

Praise for *The Ever After of Ashwin Rao*

“... a complex and moving novel that does what contemporary media accounts of the tragedy did not: it brings home individual stories of loss and makes clear the extent of the devastation... richly textured and powerful... fertile emotional territory... sympathetic and believable characters... engrossing themes, including faith and its secular underpinnings, loss, identity and nationalism.” — *TORONTO STAR*

“Ambitious... Vivid...” — *QUILL & QUIRE*

“Viswanathan tackles the story with great empathy and a journalist’s attention to detail... [P]rovocative and compelling.” — *CHATELAINE*

“This new book is the best kind of political novel: the kind that doesn’t force you to constantly notice it’s a political novel ... Viswanathan has written an important book – one that deserves to find international recognition.” — *THE GLOBE AND MAIL*

“Viswanathan’s second novel digs deeply and effectively into the psychology of bereavement, as well as providing outsiders with fascinating insight into Hinduism, Indo-Canadian culture and the history of Hindu-Sikh conflict... [A] very satisfying experience.” — *WINNIPEG FREE PRESS*

“[T]he story’s power resides in its measured treatment of sorrow and rage ... More than a memorial to the victims and the bereaved, *The Ever After of Ashwin Rao* charts how people navigate their anguish.”
— *THE GEORGIA STRAIGHT*

Praise for Padma Viswanathan’s first novel, *The Toss of a Lemon*

“*The Toss of a Lemon* is compelling mainly because of one beautiful thing: narrative. Viswanathan has an uncommon gift ... a real achievement, unhurried, intelligently paced, laced with a tender care for unremarkable and, to us, unimaginable lives.” — *SYDNEY MORNING HERALD*

“Viswanathan’s story of female empowerment within strict limits transcends culture to reach for the nature of fate itself. She has a gift for spinning an epic from ordinary details.” — *SUNDAY TASMANIAN*

“The detail is fantastic ... Many observations and even whole scenes are quite unnecessary to the plot but they charm and illuminate a rambling yet very controlled saga. The language is lyrical ... and the characters – master and servant, townfolk, friends and relations, are beautifully drawn.”
— *CANBERRA TIMES*

“In this ambitious first novel, Viswanathan reveals an India rarely seen before ... It’s an epic tale, full of the superstitions and ceremonial customs from the past that are intrinsically linked to the present.”
— *LAUNCESTON EXAMINER*

THE
EVER
AFTER
OF
ASHWIN
RAO

PADMA
VISWANATHAN



*For the lost,
And for the living.*

I dont think it makes no diffrents where you start
the telling of a thing. You never know where it
begun really. No moren you know where you
begun your own self.

—*Riddley Walker*, RUSSELL HOBAN

S U M M E R 2 0 0 4

All the new thinking is about loss.
In this it resembles all the old thinking.

—ROBERT HASS

9 June, 2004

AT THREE IN THE MORNING, New Delhi's air is mostly remnants. This is its quietest hour, though the city is not still. The sounds of night business concluding, morning business being prepared, all sorts of shrouded transactions: these carry. But the air itself is nostalgic with acrid exhaust, cookstove smoke, the dying breaths of jasmine and bougainvillea breaking down into each other, night exhaling the prior day.

Please excuse: poetic lapse. I orient by smell. The night-scent excited me as I locked my door and ascended, then stopped, descended and re-entered the flat to check again: taps off, windows locked, no food anywhere. I don't normally second-guess this way—I have many neuroses, just not this one—but I would be away in Canada for a year. I would leave my key with a fellow resident but didn't want to leave her a reason to use it.

I locked the door again, and went upstairs to lay the key in its envelope on Vijaya's threshold. She was a widow I barely considered a friend, particularly since she wanted to be more than that. Fetching my bag from the landing, I trotted briskly down the stairs, across the courtyard and into the carport, clicking my tongue for the cat. Dirty-orange fur, three rickety legs, strangely swollen jowls; it slunk around as though hoping to be hit.

I put out last night's take-away, lamb biryani, at the usual spot. I had never wanted to keep a pet, but was overcome by the urge to feed the

patchy creature. A memory knocked. My nephew, Anand, at six months maybe. When do they start with the pabulum? My sister, Kritika, was feeding him. She called me over—“Watch, Ashwin!”—as she lifted the little spoon toward his face and he opened his mouth, SO wide, his head bobbing a little, the eyes so serious, as though this were a contract he had agreed to fulfill: survival. My sister and I laughed until our sides hurt.

And two years after Anand came my niece, Asha.

Asha, my Asha. The child of my life. Sometimes I thought I recalled a whisper of her smell—green grapes and the pages of books; perhaps a hint of nutmeg?—but even the motion of my mind turning toward it fanned it away.

The cat still hadn't appeared and my auto-rickshaw was waiting. “Airport,” I told the driver, no *good morning* necessary. He had been, for fifteen years, my favourite among those at the corner rank—almost surly, always prompt. He tossed his beedi and unthrottled his engine.

Two weeks from today, June 23, would be the nineteenth anniversary of a jet bombing that killed 326 people I didn't know, and three I did: Kritika, Anand, Asha. It had taken nearly eighteen years to drag two perpetrators into court. Last spring, April 2003, I had gone to Vancouver to witness the trial's start. My first time back in Canada since 1985. A Screaming Reluctance to See It had battled in me with a Driving Compulsion to See It. Guess which won?

Victims' families, along with various other concerned parties and/or gawkers, came from all over. They milled in the grand atrium at the provincial courthouse in Vancouver, their hot, thick optimism mingling with a slight steam from the bloodthirsty and giving me . . . what is it? When one's skin crawls. The *heebie-jeebies*.

The atrium's high, glass walls gave the all-too-obvious image of transparency. Kafka's trial could never happen here. Glass houses: Canadians don't throw stones. On the government side, the excitement was both more stately and more tawdry: press releases, security expenditures, and a bullet- and bomb-proof courtroom custom-built several circles of hell underground, down where the sun don't shine.

Only two of the many hot-air buffoons allegedly involved in the bombing were standing trial. I would name them, but what's in a name? I try to block their faces, but they rise in my mind's eye. Specimens. Bad examples of their community, their race, their species. Bad men.

I felt the trial to be a sham and yet I had gone to see it. Why? And furthermore, Why?

Why a sham? Because it came so very late—and after so much had changed, from the political situations that fed the bomb plot to the security situations that permitted it—that it would do nothing to prevent future terrorist acts. The accused did not regret what they had done, but neither would they plant any other bombs.

But what of punishment? you might ask. I *hated* those men. I might gladly have punished them with my own hands, not that I have ever done such a thing. But for the government to mete out, what—justice? Hardly. No government in the world possessed a moral scepter weighty enough to flog these puny fellows.



The Yamuna's sulphurous stench cascaded in the auto-rickshaw's open sides as we approached the bridge. The city lights glinted sluggishly off the river. I gripped my bag with one hand and the back of the driver's seat with the other—he had added some turbo-enhancer he probably never got to use in Delhi's daytime traffic, and was taking advantage of the empty streets to go much faster than advisable.



So. Why had I gone? At the time, I didn't know why. In the courtroom, it wasn't the accused who interested me but the bereaved, the others like myself, those who had lost the people most important to them. Apart from my now-late parents, I had only ever spoken to one other living victim: my brother-in-law, Suresh, Kritika's husband. A good fellow, but we had not been in contact since a year or two after

the disaster. I looked for him in the courthouse crowds, fruitlessly.

How is he? I thought, for the first time in years. Perhaps it was the first time I had ever thought that. When the bomb struck, my first thoughts were not for the suffering of others. Except my parents. Well, except my father.

How was Suresh? How were these people around me? These people *like me*?

In the therapeutic context, such a question would be no problem. I am a psychologist. Put me across from a client and I will ask, intuit, tease or ferret out everything either of us needs to know. Surrounded by the crowds at the trial, though, I didn't know where to start. Every two hours, after each break in the trial (lawyers need their Starbucks), I would have someone new next to me, such as the heavy woman in a salwar kameez whose homey aroma of frying dough couldn't quite cover an inky, pooling despair. She leaned on a young man with a serious brow and neatly trimmed beard, who supported her on one arm while taking notes with his other. Two hours later, it was a tiny, twiggy-smelling couple in outdated business suits who sat without touching until, hearing some detail I didn't catch, they took each other's hands without meeting each other's eyes. Across the room, I saw a famous dancer whose husband and daughters had been killed. She had become active in the victims' advocacy group, and I had seen her name and photo in news reports. She had remarried, a gentleman whose wife and children had been on that same plane.

This was why I had come, I realized, to find out how these people had coped up. Not only *how* as in *how well*, but rather *by what means* did they go on?

There were so many of them there, but not a single one I could sit down with and ask. I should have contacted Suresh, I thought, then. Was he still in Montreal? Was he still alive? Who had he become in the years since losing his family—since losing my family?



My auto slowed in the thickening traffic as we near Indira Gandhi International. Time can be defined by motion, I mused; the airport should be its own time zone. I wanted to be in bed, not assailed by people, vehicles, shouting, honking, business. Can one have jet lag in advance of a trip? I was hastily erecting a Potemkin village of mental activity, to let me get on the plane.



Last spring, I had booked a month in Vancouver, but after only a few days attending the trial, I could take no more. What to do with the three-plus weeks left to me? Try to answer my questions, perhaps. So instead of returning to India early, I retreated to my comfort zones: the university, the library.

Surely others had written about this, I was thinking. Over the years, in psychology journals, I had come across so many studies on victims of mass trauma. Longitudinal, informational, survey- or interview- or standardized-test-based. Beirut, Belfast, Kigali. I had never seen one on the Air India disaster, but then, I'd never properly searched.

After the World Trade Tower attacks, nearly half of all Americans showed PTSD symptoms. How did the researchers think to test for that? They must have observed the symptoms in others; they might have felt them themselves. Had Canadians suffered similarly, following the bombing? The U.S. has about ten times Canada's population. Three thousand plus people were killed in the September 11 attacks, three hundred plus in the Air India disaster. Do the math. It should add up, but it doesn't.

Canadians at large did not feel themselves to have been attacked, although nearly every passenger aboard that flight was a born or naturalized Canadian. Canada's prime minister infamously sent a telegram of condolences to the Indian government, who had lost what? A jet. Oh, and a couple of pilots. No wonder Canada had failed to prevent the bombing in the first place. No wonder they had failed, for eighteen years, to bring it to trial.

And, I learned now, failed to take the bombing up in scholarship. I found no articles that addressed my questions. I looked, though it seemed even more improbable, for books. I found the same three I had read over fifteen years ago, one sensational, one implausible, and one by Bharati Mukherjee and Clark Blaise.

Mukherjee: tough broad. I've never met her but I'd like her, even if we would almost certainly fight. I loved her novels back when I lived in Canada: she was one of the very first to write about the no-man's land—or, more often, no-woman's land—of the transplant. I might have felt nothing in common with her protagonists had I met them in life, but I identified with them as I never had with fictional characters before.

Her book on the bombing was called *The Sorrow and the Terror*. (That title, in huge block letters and lurid flame-tones: really?) I sat with it in the reading room of the Vancouver public library. Much of it was good, far better than I had given it credit for the first time around, back when my pain was most acute.

Like all of us, Mukherjee and Blaise were appalled by the Canadian government's refusal for six months to acknowledge that the jet had been destroyed by a bomb, even given that another Air India jet, also originally departing from Vancouver, had blown up an hour earlier in Tokyo. Officials didn't want to admit their negligence. An FBI plant had met radical Sikhs who wanted to blow shit up in India, poison the water supply, disrupt the economy, kill thousands. The newly formed Canadian Security and Intelligence Service had tailed a motley crew of brown radicals who kept muttering to one another in secret code in Punjabi, a language none of CSIS's west coast agents spoke, despite five generations of Sikh settlement here. Phones were bugged, conversations were taped and sent back to Ottawa for transcription, all routine, no sense of urgency. After transcription, translation. After translation, decoding. ("Ready to write the book?" asked a pay phone caller. "Yes, let's write the book," responded the man who had picked up in some suburban home.) After decoding, perhaps alarm. (Wait a sec, is this—? *What* are they—?) But then, of course, it was too late.

And right after the tapes were transcribed, they were erased, per routine, leaving no original evidence to present at a future trial.

All that is laid out in the first part of Mukherjee–Blaise’s book, a very serviceable catalogue of failures. Part two “honours” the victims, telling their stories in their voices, but framing and bending them so that this stream converges with the first to become a single roaring river of accusation: that the Canadian government failed to see this as a Canadian problem and a Canadian tragedy, even though it was a plot hatched by Canadians in Canada that resulted in hundreds of Canadian deaths.

“But it is never so simple!” I said, slapping the book’s face, even though they were right. It was their methods and their tone that I disagreed with—but more on that in time.

Whatever I thought of the analysis, the interviews were a generation old. Had no one tried to learn what had happened to these people since? I hunted again for articles. I enlisted librarians to double-check my search terms. They were as puzzled as I—*What a good question*, they said. *I can’t believe no one has asked it before*. “Sorry, sir. Looks like you’re going to have to do a study,” one gentleman in wire-rimmed glasses told me, glancing away from his screen to flash me a grin, then freezing when he saw my frozen face.

I had been in a thick, paralyzing fog, less and less able to work—I still believed in my work, but had lost faith in my ability to do it. I overcame this tower of self-doubt, this mountain of lassitude, to come to Canada, to witness the start of the trial. This decision, this trip, was the single meaningful thing I’d done in a year, which is not to say I had known what it meant. I had been suspicious, because it couldn’t be the trial I was coming for. Rather, the trial led me to this: the subject of my next book. I should have known, as they say.



Fifteen months later, the trial was still dragging on, and I was returning to Canada to begin work on that book. I had avoided Air India on my last trip, but this time, I made myself fly Delhi–Heathrow–Montreal,

reversing the route of all those dear departed and retracing my own of so many years ago.

At Indira Gandhi International's security gate, I slipped my bare feet back into my sandals and tried to see the X-ray of my single carry-on through a security guard's eyes.

I FIRST LEFT INDIA IN 1969, to attend medical school at McGill, but then abandoned that course of studies during my third year, in favour of a PhD in psychology. It was a move that might have been impossible in India, where I would have been restricted by my parents' wishes, but that is not to say it was easy in Canada, where visa requirements still meant I had to cling to the trapeze of my student status until some other swung close.

Such a handhold presented itself in 1975, as I was finishing my doctorate. I hit it off with a couple of Ottawa psychologists at a conference. We stayed in touch, and they eventually invited me to join their practice.

The conference was on Narrative Therapy, a term I heard for the first time that year, an idea that, at first, grasped me more than I grasped it.

Ever since I was very young, I've kept a journal. Not unusual, you might say. Lots of people do. True. My father kept a journal—he recorded in it the details of his days, where he went, whom he met, what he ate, what irritated my mother. My uncle kept a journal—he recorded each thing he bought and how much it cost. His entire life in purchases. He showed it to me once, with unreflexive pride. He thought everyone should keep such a book.

But I keep a journal differently. I note, on a left-hand page, an anecdote—something characteristic or outrageous a friend or family member said, or perhaps a confidence told to me. On the facing page, for as many pages as it takes, I properly tell the story: third-person, quasi-fictionalized, including matters not witnessed, details I can't really know; and so try to explain what I have seen or heard.

All my friends are in there. Everyone in my family, except my mother—I have often described the inexplicable things she says and does, but long ago bowed to their inexplicability. There was no sense in my trying to write fiction that explains them. I also make notes on my own life, though I have never tried to make fiction out of that.

When I was young, I hid the journal above a rafter in the room where my sister and I slept and studied. Kritika saw me writing in it, but I tried to keep it from her. It was a private endeavour. My countrymen don't believe in privacy, so I'm not sure how I got that idea. Perhaps some child in an English book kept a secret diary and the notion infected me.

My sister told my mother about the journal. They found it and read it, then my sister took it to show my friends.

Only one took it very badly, but that was because the passing around of the journal meant everyone knew about his incestuous relationship with his aunt, which I never would have divulged. He blamed Kritika, and rightly. She was a little like my mother, in her use of an imagined victimhood to justify morally dubious acts. Several others disliked one story about themselves, but found another story to redeem the first.

I have neglected to mention that I had, some five years earlier, shown my journal to my father. This was when he got me started on writing, taking me to our stationer's to get a notebook for me identical to his own. On our way home, we met a sycophantic neighbour who asked his help with a court case. My father was reluctant and told me later why. We sat together as he recorded this encounter in his journal and I recorded it in mine. Then I wrote my first story, fleshing out his meeting with that man, and showed it to my father. My portrayal struck him as accurate. He said he never would have known that his eyes and mouth became rigid as he listened to the man speak, that he held his

breath a little, that shadows seemed to cross his face as he turned away. Juvenile stuff, but he acted impressed. And I felt proud.

Even months and years after, my friends talked to me about my portraits of them, how these differed from their self-views, but seemed as true, as rich, even despite inaccurate or invented details. They also corrected me. In some cases, I wrote new drafts to show them.

Kritika, by contrast, didn't like the way I wrote about her, ever. One story was based on a series of small lies she told when we were on holiday, staying with relatives. Each one cast her as disadvantaged or needy and told how she had gained something for herself: the final portion of a dessert, the window seat on the train. I wrote the story from her point of view, so it wasn't entirely unsympathetic, but as her fibs accumulated, it became clear they could be interpreted another way—my way. I may have been too close to her to get her right. Or it may have been my accuracy that offended her.

After I came to Canada, my journal-writing stopped. I seemed unable to represent Canadians on the page. I couldn't authentically write dialogue for them, for instance. I couldn't imagine details or deduce motivations. I could write about Indian acquaintances (dinner friends, I called them—Indian families who brought me home and fed me, out of some fellow feeling), but this was a lonely enterprise. They were not, generally, people who interested me very much.

Yet when, in my final year of grad school, I saw a notice for that conference, "Start Making Sense: the Uses of Narrative in Therapy," I felt an instinctive pull. I attended the conference and had some excellent conversations. One of them resulted in a job.

Four or five years after, I met Rosslyn. This was at another conference—"Mental Health Professionals in the Ottawa Public Schools." I never would have attended except that someone from our practice needed to go. Boring as hell. Rosslyn agreed, even as a newly minted guidance counsellor with much to learn.

There were many matters we agreed on, Rosslyn and I. It's nice to recall that, though my recollections depend on my moods. By the time we met, I was already feeling a kind of disaffection with my Canadian

middle-class clientele. But *disaffection* is too strong. Boredom? Not quite that either, though it seemed that if I saw children, it was for tantrums and truancy; adolescents, anorexia and related rebellions. Adults? Marital woes, anxiety, depression.

I found my clientele homogeneous. Rosslyn thought my inability to distinguish them was a failure of imagination. At the time, her criticism annoyed me, but I might agree with her now. It wasn't so much that the clients and their problems were homogeneous, it was that I wasn't perceptive enough to differentiate them. My therapeutic interest is in framing individuals' maladies as stories within stories within stories, the way people themselves are nested within families and societies. Presenting problems may be superficially repetitive, but they will also contain many unique facets. My challenge is to tell the story on the individual's terms, giving a nuanced sense of his problems' origins—in himself, in his community, in societal expectations.

I came to attribute my blocks to my newness here. My clients' aims; their ideals; the things they felt they deserved in life—much of this did not make sense to me, even after long, hard thought. I could parrot their accounts of their family histories, homes, schools, but these places and people were not imaginatively available to me. In talk therapy, I would tell my clients versions of their stories, but these were so much narrower, shallower, than what I hoped for.

Rosslyn occasionally referred children to the practice where I worked. Anorexics or vandals she referred to whichever of the psychologists had a vacancy in our caseload. Native children and immigrants with adjustment troubles she tried to refer straight to me. I refused. She grew impatient trying to convince me. *She* was refusing, I thought, to see that, as hard as it was for me to help mainstream Canadians with their mainstream problems, the prospect of trying to address outsiders' problems was even further from my capacities. She thought I would identify with them, while I feared I wouldn't be able to tell their intrinsic psychological problems from the ones engendered by societal demands. Which story nests and which is nested? I would be the blind leading the blind up and down Escher stairways.

The only exceptions were Indians. I saw two, in the four (or so) years that Rosslyn and I were together. One was—yet again!—an anorexic, a wealthy Canadian-born teenybopper. The other was an engineering student who had attempted suicide after failing classes and admitting to a friend that he was homosexual.

With them, I attempted the method I had mused on for so long in the absence of opportunities to test it. They told me their stories; I wrote my versions; I gave these back. We discussed, they corrected, I revised, they revised; we worked, together, toward the future chapters, in which they became the people they envisioned—with increasing specificity, clarity, logic—themselves to be. The narratives broke up their monolithic notions of their identities, their histories, and, most importantly, their destinies.

These two early attempts were ridiculously successful. If Rosslyn had thought me arrogant already (I was; I am), I must have become insufferable then. And yet these were the times she was at her most encouraging. She only wished I would find the confidence to use the method in the rest of my practice. I believed I was not qualified and would not be for many years, if ever. She thought me stubborn. Again, she was not wrong.

Then, in October of 1982, my father fell ill.

I arranged a leave to go back to New Delhi and spend time with him. Kritika also came home, but only briefly: she was, by this time, raising her own family in Montreal and couldn't stay long. While in Delhi, I arranged to meet with a psychiatrist and a sociologist whose collaborative work I had long admired. I spent a day with them at the famous Institute for Research on Developing Societies (IRDS), looking in on meetings; even, when asked, offering an opinion. A week or so later, the centre's resident Freudian, with a Jungian in tow, came to see me at my parents' home. They proposed a collaboration to let me further explore my theoretical model. They would give me an office at IRDS, say, for three months or so, and resources to explore my ideas. They suggested I see a couple of short-term clients. Their own client bases included inmates from Delhi jails moving toward release, victims of political

violence or police brutality, police officers themselves, low-caste university students, divorcées. India and Indians, they told me, needed me more than did the West.

Psychologists know how to persuade. My practice in Ottawa granted me an extended leave, and I mentioned it to Rosslyn when we talked by phone, as we did each Sunday evening. She was glad to hear me so excited, or I thought that's what I heard. It was hard to read her mood from half a world away, and I might not have been sufficiently attentive.

At the end of those three months, my work was barely starting to yield results. I had, perhaps rashly, taken on a few clients who needed more than three months' therapy. Perhaps I did it because I knew it would create an obligation in me to stay. I had begun again to write, for my practice and otherwise, in a way I had not for nearly fifteen years. Imagine how that felt. Like releasing a hand that had been tied behind my back—numbness, pins and needles, then a return of strength until it became as it once was, second nature.

I extended my leave for another three months. Rosslyn seemed to accept my motivations and voiced no objections. And yet our conversations grew tepid. It was hard for me to maintain interest in her professional activity, for the reasons I have mentioned. Talk of our days also felt remote, comparing her life in her nation's capital to mine in mine. She drove to work past tulips and the placid Rideau Canal. I saw from my bus window a crowd of newly minted Tibetan refugees; a protest, turned violent, against violence in Punjab; Indira Gandhi, with security agents and sons. What could she say? "Geez." "Wow." "Neat."

I wasn't telling her everything. Delhi was tense, and dangerous because of it. Indira Gandhi's Emergency was long over, but the sense of her reign as decadent and bloody remained. The optimism that had still tenuously prevailed when I'd left in '69 was in pieces, particularly in Punjab, our only Sikh-majority state, which was agitating for independence. Indira's response was to put the state under President's Rule. What's that old saw? To a lady with a hammer, every problem looks like a nail. Being at the Institute for Research on Developing

Societies, though, felt like being part of the solution, while in Canada, I had felt like I was hiding my head in a hole. I met political scientists and sociologists who were studying our government, its problems, our people's response; I saw clients who personified, in many ways, our struggles.

At the expiry of my second leave, June 1, the IRDS offered me a permanent place. I thought about it, for an hour or so, and accepted.

Why did I not call Rosslyn that day? Why didn't I ask her to join me? How could I? I would have had to propose, but we hadn't quite got to that point before I left—or I hadn't—in part because of my problems with the marital institution. Our relationship had been largely static in the months since I left. She couldn't come to stay at my parents' house unless we were married, but it was unheard of in India at that time for a woman to live by herself, nor would I ask it of her. Would it be right to ask her to leave her family, friends, job, all that was familiar, to come and join me? What would she do with herself in India?

Really: did I think it all through like this, back then? No. I was reveling in the new force and clarity of my work. I had no wish to wade about in the marshes of my heart.



It was in exactly this time that the tension in Punjab became suddenly concentrated in the area around the Golden Temple, Sikhdom's holiest shrine, in Amritsar. The rebels' leader would roam the Punjabi countryside with his followers on missions of "purification"—violent confrontations with members of other sects, as well as acts of nationalist assertion—and then retreat, regroup and re-pray in the the Golden Temple complex, their safehouse and stronghold.

For as long as the renegades managed to survive in their bastion, they could continue to wage their war on the disagreeable sectarians and secularists. If, alternatively, by making Sikhdom's holiest place his fort, their leader was trying to tempt Indira Gandhi to make of him a martyr there—well, he succeeded in that.

June 3 was a holy day. The pathways and shrines of the temple were pilgrim-packed, as were the hostel, offices and library within the temple's grounds. That night, a curfew silenced the city streets as the militants shrank from the temple thoroughfares into the sanctum sanctorum.

June 4, the Dragon Lady's army began its assault, a seventeen-hour shooting day, with brief pauses for the army to invite pilgrims to exit the complex. Few dared. Reports leaked out: The army locked sixty pilgrims into a hostel room overnight—this was to protect them—but without water or fans, all but five were dead when the doors were unlocked the next morning. Crossfire wounded innocents as they drank from the gutters blood-tainted water, all they could find.

We followed it all, at the office, blow by blow, shot by shot. We heard later that the generals had never imagined the fighters would be so well armed or so persistent, but imagination is not, I suppose, a quality much cultivated in the army. Rebels popped out of manholes, shot at the soldiers' knees, then disappeared again into the anthill that is the temple complex. The generals admired their courage and cunning, wished those Sikhs were on their side, as in days of yore. But the only way to get rid of ants is to kill them all.

June 5, they brought in the tanks.

Rosilyn called that night, a Sunday.

"How are you?" I said. "Have you been following all this on the news?"

"All what?" she asked.

I was flummoxed.

"The Golden Temple stuff?" she asked.

"What did you think?"

"I was confused because you said, *How are you*, and . . . oh, never mind. How are you, Ashwin?"

"Shocked. Appalled. So many dead who have no association with the rebels." I sounded accusatory, to my own ear, and could feel I was accusing her, though she didn't take it that way.

"Barbaric."

"Why can't we all just get along, eh?"

This time my tone penetrated. She took the bait. "I'm not saying it's

not complicated, Ashwin. I know it is. But it's not like you've told me anything that's not on the news."

I waited. She waited.

"So are you going to tell me about it?" she asked. "The IRDS has to be buzzing."

"It is."

"And so . . . you're still there? Your leave expired Tuesday. You're, what—you're just hanging around?"

"They offered me a permanent place." So much had happened. I hadn't told her already? "I took it." And then it occurred to me to ask, "Are you considering coming here, to join me?"

"Should I be?"

I took a breath, which she interrupted, saying, "Don't answer that."

I didn't.

"I had better go," she said.

"That's fine." Did I really think it was? "We'll talk next week."

She didn't pick up the next week, when I called, or the week after. I was piqued. Why should I keep trying? A letter arrived the week after that.

It's not that I don't want to be in touch at all, Ashwin, but obviously I'm not part of your decisions any longer. I'm hurting. I didn't see this coming. It looks to me as if we've broken up just because you had to go back and not because of any problem in our relationship. Our relationship had no pull? I'm hurting badly.

She was right that I had seized on an opportunity and an excuse: the work, the illness. Though my father seemed largely to have recovered, there was also pressure from my mother that her only son should be closer than the very farthest point on the globe. I didn't fool myself that her complaints would lessen in proportion to my proximity, but my father also was glad to have me closer.

Rosslyn was also right that these were reasons to return to India but not reasons to break with her. I hadn't known, until she wrote, that I had broken with her. The shock of understanding also brought me to acknowledge the discomfort I had been denying, through these six months in India. While living in Canada, I had been able to avoid thinking of the

many ways that I had always felt alienated from my native society. I am a naturally anti-social creature, born into the most social of places. Perhaps I had left India before I could articulate my own non-belonging. But then, the vocabulary of non-conformism was only coming into flower in the West when I arrived there, and it is only now, thirty years later, starting to gain a foothold in India. Spending nearly fifteen formative years in the West had, yes, formed me, in ways I had been denying. My thinking, my way of being, even my English, had changed. I could write about Indians, but perhaps I could have written about Canadians, as well, if I'd tried harder. I wrote to Rosslyn about these realizations, but didn't press her to come. I suppose I was still not sure of what I was doing. She didn't write back.

By October, I was ready to consider visiting Canada. I wrote to Rosslyn to suggest I return for the winter holidays, when she would have time off. I said that we should talk, in person, about the possibility of a shared future. I said, since I was finally starting truly to feel it, that I missed her. I was also very much missing Kritika's children, who I used to visit once a month.

I wasn't sure at all how the conversation with Rosslyn should go. I had recently made an offer on a flat. I wasn't entirely unhappy staying with my parents, but would be more content to live alone again—one of the ways I had become Western, or had always been different from my countrymen.

My stay with my parents had been congenial enough, though. They had a large house, which we had moved into some twenty-five years earlier. I had continued to attend high school across town and then left for university, so I never formed attachments to the place. My parents were by now quite settled here, however, and I had met a few neighbours through them.

My cousin, Vivek, his wife and their children were also staying with us. His parents, down south, were unhappy about his unemployability and his indifferent attempts to renounce alcoholism. They had appealed to my father, the family patriarch, who obliged by taking their son in and trying to find him a job. Vivek's wife had started vending saris and

nightgowns out of the house, which brought in a little cash, though she also had to tolerate cracks from my mother about the hoi polloi tramping through the main hall. Vivek himself was forever running after pyramid schemes. He had recently cornered me in my room on his return from a revival meeting on expanding one's potential. I don't even think he had been drinking; he just had some questions.

"Where is mind?" he inquired, aflame with insight. "Is it here?" he wanted to know, pointing at his temple. He pointed at his chest. "Here?" At the heavens. "Here?" I resisted the urge to point at my elbow, my ass, my open door.

The best thing about the living arrangement was their children. Vivek and Jana had two, a boy and a girl a bit younger than Kritika's kids. Their presence attracted others into the house, which throbbed with slamming doors and bell-like shouts, with childish vitality itself.

Their favourite thing was to ask about Canada, and when they learned about Halloween, they begged for a dress-up party. They chattered all week about costumes; I was to provide sweets. I was thrilled about hosting a children's party, to a degree that (the IRDS secretaries informed me) compromised my dignity and my public image as a curmudgeon. I planned to dress up as a bad-tempered female vegetable-seller: I had cajoled an old sari out of my mother and fitted a wig with a wooden tray to fill with candy instead of peppers or eggplants. For days already I had shooed youngsters from my door as I transformed my bedroom into a haunted house.

The night before, I phoned Kritika and spoke to Asha. She and a gaggle of her friends were dressing up as characters from *The Wizard of Oz*. She would be the Tin Man. Anand got on the phone at his mother's behest, cool and laconic. I asked him if he was too old to dress up. He didn't answer, but seemed interested in my party plans.

I recall ticking off the final arrangements on my commute to work that morning. I had three clients to see that day and a meeting with a subset of my colleagues to discuss a multidisciplinary research initiative on the descendants of Partition. Though still in early stages, we were gaining momentum, and already had the sense the project would be massive.

When I think back now to the moment I entered the IRDS that morning, my memories are cinematically exaggerated. I could see no one, which was very unusual: the office was typically bustling by the time I got there, not with the senior fellows, who tended to keep later and more irregular hours the more senior they became, but with the office staff and junior academics, who were always ready to exchange a friendly word. Office doors were open as a policy: much of the point of the institute was to encourage dialogue and cross-fertilization. I only closed my door when seeing clients, and had been given a special room for this on a less-trafficked floor.

I was whistling as I entered. I am competent at whistling, perhaps more so than at conversation, and was feeling jaunty. The sound, in my recollection, was sucked away from me in the emptiness of the corridors. I entered one of the conference rooms to find everyone huddled around a radio.

Indira Gandhi: shot.

Shot. The word in English is more onomatopoeic than ever we realize.

Shhh. The smooth sailing of bullet through barrel, fricting iron against iron, joined and separated by the hastening oil.

Ahhh. Iron against unresisting air, a fleshly sigh of admission.

T. The consonant finality of the bullet coming to rest.

We dispersed after some time and went about our business as slightly conflicting reports trickled in by radio and telephone: two men with turbans had assassinated the prime minister. There had been an attempted assassination on the prime minister and she was being rushed to hospital. Mrs. Gandhi's Sikh bodyguards had shot and killed her in apparent retaliation for her having ordered the storming of the Golden Temple in June.

It was the last version that was borne out, exactly the sort of thing that many at the IRDS studied: communal conflict and cycles of revenge.

In my case, I saw therapeutic clients. All made reference to the news, but then turned to their own problems, the intimate narratives and narratives of intimacy that were more under their power to direct than ever they had thought.

Events in the democracy, however—the ones we as a nation had thought we had the power to direct—turned out to be beyond us.

Early that afternoon, when we convened our meeting to discuss the post-Partition project, we spoke only of the assassination and the events that had led up to it. There must have been seven or eight of us around the table, some talking with excitement; others, including the two Sikhs, more circumspect. Opinions varied, but people seemed too shocked to clash outright. India's current incarnation was less than forty years old. The assassination was a nadir in our young democracy's history. That any Sikhs, whose community was famously loyal to the multiplicitous notion of modern India, could feel so marginalized as to resort to this act seemed as tragic as the act itself. None of us was a fan of the prime minister, which fact also saddened us. She'd increasingly played the paranoid autocrat, rather than the freedom fighter and democracy defender she had been in her youth. But even through her various national and local suspensions of civil liberties, it had been possible to maintain the idea that civil society would ultimately triumph. Somehow, this violent end seemed the final shattering of that dream. I don't think any of us suspected that the final shattering was yet to come.

The head of the office staff, a former stenographer promoted repeatedly for her unusual acumen, looked in the open door. "I am sorry"—she frowned—"but I must advise you learned people to go home." She rarely encountered disobedience from those she supervised or those she served. We left.

My bus would take me right past the hospital where our prime minister lay dying. As we approached, government cars, with police motorcycles weaving and buzzing around them, overtook us. The crowds thickened—mourners, I supposed. The closer we got, however, the younger and more male the crowds appeared. Our bus slowed to walking pace, unable to get through; then a couple of young men stopped it, banging on the door until the driver opened it.

"Show me the Sikhs!" the first shouted as he leapt up the steps. He started down the aisle, checking the empty seats to make sure no turbaned head was ducked below, out of sight. Several of his fellows

appeared behind him. Their eyes were red—not from crying, my guess. They wore half-unbuttoned shirts, moustaches, shaggy hair. Bollywood villains.

There were no Sikhs on our bus, but, as we arrived at the transit depot, I saw a tall gentleman dragged out of another bus by his shirt, spectacles askew. He was pushed down into the sweating, crushing sea of the crowd, where I lost him.

My second bus home contained a number of wary-looking Sikhs. I knew none of them. We reached my neighbourhood. They went to their homes, I to mine.

I found my father pacing in front of the radio. “Outrageous!” he said when he saw me, shaking his finger in the air. He had been a lifelong civil servant, dedicated to civility and servility. He liked a pendulum best when it was still. He had been piously regretful at the Golden Temple invasion, but extremists must bend or be bent to the rule of law.

Vivek’s children had come home early from school. They were mainly worried about whether our Halloween party that evening would be cancelled. I told them that although I wasn’t much in a mood, I would go ahead with our plan if their friends showed up.

Three did, surprisingly. Although I couldn’t bring myself to dress up, I gave them sweets and a tour of my Room of Doom, which included a disembodied hand that gripped their small necks and a ghost that popped out of my almirah. I had also strewn “poppers” on the floor so that their entry seemed to trigger gunfire. On other days, their screams would have been delightful.

Rumours floated in that I was not the only one distributing sweets: some Sikhs were celebrating the assassination. My sister phoned from Canada to tell us they had seen images on TV of Sikhs in Vancouver and Toronto laughing, dancing bhangra, that Punjabi celebration dance made famous via Bollywood and weddings: arms aloft, shoulders shaking, wrists twisting to an infectious beat.

“It’s just a handful behaving like this,” she said, “but that’s what makes the news, right? The rest of them are going about their daily business, but you can’t show that on TV. I saw a bunch at a vigil downtown.”

By the time the children finished their candy, their parents were at the door, anxious to get them home. We expected a curfew to be called, and one was. We expected, if we woke in the night, to hear the buzz and wail of police and army making smaller and larger loops through the city, lacing it tight with invisible cords, tying the city down as if it were a patient suffering a seizure, until tempers cooled and order restored itself. In some cities, this was what happened. In Delhi, things went differently.

The next morning, the air smelled of smoke. As I descended to take my coffee, there was a rattle at the back gate. My mother went out. It was the wife from the Sikh family who lived next door. The husband, in his fifties, was already a little higher in the civil service than my father had been by the time of his retirement, but the families were roughly social equals. Relations between them were cordial but not friendly, and I had wondered if the question of their equality might be the main source of the careful distance, along with the usual strangeness between members of different communities, a gap easily overcome when both sides so desire.

Now the wife was at the gate, pleading and sobbing. I went out into the garden but hung back to listen. Mrs. Singh was begging my mother to send my father to persuade her menfolk to come and hide in our house.

“They are killing Sikhs, you understand? They are going to each and every Sikh house, they are killing the men, they take the girls, they are setting the houses on fire.”

Her Hindi was heavily accented and my mother’s only functional, but still, my mother understood. She was hesitating to open the gate when the woman looked past her, and me. My father had come out to stand behind me.

“Please, sir. My husband, my sons. They will not go.” Mrs. Singh’s voice rose as she approached hysteria. “Sir, he says he is as loyal to India as the sun is loyal to the dawn. He won’t believe they will attack our house.”

“He must be right, of course,” responded my father. He hadn’t moved from his spot near the house.

Beyond the gate, Mrs. Singh stopped crying. She wiped her cheeks with her dupatta and turned to go.

“Please,” I said. “Let me see what I can do.”

She gave a slight nod but did not pause.

I went to our rooftop first and looked out across the colony. At its fringes, fires were burning, not a general conflagration but isolated posts of smoke rising around the periphery as though to make a fence. I descended to the front door and found Vivek on the street, talking with a neighbour. “It’s true,” said the man. He had one crossed eye, and it was difficult to tell what he thought about what he was saying. “There are mobs moving in from the Ring Road. They are going after Sikh homes and businesses, but they will destroy Hindu-Muslim too, anyone who hides Sikhs. No macho hero stuff, uh? Look after your family.”

I went next door, but there was no answer when I rang, so I ran back through our house and shouted over their back gate. This time, Mr. Singh came out.

“My dear chap, why so distressed?” he asked in English. He was hale-looking, with a wide, sunny face and a tightly bound beard above a dress shirt and tie. “My wife has infected you with her anxiety!”

“Sir, I think you really would be very well advised to—that is, our doors are open to you and your family.” I wanted to speak more forcefully (really, I wanted to drag him into our house just as those goons had dragged that poor gentleman down the bus steps), but could not make him seem subject to my instruction, or pity, or fear. *Singh* means “lion”; it is the name of the pride. “You are in grave danger.”

“There are miscreants on both sides,” said Mr. Singh. He patted my shoulder. “Everyone is in terrible shock. Let the police do their duty. I’m sure they will have matters well in hand very shortly.”

I left him and began phoning friends and colleagues, who passed on to me still-tentative information, since confirmed. It appeared someone, possibly in the ranks of the ruling party, had supplied lists—census? voters? ration cards?—of Sikh-occupied homes, Sikh-owned businesses. The mobs were not rampaging randomly; those batons of smoke were rising only from the addresses on the lists. The streets were

unusually quiet, and when we heard any vehicle, we imagined it was one of these organizers, shaping and directing the mobs, avenging sheepdogs herding wolfish sheep. The rumour was that the Congress party had hired otherwise unemployed young men to enlarge the mobs, 500 rupees a pop. To employ professional mourners is no new thing; to direct them to express their grief for their dear, departed leader with gleeful barbarism—this we had not seen before.

And the police? The army? “Standing by the side of the road,” one of my colleagues told me on the phone, choking on tears or indignation. “Fully complicit!” Later, I heard that Sikhs had called the police and found themselves arrested for actions they had taken in their own defence and that the few officers or commanders who protected citizens and property were reprimanded. Pogroms. State-sanctioned. Not officially, but.

The smell of smoke on our street was growing thicker, the fires visibly closer. I went again to the Singhs’ back gate and this time was met by Mr. Singh with his wife, daughters-in-law, and a small horde of children.

“All right,” he said, with the habitual optimist’s stiffness in dire straits. “Let me deliver our womenfolk and children to you. I so hate them to be upset!” He seemed almost glad to be shed of his family’s distress.

“Sir,” I said, letting his family pass into our garden. “Please. If the crowd comes to your door, let me tell them you are not home. It will go easier for all of us. Please. For your family.”

He drew a heavy breath. We could hear shouts now and guessed they must have reached our street. He inclined his head briefly and was gone. I went along between the houses, to the front, where Vivek met me, iron pot-tongs in one hand, paring knife in the other. I recall pausing briefly to wonder whether he was ridiculous.

The mob arrived, going straight to the Singhs’ house. A number of them hopped the gate into the front garden and began to bang on the door.

“*Hai!*” I screamed from our own garden. “No one is home there! They heard about you lot. They left yesterday. Shoo!” I, too, was brandishing something—I remember the feel of it in my hand, along

with the taste of acid in my throat—but I can no longer remember what it was.

Astonishingly, whatever we did was effective. The goons at the gate shouted to the goons at the door that there were other fish to fry, farther up the same road. Thankfully Mr. Singh and his sons were not tempted into confrontation.

Startled at how easy it had been to move the mob along, Vivek and I exited our garden into the road. My father followed us. There was a much bigger crowd at the end of the street, half-undone men in half-undone shirts. The smoke was thick and thicker, as were the crowds, but we caught a glimpse of a man being pulled from a house by his unbound hair, his turban also unbound and torn. We knew who lived there: two brothers, Singhs, no relation to those hiding in our house. They were about my age, owners of a motorcycle dealership a few blocks away, and lived with their father. Kritika and I used to joke about how we couldn't tell them apart. Singh and Singh. Singh and sons.

The crowd parted to reveal the man, now on fire. Oh God—which brother was it? Or was it the father? I couldn't tell. *I couldn't tell.*

He held his arms out, shaking, reaching, staggering. A whole man alight. We reached toward him, we froze. What can you do? These are the smells of a man burned alive: kerosene smoke, burning hair, roasting flesh, but also something else, something green and wet—a near-anonymous martyr tied to wood where the sap still ran.

“Bhangra!” someone shouted, seeing the man shake in his own flames, and others shouted too, even laughed. “He’s dancing bhangra!”

In minutes, the street was empty. My father had run back to our house and fetched a quilt. He threw it over the now-fallen man and threw himself on top. The flames were doused, but there wasn't enough flesh for a pulse. I checked. Another body lay at the far end of the street.

After, my father tried to phone our local police deputation. He could reach no one. He was in favour of going in person, but I told him, “Appa, surely you can tell that the police must be permitting this to happen.”

He looked insulted, angry. “Ridiculous. How dare you?”

“Then where are they? You think all this is somehow a secret from them?”

“Surely they are busy elsewhere—this must be happening all over the city.”

“Yes, because they have failed and are failing to prevent it. There is collusion, Appa.” I became more earnest as he stopped contradicting me, hopeful that I was wrong. “Come, I’ll go with you to the police station, come.” But now he sat, not meeting my eyes, looking drawn. I left him alone.

The next morning, a couple of my colleagues phoned to tell me of a protest meeting coming together in the compound of a relief agency. I was not inclined to go. I dreaded the rhetoric, the sense of mass action. I knew that it was necessary to show opposition, and that such protests might even succeed in dispersing a mob or two, but I have a near-pathological aversion to collectives. It goes against my grain to join any mob, even one forming to march and chant for something I believe in.

But Appa overheard the conversations. “This is it, Ashwin. We will make ourselves heard.” Perhaps my resistance would have broken down even if he had not insisted we go.

It was a small group, perhaps 150 people. I think it could have been much larger if they had been able to spread the word more effectively. If I had not been staying with my father, he never would have known about that gathering of concerned fellow citizens. If I had been living in my own flat by then, they would not have been able to reach me, since it would be years before I got a telephone.

I remember very little of that day. Generic details, such as the detestable mass-shouting of slogans expressing admirable sentiments. We marched together to a neighbourhood that we had heard was among the most badly affected, a Sikh-majority enclave. We confronted mobs and were mostly successful, simply with shouting, in getting them to stop, if temporarily. I don’t really remember. After the critical, desperate confrontations of the day prior, I think my brain’s ability to form memories with any specificity was topped.

My father, however, would talk about it for years as a seminal moment in his life. He had awoken to a new reality. He wasn't sure whether it had been hidden from him or he had been hiding from it. Now that he had seen it, though, he would never turn away.

My mother's reaction would have been strange for anyone else, but was typical of her. She stayed in the house and, somehow, after the neighbours left, came to insist that practically none of what we had experienced had happened. She had seen nothing, she said. When we asked why she thought the neighbours were hiding in our house, she said it was because they were afraid, which proved nothing. When we asked if she didn't see what was happening on the street, she said we had told her to stay away from the windows. None of it was false, but all was incomplete, and inarguable. She objected to the protests, said we were agitators, that we should let the authorities handle it. My anger at her made it easier for me to stomach the marches, though I imagine her behaviour made it all harder for my father.

By the evening of November 3, the army and police had rediscovered their role as keepers of the peace. The mobs evaporated as quickly as they had formed. Official estimates range upward of 2,700 Sikhs killed; unofficial ones reach past five figures. Undisputed is that thousands more had lost their homes and livelihoods, were made instant refugees in their own city. Relief workers, sociologists, psychologists and lawyers dedicated themselves to the needs particularly of the women and children whose husbands and fathers had been killed.

I was not involved in the organization of tents and cooking pots. Making people comfortable? I wouldn't know where to start. But a former IRDS fellow contacted me to say that she would like to see whether my therapeutic skills could help these bereaved and traumatized women take up the work of heading their families.

I made no guarantees, but she took me on anyway. "I'm pretty sure you can do no harm," she said. I thanked her for the vote of confidence.

All in all, I saw a dozen or so families. I tried to help them in redefining and accepting their new circumstances, a task hundreds more

managed without my help. They were usually referred to me because of some particular or extreme problem—guilt, debilitating anger, mental illness—that was preventing them from making the necessary adjustments and pursuing what little compensation was beginning to dribble forth from tightly shut government coffers.

The government claimed, much like my mother, that we had not seen what we saw. They set up “Commissions of Inquiry”—*omissions* of inquiry would have been more apt—whose main purpose seemed to be to shield those to blame for the atrocities. And our crown prince, Rajiv Gandhi, unexpectedly and uncomfortably inheriting the throne of what we had thought to be a democratic nation, passively voiced this summary of the three days of mayhem that his party had willed into being: “Some riots took place in the country following the murder of Indiraji. We know the people were very angry and for a few days it seemed that India had been shaken. But when a mighty tree falls, it is only natural that the earth around it does shake a little.”

He may not have been responsible for the violence, but he was grateful to those who did what he lacked the *cojones* to do. And after he washed into office a few months later on a tsunami of sympathy, he kept on protecting the perpetrators.

In addition to the victimized families, I saw people in the course of my regular therapeutic work who had been implicated in the violence, and were haunted. Three or four police officers, at least two of whom were on stress leave because they had been held back from acting as duty and morals demanded. Whether the leave was imposed by their superiors as punishment or given to them as time to accept the drowning of their innocence is not clear in my recollection; perhaps it is somewhere in my notes.

I saw a few of the relief workers, whose overexposure to others’ grief was beginning to addle them. I saw some middle-class people from middle-class neighbourhoods, stalwarts like my father, whose guilt and disillusion were eating into their livelihoods and relationships, particularly in cases of obvious disparity between their feelings and those of their family members and colleagues.

I wrote the stories they told me. I gave them back. The stories intersected and informed one another. Seeing this, one family asked for a meeting. I put it to the others, most of whom accepted eagerly. Two Sikh families, all women; several Hindus from the affected areas; a single Muslim police officer; and my Appa, who, when I described the meeting, asked to attend. For several hours, they compared their experiences of betrayal and trauma and spoke to one another across religion and class. Our puny-yet-potent effort at truth and reconciliation.

Their individual narratives, and the story of their meeting, formed my first book. It is mostly about treating individual survivors of a sudden incident of extreme, state-sponsored violence, but it also provided me a chance to talk about secrecy and hypocrisy and the ways they wear on the psyche.

Who Are the Guilty? asks a well-known exposé on the riots produced by the People's Union of Civil Liberties, but the title is rhetorical. I called my little book *Who Are the Victims? Narrative Therapy in the Aftermath of the Delhi Riots*. I thought my question better than the one of the pamphlet on blaming, because mine could not so readily be answered.

My book included my father's experience, though I had half wanted to keep it out. His life had been premised on a sense of order and justice. Its course was altered by what he had seen, not just the violence but the failure of the state—his nation—to prevent it. I wanted to talk about all this, but not about my mother's denials, and yet these, too, were intrinsic to his difficulties. He was, by this time, working with victims, helping with paperwork and shopping and so on, over my mother's objections. He directed me to change his name, but put his story in. He had attended the meeting; he wanted his perceptions recorded. He was right, and I obeyed.

At the time, I couldn't bring myself to write my own story. Now, writing it here, finally, I am obliged to say that the pogroms had brought on in me a visceral, almost debilitating, longing for Rosslyn. When I closed the door on our burnt neighbour, I closed my eyes to see her sepia-smooth hair by the reading lamp, her look of irritation when I interrupted her. After each phone call urging me out to the demonstrations, I sat thinking of the faint blue veins in her breasts, the way a slim hand

had so neatly fit around the back of my neck. The way I had failed to let myself know her, or failed to let myself believe I knew her.

When I recalled her lemon-leaf scent, I would also, inexplicably, think of a white-painted swing, dangling, empty, from a tree in a green meadow. Her hair was the colour of a chestnut horse I patted once, as a child, on a visit to an apple orchard in Kashmir.

When the streets began to calm, I wrote her a letter, telling her what had happened, saying again how I was missing her. I may have been more emphatic than before, though I did not press her to come—how could I, in the wake of these horrors?—nor did I pretend I could leave my work in Delhi to return to Ottawa in any permanent way.

The day I sent it, a letter arrived, her response to mine of a month earlier, when I had talked abstractly of restlessness and usefulness, of belonging and non-belonging, and asked when I might come see her to talk more concretely. Her letter was straightforward and firm. She understood how I felt, but said I had entirely failed to take account of her shock. She was involved with someone else now, someone who, like her, longed for stability; someone who, like her, had no reason to leave. She did not encourage me to come.

I didn't respond. A month later, I received her response to my letter about the pogroms, expressing regret at the violence—she had heard little about it—and sympathy for me.

How could I properly despair? I missed her bitterly by this time, but my loss was nothing compared to the losses of those around me. *Longing, we say, because desire is full of endless distances.*

When I finally wrote her back, in the spring, I spoke of my book-in-progress. She responded, saying it sounded like a book she would like to read. She further—farther—said that she was engaged, and expecting a child.