

And Then There Were Two

LESLIE NOBLE

La narratrice, consciente qu'elle a été adoptée, est choquée quand elle apprend qu'elle a une soeur qui a été aussi adoptée et placée dans un foyer d'accueil où éventuellement elle a retrouvé leur mère biologique. Cette histoire rapporte la réaction de l'auteure à qui cette révélation a changé la vie.

I was 24 and drowning in my third depression during the summer of 1985 when my mum handed me a white legal envelope one evening after dinner. "I thought maybe this might help ... answer some questions for you," she trailed.

My cheeks burned as I glanced from the Children's Aid Society insignia to my mother's eyes. I don't remember what I replied, if anything at all. As the enormity of this moment registered, my pulse raced, throbbing its way up to my temples. Doing what I always do when stressed, I grabbed my DuMaurier's, a lighter, and went out to the back yard.

I leaned against the warm bricks of the house and started to read what I had waited 24 years to know. It was as if the world sucked in on itself, and only The Document and I existed. Of the three pages I scanned, all that sunk in was a handful of words: "and your sister was placed in a different foster home..."

I had a sister? I had a sister! This was unbelievable. I wasn't an only

child after all. *Wow.* Incrementally, the neighbourhood re-emerged—a bird here, a lawnmower there.

But wait a second. I scroll down. "SHE was returned" to my parents, the letter stated. *Why,* my ego shouted, *why her and not me? What was wrong with ME?* I reasoned that I should feel joyous knowing I had a full-blooded, dream-come-true sister. Somewhere. The loneliness and only-ness could be over with a wave of a social worker's wand! Hadn't I always secretly pretended to be someone's sister, using live specimens after I was ordered to banish my imaginary ones?

And yet something gnawed at this flicker of excitement, threatening to short-circuit it with a cold, icy snap to my gut. *What the hell had been so wrong with me to keep her and give me away?* Had I been a bad baby? Ugly as sin? Was it my "chronic diarrhea" and "sleepless nights?" Or, was she just too darned cute to resist? *Oh great, sibling rivalry already!* I clenched my jaw, refusing to let those feelings seep in. I would be victorious in defining this moment as magical therefore I decided to shelve this aftershock.

Completely spellbound by the foolscap papers that classified my new identity, I crouched in the yard until somehow, it grew late. Surprised at the pile of orange butts that had grown as well, I stood and

stretched. I relocated my cloud to the edge of my bed and slumped there with my mum, The Document still glued in my hands.

And so a zombie and a potentially-displaced mother sat together awhile forlornly, tentatively trying to make sense of a new worldview. We reverently re-read The Document together. "I'm as shocked as you are," mustered my mum. "All they told us was there were no known illnesses and that you were Pennsylvania Dutch."

I couldn't resist a small smile. That had been my banner all those years, my claim to some distinctiveness as puny and unclear as it was. I could hear the taunts in the schoolyard, the "where-did-you-even-come-from's" to which I'd puff out my chest and proudly say "I'm Pennsylvania Dutch, so there!"

"They specifically said you were an only child," my mum continued. We stared at each other. I pondered why she had known as little as I. She'd virtually raised a mystery child that had been presented to her as one-of-a-kind. I don't really know what the repercussions were for her but, unbeknownst to both of us, they were only just starting to reverberate deep within me.

"I can't believe it, that I have a sister I mean," I stammered, strangely on the verge of tears. "It's so weird." I sighed heavily as if just then re-

membering to breathe. Resting my head on her shoulder, I whispered, "I love you."

"I love you too," she croaked, strangely on the verge of tears herself.

That's as far as we could go. Each engrossed in our own altered realities, we said goodnight.

I realize now, many years later, that my mum had never really thought I would actually take the adoption issue any further than assimilating the information presented to me in the letter from Adoption Services. Of course, we never talked about it.

I think she honestly thought that once I knew a little more about my background and identity, my state of depression would lift. The nuts and bolts on paper, plain and simple, would provide the magic balm. That she would even stretch to make this reasonable assumption was a huge risk for her and I am eternally grateful. Neither of us recognized this at the time.

Leslie Noble is currently working on a book about adoption encompassing the tale of her own birth family reunion and the exploration of the emotional states adoptees exhibit. A single mother of two daughters, Noble has taught piano and worked as a freelance journalist for the past two decades. She is presently pursuing a BA at Trent University and lives by the lake in Ajax.

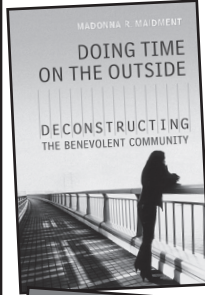
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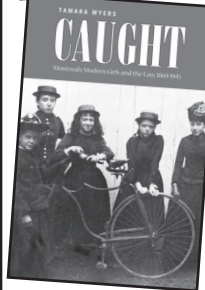
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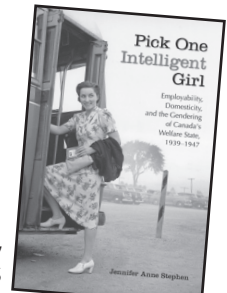
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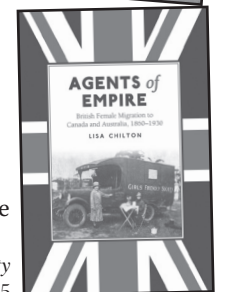
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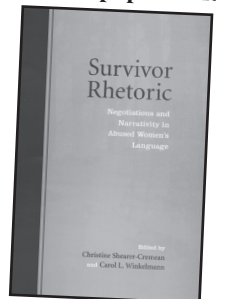
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