

REMNANTS

CÉLINE
HUYGHEBAERT

TRANSLATED BY ALESHIA JENSEN

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for the opportunity to meet, work, and learn on this territory.

And I told myself I would forget when he was there,
in the white room. I would forget it all. His hands
beneath the sheet...

—Laurent Mauvignier, *Apprendre à finir*

REMNANTS

DIALOGUES—PRELUDE

9

MAGRITTE'S FACE

15

HANDWRITING ANALYSIS

35

DIALOGUES—I

43

INQUIRY INTO MY FATHER'S PAST

63

DIALOGUES—II

96

DREAMS

101

DIALOGUES—III

109

NOTICE OF BIRTH

147

OR EVEN DEAD ALREADY

149

DIALOGUES—IV

211

INVENTORY OF THINGS THAT LEFT NO TRACE

239

DISAPPEARANCE OF A NAME

241

CARD FROM A FATHER TO HIS DAUGHTER

249

DIALOGUES

PRELUDE

CÉLINE: François?

FRANÇOIS: Yes?

CÉLINE: It's Céline Huyghebaert... How are you?

FRANÇOIS: Good, good. *(They both laugh uneasily.)* Yourself?

CÉLINE: It's been a long time...

FRANÇOIS: Yes. A long time...

CÉLINE: Is Jeanne there? Can I talk to her?

FRANÇOIS: Of course.

The sound of the receiver placed on the table, muffled voices, crackling.

JEANNE: Hello?

The first thing Céline hears is how much her aunt's voice is like her

REMNANTS

father's—stony. Then Jeanne says "Hello?" again and Céline also hears a "No," a categorical refusal that should make her hang up straight away.

CÉLINE: It's Céline. How are you?

JEANNE: I'm well.

CÉLINE: I'm glad I was able to reach you. I left a few messages, but you never returned my calls.

JEANNE: We're only here six months a year now, you know.

CÉLINE: You've got a house somewhere?

JEANNE: No, just a plot of land with a bungalow. We come back to Plaisir for the winter.

CÉLINE: Ah, okay.

JEANNE: And yourself?

CÉLINE: I'm still living in Quebec. I like it. I'm going to school. But I'm in France for a few weeks. It'd be nice to see you while I'm here.

JEANNE: Why's that?

CÉLINE: I'm doing research for a book I'm writing about Papa. I wanted to talk to you about it. And find out how you've been. We haven't seen each other since Papa died.

JEANNE: Well, there's not much I can tell you about him.

CÉLINE: I wanted to know more about when the two of you were

DIALOGUES—PRELUDE

growing up, what things were like before I was born.

JEANNE: I raised him like a son, and I can't even remember anything about my own sons, so there's really not much I can tell you about your father.

CÉLINE: Maybe if we saw each other in person, a few stories would—

JEANNE: No. No...

CÉLINE: Maybe you could lend me your photo albums so I can scan some pictures of him?

JEANNE: No, that's not possible.

CÉLINE: It's not just for my project. It's for us: his daughters. So we can have something to remember him by.

JEANNE: You've already got pictures of him.

CÉLINE: Not from when he was little.

JEANNE: There aren't very many from back then. We didn't have a camera, you know.

CÉLINE: Even if there are just a few...

JEANNE: I'd have to look around for them. They're buried somewhere. It's not something I can find just like that.

CÉLINE: That's no problem. I could come by this weekend if you like.

JEANNE: Right, well, I'll think about it.