

DEATH IN CANADA: A SHORT STORY COLLECTION

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ABSTRACT

Leanna Wharram's *Death in Canada* explores themes of family, betrayal, friendship, love, and death in four short stories, set in various locations across Canada: "The Elephant Goddess," "Paddleboat Drowning," "The Dog Groomer," and "Social Observation Study – Observer#A2651." The collection also includes a critical introduction detailing the use of foreshadowing techniques and narrative perspective.

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CHAPTER I:

THE BEGINNING OF THE END: A CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

People who read mystery novels would tell us that giving away the ending of the story too soon kills the tension of the entire book. However, a mystery *writer* would disagree with that idea: a familiar tenet with mystery novel writing is that the writer has to give their audience clues throughout the book so that the perceptive reader can work out on his or her own beforehand how the mystery ends. Foreshadowing is a time-honored technique among writers, useful for building tension and giving emotional cues to the reader. Furthermore, many books—both in the mystery novel genre and in literature overall—openly state the ending right from the start, leaving the reader to focus on the story and character development instead. In this short story collection, I have chosen to give away one important hint from the title alone: there will be death, and it will be in Canada. In each of my four short stories, I use a variety of techniques to try to instill in my readers the same focus on what is happening at the present moment in the story; if we all know that death is an ominous certainty somewhere in the story's future, the reader's concern becomes more about how the characters come to face their endings.

In the first story of *Death in Canada*, “The Elephant Goddess,” I borrowed a type of opening first line that Truman Capote uses in his short story “Children on Their Birthdays.” In Capote's story, he opens with the matter-of-fact line, “Yesterday afternoon the six-o'clock bus ran over Miss Bobbit” (58). The sentence is so straightforward, brusque, and even “bouncy” (several words or linked phrases have a three-syllable cretic [stressed, unstressed, stressed] or molossus [all three stressed] meter—“Yesterday,” “afternoon,” “six-o'clock,” “Miss Bobbit”) that it takes on an almost comedic tone, rendering the portrayed death and the story's ultimate conclusion as something so trivial the reader nearly overlooks this fact in the face of Miss

Bobbit's unsettling behavior and the eerie obsession two boys develop for her. By the time the story circles back to its conclusive opening, the reader and the narrator realize the significance her demise will have on the two obsessed boys, and the anxiety over her death surfaces too late:

Across the street there were bumblebees of talk, but when Miss Bobbit saw them, two boys whose flower-masked faces were like yellow moons, she rushed down the steps, her arms outstretched. You could see what was going to happen; and we called out, our voices like lightning in the rain, but Miss Bobbit, running toward those moons of roses, did not seem to hear. That is when the six-o'clock bus ran over her. (Capote 75)

The conclusion is decidedly more poetic in sentence structure and imagery compared to the story's opening, and although the final sentence mimics the simplicity of the opening sentence, the rush of realizations leading up to that final sentence has the effect of waves rushing up to collide with a floodwall. In essence, Capote's "Children on Their Birthdays" hinges on the fact that its ending is given at the beginning; however, it is the characters and their interpersonal (and intrapersonal) conflicts that cause the story to hit the reader like a door kicked open.

In the case of "The Elephant Goddess," I apply a similar approach in revealing the story's impending conclusion in a light-hearted manner at the start. The story's first line, "On All Souls' Day, Tyler's aunt Chrysanthemum announced on her website *Psychic Sidekick* that she had had a vision of her imminent death" plays with the idea of casting death as a humorous, theatrical event: Tyler's aunt has an unusual and psychic-spoofy name, the name of her website is a near-rhyme, and the very fact that she announces her death via her Internet webpage seems to make light of a potentially serious situation. However, through Tyler and Chrysanthemum's interactions with other characters in the story—Tyler's other aunt Amelia, Chrysanthemum's customer Bill—an underlying earnestness concerning the seriousness of Chryssy's future death

and the impact it would have on those left behind her emerges. Although death is not immediate in “The Elephant Goddess” as it is in Capote’s “Children on Their Birthdays,” the foreboding certainty of her eventual death leaves an impression on Tyler, and his initial comfort on seeing his aunt dissolves into dread at the idea that he may soon lose her. Overall, the technique of introducing a character’s death in the first line with a humorous or light-hearted tone sets up a false sense of security in the story, thereby recreating one type of situation that often occurs with death—one may see it coming from a long ways off, but in the end, it will always surprise us to some extent.

In the second story of the collection, “Paddleboat Drowning,” I use different techniques to set up the reader for the conclusion and create tension. For one, the title gives quite a lot away, setting up the main situation and event before the reader even encounters the main characters. For two, the story opens *in medias res*, right at the story’s turning point, before it reverts back to the events preceding: “The lake changes when they least expect it....It is three hours between now and when someone will drown.” One example that uses a similar approach to forecasting ominous outcomes is Mary Hood’s “How Far She Went,” a story about a grandmother and her granddaughter struggling to get along together and escape from malevolent bikers. Although the title is more obscure in what it references, it still serves as a means of highlighting the key moment of character development and the height of tension in the story: discovering the gruesome lengths the grandmother would go to protect her granddaughter. Furthermore, although Hood uses the technique of *in medias res* for a different purpose—here, she uses it to demonstrate character relationships before getting into the whys and hows of the situation—it does set up a source of tension right at the start to draw readers in and cue them about what to expect from these characters: “They had quarreled all morning, squalled all

summer about the incidentals” (281). Both of these techniques are integral tools for creating tension in stories early on, and in my case, I also use them explicitly as foreshadowing tools for “Paddleboat Drowning.”

However, another narrative technique I borrow heavily from Mary Hood’s “How Far She Went” is her choice of narrative perspective—third person omniscient—and the choice to make her characters nameless. As stated earlier, a key focus in writing my stories was to design them in such a way that the reader can concentrate on the characters’ emotional progress toward their conclusions, and in the various drafts of “Paddleboat Drowning,” I experienced some difficulty in redirecting the focus away from the imminent paddleboat sinking and onto the characters’ emotional growth. First I tried it in second person point of view, with the focus on “the boy” character as he interacted with his girlfriend “Chelsea” (this experiment emerged after reading a condensed memoir by Rebecca McClanahan, “Interstellar,” in which the author recounts her relationship with her sister by using “you” in the same manner most nonfiction authors would use “I”). Much to my surprise, that first draft resulted in an unusual form of narrative distance and alienation; as a reader, the effect was akin to dreaming about watching oneself from a higher ground—rather than placing the reader “in the moment,” the perspective placed the reader outside of the “you” character. Deciding that this was not the effect I felt the story deserved, I instead opted for the traditional first-person perspective as told by “the girl” (previously named “Chelsea”) as she interacted with “Ian,” reasoning that since she performs the most significant action in the story, that her perspective would be the more interesting one to tell. However, this second draft felt *too* personal for my liking, and considering that neither character could be portrayed in either story without the characters’ biases coloring their counterpart into a

downright caricature, I decided in the final draft to take a note from Hood's story and create an equal opportunity perspective in third person omniscient.

Third person omniscient is ideal for presenting an interpersonal conflict in which both parties share an equal role in causing suffering. Combined with having nameless characters, a story about difficult decisions and difficult relationships acquires a type of "universality" when it is not attached to a named character, and readers still gain omniscient insight into the dynamics of the characters' emotions through the perspective. In Hood's "How Far She Went," the girl and the grandmother become *any* girl and grandmother, allowing readers to identify with either character. In "Paddleboat Drowning," the same open access to the characters' thoughts and memories presents a tableau of two completely different people with opposing worldviews, and these incompatible outlooks on life force the young couple apart. In spite of this direct access into their thoughts, the third person perspective also offers the right amount of distance in the piece that it needs—considering the admittedly melodramatic scenario, coming too close to the characters through first person perspective would bait the sentimentality of the reader into adopting the focus-character's perspective. The distance of third person omniscient acts as a sort of "God's eye" into the situation, allowing readers to judge for themselves which character they believe is in the right and wrong. Due to the foreboding nature of the plot of "Paddleboat Drowning," the story best benefits in the compromise struck between the detachment of third person perspective and the closeness of omniscient character access.

Of all the stories in this collection, "The Dog Groomer" is the odd story out. Death happens off-screen and in the past; however, like in the other stories, it acts as a catalyst for different events and revelations that occur with the main character, Emmanuel Higgins. In this story, Emmanuel the dog groomer lives in the neurotic shadow of his deceased older brother's

talent as a dog shaver, and he is convinced to the point of inaction that he cannot run a successful dog salon without the assistance of Beatrice, with whom he is enamored. While the other stories in *Death in Canada* use foreshadowing elements to build tension, in this case, Emmanuel's neurosis shapes the story into a self-fulfilling prophecy. Oddly, the inspiration for this story comes from Alice Munro's "The Turkey Season." In "The Turkey Season," a young female narrator describes her work at the Turkey Barn; for the most part, the narrator takes a backseat in her own story, preferring instead to focus on the characters around her, notably the foreman, Herb Abbot, who patiently teaches her how to gut turkeys. The narrator's timidity, schoolgirl crush, and reliance on the older man rubbed off a bit onto Emmanuel in "The Dog Groomer"; the character's "mystified concentration on Herb...the pull of a man like that, of his promising and refusing" was amplified in Emmanuel's relationship with Beatrice, who becomes so smitten and dependent on her that he frets over every little thing he does in fear of accidentally offending her (Munro 280). Furthermore, the very idea of a character who is so paralyzed by her own insecurity that she "could not stand to be watched by anybody but Herb" as she worked fascinated me (Munro 269). While "The Turkey Season" does not provide much by way of stylistic insight into "The Dog Groomer," it does supply a source of thematic and character elements that are essential to understanding Emmanuel's internal tensions.

The final story in the collection, "Social Observation Study – Observer#A2651" is an excursion into an alternate form of storytelling. It takes the form of a fictional qualitative research study conducted by a small Canadian university, in which two researchers send out "directives" asking volunteers to write about different aspects of Canadian life and history. I loosely based the idea off of the University of Sussex's *Mass Observation Project*, which is "a unique UK-based writing project which has been running since 1981" that: "Provide[s] a

structured programme within which ‘ordinary’ people can write directly about their lives in the knowledge that what they send in will be archived for posterity and used for social research” (“The Mass Observation Project”). The main character of the story, Arnold Furlong, volunteers to write for the project and, through the lens of his directive responses, he reveals a burgeoning yet reluctant friendship with his new neighbors—a gay couple he calls A and S.

Part of my interest in pursuing this unusual format of storytelling arises from its potential to work as means of understated foreshadowing and the challenge of designing a story based on a character’s observations and recollections rather than a strong sense of linear plot. Considering the personal nature of this story, I decided that consulting creative nonfiction essays would be the most useful; in general, creative nonfiction experiments with a variety of different forms and organizational techniques in order to achieve a specific, desired effect in its readers, and luckily, there is one example that demonstrates how to create a foreshadowing effect with bureaucratic formatting. Eula Biss’s “The Pain Scale” is a nonfiction essay that details her experience with chronic pain, with separate sections organized by increasing numbers on the zero-to-ten scale used in doctor’s offices as guides for assessing a patient’s level of pain. The beauty of this format is that it acts as a subconscious guide to the reader, revealing right from the beginning how the account will inevitably play out over the course of the narrative, yet it never seems intrusive. Furthermore, the number system allows Biss to yolk together several different topics by the common thread of the number they have in common: religion, weather, her relationship with her father, mathematics, and of course, Biss’s increasing and futile frustration from enduring unexplainable pain. However, what is most surprising about Biss’s organizational structure is that while it successfully foreshadows suffering, she also subverts the expectations of the format in the final section by not coming to a conclusion, but rather starting over: “There is

no tenth circle in Dante's Hell. The digit ten depends on the digit zero, in our current number system.The description of hurricane-force winds on the Beaufort scale is simply 'devastation occurs.' Bringing us, of course, back to zero" (41-2). This masterful use and exploitation of an otherwise rigid form to create a compelling, intricate account of pain relies both on supporting the reader's morbid expectations as well as the surprise of subverting these expectations, and in the qualitative format of "Social Observation Study – Observer#A2651," the method of setting up the reader's expectations are quite similar.

In "Social Observation Study," a significant amount of foreshadowing relies upon the subjects of the directive questions sent to Arnold. Directive topics such as "Neighbours," "Giving & Receiving Presents," "The Ups and Downs of Friendship," and "Going to a Funeral" give readers a straightforward idea of what they can expect in terms of basic plot, and it even signals mood changes experienced by Arnold throughout the months he participates in the study. However, what sets this method of foreshadowing apart from the example of Eula Biss's "The Pain Scale" is that while Biss's account sets up an unwavering expectation of gloom right at the start of "Zero," the directive topic sheets in "Social Observation Study" do not raise expectations until the moment they are read (since the directives come in clusters of two or three at a time). This allows for some element of surprise to remain in the overall narrative in spite of the forecasted events, and the concept works akin to a person reading the chapter titles of a novel. However, this is not the only means by which the untraditional format of the story aids in introducing the readers to potential conflicts or tensions: in addition to directive questions, one of the fictional researchers—Carol Yearling—occasionally corresponds with Arnold, usually to ask him to correct a formatting error, but on one occasion, her correspondence signals something much more sinister. Although the narrative of "Social Observation Study" nominally follows a

linear time (from approximately September 12, 1999 to December 5, 2000), the nonlinear nature of Arnold's replies (as they intermix with memories and skip large amounts of time altogether) requires some stable form of conveying to the reader an idea of where the narrative ultimately leads, and the directive input from the researchers helps to supply that direction in addition to heightening the tension of foreshadowing.

So why all this focus on giving hints to the reader of what is to come? Admittedly, creating an underlying sense of tension through the use of different foreshadowing techniques is only one small part of *Death in Canada* as a whole, but I find that through the use of a variety of tools, one can create a variety of different reading experiences. Stating the ending in the first line, thus "destroying the mystery," creates a reading experience much more invested in the emotional development of the characters and their interpersonal interactions, which, at the heart of fiction, is one of the highest goals an author can achieve. On the other hand, distributing foreshadowing clues throughout a narrative engenders a sense of balance and structure in a story that might especially need an anchor that can serve as both a steadying influence and a source of tension. Both of these broad approaches to foreshadowing are useful, and they can be further adapted to suit an author's unique needs: for instance, while the abruptness of revealing the ending of a story at the beginning can create a comedic, disarming effect in the initial reading experience, the same effect could also ensnare readers with a serious, dramatic tone that sets the stage for the rest of the story. Some other tools of the craft pair well with foreshadowing, usually by enhancing the tension. For instance, beginning *in medias res* can help establish an immediate understanding of character dynamics that forecasts the nature of the potential source of conflict between characters; even the choice of a specific narrative perspective can influence the effect of foreshadowing, sometimes for the better, and sometimes for the worse. Of course, any story

requires more than one or two fictional tools to make a significant impact on its readers—the core basics of characters, plot, and voice are crucial to success. Like death, love, and taxes in life, good fiction rests on a ubiquitous foundation of basic principles upon which every reader can agree.

CHAPTER II:
THE ELEPHANT GODDESS

On All Souls' Day, Tyler's aunt Chrysanthemum announced on her website *Psychic Sidekick* that she had had a vision of her imminent death. Tyler, who regularly checked the website at work for his sign's daily horoscope, knew what he needed to do: he sent a mass e-mail to all the nearby relatives and packed a bag. But on the two-day drive to Thunder Bay, Tyler caught a cold, and he had to stop at a rest area to throw out the mound of used tissues accumulating in the passenger seat. After giving it some thought, he also threw in his girlfriend's engagement ring. He hoped it would seem more final that way. Tyler wasn't sure if it did.

A few hours later, he came through Chrysanthemum's front door sucking back mucus in his nose and holding a gift basket in his hands. Opening the door for him, his other aunt Amelia cast a disapproving glance at the basket stuffed with fancy cheeses and crackers, a bottle of Chardonnay Blanc, and thirty-dollar checks signed by various members of Tyler's family. She frowned. "Ridiculous, the lot of you," she hissed, shutting the door behind him with more force than necessary.

"How's Chryssy?" Tyler asked, his voice as rough as tires running over gravel. He kicked off his shoes next to the small, plump Buddha statue and stuffed his feet into rainbow guest slippers.

"Chryssy's *fine*." Amelia pulled at the old little cross around her neck, her lips pressing into a thin line and the frown-creases around her mouth deepening. Tyler tried to suppress a cough and failed. "Though she *won't be*," Amelia thundered, "if you smother her with your disgusting *diseases*."

"Sorry," he coughed. Tyler shuffled away from his ex-nun aunt to the room two doors down the hall, and he opened the purple door to find his aunt Chrysanthemum ensconced in a

plush, over-pillowed, over-tasseled bed. Her long, white hair spread out like a pale halo against the red backdrop of cushions, and she lay quite still. Tyler held out the gift basket. “Chryssy, I brought The Basket,” he said.

She opened her eyes and beamed. “Well, Tyler Roosevelt Pierce, it’s been damn near five years since you came to see me in person,” she said. “How’s Saskatoon?”

“It’s fine,” Tyler said, shuffling some incense holders around so he could set the basket down on the nightstand. “Still doing programming. Sometimes I catch a Blades game.”

His aunt chuckled with a bit of a rumble, like a cowboy. “My nephew, the little heartbreaker. I bet the girls can’t keep their hands off you.”

Tyler gulped back the scratchy lump in his throat and sat at the foot of the bed, putting a hand on the covered bulge that was her foot and shaking it lightly. He smiled weakly. “You know there’s only the one, Chryssy. I’ve told you about her.”

“So marry her, godamnit. It’s been three years.” Chrysanthemum raised an elegant arm in a dismissive, imperial gesture. “On the eve of my passing, I grant you my blessing to marry. I wish you fat babies.”

Tyler pulled a moist tissue out of his pocket, blew his nose, and said nothing. He removed his hand from her foot and rested it on his thigh, and he nearly jumped when he could not feel the ring in his pocket. After a minute of relative quiet, he said, “How are you feeling?”

His aunt shrugged. “Oh, Amelia’s determined to make sure I don’t die on her. She bursts in every half hour with tea and shoos away my customers. In fact, it’s—”

Aunt Amelia burst in with a tray of tea things. She gave the gift basket an evil look—it was clearly in the spot she had been intending to place the tray—and instead placed the tea set on the armoire. She busied herself with pouring Lady Grey into the delicate porcelain and spooning

out demerara sugar, as careful and measured in her movements as a chemist. Chrysanthemum watched her work with a light smile and a roll of her eyes; Tyler kept his hands politely folded in his lap. At length, Amelia turned from the armoire holding two of three teacups. She gently lowered one to Chryssy, then thrust the other one toward Tyler. She paced back to her own cup and sat in the lone, straight-backed chair with the air of a chaperone.

Tyler held the cup under his nose and let the steam partially clear his sinuses. He sniffed and took a sip; aunt Amelia still remembered precisely how he liked his tea—only half a spoonful of sugar. “Thank you, Amelia,” he said, the hot liquid soothing his throat.

She ignored him and kept her eyes fixed on Chrysanthemum. “Do you need anything else, dear? Do you need another afghan?”

Chrysanthemum shook her head and blew on the surface of the liquid hard enough to make a few droplets splash from the cup onto the coverlet. “Tea is fine, Amelia,” she replied. “My darling nephew, a good cuppa, and my favorite old bat. Like good old days.”

Tyler swirled some tea around in his mouth, rinsing the taste of sickness from his tongue with the light citrus tang. The taste conjured up weekend afternoons spent at his aunts’ when he was young, when they would fix up tea and chocolate shortbread, when Chryssy would tease him about his long bangs or his crush on the history teacher, when former math professor Amelia would help him with algebra.

No one in the extended family ever said much about Chryssy and Amelia, but their names were often mentioned with a warm smile by Tyler’s parents. When Tyler was little, his aunts’ arrangement never seemed out of place—he was used to seeing herds of little old ladies wandering together in the parks and the malls, so he assumed they naturally came in packs and pairs. It wasn’t until one day in high school, when Eric Henderson pulled out magazines with

big-boobed blondes attacking each other's mouths in the locker room, that Tyler had realized that something like his sweet old aunts could be degraded to pictures that teenage boys alternately jeered and whooped at. He'd thrown his first punch that day. Later, the love of his life would remark with a sneer that this proved he was either a better man or a prude.

"I think I want my little porcelain elephants buried with me," Chrysanthemum said suddenly. "When archaeologists dig me up, they'll think I was worshipped as an elephant goddess." She grinned around the brim of her teacup.

"Don't be ridiculous," Amelia snapped, brow crinkling. "You're making a big deal out of nothing." She set her teacup on the armoire with a stern *clink* and folded her hands in her lap.

"I am not, you old bat."

"It's just a bad spell of vertigo, Chryssy, nothing more."

"A side effect of the vision!" Chryssy insisted. Just then, the doorbell rang.

"Hell's *teeth*! Not another one!" Amelia stood up and stormed out of the room to answer the front door.

Chryssy hastily gestured her nephew to come closer. "Quick, quick! Let's eat the cheese before she comes back." She reached across to the basket and pulled out a chunk of Dolcelatte, unpeeling its foil.

"Chryssy, you know that's not for you. It's for the survivors," Tyler said. All the same, he grabbed a cracker and a piece of pecorino for himself, falling back into their old co-conspiracy game with ease.

"To eat, drink, and pay for the funeral, I know," Chrysanthemum replied. She sank her dentures into the cheese and made an appreciative *mmm* sound. "But ever-practical great-great grandma didn't take *me* into account when she made that up."

Tyler crunched the last bit of cracker and cheese in his mouth, grateful that the pecorino was pungent enough for him to taste it over his dulled taste buds. Chrysanthemum was chomping on a cracker when the door opened again.

“Chryssy, it’s—” Amelia began, then rolled her eyes as Chryssy guiltily swallowed the cracker. “It’s Bill. Again.”

“*Again?* Well, nothing doing, I guess. Let him in,” she said. She leaned back regally against the pillows and closed her eyes.

“Should I move?” Tyler asked.

“No, it won’t take long,” Chryssy replied, peeping one eye at him.

The door opened once more, and a middle-aged man dressed like a car salesman came in the room, holding a small bouquet of violets. He was grim—worry lines etched across his forehead, and his sad eyes seemed magnified by his spectacles. “Miss Chrysanthemum,” he whispered. “Is it true?”

Chrysanthemum opened her eyes and said, “I’m afraid so, Bill. How kind of you to see me.”

Bill stepped closer to the bed and held out the violets. “It’s not much, ma’am, but after all these years...”

Chrysanthemum raised an elegant, pale arm, took the flowers from him, and smiled. “Oh, thank you, dear. You have such a generous, warm-hearted soul.”

Bill’s frown quirked at one edge, a half-smile acknowledging the compliment. “Thank you, ma’am.” He crouched down by the bedside so that he was close to eye-level with her. “Have you been keeping well? I mean, I know that it’s...imminent, but have you been comfortable?”

Chryssy's eyes softened. With a free hand, she patted his arm. "Oh, Bill, I couldn't ask for a more peaceful send-off. My family has been very kind to me throughout it all." She sent Tyler a quick glance and a smile.

For a moment, Tyler felt a twinge of guilt, wondering if he should have visited his aunt sooner over the years. Talking on the phone wasn't quite the same as seeing her smile. He'd missed it, that light reassurance she could always send with a twitch of her lips.

Bill placed a hand on Chrysanthemum's wrist. "I'm glad to hear that," he said gently. "I really am." He then lowered his gaze, looking almost ashamed. "Miss Chrysanthemum, I know it's selfish of me, and I shouldn't be asking favors at a time like this, but...can you give me any last readings of my future? Anything to carry with me after you've gone to the next realm? If it's too much effort, I understand."

Tyler's aunt closed her eyes a moment, then sat up on the bed. "For you, Bill, I will. One more time, for my most loyal client. Free of charge."

Bill grinned, his eyes moist. "Thank you," he said. "Thank you, Chrysanthemum."

Amelia, who had been gathering up the tea things with a none-too-subtle glare at Bill, snorted loudly and let herself out of the room. Tyler, still sitting awkwardly at the foot of his aunt's bed, watched Chryssy set the violets down and reach for the man's hands. Simultaneously, they closed their eyes and waited. Tyler diverted his gaze from them to the violets, feeling like he was intruding on something intensely private. The flowers were a dark, glistening blue, the color of the gemstone inset he'd trashed hours earlier. Tyler frowned as an annoying tickle pricked the back of his throat. He started counting the violets, trying to distract himself from coughing; he got as far as eight, then coughed.

Chrysanthemum declared, "A boy."

Tyler turned back to them. Bill looked confused.

“What do you mean?” Bill asked.

Chrysanthemum smiled wide, dentures reflecting a perfect white. “Your wife, she’ll have a boy.”

“Lucy isn’t pregnant.”

“Not yet she isn’t.”

Her smile turned into a chuckle once realization dawned on Bill’s face. She winked and said, “That’s something to look forward to, isn’t it?”

Bill shook her hand. “Oh, thank you, thank you, Miss Chrysanthemum! Oh, wait until Lucy finds out! She’ll be ecstatic!” He seemed to catch himself and settled back into seriousness, though a hopeful twinkle lingered in his eye. “I hope your passage to the other realm is easy,” he said, his hands remaining in hers. “Send me a message when you get there; let me know you made it through okay.”

“I will, Bill.”

Chryssy and Bill broke their hands away from each other, and Bill stood up again, brushing off his knees. He murmured a goodbye and left the room in a hurry, either to escape a teary farewell or to rush towards a brighter future.

Chryssy fell back against the pillows and reached for another chunk of cheese. “He’s a nice man,” she said simply.

Tyler stretched and picked up the violets; he touched their dew-soft petals, his clogged sinuses watering his eyes, and murmured, “That’s a nice fortune for him to have.”

“It’s a self-fulfilling prophecy,” his aunt replied with a smirk.

Tyler felt an odd twinge at her words, and his throat hitched. He coughed, hiding his mouth in the crook of his arm and facing away from his aunt.

“You okay, dear?” Chryssy asked kindly. She lifted a hand towards him as though to pat him on the back, and he shrugged away from it.

“Fine,” he wheezed. He looked at her carefully, a woman bedridden yet with the same sparkle in her eye. “Just fine,” he said, voice hoarse. He affected a smile.

A small furrow appeared across Chryssy’s forehead as Amelia came through the door scowling. “The man’s half in love with you,” she said. She resumed her spot on the chair and glared at Chrysanthemum. “Stop encouraging him.”

Chryssy’s brow smoothed out as she chuckled. “For god’s sake, Amelia, it’s only *Bill*. I’m old enough to be his mother. And he’s *not* half in love with me.” She bit into the rubbery Edam cheese. “Have some of the cheese Tyler brought,” she said, poking at the basket. “It’s good.”

Amelia gave the basket a skeptical look. “I am fine for the moment, thank you.”

Tyler fiddled with the violets in his hands and tried to smell them, but his congested nose prevented him. Frustrated, the next breath out of his mouth sounded like harsh wind blowing through a hollow log. “Tell me my fortune, Chryssy,” he croaked.

Chrysanthemum and Amelia turned their heads to him.

“Whatever for?” said Amelia.

“Are you sure you’re okay, Tyler?” Chryssy asked.

The soft concern in his aunt’s voice made him panic, reminded him that she was on his side. “No, no, forget I said anything,” Tyler said, waving the question away with one hand. He

set the flowers down and pulled out the tissue to wipe his nose. “Better not to know everything, yeah? Takes the fun out of life.”

Chryssy frowned. “I know bullshit when I see it, Tyler Roosevelt Pierce.”

“Honestly, it was just a whim—”

“Tyler, what is wrong?” Amelia asked from her chair.

Tyler started, not used to hearing Amelia address him directly. His gaze connected with her gray eyes—eyes he could never find the will to lie to. He swallowed, feeling self-conscious and exposed.

“It’s—” he said.

The doorbell rang.

Amelia muttered something in Latin and stood up, breaking their stare. Tyler coughed in relief.

Chryssy eyed her nephew carefully, then said, “Give me your hand, Tyler.”

“Really, Chryssy, you don’t have to. I just thought—well, nothing, really, it’s nothing,” he said. “Just curious. Silly thoughts.”

She took his hand and pulled it a little closer toward her. “There’s nothing wrong with curiosity, Tyler,” she said. She raised her thinning eyebrows at him. “Besides, don’t you want something more specific than those horoscopes I put online?”

Tyler gaped. “How’d you know I look at those?”

She chuckled. “It’s pretty easy to figure out. I put up the statement of my impending death, and you’re the first relative through my door.”

“Oh.” Tyler fidgeted. Chrysanthemum gazed at him expectantly. He sighed, knowing she would not take ‘no’ for an answer now. “All right, Chryssy.”

She smiled and curled both hands around his own. “Close your eyes,” she said.

He did so, listening to the distant sounds of aunt Amelia attempting to shoo away a particularly chatty well-wisher. Closer, he heard Chrysanthemum’s soft breathing, and he imagined he could hear her heartbeat pulsing in her chest, a tender muscle churning out beats for over seventy years, trying to keep up with Chryssy’s vivacity. He tried to quiet the wheeze in his own breathing—it seemed too loud, like a baby crying in church. He sniffled and heard a fly trapped in between a screen and a window. He wondered just how it had gotten stuck in there.

“I was married once,” Chrysanthemum said suddenly.

Tyler’s head jerked up. He stared at her. “What? When?”

“Oh, decades before you were born,” she said. She released one of her hands and fiddled with a golden tassel on a pillow with half a smile. “He was in the military—a fighter pilot. Dashing, but very stupid. He died somewhere in the Alps. Heroically, I imagine.”

Tyler felt a stitch of discomfort—almost betrayal, as if some new face had suddenly invaded the picture he’d held of his aunt for years, the little one he kept on top of a bookshelf where she was wearing a big hat. He wondered what else he did not know about that picture—when and where had it been taken? Was it taken at someone’s wedding or a birthday? He did not even know who had taken the picture, and suddenly that felt like the most important detail he should know. “How come you never told me?” he asked.

“You never asked,” Chrysanthemum countered. She said it without malice, yet she squeezed his hand a little tighter. “Besides, we’re taking your fortune, and that’s when everyone talks about their love lives, silly.”

Tyler noticed that her hands felt cool to the touch—or maybe his hands had gotten warmer from guilt and embarrassment. He didn’t want to know his fortune. He didn’t want to

prove her wrong, to know if she had really been manipulating him and everyone for years. Out of everyone, he wanted to trust her as he always could.

“I’m sorry,” Tyler said, surprised and confused to find that he meant it.

“Oh, don’t be,” Chryssy replied, waving an arm as if to brush aside his concern. She smiled and leaned forward slightly. “You know, my husband may have been a good man, but he was very boring. I did much better the second time around.” She winked and leaned back. “Now, where was I on your fortune?”

Tyler gulped and redirected his gaze to the violets, which must surely be starving for water by now. “You haven’t told it yet,” he said. “But I don’t think—”

“Nonsense!” Chrysanthemum said. “Close your eyes again.”

Reluctantly, he did so, but this time it was his own heart he heard pounding in his chest, and he tried to be optimistic. Maybe her prophecy would be a sign that things were actually turning around. Maybe she would say that his girlfriend still loved him madly. Maybe she’d confirm the fat babies. Maybe she’d tell him that change was a good thing, and that there was something better waiting around the corner. Or maybe—

“Obstacles,” Chrysanthemum pronounced.

Tyler opened his eyes. His aunt was staring at him, and she gave his hands a quick squeeze.

“You have obstacles,” she repeated. “If you don’t confront and overcome them, you’ll succumb to despair.”

Tyler felt heavy with disappointment. “Oh,” he replied. “Okay.”

Amelia quietly reentered the room. She paused at the sight of Chrysanthemum's hands around Tyler's. "Cynthia sends her best wishes," she murmured to Chryssy, offering a small nod.

"That's kind of her," Chryssy replied, her gaze connecting with Amelia's before returning to her nephew.

"Tyler," said Amelia. "Would you like some shortbread?"

Tyler pulled his hands away from Chrysanthemum and turned to his other aunt. Amelia was gazing at him with one of her inscrutable expressions, the kind she had often made when he learned how to solve a certain type of math problem on his own, but only after a frustrating evening of explaining, re-explaining, re-wording, and re-phrasing had passed between them. Somehow both kind and discontented. "Yes," he found himself saying, though he'd intended to say otherwise. "Thank you, Amelia."

Amelia picked up the long-forgotten tea tray and carried it out of the room, sharing another brief glance with Chryssy as she did so.

Tyler bowed his head and stared at the rug, which repeated a pattern of interconnected gold circlets over and over again. He sighed.

"Tyler," said Chryssy, reaching a hand out to him again.

"I should help Amelia bring in the cookies," Tyler said, standing up. "I'll be right back." Without waiting for her to reply, Tyler left.

He stood in the hallway, gazing absently at a figurine of the Virgin Mary, and listened to the faint sounds of Amelia setting up yet another tea tray. For a brief moment, he wondered what his girlfriend would be doing now—whether she had moved out the last of her things from

the apartment yet. She probably had. He stepped towards the kitchen. “Would you like any help?” he asked.

Amelia was standing on a chair, reaching for a cookie tin on a high shelf in the cupboard. She looked over her shoulder. “I would appreciate it, Tyler,” she said. She carefully stepped off the chair to the floor again. “That shelf is always a little high for me.”

As he crossed the room, Tyler caught sight of a will on the dining table. He gestured to it before stretching toward the shelf. “Does she know how ‘imminent’ her death is?” he asked, as casually as possible. “I mean, Chryssy can’t know everything, right?” His fingers managed to grasp the tin, and he pulled it off the shelf with a light metallic scrape. When he turned, he saw Amelia gazing at the will.

“Amelia?”

Amelia sighed and took the cookie tin from him, carrying it over to a large plate. “Thank you, Tyler.” For a moment, she busied herself with arranging the shortbread stars on the plate. “She predicted it a year ago,” Amelia muttered. “But it’s only been during the past two weeks that her vertigo has been acting up.” She sighed and pulled at the string of her cross. “I don’t know, Tyler. I’ve never tried to know. I don’t feel like I should.” Amelia gestured to the teapot. “Would you carry that, please?”

Tyler picked up the teapot, casting a more concerned glance at the will. “But is she really sick? Or is it just another of her spells?”

Amelia started shuffling out of the kitchen. “I don’t know, Tyler,” she mumbled. Halfway across the room, the doorbell rang. She sighed in exasperation and set the tray on the counter, then turned to him. “But it makes me worried.”

Tyler had never heard Amelia say ‘worried’ before.

“Now,” she continued. “Would you be a dear and take the tray for me? I have to get the door.”

Tyler nodded, and he watched her stalk into the hallway. He picked up the tray and carried it to the purple bedroom door. When he stepped inside, he saw his aunt again the same way he had first seen her—her eyes closed, and her hair cascading outwards across the scarlet pillows. He set the tray on the armoire.

“Chryssy,” he said. “Aren’t you scared?”

She smiled at him with her eyes closed and beckoned him forward. “I’m not sure,” she replied.

When Tyler wrapped his arms around his aunt, he was surprised at how thin she seemed beneath the soft cotton of her nightie. Dread bolted through him, and he squeezed her tighter. The gift basket lay forgotten on the nightstand. The tea cooled. The parched violets were a splash of blue against the red coverlet, and the small porcelain elephants on the armoire were fixed in a perpetual trumpet. Everything in the room was awash in a new color, the trinkets like offerings placed at the shrine of a household god.

CHAPTER III:
PADDLEBOAT DROWNING

The lake changes when they least expect it. It begins smooth as green glass, with patches of brown algae thick enough to walk on. The wind changes. An arctic system crashing in, shoving elm branches out of the way and making gulls fly backwards, wings flapping valiantly. Whitecaps slap against the shore.

It is three hours between now and when someone will drown.

Two teenagers who have been dating for two years are getting leisurely drunk at the girl's mother's cottage. It's May, the weekend before the long weekend that cottagers come out to open their cottages. The boy shouts profanities at the lake and startles pelicans, secure in the knowledge that it takes the Mounties an hour to get their asses in gear and drive all the way from the city to a little private beach not labeled on Google. There's barely a soul around, except for the year-rounders, but they keep to themselves mostly—no one really knows what they look like.

The girl had wanted a nice, slow fuck where she could scream herself hoarse and not bother her roommate for once. But after they'd both had a time of it on the plastic-covered, sheetless mattress (the bedding was still in storage) and had accidentally clogged up the unreliable toilet by flushing down condoms ("My mom's going to kill me," she said), they found themselves with nothing left to do except drink beer.

The girl clicks her teeth against the rim of her beer can, gnawing on it slightly. "Hey," she says. "Think you'll ever want kids?"

The boy looks startled. "Why? You pregnant?"

"Naw, just curious."

"Jesus, give a guy a heart attack," the boy says.

She sticks her tongue out at him playfully, then turns her head to look out at the lake.

"What time is it?" he asks.

She checks her phone. “Dunno,” she says. “Mine’s dead. Probably four.”

The boy considers suggesting that they head back to the city. But there’s nothing to do in the city either. He belches once and repositions his chair so that it directly faces her. The rusty lawn chair squeaks and sinks into the dirt.

“Well, babe,” he says, inviting her to come up with something. The place was her idea, after all.

She drains the last of her beer, sighs, and chucks it in the fire pit. She studies him, wondering why he can’t just calm down and enjoy the place. She’s been trying to spend more time with him; he works a part-time job and they usually see each other only a couple of hours a week. She gives him an annoyed look.

“What?” he asks.

“What do you mean, ‘what’?” she says.

“What d’you want?”

“Nothing. I’m just looking.”

“Oh.” He wants to know what’s bothering her, but he knows he won’t get a straight answer from her the way she’s replying. “What d’you wanna do?” he asks.

“Dunno,” she says. She looks at the lake again. Across the way, speckles of cattle come down the hill to drink. It’s treeless and desolate over there, nothing but sun and cowpat. Not even a rusty boat launch. To the naked eye, it doesn’t look far away.

The boy feels a yearning. “What’s over there?” he asks.

The girl has been coming to this lake since she was a kid. She shrugs. “Mostly pasture. There’s an Indian reservation somewhere over there. Sometimes you see the horses.”

“What kind?” The boy’s eight-year-old dream of becoming a rodeo star at the Stampede never truly died out when he got older—he still goes every year, dragging whatever girlfriend he has at the time to watch the pros race around barrels and get thrown from broncs. The girl had enjoyed it, both times she’d gone with him.

“Um, I think it’s the Piapots,” she answers, meaning the tribe.

The boy refrains from repeating the question for the horses, worried that he might make one of them accidentally seem racist. “You ever been there?” he asks instead. “Seen ‘em up close?”

She rests a flip-flopped foot against the edge of the metal washer drum that makes up the fire pit. “Once,” she says. “Dad took me over there in his boat when I was a kid. Thought I was Christopher Columbus or something, exploring the New World.” She wrinkles her nose, remembering the stink of the horses and the overall disappointment. Her eight-year-old vision of finding a land of magic and Thunderbirds had been derailed. “Got bit by five thousand horse flies, though.”

The boy smiles, and he pinches her knee affectionately. She slaps his hand.

“Could do with some adventure around here,” he says. He pinches her again.

She swats his hand and scowls. “Ow,” she says pointedly. It isn’t the first time he’s pinched her before, and he knows she hates it.

“Sure you’re not up for a dip?” he asks, raising an eyebrow.

“No,” she replies. “I’m not swimming in that shit.”

Out of the corner of his eye, he sees a boat-shaped object leaning against the side of the cottage, out in the brushy area near where the septic tank is buried.

“What’s that?” he asks the girl, pointing at it with his beer can.

“Paddleboat,” she answers.

“No shit? Like the ones at the parks?”

“Yeah,” she says. “Mom loves ‘em. Says she gets her exercise with them.”

He jams his half-full beer into the dirt and inspects the paddleboat, lifting it slightly off the wall of the cottage. It’s a four-seater, with a canopy bundled up at the back. The front is emblazoned with the image of a pelican and the brand name—obviously, *Pelican*. The part where the foot pedals join to the boat look crusty with rust.

“Let’s take it out,” he suggests, dreaming of that other side with horses.

She looks wary. “Don’t think Mom’d like it if we did. I’ll be in enough shit for the toilet.”

“Aw, come on,” he says. “We’ll bring it back.”

She sighs and gets up from her chair, smiling a little because she can never resist her boyfriend’s puppy-dog eyes. The boy lowers the paddleboat so that it lies flat, and he grabs the back end by its handle. The girl hovers near the front of the boat, her arms at her sides, hesitant to touch the unwashed, spider-infested watercraft.

“C’mon, babe, I’m ready,” the boy says, mildly annoyed.

She reaches for the front handle and lifts, and they both stagger a bit as they try to readjust their grip and footing. She pulls forward, stumbling as she walks backward. It’s heavier than they thought; the weight strains their fingers. Luckily, the beach is just a few yards away from the cottage, but the boy slides on loose stones and bangs the paddleboat into one of his knees. He swears loudly.

“You okay?” she calls out, huffing.

“Yeah, yeah.” He readjusts his grip, switching hands. “Keep going.”

They make it to the shoreline of the pebbly beach and drop the paddleboat with a heavy *thunk* onto the sand. The girl kicks out rocks stuck in her flip-flops. The lake's surface is calm, the sun reflecting white off it in the distance. Cows low across the water, and they sound closer than they really are—sound carries far. It's not unusual to hear the fireworks three kilometers away at Glen Harbor on Canada Day. The boy shoves the paddleboat until just the tip of its front remains sticking to the shore.

"Ladies first," he says. She smiles a bit and steps into the right passenger seat, settling herself in with one hand on the steering handle. He gives another strong push and leaps into the left side, nearly falling out while he flails his arms around, trying to regain balance. The lake bursts into ripples, some of the water managing to slosh into the boat as he sits down in a rush. The girl laughs, a cruel-sounding cacophony that rings badly in his ears.

Some of the splashed lake water soaks into his jeans once he's properly seated, and he makes a face. The girl laughs harder. He sticks his hand in the lake and throws water at her. She shrieks.

"Ew, stop it!"

He cackles, mimicking the sound of her laugh.

She slicks the water off her arms and glares at him, wondering just how long it will be before he grows out of pulling pigtails and darting from whim to whim. She puts her hand back on the steering handle resting between them.

"Pedal backwards," she says, and they do. The boat retreats from the shoreline with a rhythmic churning noise and a flurry of bubbles that marks their path through the water like breadcrumbs.

The boy's banged knee twinges a bit, but he ignores it.

“Okay, now forwards,” she says, and she twists the handle a hard right. They pedal, and the pedaling mechanism makes an ungodly squeaking noise through the rust. The boat twists right until they no longer face the shoreline...and then keeps turning right, making them go in a circle.

“Babe,” the boy says.

She twists it a hard left, but the paddleboat is still turning right. “Piece of shit,” she says. She turns the handle left, right, left, right, but the boat just keeps spinning right.

The boy wonders just how much she claims to know about operating the paddleboat and gets fed up after the third spin around.

“For the love of God,” he says, and he grips his hand over hers, holding the handle straight. The paddleboat still tries to go right. He tilts the handle just slightly left, and the boat finally goes straight. “I’ve got it,” he tells her.

Her father had taught her how to drive boats when she was young, and she *knows* how they work. “No, I can handle it,” she replies.

The boy lets go and she straightens the handle. The paddleboat immediately veers right.

“Babe, let me steer it,” he says, gripping the handle over her knuckles again.

“I can do it,” she protests. “I’ve done it loads of times before.”

“Babe, you have no idea what you’re doing. Let me do it.”

She huffs and relinquishes the handle, and he adjusts it so that it curves slightly left, making the boat go straight at last. They end up paddling towards the other side of the lake, the pedals screeching on every downturn of a right foot. The sun hits them, and the paddleboat is resisting the boy’s grip on the handle, constantly pressing to go right. On every upturn, the boy’s knee reminds him that he banged it not that long ago. After fifteen minutes of silence and heat

and churning, the boy is unnerved that no one's said anything. He looks at his girlfriend and sees her legs pumping the pedals, her eyes blankly focused on the opposite shore as she worries about what her mother will say about the toilet.

She remembers her father telling her once, "Don't keep the wind at your back too long."

The boy suddenly pedals faster, and she gives him a baffled look as her feet momentarily slacken their pressure.

"Let's go faster," he says. He sends her a smile, wanting to cheer her up.

She looks at him like he's an idiot. "It doesn't *go* faster," she says.

He tries anyways, pedaling as if possessed, and she lifts her feet away from the whirling, screeching footrests. She waits about a minute for him to wear himself out. He abruptly stops, catching his breath, his knee protesting. The paddleboat did not speed up.

"I told you," she says, putting her feet back. She starts to pedal.

His legs feel tired. He rests his feet on the pedals without pushing.

A minute goes by.

The girl snaps, "*Pedal*, for god's sakes."

"I *am* pedaling."

"No, you're not! *I'm* doing all the pedaling."

"No, look, I'm pedaling!" He reluctantly starts pedaling along with her. The boat churns forward. The sun beats down.

At some point he looks behind them at the canopy. He stops pedaling. "Let's put up the canopy."

She also looks behind her. "How could we do that *now*?"

He twists an arm behind him and yanks on the metal rungs. The canopy bars lurch upright, the canvas still wrapped up, and three spiders land on the girl. She screams, swatting frantically at her arms and ruffling her hair. The boat rocks a bit. He drops the canopy and laughs.

“It isn’t *funny*,” she hisses, once the spiders have been removed.

“It’s *hilarious*,” he protests.

“*Grow up.*”

She sounds more than a little miffed.

The boy feels a twinge of guilt that mixes with anger, thinking to himself that she was the one who was laughing her head off before when he nearly fell into the water. He decides to concentrate on pedaling.

Every now and then he glances at her, trying to figure out what her deal is. A little more than an hour ago, they’d been screwing each other enthusiastically, and now they were wordlessly pedaling out into the middle of the lake, silent but for the rusty gears squealing. The boy hesitates to ask her what’s wrong. Whenever he’s tried to ask his girlfriend what’s wrong in the past, she would vaguely answer, “Nothing” or “Everything’s fine.” She tells him what’s wrong when she’s ready.

He is not good at waiting. “What’d I do?” he asks her.

“Nothing,” she replies, thinking of how often she is asked that immediately after he has done something to blatantly annoy her. She’s tired of being a scratched disc, sticking and screeching at the same point over and over.

“Why are you mad at me?” he entreats.

“I’m not mad at you.”

He knows it's a lie. She's too angry to look at him.

He stops pedaling. "Did I say something?"

"Keep pedaling."

"Babe, what's your deal?"

She sighs; her legs are tired. A cold breeze at the back of her neck makes her shiver. She doesn't want to explain again. "Let's just go back," she says.

"Why?" They are halfway across the lake. The boy still wants to touch ground on that wilder, rugged landscape across the way.

"Because I'm getting tired."

"But we're almost there!"

She looks at him and sees a child, blue eyes reflecting the frustration of trying to understand social nuances. He licks his upper lip briefly, and she notices more freckles on his nose than before. He looks desperate to please her. She's stuck between pushing him away and coddling him.

"Who said we were going across the lake?" she asks.

His shoulders slump. "Isn't that where we were—?"

"No. We never said we were going there."

The paddleboat turns itself right. The boy can't help feeling disappointed—the chance to explore a virtually untouched land with his girlfriend had seemed like something special they could have shared.

He stops the boat from turning. The girl looks up and says, "*Shit.*"

A tremendous thunderhead approaches from the north, the direction they had just come from.

“*Fuck*,” the boy hisses.

“Shit,” she says again. “We’ve gotta get back.” She starts pedaling immediately.

The boy is motionless, staring up at that huge black cloud curling up and out like fallout, then he starts pedaling along with her. His legs protest their exhaustion from pedaling for at least an hour; his knee viciously pangs.

The water resistance feels stronger to them than it did before; thighs ache. They pedal. The shore is more than a kilometer away.

A few minutes later, the girl shouts, “Quit screwing around and *pedal*, damn it!”

“I’m *trying*,” he snaps back. “My knee fucking hurts.”

She keeps her eyes fixed on the fast-approaching cloud. The wind is starting to pick up, rippling across the water, making liquid goosebumps. “Just pedal,” she says.

They keep pedaling.

The boy glances at his girlfriend. Her brow is stuck in a furrow. She’s biting her lower lip, breathing heavily with the exertion. Her nose looks sunburned, as do her shoulders. The picture of worry. For a split second, he can see her middle-aged—brown hair beginning to gray, crow’s feet around her eyes, fat-flabby arms, but with the same sunburn on her nose and shoulders. He can’t decide if she’s beautiful or terrifying. He keeps pedaling.

The wind swoops down, and wavelets begin to slap against the paddleboat. The sky darkens; thunder rumbles. The first spills of water overflow into the basin beneath their pumping feet. The shore is so far away. Muscles scream.

“Shit, shit, shit,” the girl mutters under her breath, a constant mantra. She remembers there’s no one out there to see them, that it takes the Mounties an hour to get out there, that her mom always nagged her to say where she was going before she went anywhere.

She looks in the back to see if there's a bail in the other seats, but she already knows there isn't one. They didn't wear lifejackets. Didn't even think to. She realizes how thirsty she is, how they left their beers in a cooler of melting ice on land.

The boy feels his right quadriceps seize as his knee throbs. He has to stop pedaling. The girl keeps pushing them forwards.

Their sandaled feet are now drenched as the pedals move downwards, ankles dunking into the swelling water, green particles swirling in it. Heels come up algae-freckled. A whitecap charges into the front of the paddleboat, and the edge of the boat sinks down. The boy tries to scoop out water with his hands, but another wave hits from the side, and he realizes it's useless.

"Shit. *Shit*," the girl says. She slides into the water.

The boy calls out her name in alarm.

"Get out of the boat!" she replies, one hand clinging to the side. "You're weighing it down, maybe we can still get it back swimming!"

He twists into the water and grabs onto an edge, but the paddleboat is already sinking. She tries to push it back up to the surface, to keep it afloat, futilely.

"Let it go, babe. It's gone now."

"Damn it. God *damn* it," she pants, but lets go. The paddleboat brushes against their legs as it sinks. At first, it seems to resist sinking, going slow as molasses, but suddenly it changes its mind and accept its fate, plunging rapidly once it gets to the boy's knee. The girl strikes the water with an arm and screams in fury.

They tread water. The shore is still ages away, and their legs feel like jelly. They are just keeping their heads above the whitecaps. The storm cloud has shifted fully overhead now,

blackening out the sky. It has started to rain. The water is cold, still recovering from the snowmelt in April. The boy swims closer to the girl.

“Should we try to swim back?” he asks.

Her mind is stuck between two choices: conserve energy, or risk being overtaken with exhaustion fighting the waves. “I don’t know. I don’t know,” she answers tiredly.

They focus on floating above the water. It’s raining in earnest now. A flash of lightning splinters the sky. The waves push them farther away from the beach. An enormous swell develops right next to them and engulfs their heads, and they swallow an uncomfortable gulp of seaweed-flavored lake water.

Spluttering, coughing, the girl realizes she might die out there.

The boy feels a pull on his leg, as if the rusty *Pelican* were an anchor dragging him down into the ancient glacial silt below. His limbs feel slow and heavy and numb with cold. He drinks more water and swallows. He knows he will die out there.

He reaches and strokes a hand across his girlfriend’s shoulders, comforted that he won’t die alone, at least. She will know where he was when it happened, she’ll see him go—somehow, it seems important for someone to know where he will be when he dies. That someone sees him off. He keeps his eyes fixed on her, her drenched hair plastered to her skull, her ghostly pale hands weaving through the water, her face contorting as she coughs up lake.

He says her name. A wave comes and swallows them. They resurface and splutter for air.

“No, no,” the girl moans quietly, shaking her head, denying what’s happening. She coughs some more. She squeezes her eyes shut and keeps shaking her head.

He touches her hand. “Look at me,” he says.

She opens her eyes and stares at him. She can see in his eyes that he's afraid. His hand feels like the dead limb of a cephalopod coiled around hers. She wants to push him off, a heavy weight on her arm, but she can't, not just yet, not when he looks so vulnerable, eyes huge and infantile.

For the first time, the boy is wondering what it would be like to marry her. He knows it wouldn't work, but he likes to imagine they'd get on well after the divorce, be friendly with each other when meeting at the supermarket, have occasional slip-ups together, still call sometimes, just to chat a little, keep each other informed, be in each other's lives. He decides he wants that, at least, with her. He won't get to have that now.

The boy tries to tell her this, voice competing with the sound of waves clapping, but the girl looks past him, over his shoulder.

He begs her name.

She gives him one last, wide-eyed glance, then she pushes away. She swims with strong, smooth strokes, not towards any shore, but directly into the waves. He shouts after her. She keeps swimming. The boy sees her rise over the crest of one wave, then another. On the third wave, he sees her pale arm slicing through the water, and that's the last he sees.

He won't see her again.

CHAPTER IV:
THE DOG GROOMER

Emmanuel Higgins could not be trusted with a razor. It was embarrassing, but he had to rely on his assistant Beatrice to do all the razor-work with the dogs. Before there was Beatrice, it had been his older brother Michael, who shaved the dogs so fine it was like touching baby skin. Emmanuel knew how to make the fussiest dog settle for a bath, how to clip their nails just right, and with a pair of simple clippers, he was a decent mat-remover. But when confronted with the electric buzz of blades, he lost his steady hand.

So he hired Beatrice, a woman about a decade his senior who cackled like a witch when she read the comics during slow days at work. She was doing that now, her feet propped up on a chair as Emmanuel was hosing down Sophia, Mrs. Wenceslaus's Shih-Tzu, in the tub.

"See, Emmanuel, this is why we're not cat people." She flapped the newspaper around so Emmanuel could see it and pointed at the *Garfield* strip. It featured the roly-poly tabby refusing to get out of his basket, instead dreaming about sleeping in an infinite loop. "The little furballs are too much like us," she said.

He smiled a bit and fed Sophia a treat, reaching for a towel. He wasn't sure how Beatrice managed to still look so young—Emmanuel himself was starting to feel the slowness of age, an ache in an elbow that was once dislocated, an expanding waistline. Beatrice, meanwhile, seemed to flit about, bird-like—her glossy black hair was tied up in a bun; her eyes were keen and sharp like a crow's. Maybe it was cosmetics, but she pulled it off well.

"What's the *Peanuts* one?" he asked her, removing the dog from the tub and carrying it to the table.

"Nothing special," Beatrice replied. "It hasn't been the same since Schulz died."

He hummed in assent and began clipping the hair around the dog's eyes. Sophie tried to lick his hand at each swipe.

“Funny how that happens,” he said. He glanced at the family portrait he kept hanging next to the massive cabinet of dog shampoos: him, his brother Michael, their younger sister Gabriela, and their parents and grandparents all huddled together, squeezing to fit into one frame. It was taken when Emmanuel was five, and it featured Michael in a Boy Scout uniform and Gabriela in a frilly white church dress that she would later grow to hate. Emmanuel had put up the portrait two months after his brother had died from an aneurysm.

“The magic dies a little when they die,” Emmanuel said. He smiled softly at Beatrice, who’d glanced up from the paper with those sharp eyes of hers. “You should’ve seen my brother, Beatrice; he charmed the coats off those dogs.”

She crossed her arms and cheekily replied, “Oh, am I *that* boring a replacement?”

It sent a spark of panic through Emmanuel, who was terrified of losing her or insulting her; a couple of months back, he had openly critiqued her brusque shaving technique by comparing it to the finesse of Michael’s, and she’d laid down the line right then and there that she wasn’t expecting to be criticized for a job she’d made her living on. The flash of temper had surprised Emmanuel, who was used to hearing his brother’s guiding remarks over his shoulder and had come to expect such a practice among partnered groomers; of course, he’d apologized, and Beatrice had assured him that there was no real harm done just as long as he promised not to do it again.

Beatrice was crucial—she handled the razors, and she kept the emptiness of the grooming salon at bay. On the day he’d hired Beatrice, he’d told Gabriela all about her, and his sister had replied, “Oh, boyo, you have a crush.” There was truth in it—by and large, Beatrice had a relaxed air that he liked and a tongue-in-cheek sense of humor when it concerned her ex-husband; she recounted her struggles to get him to pay child support with a laugh, as though she

viewed her life as a tragic sitcom. Emmanuel found her stories intriguing, sad, and funny all at once—she didn't keep secrets about herself, and he liked that.

But with the amount of times she brought up her ex over the several months she and Emmanuel had worked together, and with her insistence that “she'd never let a man hijack her life again,” Emmanuel soon became paranoid about how he acted around her—he tried to make sure he was always respectful, that she knew her help was appreciated, and that she was welcome at the salon every day. Every now and then, Beatrice fondly called him “her fine gent,” usually the day after a harrowing row of some sort with the ex, and it made Emmanuel feel like she appreciated him, too.

Emmanuel rushed to correct his error. “No no no, you're not boring at all—you have your own magic, Beatrice. It's just different.”

When she smiled at Emmanuel's compliment, it felt like a soft breeze blowing through a hot room.

“I'm just teasing,” she reassured him. “You miss him a lot, don't you?”

Emmanuel nodded and continued running a brush through Sophia's coat, breaking up a few of the tangles. When the bell over the salon door chimed, Beatrice got up to answer it. As she passed by and patted his shoulder comfortingly, Emmanuel thought he could smell her ginger-scented hand lotion, and he carried that light touch with him the rest of the afternoon.

When he came home that evening, Gabriela was in the hallway with her husband and a tray of shortbread cookies. Emmanuel shook hands with his brother-in-law, and Gabriela greeted him with a hug that pressed her pregnant belly into his naturally tubby one. She asked how he was getting on with his lady friend.

“She’s just a friend, Gabby. Business is going well.”

She pinched his arm and said, “Not the way you talk about her, boyo. You should be picking up your feet and proposing by now.”

He smiled and pinched her arm in return. “You just want to plan another wedding, Gabby. We can’t have one every year.”

“Why not?” she laughed. “It would make mama happy to see you settled.”

At that, their mother—her hearing still selectively sharp after all those years—called from the kitchen, “And let some other woman take *mi gordito* away? Never! Gabriela, come help me with these vegetables.”

His sister waddled off into the kitchen as her husband went out to their car to finish bringing in their things for their weekend visit. Gabriela and her husband did not live very far away from the family house—it was about a three-hour drive—but it had become something of a tradition on and around *Día de los Muertos* for the family to get together for the weekend to celebrate. Day of the Dead was a Sunday that year, and the family planned to spend Saturday shopping together for the various foods and supplies they’d need for the picnic at the graves.

Emmanuel walked into the sitting room and gazed at the table holding marigolds and all the pictures of those who had passed—his grandparents, his father, and his brother. He paused at each picture, murmured a little prayer under his breath, and lingered on Michael’s. It was his mother’s favorite picture of Michael—one from his high school prom, where he was wearing a robin’s-egg-blue suit, a mullet, and a terrifying moustache better suited to the seventies. His mother liked it because it made her eldest still seem like her young and healthy boy; Emmanuel liked it because it made his brother seem a little more human.

Growing up, Emmanuel thought his elder brother knew everything about the world: with a patience that was unusually steadfast, Michael answered every single question that Emmanuel would pose to him. When he asked Michael what the answers to his math homework were, his brother would glance at the problems and tell him. On the other hand, when Emmanuel had brought the problems to his professorial English father beforehand, his father would tell him the steps to solve the equations, but he then refused to tell Emmanuel if the answers he came up with were right, insisting that it was the process, the *steps*, that was important. Michael had dispensed answers that adults refused to tell him: what happened to people when they died, where babies came from, why his grandfather couldn't read. Emmanuel thought of his brother as an easygoing guru, one that spread knowledge by simply *telling* it, rather than making a puzzle out of it. Everything had come so naturally to Michael that Emmanuel sometimes found it suffocating.

The first two months after his brother's death, the dog grooming salon he and his brother had run together had felt like an echoless canyon—Emmanuel asking questions into a void that never answered back. He found himself subconsciously trying to hand over implements to an empty space beside him, imagining he'd heard his brother's curt "*Let me.*" Dogs were returned looking disheveled or worse, nicked. He'd lost customers. He'd lost money. It was as though his skills had been amputated from him, leaving only a phantomlike semblance of what they once were.

Emmanuel touched the top of the picture frame with one finger, made the sign of the cross, and turned from the stand to help his brother-in-law carry suitcases up the stairs. When he reached the landing, his cell phone went off.

It was a strange time for customers to call, but there was a certain list of important clients from the fancier side of town that Emmanuel allowed nearly unlimited scheduling access—they

were the dog showers, the ones that demanded perfection, the ones that paid a little extra to have the more expensive shampoos and treatments. Considering that he still was working to earn back his losses and he was trying to regain and maintain his clientele, Emmanuel was willing to be bothered outside the normal hours.

“Woof n’ Wash Dog Salon, this is Emmanuel. How can I help you?”

“Hi, it’s Amanda Coivers. I know I had an appointment for two weeks from now, but I really need to move it up—turns out the competition is happening earlier than I was expecting—could I move it up to tomorrow?”

Emmanuel smiled; Mrs. Coivers tipped well, even if she was a touch absentminded. She had a poodle. “That can be arranged, Mrs. Coivers. It’s for Fig Newton, yes?”

“Yup, that’s him. Could you make an appointment around one?” she asked.

Emmanuel waffled for a moment, remembering that his family *did* have plans for the next day, but it would be better than missing out on the official grave visit Sunday. “Absolutely, Mrs. Coivers. We’ll see you at one tomorrow.”

She thanked him and hung up; Emmanuel carried the suitcase the rest of the way to the guest room, cheerfully made a mental note to call Beatrice to ask her to come in tomorrow, and meandered down the stairs to the call of dinner.

His mother and Gabriela were arranging the dishware and steaming bowls of vegetables and tortillas and beans at one end of the dining table that held far too many vacant seats than they were used to. Once the four of them had sat down and given thanks, Emmanuel decided to break the news that he couldn’t go shopping with them tomorrow.

His mother scowled. “Oh, *gordito*, must you? Your sister’s only in town for the weekend. It’s *our* time together.”

Emmanuel felt a small pang of guilt, but he knew his mother wouldn't argue too much with him about it—not when she knew it was for the grooming salon, which she seemed to view fondly as Michael's last 'living' legacy to the family. His mother had a drive to keep Michael "alive" in whatever way she could, which Emmanuel understood.

"You know how the salon is, *mami*," he said.

She sighed theatrically and handed him a plate of chicken.

Gabriela smiled a little. "I know it's important, boyo. But it's not for the whole day, is it?"

"No," he answered.

"Besides, it's more time to court your lady love, isn't it? Maybe you can ask her to come with us after the appointment," Gabriela said.

"I'm not *courting* her, Gabby. I'm her employer." Emmanuel scooped up a forkful of rice and pondered a moment before he took a bite. "But I will ask her."

Gabriela and her mother exchanged a pleased glance. Emmanuel resolutely ignored that telling look and turned to his brother-in-law to ask him how work at the logging plant was going.

When he phoned Beatrice after the family had settled in to watch the news together, Emmanuel was surprised to hear Beatrice's son answer.

"Jordan?" he asked. "It's Mr. Higgins—can I talk to your mother, please?"

Her son sounded a bit subdued—an unusual tone for him. "Oh, hi Mr. Higgins. Um, Mom can't really hold the phone right now. Hang on."

Emmanuel immediately stood up and exited the sitting room into the hallway; his family had muted the TV during a commercial break, and they watched him leave with curious and concerned eyes. Something was wrong. Something had happened.

Beatrice's voice came on the line. "Thank you, sweetheart, you don't have to hold it for me—I have another hand," she said to her son.

"Beatrice? What's wrong?" Emmanuel asked.

She chuckled one of her low-pitched, self-depreciating laughs. "Oh, well, I went and broke my wrist today."

Emmanuel felt his stomach drop, followed immediately by a boil of anger. "Was it your husband?" he murmured, trying not to let his family overhear.

At that, she gave out a bark of a laugh. "What? Oh, heavens, *no*. He's in Vegas shacking up with a drag queen last I heard. He's too busy handling other things, if you know what I mean." He could practically hear the wink at the end of the sentence.

Emmanuel exhaled a little in relief, but the wave of anxiety only came crashing back. "Your wrist?" he asked, fearing the worst. "Which one?"

"The right one," she answered. "I slipped on some ice in the driveway and landed hard on it. But I'm set up in a nice cast, some *fine* painkillers, and I've got my little helper here fetching me things, so it's not too terrible."

"I'm sorry," Emmanuel said, smiling a little at her optimism. "...Mrs. Coivers called. She wanted an emergency appointment for tomorrow at one."

"With the poodle?"

"Yes, that one."

There was a pause, and then Beatrice said, "She's the one who tips like a sultan."

“Yes.” Emmanuel swallowed. “Please, Beatrice, I need you there.”

“I don’t know what I can do,” she replied, her tone sobering for the first time since the conversation had started. “I’m really sorry, Emmanuel, but I just don’t know.”

“Please come,” Emmanuel said, starting to pace, trying to think of a Plan B. “Just talk me through it. You don’t have to do anything, just watch and tell me what to do. We’ll make it work.”

“I’d have to bring Jordan...I’d promised him we’d do a movie day tomorrow...”

“I’ll treat you both to ice cream after,” Emmanuel countered. “It won’t take long. It’s just one appointment.”

There was a longer pause. “Okay. Okay, we’ll come.”

He smiled in gratitude. “Thank you, *thank you*, Beatrice, I really appreciate this.”

“I can’t promise I’m a good teacher,” she added.

“You’ll be great. We’ll be great. It’ll work,” he said, for a moment unsure whether he was trying to reassure her or himself. “I’ll see you tomorrow?”

“Yeah, sure.”

When he hung up, he turned and saw his sister standing in the doorway, one hand on the doorframe and another on her belly.

“Is everything all right?” she asked, coming towards him.

He hesitated. He wouldn’t know if everything was all right until tomorrow. “I think so,” Emmanuel said. “Shoot, I forgot to ask her about coming with us afterwards.”

By the time Mrs. Coivers had dropped off Fig Newton, Beatrice had still not arrived at the salon. Emmanuel wondered if he should phone her and see if she was having trouble—

maybe driving one-handed was proving a struggle? Maybe she was having trouble with Jordan somehow? Instead, he started going through the steps to washing the dog, which he could do with practiced ease. Get the water the right temperature, open all the necessary bottles beforehand, avoid getting water in the ears. Draw a line of shampoo down his back, lather and scrub in with fingers.

He was halfway through drying the poodle, and he was beginning to worry. Maybe she had hurt more than she'd thought when she slipped on the ice yesterday? Maybe there was a hip or a knee involved as well. He was itching to get to his phone but did not want to leave the dog half-dry just yet. Fig Newton seemed to have picked up on his nervousness, because the dog was squirming, restlessly snuffling at his fingers, barking, trying to get off the table.

When Emmanuel deemed that the dog was dry enough, he called Beatrice only to receive a busy signal. Confused, he hung up and went back to Fig Newton, who had urinated on the table. He huffed in exasperation, put the dog on the floor and tied him to a stand, fetched some paper towels and disinfectant. He cleaned off the table, glanced at his watch. Forty minutes later. He tried phoning Beatrice again but got no answer.

Debating what else he could do, Emmanuel put Fig Newton back on the table, picked up a paw, and began clipping his nails. The dog resisted him holding his paws, tugging backwards and making whining noises.

"Hush, you know me." He squeezed the paw and got the last nail on it, moving to the next one. Hind legs scrabbled madly, nails clicking.

At that moment, Beatrice came into the salon, looking like she had run out of the house without bothering to comb her hair or put on makeup. She held Jordan by the hand, and her shoulders drooped a bit.

“Thank goodness!” Emmanuel said, setting the dog’s paw down. “I was getting worried you wouldn’t come.”

She smiled a tiny bit, but it didn’t quite reach her eyes. “Sorry to make you worry, my fine gent. I was held up by certain selfish people in the world.”

He knew right away it was her ex-husband, but it wasn’t the normal offhand attitude she took toward the man—she was far more somber than usual. “What happened?”

She turned to her son, who was holding a coloring book and looking up at his mother with spectacled eyes. “Sweetie, why don’t you color something wonderful for me in the lobby area? You don’t want to listen to us talk about boring things.”

Jordan nodded, mumbled an “okay,” and trudged away, clutching the coloring book and three crayons as though they were china pieces he was afraid of dropping.

Beatrice dropped her purse into a chair and came over to pet Fig Newton with her left hand. “Andrew’s run off to Peru, taking my child support with him.” She sighed. “Should’ve known he’d make a break for it sooner or later.”

Emmanuel had no idea what to say to that. He couldn’t think of anything helpful at all. It was the last thing he’d been expecting. And they needed to shave this dog. “I’m sorry,” he said. It was all he could think of.

She shrugged, but her heart did not seem to be in it. “I’m sure we’ll get by—not like the state will just drop us, but, you know, it still makes things difficult. It won’t be the money that it was—Andrew has a lot of it, but he doesn’t think it’s worth sharing. That bastard just has his heart set on making life harder for us.” She suddenly scowled, her dark eyebrows furrowing together. “You know, it took me a long, long time to learn I shouldn’t rely on anybody but myself.”

“Isn’t there...Isn’t there some way to make him pay up?” Emmanuel offered, trying to give her some ray of hope—the bitter expression on her face was something he’d never seen before.

She snorted. “Oh, sure. If they find him. That might be fifty-fifty, though, and probably months or years too late. He may be a bastard, but he’s a smart one.”

Emmanuel floundered in the silence, wanting to comfort her, wanting to get Fig Newton over with, wanting to give her those days off she asked for, or even just to say something that could help her or make her laugh again. The dog in between them fidgeted, three-fourths of his claws still making small clicking noises against the table.

“We should get on with it then, yeah?” he said at last, gesturing to the poodle.

Beatrice sighed, pushed hair out of her face, and blandly said, “Guess so. An extra buck’s an extra buck now.”

Emmanuel nodded. He opened a drawer and fetched out the razor, plugging it in to a wall socket. He stared at the instrument in his hand; when he turned it on, it felt like he was suddenly holding a snarling rat that was ready to bite him at any second. The dog turned his head wide-eyed toward Emmanuel, having heard the whirring noise start up. He inadvertently glanced toward the family picture, seeing Michael’s eyes staring back at him.

Beatrice hooked two fingers from her left hand into Fig Newton’s collar in an attempt to keep the dog still. She looked directly into Emmanuel’s face, and he noticed for the first time that her eyes had green flecks in amidst the brown.

“Okay, you have to shave with the grain,” she said, but the words sounded muddled to his ears, mixed with the mechanical whirring. He tentatively lowered the snarling instrument to the

dog's fur, just hovering above the curls. He looked to Beatrice; she stared back. "With the grain," she repeated. "Not directly on the skin."

Emmanuel placed the instrument against the dog's back and jerked it roughly. Fig Newton startled. Emmanuel immediately pulled the razor away. "I can't," he said. "I can't, I've hurt him."

"No, it's fine," Beatrice said. "See, he's not hurt. You just did it roughly, suddenly. He wasn't expecting it. Just sort of...glide into it."

"How?"

"For heaven's sake," she muttered, and placed her hand on his wrist.

He felt his pulse jump. Her left hand felt softer; it was missing calluses. She pulled his arm back and forth, trying to mimic the "gliding" motion.

"See, like that. Down, and out. Down, and out. It's not hard."

He wanted to keep her there. "Do it along with me."

"I have to keep the dog's head still."

"Just once."

"Once," she agreed.

They glided slowly across the dog's back, the whirring noise muffled by thick fur. Emmanuel reveled at the simple contact, the warmth and comfort of being guided again. It was like dancing.

"Mom!" Jordan called from the doorway, and man, woman, and dog jumped. There was a yelp, a clatter, and a holler. When the commotion came down, a man and a dog were bleeding.

"Jordan!" Beatrice snapped, struggling to hold the whimpering dog in place. "We're trying to work!"

Jordan was frozen in place, holding a completed coloring picture of a tabby cat.

Emmanuel sucked at a bleeding cut on his thumb, shaking all over. When he saw the cut on Fig Newton's back, he groaned and saw a day's profits down the drain and a valuable customer lost. "No, no, no." He rushed over to a cabinet and tried to find the first aid. "I knew it, I just *knew* this would happen," he said, pulling down a cloth and an antibiotic cream. "Beatrice, look what you made me do."

He hadn't meant to say that out loud. It was meant to stay in his head, where all the sudden heart-skips and sparks that Beatrice made were kept locked inside his memories.

Her head snapped in his direction, her dark eyes flashing. He knew it was the moment when he'd done what he'd always feared he would do—insult her. "What *I* made you do?! I didn't make you do anything!" she retorted, letting go of the dog. The animal leapt to the floor and found the nearest chair to cower under.

"No, Beatrice, I'm sorry—"

"*I'm* the one who made you an incompetent dog groomer? *I'm* the one who nicked the dog? No, I'm the one who cancels a day with my son to run down here and get blamed for things." She glared him down, and Emmanuel could already hear the silence of the salon swarming. He felt a chill where her hand had grasped his wrist. He took a step towards her, ready to fall to his knees. He still needed to ask her to come with his family after the appointment, to have her meet his sister and fill up that too-vacant dining table with her and Jordan.

"I'm done," she said, storming to her purse and grabbing her son's hand.

"Beatrice, please, I didn't—"

"I don't care. I'm done. I'm done with everything. You, Andrew, everything."

She didn't turn around, but Emmanuel saw Jordan turn to give him one last look, confused and wide-eyed. He listened to the door shut, the dog whimpering. Her car was driving away, and Emmanuel felt like his insides had been scooped out. He sat in a chair, waited. Soon even the dog became quiet, and Emmanuel was left with the echo of his own voice asking questions that no one could answer and the painted eyes of his brother watching lifelessly over everything.

CHAPTER V:
SOCIAL OBSERVATION STUDY – OBSERVER #A2651

Social Observation Study



100 College Drive, Box 5002
North Bay, ON, Canada
P1B 8L7

Tel: 705.474.3450

Email: sos@nipissingu.ca
www.socialobservationstudy.org.ca

Recording Everyday Life in Canada

Social Observation Study Application Form (Pre-registration)

Please complete this form and send it to us by email or postal address as above.

Title: Mr.

First name: Arnold

Surname: Furlong

Sex: Male

Year of birth: 1932

Full home postal address:

29 Maple Drive
Little Long Lake, ON
P0G 1Y0

Email address: N/A

Telephone number: 705.725.2535

Where did you first hear about the Social Observation Study?

I heard about it from the Postmaster. She was telling me her daughter was participating in this study, and it sounded like an interesting way to pass the time.

Why do you want to write for the Social Observation Study?

(This information will not be used to consider your application.)

I'm getting too old to help out much around the community, but maybe I can still give something to our nation's history, the way I see it. It also gives me something to do in the evenings.

Social Observation Study



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Recording Everyday Life in Canada

12 September 1999

Dear Mr. Furlong,

Thank you for your interest in participating in our study! We have accepted your application and are looking forward to receiving your responses.

In the Social Observation Study, we send a panel of writers 2-3 themed directives each season on both opinion-based and personal topics over the course of a year; these topics vary from current events, family and close relationships, sporting events, and general questions about everyday life and culture, etc. Your Social Observer number is **A2651** – we ask that in your replies to our directives, you use this number instead of your name.

Correspondents may email, type, write by hand, draw, send photographs, diagrams, cuttings from the press, poems, stories, letters, and so on in response to the directives. No stress is placed on "good grammar," spelling, or style. The emphasis is on self-expression, candour, a willingness to be a vivid social commentator, and to tell a good story.

We ask that you send us a Self Portrait of yourself: this can be as long or as short as you wish but it should serve to introduce you to us. You should include your year of birth and your sex, your address, your occupation, and some indication of your home life (whether you are married or single, who shares your home and so forth). After that, it is up to you. This Self Portrait is not made public until 50 years later—so you can write as freely as you like.

We also ask that you please complete and return the Copyright form included in this letter. We ask you to do this so that we have a proper understanding with you about the use of your contributions to the study. See the Frequently Asked Questions sheet for further information on copyright and privacy.

Thank you again for your interest in contributing to our study.

Sincerely,

Carol Yearling and Kenneth Silverman

29 Maple Drive
Little Long Lake, ON P0G 1Y0
18 September 1999

Dear Ms. Yearling and Mr. Silverman,

You asked for a “Self Portrait” of myself. It feels like I’m repeating a lot of the things you asked for, considering it’s in the application form I sent earlier, but I guess it must be some kind of study formality.

I was born in 1932, male, my address you can see in the upper-right-hand corner. I’m retired now, but I used to work as a carpenter back in the day. I also rent out a couple of cottages in Muskoka (a region I’m sure you’re familiar with) on Little Long Lake. Guess that makes me a landlord. One of the cottages is down at the East end (closer to Fort Loring). The other one neighbours me, and we’re closer to Fleming’s Landing. The East one has a married couple from Mississauga who rents it out seasonally. West one’s empty at the moment. They say I’m raising the price too high for it but I had some trouble with the previous tenants—they were making a mess of the place, and they didn’t seem to understand that a compost pile doesn’t take up the whole yard. I kept seeing more and more people “staying over” there, too, who didn’t seem to ever leave. I’m convinced they were trying to turn it into some kind of commune, and I didn’t want to live next door to a bunch of kids who can’t pick up after themselves.

My home life’s pretty quiet. I’m a widower—my wife Joyce passed about three years ago. (I know you asked that we don’t include the names of others, but I figure that since she’s passed, she wouldn’t mind. She always wanted to be in papers.) We didn’t get to have any children. Sometimes my brother and his wife come to visit with their son and daughter—usually in the summer, so the kids can go swimming and whatnot—but they live out in Kenora, so it’s a bit of a drive.

Other than that, there’s not a whole lot to say about me. I enjoy the odd card game down at the community centre, and I keep myself busy making tables and other odds and ends in my woodshed for people who ask.

Sincerely,

Arnold Furlong (A2651)

Social Observation Study

The Social Observation Study

FALL 1999 DIRECTIVE

Recording Everyday Life in Canada

Please start each part of your directive reply on a separate sheet of paper with your SO number (NOT name), sex, age, marital status, the town or village where you live, and your occupation or former occupation.

Remember not to identify yourself or other people inadvertently in your reply.

Part 1: Neighbours

How do you define the word “neighbour”? Do you use it just to refer to the people next door, or more generally? How generally? Would you refer to anyone living in your neighbourhood as a “neighbour”? How would you define your neighbourhood, if you think of yourself as having one?

What do we expect of neighbours, and what relationships do we actually have with them (e.g. milk borrowing, feeding the cat, keeping an eye on things when we are away, keeping a spare front door key)? Does there seem to be an etiquette protocol in your neighbourhood governing behaviour? What in your opinion and experience are the major causes of bad relations between neighbours? What’s the difference between a “good” neighbour and a “bad” neighbour?

Part 2: Sex

Here are a few prompts to guide your reply, but you should write what YOU feel is important and relevant. Some of these topics are ones which appeared in the 1967 survey and it will be useful to be able to make comparisons. Remember: your reply will be completely confidential, with personal identification visible only to Mr. Silverman and myself, so don’t hold back! 😊

Early years and adolescence: learning about the facts of life; pleasant and unpleasant experiences; masturbation; impressions of adult behaviour; awareness of your own sexuality; experiences with people of the same or the opposite sex; sex education at school (or elsewhere); your own sexual activities if any; general/family attitudes to sex and sexual morality and how you did or didn’t fit in.

Adult years: You can write as much as you wish here: it is useful to cover key events and stages in your life which are relevant. In this section, you should concentrate on your own direct experiences.

The wider world: Use this section to share your views and experiences on how things have changed over the years (if they have) in terms of sexual morality and sexual behaviour. Write about the way sex is handled by the media, by religious communities, by politicians, by the health and social services.

Part 3: Where do you see yourself in a year's time?

Picture yourself in one year's time – in the year 2000! Where do you think you will be? What will you be doing? What do you already know will have changed for you? What might change for you and those around you? Are you planning any changes now? How much control do you feel you have about your future?

Can you speculate about your wider community – changes at work or school/university or in your neighbourhood? How will they be in a year's time do you think? What about the political and economic scene in this country and in the world? What do you predict? And how do you feel about what you foresee?

Please post your response to: **The Social Observation Study, The Library, Nipissing University, North Bay, ON P1B 8L7** Or by email to: **sos@nipissingu.ca**

29 Maple Drive
 Little Long Lake, ON P0G 1Y0
 26 September 1999

Fall Directive 1: Neighbours

A2156, male, 67, widower, Little Long Lake, retired carpenter and landlord. It's funny that this should be the first directive, because I gained some new neighbours much more quickly than I was expecting. They're both older guys like me, and they said they were looking for a quieter, more relaxing place to live. One of them (A) is a postcard artist, and they said that the surroundings might be a good source of inspiration for him. I'm not really one to trust the artsy types (those types tend to be bad at paying the rent on time), but the other one (S) says he's a retired cop, so I figure that balances it out.

I'll admit I raised an eyebrow when I met them in person—on the phone, the one I was talking to mentioned his partner by name, and his partner has one of those names that can be for a man or a woman, so I just assumed...but I figure that they can't be any worse than the hippies, especially since one of them's a former policeman. They just moved in two days ago, and I figured I'd be a good neighbour and help them carry some of the furniture in, so I went over. They just had a few things—a bed, chesterfield, pool table, some art stuff, one tiny kitchen table, a few boxes and bags of other stuff. Seems odd that guys their age don't have more than that. Maybe they were living in one of those cramped city apartments. I asked them a bit about the pool table. I could tell it was an old one, but they've kept the wood pretty well polished. Turns out that S is the big pool player, "the best in his unit" when he was on the force, according to him. After we'd gotten everything out of their U-haul and into the cottage, I gave them a few tips on looking after the yard. I warned them that there's a few things that look like weeds but are actually herbs leftover from when Mrs. P— (my neighbour from two years ago) planted them. I didn't really want to bother them too much afterwards—moving stuff around tends to tire me out faster than it used to, and I figured they probably felt the same. Before I went home, though, S invited me over on Thursday for a game of pool. I said I wasn't sure if I had an eye doctor appointment that day or the next day, but that I'd let them know the next day. I still have to get back to them on that, actually, now that I think of it. Truth be told, I've just never been that great at pool.

But to answer your actual questions: I think of neighbours as folk that live reasonably close to you, generally people on the same road as you or at least people within walking distance. I don't have very many of those on Maple Drive—well, there are several cottages on this road, but most of the cottage owners only come out in the summer, rather than living out here year-round. In terms of having consistent neighbours, I only have A and S (my two new neighbours) and across the water there's a middle-aged couple that I sometimes wave to when I'm out on my dock. I tend to think of my personal neighbourhood as this little patch of the lake that I can see, but I think of the whole lake being like a larger community.

As for neighbourly expectations, I think it depends on the distance. For instance, the couple that lives across the way is one that I only expect to wave to—it's more of a hassle to see each other, so there's not much of a point in expecting things from them. Neighbours that live next door I

would expect to do more things like check up on each other occasionally or look after the house when one of you's away. Back a few years ago, there was a widow named Mrs. P— who lived in the cottage next door, and she'd always make at least one dish a week to bring over and share with me. She was a good woman.

Bad neighbours I can tell you from experience are ones that play strange music at all hours of the night, leave empty beer bottles and other filth all over their lawn and stink up the place, and break into your woodshed and take your tools without asking for them because “hey man, we're neighbours, we can share stuff, right?” I'm hoping my new neighbours will behave themselves better than the last lot, but considering their ages, it seems like I wouldn't have much to worry about. As long as they pay their rent on time and don't make a mess of things, there shouldn't be a problem. The way I see it, at least there will be some people around who actually remember where “Kilroy was here” comes from.

Social Observation Study



100 College Drive, Box 5002
North Bay, ON, Canada
P1B 8L7

Tel: 705.474.3450
Email: sos@nipissingu.ca
www.socialobservationstudy.org.ca

Recording Everyday Life in Canada

1 October 1999

Dear Mr. Furlong,

Please remember that your SO number is **A2651**. In your previous reply to us, you used "A2156." I understand that we all make little slip-ups from time to time, but just make sure you have your assigned number written down in a convenient place. It makes it easier for us to catalogue all the replies we receive when they have their proper codes, and there is less chance of replies getting lost in an organization error that way.

Thank you for your co-operation, and we look forward to your new replies!

Sincerely,

Carol Yearling

29 Maple Drive
Little Long Lake, ON P0G 1Y0
7 October 1999

Dear Ms. Yearling,

Sorry about the slip-up. I get the numbers confused with another set of numbers I use for a security lock. But wouldn't it be easier in your study if you started with names and assigned number-codes for them afterwards? ~~I don't need to be told~~ I understand why it's important to have consistent numbering and organization for the study, but it would probably be less work for everyone if the replies were re-coded after you have received all of them. That's just my suggestion, anyway.

Sincerely,
Arnold Furlong

29 Maple Drive
 Little Long Lake, ON P0G 1Y0
 15 October 1999

Fall Directive 2: Sex

~~A2156~~ A2651, male, 67, widower, Little Long Lake, retired carpenter and landlord. Of course you'd ask this question to a widower. Not sure what excitement you'd be thinking a man my age would be having. And I happen to know my manners and wouldn't kiss-and-tell—Joyce may have wanted to be in papers, but not like that. I know you say that it's all fine because personal information wouldn't be revealed until after I'm dead, but I'm not going to give you any big, tell-all details about her role in that part of my life, just because it's something I believe should stick between a man and his wife. We were fans of Trudeau for a reason—"there's no place for the state in the bedrooms of the nation," as he said, and well, he had a point. People should keep their noses out of other people's private business.

I remember I first started learning about the facts of life when I was a kid—maybe 5, 6-years-old, thereabouts—when I saw these two ducks at the park, one on top of the other. I thought it looked goofy and I had no idea what in the hell they were doing. I asked my mother about it (we were going out for a walk), and she just pursed her lips in that way of hers and said, "Nothing important, dear, they're just being silly ducks." Of course, since I didn't know better, I kept asking her why they were being so goofy, so she said I was better off asking my father about it, because he "knew more about ducks than she did." Well, you can be sure that later that night I did ask him about it, and since my dad was a pretty terse sort of man, he just said, "They were trying to make a baby, son, and that's just how ducks do it." That was apparently enough of an answer for me up until mom got pregnant with my brother, and for awhile I just assumed my mother was getting fat until we started getting new baby things from relatives and friends. But by the time my mother was pretty sure it was another baby, my father was off fighting in Europe, so I was directed to my uncle. My uncle had a more step-by-step type of explanation for it, which answered my question pretty squarely. I remember, he ended the whole discussion by saying, "Now ~~Arnie~~, people don't like to hear about the facts of life all that much. So just keep it to yourself, all right?" I remember thinking how strange it was, that everyone was in on this secret that wasn't really a secret at all except around kids. If everyone was in on it, why was it a secret? But of course, that was back when I was 7 or 8 or so—kids don't quite understand the value of keeping things private, even things that everyone already knows. It's a mark of respect.

As for the later years, I can say that not much of it is really all that interesting or unusual. I was a growing boy, curious of course, but all boys are at one point or another. I was pretty stuck on Veronica Lake for most of my youth (can we still name celebrities in this study?)—my favourite film of hers is probably This Gun for Hire. When I was around 14 I kissed my first girl—~~Sally Ann, her name was~~. She had blonde, curly hair, and eyes like Gene Tierney. Very green. When I was 17, I was courting another girl, but then I met Joyce on a blind date and we went steady after that, getting married about a year later. She was a year older than me, and she was eager to start a family. We couldn't conceive, though. But getting back to the main point, I was always faithful to her, and we enjoyed being together. There are days now and then where it feels like all I can do is miss her, and it does get a bit quiet out here on the lake. I have a picture of her that

I keep in a bedside drawer that we took when the color Polaroids came out on the market (we were in our thirties): she's sunbathing on our dock, her hair had by then gone completely white (her hair started going white in her late twenties), and she's laying there smiling up at me as God had made her, if I might put it that way. Joyce was always beautiful to me, but that picture is the one that brings it out best. Nowadays, it doesn't arouse me or anything—it used to, when I was a younger man, but I look at it now more as a comfort. And that's probably the most you'll get out of me on that front.

Comparing how times were then to how they are now, I think they're different in a lot of ways but also it's a lot of the same story. Back then, it seems that people always *knew* what was going on with each other, they just didn't say anything about it in polite company. I listened to locker room stories just like any other fella when I was in high school. People talked about sex, but they talked about it in different terms. Of course, there are some differences—there are things that are more accepted now than they used to be, obviously. For example, I remember being 15, and a big scandal went through my school when one of the teachers got pregnant from a black man. She was outright fired when the school found out (it's pretty hard to hide, after all). But now it's not as big of a deal. There's gays and lesbians out there, too, and well, it's not like they didn't exist in my day, but for sure no one ever talked about it, and if they did talk about it, they would refer to it in ways like “Mr. Bosnik's friend” rather than just saying it outright, that sort of thing. My neighbours are a gay couple, and I think they might be the first gays I've ever known personally. They're alright I guess. Mostly we just call out a hello when we see each other doing work outside. Sometimes I see them sitting together out on the deck, S usually reading a book and A working at an easel. S has invited me over again to play pool, but I keep putting it off—I worry I might say the wrong thing if I stay over there too long, and I don't want to scare off good tenants. Having some signs of life other than the odd moose at my end of the lake hasn't hurt, either.

The way I see it, with all these different relationships that just weren't talked about when I was a kid, it's like how people used to think about man going to the moon. They thought it was ridiculous, something that was never meant to happen, and then it happened, so now people have grown to accept it as a real thing. Stuff about sex gets more attention now, but frankly, I just don't want to hear about what people are doing with each other. It's none of my business, and I don't want to know.

29 Maple Drive
Little Long Lake, ON P0G 1Y0
26 October 1999

Fall Directive 3: Where do you see yourself in a year's time?

A2651, male, 67, widower, Little Long Lake, retired carpenter, landlord. Well, assuming we haven't all been wiped out by Y2K, I'd just like to say that I'm put out that we haven't gotten flying cars by now.

In all seriousness, though, there's not much for me to look forward to. I'll be a year older, and by then I'll have outlived both of my parents. I might make a few more tables for people—maybe I'll make some to donate to one of the schools. Hopefully my brother and his family will come to visit in the summer, if ~~Dan~~ D isn't too busy with work. My niece and nephew are getting close to that teen-age where they don't want to visit with relatives, so it'd be good to see them a bit before then.

I imagine I'd still be here, though you never know what could happen. When Mrs. P— passed away two years ago, it was in her sleep one night, sudden and peaceful. In the last couple of months while Joyce was alive, I think both of us could sense that her time was coming, but I don't think at the start of that year we were expecting her to get that ill. So it's hard to say where I'll be in a year, but it's unlikely I'll be anywhere special.

Social Observation Study

The Social Observation Study

WINTER 1999 DIRECTIVE

Recording Everyday Life in Canada

Please start each part of your directive reply on a separate sheet of paper with your SO number (NOT name), sex, age, marital status, the town or village where you live, and your occupation or former occupation.

Remember not to identify yourself or other people inadvertently in your reply.

Part 1: Using the Internet

This directive theme is for everyone – whether you have a computer or not. We want to know what you think of the Internet.

Please list any of the ways you think your everyday life is now affected by the Internet. Include everything you can think of that might be relevant, whether it's related to your own home or your work place or in public places. Do you use the Internet to get information? Do you trust the information you find? What do you think about the Internet? What do you think about its benefits? Its dangers? What place does the Internet have in Canadian life?

Part 2: Giving and Receiving Presents

First, giving presents: if you do give presents, please describe the kinds of occasions when you give presents. Write about the kinds of people (and their relationship to you) who receive presents from you. Are the people who get presents *from you* the same as those who *give you* presents in return? What kinds of presents do you choose and how do you decide? Do you ask people what they want first? How do you get presents to people, especially if they do not live near you? Do you give money as presents? If so, what are your reasons? Some presents are not actually objects but treats (e.g., an outing, a holiday, a meal out or even something like a hot air balloon ride, a flying lesson, etc.). Have you ever given someone something like this?

NB: Please do not mention real names in your reply. What interests us is the nature of relationship you have with someone, so can say “my mother”, “my youngest nephew” etc, or use initials.

Second, who gives *you* presents? It might help to make a list of the presents you received in the last year, together with a note about who gave them to you and what the occasion was, plus your own reactions to what you received. What was the best present you ever received in your life (so far)? Who gave it to you? What would be your ideal present to receive if money were no object? Can you end this section by commenting in general about what present-giving and receiving means to you, and what significance you feel it has in everyday life?

Part 3: Dream Diary

If you can, we would like you to keep a record of any dreams that you have over the course of one week. Please describe your dreams in as much detail as possible. It would be helpful if you could record the dates of your dream diary. You may wish to record:

- A description of the setting of the dream. Was it familiar to you?
- Any details about who was in the dream. Did you recognise them?
- What happened during the dream?
- Was the dream pleasant or unpleasant? How did you feel during the dream?
- What did you make of the dream after you woke up? Please record any interpretations you might have about the dream.

Please state, in your directive response, if you don't dream or can't remember your dreams. If you don't ever dream it would be useful if you could share your feelings about this. Would you like to dream?

Please post your response to: **The Social Observation Study, The Library, Nipissing University, North Bay, ON P1B 8L7** Or by email to: **sos@nipissingu.ca**

29 Maple Drive
 Little Long Lake, ON P0G 1Y0
 10 December 1999

Winter Directive 1: Using the Internet

A2651, male, 67, widower, Little Long Lake, retired carpenter, landlord. To be frank, the Internet is more my brother's sort of thing than mine. He's younger than me (a good 8 years younger), and he went into engineering back in his university days so that kind of thing interests him. When I went to visit him in Kenora for Christmas one year, he tried to show me all the different things his computer could do. I think if I tried to use one I'd break it somehow.

I don't see any real reason for me to have it. The post has always been pretty reliable in my parts, even though we're just a little community. I don't think I can even get the Internet out here—we barely get cable as it is, maybe six channels at best, and I run on a septic system. But as I said before, I haven't really needed it. When I need to get information I buy the paper at the local general store or call a number from the phone book.

Most of the other folks out here don't have it either. I was talking with A the other day when I was outside bringing in some firewood, and he asked me if I was "stocking up for the winter in case that Y2K bug hits." I laughed it off and said something like, "Well, it might make it harder to boil water or drive anywhere, but as long as a plane doesn't land on my cottage I'd probably get by all right." My cottage is a pretty sturdy old thing—my father and I built it ourselves back in the '50s. And my uncle didn't spend all my teen-age years teaching me how to fish and avoid poison ivy for nothing, so I could live a camper's lifestyle if I had to (my uncle had flat feet, so he couldn't join up like my father did during the war. He was kind of like a second father to us; he stayed with my mother and me and my brother while Dad was off fighting for the Crown. ~~Dad~~ My brother's always been a bit closer to our uncle than our dad because of that. But I'm getting off track). Point being, I don't see much use for the Internet in my life. Most people around these parts don't have it either, and from what I can see, nobody's suffered by not having it. If anything, I think we're better off without it out here; we already coop ourselves up with books and the television (when it works), so if we found another reason to stay inside we wouldn't get out at all! And believe me, I know when I'm getting cabin fever—when you can't stand seeing the same walls for another minute, and you just itch to go out somewhere and drive and see different faces—and then it does this weird thing where suddenly all you want to do is sleep until something happens and food barely even tastes like anything. I had a touch of it about a week ago and just *knew* I had to get out and do something, so I went up on my neighbour's offer for that game of pool I'd been putting off. They were surprised to see me when I knocked—can't really blame them—but they let me in all the same. The furnishings were still pretty bare, but they had a bunch of paintings all over the walls. I told S that I'd been embarrassed because I actually didn't know pool all that well, and he just laughed it off and offered to teach me. It was kind of nice—different, anyway, since I'm better at cards than I am at physics. Despite S's pointers, the balls didn't go anywhere that I wanted them to, so mostly I just ended up watching S and A circling around the table and clacking the balls into the sockets. By the end of the night, after we'd had a couple of beers, we were chatting about this and that, and S just blurted out, "Good to know you're all right, ~~Arnold~~ A [me]. Thought you hated us."

Well, I didn't quite know what to say to that, cause I sure didn't hate them and I was a bit hurt they thought I did. But A [neighbour A] just shook my hand with this kinda shy crooked-tooth smile he has and said I was welcome to come over anytime. They're pretty decent guys for neighbours, and to get back what you were asking earlier, out here we get by just by looking out for each other. Internet's not required.

29 Maple Drive
 Little Long Lake, ON P0G 1Y0
 20 January 2000

Winter Directive 2: Giving and Receiving Gifts

A2651, male, 68, widower, Little Long Lake, retired carpenter and current landlord. The people I usually give presents to are my family, these days my brother and his wife and kids, and the occasions tend to be holidays and birthdays. This past Christmas, I sent my niece and nephew some money—they're getting to be teenagers now, so they're harder to shop for than just getting them toys like I used to. I sent my brother and his wife a bottle of Crown Royal. My brother's family chose to spend this Christmas with my sister-in-law's side of the family out in Saskatchewan; usually on Christmases that we spend together, I tend to give them a furniture piece I've made for them or a couple of lamp stands. I try to remember to send them cards on their birthdays (if I can remember them. Joyce was always better at remembering these things.). I also tend to make furniture pieces for people who ask nicely—a recent project was for the community centre in town, where I made a few new tables and chairs to replace the ones that were falling apart. Of course, when Joyce was alive, we always gave each other gifts for the various holidays, our birthdays, and our anniversary. Joyce always liked getting doll-like things for some reason: I'd give her a new nutcracker every Christmas, and I also gave her little Russian dolls for her birthday.

Unexpectedly, I had to rush and make my new neighbours a nice coffee table for a gift recently. Over Christmas, I figured that since we still weren't too familiar with each other, I could just give them a card and a cheap bottle of wine, but in return they gave me one of A's paintings, and it was a damn good painting. I may know nothing about "art," but I am a craftsman of sorts, and I could recognize effort when I saw it. The painting was a loon on a lake (a pretty standard subject for artists around here) but the loon just seemed so much more alive than the glassy-eyed birds you usually see in other loon paintings. It was just about to take flight, and you could see the brushstrokes for each feather and speckle around its neck, and the lake it was on was dark—the painting's in night-time, and the bird looked like it was the only living thing around, as if there weren't trees or fish in the water, just wind and a loon on the water. Well, you can imagine I felt rather cheap by just giving them wine when they gave me something a whole lot more meaningful and handmade. So I ended up spending Boxing Day through New Year's making them a really smooth coffee table out of white oak and then giving it to them as a New Year's present. They seemed to really like it—A said he liked the colonial style of the table legs (I was surprised he caught that), and S slapped a hand on it and declared it to be sturdy and level. I think it made up for my goof-up at Christmas, since they invited me over to watch the hockey game next week. ~~Though I'm still not sure about going; it's Joyce's anniversary that day.~~

As for the best present I've ever received, I still think it's the new Drill Doctor that Joyce bought me for our 45th anniversary. Most useful thing in my work shed—it sharpens all sizes of drill bits in about a minute. As for my ideal present...well, there are just some things money can't buy, but for something that money can buy, I think I'd want a hot tub. Or an Aston Martin.

But present-giving in general just strikes me as a nice thing to do for people on special occasions. Especially when the presents are something you made yourself or are something you'd just know

another person would love, it seems like you're giving a little piece of yourself to them. Presents are a way to tell how people relate to each other, and to show how much you think of another person.

29 Maple Drive
 Little Long Lake, ON P0G 1Y0
 13 February 2000

Winter Directive 3: Dream Diary

A2651, male, 68, widower, Little Long Lake, retired carpenter and a landlord. This is a bit of a difficult directive for me to write out—I don't normally do these "write about your dreams" kind of things. They seem pretty pointless. Most of the time I forget whatever I was dreaming about once I wake up anyway. But I gave it my best shot.

6 February—didn't dream anything that I can remember

7 February—briefly dreamt about Joyce, my wife. We were in a garden somewhere. I think it may have been the tulip festival they have in Ottawa; we went there once together. For some reason she kept telling me to keep up, even though I was right beside her. The dream didn't make me feel one way or the other especially—I was a bit happy to see Joyce again but a bit sad too, but mostly I was just...accepting(?)...of it. I'm no Freud, but my guess is that she's trying to tell me to hurry up and join her, haha.

8 – 10 February—didn't dream anything I could recall, except waking up with a vague sense of anxiety on the 10th, like someone had walked over my grave. It was half-three when I woke up, and I was too confused and disturbed to write down what I had dreamt about. I just went back to sleep after taking a gulp of water.

11 February—I dreamt that the painting in my living room (the loon one) came to life somehow, and it seemed like the lake was spilling into my living room. So there I was, wading ankle-deep in water, and there was the loon swimming around my couch. For some reason, I thought it was important to catch the loon, but it wouldn't let me near it. Suddenly, I wasn't in my cottage anymore but instead was out on the lake (maybe standing in a boat, 'cause I was above the water), and the entire lake was covered in loons and ducks and geese, flapping like crazy. Then I woke up. I couldn't really make anything out of that dream. Most of my dreams don't make that much sense anyway.

12 February—dreamt about my uncle and my father. I could tell they were talking about something, but I couldn't hear them—it was like they were just reading each other's lips. Then they looked at me and told me to go play outside, so I went out into the garden. Except the garden was like something out of Alice In Wonderland: the flowers just soared above my head, like trees, and I couldn't even see the tops of the trees. The vegetables were like skyscrapers. I wondered if I'd turned into a bug. Maybe my uncle and my dad were talking about secret afterlife goings-on that I'm not supposed to know about yet. That's my best guess.

13 February—didn't dream anything important, just doing stuff around here. Not a lot to it, really.

Social Observation Study

The Social Observation Study

SPRING 2000 DIRECTIVE

Recording Everyday Life in Canada

Please start each part of your directive reply on a separate sheet of paper with your SO number (NOT name), sex, age, marital status, the town or village where you live, and your occupation or former occupation.

Remember not to identify yourself or other people inadvertently in your reply.

Part 1: The Second World War

The Second World War features strongly on the public air waves, especially around the time of anniversaries, and it still reverberates strongly in the public consciousness into the new millennium. This directive is about what impact it has had on your life in particular, from childhood to the present day.

Please note that this directive is NOT aimed only at those Social Observers who lived through the Second World War but at *all of you*, whenever you were born and wherever you were living. However, if you were around between 1939 and 1945, it would be very useful if you could start by explaining where you lived, whether you were old enough to be directly involved and provide a bit of background information about any involvement by members of your family or anyone you know.

Begin by jotting down TEN separate words or phrases that conjure up the Second World War for you, and then describe what WWII means to you and how it features in your family history, your education, the media, etc.

Part 2: The Ups & Downs of Friendship

Much is written and said about love affairs and marriages when they go wrong but much less on friendship when it turns sour or difficult. In this part of the directive, we would like to hear about your experience of the ups and downs of friendship.

Would you start by talking about how you define a “friend”?

Difficult friendships

Friendships can often face stresses and strains or can be difficult to keep going. Sometimes people fall out and make up regularly, or simply endure relationships out of duty or necessity. We could suggest examples from public life – Gordon Brown and Tony Blair, or John Lennon and Paul McCartney for example had to continue working together even after their friendships became tense. If you follow the friendships of celebrities you might have noticed that they often seem to have lots of ups and downs. Madonna for example seems to have very on-off friendships with women.

Have you had any experiences of difficult or up and down friendships in your life? For example, have you ever kept going with friends who you actually find a drain, or who irritate, upset or bore you? If so can you describe your experiences and why you still maintain these friendships?

When friendship ends

Have you had important friendships where there was a falling out? Can you describe what happened and why? How did you feel at the time? Or perhaps there was a drifting apart for no very obvious reason. If so, did you feel regret, relief, or simply that this is the natural course for some friendships? Do you think these friendships are permanently lost to you? Have you changed the way you think about or approach friendship over the years?

Old friends

What about meeting up with friends from the past? Have you re-contacted former friends e.g. through email or through school and university reunions? If you've been through any experiences like this, please tell us about them.

Please post your response to: **The Social Observation Study, The Library, Nipissing University, North Bay, ON P1B 8L7** Or by email to: **sos@nipissingu.ca**

29 Maple Drive
 Little Long Lake, ON P0G 1Y0
 2 March 2000

Spring Directive 1: The Second World War

A2651, male, 68, widower, Little Long Lake, retired carpenter, landlord. Ten words about the war? Shouldn't be too hard.

1. Dad
2. A (my neighbour)
3. Nazis
4. camps
5. long
6. Normandy
7. planes
8. death
9. wrinkles
10. poppies (more for WWI than WWII, but it still carries over into that war)

It's strange that you ask us to jot down ten words but don't ask us to explain them. But explaining what that war meant to me has a lot to do with the words I chose. My father, of course, was in the war, and his absence in our family during that time was felt. My mother in particular worried about him almost constantly. When my brother was old enough to talk, he'd ask me what his real dad was like. In a way, I almost felt like I had my dad all to myself in that time: I had memories of him that my brother never had, and I'd talk about him like he was a superhero. But when my father came back, he looked so much older than I had remembered him when he'd left. Old and tired. I can still remember, when he got out of the taxicab and hugged us, I felt like I could still smell gunpowder and blood on him (There wasn't any, of course. He'd washed up beforehand, but it still seemed like I could smell it). Before my father came back, I spent most of those years imagining myself over there, daydreaming myself as a soldier. But when it was all over, and I realized my dad wasn't quite the same as he used to be—sometimes I'd get up to get a glass of water in the night and I'd find him in the kitchen, just staring out the window over the sink—the war lost a bit of its glamour for me. And of course, when all those horrible things the Nazis did came to full light in the news, that just made it worse.

Which brings up my neighbour A. I was over at their place making a visit (we've taken to playing pool together about once a week now), and we were just chatting about the old days, and I asked them where they were during the war. I knew right after I said it that I shouldn't've asked—the atmosphere got a lot heavier. S said that he was over here, too young to go like I'd been, but he'd had an older brother that had died over there. Then A said quietly he'd been at Belsen, and it hit me like a sack of bricks. I didn't realize he was Jewish. I hadn't seen anything over the holidays telling me otherwise, but they hadn't had a tree or anything, so I just figured they weren't the decorating type. I told him I was sorry—what else can you do, when something like that is revealed?—but it still felt like I was being rude even saying that. My neighbour just nodded, accepting my apology, and S went over to him and put an arm around him, and we all

didn't say anything for a minute. I still feel bad about it, though, bringing that up. I can't imagine anyone would want to remember living through that. I mean, we'd learned about the Holocaust, but I'd never met a survivor face-to-face before—it seems so much more real, more...disturbing when you meet someone who was there. Thankfully, S, in that “good host” attitude he seems gifted with, found a way to shift us out of that gloom and started talking about a few of his wackier cop stories. But it's been sitting on my mind for these past few days. It's hard to imagine that it was all only sixty years ago, that while I was sitting at home playing at being soldier, my father was out there hearing gunfire and watching men die, and A was just suffering the worst sort of hell imaginable.

29 Maple Drive
 Little Long Lake, ON P0G 1Y0
 30 April 2000

Spring Directive 2: The Ups & Downs of Friendship

A2651, male, 68, widower, Little Long Lake, retired carpenter, landlord. Friends I think of as people that you can trust wholeheartedly, people you share interests with and can talk to about more personal things than you would for a co-worker. For instance, I seem to have made friends with my neighbours, but I've never felt as close to my brother D. It may have just been the age gap between us: I tended to think of D as more of a responsibility than a friend, and growing up, the things he was interested in doing were things I wasn't interested in doing anymore. I've always thought of D as just my brother, and I do love him for that reason, but when we visit each other, we tend to run out of things to talk about. We usually end up reading quietly in the same room, not really engaging with each other, but it's not awkward exactly—we're used to it.

Joyce, of course, was my closest friend. But I suspect you're not asking so much about spouses. You'd hope your wife or partner was a good friend to you before you started living with them.

In a way, my friendship with my neighbours can be a bit strange at times. For the most part, we three seem to get along fine: we see each other often, visit for a couple of hours once a week to pass the time, and they tend to be good talkers. S especially seems like a friendly guy. He's quick to ask me how my ankle's been doing (I twisted it working outside a couple of weeks ago), and he's great at storytelling. A is a bit on the quiet side, but he asks about the projects I'm working on and I ask about his—he makes beautiful postcards, really, like something by Thomas Kinkade, though he has other artwork that looks a lot more like Tom Thomson. But I'll admit their relationship does make me a little uncomfortable sometimes. Well, as I said in another directive, I don't really care or want to know about what relationships other people get in—the fact that my neighbours are gay doesn't bother me that much. I just don't like seeing it expressed openly. When we were first starting to get to know each other, S and A were a little more touchy-feely with each other when I was around than they are nowadays. Nothing, you know, blatantly lewd or anything (they're much more polite than that), but they'd touch each other's arms when they asked each other questions, and it was so like what Joyce and I would do when we were together that it just boggled my mind to see two men expressing themselves as a couple in the same way. And S, being the more outgoing of the two of them, would sometimes pat me on the shoulder instead of greeting me with a handshake, and once when he did it, it seemed like there was a "spark" in his eyes, and I just started like a foal. They seem to have caught on to my discomfort with it, though, 'cause they're not as demonstrative when I'm in the room, we're strictly on a handshake basis with each other, and their relationship is not something we ever talk about.

Sometimes I wonder what Joyce would think of my friendship with these men. When we used to befriend other couples in the past, she was always the curious one (women seem a lot more interested in these romantic stories anyway), and she'd always ask how the other couple had met. Would she do the same for S and A? I'm almost curious what their answer would be (how do men like that even meet each other?), but it just doesn't seem like the sort of personal thing I

should ask—if they want to volunteer that story, they can do so. In a way, I wish Joyce were here with me when I had met these men—somehow, I think things would be a lot easier between all of us if she were here, and we might be better friends and neighbours. Although I enjoy their company, it feels like there's always an elephant in the room that no one knows what to do about.

Social Observation Study

The Social Observation Study

SUMMER 2000 DIRECTIVE

Recording Everyday Life in Canada

Please start each part of your directive reply on a separate sheet of paper with your SO number (NOT name), sex, age, marital status, the town or village where you live, and your occupation or former occupation.

Remember not to identify yourself or other people inadvertently in your reply.

Part I: The Garden and Gardening

The first part of the directive is about your garden, and what it means to you - if you do not have a garden now but once had one, please write about that, or if you would like to have a garden, you could describe what you would like.

First, we would like to know whether you grew up in a house with a garden; what are your memories of it? Did your parents or any relatives tell you about what was in the garden - for example, plants, insects, birds etc.? As a child, did you help to plant things in the garden? What other kinds of things did you like doing in the garden? Do you have a favourite plant/shrub or flower that brings back memories? Maybe it reminds you of your childhood or someone in particular.

If you have your own garden, please tell us about your garden, or the one that you cultivated most recently (or even indoor plants or window boxes). What do you grow in your garden? And why? (For example some people try to make their garden look attractive, and others grow plants that attract insects that will eat aphids). How do you use your garden? What kinds of things do you do in it? How much time would you spend in it on a typical spring/summer's day? In your family, who does particular tasks such as mowing the lawn, digging, planting, weeding? If you have any children do they help (or did they when they were younger)? Do you pass on gardening tips, cuttings, or seeds to them? Some people are passionate about their gardens, others see it as a burden – what does your garden mean to you? What do you *dislike* about your garden? Describe the last time you went to a garden centre (or when you go to one next time please keep a note). Why did you go there? And who did you go with?

If you wanted to know more about what kinds of plants to grow or get some general knowledge about gardening, where would you get this information from – for example, family/neighbours, newspapers, TV programmes, gardening magazines, garden centres? Do you always follow this advice? Do you consider yourself to be an 'expert' gardener? If so, do you give anyone else advice? There can often be contradictory advice in gardening (for example whether or not to

use chemicals, organic fertilisers/compost) Who do you trust to give you the best advice about gardening?

Part 2: Having an Affair

What is the impact of sexual affairs on marriage, and what happens to relationships when an affair becomes 'known'? This is a delicate but important subject and one that has been much in the news - President Clinton, Robin Cook, and (although perhaps not so much in the limelight at the moment) Prince Charles. We would be most interested in your views. Please be assured that we are not assuming you necessarily have had personal experience to draw upon. It is possible however, that many of your lives have been touched in some way or another by news of other people's affairs. As always, it is up to you how much information you wish to share with us.

Listed below are some general questions so that you can express various thoughts, feelings, and beliefs. Included at the bottom of this page are more specific, individual questions which we hope you can answer personally. Your replies will be as usual anonymous, so please do feel free to write candidly. It would help if you used initials or pseudonyms for other people.

Thinking of your own experiences, and those of people close to you, how important do you think it is to remain sexually faithful in a long-term relationship like marriage? What might the repercussions be for friends and family when news of an affair comes to light?

Have you, directly or indirectly, been affected by news of someone else's affair? Do you think there might be different types of affairs? Are there some affairs that matter more than others? Can you say why? Could affairs be positive and enriching experiences?

Your personal experience

- ◆Have you ever had - or thought about having - an affair? Has your partner?
- ◆If you - or your partner - has had an affair, who else knew about it?
- ◆Can you describe the 'stages' the affair went through?
- ◆How did the affair end, and what happened when it was over?

Please post your response to: **The Social Observation Study, The Library, Nipissing University, North Bay, ON P1B 8L7** Or by email to: **sos@nipissingu.ca**

29 Maple Drive
Little Long Lake, ON P0G 1Y0
18 June 2000

Summer Directive 1: Having an Affair

A2651, male, 68, widower, Little Long Lake, retired carpenter, and cottage landlord. Wow, this directive asks a lot more questions than the other directives have for some reason. My answer's going to be pretty disappointing—I'm not that much of a garden guy. I've been around gardens, but I'm not all that passionate about them. If I had to, I could grow one, but I'm just as fine without one.

When I was young, my mother had a vegetable garden in our backyard. She grew all sorts of things out there—zucchini, rhubarb, cucumbers, tomatoes, squash, and (if the rabbits didn't get to them first) carrots and lettuce. She seemed to be pretty good at it, though when you're a kid you don't appreciate fresh vegetables as much as you do when you're an adult. Sometimes she enlisted me to help her carry things out there (usually fertilizer), but for the most part, she seemed content to have the garden as her own little spot for herself. She also had two window-boxes—one she grew tulips in, and the other she grew petunias in. I always liked the tulips better; they're hardy things, and I tend to like perennials better than annuals.

At the moment, I don't have a garden of my own. I don't really need one; nature provides all of the plant stuff I need or could want. I do have to spend some time each summer trimming back the tree branches and bushes so my car can have a clear passage down the driveway and for the other walkways I have around the property. In seasons when the blackberries are out, I pick those. When Joyce was alive, she tried repeatedly to start a garden (just flowers, I think, although there was one year she tried for carrots and the deer just consumed them all in one night), but it never really stuck.

Mrs. P—, on the other hand (my neighbour from two years ago), was an avid gardener. It surprised A and S (the new neighbours) a little when the bluebells came out all over the place: it looks like a small pond opened up over there. Mrs. P— always tried to give my Joyce gardening tips, but when the deer like your garden above all others, there's not a lot you can do to stop them. They're almost worse than voles. Anyway, because Mrs. P— was blessed with a green thumb (and who knows, maybe she's still looking after her garden in the afterlife?), some of her leftover perennials are still thriving. The hummingbirds and butterflies seem to like it over there, too. A says it's a good source of inspiration for him, painting his unexpected garden. I think gardens are nice to look at, but I don't really want to put in the effort to upkeep one.

29 Maple Drive
Little Long Lake, ON P0G 1Y0
6 July 2000

Summer Directive 2: Having an Affair

A2651, male, 68, widower, Little Long Lake, retired carpenter, and currently a landlord. I'm proud to say I've always been faithful to my wife Joyce, and I'm pretty confident she was the same with me. That's part of the vow we made to each other, and we promised to uphold that vow in front of an audience of our friends, family, and God. As for what goes on with other people, I've said before that I consider it none of my business and I've never really wanted to know about that sort of thing. But in general, the idea of affairs doesn't strike me as anything that could be positive for anyone in the long run. Whether or not you intended to hurt anyone, someone would end up hurt, whether it's a spouse or a child or a friend.

The closest I think I've ever been directly affected by the possibility of an affair was when there were whispers going around that my brother was fathered by my uncle. I always thought it was a ridiculous rumour. Yes, my mother didn't know for sure she was pregnant until after my father had been deployed, and yes, my brother tends to take after her more than he does my father, but that's not an automatic sign of infidelity. Uncle ~~Louis~~ was always friendly with our family, and after my father had gone to war, my uncle stuck around a bit to make sure we were doing all right and to be a substitute father for ~~Dan~~ my brother while he was a toddler. My uncle and my mother got along fine, but I never noticed anything that seemed out of the ordinary. But people will talk, and the biddies that lived on the street were gossip-hungry jackals. My poor mother sometimes got dirty looks when we were out in public during the war years—for example, she was given the cold shoulder at the grocery store by neighbours when she greeted them, and I remember there was generally a hush that surrounded her arrival at a public place (like when she picked me up to walk home from school—the other mothers would just go dead silent at the sight of her). I didn't realize why the other people were treating her like that until years later—I thought they were just mean people.

She and my father did act a bit differently around each other after the war, though I think that was more because of my father's experiences with the war than because of her. From what I saw, my dad and my uncle still got along well up until their deaths. But that goes to show how even the rumour of an affair was treated back then, especially for the women involved.

Social Observation Study



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www.socialobservationstudy.org.ca

Recording Everyday Life in Canada

5 August 2000

Dear Mr. Furlong,

Your last two directive replies sent to us (the summer ones) both appear to have the same been titled under the same directive (Having an Affair). I'm assuming that the first directive dated from June 18 is intended to be for the first directive concerning Gardens and Gardening. Please confirm so that we may correct it as necessary.

Sincerely,

Carol Yearling

29 Maple Drive
Little Long Lake, ON P0G 1Y0
10 August 2000

Dear Ms. Yearling,

I'd lose my own head if it wasn't attached to my neck. Yes, the first directive from June was intended to be titled under the Gardens and Gardening directive.

Sincerely,
Arnold Furlong

Social Observation Study

The Social Observation Study

FALL 2000 DIRECTIVE

Recording Everyday Life in Canada

Please start each part of your directive reply on a separate sheet of paper with your SO number (NOT name), sex, age, marital status, the town or village where you live, and your occupation or former occupation.

Remember not to identify yourself or other people inadvertently in your reply.

Part 1: Going to a Funeral

A recent funeral

When was the most recent funeral you attended? Please describe it in as much detail as you can, remembering to avoid including too much identifying information. Whose funeral was it? Roughly when and where was it held? How did you find out about it, and why did you go? Were you there on your own? Who else was there? Did you know any of the other people? Was anyone notable by their absence? Did you speak to other people? At what points did you speak to whom, and what did you talk about? What did you wear, and what influenced your decision about clothing? Did you send or take flowers, or make any donation? If so, why? If not, why not? Who spoke at the funeral? What do you remember of what happened? How would you describe the overall 'tone' of the funeral? What sorts of feelings did you have at the funeral? Did anything in particular arouse emotions for you? Did you express your emotions? If so, how? If not, was there a particular reason why not?

After the funeral

Did you go to a reception or tea, or wake? If so, why? If not, why not? If you did go, please tell us about it. Would you have called it a "good" funeral? If so, why? If not, why not?

Other funerals

What have been the best and the worst funerals you have attended, and why? Have you ever decided against going to a funeral? Please say why.

Your thoughts on funerals more generally

What – and who – are funerals for? You don't need to have been to a funeral to have thoughts on this.

Your own funeral

Have you thought about your own funeral? Who do you think should make decisions about what happens? If you have your own preferences, what are they and why do you have them? Have you told anyone else about these? How important is it to you that the things you would like to happen do happen? Have you taken any steps to try to ensure that they do?

Part 2: Belonging

This is about your experiences of belonging or not belonging. You may have experienced a sense of belonging in relation to a variety of things: individual people, a group or a community of people, a place, a culture or a nation. We are interested in hearing about all of these (and more) ways of belonging. We would however be interested in hearing not only about the positive, but also about less happy experiences when you may have felt 'not at home' or 'an outsider.' Below are some questions and tasks to help you think about this somewhat abstract notion of belonging. Please do not feel that you are tied to these – you are free to answer this question in any manner you feel is best.

Your own experience

Could you describe what it means to you to belong? Do you feel you have experienced a sense of belonging? Could you give us examples of particular times when or settings where you felt a sense of belonging and of how this has felt to you? What do you think contributed to your sense of belonging?

What about times and places when you have felt you did not belong – why do you think this was? Has your sense of belonging changed during your lifetime? Was there for example a place where you felt a sense of belonging, but where you no longer feel you belong, or vice versa? What do you think has caused these shifts? Are they perhaps the result of moving, a change in your social networks, a change in job, or has the area in which you live undergone significant changes? Or has your sense of belonging been affected by changes in your personal life, such as having children, getting married or divorced, experiencing bereavement or ageing?

The places you belong in

List all the places or settings you feel at home in today, and the places where you felt you belonged 10 years ago. Is there a difference between these two sets of places? Why do you think that is? What has changed?

The people you belong with

Could you please draw a diagram or map consisting of a number of concentric circles, placing yourself in the middle, with those people with whom you have a strong sense of belonging on the circles closest to you, and those people with whom you feel a weaker sense of belonging on the circles further away from you.

NB: Please use initials instead of people's full names, and indicate their relationship to you (eg, spouse, sister, friend or neighbour).

Please post your response to: **The Social Observation Study, The Library, Nipissing University, North Bay, ON P1B 8L7** Or by email to: **sos@nipissingu.ca**

Social Observation Study

Recording Everyday Life in Canada



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20 October 2000

Dear Mr. Furlong,

We have not received a reply from you in over a month concerning the most recent directive. Although deadlines are flexible in this study, this is just a reminder to submit your directive responses no later than December 22nd of this year (2000). We look forward to reading your responses!

Respectfully Yours,

Carol Yearling

29 Maple Drive
 Little Long Lake, ON P0G 1Y0
 15 November 2000

Fall Directive 1: Going to a Funeral

A2651, male, 68, widower, Little Long Lake, retired carpenter. I apologize for responding to this directive so late. It's not an easy one for me to reply to. The most recent funeral for me was about a month ago—my neighbour, S. A heart attack. ~~It seems like such a quick~~ Death has a strange way of reminding us how quick and unexpected it can be. I've been to a number of funerals in my life—my father's, my mother's, my uncle's, my wife's, Mrs. P—'s, several other friends and relatives here and there. I'm beginning to wonder if it's more effective to count how old you are by how many funerals you've been to rather than by birthdays.

It was a nice enough funeral. Several of S's police friends and former coworkers were there, and the pastor gave a very warm, rather calming eulogy (A lot different from the dour ones I'm used to. I grew up Catholic). I sat with A—the poor man, he didn't shed a tear the whole way through, he seemed like he was somewhere else entirely. Considering the life he's been through, I don't blame him...he's seen more death than I can imagine.

S had been cremated, his will stating that he wanted his ashes spread wherever A thought was best. So after the service in church and a brief reception (I didn't really know anyone there other than A), I asked A where he wanted to spread the ashes. A just gave me this exhausted look and said if I thought it was okay, the lake would be fine. I agreed—that's where my Joyce had wanted hers spread as well. But when it came time to spread them, A turned this deathly white and asked me if I could do it on my own. I understood why he didn't want to. I told him to wait up in my cottage (he didn't want to go back to his own just yet). I spread S's ashes into the water. After I was done, I just stood on my dock for several minutes. It almost felt like Joyce was beside me there, and for the first time in several days I felt at peace. I felt like we had done the right thing.

But the hardest thing was going back to my cottage. A had held up remarkably well all through the funeral service, but I came back to find him just sitting on my couch, sobbing. Up until then, we'd been so busy trying to arrange everything for the funeral, there hadn't been as much time for him to grieve or for it to truly sink in. At first, I wasn't really sure what to do, but I got him a glass of water and just sat in a chair nearby and waited like a dumb idiot. It was a good twenty minutes before he calmed down enough to blow his nose, then he said something that hadn't struck me until that moment: "He was all that I had." And really, the truth of that just rang something in me—A didn't have anyone other than S. I hadn't seen any of his family members at the funeral (whether he's a Holocaust orphan or had been cast out, I'm not sure). I had no idea what to say to that. I didn't try to say anything. I didn't want to make it worse somehow. But I did offer him a shoulder to cry on, though...there's not much else I felt I could do for him.

I've been to a lot of funerals in my lifetime. The hardest ones for me personally were the ones for my wife and my mother. They do give us a chance for closure and for families to group together for support, but at the same time, they're painful no matter how comforting they are.

Sometimes I think it'd be better to do away with them altogether, but I still see the importance in them. I think I'd leave whoever's left after me the decision of if they want to have a funeral for me, but I know I'd want to be cremated so I could have my ashes spread out on this lake and join S and Joyce.

29 Maple Drive
 Little Long Lake, ON P0G 1Y0
 30 November 2000

Fall Directive 2: Belonging

A2651, male, 68, widower, Little Long Lake, retired carpenter. For the most part, I always felt like I was a “belong-er.” I’m treated well in my community, I share the national pride that my fellow countrymen do, and although I live in a more secluded area, I’ve never really felt like I was an “outsider.” Lonely, perhaps. But never rejected. I’ve been close to my family, I’ve had good friends. I think of “Belonging” as a sense of knowing where you stand in the world, and knowing who stands with you. I think the ~~first~~ only real disturbance in my sense of belonging was when my wife Joyce passed away—for a long time, I didn’t know how to live as a bachelor. By and large, I had never been alone in my life before: I’d lived with my parents, married Joyce, and then lived with her up until her death. That was hard for me to adjust to, and in a sense, I don’t think I’ve ever made that full adjustment. But also realizing how one of my good friends has been on the opposite spectrum of me in terms of belonging for all of his life makes me think that I’ve somehow got off lucky.

Places I Belong Today

1. This cottage
2. Little Long Lake
3. The Muskoka region
4. Canada

Places I Belonged 10 Years Ago

Same as above

People I Belong With

I can’t seem to find my compass at the moment and I could never stand an imperfect circle, so I’m just going to write them out in order of “closest to furthest”: Joyce (wife), Mother, Father, A (neighbour), Uncle, S (neighbour), Brother, other lake neighbours.

Social Observation Study

Recording Everyday Life in Canada



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1 December 2000

Dear Arnold Furlong,

Mr. Silverman and I were greatly saddened to hear about the loss of your friend in your recent response to the directive. I know you and he had grown close over the past couple of months, and I can only imagine what it must be like to lose a friend so soon after making one. Our thoughts and prayers also go out to your friend A, and if you feel it would be helpful, you can extend our condolences to him on our behalf. (However, if you feel like it would be wiser to maintain his sense of privacy by not revealing your writings of him and S for the Observation Study at this time, that is also fine.)

Once again, we would like to express our sympathies to you and A on the loss of your friend, and we wish you well and hope to hear from you again.

Respectfully,

Carol

29 Maple Drive
Little Long Lake, ON P0G 1Y0
5 December 2000

Carol,

Thank you for your letter—I wasn't expecting it, but the feeling is appreciated all the same. I have decided not to tell A about the study (not yet anyways, maybe in a few years, we'll see), but I'm sure if he knew about your concern and kind words, he would appreciate them as well.

We are getting by as well as can be expected. My friend A still has difficult days at times—I can't blame him, really. I was the same when my Joyce passed. But I keep a close eye on him and make sure he's not by his lonesome too often. I've also gotten him to start painting again. It's not the best stuff I've ever seen, but it's a start. We're keeping the blues...well, not out of hand's reach, but we've been trying to push it farther away a little more each time.

It has been an interesting experience working with this project, Ms. Yearling. I'm not sure if I'd do it again, but I can't say I regret it. Writing things down helped cement a few memories in my brain for the future, and for that reason, I'm grateful to have been a part of this project.

Sincerely Yours,
Arnold Furlong

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VITA

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