To my husband, Rick, and son, Tyler
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*All the world’s a stage,*  
*And all the men and women merely players;*  
*They have their exits and their entrances,*  
*And one man in his time plays many parts.*  
— William Shakespeare

*All the world’s a stage and most of us*  
*are desperately unrehearsed.*  
— Sean O’Casey
Act 1
1967
When Loddy moved into the three-storey walk-up near McGill University, she painted her basement apartment the colour of a boiled egg, and then for the hell of it, stencilled a wide China Red semi-circle across the living room wall, top to bottom, and called it the Rising Sun. Red. Her mother, Alma, hated red. She said it was the colour of communists and blood—the colour of pain. So Loddy wore only red.

Resembling a beefsteak tomato from her mother’s garden, Loddy sat Buddha-like on the front stoop of her building, a transistor radio dangling from her wrist like an oversized trinket on a charm bracelet. She dragged on a cigarette, Bette Davis in All About Eve, flicking hot ashes and letting them settle on her bare wrestler-size thighs. She felt no pain.

Her stomach undulated in waves of blubber whenever she shifted positions. For someone so big, she was not shy about exposing her gummy arms, which jiggled under her red sleeveless t-shirt as she wiped the perspiration from her armpits. She tossed the half-smoked cigarette onto the sidewalk and, then with much effort, stood
up, legs wide apart, to air-dry her innermost thighs, chafed from the friction and heat of a humid Montreal summer. Hands on hips, she stretched her entire body upwards and attempted a side bend, then strained her head towards Milton Street for signs of the van. Every little bit of exercise helped.

A couple of nights before, to find relief from the unbearable heat, Loddy moved her divan, which doubled as a bed, against the wall just below the open living room window. She slept without any covers, any clothes — too hot for anything more than naked flesh. She woke in the middle of the night, startled by a tapping on the window, a movement of shadow, a noise of shuffling feet, and then more footsteps.

What part of her naïveté compelled her to peek through the dusty vinyl venetians, only to meet an eyeball for an eyeball, then someone racing up the steps to the sidewalk above, and there she was, screaming ... or was she dreaming? She turned on the lights and her roommates, the cockroaches, scurried back to their hiding places as though they too had been awakened, terrified by her intruder.

The next day, she told Bettina about the cockroaches and peeping tom.

“You live in a dive, Loddy, and I’m going to tell Maw.”

“Like, she still not talking to me?”

“Loddy, ever since you left she wears black for Sunday Mass and lights candles for you in the name of the Blessed Virgin. What do you think?”

“Christ.”

Yeah, he gets candles too.”

Loddy shrugged and lit another cigarette to relieve her mounting hunger.

“Damn, damn, damn. Now I’ll really be late.”

She was determined not to eat today. Certainly there was enough fat to feed her body for months before she starved to death. She was ready for any major disaster — plane crash in the mountains, avalanche, or terminal disease. Bring it on. Yes, she would have a reserve of body fuel to survive anything.

She took another swill of water then splashed what was left on her sunburned face and neck, rubbing the liquid into her pores as though it were cologne. Her cigarette dangled precariously from the right-side corner of her mouth, hot ashes dribbling, etching tiny holes, burn marks, into her t-shirt. Her bare feet were already sore from the swelling ankles and it wasn’t even noon, so she lowered her bulk back onto the cement step, and cranked up the volume to the Mamas and the Papas. With eyes seized shut, she pressed the transistor radio against her ear, a convergence of music, and bobbed to the beat, singing along. Her unsecured breasts, grazing her waistline, swayed with deliberate sluggishness.

Loddy’s apartment was a gallery of photos and posters dedicated to the one she loved — Mama Cass Elliot. There was Mama Cass in various poses: in a yellow tent dress and white boots reclining on wicker; singing into a mike with head cocked to one side, costumed in a fuchsia caftan; a single head shot of her snuggling against Papa Denny in a limousine; and a group shot of the four, looking hip and sullen and serious. If a big girl like Mama Cass could make it, why not Loddy?

She didn’t hear Dewey sneaking up behind her as she lowered the volume and sighed from the depths of her boredom.

“Those things are going to kill you one day, Loddy.” He gently scuffed her shoulder.
Startled, she jumped and almost stabbed her eye with the cigarette. It became airborne, bouncing off her red cotton shorts before landing on the bottom step.

“Shit, Dewey!” Without hesitation, she lit another one.

Dewey’s thick black hair usually fell loosely to his shoulder blades, but in this heat, he had pulled it back into a tight-fisted ponytail, accenting his pockmarked face and bulbous nose.

“Loddy, why don’t you just put ketchup on those things and eat them like fries?”

She inhaled the tobacco in one long pull of defiance and exhaled a rapid succession of smoke rings towards Dewey.

“Are we ready then?” Dewey coughed through the curl of smoke.

“Like, I have to wait for the exterminators to let them in. No one’s around today.” Puff, puff, puff.

“Don’t know why they even bother. Can’t get rid of those bugs. This entire city is full of cockroaches and rats—bilingual politicians that don’t go away.” He chuckled at his feeble joke.

Dewey had entered everyone’s life in early spring. A Sunday. The St. Patrick’s Day parade, which had wound its way through the downtown core, was just breaking up and spectators were fanning out onto the main drag, St. Catherine Street, and into the nearby restaurants and Irish pubs. Floats were now parked around Dominion Square instead of horse-drawn caleches awaiting tourists and the military bands had packed up their instruments and were now searching for their rented buses near Windsor Station. Someone in the distance blew a final note on a tuba. Another drum roll and then silence. The parade had ended.

A line-up snaked its way through the Laura Secord store at the corner of Peel and St. Catherine Streets, its customers spilling out onto the sidewalk. It was worth the wait for the first real ice cream of the season.

The streets, flooded with huge puddles of slushy water, mini-pools at crosswalks, challenged pedestrians. The chic French girls in their boutique-bought mini-skirts and fashionable trench coats from Rue Elle on the main level of Place Ville Marie crossed the intersections with cautious elegance, lifting knees high, squealing “Mon Dieu” with every movement of their thighs. The more conservative English girls, who shopped at Marks and Spencer’s for practical apparel, sought out the lowest water level to navigate to the other side. It was the children though who marched like Russian soldiers, delighting in the continuous thumping of rubber boots in muddy water, splashing themselves, traipsing through the muck as their mothers gripped their hands and scolded them to “bouche-toi” or “hurry up!”

The Garage Theatre Company—Aretha, Ulu, Percy, Danny, Stanley, Marcel and Loddy—had persuaded the manager of the Winston Churchill Pub on Crescent Street to unfold some of the patio chairs and tables so they could enjoy the brisk spring weather. They had sauntered behind the parade, walking the few short blocks from the theatre after a full day of rehearsals, mingling with the police motorcade. As was their habit, they detoured to unwind with drinks and conversation on this trendy street with its outdoor cafés lining the sidewalks. They had been sitting there perhaps five minutes, Marcel engrossed in the pages of Le Devoir, when they noticed the hippie staring at them from the other side of the street.
dances inviting the audience to join them. Loddy couldn’t control herself and sensed her body shift into a life of its own as she bopped along, spinning, pirouetting around the mezzanine, propelling herself and launching this massive vessel until she lost control, giddy from the exertion. She tripped over a low-lying bench and softly landed on the carpet with a loud thump, her belly cushioning the blow.

“OOOOOOOWWWWW!”

Loddy crawled on all fours towards the railing overlooking the stage and boosted herself to an upright position. She knew she was in trouble.

The exterior door slammed again. Unhurried footsteps. Rita was in the dressing room preparing her next entrance so Loddy tiptoed downstairs to handle any late arrivals. When she reached the lobby, she choked, tried not to panic, but there they were, looking nonchalant, yet uncomfortably lost in this venue. Two men in blue. Police officers.

SCENE 3:

Merde

The police had raided The Garage Theatre a year earlier when an elderly man had suffered a seizure during a “Happening” and was whisked by ambulance to the Jewish General. His wife had alerted the authorities and had complained the strobe light and onstage antics had caused her husband’s neurons to burst like a bad appendix.

At the time, Aretha and Stanley had been onstage gyrating inside an enormous laundry bag, the size of two single bed sheets stitched together. They had been tossing out an assortment of clothing, the perception being that they were disrobing and fornicating. The illusion was destroyed, however, when they both popped out of the bag fully clothed. Unfortunately, the elderly man had already succumbed to his seizures before grasping the absurdity of the scene.

Police had arrived, scolded both Rita and Samuel, and had advised them to provide their audiences with fair warning in the future. Samuel had explained it was an art form originating in California where an artist named Yoko Ono, and her husband, Tony Cox, performed, what
perky breasts and firm upper arms. Black liner, extending beyond her almond-shaped blue eyes, evoked Elizabeth Taylor as Cleopatra, and the proverbial painted-on Twiggy lashes completed the look of a Vogue cover girl. Bird lit one of those slim brown ciggies, tilted back her head, and let the smoke coil towards the ceiling, then rolled her neck in an effort to unknot a kink. Danny changed girlfriends as often as he changed underwear, twice a day.

Loddy didn’t catch Erica sneaking into Marvel’s Pad until she poked her head through the rattle of glass beads draping the doorway.

“Hey!”
“Just looking,” Erica said.
Rita appeared in a flush of lateness.
“Darlink!”
“Erica’s in there and she might be stealing something,” Loddy lowered her voice.
“My friends do not steal.” Rita, nonetheless, stepped inside to check the inventory.

Loddy busied herself with wiping off the counter top, bending over from her waist in a gyration of circular movements, her bosoms following with a second rub of shine. Rita insisted on an immaculate counter.

Samuel and Marvel sat on the floor in the middle of the mezzanine like Indian gurus about to enlighten the flock. Marcel had gone missing, disappearing in a pugnacious mood, shortly after his final scene. “Let him go,” Samuel had said when Percy broke the news.


Rita, puckish, eyes averted, slinked from Marvel’s Pad, with a pat to her over-teased, over-sprayed bouffant, and Erica in tow. Loddy scratched her back against the kitchen door frame like a bear scraping debris after a roll on the forest floor.

“All right kiddies. You did a great job tonight—so great the cops down the street paid us a visit.”
“Cool,” said Aretha.
Samuel coughed as he took a toke from his cigarette, and passed it on to Marvel. Loddy thought it generous how he always shared his smokes.
“Weren’t you scared, Samuel?”
“Let me put it this way, Ulu, it was a Lenny Bruce moment. He would have been proud.”
“Lenny Bruce?” Aretha furrowed her brow.
“Look him up, dear.” Then Samuel turned to his troupe.
“Now, some bad news. I have to close this show Saturday. I rented the space out for the rest of August to a church group, so you kiddies will have to find something else until September. Loddy, I’ll still need you in the box office and mezzanine.”

“What are you planning for September, may I ask?” Stanley, sprawled on his back, dangled his left arm and leg over the bench.

“Sit up if you want an answer!” Everyone stopped breathing until Stanley propped himself to a ninety-degree angle. “Okay, kiddies, there’s a part for everyone here, including you, Loddy.”

Loddy jumped at the mention of her name, and gave Samuel her undivided attention.

“We’re doing a psychedelic musical— The Resurrection of Robbie Rabbit. I know, I know. But the playwright is a good friend of mine and wants to enter it in the Dominion Drama Festival. It’s a favour, and I’m hoping if I do enough Canadian plays, I’ll get some grant money. It’s a small drama group, big cast though. So I need all of your able bodies.”
“So what are we? Rabbits?”
“You got the picture, Percy.”
“You mean like Playboy Bunnies?” Loddy could not envision herself in a Playboy costume.
“No, dear, nothing like that.” Samuel’s eyes skipped around the room. “More like hippie bunnies.” He ended the meeting with a clap of his hands, a signal that he was done. “Ok, kiddies, that’s it for now. See you all tomorrow.”
They all left grumbling.
“Bunny rabbits. What the fuck is that?” Percy asked in his whiney voice. “I didn’t study at the National Theatre School for this.”
“Well, go try the Centaur then,” Stanley said, “or maybe Stratford is more your style. No one’s forcing you to put on a bunny costume.”
“You coming with us to La Ronde, Loddy?” Dewey’s voice carried across the room.
He was the only one who ever considered including her in anything, but Loddy just shook her head. “I’m tired, so like I think I’ll just head on home after I’m done here.”
“Suit yourself, but you know where we are.”
She listened to the chain of voices fading into the Montreal night, the door swinging shut behind them with a hollow thud. Erica was waiting in the lobby, but Rita sniffed around the kitchen where Loddy was finishing up.
“Okay, like I’m ready. Let’s go.”
Rita grabbed Loddy’s forearm in a tight karate hold to stall her, and then the words came dribbling out of the depths of her diaphragm: “Erica used to be Eric.”
“What do you mean used to be?”
“Darlink, you are so naïve, but that’s what’s so charming about you.” She released Loddy’s arm. “Erica is a man.”
“I’m confused.”
“Darlink, you’re confused? She’s confused.”
“You mean ... you mean ... that woman downstairs wearing all that red lipstick and high heels is a man? She looks better than I do.”
“Ta ta darlink.” And she was gone before Loddy could assimilate what Rita had just revealed. Erica equals Eric; Eric equals Erica.
Loddy could hear both of them in the lobby clucking like hens. “Well, how was I to know,” she mumbled as she secured her transistor radio to her wrist.
She was on the verge of leaving when Samuel stopped her. Here was a man with an aversion to belts or suspenders, and had developed a compulsion to yank up his oversized trousers whenever he was nervous or late.
“Loddy, dear, glad you’re still here,” Samuel said, tugging on his waist band.
“Like, I know I shouldn’t have made that racket when you guys were dancing but I couldn’t help myself. That music, like, you know, drove me to it, and I fell all over the benches, not on purpose. Honest.”
“Loddy.” Samuel had a face that could silence wars. “That’s not what I want to talk to you about. Marvel tells me you’re coming along in her dance classes. You move well, a natural turner, she says. So let’s try you out in Robbie Rabbit. You’ll be the big mama hare and we’ll give you a line or two, and maybe even a song. Think you can handle that?”
“Like, wow, a song even! Yes! Yes! Yes!”
“All right, dear. I’d like to see you lose some weight though. You have all summer.”
“I can do it, Samuel. I heard about this boiled egg and tomato diet where you lose a pound a day. I know I can do it this time. I’m really motivated now.”
Samuel patted her cheek as if to say, I know you’ll fail, but try anyhow. Five years ago, she had shown Samuel her portfolio of poems, wrapped and bound in a tidy scribbler. Loddy had just graduated from high school and here was her life—one hundred pages of adolescent angst and misery. Have a look. Samuel did and suggested she write about what she knew.

“But this is what I know.”

The next day, she was taking dance classes with Marvel, working the box office with Rita, greeting customers and handing out programs.

“You’ll get used to an audience that way,” Samuel had said.

Now, finally, a small part for her, only her, and even a song! She levitated with such joy that when she hit the pavement, she was unaware of the searing heat of the day, a marked contrast to the air conditioned interior of The Garage Theatre.

Loddy flicked on the transistor for company and resolved to walk home instead of taking the Metro, which would feel like a sauna. She examined the shop windows along St. Catherine then trolled the side streets—Mountain, Bishop and Crescent—up and down, up and down, amid a pollution of noise in a city seeking respite from a hot July night. Perhaps she would encounter The Blonde, catch her in the act of flirting with some of the Parisian sailors who had docked their ships in the old port near Bonsecours Market, or requesting a light from a stranger, head cocked to one side, the Gitane cigarette a kiss away. Oh, to be beautiful!

She paused outside the Playboy Club on Mountain Street, and observed men in business attire slip through the door, their playboy keys a jangle of unlocked fantasies where stunning women served food and drinks alongside the illusion.

“What’s your business, lady?” The bouncer noticed her body slumped against the edge of the brick building.

“I’m waiting for a friend. She has long blond hair.”

“They all have long blond hair. We have a reputation to uphold here. Move along, fatso.”

She dismissed the cruel insult and continued along de Maisonneuve Street, taking a breather at five-minute intervals. She removed her sandals to aerate aching feet and hobbled the last block to Ben’s, a deli with the anonymity of a hospital cafeteria. Since the turn of the twentieth century, it had upheld its reputation as the premier tourist trap for a smoked meat sandwich on rye; however, some would argue Dunn’s as a close rival.

Black and white glossies, autographed by both local and American celebrities from the forties and fifties, who had eaten there, plastered the walls like wallpaper—Magic Tom, Lilly St. Cyr, Sammy Davis Junior, Marvel and Samuel. The aging lemon Formica columns with their raked chrome siding, the gun-metal stools, and the oversized advertisements for smoked meat platters recalled a postwar time-warp in their kitschy charm. Loddy squinted through the sizeable windows. Old man Irving Kravitz, in his usual post by the cashier, beckoned her to enter as though he had been on patrol all day, and was now giving her the all-clear sign. The enemy had surrendered. Tomorrow she would start the boiled egg and tomato diet, but tonight she would splurge, just this once. After all, she was celebrating a promotion.

It was after midnight and the deli was rowdy with an undercurrent of hungry misfits and night-shift workers. She settled into her usual seat by the window and
ordered a smoke meat platter—a mound of thinly layered smoked meat folded into a ball in between two slices of rye bread, accompanied by fries, a humongous kosher pickle, and an Asian-size teacup of coleslaw. Everything washed down with a chilly cherry coke on ice. Still she requested a slice of strawberry cheesecake and another to go.

“It’s for my boyfriend,” she said.

Loddy burped her way home, taking the short cut through McGill campus. That night the maples stood on guard, wordless, no breeze to ruffle their leaves. Only the glow of light from the street lamps guided her. She searched for stars and, there they were, strings of miniature bulbs pasted to the sky like decorations for a surprise party. Only the banner went missing:

**Congratulations! You Have a Part in a Show!!**

Midway, the trail diverged, but she maintained the footpath towards University Street, her shoeless feet now grazing an unfinished pebbled surface waiting for concrete. Loddy bent to fasten her sandals when she heard the whoosh of footsteps in the grass behind her.

“Hey, hey, big buck. Wanna fuck?” Two of them. Drunk. Probably students from one of the residences, she thought.

Loddy quickened her pace, a fast jog across the clear-cut lawn, sandals flapping against nude heels as she now made a run for University Street and maybe people.

“Always wanted to know what it felt like to fuck a tub.” Too late. They blocked her way.

Then her voice: “Leave me alone or I’ll scream.”

Perhaps she should have kept running, but they tackled her. She tried to beat them off, biting and kicking, until one of them shoved her to the ground, holding her down. Loddy surrendered. It was always better that way. She felt swarms of shadflies seizing her, raw buttocks raking the grass beneath and the garbled voice of Aretha Franklin singing *Respect* on her transistor radio before she blacked out.

When they were done with her, Loddy remained under the maple, stock-still, until she heard the explosion, the fireworks from the exposition ground, La Ronde, on the other side of the city. She strained to see the spray of colours between the branches, but there were none. She writhed side to side, her arms propelling her like bruised angel wings in dirt, crushing the box of take-out cheese cake, until she reached the tree. She pulled herself up against the trunk and removed her red slacks hanging over a low-lying branch as though they were laundry hung out to dry. She didn’t shed a tear as she forced them over trembling legs. Her wrists were scratched and swollen, her transistor radio gone.

Loddy wedged her battered body into her apartment and switched on the lights. The cockroaches scurried to their usual hiding places—the crevices in the floorboards, behind the poster of the Mamas and the Papas, the bath tub drain, the toothbrush tumbler. She slid to the floor and bawled, not so much for herself, but because the cockroaches had returned. She staggered to the bathroom, bent over the toilet and threw up her feast from Ben’s, then stumbled into the shower and scoured her body. She wrapped herself in a clean, bath-sized towel, turned on the radio, and numbed the experience with a carton of chocolate fudge ice cream. Only a jar of boiled eggs and a bag of tomatoes remained in her fridge.
The bombings were believed to have been perpetrated by a group of terrorists intent on causing a revolution. ... supporting the separatist cause ... the FLQ ... a member of the bomb team ... dead ... several Cells ...

Loddy fell asleep to the drone of the late night news. The next morning, when daylight scoped through the basement window, she woke up to an empty ice cream carton caught between the folds of her breasts and stomach. She had dreamt that a cockroach was trapped inside, trying to escape, climbing the walls of the container.

"There’s no love in the world," Alma chirped in her European accent as she poured melted butter, and sprinkled fried bacon bits and chopped onions over Loddy’s Cepelinai. Alma shook her head side-to-side putting special emphasis on the word love. “No love in the world. No love.” Her head trembled in a trail of loves.

“Yeah, Maw, there’s lots of love.” Loddy bit into her Zeppelin-size dumpling, sour cream squirting down her chin.

“Eat, eat. I have more.”
“T’m okay, Maw.”
“I want more,” Bettina said.
“Bettina love me, yah?” Loddy watched her mother add another two dumplings to her younger sister’s already overcrowded dinner plate.
“Like, that’s five big ones, Bettina. You can’t eat all that.”
“She have as much as she want. I have more. She too skinny.” And Alma reached over and slathered extra sour cream on Bettina’s Cepelinai as though she were icing a cake.
“Va! There.” Alma stepped back to admire Bettina’s plate as though it were a work of art, a still life by Cezanne. Loddy regressed to being a child again, scarfing down the food to appease her mother. Alma’s feast cancelled out the boiled egg and tomato she had for breakfast. She would have to restart her diet and good intentions on Monday morning.

It had been six months, six months of freedom when Bettina knocked on her door, worried about a mother who threatened to jump out her second floor window if she didn’t see her oldest daughter.

“She’s, like, such a drama queen. Anyway, she hates me so I don’t get it.”

“You trying to make me feel guilty?”

“Well, you hurt her when you left.”

“Like, I’m 21, Bettina. Legal age in Quebec.”

“She made a novena just for you, so you would come home.”

“I thought she was lighting candles for me. What a liar!”

“Don’t talk about our mother like that. She’s a saint.”

So Loddy called St. Alma and apologized for living, which would cover every wrong committed—past, present and future. This time her mother’s voice was reconciliatory, dismissing the latest fracas with a disobedient daughter who dared to turn her back on traditional Lithuanian values and move out with no husband in sight.

When Loddy and Bettina were on the threshold of puberty, Alma would remind them at every turn of their youth how in the old country good girls lived with their families until they married, or died, whichever came first. Loddy’s departure was almost on par with committing a mortal sin and warranted the confessional; after all, she had broken the fourth commandment “to honour your father and your mother.” Loddy knew she should have stayed away; however, it was easier to capitulate. They were still family, so she agreed to a truce and accepted Sunday lunches.

Bettina toyed with her food, building mountains of dumplings around a valley of sour cream. She dropped the fork on the floor, causing Alma to reprimand this daughter who devoured meals, yet carried the slenderness of a fashion model.

“Eat eat. I no want to throw good food in garbage. You should see in the war, we beg for bread,” she said, her face, a portrait in despair. Alma shuddered as though she was exorcising a parasite then busied herself clearing the table.

Bettina had sneaked into the bathroom and, after a considerable intermission Loddy could hear her heaving up the Cepelinai, the toilet flushing several times, a final gurgle of emptiness. Bettina emerged, wiping her mouth with the back of her hand, her skin the colour of summer wheat.

“You okay?”

Bettina just wagged her head and carried the empty plate to Alma as though she were in a wedding procession.

“Va! You eat good.” Alma was happy. Best to keep Alma happy.

Bettina turned on the television then curled up in her familiar corner on the couch, her head bent as if to catch a blow. They could hear Alma singing, her alto voice a study in precision, every note clear and true, a folk song from the old country—a shepherd tending to his animals, his children, a traditional lament, and then Alma
announced lunch over and preparations for supper would begin. “Ah! Kukeli. We have for supper.”

“I can’t stay, Maw,” Loddy said.

Dishes washed and put away, Alma peeled potatoes over the sink, whipping off the skins with such a gusto and gospel tempo that Loddy expected the Mormon Tabernacle Choir to appear in a final chorus of Hallelujahs.

“Maw. I said I have to go.”

“What? But I make Kukeli.”

“I have things to do. I have my own place now.”

“Dump!”

“It’s not a dump, Maw. You’ve never even seen it.”

“I don’t need to see. I hear it not nice. Only mushrooms live in basement.”

“Or cockroaches,” Bettina said under her breath.

“Okay, I’ll stay for supper.”

Loddy measured her life by the number of meals her mother had cooked for her so far—2,420—and still counting. She sidled up to Bettina in a soporific state of numbness from all the Cepelinai she had consumed earlier and waited for meal 2,421. Both fixed their eyes on the television screen to pass the time, pending the arrival of the much anticipated Kukeli. The heat from the oven with the baked casserole had raised the temperature in the flat to unbearable levels. Loddy rapidly fanned her face with a folded section of Lietuva, the Lithuanian newspaper, and no one spoke except Alma who did a rambling commentary of the six o’clock news from her kitchen.

“They sick. Hooligans! Sick.” She raised her voice so everyone could hear. “You watch, that Trudeau be elected next year and you watch. He good Man. He too good looking. You have to be careful with the good looking ones.”

Alma charged into the living room, slippers flopping, dishtrag swinging in one hand and a spatula spinning in another, the Kukeli forgotten, now cooling on the counter top. Her distraction: a charismatic Minister of Justice, wearing a red rose in his lapel, condemning the bombings and robberies.

“These acts of violence,” said the reporter, “have plagued the city for months and have left several people dead or injured. Yesterday’s bombing killed a member of the team attempting to detonate a bomb found in a mailbox near the McGill Campus.”

Loddy lit a cigarette, a thread of smoke sailed by Bettina’s face.

“Ach, they murderers, murderers! Trudeau, he fix them all, you watch.”

Loddy closed her eyes and relived the blast of noise she had heard that night under the maple—a pistol shot of cracks and pops in between a greater boom, a blending of both fireworks and a bomb erupting into a final explosion. She hadn’t told anyone of her ordeal, not even Ulu. No one would have believed her. Who would want to rape a Beluga?

“Bettina, go show the pictures from Lietuva my sister send.”

Lithuania. Loddy felt disconnected from these relatives, strangers all. She was a Canadian, having lost the language of her ancestors when she entered first grade. Alma understood English, even a smidgeon of French, but used only a sliver of her English vocabulary to communicate. When Loddy was living at home, she kept a Lithuanian dictionary nearby so that she could understand her mother’s native tongue—and perhaps Alma.

The three in the kitchen now, Bettina dealt photos around the table like a deck of cards in a poker game.
Some even kicked the sliding door to the next room to get a big bass beat. Dewey passed Loddy a tambourine which was circulating the room. She realized that the words on the poster board were the lyrics and this time she listened to her foot in sand and liberated her voice, let it fly:

*All we are saying is give peace a chance*  
*... all we are saying is give peace a chance.*

When it was over, Loddy regained her bearings. The golden glare from the window filled the room with a blinding cataract of honeycombs. She blinked several times and, when her vision cleared, she saw The Blonde, clapping and singing, wedged between John and Yoko in the bed.

SCENE 21:

**Summer of Possibilities**

**Summer 1969**

On July 20, Apollo 11 landed on the moon. Although Loddy was a woman, not a man, she too decided to take small steps, letting her hair grow to her waist and wearing long, loose, gauzy dresses in psychedelic colours, solid red and flamingo pink. This infuriated Alma.

“Why you wear nightgown? You look like you go to bed.

Loddy sometimes framed herself against the sun, her legs in a wide stance, and let the light filter through the garment, revealing the outline of her chunky body through the flimsy fabric. The fashion suited her though, and made her feel ethereal. She was again cocky and confident. Perhaps it was because Fury loved her unconditionally, ripples and all. Perhaps it was because of the positive recognition she received from the nude paintings at the Gallery Den. Perhaps it was because of the good reviews for *Evil Ed* ... (and without saying a word ... left an indelible impression on the mind ...). Perhaps it was because of the business card. She hadn’t shown it to anyone, not even Fury.
After the recording session in Lennon’s room, she had lingered in the hotel bar on the main floor, and had ordered a martini, her current favourite drink, while Dewey completed a call. A burly man, bald as an eagle, a Telly Savalas look-a-like, introduced himself. He asked her name, said he worked for a New York talent agency, and had heard her sing. “I was standing behind you in the room and you have a great voice. Very Joplin.”

He flipped open his cardholder, pulled out a business card and said: “If you’re ever in New York, come see me.” Then he was gone.

Loddy wondered if he too was a figment of her imagination. But this ... this card was concrete, solid. If she chose to, she could crush it, tear it into a million pieces, chew it and swallow it even. Of course, she had seen enough movies to not take the man seriously. And yet ... and yet, there it was in bold and embossed letters:

Robert Marks  
Creative Talent Management

She didn’t crumple, tear up or chew the card. She kept it in her wallet like a potentially winning lottery ticket to be brought out whenever she needed reassurance, whenever the world made too many demands, whenever there were obligations she couldn’t ignore, whenever she doubted her own abilities. That card represented the possibilities of something more. One day, like Armstrong, she would take a giant leap and float-walk on red carpets among the stars. One day.

Loddy worked the summer for Ulu at the youth hostel welcoming the promise of an administrative position in the fall—if she wanted it. Aretha, with the gypsy soul, had received an invitation to a music festival and couldn’t pass up the experience. She had met some transients at the hostel, who were en route to Bethel, New York, and a small town called Woodstock. They convinced her to join their party.

“You don’t even know these people, Aretha,” Ulu said, scolding her with the exasperation of a mother with a delinquent daughter. “What are you thinking?”

“I don’t care. We are all one with the universe. Anyhow, I hear there’s going to be all these fab bands—Grateful Dead, Creedence Clearwater, Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix.”

“Never heard of them.”

“Ulu, you’re getting so establishment.”

“Janis Joplin!” Loddy exclaimed. “Like, you’re not kidding? She’s my favourite all-time performer now. She sings with such force. I cry every time I hear Ball and Chain. I get her.”

And indeed, Loddy had ripped off the Cass Elliot posters, replacing them with Janis Joplin in all her wrenching pain: Janis, stooped over holding her stomach, fierce voice screaming into a mike at Monterey, feathers fluttering in her hair; Janis, anorexic from too many drugs; Janis, full and stocky from too much Southern Comfort and fried food.

“Come with me, Loddy. It’ll be fun!”


Ulu squeezed Loddy’s arm in reassurance. Both followed Aretha as she boarded the psychedelic-painted van parked in front of the Y, and kept an eye on the vehicle until it merged into the busy traffic on Dorchester Street and was out of sight.
Since the exposure at the Gallery Den, both Fury and Dewey were busier than their schedules allowed. While Dewey maintained his part-time job at *The Montreal Star*, his freelance work now required him to travel to Toronto and Vancouver for various commercial and private assignments. Fury, in the meantime, renewed his teaching contracts at the museum and the university while also receiving a steady barrage of commissions to paint and design for corporate, public and private collections. He and Dewey shared a common artist’s corner on Place Jacques Cartier in Old Montreal where they would alternate a timetable of sketching and selling their work to tourists, who crowded this historic quarter every summer. When the humidity reached unbearable levels, as it always did in July, Loddy slathered herself with sun screen lotion and would accompany Fury to the site, settling beside him in a canvas lawn chair under an expansive beach umbrella. At the end of the day, they would sometimes sit on the edge of the circular fountain in the centre of the square, throw pennies and make a wish, letting the spray graze their backs. Other times they would order a cold beer at one of the outdoor bistros and listen to sightseers with pocket-size dictionaries in hand, rehearse their French with English waiters. Loddy couldn’t remember when she last felt such joy.

At the end of July, while the city broiled under a heat wave, Loddy and Fury escaped to house-sit a cottage in the Laurentians. The retired couple, friends of Fury’s parents, was away for the weekend in Montreal, a family gathering to welcome a new grandson.

The dirt road ended in a cul-de-sac from where Loddy could make out the rustic house, an unpretentious log cabin, which seemed to sink into a garden of delphiniums, hollyhocks, goldenrod and flowers she couldn’t name. When the lake came into view, Fury had barely time to stop the motorcycle before Loddy leapt off and skidded down the sloping gravel path to the wharf. After Fury tugged the bike alongside the house and unloaded their backpacks, he joined her.

The sun hung low on the horizon, and dragonflies, like miniature helicopters, hovered over the translucent lake. Loddy felt his fingers caress her tailbone and wondered if it was the chilly country air or Fury’s touch that made her shiver.

“Can we go on the lake now?” she said, with the excitement of a child.

“Anything you want, my love.”

They found each other as though for the first time. He guided her down to the surface of the wharf with the care and attention given a one-of-a-kind orchid. They peeled off each other’s clothes, and located the sensitive spots that made each convulse with pleasure. Together they peaked and the sounds of their rapture penetrated through the density of trees into the nearby woods. They lay on their backs for a minute, catching their breath.

“Feel my heart,” he said and laid her hand on his chest. He touched her nipples, still hard, and leaned over to kiss her breasts again and again.

She could hear the croaking of frogs and the chorus of crickets in the tall grass among the wild flowers.

“’This wasn’t supposed to happen so soon,” she laughed. “Really?”
My heartfelt thanks to the following: Guernica Editions for taking on the book and to Michael Mirolla for his meticulous edits; Juanita Ottens, Ellen Kelly, Alexis Kienlen, Kathleen Betteridge, Billie Livingston, Todd Babiak for their valuable reading time; Margaret Macpherson, Shirley Serviss, Kath MacLean and Rona Altrows for their insightful critiques as Writers-in-Residence for the Canadian Authors Association, Alberta Branch. Linda Goyette, who from the beginning said I was a writer and, as Writer-in-Residence for the Edmonton Public Library, coaxed me into reading those first awkward pages to a library audience. My appreciation to the following on-line Verdun and Montreal groups who shared their stories and memories — Verdun Connections under the management of LesF; and The Sunshine Gang — Laurie Etienne, Bob Pilon, Linda (Noble) Campeau and John Winston Allison. And always lending support since we met in the sandbox in Ville Emard, my very best friend, Jane Hikel; my former bosses, Lorne Sundby and Jackie Bardsley, for providing me with opportunities to develop as a writer while holding down a full-time day job; Gayle Dussault for her encouragement and shared memories of Verdun, and Denis Payne, my mentor — both said I could do it but didn't live to see me do it. Also to David Moratto for a brilliant book cover. And always to Rick and Tyler who put up with me when I am writing, which is every day.