How to Tell Renata

LINDA HOLEMAN

fact (fakt) n. something that has
actually occurred or actually exists.

It's rained the entire summer, and the air is heavy with the smell of an old basement.

The rain and the smell and the worrying about how to tell Renata what's happening are driving me crazy, and I've hardly been able to put the dictionary down. I know there's some old joke about reading the phone book. I can't remember it, but it's not flattering. I tell myself that a dictionary is nothing like a phone book, except that it's in alphabetical order. This is the very thing I find calming—the predictability of the next word. I've been reading the dictionary my whole life, it seems, although sometimes I can forget about it for a while. But for the last few months I've really needed it.

Our summers are known for their unrelenting prairie heat, so this cool, wet one is a real change. Not knowing how to talk to Renata is nothing new.

Renata is my mother—though I've never called her anything but Renata.