

A CAUSE TO FIGHT FOR

Janet Mary Nicol



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To my students

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

THIS NOVEL IS set in Vancouver, British Columbia, on the unceded and traditional lands of the Squamish, Musqueam, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations. Canada's beginnings involved the displacement of Indigenous Peoples from their ancestral lands by immigrant settlers. Today, in the spirit of truth and reconciliation, Canadians are confronting harmful past actions toward First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people in pursuit of a just path forward.

Some characters in this novel use terminology common in previous decades, such as *Indian*, instead of the correct identifier, *Indigenous Peoples*. The spelling of Indigenous community names is in English, for example, Squamish People for Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw. Furthermore, points of view expressed by fictional characters reflect some people's attitudes of the time. Racism against people of Asian descent was especially widespread in Vancouver and across Canada, underscored by the federal government's discriminatory Chinese Head Tax from 1885 to 1923 and, later, the Chinese Exclusion Act from 1923 to 1947.

Although this novel is a work of fiction, it is based on real events. BC was the only province in Canada to hold a referendum on the women's vote. It was held during the September election of 1916. Over the summer, suffragists across the province campaigned vigorously—and (spoiler alert!) successfully. A year later, the BC government enacted legislation to expand the franchise to women, the fourth province to do so. However, only a portion of women qualified, as was the case when women won the federal vote in 1918. Chinese Canadians and Indigenous Peoples were excluded by BC legislation in 1874, followed by Japanese Canadians in 1895, South Asian Canadians in 1907, and Doukhobors in 1931. These prejudicial laws were repealed in the years following the Second

World War, between 1947 and 1952. In terms of age qualification, BC residents had to be 21 years old to vote. In 1952, the age was lowered to 19 and in 1992, to 18.

As the novel unfolds, war is raging on the battlefields of France. On August 4, 1914, the British Empire, which included Canada, had declared war on Germany. By 1917, fewer Canadians were volunteering to fight, so the federal government enacted conscription. By war's end, on November 11, 1918, more than 650,000 Canadians had served overseas. Most had ties to Britain, but they also included Indigenous people, Black Canadians, and Canadians of Chinese and Japanese descent. Women played a crucial role at home and on the war front, with about 2,500 volunteering as nurses in the Canadian Army Medical Corps. The devastating impact of the First World War inspired women's active participation in peace movements across the globe.

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I

THE PROMISE OF SUMMER

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1

Vancouver, British Columbia, July 1916

I RUBBED MY LUCKY red hair ribbon as I stepped on the trail. Sure, I knew Tea Swamp Creek like the back of my hand—but at night, the creek was another place. Maple trees thick with leaves blocked the moonlight. Everything smelled of skunk cabbage, moss, and cedar. Strange creatures hid among the berry bushes. I crept deeper into the woods, feeling the chill on my bare feet. To no surprise, I stumbled on a spidery tree root and the knot I had tied at the front of my nightgown came undone. “Blast,” I muttered, nearly revealing my presence to the creatures no doubt lurking at night. No matter. I kept on.

It was past the waterfall that I spied him—at least, the back of him. He was standing close to the stream. Davie Bolton, I was sure, what with that rucksack he always carried. He’d made trouble since quitting school. Everyone said he was the one who had written *German spy* in chalk on the Smiths’ shed. Soon after, the shed had burned down. Everyone was sure Davie had done it, but nothing was ever done.

I moved off the path and crouched behind a giant tree stump. I felt foolish and scared, and I was ready to burst now that school was out for the summer and my future was uncertain.

Once it got quiet, I slowly stretched up and peered over the top. Just then, the boy struck a match. He lit something the size of a baseball, then tossed it real quick across the creek. The loud explosion left me trembling. Birds squawked and startled creatures set the bushes shaking. A thick cloud of smoke hung above the clearing. Then, everything fell silent. The boy just stood there.

And then, to my shock, he spun around. I dropped to the ground and curled into a ball, my heart beating fast. It was Davie all right:

The lick of hair over his eye, the scar on his chin.

It was quiet. Too quiet. I stood, shaking, and peered over the stump.

Davie stared right back at me. “Jess,” he hissed.

I was done for.

By the time he sprung for me, I was already blazing down the trail, no doubt looking like a terrified ghost with my long white nightgown billowing out.

“I’m going to get you, Jess Goldie! I’m going to get you!” Davie yelled, his boots pounding on the ground.

An owl’s *hoot-hoot* seemed to cheer me on. So did the rustling sound of an animal scampering nearby. At last, I burst from the woods—just as Shep, the Millers’ dog, barrelled down the street. He flew straight past me and toward Davie.

“Beat it!” Davie yelled.

I twisted around. Shep was jumping all over Davie. I sprinted to the cedar tree in my yard, grabbed at a bough, and swung on to the trunk. A moment later, a yelp split the air: Davie had kicked the collie. I scrambled up the tree and through my bedroom window, then collapsed on the floor, breathing hard and clutching the stitch in my side. My hair was a tangled mess; the lucky red ribbon was gone. Struggling, I got to my feet and went to the window. Davie was nowhere in sight. Shep was in the yard, though, barking and running in circles.

The Millers’ porch light turned on next door.

“Shep, quiet!” Mr. Miller called out.

I leaned over the sill and snapped off a twig, gently tossing it down. Shep looked up and wagged his tail; the Millers’ porch light switched off. A moment later, the collie was gone.

I quickly pulled down the sash and locked the window. I made my way over to the dresser, where I snatched my sister’s handkerchief and brushed the dirt from my feet.

At last, I fell into bed and pulled up the covers. I tried to calm down, but nothing could stop my heart from beating quite so fast—not the quiet hum of the house nor the starry blue quilt on Kathleen's empty bed. I wished she was here now.

Someone should know Davie was fooling around with a smoke bomb. But if I told anyone what I'd seen, I'd get a real dressing down. Besides, would telling make a difference?

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SPARROWS CHIRPED on the cedar branches outside. Yawning, I forced myself from bed and yanked up the window sash. A breeze entered the warm room, stirring the lace curtains. I spied Kathleen's soiled handkerchief on top of the dresser. Last night's events at Tea Swamp Creek came flooding back.

Lily was the only person I would tell, I decided, though my telling would have to wait.

I dressed quickly and raced downstairs, crossing the par-lour to the kitchen. Kathleen was asleep on the sofa couch. It had been her turn to be on standby should Father need medicine. I carried on to the breezeway, stopping short of the back room where he now stayed. The basement door was ajar, the loud hum of the wringer machine drifting up the staircase. Each step down the worn wooden steps made me dizzy than the last, what with the strong smell of starch.

Mother was putting a shirt through the wringer. "Jess, take this load to the line. And stop yawning, girl."

A *"good morning" would be something*, I thought, picking up the wicker basket and trudging upstairs.

The backyard was quiet, the lower sky streaked in oranges and reds. They say Mount Pleasant has the best views in the city. The houses across the lane were shuttered. Remaining mindful of the potato patch, I set down the basket and pinned Jimmy's trousers to the line, all the while looking at the back of the Millers' house. Will's bedroom window was wide open, the curtains flapping in the breeze. He was dreaming about the Great War, I bet, what with his older brother overseas. At least Father's accident had kept our Jimmy from enlisting.

I looked at the rash on my hand. It had almost disappeared when Father came home from the hospital. Now it was back, and I found myself scratching it as the worry of Davie's threat last night came back to me. *I'm going to get you, Jess Goldie. I'm going to get you.* What if he did?

With all the wash pegged to the line, I remembered my sister wanted me to tell Mother about the suffrage meeting. I raced inside. Mother was on her hands and knees mopping puddles on the basement floor. The wringer machine was broken again. I stood by quietly, knowing she was angry.

At last, she looked up. "All right, Jess. You can start on the breakfast."

"Kathleen has invited me to a women's meeting," I blurted. "Monday."

"Suffrage nonsense. Why on earth does your sister want you mixed up with those noisy ladies?"

"Everything's changing." I was surprised at my own words. "Not only because of the war. Women are demanding the vote."

Mother frowned. "Women should demand they never mop floors."

These ladies are serious about making women's lives better I wanted to say, but I didn't.

"Your father is on the mend, it's true." Mother's voice was softer now. "I still don't want him left alone."

"Kathleen asked Mrs. Miller to come over until you're home from work."

Mother gave me a long look. "All right, then. If you must go, make sure you've done your chores."

I tried not to show my excitement in case she changed her mind.

"Get a move on, girl." Mother stood and scooted to the sink, her back to me as she rinsed out the rag. "And make sure your father has his medicine."

I was slow climbing the stairs, thinking about how hard Mother worked. She would have made a great suffrage leader if her life was

different. At least that's what my sister said.

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3

A SWEET YEASTY AROMA filled the kitchen. The couch was folded and pushed against the wall, and Kathleen had gone upstairs to change. A loaf of baked bread was cooling on the counter.

I was stirring a pot of oatmeal on the stove when Kathleen finally came twirling into the room wearing a new yellow dress. *Why such a flashy colour?* I wondered. Surely my sister stood out as it was, being so tall and pretty.

Kathleen strolled to the table and sat down, smoothing the folds of her dress. "It's canary yellow, Jess," she said, reading my mind. "Mr. Altman suggested the fabric. The Vancouver Bakery is lucky to have such a wonderful customer."

I turned back to the stove and rolled my eyes. *There Kathleen goes*, I thought, *praising the tailor who works in the shop beside the bakery*. She cared for his opinion more than mine, I was sure.

I scooped the oatmeal into bowls and set them around the table, yawning the whole time. Kathleen noticed and raised her eyebrows.

"I didn't sleep well, Katie. By the way, Mother says I can go to the meeting."

Her eyes brightened. "The suffrage meeting will wake you, Jess."

Jimmy entered the kitchen, a copy of the *Vancouver World* tucked under his arm. "What will wake Jess?" He dropped the newspaper on the table, making an awful scraping noise as he pushed back Father's chair.

Kathleen gave him a look. "Never you mind, Jimmy. We'll not argue this Saturday morning."

A piercing whistle shot through the room. Kathleen jumped up and took the steam kettle off the burner.

I scooted beside her. "I'm going to a suffrage meeting with Kathleen."

Jimmy grinned. "Watch out for those bossy suffragists, Jess."

At that moment, Mother appeared. All eyes turned to her, followed by a chorus of good mornings. She looked well put together, as my sister would say, in a grey skirt and starched white blouse. To think she'd been up at the crack of dawn with hours of work ahead at the steam laundry.

Mother sat beside Jimmy and asked for tea.

How could I have forgotten? It was my job to ensure everyone had a hot cup of brewed tea at breakfast.

Kathleen came to my rescue, dropping a strainer of loose tea into the old brown teapot and filling it with boiling water.

Mother gave me a disapproving look. In her hectic world, there was never time for mistakes.

Everyone seated, the teapot on the table and our heads bowed, Jimmy said grace. He ended with a special prayer for Father.

"The crack is getting worse," Kathleen said, pointing to the spout. "Surely it's time for a new teapot."

Mother looked upset. "You know it was a wedding gift, Katie. Your father and I brought so few things from New Brunswick."

I heard a catch in Mother's voice. Her eyes watered. I wished Father was with us now, instead of resting in the back room as the doctor said he must.

A bee buzzed around the table, then circled the jam jar. I swatted it with a napkin, tipping over my teacup. Mother snapped at me for being clumsy. A moment later, Jimmy waved his hand at the bee and knocked over his cup too. Mother only let out a sigh before telling me to get a dishrag.

Kathleen daydreamed the whole time and hadn't noticed a thing.

"Well, the bee is gone," Mother said when I finished cleaning up the spills. "But for goodness sake, Jess, close the door when you come in from the yard."

Couldn't I do anything right?

We ate in silence after that. It made me glad I was going to Lily's tomorrow. Her house wasn't nearly so glum.

Finally, Kathleen came out of her daydream—if only to stir things up. She pointed to a headline on the front page of the newspaper at Jimmy's elbow. "It looks like the BC government is holding a referendum on the women's vote." She turned to Jimmy. "You and Father must vote yes."

"So it's up to the menfolk, is it?" Jimmy said. "Well, don't count on getting a majority. The fact is, a woman's place is . . ."

Kathleen gave him a look, as if to say "don't you dare."

". . . in the home," he finished, ignoring her narrowed eyes. "More tea if you please, Katie."

Kathleen's hand shook as she swung the teapot toward him. "Change is coming," she said. "You'll see. Women will win the vote this time around."

With that, she slammed the teapot beside his cup. Jimmy's face went red. What a shock it was when he picked it up and the handle came off in his hand. The poor teapot dropped to the edge of the table and bounced to the floor, smashing to pieces.

Everyone leapt up. Jimmy got the worst of the splashing, the tea scalding his arm and staining the cuffs of his trousers.

No one dared speak.

"Kathleen," Mother finally said, "must you provoke your brother with your suffrage talk?"

My sister looked away, seething with anger, I bet, for catching the blame.

"Jess, clean this up," Mother said, gazing at the chunks of broken clay on the wet floor. Then she strode out of the room.

Jimmy sat and tossed the handle on the floor. Ignoring Kathleen's glare, he unfolded the newspaper. My sister gave me a sympathetic look, then hurried after Mother.

What else could I do but get on my hands and knees and mop up the mess?

I was almost done when Mother called out from the hallway. I got up and went to the door frame. Kathleen was at the entrance, her hand on the doorknob, tapping her foot impatiently as Mother adjusted her hat pin.

"There's an old teapot in the pantry, Jess," Mother said, looking at me through the mirror. "It will do for your father's tea."

A moment later, they were gone. Sure, there was a streetcar to catch, but couldn't Mother take the time to say good-bye? Or offer a word of thanks for my help?

Jimmy didn't bother looking up from the paper when I came back. He was lucky. He didn't have to rush out to catch a streetcar—the building site where he worked was only a few blocks away.

I moved to the sink and got to washing the dishes. The sun beamed through the window, warming the soapy water. On the eaves outside, sparrows made a merry racket, and over by the fence, the white linen sheets fluttered like ghosts on the line. I started thinking about writing a short story for the newspaper contest—until Jimmy's sharp whistle brought me back. I turned, and he held out his cup. I strode over and snatched it, wondering why he couldn't bring it to the sink himself.

I decided to needle him. "Kathleen says the speeches at the suffrage meeting will inspire me."

Jimmy swung round in his chair and stretched out his legs. "Politics is a blood sport, Jess, and not for women. Besides, who do you think is protecting the mother country on the Western Front?"

"What about the nurses?"

He shrugged.

"And what about the women working in munitions factories?"

"Oh, bother." He swung back round and went on reading the paper.

That did it for me. "You'll never take Father's place," I snapped.

Jimmy shot from his chair and stormed into the hallway. I scooted to the door frame and watched as he grabbed his carpenter's kit by the entrance. When he yanked his cap from the wall peg, I made a

loud clucking sound. Jimmy turned and threw me a look. I stuck out my tongue, spun round, and marched into the kitchen. The next thing I heard was the sound of the front door slamming.

Our family was going to pieces. Just like Mother's cherished teapot.

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MRS. GEE DIDN'T see me look through the shop window. Her head was bent over the sewing table as she poked a needle into a garment. I stepped into the hand laundry and the bell above the door chimed.

"How is your father, Jess?" she asked without looking up.

"He's improving, thank you, Mrs. Gee."

Something about Lily's mother was different. Not her button-down dress and not her hair, swept up in a tight bun.

I suddenly knew. Mrs. Gee was wearing eyeglasses.

Lily had told me customers were complaining about the mending. She'd been trying to get her mother to wear spectacles. I guess Mrs. Gee finally gave in.

I dropped a coin in the Red Cross Society box on the counter. Mrs. Gee looked over and nodded her approval.

"Tag day is tomorrow," she said. "So many boys at war."

"My brother may be one of them." I instantly regretted my words. Our family didn't need more pity.

Mrs. Gee sighed as she stabbed the needle into the garment. "Your poor mother."

Back in March, right after Father's accident, Lily came to our house with a huge bowl of soup. In truth, our ice box wasn't big enough for all the meals the neighbours brought us. Mother didn't have an appetite for any of it.

Mrs. Gee glanced at my bundle of laundry. "Lily is in the back. Go ahead, Jess."

I went behind the counter and pushed open the door, bracing myself for the strong odour. The windowless hand laundry was always stuffy, especially in summer. Lily's father kept the door to the back lane propped open with a rickety wooden chair. Her twin

brothers had tacked up prints from their school days—woodcuts of mountains, steamers, and sailboats. Too bad the paper curled because of the damp. My favourite was a portrait of two great uncles. Alex called it “Hua qiao”—“The Sojourners.”

“Over here.” Lily waved from behind a pile of towels.

I dropped our family’s laundry in the basket and skipped across the room, bursting to tell Lily everything.

“I saw Davie at Tea Swamp Creek last night. He threw a smoke bomb.”

“What!”

Amy looked up from the mat where she played. She was dressed in a blue smock, her hair in pigtails.

I lowered my voice. “Davie saw me spying and chased me home.”

“Holy smokes!” Lily’s face was flush from the heat, though her shoulder-length hair was tied back and she was wearing a loose fitting garment.

I dragged a stool over and sat, spilling the whole story, my feet dangling above the floor.

“You shouldn’t have followed Davie to the creek,” Lily said when I finished.

“He never gets caught. It makes me mad.”

“He’s trouble, all right. Just like his father.”

Lily dreamed of studying law after high school, mainly because of people like Mr. Bolton, who was always running to City Hall with complaints about Chinese-owned businesses. Now, she loaded her arms with clean linen, asked me to watch Amy, and headed out front.

I began folding towels, glancing at the mat every so often. Amy whispered as she moved a small cloth doll around a soapbox.

Lily returned a short time later with a basket of dirty laundry. She dumped everything on the table and began sorting.

I blurted out more news. “I’m starting work every Saturday. All summer. At Cascade Steam Laundry.”

Lily nodded.

"Here's the worst part. I could end up working full time, like Mother."

Lily stopped sorting and looked at me, her eyes widening. "You might not return to King Ed. for your final year?"

"It depends on Father's recovery. If he isn't able to work, I'll be at Cascade six days a week."

"Your father will recover, Jess. He'll find a job and you'll go to school. Don't ruin your summer worrying."

"Let's hope you're right."

I tossed a towel over my hand and scratched at the rash. Lily saw what I was doing. I stopped, feeling embarrassed, and continued folding towels.

Father was improving, I knew. He wanted more than anything to work again. And if Lily and I graduated together, we'd be the first in our families. How could that not happen?

Lily's voice broke into my gloomy thoughts. "Aunt Aileen invited me to live with her in Toronto."

"You're going to Toronto?"

"I hope so. After graduation next year. She's offered to pay my tuition for law school."

I'll lose my best friend, I thought selfishly. But then again, *if* I graduated, I could take teacher training at Normal School right beside King Edward High. Whereas for Lily, all the law schools were back east. I couldn't blame her for leaving.

Lily eyed me carefully, as if reading my mind. "I'll be back in Vancouver after my studies, Jess. It won't be easy practising law though. You have to be on the voters' list to qualify for the bar exam."

I was relieved she wanted to return home, but the prejudice she faced made me mad. And it wasn't only her mother who couldn't vote; Lily's father couldn't vote either.

Lily finished the sorting and had just started helping me with the towels when Mrs. Gee burst through the door, a garment draped

across her arm. I noticed she wasn't wearing her eyeglasses anymore.

"Girls, I have something to show you." She held up a long, white wedding gown. "From a customer. Not friendly, but she likes the price I give her."

I reached over and touched the collar. "My sister would love the bead and lace work."

Mrs. Gee beamed. "Lily, you will wear a dress like this one day."

"I have my studies, Mother."

"Think about marriage, Lily. It is important."

"Couldn't she do both?" I asked. "Get married and have a career?"

Mrs. Gee gave me a sharp look. "You girls read too many books. Be more like your sister, Jess. She will marry soon."

I was taken aback. "Kathleen is volunteering on the suffrage campaign. She's fighting for women's rights."

Mrs. Gee gave me a funny look. "I see."

The bell above the shop door chimed out front. Mrs. Gee set down the garment by the hand iron and rushed from the room.

"Where's your father?" I asked Lily. "He would defend you."

Amy spoke up from the side, clutching her doll. "Father isn't here. Alex and Alan are gone too."

"Well?" I asked Lily.

"My brothers are in the Okanagan helping at our uncle's farm. Lucky them. Father has to drive the laundry truck now, and I'm stuck doing everything else."

Lily pushed her bangs from her eyes, something she did when she was upset. I thought it best to keep quiet and get on with the folding.

5

AT FIRST, I thought the man shouting at Mrs. Gee in the reception was a customer. Then I realized it was Mr. Gee. I looked over at Lily. She put her finger to her lips. We listened a while before Lily told me to watch Amy and rushed out front.

I hoped nothing terrible had happened, like the day Father had the accident. He had been rigging a tree at a logging camp near Squamish; his fall had been over a hundred feet. The doctor told us he was lucky to be alive. Everything had changed after that.

The room was awfully quiet. I glanced over at the mat. Amy was gone. She liked to wander through the cloth curtain into the house, but it was so hot in the shop that I bet she went outside.

I went over to the back door and stepped out into the lane. Sure enough, Amy was climbing over a wooden fence to get to the empty lot next door. As soon as she saw me, she climbed back down. I wagged my finger and tried not to smile.

As we crossed the lane, I saw horrid words scrawled in chalk on the wall: *I'm going to get you hag*. I rushed Amy inside and returned with a wet cloth.

My lucky red ribbon was hanging from the wall, stuck up there with chewed gum right after the last awful word. An empty wrapper was on the ground: *Hershey's Mint Flavour Chewing Gum, 6 Sticks for 5¢*.

I scrubbed off each word with the cloth and decided not to tell Lily. She had washed off plenty of Davie's rotten words over the years.

I cut off the gummy part with Mrs. Gee's scissors and put the red ribbon in my satchel now. By the time Lily returned, I was back to folding. She looked shaken.

"What happened?"

She glanced at Amy and spoke in a low voice. "Father was attacked by a gang outside his bank. They were sharply dressed too."

"Holy smokes!"

"He was heading to the truck when one of the men pushed him. The other man grabbed his wallet and ran across the street. Father started chasing the robber, but a third man tripped him. He went flying across the sidewalk."

"That's unbelievable!"

"I know. Luckily, there was a police officer outside the Astor Hotel. He heard Father yell. The robber ran right into his arms."

"A lucky arrest."

Lily nodded. "Father got his two hundred dollars back, but he has to testify. I'm going with him. My first court case."

"That's amazing, Lily!"

A sudden sharp squeal had me looking over to the mat. Amy was on her feet, wearing the soapbox like a funny hat on top of her head.

"Amy!" Lily called out, worried her sister could get hurt.

I held my breath as Amy swayed back and forth. A few moments later, the box crashed to the floor.

Lily and I broke into giggles. Amy gave out a belly laugh that had us giggling even more.

Lily picked up her sister and sat her on the table. "All right, you little clown. Help us fold towels."

I had one more thing to say. "I'm going to a suffrage meeting tomorrow. Kathleen invited me."

"What's it about?"

"Suffragists across BC are going door-to-door asking voters to support a referendum on the women's vote."

"So the government is asking *white* male voters to decide whether to give *white* women the vote."

"It's not fair, I know. And some men even face the same discrimination trying to enlist in the army. Prejudice and ignorance

are everywhere, my father says.”

Lily made a face.

“Here’s something, though. Have you heard of Miss Mabel Lee?” Lily shook her head. “She’s a college student in New York who gives speeches at suffrage meetings and talks about women’s rights in China.”

“That’s interesting. Have you heard about the secret war trains?”

“Not if it’s a secret.”

“Well, it’s not a secret for some of us. The British government has recruited men from northern China to dig trenches on the Western Front. They’ll be travelling through Vancouver this fall on their way overseas.”

“That’s incredible, Lily. My father says the Great War got its name because so many countries are involved.”

“Yes, but history teachers probably won’t be telling stories about Canada’s secret trains to the next generation.”

“By the way, didn’t our history teacher from last year enlist?”

“Mr. Burns? Yes, last spring.”

I placed a stack of folded towels in the basket. “People talk about the war as if it’s only about the British and French against the Germans.”

“Lots of Canadians see everything from the British point of view.”

“I suppose. But then, our country is a former British colony. We are fighting under the Union Jack.”

With a batch of towels in her arms, Lily crossed the room and pushed open the door to the reception. Before going through, she turned to me and said, “Empires and equality. Opposite ideas.”

Lily was good at getting the last word.

6

LADIES IN FINE SILK and muslin dresses filled the auditorium. They talked, laughed, and waved to their friends. My sister was part of the excitement, chatting with a woman in a stovepipe hat who had swung around in her chair. I sat there, not saying a word, wishing my white gloves weren't stained. Sure, Kathleen had praised my copper fluted skirt and told me it matched my eyes. But compared to these women, my garment seemed plain. Even Kathleen looked odd in her canary yellow outfit.

Still, here I was, inside the Women's Building at last. A nursery had been set up to care for the children of working mothers, and the Young Women's Christian Association—the YWCA—had an office. It was mostly well-to-do women who ran the clubs and charities—not women like Mother, who didn't have time for such activities.

I ran my hand over the red leather cover of my notebook, the word *Diary* etched across it in gold lettering. I turned to a blank page and began writing.

Monday, July 3, 1916

The idea of the Women's Building came from Vancouver club-women. They fundraised around the city before the war. Now I'm here with about two hundred suffragists, all of us wearing a purple, white, and green sash bearing the slogan "Votes for Women." At least the sash gives me one thing in common with these ladies.

I couldn't stop thinking about what Lily had said about white women asking white men to grant them the vote. On the streetcar ride downtown, I'd asked Kathleen about the prejudice in the women's cause. She'd said change was slow and human rights are won when people push.

"So we push until everyone has the vote?" I asked.

"It's a big dream, Jess. But the answer is yes."

Kathleen promised to invite Lily and me to a speech by Miss Mabel Lee when she came to Vancouver. "Let any of these suffragists try to stop me," she had said with a determination I admired.

The lady in the stovepipe hat finally turned back round.

"Making notes?" my sister asked.

I nodded and stopped writing.

"Here's a paperback Miss Grant loaned me," she said. I looked over at the book she held up and read out the title. "*Suffragette Sally*."

"It's a novel about three British suffragettes. Each from a different social class. There's lots of true events mixed in. You can borrow it when I'm finished. Shhh. Here's Miss Grant."

Kathleen's hero stood at the podium wearing a plain grey dress, her face framed with soft waves of brown hair. She was not much older than my sister. I would be frightened to speak in front of so many people. It takes courage.

"The fight for the vote in British Columbia started more than thirty years ago," Miss Grant began, as a hush fell over the audience. "Our time has finally come!"

I began copying her words in my diary.

"The premier is putting the Woman Question to a referendum at the September election. We must convince men to vote in our favour."

I scribbled away as Miss Grant went on to describe the importance of the summer campaign. I liked it most when she said, "We do not want to overtake men. We are asking for equality." It reminded me of the boys in our debating club who supported the women's vote.

"I marched on the streets of London with my sister suffragettes," Miss Grant went on. "Brave women handcuffed themselves to iron fences outside Parliament. They were arrested and sent to prison, and they held hunger strikes to protest their second class status. Do not doubt the capacity of women's courage."

Applause rolled like thunder across the rows. My writing hand was cramped, but I didn't care. Miss Grant's speech was thrilling.

"I urge everyone here to join as equals with working class women in our fight for the vote." Miss Grant took a bow and left the stage. In my diary, I underlined her final, powerful sentence.

Miss Grant's ideas stirred something in me. They reminded me of Mother's stories about her harsh childhood growing up in a New Brunswick orphanage. These suffragists seemed to truly care about others. I looked at Kathleen. She gave me a smile and tugged at my sash.

Mrs. MacKay was next, striding to the stage in a smoky-grey dress, her hat decorated with a silk rose. She appeared confident and unafraid.

I picked up my pen again.

"Sisters, the famous British suffragette—I'm talking about Mrs. Pankhurst, of course—has visited our fair province. She reports suffragettes have put aside militant tactics to help defeat the foe. And mark my words, the Germans will be defeated!"

The audience cheered at her patriotic words.

"Think of it, sisters," Mrs. MacKay continued. "This year the Prairie provinces granted women the franchise. Not long before, American women on the Pacific Coast won voting rights. Surely our time has come in British Columbia!"

Thunderous applause followed. Mrs. MacKay moved to the edge of the stage.

"We will campaign until we win, even if we must pass the campaign to our daughters. And to our daughters' daughters. We will never give up!"

Women across the rows jumped up from their seats, applauding and cheering. I'd never felt such electricity run through a crowd, not even at school foot races. Her message about not giving up reminded me of what my favourite teacher, Miss Haggerty, told us in English class.

Eventually, the audience sat back down and the room was quiet again.

“Thank you, sisters,” Mrs. MacKay said. “Remember to—”

A loud explosion stopped everything.

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7

FROZEN IN MY CHAIR, I stared at the thick cloud of smoke hovering above the podium. Mrs. MacKay was coughing madly as she fled the stage. Women in the front row leapt up, gasping and brushing soot from their clothes as the smoke made its way into the audience.

A lady in a blue feathered hat stood on her chair and called out, "Leave through the back doors! Do not run!"

Kathleen took my hand. We hurried down the row to an aisle with a stream of women rushing toward the back exit. An elderly lady in front of me jabbed someone with her cane. Another lady stepped on someone's skirt. The doors became jammed as everyone struggled to get into the hall. Someone pushed me. I accidentally let go of Kathleen's hand. She disappeared. Moments later, I spotted her by the wall. Trembling, I pushed my way to Kathleen's side, grateful now for her bright yellow dress. We linked arms and followed the throng until at last we came out the building onto Robson Street.

The sun's glare had me squinting. Kathleen said we should stay to find out what happened. I cupped my hand over my eyes and searched for the fire truck. Dozens of women milled about the sidewalk, some fanning themselves with program sheets. I overheard someone say the explosion came from the kitchen.

In the distance, there was the faint sound of a bell ringing. Minutes later, a red fire truck came motoring toward us, the sound of the bell's clang growing louder. The truck turned onto Thurlow Street and stopped at the building entrance. Five men in uniform jumped out and raced up the steps, disappearing inside.

Kathleen saw Miss Grant near the steps and waved. She came right over. "Someone threw a smoke bomb at the back of the stage. The cook saw a young man run into the alley."

"Did the cook get a description?" my sister asked.

"She only saw the back of him," Miss Grant replied. "There's something else. He tripped going into the lane. His boot came off." Miss Grant turned to me. "And who's this, Katie?"

Kathleen quickly introduced me, then went back to asking Miss Grant about the smoke bomb. As I listened, I found out the lady in the blue feathered hat was Mrs. Wheeler, a longtime suffragist from Victoria.

Presently, I glanced at the top of the steps. Mrs. Wheeler was standing there, talking to the firemen who had just come out. One of them held a boot. Davie's boot, I bet. But if I told Kathleen *how* I knew, she'd be mad. She might even tell Mother.

The firemen were heading back to the truck when Mrs. Wheeler clapped her hands several times. We joined the dozens of women moving closer to the steps.

"It was a smoke bomb," Mrs. Wheeler said, raising her voice above the din of traffic. "No one was hurt, thank goodness. Take heart, we will catch this fellow. Until our next meeting, good day, sisters."

Davie won't get caught was all I could think.

Everyone began leaving for home. My sister and I were about to go too when Miss Grant mentioned a soapbox speech at the waterfront on Wednesday. Kathleen asked if she could help.

"You can pass these out to workers while I'm speaking," Miss Grant replied, taking a bundle of leaflets from her purse and handing them to her. "Meet me at the corner of Glen and Hastings. Five o'clock sharp."

I was lost in thought on the streetcar ride up Main Street, unsure whether to ask Kathleen if I could help on Wednesday.

We got off the streetcar and started walking along Seventeenth Avenue. With our yellow house in sight, I finally mustered the nerve to ask.

"Don't worry Mother about any of this," my sister said, her smile reaching her eyes as she handed me the bundle of leaflets. "Take

the streetcar downtown. I'll wait outside the bakery. Four-thirty. We'll walk to the waterfront together."

I didn't dare show my excitement in case Kathleen changed her mind. Summer days sure were looking up what with this cause to fight for.

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II

THE SUFFRAGE CAMPAIGN

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8

KATHLEEN SAW ME getting off the streetcar from across the street and waved. She looked stylish in her summer whites. Not like me, boiling hot in a brown woollen skirt and heavy cotton jacket. The streetcar was crowded too, and I had to stand up all the way downtown. No matter. I was part of an important campaign and would abide by the suffragette's motto: *Deeds, Not Words*.

I came up to the corner at Hastings Street, stopping to wait at the crosswalk. Behind me, two soldiers stood by a pitched military tent. A young man passed by, and one of the soldiers called him over. A moment later, I hurried across the street, left to wonder if he would enlist.

"Did you bring the leaflets?" Kathleen asked as I walked up to her.

I raised my satchel, heavy with the papers, in response.

The blinds of the Vancouver Bakery were drawn, and next door, a wooden sign with the words *Tim the Tailor* leaned against the sill. So *that's where Mr. Altman works*, I thought.

"The bakery was a madhouse, Jess. Our walk will do me good."

"Does Mr. Altman know we are strolling along Hastings Street to the waterfront?"

"Oh, yes. He offered to drive us, but I assured him we'd be fine."

"I'm glad your favourite customer knows we can fend for ourselves."

Kathleen made a face as she linked her arm with mine. "Let's go, Missy."

Halfway down the block, a man dashed out of the Dominion Building. We almost collided with him as he ran to the curb, waving his arms frantically. A vehicle with a sign on the windshield

advertising a jitney pulled up. The man jumped in, and the driver sped away.

"I suppose a jitney is quicker than a streetcar," Kathleen remarked.

Buy Victory Bonds. The message was painted high up on a brick building. In the distance, the copper dome of the World Tower poked above the skyline, reminding me about writing a short story for the newspaper contest.

We were near Main Street when two men spilled out of the Balmoral Hotel and began weaving toward us. One of them called out. Kathleen pulled me to the curb and quickened her pace. I couldn't understand what he was saying. Kathleen said it was just as well.

"Are you prepared in case of danger, Jess?"

"You mean Mother's recommended weapon?" I pulled a pin from my straw hat.

Kathleen laughed. "Yes, the hatpin. What else does Mother advise?"

"Always walk in pairs. As the nuns do."

The shops and offices were soon behind us, and we began passing clapboard houses and empty lots covered in wildflowers and tree stumps. I tried to get Kathleen to slow down by drawing her attention to our long shadows.

"We are a picture," she agreed, stopping to look at the silhouette. Two sisters in long skirts and straw hats, standing side by side, one towering over the other. "Come on, Jess, we're almost there."

A salty breeze brushed against my face. The inlet appeared, sparkling beneath a late afternoon sun. On the far shore, green-blue mountains rose skyward, a few peaks hidden behind feathery clouds.

I slowed down. "The Lions are looking down on us, Katie."

Kathleen turned her gaze to the north shore. "The Squamish people call those peaks The Twin Sisters. Do you see the white church, Jess? It's on the Mission Reserve."

I wondered what life was like for a fifteen-year-old Squamish girl.

Kathleen broke into my thoughts, pointing past the railway tracks. "Those fellows will get our leaflets soon."

A team of longshoremen stood on the dock unloading crates from a sailing ship. A few used a pulley to move the cargo, and others used a metal hook. Suddenly, a train started up, inching along the tracks, its wheels making a loud clacking sound.

Kathleen sighed. "I'd love to take a train to Montreal and visit all the fashionable shops."

I liked it when my sister shared her dreams with me. She used to do it all the time.

Kathleen linked arms with me. "Onward."

A few blocks later, we came to Glen Street. The treeless area was deserted.

"Here's where we wait. Let's divide up the leaflets."

My hands shook as I opened the satchel. Was I about to make a spectacle of myself?

"Isn't it strange to stand on a soapbox and give a speech?" I asked, handing her a stack of leaflets.

"Not really. It's a democratic tradition in Britain. Suffragettes are always giving speeches at London's Hyde Park."

"Other ideas must be debated too."

"Oh, yes. People speak against the Great War and imperialism. Even fox hunts. If passersby don't like what they hear, they let the speaker know."

I gave Kathleen a puzzled look.

"Throwing rotten tomatoes," she said, with a sparkle in her eyes. "Or stones. There's heckling too."

I gulped. Kathleen wasn't calming my nerves any.

"Don't worry, Jess. The tide is turning in favour of the women's vote."

Kathleen tucked the leaflets under her arm and snapped open her purse. She took out a compact mirror and lipstick. Was she

expecting Mr. Altman to motor by?

Across the tracks stood the sugar refinery where Mr. Bolton worked: a red brick building with long rows of tiny windows. The factory had a “whites only” hiring policy—the same as the steam laundries. My brother told me a Black man went on the property to ask for a job, and a sugar worker came out and roughed him up. I wondered if that could happen when a Black man went to vote.

I scratched the rash on my hand. Where was Miss Grant?

“Don’t you worry, Jess.” Kathleen flashed me a smile, her lips a bright red now. She held up a tiny bottle of cologne. “It’s sweet and musky. Here, put out your palms.”

I obliged, and she gave my wrists a splash. The scent calmed me a little.

A moment later, a jitney rounded the corner and pulled up across the street. Miss Grant had finally arrived.

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9

MISS GRANT GAVE the driver a coin, got out of the jitney, and hurried over, a soapbox dangling at her side. Without so much as a “how do you do?” she dropped the wooden box on the sidewalk. She adjusted her felt hat, hiked her plain blue dress, and stepped on the box, inching around until she had a firm footing.

“The boss whistle will blow any minute,” Miss Grant said. Then she cried out, “Support votes for women!”

I scanned the empty street.

Miss Grant winked at me. “I’m warming my vocal cords, Jess.”

At that moment, the factory whistle blasted.

Kathleen told me to stand on the other side of Miss Grant. I scurried down the sidewalk.

“Not too far away!” my sister called out. “We need to stick together.”

Sugar workers streamed out the factory gate and walked up to the corner. “Vote ‘yes’ on the referendum!” Miss Grant shouted. “Don’t hold back the rights of women!”

Men glanced at the leaflets we handed out. A few stuffed them in their pockets. Others tossed the papers on the sidewalk and kept walking. Some crossed the street when they saw Miss Grant on the soapbox.

“Women have the vote in three provinces!” Miss Grant called out. “British Columbia must be next!”

Dock and railway labourers passed by, a few joining the sugar workers already gathering around Miss Grant. Women workers stopped too. And girls—the ones who sewed the sugar bags.

“The BC government has the power to pass legislation!” Miss Grant shouted. “But they insist on putting the question to a

referendum.”

A young man in bib overalls piped up. “Women should help our soldiers instead of campaigning.”

“That’s true.” Miss Grant looked right at him. “But we can do both!”

Davie’s father came out the gate and scowled when Kathleen handed him a leaflet. He made a show of tossing it away. I was glad when he kept walking.

Soon after, a man in a suit came up to me. “Excuse me, Miss,” he said, tipping his fedora. “I’m John Delaney from the *Vancouver World*. I’d like to interview the lady on the soapbox. Can you tell me her name?”

“Miss Matilda Grant.”

“Very good. I’ll wait for Miss Grant to get down off her soapbox.” He chuckled for some reason.

“I’m sure she’ll be happy to talk to you, sir.”

Mr. Delaney went over and joined the growing crowd around Miss Grant. Every now and then he jotted something in his notebook. *What an interesting line of work*, I thought.

Just when I’d stopped feeling nervous, Will Miller came over with two classmates from King Ed., all working at the docks for the summer. He took a leaflet from me without so much as a “hello” and walked away. I was sure that next time I saw him he’d tease me worse than Jimmy.

“What about helping us organize a union?” I heard a greyhaired woman call out to Miss Grant. “I’d rather have decent money than the vote.”

“You can have both,” Miss Grant answered. “Jess, give this woman the information she needs.”

Kathleen heard the exchange and wrote the address of the Labor Temple on a leaflet. I passed it along to the lady.

When I returned to my spot, Mr. Delaney was talking to Kathleen. Lucky her, getting all the attention.

Just as I was starting to feel all right again, Davie Bolton came up to the corner. He was with two fellows, one of them holding a tin can and stick. They stood at the back, acting like they were listening to Miss Grant. Davie wasn't wearing boots either, only a worn pair of shoes. Pulling my sunhat over my eyes, I turned away and hoped he wouldn't see me.

"Armed with the vote, women can change the laws in our favour!" Miss Grant shouted to the crowd.

"No votes for women!" Davie suddenly blurted out. His friends gave out a hard laugh.

Only a few people turned around. Miss Grant didn't even blink as she kept on with her speech.

Davie called out again. "No votes for women!"

Still, Miss Grant carried on. She sure had nerves of steel.

Davie's friend banged the tin can with a stick. This time, everyone turned around to look. Miss Grant stopped talking.

"No votes for women!" Davie's pals joined in the chant to the beat of the tin can and stick. "No votes for women! No votes for women!"

"Enough!" Miss Grant shouted, stamping her foot on the soapbox.

All eyes turned to her. There was silence, with only a faint clacking of the train's wheels in the distance.

Miss Grant puffed out her chest and placed her hands on her hips. Leaning over the soapbox, she glared at Davie. Then she glared at the fellow with the tin can. And the other fellow too. The three of them twitched and shuffled their feet. She was giving them *the look*. Davie scowled the way his father did. He muttered something to his pals and they walked off, passing me as they headed down Glen Street.

Miss Grant went back to speaking as if nothing happened. Kathleen gave me a nod and went back to talking to Mr. Delaney.

But I wasn't so sure Davie was finished bothering us. Still, I went back to handing out leaflets.

A strong wind blew a leaflet out of my hand, and I chased it down the street. Sure enough, as soon as I'd grabbed it, I found myself face-to-face with Davie.

He lunged for my leaflets, seizing them from my hand.

"Give them back." My voice was shaking.

"Give them back," Davie repeated in a high-pitched voice.

I reached for the leaflets. He stepped back while his pals laughed.

"What should I do with this trash, boys?" he asked them.

"I'll tell everyone about the smoke bomb," I said.

Davie's smile vanished. He threw the leaflets in the air.

What could I do but pick them up?

Davie crouched down and pushed his face up to mine. "Say anything and you'll be sorry, hag."

I stared at the gap between his teeth and shivered. A shadow suddenly fell over us. Davie jumped to his feet. So did I.

The tall Black man who had just appeared gave me a serious look. "Mr. Fitz."

"Jess," I mumbled back. I saw he carried a longshoreman's hook.

Mr. Fitz turned to Davie. "What's going on here?"

Davie threw him a cutting look and signalled to his pals. They started down Glen Street, letting out a string of foul words.

Mr. Fitz shook his head. "Those fellows giving you trouble, Jess?"

"I guess they're anti-suffrage." I tried to sound calm.

"Don't let them get you down, my girl."

I looked at Davie's shrinking figure and burst out, "Hang on to your boots, Davie Bolton!"

Davie swung around and glared at me.

Mr. Fitz handed me his hook. I smiled and waved it up in the air, victorious—at least this time round.

Davie scowled but kept moving.

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10

IT WAS MY first day of work at the steam laundry. Mother was halfway up the hill. She hadn't turned around even once since we'd gotten off the streetcar. I started after her and stumbled on a tree root. No surprise. Bad luck had been following me since I woke up.

The worst part was when I'd gotten off the streetcar and my skirt had caught in the door. I'd jumped onto the sidewalk, spun around, and given my garment a tug, freeing myself just before the motorman pulled away. It was no use hoping Mother would show me any sympathy. She'd already been hurrying along Beach Avenue, and by the time I got there, she was climbing the hill.

"It's about time, girl," was all Mother said when I caught up.

She pointed to a brick building on the crest of the hill. Rickety wooden fire escapes zigzagged up and down both sides.

"Cascade is the largest steam laundry in the city." There was pride in Mother's voice.

The rows of tiny windows looked like watchful, beady eyes. *I'm only here Saturdays*, I told myself. Still, come September, I could be full time. King Edward High seemed like paradise now, with its grand rooftop dome and long stone wall where chums met up.

I trailed after Mother to the back of the building and along the lane. She pointed to an empty parking lot.

"By the end of our shift, the lot will be full," she said. "The drivers are especially busy now with Saturday deliveries."

Mother stopped in front of a heavy steel door. "Ready yourself for the noise, Jess."

I took a deep breath and followed her inside. A blast of noise came at me like a roaring train.

"It's the clanging of the steam boilers!" Mother shouted to me.

Sunlight streamed through tiny windows high up on the wall. The smell was the worst of it—a mix of dirty laundry and starch and whatever other chemicals were used to clean clothes. I glanced down the long aisle at the dozens of girls and women working away at their task.

Mother motioned me to follow her into the cloakroom. It was a lot quieter there, and darker too. She hung her jacket on a wall peg; I did the same.

“We’ll meet right here after work.”

In the shadowy light, I could see a lot of grey strands in her thick black hair.

In the adjoining room, Mother removed a key and chain from around her neck. I was surprised to see her wearing it; I had only ever seen her wear a gold necklace with a crucifix that she rubbed like a charm. Now, she opened a locker with the key, took out a starched apron and cap, and told me to get dressed.

“Put your satchel in the locker,” she said after I donned the uniform.

Next, she dropped a duplicate key in my apron pocket and gave me a once over, adjusting my cap.

“Appearances are important, Jess. Put your best foot forward.”

We returned to the shop floor. Mother made a beeline to a table where an older woman was weighing laundry.

“Jess, I want you to meet Mrs. Joyce. Betty, this is my daughter, Jess.”

So this is the lady who helped Mother get her job, I thought. She looked at me kindly with her watery blue eyes before plunging into a hushed conversation with Mother. I just stood there, feeling nervous, and looked around.

Suddenly, they stopped talking. I followed their gaze. A man in a suit had come out of an office by the cloakroom. He was looking down at his pocket watch. Then he raised his head and scanned the factory floor.

“Work hard,” Mrs. Joyce whispered to me. “You’ll do fine.”

Mother took my arm and headed toward the long aisle.

"That's the superintendent who poked his head out," she said. "Mind yourself when he's patrolling."

I glanced over my shoulder and saw him nod at Mrs. Joyce before stepping back into his office and shutting the door.

Mother let go of my arm and walked briskly along the aisle, talking the whole time. "The woman beside Mrs. Joyce tags the bundles with brass identification pins."

I nodded to show I was listening.

"The bundles go upstairs to the sorting room. That's where I'm stationed. It takes skill to break them open and list each piece of laundry and mark them with a special ink."

I nodded again, and we continued walking.

Mother briefly stopped by a long steel table surrounded by ladies folding linen and gestured to them for my benefit. Then she was on the move again. A few minutes later, we came upon the mangles. Mother stopped without warning, and I bumped into her.

"Watch where you're going, girl," she said.

I hoped none of the girls noticed.

"Here's where you'll be working, Jess."

Mother nodded toward a tall girl with blonde braids coiled under a cap, then shouted the word "Watch!" The girl placed a piece of linen in a moving roller before fetching the cloth moments later. She turned to me and held it up, all steamed and pressed. I wasn't sure where to look.

Mother took my arm and moved me to a mangle that was shut off. "You'll be stationed here. No daydreaming, mind."

"Will I always stand?" I wished Mother wouldn't mention my daydreaming.

"For eight hours."

We continued down the aisle and stopped to watch a team of women shaking wet laundry. "After, the clothing is sorted into three groups." Mother told me. "Whites, colours, and fugitives—"

“Fugitives?”

“Laundry where the colours have run. After the sorting, the laundry is washed in the basement and brought here for shaking. Next it goes to the drying room. . . are you listening?”

“Yes, Mother.”

“Then there’s the pressing and folding.”

I was getting more nervous by the minute.

“The cleaned laundry is packaged and handed over to the truck drivers.”

Mother put her hand on my shoulder and looked me in the eye. “Stay clear of the parking lot, Jess. The men talk about organizing a union. Keep your head down, do you hear?”

“I’ve seen Cascade trucks around the city.” I wanted to change the subject.

“I suspect you have.” Her voice softened. “Remember, wait for me in the cloakroom. Not the parking lot.”

“Yes, Mother.” I told myself there wasn’t time to think about unions anyway. I had to focus on proving myself on the job.

“We are the largest steam laundry in the city.” Mother was sounding proud again.

“Who exactly are our customers?”

“Hospitals, hotels, rooming houses. And ships in port. Oh yes, and soldiers’ barracks. And, of course, families who have the money to send their laundry here.” Everyone knew folks who made a point of taking their business to a steam laundry even though hand laundries were cheaper.

We reached the far side of the building, where Mother pointed to an unmarked door. “There’s the break room, Jess. I’ll meet you there at lunch. Start without me if I’m held up.”

I scratched the rash on my hand all the way back to my station. When we got to the mangle, the tall girl with the coiled braids came over.

“Rosalind, this is my daughter,” Mother said. “Jess, this is your supervisor. You’re in good hands.”

I said hello, feeling weak in the knees. I turned to Mother, but she’d vanished.

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11

ROSALIND STARTED UP the mangle and handed me a damp bed sheet. I wished mother had stayed, if only for a few minutes. She was always in a rush.

I summoned up the nerve to carefully place the sheet on the roller. I waited a minute, then dashed over to collect it. I looked at my supervisor as I put it on the table and picked up another sheet.

Rosalind nodded.

I repeated the task.

"That's what you do until quitting time," Rosalind said. She strode to her station.

The job seems easy enough, I thought. *At least the supervisor won't be standing over me every second.* But when the lunch bell rang, I was perspiring right down to my starched underclothes. I could barely lift my arms.

Rosalind came over and counted the sheets I'd pressed.

"Faster!" she barked.

My mouth dropped open.

"I'm joking, girl. You're doing fine."

The first day of work was bound to feel strange, I supposed. Escaping to the cloakroom, I rinsed my face and hands at the sink, got my satchel, and headed out.

An aroma of potatoes and bread filled the break room. Dozens of workers sat at tables munching on their sandwiches and drinking tea. I couldn't find Mother, but I saw Rosalind sitting with the girls from the mangles. She didn't look up when I entered. Not sure what to do, I plunked myself down on a chair at the empty table beside hers.

My tomato sandwich tasted good. But where was Mother? I poured tea from my flask and took out my diary.

Saturday, July 8

Within these brick walls, girls as young as 15 years old sort, bleach, press, and fold laundry. The air is stifling hot and the noise from the boilers never stops. The break room is noisy. Steam laundry girls are as hungry to talk as they are to eat.

I didn't look up when I heard someone sit in the empty chair beside me.

"What are you writing about?"

"This place," I answered.

"Jess, it's me. Ellen."

I turned to look at Davie's older sister.

"I didn't know you worked at Cascade," I said. Ellen had been a year ahead of Kathleen at school. She looked the same now, short and thin, her dark hair done up in a braid.

"I've been here six years. I'm living with my sister's family a block down the street."

"You must have stories to tell about the steam laundry."

"Oh yes. It's hard, hidden work."

"May I quote you?"

"Sure thing."

I scribbled "hard, hidden work" in my diary. Such a powerful description.

Ellen uncovered the brown paper wrapping on her cheese sandwich and took a bite. "Where did they put you, Jess?"

"I'm at the mangles. Saturdays. My mother works full time in the drying room."

"Mrs. Goldie works here?"

"Mother's been here since . . ." I didn't want to explain Father's accident.

"I guess I don't know everyone. I package the clean laundry. My station's near the mangles."

"Is Davie the only one at home?"

"He sure is. I hope he isn't riling up the neighbourhood." I raised my eyebrows. "He's still making trouble, isn't he?"

"Why is your brother so awful, Ellen?"

She shook her head. "When Davie was small, he had such a sweet smile—what with the cute space between his front teeth."

I didn't tell her I'd seen his grin up close when he grabbed my leaflets and called me a hag.

Ellen sighed. "I don't know why he became such a bully. At some point Mother lost control. And Father's no help at all."

At least Ellen didn't say "boys will be boys." I thought it best to change the subject. "Mother told me to be careful working at the mangles."

"That's good advice. The mangles is where I started. I've worked every station except the washing room."

"Where's that?"

"Down the basement. A few men doing huge loads of wash. They get flooded up to their shins. It's miserable work."

Ellen finished her sandwich and took an apple from her lunch bag. I poured myself more tea and asked if I could interview her.

Ellen shrugged as she took a bite of the apple.

Turning to a blank page, I wrote: *Tales of a Steam Laundry Girl, An Interview with Ellen Bolton.*

"Are there complaints?" I asked.

"Unpaid overtime is the biggest. The drivers wait for us in the lane and try to get us to sign union cards. But most girls are scared of getting fired. We need the pay, don't we?"

"Is the pay fair?"

"Not the way I see it. When I started, I got the lower pay."

"The training wage, like I get?"

“That’s right. It’s for girls fifteen to eighteen.” Ellen’s brows creased. “There’s been accidents, Jess. At one steam laundry, the machine attached to the mangle exploded and boiling water gushed out. Six girls were horribly scalded. Two died later in the hospital.”

“That’s terrible. Did they know how it happened?”

“There was an inquest. It had to do with a leak at the head of the mangle. It was worn out.”

Father’s accident flashed into my thoughts. *Work can be so dangerous.* I asked Ellen if she knew Miss Grant.

“Oh yes, she’s been around with her union leaflets. She goes on about the women’s vote too.”

“Well, what do you think about women getting the vote?”

Ellen looked over at Rosalind’s table. The girls were talking and laughing; two of them had a serious case of the giggles.

“Will it make a difference to us?” Ellen asked, turning back to me.

“Yes,” I answered, surprised at my own certainty.

I was tempted to give Ellen a suffrage leaflet, but Rosalind looked over at us and I thought better of it. A moment later, a bell rang. Chairs scraped across the floor and everyone got up to leave. Mother still hadn’t shown. Ellen told me not to worry, that she’d likely be down on the next shift.

Ellen and I walked to the cloakroom together, put away our belongings, and parted at my workstation. I felt lucky to make a friend the first day. How funny she happened to be Davie’s sister.

12

TIME PASSED SLOWLY at the mangles. We repeated the same task over and over. I didn't know what time it was. I heard someone calling out my name. Or at least—I thought I did. I turned around in any case.

That's when my hand went in. I felt my flesh burn and let out a loud cry. The emergency bell rang. Then I fainted.

When I opened my eyes, a man was kneeling over me. It was the superintendent. I was scared. Ellen stood behind him. Her frightened expression scared me more. The superintendent turned my hand over—the one with the embarrassing rash. I winced when he put ointment on the burn followed by cotton batting. He wrapped everything in a bandage and said he was taking me to the doctor.

"Mother will be worried if I don't meet her in the cloakroom," I said in a weak voice.

Ellen leaned over. "Don't worry about your mother, Jess. Rosalind went upstairs to tell her. She gave me your satchel."

The superintendent helped me to my feet. I was thankful when he told Ellen to come with us.

Ellen hung on to my satchel with one arm and placed the other around my shoulder as we walked into the lane. "It's not a bad burn, Jess. I've seen worse."

A truck motored round and a young man in a uniform and cap stepped out. He helped the superintendent lift me into the back. Ellen jumped in and propped up laundry bags for me to lean against.

"What's the superintendent's name?" I whispered when the men went up front.

"Mr. Evans. The driver is Ted Betts. He's gung ho for the union. He'll have you to the doctor lickety-split."

I leaned back and closed my eyes.

The next thing I knew, Ellen was shaking me awake. Mr. Evans came round from the front and helped me on to the sidewalk. Everything looked familiar—the streetcars rumbling by, the Dominion Building. Suddenly it hit me: I was downtown near my sister's bakery.

I clutched Ellen's arm. We followed Mr. Evans into a building and down a hall to an office. A grey-haired man—the doctor—stood at the reception desk. He knew the superintendent. We went to the examining room. The doctor told me to sit down and looked at my hand. He got angry at Mr. Evans, saying he'd made a mess of things. He put an oxygen mask over my face and told Ellen to hold it steady. Unwrapping the bandage, he pulled out the cotton batting with tweezers. While he dressed the burn, he snapped at Mr. Evans, "You need a first aid man at the laundry."

When it was over, Ellen linked arms with me and we walked back to the reception.

"You were brave, Jess. Mr. Evans says you are to go straight home."

My hand was throbbing. I slumped into a chair across from the reception desk.

"Ellen, could you run over to the Vancouver Bakery and tell my sister what happened?"

Mr. Evans was coming out of the examining room when he heard me.

"Go ahead, Ellen. I'll have the driver take Jess home when you return."

What a disaster my first day at work had turned out! When I looked down at my bandaged hand, the pain felt worse. How could I help my family if I couldn't hold a job?

Mr. Evans sat beside me, looking sheepish. Maybe he was thinking about the doctor's angry remarks.

"Report to the sorting station next Saturday, Jess. You can work with Mrs. Joyce until your hand gets better."

Here I'd thought Mr. Evans was going to fire me. What a relief.

My eyelids felt heavy. I must have tumbled into sleep, because the next thing I knew, Kathleen's voice was snapping me awake.

"Oh, poor Jess!" she cried out. Ellen was right behind her, out of breath from trying to keep up with my sister.

Mr. Evans stood up and offered Kathleen the chair. She sat right away and put her arm around me, looking at my bandaged hand.

"Are you all right, Jess? I'm coming home with you!"

"My hand hurts, but the doctor says it will heal."

"Let's go, ladies," Mr. Evans said. "The driver will take you both home."

Kathleen and Ellen sat side by side in the back of the truck while I slumped against the laundry bags across from them.

Mr. Betts started the motor and the truck jerked forward, knocking Ellen against my sister. We all laughed.

"You should have seen how fast Ted drove getting you to the doctor," Ellen said. "By the way, he wanted me to give you something." She took a sheet of paper from her pocket and slipped it in my satchel. "Read it later."

"A union leaflet?"

Ellen nodded. "There's a meeting coming up."

"Don't blame yourself for the accident, Jess," Kathleen said. "Miss Grant is organizing laundry workers at the Labor Temple. It's accidents like this that need talking about."

The truck rumbled across the bridge and up Main Street. I was feeling drowsy when Mr. Betts turned on to East Seventeenth and parked in front of our yellow house. Kathleen leapt out and helped me to the street.

Shep lumbered across the Millers' yard and came up to me, wagging his tail and sniffing my bandage.

The truck sped off. Ellen hung out the back, waving at us until the truck disappeared from view.

Kathleen linked arms with me. "Come on, Jess. Let's get you a cup of tea."

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13

"WELL, IF IT isn't the Goldie girls." Mrs. Cook brushed strands of grey hair from her forehead as she greeted us from her front porch.

"You've caught me baking molasses cookies, my dears."

Mr. Cook was the first name on the canvassing list assigned to us by the Mount Pleasant Women's Suffrage League. Kathleen had made it clear she would do the talking at the door. My job was to hand out the leaflets. Win or lose the suffrage referendum, my sister and I were making history.

Mrs. Cook stepped into the house and yelled, "George!"

Everyone knew the Cooks' only son joined the Seaforth Highlanders last spring. Their three daughters were married with children of their own. *The house must feel empty*, I thought.

"He won't be a moment," Mrs. Cook said. "How's your father?"

"He's on the mend," Kathleen replied.

Mr. Cook appeared at the door, a giant in comparison to his wife. He was dressed in a red checkered shirt and corduroy trousers held up with cloth suspenders.

"I'll leave you girls to tell my husband what I've been saying for years."

"What's that?" I asked.

"Women are the better half!"

I laughed.

Mr. Cook shook his head. "Go back to the kitchen, Mother!" he joked, then glanced at the leaflets in my hand. "Is this about the vote?"

Kathleen nodded.

"Go ahead, Miss Goldie."

Kathleen plunged into her speech. At first, Mr. Cook snapped his suspenders every time she took a breath. But my sister must have said something impressive, because eventually he stopped snapping.

"The time has come for women to participate in government," Kathleen concluded. "Mr. Cook, can we count on your support September 14?"

"Indeed you can, Miss Goldie."

Kathleen held up the clipboard and wrote yes beside his name.

Mr. Cook turned to me. "I see you've had a mishap, Jess."

"A minor burn." I covered my bandaged hand with a leaflet, embarrassed by the attention.

"I'll take that leaflet, young lady," he said. "Good luck, and my best to your father."

Mr. Cook gave us a friendly smile and closed the door.

"A fine start to our canvassing," Kathleen said as we made our way down the porch steps. "And that's no minor burn you have, Jess. I'm still upset you didn't have proper training."

Sure, I felt sorry for myself, but I wasn't going to let on. Ellen's stories about other steam laundry accidents had made me see it could have been worse.

Davie's house was next. I dreaded going there.

"Yoo-hoo! Yoo-hoo!" The voice came from behind us. Mrs. Cook was standing on the porch, waving her arm.

"You go ahead, Jess," Kathleen said. "I'll wait here."

I climbed back up the porch steps. "Take these molasses cookies," Mrs. Cook said, handing me a brown paper bag. "And keep up the good fight, Jess!"

Packing the bag in my satchel, I returned to the sidewalk. Now to Davie's house. An idea came to me.

"Mrs. Cook said the Boltons aren't home," I told Kathleen.

Just then, Mr. Bolton opened his front door. Kathleen looked at me and raised her eyebrows.

"I guess they came back." Under my breath, just quiet enough for Kathleen not to hear me, I mumbled "Drat."

Mr. Bolton leaned against the door frame, watching us as we climbed up to his porch. "Well, if it isn't the Goldie girls. What are you after?"

I moved closer to Kathleen, fearful that Davie might be lurking inside. Mr. Bolton scared me too, especially with the way his eyes moved around in a strange manner.

"We are asking voters to extend the franchise to women," my sister said.

"Are you, now? You suffrage ladies want to ban alcohol," he growled. "You'll destroy all the breweries around Mount Pleasant. Think about that."

"It's true there's a second referendum about prohibition on the ballot," Kathleen responded calmly. "Many women believe drink destroys families."

My sister had told me the Women's Christian Temperance Union had opposed the liquor trade for decades. Lots of their members were suffragists.

"Hogwash!" Mr. Bolton's face was flush with anger. He stepped back into the house and grabbed hold of the door frame with both hands

"I'm against the women's vote," he snapped. "And I'm against the other one."

"The prohibition referendum," Kathleen said.

Mr. Bolton's eyes narrowed. "That's right."

I gave my sister a nudge to go.

"Very well, Mr. Bolton," she said. "We wish you . . ."

Mr. Bolton swung around and picked something up from the hallway. He turned back to us, holding up an empty glass bottle.

". . . a good day," Kathleen said, her voice barely audible as we both stepped back from the door.

Mr. Bolton smashed the bottle against the doorjamb. Shards of glass flew across the entrance.

My heart pounded.

“Get off my property!” Mr. Bolton yelled, waving the jagged edge of the bottle.

“Run, Jess,” Kathleen whispered.

I clutched the folds of my skirt, turned round, and raced down the porch steps. My sister was right behind me.

I didn’t stop until I came to the next block, out of breath, my bandage loose and dangling. Kathleen came up beside me, panting.

Mr. Bolton was still on his porch, watching us. “Don’t come back!” he yelled. Then he tossed the bottle into his yard. It was a relief when he went inside.

“What a horrible man,” I said, winding the bandage around my hand.

Kathleen helped me fasten the bandage. My burn was more horrible than anything Mr. Bolton could say. Father had wanted me to quit the steam laundry. Mother had been sympathetic, but she also said I was careless and would always have a scar.

Kathleen gave my bandaged hand a pat. “Mr. Bolton won’t stop us, Jess. That said, let’s head one street over.”

14

FIDDLE MUSIC DRIFTED on to the Bell's porch from around their back yard. I wondered if anyone heard our knock. Kathleen tried the doorbell. The music stopped, and soon footfalls sounded inside the house. When the front door swung open, a dark-haired man in bib overalls stood before us.

"Mr. Frank Bell?" Kathleen asked.

"That's right."

My sister gave her speech about the suffrage referendum; Mr. Bell tugged on his beard as he listened.

"Can we count on your support September 14?" Kathleen asked at the end of her talk.

"You sure can, Miss Goldie." I handed him a leaflet. "You have my son's support too. John Bell. Is he on your list?"

Kathleen looked at her clipboard, nodded, and wrote yes beside both names.

"Would you ladies like to hear fiddle music before you go?" Mr. Bell's eyes shone kindly. Music sounded grand to me after what had happened one street over.

"I think we can spare time for one tune," Kathleen replied.

Mr. Bell told us to go through the side gate, saying he'd meet us out back.

We made our way to the small yard at the back of the house. Two men sat at a wooden table scattered with fiddles, pipes, and bottles of Cascade beer. They greeted us as we came over. A moment later, Mr. Bell emerged from his back door with a pair of chairs. He set them up by the table.

"This is my brother, Jack," he said, motioning for us to sit.

"Are you twins?" Kathleen asked.

“Yes, we are. And this is my son, Johnny.”

Mr. Bell took a seat and picked up his drink. “Gents, the Goldie sisters are asking us to support the women’s vote on election day.” He turned to Kathleen. “We’ve had a long day’s work in the rail yard. This is a bachelor’s night, you see. My wife has taken the children to visit her mother in Victoria.”

“Can we offer you ladies lemonade?” Mr. Bell’s twin brother asked.

Kathleen shook her head. “We can only stay for one tune. May I ask your age, Johnny?”

“Twenty-one.” I was startled by Johnny’s loud, deep voice. “This will be my first time voting.”

“Isn’t that something?” Mr. Bell said. “A man can fight for his country at sixteen but has to be twenty-one to cast a ballot. In any case, ladies, three Bells support your referendum, right boys?”

“Right you are,” Jack Bell said. Johnny nodded.

Kathleen looked at me and winked. No one mentioned the prohibition referendum, what with the Bells’ obvious enjoyment of a chilled beer on a warm evening.

“So what shall we play for the Goldie sisters?” Mr. Bell asked.

“How about ‘The Devil in the Kitchen?’” Johnny boomed.

The trio took up their bows and fiddles. Mr. Bell nodded, and they started on the Scots pipe melody, at first slowly, then speeding up. By the end of the tune, the bows were flying across the strings fast enough to start a fire. It reminded me of the kitchen parties my parents used to have.

I spoke up. “Sing something, Kathleen. A Gaelic song.”

“Go on,” Mr. Bell said. “We’ll catch up to you.”

“All right, then.”

In a high, clear voice, Kathleen sang about a Scottish girl forced to marry a man her father chose instead of her own true love. I didn’t understand all the Gaelic words, but my sister sang with such feeling that it didn’t matter. Frank and Johnny came in on the fiddle, and

Jack joined on a penny whistle. When the song ended, the magical sounds lingered.

My spirit was lifted as we said our good-byes and headed next door.

Kathleen looked at her clipboard after we climbed the porch steps. "A Mrs. Goodwife lives here," she said. "Likely a widow. She may even agree to volunteer."

"Votes for women, is it?" Mrs. Goodwife asked when she opened the door. She looked uncomfortable in a long black dress with a high lace collar.

"That's right," Kathleen said. "There's an election in September ____"

"You young ladies should be thinking about marriage," she said, interrupting my sister. "Not going around bothering folks with your suffrage nonsense."

With that, she slammed the door.

Kathleen and I looked at each other in disbelief.

"Some people are afraid of change," my sister said as we moved quickly down the steps. "Not only older folks either." She gave me a meaningful look.

Oh brother, I thought. Why does my sister always find a way to tell me to grow up?

A narrow wooden building sat on the lot next door. "That's the Orangeman's Hall," Kathleen said, looking at her clipboard. "There's Mr. Binn's house on the corner. Let's pay him a visit."

A large sign above the front window advertised Binn's Chocolates, but a *Closed* sign hung in the door window. We followed a stone path to the side entrance, and Kathleen rang the bell. A young girl in a pink dress opened the door. She was holding a bunch of chocolates in her hand and looked about ten years old.

"We're here about the suffrage referendum," Kathleen said. "Is your father about?"

“Oh yes, the suffrage question,” Mr. Binn said, coming up behind his daughter. He was dressed in tweeds, the sleeves of his starched shirt rolled up. A pipe was cradled in his hand.

His daughter moved to the side, and Mr. Binn stepped closer to the door. Kathleen dove into her talk. At the end, she asked for his support on election day.

Mr. Binn took a draw from his pipe. “If women have the vote, they will become like men.”

“We are not asking for more power, sir,” my sister responded. “We are asking for equality.”

“Surely women are content as wives and mothers?”

“Many women work outside the home. I myself work in a bakery. I know dozens of other women employed in shops and offices.”

“And steam laundries and the garment trade,” I piped in, thinking about Mother and Miss Grant. Mr. Binn’s daughter looked at me. She smiled and popped a chocolate in her mouth.

“But you will quit your job one day, surely,” Mr. Binn said. “And become a wife and mother.”

“Why yes, possibly,” Kathleen replied. “But not all marriages last forever. Some girls don’t marry. The war is helping see to that.”

“You have an answer for everything don’t you?” Mr. Binn took another draw from his pipe. “Well, let me think on it.” He turned to me. “What’s that you have, young lady?”

I handed him a leaflet.

“Good day to you both.” He took the leaflet. Just before shutting the door, his daughter flashed me a smile. There were traces of chocolate on her teeth.

On the sidewalk, Kathleen held up the clipboard. “I’m marking him *undecided*.”

“You are such an optimist, Katie. He’ll vote against women’s suffrage, I’m sure. Puffing on that pipe like he’s king of the castle!”

Kathleen chuckled. “Come on, Jess. We’ve only just started.”

Across the street was a blue-painted bungalow with a white picket fence surrounding the small front yard. Kathleen studied the clipboard. "This is Mr. Kawai's residence. He's in the city directory, but not on the voters' list."

At that moment, a grey-haired man in overalls appeared from the side of the house. He walked up to the gate. "Were you looking for me?"

Kathleen shook her head. "No, sir."

"Are you suffrage ladies?"

My sister answered. "Yes."

"A Japanese fellow tried to get us on the voters' list a while back. They wouldn't have it."

An awkward silence followed. Kathleen wished him a good day and we continued down the sidewalk.

"Mr. Kawai's not on the voters' list because he's Japanese," I said, upset at the exchange. "It's the same discrimination women face."

"It isn't fair, Jess. But if you mention the Japanese or—"

"The Chinese. Or people like Mr. Sandhu."

"Mr. Sandhu?"

"The man who goes through our lane selling firewood."

"Yes, Mr. Sandhu. The newspapers refer to them as 'Hindoos,' though Mr. Altman has corrected me, saying they are of the Sikh faith. They hail from the Punjab."

"The Punjab?"

"A region of the Indian subcontinent. That makes them British subjects and our allies in the Great War. Yet in BC they are denied the vote by government legislation. As for our suffrage movement, well, most women suffragists are not supportive of people of Asian backgrounds."

My head was spinning. *Who else couldn't vote?* I wondered. I remembered Lily saying her aunt in Toronto admired Mary Ann Shadd. She had been the founder and editor of the *Provincial*

Freemen in Ontario and had spoken against slavery *and* in favour of women's suffrage. *Maybe*, I thought as I considered the late Miss Shadd, *all things are possible in the fight for equality*.

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15

"ONE MORE HOUSE after this one, Jess."

Our first evening of canvassing had turned out amazing, with each house having a story to offer. Dusk was gathering now, and the streetlamps flickered on.

Kathleen knocked four times before Mrs. Carriere answered the door. Her curly brown hair stuck out in every direction. It sounded like children were quarrelling in the next room.

Kathleen stated our purpose. Mrs. Carriere fled, promising to fetch her husband.

Not long after, a tall, dark-haired man with a curled mous-tache greeted us. He appeared surprisingly calm considering all the noise.

"Mr. Carriere?" Kathleen asked.

He nodded and listened politely as my sister launched into her speech.

"Give me a dozen leaflets," he said when she finished. "I'll put them in my barber shop."

His wife came back and handed me a package wrapped in brown paper. "It's a slice of war cake," she said. "No eggs or butter, but lots of margarine. Best of luck with your suffrage work, ladies!"

I thanked her and packed the cake in my satchel, heartened by Mrs. Carriere's support—and her husband's too.

"And they call us the weaker sex," I said when we returned to the sidewalk.

My sister smiled. "Many women with Mrs. Carriere's mettle are working on the suffrage campaign, rest assured."

The lights had turned on in most of the houses on the block.

"One more visit." Kathleen pointed across the street to a three-storey house on top of a small hill, its sloping yard bordered by a

stone wall. The black-shingled roof gave me a chill what with its turret being shaped like a witch's hat.

Kathleen looked at the clipboard. "The Middletons live here. Three voters. A father and two sons."

"There's no lights on, Katie. Do you think anyone is home?"

"Let's find out."

I scrambled to keep up as she crossed the street with her usual long strides. The iron gate creaked when Katherine opened it. With a sense of doom, I followed her up the steps to a flagstone walkway. Katherine reached for the iron knocker on the front door and banged it. A moment later, a dog barked. My sister tried ringing the bell. The dog's bark got louder.

"Let's go," I whispered.

"One more ring."

Right then, a German Shepherd bounded from around the side of the house, growling and snarling and coming right for us.

"Run, Jess!"

I sure did, Kathleen right behind me and the barking dog at her heels.

I had made it to the steps when Kathleen suddenly screamed. The dog had latched its teeth on the hem of her dress. I rushed back to her side. Kathleen grabbed my hand and told me to pull hard—away from her. I did what she asked, but in the tug-of-war that ensued with the dog, it felt like I was losing.

"Pull harder, Jess!" Kathleen yelled. I yanked with all my might.

There was an awful ripping sound. Kathleen lurched toward me, tilting forward but managing to stay on her feet. As for the nasty creature, a piece of Kathleen's dress dangled from its jaw.

I dug into my satchel, pulled out Mrs. Carriere's war cake, and flung it at the dog. The beast dropped the ripped fabric and began devouring my bait.

"Good thinking, Jess," Kathleen said, scooping the cloth from the ground. "Come on."

She pushed me ahead of her and we raced along the path and down the steps to the sidewalk. Kathleen slammed the gate shut seconds before the hound came leaping at us, barking viciously from behind the gate but looking comical too, with all the cake crumbs covering his snout.

I gazed at the cloth in Kathleen's hand. "It looks like a map of France."

My sister frowned. "Father has filled your head with war. Let's catch the streetcar home, Jess. We'll come back another day."

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16

AN APARTMENT BUILDING was an ideal place to canvass on a hot Sunday afternoon. At least, that's what Kathleen decided. And so, with three outings of canvassing already behind us, we walked down to the Ashnola Apartments at Main and Sixth Avenue. A grocery shop operated on the main floor. The words *Ashnola Apartments* were printed in gold lettering on the glass door at the side entrance of the brick building.

"You do the talking this time, Jess," Kathleen said when we entered the lobby. "Remember to have a thick skin. Don't take anything personally."

What an opportunity, I thought, pleased to have the chance to debate. Mr. Wilson in Suite 101 got me off to a good start, for he promised to support the referendum.

Kathleen did a tally after we visited each suite. Four men in favour, she reported, two *undecided*, and two *antis*. Mr. Bellwether in Suite 107 was an *anti*—one I knew I'd never forget.

"What are the three fastest ways to deliver a message?" he'd asked me, following my suffrage talk.

"Why, I don't know, sir."

"Telegraph."

"Yes."

"Telephone."

"I see."

"And tell-a-woman." He roared with laughter and shut the door. I turned to Kathleen, not sure whether to laugh or shake my head.

"No matter, Jess," was all my sister said, stifling a smile.

We climbed the stairs to the second floor. "May I hold the clipboard, Katie? I want the satisfaction of writing yes beside

supporters' names."

Kathleen glanced at my bandaged hand. "Are you sure?"

"The pain is almost gone. Besides, I've learned to be ambidextrous."

"Ambidextrous. You clever two-handed girl. Watch you don't frighten men away with those big words."

"Wait until I start wearing spectacles from all my reading."

Kathleen handed over the clipboard.

"No voters here," I said as we came up to Suite 201. "But we could recruit a lady volunteer."

A young woman appeared at the door after four knocks. She held a baby in her arms. I peered inside the blanketed bundle, and the tiniest eyes looked up at me.

"Mrs. Drummond?" I asked.

"My mother isn't home at the moment. I'm her daughter, Miss Drummond."

The household arrangement seemed puzzling to me. "We're here about the suffrage referendum. Do you have a moment?"

"Suffragists. Very good. Please come in and sit down."

Sunlight streamed through a row of windows along the far wall. The main room was furnished with a beige sofa and pair of Victorian-style chairs. A burgundy carpet covered the wood flooring. I spotted a baby's cup on the table top by the couch where we sat. Another table was stacked with books, knitting needles, and balls of wool.

The baby started crying. "Give me a moment, ladies." Miss Drummond stood, rocking the baby and whispering "Sally" over and over.

After a time, I found myself losing patience—unlike Kathleen. She stood up and went over to Miss Drummond's side, cooing at the baby.

Resigning myself to a long wait, I went to the window to check the view. Pots of yellow and red pansies decorated the fire escape.

Across the street, people strolled along the sidewalk, window shopping. A young man and woman held hands at the streetcar stop.

I leaned against the sill, my back to the window. A landscape painting hung on the wall, and family photographs rested along a bookshelf. *What a cozy apartment*, I thought.

The baby stopped crying. Miss Drummond waved us back to the sofa, while she herself remained on her feet, rocking the baby.

"I've met you both before," Miss Drummond said, looking at Kathleen. "At church, I think. The Goldie sisters?"

"Yes," my sister answered. "I'm Kathleen. This is Jess. Our family worships at Mount Pleasant Presbyterian church."

"You've heard about the baby Sally?"

"No, we haven't."

"Her mother has asked the minister to help with an adoption. I agreed to look after Sally—the mother's name for her—while he looks for suitable parents."

"What happens if no one adopts Sally?" I asked, upset by her story.

"She will be placed in the Alexandra Orphanage."

I thought about our mother's childhood in a New Brunswick orphanage. "That's shocking."

Kathleen rose from the sofa and went over to Miss Drummond. "Don't judge the mother harshly, Jess. We don't know the circumstances." She jingled her necklace near the baby's face. Sally giggled as she reached out with her tiny hand and touched the silver chain.

There goes Kathleen, I thought, *being a saint*. Though she must be reminded of Mother's hardships too.

"Where do you work, Miss Drummond?" Kathleen asked.

"At Magee Secondary. I teach science. Here, you may hold Sally."

My sister's face lit up as she took the baby in her arms. Had Kathleen forgotten our purpose in visiting?

“We hope you will talk to other teachers about the suffrage referendum,” I said.

“Give me a few leaflets. I’ll place them in the men’s staffroom. There’s still a few teachers who haven’t gone to war.”

Sally was crying again. Miss Drummond took her from my sister.

Kathleen moved to the door and motioned me to follow. “You have done a good deed, Miss Drummond.”

Out in the hallway, my sister stood by the closed door, lost in thought.

“Our family can’t possibly adopt the baby.”

“I know, Jess.”

I went over to the neighbouring suite. “Mr. Steward lives here.”

Kathleen didn’t budge.

I rapped sharply on the door, hoping my sister would wake up to the task at hand: winning the women’s vote.



WARNING SIGNS

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17

I WAS SEARCHING FOR my sister, but I couldn't find her. Pushing my way past the ladies rushing down the aisle, I struggled to get out of the building. . .

I woke up from my dream and got ready to go to the suffrage meeting.

Davie's smoke bomb still bothered me. Yet, here I was again, in the auditorium of the Women's Building with my sister and Lily, excited—but uneasy too. What if last night's dream was a warning?

Suffrage ladies filled the rows, all well-dressed, some wearing a *Votes for Women* sash. We had been late getting here, but luckily Kathleen had spotted three chairs in the middle row. No one paid much attention as we made our way to the seats. And why should they? Lily had more in common with the speaker than anyone else in the audience.

Mrs. Wheeler was already at the podium giving campaign updates when we sat. I fixed the bandage on my hand and got out my diary and pen from my purse.

At last, Mrs. Wheeler began talking about the guest speaker. Lily and I looked at each other and smiled. I opened my diary to record her introductory words.

Monday, July 24

Born in southern China in 1896, Miss Mabel Lee's family immigrated to America in 1905. Her father is a Baptist minister in New York City and a respected leader in Chinatown. At age sixteen, Miss Lee led a suffrage parade on horseback in support of the women's vote. Today she attends Barnard College and writes for The Chinese Students' Monthly.

Sisters, may I present our American guest, Miss Mabel Lee.

As Miss Lee walked across the stage, I thought about how the grainy photograph in the *Vancouver World* didn't do her justice. She was striking, her dark hair swept up and decorated with a jewelled comb. An amethyst brooch sparkled on her high-collared shirtwaist, and shiny black boots peeked out from beneath a long, grey skirt.

"The right to vote is a human right," Miss Lee said at the top of her speech.

Lily and I exchanged looks. Here was a kindred spirit.

"I want to talk to you about the submerged female half of the population in China," she continued. "They are deprived of full freedom."

The submerged female half. I copied and underlined her startling phrase in my diary.

"For no nation can ever make real and lasting progress unless its women are following close to its men."

Miss Lee went on to discuss marriage equality and the value of a woman's education. She spoke of the "feminist movement" many times. Women in China gained the vote five years ago, she said. Most dramatic were her stories about women who fought side by side with men in China's revolutionary war.

"It seems to me each culture has something to learn from the other," Miss Lee concluded.

The audience was still clapping when Mrs. Wheeler returned to the stage and thanked the guest speaker, handing her a bouquet of red roses. Before everyone got up to leave, Mrs. Wheeler made a plea for donations to the suffrage campaign and the Red Cross.

I was thinking about Miss Lee's ideas as we made our way out the auditorium and into the hallway. Lily was the first to say anything. "Miss Lee must have an interesting life in New York City. My goal to study law in Toronto may not be so far-fetched."

I nodded. "She inspires women to believe anything is possible."

Kathleen looked pleased. "I knew you girls would enjoy this. Let's go for a cup of tea before heading home."

As we stepped onto Robson Street, I had a flashback to the evacuation. But nothing bad happened this time. Perhaps my dream hadn't been a warning after all.

Kathleen left us by the steps at the side entrance on Thur-low Street while she went off to talk to someone.

"My sister, the social butterfly," I said to Lily "So, what else do you think about Miss Lee's speech?"

"She was brave to talk in front of all those women, but I wonder how she can support a suffrage movement that doesn't include Chinese people."

"And not only Chinese people."

Lily nodded. "Maybe Miss Lee is a bridge builder. She's fighting for human rights in a way that is acceptable. You could say she's coming at the suffrage movement sideways."

"That's interesting. She's getting everyone to think about women in other parts of the world too, not just in Britain and the States."

Lily looked over my shoulder. Her face clouded over.

I swung around.

Mrs. Gee was glaring at us from across the street.

"Mother's coming over," Lily muttered, brushing back her bangs more than once.

"Did you tell her about the suffrage meeting?"

"No. Only Father."

Kathleen came over just as Lily's mother walked up beside us.

"Mrs. Gee, so good to see you," my sister said, innocent of anything. "We heard a wonderful speech by a young American woman."

At that moment, Mrs. Wheeler came out the door of the side entrance. She was followed by Miss Lee, who was holding the bouquet of roses and getting lots of attention from a group of suffrage ladies. To my surprise, Miss Lee glanced our way, said something to Mrs. Wheeler, and climbed down the steps toward us. I just knew sparks were about to fly.

"I am Miss Mabel Ping-Hua Lee," she said to Lily's mother. "It is a pleasure to meet you . . .?"

"Mrs. Gee."

"Mrs. Gee. And this is your daughter?"

"I am proud of Lily," Mrs. Gee said coldly.

Lily jumped in. "I enjoyed your talk, Miss Lee. These are my friends, Jess and Kathleen Goldie."

Miss Lee nodded at us.

"If I may say, Miss Lee," Lily went on, "it will take a long time before we gain full citizenship rights."

"I agree, Lily. But I am confident that with strong mothers like yours, we will move forward."

Her praise didn't soften Mrs. Gee's expression.

Miss Lee took out a calling card from inside her glove and handed it to Lily's mother. "If you are ever in New York City, please visit me."

Then she pulled a rose from her bouquet and gave that to Mrs. Gee too. Before anyone could speak, Miss Lee was climbing back up the steps.

"New York!" Mrs. Gee spat out the words, holding the rose to her nose at the same time. We all quietly watched her snap open her purse and drop the calling card inside. She turned to her daughter. "You are needed here with your family, Lily. Not in Toronto!"

I didn't want my best friend to leave Vancouver either. But she had a dream.

We were four glum people boarding the streetcar for home. So much for our cup of tea.

18

THE TELEPHONE RANG. I banged the Dutch cleanser on the counter beside the sink and sprinted for the back room. "Slow down, Jess!" Father called out from the kitchen table.

I lifted the receiver after the third ring.

It was Lily, inviting me for tea at the home of a family friend in Chinatown. She said we could ride our bicycles there. I happily agreed.

"Is your mother still mad about the meeting?" I asked.

"Oh yes. We must hope Miss Lee's flower casts a spell on her."

Father entered the room for his rest just as I hung up. I told him my plans and hurried to get ready.

Lily was waiting for me in the lane behind the shop when I pedalled over. She laughed at the oven mitt I was wearing to protect my bandaged hand.

"On to Chinatown," she said, mounting her bike.

We soared down Main Street. The north shore mountains shimmered under a dome of blue sky. As we approached False Creek, Lily motioned to stop.

"Give me a minute to fix this," she said, rattling the broken wicker basket on her bicycle handlebar.

I stood patiently, holding my bicycle at my side, and listened to the sound of water rushing over rocks at the nearby Brewery Creek. Daisies, bluebells, and Indian paintbrush carpeted the ground. I wondered what life had been like for the people living here in the thousands of years before the settlers came and this place became known as the city of Vancouver.

"Why do we live in separate quarters from each other?" I asked Lily. She was still fidgeting with her basket. "Not just the people in

Chinatown and Japantown. There's the Indian band on the north shore—"

"The Squamish People," she corrected.

"Yes, and the Musqueam People along the Fraser River. All the children go to separate residential schools."

"I know, and I wonder why. Remember the stories by Pauline Johnson we read in English class?"

"*Legends of Vancouver.*"

Lily nodded. "Miss Johnson was of mixed heritage and grew up back east. When she died in Vancouver not long ago, there was a huge funeral downtown."

"My sister told me Miss Johnson was aware of women's suffrage, but she wanted to focus on using her storytelling gift to spread knowledge about Mohawk people."

Lily nodded. "Through stories, she shared the proud culture and traditions of her people. I think it's a drive we all have, no matter our background." Lily gave me a meaningful look, then said, "Let's go, Jess. I'll fix the darn basket later. You are about to meet another remarkable woman who stands up for human rights."

I FOLLOWED Lily down the narrow aisle, gazing the whole while at jade bracelets and jewelled rings glistening in glass cases. At the back counter, Lily rang a desk bell. A secret door in the wall opened, and a silver-haired man in a well-dressed suit stepped out.

"Nice. You bring a friend, Lily."

"Yes, Mr. Quan. This is Jess Goldie."

"Have you come to buy gold?" he asked me.

Lily laughed. "No, Mr. Quan. Your wife has invited us to tea."

"I will take you. Wait outside for a moment, girls."

Back on Pender Street, I moved to the curb and got a better view of Mr. Quan's shop: one storey, a flat roof, and painted bright green. *How strange there isn't a sign to advertise his business.*

Customers moved in and out of shops farther up on Pender Street. Lily told me the doors off the sidewalk opened to staircases leading up to apartments, tearooms, and secret societies.

Presently, Mr. Quan came out and locked his shop. He beckoned us next door to the entrance of a tall brick building. He rang the bell, and an elderly man with a grey beard appeared. Mr. Quan stepped inside. Lily and I followed.

"Don't be scared," Lily whispered, nudging me into the darkened hallway. Mr. Quan followed the grey-bearded man up a long, narrow staircase. I hesitated and looked over my shoulder. Lily was locking the door. She came up behind me and chuckled. "Go ahead, Jess."

I caught up with Mr. Quan on the top landing, with Lily right behind me. The grey-haired man continued on, leading us single file down a windowless hallway. Fragrant cooking odours seeped through the cracks beneath the apartment doors. My heart jumped when a man suddenly stuck his head out a door. Our guide greeted him in a hushed voice, and the man went back inside.

I heard children's voices farther along the corridor. As we passed the room, I noticed the door was open and glimpsed in. A dozen children sat at desks, laughing and throwing paper, no teacher in sight.

The grey-haired man stopped at the last door in the hallway, said something in Cantonese to Mr. Quan, and vanished inside the apartment.

Lily walked to a small window across from the door, waved me over, and pointed to the courtyard below. Two young men sat cross-legged, smoking a strange pipe.

"A water pipe," Lily said.

Mr. Quan was already heading onto a walkway. "Come, girls."

On the other side, we climbed a second flight of stairs to another long hallway. Mr. Quan stopped in front of the third door and knocked.

A white woman with wisps of grey hair poked her head out.

“Here is Lily and her friend, Jess Goldie.” Mr. Quan turned to leave. “Bāi Bāi.”

Mrs. Quan whisked Lily and me into a large parlour decorated with ornate furniture and beautiful objects. She gestured to the settee and left the room, returning a few minutes later with a tray of refreshments.

“I’ll let the tea steep, girls.” Mrs. Quan pushed *The Chinese Times* aside, set the tray on a low table, then backed into a wooden chair with ornamental carvings along the armrests.

“Welcome to the Yip family compound, Jess,” Mrs. Quan said. “My husband’s cousin owns this building. There is no place quite like it anywhere in Chinatown.”

“It’s a maze,” I said. “Which I guess makes it a-maz-ing!”

Lily grimaced at my joke.

“Did Jess see the classroom?” Mrs. Quan asked Lily.

“She peeked through the open door. The children were noisy. I don’t think the teacher was there.”

Mrs. Quan smiled. “That would be unusual. There is strict discipline. When Mr. Quan and I arrived here from New York, I spent many days at the back of the classroom learning Cantonese.”

Mrs. Quan poured tea and offered us cake from a platter. She turned to me.

“I hear you and your sister are campaigning for the women’s vote.”

“Yes, Mrs. Quan. I believe in equality.”

“Do you believe in equality for all people, regardless of race?”

“Why, yes.”

“I see.” Mrs. Quan raised the teacup to her lips, looking at me with sharp eyes. “I will tell you girls, a mixed marriage is very difficult. There is much prejudice.”

Lily turned to me. “Mrs. Quan is a respected midwife. She trained with a Catholic nursing sister near Chinatown.”

Mrs. Quan looked away modestly. "I must tell you, Lily, Mr. Quan and I are moving to a house farther east on Pender Street. The young women I help will have a place to stay after their baby is born."

I'd never met a midwife before. Mrs. Quan's work seemed unusual and important.

Lily told her about Miss Lee's speech at the Women's Building and said she was determined more than ever to study law.

Mrs. Quan beamed. "Of course, you have heard of Victoria Chung?"

Lily shook her head.

"She was born in the BC capital. This fall she's headed to University of Toronto to study medicine. You must look her up when you go for your studies."

"If I go, Mrs. Quan."

"What do you mean, my dear?"

Lily frowned. "Mother has forbidden me from leaving Vancouver."

Mrs. Quan searched Lily's face, as if looking for clues to her future. She told us to have more cake and abruptly left the room.

Lily looked upset. I didn't know what to say, so I studied the brush paintings on the wall. I was glad when Mrs. Quan returned.

"Lily, remind me to give you something before you leave." She sat and took a sip of tea. "Take heart, my dear one. You will become a lawyer."

Lily's face brightened, though I privately wondered how Mrs. Quan could be so certain.

"Tell me about Alex and Alan," she said, changing the subject on purpose, I bet. "And little Amy. How's the hand laundry business? Questions! Questions!"

Mrs. Quan seemed satisfied when Lily gave her lots of answers.

"Now Jess," she said. "I hear you are a curious young woman. You must have questions for me?"

“Mrs. Quan, do you think people who are discriminated against are safer living in a separate community or mixed in with everyone else?”

“An interesting question. I will answer by telling a true story. But first, more tea, girls?”

We nodded. Mrs. Quan served us and settled back in her chair.

“A terrible heat wave struck the city in early September,” she began. “This was, let’s see, nine years ago. In 1907. Mr. Quan and I had just arrived from New York City. I remember the newspapers built up a big story about a parade against Asian immigration. They called it a ‘monster parade’ because it was expected to have a huge turnout. It was to be held on a Saturday evening. Everyone knew the Asiatic Exclusion League was behind it. These were folks who didn’t want Asians living here and didn’t mind saying so. Dozens of people gathered at the Cambie Street Grounds and marched to City Hall. You girls must have passed City Hall coming here. On Main Street, near Hastings.”

Lily nodded as Mrs. Quan took a sip of tea.

“Main Street was called Westminster Street at that time. In any case, it was standing room only for all these people inside City Hall. A larger crowd spilled out outside the building. Menfolk mostly. Respectable too, some of them. And lads. They were whipped up by speakers talking about a white man’s country. When night fell, the crowd was even more excited. Liquor likely helped. And the heat. When someone yelled ‘on to Chinatown!’ the mob was unleashed. They raced up Pender Street and then turned into the alleys, shouting and breaking glass, cursing and throwing stones and scaring the daylights out of people inside their homes. Mr. Quan’s cousin went on the balcony here at the compound and they hurled bottles at him.”

Mrs. Quan paused and took another sip of tea. I gripped my plate, the cake uneaten, shocked at what I was hearing.

“The mob moved on to Powell Street,” Mrs. Quan went on, “and did the same thing to the Japanese people living there. A few

policemen were mixed in with the crowd, but they didn't do much. A handful of arrests, that's all. The next day we organized community patrols. It just wasn't safe walking around."

Lily didn't seem surprised by Mrs. Quan's story. I guessed she'd heard it before.

"You've seen the high gate at Shanghai Alley?" Mrs. Quan asked me.

"Lily showed me," I answered.

"It was built for peoples' protection after the riot." Mrs. Quan set her teacup on the table and looked me in the eye. "So, to answer your question, Jess, it is not a matter of whether those who are discriminated against remain separate or part of society. No place is truly safe if people are suspicious, intolerant, and mean-spirited."

I wanted to ask more questions, but the teapot was empty and Lily said it was time to go.

"I've got something for you, Lily." Mrs. Quan left the room, returning a moment later with a large bowl covered by a towel. She took the bowl with her as she guided us through the compound and onto Pender Street. I couldn't stop thinking about her riot story the whole time.

"Give this to your mother," Mrs. Quan said, handing Lily the bowl. "There's a note for her inside."

Lily waited for Mrs. Quan to go back into the building before taking off the towel. I leaned over and looked in the bowl. Steamed pork buns!

"Lucky you," I said.

"I guess so."

Lily is acting peculiar, I thought as we walked in silence to our bicycles. They were still in the lane behind Mr. Quan's jewelry shop, leaning up against the wall.

"Wait a second," Lily said when I grasped the handlebars of my bike. She pulled out Mrs. Quan's note.

"Well?"

"She's telling Mother to allow me to study law in Toronto."

"Mrs. Quan is wonderful!"

"Don't you see, Jess? I can't give Mother this note. She'll be as steamed as these buns!"

"Mrs. Quan is a wise woman. You have to let your mother read it."

Lily's eyes filled with tears. "Stay out of it, Jess." She crumpled the note and put it in her purse.

I sighed.

Lily started to put the bowl into the bicycle basket, but I reminded her it was broken.

"Here, put it in my basket," I added quickly, not wanting Lily to become even more upset.

As we pedalled up Main Street, I thought of another burning question for Mrs. Quan: *Why do girls have to fight so hard for their dreams?*

19

KATHLEEN HAD BEEN making lots of excuses not to canvass: She was working late at the bakery. Or volunteering at the Red Cross. Or helping Mother with chores.

I don't know why I bothered asking her again. We were in the kitchen clearing away the supper dishes, and, sure enough, she said no. "I have other pressing matters."

Angry, I plunged my hands in the sink. Soapy water splashed all over the counter. Some of it splashed on Kathleen too.

"Hey!" Kathleen cried out.

"Sorry," I said, though I wasn't really.

She stared at me for a time. "I guess I got you involved in the campaign, and now I'm letting you down."

"What's going on, Katie?" I asked, scrubbing the pot extra hard with a dish rag. Instead of answering, Kathleen picked up a towel and began the drying.

Once the dishwater was draining in the sink, she finally spoke.

"Let me make it up to you."

"And how will you do that?"

"By arranging an interview with a woman ambulance driver from Vancouver who was on the front line in France."

"Women are allowed to do that sort of war work?"

"I'll let Miss Joan Thomson tell you about driving wounded soldiers to the field hospitals."

Miss Thomson sounded amazing. "How can I meet her?"

"Mr. Altman knows Joan through his Red Cross work. I'll ask him to arrange an interview. I've been to her mother's suffrage teas and can come with you."

Mr. Altman strikes again, I thought. Still, I was intrigued. Writing an amazing short story about women's war work for the newspaper contest would surely help the suffrage cause.

EVERYTHING WORKED out swimmingly. Kathleen and I took a streetcar downtown the following Sunday and strolled through the shady West End neighbourhood to Bidwell Street. We walked through an iron gate and stepped into a huge yard, perfumed with roses and shaded by giant cedars. A stone path led us to the Thomsons' front door. I'd never been to a mansion before.

Miss Joan Thomson greeted us at the door. My sister had told me Joan was the same age as her—twenty—but seeing her now, I thought she looked older. Maybe it was Joan's plain dress or the way she wore her chestnut hair in a bun. Not a trace of make-up on her face, either. I wondered if she kept a sweetheart's photo in the locket of her silver necklace.

My eyes widened when I saw the foyer. A sparkling glass chandelier hung from the high ceiling, and a wooden banister, shining with polish, ran along the winding staircase.

Joan looked at my bandaged hand, her warm eyes making me feel more at ease. "Kathleen told me about your accident, Jess."

"I'm on the mend, thank you."

"Well then, you must wonder how I got into the risky business of driving an ambulance?"

"Why, yes."

"I will answer your questions after tea is served. The parlour will be pleasantly quiet. Usually it's bustling with Mother's friends."

"Do you attend many of her teas?"

"A few. She entertains all sorts of interesting women."

"Do they discuss pacifism?"

Joan looked surprised at my question. "Not that I know of. Though I've heard Mother talk about a socialist suffrage group in Burnaby."

"I see."

Joan paused. "Mother's suffrage friends sometimes talk about eugenics."

"Eugenics?"

Kathleen jumped in. "Another topic for your research at the Carnegie Library, Jess."

"Joan!" The voice came from the upstairs landing. "Has your company arrived, dear?"

A woman leaned over the railing—more stylishly dressed than her daughter, in a tailored navy dress and long pearl necklace.

"Yes, Mother. The Goldie sisters. As I've told you."

"I apologize for not joining you ladies. War work never ends, I'm afraid. Enjoy your tea." Mrs. Thomson gave us a friendly wave and disappeared down the hallway.

Joan turned to us. "Mother is preparing care packages for a Vancouver battalion. One of her many volunteer activities."

"What's in the packages?" I asked.

"Fruit cakes, hard tack biscuits, tea, and cakes. And if Mother can get away with it, apples."

"Apples?"

"You are forbidden to send fresh food overseas because it spoils. People do anyway."

"And socks of course," Kathleen said.

"Lots of knitted socks," Joan agreed. "Follow me, ladies."

Joan walked across the foyer to an arched doorway. "This is Father's study."

I gasped. An entire wall of shelves was filled with books from floor to ceiling. On the left was a large window with a view to the rose garden in the front yard. A massive oak desk sat below the sill.

When we entered the study, I looked down the other side of the room. A tall ladder with rollers leaned against the bookcase. Beside it was a leather chair and a small table with a stained glass lamp and several books on top.

Joan went over to the case, took down a book, and handed it to me. "Kathleen tells me you are quite a reader, Jess. You'll like this work by Sylvia Pankhurst."

I read the title out loud. "*The Suffragettes: The History of the Women's Militant Suffrage Movement 1905–1910.*"

"The author's sister is Christabel, and their mother is Emmeline," Joan said. "They are a dynamic trio in England."

"Have you read this?" I asked Kathleen.

"Miss Grant loaned me a copy. She admires Sylvia for her commitment to working class women. She's also an artist, by the way."

"Your friend Miss Grant is quite a suffragist herself," Joan said to Kathleen.

"Miss Grant began working in London when she was very young. It shaped the way she saw the world."

"Younger than me?" I asked my sister.

"Almost two years younger. Miss Grant left home at thirteen."

"A child labourer," Joan remarked.

"In the textile industry," Kathleen said. "Her saving grace was joining England's trade union and suffragette movements. They uplifted her and so many others. And when Miss Grant immigrated to Vancouver, she had plenty of experience to offer."

"I've read about the childhood hardships of Charles Dickens," I said. "Poverty changed the way he saw the world too."

Kathleen nodded. "His novels certainly helped bring about important social reforms in England."

"Never underestimate the power of the pen," Joan said. "You can borrow the Pankhurst book if you like, Jess. You may also borrow this suffrage novel by BC author Minnie Smith. It's called *Is it Just?*"

I packed both books in my satchel, grateful to have such interesting summer reading.

"I've one more thing to show you." Joan took a stack of newspapers from the case. "This is a complete set of *The*

Champion,” she said, handing me a single copy. “The newspaper was started in 1912 by suffragists in Victoria. Our capital was the heart of the movement before the war. Now, Vancouver has taken over.”

Kathleen looked over my shoulder as I glanced at the front page. A familiar line from a poem ran across the top: *The Woman’s Cause is Man’s*.

“The paper’s motto is taken from the Lord Tennyson poem ‘The Princess,’” I said.

“That’s right,” Joan answered. “It’s too bad the newspaper only lasted two years.”

The sound of a hand bell ringing drifted in from the foyer.

“Tea is ready,” Joan said, placing the newspapers back on the case. “To the parlour, ladies.”

She led us across the foyer to a large room with wood panelling. Sunlight from a bay window shone directly onto a plush sofa. Across from the sofa were several elegant chairs arranged in a semicircle. Every inch of the wide mantle of the stone fireplace contained framed photographs, some of men in soldier’s uniform.

Joan sat across from us, offering the sofa so we could look out at the rose garden. *What a dramatic contrast this beautiful home must be to the grim battlefields*, I thought.

“Perhaps Kathleen told you my father is a major in the Canadian army,” Joan said, “and all four of my brothers are overseas too?”

“Yes, she did. Is that why you became an ambulance driver, Joan?”

“Much to my mother’s regret, yes. I learned about FANY—First Aid Nursing Yeomanry—while I was volunteering with the Red Cross in Vancouver.”

I took out my diary and began note-taking.

Sunday, July 30

An interview with Miss Joan Thomson.

I started on my list of prepared questions.

“What is the purpose of FANY?”

“FANY is a British organization of women who work in field hospitals and drive ambulances.”

“Were you paid to drive an ambulance?”

“It’s all volunteer work, Jess. I even paid my way overseas. Most of the drivers are men, but there are a few British and Canadian girls too.”

I paused, hearing a strange noise out in the foyer.

Joan grinned. “I must put oil on the wheel.”

What a surprise when I saw *who* was pushing the tea cart into the room.

“You work here, Mrs. Carriere?” Kathleen asked as our Mount Pleasant neighbour entered the room.

“Yes indeed, Miss Goldie,” she answered, wheeling the squeaky-wheeled cart to the sofa.

“Mrs. Carriere’s house was on our canvassing list,” Kathleen explained to Joan. “Her husband supports the women’s vote.”

“He certainly does,” Mrs. Carriere said proudly. “It is a pleasure to see you ladies.”

“What a coincidence,” Joan remarked.

I couldn’t help feeling uncomfortable watching Mrs. Carriere serve us tea and Jam Jam cookies. Miss Grant’s call for suffragists to uphold equality came back to me. *I urge everyone here to join as equals with working class women in our fight for the vote.*

Once we were served, the sound of the tea cart grew faint as Mrs. Carriere steered it back to the kitchen.

“Continue with your questions, Jess,” Joan said, breaking into my thoughts about equality for all.

I looked at my list of questions.

“Did you wear a uniform?”

“We wore a blouse and tie, a long jacket, and a skirt.”

“And a cap?”

“A cap, yes. I was also trained in auto repairs.”

“What sort of repairs?”

“Changing a flat tire was a big one. The roads are badly blown up as you can imagine, and the tires take a beating.”

“What does the battle front look like, Joan?”

“I’ll never get over the night raids. The sky becomes a vast furnace. Soldiers are surrounded by smoke and barbed wire and the constant sound of explosives.”

I shuddered. “Are we winning?”

“The Allies gain a piece of land—and lose it back to the Germans. It goes on like this for days. Weeks, even.”

Kathleen jumped in. “Our boys think it’s an adventure when they enlist. Until the fighting starts from the horrid trenches.”

“It’s true,” Joan said. “I will always remember my first ambulance run. I drove four injured soldiers about twelve miles to the field hospital in pitch black conditions.”

Joan paused and took a sip of tea. It couldn’t be easy for her to relive all this.

“You have to drive fast,” she went on, “but at the same time, slow. You watch for shell holes and rocks. And train tracks. The wounded soldiers feel every bump.”

“It must be difficult on your emotions too,” Kathleen said quietly.

Joan nodded. “You tune out the soldiers’ cries of pain. I’ll never forget the bravery of our boys. One injured soldier was from the Mission Reserve.”

“Indigenous people are in the Canadian army?” I asked.

“Oh, yes. Despite their lack of equal rights.”

“Including voting rights,” Kathleen piped in.

“Have any ambulances been attacked by enemy fire?” I asked.

“Not that I’ve heard of, Jess, but accidents do happen. On one run a driver lost her leg after crashing into a moving train in the dark.”

I shivered thinking of the pain and suffering of war. Kathleen placed her hand on my shoulder.

“What do you plan to do now, Joan?”

“I’ll return to France this fall.”

“Your father must be proud,” Kathleen said.

“Yes, but Mother is at her wit’s end, though I suspect she’s stronger than the rest of us put together.”

I thanked Joan for the interview and closed the diary. Leaning back, I sipped my tea, taking in Joan’s war stories. I was glad when she turned to Kathleen to ask about our canvassing work.

A clanging sound drew my attention to the window. A boy had just shut the iron gate out front; now he was wheeling his bicycle along the walkway. Kathleen saw him too. By the time Joan turned to look, he had disappeared from view.

The doorbell rang. No one talked as footfalls sounded on the winding staircase. The front door opened and muffled words were exchanged. Moments later, Mrs. Thomson entered the parlour, holding up a piece of paper.

“It’s a telegram from the war office,” she said to Joan. “Andrew is badly wounded.”

Kathleen rose from the sofa. “Come, Jess. We should go.”

Neither my sister nor I talked about Joan or the telegram during the streetcar ride home. As we walked along Seventeenth Avenue in the direction of our yellow house, Kathleen finally broke the silence. “Let’s get back to canvassing, Jess. Tomorrow night after supper?”

I eagerly agreed. Fighting for the women’s cause would surely help us push away tragic stories of war.

20

I SAT AT MY DESK, chores done. Everyone was at work, and Father was resting in the back room. A light breeze wafted through the attic window as I wrote down the title of my short story: "Sisters in the Fire."

How to start? So many diary notes from my interview with Joan. And many more from the suffrage campaign.

Hmmm. I gazed out the window for inspiration. Someone was cycling across our yard.

A moment later, the doorbell rang. I put the diary in my apron pocket and dashed across the room, dodging old broken toys scattered across the floor to get to the narrow staircase. I ran down the steps and along the upstairs hallway. I was out of breath by the time I descended the staircase to the parlour and peered out the window.

Lily was at the door, her bicycle on the porch floor. I ran to the entrance.

"Let's go cycling," Lily burst out when I opened the door. She was shaking and pushing back her bangs.

"What happened?" I asked, frightened.

Lily started crying. "Mother found Mrs. Quan's note," she said, tears filling her eyes. "We had a terrible fight, and I ran out of the shop."

"I'm so sorry," I said. "Come in, Lily. Let's talk more inside."

"No!" Lily practically shouted. Then, in a calmer voice, "I mean, not now, Jess. Let's go for a bike ride to Tea Swamp. That's what I need right now."

"Ok," I said. "But won't your mother be mad if you're away for too long?"

"I don't care." Lily was really sobbing now.

I just stood there, not knowing what to do. Then I said, "Shouldn't you try to talk things over?"

Lily brushed away her tears. "You can't win with my mother, Jess. It's her way or no way."

"Where's your father?"

"Doing the deliveries. Come on. Let's go!"

Lily sure needed to blow off steam. "All right then. Wait out front."

I ran through the house to the yard, dropped my apron by the clothesline, and got my bicycle out of the shed. Lily was on the sidewalk waiting for me.

"Lead the way," I said, mounting my bike.

We pedalled over to Sophia Street. Lily surprised me by turning onto the lane close to the hand laundry. Moments later, a truck came thundering toward us. The driver honked the horn.

It was Mr. Gee. He braked.

"I'm in for it," Lily whispered as he jumped from the truck.

Lily's father came up to us, his brow creased. "Why aren't you working, Lily?"

"I should go home," I said.

"No, don't, Jess." Lily turned to her father. "I need time away from the shop. Mother saw the note from Mrs. Quan and we had a fight."

Mr. Gee scratched his head. "That's not good. Let me talk to her. You may go with Jess, but don't be long." He gave Lily a pat on the shoulder and went back to the truck.

We cycled into Tea Swamp Creek, stopping by a cedar stump. We got off the bicycles and leaned them against the stump. As we started walking along the trail, I picked blackberries. I offered a few to Lily, but she shook her head.

After a while, we sat by the stream. It sure was hot. I peeled off my shoes and stockings and stepped into the cool water, crouched down, and washed my fruit-stained hand before fixing my hand bandage. Lily looked glum sitting there, not saying anything.

I cupped my hands and splashed Lily with water.

"Hey!" she shouted. I splashed some more. "Stop!" Lily broke into a smile and kicked off her shoes. "Ok, I'll join you."

We walked along the pebbly stream bed, a cool place to be on such a hot afternoon. Rays of sun sparkled off the surface, shaded by overhanging cedar boughs.

At last, Lily talked about her future. "My mother doesn't like Aunt Aileen. That's one reason she doesn't want me to go to Toronto."

"Why doesn't she like your Aunt Aileen?"

"They are alike in many ways."

"Yes, stubborn—like you!" Lily frowned. "But you are stubborn enough to stick with your dream too. Come on, Lily. Admit you can be stubborn."

"If you'll admit you can be childish."

I shrugged. "All right."

Sure, I never want Kathleen to marry and I never want Jimmy to go to war.

"Remember Miss Haggerty told us to face our fears?" Lily said, reading my mind.

I nodded. "And not be afraid of the future."

"Courage," Lily said, smiling at me.

"Courage," I said back to her.

We headed to our bicycles, then pedalled over to the hand laundry.

Lily leaned her bicycle against the wall in the lane by the back door. "Come in with me, Jess. Mother might not blast me if you're here."

I had a feeling I should just go home, but I agreed.

Lily and I stepped into the hand laundry. We stood by the door and watched Mr. and Mrs. Gee sort laundry while Amy played on the mat.

Lily cleared her throat. Everyone looked over at her.

“Out!” Mrs. Gee shouted.

“Mother!”

“Not you, Lily. I’m talking to Jess. Out! I forbid you to enter this shop.”

“Mother, you can’t talk to Jess like that!”

“I don’t like those suffrage ladies! They give you crazy ideas, Lily.”

“You can’t blame Jess.”

“It’s all right,” I whispered. It was best not to say anything when Mrs. Gee was full of thunder.

But it wasn’t all right, because after I got back on my bicycle, I fought back tears all the way home.

I didn’t even put my bicycle back in the shed; I just dropped it on the lawn and ran straight inside and up the two flights of stairs to my desk in the attic. The first part of “Sisters in the Fire” came tumbling out from my pen.

The Somme, northern France, July 1916

The sky is a vast furnace. I can hear the explosions in the distance. The night raid has started.

I’ve greased and cleaned a beaten-up vehicle given to me by the British Army. My identity papers are in order. June Wilson, Canadian volunteer ambulance driver. I adjust my cap, ready for my first assignment.

A row of leafless trees is etched against a smoky black sky. My heart leaps when I hear a rap at the window. A British soldier signals me to step out. He delivers instructions then melts into the night.

I drive about a mile down the road. A pair of British soldiers appear from behind a clump of trees. They carry a wounded soldier on a stretcher to my vehicle. Two more injured men are transported in the same way. All are about twenty years old. One is unconscious. A fourth in Canadian uniform has a splint on his arm and sits up front with me.

The ambulance bounces as I motor out. A soldier in the back groans. Farther down the road, I’m forced to swerve around a shell hole.

“Where are you from, Miss?” the Canadian soldier asks.

“Vancouver.”

“Is that so? I live on the Mission Reserve.”

“Is it much farther, sister?” another soldier asks.

“A few more miles.” I turn the wheel hard to avoid a boulder.

An unmarked train crossing appears. I slow down and peer into the darkness. The coast is clear, so I drive across the track, but then there’s a bump and my knee smacks against the clutch.

Two men come out of nowhere and dart across the road. I skid to avoid running over them. Whether they are our soldiers or the enemy, it's too dark to tell. All I know is I must keep driving.

At last, the field hospital comes into view. My first night run is over.

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IV

STORM

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21

KATHLEEN HAD LOST interest in the suffrage campaign. Again. We were in the kitchen cleaning up after dinner when I finally smacked a dinner plate on the shelf and almost broke it. I didn't care. She had me steamed.

Our quarrel had started at the dinner table. I was following Mother's recipe for a bean-and-bacon stew flavoured with onions, mustard, and pepper. Jimmy was the first to taste a spoonful. He said it was good.

Feeling pleased, I turned to Kathleen and asked if she wanted to canvass after supper.

"I suppose we can knock on a few doors." Her expression told me she'd rather not. She took a bite of my stew and made a face. "There's too much pepper."

"You make the supper, if you don't like my cooking."

"That's enough." Mother sounded tired.

Feeling guilty, I looked at my sister, but she only turned away. Mother ignored both of us and asked Jimmy about work. He gave his usual quick response. No one talked after that, which was fine with me.

Kathleen helped clear the table when everyone was done. She made an awful scraping sound, on purpose I was sure, as she scooped leftover stew into a bowl. I ignored her and started on the dishes, looking out the window and feeling fed up with everything.

The sky was covered in low dark clouds. A storm was brewing, that was for sure. The air was muggy and the trees and flowers drooped from thirst. The wind picked up, whipping the empty clothesline in the yard. A flash of lightning flickered across the sky. I jumped at the sudden blast at the stove top.

"That's it," Kathleen said, lifting the whistling kettle off the burner.

“What do you mean?”

“No canvassing this evening, Jess.” She poured boiling water into the new teapot, picked up the tray, and headed to the parlour.

More lightning flashed. Thunder rolled across the sky, sounding like artillery fire. I knew we couldn’t go out, but I was still upset. Kathleen was always making excuses. *Doesn’t she know time is running out on the suffrage campaign?*

Something else was bothering me. My diary was missing. I remembered slipping it into my apron pocket. I had left the apron by the clothesline before cycling to Tea Swamp Creek with Lily. But when I went to fetch it later, the diary was gone. I’d been searching ever since.

Mother looked up from the rocking chair when I entered the parlour, her knitting needles clacking away. Jimmy was at the fireplace, stacking kindling and tossing crumpled sheets of newspaper into the grate. Kathleen got me steamed all over again, sitting there at the end of the couch crocheting, her teacup on the table in front of her. She’d put my teacup at the opposite side of the table. *On purpose.*

I sat and sipped my tea, fuming at the space between us. The wind whistled through a crack in the window, as if taunting me. The boughs of the cedar swayed in a slow-motion dance, calming me a little—but not much.

Jimmy lit the kindling and placed a log on top, then moved the screen in place and sunk into the armchair—Father’s armchair. He picked up the novel laid open on the armrest—*The Call of the Wild*, by Jack London—and began reading. The fire slowly spread, giving off a woody scent.

Everyman was the word my brother used to describe his favourite writer. “Jack London learned about life by travelling and taking any job he could find,” Jimmy had told me. “All of it fodder for his stories.”

That was the life I wanted. Everywoman. A writer and adventuress, though Jimmy would laugh if I told him.

I wondered if it was called *brooding* when you can't stop thinking about something sad and out of your control. My thoughts about Father ran that way, what with the logging accident that had left his body broken, and how he had to be alone so much in the back room to get better.

A strange tapping noise came from upstairs, pulling me from my gloomy thoughts. Only Mother looked up when I left the room to find the source of the sound.

Just as I'd thought, I'd forgotten to close my bedroom window. An earthy scent blew through the room, and the curtains made a snapping noise. But it was a cedar branch tapping against the upper pane that I'd heard from downstairs.

I pulled down the sash and leaned sideways against the wall, looking outside at the gathering storm. Our dear yellow house creaked like an old wooden ship.

Tears flowed down my cheeks. My sister called my sudden outbursts "waterworks." I missed the old Kathleen. She'd changed in ways that scared me. Thank goodness for my friendship with Lily, though it stung to have her mother ban me from the shop. I held up my bandaged hand. *What if Mother is right and I'm scarred forever?* Worst of all, I couldn't find my diary with all the notes about Miss Thomson and the suffrage campaign.

Over at the dresser, I found a handkerchief and dried my tears. Somehow Mother always pulled through her lowest moments. This thought gave me strength.

I went back into the hallway and was heading for the stairs when I heard a creaking noise from the attic. Another open window, I reckoned. Hastening down the hall, I climbed the narrow staircase to the open attic door and switched on the light. The window was wide open, as I'd thought, and the strong breeze coming into the room had caused a loose floorboard to creak. I crossed the room and lowered the window sash, then looked out. All the houses across the street were shuttered, everyone bracing for the storm.

I was about to turn away when I saw someone coming down the sidewalk. He was hatless, hunched over, and carrying a rucksack. My heart beat fast when he stopped right in front of my house. Then he looked up. Our eyes locked.

Davie.

He dug into his rucksack and pulled out something with a bright red cover.

My diary.

I held my breath as he lit a match and set it on fire. He tossed it on the sidewalk and walked away. Flames flared up, devouring the pages.

Before I could react in any way, the attic fell into darkness. All the house lights were out across the street too. Drops of rain smacked against the pane. The downpour started.

I stumbled across the pitch-black room and groped my way down the staircase to the hallway. I called out to Mother, but the pounding rain on the roof drowned out my voice.

What a miracle when she appeared at the foot of the stairs! The flame on the lighted candle in her hand gave off a warm glow.

"Come down slowly, Jess."

My knees went weak. I clutched the railing and made my way step-by-step until I came to her waiting arms.

Mother tugged playfully at my hair ribbon, murmuring, "There, there."

We went to the parlour, the fire in the hearth casting a brilliant light. Kathleen and Jimmy looked up as we passed through the entrance. Mother remained standing while I went around the side of the couch and sat.

"I'll be in the back room, keeping your Father company," Mother said, then vanished.

Kathleen picked up the teapot and slid down onto the couch beside me. "Let me warm your tea, Jess."

A peace offering, I supposed, watching her pour. I raised the steaming drink to my lips and took a sip. Kathleen gently squeezed my shoulder and turned to our brother. "Finish what you were saying about the war, Jimmy."

"Two years of fighting and there's no end in sight."

Jimmy went on about the battle at the Somme—something about forty-one days of combat and how it could turn out to be the longest battle in the Great War.

All I could think about was the destruction of my diary. And despicable Davie Bolton.

Without meaning to, I smacked my cup and saucer on the table. Kathleen and Jimmy looked over at me.

A sudden knock at the front door startled all of us. Jimmy jumped up and went to the hallway. Kathleen took a lighted candle from the side table and followed him.

I sure wasn't going anywhere. I snatched Mother's shawl off the back of her rocking chair and pulled it tight about my shoulders.

When the front door opened, the wind blasted its way into the house.

"What a time to be locked out." It was a familiar voice. "I'll need the spare key."

I ran to the entrance. Will Miller stood on the porch, his coat drenched from the rain. He took off his cap and gave it a shake. "I must have gotten the last streetcar home. Hello, Jess."

Looking past him to the howling wind, I asked about Shep. Will said his parents took the dog with them to Nanaimo earlier in the morning.

"Not a problem, Will," Kathleen said. "I'll get the extra key."

A bolt of lightning flashed across the sky a second later. A loud cracking sound shattered the air, then a branch snapped off our cedar tree and soared toward the Millers' yard.

A terrible thud followed, then a chilling moan.

Will raced down the steps and disappeared into the inky night. I stayed planted at the door with Jimmy and Katie, waiting for his return.

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WILL CAME BACK all right, but he wasn't alone. Davie limped beside him. His pant leg was torn and blood dripped onto the porch. I glared at him, and he shot me a menacing look, though no one seemed to notice.

"The branch hit Davie's leg like a spear," Will said, his teeth chattering. "We need to stop the bleeding and get him to the hospital."

Jimmy and Will helped Davie inside and over to the par-lour. Davie rolled up his pant leg on the couch, exposing a deep cut along his shin.

"Clean up the blood on the porch," Kathleen said to me. "I'll get towels for the wound."

Sure, Davie's leg looked awful, but he didn't care about everyone helping him. I clenched my teeth and got the bucket and rag.

When I came back to the parlour, Davie was lying face up on the couch, a pillow under his injured leg, his pant leg rolled up and damp towels on top of his shin.

Everyone was circled around him. I plunked myself on Mother's rocking chair. I wasn't fooled.

Will said the branch knocked out the post on the Millers' porch. He turned to Davie and asked what he had been doing there.

"Your house was dark." Davie spit out the words. "I figured no one was home and I could wait out the storm. What's the big deal?"

Jimmy shook his head in dismay. "Let's get you to a hospital. I'll call your father."

"He isn't home."

"An ambulance then," Kathleen said.

"Father won't pay for it."

My sister shrugged. "We'll figure something out. Davie and Will need to change into dry clothes. Jimmy, help them out, will you?"

Mother came into the room and asked what the commotion was about. Kathleen explained while Jimmy lit a candle and went upstairs to get dry clothes.

An idea occurred to me as I rocked in Mother's chair. "Mr. Gee could drive Davie to the hospital in his laundry truck."

Mother agreed it was a good suggestion. She went to the back room to make the call.

Davie turned to me and narrowed his eyes, looking mad and helpless at the same time. I just stared right back at him, refusing to flinch. *Go ahead and squirm.*

Jimmy came back with dry clothes. Will went to the privy to change.

"The telephone is out because of the storm," Mother announced when she returned from the back room. "Jimmy, you'll have to run over to the Gees' house. Kathleen, serve the boys leftover stew. There should be enough hot water for tea." Without further orders, Mother headed to Father's room.

I rose from the rocking chair, took hold of the poker, and jabbed the log in the grate. The fire burned bright, warming the room.

It's just the two of us now. I summoned my courage, poker in hand for back up, and took a step toward Davie.

"You threw the smoke bomb at the suffrage meeting."

Davie glared at me.

"You wrote those hateful words on the Gees' door."

He laughed.

"How dare you steal my diary and burn it." I was standing over him now.

"You're off your rocker, Jess Goldie." Davie glanced at the poker and pulled himself up on the couch. "You suffrage hags got what's coming to you."

It felt good to finally have the upper hand. "Don't think you can stop us. We'll win the vote this time!"

I didn't expect Davie to grab my arm. I struggled to pull away, but he only tightened his grip. Frightened, I raised the poker above his injured leg. Sure, I was bluffing, but it worked. He let go.

I was backing away when Will entered the parlour. He looked puzzled. "Come on, Davie. I'll help you change into dry clothes."

By the time Kathleen entered with a tray of food, I was by myself humming a war tune about Tipperary.

"You're in a good mood, Jess. Did I miss something? Is the war over? Have women won the vote?"

"Ha ha." It was no use telling her I had stood up to Davie. I'd tell Lily though.

I heard Jimmy come through the front door. I scooted out to the entrance.

"Mr. Gee's truck is parked outside," he told me. "I'll get Davie."

I pulled the shawl tight around my shoulders and stepped onto the porch.

Mr. Gee was standing there in a long black raincoat, leaning against the railing and looking out at the rain.

"Thank you for helping out, Mr. Gee."

He turned to me and pulled down his hood.

"Lily!" I exclaimed.

She laughed. "There's a flood in the shop. Father has to take care of it."

"You're driving Davie to the hospital in this storm?"

"Don't act so surprised, Jess."

I asked if I was still banned from the hand laundry.

"I'm trying to change Mother's mind. I'm as upset as you are, Jess. Amy misses you too." She flashed a grin, pulled up her hood, and headed down the steps and across the yard to the truck.

Jimmy and Davie came out a few minutes later, with my brother holding up an umbrella and Davie limping along. Jimmy helped him

into the back of the truck before jumping in himself. Lily sped off, the tires making a splashing sound as the vehicle vanished into the stormy night.

I couldn't help grinning. *Davie's sure in for a big surprise when he finds out who's behind the wheel.*

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THE WOOD CRACKLED in the grate, setting off sparks. Will looked comfortable seated nearby in the armchair, drinking his tea and talking to my sister. I moved to the couch and sat beside Kathleen. She was back to crocheting something with her yellow yarn. *A baby blanket?*

"You won't have trouble convincing my father to support the referendum," Will was telling her. "But Mother thinks politics should be left to men."

"Our mother calls the suffrage cause nonsense, doesn't she, Jess? I never understood why women hold opinions against their own interests. But our canvassing proves many do."

I nodded and took a sip of tea.

"Jess is writing about a woman ambulance driver in the war," Kathleen continued. "Perhaps if our mothers read it, they'll be persuaded."

Right then, I vowed to finish "Sisters in the Fire"—even without diary notes. Funny how a short time ago I was in tears. *Life's got lots of ups and downs, all right.*

"What's Robert telling you in his letters?" I asked Will. I didn't want to jinx my writing by talking too much about it.

"His battalion is fighting at the Somme. He says if England goes under, Canada goes under."

"Robert's patriotic."

"Unlike some of the men I work with."

"What do you mean, Will?"

"Some dockers say it's a capitalist war and not Canada's war to fight. I don't agree. If King and Country need you, by Jove you answer the call."

I admired Will's sense of loyalty. *Maybe that's why he doesn't support suffragists. We're rebels.*

Another clap of thunder shook the windowpane. I worried about Lily driving in the storm.

"I miss the piano," I blurted out, hoping good memories would push aside my fear.

"I've often heard music coming from your house," Will responded.

"Selling our piano helped pay Father's medical bills," Kathleen said. "But let's not talk about our troubles. This is a perfect night for ghost stories."

Will smiled for the first time all evening. And what an evening it had been—for all of us.

Kathleen went first, telling a true tale about the *Mary Celeste*. I never tired of hearing the story.

"The wooden ship had different owners," my sister began. "At the time of the ill-fated voyage, the vessel was in American hands."

I jumped in to tell Will it was Canadian built. "Our Father's great-uncle helped build her on Spencer's Island."

"That's right." Kathleen said. "Well, the *Mary Celeste* was set to depart from the New York harbour in the winter of 1872. It was heading across the Atlantic to Italy. Captain Brig assembled a crew of seven men and brought on board his wife, Sarah, and their baby daughter, Sophia. In the ship's hold was a cargo of more than a thousand barrels of liquor.

"On a grey day in November, the *Mary Celeste* began its journey. Some weeks later, the ship was found abandoned and drifting toward the coast of Portugal."

"A Canadian ship found her adrift," I told Will.

"That's right. Now, the strange thing is all the liquor was accounted for. Six months' supply of food and water was still on board too. But the lifeboat was missing, and so were the crew and passengers."

Kathleen allowed for a long silence. She whispered, "No one was ever found dead or alive."

"It was a mutiny," I piped in.

"Pirates," Will said.

"Here's another possibility," Kathleen said. "The passengers got sick from the liquor fumes and abandoned ship, sure they'd be rescued."

The light from the fire made strange shadows along the parlour wall. I shivered thinking of the unknown fate of the passengers.

Kathleen turned to me and signalled it was my turn.

"My story's true," I said, eager to spin another chilling tale. "It happened in our province too."

I took a sip of tea and began.

"Ten years ago, on a fair day in January, the SS *Valencia* left San Francisco, sailing north to the ports of Seattle and Victoria. More than a hundred people were aboard. But soon after the ship entered Canadian waters, a terrible storm came up off Vancouver Island. Gigantic waves tossed the SS *Valencia* about like a toy. The captain eventually lost control and the ship smashed into a reef. A panicked crew scrambled to lower all seven lifeboats. In the end, the SS *Valencia* was dashed to pieces by the storm, its remains sinking to the ocean floor. Only thirty-seven passengers and crew survived to tell the tale."

I took another sip of my tea as the wind whispered through the crack in the parlour window.

"Ever since," I went on, "seafarers in the area swear to sighting a phantom ship sailing in circles with ghostly passengers clinging to the rails."

Kathleen tugged gently at my hair ribbon. "No wonder people are frightened by storms."

"Travelling off the west coast in the winter is dangerous, all right," Will remarked.

Kathleen looked over at Will. "Your turn."

Will got up from the chair and went over to the woodpile. He picked up a log, crouched down, and carefully dropped it on top of the grate. As the fire slowly picked up intensity, he turned to us and frowned.

"Before I start, you should know Robert was wounded on April 10. An explosion burst over the trench. Four soldiers died. Robert got hit in the arm and leg with shrapnel. They patched him up quick and sent him back to the front lines."

"Jimmy told us," Kathleen said in a low voice.

Is Will going to talk about ghost sightings on the battlefield? I wondered.

He turned back to the fireplace, picked up the poker, and pushed at the log. Returning to his chair, he said, "My ghost story has truth in it."

Flames rose high in the grate and the fresh log crackled.

"Tell us, Will," Kathleen said.

"All right then. One morning this spring, I cycled downtown and took a ferry to North Vancouver. I pedalled over to the base of Grouse Mountain and left my bicycle by the trail head. When I stepped on to the wooded mountain path, it was like entering a cathedral. The silence. A strong scent of pine and cedar. Birdsong everywhere and the sound of melting water over rocks. I reached the peak a few hours later and hadn't seen a single person along the way. The view was spectacular. Waves of mountain peaks and the inlet far below. Such a contrast to the broken earth Robert described in his letters from the front.

"Plenty of daylight remained when I started my descent. About halfway down, a fog began rolling in. I quickened my pace, but it was no use. In a very short time, the mountainside was covered in a thick white mist.

"I didn't dare move. Which way would I go?

"A warm hand touched my shoulder. I spun around. 'Robert?' I said.

"There was only mist. Yet, I was suddenly calm. I could hear rushing water. Moving toward the sound, I came to a stream. I followed the watery path down the mountain and out of the fog."

"That's quite a story," my sister said.

"I'm not quite finished, Kathleen. Three days later, our family received a telegram from the war department. Robert was injured the very day I hiked Grouse Mountain."

"What do you make of it?" I asked, spooked by Will's story.

"When the fog rolled in and I felt my brother's warm hand on my shoulder. . ."

My eyes widened.

"In that brief moment," Will continued, "I believe the veil between the living and spirit world had lifted."

I jumped.

It was only Jimmy standing there at the entrance. No one had heard him coming through the front door. He told us the storm was over and Davie needed fifteen stitches. The doctor insisted he stay overnight in the hospital.

Kathleen gave Will the spare house key. I followed him out to the porch. The air was fresh and moist, and the wet cedar boughs on our tree glistened.

Partway down the steps, Will turned around. "Would you like to go boating on Sunday, Jess?"

I felt bold in the dark. "I would like that very much, Will."

I listened for his footfalls as he climbed his porch steps.

"Good night, Jess," he called over.

"Good night, Will."

V SURPRISES

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23

MRS. GEE WAS sitting at the sewing table and didn't see me walk by the shop window, swinging a picnic basket. Let her ban me from the hand laundry, I didn't care. I was with Will, and we were going boating.

"It must be lovely to live in an apartment above the post office," I said, stopping at the new building on Main Street to gaze up at the grand clock tower.

"It would be too noisy for me," Will replied, moving his fishing rod from one shoulder to the other. "All the traffic."

"I like the bustle."

Funny how Will and I disagreed on some things but listened to each other anyway. The women's vote was where we argued most. I was still hopeful he'd come round, even pointing out the Lee Building when we came to Broadway and telling him about the suffrage meetings held there.

A few blocks farther down, we turned on to the flats.

Will looked over at the coastal mountains. "Not a trace of snow on the Lions."

"Those peaks are also known as the Twin Sisters, according to the Squamish People."

"I've heard that."

"Just think, Will, when you become a scholar, you can study every known civilization!"

Will glanced at me, looking unsure. It was the war that put his dreams on hold. I promised myself not to talk about the future on such a fine Sunday afternoon.

A winding dirt path led us close to the sawmills along False Creek. The smokestacks were silent now, but tomorrow they'd be

going great guns, everything dusted with a thick layer of soot as workers from faraway places like Japan and the Punjab moved about the sheds, carrying planks of lumber and wheeling wooden boxes.

“Look, Jess. Over on the sandbar.” A black-feathered bird poked his long red beak into the shallows. “It’s an oystercatcher. A funny name, considering they go for mussels and limpets.”

The cries of seagulls followed us along the shoreline path. So did the air’s salty scent mixed with sun-dried seaweed. Will led the way onto a long, wooden dock. Small and large boats were tied up and bobbed to and fro in the gentle current. He stopped in front of a blue-painted rowboat, chipped in places and with clumps of barnacles all over the bow.

“I haven’t taken out the *Sally* for a while. She doesn’t look like much, but she’s a sturdy rowboat.”

“You call her the *Sally*?”

“My father named her after my aunt because she made good on a dare.”

“What was the dare?”

“Swim from Spanish Banks to Second Beach.”

Will tossed his fishing rod and knapsack in the *Sally* and climbed aboard, taking a seat on the centre bench. I handed him my picnic basket, hitching my skirt as I stepped in and moved to the stern. In no time, Will pushed off, rowing out to the open bay.

I dragged my fingertips along the surface of the water. Sail boats moved about in the distance, making a lovely picture.

“Do you know Harry McLennan?” Will asked, keeping a steady pace with the oars.

I nodded.

“He’s heading overseas in September.”

“But he’s only sixteen.”

“His father gave him permission to enlist.”

Will's news gave me a sinking sensation. "If a young man decides to volunteer, that's one thing," I said. "Pressuring them is another. I've heard about women going up to men on the sidewalk and pinning a white feather on their lapel and calling them shirkers and cowards."

Will's face clouded over. "Shaming isn't the way to get more volunteers. But if the war grinds on, I'm certain Prime Minister Borden will bring in conscription."

"Who would be forced to enlist?"

"Men ages twenty to forty-five. The Vancouver Recruiting League is already preparing the way, canvassing neighbourhoods. They ask male residents their age, nationality, marital status, and occupation."

"I haven't seen them going door-to-door in Mount Pleasant."

"Well, they are, Jess, and the newspapers are reporting it. City Hall is getting complaints too, in part because the police are helping."

I shook my head in dismay. "When women participate in government, we will put an end to war."

"Women may be able to bring about social reforms, but ending war? I don't think so."

"Why not?"

"It's a man's world, Jess."

"It doesn't have to be."

I looked over to the shore. A pair of cormorants shared a rock in the shallows. One of the black feathered birds spread its wings, as if flashing the lining of an expensive robe.

"Is the bird showing its dominance?" I asked, pointing to the rock.

Will smiled. "No. Only drying its feathers."

The rhythmic pull and splash of the oars filled the silence that followed.

As we neared Kits Point, Will spoke. "I know you don't like to hear this, Jess, but I believe a woman's place is in the home. Raising children is important work. Besides, working women drive down men's wages."

“That’s not fair, Will. It’s the same argument white men use about workers of other racial backgrounds. Prejudice has influenced the suffrage campaign too.”

Will didn’t reply. *Maybe I’ll never change his mind about women’s suffrage*, I thought. For now, it felt best not to argue.

“Three years ago, they forced out the last of the First Nations families here,” Will said as he rowed the boat past the railway trestle. “There was a cemetery for the Squamish People before the land was sold off.”

“What happened to the families?”

“They moved to reserves.”

“And to think Indigenous men are volunteering in the Canadian army.”

“Let’s hope their loyalty is acknowledged by our government.”

Will steered the *Sally* around the point and over to the beach. Locking the oars, he took off his shoes and socks and slipped into the water. I did the same and helped him pull the boat to the sand.

We walked up the beach to a grassy area and spread out a blanket from my picnic basket under a small tree. The branches were twisted and tilted in a single direction, shaped by strong gales of wind. We stretched out our legs as we sat and shared cheese sandwiches and a flask of lemonade, talking all the while about books, our school chums, work, the storm.

A group of children splashed in the shallow water below us, their mothers hovering nearby.

After we’d finished lunch, Will dared me to jump into the ocean. I made him look away and peeled off my shirtwaist and skirt, revealing my bathing top and knee-length swim bottoms underneath. The bandage came off my hand too.

Hot, hot, hot! The soles of my feet burned as I raced across the sand and plunged into the chilly sea. I swam a fair distance and rolled onto my back, letting the waves gently push me toward the horizon. Will caught up, floating beside me. I saw a cloud shaped like a woman in a saucer hat. Will saw a mountain in another cloud. I

didn't tell him about two wispy figures dancing arm in arm across the sky.

Presently, we swam back and basked in the sun until our suits were dry. It was late in the afternoon when we slipped into our clothes, packed up, and got back in the rowboat.

Rowing farther along the shoreline of the city's west side, Will locked the oars at Spanish Banks. A seal poked its head above the surface and stared at us with wet eyes as Will cast his fishing line.

"I may have some competition for today's catch."

I leaned back and closed my eyes. The creaking sound of the rowboat was soothing. *Will is against women's suffrage*, I thought sleepily, *but there is much to like about him too*.

Will snapped me from my dreamy state, saying, "After graduation, I'm enlisting in the Seaforth Highlanders. When I return, I'll apply to McGill University."

He held his fishing rod still and gazed across the strait to the blue mountains of Vancouver Island, appearing like a distant mirage.

"The war might end by the time you graduate King Ed.," I said.

"True, but I doubt it."

The thought of Will fighting in the trenches alongside his brother somehow made me scared and sad. *But I mustn't brood*, I told myself.

I closed my eyes again, calmed by the boat's rocking motion. Time passed. At length, I was awakened by the sound of lots of splashing. Will was on his feet, swaying to the boat's motion and reeling in his catch. He tossed me the fishing net and said to hold it steady. Seconds later, he flung a large salmon inside it, removed the hook from the fish's mouth, and dropped the squirming creature into a bucket of sea water.

"This coho is for the Goldie family," Will said. "For harbouring me during the storm." With that, he took up the oars and rowed us home.

24

"IT'S THE MACKENZIE tartan," I said to Lily.

We were on the sidewalk, looking through a Bay department store display window at a female mannequin dressed in a Scottish kilt. The sign read: *Will You Let It Come to This? Join Now! Vancouver Recruitment League.*

"How do you know it's the MacKenzie tartan?"

"I've seen soldiers in those kilts doing drills at the Seaforth Armoury. According to tradition, only men wear kilts."

Before I could say more, a man in a suit approached us, tipping his Panama hat. "Let me take your picture, girls."

Behind him, a box-shaped camera rested on a tripod. A street photographer, I realized. Too bad we couldn't afford his services.

"No obligation to buy a picture, ladies."

Lily pulled me beside her. "Let's do it, Jess!"

"Why not?" I linked my arm with hers and struck a funny pose.

We were dressed for our downtown shopping trip, both of us wearing summer whites: a shirtwaist blouse, cotton skirt, and straw hat. My ribboned brim was red, Lily's yellow.

"Move in front of the camera. That's good, girls. Now smile!"

Click went the camera. *Click* again.

He gave us his business card. "Come by the shop next week if you decide to purchase the photo." With another tip of his hat, he moved on to his next customer, a mother with two children.

Inside the department store, we browsed the glass bottles of perfume and cologne along the counters. I put a drop of the Coty perfume on my wrist and sniffed the orange blossom scent.

Lily started off to women's wear, and I followed along. We browsed through racks of dresses made of poplin, gingham, and

cotton. At the millinery department, we tried on an assortment of wide brimmed hats until a clerk gave us *the look* and we slinked away.

A sign by the wooden escalator advertised a sale on “slightly soiled and odd lines of children’s dolls.” Curious, we rode to the second floor and walked around until we found the table. To my surprise, Joan Thomson and her mother were there, each of them holding a collection of dolls.

I introduced Lily and asked Mrs. Thomson about her son.

“Andrew’s in hospital in England. He’ll be coming home in a month.”

Her son’s injury must be serious, I thought. Not like Will’s brother, who was quickly treated and sent back to the front.

Joan took her mother’s arm. “You girls must wonder why we’re buying these dolls. Our club hires unemployed women to mend them. Then we sell for a profit. Part of our money goes to the menders and the remainder to the Red Cross.”

Mrs. Thomson turned to her daughter. “Let’s go to the cashier, dear. We mustn’t be late for a luncheon date. Good day, ladies.”

I tried not to think about Joan’s brother and how difficult it must be for everyone in the Thomson family.

Lily and I were still looking at the dolls when Kathleen appeared.

“Joan and her mother were here a few minutes ago,” I told her.

“Yes, I talked to them briefly. Now, girls, help me select a dozen dolls.”

“A dozen!” Lily said.

“I’m one of the doll menders. Joan and her mother told you about it?” We nodded. “My earnings will go to the Alexandra Orphanage. You remember Miss Drummond telling us about the orphanage, Jess?”

“Yes, of course.” Would Kathleen ever stop talking about Miss Drummond and the baby Sally?

“We’ll each choose four dolls,” Kathleen said.

Lily picked up a doll right away, handing it to my sister. "I had one like this doll with the same black painted shoes."

"Where's the flaw?" I asked Lily.

"One of her blonde braids is longer than the other."

I gave my sister a doll with a red coat and jaunty matching hat. "Her glass eyes look real, but one eye is broken. The poor girl is forever looking up."

"That's what will happen to you, Jess, if you keep rolling your eyes at everything," Kathleen said.

"Ha, ha."

As soon as Kathleen had her dozen dolls, she hurried to the cashier, saying she had a luncheon date.

Lily and I browsed a while longer, then headed to the cafeteria.

"People in Vancouver stick with their own," Lily said as we entered a huge room full of shoppers dining out and workers on their lunch hour. We found an empty table, dropped our sun hats on a chair, and got a tray, joining the other customers in the lineup.

I ordered an egg sandwich and Lily asked for a bowl of chicken soup. We decided to share a pot of tea.

Back at our table, I glanced at the pair of pigeons cooing along the ledge outside. In the distance, a church steeple poked above the brick buildings.

I started on my sandwich. "Jimmy saved the newspaper article about the dips who robbed your father." Lily smiled at my mention of *dips*. "So, tell me everything about the trial, Lily."

"Father testified against the man who stole his wallet. I didn't really have to do much because a court translator was there to help. A man by the name of Mr. Cumyow."

"Was the accused found guilty?"

Lily nodded and drank a spoonful of her soup. "He was sentenced to two months at Oakalla Prison Farm."

"What about the other three men?"

"The police think they fled to the States."

"So justice was partly served."

"I suppose. By the way, I saw a few other cases while we waited for Father's. You'll never guess who was on the docket."

"Who?"

"Davie Bolton."

"What!"

"Have you heard about the Stanley Park Arsonist?"

"Davie was the arsonist?" Lily nodded. "Tell me everything." Sure, I was done with Davie, but I was still curious, even if only for his sister's sake.

"Two police officers were patrolling on horseback when they saw smoke rising at Beaver Lake. They galloped over to check it out."

"How bad was the fire?"

"One officer put it out, and his partner chased after Davie."

"So Davie was stopped."

"Not exactly. He was arrested all right. But the judge dropped the charges in court."

I almost choked on my sandwich. "Why?"

"Because Davie enlisted in the army. He even wore his soldier's uniform in court. Mr. Cumyow told my father that judges were letting some men off if they joined up. Depending on their crime too, of course."

"It's hard to see Davie's future, but who knows, Lily? The war might change him for the better."

Lily was looking past my shoulder. "Isn't that your sister, Jess? Over in the corner. She's with a man."

I swung around. It was Kathleen all right. The man had his back to us.

"Do you think it's Mr. Altman?"

"I'm not sure." *Of course it's him.*

Lily continued. "Mr. Altman sounds like a good man from what I've heard."

I didn't respond. *Why has Kathleen been keeping secrets?*

"She looks happy, Jess."

I moaned. "Too many changes are happening."

"Are you going over to say hello?"

"I'll talk to her later." I wished we'd gone somewhere else for lunch, but didn't say so.

"By the way, Jess. I talked to Mr. Cumyow about organizing a suffrage petition on behalf of residents of BC from China."

I was glad Lily changed the subject. And this was darn interesting. "What did he say?"

"He didn't say 'don't do it,' but then again, he didn't say 'go ahead.' Mr. Cumyow has lots of experience, so he would know how difficult it would be."

"What else did Mr. Cumyow tell you?"

"He was born in BC, way back during the gold rush. As an adult, Mr. Cumyow found a way to get on the voters' list. But then legislation was passed taking away the vote from Chinese and other people in BC too."

"It's so unfair. Did you tell him you plan to be a lawyer?"

Lily nodded. "He advised me to set up a law office in Vancouver after I finish my studies. And he said to press on, no matter what."

"Step-by-step."

Lily nodded. "And never give up."

Back on the sidewalk, Lily and I stopped by the kilted female mannequin in the display window. I read the sign again: *Will you let it come to this? Join Now. Vancouver Recruitment League.*

"Don't you think this display is shaming men to enlist?" I asked. "If you aren't man enough to join the military, the so-called weaker sex will step up."

"Yes," she replied. "And it mocks women too."

We looked at each other at the same time and sighed at the same time, then smiled at the same time. Linking arms, we crossed the street and caught the streetcar home.

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25

I DROPPED THE NEWSPAPER on the kitchen table: *August 25, 1916*. The battle at the Somme was still going on. But I didn't want to think about war on my birthday.

Expect surprises at supper, my sister told me before she and mother left for work.

I walked over to the breezeway and called to Father.

He stuck his head out the door. "Bring my breakfast to the porch, Jess. I've been saving some wonderful news for your birthday."

I rushed around the kitchen getting everything ready. Dry toast. A pot of tea. A small bowl of porridge. I brought the breakfast tray out and spied a bouquet of wildflowers on the wood table. A note was attached with twine: *Happy 16th birthday, Jess. Fondly, Will.*

I looked over to the Millers' porch. Shep stared back, crouched in his favourite spot.

Father came out slowly and eased into the wicker chair. "Happy birthday, Jess. Fetch the jam, will you? And take a look inside the breadbasket."

I raced to the kitchen and looked under the basket lid, where I discovered two small, wrapped gifts.

I returned to the porch and sat beside Father.

"Unwrap the blue package, Jess."

It was a framed photograph of Lily and me, arm in arm, in our summer whites, smiling for the camera. I was thrilled at such a thoughtful present.

Father looked pleased. "You told Kathleen about the street photographer. She saw his business card on the dresser and followed up. Read the tag on the other gift."

"To Lily, from the Goldies."

"It's the same photograph. Invite Lily for cake this evening and you can give it to her."

I promised myself that I would always remember this moment and my family's thoughtfulness, despite our family struggles.

Father looked out onto the street. His hand trembled slightly when he raised his cup—but he was getting stronger.

A gust of wind came up, blowing leaves off the maple tree in the Millers' yard and scattering them along the street.

"Please tell me your important news, Father."

"The doctor said I'm ready to return to work."

"Not at a logging camp, surely?"

"Don't you worry, girl. I've been hired as a first aid attendant at Hanbury's sawmill."

"Over at False Creek! Why, that's wonderful news, Father!"

"There are still medical bills to pay, Jess, which means you and your mother will have to work Saturdays, at least until Christmas."

"But I'm back at King Ed. in September?"

"Yes, you're back for your graduation year, Jess."

I was relieved and grateful. "What about Jimmy?"

"With me starting work now, your brother is free to make his own decision."

The possibility of losing Jimmy to war made Father's news bittersweet.

"YOU'RE MARRYING him?" I asked.

My sister nodded.

I felt an urge to scratch my hand, but I stomped my foot in anger instead. I was losing Kathleen.

We were tending to the dishes in the kitchen while Mother and Father had their tea in the parlour. Lily had just gone home with her gift and a piece of birthday cake for Amy.

I wished Jimmy hadn't chosen this evening to take a look at the storm damage up on the roof; his hammering was driving me mad.

“My marriage means you’ll gain a brother-in-law, Jess.”

I stared at the sparkling ring on my sister’s finger. Why hadn’t Kathleen told me about her engagement? It sure explained all the cancellations of our canvassing.

Kathleen followed my gaze. “This amethyst belonged to Tim’s grandmother. I’ve kept it hidden until now.”

“Who else knows this news?”

“Mother and Father have known for a while. I told Jimmy this morning. You will meet Tim soon, Jess, I promise.”

“As you wish.” I had heard enough.

Kathleen gave me a fixed look. “The wedding is set for October 8. Afterward, Tim and I will live near his parents’ home in Strathcona.”

It wasn’t like she was going overseas, I supposed. Still, I was losing her, and it hurt.

“There’s something else.”

I braced myself. “Yes?”

“It’s about Miss Drummond and the baby Sally.”

“You’re adopting the baby?”

“Not quite. Tim and I met with Sally’s birth mother.”

“What!” I felt queasy.

“Jenny Stanton. She works at Universal Knitting. Of course, we told the minister beforehand we would respect her wish for privacy. But she was willing to meet us and hear what we could offer.”

“About the baby?”

“About the mother and her baby. Think of it, Jess. Miss Stanton is a year older than you. She immigrated to Canada by herself and has no family here. Miss Stanton wants to keep her baby very much, but everything has worked against her. That’s why the church became involved.”

“So what is this new arrangement?” I felt a mix of emotions. I was mad at my sister for hiding so much from me, but I was also proud. Her kindness and compassion seemed limitless to me.

“Jenny will live with Mr. and Mrs. Altman. They will look after the baby while Jenny is working during the day. Tim and I plan to rent rooms across the street from his parents. We’ll help with the baby all we can. Like an aunt and uncle.”

“How long will this go on?”

“As long as Jenny needs our support. I’ve told her about you, Jess. I hope you’ll be an aunt to baby Sally Stanton.”

I was speechless. But I couldn’t stay mad at Kathleen. She was being kind and generous, just like Mrs. Quan, by helping a young mother in need. If only our mother had the same experience.

Kathleen showed me her engagement photograph, taken at Yucho Chow’s studio in Chinatown. I gave it a brief glance. Sure, my sister was happy, but I didn’t want to look at the sister taker.

“We were worried our parents wouldn’t approve of the marriage,” Kathleen went on, giving me a sharp look. “That’s why we waited for the right time to tell everyone.”

I was puzzled. “Wouldn’t approve? Why?”

Kathleen placed her arm around my shoulder. “Because of our backgrounds.”

I was still confused. Kathleen sighed. “He’s Jewish, Jess, and we’re Christian. But let’s discuss that another time. Right now, I want you to know our home will always open to you. Look to your own future, Jess, writing your stories and finishing school. If Jimmy goes to war, Mother and Father will count on you.”

Jimmy’s hammering finally stopped. I dropped the dishcloth on the kitchen table, overwhelmed by a vision of our family standing on the station platform while my brother hung out the train window, waving good-bye.

I collapsed onto the chair and held back tears. “We change as the world changes.”

Kathleen placed her hand on my shoulder. “A Jack London quote?”

“No, a Jess Goldie quote.”

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26

"I'M GLAD MOTHER is quitting the steam laundry at Christmas," Kathleen said. "I know it's been hard, Jess, but having you part time at Cascade has made her load feel lighter."

We were standing at the front door, waiting for Mother to come downstairs, both of us thrilled she had agreed to attend a suffrage meeting. It felt good to be of use.

"Are you tired these days, Katie? Going to work extra early to sew your wedding gown at Tim the Tailors?"

Kathleen turned to the wall mirror and adjusted the rose on her hat. "Not at all."

"Oh, that's right. Mr. Altman has you floating on air."

Kathleen made a *tsk* sound, spinning around to face the staircase. Mother was making her way down, looking youthful in a blue-grey skirt and white blouse.

"The future has a silver lining," she said, coming up to us. "A wedding and a baby to love are just what our family needs."

Kathleen helped her put on a jacket. Mother moved to the mirror and adjusted her felt hat. She turned to my sister and squeezed her hand.

"Now Jess," she said, looking at me, "let's see what those suffrage ladies have to say."

I handed her an umbrella. "You will like Miss Grant, Mother. She fights tooth and nail for working women."

We stepped onto the front porch and climbed down the steps. A few dark clouds warned of rain. Our backs to the wind, Mother set the pace along East Seventeenth. While waiting for the streetcar, I took out a suffrage newsletter from my satchel, eager to show my campaign news column and Kathleen's sketch of a mother cradling a

baby. The caption read: *Women deliver voters. Voters must deliver a 'yes' on the suffrage referendum.*

A drizzling rain started just before the streetcar pulled up. By the time we arrived downtown, the rain was coming down hard. Out on the sidewalk, Mother held up her umbrella. Kathleen and I huddled underneath as we walked down the block to the Labor Temple.

Lots of people were in the foyer, milling around. We headed straight to the auditorium. It was filling up fast with working women. Kathleen and Mother searched for seats while I gave out newsletters. I was about halfway done when someone in the back row called my name.

It was Ellen Bolton.

"We women need to stick together," she said when I came up to her.

Ellen introduced her sister, Mrs. Margaret Carter. I gave them each a newsletter.

"I'm starting to think the fellows driving the trucks have their heads screwed on proper," she told me. "After the meeting, I'll talk to Miss Grant about a union."

"That's great news, Ellen."

Mrs. Carter didn't say anything. Still, Ellen had gotten her to the meeting, and that was something.

I asked about Davie. Ellen frowned. "We'll see if the military can do some good for our brother. "

Mrs. Carter only shook her head and looked away.

Ellen nodded toward the stage. I turned around. Miss Grant was walking over to the podium.

"Let's meet up for refreshments later," I whispered.

I rushed up to the front row and took a seat beside Mother and Kathleen.

"Our campaign is almost over," Miss Grant began after the audience fell silent.

I sat back in my chair. I was no longer taking notes, having learned all the suffrage issues by heart.

“When working women have the vote,” Miss Grant continued, “we will fight against an exploitation that forces women into starvation or shame.”

I thought about Miss Stanton and her baby. And about the support Mrs. Quan gave unmarried women who were pregnant. I also thought about the harsh fate of my maternal grandmother, turned out by her own family and forced to give up her baby—my mother—to an orphanage in New Brunswick.

“Once working women have the vote,” Miss Grant went on, “we will fight for the mother’s pension and a fair minimum wage.”

Miss Grant held the audience spellbound, as usual.

“We must reform property laws, demand equal guardianship of children, and update the divorce laws. Women must have equal access to higher education.”

I turned to Mother and saw she was listening closely. I sure admired the courage of independent women like Miss Grant. But I also admired mothers, the invisible force driving us forward.

“We must campaign right up to September 14,” Miss Grant said as she wrapped up her speech. “Volunteers are needed at the polling stations. I hope to see every one of you doing your part.”

A young clerk from a department store was next to the podium. She had lots to say about her working conditions. After her was a lady reporter from the *Vancouver World*. She spoke about the value of a woman’s point of view. A waitress was the final speaker, and she talked about organizing a union at the restaurant where she worked.

Miss Grant came back to the stage and invited everyone to stay for refreshments, then requested Mrs. O’Connor play a few tunes at the piano. The elderly lady started with “Where the Fraser River Flows,” a rousing labour song, and followed up with a patriotic rendition of “The Maple Leaf Forever.”

I was eager to hear what Mother thought of the speeches when we got out of our chairs, but she saw someone she knew and said

she'd join us shortly.

"Let's go say hello to Miss Grant," Kathleen said after the volunteers had served us a slice of war cake and a cup of prohibition punch.

"I hear you Goldie sisters worked hard canvassing in Mount Pleasant," Miss Grant said when we approached her. "Well done."

Just then, Mother came over and Kathleen made the introductions, mentioning her work at Cascade.

"Steam laundry workers are coming to the Labor Temple with complaints," Miss Grant said.

"Such as?" Mother asked.

"Unpaid overtime."

"Well, the manager has me staying after five o'clock. Hiring more employees would help. But I don't see that happening."

"Here's my card, Mrs. Goldie. Contact me if you'd like to talk about solutions."

"Such as a union?"

"That's right."

"Don't get your hopes up. I'm only working Saturdays. And so is my daughter."

Mother's firm tone embarrassed me, but Miss Grant didn't seem to mind. "You take a card too, Jess. Good work on your newsletter updates, by the way. I see you wrote about the Vancouver Recruiting League going around the city canvassing men for the military."

"I want our suffrage volunteers to know other people are knocking on doors too."

"Military registration will lead to conscription, I have no doubt," Miss Grant said. "As a pacifist, I oppose it, but that's another political battle." She turned to Mother. "It was very nice to meet you, Mrs. Goldie."

On the way out, I saw Ellen and her sister heading toward Miss Grant. A sense of pride came over me. Change was coming. To the steam laundries. To women. To democracy. The very best part of

tonight was having Mother attend the suffrage meeting. *She'll support the women's vote now, I bet.*

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27

MY STOMACH FELT queasy as the elevator moved up. Any minute now, “Sisters in the Fire” would land in the hands of a newspaper editor. *I mustn’t expect much*, I told myself. *He’ll likely toss my story in with a huge pile of manuscripts and barely give it a glance.*

Still, I found myself thinking of the possibility of winning the contest—and how, if the story was published, readers would be inspired to support women’s rights.

I was pleased with the quote at the top of my story:

“We are going to insist on women having the vote . . . We are heartily sick of being governed, ruled, judged, sentenced, imprisoned and even hanged by men and man-made laws.”

MARY COTTON WISDOM, Cotton’s Weekly, b1909

The elevator doors opened. I walked up to a lady in a powder blue dress at the reception desk and handed over my manuscript. Behind her was a large open room. Men sat at desks, their shirt sleeves rolled up—many banging away on a typewriter, others on the telephone. Over in the far corner was the lady reporter who spoke at the Labor Temple.

The receptionist told me to watch for the contest results in next weekend’s edition of the *Vancouver World*.

I walked back to the elevator and was pushing the button when I felt a tap on my shoulder and turned around.

“Well, if it isn’t the fiery suffragist,” Mr. Delaney said. “Hello Miss Goldie.”

“Why, hello.” I blushed, flattered the reporter remembered me from the waterfront.

“Your fair sister is quite the lady, I recall.”

There goes Kathleen, I thought, getting all the limelight. I flashed a smile anyway.

"And what brings you here, young lady?"

"I've entered the short story contest."

"Good for you. You're back at school after Labour Day, I take it?"

"Yes, I'm returning to King Edward High for my matric year."

"You must enjoy writing."

"Oh yes, Mr. Delaney. Your reporter job seems so interesting."

"You see it all as a reporter, my girl. But I'm not sure a sweet young thing like you should see it all."

"When I finish school, it's my dream to see everything life has to offer."

Mr. Delaney grinned, though his eyes looked serious.

"Brendan!" a man bellowed from somewhere in the huge room.
"Get over here."

"That would be my editor, Mr. Blackhart. Most appropriately named, I assure you. A pleasure, Miss Goldie. Your first name again?"

"Jess."

"Good luck with your campaign, Miss Jess Goldie. A little birdie tells me the suffrage referendum will succeed."

I walked past the elevator to the stairs and climbed down two steps at a time to the door on the main floor. *My meeting with Mr. Delaney was lucky, I thought as I raced for the streetcar. He'll put in a good word to the contest judge, I bet.*

To think I had dreaded summer. Life's worries sure had a way of working out.

VI

VOTING DAY

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28

MISS HAGGERTY MOVED quietly down the row of desks as she read aloud from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. All I could think about was the election. Would the school bell ever ring?

If more than 50 percent of men support the suffrage referendum, I scribbled in my new diary, which I'd hidden beneath a textbook, September 14 will go down as an historic day for many—but not all—women in BC.

"A question, students," Miss Haggerty said from the back of the classroom. "What does Hamlet believe his choices are?"

I hastened to write down one more sentence in my diary before the teacher took notice.

Fighting for women's rights wasn't the only cause to fight for this summer. I faced conflicts within me too.

Miss Haggerty came my way just as I closed the diary. She could be strict, but I still felt lucky to have her for English.

"Well, Jess?"

I knew the soliloquy by heart. "Hamlet wonders which is better: To suffer with one's problems or confront and resolve them."

"Correct." Miss Haggerty moved down the row.

I still couldn't concentrate, what with the knowledge that Kathleen was already volunteering at the polling station. Her church wedding was in October, and a second ceremony was scheduled a week later at a synagogue in Strathcona. And to think, I still hadn't met Mr. Altman.

Lily didn't pay attention when I looked over at her. She was too busy following the lesson and taking notes. She'd always believed my father would get better and I'd be back at school this year. Watching her now, I had the same good feeling about her future.

“Jess, why does Hamlet decide the better choice is to suffer rather than end his life?” Miss Haggerty was standing over my desk again.

“His fear of death and the unknown holds him back.”

“That’s right.” She sounded pleasant, but her eyes warned me to pay attention.

The first day back at school, I had told Miss Haggerty my short story didn’t win the newspaper contest, but something almost as wonderful had happened. The editor asked me to write a regular column about school life for the *Vancouver World*. The money I earned, along with my wage from Saturdays at the steam laundry, would go toward teachers’ college.

I stared out the window as Miss Haggerty went on about Hamlet’s struggles. The leaves on the maples lit up the schoolyard in yellow, orange, and red. The Battle of the Somme had gone on for seventy-five days, Father reminded us at the breakfast table this morning. Canada’s soldiers continued to fight tooth and nail alongside our allies. My brother would soon be among them, and Mother refused to talk about it. Eighteen boys from my senior class were heading overseas too, including Will Miller. He enlisted the very day he learned his brother was killed.

I vowed to sort out why we have wars. And to do my part to stop them.

At last, the bell rang. Miss Haggerty assigned homework and dismissed us. Hamlet’s troubles evaporated as everyone headed to the door.

Lily knew I was in a hurry. “Come over to my house tomorrow,” she said as we made our way down the hall. “We can walk to school together, and you can tell me all the election news.”

“Your mother won’t shoo me away?”

Lily smiled mysteriously. “Ask Kathleen about Mother’s change of heart.” She waved and headed to her locker.

Outside the front entrance, I broke into a run. But something made me stop, spin around, and look up at the grand cupola on the

school roof. Here I was at King Edward High for my final year. *I won't ever take it for granted.*

I ran along Twelfth Avenue to Sixth Street and arrived at the entrance of the Odd Fellow's Hall. Kathleen saw me and came over.

"Tell me everything that's happened," I said, breathless.

She smiled. "Well, I reported to the polling station at 8:30. The male volunteers were already setting up chairs and booths. I guess they got here early so they could feel in control."

"They've never experienced such eager volunteers as suffragists."

"That's true. All the polls across BC opened at nine o'clock, as you know. Voters at our station poured in right from the start. My job was to make sure the proper rules were followed once they marked their ballot."

Kathleen handed me a stack of suffrage leaflets from inside her purse.

"You can stand outside the door and give these to voters."

I scanned the leaflet, proud of writing the text. Kathleen had contributed a drawing of two women strolling side by side with twin mountain peaks in the background. The caption read: *Two sisters for women's suffrage.*

"One more thing, Jess." Kathleen handed me a piece of paper. "Tell me what you think."

I glanced at a list of names in my sister's handwriting. Why, it was the guest list for her wedding!

"No extended family from either side?" I asked.

"Vancouver is too far away for Father's people to travel. Same with the Altmans' relatives in Alabama. A small wedding is best anyway."

I gave her a puzzled look.

Kathleen shrugged. "No family conflicts."

On the list were the Millers, the Gees, and of course Miss Grant. There was Miss Drummond and her mother along with Miss Stanton

and her baby. Also invited were Miss Joan Thomson and her mother, Mrs. Thomson. I was happy to see that the Thomsons' maid, Mrs. Carriere, was listed too, along with her husband.

"It sounds wonderful." I gave back the list, trying to sound happy. I suddenly remembered Lily's mysterious message. "Have you given Mr. and Mrs. Gee their invitation?"

"Not yet, but I paid a visit to the shop and told Mrs. Gee to prepare her finest dress for my wedding."

So that's why I'm back in Mrs. Gee's good graces, I thought. She approves of my sister getting married.

I couldn't help feeling sad about losing my sister to Mr. Altman.

"Why do make-believe stories have happy endings, Katie, but in real life, it isn't always that way?"

My sister looked at me thoughtfully. "I know what you mean, Jess. What if Father hadn't pulled through? What about all the families who have lost loved ones in the war?"

I thought of the Millers losing Robert. And now our Jimmy had enlisted. At least Kathleen and I were talking heart-to-heart. That always made me feel better.

As if reading my mind, Kathleen's eyes softened and she put her arm around my shoulder. "We have to make the best of whatever comes our way, Jess. It's important to stick together and 'bash on,' as the Brits say. Now, go reward voters with a cup of coffee."

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ONLY TWO HOURS were left before polling stations closed across British Columbia. Then there would be the counting of ballots. I could hardly wait to learn the result of the referendum.

Mrs. Smithers interrupted my thoughts to tell me we'd run out of coffee for the voters. I went downstairs to the small kitchen and had just finished brewing a pot when Kathleen came down the steps.

"Jimmy voted," she said, walking up to the counter.

"Do you think he supported the suffrage referendum?"

"I followed him outside to ask but he wouldn't say. Oh well, Jess. Let our brother have his secret ballot."

I silently agreed. Why argue when Jimmy was leaving us to join the Great War? I poured the coffee into cups. Kathleen came behind the counter and placed them on the trays.

"I'm glad we're volunteering together, Jess."

Heartened, I gave my sister a sideways glance. "The drawing of the two sisters on the leaflet looks like us."

Kathleen took one off the counter and read the text aloud:

Attention voters of BC. Be on the right side of history. Women don't want to stand behind you—or in front of you—we want to stand beside you. The right to vote is a human right. At the September 14 election you will be given a ballot with the question 'Are you in favour of the Extension of the Electoral Franchise to Women?' We urge you to mark YES in support of freedom and equality.

"Well?" I asked.

"You've done a good job summing up our campaign, Jess."

We each took a tray and headed up the stairs.

"I'm going downtown to the World Tower after the polls close," Kathleen said when she came to the top of the steps.

"With Mr. Altman?"

"That's right. I know you haven't met my fiancé yet, Jess, but please call him Tim for goodness sake."

"Oh, all right."

"Now then, lots of people will be standing outside the building watching the election updates flash on a special curtain. The *Vancouver World* will sell extra editions of the newspaper too."

"Can you telephone me when the results come in?"

"If I find a payphone. It will likely be after midnight though, and you've got school tomorrow."

"I'll be wide awake, Katie."

Kathleen glanced at my hand. "The bandage is off."

"Mother was right about a scar though."

"Yes, but the important thing is your hand is healed."

"COFFEE, SIR?" I asked.

Mr. Cook greeted me warmly, taking a cup off the tray. He had just dropped his ballot into the wooden box.

"How is school, Miss Goldie?"

"Classes are going well, sir."

After only a few sips, Mr. Cook placed the cup back on the tray and gave his suspenders a snap. "Give my best to your family."

A booming voice came from across the room. It was the young Mr. Bell. He'd just voted and was having a coffee while talking to Kathleen.

Mr. Carriere breezed by me and said hello on his way to the registration desk. He went into the voting booth, came out a short time later, and stuffed his ballot in the box.

Before he dashed off, he took a moment to tell me he was looking forward to Kathleen's wedding. *That was good of him*, I thought.

Mr. Weinstein had already voted when he came up to me and took a coffee off my tray.

"I won't say too much about the referendum, Jess. I don't want to get the volunteers in trouble."

"We're allowed to talk outside the polling station, Mr. Weinstein."

"Yes, yes, I know. But I wanted to tell you, well done. And your sister too. My wife says your campaign work in Mount Pleasant was impressive."

I thanked him for his kind words. After a few more sips, Mr. Weinstein set his cup back on the tray and left.

It was almost seven o'clock. The polls would close in ten minutes. Other than me and my sister, Mrs. Smithers and Mr. Wood were the only volunteers remaining. Kathleen came over and asked if I'd seen Father.

"He hasn't voted?"

"No, and I'm worried."

Just then, Father appeared at the door. I could tell he had back pain by the way he favoured his left side when he walked over. Still, I couldn't help asking him to hurry.

He nodded and made his way to the registration desk. I knew exactly how Father was voting. Liberal. Only because he was mad at the Conservatives. As for the referendum on banning alcohol, Father was opposed. "There's nothing wrong with a man having a few pints of beer after a hard day's work," he'd told me. Father promised to mark "yes" on the suffrage referendum though. It was Mother who had convinced him.

I was sure he'd be the final voter in our polling station—until Mr. Bolton showed up.

"Well, if it isn't the Goldie girls," he said, stumbling toward us. "If you're thinking about tampering with the ballots to get your way, you better watch it."

"What's going on here?" Father said. He'd just come out of the voting booth and was dropping his ballot in the box.

Mr. Bolton squinted his eyes. "You won't see my daughters telling me what to do."

"I beg your pardon?" Father replied, walking over to him.

Mr. Bolton shot Father a scathing look. "Never mind."

Mrs. Smithers and Mr. Wood looked over at Kathleen. She shrugged her shoulders.

I heard someone clearing their throat and turned to the entrance. A well-dressed man stood in the half-light, twirling a cane around his finger. *Surely not another late voter*, I thought.

My attention snapped back to Mr. Bolton when he muttered a terrible slur about Mother. Her whole life, people had asked about my mother's racial background, and she would inform them, not always kindly, that she was unable to give them an answer because she had never known her parents.

Father's eyes were on fire. He took a swing at Mr. Bolton and almost fell over. Mr. Bolton laughed and raised his fists, moving about like a boxer.

"Don't you dare!" I cried out, terrified Father would get hurt.

"Just a minute, gentlemen!" the man at the door called out. Everyone turned to look as he strolled over and stood beside my sister.

"Fighting won't solve anything, Mr. Bolton," Kathleen said, taking hold of the stranger's walking cane and stepping toward him.

Thankfully, Mrs. Smithers spoke up. "Follow me to the registration table, sir. There's only a few minutes left. Hurry along."

Mr. Bolton did as she bid, smirking at my sister and Father as he passed them.

"No one talks to my family like that!" Father yelled, though it was to Mr. Bolton's back.

"Polls are closed!" Mr. Wood called out from behind the registration desk. "It's seven o'clock. No more voting. Everyone out, please!"

"I haven't voted!" Mr. Bolton roared.

Mrs. Smithers clasped Mr. Bolton's elbow and escorted him to the entrance. "Too late. Out you go."

I covered my mouth, muffling a laugh.

Kathleen handed the cane back to the stranger. "Tim, please meet my sister. Jess, this is Mr. Tim Altman. You've met my father, of course."

"Hello again, Mr. Goldie," Mr. Altman said. "Pleased to meet you, Jess. Can I give anyone a ride home?"

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IT WAS NEARLY MIDNIGHT. Kathleen still hadn't phoned. She and Mr. Altman—Tim, I supposed—were downtown waiting for the election results to come in. I sat in the kitchen, my schoolbooks scattered across the table, refusing to go to bed until I found out about the referendum.

I started writing a poem in my diary. After a few drafts, it came out like this:

*When war offered men desolation
And threatened the world to deform
Canada's people stepped forward
In hopes to push back the storm.
And now men battle in anguish
And those at home suffer too
With prayers for coming together
When this wretched conflict is through.*

ANON

Maybe I'd submit the poem to the yearbook club, disguising my identity as "Anon." They say all the "Anonymous" writers throughout history were women. At least, my English teacher said so.

The telephone rang. I raced to the back room, empty now that Father had moved upstairs.

"The suffrage referendum passed!" Kathleen shouted into the receiver.

"Victory!" I shouted back, jumping up and down with glee.

"The results aren't final, Jess," my sister went on, more calmly. "The ballots from the soldiers overseas have to be counted. But it's still a clear majority."

"We did it! You, me, and all the women who worked so hard on the campaign."

"They say 70 percent of voters supported the referendum."

I grabbed the sash on the dresser mirror and draped it across my shirtwaist. "The word 'yes' is the greatest word ever!"

Kathleen laughed. "The referendum on prohibition also passed."

"Another win for women's cause, though Father won't like it."

"But he'll like knowing the Liberal Party beat out the Conservatives. Mr. Harlan Brewster is our new premier."

"Mr. Brewster supports the women's vote, doesn't he?"

"He does indeed, Jess. And his party promises to pass legislation to make our voting rights official."

"What was the count in our ward?"

"Let me take a look at the newspaper." I heard a rustling sound. "*Mount Pleasant, Ward 5: 1,660 in favour of the women's vote and 691 opposed.*"

"Did any wards have a majority vote against women's suffrage?"

"Ward 2 on the city's east side."

"That's disappointing. Miss Grant worked so hard on the waterfront campaign."

"True, but there's much to celebrate. This is a historic moment."

"Not for all women, Katie. Or all men, for that matter."

"Yes, Jess, universal suffrage is the goal. And in the next election, women voters can have a say on that."

Lily won't be so optimistic, I thought, which made me feel heavy-hearted. Still, I couldn't ignore what was achieved tonight.

"It's amazing to think our mothers can vote now, Katie. And next year, you'll be twenty-one and you can vote."

"And you'll be voting in five years, Jess."

"And in twenty-one years, so will the baby."

"Sally?"

"Yes. Our very own suffragist Sally."

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