

EDEET RAVEL

YOUR SAD EYES
AND UNFORGETTABLE
MOUTH

"A lyrical, passionate and subtle account of the emotional challenges faced by children of Holocaust survivors, whose parents are wobbly and partly dysfunctional ... but still courageous and full of love."

LAWRENCE HILL



Yes, it's been a boozy evening. Patrick's back in Montreal for his mother's funeral and I suggested we meet at a downtown brasserie. He was already there when I arrived, but I didn't notice him at first; the place was crowded and dimly lit, and he was seated at the far end, facing away from the door, his hair thinner now. I almost settled down at the bar to wait for him, but then I spotted his wife, whom I recognized from a photo his mother had shown me—glasses, delicate features—and I made my way to their table. Patrick scowled slightly when he saw me, and introduced his wife in a distracted way, as if he'd only met her a few minutes ago. Her name is Adar and she works for an academic publisher, translating Hebrew and Spanish texts into English.

Adar wasn't very talkative, but she was watching us closely, and I felt she was trying to extract clues from what we said and how we said it. Clues about what? About Patrick, I think.

Patrick's profession intersects with mine: his work at the university library includes curating, and he's interested in art history—or art reception, as I prefer to call it. Instead of catching up, we clung to the present; we discussed document preservation, current trends in teaching or not teaching theory, climate change. The three of us were hemmed in on both sides by tinted mirrors that allowed us to see kinder versions of ourselves; as the evening progressed and the vodka flowed, the mirrors became increasingly co-operative.

I'm back at my Plateau triplex now. Holding on to the cold, wrought-iron railing, I negotiated the spiral staircase to my front door. The triangular steps are treacherous in winter, but we're all attached to this architectural quirk for which our neighbourhood is famous, are quite proud of it, in fact—even though keeping the stairs clear of ice and snow is an ongoing challenge.

It's late, but I'm not at all sleepy. I checked my email: no new messages. And then, in that post-alcoholic surrender to fate, I

opened a blank page and stared at it, as if waiting for a sign from above—or below—to appear on the screen.

Does Adar know our story, I wonder. Has Patrick broken the pact, now that his mother has died? Or did he tell Adar when they first met, in spite of his admonition that Rosie and I never tell anyone, not even our lovers?

Our story—that's what I want to write about. A tale of love: my love for Rosie, Anthony's fleeting love for me, Patrick's love for no one. As I gazed at the mirrors in the brasserie, it seemed to me that the people we weren't talking about were hovering there, behind our reflections, waiting to be acknowledged. Or was it seeing Patrick's casual cruelty towards Adar that sent me somersaulting back in time?

I may change my mind tomorrow and abandon this project. I may not have the stamina—which is a sly way of saying I'm half-afraid. I have the time, if I need it. It's Friday night, and since I'm only teaching two courses this semester, a four-day weekend looms ahead. The women whose ranks I swell at Sororité—our city's last surviving lesbian bar—will manage, somehow, without me. I'm being facetious, of course—though I don't know exactly how I feel about my dependence on that laid-back neverland, where we are indeed growing older, but in a cloistered haven of our own. *Let all who are hungry ...* Even if I do not find at Sororité whatever it is I hunger for, I do find distraction from hunger.

In any case, I will stay at home this weekend and embark on this phantom-laden voyage. I will try to write out, write down, an account of our star-crossed saga. I've even pulled out of a back drawer the diary I kept long ago, when I was a teenager.

This diary of a young girl not in hiding, not heroic, consists of twenty-three spiral Hilroy notebooks, 8½ by 11 inches, sixty lined pages each, though I rarely stayed in the lines. The first notebooks have cheap, mud-brown covers, rough to the touch. Then Hilroy noticed that the times they were a-changin' and the covers were redesigned to attract flower children: three Canadian geese against

a grey and orange sky; a skier, illuminated by a flash of blinding sun, spraying snow crystals as he swerves down a hill; six hikers resting on the ground, their legs raised on backpacks.

Everything is here, inside these pages: our shifting and shuffling, our small victories and elaborate blunders.

In I go.