

CARIBOO: A NOVEL

by

Ann Tiffany

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Abstract

This thesis consists of the first fourteen chapters of a novel about the Cariboo. The time line for the novel is during inter-war years and following World War Two. Martha Scott arrives in Vancouver in 1938 determined to find a better life for herself here than the one she had in Britain. There she felt stifled as a woman and disliked the perception of women as being fit only for a life of domesticity. Idealistic and opinionated with an independent spirit, she embraces her new life in Vancouver. After meeting a young Canadian lawyer on the boat coming over, romance flourishes and they marry. Martha is now dependent on her husband. She gives up her job and assumes a domestic role. They move to Wells in the Cariboo, where Martha more used to an urban lifestyle, must now accommodate herself to life in a remote rural gold town.

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Introduction

In *Speaking in the Past Tense*, Herb Wyile argues against the idea that Canadian history is irrelevant by stating that: “Canadian literature seems to be one forum in which there is undeniable evidence of a renewed interest in and revitalization of Canadian history” (2). In his study of English Canadian historical novels, Wyile started “to appreciate that English Canadian writers’ interest in, and knowledge, of history went well beyond their novels” (3). He illustrates how writers “have raised Canadians’ consciousness of the importance of the past” (3). He interviewed Canadian historical novelists such as Joseph Boyden and Jane Urquhart and Guy Vanderhaeghe, noting “These interviews explore the writers’ engagement with the history behind and around their novels, contributing to an understanding of the historical contexts and sources that inform their work” (5). In writing, authors can interweave fact and fiction, past and present, into a good story. In my thesis, I have written the first fourteen chapters of a literary novel that is set in the 1930s in Vancouver and Wells. My novel begins with the arrival of the protagonist Martha Scott in Vancouver. She has come from Yorkshire, England in the hopes of creating a new life for herself. Although she wants to be independent, she finds herself attracted to Andrew Campbell and, contrary to her earlier desire to not marry, she does. When he later announces they are moving to Wells, Martha must adapt. The fourteen chapters of this thesis conclude with Martha’s arrival in the Cariboo.¹ However, the rest of the novel illustrates the challenges she must face and her

¹ In adhering to the guidelines in the UNBC graduate and English graduate calendars (71), I have submitted this twenty-page analysis and only the first eighty-six pages of *Cariboo*.

growth and development into a strong, independent woman. Although I have drawn on some historical events to provide a context for this story and to make my character and setting plausible, I have deviated from actual events, as I later briefly discuss, to foreground the story. Nevertheless, I have been greatly influenced by reading literary fiction in the vein of Jane Urquhart and Margaret Atwood and by the techniques of some writers of historical fiction like Timothy Findley and Joseph Boyden. I will review some of the writers who have influenced me. I will also briefly discuss some of the other research in writing this novel, and the challenges and opportunities I discovered.

There are diverse forms of literary and historical fiction. The boundaries between literary and historical fiction are often blurred and can overlap. While I have been greatly influenced by historical fiction, I would argue that my novel is literary fiction primarily because I foreground story more than history. Nevertheless, I draw on history to provide a context for the story and to create a plausible character. In her article, *In Search of Alias Grace: On Writing Canadian Historical Fiction*, Margaret Atwood is speaking of character. She states: “each [character] also exists within a context, a fictional world comprised of geology, weather, economic forces, social classes, cultural references, and wars and plagues and such big public events” (1504).

By focusing on Martha Scott, a fictional pioneer woman’s story, I aim to show how women were very much involved in the development of British Columbia. Their stories are seldom told. For example, when Martha leaves her home in England because of economic forces during the depression, just as the threat of another war with Germany looms in 1938, she hopes to carve out a better life for herself in Canada. Economically, even though Canada suffered during the depression, she believes the promise of a job in Vancouver will provide

her with more opportunities than she had back in Yorkshire. When she and Andrew go north to the Cariboo because new goldfields in the northern part of British Columbia promise economic benefits, whereas the northern part of Britain is still suffering from economic woes, Martha realizes that she must make her own life. She learns how to chop her own firewood, shoot, ride a horse. She nurses Andrew when he is mauled by a bear and she volunteers at the hospital. In short, she becomes a multi-faceted woman with many skills. Moreover, she is independent yet also involved with the community. Although faced with many challenges, she learns to persevere.

As I learned from my research, the gold and fur trades were the engines that drove the BC economy in the eighteen and early nineteen hundreds. Though seldom written about, women did come to the north and some panned for gold, some were trappers and some simply followed the men. Life was tough in these areas. Roads were largely muddy tracks and communication difficult. The men in the goldfields were often rough and lawless, and order was sporadic. Women were in a minority and life must have been brutal at times for them. That they would go north at all spoke of fierce courage and determination.

In Martha's journey towards becoming a pioneer woman, and in developing her character, I drew on *Gumption and Grit*, edited by Sage Birchwater. This anthology tells many stories of women who lived and worked in the Cariboo Chilcotin area of British Columbia in the early nineteen hundreds. They are tales of hardships, and of isolation in the wilderness and of courage when faced with such things as childbirth in remote places where help could be miles away. I was also influenced by the words of A.B. Guthrie in his article "The Historical Novel." Guthrie tries to see from a woman's point of view when he states: "I began to wonder about the women, the largely unsung heroes of the great movement to the

west” (5). He is speaking of the Oregon Trail but his words could be used to include the women who came to the Cariboo in the late eighteen hundreds and the early nineteen hundreds. He continues, “A prairie schooner, jolting remorselessly over plain and mountain, wasn’t the ideal spot for nausea, nor a tent nor a sequestered cabin, if they were lucky enough to be in one, the ideal spot for childbirth” (5).

The women of the Cariboo/Chilcotin were tough, carried guns and were undaunted by roaming grizzlies, moose and deer. Some were born in Canada and some, like my protagonist, Martha Scott, came from urban centres in Britain and Europe. Martha must make many adjustments from her urban to a more rural lifestyle when she travels to Wells.

Martha is a young woman living in a class-conscious patriarchy in northeastern England. It was an unequal society. Women in Canada, on the other hand, had been given the vote in 1918, but the impact of this new freedom was not necessarily felt at first. Women were still expected to be the keepers of the home and the givers of life and these functions were paramount. They were supposed to sit at home and knit while the men did the important paid work. It was an existence dominated by men, and women’s lives were seldom honoured for what they did. The nineteen twenties and thirties changed all that. The first wave of feminism began in the late 1800s and lasted until the 1920s. In their book, *Gender in Canada*, Adie Nelson and Barrie W. Robinson state that: “Arguably the most prominent public achievements of this movement in Canada were the right to vote and the right (granted in 1929) to be considered persons, and not chattels, under Canadian law” (79). These were times of more freedom for women in the home and workplace. Women could drive cars and even smoke, though that was still frowned upon at the time.

With the advent of the first wave of feminism women were at the forefront of change. This was shown in the new fashions of the day. No longer corseted, women's figures could now be seen. Dresses were worn above the ankles. Hair was shorter, cut into bobs, waved and pinned in ways not seen before. It was a reflection of the change in women's lives and in their feelings about themselves. They began to challenge the patriarchy and more women moved into the workforce.

Women faced many challenges in their journey towards equality of the sexes, not the least of which was discrimination in the work force. Janice Newton's article "The Plight of the Working Girl" concerns the years between 1900-1925. Newton asserts that "the mounting concern about the impact of industrialization and urbanization often coalesced around images of women 'taking men's jobs' and abandoning their traditional place in the home" (158). She further states that, "Some 24 per cent of women in the paid labour had white collar jobs, more than half of which were in 'Low paying and racially segregated professions such as teaching and nursing' (158). It was also expected that, 'Most quit their jobs when they married'" and many employers refused to hire married women (158).

Martha enters this milieu when she comes to Canada, but these thoughts are not in her mind as she travels across the vast country. She is awed by the mountains and lakes and puzzled by the lack of towns and people. Here is another component of historical fiction, that of individual memory. I remember clearly that cross-country train journey when I first came to Canada in 1964. I too wondered where all the people were. Coming from a small and crowded country like England, I suffered what we now call culture shock, but that all changed when I arrived in Jasper at a very early morning hour. I remember vividly the heart stopping beauty of the mountains and the lakes of the Rockies. The crystal clarity of the air

as the sun rose above the mountains made me realize that this beautiful country was indeed my new home. Martha experiences similar feelings as she watches the countryside from the train windows. More used to the rolling hills and Yorkshire Dales, the mountains seem intimidating at first. However, it is when she glimpses her new home in Vancouver that she is made aware of the differences between her old life in England and her new life in Canada.

When Martha first sees the home of her new Canadian family, she finds that the house is large and tree shaded. As she looks at it, she remembers the working-class home she has left in Britain. Her family was hard working but poor. Their terraced house looked just like all the others in the street. The mill owners had built them to house the workers and their families. Conscious of the class distinctions so prevalent in Britain at the time, she hopes to have left class-consciousness behind. Canada is a new country with new ideas she is eager to accept. She sees this newness and senses the vitality surrounding her when she steps off the train in Vancouver.

She notices the station building, the crowds, and the ubiquitous pigeons strutting around. Driving to her new home, she notes the busy streets, and the half-built buildings waiting for the money to complete them. Businessmen with their suits and briefcases mingle with the homeless and destitute. Later as she journeys north to Wells, and throughout her life in the Cariboo, she must contend with the long, harsh winters and short growing seasons. Throughout my novel I have paid attention to telling details and conveyed the challenges that Martha faces in her day-to-day life as she navigates between the world she has left behind in England and the country that she now claims as home.

Writers have to acknowledge the differences of expression at the time of which they write and local dialects are important. This is especially true in a country like Britain where

the dialect seems to change every few miles. Martha comes from Yorkshire a county in the north east of Britain. Her accent is broad though her language is correct. It is not easy as a reader to translate some dialects into written language. Therefore I have chosen only to include it in the peripheral characters.

The biases against Native and other marginalized peoples, including women, have had an impact on our society. As Wyile points out, “The genre of historical fiction itself—as the experience of women writers has shown—poses difficulties to non-dominant groups because of the very exclusiveness of the historical record, which tends to be preoccupied with the activities of white, upper-class English males” (5). As previously mentioned, I have chosen a female protagonist to foreground women’s stories and the pivotal role women pioneers played in helping to shape Canada. In my writing, I have been influenced by women writers like Jane Urquhart and Margaret Atwood and the techniques they use to illustrate social, cultural, class and economic challenges that women have faced.

Urquhart’s novel, *Away*, describes in brutal detail the story of Irish immigrants coming to Canada to escape the potato famine of the 1840s. She describes the Grosse Isle quarantine station in Quebec where new immigrants were vetted for disease and kept under inhumane conditions. Thus she is voicing social as well as cultural concerns through historical fiction. I was influenced by the lyricism of her writing and the spiritualism she injects into her stories along with her knowledge of history.

Margaret Atwood writes: “Fiction is where individual memory and experience and collective memory and experience come together, in greater and lesser proportions” (1504). For example, Atwood writes about the real life story of Grace Marks and James McDermot, accused of the murder of their employer in *Alias Grace*. Even though the events were real,

Atwood weaves into her story fictional details of how life was lived in the middle of the eighteen hundreds. She describes the process of writing the book, taking her idea from the writings of Susannah Moodie, a young Englishwoman who immigrated to Ontario with her husband in the 1830s. Moodie visited Grace Marks in prison on many occasions and wrote her own version of Grace's story.

Though fidelity to the truth is important in fiction that draws on history, the writer may alter details for the sake of the story. Further, the writer may need to extrapolate from the facts to fill in the story. In writing *Alias Grace*, Atwood studied legal documents. She then imagined what might have happened during the gaps in these papers, visualizing how Grace might have felt, the work she did and what might have led her allegedly to kill her employers. In this way the novelist can separate myth from reality using the facts to create a mythical story. In reading Atwood's book, I found the interplay between fiction and history interesting because she modifies the facts in order to maintain the integrity of the story.

In her article Atwood argues that one of the most important elements of writing historical fiction is time. "There must be change in a novel, and changes can only take place over time" (1506). This point is also relevant to much literary fiction. In my novel, I cover thirty years of Martha's life. During that time my character changes in response to the circumstances she is forced to confront just as the characters in Urquhart's and Atwood's novels do. Martha changes from the shy young woman stepping off the train in Vancouver in 1938 into a more assertive and independent woman.

She lives during times of great change during the inter-war years and after World War Two. Forces such as the Great Depression, World Wars, all meant adjustments to the new realities. These transformations inform the background to my novel. My aim is show how

changes were accomplished socially, culturally and economically in Martha's life when she and her husband travel to Wells. The British Columbia of this time was still largely uncharted and under populated. The towns were few and far between. Roads in the hinterland were still unpaved and full of potholes. The Canadian Pacific railway united Canada from east to west but from north to south there was little development.

Wells was a small but booming gold town in the Cariboo and the scene of the dramatic events that later force Martha to face her new circumstances in the latter half of my novel. Culturally the town was a close-knit community but with edges of violence inherent in the gold mining frontier community. Coming from a working class industrial town in Britain to the middle class comfort of Vancouver and then to the small town of Wells, Martha's life changes dramatically. In the course of my novel I have tried to recreate the Wells of 1939, the dress styles, language used and geographic details of the town.

Diana Lynn Drinkwater has lived in Wells for many years and has written a book *Our Town, Our Times, Our History* about the origins of the town. She explains that the town of Wells was a planned town. Built in 1932 by Fred Wells, owner of the Cariboo Gold Quartz Mine, streets were well laid out and there were water and drainage systems. Electricity was generated and supplied by the Cariboo Gold Quartz Mine. The houses were wooden with, for the most part, open-beamed ceilings. They faced each other across the street as is standard. There was a Royal Bank and an Overwaitea superstore. There was also a community hall where many cultural events took place. The town was, and still is, nestled in the surrounding mountains and Williams Creek runs nearby. Summers were short and the winters were long and cold. The townspeople were tough and hard working, but had a strong sense of

community. Socially and economically, Wells was a successful town during the Depression years as gold was a valuable commodity.

My novel concerns the social and community life Martha experiences. I illustrate how the people of the community interact with their families and fellow citizens. I allude to some of the concerns and community events that shaped their lives. For instance, even though the Wells community was isolated, Martha and her fellow citizens had concerns. For instance, there were problems with drinking, violence and other health issues, some arising from the dangers of mining and others from disease and from other encounters with the natural environment. For example, Martha's husband, Andrew, is mauled by a bear at a later point in my novel, an event that is not included in this thesis. In depicting the social context, I was informed by Wylie who asserts that there has been a swing in Canadian historical writing to move beyond the military and political into the sphere of social history (9). This kind of historical fiction was popular in the 1800s but has been supplanted in the Twentieth and Twenty-First centuries by stories involving people and their issues with family, and community. He states, "political history has been out, social and personal history have been in" (9). This gives rise to further arguments that this shift may not always be good. Traditional narrative, some critics fear, may lose its unifying force. Others argue that the old ways suppressed those who have been marginalized, for example the diverse voices of Aboriginal and of women.

Dennis Duffy in his novel *Sounding the Iceberg* states, "The appearance of Anne Hebert's *Kamouraska* in 1970, began a rebirth of the historical novel in Canada; the genre was beginning to attract our finest literary imaginations" (54). Wylie seems to agree when contending that "The roster of Canadian writers who write about history is, of course, a long

one” (4). For example, Timothy Findley and Joseph Boyden have written about the First World War. Findley’s *The Wars* and Boyden’s *Three Day Road* offer a poignancy that is hard to resist. They involve real life characters and interweave facts and spirituality in the story to create well-rounded and sympathetic characters.

In Lawrence Hill’s *The Book of Negroes*, Hill develops a sympathetic female protagonist named Aminata. Hill writes about a woman’s persona convincingly. By putting himself into a female voice he changes the dynamics of the story. He is a man but he understands how it feels to be a woman. There is a part in the book when Aminata is on board the slave ship. Lying beside her is the medicine man singing an English song, *Rule Britannia*. “Let him sing, I thought, hoping to spend one more night out of reach of his thick, hairy fingers. Let him sing” (238). Hill manages to reach into the heart of the young girl and depict her dread and helplessness. Similarly, I have tried to understand how the men Martha interacts with must have felt and the challenges they faced.

In my novel, I have also had occasion to fictionalize some aspects of history in order to foreground Martha’s story. For instance, I changed the names of the proprietors of the various inns where Martha stayed. I altered the décor to suit the personality of the owners. The general store in Wells has Ed McGarrity as the owner at the time of the story. Other characters, the nurses, doctors, and postmistress, are all my own characterizations.

Atwood argues that “It’s out of such individual particulars that fiction is constructed” (1505). I studied the history of the town of Wells where much of my story takes place. There is documented proof of the beginnings of the gold boom. However, events happening in the past must have an imaginative component. We were not there to witness it so must rely on

written or oral recounting of events. We can only use conjecture in our narratives.

Imagination takes over where other proofs are absent.

Nevertheless, novelists must do extensive research and aim to be as historically accurate as possible. In researching my novel I consulted archives, maps, books, records, memoirs and I also travelled to the places that my protagonist went. Trips to Barkerville and Wells were necessary for me to be able to envisage the streets where Martha may have walked. I walked along the site of the Old Cariboo Wagon Trail leading to the cemetery in Barkerville. The trail was built in response to the influx of gold miners into the region. In order to make their journey safer, the then governor James Douglas had the road built by army engineers. Parts of the road are still in use though much improved by now.

Cemeteries are wonderful sources of information. The cemetery in Barkerville was no exception. There were not a lot of women's graves in the graveyard. Barkerville in the 1860s was filled with men intent on panning for gold. Nevertheless, reading gravestones is informative. They are like books written in stone. There were many young boys who had fallen down mineshafts and suffered broken backs and necks. Someone cared for them though as they were laid to rest in consecrated ground. The men came from many places, Wales and England and the Scandinavian countries, where mining was carried out. According to the legends carved in the headstones, many were young and some died in accidents and some of disease; few died of old age.

Today, St. Saviours Church still stands in Barkerville and services are held year round for residents and tourists. In the winter months it is almost a ghost town. There is a newspaper office, bakery and general store, doctor's office and dentist. Back in Martha's day, however, Barkerville though not as well populated as it was in the 1860s, was a bustling

community and I had to take care to research the maps of the town and the archives to imagine the town as she would have seen it.

Wells as Martha knew it was far different from the Wells that exists today, although there are some traces still left behind. For instance, although the Jack of Clubs Hotel burned down a few years ago, the Wells Hotel still stands and the saloon bar does a good trade. A few houses remain: the school, community hall and the churches. There are still several hundred people who live and work in Wells, but tourism, not mining, is the source of most income.

In Wells, I wandered around the town getting a feel for it. I noted the street names and the various buildings that still stand. As I wrote my book, the town came alive in my head. I could see Martha walking over to the general store where a couple of old miners sat on a bench by the door. They always stood when they saw her coming, raised their hats and with Old World gentility, opened the door for her. I pictured the house where she lived and the cinema where she watched Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers movies. She would have seen the hospital perched on a hill overlooking the town. As a hospital volunteer she would have met the doctors and nurses, been familiar with the X-ray equipment and seen the operating room where, later in the novel, she helps the surgeon when he is operating on her husband who had been mauled by a bear. Martha would have assisted in the delivery room and nurseries. Since her husband was a lawyer, she would also have been familiar with the lawyers and the assayist office. She would have frequented the school that served Wells and Barkerville children, the post office and the telegraph office.

In writing this novel, I spent a lot of time in various libraries: UNBC, CNC, and in the Prince George Public Library. George Bowering, a local historical writer, has been another

great source of local and BC history. I searched the archives and listened to the voices of the pioneers of this area. I had the privilege of speaking to people who have lived in this region for many years and hearing their stories. I am amazed at what I have learned in order to make my book authentic. For example, I had to familiarize myself with the leisure activities the Wells townspeople would have enjoyed. Was there a library? How well did the radios and telephones work within the surrounding mountains. What movies would have been playing in the 1930s? Did women wear trousers? What kind of policing was there? I wondered about the liquor laws in place that did not allow women into the bars without a male escort. In his article entitled *Managing the Marginal: Regulating and Negotiating Decency in Vancouver's Beer Parlours 1925-1954*, Robert Campbell states, "Operators created a separate area for men only and another for women and couples, or 'ladies and escorts.' The goal was to separate unattached men from unattached women" (306). Throughout, I found the whole process absorbing and scoured newspapers and magazines in an effort to make my book as authentic as possible.

Through following the development of the characters and reading about the times in which they lived, readers can imagine what life might have been like and the challenges that the characters face. In the following fourteen chapters of my novel, I hope that my readers will gain a sense of the life and times in which my fictional character Martha lived.

Cariboo

Chapter One: 1968

The first twenty miles was hard paved road; then the gravel stretched for about a mile before the turn off for the ranch. The truck radio was blaring on a pop music station and Martha sang along in time to a Beatles song as she drove. “She loves me yeah yeah yeah she loves me yeah yeah yeah,” she caroled, happy that no one was around to hear her. Shopping in Williams Lake had been hot and frustrating and she was glad to be back on the road again going home. She planned on making herself a cup of tea and then putting her feet up in the rocking chair on the porch. Then, finally, she’d read the latest letter from her sister Aggie.

The road wound around a corner and she slammed on the brakes as an old tractor came out of a hayfield wobbling along the road ahead of her. Turning to see who was behind him the grizzled driver waved a sun-browned arm in her direction, his face split into a toothy grin. It was Butch Johnson her ranching neighbour. He wore his usual broad brimmed hat slightly askew, old blue shirt and his ripped and worn jeans. He pulled over to the side of the road so that she could go around him.

Grinding the truck’s gears she pulled out to pass him, over correcting and hitting the side of the road where loose gravel lay. Clouds of dust flew in her wake. She checked her rear view mirror; the old man was still waving.

Through the open window she felt the coolness in the air as pine and aspen trees reared up all around for the first few miles before giving way to heat blasting rock. The slightest movement caused clouds of dust to rise off the ground into the hot still air. Then that

too was past and she was back into the green shade of a stand of spruce. Taking her eyes off the road for a brief moment, she watched through the trees as the huge sprinklers, working tirelessly, watered the ground. Fresh green crops sprang out of the earth, small miracles in the dusty land.

She slowed as she hit the gravel but still the dirt rose in clouds and she quickly rolled up the truck window. Being jounced around on the graveled road up to the turnoff for the ranch forced her to slow to a crawl. At least the ground was dry now, she thought wryly, unlike in spring when the snow and ice thawed and the road became a quagmire. She lowered the window a tad so that she could smell the rich aroma of freshly watered grass mixed with the other smell, that of animal manure, as she called it, Bill on the other hand called it s.h.i.t. grinning at her as he spelled it out.

She paused as usual at the turnoff that led to the home ranch. Two long poles straddled the dirt road, a cross pole bore the legend 'Hope Springs Ranch' in crudely cut letters with the M and the B superimposed on one another underneath the words. She and Bill had first thought of calling it Hope Springs Eternal but then decided the shorter title was just as good. The sign never failed to make her feel a surge of happiness. The dust swirled and eddied around the truck as though it had been waiting to welcome her.

Further along the road she stopped. A group of cattle was being herded along to higher ground where the grass was still green. The hill shimmered in the sun as she sat idly watching as a large young man on a big roan quarterhorse yelled "hey up" to get them moving. Two border collies, tails wagging, ran around nipping at the hooves of the reluctant steers. The man scarcely looked around as she put the car into gear and rattled her way along the track. He sat easily in the saddle, his wide brimmed hat was sweat stained and there were

dark patches on his blue checked shirt. She wasn't aware that she had stopped the truck again until the man turned to look at her. He was young and very blonde; a smile crinkled his face. He waved and she waved back feeling a strong rush of affection for him. It was Adam, her first born son; she brushed tears away from her eyes before going on.

The house was visible from half a mile away settled as it was on top of a small knoll. It was a sturdy log house with wide windows. Boxes, bright with purple, red and blue petunias stark against the rustic wood, stood at each window. The roof was shingled with cedar and at each end, sat a squat chimney. A porch ran across the length of the house with chairs scattered around a small wooden table. Martha loved the old house. She parked the truck in the shade and, with both arms full of groceries, limping slightly, walked over to the house. The limp was a constant reminder of the dreadful winter she had spent in the bush outside Wells. She had lost a couple of toes to frostbite during that time and still shuddered every time she looked at her deformed feet.

Over in the corral, a dozen or so horses, mostly mares and foals, cropped the dry grass, snorting and swishing their tails at the pesky mosquitoes and no-see-ums. Tall aspens offered shade and the horses had collected like ladies at a sewing bee, nickering and nuzzling one another.

She paused at the door and looked back towards the distant range of low hills that broke the monotony of the landscape. Scrubby pine and sagebrush clung to the barren slopes. Beneath the outcrop, huge rotating sprinklers sprayed the parched earth endlessly. It was easy to see the line of demarcation of fresh green where the water fell. Far away, a cloud of dust stirred as Adam herded the cattle. She stood a moment longer drawing strength from the land around her.

Mary was in the kitchen preparing lunch. She grinned as Martha came in and moved towards her to help with the shopping bags. Mary was a Nazko native woman who had arrived years ago after the war when Bill and Martha were building the small log cabin that was to be their first home. She had simply walked through the bush to where they worked and, without being asked, had set about helping them haul the logs and guiding Bob and Sam, the two shire horses, as they dragged the logs into place. She became a fixture in the house and when, a few weeks later, Joseph Moses had appeared out of nowhere looking for work, his eye settled on Mary and they built their own small cabin close by. Martha still chuckled when she thought of the two of them, Mary and Joseph Moses, biblically leading she and Bill out of the wilderness into the green and pleasant land that they now knew. Without their help that first summer in 1946, Martha doubted that she and Bill would have managed to complete the house, but they did.

The first few years of ranching had been tough and if it hadn't been for Joseph's hunting skills they would not have survived. He and Bill hunted and fished while Mary showed Martha how to search for the greens and herbs that could be dried and used in the long winter months to sustain them. They gathered Fireweed in the spring when the young stems and shoots first appeared. There were Plantain leaves, a bit tough but good for eating raw, stinging nettles whose leaves could be dried and made into tea used for digestive ailments. Later when the berries were ripe they picked the Saskatoons and blueberries preserving them to eat in the winter. Together the families grew side by side, the children playing and bussing to school in Williams Lake together. It had been good.

Now, cup of tea in one hand and Aggie's letter in the other, Martha made her way onto the porch. Settling on the Bentwood rocker and pushing aside a couple of colourful

cushions, she set the cup down on the table, then opened the letter. She read it slowly taking in the minutiae that made up her sister's life in Bradchester, an industrial town in south Yorkshire where Martha was born and raised. All the daily doings of a busy life filled with children and grandchildren, of paying bills and making meals.

Martha's mother had died of consumption when Martha was three. She only vaguely remembered her and had very few memories of a time without dad's sister, Aunt Kate, running the home. Aunt Kate had taken over the care of the four children after their mother died. Her fiancé had been killed in the trenches during the First World War leaving her an embittered, irascible woman who ruled with a stern hand. Martha realized early on that Aunt Kate was someone to be avoided at all times if possible. Her aunt seldom spoke in sentences, unless she was good and mad; her main conversation involved a series of sayings that she found to suit all occasions. Her favourite one was 'the devil makes work for idle hands.' It seemed to Martha, since this particular saying always seemed to be aimed at her, that she must be a very bad little girl. Aggie, Martha's sister, had been her rock and had often stepped in to Martha's defense when Aunt Kate was on a rant. Even though Martha had come to Canada thirty years ago, she still thought of England as home as most immigrants seemed to do, and as with most memories, they seemed to grow softer and kinder with the passage of time.

Her still blonde head resting on the back of the chair, startling blue eyes crinkled with the memories stirred up by her sister's letter Martha let her mind drift away to that day 30 years ago when she had arrived in Vancouver, Canada. She thought about the strangeness of life and of how some things are just meant to be while others are consigned to the garbage pail. She had met Bill that day and let him go because she had already fallen in love with

Andrew. When she thought of Andrew and how things had ended, she remembered it as the fallacy of first love, and how she believed it would last forever, but it didn't.

From her older perspective, Martha could see the potholes in the road that she had not seen back then, the first signs of tension of things not quite right, and the gaps in her experience that led her to make bad choices. It had all worked out as things do, but in ways that she would not have believed possible at the time. For Martha, life was a journey; and journeys were what happened on the way from beginnings to ends, full of rocky paths, wrong turns and bad decisions that, surprisingly, iron themselves out in the end.

Martha's blonde curls were slowly turning silver and tiny wrinkles had developed at the corner of her eyes. She squinted as she looked over to the hills that surrounded her home. Clouds pockmarked the sky and the water sprinkler arced lazily over the meadow. She nodded dreamily to herself. If she'd had the ability to tell her young alter ego all that she would face in her life, would she? Wasn't life something that had to be lived in the context of each person's feelings, faced or not, and attacked or accepted according to her own ideals?

Martha reviewed her life as if had happened to someone else. When had the dream begun? Was it with this first step into a new country or had it started the night Dad had told her about his longing to own the roof over his head and a bit of land that he could call his own. Was it when he whispered to her in the darkness, "Don't be like me Martha, if you have a dream, make it come true and don't let anyone stand in your way. You have strength Martha, don't let life beat you down." She had felt his tears on her cheek as he said, so softly that she could barely hear him, "Don't ever let anyone tell you that you are not as good as they are, not ever."

She hadn't known how to speak to him then, hadn't understood the sadness of his life or his longing to have his own home, his own land, not someone else's. She knew now that his dream had become her dream and that she had finally validated that dream for him.

Chapter Two: Arrival (1938)

She saw herself clearly now, standing by the window of the train, poised on the tip of the grand adventure ready to dive in. It was spring 1938 and the train had brought her and her friend Lucy four thousand miles across Canada to Vancouver to a new life. They were both nineteen, bright and happy. Who knew what would await them when they stepped off the train? Lucy was bobbing up and down on her toes taking in all the sights outside the window holding Martha's arm in a painful grip. "This is so exciting isn't it?" and Martha smiled, nodding her head, unable to speak for a moment.

According to the booklet she had read on the journey over, the Canadian Pacific Railway had united Canada from east to west. Towns like Vancouver had sprung up across the Eastern Provinces and the Prairies wherever the rails were laid. The last rail had been laid in 1885 and Vancouver had grown since then.

As the miles had rolled by day after day Martha realized what a massive endeavor the building of the railway had been, but she had no more time to think about it right now. Her journey was ending here on this platform. As soon as she put her foot down on it, her new life would begin. The station came into view, the platform already crowded with people as the train slowed to a stop. She felt a sense of unreality as the clouds of steam blew onto the platform making vague shadowy places where the waiting people appeared ghostlike and eerie, rising to the ceiling towering above her. She watched as pigeons, full chested, their feathers iridescent in the sunlight strutted and pecked in search of food. Through the window she could see bright sunshine outside the building and a few puffy clouds busily scudding

across the sky. A single ray of sunlight caught and held her for a moment forming a halo around her blonde curls, making her blue eyes squint in the light.

Vancouver was larger than she imagined. As the train had carried them through the suburbs to the town centre, she glimpsed the ocean and wooden houses and stores scattered along the way. More used to the sight of red brick buildings in England, she found these houses friendly and warm. There were rusty old engines parked on disused tracks, signal boxes and men tapping the tracks with large hammers for signs of cracks. Overhead crows swooped and chattered over the din of the train. Rotting wooden ties lay in stranded heaps and bits of paper and other rubbish swirled around in the wind of the trains passing.

Lucy turned to her, a big grin on her face. Her soft brown eyes crinkled with excitement framed by her dark hair in a fashionable bob. They hugged briefly, excited and a bit fearful of what they would find when they stepped out onto the platform.

“We made it Martha, we’re here,” Lucy said squeezing Martha’s hand. “Did you ever think we would be here in Vancouver?”

Martha turning from the window could see her own excitement reflected in Lucy’s eyes. She stood speechless thinking back to the time when Lucy had first spoken of coming to Canada.

It had all started with the letter Lucy had found on the mat behind the front door of the house when she ran downstairs that morning. The seven o’clock siren was sounding for the start of another workday as she raced down the street to meet Martha.

Friends since their first day working at the Bradchester Steel Mill, they had got through that awful time of being the new girls who were expected to do all the menial work

that no one else wanted to do. Fresh out of school, they had been lucky to get a job at all, given the economic instability of the Great depression in Britain.

They joined the crowds of workers, mostly men, trudging to the mill to start the day's work. They read the letter as they walked along ignoring the strident wail of the siren; they would be late for work again. Mr Parker, the office manager, would tut tut at them waving a warning finger, but this letter, from Uncle James in Vancouver, was far more important than Mr Parker's anger.

Later, sitting on the grass outside the office eating their lunch from paper bags, Lucy read the letter out loud again to Martha. First off, Uncle James mentioned the looming threat of another war with Germany then went on to say that he felt Lucy would be better off in Canada with him and Aunt Lorna before things got too bad in Britain. She could bring a friend with her of course and he could give them both jobs in his office. In other words, he would sponsor them. They watched as sooty flakes of black snow floated down on them from the mill chimney. It had seemed like an easy decision to make. No more smoke and soot. Clean air and bright sunshine, or so they envisioned Vancouver to be. It had seemed like an impossible dream, away from the dark satanic mills of Bradchester for a fresh New World across the ocean. Now here they were, standing by the carriage door waiting for the train to come to a stop.

Martha had a brief moment of uncertainty before stepping onto the platform. What if she didn't like it here? What if she had made the biggest mistake of her life coming to Canada? She watched her foot ready to step down, the trim ankle, the bright new court shoes that had cost a week's wages. She felt as though the foot and the shoe belonged to someone

else, someone who really belonged here while she should be back home in Bradchester. Lucy gave her a gentle shove and she found herself on the platform.

The noise grew as the engine let out a final burst of steam that echoed around the station. Snatches of conversation drifted across to her as voices called to one another searching for friends. The accent was strange, like in the American movies she and Lucy had seen at the Bradchester Rialto theatre. She gasped as a check shirted man raced by almost knocking her off her feet. With an apology and a tip of his hat, he steadied her briefly then was off again racing for the station exit.

She felt herself caught up in the excitement of the noise and bustle; the energy was palpable. The air itself was smoky, but a cool breeze blew through the station and wisps of smoke swirled around in the general hubbub and then were gone. She glanced at the small stalls selling newspapers and magazines, the telephone booth and ticket office and a bored looking policeman patrolling the platform. She watched as he strolled outside.

Martha looked down at the battered old brown suitcase tied around the middle with one of dad's old belts. Disreputable as it was with its scratched and dented side and broken locks, it was her last link with home. She and Aggie had packed it together. Thinking of her sister, Martha felt a twinge of affection and a sudden loneliness and longing for home. There was no time for such thoughts. She bent down to grab old faithful by its sagging handle, praying that it wouldn't give way and spill everything around on the platform. With her other hand she picked up the shiny new blue vanity case the girls at the mill had bought her as a parting gift. All she had in the world was in these two cases. Looking back was not an option. Straightening her shoulders under their weight, she marched down the platform with Lucy following. Their roots lay 6,000 miles away across an ocean in England, but a new life

waited for them beyond the station doors. Martha could hear Lucy cursing softly to herself as she struggled with her cases which banged against her legs.

“Exciting eh?” Lucy grinned at her friend as they walked. “Lots of lovely men too.” Lucy was irrepressible. The trip over had been ‘fan-bloody-tastic’ as Lucy had said. The ship was loaded with men, good food, dancing and endless fun. Lucy had a new beau every night. Martha thought of her own shipboard romance with Andrew, a young Vancouver lawyer travelling back to Canada after a trip to Britain. He had stayed behind in Toronto to finish off some business and would be in Vancouver in a week or so. Martha was glad of that, wanting time to think before she got too serious about him.

“Uncle James said he’d be here,” Lucy paused standing on tiptoe trying to see over the heads of the other passengers. She gave a slight grimace, “he should be here soon. Hey Martha, you’re taller than me can you see him?”

“Well, I’ll try, but I don’t know him all that well so I might not recognize him even if I see him.” She looked over towards the station exit to see if she could catch a glimpse of him.

A small Chinese man had been watching the girls since they got off the train. Now he ran over to them. Jabbering in Chinese he started pulling Martha’s suitcase from her hands. He grinned toothily, small white teeth in a yellow face. Martha took one look at him and shrieked in surprise as she tried to pull the suitcase away from him. She had never seen a Chinese man before and couldn’t understand what he was saying. It was a faintly ridiculous pulling match. Martha was much taller, but he was surprisingly strong and determined. She wasn’t going to let him steal her suitcase so she tightened her grip on the old handle while he, equally intent on helping her, gripped even harder and continued to tug at the suitcase.

Suddenly the handle gave way and both contestants went spinning backwards into the surrounding crowd. Martha gave a high pitched scream of surprise. The little man regained his balance first and stared at the broken handle in his hand a look of horror on his face.

“Now look what you’ve done.” Martha’s voice with its strong Yorkshire accent rang out clearly above the bedlam of the station.

The effect was immediate. She was quickly surrounded by a group of young men drawn by her cry. They wore denims and checked shirts and looked big and tough. One of them, large and young, his red flannel shirt tucked into stout mackinaw pants, grabbed the little man by the collar demanding what he thought he was doing. The smaller man dangled helplessly from the big man’s hands, his feet inches from the ground. The young man shook him like a dog would shake a rabbit and the slanted brown eyes closed as he cringed waiting for the blow to fall. Horrified Martha watched as the large young man prepared to swing a mighty fist into the other man’s face.

Dropping the blue vanity case with a thump she sprang forward as the huge fist shot out ready to swing.

“No, please don’t hurt him,” she cried putting herself between the two men. Unable to halt the momentum of his swing, the fist hit Martha a glancing blow on the shoulder. She felt as though she had been pole axed. Staggering backwards she would have fallen except for the crush of bodies behind her drawn there by the ruckus. Hands reached down to help her back onto her feet. The young man’s face contorted with a look of shock. He dropped the smaller man who, seeing a chance to disappear, took off into the crowd. The young man reached out to help steady Martha.

Gingerly she rubbed her shoulder and flexed her arm feeling her muscles protest. She looked up at the young man. He was very tall, his straw-coloured hair stuck out from under a broad brimmed hat, and his blue eyes smiled apologetically at her. He was built like a rock and looked so uncomfortable that she found herself smiling at him in spite of her pain.

“It wasn’t your fault,” she held out her hand to touch his arm. “I just didn’t want you to hurt the man. I think he was trying to help me with my luggage. He took me by surprise.”

The big man held out a large calloused hand.

“I’m real sorry ma-am that I hurt you. I thought you were in trouble.” Martha felt her hand enveloped in a surprisingly gentle pressure.

“Bill McLeod at your service ma-am.”

The crowd sensing that the problem was now settled broke up and Martha and Lucy found themselves more or less alone with the tall, blonde stranger. Martha, who had never been called ma-am before, blushed.

“I’m Martha Scott,” she explained, “and this is my friend Lucy Pearson. We’re just over from England and were supposed to be met.” She waved a hand taking in the crowded station. It was much later when Bill confessed to Martha how he had been smitten with her from that first moment. He had admired her courage, coming all the way to Canada from England. Meanwhile they stood staring at one another for a brief moment before a shriek from Lucy made them look around.

Martha turned to see her friend waving in frantic circles towards the end of the platform. She had dropped her suitcase and was standing on tiptoes laughing and crying in turns. Martha looked in the direction her friend was pointing and she saw the plump little figure of Uncle James and, peering over his shoulder, Aunt Lorna. Uncle James, in spite of

his size, moved quickly over to where the two girls stood with Bill. He hugged Lucy and then held her at arm's length while he studied her.

“My, Lucy, how you’ve grown, you look just like your mum and that’s a compliment.” He beamed at them. His blue eyes hidden in wreaths of fat were warm and friendly. “I was worried,” he continued in his Yorkshire twang, undiluted by his years in Canada. “Someone said that one of the Chinese porters had attacked a young woman, I hoped it wasn’t you.”

Lucy laughed, “We weren’t really attacked uncle. It was all a misunderstanding.” Her uncle nodded, then his gaze switched to Martha still standing beside Bill McLeod. He released his niece to the custody of his wife. “Why, this must be Martha,” and the hugs and kisses started again. “And this,” he said eyeing Bill up and down, “must be your rescuer.”

He thrust his hand at and Bill who shook it. “James Pearson, Import and Export, at your service sir,” he said, handing Bill a business card that had appeared magically from his waistcoat pocket. Bill stared at it then at the untidy pile of luggage at his feet. He put the card away in his pocket then bent down to pick up Martha’s old brown suitcase, ruined beyond redemption. He tucked it under his arm. With a shrug he picked up the rest of the cases and made his way to the station exit.

They passed through the entrance hall and Martha was struck by the décor, it seemed so bright and airy. Tall pillars surrounded the open space and the windows looked out onto the busy West Cordova Street. It was much cleaner and more elegant than the dirty old station back home in Bradchester. There were several small stores opening onto the main concourse selling giftware and magazines. She wanted to stop and look around more but Bill,

the luggage hanging from both arms, marched straight to the exit doors and they all followed him out into the sunshine.

Uncle James' shiny new Studebaker stood by the curb edge parked in a spot by itself as if to point out its importance in the face of the smaller Fords. Martha and Lucy who had seldom been driven in a motor car stopped awestruck before it. Proudly James unlocked the rear door and handed Lucy into the interior before helping his portly wife into the front seat. Only after she was settled did he turn to Martha. She paused, one foot on the doorframe, and smiled back at Bill McLeod who stood on the sidewalk. Surrounded by suitcases, he still clutched Martha's old brown one under his arm. She held out her hand to him.

"Thank you for helping us out," she said smiling. "I don't know what we'd have done without you." Bill, trance-like, dropped the case and took her hand holding onto it for a moment looking deeply into her smiling blue eyes. Gently disentangling her hand, Martha stepped into the car trying to look as though she did this everyday of her life. She sighed as she settled back into the soft cushions her heart beating a little faster and her hand tingling from Bill's touch. While she waited for the men to pack the suitcases in the trunk, she took a quick glance back at the station building. It was impressive, built of red brick with tall columns like the ones in the main hall. Cars and buses, trucks and cyclists made a constant stream of activity around it.

There wasn't time to take in much more as Bill and James had packed the luggage into the trunk and they were ready to go. She watched as they shook hands. She heard James thank Bill for looking after the ladies so well. "I am in your debt sir," he told Bill. "If I can offer any kind of service in exchange you have only to ask." Then with a quick gesture of farewell he squeezed himself into the driver's seat. As the car moved off Martha turned in

her seat to look back at Bill McLeod still standing at the curbside. She waved and blew a little kiss his way wishing she'd had time to get to know him better. He really was very handsome.

Chapter Three: Vancouver

Busy streets flashed by the car windows as Martha sat taking in the sights and sounds of the city through the open window. A fresh spring breeze off the sea stirred her hair around her face. She glanced over at Lucy who turned at the same moment and grinned at her.

There were signs of the Great Depression everywhere in skeletal buildings, unfinished and stark, studding the skyline. She noticed that some of the store fronts were boarded up and the doorways full of garbage blown there by the wind. There were flower shops with bunches and containers of bright flowers but not many people buying. Granville Street was busy with men wearing striped suits just as in Bradchester, briefcases held tightly and an air of officiousness about their walk. There were also several obviously homeless men wandering about, some sitting on the sidewalks holding out their hands for small change. Buses and trolleys sped along the streets stopping briefly to let people on or off and everyone seemingly carrying an umbrella. Vancouver, like England, sported a high rate of downpours but not today.

Unlike the narrow, mean streets of Bradchester where she and Lucy had grown up, the streets here were wide and tree lined and what traffic there was flowed smoothly. Uncle James was taking them the long way home he said, so that they could see more of the city. He proudly pointed out the enormous Hudson's Bay store that took up a whole city block. She and Lucy oohed and aahed in all the right places and James smiled happily as he listened to the girls' chatter.

Martha sat back in her seat and allowed her mind to drift back to Andrew. How did she really feel about him? He was handsome, sophisticated and good fun and just thinking of him now brought colour to her cheeks. She had never really been in love before and wasn't sure about how she should feel. There had been lots of boys in her life of course but none of them had set her heart beating the way that Andrew's did. She remembered Ollie Cartwright and that night on Summerton Hill overlooking Bradchester when he told her he loved her. He looked so hurt when she had told him she didn't feel that way about him. He was content to stay in Bradchester working at the mill, but she wanted something different. Now here she was in a new city, new country, new life and maybe in love for the first time.

Once again, she allowed her mind to flow back to thoughts of Andrew.

She almost laughed out loud at the memory of him standing in his stateroom in his underwear combing his hair at the dresser mirror. She had mistaken his cabin for hers. Hung over from the party the night before she lost herself in the maze of corridors and cabins. She found all the doors looked the same.

She'd gone in search of Lucy whose bunk was empty. She vaguely hoped that her friend hadn't fallen overboard in the night.

On the promenade deck a fierce gale was blowing, but there was no sign of Lucy. The sea heaved all around her and the horizon disappeared each time the ship dipped into the huge waves. White caps danced along the wave tops as the wind sent up a spray of spume high into the air with each gust. She was thankful that the storm had carried away the fog that loitered after leaving the coast of Ireland. The sea was an angry grayish green colour not at all like the calm blue waters of the travel posters she had seen. She went back inside feeling

the rush of warm air after the cold. It was when she continued her search for Lucy that she had met Andrew.

He thought at first that she was a maid, or at least that was what he had told her. He wasn't at all embarrassed at being seen in his skivvies. She was blushing like a schoolgirl. Apologizing, she turned to go back out again, but he stopped her at the door. He held out his hand drawing her further into the room. He was tall with dark hair smoothed back over his head. His brown eyes glinted with hidden laughter as he saw her embarrassment.

"Hold on a minute, are you the stewardess because if you are, then things are definitely looking up around here." He closed the door behind her. "I'm Andrew Campbell and I'm very pleased to meet you." She shook his hand.

"Martha Scott," she began. "I'm sorry, I was looking for my friend and got lost."

He grinned at her and started to dress, slipping on his pants and shirt. She had time to notice his tanned muscular build. He talked all the time with such ease that Martha wandered how often he dressed while talking to strange women in his bedroom. He ordered tea and aspirins for her and after a while she began to feel better. Feeling awkward, she stood up to leave, he was at her side immediately.

"I'm sorry but I really do have to go, that is if I can ever find my cabin again," she finished lamely.

"No problem there," he said tucking his arm beneath her elbow and walking to the door. They located a steward carrying an official looking clipboard, who in no time had directed them to Martha's cabin. She had time to notice that Lucy still had not come in before flopping onto her bed. She was aware of Andrew drawing a quilt over her and didn't even hear the door close behind him.

On the last night at sea there was a grand ball and Andrew sent a corsage to her cabin. It was a pink rosebud and Martha wondered where such a thing could be obtained in the middle of the ocean. They dressed quickly, Martha in blue chiffon and Lucy in a red satin dress that set off her dark hair.

“I’m glad you came with me Martha,” she said. “This has been great hasn’t it?” Martha nodded and with a quick little hug they went out chattering all the way to the ballroom.

They danced the night away and the next morning, standing on deck, they stood on deck as the ship glided slowly to her berth alongside Pier 21 in Halifax. It was a bustling place full of noise and looming buildings. The other passengers lined the decks, tense and expectant at the new land before them. Martha had read that immigrants from all over the world landed here. In the early days they came over in old wooden disease infested ships then shivered in overcrowded quarantine sheds at Grosse Isle in Quebec waiting to be cleared of infection. In comparison, her journey had been very different.

She shuddered and Andrew tightened his arm around her.

“Someone walk over your grave?” He asked lightly.

She shook her head. “No, not really. I was thinking about all the other people who have come here in the past.” She sighed before going on. “They didn’t have as good as time as we did. They were terribly poor and sick. It must have been awful.”

Lucy chose that moment to grab her arm. “Hey Martha, Pier 21.” She pointed towards the building, “I guess that’s where we pick up our luggage and catch the train.”

Chains and ropes were thrown from ship to shore. The waiting men grabbed them and slung them around the bollards securing the ship to the land. Men shouted orders as the ship bobbed gently against the quayside. Within minutes it seemed, the gangway clattered down, and the loudspeaker crackled to life. There was a hissing sound then a disembodied voice echoed around them welcoming them to Canada. They were advised to get ready to disembark when all the formalities had been completed.

Martha wondered what lay in wait for them on the other side of the immigration shed. Slowly they went to their cabins to collect their luggage.

Chapter Four: Settling In

She had been daydreaming, soothed by the warm sunlight on her face and the hum of conversation as Uncle James and Lucy talked. The motion of the car slowing down to negotiate a pair of wrought iron gates brought her to the realization that they were home. The driveway led to the door of a white stuccoed house. The long journey was over.

The house in front of them seemed huge when Martha compared it to the small terraced house she had left in Bradchester. Sun glinted off the sparkling windows and the white painted door. The lawns were green and well trimmed and Martha could almost see her sister Aggie kneeling amongst the petunias and lobelia pulling out weeds. She smiled over at Lucy who stood open mouthed and silent. It took a lot to silence Lucy. Martha grabbed her arm and led her to the front door where Uncle James and Aunt Lorna stood waiting.

Inside, a large entrance hall ran from the front of the house to the back. Glass doors opened onto a patio and garden and the air was thick with the scent of roses. Doors led off from the hallway to various rooms that Aunt Lorna showed off with pride while Uncle James went off to his study to make some telephone calls.

For the first time in her life Martha was shown into a room that she didn't have to share with anyone. It was large and overlooked the back lawn. The bed was covered with a bright yellow counterpane that reflected the sunlight as it streamed in through the windows. She was to share a bathroom with Lucy and, as she ran her fingers along the white enameled surface of the bathtub, loving its cool smoothness, she was a little girl again visiting her new

friend Ethel the beautiful when they were ten years old. She remembered standing for a moment staring at Ethel's gleaming bathtub like an acolyte before the altar.

There was a strange sense of luxury seeing a set of drawers just for her. She folded her few clothes, and gasped seeing a closet set into the wall, full of coat hangers. As if she had so many clothes. A large free standing mirror stood by the window and she glanced at it making sure that it really was her, Martha Scott, in front of it and not someone else.

As she unpacked her suitcase, she uncovered the white rosary that dad had brought home from the war for her mother. It was not an expensive thing, but it was precious to her. It was something that had once belonged to her mother. She hung it from the dresser mirror and went downstairs for supper.

Afterwards she and Lucy wandered outside and down the street looking at all the houses with pretty gardens standing on large lots. They found a little park with shady trees almost hidden away at the end of the street where they sat in the evening glow. There was a set of swings where they sat gently swinging to and fro as they talked softly with a sense of awe.

"Wow," said Lucy with an impish smile, "have we struck it lucky or what?" Did you see Aunt Lorna's bedroom? It looked like something out of a movie."

Martha was silent enjoying the cool evening breeze and the far off traffic sounds. She listened as Lucy prattled on, her mind far away in the small terraced house in England listening to the clatter of pots and pans as Aunt Kate prepared supper. Aunt Kate would hate James' house, would think it was a waste of space not thinking at all of the beauty of the fine house. "Neither use nor ornament," she would sniff.

The girls had fun wandering around exploring the shops of Vancouver. They chuckled and nudged one another pointing at the colourful displays in the store windows. There were bright dresses and hats, blouses and skirts and elegant shoes. Also, as Lucy was quick to point out, a fair number of good looking young men. She poked Martha in the ribs as one of the men whistled at her as he passed. She turned around as he walked away and he turned too making her giggle even harder.

From what she could see Vancouver was a growing city in spite of the depression. It was blessed with a mild climate and beautiful surroundings. She looked over at the protective Coastal Mountains, and timbered slopes with snow capped jagged peaks. On the sides not covered by mountains, the Pacific Ocean lapped softly against the beaches at English Bay and Kitsilano Beach weaving a skein of scents and sounds around them. Sitting on the warm sand, they listened to the soft shushing sound of the waves on the shore and built sandcastles and paddled in the cool water. Small yachts dotted the ocean and the powerboats put putted their way across the waves bouncing and bobbing as they went.

All around them people were reveling in the sunshine, women dressed in chiffon or white cotton dresses the men mostly in suits and hats enjoying a picnic lunch on the beach. They laughed at the children as they ran into the ocean then ran out again, squealing, as the waves came in. It was all so far removed from Bradchester that Martha could hardly believe that it was real.

They walked in Stanley Park watching the ships across the water, and stared in amazement at the newly finished Lion's Gate Bridge and heard the distant traffic sounds, muted and far away.

It's really different here Martha wrote to her sister Aggie. *There are mountains and ocean all around us, and the friendliest people on earth.*

Aunt Lorna took them to the roof garden of the Hotel Georgia where they sat sipping tea and eating cream cakes. They looked out over at the new Hotel Vancouver, which Lorna explained, was started before the Wall Street crash of 1929, now standing in ragged silhouette against the skyline waiting for the money to be found to finish it. Martha took it all in, the tall buildings and the Hudson's Bay store and Woodwards in the distance.

She watched an airplane start its descent into the new airport at Sea Island. "Oh, look at the plane," she called to Aunt Lorna excitedly pointing a finger at the plane. "I'd love to fly, it must be a great feeling." Aunt Lorna smiled at her enthusiasm. "Well you never know what will happen Martha," she said, sipping her tea. "I'm a great believer in dreams coming true."

The office where Martha and Lucy would be working held six desks. It was a large room and four young women tapped at their Remington typewriters with amazing speed. She and Lucy would share a corner of the room with a window overlooking Granville Street. She settled into her seat and lifted the cover of her typewriter.

"We'll start you off in the general office," beamed Uncle James. "Then we can move you into the accounts department when we feel you are ready." Martha wondered who the 'we' was. Probably Mrs Baker, she thought, staring into the eyes of the elderly office manager; they were definitely not friendly eyes. She and Lucy would be on probation at first,

especially as it had been impossible to keep their relationship with Uncle James a secret.

They would have to be careful not to incur bad feelings with the other girls.

The first weeks went well and the other young women were friendly and helpful though Mrs Baker remained aloof. It was a busy office and they saw little of Uncle James during the day. At lunchtime, Lucy and Martha continued to explore the city. Sometimes they walked to the ocean to eat their sandwiches sitting on the sand watching the boats and listening to the high pitched call of the seagulls. They saved a few scraps of bread to throw at the birds as they swooped down low over the water and laughed as the birds squabbled amongst themselves over the crumbs. It was a pleasant time for them both though Martha missed Aggie and even missed the sooty flakes pouring down on them from the mill stacks in Bradchester. She also wondered about Andrew, he had written to say that his stay in Toronto had been extended.

Three weeks passed before a telegram arrived from Andrew to say that he would be in town on Thursday of that week. His parents were expecting her for dinner that night. It was Tuesday and Martha was thrown into a tailspin; she still had doubts about whether or not she wanted a serious relationship with Andrew. She thought that she loved him but couldn't be sure. His coming would be an interruption to her life now. She had settled into a routine and found herself enjoying her new lifestyle in Vancouver. Aunt Lorna had given her the freedom of coming and going as she pleased. It was a new experience for a young woman in the 1930's. Neither she nor Lucy had to ask permission to go to a show or to a dance. They always told Aunt Lorna where they were going, but she simply smiled and told them to enjoy themselves. The thought of having a handsome beau to escort her around again thrilled her.

She felt a little quiver of excitement that tingled down her spine. The ambivalence she had felt earlier was gone, replaced by a longing to see him again.

Sitting on a bench in front of the office, she ate her lunch watching the buses and the people pass by. She let her mind wander imagining what it would be like seeing Andrew again. Would her knees turn to water, was he really as handsome as she remembered him being? She thought back to the nights when they had strolled along the deck in the moonlight, arms entwined. He'd told her about himself. He was a Canadian, he said proudly, and had been studying law in London and now he was on his way back home to Vancouver to join his father's law firm. Martha began to feel a little intimidated. She had never spoken to a lawyer before and she felt inadequate.

England was a society of strong class distinctions. Her own education had been appropriate for a woman in the working class where she was expected to marry and have children, but Andrew came from a very different background. He was rich, and educated. What could she say that would hold his interest? No doubt he would find her unworldly and inexperienced. She thought of her father, rough hewn, solid and hard working, never able to do the things he had wanted to do because of lack of education and money. She had promised him that her life would not be like that. Her path would be different. Hadn't he said to her that she was as good as anyone else and that she must always fight for her right to be herself?

Annoyed with herself for these feelings, she shrugged and decided that what Andrew was didn't really matter. He was a man and she was a woman and they were, for a little while at least, isolated on a moving island in the middle of the ocean. They were like any other young man and woman, they would flirt together, have some fun, and at the end of the voyage would part and go their separate ways and that would be that.

Leaning against the ship's rail looking at the stars she asked him about Vancouver. He moved behind her his hands on her shoulders; she didn't stir but felt the warmth of his hands through the fabric of her dress. Pointing upwards he named the stars for her.

"That's the Big Dipper over there and the Little Dipper close beside it." His hands made a swooping gesture following the line of stars. "Ursa the bear over yonder and the big one overhead is the North Star. Beautiful isn't it?"

She watched him as he talked, oblivious to her glance his face earnest and softened in the dim light. The lines of his cheekbones made shadowed recesses of his cheeks; his lips parted a little as he gazed upward. He must have become aware of her gaze because he gave a shrug and looked away. Turning, he leaned back against the rail his face in shadow.

"I think you'll like Vancouver," he said and it took a moment for her to remember that she had asked about it. "It's a pretty lively city, or it was before the depression," he smiled before going on as though just the thought of his hometown made him happy.

"It's right on the ocean between the mountains and the sea. Maybe we'll see each other there," he paused looking down at her. "I have to spend a couple of weeks in Toronto before going home, in dad's words, to complete my education, whatever that means, but then I'll be back in Vancouver. Can you wait for me?" His grin told her he was joking but his eyes said he was serious.

He walked her back to her cabin and they agreed to meet for breakfast, then he kissed her lightly on her cheek before walking quickly down the hallway to the stairwell. He turned and waved. She waved back wishing that he hadn't kissed her so chastely. Lucy was snoring softly and Martha lay awake for a long time thinking of Andrew hoping that he too was lying awake thinking of her.

Chapter Five: Happenings

Thursday was only two days away and the news of the dinner with Andrew's parents caused a ripple of excitement in Uncle James' home. Martha and Lucy stood for a long time in front of the closet trying to decide what she would wear. The choice was not great. All of her dresses were homemade, which was not unusual in a working class family where money for new dresses was hard to come by, but dinner with Andrew's parents was different. She pulled down the blue chiffon she had worn on the last night aboard ship and scrutinized it carefully. The blue set off her eyes and her bright blonde hair and her sister Aggie had faithfully copied the fashion seen in London at the time.

"What do you think Lucy?" she tried to sound happy about her choice but Lucy knew her friend well.

"How about my green satin dress?" she asked darting from the room to fetch it from her own closet. Martha tried it on, staring at herself in the mirror appraisingly. She turned from side to side not pleased by the effect. Lucy was smaller and a bit heavier than Martha and the dress hung unattractively above her ankles. The shoulders were not right and the waist sagged.

Aunt Lorna came to the rescue with the offer of her white fox fur cape for Martha to wear with the blue chiffon. "Trust me," she said with a tiny wink at Martha. "Andrew will not notice that it is the same dress you wore on the ship. Men never notice these things." This last said with the smugness of a woman who knew her way around a man.

Lucy tried to change Martha's hair style to a longer sleeker look but the curls stubbornly refused to cooperate and Lucy finally gave up.

On Thursday, Martha waited impatiently for Andrew to arrive. She did not plan on going to the station to meet him, even though he had written to tell her the time that the train would be in at 4pm. Smiling, she re-read his telegram thinking how easy it was for him to expect her to be there, to take time off work. She had no intention of asking for special favours. She knew that Andrew's parents, Abigail and Hamish, would be at the station to their son. It was a good opportunity for them to spend time together. It would also send a message to Andrew that she was not at his beck and call. At four o'clock she stopped what she was doing and stared off into space thinking of the noisy train station, the huge locomotive letting off steam, and Andrew there with his parents.

She tried to remember what he looked like and was shocked to realize that she could only dimly remember him until she really concentrated. His hair was dark and fell in little clusters of curl around his neck unless he tamed it with Brylcreem. He wore it unfashionably long. His brown eyes were deep and he was tall, and had a little cleft in his chin and a dimple when he smiled. Oh yes, and that quirky scar on his eyebrow that made it look as though he was smiling. What else? His voice was deep and he had a hearty laugh. She remembered all of these things but when she tried to put them all together to form his face, the whole was difficult to see. She wondered if he remembered what she looked like. The two weeks in Toronto had turned into almost a month so she had plenty of time to think about him. Aunt Lorna and Martha were sitting side by side on the couch by the window when Uncle James ushered Andrew into the room. Lorna was knitting something long and colourful for

the Salvation Army. The clicking needles were the only sound to be heard as Andrew came around the door. His eyes lit on Martha straightaway, but manners won the day and he strode forward to shake hands with Lorna and Lucy before moving towards Martha.

Martha found that she remembered him very well after all. She stood and he kissed her cheek. His eyes bored into her and she blushed then held herself away from him.

“You look splendid,” he told her. “What a pretty dress, you should always wear blue. It looks good on you.”

She hardly dared to look at Aunt Lorna. Andrew hadn’t recognized the dress, just as she had predicted. Aunt Lorna winked at her.

He sat and Uncle James bustled around pouring whiskey for the men and sherry for the ladies. The talk was general but it was obvious that Andrew wanted to get Martha to himself. When he decided that a decent enough time had elapsed he took her hand and slipping it under his arm excused them both saying that his parents were waiting dinner for them. He helped to put the white fox fur around her shoulders while Aunt Lorna handed her the white gloves.

They all beamed at the young couple as they made their getaway.

Andrew’s sporty red MG roadster was in the driveway, its top down as they roared into the street. They didn’t go far down the street before Andrew pulled over to the side of the road. Puzzled, Martha looked over at him thinking something must be wrong. Instead, Andrew leaned over the gear stick and brake to take hold of her shoulders and kissed her full on the lips. She found herself responding to him as the feelings she had for him on the ship resurfaced.

They broke apart and he smiled at her, "I had to do that, sorry, but I couldn't resist a minute longer." She gave a little laugh, glad that now that they were apart, her breathing was becoming calmer. He put the little car into gear and pulled out into the traffic.

"I hope you missed me," he said with a sideways glance at her. She nodded.

"A little bit," she teased, "but there are such a lot of things to do here I didn't have time to pine." She was laughing but saw that his face was serious when he looked at her.

"Well, unlike you, I had lots of time to miss you. It was as boring as hell, pardon me," he corrected himself, "It was pretty boring in Toronto, I couldn't wait to get home again. I missed all of this," he continued as the little car came in sight of English Bay. The sun sparkled off the water and the tiny whitecaps far out blushed pink. He stopped the car and they watched as a cargo ship crawled slowly along the horizon towards port, frozen by distance. "It'll be fun in the old town tonight when all those sailors come ashore." He said nodding towards the ship with a dry laugh. His fingers drummed on the steering wheel as he said softly. "All the time I was in England I dreamt of this, watching the ocean with a beautiful woman beside me." He touched her hand. "I didn't realize it would happen so quickly." He put the car into gear. "Best get going or we'll be late for dinner. Don't want to upset the folks on my first night home."

Chapter Six: Uncertainty

The Campbells lived in a Tudor style house in the British Properties. Like James and Lorna's house, it was fronted by a lush, green lawn looking like an emerald sea, and bordered by colourful flowerbeds. Andrew swung the car around the semicircular driveway and parked just beyond the front door. A big old beech tree stood in the centre of the lawn its low hanging branches creating an umbrella like shelter. Martha could imagine sitting under its shade on a hot sunny day listening to the bird calls all around. In the far corner a rockery spilled its load of trailing plants in a waterfall of colour, the rocks looming large and greenish like slate. Martha decided that the house fit perfectly into its surroundings and she loved the way the early evening sun sparkled off the mullioned windows.

Andrew was holding the car door open for her as she swung her legs out onto the ground. A maid in black dress and white frilly apron opened the door and Martha thought she must have been waiting in the hallway listening for the sound of the car engine. With an appraising look at Martha, she led them into a large book lined room. A man and a woman turned from the window as they went in. The woman was small and trim with a head of light carefully waved hair. Her blue eyes sparkled as if at some secret joke. She wore a long dress of green silk and Martha stared for a moment at the circle of diamonds around her neck and in her earlobes. The man was tall and dark with a smooth, handsome face that lit up with a smile as he saw Martha. Andrew led her forward to greet them.

“It’s wonderful to finally meet you,” Abigail’s handshake was firm yet soft. “Andrew has talked such a lot about you, it was so brave of you to come over to Canada with your friend. Welcome.”

Hamish Campbell had a booming voice, no doubt a useful attribute in court. “How are you finding life in Vancouver?” he asked smiling.

Determined not to be overawed by the elder Campbells, Martha managed a small smile. “I’m having lots of fun and I love the city and the ocean.” It sounded trite even to her ears and she tried taking a few deep breaths to slow down her heart. Her hands felt moist and she stopped herself from drying them off on her dress.

The young maid who was probably Martha’s age, came in at that moment carrying a silver tray with four crystal glasses and a decanter of sherry on it. Putting the tray down on a small round table, she began to pour. Andrew handed a glass to his mother and then turning, with a wink at Martha, he handed her a glass of the rich amber sherry. Before she could take a sip, Hamish lifted his glass high and toasted her. “Here’s to a happy new life for you Martha in our lovely city.” They all sipped then Abigail led Martha over to a couch by the window. The men stayed in the centre of the room talking softly, no doubt about some business or other.

With Abigail’s hand on her arm, Martha sat trying not to stare at the beautiful room and its contents. The windows were large and looked out onto a garden filled with spring flowers and heavy drooping trees. The room where they sat was large and there were several couches like the one where she was sitting. The couches were covered in pastel brocade; tasseled cushions had been thrown haphazardly along the arms and backs. She noticed three or four small, highly polished tables scattered around the room.

Abigail was asking about her family, and sitting in this bright and beautiful room, Martha couldn't help but compare it to the small, bleak house in Bradchester. For an instant she felt a kind of shame for it and for the poverty that she had left behind. Then, Dad's words rang in her ear, a kind of fierce pride asserted itself and she sat upright and said clearly, "Dad is a fitter, I think you call them millwrights here, and he works in a steel mill. He always had to work hard but he did his best for us." She sounded defensive and felt herself colouring under Abigail's steady gaze.

Abigail patted her hand, "I'm sure he did," she said seeming to sense Martha's discomfort. "Andrew tells me that you have brothers and a sister too."

Martha nodded. "Aggie and me, well, we were always close; she married a schoolteacher, John." She paused trying not to squirm but aware that she was twisting her handkerchief into knots as she spoke. She drew a deep breath before going on. "My oldest brother Jimmy is in the Royal Navy, he's aboard the HMS Hood somewhere in the Mediterranean." She felt herself smiling at the thought of Jimmy looking proud and smart in his navy uniform. "He sent me a postcard with a picture of the ship, its huge, the biggest warship in the world." She couldn't keep the pride out of her voice and could feel herself relaxing as she spoke. "He says they are looking after British interests in the area because of the Spanish Civil War, I guess that means Gibraltar." She glanced over to where Andrew stood with his father he was smiling at her. She went on in a sudden rush hoping she wasn't talking too much. "My brother Alf is a bookkeeper hoping to be an accountant one of these days. He's married to my friend Ethel." She smiled, "I used to call her Ethel the beautiful because she was the most beautiful girl I had ever seen. She had this beautiful straw coloured

shiny hair, it was straight and I used to wish my hair was straight like that.” She patted her curly blonde mop and Abigail took her hand and held it.

“But Martha,” she said smiling. “Your hair is lovely too.” Afterwards, Martha wondered why she had not mentioned her mother’s death when she told Abigail about her family. Even though she could barely remember her, she still felt the loss profoundly. There were times when she wept for the love of a mother that she had lost as a child.

Abigail was smiling and nodding her head as she listened to Martha. “I had a lovely sister too but she died of tuberculosis just before we came out here in 1913. It was the worst thing that had happened to me at the time.” She lifted her shoulders and sipped her sherry. “We mustn’t get too miserable though must we? That’s no way to start a friendship because that is exactly what I want us to be, friends.”

The maid came in at that moment to tell them that dinner was served. Hamish took Martha’s arm and Andrew led his mother into the dining room.

After a dinner that turned out to be roast beef and Yorkshire pudding in honour of her, they strolled around the garden then sat in the evening light talking. Martha could still taste the Cherries Jubilee, a new and luscious dessert that she had never experienced before. Her head felt a little woozy. Wine had been served with the meal but she had said no to the after dinner brandy shaking her head and waving her hand in refusal. They had all laughed at her but not unkindly.

Later in bed, Martha went over the evening in her head wondering what the Campbell’s had thought about her. Andrew had told her they were absolutely thrilled with

her just as he was. She wasn't entirely sure that this was true. They were after all rich and influential people, a working girl fresh out from England surely must not be their first choice of an escort for their son. Even though they were kind and attentive hosts, she had been aware of the differences in their social stations. Intimidated by the array of cutlery around each plate she was thankful for Miss Collier, her home economics teacher, for explaining the various uses for each utensil. She had also taught the girls how to properly sweep a floor and how to iron their future husband's shirts. Martha almost laughed aloud at the memory of how working class girls were taught one thing and one thing only, how to be a good wife and mother.

Thinking about the evening, she felt adrift in a strange new-world. There was no one to talk to about her feelings for Andrew or the fears she had about adjusting to his lifestyle. It was no use trying to talk to Lucy about Andrew. Lucy thought that he was God's gift, as she put it, and could see nothing wrong with him. Aunt Lorna, who firmly believed in love at first sight and who had proved it, would not understand Martha's concerns. She gave herself a shake. They had just met and here she was acting as though they were already engaged. Andrew hadn't even mentioned marriage, and she was anticipating something that might never be.

Would she have to change, to lose or at least to modify the Yorkshire accent that was so grounded in her so that others could understand her better, to change herself to satisfy other people's notions of what she should be? She thought of what Aunt Kate would say. "You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear." Yes, that sounded like one of her sayings. Martha felt a tear sliding down her cheek. Angrily she brushed it away.

She would not betray her roots by trying to be something that she was not. Lying there she had to admit that Andrew had never criticized her actions or her Yorkshire accent. He thought it delightful and had never made her feel inferior. However, the thought of living in a fine house and doing good works, as Abigail Campbell did, was not at all appealing.

Sleep didn't come easily but Martha believed that she had to nip this relationship with Andrew in the bud. His was a different world from hers and it was one that she wasn't sure she wanted to live in. They had only known each other for a short time but already she sensed in him a far greater interest in her than she had in him.

She had to tell Andrew that she couldn't see him anymore.

Chapter Seven: Resolve

“What are you saying Martha? What do you mean you don’t think we should see each other so much? I’m puzzled, I thought we really liked each other, what happened to change that?”

They were at English Bay watching as the sun hung low over the horizon, caught in a golden glow that lit up their faces. Andrew turned to her, his back to the sun so that she couldn’t see his expression. She hadn’t meant to sound so abrupt. All day she had thought about what she should say to him but still unsure in her own mind what it was she wanted to say. She felt nervous now and not in control of herself. Did she really mean what she had said?

Andrew held her shoulders forcing her to look up at him. His hands trembled and she knew he was angry.

“I don’t know what I mean Andrew, it’s just that I’m new here. I want time to think things out a bit. Oh, I don’t know what I want.” She paused, then putting her arms around him, she buried her head in his chest. “I care about you a lot but I feel as if I’m being pushed into something I’m not ready for.”

“Martha, I’m not pushing you into anything. I’m in love with you. Those weeks in Toronto were agony for me, wondering what you were doing, if you’d fallen for someone else. I couldn’t bear to lose you Martha.” He pulled her down to the soft sand and cradled her as if she were a child.

“Did my parents say something to upset you?” They thought you were just great Martha. They really liked you.”

She drew away from him shaking her head. He reached for a handkerchief and dabbed the tears away. "Oh Martha, you are being silly. Come on smile for me. Tell me what's wrong."

"That's just it Andrew, I don't know what's wrong. I feel out of my depth. You come from a different world from mine. I'm not used to having people wait on me or having a dozen rooms in a house that are never used. It's going to take a bit of getting used to. I grew up in a house without a bathroom, and bathed in a tin bath every Friday night for heaven's sake." She smiled up at him feeling foolish while he pulled her close again.

"OK, so we'll build a biffy out at the back of the house that you can use so that you can feel more at home. I'm sure there will be an old tin bathtub we can dig up from somewhere."

She found herself laughing at how silly it all sounded. "My darling girl, I'll do whatever you want me to do, just don't say you never want to see me again, not ever."

They made up there on the sand in a small cove hidden from the sight of other couples strolling along the now moonlit beach. Afterwards, lying in bed watching the stars outside her window Martha went over the evening in her head. She had accomplished very little except that it had been wonderful to hear Andrew say that he loved her. She didn't feel ready to say that yet, it seemed such a final thing, a giving up of herself to someone else. Sighing, she turned away from the stars and slept.

Chapter Eight: The Homeless

Martha enjoyed working for Uncle James. The work was interesting and the other girls were friendly as, it seemed, were most Canadians. She loved the way they told her to ‘have a good day’ in the stores and restaurants and soon took up the habit herself.

Uncle James transferred her to the bookkeeping section where she learned about accounting and trial balances. It was tedious work writing the numbers in by hand, but she sighed with pleasure when she saw the bright, new adding machine on the desk. Lucy turned her nose up at her when she enthused about her job. “It’s so boring Martha,” she said while trying to coax Martha to abandon her desk and walk to the park for lunch.

Meanwhile Andrew worked steadily with his father to build up the firm. Their office dealt mainly with civil cases involving gold and mineral claims with occasional criminal cases to take to court. He sometimes had to work well into the evenings so that some nights they did not see each other. On those nights Martha and Lucy continued their exploration of Vancouver and went to the movies. They especially liked the musicals; Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers were their favourites. They walked home afterwards singing the songs that Fred had sung to Ginger.

Martha loved Vancouver. She loved the beaches and the mountains and she loved the people. It seemed that there was always something of interest going on in the city, cricket matches in Stanley Park, plays, balls, swimming in the ocean and concerts often in the open air. There was also the recurring theme of the unemployed, mostly young men who sat on the

sidewalks with tin cups asking for money. One day in June she was brought face to face with the desperation of these men.

It was a sunny Sunday morning and Andrew's cricket team was playing in Stanley Park. Martha packed a blanket to sit on and wore a cool white cotton dress and sandals. Andrew looked very handsome, even elegant in his cricket whites. They were in the little red roadster with the top down the breeze ruffling their hair. "I hope you don't mind darling," he turned to her with a smile. "I have to pick something up from the office." As they neared the office building on Hastings where he and his father rented the first floor, they saw that several broken windows had been boarded up. The building caretaker was on a ladder hammering the last nail into a board. He turned as Andrew approached and grinned in recognition.

"Hi there Mr Campbell," he spoke in accented English that Martha thought might have been Italian. He bobbed a greeting to Martha. "The police got the men out of the Post Office, the ones that were, what you say, demonstrating. Lots of noise, boom, boom." His hands flew upwards, fingers splayed as he tried to explain the sounds. "Tear gas, men running all over the place breaking windows like mad dogs," he ended with relish. He climbed down the ladder to stand next to Andrew. "I was sleeping, heard loud noise, windows breaking, I stay where I am, have wife, family to protect." He glanced up at Andrew who nodded and patted the man's shoulder.

Martha knew about the homeless demonstration some time back. The demonstrators had taken over the Post Office and the Art Gallery and were having a sit in. "The police must have moved them out finally," said Andrew with a grimace. "I'd better check and make sure there's no one inside." While he went into the building Martha stood anxiously waiting on

the sidewalk. There was a sudden yell from inside the building and a man burst out of the door with Andrew close behind him. He barged down the steps knocking Martha over in his rush to escape and raced off down the street. Martha had landed on her hands and knees on the sidewalk. Andrew ran over to her helping her to her feet. Her silk stockings were ripped open and her knees were bloody, she dabbed at them with her handkerchief.

“Are you ok?” Andrew looked worried but she didn’t want him to fuss. She was shaky but otherwise unhurt. They glanced down the street in time to see the man turn the corner and disappear.

“The office looks fine” he said. “He didn’t take anything, he was hiding from the police I guess.” He turned to the caretaker. “Keep an eye on things Tony. We can’t do much about the glass on a Sunday, but I don’t want anyone else to break in.” Tony nodded. They looked at the broken glass littering the road and took the long way round to the park.

The homeless demonstrations took second place a month later to the large waterfront fire in July. Lucy was the first to notice that something was amiss.

“What’s that awful smell?” She stood up from her desk and walked over to the window. Martha left her adding machine and joined her friend and they watched as traffic ground to a stop. People were pointing in the direction of the ocean. They were too far away to see the flames, but they heard the sound of sirens and alarm bells in the distance. Smoke billowed into the air in a noxious cloud from the harbour front.

“Looks like a fire over by the pier,” she said. Looking down onto the roadway. They saw several men running down the sidewalk following the sirens. It was July 27th and Pier D was ablaze. Quickly they closed the windows that had been opened to cool the office. Outside the smoke from the fire was drifting along the street where groups of women stood

staring down towards the thick haze. The smoke continued to cover the sky until by late afternoon the fire had burned out. That evening they joined the crowds of sightseers looking at the blackened ruin of the pier. Vancouver, decided Martha, was definitely a place where things happened, demonstrators breaking windows, police with clubs and tear gas and now a huge fire on one of the piers.

The biggest and best event during Martha's first year in Vancouver happened on a warm September night when Andrew asked Martha to marry him. They had eaten dinner at Alberto's, a posh restaurant, (as Martha put it), on Hastings Street downtown. Afterwards they strolled hand in hand along the beach at English Bay. The evenings were closing in and it was almost dark by seven o'clock. The sun hung low surrounded by orange and pink clouds that made a sparkling path across the water of the bay, a special calm that comes with evening made even the raucous seagulls seem quiet.

Andrew found a whitened tree trunk thrown onto the beach by a winter storm years ago. Brushing it off with his handkerchief, he sat her down on it. Instead of sitting beside her, he knelt on one knee in front of her a big grin on his face. She laughed.

"Oh Andrew, you are a clown." She put her arms around his neck. "You look like a man about to propose." She was laughing so hard that tears streamed down her cheeks.

"Well young lady, that's exactly what I am going to do." He fumbled in his pocket watching as the laughter faded from her face as she realized that he was serious. He brought out a small velvet covered box that could only mean one thing. With a flourish he opened it. Inside, though she couldn't see it properly in the dim light, lay a ring. A shaft of moonlight caught the single bright sparkle; she gave a little gasp of surprise.

“Oh Andrew, it’s beautiful, at least I think it is,” she ended with another laugh trying to see it properly in the semi darkness.

Taking her hand in his he slid the ring onto the third finger of her left hand. She held her hand towards the moon trying to catch the light.

“Hey,” she said with a sudden thought, “I haven’t said yes yet.”

With a growl of pretended passion, he grabbed hold of her and they fell in a laughing heap onto the sand.

Chapter Nine: Engagement

“It’s a right bobby dazzler,” Uncle James chuckled. They were crowded around the breakfast table admiring Martha’s ring. “He certainly hasn’t wasted any time yon lad.”

Aunt Lorna wept with quiet happiness and Lucy was jubilant. “Oh Martha,” she kept exclaiming. Uncle James was in fine fettle driving them to the office. “Aunt Lorna and me’ll pick up the tab Martha for the wedding. She’d never forgive me if I didn’t do that.”

The other girls in the office looked impressed with the size of the ring and buzzed around happily talking about weddings and dresses and honeymoons. Martha listened to it all quietly still a little bemused by the speed of events. Yesterday morning she had been a young girl in love and today she was someone’s fiancée, a bride to be and the object of much speculation as to her wedding plans. The day had a dreamlike quality. Mid morning when Andrew called she felt overcome by shyness and uncertainty. There was a sense of inevitability about her life now. She would marry and, in time, would have children.

Abigail was organizing an engagement party for them in two weeks time and Martha was to send her a list of people she wanted to invite. They hoped for good weather so that it could be held outside. Putting down the phone, Martha decided that becoming engaged was possibly the most fun she had ever had.

That night Andrew told her to go and buy herself the most beautiful evening gown she could find in all of Vancouver so that every other man in town would be jealous of him for having such a lovely woman in his life. She was to charge it to him.

She and Lucy spent their lunch hour looking at dresses in the local stores. Not finding anything close by, they widened the search and finally found the right dress in a small shop off Hastings Street. The black sequined gown felt a bit like a corset, Martha decided, with its boned tight fitting top and the single strap across the left shoulder. She felt a little uncomfortable at the bareness of her shoulders but Lucy and the saleslady assured her that it was fashionable and just perfect for her.

“But it doesn’t feel like me.” She argued but lost the battle and bought the dress. Long black gloves, silver sequined purse and silver shoes finished off the outfit

She shuddered when she saw the price of the dress but the saleslady didn’t think it exorbitant and happily prepared the bill for Andrew. “You’re worth it,” whispered a smiling Lucy.

Later, in her bedroom, she tried on the outfit again feeling rather daring. The dress fit like the proverbial glove, the thin strap and the boned top showed off her figure. Never having worried too much about her body shape before, she circled in front of the mirror looking at her reflection from all angles. She liked what she saw.

She wrote home that night to tell the family her news. *Andrew and I are engaged. I am the happiest girl in the world. You’ll like him and I hope you can meet him someday. His parents are giving us an engagement party next week. I wish you could all be here for it. Andrew has bought me a new dress, a black one with sequins all over it. I’ve never had anything so beautiful before. Vancouver is a great place to be and I love being so close to the*

ocean. We walk on the beach most evenings. Do you remember climbing Summerton Ridge Aggie? I often think of those evenings with you watching the sunset. Love to you all, Martha.

The evening of the party was sunny and mild with just a trace of chill in the air. She had felt tense all day and couldn't eat anything that Aunt Lorna put before her. They were all excited and a bit intimidated by the lush party that Andrew's parents were hosting. Martha had invited her friends from work. They were overawed but said they would be there. Part of her was worried about how she would appear to Hamish and Abigail's friends. Would they consider that Andrew was marrying beneath him? Dad had told her she was as good as anybody else but the covert and sometimes overt class-consciousness she had grown up with was hard to dislodge. She shrugged, "Darned if I'm going to let a few snooty people spoil my evening," she assured herself. "I'm as good as anyone else, Dad said so."

Bright lights flashed across the lawn from the hastily constructed marquee put up for the occasion. Coloured lights were threaded through the tree branches and around the rhododendron bushes. Candles were stuck on tall poles and placed in the darker areas where the lights would not reach. It looked to Martha like a fairyland.

Small tables were placed inside the marquee and long tables held the food. A suckling pig had been roasted and there were platters of ham, turkey, seafood, salads and desserts. There was fish in aspic and even some caviar. It was a feast for the eyes as well as for the digestion.

To Martha's relief, the night was bright with stars and moonlight, and mild enough for the guests to carry their food outside to small tables set at intervals on the lawn. By the time Martha arrived with James, Lorna and Lucy, there were a hundred or more people

circulating around the lawn. With a wink, Uncle James had said that they must get there fashionably late so that the guests could see Martha arrive. Andrew had been keeping an eye open for them and he hurried over to greet them.

“You look fantastic,” he told her holding her at arm’s length to see her better. He looked handsome in impeccable, starched, white shirt and black tie; his dinner jacket was tailored to fit. There was a knife edged pleat in his trousers. Abigail and Hamish strolled over. Hamish looked striking in his Campbell tartan kilt and sporran with the dirk tucked into his hose. Abigail wore a deep burgundy brocade dress that rustled when she walked. Uncle James beamed and Aunt Lorna gushed in the peach coloured dress that set off her pale colouring. They all seemed to get on famously with one another right away.

Abigail took Lorna’s arm and led her away to meet some of the other guests who were sitting sipping champagne under the trees. Lucy and her beau went off in search of drinks and office friends while Hamish and James wandered off talking and gesturing, stopping now and again to greet other groups who were also wandering around the garden.

The elder Campbell’s friends were almost all lawyers with long bony faces set into solemn lines. The women clutched possessively onto the men’s arms as though fearing they would be snatched away from them. She and Andrew did the obligatory round of guests. Martha was glad that he had insisted on buying her a new dress. As good a seamstress as Aggie was, the home made dress would have made her feel uncomfortable amongst the glamorous gowns worn by the other women. She guessed that most of the women present travelled to America to buy the dazzling dresses they were wearing.

As the evening wore on Martha’s feet began to ache in her new shoes. She longed to slip them off and to wriggle her toes in the cool grass, but Andrew was ushering her towards

a group of younger guests who were colleagues of his. These were young up and coming lawyers and businessmen who hadn't yet taken on the stern, unyielding look of their seniors. Their partners were young, pretty women who smoked and drank and filled the air with laughter.

A dance floor of sorts had been put down and now the music started up. To the delight of the young crowd, it was the Bunny Hop. Suddenly they were in a circle, all hands and feet beating out the rhythm of the dance. Before she knew it Martha was in the centre of the giggling mob her sore feet forgotten as the music carried her along. Andrew was dragged in to join her. Together they danced around, hands and feet doing the complicated movements until the final chord sounded and they all collapsed into a laughing heap.

A slow waltz followed and Andrew swung her onto the dance floor again. "No rest for the wicked," he grinned as he led her around the floor.

"It's alright for you, you don't have to wear high heels." He tried to look sympathetic as she went on, "I'd love to take them off and dance in barefeet. Do you think I dare?"

"It might be more dangerous for your feet that way," he smiled, "I'd probably trample them to bits." The waltz ended to a spatter of applause. Before they had time to catch their breath the band swung into a lively version of the Charleston. In spite of her sore feet, Martha grabbed Andrew's arm. "We must dance this one," she cried pulling him towards the mass of gyrating bodies on the dance floor. With hands and feet crossing and tapping in time to the music she threw herself into the dance.

"I hope you don't expect the same amount of expertise from me," he gasped as her feet nearly flew. He stumbled against her and would have fallen if she hadn't held onto him. Laughing, they joined in the applause as the piece came to an end the musicians were

sweating almost as much as the dancers. They began to play the next number as soon as the applause died down; it was the Lindy. Martha's black dress was a bit confining but she managed a credible performance.

"Finally a slow one," Andrew muttered leading Martha back onto the dance floor as the band struck up a slow foxtrot. They danced close together, their bodies flowing flawlessly together. Andrew was much better at the more formal dances Martha decided, enjoying the feel of his arms around her.

Later, they walked in the garden enjoying the cool night air before joining another group of older guests. One of the women leaned over to Martha and tapped her arm with a gloved hand. "Well, my dear, when are we going to hear wedding bells?"

Martha hated evasions, "You mean, when are we going to be married?"

The woman, not taking offense, nodded. To be truthful Andrew and Martha had not discussed that particular question at all; it had seemed enough to be engaged. Now that the point had been raised, Martha suddenly panicked. Of course, she chided herself; people would expect marriage to be the next logical step. The group had fallen silent waiting for her to reply. Feeling trapped she gave a nervous little laugh, "I don't know, we haven't actually discussed it yet, but probably next spring I think." She looked over to where Andrew sat smiling and nodding at her.

"It's a lady's privilege to decide on the date I believe," one of the older men said, his eyes twinkling in the candlelight. "We men just ask the question and then we hand it over to the ladies who surely know better than we do what to do." The ladies nodded and giggled amongst themselves. Martha blushed furiously.

There was a move onto other subjects and Andrew asked Martha to dance the old fashioned waltz with him. “You did very well with the nosy old dear,” he whispered in her ear.

Only one small moment soured the evening for Martha as she waited in the shelter of a large rhododendron bush while Andrew went for drinks. She sat on the grass and wriggled her toes free of her shoes. The little breeze cooled them. She basked in the air of comfort until she heard the sound of rustling leaves coming from the other side of the bush. A woman’s voice cut through the air like a knife, shrill in the silence.

“Well,” said the voice. “I wonder how long this little affair will last before Andrew gets sick of her. I mean honestly, she is out of her class here. Sure she’s pretty, but how long will that last? He’ll soon be tired of her boring talk and that awful accent. Andrew needs a bit more stimulation than that, don’t you think?”

A bored sounding male voice cut in with more than a touch of sarcasm. “Of course my dear, you would have been in a better position to provide that stimulation I suppose.”

“Well, at least I’ve been educated.” There was a note of asperity in her reply.

“Don’t kid yourself. In Andrew’s place I know what I would choose between brains and beauty. I think he’s made a wise decision.” The woman gave a snort of disgust and Martha heard the pair move off towards the house.

She didn’t try to look through the branches to see who the voices belonged to, but sat there tense and hurt wondering why the woman would be so spiteful. The man wasn’t much better either. His words suggested that he thought that because Martha was beautiful that she must also be stupid. She sat very still blinking away her tears, her heart turning cartwheels.

Her face felt hot, the skin tight. Her breath came in short gasps. She stood up suddenly wanting to run away, then she heard Andrew stifle a curse as he tripped over the roots of an old oak tree. She sat down again before her legs gave way.

He sat down beside her careful not to spill the drinks, seeming oblivious to her distress. "Here we are my love," he said holding two champagne glasses aloft. There was just enough moonlight for her to see the bubbles rising to the top of the glass. Andrew's eyes flashed in the darkness. "A toast," he said raising his glass to her. "Here's to us my darling, may we always love each other as much as we do now."

Gazing up into his dark eyes, she relaxed and leaned into him. He held her in his free arm and together they clinked glasses.

This should be the happiest moment of my life, she told herself. I am not going to let anyone spoil it for me. No matter how hard she tried to forget what she had heard, the night was tainted with spite. For all the wrong reasons, she would always remember this night.

Chapter Ten: Impending War

Martha bought herself an umbrella as the autumn rains assaulted Vancouver. She chose the brightest one she could find in the Hudson's Bay store in order to cheer herself up. Rain had always depressed her but at least here it was clean rain, not the sooty downfall of Bradchester. As the leaves slowly changed from green to orange and red before falling and making a slushy pile on the sidewalks, she felt a growing uncertainty as to the course that her life was taking. She loved Andrew, that much she knew, but society viewed her differently now that her engagement had been announced. She felt the tentacles of that change as the days progressed. She was no longer perceived as the sprightly young girl who made her own decisions about her life; she would be a young matron. How that term frightened her! She would be expected to settle down, have children and assume adult responsibilities from now on.

She hated the fact that she would have to give up her job and the independence she enjoyed as soon as she became a married woman. Canada had been one of the first countries to give women the vote in 1918 but the old rules about hearth and home still held firm in women's lives. She would become dependent upon Andrew the moment that the golden ring was placed on her finger. She even had to give up her name. For a man, life after marriage changed very little. He still went still out to work, made his own decisions about his life and didn't have to ask anyone's permission. A woman on the other hand, gave up her independence. She became totally dependent on a man for everything. She was no longer an individual. She became part of an unequal relationship, entirely reliant on her husband.

Giving herself a shake, Martha told herself to stop being so silly. It was just pre-wedding nerves. All young women went through this, she said firmly. Andrew was a kind man who had always treated her well; she had no reason to suppose that this would change.

Abigail was full of ideas for the wedding that was to take place on the first Saturday of May. Martha, not sure how to arrange such things as weddings, bowed to her greater knowledge. This just led her to greater feelings of helplessness as though this whole thing was out of her control. She was a puppet controlled by strings pulled by someone else. She missed Aggie's wise counsel. Everyone was being kind but she still felt isolated at times.

Andrew tried to reassure her, Vancouver, he said, didn't have a lot of fancy occasions. So when one did come up, everyone went a little crazy. "You'll get used to all the fuss," he assured her, but it didn't make her feel much better. He was working longer hours too and she missed his company.

Lucy was out a great deal having fun with lots of young men hovering around her. Martha missed that part of her life. She was promised to one man and therefore out of bounds for all the other young men. Lucy did make time for her when there was a good movie playing. Then they would trip along the sidewalk arm in arm listening to the whistles from the groups of men gathered around the cinema entrance. Sitting in the darkened theatre she could hear soft whispers and shuffling noises around her as the boys took advantage of the darkness to kiss the girls.

She was also worried about the ways things were going at home with her family. Aggie and Ethel the beautiful wrote most weeks and tried to sound as though the events in Germany were just so many storms in teacups, but Martha was not sure. Most of the people

she talked to felt that Hitler would have to be dealt with before long. There was a lot of sabre-rattling going on. Martha worried about Andrew and her brothers who would have to go to war. Her eldest brother, Jimmy, was already in the Royal Navy on the HMS Hood. Her dad had been in the First World War though he never spoke of it. Martha had not even been born then but her brother Jimmy had mentioned how changed dad had been when he came home. Now war clouds were gathering again and people were saying war would come sooner rather than later. Germany had already attacked Czechoslovakia and Sudetenland and no one had dared to challenge them.

However, if there was a bright side to world affairs at the moment it was that the depression that started in 1929 was finally easing. Aggie said that the mills were getting going again though slowly. The men were returning to work, but Martha sensed a tension in her letters that couldn't be hidden. Here in Canada, especially in the western provinces, the depression was easing a little but was still ongoing. She only had to walk down Granville and Hastings Streets, to see the suffering and despair and desperation in the faces of the unemployed. The federal government was blamed for not putting enough help in place for the working people and tempers flared when discussions took place amongst the younger men who were the ones most affected by unemployment.

One evening she mentioned to Uncle James the guilt she felt about her and Lucy taking jobs away from the local people. They had been lucky to be accepted as immigrants in the first place because the government was clamping down on immigration during the depression years. Uncle James had sponsored them and the way had been cleared for them to come over. Now he looked at her sternly as she spoke.

“No Martha” he said. “Don’t ever think that. You and Lucy do good work here and I took responsibility for you both when you came over. You are not costing the government one red cent and in any case, family’s family to my mind and we have to look out for one another. “ He smiled at her and pinched her cheek. “Now I don’t want to hear any more nonsense. You have just as much right to be here as anyone else.”

Uncle James had survived in these uncertain times because he was an astute businessman and he knew that the import and export and the resource industry would help get Canada going again. Martha knew this because she worked for him. Even though she had very little business experience, she had to admit that James had a certain flair for it. He had bought into the real estate market early on in his business career too, not just buying up land in the city, but in the surrounding areas. He had even ventured into gold and copper mining. Uncle James, Martha decided, definitely had the Midas touch.

He liked to talk to Martha about business matters because she had, he said, a feeling for it. Martha laughed when he said that, although she realized that she actually did like tinkering with figures. Canada was a resource rich country but lacked a large enough population to access the resources, so Uncle James said. Things would turn around he assured her. It seemed that as Britain and America were slowly coming out of the depression, Canada was still bogged down in unemployment and poverty. Nature was not on their side either; summer droughts on the prairies and plagues of grasshoppers had not helped. Prairie farmers watched as winds blew away the soil that had nurtured them for years and replaced it with dry undernourished, starving earth.

Martha was ten years old when the New York stock market crashed in 1929. She couldn't remember giving it too much thought at the time but gradually as the years progressed, had noticed that there were more men than usual standing around on the street corners in groups talking and sometimes shouting with their fists in the air. Their frustration was apparent with the government's lack of effectiveness in the face of the unemployment and poverty all around in the north of England.

An added insult to the already beaten workers was the means test instigated by the government. It was supposed to be helpful to them, to provide food and other necessities to people out of work and poverty stricken. The people didn't see it that way at all but as simply a means of making them feel less like men, unable as they were to provide for their families. The questions were intrusive and such was the bad feeling, that the government retracted the test. Aggie wrote to Martha about the frustrations they all felt about it. She was fine she assured Martha. John was a teacher and had a secure job, but many of their neighbours were not so lucky. The Scott family she added, were better off than most and they had to be thankful for that.

Dad had managed to hold onto his job when the mill shut down one of the blast furnaces but many of their neighbours were laid off. Martha knew this bothered him. He told her about the guilt he felt because so many of his friends were now unemployed. Some of the men no longer spoke to him so intense was their anger. She remembered those quiet evenings spent with her dad when the rest of the family was out doing other things. He would speak of his fears. "Aye our Martha," he would begin, "things are bad for the working man. Some say that it could get worse before it gets better, but how bad can worse be? I feel sorry for the

poor buggers who've worked hard all their lives, fought in wars, and when push comes to shove, there's nowt that can be done for them."

She thought back to the evening when the family was eating supper around the table and dad suddenly broke the silence. This was so unusual an occurrence that they all stared at him in surprise. "There were a meeting at the union today," he began. "They want to call a general strike, a big march to London, daft ap'orths, nowt will get done, the unions are all talk and no action."

"Will you go dad?" asked young Jimmy eagerly, swallowing a mouthful of food. Anything out of the ordinary sounded exciting to him.

"I'll have to think on it," dad scratched his head and scooped up another potato from his plate. "I suppose I should support 'em, I'd have to be gone for a day or two, and the bosses wouldn't like it."

"Aye and neither would your family Jim Scott," Aunt Kate rose to her feet to fetch the big blue and white teapot over. She started pouring the tea into the cracked mugs. "Just what do you think's going to happen to yer family and yer job while you're away?" She rounded on him. "D'yer think the mills going to keep your job open for you while you go gallivanting off with a bunch of men acting like children. You're all as daft as brushes."

"I'd try to explain it to yer if I thought it would do any good," dad replied stiffly with an unusual amount of acrimony in his voice. "It all comes down to loyalty to friends and trying to do summat about our jobs." He paused. Martha could see that he was trying to think of something to say that would please his sister. Aunt Kate was obdurate.

"Aye well, I'll be sure to tell your children when they come to the table hungry, that there's nowt for them to eat because their dad feels more loyalty to his friends than he does to

his family.” They watched as she stormed out of the kitchen banging the door behind her. All eyes now turned to dad as he sat uncomfortably at the table clutching his mug of untouched tea.

“It’s no use talking to women,” he said uncomfortably, “they don’t see things the way a man sees them,” he shrugged. Putting his mug down carefully on the table, he followed his sister out of the house.

Chapter Eleven: Preparations

Martha spun around in front of the mirror. She, Lucy and Aunt Lorna were shopping for a wedding dress. Dad had sent her some money and Uncle James would make up the difference in the price for the dress. She was to buy the best dress that money could buy, he told her smiling happily. They had been to Hudson's Bay and Woodward's department store and now were seeing what some of the smaller stores had to show. The dresses all looked beautiful and Martha was enjoying the thrill of making the most important purchase of her life. She wanted to look fabulous, Lucy's word, so that Andrew would be proud of her.

In a small shop hidden away in a corner of Granville Street, they found the dress of her dreams. At the time, she noticed, Granville Street was not always the best place to shop. In spite of the splendor of the Hudson's Bay store, there were seedier areas coexisting. Hidden away, almost unseen from the street, she had found this little store and had wandered in one day. The owner, who was also the only saleslady there, clasped her hands to her bosom and assured Martha that the dress had just arrived from London. Martha traced the line of pearls that wove around the bodice and skirt and stroked the sleek satin in a sensual motion with her hands. The long, elegant sleeves came to a point at Martha's wrists, and the sweetheart neckline trimmed with pearls framed her face and neck. She liked the look of the raised hem at the front that then swooped down low at the back. Martha stared at her reflection for a long time hardly believing that this was the young mill girl of a few short months ago who now looked like a debutante.

“It looks just as though it was made for you madam. I can’t think of another young lady in Vancouver who could wear it like you do.” The saleslady cooed as she fussed over the slightly flared hemline while little sighs of happiness escaped her.

Martha looked over to where Aunt Lorna was dabbing at her eyes and trying to smile at the same time. “It really does look absolutely beautiful on you Martha,” she whispered while Lucy, with a big grin, gave Martha a thumbs up behind her aunt’s back.

The headdress Martha chose was a veiled cloche trimmed at the front with pearls to match the dress. Martha had never felt so grand in all her life and had a hard time believing all the good things that were happening to her. In the taxi home Aunt Lorna chattered excitedly while Lucy and Martha exchanged grins.

The winter months passed by in a flurry of preparations for the big day. The rain poured down from threatening grey skies, just like home Martha told herself. There were trips to the theatre and dances and, on fine evenings, walks in Stanley Park. Andrew was drinking more than usual but he explained that he was meeting clients and the odd drink was expected of him. She pushed away the memory of so many of the men in Bradchester rolling home drunk from the pubs on Friday nights after they’d been paid for the week’s work. Singing and knocking over garbage cans, kicking empty bottles along the road, and sometimes, beating up the wives and kids. Aunt Kate called it the demon drink that made all men fools. Martha trusted Andrew and decided to think no more about it. In the office Martha continued under James’ tutelage, learning skills that, though she didn’t know it, would one day come in useful to her. It seemed no time at all before she realized that the wedding day was only a week away.

Chapter Twelve: Wedding

The day was warm and sunny, the church packed with mostly Andrew's family and friends. Martha had a fleeting moment of sadness that Aggie and dad couldn't be here to see her marry Andrew. Lucy and Aunt Lorna had helped her to dress and then Lorna had a little weep and smeared her makeup and had to do it all again. They laughed and talked excitedly and gradually Martha's nerves had settled.

The organ struck up the wedding march, the congregation stood and turned to look at her as a proud Uncle James held out a supporting arm. Lucy, her sole bridesmaid, was dressed in pale green satin, her favourite colour. She winked and gave Martha one last hug. The walk down the aisle seemed to take forever but Martha kept a smile on her face and an eye on Andrew who was waiting for her in front of the altar. He held out a hand for her and gave her a quick hug before they turned to face the minister.

"Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the face of this congregation, to join together this man and this woman in holy matrimony." She listened to the minister's deep, resonant voice, the words echoing around in her head until, with a start, she realized that the time had come for the exchange of vows. She faced Andrew, he looked nervous, and she saw small spots of perspiration on his forehead. In spite of that, his eyes were steady and together they made their promises to one another. He was nervous and almost dropped the ring as he slid it onto her finger then, unbidden he brought her hand to his lips and kissed the ring.

The photographer, a fussy little man dressed in a morning suit, white shirt and bow tie, took what to Martha seemed like a hundred photographs. Her face ached from all the smiling she had to do. The pictures were taken in Stanley Park so a long cavalcade of cars maneuvered through the busy streets from the church to the park.

The rest of the day passed in a blur, the reception was held in the Vancouver Hotel where Andrew and Martha would spend the night. It was exhausting having to smile and talk to people that she didn't know, but Andrew stayed by her side all evening. They danced and chatted and before she knew it the clock had struck midnight and the guests were leaving. As she and Andrew were shown into the wedding suite Martha looked around the splendid room and thought, can life get any more perfect than this?

They spent a few days in Victoria, the capital city of BC, wandering hand in hand though the Parliament buildings and spending a pleasant hour or two on a pleasure boat sailing around the harbour and into the Juan de Fuca Strait. They picnicked in Beacon Hill Park under a mild spring sun sitting on the grass. Martha made a daisy chain for Andrew that he wore until it drooped. They talked and laughed a lot in those few days.

Once home again life resumed its normal tenor. Martha and Andrew lived in the large house with the older Campbells while they decided where they wanted to build their own house. They had their own two rooms and joined Abigail and Hamish for meals. It seemed to work well enough but both Andrew and Martha wanted to have a place to call their own eventually.

Meantime, Abigail kept Martha busy with the various ladies' circles that had sprung up in Vancouver as the city grew. The one that Martha enjoyed the most was a pink tea organized by the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire, a title that made Martha a little wary at first. However, as Abigail introduced her to the other women, they made her so welcome that she immediately felt at home. The pink teas, Martha learned, had been a tradition from the early nineteenth hundreds and were places where women could meet and talk about women's concerns without the intervention of the husbands. The tablecloths were pink as were the napkins. Pink flowers stood on each table. Altogether it was a more feminine affair than Martha had experienced before.

The teas celebrated the lives of the suffragettes who had fought so hard for the right for women to vote and also to acknowledge the Person's Act that made it possible for women to be voted into the senate. All this was new to Martha who had not been old enough to vote in England before coming to Canada. The guest speaker was Mrs Eleanor Bishop and she had chosen to speak about the life of Nellie McClung, one of the group of five activists. Martha found herself being drawn into the life of this famous woman who had taken a lot of personal abuse in order to improve the lot of Canadian women. She wasn't sure that she would have had the same strength of purpose as Mrs McClung had but it caused her to think more about women's issues than she had previously. It still rankled that she had to stop work when she married Andrew simply because that was what society expected. It was so unfair.

At the table Martha sat next to Margaret Bowden and as they sipped tea and ate cream cakes, they found that they had much in common. Both were new brides forced out of their working environment by marriage but both determined to fill their time with useful service.

Abigail also helped out the Salvation Army in their fundraising functions and it was here that Martha saw another aspect of women's lives, that of being active in the community and of service to others. She also saw more of the poverty and homelessness all around her and felt blessed to have the life she had rather than the one that others had to bear.

She now had something to talk to Andrew about when he came home in the evenings. He listened quietly to her, making few comments. She took up knitting too, warm socks and scarves, mittens and hats for the poor and for the men who rode the rails in search of work. Andrew's quirky eyebrow shot up the first time he saw Martha getting out her knitting one evening.

"Well, that's something I never thought to see," he chuckled as she struggled grimly with the knitting needles. She didn't reply being too intent on counting stitches and making sure she hadn't dropped any inadvertently.

These evenings together were a surprise to Martha. She had watched Aunt Kate sitting in the firelight knitting or crocheting, eye screwed up in the dim light as the needles clicked rhythmically. Martha had never dreamt of spending evenings so quietly and had felt sorry for her aunt that she hadn't anything more interesting to do. Now here she was, Andrew reading his newspaper on one side of the fireplace, she on the other, enjoying the peacefulness of the scene. If he found an item that was interesting to him, he read it out and they would discuss it and sometimes he would drop the paper to the floor and walk over to where she sat and kiss her neck. "I love talking to you Martha," he often said, "you have such a unique perspective. It must be something in the Yorkshire air." She loved these intimate times with him.

Often though, they had dinners to attend with lawyers from other firms, or a play at Pantages or even a movie. Andrew liked westerns, much to Martha's amusement. He teased her saying he liked to see films where men were men and had big guns.

Chapter Thirteen: Unwelcome News

This quiet interlude lasted until the beginning of June. Martha was happier than she had ever been, but she knew something was wrong when Andrew came home one evening agitated and angry. She hurried over to him as he set his briefcase down on the hall table.

“What is it Andrew, what’s the matter?”

He stood staring at her for a moment. She could almost see the thoughts swirling around in his head as he tried to decide what to say to her. She waited for him to begin. His first words caused her to raise her eyebrows in puzzlement and it took her a moment to realize what he was saying.

“How would you like to pan for gold up in Wells,” he looked at her as she frowned.

“It could be a great adventure. You’d love it there. Beautiful country, nice people.”

She stared up at him, not understanding. Was it a joke?

“What on earth are you talking about, panning for gold, Wells, beautiful country.

Why would I want to go there or anywhere else for that matter, I’m perfectly happy here with you,” she replied pulling a face.

“Well, for a start,” he began walking away from her, “Dad’s talked before about me going up there to open up another law office. There’s lots of money and gold claims. It’s a real boom area. A good lawyer could make a lot of money.” He paused running his hands through his hair and rubbing his nose as was his habit when he had something difficult to say. She went over to the couch and patted the seat beside her.

“Come and sit down Andrew, tell me what you mean.” He walked over hesitantly and sat next to her taking her hands in his and rubbing his fingers gently over her hands.

“Think of the adventure, the gold,” he began, his dark eyes alight with excitement. “I was talking to a man, Ben Wilson, just back from Wells and he says they’ve found a motherlode. He’s going back again as soon as he sells his gold and buys some new equipment.” He stood and started pacing around the room waving his arms around his face, trying to make her see.

She thought how handsome he looked, so dashing he should be a soldier, a leader of men in a gold trimmed uniform, sword held high as he rode into the fray. If only he could channel his energy into something useful instead of into an unrealistic dream.

“I’ve had all the adventure I need for now anyway,” she said. He paused in his pacing to stare at her. “Just coming here from England was thrill enough for a while. I like it here,” she continued but, he cut into her words before she could complete them. He held her arms to cut off her tirade.

“Look at me darling, this is important to me. It’s something I really want to do. Come with me, it will only be for a year or two then we can come back here I promise. We’ll settle down and start a family. Whatever you want to do just, please, listen to me.”

He was beginning to frighten her now with his intensity. What was this about starting a family. “What makes you think I want to start a family?” She started to say then rushed on before he could interrupt. “That’s not what I want at all, at least not just yet. I want us to have some fun and make friends first, have our own home and maybe a bit of land.” He cut her short.

“Ok, Ok, so no children yet, then why don’t we go off for a while, do something different with our lives. I thought that was what you wanted.”

She shook herself loose from him and walked towards the window to look out at the street outside. Her hands wouldn’t stay still, her mind in turmoil. A car went clattering by shooting out a cloud of exhaust smoke before turning around a corner and disappearing from sight.

“I do want to do something different with my life,” she retorted irritably, “But I don’t call moving to some godforsaken spot at the back of beyond to live like pioneers the kind of difference I want. If you want to move can’t you find somewhere other than that.” She faced him feeling her face burning. “Listen to me Andrew, I’m not the pioneering kind. I don’t want to wear a mob-cap and apron and muck about looking for gold. We have a good life here and you have your practice to think of. Why throw it all up on a whim?”

He grew serious. “It’s not a whim my love, it’s called survival.” He kissed her frowning forehead and held her close. “I’m afraid I’ve got myself into a spot of bother and I don’t have too many choices. I have to get out of town for a while.”

“You’ve been seeing too many western movies Andrew, you’re beginning to sound like Hop-Along-Cassidy.” Her little joke fell flat and she looked at him uncomprehendingly. He walked over to the table where the decanter of whiskey stood and poured a shot, drank it and poured another. He stood staring out of the window, hands in pockets, tall and elegant. The room was flooded with bright spring sunlight. She would always remember it that way, the curtains gently blowing in the evening breeze from the open window. This was her favourite room. She loved the way the afternoon sunlight dappled the brocaded couch then changed into the rosy hues of evening as the sun set. She loved the antique maplewood table

with its vase of bright flowers in its centre and the beautifully balanced white marble fireplace brought over from England by Andrew's parents. It had been easy after all to get used to the different way of life. At times she felt as though her life in Bradchester had been a dream and that her life now was the only reality.

The mantle held an array of silver-framed photographs in the middle of which was the family group that Aggie had sent her at Christmas. Aggie sat on a straight-backed chair holding her new baby, Emma, on her lap while her husband John looked proudly on. Jimmy was there too looking handsome in his naval uniform, arms folded across his broad chest. Alf looked stern and fatherly, Ethel the beautiful by his side holding their son Charles, Aunt Kate sat stiffly looking straight at the camera daring it to move. Her father looked sad and reflective and stared directly at her from the photograph.

She paced the room waiting for Andrew to go on. She paused finding herself at the mantle face to face with her family. They stared back leaving her with a sudden surge of homesickness. She loved Andrew and she loved Vancouver and her new life here, but there were times when she longed for the warm north country sound of her own people where a spade was a spade and brass was brass.

Now, she turned to look at Andrew, waiting for him to explain himself. He was still standing by the open window. He turned his back to the window, his face in shadow so that she could not see it. He was very still, watching her. He brushed a hand across his mouth.

"Well?" The question startled him making him look like a small boy in front of the headmaster.

“Look Martha, I’ve got myself into a spot of trouble on the stock market trading in a slightly illegal stock.” He turned away from her again while she stared at him open-mouthed.

“Why would you do that?” Her voice was harsh even to her own ears. She felt her knees give way and sat down suddenly on the couch. “You must be mad.” Her voice had risen as she spoke, the words pinioning him with their bitterness. She heard her Aunt Kate’s voice as clearly as if she was in the room with them. “Yon lad’s got feet of clay.” “Oh shut up,” she said sharply realizing too late that she had spoken out loud. Andrew looked over at her with a puzzled frown then turned away.

“Answer me,” she hissed, angry at his silence and wanting to wound him, make him respond. She ran across the room shattering the streaming sunlight into patches of light that danced around her as she moved. Grabbing his arms she shook him as he stared at her with dull eyes. He shook his head. Finally he spoke.

“Martha, I’d give anything not to have done it but I did so there’s an end to it. I saw an easy way to make a bit of extra cash and I took it. I believed the man who told me the stock was good. I’m sorry. God, you’ll never know how sorry.” She released him and he clutched a chair back to steady himself. “We thought we could get away with it but somebody squealed. Now it’s a police matter, and they are making inquiries. It’s just a matter of time before the cat’s out of the bag.”

She railed against him, beating ineffectual fists against his chest while he stood there unmoving. Finally, her anger spent, she sat on the couch quietly sobbing.

“I’m not going with you,” she heard herself say, her voice sounding strange to her own ears. “I’m happy here, and I can do some good. Heck, I’m even knitting stupid socks for

homeless men.” She allowed herself a tired smile. “You go if you must, but I’m staying here.”

In truth she found herself wondering what choice she had. She had read tales about the northern territories, had studied the maps, seen pictures of the graveled roads few and far between, the towns even fewer. There were rough wild living men who cut down trees and floated them down the mighty Fraser River to Vancouver. The winters were long and cold and she hated the cold. There were few women who ventured into these areas or so she had read. Could she stand to leave her life behind, a life she had grown to love?

The faces on the mantel stared down at her seeming to question her decision. How could she not follow her husband they whispered in unison. You don’t know what it’s like up north she told the accusing faces silently. Neither do you, they replied.

She listened to the rattle of harnesses in the street below: voices shouting, a car starting up noisily; elsewhere life was going on normally yet here in this room a drama was taking place. She wondered how it was possible for the world to keep on turning when her life was falling apart.

“You can’t mean that.” From somewhere in the distance she heard Andrew’s voice, husky and full of disbelief. “I can’t go on without you. You know that.”

She wanted to ask him how that was her fault, that maybe he should have thought of the consequences of his actions before now. The first flash of anger was passing. She felt her resistance waning. The love she felt for him was tearing her apart but before she had time to consider anything else, a new thought intruded.

“Have you told your father?” She couldn’t look at him.

“I had to, but he doesn’t want mum to know. He will tell her that Peter West, a lawyer friend in Wells is willing to take me on as a partner. He is returning to Victoria to be with his family. Dad has put the wheels in motion. It happens to be true by the way.” This last said with a wan smile.

“So, its all been decided without consulting me?”

“I hoped you would understand.”

“Well, I don’t.” She heard him sigh then the couch springs moved and he was sitting beside her holding her hands in his.

“It could be good Martha, we’re young and you said you liked adventure. It’s only for a little while. We’ll probably be back here before Christmas. I don’t imagine the office will do much business in winter, not too many men gold panning then.” He started to kiss her fingers but she pulled her hands away quickly. “Please Martha, just for a few months then it will be all over and I promise I will never do anything like this again.” He held her to him but she remained rigid in his arms. “We might even find a motherlode and come back here rich as Croesus.”

She stared at him wondering how he imagined it would be as easy as that.

“If it were that easy,” she said in a voice not her own, “don’t you think that everyone else would be there too digging for gold.” How simple he made it all sound. Just go there, dig up a few nuggets and Bob’s your uncle as dad would say, they’d be rich.

“You have no experience in the goldfields, you could lose everything.”

He shrugged away her words.

“I’ll still have the practice, there’s lots of gold up there and they need

lawyers especially ones with experience doing claims and that's what I'm dealing with everyday." His voice was persuasive. I'll make it up to you Martha, I promise, and it won't happen again."

"How can I believe you?"

"I'll write it down for you."

"I'll think about it."

It took a long time for her to fall asleep that night and her last thought before sleep took her was, 'Oh God, not the old tin bathtub again.'

Chapter Fourteen: Wells

Saying goodbye to Abigail had been hard, but not as hard as saying goodbye to Uncle James, Aunt Lorna and Lucy. Lorna and Lucy had believed her when she said that Andrew was going to start up his own branch of his father's law firm in Wells. He would take over Peter West's office and it would be a great opportunity for him. Wells was a bustling small town now with gold mining and land claims in abundance. Andrew promised that they would be home again for the winter.

James was not so easily fooled, he managed to get her alone and asked her point blank in his blunt Yorkshire way what was going on. "What's yon lad got himself into Martha? Do I have to challenge him to pistols at dawn or summat? I know we aren't blood relatives Martha, but I still feel a bit of responsibility for you, if the lad's hurt you I want to know." He looked serious and Martha knew she couldn't lie to him. She told him about Andrew's bad deal with the stock market and how he wanted to disappear for a while. "I knew summat was wrong, you looked like a couple going to a funeral rather than going to start a new business and to seek opportunities as yon lad says." He put a heavy arm around her shoulder.

"I'd be the last man to judge another," he said slowly, "Being as how I was a bit of a rip in my young days. I used to run rum you know." He told her with a chuckle. "I never told yer aunt how I made me money. I was young and not too bright then. I never thought it was wrong either because I wasn't breaking Canadian laws, or so I thought, just American ones. I wanted to impress Lorna, her family were rich folks and I wanted to keep

up her lifestyle. Us men do a lot of daft things for our women,” he finished with a smile. “After I met Lorna, I changed. I wanted her to be proud of me so I settled down into the straight and narrow as they say and I never looked back.” He blew his nose into a giant handkerchief looking away for a moment before turning back to her.

“We’re not dealing what might have been here,” he said earnestly. “We’re talking about what is. Andrew needs to know you forgive him. He made a mistake and I’d bet money on it that’s he’s a very sorry man right now.” He shrugged before grinning down at her. “It’s unfair Martha I know, but women always have to pay for the sins of men. We do a lot of daft things and you have to take the consequences but, yon lads ok. By all means sulk a bit and let him know you’re disappointed in him, but then forgive him and put your energy into making this Wells thing work. It could be an opportunity you know. Wells is booming right now and Andrew’s in a good position to get the job done, but he needs to know you’re on his side. Give him a chance Martha.”

Abigail couldn’t understand why Andrew wanted to take Martha up to the wilds of British Columbia in such a sudden rush. Hamish took Martha aside and apologized to her for his son. “Bear with him Martha, he’s learned his lesson it was just a young man’s prank. He’s a good man at heart and he needs you.” He squeezed her hands and she felt the crinkle of paper in her palm. When she looked down at her hands later she discovered several one hundred dollar bills. He trusted her with the money rather than with his own son.

Abigail cried into her handkerchief trying to hide the hurt in her eyes. Martha hated having to lie to her and felt her anger against Andrew being rekindled. A small part of her hated him for the part she had to play in his deceit. On some level she could understand why

Abigail must be saved the pain of thinking that her only son had broken the law, but still she doubted the wisdom of the decision. They hugged and Abigail whispered in Martha's ear to be sure to write. "Hamish says you will be back before Christmas. We'll have a lovely big tree and a huge turkey and it will be such fun, we'll have James and Lorna and Lucy too. Goodbye my dear, I will miss you." Martha turned away unable to bear the hurt in Abigail's eyes. Martha's last sight of them was of Hamish with his arm around Abigail waving bravely from the front door as they drove away.

They were going to drive up to Wells in Ben Wilson's old truck. Ben had taken one look at Andrew's little red roadster and shaken his head. "Best not take that heap of tin," he said nodding towards Andrew's pride and joy. "The roads will shake it to pieces before you're halfway there." So it was decided that they should all travel together in Ben's truck. Ben was a rough man with surly looks. He had shifty brown eyes and a tangled black beard and hair. He had followed the gold trails for most of his life from California to British Columbia. He had made and lost more fortunes than most men but still the lure of the gold held him fast.

In consternation she looked at the battered old red truck in which they would make the journey to Wells and her heart sank. There was a front bench seat and she, being the smallest one, sat in the middle between the two bigger men. It had been a while since Ben had bathed and his body smell made Martha nauseous. Each time he changed gears his hand rode up her thigh and he grinned to himself sensing her discomfort. It was going to be a long journey.

Before stepping into the truck, Martha turned to Andrew and said softly. "I will never lie for you again, ever," then she remained tight lipped and silent for the first part of the trip.

The silence was uncomfortable until the men began to talk around Martha. They spoke about the gold they would find and about Andrew's law office and how great this adventure was going to be. "You'll be able to buy a car when we get to Wells," Ben told Andrew. "Not everyone gets a strike and some of the guys sell off their stuff and head for home. But I gotta tell ya, when you make that first strike, you're hooked."

They stopped in Hope and Martha stepped stiffly down from the truck. She would have fallen if Andrew had not caught her. Every part of her ached from sitting in the cramped seat for so long. The road had been bumpy and the truck's springs were obviously useless. The café where they stopped was full of men. When they entered all talk stopped as the men turned to stare at Martha. There were no other women there. It seemed that every man in the room smoked. Martha's nostrils were assailed by every smell imaginable, hand rolled cigarettes, old cigars and pipe smoke and, overriding it all, the smell of human sweat and unwashed bodies. She turned and left to sit outside on a bench she had passed on the way in. Andrew, looking concerned, followed her outside. "I'll sit with you. The fresh air will do us both good," he said and he went back inside to order their food. The air was crisp and cool coming down from the surrounding mountains. She breathed deeply and rested her head on the back of the seat. Below them the Fraser River raced towards Vancouver and the sea. The current looked strong and she watched as logs and tree roots swirled around sinking beneath the surface then bobbing up again further along. She found the constant murmur of the water soothing and closed her eyes for a moment.

The nausea was ebbing as she sat. They had been traveling for about three hours and the main part of the journey was still to come. It annoyed her that Andrew had wanted to travel to Wells by car. The road north was a graveled, rutted road full of potholes and precipitous twists and turns. British Columbia, he explained patiently to her, was a huge province and largely untamed. There were sternwheelers that churned upriver but they only took you partway. The rest of the journey was spent being jostled around in wagons. Going by car was rough and took two or three days but it was more convenient than the alternate routes. It was, he said quietly, more anonymous. If anyone was looking for him he would be harder to find than if he rode on the train. Martha remained unconvinced and sighed inwardly when Ben told her he hoped to reach Quesnel before nightfall. They would stay there overnight in a hotel before setting off early the next day.

She hadn't supposed it possible that the next part of the journey would be worse than the first but it was. The Fraser Canyon wound around the bends of the river. It was mountainous and Martha felt her stomach heave as she looked down into the precipitous canyon and saw the swift flowing river churning around the rocks far below. The trestles made her heart lurch when she felt them give as the truck passed over them. The tunnels were crudely dynamited holes in the rock walls and were unlighted; the weak beams of Ben's truck lights hardly made a dent in the stygian darkness. She could smell the dampness oozing from the rock as they drove through them and tried to focus on the light at the end in order to stop shivering. Ben gunned the motor and took the corners like a race car driver flinging Andrew and Martha around in the small cab.

They stopped at the bottom of a mountain to allow the brakes to cool. Ben, who had brought cans of gas and water in the bed of the truck, filled the overheated radiator before going on. Just beyond this place the road wound upwards and at the top of the next hill, high above the gorge, a tire blew out. It was the worst possible place for a blown tire. They came around a bend, the motor screeching with the effort of climbing the hill, when suddenly the truck swerved and veered over to the edge of the steep cliff. It ended up skewed across the highway, the front wheels almost over the rim of the drop. Martha could see the swirling water hundreds of feet beneath them and the rocky walls of the canyon jutting out. She clamped her hands over her mouth so she wouldn't scream and sat tense with fright. Ben shouted to them not to move and slowly he thrust the gear stick into reverse and even more slowly pressed down on the accelerator. Twisting the wheels until they were straight, they moved back into the road. He sat with his head resting on the steering wheel for a minute, his breathing erratic. They eased slowly up the hill until they reached a slightly widened area where they could change the tire.

Martha sat on a fallen tree trunk looking down into the valley while the two men worked on the tire. The trembling had stopped but she felt, as Aunt Kate would say, as though she'd been dragged through a hedge backwards. Her breathing slowed and she watched the antics of a couple of chipmunks as they scampered in and out of the log barely glancing in her direction. Eagles circled overhead and across the ridge, the trees moved in the wind. The scenery was spectacular as forested mountains reared above them still wearing crowns of snow.

They set off again and as the sun beat down on the roof of the truck, Martha took off her hat and flapped it to and fro to create a bit of air in the stifling interior. The men didn't

complain but she noticed that Andrew looked more and more miserable as the journey progressed. Good, she thought to herself; after all, he was the one who wanted to come here.

Clinton was a stopping place along the highway and Martha strolled around the dusty road enjoying the chance to move her legs again. The highway had started out as the Cariboo Wagon Road built to give the gold miners a safe route to the goldfields of Barkerville in the Cariboo. It had been built in 1861 on the orders of Governor James Douglas and went all the way from Yale to Barkerville. Martha was firmly convinced that, though the road had been improved in the 1920s, it was still the worst road in the whole of the British Empire. She shuddered at the thought of the miles still to go, but was determined not to complain or show weakness in front of Ben. Thinking of him, she looked over to where the truck was parked. He stood over by the truck watching her and she knew that he wanted to be on his way again but she decided he could wait a while. He grunted as she finally came back to the truck and hauled herself inside. He put the car into gear brushing against her thigh as usual and she saw a faint redness suffuse his face. She moved closer to Andrew who put his arm around her so that she could lean against him.

There were other stopping places along the way but Ben kept going until they reached Lac la Hache. He needed gas and Martha needed a break. The lake was smooth and trees on the other side were mirrored in its waters. A family of ducks paddled by and somewhere far off she heard a bird calling. Such a sad sound, she thought. She asked Andrew what it was. He searched the lake then pointed to a spot in the middle. "There it is," he told her, "It's a loon." She saw the small black and white bird way out on the water and heard again as it called out. She often thought afterwards about that lake and the loon. Its cry seemed to

epitomize the loneliness and isolation she felt as they drove further away from Vancouver and from the life she had briefly enjoyed.

“What a lonely sound,” she said shading her eyes against the sun as she watched the bird dive out of sight. Ben coughed behind them and they got back into the truck, once again on their way.

They passed through 70 Mile House and, after what seemed like hours later, 100 Mile House. Martha had been dozing when she saw the sign. “What does that mean, 100 miles from where?” she asked Andrew as she peered through the dusty window at the stopping place, 100 Mile Lodge.

“It means that this is 100 miles from Lillooet, that’s Mile 0 where the highway officially starts,” he answered, obviously pleased that she was taking an interest in their surroundings. It wasn’t like Martha to stay silent for so long. “You can laugh all you want Martha, but the goldfields were the start of British Columbia. Thousands of men came here for the gold. It was so bad that governor Douglas had to ask Britain to declare this a crown colony. If he hadn’t done that we would be part of America now. They brought in the North West Mounted Police too to support the rule of law here.” He stopped talking and pointed out of the window into the bush at the side of the road. “Look Martha, there’s a deer over there and she’s got a little one.” Martha peered eagerly as the truck drove past the spot where a doe, her ears twitching nervously, stood waiting for them to pass. By her side, legs splayed, a spotted fawn, stared at them from liquid eyes.

Strangely, the further into the wilderness they drove, the more Martha’s feeling changed. It was all so beautiful and, apart from the noise of the truck, so peaceful. She felt

herself warming to the idea of their northern adventure. She snuggled closer to Andrew and slept again.

Quesnel was a small town of just a few hundred people, but the town serviced a large outlying area and though it was quiet when they arrived late in the evening, it was a bustling place during the day.

There were houses and small stores scattered along the main street, the river running smoothly alongside a steep bank. The Cariboo Hotel was the largest building in sight and looked oddly out of place amongst the smaller buildings. The setting sun cast an orange glow over its wooden beams setting the windows agleam. A porch ran the length of the building and Martha noticed two men sitting in the last light talking quietly. They raised their hats as she approached and she managed a tired smile in return.

The hotel wasn't palatial by any means but it was cheerfully decorated in a range of colours that almost made Martha's eyes water at their intensity. The manager and his wife were friendly when they introduced themselves as Bess and Tom. The room Bess showed them was small with a comfortable looking bed covered in a scarlet spread; a small dresser stood against one wall and a washstand with a flowered jug and bowl against another, small bedside tables held lamps. The walls were papered in startling red roses and the window looked out over the street. Martha hoped that the traffic noises wouldn't keep her awake. The bathroom was down a short hallway and Bess, seeing how weary Martha was, instantly made herself Martha's protector. She made sure that a hot bath was drawn and told

the men to stay out of the way, a good idea Martha thought as she slid into the soothing water. She'd had enough of men for today.

In spite of her aches and pains she slept well, not hearing Andrew when he came in later. He was still sleeping when she awoke to the clatter of hooves and the jingle of harnesses outside the window. Moving carefully so as not to disturb Andrew, she walked barefoot over to the window and looked out. A group of young cowboys had galloped into town and she watched as they swung off their saddles and tied up their horses in front of the hotel. She smiled to herself at their youthful antics as they jostled and shoved one another making their way into the hotel's café. They were young and ruggedly handsome in their checked shirts and blue jeans, already sweat stained and dusty as the morning sun beat down on them. They took off their hats and dusted them off scratching their heads in relief as they swung open the door and went inside.

Watching their youthful swagger Martha felt better. The night's sleep had revived her and she was hungry. She was here in cowboy country and she was instantly taken back again to the theatre back home watching the latest western movie with Aggie. How exciting it was as the cowboys raced along chasing Indians or being chased, guns firing. It all seemed so romantic at the time and here they were in the flesh, real doggone cowboys. She must remember to tell Aggie in her next letter home.

Washing and dressing quickly not wanting to wake Andrew, she hurried down to the café where she had seen the cowboys disappearing. The place was full, a good indication of good food. The young men she had seen from the window sat in a group at the far table wolfing down steak and eggs. One or two of the younger ones looked up as she

came in and nudged the others until they were all looking at her and grinning. She smiled back at them before taking a seat at the only unoccupied table. She angled herself so that she could watch them without seeming to and they didn't seem to mind at all. A gum-chewing waitress came over to take her order and Martha felt she was in the middle of a movie. There was always a gum-chewing waitress in a western.

"Morning Ma'am" she said moving the gum to the other side of her mouth so that she could speak. "What'll you have today?" She thrust a hand written menu at Martha who studied it intently. She ordered bacon and pancakes with an egg. "Sunnyside up?" inquired the waitress.

"Er, I guess so," said Martha not quite sure what it meant but it sounded fine to her. The woman nodded and bellowed to a sweating man in the kitchen, "Bacon, sunnyside, pancakes."

Martha's stomach rumbled, as she smelled the bacon frying. She had eaten very little yesterday because she felt so ill but today her youth and energy had returned and she felt fine. This was so different from Vancouver; this was the real west, the stuff of Hollywood movies. She sat perfectly at ease breathing in the atmosphere. She noticed that once again there were very few women here. The other customers were mostly men, big men who looked like loggers, ranchers and ranch hands. They ate tremendous platefuls of food while talking and laughing all the time shoveling the food into their mouths and casting curious glances at Martha at each mouthful.

The café was built of logs, and hung along the walls were long iron rods. She

was pleased with herself for recognizing them as branding irons. There were horseshoes above the doors to catch the good luck, bright printed curtains hung at the windows. The tables were covered with red checkered cloths and a huge fireplace stood in one corner.

Sunlight streamed in on her, it would be a hot day for traveling, but she wasn't going to let the thought of the ongoing journey spoil her bright mood. She sat back in her chair taking in the sights and sounds around her while her mind recorded details for Aggie's letter later on.

The waitress put a plate of food in front of her. "Enjoy the food" she said with a smile moving away to take another order. Martha looked at the plate piled high with bacon, pancakes and eggs. Had she really ordered all that much? As she ate she looked over to the table where the cowboys had finished eating and were now drinking copious amounts of coffee. Then, with a clatter of chairs and a jingle of spurs, they stood up one by one. In a laughing chattering group they went out into the street. Several of them tipped their hats as they passed her table, broad grins on their faces. She managed to smile at them through a mouthful of pancake. She watched as, swinging the horses around, they clattered away in a swirl of dust. I want to ride like that some day she told herself attacking the last of the pancakes.

Andrew wasn't too pleased to find her in the café with all the men but she shushed him not allowing him to spoil the mood of the day. When Ben came over to join them she excused herself saying she had things to pack. He nodded in her direction then turned and began to talk to Andrew.

The road to Wells and Barkerville was rutted with hoof prints and the tracks of old wagons that had brought the first gold miners here to Barkerville. Almost a century had passed since Billy Barker had first struck gold in 1862. Barkerville had sprung up almost overnight with miners coming from long distances to be part of the adventure and to make some money. Later, the township of Wells had been established and boomed with fresh gold strikes since 1932 when gold quartz had been found. The resulting mine was supposed to last for fifty years or more, but Martha hoped that she and Andrew would be long gone by that time.

Through the dusty insect graveyard that was the windscreen, she could make out the pine-covered mountains, their tops arched over by a cloudless blue sky, and waterfalls falling down into streams and lakes. A small black bear sat at the side of the road watching the truck pass before ambling slowly over to the other side. Ben asked Andrew if he was a hunting man, Andrew shook his head. "There's lots of deer and moose around here," he told them, "a man could feed his family for a long time on just one moose."

There were very few signs of habitation along the road and Martha wondered why people would desert the comforts of city life to come out to these wild places to build houses basically in the middle of nowhere. She was reminded of the train journey over this vast land where she had felt a kind of despair as mile after mile of forests, mountains and lakes had not produced many towns of any size nor people to live in the towns.

Miss Grimshaw, her late unlamented schoolteacher had told the class about the Prairies where great swathes of land were given over to growing wheat. Canada was the breadbasket of the world; wheat grew well in those hot dry prairie summers. It had been too

early in the year for Martha to see the miles of golden grain as the train passed, she realized too that there was a drought and the fields stood bare.

On the second or third day of the journey, she couldn't remember which, the train had drawn to a stop seemingly in the middle of nowhere beside a small wooden platform. In the distance, as she and the other passengers watched, a trail of dust rose as an old green truck presumably driving along a road of sorts, screamed up to the platform. A middle aged woman stepped down from the train and was greeted by a wizened older man, they didn't kiss, or hug as the man threw her old suitcase into the back of the truck and they roared off again. The train sometimes stopped at night but Martha was unable to see what kind of place it was. People got on or off the train and luggage was exchanged and then they were off again.

British Columbia by contrast was full of forests, lakes and mighty rivers, mountains and flat plains in the Fraser River delta where crops flourished under a benign climate. Early crops stood in the fields and the sky seemed huge.

Her thoughts were interrupted as they rounded a bend and the Jack of Clubs Lake lay before them. Its smooth surface gleamed with the early afternoon sunlight. She noticed a group of fishermen casting their lines into the water. Ripples spread outward in dark pools and she saw smaller ripples where the fish jumped. Seeing the men, she hoped, meant that the town must be close by. She sighed with relief that the long, uncomfortable journey was almost over.

Almost at the same time she saw the first houses and realized that they were in Wells.

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