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## EXTRACT

Tom waited a hundred more breaths before opening his door one millimetre at a time. He was afraid to make even the tiniest of noises, but he needn't have worried; this was a home with doors that did not creak. Emboldened by the continued silence, Tom took a tentative first step toward his parents' bedroom. A patch of light seeped out from underneath the closed door.

Once there, Tom stopped. Pearls of sweat stung his eyes. He wanted nothing more than to retreat to his room, to fall asleep, to be done with this night—but still, he opened the door. Mom might need him. Again.

Inside, once carefully folded shirts were scattered here, there and everywhere. A slipper sat on top of the rumpled bed, the sheets were covered in dark red stains. Tom nudged the door open further, his feet now moving forward of their own volition, sidestepping a shattered vase, a bright pink bra, beads from a broken necklace.

Next to one of his father's golf club, he found his mother. Her face smeared with blood, her right eye swollen shut, only the left one open. Barely.

"Tom?" she whispered as a colossal roar exploded inside the boy's brain, drowning out her voice. She closed her eye, and her head rolled to the side. An angry lump already growing on her forehead, her left foot stuck out, off to the side. Unmoving, naked, twisted. Disconnected, just like Brawl.

Then her big toe twitched, and the boy remembered what he was supposed to do next. He scrambled to find her phone, but it had been unplugged from the charger, and it took time to unearth it from underneath a pile of scattered clothes. Tom couldn't remember the number he was supposed to dial, though he knew it had a 9 and a 1. When he at long last hit upon 911, his hands shook so hard the phone slipped and fell to the ground.

"My mom," he whispered when finally he got through. Just then he heard a sharp bang explode below. "Please," he said. "Blood," he added, but his voice sounded hollow, and his words made no sense at all.

"My mom," he tried again, but then he heard her moan, and from her lips, instead of words, spilled blood.

"We're dying."

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**Linda Leith Éditions.**

**LINDA LEITH  
PUBLISHING**

Funded by the Government of Canada  
Financé par le gouvernement du Canada

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Canada Council  
for the Arts

Conseil des arts  
du Canada

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