



THE  
OBITUARY

a novel by  
Gail Scott





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*for Anna*

What haunts are not the dead but the gaps  
left within us by the secrets of others.

– Abraham + Torok

**Rose, Negative**





~~Standing by a pond. Obsidian eyes turning this way + that. Catching the amber lights of the pond's fractal surface. Raising hands out at hips, palms down, throwing legs out sideways from the knees, tossing head left + back, Rose + her dissociates do a little dance. To the grammar of the birds. Singing by the hundreds. Then Grandpa's there beside her. He says this marsh will be drained. He says the many will stop coming. He says this is natural. The lord helps them who help themselves.~~



## These Wars on the Radio Are Keeping Us from Our Own

In pale Mile-End, behind the night sheds, little pink clouds come tipping tipping down. And huge yellow maple leaves, not cold enough to turn red, tumbling, tumbling on regrowing November grass, to lie like yellow hands. From the kitchen radio, the ack-ack-swat of the most sophisticated of bombs weighing up to two tons from the most fantastically shaped planes cut out of futuristic novels falling on rubbles of sand + broken stone desert people called home.....Oh X

do you remember  
when Afghan spelt dope  
embroidered vests, vast  
windswept steppes  
with tanned shaggy fashion models  
standing slant on them?

I'm that *Face* in upper Triplex window. Barely visible behind her grey venetians. Having arrived one day from a madame B's in border town of S-D. I am reputed to hate children. I also liking cats enough not to have one. Our overconfident ground-floor Potter with chocolate Lab named Latte feigning shock when I told her that. She's from The Outers, so instead of the friendly tangled back courtyards we used to have, now

looking down from top + middle Settler-Nun flat onto North America's biggest crop: lawn. Hours get spent artfully arranging plastic lawn sets shaped like dinosaurs in it. Her chocolate Lab following her all day, nuzzling nuzzling trying to get attention. Occasionally she throwing a crumb his way, just enough for keeping addicted. But whatever inciting me to say my name means French pet, diminutive of multiple layers + possibilities?

Rest assured, dear X, a tale's encrypted mid all these future comings + goings of parlour queens, sweet 70s chicks, telephone girls, leather divas, Grandpa's little split-tailed fis'. A tale unspeakable as owls in ceaseless vigil staring from eyes round + amber as that cat Etta's [more of whom shortly]. Be further advised, only epiphanic afternoons shall herein be remembered. Circumstantially, I am posturing as woman of inchoate origin [problematically, I can hear you saying]. To underscore how we are haunted by secrets of others. Such as they colporting spite from The Outers to rue Settler-Nun, Mile-End, QC. Further absorbing under surface of community amenity, bitter particles of those going there before, say, the Shale Pit Workers! Floating up from burnt-down Crystal Palace, whose rotting pylons still directly under. Where once upon a time, when it not being used for smallpox hospice, British officers used to hold their

balls.

They were rumoured not to like girls like me very much. They also hated Indians. This is better documented. By the end of our tale, we may likewise be dead –

Increasingly I am slipping. Yesterday, riding bicycle down sidewalk, past deserted bank building, sticking middle finger straight up in fuck-you sign a former prime minister making famous. I liking best when he wearing fringed jacket + paddling a canoe. Trying by slightly bending th' digital to make th' sign without, in my case, anybody noticing. A thin man, very dark eye shadows looking straight in my face. As if 'Are you crazy?' 'Oh non non non,' I saying waving both hands in air, in somewhat accented French. 'This not meant for you!' Turning right + driving, still on sidewalk, past where th' bank machine now is, recounting th' whole incident in rather loud voice to myself. Th' worse glissement of thought toward inappropriate action happening th' other day on bus. Sitting there in th' dim light called *pénombre* in a *chambre*, I seeing outline of breast just like *hers* + nearly reaching out + cupping. Which confusion of proprieties I blaming on incidents with ~~Brother Language~~ Untel. Little conflagrations flaring up in dark. Like lightning in a film noir.