palm facing up. “Tell me about your conversation with Mason.”

I told her about whether Nadia had wanted to have sex or not, and whether Gord could engage in sex with Nadia, and what it might mean for our investigation.

When I finished, Ellen Garcia said, “Why did Mason tell you these things?”

“He thinks that we should talk to the man named Gord, whose last name I don't know. Mason does not think that we have any other lead.”

“Gord could have some sort of connection to Nadia... but I don't think he contributed to her death.”

“Mason Pizzuto thinks so. I don't know if I agree with him, I just told you what happened.”

“Thanks.” She did not sound very happy. “I'll think about it, okay?”

“Yes.”

“I'm going to make dinner, do you want to stay to eat?” I never stayed when she offered to make me food. I politely declined.

“I'll see you later.” I told Ellen Garcia.

“Mhmm. Have a good day. Let me know if you change your mind about dinner.”

“I won't change my mind.”

“I know, Bradley. It's a joke.” She closed the door behind me before I could ask her to explain the joke.

Mason

Jamie: Thank you for meeting with me.

Mason: Sure.

J: Let's start with the basics. You're on the roof when Nadia McDermott died.

M: You already know that.

J: Yes I do. But I want to know how you saw her fall from a balcony from the roof.

M: Looking over the edge of the building.

J: And you did that because...?

M: I heard a noise.

J: What kind of noise?

M: A scream. Could've been Nadia or Lenny. Female.

J: What were you doing just before she fell?

M: Thinking.

J: About what?

M: Does it matter?

J: It might.

M: It doesn't.

J: No comment for that one, then. Were you acquainted with the deceased?

M: I knew she existed, we didn't hang out.

J: And her husband?

M: Same.

J: So the police investigation is because...?

M: My charm and good looks?

J: You know what I mean.

M: I don't.

J: The police questioned you. Why you?

M: Homophobia?

J: You gay?

M: Nope.

J: Why did you suggest homophobia then?

M: Bad taste?

J: Let's move on. You reportedly ripped down Nadia McDermott's Missing Persons posters. Why?

M: I didn't think she wanted to be found.

J: How would you know if you didn't hang out?

M: Didn't need to know her well to know unhappiness. Always crying or yelling or talking to herself.

J: Did you ever think that she was in danger and needed finding?

M: Nope.

J: Let's talk about the roof a bit more. You're up there thinking?

M: Yeah.

J: Why the roof?

M: Quiet.

J: Did you know that Ian wasn't home at the time of Nadia's death?

M: Not sure. More than one story floating around.

J: His boss confirmed him at work. But the door to the McDermott's apartment was unlocked.

M: How do you know that?

J: An anonymous police officer told me.

M: Cops can't tell you those things.

J: Hence the anonymity.

M: Nadia might have forgotten to lock the door.

J: Not according to her husband. She always locked the door on her way in. All in one motion, he said.

M: So?

J: She sometimes forgot to lock it on her way out.

M: And?

J: What if she didn't fall from the balcony?

M: You saying she had a treehouse?

J: You know what I'm saying.

M: No one on the roof with me.

J: Did you have a reason to want Nadia McDermott dead?

M: No, I didn't even know her.

J: Anyone in the building who might want her dead?

M: Her husband, maybe. Fat guy named Gord, lives on the second floor, he apparently had a crush on her, or she had a crush on him, something involving crushing.

J: How do you know that?

M: He told me. Sort of.

J: And the husband?

M: Who knows? A fight, bad sex, big credit card bill, affair, satanic sacrifice, gender transitions, broken bowl, hung out with an ex, she called him fat.

J: But why do *you* think he might have killed her?

M: They yelled a lot.

J: About?

M: I don't pry.

J: But you took down her posters.

M: So?

J: Isn't that a kind of prying?

M: It stops other people from prying.

J: Why don't you want people to pry into her death?

M: Posters for her disappearance.

J: So you're okay with investigations into her death.

M: Yeah. I mean, I'm doing it myself.

J: Are you?

M: Helping Lenny.

J: And you think Ian or Gord did it?

M: Yeah. More Ian than Gord.

J: Why's that?

M: Married people kill each other.

J: Rarely.

M: Women rarely fall out of their apartments.

J: True. They fall off the roofs of buildings more often.

M: I didn't kill her.

J: Can you prove it?

M: Who the hell do you think you are?

J: A hand-picked reporter, selected specifically for this story by my editor.

M: Never heard of you.

J: Do you read *The Windsor Star*?

M: I didn't kill anybody. I didn't even know Nadia, why the fuck would I kill her?

J: I don't have anything against you, I'm just trying to find out what happened.

M: Me too.

J: So you can clear your name?

M: So the fucker that did it can rot in jail.

J: You don't think she killed herself then? Did you ever notice any strange behaviour

from her?

M: She'd wander the halls barefoot sometimes. Once she didn't wear any pants, just a long shirt, and once she slept in the stairwell. I'd heard them arguing about money and his mother's bowl and grandchildren. Maybe they wanted a kid.

J: So you did listen.

M: I heard some by accident.

J: Did it ever sound like Nadia was in danger?

M: Danger of what?

J: Did it sound like anyone got, like one of them hitting the other, or verbal threats?

M: Not that I noticed, but not like I leaned against the walls. Most of the time I tried not to hear things.

J: So you took down the posters because she had marital troubles?

M: Apparently.

J: Did you ever talk to her when you saw her crying or sleeping in the stairwell?

M: Again, I don't like prying.

J: Maybe she needed someone to pry.

M: Yeah, but I doubt she would have told me.

J: You cared after she disappeared, but not when she obviously needed help?

M: I'm no shrink.

J: She could've used a friend.

M: Not one like me.

J: Why? What's the matter with you?

M: Sure starting to sound like a shitty article.

J: Tell me about the police investigation.

M: They wanted an alibi.

J: And?

M: Me hanging out on the roof. Nadia in her apartment, balcony specifically. You do the math.

J: Why did they want an alibi from you? Did they want an alibi from everybody in the apartment?

M: Believe it or not, they didn't tell me their deep dark secrets. Probably the poster thing.

J: How did they know about you removing the posters?

M: I don't know. Hidden cameras?

J: Since her death, you and Ellen Garcia and Bradley Finch, have investigated. Tell me how that's going.

M: Lenny wants to find out what happened. I think Ian pushed her. Bradley thinks she jumped. Lenny thinks something else.

J: What's the something else?

M: I don't know. Is this article about us or Nadia?

J: Just trying to get a handle on motivations.

M: Motivations for what? Trying to figure out why someone died in front of us?

J: Obviously Nadia is more than just a dead woman to Lenny. What's their connection?

M: Lenny needs a reason for Nadia's death.

J: But why?

M: Ask her.

J: How did you get involved in the investigation? Bradley lives next door to Lenny, so I get how they're connected, but you don't seem to have any prior relationship with them.

M: Didn't. Lenny approached me because I witnessed Nadia's fall. I don't even know if I'd call it an investigation. Lenny and I talked to Ian one day, which went nowhere, and now she's pissed off at me. I have no idea what Bradley's done, if anything.

J: Bradley's done quite a bit of research.

M: He has? On what?

J: Family histories and whatnot. He's actually given me a lot of information. Lenny angry with you? Why?

M: Whose family histories?

J: Ahh. Ian's, Nadia's, a bit of Lenny's. Why's she angry?

M: What about my family?

J: Not as far as I know. Why is Lenny angry?

M: I called her crazy. Where's Bradley finding research?

J: Why?

M: Maybe I want to do my own research.

J: On your family?

M: I know my family history already.

J: Then what?

M: Not important to your story.

J: I'll judge.

M: No, you won't.

J: Excuse me?

M: I think we might be done.

J: I have more questions.

M: Correction: We are done.

I don't know why I didn't call Bradley. Pathetic going to his apartment to try to find out what he knew. It didn't matter. He didn't care.

“Hello, Mason Pizzuto. How are you?” Bradley stood with one foot inside the apartment.

“Weird question for you.” Flash of a mermaid tail in his apartment. I hoped he wouldn't invite me in.

“Would you like to get coffee?”

“Yeah. Just a quick one.” Itching to get away from the mermaid, we went to the cafe.

“What did you want to ask me?”

“Talked to that reporter today. Said you did some research for her.”

“I did.”

“On what?”

“Nadia McDermott's family. Why do you ask?”

“How'd you find out about them?”

“The city archives have lots of information if you know where to look. Old newspapers, magazines, cemetery lot information-”

“Did you look up my family?”

“No I did not.”

“Can you?”

“I can. Why do you want me to?”

“Just tell me what you find, okay?”

“There are so many things in the archives, I can't possibly tell you-”

“I'm adopted. My birth parents' last name was Weaver. They lived on Walpole Island. That's all I know about them.” So pathetic. “I'm not looking for a reunion or anything. My parents are fine, don't need to replace them. Just want to know why I'm crazy.”

“You want to know if they displayed any signs of mental illness?”

“That'll do.”

March 17, 1984

Windsor Man attempts to swim Detroit River

An anonymous Windsor man was pulled out of the Detroit River today by a passing motor boat. The man appeared cold but unharmed. When the police questioned him, he stated that he had been dared to swim across the river to Detroit. Authorities released the man after bail was posted by the friend who made the dare.

Lenny

The hallway carpet on Mason's floor matched the colour that immediately springs to mind when you think about doctor's offices. The teal colour with flecks of gold signalled waiting room chairs and picture frames with paintings of sad children at doctor's offices. When I went to the hospital after I fell, a painting hung in the hallway outside my room of a girl in a white dress holding a doll with one arm. She supposedly cried because the doll had lost its arm, but more likely it because the doll's cheeks had been painted the colour of dried blood.

I stood at the end of the hallway for several minutes. Important to talk to Mason, though. I had to explain to him his mistake about Nadia, that she never would have cheated on Ian. She must have felt upset the night Gord talked to her. She wanted to go somewhere else. That's probably why she drank. Too much alcohol can almost feel like you're in a parallel universe

In my first year of university, three years after I fell. I'm probably one of the only people I know who waited until 19 to get drunk. I remember the initial moment where I noticed that my balance felt off. I told Hillary and Megan that I had to go to the bathroom. They asked if I needed help but I didn't. I wandered past several groups of drunk people, high-fived a few of them, and briefly hugged a girl whose mascara had

somehow found its way onto her teeth. When I got to the bathroom and sat down, the room started rocking like a car stuck in the snow, back and forth, back and forth. I wondered if I flew off into a new world. I should have brought mascara girl with me.

After a few minutes of waiting to float away, I decided that I should go back to Hillary and Megan. But when I left the bathroom, I realized that I had actually sailed to another universe. This bar seemed much, much bigger than the last one. I must have sailed all the way here while I sat on the toilet. If Hillary and Megan had also come, where would I find them? And if they hadn't, how would I let them know that I remained safe, but that I'd be gone for a long time, perhaps forever? I had given my phone to Megan to hold while I went to the bathroom, but phones might not have worked in that universe anyways.

I sat down on a bench. Alone, and everyone knows not to wander alone in a strange place. It didn't look totally foreign, a parallel universe could be nearly identical to ours, or totally different. I had to find a companion, one who knew more about my surroundings than I did. A solution came in the form of a Frenchman, or at least he had what sounded like a French accent, but who knew what had happened to France or Québec in this universe. Maybe they spoke French in Australia here.

“Why you sitting all by yourself?” the French man asked. He smelled like apple cinnamon and boy sweat. I wondered if he could become my travelling companion, or if he would turn into a shrewd knave.

“I'm looking for my friends.” He didn't look like a knave, but the shrewdest ones never do.

“Would you like to join me and my friends until you find yours?” Under the apple cinnamon, I smelled a trap – or perhaps the chance for a real adventure. I decided to embrace my wanderlust and go in search of an adventure. Taking his outstretched hand, I rose and allowed him to guide me to a pool table.

One friend had a bald head and an earring in his left lobe, a large ruby. The prince? A heavier woman with black hair that reached halfway down her back sat with him. When she handed me the man's glass so she and I could toast, half her face turned into a smile.

“Claudette and Jean. And I Paul.”

I shook their hands and told them my name, though Jean called me 'Lemon' and couldn't understand the difference between Lenny and Lemon. Paul touched my hair and said something in French before picking up a pitcher.

“Have beer!” Claudette said to me. The golden liquid did look like beer, but what if it had magical properties? What if it made me grow 6 feet, or shrink 2 inches? What if it made me blind, or gave me the power to read minds? Cleverly, I realized that I could avoid the liquid by telling them that I had no money. After all, I had no idea about currency here.

Jean had a glass in front of him, and he extended it to me. “I don't have a way to pay you for it.” He continued to hold out the cup.

“You don't have to pay,” Paul touched my cheek. It felt golden. “Smiling is all you need.”

The land had the strangest customs, and the golden liquid looked delicious.

“Perfection!” He proceeded to pour me a glass. “We're only here for another 3 weeks, sadly. Then, we return home to Grenoble.” I did not ask where. I didn't want to reveal how little I knew about this place.

We drank two pitchers of golden liquid between the four of us. It didn't appear to have many magical properties besides making me feel dizzier. Jean began to dance with me, even after I told him that I couldn't dance. Then Jean and Paul danced together. I slipped next to Claudette and asked, “Are they gay?”

Claudette laughed. “No, they're not gay – why?”

“Where I come from, if two men dance together, it usually means they're gay.” I could feel the room spinning like it had in the bathroom, and I wondered if I had to go back to my world. I leaned closer to Claudette.

“What if women dance together? Does that make them gay?” She said into my ear.

“Not necessarily. Sometimes women just do that so men don't bother them, or sometimes they do it to get men's attention.”

Claudette breathed in my ear. “So strange.” I almost asked her if she came from somewhere else too, when she grabbed my waist. “Dance with me.” The room spun so I had to hold onto Claudette. I feared that the spinning would lead to another parallel universe, but I didn't want to leave that one yet.

“Lenny, where the hell did you go?” I let go of Claudette. Hillary stood behind me. Claudette couldn't keep me in her universe.

“I don't know.” I still felt dizzy and wondered if Hillary could go with me to Grenoble – or wherever – if I found a way to go back.

“Just having drinks with your friend here. Would you like to join us?” Had Paul entered my home universe with me?

“Well I hope you enjoyed her company. We're going home now.” I wanted to tell Hillary about my friends from Grenoble, and that I wanted to go back to the other universe with them, but I had trouble walking, so when Hillary started leading me outside the bar, I leaned on her. I turned around to see if my new friends were still there, but the room started to spin again.

I woke up the next morning with a hangover and Hillary's rumour in our Intro Psych course that I was now a lesbian.

I don't get that drunk anymore. I did a Breath of Fire to push the memory away and went up to Mason's door.

“Lenny?” He wore a white buttoned shirt, tucked into grey dress pants. Every man should dress like that every day.

“Sorry, you're going somewhere...” Burgundy tie in hand, and a matching grey vest lay on the chair behind him.

“Nope, coming from. You need something?” A keyboard sat at on the other end of the apartment, facing the window. I could tell Bradley that the piano music was live, after all.

“I can come back another time if you're busy.” A piece of tape stuck to the top of his laptop.

“I'm not.” He tapped a finger on the doorknob. “You coming in or what?” Oh.

“I guess.” Other than a grey vest on one of the armchairs, everything in the room sat on the bookshelf or the coffee table in front of the armchairs. Nothing on the dining room table, and mail sat stacked in the right corner of the coffee table, the largest envelope on the bottom, getting smaller towards the top. “Where you coming home from?”

“A wake.” Whoops. “Grab a seat.”

“I'm so sorry.” A juice stain peaked out from the upper left corner of the rug underneath the coffee table. “I can go if you need space.”

“Lenny, will you relax?” He picked up the grey vest off the chair. “Nobody I knew, catering it. Now sit down.”

I did as told. When I walked down the hall, I'd tried to summon the 18-year-old who had thought she went to Grenoble and was ready to give up everything in this world for the sake of another. Ready to tear Mason a new one because I didn't need him.

Then he wore a suit and he'd catered a wake, and so as quietly as I could, I told him, “I talked to Bradley.”

He sat on the chair across from me, vest still in hand. “Sorry.”

“For what?”

“Ruining whatever girl power fantasy you have about Nadia.” A small stain puckered above the wrist, imitating the one underneath the rug.

“I don't have a girl fantasy,” I snapped, but added, “and I don't think that highly of her. In fact, the only time I talked to her, she acted mean.”

Mason rubbed the back of his neck, chin touching shoulder as he did so. “Then what the hell, Len?” He'd never called me Len before. “You've spent every hour since she died obsessing over her, not even to avenge her death, since you don't think that Ian or anyone else offed her. You clearly think something but you won't say what. Did you have some lesbian crush on her or something? Or did you bitch her out before, and you have some guilt complex?” Mason started to blur. “Shit, sorry.”

“I'm fine.” I breathed. “You familiar with parallel universes?”

Mason shrugged. “Not really. Not into science fiction.” Would he push me off the balcony?

“It's not science fiction. Every decision you've ever made, there's a universe where you chose something different. Every close call, there's a universe with a different outcome. Every mystery, there's a universe that has the answer.”

“Sounds... interesting.”

I wondered if the juice stain bothered him. “Maybe Nadia tried to get to another universe.”

“Why her? Why not some guy who crashed on Huron Line, or the weirdo who tried to swim the river?”

“They could have too, I guess.”

“Who knows, maybe she did and the chick who died was actually Nadia from another universe.”

I shook my head. “I don't think I explained it well.”

Mason's fingertips tapped cheekbones. "Okay let's say it's real." He stopped tapping. "And I'm not saying that it is. Sounds like bullshit, but let's pretend for a minute." He breathed and tapped faster. "Why would you think that Nadia tried to get to another universe? You said she acted mean to you, maybe she said mean things to Ian too and he offed her, or maybe she felt so miserable with herself that she offed herself. No universe. Just death."

"Maybe." I shouldn't have told him. "But I can't believe one thing without evidence when I know that there's an infinite number of possible explanations."

"You're a little crazy, you know?"

Mason blurred again. "Aren't we all?" I left, carrying the bones of my friends from Grenoble with me.

Bradley

Jamie: Thanks for meeting with me, Bradley. I really appreciate it.

Bradley: Please call me Bradley Finch.

J: Right. Bradley Finch. My apologies.

B: What about them?

J: Pardon?

B: What about your apologies?

J: Um. I give them to you?

B: I accept them. Thank you very much.

J: You're welcome.

J: So you saw Nadia die when she fell from her balcony. I mean Nadia McDermott. Tell me about that.

B: What about it do you want me to tell you?

J: Anything.

B: I can tell you what about the fall caused her death. I can tell you who saw her fall. I can tell you how many minutes it took for the ambulance to arrive. I can tell you how many inches past her head the blood flowed till the paramedics moved her. I can tell you what yoga position Ellen Garcia did before Nadia McDermott fell. I can tell you Nadia McDermott's family history. I can tell you what Nadia McDermott wore. I can tell you what the paramedics said when they arrived. I can tell you what the police said. I can tell you the temperature outside. I can tell you how many people huddled around her body and how many people rushed inside the building. I can tell you how many minutes Ellen Garcia stayed next to Nadia McDermott.

J: Start with the important things?

B: What makes a thing important?

J: Whether or not it's relevant.

B: But what makes something relevant?

J: Let's start a different way. Why don't you tell me from where you saw Nadia McDermott fall?

B: I will.

J: I'm sorry?

B: You asked why I would not tell you. So I told you that I would tell you.

J: Right. Um. Where were you when you saw Nadia fall?

B: Nadia McDermott. Sitting by my window.

J: What were you doing there?

B: Talking to Ellen Garcia while she did yoga.

J: Are you involved with her?

B: She is my neighbour.

J: Have you ever gotten involved with her?

B: Yes. She is my neighbour. I have already said that.

J: I meant have you ever gotten yourself involved with her sexually.

B: No. Why do you ask that?

J: Seems a bit strange that you watch her do yoga.

B: Not strange. I don't just watch her, I talk to her while she does it. I look at her while she does it, but that is no different than me looking at you right now.

J: Well if she doesn't mind... But you've never had sexual relations with her?

B: No.

J: Do you wish you had?

B: No. I don't like these questions.

J: Sorry. We don't have to talk about her. So when you saw Nadia McDermott fall, what exactly did you see?

B: I saw her falling. Then she landed and blood came out of her head. Ellen Garcia ran

over to Nadia McDermott to help her. I didn't know what to do. I know to call nine-one-one when something bad happens but for some reason I didn't think of it. Ellen Garcia told me to call nine-one-one and so I did. Then people started coming out of the apartment building and I couldn't see very much after that because Mrs. Cray's head blocked my view.

J: Okay. And what did you think had happened?

B: That Nadia McDermott had fallen and died.

J: Yes but how do you think that she fell?

B: I think that she jumped.

J: Intentionally?

B: Yes.

J: Why do you think that?

B: Her genetic predispositions suggest it.

J: How do you know?

B: I researched her family history in the archives.

J: Why?

B: You wanted me to tell you what I knew about Nadia McDermott. I did not know very much about her. We lived in the same building and that was all. So I researched her family history in the archives so that I could give you useful information.

J: But you believed that she jumped before you started researching?

B: I did not believe anything then. I knew it was a possibility, as well as a murder or an accident.

J: Do you still consider either of those possibilities?

B: Everything is possible until proven impossible.

J: So yes.

B: Yes.

J: But you still think that she jumped.

B: It seems logical.

J: Family history?

B: Yes.

J: Anything else?

B: I don't remember hearing anything.

J: Pardon?

B: I don't remember hearing Nadia McDermott scream or make any kind of noise. If she had been pushed, or if she had fallen by accident, then I think she might have screamed.

J: Makes sense to me. Why didn't you lead with that?

B: Lead with what?

J: You told me first about your research. We could've saved some time if you had simply begun with not hearing her scream. That's evidence enough.

B: No.

J: You said it yourself, she would have screamed if she had fallen or if she had been pushed.

B: No, you misunderstood me. She could've fainted from shock, or she could've hit her head, or I might have just not heard the scream. The lack of a scream made me suspect that she jumped. The research that I did reinforced that suspicion. But that was only a suspicion. I don't know what happened in the apartment or what Nadia McDermott thought about.

J: Perhaps. But you could ask someone in the apartment.

B: I thought Ian McDermott was not at home.

J: He was. And you didn't hear him scream either.

B: He did not fall.

J: No, but he did see his wife fall.

B: I don't understand.

J: Do you think that Ian McDermott could've killed her?

B: I don't see this as the likeliest of scenarios, but it's possible.

J: You didn't go with Mason and Lenny to talk to him.

B: Mason Pizzuto and Ellen Garcia. Speaking to people I don't know well makes me uncomfortable.

J: You're talking to me.

B: And I feel uncomfortable.

J: Then why did you agree to meet with me?

B: To make Ellen Garcia happy.

J: Why would that make her happy?

B: She wants someone to find out what happened. If talking to you helps to find out, then I'll talk to you.

J: You're willing to feel uncomfortable for her?

B: Yes.

J: Why?

B: She is my neighbour.

J: You sure that the two of you have never been involved?

B: In a sexual way? We have not. We're neighbours.

J: Lenny clearly cares deeply about what happened to Nadia. Why? Lenny Garcia, Ellen. Nadia Pizzuto, I mean, McDermott. Start again: Why?

B: Her mythology.

J: Pardon?

B: Ellen Garcia has sets of beliefs that differ from other people's. I don't know details, as she'll only tell me small parts. But they make her happy. And she believes that Nadia McDermott's death fits into that mythology. And so I help her.

J: I'm confused. How do you help her?

B: I listen to her. She likes that.

J: Why do you think that she needs Nadia to be a part of her mythology, as you call it?

B: I don't know.

J: Because Lenny Garcia saw Nadia McDermott die, perhaps?

B: Perhaps.

J: I mean, Nadia didn't die right away. She died after a few seconds. Lenny was with her.

B: I did not know this. Using their full names stresses you. You may call them by nicknames as long as these are the only two people we discuss.

J: Does knowing what I just told you change anything?

B: I don't know.

J: Why not? Changes things for me. And for Lenny.

B: I don't understand.

J: You never asked her why the obsession with Nadia?

B: I asked her why she had such a strong investment in finding out what happened to Nadia McDermott.

J: And?

B: She said that she wanted to know. I don't understand people all the time. Ellen Garcia and I spend a lot of time together but I don't always understand her. She does not understand me either sometimes. But that is okay.

J: Okay? Why?

B: Spending time together makes her happy.

J: You too?

B: Sometimes.

J: Why not always?

B: No one is always happy.

J: Does it bother you when Lenny isn't happy?

B: I don't know if it bothers me, but I try to make her feel happier if I can.

J: What if she was depressed?

B: She is.

J: Does that bother you?

B: Next question please.

J: Does she talk to you when she feels depressed?

B: Not always. I know that sometimes when she comes home from dinner with her parents, she wants to tell me about her mother asking questions about dating and work and it drives Ellen Garcia bonkers, and other times she comes home and says that she does not want to talk about it and just watches TV with me. Sometimes she asks me to stay with her while she does yoga because she does not want to be alone but does not want to talk.

J: And that doesn't bother you?

B: No.

J: Why not?

B: No one can tell anyone everything. Just answering your question about what I could tell you about Nadia McDermott's death took three minutes, and you interrupted me before I listed everything.

J: But she doesn't always tell you the important things.

B: You never explained what makes a thing important.

J: Not what Lenny tells you.

B: Maybe not. I don't know. I would like to stop this interview now.

J: You don't wish to continue helping me?

B: I thought we would talk about Nadia McDermott, not Ellen Garcia.

J: They seem linked to me.

B: They are not linked. Please turn off the recorder.

I did not find anything in Mason Pizzuto's family history that indicated serious mental illnesses. He had an uncle who spent a short amount of time in jail for tax fraud. I'm sure that Mason Pizzuto had family members who had mild mental illnesses, but not severe enough to be recorded in any archives I could find.

“Tell me someone is crazy,” Mason said when I told him that I had looked at the archives.

“Someone in your family? Your birth family seems to me as normal as people get.” I left out the uncle.

“And what's normal to you, Bradley?”

June, 1946

Glorious Historians of Windsor Magazine – An interview with Private Corwin Vanderwall, one year after D-Day

Q: Tell me about D-Day; you were on the front lines. Tell me about the beaches of Normandy.

A: Hell. But I kept going. We all kept going. You had to keep going. Germans would never stop if we didn't.

Q: What made it so hell-like?

A: Not the dead. The dead were free out of Hell. The injured made it Hell, God rest their souls. The blood, the screams. And our medics tried to keep up, but God's mercy let most of them die on that beach.

Q: God's mercy killed them?

A: Germans killed them. God's mercy let it happen quick. Buddy of mine, Dick, he still can't walk. Leg hurts all the time. Thing is, his leg is still in Normandy.

Q: You're very brave.

A: I survived, so I guess I'm lucky. Doesn't feel over though.

Q: What do you mean by that?

A: My dad, he fought in the Great War. He wakes up like it's happening now. Saw people gassed to death. Talks about it while sleeping, wakes up breathing like there's gas in his lungs. At a bar one time he punched a German guy in the face. The guy had probably been 10 years old when that war ended.

Q: And you feel that you will be the same?

A: I'm already the same.

Lenny

J: Thanks for meeting with me.

L: You're welcome, it was meet with you or bake yet another banana loaf, I thought about baking you one but I figured that it would be hard to give an interview with banana loaf in your mouth, and they're best when they're fresh out of the oven.

J: Let's start with what happened that day.

L: Outside doing yoga when Nadia fell. I think I was in the downward stages of a Monkey Crawl, otherwise I would have seen her fall right away. You're supposed to keep your eyes closed, but I get distracted and have them open, so if I'd been upward when she started falling, I would have seen the whole thing. I told Bradley to call 911 but they came too late.

J: And since then you've investigated into what caused her to fall?

L: More or less, yeah. It's not an investigation, exactly. When I was 9 I got really into The Hardy Boys and I really wanted to be a detective, so I looked up something I could investigate and for whatever reason, I focused in on finding Amelia Earhart's plane. To this day I have no idea why I thought I'd find it in Windsor!

J: I've spoken to Mason and Bradley. Mason believes that Ian killed her. Bradley thinks she killed herself. Which do you think?

L: Neither. There's an infinite number of possible explanations that we haven't even thought of, but that doesn't make them any less probable than the two you mention.

J: So you don't have a working theory?

L: I'll have one when I see solid evidence for one.

J: Bradley found evidence of mental illness and alcoholism in Nadia's family.

L: I know what he found. Statistical probability does not prove a person will kill herself. I haven't decided on anything that suits me the way that Mason and Bradley have.

J: Suits you?

L: Mason wants to believe there's someone worse than him in the world. Bradley wants to trust in facts; that makes him feel secure. Once I tried to explain to him general

relativity and how it can't be proven or disproven, and he didn't say anything to me for the rest of the night. Ambiguity is a red flag for Bradley. And he wants to believe that people are a sets of facts, so that once he cracks the code, he won't feel overwhelmed. Mason wants to receive redemption for something, without actually changing; so he looks for someone that he thinks behaves worse than he does.

J: If they're both set in their ways, why did you include them in your search for answers?

L: Other witnesses. Hey, why does my opinion matter? This is about Nadia, right?

J: Fair enough. Did you know her?

L: We talked once. She looked like she needed a friend, but either I read her wrong or she couldn't admit that she needed one. I always meant to talk to her again.

J: Why did you want to be her friend?

L: She talked to herself.

J: That's normally a deterrent, you know that right?

L: Yeah. Mason does it too sometimes too. I don't think he knows he does. Anyways, Nadia just kept talking and repeating to herself. "You're a good person, you have value and worth. You're a good person, you have value and worth," over and over again like a self-help tape.

J: And that made you want to talk to her?

L: I've never met anyone before who used a self-help tape. If she talked to herself, she may as well have talked to me. "What if" questions sound like regret, but they also acknowledge possibility, alternative paths. If I'd talked to Gord sooner, how would things have changed?

J: Gord?

L: A guy in the building. Nadia said I had to talk to him before I talked to her.

J: That's an odd request. Why?

L: Honestly? She probably wanted me to go away and picked a random person for

misdirection. Anyways, I didn't talk to Gord till a few days ago. Not that I could tell him why.

J: So, no connection between Nadia and Gord?

L: I don't know for sure, but I heard they were friends. Even a rumour that they had an affair, or Gord had a crush on Nadia. Hazy details.

J: Strange.

L: Yeah.

J: So you went to Ian's apartment with Mason. Tell me about that.

L: Not much happened. Once there, I realized that it was an awful idea to go with Mason and I wanted to bail. Ian didn't want to talk and Mason spoke way too bluntly. I think Ian felt trapped inside an interrogation.

J: Was it?

L: No. Or at least not for me. Mason more or less accused him of killing his wife, just not in those words.

J: So if you didn't want to interrogate him, why did you go?

L: I wanted to find out another perspective on what happened. Probably a bad idea since he doesn't even know me. I had visions of him confiding in me like an old friend, and I'd help him and I'd know what happened to Nadia.

J: Ian knows what happened?

L: I don't know, but if anyone knew her, he did.

J: Have you thought about going back without Mason? Why go with Mason and not Bradley?

L: Bradley's worse than Mason. If he said anything at all, which he probably wouldn't, he'd start reciting Nadia's family history, or start asking eerily specific questions about the funeral, like did Ian have a clammy aunt who tried to hold his hand during the service.

J: But you asked Bradley to go.

L: I'd be more comfortable. Bradley frustrates, but Mason infuriates. Also Bradley's more observant – he'd notice things that I wouldn't. I don't know where Mason's brain's at most of the time.

J: But you still spend time with him.

L: Just because I don't recognize his brain doesn't mean we can't be friends. I knew a girl in high school who had to say things three times in a row whenever she got lost because her brain said that she had to in order for her to find her way. It confused me but we stayed friends anyways.

J: Can I ask you something personal?

L: Sure.

J: I'm dying to know, is there anything going on between you and either of the boys?

L: What does that have to do with Nadia?

J: Nothing. Human curiosity.

L: I'm just friends with both of them. Mason's cute but out of his mind.

J: And Bradley?

L: Just friends.

J: Because?

L: Because what?

J: Why aren't you interested in him? Something wrong with him?

L: I'm just not, and no there isn't. Why does it matter?

J: Well, Bradley I can see as frustrating, but trustworthy. I doubt he's ever told a lie. But Mason's a mystery, like you said. Terrified of the police for some reason. I can't help but wonder about how trustworthy his reports are. I want to trust yours, but if you're involved with Mason, I don't know if I can really trust your testimony.

L: Well we're not involved.

J: So what, besides her death, do you want to know about Nadia?

L: I could ask you the same question. This a newspaper article or a blog? What do I want to know about Nadia? Why she chose to paint her bedroom green. Why she sent me to Gord and not the bald man with the stutter. Can I read her diary? Let's go through her closet and see if it's there. How does my curiosity help your article?

J: Do you think Mason's suspicious?

L: He does.

J: Do you know for sure that Nadia fell from her balcony and not from the roof? Can I hear your thoughts on that?

L: Mason's weird. Unstable, even. But I've never felt unsafe with him. As far as I know, there's no evidence against him, so don't accuse him.

J: That's pretty trusting of you.

L: If I didn't trust everyone who might have done something bad at some point in their life, I wouldn't trust anyone at all. You're the investigator – what did the police say about Mason? Do they know he talks to himself? Do they know his apartment is obsessively bare and neat? Do they know that he caters wakes?

J: How did you know that Nadia's bedroom is green?

L: Turn that off.

I stood where Bradley stood the day he saw the mouse in his apartment. I couldn't tell him everything Jamie said. I didn't want to talk about me being with him or Mason, or even the fact that Mason was a suspect.

But I had to talk to Bradley. Maybe we'd just watch TV, or maybe I'd do yoga and he'd make notes about how Upward Dog should be called Slide Pose.

Maybe we'd actually talk. But probably not. I knocked.

Bradley

The day after Jamie Vanderwall interviewed me, Ellen Garcia visited my apartment.

“I don't trust Jamie,” she told me.

“Why?” I did not know what kind of trust Ellen Garcia meant, but I didn't ask her because she talked and walked quickly. I didn't ask her about this though, because she has explained to me before that people don't like their emotions questioned, and I knew that she would tell me eventually. So I waited.

“I talked to her in person and she started asking really weird questions. Like, really personal questions that had nothing to do with Nadia.”

“I talked to Jamie Vanderwall as well.” I had not told Ellen Garcia that I had gone to talk to Jamie Vanderwall because I did not know if Jamie Vanderwall would ask questions that I did not want to tell Ellen Garcia about. But I also had questions for Ellen Garcia about my meeting with Jamie Vanderwall, so I decided to tell Ellen Garcia.

“Yeah? What'd she ask you?”

“She asked me four questions about Nadia McDermott, and three questions about you. She wanted me to tell her about the day that Nadia McDermott fell, but she did not write anything down in her notebook. I did not know what she wanted to hear, so I told her many things so that might help her.”

“She asked you about me? What did she say?”

“I don't want to discuss what she said about you.” Ellen Garcia's hands scrunched into fist and she bit her lip. Ellen Garcia does not sit still when she has anxiety. She had to explain this to me once because when I have anxiety, I don't move at all, besides breathing and blinking.

“Bradley, please? I'd really like to know.”

“I don't feel comfortable discussing this topic.”

“Okay, okay. Sorry. That's fine.” She rubbed the space between her eyebrows.

“Anyways, she asked me really personal questions too, and almost nothing that she said related to Nadia. Freaked me out a little. Who the hell have we talked to?”

“We have talked to Jamie Vanderwall.” I did not fully understand Ellen Garcia's question. She put her hair behind her ear.

“No, I know that, Bradley.” Ellen Garcia fiddled with a pen from my pen holder. “I just automatically trusted her, you know? For no real reason. Except I wanted to talk about Nadia's death.”

“Why?” When I turned twelve years old, I told Jonathan Finch that I wanted to learn more about mythology. I couldn't stop wondering about it. Carole Finch called my interest a passion but I don't like that explanation as much as curiosity because passion involves many strong emotions, and I don't like strong emotions. I prefer to define my interests as curiosities. Now I felt intrigued, and not curious, about Ellen Garcia's mythologies. I had had mild curiosity for a long time, but now they seemed especially important to her, and so my intrigue had grown.

“It sucks watching someone die like that. I kept seeing it over and over. You didn't want to talk about it, and Mason's a whack job, so I thought Jamie would be okay.”

“I did not mind talking about it with you.” I did not recall telling Ellen Garcia that I did not want to talk about Nadia McDermott's death. Maybe I had said it sub-textually. Sometimes I accidentally say things that have subtext. I don't know whether I actually mean the subtext or not. Ellen Garcia says that you have to use introspection to know whether or not you mean something sub-textually. “But talking about Nadia's death isn't what I meant.”

“Oh?”

“Can you explain to me what you think happened to Nadia McDermott?”

Ellen Garcia's hand scrunched up again. “She fell and she died.”

“Yes I know that. But what do you think happened? I think she jumped on purpose. Mason Pizzuto thinks that Ian McDermott killed her. I know that you don't think either of those things, but I don't know what you think. I know you think there are infinite possibilities, but I don't know which one you trust most.”

“You're asking?”

“Yes.”

Ellen Garcia waited forty-six seconds to answer me. “In grade ten, my teacher mentioned something called string theory. Do you know what that is?”

“I don't.”

“Theory about what the universe's make-up and how it functions. Scientists who follow string theory think parallel universes are possible. Most of it – all of it's – impossible to prove right or wrong, but a lot of scientists think that there's at least some merit to it. All theoretical.” Her explanation did not provide evidence. “Confusing, I know. I have some books if you want to borrow them. 2 days later, I heard it mentioned on the Discovery Channel, and they were comparing comic books with parallel universes to real life potentials for parallel universes. They aren't better or worse... just different.

“So I wanted to go to a parallel universe too. I knew things might get worse in a parallel universe, but they could also get better, and if I found one way to change universes, I could always keep changing till I found one that I liked, right? And so I researched and researched, like you do with your mythology. And I found all these crazy theories about wormholes and paradoxes and conspiracies. Of course I didn't tell anyone. But one day, I don't know why, I must have found some related theory, but I jumped off a building. I thought I'd get to a parallel universe. And the crazy thing is, in the hospital and passed out for a few days, I went to a world where the women walked freely at night with the men, and so more twenty four hour yoga studios opened up, and we had a common ancestor with birds instead of monkeys, so we flew everywhere, and the sky

scrapers were giant treehouses, and in the sky you could see the other universes and I could fly to them whenever I wanted. I had every universe at my fingertips.

“And then I woke up. Back here, I was suicidal girl, and my parents wanted me to stay in the psych ward for a long time, and I had to go on antidepressants. I stupidly told my parents what I had researched, and they said that I lied, and once I got home from the hospital, we never ever talked about it again. They never commented on the fact that I kept researching string theory. I have a degree in physics, and they hate that. I did everything I could to learn about it, and yes, other times I've thought that I went to a parallel universe, but I know I've never really gone anywhere, except for in the hospital. So when Nadia fell... I wondered if she had tried to go there too. When I ran over to her, it wasn't to help her but to go with her. But she died instead. And I'm still here.”

I did not say anything to Ellen Garcia. I don't know about parallel universes. I didn't know enough about string theory to comment on it, although it did not make sense to me. But I knew that she expected me to respond.

Ellen Garcia did not move. I deduced that her not moving meant that she did not feel anxious, but she did not appear calm either. If she was calm, her body would have been relaxed. She might have leaned back on the couch and crossed her legs. But she sat still, her knees at ninety degree angles, and she hunched towards them. “I don't want you to think I'm crazy. I'm not crazy.”

“I know.”

“Have you ever wanted to go somewhere else, Bradley? To exist somewhere else?”

“I like my apartment.”

“Right.” She closed her eyes. “So. Now you know. You going to tell Jamie?”

“No. I don't think that your ideas matter to her story.”

“Thank you.” Ellen Garcia's knees bent towards me.

“Jamie Vanderwall asked me if you and I had ever been involved sexually.”

Ellen Garcia's body suddenly changed its shape. “What the hell? What did you tell her?”

“I don't know why she asked me that. I told her no but I don't know if she believed me.”

Ellen Garcia leaned back into the couch. This usually meant that she felt comfortable, but this conversation made me want to sit up straight, away from the couch.

“What do you think she wants?”

“I don't know. She says that she wants to know what we know about Nadia McDermott.” I did not understand one thing that Ellen Garcia had said. Maybe it had been explained in subtext and I had not noticed it. “Why did you agree to give Jamie Vanderwall information if you did not want to tell her about string theory?”

“The news kept talking about Nadia's mental health, or Ian's mental health, and I wanted everyone to get over the whole mental health thing. Not everything that happens can get explained away by a diagnosis.”

“But you found your explanation.”

“Not a perfect explanation. I'm just sick of hearing about mental health all the time.” Ellen Garcia's hand scrunched up.

“What if it was mental health? What if Nadia McDermott had depression, or what if Ian McDermott has psychopathy?”

“Then Nadia's just another tragedy.”

“How can someone be a tragedy?” I did not want to aggravate Ellen Garcia, but I also wanted to know the truth.

“I saw her die, Bradley. She didn't die right away, she died with me. I'm imprinted in her mind forever. We shared a moment – and I comforted her. If she killed herself, then I'm the last bad thing she saw. If Ian killed her, then I'm almost an accomplice.”

“I don't think that those things are true.”

“They are to me, Bradley.”

“If Ian McDermott killed Nadia McDermott, then he made a poor decision. If Nadia McDermott killed herself, then she made a poor decision. In both cases, she would have died. You had nothing to do with it.”

“But I'm her, Bradley.”

I did not understand, but Ellen Garcia's arms wrapped tightly around her stomach, signalling sadness. I don't like seeing her sad, so I moved closer to her and put my palm up. “You're Ellen Garcia. She died. You live.” I touched her fingers. Her eyes widened but she did not move her hand.

“Are you really happy in this universe, Bradley?”

“I'm comfortable here. I don't know how happy I would be in a different universe.”

“That's all?” She asked. “Comfort?”

“Comfort makes me happy,” I explained.

“You comfortable now?”

Her hand moved so that all of my hand touched all of her hand, instead of just our fingers. “Yes, Ellen Garcia, I'm comfortable.”

“Good,” she said. She and I did not say anything for two minutes and thirty-seven seconds. Normally, Ellen Garcia does not allow silence. Sometimes silence is a good thing, like when a very loud noise ends, or when I wake up in the morning and I hear nothing instead of my alarm. Silence means that no words need interpreting. Except for Ellen Garcia's silence; then I have to interpret the silence. So many potential reasons why Ellen Garcia might stay silent. She might think about something that distracts her from talking, or she might try to figure out what she wants to say, or she might wait for me to ask the right question before she speaks. Ellen Garcia might think an idea that made it

difficult to speak, but I did not think so, because she has told me before that when she works she often has to think about lots of things at the same time while she keeps working, which shows she can think and talk at the same time. Probably not trying to figure out what to say before she said it because Ellen Garcia normally just says things, even if what she says does not make sense. I also did not think that she had nothing to say, because Ellen Garcia always has something to say. So of all the reasons that I had thought of for why Ellen Garcia did not speak, the only logical one was waiting for me to ask her the right questions.

“Ellen Garcia,” I said, “why do you think that you are Nadia McDermott?”

“You don't see it?” Ellen Garcia's eyebrows pushed close together, thinking hard.

“No.”

“Okay. Maybe I'm okay.”

“Yes.” I did not know what she meant by okay but now I knew what she wanted to hear.

“Thanks, Bradley Finch.”

“You're welcome, Ellen Garcia.”

“I should go.”

“Okay.” She did not move from my couch, confusing me. I tried to figure out what she had meant by okay once she left, but now I also had to figure out why she did not go when she said that she had to go. Having to sort out both dilemmas would take a lot of work, and I began wishing that Ellen Garcia would leave.

“Do you think Jamie is who she says she is?”

“I don't know. I don't know very much about Jamie Vanderwall, because I mostly answer questions when I talk to her, instead of asking them.”

“We should meet before any of us talk to her again. You me and Mason. I think maybe we're in over our heads.”

“Why?” I recognized Ellen Garcia's words as an idiom, but one that I had to think about for a long time before understanding. Carole Finch once said that the optical illusion with the ships and arches put me in over my head, which confused me more, but Jonathan Finch laughed.

“We need to all stay on the same page.”

“I don't understand. Explain clearly please.” I knew what the page idiom meant, but I grew tired of interpreting. And even if people read the same page, they could interpret that page in different ways.

“Sorry.” She sat up and moved a centimetre away from me. “I think Jamie may have tricked us. She doesn't seem like a reporter writing for the *Windsor Star*. She's poking her nose in where it doesn't belong – sorry, trying to find out about things that weren't her business. That better?” I nodded. Her logic remained flawed, but at least I could understand her. “So we need to decide what we're going to do, whether we just don't talk to her, or we all tell her off, or one of us explains to her why we won't talk to her anymore.”

“You don't want to talk to her anymore either?”

“Well I didn't like how she talked to me, and I don't think Mason liked how she talked to him either, so I assumed that you didn't like how she talked to you either.”

“I often don't like how people talk to me.”

“You can keep talking to her if you want to, I shouldn't have assumed that you'd be on board.” She stood up and turned towards the door of my apartment but did not move towards it. I stayed sitting down because I did not know if she actually planned on leaving now. “I mean, I shouldn't have assumed that you would agree with me.”

“If you don't want me to talk to her anymore, I won't. I gave her archive information but I don't know what else to give her when she asks me questions that I can't answer.”

“She doesn't seem trustworthy to me, but I can't make that decision for you.”

“How do you know who to trust?”

“You feel it. Do you trust me?”

“I think so. But Jamie Vanderwall isn't you.”

“True. Why do you trust me?”

“You helped me get rid of the mouse.”

“Okay so Jamie hasn't done anything like that to help you, right?” I nodded. “That would have made her trustworthy. But she has done untrustworthy things. So you decide based on her actions. Or inactions.”

“But how do I know which actions are trustworthy or not?”

“I have to think about that myself, Bradley. I'm gonna go, okay?”

I nodded my head and walked her to the door.

Was I supposed to not trust Jamie Vanderwall because she tried to find out things that she shouldn't know? But as a reporter her job meant asking questions. Ellen Garcia said that Jamie Vanderwall may not be a reporter, but I don't understand why Jamie Vanderwall had lied. We had known she would ask questions that since the first time she emailed us. And Ellen Garcia and Mason Pizzuto had gone to talk to Ian McDermott to find out things that were not their business, so why was this different? What made something someone's business? I researched history facts that didn't count as my business when I looked at the archives. But archives are accessible to the public, not just me. I did not usually see other people there, but they could read files if they wanted to. Why was that okay and Jamie Vanderwall asking questions wasn't? And why did I need to decide with Mason Pizzuto and Ellen Garcia what to do? I did not mind deciding with them, but why must we all stay on the same page? If I had ignored Jamie Vanderwall's very first email, I would not have had to do so much talking. Ignoring someone's email is rude but it's not lying. Helping her meant that I could look at the archives, but I should have just

looked up the information, and then I would know it, and no one else would need to, and Ellen Garcia could ask whatever she wanted but I would keep my archive information to myself. But I did not like keeping secrets from Ellen Garcia because I might have to lie. If I couldn't tell when Jamie Vanderwall lied, then how could I know if Ellen Garcia lied? I did not think that friends lie to each other, but I had not had a lot of friends. Maybe the friends that I have had did not lie, or maybe I never knew that they lied. Maybe some friends lie to each other. I considered asking Mason Pizzuto. I did not think that Mason Pizzuto would lie to me because he says truthful but socially unacceptable things, so he would not say something friendly but untrue. Does that mean that friends should lie? Does that make Jamie Vanderwall my friend? And Ellen Garcia? I don't think that I have ever lied to her. I accidentally lied to Mason Pizzuto about going to Ellen Garcia's apartment, did that make us friends? Does truth telling kill friendships? Did the truth kill Nadia McDermott?

I felt tired. I did not want to try to figure things out. I did not want to ask how people worked. I did not want to go to the archives. I wanted to stop analyzing what idioms or facial expressions meant. I wanted Ellen Garcia to just tell me.

Mason Pizzuto had said that talking to Gord would help to solve the mystery. So I went down to the mailboxes. Gord Jackson, apartment 204. I walked up the stairs and knocked on the door.

“Gord Jackson?” The man wore a red buttoned up dress shirt. A blue pen poked out of the pocket.

“Yes, who are you?”

“Bradley Finch. I want you to tell me what happened to Nadia McDermott because it upsets Ellen Garcia that she does not know, and Mason Pizzuto said that you knew, and that you were supposed to have sex with her but you were too fat, and a reporter keeps asking me questions about Nadia McDermott and I don't know what

happened to her, and it did not matter to me before because I didn't know Nadia McDermott, but it's important to Ellen Garcia and I think she is my friend so I want to make her feel better, so tell me what happened to Nadia McDermott.”

Gord Jackson did not say anything for thirty seconds. I did not say anything either. I had said more than I needed to.

“Do you want to come inside?” Gord Jackson asked.

“No. I want you to tell me what happened to Nadia McDermott.”

Gord pointed his forehead to the ground. “I know you and your friends have talked to Jamie. She's not a reporter. Private investigator I hired to find out what happened to Nadia. I loved her, I really did, and I never acted on it. I knew about Ian so I never made a move, but then she died and I hired Jamie. At first I thought that Ian did it.” His chin pushed into his collar bone.

“What do you think now?”

“I think I was wrong about Nadia. Empty and full beer bottles stashed in her closet, in her suitcase, all over. I asked Jamie to interview you and your friends and Ian, to rule out murder. Jamie broke into her apartment and found anti-depressants and self-help books tucked in Nadia's drawers.”

“The truth, Gord Jackson?”

His eyes wet. “Nadia probably killed herself.”

As I had suspected, but I did not feel satisfied. I did not want to tell Ellen Garcia.

“Can you prove that?”

“No, but Jamie says-”

“You don't have proof.”

“I have evidence. Look, I didn't want to believe it either.”

“I need irrefutable truth. Goodbye, Gord Jackson. Thank you for your information.” I marched to the stairs and started drafting an email in my head.

November 4, 2014

Sender: bradley.finch

Recipient: jvanderwall

CC: len_garcia2, pizzutopizzas

Hello Jamie Vanderwall,

I'm emailing you to inform you that I know that you are not a reporter for the *Windsor Star*. Gord Jackson told me that he hired you to find out what happened to Nadia McDermott.

Gord Jackson also told me that you have concluded that Nadia McDermott killed herself. I don't know why you said that, and unless you have irrefutable evidence, I don't think that this suicide necessarily happened. I previously believed that she killed herself, based on speculation and not real evidence. I don't think anyone killed her either. I don't know what happened to Nadia McDermott because I was not there, and so I won't believe anything until I have definitive proof. I used to think that family history and mental illness could predict what a person does, but I don't think that is true, because I looked up your family history, and I didn't find evidence that anyone in your family ever lied professionally. Additionally, I researched my own family history and discovered that my family history includes diabetics, drug addicts and slave traders. I'm none of the three, and so family history isn't irrefutable evidence about who Bradley Finch is today. I don't like to be lied to, and I don't like when my neighbours get lied to. You don't need to respond to this email because I don't trust you and will not believe what you write. Please don't contact me or my neighbours again.

Yours, Bradley Finch

Lenny

The stairwell walls used to glow white, when I first moved in. Now they vomited a sickly jaundice colour. The handle on the railing felt rubbery, you could bounce down the entire stairwell like a cartoon character.

I didn't know who I waited for. Mason, Ian, Nadia. Even if Mason or Ian came out, they'd probably take the elevator. Who knows what Nadia might have taken.

I could've gone out into the hall, to either of their apartments, or at least sat in the space between them, and whoever came out first, came out first.

I had broken into Ian's apartment. I had made Gord feel repulsive. I'd confused Bradley over and over again. This obsession had to end. I had to know why she left. Wherever she tried to get to, even if she died, she still tried.

I tried once, and never again. I told myself that I'd gone somewhere new in that bar, but I didn't. And I tried a crazy mission with Mason and Bradley to find out where Nadia went, but we didn't go anywhere, we stayed here asking inane questions.

Did I even believe in parallel worlds anymore? My parents sat down on either side of me.

'Thank God. Finally seeing reason.' My mother patted my hand.

'Reason? You sure? More like just feeling sorry for herself.'

'Oh hush. She'll go back to her apartment now and do something useful. Maybe she can google a new career field, I never liked this whole engineering thing. Too close to her delusions. She's not too old to go back to school.'

'I just hope she doesn't go back downstairs. Perfectly nice, eligible young men. Mason's a chef, did you know that? He'd make a great husband.'

'No, not Mason, that business on the roof makes me nervous. Ian, on the other hand, once he gets out of that pity party, might work out for her. A bit older, yes, but at this point...'

'What about that other friend, Brad? Bryan?'

'I thought he was gay?'

“He's not gay.” They stopped talking about Mason, Bradley, and Ian, and began discussing the state of the apartment building. They didn't like the jaundice either.

The door behind me opened, and Ian walked into the stairwell. He stopped and went to turn around once he realized I blocked the path to the stairs.

“Ian, wait.” I didn't know what I needed to say, but at least I could show my parents why grief had to trump the dating game.

“What?” He didn't turn back around, but let the stairwell door close.

“Gord hired a private investigator.” I stood and gripped the rubber railing, wondering if ballerinas could rehearse a stairway number on it.

“Yeah. Your friend told me, what's his name?”

“You spoke with Bradley?” I didn't know if I was impressed that Bradley had spoken to a stranger independently, or hurt that he hadn't asked me to help him.

“Yeah. He told me about Gord this morning.” The stairwell door closed. “What an ass, eh? Prying into my business.”

“Yeah,” I felt his words directed at me. “Did Bradley tell you what Jamie concluded? About the suicide?”

“What's it matter to you?”

“Maybe I'm as bad as Gord. But I need to know, for my own selfish reasons. Did Jamie find a note?”

“At least you admit it.” He finally turned around. “Last conversation you and I ever have, okay?”

I nodded. My mother groaned.

“I called Jamie after Bradley left and demanded she tell me everything she found. She didn't find a note, she found notes. Months of drafts. No final one, but I guess Nadia

thought about it for so long, and got so drunk, she did it without thinking. That's the investigator's guess anyways.”

The rubber pushed back against my fingers. I wondered if I could leave a mark in it.

“You want to not pry into my business, you want to make things right, then let me believe that my wife killed herself.”

“Why would you want to believe that?”

“Because believing's better than floating around in limbo forever. We done?”

“Yeah.” I let go of the railing. “We're done.” Ian walked past me, down the stairs.

I didn't sit back down. When I finally moved towards Mason's apartment, my parents resumed their bickering about the jaundice walls.

Mason

The first time I kissed a girl, she started to cry, but I didn't taste the tears because she turned into a waterfall and I floated away, getting wetter and wetter, till I soaked it up and sank, and at the bottom of the ocean I found her, cold and blue, and then she swallowed me whole.

Lenny came to me on the roof the day after I met with Jamie. She sat next to me for a long time. Her lips moving, but no soundtrack. I could feel my lips moving too, but could only hear the snowflakes melting when they touched the ground.

The girl I kissed – Madeline – her dad called my dad, and I got grounded but I didn't ever know for sure why. My dad got frustrated because he thought I lied, told me it's perfectly normal for a boy my age, I just needed to tell the truth. After I finally convinced my dad that I actually didn't know what happened, I went to a shrink for the first time and learned that I didn't have schizophrenia.

Lenny's breath melted the snow before it could reach my ear. Her lips kept moving, I could taste them touching each other, but her breathing stayed the same and no sound came from her throat. My lips touched.

Madeline and I kissed one other time, one year after high school graduation. I didn't float so far that time. I just sank. Not cold and blue but warm and instead of swallowing me, she melted into the water. When I woke up the next day she made me waffles and I left. I didn't talk to her again.

The snow wet Lenny's face. I wiped it off with my thumb then touched the spot where her jawbone ended. I felt it sink and rise under my thumb. Her hair turned white from the snow. The water between my hand and her face slipped into ice.

One time I met a really trippy hipster chick washing her hands in the men's bathroom at the Peace Fountain park. She apologized and said she had figured her ex-boyfriend wouldn't look for her in there. I asked her what she would have done if he had

to go to the bathroom. She stopped washing her hands and said she hadn't thought of that. Then she asked if she could stay with me for a while. I said yes. Jade was the only person besides my parents that I told about the things I saw. She asked me where I got my weed. I don't know if I ever convinced her there were no drugs involved, but she told me I had a gift, some higher calling, and she should be so lucky. She didn't want to put me in a special home. She had white hair and a broken rib when I met her so we dyed her hair brown and put some ice on the rib after we taped her up. She didn't like hospitals either.

Lenny's hand burned mine when we touched. Her teeth scraped the ice off my neck and she made origami on her tongue with it. When it melted, she made me drink it. Her veins glowed on her forearms, making a path I followed to her shoulders, which had little horns of snow on them. She made me drink them too; vodka and blood orange.

Jade and I spent a lot of time together that year. She'd take the fire escape up to my apartment and we'd sit on the balcony. I'd tell her where I'd gone that week, and she'd tell me who she'd been. Once she asked me if I could ever kill anyone. She meant when I went away. I said no.

Lenny's blue skirt flowed around her, like a frozen pond. I wrapped her white hair around my hand. I could feel snow leaking through my fingers, into my palm. It went through my skin into my veins. I filled with snow.

I found a Missing Persons report on Jade. Her ex-boyfriend, actually her husband, stapled posters all over the city. I called him. He thanked me and said he'd come that night when he got off work. When I told Jade about it, she cried and told me her real name – Allie – and she'd run away from her husband. He broke her rib. I promised we'd run to Florence, Miami, Lima. Instead she kissed me and asked me to take her to my worlds. Inside my apartment, I brought her into my mind as much as I could. When I came back she'd left.

Lenny and I fell off the building onto a snow bank. We rolled down and down

until we couldn't find a bottom, and then we fell and fell till we sank farther and farther into the snow. It melted under us until we swam in a giant puddle, surrounded by water. Lenny waved her arms in circles till a whirlpool started, and we spiralled down and down together, till we finally reached the bottom. The water crushed us and we lay there for hours. Our feet touched. The sun came and left. Came and left.

“Did you get Bradley's email?”

“Yeah. Pissed me off but whatever. I didn't faint or cry.”

“I feel so dumb.”

“Don't. I talked to her even though I didn't trust her. I should've known.”

“Why did you talk to her? You don't like talking to anyone, let alone about yourself.”

“Bored.”

“Mason...”

“Figured helping a reporter, even a shitty one, might clear my name.”

“You a suspect?”

“I dunno. Cops knew I was on the roof when she fell.”

“But?”

“Never too careful around cops.”

“But I confirmed your alibi.”

“Did you need an alibi?”

“No, but more people saw me on the ground. I'm the only one who saw you. You didn't even know her, why did they make you a suspect?”

“You didn't ask that when they asked for my alibi?”

“I didn't want to pry.”

“Yes you did. You always do.”

“I wanted you to tell me.”

“I took down her missing person posters when she disappeared in August. Cops got suspicious.

“I can see that. So... why did you do it?”

“Do what?”

“Take down the posters.”

“Why would she want to be found? Every time she ventured out of that apartment, she cried or drank or both, and the arguing inside the apartment never ended.”

“She could've been in danger.”

“How about instead, you tell me more about parallel universes and what it has to do with Nadia. And none of your 'We can't know for real' bullshit, I know you have a solid theory. Everyone has a theory.”

“Science is mine.”

“Go on.”

“Parallel worlds out there. I'm talking physics, string theory specifically. I'll send you an article. I mean, it's still unproven. But real. Even physicists say so. And I think Nadia knows too. Or, knew. She tried to get there.”

“But it's not proven.”

“Yeah but in the hospital I went somewhere else.”

“So go somewhere else. Tokyo, Sydney, Iqaluit.”

“No, not here. Not this universe.”

“Why not? The other ones aren't much better.”

“What?”

“I go places.”

“You believe me?”

“Not unicorns and rainbows like you think though. Crazy doesn't let go. You can't

wake up. Even when you're awake you can't wake up”

“How do you get there?”

“You have to have a fucked up brain. You're trying to get somewhere that you think will save you or make you a hero or whatever, because you want to escape this shithole? At least in this shithole you know where you stand, and what you see's really in front of you. You want what you don't have because you don't see bats attacking your classmates, or volcanoes exploding in front of your work and you have to go in and pretend you're happy to make small talk while you're busy trying not to burn alive. If you knew you'd hate yourself for ever wanting it.”

“Can you show me?”

“No.”

“Why not?”

“Keep dreaming. Keep hoping for something better out there, if that makes you happy, but I'm not bringing you into my fucked up world. You can't handle it.”

“You seeing things now?”

“Yeah. I'm not telling you though.”

“Please?”

“I thought you didn't want to pry.”

“I lied.”

“Lenny, you don't want to know. Ugly terror. You'll think I'm a deranged psychopath.”

“So? You think I'm a freak.”

“You're the kind of freak people like. Quirky. People hear your ideas of other worlds and think you're adorable. People find out about my brain and they want to send me to the loony bin. They're afraid of me.”

“My parents wanted to send me to a psych ward.”

“Just once? That's cute.”

“Shut up.”

“Are you afraid of me, Lenny?”

“No. A little. You're hard to understand.”

“And I'm an asshole.”

“A little. Now tell me what you see.”

“You're dead.”

“Oh.”

“I didn't kill you, if that's what you're thinking.”

“What did?”

“You burned yourself alive by fire breathing.”

“How long ago did I die?”

“A while.”

“That's not an answer.”

“Five minutes, maybe.”

“You didn't try to save me?”

“If I moved the sun would grow angrier.”

“You didn't kill her.”

“Who?”

“Nadia. I talked to Ian. So... if you're still worried, just know you're okay.”

“I thought she tried to get to a different universe.”

“Maybe. Or maybe she just wanted to die. She could've believed in parallel universes and also felt suicidal.”

“So everything you just told me about parallel universes...?”

“Real. But I can't prove it. Maybe believing in the little bit of proof that we have's better than believing in a place I can only get to if I risk death. Gory, splat on the

pavement death. I have to settle for reality.”

“I don't mind reality so much. When I can get it.”

“Mason?”

“Yeah?”

“You're a bit of a deranged psycho.”

“I know.”

October 30, 2004

High school girl unresponsive after fall from Ambassador Bridge

An unnamed high school girl tried climbing up Ambassador Bridge last night. She didn't make it all the way to the top and fell, landing on Riverside Drive West. Her condition remains unstable, and she may have sustained a concussion and several fractured bones. Unknown at this time what her motivation was for climbing the bridge.

Lenny

After he sent the email, Bradley came to check up on me. We drank tea.

I didn't jump because of unhappiness. Not for a thrill either. I jumped because I wanted to leave, permanently get somewhere. Somewhere else. I'll never understand those who fear to fly. The most wonderful thing in the world, flying. I've flown to countless worlds, seen every variation of every landmark you can think of. I'm a bird, I'm a superhero, I'm a flying carpet. But I don't have wings. I wanted to make them but I only had wax.

Bradley told me that he no longer thought that Nadia had killed herself. He'd never lied to me before. He wasn't very good at it. Even he would have caught the eye twitch and word swallowing.

The bridge grew tall, tall. Trees and skyscrapers can't touch me.

I held her hand. We'll fly together, it will be okay. Flying comes naturally when you're ten stories tall.

Nonsense.

People don't fly, they fall. No parallel universes. Just me, Bradley, and Mason. All falling, trying to fly, trying to float, but when we get too close and our wings melt we crash into the water, and our feathers fly above us. And then we sink lower and lower into

the waves.

But maybe sinking is the negative axis of falling. Does that make it okay? Amelia Earhart didn't fall out of the sky, she sank into the ocean. That's why we've never found her. Sinking can't be my solution. Falling isn't flying and sinking isn't swimming. And I know how to swim now.

The Madwoman on the Sixth Floor

In my thesis, I explore the by-now well-known image of the “madwoman in the attic.” Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar note that writing by female writers often reveals a pattern of confinement, both literally and figuratively (Gilbert xi). Edna Pontillier in *The Awakening* is confined in her marriage, Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre* is confined to an attic, Ophelia in *Hamlet* is confined between her family and her lover, etc. *Airplane Pose* reveals snippets of the lives of two women, both confined physically in an apartment building and psychologically by their families, who face the possibility of their own madness and respond in different ways. Nadia seemingly does go mad and kills herself, and Lenny, who fears suffering the same fate, manages to rebel against confinement without going mad. She is riddled with various anxieties, many of which can be related back to her fears of becoming the madwoman. Her anxieties over an impending sense of madness reveal themselves in her relationships (especially with her parents), her thought processes, what she doesn't say, and also in the physical spaces in which she exists. Gradually, by breaking out of physical and mental confinements, she is able to subvert the madwoman in the attic.

The narrative structure of the novel reflects the disjunctive nature of each narrator's ways of thinking. Lenny's worries about other universes, and her parents' constant interruptions into her thoughts are mirrored in the interruptions that her narrative has. Bradley's thoughts are also disjointed, as he is always having to back track to clarify and define different words and behaviours that he does not understand. And finally, Mason's thoughts are constantly broken up into what is real and not real.

Before I delve deeper into a discussion of madness I will clarify what I mean by this term. As Margaret Price explores in her essay, “Defining Mental Disability,” there is no all-encompassing word for all disabilities and disorders (298). About madness in particular she says that it is a useful word because its “infrequency helps detach it from

implication in medical and psychiatric industries. In addition, *mad* achieves a broad historical sweep” (299). To say that Edna Pontillier is depressed is to put words in Kate Chopin's mouth that she would never have uttered. Madness can encompass a range of states of mind. In my thesis, is Ian's grief a kind of madness? Is Gord's apparent obesity the result of madness? As the Cheshire cat tells Alice in *Alice in Wonderland*, “we're all mad here. I'm mad. You're mad” (Carroll, 56). Madness appears to be an all-encompassing term for every kind of irrational or unusual behaviour, regardless of how extreme it may be, though we may say that Nadia was “more” or “less” mad than Lenny or Mason. If madness is simply a continuum, perhaps everyone exists somewhere on that continuum.

Rosemarie Garland-Thomson suggests another term for madness or disability altogether: the misfit. Misfitting, according to Garland-Thomson, suggests a wide variety of existences that do not place all disabilities in a single box (592). Misfits suggests that the person is not inherently flawed or disabled, but that he or she simply does not fit into a given context, just as a normally able-bodied ballerina may be a misfit on a basketball court. *Airplane Pose* is filled with misfits. Ian does not fit into a context where his wife may have killed herself; Mason does not fit into a context where others do not experience frequent hallucinations; Bradley does not fit into a context with emotions and behaviours that he does not understand; and Lenny does not fit in the context of the world that she has been born into. Even Jamie, seemingly the most “normal” character in the novel, doesn't fit into readers' initial impression of her as a journalist. Though there is no evidence in that she is mad or disabled in some way, she is certainly a misfit.

Garland-Thomson suggests, based on Judith Butler's theories of performativity, that a perfect fit can never exist (594). Mason appears to his apartment building mates to fit, more or less, because his hallucinations are not visible to the public, and he does not outwardly respond to them, yet his narrated sections reveal that he is a misfit in his

cultural context. Mason performs normalcy. Bradley, alternatively, sees the rest of the world as performing, and he must interpret their misfitting. Though Bradley doesn't see himself as a misfit, he is certainly aware of the differences between himself and others in his context. And Lenny, who arguably is the best of the three at performing contextually, doesn't want to have to fit – she wants to escape to a new place, where she feels that she will already fit. Bradley and Mason are more aware than Lenny of what misfitting really means – Bradley, though he feels that his behaviour is the most logical, attempts to understand the behaviors of others, and Mason is so misfit within his context that he actually finds his mind creating different contexts that do not exist. Mason, unlike Bradley, wants to fit. He tells Lenny: “If you knew you'd hate yourself for ever wanting it” (122). Though Mason has learned to perform in his context, he doesn't want to have to, and he doesn't want Lenny to have to either.

Bradley is also seemingly on a quest to understand his context and how others perform in it, and he goes about this by researching. The chapters in *Airplane Pose* are interspersed with newspaper articles, a radio segment, and a magazine interview, all found by Bradley. Bradley, and by extension the articles that he finds, symbolizes a kind of rationality and grounding in reality that does not apply to the other characters in the novel. He is very in tune with reality, and has a near-obsession with finding out exactly what happened. This obsession is reflected in his use of supposedly reliable sources. As Lenny says, Bradley “wants to believe that people are a set of facts” (99). This belief is demonstrated in his explanation for why he thinks that Nadia killed herself. Even though he himself says that they cannot know for sure because they are unable to know what Nadia was thinking, he attempts to deduce what he can from her family history and from statistics. As the novel goes on, however, Bradley discovers that people are not as universal and definable as he would like them to be. In the end, his assertion that he no longer believes that Nadia killed herself – though it's unclear whether or not this is a lie –

shows his development through the text. Unlike Lenny and Mason, who both learn to accept their own versions of reality, Bradley learns to accept the ambiguous nature of the reality around him. Whether he does so to help Lenny feel better, or because of all the unknown factors surrounding Nadia's death, or simply because there isn't enough hard evidence to prove it was suicide, Bradley accepts the ambiguous nature of the death. Though he does not dismiss facts, he acknowledges that some things are simply unexplainable. In doing so, he is able to find a version of reality that suits him.

Lenny also had to find a version of reality that she could live with in order to break out of her confinements. Her initial “fall” when she was 15 was her first attempt at breaking out of confined spaces, though at a great cost. Lenny felt as though her only escape from the confining world in which she existed was to jump – whether to get to a new world, as she claims multiple times throughout the novel, or to end her life. When Lenny wakes up after her fall in a hospital bed, she is only able to leave the hospital by agreeing to go on anti-depressants, which becomes for her another form of confinement (*Airplane Pose* 4). In the apartment building, Lenny typically appears in elevators (38), the café (36), hallways (56), doorways (102), on the fire escape (43), and in the stairwell (115). Even when she is in someone else's apartment, she is confined to a small space on a couch, or feels so uncomfortable that she is unable to sit down. Lenny almost never ventures outside, except to do yoga. But even yoga becomes a space of confinement for her when it becomes a trigger for her anxieties about Nadia (43). We see Lenny in her car once, but she stays inside it for a long time, unable to act on her desire to speak to Nadia (39). She ventures onto Ian's balcony to try connecting with Nadia, who did escape from confined space (though not in the way that Lenny claims she wants), but is quickly interrupted by the voices of Ian and Mason above her, forcing her onto the limited space of the fire escape (43). And of course, she is constantly contained by the never ending voices of her parents.

A prevalent notion about female madness is that it symbolized a kind of rebellion that was not possible for women at various points in history. If a European woman could not escape her literal station, she could at the very least escape her mental station (Showalter 216). As Elizabeth Donaldson puts it, “In the face of such repression, going mad might be considered the only sane response to an insane world” (100). But this notion has a number of problems. By going “mad,” *Jane Eyre's* Bertha Mason becomes more confined, and more controlled by her husband, and eventually the only escape is for her to die. To say that madness holds significant power is a delusion – it cannot offer a productive kind of rebellion. If women's only kind of rebellion is an illusion, then no actual change ever occurs.

Throughout my thesis, Lenny frequently hears her parents' voices questioning her decisions and her level of sanity, to the extent that Lenny feels that they control her decisions. In Victorian literature, madness was almost always depicted as a result of parental heritage, particularly mothers, and seemingly an unavoidable fate, at least for women (Showalter 67). In Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, Bertha Mason's madness is an inevitable trait inherited from her mother, and her brother's madness is perceived as a probability, though not an inevitability – Mr. Rochester tells Jane that Bertha's brother “will probably be in the same state one day (Brontë 274). Similarly, in Henry Kingsley's *The Hillyars and the Burtons*, both George Hillyar and his wife, Gerty Hillyar, succumb to madness, but for different reasons. According to Christopher Lee, George's madness is what was known as moral insanity, which “addressed the possibility of an individual being in perfect control of his intellect at the same time as his volition was being overwhelmed by the cumulative effects of a complex and sinister disease” (39). Though George has a genetic predisposition for madness from both sides of his family, the ultimate cause of his madness is his weak character, wherein his behaviour is determined by the morality of those around him (37). Gerty, on the other hand, shows little to no

personal control over her madness; it occurs as a result of genetic heritage, isolation, and her gender (40). Thus, if a woman's madness is an inevitable result of her mother's madness, she could only hope to stave madness off for as long as possible. While Lenny's mother is never referred to as mad, or even crazy or insane, obviously a great deal of Lenny's anxieties stem both from not wanting to be like her mother and from wanting her mother's approval. If sanity or insanity comes from mothers, then Lenny's desire to both please and rebel against her mother is (according to Victorian views on insanity/sanity) also a battle between insanity and sanity. Unlike Bertha Mason or Gerty Hillyar, however, Lenny is able to choose to not be mad; when she "finally moved towards Mason's apartment, my parents resumed their bickering about the jaundice walls" (*Airplane Pose* 117), leaving them behind her. Though she moves into another physically confined space, this abandonment of her parents in the stairwell signals that Lenny refuses to be mentally confined by them any longer.

But Lenny's biggest source of anxiety is not fear of the perceptions of others or the influence of her parents, but of sharing the same fate as Nadia. When she finally confesses (at least partially) to Bradley what she thinks happened to Nadia, she says "But I'm her, Bradley" (108). When Bradley refutes this, her response is not relief that she is not Nadia, but that she is "okay" (109). Lenny is not afraid that she will be perceived as mad for her beliefs, but that she will succumb to her evident depression, or madness, though she never says this explicitly. Lenny is a particularly unreliable narrator. When she tries to convince Bradley to help her find Nadia, she tells him that he should help because "apartment building mates still means something" and then hopes that he will not ask what it means, because she doesn't know. Repeatedly, when asked what she thinks happened to Nadia, she evades giving a direct answer, such as when she tells Bradley "So I don't really know what to believe exactly, but what I do believe is that things that we consider impossible often are not only possible but turn out to be real"

(70). While this may be at least partially true, she leaves out her actual theory. What Lenny doesn't say determines what she thinks and feels. When explaining her fall, she says "I didn't plan on almost dying" (3). This statement could mean multiple things. What Lenny wants to mean is that dying was not her plan; but it could also mean that she didn't plan on *almost* dying. If her fall, as she calls it, were a suicide attempt and not an attempt to get to an alternative universe, it explains both her anxiety over becoming Nadia, and her firm stance that Nadia did not kill herself. Lenny cannot acknowledge her potential as the madwoman in the attic. In the same way that she chooses to walk away from her parents in the stairwell, in the end of the novel she chooses to live, stating, "Sinking can't be my solution. Falling isn't flying and sinking isn't swimming. And I know how to swim now" (126). Importantly, in this final monologue of Lenny's, readers don't know her physical location, just as they don't know where she is in the first section of the novel. Lenny's location becomes unimportant as she creates a new, open space for herself where she can "swim."

Lenny's anxieties over going mad and over becoming Nadia are one and the same. Nadia fits some characteristics of the traditional madwoman in the attic, or in this case, the madwoman on the sixth floor. Like Bertha Mason, whose mother "was only mad, and shut up in a lunatic asylum" (Brontë 274), Nadia's mother Pauline was diagnosed with bipolar disorder, and at some point Nadia requested and received a restraining order against Pauline (20). Regardless of whether Nadia's "madness" is a result of her mother's, the connection between the two is certainly picked up on, particularly by Bradley. Though he concedes that Pauline's mental health did not "necessarily mean that [Nadia] probably had mental health problems" (20), he clearly believes that any madness that Nadia suffered from is connected to her mother's. And Nadia was obviously unwell, if not mad. When discussing Nadia with Jamie, Mason says, "She'd wander the halls barefoot sometimes. Once she didn't wear any pants, just a long shirt, and once she slept in the

stairwell” (78). Though less animalistic than the descriptions given of Bertha Mason, Nadia fits Bertha's more spectral features. No one quite seems to know much about her, Lenny states that Nadia spoke to herself (99), and Mason's description of her fall, “hands reaching, black hair sticking straight up as though reaching for the long gone balcony railing, long dress billowing” (10) is rather ghost-like. Whether or not Nadia was actually mad, her behaviour is not inconsistent with mental illness. Mason states that he believes that “Ian had her locked up in their apartment” (37). Though this thinking is more focused on Ian than Nadia – and more revealing of Mason's character than either of them – it reflects tropes of the madwoman locked away by an evil, controlling, or ashamed husband. In Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, Catherine Morland fears General Tilney because she believes that his supposedly dead wife is hidden away somewhere in his mansion (Austen 138). Though Catherine is ultimately proven wrong, her fears come from an obsession that reflects Victorian fears over madness and isolation at the hands of men. In Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*, Lucy Snowe is surrounded by figures of isolated females, and she grows to relate more and more to them, eventually leading to a breakdown, which she recovers from only when her isolation ends (Showalter 70). Gerty Hillyar and Bertha Mason suffer similar fates, though with more tragic endings – their madness does not take complete hold of them until they are isolated. Because Mason believes that Ian had isolated Nadia, readers may conclude that risk of her madness increases. Certainly, she seems to fit the canonical precedent for “mad” female characters.

If Nadia is indeed the “madwoman on the sixth floor,” then is Mason the “madman on the sixth floor”? Of the three narrators of the novel, Mason is certainly the most “mad.” Like Bertha, Gerty, and Lucy, Mason is quite isolated, though as a result of his own choices. Though Victorian literature has examples of mad men, the causes of that madness are different from that of women. George Hillyar goes mad from a combination

of parental lineage and exposure; his half-brother, Erne, also goes mad, but his madness comes as a result of having too many feminine traits. Though George and Erne's shared father was mad, both his sons inherited their own type of madness from their respective mothers. George's mother was morally insane, while Erne went mad "as the tragic effect of the delicate sensibility which he inherits from his virtuous mother" (Lee, 44). His madness goes into remission when his isolation is temporarily lifted (46), but does not wholly leave him until he pursues a masculine vocation (joining the army) and removes all feminine weaknesses from his personality. Thus, literary male madness is an avoidable fate. George could have avoided it by surrounding himself with moral people, and Erne avoids it by abandoning his feminine qualities. For men, in order to overcome madness, they must determine their mothers' failures (immorality, weakness) and separate themselves as much as possible from those failures.

How does Mason come by his madness? His parents seem fairly normal, even loving, if not somewhat overbearing – when they find out that he doesn't have schizophrenia, they "got ice cream after the appointment ended" (10). There is no indication that Mason's parents display any mental problems, yet he's obviously somewhat unstable. Mason wants to know what's wrong with him, and so he eventually reveals the fact that he's adopted to Bradley, and asks Bradley to research Mason's birth family, telling Bradley, "I'm not looking for a reunion or anything. My parents are fine, don't need to replace them. Just want to know why I'm crazy" (81). Mason, like Lenny, wants to overcome and hide his madness, but he has an additional motivation that Lenny does not. Lenny fears harming herself, but Mason fears harming others, or at the very least, that others may fear him harming them, causing him to be somewhat paranoid. He claims not to know what's happening around him when he has "episodes" (10), but he appears to have complete control over himself. When Mason and Lenny visit Ian, Mason's account reveals that he's experiencing a graphic hallucination during the entire

encounter (46), yet when Lenny recalls the same conversation, there's no evidence of strange behaviour from Mason, aside from some blunt comments (59). Mason protects others from himself by hiding his madness and keeping his distance socially. When Lenny wants Mason to tell her about what he sees, he thinks that she'll see him as a “deranged psychopath” (122). This fear goes beyond just what Lenny might think – Mason himself fears that he may be a killer. Like Lenny, he fears where his madness may take him. But unlike Lenny, who socializes herself in order to avoid madness inducing isolation, Mason isolates himself further in order to protect others.

Mason's fears and anxieties over being dangerous actually make him safer for other people; for example, in a flashback, readers see him become a safe haven for a battered woman. When Jade asks him if he could ever kill anybody during one of his episodes, he says no (119). Yet he genuinely fears that he may have been responsible for Nadia's death. Either he lied to Jade about whether he thought he could kill anyone – which is doubtful, as at one point he says that she's the only person he trusted (45) – or he has changed his mind since about his capacity for killing someone. Mason doesn't know what happened to Jade. She may have gone back with her husband, or perhaps she escaped somehow. Mason worries that his altered state resulted in Jade being hurt or killed by her husband; because of this, Mason needs to protect others, especially women, from similar fates. When Nadia ran away, he couldn't protect her from the world, but he tore down the posters, as an act of protecting her from Ian. Mason never gives a solid reason why he goes with Lenny to see Ian – but if he believes that Ian is dangerous, then Mason cannot leave Lenny alone with him. Even Gord sees Mason as someone to confide in – Gord clearly does not see Mason as dangerous. Though Mason still has hallucinations at the end of the novel, even if he is a “deranged psychopath,” he is not a dangerous psychopath, and so he successfully evades becoming the “madman on the sixth floor.”

Mason's status as mad or not mad is significant to Lenny's level of madness because, together and along with Bradley, they find a way to subvert their mad tendencies. The final conversation between Lenny and Mason involves no setting other than their dialogue, making it important for both characters. For Lenny, she enters an unconfined space immediately following her leaving her parents behind in the stairwell. We do not know if Lenny and Mason stay in Mason's apartment, or if they go up to the roof, or go down to the café. Lenny's narrative here loses its structure, yet in losing a certain degree of control over her narrative, she gains a kind of freedom that she can't have until she leaves her parents – and with them, societal expectations – behind. For Mason, this scene shows him being able to almost fully separate his hallucinations from reality. It is unclear whether the hallucination he has about Lenny occurs during or before their conversation, but he seems to be in the same open space as Lenny. For Lenny, freedom is letting go of the world, and for Mason, it is being able to have a grasp on the world; in this scene, they're able to find a space in between that works for them. Mason's sanity becomes important for Lenny because they signal to each other where they want to be in their respective madness. There is no power dynamic that needs to be subverted – they are on equal ground here. Men and women do not hold power over the other.

Lenny's narrative choices act as a way in which she breaks out of her confined space. For the first half of the novel, Lenny constantly tells half-truths, and leaves out details of her story, both to the audience and to the other characters. Gradually it becomes clearer that words are not always what they seem with Lenny, further showing her status as a misfit – even her words seem to be out of place. Just as “The discrepancy between body and world, between that which is expected and that which is, produces fits and misfits,” (Garland-Thomson 593) the discrepancies between what Lenny says and what is real are where Lenny's misfittedness becomes apparent. When Jamie asks Bradley about whether Lenny is depressed, he responds by saying that she is depressed, and that

sometimes when she comes home from dinner with her parents, she wants to tell me about her mother asking questions about dating and work and it drove Ellen Garcia bonkers, and other times she comes home and says that she does not want to talk about it and just watches TV with me. Sometimes she asks me to stay with her while she does yoga because she does not want to be alone but does not want to talk. (95)

Though it seems that her depression is not something she talks about directly, Bradley has picked up on it. Mason too realizes that she hasn't told them everything, demanding “tell me what you think happened. And none of your 'We can't know for real' bullshit, I know you have a theory” (121). Like Bradley, Mason realizes that Lenny doesn't always tell them the entire truth. Once she does begin to speak openly with them, however, she begins to break free of her confined spaces. She first tells Bradley about multiple meanings of infinity as a way of testing the waters of her narration (71). Though she does not tell Bradley her whole theory at this point, she gives him a clue into what she will eventually tell him – that she believes in things that cannot be explained. Once she does this, she momentarily seems to have some release from her mental confinements – she relaxes with Bradley, even smiles and briefly holds his hand. This release is temporary, however, and comes undone as soon as Bradley tells her about his conversation with Mason about Gord and Nadia (72). It is not until after she finally tells Bradley about her experiences in the hospital, and what beliefs that experience triggered (105), that readers see her first act of real escape from confinement in the stairwell (117). Though she does not refer to herself as depressed, or address in any way the idea that the fall may have actually been a suicide attempt, she is no longer hiding. The freedom that she feels after disclosing may be explained by looking further at Margaret Price's article. She explores how those with disabilities are discouraged from being visible in their disability as much

as possible, and that they should always be looking for a cure, and not for a means by which to live contentedly with his or her disability (Price 301). Lenny adheres to this throughout much of the novel, hiding her misfitted state. But when she stops hiding it from Bradley, she's able to leave her parents in the stairwell and accept her status as a misfit. Even though she has read Bradley's email about Nadia having killed herself, a discovery that should have been devastating to Lenny, she is still able to break out of her confinement. She follows her walking away from her parents up by another act of narration, telling Mason the same thing, though with less of her personal account than she tells Bradley (122). She had previously begun to tell Mason a bit about her theories (87) but she becomes afraid of him judging her or thinking that she's mad, and so she leaves without giving her own narration of what happened. When she tells him the second time, although she gives fewer personal details than she does to Bradley, she still gives Mason a glimpse of her experience, telling him that "in the hospital I went somewhere else" (122). Lenny's act of narration gives Mason the opportunity to give his own narration, telling her about his hallucinations, freeing her from not knowing, and the next time readers see her in an undetermined location, she breaks free from her confinements.

In Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, a "prequel" to *Jane Eyre*, Bertha – or, as Rhys calls her, Antoinette Cosway – tells the story of the events leading up to the finale of *Jane Eyre*. According to Kathy Mezei, Antoinette's acts of narration (telling the first and third parts of *Wide Sargasso Sea*) temporarily hold back her madness. In the first section, Antoinette is afraid, and her only means of control over her life is by "the telling of [her] own story in [her] voice as narrating subject, not narrated object" (197). Antoinette is controlled by men, abandoned by her mother, and at this point, in relative isolation, and her only means of freedom from confinement are by narrating her story. In the second part of the novel, Rochester takes over the narration, and she can no longer tell her own story. By taking away her control over the story, he also takes away her final method of

freedom. By part three, even though she is once again allowed to narrate, she can no longer give a proper narrative because her madness has overcome her.

Like Antoinette, Lenny must not lose her ability and choice to narrate. Nadia's chance to narrate in *Airplane Pose* goes unfulfilled; Lenny offers her a chance to talk in the café, and Nadia turns her down unless Lenny befriends Gord (40). Lenny believes that if she had had a conversation with Nadia, where Nadia was able to narrate, Nadia would still be alive. This belief reflects Lenny's own anxiety over not being able to narrate.

Lenny's anxieties are also reflected in the amount of people that she talks to about Nadia's death. She hangs up posters with Claire (13), discusses what Nadia was doing at the harbour with Mrs. Cray (16), eventually befriends Gord in order to be closer to Nadia (40), gets excited about discussing Nadia with a reporter (43), goes to talk to Ian about Nadia (45), and involves Bradley and Mason in an investigation into Nadia's life and death. Lenny feels that Nadia's life must be narrated, because she herself is afraid that her own life will go unnarrated. Whenever she is unable to narrate, such as when no one would believe her when she was at the hospital, she wishes to escape to another universe, one where she can narrate. All Lenny's encounters with others in the apartment about Nadia are also about herself – if Lenny talks to others about Nadia, Lenny feels she gets a chance to talk about herself. Even when she meets with Jamie specifically to discuss Nadia, Lenny repeatedly brings the subject around to herself. Lenny narrates in order to stay sane. Even though she never fully discloses, she is able to choose what she does and does not narrate to others, giving her a kind of control.

Airplane Pose's Lenny successfully subverts the madwoman in the attic through acts of narration and removing herself from confined spaces. By doing so, she is able to break free from her madness and be the narrator of her own story, instead of having her story controlled by others. She learns to embrace her status as a misfit and in doing so,

learns to swim instead of sink.

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Vita Auctoris

Lydia Friesen was born and raised in Windsor, Ontario. She graduated from the University of Windsor with a BA in Psychology and English Language, Literature and Creative Writing in the Spring of 2013. After spending two years planning and preparing for an MSW, she realized that she wasn't ready to leave the English department yet, and started her grad school application two weeks before it was due. She began her MA in English Language, Literature, and Creative Writing in the Fall of 2013. She hopes to graduate in the Spring of 2015, and then take a really, really long nap.