



On Potato Mountain

A CHILCOTIN SAGA

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B R U C E F R A S E R

*On
Potato
Mountain*

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THREE OCEAN PRESS

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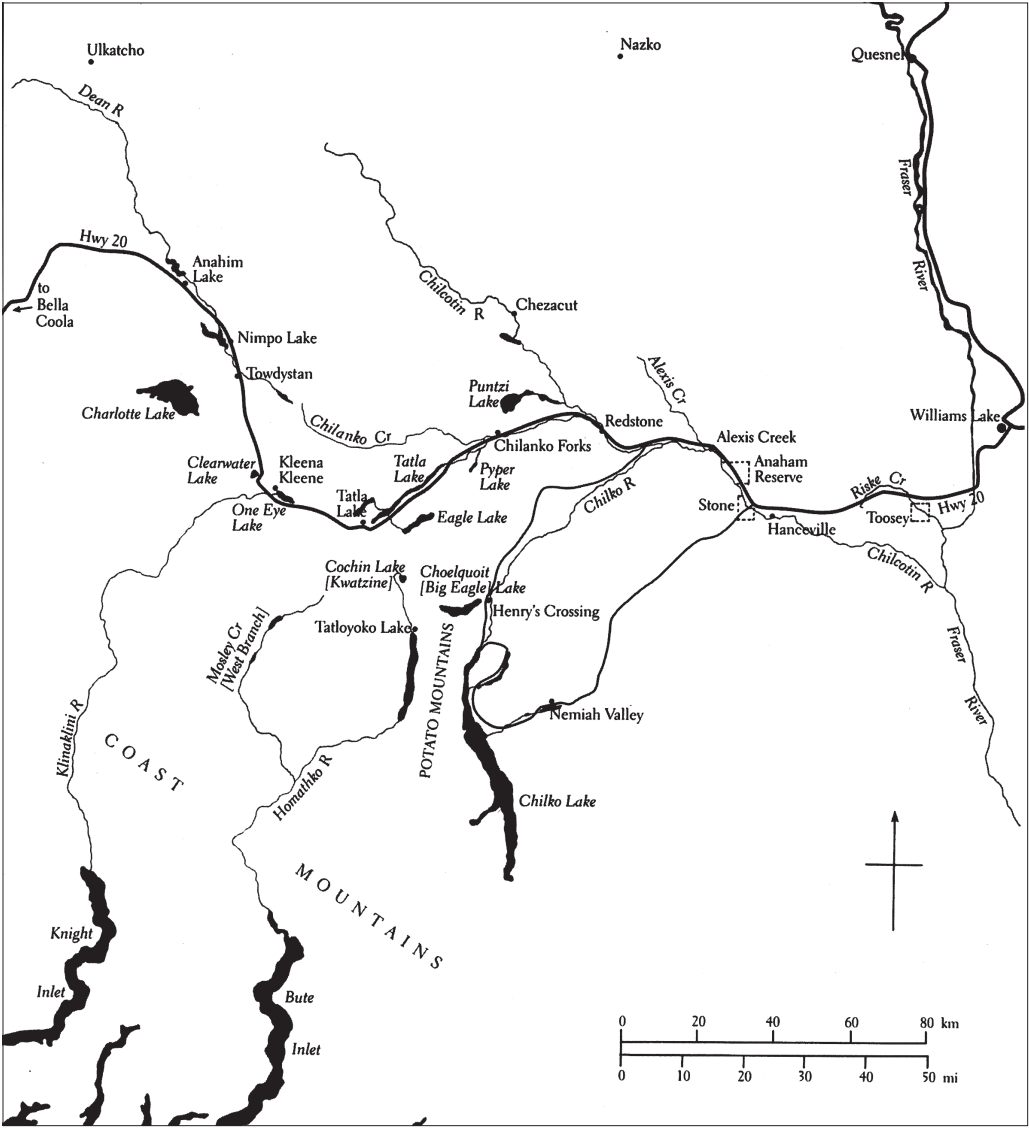
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For Gail

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Prologue

The word 'Chilcotin' defines the river, the land and its people. The high plateau has broad valleys covered in tall grass and aspen groves. Higher elevations are covered by pine, spruce and fir forests. Crowning the plateau on its south and west flanks are the coastal mountain ranges. Protected and cradled by this stony barrier, the spring-green and autumn-gold grassy hills unfold, undulating two hundred miles all the way to the eastern boundary, the brown silt-laden Fraser River. There, born in the mountains and fed by a vast lake system, the Chilcotin River nourishes the plateau before entering the Fraser from the west, midway between the Rocky Mountains and the sea. Frozen for six months of the year, when the Chilcotin wakes from its winter spell, it rushes to complete its life cycle in its allotted time. The land is the anvil on which nature's blows shape the souls of the people who, captivated by its harsh charms, choose to live their lives in its unrelenting grasp.

The Fraser River's headwaters are in the Rocky Mountains. Fed by melting snow and glaciers, the waterway heads northwest

before turning at Prince George and cutting a southward trench halfway between the Rockies and the Coast Range. Gathering strength from its tributaries, its surging waters break through the mountains south of the Chilcotin at Hell's Gate before eventually emptying into the Strait of Georgia near Vancouver.

Long before recorded time, the first people — the Dene, an Athabaskan tribe — migrated from the north, but not before the land was made habitable by their mythical hero, Lendix'tcux. The savage story of how Lendix'tcux transformed the beasts into animals, birds and fish, preparing the land for the Dene, was passed down from generation to generation. It was embedded in the memory of old Antoine, a shaman — or in their language, a *deyen* — by his own grandfather.

The people who settled on the plateau called themselves T̓silhqot'in, "people of the ochre river", a name they shared with their river and their land. To the people of the river, all that they walked on and paddled over was sacred.

Antoine spoke of his ancestors' life on the land to all who would listen:

Before my time, before reserves, our people survive on the land and waters. They hunt deer, moose and the caribou, pick sour berries and dig succulent roots on Potato Mountain. They travel in bands of big families throughout the land depending on season and chance of fish and game. They live well in summers when the salmon return up Great River from the sea to spawn in the streams and lakes of the Chilko, Taseko and Puntzi. In the years salmon fail, the people starve. In the winters when land freeze, T̓silhqot'in survive in pit house on small game, dried salmon and wild potatoes.

Beside fishing, hunting and gathering, our people speak with same tongue, have same stories and customs and defend our land. They beat off raids by other tribes and attack neighbours. On shadow side, where no mountains or big rivers, Carrier — another Dene tribe — speak with different tongue and have different customs and stories. Towards rising sun and Great River plateau are Shuswap. Over mountains in midday sun are Lillooet, neighbours of Salish coastal cousins at mouth of the Great River.

Yes. Two rivers flow from our land to the setting sun and coast. One slices through mountains at Waddington Canyon. It carved from rock by churning Homathko. Other past Anahim is swift Atnarko to Bella Coola. T̓silhqot'in trade with Natives of Bella Coola and Homathko. At times when winters on plateau too raw, number of bands and hunting parties move into coast valleys. *Qiyus* — you call them cayuses — come to T̓silhqot'in even before white man. Raiding party go to Nicola and steal 'em. *Qiyus* better than canoe, faster than dog. Grandfather tell me of first time T̓silhqot'in seen white man. He says to me, "As boy, I camp with family at mouth of Chilcotin River where meets Great River. I seen white man in canoes pass by on way to coast."

That was in June 1808, when Hudson's Bay Company fur trader and explorer Simon Fraser discovered and named the Great River after himself on his journey south to the sea.

Antoine's grandfather's stories of the beginning — how the land was transformed by Lendix'tcux and his wife and sons and of how those mythical heroes were in turn transformed into

mountains — were as important to Antoine as the land itself. Life on the plateau and the mythical stories were closely interwoven, like the plaited cedar roots fashioned by the women into berry-picking baskets. Antoine's duty was to pass on these stories to new generations. His grandfather's stories were supplemented by the oral history his father told him of the Tšilhqot'in Wars of 1864 and of how the whites said they were transforming the land, custom and law for the benefit of the Tšilhqot'in, but in the end introduced their form of justice, disease and abuse of the land.

PART I

There is a tribe of *Carriers* among them, who inhabit the banks of a Large River to the right. They call themselves Chilk-hodins.

— *the journal of Simon Fraser, June 1, 1808*

Nothing for Free

It was July in the record-hot summer of 1937. The crowd at the Anahim Lake Stampede grounds was betting that Dean Hanlon couldn't stay on Tornado, a black bronco red of eye and mean of spirit.

In the stands, whites and Natives from the full reach of the plateau watched Dean adjust his stirrups, settle on the horse, then grip and re-grip his leathered right hand under the rope around the horse's withers. The bronco pawed and fidgeted in the chute, testing its muscle, anxious to buck the annoyance from its back. In the ring, Antoine stood next to the fence, waiting for his boss to charge out of the chute.

Near the chutes, Stan Hewitt sipped on a mickey of Walker's Special Old. His long, lean face betrayed impatience. He thought that the owner of the Bar 5 Ranch, a good part of the Tatlayoko Valley, shouldn't be risking his neck riding broncos. There were pressing legal matters to deal with, matters that had brought Stan from his law office in Williams Lake to the far corner of the Chilcotin.

Dean's son, Bordy, was minding the gate for his father. He stood tall against it, his curly black hair spilling out from under a black Stetson. In this country where men were judged by how they handled horses or were handled by them, it meant something to wear the champion's silver buckle. Between father and son, who competed against each other in everything, it meant bragging rights for the next year. Now they were going at it like always.

"Careful, Dean!" Bordy laughed. "He has a double-kick that'll knock the breath out of your miserable hide."

A rodeo veteran, Dean spat chaw juice on the trampled ground.

"This horse is going to win me the title," he snarled. "Just mind the gate and keep your trap shut!"

When Dean was ready, he signalled the timekeeper with his left hand. The bell rang. The gate swung open. Tornado sprang out of the chute. Dean's head was thrown back.

"I'll beat you this time, you son of a bitch!" he shouted to Bordy.

Tornado crow-hopped across the ring, shaking the cowboy with each jackhammer jump. Dean dug his spurs into the horse's flanks and batted its head with his Stetson. Tornado's next move was the double-kick, but Dean came out on top. Again the bronco tried the double-kick and again the veteran rider bested the animal. Even so, Tornado was just warming up for his signature move, a fast clockwise spin that made even the judges feel dizzy. Still, Hanlon hung on. No rider had lasted this long on the bronco and the crowd knew it. They shouted their encouragement, all except Bordy, who was cheering for the horse. If Dean could hang on until the bell, his son would lose. Bordy could tell by the set of Dean's jaw that no horse would unseat him today.

A mounted pickup man moved closer, his eye on Dean as the seconds wound down. When the bell sounded, he moved in, wrapped his free arm around Dean's waist and hauled him off the horse. But Dean made no attempt to grab onto the pickup's

saddle as would be expected. Tornado had a few more kicks left and, as he bucked riderless, Dean's dead weight slipped from the pickup's grasp and slowly slid to the ground.

Stan, who'd had too many sips from his mickey, rose unsteadily from his seat. With a noticeable limp, Bordy ran into the ring. Antoine followed.

Bordy knelt beside Dean. He could see his father's lips moving. He bowed his head close to hear the words.

"Don't piss away the ranch," Dean rasped.

Dean's last words to his only son were followed by the judges' decision crackling over the loudspeaker.

"The winner and grand champion of the Bucking Bronco contest is Dean Hanlon!"

Antoine shook his head, unknotted the red bandana around his neck and placed it over Dean's face. Bordy looked up from his father and swore at the sun beating down on the arena. Only then did the crowd realize Dean was dead. They responded with shocked silence, the only reasonable response they could find to witnessing a man's death and watching his son's display of public grief.

Stan knew better. Bordy's tirade to the sky was not grief, but frustration that his father had beaten him for the last time with no chance of a rematch.

Dr. Hay pronounced Dean officially dead on arrival at Williams Lake Hospital. The cause of death was a massive heart attack.

The funeral was held on the shores of Tatlayoko Lake. It was a sparse gathering, partly because Dean had bought out many of the neighbouring ranchers who couldn't survive the Depression and partly because of old grudges and range disputes. Bordy and Stan were there, as was Dean's daughter, Clara. There were a few ranching families who had stayed on hoping that a miracle would happen before the bank foreclosed on their places. Finally, there

was a handful of ranchhands, both whites and Natives, including the Paul family, headed by Antoine. The only ranch worker who appeared sad about Dean's passing was Lady. The Blue Heeler cattle dog was barking in the locked barn, unable to understand why Dean wasn't saddled up and punching cows.

Stan thought that Bordy was acting strangely. He was subdued and had nothing to say about the loss of his father and sparring partner. When the procession walked up to the graveyard from the house, his hip injury seemed more pronounced.

The family plot was circled by a white picket fence on a knoll overlooking the lake. Father Dumont, the Oblate missionary whose parish was the Chilcotin, read Dean's last rites, despite the dead man's Catholicism being long lapsed. Before the burial, the good father asked Stan to pay a tribute to Dean when the mourners gathered in the parlour of the ranch house for refreshments. Stan agreed, cautioning himself not to drink anything before speaking and to keep his words short so he could get to his first drink of the day as soon as possible.

In the parlour, Stan poured himself a generous glass of whiskey to toast with and cleared his dry throat loudly. The others turned to him and fell silent in anticipation.

"Dean was a Chilcotin pioneer," he began, "who had a stump ranch on the shores of this windy lake. He learned early on from his Indian neighbours..."

Here, Stan nodded to Antoine, who lifted his glass slightly in acknowledgement.

"...that this land gave a man nothing for free. He worked himself and his family hard to wrest a living from the dirt. And by family, I mean Bordy..."

Stan turned to Bordy. Bordy smiled and gave Stan a thumbs-up.

"...and Clara."

Stan turned to Clara, standing apart from the others. She frowned and shook her head. Nonplussed, Stan continued.

“With their help, he built the Bar 5 to an eight-hundred-head cattle operation. He was a good client and a man of his word. We will remember him with respect. Raise your glasses and drink a toast to his memory.”

As the mourners raised their glasses, a half-dozen cars pulled into the yard. The mourners craned their necks to see through the windows as people piled out, whooping it up. Soon, they had brought their party into the house. Bordy’s friends from Williams Lake, bolstered by strays they had picked up on the road, introduced themselves to the mourners freely, without pause to take the temperature of the room. They may have been late for the funeral but were in time for the free food and drink and they partied all night.

Two days after the funeral, Bordy was in Stan’s office. Stan wasn’t surprised that Clara had stayed back at the ranch. For the first time, he sized up the son as a man separate from his father. Here was the tree itself, he thought, and not the branch. He saw a swarthy, powerful, handsome man in his thirties. Bordy wore a grey Western-style suit and a matching grey Stetson, which offset his luminous hazel eyes. His curls glowed with grease and he smelled of cheap aftershave. He had a reputation as a ladies’ man and Stan had heard the stories about husbands firing shotguns in the night at his retreating behind. There was never a dance in the Chilcotin that didn’t feature his fun-loving smile.

Bordy had worked on the ranch for his father since he was a child and knew how to raise cattle and ready them for market, but Dean had done all the business with the bankers, with Stan’s advice. Many had asked why Bordy had put up with the older Hanlon, a tough, one-syllable rancher. Stan knew the real answer: it was lying on his desk and here was Bordy, dressed up like a businessman to hear the news. It appeared that he had gotten over his grieving for his father, much faster than he had for his

mother who'd died when he was in his teens. Stan remembered Jean Somerville and her warm Scottish brogue well, as she was the reason he'd taken on Dean as a client in the first place.

In legal circles, Stan was known as a careful man who could have had a brilliant career in Vancouver as a criminal lawyer, but for double-martini lunches sometimes affecting his afternoon judgment. After his firm fired him, he'd decided to take his talents to Williams Lake, where they would be better appreciated. His wife had taken one look at her new surroundings and sued for divorce on the grounds of cruelty.

Now in his forties, Stan's continual attempts to go dry often ended up with him in the drunk tank. Between bouts, however, he proved his early promise as a barrister and was eagerly sought after by clients throughout the Interior plateau.

"Have a seat, Bordy." Stan motioned to the client's chair. "That was one hell of a way to go."

"He was a performer," Bordy said, pushing his Stetson to the back of his head and smiling.

"You're taking his death well."

Bordy tilted back in his chair.

"I've got over it. The important thing now is that will lying on your desk. You know I worked like three ranchhands at the Bar 5 because I was promised the ranch."

"I figured that."

"So? What's the answer?"

Stan took his time opening the will, enjoying the impatient anticipation of the young rancher. He cleared his throat.

"This says, as clearly as I could draft it, that you inherit everything — from the ploughshares to the two thousand deeded acres to miles of crown lease land in the Tatlayoko Valley."

Bordy took off his hat. He wiped the August sweat off his brow and face with a blue polka-dot handkerchief.

"Damn. He kept his word."

"There is, however, one condition."

"What's that?"

"You must look after Clara."

Bordy waved Stan on.

"What's the next step?" he asked.

"It'll take a month to probate the will. Your father had no money. All he had was the land."

"Land is all I need."

"There's something you don't know." Stan inhaled deeply. "You recall I came out to the rodeo to speak with Dean about legal matters. I was going to tell him that the bank has started foreclosure proceedings on the Bar 5."

"I'll sell some cows at the Williams Lake auction."

"The bank put a lien on the cows."

"Dean was good friends with Frank Walsh," Bordy said confidently. "I can buy some time."

Stan shook his head.

"Frank's not manager anymore. The bank fired him for extending credit to Dean so he could buy up those smaller ranches in the valley. The new manager has started the foreclosure action and nothing but repayment of the mortgage in full will satisfy him."

Bordy jumped out of his chair and began to pace.

"That old bastard! He told me he had everything under control and that we'd soon own the whole bloody valley. I should have paid more attention to the business." He fixed Stan with a glare as he walked. "And why didn't you stop him from getting in too deep in the middle of the Depression?"

"It would have been easier to stop a charging grizzly with a BB gun."

"He outrode me and now he's left me with nothing after working me like a draft horse for the last twenty years." He stopped pacing and pointed his finger at Stan. "You're my lawyer. Now,

where the hell am I going to get enough money to pay off the bank when the whole country is broke?"

Stan thought a bit before answering.

"Do you have any rich friends that you could partner up with?"

"The only friends I got are penniless girls who want to marry me for my money."

"What about relatives?"

"Yeah. There's ma's cousins in Scotland, the Somervilles from around Lanark. They came out to visit us when Ma was alive."

"Give it some thought," Stan said. "I can delay the reckoning for about a year to give you enough time to rustle up the money."

Bordy put his Stetson back on and left the office without so much as a nod.

"Come back next Monday," Stan called out. "I'll have some papers for you to sign."

Stan held out little hope that the party boy might salvage something from the tangled affairs of his father, so he was surprised to see a smile on his face when Bordy walked into his office the following Monday.

"I've given it some thought," Bordy announced. "I'm going to Scotland. The relatives are expecting me. I wired them and told them I'm looking for a wife. They're going to put me up and introduce me to the local girls."

"When do you leave?" Stan asked.

He wondered if Bordy could actually save the ranch this way but knew nothing he could say would change his mind.

"I'm leaving this week," Bordy grinned. "If I find what I'm looking for, there'll be a few broken hearts in the Chilcotin. Oh, by the way, I'm changing the name of my ranch from 'Bar 5' to 'Empire'. Look after the paperwork, will you?"

A Dazzling Smile

In February of 1938, when Bordy returned from Europe, Stan was relatively sober. He'd made that effort in consideration of the occasion.

Bordy had called from Vancouver to set up an appointment, with Stan to be the first person he saw on his return to the Chilcotin, not even bothering to head back home to the ranch first. He hadn't said much more, but he didn't need to. From his earlier wires, Stan knew Bordy had found a wife and all that was left to complete his plan to save the ranch was the paperwork.

Bordy came into the office right on time with his bride, Isabelle.

"Stan, this is Belle. Belle, Stan."

As they shook hands and exchanged pleasantries, Stan took Belle in. She wasn't a pretty woman — her features were too strong, her build slight and wiry, her expression seemed dour. He hoped she had money. He did admire the soft, wavy, auburn hair she wore off her face.

But then she smiled.

It was a dazzling smile that more than countered any defects in her slightly freckled face and squared jaw. Her voice made him feel young again.

“Mr. Hewitt,” she sang in her lilting brogue, “Bordy has told me so much about you and the good legal advice you’ve given him. My father promised me the money to pay off the mortgage on Empire Ranch, and against my wishes, insisted that I be made a co-owner. And Bordy — isn’t he wonderful? — said that now that we are married, everything he has is mine.”

“Call me Stan. I hope you like our country.”

It was all he could manage. She continued on as if she were an impressionable twenty-year-old, although Stan estimated her to be in her mid-thirties.

“I couldn’t believe the Fraser Canyon,” she gushed. “It made our Scottish glens seem so small. And the road twisted and turned so! If Bordy hadn’t been driving, I would have feared for my life. Oh, last night, we stayed at 122 Mile House on Lac La Hache. That lovely couple, Molly and Gilbert Forbes, they treated us like family. Bordy tells me the hospitality and the scenery just get better when we get to the Chilcotin.”

Bordy shook his head at her.

“Now, darling! All I said was that the benchlands along the Chilcotin River are made for grazing cattle and, to me, that’s the best scenery around.”

After a bit of small talk, Belle left the two men so she could shop for Western gear at McKenzie’s Department Store, having seen it on the way in.

“How did you meet such a charming woman?” Stan asked.

“At a dance. I showed off my talent dancing Scottish reels. It’s like square dancing without a caller. I even sang in a good baritone and held my liquor. I could tell she was impressed.”

“Enough to marry you and move here.”

“When I invited her out, I told her all about Canada and the Chilcotin. Believe it or not, I was homesick. I told her that the Chilcotin is not just a place, it’s a state of mind where everything appears to move in slow motion until nature surprises you. And then only the quick survive. Energy is not generated from greed or machines, but from the delicate balance of survival in paradise.”

Stan was surprised by Bordy’s romantic description of his home. Of course, he thought, what Bordy had told Belle to win her over had no doubt been an act of necessity born of desperation. Perhaps a life charming women and competing with his father hadn’t been wasted.

“Her fortune comes from her father’s bottling business in Paisley. She’s been married before, to a pilot in the Royal Air Force. He died and she was just getting over his loss when we met. I proposed after a month of courtship and she accepted.”

“She plays the piano, even graduated from the London Conservatory of Music. She was a local prodigy — played for the King of England at Holyrood Palace in Edinburgh.”

“Will she have much time for that on the ranch?” Stan asked, somewhat sarcastically.

“I promised she would. I even promised to have her grand piano shipped to the ranch. A Beckstein.”

As the conversation continued, it became clear that Belle’s father had set the terms of her dowry *after* meeting Bordy. Mr. Stevenson, Stan thought, was a canny man.

Annie's Child

Stan was invited to the homecoming. He followed Bordy's Buick in his old Ford on the four-hour journey over rough roads to the ranch. The plumes of Chilcotin dust behind them were like clouds of white confetti. As the cars approached the ranch house, Bordy and Stan honked their horns. Clara came out onto the porch. She removed her apron and called the hired hands out from the barn. With her brother back and a new wife to be the woman of the house, she was now free to pursue a life in Vancouver.

Well back from the ranch house, at the Paul family's cabin, Father Dumont stood facing Maria Paul, flanked by her husband Alec and his father, Antoine. Maria held two babies, one in each arm. The priest held out his arms to her. She hesitated and looked at Antoine as if to say, "Shall I give this baby to the priest?" Antoine nodded and she allowed the father to take him. Cradling her baby, Peter, in her arms, she turned away.

Father Dumont walked purposefully among the ranchhands running to greet Bordy, holding the baby to his chest.

At the ranch house, the cars were pulling to a halt. Once they had, Clara rushed out to greet them, her face flush with excitement, though to the cowhands, it was unclear if she was happy to see her brother again, to be relieved of running the ranch or to have another woman there. Any doubt as to which faded as she embraced Belle.

"I'm so glad to finally meet you," she cried.

"It's wonderful to meet you too," Belle replied warmly. "I've heard many good things about you from Bordy."

The cowhands, Cobby and Hoppy, took off their Stetsons and together said, "Ma'am." Then, they nodded at Bordy.

Father Dumont stepped forward, clutching the baby. Belle was a practicing Catholic. She had asked Bordy what their church would be. He'd told her the one in Redstone was an easy drive from the ranch and pointed it out on the way. She hadn't expected the priest to be on the greeting committee.

"Welcome home, Bordy," the priest offered, shaking his hand. "Is this your bride?"

Belle stepped up and he took her hand.

"Glad to meet you, Belle."

She smiled warmly.

"I look forward to seeing more of you, Father. And who is this adorable baby?"

"This is Annie's child."

"Well, Annie's child," she said, touching the baby's cheek, "I would like to see more of you too."

The baby beamed at her.

At dinner that night, Belle turned to the priest.

"Please, father, tell me about Annie's child."

"Annie was a young girl from the people of the near mountains west of Tatlayoko. The T̓silhqot'in call them the Stoney. She died in childbirth. The father is unknown and, since Annie's mother

couldn't look after the child, she came to Antoine to ask what to do. He asked me to find a good home for him."

Belle looked at Bordy with tears in her eyes. Stan could see the tenderness of this remarkable woman reaching out for the helpless baby.

"He is such a beautiful boy. Bordy, surely we can care for this child."

Stan could see that Bordy wanted to say no.

"I don't know, dear," he said, as if considering a calf at auction. "We don't know about his health. For all we know, he could..."

"Dr. Hay examined him," Father Dumont interrupted, "and pronounced him a robust, healthy baby. Maria, the wife of one of your ranchhands, is wet-nursing him now. And his spiritual health is excellent. I baptized him myself yesterday."

In the silence that followed the priest's words, Bordy — sitting at the head of the table — mentally went over his narrowing options. The homecoming had gone so well. The pleasure of getting back to his ranch, the relief of paying off the bank and the desire not to disappoint his bride were beginning to wear down his self-interest and his natural caution against complicating his domestic life.

"Very well," he finally said. "Let's give the little fellow a good start in life. At least we can care for him. What's his name, Father?"

"He was baptized Noah."

When Father Dumont took Noah from the wet nurse and brought him to the dining room, the child began to cry. When Belle took him on her shoulder and patted him on his back, he stopped crying. Then he burped, drooled onto the back of Belle's dress — and grinned. Belle laughed and Stan Hewitt — stiff lawyer with a drinking problem — felt there was hope for the Hanlons.

Antoine's daughter-in-law, Maria, cried when the priest came to say that the Hanlons would care for Noah. Alec, her husband, calmed her.

“We have our son, Peter, and Noah will be close by. We will make other babies.”

Antoine was pleased to hear that they were trying. They would continue to try, but their daughter Justine would not be born for three more years.

In the following years, Stan was a constant at the ranch, making himself as agreeable as possible for a divorced, alcoholic lawyer to be. With Bordy’s hip injury keeping him from conscription while other men from the area went to war, the ranch thrived. On weekends, he took the time to ride into the mountains with his new wife. What kept Stan coming back was Belle Hanlon. Her ready wit and talent enchanted him.

Over time, he saw that she was a doting mother to Noah and, as the years had passed with no hope of having her own children, her attachment to Noah had strengthened. Belle had been childless throughout her first marriage and now she and Bordy were concerned because she hadn’t become pregnant in their marriage. She convinced Bordy that they should adopt Noah and determined to raise him with books like the children’s classics *Winnie the Pooh*, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and *Wind in the Willows*.

Noah played with Peter, the only other boy on the ranch, who was the same age. However, Belle encouraged him to consider himself as white and therefore different from his friend. The white boys — the Johnstons at Tatla Lake and the Keiths near Eagle Lake — were regular visitors at the ranch, but it was Noah and Peter who shared secrets. They didn’t consider Justine, Peter’s little sister, a proper playmate until she was six and could stand up for herself.

Time was not a precious commodity among the Natives on the plateau. They moved with the seasons rather than seconds, minutes or hours, which for a child growing up in the country was fine. But time meant something to a large ranch like Empire, connected as it was to the cattle markets of the world. This wasn’t

brought home to Noah immediately. He learned that lesson one day when he was six.

Stan was at the ranch for the weekend to fish and to listen to Belle play her Beckstein. He was having dinner in the ranch house with company, including the local Member of Legislature Assembly and Father Dumont, when Noah arrived late to the table in tears. He had been riding bareback with Peter on Dobbin, an old Clydesdale plough horse. He was supposed to have been home for supper at five-thirty. It had been six when he said good-bye to Peter at the Pauls' cabin. Antoine had seen his grandson jump off the horse from his doorway and said nothing. Peter was never scolded for misdemeanours. Noah had still been full of fun from the ride as he came into the barn. He'd begun rubbing down the horse like he'd been taught. He had been standing on a stool, his little arms scrubbing down Dobbin, when his father came into the stall.

"Noah, your mother is worried about you. What time were you supposed to be in the house?"

"Five-thirty, Papa."

"Well, it's quarter after six. Where were you?"

"I was riding Dobbin with Peter and I forgot. I'm sorry."

"That's not good enough, son. Finish what you're doing, then come see me in the den."

Noah had been puzzled, but he did what his father told him. He'd finished brushing down the horse and gone to find his father.

"It was wrong of you to disobey your mother. Next time, you'll remember to obey her. It's important to be punctual."

"What does punctual mean, Papa?"

"It means to be on time," Bordy had said.

He'd gone to the desk where he kept his important documents, where Noah was never allowed. He'd grasped a piece of leather from an old harness.

"Hold out your hand," he'd ordered.

“Why, Papa?”

“Because you disobeyed your mother by being late.”

“I won’t do it again.”

“I know you won’t, son, and this will help you remember.”

Bordy had brought the strap down hard on Noah’s little hand. The boy had cried but stayed there in shock.

“Now the other hand.”

Noah had hesitantly held out his other trembling hand and received another blow. And then there had been real tears.

“I don’t want to have to do this again, so remember to be on time. Now, go to the dinner table.”

Life wasn’t all heartache and tension for Noah. Noah continued to see that dark side of Bordy, but he had Belle to comfort him and show him another side of life.

One night, after Belle had read to Noah, he looked up at her with plaintive eyes.

“Mama,” he asked, “why is Papa so mean when there is no hurt in *The Wind in the Willows*?”

“That isn’t in the real world, dear. But I will speak to your father about his striking you.”

The next night, she read to him from *Grimm’s Fairy Tales* and Noah got to know more about the other side of the world, both the imaginary and the real. When she read “Hansel and Gretel”, Noah’s eyes went wide with terror.

“Mother,” he asked, “you know that woman who travels around by herself and doesn’t have a home?”

“You mean Ta Chi, dear?”

“Yes. Is she a witch?”

“No, dear, witches are evil,” she assured him. “Ta Chi is a nomad. She prefers to live on the land by herself. That’s not evil.”

Noah was not so sure. Whenever he saw Ta Chi — and that was two or three times a year when he was out by himself — she

would suddenly appear on a rise or at a corner on the path. She would just stand there watching him without saying a word. He wondered why she wandered about the Chilcotin by herself and it occurred to him that maybe she had lost something.

Noah did not go to school that fall. Belle taught him at home through the provincial government's correspondence courses. He spent the next six years excelling at his lessons and thereby pleasing his mother. He tried to understand his father, who was constantly on the move and talking about cows, grass, water and who was either cursing the hired hands or talking about expanding the ranch.

Most days, Noah spent time in the saddle, out riding with his father. He was expected to do his part on the ranch, as was his closest friend, Peter. Noah's chores started with bringing the haying crews fresh water and food. If he was late, his father would call him out in front of the men. When he was given responsibility for the livestock, they came first and no excuse was tolerated. A cow went missing in midwinter the year Noah was eleven. He was sent to find it and was told not to come back unless he did. Bordy, whose mind was mostly on the ranch, was treating his son as he had been treated by Dean. In doing so, he was passing on to Noah how to raise a child who would hate his father and use that hate to beat the world.

When the war ended, the markets were good for cattle and Bordy wasn't satisfied with his eight hundred head. Some Americans had bought a couple of ranches by Big Bar and named them the 'Gang Ranch'. It was reputed to be the biggest ranch in North America. They boasted three thousand head of cattle. The only way Bordy could get more was to work harder.

Belle kept the books, signed the cheques and kept track of their money. Bordy was focused on expanding the ranch, but she had one aim of her own. She designed a new ranch house, basing it on a hunting lodge from happier years back in Scotland. It was

raised quickly, considering its scope. Made from massive peeled and polished pine logs, the great hall alone measured thirty by sixty feet, open to the second-floor ceiling and surrounded by a balcony on three sides. This centrepiece was designed to house her Beckstein and produced stellar acoustics when she played. About the only nod to Bordy in the room was the cabinet for his guns. The old ranch house became a guesthouse.

With this accomplished, she was no longer inclined to support Bordy's endless drive for expansion. The toll of it was wearing her down. Underlying this struggle was the fact that marriage hadn't changed Bordy's wandering eye. The tension between husband and wife was building. Belle warned him many times that she would not accept his being unfaithful and, every time, he promised it wouldn't happen again.

In July when Noah was twelve, they went to the Anahim Lake Stampede to watch Bordy ride the bronco. Showing off, Bordy got thrown. When he lost, he stormed up to Belle and Noah.

"Let's get the hell out of here," he grunted.

"But Noah is competing in the roping contest," Belle protested.

"Have it your own way, then. I'll take the car and you can come later with the truck and horse trailer."

He didn't wait for a reply.

"We probably won't be back till tomorrow. If Noah makes the finals, it will be too late to start home tonight."

He heard her as he walked away, but gave no sign.

Noah won the trophy and wanted to get back that night to show Bordy. They arrived after midnight, put the horses in the barn and walked to the house.

"I'm going right up and telling Pa," Noah grinned.

"Wait for me," Belle replied, knowing he'd charge ahead without her otherwise.

She hurried a bit, knowing he was impatient, even beating him upstairs. She opened the door to the master bedroom, but he charged in past her.

"Guess what, Pa?" he yelled.

Bordy didn't guess. Instead, he sat upright in bed, his arm around a naked strawberry blonde.

"What the hell!" he shouted.

"Sorry to interrupt," Belle said in a chilled voice. "Come along, Noah! Your father is busy."

She hustled Noah out of the room and slammed the door on the bedmates.

Clara arrived from Vancouver on a visit the next morning. Belle told her what had happened, first thing. Clara simply shrugged.

"I have no influence over Bordy. The reason I left the ranch and the Chilcotin was to get as far away from him as I could. All I care is that he sends me the payment every month."

The Hanlons didn't share the same bedroom again.

The cycle of a driven man and a strong woman finally broke over Noah's education. He was twelve and had finished his elementary schooling at the ranch. To proceed further, his parents would have to send him to boarding school in Williams Lake, which to Belle was out of the question. Noah overheard them talking in the great hall one night.

"To be properly educated, Noah will have to go to a private school in Victoria," Belle stated flatly.

"I went to school in Williams Lake and suffered no ill effects."

"Noah," Belle's voice rose, "deserves a better chance."

"We can't afford it."

"You paid two thousand dollars for a prize-winning Black Angus bull from England last year. If we can afford that, we can afford to send him to a good school."

“Don’t bring Sir Lancelot into this. He’ll pay his way. Why teach Noah all that extra stuff when all he’ll do is raise cattle like me?”

“There’s more to life than raising cattle.”

“Not in the Chilcotin there isn’t.”

“When you were courting me, when you said that the Chilcotin was a wonder of the world, I believed you. Then I saw it and knew that you hadn’t deceived me. Now you spend your waking hours trying to figure out how much money you can make out of it. Then, you said you loved me and, now, I see you *have* deceived me.”

She looked directly at him and knew he didn’t give a damn.

“You don’t love me. You only love the latest floozy you’ve bedded. I’m taking Noah to Victoria.”

Later in the summer, Bordy was in town for a Thursday cattle auction and dropped by Stan’s office. He told Stan that Belle was leaving with Noah. Stan could tell that Bordy was resigned to the move because he immediately began talking about the rise in the price of yearlings and his decision to hold back this year’s calf crop to sell them as yearlings next year. Of course, Noah would be back out on the range with him in the summer, learning everything Bordy had learned from Dean’s beating it into him.

“What about Belle?” Stan asked.

“I’m not so sure she’s coming back. All I know is we’ve agreed that I’ll run the ranch and pay her a large monthly allowance.”

The news of Belle’s leaving affected Stan. He had looked forward to regular visits at Empire Ranch, where he could talk to Belle and listen to her play Brahms in the evening and fish during the day. It had been a wonderful distraction for him, whose closest friend before meeting Belle had been a whiskey bottle. He invited himself to Tatlayoko that weekend to say goodbye.

Belle played Chopin that evening in the great hall.

"The acoustics complement your playing," Stan mused afterward. "You know if you go, you'll be giving up your dream home and your piano."

"Noah comes first," she replied. "Besides, I'll be taking the piano. And will play to a larger audience than just you."

"I can't believe Bordy is letting you go."

"Bordy is quite happy with the arrangement."

"I'm not. I am very unhappy."

"Then you will have to visit me in Victoria."

"But Noah can attend boarding school in Victoria while you stay here in the Chilcotin."

"It is not your place to question my actions," she said, showing him some toughness for a change. "In fact, I resent your interference and will not tolerate it. I've thought of you as a good friend and I hope, if you value our friendship, you will keep your thoughts about my marriage and Noah to yourself."

With that, she got up from the piano and left the large room, leaving Stan to reflect on how badly he had handled the situation. He was used to the hard-hitting debates of the courtroom and indelicate discussions about friendship and marriage. He remained where he sat, quietly drinking until the early hours of the morning. The goodbye had been a disaster. He had been critical when he should have been bracing and negative when he should have been supportive, encouraging Belle to return with Noah on the holidays.

In the morning, he woke up with a hangover, which he treated by slowly drinking some beer. He had planned to do some fishing on the lake, but Bordy suggested he delay until he was in better shape. He shrugged off the suggestion and was on the dock readying the rowboat when Noah showed up.

"Pa wants me to go with you."

"You tell your pa that I've been fishing for forty years and don't need a twelve-year-old kid to help me."

Noah didn't respond, but when Stan lurched into the middle rowing seat, almost capsizing the boat, he climbed into the stern. Stan made no further protests. He rowed out towards the middle of the lake, which was sandwiched between mountains and stretched miles to the south.

"Since you're here," he told the boy, "you might as well row. I'll fish."

They changed places, with Noah keeping the boat from tipping by shifting his weight. Stan settled at the back, opened a bottle of beer and took a long swallow.

"I thought you said you were going to fish," said Noah.

"I'm trying to decide where the fish are."

"I know where the fish are. They are deep and, at this time of day, near the cliffs over there."

Noah pointed to an outcrop on the west shore.

"All right then. Row me over!"

A bottle of beer later, Noah signalled that Stan should set some line.

"You're not going to tell me what lure to use?"

"I would use some weight, a flasher and fish eggs. There are some big char down there."

Noah didn't understand sarcasm.

"I'm fishing for trout, so I think I'll cast for them."

"The wind is coming up a little. Maybe you shouldn't stand."

Stan took this as an invitation to rise to his feet with the fishing rod in his hand. He made a casting motion by drawing his right arm back and flinging it forward. In his drunken state, he lost his balance. Had he followed the rod into the water he might have cleared the gunnels, but he tried to check himself and got his feet entangled in his fishing gear. The boat capsized, spilling them both into the glacial waters of Tatlayoko Lake.

They were a hundred feet from shore. Neither had a life jacket and only Noah could swim. Stan sputtered to the surface, flailing

at the water. The wooden clinker-built was upside down, ten feet away from them, and the wind was gently moving it farther away. Noah was nearer to the boat. Seeing that it was their only chance, he swam to it and caught up. He pushed it slowly closer to Stan, who was yelling and sputtering. He was beside Stan when the lawyer came up again. Noah made a last effort and shoved the boat towards him.

“Grab on!” he shouted.

Stan had sobered up enough from the shock of the water to make a lunge at the boat and get his fingers on the keel. They were still a hundred feet from shore and the wind was pushing them parallel to the shoreline. They would have to reach shore before the cold sapped their strength. Stan started to function. He moved hand over hand to the stern, where he was able to grasp an iron mounting for an outboard. Using this to hold onto, he began kicking the boat towards the shoreline, while Noah, exhausted from his effort, could only hang on to the overturned boat and be carried to the shore.

It took them ten minutes paddling the inverted rowboat with pieces of driftwood to reach a small pebble beach. There, they collapsed and felt the sun slowly warm them to life. They didn’t speak for the longest time. Eventually, Stan broke the silence.

“Thank you, son. You saved my life. I’ll never forget it.”

“Pa would’ve been mad if I’d come back without you.”

When they got back to the ranch, soaked through, Stan told everyone how the boy had saved his life.

“It’s only what I would expect of Noah,” Bordy boasted.

“You’re a brave boy and I am proud of you,” Belle gushed.

She saved her wrath for Stan.

“You selfish old drunk. How could you put my son’s life at risk?”

Stan wished that he had drowned. It would have been a better fate than hearing Belle attack him. Her words gutted him, not just because there was truth in them. The one person he most

admired — and if he told the truth to himself, even loved — had found him out. When he left the ranch in his Ford an hour later, he made a vow to stop drinking that, with a few notable exceptions, proved more successful than any of his attempts at the twelve steps of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Neighbours

In Victoria, Belle's first priorities were to find a home and arrange for Noah's education. She rented a large house on the waterfront in the Uplands, an imposing white structure with a carved oak door. While it was more than the two of them needed, the owner had had to leave town and she got a deal, with the planned payments from Bordy more than enough to cover the rent. Soon after they moved in, there was a knock on the door.

"Hello, I'm Adele Buscombe. Your new neighbour."

The woman at the door was bright-faced and elegantly dressed for midday.

"Belle Hanlon. A pleasure to meet you."

"Now, I know it's not much notice," Adele said rather quickly, "but you must come to our house for dinner tonight. You can meet my husband Charles. Your other neighbour, Major Parmenter will be there as well, so you see, you *must* come. Tonight at seven."

"Oh, that would be lovely. My son is twelve..."

"I'm so sorry," stammered Adele. "I didn't think..."

"I can make something for him here," Belle interjected. "I'd love to come."

For a moment, Belle had forgotten she was no longer in the Chilcotin.

Alone in the new house, Noah ate his dinner happily. After all, he was used to working alone on the ranch. But after his supper, he explored his new home and everything seemed strange. While he knew things would be different in the city, he had never experienced a city life. Still, he was looking forward to days without chores.

Next door, Adele introduced Belle to her husband, Charles. No sooner had they greeted than the doorbell rang. It was the major.

Major Jack Parmenter was an older man, nearing sixty, but very fit. His ruddy complexion was offset by a salt-and-pepper moustache.

Belle, back straight, saluted the major.

"Do you have military background, young lady?"

"My first husband was a pilot in the Royal Air Force. When I lived in Scotland."

Dinner was a delight. The food was marvellous. Adele was the consummate hostess, Charles was fine company, if a bit shy, and the major, gregarious. The Uplands, the upscale subdivision they lived in, was praised by all. The waterfront was close and Belle was informed of all the local amenities.

Belle quickly learned that the major had done all the necessary useful things to succeed in business in Victoria: he had joined the Union Club, made contact with Royal Roads Military Academy, become friends with the commanding officer on the *HMCS Esquimalt* and made an effort to get to know members of the provincial cabinet. However, he had not settled on a business in which to invest his sizable fortune.

Belle found herself wondering if the military connection was why she felt an immediate attraction to this bustling man who never seemed comfortable staying still. It was evident to her that he had seen active duty, as he would start at any sudden noise in the distance. Sure enough, she was correct. He was a military engineer who had fought in every theatre of war from Africa's desert sands to Italy, the beaches of Normandy to India, Burma to Kenya. Whenever there had been a pause in the wars, he had returned to Victoria. From various clues, Belle correctly surmised that he had served in the Royal Engineers rather than the Royal Canadian Engineers.

Adele and Charles were both native to Victoria. Adele had been left the Cowichan Electric Company by her father. Adele's head for numbers was an asset to the company and she served as controller. Charles served as manager, which often required him to travel. They were facing political pressures, as the government wanted to consolidate electric power in the province. A competing company with its government connections established, Nanaimo Electric, was better positioned and had made a takeover offer. The couple didn't seem to want to discuss that much further and turned the topic to happier things. In his spare time, Charles built model trains. Adele seemed to busy herself with social events.

Soon, the conversation turned to Belle.

"So, Mrs. Hanlon, you have a son," the major offered.

"Yes. Noah's at home this evening."

"He's twelve," Adele offered. "Grade seven, right?"

Belle nodded.

"What school will he be attending, Belle?"

"Well, we've just moved here," Belle confessed. "We haven't made arrangements yet. I want to find a good private school."

"My military friends," the major mused, "say All Saints is excellent for boys."

“They’re well-respected,” Charles affirmed. “They take day students and boarders both.”

“I’d like to meet your son,” the major nodded. “Perhaps you could come over for tea tomorrow?”

At tea the next day, Noah fidgeted while Belle and the major explored each other’s lives. It didn’t take Belle long to get to know the major’s interests. He had ‘retired’ to Victoria in his mid-fifties with a plan to invest in a small company, enjoy the society of the provincial capital and perhaps find a compatible woman with whom he could hunt and fish.

He knew of the Chilcotin as a remote, desolate part of the province’s Interior, good for hunting mountain goats. As Belle told him about her life there, it came to his mind that she might be the woman he was hoping to find.

It was decided that it would be best for Noah to board at All Saints during the week but return home for weekends.

Over the next few months, after Noah was settled at All Saints, Belle spent a lot of time with the major. He wooed her and won her heart with his little attentions — the kind of things Bordy used to do before he put his cattle ahead of their marriage.

When she learned her father was ill, the major was there to comfort her. Arrangements were made for Noah to stay at the school for the weekends as Belle was asked by her family to return to Scotland. She spent a month helping care for her father, finally sitting at his bedside as he died. The next while was a whirlwind, what with planning his funeral and being circled by lawyers looking to carry out his will.

When she returned, the major’s connections helped her to deal with all the paperwork. Freeing her time up even further, she hired a housekeeper. She made an offer and bought the house. Belle and the major bonded during this time.

One night over dinner at the Union Club, the major took Belle's hand.

"My dear, I have never met a woman as vivacious and attractive as you," he offered, smiling. "I would like you to be my wife."

By this point, the major's proposal was not unexpected, nor unwelcome. But things were not that simple.

"You know I am Catholic," Belle replied, "I won't divorce Bordy. But I do like you, Jack. I could even learn to love you. Let's just say that you are my intended."

The major nodded slowly, understanding though disappointed.

Noah adapted well to school, especially to art classes, showing a talent for drawing wildlife, particularly birds.

With her son gone during the week and the housekeeper taking care of the house, Belle found herself looking for something to fill her time. She began to take a greater interest in the major's affairs. She still had plenty of her inheritance to invest and he was still looking for the right company to buy into. Cowichan Electric, she decided, was ideal for both of them.

The Buscombes didn't want to sell the company, but the political landscape made for good reason for them to sell *part* of it. Charles was a fair administrator and Adele skilled with figures, but politics were beyond their comfort. The company needed someone who knew how to negotiate with the government. The major would make for a perfect fit with his many political contacts and his experience dealing with large bureaucracy.

By Christmas, Belle had convinced Adele that Cowichan Electric should hire the major and that an investment would be to the benefit of all concerned. Adele convinced Charles. Within a short time, Major Jack Parmenter became the General Manager and President of Cowichan Electric, whose shareholders were himself, the Buscombes and Belle, who would act as a silent partner. The major quickly turned the political tides and the tables, positioning the company to make a reverse takeover bid

for Nanaimo Electric, whose owner fought through the courts to prevent it. With a bit more capital from him and Belle, though, the offer was approved.

At the ranch the following two summers, Noah reconnected with Peter. He'd been attending St. Joseph's Mission residential school for Indians, run by the Oblates and the Sisters of the Child Jesus. Away from his family and with Noah gone, he had felt abandoned and had lost his sense of fun. But the spark of their friendship seemed to bring it back.

By the end of the second year, the company was thriving. With the government's blessing, the major bought Campbell River Power, a harder fight than his earlier one. This one was followed with allegations of corruption from the old owners and time in court, but he prevailed.

The amalgamated company, renamed the Vancouver Island Power Company, became the biggest supplier of electrical power to middle and upper Vancouver Island and its growing population. With the major proving himself at the helm and now majority shareholder, Charles Buscombe retired to his real passion in life: keeping his model trains running on time.

Belle remained involved through discussion with the major. She was content to let her role beyond that be only the occasional signature.

By mid-summer, things were going so well that she felt comfortable taking a month to travel in Europe and using the opportunity to feed Noah's love of art by touring the galleries. Bordy could finish the summer on the ranch without running his son ragged, she decided.

Gin and Tonic

The daffodils were blooming outside the windows of the Union Club when the major ordered his first gin and tonic of the year. The intricacy of this spring tradition was to be admired.

Jepson, the steward, took a bottle of Beefeaters from the major's personal oak locker and placed it on a silver tray. From the cooler behind the bar, he grabbed a small bottle of Schweppes. Then, with a flick of the opener cupped in his right hand, uncapped it and placed it next to the gin. He filled an ice bucket and sliced limes into quarters, adding these ingredients to the tray. A crystal glass was the final touch.

Silver tray in hand, he approached the major's corner table. The major took a keen interest in the quality and ceremony of his drink, making sure no detail was missed. Jepson held the tray in the meaty part of his left hand and, with his right, arranged the contents on the table. Using the ice tongs, he dropped two ice cubes into the crystal, each making a 'pinging' sound and misting the inside of the glass. He splashed some gin over the cubes and they made a satisfying crackle. He added the tonic to

within a half-inch of the top. To finish, a lime wedge was driven down onto the rim of the glass.

The major appreciated Jepson's professionalism, for he was a professional himself and a stickler for detail. Indeed, details seemed to stay with him, the redness in his cheeks seeming to recall his time in India and countless gins consumed during the hot season. For someone whose history had trained him to look at life as if he were on a war footing, there was certainty in the details, a certainty that reassured, if not relaxed him.

The perfection in the details of the drink recalled the gin and tonic served to him by the Maharajah of Jodhpur following a tiger hunt on the prince's private reserve. Major Parmenter had saved the maharajah's life by shooting a tiger in mid-leap and the prince was grateful. He had showed his gratitude by personally serving him a gin and tonic at the palace that evening. This was a memory the major would carry with him for life.

Jepson straightened and brought the empty silver tray up to his chest as a shield.

"Is everything to your liking, major?" he asked deferentially.

The major raised an eyebrow, took the lime from the edge of the glass and squeezed it into his drink. He raised the glass slowly to his lips and sipped.

"Splendid, Jepson. The maharajah couldn't have done it better. Now I must drink up and meet a boring lawyer for lunch."

Belle had been content to let Bordy run the ranch as he pleased, so long as he kept up his payments to her. Bordy had been doing well but gotten it in his mind to make the Empire the Chilcotin's largest ranch, one to rival the Gang Ranch and even the Douglas Lake Ranch in the Nicola Valley. This meant buying land on the Chilcotin River where the best hayfields were located, which in turn meant signatures were needed from the ranch's co-owner.

This made for an excuse for Stan to travel to Victoria to see Belle.

For her part, she was happy to see him so long as he arrived sober and offered no advice on how she should live her life.

At eleven o'clock one morning, Stan arrived at Belle's.

"I was sorry to hear of your father's death," he began. "I corresponded with him to set up the ownership of the Empire Ranch. He seemed a very fine man."

"Thank you, Stan. He was." Saddened, Belle nodded. "A host of his friends saw him piped to his grave. He was celebrated well."

"I know how concerned he was for your welfare so far away."

"I'm well taken care of," she assured.

Stan took the hint not to pry further. They both knew he was aware of the inheritance and Belle clearly didn't want his advice on her money. Deciding to change the subject, he looked around the anteroom.

"Where's the piano?"

She showed him the front room. The Beckstein looked quite small in a room with floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the Strait of Georgia, quite unlike the cavernous wood-lined great hall at the ranch. They continued on to the den to conduct business. When that was done, they moved to the dining room, where the housekeeper had set out lunch. There were three places set.

"Are you expecting Noah?" Stan asked.

"Major Parmenter will be joining us," she answered. "He's my next-door neighbour. I hope you don't mind?"

"Not at all. How is Noah?"

"He's doing well."

"I didn't get to see him this summer before you two left for Europe."

The doorbell rang. The housekeeper showed in the major.

"Stan, this is Major Jack Parmenter," Belle announced.

The major came up to Belle and kissed her on the cheek. Stan looked away. He still felt a twinge of jealousy.

"Sorry I'm late," the major said, extending his hand to Stan. "We're in the middle of rate hearings. The meeting went into the lunch hour."

"Jack's the CEO and majority owner of the Vancouver Island Power Company," Belle explained, "and the company is in the midst of a takeover."

Her own explanation couldn't satisfy her though, given the distinct odour of gin on the major's breath.

Stan had wanted to spend more time with Belle, perhaps get her to play the piano. Instead, he ended up trying to be nice to a man who was obviously her lover. Was Belle using him as a pawn? Had she invited the major so that he could meet him and convey his impression back to Bordy? He had no intention of doing that of course, but it wouldn't have been favourable.

Over lunch, the major talked about his North African campaign under Field Marshal Montgomery. Listening to the soldier getting worked up over his war years made Stan feel even more uneasy about the man who had captured Belle's affections. He thought ruefully that he could have been in the major's shoes, if only he had wooed Belle, for Belle and he had so much more in common. He had to be content with being allowed back into her circle.

After lunch, the major left for his hearing and Stan found himself alone with Belle in the foyer.

"It's been wonderful to see you again, to find you so happy," he said. "I would have liked to hear you play."

"If only you were staying in town longer. I'm doing a recital soon. But now I'm expecting my bridge group any minute. I promise I'll play for you next time you're in town."

Stan took her hand.

"Goodbye, Belle."

The major returned to his office in the city, a large corner suite decorated with his war mementoes. He was approached almost immediately by Ian Richards, an engineer who spoke and acted like a servant rather than a professional man in the presence of his chief, which engendered a high regard from the major.

"I need your advice, Major."

"Always happy to give it."

"Our electrical consumption projections show that we'll have to find and develop a new source of hydro power within the next five years so we can meet future demand over the coming decade. I have the report on a number of sites we've been considering for a dam. Once you've had a chance to review it, would you advise me on a course of action?"

Richards knew his boss and how to stroke his ego. He knew the major had already made up his mind where to put the dam if one was needed and had shaded his report in that direction.

"Thank you, Richards. I'll read it and get back to you."

The major took the report, but Richards remained standing before him.

"Is there anything else?"

"I'd like your advice on a personal matter involving my son."

The major smiled. He enjoyed influencing the lives of young men. His advice was inevitably the same: enlist in the armed forces. It was what he had done and it had served him well.

"Go on, Richards," the major said.

Ian's son, Ralph, was enrolled at Oak Bay High School. Ian Richards could not call his son a student, for that would imply that he studied. He lived in the shadow of his older sister Emily, an overachiever. Ralph and his friends played in a jazz band, which was an excuse to drink and party. He could have continued this idyllic life through to graduation had he not crashed the family car while driving home from a gig. He had been arrested and charged with driving while drunk. Ian and his wife, Enid,

had been surprised when their daughter turned out so well and terrified when Ralph — who had seemed to be so sensible and kept below their radar — suddenly became a criminal. They'd decided that the solution was to send him to a private school to straighten him out.

"Enid and I have decided he needs the discipline of a private school. I was hoping you could suggest one."

"I have a few ideas and connections," the major mused, "but before I recommend anything, bring him to my house tomorrow so I can size him up."

Father and son arrived at the major's house that Saturday. Ralph was a short, slouching teenager, self-conscious, wearing the baggy draped slacks fashionable in the early fifties and not knowing what to do with his hands. He shoved them into his pockets, but then had to drag one out to shake the major's hand. The major grabbed onto it in a vise grip and wouldn't let go.

"So, you're the boy who wants to piss his life away?"

"No, I don't."

"Drinking and driving. What were you thinking? Your father asked me to help. I know something about educating young men for war."

"We're not in a war, *sir*," Ralph said, looking confused.

"That's what you think, sonny. We've already had two world wars this century. The last one ended just eight years ago. Do you have a brain in your head?" The major answered his own question. "I think you do."

Ralph had never been spoken to in this way. Discipline at home meant being sent to his room, locking the door and crawling out through the window to go meet his friends. Ian hid a smile.

"I'll tell you what. I'll get you into a school that will change your life. You've heard of All Saints?"

The major crossed the room to an elaborate gun case. He pulled out a gold-inlaid, French double-barrelled shotgun and put it in Ralph's hands.

"See how light this is," he told the boy. "I use it for skeet shooting."

He went to his desk and took out a handful of shells and some clay pigeons.

"Come outside a minute."

He led Ralph to the terrace. Ian followed without a word. On the terrace, the major spotted Noah in Belle's yard.

"Come here, Noah. I want you to meet someone."

When Noah reached the terrace, the major introduced him to Ian and Ralph.

"Ralph here wants to go to All Saints," the major explained, "and I'd like you to keep an eye on him."

"I didn't say I wanted to go to All Saints," Ralph protested.

"You're going to All Saints," his father hissed.

The two boys cautiously looked at each other.

"Ian," the major commanded, "throw this clay pigeon out towards the sea."

The pigeon had hardly left Ian's hand when the major put the gun to his shoulder, sighted the skeet and fired, all in one motion. The pigeon burst into pieces.

He handed the gun to Ralph.

"Now, you try."

Ralph eagerly took the gun. He wasn't able to hit the five pigeons that the major threw out for him, but the major praised his effort and said he saw some natural talent. He then handed the gun to Noah.

"Your turn, Noah."

Noah missed in his five attempts. The major scoffed, but Ralph looked at Noah with real interest, because it looked to him like Noah had missed deliberately.

The major led them all back into the house.

"There's more to guns than shooting them." He handed the boy a cleaning kit. "Clean the gun and put it back in the gun case."

When Ralph placed the gun back in the cabinet, he noticed that all but one of the guns in the case were engraved and inlaid with gold. He took particular notice of the orphan plain gun because it had three notches on the barrel and seemed out of place and somewhat down at the heel, much the same way Ralph was feeling these days.

"Isn't the major something else?" Ian asked his son on the way home.

"Yeah." Ralph nodded. "He's a crazy old bastard, that's what he is."

The major had done one thing for Ralph: he had gotten him riled up. Ralph's anger got him through the years he attended All Saints. That and his friendship with Noah Hanlon were enough to see him through to graduation.

Noah was different from the other guys. By all rights, Ralph thought Noah should have given him a hard time by breaking him into the school traditions. Instead, Noah sort of looked out for him. Ralph was a bit of a runt, but the rugby coach thought he had just the right build for a scrum half. During the practices and games in early autumn, he was every opposing player's punching bag. The only reason he survived was that Noah — who played wing and ran so fast no one could touch him — was always there to pull Ralph out of the pile and tell him that he had made a hell of a play.

Soon the other boys started rallying around him and resented it when the opposing teams roughed him up. Their team spirit was so strong that in the last season of Noah's graduating year, All Saints won the McKechnie Cup — a first for the school. They were labelled by the opposition as the "All Whites" because of

their white uniforms and the colour of their skin. Noah was the exception and it galled them to see him run past, through and over their best players for a try. In the beginning, the opposition called him 'the Indian', but by the time Noah graduated from All Saints he had taught them to call him 'the Chilcotin'.

That summer, as in other years, Noah spent most of his time at Empire Ranch. He saw Peter only occasionally, as his friend had dropped out of school and started drinking in Williams Lake with others his age. As a result, he'd drifted away from the ranch. It wasn't long before the attractions of the big city lured him to Vancouver. Noah knew his summers would be that much bleaker now.

Ralph noticed that when Noah had left for the ranch in July he was full of praise for the Chilcotin, but when he returned at the end of August, he was quiet and reserved, lean and hard, and talked very little of his time with his father and the ranch.

"Why are you so different when you come back from your dad's?" Ralph asked.

"Bordy is working out his demons," Noah said. "He doesn't just pick on me. He's that way with everything and everybody."

"Why do you go back?"

"I wish I knew. I'm like a moth to a flame. I can't keep away from the Chilcotin."

That fall, Noah entered the Fine Arts Program at Victoria College and began a major in painting.

Soon after, he brought his portfolio to Ralph's to show him. Emily arrived home from university in Vancouver. She was amused on finally meeting this fantastic rugby player friend Ralph had told her about.

Emily was in her second year at the University of British Columbia, majoring in ornithology. As a biologist, she classified

Ralph in the class *Reptilia* and wasn't interested in any of his friends. She also had no interest in sweaty athletes. Until she met Noah. He was six feet tall, a dark and soft-spoken artist — qualities she didn't usually associate with Ralph's friends.

Noah showed her his portfolio and she was impressed. Soon, he phoned her up and asked her on a date. Out of curiosity, she accepted. He took her to dinner and brought her home to meet his mother.

Belle was used to Noah's dates being pretty girls with little going on upstairs. She could not say that about this one. Still, it occurred to her that Emily was studying dead birds neatly filed in drawers while Noah was drawing and painting living ones.

But love isn't just for the birds. For the next year, they dated.

When Belle had lived at the ranch, Stan's visits would include entertaining the family and their dinner guests with his court stories. He got the chance to continue this tradition when he came to Victoria on an appeal and Belle invited him to dinner. Noah would be unveiling a portrait of her he had done.

When Stan arrived, the major was full of his recent takeover of Campbell River Power. Noah had brought friends, Ralph Richards and his sister Emily. Stan surmised Emily was Noah's girlfriend. He sat between them at the dinner table.

Over dinner, conversation turned quickly to the portrait.

"I think the portrait is second only to the subject," Emily raved, earning a smiling nod from Belle. "Though the chartreuse she's wearing now highlights her colouring more."

The guests started complimenting Belle on her outfit.

"I prefer her in black," Noah said. "She looks more imperial."

"Both suit her," Stan assured.

"What brings you down to Victoria, Mr. Hewitt?" Emily asked.

"I appeared before the Court of Appeal today in a civil case. Parents from Alexis Creek were suing their ten-year-old daughter,

represented by a public trustee. The father had recently been laid off and they bought an Irish Sweepstakes ticket with their meagre savings and, thinking it would be lucky for the whole family of seven, they placed the ticket in their youngest daughter's name. To their joy, they found that they had won a hundred thousand dollars. That the cheque was made out to their minor daughter was a mere formality, they had thought. But they hadn't counted on the law! The public trustee interpreted it as saying that it was the child's money, not the family's. And although it was her money, she wouldn't be able to claim it until she legally became an adult at age twenty-one. In the interim, it could only be spent on her necessities and education, not on her family. The trial judge, Mr. Justice Deacon, agreed with the public trustee. He disregarded the intention of the parents and found that the ticket was a gift."

"What a horrible situation," Belle replied, enthralled.

"Ah, but today," Stan smiled. "Today, the Court of Appeal gave their decision from the bench, accepting my argument that the intention was that the money be for the whole family. They divided the winnings into seven equal parts."

He finished his story with a flourish. Had he been drinking, he would have quaffed a glass of wine with one swallow.

"A truly biblical decision," he announced.

The dinner guests, with the exception of the major, applauded.

After dinner, the men went for a smoke in the den. Noah and Ralph were ordered by the major to join them and give the women a chance to talk without them. The boys ended up with front-row seats to the men's talk.

Stan took his filtered cigarettes from his vest pocket, extracted one and fit it into his holder. The major watched this show with some alarm, then gestured at Stan.

"I find that holder quite affected," he said gruffly. "You should have a man's smoke."

“Oh, and what is a man’s smoke?” Stan replied good-naturedly.

“A cigar, of course. Hand-rolled in Cuba on the thighs of a nubile Cuban woman.”

He offered Stan a cigar. Stan declined, thinking to himself that Belle’s men were a vulgar lot. The major took offence on behalf of the cigar.

“Not good enough for a back-country lawyer? Perhaps it’s not biblical enough.”

Stan ignored the major’s gibe.

“How are you finding the change from fighting wars to running a power company?”

“There’s no difference,” he said with a smug smile. “I run the company as I ran my division. I set my priorities and objectives and achieve them. I let nothing stand in my way. As you can see, I have been successful.”

“So far,” Stan replied in a way that sounded as offhand as it was by design.

“Why don’t you blow that smoke out your ass?” the major huffed.

“Why don’t *you* read Cervantes?” Stan replied, butting out his cigarette.

“What? What the hell are you talking about?”

“Don Quixote, the mad knight who fantasized about jousts and ladies. Yet throughout his adventures, Don Quixote mainly harmed himself.”

With the major looking angry and belligerent, but lost for words, Stan stood up and left the room.

Noah smiled at Ralph, knowing what they were really arguing about.

Stan and the boys couldn’t have known it that night, but there was more on the major’s mind. He was running out of options for a site for his hydroelectric project, the centrepiece of his and

Belle's investment. Political wrangling was holding up the sites on Vancouver Island, so the company was relying heavily on costly diesels to produce electricity on-Island.

He was explaining this to Belle one night, getting frustrated because she didn't seem to be paying attention.

"When Bordy and I were first married," she interjected, "he took me on horseback into the mountains west of the ranch."

The major bristled at the interruption, as well as the mention of Belle's husband.

"I remember following the Homathko River before it joins Mosley Creek," she continued. "We climbed far above the rapids, dismounted and clambered to the edge of a gorge that was hundreds of feet deep. Waddington Canyon. We made our way down to the river and Bordy showed me some iron pegs sunk into the walls of solid rock, which he said were put there to suspend a road through the canyon."

Now the major was listening intently.

"The road," Belle remembered, "was intended as a route to the gold fields in the Cariboo. It would be an ideal place for a dam. Too bad it's not on the Island."

The major nodded as he took this in.

"I'm desperate," he finally said. "I'll look into this, but we have to keep quiet about it until we get approval for a water licence. Otherwise some interest group will oppose it and the cabinet will get cold feet."

During Easter week 1957, Stan received a call from Bordy on the radiophone, demanding that Stan come out to the ranch. Since the radiophone was on an open channel and anyone in the Chilcotin could overhear the conversation, he figured it must be urgent legal business. After all, he had not been invited to Empire since Belle had left.

“We’ll be branding tomorrow and there’s a dance in the evening,” Bordy offered. “You can stay overnight.”

Stan drove to Tatlayoko Lake via Highway 20. Twenty-five years ago when Stan had come to this country, Dean Hanlon had been struggling to live on forty cows and a quarter-section of land. Now, most of the twenty miles from Eagle Lake to Tatlayoko was Empire Ranch. But at what cost to Bordy, Belle and Noah, he wondered.

The home fields were full of cows closely followed by bawling calves about to have the ER brand seared on their right flanks. Cowhands rode in and out of the herd, lassoing the calves and dragging them to the fires and the red glow of the irons. The young male soon-to-be steers suffered the further indignity of having their testicles removed. Stan had attended these branding parties in the past and always felt uneasy about celebrating the ritual.

Mingling in the herd and watching from the fence railings was a good cross-section of the Chilcotin, white and Native alike, all rejoicing in Bordy’s prosperity. The man of the hour was everywhere: giving orders, talking up the hands, showing off to the onlookers.

Peter was in Vancouver, but the rest of the Pauls were there. Alec was now lead hand. Justine joined in the physical work with much grace and had become a fine horsewoman. She carried herself well. Her hair was pulled back tightly from her forehead and braided at the back. She had a small oval face with large brown eyes which were alert and inquisitive.

Noah did his part with Bordy riding herd on him.

Stan joined the rail-sitters next to Antoine. Where Stan buried himself in the law and the more cynical approach to life that came with it, as *deyen*, Antoine was connected to his surroundings, natural and unnatural alike. He was uneducated in that he couldn’t read or write, unable to attend public schools because of his Native heritage, but was a person whose opinion Stan valued.

After acknowledging Stan, Antoine turned his gaze back to Bordy, mounted on a palomino stud and every bit the general in command of this branding. He had come a long way since his father died in the ring at the Anahim Lake Stampede twenty years ago. Yet, Stan could see a lot of Dean in him.

A calf that Noah had lassoed slipped loose and went bawling back to its mother.

"Don't you know enough to cinch up on that lasso?" Bordy yelled.

Then Bordy lassoed the same calf himself.

"That's how you do it," he yelled.

"Bordy," Antoine confided to Stan, "is boiling water. He always scalds, never soothes."

They kept their eyes on Noah to see how he was taking his father's insult. Justine rode up to Noah and said something. He appeared calmed by her words. He even smiled.

After branding that day, Noah was rubbing down his horse in the stall next to Justine's. Since she'd spoken to him in the corral and calmed him down, he hadn't been able to stop thinking about her. She had always been Peter's little sister, almost a sister to him. Now with Peter in Vancouver, he saw her for who she'd become: a spirited, independent T̓silhqot'in woman who seemed to care a lot about him.

"Thanks for cooling me down over that roping miss today."

"Well, Bordy is a shit at times."

Noah laughed.

"At times?"

They finished with the horses, walked to the front of the barn and sat on a hay bale.

"Have you heard from Peter?"

"He sometimes phones Mum and Dad for money."

"I feel guilty in a way. If I had stayed in the Chilcotin, he might not have been tempted to leave."

“Don’t blame yourself,” she said, laying a hand on his arm. “Antoine says that Peter may come to his senses. He’s planning on going to Vancouver to see if he’ll come back.”

Noah took both of her hands in his, tenderly.

“This must be very hard on you.”

Her heart stopped beating for a moment and tears were in her eyes.

“Yes. I miss him.”

He clasped her hands more tightly. Justine knew that Noah had a girlfriend in Victoria and had been resigned to being just good friends with him, but now she was overcome. She flung herself at Noah and they fell off the hay bale in each other’s arms.

There was a barbeque and a dance in the great hall that evening and Bordy was the life of the party.

Noah shared every dance with Justine. Even Stan saw that they were a couple. Towards midnight, Bordy approached the two when everyone was taking a breather from a strenuous square dance.

“Noah,” he said. “I see you need more practice with the rope.”

He looked at Justine and winked. She squeezed Noah’s hand.

“I’m doing just fine, Bordy,” Noah replied.

“Well, it’s time for you to go to bed now. We’ll be up at dawn to finish the job.”

“No. Justine and I are just getting started, but you have a good night’s sleep.”

Bordy scowled and walked away.

A half-hour later, with the band taking a break, they danced slow to Louis Armstrong’s recording of “Blueberry Hill”. Bordy came up to them on the floor, obviously having had a bit more to drink.

“I think I’ll dance with Justine now.”

“No, thank you, Mr. Hanlon,” Justine deferred. “I promised all my dances to Noah.”

Frustrated, Bordy motioned Stan into his den. Bordy took a single-malt scotch whiskey, not his first of the evening, from the bar.

"Will you have one?" he asked Stan.

"Don't think I will."

"That's not like you, Stan."

"I swore off it a while ago."

"Well, that's probably a good thing. You'll need all your wits to help me."

"What's the problem?"

"I've got news that the provincial cabinet has been secretly petitioned to give a water licence to the Vancouver Island Power Company," he said. "They want to dam the Homathko River at Waddington Canyon. If that dam is built, this valley will be flooded and we'll be under ten feet of water."

"Easy now," Stan cautioned. "That's a long way off and we have time to divert those plans. You do know of course that Belle is on very friendly terms with Major Jack Parmenter, the majority owner of the power company."

"I know that," Bordy shouted. "I can see her devious hand behind all this. I want you to use every legal trick you can to stop this invasion of my land."

"Well, they haven't made the decision yet. I'll start working on it."

Stan used the age-old lawyer's strategy of threat and delay to interfere with the government's plans. He wrote the premier and threatened legal action if a water licence was granted. He knew that it would take months for the Attorney General to provide the cabinet with an opinion on whether its decision could be upheld in the courts. Throughout the balance of 1957, there was silence from Victoria on the rumoured plan.

To Noah's surprise, Emily was waiting at the ferry terminal when he returned. In the car en route to Victoria, Noah hesitantly spoke up.

"Emily, I have to tell you that I'm seeing someone else."

"Oh really!" she said in a hurt and angry voice. "The ranch was just an excuse to be closer to this someone else."

He didn't respond. She hit the brakes and pulled over to the curb.

"Class *Reptilia*," she muttered. "I should have followed my instincts. Get out!"

He walked the next few miles home.

Bordy had a stroke that Christmas, which Stan thought was mainly a result of his being continually angry at the thought of the dam. Feng Chan, the cook at Empire, found Bordy in bed after he didn't come down for breakfast. Alec Paul drove him into the hospital in Williams Lake, where Dr. Hay kept him for a week. The right side of his body was paralyzed, but he was mentally alert. The doctor warned him that if he continued to run the ranch in his condition, he would certainly have a relapse. With proper exercise and a good diet, he would see some improvement in the next year.

Noah came to see his father. Belle decided to remain in Victoria when Bordy refused to see her. Stan hovered in the back of the hospital room to give father and son some space. Bordy greeted Noah from his bed.

"I'm not dead yet."

Noah had never seen him so vulnerable. To see him lying there weak, his face twisted on the right side, made him sympathize with Bordy for the first time since he'd first ridden on his father's pommel as a child.

"You sure don't look well," Noah mumbled, some warmth in his voice.

"I can't ride a horse now. How can I run a ranch without a horse?"

“My kingdom for a horse,” murmured Stan. Louder, he added, “You’ll have to find a good manager.”

Bordy nodded and looked at Noah with apparent feeling.

“The only person I would trust is Noah,” he replied. “What do you say, son? Will you take over managing Empire until I get back in the saddle?”

“That would break up my year at college,” Noah started, but then he looked at his father. “But I’ll think about it if you really need me.”

“Start thinking!”

On his return to Victoria, Noah told Belle what Bordy had asked him.

“What did you say?”

“I said I would think about it.”

“He doesn’t need you to manage the ranch,” she responded passionately. “He wants to make life miserable for you and to humiliate me. You’re an artist, not a cowboy.”

“You should see him. He’s paralyzed on one side and can’t ride a horse.”

“Can he talk?”

“Yes.”

“Then he’ll make your life a living hell!”

The major’s response was more tactful.

“I know you’re a good artist. I’ve seen your work,” he said. “I don’t know about your ranching skills. Don’t you and Bordy fight all the time?”

“That’s his way of teaching me.”

“If you want to be taught how to run a business — which I recommend, because you can’t make a living as an artist — I’ll hire you to work at the company.”

“Thanks a lot,” Noah said sullenly. “That would kill any creative energy I have.”

“And being a rancher won’t?”

“No. The Chilcotin’s in my blood. I’m not keen on running Empire Ranch, but I’m going back to help Bordy. It’s the Chilcotin I’m committed to and, while I would prefer to go back as a painter, I believe it will give me the inspiration I need to become one.”

Belle straightened.

“Don’t bother coming back to this house until you’ve rid yourself of the notion that you’re a cowboy.”

Sparrows

Noah agreed to manage the ranch for a year. The first months of his stewardship were relatively peaceful, Bordy being confined to his room. He found time to do some winter sketches and to visit Justine, now a student at the St. Joseph's Mission residential school for Indians, about twelve miles south of Williams Lake. This idyllic lull ended with the start of the calving season.

The calving yard held fifteen hundred cows. The first calves came in March and the season stretched into April. Noah slept in the barn to be close to the herd and assist those cows having birthing problems. After the spring breakup, when the frost rises from the ground and turns dirt roads into soupy messes, the roads normalized and work went back to usual. The hay fields were harrowed and fertilized, then the water systems had to be repaired. The busy summer months were full of riding the range, irrigating and haying. Noah had no personal life, no time for Justine or his painting and each day of Bordy's improving health meant more of Bordy's verbal lashes. One reprieve was that Bordy

would hold his tongue when they lunched each day in the huge dining hall that could seat twenty-four people.

Management of the ranch only made Noah miss Peter's company even more. He had worked side-by-side with him doing chores as early as he could remember and they had considered themselves brothers. Antoine had not been able to convince Peter to return from Vancouver and, aside from a few phone calls asking for money, his parents had lost track of him.

May finally brought word in the form of a phone call from the Vancouver police. Peter had died of alcohol poisoning. His family made the painful journey by pick-up to the city with a pine box to bring Peter back and bury him in the Chilcotin. While they were gone, Noah convinced Bordy to let Peter be buried in the Hanlon graveyard. When the family returned, Noah and Justine consoled each other over the loss of their friend and brother.

In June, Bordy showed up to lunch drunk.

"I was at the Eagle Lake hayfields," he grumbled. "You aren't getting enough water on them. I may be an invalid but there's nothing wrong with my eyes."

Noah looked up from his soup. He had been up since four that morning and was not in the mood.

"Those fields have plenty of water. You're the one who needs more water. And less whiskey."

"Listen to me, boy. If you spent more time looking after the ranch and less time making eyes at that Paul girl, you wouldn't be losing my money."

"If you don't like the way I'm running the ranch, fire me."

A month earlier, Noah wouldn't have spoken to his father that way. He would have been more respectful despite the abuse but, for the first time in his life, he had experienced the loss of a close friend and thoughts of his own mortality gave him a sense of purpose and fight.

And so it went for some time. Bordy's plan wasn't to fire Noah, he would push him until he quit. Noah was determined to finish the year and hand the ranch back to his father in better shape than he had received it.

The ranch crews hayed through the hot spells and, in September, hauled the hay to the winter fields and got ready for the annual roundup. Bordy made a practice of riding around in a buggy cursing at the hay crews and countermanding Noah's orders. He told everyone who would listen that his adopted son was ruining him and running the ranch into the ground.

Stan had not been invited to the ranch since Bordy's stroke and had no reason to drop by, still having heard nothing from the premier's office on the Waddington dam licence, which suggested the cabinet had other ideas for hydroelectric power. Even without visiting the ranch, Stan heard what was happening. The word was that if Bordy were feeling better he would have fired Noah by now. Stan knew Bordy well enough to know there was more to it — he was getting some enjoyment out of tormenting his adopted son. The question was whether Noah would be able to bear up under the pressure or if Bordy would break him like a wild mustang. Stan was planning on going out to the ranch to see firsthand what was going on, but it would have to wait until after his annual Thanksgiving fishing trip at Puntzi Lake.

The week before Thanksgiving, the crews drove the cattle from the ranges to the home ranch. Empire now ran over three thousand head. It took foreman Alec Paul, Cobby, Hoppy, another cowhand and Noah the better part of the week to round them up off the Potato Mountain, Chilko River and Eagle Lake open ranges.

On Saturday, Justine joined them, but got word that her mother was sick and left to tend to her. As well, one of the cowhands was off doing other chores for Bordy, so they found themselves

working harder than usual. Near the end of the day, a group of steers escaped them and ran up the draw.

As luck would have it, that was when Feng drove up with Bordy in the buggy. They could hear him ordering Feng to drive right up to Noah. Alec and the two cowhands exchanged looks.

"You're nothing but a mother's boy," Bordy sneered, obviously drunk. "You're no help to me out here. You're fucking harassing those steers."

"That bunch of steers ran up the draw," Noah replied in a matter-of-fact tone, refusing to argue. "We're bringing them back to the main herd."

His tone said he wouldn't be baited, wouldn't argue. And he knew Bordy couldn't ask for anything more. In Bordy's drunken state, though, any reasonable talk only angered him more.

"You goddamn breed," he snarled. "You've forgotten all I taught you."

He stepped off the buggy and fell on his face.

"Bordy, you're drunk," Noah said. He turned to Feng. "Take him back home. He could get injured out here."

The group of wranglers rode off, leaving Feng to deal with a humiliated Bordy, who cursed his cook, his crew and Noah all the way home.

In Victoria, Belle found that the major was becoming unmanageable. Tensions had been building for months. Waiting on the cabinet to grant his company the water licence was making him irritable and he kept muttering to himself whenever the topic came up that Field Marshal Montgomery would have dealt with the roadblock directly. Of course, the 'roadblock' was Bordy Hanlon and his lawyer, Stan Hewitt.

Before Thanksgiving, the major dropped by Belle's house. He had already been to the club and was tellingly red in the face and excitable. She was at the piano practicing for her recital at

the Royal Theatre that evening where she would be performing Beethoven's *Appassionata* and Chopin's "Ballade No. 1 in G Minor". She didn't look up when he entered, which irritated him. He poured himself a drink, then walked up to her.

"No more delays!" he commanded. "I won't stand for any more delay in getting approval from the government for my dam. I've even sent Charlie Rainbow to scout the area."

Private Charlie Rainbow, an Iroquois from Ontario, had moved into the major's basement suite the year before and was now doing odd jobs for him. Charlie had been his batman during his campaigns. He was very quiet and very helpful. Belle knew that there was nothing he wouldn't do for the major.

"Charlie's a good man," Belle replied. "He obeys orders."

The major paid her no mind.

"Stan Hewitt," he thundered, "that tiresome lawyer who dotes on you, has threatened a lawsuit and injunction against the survey. But he's in a conflict of interest."

"Stan doesn't know I have an interest in Vancouver Island Power."

"You're a half-owner in the ranch. I want you to take action to force a sale. My lawyer tells me it can be done in a few months. Besides, an invalid isn't fit to run a large ranch."

"I can't talk about it now. Can't you see I'm getting ready for my recital?"

"I leave for my fishing weekend early tomorrow, as you know. This is too important to wait. The company needs the power. Bordy is causing a delay. You have to make a choice, Belle: either him or me. If I don't get this water licence, you and I are through. Give the word and I will have my lawyer start proceedings to force a sale."

Belle threw up her hands.

"Leave me be while I compose myself for the recital. I will take care of it in my own way."

Mollified, the major still had the last word.
“See that you do.”

After lunch on Thanksgiving Sunday, the ranch was quiet. It was a cool, still autumn day with a hint of snow in the sharp air. All the able-bodied hands were in the hills for the last push into the home valley. The old cows knew the way and walked placidly to their winter quarters — in good time too, as the first snow began falling while the last of them were making their way back. By dinner, three thousand head of the finest Black Angus and Hereford cattle outside of Great Britain would converge on the fields surrounding the main house.

Antoine rested in the lean-to attached to his son Alec Paul’s cabin near the barn, set well back from the main house. Age had not affected his hearing or imagination and he was alert for the sound of the lead cows, which would soon be followed by the thunder of thousands of hooves descending on his valley. He wondered, as he did every day, what he could have done to prevent Peter’s death. The boy who had once been the pride of the Paul family, the hope for passing on the T̂silhqot’in’s knowledge of customs and cures, had died of alcohol poisoning.

Sparrows in the bush outside his window were speaking to him and their chirps were comforting. He thought of Ta Chi, then of Noah. He considered the notion that Noah just might substitute for Peter as *deyen*.

The sparrows took flight.

Antoine heard only his rasping breath, like the slow dip of a paddle across a still lake in the silence of the falling snow. Then he heard a yell from his eight-year-old grandson Ben inside the cabin.

“Don’t hurt her!”

The old man got to his feet too quickly. Dizzy, he steadied himself, then looked out the cobwebbed window. Justine, her

blouse torn, ran out of the cabin followed by Bordy. Justine ran for the barn while Bordy limped towards the ranch house. Gaining his balance, Antoine made his way to the door and pushed it open. Ben carried his father's hunting rifle into the shed, then returned empty-handed.

"I heard you yell. What happened?" Antoine asked.

"Nothing," replied Ben, with a feeling of pride.

Antoine noticed both the pride in his voice and a fresh welt on his face.

"Go back to sleep, Antoine," Maria called out from the cabin.

Antoine sat on the porch. Why was Maria telling him to go back to sleep? Did she think he was too old to protect his family?

His breath came in little gasps and his chest tightened. He stayed on the porch, listening to the snowfall until his heart settled.

For Tomorrow We Die

At five a.m. on the Tuesday after Thanksgiving, Stan Hewitt's long, grizzled face stared back at him from a cracked mirror hanging above the kitchen sink. He never bothered to shave on weekends spent at Puntzi Lake camp. He passed a hand over his three-day stubble, lathered and, with an ivory-handled straight razor, scraped the whiskers from his lean, weathered cheeks, chin and stringy neck. He rinsed in cold bracing water, then paused a moment to look at the effect.

He was pleased with himself, not out of vanity, but from amazement that after the life he'd led, he could still shave without injury to himself.

He may not have to shave much longer. His smoker's cough had developed into a small throat tumour and Dr. Hay was worried the cancer could spread. He had arranged to treat him with radiation and also given him some advice: "Stan, tidy up your affairs, stop working and go fishing."

A phrase came to mind: "Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die."

He was well-prepared for death, having spent a lifetime doing just what the phrase had suggested. He ignored his doctor's advice just as he had ignored Father Patrick's appeal to prepare his soul for the afterlife. What kept him at his desk reading law and taking on cases was the conceit that a major case, perhaps his next client, would benefit from his experience. He would use his lifetime of knowledge at the bar, his full warehouse of wisdom, to obtain one last acquittal from a jury. Then, he would put his affairs in order.

Mist was rising from the warm lake into the frosty air and Stan should have been getting his gear ready for a day of fishing. Instead, he was shaving to go into town to see Noah Hanlon, who was in jail at Williams Lake on a charge of murder. It would be a three-hour drive over rough roads from Puntzi Lake. He wanted to be at the jail when it opened at 9 a.m.

The jail was in the basement of Williams Lake Courthouse, the scene of many of his legal battles. Deputy Richard Snellgrove met him at the desk. Richard's main qualification for the job was that he was Sheriff Gideon Snellgrove's nephew. He also weighed three hundred pounds, stood six-and-a-half feet tall and could intimidate most people by standing and staring down at them with his pig's eyes. Stan usually had a lot of tolerance for people, especially the misfits, for they formed the basis of his clientele. He took pride in finding some human warmth even in the worst offender. Snellgrove was the exception.

A Dickens fan, Stan thought of Richard Snellgrove as a Bill Sykes type of bully who became Uriah Heep and snivelled when he didn't get his way. A few years ago, after Richard had roughed up a few of Stan's Native clients who were prisoners in his charge, Stan advised Gideon to fire him. Word got back to him and his natural mean streak was now directed towards Stan.

"What are you doing up this early, old man?" Richard asked.

"I'm here to see Noah."

"You mean that murdering breed that shot his father?"

"We'll see about that."

"Oh, we'll see all right. He must be desperate to think of hiring you."

"Just bring Noah to the interview room and leave us be."

Richard turned and started walking towards the cells.

"Hey, Noah! Your lawyer the town drunk is here," he shouted.

Stan moved into a room behind the desk. The deputy shoved Noah into a chair across a table from Stan. They shook hello. Noah's hand was hard and calloused, but his grip was surprisingly gentle. He looked closely at Stan, keeping his eyes on the older man. Stan was used to his Native clients not looking him in the eye much when they spoke or were spoken to. In their culture it wasn't polite.

The lawyer looked at the boy, whom he hadn't seen since he'd started managing of Empire Ranch. He appeared physically strong. His face was leaner, emphasizing his high cheekbones, and his green eyes burned. He had lost his city softness. Living with Bordy could do that to a person.

"You all right?"

"Yes. Mother's been here. It's good to see her again. But not this way."

"The RCMP told me you've been charged with the murder of your father."

Noah took in the older man's deep resonant voice with the timbre of a bass fiddle. He recalled Stan telling his law stories about his law cases. He used to laugh and wonder how people could get themselves into such impossible situations. Now he knew.

"My mother will pay for a lawyer. She suggested another lawyer from Victoria, but I prefer you."

Stan put his notepad on the desk and took out his pen.

"Tell me what happened."

"There isn't much to tell. Last Saturday, Bordy came out to the range. We'd been rounding up our cattle for a week. He'd been drinking. We argued. He was mad. He went back to the ranch."

"This was the day he was shot?"

"No, that was the next day, the final day of the roundup. I met Justine in the barn at dusk and she'd been crying. Bordy had hurt her in the kitchen of her parents' cabin. She was afraid of him. I told her to go back to her cabin, that I would speak to Bordy."

"Did you? Where was he?"

"I saw him drinking in the great hall in front of a blazing fire."

"Was he standing or sitting? Kneeling?"

"He was standing. Near the fire."

"Where were you?"

"I was outside when I saw him but went in through the French doors. They were wide open, even though the wind off the lake was near freezing and it was snowing. I told him never to lay a hand on Justine. He said I had my eye on her myself."

"Is that true?"

"Yes." Noah's face softened. "We're in love."

Stan nodded.

"I told Bordy that, but he just laughed. 'That doesn't make her yours,' he said. I told him to leave her alone. He said I couldn't stop him."

"Where exactly was he when this happened?"

"He was standing by the fireplace."

"What did he say?"

Noah's eyes narrowed.

"'If I want Justine, I'll have her,' he taunted me. I moved closer to him."

"Did he respond to that?"

"Well, first he said, 'Sure, beat up on a crippled man.' Then he dived for his rifle. He shouted, 'You're just like your mother.'"

"Where was his rifle?"

"He had it on the mantelpiece like he was expecting trouble."

"When did you first see the rifle?"

“Only when he went for it.”

“What did you do?”

“I ran towards him as he was raising it and grabbed it. We, we wrestled,” Noah stuttered.

“I know,” Stan said. “This is hard for you, but it’s best I hear it now while it’s fresh in your memory.”

Noah nodded. In many of Stan’s stories around the dinner table, it was the little details that ended up mattering for his clients.

“I tried to take it away from him,” Noah continued, “and it went off. The shock of the sound startled him. He loosened his grip. I threw the gun on the floor.”

“Did you see where the gun landed?”

“No. I turned, facing the lake. I walked the length of the room towards the open doors without looking back.”

“So you left then?”

“No. When I got near the open doors, I heard a high-pitched, animal-like scream. Then there was sound of a gunshot and the whistling sound of a bullet from the lawn. I looked out and saw a person in the dusk and snowflakes.”

“Do you know who it was?”

Noah hesitated.

“No,” he finally said.

“Could you make out features? Height?”

“No.”

“What did you do next?”

“I looked back into the room. Bordy was lying on the floor, bleeding from his chest. I tried to stop the bleeding, but he was already dead. I picked up his gun and ran from the room, right into Cobby and Hoppy, who’d come running from the barn when they heard the shot. I had the gun in my hand. I was gone for a good long while, trying to track the killer, when the RCMP found me and took me into custody.”

“Did you give them a statement?”

“Yes.”

“Did you tell them what you told me?”

“I left out the part where Justine told me she was assaulted. I don’t want her involved in this. I just told them Bordy and I had a quarrel about the cattle drive.”

“Do you remember anything else?”

Noah thought back.

“I seem to remember a plane taking off from the lake. It wasn’t loud. I was too distracted to think about it till now.”

“Do you think that’s important?”

“Floatplanes often land on the lake to deliver hunting and fishing parties.”

The two men were silent for a moment.

“Can you prove I’m innocent?” Noah asked. “I couldn’t bear to have Justine think I could do such a thing.”

“We don’t have to prove your innocence. The Crown must prove your guilt beyond a reasonable doubt. They only have a circumstantial case.”

“What does that mean?”

“The Crown must prove that you aimed the gun at Bordy with the intent to kill him and that you squeezed the trigger, firing the bullet that killed him. If the Crown had a credible eyewitness who saw this happen, that would be a strong case against you and could well be proof beyond a reasonable doubt.”

“The only eyewitness I’m aware of is the person who shot Bordy.”

“In that case, the Crown will have to rely on circumstantial evidence such as witnesses hearing shots, seeing you with a gun in your hand and Bordy lying dead on the floor. There must be other explanations for what happened. The jury must take those other explanations into consideration and that may lead them to a reasonable doubt about your guilt. The judge will instruct them that they then must acquit.”

Noah nodded. He seemed to take comfort from Stan's explanation.

Stan scanned his notes.

"One more thing," he said. "Can you describe the gun?"

"It was Bordy's. A Winchester automatic thirty-thirty hunting rifle. He usually kept it in a cabinet in the great hall."

It was now 1 p.m. and Stan had not eaten since 5:30 in the morning. At the Flying U Café, he sat at the counter and ordered his usual fried-egg sandwich and coffee. When he was in town on a weekday, Fran Harrop cooked him breakfast and he liked to use her as a sounding board. She'd been around awhile and knew what was on the minds and tongues of the locals. Also, while she was flipping his egg, she was a captive audience.

"Fran? You hear about Bordy being shot and killed at Empire Ranch?"

"Yeah, that's no surprise. Half the Chilcotin had a grudge against him."

"You know the police have charged Noah with murder?"

"Yup! Now, I find that hard to believe. He's a nice Indian boy. I've served him since he was kid and he was always polite."

Stan liked that answer. The jury would be made up of people like Fran. Her feelings about the case and Noah were probably those of the town.

His next stop was the prosecutor's office. Acton Bates saw him from the open door of his office and told the receptionist to show him in. He'd already heard that Stan had been retained.

"This case is a slam-dunk, Stan," he explained. "The crime lab technician said Noah's fingerprints are all over the gun and ballistics tests show that a shell casing was ejected from the gun. And Noah admitted to being in the room at the time of the shooting."

Stan shook his head.

“You sure that’s the gun that killed Bordy?”

Bates responded with a shrug.

“You’re going to have to find a lot more evidence than that to convict my client,” Stan said. “In the meantime, I want all the witness statements and a summary of all your evidence as soon as you have it. I particularly want a look at that rifle when it gets back from ballistics. And I want a preliminary hearing and trial before Christmas.”

“There are other cases on the docket.”

“None as important as this one. I’m going to bring on an application for bail on Thursday.”

Bates had expected Stan would apply for bail, which would usually be granted to a resident in good standing in the area. But this was the crime of the century on the plateau. Nothing like it had gripped the public’s attention since the T̓silhqot’in Wars in the last century. A T̓silhqot’in had been charged with murder. The press from Vancouver and Victoria were all over the story. The Deputy Attorney General in Victoria had even called earlier to determine if the homicide arose from a family affair or from racial tension.

“You don’t want the press to start speculating about this Chilcotin affair and the reasons for the murder,” he’d said. “That could only cause unrest in the whole Chilcotin. It’s too unsettling to have an unknown killer or killers roaming around loose on the plateau.”

“We’ve got the right man,” Bates had assured him. “I’m on top of this.”

Now, Bates had to follow through.

“I’ve got instructions to oppose your bail application,” he admitted to Stan.

Stan was expecting that response.

“We’ll see,” he said.

Belle was staying at the Williams Lake Hotel. She couldn't bear the idea of staying at the ranch, considering everything that had happened there. That meant hiring a manager. The Johnstons from Tatla Lake were all too willing for the chance to live at Empire and the family was well-suited for the job. In any case, Belle wanted to be close to Noah in case she could help.

It had been over a year since Stan had seen her. He was wondering how she was bearing up under all the strain.

He phoned from the lobby and asked if he could come up to her room. It was late in the afternoon and he was tired, his head throbbing. He remembered he was due for his first radiation treatment later that week in Vancouver. But when she opened the door and he saw her, he forgot his troubles. When she began to cry, he put his arm around her.

"The police called me the night it happened," she explained. "They said he was a suspect and could be charged with murder. I took the next plane to Williams Lake and rushed straight to the jail."

"Don't you worry. I'll do everything in my power to clear his name."

He sat down on a chair. She sat on the bed opposite him.

"I told Noah not to become ranch manager. I told him if he did, I wouldn't speak to him until he came to his senses. What more could I do to stop him? But I didn't think it would come to this."

"When you saw him in jail, did he tell you what happened?"

Stan knew anything Noah told his mother was not privileged and he didn't want to be sideswiped at the trial.

"All he said is that he didn't shoot Bordy. And I believe him."

"So do I. And it's my job to convince a jury of that. Did the major come with you?"

"No."

"In that case, and since you'll be here at least for the bail application, would you like to have dinner tomorrow night? I'll

have to call you as a character witness for Noah. We could talk about your evidence.”

“Yes. I would like that, Stan.”

The next day, Noah had another visitor. Deputy Snellgrove was lounging behind his desk reading a copy of *Field & Stream* when Justine arrived. He knew she was there but made no movement or response. She waited, knowing he would expect her to be submissive in front of a white man with authority.

Finally, he looked up from his magazine into Justine’s face. Although she was shy and didn’t look directly at strangers, she spoke in a quiet, determined voice.

“Who are you and what do you want?”

“Justine Paul. I’m a friend of Noah Hanlon.”

“You know he’s charged with murdering his father. That’s a hanging offence.”

“Yes, I know,” she said. “May I see him?”

“Why?”

She’d already phoned the sheriff’s office. The sheriff himself had said she could see Noah, but she didn’t want to tell the deputy. Going over Snellgrove’s head would make her his enemy and make it hard for her to visit Noah again.

She didn’t answer. Snellgrove grinned.

“Maybe he doesn’t want to see you.”

Justine felt like she was dealing with a child caged in a three-hundred-pound adult body.

“Would you ask him? Please?”

The deputy now believed that he had the best of her, that she knew who was boss.

“All right. You can have five minutes with him, but I’m keeping my eye on you.”

He let her into a room divided by wire mesh and left the door open. Noah was sitting on a chair on the other side. When she

entered, he got up and put his hands against the mesh. She did the same.

“God, I’m glad to see you,” he said.

“I’ve been so worried.”

They moved closer so that their lips were brushing the wire mesh that separated them.

“Hey, you two — back off!” Snellgrove shouted from the doorway. “I don’t want you passing anything between you, even germs.”

“Justine,” he whispered, “you know I wouldn’t kill Bordy, don’t you? All I did was warn him off you.”

She nodded.

“I knew it must’ve been an accident.”

“It was no accident,” Noah said, shaking his head. “He was shot by someone who was outside the room on the lawn.”

“Time’s up!” Snellgrove barked.

“Will you come back?” Noah asked.

“It will take more than him to stop me,” Justine answered.

The bail hearing failed. Stan pled his case well, but Acton Bates had pressure from the Deputy Attorney General’s office going for him.

Within a week of Noah’s imprisonment, he asked Justine to bring pencils, pastels and paper to his cell. For the first time in months, he had time for sketching. Rather than loose paper, she brought him a small sketchbook, which left him at a loss for words. It became his artist’s diary, filling with sketches of birds, animals and people. He drew Stan as a blue heron — thin and erect — in his black court robes, watching little fish glide by. He drew Justine as a fawn. She was flattered by it and asked to keep it. Noah agreed with a nod and a smile. He didn’t show his tormentor the drawing he’d made of him: only a wolverine could convey Snellgrove. Justine shuddered when she saw it, the fanged snarl and sinister cringing leer turning her cold.

Justine visited Noah whenever she could get away from her studies at St. Joseph's and grew to hate Snellgrove. The Mother Superior had great plans for Justine, so granted some freedom in her last year of high school. Snellgrove, on the other hand, took every opportunity to insult Justine as a Native and as a woman. She didn't complain to Noah about the treatment she received because she knew he received much worse. Although Snellgrove did not abuse Noah physically because he knew he would have Stan Hewitt on his case, he called Noah every dirty or racist name he could think of — 'breed', 'Siwash' and 'motherfucker' were his favourites. He wasn't inventive, but the repetition wore on Noah.

One time when Justine visited, Noah saw Snellgrove say something to Justine outside the room and get upset when she responded. He asked her about it while he sketched her.

"He asked me where my home was," she said, plainly. "I told him."

"He got mad that you lived at the ranch?" Noah asked. "Or did you say Tatlayoko Lake?"

"Neither," she responded. "I told him my home was the Chilcotin."

As they talked more, he understood. Her home wasn't the corner of the Chilcotin where her parents lived or where she went to school, it was *all* of it.

"You should draw your home," she told him.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, the Chilcotin is your home too."

"Yes, but I don't know it well enough to paint it."

"When you get out of here, I'll show it to you."

Noah's preliminary hearing began in December. Acton Bates had as witnesses the cowhands and Feng Chan, who all said in their statements they had seen Noah outside the great hall, rifle in hand, within minutes of the shooting. They said that father

and son often quarrelled and had done so at one of the camps a few days before the shooting. Then there was the fingerprint expert identifying Noah's prints on Bordy's .30-30 Winchester and the forensic expert recreating the scene and the position of the victims and the assailant when the gun was fired. The report from the expert on gunpowder residue showed that Noah had fired a gun recently.

The Crown's case was not strong, however. A lead slug was found in the fireplace after the fire had burned out but could not be identified as being shot from the Winchester either through the calibre or striations as the fire had reduced it to a formless lump. A casing was found in the room. It matched the gun's firing pin, but the exact location of the shooter wasn't known.

Still, Noah had had the gun in his hands when the cowhands had arrived on the scene. The cowhands had heard only one shot and there was only one casing in the room. Bordy was found lying on the floor with his head towards the fireplace.

With that information, the experts concluded that the assailant had been standing inside the room, near the double glass doors and that Bordy had been exactly fifteen feet in front of the fireplace, where the outline of his body was now chalked on the floor. They said the bullet had been fired from near the glass doors and struck Bordy in the chest, then exited Bordy's back, struck the stone fireplace, fell into the fire and melted.

Stan cross-examined the cowhands to determine if there were any inconsistencies or flaws in their evidence he could exploit at trial. Feng was not offered as a witness on the preliminary hearing. Stan wanted to make sure that there wouldn't be any surprises and made only a perfunctory argument that the magistrate throw out the charges.

"Your worship," Bates began his summation, "I won't repeat the evidence you have just heard except to say that all the forensic evidence and the witnesses' evidence points to Noah Hanlon as

the person who fired the gun that killed his father. He should be remanded to stand trial for murder.”

The magistrate didn’t have to think about it much.

“The accused, Noah Hanlon, will be remanded to stand trial without bail to the next assize in February.”

Stan had told Noah that the magistrate would find that there was a *prima facie* case against him. He knew though that Noah had still hoped that he would be freed, which only made the disappointment greater for both of them. Snellgrove didn’t help either.

“I told you, you should get a different lawyer,” he’d told Noah on the way back to the cells. “You’re going down.”

Stan met up with Bates in the lawyers’ robing room.

“If your client tells me the full story now and pleads guilty to manslaughter,” Bates said, “perhaps we can discuss sentence.”

“That’s not possible,” Stan said.

Bates proceeded with the major charge. Stan was left relying on Noah to tell his story in a credible manner so that a jury, properly charged, would acquit.

One afternoon before Christmas, Noah was surprised when Snellgrove’s holiday replacement jangled his jail keys in front of Noah’s cell and told him that there was “a pint-sized boy with a bad attitude” there to see him.

Ralph Richards greeted Noah in the interview room.

“Ralph, it’s good to see you.”

“I’m sorry I didn’t come sooner. I brought you some cookies my mum made and Emily sends her best.”

They spent the rest of the time talking about Victoria and the friends Noah had left behind and not heard from. The replacement deputy cut them off just when Ralph was asking about the case, so he promised to come back.

The next day, Noah told Ralph about the case. They talked about Stan quite a bit.

"I can't attend your trial," Ralph said apologetically, "but I will be praying for your acquittal."

"My spirits rose yesterday," Noah told him. "To think that you cared enough to travel to Williams Lake to see me. Justine can only visit once a week. It's too bad you can't meet her."

Justine visited Noah over Christmas. The deputy on duty gave them the privacy of the interview room where they could be together without bars or wire. Noah walked in with his sketchbook, which showed signs of heavy use, many of the page edges bleeding with pastel colour. Justine gave Noah a few presents: more pastels and a painting of the Cariboo by Sonia Cornwall, a local artist.

He looked at it with a critical eye.

"There's freshness in this painting," he said. "She has a strong sense of the understanding of life with space and movement."

"I thought you'd like it," she smiled. "Something about it made me think of you."

"I'm working on a distinctive style of my own which will show the Chilcotin the way Mrs. Cornwall has found a style for the Cariboo. But here's me talking about painting beauty when I'm looking at the real thing. I have a present for you."

Noah lifted his sketchbook to reveal a book behind it. He handed her a copy of the complete works of Percy Bysshe Shelley.

"I asked Mother to bring it," Noah smiled. "He, above all the Romantics, best suits my mind and speaks my love for you."

Justine threw her arms around Noah. The book dropped to the floor as they embraced. When they separated, Noah picked the book off the floor and opened it to a well-thumbed page.

"Shelley died before he finished his best and last poem, 'The Triumph of Life', but I've finished it for you."

“Read it to me.”

“Shelley writes:

“Then, what is Life?” I said . . . the cripple cast
His eye upon the car which now had rolled
Onward, as if that look must be the last,

And answered. . . . “Happy those for whom the fold
Of...

“Shelly didn’t finish the stanza,” Noah said, “but I did:

And answered. . . . “Happy those for whom the fold
Of love hath embraced in the dew-filled dawn
Life is a love story that is eternally told,
The curve of Justine’s breast beautifully drawn.”

“I live to embrace you in the dew-filled dawn,” Justine sighed.
She took Noah’s hand and placed it on her breast.

“Hey! It’s awful quiet in there,” the sheriff called out.

“Noah is explaining a painting to me,” Justine called back.
They pulled apart, but kept their hands clasped.

“I have something important to tell you,” Noah said. “You
mustn’t tell anyone unless I’m dead. You’re the only one I can trust.”

“Tell me,” Justine said, concern on her face.

“I’ve been thinking about what happened when Bordy was
shot. I told the police and Mr. Hewitt that I saw someone on the
lawn after the shot was fired. The police don’t believe there was
anyone. Mr. Hewitt believes me and he’s putting that forward as
my defence. That night, I couldn’t give anyone a description and
I didn’t have any idea who it was. All these months, I’ve been
trying to connect what I heard and saw to the shadowy figure
on the lawn. I think I know who it was.”

“Who?”

Noah hesitated. He had second thoughts about telling Justine.

“If I told you, your life would be in danger.”

“You must tell Mr. Hewitt.”

“I can’t trust anyone but you.”

Blood and Feathers

There were no T̓silhqot'in, Shuswap or Carrier in the jury pool when the trial began before Judge Deacon that February. The lawyers had to pick a jury from the thirty-four white people sitting at the back of the courtroom, most of whom were from Williams Lake. It was more convenient for the sheriff to serve them with a jury notice and much more convenient for townspeople to attend in the middle of winter than those citizens living over a hundred miles away. The roads were icy and blizzards frequent and the sheriff would have had to put them up in a local hotel at the Crown's expense. Neither the distance nor the weather prevented a crowd of about fifty Natives from filling the balance of the courtroom and flowing out into the corridor.

Noah entered in handcuffs under the guard of Richard Snellgrove, who made a show of removing Noah's cuffs in front of the jury pool and the Natives. It appeared to Noah that the only whites in the courtroom were the jury pool and his mother. He had hoped that some of his friends from Victoria would be there and was disappointed when he didn't see any. Justine sat

beside old Antoine and Alec and waved to Noah, who was in the prisoner's box facing the judge.

Stan knew most of the potential jurors: a bank teller, a shoe salesman, an accountant, loggers and housewives. The people of Williams Lake considered themselves law-abiding and, sometimes, when it was thought that the police weren't applying the law, the citizens took it into their own hands. Guns were not the way they usually settled disputes — unless there was too much liquor involved. He sized up this group of prospective jurors as they sat quietly, waiting to know if they would be picked. He had had great success with Williams Lake juries. They understood the meaning of reasonable doubt. They also understood fairness, the struggle people had to survive on the plateau, their willingness to defend what little they had — including their pride — and their natural distrust of strangers.

Stan recalled that he had defended a few of the local boys in front of a Williams Lake jury last summer for assault causing bodily harm. That evening when he saw Noah in jail, he told him about that trial to raise his spirits.

"A motorcycle gang from the east side of Vancouver," he began, "had rolled into a 150 Mile bar looking for refreshment after a long dusty ride. Full of high spirits, the gang thought they would show the locals a thing or two about big-city etiquette. To the guttural sounds of their engines, they swept into the hotel parking lot whooping and hollering. Each of them had his girl sitting pillion except their leader. He was this big six-foot-two guy dressed in black leather, a metal skullcap and a red ponytail. And he had an empty saddle behind him that he figured needed filling.

"Entering the bar, he spotted a girl at a table and introduced himself by pulling out his dick and slapping it on the table. 'Hey there, pussy! I bet you've never seen anything this size in these parts!'

“His whole gang burst out laughing. At exactly the same time, her cowboy friend launched himself at the biker’s throat and his ‘pussy’ kicked him in the groin. The fight was on. The cowboys who grew up throwing steers and riding fencelines in minus-forty degrees cleaned up on the east side boys. A Williams Lake jury just like ours acquitted them of assault causing bodily harm and the courtroom broke into cheers.”

Stan didn’t tell Noah that his case was different. Guns hadn’t been involved, nor father-and-son quarrels, nor death. Stan could not play the stranger card, nor could he emphasize Bordy’s reputation as a hard-driving son of a bitch. That would only help to reduce the charge from murder to manslaughter. The jury had to believe that Noah was innocent, that he and Bordy had indeed quarrelled but that Noah had been leaving the room when a shot from a third person outside the room killed Bordy. The big question was: who would the jury believe was responsible for his death — Bordy’s adopted son or some unknown among the half of the Chilcotin that had a problem with the man? You couldn’t be indifferent to Bordy. People either hated or loved him and there were very few who loved him.

Before the jury was selected, Stan made a motion to the court in the absence of the jury pool.

“My Lord, I have seen the jury pool, which is composed of thirty-four persons, all of whom are white and who reside in and about Williams Lake. There is not one Native among the prospective jurors, yet as you see there are at least fifty Natives seated in this courtroom. This pool is not representative of the Chilcotin territory where this offence was alleged to have taken place.”

Judge Deacon turned to the prosecutor.

“What have you to say to that, Mr. Bates?”

“The sheriff picks the jury pool at random, My Lord. This is a large jurisdiction.”

The judge turned to Stan.

“Your client is the son of a white couple. Why is it that you require Indians on the jury, Mr. Hewitt?”

Stan, who found the high falsetto and the precise manner of the judge irritating, didn’t know that he was colour-blind.

“My client was adopted, My Lord. As you can see, he is a T̓silhqot’in by birth. Most of the gallery who are present today live on the Chilcotin plateau and by their presence show that they have a great interest in this case.”

“Very well, Mr. Hewitt. Mr. Bates, I’m inclined to have the sheriff increase the jury pool by adding a few Indians. I can see by the gallery that this would not be difficult. I will stand this case down for an hour. Mr. Sheriff, will you make those arrangements?”

His first victory in the trial proved useless to Stan’s defence. Three Natives were added to the pool. Stan used his challenges on the white jury selections in the hopes of getting at least one Native onto the jury. When Joe Henryboy’s name was pulled from the box of names by the sheriff and read to the court, he stepped forward and walked to the bar.

“Agreeable, My Lord,” Stan announced.

“Challenge, My Lord,” replied Bates immediately.

Henryboy was told to return to his seat. Stan had used all his challenges. The twelve seats in the jury box quickly filled with an all-white, ten-man, two-woman jury.

Stan was not discouraged. Noah, a young man with no stain on his life, would take the stand and explain what had happened. His mother would verify his gentle nature and good character. Even a white jury would be moved. One of the shields a defence lawyer had in a tough case was sympathy, even if the judge told the jury to erase it from their minds. Because the case involved family and guns, this jury might be unduly influenced. If Stan had had his pick of judges, he would not have chosen Judge Deacon, but there was no time for hypotheticals. His mind was fixed on acquittal.

Acton Bates opened the case for the Crown on the afternoon of the first day.

“The Crown,” he told the jury, “will prove beyond a reasonable doubt that the accused, Noah Hanlon, murdered his adoptive father, Bordy Hanlon, on that fateful Thanksgiving Sunday at their ranch house in the Chilcotin. The evidence will show that there was a quarrel between the accused and the deceased on the range a few days earlier. According to two cowhands, the accused went to the ranch house at about 6 p.m. Shortly after, they heard a shot and ran to the house from the barn area about three hundred yards away. It took them a few minutes to get to the house. On entry through the door into the great hall, they saw the accused with a gun in his hand. They went into the room and saw the deceased lying on the floor with a wound to his chest.

“We will be presenting forensic evidence that will show that the accused’s fingerprints were on the gun that fired the fatal shot, that he had powder residue on his hands. We will show through reconstructions how the one shot would have been fired by the accused while he was standing in the room by the double doors. The Crown will be asking you to find the accused guilty of second-degree murder or a lesser charge of manslaughter.”

Over the following days, the jury heard the evidence of the two cowhands and the cook. Cobby Evans, one of the cowhands, was a big man with rounded shoulders and a drooping white moustache yellowed with cigarette smoke. His muscular arms, linked by his clasped hands, framed his belly when he sat down in the witness box facing the jury. He had a meandering mind and the judge had to keep him on track.

“Tell the jury what you heard and saw when Bordy Hanlon arrived on the range.”

"Me and Chet Hopkins — he's called Hoppy on the ranch on account of his being twitchy. He's a nervous type, Hoppy. I remember just last year..."

"Please, Mr. Evans, what were you and Mr. Hopkins doing on the range?"

"I was just getting to that. We were rounding up cattle at Choelquoit Lake when the old man came up in a buggy and chewed us out for harassing his steers."

"Who do you mean by 'old man'?"

"Well, I thought everybody knew that. Isn't that what this trial is all about: the death of Bordy?"

"Carry on, witness."

"We never argued with Bordy. He was apt to fire you on the spot. As we were jawing, up rides Junior — that's what I call Noah — and the old man turns on him and says, 'You better go back to your mother because you're no damn help to me.' He used stronger language than that, but I'd better not say it in front of the ladies. And Junior says, 'Those steers got away from us. We'll walk them in from here.'"

"What was Mr. Hanlon's reaction to that?"

"Well, I thought it was reasonable, but it really got to Bordy. He just got madder. 'I'm taking over my operation,' he says. And he swore some more, calling Junior a 'goddamn breed'."

"Go on."

"Then up rides Alec Paul, the lead hand. The old man says to him, 'You're taking orders from me now,' and he gets out of the buggy and falls on his face. Junior says to him, 'Bordy, you're drunk.' Then he turns to Feng, who is driving the buggy and says, 'Take him back to the ranch house before he has another stroke!' And we all ride off 'cause the cattle are starting to wander."

"Did Noah say anything else before you rode off?"

Evans sat sphinx-like without moving a muscle.

“Yeah,” he said slowly through his moustache. “As the buggy moved off, he said, ‘Better watch out, Bordy! You could get yourself killed out here.’ ”

Bates then turned to the night of Bordy’s death.

“Where were you when you heard the shot?”

“Near the barn, about three hundred yards from the back of the house. I can tell you I was winded when we got to the house. If a horse can’t carry me over any distance, I’m in trouble.”

He started to expand on horse-riding versus walking when the judge interjected.

“Try to keep your answers to the point, Mr. Evans.”

“All right, Judge. We was just coming up to those fancy glass doors at the front of the house when Junior runs out of the big room with a rifle in his hand and heads for the lake like he was chased by a pack of dogs.”

In cross-examination, Stan’s conversational style got Evans to say that Noah was at the ranch to help his father, that he was a mild-mannered person who got along well with Alec Paul and treated the ranchhands a lot better than Bordy did. When Stan asked if there were any other people in the area the day Noah and Bordy had words, Evans had to think a bit.

“No one except maybe Ta Chi,” he finally answered. “Her camp was a hundred yards away. She was probably catching suckers in the creek.”

On hearing Ta Chi’s name, the Natives whispered to each other, so that there was an audible sound in the courtroom like wind rustling aspen leaves.

“Who’s Ta Chi?”

“She’s a crazy Native woman who’s part of the landscape. She shows up at the darnedest times.”

“Could she hear anything?”

“I dunno. I didn’t see her. I just know she was camped there.”

"Now turning to the day of the shooting. You say you were at the barn and heard one shot?"

"Yeah."

"Did you hear any other sound coming from the direction of the house before that?"

"No."

"I take it there was a lot of noise around the barn with cattle milling about?"

"Yeah."

"Then you could have missed the noise of a muffled shot?"

"I coulda."

"Thank you, witness."

Hoppy took the stand next. He was the opposite of the large and garrulous Cobby. He was short and wiry and couldn't sit still in the witness box. Bates found it hard to get words out of him and whole sentences seemed impossible.

"You were on the range rounding up cattle when Bordy rode out in the buggy?"

"Yeah."

"Did you overhear any conversation between Bordy and Noah?"

"Yeah."

"Tell the court what you heard."

Normally, Hoppy put his hat on with his boots in the morning and only took it off in his bunk at night. In the courtroom, he had to give his evidence hatless and this confused him. He moved his right hand to his head as if to lift his Stetson and scratched his head with the other hand before setting the imaginary hat back on his head.

"They had words," he mumbled.

"What were the words?"

He repeated the hat-and-scratch manoeuvre.

"I guess they wasn't happy."

"What weren't they happy about?"

He was about to go for his imaginary hat again when Judge Deacon's exasperation came to a head.

"Mr. Hopkins, is it possible for you to answer a question without scratching your head?"

Hoppy was startled by the judge's voice. He hadn't expected him to say anything, so he stared at the judge. His left hand came up to remove his hat and the right smoothed his hair.

"I guess not. Carry on, Mr. Bates."

This took a while because Hoppy had forgotten the question. The court reporter read out the question to Hoppy, whose face furrowed in concentration.

"I guess they were each unhappy about t'other," he finally said.

Bates gave up at this point and Stan began his cross-examination.

"Mr. Hopkins, I guess most people in the Chilcotin were unhappy with Bordy Hanlon?"

Hoppy smiled at this simple question, which didn't require any hard thinking or head-scratching.

"Yeah."

"Did you notice Ta Chi's camp nearby?"

"Sure did."

"What did that mean to you?"

"Trouble."

"Why is that?"

" 'Cause it explained a whole lot."

"What, for example?"

"Cattle spooking the way they did."

"What did she have to do with that?"

"Bad things sometimes happen when she's around."

Stan had found a rich vein of defence evidence in Hoppy. He could see the jury taking notice.

"Now you were at the barn when you heard a gun go off?"

"Yeah."

"It was quite loud?"

“Yeah.”

Hoppy was starting to enjoy his role now. His shirt with its mother-of-pearl snap-on buttons didn't feel as tight around his throat.

“Why did you run?”

“You don't hear gunshots from the direction of the big house every day.”

Feng Chan, the cook at the Empire, was the next witness.

“I was in kitchen cooking dinner. Thanksgiving for the crew,” he explained. “Then I heard bang.”

“And then what?” Bates asked.

“I ran to great hall,” he answered. “Mr. Bordy dead on floor. In pool of blood.”

Stan stepped up to cross-examine the cook.

“How many bangs did you hear that night?”

“Just bang.”

“Did you hear more than one bang?”

“I don't know. I can't remember.”

After the court adjourned that day, Bates took Stan aside in the lawyer's changing room.

“I'm going to call Justine Paul to the stand tomorrow morning.”

“Why would you put her through the ordeal of testifying against Noah? Besides, what can she say that hasn't already been said?”

“Getting at the truth is always a painful experience,” Bates intoned.

“Well, what about Miss Ta Chi? She isn't on your list of witnesses. Did you interview her? We believe she may have seen or heard something that may help the defence.”

“This is the first I heard that she was in the area. If you can find her, you call her.”

Stan spoke with Noah that evening in the jail.

"The Crown will be calling Justine as its last witness."

"Why would she give evidence against me?"

"Justine has no choice in the matter. She's been subpoenaed, so she must give evidence."

"What will she say?"

"According to her statement and what she told me, she will say that she heard only one gunshot from the house and that she is your girlfriend."

"But what if he asks Justine about Bordy assaulting her?"

"They know nothing about that. Besides, Mr. Bates may be bluffing just to unsettle you."

"Well, he's succeeded."

Still, Noah quieted down after Stan's explanation, so Stan raised his next concern.

"You and I have gone over your evidence many times over the last few months preparing for trial. I'll be calling you to the stand tomorrow."

"I'll have to sleep on that."

This was the first time Noah had indicated he wasn't fully committed to telling his story to the jury. Stan tried not to let his anxiety show in his voice.

"Noah, our defence is based on you taking the stand."

When Stan left the cell, he felt that Noah understood and would probably accept his advice.

Justine visited Noah in the jail after dinner that night. She was agitated. She sat down opposite him but remained quiet until the guard left them alone.

"That Mr. Bates," she whispered, "wants to put me on the stand tomorrow, but I'm going to tell him I'm not saying a word."

"Stan says you don't have a choice, Justine, but I do. Stan wants to put me on the stand and I intend to refuse."

"Why? It's your chance to tell the jury what happened."

"I've got to find out who killed Bordy." He leaned forward and quietly asked, "Will you help me escape from the white man's justice?"

"How?"

"I have a plan."

At ten the next morning, after the judge had settled on the bench and the jury, anxious to hear the next act of the drama, were seated, the prosecutor rose.

"That's the Crown's case, My Lord," he announced.

Stan smiled to himself. He was right that calling Justine was a bluff, one that apparently didn't pan out. Clearly, Justine wouldn't tell Bates about Bordy's attack. He probably suspected she knew more than she let on, but calling her without a strategy would only give Stan the right to cross-examine on all Noah's good qualities. He turned to look at Noah, who appeared relieved that his lover would not be put through that ordeal. Even so, he noticed, the boy's hand held his sketchbook tightly.

Judge Deacon pursed his lips and looked at the ceiling. He had not been sleeping well. This little town hadn't much to offer for lodging and nothing in the way of decent food unless one enjoyed egg foo yung. He thought he saw a bird looking down at him from on high, but dismissed it. After all, this was a courtroom. The trial was not moving at the pace he would have expected in the city, where the younger lawyers kept things lively and were at each other's throats. Here in the Interior, it seemed that they were much too friendly and things were too predictable. Hewitt had been around forever, although there was no sign of his usual drinking. The judge brought his eyes down from the ceiling. He scanned the court. The usual crowd was in the gallery and the RCMP constable was sitting in his normal spot in his red serge. He looked at the jury.

"Yes, members of the jury. As I told you would happen at the beginning of this trial, the Crown has rested its case and we are

now in the capable hands of Mr. Hewitt, who will present the case for the defence.”

Stan was wary of judges who paid him compliments — there was usually a stinger at the end — but he rose and addressed the jury in his rich baritone.

“The defence expects to call three witnesses to show that the Crown’s theory that Noah Hanlon shot his adoptive father Bordy is wrong. The Crown’s web of circumstantial evidence is weak and cannot hold up under scrutiny. What happened at the ranch house was a tragic accident that occurred between father and son. The defence will show that Noah had spoken to his father in the great hall and they had indeed quarrelled. His father produced a gun and Noah disarmed him. During the tussle, the gun discharged in the air and the bullet was not found because it exited the room through the open doors. As Noah left the room through those same doors, his father was still alive. As he cleared the doors, there was a shot from the lawn and that was the shot that killed Bordy Hanlon. Noah picked up his father’s gun and gave chase to the murderer. That was when the cowhands, Cobby and Hoppy, arrived.”

Stan was about to call his first witness when two birds began twittering from a perch high on a window ledge. The judge hadn’t been imagining things. The high-ceilinged room had been built forty years ago to convey the majesty of the law and the birds, sparrows that wintered on the plateau, had flown in through a broken window thirty feet above the bench. The Natives in the gallery smiled and nudged each other, looking upon the birds’ appearance as a good omen. Judge Deacon, on the other hand, took this avian intrusion personally as an affront to the dignity of his court. He turned to the RCMP constable.

“Constable, do my eyes and ears deceive me or are there birds in the courtroom?”

“Sparrows, I believe, My Lord,” he replied.

The lightness of the officer's response angered the judge.

"I don't need to know the species," he spat out, "I just want them removed immediately. I shall adjourn court for five minutes and I expect them to be gone by then. Do I make myself clear?"

"Yes, My Lord."

Everyone left the courtroom except the RCMP constable and Snellgrove. There was a flurry of activity inside. The minutes ticked away as the birds refused to be captured. The judge's five-minute deadline passed. Stan was talking to Antoine in the corridor when a shotgun blast from inside the courtroom startled him into silence. The doors opened, releasing a whiff of gunpowder. Snellgrove ran out with the shotgun.

The constable was on his knees scraping up the scattered remains of the dead birds. The aftermath of this wanton execution changed the mood of the Natives. Noah, brought back up from his cell, was shocked to see the officer cleaning up the carnage. Judge Deacon and the jury returned. The judge glanced at a ceiling peppered with birdshot, flecks of blood and feathers. He shook his head.

"Mr. Hewitt?" he sighed. "I believe you were about to call your first witness."

"I call Belle Hanlon to the stand."

Belle entered the courtroom. Stan thought Belle looked magnificent. From the small black hat atop her long auburn hair to her simple black dress and patent-leather high heels, she gave the impression of a person completely in control of herself, despite the situation. Stan knew that she would not have worn that hat in Victoria, but this was Williams Lake. She knew that the impression she had to give the jury was that she was just one of them.

In the prisoners' box, Noah turned to watch his mother enter the courtroom. As she passed, he was overcome by the fragrant scent of white heather perfume. She hadn't worn that perfume in years. It had been part of his childhood, his protection when he

was too young to protect himself. Then he remembered the last time he had smelled that scent: in the great hall on the night of the shooting. Could Belle have been there? Suddenly, he felt lightheaded. If she had been there, why hadn't she told him? When the blood rushed back to his brain, he reasoned that his mother would now tell the truth on the stand and he would be a free man.

He looked at the notepad Stan had given him to write down anything he thought might be useful during the trial. He had drawn the judge as a hawk perched on the bench and the jury as shrieks, smaller birds of prey waiting on a wire for their turn at a chickadee: himself. Noah made a rough sketch of Belle while she intoned that she would tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

"...so help me God."

The sketch had Belle as a raven with one raised eye crouched on a field of snow.

The jurors, the spectators in the gallery, the courthouse staff, everyone except Judge Deacon knew that there were two ranches in the Chilcotin that ranked among the biggest cattle operations in North America: Gang Ranch and Empire Ranch. The Gang was owned by two Americans who didn't come up to Canada that often; Empire had been owned by Bordy Hanlon. But no one knew what Stan Hewitt knew — that the person who had saved the ranch and financed its expansion over the years was Bordy's wife, Isobel Hanlon.

Stan started his direct examination.

"Madam, are you Noah Hanlon's mother?"

"Yes, I am."

"Noah was adopted by you and Bordy when he was less than a month old?"

"Yes. On the day that I arrived at the ranch from Scotland, Father Dumont presented us with a perfect child. His mother had died in childbirth and his father wasn't known. We cared for him and, after a few years with us, I insisted that we adopt him."

"And you raised him as if he was your own. You schooled him as if he was your own, did you not?"

"Noah is as close to me as a natural-born son. I taught him through correspondence school until he was twelve. Then we decided that the best thing for him was to attend a private school in Victoria, so I moved down with him to give him a home. Bordy stayed with the ranch he loved. Noah came back in the summers to help with the haying and all that."

"You left your husband?"

"No. It wasn't like that. In Victoria, I developed a career as a pianist, so I couldn't get back to the Chilcotin as often as I would have liked."

"What sort of relationship did Bordy have with Noah?"

"Bordy was a hard-driving man. I think that in order to survive in the Chilcotin, you've got to be a bit hard-driving and Bordy did more than just survive. He thrived. He demanded a lot from everybody, especially Noah, but Noah loved Bordy and would do anything for him."

"When Bordy suffered his stroke a year ago last December, what did Noah do?"

"Noah was in his second year of fine arts at Victoria College. He's an artist. A gifted painter. But his father needed him, so he gave up his studies and went back to Empire to run the ranch."

"Is Noah a violent person?"

"He doesn't believe in violence towards any living thing. When he was six, his friend Peter used to chase grasshoppers and put them in a jar. Noah would let them go because he felt the jar was like a prison. He is very sensitive and prefers to draw birds rather than shoot them."

As she said this, she looked up at the blood-stained ceiling, then at Judge Deacon. The Natives in the gallery nodded at Belle's reference to the dead sparrows and Stan, sensing that the jury had gotten his point, turned to Bates.

"Your witness."

Bates did not waste time on pleasantries.

"You and your husband had not lived together for nine years?"

"That's true, but we were still friends."

"You hadn't seen your husband for years? Not even when he had his stroke?"

"I would have seen him, but I was in Europe."

Noah shook his head.

"I sent him my good wishes for a speedy recovery. It was sad to know that this robust man was reduced to walking with a cane. He couldn't get on a horse and he lived his life on a horse."

"Do you know what happened in the ranch house when Bordy was killed?"

She looked at the jury, her eyes pleading with them.

"No!" she answered. "All I know is that my son didn't kill him."

"How would you know that your son didn't kill your husband? You weren't there!"

"I know my son and he is *not* a murderer."

Noah watched his mother give her evidence in the self-assured manner reserved for people with money and standing in the community. Why hadn't she told the jury that she was there at the ranch the day of the shooting? Was he mistaken? Or was she lying to protect someone? Perhaps Stan Hewitt was in on it. Noah had to find the answer.

As Belle left the witness stand, Judge Deacon thought to himself that she was a fine-looking woman. In any case, he could tell that the jury was not as impressed with her as he was. He had hoped that this trial would go to the jury that day and he would be able to catch the 6 p.m. plane to Vancouver, but that was not to be.

"My Lord," Stan piped up, "I will want to discuss the case with my client and therefore I require an extra fifteen minutes at the break."

"Very well then, Mr. Hewitt. The court will reconvene at 3:30."

When Stan entered the holding cell, he thought Noah appeared calm, like he had come to terms with what he had to say in court. It was, after all, the truth. He was about to tell Noah that if he told his story as he'd told it to him, nothing the prosecutor can say should shake him from it. He didn't get the chance.

"I've decided not to take the stand," Noah said.

Stan had seen and heard too much in his over thirty years of practice to be surprised by any twist or turn on the road to a verdict. He remained seated, lit a cigarette and took a drag.

"Can you tell me why?"

"I could. But I won't. My reasons are personal."

"Look, if you're trying to protect somebody, tell me and it won't go any further. You can trust me. I'm here to advise you and I need to know your reasons to be able to advise you. You don't have to accept my advice, but at least you should hear it and consider it."

"I have considered everything. I've had four months to consider everything. I know what I have to do and that's remaining silent. It's for the best. Not just for me, but for everyone."

"Noah, I believe you're innocent. But if you don't give the jury an explanation of what happened, there's a good chance they'll convict you at least of manslaughter. You could go to jail for ten years."

Noah looked down at Stan with a tight-lipped smile. Stan decided to try another way to shake Noah from his decision.

"You know, son, I took this case because I thought you wanted me to represent you. I also had personal reasons. I'm repaying the debt I owe you from the day the boat turned over at Tatlayoko Lake. You saved my life. I figure that by taking on your defence, the fates gave me the chance to repay you. Now I feel that I'm letting you down."

"That's not the way I see it. When you came into my cell that first day, I was pleased someone was there to help me through

my ordeal. If it wasn't for Justine and you, I would have given up a long time ago."

Stan nodded.

"I have a question," Noah added.

"What is it?"

Noah took a moment to frame it right in his head. He didn't want it to sound like an accusation.

"Mother looked strained when she gave her evidence. Is she all right? Is anything troubling her?"

Stan was surprised. He hadn't been thinking about Belle.

"As far as I know, she's fine."

"Where did she say she was at the time of the shooting?"

"She told me she was in Victoria. Why do you ask?"

"I can't think of the great hall without her and the Beckstein."

"I know what you mean." Stan stood up. "I tell you what I'm going to do. I'll ask to adjourn the trial over the weekend. That will give you more time to think over your decision."

When a client made a fundamental decision against his advice like Noah had just done, Stan usually took the precaution against accusations of professional negligence of drafting a note to that effect and having the client sign it. In this case, he wouldn't. If things went wrong, Noah could use that as grounds for appeal. Not that Stan was ready to concede. He simply wanted to delay the trial over the weekend to allow Justine, the person in whom Noah had the most trust, to talk to him and perhaps get him to change his mind. He would ask to speak to the judge in the absence of the jury.

Richard Snellgrove opened the cell door.

"Break it up, you two. The judge is waiting."

Stan made his way to the courtroom.

Snellgrove moved Noah, in handcuffs, from the interview room to the holding cell. He unlocked the door and entered. Noah

followed and turned towards the door so that he was between it and the deputy, his hands near the lock. Snellgrove kicked the holding cell door to shut it, enjoying the clang of metal on metal, not listening for the lesser telltale click of the spring lock which would confirm that the door was locked. He shoved Noah in front of him and took his cuffs off at the foot of the staircase leading up to the prisoners' box.

With Noah in the prisoners' box and the judge on the bench, Stan rose to his feet.

"My Lord, during my cross-examination it came to my attention that there is another witness the Crown did not reveal to the defence before the trial: a Miss Ta Chi, who may have some relevant testimony. I am seeking an adjournment until she is found and I can speak with her."

Bates jumped to his feet.

"I wasn't aware of her presence before the trial, My Lord. I don't see how she could have overheard anything even if she was in her camp. It was over a hundred yards away and the evidence about the quarrel does not appear to be in dispute."

Judge Deacon was annoyed and thought a lecture was in order.

"Gentlemen, this is all very unsatisfactory," he warned. "I had expected that a week would be enough to hear the evidence and that we would be addressing the jury on Monday. Now there is this surprise witness. I thought that was what preliminary hearings were all about, to sort out these witness problems well before trial. I suppose you should have a chance to speak to her if she can be found over the weekend. I expect, Mr. Hewitt, that you will continue the defence on Monday whether she is found or not."

The motion and the long recess had taken some time. It was an hour past the usual court rising time. The judge advised the jury that the trial would be adjourned for the weekend and cautioned them that they were not to speak to anyone about the evidence or about the trial.

Flight

Judge Deacon rose. The whole courtroom stood in deference to his authority. With all other eyes on the judge, Noah turned to Justine, who was sitting behind the prisoner's box. She smiled at him. Once he knew he'd caught her eye, he tapped his sketchbook, then tucked it into his waistband.

She immediately left the courtroom, walked around to the back of the courthouse and waited.

The sun — which had barely made an impression on Williams Lake during the day — had set, leaving the town in the dark. Only a few streetlights guided the people leaving the courthouse. The Natives from the plateau left in a group, heading out to their pick-up trucks to return to their reserves and ranches. Once home, they would tell their families what had happened and everyone would come to his or her own conclusions about Noah's guilt or innocence.

Richard Snellgrove didn't bother putting the handcuffs on Noah. After all, the prisoner was docile and he felt free to let his mind

wander. As it was, he would already be late for his usual after-work drink at the Legion. Before they left the courtroom, Stan spoke with Noah. He didn't say much and Stan had nothing new to offer.

"I'll see you tomorrow," Stan finally told Noah.

They went from the prisoners' box down the stairs to the holding cage below. Snellgrove pushed the metal door to the cage open and marched Noah inside. Snellgrove took out the handcuffs. It wasn't that far to the jail, but once there, he'd want to show that he'd followed procedure.

"Put your hands behind your back," Snellgrove ordered.

Noah faced the metal door, his back to Snellgrove. He looked down the corridor. At the far end, a red exit sign hung over a door he knew he would open. He started to put his hands behind his back while Snellgrove was head down, still sorting out the cuffs. Snellgrove felt rather than saw Noah move and then the metal door hit him in the face.

Noah ran down the corridor towards the red exit sign. Stunned, Snellgrove staggered out of the cage, pulling at the revolver on his hip. Noah hit the exit door as Snellgrove fired. The bullet struck the wall and Noah was through the door to freedom.

Running after him, Snellgrove saw Noah headed for the back of the building. He raised his gun just as Noah rounded the corner. Still in pursuit but losing ground, he reached the corner only to see a retreating figure crossing the snow-covered field leading to the wooded park north of the courthouse.

The sheriff popped out a door and immediately saw what his nephew was looking at. Another officer straggled out behind him.

"I heard the shot," the sheriff yelled. "Keep him in sight, but don't shoot."

Snellgrove took off after Noah.

"Police are coming," the sheriff yelled, before turning to the other officer. "Get the RCMP to circle the park with cruisers."

As the other officer ran back inside, the sheriff watched the dark shadow disappearing into the woods. The park was surrounded by roads and he was confident that Noah would be captured. It would be just a matter of minutes before they would have him back in custody. Still, although his nephew was responsible for the escape, he knew he would have to bear the ultimate blame.

In a patrol car on the park's eastern boundary on Highway 97, Corporal Leblanc saw someone run out of the park two hundred yards away and flag down a passing car. When he turned on his siren and lights, the person retreated into the brush and back towards the park. He saw the other squad car on the far side of the park, cutting off escape from that direction, and knew the foot patrol was advancing — the fugitive was trapped. He stayed in his vehicle and kept an eye out.

In the park, the foot patrol saw the figure — exhausted from running through the snow — fall to his knees, bend over and cover up his head.

Richard Snellgrove was the first there. He pounced on his fallen prey.

"I got ya, you no-good breed," he yelled in triumph. "No Indian ever got the best of me!"

Sheriff Gideon Snellgrove, out of wind and panting hard, caught up to his nephew just as he yanked the fugitive by the parka to his feet with the intention of giving him a beating.

Instead, he found himself staring into the face of Justine Paul.

The T̓silhqot'ins still socializing in the parking lot weren't aware of the escape. They were getting into their pick-up trucks to start the long drive back to the plateau and the Anaham, Stone and Toosey reserves. Some would have to overnight at Riske Creek or Redstone. Some would return to the courthouse on Monday to show support for one of their own, but Alec Paul could not because the cows were starting to calve and he was needed at Empire Ranch.

In each pick-up, nine in all, three or four people crowded into the front bench seat, with canvas-covered boxes full of groceries and supplies. The caravan headed out of Williams Lake past the rodeo grounds, across the flats, past the stockyards and sawmills with their beehive burners lighting up the night sky and up the hill heading west towards the Fraser River. The pick-ups were old and tended to break down, so the drivers went slow and kept in sight of each other as they strung out along the road.

Alice and Joe Henryboy rode in the last truck in the caravan. Rose Cochlin and her son, George, from Eagle Lake squeezed in-between them. They all knew Noah. George and Joe had worked at Empire when the big ranch needed extra help during haying.

"Too bad that judge killed those sparrows, eh?" Alice said to Rose.

"Pretty bad spirit, I think," Rose said back.

"That defence lawyer Hewitt not very good," George interjected. "Pretty old, eh? He shoulda put Noah on the stand right away to tell his story. Bordy drank a lot, I think. Must have been trouble from the drink. Can't see a reason why Noah would kill him on purpose."

Sheep Creek Bridge was the only bridge across the Fraser for seventy miles in either direction. They crossed it and were heading up Sheep Creek Hill.

"What about Belle, poor thing?" Alice asked. "Pretty hard on her, eh? Maybe we give her a hand."

"You girls put on any weight at the lake?" Joe spoke up. After shifting into low gear, he added, "The old truck is having a hard time getting up these hills."

"You shut your mouth, Joe," Alice huffed. "You got a big load in the back there under that tarp."

She turned to Rose and, ignoring Joe, turned the conversation back to what they could do for Belle.

The caravan was the only traffic on the road. Joe could see the taillights of the other trucks climbing the hill a half-mile ahead of them, but in low gear it would take them a while to crawl up the five miles to the Chilcotin plateau, at which point it would be another half-hour to Riske Creek, where the caravan would break up. Some would then head south towards the Gang Ranch, some would stop at Toosey, but the Henryboys and others would head further west to Alexis Creek where they would stop for the night.

A few miles from Riske Creek, Joe and his passengers heard a police siren behind him. Within minutes, a police car passed them, moving at speed and kicking up clouds of snow. The squad car passed every truck, finally pulling in front of the lead truck to stop the caravan.

Joe's ailing truck was a few minutes behind the stopped vehicles. At only twenty miles an hour, he crossed a small bridge over a frozen creek fringed with willows and surrounded by snowfields. The truck swayed crossing the bridge and Joe looked into the rear-view mirror to see if he had lost any cargo from the back. It was too dark to tell to be sure, as he could barely see the tarp in back, let alone anything that may have fallen on the road.

No one else had seemed to notice anything. Alice and Rose were still talking about Belle. Joe pulled in behind Len Shand's truck, leaving the engine running. He stepped out and took a look at the road behind him. Far as he could tell in the darkness, nothing had fallen out. He walked up to Len's truck.

"What's up, Len?" he asked, pointing at the motionless caravan.

"The police are searching our trucks," Len replied. "Won't say why."

Two RCMP officers quickly moved down the line of trucks, shining their flashlights in the faces of the occupants and looking under the tarps and into boxes. After their trucks were checked, the drivers grouped together by the lead pick-up to see if anyone

knew what was happening, since the police weren't offering any explanation.

When the police completed their search, the corporal in charge spoke to the gathering of men near the lead pick-up.

"Noah Hanlon escaped from the courthouse just before you people left," he announced. "Have any of you seen him?"

No one spoke up.

"If you have helped him in any way," the corporal warned, "you could be charged with giving aid to a fugitive, which is very serious. Speak up now and there won't be any trouble. Did any of you see Noah Hanlon around the courthouse or on the road?"

Again, there was silence.

"If you see him, contact the RCMP. There'll be a reward if you do."

Nomad's Land

On the day of the escape, a disinterested setting sun provided a high cloud-filtered light, but no warmth, to any living creature brave enough to be outside. Nothing moved on the bleak plateau during the day, for man and beast were holed up in their lairs and shelters.

As if emerging from the land itself when the sun slipped past the horizon, a lone figure leading a *qiyus* and *sek'i*, horse and cow, cast a long shadow along a streambed, moving without effort through the snow. Fifty yards ahead at a bend in the willow-draped stream, a lop-eared black-and-white cattle dog, *selin*, barked. Ta Chi approached the bend, where a frame of bleached willow and poplar branches were lashed together under the lee of a sheltering bank. It was a familiar place to stretch a tattered canvas and spread blankets on the hard ground near the bridge that spanned the creek.

Covered in layers of clothing and capped by a blanket shawl, Ta Chi built a fire the size of a handkerchief a step away from the opening of the shelter. She removed her shawl, revealing

her strikingly delicate T̓silhqot'in features. Her shoulder-length white-flecked black hair was held off her face by a headband of tanned deer-hide. Her copper-coloured face was unlined except for crow's feet at the corners of her wide black eyes. Her broad forehead, high cheekbones and slightly squared chin were perfectly proportioned.

She was completely focused on skinning the rabbit she had snared at her last resting place. A sharp paring knife in her quick fingers, she removed the fur, exposing the lean carcass. She cut it into quarters, which she pierced with willow sticks and pushed into the fire to roast.

She planned to camp in this spot a few days so that her *qiyus* and *sek'i* could eat hay from a nearby rancher's haystack. They were now browsing like moose on purple shoots of willow. A billycan of melting snow was suspended above the fire and a piece of tinfoil reflected the small heat towards the opening of her shelter.

Her wanderings over the land followed the routes her ancestors had taken in their search for food. They had wintered in pit-houses then. Now most of her people were in frame houses in the six reserves across the plateau. All she had in the world was the Chilcotin. She had no house, no possessions except the clothes on her back and what fit in her bags. Winter didn't interfere with her constant communication with the land. In a few days, if the weather allowed, she would follow the creek down to the Chilcotin River where her animals could scrape away the snow and feed on the wild hay of the river bottomland. It was better than moose-browse.

When she saw the rabbit was roasted, Ta Chi squatted in front of her shelter. She ate it with her hands, gnawing meat from bone, and washed her meal down with boiling tea. Once finished, she rose from her haunches and stretched her arms to the clouded moon. A coyote, her competitor for the small game, howled.

“Eat willow shoots, *qiyus*,” she said. “See how *sek’i* nibbles them. Tomorrow you eat hay from Rafferty’s haystack. She won’t miss it.”

Rafferty was a man, but Stoneys like Ta Chi referred to males as ‘she’ and females as ‘he’.

Ta Chi’s camp was in a hollow out of sight of the few vehicles travelling the road between Williams Lake and Anahim Lake. She could identify most of the vehicles by the sounds made as they passed. Johnny Setah’s old Chevy clanked by sometime after sunset, waking her from a light sleep. Shortly after that, she heard the rumble of a number of vehicles heading west from Williams Lake, probably returning from the boy’s trial. The first was a pick-up truck, which sounded like Fred Quilt’s, creaking under a heavy load. Then, a few minutes later, another pick-up and another. From farther east, a good mile away, where the road dipped onto the prairie, she heard the wail of a siren that became louder as the convoy of pick-up trucks passed her campsite. Before the last straggling pick-up passed her shelter, the police car caught up with the convoy, passed each vehicle and finally cut in front of the lead vehicle to force it to stop.

The straggler, Henryboy, was well behind the others and seemed to be having some engine trouble. As he came level with her camp, she heard a thump that sounded like a deer carcass thrown onto the road followed by a muffled cry of pain, then a shuffling, dragging sound.

Later, the police car slowly retraced its route, crossing the small bridge, heading back towards Williams Lake. The night returned to creatures of the plateau both great and small.

Under the bridge, still dressed in a jacket and tie for his trial, Noah was wrapped in a blanket he had found in the truck. He pulled his sketchbook out of his belt. He’d almost lost it when he’d circled the courthouse and ducked under the canvas in the back of the Henryboys’ pick-up. He opened it to a sketch of

Justine, then tucked it back in his belt. He worried about her after decoying Snellgrove to allow his escape. He touched his leg and winced in pain. When he'd jumped from the truck, he'd landed heavily on his right leg, which now felt broken.

Even after the police had driven off, Noah remained huddled under the shelter of the bridge. He would have to take his chances flagging down a car whose driver would help him instead of turning him over to the authorities. The adrenaline and stress of escape and avoiding capture had left him exhausted. Through the cold and the pain in his leg, he began questioning how he had arrived at this low point in his life. Half-awake but trying to stay alert to any sounds, he tried to piece together why his adopted white world, having made him in their image, had turned against him.

He thought he heard an animal at one end of the bridge. He sat up and drew the blanket around himself, facing the sound. The moon was shining enough that he could see the frozen creek and the overhanging branches beyond. There was nothing there. Another rustle caught his attention. He turned to see a silhouetted a creature — human or animal, he couldn't tell.

"Who's there?" he whispered, taking a chance.

"You're in a lot of trouble."

"Who's there? I'm armed."

"Hell you are. You're hurt and weak. I guess if I left, you'd die."

He didn't reply.

" 'Course, she could go back to jail."

"How do you know I was in jail?"

"You're Noah. I know the voice. You jump from pick-up while ago."

A coyote yelled at the night and her dog yipped.

"Shut up."

Selin cowered and lay down.

"You're Ta Chi," Noah said.

"Lucky I found you."

Reward

Belle left the courthouse that evening believing that when Noah took the stand on Monday, he would be acquitted after a short deliberation. She was resigned to waiting through the weekend. She ate dinner alone at her hotel. When she got back to her room at eight, there was a message waiting for her from Stan Hewitt.

When she called, he told her that Noah had escaped, that he was in grave danger if he didn't give himself up. She sat down on the bed.

"Do you know where he is?" Stan asked.

"No. No, I don't," she said, still shocked. "This is terrible. He *must* tell the jury what happened."

"Noah asked me something today."

"Please tell me, Stan."

"After you gave your evidence, he was concerned about you. He asked me where you were the day of Bordy's murder. I told him, as you'd told me, that you were in Victoria. Am I right about that?"

“Yes,” Belle replied, without a pause. “Of course.”

Stan left it at that.

“Stan, are you still there?” she asked. “What can I do? Go on the radio and beg him to surrender?”

“I doubt he’s listening to the radio. There’s nothing to be done on that front. My concern is that if he’s captured alive, he’ll refuse to take the stand.”

“Why?”

“I think he believes that if he takes the stand, he’d put someone else at risk of being charged with Bordy’s murder.”

“Who’s that?”

“He didn’t say. Even if I did know, I couldn’t tell you because of solicitor-client privilege. The best thing you can do is return to Victoria. I’ll be asking for an adjournment until he is found. I’ll keep in touch.”

“I want to go to the ranch for a few days. Noah may contact me there.”

“If he does contact you, call me immediately.”

Luke Parsons had left Prince George at five Saturday morning to make a seven a.m. appointment at the sheriff’s office in Williams Lake and was in bad humour. Parsons, the regional supervising sheriff from Prince George, summarized the verbal report he’d received from Sheriff Gideon Snellgrove and Deputy Sheriff Richard Snellgrove. Also in the room was Staff Sergeant Boyd of the RCMP, the chief investigator in Noah’s case.

“Deputy,” Parsons began, “let me get this straight. You oversaw the prisoner, who was on trial for murder and who had been denied bail because he was considered a danger to the community and a flight risk. The Crown had closed its case and the defence was in the middle of its case when the trial was adjourned for the weekend.”

The deputy nodded.

"The prisoner," Parsons continued, "was not handcuffed in the courtroom. You allowed him to leave the courtroom without handcuffs."

Richard nodded again.

"Do you want to tell me why?"

"He was going into the locked holding cell."

"But the cell wasn't locked!" Parsons said, exasperated. "The prisoner kicked the door open. How was that possible?"

"I shut the door before I brought the prisoner up to the courtroom. The door didn't lock because..." Richard paused a moment. "...the prisoner had jammed a wad of paper in the lock."

"Do you have the paper?"

Richard dug into his pocket, pulled out a crumpled piece of paper and tossed it on the desk.

Parsons picked the paper up and carefully unfolded a torn piece of drawing paper. On it was a pencil sketch of a wolverine that bore an unmistakable likeness to the deputy.

"For the last four days," Richard offered, "I moved him without shackles. The jail's in the same building as the courthouse. I didn't think they were necessary. I was *going* to put on the cuffs. I usually do but, that one time, I didn't. If he hadn't jammed the lock, it wouldn't have mattered."

Richard saw his three seniors staring at him. He looked to see if his uncle would say anything. No one did.

"That Indian never showed any sign of wanting to escape," he whined, his voice no longer assertive. "He was dumb. I couldn't get a rise out of him. I figured I knew him."

Parsons stood there like he was made of stone.

"Besides," Richard added, "the sheriff knew I didn't put shackles on Noah and he didn't say anything."

Sheriff Snellgrove turned his back on his nephew.

"The prisoner," Parsons continued his recap, "ran down the corridor towards the exit. Instead of following him in hot pursuit,

you wasted time going for your gun. Thank God you didn't shoot him, but the delay allowed him to get away."

"I followed him," Richard protested. "It was pitch black, but I swear it was him. He was running like a scared rabbit up the hill to the park. I figured we had him cornered. And we *did* corner him."

"Trouble was, it wasn't a him, but a her. Where is Justine now?"

"She's in jail," Boyd replied. "I'll have her brought in."

Soon, Justine was escorted into the room by an RCMP constable. She hadn't slept, but it didn't show. Her dark eyes burned. She looked defiantly at her jailers. She knew her rights.

"Justine, I am Sergeant Boyd, the officer in charge of the RCMP investigation. Tell me why you were at the back of the courthouse when the prisoner escaped and why you ran from the police."

"I was going back to my school dorms," she snapped. "I was late because the trial didn't end till five, so I was running. Suddenly, I saw men chasing me. I ran harder and tried to flag a car. I heard sirens. Then the police arrested me and threw me in jail."

Richard receded into the background.

"But I haven't done anything wrong. Can I leave now?"

Richard hated her. He knew she'd been a decoy. Life would not go well for Justine if he were to lose his job over the escape, he thought.

The sergeant decided to let Justine go. He knew she'd probably try to help the prisoner, but that was all right. She could lead them directly to Noah.

"She's not telling us the whole truth," Richard said.

Sergeant Boyd looked disdainfully at the deputy.

"Oh? And what's that?"

"I don't know, but she helped him escape."

"I thought he escaped from your custody. If she helped him, it had to be on the spur of the moment. Unless she knew you weren't going to secure the prisoner."

The sergeant's voice cut like a knife.

"Now, let's get back to Noah Hanlon. He's out on the Chilcotin plateau and it was ten below zero last night. We have limited resources for a manhunt. In the next hour, I'll instruct my search team to drive every road in the area, plastering the area with posters offering a reward. Which your office should pay, sheriff."

The sheriff nodded without looking up.

"We'll question every person in last night's caravan," Boyd continued. "I believe one of them transported him back to the Chilcotin and that he got off before the roadblock. We didn't have dogs last night, which was another oversight. Today, we'll get them to sniff each truck, then we'll search along the road to see if there's been any sign of him. A big reward and a thorough search should be enough to flush out our man."

By the time Boyd left the room, he'd gotten the sheriff to agree to a \$2,000 reward, all his department's available funds. He'd told the sheriff Justine was an innocent hare to the deputy's hound, but he would keep a close watch on her. She was much too clever to not be involved.

Luke Parsons asked the sheriff and Richard to stay behind.

"Deputy Snellgrove," Parsons began. "I've looked at your personnel file and it doesn't give me any confidence in you. There's a series of complaints from lawyers about your conduct towards prisoners. With your background, I can't overlook this serious breach of regulations, one that's led to a prisoner's escape. You've left me no alternative but to release you from your duties. Leave your badge and gun, then go."

"Old Hewitt has been on my case. He's the town drunk."

"Not for some time."

Richard turned to his uncle.

"You can't let him do this, Uncle."

Gideon Snellgrove said nothing.

When the door slammed shut behind his nephew, Parsons turned to him.

“You’ve given good service over the years, Gideon, but you slipped up badly by hiring your nephew. And by not disciplining him in the past. I urge you to consider early retirement.”

That evening, ex-Deputy Sheriff Richard Snellgrove told his friends at the Legion that he was the one wronged. At least there, he was respected on account of his size and strength, even without his badge. As well, the large reward offered on the posters already being posted around town helped bolster his take.

“I showed the breed some leniency,” he growled. “Then he took advantage of me and escaped. With the help of his girlfriend. I could’ve shot him, but I showed a little mercy.”

His friends nodded. Most of them, being unemployed, felt a lot of sympathy for him.

“I’m forming a posse to find him. Who’s joining me?”

Hands shot up and cheers rang out. He called for a round for the house and raised his glass.

“Here’s to the Snellgrove posse!” he shouted. “Here’s to the reward! Here’s to success!”

The Verdict

With the help of *selin*, Ta Chi dragged Noah to her shelter. She put an extra stick on the fire, followed by a pot full of water and shredded roots. Then, she rummaged in her bags for some clothing and helped dress him to withstand the sub-zero temperatures. While she did, she noticed his right leg was swollen. She probed and found a simple fracture of the smaller bone of the lower right leg, which she immobilized by making a splint from two sticks bound by rags. She packed it with snow to reduce the swelling. The pain from her poking and prodding made Noah sick and lightheaded. He cursed her. She ignored him and went about her treatment, then removed the pot from the fire, all the while talking to herself as if he wasn't there.

"Here blankets and belts and a jacket. She need something. I had other *sek'i*, she take place now. Look at leg, there no bone showing. I fix. Now some roots to take away pain."

She removed the roots from the cooling water and made him drink the liquid. The roots had an effect. The pain subsided and he fell into a deep sleep.

It was light the next day when Noah woke with a start to see her staring at him across the fire. She gave him some tea and porridge.

“We move now,” she said. “First, I go to road. Wipe away marks.”

She cleared the marks that he had made dragging himself off the road and over the windrow left by the snowplows. The police would return with dogs and those were the signs they would be looking for.

When she returned, she doused the fire by stomping on it and burying it in snow. She fashioned a travois out of her canvas and two long poles and lashed it onto her horse. While she pushed, he pulled himself on to it. She covered him with bags and blankets so it would look like he was part of her baggage, then strapped it all onto the travois.

They moved away from the road, south on an old trail. Her intention was to get off the exposed prairie and go down into the Chilcotin River valley, which had many draws and hideaways. There was an abandoned cabin on the other side of the river where he could stay for a while.

Noah felt like her papoose. They were moving away from any connection with people and onto the land. If she left him now, he knew he would die.

Belle was there on Monday morning when court reconvened. Bates advised Judge Deacon, for the record, that the accused had escaped custody. Stan requested an adjournment until his client was found. He also reminded the judge of the missing witness.

“My Lord, Mr. Bates tells me that the RCMP have not been able to locate Miss Ta Chi. Until she is found and I have had an opportunity to speak to her, my client would not have a fair trial.”

Judge Deacon did not call on the prosecutor to respond.

“Mr. Hewitt, your client has shown by his conduct that he holds this court in contempt. I am issuing a bench warrant for

his arrest. If he has not been captured and returned into custody by next Monday, the trial will resume without him. As for Miss Ta Chi, the police will continue to look for her, but if she cannot be found in the next week, the trial will proceed. I cannot keep the jury waiting any longer. I trust that your retainer allows you to continue to represent him in any event.”

“Yes, My Lord.”

“Very well. Clerk, call the jury in and I shall advise them of the adjournment.”

After the judge and jury had filed out, Stan walked up to Belle.

“There’s no need for you to stay here,” he said. “The judge said the trial will be adjourned for a week, but it would be highly unprecedented if the trial proceeds without the accused. Go back to Victoria and wait till you hear from me.”

Belle followed Stan’s advice.

Stan spent the next few days in bed trying to recover from fatigue caused by his cancer treatment.

On the off-chance the judge would force him to proceed with the trial in the absence of the accused, he turned to revising his closing argument. Without Noah, there would be no explanation of what had happened. He reflected on the evidence from this new perspective, seemingly to no avail, until he woke up on the Saturday before court was to resume with an inspiration.

He reviewed the transcript of the trial evidence from the cook. Sure enough, he discovered that his evidence at trial differed from his written statement to the police. In both those cases, Feng had said that he was in the kitchen cooking Thanksgiving dinner for the whole crew when he heard a ‘bang’. He had run into the great hall and seen Bordy lying dead on the floor in a pool of blood.

Stan read from the transcript of his cross-examination at the trial:

SH: How many bangs did you hear?

W: Just bang(s).

SH: Did you hear more than one bang?

W: I don't know, can't remember.

Stan had heard the cook refer only to the singular bang at the trial. In the cook's statement to the police, he had referred to solely one. But the court reporter in transcribing his shorthand notes thought Feng said 'bangs' — plural. He knew Feng had only heard one bang, which gave him an idea.

First, he subpoenaed the cook to appear on Monday morning.

Then, he had an investigator conduct an experiment, arranging for it with Belle by phone.

A similar rifle was fired both in the great hall and outside the room while the investigator was in the vicinity of the barn. This was done twice, once with the doors to the hall open, once with them closed. For both shots from inside the room, the person could not hear the rifle discharge. But the rifle shot was clearly heard when the shot was fired from outside the room.

Noah and Ta Chi moved at a slow pace. The animals were hungry and listless. Noah had a fever for the first few days and was in constant pain. Ta Chi didn't speak much to him except to give him orders. When she spoke to herself, it was in the third person. Always alert, she made sure there was always some cover near the trail where they could hide.

They camped on the north bank of the Chilcotin River at noon, then waited until dark to make the exposed crossing of the high timber bridge at Farwell Canyon. With no moon, conditions were perfect for a crossing. At midnight, she strapped Noah onto the travois and covered him up again. With *selin* keeping the cow in line, they started across.

They were at the midpoint when a sweep of headlights made an arc across the snowbanks. A northbound vehicle was snaking down the canyon and slowly advancing on them. There was nowhere to hide. Before the headlights caught them, Ta Chi turned the horse around as if they were heading in the opposite direction.

The headlights of Alex Auld's pick-up lit up the procession, which looked to him like a travelling manger. As he drew closer, he and his very pregnant wife, Darcy, recognized Ta Chi. He drew up beside her and rolled down his window.

"Hey there, Ta Chi!" Alex said. "Whatcha doing out on a night like this?"

She didn't reply.

He looked at her horse and cow.

"Stock looks pretty lean."

"Um. Ta Chi look for hay."

"Well, I'm heading for Williams Lake. Darcy here has got pains. I think the baby's coming. I'll be back tomorrow and I'll haul some hay out to ya. Oh, and keep a sharp eye out for Noah Hanlon. The police are looking for him. Say he might be dangerous."

He rolled up the window and drove off.

This was Noah's closest contact with anyone since Ta Chi had rescued him. It was good to hear another voice. He had felt like calling out to Alex, "Take me with you," for he knew that nothing would be the same after he crossed the Farwell Canyon bridge. Instead, he just watched the red taillights receding, imagining the warmth of the heated cab. He wondered why he had made a run for it and why this simple woman was so determined to care for and hide him.

He couldn't forget that she had, after all, given him the promise of life. He could endure just a bit longer, if just to please her. Their procession carried on to the south end of the bridge, left the road, found the trail and climbed the bank two hundred yards. There, Ta Chi made camp.

In the morning, there was no fire. Noah ate cold porridge, drank water and decided he was improving because he was questioning the quality of his rations. Ta Chi talked to herself and appeared agitated. Concerned, he tried to make out what she was saying when she stopped eating and looked at him.

“Last night, she come to bridge crossing the river as Noah. In middle of bridge, we meet woman in labour. We come to this side of bridge, she now Wawant’x.”

He didn’t know what to say. She was giving him his Native name. Was that her way of accepting him as a Tâilhqot’in? She didn’t wait for a response.

“I bring *sek’i* to road. Leave with rancher. Get hay for *qiyus*. She can see road from here.”

He watched her lead the horse and cow back to the road and across the bridge, settling there as if her camp was on the other side. The few vehicles that passed on the road stopped or slowed down and honked. She was a landmark in this country, a sentry. People were on the lookout for her and pointed her out when they saw her, which was usually from a distance. Oftentimes it wouldn’t be her, but a gnarled stump or a black bear scurrying into the trees. Children were told that if they didn’t behave, Ta Chi would get them. Yet she harmed no one and asked nothing from the people, only from the land, which maintained her and her spirit.

Alex Auld came back from Williams Lake just before noon the next day, a bit worse for wear. He’d waited out Darcy’s labour the previous night at the Legion and the congratulatory rounds kept flowing. The baby still hadn’t been born, however, and Darcy finally asked him to go help Ta Chi rather than hindering her. Safely hidden, Noah saw him stop, exchange words with Ta Chi and carry on. Half an hour later, he was back with some hay for the horse. He forked out the hay and backed his high-box pick-up into a rise. He loaded the cow and left.

Ta Chi was packing the hay onto the travois when a car drove up to the bluff overlooking the bridge. It stopped a good five hundred yards above her, with a clear view of her and the bridge. She gave no indication that she was aware of being observed and carried on with the loading. When it was done, she started moving off the road, heading east towards the Fraser River at its junction with the Chilcotin. Noah knew then she was aware she was being watched.

The car came down the hill very fast and intercepted her before she got far from the road. Two men got out. Even at a distance, Noah could recognize Richard Snellgrove. They walked up to Ta Chi. She stood her ground as they yelled at her. Noah couldn't hear the shouting but, towering over the twig of a woman, Snellgrove was waving his arms as he spoke. He pushed her down into the snow and waved at her some more while the other man held him back. Noah wanted to help her but couldn't move — trying would probably cause further damage to his leg. He felt sick at not being able to help.

The two men returned to the car and went back in the direction of Williams Lake.

The court reconvened the following Monday. The police had not found Ta Chi.

With Noah still at large on Monday morning, Stan made another motion for an adjournment before Judge Deacon. Surely the court would not proceed without the accused, as Stan had told Belle.

"My client would not have escaped if the sheriffs had been doing their jobs. The Crown is to blame for his escape and the trial should not proceed until my client is found."

"I've given your client a week to reconsider his ill-advised escape and turn himself in. Please proceed with your case, Mr. Hewitt."

Stan had no choice. After the jury filed in, he recalled Feng Chan to the stand.

“Mr. Chan, do you remember your evidence about the bangs you heard from the kitchen on the day of Bordy Hanlon’s death?”

“Yes, I remember.”

“Your evidence was — and I am reading from the transcript, My Lord...”

Stan read from the transcript.

SH: How many bangs did you hear that night?

W: Just bang(s).

SH: Did you hear more than one bang?

W: I don’t know. I can’t remember.

“Mr. Chan,” Stan continued, “can you describe where you were and what were you doing and what you heard the day Bordy Hanlon was shot?”

“In kitchen. Head in oven. See if roast cooked for Thanksgiving meal. Heard ‘bang’. Sound like something drop on floor.”

Stan nodded and smiled at the witness, encouraging him.

“Later, did you hear another something being dropped on the floor?”

In a slow, deliberate manner, Bates unwound himself from his chair and stood up.

“I object, My Lord,” he intoned. “This witness has already testified that he heard only one bang. My friend is trying to confuse the jury as he has confused me.”

Judge Deacon raised an eyebrow at Stan.

“My Lord,” Stan explained, “this witness’s evidence is uncertain. If you read the transcript, you will see that the court reporter was not clear on the plural or the singular of the word ‘bang’. As well, the witness himself was uncertain.”

Stan then read to the point in the transcript where the witness said he couldn’t remember how many bangs.

The judge shifted uneasily in his seat and took a moment.

“Oh, very well, Mr. Hewitt,” he said with a touch of impatience. “Ask your question.”

The jury was on the edge of their seats. They had rested from their labours for a week and now were plunged back into the murder case. Stan was determined to create as much confusion in the jury’s minds as possible, as that was the best defence he had left.

Stan turned back to the cook.

“Did you hear another something being dropped on the floor after the time you had your head in the oven?”

“Yes,” Feng answered. “I peel potatoes. Not long after, I hear another something being dropped on floor. Not as loud. Maybe dropped outside. Then I go see what’s making ‘bang’ and find Mr. Bordy dead.”

“Thank you. Those are my questions.”

Bates slowly got to his feet. He looked at the jury. He looked at the judge and shrugged his shoulders. Finally, he turned to the witness, who appeared to be cowering in the witness box fearful of the gruff prosecutor.

“Mr. Chan,” Bates asked, “when you swore to tell the truth at this trial, did you understand what the truth is?”

“Yes. Tell what happened. Don’t make up things.”

“When you gave evidence last week you said you heard only one bang, didn’t you?”

“Yes.”

Bates smiled and readied himself to dismiss the witness.

“But,” Feng continued, “I heard two noises like something being dropped on floor. Second one not so loud.”

“So you didn’t hear any bangs,” Bates sighed. “Is that what you are saying?”

“I don’t know. I just tell the truth.”

When Feng left the stand, Stan shook his hand warmly and offered his heartfelt thanks. Stan next called his investigator

to give evidence. He testified as to his failure to hear from the barn a gunshot from within the house whether the doors were open or closed, as well as his ability to hear a shot clearly from outside the house.

This was all Stan could do, without his client to tell the story, to bring home to the jury that an indoor shot at the time of the shooting would not have been heard by the cowhands at the barn, but a shot from outside the house would have.

Acton had no questions.

“That,” said Stan with a heavy heart, “is the case for the defence, My Lord.”

In his summation, Stan made it clear to the jury that there was no direct evidence as to what had happened in the great hall of the ranch house. The Crown’s case had been that there were two people known to be in that room: Bordy and Noah. But the Crown had not accounted for the third person — the shooter — who had been outside the room on the lawn.

The glass doors on the front of the house facing the lawn and the lake had been open. The barn from where cowhands had heard a gunshot was three hundred yards from the back of the house, a solidly-built log structure. The cowhands could not have heard a rifle fired within the house. Their testimony was that the gunshot had been loud and sharp, that it had brought them running. That meant the gun must have been fired from the outside of the house by a third person who had gotten clean away. Therefore, the gun that had Noah’s fingerprints on it was not the gun that killed Bordy.

“Don’t forget the evidence of Mr. Chan,” Stan reminded the jury, his voice filled with passion. “There is a reasonable doubt and, as his Lordship will tell you, if you have a reasonable doubt, it is your duty to acquit.”

Acton Bates summed up the Crown’s case in a more clinical, matter-of-fact way. He was a methodical man with a detached

manner befitting a prosecutor, but when he spoke to the jury, he closed his eyes from time to time giving the impression, true or not, that he was drawing on his vast inner resources and providing them with the benefit of his extensive legal learning. He assumed that the jury would not be impressed by the accused, who hadn't bothered to stick around to tell his story and hear their verdict. His most telling argument was that even if the shot was fired from the outside of the house, Noah Hanlon was the person who fired it, not some mystery person.

Judge Deacon was also short and to the point. He outlined the law and summarized the facts. There was in evidence only one gun, one shell fired from that gun and one lead bullet. The accused's fingerprints were on the gun, the analyst had detected powder residue on his hands indicating that he had recently fired a gun and, finally, the cowhands had seen him with the gun in his hands. Whether the rifle was fired from outside or inside the room was of little consequence, for it was open for them to decide whether Noah Hanlon had fired the gun and the bullet which killed Bordy Hanlon. The motive was a quarrel between father and son and, as the Crown had argued, there was no evidence that Bordy Hanlon was killed in the heat of the moment.

Justine, who had received permission from the school to attend, sat through the evidence and argument, confident the jury would acquit, for it was plain to her that things had happened just the way Mr. Hewitt had explained.

The jury entered the courtroom in the afternoon with their verdict.

"Have you reached a verdict?" the clerk asked them.

"We have, My Lord," the foreman answered.

"What is your verdict on the first charge of the murder in the second degree of Bordy Hanlon?"

"We find the accused not guilty."

The gallery was all smiles. Noah would be free.

"What is your verdict," the clerk went on, "on the second charge of manslaughter?"

"We find the accused guilty as charged."

The Natives in the back of the court — the ones who had sat through the trial, who did not rely on newspaper accounts and wanted to see justice done with their own eyes and hear the evidence with their own ears, cried out in one voice.

"No! No!"

The judge called for order and their cries quieted.

Judge Deacon thanked the jury. The foreman of the jury turned to his fellow jurors in the box and they whispered to each other. Heads were nodded and the foreman stood.

"We recommend mercy in the sentencing, My Lord," the foreman said. "This was a horrible accident."

The judge thanked the jury again and they filed out, nodding to Stan. He was on his feet as soon as the door closed.

"My Lord, the jury's verdict is perverse," he thundered. "I move to set aside the guilty verdict and order a new trial. The foreman just called the events an 'accident,' which indicates that the jury didn't understand the essential elements the Crown must prove in order to convict on a charge of manslaughter."

Mr. Bates rose.

"When twelve men and women," he said, his eyes closed, "come to a difficult decision after due deliberation, it is not for us to question their verdict. The evidence is there for them to accept or reject. As to the word 'accident,' that was just a layman's way of saying it was a tragedy."

Judge Deacon thought a moment before he spoke.

"The Court of Appeal," he announced, "will have to consider your arguments, Mr. Hewitt. The verdict will stand. I sentence your client Noah Hanlon, in absentia, to ten years imprisonment for the manslaughter of Bordy Hanlon."

The verdict left Stan drained. He had taken on Noah's defence sure he would get an acquittal. He was convinced that Noah was innocent of the crime and equally determined to have the decision reversed.

Dr. Hay's advice to tidy up his affairs would have to wait.

PART II

The intelligence Mr. MacDougall conveys in regard to Alexandria is not very agreeable. The Indians in that quarter, having had some serious misunderstandings a few years ago with the Chilcotins, the latter, in revenge, lately murdered three of the former when they were hunting in the vicinity of the Chilcotin River, and the others, in retaliation, perpetrated a like deed upon two young men of the Chilcotin tribe who were amongst them. Since this occurred all intercourse between the two tribes has been broken off, and both being apprehensive of being attacked, the Chilcotins retreated beyond our reach for the present, which prevented Mr. McDougall from making them the promised visit, and the others have, since that unfortunate affair, done nothing.

This event I am afraid will be an obstacle to the establishment of a post on the Chilcotin River for the present.

— *the journal of William Connolly, Chief Factor of the
Hudson's Bay Company, 1826*

Power

On the day of Noah's verdict and sentencing, the major got the good news he'd been waiting for. At the club, Jepson poured him the usual stiff gin to celebrate the cabinet granting the Homathko River water licence to Vancouver Island Power. Now he could dam up the river and flood Bordy's ranch.

"By the way," the major noted, "I'm expecting a guest at seventeen-hundred hours. Show him to my table and ask what he drinks."

Ian Richards was late.

That morning, he'd been trying to balance his family accounts at his desk when the major phoned and invited him for a drink at the club at five. The accounts were all the more difficult now that Ralph was enrolled at All Saints on the major's recommendation. Although their brochure featured healthy boys studying hard and playing rugby, All Saints prided itself on straightening out problem rich boys through strict discipline. Major Jack Parmenter, having no children himself, had taken a keen interest in Ralph by

questioning his father from time to time on his progress.

Ian proudly wore the civil engineers' iron ring on his little finger. He had clung to his desk in Victoria throughout his career as firmly as a shipwrecked sailor to a piece of flotsam, not willing to challenge himself by venturing into the field. He made the point of chatting up the major whenever he stopped by. He kept reminding the major that the company should decide on new sources of power on the Island to address the heavy demand from a projected tourist boom over the next decade.

Just before five, Enid phoned him to remind him of all the things he had to pick up on the way home from the office. She ran on about what her hairdresser had told her of an affair between two deputy ministers whom they vaguely knew. He couldn't get her off the phone.

"Enid, Major Parmenter invited me to meet him at the Union Club and I'm late."

"Oh, that stupid old fool. Let him wait."

"He's the majority stockholder. And don't forget he got Ralph into All Saints."

"Yes, and the school fees are bankrupting us. Never mind, go have your drink with that madman."

At five sharp, Colonel McGowan, head of the Liquor Control Board, had entered the club and, instead of walking directly to his table at the far end of the lounge, took a circular route which brought him by the major's table, a change of routine so profound that the staff and a few of the members scattered about the lounge remarked on it later that evening. The two knew each other enough to nod when their paths crossed, but this was unheard of. The colonel's connections with the party in power kept him well-informed, so recognition of Parmenter in such a public way could only mean the government's favour. The major was on his second gin when the colonel walked up to him.

"I say, Major," the colonel offered, "I've received a shipment of hundred-proof Jamaica rum. I thought you might like a few jars before the boys water it down."

"That's decent of you, Colonel. Yes, I would."

"I've just heard that your company has been granted the water licence on the Homathko River. Congratulations!"

"Thank you, Colonel. By the by, I believe you know the coastline at the northern end of the Island."

"Yes. I sailed up there a few summers ago."

"Tell me, is Bute Inlet still navigable to the outfall of the Homathko River?"

"Yes! Yes, it is. But it's a long way to go for nothing. If you intend to boat there, the squalls off Mount Waddington can be dangerous."

"Danger, you say?" The major bridled. "Danger is landing with the Canadians at Dieppe in rough seas under German fire. A little wind from Mount Waddington is nothing."

Jepson ushered Ian into the club's lounge at ten past five.

Ian Richards was a man who had been waiting for greatness to be thrust upon him, but would not be disappointed if he'd waited in vain. He wore polished shoes, blue blazers, *HMCS Esquimalt* ties and buttoned-down shirts, buying his flannels at Straith's on Government Street. He fit very nicely into a four-some at the Uplands Golf Course and tried not to embarrass Enid when they played bridge. He had caught the major's eye because he kept his hair short, had gone through college on the Reserve Officers' Training Corps program and was a good listener whenever the major told his war stories. The major was thinking Richards was the man to head up his biggest campaign. That notion might have changed had the major been aware that Richards was late, which he failed to notice because of the colonel's diversion.

The colonel moved on, just as Jepson showed Ian to the table. The major, stimulated by his encounter with the colonel, stood up to greet Richards.

“Richards,” he said. “Just the man I want to see. I am appointing you my field commander in our campaign to dam the waters of the Homathko River.”

“And where is the Homathko River, sir?”

“That beautiful river, Richards, is in the Chilcotin. You’ll find out where that is presently. First, let’s have a drink.”

The circles of Victoria’s social, business and political society intersected at the Union Club. Deputies who effectively ran the government, bankers and businessmen who benefited from government contracts, lawyers, lawmakers and social hangers-on were all members. There, in the lounges and dining rooms of the venerable institution, was where the members firmly believed that the decisions which shaped the province of British Columbia were made.

They deceived themselves. Those banned from membership by the rules of the club, although they could be entertained as guests, made many of the real decisions — not Asians, nor Natives, nor Jews, all of whom were also excluded, but women.

Four of the most influential women in Victoria were playing bridge at Belle Hanlon’s. Her partner was Adele Buscombe. Their opponents were Sybil Crosstairs, wife of the Minister of Energy and Mines, and Samantha Edgell, wife of the senior deputy minister, the Deputy Minister of Finance.

Belle was trying to keep both her spirits and her cards up. Unfortunately, she was looking at a weak hand with barely enough to open.

“One no trump,” she bid. “I’m so pleased, Sybil, that Reggie obtained cabinet approval to survey the Homathko. It will make the major’s day, don’t you think, Adele?”

Adele laughed.

"He's probably at the club right now planning his campaign."
She went to the sideboard and picked up a dish.

"Now, I want you all to try some antipasto I made fresh this morning."

She went around the table offering it with crackers. Samantha took a bite.

"*Mmm.* Adele, this is delicious. You know the licence was no sure thing. The cabinet was divided. I doubt it would have been granted were Bordy still alive. He and his lawyer were putting up quite a fight."

To protect the ranch, Bordy had used his influence over the sitting member from the Cariboo Chilcotin, Eric Manson, and Belle had hosted a number of political picnics and dinners at the ranch house. Eric knew how to get elected and to keep his own seat in the backbenches of the government, but in Victoria, Sybil had a better command of political power, as evidenced by her husband's place in cabinet.

She'd married an ambitious lawyer and decided early in their marriage that he should run for reeve of Oak Bay because she enjoyed entertaining. She found herself in Belle's inner circle at the bridge table because her political instincts were beyond any that Belle had previously encountered.

"I am a better organizer than most men," she'd explained to Belle. "I understand how half the population thinks and I can manipulate the other half. My political philosophy is simple: the basic unit is the family. What's good for the family is good for Victoria and the province. Who runs the family? Women."

She'd made that speech to the Women's League on many occasions when she was president. Now, at the bridge table, her focus was elsewhere.

"You must give me the recipe for this delicious antipasto."

With six spades, king high in her hand, she bid two spades.

Adele, south with the AKQJ and two small hearts, knew that Belle would not cooperate with any six-level adventure and made the practical decision to bid slam on her own.

“Six hearts,” bid Adele.

The strong bid didn’t startle Belle, familiar as she was with her neighbour’s take-charge attitude in life and bridge. Adele had married Charles, a man whom she thought could run the Cowichan Electric Company while she retained control, but she ended up compensating for his lack of vision. When his limitations became an obvious impediment, she’d agreed to have the major take charge, never regretting that decision. She now had more time for the social events she lived for.

Sybil led a spade and the table was silent as Adele set about making her twelve tricks. After winning the spade lead with the ace, she drew trumps and had to decide how to develop the extra tricks she needed to make the contract. She found them in diamonds, giving Samantha her diamond jack and smugly ruffing the spade return, crossing to the table with the club ace and discarding her club losers on the six and three of diamonds. The table erupted in praise and congratulations.

“Oh well done, Adele.”

“I thought you would go down.”

“I’m glad we didn’t double.”

With the tension of the hand over, Sybil turned to Belle.

“What’s happening with Noah’s trial?”

“I don’t know what to think or do anymore,” Belle replied. “His lawyer says that the trial shouldn’t proceed without him and to expect another long adjournment. Otherwise, I would be in Williams Lake. I’m lost as to how to prove that he’s innocent. I warned him not to give up his art to take over the ranch, but he insisted and now look what’s happened.”

She sighed, but wasn’t allowed to dwell on her emotions for long.

“Why do you think he is innocent?” Samantha asked. “We all know that Bordy was an impossible man to live with.”

Of the foursome who enjoyed dealing the cards and divining the future, Samantha was the quiet one, appearing out of place in the colourful group. She brought a rational mind to their avian flights of fancy. Last year, Adele had mentioned that Vancouver Island Power, thanks to the major, had expanded too quickly for its electrical power base. She’d told Samantha that he was looking for a source of hydro power in the Chilcotin. Samantha knew that they would need a water licence from the highest levels of government before even a water survey could be done. She had suggested to Sybil that it would advance Reggie’s career to secure the power for Vancouver Island, his own political power base.

When Belle didn’t answer her question at once, Samantha prodded.

“You’ve told us that Noah hasn’t told anyone except his lawyer what happened at the shooting. Perhaps he escaped because what he has to say in court may affect too many people?”

Belle was shaken by this suggestion.

“All I can say is that my son is innocent.”

Just before five, the phone rang in her den. Belle had been anticipating the call and excused herself. She picked up the receiver in the den.

“Hello, Stan. Did you get the adjournment?”

“I have bad news. Noah has been convicted of manslaughter.”

Stan heard her sigh and catch her breath. She was always a composed woman, very bright and intense and not given to emotional outbursts. The pause on the line convinced Stan that she felt this verdict deeply. He respectfully left her the silence.

“I’m devastated,” she said finally. “It doesn’t make any sense.”

“I think there are grounds for appeal. I don’t believe he’s guilty. Another person shot Bordy.”

“Who?”

“We’ve been over this before, Belle. This is your family. Do you have any new ideas?”

“No, I have no idea. As you so well know, Bordy was not well-liked. But if you succeed in your appeal and Noah goes free, will it matter any more?”

“Well, yes. Yes, it will. The best I could do for Noah on appeal is to get a retrial. We don’t want to put Noah in jeopardy again. Besides, there is a killer out there on the plateau and the police should be looking for him or her. You are all in danger until this person is caught. Belle, you’re paying my retainer and Noah can’t be found. Do I have your instructions to appeal his conviction and to find out who killed Bordy?”

“Yes, of course, Stan. Please proceed.”

After Belle hung up the phone, she remained sitting at her desk in the dark, unable to move. Since Bordy’s murder, she had been torn between her devotion to Noah and the major’s obsession with building a dam on the Homathko River. Then, on the very same day, she learned that the government’s approval for the survey had been awarded and that Noah had been convicted of manslaughter. She sat there knowing her bridge partners were in the other room waiting for her to return and take command. Her conscience, guilt-ridden and over-exercised, could not reconcile the two driving forces in her life.

She made the decision to hide her grief for now, attend the major’s licence celebrations that evening and speak to him afterwards to get his advice on what she should do.

She returned to the bridge table.

“What happened?” the others said in unison.

She slumped in her seat.

“Noah’s been convicted of manslaughter and sentenced to ten years.” Then she straightened up and said, “Never mind! Noah will be found and his appeal will be successful.”

“How will this affect the dam on the Homathko?” Samantha asked.

“The major will proceed, of course.” A fit of bravado overtook Belle. “And you are all invited to the ranch in July to play bridge. The ranch is at its best at that time of year.”

The irony of Belle’s invitation was not lost on Samantha: the ranch would be flooded in a few years and all that beauty would be submerged.

The major had invited a select number of influential people — politicians, bankers and would-be investors — to his house that evening for a barbecue dinner. On occasions when people of like mind who have backed a winner gather to confirm their good fortune, there seems to be no obstacle that cannot be overcome by planning, selecting the right people to execute the plan and, of course, money. That had been the major’s formula, aided by Belle’s silent financial backing.

The takeovers of Nanaimo Electric and Campbell River Power had both had their issues. Then Bordy Hanlon had proved a problem, as Belle had warned he would. Stan Hewitt’s questioning the legality of the licence and threatening to take the government to court if one was granted had proved effective. The cabinet had delayed the announcement, vital as it was to the power company’s existence. But Bordy’s opposition to the dam had died with him. Belle now was the sole owner of Empire Ranch, as well as a partner in the Vancouver Island Power Company.

On hearing of Noah’s conviction, the major thought it a shame that everything had turned out so badly for the boy. He was a good lad and had attended All Saints, a good prep school, which in the major’s estimation was a wonderful preparation for life. Noah had even asked the major for his advice on whether to go back to the ranch after Bordy’s stroke or finish his schooling in fine arts. Of course, the major hadn’t seen any use in a fine

arts education for a young man. At the same time, he hadn't encouraged him to go back to the ranch. He had suggested a third alternative: join Vancouver Island Power and work his way up to the top of the ladder. Noah hadn't taken his advice and the major hadn't held it against him. Yet the major couldn't help thinking that things would have turned out much better for Noah if he had.

The major was surprised that the jury had convicted Noah. The boy took little interest in guns and had no interest in hunting. But that was all the thought he could spare for that unfortunate lad until he and Belle settled down to talk after the last guest had gone.

It was almost midnight at the end of a hectic day full of the excitement and anticipation of planning a campaign. The next two months held the promise of many more busy days as he readied his survey party for the Chilcotin. Still, he knew Belle needed him. The fire was burning low as they sat on the sofa.

"Thank you, Belle," he smiled. "I know it took a lot out of you to be gracious when your family is in such turmoil."

She brushed aside his thank-you. Belle was a performer. What she needed was his advice. She had been tormented by guilt since last October. She had confessed her sin of omission to the priest every week for months but had done nothing to rectify it except to say a few Hail Marys. The major was someone in the practical world she could lean on.

"Jack," she began, "you must understand that I only went to the Chilcotin to help deal with Bordy. You'd suggested that the day of my recital. I wanted to confront Bordy, to tell him that if he didn't stop his opposition to the licence, I would force a sale of the ranch."

The major became a little testy.

"What possible connection could that have with your husband's murder? What are you telling me, Belle?"

"I was at the ranch when Bordy was shot. He'd threatened me with the gun. I was leaving when I heard it go off. I'd parked my car in the woods where none of the ranchhands would see it, so I ran to get to it and drove off. I stopped in Lac La Hache and called home. The housekeeper told me Sergeant Boyd had called. I only learned Bordy was dead when I called the sergeant. I left the impression with him that I was phoning from Victoria and would arrange to get to Williams Lake the next day, which I did."

"Have you told anyone else you were at the ranch?"

"No," she admitted. "I told the police, Stan and the prosecutor I was in Victoria. I even swore under oath in court that I was in Victoria at the time."

"Why, Belle? Why would you do such a thing?"

"I thought that if it were known that I was at the house at the time of the murder... well, we'd never get the licence considering my association with you."

The major nodded slowly, recognizing the sacrifice of this woman for his ambition.

"Stan believes," she continued, "that there was another person outside the great hall, but he doesn't know who. I didn't see anyone. You're the only person who knows the full story. I believed it didn't matter to Noah's case whether I was there or not."

"So you didn't see him there?"

"He wasn't there when I left the hall. The shot was fired after I left. I didn't lie to harm Noah but I fear I may have."

Her eyes implored the major to help. He returned her look rather coolly.

"Are you sure," he asked in a near-whisper, "that there was no one else in or outside the house who could have seen anything? Besides Noah?"

"I was in a panic. I thought I was going to be shot. I didn't look back then and didn't see or hear anyone else before that. Although," she mused, "I did have a strange feeling on the long

drive back to Lac La Hache that there could have been someone there. I thought it was my guardian angel. I believe Stan thinks it was Ta Chi."

"That Native woman who lives off the land and turns up when you least expect it?"

"Yes, her. The Natives say she is the embodiment of the Chilcotin. I say she's a bit deranged."

The major had found his true mate in Belle: the equal of any man, as well as a real partner in business and at home. He felt pride that she trusted him in the most difficult crisis of her life. He'd forgotten he'd given her an ultimatum to remove Bordy's opposition to the dam. He shifted towards her and held her hand to reassure her. He would do anything to support her, anything to protect her.

"You've been carrying this secret far too long. I'm sorry I was away fishing that weekend. If not, perhaps you would have told me of your plans."

"What should I do, Jack? If I come forward at this late date, the press will play up the connection between me and you and the company."

The major nodded grimly.

"I can't," she said, "let Noah's conviction stand for a crime that he didn't commit."

The major was noted for making quick decisions, but now he hesitated. He was trying to control his emotions, for he knew that this day which brought such triumph could come to nothing if Belle's involvement, no matter how innocent, in Bordy's murder were made public.

"My dear," he said, slowly and distinctly, "the first thing you must do is fire Stan Hewitt. We will then hire the best criminal lawyer in Victoria, who will have the verdict set aside and who will successfully defend Noah at a new trial when he is found. I suggest Chris Cuthbert."

The major's eyes glazed a bit. Belle recognized the look and knew he was lost in memory.

"You will recall," he continued, "Cuthbert defended me on the fraud charges related to the Campbell River Power takeover. Oh, you should also have Cuthbert act as the lawyer for the ranch. He's in Victoria and it's more convenient. As for Noah, he's a dreamer, but he showed a bit of pluck by escaping custody. It reminds me of my escape from the Nazis in the Italian campaign by swimming the river Arno. God, that water was cold."

He began to shiver and his eyes narrowed to pinpoints. He noticed Belle looked alarmed at his digression. He shook himself.

"As for you, my dear," he said, squeezing her hand perhaps a little too hard, "there is no need for you to breathe a word about this to anybody. Do you think Noah saw you at the ranch that day?"

"I don't know. When we met in the jailhouse, he didn't mention it. But he escaped before giving evidence. Why do you ask?"

"I suggest we arrange to find Noah on our own, so we can help him through this ordeal."

"What do you propose?"

"I'll ask Charlie Rainbow to track him down."

She felt better. They went to bed on that note.

In Williams Lake, a hard-blowing, snow-packed west wind pushed Stan Hewitt down Third Street towards his office. He was thinking that it would be hell out there on the plateau for Noah.

Still, he had to focus on Williams Lake right now. Stan had made some inquiries and found out that Alex Auld, deep in his cups at the Legion while waiting for his wife's delivery two nights previous, had told Snellgrove that he had seen Ta Chi at Farwell Canyon. Since then, Snellgrove had boasted in the Legion that he had found Ta Chi and convinced her to keep an eye out for Noah. He proclaimed that the reward would be his.

Stan phoned Sergeant Boyd, told him what he had heard and warned him that he had better keep Snellgrove under control.

He had to find Ta Chi, sure she held the clues to the death of Bordy Hanlon. Auld had said that she was heading east towards the Fraser. But T̓silhqot'in people told him that since it was now March, like the deer and the caribou, she would instinctively follow the migration route west towards the foothills and higher land as winter retreated.

Back at his office, he was still stamping the snow off his feet when the phone rang. It was Belle.

"I've slept on the bad news you gave me last night," she told him. "You've been wonderful for Noah. He has such trust in you and so do I, but you have not been well. I think this is too strenuous for you."

"Nonsense. I rise to the challenge."

Belle changed her tactics.

"I think the appeal and the retrial should be in the hands of a more experienced appeal lawyer. Do you know Chris Cuthbert?"

"Yes, I do. He has a fair reputation."

"Well, he's agreed to take the appeal and the retrial. I will of course pay your fee up to date. There is no need for you to do any investigative work either. I want to thank you for being there in our darkest hour. It also makes sense that Cuthbert should act as lawyer for the ranch since I'm in Victoria."

Stan mumbled something into the phone and hung up. He knew perfectly well that Noah was his client and his mother's permission to act was not necessary, but he'd wanted to keep her in the game. For the last four months, Noah's defence had consumed him. Now, he was told that his services were no longer required. He had been fired in the past because he was drunk, but never because he lacked experience. He desperately needed a drink.

Instead, he rang up an old fishing buddy of his, Tom Barton at 122 Mile House, and invited himself down for some ice fishing

on Lac La Hache, which was noted for its kokanee. Tom had been following the trial in the *100 Mile Free Press* and was curious.

That evening, Tom and his sister, Dorothy, questioned Stan about the verdict. They'd been good friends with Belle when she was in the Chilcotin. She had often stayed with them or next door with their sister Molly en route to Vancouver. They reminisced about those days.

"You know," Dorothy recalled, "I saw Belle up here last fall. She stayed at Molly's place for a night or two. I don't remember when."

Stan held his breath.

"Dorothy, would you mind giving Molly a call and ask if she remembers the date?"

Stan had his answer within minutes: she'd been here at Thanksgiving. Molly had remembered that Belle had gone to Quesnel to have dinner with Hetty Southin. She'd returned too late to eat pumpkin pie while it was still hot from the oven. Belle had lied to him. She had not been in Victoria when the shooting occurred. She'd been within a six-hour drive of the ranch.

Over the next few weeks, Stan talked to Cuthbert and briefed him on the case and his thoughts about the appeal. He was very frank with him.

"I won't be offended if you tell the Court of Appeal that I'm a doddering, negligent old fool. It's the truth. Noah's conviction must be overturned. I'm sure once Noah is found, there will be sufficient evidence to acquit him, evidence that was not available at trial."

Cuthbert pounced immediately on this.

"Can you tell me what it is? It will be helpful on the appeal."

Stan couldn't tell him because he didn't have it yet and he was not prepared to voice his suspicions, nor did he tell Cuthbert that he was continuing to work the case to clear Noah's name. Noah had never dismissed him, therefore he was still Noah's lawyer. He would bide his time, wait until spring came to the Chilcotin and then he would find Ta Chi.

Frozen Tears

Ta Chi returned to the camp to find Noah on the ground in pain. She adjusted his splint and boiled some root juice to sedate him. His pain could not be allowed to stop their journey. They had to keep moving west from Farwell Canyon, where she'd been sighted. They headed upriver with the horse breaking trail.

They camped that night.

"Those men don't hurt," she explained in her halting English. "They warn me watch out for Noah. If I don't tell 'em where she is, then they hurt me. Noah is gone. Wawant'x lives."

It was warmer that night. The small fire was between them and the stars were very close.

"Next few weeks, I show her how to snare rabbits so we eat, and trap beaver and martin so she can trade for food."

Noah asked her about the morning star in the southern sky. She told him a story that old Antoine had told her.

Once, three young brothers who hunt with dogs
live with old woman grandmother. Each time come

in from hunt, young men give old woman a little caribou liver and other good bits. One day, after hunting all day, they kill nothing and come home to old woman. They take some rotten wood, give it to her and say, "Here, Grandmother, here is some caribou liver for you." Old woman is blind, take it and try to eat it and when he see trick, very angry. So next day, when young men start out, old woman take bear's foot and heat it in fire and dance about camp and sing his song. In this way by his magic, he stop young men from coming back and turn them into stars. After this, young men live in sky. One day while hunting, they find tracks of great moose and follow them many days. As young men track moose, they look down and see Earth. Eldest brother decide to try get back to Earth. So she tell her brothers to cover with their blankets and not to look. Then she start, but when only partway down, youngest brother look through hole in his blanket. So her brother can go no farther. They live, all three, in sky ever since. You can see to this day, as well as moose and dogs. Morning star is old woman with torch looking for young men, her grandsons.

Noah had forgotten his pain while listening to her story under the stars. Starting to think about where his next meal was coming from made him even more aware of his condition.

"Thank you, Ta Chi. I'll remember that story when I see those stars." Then he asked, "Do you practice magic?"

She smiled.

"Better rest up. We move soon."

“Mother told me that when Father Dumont brought me, he said that my birth mother was Annie and she died at childbirth.”

“Yeah.”

“Was Annie my birth mother?”

“No.”

“Do you know my birth mother?”

“Yeah. Your mother is Ta Chi.”

Noah stared at the small placid figure who without emotion had just declared that she was his mother. After enduring four months of jail and over a week of being hunted like an animal, with this, he was overcome. He couldn't stop the tears from welling in his eyes, spilling down his cheeks and freezing there. He had wanted to know something about his real mother ever since he fell in love with Justine. He couldn't speak.

He saw that Ta Chi's attention was directed at the fire. Going back to the time he could first remember, she was always there in the landscape, just as the land was always on his mind and in his heart. He believed her. All he could think to do was to reach out and touch her on the hand.

“Thank you,” he said.

He watched her tend the fire for a while, not wanting to disturb her.

“And who,” he said offhandedly, “is my father?”

She looked away as if she hadn't heard the question.

“Chilcotin.”

It was all she said. He accepted that and didn't press her further. He knew that from then on, he would be able to tolerate memories of Bordy because he wasn't his real father. He turned to his sketchbook and drew the old woman with a torch looking for her grandsons.

They moved upriver along the Chilcotin Valley trail. Supplies were low and chances to trap rabbit and squirrel were few. After seven days of low rations and hunger turning into starvation,

near a small lake that fed Big Creek, they heard a wolf pack in full chase under a waning moon. They listened for a half-hour to the din. It stopped suddenly.

Ta Chi interpreted the sounds.

"Wolf flush deer from cover. Chase onto lake and bring down. In morning, we follow sound of raven. Find kill and take our share."

"The wolves won't like that."

"They eat good."

In the morning, they followed the ravens to the wolf kill, just as she had said. It was a fine-looking stag which had wintered well. The wolf pack had chased the deer onto the lake, where it had lost its footing and slipped. After the pack had brought the stag down, they'd eaten their fill. A lone wolf stood guard to keep the ravens from finishing the deer and depriving the pack of a second meal.

Still not able to walk, Noah stayed behind with the *qiyus* while Ta Chi moved out on the lake with *selin*. The horse had caught wind of the wolf and he had trouble controlling it.

Getting close to the kill, Ta Chi raised her arms and shouted, firing her .22 rifle in the air. The wolf slunk off. Ta Chi hacked off a hindquarter of the not-quite-frozen meat, enough to feed them for a week. She tied the bloody meat to the horse, leaving the balance of the red carcass to the ravens and wolves.

While they moved through the pine forest, Noah still on the travois, Ta Chi gathered what appeared to be pieces of bark from the branches of trees lining the trail. Noah wondered about the reason for this until they camped that night. She made a stew of the venison and placed the pieces of dried bark into the stew. They tasted like mushrooms.

"In summer," she explained, "squirrels pick mushrooms on trail and carry to branches to dry. In winter, squirrels and Ta Chi eat mushrooms."

By the end of March, Noah was starting to walk with the help of a staff. They had travelled as far as the Taseko Lake road, close to Hanceville on the other side of the river, on the outskirts of the Stone Reserve. Ta Chi explained that this was where her cousin lived. She waited until dark and then went to his house.

“I come to ask buy tea, sugar, oats. Pencils and paper.”

He was puzzled.

“Pencils and paper?”

She handed him a letter.

“This letter for Justine Paul at the mission school. Deliver to him, no one else.”

He accepted these jobs without further question and agreed to look after her horse.

At his office in Williams Lake, Sergeant Boyd met with the three constables who patrolled the Chilcotin. His first priority was the capture of Noah Hanlon. There had been a number of break-ins over the last month in Anahim Lake, Redstone and Hanceville, all of them unsolved. The victims and the press attributed them to Noah. *Williams Lake Tribune* editorials asked pointed questions about why there weren't any leads or trace of the fugitive. And there was every reason to expect he'd be found — citizens and community groups had kept adding to the pot and the reward had climbed over \$10,000. The reward idea had backfired. Now the police just looked incompetent if the public's help was needed *that* much. The case needed to be resolved. Justine was to take her Easter break the following week and a special constable would be assigned to follow her.

“Richard Snellgrove,” Boyd sighed, “wants the reward that has been posted for Noah's capture. I expect he'll be out there and I don't want him interfering with our search. Keep an eye out for him and warn him off if necessary!”

In her bed at St. Joseph's, Justine read the letter for the tenth time, though she knew it by heart. She would burn the letter tomorrow, but she had to sleep with it tonight. The envelope was folded paper gummed together with pine sap. On receiving it, she noted with a smile that it was drawing paper. It was addressed to her at the mission school and given to her, without explanation, by a Tâilhqot'in from the Stone Reserve.

The printing in pencil appeared to be the stick letters of a child. The brief message inside had the same printing:

Hope school goes fine.
Pick you up at Anaham
on Easter break.
Love, Mother.

Justine's mother couldn't read or write, so she knew it was from Noah, that he was safe. The drawing paper had been enough to give her hope, but this confirmed it. She put the letter under her pillow and went to sleep.

When she woke in the morning, the letter was gone. She was frantic. She couldn't find it around the bed or in her room — someone must have taken it. She figured there were more important things to do, but she would have to be on guard. She headed out to the Williams Lake bus stop, not noticing the men who followed her.

She boarded the bus to the Anaham Reserve. The driver nodded hello. The bus was quite full. Hidden in the crowd, Native special constable Dale Pope was sitting well behind her. Across the street in a car with two other men, Richard Snellgrove watched. Pope was there on instructions from the sergeant, following Justine in the hope she would lead him to Noah. Snellgrove was there because his informant at the school had stolen the letter and given it to him. Pope was aware of the other and his interest in Justine.

The trip took two hours. Justine was impatient to get off and see her relatives. The bus driver finally pulled up to her stop. The Anaham Reserve was a cluster of houses strung out along the road to Anahim Lake on the north steppe of the Chilcotin River. Justine stood to leave, but Pope stayed in his seat.

"I see you have a welcoming committee," the driver said.

Running down the muddy road came a swarm of young children, shouting and waving at Justine. She waved back. They formed a ring and jumped around her, their eyes open wide and each one demanding her attention.

"Justine, look at me! I have a tooth missing."

"Tomas Hance broke his arm when he was bucked off his horse."

"Are you going to ride in the Stampede this year?"

"What did you learn at school?"

"Granny is not well."

She answered each question, squatting down to hug the girls and tousle the boys' hair.

"What about Granny?" she asked.

"She came here last night and took to bed. She wants to speak to you."

"All right. Billy and Matthew, you can help me with the bags and then I'll give you all a treat."

The welcoming committee walked back up between the two ruts made by the Bennett wagon — a horse-drawn buckboard mounted on car wheels, adapted by the T̓silhqot'in to navigate the mud during spring breakup and used year-round to haul hay and the family. A couple of the reserve's best Appaloosa horses were tethered in the field in front of the house. The children prattled and chatted. They told Justine how things were going on the reserve. Their treat was a bag of Werther's candies they were told to share amongst themselves.

In the one-room shack, a wood fire burned in the cast-iron cookstove in the middle of the room. It was uncomfortably warm.

Del and Cecilia Lalula sat at the table. They nodded without getting up. This form of greeting was common among many Natives as an acknowledgement of someone's presence in their house. With it, Justine felt welcome. In one back corner, a curtain of blankets partitioned off the corner of the room where the parents slept. In the other corner, watching her every move, Ta Chi was on a pallet of straw. The woman was like a caged sparrow, uncomfortable inside, waiting for Justine to release her.

"Justine," she whispered.

She reached out and touched Justine on the arm with her sinewy fingers.

"Are you not well, Granny?"

Ta Chi was not her grandmother, but like many others, Justine called her that as a term of endearment.

"I don't like indoors," she answered. "I bring news of Wawant'x. She's reborn. You will see her tonight."

"Who is Wawant'x, Granny?"

"She used to be called Noah."

Justine had not expected that Ta Chi would be the one to tell her where to find Noah. It was remarkable that Ta Chi, who refused to be housed and wandered the land alone, would lend herself to such a meeting.

"Granny, I will wait forever for the chance to see Noah again."

She placed her hand in Ta Chi's.

Special Constable Pope got off the bus a few houses down from Justine's stop. He walked to a hill at the back of the house where he had a good view of the shack. As dusk settled, he saw the Snellgrove posse leave their car and surround the shack. They waited for two hours. Pope watched them and waited. No one came or went from the house, so Snellgrove, who had no patience for the waiting game, finally motioned his two comrades forward. He and the second one burst in the front door while the third entered through the back.

The force of the entry startled Del and Cecilia and their children. Still, they had suffered abuse and disgrace before at the hands of the whites, so they sat still while the men cornered Ta Chi and Justine. Ta Chi lay in the corner with her eyes shut as if asleep, Justine at her side. Snellgrove was disappointed at not finding Noah there.

“All right, where is he?”

Neither woman spoke.

“I know that Noah is to meet Justine here.”

“Leave now or I will send someone to call the police,” Justine said.

He ignored her and spoke to Ta Chi.

“I told you to report Noah to me when you see him. I know you’ve seen him. Where is he? Things will go bad for you if you don’t tell me.”

He towered over her and she would have seen him raise his fist if her eyes had been open. Del Lalula saw. He stood up. A short man with bandy legs, his eyes were level with Snellgrove’s chest and he had to tilt back his head to speak to him.

“You’re not welcome in our home or on our land. You threaten Ta Chi, you threaten our land and us. Get out!”

Snellgrove realized he might have gone too far.

“Noah is a fugitive,” he snarled. “No one should help him.”

He motioned to his men and they left. As they did, Ta Chi opened her eyes. To her, the men appeared as wolverines slinking away in the night.

Special Constable Pope had come closer to the shack after he saw the posse make their move and heard the commotion inside. He’d retreated before the posse left. He figured Justine would leave soon and planned to follow her. He failed to notice that he himself was being watched.

At midnight, Justine left the cabin and walked towards the woods in back. There was no moon, but Pope could just make her out as she approached his lookout. When she passed by, he followed behind. The trail was a rough one, especially as he was trying to be silent. He clambered over and under deadfalls. Within two minutes of taking up her trail, he was crawling on his hands and knees in the snow under a fallen log. When he straightened up, he placed his foot on some loose brush atop the snow and was caught in a snare, his ankle jerked upwards by a rope tied to a young spruce.

It took him five minutes to cut himself down and, by then, Justine had slipped away. It was a good half-hour before he got back to the road. He found a phone and called the Tatla Lake RCMP detachment, advising them that Noah was in the vicinity and to send a patrol and dogs.

An hour later, the dogs picked up Justine's scent, which they followed in a circle back to the road, where the trail was lost. It was clear that a passing vehicle had picked her up. It wasn't possible to determine in which direction they had gone. Pope reported back to Sergeant Boyd.

"We can't prove she intended to see Noah," Boyd commented, "but it sure looks suspicious."

Del Lalula called his cousin, saying that he was going to visit his mother at Anahim Lake. His cousin agreed to pick him up and drive the hundred miles west, a journey back to the beginning of T̓silhqot'in existence on the land. He didn't ask questions when Del told him not to come to his place and told him where they could meet.

Del and Ta Chi had no trouble leaving unnoticed, even though Snellgrove was parked out front. Their skills moving across the land were much greater than his observational ones. They met Del's cousin and Alec Paul at a clearing a half-mile down the

road. They arrived at the same time as Noah and Justine. *Qiyus* was hitched to a nearby tree.

This was the first time since Christmas that these two could touch, look and speak to each other outside of jail. Knowing they had only a few minutes, Justine clung to him.

"I want to go with you and be with you," she said. "Nothing else matters."

"No. I can't place you in danger. I need to know you are safe."

"But I love you. I want to be with you."

"Do as I say. I promise to meet you on Potato Mountain in June when you finish school."

He didn't need to offer more. She knew he meant that special place they knew as children, on the slopes of Potato Mountain overlooking Tatlayoko Lake.

He steered her towards her father's waiting truck, then kissed her.

"I wanted to spend time with you," he said, "and let you know I'm alive and in good health, thanks to Ta Chi. Justine, you can trust her. She is my birth mother."

Noah put her inside the truck, nodded at her father at the wheel and, before he shut the door, kissed her again.

"I love you," he said. "Meet me in June."

"June," she nodded.

As the truck left, she looked out the back window, watching Noah standing on the road in the moonlight, waving until they rounded a curve.

Del's cousin stopped his pick-up beside them a few minutes later.

"Do you mind," Del asked, "if two of my friends and their horse hitch a ride in your box?"

If anybody had a vehicle in the Chilcotin, it doubled as a free taxi for those who didn't.

Del got into the cab. Noah and Ta Chi got into the box of the pick-up with their bags and the horse.

"Who's your friends?" Del's cousin asked after a while.

"Oh, a couple of guys drinking at my house."

The answer was good enough. No further questions were needed.

Del asked his cousin to pull over at Towdystan to let the others out. He hopped out and opened the box for them, then headed on his way with his cousin.

Ta Chi took Noah to an empty cabin on a bay of Charlotte Lake where he could hide until the end of May. She left him there, promising to return to guide him back to Tatlayoko Lake.

Sergeant Boyd came knocking at the Pauls' cabin door at Empire Ranch early the next morning. Alec let him in but stayed in the room while his daughter was being questioned.

"I see you made it home safely," the sergeant began.

"Yes, I have."

"You were seen with Ta Chi yesterday at the Anaham Reserve."

"I was there, but I didn't see Ta Chi."

"Oh, then my informant must have been mistaken."

She didn't reply.

"Why did you stop off at Anaham?"

"I was able to get a ride home from there."

"Did you see Noah Hanlon at Anaham or at all in the last few days?"

"No."

"I want to remind you again that if you're seeing Noah, you must tell me. You know it's an offence to help a fugitive and I don't want to see you spend time in jail."

"Thank you for telling me."

Boyd turned to her father.

"Alec, if you love your daughter, keep her away from Noah."

Alec nodded.

Sergeant Boyd opened the cabin door and left. He nodded to the constable who was driving the police cruiser and got in.

“We were close to getting him this time,” he told the constable. “He’ll slip up soon.”

Settling into the cabin and free from detection for now, Noah was able to pause and consider his westward flight through the heart of the Chilcotin. He thought of the Chilcotin as a huge house with many rooms connected by long corridors — the rivers — and interlaced with secret passages — the trails. This reminded him of a Bible passage drilled into him during his Catholic schooling: “In my father’s house are many mansions.” Noah’s father remained a mystery — he didn’t know who he was, whether he was still alive or whether he’d be proud of him. Although born and raised in the Chilcotin, Noah had spent that time confined to one room — the area around Empire Ranch circumscribed by his adoptive parents’ war. He had left for the civilizing influences of Victoria, interrupted by his summer work and time as ranch manager, destined never to experience more of this land until he was charged with and convicted of manslaughter. Now with the help of Ta Chi, he was becoming familiar with the whole house and its inhabitants.

For over a month in the cabin, he was able to reflect on his experience and his art. In Victoria, he had drawn and painted in the Audubon style. His paintings had been anatomically correct, but they lacked life. He’d tried with some success to detail the birds’ surroundings and make their natural settings vivid. He had also studied the art of Victoria painter Emily Carr and watched Mungo Martin, a Native carver from the coast, carving totem poles next to the legislative buildings, so became familiar with the art form of the ovoid and inverted U’s. He was starting to experiment with more interpretive drawing of birds in larger

landscapes combined with West Coast Native motifs before he took over managing the ranch. In jail, he had taken up his drawing again with the supplies Justine had brought him. On the run, two months of wandering the rooms and corridors with Ta Chi, he had a better idea of what Justine had been talking about when she'd said the Chilcotin was her home.

He may have been restricted to the size of the sketchbook pages, but not only had his portfolio of work grown, but he'd found himself expressing himself in ways new to him, if ones as old as the T̓silhqot'in themselves. With time to think, he began drawing and planning for a project about what Justine referred to as his home. When all his troubles ended, he would paint this land. He would never again ranch Empire.

Bushwhacked

Spring came to the high Chilcotin in April. First there was a tonic in the air, then the booming sound of cracking lake ice, a trickle of water in the rivulets, a flow in the streams and a gushing torrent in the rivers.

The government hadn't thought it necessary to consult the T̓silhqot'in on the cabinet's decision to grant the water licence to Vancouver Island Power. Bordy had opposed the project to save Empire Ranch, not the T̓silhqot'in's land and water. It was thought in Victoria that the Natives would not be directly concerned because their reserves were in the Chilcotin River watershed. The flooding of the Homathko watershed would affect only a few T̓silhqot'ins — those Stoneys, including Ta Chi, who were still semi-nomadic. Empire Ranch and a few smaller ranches that Bordy had not succeeded in buying in the fertile Homathko Valley would be flooded. Empire Ranch would cease to exist, as would the jobs of the lead hand Alec Paul and the Natives who were hired on hay crews and as cowhands. There would be no compensation for the loss of the Natives' traditional lands.

The power company's intentions were not made known to the T̓silhqot'in through more conventional forms of communication, but Antoine had his own way of divining the future of the land. With the coming of spring, Antoine went into the mountains to a cave that had been shown to him by his grandfather, where generations of *deyens* had sought visions. There, perched on a high cliff above the Homathko, Mount Waddington looming to the west and Potato Mountain to the east, with snows receding in the April warmth, he fasted and waited for his vision, a foretelling of the year ahead for the land and the people.

The winter caws of the brash crow, the crackle of the raven and the rasp of the jay were answered by the warble of the mating thrush and the distinctive sounds of the killdeers and mergansers. The river ice had broken and the deer and moose were moving from the lower valleys to the western mountains. The does were heavy with their unborn, some with the promise of twins. With winter's privation ending, Antoine was thankful to be alive, but he was concerned with what the spring awakening would bring. He drank only spruce tea and ate some dried salmon. His ancestors had starved at this time of year before the salmon runs. If one had food to share, now was the time to share it. That spirit of sharing had been forgotten a long time ago.

The T̓silhqot'in War was a wound Antoine felt as if it had been inflicted yesterday. His father, who had taken part, told him that the ferryman on the Waddington survey had refused food to two starving T̓silhqot'in hunters. In a rage, they had shot him. The main hunting party was nearby and when they were told of the shooting, they had decided to form a war party to stop the incursions of the whites, the *midugh*, into the Chilcotin. The war party had been led by the chief Klatsassin, who incited his band to follow him. They fell on the survey and road-building crew, killing all but three who escaped.

The mercenaries and settlers who had been sent there by the government in New Westminster, then the capital of British Columbia, in turn had hunted Klatsassin and his men, but could not find them on the vast plateau. On a promise of safety should they turn themselves in, the T̓silhqot'ins did so but, instead of freedom, found themselves put in chains, tried by Judge Begbie and convicted. Six were hanged at Quesnel as common criminals: an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth and a life for a life.

Antoine chanted the trials of his people since the coming of the *midugh*: the first sighting of Simon Fraser; the failed attempts of the Hudson's Bay Company to establish a fort in the heart of their lands; the distinction of being described in the company's journals as "troublesome and disorderly"; the long association with the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, who persevered and finally converted many to their faith; the smallpox epidemics which wiped out over half the population; being assigned to reserves; watching children and grandchildren, including his grandson Peter, forced to go to residential school, then turn to alcohol, go to Vancouver and be lost to the ghetto. Life had been hard for many of his people — there could be no letting down their guard for a promised heaven.

"What is Raven's message for the T̓silhqot'in this year?" he asked. "Where is the next threat coming from?"

A raven answered by swooping low over the clearing by the river. Another raven flew from its perch by the cave entrance and they joined — plummeting, swirling and falling into the swift river in a feathered embrace. One managed to escape, shake its wings and fly off. The other was caught in an eddy and was swept away.

"It is the river," Antoine said aloud.

The threat was coming from the river that cut through the mountains. It was a natural weakness to be exploited, in Klatsassin's day for a road, now perhaps for a dam. It had caused the war years ago. What would happen now?

His son Alec and other members of his tribe joined him that evening and he told them what Raven had told him.

Noah was away from the cabin for a few days. He climbed a nearby mountain to get a better view of the land, to sketch the landscape and to determine his escape routes should he have to leave in a hurry. Watching the stars move across the heavens, he began tracing and naming them, not by the myths of the Greek gods but by the T̓silhqot'in stories that Ta Chi had told him.

He had not seen anyone since being led to the cabin by Ta Chi. He was coming down the lake, approaching the cabin by canoe, when he saw smoke coming from the chimney. He paddled to shore, stashed the canoe and approached close to the cabin on foot. He would wait until whoever was inside came out.

After an hour, the cabin door opened and a man came outside for an armload of wood for the fire. He straightened up and looked out onto the lake. It was old Antoine. Noah gave him a signal he was there so that Antoine could tell him whether he was alone. He waved Noah in.

Noah Hanlon, named Wawant'x by Ta Chi, sat with Antoine in the cabin. Wawant'x gave the old man a meal of roasted squirrel, rainbow trout and potato, which they ate in silence. After, Antoine lit his pipe and quietly smoked while nodding and smiling at Noah. Ta Chi said that Antoine, whom Noah had known as a babysitter for Peter and Justine when he was growing up on the ranch, was a *deyen* who was much respected by the Natives. He had seen Antoine at the trial but had not spoken to him and, of course, he remembered him from the times when Peter and he were companions at the ranch.

Antoine waved his pipe at the drawings tacked to the walls.

"I see you draw."

"I have found time to draw."

"You have discovered our land?"

"Yes, from Ta Chi, my mother."

"Do want to learn more?"

"Yes. I have to know more to finish this painting."

"What do you want to know?"

"How the Tâilhqot'in found this land and the stories that sustain them and, I guess, most important to me: Who am I?"

"I answer last question first. You is Tâilhqot'in, born of Ta Chi in mountains near lake like this. Your mother could not raise you. Leave you with me. I ask Father Dumont to find family to raise you. Maria, your wet nurse, would not let Father Dumont give you to anyone but the Hanlons, where she keep an eye on you."

"I know my mother is Ta Chi. Who is my father?"

"I can't tell that. Ta Chi will tell."

"Ta Chi's told me that my father was the Chilcotin. She wouldn't say more."

"If she don't say, I don't say. Now I tell you of our beginnings."

He took some tobacco out of his pocket, stuffed it into the bowl of his pipe with his thumb and picked an ember from the fire to light it. He drew in the smoke and exhaled.

"I tell you story of Lendix'tcux, the transformer," he said. "He readied the Tâilhqot'in for our people. Since you returned to us, you hear it. It help you to know our land. I tell the story to Peter before he taken from us. It maybe help answer all your questions. Perhaps you use story in drawings."

"I think so."

Long ago, before my time, before our people find Chilcotin, a chief's daughter had a lover. He visit her during night but not show himself. She discover identity of lover by marking his shoulder with white paint. He turn out to be a dog. The woman later give birth to three pups. Her father in anger desert her,

take villagers with him and leave the woman alone with pups and dog father, whose name is Lendix'tcux. The mother one day surprise dogs playing in house in human form and she destroy dog blankets of three children and half the blanket of Lendix'tcux. Then children remain in human form and father is half-dog, half-man.

Noah nodded. He got up to put a log on the fire and had a sudden question.

“Which half was man and which half dog?”

“Man is above waist.”

Noah sat back down and waited for Antoine to continue.

Boys grow up and were taught by mother to become skillful hunters and lay up great stores of meat. On return of villagers, all are happy. But Lendix'tcux and boys become restless and wish to travel to Chilcotin country. Their mother warn them: in the Chilcotin country, animals kill people. But they start out anyway after receiving full instructions from their mother and come towards the Chilcotin country, where you sit now.

They come first to ford in the river guarded by great moose. Moose swallow Lendix'tcux, who kill it by cutting his way out of moose. They roast the heart and from the carcass, they make all sorts of small animals. After many failures, he succeed in making Frog from brain.

Next, they come to seagull. It was spearing salmon. Lendix'tcux turn himself into salmon and seagull

spear him, but Lendix'tcux cut off head of spear and swim away. He come to the seagull's camp when seagull is mourning loss of spear. His wife is weeping bitterly, because being pregnant, she must die. Because at that time in Chilcotin, the only way to give birth to children was by a section of abdomen. Lendix'tcux give seagull spear point in return for sweathouse and teach woman how to give birth to children with safety.

Noah marvelled at Antoine's knowledge as he told the story.

Next, he obtain eagle feathers from nest and is carried up and back again by eagles. He make them harmless to men. Lendix'tcux lost last part of his little finger in stone door of marmot's house, now short of that part of finger. Next, he obtain tobacco from tree. He has intercourse with a woman after breaking out teeth in her vagina with magic staff. Then he meet two moose who kill men with dust raised. He overcome moose by running race around mountain. Lendix'tcux pretend to be old and feeble dog. He tie arrow points in his hair, which fly out as he run and kill moose. He bring to life again and make harmless to men.

He next come to Chilko Lake, where he is swallowed by beaver. He is found by the three boys after long time and is rescued. From beaver flesh, they make fishes. A messenger from boys' mother overtake them, but messenger not speak. Finally, in anger, Lendix'tcux kill him. He then try to catch chipmunk, but fail, and chipmunk has stripes on its back where

his fingers scratch. Because he fail, Lendix'tcux and sons transform to stone.

To south of Potato Mountain and Nemiah Valley is Lendix'tcux with three sons watching over Chilcotin. The mountain we call Ts'il?os.

Antoine's voice, which had filled the cabin, fell silent and the two men watched the open fire of pine logs in the hearth and thought their own thoughts. Antoine remembered the effect of his story on Peter, his chosen one, as he'd listened to how the land and animals were transformed. He was thirteen at the time and Antoine had taken him to his cave overlooking the Homathko to explain the mysteries and myths of their people. They had fasted and Peter was overcome with the ghosts of his ancestors.

Noah, sensitive to the stories of the religion in which he was brought up and of the ancient gods that he had studied, was amazed to hear of the taming of the land in such a fierce way. But he was more receptive to the message after surviving with Ta Chi for many months. His thoughts also turned to Peter.

"Would Peter," he asked, "have become a powerful *deyen*?"

Antoine's response was quick.

"Yes. His mind was open to the T'silhqot'in."

"I would like to ask where you were when you first heard the story of how the animals were created."

"My grandfather told me and I have been telling it around our campfires for many years."

"You know there is another story in the Bible about how the animals were saved."

"Yes, I know it. Father Dumont told it to me. But that story, it seem, does not fit our land or our people. You should know our story if you are going to paint our land."

The next morning, Antoine promised to meet Noah on Potato Mountain, from where he would show him Lendix'tcux and his three sons. Noah walked with him to the highway where he was going to hitch a ride.

"I have been thinking," Noah said, "about Lendix'tcux and how he was transformed into the mountain. My experience since my escape from jail seems to have been a transformation."

The old man smiled and nodded.

"*Midugh* intends to dam the Homathko at Waddington Canyon."

"When?"

"I think they come soon."

"Does Ta Chi know this?"

"Raven, she know."

It was May and Noah was expecting Ta Chi. They would be leaving the cabin and returning to Tatlayoko Lake. He had told her that was where he would find Bordy's killer. He was getting impatient. He wanted to see Justine. He wanted to confront Belle.

He was cutting wood outside the cabin in the afternoon. It was quiet and, as he methodically split the silver birch for his fire, he thought about his project. The drawings and ideas had kept expanding — there was simply too much to the Chilcotin to do it justice with a smaller work. It would have to be a mural and Ta Chi would be part of it. Finishing the job, he set the axe aside and gathered an armful of dry birch.

As he backed through the door, a strong arm grabbed him from behind in a chokehold. He tried to fight back, but his air was throttled.

"Don't struggle or you'll black out," a voice said quietly. "I want to talk to you, but I have to tie you up or you'll run away."

Noah knew any further effort was futile, so he relaxed and let his attacker blindfold him, wind rope around his waist and pin

his arms so he couldn't move. He caught his breath.

"You're after the reward. I'll pay you if you let me go."

"Not the reward. I have instructions to speak to you and to bring you in if necessary."

"Who are you going to bring me to?"

"I can't say. It's near suppertime and I'm hungry. I'll get some food for both of us."

The stranger heated up some beans, toasted bannock and brewed tea on the fire. They ate without speaking, the stranger having to feed Noah since he couldn't see or move. He looked at Noah, sizing him up.

"How did you survive in the wilderness for so long?" he asked.

"This is my land."

"It's not important. What I want to know is who you saw on the lawn the night of Bordy Hanlon's shooting."

"No one."

"You told the police that you saw someone."

"I lied."

The stranger slapped Noah across the face with his open hand.

"I don't believe you."

Noah wasn't expecting the blow and shook his head to clear the stars.

"What do you care about who it was I did or didn't see?"

"Maybe someone wants vengeance."

"Bordy didn't have too many friends. Who would want to avenge his death? Maybe it was me that killed Bordy."

"We've just met. Already I know you couldn't have done it."

"I can't tell you any more. You're going to have to take me to your people."

"We'll wait till morning, then you and I will go to Nimpo Lake for a plane ride."

Noah didn't sleep well. His captor had taken the precaution

of tying his feet together. He was certainly more professional than Snellgrove.

After a light breakfast and little talk other than the stranger's orders, they both mounted Ta Chi's horse. Noah still bound and blindfolded, they rode for a mile to the end of the lake, where the stranger's horse was tethered. He mounted it and, with the reins in his hands, led Ta Chi's horse down the trail to Nimpo Lake.

It was an all-day ride, giving Noah time to size up his captor. He was very disciplined — he didn't smoke, only spoke when necessary and stayed alert to his surroundings. As a bushman, he was almost comparable to Ta Chi. The difference was that she did effortlessly what he had to think about. That gave her a few seconds' advantage when she rose up in front of the stranger's horse from what appeared to be a pile of leaves on the trail.

The stranger's horse reared and threw him. Ta Chi was on him, wielding the butt end of her .22 and clipping him on the side of his head. She signalled her horse to her, cut off Noah's ropes and removed his blindfold. She mounted the stranger's horse and they were away.

The stranger came to in time to sit up and watch them go.

He walked the rest of the way to Nimpo Lake. There, he found his rented horse. On a radiophone, he called his employer.

"It's me. I found him. I questioned him. He wouldn't tell me anything. I think he knows who was on the lawn. I thought about bringing him to you but decided against it."

For a moment, there was only the static background crackle from the radiophone.

"That's too bad, Charlie," rang out the foghorn voice of Major Jack Parmenter. "We can't have Noah implicating Belle. But we'll deal with him later. Here's what you'll do: get on the floatplane and return to Victoria. I need you for something else."

For the past two months, Stan had been hibernating, gathering strength for what he believed would be his last stand. He'd heard that Ta Chi had been seen at Anaham with Justine and that a special officer had followed her only to be bushwhacked. Ta Chi had disappeared, swallowed by the huge landscape. The speculation was that Noah was with her. The word was out that the police wanted her for questioning. It was time for him to make his move onto the plateau.

He phoned Belle.

"Belle, this is Stan."

"Stan. It's good to hear your voice." She said this as if she meant it. "How's everything with you?"

"I can't complain."

"You haven't sent me your bill for the work you did on Noah's trial."

"No, and I don't intend to. I wasn't satisfied with the result. But Belle, there is something you can do for me. You know how much I like fishing?"

There was a long pause. She remembered the last time he had gone fishing on Tatlayoko Lake.

"Yes."

"I'd like to spend some time at the ranch and fish on the lake. You know my health isn't very good. I haven't been there in years and this would mean a lot to me. Feng is still there and I won't bother the Johnstons."

"You know them?" she asked, a suspicion rising.

"Good people," Stan answered. "And they're doing well at the ranch."

He didn't share with her his concerns about her involvement in Bordy's murder. He wanted to investigate his theory that she knew more than she had told him or the police and take the opportunity to confront her. He still thought of her as the kind woman who wouldn't say no to an old friend.

"I agree," Belle said warmly.

She thought that if Stan Hewitt wanted the new ranch management as a client, that was fine.

"All right, Stan, go ahead. I'll let the Johnstons know you're coming and Feng will be pleased to cook for another person. Enjoy your stay."

When she put down the phone, the major harrumphed at her.

"Why would you let that Hewitt man putter around the ranch?"

"Oh, he's harmless."

Expedition

The team the major assembled to survey the Homathko Canyon dam site was impressive on paper: twenty men led by engineer Ian Richards, a boat to navigate Tatlayoko Lake from the north end of the road at Empire Ranch to the south end at the outfall of the Homathko River and a helicopter rented for four months to ferry men and supplies between camps. The turnout, however, didn't look all that remarkable.

The men gathered on a May morning in a Vancouver parking lot to begin their road journey of six hundred miles up the valley of the Fraser River and onto the Chilcotin plateau. They could easily have been mistaken for a line-up at an east side soup kitchen. Fortunately, the major wasn't there to see them off. He intended to motor up Bute Inlet in his yacht where the helicopter would pick him up and take him to camp. There, he could give encouragement to the men.

Charlie Rainbow was there to make sure his crew survived in the wilds of the Chilcotin and to keep an eye on Ian Richards. The major had staked everything on the success of this survey and he

was determined that nothing would go wrong. He was aware of the failure of the Waddington survey to build a road in Chilcotin territory many years ago. That had ended in a massacre. He had personally sacrificed much and had made no compromises to realize this mission.

Ralph Richards had insisted he be hired as a member of the survey so he could be on the alert for any sightings of his friend Noah. His father spoke to the crew from the running-board of a truck.

“Men,” Ian announced, with as much gravitas as he could muster, “we are heading out soon. I will have time to speak to each of you and to tell you what I expect from you on this survey. Our intention is to prove that the Homathko Canyon can be dammed for the benefit of the Vancouver Island Power Company and our customers. We will be surveying the dam site and roads so that work can begin next year on the construction of this grand project. Tonight, our caravan will drive to Hope, then on to Williams Lake for more supplies, then from there to Empire Ranch, which will be the staging ground for our expedition.”

Standing beside Ian as he spoke, Charlie Rainbow searched the face of each man as if weighing their value. From the scowl on his face, they were all lacking, particularly Ralph Richards, who was evidently self-conscious about his small size.

“This is our chance,” Ian intoned, “working as a team, to make a difference to this province and...”

Before he could finish, a two-tone blue-and-white Chevy Bel Air, chopped and channelled, turned off a side street onto the lot with a rumble of exhaust and the squealing of brakes. It was driven by a dyed blonde as big as a crew cab. She jumped out of the car and held the door open for a twenty-five-year-old gap-toothed draggie of a man with a coiled red-and-green cobra tattoo on his right arm. They embraced in a tangle of arms, legs and lips. She jumped back in the car and laid rubber on a tight

U-turn as someone in the back seat threw a duffel bag out the window. It landed at the man's feet.

"Hi, I'm Aaron," he broke the silence, "and I'm ready to roll."

The survey crew was complete.

Justine looked up from her exam paper. Her classmates focused their bowed heads on the history of the Hudson's Bay Company in British Columbia. Through the open windows beyond them, the greening hills surrounded Williams Lake. She looked down and read the next question: "Where did the Carrier Indians of Northern British Columbia get their name?" Even that reminded her of Noah. His favourite poet, Shelley, was cremated by friends on the seashore. When his heart wouldn't burn, his wife, Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, had it placed in a silk shroud. She wore it around her neck for the rest of her life.

Before Justine wrote the answer, she got caught up in a daydream about her family at the range camp at the south end of Tatlayoko Lake. Her little brother, Ben, was fishing in the Homathko River for rainbow trout. Her mother, Maria, was scraping beaver skins stretched on their frames. And Noah Hanlon was waiting patiently for her and thinking only of her in the meadow at the foot of Potato Mountain, where they had agreed to meet. They recited Shelley's poems. All of her many daydreams ended this way.

"Time's up, girls," Sister Betty announced from the front of the class. "No more writing, please."

Justine frantically scribbled, "Because the women carried..."

Sister Betty was suddenly beside her, taking the paper while Justine's pen was still scratching.

"Justine, you know the rules."

"But I know the answer, Sister."

"Sorry. I've been watching you. You decided to daydream rather than answer the question."

It was the last answer on the last exam and she had worked hard. She had read Father Maurice's book, *The History of the Northern Interior of British Columbia*. Her answer was: "Because the women carried the charred bones from the funeral pyre of their warrior husbands on their backs for years."

That afternoon, her father picked her up from school and drove her to town. They would stay overnight with her friend Sarah's family before driving to Empire.

After dinner, the girls walked to the Rendezvous Café next to McKenzie's Department Store. Justine told Sarah about Sister Betty refusing to let her write the answer. Justine was animated by the injustice of being denied a chance to answer the last exam question. The chill of the early June evening fired her temper: her chin jutted and her hands waved.

"The old crow wouldn't give me a chance," she complained. "She snatched my paper from me like it was a piece of garbage."

Sarah was more restrained about it.

"Sister wouldn't snatch the paper. She's strict about the rules. She didn't single you out."

"But I was working on a perfect score. I need good marks to get into nursing."

The subject didn't interest Sarah.

"Will you be riding in the barrel races this year at the Williams Lake Stampede?"

The Stampede would be at the end of June. Justine's horse Getaway hadn't been ridden since the fall. Every year at Stampede time, her family came in from Tatlayoko and camped on the fairgrounds. Her father entered the bucking-horse, calf-roping and steer-wrestling events. For the last five years, she had entered the barrel races. She'd been runner-up last summer.

"I'm going to enter and I'm going to win," she replied.

They opened the door to the Rendezvous.

Charlie Rainbow sat in a booth with his back to the entrance. Opposite him were Aaron and Ralph. The rest of the crew were in other booths eating their dinner.

Aaron had not disappointed the crew by softening his first impression. All the way up the Fraser Canyon and onto the plateau, he had acted as brazenly as when he first appeared. Hired as a driver because of his experience driving a cab, he quickly demonstrated skills more akin to a racer. He drove the jeep fast but expertly, attempting to herd the other slower vehicles of the caravan by rushing to the front and then dropping to the back of the line of trucks, scouting out stops ahead and making sure there were no stragglers. This did not seem to disturb Ian in his role as commander-in-chief of the expedition. Released from the shackles of his desk job and the man in charge, he felt it was only fitting that Aaron act the way Ian felt.

At the Rendezvous, Aaron hit on every girl he saw. He spotted Justine as she entered.

“Would you look at that filly!”

Ralph looked, but didn’t say anything. Charlie turned around to see as two girls walked to a booth on the other side of the café. For his part, Charlie wasn’t impressed — both girls were far too skinny. He liked a woman to be plump, with a forgiving nature and round, happy features and he said so. Aaron said Justine looked as pretty as a wild mustang and as spirited.

“I sure would like to ride that filly. Hey, Ralph, how about you and I go over there and talk up those two?”

Ralph had manners enough that he wasn’t going over without an introduction and demurred. The waitress brought the bill. Charlie settled up the account and the crew started leaving the café in twos and threes.

Aaron walked around the U-shaped counter to the booth on the far side where Justine and Sarah, unaware of any interest they had stirred in the crew, sipped soft drinks.

"Hi," he said. "I heard you talking about horses. Are you going to the Stampede?"

Their eyes remained fixed on their drinks.

"Hey, I'm talking to you. I'm going to be riding in the Stampede. Maybe I'll see you. My name's Aaron. What's yours?"

Again, no response.

"Are you hard of hearing?" he yelled, bringing his hand down hard on the table.

The girls were startled, ready to bolt, but he blocked their way. Ralph came around the table and took Aaron by the arm.

"Let the girls be."

Aaron shook himself free and spat at Ralph.

"Leave me alone, mister. I'm breaking these Indians in my own way."

Justine looked up at Aaron.

"I'm not an Indian, I'm a T̓silhqot'in." She pointed at Charlie Rainbow. "He's an Indian."

"Okay, boys," Charlie called. "You've had your fun, so let's go."

Aaron and Charlie parted from the crew returning to their hotel and headed to the Legion. Charlie ordered them each a beer.

"You know, Aaron," Charlie said, "I hired you to drive and supply our camp. You're getting a good wage and the work isn't hard. It's better than living on welfare in Vancouver. The only other condition is that you take orders from me. Now, I want you to shape up and not cause trouble with the crew."

"That Richards kid gets under my skin," Aaron said.

"Lay off that boy," Charlie warned.

He left after finishing his beer.

Aaron stayed for another round. A bulk of a man at the next table commented to many who passed by, clearly knowing his way around the bar. Aaron raised his glass to him.

"Hi, I'm Aaron."

“What brings you to Williams Lake, Aaron?” There was menace in the voice.

“I’m with a crew. We’re headed into the Chilcotin to survey Waddington Canyon.”

The menace faded immediately.

“Well, glad to meet you. I’m Richard Snellgrove. That’s great country you’re going into. Come on over to my table. Drinks on me.”

The two men closed down the bar at the Legion on Aaron’s promise that he would look up Snellgrove when he came to town for supplies and keep his eyes and ears open about Noah Hanlon.

The potholed pavement on Highway 20 west from Williams Lake turned into washboard gravel at Hanceville. Billowing dust swallowed the survey caravan and the crew chewed grit and rubbed their eyes red. The truck came to a grinding halt at Alexis Creek when the cabin cruiser shifted and tilted, breaking an axle on the boat trailer it was hauling.

The sight of the heavy V-hulled boat tilted at a dangerous angle drew a crowd of T̓silhqot’ins, who stood by to see if the greenhorns would make a bad situation worse by shifting the boat so hard that it would topple over on the opposite side. Bets were being taken between a few of the crowd when Charlie arrived in the jeep and took charge. Here was something different: an Indian giving orders and dressing down the stumbling crew who, left on their own, would have created lots of fun for the onlookers.

The local garage could not get the necessary part until the next day. The expedition was scheduled to be at Empire Ranch that night to keep to the major’s tight timetable. He would not be amused when they arrived late.

The crew cleared their throats of dust at the hotel beer parlour and propped their boots on the porch rail outside while talking

to some young T̓s̓ilhqot'ins. Quietly whittling within earshot, an elder listened to the boasts of these young white men saying they were going to dam the Homathko River.

Also overhearing this, a young Native waved at a mountain in the distance amid a range of snowcapped mountains to the south, calling it the T̓s̓ilhqot'in name 'Ts'il?os'.

"He was the first chief, who turned into stone with his three sons and now guards our land. Better watch out."

After the young man left, the elder came up to the crew.

"He's right about Ts'il?os. It's Lendix'tcux and his sons. He prepared this land for the T̓s̓ilhqot'in. But the young one shows the wrong mountain."

"Is that right, Pops?" Aaron said, winking at the others to cue them to the joke. "Maybe you can point out the right one."

The elder took him seriously.

"No. It is forbidden to point. I would then know his anger. It is enough for you to know that he is watching. What you do will not please him."

After a two-day delay, the axle was repaired. Despite the elder's warning, the crew travelled east past Redstone and on to Tatla Lake near the headwaters of the Chilcotin River. They turned south off the main road, taking the branch towards Empire Ranch. At about eight that evening, they arrived at the ranch yard. A string of horses stood outside an open corral of beaten-down compacted dirt, with white, blue and red painted barrels set at each end. Antoine and Stan were sitting on the rail.

Taken aback by the sudden arrival of visitors, Stan turned and watched the crew emerge from their vehicles. He turned back when he heard a screech like a banshee's. A young woman with curly chestnut hair rode a palomino at full gallop out of the barn and towards the far barrel. She made the turn around it and headed back. Flecks of foam and spittle flew from her horse's mouth as

she stroked its flank with her crop. She passed the second barrel and brought the horse up to a quivering halt.

"Fifteen seconds," shouted another girl from the shadow of the barn. "Not bad, but it's not a winning time."

"You do better," grinned the first, "if you can."

A pinto came out of the barn with its tail flying. Its sides were wrapped by Justine's bare brown legs, her ponytail paralleling the horse's. A crop was between her teeth and the heels of her bare feet raked the sides of the pinto, whose nose was aimed at the barrel. Coming opposite the barrel, Justine touched the horse's neck on the left side with the rein and pulled on the right rein. The horse responded by leaning to the right and digging his hooves into the soft earth, making a U-turn and grazing, but not overturning, the barrel. The crop came out of Justine's mouth. She gave a wild war cry and used her free right hand to whip her horse over the finish line.

"Damn!" Sarah exploded. "You beat me by two seconds. You've been practicing."

The survey crew shouted encouragement. The girls were too focused to hear them. The loudest was Aaron, who had taken off his hat and was waving it at Justine.

"Hey, there! Remember me? I met you in town."

Some of the crew who had heard him boast about riding in the rodeo urged him on.

"Let's see you ride that pinto."

Aaron jumped over the fence into the corral and sauntered right up to the girls standing beside their horses, not an ounce of reserve in him, born of the arrogance of the city. He grasped the pinto's reins near the bit and tugged the loose end from Justine's hand.

"I'll show you how it's done," he said, vaulting bareback onto the horse.

Justine stepped back. She wasn't worried. Sarah reacted more directly: she brought her hand down hard on the pinto's rump.

"Hyup!" she shouted.

The horse arched its back and flung its hind legs up, throwing Aaron high in the air. Then it came down on all four feet and blazed towards the far barrel, leaving Aaron a crumpled heap wheezing for breath on the ground. Justine whistled and the horse turned and trotted back her way. Ralph watched from the edge and caught Justine's eye as she turned to go. Her look said, *You people are not welcome here*. The girls followed the horse into the barn.

Aaron dusted himself off to the jeers of the crew.

Antoine had watched the exploration crew pull into Empire Ranch from his son's cabin, just as he had watched Bordy and Belle arrive twenty years ago. He walked over to the corral. As he did, Charlie started shouting at the crew to gather for their orders. He took a long look at Charlie.

"What's this?" Stan asked, curious about Antoine's reaction.

"*Midugh* — white men come to destroy the waters of the Homathko."

"Did you know they were coming?"

"I was expecting them. Raven told me."

"So they got their water licence," Stan muttered. "Bordy wouldn't have let that happen without a fight."

Belle must have known that the Homathko waters would be dammed, he thought. She hadn't told him. She hadn't told him a lot of things. He'd told Belle that he wanted to spend his time at the ranch fishing, which was true. He was fishing for fish as well as facts to prove Noah's innocence. Now, Antoine had given him one more reason to suspect Belle Hanlon in the death of her husband.

"Antoine, I'm looking for Ta Chi."

Antoine stretched out his right arm with his palm up and moved it in a full circle east to Potato Mountain, then south to Mount Ts'il?os and finally to the high mountains to the west.

"She out there."

"Yes, but where?"

"Wait! She will come."

"Have you heard from Noah?"

Antoine trusted this lawyer. He had acted for Peter and Noah. He had acted for the T̓silhqot'in.

"It is said Noah walks with Ta Chi. Are they all you look for?"

"If Noah had given evidence, he would have said that the shot that killed Bordy came from the lawn near the lake. I'll look around a bit. It snowed after the shooting. Perhaps the police missed something."

Antoine slowly got down from the fence and started to walk away.

"Say, Antoine?" Stan said.

"Yeah."

"Do you know who killed Bordy?"

"A lot of people coulda killed Bordy."

PART III

Those who came to see us from below [Soda Creek] were on horse back. But tho' animals are plenty and the country in many places clear of wood, they do not use them to hunt, but use them to carry themselves and baggage, which is the chief cause of them not going much in Canoes.

— *the journal of Simon Fraser, June 1808*

Wild Horses

A long month's journey on foot and horseback had taken Noah and Ta Chi over the back trails from Charlotte Lake, circling to the north of Nimpo Lake and Tatla Lake. At Chilanko Forks, west of the outfall where the Chilko River feeds into the Chilcotin River, they crossed the road and the river. They camped in the country named after a small lake in the centre of a pine forest and meadowland where wild stallions led their herds of mares and foals, the Brittany Triangle. Forming two sides of the triangle, the clear blue Chilko to its west joins the milky Taseko River to its east where they empty into the Chilcotin River. The third side, to the south, is the Nemiah Valley.

They were fishing for suckers in the mouth of a small slow-moving stream at the edge of the Chilko River. Noah trapped a fish and threw it into a basket.

"I'm leaving you soon," he said. "I hope to meet Justine in two weeks near Tatlayoko Lake. It's dangerous for me to be near the lake. I'll need a horse."

Ta Chi stopped chasing a sucker. The day had come. She had taught him all she could about survival. He was ready to survive in the Chilcotin on his own. He looked at her and wondered what she was thinking. She had named him Wawant'x and he had accepted it, along with his life, as a gift from her. How could he possibly repay her?

"Plenty *qiyus* in the Brittany," she said.

"Those are wild horses. I have no horse to ride them down and rope them."

"That *midugh* way. T̕ilhqot'in finds stallion and her herd. Builds small corral. Places good hay and salt in corral and waits." While she explained, Ta Chi mimicked the movements of Noah and the horse, performing a little dance. "*Qiyus* goes into corral to lick salt and Wawant'x shuts gate to corral. Wawant'x has *qiyus*."

Noah laughed and pretended he was on a bucking horse.

"I will have a wild, unbroken horse. It would take me a month to break it. Or it will break me."

He fell down.

For the first time, he heard Ta Chi laugh aloud.

"No," she said.

"Is there a T̕ilhqot'in way to break a horse?"

"Leave *qiyus* in corral with no food, no water. She is weak. Wawant'x give her a little water, a little hay, get to know her, give her a name. When *qiyus* still weak, Wawant'x slowly tame." She demonstrated by gently riding a well-behaved pretend horse. "Take a week."

They were both laughing at the end of the pantomime.

Following Ta Chi's instructions, Noah left with *selin*. It took Noah three weeks to capture and tame his *qiyus*, a wild Appaloosa mare which he named Chilko. Ten miles east of Empire Ranch, Noah rode Chilko out of the Brittany Triangle and headed back to the stream where Ta Chi was camped to show her what he'd done.

Noah had been pushed by Belle to excel in school and he had. He had wanted to paint, which was also what Belle wanted for him. His drawings and paintings were displayed all over their Victoria house. Bordy had been at least as demanding as Belle. While Noah was growing up on the ranch, he'd had to work as hard as Bordy, only to hear Bordy criticize everything he did. Then, when he'd decided to give up his education and his painting to go back to the Chilcotin to ranch, Belle had fought him with logic and emotion. She had told him he wasn't a rancher, that Noah would be unhappy and that Bordy would not be impressed with his charity. Justine was the person who had most accepted him as he was, with no intention of shaping him into something that he wasn't, the person he'd turned to when he wanted to share his fears and dreams.

Belle had been right. He had soon discovered that he could not please Bordy. Unhappy and unappreciated at the ranch, he had also found that he didn't have time for painting. Running that huge operation and fighting with Bordy took all his waking hours and sapped his creative energy. Bordy's death had released him from his ordeal. He would have thought that running from the law would be worse, but instead he found that he now had time to think and draw.

Thoreau's *Walden* had been one of his favourite books. Thoreau equated freedom with lack of material possessions and living off the land. By that definition, Noah was free. Now, he was riding a horse that he had tamed in order to meet up with Justine. He'd had time to draw with a new perspective — through the eyes of a T̓silhqot'in, not of a rancher. His sketchbook was full of drawings of wildlife that were influenced by T̓silhqot'in motifs and symbols. He had begun drawing people, not as portraits, but as part of the landscape, not in a dominant role, but in a sharing perspective. One of his models was Ta Chi, but when he tried to draw her, he couldn't capture her as a person. When she moved,

it was a sparrow's flight. When she rested, she blended into and became part of her surroundings. He had drawn and painted her as part of the landscape, something that gave the Chilcotin life.

Ta Chi could hear a raven caw a mile away or feel a horse gallop long before it came into view, giving her time to make herself invisible. But a boy from a family that was camped a distance away was playing and wandering along the river when, undetected by Ta Chi through the noise of the rushing water of the Chilko, he saw her by her fire. He went back to his friends, all bored boys full of the devil in their pre- and early teens. They thought it would be fun to pester this nomad.

They swooped down on her from all directions. She had nowhere to escape to. Their weapons were taunts and stones. They spent a half-hour amusing themselves in this way, driving her away from her bags of clothes and provisions. She tried to yell them off, unwilling to fire her rifle at them. Though it wasn't their intention to do her harm, only to bait her, an errant stone struck her on the temple and she crumpled to the ground.

As he approached Ta Chi's encampment, *selin* started barking and ran ahead. Noah urged Chilko to a gallop. The horse was fresh and excitable. It plunged and reared as Noah thundered down on the boys, lashing out at them with a willow whip. He hounded them across the stream and into the woods, then watched them scatter over the next rise. Their story that night around their parents' fire was not of their mischief but of being chased by a T̓silhqot'in stranger on horseback who'd threatened to kill them. Their parents made the connection to Noah and this sighting came to the attention of the police.

Noah had intended to ride the next day for Tatlayoko Lake and his meeting with Justine, but Ta Chi was disoriented and couldn't move. He had to look after her. It was his turn to help her now and he used the same method she had. He fashioned a travois, attached it to her *qiyus*, moved her a few miles west

towards Potato Mountain out of harm's way and nursed her for a week. He would be late for his rendezvous with Justine.

Potato Mountain wasn't the only obstacle in the way of the two lovers. Sergeant Boyd had received the tip that both Ta Chi and Noah were in this vicinity and had formed a special patrol to track them down. Nor had Richard Snellgrove given up the thought of the still-climbing reward, but now a more powerful incentive was his thirst for revenge. Aaron had kept his promise to Snellgrove and told him of the rumours that Noah had been sighted in the vicinity of Tatlayoko Lake.

Ian Richards had foregone his usual pleasures of a summer in Victoria — sailing, playing golf and occasionally giving some thought to his desk job. He had taken the Homathko field assignment because the major had asked him to and to advance himself in the company. He pretended that he was inconveniencing himself for the good of his family — had he refused, he probably would have been declared redundant. Whether he was suited for the job was another question. His idea of heading up the survey was to have Charlie build him a fancy office and living quarters in a tent with a wooden floor, to be chauffeured about by Aaron and to order the cooks to prepare meals he preferred. His job was to oversee the compilation and the charting of information collected by the field crews and to be in constant contact with the major, catering to him when he showed up on site. In his frequent letters home to Enid, he dwelt on the hardships he was enduring.

For Ralph Richards, life was raw. Overriding Ian's objections, the major had insisted that the boy be on the survey as another character-building exercise. His father had assigned him to one of the field crews. As the son of an unpopular boss, he had to hear all the gripes and snipes directed at Ian. He was not inclined to defend him and asked for no favours, nor were any given. Ian felt the best way to treat his son was to give him the hardest jobs

rather than the cushiest and to send him off to the field camp out of his sight, far from fine cooking and permanent quarters. This suited Ralph, whose main threat was Aaron. Since the time Ralph had crossed Aaron over his harassment of Justine, Aaron had treated him as an enemy. For good reason, Ralph believed Aaron to be a psychopath, or at least very dangerous.

The day following the crew's arrival at Empire Ranch, they travelled the fourteen miles down-lake from the ranch in the cabin cruiser they'd so painstakingly hauled from Vancouver. Now in the heart of the Chilcotin, they spent their first working day setting up camp under Charlie's direction. At the end of the day, they were exhausted. The cooks prepared a makeshift meal on gas burners as the cast-iron cookstove had yet to be lifted in by helicopter from the other end of the lake.

They finished their hot dogs and Charlie amused them by demonstrating the art of axe-throwing. He was able to impale a tree trunk with a single-bladed axe at thirty feet and then throw another axe to strike the first axe with its blunt end and drive it farther into the tree. The whole crew wanted a try and Aaron was at the head of the line. There were only so many axes to go around and, of course, the thrown axes had to be retrieved. Ralph went to the target to pull an axe out. It was well-embedded. Aaron was primed and ready to throw at the target.

"Get out of the way, Shorty, or I'll stick you," he shouted.

Ralph ignored him and gave another tug. The axe resisted, but was loosening when he heard a shout from another crew member and ducked. Aaron's axe hit the tree and clattered to the ground.

"Shorty, I told you to move. I gave you fair warning."

Ralph grabbed Aaron's axe and charged at him. Charlie, who had not seen the near-miss, intervened. Ralph refused to say why he had gone at Aaron with an axe. Aaron just slunk off to his tent.

Within ten minutes, everyone was jolted by the discharge of a gun. Aaron, rifle in hand, was shouting and pointing into the bush.

“Did you see that buck? It was huge. I think I hit him.”

Aaron pointed towards the lake, where a deer was staggering towards the underbrush. He ran after it with the rifle, stopped and fired again. The deer, still on its feet, crashed into the willows and was lost to sight.

Charlie ran after Aaron.

“What the hell are you doing?” he shouted.

He caught up to Aaron and yanked the gun from his hands.

“All right!” Aaron yelled. “You can have the damn gun. The deer’s gone, but you saw me hit it.”

“You wounded it in the stomach. It’ll die a painful death.”

“What the hell? It’s just a deer.”

“The deer is sacred to the Natives. You don’t shoot deer for fun. Now we have to track it and kill it before it suffers more. All of you, fan out and find that deer.”

The deer had taken cover about two hundred yards into the thicket. It tried to rise. Charlie came up to it and shot it in the head. The crew stood around the carcass while Charlie cut it open. It was a white-tail, a doe, and it was carrying twins. Charlie had difficulty controlling himself.

“The Creator placed these creatures here for a purpose,” he said. “You killed them for no reason. You have to respect what you kill. Even animals know that.”

“Whatever,” Aaron said with a scowl.

Ian was in his tent drinking scotch with his head draughtsman when Charlie told him about the killing of the pregnant doe. Ian wanted Aaron fired, but Charlie recommended that Aaron be told that he was on probation and said he’d make sure that he behaved. The gun was left in Ian’s tent for safekeeping.

Maria Paul sat up on hearing the first report of a rifle. The sun had gone behind the coastal mountains, yet it was still light. She had noticed the activity during the day as the crew set up its camp,

but the gunshot was a surprise. Alec would have investigated, but he was up on Potato Mountain with Justine riding herd on the cattle. She took Ben with her to find out what they were shooting at. She was on the trail to the survey camp when a second shot echoed down the lake, confirming that the gunfire was from the survey camp. She motioned Ben to stay where he was. She left the trail, using the cover of the brush and trees to get closer.

Ben followed his mother until she came to the edge of a clearing. A pregnant doe stumbled into a thicket, a stone's throw from where she was hiding. It had been around her cabin for the last few weeks and she had been looking forward to seeing it fawn soon.

Across the clearing, she saw a Native, not a T̓silhqot'in. This heavyset powerful man took a rifle from the hands of a young white man and shouted at him about slaughtering deer out of season. She heard him order the crew to find the mortally wounded deer. The woods were full of young men trying to flush out the doe. She turned and stumbled over Ben, who was right behind her. They retreated and heard the finishing gunshot on their way back to the cabin.

"What will happen to the man who shot the deer, Mommy?" Ben asked.

"Your father will speak to him."

Confession

Stan took a few days to settle into the routine of the ranch, to get his bearings before he could begin his investigations. Within the week, he was ready.

He began in the great hall, where Bordy's body had slumped to the floor after he was shot. Looking out the double doors to the lawn and the lake, he took in the scene. He picked up the sketch by a police expert that showed the trajectory of the bullet that had killed Bordy. He narrowed down the area of his search.

The expert had said that the shot must have come from someone firing by the double doors, which would account for the shell casing found in the room. Stan had urged Sergeant Boyd to search outside the room for another shell casing. Boyd had reported back that nothing was found. But there had been six inches of snow on the ground at the time and a lot of ground to cover.

Stan started with the porch, going over every inch and, with great effort, even pulling up the decking. Finding nothing, he extended his search over the next few days to the lawn itself.

He methodically stretched string from where Bordy had fallen along the sightlines through the door opening to the lawn. He laid out gridlines on the lawn. He combed every inch of lawn within those lines, starting from close to the house. All that day and until noon of the next day, he searched and found nothing: no cigarette butts, no candy wrappers, no shell casing.

In the afternoon heat of the second day, he was running out of lawn and a fair distance from the house. The shooter would have to have been a pretty good marksman to kill Bordy with one shot from this distance. But it was possible.

He got further out from the house. He knew the killer may not have ejected the shell from the gun, but he kept looking. On his hands and knees behind a small lilac bush, he lifted a branch and saw a glint of metal. He looked closer but didn't disturb it. It was a shell casing half-covered by dead leaves. Getting up and looking around, he saw there was no one about.

From the house, he got on the radiophone and called Sergeant Boyd.

"I've found something you must see."

"What is it, Stan?"

"You can be here by seven. Bring a camera and an exhibit bag."

"Okay, I'll be there. But it better be worth my while."

Belle arrived at the ranch at the end of June. Stan was still there, convalescing.

The day after her arrival, she sat alone in front of the open double doors of the great hall, watching the moon glitter on Tatlayoko Lake. The major had retired to his room and the Johnstons had gone back to the guesthouse. The room looked empty to her without her Beckstein.

The major's advice to keep quiet had given her some ease. The new lawyer had assured her that the chances of having the verdict set aside were good. She would do everything in her power to

see this lead to his ultimate acquittal. Rumour had it that Noah was in the area and she hoped to hear from him.

The survey was apparently going well. The major had arrived at the ranch by helicopter that evening and would leave before breakfast to inspect the crews and their progress. From there, he would return to Victoria. Her bridge group, pledging their support to her in tough times, were expected in the next few days and she was looking forward to their company, though she knew they were all involved in the project and might not be coming otherwise. She knew this summer would be her last look at the Chilcotin pioneer landmark before construction started on the dam and the floodwaters claimed it.

Stan shuffled in.

"Oh!" she started. "You startled me. I'm having a nightcap and thinking about happier times. You know I haven't been here for ten years."

Stan sat in the chair opposite her, studying her face in the moonlight as he put a cigarette in a holder and lit it.

"If you don't count last Thanksgiving," he said, flatly.

"What do you mean?"

"After you took me off the case, I visited the 122 Mile. Dorothy Barton told me you stayed at Molly's place for two nights last fall. On Thanksgiving Sunday, the day Bordy died, you were gone from early morning to late evening. You told them you had gone to Quesnel to see Hetty Southin. I know Hetty and she told me you weren't there."

Belle looked stunned.

"Then there was another little fact that you didn't tell me. You're a silent stakeholder in the Vancouver Island Power Company."

She nodded.

"I'm sure you were here that day. You argued with Bordy and something happened, something you regret. Do you want to tell me about it?"

“You must think I’m an evil woman.”

“No. I think you’re confused and worried. But you want to do the right thing for Noah.”

Belle knew the major would be furious with her if she said anything, but she couldn’t keep up the sham any longer. Words began coming out of her without thought. She found herself relieved to finally be telling her story.

“I was here in this room on Thanksgiving at about six o’clock,” she began. “I’d returned to the ranch for the first time since I left with Noah for Victoria. I had to speak to Bordy about many things.”

“I would guess.”

“Bordy was charming when we were first married and we were quite happy. I had money and he had drive, the ambition to create Empire Ranch — which grew into his obsession. In our last years together, we quarrelled about everything. He wouldn’t take vacations and he grew distant from Noah, treating him like a ranchhand. Finally, there were his infidelities. You know, I caught him with a woman in our bedroom.”

“It doesn’t surprise me, I’m sorry to say.”

“I found a new life in Victoria. Noah flourished and I had the arts and culture and my music. As you know, I also found a new man.”

“Did you ask Bordy for a divorce?”

“No. I couldn’t do that. I’m still Catholic and the church would never...”

“So what happened?”

“I told him to let Noah go, that he was destroying his life. I also told him I wanted to sell the ranch. His stroke had made him even more bitter than when I left. And he was drunk. He yelled at me, accused me of being a whore. I said he’d been sleeping with the whole Chilcotin. He didn’t deny it. Then a sly look came over his face.

"He asked, 'Who would buy this ranch knowing that it could be flooded in the next few years?'

"I said, 'I'll buy out your share and agree to the flooding.' "

She was welling up with tears.

"He started to shake with anger," she continued. "He said, 'This ranch, this land is my whole life and you're going to drown it. I'll never give it up.' He moved towards his gun cabinet. I rose from my chair and asked him what he was doing. He answered, 'You've done enough talking. I know how to end this.' His rifle was in his hands when I ran out."

"You left through the doors."

"Yes."

"Where did you go?"

"To my car. I'd hidden it in the bush. Before I got to it, I heard a muffled sound."

Stan leaned forward. Belle knew his question before he could ask it.

"Yes, it *could* have been a gunshot. Then, at the car, I distinctly heard a gunshot."

"What did you think was happening?"

"I thought he was firing into the air to scare me off. I drove away. I thought that once I was gone, Bordy would cool down."

She ran out of breath and took a sip from her glass. Stan took a deep drag on his cigarette, secure in its holder. Since his cancer scare, he'd been trying to cut down on his smoking, but today wasn't easy. Anyway, the smoke didn't bother his lungs during the day. It was only when he got up at five in the morning that he would cough from his guts for ten minutes.

"Now you know what a terrible mother I am," Belle continued. "I believed Noah would take the stand and be acquitted. Had I come forward, it would have risked the water licence. And if I'd come forward, my son might still have been convicted because I don't know who killed Bordy."

"And of course," Stan sighed, "you'd be a suspect."

"What?" she replied. "No, I thought it would look like I was covering for him."

"It could," Stan noted, "have given the jury reasonable doubt."

"Oh, I never thought..." she gasped. "I jeopardized Noah's life by being selfish."

Stan could understand her reasoning, but he had found that when one's children were involved, reason and justice usually took second place to a parent's protective instincts. He couldn't be hard on her now.

"Don't punish yourself," he said. "Your judgment was impaired. You can make it right by signing a statement, which I will draft."

"Please!" she insisted. "Give me the chance to make this right."

"I've found additional evidence that may help convince the Court of Appeal to set aside the verdict," Stan reported. "I searched the garden. There was a shell casing behind the lilac bush."

He pointed out the doors.

"You can see the bush silhouetted in the moonlight from here. I believe the shooter was there and would have had clear sight of Bordy."

"Do you know who it was?"

"I don't know for sure."

"Did you give this shell casing to the police?"

"Sergeant Boyd has it. He gave me a photograph of it. It doesn't match Bordy's rifle. I haven't found a match on the ranch."

"Could it have been Noah?"

"He thinks it was you."

Stan was sure this was Noah's reason for refusing to testify. Belle was a suspect. She hadn't confessed to the murder, nor had she given him a clue as to who could have done it. Could he believe her now after such a cover-up? He wanted to.

Belle's face fell.

“What else can I do to make it right?” she pleaded with Stan.

“Noah’s out there tonight and probably not too far away. An RCMP special patrol is in the area. Snellgrove is looking for him too. I’m afraid your husband’s killer is still on the loose and we don’t know who. Or what his or her motive was. All you can do now is pray and tell Noah the truth when you see him.”

He butted his cigarette in the ashtray and left.

Belle remained in the room, lost in her thoughts. Beyond everything her son faced, she now had the dreaded task of telling the major that his attempt to tame the Chilcotin was in jeopardy because of her.

That night on the western slope of Potato Mountain, halfway down Tatlayoko Lake, Noah could see the fires of the survey base camp to the south and the lights of the ranch house to the north. He waited at the meadow for Justine. He was a month late, but he knew she would come. Ta Chi had left a few days ago, moving towards the outfall of the lake and on to Waddington Canyon, though promising to return at harvest to dig for wild potatoes.

A horse whinnied. Noah heard hooves on rock. He knew Chilko was tethered further up the mountain. The moon hung full in the sky. He felt a connection to the moonscape and took cover as Ta Chi had taught him. A horse and rider passed almost within touching distance. They continued on another fifty paces to a small clearing, then stopped.

“Wawant’x. It’s Justine,” the rider whispered.

He didn’t move or reply. After a few very slow minutes, he heard a slight rustle in the brush thirty paces down the trail. She had been followed.

Justine looked around for Noah. She’d come up the mountain from her father’s range camp every time she’d had the chance for the last month.

“Wawant’x. It’s me.”

There was still no answer.

He wanted to reach out to her, to call her, to touch her. He couldn't. Revealing his presence would jeopardize her. She turned her horse and retraced her steps to camp. Her trackers didn't reveal themselves as she walked her horse by them. Noah waited to make sure they weren't coming to the clearing. Once Justine was well away, they talked openly.

"This is their meeting spot," said one. "This makes twice since we've been watching her. We'll speak to the sergeant. He'll post someone here. Let's get back."

They headed off on foot, in the opposite direction from Justine.

In the last few weeks, Justine had been to the clearing a half-dozen times and Noah had not been there. Where was he? Was he injured? Was he dead? She was feeling beaten. She was so caught up in her thoughts as she approached camp that at first she didn't hear anything. Then she heard a horse galloping behind her and closing fast. She looked back over her shoulder, thinking it might be Noah. In the bright moonlight, however, she could see it was Snellgrove.

Snellgrove and one of his posse were camped near the range camp to keep an eye on Justine. Earlier that evening, she'd given him the slip. Having been made to look a fool again by Justine, he'd gone out on horseback to locate her. He'd been drinking and had lost any control over his quick temper. He'd show her how he treated Native women, especially one who embarrassed him publicly and got him fired.

When Justine turned her horse to confront him, he rode up to her and attempted to sweep her off her horse by circling her with one arm. He succeeded, but her horse reared. Snellgrove lost his balance and was also unhorsed.

Snellgrove's bulk winded him when he hit the ground and his grip loosened. Justine used the moment to roll away. He grabbed

her ankle and held her hard. She kicked at his head with her free foot. He grabbed it and started pulling himself up her. He had a thought as he did. He could exact his revenge against her and the breed at the same time. If Noah felt anything for her, he'd come after Snellgrove, who'd be ready.

Soon, he held Justine on the ground, choking her with one hand while the other ripped off her blouse and stripped her jeans. She could hardly breathe, let alone scream. He was so intent, so inflamed, that he was anything but ready when Noah came up behind him with a stone in hand. It came down on his head with enough force to knock him out.

When Snellgrove came to, it was still dark. He had a lump and a cut on the back of his throbbing head and Justine was gone. Perhaps the girl had been able to strike him with a rock. She must have returned home and told her story. Dazed and with no firearm, he could not go back to his camp near the Pauls', as there would certainly be retaliation. The only place he could get help was at the survey base camp at the end of the lake with his drinking buddy, Aaron. He rode into camp at about two that morning and had a new idea.

He claimed that Noah Hanlon was in the area, that the fugitive had attacked him. He showed everyone a crumpled poster of Noah he had in his pocket.

After knocking out Snellgrove, Noah had calmed Justine and helped her dress. He took her to the safety of her father's camp. She lay on the bed as she came out of shock.

"Come and hold me," she implored Noah.

He held her until she stopped shivering.

"What happened?" she asked.

"I knocked Snellgrove out with a rock and left him there. Your dad is out looking for him now."

Exhausted, she fell asleep in his arms.

He only let go of her in the morning when Alec took him aside.

“Snellgrove has been injured,” he reported. “The RCMP may be around soon asking questions. You go to the top of Potato Mountain. We’ll be there soon for the T̓silhqot’in jamboree.”

Noah nodded and left.

Alec Paul went to his daughter’s side. Since Peter’s death in Vancouver, he and Maria had feared for their daughter’s safety. Alec had worked hard under Bordy’s whip hand for years with an eye to a good life for Justine. Where other men had given up, fought or cursed Bordy, Alec had watched, obeyed, taken the abuse and learned. It had allowed him to persevere. But where he was submissive and silent, his daughter was headstrong and vocal. Although he was proud of how she stood up for herself, took the lead and exercised her free will, he feared it meant a hard life ahead for her.

PART IV

In the morning of July 17th [1864], McLean, who pooh-poohed all warnings of danger and declared to whites and Indians that “when the Chilcotins would see him they would “bend down their heads” and he would “kill them with a club,” — went reconnoitring in company of a single Indian, Jack, of Alexandria. After having crossed a prairie where they were the observed of several pairs of unfriendly eyes, they climbed a rocky hill, the top of which they were just nearing when Jack thought that he heard a gun snap.

“Pshaw!” contemptuously exclaimed McLean, in answer to the Indian’s remark, “they would not shoot us. They are too much afraid of me.”

He had scarcely finished the sentence when he fell dead, shot by Anukatlh, a Chilcotin, who was never apprehended, so that the death of him who had ill-treated and slain so many natives remained unavenged.

—The History of the Northern Interior of British
Columbia, *Adrien Gabriel Morice*

Throwing Axes

I an Richards wasn't prepared for Snellgrove's sudden nighttime appearance or the change in the routine of his base camp it brought about. He turned Snellgrove over to Charlie, saying he didn't want the man eating with the crew and if he didn't like that, he could mount up on his horse and leave. Snellgrove wasn't fit enough to do that, so he backed down but let it be known that he didn't enjoy being talked to that way.

Charlie had Snellgrove bunk in with Aaron, reasoning that he would then know where the two troublemakers were. He assumed sentry duty and sat hidden under a tree near the perimeter to keep an eye on the camp sleeping under the shadow of Lendix'tcux. During the night, he heard only the movement and sounds of wildlife.

In T̓silhqot'in, Tatlayoko means 'windy lake'. The camp was at the windiest end, where the narrow Homathko Valley funnelled the heavy weather in from the coast. The wind came up as dawn was breaking, stirring the treetops and rippling the water. The men would soon be up. Charlie knew from his army service that

when one's guard was down in the half-light of dawn was when enemy raids could be expected. He shook off his drowsiness and watched the cooks, who were up to light the fire in the big cook-stove and check on their hidden homebrew, which everybody in camp except Ian Richards knew about.

A twig broke. To an untrained ear, like those of the whites around him, it would've meant nothing. To Charlie, it was out of place and much too close to camp to be an animal. From farther away, a coyote yipped twice and a responding howl came from the opposite direction. The coyotes' noise woke up a few men.

Snellgrove's head still rang from the stone's blow as he stumbled out of his tent. Before Charlie could shout a warning, the morning was disturbed by a swishing sound as an axe parted the air, striking Snellgrove on his left abdomen. He took two steps and fell.

When Charlie reached him, he was alive and howling. The cooks scrambled for cover, not knowing where the attack was coming from. Charlie circled the area where the axe came from. He found no one. Whoever had thrown the axe was familiar with the bush and the terrain and had melted into the underbrush — there was no sense in chasing a shadow.

He turned his attention to the men, now emerged from their tents, to assure them the danger had passed. Once word was being passed around, he bandaged the yelping Snellgrove's wound. Had the assailant wanted to kill Snellgrove, he could have, Charlie thought, but the intent was obviously not to kill. The axe was single-headed and thrown so that the blunt end struck Snellgrove, breaking several ribs. It appeared to be a warning.

Aaron went to the camp near the Pauls' range camp to collect the ex-deputy's belongings. When he got there, he found them scattered about and Snellgrove's man gone. Aaron gathered what he could find of Snellgrove's possessions and tent, brought them back to the base camp and set up the tent on the perimeter.

In camp, Aaron now seemed to be under a spell. He was quite happy to act as Snellgrove's servant, yet Charlie and Ian had difficulty getting Aaron to do his job of supplying the camp. Ian agreed to feed Snellgrove until his ribs healed and he could move. Aaron brought him his meals — and more. It hadn't taken Aaron long to discover the cooks' still and he had been siphoning off small quantities for his own use. He didn't like drinking alone so, when Snellgrove showed up, Aaron shared it with him. The two of them sat for hours each night polishing grievances against Noah and Justine, plotting revenge.

"I know Noah's around here," Snellgrove said one night. "When I can move, I'll get my posse together. We'll ride down that fugitive."

"What about Justine?"

Aaron still had dreams about her.

"Those two have destroyed me. If I see him, I won't talk. I'll shoot. That bastard is outside the law. And if she's there, I'll shoot her too."

He shifted his weight and grimaced in pain, a fresh reminder of what Noah and Justine had done to him. Aaron fawned over Snellgrove, topping up his glass with more homebrew.

"These cooks know what they're doing," he said. "The food is garbage, but the hooch is not bad. They make it from raisins."

Snellgrove still had his mind on revenge.

"Noah's outside the law. I'll call it self-defence and I'll get a reward for it."

"A reward?" Aaron's eyes grew bigger. "You mean for killing him? How much?"

"More than ten thousand dollars!"

"What's my share?"

"What have *you* done?"

"Waited on you hand and foot and saved your life. Where would you be if I wasn't in this camp?"

"I'll think about it."

"I don't think you should shoot Justine," Aaron mused. "You leave her to me. I think she's sweet on me."

"Ha! You can have her. That one's a she-wolf."

Snellgrove must have kept thinking about it, because after some silence, he had a different take.

"We can't have any witnesses."

In the early hours of the next morning, an animal's scream echoed through Waddington Canyon, shattering everyone's sleep. A satellite team of survey crew members was housed in a small camp on a sandbar downstream in Mosely Creek. They jumped out of their bedrolls and tents and peered into the blackness. They heard the heavy, raspy breathing of a grizzly. These sounds died down only to be followed by what sounded like the whimpers of a child. When these ceased, no one could get back to sleep.

Charlie Rainbow was dispatched from the main camp at Tatlayoko Lake the next day to calm the crew, who refused to go into the bush to cut lines or take levels and transit sightings with a wild animal on the loose stalking them. Ralph's transit man wasn't moving from the camp and so they were part of the crowd when the helicopter brought Charlie, rifle in hand. The Native's presence calmed the crew and, after lunch, they went into the woods with Charlie patrolling and on guard. They found nothing, so he stayed the night.

Just after midnight, a deep guttural sound like that of a rutting bull moose came echoing down the canyon. Charlie would have welcomed that explanation. Even a grizzly lured by the smell of the cache of food in the camp would have been more acceptable than what he now figured had made the sound: a human, a creature deadlier than a grizzly, especially since the camp was forty miles from the nearest road. Charlie thought it was a human who didn't welcome the presence of the camp in the Chilcotin.

He didn't share his fears with the camp, nor did he tell them of the axe attack on Snellgrove at Tatlayoko, but he did remain with them for several days until the night sounds receded and, on the fourth night, stopped altogether. When Charlie returned to the base camp, he brought Ralph with him, on orders from Ian.

As Snellgrove improved, he became more impatient and nasty to Aaron. He was able to walk a bit in the second week and started to make a nuisance of himself to the crew.

Ralph returned to base camp with Charlie. He was assigned to accompany and assist the geologist every day in the helicopter. In the morning, the pilot would leave them on a sandbar where they would climb the canyon walls to examine the rock formations at the proposed dam site until they were picked up again in the evening.

In the evenings after dinner, Ralph practiced axe-throwing. He had learned everything Charlie could teach him and was becoming an expert. At thirty paces, he could light a match with a thrown axe seven times out of ten.

Snellgrove had recognized Ralph from when he'd visited Noah in jail and throwing axes wasn't exactly something he found endearing. Aaron was no fan, either. They watched him practice for a few minutes.

"Who is that little snot?" Snellgrove snarled in a loud voice, meant to be overheard. "And why is he wasting his time throwing axes?"

Ralph paid him no mind. Aaron snickered and looked around to see if Charlie was nearby.

"The chief's kid," he answered. He mimed a stabbing motion. "I almost stuck him early on at this camp."

Snellgrove was no fan of Ian's and his son had visited Noah in jail. He found that more than interesting.

Capturing the Wind

At the annual Potato Mountain harvest, the people of the Chilcotin gather on summer days in July to dig the wild root, roast and eat it on the spot, storing the rest for winter. The men gambled on horse races down the mountain or on *lahal*, a game played by Natives in the coastal and plateau regions of British Columbia. It was a social occasion and was played to the accompaniment of songs and drumming. As simple and as addictive as craps, men could leave the game stripped of all their possessions. Play usually involved ten scoring sticks and two pairs of bones, male and female. One team must guess where the male bones were hidden by the other. The team that guessed correctly got some of the other team's sticks. The first team to win all of the other team's sticks and to ensure that all the sticks were dead won the game.

The two-week-long celebration on the mountain drew people from all over the plateau and beyond. It was not for whites.

It was a hard climb up the mountain, not made any more pleasant by the drizzle falling from the encircling clouds. For

that reason, many of the old people didn't come. Old Antoine was there, though. His son, Alec, had mounted him on a quiet horse and shepherded him up to the flat ridge while Justine rode beside him. Antoine had lost count of his years riding up Potato Mountain. At harvest, he gained spiritual strength from the land that stretched before him and ate the traditional wild potato, which sustained him. A woman could dig fifty pounds of these in a day using a piece of rake tooth or an old metal spring leaf. He could see the women now amidst the plants, bending over them, grubbing for the small tubers and placing them in a woven bark basket. His rheumy eyes stopped on seeing *selin*, sitting patiently behind a familiar figure wearing a cloth headband, denim jacket, print skirt and moccasins. He walked towards her. She was smiling. She always smiled now.

"I hear you are not travelling alone," he said.

Ta Chi looked up at him standing over her.

"A while ago," he added, "near Chilko River, I hear a man chased away some boys who bother you."

"Damn near killed me," she said.

She dug up a few more potatoes, then looked up at him.

"I need help."

He had never heard her ask for anything from anyone for herself except maybe a ride to the store for supplies. He sat down beside her and began digging. For five minutes, they worked in silence, placing potatoes in her basket.

"I know where Wawant'x is," Ta Chi said suddenly, still grubbing potatoes. "She can't live like me. She don't kill her father."

"I was at the trial. The jury said he did."

"What do you say?"

"Tell your son to attend our circle of elders tonight. He can tell his story to us."

"When?"

"Tonight. At my son's tent."

“You tell her. You tell her about Lendix’tcux. It’s your story to tell. Tell her more of our stories.”

“Have Wawant’x meet me before tonight,” Antoine asked, brushing dirt from his hands. “I will be on the rise over there where we can see Lendix’tcux.”

She returned to full focus on the potatoes. He left her and wandered up the hill.

Their casual meeting did not go unnoticed. Two RCMP officers had the camps under surveillance. They’d been ordered not to make a move or show themselves until they were sure Noah was in the camp, then to radio for assistance. An informant in the camp reported to them twice a day. He reported seeing Ta Chi with Antoine and was told to follow her. This proved impossible. He lost her in the first stand of trees, which seemed to swallow her. He abandoned the job to go back to the camp to drink and gamble with the money the RCMP was paying him.

Noah had never been to Potato Mountain during the harvest. He looked out from a knoll above the flat ridges of the Potato Range, in sight of the mountain Ts’il?os to the south and overlooking Chilko Lake to the east.

Antoine met Noah there. He pointed out Lendix’tcux and his three sons cast in stone on the northern slope of the mountain.

“When in your cabin near Charlotte Lake,” Antoine said, “I see drawings. Since you catch and tame wild horse, I want to tell you story my grandfather told me about boy capturing the wind and his drawings and his magic horse. Do you have time to hear?”

“Yes,” Noah answered. “I have time to hear it.”

Long ago before my time, there lived a chief with many sons. In those days, wind used to blow furiously all time and chief told one son to try to capture wind. So young man make snare and place it in

tree. Next day, he go to examine it. He find small boy with potbelly and streaming hair caught fast in snare. Now, this boy was wind. Chief's son keep him for some time, but finally agree to let him go if he not blow so hard and only once in a while. The wind boy agree and was set free.

Now, chief have garden where he grow many potatoes and someone constantly stealing them, so he tell son to try to catch thief. So one night, young man sit up to watch and when hear someone among potatoes, he throw spear and break thief's leg. But young man not see him plainly and thief escape and disappear in ground. Young man follow him underground and finally come to big village. Going up to central house of village, which belong to their chief, he find chicken living there and he feel sure it is chicken that stole father's potatoes, but no way to prove it. When young man try to come back to surface of the ground, he cannot, and ask chicken to help. The chicken refuse. Now, young man have under blanket a magic picture of horse which a chief up above, his father-in-law, give him when he give him his two daughters as wives. Young man take picture, whip it and it become horse with fine harness and spurs. He ride horse back to surface of Earth and to father's house.

Now, young man gone for some time and his father give him up for lost, so he make long spear and stick it in ground slanting towards the people and say that any man who ride horse at full speed straight onto spear win the two wives of his son. Now, when

young man return, he is very thin and haggard and his clothes is worn and ragged and no one recognize him, not even his own father, the chief, who treat him roughly and make him fetch wood and water for cooking. Every day, young men of village gather and try to ride horses onto spear, but no one succeed.

One day, young man watch trials for short time and then start to fetch water, but leaving water-basket at stream, he go into brush and take out magic picture, whip it and it become a horse. He then mount and ride around. Suddenly, he appear among young men and ride his horse at full run straight onto spear and disappear beyond in brush. Then, turning horse back into picture, he take up water and come quietly back to village. Everybody wonder who strange rider is and what become of him, but nobody guess.

Another day, young man does same thing, but still nobody know him. Now, his two wives are watching from window of house and when they see strange rider and what he does, they think, "Surely this must be our husband who comes back," for they know about magic picture. So two women begin to search all the men to see who has picture, but they find no trace. All this time, Raven keep saying that it is he who ride onto spear, but everybody laugh at him.

Noah laughed out loud and Antoine couldn't help but laugh as well.

Finally, women tell chief about matter and he direct a man to search everyone's clothes for picture, but it is nowhere to be found. When man search everyone

else, he come to young man and about to pass him over, for he think it impossible that so poor and miserable a person could have any such thing as magic picture. But chief tell him to look and when he does, sure enough, there it is. Then, to prove that he is the strange rider, young man whip the picture and it become horse and he ride straight onto spear and back again to chief's house. Then, whipping the horse, it become picture. He put it under his blanket. Then chief recognize his son and give him back his wives.

"I been saving that story to tell to the right man. Now you ride your horse onto spear and you tell your story this evening to a circle of elders so that they may know what happen when Bordy died."

Noah didn't reply.

"Will you come?" Antoine asked.

"Yes. I will come and tell my story to them."

Snellgrove's attack on Justine had made Noah believe that Justine was in more danger than he was. He was prepared to submit to the judgment of the elders. If they decided that he should turn himself in to the RCMP, he would accept their decision. He hadn't confronted Belle, whom he believed knew the person who shot Bordy, but he couldn't continue being an outlaw without the support of the T̓silhqot'in. There was no mercy for outlaws.

A young, strong T̓silhqot'in approached Stan at the ranch that day while he was resting in a chair. The young man told him that Noah was appearing before the circle of elders that evening and that he and his friends — he motioned to five Natives standing nearby — had been sent by Antoine to escort Stan up the mountain.

Stan was still recovering from his latest radiation treatment and was quite weak. He had not left the guesthouse since his confrontation with Belle, but he could no more have resisted the call to trial than his dying black lab, Oscar, could have failed to slowly and painfully scabble to its feet for a last walk with its master. Every instinct bred into Stan and practiced by him over the years dictated that he be there.

They loaded him onto a Bennett wagon, which he rode until the trail became too steep. Then the T̓silhqot'ins placed two poles under the seat of the chair Stan was sitting on. Four of them each took an end of a pole, lifted his chair and moved him to the top of Potato Mountain.

Circle

An afternoon wind blowing from the coast up the Homathko through the canyon and onto the plateau swept the drizzle clouds from Potato Mountain and brought the warm July sun, drying the underbrush and making the rocks steam. The evening remained warm. The eastern moon lit the way as Noah picked his way through the tents to Alec Paul's, where he saw eight men sitting in a circle around a fire.

He knew them all. They were the T̓silhqot'in elders: Joe Henryboy, old Antoine, Alec Paul, Jimmy John, Harry Sepia, Tom Lupa, Jack Loneman and Harry Patrick. Noah was surprised to see Stan Hewitt sitting slightly apart from the circle. He also knew that Justine and her mother were listening in the tent. He took his place beside his lawyer.

"Wawant'x will tell you," Antoine began, "about the death of Bordy. Most of you were at courthouse in Williams Lake. You heard others talk, what they saw and didn't see. We not jury. We sit in courtroom and listen. Wawant'x decided not to tell his story to white jury. He now tell us and we judge him."

While Noah spoke in the dark with the fire lighting his face, the eight elders listened attentively as they would to a young hunter who had returned from the hunt to tell of his adventure, perhaps to explain that he had no game for the fire and that they would have to dine on his story instead.

“You have known me as Noah Hanlon,” he began, “adopted son of Bordy and Belle Hanlon and brought up white. I don’t know my blood father. My mother is Ta Chi.”

Some of the elders nodded on hearing this information.

“I knew little of my T̓silhqot’in heritage until five months ago when I was exposed to the land and since then I have lived as an outlaw from the white society. I survived because I had someone to interpret the land for me. I have been told that in our land, the stones speak to us. I now know that to be true.

“Many of you were at the trial and heard the evidence that the Crown brought against me — the fingerprints, the hired hands, the gun expert — but no witnesses came forward to say that I held the gun in my hands that shot and killed Bordy.

“Bordy and I had quarrelled on the range near Eagle Lake. It wasn’t the first time. Alec Paul and some cowhands were there, Justine was not. She had returned to the ranch early because her mother wasn’t well. The next day was Thanksgiving and, by that afternoon, we had the cattle in the home fields. Alec left first to check on Maria. I stayed another half-hour to make sure the cattle were secure. Justine found me by the barn and told me that Bordy had assaulted her. I went to the house about dusk to warn Bordy off. He was in the great hall by the fire and the first winter snow was falling. We argued and he grabbed his gun and would have shot me if I hadn’t fought him for it. We struggled for it and the gun fired accidentally. The slug must have gone through the open doors, as the RCMP found only one slug in the fireplace. I left him in the room without looking back and as I got near the doors I heard a scream and a shot fired from

outside the house. I turned back and Bordy was on the floor, shot through the chest.”

Joe Henryboy knew he should have been on the jury and had spent much time thinking over the events of the trial and what followed.

“You jumped off my truck at Riske Creek, didn’t you?” he asked. “The old truck was wheezing up those hills. I thought the wife and the rest of them in there ate too well at Williams Lake till you lightened the load.”

“I did. That was me.”

“Did you see who fired the shot or in what direction it came from?”

“The shot came from the lawn in front of the house. It was dusk and snowing, but I thought I saw a figure out there. At first I didn’t know who it was, although I thought I heard an animal scream. Then in the courtroom, I came to believe that the person was my mother, Belle.”

“Why did you run away from court?” Johnny Setah asked.

“You were there. You saw the Queen’s coat of arms on the wall above the judge. Two beasts: the one on the right was mythical, a unicorn in chains; the other on the left was a crowned lion. Together, they supported a crest with the motto in French, ‘DIEU ET MON DROIT’ — God and My Right. Beneath these splendid displays, busy deciding my fate, were the white judge, jury and prosecutor. The newspaper reporters and the court clerk were also white. When I turned around, there were no whites in the public area except Belle. That’s where you Natives sat: the T̓silhqot’ins, Shuswaps and Carriers. I was raised by Belle to be white. I thought, prayed and painted as a white person. I love my mother, but for the first time in my life, I understood what it was like to be a T̓silhqot’in, to be part of a community of people who cared for me in good times and in bad.”

“That’s not a reason for running away.”

“There were other reasons. I wanted to confront my mother.”

Before anyone in the circle could ask if Belle was the killer, Stan cleared his throat.

“I wonder if I could say something,” he croaked. “I think it will help.”

Antoine looked around him. The elders were nodding their heads.

“Speak.”

“Thank you for bringing me here. I appreciate your trust. I haven’t seen Noah — or Wawant’x, as you call him — since he left the courtroom at Williams Lake. I have continued to represent him and have done some investigations to try and clear his name. Belle Hanlon, Noah’s mother, has admitted to me and given me a sworn statement that she was present in the great hall at the ranch house last Thanksgiving and argued with Bordy. After some name-calling, Bordy went for his gun and Belle ran through the open doors and onto the lawn. Running towards her car some distance away, she heard a muffled bang that could have been gunfire. When she got to her car, she heard a loud gunshot. She headed immediately back to Williams Lake. She spoke to no one about this, believing that to do so would jeopardize the power company’s application to dam the Homathko River. She also believed that Noah would be acquitted and so told no one about her involvement.”

Noah turned to Stan and shook his head. He’d suspected it had been Belle he’d seen on the lawn and who had killed Bordy. He’d intended to confront her with his suspicions at the ranch and then they would decide what to do — he still believed she would not let him take the blame, unless maybe there was someone forcing her hand. He had already made excuses for her in his mind — Bordy was going for his gun and could have killed him as he left the room. But she was not admitting to the shooting. Could he believe her?

“My theory of the crime,” Stan continued, “as I put it to the jury without any proof, is exactly what Noah has just told you: that someone hidden in the shrubbery outside fired at Bordy. How else could the cowhands have heard the gun so clearly? Had there been only one gunshot from inside the house, it would have been muffled — that is what Belle probably heard first. Recently, I searched the ground in front of the house for clues. You will recall that on the night of the shooting, there was a large snowfall that covered the valley. Even if the police had wanted to look, it was impossible to find anything with a foot of snow on the ground. My search was rewarded: I found a casing outside where there was a view of the double doors. A person kneeling in that position would have had a clear view into the hall and a clear shot at Bordy.”

Maria came walking up from the large tent and took a place at the fire. There was noise from a tent some distance away, where a *lahal* game was being played to the continuous beating of drums. Lifting her eyes to the stars, she spoke, not to anyone in particular, but to the night.

“This has gone too far. We stay back and don’t speak about what happened. We see Wawant’x found guilty when we all know he didn’t shoot Mr. Hanlon. I tell you, on the day of the shooting, I was sick and Justine came back early from the roundup to look after me. After lunch, Mr. Hanlon came round to our cabin. This is not usual. If he wants to speak to Alec, they go outside. He never comes in and he knows Alec is not there. He is drunk and says he wants to know how I am feeling. He is not looking at me when he says this, he is looking at Justine. Justine is embarrassed, so she goes to the kitchen. Mr. Hanlon waits a minute, then he follows her. He whispers something and she says no. Then the kitchen table is overturned. I call out and Justine says Mr. Hanlon is going now.

“Ben then comes into the house and goes into the kitchen. He screams at Mr. Hanlon, ‘Don’t hurt her.’ I hear him being struck.

He land on floor, then sounds of a struggle. Justine break free and run through the room and out the door with her blouse torn. Mr. Hanlon come out of the room as if nothing had happened, says 'I hope you're feeling better tomorrow.' I could hardly get up. I struggled to the kitchen. Ben was whimpering in a corner with a welt on his face. I told Ben to hide gun before his father come home. Later, Justine come back and treated him and got me back to bed. She told me not to tell Alec, as he would be mad. Then my husband come. I told him what happened. He went looking for his gun."

With that, Maria simply stood and returned to the tent.

The elders turned back to Stan.

"I haven't been able to match the casing to any gun on the ranch," he told them. "It's a thirty-aught-six cartridge from a Lee Enfield. I gave the casing to Sergeant Boyd for evidence, but I have a photograph of the casing with the firing-pin mark on it."

He pulled the photo out of his pocket and passed it among the elders to be examined. Each was familiar with the mark that the firing pin makes on the casing when it is fired. Antoine did not examine it but passed it on to his son. Alec looked at it closely in the firelight before passing it on to Joe Henryboy. The photo came back to Stan, who put it in his pocket.

"I seen a spent thirty-aught-six shell casing like that," Alec said. "With the same firing pin markings."

Stan raised his hand.

"Before you say whose it is, the owner may not be the person who fired the gun."

Alec stroked his chin with his hand.

"I found the casing near where the surveyors shot the pregnant doe," he recalled. "Maria told me about the kill and it upset me. The doe was pregnant with twins. Maria told me where it was and I went there. The bears and coyotes had eaten most of the carcass. I looked around and found a casing. I figure they'd wounded it before and that was the kill shot."

Alec was a steady influence within the group. He usually spoke rationally and acted moderately.

“Why were you looking for your gun that day?” Johnny Setah asked.

Alec didn’t respond right away. But this was a time for speaking the truth.

“When I went back to my cabin on the ranch that day, I looked for my gun and it was missing. The next day, it was back in my cabin. I thought I had misplaced it. Maria thinks I killed him. If I had the gun, I probably would have.”

“Have you heard enough?” Antoine asked.

Each one in turn nodded.

Antoine turned to Noah.

“You may go into the tent and wait while we talk.”

Stan nodded a farewell to Noah as he stood to leave. He knew it wasn’t time for them to talk.

Inside the large tent, Maria and Ben sat near the flap so they could hear the elders. Justine, who had recovered from Snellgrove’s attack, sat by herself at the far end, dressed in a white doeskin vest and skirt. Noah sat beside her on a bearskin, holding her hand. For the first time since his arrest, he searched her face free from capture or the threat of it looming. Even after Snellgrove, he had only been able to comfort her and assure her she was safe before fleeing once again. He forgot why he was here, for all he could think about was Justine.

“You look beautiful in white.”

“I’ve waited so long. I hope I don’t disappoint you.”

They embraced.

“You don’t know,” Justine continued, “how hard it’s been on me to know you were being hunted and I wasn’t there to help.”

Stan, still with the elders, clutched his jacket and crossed his arms.

It was mid-July, but on Potato Mountain the temperature was dipping. He was so close to an acquittal of his client that nothing would move him from this spot until he heard what the elders had to say. He was so passionately involved in his brief to defend Noah that he had caught himself praying in the last week — not for his own soul or for an afterlife, but for the strength to see this case, his last case, so he thought, through to a successful end.

While Alec and Maria spoke around the fire, he had taken mental notes. He would have them swear their statements. They hadn't told their story to an RCMP officer because they weren't asked and, had they been asked, they might well have remained silent. They had told it tonight to their own people, their equals, who would not look down on them.

Stan was no closer to finding out who had killed Bordy, yet he was confident he had enough evidence to convince the Court of Appeal that Noah's guilty verdict should be set aside. He would stake his thirty-odd years as a lawyer that the Crown would stay the charges and Noah would be a free man.

The elders' conversation wound down.

"If Noah is the murderer," Joe Henryboy summed up, "he has to have the Lee Enfield. Find who owns the gun, maybe find the killer."

"Does anyone believe that Noah killed Bordy?" Antoine asked.

They all shook their heads.

"Mr. Hewitt, we say Noah didn't shoot Bordy. What will you do now?"

Stan had his next steps worked out.

"I'll get sworn statements from Maria, Alec and Belle. Tomorrow, I'll go down the mountain and tell Sergeant Boyd that I will arrange, with Noah's consent, to have him turn himself in at the ranch in a week. Boyd will agree to that. Noah may have to spend a few weeks in jail after he turns himself in. The Court of Appeal will be hearing his appeal within two weeks and this

evidence will be before them. It should set aside the guilty verdict and the prosecutor, Mr. Bates, should drop the charges.”

Antoine signalled Maria to have Noah come back to the circle. She leaned in the tent and pulled back the flap. Noah and Justine walked out together. He stood in front of the elders with her by his side.

“Wawant’x,” Antoine said, “we decided that you did not kill Bordy. Among your people, you are free. Mr. Hewitt say that you have to face the Queen’s justice. He will arrange a time and place for you to turn yourself in. For now, up here on the mountain, you will be safe among your people.”

Noah looked up beyond the elders to the many fires on the flat of Potato Mountain. They mirrored the stars overhead and gave Noah a sense of Earth meeting the cosmos. This was the time to tell the camp. He had not spoken to Justine about marriage. There was no need — they had spent a lifetime in the last nine months trying to be together. He had searched her face: it told him that this was what she wanted.

“Now that I am free,” he said to the T̓silhqot’in. “I want to bind myself to Justine. We will live together as husband and wife. We have been apart long enough.”

The news spread through the camps and the cheers could be heard in the night as runners told it at each fire.

Stan felt he’d caught a chill. The morning after the hearing before the elders, he coughed long and hard enough to bring Maria to him with a tonic, which seemed to soothe him. He had a smoke and some coffee but wasn’t able to eat breakfast. He also wasn’t able to leave the mountain in that condition, but he did have enough strength to write a note to Sergeant Boyd saying that Noah would turn himself in at the ranch in a week’s time — on Saturday, August first — on the condition that he not be hunted and be given safe passage. He was sure to note that he now had

enough evidence to prove Noah did not murder Bordy, promising to bring it when he recovered. Stan wrote a separate note for Belle telling her of Noah and Justine's marriage and that, in his opinion, with the evidence soon to be in the hands of the law, Noah's appeal was assured of being successful and the Crown would probably stay the charges against him.

On receiving Stan's note, Belle asked the young T̓silhqot'in man to wait until morning to deliver her note to Noah on Potato Mountain. It took her some time to compose, for she had much forgiveness to ask of her son and some advice to give.

A Bed of Spruce Boughs

If there was such a thing as paradise on Earth, or the Heaven that Dante had described and Catholic upbringing had taught Noah, then he and Justine found it in the week they were together on Potato Mountain. In the early hours of the morning after his trial before the elders, Noah and Justine walked towards their tent, set apart from the others near Echo Lake. They had visited most fires on the mountain and were offered congratulations, food and drink. At one fire, the *lahal* game stopped for a few minutes and Johnny Setah insisted on giving half his winnings to Justine.

“Come and join the game,” his cousin Clarence had yelled at Noah. “You can bet your bride.”

The gamblers had laughed, many envying Noah.

Maria had prepared them a bed of spruce boughs that were as springy as a mattress and more fragrant. They undressed as the eastern sky was brightening, fell into bed in each other’s arms and, exhausted, immediately fell asleep.

Justine awakened a few hours later to what sounded like rain on the tent canvas. Opening the flap, she looked into the face of

one her little friends from Anaham, who asked her to play while the other children threw wild alpine flowers onto the tent. She dressed, leaving Noah asleep, and stepped out onto the dew of a new day. She motioned the children away from the tent and, with her finger on her mouth for silence, she brought them to her mother's camp.

Noah slept till noon and woke alone.

"Justine?" he called.

There was no response. He went outside.

"Justine!" he called again, louder now.

There was no one in sight. Suddenly, he saw her running towards him. She jumped into his arms and they kissed. He needed her there. She had come to fill the void in his life and his heart.

That evening, Alec and Maria held a feast for the couple. The guests ate roast venison, wild potatoes, hooshum berries whisked into froth and dried Saskatoon berries, which the Tâilhqot'in call *dig*. Noah and Justine didn't stay for the drinking. Silently, walking hand-in-hand, they entered their tent. He undressed her slowly, stroking the curve of her face with his hand, tracing the line of her shoulder and caressing her while she stood, still as a fawn, her wide eyes willing him to continue.

He undid her dress, which was tied at the back, and it fell to her feet. He rested his hands on her hips and gently pressed her to him. A man had never treated her this way, nor had her friends told her that lovemaking was something to enjoy. She had never given herself to a man. She was in love with Noah and knew him to be gentle. She undid his belt, and his pants joined her dress. She felt him, very hard against her. She sank to her knees, pulling him down with her. On their bed of spruce boughs, she slid under him and they looked at each other until they kissed. Coming up for breath, he told her that he loved her, which she echoed. They joined in an embrace which nothing could break apart.

In the morning, they woke early and jumped into cold Echo Lake. They screamed the names of saints, cherubim and Lendix'tcux, hearing their voices thrown back at them. Then it was back to their bed.

"You were out on the plateau from March to June," Justine noted, "with no company except coyote, raven, wolf and Ta Chi. How did you survive?"

"I had to go through all of this just to be with you. It was a test to show I was worthy of your love."

"Well, then I should mark you to see if you passed."

"There were some low points. I almost starved to death. I broke my leg. I was trussed up like a papoose for a week. There were many times I thought of giving up and turning myself in."

"What kept you going?"

"Besides you? I had my diary. Not the written kind, but the sketchbook you gave me."

"I want to see it."

"Of course you'll see it, but it will take me days to explain it to you because it's the story of my journey to find you and to find myself. First, you must tell me how you avoided taking my place in jail after I escaped."

"That'll wait. You must be hungry after last night. I'll make breakfast."

She built a fire, boiled water and soon presented oatmeal, sugared tea and cold venison.

After that simple meal, they rode Getaway and Chilko over the Potato Range. There was a horse race every day down the steep slopes of the mountain. They stopped and watched the riders launch themselves into a test of man and beast against mountain — horse and rider had to finish the race together and few contestants met that rule. They were on their horses when Joe Henryboy came up to Noah with a sealed letter from Belle. Noah put it in his pocket and, curious, they returned to their tent.

Seated on the ground with his arm around Justine, he read it aloud.

My dearest son,

This is my first contact with you since the trial and I am overjoyed to write you knowing that you are safe and well. It's ironic that you are five miles away on Potato Mountain, yet it seems like leagues and centuries to me.

Stan Hewitt has told me of the arrangement he made with the RCMP that you will give yourself up in a week at the ranch. He has worked very hard on your behalf and, because of him, you will be cleared of these charges. I hope you will find it in your heart to forgive me for not telling the court and the police of my being at the ranch at the time of Bordy's death. There is really no excuse for my conduct, but I will try to explain.

I went to the ranch to persuade Bordy to sell to the power company. The dam would flood the ranch, which he couldn't manage after his stroke, and you are a painter, not a rancher. He threatened me and I ran from the house. I wasn't there when the shooting started and I didn't think my evidence would help you. Stan has since told me I was wrong. My evidence would have explained why Bordy was so angry after I left the great hall that he threatened you with his gun. It would also verify that there were two shots fired at the ranch house. I didn't come forward about my involvement because I was thinking about my attachment to Jack Parmenter.

I have been unlucky with men. My first husband died. It took me a dozen years to recognize that Bordy didn't love me and so I was determined to make a success with Jack. That's

why I risked confronting Bordy to get him to see reason, to get him to see that he was not well enough to run a large cattle ranch and to get him to drop his opposition to the water licence. When everything went so terribly wrong at the ranch, I believed that if I came forward, the knowledge of my involvement would have meant the end of Jack's plan to dam the Homathko. The government wouldn't want to grant Jack's company a water licence in those circumstances. Jack thought so too.

Jack offered to send Charlie Rainbow out to find you and to bring you to me. Before I came up to the ranch this summer, Jack told me that Charlie was unable to locate you. If Charlie couldn't find you in the Chilcotin wilderness, then no one could. I have given my statement to Stan. I hope it's not too late.

When he read the part about Charlie, he stiffened.

"What's wrong?" Justine said.

"Who is Charlie Rainbow?" he asked.

"He's an Iroquois working for the survey crew. Why?"

He shrugged.

"Just wondering."

He finished reading the letter in a monotone, his mind back at Charlotte Lake.

Stan also told me that you and Justine are living together as man and wife in the Native way. I am pleased that you are happy. I saw Justine at the trial and she is a lovely woman. Everyone speaks well of her. I do hope that you will have your marriage blessed by the church.

All my love,
Mother.

It had been Charlie who had questioned him, held him prisoner and tried to abduct him from the cabin, which meant that Charlie or the major had lied to Belle about not being able to locate him. His fears about his and Belle's safety returned. He didn't want to alarm Justine, so said nothing.

During the young couple's week together, Belle came to Potato Mountain at Noah's invitation. She arrived at the top of Potato Mountain by helicopter. Noah and his bride waited arm-in-arm by their tent, their clothes whipped by the wash of the rotor blades until the pilot helped Belle out of the cockpit.

Belle walked slowly forward. She hadn't seen Noah since the trial. He looked different now, more like a T̓silhqot'in than the boy she had raised as her own son. He was very lean. His hair was now down to his shoulders and he wore a headband. Justine was holding on to him. Justine had been a slip of a girl when Belle had left the Chilcotin but now she was a beautiful woman and, from what she had been told, had a lot of spirit. Still, she couldn't help thinking that Noah could have done so much better — she'd been particularly fond of Emily.

She suppressed those thoughts. She was in no position to judge him, having betrayed him and set a bad example by sleeping with the major while still married. Her church didn't condone that arrangement but would excommunicate her if she had divorced Bordy. She didn't know how Noah would react to her failure to tell the whole truth at his trial.

Noah took a step towards her with outstretched arms. She felt the ice between them melt. He hugged her.

"Mother," he said, "I would like you to meet my wife, Justine. She saved my life and made me the happiest man alive."

The two women embraced.

"Thank you, Justine," Belle said.

"I wanted to introduce you to Ta Chi," Noah added, "but she is shy. She could be in that thicket over there watching us. If you want to be friends with her, all you have to do is to love and respect the Chilcotin."

Belle remembered that Bordy had said the very same words when he was courting her.

"I would have brought Jack up here with me," she offered apologetically, "but he had to return to Victoria for some important meetings."

Near the end of their week together, Noah and Justine began to plan for their future. Justine wanted to go to nursing school in Vancouver. Noah wanted to apprentice to a Native artist, also in Vancouver. After completing their training, they could move back to the Chilcotin. Justine would nurse and Noah would run a small ranch and paint in his spare time.

One night after they made love, he talked about his idea for a mural. He showed her his sketches and drawings. The master drawing was to scale on sheets of white paper measuring one by four feet. He explained to her that it would be enlarged ten times and painted on three panels mounted on a wall. The wall Noah had in mind was the west wall in the great hall at Empire Ranch. He was excited as he told Justine and she thrilled at the scope and breadth of his vision. What he saw was the whole of the Chilcotin territory from the curve of the mountains to the mighty Fraser, an ovoid shape with the Chilcotin River the umbilical cord to the Fraser River itself. Within was the circle of migration and life of the people of the azure water, both white and Native, nourished by their myths and religion, encouraged by their heroes and heroines, sustained by nature's bounty and chastened by its laws. Justine fell asleep picturing his dream.

When she woke in the morning, he was outside their tent sketching Lendix'tcux and his sons outlined on T'syl?os as the

rising eastern sun highlighted their features. When he was finished, he spent the rest of the morning sketching Potato Mountain, which he said would be the centre of his mural.

“Is that a bush with sparrows in the foreground,” she asked, “or is it a figure of a woman bent over with a sack on her shoulder?”

“That’s Ta Chi. I can’t seem to capture her in my painting without making her part of the land and a sparrow.”

Having rested on Potato Mountain under Maria’s care, Stan felt well enough to travel down and deliver the statements to Sergeant Boyd, arriving the day before Noah was to give himself up. He spent a few hours with the sergeant and provided him with four affidavits: Belle’s, Maria’s, Alec’s and, finally, Noah’s.

The bridge club had been at the ranch for a week and had played every afternoon. On her return from Potato Mountain, Belle decided to tell them her secrets, her lies and her frailties. They had followed and invested in the Homathko project and should hear her confession. For years, the four women had shuffled their way through the cards, exchanged bids, followed convention and taken chances together, on the game and on the lives of those around them.

When Belle came to the table with her secret, it took them only a few hands to know that she was waiting to unburden herself. It was Samantha who voiced their concerns.

“The Chilcotin has a negative effect on your bridge. What’s on your mind?”

“I am not what I seem,” Belle’s replied enigmatically.

They waited for a revelation from their sister gambler.

“I have not been open with you.”

She was stalling for time to gain the courage to tell them. Adele, Sybil and Samantha remained silent. Then it came gushing out.

“When Bordy was shot last Thanksgiving, I was at the ranch. I didn’t witness the shooting, but I saw him. He threatened me with a gun before I left. I didn’t tell the court because if I were implicated in any way, the major’s company would probably not have received the water licence.”

There was a chorus of sympathy from Adele and Sybil, but Samantha didn’t join in.

“Why are you telling us this now?” she asked.

“Because,” Belle drew that word out slowly, “I have given Stan Hewitt a statement and it will all be made public. I thought you should know before it is.”

“Have you told the major?”

“He knows my lie, but he is not aware that I have corrected it. He’s been away in Victoria for over a week. I’ll tell him tonight when he returns.”

The game was forgotten as each woman considered how to best deal with the consequences of this revelation and how to advise the clique to turn Belle’s personal anguish and defeat to an advantage, or at least to lessen the political and financial fallout. They all agreed in the end that it was possible for the Homathko project to proceed, based on Belle’s assurance that she was not connected to the shooting and that Belle would tell the major that evening.

Exhausted, yet elated from his strenuous physical and mental workout over the last few days, Stan fell into his bed at Empire Ranch. He had his last smoke for the day in bed, thinking how strange it was that his final acquittal had not been from a traditional jury but from a Native circle of elders. Before the elders, the evidence was not squeezed out of witnesses by heavy cross-examination, the two sides didn’t cover up as many of the facts as possible to make their client appear honest or throw as much mud as possible on to make their opponent’s witnesses appear

bold liars. His ever-active mind thought that this would make a good comparative law article for *The Advocate* or the *Canadian Bar Review*. On that pleasant thought, he turned off the light and fell into a deep sleep.

Stan dreamt that he and his fishing friends were on a Chilcotin lake when he hooked a beauty that bent the rod. It flashed silver until exhausted, then was brought to the surface near the boat. Bending over the gunwale to net the big rainbow trout, he realized that it was Belle.

He woke with a start. It was late morning, the sun was shining in the window and Belle was leaning over him.

“Are you all right?”

“Yes. Yes, I just had the most uplifting dream in my whole life. I’ve never felt better.”

“When you didn’t come down to breakfast, I worried.”

“Thank you for worrying. You know, I think I can beat this cancer.”

She smiled.

“I know you can.”

“Belle, have you told the major about your confession?”

She looked surprised and thought of dissembling, but the new Belle answered truthfully.

“No.”

“The sergeant has your written affidavit. I thought it best that the major hear it from you.”

She turned away and walked to the door, then stopped.

“Come down for breakfast now.”

The previous afternoon, Belle had promised her bridge coven that she would tell the major that evening, but he hadn’t arrived at the ranch until now. She went to the main house and found the major in the kitchen having a cup of coffee. Belle took him upstairs to the bedroom for privacy and sat him down.

The major had not stopped moving the whole summer. He was monitoring the progress of the survey crew and the geologist. He had secured the right-of-way for the transmission line down Bute Inlet and across the Redonda Islands to hook up with the Island grid at Campbell River. He also ran the day-to-day business of the company. In his consuming assault on the stored energy of the Chilcotin, he could taste victory and visualized thousands of kilowatts of electricity being generated and distributed. Belle's attention at this time was unwelcome.

"As you may know," she began, "Noah is surrendering himself at the ranch at noon. Sergeant Boyd is here, waiting to take him into custody."

He sat there motionless, waiting for her to proceed.

"To make sure he gets every chance to prove his innocence, I've sworn an affidavit Stan Hewitt prepared saying I was at the ranch at the time of Bordy's death."

The major laughed out loud. He laughed long and hard, almost maniacally.

"Belle, Belle, Belle," he said, finally controlling himself, "you foolish woman. You came to me for advice and help. I gave you advice and now that I am giving you that help, you change your mind."

She felt a chill.

"What do you mean, you're giving me help? What help are you giving me? You can stop that help right now because I don't need it."

"Never mind, my dear. It's too late now! We shall try to make the best of it."

He left her to puzzle out what he had said.

Vengeance

Potato Mountain had another visitor on the day before the breakup of the T̓silhqot'in jamboree. Charlie Rainbow arrived to talk to Alec about the deer shooting. Over the summer, Alec had told Charlie that someone at his camp had shot a pregnant doe out of season. Charlie had told him it wouldn't happen again. Alec said the person who did it should be punished. Charlie hadn't responded and they had gone their separate ways.

Up on Potato Mountain, Charlie again brought up the subject with Alec.

"The chief engineer has punished the guy who killed the deer."

Alec said nothing.

"It was a bad kill, I know."

Again, Alec remained silent.

"A few days ago, our camp at Mosely Creek was upset by the wailings of a person in pain. Do you know anything about that?"

"No."

"Is your jamboree finished?"

"Yeah. The last of us will be moving out tomorrow morning."

“Okay. See you around.”

Charlie headed off down the mountain and arrived back at the survey camp in time for dinner. He knew about the cooks’ still and, because he virtually ran the camp, he was given a glass from time to time. He checked in on Snellgrove and noticed that his ribs had healed enough that he could move about.

After dinner, Snellgrove told Aaron that he was tired of sipping homebrew. He wanted a real drink. Aaron came back with a bottle of the cooks’ hooch. After midnight, when they attempted to get their hands on more, their drunken shouts woke the cooks, who defended their cache. The ensuing brawl brought out Ian, Charlie and the head draughtsman, who had to break up the fight. Without speaking to Ian, Charlie told Snellgrove to leave the camp in the morning. He fired Aaron and told him he could leave with him.

When morning came, Charlie saw to it that they were packed and ready. He took Snellgrove aside and spoke to him. Ralph, the only one who noticed this exchange, recognized that Charlie was doing more than just pointing out a direction.

Snellgrove was hungover and still in some pain when Aaron got him on his horse along with their gear. The sorry pair walked out of camp with Aaron on foot leading Snellgrove’s horse. Ralph watched them go. He had survived their presence in camp and could now breathe easier. But within the hour, Charlie discovered that the camp’s rifle was missing. He told Ian that he would run Snellgrove and Aaron down and retrieve it. When Charlie started off jogging down the trail armed with a double-bit axe, Ralph followed him, his own axe in hand, on what was going to be a long run along the eastern shore of Tatlayoko Lake. With Aaron walking and Snellgrove still hurting, they would likely catch them up about halfway down the lake — before they could do any harm.

The Natives on Potato Mountain broke camp in the morning. Some had left the day before for Anahim Lake, Nemiah Valley and Farwell Canyon. They took various trails off the mountain.

In the morning, Noah and Justine travelled down the western slope with Antoine, Alec and Maria. The couple separated from the family at the Pauls' range camp. From there, they rode towards the halfway point of Tatlayoko Lake, making their way to the ranch house, where they were expected in the early afternoon.

They walked their horses side-by-side, Noah on Justine's left. They felt safe even though they were only a few miles from the ranch where Noah would be arrested and they would be parted. Even a week away from each other would be too long.

As they approached the lake, the land flattened and the trees thinned to a small clearing where the mountain trail joined the lake trail that would lead them to the ranch. At that moment, Justine was very happy with the promise of living the rest of her life riding beside the man she loved.

"I'm surprised Ta Chi hasn't shown up to congratulate us," he said.

"Don't worry," she said. "She'll appear when we least expect it."

When Ralph followed Charlie Rainbow out of the survey camp, it seemed that Charlie was quickening his pace to outrun him. But it wasn't possible to leave Ralph behind — he could have run all day, having spent the last two months climbing up and down mountains. He was also driven by the fear of what might happen with the gun in the hands of those men. Charlie Rainbow couldn't keep up the pace that he had set and Ralph, barely winded, passed the older man without exchanging a word. This marathon continued, each man holding an axe in his hand like a baton, as they headed for the encounter.

Noah and Justine rode slowly down the trail. To their left, Snellgrove impatiently crouched behind a bush. Aaron lay beside him. Snellgrove aimed the rifle at the advancing, laughing couple.

Ralph ran by a pile of steaming horse dung. Snellgrove and Aaron were not far ahead. He came to a rise in the trail. Looking down, he saw a tableau so clear and ominous that his mind seemed to detach from his body. Part of him was watching the scene play out, part of him was part of the action, shouting and running hard towards the ambush.

The lovers heard the lake waves striking the beach before they could see the meadow and the shoreline. It was a peaceful morning scene. There was a flurry of sparrow calls and then a fluster of movement in a bush about fifty yards to their left. Noah felt a cold hand on his heart. He turned Chilko's head towards the bush.

Ralph was running and breathing hard, his grip tightening on his axe.

Chilko, responding to Noah's rein, charged the bush. Noah drew Ta Chi's small axe from his belt. He hurled it at the bush. The bush belched a tongue of flame. The gun snapped.

Noah fell from his horse.

Ralph ran on.

On the ground, Noah felt a searing pain in his right side. Justine flung herself from her saddle and fell beside him on the ground, cradling him in her arms.

Lying next to Snellgrove, Aaron had his eyes fixed on Justine. "Now!" he shouted. "Shoot the bitch!"

Richard Snellgrove didn't answer. Aaron looked at his mentor and finally saw Ta Chi's axe embedded in his forehead.

On the ground beside Noah, Justine took no notice of what else was happening. She only knew that Noah was badly wounded, perhaps mortally.

"Dearest," she wept, "don't leave me."

"I'm hit in the side," he rasped. "You must stop the bleeding."

Ralph, in full flight, raised his axe. Had Aaron attempted to reach for the gun, he would have thrown it. Aaron, however, was in shock. Ralph picked up the gun.

"Don't kill me!" Aaron cried. "I didn't do it. We were set up."

Ralph ignored him. He grabbed the gun and ran to Noah.

Seeing Ralph tending to Noah, Aaron came to his senses and took flight.

Just then, Charlie Rainbow crested the hill, axe in hand. He surveyed the scene, then chased Aaron down.

It took some time for Justine to stop the bleeding. Charlie Rainbow retuned without Aaron.

"How is he?" he asked.

"He'll live, but he needs a doctor."

"I'll ride to the ranch house. They can radio for a floatplane to take him to Williams Lake."

"Where's Aaron?" Ralph asked.

"He had an accident," Charlie said. "He won't be bothering you."

At eleven-thirty, the sergeant, Stan, the major and Belle set themselves to waiting for Noah to arrive at the ranch house.

At noon, Charlie Rainbow rode up at a gallop, shouting that Noah had been shot. The major ran towards Charlie to help him from his horse. Stan watched as the two of them had private words together.

"I'll call my base camp," the major said. "They'll send the helicopter to pick Noah up and fly him directly to Williams Lake Hospital."

Sergeant Boyd mounted his horse.

"I'm going to the scene of the shooting with Charlie. I'm ordering all of you to remain here until I return."

Belle refused the order.

"My son is injured. I'm going with you."

Stan took the sergeant aside before they left.

"Would you," he asked, "time your ride from here at full gallop?"

Revelation

It was after six when the sergeant returned with Snellgrove's body in the wagon. Aaron, head bandaged and in cuffs, sat beside the dead man. Belle rode alongside with three new arrivals. Alec and Maria rode their own horses. Ralph was mounted on Justine's horse, as she had boarded the helicopter with Noah.

Sergeant Boyd reported that Noah's wound was not fatal. He excused himself to talk to Charlie Rainbow and Ralph separately in the den.

After dinner, the sergeant gathered everyone in the great hall. Belle insisted that he tell them what he knew of the shooting before she and the major flew to Noah's bedside.

"I have been guilty of a cover-up," she said to Sergeant Boyd. "I want you to lay your cards on the table. The major is here to answer any questions and so is Charlie. As am I."

She was taking responsibility. Stan approved.

The major wondered where this was all leading.

"You've finished with Charlie," he said, with a hint of concern. "I would like him to get back to the camp to tell the men firsthand what has happened."

The sergeant brushed that aside.

"This shouldn't take long. I'd like you all to stay."

Then he began his review.

"When Bordy was killed in this room last Thanksgiving, we now believe that the killer was outside the house on the lawn and the shot that killed Bordy came through the open French doors.

"Stan found a shell casing on the lawn, where the shooter must have knelt. The casing was from a thirty-aught-six Lee Enfield rifle. Mrs. Hanlon has admitted to seeing Bordy minutes before the shooting but claims to have left him alive. Within minutes of her leaving and without knowing that his mother was in the Chilcotin, Noah entered the room and quarrelled with Bordy. They fought over a gun and it discharged without harming anyone. Noah left and, as he neared the door, a shot was fired from the lawn where the casing was found. We have eliminated Noah as the person who fired the shot. We cannot eliminate Mrs. Hanlon at this point because Major Parmenter owns that gun and, as she is a friend of the major, she would have had access to the gun."

"What?" sputtered the major.

"Here's the evidence."

The officer produced the spent shell.

"It's from the gun that Snellgrove used to shoot Noah. Fortunately — according to his wife, Justine, who was riding beside her husband — sparrows alerted Noah to the ambush. The bullet struck Noah in the right side as he threw the axe. The axe struck Snellgrove on the head and killed him. His accomplice, Aaron, who was waiting in the bushes with him, tried to escape. Mr. Rainbow caught him. That is the reason I spoke to Mr. Rainbow earlier."

"Charlie should be congratulated," the major announced.

"Save your applause."

The major was unused to being spoken to in this way by a non-commissioned officer.

"I asked Charlie," he said with a calculated coolness, "to buy a gun in the Chilcotin to protect the camp and the surveyors from bears. So if that is the gun, it could not have been used by Belle to shoot her husband. She is in the clear."

"No. Somebody remembers seeing that gun."

He went to the door.

"Ralph," he called out, "will you come in?"

Ralph Richards entered the room and stood by the door looking at the gathering. He drew a slow breath.

"Tell us," the sergeant said, "what did you see at the major's house?"

"I was in the major's home a few years back," Ralph said slowly. "In his den where he kept his gun collection, I noticed this Lee Enfield bolt-action rifle that seemed out of place in a cabinet of beautiful guns. It had particular markings on its butt: three notches. This was the camp gun, the same gun that Snellgrove had in his hand when I saw him shoot Noah."

The major's pink face reddened. He turned to Belle.

"How were you able," he asked, "to get that gun out of my house without me noticing?"

She appeared confused. She opened her mouth to speak, but the sergeant waved her off.

"Mrs. Hanlon," he said, "Mr. Hewitt provided us with your sworn statement saying that you were at the ranch when your husband was murdered. Is that true?"

"Yes."

"But you told me, the prosecutor Mr. Bates and Mr. Hewitt — and you swore under oath at your son's trial before judge and jury — that you were in Victoria at the time."

"Yes."

"Was that true?"

"No."

"You lied under oath?"

“Yes.”

“You do realize that perjury is a criminal offence.”

“I do. It was wrong. I shall have to live with that for the rest of my life.”

The sergeant turned to a table behind him, picked up a rifle and showed it to Belle.

“Do you recognize this rifle? It’s the rifle that was used to shoot your husband and your son.”

She looked at it with disgust.

“I’ve never seen this gun. Whoever used this gun is evil and has done a great wrong. They have killed the man I used to love and wounded my son.”

“Didn’t you bring this gun with you on Thanksgiving last year?” the sergeant pressed. “And after you quarrelled with Bordy and he threatened you, didn’t you go to your car, get the gun and return with the intent of shooting him? And didn’t you see Bordy and your son fight over his gun in the great hall? And when your son was leaving the room and Bordy moved towards his gun, thinking he would shoot your son, didn’t you then fire this rifle and kill your husband?”

Tears welled up in her eyes.

“If I’d had a gun,” she said, “and had seen what you describe, I would have. Any mother would.”

“You lied about not being there, why should anyone believe you now when you say you didn’t kill Bordy?”

“Maybe no one will believe me. If I go to jail for Bordy’s death, it would be a fitting punishment for what I’ve done to my son. But I’m through lying. I’m thankful that Stan persevered and made me tell the truth.”

“Did anyone else know about your lie?”

Belle’s pause was hardly noticeable to the sergeant, but to Stan it was a lifetime. This was a test of the statement she had just made about being through with lying. Would she now reveal that

someone? Stan knew that there was only one person she would have confided in and saying the name would mark the end of a relationship.

“Jack Parmenter,” she replied.

The major drew in breath sharply.

“What did he say when you told him?”

“He said not to tell anyone, as the guilty verdict would be set aside. He suggested that I fire Stan as his lawyer and get a Victoria lawyer, which I did.”

“And was that the only reason he didn’t want you to tell someone?”

“No,” Belle admitted. “He believed that if the government knew that I was involved in any way with Bordy’s death, considering he was opposing the flooding of Tatlayoko Valley, they would not grant Vancouver Island Power Company the water licence that he so desperately needed.” Trying to soften the disclosure of the major’s involvement, she added, “But he cared about me, my being involved. He’s a very sensitive man.”

Now, it was the major’s turn. The sergeant turned to him.

“Do you believe Mrs. Hanlon when she says that she did not kill her husband?”

The major was having difficulty balancing his affection for Belle and his loyalty to the company, but like a good soldier, he did not shirk his duty.

“No, I don’t.”

“Did you believe her when she first told you of her trip to the ranch?”

“I had my doubts.”

“Did you do anything to protect her after the conversation?”

“She told me she believed that Noah had seen the person who had shot Bordy. She thought it might have been Ta Chi, whom she described as a nomad who haunts the ranch. Noah escaped and would want to find his father’s killer. If he found that Belle

was there, he may well have named her — I believed that she had probably shot Bordy even though she denied it. She wanted me to find Noah. I sent Charlie to the Chilcotin to see if he could get him to reveal who he saw.”

The major motioned towards Charlie.

“Charlie told me,” he continued, “Noah would not identify that person, which made me suspect it was Belle he saw. Charlie decided to let him go rather than bring him to me.”

Stan was getting concerned with the shift of this enquiry towards Belle.

“Surely,” he said, “you aren’t going to charge Belle.”

“She lied once, denying any involvement. She may be lying again.”

Stan was trying hard not to let his emotions get in the way of his reason. He wanted to believe in Belle’s innocence even though she had directly lied to him in the past.

The sergeant wasn’t finished. He turned to Ralph, who was still standing by the door.

“Tell them what you saw and heard this morning,” he said.

Ralph had been following the investigation with increasing interest. He was able to fit his small role into the larger play. It seemed to him that his observations and actions were factors the major and Charlie had not considered in their schemes.

“Charlie spoke to Snellgrove before he left camp this morning. I didn’t hear what he said, but he spent some time with him. I don’t know how the rifle could have been taken without Charlie noticing at the time. And when he discovered the gun was missing, he wanted to go alone to fetch it back and was annoyed that I went with him. He tried to lose me. Then after the shooting, with Snellgrove lying dead at my feet, Aaron said, ‘We were set up.’

“I didn’t see Aaron run,” Ralph continued. “I was with Justine and Noah. There was no place for him to go. He was unarmed and, when Charlie said he’d had an accident, I didn’t understand

until I went over the ridge and found Aaron. He was badly beaten and appeared to be in shock or scared witless. He refused to say anything.”

When Ralph had finished, the sergeant arched his eyebrow at the major, who responded by smiling and shaking his head.

“Now, sergeant! As a man of the law, you can’t believe that these suppositions and innuendoes have any weight.”

“Your man Friday, Charlie Rainbow, had access to your guns.”

“Are you seriously suggesting that Charlie had anything to do with Bordy’s murder?”

“Yes. And with the attempted murder of Noah Hanlon.”

Charlie, who had been sitting expressionless to this point, now shifted his position slightly.

“I thought Snellgrove shot Noah,” the major persevered.

The major shook his head while looking at Belle, who was becoming alarmed.

“Yes, he did,” the sergeant continued, “but I believe Charlie set Snellgrove up to do the job. He knew when Noah would be turning himself in. He knew that Snellgrove was determined to kill Noah if he saw him again, so he told him where to find him and gave him the gun.”

The major threw up his hands.

“That’s preposterous. You’re making this all up. Charlie is the best guide in the country, but he couldn’t possibly have dreamt up this fantasy. And for what purpose would this all be?”

The major’s main audience member was not so much the sergeant as it was Belle, whose emotions were plainly affected by each new revelation and accusation. The sergeant persisted in his attack.

“Charlie was up at the Potato Mountain camp on Friday. Alec Paul told him Noah would be heading down the mountain to give himself up at the ranch on Saturday morning before noon. Charlie ran the survey camp. He arranged to have Snellgrove and

Aaron booted out Saturday morning and then told Snellgrove when and where Noah would be coming down the mountain.”

“Is there any other explanation?” Belle piped up. “You were so wrong when you charged my son with murder.”

“Of course there’s another explanation,” the sergeant smiled. He couldn’t resist. “Belle could have taken the gun, as the major suggests, and shot her husband. Perhaps we wouldn’t have charged Noah if she had come forward sooner. But what the major says about Charlie being of help is correct. The question is, who was he helping? He could have been helping the major. Today when Charlie rode here for medical help at full gallop, Stan noticed that his horse was not breathing hard or lathered and asked me to time the ride back at full gallop to the scene of the shooting. It took twenty minutes, but Charlie took forty minutes to make the same ride. One explanation is that Charlie was in no hurry to get medical aid for Noah and the longer Noah was unattended, the greater became the risk he would die from his wound. Also, it was Charlie who noticed that the gun was missing and volunteered to get it. He was in no hurry to get there, expecting Snellgrove to have shot Noah. The purpose was to silence Noah, who the major believed had seen his mother shoot Bordy.”

The sergeant looked at the major and Charlie in turn.

“It seems you have some explaining to do. Will you come with me to our station in Williams Lake for questioning?”

“Are we under arrest, Sergeant?”

“No. I want to get a statement from you.”

“I would prefer to have my lawyer present and I am sure Mr. Rainbow will want the same.”

Before the major and Charlie left for the Williams Lake RCMP station in the squad car, the major approached Belle.

“Don’t worry about me, my dear. I’ve been in worse scrapes. I’ll be back tomorrow and we will carry on with our lives and our dream of damming the Homathko.”

Belle, whose emotions were exhausted by the day's events, mustered up both her Scottish pride and Chilcotin grit.

"You know, Jack, the last time I said goodbye to one of the loves of my life was in this room when Bordy and I separated. I agonized over leaving that unfaithful bastard and the Chilcotin. You've made my decision to leave you much easier. Goodbye."

Deyen

While Noah convalesced in Williams Lake Hospital, Stan, still recovering from his radiation treatments, represented him in the Court of Appeal. The Crown didn't put up any argument. Stan explained that Noah had escaped only to find his father's killer and that he'd voluntarily turned himself in. The Court of Appeal set aside the guilty verdict and ordered a new trial. The chief justice commented on Belle's silence, noting that had she come forward sooner, the jury may well not have convicted. With all the evidence now pointing away from Noah, the Crown dropped the charges against him and he was a free man.

Since it was evident that Noah had killed Snellgrove in self-defence, no charges were laid. Boyd focused on Aaron, arresting him as an accessory to Snellgrove's attempted murder of Noah.

Noah's release raised the question of who would be charged for Bordy's murder. Belle, the major and Charlie Rainbow all had access to the major's Lee Enfield. In the end, Boyd and the sheriff agreed they didn't have enough evidence to charge any one of them.

Between Belle and the major lay a wasteland of distrust which could never be bridged. The major couldn't understand why Belle had put the company in jeopardy by confronting Bordy, nor why she betrayed it by admitting she'd been there at the ranch. For her part, Belle believed that the major and Charlie had used Snellgrove in a plan that, had it been successful, would have cost Noah his life. The seeds of doubt having been sown, the harvest would be the abandonment of the Waddington dam project. The greatest irony was Belle taking over Bordy's adamant opposition to the dam. That sparked heated conversations when the bridge club met.

Aaron was represented by Acton Bates at trial. In the courtroom, he appeared a beaten man and refused to take the stand. Bates confided in Stan after the trial that he'd wanted to put his client on the stand, but Aaron had refused to even tell his lawyer what happened, seeming afraid of his own shadow. Without his cooperation, the Crown didn't have enough evidence to charge Charlie Rainbow as a co-conspirator. Aaron wouldn't repeat or explain what Charlie Rainbow had told him even when offered a reduced sentence.

With no interest in managing the ranch, Noah and Justine moved to Vancouver, finding a basement suite off the Blanca loop. He worked on plans for his grand mural. She enrolled in her first year of nursing at the University of British Columbia.

Within months, the government expropriated the Vancouver Island Power Company and abandoned the plan to dam the Homathko, at significant expense to the partners. By year's end, Belle would retreat from Victoria to the ranch she now owned outright. Her Beckstein brought life back to the great hall, countering any darkness that may have hung over it.

Bordy and the major had been attracted to her for what she could do for them. Bordy cared about Empire Ranch and the major, the Vancouver Island Power Company. She realized her own sense of independence had led her to men who couldn't share, who would devote themselves to a life separate from hers.

Stan, she realized, although deeply flawed, had always been there for her. He'd proved himself willing to change to accept Belle, and the Chilcotin, on their own terms. As he came out to Tatlayoko Lake every weekend, Belle discovered he was good company. Since his pleasure in life was to be with her, he finally found a reason to look after himself and soon saw his cancer go into remission.

She asked him to move into the ranch with her. She was lively, talented and independently wealthy and he was scaling down his practice, so they had plenty of time for long conversations and leisure. He read biographies of great men. She read the classics and played her Beethoven. Yet he found himself missing the discipline of the law and so invited the ever-reliable Acton Bates to join his practice and share his workload.

Belle sold off much of the land, allowing the Johnstons the chance to move on to their own property. With the change, Belle restored the Bar 5 Ranch name. Alec Paul became foreman and Belle looked after the business end of a much-reduced acreage.

Antoine disappeared into the mountains more often than he used to, taking Noah with him whenever he returned from Vancouver. Satisfied that Noah had survived tests enough to prove him worthy, Antoine began preparing Noah for the role of *deyen* after he was gone.

Noah spent the rest of his time in the Chilcotin exploring the land and painting his mural in the great hall. Sometimes, a week would mean grand, sweeping lines were added, other times, his attention would be restricted to a small segment.

The summer following, Noah finished the centre panel, the final piece of his mural showing the Chilcotin in its living, breathing and heart-beating glory. Belle insisted on an unveiling in the great hall, inviting a host of people. Word went out that all the denizens of the plateau were welcome to see the mural on August 7, 1959.

“My husband Wawant’x,” Justine announced, “who is also known as Noah Hanlon, lived his childhood in the Chilcotin. He moved to Victoria and, thanks to Belle, received a liberal education. He studied hard to be an artist and showed talent. He returned to the Chilcotin and through sufferings and tribulations, Ta Chi introduced him to our land. I wish I could say that it was I who inspired his mural, but I am pleased to take second place to the Chilcotin.”

A couple of ranchhands on ladders readied themselves to uncover the mural.

“Today, we unveil the mural. The centrepiece is Mount Ts’il?os. My thanks to Belle for commissioning the work, which she has named the ‘Chilcotin Portrait.’”

When the curtain fell, the hushed room came alive with *ahhs* of appreciation, followed by handclapping from the whites and shouts from the Natives. The dignitaries from Williams Lake and Victoria, the Natives from the reserves and the Stoney nomads were overcome.

Everyone had an opportunity to speak. Praise flowed for the painting, the land and the man.

Belle had tried to come to terms with her betrayal of Noah. Most important was that her son had forgiven her, but she couldn’t forgive herself, having realized that she’d been worse than Bordy when it came to exploiting the land. The dam would not only have destroyed the ranch but also broken the sacred circle that was the Chilcotin and for what?

“Noah’s mural being in this room,” she said, “means as much to me as it means to the people of the plateau, the T’silhqot’in.” She wiped away a tear. “I would like to pay tribute to my son by

playing one of his favourite pieces, which he enjoyed listening to when he was a young, beautiful boy.”

Noah blushed.

“Play, mother, play.”

She sat at the Beckstein and played Rachmaninoff’s “Prelude in E-Flat Minor, Op. 23 No. 9”. When she played the last note, there were no dry eyes in the room. Stan was especially moved, thinking he could picture her playing for the king at Holyrood. He brushed the thought away — this audience was far more appreciative and welcoming than was the King of England.

Belle finished to warm yet resounding applause. She let it go on for a moment, then signalled the crowd to quiet.

When there was absolute silence, Native drums began a long tattoo.

Finally, the artist spoke.

“Justine urged me to work on this great mural. It was conceived when I was in the wilderness and so is part of me, part of Ta Chi and part of the Chilcotin. This is my gift to the Tsilhqot’in people. I have attempted to reveal the secret life of the land and, while I was painting, I felt the Creator’s hand guiding mine. I hope that this mural will encourage Native art and culture on the plateau.”

Standing beside Justine on the spot where Bordy died, Stan looked out the open double doors onto the lawn. He thought he saw a small person, perhaps a child, shielded by the trembling wind-rustled lilac, looking towards the house. He nudged Justine and whispered so as not to interrupt the elders who were accepting the gift.

“Look outside at the lilac. Do you see that?”

She turned to see.

“That’s Ta Chi,” she smiled, nodding at her. “I’m glad she came.”

After the ceremonies, Stan went outside to the lilac where he had found the spent casing. As he approached, sparrows flew off towards Tatlayoko Lake. He wondered if seeing Ta Chi had been real or a vision.

Over time, Stan noticed that Noah's painting appeared to be in constant movement — nothing was still. With Ts'il?os in the background, the Chilcotin world seemed to circle Potato Mountain, just as Ta Chi circled it on her constant migrations, just as the stars circled the heavens. Up on the mountain's flat ridges, Stan had seen the east slope drain into Chilko Lake and then to the Chilcotin River, the Fraser and into the sea, and he had seen the west slope flow into Tatlayoko Lake and through the Homathko River to the sea as well. Only now though did he find himself beginning to understand the site's significance to the Tsilhqot'in.

The oval and the circle: these leitmotifs were woven into Noah's painting. Stan remembered Noah explaining to him the West Coast Native art ovoid form, the U-form, the split U-form and the S-form, how these lines and forms differed from Western linear art forms. Noah had recalled seeing the Bayeux Tapestry on his trip to Europe and contrasted the linear depiction of the Normans conquering of England, as well as the tableaux of the Gothic cathedrals, with the Native way. He preferred the latter to Western society's way of creating a direct — and in their eyes, only — link to God. Nature's circle was more open, more inviting, more welcoming.

That fall, Antoine, now in his eighties, took to his bed in his lean-to. Belle wanted to move him to the main house, but he refused. Stan spent a lot of time with him. Noah and Justine came in from Vancouver. She was eight months pregnant with their child and Antoine got to feel the baby kick.

The old man became weaker, to the point where Dr. Hay told them he might not last the week.

Stan and Noah visited one morning. The lean-to was crowded with three men in it. Stan sat on the only chair at the head of the bed and Noah sat cross-legged at the foot. On the bed, Antoine

seemed more alert that morning, though he kept his eyes closed. Stan mentioned the failed project at Waddington Canyon.

"Yes, Klatsassin," Antoine agreed. "Warrior chief made sure no road."

Stan shook his head. Noah looked closely at his mentor, trying to hear and understand the old man.

"I was talking about the dam project two years back," Stan said.

"Yes, we stop it like Klatsassin, I guess."

Stan realized the old man was losing his memory. He tried to gently bring Antoine around.

"No, the Vancouver Island Power Company abandoned the project."

Then the old *deyen* became the questioner.

"Oh, why abandon?"

Noah watched and half-listened.

"Because Belle and the major," Stan said, "lost faith in the plan and each other. After I discovered the thirty-aught-six casing on the lawn."

"How did casing get on lawn?"

"Bordy's killer left it there."

Antoine opened one questioning eye but said nothing.

"I don't know whether it was by fate or chance that I found it," Stan mused. "That damning piece of evidence not only helped clear Noah, it created such conflict in the power company that they had to abandon the project."

Antoine opened his other eye. Stan stayed silent, unsure if Antoine would say anything.

"Not fate."

"Then it must have been chance."

"Not chance."

Stan looked at Noah, who shrugged his shoulders. Antoine must have some other metaphysical reason, Stan thought, something connected to his view of the Creator.

"Then how was it," Stan asked him, "I was able to find the shell that connected the power company to the murder?"

"When you come to Tatlayoko looking to find clue," Antoine said haltingly and with some effort, "I think to help. Alec find cartridge shell at power camp where they kill pregnant doe. He give it me. I place on lawn where you find it."

What could Stan say? He'd unwittingly played a part in a frame-up by an eighty-year-old *deyen*. There was enough deceit and covering up in this affair to spread across the whole of the Chilcotin. He searched Antoine's face, cross-hatched with lines below the eyes and around the mouth, high unlined cheekbones and unblinking cloudy brown eyes. Those eyes were searching his face in return, asking a question to which Stan knew he had no answer. Antoine put it into words.

"Do you know who kill't Bordy?"

"I don't know. I had my suspicions that it was the major or Rainbow, but no proof. Now that I know that the cartridge was planted, I'm wondering if even my suspicions were correct."

There was another long silence.

"Do you?" Stan asked Antoine.

Antoine had known the question was as inevitable as death.

"Antoine watches Bordy and Noah argue in great hall. They struggle for gun. It fire and bullet whistle. Noah throw down gun, walk to door. Bordy bends down to pick up gun. She screams like eagle and gun snaps and Bordy falls."

Stan leaned in.

"You saw this person?"

"Mother of Noah shoot his real father," Antoine rasped.

At the foot of the bed, Noah sat up, only having heard the overly specific phrase "his real father". He inhaled sharply. Stan, however, missed this and focused on the word 'mother'.

"Are you saying Belle shot Bordy?"

Antoine shook his head.

Stan was relieved, but Antoine was speaking in riddles, so he persisted.

"Then, old friend, who was this person?"

"Was spirit of Chilcotin."

"Is that a person?"

"Maybe."

Noah slowly exhaled. He had longed to know his real father since Bordy had started treating him like a hired hand. He'd dreamt that his real father would have helped him, had he been there. He had embraced Ta Chi's answer that his father was the Chilcotin, an ethereal being rather than an identifiable person. This thought had given him strength to fight on, to survive in the wilderness and make the Chilcotin proud of him. Noah took Antoine's revelation as confirmation of his belief, having heard Antoine answer that the killer was "his real father", that he was the "spirit of the Chilcotin." Antoine was confirming that his real father was the fabric of the land. The old man's final lesson had been about the shadow line between reality and spirituality discovered by artists and *deyens* in each generation. Noah rose and went to the head of the bed. Stan pulled his chair back. Noah knelt on the floor beside the dying man and grasped his hand.

"I now understand," he said, "the connection between the land and our people, between Ts'il?os the mountain and Lendix'tcux the spirit, between Ta Chi and nature."

Antoine could only smile, nod his head and faintly squeeze Noah's hand.

Stan, the realist, had heard Antoine, the old *deyen*, say that the mother of Noah — not Belle, so it had to have been Ta Chi — had shot Bordy. Belle now cleared, he realized what Antoine had meant by Noah's "real father". But he followed Antoine's lead and left it at that.

Like Belle, Antoine had remained silent while Noah was on trial. For his own reasons, he hadn't come forward until he was

on his deathbed. What those reasons were, Stan could only surmise. Was Antoine protecting Ta Chi? Did he have faith in Hewitt's professional ability to successfully defend Noah? Was jail just another one of Antoine's tests for Noah? Reluctantly, Stan realized that Antoine could be implicated in the shooting, especially since he'd planted evidence. Antoine, the trickster of the Raven clan, had protected the land by planting a false clue and had humbled Stan by telling him the truth about that. There was no reason to disbelieve him about who had shot Bordy and why. Stan, who'd spent his days convincing clients to speak, realized he would now be the one keeping silent.

Antoine's last words were barely audible.

"Spirit save Noah's life."

Antoine felt a lightness of being when he died, having spoken the whole truth to the new guardian and *deyen* of their sacred land, knowing that Wawant'x would watch over it.

Antoine's death barred the lawyer from asking how Ta Chi had obtained the rifle or where exactly Antoine had been in relation to Ta Chi at the time of the shooting. Stan wouldn't tell Noah, or anyone, what he believed. Perhaps Noah and his children would read about it in Stan's memoirs, if they were ever published. There, they would also read Stan's thoughts on how the younger generation survived the pressures and expectations that the older generations, both white and Native, placed on them.

A CHILCOTIN SAGA

Bruce Fraser

chilcotin.threeoceanpress.com

“ He saw the Creator’s amphitheatre: the wild white potato flowers appeared as snow on the hills surrounding the stage, a bare grass-covered area with two small lakes glistening side by side in the afternoon sun. In Noah’s mind, they were the eyes of the mountain — a connection to the spirits of their ancestors. ”

The Hanlon family has many problems facing them, but drawing strength from the land beneath them, they take on challenges from rodeo grudges to a small-town sheriff with a chip on his shoulder, from betrayals to loss, from cancer to a presidential candidate with a secret that crosses borders.

A CHILCOTIN SAGA explores the mysteries of the vast canvas of the rugged Chilcotin region of British Columbia through the lens of a family whose roots, lives and hopes are embedded in its soil.

ON POTATO MOUNTAIN

The unforgiving winter of the Chilcotin envelops young Noah Hanlon, on the run after being charged with murder. Moving across the endless terrain, he reconnects with his Indigenous heritage while hoping to find the real killer.

THE JADE FROG

Secrets start changing lives until a mysterious death causes deeper upheavals. Questions haunt the people of the Chilcotin, with the divinations of an artist-shaman and the studies of an English teacher the best chance to find truth.

NOAH’S RAVEN

A billionaire presidential hopeful’s route to the White House weaves a twisted path to the vast Chilcotin. History and the region will change forever if an Indigenous elder can’t overcome personal tragedy to fight for the land he loves.

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