GREATA

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ABSTRACT

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Greata is an historical novel, set in the Okanagan Valley of B.C. in 1912, a time of transition between centuries. The novel traces the lives of four characters -- two men and a woman who live on the margins of society, and a capitalist who is an axis of power in the valley -- as they come to terms with their own situations within a colonial society that is, at once, embracing and resisting modern technology and the change it promises.

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To you all, I wish to express my gratitude.

Men's memories are uncertain and the past that was differs little from the past that was not.

Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian*

Speed soothed them; speed was violence.

John Banville, *The Book of Evidence*

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ONF

You would not wish to find yourself surrounded with garlic eating, foreign speaking neighbours, with whom you could have nothing in common socially. The class of people coming to NARAMATA is not of that type. They are of the very best Canadian stuff.

promotional brochure, Okanagan Trust Company, 1907

March 16, 1912

Aubrey Fetherstone braked heavily and veered his shiny McLaughlin off the fading track and into the headlight-high wheatgrass. The road ended on a knoll above town that offered an unbroken view of the valley from Skaha Lake to Peachland. Aubrey drove here often, lately, to sit and look at his creations and watch the soaring ravens. Men were building machines that could fly, now. He had pictures of them and lists of the names of some of them. Someday, he imagined, the sky would be his domain too.

The Kettle Valley Railway would soon be planting rails along the side of the mountain where Aubrey sat in his motorcar. The final surveys were scheduled to begin any day, pegging out the line from Chute Lake down into the valley to Penticton Word was that McCullough had found a way to make the three thousand foot descent without going over a three percent grade. Hard to imagine it, sitting on the side of the very mountain he would have to traverse. But Aubrey knew McCullough would do it, must do it, and connect the Okanagan to the twentieth century by two bands of steel that would carry the fruit out to eastern markets and the coast. The entire country, the empire, would taste the fruit from Aubrey's valley and want more; the King

himself would demand Okanagan peaches to bathe in his bowl of cream at breakfast, and Aubrey would provide them.

He was nearly satisfied.

Across the lake the town of Summerland occupied Siwash Flats, a broad confluence of three smaller valleys. Summerland was Aubrey's second favourite place on earth. Like Peachland and Naramata, it was built on the sandy loam and silt that supported little more than fescue, wheatgrass, and sagebrush. Too good for cattle, and worthless to the Indians. Until you put water to it. Aubrey had created fruit-bearing orchards where before had been only semi-arid wastelands. Created communities where there had been dust, peopled them with select British stock and provided them with the opportunity to work for a share in the new-sprung wealth. South of Summerland the flood plain of Trout Creek fanned out into the lake, and Aubrey could see the Gartrell place where those first wonderful peaches had been grown.

Irrigation. The whole scheme was so simple it made him giddy sometimes. Damming creeks, diverting them into systems of trenches and wooden flumes, then drawing off the water into ditches scratched into the land already prepared in five, ten, and fifteen acre plots. Sure, he'd been laughed at by the cattlemen and the merchants. He'd been laughed at until the fifth year, when the spindly trees finally dropped their paper-white blossoms to reveal hard, green nubs that grew rapidly beneath the endless sun and ripened into the finest fruit a man had ever bitten into.

The apples were first class, having taken ten firsts and four seconds at the National Apple Show in Spokane last November, beating the Americans in their own territory. And silver medals three years running at the Horticultural Society's Exhibition in London, England. Such success had not gone unnoticed, and other entrepreneurs were following Aubrey's lead, acquiring large parcels of land from the government and planting orchards to sell to the immigrants.

He turned his gaze southward to the delta of Nine Mile Creek, the town site of his latest and most successful venture, Naramata. "The Italy of Canada" was how one of his contented customers had described it, and the thought made him smile. Yes, it was like Italy, but without

the Italians. He thought of the railway work camps that would soon invade the valley with their crews of dangerous foreigners. He would see to it that none lagged behind after the camps had passed through.

Okanagan Lake shimmered in the valley bottom like a broad, mythical river, a river arrested by the very channel it had scoured out of the Interior Plateau, damming itself in a seventy mile trench. The lake was still the valley's main avenue of travel, plied daily by dories, scows, launches and the CPR sternwheelers, but Aubrey envisioned that changing soon. Completion of the railway would make lake travel obsolete. And with improved roads the motorcar would bring convenience to all who could afford it.

A movement caught his eyes and he watched a pair of ravens stall and tangle in mid-air, then drop away from one another in soaring dives to turn and come together again. A single feather hung where the ravens had touched, then began to spin lazily through the still air towards the earth like an iridescent seed pod. He lost the feather in the shadows forming across the lake and trained his eyes on the empty stretch of benchland that ran beneath Wildhorse and Eneas mountains, north of Summerland. It was empty but for one small holding of fifteen or twenty acres, which might well be abandoned for all he'd heard of the place in the last year. A foolish place to have built in the first place.

The York sounded its whistle and began to move away from the dock at Naramata. Aubrey watched the sternwheeler turn in a slow, wide furrow and head towards Penticton five miles distant. The steamboat seemed hardly to move at all, and he had to shift his eyes away from it to confirm its motion.

Speed: the word came to mind as it had been doing lately, exciting and disquieting him. There was much talk about speed these days. Some claimed it was evil, and pointed to the small cults of dark-eyed young men that galloped their horses in the streets and tinkered with the engines of their motorcars to make them go faster. Others said it was a good thing, that it was the way of the modern age, and would vastly increase productivity and profits in the near future.

Aubrey ran his gloved hand over the varnished walnut steering wheel. The McLaughlin was capable of thirty-five miles per hour, forty on the downhill. Hurtling along at forty miles per hour had frightened him terribly at first, but after he had done it a few times he noticed that the speed lost its ability to frighten him and became, in a private, almost carnal way, very pleasing.

"Speed." He said the word aloud, enjoying the feel of it on his lips. The word filled him with a desire that was neither evil nor immoral, a desire that was the perfect blend of pleasure and business. Yes, he would consult Mrs. Ambrose about this business of speed. She would pierce the truth and describe its meaning, as she had done so often for him, and with such precision.

* * *

Frank Wilson ... is a cook, originally from Halifax, Nova Scotia, more lately from Seattle. He has led a wandering life for some years.
The Vernon News, 23 May 1912

Where they got that information, Frank never knew. He had cooked some as a boy on his father's riverboats, but he'd never been further east than Edmonton. He'd been down to Seattle once, ten years ago, but Frank was a B.C. boy. Born in a hotel room in Boston Bar and raised in Lillooet and Hope, and several places in between. He resented the bit about "a wandering life." Sure, it was true, he drifted some, mostly up and down the Fraser, a short spell in the Chilcotin and Cariboo, but he'd been a citizen of Kelowna for nearly three years, and was on his way, he reckoned, to settling down. Granted, there were still a few changes to make, but they wouldn't be long in coming.

The first change Frank could foresee was his being made a foreman for Oldfield. Which was about bloody time, too, if you asked him. A man could only maintain his pride and dignity for so long when he was forced to work alongside Chinamen and other foreigners. More than once he'd come close to blows with the boys at the Bellevue while defending his dignity. But he

was getting too old for that; most men his age were married and had children and homes of their own. Not that Frank envied any of them their complaining wives.

Dick Oldfield walked the line at least once a week these days, joking with the women, rubbing his hands together and watching their heavy behinds sway as they rolled and cut the leaf. Nodding wordlessly as they held up their cigars for his approval. "So, Frank." Dick would stop and lean his hip against Frank's bench as he surveyed the room. "I'm going to need a good foreman in the field this summer. I won't tolerate dogfuckers out there. I need someone who can keep an eye on the bastards."

"I'd be your man, Dick."

Oldfield would raise his eyebrows. "You might be, Frank. You might be." He'd wink knowingly and leave Frank to interpret.

With the leaf from last year's crop running out they were down to working three days a week. In another month the leaf would be done. Getting through to June when the work in the fields began might be tricky, but Frank could pick up work somewhere else if need be. They might need men on the railway by then, but that would be about the worst. He couldn't just walk into a foreman's job up there, no sir, he'd have to rake muck alongside no telling what kind of garlic eater. Word was there were more dagoes and bohunks up there than a man would care to know existed.

It was Frank's day off. One of his days off. Drawn to the lake by the sun's warmth, Frank looked up from his seat on the edge of the boardwalk. The SS Okanagan was nosing into the CPR wharf, rubbing against the pilings with a heavy creaking of wood on wood. He pulled himself to his feet and let himself be caught on the edges of the flow of people walking to greet the ship or just watch the arrivals come ashore.

He left the boardwalk and the shade of the cottonwoods and walked in the sand, enjoying the way the sun made his shirt warm against his skin. He walked at the water's edge where the

sand was compacted by the waves. A thick flock of coots turned in the shallows and made for deeper water at Frank's approach. Dirty-looking little birds, they were. Poor eating.

Frank was forty-one years old. The wide stance of his feet had come from growing up on the river boats of the Fraser under the less-than-watchful eye of his father. It had been the other men who'd looked out for him, told him where not to stand, what not to hold onto, hauled him back from the rail as a wave surged and broke across the deck, sweeping it clear of all that wasn't lashed down. His stocky body had started to settle, much as he tried to ignore it. He didn't need a mirror to know that his straight, ropy hair was beginning to thin out, or that the skin under his jaw was beginning to thicken and sag a bit. He could tell all that with the seven complete fingers he had. At twelve, the index finger of his right hand had been severed at the second knuckle by a snagged cable coming taut like a guitar string. Frank hadn't felt a thing as the end of his finger rolled off the rail into the river. His father'd cursed from the wheelhouse while the mate wrapped Frank's stump in his shirttail.

Frank watched the passengers come ashore, the ladies with their bristling skirts and flimsy parasols stepping carefully on the line of planks laid across the muddy street. The men followed them, dark suited and hatted with bowlers and fedoras, smoking the very cigars Frank had rolled.

These men think they're about to prosper. Probably being sold one of those orchard plots and the promise of wealth. Was anybody, wondered Frank, telling them about the long days of back-bending labour tending the young trees? Likely not. They would be told how they were their own bosses, and growing a cash crop. Frank knew better though, he'd seen men turned to slaves by the weather or a wife wanting finer things. A man, a single man, who supervised other men did not have those worries or responsibilities, he simply had to keep his men working, that was all. His Sundays and evenings were his to do with as he pleased.

A job as a foreman would mean other things to Frank, too. He'd be able to pay for a room at the Bellevue again, and not have to demean himself by asking for credit. Nor would he be forced to camp out come spring, as he had for the past month.

The dock emptied of foot passengers but for one who was pushing what looked like one of those motorized bicycles he'd heard about. As the person drew nearer he saw it was a woman, a tall, high-hipped woman with red hair that stuck up from her head in unsprung coils. She wore dungarees and thick-soled boots.

Frank leaned against the rutted bark of an old cottonwood and watched her wheel the machine off the dock and into the mud. The deflated tires sank to their rims and the mud gathered on the spokes in large clumps until the wheels would no longer turn. The woman gave up pushing and began flicking the mud out of the spokes with the toe of her boot. People stopped to watch and shake their heads. Mothers jerked on the pointing arms of young boys, and men studied the woman and the machine, grew self-conscious about their fascination and moved on. Someone ought to lend a hand, thought Frank. If there weren't so many people watching I might do it myself. She might be halfway handsome if she dressed like a woman.

She gave a final kick at the wheel and leaned the machine against her leg as she looked about. She put a hand to her hair to push it down, but it sprang upright as soon as she removed the hand. Her grey eyes came to rest on Frank.

Shit, he thought, nodding politely and raising his tobacco-stained fingers to his hat brim. When he brought his hand down he saw she had turned her back and was rocking the machine, trying to break the grip of the mud. Her feet were planted wide in the mud and her hips swayed as she pushed and pulled on the handlebars. Frank pushed off from the tree.

"Is that one of those motorized bicycles?"

The woman stopped her struggle. "Pardon me?"

Frank removed his hat and saw her eyes dart to the top of his head.

"A motorcycle," she said.

"Do you need help?"

"Are you a mechanic?" she asked, wiping her brow with the back of a bony wrist.

"A push, I meant," said Frank.

"Put your hands there." She indicated the back of the seat with a nod.

They rocked the machine twice and broke it free of the mud. They rolled it along Bernard Avenue, mud sucking at wheels and boots, and Frank's breath quickly grew short as he worked to match her long strides. At the corner of Water Street he relinquished his grip on the seat and grabbed his knees to keep his legs from giving out. The woman kept going, looking over her shoulder briefly to thank him.

When the tiny stars had stopped drifting in from the edges of his vision, Frank straightened and searched the street for the woman or her machine among the maze of buggies and autos. She was gone. His chest burned when he breathed in and his knees had gone wooden, but in spite of the pain he felt good, he decided. Felt optimistic. A drink was called for.

* * *

James was stated to be a deserter from the U.S. Army, and to be carrying a Winchester service rifle, with two Colt revolvers and ammunition. His age was given at 23, and height 5 feet 11 inches, and of a dark sallow complexion.
Penticton Herald, 23 March 1912

Walter Boyd James was eighteen, five feet seven inches, and not of a "dark sallow complexion" at all, which is a contradiction. Rather, his complexion was sallow in the strictest sense of the word--his skin pale, sickly, and slightly yellowish from a winter diet of turnips and muskrats. He was thin as a rake handle and about the same length. His face, in contrast to his lean frame, had retained the soft, fleshy cheeks of childhood. Mouse-coloured hair hung straight over his ears and forehead, matted like an unkept horse tail. He wore a cowboy hat, the brim flattened and the crown punched out of shape, and his clothes hung from the points of his shoulders and hips like canvas on a poorly pitched tent. His shirt and pants were stained with cooking grease and muskrat blood.

Boyd perched on the rail out front of the Bellevue Hotel, listening to his stomach digesting air. North Dakota was almost too far away to remember, but if he closed his eyes he

could see the dark earth cut open in long lines by his father's disc plough, the low sky stretched right down to the edges of the land. He was going home as soon as he had the means to travel. Right now he had nothing--neither money nor horse. He'd sure as shit come to the wrong place, he knew now. These English folks were more righteous than the Methodists back home. Maybe they were Methodists too. Working in an orchard for some stiff-necked Englishman or other foreigner was not Boyd's idea of living on the frontier.

Three years was a long time to be gone from home in a life that spanned only eighteen. Only he hadn't known until this winter that it was home. He belonged on the prairie, on his father's farm where there was only the wide earth and the sky. Here, the mountains and people crowded in on him and forced him up against the goddam trees or into a gulley that had no good reason to be where it was. Boyd wanted nothing more than to be able to sight down a furrow until it merged with all the others and ran into the bottom of the sky.

A man stepped onto the front veranda, the door swinging closed behind him. Boyd turned his head and saw the Professor holding onto a post as he waited for his eye to adjust to the light. His striped brown suit hung about his shapeless body like a shroud as he looked at Boyd out of one red eye, the other eye rolled back in its socket and misfiring upwards among the rafters.

Boyd chuckled, a parched rasping escaping his throat. He had to laugh every time he saw the old fart with his maverick eye. Boyd grinned and nodded. The Professor turned as if not seeing Boyd and began to negotiate the stairs, both feet on each step before attempting the next. When he reached the bottom he leaned forward and released a string of saliva from his lips which dangled before parting from his lip.

Boyd pursed his lips and spat in a neat, quick motion, clearing his leg easily. His stomach begged for his attention again, and Boyd hopped down from the rail. Head down, hands thrust deep in his pockets, he walked across the road to the back of the General Store and kicked over the empty boxes.

A man in a butcher's apron came to the back door and looked at him. "Away from there, son!" The man made a shooing motion with one hand. "Nothing for you there. Go on!" He stepped out of the door and faced Boyd, his apron front and hands spotted with blood.

Boyd spat, turned on his heel, and began walking towards town. He passed the Professor's shack and noticed there was no smoke from the chimney. At the bridge he ducked into the brush and followed a game trail downstream, walking in a crouch through the tunnel in the elderberries and saskatoons. He reached a small hollow and sat cross-legged. From the brush beside his leg he drew out an oilcloth bundle and laid it in his lap, opening the cloth.

The old, Army-issue .45 was a dead, cold weight in his hand, the long barrel ungainly as he moved it side to side. He opened the cylinder and counted the rounds. Three left. Plus the two he wasn't sure about in the derringer on the leather thong under his shirt. He'd had been given the tiny pistol by a whore from Nahun who'd taken pity on him for a few days after he'd quit swamping for Perry Macauley. Macauley was a bastard, though Lily hadn't pitied him so far as to give him any free times. But she had given him the derringer, telling him, "I don't know if it works. I've never fired it." Boyd never got around to firing it either. He'd checked to see it was loaded and, not being able to afford more ammunition, strapped it on and worn it all winter. He hadn't taken it out more than once or twice after the first week, wearing it as one wears an amulet around the neck, its constant presence making it seem a part of the body rarely noticed.

He wouldn't mind running into Lily again with a few dollars in his pocket. He'd slip two dollars into the front of her dress and, by God, he wouldn't sit in the chair in her room like before, talking about the things he missed back home while she painted up her lips for the next paying fellow. He'd had to go out when she had her infrequent customers, but she let him sleep on the floor for two nights before sending him on his way. She was from the mid-west, he remembered. He imagined taking her back to North Dakota and laying her down on the bald prairie, the wind lifting the skirts of his painted lady as he lowered his body onto hers in the same way the sky stretched out over the plains.

* * *

She was the Harriet Quimby of the NorthWest, without the purple silk. I could tell straight away she was a natural.

"Birdman" MacKenzie, unpublished diary

Eudie stood framed in the doorway of the dark garage, her shadow slewed up against the doorframe. She rested the weight of the machine against her leg and wiped the sweat from her forehead, waiting for her eyes to adjust to the thick shadows.

"What is it?" said a voice from the darkness.

"Hello," she replied. "Are you the mechanic?"

A pair of boots and legs walked into the light. The man came forward until all of his body except his face was out of the shadows. "Where did you get that?" he asked, his consonants thickened by a German accent. He knelt beside the machine, his fingers probing and tugging at it like a man checking a horse's teeth.

"It's mine," said Eudie, holding the machine away from her leg to make room for his hands.

In the sunlight the mechanic's pocked face had a sheen to it as though there was a permanent layer of clean grease protecting his skin. He looked up at her, squinting. "It's a long time since I saw a motorcycle. I used to have a Peugeot." He smiled, revealing a row of crooked teeth. "Very fast machine. Very fast."

"Yes," said Eudie. "I know them. Twelve horsepower."

"Fourteen," he corrected. "Very fast." The mechanic stood up, wiping his hands on his coveralls. "My name is Jules."

"Eudie." She extended her hand.

"You ride?"

"I do, but it's been sitting a couple of years."

Jules nodded. "An Indian. Good machines, chain drive, yeah. You w[illegible] get it running?"

"Yes. Can you do it?"

"Of course," said Jules, flashing a smile.

"Jules! Jules?" Another man's voice came from the darkness. "Oh, there you are. I want you to--" A man in a suit and bowler strode into the sunlight and stared at Eudie and the motorbike. "Well. What's this?" he said.

Eudie pressed a hand into her hair. "I came to get my motorcycle repaired." She was taller than he was.

"This is yours?" He looked at her distrustfully. "Do you realize how dangerous these are, ma'am? Why, they're lethal in untrained or incapable hands. Ask Jules, he raced the devil-machines. He'll tell you."

"I know how to ride it," explained Eudie. "I know what the dangers are."

"Pardon me, ma'am. Don't get me wrong." Mr. Richards began again. "It ain't--isn't that. But don't you think it improper ...?" He stopped speaking.

"No, I don't think it improper," she replied. Just as she had expected. "Do you?"

Her lack of deference disarmed him, and he muttered soft apologies as he retreated into the shadows. She waited for him to emerge again, but the sound of a door latching signalled his escape.

"When can you do it?" she asked Jules.

"I can start it right now."

She handed over the machine.

"Can you come back tomorrow?"

"Sure," said Eudie, turning to go.

"Where did you ride?" he asked.

She stopped and pushed her hair back from her forehead. "Back east."

Jules frowned. "You do ride?"

She nodded, pursing her lips. "Yes, I ride. Ever hear of Jake Thomas?"

"Yes," Jules replied after a moment's thought. "When I arrived in Halifax. Jake Thomas. He and ..." He stared at Eudie.

She smiled, letting the gap between her front teeth show for an instant. If he knows, he'll respect it, if he doesn't then it's not worth explaining. She walked into the sunlight, leaving Jules severed by shadow and light.

"Hey, wait a minute," he called, but all he could see was the plume of hair rising and falling as she strode down the crowded boardwalk.

* * *

Wilson met James several miles south of Kelowna on his way to Penticton.
Penticton Herald, 23 March 1912

Wilson ... was proceeding to walk from Kelowna to Penticton to get a job in the railway camps there. On the second day of the trip he had met up with the accused whom he took for a trapper from the hills, and had gone along with him in more or less fear.
The Vernon News, 23 May 1912

Nearby waited his pal, Wilson, and together they made their way to Penticton.
Gellatly, *A Bit of Okanagan History*, 1983

There are grains of truth in each of these accounts, though the Vernon reporter and Gellatly show the most active imaginations. The Penticton reporter was closest, probably unknowingly, to recording the truth with his simple, declarative statement. The truth is that Frank was unconscious when he and Boyd took up together. He was asleep in a seventeen foot dory moored in the protected waters of Lyson's Boatworks, where he'd been sleeping since giving up his room at the Bellevue.

The afternoon had passed quickly for Frank as he drank rye at the Lakeview Hotel while Ozzie, the bartender, listened and wiped the glasses and bar top obsessively.

"I'm telling you, Ozzie, it was a woman pushing a motorcycle."

"Sure, Frank."

"Don't see that every day. S'gotta be a good sign."

"Sure, Frank."

As soon as Frank's forehead touched the rim of his glass, Ozzie put him out. "You know the rule, Frank. Straight home now."

The tricky part was getting his weight transferred from the wharf to the dory. There was that moment of in between, which was usually when the dory would start to shy, that made him vulnerable to an unexpected dunking. After the first time, Frank learned that if he lay on his belly he could catch the dory with his feet and pull it underneath him, then drop his weight into the centre. It was a manoeuvre he could perform, he soon found, after any amount of drink.

There was a canvas tarp over the dory that Frank wound himself inside of to keep off the dew and cold. Laying across the stern seat in the foetal position, with his knees drawn up and his arms folded over his belly, his sleeps were deep and restful.

Frank opened his eyes, trying to make sense of it. The jerky rhythm of the boat's movement was not right. "What?" said Frank.

Boyd stopped mid-stroke, holding the dripping oars above the water, listening with his mouth open. Frank moaned as he dropped his legs to the floorboards and pulled himself upright.

"Oh, God," croaked Boyd, dropping the oars and propelling himself backwards over the seat, boot heels scraping as he tried to wedge himself into the bow. He pulled the revolver from his belt and aimed it two-handed at the apparition.

Frank freed his arms from his canvas cerement and displayed his empty palms. "No," he said. Sitting upright brought sharp pains to the sides of his skull.

"What in hell?" Boyd's voice cracked.

"Don't shoot," said Frank. Bile rose in his gullet and he fought it back down to an acid heat in his stomach. The tarp was too confining. He needed out. He saw the yellow-orange flame spit from the end of the barrel as the explosion concussed in his ears and sent him reeling against the transom.

In the heightened silence following the gunshot, he smelled the burnt powder, felt it bite at his nostrils. He pulled himself up in the seat, realizing he was not dead and not wounded except for the ringing in his head. His stomach fisted and pushed at his throat again, and he swallowed hard, tasting bile on the back of his tongue.

Boyd hunched in the bow, unmoving. He continued to hold the pistol in both hands, pointing it at the moaning creature in the boat with him. One round left. Was this what came of stealing? Was this the retribution Pa spoke of when he prayed to God at dinner? He wondered if he could kill the wraith before him. If that was what it was. It was speaking again.

"Christamighty. You trying to kill me?"

Boyd was silent, watching the figure emerge from the windings of the tarp. It had a smell he recognized.

"What the hell are you doing, anyway, rowing down the lake in the middle of the night? Talk to me, boy. You a runaway?" The effort of speaking brought another wave, and Frank could no longer hold back the fist that forced itself into his mouth. He rolled and hung over the transom, heaving and puking into the black water, his body coiling and straightening as it purged itself. Frank gasped for air and forbearance, coughing and spitting between convulsions.

Boyd lowered the revolver, letting it hang between his knees. He knew the smell of whiskey, and chided himself for the way he'd let his fear take hold. As he listened to the drunk groan and heave, Boyd thought he should take up the oars again. He could dump him off at first light.

After a while Frank rolled over on his back and lay panting, letting the movement of the boat lull his senses further into dullness and, he hoped, sleep. The drying sweat on his face cooled and soothed him.

"You been drinking, mister."

"Next time," gasped Frank, "don't miss."

In springtime, dawn in the Okanagan arrives quickly. The indigo night sky pales and shifts to a grey which rapidly washes the sky into daylight before the sun is rolled up from behind the southeast horizon to begin its climb across the valley.

By the time Frank jerked awake the sun was lighting the tops of the mountains behind Peachland and bathing them in a glow that promised warmth. He watched the reflection in the silky water ripple like muscle on a horse's flank. A chill started down his neck and he hunched the tarp up higher.

He looked at the kid curled beneath his coat, lying between the bow and centre seats. His face was buried in the angular wrap of arms and elbows and he was shivering.

Frank turned his head to look up and down the lake. They were drifting off the eastern shore, a few miles north of the Rattlesnake Island. The air was so still he could hear the squawking and splashing of the ducks, grebes, and goldeneyes along the shore. Somewhere up among the trees a ruffed grouse drummed the earth in a series of muffled crescendoes.

"Wake up," he said, his throat dry as an old boot.

Boyd stirred, then sat up, looking bewildered. His hair jutted out at odd angles and his eyes were puffy and unmakeable beneath the single eyebrow that ran the width of his forehead. "Whud," said Boyd.

"Take me to shore," said Frank.

"You."

"Go to shore," Frank insisted.

Boyd looked puzzled as he climbed onto the seat, the butt of the pistol poking into his stomach. He stared warily at Frank as he pulled towards shore.

Frank shed the tarp as they neared the narrow beach, and as soon as the keel touched bottom he swung his feet over the side. He stood at the water's edge and relieved himself and Boyd, seeing the sense in it, climbed out and did the same on the other side of the dory.

"So," said Frank, tucking himself in. "What's your story?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, what are you doing making off with one of Lyson's boats in the night? What are you doing firing point blank at an unarmed man?"

Boyd looked at his boots. "You scared me."

"Oh," said Frank. "I see."

Boyd chanced a direct look at Frank's face and found him looking back, waiting. "I robbed the Charter 'n' Taylor's."

"You what?" Frank stared in disbelief at the unlikely desperado before him. The boy's dirty clothes hung off him like empty feed sacks. His eyes--Frank caught a glimpse of their pale blueness--had a nervous quickness to them, moving and shifting constantly like an animal smelling death.

"Had to eat," he said. "But I'm leaving, crossing the line." His voice arid as summer, breaking and fading like the hiss of wind in wheatgrass. "Goin' home."

"Home," said Frank.

"Yeah. This place ... Something about it ... I don't know." He gave up with a shrug.

Frank nodded. Home was not a word he had much use for.

They lifted and turned their heads in unison at a deep, regular sound from across the water. Boyd came taut and hissed. "Hide the boat!" He took hold of the gunwales and without thinking Frank did the same. They dragged the dory in under the low growth of alder and cottonwood, then stood motionless amid the swaying branches.

They had landed in a bay that was shallow and open on the north side and partially enclosed by a small headland on the south. The thumping of the gasoline engine grew louder, and they fixed their eyes on the point.

A white boat appeared, its plumb bow rising and falling in a shallow sawing action. A small pennant flag wagged slowly above the wheelhouse and along the rail stood a tall man wearing a dark coat and fedora, watching the shore. He turned his head towards the wheelhouse, then back, and stood motionless as a statue as the boat passed from view.

"Hunting you already," said Frank. "What did you steal?"

"Apples, and cash. That's just a freight run," Boyd assured him.

"With a man checking the shore," Frank added.

Boyd gave him a quizzical look, then shook his head. "We gotta keep moving."

"How much cash?" asked Frank.

"Oh," said Boyd, thinking for a moment. "'Bout fifty dollars."

"Where's home?"

"You ask a lot of questions, mister," said Boyd, bending to push the dory towards the water. "Get in," he told Frank when the boat was floating again.

Frank looked up and down the lake. Walking out in either direction would take more than a day. "Which way you going?"

"Get in," said Boyd, bringing his hand to rest on the revolver. "You can row."

"Another boat," remarked Frank, cocking his head.

"What?" Boyd listened intently, his mouth hanging open as he scanned the lake. Near the middle of the lake another small freight scow, steam-powered, was chugging southward. "Can't see us from out there." Boyd stood motionless except for his pale, spidery fingers which moved restlessly along the gunwales. "Shit," he said, then spat into the water. "We better stay put 'til dark."

Frank found a dry, grassy spot in the sun that afforded a protected view of the lake. As soon as he lay down his body signalled its aches and fatigue, and he began to drift along the borders of sleep, disturbed only by Boyd's pitching around in the brush.

Boyd hated sitting still and waiting for the day to pass when he knew he could be moving further homeward. The border was only a day's ride south of Penticton, after which he'd be able to relax. Frank lay stretched on his back beside him, wheezing and farting in a troubled sleep, smelling of whiskey and puke.

Down in a damp hollow he found some cow parsnip and honeysuckle. With a stick he dug up one of the cow parsnips. He washed away the soil and stared at the white root.

Several hours later, the same boat passed by on its return trip. The man was not standing on deck, but Boyd could see him at a window in the wheelhouse.

* * *

The motorcycle, even in the shadows of the garage, had a dark gleam to it. Jules had given it a thorough cleaning. "And it runs fine?" Eudie asked.

"Listen to this," said Jules. With the rear wheel up on the stand, Jules mounted the machine and pumped the pedals. The engine burst to life and filled the low-roofed room with a familiar thunder. Eudie placed her hand on the handlebars, feeling the exploding rhythm in her arm, letting it take her back to the motordrome and a life lived on the edge of fear.

"What do you think?" Jules was shouting into her ear.

A girlish grin broke across her face as she nodded her approval. She leaned over the rumbling machine and removed the spark plug lead. The engine died, leaving a ringing echo in her ears. "What do I owe you?"

"Are you really Miss Harding?" he asked, a look of concern on his brow.

"Not these days," replied Eudie. "Look, I'd rather people didn't ..."

Jules smiled. "Don't worry. Four dollars."

Eudie dug in her pockets. It occurred to her that she was also paying for Jules' silence.

"That was a hell of a show you two did," Jules said admiringly. "No one has done anything like it since, you know."

"Maybe that's for the best," she said, handing him the money.

"Why did you stop?"

Eudie looked hard at Jules and saw that he knew he'd asked one too many questions. But it was not retractable. And he knew, before she answered, what the answer must be. "Jake went too far," she said quickly, taking her leather helmet out of her coat and pulling it over her head, tucking clumps of unruly curls under the sides. She swung her leg over the machine and settled into the seat, planting her feet wide on the packed dirt floor as she pulled on her gloves. Jules stood by uncertainly, made awkward by the exchange. She fitted the goggles over her eyes and looked up at him through the wide, flat lenses, and pursed her lips in a sort of grimace. "I'll bring it by sometime and you can take it for a ride," she said.

"All right," said Jules.

She rocked forward off the stand then rose on the pedals and propelled herself into the street. The engine rumbled alive, jerking the machine forward, and Eudie let herself drop into the seat. The street was still rutted and tricky, so she rode with her feet out.

At the sudden noise echoing off the buildings and windows, horses tossed their heads and strained at their harnesses. Men gathered reins to their chests, wild-eyed as their horses, cursing and looking about for the approaching machine. It was louder by far than any motorcar on the street. Dogs ran out from the shade of wagons, barking, then turned tail and slinked beneath the boardwalk for protection. Boys shook free of their mothers and ran into the street to watch, slack-jawed, recovering their wits to race after the motorcycle, elbowing one another to be first to touch it. Glass panes rattled in the storefronts, drawing customers and merchants to the windows and onto the boardwalk to decry the noise. The devil's work, said some. Amen, replied others.

At the CPR wharf Eudie stalled the engine and looked about for Hitchner's scow to take her over to Westside. She could see it about midway across, coming towards town, so she walked along the beach while she waited, escaping the boys and men gathering about the motorcycle.

She spent the crossing staring at the patterns in the waves. The short ride had caused an upwelling of feelings, and Eudie tried to name them. The memories of Jake were not unexpected; their strength was. She could not live like that again, nor did she want to. Nor did she want to continue living in exile and mourning the way she had for the last two years. It had been necessary for a while, but during the last few months of winter Eudie had become profoundly dissatisfied with her hermit-like existence and begun to yearn for the sensations of being fully alive and engaged with life. Speed and danger, her old familiars, still held some fascination for her, but so did a measure of stability and security, now.

She had the place at Greata. She had managed to convert the loss of Jake and the remains of the show into a small holding, a holding with a glasshouse and garden plot that she could plant and tend. And now she had her motorcycle again, and a way to temper a quiet life with a taste of the old game now and then.

The bumping of the scow against the Westside wharf brought Eudie into the present, reminding her that she'd committed herself to attending the Women's Institute meeting in Peachland that evening. She looked at her mud-spattered trousers and boots and wondered how she would look in a dress. It had been a while, four years at least, since she'd worn one. Not since Paris.

* * *

Boyd was a restless sleeper. His muttering and tossing woke Frank, who turned on his side and watched the kid's hands and legs twitch. The revolver had slid free of the kid's belt and was lying in the folds of his coat. Possession of the weapon would increase Frank's choices

considerably; it was a situation that only a fool would let pass. He rolled to his hands and knees and crawled towards the kid.

Too easy, he thought as he lifted the revolver free of the coat. He moved off and sat against the base of a ponderosa pine. The weapon was an old, long-barrelled Colt Peacemaker, as reliable a weapon as was ever built. He flipped open the cylinder, cupping his hands around it to dampen the sound, and counted the empty chambers. One round left. The kid was at the end of his rope unless he had a good roll of bills on him. He eased the cylinder back into position, setting an empty chamber behind the pin, the single round next to it, then walked over to the sleeping figure and gave it a kick.

Boyd wrestled his way out of a confused sleep and sat up. His eyes found Frank, and came to rest on the weapon. He brought a hand to his midriff, touching himself where the pistol had been. "What're you gonna do?"

"The money," said Frank. Fifty dollars would see him through to June in considerable comfort. Taking money from a thief wasn't wrong, it certainly wasn't against the law. Boyd looked at him balefully. "The money," Frank said again, lifting the revolver. He was reminded of the time when, as a boy, he and his father had been held up by Archie McLean and Alex Hare at a fuel stop along the Thompson near Kamloops. Archie had already killed a man, though he was only two or three years older than Frank at the time, and he'd handled his weapon with an authority that Frank was unable, at present, to muster. He knew that if Boyd were to lunge for him he would not be able to pull the trigger.

Boyd attempted a disdainful laugh that caught in his throat. "It's empty." He indicated the pistol with a nod.

Frank grinned. It was a good play. "Then I guess you can just walk away and not worry about me shooting you in the knee."

Boyd's eyes floated between his revolver and Frank's face as he weighed his choices. "Okay," said Boyd, holding his hands open. "What d'you want?"

"The money," said Frank. "Put it on the ground."

Boyd thrust his hand angrily into his pocket. Things were going all to hell. He tugged free his fist and dropped several bills and coins on the sandy ground.

"All of it."

"That's it."

"That's it?"

"Yeah."

Frank looked at the money. "That can't be more than fifteen dollars," he said. "You said fifty."

"I didn't count it yet."

"Shit," Frank cursed under his breath. He motioned with the revolver. "Move back."

Boyd stepped back several paces and Frank scooped the bills off the ground, stuffing them into his shirt pocket.

"That's my travelling money."

"Shut up," said Frank.

"How am I gonna get home?"

"Walk. I'm leaving your legs."

"Walk to North Dakota?"

"The money wasn't rightfully yours anyway," said Frank. A gust of wind sifted through the pines overhead and both men turned their attention to their surroundings. A north wind, Frank noticed with dismay. The sun had set in a watery grey sky and the light was beginning to weaken. He should get moving.

Boyd stood on shore, wringing his hands as he watched the son of a bitch row away with his money and gun. Things were going from rock bottom straight on down to hell in no time flat. Walking out was not a matter of choice now, it was the only thing left. He would walk until it was too dark to see, he decided, and set out along the shore, scrambling over the rocky headlands

and dropping down onto the flat, narrow beaches between. His leather-soled boots slipped continuously on the lichen-covered rocks and brittle grass.

You had to be a real bonehead, he told himself, to be taken by a stinking, old drunk. He searched his pockets for his last apple and came up empty. Goddamn. He kicked at a clump of prickly pear, then stopped to dislodge them from the toe of his boot.

On a high outcropping he sat down. The wind was still building, and the tops of the waves were breaking off and fleeing downwind in a bright spray. The old bastard'll be having a hard time of it against that. Need to get back across the lake, find some food, another boat, a horse, anything. He closed his eyes and tried to imagine himself outside the folding confines of the valley; tried to remember spreading his arms wide on either side and being able to point to a horizon that wasn't obstructed by hills or mountains; tried to remember a landscape that didn't deceive and wasn't full of sudden hollows and bushwhacking men.

* * *

Potholes and wheel-ruts made for slow and tiring riding, and by the time Eudie reached Westbank she knew she didn't have time to go home and put on a dress for the meeting. Her boots were caked with mud and her pants soaked to the knee.

Eudie had fully expected to be noticed when she started making more frequent trips to town, but she hadn't prepared herself for the entreatings of Mrs. Fearnley. Finally the recluse emerges, and the women wanted to get a good look at her, determine her suitability as a citizen of the Okanagan. Eudie knew full well they would not approve, but let them have their look and be done with it.

"But you must come," she'd said, closing her hand on Eudie's arm. "It's not good for a woman to be alone so much of the time. I've been watching you, you know. I can tell when a woman needs the company of her own."

She'd clearly been misjudged, but attending one of their meetings couldn't hurt. She would let them have one good look at her and then carry on with her own life. And there was one other thing Mrs. Fearnley had been careful to mention. "Oh yes, be sure to wear a dress, Miss Harding," she'd said, casting a disapproving eye at Eudie's trousers and boots. Eudie could probably count on her fingers the number of times in her adult life that she'd worn skirts, and her ability to assume the appearance of a lady, she knew, would be a major element of the judgement of the Women's Institute.

As Eudie rolled to a stop beneath the clock in front of the bank, and saw that the meeting was due to begin in fifteen minutes, she was approached by three women. Eudie removed her goggles and looked up to find sweet, fussing Mrs. Fearnley, Mrs. Thacker, grim-faced and bulldoggish, and a younger woman with flowing dark curls whom Eudie hadn't seen before.

"Miss Harding? Is that you?"

Eudie smiled half-heartedly, guilty. "Oh, hello Mrs. Fearnley. Mrs. Thacker." She glanced at the third woman and their eyes met briefly.

Mrs. Thacker nodded sternly. The third woman smiled and offered her hand. "Cora Armstrong," she said. The high bridge of her nose gave her face the intensity of a hawk, but the deep, brown eyes softened the raptor quality and gave her face a certain warmness. Her greeting was genuine and admiring.

Eudie tugged the glove from her hand and enclosed the woman's hand within the wide palm of her own. "Eudie Harding."

"Harding," said Mrs. Thacker. "Are you a Yorkshire Harding? I knew some Hardings from Yorkshire."

"No. Manchester."

"Ah."

"Cora has come to apprise us of the latest political developments in the suffrage movement," Mrs. Fearnley explained. "And I'm told she also has a superior shortbread recipe to share with us," she added.

"She can't come like that." Mrs. Thacker spoke, indicating Eudie's pants.

"I wasn't planning to, but the ride from Kelowna took much longer than I expected." Eudie saw a look of relief soften Mrs. Thacker's features for a moment.

"You do look a fright," Mrs. Fearnley said quietly.

"The road was quite rutted and wet," Eudie explained.

"So it seems," said Mrs. Thacker.

"Perhaps I should come another time."

"Yes," agreed Mrs. Thacker. "That would be best."

"No," said Cora Armstrong. "I think it's splendid if Miss Harding comes just the way she is."

Mrs. Thacker and Melissa turned on her and she met them with flashing eyes. "She is a perfect example of what woman suffrage is about. We need to demonstrate that we are equal to men in every aspect, social as well as political."

The two older women looked at her, stupefied.

"No, really," Eudie protested. "I'm a mess."

"I'm quite serious," Cora went on. Her hands signalled her determination as they punctuated the air. "It's vital that the other women see what we are capable of if we choose to exercise our right, our fundamental right, to equality in any avenue of society we choose to enter. And they are all open to us if we put our voices together and speak loudly enough."

"I'm much too muddy," said Eudie, fighting the urge to climb on her motorcycle and ride away. She had no desire to be paraded before the women of the town as an example of equality or woman suffrage or anything else.

Cora appeared not to have heard. She was exchanging intense looks with Mrs. Thacker and Mrs. Fearnley.

"I don't know," said Mrs. Fearnley. "This sounds excessively liberal-minded to me."

"Precisely," said Cora, jabbing the air with her forefinger.

Mrs. Thacker stood motionless but for her jaw, which worked in a heavy, circular motion, a grizzled umpire contemplating a decision. She heaved a sigh from her wide bosom and spoke, her eyes fixed on Cora. "Miss Harding is an aberration. I do not see how a mud-caked misfit such as this can be of benefit to any political or social organization."

Cora drew her breath sharply, nostrils flaring. Mrs. Fearnley uttered a little cry of surprise. Eudie lowered her goggles over her eyes and stared straight ahead. She had made a point of conducting her life away from people like Mrs. Thacker and Mrs. Fearnley, and this was a sharp reminder of the reasons for that decision.

"Edna!" cried Cora. "How can you, how dare you, say such a thing! Oh, you're a fine one, aren't you." Her eyes grew wide and dark, and her hands began to poke and grab furiously at the air. "I knew my uncle had married a staunch, old maid Tory, but you are an outrage!"

Mrs. Fearnley and Eudie traded furtive glances across the standoff between Cora and Edna Thacker. Mrs. Fearnley looked decidedly ill at ease. She had been the one who invited Eudie, and would have to face Mrs. Thacker's wrath for it. Eudie didn't care a damn about Mrs. Fearnley's worries as she watched the wilful aunt and niece silently denigrate one another.

Edna Thacker spoke again, her voice low and menacing. "You are no longer welcome here, Cora."

"That is of little loss to me," said Cora, her voice shaking with anger. Her arms were locked rigidly at her sides. "Or to woman suffrage." Her skirts flared like a dancer's as she spun and strode away from them.

"Come, dear," Edna took Mrs. Fearnley by the arm. "We'll be late."

Eudie removed the goggles from her face and rubbed her eyes. The two women were moving briskly away, arms swinging soldierly as they marched to their meeting without a representative of suffragism, without a shortbread recipe. Eudie leaned down and reattached the spark plug lead, then spun the pedals into position. That's that, she thought, preparing to start the machine. A hand closed on her arm, and she turned to see Cora, tears rimming her eyes like beads of glass.

Eudie lifted her goggles. "Miss Armstrong," she said. "It looks like I just cost suffragism some support. I'm terribly sorry."

"No, no," Cora shook her head. "It's been there since I arrived. You were just the catalyst. Actually, I'm relieved it happened so soon." She laughed nervously and waved her hand. "Cleared the air."

"Are you staying with her?"

"I'll go to the hotel tonight."

"Then what?"

"I don't know. I'll have to think." Cora stared up the quiet street. "There's so much to be done, here."

She looked too young and frail to be saddled with the weight of political responsibility and looked, at the moment, defeated by the inertia of tradition. She brushed a lock of hair from her cheek.

"Your aunt is a stubborn woman," observed Eudie.

"Are you married?" asked Cora, as if she hadn't heard.

Eudie's surprise displayed itself in a quick turn of the head, as she caught Cora's eye as if to discover the question's meaning there.

"It's none of my business, I know," Cora added quickly. "But I'm curious about the motorcycle. Is it yours?" A nervous smile allowed a brief glimpse of her even teeth.

"No, not married," Eudie said slowly. Cora's shy self-consciousness was in such contrast to her earlier outburst against her aunt that Eudie felt herself wanting to put the young woman at her ease. "The motorcycle is mine. I used to ride with a man," she continued, noting Cora's renewed interest. "But that was a couple of years ago now..." There was more she could say, but to tell even a little more would mean having to tell all. "But he wasn't my husband," she added. "What about you?" she asked, turning the conversation away from herself. "Are you married?"

"Oh, no," Cora dismissed the notion. "Haven't got time for a husband, even if I wanted one."

"Yes," nodded Eudie. "I know what you mean."

"Listen. I, uh ... Would you like to have tea with me? Maybe tomorrow? Or the day after?"

"Yes, of course," replied Eudie. "Where would you like to meet? Where will you be staying?"

"Oh, I'll probably be at the hotel. We could meet there," offered Cora apologetically. "I don't know what it'll be like."

"Why don't you come out to my place? Get away from town for a day," Eudie offered, surprising herself. She hadn't had a visitor in months, and hadn't wanted one. "I can bring you back to town."

"On the motorcycle?" Cora's eyes brightened.

Eudie smiled and shook her head. "It only carries one. I'll hitch the buckboard."

"All right. Where do you live?"

"Greata Ranch. Two miles south. Catch the morning coach and tell the driver. He'll let you off."

"I'll see you then," said Cora, touching Eudie's arm. "Thank you."

It was impulsive and rash for Eudie to extend the invitation. Cora almost seemed, when she's stopped speaking as a feminist and suffragist, to be one of the young and helpless women

Eudie disdained. But she wasn't making a virtue of her helplessness; she was working towards an autonomy, and not just for herself.

* * *

After Frank had been rowing into the wind and waves for half an hour he knew he would not be making it back to Kelowna, or even as far as Mission, before dark. He hadn't eaten for over a day and the sickness had drained what few reserves he'd had. The exertion of plunging the dory's bow into wave after wave drained him quickly, and he was beginning to feel dizzy. The chop had built to nearly three feet by this time, with the wind ripping the tops off the waves and scattering the spray like sown seed against Frank's back. In keeping his bow directly into the waves he'd moved steadily further from shore, he realized, and was probably a third of the way across the lake. There was too much rebound and craziness near shore anyway.

It reminded him of a time on the Fraser when his father was running a flat-bottom scow, up around Quesnel. They were going home, down river, when this hot, dry wind came funnelling up the valley. That in itself wasn't so bad except that they happened to be running the Fingers just then, through six foot standing waves. The wind took the top two feet of each wave and dumped it on deck. Frank and several bundles of shingles started swimming for the port side--there were no rails on the scow--while his father held onto the tiller and yelled at him to grab the hell hold of something solid. But Frank couldn't find anything to hang onto that was bolted down, and was about to kiss his ass goodbye when his belt caught on a cleat.

Frank spun the boat on a wavetop and aimed for shore, broadside to the waves. The first breaker came in over the side, and he cursed himself for letting that happen. He got on his knees and bailed with his hat. When he looked up again he realized how quickly he was drifting--he'd nearly passed the spot where he'd left the kid, and could see Rattlesnake Island, a couple of miles off, beginning to separate itself from shore. He was nearing exhaustion. He shipped the oars,

shook the water from the tarp and wrapped himself in it, then lowered himself in the bottom of the boat and screwed his hat down tight.

He and the kid were going the same direction now, he figured, and wondered if they'd meet again. It occurred to him that he should pity the boy. But how could you feel sorry for a common thief? I wish him one thing and one thing only, thought Frank: safe passage back to North Dakota. Anybody deserves to make it home.

Half an hour later Frank jerked awake. He looked up and saw Rattlesnake Island looming off his port side. He pulled himself up onto the seat, shedding the tarp, and took up the oars. He spun the boat, lined up the island over his shoulder and began pulling for it. The waves, following and quartering him now, nudged him along, trying to broach the dory, and Frank began timing his strokes with the waves, keeping his angle and trying to run in front of each wave with a hard stroke. His right shoulder began to burn from the constant pulling on the same side. As he neared the island, he was struck by the immensity of it--steep sided and bare except for a few trees, it was a fortress of rock, grass, and prickly pear. And rattlesnakes, they said.

The wind was building, too, as he approached the island, and he saw he was too far down wind to catch the channel behind the island. He would have to work hard just to catch the lee behind it. If he missed both he would bundle up in the tarp and lay in the bottom of the boat again, all ready for a sea burial. The dory ought to be seaworthy enough to ride out whatever wind and waves there were off Squally Point, but he'd heard stories of how the waves meeting there could form towering haystacks that formed without regularity or predictability. Frank could read river waves well enough, he knew where and how they formed, understood their cycles of surge and recession; he knew where and where not to be in a boat. But these--men had gone down here in bigger boats than Frank's.

A body of water needed a current to create order, he thought, trying to distract himself from the increasing pain in his shoulder. Tiny stars began to blink at the edges of his vision, and he squeezed his eyes shut to make it stop. The second time he did it the stars stopped. His chest

began to burn, too, and Frank, not usually given to prayer, prayed out loud for strength and forgiveness. "I'll give the kid back his money if you see me through this one time, Lord. I swear it."

Then he was in calm water, the surface fanned and riffled by the breeze eddying in the lee. "Damn," said Frank. He made the short pull across the bottom of the channel and drifted into the calm of a wide bay. Exhausted, he released the oars and slumped back into the boat, his calves across the middle seat and his head supported by the edge of the bow seat. It was nearly dark.

Frank had heard many of the stories about the lake monster the Indians called Naitaka. One of the stories told that Naitaka lived here, in the waters near Squally Point, that he made his home in underwater caves below the cliffs. The Indians would throw a chicken or a dog overboard as an offering whenever they travelled on the lake. And now white men were claiming to see it, too. Once people got it in their heads there was something out there they started imagining all sorts of shapes in the waves. Frank thought it was a lot of bunk.

The bay he lay to in was named Reluctant Dragon Cove--though Frank did not know this. Even had he known the name of the cove he still would've thought it a lot of bunk, at least up until the water closed over his head and took him down.

* * *

Mrs. Ambrose huddled within the slack folds of a shawl, her flaccid lips working in silent utterance. The crow's feet inscribed at the corners of her muddied eyes extended thin claws down over her cheek bones to connect with the heavy creases around her mouth. She drooled from time to time. Her rocker was motionless, being too heavy for her to propel except when she sat in it by letting her feathery body fall against the seat back. In this manner she could cause the chair to rock back and forth several times. "Is that you, Aubrey?" she said, her head jerking upward weakly. The sinews in her neck subsided as she gave in to its weight. "Is that you?"

Aubrey knelt before her and covered her liver-spotted old claw with his thick fingers. "Yes, it's me, dearest. How are you? You look divine."

"What do you want?" Her voice cracked with the dryness of writing paper.

A chuckle shook free of Aubrey's round chest and floated in the air like blown feathers.

"What?" demanded Mrs. Ambrose. "What do you want? Why do you keep me in this room? Say something." Her eyes, a confusion of iris and pupil, peered at him as though from behind a pane of smoky glass.

"Relax, my dear, relax. How are you feeling tonight? Do you feel well enough to cross over?"

"Cross over?" she parroted, her wispy eyebrows arched, rippling the skin of her forehead. Her lips began to pucker and grimace, losing bits of saliva to her chin and breast. "Not now," she said. "Not now."

Aubrey squeezed her brittle hand lightly. "There, there. It's all right. We don't have to do it if you don't feel well enough. I know it takes a lot of strength for you."

"Can't cross over. Too hard, too hard."

"I know, I know. We won't try tonight, my dear. You just relax." Aubrey rose and seated himself in the chair next to her. He searched in the folds of her shawl and found a damp handkerchief and wiped the saliva from her chin.

"I had a dream," he said, staring into the well-furnished shadows of the room. "I wanted to tell you and see what you thought of it. Would that be all right?" He waited for her response. A deep, wheezing breath indicated she had gone under again.

He leaned forward and lifted the small brown bottles on the side table one at a time, holding them against the light. Three were completely empty, two were partially full. The spoon lay clean and untouched on the linen cloth. "Damn," he whispered. She had no self control. He'd have to start administering for her again. He made a mental note to visit Doctor Harmes.

At the door he turned to watch her. Her interpretations, visions, and guidance had brought him a long way, and he could feel the final step approaching. He must take good care of her, now the dream had arrived.

* * *

Boyd, too, sought the protection of Reluctant Dragon Cove, wanting to get out of the wind and find sleep for a couple of hours before the moon cleared the mountains and provided light for travel. His boots crunched in the pine needles as he passed under a tall pine and dropped down onto the gravelly beach. When his boots hit the beach he stopped and dropped into a crouch. Across the bay lay the dory, adrift and empty.

The drunk could still be in it, like before. And he had the revolver. All the same, it caused a kind of hope to rise in Boyd again, and as he made his way carefully along the beach he entertained brief visions of North Dakota--the snow melting and the sloughs filling with water and migrating pelicans, the first plough slicing into the black soil.

The dory lay twenty or thirty feet off shore, motionless in the black water. Boyd stripped, shivering as he exposed his sallow skin to the night air. If Frank had sat up at that moment he would have seen, onshore, a pale, spidery apparition standing with arms wrapped around itself, preparing to enter the water.

The water was deathly cold, and Boyd had to fight back the urge to shriek as it rose over his scrotum and belly. He carried his arms above the surface like two white pincers as he approached the dory, lowering them to dog-paddle the last ten feet to the stern end. Gripping the centre of the transom so as not to rock it, he pulled himself up and peered into the boat. Right under his nose lay Frank, swathed in his canvas shroud.

Boyd clenched his teeth to stop them chattering. He had to move quickly, the water was draining the strength from his thin bones, and in another minute he would be too weak to do

anything. He lowered himself into the water and moved around to the midpoint of the boat. There was only one thing to do.

Holding on to the gunwale, he let himself sink until his arm came straight. Then, giving a powerful kick, he launched himself belly first onto the gunwale, shooting out an arm for the far side. Kicking and grunting, he sank the near gunwale and closed his hand on the other as it rose, the oar swinging vestigially in the air as he capsized the boat. The silence that followed the boat's fall back to the surface was like death, sudden and unexpected.

Boyd paused, then, hearing a bubble of trapped air escaping the upturned hull, realized he must move quickly. He found the bow line floating in a spreading coil and kicked for shore. He cried out loud against the cold that twisted knots in his pallid flesh.

Frank dreamed he was rolling over on his side, so effortless, so light, and then the water exploded in his ears, an iron fetter around his skull. The rush of silence was broken by the screaming in his head as he fought against the windings of the tarp to free himself. Naitaka! It was Naitaka!

With his arms free, Frank tore the canvas from around his legs, striking something hard with his foot. He kicked towards what he thought must be the surface, though all was dark, and burst into a black void, slamming his head against a hard surface.

He felt air on his face, and swallowed it in large mouthfuls, choking down the fear. "Oh God! Oh God!" He must be in one of the caves. His feet found bottom. "Oh God! Help me!" he demanded, his voice breaking. "Oh Jesus Jesus!"

He'd been dragged down into one of the caves. Something bumped against the side of his head and he brought his hands up to fend it off. His fingers touched wood--ribs and stringers and, by God, he was under the boat! He tried to laugh his relief, but was pushed off balance. The dory was moving, taking Frank with it.

His fingers gripped at the boat as he kicked to get his feet beneath him, but the water grew shallow under him, forcing him onto his back. The seat came across his chest and pinned him on his back in the shallows, cold water lapping at his ears and throat.

Boyd dragged the bow into the gravel to hold it in place, then sat straddled atop the upturned hull. The drunkard was fighting against the dory's weight, but his strength was leaving him quickly. Another few minutes and he'd tire enough to let him out. It was kind of a funny way to cage a man, thought Boyd, rolling his hips easily with the lurching hull, like a man aboard a bucked out pony.

After Frank had gone quiet for a bit Boyd slid off the hull and fought his way back into his clothes. His thumbs were useless as he tried to button his pants. Giving up on the button, he cinched the pants tight with his belt. He hadn't been this cold since going through the ice on Duck Lake last winter.

Boyd lifted the bow of the dory and rolled it back. Frank lay on his back, an oar floating beside him like part of a stretcher frame. Boyd took him under the arms and dragged him until only his boot heels were in the water. He knelt by the soaked and foul body and found the revolver, then rifled the pockets of the man's coat for the money and found only part of it. He listened for the laboured breathing, then slapped the man's cheeks the way he'd seen men do. Hitting that loose, whiskery skin with his palm made a flat sound. He slapped him harder, the sound still flat, only louder.

"Come up, mister. Come up." Boyd stood over the man's body. Come up. Come up. The head rolled side to side with the blows, but the face remained empty. He ought to wake, he ought to of waked by now. Boyd grew suddenly alarmed that the man would die on him. He didn't want to kill him, he just wanted his money and revolver back. He swung harder, moving his arms side to side like a skater, until his hands began to sting. Come up, damn you.

Frank moaned, and his eyes blinked open. Boyd straightened, panting from the exertion and fear. The moon was on them now, its silvery glow half-lighting their startled figures.

Frank touched his cheek. "You hit me."

"Thought you was dead."

"Not dead."

"Thought you was."

"No."

Boyd unstraddled Frank and Frank sat up. Boyd lowered himself into a crouch, several feet away. "You went under," he told him.

Frank looked at Boyd, looked at the dory. "Who are you?" he said to Boyd.

"Told you already."

"You got a name?"

"Yeah."

Frank touched his face again. "How come you hit me like that?"

"Thought you was dead."

"Need a fire," said Frank.

Boyd stared at him blankly.

"I'm wet through."

Boyd rose, patting his pockets. "Here," he said, tossing out a wood match.

Frank fumbled for the match, found it, and jammed it between his teeth. He rolled to his knees and gained his feet unsteadily as Boyd watched him scrape together a pile of tinder and ignite it.

The small fire drew them closer, drew them near to the warmth and the uneven light in which they could examine each other. Frank began removing his clothes, wringing them out and hanging them on bushes. He turned away from the fire and dropped his dishwater-coloured long johns into a puddle at his ankles. Boyd stared at the wide, hairy back and runty buttocks, then spat into the fire. He had to start moving again. Another long day, he reckoned, and he could make the line, cross into safety.

Boyd pulled himself to his feet, looking to the black, undefined surface of the lake. The wind had eased. His father's hand rested upon the book. Always the book. He is not my brother, nor I his keeper, he protested. He kicked a stone into the water.

Frank looked up.

Boyd held the revolver by the barrel. "Give me the rest of the money." He looked at the figure across the fire from him, naked, chicken-skinned, crowding the fire like a primitive.

Frank shrugged. The cold water and fear had left him weak, but not without resolve. He stooped and picked up a wedge-shaped stone, weighing it in his hand. They stared at each other across the fire while behind them their shadows tumbled across the beach in mock battle.

He would have to bash the man's head in, Boyd saw, and risk getting his own bashed in. He raised the pistol butt and looked at his white-knuckled fist. He was the stronger now, he was sure. The words of his father rose in his mind, filling his eyes with revulsion at an image of blood crying on the ground. He backed away from the fire. No blood. He wanted no blood. He turned and ran for the dory, pushing it off the beach and throwing himself into it. He planted himself in the seat and grabbed for the oars, finding only one.

Frank watched in disbelief as the kid thrashed in the shallows for the second oar. It occurred to him to throw the stone, but his fingers relaxed and let it drop to the ground, and he moved closer to the blades of flame. When he could no longer hear the clunk of the oarlocks in the darkness, Frank stoked the fire and lay down beside it, drawing his coat over himself.

* * *

The place at Greata had been abandoned when Eudie first saw it; abandoned and to be had for a good price. The house and out-buildings on the long stretch of empty benchland belonged to neither Peachland nor Summerland. The place was called Greata, and for all that it signified it was enough for Eudie--there was a buffer of empty space between herself and the rest of humanity, which at the time had been her only criterion. She could be undisturbed and unseen

for as long as she wished. The money she'd raised selling Jake's motorcycles and the motordrome had been enough to pay for the place outright.

The porch of the house looked across the lake at Squally Point, where sheer rock walls rose from the water for two hundred feet or more. To the north of the point lay Rattlesnake Island, a barren dome of rock said to be teeming with rattlers, and to the south, Wild Horse Canyon cleaved a deep, narrow gap in a series of upthrusts that lay up against one another like huge granite headstones waiting to be chiselled with the names of the dead. For all the silt and sand in the rest of the valley, the rockiness of the other side never failed to impress Eudie. The trees were sparse, the ground beneath them always grey and dirty looking, too rocky to host even the toughest bunchgrass.

She let her eyes sweep the across the wide bend of the lake to Peachland and along the shoreline to Trepanier. The lake was several shades darker than the sky, still brooding from last night's blow.

For weeks Eudie had been watching the snow retreat higher and higher into the coyote-voiced hills, waiting for it to disappear into the shadows of gullies and draws, and reappear as runoff. Gullies turned to creeks, and the creeks bloomed mushroom clouds of silt at the lake's edge. The benchland, a two hundred foot deep glacial silt deposit, was saturated and pooled with snow melted to runoff.

In a few weeks it would all be as dry as toast. Mud and snowmelt were transitory. They meant two or three brief weeks of greening and flowering before the water sank far below the roots, and the green-clad knolls and gullies faded into the dun brown of summer, fall, and winter.

Cora arrived in the early afternoon, slope-shouldered, her hat pulling at its pins as she lugged her heavy suitcase into the yard. "You made it!" Eudie greeted her, and was greeted in turn with a quick hug. The way they did in the east.

"Yes." Cora was out of breath. "Lord, that's a steep climb."

Eudie relieved her of the suitcase.

"This," Cora cradled the place in her open, outstretched hands, "this is marvellous. Just grand." Her boots and ankles were coated with mud, but her eyes sparkled as she spoke. "Real pioneer living!"

Eudie smiled in return, allowing the gap in her teeth to show momentarily. A light breeze pushed a lock of tangled curls over her forehead, causing her to squint one eye. She tucked the hair behind her ear, but it sprang loose immediately. "Come," she said. "Let's get you out of the mud."

"Oh," said Cora, lifted her skirts and looked at her feet. "Oh, yes."

They took tea in the sunlight on the porch. Eudie bound a scarf over her head, tying it at the base of her neck beneath the rusty explosion of hair. "What are you going to do? Go back east?"

"Oh, no," Cora waved off the idea. "Kelowna. I think I'll see what I can start there. This valley needs someone to start the movement."

"You're really committed to the suffrage movement?"

"It's important," replied Cora. "I think it's important."

Eudie nodded her agreement but said nothing. She had every respect for women who were devoting themselves to woman suffrage, but would not be recruited to such causes herself, preferring to avoid the rhetoric and campaigning and live her life as she chose. The only support she could offer them, if Cora was looking for any, was moral.

"I'm dying to know more about your motorcycle," said Cora.

"The motorcycle?"

Cora nodded.

"It's built in 1910. It's a four horsepower engine, chain drive, and it'll go fifty miles per hour."

"No. That's not what I mean. Why do you have it?"

"Have you ever travelled at fifty miles per hour?"

"Never. Well, perhaps on the train."

"Not the same," said Eudie, looking across the lake. "Going fast, with the wind ripping at your clothes and face, is an incredible thrill. Speed, Cora, speed." Eudie leaned forward on her chair. "It's the perfect blend of fear and excitement." The speed was one thing, sure, but using it to defy gravity had been the real narcotic, like a prolonged inhalation of smelling salts. She had been committed to it until Jake's death, but looking back on it now it appeared meaningless; it lacked a proper context. But how did you explain it to people? "There's nothing else like it," she concluded, pulling herself upright in the chair.

"So, what...? Where do you ride?"

"Around here? Just on the roads, I guess. I just got the bike running a few days ago."

"Where did you ride?" asked Cora.

"Oh, all over," said Eudie. "The U.K., France, all over the eastern States and Provinces."

Cora was astounded. "You've been to France? Paris?"

Yes, Paris. Eudie nodded. She and Jake had had their biggest success there. The French had a greater appreciation of daredevilry than anyone else they'd performed for, even the Americans.

"Tell me about Paris. I would so love to visit Paris and sit in the cafes among the great writers and thinkers. Women are valued for more than cooking and child-bearing in Paris, didn't you find that? Not like here. But how have you been to so many places? Did you travel on your motorcycle?"

"I raced," replied Eudie, not untruthfully. Raced away from a family that expected her to bear the next generation of merchant Hardings, a family that expected her to marry her father's junior partner and believe that she had fulfilled herself.

"You raced?! Oh, my God--excuse me, but this is ... unusual!"

"Unusual?" Eudie laughed. "No, it's worse than unusual. You can say it, it's okay."

Cora leaned back in her chair and sighed wistfully, trying to imagine Paris and the bohemian life. "And did you go to any 'salons'?"

"No. We didn't know the right people." Didn't know the right people, indeed. The carnies and freaks held their own "salons" in their tents after the shows, but these were not the cultured gatherings that Cora wanted to know about.

* * *

Frank managed to flag down the York on its return from Kelowna. They sent two men into the bay in a skiff.

One of the men rowed facing the bow, one knee on the seat. "We'll take you aboard, mister," he shouted.

"No, thanks," said Frank. "I'm headed north."

"The Captain says we're to bring you aboard," said the second man. "Get in."

"Tell your captain thanks, but I'm going to Kelowna. Maybe you could tell the next northbound boat you see to pick me up," suggested Frank.

"He don't understand," said the first man to the second.

"Mister, you better just come aboard with us before the Captain gets pissed at being held up."

There was a slightly menacing tone in the man's voice, and as the skiff drifted closer Frank could see a rifle lying across his knees. The man lifted the rifle into his arms. "They got your partner," he said, swinging the barrel towards Frank.

"How's that?"

"They got the kid."

"You fellahs are making a wrongful mistake," said Frank.

Detective Ross met Frank with a pair of handcuffs. "Welcome to Penticton," he said grimly.

"What's this about?" asked Frank, offering his wrists.

"Well, your young partner says you tried to kill him. Now I reckon that's just between you and him, but if you're an accomplice to his petty thievery in any way you will experience the full effect of the law."

"Damn it," said Frank. "I've been telling these fellahs on the boat the very same thing. Maybe you'll listen to me? I am not the kid's partner, and I did not help him rob the store."

"But you know about it."

"He told me."

"I'm afraid you'll have to repeat it at least one more time," said Ross. "It's up to the Judge whether you're lying or not."

"Judge? You're sending me to court?"

Ross nodded.

"Listen, Detective, I am a law abiding citizen of Kelowna, and I am expected at Oldfield's factory tomorrow morning for work."

"That's unfortunate," replied Ross. "Though we'll do our best to get you to Kelowna tomorrow."

* * *

Boyd sat on the edge of his bunk, arms folded across his belly, rocking. He could hear the voices of the Constable and the Detective in the office, heard the clunk of heavy objects on the wood desk. Leg irons or rifles, or both. In the grey light outside his cell window a robin stopped singing. He could hear the men speaking. "Are you sure? I know you haven't done many, but there's no one else around to go with you."

"No, I'm okay. They're just petty thieves, these two."

"I'd go with you but I've got this meeting in the afternoon."

"Don't worry, sir."

"Well, call in when you get there."

"Right."

Boyd touched the lump above his hairline where Detective Ross had rubbed his head against the apple boxes. Stevens wasn't mean like Ross. Boyd closed his eyes. In North Dakota dawn sprang from the earth itself, like a wedge driven between the ground and the sky to create an ever widening crack for the light while meadowlarks announced the message across the fields like telegraph operators.

They were returning him to Kelowna to stand in court. They would make him pay a fine or spend a few days in jail, then he'd be on his way again. He would be too late to see the pelicans pass through on their way north, by now, but his father, he knew, would be walking down to the slough every evening to watch the huge, quiet, white birds too beautiful to shoot. Constable Stevens opened the door from the office, spilling harsh, electric light into the cells. "Wake up, fellahs. James. Wilson. Wake up. Ready to go are you, son?"

Boyd ignored him, listening instead to the movement in the next cell. They'd brought Wilson in late yesterday.

The Constable opened the cell door. "Out here," he instructed Boyd, then did the same for Frank. He had them stand side by side, facing the wall, while he clamped leg irons about their ankles. Detective Ross looked on with mild interest. "You fellows are going to Kelowna to appear in court. I've told you both the charges. I suggest you respect the wishes of His Honour and get this done with, so you can carry on like decent, law-abiding citizens instead of two-bit rabble."

The short length of chain between the leg irons allowed short steps only, forcing Boyd and Frank to walk in a jerking shuffle. In this fashion they were moved out of the Detachment office

and into a waiting delivery van, taken to the foot of Main street and onto the CPR wharf. The van pulled to a stop beside the forward cargo door of the SS Okanagan.

Deckhands and teamsters stopped their preparations and watched, poker-faced, as the two men in chains were led along the companionway, up past the boiler funnel and stoker's platform to the stairway. In the dining saloon the waiters and a few early passengers stared as Boyd and Frank were guided up another staircase to the staterooms.

Ross instructed them to sit side by side on the raised bunk, then took Stevens outside to speak to him.

"You told them I was your partner?" Frank rolled his head to look sidelong at Boyd.

"I reckoned you were gonna kill me after taking the money off me," replied Boyd.

"Ah," said Frank. "So you'd have somebody to hold your hand in court?"

Boyd's eyes glowered beneath the bristle of his eyebrows. He sat up straight, compressing his hair against the low ceiling. "I don't need you, mister."

Frank rolled his head back and stared at the wall opposite. "So you say," he sighed.

"Damn you--" Boyd's anger rose like bile as he folded his thin fingers into a fist beside his leg.

Ross pushed open the door. "Shut up." He removed his hand from his pocket, letting the blackjack rest in his open palm.

Boyd closed his eyes and settled back against the wall. This was all wrong. He should be across the line by now, going south out of Oroville. After a few miles he would veer left and leave the Okanagan River valley, climb the dirty hills up into a high country of pine trees and wind. Spokane tomorrow or the day after. He still remembered the route. It was all there in his head, waiting for him to follow it home.

The ship's whistle sounded twice and moments later the ship began to shudder as the sternwheel ploughed up great walls of water and poured them off the paddles in thin sheets.

Through the small, rectangular window at the end of the bunk, Boyd watched the dock moving away as the ship came about to head up the lake.

Constable Stevens sat in the single chair next to the table. Under the table was a jug of water for his prisoners. He was the son of an Ottawa civil servant, Assistant Deputy Minister of something or other, and new to the Provincial Police, having come to them after a short and inglorious tour with the NorthWest Police in Atlin. He'd secured the Penticton posting through his uncle, who happened to be a friend of Detective Ross. As a comparatively peaceful place, the Okanagan, Stevens felt, would be better suited to his more rhetorical methods of law enforcement than the emphatically physical role required in a frontier town such as Atlin.

They rode in silence for a time, each man content to remain within his thoughts while furtively taking the measure of his companions. They studied the walls thoroughly, taking note of every irregularity in the clear fir boards nailed on the tongue so the nailheads wouldn't show except for the last board, where they were countersunk and filled. The pearly orb of the single, unlit electric bulb in the centre of the ceiling was observed, and each man gave a thorough examination to the toes of his boots, noting scuff marks and gouges like small flesh wounds, wear marks from stirrup or shovel.

Boyd broke the silence, talking to keep the walls from closing in on him, thinking a voice might hold off the constriction, even expand, by its presence, the small cabin. "How about opening the window?"

Stevens looked at him, a surprised expression crossing his stern, young face. "I guess that would be all right," he said, and getting to his feet, bent over the end of the bed to wrestle the frame open.

"Do we get to eat soon?" Boyd asked when Stevens was seated again.

"Not 'til Peachland. But I have some water here, if you like," said Stevens, indicating the jug beneath the table.

"Sure," said Boyd.

Stevens reached under the table for the jug, exposing the back of his head as leaned forward. Boyd raised his eyebrows and glanced at Frank, who was watching Stevens also. He caught Frank's eye and held it until Frank frowned and looked away. Boyd drank and offered it to Frank. Frank shook his head, and Boyd passed it back to Stevens. "You new to Police work?" he asked.

Stevens pulled himself up straight in his chair. "No. This is my second posting."

"Where were you before?"

"Up north. Atlin."

"Never heard of it."

"Gold mining, mostly. It's part of B.C., but it's more an extension of the Yukon territory. The only road in is from the north."

"Oh. Why'd you leave?"

"I was, uh, seeking more temperate climes."

"What?"

"Warmer weather," growled Frank. "Winters are goddamn cold up there, right?"

"Quite," said Stevens, though he hadn't stayed long enough to actually experience one.

Boyd sighed and knuckled his eyes. "I'm getting hungry."

Stevens glanced out the window. "We're nearing Summerland now. It'll be another hour yet."

"Shit," said Boyd. "You hungry?" he turned to Frank. "What's you're name, anyway? Hah! I don't even know your name, do I?"

"Frank."

"Same as my pa," said Boyd. It was the perfect time and place for the old joke, he realized, too good to resist. "You got a brother named Jesse, too?" he asked, trying to keep the stupid grin from prying his lips apart.

Frank turned his gaze on Boyd and stared with disbelief.

Stevens's eyes widened. He spoke, recounting something he'd read somewhere. "Jesse James never had any offspring, but Frank did."

Frank continued staring at Boyd as if trying to make up his mind. "That's funny, kid." snapped Frank. "Story like that'll get you into real trouble."

Boyd chuckled soundlessly, his mouth hanging open like that of a panting cat. They were silent again, listening to the sounds of the engines reversing and the shouts of men as the ship eased alongside the wharf at Summerland. Boyd raised himself on his elbow for a better view of the proceedings below and felt something hard jab into his armpit. Stevens had missed Lily's derringer when he'd checked for weapons. It struck Boyd as funny that he was armed. Ain't that just like a James, he thought, lowering himself to the mattress. The ship's whistle sounded, two short blows, and Boyd rolled onto his back again. "How much longer to Peachland?" he asked.

"Half an hour or so," said Stevens. "You gonna make it?"

"'Course. You?" said Boyd, checking his hand from wandering back to his armpit. He began to scratch himself about the stomach, chest, and shoulders so he could touch the pistol, receiving a small charge of adrenalin each time his fingers encountered it.

"You lousy?" asked Frank, noticing Boyd's scratching.

"I think so."

"Shit. I'll probably get it, too."

"Yeah."

When he thought they were about halfway to Peachland, Boyd asked for another drink of water, and Stevens complied by reaching under the table, as he had the first time, for the jug. Boyd drank and passed it back.

"You can put it away, now. I won't need any more."

Stevens slid the jug under the table with his boot.

* * *

They spent the afternoon exploring the ranch. That is, Cora explored the buildings and sheds while Eudie followed, re-examining and rediscovering the contents of her wealth, and gaining a new sense of its potential. The glasshouse had perhaps been the most insightfully constructed building on the place. Plants could be both started and brought to maturity within the humid glass room using a minimal amount of water. The Chinese had built a couple in Kelowna and were growing the finest vegetables in the valley.

In the late afternoon they went out in the dory and caught six kokanee trout for dinner and breakfast. It was a quick, easy harvest, Cora looking on while Eudie set her hook expertly at each strike, hauled in the silver-blue fish and knocked them on the head with a stick. On shore Eudie cleaned the fish while Cora stood by, self-consciously avoiding the spatter of fish guts and blood.

"I should leave in the morning," said Cora, scraping fish bones to the edge of her plate.

"Gentlemen of Kelowna beware," rejoined Eudie. "The suffragist cometh."

"Ha!" blurted Cora, a coarse, harsh monosyllable that one would expect from the mouth of a miner or a farmhand, not from the lips of a feminine, cultured woman. "Thank you for getting me out of Peachland, by the way."

"I hope you'll come back to visit," said Eudie. "Whenever you can take time away from your campaigning."

"Well, who knows. Maybe I'll get run out of Kelowna, too. And come here to hide from the authorities!" she joked.

Eudie grinned. She was enjoying Cora's company more than she'd expected. "You can stay here anytime," she heard herself offering.

"Thank you. Will you take me to town on the motorcycle?"

"It won't carry us both, not to mention your suitcase," laughed Eudie. "I told you that already." She was a persistent woman. Eudie liked that about her.

"I know." A hand rose and fluttered to her lap. "I just wanted to be sure."

* * *

Boyd raised his manacled hands and opened the top buttons of his shirt to scratch himself. He said "Maybe I'll have one more drink after all. It's warm in here." He was sweating and his mouth kept drying up on him.

Stevens frowned, then leaned forward to retrieve the water, and Boyd removed the derringer from under his shirt. Stevens sat up and paled. His mouth opened like a small, oval hole across his jaw.

Boyd pointed the pistol at Stevens's face. "Put the water down. Slowly. I don't want to kill you." His heart was beating so hard he found it difficult to hold the derringer steady. "Hands on your head," he said as Stevens sat up again.

"Listen, Mr. James," Stevens's voice was just better than a whisper. "Don't be foolish. This'll only make your situation worse, much worse, believe me. This will put you well beyond the realm of stealing."

"He's right," Frank said quietly.

"Shut up! I ain't asking you." Boyd stood up in the narrow space beside the bed and faced Stevens. "Slide down," he commanded Frank. "Take his keys."

Frank humped himself towards Stevens, stopping at the end of the bed. "Take his keys!"

"Wait," pleaded Stevens. "Just wait a minute, Boyd. Think about what you're doing, think of the consequences of this rash action."

"Hit him, Frank. Shut him up."

"No."

"Remember what happened to your uncle Jesse?" said Stevens.

"My what? Oh, yeah," Boyd laughed, a short, clipped croak. "Uncle Jesse. He got to be pretty famous, didn't he?"

"Infamous," Stevens corrected him.

"Take his keys, Frank, or I'll shoot you first." Boyd felt his voice speaking at a slight distance from himself, as though he had stepped back and was watching himself. It was easy, really, he thought, and more exciting than anything Lily had done for him. "Ever been shot by a ladies' pistol, Frank? Bet it hurts like hell."

Frank grunted and leaned forward, patting Stevens's pockets.

"I don't have the keys to your shackles," said Stevens.

Frank looked up.

"He's lying. Christ, hurry up." He felt the power in his voice beginning to slip just a little. He could bring it back, though, and hold off the fraying edges as long as was needed. He sighted his concentration down the barrel and into Stevens's face. Did the pistol pull right or left? High or low? At this range it wouldn't make much difference.

Frank was tugging at the key ring in Stevens's front pocket as Stevens brought his fisted hands down onto the back of Frank's neck. Frank slumped forward onto Stevens's legs, pinning him in the chair. Boyd squeezed off the first round at Stevens's head. Nothing more than a tiny snapping sound. The sound of a small hammer striking the brass rim of a .22 calibre shell. A misfire.

"No! Please!" Stevens held his palms out as if to stop the next shot. His chest heaved. Panic twisted his voice up high in his throat. "Don't shoot! Please don't! I have a fiance." Tears and nervous sweat gave his face a dull shine.

Damn! damn! damn! If the second round was dead he was going to have to fight the Constable, who was bigger than he was. If he'd just give me the keys, oh Jesus. Come up, Wilson, come up, damn you. Just get me the keys. Boyd blinked the sweat out of his eyes. He and Stevens stared at one another like a pair of pit-lamped does.

Frank groaned and rolled onto his side. Stevens stood up cautiously.

"Don't," warned Boyd.

"Listen, Boyd," Stevens spoke in a low voice, the quivering barely detectable. "You know this can only turn out bad for you if you follow it through. Why not give me the gun now, and we can get back on track here. Heck, we might even forget it happened, if you know what I mean." He tried to smile, but succeeded only in looking giddy and frightened. "Let's both sit down and sort this out like reasonable men, all right? Now, let me have the pistol." He held out his hand.

Boyd could see how he'd managed to work one leg free of Frank's weight while he talked. He was going to come at him any moment. "Sit down!" Boyd commanded. "Don't make me shoot you. Sit down!"

"Let me have the pistol." Stevens moved his free leg forward and waited, one hand outstretched.

"Don't!"

Frank rolled his head, eyes open, and looked up at Stevens's frame straddling him. For several long seconds no one spoke or moved, frozen by fear and uncertainty into their dramatic poses, like actors reliving the moment, each having forgotten who was supposed to make the next move.

The ship's whistle decided their fate--a simple, wood and brass steam whistle used to signal the arrivals and departures of the SS Okanagan, the braided cord pulled by first mate, Henry Myles, releasing a jet of steam through the whistle and out the narrow stops to create a high, shrieking sound like a frightened mechanical bird.

Stevens lunged forward and Boyd, startled and frightened, squeezed the trigger. The hammer drew back and fell onto the rim of the cartridge with a sharp snap and Stevens pitched head first against Boyd's legs.

Frank pulled himself free as Boyd removed the Constable's revolver from its holster, then rolled the body on its side to fetch the keys.

"You shot him?" Frank asked.

"I think so," Boyd replied, kicking at the leg irons as he unfastened them. He tossed the keys to Frank. "Here."

Frank caught the keys and stared at them in his hands. Boyd whistled in amazement. "Look!" he said, lifting Stevens's head by the hair and pointing his finger at a small hole in the forehead. A thin line of blood angled down the forehead and caught in the end of the eyebrow.

"Is he dead?"

"I guess so," said Boyd. "How do you tell?"

"See if he's breathing."

Boyd watched Stevens's chest closely, then lowered his ear over his face. He could hear a brief, shallow movement of air every few seconds. "He's breathing."

"Then he ain't dead," said Frank. "But I reckon he will be soon."

Boyd released the handful of hair, letting Stevens's skull fall to the floor. He stood up and tiny, brilliant stars crowded his vision, obliterating the room. He put a hand against the wall to balance himself. He had to act again, but had no thought of what to do. He waited for his vision to clear. "We get off here," said Boyd's voice. The moment was still unreal, still at a distance from him. But he was moving again, he was heading towards home again.

Frank sat on the bunk, studying his hands.

"You're coming with me."

"No. I've done nothing wrong," Frank protested weakly. "I have a job I have to get back to."

Boyd lifted Stevens's revolver. "You're coming."

"Why?"

"I might need you."

"What for?"

"I don't know. Get up."

Frank shoved Stevens under the bed while Boyd held the gun on him. They made their way down the stairs to the freight deck, Boyd walking close behind Frank, prodding him with the revolver like a man goading a steer into a chute. On the freight deck they crowded towards the open door with the stokers and deckhands, all squinting in the broad daylight. At the back of the deck they could hear the huge steam cylinders coming to rest, stalling the piston arms longer than a tall man. They followed the working men onto the dock, ignoring questioning glances, and began striding for the shore, weaving their way among parasols and the felt of new homburgs.

They strode into the streets of Peachland, both men scared and Boyd, conscious of the weight of the revolver inside his coat, dangerous as a result of his fear.

They followed the road through town and turned up another that appeared to lead up into the surrounding hills. Hearing a motorcar approaching, they scrambled up the cutbank beside the road and stood under the pine trees to watch it pass. "That's what I need," said Boyd, "to get me home. A motorcar."

They stayed parallel to the road, climbing steadily along a hillside the colour of rust. Boyd kept Frank in front of him, prodding him in the ribs with the pistol whenever he slowed or faltered.

* * *

"Yes, and then I almost felt as though I was one of them, and able to float on the currents of air on my own, but I rode on its back. I lay my cheek against the back of its head and watched the broad, black wing feathers pump the air, the tips of the feathers rippled as we soared. It was like I was in a bed of iridescent, black feathers.

"We flew across the lake in a matter of minutes, no time at all it seemed, layed a wide, flat circle over Summerland, then winging towards Peachland. But I don't remember seeing Peachland from the air. Something happened before we got that far, something, oh, it won't come to me right now." Aubrey stopped speaking and stared at Mrs. Ambrose, his sweating face glowing dully

in the light from the kerosene lamp. Mrs. Ambrose wouldn't permit him to burn electric lights in her room. They disturbed the natural patterns of feeling, she said. Aubrey patted his cheeks and forehead with a neatly folded handkerchief, then examined its moistened surface with an expression of dismay, as if the skin of his face were sloughing away under his hands.

The sinews in Mrs. Ambrose's leathery neck came taut like drag-lines, but instead of lifting her head high enough to see Aubrey in the chair facing her, she rolled it to one side, exposing a single, murky eyeball to the light, and fixing it on him like the lens of a spyglass, taking some moments to adjust the focus. It always unnerved him. "I do wish you wouldn't sit so far away," she said.

"I'm sorry." He humped his chair forward and bumped his knees against the brittle sticks of her legs.

"Better," she said.

"What about my dream?" he asked, impatient with the old woman. Their last consultation had been far from satisfactory, but he wasn't sure whether she was losing her gift or had taken too much medication. He'd brought that under control, since, and was receiving the laudanum from the doctor in premeasured vials, which he set out for her daily.

Her condemnation of speed had disappointed Aubrey, and left him disturbed. He'd been so certain that it was the way of the future, the way of his future, and she had dismissed it without hesitation as the devil's embodiment, the cause of too much death and misery. "Speed sank the Titanic!" she'd croaked, though he knew that tragedy could not be blamed entirely on speed.

So certain had Aubrey been of the efficacy of speed that he'd submitted, without seeking her advice, a bid on the mail contract, which he would almost certainly be awarded. His idea was to deliver the mail by motorcar, a much faster method than steamboat. He had already arranged for a driver and a motorcar. And then he'd heard talk about a woman who rode a motorcycle. An even faster machine! And a woman rider! To be able to enlist the services of this unusual woman and make the mail travel even faster was an idea that had begun to seize his mind when he

lay down to sleep at nights, racing away with him up and down the roads until he spent some nights in the throes of a feverish insomnia.

"Tell me the rest of it," she said, continuing to hold her head at an angle, the murky eye wandering in its socket as if seeking out others in the room that he could not see.

"Let's see," said Aubrey, pressing his thick fingertips into his temples. "We were north of Summerland. I think it was, yes, yes, I have it now, the air became very warm from the land below which was so hot and dry, and the rising currents pushed us up and up and up and, and then, I don't know ... Oh, it fades from my mind again, but I think I know. I think it's another irrigation dream, different from the others in the aspect of being a bird, but, yes, most definitely another irrigation dream. What do you think?"

Mrs. Ambrose was quiet. Aubrey listened to her stertorous breathing, fearing she might go under on him. Her fingers clawed feebly at the afghan, a sign that she was thinking, busy interpreting the dream in ways he was not capable of.

"It's clearly an irrigation dream, wouldn't you say?" he was becoming impatient with her slowness. He wanted to know now, needed her affirmation.

Mrs. Ambrose drew a sudden breath, sucking back the saliva pooling in her lower lip. "No," she said, shaking her hung head. "No water up there. You know that."

"What?" He could not believe it. True, the water was not close, but with the construction of flumes it could be made to flow over considerable distances, to places previously unimagined. She's been getting stubborn lately, he thought, maybe she's losing it, maybe it is leaving her. "What, then?" he asked, a politely restrained demand.

"Icarus fantasy," she said, her voice a dry rattling sound.

"Icarus?" he echoed weakly. "I'm going to fly? Is that it? Oh, Jesus Mary and Joseph, this is bigger than I expected." He clasped his hands together. "My heavens, why couldn't I see that. You know, I have often stopped to watch birds in flight and tried to imagine the sensation

of free flight. Oh, Mrs. Ambrose, my dear, you never cease to amaze me with the acuity of your vision. But how? When?"

"A warning."

"What?"

"It's a warning." She raised a scrawny fist and rapped the air with her feeble knuckles, pointing up the truth as only she could perceive it. "Icarus fell."

"True, but," Aubrey hesitated. "But he flew first, didn't he? And we all ... we all die," he said, his voice fading to a threadbare whisper. We all die when we've outlived our usefulness. Aubrey pressed his eyes closed, willing away the morbid notion. He shuddered, felt cold suddenly. "I'll ... I'll make some tea," he said, carefully sliding his chair away from her.

Her finger remained poised in the air like a twig of knotty pine. "Aubrey?" she said in a tone softened by fatigue and decay.

"Yes, my dear?"

"We leave this world when our work is done. Not before."

"Yes," he said, bowing his head and going out of the dim room. She knew! She knew his very thoughts! Damn her! But flying, FLYING! This could be the very realization of a dream. He crossed the kitchen lightly and bent to pick up the tea setting.

* * *

The road topped out and entered a narrow valley that had been cleared for pasture. A creek ran along one side, lined with grey-barked cottonwoods. Near the edge of the water grew cow parsnip and turk's cap. The other bank sloped upwards in a hillside of lichen-crusted rock, cheat grass, and prickly pear. At the head of the valley stood a house and barn, and an empty corral.

Taking only what they could carry, Boyd's pockets stuffed with hard biscuits, Frank's with a few biscuits and a bottle, they headed out the top end of the valley, walking side by side in the

long grass that swayed around their knees like dry surf. They walked without speaking for a time, listening to the sounds of their boot heels and the soft roar of the wind sweeping through the pines and Douglas firs. The wind was northwest and cool. Rain coming, thought Boyd, looking up without satisfaction minutes later as he heard the spatter of drops begin in earnest. He turned up his collar and hunched deeper into his coat.

They had swung further and further south to avoid the snow, till the wind and rain were at their backs. Daylight had been rudely suppressed by the coal-coloured clouds that roiled above them, filling the valley. Frank was lagging behind, and Boyd noticed him with the bottle to his lips several times when he turned to check.

Should've left him. Still could. Just walk away from him after he passes out, which ought to be soon the way he's going at the whiskey. Boyd climbed out onto a knoll overlooking the lake, and waited beside the red bark of a ponderosa pine. They were somewhere in the middle of the clouds, he realized, looking down into the valley. All that was visible below him was the steep hillside that ran down onto the benchland, and a narrow strand of water beyond that. As he studied the tilted landscape, the clouds seemed to lower themselves further still, obliterating the lake and fusing themselves to the ground.

Frank had stopped a ways behind and was leaning heavily against a tree. "Come up here," Boyd shouted, wondering if he could hear him. His voice seemed to be absorbed by the air as soon as it left his mouth. The oppression of light and sound closed around him in a clammy blanket of discomfort. Ought to be thunder and lightning with this, he thought, except we'd be in the middle of it. He longed for a flat earth, where no matter how low the sky got, it was still separate, not like this, where the sky could fold over the land and draw the earth up inside it so you couldn't tell which was which.

Frank lurched to a halt beside him, gasping for breath. The brim of his hat was beaten down by the rain and the hat pulled down to his ears so it looked like his head had been driven

down into his neck. Beneath it his face was sour and twisted like a knuckle of scrub pine. "What?" said Frank.

"Give me a drink." Boyd reached for the bottle. "You're drunk again."

"No," said Frank, lowering himself to a squat against the tree.

Boyd felt the whiskey rage down his throat and roil in his belly. It was a moment before he could speak. "I should've left you behind. I knew it."

"Don't holier-than-thou me," Frank growled. "I ain't keeping you from nothing."

Boyd dropped to a squat beside Frank, and felt the butt of the pistol press into his belly. He could shoot Frank, now that he had a gun that worked. He pushed the thought aside, telling himself, I'm not a killer. As if in defiance of his determination, the Constable's face presented itself, the eyes manifesting fear of his own mortality and the nearness of it as he faced the derringer, and then surprise and disappointment in the moment before he collapsed with a slug in his forehead. "Think he'll die, that officer?"

"You put a bullet in his head, didn't you. Not many survive that."

Maybe I am a killer, he thought. Maybe I am. I never planned it, never thought I would be. "If he dies, that makes me one," Boyd observed aloud.

"What?" Frank passed him the bottle.

"We better find somewhere to hole up till morning," said Boyd, refusing the bottle and rising.

Frank tried to stand and fell back. He rolled onto his knees and pulled himself up with the help of the tree.

"What's wrong?" asked Boyd, watching Frank struggle to his feet.

"Nothing. Just, my leg's a little... Fetch me a stick." Frank could feel the pleasantness of the whiskey turning to anger. The furnace in his belly and brain was smouldering to a low-level rage directed at himself and the world around him. His limbs were cold, his joints ached, and he wanted nothing more than to rant or puke, then go to sleep and wake up in a warm, dry bed.

What in hell was he doing traipsing about the hills in the rain with a kid who'd just killed a man? he wanted to know. He demanded an answer of himself, shrugged and took another drink. You're a forty year old man with shit-all to his name. He tried again to rouse himself. You've lost your job by now, you're broke, not a pot to piss in. The kid has a gun. No choice. The kid's no killer, he won't shoot you if you walk away. Won't he?

"Hey, hey, mister! Frank!" Boyd stood over him, panting after running back up the hill. Frank lay on his side, mumbling incoherently, arms and legs thrashing while his hands clutched at themselves. Boyd took a step back. "Frank! Hey! You going crazy on me?"

Frank looked up at him, his face twisted in misunderstanding and bewilderment. "What?"

"Jesus, you look spooked. Who're you yelling at?"

"I, uh, I don't know," said Frank. "I thought you were ... I was ... Ohh. Bad whiskey."

"I found a spot."

"Help me up."

Boyd shouldered Frank to his feet and balanced him down the hillside to a cluster of scrub pine that had grown over on itself, creating a small hollow within. Someone had laid fir boughs over the twisted wood shell to shed water, and the inside was dry and protected. Boyd lowered Frank to all fours and pointed him at the entrance. He followed him in and they huddled on opposite sides of the clearing, Boyd eyeing Frank warily, as though he were a feral dog that might leap at any moment. Must not fall asleep, he told himself. He reached inside his coat and removed the revolver from the waist of his pants, resting it on his chest, his fingers curled about the trigger guard.

* * *

She did not keep a scrapbook, as her mother had once encouraged her to, but kept instead a pillow case containing the clippings and photographs she might have pasted into a

scrapbook, if she had ever been the type to sit about trimming and gluing pieces of paper. The rain created a wall of noise that was mildly soothing, succouring withdrawal and introspection.

She had finally broken her silence. She'd ridden the motorcycle again, and looked Mrs. Thacker and Mrs. Fearnley in the eye, not feeling cowed in the presence of the town women. It was as if the bike itself gave her the old confidence. And meeting Cora was a good reminder that Eudie was not alone in the struggle against conventions and expectations. Cora might be a bit idealistic and naive, but her determination and conviction were sincere.

She drew a handful of papers from the cloth sack and spread them before her on the table with a sweep of her hand, like a card sharp about to goad you into picking one card, any card, in order to describe your fortune to you. Or relieve you of it. But these "cards" contained faces and words of her life only, no one else's, described only what had been and not what was to come. Or was there some way to read the future there? Some historians claimed to be able to conjure the future from pieces of the past.

She lifted a piece of paper by the edge and held it near the lantern's base. The letter from Father, following Jake's death. All is forgiven, it said. Enclosed is enough money for your passage home. Please come as soon as you're well enough to travel. All your transgressions will be overlooked. Father.

Just like him to bring that up, another reminder of the wrong he and Mother thought had been done them. All would not be forgiven, she'd known, with just a few strokes of the pen. No, there would be apologies to tender and penance to serve. It occurred to her that her parents had probably been secretly relieved when Jake had died. The cause of all her transgressions, as father so succinctly put it, gone.

Recover herself she did, selling the motordrome and Jake's bikes to the circus owner, then purchasing passage west instead of east. That was where they encouraged young men to go, well why not Eudie Harding? Staying in Toronto had been out of the question; she was marked as a circus performer, a freak, and would never be permitted to make the transition to "normal."

So, west it had been. West it was.

She picked up a photograph: a woman younger than herself with an explosion of rankled hair stared back at her, hands set defiantly on her hips. She was tall, high-hipped and long-legged, and she was smiling. Her feet were planted wide, which looked arrogant, almost campish, until you realized that the stance simply suited her build. She'd always been rangy, taller and stronger than most women, and some men. She leaned the photo against a cup, facing her.

She passed her hand over the table, as if expecting a magnetic response to guide her hand to select the next article. She caught the edge of a news clipping with her fingernail, intentionally, it was something she recognized, and pulled it free.

The Toronto Mail August 28, 1908

RIDERS CLING TO WALL OF DEATH

Crowds at this year's Exhibition will be treated to an exceptional display of daring and acrobatic excellence by The Flying Welshman. Picture a motorcycle racing around the vertical sides of a giant wooden motordrome, thirty feet deep and thirty feet across. This is The Wall of Death. Now picture two motorcycles racing around the inside walls . Unbelievable? Impossible? Not according to Jake Thomas and his charming partner, Miss Harding, who regularly perform feats, the likes of which have never been seen in this country, as they race their machines round and round The Wall of Death. It is deafening to watch, insane to perform, but the balance, finesse, and daring exhibited by these two young performers is unsurpassed as they defy the Natural Scientific law of Gravity.

The twenty-five year old Thomas is a former motorcycle racer, having competed in the Paris-Madrid Race, the London-Edinburgh Trial, and the London-Land's End Trial since their beginnings. He turned to dare-devil riding because "road racing was getting too popular, too many blokes doing it. I like to try things that people haven't done yet." He has certainly succeeded, having performed to great acclaim in London, Paris, Berlin, New York, Montreal, and Toronto.

When asked about his partner, Thomas stated: "Eud's me mate. She's steady, she doesn't make mistakes." Indeed she doesn't, riding flawlessly each time, as this writer can attest, having had the pleasure of observing three Superior Performances.

For their finale, both performers mount their thundering machines and race around the bowl in opposite directions! Then, on a signal from Thomas they begin to weave their paths together, passing first on one side then on the other, an astonishing display of timing, control and unflinching nerves. This final display is called The Gyrose, and it is truly a Dance with Death! It is not to be missed!

They made it sound so good, she thought, and it was that good the first three years. It was exciting and challenging and she and Jake were mad about the show and each other. Their riding was an expression of the magic that seemed to charge the air between them, making all they did and said together work in a synchrony that was disturbed only by the uncertainty of the limits they were pushing back--going faster, decreasing the margins, playing fast and loose and living the carnival life, the carnal life.

But early in the summer that Jake died, Eudie began to notice a fraying around the edges, nothing more than a loose thread, really, but up until then she and Jake had maintained a dialogue between shows that allowed them to explain or account for these threads, or find ways to make the edge more comfortable. Or less so. Jake had found his way, he was more comfortable certainly, but Eudie began to fear him, fear them, as the season progressed. Stepping into the confines of the motordrome became a fearful, daily experience. She found herself looking upwards at the sky and the row of heads around the rim, a dangerous distraction for someone so completely reliant on the containment of the wooden walls. Jake had begun to look up, too, she noticed. Shooting around inside it like marbles on a roulette wheel, Eudie realized that sooner or later she or Jake had to drop into one of the numbered holes, and at that moment the game would end.

"Nobody's coming off!" he'd shouted. "Not me, not you." He'd raised his glass, forefinger pointing across the table at her, she remembered the gesture. "Talking that way means you're thinking that way. And if you're thinking that way you're going to come off. No more of it now!"

"God, Jake. I used to be scared because I didn't know what we were capable of, but now I can see what we're capable of and I'm scared worse." The tears were on her cheeks again, familiar to her, but he'd not seen them yet. "Aren't you scared?"

"All the time," he said, lowering his voice when he noticed her tears. "But it's fear keeps me sharp, keeps me honed."

"But that's just it!" Eudie was shouting then. "You're not sharp! You're getting sloppy and one of us--"

"Enough!" he roared, hurling his glass at the wall. "You want to quit? Then quit!"

For two months they repeated the scene, Jake disappearing for several hours and Eudie finding comfort among the painted faces of clowns and trapeze artists, amid the dwarfs and giants. Come show time, though, she and Jake would each return to the tent with quiet apologies, suit up and re-enter the motordrome, glancing furtively at the sky as they fired up their machines, filling the air with the hard-edged pounding of unbaffled engines and a lingering oil smoke that stung the nostrils. And they would ride again, closing in on the edge of things.

* * *

The morning was imperceptible but for a diffuse light and a chill creeping into the scrub pine shelter. Boyd shuddered and woke. He poked his head out of the shelter and saw a sky the colour of gruel. The rain was running straight down from the sky, the wind having died during the night. The clouds had lifted so he could see halfway across the lake before rain water became indistinguishable from lake water and all was melded into a consistent grey-scape. Down near the edge of the bench he saw some buildings and smoke rising from a chimney, though it was hard to tell if it was smoke or just a trick of imagination and light. There would be a horse if anybody was living there. Maybe a motorcar. He heard Frank stir behind him and turned to face him. "There's a place down the hill," said Boyd.

Frank stared at Boyd like a mute idiot. He knuckled his eye sockets and stared again.

"How'd you lose your finger?" asked Boyd.

Frank opened his right hand, flexing the fingers as if he might make the missing forefinger reappear. "Accident. Cable took it off."

The question seemed to bring Frank back inside himself, Boyd noticed. "What kind of cable?"

"Just cable. On a riverboat."

"Oh. I worked up Black Creek for a bit. The irrigation."

Frank made no reply.

"Yeah," said Boyd, spitting into the dirt. "Asshole foreman treated us worse'n Chinese."

"I gotta piss," said Frank, moving towards the entrance.

"S'already pissing out," said Boyd. "Heh."

They crawled out and stood facing away from each other to leak.

"See that place down there? I'm going in. You can come if you want, I don't care." I can't be packing you around any more, mister, he thought. You slow me up. Gotta get back on the trail home.

Frank gauged the distance to the buildings. He figured he could make it that far, it was downhill. After that he'd have to let the Lord or the kid or whoever have their way with him. He needed to rest, wanted to sleep off this nightmare of bad whisky and lawlessness. Wanted to go back to Kelowna and spend his two or three days a week in Oldfield's factory and get that sweet tobacco smell back in his clothes, renew the brown stains that were already, he imagined, beginning to fade from his fingertips.

"You in?" Boyd asked, tucking the revolver into his belt.

Frank mumbled his assent.

"I'm going ahead," he told Frank. "You take your time, and I'll have it all taken care of by the time you get there." He smiled, a thin crack parting his lips. Frank would be of no help if there was trouble down there. He might even go back on him if he got the chance. With any luck, he thought, I'll be gone before he gets there.

"Sure," said Frank, watching the kid turn to leave. It came to him that he should offer the boy, by virtue of his own more advanced years, some words of encouragement or caution: be careful, or good riddance you young bastard. "Wait," he called weakly, but Boyd didn't hear.

Frank became aware of the tapping of rain on his hat brim. He wrested a stick from the ground and set out down in the hillside in a lurching traverse.

Boyd dropped down near the edge of the bench and kept the barn between himself and the house as he approached. When he reached the barn he could see a pale banner of smoke drifting above the chimney. He tried the back door of the barn but it was barred on the inside. Heard the hollow thud of a horse's hoof on the wood floor.

Crouched with his back against the wide door he tried to think clearly. Need a plan ... I can just take the horse and go, but I'll probably be seen before I get away. No telling who's in that house, I might get shot. Better go to the house and take care of whoever's in it, then take the horse. Or if there's a motorcar take that. He tracked a fanciful image of himself shooting across the high plains of Montana at the wheel of a motorcar with Lily, a respectable gal, beside him. A trickle of rainwater shot down his neck and he clamped a bony hand over the spot to check it. He stood up and moved to the corner of the barn for a view of the house. Can't run a engine on grass, fool.

Partway between the barn and the house was a low, narrow shed, its roof made of small windows. Beyond that he could see an empty window along the side of the house, and another beside the door at the front. He leaned back, trying to work up enough saliva to spit, but his tongue had turned cottony. He lifted the back of a hand to his mouth and licked the raindrops onto his tongue. As he screwed his hat down to the tops of his ears, he swept his eyes back along the hill and spotted Frank.

Boyd reached inside his coat and rested his hand on the butt of the pistol, then ran in a crouch to the glass-roofed shed. By the time he'd run to the house and pressed himself against the wall beside the window he was certain his breathing would be heard inside.

Eudie rose from the table and went to stare out the window, lost in daytime dreams and memories evoked by sifting through the contents of the pillowcase. The window glass was

streamed and rippled, distorting the world outside. A movement caught her eye, and she leaned forward to see a dark figure walking across the field towards the house. No sane man would be out walking in this, not even a vagrant. She turned from the window and returned to the table to shuffle the papers back into the pillowslip, missing, as she did, the distorted face that rose to replace hers on the other side of the glass.

Boyd wiped his fingers across the glass, changing the ripple to horizontal as he strained to make out the figure at the table. He made his way along the wall and onto the porch, pausing before the door. As he put his shoulder against the door he discovered he was shaking. He held the pistol up, trying to steady it with his second hand.

The door opened.

Framed in the doorway was a gaunt-faced boy staring at a revolver in his hands. Eudie froze, close enough to see the blue of his eyes watered down by the rain. In the instant before either moved, Eudie experienced a sensation like sudden acceleration, a momentary thrill of speed, and then the barrel of the pistol was in her face and he was barking at her. "Hands up! Get back! Move!"

He followed her into the house as she backed away, waving the pistol around like a conductor's baton as he circled her, glancing into the kitchen and the two small bedrooms. "Anybody else here?" His lipless mouth opened and closed mechanically, emitting a croaking voice that seemed strangely, appropriately reptilian.

Eudie shook her head and forced the words from her throat. "No. No one." She stared at him, transfixed like a rabbit in the glare of a lamp. She wanted to touch him to see if he was real or if he wasn't some frightening fragment emerging from one of her daydreams.

"What're you gawking at?"

Eudie lowered her gaze. "Sorry," she mumbled. "What do you want?"

"You alone here?"

"Yes. You can see for yourself."

Boyd studied the woman. Was she lying? She was taller than he was. Her hair looked like it belonged to some tropical bird, blooming and swaying like a cock's plume on top of her head. "Where's your husband?" he blurted, beginning to feel himself becoming disconnected from the scene, watching it over his own shoulder.

"Dead," she said, burying her fingers in her hair.

"You killed him?" She might kill, he thought. She looks not right.

Footsteps on the porch startled them, and they turned as Frank appeared in the doorway. He glanced at Boyd, lifted his hat and nodded to the woman, then closed the door and eased himself into the nearest chair. "So," he said.

They stood in uncertain silence, as though Frank had broken in on an intimate moment between Boyd and Eudie. After a moment Frank spoke again. "I'm Frank and this young snake is Boyd James. I just need to warm up a spell if that's all right with you, ma'am. I don't know about Boyd. What're you doing, son?"

"You got a motorcar, lady?"

"No."

"A horse?"

She nodded.

"Good," he said. "How about coffee?"

"I'll make some," said Eudie, looking at Frank. I know that face.

"Yeah, make some," said Boyd, pulling a chair back from the table. He'd be on his way soon. Things were starting to go right again. A horse was more reliable than a motorcar anyway.

They pulled their chairs close to the stove, spreading open their coats and legs, and soon their smell began to spread through the house the way a wet dog's does. Frank shucked his boots and yarded up his prolapsed socks.

"Whew!" Boyd held his nose with his fingertips. "I seen carcasses that smelled better."

"You're no garden lily yourself," said Frank. "If we're offending you, ma'am, you go ahead and open a window. We ain't been properly bathed recently."

Lily? Did Frank know Lily? wondered Boyd.

"Uh, yes, maybe I will," said Eudie, backing into the kitchen and unlatching the window. Kelowna, she remembered. He'd helped her push the motorcycle. She measured the coffee quickly into the pot and set it on to boil. The presence of Frank, the older one, was only mildly reassuring. The young one seemed to be both on the edge and in control of the situation, a destructive combination all too familiar to Eudie.

"Heh, you were bathed across the lake there," remarked Boyd.

Frank ignored him and concentrated on the pleasure of the warmth and comfort beginning to overtake him.

"No soap, though," said Boyd, dropping his mouth open in a silent laugh. God, but the heat felt good. He lifted his hat and ploughed his fingers into his matted hair as far as they would go. The control was good, it came easier to him than he might have expected. He was getting better at it.

Maybe I am a killer. But it's this place that makes me one. Never had any inclination to be that way before. All these proper type people, these *English* people that won't put up with anyone not like them. He watched Eudie stoke up the firebox. Wonder if Frank ever killed a man?

"The motorcycle!" Frank said suddenly, leaning forward and planting his palms on his knees.

Eudie looked askance at him.

"What?" chirped Boyd.

"You're the lady with the motorcycle. Kelowna, what, a week ago? I helped you push it."

"Oh. Oh, why yes. That's right," Eudie said with poorly acted surprise.

"A motorcycle?" Boyd had never seen one, but he knew right away the potential it represented for a man in his position. "Where? Show it to me." He was on his feet.

"Won't you have coffee first?"

"Sit down, Boyd. The coffee's nearly ready," Frank growled, determined not to have his comfort disrupted yet.

"Don't tell me--" Boyd threatened Frank, weighing the pistol in his hand like a blackjack.

Eudie held out a steaming cup of coffee, and the scent seemed to placate Boyd. He took the coffee roughly and held it under his chin, still glaring at Frank.

Frank leaned forward to accept his cup, ignoring Boyd. The hot, viscous liquid bit at their tongues and, for several moments, an air of quiet satisfaction settled in the room.

Eudie glanced furtively at her unlikely companions as they sipped hungrily at their cups. Frank noticed and squinted his eyes in a gesture of complicity or questioning, she didn't know which. If she had an ally here it was him. But she knew nothing about him except that he'd lent her a hand once.

Boyd tossed back the last of his coffee and stood up. He felt a surge of confidence flow from the hot coffee in his belly and tingle in his arms and legs. His boots were fully dry on the outside and he felt irrevocably warm. "Let's go see the motorcycle, lady. Get your boots on. You too, Frank." He thrust the pistol into his belt and rested his palm on the handle.

"I'm staying here," said Frank.

"I said get your boots on," Boyd repeated. "I ain't done with you yet."

The warmth of the barn met them with the smell of alfalfa and manure, combining to touch the sinuses like a secret hit of ammonia salts. They passed the mare's muscled rump and the cow's hip bones, each animal swinging its heavy head to regard them with an unblinking eye. In the third stall was the motorcycle, smelling faintly of oil, its down-turned handlebars poised to hook the fool who came too close. They stood and eyed the machine as one might watch a distempered steer, keeping their hands away from the rails in case it should suddenly charge.

"There it is," said Frank.

"I can't let you take it," said Eudie. "Take the mare."

"What's that?" Boyd turned on her, brandishing the pistol.

"The mud is hard to ride in," she said weakly.

"I'll bet it's ornerier than any horse you ever fell off of," offered Frank.

"You think I can't ride it?"

"I ain't saying that, but I'm fully looking forward to watching you try."

"Take the horse instead," said Eudie, trying to sound helpful.

Boyd ignored her and slipped into the stall alongside the machine and gripped the handlebar. "What's this here say?" he asked, indicating the fuel tank.

"Indian," said Eudie.

"Indian? Hah, that's good. Bet the Indians wisht they had these." He swung his leg over the rear wheel and eased his butt into the seat. The machine was low slung and unimposing beneath him, but the shape of the handlebars and the smell of gas and oil gave it a foreign, menacing presence. He gripped both handlebars, and knew by the width and feel that meant he was taking a considerable power in his hands. Like climbing onto the back of a bull and hoping to ride it by holding onto the horns. "Hellfire," he said. "How do you start it?"

Eudie's hands squeezed and clutched at one another as she tried desperately to think of a way to dissuade him. He would be lucky to make it down the driveway without dropping it on his leg.

"How do you start it?"

"Listen," she said, stepping into the stall with him. "If it weren't foolishness to ride in these conditions I would be out there myself, but you must understand you won't be able to keep it upright. The mud, I swear." She despised the pleading sound in her voice.

Boyd ignored her and pushed the machine forwards off the stand, dropping the rear wheel onto the floor. Still astride, he kicked himself out of the stall, cranking the bars to the side with a bull-dogger's grip.

"Maybe you oughta take the mare," said Frank. Eudie turned her head sharply. "Horse's more reliable. Get you farther."

"Too slow. Show me how to start it."

"You have to pedal it," said Eudie. "Like a bicycle."

"And it'll start up?"

She nodded.

"Okay. Open the door there, Frank. Stand clear." Like a rodeo cowboy with one hand on the rail, not quite ready to commit himself to the will of the beast between his knees, Boyd raised himself up on the pedals, the machine wobbling beneath him. "Like this?"

Eudie watched him trying to gain his balance. She was on the verge of speaking out in anger at the youth and at her own helplessness. She clenched her teeth and thrust her fists into the deep pockets of her overalls. Her right hand closed on a button and jammed the edge of it into the flesh beneath the thumbnail. "Pump the oil once in a while," she instructed.

"The what?"

Eudie reached down and gave the pump a single stroke.

He glanced at her, then looked down at the machine beneath him. "Okay," he said to himself.

The distance from the stall to the door was not more than twenty feet, the aisle being about eight feet wide. Beyond the door the yard had been pounded into a grey ooze by the rain, dotted with puddles of grey water.

In one jerky move, Boyd released the rail and grasped the handlebar, pulling up on it as he sank his weight onto the pedal under his right foot. The machine rolled forward, emitting a soft oil-smelling fart as the piston rose and fell once. He rose onto his left leg, driving the pedal

downward. The engine spoke again, a rasping *blap* sound, and a third time Boyd pumped, mustering all the strength he could from his pole-thin limbs, and this time the motor fired and coughed, discharging a thick smoke, then caught with a roar that ripped the air in the barn like boxed thunder. Boyd dropped onto the back of the seat as the machine wrenched at his arms and charged forward with a strength that seemed immediately beyond control.

Frank clapped his hands over his ears and pressed himself against the wall as Boyd and the machine somehow hit the opening and shot out into the mire of the yard. The rear wheel spewed a rooster tail of gritty bile as the machine twisted and bucked between Boyd's outspread legs. He fought the motorcycle with a strength found in fear, respond' ig to an instinct to stay on top or be trampled. He wrestled the handlebars as the front wheel slewed over and ploughed gashes in the mud before somehow jerking free and slewing to the other side. He kicked the ground away viciously each time the machine yawed and threatened to take him down in the muck.

The corner of the corral jumped into his vision, rushing towards him, but the machine shied at the last instant so that only the shoulder of his coat snagged on a nail as he shot past the post and headed for the gap in the trees where the driveway disappeared over the bank. He plunged down the track like a log down a greased chute, the wheels sliding about, the throttle twisted wide open, and hit the corner at the bottom, dumping the machine onto its side but staying astride it like a calf-roper about to apply the pegging string. He tilted the howling machine upright and caught the seat with his buttocks as it bolted forward again. The road was rutted and greased badly, and Boyd battled the motorcycle as it lurched and slewed from rut to rut. It wasn't stylish, but hellfire, he was riding the sonofabitch!

The racket of the engine spooked the milk cow into trying to climb her feed trough, and the mare bolted too, rearing sideways as she tried to escape the noise, and stranding a foreleg on the rail between the stalls.

"Easy, girl!" shouted Eudie "Easy! Easy!" She approached the mare, hands outstretched to calm the beast.

As the noise of the motorcycle faded, Frank became aware of the commotion behind him. "Get a rope on her," he told Eudie. "On the halter."

"There," she pointed to where he'd tried to impose himself among the bridles and tack. He pulled a coiled line off one of the hooks and shook it loose. Eudie had climbed up on the rails and was trying to quiet the mare.

Frank handed her the rope's end. "Pass this through the bottom ring and around her head." He climbed the rail behind the mare, positioning himself with one foot in the feed trough, catching the end Eudie passed to him. "Now, move back a bit."

"What're you going to do?"

Gathering the ends of the rope into one hand, Frank pulled the mare's head back, forcing her weight onto her rear legs. She began pawing at the rail again as Frank worked her backward until her foreleg cleared the rail. Then he eased off the rope and she settled onto all fours inside her own stall, nostrils flared and ears flicking.

"Easy, girl," said Eudie, holding a handful of oats to the mare's muzzle.

"Climb up on the other side, there and take hold of the other horn," said Frank, manoeuvring himself into the next stall. Together they wrestled the bawling head back, as Frank had done with the horse, and after several efforts managed to work the cow free of the trough. Eudie tossed a handful of feed to the cow, then joined Frank in the doorway, looking at the rain-filled scars left in the yard by the wheels. They were both breathing heavily.

"Thank you. I couldn't have done that alone."

Frank nodded and pursed his whiskered lips. "How far you think he'll make it?"

"Not far," she said. "I just hope he doesn't crash too hard."

"You really ride it?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Well that's just something," said Frank. "I think that's just something."

"I guess it is," said Eudie I should not be standing here talking to this man like neighbours when his partner just stole my motorcycle and for all I know he may be planning to take the mare for himself.

"I guess you figured out the kid's on the run," Frank said.

"Yes."

"He forced me to go with him. He has a gun, yo· ·aw it. But I'll go turn myself in tomorrow, I guess."

"It's not my business anyway. Well ..."

"Yeah," said Frank, scuffing his toe against the floor. He held his hat and stared at the rain falling as hard as it had all morning. "Listen, ma'am. W·uld you mind if I just stayed here a little longer--in the barn I mean? I won't steal your horse, that's a promise, and I'll be gone soon as it stops raining You won't have to see me again. It's just, I'm so tuckered, I need to rest a bit." He rolled the hat brim in his fingers, studying the action intensely.

The defeatedness of his request took Eudie by surprise. She watched his fingers worry the hat; a beaten man, fallen into bad circumstances possibly, but a man running low on second chances. If she said no he would probably leave without protest, but he'd just saved her a considerable anguish and effort. She couldn't just turn him out. Eudie hitched her collar up around her neck, preparing to step into the rain. "Just don't come up to the house," she said in a voice colder than she intended. She stepped into the rain and escaped towards the house.

Inside, she barred the door and slumped into a chair, staring disconsolately at the coffee cups and the muddy boot marks on the floor. Their humid smell still inhabited the room, leavened by the heat from the stove. She rose to refill her coffee cup and noticed her trembling hands.

* * *

It was the silence that woke Frank, the spaces of silence between the drops. The rain had quit. He rolled back the horse blanket and sat up, listening to the horse and cow chewing in the nearby stalls. A blade of light knifed through a crack in the door and slashed the wall where the tack was hung, illuminating the geometry of hanging ropes and lines. He rose and walked towards the door. The mare lifted her head and spoke softly to him. He pulled the barn door ajar and raised his hand to shield his eyes.

The sun was just below the horizon, but the sky was already bright with the promise of warmth. Shards of clouds drifted harmlessly, purged a clean white against a solid blue of sky. The earth and everything on it was dripping as if it had just that morning been rolled out of amnion to find its form. The wood of the barn and fences was soft and malleable, the ground was an elemental muck blotched with gleaming puddles of secretions, the bushes and trees skeletal frames awaiting the flesh of foliage. Awaiting the signal.

A corner of the glasshouse reflected the sun and caught Frank's eye as the hump of the sun's shimmering back became visible above the mountain. The glass roof shone bright as burnished steel, and Frank approached the structure transfixed, beckoned by the immanence of unbelievable brightness, each step in the boot-gripping mud a conscious effort to a pilgrimage.

The air inside the glasshouse was funky and humid with the devolution of plant matter, manure, peat. The stillness was almost holy. Frank stood inside the door and cast his eyes along the benches of broken flats and upended pots, piles of mixed soil, uprooted plants pale and wilted and rotting into one another, spent and useless, rotting into the top of the bench itself.

With the sun removing the last of excess moisture from every surface it touched, Frank found himself at the edge of water. He did not remember walking down the hill nor did he know how long he'd been standing so. His hands were coated to the wrist as though he'd been groping in the mud for coin, and in one of his hands was a jar of blood red fluid. He was naked, except for the collapsed heap of clothing circling his ankles, and he could smell something foul in the air about him.

At his feet the lake lay flat and impervious as a sheet of steel, impenetrable by the sun or any earthly body. Frank thought he could hear birds along the shore, ducks or grebes, but none disturbed the water's surface, as though the perfect surface was resistant to even the faintest of ripples. The water did not move where it met the sand, did not surge in and out of the sand, did not rise nor fall that one could detect.

Frank did not know what had brought him here, only that he was here, naked and drunk and repentant before his Maker. But he did not know his Maker, and if he did, or if he was meeting him now, then he was no longer in the world he thought he knew. The jar slipped from his hand, spilling on his leg like thin blood, seeping quickly into the sand. He looked at the flaccid, grey body beneath him, the sagging chest and overhung belly, spotted with tiny sores and patches of greying hair without apparent symmetry. This is what is left of my body, thought Frank.

The ground seemed to shift suddenly beneath his feet, and he felt himself pitch forward towards the ice-like sheen of the water. His left leg jerked forward to catch his weight but his foot was snared in the crusted cuffs of his trousers. A figure rushed up from the glass to meet him, a face distended by fear. Frank opened his mouth to cry out as the face rushed up, and in the moment before they met and merged, there was imprinted on his mind an image of that other face that would stay with him--a misshapen, red-eyed face wearing the haggard expression of a man thrust head on at the devils of his self, the face of a man on the verge of losing his grip.

The water did not resist Frank's entry, but parted willingly to let his face plough down to the gravel bottom. Voices roared in his ears, hollering and blaspheming as Frank gasped the air from his lungs and choked on his swallowing. He beat his fists against the huge voices, reaching behind his head for the air he suddenly knew he must have. He tried to kick his legs but they were tangled or pinned somehow in his clothing. He pushed the bottom away with his hands and arched his back and neck to reach his mouth into the air, coughing and choking, then sucking at the air he'd reached. "He come up," said a voice somewhere behind him. "Just like old Lazarus."

"Knew he would," said a second voice.

Frank could not turn and face the voices until he had taken more air into his burning windpipe. His feet were pinned and his outstretched arms were tiring. He crabbed his body sideways into the shallow water.

"He wants to live," said the first voice.

"Better if he didn't," said the other.

"Let him up."

Frank twisted onto his shoulder to see the speakers, and felt the weight removed from his feet. He lay on his side in several inches of water, panting, and looked up at two men with rifles. One was tall and thin, and wore a suit vest over his denim shirt. His fedora was raked down at the front and he rolled a matchstick in the corner of his mouth. The second man was just as tall, but big and ham-fisted. He wore overalls and his shirtsleeves were too short to reach his wrists. The shotgun looked like a child's toy resting across his girth.

"He don't look at all dangerous now, does he?"

"Nope."

"We could shoot him," said the big one. "Say he put up a fight."

"No," said the thin one, removing the match from his mouth to spit. "We're not those kind of men."

"Who are you?" Frank asked, weak-voiced and beginning to shake.

"Get up," the big one commanded. "Put your clothes on."

Frank rolled to his hands and knees and crawled from the shallows onto the beach, pale, naked and fearful.

* * *

The flagpole of the SS Okanagan ran straight up in a vertical extension of the plumb bow, such that a man standing with his back to the flagpole would directly face the windows of the

men's smoking saloon and the ladder to the deck above, where he could look up at the two windows of the purser's office. And perched above that the wheelhouse, with the huge black stack looming directly behind it. On either side of him would be a straight drop to the water of fifteen feet or so, depending on draft and freeboard. On a summer's day it would have been a most pleasant place to enjoy the ride, with the cooling breeze over the water and the distant thumping of the stern wheel which would provide a comforting, unobtrusive, rhythmic sound by which to indulge one's daydreams and fancies.

But it was not by way of enjoying the ride that Boyd found himself with his back to the flagpole, wrists lashed together, the pole chafing his spine. The two men who sat on the lower rungs of the ladder and were his travelling companions held their weapons, a 30.06 Winchester and a 12-gauge shotgun, across their knees for the entire voyage. The fear behind their eyes showed from time to time and they spoke in low voices to one another, casting frequent glances at Boyd.

It was a sunny day, but the thirteen knot breeze created by the ship's movement was not warm, it being March still. Boyd did not appreciate the irony of his travelling backwards, watching his destination slip away in front of him as the horizon receded instead of growing closer. The daytime dreams of Dakota and the grasslands that he'd comforted and encouraged himself with had eluded him since the motorcycle burned his leg, and when he tried to find the dreams now all he got was an ache in the low part of his belly, like a hard knob of shit stuck in his entrails, which reminded him of the time he ate a whole block of hard cheese out of the larder and didn't shit for two weeks. He'd walked around the whole time fingering the lump in his belly, afraid to tell his ma or pa for fear he'd get whipped. They thought it was mice got the cheese.

Passengers crowded forward on the deck to stare at Boyd, hurling insults and threats until Detective Ross came down from the wheelhouse and harangued them back inside so that they had to watch him from behind the windows of the saloon. The attention excited Boyd, and he found himself roused to respond with threats of his own, spitting and lunging against his bindings. Even

though his ribs hurt him to do it, it caused people to start back in fright. It also caused one of the guards to walk forward and smash the back of his gloved fist into Boyd's cheek, splitting the skin against his teeth. "Shut up or I'll gag you with a rope."

They brought Frank aboard at the Peachland stop, and tied him, sitting, to the rail near Boyd.

"They got you," said Boyd.

But Frank had no answer for him, just a quick look from the depth of his red-rimmed sockets.

He looks more beat down than June wheat after a hail, thought Boyd. "The Constable's still alive," said Boyd.

Frank glanced up, staring blankly.

"You look done over. They rough you up?"

Frank looked away.

"They think I'm Jesse James' nephew, these damn fools," Boyd continued. He was talking impulsively, eager to be sharing words with someone. "I ain't letting on otherwise, they're all so jumpy and nervous about it. You shoulda heard 'em, making threats and all."

When Frank still didn't respond after several more tries, Boyd gave up, reminding himself that Frank was just an old booze hound, nothing better.

After a while Boyd heard the voices of ladies singing songs he did not know and did not want to listen to. He wished they would stop singing, wished someone would stop his ears with wax.

A large crowd had assembled at the Kelowna wharf to receive them like heroes being returning from their adventuring. A battalion of reporters and photographers had assembled, backed by a civilian mob, and before the ship's mooring lines had been tossed the reporters were barking questions up at Boyd, while photographers elbowed for position and shouted at him to turn face on, or to give them a profile. "How many men have you killed, Mr. James?"

"With or without the Constable?" replied Boyd.

"Is it true that your father, Frank James, has settled down on a farm in Arkansas?"

"Is Jesse James really your uncle?"

Detective Ross waved off the reporters. "Later, gentlemen. Save your questions for later."

As they emerged from the cargo door to step into the waiting van photographers began setting off a chain reaction of soft, silver explosions that captured images of Boyd, strutting and heroic in his chains, and behind him Frank, defeated and withdrawn.

* * *

The motorcycle lay in the back of Silas Bowering's buckboard like a metal corpse embalmed in mud. "The Constable asked me to bring it by, ma'am. Someone said it belonged to the woman at Greata and I happened to be heading up to Peachland today and he said would you mind Silas and I said heck no I always wanted to stop in and have a look at that place anyway and so is it yours?" Silas was the Postmaster's brother. He owned the general store at Summerland and ran a little freight on the side.

"Yes, it's mine. I'm grateful to you for bringing it up," said Eudie. She leaned her elbows on the sideboard and looked at the machine. "If you'll help me take it down I won't take up any more of your time."

"Surely," said Silas. "That was some rain we had. She'll dry up quick, though. Early spring this year." He winked knowingly.

"I hope you're right," Eudie replied.

Once on the ground, she straddled the machine, turning the handlebars and checking the oil pump, the fuel cock, and sparkplug lead. It was just dirty, by the look of it, nothing bent or broken.

"I reckon the kid's leg took the worst of it," Silas said with a grin.

Eudie nodded.

"Until McTaggart got to him. Heh."

"What's that?"

"He ran into McTaggart's new sheep herd just off the boat, broke the leg of his prize ewe. Jackie turned madman, kicked the boy for a good while before they found them. How fast does it go?" he asked, setting his hat higher on his forehead.

"Fifty," said Eudie, watching for his reaction.

"Fifty miles per hour! Lordy!" exclaimed Silas. "Those new McLaughlins will only do thirty or thirty-five. Why on earth anybody'd want to go that fast I don't know."

"It gets you to places more quickly," Eudie offered, tucking away a strand of hair that had sprung free of her scarf.

"I've never been in a hurry all my life," he countered.

"And it's exciting," she added.

Silas cocked his head and looked at her with suspicion and incomprehension. "Hmm," he said. "I'd best be on my way."

After she'd wheeled the motorcycle back into the barn, Eudie returned to the door of the glasshouse for another look, just to be sure she hadn't been imagining things. But it was still there, the dirt scraped into neat piles on the benches, flats repaired and stacked, all ready to be put to use. The only thing out of order was the empty wine bottle, the final remnant of Mr. Greata's grape growing efforts. She'd tried one of the bottles once and found it undrinkable. Maybe it had improved with age.

It had to have been him, before he'd gone down to the lake. When they'd marched up to the yard looking for the kid, their sodden captive between the two proud orchard keepers, Eudie'd found herself feeling sorry for the cowed and captured man.

"Don't start again," she told herself. He's a party to the shooting and deserves whatever he gets. She'd been faced with a kind of danger she hadn't recognized, a danger where the outcome didn't depend on her own concentration and nerve, nor on the steadiness of a partner

who knew the routine and the risks, but where control of the situation lay entirely in the hands of a man she knew nothing about. The safest response had been for her to do nothing and say nothing--a way of dealing with danger that she despised for its passivity. A person needed to act in every situation, or be acted on. It was folly to stand by and let someone else take control of your situation. Pure foolishness.

* * *

Frank did not, or would not, speak for two days, except to nod and shake his head yes or no to the doctor sent to examine him. He'd retreated to some place so deep inside himself he didn't know if he could return from it or not. You've really mangled it now, the voice kept saying to him. Just when you were about to prosper and settle into a kind of life like other folks you end up in jail with a kid who's shot a Constable. Oldfield would be a fool to take you back as anything more than a labourer. Sure, go back and work beside the Chinamen picking leaf. Do you good. Humble you.

Maybe they would just lock him up for a long time and then he wouldn't have to worry about trying to start again. They could let him out when he was an old man and harmless, and he would be content to quietly drink away the rest of his days.

When he wasn't laying on his back staring a hole through the ceiling he watched Boyd and the jailer, their movements and words carefully designed to avoid interfering with his silence.

On the third day Oldfield came to visit. One way or the other, Frank realized, the visit would mark a turning point. One way or the other.

"As long as you're in jail my hands are tied," said Oldfield. "You gotta understand my position on this. I brought you these." He drew five perfect cigars from his pocket.

Frank held the cigars in his opened palms like a sacrament. He lifted them to his nose one by one and drew in the sweet and pungent tobacco smell.

"They were worried about you." Oldfield kept talking, uncomfortable with Frank's silence. The sound of his words was reassuring, and the smell of the cigars uplifting. "They thought maybe they'd lost you," he said. "Well I for one am glad to see you back in the land of the living. I just wish there was some way I could help you out, Frank. But it seems we just have to let justice run its course and see what comes out of it. You know I'm on your side. You know that, don't you?"

"Sumatras," said Frank, separating two cigars from the others. "Flora del Sols," he said, indicating the others.

"Atta boy, Frank. Here, let me light one for you."

"No," said Frank.

"Oh, okay. Save them for later then." Oldfield rose. "Well, I gotta get back, Frank, and make sure those bitches aren't pocketing the last of the crop. They all said bonjourno, by the way. Christ, I wish you were there to keep 'em in line. I'll tell you, they're giving me a goddam headache lately. So, look after yourself, all right? I'll be in touch. See how things go for you."

When Oldfield had gone, the jailer moved Frank back to his cell. "You better let me keep those safe for you," he said, removing the cigars from Frank's hand.

Frank closed his fingers.

"All right. Keep one," said the jailer. "You want it lit?"

Frank shook his head.

Boyd looked up as Frank reentered the cell. "He gave you a cigar?"

"Flora del Sol," said Frank. "Third generation leaf. Good grower. A good smoke." Making words, talking again brought a kind of comfort, allowed him to venture out of himself and test his surroundings.

"What did the doctor tell you?"

"The doctor," said Frank, pausing to remember the doctor's morning visit. "Said I better not drink again."

"I could've told you that," said Boyd. "The way you were sick back there in the boat, and up in the hills."

"Said I could die."

"Yeah, I could die, too, if the Constable dies. Shit, we could both die. We're all gonna die anyway, sooner or later." His voice had an edge of panic. "Shit," he said, getting up to pace.

Frank laid himself down on his bunk, balanced the cigar across his upper lip and closed his eyes, drawing the fresh leaf scent up into his nasal passages where it tickled at his memories and dreams of a different life.

"Can you write?" Boyd's voice vexed Frank's ears like a splinter beneath a fingernail. "Frank, can you write?" He leaned over and stared down at Frank and his balanced cigar. "What in hell are you doing?"

Frank opened his eyes. "I can write some words." He spoke without moving his lips, the cigar remaining in place.

"What are you doing?"

"Why?"

"'Cause I've never seen a man sleep with a cigar on his lip before."

"What do you want to write?"

"I want you to show me how," he said, resuming his pacing.

"Tomorrow." Frank balanced the cigar on his lip and closed his eyes again.

"You don't know how to write," said Boyd.

* * *

The unrestrained explosions of the motorcycle blanketed the shoreline behind Eudie as she idled along, letting the engine warm up. She felt close to exuberance astride the motorcycle again, as if she were on the first day of a long journey--it was that kind of forward-looking feeling--and the ground passing beneath her provided a continuity, a comforting sense of movement that

had been lacking for too long. It was the same liberating effect riding had had on her when she'd first been bitten by it.

She twisted the throttle open, banking the machine and accelerating through the sweeping corners and onto the straight stretch leading into Peachland. The wind slapped at the exposed flesh of her cheeks and chin, and snapped the cloth of her pants as she shot along the road. A flock of coots rose in a black wave from the shoreline as she neared, beating for open water, and mallards lifted from the cover of bullrushes in a squall of feathers. The small rise before the town rushed to meet her, and she waited, then turned the throttle back and braked hard as she hit the rise and decelerated quickly. She felt sharp this morning, crisp and alert. In control.

She didn't stop in Peachland, but idled up the near-empty street and as soon as she crossed the Trepanier bridge opened it up again, following the shoreline road to Westside.

In Kelowna she found Cora on Water Street, freeing an arm from a sheaf of papers and stepping into the road. "How are you, Eudie?" she said, laying a hand on Eudie's shoulder. "I just read about the outlaws. Did they harm you? I was worried for you."

"No," Eudie reassured her. "I'm okay. Scared me a bit, was all. What's all this?" Indicating Cora's armload.

"*The Champion*," said Cora, peeling a sheet off and handing it to Eudie. "It's the voice of the Political Equality League. I'm starting a branch here. Look, read that part. Read it out loud."

Eudie read the Editorial at the bottom of the page. "The Premier in his speech at Goldstream last month made the following remarks: 'In British Columbia woman suffrage is by no means a live issue. The women of British Columbia are quite content to allow the men of the country to settle the various public policies that arise from time to time, and to busy themselves with the domestic duties which appertain to their sex. But I must admit, having said so much, that a great part has been played by the women of British Columbia in the useful works associated with the provincial charities'-- He really said this?"

"McBride's a lunatic," said Cora. "And they'll re-elect him next week, too. You watch. He'll charm his way back into the Premier's seat. Land grants, timber licenses, anything you want, as long as you're a man with a drink or a dollar. It's going to be hardscrabble for women as long as the Tories are in."

"I guess so. And what's his partner's name?"

"Bowser?"

"He's just as bad, isn't he?"

"Worse," said Cora. "He's the one with the intelligence, not McBride. God help us. Listen, why are we standing here talking? Let's get the rest of these up and have tea." Cora assembled the papers in her arms and pressed them onto Eudie's chest. "You hold these. I'll tack them up."

They walked from pole to pole down Water street and back up Pandosy. "I'm starting a hostel for women," Cora confided as they tacked up the last of the papers. "A place where new arrivals and single women can stay and be exposed to the arts and politics. We'll hold regular salons."

"A hostel. Do you think it'll work here?"

"Absolutely," said Cora. "I've already found the house I want."

They had come back to the motorcycle, when two men in charcoal suits and fedoras stopped and addressed them. The men's faces and hands were pale and soft, their trousers creased like knife blades, and jackets perfectly fitted at the cuffs. It was the younger of the pair that spoke first. "Pardon me, ma'am," he said to Eudie, lifting his hat to reveal his centre-parted hair. He smiled nervously as his senior partner stood by looking sceptical. "Are you the owner of the motorcycle?"

Eudie examined the pair before she answered. They were too well dressed to be city councillors. "Yes, it's mine," she answered, pleased to find herself taller than both of them.

"How fast will it go?" asked the younger. "My friend here, Mr. Dankin, needs to know."

Eudie looked at the grey, doughy folds of flesh around the gunmetal blue of Mr. Dankin's eyes. "Fifty," she said, casting a glance at Cora, who was also watching the elder man.

"You hear that?" the younger was saying to Mr. Dankin. His enthusiasm was that of a pup at the side of his sire. "She could make it easily. It's only just one now," he said, drawing a heavy watch from his vest pocket. "Four hours is plenty. Try her. What other choice is there?"

"Try me for what?" interrupted Eudie.

Both men turned their heads and regarded her suspiciously, as though she'd been eavesdropping on a private conversation. Mr. Dankin cleared his throat, then spoke in a slow and thoughtful voice. "How long would it take you to drive to Sicamous?"

Eudie thought for a moment. "How far is it?"

Dankin and the younger looked at one another. "About sixty miles," said Dankin.

"I don't know what the road is like," said Eudie. "But I could probably make it under two hours. May I ask why?"

Dankin and the younger exchanged glances again, then the younger spoke. "We need a package delivered, and it has to be on the five o'clock train to Vancouver."

"It sounds like an important package," said Cora. The two men jerked their heads toward her and were met by a hawk-like visage that had been watching them closely the while. "I would expect you would be willing to pay for its delivery in proportion to its importance."

"Naturally," said Dankin. "But we are wasting precious time in talking about it. Will you do it, Miss ---?"

"Harding."

"But as my dear friend asked," continued Cora, "how much will you pay for this?" She stepped up close beside Eudie and took her arm above the elbow, squeezing reassuringly and holding herself against it.

"Five dollars," said Dankin.

"How much would you pay a man to do it?" asked Cora.

Dankin and the younger man glared politely. Dankin cleared his throat.

"Fifteen," said Cora.

"Out of the question," said Dankin. He turned to the younger. "I told you this would be a waste of time. Come on."

"Wait," said the younger, stopping him by the arm. "Ten."

"Twelve," countered Eudie. "And you've got a deal."

Dankin heaved a pained sigh. "Twelve dollars," he echoed, tossing a hostile glance at the younger. "All right. But..." He raised his forefinger meaningfully. "Only if you get the package there on time. Otherwise, nothing."

"Fair enough," said Eudie. "Just how large is this package, anyway?"

"Its just an envelope," the younger assured her. Dankin had withdrawn an envelope from his breast pocket and was holding it before him.

Eudie accepted the envelope with her left hand, and with her right grasped Mr. Dankin's empty hand and shook it firmly. "Deal," she said.

"Deal," he replied uncertainly. "Come to my office tomorrow with the receipt, and I'll see that you're paid."

"Right," said Eudie, tucking the envelope inside her coat. "I'll see you, then."

"Very well," said Dankin. He turned to leave, and the younger man followed him down the boardwalk.

Cora gave Eudie's arm another squeeze. "A little private enterprise for the woman on the motorcycle? Good for you."

Eudie grinned and looked up the street. "I better get going."

"Yes, but listen, stop in when you get back. You'll be tired I'm sure. Heck, stay the night with me, it's a big room." Her hands opened expansively to indicate its breadth.

"Thanks. I'll see."

Stunt riding had never given her time to think. It required full concentration the entire time you were on the bike--to lose your focus was to crash, it was nearly that simple. But this four horsepower express that allowed her to ride the shores of big blue lakes gave extended moments of contemplation.

She realized that a big part of the last two years, aside from her mourning, had been spent waiting to ride again. Freedom and speed had been central to who she was before coming west, and, it was becoming clear, were just as central to who she would be now--she hadn't shed the desire for speed after all. But it was still unclear what she wanted to do, or what she could do, though certain choices and possibilities had begun to present themselves. Expanding the garden and selling to the grocers was the most obvious possibility; delivering letters by motorcycle was another possibility she had not thought of until now.

She arrived at Sicamous before three o'clock, re-fuelled, then headed back immediately. At six-thirty she found herself soaking in a hot bath in Cora's hotel room, contemplating the length of her outstretched legs. Cora had insisted, and Eudie had protested weakly--she was exhausted after four hours of bouncing along rutted roads.

Cora eased open the bathroom door and poked her head in. "Let me wash your back for you?" she asked, entering. Eudie folded her legs into the tub and crossed her arms over her breasts. She leaned forward, hugging her knees, as Cora knelt beside the tub and worked up the soap. "Tell me more about Paris."

"Paris?" Eudie half heard the question, having closed her eyes and submitted herself to the care of Cora's hands. Fatigue and the rising steam were filling her mind with memories of childhood baths under her mother's hard hands, hands that had been determined to wash away more than just physical uncleanliness, as if it were her duty to scrub her children's souls as well as their bodies. Cora's hands were soothing, not tainted with moral righteousness.

"Is it true the women dance with one another there?" Rinsing Eudie's back with cupfuls of water.

Eudie opened her eyes. "I think that only happens at private salons, from what I've heard," she replied. At private salons and in tents after the shows--this was a startling memory, from before she and Jake had their own tent--when Sabina and her friends would wash one another's backs, hair, and legs, touching each other in ways and places they knew would embarrass the other women. They were shameless and honest, and Eudie had admired them for it--and been caught staring.

"The French are so libertine, aren't they?" said Cora. "I'd love to go there." Her hand rested idly on Eudie's shoulder.

"You'd like it, I think," said Eudie. "Would you hand me the towel? I think I'm getting cold." *Thinking of sloughing off Jake?* Sabina would taunt her, sidling up with hands sliding over hips and mouth pouting. But the Boston Marriages always ended badly the moment they went outside the confines of the carnival tents. And besides, Eudie and Jake had been on a roll at that time, their show approaching full speed.

"Let me wash your hair first?" Cora suggested warmly, running her fingers into the tight curls at the hairline.

"No," said Eudie, startled. She closed a hand over Cora's wrist. "It's okay. I--I like to do it in the morning."

"You're sure? I don't mind."

"No. I don't like going to bed with it wet."

Cora's hand relaxed and fell to her shoulders, rubbing the skin briskly. "Goose bumps," said Cora, and pushed herself to her feet.

Eudie took the open towel from Cora and hugged it around herself. She waited for Cora to withdraw from the humid room before stepping out of the tub, flattered and confused by the attention. There was a closeness in Cora's ministrations that was sisterly and reassuring, but it was happening too fast.

* * *

Boyd circled his jacknifed legs with his arms. The knobs of his spine pressed against the wall as he lifted his head to look at Frank, lying on his bunk, legs crossed at the ankle, smoking one of his cigars. Boyd forked a shock of hair away from his face with his fingers. "How come the son of a bitch had to go and die on us? Fucker. I'm never gonna make it back to Dakota now, you know. I'm not gonna make it back. They're gonna put us away, aren't they? Aren't they, Frank?" His voice was pathetic and childish, fractured at the edges by his fear. He closed his eyes and jammed the heels of his hands into the orbits, forcing himself to see the flatness, the rolling flatness that raced away for a thousand miles in any direction, escaping under the edges of the sky's low dome. But it wouldn't come. All that appeared were drifting, white spots that blinked like incendiary snowflakes, making his eyes sting.

Frank rolled onto his side and stared at Boyd, exhaling a long stream of smoke towards him. "I thought you liked being a famous outlaw," he said. "Boyd James." Three square meals a day agreed with Frank. He was surprised at how quickly his strength was returning, and how much more clearly he seemed to be able to think in the last two days.

"Hell no," said Boyd. "I was just funning those reporters. You know I'm no outlaw."

Frank studied the tip of his cigar. His body rocked as a chuckle escaped his lips. "I reckon they've got you pegged as a murderer after that performance of yours."

"Don't say that," said Boyd, unfolding and rising to his feet. "Don't say that," he repeated. "For all they know you were the one that shot him. Not me. Don't say that again!" Boyd began to pace across the cell, four steps, turn, four steps, pushing the wall away each time it stopped him.

Frank swung his legs to the floor and sat on the edge of his bunk, elbows on knees. "Ever see a man hang?"

Boyd stopped, facing him. "What?"

Frank ignored him, and Boyd began pacing again. "I seen it twice," said Frank. "Once legal, once not. Something you never forget. I can still see both of those sorry bastards dangling

in the air like they were trying to dance but didn't know where to put their feet even if they could've touched the ground."

"Shut up!" shouted Boyd. "What's with you?"

Frank dropped his cigar on the dirt floor and stood up, face to face with the kid. "And when they're dangling there, trying to figure out where to put their feet and getting it wrong and getting it wrong 'cause every place they step there's nothing but air, they shit themselves."

"You're nuts," said Boyd, backing away. "You're crazy as a goddamn loon. Keep away from me. Just keep away from me."

Frank advanced on Boyd again, a strange, serene expression on his face. He spoke the words slowly, an old sage imparting the gift of knowledge to his student. "Then your dick gets hard and lets go every last bit of jism. Hell of a thing. And if the drop isn't far enough to break your neck you generally hang there until you suffocate, 'cause nobody wants to lift a body that's fouled itself and drop it again."

"Fuck off! Keep away from me!" Boyd pushed Frank off and crossed to the far side of the cell. "Guard!"

Frank smiled at Boyd and returned to his bunk, bending to retrieve the cigar before laying down to finish his smoke. Boyd paced several more times, then swung himself up onto the top bunk.

Several minutes later, Frank spoke again. "I reckon--"

"Don't talk to me," Boyd cut in.

"I reckon I should of did that for you sooner, but--"

"Shut up, Frank. Just shut up. Fuck."

* * *

Several minutes after Eudie arrived home, a blue motorcar pulled into the yard behind her. Behind the wheel was a fat man in a long oilskin, leather gloves, goggles, and a tweed cap

raked down on his forehead. He wore a thick moustache, and was smiling widely as he tugged on the parking brake.

"Hello!" he said, climbing down from his seat and setting his cap to the back of his head. "You were travelling at quite a speed when you passed me back there." He loosened his coat to reveal a crisp grey suit and substantial belly. He removed his cap and extended a bare hand. "I'm Aubrey Fetherstone," he said.

Eudie accepted the soft hand, noting the thinning hair on the top of his head. "Eudie Harding," she said, wiping the leather helmet back off her head.

Fetherstone stared at the orange halo wafting about her head in the light breeze. The woman before him was, in a way, rather handsome. "I'm, uh, I'm pleased to meet you. You know, I've often driven by this place and envisioned what it would look like with a rows of blossoming apple and peach trees. There is potential here for a superb orchard, you realize. This is, what, fifteen acres?"

"Twelve."

"Yes, twelve. If you were to plant this spring, in five short years you could be harvesting top quality fruit. A cash crop."

"What was your name again?"

"Fetherstone. Aubrey Fetherstone. I own the Okanagan Land Development Company. I've been responsible for the development of most of the fruit industry here." He gestured up and down the valley. "Peachland, Summerland, Naramata. What's surprising is that this place here has somehow been overlooked."

"There isn't enough water here," said Eudie.

Aubrey coughed lightly. "There was no water anywhere except in the creeks when we started. But now, you see the green of fruit trees along the benches and flats from Osoyoos to Vernon."

"I understand how your irrigation systems work, with their ditches and flumes," said Eudie. "But tell me where you would divert water from to irrigate this place."

"Where's the nearest creek?" he asked brightly, as if the answer was perfectly obvious.

Eudie strode down to the edge of the bank, and Aubrey struggled to match her steps. "Do you see Peachland Creek, up there?" she asked, pointing.

"That's the closest, is it?" he asked, pressing his fingers into his doughy cheeks as he recalled his original survey reports. It was simply not viable to divert water over that distance for one or two small plots. Not then, and not now.

Eudie rested her hands on her hips as she waited for his answer.

"Of course it would have to be surveyed," he said. "It is a fair distance, isn't it?"

"Two or three miles," said Eudie.

"Yes, well," he said, turning and walking slowly towards his motorcar, as if considering the engineering requirements of the job. "Ah!" he said suddenly. "I wanted to ask you how fast your motorcycle will go."

Always the same question, thought Eudie. I should hang a sign on my back for them: Fifty miles per hour. "It'll go fifty," she said.

"Fifty!" breathed Aubrey, his eyes alight. "And have you ridden at that speed?"

"Often."

"Oh my! That must be absolutely exhilarating! I can barely imagine it!" he exclaimed, closing his eyes and lifting his face heavenward.

Eudie felt a grin pull at the corners of her mouth. He knew--he knew what it was like. It was written on his face.

Aubrey opened his eyes and stared at the marvellous woman before him. "Horses and buggies are a problem," he said gravely.

"Yes, you have to watch for them," Eudie agreed.

"I find they usually clear off if you sound the horn well enough in advance. But all the same ..."

"They usually hear me coming," said Eudie.

"I should think so." Aubrey folded his arms and supported his chin with his palm, watching her. "It's the new aesthetic, isn't it?" She was tall, long in the legs, good solid bone structure. Her hips appeared sturdy and fine beneath her dungarees.

"Pardon?"

"Speed. It's the new aesthetic, don't you think?"

"New aesthetic? I suppose it is."

He looked disappointed for a second. "It's going to transform society, technology, everything," he said, making a sweeping gesture with his hand.

"Do you think so?"

"I know it," said Aubrey. Her grey eyes were clear and steady. Her hair waved in ringlets above her head, beckoning to him like the serpentine hair of some mythic beauty. "Listen," he said, stepping close, trying to catch her scent. "I have a proposition that might be of interest to you. It's a business venture, but also a kind of scientific exercise." He glanced at her eyes and lost his train of thought.

"Yes?" Eudie bent her head to listen. He seemed flustered and was having trouble finding the words. She stepped back and regarded his glistening forehead.

"It's an opportunity," he began, following a deep sigh. "An opportunity to prove the value of speed. You see, I have received the contract for the delivery of mail between Sicamous and Penticton, and I was awarded it by virtue of my claim that I can have the mail distributed from Sicamous to Penticton in a single day, where before it took two."

"You're going to deliver it by motorcar," said Eudie.

"Yes," Aubrey replied, his eyes growing bright. "But a motorcycle would be faster yet, wouldn't it?"

"It would be," she said.

He looked at her, expecting her to share his show of enthusiasm, and was met by a steady, detached gaze.

"State your proposition, Mr. Fetherstone. Just so we understand one another."

Aubrey admired directness in business affairs. "I am offering you the opportunity to prove to the residents of this valley the true value of speed, to demonstrate the constructive uses to which it may be put. Twice a week the mail arrives by rail at Sicamous, and must be delivered, will be delivered to the valley on the same day. You will be paid at a fair and reasonable rate."

"Assuming I am interested," said Eudie, resisting the urge to fall to her knees and thank the man. Things were suddenly happening too fast--the delivery for Dankin a few days ago and now, suddenly, the offer of a steady mail run. That none of it was her making disconcerted her. She felt a brief longing for the solitude of mourning, the solace of silence.

"Of course," said Aubrey.

"I'll think about it," she said uncertainly. It was too unexpected, too fortuitous to say yes on the spot. She needed to think it over, needed to regain control.

"I see." He looked puzzled as he drew a watch from his vest pocket.

"I have responsibilities here that I have to consider. The garden, the stock," she said, gesturing vaguely. "I can let you know in a few days."

"I'm sure we could find someone to look after the garden for you, if it was necessary," he said, pocketing his watch quickly. "I must be going. Good day, Miss Harding. I'll be in touch in a few days, then."

"Right," Eudie said, watching him struggle to fit the crank, then rotating it with an effort that appeared, by the puffing of his cheeks, herculean.

After he'd buttoned his coat to the throat, tugged down his cap and set his goggles, he gave a curt nod and dumped the clutch. The motorcar jerked into motion like a shiny beast

rankled out of sleep, bouncing and swerving and hitting the entrance to the driveway, disappearing over the bank and leaving in the air the fading sound of the motor.

"Strange man," Eudie said aloud. "But the mail must go through." She grinned at the image of herself shooting along the valley road like a motorized pony express. It was an appealing proposition, a perfect opportunity, she knew, in spite of the indifference she'd tried to show. It could mean a steady income, and still allow her to grow the garden. She knew she'd been right not to accept it on the spot, she'd made hasty and foolish decisions that way before--but this offer was like a gift from above. She hoped she hadn't squandered the opportunity by not accepting it right away. But there were no other motorcycles in the valley, there was no one else in the valley who could travel as fast as Eudie Harding

* * *

The Kamloops Prison sat like a fortress on a wide breast of hill that fell away to the river on the south, and to a shallow valley that housed outbuildings and the Warden's quarters on the north. The nearest tree was miles off across hills that surged with waves of windbeaten grass. The wind was a voice over the landscape that spoke incessantly in tempers that ranged from whispers to wailings, vexing the listener because there was no one to be seen casting the voice, and no cause for the voice to rant and wail as it did.

The wind's diatribe taunted the imprisoned men through keyholes and iron bars, it argued in rushing dust-devils in the yard, its spiral logic confounding the confined men. It shouted abuse from the eaves of the towers on the high corners of the walls before fleeing downwind, fragmented and incoherent.

The wind was a comfort to Boyd at first. It reminded him of home, where the wind swept unchecked across the Dakotas most of the year. A prisoner with no horizon, he saw only a square patch of sky and the faces of hostile men, but he was able, at night, when the prison fell quiet, to let the wind's voice imagine him into an endless, sweeping horizon where he was the only vertical

feature on the slow whirling earth beneath a vast sky. And the wind spoke the prairie to him in sentences that ran on from Minnesota to Montana, there being nothing to interrupt its long thoughts until the mountains shrugged up east of Kalispell, imposing pauses and full stops.

He hated the yard. The square lid of sky made his mind turn in on itself so that each time he came back from the yard it was harder to reach home. And one day one of the big, hostile-faced men spoke to him. The man was marked as a dullard, and he spoke softly to Boyd as he walked beside him. His big hand was on Boyd's elbow, and as he spoke softly in his unintelligible tongue he steered Boyd into a shadowy corner. His hand rose and closed on top of Boyd's head and forced Boyd to his knees. The man was fumbling in his open trousers with his other hand when Frank flattened the man's ear. The man reeled, groping at the front of his pants, and caught himself against the wall.

"Leave him be," Frank growled, his fisted hands hanging at his sides.

There was no trouble after that, but Boyd stayed in his cell for the next week, listening to the wind and closing his eyes, trying to imagine. Frank showed him how to write the words he knew, and they wrote a letter that Boyd sent to his father.

"Do you think he'll come?" Boyd's complexion had turned sallow again, in spite of the three square he was receiving.

"Don't know," said Frank. "It's a long way. You his only son?"

"Yeah."

"He ought to come."

One day, after Boyd had started going out of his cell again and talking to the other prisoners, he asked Frank: "What're you gonna say up there, Frank?"

"I dunno. The truth, I guess."

"Bert says we should just tell them what they want to hear."

"That's the truth, ain't it."

"Not always, he says. He says there's different ways of telling it, and we got to get our stories straight."

"The only story I know is what happened," said Frank. "I'm no good at making up things."

Boyd stared at the ceiling. "Chrissake Frank, they'll hang me." He clamped his lips between his teeth to stop them chattering. I'll never make it home, he thought, I'll never make it.

The arrival of spring was heralded by two events at the Kamloops Prison: geese and ducks began flying north in droves, wave after wave etched in the sky like shakily pencilled Vs, passing across the blue and scudding patches of white like wedges being driven northward.

The prison sat atop an exposed hill north of the river, and each morning the flocks that had overnighted along the river rose and passed low over the walls of the prison. This was a phenomenon of some magnitude and pleasure for the guards, for it provided some of the easiest shooting around. Each morning at daybreak two guards would set out on horseback to patrol the perimeter of the prison's walls while the guards in the towers would shoot any flying thing that came within range. The horsemen retrieved the kills, often loading their horses with so many birds they were forced to dismount and walk back to the gate.

The prisoners, of course, bolted awake each morning to the sounds of a small war being waged upon the birds. And while it meant fresh roast goose or duck for dinner, Boyd and Frank were not the only ones who complained about waking to the sounds of battle. And Boyd was reminded of the pelicans back home, and the ritual of their migration. Someone said that a large colony of pelicans nested up in the Chilcotin somewhere, so Boyd began to watch the sky at every opportunity, hoping to see them, and hoping at the same time that they would not pass within range of the guns.

* * *

The evening before Aubrey planned to return to Greata to receive Miss Harding's reply, he came across his letters with the names of airplanes and flying machines. He lowered himself

into the chair at his writing desk and began to pour over the names, trying to imagine the machines they signified, wondering if a name itself was enough to render the machine real. It was, he concluded, if he could only imagine it.

The British airplanes had names that were utilitarian and unromantic. A practical race, we are, he thought, reading the names quickly--*Cody, Avro*, and *Roe II Triplane*. There was one Danish airplane with a mythological sounding name, the *Ellehammer*. The *Curtiss* somehow sounded typically American--independent and rugged. It probably had guns mounted on its wings.

The names of the French airplanes were like the names of the finest wines and sipping sherries, and alluring, exotic mistresses. These he read slowly, savouring their foreignness, their unusual combinations of vowels that urged his tongue to form strange shapes inside his mouth and produce sounds high in his nose. He read them slowly, pronouncing each name several times; *Voisin, Demoiselle, Breguet, Coanda, Bleriot, Hydravion Fabre, Antoinette*, and *Deperdussin*.

But the Italians were the ultimate romanticists. They named their flying machines with passion and verve, putting as much of the machine into each name as was possible. The names of the Italian machines excited Aubrey the most and conjured up the wildest images in his mind, creating pictures he would never have imagined himself imagining. The *Churiburi* would be a capricious machine that would take off and land vertically in great clouds of coloured smoke, and fly at night. The *Aerocurvo Ponzelli* was nothing if it was not a sleek and highly strung thoroughbred machine designed purely for speed. An impassioned and sensitive machine built for only the most courageous of flyers.

The names transported Aubrey into the world of whim and fancy, and he let himself be seduced, permitted himself to sit at the controls of each machine and ascend into the heavens, climbing and soaring like the ravens and ospreys. From on high he would be able to look down on all his creations at once, the towns and orchards that he had envisioned and caused to rise from the wasted dust of the valley. And he knew, if he could find a *Ponzelli* or a *Voisin* or even a

Cody, that he would fly like Icarus, better than Icarus, for he would have technology and horsepower to keep him aloft, which were far more reliable than mere feathers and wax.

* * *

TWO

Spring Assizes were held in Vernon, with seven cases to be tried, including Frank and Boyd. There was the half-breed Milo Roberts who'd shot a bank manager in Lumby during a drinking affair; Tom Jim had assaulted a Police Constable in Armstrong; Bert McLaren had stolen thirty dollars from his partner in Nahun; Albert McDougall had killed his brother-in-law in Rutland during a drinking binge; and Amos Gillard had shot a man in the bar at Nahun. Frank was charged with escape, and Boyd was charged with robbery, escape, and murder.

The seven men were chained together and loaded like cattle into the back of a boxed-in wagon. When the back doors were barred shut the light entered like knife blades between the planks. Periodically a man would twist on the bench and press an eye or nostril to a crack, seeking a view or sucking in fresh air like a caged and frightened steer trying to smell out his surroundings, some instinctive knowledge alerting him to the imminence of butchery.

Boyd sat shoulder to shoulder between the hulking, angry McDougall and the half-breed Roberts. Once their charges had become known among the prisoners, he and Frank had gained a considerable amount of respect. Finding approval and admiration for the deeds he could lay claim to, Boyd became popular and did little to discourage conjecture about his genealogy. Frank, on the other hand, shied from the attention and spent more and more time alone in his cell, thinking and speaking to himself in a soundless voice.

"Frank, you oughta come out. It's okay now."

"No," said Frank. "It isn't you they're interested in, son, it's what you did."

"Same thing," said Boyd, thinking, Don't call me your son when there's others around.

"Is it?" asked Frank, staring at his boots.

Even a beast like Albert McDougall, who had respect for nothing and no one, including himself, was careful not to lean too heavily against Boyd as they were jostled about in the back of the wagon. But that didn't prevent McDougall from banging the walls with his fists and hollering

at the guards to slow down. They heard him and stopped the wagon. Bolts and bars rattled on the heavy door, then it was drawn back to reveal a hard, white sheet of light that caused the men to cover their eyes and turn their faces away. Except McDougall, who rose towards his captors, blind and demented, and demanded better treatment, and was met with a blackjack on the ear. They unhooked him from the chain and pulled him from the wagon, dragging him around the side. The outriders pushed their horses forward to block the open door, and the smell of warm horse wafted into the wagon bed, a haysweet smell that soothed the mind as it evoked, for each man, some pleasant memory. They sat in silence, listening to McDougall receiving the "better treatment" he demanded, grunting and expelling air in harsh surprise with each blow. He was barely conscious when they laid him in the aisle between the men's boots, and he raised his voice against no man for the rest of the journey.

The journey from Kamloops took two days, and by the time they reached Vernon the prisoners were sore and chafed about their buttocks and backbones, and each man thought he knew how McDougall must feel by better than half. They were prodded into cells, two to a cell, except McDougall, who had earned a cell to himself, and fed a gelatinous stew that was hot and therefore good.

The Vernon Courthouse, on May the fifteenth, 1912, was entered through several doorways by, variously, a small group of select men carrying costumes and satchels, understudies on their way to a dress rehearsal of some timeless tragedy; a knot of nervous men in suits, editors of a kind, who must prove their ability to listen attentively and objectively to each story and be prepared to pass judgement on the teller and his characters; seven men in chains, herded by their stone-faced keepers; a trickle of men in fedoras and flat-caps, professional storytellers themselves, armed with pencils and paper to record the stories as they heard them and render their versions into print for all who could read, in the weekly news; clusters of concerned citizens, men who would examine the stories over glasses of drink with other men, then take what they would

remember home to their wives, to be shared in turn with other wives, and children who listened cautiously through walls and behind doors; a few women, all wearing skirts; and a single man, tall and grave looking, by a side door--His Lordship Chief Justice Maynard "Haul'emaway" Holloway.

"All rise!" intoned the bailiff. "For the County of Yale, in the District of Columbia, these are the proceedings of the Spring Assizes, His Lordship Chief Justice Holloway presiding."

The gavel struck the wooden pad in a restrained but firm gesture of authority. "Order. Order."

Eudie tugged at the folds of her riding skirt and leaned forward to hear the bailiff read the docket. She had been subpoenaed, the prosecuting lawyer told her, in case they needed her, though he assured her that it was very unlikely she would be called to testify against either man. The evidence, he hinted, was very good.

The proceedings began on a Wednesday, and by Friday they had dispatched five of the accused. The Judge instructed the members of the court to appear again on Monday, at which time prisoners Wilson and James would be dealt with. Disappointed, Eudie went back to her hotel, changed and checked out, her dress neatly folded in a bed sheet inside the wicker fishing basket. She would go home tonight, spend Saturday in the garden and stay Sunday night at Cora's hostel.

They had not stopped staring at her yet, and she received the usual stares and glares as she rumbled out of town. At the bottom of the long hill out of town, a young man waved her down. "Can you carry a passenger?" he asked. "I'll pay you for it." He was a tall, boyish man in his twenties whom she'd seen in Kelowna. "I work for *The Courier*. I have to get my story back before six o'clock."

"There's nowhere to sit," said Eudie, lifting the goggles to her forehead, and indicating the bare fender covering the rear wheel.

He looked at the fender with dismay.

"But I could take your story back for you," she offered.

He eyed her sceptically. "I don't know. Do you know where the office is?"

Eudie nodded. "Ellis and Doyle."

"How long will it take you to get there?"

"Less than an hour," she said. "And it'll cost you a dollar."

"A dollar?"

"A dollar. You said you'd pay."

"One dollar," he said, as if he hadn't understood. "To carry several pieces of paper. It's an outrage."

"Perhaps," said Eudie as she adjusted her goggles over her eyes. "But the story's important, isn't it? You can catch a ride in one of the motorcars." She stood and nudged a pedal to its apex with the toe of her boot, then rested her foot on the platform.

"Wait," he said. "It'll be late otherwise." Digging deep into his pockets. "A dollar," he mumbled. "Here." He dropped it into her gloved palm. "And here," he said, thrusting several wrinkled pages of script at her. Eudie dropped the dollar into a pocket, and folded the pages inside the front of her jacket.

"Don't lose it," he said, tugging at his throat skin.

"What's your name?"

"Davies. Bob Davies."

"Okay, Mr. Davies. Don't worry about your story. I'll get it there all right." She pedalled the machine to life and twisted the throttle open immediately, shooting up the hill in a clamour, weaving a snaking trail of dust and oil smoke through the convoy of motorcars heading home.

Frank and Boyd were getting tired of hotel food by Sunday, though it was better than either of them was used to. "I hate the way they do the potatoes," said Boyd, scraping them to one side.

"Here," said Frank, holding out his plate. "I'll eat 'em. You can have my peas." An exchange was effected, potatoes for peas, with a scraping of silverware on enamelled tin, and they resumed eating. "Tomorrow's the day," said Frank.

"Yeah," Boyd said slowly. "I guess Holloway'll have his way with me tomorrow, won't he? Gillard two years, Roberts twelve, and McDougall to hang; how do you figure it?"

"Roberts is a half-breed, Gillard's full blooded Salish. Being white didn't help McDougall. His brother was an upstanding sort, from what I hear."

"So, it doesn't look good, does it?"

Frank spoke through a mouthful of potatoes. "You're younger than any of them. That's in your favour, but you can be certain Holloway doesn't approve of people killing Constables."

Boyd set his plate down and plugged his eyes with the heels of his hands, leaning his elbows on his knees. His shoulders jerked as he fought the rising fear that twisted inside.

"Aw, shit. Boyd, I'm--don't listen to me, I'm just a long-winded old fool anyway. C'mon, eat up. Hey."

Boyd cried, breathing in noisy bursts after long intervals of silence, like an underwater swimmer breaching and expelling stale air, sucking lungsful in a single sound before going under again. And while he was immersed two thoughts rang in his mind: that he would almost certainly be hanged, and that he desperately wanted to see his father before he died. Not that his father could do anything to save him, but maybe he could say something for Boyd, he didn't know what.

Frank set his dinner aside and swung over to sit beside Boyd. He rested a hand on the boy's bony shoulder and squeezed lightly. It was a strange thing. He hadn't touched another human in affection or comfort in ... he couldn't remember the last time. "I--I'm sorry, Boyd." He was groping for a language nearly foreign to him, trying to use words in ways unfamiliar. "Look, I know you're not a bad kid. And you gotta let that show tomorrow, you gotta show Holloway that you deserve another chance. You gotta let him and the jury, see that, yes, you made a mistake, and you're damn sorry, but that you can still be a good man, that you are a good man.

"Hell, if there's anyone ought to be strung up it's me, for letting you get into this fix. I could've prevented it, and believe me, I'm almighty sorry I didn't. Shit, I ain't helping, am I?" Frank slouched against the wall. Being emotional was a tiring thing. No wonder womenfolk were so fragile. He retrieved his plate, and forked cold potatoes into his mouth, chewing without interest.

Monday morning, the bailiff stood to the right of the bench, looking fresh and revived after the weekend, and read the remainder of the docket: "His Majesty the King versus Frank Wilson. The accused is charged with Escape, one count.

"His Majesty the King versus Walter Boyd James. The accused is charged with Robbery, one count; Escape, one count; and Murder, one count."

Eudie noticed the nervous little man beside her, his fingers swarming over his hat like insects, tracing, creasing, and rolling the brim in a relentless reshaping of the worn felt. The cuffs of his suit sprouted thread ends like tiny tendrils.

Frank was led to the prisoner's box by the jailer and offered a Bible by the bailiff.

"No," said the bailiff, jerking the book out of Frank's hand. "Just put your hand on top of it, and tell the court your name."

"I thought you knew who I was," said Frank.

"State your name," the bailiff hissed at him.

"Frank Wilson," he said, looking the bailiff in the eye and thinking: Don't get smart with me, young fellow.

A big-boned man named Samuelsson, acting as Barrister for the Crown, began peppering Frank with questions, cutting him off mid-answer as he goaded Frank through his narrative.

"But," Frank protested. "You're not letting me tell all of it, there's things I haven't told you--"

"Only the relevant facts are necessary," said Samuelsson. "Now then, why did you leave the vessel with Mr. James?"

"I told you already," said Frank, coming to his feet. "He had a pistol jammed in my ribs!"

"Order!" Holloway commanded. "Sit down, Mr. Wilson, and confine yourself to answering the questions as directed."

Mr. Ballegeer, Frank's court-appointed Solicitor, declined to ask any further questions. In his address to the jury, he asked the members to note that when Mr. Wilson was arrested in both Penticton and Peachland, he was not in possession of any firearm or weapon, and did not resist arrest. It took the jurors five minutes to find Frank Not Guilty.

He rose to his feet with a great sigh, a free man. He held out his wrists for the jailer to unshackle him. "Not yet," said the jailer, taking him by elbow and steering him out of the box, toward the cells. "You still have to testify this afternoon," the jailer told him.

Boyd looked up at Frank's approach, raising his eyebrows in question.

"Acquitted," said the jailer, as Frank avoided Boyd's searching eyes.

They sat across from one another, silent, studying their boots, the planking of the floor and benches. "How come they brought you back here?" asked Boyd, finally. "You come to say good-bye?" He snorted weakly.

I have to testify this afternoon."

"What're you gonna say?"

"It's not like that," said Frank. "They only let you say what they want them to hear. They cut you off and twist your answers around on you ..."

Before Boyd had announced his plea of Not Guilty to the court, his voice a dusty scratch of noise in the quiet room, before his inflectionless words had settled, Mr. Samuelsson was on his feet, strolling before the jury like a dark angel descended from some unfathomable realm of justice. Descended to impart truth to the misguided, mortal souls with their sweating buttocks planted on the unforgiving wooden seats of judgement. "It is a long time since there has been

such a cold-blooded and duly planned murder in our valley," he began. "The evidence and the facts in the case are, though brief, significant, crystal clear, and sufficient. This case should not, therefore, occupy too much of your valuable time." He was seen to cast a discreet glance at Mr. Ballegeer, the defense, as he said this.

In rapid succession, Samuelsson called forth Detective Ross, Doctor Huycke, and the Purser, Alfred Watson. Samuelsson questioned them, kindly, sceptically, and indirectly, at times leaning his winged arms on the rail of the witness box to look deep into their eyes, then turning, gowns flowing like some ethereal square-dancer to stride to his notes, standing with his arms crossed, appraising each man from a distance before he prodded and cued them, guiding the story closer and closer to the black truth. In his hands the narrative was revealed as beautifully consistent, infallible and polyphonic, which made it more splendid still. His witnesses had been well rehearsed, and had performed flawlessly under his direction. It was in support of this narrative that Frank was called to the witness box, his shackles now removed. "Did you see the accused shoot Constable Aston?"

"No, I was lying on the floor."

"Did you see, at any time, a weapon in the hands of the accused?"

"Yes."

"Was there anyone else in the stateroom besides yourself, Constable Stevens, and the accused?"

"No."

"Thank you. That is all," said Samuelsson.

"Wait," said Frank. "You haven't let--"

"That will be all!" pronounced the Judge, raising his gavel.

Frank was led to a side bench and seated beside the jailer and Boyd. He could feel the weight of the eyes of many as he sat in full view of the gallery. There was more he wanted to say, and maybe he would get another chance to speak for Boyd.

"The Crown calls the accused, Walter Boyd James."

The small man beside Eudie drew a breath sharply at the sound of the name. She glanced at him and, as though he'd been waiting for her, he leaned closer, the odour of camphor rising with his movement. "My son," he whispered apologetically.

"Oh," whispered Eudie, a little stunned. A moment later she was fighting the urge to lean over and ask him about Boyd: his age, where he was from, what had happened to him. She pressed her lips together and forced her back against the chair, watching and listening intently as the Prosecutor began his work.

Before addressing himself to Boyd, Samuelsson produced some sheets of paper which he said were Boyd's written confession, made at a preliminary hearing in Kelowna. He requested that the statement be read to the court.

"Objection!" shouted Ballegeer, rocking his chair as he lurched to his feet.

"On what grounds?" asked Holloway.

"The statement was made in a trial for a charge of escape and is therefore inadmissible as evidence in a separate trial for an altogether different charge."

Samuelsson turned his bewigged head. "May I remind my esteemed colleague that the statement was made without threat or fear or promise of favour. And may I also refer the court to the case of Rex versus Mallet, Nova Scotia, 1907, in which a precedent for this has been established."

"Overruled," growled Holloway, waving to Samuelsson. "Proceed."

Samuelsson requested that Doctor Huycke read the statement, as it was in his handwriting. The Doctor read several excerpts in a loud voice:

> I drew the .22 and ordered him to throw up and not make any noise. He did not make any noise but refused to throw up his hands, and asked which hand to throw up. I told him both, meanwhile he came closer.... He still kept on coming closer. I then tried to shove him back with my left hand: he made a rush for the pistol, which he did not get. I drew the pistol back and snapped the trigger not knowing whether I hit him or not as it

was without aim. I then pulled the hammer back and pulled the trigger--this shot also was without aim. This shot took effect, he fell to the floor.

I asked Williams if I should tie him up and put the blame on me. He said "No. I ain't staying with a dead man." We got off at the landing and walked up the mountain for three or four miles.

The Doctor hesitated a moment, then continued:

I would never have attempted to do this trick on the boat if I had thought it would come to shooting, thinking that he would let us go off willingly after drawing the gun on him and tying him up, but while so doing he rushed and I got excited as I did not know if his gun was handy or not, and thinking he might do some of his own shooting pretty quick. I guess that's all. Signed, Walter Boyd James.

His Lordship folded his hands over his chest and leaned forward. "Did you make that statement, Mr. James?"

"I guess, but I don't recall saying all of that, Your Honour," said Boyd.

"Will there be any more witnesses for the prosecution, Mr. Samuelsson?"

"The prosecution rests," said Samuelsson, descending to his chair, the black mantle of his gowns settling about him.

Mr. Ballegeer rose, instructing Boyd to remain on the stand. "Mr. James," said Ballegeer. "Would you tell the court where you live, and how you came to the Okanagan valley?"

"Yessir, I left my ma and pa in Goodrich, North Dakota, about four years ago. I joined the army but it weren't for me, so I come up to Canada. I worked on the roads near Chilliwack, then come up to the interior and worked in a grading camp at Nicola, swamped freight for the Belgo Company, and did some other stuff."

"How did you spend last winter?"

"I had some rat traps on Duck Lake. But I traded them a while ago. I was gonna go back home, but I didn't have any money to eat or travel, so I had to steal some food from the store."

"You robbed the store because you were hungry?"

"Yessir."

"Did you take anything besides food?"

"A few dollars."

"Travelling money, I presume?"

"Objection! Leading the witness."

"Sustained."

"Would you recount for court, Mr. James, how the incident in the stateroom came to pass?"

Boyd cleared his throat, his frightened eyes darting over the faces in the gallery, stopping on the face of his father, barely visible between the shoulders of two men. "Pa!" he called, rising to his feet and reaching a hand towards the man who was also standing now, calling, "Boyd!"

"Order! Order!" bellowed Holloway. "Just speak as you are requested to. Continue."

Boyd sank to his seat and began to speak in a quiet voice.

"Speak louder!" commanded the Judge.

"We talked about it before, and then Wilson asked me if I still had the pistol when we were leaving Summerland. He said I better do something with it soon. We had made the plan before. His part was to jump on the policeman and overpower him and do the gagging. I never told this before because I thought he would own up to his part of it. But now that he's gone back on me and said all these false things. I didn't force him to go with me--"

"Lies!" shouted Frank, rising. "Lies!"

"Silence that man!" thundered Holloway.

The jailer jerked Frank back into his seat and spoke to him in a low, threatening voice.

"I didn't force him to go with me," Boyd continued, looking straight at Frank now. "We made the plan together. And he went back on me."

"That's enough," sighed Holloway, nodding at Ballegeer.

"One further question," said Ballegeer, his forefinger held vertically over his lips and nose as if signalling for silence. "What is your relationship, if any, to the outlaws Frank and Jesse James?"

"My pa's name is Frank James, but he and I ain't no relation to the outlaws nor them to us. You can ask my pa if you like. He'll tell you."

The faces of the court turned on Boyd's father. He rose to give mute testimony, and was examined like an untagged exhibit. He held his hat tightly to his chest and stared at Boyd from an impassive face that was scored with the wind-driven snow and dust of years of living on the flatland. He had learned to accept the forces of nature and God, if not understand them, but of the forces at work before him he had little understanding, and was uncertain in the presence of berobed men who moved like angels and spoke tapestries of words. He understood only that his only son was said to have killed a man, and that no man had instructed him, the father, to strike his door frame with herbs dipped in calf's blood. What hath God wrought on my son? he wondered. He lowered his head and resumed his seat, the creak of his chair startling the members of the court.

"Your father does not look like an outlaw," observed Mr. Ballegeer.

"Objection!"

"Sustained."

"Would you repeat for the court your relation with the outlaws, Frank and Jesse James?"

"None," said Boyd.

"Thank you. You may step down."

Ballegeer paced slowly before the jury, head bowed as if in prayer, or invocation of his summary. He lifted his head and began to speak. "Gentlemen. It is clear that a crime has been committed. And it is clear, too, that the responsibility for this unfortunate, tragic incident lies as much upon the shoulders of Mr. Wilson as it does upon Mr. James's. As the elder and more experienced member of the partnership Mr. Wilson assumed, unknowingly perhaps, but nonetheless assumed the responsibility for the moral and physical guidance of his young charge."

Frank began to rise, and was jerked abruptly into his place by the jailer.

"It naturally follows that Mr. Wilson must also assume a majority share of culpability for any actions or transgression the partners may have effected." Ballegeer glanced at Samuelsson, then stepped towards the jury, opening his arms as if to welcome the jurors unto himself. He rested his hands upon the railing. "Is it not, I ask, the responsibility of all older generations to instruct the young in the difference between right and wrong, between good and evil? Are we not, each and every one of us, implied in the education and proper upbringing of the youth of our society? And, therefore, is it fair and just for Mr. James to bear the full weight of responsibility for his unfortunate association with Mr. Wilson? Is it not fair that Mr. James be given the benefit of the doubt, and a second chance to prove himself as a capable and responsible member of our society?

"Boyd James, a young man alone in the world, made the unfortunate error of turning to Mr. Wilson for moral direction, and was guided and encouraged to indulge in evil and destructive acts. For this, I submit to you, he should not be punished too severely."

"Objection!" roared Frank.

"Remove that man!" thundered Holloway, glaring.

The jailer lifted Frank by the arm and dragged him from the court.

"Are you nearly finished, Mr. Ballegeer?" Holloway asked wearily.

"Nearly, Your Honour." He faced the jury again. "The intent of the crime is its essence, I remind you. And Boyd James did not intend to kill Constable Stevens, only to frighten him. If there is any doubt in your minds as to the intent of the crime I also remind you that you are obligated to give the prisoner the benefit of any such doubt. And finally, I appeal to your sense of humanity, to give this youth one more chance, either in prison or out of it, to lead an honest and productive life. Thank you." Mr. Ballegeer bowed deeply, gathering his gowns around him as he returned to his seat, his face calm.

Judge Holloway cleared his throat loudly and took a long drink of water. He eyed the jurors menacingly. "Gentlemen, I charge you with your duty of deciding between the interests of

society and the life of a human being. And I remind you of the distinction between murder and manslaughter, as I did the jury for the McDougall case. There has been no suggestion of provocation in this case. The murdered man met his death in the discharge of a lawful act, an act of charity and kindness. The facts here are almost undisputed. There is no doubt that the Constable came to his untimely end by a shot fired from a .22 calibre pistol, and there is only one .22 calibre pistol as evidence, and only one owner.

"The defence has suggested that Mr. Wilson might be equally guilty of the crime. But what had Wilson to gain from escaping Constable Stevens's charge? He was facing no charges, no threat of imprisonment as James was. It is quite likely, in fact, that Wilson was receiving better rest and food while imprisoned than he did a free man. James, on the other hand, facing the prospect of imprisonment, had motivation for wanting to escape.

"I remind you also of the significant fact that Wilson, at no time, was found to be carrying any gun or illegal weapon, while James, as you will recall, carried, in addition to the .22, a .44 calibre revolver. One is well founded in asking what a young man requires of such weaponry in our peaceful society." The Judge paused, studying the backs of his hairy hands. "The argument that James did not intend to kill seems futile in the face of the fact that a man who has been a soldier is under no misapprehension of the probable results of pulling the trigger of a loaded pistol in the face of a man.

"It makes no legal difference whether prompt and immediate medical attention might have saved the Constable's life, and I do not think it warrants your speculation. In conclusion, if the evidence laid before you compels you to return a verdict against the prisoner you will fully discharge your duty to society as the words of the oath which you and your predecessors for generations have taken, and make a true deliverance between our Sovereign Lord the King and the prisoner at the bar."

With these instructions the jury left to begin their deliberations. Judge Holloway retired to his quarters to pour himself two fingers of bourbon and rest his heels upon his desk.

Frank was removed from the holding cell and Boyd put in his place. Neither man spoke as they brushed past either side of the jailer.

"You're damn lucky Holloway didn't find you in contempt," said the jailer, pointing to a chair. "Sit there."

"What do you mean?" Frank protested. "You heard that shit he was telling them. He's the one in contempt, not me."

"You went back on me, Frank." Boyd was standing, holding the bars, shaking his hair back off his forehead. "You could've helped me out but you went back."

"God damn you!" Frank stood up and moved towards Boyd. He would not be called down by a lying pismire. But the jailer was up just as quick and had Frank by the shirt front, pressing him back down in his chair.

"C'mon, Frank," Boyd taunted. "Goddamn boozer."

Frank looked up at the jailer's meaty face and spoke in short bursts between the rising and falling of his chest. "Put me in there--I'll save you--trouble of hanging him--I ain't--going to take--that--not from him or--nobody."

The jailer leaned his face close and hissed at him. "You just calm down right now or I'll throw you in the wagon for Kamloops. The Judge don't like it at all when the prisoners assault his jailers, and it's your word against mine, unless you think your young friend will help you." His breath smelled like eggs.

"Why're you keeping me here?" asked Frank, his voice defeated, pleading almost. "Why don't you turn me out?"

"I can't do that until the Judge signs the order. Which won't be till after James's case is done. They won't be long in deciding this one." He winked a heavy lid.

Three and a half hours later the jury filed out of their hotel room and crossed the street to the courthouse, and were followed by the ragged crowd that was determined to hear the verdict. The foreman announced the verdict: "Guilty."

The Judge ordered Boyd to stand. "Do you have anything to say before I pass sentence on you, young man?"

Boyd looked at the solemn jurors, and the foreman, still standing, across the room from him, head lowered. Guilty was right. I did shoot and kill the man, but ... He let his eyes wander over the stony faces of the gallery, searching out his father. There he was, sitting forward on his chair, hat clasped to his stomach. Boyd remembered when he and his father used to walk down to the slough in the spring, in the hour after dinner when the daylight diminished and the coming darkness could be seen seeping up into the sky like ink. How they would crouch at the edge of the rushes, and he'd hook his elbow over his father's knee as they waited for the pelicans to come in to roost, those huge silent birds that carried themselves upon the air so easily and proud. He could see them approaching now from the south, necks folded back to rest large bills upon their great white breasts. They flew above the stubbled fields in low lines of six or eight, the lead bird stroking the air three or four times then gliding on those great, wide, white wings, the sequence repeated by each bird in turn so that the line rose and fell as if riding over invisible swells. And they would bank down from the sky, one at a time, gliding and sideslipping down through the cooling air, wings extended to work the air with subtle shifts of angle and feather to stall and come to rest on the water without a ripple. Magnificent and somehow glowing in the failing light, the pelicans did not honk or squawk or cluck as they folded their bright wings and dipped their long bills in the dark water. They had no need of voice. Nothing to say. His father was watching him expectantly.

"Did the pelicans come?"

Holloway cleared his throat as he examined the prisoner. He'd had no doubt of the jury's verdict, and had, therefore, had the benefit of several hours and bourbons to decide upon the sentence. It was one of the real pleasures of his work, to sift through the narrative he'd listened to and reduce it all to a single, final, irrevocable sentence. The ultimate epigrammatist. He spoke with a certainty and gravity, his voice filling the room like an immoveable stone. "The jury, after

lengthy and patient deliberation, which does credit to their humanity, have found you guilty of a most treacherous and cold-blooded murder. I do not propose to dwell upon the enormity of your crime or to help you to realize the solemnity of your position, only to advise you to prepare for the inevitable.

"The sentence of the court is that you, Walter Boyd James, be taken to the place from whence you came and there to remain until the eighth day of August. Thereupon you shall be taken to the place of execution and there be hanged by the neck until you are dead. Remove the prisoner!"

Boyd squeezed his eyes closed, surrounding himself with darkness as the jailer took his arm and led him from the box. He was returned to his cell, handled gently now by the sturdy man, who was not unfamiliar with seeing men come face to face with their own death. It was the only time he did not treat them like animals--the nearness of death, the affirmation of it, affected him, for he was a God-fearing keeper of men. They did not speak to one another, as there was nothing to say, but after Boyd had been left alone in his cell, he tried to put words on it and failed. He remembered the silent dignity of the pelicans and closed his lips. He would go quietly. There was nothing more to say. He saw a line of bright birds bank and glide in a Dakota sky, then swing away from him across the fields westward, huge wings beating and gliding, beating and gliding, rising and falling as they crossed an unseen ocean towards the sun.

The court cleared quickly as men hurried to repeat the Judge's words. When the janitor came around with the broom one man remained in his seat, his face buried in his hands.

"You'll have to go now, mister," said the janitor.

Frank's first taste of freedom was the scent of lilacs. They'd turned him loose in the evening with four dollars and a ticket to Kelowna. The lilacs' scent met him at the corner where the alley from the cells opened onto the street. Someone had hung a basket of them over the boardwalk, and Frank reached up and picked a cluster, inhaling the thick aroma greedily, enjoying

the way it cut through the smell of men living in close quarters that seemed to have left a heavy coating on his view of things.

Lilacs reminded him of the late spring evenings of childhood, when the dusk pressed the scent close to the ground, where he lay concealed among the bushes, watching men come and go from the hotel where his mother worked, trying to pick out one for a father. The memory began to sour and Frank tossed the lilac aside.

He found a cigar and a glass of whiskey. Just a nightcap, though, he was catching the boat to Kelowna in the morning and paying Oldfield a visit. He knew he'd missed the planting, but there were still field hands to be supervised.

In the brief period between the robins' first singing and the arrival of daylight, the jailer rose to a tapping at the door to the street. Outside stood a weathered little man, hat in hand.

"I'd like to see my son," he said. "I'd like to see my son."

"Your son?"

"Boyd." The man looked up at the jailer from a face shaped by a constant squinting against the elements. Between the leathery folds of skin his pale, far-seeing eyes stared passively. The jailer thrust his head into the back street and looked up and down. "Come in."

The man nodded and ducked past him with a smell of camphor and tobacco to stand in the gloom of the office. "James," the jailer said, giving the bars a shake. "Wake up."

Boyd stirred at his name, rising from a sleep of exhaustion. His father stood with his fingers curled about the steel bars, and for a moment Boyd thought he was dreaming his father behind bars. "Pa," he said, his sleep-coated voice breaking before uttering the single syllable.

"Boyd. Son." The jailer cranked the key and slid the door ajar. Boyd's father entered the cell and sat beside him, his hands resting on his knees. "They came," said his father.

"What?"

"The pelicans."

"Did you tell ma?"

"Had to, going away for so long."

"Is she ... ?"

He nodded.

"I was coming home. I was on my way home."

His father nodded again. "I know. She knew you were coming. She prayed for your safe return."

They sat in strained silence. There was suddenly much to say and not the words for it.

"How are the fields? Tell me how the fields look."

"The fields? Well, the original section is lying fallow this year, so it's just stubble, brown like the coat on that buckskin we used to have. I turned the rest of it, and turned a new piece this year, just a small piece."

"Where?"

"Up next the old Avery place."

"By the river?"

"No, west of there."

"Tell me about the disced fields, what they look like."

"Well, if you go up on the rise by the slough, you look away to the west at patches of black and brown that looks like one of your ma's quilts."

"Are your furrows straight?" he asked, knowing full well that his father ploughed a straighter furrow than any man within a hundred miles. Two hundred miles. It was the question his father put to him time and again as he had learned to steer the plough and team. Are your furrows straight?

"Dead straight." The words escaped his father's lips unmindful of their multiplicity.

The words tumbled in Boyd's mind. Why was death straight? he wondered, trying to connect his father's perfect furrows with death. It arrived with a casualness that was blunt and

obvious. The rope'll go straight when I hang from it. My legs and arms will hang straight. Dead men are laid straight as furrows in their caskets.

"Have you prayed?" asked his father.

Boyd shook his head. "Don't know how."

"You will be forgiven if you pray," he said. "Though your sins are scarlet, He shall make them white as snow. But you must repent, you must ask forgiveness. Close your eyes and I will pray with you."

Boyd closed his eyes, and felt his father's hand come to rest lightly on his. His father spoke in whispered syllables that Boyd could not decipher, then released his hand.

"You must continue to pray," said his father.

"Time's up," said the jailer.

They stood.

"Pa, I--I'm...." The words jammed in his gullet. He faced his father, a beaten-looking man, a man also with a long journey ahead. His eyes were tearing like a child's.

"I would have killed the fatted calf," his father said, his voice filled with regret. He stepped forward suddenly and gripped Boyd roughly with his arms, burying his face in his son's neck.

Boyd bent his pinned arms and clenched his father in return, feeling the ribs under his fingers. They broke apart like a pair of wrestlers, and Boyd watched his father turn and leave.

* * *

THREE

BIRDMAN ROGER MACKENZIE

SATURDAY, MAY 25TH. AT THE KELOWNA FAIR GROUNDS.
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DAREDEVIL OF THE AIR!
DEATH MOCKER!

Life defier will disport himself with a freedom and
abandon that fairly appalls. Circling the course round
and round at the speed of a locomotive. See the SPIRAL
GLIDE that Hackman died at! See the ZIG-ZAG WHIRL!
See the HAIR-RAISING mid-air manoeuvres that have set
the world a-talking everywhere this DARING AVIATOR has
exhibited. The big show begins promptly at 3:00
thus permitting everyone to return by dinner time.
Admission 50c. Grandstand $1.

This exhibition brought to the Okanagan Valley
by the Okanagan Land Development Company.

Above the print a blurry photo of the flying machine invited readers to try to pick out details which turned to tiny dots the closer one put one's face to it. An oval-shaped insert in one corner contained the head of a man who one supposed was the Birdman himself. His face had discernibly thick features--thick nose and lips, and low-slung ears that jutted out like flaps.

The posters appeared on poles, on the walls of vacant buildings and some not vacant, the sides of buckboards, and the doors of motorcars from Vernon to Oliver. There were even reports

that one of the Allison boys had glued a poster across the rump of his saddlehorse. If the truth be known, though, one poster in each town would have been sufficient to draw the attention of every man, woman and child in the valley.

The flood of people into Kelowna began several days before the event, with men arriving ahead of time to secure rooms for their wives and children, and to get a glimpse of the flying machine as it was being assembled and prepared for the exhibition. On Friday afternoon all freight shipping was suspended on the SS Okanagan, and the freight deck was outfitted with rows of pews borrowed from St. Mary's Anglican Church. and tea and coffee were served on the freight deck for the first time ever. By six o'clock Friday evening there was not a room to be had in town, and a rider was dispatched to the railway camps, armed with a decree from the Mayor to load all available tents onto a wagon and send them into town before morning.

The sky was subjected to such scrutiny as never before, with people straining their necks at the sound of every backfiring motorcar and youngsters searching its bounds constantly, pointing and hollering at every goose or raven they saw winging overhead. The sky was suddenly much more than a place where the weather was checked, and in quiet moments people stared up at it, trying to imagine being up there, trying to picture the world from such a vantage point. Everyone had been up Knox Mountain and looked down on the town and the valley, but to look down on it all with no ground beneath one's feet was quite another, astonishing, notion to entertain--it was to enter the realm of birds and mythical creatures, and God Himself.

Stores were filled with visitors impatient for the morning to pass. Women fingered bolts of cloth they knew they could not afford, and with quick calculations realized they might if they fed the children corn meal all summer. The men, no less tempted, tested the fit of the latest hats from France and England. Narrow-brimmed homburgs, such as Mr. Fetherstone was often seen wearing, were pressed onto skulls; tweed flat caps like Roger Mackenzie had worn about town the past few days were set and checked in the mirror, then given more rake to suit the image desired.

By noon the crowds had begun to assemble at the Fair Grounds, swarming towards the grandstand and along the fence lining the track. At one end of the track a section of fence had been removed to provide length for a landing strip, extending into Axel Willard's hay field.

When the Okanagan discharged its load of humanity the crew appeared visibly relieved to regain the precious freeboard they'd lost by inches as they made their way from flag stop to flag stop where kids and grannies stood waving and cheering. The crossing from Westside to Kelowna was only slightly rippled, yet not infrequently did deckhands glance nervously at waves running over the rails and sloshing along the scuppers.

Eudie and Cora waited at the door for Cora's young charges to ready themselves. The Gilman Hostel, as she had named it, had three residents at the moment, and had begun to attract attention in the community. It had also, apparently, attracted the attention of the city fathers and was being closely scrutinized.

Eudie drew out her watch and checked the time. "We'll be late if we don't get going," she said, casting a worried look up the stairs. "We don't want to miss any of this."

"Relax," said Cora. "When did you start carrying a timepiece?"

"Fetherstone gave it to me. He wants me to record my arrival and departure times at each stop."

"He gave it to you?"

"Yes."

"Do you see him much?"

"No, just on Fridays when he pays me."

"He give you anything else?"

"No," said Eudie, growing mildly annoyed with the interrogation. "You're awfully suspicious of him, aren't you?"

"Of course I'm suspicious of him. He's a man, isn't he?" replied Cora.

In spite of Cora's suffragist rants, Eudie enjoyed her company. With Cora and her "residents" she felt accepted and, later learned, was being presented by Cora to her charges as a model of independence. Things were happening quickly for Cora too, though she appeared to be in full control of, and thriving on, the acquisition and opening of the Hostel, and was already organizing "salon" evenings for the women of Kelowna. She had invited Eudie to a reading of poetry, but Eudie was evasive and noncommittal in response, never having had much patience for poems or the people who wrote them.

The women appeared at the bottom of the stairs and they set out for the Fair Grounds. Cora popped open her parasol and rested it on her shoulder. The two older girls fell behind, engaged in a discussion about a recent Nellie McClung speech, with Cora tossing approving glances over her shoulder at them. The third, a fawn-haired Shropshire girl named Hillary, walked close to Cora's shoulder, listening and watching her intently. "I suppose you're going to learn to fly," said Cora.

"Maybe. Roger's going to be here for a week or so. He said he would at least take me up a couple of times."

"How did you do it? Just walk up and introduce yourself? Tell him you wanted to fly?"

"No, no. He was a friend of Jake's. We met a couple of times back east."

"You never cease to astound me. First the motorcycle, then the mail delivery, and now flying! What's Fetherstone like?"

"Fetherstone?" Trying to keep up with the pace of Cora's inquiry. "He's a bit odd, an eccentric. He's very enamoured of speed."

"A man doesn't start giving things to a woman unless he expects something in return," said Cora, an edge to her voice.

"I only see him once a week. You don't have to worry, Cora."

"I know," she smiled. "But I do."

They could hear the buzz of the crowd from several blocks away. The games and fun races were under way, and the crowd was laughing and cheering like a chorus of deviants, shouting out of turn as they encouraged the young men and horses engaged in tandem, klootchman's and postilion races.

The grandstand was brimming, and wagons and motorcars had been drawn up outside the crowd lining the field, filled with people sitting under parasols or standing squinting against the sun. Eudie and Cora found a vacant piece of fence down along the back corner and crowded against it.

In the centre of the infield sat the airplane, looking like a huge, mechanical moth. The machine was a Bleriot IX, built in 1909, a two-seater version of the machine Louis Bleriot had flown in the first crossing of the English Channel. Harriet Quimby had flown a similar model in her April crossing, becoming the first woman to cross the Channel. The engine was a Gnome-built, seventy horsepower, radial cylinder design, mounted on the nose of the airplane, and gave the airplane a top speed of forty-seven and three-quarters miles per hour. The Bleriot was a monoplane, with lines that were strong and capable looking, verging on graceful. The leading edges of the wings spanned long, shallow curves, and the trailing edges were scalloped in three sections. The wings were slightly concave on the bottom to provide additional lift and glide. The seats were buried inside the enclosed body, each marked by an oval-shaped opening on the top of the fuselage.

The airplane's presence was both menacing and promising. It seemed to possess, in its grace and simplicity, a potential that belied its size, threatening and promising to change one's point of view of the world.

Aubrey watched the crowds spill into the grandstand and perch on their seats like rows of crows around a carcass, watched them flow up against the fence in all manner of dress and transport. He knew full well the auspiciousness the day held for them all, and for himself. He was seated in the infield with the Mayor and councillors, and as a supporter of cultural and

technological advancement in the twentieth century, Aubrey did not underestimate his own significance. He was though, like the raucous crowd, growing impatient to see the airplane fly.

In the shade beneath the grandstand, Frank and the Professor drained a small flask and gazed out through the tangle of feet and ankles. Neither man was drunk, but each was suitably braced to withstand the impact of the cultural event they were about to witness. "It ain't natural." Frank spat in the dirt.

"Frank, Frank," the Professor consoled him. "Men have been doing it for years already. It is natural, it's the natural progression of man's dominion over nature, the progression of technology and industry."

"It ain't natural," Frank repeated.

"The old order changeth, yielding place to the new, and God fulfils himself in many ways," the Professor quoted.

"You can't tell me that's God's work out there." Frank turned on him. "Can't you do something with your eye?"

The Professor peeled the lid back and fingered the glass eye so it stared at Frank's forehead. "Are you suggesting it's the devil's work, then?"

"Hell, no. I'm just saying it ain't natural." He hated being drawn into these discussions, knowing he was no match for the Professor. But the Professor was patient with him, and seemed willing to tolerate Frank's ignorance and moral stigma. He was the only person who'd shown Frank anything resembling hospitality since his return, and had taken an interest in Frank's situation, bringing it up for discussion often.

"Let's find a place to watch," said the Professor, his eye wandering skywards again in anticipation. He brushed a drifting cigarette ash from the flattened ridges of his corduroy suit and made for the light.

They emerged into the brightness, shielding their identities from the sun with upraised hands. Frank tugged his hat low and followed the Professor along the fence until they came to a

gap in the crowd. They stood and sweated beneath the sun like two men awaiting their fate. "Oh, for a beaker full of the warm South with beaded bubbles winking at the brim," the Professor intoned. "I should have filled another flask. Keep one eye on that immortal bird, Frank, for when it begins to roar and smoke, you will be witnessing the shape of the future."

Frank ignored him, hanging his elbows on the rail and resting his chin on the risen veins in his hands. The Professor had turned and was speaking with the woman next to him. "You don't say," Frank heard him say. "A commendable enterprise indeed, though far in advance of the sensibilities of this community, I would surmise. But the role of women in society must eventually change, of course, for everything changes sooner or later. Change and death are the only certainties, are they not?" Frank stared at the airplane, an ungainly creature that he would never have imagined.

A hush settled over the crowd like a winding sheet as the Mayor rose and bellied up to the podium. He raised a bullhorn to his lips and the crowd fell silent. "Welcome to the greatest exhibition ever to appear in this beautiful valley. Through the good graces of the Okanagan Land Development Company and its founder, Mr. Aubrey Fetherstone, we are fortunate to have in our midst, as you see before you now, a flying machine, an aeroplane. Through his desire to keep the citizens of the Valley abreast of all the latest developments of the twentieth century, Mr. Fetherstone has gone to great length and expense to bring this event to fruition." Aubrey rose and bowed to a smattering of applause. "Today we are privileged to bear witness to the miracle of flight, and we have in our presence one of the greatest, perhaps the greatest, and most daring aviator of our time. He is unsurpassed as a stunt flyer, and he recently completed, successfully I might add, ha ha, the first ever parachute test jump in St. Louis, and he continues to explore the limits of aviation and daredevilry. I am speaking, ladies and gentlemen, of none other than the Birdman, Mr. Roger Mackenzieeee!!!"

The crowd exploded in roar of applause and whistles and cheers as a thin, large-eared man in baggy trousers shambled out from the bottom of the grandstands, waving shyly and lifting his

cap. He shuffled out to stand beside the Mayor. They spoke briefly, nodding to one another and shaking hands, then the Birdman headed towards his airplane, joined by a second man wearing coveralls.

The Mayor raised the bullhorn again. "The Birdman tells me that conditions for flying are optimal today, and that he's going to give us a show we'll never forget!"

Roger and his mechanic circled the machine, their hands swarming over it as they plucked guy wires and moved rudders in a last-minute check. Roger replaced his cap with a padded leather helmet and goggles, and shrugged into a leather jacket. As the mechanic positioned the propeller, Roger climbed into his seat and tugged on his gloves. When he was ready he nodded.

The mechanic rose up on his toes like a maestro, arms outstretched as he gripped the propeller, then thrust it downward, spinning away from the great blade. The engine coughed and died. A small blue cloud of smoke drifted upward, evidence of the failed explosion. An expectant silence filled the air as the mechanic set the propeller again and spun it a second time. The engine caught immediately, spewing a second cloud of smoke, and emitting a harsh, rattling roar that startled horses and small children, the opening bars of a symphony of thunder and steel.

The airplane began moving immediately, as though it had intentions of its own, but Roger was guiding it, steering it onto the track, where he let it idle as he circled the track once, then stopped at the end opposite the opened section of fence.

The engine began to run up its speed, causing a fierce wind to blow past its tail and into the faces of the people behind it. But the machine refused to move, staying fixed to the ground, screaming and shuddering as it threatened to fly apart at any moment. Behind it the crowd scattered like leaves before a storm, men shielding their faces with collars and hats.

Frank clapped his hands over his ears as the engine roared louder and louder. "Damnation!" he yelled, but his voice was obliterated beneath the clamour of sound.

Then it began to move as if at a silent command, shuddering still, but picking up speed quickly as it swayed and lumbered down the track. A black dog ran out from the stands, barking

voicelessly, then shied into the ground as the machine bore down on it. The engine's roar was caught beneath the roof of the grandstand, amplified and hurled down on the spectators' heads like bolts of thunder. The machine hurtled onward, approaching the end of the track, bounced over the ridge of dirt and into Willard's field, wings rocking and swaying as it rushed across the hay field.

And then it was lifted from the ground, rising into the air like some fearful mirage. A collective gasp arose from the crowd and then, as if realizing the import of what they were witness to, a cathartic cheer went up.

Aubrey stood mesmerized by the visceral tingling the engine had caused in him, savouring the feeling as it faded. The machine rose higher and banked away from them, no longer demonic and violent, but floating on air like a large raptor.

Cora grasped Eudie's arm and squeezed. She could not think of what to say. Eudie responded with a nod. There was nothing to say. One could only watch and relish the moment.

The airplane turned and glided back down towards the grandstand, banking sharply in front of the stands and swinging away towards the mountain. A man had ridden onto the track on a saddlehorse, and was immediately recognized as Geordie Scallon, astride his quarter horse, Cadwallader. The crowd roared their approval, sensing the shape of things to come. It was well known that Cadwallader had not lost a horserace in two years--this would be his greatest challenge yet. Scallon waved his hat and trotted his mount around the track as the airplane swung out over the lake in a wide circle. He reined up at the spot where the airplane had started, turning in his saddle to watch the airplane skim the tops of the cottonwoods as it made its low approach over the Polo field. When the machine was nearly upon him, Geordie laid the heels to Cadwallader with a savage yell. The animal bolted forward into an immediate gallop, nostrils flared and ears shot forward. Geordie's elbows pumped like mock wings as he pushed his hands forward over the horse's neck to give the beast free rein.

Above the churning horse and rider the Birdman rode calmly, banking into the first turn and dropping the wingtip within feet of the horse's surging hindquarters as though to nudge the animal to greater speed. Down the back straight Roger accelerated and flowed past Cadwallader easily, and dangled a wingtip in front of him through the final turn like a hare before a hound.

Geordie pressed himself flat over Cadwallader's neck as they lined out for the finish, spurring and whipping frantically, but the animal had no more speed to give. Roger wagged his wings as he passed the grandstand, then banked sharply, pulling up into a climb and swinging out over the fields again The crowd cheered animal and machine. The fastest quarter-miler in the valley had been defeated, but it had taken a flying machine to do it.

As Geordie left the track with a wave of the hat, a motorcar drove on, a Model A Ford stripped of windscreen, doors, and top. Hunched behind the wheel was Jules, the mechanic from the Ben Richard's, wearing his flat cap wrenched down around his ears, held on by a pair of goggles. He spun the wheel and with a snarl of open exhaust pipes shot onto the track, the driving wheels throwing dirt. He circled the track once, then backed into the starting spot, turning in his seat, as Geordie had, to watch the airplane approach across the field behind him.

Jules didn't wait for the airplane to get too close before revving his engine and releasing the clutch. The rear end kicked, wheels spinning, then heaved forward as the tires grabbed. Jules worked the gears with quick precision as he hunched behind the steering wheel, grim-faced as a man at the gallows. By the time he passed the grandstand, the Bleriot was floating directly above him. The combined noise from the two machines shook the planks of the grandstand and sent vibrations along the rows of seats.

They ran even through the first turn, Jules throwing the steering wheel side to side to control the skid while the Birdman made indiscernible movements and banked smoothly through the turn. The motorcar accelerated down the back straight as the wheels found traction, and Jules nosed ahead. They entered the final turn dead even, and again Jules fought to keep the rear end

from sliding out while the Birdman dangled a wing in front of him, then swept ahead to beat him by two lengths.

The Birdman soared past the grandstand, pulling the nose of the airplane upward and banking sharply so that the machine began to spiral up and up, twisting itself up into the sky. Higher and slower it climbed until it had stopped its ascent, though the engine strained to push it higher. For a moment the machine appeared to come to a dead halt in the air, unable to screw itself any closer to heaven. Then the sound of the engine died and the machine began to slip backwards, tail first. The crowd fell silent as the tail slewed to one side and the airplane started falling sideways. Tail and nose passed one another in the air and the machine fell into a nose-first dive. The Bleriot hurtled toward the ground, the signal paths of its controls somehow reversed. A woman screamed and collapsed into the arms of the man beside her husband. Men calculated the rapidly closing distance between the airplane and the ground with inadequate comprehension of the dynamics of speed and gravity, able to imagine nothing but the most horrifying and immediate catastrophe. It was clear the Birdman had miscalculated this time. Sweating hands were withdrawn from pockets and poised to cover the eyes of wives and children.

The airplane's attitude seemed to make a subtle change, and then the Birdman could be seen gathering the steering control to his chest as he leaned back, lifting the nose of the plummeting machine. A great shuddering and hissing of air was heard as the nose lifted and lifted until the crowd realized with an appreciative gasp that the airplane was gliding silent and horizontal above the field. The engine roared back to life, not dead after all, and a cheer arose to welcome the return of noise and smoke.

Fainted women were slapped lightly about the cheeks and brought around, and galloping hearts were coaxed back down to their proper places. Men turned to their neighbours and tried to smile as they spoke in quiet voices. You didn't really think he'd drive it into the ground, did you? And the neighbours swallowed hard and answered: No sir, not for one second.

While the Birdman made another wide circle out over the lake, the mechanic jogged out to the centre of the infield, drawing a large white scarf from his pocket. He placed the scarf on the ground, shaping it to form a small peak in the centre. The airplane returned, circling the field twice while the Birdman looked down at the scarf. On his third pass he glided in at an idle, dropped one wing and began to sideslip towards the ground. The wing dipped further, nearly touching the ground as the tip caught the scarf and whisked it into the air. The scarf fluttered from the wingtip for a moment, then drifted free and slid back to earth. "OLE!" roared the crowd.

The Birdman came gliding in over the field for his landing, shedding air speed, drifting closer to the ground until the wheels struck and bounced off the dirt, the airplane suddenly travelling very fast. The wheels struck again and stuck and the airplane slowed quickly, coming to a dusty halt before the stands. The crowd erupted in a cheer of unbridled adulation, tossing hats and programs and children in the air. Bravo! Magnificent! they cried.

Roger was signalling someone among the group seated in the infield. The Mayor and several of his councillors turned their heads to Aubrey, and Aubrey clutched his breast. The Mayor nodded and Aubrey rose, his heart pumping heavily as he made his way towards the idling machine. He felt as though he were moving through a dream as he eased himself into the passenger seat. The flight itself just a short loop above the town, but it was a powerful affirmation for him of what the twentieth century, the modern age, would hold for him. It gave him a point of view he had only been able to imagine up to now.

Several more men were taken up, the Mayor and a couple of reporters, before the Birdman climbed down from his seat, coughing, and motioned to the mechanic. The mechanic arrived with a cup, which Roger took and emptied in one draught.

The Professor raised both hands to the sky and intoned in a priestly voice: "With the invention of this airship I hold control of the entire world, and there lies no force within the reach of humanity which is able to resist me. What majesty!" He touched a finger to the corner of his good eye. "What absolute, unrivalled majesty!"

Frank looked across at the Professor, noticing the women he'd been speaking with earlier looking at him too.

"This is an historic moment, Frank!" said the Professor. "Remember this."

Frank recognized one of them, he realized, the one with the red hair. Her grey eyes met Frank's and he turned his face away to stare at the empty track before she too condemned him for his moral shortcoming. Boyd's final statement, Boyd's lie, had made a big impression on the community when it came out in *The Courier*. Oldfield had certainly believed it, and had not even granted Frank the dignity of meeting him face to face to tell him that he wouldn't take him back. In the space of a week, Frank watched his options dwindle until it seemed the only choices left were to fold laundry or go up to the rail camps, or do nothing for a while and think it all over. Frank chose the latter, needing only slight encouragement from the Professor. It occurred to him that maybe Boyd had been right to try to leave this place.

After reestablishing their casual drinking acquaintance at the Bellevue, the Professor had offered Frank the use of a lean-to that sagged off the back of his cabin. The Professor kept a large, earthen jug of potato wine beneath his bed, which he drank through a hose. It was a disarming brew which demanded an acquired taste, but Frank managed. All the Professor wanted in return, as far as Frank could tell, was someone to listen to him talk about history and morality and law and philosophy and literature. Frank had grown used to listening to the lectures and rantings, even though he didn't understand much of it, but that didn't seem to bother the Professor, and he answered the Professor's questions about him and Boyd as well as he could, which seemed to satisfy the learned man.

Frank excused himself from the Professor and the women, and headed across the Polo field to the lake. Maybe it was the result of his youth spent on the riverboats, watching the patterns in the water's flow and learning to read the moods of the river in its upwellings and bubble lines and smooth, wide tongues that drew Frank to the lake. A lake did not possess the same voices and moods as a river, but the large body of water had a presence, nonetheless, that

drew him like an old habit. He squatted on his heels by the water's edge and listened. There were voices after all, he noticed, mere whispers in the waves' slipping in and out of the shore, but they told him nothing he did not already know.

He followed the shore until he came to the CPR wharf, then entered the half-empty streets. A small crowd of men had gathered in front of the livery stable, and Frank drifted onto the edges of it. In the centre of the crowd was a middle-aged woman entreating the men to something, Frank couldn't make out what exactly. One by one the men shook their heads and mumbled excuses to her until she threw up her hands in frustration. "There must be somebody that can do it!" she cried.

Frank strained to hear the men's low-voiced exchanges. Something about a broken leg. "What's the lady's problem?" he asked finally.

A man turned his head and said quickly: "Husband broke his leg. She needs a teamster."

"A teamster?" asked Frank, but the man had already turned away. Shit, I can drive a team as well as any man. "I can do it," he said aloud. A couple of heads turned, but the woman did not hear. "I can do it," Frank said again, louder, and several faces regarded him. "I can drive a team."

"What? Who?" asked the woman.

"This fellow here says he can drive your team," said someone, and the crowd parted between Frank and the woman.

"You? What's your name, mister?" she asked, taking several steps closer. A man leaned forward and spoke to her behind his hand.

"Wilson. Frank Wilson. I've run pairs and fours."

"Frank Wilson?" She regarded him with a shrewd eye.

Frank could hear his name being passed from mouth to ear as the space around him increased. Someone among the crowd spoke, and several men laughed. The woman looked at them sharply. "Well, Mr. Wilson," she said. "I'd have to see how Mr. Lane would feel about you driving his team. He might rather turn his team over to a Chinese than a moral reprobate."

A big man guffawed, and several others chuckled. "That's a young team, too, beneath the age of majority, aren't they?" said someone, and the laughter broke like rain in Frank's face.

He eyed the crowd of amused faces. Dandies and merchants all, not a callussed hand in the bunch. Frank replaced his hat, and felt his hands fisting. "I reckon I made a mistake here, ma'am," he said as politely as he could manage. "I thought you were looking for someone to do some honest labour." He turned and retreated down the boardwalk, turning the first corner he came to in order to escape the laughter and comments. He drove his fist into a clapboard wall and walked on.

Next morning he lay on his pallet, watching the shafts of sunlight drive down through the trees and berry bushes. Sparrows and thrushes threaded the bushes and sang with astounding great voices, unmindful of the sleeping. Frank lifted the blanket across his chest and felt the warm air flow onto his face. It smelled familiar, of damp wool and old sweat. On the other side of the wall the Professor snored, oblivious to the unbelievable brightness overtaking the world.

Frank sat up and scratched himself. He gathered his blanket and shook it out, advancing on the chokecherry bush, blanket raised as if to smother the joyful singing. The birds flushed and rose to the tree tops, and Frank laid his dark blanket over the bush to let the sun pour over it. He heard a knocking on the door of the cabin, and the Professor stumbling about and speaking gruffly.

A lad of ten or twelve met Frank at the side of the cabin.

"Mr. Wilson?" The boy was wide-eyed, he'd never been this close to squalid men before.

"Yeah."

"Mr. Lane says for you to come this morning if you want to drive the team."

"This morning?"

"Soon as you can," said the boy. He spun and sprinted out to the road, where a nag stood droop-headed. The boy launched himself belly-first onto the horse's back, forked his legs over it and drove his heels into the ribs.

"Well, well," said Frank. "He must surely be a desperate man to turn his team loose with a moral reprobate. Guess we better go see the man."

The Professor was standing at the open door. "You going to work?"

"Looks like it."

"That's interesting," said the Professor, studying Frank and the sky simultaneously. "I wouldn't have expected your pariah days to end quite so soon."

"Yeah. Well," said Frank.

* * *

Eudie arrived at the fair grounds to find Roger waiting by the grandstands. "Ready to fly?" he asked, a cigarette dangling from the corner of his mouth. His cap was raked back on his head at a severe angle, his ears jutting beneath it as if to keep it from sliding off.

"Sure am." Eudie removed her helmet and jacket. An idiotic grin was stuck across her face. She could not get rid of it.

"We should've put you out there, the other day," said Roger, nodding at the motorcycle. "That would've been a more interesting race."

"Oh, I don't know. I've never ridden the track. And socially, you know, it might've been a bit of a faux pas," she said, fluttering a hand demurely.

"Right," he chuckled, his laugh breaking into a wheezy cough. "Oh," he groaned, recovering. "I thought this dry climate was supposed to help."

"Help?"

"My lungs," he said, pointing to his chest.

"What's wrong?" she asked.

"Bit of TB." He withdrew a flask from his pocket and spun the top free. "Shall we go flying, then?" He took a quick sip from the flask and put it away.

"What is that?" she asked.

"My medicine," he said.

"Shouldn't you be in a hospital bed?"

"Hell no," said Roger. They were walking across the infield to a temporary hangar that had been erected. "Consumption makes me a better flyer."

Eudie said nothing, uncertain how to respond.

They folded back the tarp door, flooding the dim hangar with light. Eric, the mechanic, was tinkering with the engine while Jules looked on.

"Morning, boys," Roger hailed them.

"Hi."

"Hello, Miss Harding. How's the motorcycle running?"

"Hi, Jules. Fine, just fine. Learning something about airplanes?"

"I see you two have met," observed Roger.

"He's my mechanic," said Eudie.

"She ready to go?"

"Yeah," said Eric. "I just have to tighten these manifold bolts, here, and fill the oil."

"Just hang on and enjoy the ride for now," he told her, showing her where to place feet and hands. He climbed into the pilot's seat and made several quick checks and adjustments, then nodded to Eric. Eudie gripped the sides of the seat fiercely as the engine roared to life and set the entire frail structure to shaking and shuddering alarmingly. Roger turned in his seat and gave her the thumbs up. She nodded and grinned, unwilling to pry a hand free.

They taxied onto the racetrack, and as they entered the straight stretch Roger opened the throttle. Eudie felt the machine jump forward beneath her and gritted her teeth, tightening her grip on the seat as they sped along the ground. They passed the empty grandstand, which hurled their noise back at them, then bounced over the ridge of dirt and into the open field, the airplane shaking and straining as if about to destroy itself. The machine was shaking too violently, the

engine screaming too loud, and then the field fell away beneath them as Eudie felt herself lifted from the bonds of the earth in a single, powerful gesture that was smooth as cream.

Eudie gripped and grinned as she watched the ground fall away below, noticing the sensation of speed disappear as they climbed. The airplane which shook and shuddered so furiously now rode easily on the air as if drawn along a sash of silk. The wings and struts and wires hummed with the hiss of passing air, and the engine worked much less hard now they were off the ground. The streets of the city ran out below like a scaled-down model, complete with tiny people and buggies and motorcars. The lake shimmered like a huge river of blue and silver that flowed out of sight in either direction.

It did not feel fast, except for the wind beating about her face, but the absence of speed didn't matter. As they left the ground behind, Eudie realized that speed was being replaced by something subtle, something far more exhilarating and liberating; an absolute and unlimited ability to glide and soar in any direction, at any moment.

The left wing tipped towards the ground and Eudie found herself looking down at tobacco fields as they banked and turned in a long, gliding turn. They flew above the valley bottom for fifteen or twenty minutes as Roger put the airplane through a continuous series of climbs, stalls, and slide-slips, planing and gliding through turns that ebbed and flowed from one to the next like a dance. As they made a lazy, winding descent towards the racetrack Roger shouted something over his shoulder that she could not make out.

"What?" she yelled back.

He shook his head and they grinned at one another.

The ground rushed up to meet them, speed returned, and they bounded across the field and onto the track. A small crowd of children and idle men had gathered along the fence to watch the Birdman and his machine perform again. Eudie remained on her seat while Roger climbed down, then offered his hand. She shook her head. "Take me back up."

"I knew it," he said.

"That was the most amazing experience, Roger," she said, her voice tinged with reverence. "It was like--"

"Don't start talking in poetry, now," he cautioned.

She laughed, and pulled her helmet off. "Will you teach me to fly?" she asked bluntly.

Roger wiped the grin from his lips and jammed a cigarette into the corner of his mouth as if to prevent another grin from appearing. "Tomorrow," he said.

"I have to deliver the mail tomorrow."

"We'll do it with the Bleriot," he suggested.

"What? The mail?" she asked, disbelieving. He was teasing.

He nodded. "Sure. There's always an empty field somewhere to land in."

Eudie wanted to run through the streets, shouting and dancing. The world around her had been transformed, made small and insignificant from the air--she tossed her head back and stared skyward, wanting to be up there, up there! She rose onto her toes with each step, her hair flowing plumose about her head as she ignored the indiscreet stares of passersby.

Stunt riding was dirty, tough, and dangerous. The danger was immediate and tangible in the smell of burnt oil and gasoline fumes, in the film it left on your hands and clothes. The risk of collision or coming off the wall was present at every moment of every ride. Every performance was driven by adrenalin, godless fear, and machismo. Even riding on roads had an element of toughness to it.

But flying! Flying was poetic. Flying was the gesture of a woman; full of the finesse and grace of birds. Flying was an act of inspiration whose purity and clarity transcended the bounds of gravity and earthliness. She was deliriously and happily intoxicated as she waxed poetic in her head. She would relate every moment of it to Cora--the experience demanded that it be turned into words and shared.

* * *

They put him in a different part of the jail when they took him back. They put him in the basement of the south wing with the other men who like him would, before the end of summer, be put to death.

There was a small window high in one corner of his cell, level with the ground outside. The view, depending whether you stood under the window or back against the far wall, was of the sky or the outside wall of the prison, or both. The voice of the wind was rarely heard, and at a distance. It was as though the eternal silence that would follow death had begun prematurely, and the men in their mausoleums were loathe to interfere with it, moving quietly in their cells, speaking in low voices when they must speak.

The sun entered the cells regularly, a silent visitor that slipped between the bars with an illicit brightness. It would begin just after dawn, tingeing the brick sill with shades of light that ranged from a weak, pale yellow to an intense rusty hue that approached the redness of blood some mornings. The viscous light would flood the sill and pour down the wall in a shifting shape like some highly burnished blade, growing long and distended across a wall inscribed with names and dates of dead men, until it pooled on the floor in the corner. Then, like a sentient presence the bright pool would begin to slide across the dirt floor towards Boyd.

The pool moved so slowly across the floor that it was impossible to stare at it and detect its movement, and his mind would wander. The guards would arrive with the breakfast trays, jangling their rings of keys, rattling keys in locks, and clanging doors open and shut as they slid the trays inside, and the sun would be forgotten for a time.

Boyd thought about death. Not intentionally, but inadvertently, inevitably. It invaded even the most innocent and idle of thoughts, taking him by surprise again and again. He would see a blurry death's-head imprinted on the congealing skin of his porridge, and stir viciously to obliterate it. Images of home, when he was able to summon them, were of November, when the fields lay close to death, the birds long since escaped southward, and a slick, grey pall hung from

the sky as winter prepared to smother all that remained alive and struggling on the vast plain. The slough was iced over solid, a pair of ducks caught by the legs like table ornaments.

The cell stayed cool as a tomb during the hot days, and Boyd ventured into the heat of the yard less and less to stare at the patch of sky reeling overhead. In his cell there was comfort in the coolness that allowed him to sleep for long periods, or stare at the wall or the ceiling as he relived his life in several different versions, none of which matched the version he felt himself trapped in. One day near the end of May he sat up out his reverie and realized he would die a virgin.

* * *

Aubrey had been flying ever since the day of the exhibition, metaphorically speaking. He began lying awake at night with his eyes squeezed shut as he tried to imagine himself soaring aboard the airplane again and again. And the delivery of the mail by airplane had caused a new flood of possibilities to rush through his head faster than he could articulate or examine them. On the third day he loaded Mrs. Ambrose in the cabin of the houseboat and headed back to Kelowna at full steam. He had to see the Bleriot again; had to be near it and the man who could fly. And there was something else he had to do, he sensed, which would only become clear after reaching Kelowna.

He did not speak of his ideas to Mrs. Ambrose, who rarely emerged from her stupor with any degree of lucidity since he had increased her dosage. It was for the best. She seemed content to exist in her dream state, and required much less care that way. She had reached the end of her usefulness. The old wretch had failed to see the value, the necessity of embracing speed and technology in order to keep abreast of progress and advancement. Spirituality was a nineteenth century notion which was clearly being supplanted by the pragmatic wisdom of technology.

Aubrey found himself thinking often about the woman he'd hired to deliver the mail. She seemed to defy all social expectations, and was far ahead of most men in her embrace of

technology. Miss Harding was a modern woman who understood the importance of machines and speed, and the possibilities they offered.

Aubrey began to go for long drives in the afternoons, up and down the valley, among the apple and peach blossoms, so fragrant and delicate, so full of potential. As the blossoms began to fade and drop like confetti, he began to drive the side roads up the valleys where there were fewer buggies and horses. He drove fast all the time now, going as fast as the narrow roads would allow, testing the limits of the motorcar and himself, mining speed.

* * *

June 11, 1912
Port Arthur, Ontario
Englishman -- a Carpenter.
183 lbs.
Drop 4 ft. 7 in.
2:14.
Raining.

* * *

Flying was a different aesthetic from riding, to use Fetherstone's word--no, Roger had used it, too. "I consider myself an artist, laugh if you want," Roger'd shrugged. "No," said Eudie. "I can see why. What you do has its own kind of beauty."

She spent the better part of every day with Roger during his stay, flying, eating, and walking with him, soaking up the principles and anecdotes he used to instruct her. And each evening she returned to the hostel where, though always made to feel welcome, sat at the edges of the gatherings.

The Gilman Hostel was fast becoming the cultural centre for the young and single women of the town. Salons and readings were being held twice a week and groups were organized for outings to local musical productions and concerts, Miss Verna Fulton and The Allen Players coming next week, and to the Nickleodeon for moving pictures. Cora had become openly involved with young Hillary, to Eudie's relief, removing the necessity of confronting her curiosity, and removing the opportunity as well.

She and Cora talked most evenings, about flying and the Hostel mainly, and Eudie found, for the first time since childhood, someone she could tell most everything to, so long as Hillary wasn't hanging on Cora's arm.

Roger, she quickly learned, was a man curiously detached from everything in the world except flying. He ate disinterestedly and grunted at splendid sunsets, but talked incessantly about flying, about the sequence of hand and foot movements in performing a vertical stall and recovery, about lift and glide, and about the possibilities of manoeuvres that had not yet been performed, such as taking the machine over the top of a vertical loop, and flying upside down. "Somebody'll do it soon. All it takes is more horsepower," he predicted.

Eudie learned to let the Bleriot fly itself, and make only the necessary corrections for stable flight. Roger taught her to aim for the landing point and glide onto it. "Always remember," he told her. "Most airplanes, this one included, are built to do two things--climb and glide. Landing is just gliding. You only have to keep it straight. Don't try to force it into doing things it can't."

"But that's what you do," she replied.

He nodded, straight-faced. "That's what I do."

When she was able to land without slamming the wheels into the ground, or without the tail kicked out of line, he sent her up on her own. "You're a natural," he told her, as if that would explain away all her self-doubt and fear.

They decided she would do Friday's mail on the motorcycle, so Roger and Eric could do some maintenance work. Fetherstone met her at her Kelowna stop, and only then did she realize she'd been seeing him lurking near the field all week, watching.

"No air mail today?" he asked jovially.

"They're working on the Bleriot today."

"Yes, yes, I know. I was over talking to them. Roger tells me you've learned to fly very quickly." He smiled approvingly.

Eudie took out her watch and checked the time. "I should be going or I'll be running late."

"Of course," said Fetherstone, handing her the pay packet. "I'll see you anon."

Eudie returned to Kelowna first thing in the morning, having spent the night at Greata to feed and water the stock, and milk the complaining cow. Roger met her with a puzzling expression, plucking the cigarette from the shelf of his lower lip before he spoke. "You know this Fetherstone fellow?"

"He's the man I deliver the mail for."

"He bought the Bleriot."

"What?"

"He bought it."

"What's he going to do with it? The mail? Are you teaching him to fly?" She hit Roger with a barrage of questions fueled by a mixture of uncertainty and excitement. There was no doubt it would have implications for her and she wanted to know before being told by Fetherstone.

"No. I don't know. Saves us a lot of work not having to ship it."

"Did he say what he ...?"

"No." Roger crushed his cigarette against his heel. "But you're the only one around who can fly it, as far as I know. Look, I'm not supposed to be telling you this, so...."

"When did he approach you?" she asked, needing to know all she could about it.

"We made the deal last night."

He probably plans to tell me today, she thought.

"He left this morning," said Roger. "Said he had to go home and attend to business."

"Did he leave any message for me?"

"No. He asked me not to tell you."

"I see. You look unhappy."

"I guess I am."

"Why?"

He scraped the grass with his shoe. "I guess I was hoping you would come back east and fly with me."

"What?"

"Yeah. You're good, and I ... I think we'd be good together."

"Wait a minute, Roger. What're you saying?" One week together and he was asking her to run away with him. Just like Jake. She'd gone with Jake willingly, but it was different this time, it was too easy to see how it would end.

"You know what I'm saying," he said quietly.

"I can't," she replied. "I've got too much invested here to just up and leave. I'm through being a gypsy."

Roger gave her a funny look and spun open his flask.

"I'm sorry," she said.

"No," he said. "I knew you probably wouldn't come, but I had to ask."

The following week Aubrey was not at the Post Office to meet her with her pay, as arranged, and the Postmaster had not seen him nor received any message. Eudie waited for half an hour, then set out for home without her pay, dismayed.

Roger had caught the train out of Sicamous the day before, trying again to tempt her to go with him. "If you change your mind let me know. You're good. Good as Moisant or Quimby. I could get you a machine."

"Thanks," she replied, flattered. Roger had inspired her with tales about Mathilde Moisant and Harriet Quimby, the first women pilots in the U.S. Moisant had set an American altitude record of 1,500 feet the previous year, while Harriet Quimby had, in April just passed, been the first woman to cross the English Channel solo, flying at 6,000 feet. "I need to see what I

can do here with the garden and the mail route." And she added, as it occurred to her for the first time: "I'm almost content here, right now."

"What's missing?"

"I don't know. Maybe nothing's missing, maybe I'm just not seeing it right yet," she said.

"Well, the offer stands," said Roger.

"Okay."

At home she parked the motorcycle, went into the house for a bar of soap, a towel, and a cotton shift, then headed down the path to the lake. The shallow bay was gaining more and more afternoon sun each day, as the solstice approached, and the water was losing its debilitating coldness. After a quick look around, Eudie stripped out of her riding clothes, dropped them in the shallow water and waded in, armed with the soap. Chicken skin rose on her arms and stomach, and she immersed herself with a gasp and began scrubbing away the road dust.

She swam out and floated on her back, staring up at the bright sky as an osprey glided overhead on fixed wings, examining the surface of the lake for prey. Eudie imagined what she must look like from up there, a stark, white body draped on the surface. She grew conscious of her nakedness and rolled onto her front to look up and down the sheet of water. A squarish houseboat was chugging up the shore from the south, still a ways off, but Eudie began stroking for shore.

She dried quickly, dropped the shift over her head and wrapped her hair in the towel. She gathered the dress and pulled it up over her knees, knotting it to hold it there, then waded in for her soaking clothes, ringing them out and tossing them ashore. The houseboat, she noticed, was heading straight for the bay, showing no intention of changing course to pass by the point. She gathered the clothes from the beach and loaded the twisted garments on one arm like pieces of firewood, then, with a quick glance over her shoulder, walked up the beach, placing her bare feet gingerly on the coarse sand.

"Miss Harding!" a voice called behind her. "Miss Harding!"

Eudie turned to see a man on the front deck of the boat, an arm raised. He hurried back inside, and she heard the engine die. He reappeared as the boat drifted towards her. "Miss Harding!" It was Fetherstone. "There you are! What luck!"

Eudie tried to undo the knotted hem with one hand, succeeding only in pulling the dress further above her knees. Damn, of all the times for him to appear. She tugged the dress as far down as it would go. He was staring at her legs.

"Hello," she said flatly.

"Bathing, were you?" he observed jovially. "Wonderful, the water must feel wonderful on your ... is it cold?"

She nodded.

The flat hull crunched gently against the slope of the beach. Aubrey felt a rush of breathlessness at her unexpected appearance; her lovely pale calves disarmed him, and her face, her cheekbones showed their full beauty and strength with her hair wrapped under the towel like that. He barely concealed a gasp as he realized that she was in all probability naked beneath her thin cotton dress.

"Did you bring my pay?" She was asking him for the second time, he realized.

"Oh! Yes!" he started. "The very reason for my visit." He knelt and began wrestling a plank forward.

"You can just hand it to me," said Eudie, ignoring the plank and stepping into the water.

Aubrey looked up from his gangplank, his eyes inadvertently alighting on her bosom. Yes, he saw, she was exquisitely naked beneath the dress.

"Do you have it?" She shifted her armload to cover her breasts.

"Of, of course," he said, still on his knees, his hands resting in his lap. "But I was thinking why don't you come aboard. Our first month of high speed mail delivery calls for a small celebration. Don't you agree?" He smiled widely.

"A celebration?" she said uncertainly. She did not like the sound of it, but it was an opportunity to find out what his intentions were for the Bleriot. "Okay," she said, and his face brightened. "But I have to get rid of these wet clothes and dry my hair. I'll be back down shortly."

Oh. Aubrey's heart sank. She would not remain in her gossamer cotton for him. "All right," he said, concealing the deflation he felt. He watched her stride up the beach and into the trees, her hips rolling beneath the dress, bare calves flexing brightly. He stood up, sweating and trembling, and entered the cabin. He took a thin flask from his inner pocket and sipped quickly from it, noticing that he was still very aroused.

Eudie shed the flimsy shift with a shiver. The damp cotton had chilled her, and Fetherstone's ill-concealed appraisal of her had caused an unpleasant coldness as well. She recalled Cora's blunt warning as she legged her way into a pair of trousers. What sort of celebration did Fetherstone have in mind, she wondered?

When she returned to the beach he was waiting on the foredeck, smoking a cigar and wearing his tweed flatcap raked forward at what was supposed to be a jaunty angle. He was visibly disappointed at her trousers and collared shirt buttoned to the top. Her hair was free, though, glowing like an aura in the afternoon light. "Champagne?" he offered.

"Oh, my," she said, ignoring his proffered hand as she stepped aboard. "Tea would really be fine."

"Oh, no," he said boldly. "Something cold and bubbly is in order. This way." He led her through the cabin to the rear deck, where two chairs and a small table awaited them in the shade of the awning.

Eudie took a seat and Aubrey disappeared back into the cabin, emerging a moment later with a silver tray sporting two crystal champagne glasses, a bottle of French champagne, and a bowl of grapes. He placed the tray ceremoniously upon the table and straightened, a broad smile on his face.

"Mr. Fetherstone, this really isn't necessary."

"Aubrey," he said. "Call me Aubrey. And yes it is necessary, quite necessary, I believe. You and I, my dear, are proving, have proven the value of speed to the citizens of this valley, and shown them but one of the constructive uses to which it may be put." He twisted the wire cage free of the bottleneck and began pulling on the cork, the bottle clenched between his knees. When it was nearly out he held the bottle up before him and pressed the cork free with his thumbs. With a resounding POP! the cork shot into the awning and the bottle foamed uncontrollably in Aubrey's hands, dripping onto his pants. "Ho!" he shouted. "Whoops! Ha, ha!" He filled the slender glasses to overflowing, offering one to Eudie.

"Here's to speed!" he toasted, clinking his glass lingeringly against hers.

"To speed," she said, amused and perplexed.

He lowered his squat bulk into the chair and drew out a folded handkerchief. He patted at his forehead and neck as if putting out small fires. "Goodness, it's warm," he exclaimed, loosening his tie with violent jerks.

Eudie sipped at her drink, enjoying the tiny, cool explosions in her mouth, ignoring, for a moment, the fidgeting man beside her and gazing up the lake towards Peachland. She draped an arm on the rail, and rested her head against it.

"So, tell me about your flying experience," he was saying.

Eudie raised her head. He leaned towards her, elbows on his knees. "Are you tired?" he asked in a kindly voice.

"Excuse me. Yes, I guess I am a bit. And the champagne," she said, smiling weakly. "Sorry."

"Not a bit." He reached into his vest pocket and withdrew an envelope. "Here is your week's pay," he said. "And your bonus," he added.

"Bonus? What for?" She eyed him distrustfully. "I don't deserve a bonus." She withdrew the money and counted it. Seventeen dollars. Five extra.

"You do deserve it."

"What for?"

"For delivering the mail by air. I received no end of compliments about that from folks. Credit where credit is due, I always say."

"It's really not necessary," said Eudie, placing the extra money on the table.

"Take it," he said, his voice stern. Then, more gently: "As an employer I am entitled to reward my employees from time to time as I see fit, and I consider this a most deserving, exemplary situation." He took the money and pressed it into her hands, enclosing the money and her hands with his, giving a reassuring squeeze. "I insist."

Eudie sighed. "You're much too kind," she said, and smiled.

"Good." His fingers grazed her knee as he released her hands. He refilled both glasses, then looked at her with a slightly demented grin. He chuckled and raised his glass to his lips.

Eudie helped herself to the grapes, breaking the flesh between her teeth and resting the split halves on her tongue, letting the flavour seep over her tongue before crushing them with her teeth. She had not tasted fresh grapes or champagne for probably four years, she calculated. Not since the first show in Montreal with Jake, where they'd been treated like visiting royalty. She was beginning to feel languid and decadent, sipping champagne on the lake in the comfort of a June afternoon, in that time when the sun has just gone behind the mountain and the day is still bright and warm. The shadows warm and inviting. She crossed her legs at the knee and bounced her foot lightly.

"So you've learned to fly?" said Aubrey.

"Yes. Roger was good enough to spend several days with me. He was a very good teacher. I enjoyed it very much." She was gazing into the distance as she spoke, and Aubrey watched her lips produce each word. Her voice was rich and soothing in his ears, and a smile drew back the corners of her mouth, now and then, to reveal the slight gap between her front teeth. Ah, my Wife of Bath, thought Aubrey, finding himself wanting to touch her face and hair, wanting to gather her hair in his hands and stroke its softness. She raised the glass to her lips and

Aubrey watched the slight pucker form to receive the sparkling mead. A thin, bright moustache glistened like tiny beads of glass caught in the fine hairs of her upper lip, and he resisted the urge to dab it away with his kerchief. "I have dreamt of little else since," he said.

She looked directly at him, seeing into his very thoughts.

"About flying. I dream of an airplane and, and ..." And you, he wanted to say, you, my pilot, my ... "And it's fabulous," he finished weakly.

"It is fabulous," she said, encouragingly. "You're absolutely correct."

Aubrey stood up and leaned on the rail. He let out a long sigh; he could not tell her yet.

Eudie pulled herself up by the rail, feeling the effect of the drink on her empty stomach.

"It's beautiful here, isn't it?" he said.

"Mmm," she replied, gripping the rail with both hands and wondering how to find out about the Bleriot without being direct.

Her voice sounded content as a cat to Aubrey's ears. "More champagne?" he asked, turning his head to see her in profile against the sharp blue water. He looked away quickly, the way a man standing on top of a cliff cannot look down too long without being tempted to jump.

"I have chores waiting for me," she said. "This was very nice of you, though."

Aubrey looked up at her, trying to conceal the wave of panic breaking inside him. "Oh, you can't leave yet," he said, forcing a smile. "We have more champagne. And food. I have some cheese and biscuits. You must be hungry?"

She was ravenous. She shook her head. "No, I--"

He took her arm, trying gently to steer her back to her seat. "Come now, my dear. Have a seat and I'll get you something to eat." He felt the muscles in her arm tense beneath his fingers. "Please, don't be difficult."

"No," she said, voice trembling as she removed his hand from her arm. "Thank you, but no. I must get to my chores."

His hand clamped around her forearm again and he looked at her from pleading, yet menacing, eyes. "There is something I have to tell you," he said.

Ah, thought Eudie. Now we're getting somewhere.

"As you have probably learned I have purchased the Bleriot from Mr. Mackenzie."

Eudie nodded and waited for him to continue.

"Now, your first thought may have been that I intend to employ it in the delivery of the mail, but that is not my intention. It's far too expensive at this point. I didn't get where I am today by making foolish business decisions, I can assure you. Clear thinking and rational analysis have been my guiding principles from the beginning." He'd spent some time preparing and rehearsing this speech, it was clear. "What I have in mind is to fly for pleasure only. Flying has changed my perception of the world in a significant way."

"I know what you mean," said Eudie, masking her disappointment. "So you want me to teach you to fly?"

"No. Well, eventually, perhaps." He paused to drain the bottle into their glasses. "What I propose is to fly one or two times each week, with you as my pilot, so that I, we, may share the joy of soaring with the birds and seeing the world transformed below us."

"You want me to be your pilot," she stated. "That's it?"

"That's it."

"No business element?"

"Well," he chuckled. "If you wish to state it in those terms, which I prefer not to, then it may be described as a venture in which the expense is one's time, and the profit is pure pleasure." He beamed, pleased with his alliteration.

Pure pleasure. It sounded too easy, too good.

"So you'll fly with me?"

"Yes. I guess I will," she said.

"I'm so glad," he said, assuming a dramatic stance along the rail. He raised an open hand to the heavens and spoke in a thickly accented baritone. "'And I shall be thy slave and wait on thee, and give thee more than thou have wit to ask.'" He grinned self-consciously. "Heh. A bit of theatre I picked up along the way," he said apologetically, blushing with pride and drink.

Eudie made to go, alarmed by the strange little performance, but he raised his arm, halting her, about to speak again. He stopped at some sound, and they listened. A voice, if you could call it that, was calling Aubrey's name. It sounded like the croaking of a dying bird. Eudie looked at the sweating, pale man and saw the disappointment in his eyes, as though the clock had struck twelve and he must return home. The voice called to him again from somewhere within the large cabin.

"There's someone else here?" she asked in a harsh whisper.

He nodded. "My aunt. She's not well."

"You'd better go check."

"Yes," he said, his hand still on Eudie's arm. "You won't go?"

Eudie looked at his confused, frightened face. Beads of sweat had collected at his temples like a profusion of tiny water blisters, and his cheeks were flushed and greasy. She had already overstayed, she knew. She shouldn't have been here to hear that voice calling to him.

"Wait here," he said in a stricken voice, then disappeared into the cabin.

As soon as she heard his voice Eudie moved along the rail towards the bow. A hatchcover was thrown open in the floor of the main cabin, and through the window she saw Aubrey's back as he bent over a reclined figure beneath a blanket. Eudie pressed her face against the window, and over Aubrey's shoulder she caught a glimpse of a small skull hung with grey, wrinkled skin and wisps of white hair. The creature's eyes were mere slits in the heavy lids, and the mouth was gaped and puckered. Eudie shivered and hurried ashore.

Sobered by what she had seen, she plunged into her chores, trying to ignore the questions that ran at her from all angles. What kind of a sick aunt was that, that he kept her locked in the

hold? Was she dangerous? Was she a freak or a prodigy of some sort? What kind of man was he to keep her there? It's not my business, told herself, but her mind would not leave go the image of the haggard face, and the twisted mouth straining for nourishment.

He did not come up after her as she feared, and in the morning when she looked down on the bay from the edge of the bank the houseboat was gone.

Their meeting the following Friday, at the Naramata Post Office, was brief, and polite.

"Hello, Mr. Fetherstone." Not Aubrey.

"Hello, Miss Harding." Accepting the formality.

"I should apologize," she began, but he cut her off with a raised hand.

"No, it is I who should apologize," he insisted, duly humble in posture. "I drank too quickly. Behaved ungentlemanly." He could not look upon her without the desire-- "Yes, well," he continued stiffly. "I'm having a field prepared for the airplane. Should be ready next week. I'll let you know. And do keep up the good work."

"Thank you. Good day." Leave before more is said, before questions are posited.

"Good day." Watching her from the veranda of the Dry Goods store that housed the Post Office. The unbaffled exhaust of her motorcycle thumped at his chest and stomach, and caused an exquisite tingling in the flesh of his nether parts, much like the sensation he'd felt in the airplane.

* * *

June 20, 1912
Dryden, Ont.
Scots -- a blacksmith
212 lbs.
Drop 3 ft. 10 in.
1:38
Flies intolerable.

* * *

Frank was afoot on the Pandosy road, walking back towards the Mission, the Professor's shack, and the Bellevue Hotel. He had a little money in his pockets but he was mad as hell. Lane

had been apologetic as all get out, but it was clear he was glad to replace Frank with his newly arrived brother-in-law, a starched dandy from Brighton who probably didn't know the first thing about driving a team. He was a polo player of some repute, he was careful to let Frank know. Yes, he was quite a horseman.

The sun buzzed the air with heat, and it was only mid-morning. Sparrows and chickadees celebrated among the willow thickets and berry bushes by the creek, but that only annoyed Frank more. In the pines and firs he heard flickers and crows calling. He needed a shady hole somewhere to ponder it all. A shady hole and cool drink. Or two.

He passed the Mission and the Oldfield's tobacco fields, trying to ignore the silent crews at work among the burgeoning leaves. An irrigation flume ran parallel to the road up beyond the flats of the Mission, a wooden trough on stilts, and Frank walked over to it and dipped a drink from the cold flow. Wetted his face and neck.

Not half a mile further he began to hear a voice, a painful half-moaning, half-singing of some death-knell tune with unintelligible words. An Indian or a Chinese left over from a night at the Bellevue. He could see part of the source of the voice a little further on, in a pair of fiercely white shins and feet draped over the sides of the flume, and the back of a grey head that rolled against a cross brace. As Frank drew even with the fluvial lunatic he turned his head to see if it was someone he knew, and saw the Professor's face chinning itself on the flume's rim. "Jeesus H. Christ!" he whispered. "I thought I was shaking it rough."

The Professor stared at Frank as he approached, commencing another verse. His hair was a spiky mess and his eye stared unflinchingly as Frank drew near. His other eye socket was empty, Frank saw with a start, a squinting, fleshy divot.

He grasped the Professor by the arm. "Here! Let me help you! C'mon, now!"

The Professor interrupted his song. "Unhand me! What are you doing?" he demanded.

Frank let go of the arm. "What in hell are you doing?" he asked. The Professor was buck naked. His soft, white flesh shimmered beneath the surface as though parts of him would to tear

off and drift downstream like rotting leaves. Frank tried not to look. "What're you doing?" he asked again.

The Professor hiccuped, knocking his head against the brace. He looked down at his body. "I am engaged," he spoke slowly, enunciating carefully as if swearing an oath or making a declaration of sober truth. "I am engaged in a cleansing of body, soul, and mind." He fished between his legs and pulled up a bottle.

"What was all that moaning about?"

"Moaning? Moaning?" He was indignant. "That, my philistine friend, was the *Requiem in Memoria*, a most solemn and beautiful work of hymnody. A work you ought to learn." He took a drink and offered the bottle to Frank. "Join me? Nothing better for the soul on a hot day than to immerse the body in the flowing waters, sing, drink, and, from time to time," he added with a wink of the empty socket, "urinate."

Frank took a second drink. "Where's your other eye?"

"Oh, bother." The Professor poked at the empty socket with a fingertip. "Must have washed out. I have another."

"Let me help you out of there," said Frank, reaching for his arm again.

The Professor raised a forefinger at Frank, and began sawing at the air with it. "Don't presuppose anything, Frank. Least of all your own immorality. Morality is a cultural expression of fear. Constructed by mankind to empower the weak, it fails or is subverted at every historical moment. You see? You see?" He clasped the flume beneath his armpits and wrestled himself to his feet. Water rushed from his pallid body, making the hair of his belly and legs lie neat and straight. "Morality is the cultural expression of fear, Frank. Understand this well. Fear of the body. Fear of pleasure. Fear of anarchy." His body swayed on uncertain legs, his knees pressed by the current against the thwart. His arms paddled the air for support.

Frank stared in embarrassment, stepping forward hesitantly to catch him, halted each time by the uncircumcised cock that dangled at eye level, distending like a feeder tube on the giant

clams he'd seen in Seattle. He picked the Professor's shirt from the pile of clothing and held it up to him. "Here, put this on."

The Professor shot a bony finger at Frank and bellowed: "You offer me this blooded shirt of Nessus? Betrayer! I am no adulterous Heracles to be driven to the funeral pyre! Keep away from me!" He raised a fist to the sky, his body tilting precariously. He lifted a leg to recover his balance and Frank grabbed it, hauling him forward. "No!" shouted the Professor as he pitched headlong, clutching at the air. Frank caught the Professor easily as he folded over his shoulder like broken grain sack, the side of his face buried in the Professor's shaggy belly as they embraced.

"Put me down!" howled the Professor.

Frank bent and released him, amazed at how light and soft he was. "Get dressed, would you?" he said, disgusted and ashamed at the unbidden intimacy.

Frank retrieved the bottle from the dust and rinsed it while the Professor struggled into his suit. As he finished dressing, the Professor accepted the proffered bottle and saluted Frank.

"To our moral exclusion. Or should I say excision." He closed his quivering lips on the bottle mouth and drank deeply.

"Moral what?"

The Professor lowered the bottle, gasping. "You and I, my friend, are pariahs. Outcasts. We exist without the community's consent and approval. We live in spite of their disapproval. I thought you were working."

Frank spat into the rusting carpet of needles. "Lane's brother came. He's driving now."

"I rest my case," said the Professor. He patted his hair into a bird's nest.

They made the road and began walking the remaining distance to the Bellevue Hotel. Frank was quiet and sullen while the Professor pontificated on pleasures to be had in spite of their social exile, evidently not as drunk as he'd appeared. They were free, he insisted, to indulge in all pleasures and pursuits without restraint, be they physical, intellectual, or artistic.

They heard the motorcycle long before it appeared behind them, trailing a thin cloud of dust. They lined into single file to let it pass, and heard it slow as it approached.

"It's that woman," said Frank. "The one that delivers the mail."

"Yes, I remember her from the flying exhibition," replied the Professor. "A pariah herself, I would imagine. A woman on a motorcycle." He laughed, an abrupt snort, and slipped the bottle into his jacket pocket.

Eudie slowed as she came up behind the men. They had the appearance, from the rear, of a pair of decrepits. Pulling abreast she recognized Wilson, and the Professor's corduroy suit. She steered to the side of the road and killed the engine. "Mr. Wilson?"

Frank approached warily, the Professor at his shoulder. The Professor looked like he'd just been swimming, and Wilson looked angry. "I have a letter for you, Mr. Wilson."

"A letter? Nobody writes me."

She shuffled through a handful of envelopes. "Here it is."

It was addressed: Frank Wilsin, Kelowna. Boyd. He knew it before he opened it.

"Go on, open it," urged the Professor.

Frank tore it open and stared at the words that had been pressed onto the page by a hand wielding a blunt pencil like a knife. He began reading aloud, mouthing the words carefully.

To Frank,

Im in prison and your walking around free when you are to blame to You went back on me Frank and you shouldn't have done it. You sayd you wood tell the truth not lie. I aint mad anymor at you but you are a basterd. 53 days til Im dead.

Walter Boyd James

Frank looked up, realizing his audience. "Pardon me, ma'am."

"I've heard worse," said Eudie.

"He still blames me," said Frank.

The Professor laid a hand on Frank's shoulder. "What did you expect from him? It's natural for a condemned man to speak from a rhetorical position that permits personal redemption. Don't begrudge the lad that."

"But--"

"No buts, Frank. He doesn't mean it. Not really."

"Don't start talking in tongues now, Professor, all right? It says here what he thinks of me. Why would a man put words on paper that he doesn't mean?"

"What does it say, Frank?"

"It says I'm a bastard, which I ain't. He says I'm to blame for his hanging."

"Are you?"

"Hell no!" Frank snorted. He hated it when the Professor started shaping things by asking his questions. He was clever as a barrister when it came to twisting the meanings of words.

"I think the Professor is right," said Eudie. Both men looked at her as though she'd been eavesdropping. "You shouldn't blame yourself for something that was beyond your control. He never wanted you with him, except as a shield, maybe."

"What do you know about it?" asked Frank. "You weren't there."

"Yes I was," she said matter-of-factly. "You came to my ranch."

Frank realized his mistake immediately. She was probably the only person who'd seen him and Boyd together, seen how they'd been glad to be rid of one another. "Excuse me, I reckon I did forget. But that don't change the fact of my moral exile." He tossed a quick glance at the Professor, who was absently fingering his empty socket. "It don't matter what the court said, you see, because I was condemned by Boyd and the newspapers. I can't get hired by anybody around here now. I had a job driving for Lane, but he let me go as soon as his brother-in-law arrived, a dandy that likely doesn't know the first thing about work horses. But he hasn't committed any moral crimes, at least ones they know about." He stopped to recover his breath, surprised by the string of words he'd produced. The Professor looked at him approvingly.

"I see," said Eudie, breaking the silence. "I didn't mean to upset you, Mr. Wilson. It's just--"

"I was already mad," said Frank, folding the letter and jamming it back into the envelope. "Well, at least Boyd doesn't have to worry about finding work."

"Frank," cautioned the Professor.

"No, I mean it, look at the three of us here. Mrs.--"

"Miss. Harding."

"Miss Harding here has a regular job, a respectable job. And you get paid for whatever it is you do, don't you?"

The Professor nodded solemnly.

"What is it you do, anyway?" Frank demanded gently.

The Professor cleared his throat. "I am a scholar," he said carefully. "A historian."

"Historian?" Frank snorted. "Not much history here, is there?"

"On the contrary, there is a little, though precious little, I might add," admitted the Professor.

"So why stay if there's nothing here to study?" asked Frank.

"That, I am afraid, is a matter of no slight embarrassment to me. You see, I am on a sabbatical leave from my university. An imposed sabbatical of indeterminate length."

"You mean you're paid to stay away from your university?" asked Eudie.

"Indefinitely."

"Why?" asked Frank.

He studied their faces with his cyclopic eye as the empty socket squinted shut. "Some of my views were deemed unacceptable and disruptive to the well-being of the institution. So I was shuffled off to the colonies where my dissenting voice would not be heard. To this marvellous and stifling place." He raised his arms in a futile gesture.

"But you get paid," Frank reminded him.

"A trifling amount. An insult."

"I don't see what you're complaining about. I'd be happy to have your job, insulting or not."

"Point taken," said the Professor, working a pebble with the toe of his shoe.

Eudie closed her saddlebags and made ready to leave. She turned, before she mounted the motorcycle. "I wanted to thank you again, Mr. Wilson, for your help with the animals that day. I couldn't have--"

"No, I--"

"And for the work you did in the glasshouse."

"What?"

"The cleaning up you did."

"Oh," said Frank, struggling to remember. "Are you growing a garden?"

"Yes, it's doing so well I can hardly keep up with it."

"That's good," said Frank. "That's good. Well."

"I'd better be going," she said. "Mail to deliver."

Frank and the Professor stood like a pair of schoolboys watching Eudie set the gas cock and pedal the engine to life. She gave them a quick nod as she made a sharp turn, left foot out for balance, then drove off in a rattle of smoke and dust.

"Quite a woman," the Professor said admiringly. "I wonder how she manages."

"Manages what?"

"You were at her place?"

"Yeah. Me and Boyd."

"You didn't tell me about that."

* * *

Mrs. Ambrose was turning to dust. Her hair was pulling out of her scalp like dried corn silk, and her skin was sloughing off her face, odourless and dry as meal. The journey in the hold of the houseboat had not done her health any good, even though she hadn't known where she was. Increasing her medication seemed to keep her at peace, and Aubrey did so willingly. She spoke rarely now except to ask him how his son was.

But occupying Aubrey's mind day and night, as he drove fast and without apparent purpose, or wrestled with his blankets through the sleepless nights, was the Bleriot. The Bleriot and Miss Harding. In just a few days he would take to the air and begin to fulfill his greatest dream.

* * *

It had simply come out wrong, was all. The request was not out of line or unreasonable, but Boyd's truthful observation had been directed at the wrong guard on the wrong day. Jock Shannon was a son-of-a-bitch at the best of times, though lately even the other guards were avoiding him. Word was that his daughter had run off with a hired hand from the Douglas Lake ranch, and Shannon had been slamming doors and raking his keys along the bars for a week, daring any man to tell him to dummy the noise.

Boyd slept through laundry change and asked Shannon if he would get him a clean set of clothes.

"Walk all the way to laundry room for a runt like you?" scoffed Shannon.

"You don't have better to do," observed Boyd.

"I what?" he bellowed, reaching for his keys.

"I mean, I didn't mean--"

"Shut up!" Shannon growled, sliding the door ajar and closing a fist around Boyd's ear. He dragged Boyd out of the block and into a small room with a table, chair, and cot. The door had no window in it, and the grey light came through vent in the ceiling. He ripped the stunned

Boyd's shirt from him and tossed it aside. "Oh, I'll get you a clean shirt, all right, you little fucker. Just you wait." He pushed Boyd to his knees in front of the cot. "Lean over and grab the legs." He knelt and clipped Boyd's wrists into the handcuffs already attached to each of the legs. Boyd knew what was coming. He'd seen the crescent-shaped scars the strap left on men's backs. He'd listened to the howls of men in pain. The strap was a length of girth leather with a row of thumb-sized holes punched out of it, and in the hands of an experienced user such as Shannon the strap was capable of raising a multitude of lunate scars that could keep a man lying on his stomach for several weeks.

Boyd gripped the legs of the cot as fear gripped his chest and threatened to choke his breathing. Only the first ten hurt, they said, after that the pain of one blow ran into the next and was reduced to a single, continuous sensation. He squeezed his eyes closed to stop the escaping tears and fought with his panicked mind to think of things pleasant, like the prairie grass, or the smell of Lilith's powders. He drew his knees up under the cot's edge and waited for the first blow, hunched like a coupling hound. Spasms of anticipation flirted over his spine, making him flinch and twist involuntarily. He heard Shannon chuckle. "Ready then, lad."

At the first lash Boyd's head snapped back and he cried out at the searing brand across his back. He clamped his teeth together, determined not to give Shannon the satisfaction of hearing him cry out again. At the second blow he released an explosion of spit and mucus. He tried biting the edge of the cot but his spine straightened of its own accord under the next blow, snapping his head erect and forcing his teeth to abandon their grip. Between blows his jaw hung open like some sludge-fed carp, swallowing air and closing wordlessly.

The holes in the strap created a soft whistling just before it struck each time, heard too late for the body to brace itself, but the pair quickly discovered a rhythm in the beating that both welcomed. Shannon, because of the familiar comfort of the dance-like step and swings he performed, and Boyd, because it enabled him to breath and brace himself between blows. Boyd lost count after the sixth lash and Shannon, as if sensing his partner's loss of interest, made a

subtle addition to his routine, jerking the strap towards himself just at the moment it lay embedded deepest in the reddened flesh. By abrading the edges of the rings of flesh that rose inside the holes like leavening dough, he regained Boyd's full attention with the addition of another level of pain. He smiled grimly as the blood began to rise in a multilayered pattern of rosy crescents. He knew then that he was in good form, and realized how badly he'd needed the release.

Boyd was soon conscious only of the intense heat being applied to and emanating from his back. His open eyes saw nothing but the white heat that coursed through his body more intensely than anything he'd felt before, and his mind escaped, finally, by rising into the heat of the pain and hovering, detached and disconsolate, somewhere above his body.

Shannon stopped at twenty-five. His face was sweating heavily and his breathing was deep and audible. He tossed the strap onto the table and approached Boyd, peering down at the stippled flesh like a painter examining the brush strokes of a masterpiece. He ran a thick hand up his face and into his hair, as if trying to erase his features. Squeezed his eyes shut and knuckled the stinging sweat from them, then bent and hooked his fingers in the waist of Boyd's trousers and jerked them down over his hips, exposing the pale, child-sized buttocks. He unbuckled his own pants and fell to his knees behind Boyd, grimacing with concentration as he pulled coaxingly at himself.

* * *

June 28, 1912
Winnipeg, Man.
Metis -- trapper
165 lb.
Drop 5 ft. 6 in.
2:33 (Had to subdue first.)
Flies bad.

* * *

FOUR

Cora waited impatiently while the men postured and strutted before one another in discussions about whether or not to let a contract for the regular grading of the city streets, whether or not to begin replacing the wooden boardwalks with concrete sidewalks, and which species of trees would be best suited to the city environment, and the spacing and pruning required for each. She began to wonder if she was even on the agenda.

The Mayor had launched into yet another item. "The speed of motorcars within the city street has become a serious danger to our children," he said, accusing no one in particular. "The Provincial Statutes state that the speed permissible within towns is ten miles per hour, and yet I have seen motorcars travelling at speeds of fifty miles per hour along Bernard Avenue."

"Fifty miles per hour?! Come, come, sir!" shouted Councillor O'Riley. "How can you propose to judge the exact speed of a motorcar travelling past you on a street?"

"Unless you were in it!" added a second voice, causing an eruption of laughter and thumping of hands on the table.

The Mayor rose to his feet, commanding silence. "I have myself travelled on country roads at speeds of forty miles per hour, and so am well able to judge such speed and its dangers," he assured the assembly.

O'Riley, who did not own a motorcar, bowed his head in acquiescence.

"The Provincial Statute is out of date," said Councillor Wilkins. "Ten miles per hour is much too slow."

"Hear, hear," chimed several voices in sloppy chorus.

"Perhaps," conceded the Mayor. "Regardless, though, I propose we post signs at the entrances to town, advising motorists to adhere to the Provincial Statutes. Discussion?"

"It's those Vernon drivers that are the worst offenders," declared young Councillor Simpson, seeking to regain favour with the Mayor after the sidewalk issue.

"And that motorcyclist," added O'Riley. "She's a bloody terror on that thing."

"Yes, that woman," added another.

"Delivering the mail does not excuse her from obeying the laws of the land, I agree," said the Mayor. "But she is not the only one." He glared at Councillor Harvey, who, the week before, had clipped a dog that belonged to the Mayor's nephew. The hound had dragged its broken hindquarters under the boardwalk where it remained for several hours, howling in pain and refusing to be lured or dragged out to be disposed of. "I move, then, that signs be posted, stating briefly the Statues, at both ends of town. Second?"

Simpson seconded.

"All in favour?"

All hands rose.

"So be it." The Mayor paused, straightening the papers before him, and cleared his throat. "We have one final point of business before us today," he said, nodding at Cora to come forward. "As we are all aware there has been a hostel, I believe it is called, operating in our town for over a month, now. This hostel has been providing accommodation to young females arriving from England and Eastern Canada, and, as I understand, preparing them for life in the colonies by instructing them in political ideologies and enlisting them as suffragettes, discouraging them from any notions of marriage or civic responsibility."

"That is a very inaccurate representation, Mr. Mayor," said Cora, standing outside the circle of chairs at the long table. "The young women are being instructed in basic civil, and civic, liberties, such as equality. Their eyes are being opened to possibilities beyond marriage and child bearing, possibilities ranging from cultural to political to artistic."

The Mayor raised his hand. "Be that as it may, Miss Armstrong, that is not why you are appearing before this council today. I refer you to bylaws number seventeen and twenty-one,

requiring all business to purchase a business license, and to pay civic taxes at the end of every month. You have done neither."

"You are quite wrong, sir. I am not operating a business for profit. Every cent I take in goes into paying for rent and food for the women. In fact, I am operating at a loss, if you wish to state it in business terms, which I don't. The Gilman Hostel is a non-profit enterprise, a social service to the community."

"Whether the Gilman Hostel is a business or a non-profit enterprise is a matter for the members of this council to determine. The possibility of it being a social service seems to me quite ludicrous," he said, smiling at his colleagues.

As if on cue, a modest round of chuckling arose, lightening the tone of the exchange to the Mayor's satisfaction. "I propose we put the matter to a vote."

"The question being what?" Cora challenged.

The Mayor appraised her unflinchingly. "The question being," he began, his voice firm. "Whether or not the Gilman Hostel is or is not operating under terms which require a business license and, ergo, the monthly submission of civic taxes. All those who believe that it is--"

"Wait!"

The Mayor glared at Cora, his ears reddening. "What is it?" he hissed.

Cora's mind charged through possible ways to delay, or even sway, the outcome of the vote. She knew she did not have a hope of winning, but perhaps she could embarrass one or two of them into siding with her. "Will you at least afford me the opportunity to inform the members of the council of the aims and goals of the hostel, and its day to day operations? It would only be democratic and fair, would it not?"

The Mayor glanced at the pen-poised reporters in the gallery. "Do keep it brief," he said, resuming his seat. "This has been a long meeting."

She began by painting a picture of young, cultured women being dropped into a situation of cultural deprivation and social isolation with little or no forewarning, and no means by which to

adjust to the social and cultural conditions of their new surroundings. The Gilman Hostel was a transitional house, she explained, designed to inform the women about the social, political, and cultural conditions of the city and the province, in order to allow them make an informed, intelligent entry into their new world.

"Women need not concern themselves with politics!" bellowed old Mr. Cornell, rising.

Cora stared him back into his seat. "Women should, and do, concern themselves with politics in this town, though not to the extent they ought to. They have been cowed into believing that men are capable of running things, and given the chance I am sure you would be surprised at who might step forward and take an interest in the affairs of the community."

"She's talking nonsense," cut in Councillor Simpson. "She has no support anywhere in this community and she knows it."

"You are quite mistaken, sir," said Cora, her ire rising. "We have had good support, in the form of donations, from several wonderful married ladies of the town. Just last week one of these women delivered three loaves of fresh bread to us." She let her eyes linger on the face of Mr. O'Riley, whose wife had been the baker. "And from another dear woman we received several works by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, for whom the hostel is named." She stared at Councillor Simpson until he felt the weight of her gaze and several others.

He started and banged the table with his fist. "I told her to get rid of those before we were married!" he said vehemently. He struggled to his feet, thrusting his chair out awkwardly behind him. "You are a trouble-maker, young lady," he shouted, pointing the accusatory finger at Cora. "And I will see you and your kind removed from this town, mark my word!"

"Mr. Simpson!" shouted the Mayor. "You are out of order! Sit down!"

Cora continued, her voice loud and insistent now, as she stalked the perimeter of the circle. "This community has a moral obligation to provide a service to the young women who choose to stake their futures upon this place. And I say again, that the Gilman Hostel is not a business in which monetary profit is sought, but a social service which measures its profit in the

education of the women who will contribute more to this town, to this province, than their child-bearing capacities!"

"Thank you, Miss Armstrong. You may sit while we put it to a vote. Unless there's any further discussion?"

"Is this a secret ballot?" asked Cora, still standing.

"I don't think that's necessary," said the Mayor. "You may sit," he said again, pointing to the chair she had vacated.

The question was posed again, and the hands rose unanimously.

"So, Miss Armstrong. You have five days in which to purchase your business licence and bring your taxes out of arrears."

* * *

The metallic trill of thrushes woke Frank before dawn, and he lay on his pallet listening to the robins join in, watching the daylight casting the thin pines and the foliage of the berry bushes into sharp relief. The sun was nearly touching the scabby lower bark of the trees when Frank slid out from under his blanket, placing his stockinged feet carefully on the scrap of shook that served as bedside mat.

He entered the cabin and knelt by the stove, ritually placing the kindling piece by piece in a preordained arrangement before lighting it.

"Don't know what I'll do in the mornings when you're gone," the Professor said. His voice was gravelly as a rail bed until he wetted it with coffee or liquor.

Frank paused, as he dipped water for the coffee pot. "Gone?" he asked, the word evoking thoughts further ahead in time than he had lately given himself to venturing. In fact, he had been deliberately restraining himself from thinking in that direction at all. The past and present were discouraging enough.

The Professor swung his feet over the side and hunched on the edge of his bed, draped in a grey suit of underwear. "You didn't plan to spend the winter in the lean-to, did you? I presume you've been giving some thought to your future."

"Huh," said Frank, jamming the lid on the coffee pot. "I guess I've about worn out my welcome here."

"Not at all. Not at all." The Professor sought the hose beneath his leg and raised the end to his mouth, loosening the clamp. He swallowed several times then offered it to Frank, his thumb over the end to prevent the wine from back-flowing.

Frank shook his head, intent on measuring the coffee.

"What I'm saying, Frank, is that sooner or later you must get on with things, begin lurking about the edges of the community until someone leaves a door open a crack and you can get a foot in, so to speak. As long as you stay with me you prevent that from becoming a possibility."

"You're tired of having me around."

"Bah! Nonsense, Frank." The Professor held his trousers before him as though making an offering of the crusty garment. He lifted one foot, then replaced it on the floor. He sat back on the bed. "You are welcome here indefinitely, you know that, but you must consider your own interests and needs. This friendship has served us both well, I believe, and I hope it continues."

"What have you got out of it?" Frank asked, feeling offended, but uncertain why.

"You have been a sounding board for me, Frank, and a very practical-minded one."

"A sounding board?"

"Yes. You have provided a layman's response to some of the ideas I've been tossing about. I'm well on the way to a final draft of a paper on a theory of morality and exclusion, which I will be sending to my esteemed colleagues back home."

"You've been using me?"

"You've been using me," replied the Professor. "Though I dislike the word 'use.' We've both benefited, wouldn't you agree?"

"I guess so," said Frank. "But I never thought we were taking advantage of each other."

"We weren't. We were taking advantage of the situation."

Frank watched the water roll to a full boil, then tossed the grounds into the pot and damped down the stove.

The Professor blocked open the door, allowing a sheet of light to spread into the dank interior. "She's going to be hot today," he observed. "Warm already. Good day for a bath in the flume."

"You can do that without me," Frank said, scowling. "A grown man, bathing in public. I was some ashamed, I'll tell you. Good thing nobody saw you but me."

"That's the attitude," the Professor said, clapping Frank on the back. "Moral indignation. Have you seen my eye?"

"It's on the table, there."

"Ah," He picked it up and studied it for a moment, gave it a wipe on his sleeve, then deftly inserted it in the socket. "How's that?" he asked, turning to face Frank.

"You're looking at the rafters," said Frank.

"Damn. This one doesn't fit so well," the Professor said, fingering the glass orb. "Better?"

"No," said Frank.

They sat in the bright glare of the sun, a pair of hermetic monks on upturned apple boxes, property of Kelowna Orchards Co., and savoured their coffee in silence. "I might as well go today, then," Frank said after a spell.

"Where?"

"The park. I can find a spot under a tree. It's not too crowded with tents this year."

"What about food, work?"

"I don't know. Something's gotta come up, sooner or later, like you said."

"Well, in the meantime." The Professor dug a pair of fingers into his breast pocket, extracting several crumpled bills. He separated ten dollars and held it out to Frank. "For your work as my research assistant."

"I can't take that."

"You'll need it."

* * *

For no reason that Boyd could discern, laying on his stomach day long enabled him to escape on the wind when he closed his eyes. He could no longer track the blade of sun down the wall each morning, unless he turned his head at an awkward angle that gave him a crick in his neck, so he kept his eyes closed and listened to the wind tear itself against the outer walls, and he began to find a grim solace in the wailings and long sighs. He found himself emerging from the low Rockies of northern Montana and onto the edge of the high plains.

One night when the guards had stepped out for a minute, the man in the cell across spoke in a low voice. "I would kill him if I got the chance."

Boyd wasn't sure if he was being spoken to or not, and lay still, listening.

"I would kill him," repeated the voice. The man's name was Taki, short for something. He was Japanese, and had already killed a man in a fight.

"Who?" Boyd asked.

"Shannon. He is the worst of dogs. Someday, somebody will kill him. I hope it is me."

Boyd closed his eyes and listened for the wind. Its voices described to him the prairie and the pelicans. The birds summered for him at the slough and along the banks of the Fitt River. And Lily joined him each night at dusk to watch them glide in on the dying breezes to roost. She would sit in the waving grass beside him, their shoulders touching, hands resting close together on the edge of her skirts, the mild, dusty smells of grass mingling with her scented powders in the shifting eddies of air between them.

His ma and pa excluded, Lily and the pelicans were the only memories he had in which he hadn't been shunned or ignored. The pelicans had shared their silent, white presence with him spring and fall for as long as he could remember. And crossing the fields with his father, it was as though they made a pilgrimage each evening to see something much greater than flocks of stately, large-billed birds; it was somehow holy. The reverence of his father's words, and the birds themselves, had made Boyd feel as though he must be in the presence of God, if such a thing were possible. To share it with Lily was a witnessing for them, of them. It could only be love. That is how he chose to remember it.

He thought about Frank again, and began to think that maybe Frank had tried to help him after all, but just hadn't been any good at it. Maybe he hadn't tried to help anyone before and, like most new things people try, didn't get it right the first time. He wouldn't have called what he was thinking forgiveness, but he thought he should tell Frank that he didn't hold a grudge any longer. It wasn't good to be holding grudges when you died, somebody, maybe the priest, had told him.

Boyd began composing another letter. Finding the right words and placing them in the best order was a difficult task, he found. With less than fifty days left he was forced to settle for placing them on the page in the order they came to him. With forty days left in his life, Boyd posted his last letter.

He knew, and did not question his knowing, that Lily must still be at Nahun. About whether or not Frank would deliver his message Boyd simply hoped in mute silence, and began to ask himself why he hadn't just written straight to Lily, why he had decided Frank should deliver his message.

He imagined their meeting and conversation about himself. That was why he'd asked Frank to visit Nahun, he realized--so he could imagine the two people he might call friends speaking about Boyd James. What would they say of him? He was a good man who ran into some hard luck? That he was only trying to escape the Okanagan and return to his father's farm?

Frank and Lily were the only people in the valley who might remember him as other than a criminal, and Jesus--he sat up out of sleep, feeling the pull of tight, scabbed skin on his back--his mind formed a picture of their meeting, Frank's bandied legs and runty butt rising and falling between Lily's white thighs. The rhythmic, laboured squeaking of her tired bed. Boyd swallowed the bitterness in his mouth and lowered himself to his bunk again, disgusted with the image. He pronounced a curse on Frank's head if he should treat Lily like a whore, waiting to be mounted and ridden to a lather by any man with the money. She wasn't like other whores.

* * *

Eudie stood in the middle of the glasshouse, feeling the sweet, rank air permeate her clothing and cling to her skin. Seven straight days of sun, and she'd forgotten to open the vent windows the day before. The glasshouse had overheated and charged the plants with a frenetic burst of growth. The lettuce had bolted and was slumped like rows of soiled handkerchiefs. The tomato plants were suffering too, but they would recover. And the tomatoes had other problems, she noticed, fingering the leaves. Eudie had no delusions about her presence in this garden, she was no Eve and the glasshouse no Eden. The lettuce was lost and the tomatoes had aphids.

She pumped a bucket of water and began wiping the bugs from the leaves and stems with a rag, muttering as she bathed the plants. After she finished in the glasshouse she walked into the field and began checking the rows of tomatoes, cucumbers and carrots. No aphids, but the deer had grazed a row of carrot tops to ground level. She would have to fence the garden. This was another good reason to hire someone.

She hauled more buckets of water to the top of the field and walked slowly down the rows, back bent, pouring the water around the bases of the plants. She stopped counting after the twelfth bucket. One of Fetherstone's irrigation systems would be nice, she thought, bracing her back as she straightened.

She sat with her shoes off, heels on the rail of the porch, picking at the last of her dinner as the sky turned the colour of bruises, beating out its last light on a rogue cloud that had drifted in from the west. The lake lay brooding, smooth and dark, absorbing and muting the violent colours playing above it. She weighed the probable costs of irrigation flumes and hired hands, trying to list the advantages and disadvantages of each on a mental ledger. As much as she looked forward to flying Fetherstone's airplane, she could see that it was going to take her away from the garden another day or two each week, which she could ill afford unless she hired someone to weed and water, and build the fence, on the days she was away. Perhaps Fetherstone would be willing to help her out. After all, without her he couldn't fly. That had to be worth something.

His name surfaced in her mind a little later, as she was feeding the animals. He was good with animals, she'd seen that, and he'd done that cleanup in the glasshouse. But if he was with the Professor he was drinking. Or was he with the Professor and drinking because he couldn't find work? He did seem to want to work, he'd expressed that when she'd delivered his letter. Hiring him wouldn't be any more scandalous than her riding the motorcycle.

The more she thought about Frank the less she realized she knew about him, except for his current condition and his association with the James boy. It wasn't much, nor was it encouraging. But, she reminded herself, she'd also seen a bit of what he was capable of when he was here at Greata. She'd look for him Friday when she was in Kelowna and ask him some questions. In the meantime she needed to protect the garden until she got the fence built. The sky was still a pale, watery grey when Eudie walked to the edge of the garden and arranged a bedroll on the ground. It would be cooler than sleeping inside, she told herself.

She was bent over a shovel, levering a rock out of her third post hole, when Fetherstone drove into the yard. He walked out to the garden, sweating profusely, a greasy sheen to his skin. Eudie fetched her shirt and pulled it on over the cotton undershirt she was working in.

"The field is ready," he announced proudly. "I want you to fly the airplane down tomorrow."

"Tomorrow?"

"Yes, tomorrow."

"Oh." Her voice sounded tired. She was tired, the mosquitoes had been at her all night it had seemed.

"Is something wrong?"

"Well," she shrugged. Now was the time to do it. "It's just that I've gotten behind with the garden, and I've been wondering how I'm going to manage it if I'm flying for you twice a week. I have to get a fence up right away to keep the deer out."

"Ah," said Aubrey. "I see. What you need is hired help of some sort." He stroked his moustache thoughtfully, realizing in a flurry of thought that this might be the final component in his grand design. There was a way, he saw with sudden clarity, to satisfy everyone's needs here.

"I can't afford to hire anyone," said Eudie. "But I can't afford not to. I don't want to abandon the garden now."

"Oh, no. Don't want that," said Aubrey. "I have an idea," he said, glancing at the sky. "What I am prepared to do is to give you a raise in the exact amount that it would require you to hire somebody for three days a week. Does that sound fair?"

"Quite," she replied, surprised at how easily she'd been accommodated. "How can I repay your generosity?"

"Don't you worry about that," he smiled. "The important thing is that we go flying. And that your garden is properly cared for, of course."

She began to thank him again, but he repelled her words with a raised hand. "I'll hear no more of it," he said. "Now, about tomorrow."

"Of course," she said. "But I'd better get some work done today if I'm flying tomorrow."

"Quite right," said Aubrey. "Quite right." He extended his hand to her.

It was what they called a gentleman's agreement, she knew, placing her broad hand across his fleshy palm in reply. He bent his head suddenly, pressing his lips to the back of her ruddy

knuckles, then laughed nervously. "Forgive me," he said. "But I feel as though we've just begun what will prove to be a very satisfactory arrangement for us both."

Eudie was too taken aback to respond with words, and nodded as she rubbed the feel of his lips and moustache from the back of her hand.

"I must be off," he said.

As Eudie watched him go she felt as though she'd just accepted a proposal for marriage, and when she thought about it later she experienced a feeling of dread, but dismissed it as unfounded. She would look for Mr. Wilson on Friday and see if he looked capable of working. She would also stop in and see Cora, find out how she was faring against the city fathers.

She hadn't flown for nearly three weeks, and hoped she hadn't forgotten everything Roger had taught her. But as she and Jules inspected the machine she found it coming back, the routine of checking the rudder and wires, wheels, and engine. Jules, it turned out, was also under a part-time contract with Fetherstone to maintain the Bleriot. "Ya, once a week I have to go to Penticton now to check it over. I don't mind it so much."

"Well, I'm reassured that it's you looking after it and not someone else," Eudie told him. She was also reassured to find someone else in a position similar to her own.

Aloft, Eudie was again reassured of her decision. She banked over the town site and pointed the nose down the valley, following the wide corridor to Penticton. As she rounded the big bend at Peachland she let the Bleriot drift wide over Greata and circled the place twice while she looked down at the collection of buildings and the patch of green garden on the barren strand of benchland. Greata's only significance, from this height, seemed to lie in its isolation, its lack of proximity to either of the nearest towns, which still suited her fine.

He was waiting at the field, as he'd said he would be, and so was half the town, it appeared, waving and cheering as she passed overhead, inspecting the field. He'd even hung a makeshift flag on a pole for her to check the wind.

Her landing was a bit rusty, but she got it to stick to the ground on the second bounce. His face was beside the cockpit before the airplane had stopped rolling. "Bravo! Marvellous job!" he cheered her.

The crowd adored Fetherstone, and he played to them with grand words and gestures befitting a stage actor, promising them progress and technology, speed and cultural advancement and all other fine things he could bring to mind. As he held court, Eudie drifted off the edges of the crowd and found refuge in the doorway of the small shed erected to hold the fuel and oil. They still didn't know what to make of her, in spite of Fetherstone's sanction, and tossed numerous glances her way while maintaining their distance. The women, it seemed to her, could not comprehend her masculine dress and activities, and the men were equally baffled, as well as intimidated by the disapproval of their wives whenever they made gestures towards satisfying their curiosity about this woman who drove a motorcycle and flew an airplane. Let them wonder, she thought. If I have to explain they won't understand.

* * *

By Friday she had planted a straggly row of posts, and strung a line around the garden, hung with bits of cloth and tin cans with buttons inside to make noise. But the deer came still, ducking or jumping the line, and so Eudie continued to sleep at the edge of the garden.

In Friday's mail there was a letter for Frank Wilson. She thought it a good sign. At least that way if she changed her mind when she talked to him she wouldn't have to make some excuse for having gone to see him. She rode out to the Professor's shack and found him staring at a sheaf of papers, chewing the end off a pencil.

"Mr. Wilson here?"

"No, Frank doesn't live here now."

"Oh. Where might I find him?"

"The park. I think he said the park. Another letter?"

Eudie nodded.

"The kid?"

"I think so."

She walked among the tents pitched under the swaying cottonwoods and poplars, searching the groups of men huddled around cooking fires and billy cans. They stopped to watch her pass, some staring mutely, others tipping their hats.

She found Frank sitting on the beach, tossing pebbles into the shallows. His leathery cheeks were darkened by several days growth of whiskers, greying at his temples and chin. He looked up at the crunch of her boots in the sand. She stood with the sun behind her head, so that all he could make out was the swaying orange halo around her head. "Hello, Mr. Wilson. I have a letter for you."

Frank stood up, brushing the sand from his trousers. He took the envelope and tore the end off. From Boyd, of course. Damn. Just when he'd finally stopped feeling like he owed Boyd anything he got a letter like this. Life was not tolerant towards certain kinds of people, Frank knew, and felt that this letter confirmed that he was one of those kinds of people, whatever they were called.

Eudie watched him mouth the words and utter the odd syllable as he read. She felt like an intruder. He was dirty and had a strong odour about him, but those could be washed away.

He looked up at her when he finished reading, surprised to see her still there. "Is there more?" he asked.

"No, just that."

Frank thought there must be something else she expected him to say, but could not imagine what. "Thanks," was all he could come up with.

"Oh," she smiled briefly. "No, it's my job." She stirred the sand with her toe. "Uh, listen, I wanted to ask you. Have you found work yet?"

"Not yet," he said, eyeing her warily.

"You moved out of the Professor's place?"

He nodded. "I figured I wasn't going to get anywhere as long as I was staying with him. Him being an outcast and all."

She looked at Frank's clothes, stained with coffee and who knew what else, worn with holes as though inhabited by termites. He almost looked like the weight of his eroded clothing might haul him to the ground and force him to decay prematurely. He was not angry this time, and the absence of anger presented to her a man resigned to lowliness and disregard. She reminded herself of the glasshouse, the animals. "I have a proposition, a suggestion, if you're interested. Just a trial--"

"A trial?" He looked alarmed. "What for?"

"Wrong word. Wrong word," she said hastily. She took a deep breath, catching a whiff of him, then looked him in the eye. "I'm trying to offer you a job. On a trial basis. It's not much, just three days a week, room and board and a small wage. I need someone to finish a fence and keep up the garden while I'm away. I thought you might be interested. I know it's not much."

Frank was confused. He didn't like being pitied, but he wasn't sure if that was what she was doing. "You're going away?"

"No, but I do the mail twice a week, and now I have something else that's going to take up another day or two. And the deer are in the garden every night, the lettuce bolted on me, and I found aphids on the tomatoes. I need help with it, I can't keep up to it any more. I planted too much, it's too big...." She was talking rapidly, unable to check herself.

"Hold on a minute," said Frank. This was hard to believe. She was almost pleading him to come and work for her. "You're offering me three days a week, room and board?"

"Just to try it. See if it works out," she said quickly, embarrassed at her outpouring. "Three days is all I can afford to pay you for."

"Why're you offering me this?"

"I don't know who else."

"Why not some kid?"

"Too unreliable."

"A Chinaman? Lots of them good with gardens."

"No." She shook her head.

"Don't trust 'em myself," said Frank.

"So?" she asked, trying not to sound desperate. "Will you come and give it a try?"

Frank looked up and down the lake, as if his answer might break the surface of the water and reveal itself. He heaved a sigh. He'd never imagined himself working for a woman before, particularly one younger than himself. Imagine taking orders. Boyd wanted him to go to Nahun. A dying man's request. It occurred to him that this offer would never have come his way if not for Boyd. Yeah, life was intolerant of certain people, but intolerance, he guessed, wasn't always a straightforward matter. He had to go to Nahun, he could see that much clearly, at least. He turned to face her again, looking at her boots. "Well, I can't do it just now," he said.

"You can't?"

"Nope."

"May I ask why?" said Eudie. She noticed her voice beginning to rise, offended that he would refuse the offer. What had possessed her to think he'd be grateful, anyway?

"I have to go up to Nahun. For Boyd."

"The letter."

"Yeah. Have to deliver a message for him."

"And that means you won't take the work?"

"Well, I have to go to Nahun. It's a dying man's request."

"For how long?"

"I don't know. Take me a couple or three days, I guess, to get up there and back."

"What about after you get back? What about then?"

He eyed her again. She was being awful insistent about it. "I don't get it," he said.

"What?"

"Why you'd hire me."

It was Eudie's turn to heave a sigh, of exasperation. She spoke slowly and clearly. "Because I know you need work. Because I know you can't get hired here in town. Because I know you're good with animals. And because I have a hunch you'll be a capable gardener."

"Well, I have to go to Nahun first."

"That's all right," she said. "I can wait a couple of days as long as I know you're coming."

"Okay, then," said Frank, trying to maintain a look of seriousness.

"So you'll come to Greata straightaway after you're done at Nahun?"

"Yes, ma'am."

Eudie offered her hand in another gentleman's agreement, hoping it would not be kissed again. She had fallen just short of convincing herself that Frank was the man she needed, but was relieved all the same.

Frank shook her hand gently, surprised at her firm grip. Her pale eyes regarded him with what he took for approval.

The next afternoon Frank went ashore at Caesar's Landing with his bedroll under his arm and the rest of his belongings slung over his shoulder in a burlap bag. He was the only passenger to disembark. He watched the sternwheeler back out and turn north, the huge paddles shearing away the water, lifting and pouring sheet after silver sheet into a shattered foam. Two merganser hens and their chicks burst from the cover of the pilings, feet and wing tips beating at the surface in a rapid mime of the sternwheel as they made their escape. The boat thugged and thumped, spewing black smoke as it built up a head of steam, and Frank felt a longing for the river and the rhythmic, shifting patterns of the flow. The still water of the lake had frustrated him since he'd moved down to the park. Likely it was just that he spent too much time staring at it, which in itself wasn't bad, but staring at still water was dull, nothing changed or moved, it didn't cause any movement or change inside you. Staring at moving water was somehow good for you, he knew.

He wandered up into the cleared landing and stood in waist-deep grass the colour of toasted bread. Sparrows and thrushes sang from thick waisted cottonwoods ringing the shore side. There was nothing left here now but a tumbledown lean-to, part of a stable for the teamster's beasts, and probably a few rails long buried in the grass. Frank hung his burlap bag from a low branch of alder and flies gathered around it immediately. He found shade under an alder and leaned against the trunk as he dug the letter out of his breast pocket, snapping open the page.

To Frank Wilsin

41 dys left. I dont want to dy but nothing I can do I bin thinkn Frank that may I got to take responsblity to for my akshins. Do somthing for me? Go to Nahun and find Lily she works ther. Tell her I luv her. Plees do this thing for me Frank and rite back. This is inportant. You wer my only frend after all.

from Walter Boyd James

PS plees do it and hurry.

Nahun had been a roadhouse along the Fur Brigade trail since the early 1800's, consisting in its prime of an inn and livery where pack animals and their drivers could be fed, watered, and bunked. Jep Sweeney produced a fair potato whisky, and from the beginning at Nahun there was a legendary string of whores.

For nearly seventy-five years, which constituted a tradition in that time and place, for there were few other institutions in the territory that could claim existence for that length of time, the whores of Nahun had plied their trade in canvas tents, in rough-hewn cabins, and finally, in 1844, just five years before the international boundary re-routed what remained of the fur trade and effectively made the trail redundant, Sweeney built a proper establishment and imported a string of fine pack horses to complement his already well established string of whores.

Many a Factor bypassed the shorter route from Kamloops down the Nicola valley and into the Okanagan via Trepanier in favour of the longer route through Westwold and Nahun. There were two good reasons to go the long way: it was an easier climb, and it allowed the men the

chance for a throw or a tumble or just a good fuck, which was considered good for the disposition of the entire company.

George Dawe, the noted geologist who kept meticulous notes of his journey up the Columbia and Okanagan systems in 1877, stopped over at Nahun for three days to rest and replenish his horses, chip off a few shale samples, and embrace legend. Surprisingly, or not, this is not recorded anywhere in his otherwise extensive field notes. But, as old Jep could have told you, George Dawe was a small man with a large appetite, and while all the women fawned over his exotic hunchback, he would have no one but Anna, the dark-haired, green-eyed girl who was known for her vocal enthusiasms. After three days with Dawe, Anna was voiceless for a week.

The whores of Nahun were reputed and disreputed from the mouth of the Columbia and Fraser rivers to their respective headwaters. They were spoken of with admiration at the Bellevue Hotel, in hushed tones at the Lakeview, and in the most discreet of voices in the smoking rooms of the Lawn Tennis & Badminton Club in Vancouver and parliamentary chambers in Victoria.

The whores of Nahun were said to know as many different positions for coupling as the Chinese. Some men, extremists, argued that the whores of Nahun knew more positions than the Chinese, that they'd invented positions the Chinese, even with their opium, could not have imagined. These men offered as proof the names of configurations of leg, limb, and orifice such as "Rooster Crows at Midnight," "Coyote Reaches the Moon," or the more recent but already renowned, "Stem to Stern."

Lily was the penultimate whore of Nahun. She was next to last in a long and distinguished line of pedigreed prostitutes known for their enthusiasm and inventiveness, their beauty and charm, and the size of their bosoms. Her successor, a disillusioned young woman from London, would have rightfully been titled the ultimate whore of Nahun if she had not possessed such a paltry imagination. Lily secretly and proudly considered herself the ultimate whore of Nahun.

Frank intended to take his time walking the easy two miles up to Nahun. He was in no hurry, knew he'd reach it in plenty of time, but shortly after leaving the shoreline he began seeing the signs, mostly broken fence pickets, nailed crosswise to the pines lining the road, the white letters running into a bottom border of excess paint. He paid little regard to the first two. They made no sense. Not until he'd seen four or five did he realize they were the names of the very positions that shall herein remain undescribed. Go Down Moses. Back in the Saddle. Headin 'n Heelin. The signs taunted him, dared him to imagine their meaning. Naitaka's Tongue. Nearer to God. Bird in the Hand. His pace quickened in his eagerness to reach the next sign so he could imagine the ways the words might signify their meanings. Orbiting the Sun. Venus Ascending. Sermon on the Mound. Frank broke into a rapid stride that his legs could not sustain, will them to as he might. His heart banged at his chest and his lungs threatened to rupture. What would the next one say? He lost his footing and pitched to the ground at the base of a sighing ponderosa. Head Over Heels, said the sign above him.

* * *

Frank reached Nahun in mid-afternoon, tired, hungry, and horny. There was a brittleness in the air, in the gravel under his boots, and in the fallen needles and parched grass. His nose felt like someone had clamped a pair of pliers over it and was twisting it the way you put a twitch on a horse's lip to subdue it. The dust he mined from his nostrils was hard and gritty under his nail. Passing under the shade of a silver fir, Frank could hear the needles rattling like tiny bones. Horseflies thrummed noisily around an empty corral, searching out manure that wasn't dry as hardpan. One of them caught Frank's worthy scent and wirled about his head and shoulders, seeking exposed flesh, causing Frank to swat and curse.

Beside the deserted corral was a long, low barn that had housed pack animals during the days when the two or three hundred head of stock of several pack trains might end up at Nahun

on a sirgle night. The only other building at Nahun was Sweeney's hotel, a three-storey, peak-roofed building, the place of many a young furrier or cowboy's first fulfilment of carnal desire.

Frank passed through the dark lobby and entered the saloon. There was no one at the bar, just as there had been no one at the desk. He leaned an elbow on the bar and stared into the gloom, waiting for his eyes to adjust, expecting to see some old trader or disinterested whore watching him from a table. After a couple of minutes of silence he cleared his throat and scuffed a heel on the floor, hoping to attract someone's attention. He leaned across the bar and looked on the floor behind it for a sleeping figure. Nobody.

A bent man with a nose like an osprey's beak and a toothless hole in his chin for a mouth wandered out of the darkness and stood beside Frank. "What?" he said brusquely, as if he were being harried from all sides.

Frank eyed the wizened little man. "You work here?"

"Wouldn't be asking if I didn't. What you want?"

"Boilermaker," said Frank.

The man raised an eyebrow and rounded the bar, keeping one eye on Frank as if he thought it a poor prank to waste an old man's precious time by ordering a drink. He set the beer and the shot glass in front of Frank. "Thirty cents."

"Thirty?"

"Thirty."

Thirty cents was highway robbery, Frank muttered as he dug for coin, then slid it across the bar. "There a woman named Lily here?"

"Ha!" cracked the old man. "Knew it. What you want her for, she's old 'n' wore out. We got a new girl here you should try. Forget Lily."

"I got to talk to h: ," said Frank.

The little man winked. "Right."

"She here?"

The man's head rolled back on his shoulders and his soft mouth fell open. "LILY!" he bellowed. They listened to the intense silence, and after a moment the old man nodded. "She's comin'."

A minute later Frank heard sharp footsteps on a floor somewhere above him. He tracked the steps as they grew nearer, and then he could hear the heels on stairs to his right, and a voice. A tired, smoke and whiskey-thick voice. "What is it, Bender? I'm in the middle of Celia's nails."

"Customer," barked the little man.

Frank could not see her yet.

"If you remember what that is."

"A customer?" A pause, and the voice again, smoother, but still husky. "Well, well. Come say hello, cowboy."

Lily emerged from the darkness, her swinging skirts, high bosom, and harlequin face taking form like a figure in a burlesque nightmare. She'd been beautiful once, Frank saw, as she sidled up and brushed against his elbow. Still was, but with signs of wear. Her eyes were dark brown, pretty eyes, rimmed with black lines and blue shadows, and her cheeks were powdered and reddened as if someone had been slapping them. Her black hair was piled and pinned on top of her head to look like a farcical hat worn at some pompous ceremony, with a single plume hanging free like a tassel. Her perfumes penetrated Frank's abused nose with the strength of an ammoniac, causing him to blink stupidly.

"Buy me a drink?" she purred.

"Sure," said Frank, motioning to the little man whose lewd grin distended his face.

"I just wanted to talk to you," said Frank. "I have a message from Boyd."

"A message from Boyd?!" She tossed her head back and chuckled softly, exposing her throat and making her bosom jiggle. "That's a new one. A message from Boyd! I like it." She smiled and brushed her hand against his leg. "Come sit," she said.

Frank followed her to a table and sat beside her, holding onto his beer glass with both hands. Just deliver the message, finish the beer, and leave. That's all you have to do. He started as her hand settled on his leg.

"Relax," she purred. "It's been a while, has it?"

"Yeah," said Frank.

"I'm a little rusty myself," Lily said, leaning her head close to Frank's shoulder.

"I just want to tell you what Boyd said. I didn't come here for that."

"Don't be silly," she cooed. "There's only one reason anybody comes here for. And it ain't the whiskey."

Frank touched her hair with his nose and inhaled. The mingling scents of her hair and perfumes were intoxicating. All he had to do was drop two dollars on the table and he could have her. Back in the Saddle. Nearer to God. What was her specialty, he wondered. It would be like cheating on Boyd. Or would it? And it occurred to him with perfect clarity that he could do it for Boyd. "Those signs," he said. "On the way up." There would be time later to tell her about Boyd's love. Her hand snaked across his chest, fingers slipping inside his shirt. Her touch created a sensation of speed as Frank's skin tingled beneath her fingertips. Hell, he could deliver Boyd's message in word and deed.

"What about the signs?"

"Any of 'em yours?"

"Cost you two dollars to find out."

A dying man's last request.

Two dollars down and Frank following Lily's ankles up the dark stairs and along the dim hall to a twelve by twelve room with a bed, bureau, and mirror. "So," said Frank, shedding his shirt and trousers like they were on fire. "Which signs are yours?"

Lily peeled the black stocking down her leg to reveal the white skin of her thigh. "Well, I was raised a Catholic, if that tells you anything."

Frank dropped his long johns into a lump at his feet. "Oh," he said, pausing to think as the names came to him. "Nearer to God? Sermon on the Mound?" he asked.

Lily nodded providentially as she cast her corset aside, revealing a pair of pendulous, secular breasts for Frank to bear witness to. He had forgotten Boyd and was intent only on the immediate and tangible religious experience he was about to embrace. He noticed he was beginning to believe. Lily noticed too, and smiled. "Shall we begin with a short sermon?" she asked, slipping beneath the covers.

Frank nodded, his mouth agape as he lay himself down among still sheets. An animal smell, dank and musky, mingled with Lily's scented powders, and Frank inhaled deeply of it as he stretched himself out to fulfill a dying man's last request.

He lay on his back listening to her pee, impressed by the force of her stream ringing the side of the enamel pot. The pungent scent of urine touched his nostrils. "The message from Boyd," he said.

"What?"

"Boyd," said Frank, raising himself on one elbow. She was still astride the pot, wiping herself. "He asked me to tell you something."

Lily straightened from her ablution, tossing a curious look at him. "Who's this Boyd? I thought you meant your Roger."

"Boyd James. You don't remember him?"

"Nope." She sat on the edge of the bed, folding her arms under her breasts.

Frank was spent, satisfied, and sleepy. "Young, skinny kid, American. They're hanging him in a few weeks."

"What for?"

"Shot that Constable. Back in the spring."

"He use a derringer?" she asked, lifting a leg and running a hand along the top of her thigh. If she worked at it a bit she might earn another two dollars.

Frank caught a glimpse of tufted hair between her thighs. "Yeah. How'd you know?"

"Everybody was talking about it." She got up from the bed and bent to reach for her clothes, her back to Frank. "That was my pistol," she said.

"What's that?" asked Frank, intent on the small gap between her thighs where flesh and desire converged.

"I gave it to him," she said. "Didn't think he'd be so stupid."

"He was trying to go home. Back to North Dakota."

"What was his message?"

"Said he loved you."

"Loved me."

"Yeah," said Frank.

Lily tossed her head, laughing, and turned to face him. "I've heard that one a hundred times. A man gets himself in a bind and wants me to be his sister, wife, mother, and whore." She held the dress in front of her, lining up the head and arms.

Frank supposed what she was saying was probably true, he kind of fancied her that way himself.

* * *

July, 9, 1912
Battleford, Sask.
Indian
157 lb.
Drop 5'9"
1:26
Overcast, warm.

* * *

Aubrey could feel satisfaction approaching. The Bleriot was his now, he had a pilot, and soon he would have a woman to carry his son and heir. Soon he would be able to look down on

his valley from on high like the soaring ravens. He would be up there with them, would be one of them.

He pressed his foot harder on the accelerator, palming the steering wheel to avoid a pothole. Driving fast had not lost its appeal. In fact, he regularly found himself seeking new challenges by timing himself between points, pushing himself to drive faster and faster, taking his foot off the accelerator only at the last possible moment for corners and obstacles, loathe to let himself touch the brakes. He pushed the machine to its limit, always accelerating or braking, never coasting, all or nothing. Fear and speed combined, he discovered, were endlessly exciting.

Aubrey took the car to the mechanic and had the baffles rigged so he could open them and run a free exhaust pipe when he wanted more power, and close them for respectability in town. The increased power sent Aubrey out along his favourite routes over and over again, faster each time. He began recording elapsed times between places, taking great delight in watching his times diminish as his speed increased.

It happened on the road between Naramata and Penticton, a three-rut dirt track that ran along the shore at the base of the silt cliffs, breaking in sharp corners at the mouths of the gulleys. The sun was dancing like shattered glass on the water beside the road as Aubrey rounded a corner, entering the mouth of Crookshaw gulley, his wheels riding the berm perfectly. The warm air was scented with pine. At the apex of the corner, on the dry grass struggling between the ruts, a coyote was tipped back on one haunch, head bowed between parted legs as his laughing tongue gave his testicles a thorough cleaning. The coyote lifted his head from his business to watch Aubrey lock the rear wheels and go into a skid. Aubrey corrected for the skid, but one of the wheels hit something and sent the rear end slewing across to the other side, spraying up dust and gravel as the car shot towards the dry creek bed. The coyote didn't move, but calmly bowed his head to resume his tongue work on his nether parts as the McLaughlin shot past him and ploughed a furrow into the bank of the creek bed. Aubrey pitched forward to knock his head

against the windscreen and take the steering wheel in his ribs before slumping back into his seat, unconscious, the silt dust settling over the McLaughlin in a malevolent cloud.

The coyote remained on his haunch, nibbling bits of dried feces from the matted hair at the base of his tail. Then, cleaned to his satisfaction, he rocked to his feet in an easy motion, yawned and disappeared up the steep-sided gulley like a fragment of the dust cloud that settled on the motorcar and its unconscious driver.

* * *

"They gave me the choice of taking the train north or the boat south. They didn't care which so long as I was out in two days. They closed me down, Eudie." Her eyes were red around the rims. "Just like that." She'd arrived while Eudie was out and had supper waiting when she arrived home.

"What about the girls?" asked Eudie, opening her arms to comfort her. "What's happened to them?"

"Sarah took the train to Kamloops, she has an uncle there, and Hillary and Elaine have gone to Vancouver. Eleanor decided to stay and marry the Hinton boy. She was never sincere about being a suffragist anyway."

Eudie was surprised at the way Hillary seemed to've been let go with the others, and wanted to ask about it but feared sounding jealous.

"Can you put me up for a few days until I get sorted out?"

"As long as you need."

They moved Cora's suitcases and hat boxes into the second bedroom. Cora dug a hand into her bag, her eyes and forehead shadowed with the intensity of a bird seeking its prey. "Here." She pulled a folded piece of newsprint from the bag, holding it up for Eudie to see. Cora rattled the paper as she unfolded it. "Listen to this. I was there. Oh yes, here it is. Listen to this." She glanced up quickly, a flash of her dark eyes. "With reference to the presence of so many ladies in

the audience, he--this is Bowser--he jeered at the women's suffrage plank in the Liberal platform, which he said was quite impracticable because for the next twenty years the Liberals would not be in a position to rule the province. The government took a friendly interest in the question, however, had passed much legislation in favour of women, and perhaps within the next 50 or 100 years would enact legislation giving women the right to vote." Cora lowered the paper and glared. "They loved him. The men laughed and cheered, and their wives politely hid their shock behind their hands."

"All except you," said Eudie.

"I stood up and demanded his resignation on the spot. It didn't go over too well."

"It's a tough one," Eudie observed.

"I'll probably go to Victoria. That's where the politicians and the power are." Cora sighed. "I'm going to be in Bowser's way every time he turns a corner, every time he makes a speech. Some day I'm going to make him regret these words." She folded the paper roughly, as if the words on it were the man himself she was reducing to a flat wad. She crossed the room to stand in the open door, looking out at the lake and Okanagan mountain. "You're lucky, Eudie. This place suits you, with the mail route and your garden. All you need is a man around the place." She turned, smiling ironically.

"Funny you should say that," said Eudie.

"I'm only kidding," rejoined Cora.

"I can't keep up with the garden anymore. So I hired someone. You're sure to disapprove of him."

Cora eyed Eudie guardedly.

"It's Frank Wilson. The fellow that was tangled up with Boyd James, the lad that shot the Constable."

Cora's jaw fell. "You hired a criminal?"

"He's not a criminal. He wasn't convicted." Surprised at the vehemence of her response. She'd expected a little more understanding than this from Cora. "Nobody in Kelowna will give him work because of it, even though he was acquitted. He deserves a chance to prove himself."

"Well, I never met the man so I shouldn't judge him," said Cora dismissively. "And what about Fetherstone? How are you getting along with him?"

"Why don't we sit outside?" said Eudie, getting to her feet. They dragged their chairs out to the porch. Eudie put her feet on the rail and tilted back. "He bought Roger's airplane," she said. "I'm going to be flying it for him once or twice a week." She watched Cora's face for a reaction.

"What does he want in return?"

"He says nothing."

"You can be pretty sure he wants something. You're an attractive woman, Eudie. He's a single, powerful man...." She left it for Eudie to complete the thought.

"You can't be serious."

"Why not? A man who gives a woman something, no matter how small the gift, always expects something in return."

"You're a cynic, Cora," chided Eudie, trying to lighten the tone.

Cora remained silent, letting her judgement stand.

What was it he'd said about being her slave and giving her more than she would ask for? It sounded harmless, yet faintly ominous at the same time. What more could he give her? What did she have that he might want in return? He was a businessman after all, and hadn't got where he was by giving things away or investing for pleasure. "I'm cold," she said, rising. "Do you want a sweater?"

"No," said Cora, watching her.

She was disappointed that they'd disagreed on the two important things happening in her life, for she had up to this point trusted Cora's judgement, though she'd taken it with a grain of

salt. They spoke little the rest of the evening, and said a quiet "Good night," with a moment of brief, direct eye contact in which each silently questioned the intentions of the other. It was the furthest Eudie'd felt from Cora since their first meeting.

* * *

Frank caught the steamboat on its return run south the next afternoon and got off at Peachland. As he walked off the wharf he couldn't resist a glance back over his shoulder to see if he was being marked by the ship's purser again. But no one gave him a second glance as he hitched his bedroll higher on his hip and made his way past the Laundry and the Hotel and out of town.

The sky and lake were a hard blue above and below the dun-coloured hillsides. There was no wind to ruffle the surface of the lake which stretched out in the valley bottom like a vast mirror, capturing the sky and holding its reflection in a flawless inversion. Near the shore mallards tipped and dabbled, and blackbirds castigated one another as Frank passed by.

He didn't mind walking the two or three miles to Greata. His limbs felt more alive than they had in a while. Lily was a lady as well as a whore, he surmised, not like the seedy tramps at the Bellevue whom he avoided. She knew her trade well. He'd killed two birds with one stone in Nahun, fulfilling Boyd's final request and providing himself with a measure of pleasure at the same time. He would write Boyd to tell him his message had been properly delivered, and thought he might go back to Nahun some time again.

At Deep Creek he knelt and plunged his face into the water and drank, then rested in the stippled shade of an alder before continuing on to the ranch.

He climbed the narrow road that cut up the bank to the ranch in the warm shadows of late afternoon. The place looked much as he remembered it: the bare yard, clapboarded house, the glasshouse and barn, and the corral with its fallen rails. He stepped onto the porch and tapped the door.

It opened immediately and Frank found himself face to face with a young, hawk-faced woman. "You Wilson?" she asked, looking him over.

"Yes, ma'am."

"Miss Harding will be back in a hour or so. You can put your bedroll in the barn."

"Why sure, thank you, I'll--" The door closed and latched in his face, ending the conversation as abruptly as it began. Fine, thought Frank, hoisting his bedroll on his hip and crossing to the barn. As he shouldered open the tall door, the horse and cow swung their heads with half interest. Frank muttered to himself as he climbed the ladder to the loft and tossed his bedroll onto the bare, dusty planks. These animals should be out grazing, not locked in here all day. He checked their feed, then went out and wandered around taking note of needed repairs and the makeshift fence around the garden.

Two hours later Eudie burst over the rise and into the yard, a plume of dust trailing the motorcycle. Something was different. The barn door was open, but it wasn't that. He must have arrived, she thought. But there was something else changed that she couldn't identify. Frank walked out of the barn as she parked the motorcycle. "Hello, Miss Harding," he said.

"Hello. You made it," said Eudie. She peeled off her leather cap and shook out her hair. "Cora should have dinner waiting inside. You met Cora, I take it?"

"Yeah. I ate already," said Frank. "Caught a couple of kokanee and cooked them down on the beach."

"Do you cook, Mr. Wilson?"

"Frank," he said. "Call me Frank. I'm a passable cook, I'd say. Nothing fancy."

Eudie smiled cautiously. He appeared to have washed himself while he was at the lake, she noticed. "Well," she said as she shrugged out of her jacket. "Just let me clean up and eat, and then we can take a walk around the place and see what needs to be done."

"Right," said Frank. "I'll be in the loft." He watched the swing of her hips as she walked to the house, and thought of Lily. Miss Harding isn't that kind of woman, he told himself, returning to the cool shade of the barn.

Frank had bathed earlier, she was right, but he'd done it not so much to get clean as to test the reality of the situation, half expecting to be arrested by a pair of fruit farmers when he emerged from the water. But no man had been waiting for him, shotgun cradled in his arms, when he emerged, and the water was warm and satisfying. As he rinsed the dust from his limbs and scrubbed the punky smell from his groin he was satisfied that he was not repeating the bad dream of him and Boyd.

* * *

Boyd, however, was still mired in the sour dream, the end, the waking moment of his death rushing through time to claim him. Each day he made efforts to prepare himself to awake into whatever world waited for him next. Twenty-two days. He waited for Frank's reply with less certainty of hearing it as each day passed and was lost, indistinguishable from the rest of the escaping days.

Taki, in the cell across from Boyd's, had begun to talk to him. He said there was another world waiting for them. No Heaven or Hell or Purgatory, just another different world where they might find themselves at the tables of gods and kings, or as goats or sheep, driven and abused by adolescent shepherds. It did not matter which, he said, for it was just another of the many lives one must go through in time eternal.

"You mean that's all we ever do?" Boyd asked. "Just keep living and dying? Over and over?"

Taki smiled as though his young student had just discovered an important fact. "Just keep living and dying over and over," he repeated, his voice a sound soothing as water in the dim, dry cell. "There is no end. Only thresholds and beginnings."

"So you and me, we'll probably be goats or dogs next life, huh?"

Taki shrugged and raised his open palms. "We might as easily be kings," he said. "There is no telling."

Though not completely convinced, Boyd found that thinking that way helped ease the fear that gripped him when he tried to imagine the nothingness that would follow death. Of Heaven and Hell he'd never been entirely convinced, in spite of his father's faith.

* * *

July 18, 1912
Prince Albert, Sask.
1 Indian, 1 Halfbreed, 1 Irishman
170 lb. 155 lb. 190 lb.
5'2" 5'11" 4'4"
No time
Clear and sunny. Dinner by the river.

* * *

When Eudie stepped out the door the next morning to call Frank for breakfast, she saw right away the change she had only sensed the day before. The rails of the corral had been nailed back in place. Frank appeared in the door of the glasshouse. "Coffee's on. Come on in."

After breakfast they walked around the glasshouse and garden as she told him what she wanted done, sensing the while that he'd already looked it all over and seen what was needed. He had already tethered the cow and mare in the field beyond the garden. "We'll need to string proper wire on this fence," said Frank. "I saw barbed wire in the barn, I think."

"Okay," said Eudie. She didn't know she had wire of any sort.

"But I'll dig in the rest of the posts first. And brace up these corners. Somebody been sleeping out here?" He squatted beside the patch of flattened grass where Eudie had lain her blankets.

"I was. Up until I got the fence strung."

"By the looks of it you shouldn't have moved indoors." He pointed at the missing foliage of several tomato plants.

Eudie had assumed the fence would do the job the way it was, and had moved inside several days ago without giving the deer another thought.

"I'll pitch my bed out here until we get it finished," said Frank. By mid-morning he was being hit by dizzy spells. The sun was driving the sweat out of him rapidly, even though he drank frequently from the bucket at the edge of the field. It would be like this for a week or two, he knew, before he would start to feel strong and clear. He hadn't expected to begin with such demanding work as digging post holes.

Several times Eudie noticed Frank stop and grip his knees for balance, and when he fell to all fours and began to dry heave she dropped her hoe and crossed the field. "You okay?"

"Yeah," he gasped, annoyed with himself.

"Have some water," she said, kneeling beside him and holding out the dipper. Frank sat back on his heels and accepted the water, sipping it tentatively. "Don't knock yourself out first day," she said. "I need you around a little longer than that."

It was Frank's turn to be embarrassed; a man would've ignored him or fired him, not offered him water and consolation. "I'm sorry, ma'am. It'll take me a few days to get used to this."

"That's okay," said Eudie. She got to her feet and went back to her weeding, sensing his desire to be left alone. He was the only one that could purge himself. The best she could do for him was offer water once in a while and leave him alone until he got over it.

At noon they stopped and headed for the shade of the porch. Cora had made bread, which they devoured, covering it with molasses and preserves. Cherries and apricots were ripening, and Cora brought some out in a bowl.

"Where are you selling the produce?" asked Frank, splitting a cherry with his teeth.

"I'm not sure yet. I was going to sell the lettuce in Westbank and Gellatly, but I lost it. I've spoken to the same fellow about the cukes and tomatoes, but he hasn't said yet if he's interested."

"What about Summerland, or Penticton?"

"I'm going to talk to the Postmasters this week. They'll know who might be interested in buying."

"Peachland's closer, isn't it?" Frank asked.

"Yeah," sighed Eudie. "But I'm not exactly welcomed with open arms in that town."

Frank looked at her with raised eyebrows.

Eudie chuckled and fed another cherry into her cheek. "No, the motorcycle was a faux pas there, a social error. Proper ladies don't ride motorcycles, it seems."

"Ha!" Frank blurted, a note of triumph in his voice. "You're an outcast too, then. Aren't you?" he said.

"Certainly in Peachland I am."

In the afternoon Frank tried to pace himself, but was reduced to his knees once again and forced to forfeit his lunch. He managed to dig five more holes before Cora announced dinner, which came none too soon for Frank, who needed the rest more than the food. It'll take a little time to get used to it, he told himself yet again. He ate sparingly, feeling as if Cora were giving him a thorough examination the whole time. Conversation was sparse. "Well," said Frank. "I'm sorry I couldn't enjoy that stew a little more, Miss Armstrong. It's real tasty."

"Thank you," said Cora coolly. "Have you done a lot of farm work before, Mr. Wilson?"

Frank glanced at Eudie, saw she was looking at Cora. "Mostly I've worked on riverboats, but I did a short stint up near Hundred Mile some years back." He had the growing feeling he was somehow intruding on Miss Armstrong's territory, though he knew she was only visiting. He got to his feet. "I'll go check the animals. See if they need to be moved. We could leave them

out overnight if you like, they'll discourage the deer. Ought to put a bell on that cow if we have one."

"Sure," said Eudie. "You might find one in the barn."

"I'll look," he said, removing himself from the porch.

"Good God, Eudie, he's close to death," whispered Cora as they watched him cross the yard.

"He'll make it. Don't you worry. In a week or so he'll be fine. You don't like him."

"No, he disgusts me."

"Why?"

"Do I need to list the reasons?"

"Cora! You're heartless."

Frank emerged from the barn with his bedroll and a cow bell, which he raised and tinkled for them before heading towards the garden.

"I think it's time I left," said Cora. "Tomorrow or the next day."

Eudie strained to make out the expression in Cora's eyes. "Are you sure?"

"I'm not cut out to be the farm wife, cooking and baking all day. I need to hear talk about something besides tomato plants and fences. If I stay any longer I'll start resenting being here. And ... I guess I ..." Cora sighed. "Forgive me, but I thought, I hoped we might find more in common than we have. We don't seem to want the same things, after all. I guess I was--"

"No," Eudie stopped her. "I thought so too, at first, maybe. But I guess I'm, well ... I'm glad you came and stayed."

Cora sighed again and they fell silent. The sun spread dying fingers of light up the cloudless sky, tingeing the edges of the horizon with pink and mauve. An osprey cruised silently in the windless air, banked and slipped down towards the lake and out of sight.

* * *

When Eudie picked up her pay on the last Friday in July, Fetherstone wasn't waiting in his motorcar outside the Post Office, as he customarily did. In fact, neither he nor his McLaughlin were anywhere to be seen in the streets of the small town.

"Has Fetherstone been around?" Eudie asked the Postmaster, dumping the saddlebags onto the counter in a dusty heap.

Mr. Crowe, the Postmaster, coughed and sawed his bony hand through the air, then wiped the countertop where the silt was beginning to settle. "No, but he left you this," he said, producing an envelope from under the counter.

Eudie noticed with a mixture of dread and excitement that the letter bulged with more than just her pay. She thrust it inside her jacket and made the exchange of mail with the fussing old man as quickly as possible.

Outside, she wheeled the motorcycle into the shade of a large ponderosa, rocked the motorcycle back on its stand and propped herself against the seat, boots crossed at the ankle. In addition to her week's pay was a carefully written note: *Come Sunday and we will fly. AF.*

Cora had left with a final warning about Fetherstone, and Eudie had been on edge since. She rode home fast to keep her mind from straying into confusion, concentrating instead on keeping her wheels on the berm around the continuous corners of the winding road. Cottonwoods and alders whipped past like fence pickets, breaking now and then to reveal the shimmering lake. She gripped the throttle hard, twisting it further and further as she squeezed more speed from the machine and more courage from herself. The rushing air was warm on her face with occasional, momentary pockets of coolness that pricked the nostrils and the brain with alertness, soothed and readied her for the next hot stretch.

She was able to stop thinking finally, her mind a blank, her body the only expression of her being, joined to the machine by legs and arms, moving the motorcycle beneath with a control born of endless practise and response. With a subtle down-weighting, by pressing her weight down into the seat as she accelerated out of each corner she could increase the traction of the rear

wheel and, it followed, her speed. No longer was she riding with just her arms and legs, but with her entire body, the way she had ridden inside the motordrome. She smoothed out the corners and left them flattened behind her without a second thought, racing on to embrace the next and the next in a rhythm that seemed it could go on for as long as she had the strength.

At the bay below the ranch she leaned heavily into the brakes and rode the motorcycle to a skidding halt. She dismounted, cast off her jacket and flung herself onto the beach on her back. As her chest eased its heaving she tried to lift an arm, then a leg, but it felt as though the sand and gravel of the beach had been piled on them in a dead weight. She submitted to her bindings of earth and gravity, content for a time to stare at the sky. Her mind re-engaged, to her dismay, forcing her to consider the world around her, and her place in it. She worried her lower lip with her front teeth as she felt the anticipation of flying with Fetherstone, and tried to appraise Cora's warning.

She heaved a sigh and sat up, leaning back on her arms. Why did all the problems in her life seem to involve men? First Jake, and now Fetherstone. Not that she could ever become romantically involved with Fetherstone--the thought, the image was ludicrous, and socially unacceptable for a man in his position.

Frank seemed to be an exception, though their relation was differently defined. He was working out well so far, but she was still reluctant to relax completely, trying to save herself from the disappointment when he ended up drunk and quit. In some ways he seemed to be the most stable person she knew, which might be because she knew exactly where she stood with him. Not knowing that had often been the case with Jake, and was certainly the case with Fetherstone. Each time she felt she knew where she stood with Fetherstone, a little voice inside would gainsay and throw her once again into uncertainty.

In spite of Cora's repeated warning or advice, whatever you wanted to call it, she couldn't help thinking she was reading too much into it. He had only asked her to fly for him, nothing more. There was room for intuition here, but she was reluctant to indulge it. She ought to trust

her intuition, her feelings, her second thoughts, but to do so might jeopardize flying. And she wanted to fly. She had to fly. Needed to ride those invisible ramps of air that led anywhere and let you ride in a space of your own making.

Eudie squatted at the water's edge and lifted a handful to her face, rubbing her cheeks and forehead, letting the water trickle down her chin and throat.

* * *

Aubrey's accident, aside from the embarrassment it caused him, had been, he soon saw, a blessing in disguise. The bump on the head had raised a sizeable lump that had prevented him from wearing anything but a flat cap for a week, and had somehow put his future into a perspective that was perfectly crystallized in his mind, down to the last detail. You could call it an epiphany--he did. The whole design and meaning of his life had come clear in a trinity of motorcar, airplane, and the Harding woman. There were, quite naturally, several practical matters to be resolved, plans to be put in place and executed at the appropriate moment, before he could be assured of the continuity of his estate and wealth.

Mrs. Ambrose was now little more than dead weight, if one could excuse the cruel pun. Not dead, but she'd become as useless as if she were. Her infrequent muttering no longer made any sense, and her wasting flesh disgusted him. She seemed to be flaking away like pastry, leaving the crumbs of her body in the blankets she inhabited. Returning to dust.

He often wished she were dead. And each time apologized, eyes uplifted humbly, reverently. She'd lost all sense of time and kept repeating her twisted analysis of a dream he'd asked her about months ago. He no longer asked for her predictions and insights, so wasted was she, but he sat with her in the evenings when he could, dutiful and biding, suppressing his hopes for a rapid end to the remaining shards of life within her.

All day Saturday Aubrey paced like a man possessed, torn between watching over Jules and tending Mrs. Ambrose, looking across the grounds and listening up the streets for Miss

Harding. If he understood one thing about her he understood her desire to fly. He'd seen the flush and glow in her face and eyes when she'd landed in Penticton. He'd questioned Roger extensively about her skills and potential as a pilot. "She's a natural," Roger had said repeatedly, as if no further explanation was required. A natural.

* * *

Saturday afternoon Eudie dropped the end of the wire she was holding tight while Frank nailed. When the wire went slack he looked up with dismay. She was walking towards him, a look of concern on her face. "This is four days," she said. "You shouldn't be working today."

"What about the fence?"

"I can't pay you. You shouldn't be working today."

Frank removed his hat and scratched at his skull. "I never gave it any thought," he said. "Are you telling me you don't want the fence finished today?"

"No," said Eudie. "I'm telling I can't pay you if you work today. I said three days when I hired you, remember?"

Frank remembered. He wiped his forehead on his sleeve. "Yeah, but I--what about the fence? The deer aren't gonna wait." He hadn't thought a bit about the remaining four days that he'd be unemployed. Was he supposed to leave Greata for those days? He couldn't rightfully expect her to feed him if he was just loafing about. "I forgot about the other four days," he said. "I know you can't pay me, but I'd just as soon keep working. I got nothing better to do."

"This is my fault, I'm sorry. I never thought it all the way through. Listen." Nothing better to do and nowhere to go. If he were to go back to Kelowna every week he'd probably come back sick and smelling of whiskey, if he came back at all. She had to offer him something. "The best I can do--if you want to work more than three days--the best I can do is give you room and board. You don't have to work for that, though. It's not much."

"It's enough," said Frank, relieved. "It's better than any other offers I've had."

"Okay," said Eudie. "Well, shall we finish stringing this wire, boss?"

"Boss?" He saw the grin on her face and turned away, flustered. "You're teasing me," he said.

She stopped him with a hand on his shoulder. "No, Frank. It's just that I'm beginning to realize that I've got a thing or two to learn from you about farming."

"Well then," said Frank. "Take up that hammer and pull this strand tight for me, if you will."

He watched her stride back up the line of posts, fix the claw around the wire and lever it tight around the post. He began tacking the wire down again. Things had begun to look uncertain for a moment there, but she'd bailed him out again. Why, he wondered, does she keep doing that for me? Her and the Professor. "Don't question it," he told himself. "Just be thankful."

* * *

A crowd of men was gathered around the Bleriot to inspect the machine and speculate on its potential when Eudie rode onto the field Sunday morning. They fell back as she approached on the rumbling motorcycle, making room for the renegade woman who was the only person in the valley capable of making the airplane fly. Their respect for her was unarticulated--they both begrudged and secretly admired her. And to a man they found her, if the words had occurred to them, an alluring woman, though they did their best to mask their fascination as scorn when their own women were present.

Eudie did her best to ignore their overt gazes, riding beyond the airplane and parking beside the temporary shed where she could see Fetherstone. For once she felt something like relief at seeing his balding dome. He would keep the other men at bay. She felt his hand on her shoulder as she rocked the motorcycle onto its stand. He gave her a little squeeze like a kindly uncle. "Isn't it beautiful?" he was saying, beaming uncontrollably.

"Yes," Eudie agreed, glancing at the knot of men tightening about the machine again. "Is it ready?"

"Yes. Are you?"

He looked overwrought, rubbing his palms on his thighs, drawing out his handkerchief to pat at his glistening forehead and chin, striding forth and back impatiently. "Perhaps." He had stopped his pacing to stand close to Eudie's elbow. "Perhaps we should begin checking the controls," he suggested, looking for Eudie to take charge. "Make sure everything is working properly."

"Could you get them to move back a bit?" She nodded towards the cluster of men.

"Of course," said Aubrey, and turned on his heel. He walked toward them waving and gesticulating like a man chasing cattle from a feed trough. He was met with blank stares of immobility. "Move back, gentlemen! Make room!" he said in loud and urgent voice, and they fell away at his command. He puffed himself up before the small, untrusting crowd and explained the portent of what he was about to do. "I am making history here, today, before your eyes," he told them. "Mark it well, and when the day is over, spread the stories of what you have seen."

"Are you flying it?" asked a fellow with an unshaven jaw.

"Miss Harding is my pilot," Aubrey said, pointing at her.

There was a moment of mumbled exchanges among the men before one of them called out: "Does she do stunts?" Causing a gust of laughter to break from that quarter of the group. Eudie ducked into the shed as Fetherstone stood flustered before the men, groping for words to express the seriousness and magnitude of the event. The men began to head for the fence, leaving Fetherstone to explain his history-making to the field stubble.

She circled the airplane, running her hand over the canvas-covered surfaces, plucking the taut guy wires like harp strings for tension, checking the rudder and flaps for proper movement. She climbed into the cockpit, comforted by the way the narrow space confined her elbows. She looked down around her legs and feet and found the rudder pedals and throttle control. Between

her knees sprouted the steering stick with its half wheel atop the spindly shaft. She kicked the pedals, looking over her shoulder to gauge the movement of the rudder.

"Are you ready?"

"Any time."

"Okay, I'll start it up for you. Just go up and circle once or twice, make sure everything's working right. Then come down for me and we'll go up together."

Eudie ran the Bleriot down the field, turned, and with the brake on full ran up the engine. She released the brake and began rolling across the field, the airplane lifting from the ground, seeming as eager as she to break free of the shuddering earth-ride and step up onto the air and its smooth freedom.

As intent as she was on making the correct moves with her hands and feet to hold the machine straight, she was still struck with elation at the moment the charging machine shed its speed and rage and made the single, simple step into the air to become an aloof and graceful creature, climbing away from the crude lust of speed for the transcendent pleasures awaiting above. She climbed out over the marshes and banked into a sweeping turn that took her over the town, where small figures waved tiny arms. She swung out over the lake which invited her to follow its wide corridor of blue northward, then turned again and headed back to the field for Fetherstone. Taking off was easy. She remembered Roger's words about landing: pick your aim point, keep it straight, and glide onto it.

She came in too high on the first pass and had to pull out and circle around for another attempt. On the second approach, Eudie skimmed down over the tops of the trees, floating low over the adjacent field, wafting towards the strip like a giant mosquito cruising the hide of a sleeping beast. She had to keep applying the throttle to avoid touching down too soon, and as the fence passed beneath her wheels she backed off the throttle, angled the nose upward slightly and waited for the touch of the rushing ground. It met her with a solid thump, and suddenly all was speed and noise again. The uneven surface kicked at the tail wheel, trying to make it slew out

behind her, but Eudie played the pedals and kept it straight. As the Bleriot came to a halt she kicked the left pedal, as she'd seen Roger do, and brought the plane around ninety degrees. Nice touch.

Fetherstone came running across the field towards her, the tails of his coat flapping like budding wings. A small crowd of idlers followed him at a distance, gesturing rapidly to one another. Before they came too close, Fetherstone had heaved himself into the rear seat, pulled up the rope step, and was telling her to go. "Ignore these men. You and I are going flying, my dear."

She turned her head and tried to smile for him.

After circling Naramata several times, and crossing the lake to do the same over Summerland, Fetherstone tapped Eudie on the shoulder and pointed south to the narrow canyon of Trout Creek. She nodded and banked toward it, then followed it several twisting miles west to where it emerged onto an open flat and meandered along the edge of a rock-spotted field. A faint track ran across the flat and Fetherstone indicated that he wanted her to land there.

She banked away from the creek bed and glided above the field, studying the proposed landing strip. She flew low, alongside the track, inspecting it for rocks or holes, then, satisfied, pulled up in a sharp turn and lined up to land.

"What are we stopping here for?" she asked when the engine had died.

"Ah. I thought we'd take our lunch by the creek," he said brightly. "If you reach in behind my seat there's a basket."

Eudie stood on her toes and plunged her arm into the airplane's body, feeling around for the basket. Aubrey stood behind her, admiring her height and reach. They were good qualities, he thought, as though checking them off a list.

Eudie lifted the basket free. It was heavy with food and drink. Nothing but the best for Fetherstone, and lots of it, she thought with a glance at his round belly.

"This way," said Aubrey, taking the basket from her and heading off towards the creek.

She followed his almost comic figure, basket swinging from the arm of his round body, through the tall grass and into the shade. The creek water was bright and clear as it rattled over polished stones. She removed her jacket and slung it over a shoulder, staring into the water. The picnic lunch was a disquieting reminder of that evening on his houseboat.

Fetherstone called to her and she turned away from the creek. He had spread out a blanket and arranged bread and cheese, fruit preserves, biscuits, and a bottle of wine. "Come sit," he said, offering her a slice of bread with butter cheese.

Eudie accepted the bread and chewed it hungrily. She squatted at the edge of the blanket and loaded a dollop of preserves on a biscuit.

"Well," said Aubrey.

Eudie looked up, chewing steadily. He held out a glass of wine to her. She shook her head, cheeks full, swallowed thickly. "No thanks," she said.

"One glass won't hurt," he said. "Here." His arm remained extended, offering the glass.

She looked at his face and flesh-embedded eyes, no longer smiling. They ate in silence, greedily and quickly, Eudie because she had not seen food like this for too long, Aubrey because he was used to consuming large quantities of it. The block of butter cheese was chiselled down to a thin wedge, the loaf of bread decimated. Drops of preserves dotted the blanket, describing diverging paths from the jar to their mouths. She licked her fingertips clean and wiped them on her pants. Aubrey unfolded a serviette and did a methodical cleaning of his hands and mouth. "Come sit," he said, patting the blanket beside him, dropping the serviette into the basket. "I've worked out an arrangement for us that I'd like to explain to you."

Was this what she'd been waiting for, expecting? Was this what Cora had been warning her about? She lowered her frame carefully onto the blanket. She thought she ought to say something.

"That's better," he said, and patted her knee in the manner of an uncle. "You see," he began, "when I engaged you to be my pilot I had only a vague notion of my plans. But I have

recently had an experience that I would call an epiphany, in which everything has been made clear to me. Almost in the fashion of a divine revelation, if you will."

Eudie shifted her buttocks on the blanket, seeking comfort

"And I know now why our paths have crossed, why I have bought the Bleriot, and why you should be the only person in the valley capable of flying it. I have seen the design of it all, and know now exactly where each component is meant to fit. Life is like a grand machine, don't you think? A jumble of individual parts that must be assembled to create a whole."

He saw the puzzled look on her face. "But let me come directly to the point. I am a wealthy man. I have worked very hard to build what I have built, which is a considerable fortune, I don't mind telling you. But I am not so young as I once was, and while I was busy building the towns and orchards of this valley I forgot to make one rather important acquisition. A wife."

Eudie's raised her hands as though at gunpoint. "Now, wait--"

Aubrey closed his hands around hers, prayer-like, and pushed them down against her leg. "No, no. You jump to conclusions. I'm not asking you to become my wife."

Eudie exhaled slowly, untangling her fingers from his. His right hand remained on her leg.

"It's out of the question, as a matter of fact. Socially, you understand, it would not be acceptable. No," he said, taking a deep breath, looking up at the tree tops. "I have never wanted a wife. But what I failed to realize in my younger years was that a wife was also a means to a certain end. And it is this end which I have selected you to fulfill."

He rolled his face towards her and smiled benevolently. "Do you know what happens to the estate of a wealthy man when he passes on? The estate passes to the surviving members of his family, and as you may know, I have no immediate family."

And I shall give you more than you have wit to ask, the words echoed in her mind. He's going to will his estate to me, she thought wildly.

"I want you to bear me a son. An heir."

Something wrenched itself tight in Eudie's stomach. "Oh no," she said, getting quickly to her feet. "You've made a mistake, Mr. Fetherstone. You've made a big mistake." There was a rushing noise in her ears as of wind, or blood. The edges of her vision blurred, tears from the wind, from the sudden, uncontrollable speed overtaking her.

He remained on the blanket, his legs outstretched. "I think not," he said. His face was smiling but his voice was serious. "No, I think not. You are the right one. You have good bones, you're strong and tall. You'll produce a fine son, I am certain. And with that fellow living at the ranch now, there'll be no cause for suspicion." He rolled to his knees and stood beside her. He removed his jacket and began to unbutton his shirt. "Remove your clothes and let me have a good look at you."

"No, Mister Fetherstone," said Eudie angrily. "You've made a mistake. I will fly you anywhere you ask but I will not be your whore."

"Not a whore," said Aubrey calmly. "A child-bearer. A mother. Come now, we must consummate this affair."

Eudie picked up her jacket and began walking towards the airplane.

"Wait!" Aubrey said sharply.

She stopped and turned.

"You ought to consider this carefully." His voice was severe now, threatening. "Do you expect, if you refuse, to continue to fly? Do you expect to continue to deliver the mail? To be able to sell your produce within a hundred miles of the valley? Be assured, my dear, that I can and will ruin you if you do not consent to this. Now remove your clothes and lie down." He was standing in his underwear, his erection poking at the cotton garment.

Eudie swore beneath her breath. Much was suddenly becoming clear, painfully clear, to her. Fetherstone understood well the lust for speed and excitement, knew how strong her desire was for it. And he'd taken her beyond the arena of physical danger without her realizing it and was presenting a risk she couldn't defeat by riding harder or faster, or by shutting down the

machine and walking away. She stood hugging herself, numbed and unable to act. What should she do or say? What would Cora do if she were here?

"I've been studying you for some time," his voice had softened slightly. "And you have the right build, the bones, the eyes, good hips. Your body and my intellect will produce a quite remarkable son. I have no doubts."

"How can you--How can you expect me to do this? There must be some other way, something else...." She heard her pleading voice and grew angry.

"No." He shook his head. "This is the only way. For the best."

Eudie squeezed her eyes shut as he began removing her clothes, gently, the kind uncle undressing the exhausted child for bed. "Yes," he said reverently, his voice a whisper. "You'll do fine. You'll do fine."

Eudie kept her eyes closed, feeling the tears escape onto her cheeks. She opened her eyes once, for several seconds, and saw the opening of sky ringed with swaying branches, closed them and wished herself far away.

"If it's any consolation, you only have to do it until you conceive," he said, his voice placatory as he gathered things into the basket.

God help me, she entreated silently. If this is the only way out, then let it be now. A child for Greata. More than I have wit to ask. And what if I cannot conceive? Then this? Until he grows old and dies?

* * *

On Tuesday's mail run there was a note from Fetherstone requesting her to join him Saturday for another flight. The irony of the note's wording was not lost on her--the pleasure of your company is requested, etc. No ceremony, formal dress not required, no dress at all, in fact, just bring your womb and be prepared to consummate thank you very much.

I won't go, she told herself, wadding the note into a tiny ball and dropping it between the planks of the boardwalk. He can die without an heir. How could I have been so stupid? She wished Cora would make another visit. As much as she would hate to hear her say I told you so, Eudie needed a shoulder for support. She wracked her brain for some alternative, some way to keep Greata without bearing Fetherstone's child. She could up and leave Greata, she told herself, knowing it was a lie. Greata was home. Finally. The garden was doing well, now that it was getting regular attention and was protected from the deer. Frank was working out well, finding odd jobs to keep himself occupied, and she'd stopped worrying about him, or had had her concerns about him replaced by Fetherstone's demands.

* * *

July 27, 1912
Prince George, B.C.
1 Indian
148 lbs.
6'2"
1:08 (Not bad! Only 10 sec. off Uncle's best!)
Hot and dry.

* * *

Frank sensed that something was eating Eudie, but figured if she wanted him to know she would tell him. So he kept his silence, trying to work a little harder and take some pressure off her. The fence was done and he'd moved back into the barn, no longer needing to sleep beside the rows of carrots. In a couple of weeks he would begin picking the cukes and tomatoes.

He'd begun to worry that he might work himself out of a job if he wasn't careful, and had started a mental list of jobs to keep himself going. The first thing he did was clean up inside and outside the barn, clearing away a waist-deep tangle of bull thistle, under which he discovered a pile of cedar posts and more wire. He set out, then, with Eudie's approval, to fence the perimeter of Greata, spending part of each morning digging holes and planting posts. In the heat of the day he

developed the art of puttering, starting several small jobs at once, and keeping them all going a bit at a time, moving from one to the next with no apparent method while maintaining steady progress at them all. There were, from time to time, periods of vacant staring which were a necessary part of the process in which a job had to be envisioned at some inarticulate level, the shape of it often becoming apparent only after the application of hands and brow sweat. He made it a point to do his staring when Eudie was not around to watch him at it.

By the end of his third week Frank had started work on two or three projects on his mental list and envisioned several more. The laying out and construction of the fence took up the greater part of his "spare" time, but he also, having laid his hands on a good bastard file, sharpened every tool in sight--shovel, spade, scythe, axe, and hoe. With a pair of blacksmith shears, sharpened first, he trimmed the mare's hooves where they'd grown out. He considered reshoeing her until he realized he'd never done it before and never watched closely enough to try. He made plans to rehang the corral gate, renail some shingles that lay loose on the roof of the house, and replace the broken panes in the glasshouse. And he began to think about chickens and fresh eggs.

* * *

Aubrey looked immensely pleased when Eudie pulled up beside the fuel shed. She avoided his eyes as she parked the motorcycle and walked to the Bleriot. "I thought we'd make a pass up over Chute Lake and have a look at the work on the railway."

Eudie nodded, ducking under the wing to set the prop as Aubrey hoisted himself into his seat. The moment the ground dropped away from the wheels Eudie was almost able to forget his presence. She looked down on her right at the Okanagan River, a series of oxbows lined with dense brush and acres of marsh. Just beyond the treetops at the lake's edge she could see the end of the CPR wharf and a few men standing beside a small freight boat. She dropped her right wing and flew towards the dock, passing directly overhead, then crossed the stippled water towards the

benchlands that unfolded above the clay cliffs. They began to climb steadily, passing over the green, quilted expanse of orchard plots with their orderly rows imposed on the flow of mounds and knolls and gulleys. Scattered stands of pine and fir lined up where the bench ended and the mountainside steepened, barring the intrusion of orchards and flumes. She nudged the steering stick left and banked away from the mountain, climbing still, and riding a huge spiral through 270 degrees before levelling her wings and aiming for Little White Mountain, rising like a white-tipped dorsal fin in the distance.

They flew over Chute Lake and the rail camps, seeing little activity beyond a sudden, frantic gathering of men at their passing, and Fetherstone pointed to Summerland.

She circled above the town twice, and when she began to level out and head back to Penticton, he indicated to her to keep circling. They completed four more circles before he let her straighten out and fly home, Eudie expecting him at any moment to tap her shoulder and point towards the Trout Creek canyon and flats behind Summerland.

Back at the field she hurried to tie down the airplane and get away. Fetherstone waited for her in the door of the fuel shed. As she approached, aiming for the motorcycle beside the shed, he smiled and crooked his finger. "Come in here a minute."

Nausea rose in her throat as she stepped into the dim shed and the gasoline fumes. He closed the door so the only light was in thin, vertical slits. "I love the smell of gasoline," he said. "It must be an aphrodisiac."

Never again. Never again. She repeated the words over and over as she rode home, a talisman against Fetherstone and his heir, against her prostitution to flying.

She could write Roger again and see if his offer still stood, telling him she'd changed her mind. Except that she hadn't changed her mind. She had no desire to travel steadily and live the life of uncertainty that a travelling air show would hold. She'd found the place she wanted to stay,

and she'd found the outlet for her need for excitement. But now flying was threatening to be her undoing, one way or another, and she could not imagine living without it.

Roger was right. To become a pilot was to become an artist. Being an artist, they said, required certain sacrifices. Some artists went hungry, some went mad, or died syphilitic. Some made deals with the devil, others with the bottle. But she knew of none that had prostituted their wombs in order to practise their art. She was a whore to excitement, a slut for a moment's exhilaration. The only hope was to get pregnant. It was the only reprieve she could imagine, temporary as it would be.

* * *

Frank was obsessed about fresh eggs for breakfast--poached, scrambled, omelettes, or sunny side up. The more he scratched around the place the more he found to support the notion. Somebody'd had big plans for the place and had laid in materials for several jobs before leaving. Eudie had no idea most of it was there, and seemed only mildly interested when he showed her his latest find, or suggested another project, giving her vague approval to each.

There was a stack of milled planks inside the barn, left over from the barn or the house. Just about the amount required to tack a coop on the side of the barn. He had the boards stood on their ends, lined up against the barn like sentries while he hacked at the grass and thistle with the scythe to clear a place to build.

"What now?" she asked as she rocked the motorcycle onto its stand. Her jacket hung open and her neck was streaked with dust.

"What do you think of chickens?" he said, hooking an elbow over the top of the scythe handle.

"Chickens," said Eudie. "Sure."

As easily as if he'd suggested they eat breakfast in the morning. Frank tried not to stare at her, but she looked pretty disturbed about something. "Everything okay?" he heard himself ask.

"No," she said, turning quickly and walking to the house.

Frank watched her walk to the house, wondering if he should follow. "You're just the hired hand," he reminded himself. "Don't go to presuming more than that." He swung the scythe again, mowing down thistles and problems with broad, even strokes.

"Where are you going to get the chickens?" she asked Frank in the morning.

He was nailing together the nest boxes. "Don't know yet." He looked up at her with a half grin. "Thought I'd go into town after midnight and find some."

Oh no. "Don't you dare. The last thing we need is stolen chickens."

Frank reared back his head and laughed. "Don't worry, I'm not going to steal them."

Eudie blushed, embarrassed at her naivete, still expecting the worst from him. "Next mail run I'll ask if anybody has any to trade or give away. Those Postmasters know what everybody's up to. How many do we need?"

"Four or five ought to be plenty," said Frank.

* * *

Getting pregnant would stop Fetherstone from having his way, but it would mean carrying and delivering a baby. It would mean giving up riding and flying after two or three months. Getting pregnant and finding someone or some way to miscarry would only interrupt Fetherstone's plan for an heir until he found out what she'd done, and then she'd be forced to submit to him again. But miscarriages were not uncommon. It wouldn't be all that unusual if she happened to miscarry after three or four, maybe five, months of showing nothing. Some women showed little until the fifth or sixth month.

The only thing she was sure of was that she could not endure further humiliation. Getting pregnant, or even telling him that she was pregnant would bring a temporary escape. As soon as she told him she'd miscarried she'd have to devise something else, like becoming immediately pregnant again. If it happened several times, and became apparent that she was

incapable of carrying a child, maybe he would abandon her and find someone else. And in that case he would not have reason to ruin her.

It was the only thing to do. It might end the mail delivery, but she could survive that if she had to. Eudie sat up out of her ruminations and picked up the pocketwatch, realizing she'd been hearing the meadowlarks for some time. Would he take back the watch? It was nearly seven. The mail would be late today, but it would still be delivered faster than by paddlewheel. She would remind the Postmasters of that fact when they questioned her late arrival.

It was a relief to spend the day on the motorcycle and not have to talk to people too much. She could end each conversation as abruptly as she liked by glancing at her watch and mumbling something about running late. As she sped along the dusty roads of the valley the idea of declaring herself pregnant made more and more sense.

There were prices to pay whatever you did, that was nothing new. And larger events in life demanded larger expenses. It had been that way with Jake--he'd crossed the line and ridden right out the top of the motordrome like a damn fool trying to ride into the sky--and it would be no different with Fetherstone. Riding the Wall had cost her a man she loved and feared; the pleasure of flying would be paid for with her body. It all came down, sooner or later, to some form of exchange.

Driving into Naramata to make the mail drop had become a source of dread for Eudie, but as she entered the town site on Friday she had no doubt that one of Fetherstone's invitations would be waiting for her, requesting the pleasure of her company in another tryst in the fuel shed. And she felt prepared for the invitation, no longer felt powerless to do other than he beckoned, no longer felt like total control of her life had been removed from her grasp.

She was not disappointed. The note was in the envelope with her pay, as usual. Sunday.

* * *

The letter from Frank was the only letter Boyd ever received. The moment he had it in his hands he regretted not having asked Frank to tell Lily to write. That would've been best, but it was too late to send her a letter and expect a reply. He was pleased that Frank had done as he requested. He imagined the conversation he and Lily would've had. A good young man, just hit a patch of bad luck. Yes, a sweet youth, I felt something move in my heart when he left me. And he imagined possible variations on the theme, rearranging the words in as many ways as he could think of without losing the meaning.

The dog days of July passed sultry and oppressive, and the summer entered August and Boyd began counting the remaining days of his life on his fingers. The rest of his life didn't look like much when he held it before him in a cluster of fingers. A finger was a poor way to represent a day in a life, he reckoned, even a day spent lying on your bunk watching a patch of sun cross the cell floor.

The cells stayed cool as tombs, and provided an escape from the crushing heat in the courtyard, and Boyd was reluctant to leave his cell when he was allowed his daily hour of exercise. "Come up and see the sun," Taki repeatedly urged him. "Look at the sky.

"Show me a prairie sky," he replied, "and I'll come." The square patch of sky was not worth the effort. He read and reread Frank's letter, trying to extract all meaning from it, trying to determine Lily's presence in Frank's words. Lily had re-stored Frank's faith, the letter said, which must mean that Frank had been impressed with Boyd's choice of women, for neither of them was religious that he knew of.

With the fingers of one hand remaining intact, the lumber for the gallows arrived and all day long for the next three days the prison echoed with the sawing of wood and the din of hammer blows. Men raised themselves on one elbow and stared through the bars vacantly, spat, and fell back to their bunks with oaths on their lips. Boyd sought refuge in Frank's letter. Repeated the words to himself to ward off the cutting and pounding.

* * *

Saturday morning Silas Bowering's grey nag dragged herself over the crest of the hill and into the yard. Behind the ragged mare were Silas' buckboard and Silas, and in the bed of the wagon was a small crate. "Heard you were looking for chickens," he said as Eudie approached, Frank trailing. "Who's he? Husband?"

"Hired man," she said.

The old man grinned and spat a brown streak. "Hidy," he said to Frank.

"Hi."

Silas turned sideways on his seat, dangling his legs, and stared at the crate in the bed behind him. "Better take these quick," he said. "Before the boy's ma finds out what I done with 'em."

Eudie and Frank peered through the sides of the crate.

"Four reds. Good layers every one."

"What do you want for them?" asked Eudie.

"What've you got?"

"Not much yet. Few ripe tomatoes. Cukes and carrots soon."

"That'll do. Take 'em off the wagon quick."

"What's the hurry?" asked Frank. "These belong to someone else?"

Silas looked affronted. "Are you suggesting these chickens is stole?"

"No, sir. I'm just curious about what's your hurry to unload 'em."

"Hah!" he spat. "You'll do. They belonged to George, my grandson. Least they did till he run off to Vancouver with that damn ball team. Fancies himself a ball player. Can't figure it, myself. Kid's too skinny. Wears glasses yet." He swung his legs over the back of the seat and began pushing the crate out the back. "Take 'em."

Frank lunged to catch the end of the crate as it came off the bed. Eudie caught the other end and they lowered it to the ground. "I'll pick you some tomatoes," said Eudie. "Just a minute."

Silas waved her off. "Square up some other time. Have to get back before the wife gets to suspecting me. I'll see you."

"Thanks," said Eudie.

"Nothing to me," said Silas, flicking the reins along the back of the grey.

They watched his head disappear over the crest, heard the groan of the wheel brake, then turned and looked at one another. "Well, you got your chickens."

"I'll be," said Frank. "Fresh eggs."

* * *

"This is wonderful news, indeed," said Fetherstone. "Good seed and a fertile womb." He winked.

He seemed genuinely pleased and impressed. Proud, even. She'd spilled the news like a schoolgirl with a good report card, embarrassing herself but sounding utterly convincing.

"So quickly," he remarked. "A good sign." He took several steps towards the Bleriot and stopped. "You must teach me to fly. Today. We don't dare risk the life of my son with further flying. And I'll arrange a motorcar for the mail. The motorcycle is much too dangerous for you now." He had planned every detail of her pregnancy. His thoroughness disarmed her.

He laid a consoling hand on her shoulder. Leaned close and tried to kiss her cheek. "Oh, I know you must be disappointed that I have to ground you, but surely you see the reason. We must make sure your body is well taken care of and safe from all danger."

"I've never taught anyone to fly before," was all she could think of to say.

"You've never carried a child before either, have you," he replied.

He sat in the cockpit while Eudie stood on a box beside him and talked him through imaginary takeoffs and landings. She had the impression that he already knew much of what she was telling him, and wondered if he'd received some instruction from Roger before he left. It would not have surprised her to learn that he had.

Finally, he did several runs up and down the field by himself and took off. He wouldn't let Eudie go up with him, nor did she want to. She watched him circle the field, wings wobbling and tail wagging, trying to pass the nose, and hoped he would crash, hoped he wouldn't damage the airplane.

The wheel carriages survived the impact of his landing, and he taxied back from the end of the field, arm raised triumphantly. "A splendid experience," he bellowed as the engine died. "Far superior to being a passenger, I must say."

Eudie smiled lamely, trying to share his enthusiasm.

"Now," he said, taking her by the arm and leading her towards the shed. "Don't look so downcast. They say pregnancy is a wonderful experience."

"So that's it for flying?"

"For the time. For the time."

They stopped at the door of the shed.

"You're absolutely sure of your conception, are you?"

She nodded. "My time was supposed to come four days ago."

"It might be late?" he asked.

"No. I'm never late."

"Perhaps we should do it once more to be sure," he suggested.

"Oh, no," she said quickly. "It might, we might, you know, damage the...."

"Oh, I see. Yes, of course." He stroked his moustache thoughtfully. "Well, then, I guess there's nothing for it but to watch you grow. You'll be sure to tell me," he inclined his head closer to her. "If the, uh, if the blood should," he raised his eyes and peered into her face.

"Oh, yes," she assured him. "Yes."

"Good." Fetherstone took a deep breath and let out a long sigh as he surveyed the field and the valley itself. "Marvellous summer isn't it? Sunshine. The orchards are doing well. Peaches especially. Bumper crop."

Eudie began making motions to leave. Fetherstone remained with his hands clasped over his belly, feet wide apart, casting his eyes up and down the valley as if watching for airplanes. Only when she was astride the motorcycle did he seem to notice her presence and turned, frowning at the machine.

"I'll arrange a motorcar right away. It'll be a little slower, but we can't have you risking the future on that any longer."

Eudie stood and pedalled the machine forward, then settled into the seat as the engine fired and carried her across the field to the road. She swung on to the road and accelerated hard, leaning forward over the fuel tank to escape the wind.

* * *

The sun rolled over the top of the mountain behind Penticton and spilled light into the valley, erasing the remains of the night and promising heat. When Frank woke he knew what day it was, knew it was August the eighth. Not that he'd been following a calendar, in fact he couldn't have explained how he knew the date other than to remark on a feeling in his bones, which, if you're old enough and he considered that he was, can be used to account for any kind of intuition. But Frank's bones didn't feel any different from any other day. He just knew, as though some subconscious clock had been ticking away Boyd's days without his knowing until it struck zero and rang.

In the yard he looked at the sun and gauged the time. Six-thirty or seven. What time? he wondered. He did the chores without noticing them, feeling the weight of the date and trying to figure what it meant or ought to mean to him. He saw it as the closing of an unfortunate episode, one that had both stopped affecting his life and would continue to affect it for as long as he had memory of it. No, he corrected himself, it was a closing for Boyd, but not for himself. How would the Professor make sense of it? What would he say about this morning? Would he still talk about morals and exile, or would he say that Frank had redeemed himself?

Frank ventured his own answer in the Professor's stead. I still ain't walking and talking with the town types but I don't have a particular need to. I'm still in a kind of exile, you could say, but it's a comfortable one--I'm in good company and I've got the run of a small spread. It ain't my own but it feels a damn sight better than working for Oldfield. I wasn't cut out to be a foreman of Chinese anyway.

It was a bit wordy, like the Professor, but it would do for now.

* * *

Boyd did not come awake as most others as he had not been asleep. All night he'd wrestled his blanket on and off--too cold without it, too hot with it on--like a man wrestling demons. But the only winner was time, and time had caught up to him, or run out, however you wanted to look at it.

It hadn't been until the hangman's appearance the day before, to determine their weights and the sizes of their bindings that Boyd felt the imminence of his death. Hackett, the hangman, had looked him over like a man at a cattle auction, appraising him from all sides, squeezing his arms and legs to get an accurate measure of his bone structure. It was akin to being measured for a suit or a coffin. But he'd heard nothing about whether he'd be placed in a coffin afterwards and hadn't asked.

It was hard to imagine being dead. Would he just shed his body like Taki had said, and begin another life? He hoped they would treat his body with respect.

Even the banging of the carpenters' hammers as they nailed together the platform that would stage his final gesture had not disturbed him much as the hangman. The hangman. You would expect an evil man, dressed in black; a man who took pleasure in dangling unfortunates on a rope; a man in cahoots with the devil himself. But Hackett was an unassuming man, quiet, efficient and business-like. Just a man doing a job, like a tailor who knows he is judged by the

appearance of his final product. An artist, if you asked him, condemned men his content, the dance of death his form.

The smell of coffee arrived like a muse, and Boyd tried to think of pelicans again, but the word remained no more than a word.

* * *

Eudie woke to the sound of Frank dropping a stove lid and cussing. She'd intended to be up before he returned from chores and have the stove lit and the coffee water on to boil. She lay on her back and listened to him coaxing the stove, pumping water and mumbling to himself, and congratulated herself on her judge of character, for once. She hadn't flown for nearly a week, which angered her, and had consequently been riding very fast, which had been drawn to her attention by several Postmasters who remarked on her early arrival. She'd heard nothing from Fetherstone about the car yet, which was fine.

Speed was only a substitute for the freedom of flight. But, she sat up in bed, reminding herself that flying was not all that free. Nothing was free: not flying, not motorcycling. Each had exacted its toll. She'd survived riding with Jake, but was less certain of her ability to survive Fetherstone, even though she was safe now, for a while.

She considered her position of safety. Life had changed considerably since she'd stopped riding The Wall, and she had changed, been forced to change, with it. She remembered something Frank had said one day about being raised on rivers. You look at a river long enough, he said, and you begin to see the patterns and order in the chaos, and you watch it longer still and you see that all the water is ever trying to do is reach a state of balance. But even the balance it finds after it reaches the ocean isn't a lying still and stagnating like slough water, but a balance of flow, of ebb and flood. Don't ask what it means, he'd said. I'm just telling you what I've seen.

* * *

The breakfast the day guards brought was different from the usual. A mug of oily coffee and two slices of sodden, buttered toast. The last breakfast. The coffee turned acidic in Boyd's stomach. He nibbled the toast without interest. What was the point in eating?

"Eat up," said Taki, noticing Boyd's lack of appetite. "It's a long journey ahead. You'll need your strength."

Boyd said nothing, but took a bite of toast to appease him. The sounds of the prison coming awake seemed louder and sharper than normal. Doors clanged with finality, resonating up and down the tiers and hallways. Keys jingled, cups knocked against trays as if the entire prison were operating in the cell next to him. He collected the sounds, tagged each and filed it in memory, and sifted through the new ones for the single sound that would mark the reality of the day. The voice of the priest or the hangman. They would probably send the priest first, to whom Boyd had already said all he had to say. He stared at the butter congealing on the bread and pushed the tray aside.

* * *

Deputy Warden Levitt tapped on the door with the toe of his boot then elbowed it open, not waiting for a reply. Abe Boyle, the Warden, was hunched over his raised boot, rubbing up a shine in the toe he'd planted on the desk edge. He glanced up as Levitt placed two steaming cups of coffee on the desk and eased himself into a chair. Boyle spat into the rag and finished buffing. "How's my jail running this morning?" he asked Levitt.

"Like a well-oiled machine," Levitt assured him.

Boyle grunted, lowering his boot, and dropped the rag into the bottom drawer of his desk.

"Tucker's going to help Hackett with the pinioning. Seems to know his business, that fellow," said Levitt. "He's the man that hung that Indian in New Westminster last fall. The one that wouldn't die, remember that?"

"By God, yes. Hung him four times."

"And Hackett did it the fourth time."

"Right. Knows his stuff."

"He's your only man, I'd say."

Boyle opened a box on his desk and pulled out two cigars. Levitt accepted and produced a flaming match which he held to the tip of Boyle's cigar before lighting his own.

"He was asking if he could hang these two separately," said Levitt. "One after the other, so he could time himself. He wants to see how fast he can do a hanging."

Boyle looked at him with disbelief. "You didn't--"

"Hell no!" growled Levitt, grinding the match out with his heel. "This is a prison, I told him, not a goddamn sideshow. A prison," he repeated. "Not a goddamn sideshow."

"Good," said Boyle, draining his cup and thrusting his chair back with his knees. He lifted his Sam Browne from the coat stand and strapped it around his middle, inhaling to reach the worn notch on the belt. When he relaxed, the buckle dug into his belly, so he backed it off a notch, turning away from his inferior as he did. He stared at his reflection in the window as he set his cap, the brim straight across the eyebrows. "Let's get on with it. The angels must hang. Turn the mob into the yard, I want them all to see it."

* * *

Aubrey breached out of sleep with an immediate sense of anticipation at what the day promised. He was going flying today, and he was going to take Mrs. Ambrose up with him and give her a taste of the freedom and boundlessness of the sky.

Thrushes played ascending scales in the pine branches outside his bedroom window, urging him to hurry with his dressing and embrace the day full on. He looked in on Mrs. Ambrose and gave her a gentle shake. "Awake," she croaked. "Always awake."

"We're going out today," said Aubrey, leaning over the tiny frame that inhabited the blankets. A queer, faintly metallic smell emanated from the old woman as an arm appeared from under the blanket, the hand closing on Aubrey's with surprising strength.

"Out?"

"Yes," said Aubrey. "We're going flying, you and I." It was something he should have done for her much sooner. Taking her up in the airplane would convince her, he knew, of the wisdom of technology. He watched her face, waiting for an expression of gratitude or joy to crack her usual scowling mask.

"No," she croaked, spittle escaping her slack lips.

"We'll be able to see forever," he assured her. "Doesn't that sound grand?" She remained silent, gripping his hand tightly. He pried her fingers from his. She would see soon enough. She would see.

He propped her in the passenger seat of his McLaughlin, swaddled in extra blankets, and drove slowly along the lakeshore road, passing in and out of the sunlight. Gusts of wind vexed the water's surface then fled to other calm spots. With the top down he was able to see up through the treetops to the cloudless sky. Aubrey was satisfied. He had a son now, and he could fly with the ravens. All else was dross.

* * *

"Breakfast is ready," called Frank.

"Okay," she replied, her mind foggy. She'd drifted off to sleep again. Eudie flung back her blanket and stepped into a pair of overalls. She combed her hair with her fingers, then opened her door to the smell of coffee and bacon. She seated herself before a steaming cup of coffee and bowed her head to it.

"Today's the day," said Frank, his back to her.

"What?"

"Boyd," he said, and pointed to the calendar.

Eudie watched Frank shovel the bacon strips onto a plate. He cracked four eggs into the fat, covered the pan and turned to face her. "They hang him today?" she asked.

"Yeah." He pulled out a chair and leaned his elbows on the table.

"You aren't responsible," she reminded him.

"I know, but--"

"But nothing," said Eudie, rising. She went to the stove and turned the eggs. "You die the same way you live. Age doesn't matter." That didn't explain why she and Frank were still alive and well, she knew, but it might explain why Jake and Boyd weren't.

* * *

The prisoners shuffled into the yard, seeking the shade along the south wall, trying to distance themselves from the scaffold. The new lumber gleamed like flesh--fresh cut spruce and fir that you could smell if you stood close enough. Two empty nooses dangled above the open traps, as if two bodiless spirits had already been hanged, or the two intended necks had somehow slipped their nooses and disappeared with the coming of daylight.

There was little else to look at inside the grey walls. The patch of sky overhead held little of interest to the prisoners below. Conversation was muted and confined to grunts as the men smoked and waited for the cast of players to align themselves on the wooden stage and enact their brief tragedy.

Few of the prisoners had witnessed a hanging before, and none would give voice to the questions in their minds. What did it sound like when a man's body hit the end of the rope? Was it true you shit yourself? Most men tried not to think of their questions, and studied their cigarettes closely as the tobacco and paper burnt down close to their fingers.

In the cool of their basement cells, Boyd and Taki were ordered to stand, hands crossed in front of their stomachs, while their riggings were set. Hackett worked quickly, making only the necessary comments as he bound the prisoners.

"You put my hands here," Boyd said, holding his crotch, "so they don't see me piss myself?" His voice cracked, the joke dying on his lips. The other men shifted their weight and looked at their boots. "You get paid good for this?" Boyd asked.

Hackett glanced up, nodded. "Yup," he said softly.

"How much?"

Hackett straightened, giving a tug at Taki's belt. He looked at the guard before he spoke. "Three hundred dollars."

"For the two of us?"

"Each."

Taki whistled softly.

Hackett stepped back, appraised his work, then nodded to the guard. "Let's go," said the guard.

At the end of the block waited the priest and the wardens, who fell into single file and led the men up out of the shadows and into the white light.

Boyd squinted hard against the sun while trying to take in the entire scene. His last memory. No, not yet. He heard the men's boots on the wooden steps, and the others join them in time. Boyd lifted his eyes and was met by the stairs to the platform. The gallows. His stomach rose and twisted and he thought of trying to run. He stared down at the iron collars around his wrists and ankles and was prodded from behind.

His cheeks felt numb and the collar of his shirt chafed his sweating neck. His stomach rolled again and he worried that he might void before they hanged him. He prayed silently that he wouldn't. His boots struck out of time with the others as he ascended the stairs, causing a stilted counterpoint to reverberate in the courtyard. He stopped again at the top, out of breath. The

traps were up and set, and the expanse of the platform seemed huge. He could see rolling hills beyond the prison walls, and above him was a sky no longer square--the most sky he'd seen in weeks. He stared at it in wonder until he was prodded again.

* * *

Lifting Mrs. Ambrose in the rear seat of the Bleriot nearly exhausted Aubrey. Once he had her wedged in with all her blankets, he sat on an apple box and waited for the stars to clear from the edges of his vision. Blackbirds called from the marshes beyond the edge of the field and meadowlarks sat like sentries on fenceposts, watching Aubrey and reporting his moves down the line.

With his hands smelling pleasantly of gasoline, he closed the shed door and walked back to the airplane. He stepped forward and raised his arms in the air, closed his fingers on the edge of the blade and thrust it toward the ground, leaping away lest it strike at him. Again he stepped forward and raised his arms and thrust the propeller downward, leaping clear. The engine burst to life, shaking the air and billowing smoke.

A gusting crosswind buffeted the Bleriot as it lifted into the air in a wobbly take-off. Aubrey overcorrected with the rudder pedals as the tail slid side to side, trying to pass him.

* * *

The other men on the platform seemed distant and ethereal as they shuffled around one another, directing him to his place and finding their own. He stood in the centre of a two-and-a-half foot square, separated from the others by a line slightly wider than a saw blade. He heard the priest speaking to Taki, felt the hangman behind him. The noose was lowered over his head and brought snug with the knot pressing against his skull behind his left ear. The rope fibres scratched at his neck like wool, and he lifted his chin and swivelled his head to remove the itch. "Here," the

hangman said sharply. He stepped behind Boyd again, lifting and tightening the noose around his neck. "Don't do that again."

Boyd felt the urge to piss. He took a large breath of air and closed his eyes, fighting the urge to cry out. There were no particular words he wanted to say, it was just the sound he wanted to make. Wanted to hear the final sound of his voice. The only sound now was the hangman's boots as he made his final preparations.

He became aware of a growing murmur of voices around him, and opened his eyes. A number of prisoners were looking up at the west wall and pointing at the guard tracing something across the sky with his rifle barrel. "Shoot it! Shoot it!" they began to chant. "Shoot it!"

Boyd searched for the target and saw a large, lone bird approaching from the north. Four, five wing beats, glide, two, three, four, five, and glide again on wide wings. No other bird flew with the same pattern, the same rhythmic grace. "Shoot it! Shoot it!" the mob chanted as the bird drew near.

The guard on the wall squeezed off two rounds, and a burst of white feathers exploded from the pelican's belly. The huge bird tipped and fell down the air, then caught itself on outspread wings and glided for several seconds, trying to recover. A second guard released the barrels of his shotgun and another burst of feathers filled the air. Boyd watched with horror as one wing folded and flailed, useless. Without a sound the broken white bird began to tumble through the air as the good wing fought to contain the unravelling flight. As the pelican disappeared behind the south wall a cheer erupted in the courtyard. "Bastards!" Boyd screamed at the guards. "You bastards!"

A fist flattened his ear, causing him to lose his balance. His boots slid on the green planking and he went down, his head striking the boards as his feet skidded off the edge of the platform. His cheek and nose rubbed along the fresh spruce as he kicked a leg up to catch his fall, but the movement caused his upper body to pivot and roll off. As he slid from the platform, open-mouthed and mute, the rope twisting round his neck and pressing the knot into his cheek

like a row of knuckles, his pale eyes could be seen sighting back up the rope, gauging the distance he had to fall before being prematurely hanged. Someone shouted and suddenly Hackett had him by the shirt collar.

Another cheer arose from the mob milling in the yard. They'd not expected to be entertained at all, and were mightily pleased with the unfolding of events so far.

Hackett and a guard hauled Boyd aboard like a hay bale, standing him on end and holding him until they were sure he would stay up on his own. Boyd stood dazed and gasping. The side of his face was burning, and his nose bled where the skin had been scraped away. As Hackett checked and straightened the pinions, Boyd caught the hangman's eye. "Thanks," he said.

Hackett gave him a strange look. "Bloody hell," he cursed, loud enough for everyone on the platform to hear. "Goddam circus."

"Please," said the priest.

Hackett glared.

"Get on with it," the Warden said, invoking order. He turned to Levitt and muttered fiercely, "I want those shooters in my office!"

The priest prayed aloud for the condemned souls, head bent and hands clasped at his chest. He stopped in front of Boyd. "Do you have anything to say, my son?"

Boyd looked at the red-rimmed eyes and mottled nose. I'm not your son, he wanted to say. I didn't mean to kill any man, he wanted to say. He opened his mouth to speak, but no sound would pass his throat. He swallowed and closed his lips. Tears blurred the corners of his vision and he blinked to clear his eyes.

"Goodbye, gentlemen," he heard Taki say. "Goodbye, Boyd."

Boyd turned his head and nodded at Taki as the hood came down over his head, closing him off from the world, filling the space around his head with a white light. Why white? White was the colour of light and pelicans, not silence and death.

Silence. A nervous cough.

Boyd's body burned in several places, but it didn't matter now, his body. Why white? Death came black. Didn't it? The brightness of it was puzzling. He strained for sound. Heard the beginning of sound. Sensed motion: fell.

The seven foot plummet to the end of the rope snapped Boyd's neck at the third vertebra. A deadened bounce and his body arching like a hooked trout, muscles wrenching and snapping to a flurry of signals before relaxing, going slack and swinging. Going slack and voiding itself in a final purge as blunt-toed boots kicked into a graceless pirouette.

* * *

Frank held onto the knots in the rope as he descended its length to the bottom of the well. When he reached bottom he lowered his feet into several inches of water and began chipping at the muck with a spade, filling the bucket with sand and silt. It was this or haul water up from the lake.

Eudie stood at the top, holding the rope and waiting for the signal to haul it up. She heard the unmistakable drone of the Bleriot and cast her eyes down the sky. Fetherstone up flying again. Hearing the Bleriot brought a moment of anger and regret. All she had to do was tell him the blood had come and she could be up there again and, the inevitable followed, she could also be on her back or bent over a sawhorse while he created his heir. No, it was not a choice to consider.

Frank hollered from the bottom of the shaft and Eudie braced her foot against the cribbing, hauling up the rope hand over hand. She could hear the Bleriot getting closer, and as she pitched the muck over the bank she spotted it along the edge of the bench, flying towards Greata. He would pass in another minute or so.

"Bucket," she called down, and began to lower it.

"That Fetherstone I hear?" called Frank.

"Yeah," replied Eudie. She could hear Frank saying something more, but the sound of the airplane drowned out his voice. Fetherstone was going to fly directly overhead, she saw, and watched him come, the heel of a hand on her hip, craning her neck as the airplane passed above her.

A wing dipped and Fetherstone raised a salute to her, signalling what? A victory? she thought bitterly. The airplane righted itself partway and continued in a wide turn out over the lake in a gradual climb. Frank shouted from the bottom of the well and she began hauling up the filled bucket, keeping one eye on the Bleriot. Fetherstone was doing his usual routine, circling endlessly above the valley so he could look at it. But he was climbing too, as he circled.

In a little while she could no longer see the Bleriot, but could catch its sound when the breeze shifted, and knew he was still up there, circling and climbing. After she could no longer hear the airplane she continued to look up at the empty sky, waiting for the Bleriot to reappear in its descent. She pulled out the pocketwatch and calculated--he'd been up nearly an hour.

They took lunch on the porch steps, squinting at the sky while they ate. "You don't fly for him anymore?" said Frank, inflecting the observation as a question.

Eudie shot a look at him, wishing she could tell him. Not that there was anything he could do about it, but it would do her good, she reckoned, to speak the situation aloud to someone. "No," she said quietly. "Not since I taught him how to fly."

"A shame," said Frank. "Flying seemed to agree with you."

Eudie removed a piece of food from her teeth with a fingernail and examined it, flicked it into the dust, then pushed herself to her feet and returned to the well.

* * *

August 8, 1912
Kamloops, B.C.
1 American, 1 Japanese
135 lb. 158 lb.
7' 5'9"
No time.

Goddamn circus.

* * *

Aubrey was higher than he'd ever been, and the valley below seemed to be losing its significance because of it. But the endless blue was inviting, and he wanted to be sure Mrs. Ambrose was getting the benefit of the greatest possible sight. He wished he could turn in his seat to see her face.

He was laying wide circles on the sky above Naramata, his chin hung on the edge of the cockpit to enjoy the view, when he noticed the movement from the corner of his eye. What was she doing? He twisted his bulk for a better look, causing a wing to drop suddenly. He overcorrected for it, the Bleriot yawing alarmingly as he recovered. He turned his head as far as he could while holding the stick steady, and saw Mrs. Ambrose trying to pull herself upright in her seat. "No! Sit down!" he shouted, his voice torn from his mouth and shredded by the wind before it could reach her. He must take her down right away, he thought, banking into a steep turn and feeling the airplane sideslip sharply beneath him. He levelled out shakily and continued in a shallow descent.

Mrs. Ambrose had managed to pull herself to her feet and was clawing her way forward, her trunk flattened on the body between the seats. Her mouth opened and closed noiselessly as she reached out a wattled claw and gripped the back of Aubrey's shirt.

Aubrey felt his collar and tie tighten around his throat, and reached back to loosen her hand, his movement rocking the wings again. He gripped the steering stick with both hands and brought the airplane under control again, fighting the constriction around his throat by tensing his neck muscles fiercely. Her hands possessed an uncommon strength, and his tie was beginning to squeeze off the blood vessels in his neck. He had to get the airplane down quickly, before he lost control, before the old woman choked him to death. He banked into a steep turn as the field

hove into view. He knew he was flying at the limit of his ability in making the steep descent, but he needed to get to the ground quickly and subdue the old woman before he lost consciousness.

* * *

Two days later Eudie entered the Summerland Post Office and met Silas Bowering. "Hear 'bout Fetherstone?" he asked.

Eudie stopped. "No. What?" She was suddenly aware of her heartbeat, could feel it squeeze and release at her temples.

"They found him and the old woman. He missed the field and crashed in the marsh." He leaned out the door to spit. "The old woman got thrown about thirty feet when they hit."

"What? Is he--?" A numbness in her cheeks leached a metallic taste into her mouth.

"Both dead."

Fetherstone dead. Her mind bounded forth and back--no more pretended pregnancy, no more flying, no pregnancy, no flying ... She wanted to ask Silas about the airplane. Had it been destroyed, too?

She told Frank while they ate on the steps. Eudie watched the sky expectantly, not the west where white clouds were blushing with the last of the sunset, but down the lake towards Naramata, where Fetherstone had circled and climbed out of her life, as if she expected him to reappear out of the dusk and pass over Greata again, saluting in victory. Crickets began to chirp, signalling dusk and promising cooler air.

"It's none of my business, I know," said Frank. "But was he part of what's been bothering you so bad?"

She had anticipated Frank's curiosity, even the question, but hadn't thought out an answer to it. "I, uh--he thought I was carrying his son," she said bluntly.

Frank halted his fork's ascent and set it carefully on his plate. "Pardon?"

"He thought I was, but I'm not." She watched Frank trying to make sense of it. "It was the only way I could fly," she added, feeling a tear swell in the corner of her eye and brushing it away like a speck of dust.

"I see."

He didn't, she knew. Not completely. But that was all right, because she didn't need him to understand, just to listen.

Frank was shaking his head. "How could you let him do that?"

"That's a hard one to explain, Frank. I think you'd have to go flying or ride the motorcycle before you'd understand."

He raised his hands in defence. "No, thank you, ma'am. I'll just have to take your word on it."

She leaned back on her elbows, breathing in the smell of dry grass and pines, smiling at Frank's reluctance. He could stay at Greata as long as he liked. While he may not appreciate speed or flying, his resistance to change was like the beds of the rivers he'd grown up on, which resisted and yet changed regardless. It would provide a useful measure of balance around the place.