



# LIBERTY AND OPPORTUNITY

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Excerpt of three chapters

## PROLOGUE

January in the Waikato district of New Zealand was usually hot and dry but the summer was about to become the hottest on record as the ongoing drought scorched the rural landscape. Even the trees in the bush looked dull and lifeless with their dust covered leaves shading the parched grass where even thistles found it hard to grow. A slim, auburn haired woman in brief shorts, loose pale blue blouse and large floppy sun hat ambled out along the drive with her sandals squelching in the melting tar. At the gateway of *The Blue Mist Motel* she pulled down the hinged letter box door and reached for the day's mail that the rural delivery van had just dropped off.

Nicole Tucker sighed as she sorted through the pile of letters. There were three bills, inquiries by the look of them or perhaps cancellations and the usual junk mail. She recognized the writing on a small parcel the letters had been held to by a large rubber band. Grandma had written again. Dear Grandma seemed to quite lonely and enjoyed the letters she wrote on a regular basis. A parcel, though, was unusual.

Nicole grimaced, glanced around at the bush clad hills, poked the parcel and letters in a large plastic bag she had with her and walked back along the twisting tree lined drive to the motel.

For two years, her partner, Simon McDoyle and herself had been running *The Blue Mist Motel* and camping ground but attempts to build it up as a tourist center had been only mediocre. She frowned. It had been scorching weather but this had tended to drive guests away rather than attract them. The waterfall, one of the main attractions in the area was now a merest trickle and the stream so shallow visitors could jump across from rock to rock without getting their feet wet.

Of the twelve motel units, only five were in use that night. Three families had cancelled bookings and no casuals had arrived, where-as usually the motel was full and visitors turned away at this time of the year. Also, the campsites were almost empty with only the hardest of campers braved the scorched dry conditions. Likewise, only three caravans and two motor homes remained plugged into power sockets and the games room had an empty eerie look usually associated with the winter off-season.

Simon's theory that they fell between the up-market hotels that catered for overseas tourists and the massive camping grounds and backpackers places catering for younger people was probably correct. Throughout the country, too, overseas tourist traffic was hit by a recent Asian currency crash. The busloads of Koreans who visited in 1997, the year they bought the property, were a luxury of the past. Nicole sighed again and hoped some rain would arrive soon to settle the dust and replenish the stream.

She walked into the administration block and through the office to the living quarters. Simon should be back from work soon. He'd been doing seasonal farm work for local farmers to supplement their income but all it had really done was make him tired and moody.

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When the tall bearded man walked in the door without even taking off his work boots Nicole knew he was in one of his moods. All summer there seemed to be something wrong with the man.

'We need to talk,' he grunted, grabbed a beer out of the refrigerator, sat down at the kitchen table, ripped the tab open and gulped a quarter of the contents down before wiping the froth off his moustache and burping. Nicole shuddered. He only displayed these shocking manners when he was angry or nervous.

'I guessed that,' she sighed, gazed intently at her partner and waited for the outburst. 'Look,' she defended. This is only a slack period. Once the cooler weather returns and the

stream level rises, I am sure the campers will come back.'

Simon gulped another mouthful of beer before he fixed his eyes on the tanned woman. 'It's not the business, Nicole. It's us.' He drank the rest of the can as if he needed sustenance to build up his nerve.

'Well, For God's sake out with it,' snapped Nicole. She was usually an easy going, tolerant person but there were limits to her resilience.

The man's eyes turned away. 'There's no way easy of saying this, Nicole. The truth is things have fizzled out between us and I'm leaving.'

Nicole stared at Simon. 'Just like that,' she whispered. 'After everything we've done together you've decided it is too much of a commitment and you're leaving.'

'It isn't like that. I've just...err...Well, you know.'

'No,' said the woman with her eyes blazing. 'I don't bloody know. Pray, tell me.'

'I'm shifting away with Madison Greaves. She's going back to 'varsity in Auckland and invited me along.'

Nicole stood up from the chair where she had been sitting and stared in utter disbelief. She knew Simon and herself had been having a rough patch lately due to the stress of the business but never suspected there was more to her partner's moods. Madison Greaves, a bubbly girl three or four years younger than herself, was one of the students employed over the summer to help out at the motel.

'You bastard!' she hissed as she thought back over the last month. Of course, in hindsight that could explain a lot. Those late nights home, hay making he said then other feeble excuses over the last week. That was the trouble, she was too trusting and had even blamed herself for not doing enough for their partnership.

'I suppose you've been fooling around with her for weeks.' She glared at her partner and saw he had the grace to flush red. 'No wonder you haven't been so keen with me,' Her eyes were wide with the hurt. And I put it down to tiredness.'

Simon nodded. 'Well, our relations haven't been much fun lately.'

'Fun!' Nicole screamed. 'That's all you can think about. Fun! Grow up, Simon. Take a few responsibilities in your life.' She stood and walked over to the window so he could not see the tears welling in her eyes. 'Well, I stuck by you, Simon but God knows why. I don't sleep around, I worked bloody hard to try to get this little venture going and invested all my money in it.'

'So have I but...'

Nicole swung around with the embarrassment forgotten. 'Just go, you bastard. Go to Auckland with your young bit of fluff and see how long you last, but don't expect to come crawling back here when she decides the boys there are more fun.' She leaned on the table and fixed her tear filled eyes on him. 'I'll speak to my lawyer and bank manager and arrange finance so I can buy you out of your share of the motel.'

'There's no need,' Simon replied.

Nicole stood back and continued to glare at him before she swallowed and sat down. 'I thought it would work out, the business would pick up and perhaps we'd even get married and have a family,' she whispered, jumped up and headed for the door. 'Just bloody go!' she stormed, stomped outside and slammed the door behind her.

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It wasn't until later that evening after Simon had packed his old station wagon with his belongings and Madison Greaves had discretely left, that Nicole returned to her living room. She sat down and stared around with that numb feeling inside. Part of her felt like crying while her more practical side realized that, in the long run, she would be better off without Simon. His public relations had never been good and on more than one occasion he'd driven irate customers away with his surely attitude.

It didn't look as if anyone would arrive now so Nicole decided she'd get the evening chores around the camp done early, shut the office and have a hot both. As she walked back through the room she spied the mail still sitting on the bench below the office counter and reached for it. In a half-hearted manner she sliced the motel letters open and filed the bookings;

tomorrow would do for any replies. Finally she came to her grandmother's parcel.

She cut the binding, undid the brown wrapping and was about to open the cardboard box inside when a photograph fell out and landed on the counter. Nicole frowned. It was an old black and white photo, quite tatty around the edges and yellowing with age.

She picked it up in her long fingers and studied the image. The photo was of a young woman about her own age, dressed in white clothes from the beginning of the century and standing in front of a suspension bridge. Nicole peered at the woman. The profile of the face looked familiar with a long nose and gentle smile. My God, if it wasn't for the clothes and hair style it could be a photograph of herself.

With shaking hands, Nicole turned the old photograph over. A whiff of the musty paper tickled her nose as she noticed faded writing on the back. It was barely legible but by holding it up to the lamp at the end of the counter she could just make out the words.

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*Wednesday 8 August 1906*

*Dearest Diary: With Samuel being a photographer, I can now include a few of his photos with my writings. This is one taken at the Capilano Suspension Bridge in North Vancouver, British Columbia. Yours sincerely Amanda*

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Filled with curiosity, Nicole continued to open the box and found two cloth bound books inside, one with a faded blue cloth cover and the other just as old and but with what would have once been red cloth for its cover. They looked ancient and had the same musty smell of age as the photograph. Her grandmother had included a brief one-page note clipped to the cover of the topmost book. This was unusual as the elderly lady usually wrote heaps.

"Dear Nicole," read the note. "I haven't been too well lately and decided it was time to pass these diaries onto you. If you take time to read them, they are really self-explanatory. Thanks for your last letter. I hope your motel is coming on well. Will write a longer letter when I get over this persistent flu virus. Love Grandma."

Nicole frowned and opened the top book, the blue one, and realized that it was not printed but was really an exercise book filled with handwriting. The faded black ink was flowing, beautifully styled and still quite legible. In spite of the bath she had planned a few moments earlier, she sat down and began to read.

An hour later with the chores and her cheating partner forgotten, she was still engrossed in the writing. It was a diary of the woman in the photograph, her grandmother's grandmother. The words seemed to spring out at her as if they were only written a week instead of a century earlier.

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## PART 1 AMANDA 1898

### CHAPTER ONE

*Monday 19 September 1898*

*Dear Diary,*

*The decision is made. Tonight, I am leaving my home of the last twenty years. Father will not compromise and has banned any association with Jack Williams. Why, you might ask? Is it only, as he says, because Jack is a Presbyterian and our family is Irish Catholic? No, I believe it is also because we are the landed gentry and he is but a poor worker in Father's lumber mill.*

*We are leaving for Canada and a new life away from this autocratic atmosphere where women are expected to obey without question. I shall miss Mother but dare not tell her my plans because she is sure to pass the information on to Father and he will carry out his threat.*

*I attended Mass for the last time ever yesterday and hope God forgives me for forsaking the Church. Jack is doing the same as we do not believe God only looks down on one religion; Catholic or Presbyterian We shall be neither but shall pick a third faith to follow. I will take money and shares given to me for my eighteenth birthday so Father cannot withdraw them.*

*As I stare in the mirror I see my auburn hair and freckled nose. Even though I wish them gone Jack loves my freckles and my curves but I must not be vain.*

*Have I made the right decision? I only know I love Jack with all my heart and he loves me in return. Only you, Dear Diary, will unfold the truth as Jack and I move forward into the new century together. The 1900s are only a little over a year away. What do they behold?*

*Sincerely,*

*Amanda O'Donnell.*

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Amanda blotted the entry and tucked the cloth bound notebook in her cane pouch; it was a bag really and held her clothes and other necessities. She glanced around the bedroom for the last time. Wasn't it strange that to do something for love, one had to become so sad?

She brushed her hair, rolled it up high and put her Sunday frock on. It was probably entirely inappropriate for the horse ride they were about to make but she could think of nothing else to wear. She pulled the especially made bag over her head and tied the strings around her waist, wiggled into her coat, bonnet and gloves and, except for her riding boots, was dressed to leave.

'Honey, are you still awake?' Her mother's voice came up the corridor.

Amanda jumped in fright at the sound of her mother's loud voice and swung back from the dressing table. Her face drained of color and wide blue eyes stared at the door. If Mother walked in now and noticed she was dressed their plans would be ruined.

'Just reading, Mother,' she called and tried to disguise the quiver in her voice. 'I'll have the light off soon.'

'Don't be long, Honey. Father says you should not let the electric light burn too long or it'll overheat.'

'No, Mother,' Amanda replied and pulled the cord so the light went off. 'I've decided to sleep now. See you in the morning.'

'Night, My Love.'

The young woman shivered and stared at the silhouette of the window in the darkened room. The only other light in the house, the one in the main bedroom along the corridor, clicked

off and she heard her mother's cough. It was like any other night. Father was at a meeting and would not be back before midnight and by then she'd be long gone. Amanda could just make out the hands of the clock on the mantelpiece. Nine thirty-five! Jack would arrive at ten but promised to wait if there were any delays.

It was a three-hour journey north from their Washington State home to the border into British Columbia. Afterwards they'd continue on to Vancouver. If discovered here in United States she would be brought back home but Canada was a new country beyond Father's influence. She would be safe. Just three hours away! Amanda waited with a pounding heart for almost five minutes before adjusting the strings of her pouch and grabbing her boots.

She tiptoed to the landing and glanced along the long corridor. The door to her three brothers' room was shut. She was the eldest in the family and would miss them, especially five year-old Jamie. A touch of sadness crossed her mind as she thought back to her only sister, Georgina who would have been nineteen now but had died three years earlier from diphtheria.

Mother's door was open but all was silent. Using her outside hand to run fingers along the polished wall, Amanda made her way to the banister and felt, rather than saw her way down the stairs. Her eyes were open but could see nothing except pitch-blackness.

Suddenly her foot hit something soft and a cat screamed.

Amanda froze!

She'd forgotten Patches slept on the stairs. She reached down and patted the animal and hoped the noise didn't disturb her mother.

Luckily, all remained quiet, as Patches seemed content once he realized it was her. He gave a more pleasant meow and followed her to the kitchen. She could feel him by her leg as she crept forward. The kitchen stood silent and eerie in the white reflected light from the window but now, at least, the outline of the bench could be seen. Amanda moved forward and opened the veranda door. Cold air puffed into her face. It was only fall but already the nighttime temperatures had dropped and snow was close.

'Bye, Patches,' Amanda whispered and patted her pet for one last time. The door squeaked when she pushed it but everything remained still. The barn was across the cobblestone yard and beyond, the lane where Jack would be waiting with Stargo, her horse, already saddled. Everything was going to plan.

She squeezed into her boots and moved away from the house, a place where she would never return, and across to the barn.

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'Amanda! Here,' whispered a hoarse voice.

Jack was there, as loyal as ever. Amanda wanted to smile but tears were in the way. She felt his hand, a brief kiss on the cheek and a helping hand up onto Stargo. The young woman hitched her frock and petticoats up and straddled the horse the proper way, not sidesaddle as she'd been taught at finishing school.

Even in the comparative safety of Jack's company, she dared not talk but allowed him to lead Stargo away up the lane to the road where a left turn headed north to Canada. There was no going back, not now or ever. She knew that if they were caught, Jack would be horse whipped and herself, banished to a convent. Her father had threatened to do this only two days before. Perhaps the threat was an unexpected benefit for it helped to make their decision to leave a necessity. Amanda moved her one free hand to her breast. The straw pouch was safe and fingers touched her diary. Somehow the book gave her security, more so than any other possession.

At the road Jack turned in the opposite direction from where she expected.

'Jack?' she queried.

'We have to take a back road,' he replied. 'There's a group of riders on the road and they're heading this way.' He grimaced in the darkness. 'I recognized some of them. They're your father's friends.'

'Oh, My God!' Amanda responded. 'You mean they know?'

Jack shrugged. 'I doubt it,' he said, 'but it would be foolish to ride right past them, wouldn't it? We'll take the fork road around the lumber mill. It's not much further.'

'Jack,' whispered Amanda and stared across at her companion. 'I'm scared. There is no

reason for those men to be on the road at this time unless they're looking for something. Are you sure you never told anyone?'

Jack looked tall and the same as ever, clean shaven with a normal floppy black hat, jacket, trousers and boots. His white teeth smiled in the dull moonlight.

'My Dear,' he said as the two horses increased their pace to a canter. 'It's okay. By breakfast we'll be in Vancouver and free. Now, just relax and let Stargo do the work.'

'I will,' she replied but a nagging doubt filled her mind. Her father was an astute man. Perhaps her willingness to go to church the day before wasn't a good thing. In hindsight, she realized she should have made her usual grumbles. By trying to make everything normal, perhaps she'd made things worse.

'You'll be fine,' Jack encouraged as if he could sense her misgivings. 'Come on. The turn's just ahead.'

Amanda enjoyed riding Stargo and relaxed a little as they turned into the long skinny road through the firs. Without Jack, the desolate scene would have been frightening with the towering trees and dark ground beside them. It was cold, too and already her cheeks felt numb.

Time ticked by. After two more turns they were now back on the deserted main highway north of the village. Nobody should be around now, not even the occasional automobile with their chugging motors and powerful lights. It was close to midnight when Jack called a halt. In the whole two hours they'd passed nobody and had only seen lights from half a dozen ranch houses.

'Listen!' he hissed.

Amanda strained her ears and heard the clip clop of at least three horses coming up rapidly behind them. Her heart raced. It could only mean one thing. They were being followed.

'Come on,' Jack called. 'They're probably following our tracks in the dust. We can't be more than five miles from the border.'

Amanda clicked her heels into Stargo's side and her horse responded. They raced forward at a gallop but Amanda knew the pace was too difficult to maintain. Stargo was already tired. She could not expect him to continue this way. They came to a hilly section where the road curved around through the forest when Amanda called a stop.

'The horses,' she gasped. 'We can't keep this pace up. The poor creatures are exhausted.' As if to support her, Stargo whinnied and Amanda bent forward to pat the horse's neck. In spite of the cold temperatures he was covered in perspiration.

'Right,' said Jack. 'We'll turn back a few yards and go into the trees. With luck, they won't notice. If we can get behind them....' His sentence trailed off into doubt and Amanda could sense his fear.

'There's something you never told me, isn't there?' she asked as they halted, turned and walked the horses back then off on a tangent into the trees.

'Your father knew,' Jack gulped. 'He laid a trap. I just avoided it getting to your place.'

'But how?' Amanda gasped.

'I don't know. Perhaps he just guessed...!' For the first time Amanda saw that Jack looked scared. 'Look,' she added. 'Let's get further back in the trees. There's room for us. Whoa Stargo!' She patted the horse again and slid off the saddle. My God, her bottom felt stiff and the insides of her legs were chaffed. She sniffed back a tear but it was for Jack. If they caught them out here there was no telling what the men would do.

Jack had also dismounted and, without another word, led their horses back down a small slope into a dry creek bed. The moonlight was a mixed blessing. It helped their vision but also lit up the trail for their pursuers.

'Quiet Stargo,' Amanda whispered. The four, two humans and two animals stood still and listened. Horses were approaching at a slower speed than earlier but still at a more rapid pace than they could have maintained themselves.

Closer and closer the noise came until at least half a dozen horses thundered by immediately above them. Amanda felt a hand in hers and glanced up at Jack. She squeezed his hand and moved back a fraction so her hair brushed against his chin. It wasn't fair. Why was her father such a pig of a man?

'Let's follow this creek bed a bit,' Jack suggested. 'I heard no dogs so that's a good sign.'

Amanda bit on her lip and nodded. It seemed hopeless. 'Jack,' she said, 'our only hope

is to take the horses to the road and turn them loose. Stargo will return home, I reckon and your horse will follow. By the time Father finds them we could be further away. It won't take him long to realize we're in the trees off the road.'

Jack grunted and it seemed as if he was about to argue. After all, five miles was a long way to walk. The border could be even further and, if their direction was out, they might never reach it. In this remote countryside the border wasn't even marked. Locals wandered back and forth between the two countries all the time.

'You're right,' he finally conceded and followed Amanda back to the road.

They removed the bits and saddles from the horses and Amanda gave Stargo a small slap on the rump. 'Go home, Stargo,' she commanded. 'Go back to Mother.'

The horse gazed at her, gave a reluctant snort as a final protest and headed back. Jack's horse seemed more enthusiastic and bounded away as soon as it was out of the saddle. The two humans carried the saddles into the foliage and hid them as well as they could behind a rocky outcrop before returning to the creek bed.

The following hour was almost an anticlimax as they made their way forward to a small forest track. Jack slipped a tiny compass from his pocket and watched the needle spin. It could barely be seen in the darkness but he confidently pointed to the left.

'This way,' he whispered and took Amanda's hand.

Hours slipped by and the sky reddened. Amanda was exhausted but refused to stop. Her frock brushed the ground and hair dropped over her shoulders from under her disheveled bonnet. She envied Jack's more logical clothes that allowed freedom of movement.

'Apple?' asked Jack and pressed one in her hand.

'Thanks,' Amanda replied and smiled at him. 'I'm sorry, My Love. If it wasn't for me...'

Jack stopped, turned and glared at her. 'Cut that out, Amanda,' he said. 'We're in this together. We planned to go to Canada and are still going to do it. Okay?'

'Okay?' she replied and bit into the apple.

Two minutes later, without warning, six men stood up around them. Sean O'Donnell glared at his daughter and signaled to the others. Amanda recognized the burly men from the lumber mill.

'Well, Amanda,' O'Donnell snarled. In one brief step he was in front of his daughter and slapped her so hard across the cheek the apple in her hand went flying and she crashed back on the ground.

She screamed and wiped her hand across a bleeding mouth. She stared up in terror and saw a furious Jack struggling to free himself from two men but his efforts were futile.

'You cowardly bastard!' Jack yelled as Amanda struggled to her feet.

'You turn will come,' O'Donnell said in a quiet voice and very slowly pulled a long thin cane out from a leather bag attached to his saddle. 'Strip her top off,' he ordered.

Two leering men moved forward and grabbed Amanda. With one tug her frock was yanked down to her waist, her remaining petticoat suffered the same fate and the cane pouch was cut off and tossed away.

'For modesty's sake she can leave the rest on,' O'Donnell hissed. 'Turn the little harlot around.'

Rough hands thrust her, none too gently, over a round rock while Jack screamed and struggled to be free of his captors. With one almighty crash Sean O'Donnell lashed his daughter across the bare back. Her whole body jerked up and tears rolled down her face. She banged down on the stone and jarred her chin so hard it felt as if her teeth would fall out. The pain was excruciating but she did not cry out.

'I shall report you to Father McNeil for this,' she spoke defiantly through her teeth and spat out some blood. 'You may have the town wrapped around your fingers but not Father McNeil.'

O'Donnell, who had his hand up ready for another lash, hesitated. The one person in the county not under his control was the local priest. 'Let her go,' he grunted and Amanda herself released.

She fell to the ground, stopped and pulled her frock up before turning again towards her father. 'You will never touch me again, Father,' she said. 'Now let Jack go and we'll be on our way.'

'Oh yes, the young man,' said O'Donnell. 'You can have him when we've finished, Amanda. He's not even Catholic so Father McNeil won't worry about him. You can watch and see what happens to heathens who go around raping my daughter. No court in the United States will convict me for a right and just punishment.'

He turned and was about to give an order when Amanda heard another voice, a calm clear voice but a loud one.

'Not yours, maybe, but ours will. In the name of Her Majesty's Government, you will stop and drop all your arms.'

Amanda stared in the direction of the voice. In the pale dawn light, a man dressed in a red jacket, lemon squeezer hat, brown riding trousers and knee high black boots, stood with a powerful looking rifle in his hand.

'The name is Dutton, Sergeant Anthony Dutton of the Northwest Mounted Police. You men are illegal immigrants into Canada.'

O'Donnell leaped around and his hand went for a gun in his belt but stopped half way there. There was a click of the bolt as the Canadian moved his rifle up ever so slightly.

'I wouldn't,' he rumbled. 'I don't know about The United States but in Canada it is against the law to assault women.' He grimaced. 'Men as well. If you want to try anything...' He added no more but two more red coated men stepped out from the trees, both armed with rifles aimed and ready.

'You have no authority here,' O'Donnell snarled but made sure his hands were free and away from his gun. 'This is the State of Washington.'

Suddenly, a rifle cracked. Amanda screamed but her voice was obliterated by the sound. One of O'Donnell's henchmen stumbled back grasping an arm. The man groaned and stared at his blood stained arm where a bullet had hit him.

'You're half a mile in Canadian territory,' Sergeant Dutton said softly as clicked back the bolt and expelled the expired cartridge from his rifle. He turned. 'Constable, if you'd be kind enough to give the lady a hand.'

Amanda found a hand grab hers and a Mountie, hardly her age, assisted her up. 'You're safe now, Ma'am,' he said kindly. 'Welcome to Canada.'

She glanced across and saw Jack had been released and her father's men were backing up with their hands behind their heads. It was only when her eyes met those of Jack and she saw the compassion did she allow the tears to flow. Within seconds, Jack had her in his arms and held her close while she sobbed into his chest.

Jack stared at O'Donnell. 'You are not even a man,' he spoke quietly but with venom in his voice. 'No man would treat his daughter in the manner you have just done. My God, it is almost 1900, not the 1830s. You are even too gutless to do anything on your own but had to use six great oaths to hold us down. Six!' Jack repeated and spat on the ground.

O'Donnell's face was black. He almost stepped forward towards the pair but hesitated when he heard a mountie click a rifle bolt.

Jack gave Amanda a tiny kiss on the forehead and turned her around so her back was exposed. The ugly welt crossed across her back diagonally from the right shoulder down to her waist. Only an area where her undergarment was laced up did the skin remain uncut. Blood flowed in tiny globules down the white skin.

The young man turned to O'Donnell. 'My advice is to never come near Amanda or myself again. If you do, then, I promise God I shall repay this brutal punishment with interest.'

He took a handkerchief out of his pocket, quietly dabbed the punctured skin before doing the five little buttons of Amanda's frock up. Three were missing and the front was torn but she was now covered. When he had finished he spun the girl around again and held her close.

'I'm okay,' she whispered and stepped back.

Her eyes bore into her father. 'I always found you a strict but honorable man, Father. Until now, that is. I want nothing to do with you again and hereby renounce my association with the O'Donnell family. My only regret is for that of my mother.'

'If you ever come across the border, my girl,' threatened O'Donnell. 'You are under age and I have the legal right to discipline you any way I see fit...'

He was about to say more when Jack let Amanda go and stepped forward. With one almighty swing, his closed fist connected with Amanda's father's chin and the man went sprawling onto the ground. He gave a howl of rage and dived at Jack but was stopped by a Mountie who stepped forward and pointed a rifle at the man's chest.

'I wouldn't,' he hissed.

'Hold it, son,' Sergeant Dutton said at the same time to Jack who stood with bleeding knuckles ready for the fight. 'He's not worth it.' He turned to O'Donnell and his men. 'Your rifles stay here but I will give you fifteen minutes to retreat back across the border,' he hissed. 'If any of you show your face in British Columbia again, you'll be arrested for assault on a woman.'

O'Donnell stared with his face flush with anger. However, the three Mounties stood firm ready to fire, if necessary.

'It is now thirteen minutes,' spat Dutton.

'Come on, boys,' O'Donnell said. His eyes stared at Amanda but she avoided the dark look.

The rifles dropped on the ground and the men walked away.

'Oh Father,' Amanda called out just before the group disappeared.

The man glared back.

'Not that you care, but I am still a virgin. You may wish to tell Mother that.' Her eyes were wide as she swung around so his reaction could not be seen.

'Now go,' Dutton instructed.

After O'Donnell had vanished, he turned to Amanda and Jack. 'I am afraid your horses have gone but if you don't mind riding together you can have one of ours.'

'Thank you, Anthony. Can I call you that?' Amanda replied.

'No,' answered the sergeant with a grin. 'My friends call me Tony.'

'Tony it is,' Amanda said and slipped her hand into Jack's.

Fifteen minutes later the Mountie Police and two rescued Americans turned into a wider road as the morning sun began to rise in the east. Amanda clung to Jack and tried to ignore her throbbing back when she noticed a tiny red and white post on the roadside.

'The border,' grunted Tom.

'You mean!' gasped Amanda.

'Yes,' replied one of the other Mounties. 'That's why we let your father go. We were at least two miles inside Washington State.'

'Oh My God!' Amanda continued. 'You did this all for us. How did you know where we were?'

Jack grinned and continued the story. 'Last Wednesday I came up to BC and arranged for Tony to meet us at the border. I knew if your father chased us any little post in the ground wouldn't stop him.'

'We realized you were late and decided to investigate,' Tony continued. 'The chance of anyone else being here was extremely remote.'

'And you risked this all for us,' she whispered. 'How can I thank you?'

'Just don't tell anyone,' Tony cautioned.

'About what?' Amanda replied and, for the first time, a twinkle appeared in her eyes. 'As a loyal Canadian citizen I wouldn't dream of breaking any of Her Majesty's laws.'

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Since the arrival of the Canadian Pacific Railway a few years previously, Vancouver had mushroomed. Everywhere, new buildings were rising. Carriages, horseback riders and even some automobiles crowded the wide streets. Amanda was impressed. It was now morning and the city was waking up. The only differences from home were the Mounties; the flag poles where the Union Jack fluttered instead of the Stars and Stripes.

After a few formalities, Amanda was taken to a doctor who bathed her wound and declared her a brave young lady. Afterwards she was booked into the Prince Albert Hostelry for Young Ladies while Jack had to be content with less pretentious accommodation closer to the waterfront.

'I'll be fine,' she smiled at Jack by the hostelry's entrance. She reached into her cane bag and took out some money. 'If they take American dollars I could do with a new blouse, though. Can you buy me one, My Dear?'

Jack flushed bright red but nodded. 'Having a beautiful young lady to look after is an awesome responsibility,' he stated in a solemn voice.

'Don't worry,' Amanda replied just as seriously. 'I can look after myself. If you'd rather not...'

'No,' Jack retorted and squeezed her hand. 'One new blouse coming up.' He turned and disappeared down the sidewalk.

'Your fiancée?' asked the proprietress who had overheard the conversation.

'Almost,' Amanda replied with a grin and walked inside.

## CHAPTER TWO

*Thursday 20 October 1898:—*

*Dear Diary,*

*I must apologize for neglecting my entries but it is silly to write every day when nothing really happens. I notice I now tend to make several long entries well spread out. But so be it.*

*It is over a month now since our arrival in Vancouver and life has settled into a routine. Jack has been a perfect gentleman, so much so I could almost scream. I swear I'll have to do something about the situation.*

*The Prince Albert allows no men indoors but the cellar is fitted out for these men to become gratified as Suzanne (one of the girls) calls it. It seems the cellar isn't counted as indoors.*

*Poor Jack is depressed lately as he can only get casual laborer's job working ten hours a day for a dollar fifty. I must admit my money is going too but I won't tell Jack.*

*One good arrangement. I sold my shares in Father's firm and made a wee profit when, on my broker's advice, bought into Canadian Pacific Railway. It's safer than money in the bank Mr. Houghton, that's the broker, told me. Strange man he is, but once he swallowed his pride and agreed to take a woman on as a client, was very helpful. One would think our different shape changes our ability to use our brains or is it that men don't want to lose their control?*

*Once again, Dear Diary, this is our secret. I haven't told Jack about the shares, it would only make him feel inadequate which, I assure you, he isn't.*

*Sincerely,*

*Amanda O'Donnell*

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Amanda smiled as she reread her entry and glanced out the bedroom window. It was upstairs and provided a view over the veranda where horse drawn carriages and an occasional automobile competed with pedestrians who seemed to wander everywhere. Suddenly, Amanda grinned. Jack was bustling along the street with an envelope in his hand. He stopped, spied her in the window and waved wildly.

'Amanda,' he shouted after she'd opened the window and waved back in a most unladylike fashion, 'Come on down. I've something to show you!' He acted excited.

'Be right down,' she replied and again, without considering how a lady should behave,

gathered up her skirt and dashed downstairs.

Jack took her two hands and almost kissed her on the public street in front of everyone he was so elated. 'I got a job,' he said. 'A proper job! You said my steam certificate would help and it did.'

'Well, tell me,' she answered and guided her friend over to one of the cane chairs on the veranda.

'It's as Trainee Locomotive Driver on the Canadian Pacific Railway.' He grinned and handed her the envelope.

Amanda pulled the letter out, saw the Canadian Pacific Shield with the picture of a beaver sitting on top and smelt a whiff of new paper. Underneath was the usual introduction but Amanda skipped her eyes down to the important part.

'We hereby appoint you as Trainee Locomotive Driver, 2nd Class, to be employed the Canadian Pacific Railway. After a period of training, you will assist in the running of locomotives within British Columbia and Alberta.' She read the page orally before gazing up with a look of surprise and continued to read the next sentence. 'The wages shall be at the rate of 90 cents an hour rising to \$1.25 on completion of training.'

'Not too bad is it?' Jack responded.

'Jack,' said Amanda. 'That's wonderful! It's even more than your pay at Father's mill. You're going to accept, aren't you?'

'There's one tiny problem,' Jack coughed as if he was embarrassed. 'Read the next paragraph, Amanda.'

Amanda nodded and read on. 'It says a house is provided for your wife and yourself.' She glanced up at her companion before adding, 'So what?'

Jack flushed. 'Only married men were allowed to apply,' he muttered.

'But you aren't.' An impudent look appeared on her face. She was beginning to enjoy the direction the conversation was leading.

'No,' muttered Jack. 'I'm not but I really want to be.' He looked at his feet that didn't seem to know where to be placed.

'Well, bloody ask then,' she snorted and went crimson herself. This was the first time she'd sworn in front of Jack though the girls often did it when they were alone together.

'But you're Catholic.' The man looked thoroughly miserable.

'Was!' Amanda flung back her auburn hair and glared at Jack. 'We can get married with a Justice of the Peace, you know. I turn twenty-one next month so need nobody's approval.'

Jack glanced up and their eyes met. Suddenly he smiled. 'You don't mind?'

'No,' said Amanda. She laughed and touched his lips with her fingers. 'Well?'

'What?'

'Are you going to ask me?'

'Oh yes,' he said. 'Amanda will you marry me?'

'There is a condition,' she answered in a somber voice.

Jack nodded but looked apprehensive.

'Our marriage is to be a partnership,' Amanda stated with her eyes intense. 'I am not going to give away my rights to be free and to think for myself. I will not become your property like poor Mother, who is scared to move without Father's permission. It is almost 1900 and I believe women should be equal in all ways. We should be able to vote, to run a business or do whatever we wish.' She grabbed Jack's jacket sleeve. 'If you don't agree to that, well...' Her voice trailed off.

Jack fixed her with an equally intense stare. 'Have I ever stopped you doing anything, Amanda?'

'No, My Love, you haven't but I just want to be sure. That's all.' She smiled in a way that lit up her whole face. Until now she had made most of the decisions, anyway, not that Jack was a wimp...

'I agree, Amanda,' Jack continued but hesitated again. 'They need a reply within ten days so...'

'Straight after my birthday, then,' Amanda directed. She swung her arms around his neck, kissed him and made sure her bosom rubbed against his chest. Too bad if it was not the thing a young lady did on a public street. 'If you walk along the fire escape tonight about eleven

'I'll let you in my room.'

Jack stared. 'Men aren't allowed?'

'Why worry,' Amanda snorted again. 'I'm sick of being a goody good.'

\*\*\*

On Friday, November the fourth 1898, Amanda turned twenty-one and was awakened by a knock on her bedroom door. She tumbled out of bed, shivered in the chilly air and opened the door.

'Jack,' she gasped. 'What are you doing here?'

He stood grinning with a large box in his hand. 'Yea, I know I usually come in the window but I have a birthday present for you.' He held the box forward and kissed her cheek.

'Come in,' Amanda said. 'Half the hostelry knows of your nocturnal visits, anyway.'

She almost skipped across to the bed and pulled the large red ribbon apart to discover inside a beautiful gown, all cream and full of lace.

'Jack!' cried Amanda and held it against herself. 'It's simply wonderful.' She swung around. 'Where did you get it? There's nothing in Vancouver this fabulous. How could you afford it?' She lay the garment on the bed and flung her arms around her lover. 'Oh, Jack,' she wept and buried her head in his chest.

'It your wedding dress, Amanda,' he said. 'I bought it from New York through a mail catalog. I hope it fits and as for the cost that's for me to know isn't it?'

'Jack!' Amanda said. 'I'm sure it will fit just right,' she stopped, 'but you are not going to see until our wedding.'

'It's tomorrow, Saturday,' gulped Jack.

'What?' Amanda retorted.

'Our wedding. I've booked in at the courthouse at ten. You're twenty-one now, so...' He seemed all flustered again. 'I know we agreed to share all our decisions but...'

Amanda tried to look serious. 'My God you've got the cheek, Mr. Williams.... but I'll forgive you this time.' Her mouth broke into a smile as she picked up the gown and held it to her body again. 'Thank you, My Darling. Thank you.'

\*\*\*

The next day, a small group of friends gathered in an anteroom of the courthouse for Amanda's and Jack's wedding. He looked dashing in his hired black suit but all eyes were on the bride as she stepped from the carriage in the cream frock with full skirt and high-laced collar. The bride never told Jack but it took the girls at the hostelry and herself most of the day to get the frock fitting just right.

After the very brief ceremony the new Mrs. Williams turned and saw someone familiar in the small crowd.

'Mother!' she cried and burst into tears.

Dorothy O'Donnell rushed up and grabbed her daughter in her arms. 'Jack wrote and invited me,' she cried. 'Sean banned me from coming but I told him to go to hell.' The older woman held her daughter out in her two arms. 'How could I not come to my own daughter's marriage? You look so beautiful, My Darling.'

'Oh Mom,' Amanda cried and held her mother close. 'I never wanted to leave you but I couldn't stay.'

'I understand,' Dorothy O'Donnell smiled through her own tears. 'You know, I heard you leave that night. I cried but knew you had your own life to lead,' she glanced back at Jack waiting patiently a step behind, 'and I couldn't have picked a finer man.'

'Thank you, Mrs. O'Donnell,' Jack replied in a gruff voice as he attempted to swallow the lump in his throat.

He reached his arm around Amanda's waist and guided her on, through the well wishers to the waiting carriage. Their wedding may have lacked the pomp and glandular of a church but in their eyes it was everything they wanted.

'Thank you for asking Mother, My Darling,' Amanda whispered to her husband as the

horses pulled the carriage away.

Jack grinned at her and, without a word, reached across and placed an arm around her. The proud look in his eyes portrayed all that was needed on that, their wedding day.

\*\*\*

Their honeymoon was on Vancouver Island. They caught the ferry to Victoria, a beautiful town that was now the capital of British Columbia where three days were spent in a delightful little hotel doing all the things newly weds did. Jack was due to start work in a week and their new railway home was waiting for them to shift in.

When they stepped off the ferry back in Vancouver, a carriage was waiting for them. Dorothy O'Donnell stood beside it with a tiny smile on her face.

'I have a wedding present for you, dear,' she said after she had hugged them both and the bags were all placed in the carriage. 'Well, it's more for you than Jack but I'm sure he will not mind.'

'What is it, Mother?' Amanda asked. The air of mystery intrigued her.

'Oh you just wait,' Dorothy replied. 'Driver, to the shop if you please.'

'Shop! What shop, Mother?' Amanda sensed it had something to do with the present. Probably there was a gift to pick up.

'Oh, my impatient daughter, you just wait and see,' her mother chuckled and turned to Jack. 'She is so brazen isn't she, Jack?'

'Yes,' he replied and received a slap on the arm from his young wife.

The coach traveled through the crowded streets to the downtown area and turned into Cordova Street. Amanda stared at the three and four storied buildings towering above each side of the road. Electric power poles strung wires above the pavement and in the center of the road, ran the rails of the brand new street railway.

'They're killing our business,' shorted their cab driver as an BCER electric rail car hissed by with a clack, clack of the steel wheels on the rails. 'Passengers could be seen gripping on the open interior. 'Damn things are allowed to travel twelve miles an hour.' He glanced back and saw Amanda's excited face. 'Sorry about the bad language, Ma'am.'

'I've heard worse,' the young woman replied.

'Well, at least the horses are used to them now. You should have seen the fuss when they first arrived. Terrified horses everywhere.'

'We need to have progress,' Jack added.

'Yes, I suppose so,' the cabby replied and pulled in next an ornate building towering above them.

All the ground floor consisted of a line of shops opening directly onto the pavement; barbershops, emporiums, fashion shops and banks. When Amanda alighted she saw two workmen erecting a brand new sign above the front windows of one slim shop with the two large display windows filled with books.

"O'Donnell and Williams, Stationers and Booksellers" it said in curly brown letters painted against a green background.

'What's this, Mom?' Amanda asked with a puzzled expression. Dorothy smiled. 'I am quite a rich old lady, Amanda,' she said. 'That lumber mill of your father's is really mine. It belonged to your Grandfather, my father. You were only five when he died and, since I had no brothers, everything came to me. Sean was only a foreman at the lumber mill in those days.' She sighed. 'I foolishly let him take control and you know what happened!'

Amanda glanced at Jack, saw his look of support and nodded for her mother to continue.

'I wasn't a complete fool though, Amanda. I kept some investments back. Those shares we gave you were really mine, not Sean's, and I sold others to buy this shop.'

'Yours!' gasped Amanda and looked at her mother in a new light.

'You're half right, My Darling,' said Dorothy. 'Only one third is really mine.'

'And the rest?' Amanda felt a little buzz inside and clasped Jack's hand that appeared beside her.

Dorothy turned and stared at her daughter. 'My lawyers have drawn up the papers,

Amanda. One-third share is for you and one third for Jack. I've made them clearly separate just in case.' She coughed and glanced at Jack before switching her eyes back to her daughter. 'Also, if you agree, you are appointed Managing Director. This book shop is for you Amanda; your little business to run how you please. I am merely a silent partner.' She turned to the young man listening. 'I hope you understand and approve, Jack.'

Jack let Amanda's hand go and stepped forward to place his hands on Dorothy's waist. 'I think this is a wonderful thing to do, Mom; I hope I can call you that.' Dorothy said and nodded. 'The last thing I want is for Amanda to sit at home washing dishes and sweeping floors.' He bent forward and gave his mother-in-law a kiss on the cheek.

Amanda just stared, flabbergasted, at the sign. She blinked a tear from her eye and turned to her mother. 'Mom, this is the most wonderful thing you've done. Thank you.' She moved in beside Jack and flung her arms around them both. 'And I thought I'd never see you again. I thought you'd tell Father all my plans. I treated you so badly, Mom, and you do this for me.'

'Well,' coughed her mother. 'I'm still part owner, you know and will want progress reports. Let's go in. The previous owner told me she'll stay on for two weeks to help you settle in. It's a lovely little shop in a good commercial area.'

Amanda was almost in a trance as she walked through; met Mrs. Hoffman, the elderly lady proprietress and present owner, and stared at the neat rows of books along the walls, the tiny stationery section and the long varnished counter. In the middle of the highly polished floor, a pop bellied stove radiating warmth throughout the shop. It was like a dream. She loved books and reading. Her mother knew that.

'You take over next week', Mrs. Hoffman said. 'It's a good time of the year with Christmas coming up. December is my busiest month.'

'Well Amanda?' her mother said after they left the shop. 'Do you want to staff it yourself or shall we employ a manager?'

'Mom.' Amanda said. 'What do you think?' She turned to Jack. 'Oh My Dear, you don't mind, do you?'

Jack grinned. 'We have a partnership, My Love,' he replied and gave her a hug, 'and I can think of nothing better than have a shop proprietor for my wife.' Amanda beamed and kissed her husband fully on the lips. 'I love you,' she whispered before she turned back to her mother.

Dorothy coughed and pretended she didn't see the display of emotion. Young women in 1898 did things she would never dreamed of doing.

'One other thing,' she said. 'Your father doesn't know about this. In fact, he doesn't even know I'm in Canada and has banned mention of your name at home.'

'He would,' snorted Amanda with anger appearing in her eyes.

'Anyhow, I have a mail box in Bellingham so you can write to me there.'

Bellingham was the small town just across the border in Washington State and the closest center of population to the lumber mill where Amanda's old home was.

'Oh Mom, you've thought of everything.'

'I hope so but please Amanda, and you too Jack.' Dorothy's eyes grew tight. 'Don't go back across the border even for a visit. Your father is a dangerous man. If either of you step into Washington State...' She stopped and swallowed. 'Don't come home at all. I'll keep in touch by mail and try to visit when I can. If there are any emergencies, don't phone me. Telephone Mrs. Beattie, our neighbor, and she'll come to me. I'll leave her number with you.'

'I will,' Amanda replied and felt the scar across her back give a twitch. She knew what her father was like.

'Right,' replied Dorothy. 'Now let me see your new home. You're lucky to have a railway house. I've heard they're very comfortable.' She smiled at Jack. 'I'll call another cab.'

'No,' said Amanda. 'Let's ride the street railway. Our new house is only a block away from the line.'

'I'm beginning to like your mother,' Jack whispered a few moments later as they rode in the swaying rail car towards New Westminster and their suburb.

'Me too,' Amanda replied. 'She has more spunk than I thought.'

'Yes, I wondered where you got your determination from, My Love,' he said and laughed at Amanda's look of disdain. 'Come on, tell your Mom we get off at the next stop.'

Arm in arm, the two newly weds climbed off the electric rail car and headed towards their new home with Mrs. Dorothy O'Donnell walking up the rear with a proud look on her face.

The house was quite tiny but provided everything they needed. There was electricity, gas and running hot water; something even their house in Washington never had. The narrow downstairs had a parlor at the front, kitchen and living room behind and a laundry out the back in the tiny yard. Up the narrow stairs were two bedrooms and a bathroom with a proper tin bath. Everything in the brand new building smelt of fresh wood.

Amanda walked through the rooms and sighed. 'My God, what a day,' she whispered. 'It's like a dream. I keep thinking I'll pinch myself and find myself back in my little room in Washington with Father growling outside.' She caught her mother's eye and stuttered. 'I'm sorry, Mom, I really loved it at home but just grew up, I guess.'

'I know what you mean,' Dorothy replied. 'Your father was always a hard man. Still is,' she added in a sad voice.

'Then why go back to him?' Amanda snapped.

'For your brothers, Amanda. They need me like you did. Until they grow up, I need to be there for them.'

'Of course you do,' Amanda replied and felt annoyed with herself for the outburst, 'but remember we can help if you want us. We may be in a different country but it isn't really far away.'

'Thank you, My Darling,' Dorothy replied. 'You've grown into a young woman to be proud of.' She laughed, 'but I already told you that didn't I?'

'Did you?' asked Amanda. 'I thought you were talking to Jack.'

The two women's eyes met for a moment before the subject was changed and the instant forgotten. Jack, though, noticed Dorothy's face and could see where his wife obtained her facial features. Their eyes were the same except Dorothy's looked so sad and even lonely.

'Yes,' he said with empathy in his tone. 'If you ever need our help, just contact us. Any time.'

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## CHAPTER THREE

*Monday 1 January 1900*

*Dear Diary,*

*Yes, it is here. The new century has arrived. Jack and I mixed with the thousands of citizens last night to welcome it in at Stanley Park. The fireworks were so spectacular I'm sure our Chinese citizens provided the expertise.*

*I have a contribution to make to the new century, Dear Diary, as I am with child and have been since the middle of the year. I was afraid my growing anatomy would make me unattractive for Jack but he just laughs and feels my tummy before telling me I am the most beautiful woman on this earth. That's what Jack is like. It is evening and he is now asleep on the couch.*

*I have been married for over a year now and love Jack with all my heart. I must admit, though, in the earlier days of our marriage he was often in too much of a hurry to bed me. He'll do anything for me before we consummate our marriage, yet again.*

*Onto other matters. Jack loves his job and now drives the Imperial Limited once a week to Calgary. He is away over night and brings the westbound express back to Vancouver. Each trip is a long two days but afterwards he has a day at home.*

*My little shop keeps me occupied. I now have an assistant called Sally McCorkindale, a*

*sweet young girl and very keen. I write to Mother on a regular basis and receive mail from her in return. My younger brothers are well and Father is the same. I don't know why she puts up with him.*

*Our big excursion to Toronto is almost here. Next month Mother and boys are travelling on the Imperial Limited with me to visit publishers there. (Yes, it is the one Jack drives as far as Calgary). We hope to restock the shop with the latest books from the East, New York and even London. We'll be away two weeks so I hope poor Jack can tend to his own needs. Men can be so helpless at times.*

*Sincerely,  
Amanda Williams.*

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It was just before seven in the morning and the pride of the Canadian Pacific Railway, The Imperial Limited, stood waiting at the station ready to commence its journey east to Montreal a hundred hours and a continent away. Jack waved out the cab of the massive steam 4-4-0 locomotive, as Amanda's four brothers dashed along the platform and joined him. Peter, Jeffrey and Jamie were enthralled at the privilege of being able to visit the cab and even cynical seventeen year-old Abraham was impressed by the massive coal burning engine with roaring fire, brass levers and dials everywhere. However, it was soon time for them to take their seats in the third carriage for the journey east.

'Are you sure you'll be strong enough for the trip, Honey?' Dorothy O'Donnell asked her daughter yet again as Amanda sat down in the comfortable padded seat.

'I'm fine, Mom,' she said. 'The worst is over.' She switched her eyes to her eldest brother and gave him a glare as if she dared him to make a remark about her size. Abraham grinned and decided to refrain from any comment but it was Jamie who spoke up.

'I don't like you fat, Amanda,' he said in a mournful voice. 'When will you be all beautiful and slim again?'

'Not long Jamie,' Amanda laughed and rubbed her youngest brother's hair. 'In a little over a month you'll be Uncle Jamie. Won't that be grand?'

'I guess,' the youngster shrugged but his attention turned to other matters. 'We're moving,' he yelled and almost tumbled over his sister to get to the window.

There was a hiss of steam; a jerk and the mighty train chugged forward. Slowly at first as the platform disappeared. The Imperial Limited moved through the railway yards, past dozens of carriages and wagons of every size; huge freight cars with opened doors, completely sealed grain cars, lumber wagons piled high with logs and tiny shunter locomotives belching smoke into the freezing morning air.

The O'Donnell boys sat glued to the windows as the city unfolded beside the tracks while the two women took a more genteel interest in the world outside.

'How did you persuade Father to let the boys come?' Amanda asked.

'I guess I took a page out of my daughter's book of methods and simply told him we needed to go to the east to purchase new books and I was taking the family with me.' She gave a tiny smile. 'I think he was quite relieved he wasn't left to look after them. You know now how he hates to do anything in the house.'

'But with me?' Amanda continued.

'Oh, he's okay. In fact, I think he was quite proud to know he'll become a grandfather soon.' Dorothy gave a little frown. 'He did count back the months from baby's arrival time, though.'

'He would,' snorted Amanda, 'and I bet he didn't wait until your wedding night.'

Dorothy stared at her daughter, 'Amanda,' she snapped. 'The boys will hear.'

'Well,' said the younger woman. 'It's true isn't it?'

Dorothy frowned for a moment and stared out the window before her eyes caught Amanda's and a crimson flush ran through her cheeks.

'I know,' Amanda laughed and squeezed her mother's arm. 'Don't tell Father but Jack and I didn't wait.'

'Amanda!' Dorothy gasped. 'Ladies shouldn't talk about these things.'

'I know Mom but it's a pity, isn't it?'

Her mother smiled and nodded. In the last few months the two had become quite close and had discussed things like two adults rather than the earlier situation of an austere woman lecturing a naive teenager. She grinned again but changed the topic. 'The shop's doing well, isn't it?'

Amanda laughed. 'Oh Mom,' she added and stood up. 'I've got the call of nature, again. In my condition it's always happening.' she added and walked through the carriage to find the women's toilet at the end far of the carriage.

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By the time Locomotive 1073 pulled out of Revelstoke station, huge snowflakes had begun to drop onto the snow covered forest. Ahead was the notorious Roger's Pass with its miles of zigzag tracks covered in snow sheds with their huge sloping roofs above the lines. The snow at the moment had piled onto them and sections were already sliding off and down the mountainside. However, under the structure, the line was free of snow and the Imperial Limited rumbled on.

Inside carriage three, the O'Donnell boys stared fascinated out the open side of the snow shed at the world of white below. Drifts were now so high it was almost like a tunnel as the mighty express rattled and rumbled on. Black smoke from the coal-burning engine swirled down and, even with all windows close, the sooty smell filled the carriage and made passengers cough.

In the cab, Jack watched the pressure gauge and eased the throttle back slightly. Traction and power were more important than speed. Ahead, the powerful front light bathed the track in white light and steam hissed through the massive pistons driving the locomotive forward.

'These big wheels are all very well on the plains and give you speed,' he shouted to his stoker, Andy Carmichael, 'but in these mountains I prefer the older locomotives. Sure, they're slower but have more traction on these steep sections.'

'Sure!' grunted Andy as he scooped another shovel of coal into the fiery furnace and stood up. Perspiration rolled off his glistening muscles as he wiped a sooty hand over his brow and leaned on the shovel for a few moments rest before starting again.

The locomotive slowed to almost a walking pace as they entered snow shed eight and the roar of the engine became accentuated by the enclosed space. Light faded into semi-darkness and smoke bellowed in around the two men in the locomotive cab. Jack coached more power into the slapping pistons and checked the stream pressure gauge that hovered on the edge of the red danger section.

He smiled slightly and glanced back across the wide curve of carriages behind them as the Imperial Limited thundered out of the snow shed into a cloudy mist of sleet. Smoke shot away through the freezing weather and the air in the cab became breathable again. Andy opened the fire door and shoveled in half a dozen loads of coal, shut the door and poked his head out the window into the freezing air.

'Roger's Pass Station coming up,' he yelled. The tiny wooden station was largely abandoned now the snow sheds had been completed but a maintenance gang still used the building for gear and as a staff canteen.

Jack grunted and prepared to open the throttle. The worse of Roger's Pass was now through. Suddenly he saw that the signal beyond the station was down. The express had to stop. He automatically shut the throttle and applied the brakes throughout the train. Wheels screamed and excess steam, not needed now, was vented out while the whole train slowed to a crawl. The locomotive driver hoped the signal would change but it didn't. Damn, he would have to bring the train to a complete halt.

This he did with expertise so the locomotive came to a hissing stop in front of the down signal. The passengers were hardly joggled as all forward motion ceased. Jack placed his head out the window into the frigid air and waited impatiently for the signal to change but it remained down. A man came bustling out of the station and rushed over to the locomotive.

'I've had a telegraph message from Lake Louise,' he yelled up at the cab. 'The last train

through reported a huge build up of snow. The conditions are bad.'

'But is the line open?' Jack screamed back. His voice was almost lost in the howling storm and hissing engine noises.

'Just!' screamed back the man. 'I'd only give it an hour.'

'That should be enough,' Jack grumbled. He didn't want a trainload of passengers stranded in these conditions.

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In carriage three, the O'Donnell boys rushed to the window while Amanda stood up and stretched her rotund body. She felt stiff from lack of movement, her back ached and baby was kicking like crazy.

She grinned at her mother. 'I'm off back to the toilet, Mom,' she said. 'See you soon.'

'Right Honey,' Dorothy replied and switched her attention back to the novel she was reading.

The tiny cubical that held the toilet was so small Amanda had to manipulate her body in sideways and, once there, could barely close the door.

But she did and it saved her life!

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The tragedy happened with less than a minute's warning. While the Imperial Limited chugged forward, up above, thousands of tons of accumulated snow began to topple and slide. Within moments there was a mammoth avalanche that crashed down the mountainside.

Jack heard the roar like thunder, saw the wall of whiteness descending on them and, in that split second even though the signal was still down, made a decision start the train moving.

'Hang on!' he screamed to Andy who stared opened mouthed out the inside window.

Jack opened the throttle, increased steam pressure and released the brakes simultaneously. The wheels spun on the icy rails, gripped and the mighty express edged forward.

'Come on! Come on!' Jack cursed as the screaming thunder of the avalanche tumbled towards them.

Smoke bellowed out the chimney and hissing pistons thrust back and forth. The locomotive was past the signal box as were the first two carriages.

'Keep her going!' screamed Andy who watched behind while Jack concentrated on the line ahead.

The heavily laden train, though, had no chance. Jack watched the wall of snow and frozen debris sweep the wooden station building aside. The walls and roof just snapped and crumbled, before it was gone; buried in the deluge. Jack knew it was too late and pulled on the emergency brake. Wheels screamed and passengers were flung forward like rag dolls and steam hissed but it was to no avail.

The avalanche struck the express two carriages back from the cab!

In a scream of timber, voices, ice and snow, the second carriage was flung off the tracks by the avalanche, tossed upside down and buried in a mountain of snow. Jack stared in numb horror. Everything behind carriage one was gone. In seconds the raw power of nature had buried the two carriages under in a thousand tons of snow.

The locomotive stopped and the two men in the cab could only watch as the avalanche thundered behind them like a horizontal waterfall. Clouds of airborne ice and snow hit the locomotive cab, glass shattered and the last thing Jack remembered was being flung to the steel floor and searing pain as his head hit a lever.

Carriage three was gone; literally crumbled under the pressure and movement of the avalanche and voices of terror screamed out unheard as the roof and walls collapsed. Those not killed by being squashed beneath the timber superstructure were immediately engulfed in snow and their air supply cut off. It was complete and utter annihilation! Over thirty humans, including the O'Donnell family had their lives snuffed out in those few terrible seconds. What thoughts entered their minds, indeed if they even had time to form them, nobody would ever

know.

It was quick and totally without mercy.

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But was it?

The very end of carriage three was flung up as the avalanche hit, ripped away from the following carriages and propelled down the mountainside, along with the splintered wood of the station and snapping fir trees. However, one massive tree caught the carriage, three quarters of the way back and sliced through it like a lumber saw. The motion sent the remaining section off on a tangent into another tree, down a gully and finally into a gigantic snow bank where it stopped.

Amanda screamed hysterically throughout the ordeal as she was flung around the tiny cubical. Her head hit the ceiling; she was upside down; a steel pipe slammed into her stomach and her body whip-lashed back.

The terrified young woman blacked out!

Purple clouds floated through her mind. Her eyes did not want to open but she forced them to. Her head pounded and suddenly Amanda felt another pain. Her lower body was in agony and she felt wet from the inside, not out.

'My God!' she screamed. 'My Baby!'

The distraught young woman realized three things in that instant; she was alive, the cubicle had stopped moving and her water had burst. Wanted or not at that time, her baby was coming into the world. Another spasm shot through her body, so severe Amanda bit on her lip and blood filled her mouth.

'Help me!' she cried but she was alone in that tiny toilet thirty feet below the locomotive and what was left of the railway track.

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Time was meaningless. All Amanda's thoughts were on the birth, the contractions and the realization that her baby was coming. It was cold stuffy and dark but, all alone in that confined space, the young mother removed her underwear so the baby would have room. Perspiration poured off her body as she grabbed a door handle, the only thing available and pushed...

The agony continued on and on. Her screams turned to sobs until suddenly she realized her baby as there in the cubical and it was crying.

Amanda reached down and tried to remember what do but could not think. Her eyes felt heavy. Nothing seemed real, everything was a dream; a terrible nightmare.

She woke and realized she had passed out. The infant was in her arms with her coat around it and the knotted umbilical cord down its side. She had no recollection of having wrapped up the baby but she must have done it. There was nobody else there. The cubicle was splattered in blood but baby was alive and still crying.

'Oh your poor little darling,' Amanda cried and hugged her infant close but didn't even know if it was a girl or boy.

She heard a noise; scrapping sounds and hollered almost hysterically. Now that help had arrived, reality returned and with it fears of the situation. Without warning a pick axe blade hit the wall near her head. She stared in horror and screamed again.

A hand appeared. A woolen glove reached in and pulled back the splintered wooden wall. Cold air rushed in and a face appeared.

That nose! She knew the nose and the concerned eyes!

'Amanda. You're alive' sobbed a voice. It was Jack.

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Amanda woke up again to find herself lying on the floor of a railway carriage. It looked like the dining car but she wasn't sure. She felt sore, stiff but warm. A man was looking at her.

'Hello, Mrs. Williams,' he said in a soothing voice, 'I'm Doctor Steinhov. Just lie back.'

You are safe in one of the undamaged carriages.'

'My baby! Jack!' Amanda cried and attempted to sit up but the carriage began to spin before her eyes and she collapsed back against a pillow.

'I'm here, My Darling,' Jack's voice was right beside her. He was kissing her. 'Our baby daughter is fine.'

'Oh Jack!' sobbed Amanda. She felt Jack embracing and rubbing his stubby chin against her. 'Oh Jack!'

Her eyes swung up to focus on his face she smiled. He was holding a tiny bundle still wrapped in her coat. A wee head stuck out with long shut eyelashes. Her baby was asleep.

'Everything will be fine,' the doctor said. 'You are a brave woman, Amanda. When we dug you out your baby was already born and wrapped up like a cocoon. Your forethought saved her life for I believe the infant would have frozen otherwise.'

Amanda nodded but the relief was shattered by a terrible thought. 'Mom! Where is my mother; and brothers?'

Jack took his hand in hers. 'They never made it, My Love.' His voice quivered with emotion. 'Everyone in your carriage was killed. When that tiny toilet was flung away from the avalanche, you and our baby were saved. Over thirty people are missing.'

'Oh My God!' Amanda sobbed. 'Not the whole family?'

'I'm afraid so,' Jack replied in a somber tone. 'I thought you had gone too.'

'But he never gave up,' said another voice. It was Andy the stoker. 'I'd say Jack saved six lives today, four from carriage one and you two.' He shook his head in wonder. 'I guess he even saved more. If we hadn't moved that locomotive forward, the whole express would have gone. There's no station there. Nothing's left.'

Jack, though, only frowned, '...and two minutes later we would have been completely clear. If only that signal wasn't down.'

Amanda looked up and saw tears roll down her husband's cheeks and realized how close she'd come to death that day. 'Perhaps God wanted us to survive,' she whispered. 'My little girl, you and me, My Darling.' She reached up and pulled Jack down into in her arms.

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