



House of Crows

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EDEANA MALCOLM

Praise for *House of Crows*

House of Crows is a captivating read.

Three generations. Three women. Three stories that span the formative years between 1852 and 1898, alternating narratives between Edie, the grandmother from Edinburgh, Scotland; Lucy, the mother, who grieves the death of her beloved husband; and Maggie, the daughter, who works as a maid for a wealthy family that lives on the ocean's edge. These women forge a path through very challenging times and their stories lay the foundations of possibility and hope for our modern world.

Written from seeds scattered through archival sources, the women's voices in this novel have an authenticity seldom seen in historical fiction. They say that crows speak a specific dialect unique to the West Coast, and this novel captures that language from the vantage point of the newcomer.

Author Edeana Malcolm weaves the story of three women into the history of Victoria as it grows from isolated wilderness to burgeoning metropolis. *House of Crows* reminds us that place is identified by the people who live there and the stories that made them who they are — and vice-versa.

If you love historical fiction and stories about women by women for women... this is your book!

SHERI-D WILSON, D. Litt, C.M., Member of the Order of Canada,
Poet Laureate Emeritus of Calgary (2018–2020), and author
of *Open Letter: Woman against Violence against Women*

Deftly weaving the lives of three generations of women together, *House of Crows* reveals a precarious survival in 19th century Victoria, where longing and loss threaten to tear families apart.

VANESSA WINN, Author of *Trappings* and *The Chief Factor's Daughter*

House of
Crows

House of Crows

EDEANA MALCOLM



THREE OCEAN PRESS

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*Dedicated to the memory of my friend,
Catherine Ellis Azhari,
who loved this place
and left it far too soon*

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Crossing the Ocean



i. On the Streetcar



Maggie, 1891

A WAYWARD CURL of light brown hair tumbled free from Maggie's maid's cap as she took it off. She tucked it back up as best she could with one hand, then stuffed her cap in her apron pocket. She picked up the lantern to look around the kitchen. The washed china had been put away on the shelves in the pantry, the floor had been swept and the big black stove had been scrubbed clean. She didn't want Li yelling at her in the morning.

Oh, how her feet ached! She wasn't used to being on them all day. School had been so much easier.

Maggie carried the lantern with her into the scullery. She put it on the counter and blew it out. She took off her apron and hung it on the hook by the servants' entrance. Then she put on her overcoat and opened the door. She walked through the O'Reillys' well-manicured English garden, out the gate and down Pleasant Street in silence.

Should she walk home? Granny would think the newfangled streetcar was a waste of her money. "A penny saved is a penny earned," she'd say. But Maggie didn't think her feet would take her so far this evening and she couldn't wait to get home to tell Mama and Granny the latest news. A few drops of rain left wet spots on her long black skirt, sealing her decision. She crossed Bay Street to the streetcar stop. It wasn't long before a streetcar shuddered to a stop in front of her.

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She got on and placed five pennies in the box. As the streetcar lurched forward, she fell into the closest wooden seat. A group of schoolgirls giggled in the seat behind her. Her own school friends would have swooned to hear Maggie's romantic gossip, but now there was only Mama and Granny to tell and they weren't likely to get so excited.

The moment Maggie had turned sixteen, Granny insisted she leave school and work to contribute to the family expenses. So, Mama had used her contacts as a seamstress to get her a job as a maid for one of the most important families in Victoria. Mr. Peter O'Reilly was the provincial Commissioner of Indians and his wife Caroline was from the distinguished Trutch family.

As the streetcar trundled along to the other side of town, Maggie glimpsed the familiar two-storey wood-clad box that was home. She yanked on the cord to let the driver know she wanted off. Lifting her skirt a little so she wouldn't trip, she ran the short distance down Cormorant Street. She went around to the back entrance, knowing she'd find Granny in the kitchen. She scraped her shoes on the boot-scraper and went in.

The comforting smell of Granny's mutton stew filled the warm kitchen. Almost disappearing in her widow's weeds at the big black stove, Granny hunched over the large pot she was stirring, contrasting starkly with the bare whitewashed plaster walls.

Before Granny could speak, Mama entered, dressed in widow's black as well, but her gown had the very latest flourish of frilly caps over the shoulders. Her face glowed as she rushed to welcome her daughter with open arms. She hugged her, then took her by the shoulders.

"You look happier today," Mama said. "Did you have a good day?"

"Yes, yes," Maggie said impatiently, slipping out of the embrace. "Give me a chance to take off my coat."

She laughed as she took it off and hung it up. Then she sat down at the small wooden kitchen table. Mama sat across from her.

"You'll never guess what happened today," Maggie leaned toward her mother.

Granny placed a bowl of stew on the table.

"Speak plainly, lass, and deliver your news." Granny's Scottish brogue was still in evidence though she'd lived in Victoria for forty years. "We'll have no guessing games at this table."

Granny pulled out a chair and sat down.

"It was just a figure of speech," Maggie protested. "Not a guessing game."

Granny glared at her. "Just tell us your news."

There was no use arguing with her.

"Captain Stanhope has proposed marriage to Miss Kitty O'Reilly! And she has accepted!"

"Who is Captain Stanhope?" Granny demanded. "And is he a suitable suitor for the likes of Miss O'Reilly?"

"He's a British naval officer at Esquimalt and, what's more, his father's an earl! Miss O'Reilly will have to move to England to live after she marries him."

She picked up her fork. A vision of the Queen of England flashed into her mind. A sort of fatter version of Granny, she was sitting on an immense throne in a shimmering crystal ballroom with a diamond tiara on her head and a sceptre in her hand. Maggie set down the fork.

"Perhaps," she mused, "Miss O'Reilly will need a lady's maid when she goes to England. Wouldn't that be exciting? Do you think she'd take me along as a lady's maid? I should like to go to England."

"I dinna think they need any more lady's maids in England. Besides, we need you here," Granny said. "Now, eat your food."

The queen in her vision glowered at her before vanishing. It was just like Granny to spoil her dreams. Maggie nibbled at a forkful of mutton.

Mama spoke at last. "Perhaps I'll be asked to make the wedding gown?"

"Don't be silly, Lucinda," Granny said. She put on a hoity-toity voice. "Every young lady of quality hires the House of Worth for her trousseau."

"I suppose," Mama murmured. "Still, that's exciting news, Maggie. I do love to hear tales of romance."

At least Mama seemed to appreciate her news.

"But," Mama continued, "I think it's a shame Miss O'Reilly will have to leave our beautiful Victoria. Do you think Captain Stanhope would consider staying here?"

Maggie had thought about this. "Not if his father dies and he becomes the earl. Then, he'd have to go back to fulfill his duties and Miss O'Reilly would have to go with him. She'd be Mrs. Stanhope then, or... What is the wife of an earl called? Do you know, Mama? The wife of a prince is a princess, the wife of a duke is a duchess. Do you think it would be an earless?"

"Stop talking nonsense," Granny interrupted, "and eat your stew."

"Aren't you going to have some?"

"We've already eaten, dear," Mama replied.

"Well," Granny piped up again, "Miss O'Reilly couldna have found a better suitor if you ask me. I hope you find someone even half as good, Maggie."

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Maggie couldn't picture what being married would be like even though she and the other girls at school had talked about it all the time. Granny had said Mama's marriage had been happy, but Maggie couldn't remember her father and her mother never talked about him.

She took another bite of stew and realized she was hungry. As she chewed, she imagined travelling to England, the place where history had happened. At school, she'd loved hearing the stories of the dramatic lives of kings and queens. Perhaps one day she'd see a real palace, not just fake Dunsmuir Castle up on the hill near Central School. Perhaps, one day she'd live in a beautiful house like the O'Reillys and have her own maid to wait on her.

That was not likely to happen even if she went to England, not if she was a maid herself. Granny was right. She picked up her fork and took another mouthful. Her dreams would never come true unless she found a rich suitor, perhaps one of Miss O'Reilly's cast-offs or Captain Stanhope's friends. But Maggie didn't know much about men. Not only had her father died when she was small, but her grandfather had died before she was born. The only men she'd ever known were the teachers at school and the clergy at the church, all stern and unapproachable.

"Well, travelling to the other side of the world for love isna such a good idea!" Granny said. "Miss O'Reilly should stay right here with her family."

"I couldn't agree more," Mama said.

What did they know?

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Crossing the Ocean



ii. The Voyage Out



Edie, 1852-3

THE *NORMAN MORRISON* set out from Edinburgh in the middle of August. Edie, her husband, three children and sister were leaving behind a life of hardship and strife for a New World of hope and promise. The ship was filled with other indentured servants and their families — some Scottish and some English — going to serve the Hudson's Bay Company farms on the western shore of North America.

During the fall, they sailed down the coast and crossed the Atlantic Ocean, enduring wind, rain and thunderstorms. The deck was slick and wet, dangerous to walk on. Little Lucinda had barely begun walking and needed constant attention lest she fall.

In November, they reached the far end of South America, where it was scarcely ever dark at night. Now Lucinda could toddle on the rolling ship as well as anyone and time was spent chasing her instead of catching her.

One evening as Edie was walking back to the cabin with Lucinda, the little girl broke away, running towards a group of people at the stern of the ship. When Edie caught up to her, she had come to a standstill in front of the preacher. He was intoning the Twenty-Third Psalm.

A funeral service. Ah, yes, she remembered now. Poor Mrs. Muir's wee lass had died. She'd been sick when they'd come aboard and hadn't

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gotten any better on the voyage. Mrs. Muir hadn't wanted a lot of people at the service, wanting to be alone with her family in their grief.

Eddie didn't want to make a scene pulling Lucinda away, so she took her daughter's hand and listened. It was always comforting to hear the words of a preacher. She bowed her head and prayed.

When she looked up, she saw the body of Mrs. Muir's little girl slipping from under the flag into the sea. Lucinda stared wide-eyed, mouth agape. Perhaps it wasn't such a good idea for her daughter to see such a sight. She swept her up in her arms, turned and walked quickly back to the cabin. She would pay her condolences to Mrs. Muir later.

* * *

Soon they rounded Cape Horn, which lived up to its fierce reputation with hurricane-force winds and huge swells.

After five stormy days, they were sick to death of the cabin crowded with men, women, children, boxes and beds. They'd hung blankets between the bunk beds to create their own private family space, but there was no escape from the chatter and the reek of unwashed bodies and unemptied chamberpots. It was unpleasant, but still safer than walking on the deck.

It was cold in the cabin, even with all the people. Little warmth or light came from the lantern hanging from the upper bunk. It swung wildly in the rough seas, casting eerie shadows on the sheets around the bed.

"Look at the ghosts, Lucy," Jamie teased his sister. "They're coming to get you!"

He made a face and lunged at Lucy, who cried out.

"Canna you keep the bairns quiet?" John grumbled. "I'm trying to sleep."

He had been staying up late every night with friends and sleeping half the day away. Eddie suspected he feigned sleep in his upper bunk with his back to them all. She glared at him.

Bella got up from her lower berth and scooped up the toddler.

"Let me tell you a story, Lucy." She sat down and waved Jamie and Sam over. "Come, lads. I ken you want to hear it too."

She made room on the bed and the two boys climbed up on either side of her.

Eddie only half-listened to her sister's tale about the great whales and the strange blue iceberg they'd seen in the southern sea. She was praying for peaceful seas again.

Her prayers were answered as they journeyed north and the Pacific Ocean lived up to its name.

Finally, they could escape their cabin and sit down to a dinner with the other passengers. Weeks earlier, the ship had run out of decent food, so now their meals were an entertaining diversion. What would today's mystery meal be? So far, they'd eaten albatross, pigeon and porpoise. But — ah blessed day! — today, they had bonito, delicious tuna that fell apart with the fork and wasn't as chewy as rubber.

* * *

As they travelled farther north, the weather grew colder again.

One afternoon, Edie found herself in the sleeping quarters with the children, left alone to look after them. John had found some excuse to leave first thing in the morning and hadn't come back. Bella, who'd been so helpful earlier in the voyage, was probably off talking to the ship's cook again. Edie thought they were becoming *too* well acquainted.

As usual, the boys were fighting with each other. She scolded them and, as if to spite her, Jamie pulled his sister Lucinda's tiny ponytail. At her wit's end, Edie picked up the crying toddler.

"Come on, lads. Let's go find your papa."

She found him sitting on the deck with a group of other men, passing around a flask that presumably contained whisky. She was stunned, never having known John to be a drinker. He came from a strict, teetotaling Presbyterian family, just as she did.

"What're you doing, John?"

"You can see what I'm doing with your ain eyes." He didn't even have the decency to look ashamed.

"Well," she persisted, "I'm tired of looking after the bairns all by myself. Canna you take a turn and give me a few minutes to jaw with my friends?"

"Would you," he shouted, "have me doing lassies' work?"

The other men roared their approval of his remark.

"Be gone with you," he barked.

She could see he was angry because she'd embarrassed him in front of his friends. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Jamie wandering away and knew she should go after him.

"But John, they're your bairns as well. If you drink any more, you'll not be in a fit state to look after them."

"Give me any more lip, woman, and you'll not be in a fit state neither."

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Who was this rude creature and what had he done with her husband? It must be the demon drink talking and the encouragement of the other men who cheered on his crude and unkind words to her.

She took Sam's hand and ran after Jamie. Then she took the children back to the cabin, gasping as the reek of it assailed her nose again. Leaving the children to play with others, she made her way to their beds behind the blanket. Only then did she allow herself a good cry.

When John came back later in the evening, he was contrite, but the next morning, he again left early and didn't come back till evening. Edie couldn't wait to arrive at their destination, praying that, once again on land, her kind and loving husband would be restored to her.

At last, they reached Vancouver's Island. All the fury of the sea turned on their ship again and they could get no closer. For three hellish days, the captain attempted to enter the strait that led to Fort Victoria, but the strong winds threatened to pitch the ship against treacherous rocks. Finally, they were driven out to sea again. There, the captain waited for a calmer day.

Edie's thoughts turned to the parents she'd left behind in Rosshire. Leaving Scotland for the New World had seemed a great adventure, but now she missed her parents. She was glad Bella had come, but for the last few weeks, she'd hardly seen her. Edie could only hope their life on the farm near Fort Victoria would be worth all this sacrifice. John would only be an indentured labourer for five years, at the end of which he'd have his own land: he'd be "his ain laird."

* * *

As long as she lived, Edie would never forget the 15th of January, 1853, the day the *Norman Morrison* entered the Royal Bay outside Esquimalt and anchored next to the ships of the Queen's Navy. The deck was crowded with settlers, both English and Scottish, eager to get a good look at their new home. Besides a few rough buildings, Edie saw nothing but trees — tall, dark fir and cedar trees.

"Where's the fort?" she asked a bluejacket who was unwinding a rope to cast it on the dock.

"The fort is in another harbour," he explained, turning to her, "one too shallow for the *Norman Morrison* to anchor fully loaded. You'll have to go 'round by steamer."

A steamer! Edie never wanted to get on board another boat as long as she lived. "Is there nae other way to get to Fort Victoria from here?" she asked.

"Aye," the bluejacket replied, "but the road's very rough."

"I'll take a rough road over a rough sea any day."

The bluejacket just shrugged and continued pulling on the rope.

Edie looked around for her husband and children but saw only Bella, lost in conversation with the ship's cook again. She'd been spending far too much time with the man. The children missed her and so did Edie. Bella had always been with them. In Scotland, she'd lived with them and helped out when John was engaged as a labourer. Bella had done the fieldwork of hoeing and weeding when Edie had a baby to nurse. When they'd decided to emigrate, Bella had hired on too, as a maid for the steward who was going to run the farm, Mr. Mackenzie.

At that moment, she caught her sister's eye and Bella broke away from the ship's cook.

"You'll never guess, Edie." Bella's eyes were shining. "Mr. Greene has only asked me to marry him."

"But you canna! You're engaged to serve the Mackenzies for the next five years."

"I ken that, but Mr. Greene is willing to repay them for the cost of my passage."

"But Bella, whatever will I do without you?"

"You'll manage fine," her sister said. "You must see this is the best thing for me. My ain man, my ain family."

"I didna think you were sae unhappy with mine," Edie sniffed. "But think of it! Another five-month journey back to the old country on this ship. I couldna stomach such a voyage again."

"Aye, there is that. But I do love him, Edie. I think I can manage it for the sake of my happiness."

"It isna always the best thing to marry for love," Edie said. John was not the same man she'd fallen in love with, much as she prayed he'd revert once they were on land again. "Have you given him an answer yet?"

"I told him aye."

"Oh, but Bella, you should think on it a little more." She hooked her arm in her sister's. "Come. Let's find John and the bairns."

* * *

Later that day, when the steamer came alongside the *Morrison*, there was only room for the English settlers to board it. The Scots had to spend another night on the ship, except for Mackenzie who, as the steward of their farm, was allowed on the steamer with his family and Bella.

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Edie walked to the gangplank to say goodbye to her sister. Mr. Greene was already there to see her off as well. Edie kissed her goodbye and then gave her into the care of that awful cook. As Bella and Mr. Greene put their heads together and whispered intimately, Edie wished he would just vanish off the face of the earth.

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iii. Falling



Lucy, 1853

ONE DAY, THE earth stopped moving.

Lucy found herself falling.

Face-down on it, the earth had a smell she'd never smelt before — deep, dark and alive.

Before, the air was only cold and filled with a salt tang.

Before, the wooden boards under her feet moved up and down, up and down, little shudders and great swells. Always moving. She learned to walk on this ground that sometimes bucked and pitched and tried to knock her off her feet.

Before, she clung to whatever she could reach and tried not to be tossed into the ocean like the little girl the sailors had thrown over one day.

Lucy remembered the man with the black book, his voice shouting louder than the waves: "Dust to dust. Ashes to ashes." Everyone standing around muttering words quietly. "Our Father, who art in Heaven..." The sailors tipping up the board they were holding with a blue, red and white cloth on it. A little girl sliding off the board and into the sea. Then the girl's mother wailing and Lucy putting her hands over her ears. What did the little girl do? Lucy was afraid of the sailors and the great grey ocean that could swallow a little girl whole and make her disappear forever.

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She lay face-down in the dirt till Mam pulled her up and carried her away, just as she had on that other day. Only now, they walked away from her ship home onto this new unmoving earth.

The Inner Harbour



i. On Rock Bay Bridge



Maggie, 1891

THE NOVEMBER RAIN soaked Maggie on her walk to work. She pushed open the gate of the white picket fence that led to Point Ellice House, the O'Reilly family bungalow. *Bungalow*. The word conjured images of India and Empire, setting Maggie to dreaming about foreign lands. The house was rather squat amongst the stately homes of Victoria but she loved its pale rose colour and dark brown trim. The garden with its croquet lawn, roses and woodland walk was so very English. In spite of Granny's discouragement, she still harboured dreams of travelling to England as a lady's maid. She'd decided to put the idea into Miss O'Reilly's head. This very morning, she would ask to accompany her to England.

Maggie opened the servants' door, hung up her dripping overcoat in the scullery and closed her umbrella. When she greeted Li in the kitchen, he simply scowled and nodded in reply. Good. That meant she wasn't late. On the one day she'd been late, he'd shouted at her in Chinese and it had unnerved her.

Putting on her cap and tying her apron over her black skirt, she thought about her first task, taking tea into Miss O'Reilly's bedroom to wake her. She prepared the tea tray, her mind racing. "*Do you think I could go with you to England, Miss, as your lady's maid?*" Too direct. How should I introduce the topic? "*Congratulations on your engagement, Miss.*"

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As she carried the tray to Miss O'Reilly's room, the teacup rattled on the saucer. When she stopped to open the door, it continued to rattle and Maggie realized she was shaking. She took a deep breath to calm her nerves before entering the bedroom with a smile. The colourful flowered wallpaper made the room warm and cheerful, so unlike the bare white walls at home. Her young mistress was seated by the fireplace, already dressed with her chestnut-brown hair swept up in a perfectly formed bun. Maggie noted this with pleasure, as it meant she wouldn't have to brush it.

"Good morning, miss," she said.

She placed the tea tray on the side table by the chair. Her heart was thumping as she thought about what she was going to say. Then she looked at Miss O'Reilly and noticed her bright blue eyes were rimmed with red.

"Whatever is the matter, miss? You look as though you haven't slept a wink."

"I haven't," she replied.

"What has kept you awake?" Maggie asked, trying not to sound as avidly curious as she actually was.

"I can't do it. I just can't."

"What do you mean?"

"I can't marry Captain Stanhope and move to the other side of the world. I can't leave my home."

That was the silliest thing Maggie had ever heard. Miss O'Reilly, in spite of her Irish name, was an Englishwoman; her family even spoke with an English accent.

"Of course, you can. You went to school in England, didn't you?"

"Yes, but that was different. I knew I was coming home again. This time, I'd be leaving home forever."

Miss O'Reilly can't reject the proposal! Maggie might never have another chance to travel to England.

"Oh, not forever, miss. You could come back and visit whenever you wanted, I'm sure."

Miss O'Reilly looked at her as if she'd overstepped her bounds.

"Forgive me, miss. It's none of my business." There was no point asking her question now. She was anxious to get out of the room and nurse her own disappointment. "I must go set the table for breakfast. Enjoy your tea."

Miss O'Reilly didn't seem capable of enjoying anything at the moment.

Now, it was time to take Mrs. O'Reilly her tea. Maggie wondered if she should say something about Miss O'Reilly's decision so she could

talk some sense into her. She decided it was best not to interfere and to let daughter tell mother. It was too bad Mr. O'Reilly was away on one of his many trips to the mainland as the Commissioner of Indians. If he were here, he might set things to right. Surely that was a father's duty.

After delivering Mrs. O'Reilly's tea, she popped into the kitchen to see what Li was preparing for breakfast so she'd know what dishes and cutlery to set on the dining room table. Then she arranged three place settings of the Minton china with its 'King's Border', delicate white porcelain with a burgundy floral border and gilded rim that Maggie admired very much. Then she went to take young Master Jack his tea. She'd put it off because the lad was very difficult to wake in the mornings.

When she came out of the kitchen with the tea tray, Mrs. O'Reilly stopped her in the hallway.

"Maggie," she whispered. "If Jack's not up, please don't wake him yet. I want to have some time alone to talk with Kitty this morning."

So, Miss O'Reilly must have told her mother. Maggie hoped she could convince her daughter she was being foolish.

"Just two places for breakfast then?"

"If you've already set three, then leave it. Jack will want his breakfast later."

"Should I tell Li so that he doesn't sound the gong?"

"I'll look after that, dear. He can be irascible at times."

If that meant cranky, then, yes, he could. Maggie was grateful to Mrs. O'Reilly for talking to him for her. At least the baize door would mute the noise of his angry response to the change in plans, so as not to wake Master Jack.

Maggie would've liked to listen in on the conversation in the dining room during breakfast, but she was sent to light the fire in the drawing room. Later that morning, after she'd seen to Master Jack's breakfast, collected and washed the dirty dishes and straightened up the dining room, she noticed Mrs. O'Reilly with her daughter sitting in her husband's study. Huddled together at the desk by the window, they seemed to be writing a letter together. From what she could overhear, it sounded as though poor Captain Stanhope was about to have his heart broken. So even her mother had failed to convince the heartless Miss O'Reilly.

A half-hour later, she was called to the study.

"Could you take this letter downtown to the transfer depot, Maggie?" Mrs. O'Reilly asked. "I want it on the late-morning stage for Esquimalt."

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"Of course, ma'am." She took it and glanced at the address. Sure enough, it was for Captain Stanhope. "I won't be back in time to serve lunch though."

"We'll manage, I'm sure. There's a dear."

As Maggie put on her overcoat, she thought about this latest turn of events. Miss O'Reilly was going to turn down Mr. Stanhope and her mother was going to allow her to do it. And why? Because Miss O'Reilly didn't want to leave this godforsaken little town on the edge of an island on the other side of the world from civilization.

The persistent November drizzle had not let up. As Maggie walked through the lush green O'Reilly garden, the dampness chilled her. She put her hands into her overcoat pockets and made her way down Pleasant Street to where it ended at the water. There, she turned left and walked the boardwalk to Bridge Street where she had to cross the streetcar tracks. She lifted her black skirt discreetly and looked both ways before stepping down onto the muddy road.

As she went over the bridge at Rock Bay, she passed the shore where Granny had told her that the Haida used to camp when they came south in their canoes to trade at the fort. Granny'd said that warring tribes had even fought a battle there once, but Maggie didn't know if that was true or not. Granny tended to exaggerate about the Indians. Maggie looked across the harbour at the shacks where the Songhees lived. She couldn't imagine such a quiet peaceful people at war, whatever other tribes had done. Mama often stopped and talked with the women selling their wares on the street and Maggie realized they were people just like anyone else.

Maggie walked down Store Street past the Albion Ironworks, a shoe factory and a matchworks. The smell of sulphur mixed with the alien odours of Chinatown spices. Maggie glanced up Fisgard Street and saw the bustle of merchants and customers shouting in their strange sing-song tongue that always made her vaguely uneasy. She walked over the bridge at the ravine between Johnson and Bastion streets. The fort had stood there before she was born. It was hard to imagine such a thing now.

She found herself in the middle of a bustling commercial waterfront where wharves and jetties were forested with the masts and spars of sailing ships and foggy with the smoke of steamers. On the cobbled street, she had to step carefully not to be knocked over by the stevedores, sea captains and shipping agents in transit between the town and the ships.

At last, Maggie arrived at the Victoria Transfer Depot on Broughton Street to deliver the letter just in time for the late-morning stage.

Her errand done and not expected to serve lunch, she decided to go home for a quick bite to eat. It was only about a ten-minute walk from the depot and Mama and Granny would be keen to know the latest news.

As she walked up Pandora Avenue, her family home came into view. Though it wasn't as grand as Point Ellice House, it was precious to her and deserved to have a name just as much as any of the swells' houses. She had christened it the House of Crows.

"Why House of Crows?" Granny had asked.

"You need to ask?" she'd laughed. "You and Mama are always dressed in your widow weeds and I have to wear this horrid black skirt."

"But you have a white blouse," Granny'd responded. "I'd call it two crows and Maggie the magpie."

Magpies must have been some kind of British bird.

"There are no magpies here in Victoria," she'd said decidedly. "It's a House of Crows."

Maggie turned north and walked until she reached Pandora Avenue. The First Presbyterian Church was on one corner, the congregational church on another and the Jewish synagogue on the third. Just a short block from this 'church corner' and she was home. As if to confirm her name for the house, three crows skulked in the wet patch of grass in front of it.

"Good morning, crows," she said.

They made no reply, but hopped away, glaring at her with their beady little eyes.

Maggie looked up at the small two-storey clapboard house on Cormorant Street that had been her home forever. It needed a coat of paint, but there was never enough money for such endeavours. She went around the back and scraped the mud off her shoes before going in the door. Granny looked up from the table as she entered the kitchen.

"What're you doing home at this time of day?" she asked. "You hav'na lost your job already, have you?"

"Don't worry, Granny. No, I haven't. I was just sent on an errand downtown and will miss lunch at the O'Reilly house anyway, so I thought I'd come home. What are you making?"

Maggie walked over to the stove to look in the pot.

"Barley soup," she said. "It'll stick to your ribs on a day like today."

Granny always said this, though what it meant, Maggie was not altogether sure.

"It smells delicious. Is it ready?"

Granny nodded. Maggie put an apron over her skirt.

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"Where's Mama?"

"Where d'you think she'd be? She's working in her room."

Maggie'd always wondered why Mama didn't have the other bedroom upstairs where hers and Granny's were, but when she'd asked, her mother had said her room off the kitchen was more convenient. There, she was hunched over a table covered with reams of silk, cutting out a dress.

"Would you like some soup, Mama?"

Her mother jumped and the scissors snipped.

"Damn," she swore under her breath. She looked up. "Maggie, you startled me."

"I'm sorry. Have you made a mess of it?"

"It can be mended," she said, looking down at the shining material.

"What is it you want?"

"Would you like some barley soup?"

"I'm right in the middle of something. I'll join you when I'm done."

"I won't be here long. I've got to get back to work. Besides, I've got some news to tell you and Granny."

"All right."

Mama sighed, put down the scissors and, with a long backward glance at the silk, followed Maggie into the kitchen.

"What is it, Maggie? You seem quite downhearted this morning. You haven't said something to make them give you the sack, have you?"

Maggie was annoyed by her mother's lack of faith in her.

"No, Mama. It's nothing like that." She took a loaf of bread from the breadbox and started cutting slices. "But you'll never guess. Miss O'Reilly has changed her mind and turned down Captain Stanhope's proposal of marriage!"

"What?!" Granny cried.

"Yes. Can you believe it?"

Maggie took out the soup bowls from the cupboard. As she ladled the soup into them, she considered how plain and heavy their tableware was compared to the O'Reillys' delicate Minton china.

"Why would she turn down such an excellent proposal?" Granny asked. "Does she have a better offer from someone else?"

"Perhaps," Mama suggested, "she doesn't really love Captain Stanhope."

"What's that got to do with it?" Granny exclaimed.

"Oh, come now, Mam. You know it's important to love the man you marry."

Maggie put the bowls and some spoons on the table.

"It's more important that he's a good man and that he can look after you," Granny said. "If he can do that, then you can love him. Is Captain Stanhope a good man, Maggie?"

"Far as I can tell," she said, passing plates of bread to her elders.

"And he can look after Miss O'Reilly, canna he?" Granny asked.

"Did she say why she wouldn't marry him, dear?" Mama asked.

Mama took a spoonful of soup and blew on it.

"She didn't want to leave home. That's what she said. Can you imagine it?"

"I canna imagine turning down such a proposal."

Granny picked up her bread and took a bite.

"But you must remember Miss O'Reilly was born here," Mama said.

"Victoria is her home." She turned to her daughter. "What about you, Maggie? Would you marry a man you didn't love and travel to the other side of the world with him?"

"I would, yes, in a heartbeat. Imagine living in a castle in England. It would be such an adventure."

"But if you didn't love him?"

"Oh, bosh," Granny said, her mouth full. When she'd finished chewing, she added, "She could learn to love him, if he was a good man."

"Yes, Granny."

Maggie had heard this argument before on more than one occasion. She wasn't sure which of the widows was right, but she knew her own mind. She would have gone to England with Captain Stanhope and she would have taken Granny with her if she'd wanted to come. And her mother too, though she wasn't so sure that her mother would leave Victoria. That was all well and good when you were her age, but Maggie was young and adventure called her. There certainly wasn't enough of it in this sorry little town.

"Don't you have to get back to work, dear?" Mama asked. "Won't they be missing you?"

"I'll take the streetcar back," she said, trying not to think of the pile of lunch dishes that awaited her at Point Ellice House.

"That's a waste of a good nickel," Granny said.

"But it's worth it to have lunch with you instead of with the grumpy old cook."

The Inner Harbour



ii. The Fort



Eddie, 1853

THE FAMILY BOARDED the steamer along with twenty-four other Scottish families. They sailed from Esquimalt to the Hudson's Bay wharf in the inner harbour where Fort Victoria was located. As they entered the harbour, Eddie saw a small island. Even though it was winter, the few trees on the island still had waxy green leaves and smooth red bark. Under a wooden shelter, four large wooden carvings of men painted in bright colours stared out at her menacingly.

"Who are they?" she asked a sailor, pointing at the island.

"Statues of the dead Indian chiefs," he said, "whose bodies have been left to rot there."

Eddie shuddered. She'd heard frightening stories of the Indians in the New World, how they attacked settlements, raped the women, kidnapped the children and scalped their victims. It was one of the reasons she had not wanted to come, but John had assured her they would be safe inside the stockade of the fort. She wondered if this island was an omen of their future.

Coming into the harbour, she saw real live Indians in a strange-looking canoe, wrapped in blankets and scowling at them as they passed. Even the sky was grey and unwelcoming. As they docked at the wharf, Eddie looked up at the rough wooden exterior of the high stockade

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surrounding the fort. She might feel safe from the Natives inside those walls. At the shore, a scruffy-looking man greeted them tersely and told them to follow him. The Scots followed, carrying all their worldly goods and trailed by their children.

Little Lucinda was unsteady on her feet and fell. Edie stopped to pick her up and then tried to catch up with the others. They walked around the outside of the stockade until they arrived at a great barn-like storehouse.

"This," the man said, "is where you'll sleep."

"But," John protested, "it's not inside the fort."

The rough man wiped his face on the sleeve of his dirty jacket. "The English got the last beds in the fort yesterday. This is where you'll have to stay."

"But is it safe?" Edie asked.

The man ignored her.

One of the men asked, "For how long?" and of course he was given an answer.

"Till you build your own houses out at the farm."

There was a hue and cry from the settlers, but the man from the fort shook his head and wiped his hands as he walked to the door.

"I'm only the messenger," he said as he left.

John looked around the leaky storehouse.

"They didna tell us we had to build our own houses. It's January and it'll be months before they're built."

Edie said nothing. She set Lucinda down on the dirt floor. In Scotland, at least they'd had a wooden floor with rugs. They'd lived in some rough cottages but none as bad as this.

John set down their chest on the dirt floor, then left her alone with the children as usual and went in search of his drinking mates again. Lucinda looked exhausted. Edie opened the chest to rummage through and find a blanket so the lass could lie down.

Edie had just finished getting her daughter settled for her nap on an improvised bed of straw when Bella found her.

"This is awful," Bella said, looking around.

"I suppose your accommodations are a lot more luxurious," Edie sniffed.

"Nae. They're only a tad better. The Mackenzies have a one-room shack with a blanket hung between us maids and them. Mrs. Mackenzie wants to go back home on the very next ship. That would solve all my problems if she did."

"Perhaps then we'd all have to go back home." Edie almost hoped they would, though the thought of another sea voyage was not tempting.

"The moment I laid eyes on this place, I said to myself, 'This isna for me.' It's so dark and dreary and wild."

"I'm glad that I've accepted Mr. Greene's proposal."

"You didna tell him you'd think on it?"

Bella shook her head.

"And what do the Mackenzies think of that?"

"It doesna matter. We shall be married here. I'll sail to England with him when the *Norman Morrison* goes back whether they stay or go."

"You canna!" Edie cried. She couldn't contemplate the horror of this place without her sister to confide in.

"I came here to better my life and you have to admit this is nae better than what we left."

"But it'll get better, I'm sure."

"But why should I turn down a much better offer to be married and have a house of my ain to live in? Why, it's all I've ever dreamed of. I've made up my mind and I'm going."

Edie could see there was no point arguing. Bella was stubborn and once she'd decided something, she didn't change her mind.

"When is the ship returning to England?"

"It's to stay in port for a while yet. Now that it's empty, the *Morrison* will be coming into the harbour in a few days. In the meantime, I must get back to serving the Mackenzies."

Edie was relieved to hear that her sister would still be here for a little while, but the daily business of keeping warm and fed would not leave her time to think about it.

* * *

A few weeks later, the fort's bell rang for the wedding of Isabelle and Mr. Greene, but then, it rang for every meal, church service, death or anything else really. Still, it meant attendance was expected. Edie and John assembled their family and walked to the mess room where the wedding was to be held. The large room had an open fire at one end and a pendulum clock on the wall. The tables for meals had been cleared away and chairs arranged for the service.

Everyone was there to celebrate. Edie had never seen so many differently coloured people in one place before. Most of the women were Indians or mixed blood, though they dressed as if they were white. She learned they were called 'country wives' and were 'married' to the white fur traders at the fort without benefit of clergy. 'Handfasting' was what they used to call such marriages in Scotland. But it wasn't considered

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decent anymore and she wondered that the men had the nerve to attend a religious marriage in their state of sin. *What kind of heathen place had she brought her bairns to?* They were watching wide-eyed, taking it all in.

At least there was a minister officiating at the wedding, even though the Reverend Staines was Church of England, not Presbyterian. Once the service started, there was so much standing up and sitting down and saying strange words by rote that she had no more time to stare at the scruffy men in buckskin and their dark-skinned wives. It was confusing and exhausting.

When she left, the family said goodbye to Bella with many tears and few words. Edie and Bella had been together all their lives and had known and suffered every hardship together. And this was the greatest hardship of all — to be separated from her by a continent and an ocean and never to see her again. The last bit of home, of Scotland, was going with her and Edie would be left in this wilderness with her husband and children. They would have to make the best of it, come what may.

* * *

That night Edie was alone to tuck the blankets around her three children on their bed of straw.

“Tell us a story, Mam,” Sam asked.

“Aye, Mam,” his brother Jamie chimed in. “Tell us a story.”

A story! That was Bella’s job. Bella always had a story at hand that seemed to pop right out of her head. Edie didn’t have any stories in her head, just a blank slate.

The three children looked at her with hungry eyes.

Edie searched her brain to remember some story she’d heard growing up, but all the stories she could think of were gruesome with ogres or monsters and children being killed. She’d hated bedtime stories when she was a child. They’d kept her awake half the night, terrified a monster was coming for her. She wished she’d paid more attention to Bella’s tales.

“Hurry up, Mam,” Sam said.

Their hungry eyes were still waiting.

A Bible story! That would have to do. She thought a moment. The one about David killing the giant Goliath. The lads would like that.

She tried to tell the story but it ended too quickly and the boys weren’t satisfied. They wanted more details.

“Was he a one-eyed giant?” Sam asked. “I’ve heard of them.”

“How did Davey make the slingshot, Mam?” Jamie asked.

"I dinna ken," Edie said.

"Do you think I could make one?" Jamie persisted.

Edie was impatient. "Go to sleep now."

The boys were restless and chattered about all they'd seen and done that day. Lucinda fell asleep almost immediately. Now that she could walk and get around, she was constantly wandering off. Edie was always chasing her, terrified that Indians would kidnap her. Perhaps tomorrow's bedtime story should be a cautionary tale about what happened to children if Indians caught them. Too bad Bella wouldn't be there to tell it.

The Inner Harbour



ii. Weaving



Lucy, 1853

ONCE LUCY LEARNED to walk on this new earth, she loved to wander. Outside the big storehouse, she followed along the great wall made of reddish-coloured wooden stakes that smelled like the inside of the box where Mam kept their clothes. At the end of the wall, there was a square tower with cannons at the top. Lucy peeked around the tower's corner and saw a strange crooked house made of sticks with mats thrown on top for a roof.

A woman sat on a mat, wrapped in a blanket in front of a great big loom with another blanket hanging on it. Lucy went to see what the woman with the pointy head and the long black hair was doing. Her hands moved quickly, guiding a white thread of yarn in and out between more yarns. Lucy saw a pattern of colours at the edge of the blanket. She stared with her mouth open, her eyes wide. It was beautiful.

The woman stopped working and turned to look at her. She spoke but the words were strange. Lucy just stared at her. The woman turned back to her work and Lucy watched, fascinated.

A little white dog with woolly hair, black eyes, a pointy snout and little ears got up from the ground and trotted over to Lucy. It wagged its short round tail and its whole body wriggled in happiness. Lucy reached out to touch it. Someone grabbed her hand and pulled it away.

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“Dinna touch.”

Lucy recognized her mam’s voice.

“What,” Mam demanded, “are you doing here?”

She scooped Lucy up and carried her away, back along the long wooden wall. Mam scolded her angrily all the way, until they came to the great house full of people from the ship, but no sailors. Familiar people. Familiar smells.

Through the Gorge



i. In the Scullery



Maggie, 1891

THE NEXT MORNING, Maggie answered a knock at the servants' entrance. She expected to see a tradesman, but there stood a bluejacket instead. His eyes widened at the sight of her. He smiled, doffed his cap and, with a jaunty air, bowed slightly.

"Good day, miss," he said. "I've come with a message from Captain Stanhope for Mrs. O'Reilly." He handed her an envelope. "If you'd be so good as to give it to her."

"Won't you come in for some refreshment?" she offered. "You've come a long way."

"Don't mind if I do."

Maggie opened the door wide for him. She led him through the scullery into the kitchen and showed him a chair beside the shiny copper boiler. He was handsome. Without the usual sailors' bushy beard, she could see the clean line of his jaw broken only by the cleft of his chin. He might not be up to Granny's standards though, since he was just a common sailor. Still, he was English and that was a feather in his cap.

"Li," she said, "would you make this gentleman a cup of tea while I take this letter to Mrs. O'Reilly?" She turned to the sailor. "You can wait here. I'll be right back."

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She looked down at the letter and hoped that it contained something to persuade Miss O'Reilly to change her mind. She wondered why he'd addressed it to the mother and not the daughter. Perhaps that would have been too forward. She handed the letter to Mrs. O'Reilly and went back to the kitchen.

When she returned, the sailor was perched on the edge of the chair, holding his cup of tea by the saucer.

"I'm so glad you've returned, miss. I hardly know what this man is saying."

Maggie looked at Li apologetically.

"I'd be happy if you joined me, miss," the sailor said. "Here. Have my seat."

He stood up so quickly that the teacup flew off the saucer, hit the ceramic water filter on the other side of the boiler, shattered and fell to the floor.

"Ai-ee!" Li screamed, followed by a torrent of Chinese that didn't sound at all polite.

The bluejacket looked so sheepish that Maggie had to smile to relieve the tension.

"It's only a cup, Li. There are many more."

"Missus take the cost of cup out of my wage," Li said.

"Don't worry. I'll say I broke it."

"Why you let in this man? You send him away now."

"Oh, Li. You are so rude," Maggie said. She turned to the bluejacket. "I'm sorry, sir. Can I get you another cup of tea?"

The sailor shook his head vehemently. "No, thank you, miss. I'm sorry to cause you so much trouble. Perhaps I should be off."

"Are you not expecting an answer to the letter?" she asked.

"I'm not sure."

"Then perhaps you should wait till we get word. Let me get you another cup of tea."

"No. No more tea," he said, "but I'd be delighted to spend some time with such a handsome and well-mannered young lady as yourself."

Maggie blushed and Li scowled at them. She knew he didn't like people in his kitchen.

"Let's move to the scullery. It's a small room, but we can sit more comfortably."

On the way, Maggie asked, "What's your name, sir?"

"It's Jack. Jack Robertson. And yours, miss?"

"Maggie Macaulay."

"If you don't mind me saying, you seem too well-spoken and refined to be a maid, Miss Macaulay."

She blushed again.

"Well," she said, "I always did enjoy school."

"I can't say that I did. I was more interested in adventure. I wanted to see the world."

"Oh, so do I," she said enthusiastically. "You men are so fortunate. I wish I could just run away and join the navy like you."

"Well," he said, "it's not quite as easy as that."

She leaned forward, eager to hear more about his story, but Li interrupted them, looking in at the scullery door.

"Why he still here, miss? You have work."

"We're waiting," Maggie said, "to hear if there's an answer to Captain Stanhope's letter."

"Then go ask," Li said.

"Oh, would you, Li?" she asked.

He scowled at her for a moment but then turned and left.

"I'm sorry to keep you from your work, miss," Mr. Robertson said.

"And I'm not sorry at all."

He laughed. "You don't like being a maid?"

"Not really." She couldn't tell him she'd rather he married her and took her away to England, even though that was what she was dreaming at that moment. "As I said, I'd rather run away and see the world."

Mr. Robertson laughed.

Li looked in again and shook his head. "Missus say, 'no answer'."

"Now," Mr. Robertson said, "I must get back to my work and leave you to yours." He stood up and shook Maggie's hand. "It was a pleasure meeting you, Miss Macaulay."

She opened the door for him. After closing it, she stood there a moment remembering his sad face when he'd broken the cup. When she turned around, Li was watching her.

"He not for you, miss."

"Of course, he's not for me, Li. What made you think I cared in the least about him?"

Li shook his head, exasperated.

"Now you get back to work!"

Through the Gorge



ii. The Canoe



Edie, 1853

ON ONE OF his many visits back to the fort from the farm, John told Edie that the houses were built, that she and the children would soon be going to the farm by canoe.

“Why do we have to go by water?” Edie asked.

“There is nae road,” John said.

“Nae road! But the sailor told me they’d built a road.”

“Not to the farm,” he explained. “Victoria Harbour is at the beginning of a long inlet called the Arm and the farm is farther up the Arm.”

“But why do we have to go by canoe?” she whined. “They tip so easily. Why canna we go by a proper boat?”

“You ken there’s a narrow gorge halfway along the inlet. Canoes are the narrowest and safest craft to pass between the rocks.”

“I also ken that some canoes have already tipped going through the rapids at the Gorge. What if our canoe tips, John? I canna swim and the bairns will drown!”

“Dinna fash, Edie,” John said, looking annoyed. “Do I look as though I’ve drowned? You’ll go when the tide is coming into the Arm. It’ll push you through the Gorge. You canna go when the tide is coming out. The current is too strong.”

“I canna go at all!”

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"You have nae choice," he said. "And I'll be there to greet you when you arrive."

So, Edie stood with her bairns and all her belongings, staring at the flimsy wooden canoe that was going to take them to the farm. Then she looked at the two men who were rowing them out to the farm. They looked as wild as the country they inhabited with their long greasy hair and unshaven faces. They were called Canadians and spoke French.

One of them extended his hand. "Take the hand, missus," he said in his broad accent.

She gave him her hand.

"Now step in the centre," he said.

She looked at the boat anxiously.

"Go on," he urged.

The other Canadian was holding the canoe or she wouldn't have dared get in. She put her foot on the floor of the canoe and it rocked unsteadily. Edie's heart sank.

"Put the other one," the first Canadian said.

She climbed into the middle and struggled to stand upright. The boat pitched violently as if it were about to tip.

"Sit!" the first Canadian shouted.

Edie crouched and landed on the narrow wooden seat. Then the angry Canadian handed Lucinda down to her. She clung tightly to her daughter and watched nervously as her two sons clambered on board.

"Stay still," the second Canadian shouted at them. Then he turned to his mate and started to speak in French. Edie thought it sounded as though he were cursing.

Once on their way, she looked at the wild, untamed shore and listened to the gentle splash of the paddles. Soon, they were passing a small island that was cluttered with rough wooden huts and overturned canoes.

"What's that place?" she asked.

The Canadians exchanged a glance and smiled.

"The Island of Dead Men," said the one who had spoken to her before.

Edie remembered the other island at the entrance to the harbour. The Indians were morbid, she thought, but she soon had other things to be frightened of. Even before she saw it, she could hear the infamous Gorge. The water ahead was no longer peaceful but churned white as it rushed through the narrow passage between the rocks.

Edie gripped the sides of the canoe and clasped Lucinda between her knees. She closed her eyes and prayed.

The canoe felt as if it had suddenly been lifted up and swept forward. Her head whipped back. Then the canoe sank down and her stomach leapt into her mouth. Her eyes still closed, she felt and heard the canoe scrape against a rock beneath her.

Please, God! Hold this thin boat tight.

The canoe lifted again and shot forward as her head was flung back. Then just as suddenly, the water felt still.

Eddie opened her eyes. Around the canoe, the water swirled in giant eddies that threatened to turn it around. She watched the Canadians dig deep with their paddles and straighten the craft.

Eddie thanked God for the men she had maligned in her thoughts. They were all safe.

Her heart still beat fast as she gazed into the dark, impenetrable forest that came right to the water's edge. It was filled with a variety of trees, some familiar to Eddie and some passing strange. She saw more of the odd reddish trees she'd seen on the island with the statues at the entrance to the harbour. They seemed to grow out of the shallow water they passed over.

Though the Arm looked like a wide flowing river, she could tell by its brackish smell it was salt. It was filled with eelgrass that stretched out straight with the strong tidal current. A grey heron stood stock-still near the shore as it scanned for eels among the grass. An otter bobbed its head out of the water and stared at her before ducking back under.

Looking ahead, she saw rolling blue mountains that reminded her of the highlands of home. The sight gave her some comfort. Perhaps good fortune awaited them after all. The soft gentle splash of the Canadians' rhythmic paddling soothed her as they came at last to the Craigflower farm on Maple Point.

Eddie examined the rough wooden huts clinging to the shore. Instead of small individual huts, they were long and built for many families. John brought them to their own door and she looked inside. There were two small rooms — one for living in, one for sleeping in — with a rough wooden floor and a fireplace. It was their own place. She smiled at John. He smiled back and put his arm around her shoulder.

Perhaps the old John was back again now.

Through the Gorge



iii. Spinning



Lucy, 1854

MAM SENT LUCY out to play with Sam and Jamie. She told the boys to look after their sister, but as soon as they met their friends, they ran away and left her alone as usual.

Lucy went to watch Papa and the other men cutting trees. With their great saws, they scratched and pulled and scratched and pulled till the tree spilled its dusty blood on the ground, filling the air with its sweet fresh woody smell. She watched until one of the men noticed her.

“Go home,” he told her.

Lucy went into the forest, looking for her secret place — a patch of moss under a bush. The sun shone through the lacy branches making spots on her hand. She heard a raven’s loud cry, almost the same sound the tree had made when it cracked apart just before it fell. The forest hummed with quiet sounds but, still, she felt footsteps as light as powder on the earth.

A little girl with a round face and straight black hair peered through the branches at her.

“Hello,” Lucy said.

The girl held out her hand and Lucy went with her. She led Lucy through the forest, always chattering in her strange language. Lucy listened and slowly learned. Her friend was named Sitlamitza.

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They played together every day.

One day, her friend took her through the forest to her village. Lucy followed her friend inside one of the houses there. It was big, not like the hut she lived in, more like the house they'd lived in at the fort, a house for many people. It had a great wooden roof with wooden beams and poles holding it up. It smelled very strange — a fishy, earthy smell. She saw a wooden loom like the one she'd seen outside the fort. A woman was sitting on the dirt floor near it. Lucy went to see if she was weaving a blanket, but she was not. She had a stick with a flat disc on the end and she was spinning white wool with it.

"My mama," Sitla said in English. She was learning some of Lucy's words too.

Sitla's mother looked at Lucy and said something in that strange language that was becoming less strange to her every day. She knew it was a greeting.

Then the girls went outside and played some more.

On the Arm



i. The Christmas Party



Edie, 1854

EDIE PICKED UP a blanket and went out to escape the sound of her husband snoring.

The bairns were outside building a snowman in the wet, slushy snow with the other farm children. She was relieved they were nearby, where she could see them. Edie worried the settlers were becoming too familiar with the Indians these days, especially now that Mackenzie was hiring them as workers.

She sighed and hugged the blanket tightly around herself. The distant Sooke Hills that had once reminded her of the Highlands of Scotland were frosted with snow. Every dark tree was outlined in white. It was beautiful here, but oh so cold this morning, and she felt bitterly alone.

She nodded to her next-door neighbour Isabelle, who was hanging wet clothes on the line. With just a thin wooden wall between them, Edie knew her neighbour's business as well as she knew her own. It was a struggle to keep up a pretense otherwise, but she went to talk to her anyway. Though they were often too busy to spend a lot of time together, the other women of the settlement were its only consolation.

"Will the men be doing any work today, d'you think?" Isabelle asked.

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“Not my husband,” Edie replied. “He isn’t fit for it. He’s had a wee nip with the lads.” What was the point of hiding the obvious? “What can you do with ’em?”

“And what can you do about this damnable cold?” Isabelle replied.

Edie thought it was coarse of her to speak like that. Just because there was no kirk here didn’t mean the women should start speaking like heathens.

“Would you like some tea?” Isabelle asked. “I have a pot on the hob.”

“Why not?” Edie said. The woman had the same name as her sister, so she couldn’t be all bad.

They went into a room identical to Edie’s but reversed; the fireplace was on the opposite side as they shared the same chimney. Isabelle went to the hearth and poured Edie a cup of tea from the pot on the hob.

Edie wrapped her fingers around the warm cup and sighed.

“Why do they do it?” she asked.

Isabelle poured herself a cup.

“Do what?”

“Why do the men drink sae much?”

“They feel like they’re in a trap,” Isabelle put the pot back on the hob. “All the single men have left to get work elsewhere. They can make enough money to buy land in less than five years so why should they keep working on the farm here?” She sat across from Edie and poured some milk in her tea. “But the ones with families like our men can’t up and leave.” She handed the milk jug to Edie. “Want some?”

Edie nodded and took the jug. It had been a difficult year with men escaping to America or absconding to Sooke. Mr. Mackenzie had taken to jailing men if they didn’t show up for work.

“At least we have Christmas to look forward to,” Isabelle said. “Are you coming to the fort this year, Edie?”

“Aye,” she said. “I’m looking forward to seeing how the English keep Christmas. I’ve heard so much about it.”

“Last year, the clerks and officers of the company put on a theatrical play and ball. It was great fun,” Isabelle said. “Why did you not go last year?”

“I wouldna go as long as there was nae road to take me. I wouldna risk my life going through the Gorge again. But since the men have built a road, I’ll go.”

Isabelle nodded as she stirred her tea. “At least the men did something useful last year.” She took a sip as if to avoid saying something untoward. “In-between the bouts of drinking and carrying on.”

Edie looked into her teacup and sighed.

When it was time to go to the fort for the Christmas celebrations, John helped Edie climb on the hay wagon and lifted the children in one by one. Edie tried to place Lucy between her legs, but she squirmed away and went to sit beside her older brother Sam on the other side of the wagon. He looked fondly at his little sister before turning back to his friends and ignoring her.

John settled in beside Edie. It was rare she had a moment to speak with him. She'd been thinking about her conversation with Isabelle ever since they'd spoken the day before.

"Why do the men drink sae much, John?" she asked.

"Stop your bellyaching, woman. We've been busy. We just finished this road so you could get to the fort on the land. I thought you'd be happy about that for at least one moment."

It was true. Edie shouldn't complain so much. John hated roadwork. It was backbreaking and he'd had to do so much of it back in Scotland in order to receive alms from the kirk during the potato famine.

"You dinna complain when you put food in your belly every day," he said. "And that's thanks to all the work we did last summer. We sowed the turnips, sheared the sheep, put up a cattle-shed and fenced in the barnyard. You'd only be content if I worked every hour of the day."

He picked up a straw, put it in his mouth and chewed.

"Well, I do appreciate the work you do, John, but I still dinna see where the drink comes into it."

"And dinna forget that we're almost finished building the schoolhouse! Soon the lads willna be underfoot anymore."

"None too soon," she said, "before they forget all their book learning and turn into savages!"

John's face went dark and he turned away from her. Edie wished she could keep her mouth shut. Her nagging didn't stop him from going out to drink with his mates, but she couldn't help herself. She wanted things too. Mostly, she just wanted to go back to Scotland again. Though she'd been hungry all the time, at least she'd had her family around her, especially Bella. What was Bella's life like now? Was she lonely too when her husband was away at sea? Did she have any bairns yet? It had been a long time since she'd had a letter from her sister and it was hard to be so far from her.

After the one-hour, teeth-rattling, bone-jarring ride, Edie was happy to arrive at the fort, though she wasn't looking forward to going back

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into the mess hall where Bella had gotten married and where she'd eaten so many meals at the table with the settlers.

The great hall was almost unrecognizable, festooned with coloured banners, branches of sweet-smelling cedar greenery and red ribbons. A warm fire glowed in the large hearth and a couple of fiddlers were playing a lively reel. Everyone was talking, laughing or dancing.

Edie followed her nose to a table spread with food: turkey, goose, meat pies and sweetmeats of every kind. A man with a cook's apron urged her to help herself and Edie filled a plate to share with her family, but John was nowhere to be found. He'd probably found his friends and the grog as usual.

As she searched the room for her husband, she saw Mrs. Douglas, the Métis wife of the Chief Factor, coming to speak to her. Edie looked around for an escape. There was none.

"Madame Innis," she said in her thick French accent, "welcome to the fort." She held out her hand and Edie shook it. "It is long time since we saw you."

"Aye," Edie replied, trying to think of something else to say to the woman. "I didn't enjoy the journey by water. I've waited for a road to be built."

"And is the journey better by the road?"

"It isna."

Mrs. Douglas smiled faintly, looking unsure how to respond.

"I am sorry for that," she said finally. "Enjoy the food."

She moved on to greet another guest.

Edie relaxed after the awkward meeting. She'd always avoided such encounters with the Chief Factor's wife. Then, Edie watched as Mrs. Douglas went to speak to Isabelle, who turned her shoulder and did not reply. Almost all the women she tried to speak to snubbed her in one way or another. Mrs. Douglas was trying very hard to be an exemplary hostess, but the other ladies would not let her succeed. Edie felt a little ashamed. Mrs. Douglas was at least trying to act her better half.

That night, they slept in the old storehouse which she had so happily left behind two years before. John was sick the next morning, but he managed to get on the wagon that was to take them back to the farm.

The adults sat on bales of hay around the outside of the wagon, while the children played in the middle. The children seemed not to mind being jerked about by the bumpy ride and they played as if it were a game.

Edie looked at her pale green-faced husband seated beside her.

"Why d'you do it, John?" she whispered.

He returned her gaze. "What?"

"Why d'you drink so much when you ken you'll be sick the next day?"

"Not this again!" he said. "I do it because you're a nag."

"Nae," she said. "Dinna blame me. You did it before I was a nag. Why d'you do it?"

He stared off into the dense forest.

"Why, John?"

"I dinna ken," he said. "I'm unhappy when I'm not drunk and happy when I am."

"Why are you unhappy?"

"You have to ask? Because I work sae hard and get sae little for it. We're nae better off than we were in Scotland."

"How can you say that? In a few years, we'll have our ain land."

"A land full of trees to cut down, another house to build, another crop to sow. I'm tired of such hard work, Edie. I just want a little fun. D'you begrudge me even that?"

Edie said nothing because she did begrudge him that. She worked hard too and why couldn't they have fun together like they used to do? She wanted to point out how sick his kind of fun made him feel the next day, but he already knew that and it didn't stop him, so she said nothing else.

"I'll try to do better," he said.

But Hogmanay was only a week away and that was an occasion for drinking he would not miss.

On the Arm



ii. Running Away



Lucy, 1854

IT WAS NOT fair.

Sitla had taken her many times to her house. Sitla's mama had given her fish and bannock to eat. Mam had told her many times: when someone gave you food, you had to repay them. So, Lucy should invite Sitlamitza to her house and Mam should feed her.

But Lucy was afraid to invite her. Mam always told her not to play with the "dirty Indians." She knew her mother was wrong. When she took her friend's hand and rubbed it, the colour didn't come off. She wasn't dirty. Lucy told her mother they weren't dirty, but Mam didn't listen. It wasn't fair.

So, one day, Lucy brought Sitla to her house. When they got close to the cleared land of the farm, Sitla was afraid. She pulled her hand away from Lucy's. Sitla held her nose as if she didn't like the smell. Lucy understood. Strange smells made her gag, too. The first time she'd been to Sitla's home, she hadn't liked the strong smell of smoky fish, but now it seemed an everyday smell to her. Sitla would get used to it. She took her friend's hand and pulled it.

"It'll be all right," Lucy said.

Sitla followed till they came to the door of the hut that was home. They went inside.

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"Mam, this is my friend."

Mam was washing some clothes in a bucket. She looked up and her eyes jumped open wide. Then they narrowed till she was squinting.

"What's this?!"

Lucy was startled. "She's my friend."

"Didna I tell you not to play with the Indians?"

"But she's not dirty, Mam. She's my friend."

"Does she speak English?"

Lucy didn't know how to answer.

"Well, does she?"

Lucy shook her head.

"She's a savage, Lucy."

Lucy didn't know what that meant. "Her mama gives me food."

Mam's face went white.

"I thought you would give her food, too."

"You thought wrong then. Now, send her away."

Mam walked towards Sitla, waving at her to leave. Lucy looked at her friend, who was shaking with fear. Sitla turned to run out the door and Lucy ran with her.

"Lucinda," Mam yelled from the door, "you come back here this instant!"

Lucy ran with Sitla. They ran as far and as fast as their feet would take them back into the depth of the woods. Then they stopped and Lucy dropped onto a pile of leaves. Sitla fell beside her. She looked so frightened that Lucy started to laugh. Sitla laughed too. They laughed until Lucy ached all over. She wanted to cry. Her insides were filled with too many feelings. Fear. Anger. Sorrow. Some other feelings she'd never felt before and couldn't name.

She didn't want to go home. She wanted to stay with Sitla in her big house. She knew Mam would scold her just like she scolded Papa. She was afraid she would be punished. She was afraid she would never be allowed to play with Sitla again.

They played that day as they played every day, passionately, as if it were the last day they would ever be together again. Then Sitla went home and did not invite her to stay in her big house. So, Lucy sadly went home too.

On the Arm



iii. In the Stable



Maggie, 1892

“SEVENTY-NINE,” SAID Maggie, as she drew the brush through Miss O’Reilly’s long, chestnut-brown hair.

For almost a year now, Maggie had been following this routine almost every morning — one hundred brushstrokes. But this morning, Miss O’Reilly was impatient.

“That’s enough for now.” She took the brush from Maggie and laid it on the dressing table. “I was thinking — would you like some tickets for the bazaar on Sunday? You could take your mother.”

Miss O’Reilly was involved in a project to raise money for the new Royal Jubilee Hospital. As well as being beautiful and talented, she was generous. If Maggie had even some of Miss O’Reilly’s accomplishments and opportunities, she’d be married by now, probably to the handsome Captain Stanhope, and living in a castle in England. But Miss O’Reilly was here in Victoria working at a bazaar to collect money for a hospital. There was no point being jealous of all her accomplishments if she didn’t know how to use them.

“Thank you, miss. That’s so kind,” she said. “Would you like me to pin your hair up?”

She’d asked, though she knew the answer beforehand. Maggie only ever succeeded in making a mess of it. She was honestly surprised that

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the O'Reillys still kept her on as a maid. If there wasn't such a shortage of maids in Victoria, they probably wouldn't have.

"No, thank you. I can manage this morning. Will you let the groom know that I'll be taking the pony carriage this morning, please?"

"Yes, miss," she said, eager for the opportunity to go out and talk to the handsome young groom.

Besides Li, the only men she ever saw in her position were tradesmen. There was Simon, who delivered coal. His natural skin colour was as black as his product. He frightened her — though, when she plucked up enough courage to take a look at him, he quite took her breath away — the size of him and his muscles bulging even through his shirt. She felt herself blushing. What nonsense!

Terence the groom was a more reasonable possibility. He was young, good-looking and the same social class as she was, though that was not necessarily an asset. He was capable and handled horses well. Perhaps in a few years, if he had enough ambition or a wife to push him, he could go into business, open his own stable or transfer service, then make something of himself. Granny often told her that the important men of the town had once been no better than she was, just indentured farm labourers from the old country, but they'd used the land they'd acquired wisely, worked hard and made something of themselves. If Maggie couldn't marry a wealthy man, finding one who'd make something of himself was the next best thing.

"Good morning," she said, walking into the stable.

She stopped short. A horse was standing there out of its stall. Its ears pricked up and its wild eyes glared at her. She stepped back. Maggie was afraid of horses, so big and unpredictable. Their quick movements made her heart beat faster, made her remember something. A horse running in the snow, its mane flowing — and terror. That was all. She could never see more than that in her vision.

Terence emerged from behind the horse with a brush in his hand. Maggie hadn't noticed him there. She was relieved but still didn't have the courage to step toward him.

"Good morning to you," he replied. "And how are you this fine morning?"

"I'm fine," she said, keeping one eye on the horse to make sure it didn't bolt in her direction. "And you?"

He shrugged.

"Miss O'Reilly wants the pony carriage this morning. She's taking it to the bazaar at the Assembly Hall."

"What time does she want it ready?"

"I think as soon as possible. The bazaar only starts this afternoon, but she's going this morning to help set it up."

"Well," he said, turning his back to her, "I'll get the carriage ready then."

The horse put its head down, ignoring her also, and she sighed with relief. This conversation wasn't going well. It was all business. What could she talk about with the young man? He knew horses.

"Do you have your own horse, Terence?" she asked.

"I wish I did," he replied. "But no. I haven't the money for that."

"Do you walk to work then?"

"No. I usually take the streetcar."

"What time do you finish work? Perhaps we could ride the streetcar together."

"I doubt that," he said. "Unless you live out on the Arm. That's where I'm staying."

"No," she said. "I live in town. My mama and granny used to live on the Arm when they first came here, though."

"Well, I've been living there since last spring."

"Really? I thought people only camped out there."

Sometimes the wealthy inhabitants camped out in the wilderness. They took their maids and Chinese cooks. Maggie was glad the O'Reillys never did. She didn't much relish the idea of roughing it. Granny thought it was nostalgic nonsense.

"Well, I started camping out there for my safety when the smallpox broke out. Lots of young men do. With the streetcar going directly there over the Point Ellice Bridge, it's very convenient."

She thought he was needlessly alarmed about the smallpox. There'd only been a few cases, not like the terrible outbreak back in 1862. Maggie had heard about that from Granny and Mama. And besides, this time everyone had been vaccinated by old Dr. Helmcken.

"Where do your parents live?" she asked.

"Downtown," he said, still brushing the chestnut mane of the horse. It was the same colour as Miss O'Reilly's hair.

"What does your father do?" she asked.

"He works for Victoria Transfer Company as an ostler."

"Oh, he works with horses too," Maggie said. "Is that how you come by your love of horses?"

"I guess so," he said. "I'll have a horse of my own one day."

Ah, so he did have an ambition. It wasn't a very great one, but it was a start.

"Wouldn't you like to have a stable filled with horses like Mr. O'Reilly?" she asked, trying to encourage him.

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"I couldn't imagine it," he said.

"Or even your own transfer company, perhaps. Wouldn't you like that?"

He looked at her queerly and she wondered if she'd gone a little too far.

"No. I just want one horse of my own so I can ride it on my days off. I'd enter the race at Beacon Hill Park on the Queen's birthday. It's been my dream ever since I was a little boy. One horse is enough for me if it's fast enough."

So, a tiny bit of ambition then. Certainly not enough to meet Granny's requirements. Maggie wondered if it would even be enough to meet her own.

"Well, Terence," she said "Miss O'Reilly has given me two tickets to the bazaar on Sunday." She swallowed her fear. "I wonder if you'd like to come with me."

"Oh, I couldn't, miss," he said, rousing himself from his horse-riding dream. "The danger of the smallpox isn't past and I'd rather not take any risks till it is." Maggie's face must have shown her disappointment because he hastened to add, "But thank you very much for the offer, miss."

"Perhaps some other time, then," she said, gathering her skirts. "Good day."

She turned and walked back to the house.

She should have known better. Granny always said that a lady didn't invite a gentleman, but then, she wasn't a lady and he wasn't a gentleman. All the same, it stung to be turned down.

A Letter from Bristol



i. In the Kitchen



Maggie, 1892

THAT EVENING, MAGGIE told Mama and Granny she had tickets for them for the bazaar on Sunday. She'd decided to pay her own way so Granny wouldn't be left out.

"Thank you," her mother said. "But why didn't you invite a friend?"

"I did," she admitted, "invite the O'Reilly's groom."

"And do you think he would make a good groom?" Mama asked, smiling.

Maggie looked at her queerly, but Granny laughed.

"She means a bridegroom, dear," Granny said. "But you ken that a lady doesna invite a gentleman."

"He's only a groom, no gentleman. And I'm only a maid."

"Even a maid and a groom should have proper manners. Why're you taking your old grandmother instead of this lad?"

"He turned me down. He's been camping out on the Arm because of the smallpox outbreak and he doesn't want to come into town."

"That's a pitiful excuse if you ask me," Mama said. "He couldn't love you then."

"Oh, Mama," Maggie said. "It's much too soon to talk of love."

"Indeed it is," Granny said. "And he's nae gentleman. To tell the truth, I really dinna think he'd make much of a bridegroom either."

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"I suppose not," Maggie sighed. "But I never meet any gentlemen at all in my work."

Her mother patted her arm annoyingly. "There's plenty of time yet. One day, you'll meet the right man and fall in love. You'll see."

Granny shook her head. "What nonsense! How will she meet the right man if she never meets any gentlemen?"

"And where will I meet a gentleman, Granny? A lady can't go into gentlemen's clubs or public houses."

Granny made a face. "And you wouldna want those 'gentlemen' anyways."

"Perhaps," Mama agreed, "there'll be gentlemen at the bazaar on Sunday?"

"Perhaps," Maggie said, "but they'll probably all be escorting ladies. But you've just given me an idea, Granny. On Sunday, we meet young men at the kirk all the time, though you always tell me they're not good enough. The O'Reillys are Church of England, not Presbyterian. In fact, all of the well-to-do people are Church of England. So one Sunday, I'm going to attend St. John's."

"Well, dinna expect us to come with you," Granny said, looking perturbed. "Even I think that's going a little too far."

"That's all right. I can go alone."

"And if you find a suitable groom, remember, 'A lady doesna invite a gentleman.'"

Maggie laughed. "Yes, Granny, I know. And I won't make that mistake again, you can be sure."

A Letter from Bristol



ii. The Picnic at Esquimalt



Edie, 1855

IT WAS WELL into February when the schoolhouse was finally finished and a schoolmaster moved in. Grumbling and complaining, the boys were sent off to school. Edie had only Lucinda at home to look after. It was a good thing, too, because she needed to be watched all the time or she'd wander off to play with that Indian girl.

The schoolhouse was across the Arm from the farm, so the boys had to cross a bridge to go to school. Mr. Clark, the new schoolmaster, conducted Sunday services there once a month and Edie made sure the family attended.

One beautiful June morning, they were sitting in the classroom listening to one of Mr. Clark's interminable sermons. Or at least Edie was trying to. Jamie pulled Lucinda's ponytail and she started to cry, so Edie separated them, putting Lucinda between herself and John. Then John started to snore and Sam and Jamie laughed. She reached over Lucinda's head to nudge John awake, shushing her two lads while the schoolmaster glared at them. She felt like a guilty bairn in school again.

Finally, the sermon ended. Then, Mr. Clark announced there was to be a picnic at Esquimalt in celebration of the birthday of Chief Factor Douglas's son and everyone was invited. When the service

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was over, they filed out at the door where Mr. Clark stood to shake hands as people parted. He took Edie's hand between his and leaned forward.

"I've scarcely seen your son James at school this week," he said.

"I'll speak to him," Edie replied, blushing.

On the way home over the bridge, Jamie capered.

"A picnic!" he cried. "A picnic!"

"At least," Edie grumbled, "you heard *something* Mr. Clark said."

"Can we go to the picnic, Mam?" Jamie asked.

"Nae," she said firmly. "I willna reward you for skipping school."

"I didn't skip school," Sam complained. "Does it mean I cannot go?"

"That wouldna be fair, Edie," John said.

"I suppose not."

Lucinda tugged Edie's arm, wanting to run ahead.

"And you didn't let us go to Beacon Hill Park for the horse races on the Queen's birthday last month," Sam complained. "We never get to go anywhere."

"It was too far for Lucinda to walk," Edie said.

"Esquimalt isna sae far," John said. "It's time you went out and enjoyed yourself, Edie."

She couldn't argue with that. "All right," she said, "but only if Jamie goes to school every day before then."

She looked at him and he nodded.

"Promise?" she said.

"I promise, Mam."

"I'll make sure he does," Sam said.

"And only if you dinna touch a drop of drink before then, John."

She looked at him and he cringed.

"I'll try," he said.

"Nae," she said. "You'll do it for the bairns' sakes and mine."

He nodded.

"Promise?" she said.

"All right."

* * *

In spite of the beautiful weather, Jamie attended school every day in the week before. Even John refrained from drinking in order to gain Edie's approval. So she relented, secretly longing for a special occasion herself. It had been so long. And this time it was not at the fort but in Esquimalt, a great deal closer to Maple Point than Beacon Hill.

Edie, John and the children started off early in the morning. Edie took comfort from the fact it was a child's birthday and that the men might be less inclined to drink so much with their families there to restrain them. She even dared to hope there'd be no grog served at all.

It was a perfectly splendid day for a walk! As grey and dismal as the winters were, the summers on Vancouver's Island more than made up for them. Back home in Scotland, they could often be just as dreary as the winters. Much as she missed her family and her homeland, she had to admit the summers here were better.

They set out along the well-worn wagon track that led from the farm to the naval base. The Craigflower farm provided food for the navy as well as the fort, so sailors and officers often travelled the road to visit the Mackenzies and the farm labourers.

On the way, they passed an Indian village with its great wooden building. Indian children and dogs were playing in the sunshine and Edie admonished her children not to go running off to join them. Lucinda let go of her hand and waved excitedly at a girl who had left the other Indian children and was walking toward them. Before Edie could do anything, the girl threw her arms around Lucinda. Edie recognized her as the one that she had chased away when Lucinda had brought her home. She was a little embarrassed by how she'd reacted on that day. After all, they were just bairns. But she'd been astonished, even as she was now. How could they be such good friends? Lucinda would start school next September, then perhaps she'd become civilized. It couldn't be soon enough for Edie.

They continued their journey and came to the house of the Skinner family, a lovely fenced-in bungalow called Oakland. Mr. Skinner was the steward of Constance Cove, the farm that bordered on Craigflower. The English farm labourers who worked here had come over with them on the *Norman Morrison* more than two years before. Many of them joined the Craigflower farm group and walked with them to Esquimalt. Edie recognized a lot of people she hadn't seen since that time and chatted amiably with them, asking about their families. Someone even asked her about Bella and she shared what she knew of her sister's life, which was sadly little.

When they arrived at Esquimalt Harbour, Edie could see the masts of the ships of the Queen's Navy where the *Norman Morrison* had first moored. Memories of that arrival in the depths of winter came back to her, almost spoiling the festive atmosphere. John said he was going to check if any mail had arrived for them and left her with the children. She shook off the gloom at the possibility of news from home.

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The children ran off to play the birthday games: sack races, Pin the Tail on the Donkey, three-legged races and more. It was just like a picnic back in Scotland. Edie smiled at the thought. She spread out a picnic blanket and sat down to watch.

Mr. and Mrs. Douglas were making the rounds of the picnic blankets, greeting the guests and exchanging pleasantries. Edie stood up to be polite. Mrs. Douglas had tried so hard to be a good hostess at Christmas and, after all, it was her lad's birthday party.

"Thank you for the invitation, Mrs. Douglas," she said. "I hope your lad is enjoying his party."

Mrs. Douglas smiled. "I thank God every day for his good health."

It was well-known in Fort Victoria that the Douglasses had lost many children. People speculated it was because they were of mixed race. Whatever the reason, Edie couldn't help but sympathize with a mother on the loss of her bairns, no matter what race they were. She had lost a few of her own during the potato famine.

"I hope your children are well," Mrs. Douglas said.

"Aye, they're hale and hearty," Edie said. "Though they do grow wild in these wild lands."

Mrs. Douglas smiled. "It's a deal of work to civilize them, isn't it?"

Mr. and Mrs. Douglas continued their round of the party-goers. *Such a lovely woman!* Edie thought as she watched her visiting the other guests. Why had she ever looked down on her?

Edie was getting hungry and started to unpack the Scotch eggs from the picnic basket when John returned from the naval yard.

He smiled as he handed her a letter. "For you, from Bella."

She stopped unpacking and sank down on the blanket, carefully unfolding the letter. It was dated six months earlier, in January 1855.

Dearest Edie,

It has been so long since I last wrote you, but I've been busy. You'll understand when you ken that Mr. Greene and I have had a son! We named him George after his father. He is the light of our lives and we are very happy. I could only be happier if my husband were home more often. Perhaps he will find work on land and be able to leave his seafaring life. That is my fondest wish. That and the news that you and your family are well in your far distant land of Vancouver's Island.

Your loving sister,
Bella.

Edeana Malcolm

It was too brief and short on details. Edie hugged it to her breast. How could she make her life happier so she would have something pleasant to write her sister? This picnic was a happy place to start.

A Letter from Bristol



iii. Drawing



Lucy, 1856

LUCY DAYDREAMED AS she looked out the schoolhouse window at the ducks gathered on the bank of the Arm. When the children went out to play at recess, they would run and chase the ducks off the bank. Then the ducks would waddle as fast as they could and slide gracefully into the quiet water. On warm summer days, she slipped into that same water for a swim and it held her in its embrace. Perhaps that was why it was called the Arm.

When the school had been built, Mam said that civilization had come at last to Maple Point. At first, Lucy hated school. She never saw Sitla anymore. She couldn't ever sneak away to find her in the woods now. She wondered why Sitla didn't have to go to school too. It wasn't fair that Lucy was forced to sit at a desk, even on warm sunny days that beckoned to her through the window. She wondered what she'd done to deserve such punishment.

Then, one day, Lucy started to love school. She loved the magic of drawing things on her slate, of creating with just her chalk and her mind's eye. Lucy bent over the slate drawing as precisely as she could.

"Don't write with your nose," the schoolmaster said.

She looked up, wondering what on earth he meant.

"Sit up straight," he ordered.

House of Crows

Oh, *that* was what he meant. She hadn't realized how intent she'd been. Outside, the rain was coming down in long straight lines. Inside, there was a fire in the hearth and the room was so warm and cozy she could have curled up in a ball and fallen asleep. It was so much nicer at school than at home, with everyone sleeping in one cold room where the wind and the damp somehow seeped in through the cracks. School was like a rich man's mansion, like the big white manor that Papa and the other men were building for Mr. Mackenzie and his family to live in. Papa would curse "the laird of the manor" in his scornful voice, saying they'd left Scotland to escape men like him.

"Be patient," Mam said. "In another year, you'll be free of him. Then you'll have your ain land. You'll be your ain laird."

At first, Lucy didn't know what they were talking about, but she was learning. Sometimes she'd listen to the schoolmaster when he was talking to the older children about the Queen across the sea and the House of Lords, or Lairds as her parents called them. He often used words Lucy had never heard before. The lords lived in houses so big they were called palaces and they had many servants.

"Like Mr. Mackenzie," a student said.

All the children laughed, but the schoolmaster scowled.

"Not at all," he said.

He didn't seem interested in teaching his youngest pupils. So, Lucy watched the other pupils in the classroom as Mr. Clark rambled on, especially her brothers. Sam listened eagerly and thrust his hand in the air whenever the teacher asked a question, but Jamie didn't pay any mind at all. Lucy saw him scribbling notes on his slate and showing them under the desk to his neighbours, who snickered.

"James!" the schoolmaster said in his deep voice.

Lucy knew what was coming and turned to watch her brother. Jamie put the slate down on his desk.

"Aye, sir," he said, looking almost bored.

"Get up!" the teacher said.

Jamie slid out of his seat and stood beside it.

"Who is the prime minister of Great Britain?" Mr. Clark demanded.

"I dinna ken," Jamie said.

Lucy gasped and looked back at the schoolmaster. He reached into his desk and took out the thick leather strap he used.

"What did you say?" He tapped the edge of the strap on the palm of his hand.

"I dinna ken, *sir*," Jamie added the expected word.

Mr. Clark tapped the strap on his palm again. "*I don't know, sir.*"

"That's what I said. I dinna ken, sir."

Mr. Clark went red in the face. "Come here," he demanded.

Lucy looked back at her brother. Jamie strutted toward the teacher as if he were going to the playground instead of his punishment.

"Hold out your hand."

Jamie held it out. The teacher brought the strap down on his open palm so hard that it whistled in the air. Lucy closed her eyes.

Thwack!

"One," the teacher counted.

Thwack!

"Two."

Lucy could feel her hand tingling.

Thwack!

"Three."

That's enough, she thought.

Thwack!

"Four."

Mr. Clark was a monster.

Thwack!

"Five."

Silence.

Lucy opened her eyes in time to see Jamie sauntering past her, looking the same as he did at home when Papa hit him. As if it were nothing at all. It was not the first time he'd been strapped and it wouldn't be the last. Tomorrow, he probably wouldn't come to class. She wondered if he went to play with the Indian boys. She would have liked to follow him and go see Sitlamitza, but she didn't have the courage.

Lucy admired her brother, but she was afraid for him.

She put her head down and went back to drawing pictures on her slate.

The Craigflower Bridge



i. At the Bazaar



Maggie, 1892

MAGGIE WANTED SOMETHING — she just didn't know what. An inexplicable emptiness followed her around every day as she went about her chores. She picked up a ceramic shepherdess off the mantel in the drawing room that had once enthralled her, but now it was just another knickknack to be dusted. She didn't notice the gleam of the silverware anymore as she polished it and placed it in the velvet-lined boxes. Even at home with her mother and Granny, something seemed to be missing from her life.

Granny said it was a man.

Mama didn't agree.

As Maggie strolled around the bazaar, her arm linked through her grandmother's, she glanced at the glittering array of objects, scarcely seeing them. Absentmindedly, she picked something up.

"That's lovely," Granny said. "Give us a gawk."

Maggie passed it to Granny, noting as she did that it was a pottery bowl with a painting of a flower in its centre.

"Look at this, Lucinda," Granny said. "You used to paint at school. D'you think you could do this?"

Mama looked at it and shrugged.

"I could," she said. "But I haven't time for such fripperies."

"What about you, Maggie?" Granny asked, passing it back to her.

House of Crows

Maggie sighed as she placed it back on the table.

"I never had the talent for such things. At school, I only ever loved learning about history."

Granny snorted. "Stories about the past dinna put bread on anyone's table."

"That's not true, Mam," Maggie's mother said. "Perhaps you could write stories, Maggie. Have you ever thought about being a writer?"

Maggie shrugged. "When would I have the time? I work six days a week and twelve hours a day."

Mama hadn't waited for her response. She'd found some needlework at the next table and her head was already bent over a piece, examining every stitch in detail. Mama was lucky. She was a hopeless dreamer, but in spite of that and even though Granny didn't have any time for dreamers, Mama contributed the most to the family's finances. She lived her dreams, or so it seemed to Maggie, absorbed as she was in fabric and in creating beautiful clothes for wealthy women.

"I wish I knew what my dream was," Maggie said to Granny.

"Perhaps," Granny said, "it's a man."

Mama rejoined them. "Oh, Mam. Leave off. Not every woman needs a man to complete them."

"That's all right for you to say," Granny said, "but you had a man who loved you."

Mama quickly moved away to the next table to examine some more needlework.

"Why does she never want to talk about my father?" Maggie asked. "I want to know more about him."

"You ken," Granny said, "he was a good man from a wealthy family, your father."

"Then why are we so poor?" Maggie asked.

"His family cut him off when he married your mother."

"Why did they do that?"

"Because we were poor."

"Did you have a man who loved you, Granny?"

"Oh, aye," she said. "At least for a while until it went sour. But I was never as lucky as your mama. The love of my life was a poor man with nae ambition. Love doesna put bread on the table and you might as well marry a rich man. You can learn to love him."

"Marrying a rich man," Maggie said, "didn't put Mama any farther ahead."

"But," Granny replied, "not every family is as mean-spirited as the Macaulays."

Edeana Malcolm

Maggie looked about the bazaar. Perhaps there was a rich man here she might fall in love with. There were very few men but those she saw had their arms firmly curled in the arm of a fashionably dressed young woman. Well, thanks to her mother, Maggie was as fashionably dressed as any of them. At least today on her day off, nobody could see that she was just a maid.

How she longed to be something more.

The Craigflower Bridge



ii. Craigflower Manor (1)



Eddie, 1856

IN EARLY MARCH, rumours abounded of an imminent Indian invasion. The northern tribes were said to be coming in great numbers in their canoes to attack the local tribes who were under the protection of Fort Victoria. Chief Factor Douglas came out to the Craigflower farm to raise volunteers for a militia corps in case of an attack. To Edie's dismay, John joined up and was issued a musket.

"I willna have that gun in my house," she said, when John showed it to her. She was afraid of what he might do with it when he was drunk.

"Dinna be ridiculous, Edie. It's for our own protection. You're always going on about how you're afraid of the Indians. Now we'll be prepared in case of an attack."

"Do you think I could use it to hunt with, Papa?"

Jamie seemed a little too interested in the musket.

"It's nae for hunting, lad. It's for use in case of an Indian attack."

"You see," Edie warned, "that's all you use it for, John."

In the middle of the month, a fleet of thirty canoes arrived from the north. But instead of attacking, they made a camp at Rock Bay in the inner harbour. There, they traded peacefully with the fur traders at the fort and didn't bother the Songhees, so the dreaded Indian invasion never occurred.

House of Crows

* * *

One sunny, warm afternoon in May, Edie was hanging up the wet clothes, thankful to be outside. She heard a noise that sounded like a firecracker. Edie looked up from the wet britches she was holding and saw a group of men in front of the Mackenzies' new manor house. Immediately, she recognized one as John. He was waving a musket in the air and the other two men with him had muskets as well. She dropped the britches and ran towards them.

As she approached, she saw one of the men drop his knee to the ground, aim his musket and shoot it toward the Mackenzie's manor house. She heard the sound of glass shattering as the men waved their arms in the air and shouted triumphantly.

"Stop!" Edie shouted.

She then stopped herself, afraid one of the drunken men would accidentally shoot her. They either didn't hear her or were ignoring her.

The man who had just fired his musket said, "Your shot now, John."

"Nae!" Edie shouted.

John continued to ignore her, but the other two men looked in her direction. Then, Edie realized she wasn't alone. Other men and women were coming from their work to find out what the noise was. She felt suddenly ashamed, glad John hadn't acknowledged her. If only she could disappear and no one would notice she was here.

Isabelle's husband stepped forward and took charge.

"Give me the gun now, John."

John handed him the musket sheepishly. He turned to the other two men.

"Let me have the muskets before someone gets hurt."

Edie wished that she had stepped forward and taken John's musket from him. She imagined herself standing over him, musket pointed at his heart. She shook her head. She would never have the courage to fire it at him, no matter how much she wished sometimes that he was dead. *Such an evil thought!* Edie was surprised at herself. She prayed for forgiveness.

Just at that moment, Mr. Mackenzie opened the door, his animated face red with anger.

"What is the meaning of this?" he shouted.

"Good morning, your lairdship," John slurred.

Mr. Mackenzie ignored him and called to the other workers. "Help me get these men to the schooner. We'll take them to the fort to be tried immediately."

Edeana Malcolm

Edie couldn't blame him. She closed her eyes and prayed that no one in his family had been hurt.

"Are your family all right, sir?" she asked.

He was too busy arranging the removal of the men to answer her.

She walked slowly back to her clothesline, bent down to pick up the britches and slapped them to knock off the dirt. She didn't want to have to wash them again.

The Craigflower Bridge



iii. Dreaming



Lucy, 1856

AFTER SCHOOL, LUCY crossed the bridge over the Arm to get home. The rain had stopped and the sun was making a showing, peeping out between the clouds. She loved the feel of the sun on her shoulders, the way it warmed her all the way through her skin right to her bones.

She thought of home. It had been nice and quiet the last few days with her father gone “on a bender” as her mother called it. He wasn’t around to beat her brothers. He never touched her or Mam, but he liked to beat the boys — “to toughen them up,” he said. Lucy thought they were quite tough enough already, especially Jamie. She wondered if her father would be back yet or if the house would still be peaceful.

Mam was sitting at the table, her head bent so low it almost touched the wood. The schoolmaster’s voice popped into her head. “*Don’t write with your nose. Sit up straight.*” But she knew better than to say it out loud. Lucy wondered what had made her mother so sad.

Mam finally looked up when all three of her children were there. Her eyes were embers of anger.

“Your father’s been locked up at the fort.”

“Why?” Sam asked. “What did he do?”

Mam turned those smouldering eyes on Sam.

House of Crows

“What did he do? Same as he always does — bit the hand that feeds him, the fool.”

Lucy tried to imagine her father biting someone’s hand but couldn’t.

Then Mam looked around at each of them, slowly so they could all feel the heat of her eyes. Lucy looked down and saw an ant crawling across the wooden floor on its way to the larder.

“He’ll be locked up at the fort for some time, so we must work to take up the slack. Sam, I’m going to the manor to offer your service to Mr. Mackenzie to replace your father until he’s released, so they dinna throw us out.”

“What about school?”

Lucy thought her mother was going to hit him, but she simply used her eyes again.

“What about it? Surely you’ve learned enough readin’ and writin’ by now. It’s time you were out working.”

This didn’t sound like the same mother who was always after Jamie about playing truant. Where had that mother gone?

“Can we all stay home then?” Jamie asked.

Lucy wondered how he could be so bold as to speak to this fierce woman. The woman who looked like their mother turned on Jamie like a lioness who would snap off his head.

“Nae,” she roared. “You’ll go to school, and you’ll do your chores before you go. D’you ken?”

He nodded.

“Now, go chop me enough wood for this evening and tomorrow. Lucinda, come with me. You’ll help me with supper.”

So, Lucy took a knife and scraped, pared and chopped carrots, potatoes, parsnips and neeps that she put in a pot of water and carried to the fireplace. Meanwhile, Mam skinned and chopped up a rabbit and tossed it in the pot. Jamie brought in an armful of firewood and put some on the fire. They would eat well at least.

“This meal’ll have to last a couple of days,” Mam said, her fierce eyes doing the round of them again, “so dinna eat like you’re starving.”

Mam did not speak again, but Lucy’s stomach churned so much she was hardly able to swallow the food she ate. It reminded her of the deck of the ship they had come here on, churning and rolling.

At night, when she lay down to sleep, she remembered it — the gentle, rocking roll of the ship — and it helped to soothe her, to rock her to sleep. But then, in the middle of the night, the nightmare came. The ship rolled like a giant beast. She clung to the deck, praying not to be tossed off into the ocean, into the deep, never-ending darkness. A man

Edeana Malcolm

read solemnly from a big black book and the sailors tossed a little girl's body into the sea. The black sea opened its mouth then to swallow her.

Lucy woke up gasping for breath, terrified.

The Craigflower Bridge



iv. Craigflower Manor (2)



Edie, 1856

THE DAY AFTER the incident at the Mackenzies, Edie went back to apologize on her husband's behalf. The gleaming whitewashed two-storey manor house loomed above her and she felt a sliver of her husband's resentment when she thought of the two tiny rooms they still lived in. She approached the formidable entranceway. The door, its large transom window framed by a great wooden pediment and square columns on either side, was studded with hand-forged iron nails so that it could withstand Indian attacks. *To think my ain husband is the only savage who's attacked it!* It took all the courage she could find to knock on the great door. The sound of her knocking disappeared like a whisper into the thick wood. Then she dug up all of her anger at John and beat on the door hard enough to hurt her knuckles.

A young Indian girl answered. Since Bella had left, the Mackenzies had lost to marriage every Scottish maid they'd hired, so there was nothing for it but to employ Native girls as housemaids.

"Mr. Mackenzie, please," Edie said.

"Whom shall I say is calling?" the girl asked with almost perfect diction.

"Edith, one of the farmhand's wives," she said, afraid to give her last name in case she would not be received.

House of Crows

"Come in," the girl said.

Eddie entered the bright hallway lit by the transom window. It was as large as their bedroom. Then Eddie followed the maid into the parlour, another bright room with two large windows.

"Please wait here."

Eddie looked around. There was a great chair with a seat as long as a sofa but with no back. She'd never seen anything like it. There were two more conventional armchairs with covers to protect them. She sat herself on the edge of one of these.

As she waited, she surveyed the walls, admiring the engravings of Queen Victoria and her handsome husband, Prince Albert. The engraving above the bookcase showed a very fanciful glass palace and she wondered what it was. She was about to get up to examine it when the formidable Mr. Mackenzie himself came into the room. He stood at the doorway looking at her. His eyebrows jumped up and down and his mouth was moving, though as yet no words were coming out.

Eddie stood up and curtsied.

"Good evening, sir."

"Edith, is it? May I know of which farmhand you're the wife?"

"Aye, sir. My husband is one of the miscreants who was taken to Fort Victoria for trial — John Innis."

Mr. Mackenzie's eyebrows shot up.

"I've come," Eddie continued, "to apologize for my husband." She looked down at her shoes and decided to make no excuses for him. "I hope your wife and bairns are all well, sir?"

She looked at him cautiously. His face twitched.

"Well," he said. "The good Lord has seen fit to spare them from physical injury but they are much shaken by the events of yesterday. If you've come to ask for clemency on your husband's behalf, it isn't on. He'll spend his time in jail or pay whatever fine the magistrate sees fit."

"I've come for my bairns' sake. They dinna deserve to suffer for their father's crime. I've come to offer my son's service to replace his father. He's fourteen years old and willing to work hard."

"That's as may be, but the schoolmaster will have a conniption if I take him out."

Well, if he wouldn't take her son, she would have to give herself.

"Then I could work for you, sir, while my bairns are in school. Surely you have some cleaning to do in a house this size."

"Perhaps Mrs. Mackenzie might have some work for you. I'll speak to her."

Mr. Mackenzie left. She waited a long time, but he did not return. Finally, she went to study the print on the wall above the bookcase. It read, "Crystal Palace, Site of the Great Exhibition, 1851." Then she examined his books. There was a great leatherbound volume of Lord Byron. Edie had heard of him, but nothing good; he was a scoundrel. She wondered that a man like Mackenzie should have such a book. Just then, the maid was back.

"Come," she said.

Edie followed her through the pantry and larder to the kitchen where the maid opened the back door.

"Mrs. Mackenzie," the maid announced, "says you're to be here at eight o'clock sharp tomorrow morning."

Edie waited a moment for her to say more, but she didn't.

"All right, I'll be here. Good evening to you."

* * *

The next day, Edie was at the manor house washing the replacement windowpane in Mr. Mackenzie's office. He had a new window already while they had never had a pane at all, suffering in the long, cold winter with just oiled paper in their windows instead of glass.

When she'd finished, Mrs. Mackenzie, a stern, thin-lipped woman, inspected it. After an eternity, she nodded at Edie.

"We've boxes of things from the old place that still need to be unpacked," she said. "Rosie'll show you where they are."

Then she walked away.

The Indian maid she'd met the day before arrived and Edie presumed she must be Rosie. She seemed friendlier today. After she'd taken Edie upstairs to the boxes and told her what to do, she stayed to help.

"Did you know," Rosie asked, "it's the Queen's birthday in a few days?"

"Of course I ken that!" Edie snapped. How dare an Indian girl tell her what she, a British woman, already knew.

Rosie smiled. "And did you know that sometimes at the fort, they pardon prisoners on the Queen's birthday?"

Now that was something that Edie didn't know. She felt a little sorry she'd snapped at the young lass.

"D'you think they might pardon my husband?"

Rosie nodded. "They pardoned my father last year. He was a drunk like your husband."

House of Crows

To have her husband compared to some drunken Indian! She was about to say "How dare you!" but she had no right to chastise Rosie. In truth, Rosie was her boss. She felt so humiliated at this moment. But her husband deserved to be called a drunk and she herself had called him a savage. She put her head down and went back to work.

* * *

John and the other two men involved were paroled a few days later. Edie welcomed him with less than open arms. In fact, she decided it was best to say as little as possible. Besides, he looked remorseful.

"I'm sae sorry, Edie," he said. "It's the demon drink. It isna me. You ken I wouldna hurt a flea."

Edie said nothing in response. She was tired of talking to him, tired of nagging. It did no good at all. She only hoped that he was serious about his remorse. She hoped he wouldn't drink anymore, but she was beyond believing it was possible that such hopes would ever be realized.

On Saturday, Mr. Mackenzie and Mr. Clark held a meeting at the schoolhouse to question witnesses about what had taken place during the shooting incident. It was determined that only two of the men had actually fired on the manor house and they were fined five pounds each.

John was free to go.

Edie knew it was only the intervention of the workers which had prevented John from firing his gun as well. He had been fortunate.

After the examination, Mr. Mackenzie spoke to them both.

"I don't have the luxury of turning away workers," he said, looking very unhappy. "Or you can be certain you'd be gone tomorrow."

Edie quivered as he scowled at her husband.

"I'm sorry, sir," John responded. "I was drunk out of my mind."

"So, no more drink for you," he said. "Is that understood?"

"Aye, sir."

Mr. Mackenzie turned his gaze on Edie and she instinctively looked down at her feet.

"Mrs. Mackenzie says she still has need of your services as well, Mrs. Innis. So we'll expect you at the house same time as usual on Monday."

With that, he turned on his heel and left. Neither of them dared to ask if Edie would be paid for her labour. It was without doubt a debt of guilt she was expected to pay.

Across Craigflower Bridge



i. At the Iron Church



Maggie, 1892

FULL OF HOPEFUL expectations, Maggie looked up at the Church of St. John. Would she find the love of her life in this strange-looking church made of iron, not wood like almost every other building in Victoria?

Granny told her the pieces had been shipped out from London on a steamer at the time of the gold rush before Maggie was born. The miners had lived in tents because the town had grown so fast there wasn't enough room for all the people. The Anglican bishop sent for help from England to civilize all the rough miners that were upsetting the town. They'd sent the iron church. Granny thought it was the funniest thing. "As if we didna have enough wood here to build a kirk!" she'd said.

The English lady who had donated the church was called Baroness Angela something or other. Maggie couldn't remember her last name, but Angela College was named for her. Maggie wished she could have gone there like Miss O'Reilly and all the other rich girls. Instead, she had to attend Girls' Central Public School till she turned sixteen and went to work.

When she walked into the church, she was taken aback by the strange decorations that adorned the sparse interior. She smiled at the coloured paper shapes pasted on the walls. She wondered if a child had been asked to decorate. Even with her lack of artistic talent, she could have done better.

House of Crows

She'd arrived early and had her choice of seats. She chose a pew in the centre of the church and sat in the middle of it so that people wouldn't have to shuffle around her.

As she sat examining her surroundings, she noticed a strange contraption, a long narrow board attached to the bottom of the pew in front of her. Out of curiosity, she touched it and saw that it moved on a hinge. When she flipped it over, it rested on the floor and there was a cushioned pad on top of it. She realized this was for kneeling to pray. How strange! She would be embarrassed to get down on her knees to pray in front of everyone. No wonder Granny wouldn't accompany her to the church. She almost laughed out loud to think of Granny getting down on her knees like a scullery maid. It would've taken both Mama and Maggie to get her back up again.

As Maggie was examining the hymnal to see if Anglican hymns were different from Presbyterian ones, a woman with a large brood of young children arrived. She stood at the end of the pew Maggie was sitting on and glared. Maggie looked around the church at the many empty pews and wondered why they didn't sit somewhere else.

The woman didn't move. She cleared her throat rather loudly.

"Excuse me," she said.

Then she ushered her children into the pew.

Maggie could see she would have to move over to give the family room, so she replaced the hymnal and moved to the next pew on the other side of a divide. Rather than thanking her, the lady gave her a self-satisfied nod.

Soon, another smaller family approached her from the other end of the pew she now occupied.

"Mama," a little girl said, her eyes wide, "who is she?"

"Don't stare, dear. It's very rude."

All through the service, Maggie noticed the little girl sneaking quick peeks at her. And what a service it was! Standing up and sitting down. Kneeling and getting up. Reciting and singing. Everyone else knew what they were supposed to say and do and when they were supposed to say and do it, but Maggie sat when she was supposed to stand and stood when she was supposed to sit. All of her actions were a few seconds behind everyone else's and, when they recited the words they knew by heart, Maggie just moved her lips in pretense.

The little girl down the pew from her was smiling broadly. "She doesn't know what she's doing, Mama. Do you think she's never been to church before?"

"Hush," her mother said.

Maggie was so embarrassed that she forgot all about looking around for eligible gentlemen. If there were any and they had observed her during the service, they would have known immediately that she was not one of them. She couldn't wait to get out of there and, though the sermon wasn't long by Presbyterian standards, it seemed interminable.

As she left through the doorway, she was obliged to shake the hand of the minister. He held hers much too long.

"I haven't seen you here before, my dear. What's your name?"

She thought of lying so he wouldn't look her up afterwards, then decided she would surely go to Hell if she lied to a preacher.

"Maggie Macaulay," she mumbled.

"Well, do come again, Miss Macaulay."

He let go of her hand at last. It was all she could do not to run out the door into the sunshine.

On the way home, Maggie was reliving the humiliation of the service in her mind when a man fell into step beside her. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw that he was a bluejacket and there was something familiar about him. Curious, she turned to look at him.

"Excuse me," she asked, "do I know you?"

"Yes, I believe we've met before. Did you work at the O'Reillys' house a year ago?"

It was the sailor who'd brought the letter from Captain Stanhope!

"Yes," Maggie answered, "I still work there."

"I came to deliver a letter and you asked me in for tea."

"I remember."

"Since you were so kind, I thought I'd walk you home to pay you back. If you don't mind, of course."

She appraised him briefly. He was pleasant enough to look at and he still didn't have a bushy beard like most bluejackets did. She couldn't abide the messy appearance of a beard.

"I live only a few blocks from here, but you may accompany me if you wish. I'm afraid I don't remember your name."

"It's Jack. Jack Robertson. I remember yours. It's Maggie, isn't it?"

She blushed to think he had remembered her name after all this time.

"Yes. Maggie Macaulay."

"How did you find the service?" he asked.

"Well," she said, "I couldn't even find my place. Everyone stared at me so rudely as if I didn't belong. Are Anglicans always so inhospitable?"

"Oh, you're not Anglican then. That explains it."

"No, I'm Presbyterian. What do you mean, 'that explains it'?"

House of Crows

"Do they not have the custom of paying for pews in the Presbyterian church then?"

"Paying for pews? Whatever do you mean?"

"The family that snubbed you paid twenty-five dollars for that pew, so you can understand why they weren't too happy to see you in it."

"Really? You have to pay for pews in the Anglican Church? How mercenary! I think I'll keep to my free church in the future."

"Then I shan't have the pleasure of seeing you next Sunday?" he asked, looking a little downhearted.

"I shouldn't think so," she said, rather coldly. "Unless you change churches."

"I'll consider it," he said. "Tell me, do you like to dance, Miss Macaulay?"

The very thought of dancing set Maggie's heart aflutter and her toes to tapping. She hadn't danced since they'd learned to at school.

"Yes, I do."

"Perhaps you'll do me the honour of accompanying me to a dance next Saturday night, then?"

"I should like that," she said. She stopped suddenly. "This is my house, so you'll know where to call for me next Saturday night."

"But surely you'll invite me in to meet your mother and father! I know my parents would never let my sister step out with someone they hadn't met."

"Of course," Maggie said, blushing. She was unused to this courting business. "You must come in and meet my mother and grandmother."

"I'd be delighted," he said.

Maggie went in the front door and was glad to see that for once her mother's work was all stowed away and the parlour was neat enough to sit in if need be.

"They must be in the kitchen," she said. "Follow me."

She hoped Mama and Granny wouldn't be too shocked to see a man in their kitchen. They looked up from their soup and stared at him.

"This is Mr. Jack Robertson," Maggie said. "He walked me home from church and I asked him in to meet you. He's invited me to a dance on Saturday and so we seek your approval first."

"Well, Mr. Robertson," Mama said, getting up. "Would you stay for lunch?"

"I wouldn't want to put you to any trouble, ma'am."

"No trouble at all," Mama said as she walked to the cupboard.

Granny got up and pulled out a chair for him.

"Have a seat," she said, looking him over as he sat down. "I see you're in the navy. What's your rank?"

"No particular rank, ma'am. Just an able seaman, but I mean to make my way up in the ranks."

"Hm," Granny said. She squinted at him. "Where d'you come from, Mr. Robertson?"

"I'm from London."

"Would you like some bread?" Mama asked as she placed bowls of soup in front of him and Maggie.

"Yes, please," he said.

When they were all seated at the table, Granny asked, "And how was the Church of England service, Maggie?"

"It was just fine, Granny," Maggie said.

"Come now, dear," Mama insisted. "Tell us all about it."

"Well, apart from Mr. Robertson, the people were not friendly at all. This woman scowled at me when she got into the pew beside me. Mr. Robertson explained that I was sitting in their family pew."

"You didn't see a name on the pew as you entered?" Granny asked.

"I didn't think to look."

"And it was all a lot of mumbo-jumbo," Granny said.

It was as if Granny had been there. Yet Maggie didn't want to agree with her in front of Mr. Robertson. After all, it was his church.

"Why would you say that, Granny?" she asked.

"When we first came here, there was nae Presbyterian kirk and we were obliged to attend Church of England. Never did care for it, though." Granny broke her bread. "So, Mr. Robertson, why did you come all the way from Esquimalt to attend a church in Victoria?"

"Well, I don't like the chaplain at the naval base, ma'am. I heard that Reverend Hills was a good preacher and I came to hear for myself if that was so."

"And what did you think?"

"I'm not convinced."

"Well, Presbyterians are the best for preaching. You should come with us to kirk next week."

"Perhaps I shall, ma'am."

"And you're to take our Maggie to a dance next Saturday, sir?"

"With your permission, ma'am."

"You see that you behave like a gentleman, d'you hear?"

"Yes, ma'am," he replied.

He helped himself to another slice of bread, looking very pleased.

Across Craigflower Bridge



ii. The Twenty Acres



Edie, 1858-59

AT LAST, THEIR five years of servitude were up. They would have their own land and all would finally be well.

John came home with a map that had the outlines of their property and Edie gazed at it with the awe she usually reserved for the Bible. Their twenty acres was a narrow strip of land across the bridge and beyond Craigflower School. The family walked out one afternoon to observe what the surveyor had marked off as theirs. They had to search the thickly wooded forest to find the red ribbons tied to trees that marked the four corners of their land. On the eastern boundary, they found one beside some partially cleared farmland that belonged to the Yates family, who also owned the Craigie Lea farm farther back down the Arm beyond the Gorge.

The family continued walking along that cleared land as far as Colquitz Creek where they found a second ribbon.

"We'll have to build by this creek," John said.

"But that'll mean the children will have a long walk to school," Edie complained.

"Would you rather carry the fresh water a long way every day then?"

Edie hated to admit it but he had a good point. "You're right," she said sheepishly.

House of Crows

"I'll get some canvas for a tent to live in for the summer while we build," John said. He looked at Edie. "Dinna expect anything grand."

She knew with John building it, it wouldn't be. He wasn't much of a carpenter.

"The lads can help you build it." She hoped one of them might prove more skilled than their father.

"Of course they will."

"And I'll plant a kitchen garden near the house," she said. Lots of potatoes, she thought, to last the winter. *Thank God for potatoes that grew anywhere, and spare us from another potato blight*, she prayed. "And we'll buy some chickens."

John nodded. They walked along the creek a short way to the other ribbon and then through the forest to Maple Point in silence. The children ran ahead, exploring the land that was to be their home, while Edie thought of the packing yet to be done and the work that awaited her once they moved. She could see by the morose expression on John's face that he was thinking along similar lines and she worried. She knew how much he shunned hard work.

* * *

A few months later, the house was finished and they moved in. Some things were better and some things were worse than the place they'd left behind on the Craigflower farm. It was basically a wooden box, but they had a little more room than before: two bedrooms instead of one. They'd splurged and put a glass pane in one of the windows, but that meant there was no money for a wooden floor. Edie had to make do with pounded earth. With no neighbour's house attached, they had privacy at last. But it also meant that more heat escaped, so it would be colder in the winter. They were far from their nearest neighbour, so Edie would have to get used to being alone.

Edie's garden would provide some food for the winter. They had no one else to depend on now and no income to buy the goods they needed. This first year would be difficult, but she hoped John would clear some of the land and plant a cash crop so that, next year, they would have an income.

"Now that the house is finished," she asked him, "could you build a chicken coop next? They'd lay more eggs if they were sheltered from the weather."

"Woman, will you leave off nagging? I thought I'd just take a few days' rest before I start on the next project. Besides, Sam's gone back to school. I've never seen a lad so eager for book learning. It's unnatural."

"A chicken coop, John! I'm sure you could put up one of those on your ain."

"I told you I'm taking some rest first. House-building is thirsty work and I'm off to the fort tomorrow."

Edie knew better than to argue. He hadn't gone off on a tear all summer. Perhaps it had been too good to last forever.

* * *

For the next few days, Edie set a plate for John at the table expecting him home. On the third day, he came back from the fort. He sat down at the dinner table where the family was already gathered and began spooning food onto the plate.

"You'll never believe what's happened to our wee Fort Victoria!" he said, his voice full of wonder. "It's surrounded by miles and miles of tents. Thousands upon thousands of people!"

"What are they there for?" Edie asked.

"Gold rush," he said reverently.

"They've found gold in Fort Victoria?"

"Dinna be daft. They've found gold at a place on the mainland in the Fraser River Canyon. This is the closest town and so the miners come here to stock up on supplies before they go make their fortune."

Edie didn't like the sound of this at all. She was only glad John didn't have enough money to "stock up on supplies," so he'd just have to stay until he got at least one year's crop in.

"Are you going to build my chicken coop now?" she asked.

"Damn your chicken coop!" he said.

"You ken I dinna like your cursing in my house," she said, sternly. "Especially not in front of the bairns."

"It's *my* house, woman. I'm the one who built it and dinna forget it."

"It's your house too, Mam," Sam said. "I give you the part I built."

John raised his arm to his son but wasn't drunk enough to hit him. "Leave off, you wee lass."

Edie felt a great love in her heart for the lad who risked getting hit to support her.

The chicken coop got built, though it took months of nagging to get it done. And then it was time to start nagging about cutting down trees so they could put in a crop in the spring. John couldn't see the need to hurry and kept putting it off.

His visits to the fort were frequent and long, so Edie was the one who ended up doing whatever chores needed doing. She couldn't fell timber

though. John would come back with his head full of tales of gold, which he repeated to Edie.

One day, he came home with a plan.

"Listen, Edie," he said. "I'm going to the Fraser Canyon to make my fortune. All I need is a grubstake."

"A grubstake?" The word sounded dirty and she hated even to say it.

"Aye, some money to get started."

"Where d'you think you could get that?"

"You'll like this, Edie. I'm going to clear some land, plant a cash crop and, next fall, when I sell the crop, I'll have enough for a grubstake."

"As long as you leave us enough money to live on when you go, I'll be happy."

She didn't hold much hope that he would carry out the plan, but the very next day, he pulled Sam from school again and they began the arduous work of felling trees. When he'd cleared about an acre, he put in a crop of potatoes around the stumps. Edie didn't think it was nearly enough and told him so. John answered by going to the fort for days on end, while Edie weeded. On those days, her back aching from bending over and pulling weeds, she complained to herself that it was too much work, especially since she doubted she would ever see a penny of it when it was sold. The most she could hope for would be potatoes enough to get them through the winter while John was in the Fraser Canyon, wherever that was. She imagined it was even more godforsaken than this place, though that was hard to credit.

She knew they would need more than potatoes to make it through the next winter. Someone would have to go to work to make extra money so they could buy things. Sam was sixteen now, certainly old enough to leave school, so Edie got him a job at the Craigie Lea farm as a farmhand.

"I want to go back to school," Sam complained, "so I can learn and be someone. I don't want to be a farmer."

"Dinna be daft," Edie said. "This is your land, too. You're going to be a farmer, so you'd best learn your trade."

Across Craigflower Bridge



iii. Doing Needlework



Lucy, 1858-59

LUCY DIDN'T MIND the long walk to the Craigflower School. Walking through the woods was still her favourite activity. Sitlamitza lived far away now and they'd grown apart ever since Lucy had started school. But she still continued to play the games they'd played together. One of them was to see how quietly she could walk in the woods without frightening any deer. Sometimes her brothers would come crashing through the forest and destroy her little game.

She wondered at them. They claimed to be hunters. Didn't they know to be quiet when they hunted? Lucy thought she'd be a far better hunter than they were as she could get so much closer to the deer.

Being quiet had rewarded her on more than one occasion. Once she'd come so close to a deer, she had time to examine its beautiful markings. Its smooth tawny fur was broken by a scar on its left shoulder. It turned and looked at her. She was astonished to see an almost-human expression of curiosity in its eyes. Lucy felt as if she could speak to it.

"Hello," she said.

The deer's expression turned to one of fear and it fled, bounding and crashing through the forest undergrowth. Lucy had eaten venison many times before, but now she wondered how she could ever eat it again. She was glad that her brothers were not such good hunters.

House of Crows

Another time Lucy was playing her quiet game, she came across a panther. The big animal had a golden honey-coloured coat and large eyes that slowly turned in her direction. She could see its eyes turn from languid to terrified in that instant and was surprised to realize that she had startled it. The panther turned and ran before she could even take another breath. Then she realized that she ought to have been afraid herself — if there had been time. She let out a deep sigh and continued on her way to school, this time making lots of noise as her brothers did. Perhaps they were right after all.

At school, the older girls taught needlework to the younger girls. While they sewed their samplers, the boys recited the times table after the teacher. Some of the girls listened and recited along with the boys but the teacher never asked them questions about it so Lucy didn't pay much attention. She spent her time perfecting even little stitches.

As the teacher walked by her desk, he glanced at her sampler.

"Very neat work," he said.

One of the other girls stuck out her tongue at Lucy when the teacher's back was turned.

Girls were ever so much better at not getting caught when they misbehaved than boys were. Girls could sit quietly for longer and they knew how to be invisible when they needed to be. Boys, on the other hand, were such strange creatures! They took no pains to hide their bad behaviour even though they knew the consequences. If the boys didn't know the answers to the teacher's questions, he would strap them. But some of them, like her brother Jamie, still paid no attention. If Lucy thought the teacher would strap her, she would have listened carefully and learned her numbers.

Lucy longed to do the fancy needlework that the older girls did. She loved the way they stitched the little coloured threads into pictures. In her mind's eye, she imagined she had honey and gold-coloured threads of many shades so that she could embroider the panther she'd seen. The background would be shades of green and black like the forest. But where could she get all those different threads? Anyway, she knew that her dream was far away. For now, she had to concentrate on making the neatest tiniest stitches on her sampler. And then one day she might have the skill and the threads to be able to create her panther.

Lucy would have spent all her time at school or in the forest if she had her way. Even though her father was now 'laird of his ain land,' home was still not a happy place. After Papa had built his house, he'd rested. Mam kept pushing him to cut down more trees, to clear more land, to put in crops, and on and on, but he wouldn't. Farming was just too hard

work, he said. Lucy was glad he didn't cut down any more trees. She loved the forest just the way it was.

Then one evening, he came to her and told her that he was leaving the next day.

"Where are you going, Papa?"

"I'm going to the gold rush."

"What's that?" Lucy asked.

"I'm going to hunt for gold," he said. "And when I find some, I'll come back home and we'll be rich."

"Will you bring me back some gold thread, Papa?"

Her father laughed and she was hurt because she hadn't meant to be funny.

"I need gold thread, Papa — lots of different colours of gold — to make an embroidery."

He stopped laughing then. "Of course, I will, Lucy. I'll bring you as much gold thread as you want. But it may take me some time to find it. I may be gone a long while. So, you be a good lass and help your mam with the housework while I'm gone."

On Colquitz Creek



i. In the Parlour



Maggie, 1892

ON SATURDAY EVENING, Maggie admired herself in the dresser mirror before going downstairs. The green organza gown her mother had created matched her eyes perfectly. Mama had also swept up and pinned her hair to emphasize her soft brown curls and her long, graceful neck. She only hoped her hair would stay in place better than when she arranged it herself. This evening, she felt herself quite as beautiful as Miss Kitty O'Reilly. Mama could stitch together a gown in a week better than most could do in a month.

Later, as she sat in the parlour, Maggie's heart fluttered just a little as her feet tapped a rhythm on the floor.

"I haven't danced since I was at school and I'm afraid I'll make a fool of myself."

"Nonsense, dear," Mama said kindly. "It'll all come back to you."

"Mind you," Granny said, "at a sailors' dance, it'll be all hornpipes and reels and bouncing around. You'll be just fine."

They sat with her in the parlour, at first making small talk as they waited for Jack. After the time for his arrival passed, their conversation diminished until they stopped speaking altogether. Mama picked up a book while Granny did some mending. Maggie opened a novel she had borrowed from Mr. O'Reilly's office and pretended to read, but the

markings on the page made no impression on her brain. Mostly, she concentrated on not crying and humiliating herself.

Why hadn't he come? Was he stricken with illness? Did he have such a terrible fever that he couldn't send word to her? Or had he been run down by a dray? Was he lying at the side of the road dying? Surely, he'd get word to her tomorrow. She'd know then what terrible calamity had prevented him from coming to get her.

After an hour or so had passed, Granny got up. "Well," she said, "it's getting late and I need my sleep, so I'll say good night to you."

After she'd left, Maggie turned to her mother in desperation. "Where can he be? Do you think he's been injured?"

Mama looked upset at the suggestion. "I don't know, dear," she said, "but one of the hardest lessons we have to learn in life is patience." She stood up. "I'm going to bed now. Are you coming?"

"No. I'll just stay up a little longer, Mama."

"Well, don't stay up too long, and don't forget to put out the lamp before you go to bed."

"Yes, Mama," she said.

When she'd gone, Maggie picked up the book Mama had been reading. She took the bookmark out and examined it. She'd seen it before — she'd once asked about it, but Mama's eyes filled with tears, her voice choked and all she said was "It's from your father." She'd left the subject alone since then, but tonight, she needed some kind of distraction.

It was something she must have made herself when she was a little girl, judging by the meaningless colourful scribbles. She turned it over and read the words on the back. It said, "With all my heart and soul, I promise you that we will meet again. Love, Robert." Oddly, it was Granny's childlike handwriting, despite it being her father's name.

Imagine a man loving you like that! Maggie was sure it would never happen to her. The tears that had been just below the surface for the last few hours began to flow. No gentleman caller. No dance. And now she'd have to remove this gown Mama had spent so many hours making and take down the hair Mama had pinned up.

She cried then for Mama almost as much as for herself.

On Colquitz Creek



ii. The Craigie Lea Farm



Edie, 1859

THE MANAGER OF the Craigie Lea farm was at Edie's door, hat in hand, eyes blazing.

"Where's your son, Sam? He didn't come to work this morning. Is he still abed?"

Edie shook her head. "I saw him off myself this morning at the usual time." Her heart started beating faster. What could have happened to him?

"Well, he didn't make it to the farm. Are you sure he didn't sneak back into bed?"

"I'll go look," she said.

She went to the bedroom. Just as she expected, the beds were all made and there was no one in them. But on Sam's bed, she saw a neatly folded piece of paper. She opened it. It was well-written. Edie didn't even know some of the big words he used. This cut her to the quick. It was as if he was saying she wasn't good enough for him. The gist of it was that no one had ever consulted him about his wishes. He didn't want to work on a farm. He didn't want to be a farmer and he wasn't a child any more. He knew his own mind. He was going to the gold rush, just as Papa had. He would make his own fortune and then start up his own business.

House of Crows

"You don't have to worry about me."

That was the last thing he'd written. Fine thing! Worry wasn't something you could shut off as easily as closing a door. She'd worried about him all his life and would go on worrying about him as long as she lived. But that wasn't her biggest concern at that moment. How would they survive?

She went back to the door.

"The lad has run off," she said. *Like a bairn*, she added to herself. "I'm sorry. If you want, I'll come do his work myself."

"Would you? The kitchen maid had to milk the cows this morning and so the lunch'll be late. We're all behind now since I've had to come all the way here to look for Sam."

"I'll come in a trice," she said. "Just let me leave a note for my bairns."

On the table, she left both Sam's note and her own hastily scribbled words.

* * *

When they got to the farm, the manager showed her around.

"The milk cows are in the pasture," he said. "There are eight of them. Before you leave this evening, you bring them in and milk them."

Then he showed her the chicken coop with the chickens she needed to feed.

"Pronto," he said. By that, she assumed he meant 'right away.'

Then there were the forty pigs that needed feeding.

"If you go in the kitchen, Sally the kitchen maid'll give you the slop bucket for them."

Forty pigs! she thought. *What she wouldn't do for just one of them. Imagine eating bacon again!*

At the end of the long day, she walked home. Lucinda and Jamie were worried that she'd come home so late.

"I've agreed to go work there every morning," she said. "Which means I'll be up before the sun. You must get yourselves up in the morning. Lucinda, you'll get all the meals and look after the house. And Jamie, you'll keep the garden and the chickens in order."

"Let me work on the farm, Mam," Jamie begged. "I'm the man of the family now. School's a waste of time just like you told Sam."

"You're too young, Jamie," Edie said.

"Call me James," he replied. "I'm ready to go to work."

"Jamie, this family needs you to go to school."

"James!" he shouted, storming out of the room.

She should never have made Sam drop out of school. She wouldn't make the same mistake with Jamie. He had to be the one to get an education now. It had been eight years since she'd come to Vancouver's Island. She scarcely thought of her Scottish home anymore. Home was a far-off country, a life she'd lived a long time ago. Once in a while, a memory would flit into her mind's eye, perhaps a glimpse of her mother or father or sister, then she would wrap it in a safe place in her heart, sigh and get back to work. It did no good pining. She was here now and the business of survival took all of her time and energy. But even in the old country it had been like that, especially after the blight had taken the potato crop. That was life. You worked hard or went hungry — sometimes both.

On Colquitz Creek



iii. Cooking



Lucy, 1860

EARLY IN THE morning, even before Lucy and James were awake, their mam left to go milk the cows at the Craigie Lea farm.

At first, Lucy was terrified when she woke up in the morning with no mother and no father, only James. Even with his new name, he didn't seem any older. But now, she was used to it.

She got up and went to the fire. Before stoking it, she shovelled out the baked potatoes for their lunch. Then she put the pot on to make porridge for breakfast. She had to do all the cooking and housecleaning now. She never had time to play anymore, but at least it was quiet with Mam gone. Mam would come home at the end of the day, too exhausted to yell at anyone, and go to bed as soon as the sun went down.

While life at home was busy, the rest of the day was pleasant. On the long walk through the woods to school every morning, James seldom spoke to her, but his silence allowed her to enjoy the peaceful beauty of the woods. She also liked being in school because it was the only time in her day when a grownup was in charge and she could be a child for a while.

After lunch, Lucy noticed that James had not returned. She didn't mind him skipping class because it meant he would bring something home for supper tonight. He would fish off the Craigflower Bridge

House of Crows

when the salmon or the herring were running or, when they weren't, in Colquitz Creek nearer the house. Lucy would clean and cook the fish that he brought home. Papa had said that his musket wasn't good for hunting but James had taken to using it and seemed able to shoot rabbits just fine. Lucy would skin and cut up the rabbits he killed just like she'd seen her mother do. It wasn't pleasant work, but she was getting used to it and even developing some pleasure in her skill.

Mr. Clark was suddenly in front of her desk. "Where's your brother?" he asked.

"I dinna ken, sir," she said, and then reddened when she realized her mistake. "I don't know, sir." She looked at Mr. Clark, afraid he might give her the strap, but he seemed not to have noticed.

"Well, there's a letter for your family. Do you think you could take it home?"

"Aye, yes sir," she stammered.

He handed it to her. She recognized the handwriting right away. It was from Sam! Lucy started to rip it open.

"What are you doing?" the schoolmaster shouted. "The letter's addressed to your mother." He pointed at the name on the envelope. "Do you see that?"

Lucy nodded.

"Read it out loud."

"Mrs. J. Innis," she read.

"Is that you?"

"No, sir," she said.

"Then take it home to your mother."

* * *

Lucy couldn't wait for her mother to get home so she could open the letter. She wanted to hear what Sam had to say. Where was he now? What was he doing?

There was still supper to prepare. She started to get the potatoes ready and wondered what James would bring home for them tonight. He came through the door carrying something much larger than a rabbit over his shoulders.

Lucy gasped.

James flung the deer down on the dirt floor and Lucy stared at it. On its left shoulder, there was a distinctive scar. It was the deer she had seen in the woods, the one with the human eyes! She wanted to be sick.

"I'm not skinning that!" she cried.

James looked at her strangely. "You have to skin it and cut it up," he said.

"I will not," she said. "Take it outside. I cannot look at it."

"I canna leave it outside!" he cried. "It'll attract a bear or a panther."

"Then put it in the shed."

He shrugged his shoulders, then hefted it back onto them. "All right," he said, "but you're making a big mistake."

Lucy made a supper of boiled potatoes because that was all that was in the larder. James complained bitterly. Mam was not very happy either when she came home later.

Then Lucy brought out the letter. She hoped it would distract them both from their disappointing supper.

James and Lucy watched as their mother read the letter without showing any emotion. When she finished reading, she let it drop on the table. Both James and Lucy grabbed the scrap of paper at the same time.

"Let go," James said. "I'll read it out loud. I read better than you do."

Lucy doubted that was true but she knew he was stronger, so she dropped it. James picked it up and read it haltingly.

"Dear Mam," James began. "A year has passed since my pre... precip..." He looked frustrated.

"Let me see," Lucy said.

He handed the letter to her. She found the word.

"Precipitous," she pronounced proudly.

"What does it mean anyway?"

Lucy wasn't sure. "Steep, maybe?" She went back to the letter and read it aloud again from the beginning.

Dear Mam,

A year has passed since my precipitous departure. I regret that I didn't have the courage to say farewell in person, but I was afraid that my anger would get the better of me.

"Dinna fash," as Papa would say.

Suffice to say, I am in excellent health, though panning for gold is arduous and not at all remunerative. If I manage to accumulate a few ounces, I shall move on to greener pastures immediately.

I shan't let such a long time elapse before I communicate again. Give my regards to Jamie and wee Lucy for me.

Yours sincerely,
Sam.

House of Crows

Lucy held the letter tightly in her hand. Sam had held it and it was a link to him, however slight.

"Well," James said, "I dinna ken what all that was about. He should write in English next time."

Lucy shook her head at him. "And you should speak in English. It's 'I don't know'."

He stuck his tongue out at her, and then turned to his mother. "Mam, I brought home a deer for supper today, but Lucy will not skin it. It's in the shed."

Mam shook her head at Lucy. "It's nae different than skinning a rabbit," she said. "You can do it. You dinna need to leave it for me to do. I have enough work already."

"Why doesn't James do it? It's his deer and he's the one who'll eat most of it."

"Dinna complain, Lucy. It's your job and, tomorrow, you'll skin that deer."

"But..."

"Nae more argument."

Lucy thought her mother had a strange idea of what was women's work and what was men's. If a boy killed the deer, he should have to skin it too.

* * *

The next day, she got James to do it. She told him she wasn't going to and if he didn't, she'd drag the deer out into the forest and bury it. She could be as stubborn as her mother when her mind was made up. He knew it too, so he took it outside, skinned and cut up that deer. Lucy went inside so she wouldn't have to see him doing it.

She tried not to think about the human eyes of the deer in the forest. After all, it was dead now and there was nothing more she could do about it. She decided she wasn't going to eat any of the meat. But she was hungry and the smell of the venison cooking, its juices dripping from the flesh into the fire as she roasted it on the spit, was too much for her. She took a bite, then two, then three.

Later, her mother came home from work and was happy to have fresh venison.

"This is delicious, Lucinda," Mam said between chews.

Lucy couldn't remember the last time she'd seen her mother looking so happy.

"You see what you can do when you put your mind to it?" Mam smiled at her, her greasy lips gleaming in the lamplight.

Lucy looked down at the dirt floor and then across the small room at James who was cleaning their father's old musket. He met her eyes and looked down. Good! He wasn't going to say anything. Perhaps he was too embarrassed that she had made him skin the deer. Lucy knew she should tell her mother that James had done it, but praise from Mam was such a rare thing that she decided to bask in it.

"And you, James." Mam looked at him. "Thank you for bringing home the deer. You see what we can do together."

Lucy felt like crying. Mam was starting to look so old with all the hard work she endured in silence. She didn't seem such an ogre anymore. She was just someone who seldom expressed her feelings. Like James. Mam needed and appreciated both of her remaining children.

She wondered if Papa was ever going to come home with her golden threads or if she would have to make bannock, clean house and weed the garden for the rest of her life. She realized it didn't really matter. The three of them kept the sky up and kept the world turning. They didn't need anyone else.

Across the Harbour



i. On the Lawn



Maggie, 1893

AS MAGGIE STEPPED out into the early dawn to go to work, she smelled an overpowering, if familiar, scent — somewhat like boiled potatoes. Once, when she'd asked what that smell was, Granny'd laid her finger at the side of her nose and said, "They're cooking opium in one of the factories in Chinatown."

Maggie took a deep breath and imagined herself in one of the opium dens in Chinatown. She'd heard stories of the fiendish things that happened in those dens down in Fan Tan Alley and wondered if the people who went into them really turned into half-dead creatures with no will of their own. She would have liked to go find out for herself, but a young woman alone was easy prey for white slavers. And she was still a woman alone. No man had come along to ask her out in a whole year.

A whole year had passed since she'd been stood up by that no-good sailor Jack Robertson. She'd expected him to call with an explanation, but he hadn't. She'd searched the newspaper for news of an accident or incident that might explain his absence, but there'd been nothing. Every day, she'd expected a letter in the mail, but nothing came. She'd thought about going to the naval base in Esquimalt to inquire after him, but that would have been far too forward. She'd thought about sending him a

letter in care of the navy asking for an explanation, but time passed and she did nothing. She finally concluded Jack Robertson was not worth wasting any more thought on. But still, there wasn't a day that went by that she didn't think about him and regret her lack of courage in looking for an explanation.

She decided she should practice being brave about small things, then when the big problems came, she might have more courage. For instance, she should satisfy her curiosity about opium. Surely Li would know about such things. He didn't terrify her as much as he had two years ago when she'd started working at the O'Reillys, but it would still be difficult to broach such a sensitive topic with him. If she could get up the courage today and do this one little thing to satisfy her curiosity, then she might not be such a coward the next time a bigger problem arose.

Besides, the smell of the opium was just too delicious. She waited all morning for a good opportunity to speak to Li. After the breakfast dishes were washed and put away, she went into the kitchen but couldn't find him. She called and heard a muffled response from the scullery. The trap door was open and he was coming up the ladder with his arms full of food from the storeroom below.

"Take this, miss," he said, handing her a large basket of root vegetables.

She took it from him and placed it on the table behind her. Then she turned and helped him up from the ladder.

"Thank you, miss," he said. "At-home day today. Lotsa work."

He walked past her toward the door.

"Li," she said.

He turned. "What you want, miss?"

"They're cooking opium today. I can smell it."

He shook his head. "No, no, miss. Ladies don't talk about this."

"Why not? Opium isn't illegal and I'm curious. Have you ever been to an opium den, Li?"

He was still shaking his head, looking embarrassed by her question. She rather thought it meant he had. It might explain his crankiness some days.

"I was wondering if you'd ever tried it yourself, Li. What's it like?"

"Young lady should not ask such question," he said, turning and walking into the main kitchen.

She picked up the basket of vegetables and brought it to him.

"I'm sorry if I upset you, Li." She handed him his basket.

"You go now," he said, glaring at her furiously. "Go work."

Well, it had been worth a try, but it would probably be months before Maggie regained his trust.

About an hour later, Maggie was in Mr. and Mrs. O'Reilly's bedroom, dusting. She sometimes enjoyed examining their beautiful possessions and contemplating having some herself one day. She was admiring a black-lacquered Japanese comb when Mrs. O'Reilly came running into the room, out of breath and in a perfect panic.

"Where's my husband?" she cried, looking around the room.

"I don't know." Maggie put down the comb. "Why? What's the matter?"

"Li's had an accident. He's fallen through the trap door."

Maggie must have upset Li so much that he'd forgotten to close the door.

"Is he all right?" she asked, feeling guilty.

"He's alive, but we must get him to the doctor's."

Mr. O'Reilly came in to the room to find out what the fuss was about.

"Oh, there you are, Peter," Mrs. O'Reilly said. "There's been an accident." She told him what had happened.

"Go tell the groom we need the carriage, Maggie," Mr. O'Reilly said.

He rushed out of the room to tend to Li.

Maggie had barely spoken to Terence since he'd turned down her invitation to the bazaar two years before. He smiled when he saw her coming and she thought he looked desirous of a conversation with her, but now was not the time and anyway she wouldn't give him the satisfaction. She was all business.

"There's been an accident. Li has fallen down the trap door and they must get him to the doctor. Mr. O'Reilly needs the carriage as quick as you can."

"Right away, miss," he responded.

She turned on her heels and left before he could say anything else.

"Whatever am I going to do?" Mrs. O'Reilly asked her daughter. "I've lost my cook on my at-home day, when everyone will be visiting. They'll expect tea and cakes on the lawn this afternoon."

"Why don't you cancel, Mother?" Miss O'Reilly said. "The weather is not looking promising today and, besides, the smell outside is quite obnoxious."

"That would mean we'd have to alert everyone we know. It would take all day and we haven't time."

"I could make some goodies, ma'am," Maggie said, still feeling responsible for the accident.

"Really? You know you'll have to serve them, too."

House of Crows

"I'll do my best, ma'am."

"That's all any of us can do. Thank you for the offer, Maggie. And could you get us lunch as well? Something easy. Cheese sandwiches will be fine."

Maggie had her work cut out for her that day. She put on an apron and tried to find all the utensils and foods she would need in Li's kitchen. As she worked, she imagined she heard him standing just behind her, scolding her for touching his things.

After lunch had been served and the dishes done, she started getting things ready for the afternoon visitors. She decided to make scones. She'd seen Granny make them often, so she thought she could do it. Though she was uncertain of the proper proportion of ingredients required for the dough, she made a guess and mixed them together, kneaded it and covered it to let it rise. Then she had to make the cake. But Li didn't use recipes; for one thing, he couldn't read. Perhaps Jack Robertson couldn't read either, which would explain why he hadn't written to her. If he didn't know how to read, then he certainly wasn't good enough for her. She had to forget about him and concentrate on the cake. She tried to remember what ingredients Granny used. She had some idea of the ingredients but no idea of the proportions. She took a guess and then stirred them together in a bowl. She stuck her finger in the batter and then licked it. Then she put some more sugar in the batter and whipped it.

She remembered how Granny would beat the cake batter for what seemed an interminably long time. After a while, her arm was aching. She stopped. Surely that was enough. She poured it in a pan and put it in the oven.

What else did she have to do? Cut the bread for the sandwiches. Maggie looked around the kitchen for a bread knife. She found one and started sawing the loaf of bread. It wasn't sharp enough and the slices were all uneven. Some were too thick, some were too thin, some started too thick and ended too thin. She sighed.

She rolled out the biscuit dough. It stuck to the rolling pin, so she showered it with flour, then rolled again. She took a cup and cut out the biscuits. Then she put them on a sheet in the oven beside the cake and cut the cucumber for the sandwiches.

Mrs. O'Reilly came into the kitchen.

"Oh, Maggie, you look like an old woman. Your hair is white with flour. Go clean yourself up before you serve the guests. They've started to arrive."

"Yes, ma'am."

Maggie was in a panic instantly. There were still the sandwiches to make, there was everything to come out of the oven and be plated, then she had to get herself prettied up to be presentable for the guests. She flew to work.

First, she took the cake out of the oven. It was sagging and Maggie could still see it was moist in the middle, so she put it back in the oven to cook some more. Then she tried to pat the flour out of her hair and pin it up again neatly. She put on a clean pinafore and went to arrange the cucumber sandwiches on a lovely Minton platter from the pantry.

She carried the sandwiches out to the garden where all the ladies were sitting around a table in their white gowns and their wide-brimmed hats to protect them even from the tentative sun. The guests were some of the cream of Victoria society — Mrs. Tyrwhitt-Drake, Mrs. Turner and Mrs. Trutch.

Maggie placed the plate on the table. The ladies raised their eyebrows at the strangely shaped sandwiches, but no one complained of the taste as they nibbled them. Pleased, she rushed off to fetch the scones, cream and jam.

Then Maggie remembered the cake. It was still in the oven! She took an oven mitt and pulled it out. There was still a cavernous hole in the centre, but it was no longer shiny. Perhaps if she cut the pieces around the edge and put them on a plate, no one would see the mess of the cake itself. No time to do that now. She took the scones out to the waiting ladies.

Later, Maggie carried out the platter with the little pieces of cake she'd managed to cut from around the edges — one for each lady. She placed it on the table, looked up and saw Mrs. O'Reilly scowling at her.

"I don't know what you've done to the scones, dear, but they taste awful. They're inedible. Take them away."

As Maggie collected the little plates with their slightly nibbled scones, Miss O'Reilly added, "Such a waste of cream and jam."

"Well," Maggie said as she picked up the tray and scampered away, "I hope the cake is more to your liking."

Maggie returned with new plates and served the cake. She stood watching as the ladies bit into their morsels. No one said anything but Mrs. Trutch made a face as she put her cake down on the Minton saucer.

"It's a little dry and hard, Maggie," Mrs. O'Reilly said.

The other guests nodded as they crunched their cake.

"Well," Miss O'Reilly added, "at least it's edible."

"And the tea," Mrs. Tyrwhitt-Drake said, picking up her cup, "is delicious."

House of Crows

“Thank you, ma’am,” Maggie said, grateful for her kindness.

“Well, it’s not your fault, dear. You did your best,” Mrs. O’Reilly said. “Now, run along. I’m sure you have a lot of cleaning up to do. We’ll call you if we need you.”

* * *

Afterwards, Miss O’Reilly told her she should stick to being a maid.

“Now, Kitty,” Mrs. O’Reilly said, “she did her best just as she promised she would.”

Scratch ‘cook’ off her list of possible careers.

Across the Harbour



ii. The Walk to Victoria



Edie, 1861

ONE MAY DAY, after feeding the chickens, Edie came into the farmhouse kitchen to get some slops for the pigs. She greeted Sally, the kitchen maid who had known them since the Craigflower farm.

“Good morning, Mrs. Innis,” the maid replied. “I was so surprised to see your husband at the fort yesterday while I was there. You didn’t tell us he was back from the gold fields.”

Edie felt as though a bucket of cold water had been dumped over her head.

“Are you sure it was him?”

“Yes. He was in his usual state.”

The maid smiled. Maliciously, Edie thought, blushing.

“Well, I hav’na heard from him, so I wouldna know.”

She picked up the bucket of slops and went out to feed the pigs. They snorted and shoved each other’s snouts over the slop. Still, it’d be an insult to these fine animals to call her husband one of them. She determined to do nothing. If he was in the fort, he would come home eventually. She would just have to wait. And what if he didn’t? They were better off without him.

House of Crows

Edie always looked forward to Sunday. It was her one day off and she could sleep until after the sun came up. Then, when there was a church service, she would walk with the children in tow over to the Craigflower School and listen to Mr. Clark or Reverend Cridge or whichever other visiting minister was preaching. Sometimes it was a Royal Navy chaplain from a ship in Esquimalt. Occasionally it might be a Presbyterian, though such treats were rare and Edie had to tolerate the Church of England style of service.

The Sunday after she'd heard John was back, the sermon was given by a visiting Presbyterian preacher. His accent and demeanour reminded her of her father and made her feel homesick for Scotland. James escaped as soon as the last amen was spoken. Lucy sat patiently beside her as Edie contemplated the preacher's words in a state of bliss.

She looked up to see the schoolmaster approaching and steeled herself, ready for another complaint about James's truancy.

"A letter for you, Mrs. Innis," he said, handing it to her.

Perhaps it was a word from John at last about where he was and what he was doing. She glanced at the envelope. Another letter from Sam. She ripped it open and read that he had moved on from the Fraser Canyon to some new town called New Westminster, wherever that was.

She looked up and Isabelle, her old neighbour from the Craigflower farm, was standing there.

"I haven't seen you in such a long time, Edie," Isabelle said.

"Good morning, Isabelle."

"Can I read the letter, Mam?" Lucy asked.

"Aye," Edie said, handing it to her. "Go show it to your brother outside."

Lucy jumped up and eagerly ran away.

"It must be a relief," Isabelle said, "to have your husband home again."

"How did you ken that he was back?" Edie asked.

"My husband saw him at the fort."

"Well, aye," Edie said. "It's a relief to have him home again."

She vowed there and then she would go to the fort and find him. She'd had enough of backbreaking labour. Whether he'd made any money or not didn't matter. It was his turn to do some of the work.

It was hard to believe, but in the eight years since they'd been here, Edie had only been back to the fort one Christmas. John and the children had gone more often, especially on holidays, like the 24th of May. Even after the road had been built, it had seemed too long a distance to walk and they had no horse. Besides, she didn't like what she remembered

of the fort — a rat-infested, leaky storeroom to live in and inhospitable Frenchmen and Englishmen to live with.

On Monday, she gave notice at the farm that she'd be absent the next day. Then on Tuesday, she set out for Fort Victoria to find her husband. It took all her determination to put one foot in front of another to walk into town. A part of her really wanted to let sleeping dogs lie and ignore the man, but it wasn't fair how hard she had to work while he did nothing. She didn't know how long she could continue at this pace.

She walked past the schoolhouse across the bridge to Maple Point. She scarcely glanced at the chandlery, mills and smithy, not even the building which she'd lived in for so many years. She glared at the great manor house with its heavy iron-studded door where she'd knocked that day she'd gone to ask forgiveness for her husband, another memory she'd rather not have. Then she turned down the Victoria-to-Sooke Road that led through the forest to the fort.

After two and a half hours of walking, she could see the fort across the harbour. It was not such a terribly long distance after all. Why ever had she thought it too far? Why had she not gone to the fort? John had told her over and over it would be a change for her and she should have some fun. He had begged her to go and she'd always refused. She had somehow thought it would keep him from drinking, but her refusal had never stopped him from going. Perhaps if she'd gone with him, she could have stopped him. No, she knew that wasn't true and, besides, there was no use hashing out old mistakes.

From across the Point Ellice Bridge, she tried to find the fort in the maze of buildings that had sprung up around it. Finally, she spotted a wooden stockade even older and shabbier than it had been eight years ago. But everything around it had changed. Where there'd been only forest before, a town had sprouted. There had been a few hundred people living here eight years ago, but this town looked as if it housed thousands. The thought gave her great pleasure. A town! Lots of people. She was so tired of seeing the same faces day after day. Everyone knowing everyone else's business. Here was a place where you could hide.

That was just what John was doing. He was hiding in this place and she might have a devil of a time finding him. But no, John was predictable. All she needed to do was to find the nearest tavern and that was where he would be.

She asked a respectable-looking gentleman if he could tell her where there was a tavern. Immediately, she wished she'd chosen someone less respectable. He looked at her as if she was some kind of hussy, so

House of Crows

she quickly added that she was looking for her husband. Then his gaze turned to one of great pity. She didn't know which was worse.

"Down the road there," he said. "And past the fort. There are any number of taverns. Take your pick."

She walked down the road towards the fort and went into the first tavern she came to. The yeasty, almost pleasant, smell of beer reminded her of the smell of bread baking. But the sight of the unsavoury characters hunched over their grog and glaring at her brought her back to her purpose. She searched the faces that were staring at her, but John's was not among them.

The next tavern was almost a copy of the first one, but at least here there was music. A tinkly air was coming from a badly-tuned piano in the corner of the room. She looked at all the patrons staring at her from the bar, then at the customers seated at tables. John was not here either. How many more taverns would she have to walk into and be gawked at? Surely, the next would be the one.

She barely got in the door before a man came up to her.

"Can I help you, ma'am?" he asked in a most unfriendly manner.

It wasn't seemly for her to be in this place but, once upon a time, men would have greeted her more kindly. She scarcely ever looked at herself in a glass. How old and haggard she must look now!

"I'm looking for my husband," she said.

"What's his name?"

"John Innis," she said, feeling her face redden.

"He's not here yet," the man said. "Try again later."

She didn't even have time to look around for herself before he hustled her out.

She continued down the street past the horses and wagons lining the boardwalk, looking in windows for the next tavern. She saw the words 'Brown Jug' painted on a darkened window.

Edie went in. Her eyes slowly adjusted to the dim light. Again, she smelled sawdust and beer. Again, she heard the tinkle of a piano, but here it was almost drowned out by the shouts of a group of men arguing at the bar. She peered to see if John was among them.

Someone grabbed her arm. She swung around and there he was.

"Edie! What in God's name are you doing here?"

"I'll thank you to leave His name out of this," she replied, shaking loose from his grip.

"Let's go outside," John said.

"With pleasure," she murmured, happy to leave this place. She followed him out the door.

On the wooden sidewalk, he leaned unsteadily against a water cart and smiled. She could see he was drunk already though it was still morning. She shook her head.

"How long have you been back from the gold rush and why have you nae come home?"

"You look tired, Edie."

"I am tired, John. I've been working hard to feed myself and our bairns. I had to take work at the Craigie Lea farm."

"Hasna Sam been helping you? I'll give him a thrashing when I get home."

"Nae, you willna. Sam's gone to the gold rush too."

"Hope he had better luck than I did."

"Didna you make our fortune, John?" Perhaps that was why he was hiding in town. He was afraid to come home and tell her. "Well, I suppose you'd best come home again then. There's a lot of work to do and I'm tired of doing it alone."

"Hm," he murmured.

The stage of his drunkenness was mellow and not yet belligerent. He was easy to manage in that state. Perhaps she could get him home. First, she'd have to find a place that served coffee, then she'd share the sandwich she'd brought for her lunch with him. Then during the long walk home, he'd sober up and perhaps not be too nasty when he did. Why did she bother? Did she really need him?

If she could get him sober, if she could get him to stay sober, maybe he could help her and she wouldn't have to do all the work alone.

"Where can we get some coffee, John?"

He nodded up the street. "At Campbell's Corner," he said. "In the Adelphi."

They walked up the street and into the building where they were greeted by a genial man.

"Good morning," he said. "Can I get anything for you?"

"A cup of coffee for my husband, sir."

"Right away. Would you like anything yourself, ma'am?"

"Nae... er, no thank you."

They took a seat and Edie looked around. A group of people were standing at a noticeboard talking excitedly.

"What's that about?" she said.

"It's the news of the day. Can you read what it says?"

Edie squinted. She read the words out loud. "Civil War Declared in the United States."

"That must be why," he said, "all them damn Yankees are all riled up."

House of Crows

“John, your language, please. You are’na at the gold rush now.”

“Seen enough Yankees to last me a lifetime. Rough bunch,” he said. Suddenly, he snickered. “Civil war! It dinna seem those states are sae united, after all.”

Just then, the gentleman who had greeted them put a mug of coffee in front of him.

“Thank you, Frank,” he said.

“It’s good to see your wife has come to sober you up, Jack.” Frank smiled at her before leaving them.

“I see you’ve been here long enough to meet the locals? Why have you nae come home before this?”

“Dinna start with me, Edie, or I willna go.”

“If you dinna come home with me, John, I’ll go find someone to make you do your duty.”

“Who would you go looking for to do that?”

“I dinna ken. The Chief Factor Douglas, perhaps. I hear he’s the Governor of all of British Columbia now, but he’ll remember you right enough.”

“Nae. I’ll come home. No need for you to get riled up, too.”

He chuckled to himself.

Crossing the Log Bridge



i. The Walk Home



Edie, 1861

ON THE WAY home from the fort, John stopped at a roadhouse on the Victoria-to-Sooke Road.

“Why’d you stop here?” Edie asked.

“I ken a shortcut,” he said, pointing to a trail that led down to the Arm.

Edie followed him down the trail. At the end of it, there was a log stretched across the Arm and over the Gorge. She looked down into the rushing rapids and remembered vividly the day she’d passed over it in a canoe on the way to the farm at Maple Point.

“You dinna mean to cross that, d’you?” she asked looking at the log. “Why, there isna even a rail to hang on to!”

“Come on, Edie. I’ve done it many times and not always sober.”

She shuddered to think. One false step, one attack of vertigo, and she’d fall into that whirlpool. With the rocks and the fact that she couldn’t swim, it would be certain death.

“Nae, John,” she said.

“Come on, Edie. Dinna be such a coward.”

His cajoling took her back ten years to the first day he’d urged her to come to this New World with him. Finally, she’d packed up their three children and said goodbye to all her family and followed him. Look where that had gotten her.

House of Crows

“Look, Edie. There’s another public house on the other side. If you dinna come across with me, I might just stop in there. You should stay with me to save me from myself.”

It was blackmail, pure and simple. She wouldn’t do it. He started to cross the bridge without her. She knew him. He meant it. He was going to go into the pub. She’d have to walk another half an hour down the road to the Craigflower farm, cross the bridge there and then walk another half an hour to fetch him from the pub. He’d be good and drunk by then and no good to her.

He was halfway across the bridge now. If she kept her eyes on his back, she might be able to cross without looking down. And if she prayed all the way across that God would guide her footsteps and keep her from falling, she might just make it.

Edie took a deep breath and stared at his back. She didn’t pray as she’d intended to. Instead, she kept her eyes fixed on him in anger and hatred. She cursed him for bringing her to this place. Using all of her will to keep her balance, she placed one foot in front of the other. Glancing down to make sure her foot was placed safely on the log, she saw the wild, rushing water below. She gasped. The log was slick with the spray from the whitewater, so she had to watch and plant her feet securely, but how could she? She was terrified of the rapids. Her heart beat fast and loud, yet she could still hear the rush of the Gorge below.

She looked up again at her husband’s back. He was almost across already, walking jauntily as if the log bridge was just a boardwalk in town. She vowed she would make it across so she could make the rest of his life as awful as he’d made hers.

She placed another foot forward, glancing down to make sure it was safe, then quickly up again. Scarcely time to notice the water. John jumped off the log at the other end, then turned around to taunt her.

“Dinna be such a lily-livered coward, Edie!”

I willna listen to him.

She placed her foot gingerly on the log.

I willna listen to the water.

She kept her focus narrow, watching her other foot as she tested its placement on the log, refusing to see the water past it.

I will put one foot in front of the other like this all the way across.

“C’mon, sissy!”

I willna listen to him.

She dragged one foot along the slick log to meet the other, the water below a blur, the sound of the rapids rushing in her ears.

I willna listen to the water.

Her heart was thumping. Another sliding step forward.

"You're gonna fall!"

She looked up at him, exasperated, and saw she was halfway across. Going back was not an option now. She could not turn around anyway. She stopped, took a deep breath and tried to banish the fear on the edge of her concentration. She couldn't let it take over. She imagined herself bending down, hugging the log and staying there forever.

"What's the matter, Edie? D'you want me to come and carry you across?"

I willna listen to that man!

She took another step. She could feel her hatred rising.

And when I get across this bridge, I'll show him what's what.

She concentrated again on her feet, on the log, on moving her feet along the log.

I willna listen to him.

I willna listen to the water.

I willna see the water.

She concentrated on the movement of her feet as they moved along the log. She kept going. Surely she was close now.

She looked up. Only two steps more. She had an urge to run those steps, to end this. But the log was slick and she couldn't risk slipping and falling. Not now.

She continued her slow methodical pace.

One more step.

And then another.

She felt John grab her arm and pull her onto solid ground. She lay down on the grass, exhausted.

"Would you like," John said, smiling, "to come sit in the pub while I have a pint?"

John always knew how to get her goat.

"I most certainly wouldna. Now come help me up and let's get home."

It annoyed her to see him in such good spirits as they walked back home along the Arm. They crossed the Craigie Lea farm and she wondered who had milked the cows and fed the pigs today. She hoped that Sally wasn't watching from the window. She didn't want to face her gloating the next day.

When at last they came to their farm, John praised her for how well she'd kept their property.

"Your son is responsible for that. *Not me!*" she said, bitterly. "*I'm* always up at the Craigie Lea farm."

They arrived at the house.

House of Crows

"The bairns are'na home from school yet," Edie said, opening the door.

He leered at her. "Let's have a tumble then."

She was furious with him. *Furious!* At the same time, she felt a restless stirring, a memory of what it had been like such a long time ago back in Scotland when they were young. She was a little relieved that he still might desire her. But now was most definitely not the time and he was most definitely not the man he'd been then.

"They'll be home soon," she said, "and they'd walk in on us."

"Well, then, let's go out in the woods for it. I ken you want to."

"I'm not a heathen yet, John, much as you've been working on it ever since we got here."

"Come on, Edie." He came towards her and put his arms around her. "I've missed you."

"Just because you persuaded me to cross that bridge doesna mean I'll fall for your tricks again."

At that moment, the children arrived from school. Lucy came first and, when she saw her father, she ran to him and flung her arms around him. He hugged her while James stood at the door and stared.

"What's he doing here?" James asked.

"He's your father and he's come home to do his duty. And I'll thank you to keep a civil tongue."

"Is he sober?"

"Dinna talk about me as if I'm not here," John said, letting go of Lucy. "Aye, I'm sober, Jamie. Your mother tells me that you've been a great help to her in keeping up the farm."

"It's James now and I'll stay at home just as long as you stay sober. But if you get drunk and strike me just once, I'll be off to parts unknown without a backward glance, just like Sam. Do you understand?"

John only nodded.

Lucy tugged on his sleeve. "Did you remember my gold threads, Papa?"

"What?" he asked.

"Did you remember to bring my gold threads?"

"What gold threads?"

"It's nothing."

Lucy's smile faded. John shrugged and walked away.

"Let's make supper, Mam," she said.

Crossing the Log Bridge



ii. Losing Threads



Lucy, 1861-2

LUCY WAS DISAPPOINTED in her father.

She'd remembered a man who loved her and indulged her every whim. But this back-from-the-gold-rush father had not even remembered that she'd asked him for gold thread. It was all she'd asked him for and he'd forgotten.

His return home didn't change very much in their routine. Mam still worked at the Craigie Lea farm, Lucy still kept house and cooked while James looked after the farm. The only difference now was that Papa was here too and, when he came in for his supper, he complained about the food she'd prepared.

"Potato pancakes again, Lucy!" he said. "Is that all you can cook?"

"When that's all I have to cook, Papa," she said. She wanted to add that James hadn't caught any fish today, but she didn't want to get him in trouble too.

"After a day of work cutting down trees," Papa said, "a man needs more sustenance than this."

Lucy fought back a tear. It was clearer to her now than it had ever been that her short childhood was over. Her father no longer treated her as a little girl and she was afraid of him, never sure how he would treat her.

House of Crows

* * *

One evening, a few months after he came back, Lucy heard her parents in the next room while she was supposed to be sleeping.

"I'm glad you've cleared sae much land," Mam said.

Lucy was not so glad. The forest that she walked through to get to school was starting to disappear and only stumps were left where great trees once stood.

"Maybe one day soon," Mam continued, "I'll be able to quit my job and stay home to feed my ain chickens and milk my ain cows."

"Your plans," Papa replied, "are not the same as my plans."

"What d'you mean?"

"I learned a lot during the gold rush," he said. "I learned that the men who made money were not the ones searching for gold, but the ones who opened the shops that fed and clothed and supplied the prospectors."

"Aye. What about it?"

"I was a fool to be searching the streams and the rocks for a lump of gold when I could've made money opening a shop."

"Well, it's too late now."

"Nae," he said. "There's another gold rush in the Cariboo now. There'll always be fools searching for gold and I want to open a shop. Besides, the land here is nae good for farming. It's worth more money if I sell it. I say we sell this land and buy a shop in town."

Mam was silent for a time, then started shouting.

"You'll not sell the land we worked sae hard to get!"

"Calm down. You'll wake the bairns."

"Nae matter how much you get for the land, it willna make up for the years of work we've put into it!"

"I canna talk to you!" Papa yelled.

Then Lucy heard the door slam.

After that, Papa was often absent and when he did come home, he was usually drunk.

* * *

One night, in his usual drunken state, he was shouting at James after supper.

"I hear you've skipped out of school again!"

"Well," James responded, "someone has to do the work around here because you never do it."

Lucy stared at him, admiring his gumption.

"If you dinna go to school," Papa shouted, "you'll end up a worthless scoundrel like your brother!"

"Why, because he went to the gold rush just like you? You must be a worthless scoundrel then."

Papa struck him with the back of his hand across the face.

Silence. Lucy stared at her father. Then she looked at her brother.

"That's it," James said. "I told you if you ever hit me again, I'd leave. I'm packing my things and I'll be gone tomorrow."

Mam looked stricken. "But James, where'll you go?" She grabbed his hand, but he pulled it away. "Dinna leave in anger."

"I'm sorry, Mam, but I won't stay here and be abused."

"Please dinna go," she pleaded. "He's only drunk. He'll apologize later when he's sober."

"But then he'll just get drunk again," James said. He looked at her with pity. "Sorry, Mam, but you'll not persuade me to stay."

"But where'll you go, James?"

"I dunno. Maybe the Cariboo for the gold rush."

"More fool, you," Papa said.

"Shut up, John," Mam said.

When James went into the bedroom to pack his things, Lucy followed.

"Are you going to leave me all alone with Mam and Papa?"

"You'll be all right, Lucy. Papa never hits you."

"Please don't go, James."

"I must. I said I'd go if Papa ever hit me again."

This made some sense to Lucy, but it still broke her heart.

"Where will you go?" she asked. "Will you see Sam in New Westminster?"

James stuffed another shirt in his bag and looked thoughtful.

"I have a hankering to wander farther afield. I've always wanted to see the world. Maybe take a steamer down to San Francisco and think about where to go from there."

"But," she said, "that's even farther away than where Sam is."

"Don't worry. I'll write."

Lucy thought of the brief letters on scraps of paper that Sam sent, hardly a substitute for her brother. And now that would be all she would have of either of them. She would be alone to help Mam with all the work and there would be no one to bring home fish and rabbits to supplement their meagre diet of potatoes.

* * *

With both her brothers gone, Lucy became terrified of her father. She did everything she could to make him happy and comfortable because they would need him to look after the farm. She was determined that

House of Crows

Papa would treat her kindly because she didn't want to have to leave too.

One day, Papa was sober — it must have been a Sunday — and he was talking to Mam after the church service.

"Listen to me, Edie. For a change, listen to me. I want to sell this accursed land and buy a shop and I willna be happy till I do. D'you want to be getting up at the crack of dawn, working on someone else's farm for a pittance? D'you want to go on living this life? Because I dinna."

Mam looked down at her work-worn hands.

"All right, I'll listen to you."

"Really? You'll listen to me?"

She nodded. "But tell me, will the price you get for the land be enough to buy a shop in town?"

"It will."

"And what kind of shop will it be?"

"A shop that outfits the miners going to the gold fields."

"All right," she said.

In shock, Lucy looked at her mother. Mam's face was drawn and she looked tired. All the fight was gone out of her.

"Really?" Papa seemed as surprised as Lucy.

* * *

They never asked what Lucy thought about moving. If they had, she'd have told them that she didn't want to go. Imagine living in the town with all those people! She loved the quiet isolation of the forest. But, as it turned out, she didn't have to worry right away. In the spring of 1862, smallpox broke out in Victoria and neither of her parents wanted to move into town until the epidemic had passed.

At first, Lucy couldn't understand what the fuss was about. 'Smallpox' sounded like a not-so-bad little brother of chicken pox. Lucy had suffered through that disease a few years ago and, though it hadn't been fun, she'd survived. But as the days went by and they heard more and more stories about people dying in Fort Victoria, she realized that 'small' didn't always mean 'lesser'.

While they waited for the epidemic to pass, Papa worked even harder getting the land in shape to sell. He busied himself cutting down trees because he'd heard that cleared land was worth more money than uncleared land. Even more of the forest disappeared every day until Lucy could no longer find the place where she'd seen the panther. There were no more woods.

Edeana Malcolm

In early July, Papa went into town and brought home a copy of *The Daily British Colonist*. The newspaper said that “the smallpox seems to have exhausted itself.” After that, his visits to town grew more frequent as he looked for a shop and also a buyer for the land.

Lucy was glad there was no school in the summer and she didn’t have to walk through the ugly stumps where the forest had once stood. She would busy herself in the kitchen garden, picking vegetables for supper. With James gone, there would be no meat to go on the table and she would hope Papa wouldn’t notice with all the variety of food on his plate but, of course, he always would and be angry again.

By September, Lucy didn’t recognize their home anymore. It looked like a beautiful woman whose hair had been shorn by an incompetent barber. She wept to see such ugliness. In fact, moving into town would be less painful than staying and seeing what the forest had become.

* * *

In the fall, all had been arranged. Papa announced he had found a buyer and now he had the money to buy a new building on Government Street. There was space for a shop downstairs and an apartment for them to live in above. So Lucy, the only child left, moved with her parents into the newly proclaimed town of Victoria.

Crossing the Log Bridge



iii. In the Kitchen Again



Maggie, 1893

MRS. O'REILLY ASKED Maggie if she'd look after the kitchen until Li returned. Maggie was flabbergasted to be asked after the debacle of the at-home tea, but Mrs. O'Reilly kept her demands simple — little more than sandwiches and soup, so Maggie managed all right.

She was in the middle of mixing dough for scones — Granny had given her a sure-fire recipe, so she was going to try again — when she heard a knock at the service door. She wiped her flour-covered hands on her soiled apron and went to answer it.

There stood Mr. Jack Robertson, looking as handsome as ever in his blue uniform. He snatched his hat off his head.

"Good afternoon, miss."

Maggie was suddenly conscious of how she looked. She swept a wayward lock of hair behind her ears. He was meant to have seen her in the green organza gown with her hair neatly pinned up, not in an apron with her flour-covered face and hands, her hair a mess. Where had he been a year ago on the evening when she'd been waiting for him to show up for the dance? The pain she'd felt on that night came flooding back to her.

"What do *you* want?" she asked.

"I wanted to apologize and to explain."

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"I'm very busy. Why are you calling on me at work?"

"I'm sorry to disturb you, but I couldn't face your mother and grandmother. You are owed an explanation, though."

She wanted to shut the door on him and send him away. But even more, she wanted to hear why he'd caused her so much pain.

"Come in," she said. "The cook is ill and I have to prepare all the food today, so I'll continue working while I listen."

She plunged her hands back into the dough to knead it.

"That's fine," he said, standing hat in hand.

"Well," she said, slamming the dough on the wooden board with all of her pent-up anger. "What have you got to say for yourself?"

"I was shanghaied."

"What?" She flipped the dough over uncertainly.

"I was shanghaied."

"You'll have to explain." She pounded the dough with her fist, frustrated by his words.

"When a ship is missing sailors — say some of 'em have jumped ship, that happens," he said, awkwardly looking for words, "the captain'll order a crew to go round up some sailors from the street. They don't always care if it's the same ones as has jumped the ship so long as they've got enough able seamen to set sail. I got picked up and sent on another ship. We call it 'shanghaied'. My new ship just returned to port this morning and I came straight away to explain."

"And you couldn't write to me?" she asked. She slammed the dough down again in anger.

"You can't send mail from a ship," he replied. "And I wasn't allowed to leave the ship when we were in port."

She flipped the dough again, wondering if what he said was true. "Maybe you can't write at all and that's why you didn't send me a letter."

"I *can* write," he said, full of umbrage.

He put on his hat while Lucy pulled the dough apart. Then she put it back on the board and sprinkled it with flour. When she looked at him again, his hat was back in his hand and he seemed contrite.

"I'm sorry I didn't find a way to write to you, miss."

"Yes." She bundled the dough into a ball again, remembering in vivid detail the tears of that evening, the gown her mother had made her and the months of wondering why he hadn't come. "But it's not good enough. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have a great deal of work to do."

She turned her back to him and went to get a cup to cut out the scones.

"Well," he said, "I'll go then."

He turned his hat nervously, but made no move to put it on or leave.

"Do you need help finding the door?" Maggie asked.

"Are you sure I can't take you out and show you a good time to make up for standing you up?"

Maggie said nothing, but she stopped with the cup in her hand and looked at him in exasperation. She simply sighed.

"Well, I'm sorry, Miss Macaulay. I'll find my own way out then."

Maggie watched him go. She wanted to call him back, but she couldn't bring herself to forgive him so easily for the pain she'd felt. And for her mother's disappointment as well. She covered the dough to let it rise and went to put yesterday's leftover soup on the stove.

'Shanghai'. It was an interesting word. A place in China, she thought. And the sing-song sound of Li in the kitchen came into her head, as did the half-dead opium-eaters in their dark cavern. How had he felt to be shanghai'd, to be snatched off the street? Had he been afraid? Had he thought about her at all as he was being shanghai'd? But why would he? She stirred the soup absent-mindedly.

If he'd thought about her in the year he'd been away, why hadn't he written?

She tasted the soup to see if it was warm enough to serve. Not yet. She continued stirring.

Shanghai — a city in China. She wondered why being kidnapped for sea duty was called that.

Maggie sighed.

He'd looked so handsome in his blue sailor's uniform. And sheepish. If he didn't care about her, why had he come to explain?

But it didn't matter. She'd shoed him away and would probably never see him again.

* * *

Because of Li's absence and all of her extra work, Maggie was late finishing work that evening. It was dark, so she took the streetcar. On the ride home, she thought about how the O'Reillys had praised her for the scones. She decided she would ask Granny for another recipe for tomorrow's supper. This cooking was not so bad after all. Perhaps Granny would teach her how to cook so that, if she ever met a man that she could trust to marry her, she'd be prepared.

She came in the back door and saw Granny and Mama still waiting up for her.

"You look tired, dear," Mama said. "Was it a difficult day?"

"Not so bad," Maggie said, "thanks to Granny's scone recipe."

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"Glad to be of service," Granny said. "Now, I should take my leave of you both. It's past my bedtime."

"Before you go to sleep, will you find me another winning recipe for tomorrow?"

"My recipes are all in my head, Maggie. I need time to think about them before I write them down."

"I'll write one down for you, dear," Mama said.

Granny got up to go upstairs.

"Goodnight." Maggie gave Granny a peck on the cheek.

Mama sat down to write out a recipe on a piece of paper.

"So, tell me about your day, dear," she said.

Maggie wanted to ask "Why are men so difficult?" but that would have required explaining about Jack Robertson and her feelings on that subject were too raw and fresh.

"Why," she asked instead, "do you never talk about Father? I should like to know more about him."

Her mother looked up from the paper, her eyes like those of an animal about to flee. But then, something changed.

"Sit down, Maggie," she said.

Maggie sat and watched her mother, who seemed to be searching for words.

"What should I say? He was a good man, a good husband and a good father, but that tells you absolutely nothing. He loved you very much. He used to look into your eyes when he talked to you. He never spoke to you like a baby but answered all your questions. You used to ask him so many questions."

Maggie heard a catch in her mother's voice.

"It's so unfair," Mama continued, "that you don't remember him when he spent so much time with you." Her emotion was growing stronger with every word. "It's so unfair that he left us so young."

Mama started to cry.

"How did he die?"

Mama got up and walked to the door.

"I'm sorry," she said, turning back before she left the room. "I'll finish the recipe tomorrow morning."

Tears were streaming down her mother's face and Maggie knew that, yet again, she would have no answers.

On the Gorge Bridge



i. Walking to Moss Rock



Lucy, 1863

LUCY WOKE UP slowly. The room was warm and bright and she wondered why her mother hadn't wakened her. Then it dawned on her that this must be Saturday, the only day she didn't have to get up early. She didn't have to go to school today, not even Sunday School. She lay in her bed, enjoying this thought as she looked around her room. She'd had her own room when James left, but it had not been as fine as this. Instead of rough bare wooden walls, there were smooth plaster ones. Instead of dirt, there was a wooden floor. And best of all, the room was warm. When she got up and stepped on the rag rug at her bedside, she didn't need to run for a robe.

Lucy smelled the familiar 'parritch' her mother now prepared every morning before she went downstairs to work in the shop. On a stove, not over a fireplace! And Lucy didn't have to cook as often anymore, only when Mam was too busy helping Papa in the shop. Their apartment was no bigger than the hut they had moved from, but it was as if they'd moved to another time rather than another place. For that reason and many others, her mother was happy now and Lucy's life was easier.

At last, the smell of food moved her to get up. She still had to work a few hours in the shop this morning, but in the afternoon, she would be free. She ate her breakfast and then hurried downstairs to help her

parents with whatever needed to be done today — sweeping, counting stock, seeing to customers.

Instead of store work, Mam sat her down to write letters to her brothers. Now that the family lived in town, it was easier to send and receive letters through the Wells Fargo office. Mam found it onerous to write the letters herself so she dictated them to Lucy. Lucy enjoyed the chore because she could add her own secret notes to her brothers as well.

The letter to Sam was short and sweet. Mam was pleased that he was working in a shop in New Westminster now. Though she knew he must be busy, she hoped he would come to visit when he was able. Perhaps he could even come home to work in their shop, Mam suggested.

On the other hand, Mam was not so pleased with James' choice of career. He had written to say he'd joined the Union Army and was going to see the rest of the United States. To Mam's mind, this was far too dangerous. Did he not know there was a war going on and he would be fighting?

Lucy found the letter to James difficult to write too. She couldn't help but see him looking as fearless as he always did when his father or the schoolmaster struck him, only now he was striding into the heat of a battle with guns firing and blades flashing. She was afraid for him, but it was too late for him to change his mind. He'd already joined the army and to quit now would be desertion.

When noon arrived, Lucy ate a quick lunch before leaving. She walked over the boardwalks of town, avoiding the muddy streets as much as possible. She nodded at people she passed because Mam said it was important to be nice when you were in trade. Lucy smiled and nodded on her way out of town, away from everyone, into the forest and her only time of freedom.

School was not so bad, though. She loved the nuns, Sister Mary Providence and Sister Marie Bonsécour, gentle ladies who had come all the way from Quebec down the east coast by ship, across the Isthmus of Panama and, by ship again, up the west coast to minister to the needs of French-speaking Canadian fur trappers and their families at the fort. When they arrived and discovered there was no school in the town for girls, they'd opened one.

But Mam didn't love the nuns. Mam said they would turn Lucy into a Papist, whatever that was. Mam had been unhappy to discover that the Colonial School in Victoria was for boys only and the only girls' school was Catholic, run by the Sisters of St. Ann in a brick building on View Street. At first, Mam didn't want to send Lucy there at all. Lucy had

cried and begged and pleaded, while Papa had tried to persuade Mam as well.

Papa had stopped drinking since they'd moved to town. Perhaps that was why Mam had finally given in to him and let Lucy go to the girls' school. But she insisted that Lucy go to the Presbyterian Sunday School all afternoon after church to make up for whatever bad influence the nuns had on her. Sunday School was too much like an extra-long sermon for Lucy's liking. She much preferred the school run by the nuns. Perhaps she was becoming a Papist after all, though she'd never tell her mother that.

Lucy walked past farmers' fields and then along trails that led through the woods. The woods here were different from the forest where she used to live on Colquitz Creek. Instead of towering firs, the trees were gnarly oaks and peeling red arbutus. The land was more open to the sky. She walked through a meadow strewn with blue camas flowers. Then she climbed to the top of a moss-covered rocky hill, which she later learned was aptly named Moss Rock. At the top of the granite outcrop, she looked out at the ocean with the sun glinting off it across the strait to the range of snow-covered mountain peaks like a wall across the horizon. It was beautiful and terrifying, as if the whole world were suddenly laid out before her. It was so large that she felt so very, very small.

She sat down. Beyond the rocks, the land fell away steeply. In the hollow, there was a forest of trees more familiar to her. There was about a mile of forest between her and the blue-grey swirling sea. Just off the shore, there was a barren rocky island and, beyond that, a ship, its sails fully rigged and billowing. The sight of the ship was almost magnificent enough to match the splendour of its setting. Lucy had only ever seen ships in the harbour with their sails furled or little boats with single sails in the waters of the Arm. She realized how little she knew of the world and how very much more there was to learn, not just from reading books and listening to the teacher, but in feeling the wind fill the sails of her senses. Beyond this moment, she could not know, while in this moment, she felt more joy than she could ever express.

On the Gorge Bridge



ii. At the Gorge Regatta



Maggie, 1894

THREE YEARS IN and Maggie was still a maid at Point Ellice House. She'd thought by now she would have been married. Or perhaps would have been given the sack for her incompetence. Instead, she was becoming very good at her job.

The O'Reillys were grateful. Keeping servants for very long was a difficulty in most Victoria households. In the last year in the O'Reilly house, another cook had replaced Li after his accident and another groom had replaced Terence when he moved on to a better position with Winters' Carriages. Perhaps he had more ambition than she'd given him credit for.

In fact, she'd been there so long that the O'Reillys gave her the Queen's birthday as a holiday. Usually, she'd be very busy serving at their garden party. Everyone who was anyone in Victoria would be there because the O'Reilly boat dock was an excellent place to view the Gorge Regatta, held on the Arm. The annual boat races started in the inner harbour at the old Hudson's Bay Company wharf and ended at the Gorge Bridge, passing right by Point Ellice House. The only better place to view these races was at the finish line near the Gorge, though with the disadvantages of crowds and that one had to bring one's own picnic.

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This year at least, Maggie would not be the maid at the O'Reillys' party. The Trutches were bringing their own maid to serve the food.

Maggie was excited about being with Mama and Granny among the crowds at the Gorge Bridge. Mama had prepared a picnic basket, so it was sure to be a special treat. She could turn the most ordinary of meals into an occasion of splendour. If she hadn't been such a skilled needlewoman, she might have been a cook.

It was the first time since the new streetcars had come to Victoria that they'd been able to persuade Granny to travel on one. She looked terrified as she climbed on board along with the throngs of happy holiday-makers. A gentleman stood to offer his seat to her and she chattered amiably with him as the car headed down Fort Street. Maggie was happy not to have to get off at the stop at the end of Pleasant Street. She glanced up the street with a sense of freedom, knowing she wouldn't be walking up it.

The streetcar began its crossing of the bridge. Everyone held their breath as if that would lighten the load as the wooden bridge sagged under the weight of the heavily laden streetcar. A great sigh was heard when the streetcar made it safely to the other side. Then it went up the hill, turning away from the ramshackle old buildings of the Songhees Indian reserve.

The man speaking to Granny shook his head.

"What an eyesore!" he said. "That reserve should be moved somewhere we don't have to see it all the time."

Granny nodded in agreement, but Maggie thought it would be a shame. Where would the Indians go and how would they sell their wares downtown?

When they arrived at the end of the line, Granny straightened her skirt and repositioned her hat.

"Thank God *that* is over," she said.

"Perhaps," Maggie suggested, "we could take a carriage back."

Both Granny and Mama gave her a look of horror. They never hired a carriage because of the expense.

"Just joking," she said.

They walked up the road to where the waters of the Arm narrowed through the rocks on either side, forming falls that reversed as the tide ebbed and flowed. Granny grew very animated as they stood on the Gorge Bridge and watched the rushing water flowing under.

"This was the way we had to go when we first came here." Granny shuddered.

Mama smiled at Maggie. They'd heard this story many times before.

"From the old Fort Victoria to the farm through these narrow little falls here in a tippy canoe," Granny continued. "There used to be a log bridge here. I walked across it once."

"Let's go find a place for a picnic," Mama said. "And later, we can come back here to watch the races."

They looked around and finally decided on some moss-covered rocks on the far side of the bridge. Maggie spread the blanket on the rocks. She helped Granny get seated as Mama opened the picnic basket. When they were all seated, Mama passed out the sandwiches, cut into crustless triangles.

"Mama, these would be quite good enough for the O'Reillys' picnic table. Bravo!"

Granny only nodded her approval with her mouth full of food.

Maggie looked about her at the families that were also enjoying the May sunshine and their picnic fare. All in all, it was as gay a party as any she had ever seen at Point Ellice House, even if people were not quite so splendidly dressed.

Having finished their picnic, they made their way back up to the bridge to find a place to watch. Granny, due to her age, was offered a place at the edge where she could lean against the railing, but she declined.

"I'd rather not," she declared, "look down into the depths of Hell."

Instead, a crowd of children took the spot, laughing and playing to pass the time till the regatta began. Maggie stood patiently waiting for the Royal Salute to signal the start. Finally, at noon precisely, the distant roar of cannon from Esquimalt Harbour was heard. The crowd cheered.

The first boats came into view, sculls manned by sailors only. As the first scull approached the finish line below them, she heard the coxswain calling "*Stroke! Stroke!*" She leaned over and scanned the handsome young sailors before they disappeared under the bridge. None of them were Jack.

Why did she have to think of Jack?

The next race was between Indians in their carved cedar canoes. They knelt on one knee, dipped their paddles deep and called out a chant in their own language. The crowd cheered as the winning canoe slipped beneath the bridge.

The third race was mixed, sailors against locals. Maggie could hear the noise of the crowd even before the first scull came into sight. When it did, she saw why the crowd was so animated — a team of local lads was in the lead. The crowd on the bridge started jumping up and down, screaming. Maggie and Mama cheered as well. Granny put her hands

House of Crows

over her ears but was smiling. Then, at the very last moment, just below them, a scull of sailors slipped past the local team. The sailors raised their fists in the air and hooted as the crowd booed.

Maggie felt a tap on her shoulder and turned to see Terence, the O'Reillys' former groom, standing beside her.

"Hello, miss," he said, doffing his cap to her.

Maggie introduced him to Mama and Granny.

"How do you like working at Winters' Carriages?" she asked him.

"Fine, fine," he said, unenthusiastically. "Are you still working for the O'Reillys?"

"I am," she said.

"I thought you'd be there today serving the gentry."

"I have the day off."

"Did you go see the horse races this morning at Beacon Hill Park?"

"No," she said. "This is our one event for the day. It's quite enough excitement for Granny."

"That's too bad. You would have seen me in the horse race." He smiled proudly.

"Did you win?"

"No, but I will next time. Besides, that's not the important thing. The important thing is that I have my very own horse and I ran in my first race today."

"Congratulations," Mama said, smiling at the young man. "That's quite an achievement. Your parents must be very proud."

"I don't know about that," Terence said. "They don't much approve of horseracing because there's gambling involved. Not that I involve myself in the likes of that."

"Look!" Maggie interrupted excitedly. "They're setting up the greasy pole."

She pointed to where a boom extended out over the water from a large naval vessel. A sack was tied at the end of the pole with a squealing pig in it.

"You always loved watching this when you were little," Mama said, looking wistful.

"Why don't you try to rescue the pig?" Maggie asked, turning to Terence. "If you succeed, you'll get to keep the pig and ten dollars too."

"Not my cup of tea," he said shaking his head. "I don't much fancy a dip in the sea. Well, it was nice to see you again. I'll be off now."

He strolled to the other side of the bridge.

"He seems a nice lad," Mama said.

"I suppose," Maggie said. "But he has no ambition."

“You sound like your grandmother.”

Granny, who was not paying the least attention to them, was shaking with laughter as the first young man plunged into the waters of the Arm. Maggie turned her attention to the sport at hand, watching boy after boy slide off the pole before reaching the squealing sack.

Then a young sailor stepped up to the pole, looking very confident. He removed his blue jacket, revealing his lean, well-muscled torso. Maggie watched entranced as he rubbed his arms and chest with chalk.

She turned away and tried to regain her composure. It was Jack Robertson! Why did he have to be so attractive? She thought she was well and truly over him but here he was, standing half-naked to disturb the peace of her afternoon. Well, she wouldn't let him. She turned back and tried to watch dispassionately while he climbed out along the greasy pole, but her stomach was writhing like the pig in the sack.

His knees gripped the pole forcefully and his arms hugged it tightly as he shinnied along inch by inch. Slowly and carefully, he made his way along the pole. For one moment while reaching forward, he slipped a little. The audience gasped. Then his knees locked in place again and his arms regained their tight grip around the pole. The audience sighed.

Only two more confident slides forward without incident and Jack Robertson had his hands on the sack. He untied it from the pole and let it fall into the water. Jack jumped off the pole into the swirling waters of the Arm and swam towards the squirming bag. A few minutes later, he had the sack in hand and held it high above his head. The crowd cheered and applauded.

Maggie just stood watching, overcome with feelings she couldn't quite explain.

On the Gorge Bridge



iii. Christmas in Victoria



Eddie, 1863

AFTER TWO MONTHS of preparation in the fall, the shop had opened for business in early November.

Now it was a week until Christmas, the season of light. Eddie arranged lanterns and candles on the shop counter. Even though she'd never celebrated Christmas this way back home, she was trying to be part of this new town.

Eddie pulled back the curtains of the shop window to let in more light while John unlocked the door to admit their first customer of the day. Mrs. Smith was a frequent visitor who seldom made a purchase but was such a fountain of useful information that Eddie was happy to see her.

"Good morning," Eddie said.

"Good morning, Mrs. Innis, Mr. Innis. I noticed you haven't put a tree on your veranda post." She shook her head in disapproval. "Have you no Christmas spirit?"

Eddie, who had been holding Christmas in her heart as she'd decorated that morning, was disappointed.

"Whatever d'you mean?" Eddie asked. "You ken... I mean, you know we are new to town and not familiar with your English customs."

"Did you not see the wagonloads of fir trees brought in from the countryside yesterday?"

"Aye," John said, "but I wasna interested in purchasing something I've been chopping up and discarding for years. I'm sick to death of trees."

"That's as may be, but all the shopkeepers have a tree on their veranda. That's how we know the time has come to start shopping for Christmas."

Eddie didn't have any time to respond as the bell above the door rang. Another customer. She looked over and saw Mr. Pemberton. Immediately, John went to greet him. Here was a man of consequence who made many purchases in the store, though he had not yet paid for any of them. It seemed to be the custom in Victoria to grant credit to the wealthiest patrons without any expectation of payment. Eddie was beginning to wonder if they ever paid their bills.

"I've come to settle my account," Mr. Pemberton said, as if reading her mind.

Mrs. Smith leaned towards Eddie.

"Paying your bills at Christmas," she whispered, "is another Victoria tradition."

That was one tradition Eddie heartily approved of. Now they might have enough money to buy a goose for Christmas dinner.

"So," Mrs. Smith persisted, "are you going to put up a Christmas tree?"

Eddie shook her head. "I do not think Mr. Innis approves."

"But it was Queen Victoria herself who started this tradition and we in this town named for her have happily adopted it, there being so many trees hereabouts."

"Queen Victoria, you say?" Perhaps it wasn't such a bad idea after all. "Well, I'll try to persuade Mr. Innis then."

"Will you be at church on Christmas Day, Mrs. Innis?" Mrs. Smith asked. "Everyone goes to church on Christmas morning. Except the Catholics, of course. They go on Christmas Eve."

"Of course," Eddie replied.

She'd been so happy to discover there was a Presbyterian church in Victoria when they moved in. First Presbyterian Church had just opened on the corner of Blanshard and Pandora as they arrived. The minister, Reverend Hall, was from Ireland and had a northern Irish accent, but it was still better than the Anglican services and she vowed she'd never go to another Church of England service.

She picked up some candles from the counter.

"Can I interest you in candles, Mrs. Smith? The evenings are dark so early these days and everyone needs candles, especially at Christmas."

"Thank you, Mrs. Innis. I have all I need. Now I must be off. Good day."

"Good day," Eddie watched her go. She must have come in for the sole purpose of letting them know they were failing in their duty as Victorians by not having a tree on their veranda.

The Letter from Kentucky



i. In the Dining Room



Maggie, 1895

“It’s YOUR BIRTHDAY,” Mama said, “but you don’t look a bit happy.”

Maggie surveyed the seldom-used dining room that her mother had prepared in honour of her day. Mama had wanted to invite some of Maggie’s friends, but the girls she’d known at school were all married now with children of their own and too busy to attend. Granny would have invited young people from the kirk, but Maggie said no. She insisted it be just the three of them. She didn’t want a lot of people she scarcely knew at her party.

Mama had done her best to fill the empty space at the dining table with festive colour. She had picked every late-blooming summer flower in the garden. There were impatiens, petunias and pansies of every colour, plants so fragile they would last but a day and then be thrown out. Maggie thought this was fitting to her mood, which was fragile as well. But she tried to put on a smile for her mother’s sake and, of course, they all dressed up for the occasion in their church clothes.

“Everything is lovely,” Maggie said.

“It’s nice,” Mama said, “that the O’Reillys gave you the afternoon off to celebrate your twentieth birthday.”

“Oh, don’t remind me of my age!”

“So that’s what’s upsetting you, dear. Twenty is not so old at all.”

House of Crows

Maggie shook her head. "Who would have thought I would still be working as a maid? And an old one at that! Nothing exciting ever happens in my life."

"Be careful what you wish for, Maggie," Mama said.

Granny carried in a platter with a chicken roasted to a golden brown, surrounded with roasted potatoes, carrots and neeps. The smell made Maggie realize how hungry she was.

"Well, I really don't wish for very much," Maggie said. "Just a little less work and a little more fun. What I'd really like to do is go to a dance at the Sail Loft. There's one next Saturday."

Granny put the platter on the table.

"There's all kinds of wickedness at a dance, Maggie," Granny said, "and you'll only meet more awful ordinary seamen like that Jack fellow."

"They're not all awful, Granny."

Granny shook her head. "Nae. What you really need is a decent husband to look after you. I'm surprised you dinna meet anyone at the O'Reillys'." She picked up the knife to carve the chicken. "Surely they have eligible men at their parties."

Granny began carving the chicken.

Maggie didn't tell Granny that she had first met Jack at the O'Reillys'. "I'm the maid, so I might as well be invisible."

"Have you tried flirting with them?"

"If I make eyes with one of her guests, Mrs. O'Reilly will have my head."

"You have tried, then." Granny smiled.

"And been thoroughly scolded afterwards. I think I shall have to resign myself to being an old maid like Miss Kitty O'Reilly."

Mama smiled. "You do exaggerate so. You're still young yet, Maggie."

Mama filled the plates with vegetables as Granny passed them to her.

"How old were you when you got married, Mama?"

Mama blushed a little. "I was twenty," she said.

"You see!" Maggie said. "I'm the same age as you were when you married and I haven't even met the right man. How did you meet my father?"

Maggie poured some gravy on the plate Mama passed to her.

"I was just out walking, met him and we struck up a conversation."

"I suppose I should go out walking more then. Perhaps I should walk to work instead of taking the streetcar. Then I might bump into a banker downtown."

Maggie took a bite. The chicken was tender and juicy. It must have been a young bird. Granny and Mama had gone all out.

"Splendid idea!" Granny said. "And then you might save some money for a wedding trousseau as well!"

"I have a better one," Maggie said. "I can go to a dance."

"But," Granny said, "you canna go without an escort."

"Mama could take me." She looked at her mother hopefully. "Couldn't you?"

Mama did not look so enthusiastic. "I'd rather not," she said.

"But Mama, it's all I really want for my birthday. Just to go and have some fun. Will you please take me?"

Mama sighed deeply, but Maggie knew from long experience if she begged long enough, her mother would break down.

"At the Sail Loft, you say?" Mama asked. "It's one of those navy dances then, out at Esquimalt?"

"That's right."

"It's a long way to go. We'll have to take the streetcar and walk some."

"I don't mind."

"Of course you don't, but it's too much for Granny."

"Me?!" The old woman started laughing. "What are you talking about? I'm well past my dancing days. Nae. You two go along and have a good time. Mind you hobnob with the officers though, not the bluejackets."

It would be a real party. Not like this quiet meal with Mama and Granny. Maggie could hear the music and her feet wanted to dance already.

"But what shall I wear?"

"Dinna forget the gown your mama made you. You'll turn a few heads in that."

Maggie had tried to forget the gown at the back of her wardrobe. It always made her heart ache when she caught a glimpse of it among her dresses.

"I don't know if it still fits me."

"I'm sure it does," Mama said. "Go and try it on. If it doesn't fit, I can make some adjustments."

Maggie put her napkin on the table and went to her room. From the wardrobe, she took the green organza gown that fluttered like a butterfly in her trembling hands. Mama came into the room to help her dress.

Maggie looked in the mirror and could almost see Miss O'Reilly staring back at her in one of her lovely gowns. While she still admired the woman's style, she had long since gotten over her jealousy of the spinster who had turned down Captain Stanhope. Maggie would never have made such a mistake. She knew a proposal might come along once in a lifetime and you ought not to say no. Unless the suitor was old and ugly or poor as a church mouse. Even Maggie had standards.

The Letter from Kentucky



ii. In the Wells Fargo Office



Edie, 1864

EDIE WAS PUTTING away a tarp that some customer had decided against buying when she heard the gun being fired in the inner harbour. Her heart did a little jump for joy. The mail ship was in! The only sadness in her life since they'd moved to town was the absence of her sons, but there was sometimes a letter from one or the other of them.

She impatiently shoved the tarp into the spot it had come from. By some miracle, the space seemed to have grown too small in the time it had taken her to show the tarp to the customer. John came to her aid.

"Dinna fash," he said. "I'll put it away. You go along to the post office."

"Thank you," she said.

He was a different person when he wasn't drinking and, in the two years since they'd been in town, he'd stayed sober. Every night, she prayed that his sobriety would continue and so far God had granted her wish.

Edie walked up the street to the Wells Fargo office. After the long damp days of winter, the sun felt warm on her shoulders and the trees were sprouting fresh green buds. She glanced across the street at the few remaining scraps of the old fort that was being torn down. Soon, all remnants of that past would be gone — Victoria would be a town and

not a fort anymore. Then Edie's world would be wholly new. If only her sons could be back home so they could all be together again, then her happiness would be complete.

She prayed that either Sam or James had written her a note, no matter how short, sharing a little of their life with her. She prayed for both her sons every day. She hoped that Sam was doing at least as well as his father was. She knew how difficult it was to make ends meet in the business of trade. Edie was also anxious to hear news of James now that he was a soldier. His previous note had said that he was in Kentucky. She didn't know where that was but she knew it was far away. It all seemed so strange. Once her lads had been her whole world and now they were far away. She wondered if she'd even recognize them when they came home again.

When she arrived at the Wells Fargo office, it was already filled with townsfolk chattering in a holiday mood. Edie chatted with them, admiring this one's scarf and asking after that one's son. A hushing sound soon began to spread among them and everyone stopped speaking. Edie could see an army officer with a handful of letters standing on a chair to be seen by all. He wouldn't call the names of people, only the addresses. So, Edie listened carefully as she did every month for her number on Government Street.

The major had finished distributing the first handful of letters and was almost through the next when she heard her address called. Full of excitement, she made her way through the dwindling crowd. This time, she would not go home empty-handed. One of her lads had remembered her.

She took the offered letter jubilantly and walked back through the sad-looking people who were probably going home empty-handed. She tried not to gloat but she had no control over the muscles of her face. There was a great wide smile plastered there. She would take the letter home to read in the privacy of her own apartment and then give it to John to read in the evening as she always did.

She looked at the envelope to see which of her sons had written it. The writing was not crabbed and untidy like James'. Perhaps Sam had written it. But no! The writing was neater even than his. It had the spidery flourishes of a woman's hand. She looked at the return address. It was from Kentucky. James then. But not James. Perhaps he had a woman friend. But why would she write to Edie? The letter was addressed to Mr. and Mrs. Innis. Perhaps it was an announcement of James' impending marriage. Excited, Edie hurried up the back stairs to the apartment, avoiding the shop.

She put the letter on the table and tried to calm her fast-beating heart. She sat down and opened the envelope. The handwriting was uniformly neat and easy to read. Edie's eyes followed the words across the page.

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Innis,

You don't know me. I am Sister Mary Burns and I am a nurse at the Presbyterian Hospital here in Paducah. I was with your son James when he breathed his last. You would have been so proud of your soldier son. His dying wish was for me to send this letter to you...

Edie could not continue. She put the letter down.

No. It was not possible.

If she had not read these words, it would not have happened. She willed them out of her mind. She willed the ink back into the pen that had written them. She willed this sister to oblivion, to non-existence. She willed her son back into her arms again. Her wee bairn Jamie, his mischievous smile. 'Up-to-no-good-again Jamie'.

Edie went downstairs, put on her apron and went to work beside John.

"Was there a letter from one of the lads?" he asked.

"Nae," she said.

"I'm sorry," he said.

She said nothing. If she didn't speak of it, it wouldn't be. But all afternoon, the letter's spidery words kept creeping into her head until, finally, she could ignore it no longer. In the middle of waiting on a customer, she ran out of the room into the back storeroom. She couldn't bring herself to enter the apartment where the letter was lying in the middle of the table for all to see.

John came into the storeroom.

"What's the matter, Edie?" he asked. "Did that customer say something to you? He seemed polite enough with me. And rather astonished that you left so abruptly."

She was sitting on the floor with her back against a shelf. She was sobbing. He crouched down beside her, looking distraught.

"What is it, Edie?"

"I canna say." She blurted the words out between sobs. "Dinna ask me."

That was all she would say.

Then the shop bell rang, indicating another customer had entered. He stood up and left her there, still sobbing.

House of Crows

She stayed there, in the darkness, until she heard Lucy coming down the stairs from the apartment above. *Nae!* Lucy would have seen the letter. She came out of the storeroom in time to see Lucy, in tears, pass the letter to John. It was too late now to stop it from happening.

Now everyone knew.

The Letter from Kentucky



iii. Stitching the Needlepoint Panther



Lucy, 1864

LUCY WATCHED MAM praying in the pew beside her, her eyes scrunched tight and her lips moving soundlessly. It seemed such a useless activity. Surely what Mam prayed for was never granted or her brother would not be dead now. It seemed to Lucy that the church didn't help her mother much. Perhaps she found some consolation in her belief in an afterlife, but the church didn't make Mam more forgiving. If anything, she was sterner now and blamed Papa for James' leaving and thus, in a way, for his death.

Papa didn't come with them to the kirk anymore. He had fallen off the wagon again. She supposed his drinking was his way of coping with James' death, just as Mam's way was the church. But Papa's way didn't help either. In fact, it made things so much worse. Mam had to do all the work at the store and it seemed to be a little too much for her. Lucy had to do more work keeping house and cooking again. Life was becoming as hard as it had been on Colquitz Creek. She had almost no time to walk in the woods anymore.

Lucy had to find a way of coping with her brother's death too.

She had grown close to James when they were alone on the farm. He provided her with food to eat and she cooked it. Though they scarcely spoke, they completed each other. Now he was gone and he wasn't

House of Crows

coming back. She would never again see him coming through the door with a deer slung over his shoulders. She would never again see the cocky look in his eyes as the schoolmaster or his father struck him. She had always been afraid for him and now she knew why. His fearlessness had finally gotten him killed.

* * *

Lucy found some kind of solace at school. The nuns taught her to be more skilled in the needlework that she'd always loved. Under their careful guidance, she had even completed the needlepoint picture of the panther she'd so long imagined — the one she'd seen in the forest near her home on Colquitz Creek. Sister Bonsécour lavished praise on the finished product.

"You have real talent," she said.

Lucy couldn't wait to take the needlepoint home to show her parents. Perhaps she could divert their attention from each other and their arguing for a time.

Papa said, "It's a nice likeness of a cat."

Mam shrugged and said, "What use is it? Can we sell it in the shop?"

Lucy was disappointed and wished she hadn't shown her mother the needlework.

"Now, Edie..." Papa began.

"Dinna talk to me," Mam interrupted him. "You're nae use at all either!"

Papa looked abashed. "I work in the shop, too."

"When you're there, you're usually drunk and it frightens away our decent customers."

Lucy was tired of listening to her mother nagging her father. She knew he would just get upset and go off drinking again. So she tried to divert her mother's attention again.

"Maybe I should leave school, Mam. Then I could help you more in the shop."

Mam's face lit up as if she thought it was a good idea. But Lucy didn't really want to give up school. It was her one consolation in life.

"What can she do, Edie?" Papa asked. "She's only a girl."

Lucy felt affronted by her father's suggestion that she was "only a girl," but she said nothing.

"She's a good seamstress," Mam said. "Perhaps I can find someone to take her on as an apprentice and she can learn the trade. And we'll finally get her out of that convent school before they turn her into a nun."

Papa looked at Lucy sympathetically. "You willna have to leave school, dear. I'll stop drinking and help at the shop more. I promise."

Lucy breathed a sigh of relief. But she knew enough about Papa's resolve to know it would only be a brief respite. He would soon fall off the wagon again and then Mam would start looking for a place for Lucy to go to work.

The Streetcar to Esquimalt



i. The Letter from London



Eddie, 1865

THE BELL ABOVE the door rang. Edie looked up and saw trouble. It wasn't the first time Mr. Macaulay, a wholesale merchant, had come looking for an overdue payment for merchandise. She'd explained to him that she really didn't understand the money-side of the business, that John always looked after that. She'd told him he should come back when her husband was there.

After Mr. Macaulay had visited the first time, she'd gone to John's office after the shop closed and looked over the paperwork. She could make neither head nor tail of it at first, but finally she found a drawerful of bills. So much money owing! Edie had been taking the money from the till to the bank every week so she knew the balance wasn't near enough to pay all these bills.

She'd sat down with a paper and pencil and tried to do the arithmetic. It had never been her strongest subject at school and that had been a long time ago. She'd fretted and frowned over the numbers trying to make them add up. Should she pay all the smallest bills or just the largest one? Or should she give everyone a little bit with a promise of more? She finally decided on the latter. She'd taken the money around to her creditors and humbly begged for more time to pay the remainder.

House of Crows

Mr. Macaulay had taken his pittance and scowled, saying, "You have one month to pay in full, Mrs. Innis."

Well, obviously the month was up because here he was. And she still hadn't sold enough stock this month to cover the remainder of his bill. What's more, John was in the store and, though it was not yet noon, he was in an unpredictable state of inebriation. Mr. Macaulay gave her a sardonic smile as he walked past her on his way to the counter.

"Mr. Innis," he announced loudly, "you are in arrears."

The only client in the shop glanced over to see what the commotion was about.

John contorted himself to look at his behind, then at Mr. Macaulay.

"Nae," he said cheekily. "I'm not behind myself." He chortled.

"There is nothing," Mr. Macaulay said, looking grim, "the least bit humorous about the situation."

Eddie walked over to the counter and stood beside the gentleman.

"Mr. Macaulay," she whispered, "perhaps we could speak about this in private."

"No," he said. "I'll stay here."

Eddie lowered her voice even more. "If you make a fuss in front of the customers, we'll lose them and then how will we pay you what we owe?"

"It's not my concern, Mrs. Innis," he said loudly.

Eddie noticed the customer scurrying out of the shop. John was puffing himself up to look as indignant as Mr. Macaulay.

"I'll thank you," he slurred, "to leave our premises, sir."

Mr. Macaulay shook his head at him, then turned to Eddie.

"The reason you have no customers, Mrs. Innis, is because of this drunken fool." He turned back to John, imitating his slur. "And I'll not leave the premises until I've received what I'm owed."

"You canna," Eddie said, "milk a cow when it's dry, sir."

The wholesaler turned away from the counter.

"Well said. So I'll be off to speak to the bailiff."

He strutted out of the store, slamming the door behind him, the bell ringing furiously. John followed, trying to imitate Mr. Macaulay's strut, but stumbling. Eddie went and opened the door for her husband.

"Go," she ordered him, pointing outside.

He stepped through.

"And dinna come back till you're sober."

She closed the door on John, with an unholy prayer that he never come back.

* * *

John came back that evening, though he wasn't sober. Edie gave him the usual talking-to before he fell into bed and started snoring. After that, he slept late every morning, then went out. If he came into the shop at all, it was at the end of the day.

Edie was grateful he didn't come in. He had driven away all of their respectable customers and it would take some time to win them back. Even with a reduced clientele, they were running out of stock, especially everyday items like candles. Edie couldn't obtain any more stock on credit, so customers would come in, not find what they were looking for and leave without making a purchase.

* * *

Edie was in the Wells Fargo office one morning, contemplating her difficulties and hoping for a letter from Sam to relieve her worries. She didn't despair entirely. It was November and if she could just hang on till Christmas, she knew then the wealthy customers would come in and pay their bills. It wouldn't be a lot of money, but perhaps enough to pay off her creditors. Then she could buy more stock and start over again in the new year.

She heard her address called and went forward to receive her mail. It was a very official-looking letter from the Bank of British Columbia in London, England, addressed to Mr. John Innis. Edie put it inside her coat so it wouldn't get wet in the November rain. All the way home, she fretted and worried about what this letter could mean.

She opened the letter on the counter and read it. She didn't understand a lot of the jargon, but the gist of it was ominous indeed. Something about lack of payment, of a mortgage and a foreclosure of property.

That couldn't be right! John had bought their property outright from the sale of their land on Colquitz Creek. Or at least that was what he'd told her.

Edie waited until John came home that night and confronted him.

"Is this true, John?" she shouted. "Do we owe money on this shop?"

He looked at her sheepishly, barely able to stand straight. "If I told you I took out a mortgage, you wouldna moved," he said.

"But you hav'na been making the payments, John!" she shouted. "And I didna ken aught about it."

He shrugged his shoulders, looking lost and ashamed.

There was nothing Edie could do about it. Their property would be foreclosed. She would not be able to pay her creditors. There would be no Christmas present. The future was as bleak as the November weather.

* * *

House of Crows

As there had been fewer customers, a lot less money came in at Christmas. Edie spent all of it to pay her creditors, but there was not enough to pay the mortgage too. The bank officers came to seize the property early in the new year. Edie found the family an upstairs apartment in a house on the corner of Blanshard and Yates, one block south of the First Presbyterian Church. She also found a job for Lucy as an apprentice to the seamstress Mrs. Wright. Lucy didn't make quite enough to cover the costs of food and rent, so with her experience working at the Craigflower farm and the Craigie Lea farm, Edie took a job cleaning houses.

Edie gave John a small allowance to cover the cost of his liquor. She didn't nag him anymore. Something had snapped in her that day when the letter arrived from London and she gave up fighting her husband.

The Streetcar to Esquimalt



ii. Sewing



Lucy, 1866

AT THE TENDER age of fifteen, Lucy's career as a seamstress began.

Mrs. Wright started her off doing repairs and hemming but soon asked her to do smocking and embroidery on gowns. Mrs. Wright was so pleased with her work that it wasn't long before she was teaching her how to cut cloth from a pattern and, then, the very special work of sewing with a machine! Lucy soon became enamoured of the rocking of the treadle and the up-and-down motion of the needle as she gently pulled the material through the machine. It was always a joy to her to examine the perfectly finished seam. She could have stitched so neatly by hand but it would have taken her very much longer.

About fabric, Lucy loved everything — the way it felt, each cloth distinct, smooth or coarse or a mixture of irregular textures; the way it caught the light in its shadowy folds and gleaming surfaces; of course, the patterns and the colours, some bright and flashy, others dull and muted; the way it smelled, for fabrics did absorb the odours of their past. Worn fabrics carried the scent of their owners, some old with the faintly unpleasant but somehow sweet smell of skin, some young and filled with the energy of salty sweat. Even new fabric had its own particular smell. Deep in the threads, it held a hint of the spices of its homeland and she could always detect the salty sea air of its voyage here. It stirred

House of Crows

in her deeply buried memories of her own voyage to this place.

Lucy would close her eyes and imagine how each fresh piece of cloth could best hang and drape around a human body — how she could cut it and sew the pieces together in different ways that would best express the fabric and the wearer. She never forgot the wearer, the human element, the one who would bring her creation to life.

The greatest joy of all was to see a finished gown on one of the clients. The gowns had yards and yards of luxurious material draped over iron hoop skirts or crinolines. Lucy herself never owned a dress so beautiful, so she had to enjoy the experience through the pleasure of her clients. In some ways, that was better. Lucy couldn't imagine how one could wear such a gown on the streets of Victoria with its mud and dust. Of course, the ladies who wore them usually didn't walk in them. They rode in carriages.

She couldn't afford such luxuries. She gave all of her salary to her mother every month and had no money for herself.

* * *

Lucy was walking with Mam to the Wells Fargo office to see if there was a letter from Sam when they met Mrs. Trutch walking in the opposite direction.

She was wearing one of Lucy's creations — an afternoon dress in a plaid pattern of beige, brown, green and yellow. Lucy remembered how long it had taken her to match the pattern along the seams and how much extra material had been needed.

Lucy nodded at Mrs. Trutch, who nodded back. She had almost passed them without speaking but, at the last moment, turned and stopped.

"Is this your mother, Miss Innis?" she asked.

Lucy said yes and introduced the two women.

"Well," Mrs. Trutch enthused, "what a marvelous seamstress your daughter is, Mrs. Innis! She made this gown and several other day dresses for me. The next time I need an evening gown, I won't have to send to London. I'll order it from you."

Lucy blushed.

Mam just stood nodding her head, unused to such suffuse praise.

Mrs. Trutch continued, "You know, if you started your own business, I'd be your first customer and bring many of my friends along as well. Just think of it, Miss Innis, getting away from that ghastly Mrs. Wright. She hasn't an ounce of your talent." Mrs. Trutch took Lucy's hands in

her gloved hands. "You will think about it, dear, won't you? I'm sure your mother will support you in such an undertaking, wouldn't you, ma'am?"

Mam nodded again. "Aye," she said. "Yes. I'll do what I can."

"There, you see!" Mrs. Trutch said as if it was decided. "Well, I'll be off. Good day to you both."

Mrs. Trutch continued on her way and Mam and Lucy theirs.

"You should," Mam said, "do as she says, Lucinda. Start your own business."

"It's not that simple, Mam," Lucy explained. "I'd need a sewing machine if I'm to start my own business. And that is a large expense."

"How much does a sewing machine cost?" Mam asked.

Lucy told her the amount she would need.

"I'll put aside a little every month," Mam said, "till we have enough."

"I don't know how I can entertain customers at home," Lucy said. "Papa might come in at any time in such a state it will drive away business."

"Leave it to me, dear. I'll make sure he stays out of your way."

Mam continued to clean houses and, after a few months, collected enough money for a sewing machine. Lucy said goodbye to Mrs. Wright and set up shop in their little apartment at the corner of Yates and Blanshard streets.

Lucy put up a sign in front of the house, a board on which she'd painted a giant silver needle and, through its eye, a wavy golden thread. She'd gone to the trouble and expense of buying paint with real gold in it so that it caught the sun on the rare days it was out. Under the needle, she'd painted the words 'The Golden Thread. Designs by Miss Lucinda, Seamstress.' It was one of the few times in her life she was glad her mother had given her such a fanciful name.

It was decided that Lucy would meet her clients in the front parlour and Mam would spend her time in the kitchen. Papa was seldom home anymore, but if he did show up, Mam would quickly take him outside and away from trouble. The day Lucy opened for business, Mrs. Trutch arrived at her door.

"I'm so glad you took my advice, dear," Mrs. Trutch said. "Who painted your lovely sign?"

"I did," Lucy said.

"Well, you're very talented."

"Thank you, Mrs. Trutch. What can I do for you?"

"I've come to have a gown made from this fabric." She took a bolt of dark green silk from her bag and laid it out on the counter. As it caught

the light, its colour rippled like a spring field in the wind. The green was the same shade as Mrs. Trutch's eyes. Lucy nodded, already imagining how she would fashion the gown, how she would cut the fabric, where the buttons would go.

"Did you have anything specific in mind?" Lucy asked.

"A tea gown," Mrs. Trutch replied. "Other than that, I leave it in your capable hands."

Because the fabric was so fancy, Lucy kept the design simple, but elegant — a wide skirt with extra length in the back to gather in a bustle and make a slight train, an attachment of black lace that sat on the hips and came to a downward vee in the front, small fabric buttons down the bodice ending at the tip of the vee and, finally, slightly belled sleeves. The effect was so slimming and complimentary to the figure that Mrs. Trutch was pleased indeed.

That Mrs. Trutch was one of *the* people of Victoria didn't hurt either. Her husband was a prominent businessman and they knew everyone with money. Mrs. Trutch would make her business grow. When she wore Lucy's gown, everyone would surely ask "Where did you get it? Who made it?"

The Streetcar to Esquimalt



iii. At the Sail Loft



Maggie, 1895

MAGGIE AND HER mother modelled their gowns for Granny before they left for the dance. Mama's hair was pulled tightly in a simple bun at the back of her head. She looked elegant in a black evening gown with long sleeves slightly puffed at the top and gold embroidery on the back and down the train of the dress. She'd had the time to add the embroidery to one of her old gowns because Maggie's green organza hadn't needed any adjustments even after three years.

Maggie felt proud of that fact as she paraded before Granny.

"Your hair looks splendid," Granny said.

Mama had done Maggie's hair more fancifully than her own. It curled softly around her face and her bun was wound in ever smaller circles and pinned at the back of her head.

"Well," Granny said. "Off you go now and mind you dinna shake out your hair with your dancing."

They took the streetcar to Esquimalt and then walked to the Sail Loft where the dance was to be held. Mama almost never hired a hack or carriage, which Maggie supposed was because she was too frugal to think it worthwhile. Most of the time she didn't mind but, this evening, her feet were almost worn out by the long walk when she wanted them to be fresh for the dancing.

House of Crows

When they entered the building and climbed the stairs, the sound of the lively music from the hall revived her. In the crowded cloakroom, she traded her heavy walking shoes for a pair of dancing slippers and excitedly did a little shuffle in time to the music. Mama smiled at her.

"Just checking to see if they work," Maggie said, "and they do." She smiled back.

Mama took her arm and they entered the hall. It was festooned with brightly coloured banners and filled with the noise of music and people chatting. Young ladies dressed in the finest gowns vied for the attention of men in suits with slicked-back hair and bluejackets looking debonair in their dress uniforms with their polished buttons gleaming. Maggie couldn't see any officers anywhere but she was not in the mood to be too picky.

Granny was right about one thing. The music had a loud, enticing beat. She felt herself tapping her toes as she looked around the room for a place to sit. There were tables around the walls but few chairs. She supposed it was to encourage people to dance, though the music was enough of an inducement for her. They found one chair at a crowded table. Mama sat down and Maggie went to fetch a glass of punch for her. On the way, she had to turn down two invitations to dance.

"Perhaps later," she said each time, "after I've gotten some punch for my mother."

The second gentleman introduced himself and offered to carry the punch glass to her mother for Maggie. Because of the loud music she didn't catch his name, but he was polite, so she accepted his invitation. As they walked to the table, she cast a quick glance at the man. He was thin and had a nervous tic about the mouth. When his mustache moved, he reminded her very much of a large brown mouse.

"Here's your punch, Mama," Maggie said as her mouse-escort placed the cup on the table.

"Thank you. And who is this young man?"

The Mouse introduced himself to Mama and shook her hand.

Maggie was so eager to trip the light fantastic even with a mouse that she couldn't have waited another minute. He turned out to be not so bad a dancer and he swirled her around the dance floor to a fiddle tune. They managed to have a few words in-between stomps. He said that he was a clerk in a government office. Was this a high enough position to satisfy Granny? She didn't know but, quite frankly, Maggie wasn't likely to ever fall in love with him. He was boring her so terribly that she soon began to wonder how to extricate herself from his company. She would plead exhaustion after this dance and return to her mother's table.

Just as the dance ended but before she had a chance to declare her exhaustion, a bluejacket appeared beside her.

"May I have the next dance, miss?" he asked.

Relieved, Maggie smiled and turned to him. "Y—," she began.

Then she recognized Jack Robertson.

"You owe me a dance, miss. Please don't make me beg."

"Well, of course, if I owe you one." The words came out of her mouth politely enough, but inside her head they reverberated with sarcasm.

Maggie was a cauldron of mixed emotions. There was something about this man that unsettled her. When he took her hand to dance, she felt a jolt like lightning and a tingling through all her limbs that did not cease as long as they danced. She wasn't sure if she really liked the feeling but didn't want the dance to end nor him to walk away.

"You look lovely in that gown," he said.

Was he just being polite or did he mean it?

"Mama made this gown," she said. Then she remembered anew the deep humiliation of that night the first time she wore it.

"Is your mother well?"

"Yes. She's here this evening. After this dance, you must come and speak to her. You owe her an apology, I think. She made this dress for the dance that you invited me to."

"Yes, I will."

He bowed his head and looked so ashamed that Maggie almost forgave him immediately. Still, she had to see him apologize first.

The dance ended and Maggie led him to her mother's table.

"Mama, do you remember Jack Robertson?"

Mama looked surprised and then annoyed. "How can I forget?" she said.

"Maggie says I owe you an apology and she's right." He shifted from one foot to the other uneasily. "I apologize for that evening I kept you all waiting. Did Maggie tell you I was shanghaied?"

Mama looked at her accusingly and Maggie felt a little stab of guilt.

"She did not."

Why didn't I tell Mama before?

"It was a long time ago," Maggie said without conviction. "I didn't want to talk about it."

Just then, the Mouse showed up and asked her to dance. Maggie was anxious to escape her mother's criticism and scurried off with him.

While dancing, Maggie watched Jack, sitting on the chair beside her mother, deep in conversation with her. Meanwhile, the Mouse was rambling on about his job, something about the complexities of filing

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papers. Though she could scarcely hear him for the music, she was not interested enough to listen more closely. She couldn't wait until the end of the dance when she could finally use the excuse of exhaustion.

When the music finally stopped, she made her apologies. Then she left the Mouse and flew to the table. Jack stood up to give her his seat.

"Mr. Robertson has been telling me about his terrible experience of being shanghaied. You should have told me, Maggie."

"Well, as I said, it was a long time ago. I had almost forgotten about it," she lied.

"Will you dance with me again?" Jack asked her.

She took his hand and went with him to the dance floor.

While they danced together, she caught a glimpse of the poor brown Mouse watching from a distance and prayed he wouldn't attempt to cut in. After that, she didn't notice anything except her partner and the music and the fun they were having. They danced so many dances she lost count.

Jack talked to her about his fellow sailors and the work they did. She had to lean in close to hear him above the sound of the music. She was glad she did, because his stories about life at sea kept her laughing so much that she didn't realize how much her feet were aching. Finally, the band took a break and Jack led her back to her mother's table.

"Do you mind if we go now?" her mother said, standing up. "I'm tired and it's very noisy here."

Maggie was disappointed, but she didn't want to tax her mother.

"No, of course not, Mama."

"Let me accompany you," Jack Robertson said. "I owe you that much at least."

"Of course," her mother said. "We'd appreciate that."

Maggie's spirits lifted. She followed Jack and her mother to the cloakroom, where she changed her shoes and retrieved her wrap. It gave her a shiver of pleasure when Jack took it from her and draped it around her shoulders.

As he helped her mother put on her overcoat, she thought he acted like a true gentleman. Even Granny would have approved.

A Walk to Clover Point



i. In the Parlour



Maggie, 1895

MAGGIE'S EARS WERE still ringing from the boisterous music and the chatter in the dance hall. As they stepped outside, she found the quiet and darkness of the starry night refreshing. Jack glanced at the line of carriages beside the hall.

"May I hire you a carriage?" he suggested.

"We prefer to walk," Mama said.

"It's a long way," Jack said.

"We'll walk to the streetcar and then take it home," Mama said.

"Then I'll escort you to the streetcar stop." Jack took her arm and turned to Maggie. "Let me take your arm as well, Miss Macaulay."

Maggie linked her arm through his and they walked in silence for a time.

"I saw you," Maggie said, "at the Gorge Regatta on the Queen's birthday last year."

"Really? I'm sorry you didn't speak to me then."

"I couldn't. You were the bluejacket who climbed out on the greasy pole and won the pig, weren't you?" She blushed, remembering his fine physique.

He laughed. "And a fine pig he proved to be. We ate him with applesauce and he made many a sailor happy."

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Maggie and Mama joined in his laughter.

When they reached the streetcar stop, Maggie thought he would take his leave of them but he didn't. And when the streetcar arrived, he hopped on and took a seat behind them. Maggie was surprised but Mama didn't seem to be. In fact, when they got home, Mama invited Mr. Robertson in and he accepted. The parlour was empty. Granny had already gone to bed.

"I'll leave you two now," Mama said. "I'm tired and I know you have a lot to talk about."

What is she on about? Why is she leaving me alone in the parlour with this man who humiliated me?

Jack was glancing left and right as if not sure where to put himself. She had never seen him look so ill at ease. What was going on?

"Good night, Mama," Maggie said. "Have a seat, Mr. Robertson."

When they were settled, she asked, "What is it we have to talk about?"

The words tumbled out of his mouth like water after a dam has broken. "My ship is sailing next week."

"Next week?" Maggie felt the words knock her off her feet. When she found her footing again, she said, "I'm sorry to lose your company again so soon."

"Are you really?" he asked. "Will you miss me?"

Maggie thought about this. She hardly knew the man, they'd hardly ever spoken to each other and yet she knew she would miss him terribly. Why had she spurned him so completely two years ago?

"Yes," she admitted with regret.

"If I'd only known... I should have tried harder to seek your forgiveness. I should have persisted. Now I'm sorry for what I've lost."

"Will you be able to write to me this time, Mr. Robertson?"

"If you'll permit me?"

"Of course." Her heart was a little satisfied by this promise.

"I'll only be gone about a year," he said. He looked at her as if he were trying to find the answer to a question before he asked it. Finally, he spoke. "Will you wait for me to come back?"

"I'm sorry. I don't know what you mean."

"I couldn't bear it if you saw other men while I was away. Like that man you were dancing with tonight."

"I don't know why I shouldn't see other men, Mr. Robertson."

"Your mother said I should ask you to marry me."

"Oh, she did, did she? What business is it of hers?"

"I'm sorry. I would ask you myself if I thought I had any hope at all."

"Go ahead and ask me then. Don't be such a coward."

He stood, looking awkward for a moment. Then he cleared his throat and spoke, his voice much quieter than usual.

"Miss Macaulay, would you do me the honour of becoming my wife?"

Maggie didn't answer right away. She couldn't speak. He was leaving so soon. They would have a long-distance courtship and she wasn't sure how good a correspondent he would be. Even if he did write faithfully, it took at least a month for mail to arrive from England, maybe more if his ship were in some exotic port of call. In the meantime, she wouldn't be able to see anyone else, but that didn't matter. She never saw anyone anyway. And it was only a year.

Only a year! It would be an eternity!

"Oh," he said, "please answer."

She looked into his eyes and his vulnerability touched her deeply.

"No, I couldn't," she said. "I hardly know you."

"Well," he replied, "ask me anything. I'll stay and talk with you all night if you want."

That made a lot of sense. So she invited him to stay and they sat up talking till the wee hours of the morning.

"My father," Jack said, "before he died, had a grocery shop in London. He wanted me to learn the trade so I could take over the shop when he retired, but I found it deadly dull. I always wanted to see the world and have adventures. So, I joined the navy."

Maggie thought they were much alike. "I've always wanted to travel too."

"If you marry me," he said, "I'll take you with me to my home in London. You'll see a great deal of the world on that trip."

Maggie smiled. "I would, wouldn't I?"

"Then I'd leave the navy and we'd settle down in my family home with my mother. And we'd have children, as many or as few as you want."

Maggie scarcely heard him. She was imagining finally living in the land where history had happened. She would visit Buckingham Palace and Windsor Castle, perhaps even catch a glimpse of the old queen. She would ride in a carriage and have her own house and not be a maid anymore. In fact, she might even have her own maid. She would be as kind, considerate and understanding of her maid as the O'Reillys were of her.

"Are you listening?" he asked.

Maggie yawned. "You really must go, Mr. Robertson. It's late."

"Do you know me well enough now to accept my proposal, Miss Macaulay?"

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"Of course not," she said. "Now, you really must go. Granny will expect me to go to church in the morning."

"Let me escort you and your mother and grandmother."

"You don't mind going to the Presbyterian church, then?"

"Of course not. You've been to my church. It's my turn to go to yours."

"Call for us at ten o'clock," she said.

She got up and went to the door. He followed her quickly. Then he kissed her discreetly on the cheek. She pulled her head away.

"Mr. Robertson!" she cried.

But after she closed the door, she gently touched the spot on her cheek where he'd kissed her.

A Walk to Clover Point



ii. Full Circle



Edie, 1866

EDIE'S LOVE LIFE had begun well enough, long ago, back in Scotland. John had been ambitious and full of dreams, so she'd married him. Those first years, the honeymoon years, had been happy. She'd had the two boys and, though John worked hard as a farm labourer, it was nothing compared to what was to come.

When the potato blight happened, there'd been years of no farm work and near-starvation, despite a little aid from the church. But when the potato blight went on and on, the church wouldn't just give away its charity anymore. The men had to earn it for their families by building roads. John hated it. It was backbreaking work, hammering rocks with a pickaxe all day. Even after he found work as a farm labourer, he couldn't get the humiliation of roadwork out of his head. He was determined to emigrate so he could have his own land and never be forced to work like that again.

When the Hudson's Bay Company came looking for indentured servants, John had signed up right away and Edie dreamed that their honeymoon would resume in this new Eden. But for John, the grass was always greener on the other side of the fence and, when it wasn't, he drank to dull the disappointment. Finally, the last disappointment had come when they sold their unsuccessful outfitting business and moved

into a small apartment on the edge of town where Lucy's sewing work kept them alive.

Then, when they were at their lowest ebb, Edie found herself more and more alone. John often stayed out all day, but he usually came home at night. If he didn't, she would not go searching for him in public houses. She'd done that once before and remembered how humiliating that had been. So if he didn't come home, she assumed he would sleep it off somewhere and eventually find his way back.

On one such morning, when John had not come home the night before, Edie went about her usual routine. She got up, made breakfast for herself and Lucy and then did her chores while her daughter went into the parlour to do her sewing. Later in the morning, John had still not come home and, knowing he would be very hungry when he did, she went out to buy some food for lunch. The native Indians often sold fish at a reasonable price — she would go down to the dock to see if she could find some salmon. On the way, she heard the clinking of chains and turned around to see a chain gang of men walking along the road. She stepped out of the way to let them pass.

"Edie," one of them said as he brushed by.

She looked up to see John, full of regret. He cast a backward glance at her as he went by but, being chained to the others, he could not stop.

The man at the end of the line barked at her to get out of the way. He was carrying a rifle and was obviously in charge.

"Where are you taking them?" Edie called to him. "What have they done?"

"These are the drunks we picked up off the street last night. They're going to do some roadwork to earn their keep."

Edie watched them go with a heavy heart. *Full circle. He had come full circle.* She shook her head. *Surely now he would stop drinking. Surely now.*

A Walk to Clover Point



iii. Meeting Robert



Lucy, 1867

LUCY WORKED EVERY day of the week except for Sundays.

On Sundays, she was required to attend church in the morning. A year before, Mam had joined the other Scottish members of the congregation of First Presbyterian Church to follow their new minister from Scotland and start a new church called St. Andrew's Presbyterian. It made no difference to Lucy. The worship service was still two hours or longer. But after it was over, Lucy was free to do whatever she wanted, so she wandered.

She knew her mother would not approve of her ramblings but Lucy was the one who provided for the family now. Though she was only seventeen, she felt entitled to this little independence. Often, she returned to Moss Rock where she had seen the ocean and the distant Olympic Mountains.

The view never disappointed her.

On one peaceful watercolour summer day, Lucy found another person sitting on the ground staring at the ocean on her mountaintop.

When he saw her, he seemed annoyed to have his solitude disturbed. Lucy understood immediately, knowing how she would have felt if he'd intruded on her reverie.

"Excuse me," she said, as if she'd just trod on his foot.

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The young man looked at her for a moment without speaking. His expression softened. Finally, he smiled. "It's a beautiful view from here, isn't it?"

"Yes. I come every Sunday," she replied, looking out at the ocean and mountains beyond.

"It's my favourite walk as well, but I don't come as often as I'd wish," the young man said. "Won't you sit and enjoy it with me?"

It was as if he could read her thoughts.

She was still wearing the dress she had worn to church and its great stiff crinoline did not easily conform to sitting on the ground. If she'd been alone, she would have sat down anyway, but with a gentleman present, it was impossible. She walked over to the rocks and perched herself awkwardly on a cleft that was almost a ledge.

"A woman's gown is so cumbersome, don't you find?" he asked.

Lucy smiled, unsure how to respond to such a personal comment from a man she did not know.

"But yours is very beautiful. It matches so perfectly the colour of your eyes. What would you call that colour? Violet?"

Lucy blushed with embarrassment, though there was a hint of pleasure mixed with it.

"Of course not!" she said. "You are impertinent. We have not yet been introduced."

"Forgive me. My name is Robert Macaulay."

He gave her his hand to shake and she shook it.

"Lucy Innis."

"Pleased to meet you, miss. Now may I resume being impertinent?"

Lucy laughed. "By all means. But if you don't mind, my eyes would rather drink in the view than my ears listen to your flattery."

"A woman after my own heart," he said.

They sat in silence for a long while as the seagulls wheeled and soared above them. A light breeze stirred the forest below and the trees swayed as though they were beckoning her.

"The ocean is peaceful today," he said, breaking the silence at last. "On days like today, I love to walk on the shore. Would you care to accompany me?"

She looked towards the cliff. "It's too steep."

"I can help you down the rocks. Of course, we'd have to walk through the forest. Perhaps you'd feel nervous about that?"

How could he know how much she longed to go into that forest and smell the trees? She'd always wanted to walk through those woods but had never dared go down the steep slope that led into them. Should she

trust this young man, though? It would be foolish to do so and yet her heart told her it would be all right.

"I'm not at all afraid of a few trees," she replied. "Let's go."

"May I take your arm going down?" he asked.

Lucy linked her arm in his, looking around to make sure no one could see them in such an intimate position. They were alone.

She was glad of his arm as they made their way down the steep rocks. When they reached the woods and started to walk along a level path, Lucy reluctantly unlinked her arm from his. They walked in silence, Lucy drinking in the scent of cedar and fir that stirred memories of her childhood till they came to a wagon road that followed the shoreline.

The wagon road led down to a point of land where they could walk onto the beach. Robert stopped just at the edge of the waves and looked out. Lucy saw in his face a look that she dared not interrupt. She knew it as the sense of wonder that she so often felt herself. The sound of the waves brought a deep peace to her soul as the water swooshed over the rocks and sighed back down.

After a moment, he said, "I usually walk along the beach." He looked down at her feet. "But it may be difficult for you to walk on the pebbles in those shoes."

"Yes. It would be easier to walk in bare feet."

He looked surprised. "Would you do that, though? Would you take off your shoes in front of me?"

Lucy blushed. "I didn't mean to sound like a brazen hussy," she said. "I only meant it would be easier were one to take them off, not that I would do it."

"I'm sorry. I shouldn't have presumed that you meant to do it," he said. "Shall we take the road, then?"

Lucy looked along the beach and saw that the land rose higher the farther one walked until a cliff separated the beach from the wagon road. If anything had happened, her cries would have been unheard.

"Yes," she said.

A few moments later, they were on the wagon road again, walking west in an awkward silence. Lucy was remonstrating at herself for having come such a long way out of her way alongside a man she didn't even know. She decided she should turn up Cook Street when they got there and head back towards town and home.

Finally, he spoke and interrupted her thoughts.

"I never realized before how confining it is to be a woman: your voluminous skirts that you can't sit down in, your delicate little shoes that are not made for walking in, how you dare not even take them

off in public or be seen walking with a man, however innocent the conversation. How do you ever enjoy nature? I don't think I should like to be a woman."

Lucy smiled politely. "I suppose it has its compensations. I've always thought women feel things more deeply. But you're right about one thing: I should very much like to take off my shoes, lift my skirts and run on the beach."

"You paint a lovely picture," he said. "And I should very much love to see you do it."

She blushed. "Perhaps when I know you better," she said.

"What would you like to know? I'll tell you everything about myself."

As they walked along the wagon road, he told her that he lived with his parents in James Bay on the other side of Beacon Hill Park. He was the youngest child, with two sisters and three brothers. His sisters were married and his older brothers had already taken on the family business, so he was going to open his own shop. He had already picked out a storefront on Douglas Street but he hadn't decided what to sell.

"I've thought of sporting goods or a haberdashery but there already seem to be enough shops of that nature," he said. "What about you, miss? Tell me about your life."

"I live with my mother and father in a small apartment in a house on Yates Street at the corner of Blanshard. My two older brothers have both left home. I'm a seamstress." She didn't mention that one of her brothers had died in the American Civil War. It was still too painful and sad for her to talk about with someone she'd just met.

"A seamstress," he said. "That sounds interesting."

"You know," she said. "If you're looking for an idea for a shop, there aren't enough shops in Victoria that sell notions."

"And what do you mean by 'notions'?" he asked.

"You know, all the threads, needles, ribbons and such that women need for sewing."

"Really?"

"Yes," she said. "I often have trouble obtaining certain products in Victoria. Our shops aren't always the most up-to-date and well-to-do ladies sometimes go all the way to England if they want the latest styles. It shouldn't be necessary when we have such good seamstresses here. If we could purchase the latest pattern books and everything we needed in Victoria, the ladies wouldn't have to go so far for fashion."

"That's very interesting. If I opened such a shop, do you think you could help me decide what products I'd need to stock?"

She nodded and blushed. It would mean she would see him again.

“But miss, you said you live on Yates at Blanshard and I’ve taken you far from your home. How will you ever get back?”

“I was just going to walk up Cook Street,” she said, just as they arrived at the corner of that street.

“I have a plan,” he said. “It’s only a short distance across Beacon Hill Park to my parents’ house. Come with me there and I’ll take you home by carriage. It’s the least I can do after I’ve taken you so far out of your way.”

Carriage! A well-to-do family, then. Mam would be pleased, though Lucy didn’t really care. Still, if he didn’t have money, how could he open a notions shop and, without a notions shop, how could he be of any further interest to her? And yet he was — deeply interesting. Lucy blushed again at the thought.

“No, thank you,” she said firmly. “I’ve imposed enough on you today. The walk will do me good.”

“At least allow me to accompany you,” he said.

She liked his company and was loath to give it up. “By all means,” she said.

They agreed to meet the next Sunday at Moss Hill where they’d first met. When the time came, Lucy brought a list with her of all the notions she wanted to see in his shop. Some months later, when he opened his shop, Lucy was his very first customer.

On James Bay Bridge



i. On the Way to St. Andrew's



Maggie, 1895

MAGGIE CAME INTO the kitchen all bleary-eyed the morning after the dance.

Granny stood with a pot in one hand and a wooden spoon poised over Maggie's dish.

"Would you like some parritch?"

Maggie nodded, knowing it was easier to eat the horrid slop than it was to argue with Granny about it.

Mama looked up, her eyes shining with expectation. "Well?" she asked. "Did he propose?"

Maggie nodded and sat down.

Granny's wooden spoon stopped in mid-air and a blob of the parritch fell onto the table. She didn't even notice, just stared at Maggie with her mouth agape.

"And have you accepted?" Mama asked.

Maggie shook her head. Another blob of porridge dropped from Granny's spoon onto the table.

"What on earth are you talking about?" Granny exclaimed.

"Put down the spoon and sit." Mama pulled a chair out for Granny. "I should have told you before Maggie came down. We met Mr. Jack Robertson at the party last night and he's proposed marriage to our Maggie."

"Not the Jack Robertson who broke her heart once already?"

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Granny slapped the wooden spoon on the top of the parritch, splashing some of it on the table. She took the omnipresent dishcloth off her shoulder and scrubbed the blobs of parritch vigorously.

"How," she continued, "could you let that man anywhere near her? Dinna tell me he proposed with your consent, Lucinda?"

"Now, Mam, you don't know the whole story. Come sit down and I'll tell you."

Granny slapped the dishcloth back on her shoulder and took a seat.

"It'd better be a good one."

"The reason Mr. Robertson disappointed our Maggie was not his fault. He was shanghai'd."

"Shanghai'd!" Granny placed the dishcloth on her lap. "Well, that's a fanciful start to your tale. And you believed him?"

"I did. Did you not, Maggie?"

Maggie nibbled on the parritch on the end of her spoon and nodded.

"Well, he could have explained that to her. It's been years since the incident." Granny twisted the cloth in her lap.

"Apparently, he *did* explain as soon as he came back. Maggie neglected to tell us that."

Granny slapped the dishcloth on the table and turned her fierce eyes on Maggie.

"Is there anything else you've neglected to tell us? Have you been seeing Mr. Robertson on the sly?"

"No, Granny, of course not." Maggie dropped her spoon and splashed more parritch on the table. "I only spoke to him last night for the first time in two years."

"Then why such a hasty proposal?" Granny reached over and wiped up the parritch with the dishcloth.

"His ship is sailing next week, Mam," Mama said, before turning her eyes on Maggie. "But why did you say no?"

"I scarcely know the man, Mama."

"I canna believe," Granny said, "you think it fitting to let her marry a man she doesna ken."

Maggie wondered if she should explain they had spent half the night talking or if that would just bring more of Granny's angry words upon her mother's head.

"I think that he loves her very much, Mam. He told me of his feelings when he asked my permission to propose to her."

"I ken you and your romantic notions are behind this, Lucinda. And what are his prospects? How would he keep our Maggie? Did he tell you that as well or did you not think to ask?"

Mama looked sheepish, so Maggie spoke up.

"It doesn't matter since I've turned him down. But he said when he finishes his current tour of duty and returns to Victoria in a year, we would marry. Then he would retire from the navy and we'd take up residence in his mother's house in London."

"In London?" Mama said, her forehead scrunched in a deep frown. "He didn't tell me that."

"And what kind of work would he do in London?" Granny got up from the table and threw the dishcloth in the sink.

"I don't know for sure, Granny, but he was quite confident of finding employment."

"I dinna think it wise to marry a man before you ken whether he has any employment or whether his employment will be enough. 'Tis a good thing you've turned him down. I willna give my blessing till I ken the man better."

"Well, he's coming this morning to escort us to the kirk, so you can ask him about it then."

"And I," Mama said, "shall have to talk to him about taking you away from us, Maggie dear. I want your happiness above all else, but you can't leave us and go to London — no, that's too much, isn't it, Mam?"

Granny shook her head. "I wouldna advise it."

"Everyone leaves," Mama said sadly, "and when they do, they never come back. First Sam and then James."

Granny looked stricken. "We dinna speak of that," she said.

"Being a mother isn't fair," Mama said. "Sooner or later, one way or another, you always lose the children you love."

Maggie had rarely seen her looking so sad.

"Console yourself, Lucinda. She isna going."

"You're right, Mam. We should enjoy what little time we have together."

* * *

Maggie was pleased to see that Jack looked smart and well turned-out in his uniform as if ready for inspection. Granny could be just as exacting as any naval officer. And she did look him up and down with a critical eye. Then he politely offered one arm to Granny and the other to her mother. Mama declined.

"I'll walk with Maggie," she said.

The four of them walked down Pandora one block. Then Jack stopped in front of the First Presbyterian Church.

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"Why are you stopping?" Granny asked with disdain. "We dinna worship here."

"But Maggie said you were Presbyterian."

"I should have told you," Maggie said. "We attend St. Andrew's Presbyterian on Douglas Street."

They all continued walking.

"But why," Jack asked, "would you attend such a distant church when there is one so much closer to your house? Is it for your health?"

"The health of my soul, more like," Granny snapped.

"Some years ago..." Mama began.

Jack looked over his shoulder to listen to the response.

"Before I was born," Maggie interrupted.

"There was a disagreement," Mama continued, "between the Irish Presbyterians and the Scots Presbyterians. The Scots left to set up their own congregation. Mam, being Scottish, went with them."

"And that's where my soul belongs," Granny said, tugging sharply on Jack's arm.

"What was the disagreement about?" Jack asked.

"I don't know," Maggie said.

"I don't know either," Mama said.

Granny shrugged.

"Anyway, you're not the one to ask about distant churches, Jack Robertson," Maggie teased. "You came all the way from Esquimalt to attend the iron church!"

"That was on one occasion only and very fortuitous it turned out to be."

He looked over his shoulder at her. Maggie smiled.

* * *

On the way home after church, Granny asked, "Did you enjoy the Presbyterian service, Mr. Robertson?"

"Very much, ma'am."

"You understand," Granny said, "if you want to marry Maggie, you'll have to become a Presbyterian."

"Granny!" Maggie remonstrated. "That is not so, Mr. Robertson. You can attend any church you wish."

"Then," he asked, "you *will* marry me, Miss Macaulay?"

"It's too soon to tell," she replied.

"But," Granny resumed, "if you do marry my granddaughter, Mr. Robertson, you have to escort her to the Presbyterian church every Sunday."

"If that is what she wishes, I will, by all means."

Granny continued her interrogation. "And what kind of work will you do when you leave the navy?"

"I intend to work as a pilot on the Thames. It's something I've always wanted to do and what I've been preparing for all my seafaring life."

As they crossed the muddy street, Granny stepped around a puddle, pulling Jack into it.

Maggie cringed as she saw him forced to get his feet wet.

"So," Granny continued, "you intend to continue working on the water. Is that not a dangerous occupation?"

"No more than many others, ma'am."

Maggie and her mother walked around the puddle.

Granny was relentless. "And does being a pilot pay well?"

"It should be enough to keep us both comfortable if, God willing, Maggie will have me." He smiled over his shoulder at her. "And Maggie wouldn't have to work as a maid anymore."

She smiled back.

"Maggie says you'll be gone a year," Granny said. "Perhaps she can give you her answer when you return. We dinna ken what could happen in a year."

"I should like to know," he said, casting a glance at Maggie, "sooner than that."

"But must you take Maggie to London, sir?" Mama spoke up. "Aren't there jobs for pilots right here in Victoria?"

"Yes, ma'am. There are, but my mother and my home are in London."

"And Maggie's mother and home are here," Mama said. "I think it's hard of you to take her so far away from us."

Maggie squeezed her mother's arm. "I haven't said yes, Mama."

On James Bay Bridge



ii. Being Proposed



Lucy, 1867

THE GLITTERING CHANDELIER shed its flickering candlelight on the long dining room table, the gleaming white dishes and the array of shining cutlery.

Lucy looked at Mrs. Macaulay for instruction on which seat to take, but she was busy scolding the maid. She caught Robert's eye and he indicated the name cards at the table settings. Lucy found her name and sat down. She was halfway down the table between Robert's two sisters. Mrs. Macaulay found her place to her left at the end of the table and her husband sat down at the other end.

"Mr. Macaulay," she said, "the blessing."

He put his head down and mumbled a few words. Then he put his napkin on his lap and picked up his soup spoon. Lucy at least knew which of the many spoons was used for soup but she was not so sure about the forks.

"Where," Mrs. Macaulay asked, "do your people come from, Miss Innis?"

Startled, Lucy turned to answer her and knocked the hand of the maid who was about to ladle the soup into her bowl. The red soup spilled on the white tablecloth.

"Sorry," Lucy said.

House of Crows

"Clumsy girl!" Mrs. Macaulay yelled. Lucy was not sure which girl she meant. "Go get a cloth and wipe it up."

The girl turned to leave.

"But give our guest her soup first."

Lucy was mortified at the embarrassment she'd caused the poor maid who ladled the soup into her bowl with a trembling hand.

"Well?" Mrs. Macaulay looked at her coldly. "Where did you say you were from?"

"We came from Rosshire in Scotland, ma'am, on the *Norman Morrison* fifteen years ago. My father worked at the Craigflower farm."

"What did he do there?" Mr. Macaulay asked.

He slurped some soup and Lucy realized she could start to eat some too.

"He was an indentured farmhand. He once owned some property on the Arm but he sold it to start a business."

She took a sip of soup.

"Oh?" Mr. Macaulay seemed interested. "What business is that?"

"He had an outfitter shop on Government Street."

"And what was his name?"

"John Innis."

Mr. Macaulay stopped eating and put down his spoon.

"Yes," he said. "I've had dealings with your father before. And he still owes me money, the drunken sod."

Lucy blushed and looked down at the spoon that had been on its way to her mouth. She didn't know what to say.

"His business," he continued, "was foreclosed two years ago, wasn't it?"

Lucy nodded.

Mrs. Macaulay sniffed.

"He should have declared bankruptcy," Mr. Macaulay said, picking up his spoon again. "Maybe I would have seen a few pennies of what was owed me. What does he do now?"

"He's ill," Lucy said.

She took a sip of soup from her spoon. The silence at the table was so deep she could hear the maid rubbing the tablecloth beside her.

"However do you survive?" Mrs. Macaulay asked.

"I have a business as a seamstress. Perhaps you've heard of it? The Golden Thread."

"Can't say that I have. You surely can't make enough money to support your whole family on a seamstress' wages?"

"There's only my parents and me. My brother lives on the mainland where he has a more successful business."

"I suppose," Mrs. Macaulay said, "he sends you support."

Let her suppose what she wished. Mam would never tell Sam there was any need of it.

"Girl," Mrs. Macaulay shouted at the maid, "could you stop that interminable scratching and take away the soup bowls? We want the next course now." She shook her head and turned to Lucy. "It's difficult to get good help these days, have you noticed?"

Lucy didn't know what to say, so she put her head down and finished off the rest of her soup before the maid took her bowl away. Poor girl!

Lucy was relieved there seemed to be no more questions. Everyone at the table had moved on to other topics and took no more notice of her. She was happy to pay attention to the delicious meal they were eating: succulent turkey, gravy, cranberry sauce, potatoes, tiny little cabbages that she'd never eaten before. As she was chewing contentedly, her ears pricked up when she heard a name she recognized.

"Mr. Trutch's sister Caroline and her husband Peter O'Reilly," Mrs. Macaulay announced, "have moved back to Victoria from New Westminster."

Lucy almost said that Mrs. Trutch was her client, but she didn't think Mrs. Macaulay would be impressed and, anyway, she didn't want to call attention to herself again.

"Is that so?" Mr. Macaulay asked.

"Yes. They've bought a house on the Arm at Point Ellice, a little bungalow."

"They would have a view of the water then," Mr. Macaulay mused.

"View or not," Mrs. Macaulay sniffed, "I don't think I could live so far from town."

"It's not much farther from town than we are," Robert commented.

"Yes, but in the other direction. And so far from everyone else."

"The town is growing, dear," her husband said. "Soon they'll have other neighbours."

"Where do you live, miss?" the sister on her left asked, as if to be polite.

Lucy wished she hadn't. "On Yates Street near Blanshard."

Mrs. Macaulay sniffed at the address.

"It's well-located for my business," Lucy said in her defence.

She wished she didn't feel the need of defending herself. She looked across the table at Robert and he smiled sympathetically.

After dessert, Lucy couldn't wait to get away. She used her work as an excuse.

"I have to be up early tomorrow to finish a gown," she said.

House of Crows

"I'll walk with you," Robert said.

"Take the carriage," his father suggested. "It's such a long distance."

"We'd rather walk," Robert replied.

* * *

As they strolled up Carr Street, Lucy was glad that Robert had turned down the carriage. They had a lot to talk about.

"Well," she said, "that did not go well. Your parents don't like me."

"They can't not like you. Anyone who knows you likes you."

"That's what you believe, Robert." And Lucy was so grateful that he did. "But your parents think otherwise. They clearly do not approve of me."

"I think," he said, "it's your father they don't approve of."

"And by extension, me."

He said nothing but walked on for a while before stopping at the government buildings across the street.

"Do you know why they call those buildings the 'Bird Cages'?"

"I don't know," she said, feeling embarrassed by her ignorance.

"They're supposed to look like large, fanciful Italianate bird cages," he replied. "I've never been to Italy, so I don't know if that's true."

Lucy thought of a beautiful fabric she'd once worked with that had Chinese buildings with curved roofs on it.

"They look more like Chinese houses to me."

"'Pagodas', I think they're called," Robert said.

He knew so much more than she did.

Just then, they arrived at the long rickety bridge over James Bay. Robert stopped and Maggie was afraid he was going to leave her to cross on her own. She felt acutely the distance between their fortunes as she looked across the bridge separating his neighbourhood from hers. Below the bridge, the tide had receded, revealing mud flats with old bottles, tin cans and other trash decorating the sludge like fruit in a pudding. The flats, as always, smelled very badly and Lucy put a scented handkerchief to her nose as they started across.

"Perhaps we should break it off before we become too attached, Robert."

"Whatever are you saying, Lucy? It's already too late for that."

"But surely you don't want to alienate your parents."

"I want to marry you, Lucy," he paused, looking at her hopefully. "If you'll have me."

She looked at him and smiled. It was not a very romantic setting for a proposal, she thought, looking at the slimy, barnacle-covered rocks

through the slats of the bridge. It wasn't a very romantic proposal either, but she felt comfortable with it. It suited them.

"But your parents will not approve."

"I'll ask them and, if they don't approve, then we'll just have to wait before we marry."

"Wait for what?"

"Wait until my business is going well enough so that I can pay my parents back the seed money. Wait until I have enough money to buy a house. It may be a few years yet, but we're still young. Would you mind terribly having to wait, Lucy?"

Her eyes filled with tears as she answered him. "I'll marry you, Robert, and I'll wait however long it takes."

Robert looked all around to make sure no one could see them. Then he leaned forward and gave her a chaste kiss on the cheek. Lucy could feel its light touch there all the rest of the way home as she felt herself floating just a little above the ground.

Another Walk to Clover Point



i. On the Way Home



Maggie, 1895

THE NEXT DAY after work, Maggie walked through the garden of Point Ellice House. There had been a light rain in the afternoon and the air smelled fresh with the scent of lilac. She took a deep breath and opened the white picket gate.

As she walked along Pleasant Street, she saw him ahead, obviously waiting for her.

It was Jack. He came along beside her.

"Hello, Maggie," he said. "May I call you Maggie?"

She nodded, her heart too full to speak.

"May I walk you home?"

She nodded. A few strides later, she found her voice.

"You are in full pursuit."

"Well," he said, "I have less than a week to woo and win you over."

If only he knew how close she was to saying 'yes'.

"I was going to take the streetcar," she said as they came to the stop. "I've been on my feet all day."

He stopped. "Well, I don't mind taking the streetcar, then."

"No," she said, walking on. Truly, the sight of him had rejuvenated her and she relished a long walk with his company and conversation.

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

"You know if you marry me," he said, "you'll have your own maid to order around, Maggie."

"Don't tempt me," she replied.

"Why are you resisting, Maggie?" he asked. "I can see you want to say 'yes'. What's keeping you from agreeing to be my wife?"

He had read her mind, but she wouldn't tell him the truth. She wanted to enjoy this pleasant wooing as long as she could.

"Is it the thought of leaving your mother and going to England?"

"Oh no," she said. "I want to go to England ever so much. I would miss Mama and Granny, though."

"I don't see why they couldn't come as well."

"Really?" Maggie asked. That would be perfect.

She realized she had sounded much too enthusiastic. Playing hard to get was proving to be very difficult.

"I'll ask them if they're interested," Maggie said, trying to sound disinterested herself. "I can't imagine Mama would want to leave Victoria. And Granny is too old to go."

"Well," he said, "perhaps we could come back to visit them."

"I will think about it," Maggie said. "Now let's talk about something else."

* * *

Jack walked her home from work every day that week and Maggie played her indifferent act as well as she could. On the last evening before Jack's ship departed, they were sitting in the family parlour after Mama and Granny had gone to bed, talking as they had every evening.

"My ship is sailing tomorrow, Maggie," he said. "Are you going to send me off with a heavy heart? Or are you going to make me the happiest man on earth?"

"Jack," she said.

He looked at her intently because she rarely called him that.

"If I say 'yes', will you promise to write me without fail?"

He nodded vigorously. "Will you say 'yes'?"

"Yes," she said.

Before she had time to take a breath, he clapped his lips on hers. She was startled and pulled away.

"Mr. Robertson! Is that appropriate?"

He smiled and put both arms around her. This time, he moved slowly and brought his face towards hers, so close she could see every pore and whisker clearly.

Edeana Malcolm

She should pull away. She should slap his cheek. His handsome cheek. She stopped thinking, let him kiss her and felt a warmth course through her, her body stirring in hidden, unknown places.

Then she had to back away before it became impossible.

“I think,” she said, “you must go now.”

Another Walk to Clover Point



ii. Getting Married



Lucy, 1870

ONE EVENING, ROBERT came calling at the Innis apartment as usual. Because her father was home, Lucy met Robert at the door ready to leave immediately.

“You’re not going to invite me in, Lucy?” he asked.

“Papa is here,” she said, as if that were explanation enough.

“All the better,” he said. “I have something to ask him.”

Lucy was mystified. Although Robert was always kind to her father when they met, she could not imagine what kind of business Robert would have with him.

She removed her coat and took him into the parlour. Papa was lying stretched out on the chesterfield.

Mam greeted Robert and looked questioningly at Lucy.

“Robert says he has something to ask Papa,” Lucy said.

Mam immediately slapped Papa on the bottom of his feet and pulled him up.

“John,” she shouted. “Robert wants to speak with you.”

Papa sat bleary-eyed, gazing around the room half-conscious of where he was.

“Sir,” Robert said.

Papa looked in Robert’s direction and blinked, focusing.

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"I've been courting your daughter for three years. At last, I've paid off my debt to my parents and put aside enough for a down payment on a house for Lucy. I lack only your permission to take her hand in marriage."

Papa grinned.

"You're taking out a mortgage on the house, Mr. Macaulay," Mam said. "Is that wise, d'you think?"

"Let me allay your worries on that account, ma'am," he replied. "My business is doing well and I have budgeted for the expense."

Lucy could see that her mother was impressed with the response.

"I could show you," Robert continued, "the figures if you wish, ma'am."

"That's quite all right," Mam said, shaking her head.

Lucy knew from her own business dealings that Mam had no head for figures.

"What d'you say, Papa?" Mam shouted.

He continued smiling and nodding. "'Tis a pleasure to welcome you into the family, sir."

Lucy felt proud of her parents and happy to finally be officially betrothed. There remained just one obstacle to her complete happiness.

* * *

Lucy was filled with trepidation as she and Robert were ushered into the Macaulays' parlour to tell his parents that they were engaged. She suspected they still would not accept her, even though Robert seemed sure that three years of hard work and patience would soften their hearts. Lucy hoped that it would be so.

They all sat in the parlour and the maid — a different one from the maid who had served her at dinner a few years before — brought a tray with tea and cups. She poured it as they sat in silence. The maid put a plate with cookies on the tea table and left the room, closing the door behind her.

"So," Mrs. Macaulay ventured, "what have you come to tell us, Robert?"

Lucy saw the dark scowl on Mrs. Macaulay's face as she spoke.

"I wanted you both to know that Lucy and I intend to be married."

"I think," his father replied, "that is ill-advised, son."

"And why is that?"

"We've already told you," Mrs. Macaulay said, looking down her nose at Lucy, "that we don't approve of her family. And we haven't changed our minds."

"Nevertheless, we *are* getting married, so you'll have to get used to the idea."

"And you, my boy," his father said firmly, "will have to get used to the idea of finding your own way in the world, for we won't pay a penny for the wedding or anything else from now on."

Lucy looked down at the floor. She felt extreme misery for Robert's humiliation. She wished she had the courage to tell them what she thought of their unkindness.

Robert seemed not the least humiliated.

"That's fine," he said. "I've repaid all the money you lent me for my business. I've bought a house on Cormorant Street for Lucy and me to live in. We don't need your money, but we'd appreciate your blessing."

"Cormorant Street!" Mrs. Macaulay said. "You don't intend to live there?"

"It's what I can afford."

"How sad for you," Mrs. Macaulay said.

"The wedding will be at St. Andrew's Presbyterian church on June third. We hope you'll attend."

"We will not," Mr. Macaulay said.

Mrs. Macaulay nodded.

"That's so unkind," Lucy murmured.

"What did you say?"

"Nothing at all," she replied. "Let's go, Robert."

They stood up, leaving their tea and cookies untouched. He followed her out of the room. She looked back and saw that he looked crushed. She put her arm around him.

"I'm sorry," she said. "You've had to give up so much for me. It hardly seems fair."

He smiled. "Don't worry. I'm certain I've made the best of all possible choices."

"I hope so," Lucy muttered, more to herself than anyone else.

* * *

Lucy advised her clients that her business was ending. She finished up the jobs still on her schedule and set about sewing the most beautiful wedding gown she could create in the month before her wedding day.

Early on the wedding morning, she went to Moss Hill and picked a bouquet of wildflowers. She was gloriously happy as her father took her arm to walk her down the aisle. She was thankful that he was sober for the occasion, though he didn't look well. His pallor had a distinctly

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greenish tinge to it and he seemed to be in pain. But she scarcely gave his condition a second thought. Her mind was on Robert, waiting for her at the end of the aisle.

His parents had forbidden his brothers and sisters to come to the wedding. This broke Lucy's heart. She thought how sad he must feel that his family would not put his happiness before their own propriety, but she put on a game face. His happiness was all that mattered to her because it was her happiness too.

Lucy's brother Sam sent a letter from New Westminster with his apologies for not attending. He could not leave his business unattended as he was short-handed, but he wished his sister all the best in her marriage. He mentioned in his letter that he himself had married a few months before. Lucy could tell that Mam was hurt that they hadn't been invited.

After the wedding ceremony, they walked the few blocks to Cormorant Street, near Quadra and Pandora, their new home. Lucy had never imagined living in a house so grand. It might have been an unassuming box-shaped two-storey house to Robert's parents, but to her, it was enormous: a parlour, dining room, kitchen and maid's room downstairs and three bedrooms upstairs. She was afraid they would get lost in it, but Robert assured her they would soon fill it with children.

Like her mother before her, Lucy worked in her husband's shop alongside him. On Sundays, they went for long walks that usually took them up to Moss Hill, sometimes down to the beach near Clover Point where they had gone on the day they met.

One sunny day, she even took off her shoes, lifted her skirts and ran through the sand. Robert, taken a little by surprise, laughed heartily and ran after her. He caught her easily and then kissed her. She pulled away and looked around. Two middle-aged ladies, walking on the old wagon road above them, shook their heads in disapproval. Lucy glanced down and blushed. Robert placed his hand under her chin and raised it up so that she looked into his eyes. For a moment, she was lost in them. What did it matter what anyone thought when they had each other? He took her hand and they resumed their walk along the beach. She did not put her shoes back on until they went back up to the road.

They had dared a lot of scorn to get married. A kiss on the beach was nothing beside it. And Lucy was happier than she'd ever been. She was free at last from the depressing atmosphere she'd grown up in. Her father's drunkenness, her mother's sadness. The emptiness her brothers had left behind them. Sometimes, Lucy wished she could be as heartless as Sam was, but she couldn't. Every day after a long day of work, she dutifully visited her mother and father.

Edeana Malcolm

Her father was more often at home now. Too ill even to go out drinking, he spent most of his time in bed. And her mother nursed him. After all she had suffered at his hands, it was now her duty to nurse him. Lucy could see that she didn't do so tenderly, but she didn't blame her mother for that. Robert, out of the goodness of his heart and his love for Lucy, paid the rent for her parents to live on in their apartment, even though it was a great expense for the young couple.

Another Walk to Clover Point



iii. Laudanum



Edie, 1871

JOHN CALLED EDIE from the bedroom. He wanted more of his pain medication. She picked up the nearly empty bottle and went to tend to his needs. He looked terrible. His skin and eyes were yellow and his belly was distended.

“Where’ve you been, wench? Where’s my whisky?”

“Here it is.”

She put thirty drops of the laudanum in a glass of whisky and gave it to him. He threw his head back and drank it down. She would have a few hours of peace before he asked for more. Then she would have to forestall him. The doctor said he shouldn’t have it more than twice a day, but she was growing weary of his pleas. Sometimes, she would give him a glass of whisky straight just to shut him up.

It was strange to think that this whisky she gave him was the very thing that was killing him. Well, he was beyond saving anyway. There was nothing else she could do except to ease the pain.

Edie went to the kitchen and cut a slice from the brick of opium, put it in a dish and poured a little boiling water over it. Then she took a pestle and macerated it until it was dissolved. She poured it into an empty bottle. Next, she rinsed the dish with brandy to make sure that all of the opium was removed and poured the brandy into the bottle too. She put

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the stopper on the bottle and shook it well. Then she placed it on the top shelf in the pantry where it would be ready for use tomorrow. It was cheaper for her to prepare the laudanum herself. Money was always tight and Edie had to save where she could.

Sure enough, less than two hours later, he called for his medication. She put down her mending and went into his bedroom.

"What d'you want?"

"You ken what I want. What're you doing in the other room? You should stay here with me."

"I'm sorry, John. I have work to do."

"The bairns dinna need you as much as I do," he said. "I'm sick."

The bairns?

"Tell them I willna work on the chain gang any more. That work is killing me. I'm aching all over."

"Nae, you dinna have to anymore, dear."

"D'you believe me now, Edie?"

"What d'you mean?"

"Dinna you see that it's time we removed to the New World?"

"Aye, John, it is." *Very soon he'll be in a New World. Surely it couldn't be much longer before he left this one.* "Would you like me to read to you?" She would read to him from the Book of Isaiah. "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth."

"Nae, woman. I want my whisky and I want it now."

"The doctor said..."

"Hang the doctor. Give me my medicine."

Edie poured him a glass of whisky just to keep him quiet. *How much longer?*

* * *

He grew more cantankerous every day. Sometimes he didn't even know who she was. If she didn't give him what he wanted immediately, he would lash out at her. He had never struck her before in all the years they'd been together, even when he was drunk. Strangely, she was not the one with bruises though. If she used her hands to protect herself, he would have deep purple bruises everywhere that made contact.

She wouldn't let anyone in to see him anymore, not even Lucy. The way he looked, people would think she was beating him, though she wasn't. She was being as kind as she could be, but it was wearing her down.

She prayed: *God, just call me Job. Why are you doing this to me? How long am I to be afflicted by this man?*

He was in pain. She could see that. Even the laudanum wasn't relieving the pain anymore. She decided to 'hang the doctor', just as John had said. She would give it to him every time he asked for it.

For a while, she had peace as he slept more and more and, when he was awake, he seemed to be floating.

"More," he would say. "Gi'e me more."

One night, he woke up in a sweat, crying out in pain and begging for his medicine. Edie got up and went to the kitchen. She took down the laudanum from the top shelf. She poured a glass of whisky and measured two teaspoons from the bottle. She stirred them into the whisky. She was tired. She would have peace tonight.

The next morning, John did not wake up.

Edie looked at the ugly bloated corpse lying beside her. She ran to the kitchen and threw up in the sink. He was gone. She had killed him in the middle of the night when she was very tired and her will was low. She scarcely even remembered it in the light of day. She sat down on a chair and tried to cope with all the emotions that threatened to overtake her.

What she felt most of all was a deep sense, not of remorse, but of relief. The long ordeal was over at last. Then, there was guilt like a tidal current threatening to pull her down. She felt guilty most of all for not feeling guilty. *She had killed her husband.* She should pour herself a whisky with two teaspoons of laudanum and see what it did to her. But suicide would only compound the sin. And then she wouldn't be able to enjoy the relief she felt, the weight that was gone from her shoulders so that she felt as if she could fly now.

John was gone.

There was that heap of a man, that yellow stinking thing that was lying on her bed. But that was not John. John was the handsome young man she'd met years ago back in Rosshire, the man who'd taken her in his arms and promised to love and protect her. But he'd gone a long, long time ago. She hadn't even noticed his passing. Perhaps she'd lost him on that awful, arduous voyage coming over from the Old World. It was sure he'd been a different man once he'd arrived here on Vancouver's Island. She hoped he'd found his New World at last, a world free of chain gangs and work so hard it could break a man's back.

She wanted to put her head down on the table and weep for what had been. She wanted to weep for the man she'd lost, even if it was a long time ago. She'd never had time to weep for his passing and it was no different now. There was work to be done.

A Letter from Gibraltar



i. Hogmanay



Edie, 1871

EDIE HAD CHRISTMAS dinner with Lucy and Robert at their house. It was her first Christmas without John.

"Are you sure," Robert asked, "you won't move in with us, Mother?" He asked every time he saw her.

"Nae, nae," she assured him again.

Still, it was getting harder and harder for her to say no. Being alone meant too much time thinking about the terrible sin she had committed. She prayed that God would forgive her.

"These are very good oyster patties," she said, changing the subject.

"I'm glad you like it, Mam. Will you give me your recipe for haggis? I'd like to make it for Hogmanay next week."

"Nonsense!" Edie cried. "I always make the haggis and you're invited to my place to eat it."

"No, Mam. We're having Hogmanay here this year. We've invited other guests and your place is too small."

"Who've you invited?"

"I can't tell you. It's a surprise."

Edie sniffed.

"But if you want," Lucinda said as if to placate her, "you can make the haggis and bring it."

House of Crows

"And my black bun as well! I've already made it."

"Yes, of course."

* * *

A week later, Edie got up early to make the haggis for Hogmanay. She stuffed the sheep's stomach with oatmeal, mutton suet, stock, the heart and lights and liver of the sheep, onion and whatever spices she had to hand.

While the haggis boiled on the stove, Edie brought out the black bun from the pantry. She had prepared this fruitcake some weeks before so that it would be ready to be eaten now. The casing of dough was filled with dried fruits, nuts, spices and just a little brandy. When she'd bought the brandy, she'd thought of John. Now he was gone, the brandy would probably still be in her parlour next Hogmanay.

When all was in hand, she sat down in the parlour and waited for Robert to arrive to help her carry the haggis and black bun the few blocks to his house. He arrived right on time, took her parcels in hand, offered her his arm and away they went. He was such a gentleman. Edie loved him almost as much as Lucy. In fact, she couldn't help herself. She was jealous of her daughter. Why couldn't she have had such a loving and kind husband?

* * *

Edie and Robert arrived at the door and entered.

"Happy Hogmanay!" Lucy called to them happily.

"Now tell me," Edie asked, "who is the mysterious visitor?"

"You'll have to wait and see," Lucy answered.

Homes were supposed to be open to visitors on Hogmanay. But why all the secrecy about who was coming? Someone from the kirk, perhaps. Or the minister himself. Edie sat on the horsehair armchair and tried to imagine who it could be.

Some short while later, there was a knock at the door. Lucy rushed to answer it, looking all aflutter. Edie could hear her in the hallway greeting their visitors.

"Happy Hogmanay!" she said.

Edie listened for the reply. She heard a woman's voice but didn't recognize it. Then Lucinda invited the guests in and Robert went to help with the overcoats. She heard Lucy introduce Robert. Someone who didn't know Robert! Who could it be?

Then she heard a man's voice and her heart skipped a beat. It sounded just like John. But it couldn't be — John was dead.

Lucy appeared in the doorway, followed closely by the man who had spoken.

"Mam," she said, "look who's come home for Hogmanay."

She stepped aside and Edie saw the gentleman behind her.

It was Sam! A little older and more mature, but she'd know him anywhere. Edie's heart skipped another beat.

"It's Sam," Lucy said. As if Edie didn't know her own son.

He came to her and she stood up and put her arms out. He hugged her and kissed her on the top of her head.

"Mam," he said.

She was suddenly angry with him. All these years and he hadn't come. He must have waited till his father died. She pushed him away. No, he was here now and she shouldn't push him away.

"Let me look at you," she said, as if to explain her push.

He stepped aside. "This is my wife, Clara."

A very pretty young woman cradling a bundle in her arms stepped forward and smiled tentatively.

Edie nodded. "Pleased to meet you."

"And our son, John," Sam added.

Edie's heart skipped a beat again. At this rate, she was afraid it would stop altogether soon. She walked over to the woman's side to examine the bundle more closely. It was indeed a baby, lying peacefully asleep in his mother's arms. Babies, wrinkled and ugly though they were generally, were unaccountably beautiful when they slept.

"Oh, how lovely!" Edie exclaimed.

"Your first grandchild, Mam," Sam said. "Would you like to hold him?"

"Of course."

"Then sit back down again. Clara will give him to you."

Edie obediently sat down in the horsehair chair and pretty Clara placed the sleeping baby in her arms. She stared at him while he squirmed, trying to find a comfortable position.

"Why did you name him John?" she asked. It seemed strange he would give his bairn the name of the father who had driven him away, but then she blushed, remembering it was she who had driven their son away.

"He was born on the day I received your letter saying Papa was dead," Sam said. "It seemed the right thing to do."

"And I insisted on it." Clara spoke for the first time.

Edie had dismissed her as merely pretty at first, but her words indicated a strong will and that was a good thing.

House of Crows

"I'm sae glad... so glad to welcome you to the family, my dear," Edie said. "And I'm happy to meet some of Sam's family at last."

"Why have you not come before this?" Edie asked, looking at Sam.

"It's been a good deal of work to get my business functioning so that it's making a profit," Sam said. "I couldn't just leave it to employees."

Edie suspected that he'd also been avoiding his father. It couldn't be a coincidence that he came only after his father was dead. But she didn't express her thoughts aloud. Today was a special day and should not be marred by her angry rancour. She looked at the peaceful infant in her lap and thought of Lucy. Perhaps she would like to hold the bairn as practice for when she had her own. Edie looked around and realized that both Lucy and her husband were in the dining room, setting the table.

Just then, Lucy appeared in the doorway.

"Now," she said, "let's all go into the dining room. Mam has prepared a feast for us."

Clara came and took baby John from Edie, then followed Lucy into the dining room.

Edie sat on the chair, listening to the chatter as everyone assembled in the next room. She waited for her heartbeat to return to normal, trying her best not to cry. Though they would be tears of joy for once, she felt as though she had cried far too much this year already. But this was a new year starting tomorrow and perhaps this was an omen of the happiness she was about to experience.

Lucy reappeared at the door.

"Mam, are you coming? Sam has brought crackers. Isn't it marvelous? We're waiting for you to begin the toasts and crack the crackers."

Edie started to cry.

"What's the matter, Mam?" Lucy said. "I thought this surprise would make you happy."

"It has," Edie said.

"Then why are you crying? Come now. Sam hasn't seen you in such a long time."

"Whose fault is that?" Edie barked.

"Now, Mam. Let's not talk of fault on a day like today. It's all water under the bridge."

Edie suddenly had a vision of the roiling water rushing under the log bridge at the Gorge — her paralyzing fear of taking another step and knowing that she had no choice but to go forward. There was nothing else to do.

She got up and followed Lucy into the dining room.

A Letter from Gibraltar



ii. Still Bearing



Lucy, 1872

IT WAS ONE of those cold, grey November mornings when it's difficult to get out of a warm bed, but Lucy gritted her teeth, put her feet on the cold floor and ran across the room to where her robe was draped over a chair. She pulled it around herself, patting her growing belly as she did so.

"Good morning, baby," she said.

"You're daft." Robert smiled at her from across the room where he was already up and getting dressed.

"But you love me anyway," she replied.

"That I do. But you don't need to get up so early now that you're confined."

Lucy hated that word. It made her sound like a prisoner in her own home, but she didn't feel like a prisoner. In fact, she'd never felt so free.

"I want to make you breakfast before you go to work," she said.

"I wish we had a maid so you wouldn't have to do so much work, especially now in your condition."

"Don't even think about it. I *would* go daft if I didn't have something to keep me occupied all day."

After breakfast, she gave him a kiss and sent him off to work while she cleaned up the dishes. There was a knock at the door and she went to answer it.

House of Crows

“Mam,” she said. “Come in. Would you like some coffee? It’s still fresh.”

Her mother had become a frequent visitor since Papa had died. She came in and hung up her threadbare coat.

“Thank you,” she said. “I would.”

Lucy thought her mother looked particularly strained this morning. “What’s wrong?”

“I canna stand to be alone any longer,” Mam said. “But I dinna wish to be a burden to you and Robert.”

“Don’t be silly, Mam. You’d never be a burden,” Lucy said. Deep in her heart, though, she feared the contrary.

“With a bairn on the way, you’ll need some help. Let me offer my services. You willna have to pay my rent nae more.” She waited a moment for Lucy’s reaction, which was not forthcoming. “What d’you say?”

On the one hand, it was eminently sensible and the answer to all their problems; on the other hand, Lucy was afraid of what her mother’s presence might do to her marriage. But that was silly! She and Robert were a fortress that nothing could destroy.

“I think it’s a good idea. Of course, I’ll have to talk to Robert about it first, but I’m sure he’ll agree. After all, he invited you to stay with us after Papa died.”

“Good. It’s settled then. Let me have that coffee. It’s cold out there this morning and I need something to warm my hands.”

* * *

Lucy wasn’t sure if it was just the greyness of the month or her mother’s presence, but a certain sadness entered the house. Even though Mam’s bedroom was downstairs, she and Robert whispered in their bed now. And he no longer hugged her and kissed her anywhere and whenever the spirit moved him — Mam would not have approved. Still, they couldn’t complain because she did more than her share of the work.

* * *

One morning, Lucy couldn’t get up for the pain in her belly. She curled herself up as much as she could and cried. Robert went immediately to fetch the doctor. Mam hovered over her asking if she wanted anything. Lucy shook her head. She wished her mother would leave her.

Fortunately, when Dr. Helmcken arrived, he sent her mother away.

“How are you?” the doctor asked.

"Good," Lucy replied. "The pain has subsided. I feel a little foolish for calling you."

"That's the way it is with labour pains," he said.

"I'm glad to see you back doctoring again," Lucy said.

"Yes, I've had quite enough of politicking for a while," he replied, smiling. "I did what I could to get British Columbia a good deal in the Canadian Confederation, but no one seems to appreciate it much. So I've come back to what I know, to being a doctor."

"My husband says that no one really understands Confederation very well. And people are afraid to lose our connection with Britain."

"Well, time will tell if it was the right decision," he said as he opened his black bag. "Now, let's get to the root of your problem, Mrs. Macaulay." Then he asked her a question that frightened her. "When was the last time you felt the baby quicken?"

Lucy's mind went dark. "Not since yesterday," she said. "Do you think the baby's dead?"

He shook his head. "Don't worry," he said. "The child may quicken again."

Did he say that only to give her false hope? But she did not ask. She wanted to hang on to any hope there was.

"You should prepare yourself for that possibility."

With that, he snatched away her hope. If she prepared herself, then that would mean giving up. She would not prepare herself. She would watch and wait. The baby would recover and stir in her womb again.

"There've been no pains for some time?" he asked.

She nodded.

"Good," he said. "Call me if the pain resumes."

* * *

That night, the wind came up. It howled outside the window. Lucy got up to look out at the trees whipping themselves in a frenzy. And then the heavens opened. She could see the water bouncing off the boardwalk onto the road that already ran with muck.

She felt a sharp pain, cried out and doubled over.

"Are you all right, dear?" Robert asked from the bed.

Her mother came running into the room.

"What're you doing out of bed?" she said, pulling back the sheet so that Lucy could climb back in.

But Lucy couldn't budge. She merely gasped like a fish out of water, trying to catch up with the pain.

House of Crows

“Lucy, get in bed now.”

She glared at her mother with bulging eyes. Robert got out of bed and came to her side to lead her back into bed. But she was in such pain that she shook her head. They waited until the spasm finally released her enough so that she could speak.

Finally, she said, “Fetch Doctor Helmcken.”

Then she crawled into bed. Robert threw on his clothes and rushed out of the door, leaving Lucy alone with her mother.

The pain ebbed and flowed like a tide but, when it flowed, it did so with a fury like the storm outside. The period of ebb was too short — only a moment to catch her breath, a short space to prepare for the next burst of pain.

How many hours passed like this while the wind roared outside and the rain battered at the window like someone desperate to get inside?

“It could be worse,” Mam said.

Why was she here, spreading her gloom?

“Remember the storms we used to have on the farm? How the roof leaked and the wind blew out the fire in the fireplace? At least here, you’re warm and dry.”

Lucy remembered the tall, stolid trees swaying like wild dancers, swaying so wide she feared they would snap off like sticks, and the branches falling from the trees...

Her thoughts were ripped out of her head by the pain that flooded her and she cried out again.

Suddenly, Doctor Helmcken was there, looking down at her. He waited till she’d stopped moaning and then asked her to open her legs.

“It won’t be long now,” he said. “Next time you have a pain, I want you to push as hard as you can.”

He spoke as if he thought she had some control over her body. He didn’t know. But when the next pain came, she felt the desire to bear down and get rid of this monster that inhabited her. It was not a baby anymore. It was just a bad dream. She imagined a black lump like coal, hideously deformed and covered in hair. She pushed and screamed, and screamed and pushed, until the pain subsided.

The wind was quiet outside.

“Has the storm passed?” she asked.

“Not yet,” the doctor said. “It’ll resume again.”

Sure enough, she heard its howl. She matched it with her own long, screeching agonized cry as she grunted and pushed till she must surely explode. Then, when she could not stand another moment of pain, it burst out of her and she lay back.

"Is it done?" she said.

"Not yet," the doctor said. "There is afterbirth to come out. I'll need you to push some more in a moment."

Doctor Helmcken scooped something up and wrapped it in a blanket.

"Is that the baby?" Lucy asked.

He looked at her sadly. "It's stillborn," he whispered.

Mam gasped and collapsed in a chair.

What an odd word! Not dead, but still born. Did it mean 'born anyway'? Did it mean the baby was born still, not moving? Why didn't he just say 'dead'? But that was too harsh a word, too final. It couldn't be dead. And it wasn't an 'it'.

"Girl or boy, Doctor?"

"A boy," he said.

"Can I see him?" She had to see him. Perhaps the doctor was mistaken. He couldn't be dead.

"After you're done," he said.

"Yes," she said. "The afterbirth." Whatever that was.

Another gust of wind. It was as if the air was sucking the life out of her, as if the wind had stolen the baby's breath and now wanted to take hers as well. She wished that Robert could be here with her instead of her mother. He would know what to say to comfort her. If there was any comfort to be had.

"Where's Robert?" she asked. "Can't he come in yet?"

Mam shook her head. "When it's over."

"Has someone told him about the baby?"

Another contraction prevented her from hearing the answer.

After the afterbirth had passed, Lucy lay still, her throat sore from all the screaming.

Mam was sitting stone-faced and silent in the chair. Lucy wanted her to leave. She couldn't cry with her mother sitting there. She wanted her husband with her so that they could cry together.

"Mam," she croaked, "could you get me some water?"

"Aye, of course. I'll fetch you some."

"And could you send Robert in with it? I'm sure he'll want to see the baby."

"I dinna ken," Mam said. "Is it all right, Doctor?"

Doctor Helmcken nodded. "Yes, send him in."

He took care to cover Lucy up as if her husband had never seen her naked, perhaps so that her husband wouldn't know that the doctor had. Lucy snatched the blanket up to her chin. She suddenly felt so very cold.

She'd said she wanted to see the baby to make sure that he was dead. But now that she was beginning to believe it was true, she was not so

sure she wanted to see him. What if he was a monster like the one she had imagined when she was in labour? And then she knew she had to see him or she would always think of him that way.

Robert came in and went straight to her. He took her in his arms as if no one else was in the room, as if there was no one else in the world but the two of them. He looked at her, brushing the hair from her face.

"Are you all right? I heard you screaming and I was so afraid you were dying."

"I'm all right," she said. "But the baby's stillborn."

"I know."

He looked at his hands, trying to control his eyes so he wouldn't weep. Why was he trying not to cry? Was he as cold as her mother?

"It's all right," he said, "as long as you're alive."

"It's not all right," she said. "It'll never be all right."

He made soothing sounds and stroked her face.

"I know," he said. "I know."

"I want to see our baby," she cried.

"All right. Don't upset yourself. The doctor will bring it over."

"*Him*, Robert. *Him*."

Doctor Helmcken finished whatever he was doing at the side table and brought the baby, wrapped in a blanket, over to the bed. He placed him in Robert's arms. They looked at him together, a perfectly shaped baby boy with five fingers on each tiny hand and ten little curled toes. He had two eyes, a squashed button nose and a rosebud mouth. A perfectly formed baby, except its colour was not right, pallid and grey like the November skies. And like those skies, Lucy began to weep as she held him tight, her still little baby boy.

A Letter from Gibraltar



iii. On Government Street



Maggie, 1895

WINTER HAD BROUGHT its endless days of drizzle. Maggie felt like the weather as she walked home from work. She missed Jack but, if she married him, tomorrow might be the last Christmas she would celebrate with Mama and Granny. The O'Reillys had let her go home early to do some shopping and she would have the next day off as well. Fong, the latest Chinese cook, would have to wait at table the next day because the Chinese didn't celebrate Christmas.

As soon as she got home, she went out again with Mama and her great long grocery list. For Christmas dinner, they always started off with oyster patties. Then they had soup and a small turkey. There was ham and various sauces and such to go with it. Mountains of vegetables were served, as well as plum pudding, great big mince tarts and dried fruits of all sorts.

Before they even arrived on Government Street where most of the stores were, not far from the house, Mama stopped beside an old Indian woman who was selling her wares.

"Lucy!"

"Lucy!" the Native woman cried as well, smiling a great toothless smile.

Then, to Maggie's mortification, the two women hugged each other.

House of Crows

As they haggled over the price of oysters, Maggie wondered why her mother would be on such intimate terms with this stranger. Maybe it was because they shared the same name. But then, how did her mother even know the woman's name? She had to ask, but waited until they were walking down the street again, Mama's basket full of oysters.

"How do you know that woman?" Maggie asked.

"We were childhood playmates," Mama said, "when I lived on the Craigflower farm."

Really? Maggie thought. It was just another of the mysteries that was her mother.

They arrived at Goodacre's Meats to get the turkey and ham. It was not Maggie's favourite place, for the bloody carcasses and stench of flesh made her stomach turn. Today, flies buzzed about the huge carcass of a bullock on display in the entrance and, on the other pillar opposite the doorway, a great big pig was displayed. Mr. Goodacre was handing out turkeys to his best customers but did not even glance at Mama. They would have to buy their own scrawny bird and tiny ham.

"Why don't we get a free turkey, Mama?"

"We don't buy enough meat," she said. "The free birds are only for large families and ours is small."

Mama was always ready to put a rosy glow on things that Maggie thought were unjust. Most of the families receiving the handouts could well afford to pay for their own, while she and Mama and Granny could not.

Maggie was happy to leave the butcher's and enter the Dix and Ross grocery store. The odours of coffee and spices enticed, then overwhelmed her as she watched Mama fill her basket with the ingredients for their Christmas dinner. Maggie wondered if Christmas would be the same in England next year. Of course, it wouldn't be. Nothing could ever be the same. For one thing, Mama wouldn't be there, nor Granny. Maggie felt a sudden pull on her heartstrings.

She followed her mother to the counter where she laid out her goods.

The storekeeper named a price. It was more than a dollar! Mama dumped the contents of her change purse on the counter and counted out the coins. She was short. She started to lay aside some of the ingredients, but Maggie took out her change purse.

"Let me cover the difference."

"Thank you, Maggie," Mama said.

"Not at all, Mama. I'll be eating this feast as well."

"And it may be the last one you'll eat with us," Mama said, looking sad, "so it ought to be the best."

Next year, there would be no more scrimping and saving. She would have a husband with money in his pocket to pay for Christmas dinner. Maggie vowed then and there she would send money at Christmas so Granny and Mama could eat well.

They arrived home laden with their bags and bundles of groceries. When they'd greeted Granny and been relieved of all their parcels, Granny casually mentioned there was a letter for Maggie postmarked from Gibraltar on the side table in the parlour.

Then Maggie flew to the table, sat down on the armchair and, for some time, stared at the tissue-thin paper with its stamps and postmarks and her address written in Jack's hand. At last, she unfolded and read it.

My dearest beloved Maggie,

It seems rather bold of me to address you so intimately, but I trust you will not be offended since we are engaged. It was wonderful to see Momma and my sisters again. We celebrated as if it were Christmas since my ship was leaving again, this time for a short Mediterranean tour. My little nieces and nephews are a rowdy bunch and Momma is most contented in her role as grandmother. She was very pleased to hear of our engagement. I showed her the photograph from Maynard Studios you so kindly gave me. It was fortunate that you had a photograph taken by Mrs. Maynard. My mother couldn't believe it when I told her the photographer was a woman! Such a thing would not be possible in England, I think. In some ways, you colonials are ahead of us rather than behind. Momma is anxious to meet you. She seemed even sadder than usual to see me go and I suspect she is not as well as she lets on.

I hope that you are well, my darling, and that your mother and grandmother are in good health as well. Give them my best. I will send this missive from Gibraltar, which is our next port of call. I miss you terribly.

All my love,
Your Jack.

Crossing Point Ellice Bridge



i. Another Miscarriage



Edie, 1873-4

EDIE SCOLDED LUCY, but it did no good. She'd always been a stubborn lass. The doctor had said she was to do nothing but rest in bed during her confinement but Lucy got up anyway. Edie fixed her up on the chesterfield with a blanket, but Lucy got up and came to the kitchen and criticized her baking.

"I was baking before you were born," she said. "Now go and lie down."

"But," Lucy insisted "Robert doesn't like it done like that."

"Dinna fash. He'll eat it and like it. Now, go back to bed."

The next day, Lucy insisted that she wouldn't stay home with Edie. And Robert, as soft-hearted as ever, gave in to his wife. Edie told him that he had to be firm. It was, after all, the doctor's orders, not hers.

What could you do with a child who was an adult? Edie tried to reason with her daughter, but Lucy went to the shop with her husband anyway.

Edie hated to say "I told you so," but later in the day, Lucy and her husband came home in Mrs. Trutch's carriage. Lucy was having labour pains and it was far too early to be good news.

Fortunately, her water didn't break in the good lady's carriage. Perhaps she wouldn't have remained such a faithful client if it had. No, that particular event occurred after Lucy was safely installed in bed.

House of Crows

The water broke and more.

Everything came out. What a grim mess it was too.

Eddie gritted her teeth and cleaned it up. It wasn't the first time in her life she'd cleaned up after others. The months of nursing John came to mind, but she hated to think about that and her part in its ending. If someone had told her the kind of life she was going to live, she might have preferred to die before she was born, like this bairn and so many others before.

* * *

The next time Lucy was with child, she took to bed more dutifully. Eddie brought needlepoint and books for her and she was good for a few days. Still, it wasn't in her nature to stay in bed, so soon she was up baking cookies for her beloved husband. She did love that man overmuch.

Truth be told, Eddie was still a little jealous of her daughter's happy marriage, perhaps even happier than hers had been before they'd come to Vancouver's Island. Why did some people have all the luck? Well, not all of it. Lucy seemed unable to bring a bairn to term.

Eddie smelled the cookies. "I think they're ready, Lucinda."

Lucy bent down to take the pan of cookies from the oven and collapsed. Eddie ran to her aid, but Lucy pushed her away. She was crying and nothing Eddie could say made her stop. She was inconsolable.

"Robert will," she finally stammered between sobs, "be devastated."

"I told you to stay in bed, Lucinda."

"I know, Mam. I'm sorry."

Eddie led her to the bedroom and helped her into bed. She stayed as Lucy passed again though the pain of non-birth. *Poor Lucy! Still without a living bairn.*

Robert was sad too, but he didn't get angry or blame her for doing too much. Eddie wished sometimes that she could be as forbearing as he was.

The next day, after he'd gone to work, Lucy sat at the kitchen table with her head down on her arms, sobbing.

"Whatever is the matter, Lucinda dear?" Eddie asked her distraught daughter.

"Why can't I carry a child to term?" Lucy cried. "You had three children. Why can't I even have one?"

"Aye," Eddie said, "but have you never wondered why there was such a large gap between James and you?"

Eddie paused. Lucy stopped crying and leaned in to hear more.

"I had two miscarriages between his birth and yours."

Edeana Malcolm

She hoped that would make Lucy feel a little better. But she didn't tell her daughter that it was the time of the potato famine in Scotland and that she hadn't had enough to eat. That would certainly not have made Lucy feel any better.

"But you were born," Edie added, "when times were tough. I'm sure you'll manage to have a bairn of your ain."

Crossing Point Ellice Bridge



ii. On the Lawn Again



Maggie, 1896

MAGGIE WAS CLEANING up the lunch dishes in the kitchen, wondering what Mama and Granny were doing. Yesterday, they had gone to the Gorge Regatta. Because the Queen's birthday fell on a Sunday this year, the regatta had been held on Monday. Today, Tuesday, was the day of the sham battle between the navy and army at Macaulay Point in Esquimalt. Mama and Granny had told her this morning they might go and see it.

Whenever Maggie thought about the navy, she thought about Jack. Her mind wandered to thoughts of him a hundred times a day. Yesterday, while serving the O'Reillys' regatta guests on the lawn, someone had said "Oh, there's a navy cutter!" She had looked up, her eyes searching for him.

It was ridiculous. Jack had gone back to the old country. She missed him terribly, but he was coming back. He had promised and, when he came back again, she would go with him. She wouldn't make the same mistake as Miss Kitty O'Reilly had done five years ago. *Was it that long ago?* Maggie was about the same age now as Miss Kitty had been then. Now poor Miss O'Reilly was an old maid. She had fewer gentlemen callers these days and her hopes were getting slim.

Maggie was on the way to the parlour when she heard a crash so loud she instinctively crouched on the floor, afraid the roof was falling on her.

House of Crows

What on earth was that? She waited for the sound to come again.

When it didn't, she looked into the kitchen to see if Fong had dropped something or if he'd fallen through the trapdoor like Li had years ago. He was standing there with a puzzled look on his face.

"What was that?" she asked.

He shrugged his shoulders. "Earth shake?"

She ran to the parlour that overlooked the Arm at the back of the house. Mrs. O'Reilly was standing at the window, looking out. She turned to Maggie with a horrified expression on her face.

"What is it?" Maggie asked, going to see for herself.

She looked out the window. Something was amiss, but she couldn't make out what it was.

"The bridge has fallen down," Mrs. O'Reilly said.

Then Maggie realized. The middle span of the bridge was gone. On the far side, she saw a streetcar that had just cleared the bridge.

"That streetcar," Maggie said. "They're lucky they weren't on it when the span fell."

"But," Mrs. O'Reilly said, her voice quiet, her face pale, "I saw another streetcar on it when it went down."

Maggie's heart sank.

If Mama and Granny had gone to Macaulay Point, they would have taken the streetcar across the bridge. They might have been on the streetcar that went down with the bridge. She couldn't bear to think about it.

"We must," Maggie said, "go down to the dock to see if we can help."

As she and Mrs. O'Reilly went down to their private dock, Maggie thought of the time she'd taken the streetcar to the Gorge with Mama and Granny and how the bridge had sagged from the weight.

Maggie could see people swimming in circles. She watched them, scrutinizing each individual to see if they were Mama or Granny, but the swimmers were too far away for her to make out faces. She walked to the edge of the dock to get closer. She stopped when she felt Mrs. O'Reilly's hand on her shoulder.

"Oh, Maggie," she said. "If only Mr. O'Reilly were here."

Mrs. O'Reilly rarely complained of her husband's absence though he was often away from home on provincial business.

Maggie continued scanning the swimmers. Some of them were calling for help, while others just floated in a dazed state. She saw a horse in the water too, swimming frantically and screaming so loud it was hard to hear the human shouts. It was all too much. She put her hands over her ears and kept looking.

Someone was treading water. She could tell by the hair it was a woman, but was it Mama? Maggie squinted, trying to see better. She thought about taking off her shoes and jumping in.

"Perhaps," Maggie said, "I should jump in and try to rescue them. I can swim, ma'am."

"You stay right here, Maggie. They would pull you under and drown you too if you tried to save them. Besides, look. There are already men in the water going to rescue them."

Sure enough, rowboats were beginning to appear among the desperate swimmers. The O'Reillys' next-door neighbour, Captain Grant, was rowing out in his boat to save people. He tipped his hat to Mrs. O'Reilly and she waved back.

"You can bring them here," she cried.

Maggie didn't think he heard her. Another rescuer heard though, a swimmer who was hauling someone with him. When he got to the dock, Maggie and Mrs. O'Reilly leaned over to hold the victim while he climbed the ladder onto the dock. Then together, the man and Maggie pulled the unconscious woman from the water and lay her on the dock.

She was young, definitely not Mama or Granny.

"Is she alive?" Mrs. O'Reilly asked, bending over the young woman.

"I don't know," the swimmer said, looking concerned. "She was."

He crouched down and started to pump her lungs. After a few minutes, a stream of water came out and she suddenly coughed and spat. She struggled to sit up.

"No, no," he said. "I'll carry you."

As the young man picked the woman up, Maggie noticed his wet clothes were those of a militiaman.

He turned to Mrs. O'Reilly. "Where shall I take her?"

"Maggie, go with him to the house. Wrap her in a blanket."

She didn't want to leave her place on the dock. She wanted to keep on searching for Mama and Granny, but she had no choice.

"Yes, ma'am."

She led the militiaman across the lawn to the house and asked him what he'd seen of the bridge collapse.

"I was having lunch with my friends on the shore when the bridge fell." He nodded in the direction, the woman in his arms shivering. "Oh my God, what a terrible sight! There were carriages already on the bridge and a streetcar filled to the gunnels — even boys on the roof and others hanging on to the sides. It started across and was halfway when the bridge gave way."

House of Crows

Surely, Mama and Granny wouldn't have gotten on such a crowded streetcar. Granny especially would have complained about the cramped space. But what if they'd been one of the first to get on?

"Please don't talk of it," the woman said in a feeble voice.

"I'm sorry," he replied. "We'll soon have you right as rain, miss. You'll see."

It was a warm, sunny day, but the house was shaded and cool even on the warmest days and Maggie didn't have time to start a fire. She went to the linen closet and took out a blanket.

"Are you well enough to stand, miss?" the militiaman asked.

She nodded and he put her down.

Maggie wrapped the young woman in the blanket.

"There's no fire," she said, "It's such a warm day. Perhaps you'd be more comfortable in the sunshine outside."

The woman nodded and followed Maggie and the officer outside. Mrs. O'Reilly was coming up from the dock at that moment.

"Sir," she said to the militiaman, "you should take our rowboat out to rescue people. The oars are in the shed there. I'll show you. Maggie, we'll need more blankets for the people he brings."

Maggie wished she could go out in the boat with the militiaman to look for Mama and Granny and help with the rescue, but blankets were important too. She showed the young woman to a deck chair and went inside.

Fong came running from the kitchen.

"Mr. Grant's maid, she come," he said. "She ask for blankets, miss."

"Well, we need them, Fong. I'll go see what she wants."

Maggie went to the door where a young maid was standing.

"Mr. Grant," the maid said, "is bringing boatloads of people to our lawn and we're in need of blankets. Can you spare any?"

"Sorry, but we're collecting people too. We need all we have."

"Well, can you spare your cook then? And maybe some vegetables? Our cook is making soup for all the survivors and I'm sure he'll need a hand."

"That's a good idea." Maggie turned to Fong, who was right behind her. "Go ask Mrs. O'Reilly if she'll let you go. When the soup is made, perhaps you could bring some back here for our survivors."

Mrs. O'Reilly came and helped Maggie spread the blankets on the lawn to lay out the survivors. She imagined Mama and Granny lying on them. When they were done, they saw that their militiaman had already filled several of the blankets. Maggie looked carefully at their faces, but none of them was Mama or Granny.

"Are you all right?" Mrs. O'Reilly asked each one, making sure they weren't badly hurt. "Maggie, go to the Grants and see if the soup is ready. Take our biggest tureen over to the neighbours and fill it with hot soup. Fong can help you carry it back."

She hated to go. She wanted to stay and see if Mama and Granny were among the survivors, but she was needed. Later, there would be time for taking stock.

"Yes, ma'am," she said.

The Grants' lawn was also covered with people on blankets. Maggie was glad she'd come. Perhaps her mother and grandmother were here among these survivors. She walked slowly across the lawn, looking carefully at each person, but didn't see Mama or Granny.

The Grant kitchen was humming with activity. She found Mrs. Grant carrying a tray of hot soup out to the lawn and asked if she could take a tureen of soup back to their survivors.

"We need all we have," Mrs. Grant said. "I'm sorry."

"But you have our cook so we can't make any for our survivors."

"All right. Take what you need." Mrs. Grant turned back to the busy servants in the kitchen. "Fill her tureen and start making more."

Fong helped her carry the tureen back to the O'Reilly house, then went back with more vegetables from the larder to make more soup. Maggie set to work dishing out the hot soup and taking it out to the cold survivors. Back and forth from the kitchen to the lawn, she travelled until everyone had a bowl of soup.

On the third trip, she noticed that the latest arrivals on the lawn were not moving. Their faces were ashen pale. Some men were trying to pump water from their lungs as she'd seen the militiaman do earlier. They would work a few minutes and then move on. Maggie watched in fascinated horror. She studied every ashen, lifeless face, only this time she thanked God that none were Mama or Granny.

Perhaps they had decided to stay home. Or perhaps they'd been on another streetcar altogether. She didn't know. Catching snippets of conversation here and there, she'd heard that many didn't make it. Many were still trapped in the streetcar, pinned under bridge debris. Everyone was saying how lucky they were to have been thrown free. Some were thanking God for their safety. Maggie stared down at the grey faces and wondered what the dying prayed for.

"What are you doing, Maggie?" Mrs. O'Reilly was beside her. "There's work to be done." Then she looked down and saw what Maggie saw. "Oh, cover them up, please," she said.

One of the men pulled a blanket from under a corpse and covered it.

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"Now get to work," Mrs. O'Reilly told her.

Maggie started to walk up to the house but turned back to see a new arrival being carried in. This one seemed to be moving.

"We need another blanket," one of the rescuers said. "And more soup."

As soon as she was sure it was neither Mama nor Granny, Maggie hurried to the kitchen for another bowl.

Old Doctor Helmcken finally arrived to examine the people on the lawn. By this time, there were many more corpses. He ignored the lifeless bodies and studied the others, sending some of them to the hospital and others home. It took hours to arrange all the transport. The O'Reillys' groom took carriage-loads of people home and several ambulances went back and forth, ferrying people to the hospitals.

It was late by the time the last survivor had gone. Maggie really wanted to go home too and check on her family but had to stay. She had to wash up all the bowls and cutlery and collect all the blankets for the laundry, all the time worrying about Mama and Granny.

It was dark when she walked home, exhausted. There were no more streetcars running, but she wouldn't have gotten on one if there were. With every step, she prayed that Mama and Granny had not gone to Macaulay Point, that they were safe at home waiting for her.

At last, she opened the door. Granny was sitting at the kitchen table. "You are late, Maggie."

Mama ran into the kitchen and threw her arms around Maggie.

"Oh!" Her voice trembled. "We were so worried about you. We heard about the streetcar accident and wondered why you were so late."

Maggie couldn't speak for the joy that she felt to see them home safe and sound. She started to cry.

"I'm so glad that Granny didn't want to go," Mama said.

"Sometimes," Granny said, "I'm right, you ken."

And Maggie couldn't help but laugh for joy.

* * *

As tired as she was, Maggie could not fall asleep. Every time she closed her eyes, she saw the pale, spectre-like faces of the dead laid out on the lawn. She was afraid they would haunt her dreams. And the anxiety that had filled her long, exhausting day would not dissipate so quickly. The thought of losing Mama and Granny had frightened her so.

If she went to England, she might never see them again. They would write of course, but she thought of how inadequate letters were to convey emotions. Though she cherished every letter she received from

Jack, it just wasn't the same as his presence. Why couldn't he come to live with her here in Victoria so that she could stay with Mama and Granny?

Sometime in the middle of the night, Maggie gave up trying to sleep and got up to write a letter to Jack. In it she told him the details of the terrible day. Then she wrote:

I have thought about this long and hard. Now I know that I cannot leave my mother and grandmother behind when I marry you, and they will not leave Victoria.

I still love you and want to marry you, but I cannot go with you to England. You will have to decide to remove to Victoria and live here with me. Please let me know your decision by return post.

Then, she signed it and sealed it. She posted it on her way to work the next day.

Mrs. O'Reilly commented on how tired she looked, which brought to her mind Miss O'Reilly on that day so long ago when she'd rejected Captain Stanhope. But Jack was not the son of an earl and he didn't have an inherited position to fill. Perhaps he would see the sense of removing to the New World. Still, she felt a little regret that she would never see the old one herself.

* * *

Their letters must have crossed somewhere en route because a few days after she mailed hers, Maggie received one from Jack.

My dearest Maggie,

I hope this letter finds you well, your mother and your grandmother too. While we were on our Mediterranean cruise, I received word that my own mother was taken ill. The Navy gave me leave to go and visit her, so I took several trains and went back to London. My sisters are doing the best they can to look after her, but they have their families to look after too and there is no one to stay with her at night. Since the Navy will not grant me further leave, I have left that august body and found work as an apprentice pilot on the Thames.

This does not mean I am retracting my proposal of marriage. If you still accept it and wish to live with me here, it only

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means you must take the grand adventure and come out alone by train and by boat. Or if either your mother or grandmother or both will accompany you, they are also welcome. Only say you will and I'll immediately send you the fare. I miss you so and, in this time of trial especially, I need you by my side.

Your most loving Jack.

Crossing Point Ellice Bridge



iii. Giving Birth



Lucy, 1875

LUCY FOUND HERSELF with child again. This time, she took no chances. She took to bed immediately. Boredom was a small price to pay for the possibility of a miracle. The hardest part of the boredom was the thoughts and emotions that came unbidden to her mind. She tried to quell the fears with conversation but, when Robert was at the shop, her mother was not the most cheerful companion.

Mam urged her to deal with her previous miscarriages as if they were just a natural part of life, as if those dear, sweet babies had never really been alive and were not really worth mourning. Lucy could hardly forgive her mother for her callousness, yet she understood the why of it. Her own fragility in the face of these miscarriages was a weakness but she couldn't help it. She so longed to bring a baby into the world alive, to see it kick and squirm and open its eyes.

Lucy talked to her baby. She would say, "It's a beautiful world if you'll only wait a while and come into it alive." She spoke of sunshine and flowers, of birds and trees, of the ocean and mountains, of the forest and deer. She even told her baby the secret story of the panther.

And she sang.

She sang every lullaby that she knew and she got her mother to teach her more songs from the old country. She sang and talked so much that

her mother was beginning to worry that she was going mad, but it was just her way of coping.

Each month that passed was a little victory. She thanked God for each victory and then prayed for the next one — prayed for the next month to pass without that sharp stab of pain and outpouring of blood that always meant death. It was the end of the eighth month when the first contraction started. Lucy had been praying so long and hard for this pain not to be that she almost started weeping till her mother reminded her it was all right. It was probably time for her to give birth.

"I'll go fetch Doctor Helmcken and stop by to tell Robert the news," her mother said. "Will you be all right alone?"

"I won't be alone," Lucy said. "I'll have the baby to keep me company."

She had felt it move so recently that she was sure it was still alive. But she wasn't complacent. She had still to see the child through its next difficult journey. While she waited for the doctor, she sang to the baby and promised that she would be there till the end.

Doctor Helmcken arrived and his calm and professional demeanour helped to centre Lucy. Then her husband arrived with fear in his eyes and came straight to her bed.

"Get out," the doctor said.

"Are you all right?" he asked her, ignoring the doctor.

"I'll be fine," she said. "Now, do as the doctor says. He knows what he's doing."

"May I stay?" Mam asked.

"Yes," the doctor replied. "In case I need help."

Lucy recognized the pain of labour now, but this time she felt it as a joyful and not a hollow pain. At last, after the final push, she felt the great relief as the child slipped out. Immediately, the baby released a great wail. It was the sweetest sound Lucy had ever heard. She caught a glimpse of the scrunched-up face with the wet hair plastered at its sides before her mother whisked the baby away to be cleaned.

"You have a healthy baby girl," Dr. Helmcken said, barely audible over the baby's crying.

"Bring her to me," Lucy said.

A tiny corner of fear had crept into her mind. Perhaps the baby would die before Lucy could see her. She watched her mother meticulously clean the baby and then wrap her tightly in a cloth, taking care with each fold. Through it all, the baby screamed as though she were being tortured and Lucy's nerves jangled like a bell. It seemed to take forever before Mam brought the screaming child to her.

"Here you are, my dear."

Lucy took the baby in the crook of her arm and began to sing. The baby stopped in the middle of a scream and looked at Lucy, staring intently as she listened.

Doctor Helmcken opened the door and Robert almost fell into the room. This time, the look of fear vanished from his face as soon as he saw his smiling wife and baby. He came to the bed and stared at the child.

“Would you,” Lucy asked, “like to hold her?”

The moment the baby was in his arms, she resumed her screaming.

“You’ll have to learn how to sing, I think,” Mam said.

“No one would be happy if I did that.” He smiled. “But this sounds like music to my ears.”

* * *

Margaret Lucinda was christened three days later. Robert and Lucy took turns staying awake to watch her because they were so afraid she would stop breathing. But she proved a healthy baby with a lusty cry. Whenever she cried, Lucy responded immediately, picking her up and talking to her.

Her mother looked displeased. “You act like a servant answering the call of the master.”

But Lucy just laughed. She was so happy that the baby was growing heartier and healthier every day. Her fears of the baby’s imminent demise grew fainter.

* * *

Soon, she changed from a helpless infant to a baby that could creep about and pull herself up, and Lucy started to call her Maggie. She grew out of all her infant clothes so quickly that Lucy sewed her a new wardrobe almost every month.

One day, she sat down in the parlour to sew a new frock for Maggie while Mam watched the little one in the kitchen. As usual, Lucy was lost in the pleasure of the task at hand when she heard a crash. She looked over to see the smiling face of little Maggie, who had evidently crept into the room, pulled herself up and dumped all the contents of Lucy’s sewing basket on the floor.

Mam came running into the room, full of apologies.

“Dinna disturb your mama!” she shouted at Maggie. “I told you not to come in this room.”

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Then she snatched up the smiling child. Maggie was startled and immediately broke into a loud cry. Poor Lucy couldn't stand to hear it.

"Give her to me now!" she shouted.

Mam looked surprised and handed her over immediately. Lucy wrapped her arms around Maggie and patted her on the back.

"It's all right, dear. Mama's not angry with you. You're a very good girl." All the while, she glared at her mother over her daughter's shoulder. Then Lucy said to her mother, "I'll have a word with you later when Robert is home."

* * *

That evening, after Maggie was abed, the three of them sat at the dinner table.

Lucy said, "Maggie meant no harm in upturning my sewing basket. There was no reason to shout at her."

"You are both much too lenient," Mam said. "'Spare the rod and spoil the child,' that's what I say."

"The day you take a rod to that child," Robert announced, "is the day you are shown the door!"

"Well, I suppose the hand is enough for her. She *is* still a wee bairn."

"And," Lucy snapped, "you'll not lay a hand on her either."

"So, I canna spank her nor even speak harshly to her. How shall I discipline her then?"

"You will *not* discipline her. If there are any problems with Maggie, you are to bring her to me or Robert and we'll deal with them."

"I've seen how you discipline her. You give her everything she wants. Mark my words, you'll rue the day."

The Sleigh Ride to Cadboro Bay



i. On Dallas Road



Maggie, 1897

AFTER READING JACK'S letter, Maggie sank into deep despair.

Of course, when Jack received her letter, he would think it was a response to his, not knowing she'd sent it before his had even arrived. He would think her rude and unfeeling to make no mention of his sick mother and it caused her grief that he should think ill of her.

She immediately sent him another letter expressing concern for his mother's illness and understanding for his situation.

But aside from the lack of sympathy, her first letter was, in a sense, a response to his. He wanted her to come to him and she had decided she couldn't leave her mother and grandmother.

She read Jack's letter aloud to them.

"You've always wanted an adventure," Mama had said, "and now here's your chance. Imagine travelling by train across North America! Imagine the sights you'll see! And then an ocean voyage! Why, you'll be a world traveller just like Miss O'Reilly, just as you've always wanted."

"You make it sound so wonderful, Mama. Perhaps you'd like to come with me?"

"Oh, I could never leave your granny at home alone. She's well enough now, but with her advanced years, she may need me soon."

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"Dinna use me as an excuse to stay at home, Lucinda. I can look after myself."

"Perhaps you'll come too, Granny. Jack says you're both welcome and you said you've always wanted to go home."

Granny looked wistful. "Aye, but London's not my home, Scotland is. Besides, the time for going home is long past."

"You know," Mama said, "how your granny's been pining for Scotland all her life. Well, I wouldn't want to go somewhere so far away and end up pining for Victoria till the end of my days. But you ought to go alone, Maggie."

Maggie broke down and cried.

Mama looked distraught. "What's the matter, dear?"

"I've made up my mind. I could never leave you and Granny. I'd miss you both too much."

"But if you love him, you should go to him. Mam and I'll be just fine here without you."

"I hardly know him at all," she said. "Besides, he's chosen his mother over me."

But she couldn't fault him for being a loving and devoted son. She only loved him the better for it.

* * *

This time, she waited patiently for his reply, having learned her lesson about letters crossing en route.

Finally, his reply to both letters arrived. He suggested in a stumbling sort of way, that, if she didn't mind, if she had the patience, perhaps they could go on writing each other until one of their situations changed.

He wrote: "I cannot ask you to continue in a betrothal that may last for years. Perhaps, if you do not mind, we could go on writing as friends. Your letters cheer me so."

His words touched her heart and she sent him another letter. She was equally vague about their situation. It was a sensitive matter. She didn't want to bind him to an agreement that required him to hope for the death of his mother. She decided that they should continue their correspondence as friends. She wanted to cheer him.

So, her letter was full of the excitement of the Victoria celebrations for the Queen's Diamond Jubilee. For the occasion, there were to be special illuminations all along the coast and a beach bonfire on Dallas Road.

Mama insisted they go.

"The first time I met your father," she told Maggie, "we walked along that beach. It holds special memories for me. I'm sure we can find someone to stay with your granny."

"I'm nae invalid," Granny said, "and besides, I want to come with you. I want to pay my respects to the Queen as well."

Maggie knew the reason they both continued to wear black so long after their husbands' deaths was because the Queen did so.

"But Mam," Mama said, "you can't walk all that way and we can't afford to hire a carriage for you."

"I'll ask the O'Reillys if we might use theirs," Maggie suggested. "I've never asked them for anything in all the years I've worked for them."

"But," Mama asked, "won't they be going themselves?"

"Well," Maggie replied, "there's no harm in asking."

"If you dare, my dear," Mama said.

Maggie dared and didn't expect to be refused, but the O'Reillys *were* going themselves. There wasn't enough room in their carriage for even one more person. Mrs. O'Reilly was so sorry to have to say no to Maggie that she offered to hire a carriage for Maggie's family.

"It would be so much better for you if you could all travel together at your leisure. I'll hire Winters' if you just tell me at what time you want them to call for you."

"That's so generous and kind, Mrs. O'Reilly. Thank you."

"It's the least I can do. You've been such a loyal servant for so long and your mother has made me many beautiful gowns over the years. It's my pleasure to give back a little."

* * *

The Winters' carriage, a large barouche with two stout horses, arrived at their door on the evening of the 22nd of June. Maggie spotted the coach out the window and called her mother and Granny to come. As she went out the door, the coachman jumped down from his seat and walked up the path to meet her. It was Maggie's old friend, Terence the groom, looking as handsome as ever.

"Terence!" she cried. "It's so good to see you after so many years! How've you been?"

"It's a pleasure to see you as well, Maggie."

"You're a driver now, I see."

"Yes, it's quite a promotion for me." He looked very pleased with himself.

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The four-seated coach was open to the elements but had a foldable hood in case of rain. It was drawn by two large horses that Maggie eyed with suspicion.

"Are you sure," she asked fearfully, "you can handle such large beasts?"

Terence laughed. "Of course! Percherons are sweet-natured creatures."

Mama and Granny came out of the house and walked down the path.

"This is my mother and grandmother," Maggie said. "Terence used to be a groom at the O'Reillys. You met him at the Gorge Regatta once."

"Where are you going this evening, ma'am?" he asked her mother, all business.

"Where everyone is going," she replied. "To the bonfire on the beach and to see the illuminations for the Diamond Jubilee."

Terence helped the three of them into the carriage. Maggie kept her gaze on the scenery and tried to ignore the sturdy horses as they plodded down Cormorant Street and turned onto Government Street. From there, it was a long ride through town, across the James Bay Bridge and down to the sea at Dallas Road. Maggie grew accustomed to the slow, steady gait of the horses and was no longer nervous by the time they arrived. Spectators stood along the roadway looking down at the bonfire on the beach.

Terence found a spot for their carriage, parked it and descended to open the door for them.

Mama said, "My mother cannot stand for a long time. Is it all right if we stay in the carriage to watch the bonfire and the fireworks?"

"Of course," Terence replied. "There's a lap robe if you get cold."

"But I'd like to go down," Maggie said, "to be closer to the fire."

"I'll escort you." Terence offered her his hand.

Maggie looked at her mother, who nodded stiffly. She took his hand and stepped out of the coach.

The sun was low on the horizon as they walked down the beach, carefully stepping over rocks and driftwood logs. They stopped about ten feet away from the fire, unable to get closer because of the crowd. But even at that distance, the enormous bonfire gave off so much heat their faces grew red and hot.

"I thought for sure," Terence said, "you'd be married by now, Maggie."

"Why, because you thought I was desperate for a husband?"

"No, of course not. I thought you'd be married because you're quite the looker."

Maggie would have blushed if her face wasn't already red.

"I never suspected you thought so. In fact, you seemed quite uninterested in me."

"Well, I was a foolish boy at the time," he said. "I've since regretted that fact. Perhaps you'll consider stepping out with me now, Maggie?"

Invitations 'to step out' had been few and far between in Maggie's experience, so she was reluctant to say no. Jack was far away in England and who knew when or if he would be back again? What could it hurt to go to a dance with a handsome young man on her arm? But would it be fair to Terence? She would be toying with his affections and might even end up breaking his heart for her own pleasure. She'd never thought of him as a serious young man and, if she let him know that it was just for a little fun, what could it possibly hurt to go out with him? Perhaps she should test the waters to see how deep they were.

"Well," she said, "perhaps an outing would be fun."

"Great! Do you still work at the O'Reillys?"

She nodded.

"And you still have Sundays off?"

"Yes. It would have to be after church, of course."

"Of course," he said. "I'll take you for a swim on Sunday if you wish. You do swim, don't you?"

"Yes," she said, chuckling to herself. *A swim will certainly test the waters.*

"Great. Then, I'll call for you at two o'clock on Sunday."

The sun had sunk below the horizon while they'd been talking and it was getting dark enough for the fireworks to begin. Terence escorted Maggie back to the coach in time to watch the display. She stood outside with Terence.

"You're not getting back in, Maggie?" Mama asked disapprovingly.

"No," she replied. "I can see better out here."

They watched in awe as the lights exploded in the twilight sky.

Afterwards, Terence helped her back into the carriage. Maggie noticed that Granny was shivering even though she had a shawl wrapped tightly around her shoulders and a blanket on her lap. She put her arm around Granny.

Maggie noticed they were taking a different route home. They were driving down Menzies Street instead of Carr Street.

"Why are you going this way?" Mama asked Terence.

"Wait and see," Terence said.

As the carriage came up to the newly built Parliament building, they noticed a glow from the as-yet-unopened edifice. When they turned onto Belleville, Maggie gasped. All around the outline of the building, little lights glowed with a steady and unblinking flame.

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"They're electric lights," Terence said, stopping the horses so they could look at the display.

"What a marvel!" Mama exclaimed.

"But," Granny asked, "will not the building catch fire with so many lights on it?"

"No," Terence replied rather indignantly. "We've truly entered a great new age of electricity."

"Well, I dinna... do not think much of this 'electric' stuff," Granny grouched. "Our electric streetlights are no better than the gas ones were and they cost a pretty penny!"

"Oh, Mam!" Mama sounded exasperated. "Why don't you just enjoy the wonder of it?"

At last, Maggie found the words to speak. "It's beautiful and I'm sure it's worth every pretty penny, if only for this one night of beauty."

"I think they're going to be on every night," Terence said, "not just tonight."

"Oh my!" Mama exclaimed.

Granny tsked her disapproval. "Let's move on," she said.

Maggie kept her eyes on the electric lights for as long as she could see them. When they were no longer in view, she turned her eyes to the front and looked at Terence. She wondered if she'd made a mistake accepting his invitation. She should tell him she'd changed her mind before they reached home, but she couldn't bring herself to do so in front of Mama and Granny and home arrived much too soon.

She said goodbye to Terence with some doubts, unsure that she'd made the right decision.

The Sleigh Ride to Cadboro Bay



ii. Sleighing



Lucy, 1878

IT WAS A cold December day, but the sun shone. A crisp clean white layer of snow covered the mud of the streets.

Little Maggie with her pink cheeks laughed delightedly. She picked up a mittenful of the white stuff and threw it into the air. It landed on her woollen tuque, turning the pom-pom into a snowball. A flake or two landed on her face and glistened in the sunlight, then melted into tears. Her expression turned to one of surprise as she shook the sodden woollen mittens off her hands and started to cry.

Robert grasped her two red hands in his and rubbed them together.

“Lucy,” he said, “do you have a fresh pair of mittens for Maggie? It won’t do to start out on our adventure with wet ones.”

Lucy called to her mother who was watching them from the doorway. “Can we have another pair of mittens for Maggie?”

Mam shook her head in disapproval but went inside and came back with another pair.

“Thank you, Mam,” Lucy said, taking them from her. Then she said to Maggie, “It’s a good thing Granny has knitted you so many, isn’t it? Granny looks stern but she loves you very much.”

Once Maggie had her new mittens on, it was time to embark on their adventure. Robert had seen the snow in the morning and declared it the

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perfect weather for a sleigh ride. Lucy had never been on a sleigh ride before.

"Well, we must put that to rights," Robert had declared. "When I was a boy, we took sleigh rides every snowy winter's day."

"But then you had a carriage to make into a sleigh," Lucy had replied. "We didn't and we don't."

"We'll simply have to hire one then," he'd said. "We'll go down to Victoria Transfer and get our own sleigh for a day."

Mam had protested the waste of money even after Robert insisted he could afford it. Finally, she'd said she would stay home; someone had to be there in case their sleigh got upset. Lucy would have been angry at her mother's bad temper if it hadn't meant that she and Robert and Maggie would have their fun together without her mother's frowning face to put even more of a chill on the cold day.

So off they went in their hired one-horse open sleigh.

"Where are we going?" Lucy asked.

"You'll see." He turned to Lucy. "I know exactly where we should go."

Robert drove up Fort Street past the new two-storey brick Central School. Lucy smiled as they passed. The school accepted girls so Maggie would have a more promising future than Lucy's.

* * *

The old trail led through the forest where the trees wore gowns of sparkling blue-tinged white, a colour no fabric could ever imitate. The sky was a brilliant cerulean blue. The air itself was charged with electricity so that every sound crackled and snapped crisp to the ear.

Robert urged the dappled grey horse faster and the sleigh flew with the softest swoosh across the snow, following in the ruts of those that had gone before.

Lucy held on to her hat with one hand, grasping Maggie tightly with the other. The girl's face was rapt with joy as the cold wind whipped it red. Lucy felt that same breathless joy, but mingled with a nameless fear, especially when their sleigh caught up with another slower one.

"Shall I overtake it?" Robert cried, obviously having fun.

"Be careful." She imagined the sleigh flying through the air if it left the ruts at such breakneck speed. "You don't want to upset the sleigh with Maggie in it."

Robert looked at them and smiled. He gave the horse a tighter rein.

"Whoa," he said. "We must not upset Mama and Maggie." Then he turned to Maggie, as the horse cantered peacefully behind the other sleigh. "That was fun, wasn't it?"

Maggie nodded, the pom-pom on her woollen tuque bobbing up and down.

"Even Mama enjoyed it, didn't you?"

Now that Lucy's heart cantered at a slower pace along with the horse's, she had to admit to herself the speed had been exhilarating, if almost too terrifying.

"No," she said. "Not really. But where are we going?"

"You'll soon see."

She felt more at ease now that she could enjoy the scenery around them again. The silence of the forest was broken by the laughter and chatter of the occupants of the sleigh in front of them, so Lucy started to sing to Maggie, who joined in with her mother.

They had only just started the second verse of "Jingle Bells" when their destination came into view. It was the ocean but from a different view than Lucy had ever seen before. Instead of the long white wall of the Olympic Mountains, there was one lone peak, much bigger and whiter and shaped in a perfect cone with jagged peaks below it.

"What is that?" she said, enthralled.

"Cadboro Bay," Robert said.

"No, I mean the mountain."

"That's a volcano," he said. "It's Mount Baker."

"A volcano! I didn't know we had a volcano so near us. Is there any danger of it erupting?"

"Well, it isn't that near. It's miles away in the United States. And it seems peaceful enough. Never even let off a puff of smoke, to my knowledge."

"Well, that's a blessing anyway. It's beautiful, isn't it, Maggie?"

Maggie was clamouring to get down so she could play on the beach.

"Yes," Robert said, "let's get down and walk a bit."

He lowered Maggie to the ground. He turned to help Lucy too, but she urged him to go after their child, who was already running toward the shore. As he ran to catch Maggie, Lucy got herself to the ground and tied the horse to the hitching post.

Her family had never had horses, so she'd scarcely ever tied a horse up before. She tried to remember how best to do it. Her first attempt failed and she tried again. She could hear Robert calling her from the shore. She wrapped the leather strap around the hitching post and tucked it under once and then again. Then, she gave it a good tug and

it held. It would do. The horse was not likely to wander away and they wouldn't be far, she thought as she walked towards the shore.

Walking on the beach with Robert brought back so many memories, even though the sand was covered in crisp snow. And the memories were enriched by the presence of their child. Lucy thought she'd never been so happy in her life. Even her fingertips tingled with pleasure, though perhaps that was just the cold.

"Sir," a stranger cried, running up to them, "your horse is getting away!"

Robert and Lucy both looked back and, sure enough, their horse had managed to disentangle Lucy's less than adequate knot and was now dragging the empty sleigh back toward the trail.

Robert dropped Maggie's hand and ran after it as fast as he could run.

"Hurry," the stranger urged Robert on, "before he hits the trail. He'll take off like a jackrabbit then."

Lucy picked up Maggie's hand and watched with concern as Robert slipped on the icy snow, fell, picked himself up and continued to run. He grabbed the back of the sleigh but the horse just dragged him along with it. Clutching the sleigh tightly, he made his way over to the runners and followed them around to the side. Then he pulled himself onto the sleigh just as the horse came to the head of the trail.

Lucy prayed he would be able to reach the reins but they had fallen and were being dragged. She could hear him shouting "Whoa!" as he lunged onto the horse's back.

For a second, she thought he had made it, then she watched him tumble off. The runners of the sleigh hit him, sending him flying into the ditch at the side of the road. The horse bolted with the sleigh careening wildly behind it.

Lucy's heart stopped beating. The blood rushed from her head to her feet. She heard a rushing sound like the ocean in her ears and fell to the ground.

"Mama, Mama!" Maggie screamed.

It woke Lucy from her torpor. She sat up and saw two men rushing to her husband's aid. The white started to creep into the corners of her vision again, so she put her head down between her knees till the blood came back. She had to recover herself for the sake of her child, for the sake of her husband.

A woman came over to help her. "Are you all right, ma'am?" she asked.

Lucy nodded, unable to speak.

"Mama!" Maggie cried.

"Yes, dear," the woman said. "We'll help your mama. Can you walk, ma'am?"

Lucy felt the blood slowly fill her face again. She nodded.

"My husband. Is he all right?"

"I honestly don't know. But my husband and that other gentleman are looking after him. They're lifting him into a sleigh now and they'll take him to the hospital. If you can manage to get into our sleigh, we'll follow them. Shall we?"

Lucy nodded again.

The kind woman helped her to stand and get to the sleigh. Then she lifted Maggie into the back and Lucy climbed in beside her.

The woman's husband came back to drive them.

"How is my husband?" Maggie asked. "Is he all right?"

"I'm sorry, ma'am. I can't say. He's not conscious, but Harry will get him to the hospital in no time. We'll follow."

Maggie clutched her mother's hand. Lucy never took her eyes off the sleigh in front of them.

They arrived at the Royal Hospital at the foot of Pandora after what had seemed an eternity. As soon as the sleigh came to a stop, Lucy hopped down and started toward her husband's sleigh, but the driver stopped her.

"No," he said. "You stay with your daughter. Shield her from the sight."

He got down and went to help carry Robert into the hospital. Lucy, wondering if he was still alive, watched as the two men carried her husband unconscious through the door. Surely, they wouldn't be so careful about a body. But perhaps they were doing it for her benefit and they wouldn't let her see him for the same reason.

"Papa?" Maggie said.

Lucy was brought back abruptly to her duty to shield her daughter, who was staring at the door of the hospital.

"He's had a fall, dear," Lucy said. "They're taking him to see the doctor now."

Lucy couldn't take her daughter through the door. She could scarcely stand the thought of going through herself. It was only about four or five blocks to walk home, where she could leave Maggie with her mother, but she didn't dare leave her husband. She had to know what had happened to him and if he would be all right.

"Are you going to go in?" the woman in the carriage asked.

"Yes, but I'd rather not take Maggie in there. Would you mind taking her home for me, please? It's not very far and my mother is there to look after her."

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The woman didn't answer immediately but seemed to size Lucy up. "Please, ma'am," Lucy begged.

"Of course," the woman replied at last. "A hospital is no place for a child. I'll take her. Please let my husband know where I've gone."

Lucy gave the woman her address and thanked her. Then she steeled her courage to walk through the door. Behind her, she could hear Maggie crying "Mama!" She glanced back and saw the woman driving away with Maggie in the sleigh.

Inside, she saw no sign of her husband and the men who had brought him in. An official-looking gentleman was sitting behind a desk, so she went to him.

"Where have they taken my husband, sir?"

"Is your husband the man who had the sleigh accident?"

"Yes. Is he all right?"

"I don't know, ma'am, but before you go in to the waiting room, I need some particulars." He picked up a pen and straightened a piece of paper on his desk. "What's the name of the patient?"

Lucy gave her husband's name and their address. Then she stepped toward the door.

"Just a moment," the man said. "What is your relationship to the men who brought your husband in?"

"No relationship," she answered impatiently. "They're just kind strangers. May I go in now?"

The clerk nodded and Lucy went through the door, half-hoping to see Robert there lying on a bed, smiling at her.

But her husband was not there. It was just a waiting room and the two men who rescued her husband were sitting on two of the simple wooden chairs that were placed along the walls. They stood up as she entered.

"I'm Mr. Cameron," her driver said, extending his hand. "And this is my brother-in-law, Mr. Phipps."

"Mrs. Macaulay," she murmured as she shook their hands. "Is there any word yet on my husband's condition?"

Mr. Cameron shook his head.

"How was he on the sleigh?" she asked Mr. Phipps. "Did he regain consciousness? Did he speak at all?"

"No, ma'am," Mr. Phipps said. "He didn't wake up on the trip here."

"Is he still alive?"

"He was breathing when we brought him in."

Lucy felt the blood rushing from her head again.

"Why don't you sit down, Mrs. Macaulay?" Mr. Phipps suggested.

She sat down in the closest chair. It was rigidly straight-backed and uncomfortable.

"Are you all right, ma'am?" Mr. Cameron asked. "Perhaps we should call a doctor for you?"

It took her a moment to gain control of her breathing.

"No, I'll be fine," she said, finally.

"Is my wife with your daughter?" Mr. Cameron asked.

"Yes," Lucy said, "Mrs. Cameron has taken Maggie home where my mother will look after her. Your wife said she'd be back for you soon."

Mr. Phipps stood up. "I should report the runaway sleigh to the police."

"Oh," Lucy said. "Would you, sir? We rented it from Victoria Transfer."

"Yes, of course."

"And thank you for conveying Robert here."

"It's nothing," he said, pausing. "I hope he's all right."

Then he left.

The room was as bleak as Lucy's emotions. There were no windows. A gas lantern hanging from the ceiling cast its ghostly light on the whitewashed plaster walls. Out of the corner of her eye, Lucy glimpsed the shadow of a woman's body on the wall beside her. She turned to examine it. Whoever had plastered the wall had done a poor job and the sweep of the trowel's blade had left lines that looked like a woman's curvaceous body and, above that, long flowing hair covering where her face should be. The faceless woman disturbed her and she turned back to Mr. Cameron.

"Do you have the time?" she asked. There was no way to tell the hour in the windowless room.

He pulled out his pocketwatch.

"A little after noon," he said.

She'd thought for sure it was much later. The moments seemed to be creeping by.

Mrs. Cameron arrived.

"Your daughter," she said to Lucy, "is with your mother now, ma'am."

"Thank you. You can call me Mrs. Macaulay."

"Has there been any word about your husband's condition?"

Lucy shook her head and tried to choke back tears.

"You have both been so kind," she said. "Please don't stay if you have somewhere else you need to be."

"We wouldn't dream of leaving you alone in such a situation, Mrs. Macaulay," she said, sitting down beside her husband. "Where is Harry?"

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Her husband answered but Lucy was not interested in any further small talk. She went back to examining the woman on the wall. Lucy imagined she was weeping behind her long hair. She could almost hear the woman's sobs.

"Mrs. Macaulay?"

A man in a white coat stood in the doorway.

"Yes." She jumped to her feet. "How is my husband? Will he be all right?"

"We don't know that," the doctor said. "He's suffered a most severe head injury and hasn't regained consciousness."

Mrs. Cameron gasped. Her husband put his hand on her arm and shook his head.

"You ought to go home," the doctor said. "Perhaps we'll know more in the morning."

Lucy couldn't stand the thought of leaving him but also couldn't stand another moment in the waiting room. Besides, she needed to see Maggie and reassure her.

The kind couple took her home where she endured her mother's questions as best she could.

The Carriage Ride to Cadboro Bay



i. At the Beach



Maggie, 1897

“ARE YOU SURE that this outing is such a good idea?” Mama asked as she combed Maggie’s hair. “Are you not still betrothed to Mr. Robertson?”

“Our situation is not at all clear, Mama. He said he would not bind me to an engagement that may prove too long.”

Maggie felt a little guilty that she did not have time to write and clarify her situation with Jack before she stepped out with someone else.

“Dinna pester the poor girl, Lucinda,” Granny interrupted. “What harm will it do if she goes out with this young man? She has little enough...”

Granny started coughing and did not stop for a few minutes.

“You should be in bed.” Mama put the back of her hand on her mother’s forehead. “You’re warm. Let’s get you to bed with a hot toddy.”

“Dinna fuss, Lucinda,” Granny said, but she went willingly.

Maggie was relieved that her mother’s fussing had moved to a different object, though she was sorry it was on account of Granny’s cold. She’d been ill ever since their trip to the Queen’s Jubilee celebration the week before.

Mama was still in the bedroom tending to Granny when Terence knocked at the door. Maggie picked up her bag, called “Goodbye” to the upstairs bedroom and left with him.

House of Crows

Mama had made her feel guilty but Granny had supported her. She was just going to have a little fun and what was wrong with that?

Outside, Maggie was surprised to see a horse and buggy. Somehow, she'd been imagining the sturdy coach they'd ridden in the week before.

Terence misinterpreted her surprise. "Isn't it a beauty!" he said. "And it's all mine."

He helped her up into his one-horse shay. To Maggie, it seemed rather flimsy with four big thin wooden wheels, just a seat perched on a box and no top to protect them from the summer sun. She glanced nervously at the horse prancing and chomping at the bit.

"You look swell," Terence said. "I hope you're ready for some fun. This trap is built for speed."

He gave the reins a flip and the horse lunged forward, giving Maggie's heart a flip with the sudden movement.

"Where are we going?" she asked.

"Cadboro Bay," he said. "I hope you have your bathing costume with you."

"Yes," Maggie said, indicating the large bag that she'd placed on the floor of the box. "But I've never been to Cadboro Bay."

"What! Never? That's impossible. Where do you go swimming then?"

"It's rare that we go swimming, but when we do, we usually go out to the Arm. Sometimes on hot days, I might even cool my feet off the dock at Point Ellice House."

"Tame waters," Terence said. "Well, hold on."

They came to the Cadboro Bay Road at the edge of town. Maggie held onto her hat and the edge of her seat as Terence loosened the horse's reins. The horse cantered and the carriage bounced on its springs along the bumpy road, carrying them out into the countryside where Maggie had never ventured before.

She was nervous. It wasn't the speed that bothered her so much — the streetcar went faster than this carriage did — as long as she could remember, she'd been afraid of horses. She hoped Terence was in control of the beast in front of them. She held on and tried to enjoy the ride, but it seemed to go on forever. She kept imagining the horse suddenly breaking into a gallop and the carriage overturning. Terence sat beside her, looking nonchalant while she fretted inexplicably.

At last, they arrived at the beach. Maggie was relieved as Terence helped her down and away from the carriage. He didn't seem to notice how she was shaking. She would try to put the return journey out of her mind. Otherwise, she wouldn't be able to enjoy the occasion at all.

While he secured the horse, she looked around and saw the solitary white mountain across the water from them, looking crisp and clean against the blue sky.

"Is that Mount Baker?" she said. She'd heard of it from Mama and even glimpsed it in the distance on the odd occasion from second-storey windows but had never seen it so prominent before. "It's beautiful."

They walked to the edge of the shore, where the waves sang their rhythmic song against the sands. The sound calmed Maggie. She took off her shoes and lifted her skirt to test the water. It was cold, as cold as the water at Dallas Road. She wondered that anyone would think it swimmable. And the day wasn't nearly warm enough to put on her bathing costume for this.

Terence rolled up his pants and joined her, wading in the water. He looked back at her, smiled, then bent over and splashed her.

Maggie was startled.

"How dare you? You'll ruin my dress."

She started to walk back out of the water.

"Surely a little water won't hurt it." He started to laugh. "Look, the back of your dress is dragging in the water."

She looked behind her and saw her hem was soaking wet. Then she bent down and scooped a great swath of water up and towards him. She didn't even look to see if she'd splashed him but waddled her way out of the water with as much dignity as she could muster. He was behaving like a child, just like the boys who used to tease the girls in the schoolyard, and she'd had nothing to do with them then. Why should she now?

At the shore's edge, Maggie picked up her shoes and walked up the beach, gingerly stepping on the rocks and over some driftwood. She came to a log large enough to sit down on and put on her shoes. Terence arrived right behind her.

"Are you angry?" he asked.

"Yes," she said. "You splashed me and I'm not in my bathing costume."

"Well, get in it then," he said. "I'll go put mine on."

He started walking toward the movable hut.

"I want you to take me home," she said.

"But it's a beautiful day. The weather's perfect. Look at the view! How can you want to go home?"

Maggie looked around. Though she knew she'd never been here before, she felt as if she had. And even though the sun was shining, she felt a strange coldness under her skin and a nagging fear. She supposed the fear might have been left over from the experience of the carriage ride.

House of Crows

"I want you to take me home and I want you to drive slowly. I'm not used to all this bouncing around. I'm wet and cold and I want to go home."

"You're a right wet blanket, you are. Your dress is just a little damp at the bottom. It'll dry soon enough. But if you want to go home, I'll take you. I've no wish to spend the day with someone who doesn't know how to have any fun."

Perhaps he was right. She was acting like a sullen little girl and she had meant to have a good time.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I guess I'm not very good at having fun. Mama packed us a picnic snack and a little food in my belly might put me in a better humour."

Terence smiled a smile that melted her cold heart. Perhaps the rest of the afternoon could be salvaged after all. So they ate and talked about the bonfire, the fireworks and the lights on the Parliament buildings. They laughed and Maggie started to relax and enjoy herself a little. The warm sun dried the hem of her dress but did not warm her enough for her to want to put on her bathing costume. Instead, she watched as Terence frolicked in the waves alone. He was handsome and a great deal of fun to be with, she thought. He smiled and waved at her. She waved back.

She felt that she might be seduced by his charms if she didn't feel so guilty about cheating on Jack. But why should she feel guilty?

There was something heavy and dark inside of her, something she could not understand.

* * *

On the way home, Terence tried to invite her on another outing.

"We could go riding together," he suggested excitedly.

How could she tell him she'd never ridden a horse before? It was something everyone did in Victoria. Even if you didn't own a horse, you knew someone who did. On weekends, people went riding out in the countryside, but Maggie had never wanted to go.

"No," she said. "I don't like riding."

He looked at her as if she had two heads.

"Well, I'm in a steeplechase this Saturday. Perhaps you'd like to come and watch me race."

She couldn't think of anything she'd rather do less than that. "I don't think so. Besides, I still work on Saturdays."

"But not Saturday evening surely. We could go to the Victoria Theatre and see the production of *Pirates of Penzance* Saturday evening. Would you like that?"

Edeana Malcolm

Now this sounded more like something she would enjoy.

“All right,” she said. “I’d like that.”

So, they set a date for the following Saturday. When Terence left her at her door, she thanked him profusely but turned her head away when he tried to kiss her.

The Carriage Ride to Cadboro Bay



ii. Nursing Robert



Lucy, 1878

LUCY BARELY SLEPT that night and when she did, she had a nightmare about the sobbing, faceless woman. She returned to the hospital bright and early the next morning. Robert was awake and they let her go in to see him. She could hardly restrain herself from jumping onto the bed and throwing her arms around him. She settled for bending over and giving him a kiss. He looked like an animal caught in a trap.

"Lucy," he said, "I cannot move anything but my head."

"But at least you're alive!" she cried. "And I'm sure it'll get better." Lucy was not at all sure. "What does the doctor say?"

"He doesn't know. He says we'll have to wait and see."

"Are you in any pain?"

"The doctor," he said, "has given me laudanum."

* * *

She visited him every day and, every day, he was exactly the same. Two weeks later, they sent him home. Lucy made a bedroom on the first floor beside the kitchen. It was supposed to be a maid's bedroom but they had never had a maid and Mam had been staying in it. Now, she moved upstairs and Lucy and Robert set up their room there. It was a

House of Crows

convenient location for her to nurse him during the day. Truth be told, she was glad to get out of the room where her babies had died.

Robert had some limited use of his arms, but he couldn't move from his chest down to his toes. He said his hands felt like blocks at the ends of his arms. There was no feeling in them. Every day, he lay in pain. He needed a full-time nurse and Lucy insisted on staying home to look after him. She fed him and cleaned him. She changed his clothes when they needed washing, but it was such a painful, laborious process that Robert spent most of his time in his nightshirt.

* * *

In the morning, Mam and Lucy propped Robert to a sitting position on the bed. He rarely left the bed now because it was so much trouble for them to get him into a chair and back again. Then Mam went out to bring him his breakfast on a tray.

Robert could move his arms without any trouble and, every morning, he tried to pick up a spoon to feed himself. This morning was no different. He couldn't get his fingers to wrap around the spoon. He sighed.

"Perhaps tomorrow," Lucy said.

He glared at her. She picked up the spoon to feed him.

"But who's looking after the shop," Robert asked, "while you're here playing nursemaid?"

"I've closed it for the time being," she said, scooping up a mouthful of porridge from the bowl. "Until you're well again."

The doctor had said that he never would be, but she had chosen to ignore him.

"You should go to the shop, dear," Robert suggested, "and hire someone to look after me."

"No one else will care for you as I will," she said, bringing the spoon to his lips.

Lucy needed to stay with him always, to be his legs and somehow make up for what she'd done. It was her fault that the horse hadn't been tied securely.

He chewed and swallowed.

"Well then, hire someone to run the shop," he said. "And what about Maggie? Who's looking after her while you're always here with me?"

"Mam," she said.

"But we'd agreed your mother is too strict."

"Mam loves her and that's all that matters."

Days passed and, just as the doctor had said, he didn't get better. Lucy knew she had to do something about the shop. She had enough to do with managing her husband and mother and child but didn't want anyone else in their shop selling their products. It was their shop, hers and Robert's, and she didn't want to work all by herself there either, not without him.

Her heart wasn't in it anymore, so she convinced Robert that they should sell the shop.

The Victoria Transfer Company had sent them a bill for the cost of the horse they'd had to put down and the damage done to the sleigh. With that and the hospital bills to pay, there wasn't much money left after the sale to live on.

So Lucy resumed her sewing business. With mixed feelings, she hung out the old 'The Golden Thread' sign and went back to the work she'd always loved, though now she had to balance it with the demands of an invalid husband and a young child.

She set up the old treadle sewing machine in their new bedroom so she could keep an eye on Robert in case he needed anything. She was sitting there at work one afternoon, working on the first dress for a new client, when Maggie flounced in and interrupted her.

"Mama, Granny is so bossy. She says I have to eat all my dinner before I can have some pudding."

Lucy sighed. "Quiet, child. You'll wake your daddy."

"It's daytime," sassy Maggie replied. "He should be up."

"You must do as your granny says. Now, leave this room immediately and don't disturb me when I'm here."

Maggie stomped her feet and Robert woke up.

"I'm sorry she woke you, dear."

"I don't mind," he said.

"I want my pudding," Maggie stomped her feet in time to her demand.

"Mam," Lucy called, "come and fetch this child before I do something I'll regret."

Mam came into the room. "You mean like spanking her. I'll be happy to do it for you."

She swept Maggie into her arms.

"No," Robert gasped. "No one will lay a hand on her. She's only a child. Let her be."

"But she had no right to wake you!" Lucy cried.

"There'll be time enough for me to sleep when I'm dead."

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Mam looked from one to the other. "Well," she said. "I shall just take Maggie out, shall I? I willna spank her, Robert, though she's a cheeky bairn." Mam tickled Maggie. "Are you not?"

Maggie giggled and Mam carried her out of the room.

"There'll be no more talk of dying, Robert!" Lucy cried when they had gone. "Perhaps I should set up my sewing machine somewhere else so we won't disturb you."

"No," he said. "Listen to me, Lucy. I love to watch you when you're working. You have such an intense look on your face. When you look like that, I wouldn't want to disturb you for all the world. I'm surprised that Maggie has the temerity."

"I never thought before that Mam might be right about Maggie. We've always given in to her demands. Perhaps she needs a little more discipline so that she can learn to be considerate of others."

"Perhaps," Robert said, looking unconvinced. "But you'll see that your mother doesn't strike the child, won't you?"

"Of course, dear. Now, please let me know if you need anything. My first duty is to make sure you're cared for. Are you in any pain now? Do you need some laudanum?"

Robert shook his head, but she wondered if he was lying. He didn't complain often but sometimes he would wince in pain. Whenever she saw that, she would rush to the cabinet in the kitchen and prepare a beaker of laudanum. Lucy'd been surprised when her mother showed her how to prepare it, but then realized Mam must have learned it when nursing Papa. The doctor had prescribed ten to thirty drops depending on the severity of the pain. Whenever she saw his face screwed up in agony, she always put in thirty drops and urged him to drink it.

The doctor had said to use it sparingly lest the patient become addicted, but what did it matter if he would never be well again? Mam was concerned about the laudanum too. She was always cautioning Lucy to be careful about the dosage and not to give too much.

A Letter from London



i. Hosting the In-Laws



Lucy, 1878

LUCY WAS IN the parlour at the front of the house, taking a break while Robert slept, when she heard the arrival of a carriage on the street outside.

She looked out the window and was surprised to see Robert's mother and father alighting from a carriage. She tried to compose herself as they walked up the garden path to the door. She looked down and smoothed the front of her gown, checking to see if it was soiled.

"Mam," she called, "the Macaulays are here."

Her mother came from the kitchen where she had been baking with Maggie. They were both covered in flour.

"What?" she asked.

"The Macaulays are here. Take Maggie upstairs and clean yourselves up."

"Whatever could they want?" They had never visited before.

"I don't know."

There was a sharp rap at the door.

"Go on. Take her upstairs and clean her up."

She watched till they were no longer in sight or hearing, then she went to answer the door.

"Good morning," she said. "Come in."

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They said nothing but entered, filling up the entranceway so that it seemed tinier than it ever had.

"Let me take your coats," Lucy said. "Come into the parlour and have a seat."

They settled themselves on the sofa by the window and looked around the parlour, still without speaking. Lucy followed their gaze and saw dust and clutter she had never noticed before.

"Can I get you anything?" Lucy said, feeling at a loss. "Some tea or coffee, perhaps?"

Finally, Mr. Macaulay opened his mouth. "No, thank you. We didn't come to eat or drink."

"We heard that our son Robert," Mrs. Macaulay said with a catch in her voice, "was in an accident and that he's not well."

"He's sleeping now," Lucy said, "but I can wake him."

Mrs. Macaulay looked eager, but before she could answer, Mr. Macaulay leaned forward.

"No," he said. "Leave him sleep. We also know that you have closed Robert's business down."

He stared at her with his beady eyes.

She nodded. "That's so."

"And," he continued, "that you have a daughter."

"Yes. Her name is Margaret. Would you like to meet her?"

"Oh, yes," Mrs. Macaulay said.

Mr. Macaulay turned his severe gaze on his wife.

"In a moment," he said. "But perhaps we should tend to the business at hand first."

"What's that?" Lucy asked.

"Well, it seems to me that, what with Robert's illness and all, you can no longer provide for your daughter." He looked around the parlour again as if finding it wholly inadequate. "We propose to take her in and raise her ourselves."

Lucy jumped up, about to shout her objection, but just at that moment, Mam arrived with Maggie. They stood in the doorway to the parlour.

The Macaulays stared at their granddaughter.

"Oh," Mrs. Macaulay said. "How precious!"

Mrs. Macaulay opened her arms, but Lucy snatched Maggie up, hugging her tightly. How could they presume?

Mam was meeting Mr. Macaulay's fierce stare with her own.

"Did I hear you say you want to take my granddaughter away from us, sir?"

"You must see the sense of the proposition, ma'am. We have a great house and can provide her with so many more opportunities. What can you give her?"

"Love, sir. Lots of love."

"Well, of course," Mrs. Macaulay said. "She's our granddaughter too and we'll love her."

"As you have loved your son?" Mam said.

Mrs. Macaulay looked down at her hands. "And of course, you would be welcome to visit your granddaughter."

Mr. Macaulay scowled at his wife as if that had not been agreed to. He turned back to Mam. He evidently thought she was the one he should speak to.

"I can see you are a sensible woman. If you really love Margaret, you will consider her best interests."

Lucy looked at her mother, frightened that he would win her over with his mercenary arguments.

"You will not," Lucy said firmly, "take my daughter away from me."

She squeezed Maggie tighter. The girl squealed in protest. Lucy loosened her grip, but she wiggled free and ran to her granny.

"May we see our son, now?" Mrs. Macaulay asked. "He should have some say in this decision."

"Yes," Lucy said, "of course."

She led the way through the kitchen, past all the mess that Mam and Maggie had left behind with their baking. She tapped at the door of his room.

"Robert," she called. Then she turned to his parents. "Wait here while I wake him."

The small room was cluttered with her sewing materials. The sewing machine still had a gown draped over it. Lucy was afraid it would get stepped on with all the people soon to be in the room, so she scooped it up and stuffed it in the wardrobe. Then she opened the curtains to let in a little daylight. The room smelled stuffy, so she lifted the window sash to let in some air. Then she went to the bed and gently shook her husband till his eyes opened. He smiled at her. She did not smile back.

"What's the matter, love?" he asked.

"Your parents are here."

"What?"

"Your parents are here."

"What do they want?" He looked hopeful. "To reconcile?"

"To take Maggie away from us."

Someone knocked on the door.

House of Crows

"They're impatient," Lucy said.

She went to let them in. Maggie and Mam came in too.

"Perhaps you should take Maggie back to the kitchen to finish your baking, Mam."

Mam looked as if she were about to object.

"Maggie," Lucy whispered, "doesn't need to hear this conversation."

Reluctantly, Mam took Maggie's hand and went out again. Lucy closed the door. When she turned around, she saw that Mrs. Macaulay was standing over Robert, crying.

"My poor baby," she was saying. Suddenly her whole demeanour changed and she glared at Lucy. "Why is he still in his nightshirt?" she shouted. "It's the middle of the day! Why haven't you gotten him out of bed yet?"

Robert looked mortified. He looked at Lucy and seemed to draw courage from her fear.

"Lucy," he said flatly, "tells me you want to take Maggie away from us."

"You must see, son," Mr. Macaulay said, "that you can't afford to look after her. It really is for the best."

"You're right. I can't look after her, but Lucy has resumed her sewing business and her mother is looking after Maggie. If you really want what's best for us, you could give me my inheritance now so Lucy wouldn't have to work so hard. Then you'd earn the right to call me 'son'."

"I told you that if you married Lucy, you would lose your inheritance and yet you married her anyway."

"Then do not call me 'son' and do not come around here trying to take away what is mine."

"You're not being sensible, Robert," his mother said. "If you really loved Maggie as you say you do, you would do what's best for her."

"Do not," he said, "speak to me about love."

Though he spoke quietly, Lucy could see he was trembling with rage.

"I think my husband has spoken plainly," Lucy said, "and, as his nurse, I must insist that you do not tax him any further."

She went to the door and opened it.

"We could always take the matter to court," Mr. Macaulay said.

Mam appeared at the doorway in a rage.

"You willna do such a thing. If you dinna leave now, I'll call the police and have you thrown out."

Mrs. Macaulay bent down to kiss her son. Then she took her husband's arm and left the room.

"Mam," Lucy asked, "can you show them the door?"

"They *ken* where to find it," Mam replied. Then she went back to Maggie.

Lucy waited till she heard the front door close. Then she turned to her husband, worried how all this fuss was affecting him.

"Are you all right?" she asked.

His eyes were filled with tears, but he nodded.

"What if they take us to court?" Lucy cried. "What if we lose our Maggie?"

Mam came into the room, looking worried.

Robert shook his head. "Papa likes to threaten people, but he's never actually sued anyone. He's too cheap to pay for a lawyer."

Mam looked relieved. "He threatened to take John to court as well, but it never happened."

"So, you see, Lucy," Robert reassured her, "there's nothing to worry about."

Maggie came running into the room and Lucy scooped her up.

"And I willna let it happen," Mam said.

They took turns hugging Maggie and then each other.

A Letter from London



ii. At the Theatre



Maggie, 1897

MAGGIE PICKED UP the latest letter from Jack and started to read it again.

My Dearest Maggie,

I have just given Momma her medicine and she is asleep at last. She looks more peaceful than I have seen her in a long time, so I have left her side to come and write this letter.

My sisters take turns nursing Momma during the day. They used to bring their children with them, but now the grandchildren are too much for her to deal with. So they take turns looking after Momma and each other's children. I come in the evenings so that they may get home to their husbands. It is a pleasure for me to look after my mother, especially when I recall the years she looked after me. She was a loving and kind mother and managed to keep us in hand without over-use of the cane.

It is such a relief, though, to have a few moments to myself to write you this letter. I have not been as good a correspondent as I promised and, for that, I am sorry.

I think of you often and regret that we've had so little time to get to know each other. And yet, every time I've been with

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you, I've felt as though I've known you forever and you were the person I was meant to be with. I don't know if you feel the same way. I pray that you do and that somehow, some time, somewhere, we will be together again. That is my fondest hope.

"Maggie!" Mama called from downstairs. "Your young man is here." Maggie put down Jack's letter.

"I'll be right there," she called back.

My young man, indeed. How could she presume to go out with Terence after reading such a letter from Jack? She was ashamed of herself for thinking that she and Jack were no longer betrothed. He called her "the person he was meant to be with" and she felt the same way. Yet, while he was nursing his ailing mother, she was going out gallivanting with another man.

She looked at herself sheepishly in the mirror, tucked an errant curl back into her bun and walked down the stairs. Terence smiled up at her from the hallway. She wished he wasn't so good-looking.

Mama handed her an overcoat with a disapproving scowl.

"We won't be late," Maggie said, hoping to placate her.

"See that you're not," Mama said succinctly.

Maggie leaned over and gave her mother a peck on the cheek. "Good night," she said.

Mama closed the door behind them, still not once having smiled.

* * *

At the theatre, Maggie determined to put aside her worries and enjoy the show as they took their seats in the balcony. It was delightful musical theatre and the actors, most of whom had come from San Francisco, were excellent. At one particularly funny moment, Maggie glanced over to see if Terence was laughing as hard as she was. He was not looking at the stage, but rather at the audience below. She followed his gaze and saw two rows of women at the front of the theatre. One of the women was looking back up at him and smiling.

She glanced at him and saw he was smiling back.

Was she his sweetheart? Was he playing the field?

Maggie looked more closely. It was odd to see so many unaccompanied young women together out in public. Having grown up around dresses, Maggie could tell their gowns were expensive. Even though the gowns were modestly styled, there was something not quite right about their

appearance. Some of them were wearing paint; their lips and cheeks were red. Were they 'fancy ladies'? She'd heard about such women who sold themselves to men for evening entertainment. And if so, how did Terence know one of them?

Maggie felt deeply ashamed. She should not be out with such a man, not when her future husband was on the other side of the world caring for his ailing mother. She vowed she would not go out with Terence again. She would not.

After the show, he took her home, chatting all the way about the wonderful singing and dancing in the play. Maggie listened but said nothing. When they arrived in front of the house, Terence leaned over, put his arm around her and kissed her cheek unexpectedly. She pulled herself away from his embrace.

"I'm sorry, Terence, but you shouldn't entertain the wrong idea about me. I've had a lovely evening, but I don't wish to step out with you anymore. We have such different interests and I don't think we are suited to each other at all."

Terence looked at her blankly. "I'm not proposing marriage, Maggie. I just thought we could go out together and have a good time."

"Again, we have a different opinion about what a good time is. Thank you for this evening, but I must say 'good night' and 'goodbye'."

"I suppose you're right, Maggie. It seems to me you just have no idea how to have fun. Goodbye, then."

She waited a moment, then said, "Are you not going to help me down from the carriage?"

He sighed, then mumbled, "Thought you could do it yourself."

Then he got down, went around to her side of the carriage and offered his hand. She took it, alighted, said "good night" again and, without so much as a backward glance, went inside.

A Letter from London

iii. Robert's Request



Edie, 1880

ROBERT CALLED LUCY. Edie went into his room.

"Lucy's gone out to see a client," she said.

It was stale in the room, so she opened the curtains wide and threw up the window sash. She turned around and saw him squinting from the sudden brightness.

"Are you in pain? Can I fetch you anything?"

"Bring me the laudanum," he said.

"I'll fetch it for you," she said. "How many drops do you need?"

"Bring me the bottle," he said.

"You ken you canna do it by yourself," she said.

"Sit down," he said, "and look at me."

She sat down on the chair by his bed but still did not look at him. She had scarcely ever looked him in the eyes since Lucy had brought him home from the hospital.

"Look at me," he repeated.

So, she did. He looked back at her with the eyes of a rabbit caught in a trap.

"I want to die, Edie," he said.

That a once proud man had been brought to this! Such a good husband he'd been to her daughter.

"Have you," Edie asked, looking at her brown-spotted hands, "talked to Lucinda about this?"

"I can't. She would never even entertain the thought. She blames herself for my condition."

That was true.

"That's why I canna help you kill yourself. Lucinda loves you so much it would break her heart if you died."

"Better her heart than her body. Have you seen how tired she is? She is slowly killing herself with all the burdens on her."

"D'you think her labour will be less if you're not around?"

"Yes," he said. "It would be less difficult without me. She gives half a mind to her sewing and watches me like a hawk. She tries to meet my needs before I even have them. It's wearing her out. Besides, she has you to help her when I'm gone. Then she can give her whole heart to her work as she should. And to Maggie. Maggie deserves at least one parent who can care for her."

"What if your father makes good his threat and takes us to court? Who will fight for our Maggie?"

"That was a year ago. If he was going to do it, it would be done now. And besides, I know you would fight for her as hard as I would."

That was true. And it would be hard to bring his bed into a courtroom.

"So, what d'you want me to do?"

"Just leave the laudanum here on my side table," he said. "I'll manage to drink it myself. If you love her, you'll do it."

Edie thought about it. She did love Lucinda, but what he was suggesting would break her daughter's heart.

"If you die, she'll blame herself for your death. I canna bear to think how she'll suffer."

"I'll dictate a letter explaining that I did it myself and that she is not to blame."

"It doesna matter what you say in the letter," Edie said, "she will always blame herself and suffer because of it. And if I write the letter and then leave you the means of killing yourself, she'll blame me as well. I dinna think she'd ever forgive me for killing the man she loves." Even as she spoke, Edie realized it was true. "And if she throws me out and has no one to help her with the bairn, then she'll be in just as bad a state as she's in right now."

"But I want to die, Edie."

"Then you'll have to talk to your wife about it, Robert. You'll have to convince her, not me. I'm sorry, but that's just the way it has to be."

Edie looked at his downcast eyes, truly sorry she couldn't help him. A wave of guilt swept over her as she remembered how she'd killed her own husband. He hadn't even asked her for it and she'd done it anyway. This time, Robert was asking for it, but she knew it wasn't her place to do it. It was Lucy's and Lucy would never do it. Of that, she was certain.

"Now, I hear Maggie calling. Can I give you any laudanum before I go?"

He shook his head. "You could just leave it here," he said, his voice just a whisper.

"I canna do that," Edie said matter-of-factly, "but I'll make up your usual dose."

Another Letter from London



i. Shopping



Lucy, 1880

FOR DAYS, MAM had looked as though she wanted to say something to Lucy but said nothing.

Finally, Lucy could stand it no longer. She put Maggie to bed and came back to the parlour.

“What’s on your mind? You look as though you want to tell me something.”

Mam answered her question with another. “Has your husband said anything to you about his wishes?”

“His wishes for what?”

“He told me that he wished to die.”

The statement sat in the pit of Lucy’s stomach like a stone.

“He wishes to die,” she repeated, trying to make sense of the words.

“That canna be so much of a shock to you. Look at the life he’s leading. It’s torture for an active man like him.”

“But not to watch his daughter grow up, not to lie in bed with me...”

“To be in constant pain, to lie beside you and do nothing. Anyway, this is a conversation you should be having with him, not me.”

“Why did he speak to you? Why did he not speak to me?”

“He needs someone who can see his side of things, someone who can be tough when they need to be.”

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Tears welled up in Lucy's eyes and her voice cracked. "Does he think I can't see his side of things? Am I so selfish?"

"You've been a wee bit wrapped up in your own guilt since the accident. And he's afraid you'll feel even more guilt if you help him. That's why he asked me. But it isn't my place."

Lucy picked up her table napkin and dried her eyes.

"I should go and talk to him before he falls asleep."

She felt as though her insides had turned to liquid. She was afraid to talk to Robert because his words could pierce her thin skin and she would surely melt into tears. As she walked to the bedroom, she was fully determined to talk him out of his morbid state, to convince him as she had once done for her unborn child, that there was everything in the world to live for.

When she finally found the courage to go into the room, she saw that he was asleep. He looked so calm and peaceful that she didn't have the heart to wake him, so she pulled up a chair and watched him, turning over the things her mother had said to her. She tried to imagine what it must be like for him, to live out the rest of his life in this bed with his wife hovering over him, his daughter making the occasional brief visits before running off to play with someone or something more amusing.

She'd once spent nine months in bed waiting for Maggie to be born. It had been impossibly dull and boring even with the hope of a child at the end of it. Robert had only death to look forward to at the end of his confinement. And he had pain in the meantime. Lucy had felt the pain of labour many times, but the physical pain was always short-lived. When it was over, she didn't have to wait for another bout again and again.

The only time Robert was at ease was under the influence of laudanum. He complained that, though it was a peaceful sensation, sometimes it muddled his brain so that he didn't know where he was and could barely speak. It made him sleep, too, like now. Like a cat, he ate and slept and that was all.

She couldn't even imagine what it was like for him not to be able to use his hands and fingers. He put his arms around her when they slept at night but his hands still had no feeling in them. Together with Mam, she could sit him up or turn him on his side. Otherwise, he lay on his back and couldn't move. Though he felt humiliated by his situation, she had to convince him that he was not diminished in her eyes. She still loved him the same as she always had and couldn't bear to be without him.

If he wanted to die, she shouldn't be so selfish. She should let him die but couldn't. She didn't have the strength. It was just as her mother had said. She was good to a fault.

Lucy turned the dilemma over and over in her mind but couldn't come to a decision. Finally, she got into bed beside him. She lifted his arm up and wrapped it around her like a scarf. His eyes opened up but just stared at the ceiling. They lay together until Lucy gathered the courage to speak.

"Mam told me you wanted to die," Lucy said.

In the darkness, she couldn't see his face, but she heard him sigh.

"You're not thinking clearly."

"I'm *never* thinking clearly anymore. The laudanum muddies my thoughts."

"If you're not thinking clearly, dear, perhaps I should do the thinking for you."

He sighed again. "You're always thinking of me and for me, never of yourself and Maggie."

Lucy shifted onto her side to face him and he moved his arm down to his side. She could just make out his silhouette in the darkness.

"You think things will be better for me and for her if you aren't here? I would be grieving."

He finally turned his head toward her. "The grief will pass."

"How," she asked, "could my grief pass? I would never forget you. I would think of you and miss you every day."

She lifted his arm again and wrapped it around her shoulders. She snuggled closer and felt his warm body against hers.

"At least now we have these moments together when we can talk."

They had slept beside each other every night since they'd married almost ten years ago. Sometimes she couldn't tell where she ended and he began.

"We are one," she sobbed. "What would I be without you?"

It was a cry rather than a question and he didn't answer right away.

"I suppose," he said, his deep soft voice resonating in her chest, "I should just have patience. I shall die soon enough anyway. The doctor says people in my condition usually die from one complication or another — infected bedsores, heart ailments, breathing problems."

She imagined him becoming sicker and frailer until he faded away and died. He had been such a strong, virile man that it might take years for him to become the shrunken corpse her father had become. How could she let that happen to her husband if she loved him?

She took a deep breath, searching for the old familiar smell of him beneath the new odour of sickness that overlaid it.

House of Crows

"My arm is getting numb, Lucy, and it's the only part of me that I can feel."

She realized that he was asking her to release him.

"I'm sorry," she said.

She moved herself off his arm and turned away from him.

"I'll think about it," she said. "But I cannot promise you anything. I cannot bear to imagine my life without you."

She started to cry and tried to do it so that he wouldn't hear. But soon she was sobbing, her body heaving in spite of all her attempts to control it. She felt his hand lying like a stone on her shoulder and wished his fingers could caress her once more.

"It's all right," he said. "I'll give you time to think about it."

* * *

Lucy got up in the morning and decided to make Robert's day so special that he would change his mind about dying. She would make him a special meal with all his favourite foods. After breakfast, she picked up a basket and walked out, calling goodbye to her mother. As she walked down the street, her eyes were on the dust she was kicking up and her thoughts were back on the bed with her husband, reliving the awful conversation of last night. She tried instead to focus her thoughts on Robert's special day.

The first item on her list was salmon. This, Robert loved above any meat and, even though Lucy didn't especially like it, she would eat it today for his sake.

"Salmon!" a woman's voice shouted from the other side of the street.

Lucy looked up, startled from her reverie, curious to see who was reading her mind.

"Fresh salmon. Caught today!"

It was an Indian woman. They often sold foodstuffs on the side of the road. That this woman was selling salmon so near to her home on this day of all days was too lucky to be a coincidence. Lucy looked up and down Pandora for vehicles and then crossed the road.

The Indian woman was staring at her and Lucy felt a little uneasy under her stare.

"How much?" she asked.

The woman looked at her as if she recognized her. "Is your name Lucy?" she asked.

How could she know? Lucy looked at her more closely. Her face was pockmarked. She must have survived the smallpox epidemic back in

1862. But there was something familiar about the woman's eyes. She decided to take a chance on a vague memory.

"Sitlamitza?" she asked.

The woman's eyes lit up. "Yes," she said, "and you're Lucy."

It was the little girl she used to play with all those years ago at Maple Point. Lucy put her arms around her. The woman stiffened a little at the familiarity but was still smiling when Lucy released her again.

"Sitla," Lucy said.

"No one calls me that now."

"What do they call you?"

She looked down sheepishly. "My English name is 'Lucy'."

Lucy smiled. "You took my name! Well, you're welcome to it." She looked down at Sitla's basket. "How much is the salmon?"

Sitla bent down and took a great shining fish from her basket. She handed it to Lucy.

"Take it. It's yours."

"No, no."

Lucy took her change purse from her pocket and removed a quarter. She passed it to Sitla. Then Lucy took the fish and opened the wrapping to see how fresh it was.

"My husband caught it this morning," Sitla said.

"And my husband shall eat it this evening," Lucy responded.

Sitla smiled. "Do you have any children?" she asked.

"Just one daughter. What about you?"

"Oh, many," she said, laughing. "This will help to feed them." She held up the coin and then pocketed it.

Lucy remembered how often she'd eaten at Sitla's when they were children and how the only time she had invited Sitla, Lucy's mother had turned her away. She owed Sitla a meal and now she would provide it. It was her home and Mam couldn't interfere.

"Well," Sitla said, "I must go home to feed my children."

"No," Lucy said. "First, you must come to my house and have something to eat. I insist."

Sitla looked at her shyly. "No, I couldn't."

"You must," Lucy replied. "My house is not far. Just there." She pointed.

"All right," Sitla said.

Lucy smiled. "Good. You'll come with me. Mam is making a diet-loaf. I'm sure you'll like it."

"Your mother," Sitla asked, looking afraid, "is still alive?"

"Yes, but you needn't be concerned. She's old now and has lost most of her teeth."

Sitla laughed.

They went in the back door and found Lucy's mother sitting at the table, sprinkling powdered sugar on the loaf she had just brought out of the oven. She looked startled to see an Indian woman in her kitchen.

"Who's this?" she asked.

"Mam, you remember Sitlamitza, don't you?"

"Canna say that I do." She continued to stare at the stranger.

"I brought her home with me once when we were children and you chased her away. I told her you've become more hospitable in your old age."

Mam's face softened. "I remember," she said. "And where have you found her?"

"Just on the corner. I bought a salmon from her." Lucy brought the basket over to show her mother. "Isn't it beautiful?"

"Aye. 'Tis a good fish. Put it in the larder and we'll eat it for supper." Mam got up and put the cake back in the oven. "Your diet-loaf will be ready shortly. Would you like some coffee while we wait, Mrs.? What's your name again, lass?"

"People," she replied, looking embarrassed, "call me Lucy."

"Oh, she took your name, Lucinda. You must have been good friends."

"More than you know, Mam."

Just then, Maggie came bouncing into the room, singing a song. She stopped short when she saw a stranger in the house.

"Dinna be afraid, lassie," Mam said. "This lady is called Lucy like your mama."

"She has golden hair just like you did," Sitla said to Lucy. "She is the age we were when we were friends."

"It was such a long time ago," Lucy said.

Mam went to answer the whistling kettle on the stove. "Anyone for coffee?"

"Yes, please," Sitla responded.

Lucy took down three cups from the cupboard. She hesitated and then took down another.

"Pour one for Robert as well and I'll take it to him," Lucy said to her mother. "Would you like to meet my husband, Sitla?"

"Oh, yes," she replied.

Mam shook her head. "Ask him first. He may not be up for a visitor."

Lucy put down the cup and went into the bedroom to tell Robert about their visitor.

"I can bring her in here and we can have cake and coffee together with you."

"No," he said.

"But don't you want to meet my childhood friend?"

"Of course, I do, but not like this. It's not seemly to bring a woman in here. I'm not even dressed."

"But you're never dressed." He was still in his nightshirt. "I'm sure she won't mind. Mam was so inhospitable to her when she was a child. I don't want Sitla to think ill of you too."

"I'm sorry, but the answer is still no. Tell her I'm ill. That's the truth of it."

Lucy stood there.

"You can bring me my coffee and cake after she's gone."

There was nothing more to say. Lucy went back into the kitchen to entertain her guest. At least Mam was being hospitable this time. As she went into the room, she heard her mother talking to Sitla.

"I was afraid, Lucy. Just like Maggie here. We were all afraid of your people in those days. We heard such stories about what you would do to us. But you were just a wee child and I shouldna have sent you away. I'm sorry."

Lucy sat down at the table.

"Milk and sugar?" she asked.

Sitla nodded and Lucy pushed the containers toward her.

"My husband, Robert," Lucy said, "is too ill this morning to receive a visitor. I'm sorry."

"Well, that's enough apologies." Mam got up and went to the oven. "Let's have some diet-loaf."

Another Letter from London



ii. The Last Supper



Edie, 1880

WHEN THEIR GUEST had left and the dishes were cleared, Edie asked Lucy to sit down.

“I promised to take Robert some cake and coffee,” Lucy replied.

“He can wait, Lucy dear. Patience is one lesson he’s learned in the past few years. Besides, I’ll need to make fresh coffee for him.”

Lucy sat down.

“Have you had a talk with him at last about his wish?”

Lucy nodded.

“And will you grant him his wish?”

Lucy shook her head.

“I didna think you would be able to do it.”

“How can I, Mam?” Lucy’s voice was filled with anguish. “How can I live if he’s dead?”

Edie sat looking at her hands, stippled as they were with brown spots. When had she grown so old?

“I remember when James died,” Edie said quietly, unused to sharing her feelings. “I thought I’d die too. How can a mother live when her bairn has passed?”

“You blamed Papa,” Lucy said, “and then he started drinking again. You may as well have killed him.”

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Eddie flinched. Lucy had no idea how close she was to the truth.

"Sometimes," Eddie said, "killing someone isn't the worst thing you can do."

"How can you encourage it, Mam? Doesn't it go against everything you believe?"

"Aye." Eddie sighed. It was a conundrum to be sure. Sometimes Eddie was sure she would go to Hell for what she had done to John and now she was urging her daughter to do the same, but with more intention. Surely that was worse. "I have to believe that God forgives."

"Perhaps it's easier for you because you believe there's another life after this one," Lucy said. "I'm not so sure. I'm afraid that when Robert dies, it'll be the end of him and I'll never see him again."

"Oh, you'll see him again," Eddie said. "He'll walk right into your dream one night when you're asleep and he'll be as alive as he is right now."

Lucy looked at Eddie as if she'd never seen her mother before. "But that's not the same as seeing someone alive again. Do you really believe in Heaven, Mam?"

"Jesus said, 'In my Father's house are many mansions.'" Eddie adopted the serious tone she used whenever she quoted scripture. "'I go to prepare a place for you.'"

"'Many mansions,'" Lucy murmured. "Do you think there'll be a mansion like the Mackenzie farmhouse for Robert, Mam?"

"Even grander," Eddie said. "I'm sure there's one as big and grand as the house he grew up in."

"Well, thank you for welcoming Sitla, Mam." Lucy changed the subject. "I was afraid you wouldn't be hospitable, like the time you chased her away when she was a child."

"Nae," Eddie said, "I was wrong about that. I ken now they are nae different from you and me. The Indians hav'na once attacked us. The least I can do is be friendly to them as well."

Lucy leaned over and gave her a kiss.

"Now I must make some more coffee for Robert," Lucy said. "He's waited long enough and I wanted today to be a special day for him."

* * *

When Eddie went into Robert's bedroom later that afternoon, he told her that Lucy had finally acceded to his wishes and was going to prepare him a last supper that evening. He wanted to give his wife and daughter some gifts before he left. He needed help to prepare

them, so she listened to his requests and told him she would carry them out.

In the afternoon, while Edie worked on Robert's gifts, Lucy prepared a meal of salmon, potatoes and salad.

That evening, Lucy and Edie together dressed Robert in his wedding suit. It was a laborious process that felt like a sacred ceremony. They took off his nightshirt and underclothes, washed him and carefully put on new fresh, clean clothes.

When he was dressed, they put on their own Sunday best and let Maggie choose her favourite frock. Then they brought the supper to Robert's bedroom. Lucy opened the drapes wide and threw up the window sash. Edie brought in a table and they set the feast on it. After the delicious meal, they lit three candles on the remains of the diet-loaf, one for each decade that Robert had lived, then sang "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow".

Lucy cut the cake and covered each piece with blueberries and cream as Robert liked. When they'd finished eating, Edie took the dishes into the kitchen and came out with two little cloth bags, one with a pink ribbon and one with a red.

"They're from me," Robert said. "I wanted you to have something to remember my special day. There's one for you, Maggie."

Edie handed the one with the pink ribbon to Maggie and she scrambled onto the bed beside her father to open it. She pulled the ends of the ribbons that held it closed but it only tightened more. She shook it angrily and then tossed it on her father's chest.

Edie picked it up.

"Now, Maggie," she said. "Have patience. Let me open the bag for you."

She loosened the ribbons and held the bag out to her granddaughter. Maggie reached her little hand inside and pulled out a folded paper fan and a hard candy. She smiled and started to get down from the bed.

"You should thank Papa for the favour, Maggie."

The wee lass turned and smiled.

"Thank you, Papa."

Then she leaned down and kissed her father on the cheek.

"The other one is for you," Robert said to Lucy.

Lucy untied the red ribbon carefully and opened it. Inside was a long, slender card. Lucy took it out, read it and started to cry.

Edie knew what it said as Robert had dictated the words to her that afternoon. It said:

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With all my heart and soul, I promise you that we will meet again. Love, Robert.

"It's a bookmark," he said. "Now when you have your head buried in a book, you can think of me. Maggie painted the other side for me."

Lucy was crying softly, unable to respond.

"Look at it, Mama!" Maggie demanded.

Lucy turned it over and saw the colourful squiggles.

"It's lovely," she said. "I'll treasure it always."

Lucy leaned over and kissed her husband.

Edie took her granddaughter's hand. "And now it's time for you to go to bed, Maggie. Give your Papa a kiss goodnight and then come with me."

Edie looked away as Robert hugged his daughter for the last time. Then, she took her hand and led her from the room.

Another Letter from London



iii. In Granny's Room



Maggie, 1897

JACK WAS BECOMING a distant memory for Maggie. She'd written him a letter full of her heartfelt love after her last disastrous outing with Terence in July, but the months passed and she didn't receive any response. It had been so long since she'd seen Jack that she couldn't remember what he looked like anymore.

Every day, she went to work and did the hundreds of petty chores she'd done for years now. It seemed as though they would never end.

Finally, at the end of October, she received a letter from Jack. She sat down to read it, hoping it would cheer her up, but it was filled with the aches and pains of his mother's illness. It did not take her out of her funk at all.

Granny was ill now, too. The cold she'd caught at the Queen's Jubilee had worsened to pneumonia. Maggie came home from work to find her failing in health a little more each day. It wasn't fair; it wasn't right. Maggie had given up on her cherished dream of going to England because she didn't want to leave her mother and Granny behind. Now Granny was going to leave them anyway.

She came home from work one evening to find her mother weeping in Granny's favourite chair.

"Oh, Mama. What's wrong?"

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She went to her and knelt on the floor beside her. Mama looked pale and worn out.

"Is Granny gone?"

Mama looked up. "No, but it won't be long now. I'm going to stay with her through the night."

"I'll sit with you," Maggie said.

"No. You've worked all day and you need your rest."

"And so have you," Maggie insisted.

"All right, but go have a bite to eat first. Then you can join me."

So they sat together by her bed that night, watching Granny's chest under the crazy quilt moving up and down ever slower and more irregular, waiting for the last breath. Maggie had trouble recognizing her strong and fierce grandmother in the frail old woman lying on the bed. Mama sat resolutely bolt upright, lines of worry etched into her forehead, watching, watching, as if she could catch the last breath and keep it from leaving. Maggie tried to keep her eyes open, not wanting to miss it for her mother's sake, so that she could comfort her when it happened, but some time in the middle of the night, she nodded off.

Mama woke her with a gentle nudge.

"It's over," Mama whispered. "You can go to bed now."

It took Maggie a moment to remember where she was.

Then she looked down at Granny's still figure on the bed, her silver hair shining like a halo in the moonlight. She looked so different. The deep creases of pain had left the face and she seemed at peace now. The rasping, shallow breath had gone silent.

"Oh," Maggie said. "She looks like an angel."

Mama started to cry. Maggie put her arms around her to comfort her. The house was too quiet and empty.

* * *

The next morning, Maggie sent a message to Point Ellice House to tell them why she was not coming to work that day. The House of Crows continued in its silence. Mama did not speak and moved about like a ghost. Outside, it was raining, November rain. It rained all day.

"Should we fetch the doctor or the undertaker?" Maggie asked her mother.

"She has no more need of a doctor."

"But one has to pronounce her dead, doesn't he?"

Mama shook her head.

"I'll fetch the undertaker," Maggie said.

She put on her overshoes and took out an umbrella, then made the short walk to the undertaker's. Soon, a hearse arrived to take away Granny's body. Then Maggie walked to St. Andrew's Presbyterian to tell the minister. Perhaps he might come and comfort her mother since her grandmother had been such a faithful parishioner.

"Oh, you poor dear girl!" the minister said. "Your granny was a pillar of the kirk, she was."

"That's why I thought you might come and comfort my mama. She's grieving sorely."

"I'm sure she is. We all do," he said, "But I canna come this afternoon. I'm busy."

Maggie stood staring at him, unable to understand how anything else was important.

"Don't worry," he said. "I'll do the funeral service for your granny. Give my best to your mother. I'll come when I can."

Maggie left, feeling as gloomy as the weather. Granny had been such a faithful parishioner of the kirk, attending every Sunday without fail, but the minister was too busy to comfort Mama.

Her overshoe stuck in the mud when she stepped off the sidewalk to cross the street. Maggie looked down and the hem of her black skirt was grey with mud. She had forgotten to lift it up. She was cross with herself, cross with the minister and cross with the world that had so let her down. She lifted her foot and the overshoe stayed behind in the mud. She pulled it out and tried to hop across the street but she had to put her foot down to keep from falling. When she reached the other side, she struggled to put her muddy overshoe back on but her shoe was now filthy too. She didn't care, so she carried the overshoe home.

When she got back to the House of Crows that now contained only a crow and a magpie, she swore to herself that she would not go back out again in this weather. Mama was sitting in the dark parlour and Maggie could see she'd been crying.

"I'll have to go clean myself up," Maggie said. "When I get back, I'll make some soup for dinner."

"I'm not hungry," Mama replied.

Maggie repeated the words her Granny had so often said to her. "You'll need to keep your strength up."

Mama shook her head as if it were too much effort to speak.

"All right. I'll make some anyway and perhaps you'll change your mind."

Maggie needed to be doing something. If she sat with her mother, she would sink into a morbid funk like her. She peeled and chopped carrots, potatoes, turnips and parsnips, throwing them into a broth bubbling

House of Crows

on the stove. She hoped the smell of the simmering vegetables might awaken her mother's appetite.

Half an hour later, when the soup was ready, Maggie found that she was not hungry either. She put a ladleful in each bowl and placed them on the table. Steam rose out of the bowls. It would take a few minutes for the soup to be cool enough to eat. She went back to the parlour to fetch her mother for dinner.

"The soup is ready," she said as she sat down on the chesterfield by her mother. "Still very hot though."

Mama only nodded.

"Would you like to talk?"

Mama shook her head.

"We'll miss her so much."

Maggie realized in that moment how much her mother especially would miss Granny. Mama would be waiting alone in the dark house all day until Maggie came home.

"You should take some more clients now and do more work," Maggie suggested.

Mama had reduced her workload while she tended Granny. Perhaps work would take her mind off her loneliness.

"My eyesight is failing," Mama said. "I'm finding it hard to see the fine stitches."

"We'll purchase some spectacles for you."

Mama nodded.

"The soup should be ready now. Should we go have some?"

Mama stood up and they walked to the kitchen together. They both sipped their soup half-heartedly and neither finished it.

"Would you like anything else, Mama?"

She shook her head.

* * *

Two weeks later, Maggie sat down at the table to write Jack a letter to tell him about Granny's death.

I am more convinced than ever that I cannot leave my mother now. She would be alone and so lonely without me. And I know that she will not leave this town. It is so full of the memories of her life.

I hope your mother is recovering and that she will soon be restored to good health.

Edeana Malcolm

After Maggie signed her name, she stared at the paper for a while. Was it really worthwhile to continue her correspondence with this man? Though she was still betrothed to him, it seemed less and less likely they would ever even see each other again, never mind marry.

She folded the letter and placed it in an envelope.

* * *

A few days later, Maggie received a letter from England.

My dearest Maggie,

It is with a heavy heart that I write this letter. My dear Momma passed away this morning. After such a long and painful illness, it is almost a relief for me that she is gone. But I am left alone to mourn and to do so without you by my side is great sorrow indeed.

Indeed, she knew the pain he was feeling. His words brought him closer to her at last and he would understand her sorrow when he received her letter. She wondered whether he would come to her now that his mother had died or whether he still expected her to come to him. But her letter had told him that she would not come. When he received it, he might come, but first he had to mourn. Maggie knew from experience there were many affairs to be taken care of on the death of a loved one. She was taking care of the obituary, the funeral service and the handling of Granny's tiny estate. Mama had been too wrapped in her grief.

Maggie had not expected her mother to be so distraught. But then, everyone grieved in their own way. Even after her mother obtained new spectacles, she did not resume her former activity as a seamstress. She continued to take small repair jobs but did not take on the design or sewing of any gowns, something she had so loved to do in the past.

* * *

On Christmas morning, Maggie remembered how last year she'd thought it would be her last Christmas with Mama and Granny. She'd been half-right. But this Christmas was not like the last one. They did not buy any food for a feast. Instead, in Granny's memory, they went to the kirk.

After the walk home, Mama was tired.

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“Perhaps we should attend the First Presbyterian Church from now on, Maggie. It’s much closer to where we live and has more activities for young people.”

As far as activities for young people were concerned, Maggie had little interest anymore in searching for a husband. She loved Jack and, though she didn’t know how their betrothal would work out, she was prepared to wait and see if it did. Although Mama did not say as much, Maggie was sure the real reason Mama didn’t want to go to St. Andrew’s anymore was because it held too many memories of her own mother. As far as Maggie was concerned, she would just as well not see the dour minister at St. Andrew’s anymore. She couldn’t look at him without thinking that he’d been too busy to comfort Mama.

He wouldn’t have succeeded anyway. Maggie had been trying for a month now and Mama was still inconsolable.

The New Bridge



i. At the First Presbyterian Church



Maggie, 1898

THE FEBRUARY SUN had enough heat to warm Maggie's shoulders as she walked home from work early one Saturday afternoon. It felt good after the cold, drizzly days of winter and she felt her shoulders loosen and relax.

As she approached the House of Crows, she felt the urge to walk past it, up the hill and into the forest. The house still felt quiet and alien without Granny to greet her. Mama was always sitting in the dark parlour, looking glum. But with the sun shining in the window, perhaps today would be different. So, at the last moment, she turned onto the walk.

She always went in by the front door now because it felt so wrong that Granny was not in the kitchen to greet her. As soon as she appeared in the parlour doorway, her mother greeted her. That in itself was unusual but she was smiling, something Maggie had not seen for a long time.

"What is it?" she asked.

Her mother was blocking her view of the sofa, but Maggie sensed someone was there.

"Look who's here," Mama said, turning aside so Maggie could see.

He stood up. It was Jack!

She'd almost forgotten what he looked like in the time they'd been apart but the instant she saw him, she knew him. He came to her and took her hands in his.

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"Are you happy to see me, Maggie?"

She threw her arms around him and he hugged her, lifting her off her feet and twirling her around. She laughed.

"Put me down," she said, "so I can look at you."

He obeyed but took her hands in his again, as if he didn't trust her to stay with him.

"It's good to see you, Jack." She wondered if he'd come to take her back with him to England. "Are you here for a visit?"

"Silly girl! I'm your fiancé. I've come to marry you, if you'll still have me."

Her heart melted. She looked at her mother and saw a tender happiness budding in her face at last after the long period of grief.

"I'm sorry that your grandmother isn't here to greet me as well."

Maggie felt suddenly ashamed of herself. She had not yet offered him condolences on the loss of his mother. One look at her own mother reminded her how difficult such a loss would be.

"I, too," she said, looking down at the floor, "am so sorry for your loss."

"You two have a lot to talk about," Mama said. "I'll go in the kitchen and make some supper. You'll stay for supper, Mr. Robertson?"

"Thank you, I will," he said. "Let's go for a walk, Maggie. It's a beautiful day."

"Yes, it is."

She was so glad she'd gone home rather than taken a solitary stroll. Now she had someone to walk with, someone special.

They walked up Fort Street to the school Maggie had attended, past all the new houses that stood where there had been only forest when she was a girl. She described the neighbourhood and its changes to him as they walked. As they passed the school, she told him how much she had loved to learn about history and how she had wanted to travel to the Old World where history had happened.

"History," he said, "happens everywhere."

"I understand that now and I seem to have lost my desire to travel. I couldn't possibly leave my mother alone."

"That was my feeling, too, when my mother was ill. It's why I asked you to come to be with me in England."

"I'm glad you were such a good son to your mother."

"When you said you weren't coming, I thought to myself, *After Momma dies, I'll go to her*. But then I couldn't write that down in a letter. I couldn't wish my mother dead."

"Please forgive me for wishing that you'd put me first."

"There's nothing to forgive."

"Well, it doesn't matter now. We're together again and we're going to marry?" She lifted her voice at the end. She wanted to hear him confirm what she thought he'd said.

"Yes, we are," he said, smiling. He stopped and turned to face her. "And now that I've come to terms with Momma's death on the long voyage here, I intend to put you first."

Maggie was too overwhelmed to know what to say. Now was the time to ask him if he was going to stay in Victoria, but she couldn't find her voice.

"I know you want to stay here with your mother," Jack said, "so this is where we'll stay."

Maggie threw her arms around him again but this time, instead of hugging back, he put his head back and looked into her eyes.

Maggie saw the joy on his face as he moved to kiss her. She gave in to the sensation of relief that she felt and kissed him back. All of the suppressed emotions of the last few years came surging upwards from some well deep within her. Through the rushing ocean sounds of her beating heart, she heard faintly the sound of someone clearing his throat.

Of course, it wasn't seemly to kiss in public. Maggie pulled herself away. The stranger, half-turned to look at her, smiled and doffed his hat. She blushed.

"My apologies," Jack said.

She smiled at him. "We should set a date," she said, impatient now to be his wife.

He smiled back. "Yes, we should. But let's go home to supper now. We have a lot to talk over with your mother."

* * *

The next day being Sunday, Jack came with them to the First Presbyterian Church, which they now attended. Maggie felt the air vibrating between their arms as they sat side-by-side on the pew. She could scarcely concentrate on the words of the minister as he preached. Her mind was engaged in decorating the dark sanctuary in bright flowers for the occasion of their wedding. She would be wearing an extravagant white gown Mama had made for her and strolling down the aisle with an enormous bouquet of flowers. Instead of pounding his fist on the pulpit as he was doing now, the minister would be standing in front of her and Jack. He would smile as he pronounced them man and wife.

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After the service, Jack came again to their house for lunch.

"You'll have to marry soon," Mama said, "so you can move in with us and contribute to the cost of your board."

They both looked at her and she laughed to show it was spoken in jest.

"Now that you're no longer in the navy, how will you make your living, Mr. Robertson?"

"You sound like Granny," Maggie said.

"And since she's no longer here," Mama said, "someone will have to take her role. She always worried first about how we'd have enough to eat. I imagine when you marry that you won't want to continue as a maid, so you'll have no income."

"Tomorrow," Jack said, "I shall find myself a job. Before I left, I worked in London as a pilot on the Thames. Fortunately, Victoria, being on an island, needs pilots."

Maggie and her mother both breathed a sigh of relief.

"But come," Jack said, "what should we do to pass the time this afternoon?"

"You remember I wrote you about the disaster when the Point Ellice Bridge fell?" Maggie blushed, remembering the news must have been in the same letter in which she'd told him she wouldn't come to London to marry him.

"Yes. You said fifty-five people died in the tragedy and that you helped look after the wounded."

"That's right. The new bridge is much safer I've heard, but I haven't had the nerve to take the streetcar over it yet."

"Well then, I shall take you. And you as well, Mrs. Macaulay."

"No, no. You go. I'll stay here and clean up."

"Nonsense, Mama. We'll all clean up together and you'll come."

"You don't want me along," she said.

"Yes, we do," Maggie insisted.

She didn't trust herself alone with Jack. If he kissed her again, she could so easily let herself go in an unseemly manner. And she didn't want her mother moping all by herself while they were out having fun.

As the streetcar approached the new Point Ellice Bridge, Jack linked his arm through Maggie's. She looked at him and smiled, unafraid to pass over this bridge with him at her side. Let it fall, he would catch her. She could feel Mama's eyes on them, approving.

When they started across the bridge, Maggie took a deep breath. Of course, she knew it would hold. They must have built it strong enough this time to hold up all the traffic it carried, including streetcars.

All the way across the bridge, the memories of that morning flooded back to her — the people swimming in the water, the horse screaming as it circled, the white-faced corpses on the lawn at Point Ellice House and searching frantically for Mama and Granny.

Maggie took Jack's hand and he looked at her, his eyes soft with concern. They had made it across the bridge and it had not sagged in the least. It had felt as safe and secure as being on solid ground. And she need not ever feel afraid of bridges again with Jack at her side.

At the end of the streetcar route near the Gorge Bridge, Jack helped her mother down from the streetcar first. Maggie was moved by his solicitude. She smiled at him as he helped her down as well. Then he linked each of his arms with one of theirs and they set off down a path through the dense woods toward the Gorge waters. Shortly, they reached the reversing falls and looked down from the bridge at the churning waters below them.

"The tide is coming in," he said.

"Yes," Maggie said.

The swirling water made her feel almost dizzy.

"My mother used to tell me a story about these rapids," Mama said. "She said, when we first came here, we went through these rapids in a canoe with French-Canadian oarsmen. She said it was the second most terrifying incident in her life."

"What was the most terrifying then," Jack asked, "if you don't mind me asking?"

"She said the most terrifying involved these rapids again. She once followed my father across a log that was stretched over the Gorge before they built this bridge."

"My word!" he said. "That would have been frightening."

"Mam never did like this gorge," she said. "Let's walk on."

"But I have a more pleasant memory of this bridge," Maggie said. "Do you remember when we watched a certain sailor capture a pig in a poke from this very bridge?"

"I do indeed."

Mama laughed. It was the first time in a long time Maggie had heard that sound and it did her soul good.

They walked along the Arm.

"It's a lovely day, isn't it?" Maggie said.

"It is," Jack agreed. "And even lovelier for me to be in the company of two such ladies as yourselves."

They came to a bench and Mama said she wanted to sit down. "You two should go on," she said, "but I need to rest."

House of Crows

"Are you sure?" Jack asked.

"I am," Mama said.

So, Mama sat while Maggie and Jack walked on to discuss their future plans.

"I know Mama as good as invited you to move in to her house," Maggie said, "but you mustn't feel compelled to do so if you want us to have our own home."

"Don't be ridiculous! When we have enough money to buy our own home, your mother will be quite welcome to move in with us. In the meantime, I am happy to move in with her and pay for all the expenses. She is the one most responsible for bringing us together. Besides, it's time for your mother to retire from her work and enjoy life."

"Yes, it is," Maggie agreed. "Her eyesight is failing. I hope you'll be able to find work as a pilot."

"If I don't, I'll find other work. You can count on me, Maggie. I'll look after you."

She squeezed his hand. "I'll count on you."

The New Bridge



ii. The Fire in the Hearth



1898

THE NEXT EVENING, Lucy and Maggie sat in the parlour in front of the fire, each one lost in a reverie — Maggie in dreams of the future, Lucy in memories of the past.

“I gave my notice at Point Ellice House today,” Maggie said.

“Mrs. O’Reilly must be very sad to lose such a dedicated employee. She told me once they’d never had a maid who stayed so long.”

“What did you do today, Mama?”

“I started to plan your wedding gown. It’ll be my last great project. I have a picture in my mind of what it’ll look like. I’ll sketch it for you and show it to you for your approval.”

“I’m sure I’ll approve. I’ve never seen a gown you made that I didn’t like.”

“Thank you, my dear.”

“Except perhaps some of your own personal gowns. Perhaps, if you have the time, you could sew yourself a new gown for my wedding, something with colour in it.”

“Then we’d no longer be the House of Crows.”

“That is my earnest hope. Once I take off my maid’s uniform, I don’t intend to wear black ever again. Papa died a long time ago and you’ve worn it far too long.”

House of Crows

Her mother gave her that familiar warning glance she always did when Maggie mentioned her father, but that was another thing that had gone on too long.

"Mama, can you tell me now about my father?"

Lucy felt that lump of terrible emotions of love mixed with guilt and fear. She looked at Maggie a long time before she found the courage to answer.

"I haven't been fair to you all these years," she said finally, "keeping your father to myself. What we had was so precious."

Lucy paused, feeling the lump of emotions rising to block her throat again.

Maggie heard the catch in her throat and thought, *Oh no, she's going to stop just as she always does*, but she went on.

"You know how romantic novels always end at the moment of greatest happiness and at the beginning of a life together?"

Maggie nodded.

"That was how our romance was. It ended almost at the very beginning and it always seemed so unfair to me. We were supposed to grow old together."

Maggie thought about her Jack and their future together.

"But now I think it was perhaps for the best. Because in reality, life goes on after the novel ends and what happens then is what's important. Don't ever grow jaded, Margaret. Don't ever take your love for granted."

Maggie looked down at her hands. She still didn't really know anything more about her father except what she'd always known — that her mother loved him very much. And in the end, wasn't that all that really mattered?

"Anyway," Maggie said, "he died a long time ago and it's time you stopped wearing mourning."

"But," Lucy said, "Mam's death was less than a year ago."

"It was, but by the time of my wedding, it will have been a year. So, let that date be the day you cast off your widow's weeds for good."

Lucy thought about it. Perhaps Maggie was right. She wanted this house to be a happy place for Maggie and Jack and any children that God blessed them with. She didn't want to become her mother with her stern worry lines. She wouldn't be her mother. It was time to put away the garb of mourning. She let her thoughts fly like a bird to touch all the colours of her imagination.

"I'll think about it," she said.

Still, a peacock tail of possibilities had opened in her mind and she would soon stitch a gown for herself with golden thread. After she'd

sewn Maggie's wedding gown, of course. She stared intently at the fire for some time.

"I think," she said, "your granny would be very pleased that you're getting married."

"I wish," Maggie said, "she could be here to enjoy it with us."

"She is," Lucy replied. "I'm sure she is."

Just then, a spark burst with a crack from a burning log, hit the screen of the fireplace and fell back down, a spent ember.

It was just like Granny to make her presence known like that.

"Jack says we'll have an electric fire in our new house."

"Oh, your granny wouldn't like that at all!" Lucy turned from her daughter to the fire. "You wouldna, would you, Mam?"

With a crackle, another spark flew from the log. Both women smiled, sure they could feel its warmth.

About the Author



EDEANA MALCOLM lives with her husband David Bray in Victoria somewhere between Craigflower Manor and Point Ellice House, two of the settings of *House of Crows*. These well-conserved historical buildings provide a fascinating insight into BC's past.

Drawing on a love of history and literature, Edeana writes historical fiction. Her first five novels tell the tales of ancestors on her mother's side who came to Nova Scotia in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. In this latest novel, *House of Crows*, she has turned her attention to the settlement of her hometown of Victoria in the last half of the nineteenth century.

Edeana Malcolm is the current president of the Victoria Writers' Society and is also on the Board of First Metropolitan United Church.

