

LINDA KENYON lives on a farm outside of Bright, Ontario and works for Johanns Graphics in Waterloo. Her work has appeared in several journals, most recently in *Quarry* and *Hysteria*. She is currently working on a collection of short stories centering on the character in the piece that appears here.

Notes for a Story

LINDA KENYON

She first notices the scar while shaving her legs in the bath (hasn't shaved since the cold weather set in but going to mother-in-law's for dinner and wearing a dress). The scar is a clean line, three inches long, just above her ankle. She looks at it, shaves around it, thinks surely she'd remember cutting herself that badly. But a knock at the door — he wants the water while it's still hot — so she dries herself and forgets all about the scar.

The house smells nice . . . Pine-sol, lemon wax . . . oh, shit — I forgot to water the plants . . . guess they'll live another day . . . furnace sure has been running a lot . . . must really be cold out there . . . should check those lambs . . . let's see, chicken stuffed with lemon and sage — have I got any sage? . . . potatoates, cauliflower, a salad . . . yeah, but dessert . . . pears, I guess . . . canned pears . . . ten to three . . . half an hour 'till I have to put the chicken in . . . I'll never finish this story today . . . why do I always ask people over . . . I'm tired, so tired . . .

And of course she's ready to
go before he is so she puts a
load of overalls in the washer,
puts away the penicillin he
bought that afternoon, gets
a chicken out of the freezer,
sits down to make out a
grocery list. Then he comes
in with his coat on.

. . . that poor ewe last night —
thought we were going to turn her
inside out, had to pull so hard . . .
and the lambs so weak . . . I should
check them . . .

Sometimes, like last night,
working in the barn together,
it seems possible, but then
morning will come and this
story presses but so does
housework and tonight's company.
I scrub and make coffee, listen
to talk of mange and mastitis
and a new part for the pressure
washer and plans for a finishing
barn. Then I go and check the
lambs and get the feeling with sun
on straw and shakey legs and the
way the ewe stamps her feet at
the dog that this is the real
part. But then the story comes
crowding in so I go back into
the house and sneak some time
at it and then it seems real and
all else squalling improvisation.

. . . what I'd like to do is
go for a run . . . down the lane.
to Bright, to Hickson, to Woodstock
(malaise, nothing: this woman has
cabin fever) . . . or else sleep,
wrapped in a quilt on the couch,
for as long as I goddamn well
please . . . he'll be in for
coffee soon — better put the kettle
on . . . the cat's on the table,

sitting right where he'll set his
cup, scratching her ear . . . oh
well, what he doesn't know . . .

She has no time to think about
the scar (friend having a breakdown,
sister having Christmas and so
phoning every day asking favours).
But one morning, walking down to get
the mail, she notices her shin
aching, so rolls up her jeans/down
her sock and the scar is redder
and rawer-looking than before.
Begins to ache continuously, but
the cat has an ear infection,
her husband a cold, and the
truck needs a new clutch.

. . . hope our company doesn't
stay late . . . tomorrow a
letter to mom and wash a load
of work clothes and do something
with the bushel of apples going
soft in the root cellar . . . oh
here he is at the door and I
haven't got the kettle on yet . . .

Then it's time to make supper
so I gather up my story and
put it away and while I'm
peeling potatoes and watching
the sun go down (raspberry canes
stick through the snow, marking
the edge of my garden) I think
of mom peeling potatoes for
eight and the peace of this old
house at this time of day and
wonder about a baby and then
I think I know that a man and a
woman can live together in peace
and then that seems real and my
story fades away leaving only
a slight ache in my head and I
don't know, anymore. I don't
know if it was ever anything.

One night she notices her
sock is damp and then can't sleep
and so gets up to make tea.
She goes out to get some wood and
is startled but not really
surprised to find an old woman in the
woodshed with a bloody rag tied
around her ankle. How did you
hurt yourself? Splitting wood
late at night. You know, it
doesn't take long to bleed
to death. Yes, replies the
younger woman.