Cadillac Road
A

AN OLD GREY house and in the distance dark bush-covered hills in Cadillac, Quebec, where I was born. I remember the board sidewalks high above the muddy streets and Mom’s warning to keep away from the edge. There’s no snow. Must be a summer memory.

Cadillac, Quebec — unpainted or tarpaper-covered houses, dirt yards, mud everywhere. Me and Suzette Belanger in rubber boots and overalls, dig in the dirt back of my house. We find a battered lunch bucket, a rusty spoon and a piece of a blue-flowered cup.

Our houses have faces. Mine has a sad face — the pointed porch roof makes the nose and its sagging floor, the mouth. The lighted windows above are the eyes. Shades half down like it’s squinting or ducking a blow.

Belangers’ next door its twin, but so different. Is it the porch with the baby carriage, the half-built go-cart, and at least three bikes? The upstairs in both is one big room, more a large attic with slanting walls. Me and my little sister Gloria share the iron-pipe bedstead. We also share the hiding place below.

Mommy takes out her hairpins and lets down her wavy red hair. I brush it for her. Though I’m only four or five — must be under six, because we leave when I’m six, I know my mother is beautiful, blue-green eyes, and long red hair. I love how her hair lifts itself to the brush. And how, when I climb on her lap, it makes a shawl around us. Sometimes we have tea, milky tea for me. Gloria, a year younger, is already asleep in the big bed upstairs. My hair is red and curly like Mommy’s. Gloria’s is dark.

Not all good — we hear the end-of-shift whistle at the mine. I run upstairs and burrow under the covers next to my sister. Then comes the heart-thumping wait. Sometimes, laughter rises from below, his loud, hers tinkling. Nights that he curses, glass shatters, Mommy screams, and I pull Gloria from the bed to our hiding place. She whimper, too
scared to cry out. We have a blanket under the bed and sometimes, fall asleep there.

My mother’s long red hair, the unpainted house, the iron-pipe bed, my whimpering little sister.

That’s not all. Those trips to our cousins’ place. The car heater doesn’t work. Mommy makes us nests in the back seat, pillows, blankets, and hot water bottles. Gravel flies, bush crowds the road. Every so often a branch scrapes the car, and Papa swears.

When we set out the road is gravel, but I remember the bump, bump over corduroy roads. Such a funny name. My overalls are made of corduroy. The roads are logs laid down in a row.

Me and Gloria giggle as the car bounces along. Papa sings *O claire de la lune*, something like that, and another one *Sur le pont*.

Our old car rumbles up the lane, and Aunt Lisette, Uncle Yves, and all the cousins spill out of the house. Papa and his brother hug, smack each other on the back. My aunt and uncle hug and kiss me and Gloria. Mommy hangs back, like she’s shy.

The farm: a cow, pigs — never more than a couple — and chickens all over the place. The wonderful animals are uncle’s horses. Clydesdales — reddish coats, black manes and tails, and a white hairy ruffle around each hoof. Once my uncle lifts me up, and I sit on the wide warm back, more thrilled than scared.

Their log house and barn are so old the wood’s mossy. Great piles of fresh cut trees fill the yard. Uncle Yves sells wood.

Falling asleep, I occasionally see that log house and barn sinking into the green hillside. The neat stacks of cordwood. The wall of bush. The trees grow so close together I can’t walk between them. The farm has its own corduroy roads. Me and my cousins — Gloria’s too little to come — follow these roads to the clearings where Uncle Yves’ been cutting. Cowboys and Indians. Run, run, run. *Vite, vite.* My feet stay warm in a cousin’s rubber boots, wool socks. The sharp spruce smell in the cold air.

My cousins: Louisette, Jacques, Pierre, Marie. There were a lot more than those four. I can’t remember the others’ names. Was Pierre the redhead or was that Jacques?

They didn’t speak any English. I spoke French as I did with the Cadillac children. Papa spoke French, but English to Mommy unless he was mad at her. She didn’t speak French. She met Papa when he was working on the railway in Buffalo, before he went back to Quebec to work in the gold mines.

I can’t speak French now — I’ve forgotten it all. A strange feeling because the lost words are in my head, sometimes they almost come to me. When I start high school in September and take French, will I remember then?

I do have good memories of when we lived in Cadillac. I occasionally dream of my cousins’ log house, but more often of hiding under the iron-pipe bed and listening to my parents fight.

Papa is mean. Mommy yells: “Leave my baby alone!” He’s holding Gloria by one skinny arm and smacking her bum. She’s just wearing an undershirt. I’m under the table and tuck my nightie tightly around me. Gloria’s shrieking and trying to twist out of his reach. There’s a loud thud. A piece of firewood lands by the table leg. Mommy must’ve hit him because he curses and lets Gloria go. She crawls under the table and I hold her tight.

Mommy yells: “Sharon, take her to Belangers.”

I grab Gloria’s hand and run, but not before I see blood pouring from my mother’s mouth.

At Belangers’ we have brown sugar spread on white bread. The big girl fixes it for us. What is her name? I don’t remember. Upstairs a curtain divides the girls’ side from the boys’. We sleep in a wide bed along with the big girl’s little sisters.

Gloria won’t tell what bad thing she did. Most likely pooped behind the door. Mommy told her when she turned five she had to stop using the potty and use the big toilet. She’s scared she’ll go down the drain. She’s a silly.

I don’t remember how long we stay at Belangers’, only that, when our mother comes for us, she looks ugly — her mouth puffy and bruised, and her front teeth are gone.

I remember my mother telling somebody, maybe Aunt Jean in Buffalo: “I hit the bastard with a piece of cordwood — too bad it was his arm and not his head. I should’ve killed him.”

That memory’s from later. My last Cadillac memory is the train.
The seats are dark red plush. Gloria keeps petting them. She does things like that. She’ll sit real quiet and stroke and stroke the ratty old fur collar on Mommy’s coat.

We have two big seats facing each other. I have one all to myself for a bed. Gloria sleeps on the other one, her head on Mommy’s lap. We play paper dolls—the cuttings are all over the floor, and Mommy makes us clean up. We eat bread and cheese and big sugar cookies Mrs. Belanger made. We get water in little paper cups from the tap by the bathroom. A nice lady gives us an orange to share. We’re on the train all day and all night and all the next day.

Miles and miles of snow, trees, rocks, and lakes.

WAKE UP IN Toronto, Mommy telling me to hurry.

“Get your coat on. Hold your sister’s hand.”

Gloria leaves her favourite paper doll behind and bawls.

Trains are everywhere, huffing and shunting. Some go right into the building. I’m a little bit scared, but don’t let on. Gloria’s still wailing. Is she scared of the trains or mourning her lost paper doll?

I carry the small suitcase and Mommy the big one. We climb stairs that go up and up into an enormous building with an arched ceiling more grand than the church in Rouyn-Noranda where me and Papa went one time.

Another train and finally, Buffalo. In the taxi, cars honk all around us. With my face pressed against the window, I see tall buildings and red lights that make a picture of a bottle—flashing off and on. The taxi driver honks at the blue and white bus blocking our path. A woman in a turquoise coat, holding a tiny plaid-coated dog under her arm, crowds between our taxi and the bus. We have left the grey North far behind.

Grandma looks just like the grandma in Grandma and Stony River Farm. She’s white-haired, short and plump and wears glasses. Her apartment’s warm and everything is so pretty. The floors are shiny wood. The living room rug has designs of tiny flowers, blue, green, red, with a blue border and white fringe Gloria likes to make all straight and nice.

Grandma’s dishes are pink and white and all match. We have orange juice and waffles for breakfast, much nicer than oatmeal. Mommy, me, and Gloria all sleep in one big soft bed.

There’s a playground next to the apartment building. Lots of kids. They all speak English. Gloria’s too shy to speak and scared to get on the big swings. I push her on the baby swings, then take her to the monkey bars and tell her to watch. At first, I just climb and swing a
bit. Much easier climbing than on the trees back of our old house. A
girl in a red jacket goes hand over hand from one side to the other. I
try it. The first time I fall, the second, make it across. Not as hard as
it looks.

“Where you from?” Red Jacket asks.
“Cadillac. We came on the train.”
“She lived in a car,” a girl says.
“No, we had a big house with good climbing trees.”
“Dummy, a Cadillac’s a car,” a boy says.
“It’s the name of a town,” I tell them.
“Funny name,” Red Jacket says, and the other kids all laugh.
“Not as funny as Buffalo. A buffalo is a big smelly animal.” I
swing myself up on the bars, and go hand over hand from one end to
the other without falling.

Red Jacket and the boy follow, and we take turns until Red Jack-
et says: “Let’s go on the swings. My name’s Ruth. What’s yours?”
“Sharon Desjardins, and that’s my little sister Gloria.”

We soar high on the big swings. I feel I could fly right over the
fence. Gloria hides behind the post. When I take her hand to go home,
her teeth are chattering, and she’s peed her pants.

“I want Mommy,” she whispers.
“Come back tomorrow,” Ruth yells.
“Yeah, see ya,” I call back.
In Buffalo, Cadillac is the name of a car.

***

I get out of bed. Need a drink of water. Mommy and Grandma are in
the kitchen. Mommy says something about Papa and high-grading.

“Mommy, what’s high-grading?”
“You’re supposed to be in bed.”
“What’s high-grading?”
“Taking gold home from the mine.”
“Stealing?”
“Yeah.”
“Did Papa?”

“I sure never saw any gold. Now you get back to bed.”

***

The day before Christmas, we pile into Grandma’s car. It’s called a
station wagon and has wood sides and leather seats that smell new,
though Grandma says it’s eight years old. But there are no dents or
scratches and no rope to tie the trunk shut. Mommy drives.

We pass other apartment buildings like Grandma’s—red brick,
three stories high. Streets and streets of brick houses and tall wood
ones, but not like Cadillac—these are painted pale blue or white. One
is yellow. Some have shutters. The yards have big trees. Mommy says
they’re maples and oaks and will be beautiful in the spring when they
get their leaves. They’re beautiful now with every branch iced in
snow. Cement sidewalks, no wooden ones. We go down Main Street,
past Grants where Mommy worked as a girl, and J&M’s Department
Store where last week she bought herself a Christmas dress. There’s
the bus terminal where the legless man was selling pencils. I don’t see
him today.

Bethlehem Steel is the biggest factory I’ve ever seen, makes Wood-
Cadillac mine look like a bunch of shacks. Towers belch flames and
smoke. All the buildings are grey. The houses around the factory are
grey, too. Grey like in the North, but street after street and no trees or
wood piles.

And the people are dark, too. Negroes, Mommy calls them. I
haven’t seen negroes before.

We drive past more factories. One really stinks. “P.U., what’s that?”
“They make beer,” Grandma says.

Papa drank beer. Mommy, too. Grandma drinks tea or hot water.
Makes cocoa for me and Gloria.

The houses look better again and have big yards, lots of trees, some
with yellow leaves still hanging. We pass open fields. “Look, Gloria,
horses.” I give her a poke. This farm’s not at all like our cousins’ place.
The house is huge, white with green shutters. There’s a green barn
with a shiny metal roof. People in funny suits and hats are riding the
horses, jumping over gates.

“He didn’t ask you, did he?”

“Na, those swanks were just playing around. Well, here we are — Blossom City. Ritzville.”

Wide streets lined with small trees. The houses are newer, shorter, more spread out. That one is white with blue trim and a little porch with black iron railings. We stop in front of a red brick house. The windows have many little panes outlined in black. A curving, cement drive and a brick garage and a sidewalk right up to the front porch, and the door is shiny wood with a coloured-glass window — flowers in the glass. Only place I’ve seen this is the church in Rouyn-Noranda.

Aunt Jean’s at the door. She’s wearing a creamy dress. She hugs Mommy.

“Oh, Muriel, you poor thing. We’ve got to get you to a dentist.”

Mommy puts her hand over her mouth. It doesn’t look that bad now. Not swollen and she’s wearing her new lipstick — really bright red. Just no front teeth. I don’t have front teeth either. Different though. Mine fell out on their own, and the tooth fairy came and brought nickels.

Aunt Jean hugs me and Gloria, both at once. Her dress is soft wool, and she smells nice.

“John’s still at the bank,” she says to Grandma.

Last night Mommy told me Uncle John is a bank manager.

Our cousin Barbara is seven and very beautiful. She has long blond hair, white butterfly barrettes, a red plaid skirt, white stockings and shiny black shoes with straps. She just stands there though, with a stuck-up look.

Aunt Jean hugs me and Gloria, both at once. Her dress is soft wool, and she smells nice.

“John’s still at the bank,” she says to Grandma.

Last night Mommy told me Uncle John is a bank manager.

Our cousin Barbara is seven and very beautiful. She has long blond hair, white butterfly barrettes, a red plaid skirt, white stockings and shiny black shoes with straps. She just stands there though, with a stuck-up look.

Aunt Jean says: “Why don’t you show the girls your room?”

Barbara, with a little shrug, leads us down the hall and up the stairs.

Her room has all white furniture, a pink-flowered quilt, and curtains and the same pink flowers on the wallpaper. There’s a long shelf with dolls all in row, like in a store. They look brand new. Gloria touches one, and Barbara says: “Don’t, you’ll mess up her dress.”

I have a feeling I’m not going to like this cousin. I take Gloria’s hand, and we go back down to the living room where the grownups are having tea.

Supper’s amazing—a gigantic ham, a Jell-O salad in the shape of a Christmas tree, and more fancy desserts than we can possibly eat. Uncle John says grace, and that’s all he says. He’s not a bit like Uncle Yves, who has a very loud laugh and pretends to be a bear and chases us kids all through the house.

After, we sit by the Christmas tree. It looks like the ones in J&M’s windows. The ornaments are made of glass. I hold Gloria’s hand, though she’s stopped trying to touch everything.

We had a tree last year. Papa cut it in the bush. Me and Mommy made popcorn strings and red crepe paper bows. It was pretty, and after Christmas, we ate the popcorn. It was really hard to chew.

We’re in a big bed in a room by ourselves. The bed’s soft and the room warm. Gloria’s scared. She’s such a crybaby. I have to tell her stories. I tell her about Santa Claus coming down the chimney. She cries harder. So I make up a story.

“Once there were two little girls, and they went to visit their grandma. They had to go a long way through the bush.” I’m about to mention the big bad wolf, but think better of it. “They took the train. Miles and miles of snow, rocks, and bush. It was a long, long way, but they didn’t have to be afraid of wolves and bears because they were on the train. The whistle went ooouu ooouu, and all the wild animals ran away. Grandma lived in a big city in a beautiful house and all the windows had coloured glass flowers in them.”

“Grandma lives in the apartment.”

“This is a story, silly.”

“Okay.”

“It was Christmas Eve, and the children went right to sleep because they knew there would be presents the next morning.”

“What did they get?” whispers Gloria.

“The smaller girl got a beautiful doll with blond curly hair and eyes that open and shut, and the doll was wearing a red silk dress and black shiny shoes.”

“Really, she got a doll?”
“Really, now go to sleep. Soon it’ll be morning.”

***

Christmas morning is far better than my story. We both get red velvet dresses, long white stockings and shiny black shoes with straps. Mommy says the shoes are called Mary Janes.

Aunt Jean says: “We maybe should’ve got Sharon green. Red-heads shouldn’t wear red.”

“Sharon’s so pretty she looks good in any colour,” Mommy says. “You’ll make her vain,” Grandma says.

I’m not sure I like being dressed exactly like my little sister. We both get oranges, candy canes, and best of all dolls with blond curls and open-and-shut eyes, and the dolls have red velvet dresses, too.

Barbara gets a plaid taffeta dress and whispers: “Velvet’s for babies.”

“You’re an idiot. Your mother’s dress is velvet,” I whisper back.

All day Gloria holds her doll. She strokes and strokes its velvet dress. She strokes her own velvet dress too. She won’t play Snakes and Ladders. She won’t colour in our new books. I colour with Barbara who doesn’t like it when I draw pictures in the margins. “You’re supposed to colour within the lines,” she says.

“It’s my book. I’ll colour wherever I please.”

January is a very good month. I start school and learn to read in two weeks. Miss Cherry says I’m very smart. What she doesn’t know is that I was already reading with Mommy. In Cadillac we had a whole box of books that she had when she was little.

Mommy gets new teeth and is beautiful again. She also gets a job at Grants department store. On the last Friday of the month, the day she gets paid, she takes me and Gloria on the blue and white bus to Grants. We have supper at the snack bar: hamburgers, French fries, and grape phosphates. We watch the waitress squirt the syrup in the glass and then shoot the fizzy water from the machine. And voila, grape pop. There are twelve different flavours. Grape was Mommy’s favourite when she worked here as a teenager. Gloria and I stick our purple tongues out at each other. Mommy smokes and chats with our waitress, Holly, who tells us she and our mommy are old friends. Grandma doesn’t like it when Mommy smokes. Says it isn’t ladylike.

We go to the girls’ department, and Mommy buys us new underwear in different colours with the days of the week stamped on them. In Cadillac at Ducharme’s store, they sold only white underwear, and Mommy says it was more expensive. Everything’s prettier and cheaper at Grants. We get red plaid skirts and white blouses, and flannelette nighties with kittens printed on them. In the toy department there’s a counter covered with doll clothes. Dresses are 25 cents, and we each pick one out and socks for 5 cents and shoes for 10. Mommy says next week she’ll buy us new dolls. Gloria wants the soft-bodied baby doll, while I would like the grownup lady doll with the ruffled taffeta skirt.

“Are we rich now?” I ask Mommy.

“Not quite,” she says and laughs.

February is good, too. Gloria gets her baby doll and me a lady doll. Each Friday we eat at the snack bar. We’ve had cherry, orange, lime, as well as the grape phosphates. Every week we get new clothes,
and almost every night she brings us a colouring or paper-doll book, or some candy. It’s like every day is Christmas.

Gloria has stopped wetting the bed and pooping in corners. Grandma bought a child-sized toilet seat and covered it in pink furry fabric. Gloria stopped being afraid of toilets.

It’s cozy being in the big bed with Mommy and Gloria, but I can’t always go to sleep right away.

I’m still awake when Mommy comes to bed and snuggles down beside me.

“What was your papa like?” I ask her.

“A good man. Critical, though.”

“What’s critical?”

“Oh, just how he thought about people. My best friend was Mary Talbot, our next-door neighbour. Her folks had a store downtown, Talbot’s Gifts and Confectionary. Their store sold beautiful china dolls, and Mary got one each Christmas. I knew my folks could get me one through the store at half price. I heard our mothers talking. I never got one though.”

“Did you get ordinary dolls instead?”

“Once, but after that she would say, ‘You have a doll. What do you need another one for?’”

“Was Mary nice?”

“Oh, yes. She always shared everything. Lent me clothes and even her dolls. My dad didn’t like that. Anyway, when we were nine, her parents had to sell their store and move away. Dad said, ‘That’s what happens to big-time spenders. Serves them right.’ Our families were supposed to be friends. We even had Thanksgiving dinner together, every year.”

“But why did they have to sell their store?”

“It was the Depression. A lot of people lost their jobs. Nobody could buy anything. Most people were poor. The Talbots came back a year later and rented the apartment over their old store. For a while her dad was a janitor. Then he was unemployed again. Dad said, ‘What does he expect, gadding around the countryside?’ My mother replied, ‘A rolling stone gathers no moss.’”

“What’s that mean?”

“If you travel, you won’t have things like a house and money. Mother loves those old sayings.” Mommy sounds cross.

“Your mother’s nice. I love Grandma.”

“Yes, she is nice, and has been very good to us. We better get to sleep—school for you and work for me in the morning.”

March starts off good. First of all, the snow melts, and we don’t have to wear our itchy-wool snow-pants. If we went bare-legged in Cadillac in March, we’d freeze our behinds, as Mommy says. I learn to skip double Dutch.

Then things get very, very sad. Grandma dies. I didn’t know she was sick. She did sleep a lot, but she looked after Gloria all day while Mommy was at Grants.

Grandma said: “Sweet little Gloria’s no bother. I hardly know she’s in the house.”

Gloria had a nap every afternoon with Grandma. I can’t remember ever having afternoon naps. But Gloria, with her Christmas doll, her baby doll, and the brand new Raggedy Ann doll, slept all afternoon in Grandma’s bed.

Mommy and Aunt Jean have a big fight. Aunt Jean says: “Mother was too old to look after your kids, and that’s why she had a heart attack.”

Maybe she means me, because Grandma said Gloria was no bother. I know I’m not quiet. And sometimes, Ruth came after school, and we made a fort out of the kitchen chairs and a blanket. But Grandma said she didn’t mind. She liked to see children having fun, and she gave us cocoa and graham crackers spread with peanut butter to take into our fort.

Mommy buys us pink taffeta dresses for Grandma’s funeral. In the funeral home I have to tell Gloria to stop stroking hers. People will think she’s a crazy.

Gloria does act crazy. First, she wants to stand by Grandma’s coffin. Everybody says what a sweet little girl she is. Gloria tells everybody: “My grandma’s sleeping. Doesn’t she look pretty?” I try to lead her away, but she won’t budge.
The man in the black suit tells everyone but the family to go in the chapel. "I'll give you a moment to say goodbye," he says to Mommy and Aunt Jean. They both kiss Grandma and step back. Don't seem to notice Gloria hasn't moved.

Black Suit closes the lid and Uncle John and some other men I don't know pick up the coffin.

Mommy picks up Gloria, and we all follow the coffin into the chapel. Mommy said a chapel is a little church. No pretty windows, but somebody is playing an organ.

At first, Gloria whimpers, then she cries louder and louder. I can’t hear what the minister’s saying and give her a poke to make her shut up, but she screams and screams right to the end.

Gloria has nightmares—she’s in a coffin, and a man in a black suit closes the lid, and she can’t breathe.

What’s worse, she wets the bed. And Mommy has enough to do getting off to work without having all that extra laundry.

And then, Mommy going to work is the problem. Who’s going to look after Gloria? Grandma’s friend, Mrs. Jackson, does for a while, but some days she has appointments, or a headache, and her bridge club meets on Thursdays.

Everything just gets worse, and I have to stay home from school some days to look after Gloria. If I get to go to school, I have to come right home after, and Ruth’s not allowed to come. Those days, Mommy leaves as soon as I get home. Me and Gloria eat the sandwiches, milk, and cookies she left for us. We colour and play with our dolls. We get too tired to wait up for her and go to bed. We’re asleep before she returns. She says to keep the door locked, don’t ever turn on the stove, and don’t tell anybody at school we’re alone.

Aunt Jean and Mommy have another big fight. Aunt Jean wants to sell Grandma’s car, but she can’t because Grandma gave it to Mommy. Mommy has the ownership paper and waves it in Aunt Jean’s face. Aunt Jean leaves as soon as I get home. Me and Gloria eat the sandwiches, milk, and cookies she left for us. We colour and play with our dolls. We get too tired to wait up for her and go to bed. We’re asleep before she returns. She says to keep the door locked, don’t ever turn on the stove, and don’t tell anybody at school we’re alone.

When we turn around, Gloria is howling on the bare living room floor. No more fringe for her to straighten.

***

I wake up and Mommy’s not in bed with us. From the living room doorway, I see her sitting on the couch. She’s smoking. She’s not supposed to smoke in Grandma’s house. I stand right in front of her, but she doesn’t see me. She’s staring at the window with a gone away look.

"Mommy, what are you looking at?"
"Just thinking, honey, just thinking." And she reaches out and pulls me onto her lap.

"About what?"
"How much I loved my mother, and never told her."
"I love you, Mommy."
"I love you too, Sharon. Never forget that. Don’t ever think I don’t, no matter how stupid I act."
"You don’t act stupid."
"I never did anything she approved of."
"You had me and Gloria, and she loved us."
"Yes, she did." She holds me so tight I can’t breathe.
"Come back to bed," I tell her.

She gets up and carries me to bed, just like a baby. She tucks me in beside Gloria and kisses me. "I’ll be right back. Go to sleep now."
But I can’t go to sleep, and she doesn’t come back. I can smell her cigarette. Grandma didn’t like Mommy smoking.

***

Mommy’s late for work because Gloria clings to her leg and won’t let her go. Mommy pulls her off and I hold on to her while Mommy gets out the door.

One time, Mommy sits down on the floor with Gloria on her lap and they both cry. That’s scary, and I don’t know what to do.

Gloria gets strep throat, and Mommy has to stay home. Gloria
has pills that cost a lot of money and a high fever. Her being sick isn't all bad because every day I get to go to school.

Gloria’s sick for two weeks and Mommy loses her job. “Those S.O.B.’s,” she says, but won’t tell me what that means. She says not to worry, we’ll have the money from Grandma’s estate.

Aunt Jean returns and takes the pink and white dishes, the silver platter and all the pretty things in the china cabinet. Then the movers come and take the china cabinet. The apartment doesn’t look like Grandma’s place anymore.

Mommy says: “It’s okay. When I get my money, we’ll buy new things.”

In May, me and Gloria move into Grandma’s room. Two men come and bring white beds with gold trim and take Grandma’s old bed away. Mommy buys us pink flowered quilts and pink curtains and a pink rug for between the beds. Our room is just as pretty as our cousin Barbara’s.

The only problem is Gloria’s scared to sleep alone and crawls with me. I tell her I’ll kill her if she wets the bed. I wake up with cold pee against my leg. She’s sound asleep in her soggy mess. I give her a good poke. She bawls and Mommy comes.

***

June 12th is my birthday. I’m seven today. Gloria’s still five because her birthday’s not till October. We have pink and white balloons and streamers, but best of all, I get to invite Ruth and also Judy and Karen, but Ruth’s my best friend.

We have a treasure hunt. Have to follow the clues. Mommy hands me a pink note: Look in the third dresser drawer in the girls’ room.

I read the notes because I’m the best reader in our class. The next one says: Look in the silverware drawer.

We run to the kitchen. Ruth yanks out the drawer so hard it falls on the floor and the stuff flies all over with a great bang clatter.

“Sorry, Mrs. Desjardins,” says Ruth.

“It’s okay.” Mommy laughs and pats her on the head. “Find the clue, quick.”

I spot the piece of pink paper, and we’re off to the living room. Under the middle cushion, the note says.

By the time we find the prize in Mommy’s closet, the apartment is a big mess, but everybody’s laughing, Mommy most of all.

We tear the paper off the box and there are shiny bead necklaces and bracelets for all of us.

We have hot dogs, cake and ice cream, and the cake is from the bakery, and it’s white with pink candy roses and has happy birthday and my name all in pink icing.

In Cadillac, Mommy made our cakes, and they just had candles and white icing.

When Mommy’s tucking me into bed, I ask her: “Did you have fun birthday parties when you were little?”

“No. My mother didn’t think children needed birthday parties.”
I would like to thank Guernica Editions’ publishers, Michael Mirolla and Connie McParland, and my editor, Lindsay Brown. It was my great pleasure to work with Lindsay during the editing process.

I am indebted to Sylvia Andrychuk for her editing skills and technical support.

I would also like to thank the Ban Righ Writers’ Group, especially Maureen Garvie, Bill Hutchinson, and Darryl Berger for their long-time support and encouragement.

A chapter from this novel was published with some modification as a short story in Room’s fall issue 2010.

Kristin Andrychuk was raised in an area of stark contrasts between the conservative village of Ridgeway, Ontario, the vibrant summer resort town of Crystal Beach, and just a few miles away from the bustling American city of Buffalo, New York. All three places majorly influenced the stories she tells in her poetry, short stories, and novels. She has been widely published in literary magazines and anthologies. *Cadillac Road* is her third novel. Her two previous novels are *The Swing Tree* (Oberon 1996) and *Riding the Comet* (Oberon 2003). She has three times been the recipient of scholarships to attend the Banff Centre’s writers’ studios. She resides in Kingston, Ontario with her husband Don.