

Séance

On Farmington Avenue, in Connecticut, scant miles from the place where Mark Twain used to live, we asked the ghosts in. My older, older sister said the guardian would take control of the Ouija board, the planchette moving slowly over the wood letters.

The red tablecloth. The candles spread about the room as if they were at a celebration of life for electricity. One candle in the middle of the table, something to catch the wax. It was the autumnal equinox. Our tie-dye shirts and bell bottoms under makeshift robes our mother helped us make. The younger of my older sisters kept using a word she had just learned—*facetious*. No one was fifteen years old. Contacting the dead was an art form. The artefacts were assembled: a pebble from a neighbour's rooftop, a switch from a corn broom, something dead, and something alive under a crystal goblet. None of us had read *The Monkey's Paw*. The windows were covered. We held hands. The planchette moved.

It did not tell us we would be moving in six months, leaving the friends we had made far behind. It did not tell us our father would have his first of four heart attacks in ten years, be dead in twenty-five. We asked the table to rise. My brother asked to speak to Houdini's mother—a swift kick in the shins was his reply. We were as far from trouble as you could be. It seemed my sister was making up the ritual on the spot. Wax dripped down candles. We asked for a sign. The floorboards above us creaked in response. It was our mother, in the kitchen, making cookies, listening to her music, more alone than we knew.

Bead curtains hung in closets. Girls' bedrooms in psychedelic paint, boys' bedrooms in sky blue. We were barely awakening to our lives. We were committed to the dead. We were going to lose all our friends. We were going to lose our father. In the flickering shadow of that musty basement, we said goodbye to our childhood, our mother was losing her music, while I watched the bug under the upturned crystal goblet, scurrying in all directions, trying to escape.