

Senior Division, Non-Fiction

Christa Eastman, St. John's

**Clean (an excerpt)**

There was an incident when I was quite young. I was standing near my grandfather on the stairs next to the kitchen. I lost playing cards, so the story goes. But my little self was smarter than most would give me credit for, and I used the force I had to push the bad man away from me. I watched him tumble and fall as he reached for coats on hangers, trying to hold onto something to steady himself. I ran into my brother's bedroom and hid under the bed until I heard someone coming in to get me. He shuffled his feet, as he always did at this point, and said, "Granda's ok." My family thought I hid out of fear of getting punished. They were right to believe it was fear. But not fear of punishment. Fear that he was still standing. Without being able to stop him, it kept happening. It was difficult keeping a grown adult male, even an old, drunk one, from pushing his way into my room. He was supposed to be watching me, taking care of me. Instead, he was exerting his power, over and over, with me as his reward.

I was almost through elementary school when I could not take it any longer. I knew something was wrong. I was constantly screaming on the inside, scratching at my internal sores, while on the outside I presented myself as the perfect child. Quiet, smart, obedient. I began obsessing over movements I had to make with my body. A jerk of the arm here, a pinch of a muscle there. This consumed me.