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CHAPTER ONE

Wind

THE FIRST NIGHT she hardly noticed he was gone, and even though she had expected him back before the moon rose, she slept soundly. Probably, she thought, he has stopped overnight at the Beausoleil's so he and Napoléon can have a good chin wag and a glass of brandy together. He will surely be back by ten tomorrow morning. Charles asked, "*Papa?*" more than once, but a crust of bread, a sip of milk, a song complete with nose-touching and hand-patting, soon made him forget his father's absence. The second night, though, the slightest sound disturbed her, twice she rose from her bed, carefully, so as not to wake her son, and peered out their cabin's one window onto the moonlit prairie, but there was no one to be seen, not even a wild animal. Not that there was anything to fear – grizzlies were rarely seen anymore, indeed they had never seen one, only their droppings. The cabin walls kept out any wolves or rare mountain lion, and the Indians, subdued since the rebellion, posed no threat to settlers, if they ever had. And yet, all night she felt uneasy, lying for long periods awake, changing positions in the bed cautiously and, if Charles moved, holding still until he lapsed back into sleep.

Toward dawn, drowsing, she came awake with a start to a low moan in the distance – ceaseless, growing louder as it advanced toward the cabin, until, arriving, it pushed against the

cabin walls, the furred body of a great animal blundering determinedly by, the force of its desire set always on something further on, at the far edge of the prairie, while she lay, already tense, listening over the wind's noise for the sound of hoofbeats, or the creak of the wagon's approach.

Again, she fell asleep and this time slept deeply, opening her eyes to stained canvas walls that swelled, then collapsed inward with gusts of wind. Pierre lay snoring beside her, and she tried once more to orient herself. A tent. She was back in the canvas tent they had set up on the prairie while they built their small house. The sloping ceiling had turned from greyish white to a burning golden-yellow, meaning the sun was up and they had overslept, both of them, exhausted as they were from the hammering and lifting, from the dragging and the sorting. Around their cots the sacks of their perishable goods – flour, sugar – leaned against each other waiting for the sod roof to be finished on the house. Wind caught the closed tent-flap door and snapped it noisily, as if to say *rise, there is work to be done*. Then she was working in her garden, pulling weeds. The soil, usually thin and a pale brown, now rich and dark as the garden of her grandparents' house back in Québec and she worked doggedly, pulling and digging, checking the tiny plants, saying a prayer to them to grow. Then she was standing alone in the endless sweep of strange prairie grasses and small flowering plants, the wind tearing at her skirt and apron, her face turned upward to the sun, and all around her a music rose that seemed to be made of rippling grass, birdsong, a throaty murmuring from the earth itself, and a high-pitched keening from the sky that rose and fell with the music of the wind. She saw all of it would sweep her away; she wasn't afraid, lifted her arms in preparation, pulled the fastenings from her hair and loosening the buttons at her

throat, then her bodice, until she had bared her breasts to the elements and the music.

She woke then, still feeling the heat of the sun on her bosom and throat, and lay stunned, trying to come awake to the day, and the cabin, and the fact of Pierre's continuing absence. But she couldn't catch her breath, and her heart fluttered and tripped against her skin, each hair on her head bristling with its own life. She pulled herself to a sitting position and gazed into the shadows of the room where everything sat as it always had, rough and shabby, waiting for her to begin work. Her breath slowed to normal, her heart retreated into its cage and resumed its steady beat; even the hair on her head lay subdued. Such a dream! She lifted herself from the bed and padded to the pail of water where she filled the dipper and drank thirstily from it. Morning, and still no Pierre. Now the dream dwindled fully and vanished. Both elated and frightened by it, not daring to pursue it, she let it go, for there was exigency this morning to which she must attend. Where was Pierre?

But this was not the first time he had failed to return home when he said he would. Once, it had been a deluge of rain that turned the trail to gumbo, forcing him to camp until it dried enough for the team and wagon to get through. Another time, when a wheel had broken on a rock he had failed to notice on the trail, he'd stayed at the Beausoleil's while he and Napoléon repaired it. This past winter he stayed two nights with l'anglais, Harry Adamson, whose shack was at the edge of the village by the trail that led into the wilderness and home. Night was falling, Adamson had seen Pierre trying to get his horses to face into the growing blizzard sweeping up from across the American border. Pierre wasn't good with horses, a more serious weakness in a settler – although one never to be mentioned – than Sophie

would have guessed. His horses knew better than Pierre. In the spring, to the west, the bodies of two unnamed travellers were found huddled by the trail.

“Adamson, he didn’t even put a coat on,” Pierre had told her in his dramatic way – the flash of light in his black eyes, the quick lift of chin, his black hair tossed from his forehead, his smile. “He came rushing out in the wind and the snow – he caught Belle by the bridle and shouted to me, “*Venez-vous a moi! Chez moi!* I could barely understand his French! But –” his shrug, wide-handed, his mouth comically pursed, his eyes full of merriment, so that, imagining that excellent, overly-large bachelor in his crudely mended trousers, she had laughed too.

She hadn’t the energy in this too-early morning, in this late summer of unending dryness and oven-like heat, the fourth of their sojourn here, and now, in his worrisome absence, to feel anything at the memory of that gesture. Once, that movement had brought heat to her face and chest, so that after he had left, as she walked in her grandparents’ garden in the Québec village where she’d been raised, she would fan herself, and ponder in wonder, dismay, and some half-denied delight, the deep-seated sensation by which she’d been overcome whenever he fixed those dark eyes on hers, smiled, and tossed back that lock of hair. She hadn’t understood then that what she felt wasn’t so much love, as she had thought, as physical desire. But no, she thought, remembering again how overcome she was when at last she was freely able to put her fingers in his hair, her palm against his cheek, her mouth against his. She had been in love with him since the first kiss by her great-uncle Henri’s grave-side – no, sooner, since she was a child and with grandfather, visiting the Hippolyte farm. Surely, she corrected herself, there is no separating love from such desire.

WILD ROSE

On the third morning since his departure, the stillness came as it always did, the only sound, the piping of small birds in the buff-coloured grass, the occasional call from a single coyote somewhere toward the west where the land rose, hazy and mauve, into a line of low hills. It was her favourite time of day, strolling to the barn with Charles walking at her side as the sun climbed slowly above the horizon sending its first gold, then yellow rays across the grass, the light rising higher, soon blotting out the stars. And the heat, even so early, beginning.

At the barn she pumped the trough full of water, then opened the corral gate so that their five cows could move out to spend the day grazing on the prairie, while she kept a constant eye on them to see that they didn't venture near the crop or her garden so parched in the heat. She turned Fleurette, her milk cow, into the pole corral, gave her hay, and milked her while the cow munched contentedly. Charles wandered, chirping to himself, picking up an insect and bringing it to her to admire, whether crushed to a bloody pulp on his palm or crawling up his arm. *Papa?* he thought to ask, but not waiting for an answer, toddled off to whatever new matter had caught his attention: a yellow wildflower quivering under the weight of a bee, a tiny green snake slithering into the grass. All the while the warm milk hissing into the wooden pail, and birds singing their morning song in the still, clear air, and the sun rising higher, a bath of lemon and gold light lifting the night-dull prairie into the blaze of day. Then she and Charles let the chickens out of their shed, and gathered whatever eggs they could find. Last, she led Tonerre, Pierre's saddle horse, and Fleurette, one by one out onto the prairie, pounded tethering pins into the ground, tied them, and left them to graze. One day soon there would be fences, but for now, not being able to risk losing

either animal, tethering pins would have to do.

Later, Charles leaned his sturdy little body against her knee as she stood looking out the open cabin door across the unending expanse of grass. So intense was the heat that at the far horizon the earth lifted, shivered, melted slowly downward to rise again, so that sometimes she could see the land on the far side of the upward tilt of the plain floating, the palest aqua, low in the sky. She gazed, sweeping the quivering horizon, searching for the first sign of someone approaching, a darker spot in the wavering heat, tiny, growing bigger by infinitesimal degrees, until she could decide if she saw a wild thing, or horse or cow, or human.

She could feel through her skirt how hot Charles was, and she bent and lifted him into her arms. He settled his head into the crook of her shoulder and she kissed his cheek, patting his damp back at the same time. He lifted his head and said into her ear, "*Maman?*" And then, letting his head return to that curve of neck and shoulder where it fitted perfectly, "*Où est Papa?*" Such a bright child, she thought, only three and speaking so well. Already she was worrying about where he would go to school. Would she have to send him away? And where would she find the money to do that? She had been no scholar herself, nor was she much good at the skills the nuns and her grandmother had insisted on, her fingers still prickling at the thought of all the embroidery. Even her devil-may-care Pierre complained when the socks she had darned for him raised blisters. But for her little Charles all would be different. She would find a school where the teachers would cherish her bright boy and teach him well.

She said in English, "Soon papa will come 'ome." Then, correcting herself, "Home," aspirating the "h" carefully and adding,

“*Bientôt.*” She wanted Charles to speak both languages and spoke to him in her own imperfect English, never hesitating, on the few occasions she was with the English-speaking settlers’ wives, or the few women in town, to enquire how one said this or that, finding them only too eager to help as if she, a heathen and an *idiote*, had at last come to her senses. Then she would practice on the way home, irritating Pierre with her efforts.

“We are Québécois,” he would insist to her. “We are French.”

“Can’t you see?” she would say. “Already settlers come from other places – they all learn English. Everyone who is important here is English. If we are to survive, we must learn English too.” But Pierre merely grimaced, and if she insisted, he would shout. She had faltered only during the rebellion, especially after they hung Riel, and wondered for a while if it was a mistake to throw in their lot with les anglais.

Then their perfect peace, or so she thought of it, had been disturbed by the fear running through all the settlers, men riding from one tiny, isolated farmstead to the next to ask of news, to try to think of plans for the safety of their wives and children should the Indians rise up too, and kill them all. Or the mad Métis.

“We are French,” she had argued. “They will not harm us.”

“Oh, so now we are French,” Pierre had bellowed at her, and in front of Napoléon Beausoleil. Exasperated and embarrassed, glaring at him, she had snapped back, “We cannot be anything else, of course. But we must be practical, Pierre,” a pleading note entering her voice. She knew Beausoleil thought her mad: To be French was to be French, that was all there was to it. One didn’t argue about it, or mitigate it; one was, and would always be. She gritted her teeth, holding back her argument,

that one could be French privately and among other French people, while in the larger community working to fit in. In her mind it was simple, and not one whit treasonous, as the men clearly thought.

And were not the Beausoleils their only neighbours for miles in any direction on this never-ending, boundless plain? Somewhere far to the east there were swamps and bogs and near-impenetrable forests of pine and spruce that went on forever before one reached Toronto and then Montréal. Below them lay the United States of America, much-longer settled than the newcomers they knew themselves to be, where, if one went far enough, the winding trails made by wagons and mule trains or teams of oxen had become real roads. Where there were schools and churches and governments elected by the local people, unlike them who, despite the Territorial Council, were truly still governed from the East. To the West, equally impenetrable, the Rocky Mountains, snow-covered at their summits all the year round she had heard, and then the rainforest and the ocean. Above them, the north, everyone said fit only for the Indians and the Eskimos. Legion upon legion of trees, then tundra, then unimaginable millions of acres of ice and snow leading to a frozen bluish-white sea. No, Beausoleil had ridden half a day to see them. For half a day he had ridden his plow horse across the undulating sun-cured grasses of this blessed golden plain, seeing not another soul, and if he rode on, as he said he might, it would be more than another half day before he again found a settler's flimsy shack rising grey and shabby, a miniscule dot above the lie of land and beneath the endless dome of sky. She had said, then, "Dear Monsieur Beausoleil, do share our meal before you go on. We will say a rosary to speed you on your way." She had felt Pierre relaxing.

Now she asked, "Are you hungry, Charles?"

"*Oui, Maman,*" he replied, and she said, automatically, "Yes, Mother," but he was intent on a lock of her hair that had come untucked.

She went back inside, closing the door behind her to keep out mosquitoes and flies – a hopeless task, that one – and set her son down, waiting for her eyes to adjust to the interior gloom. They could afford only one window, so as long as the weather allowed, they spent most of their waking hours outside. If she were cooking, though, she hurried inside every few minutes to make sure the chimney hadn't overheated. In their first year, there had been a prairie fire to the north, flames leaping more than a hundred feet in the air, devastating the grassland for many miles killing everything in its path from wildlife to cattle and horses, and burning out every settler's shack in its way. All that long night they had waited, watching, falling asleep to wake with a start, the wagon loaded, the horses in harness, ready to run should the wind shift. She would never forget how terrifying it was as the horizon blazed against the black sky and the wind blew eastward in howling gales.

Charles's eyes seemed to need no time to adjust. As soon as she put him down he was attracted by an ant struggling across the rough wooden floor, and toddled toward it, his fat little hand outstretched, murmuring to it. What quick eyes he has, she thought, and would have laughed at herself except that how could any child be quicker or more curious than Charles? And where was Pierre?

What if he has had a runaway and was thrown from the wagon and lay, all his bones broken, somewhere on the prairie? Four years ago when she and Pierre had begun to search for the quarter of land they had filed on in Swift Current, the entire

area was nearly empty of other people. But since then, more of them crisscrossed the prairie on their way here and there. Some stopping to ask Pierre for advice in finding a section or quarter-section stake, miles away from Sophie and Pierre's cabin, so that she thought they stopped more out of fear, and to hear a human voice not their own. And now, the newcomers, too, those who stayed, stood in their cabin doors as she did, gazing out across the stiff pale grass, and spotted every rock, every animal, and if they could not at first tell a rock from a cow, it did not take long for them to educate themselves: horses as black strokes against the tawny landscape, cows black dots. She did not believe Pierre was lying half-dead on the prairie. He followed trails; someone would have seen him as a still black spot where one had not been before. Someone would have found him.

Yet she could see no reason why his trip to the blacksmith in town to repair a broken part from his binder in such perfect travelling weather should take so long. He drank yes, what man did not enjoy a glass of wine, or a brandy now and then, but he was not a drunkard as so many of the men in the West seemed to be, no doubt because they had no women to remind them of a normal way of life. What else to expect when no single woman could even apply for free land?

She thought back to the morning Pierre had left. He came to the house, the horses already hitched, the broken part, she assumed, tossed into the wagon-box. He had seemed angry, in a hurry, ignoring Charles who had called, "*Papa, papa,*" so she hadn't questioned him, didn't even ask him to get her this or that, not even if she might go with him. A sheen of sweat lay on his forehead, a line of it trickled down his neck, but then, he'd been cutting wheat since not long past dawn, and the morning was such that heat came up off the prairie in billows,

as if it was the earth itself churning it up. He hadn't once looked into her face, and that had also troubled her.

Charles climbed into his seat at the table, and she picked his bowl from the shelf and at the stove spooned a little of the porridge she had made the evening before when the prairie cooled and it was possible to make a fire in the stove without fainting from its heat, then carried it to the table where she set it in front of him. Guillaume and Claire had sent the bowl for Charles when he was born, and the shiny silver spoon too, in which he could see his own face upside down, and that, no matter how many ways he turned it, to his eternal mystification, remained upside down. She poured a little of the pitcher of cream she had separated earlier in the morning onto the porridge.

"Careful, *c'est chaud!*" She said to Charles, as she always said to him, sitting down beside him, and taking the spoon from his hand to demonstrate yet again, "It's hot, very hot. Blow, blow very hard." She gave the spoon back to him and Charles blew, sending porridge in all directions, grinning happily into her face.

She rose and went to the door again, opened it and stared once more out over the prairie to the southeast where the village of Bone Pile sat some ten miles away, then she turned to look out to where Pierre had left the binder against the last row of cut wheat, at the other end of the field from where she stood. He had made a few stooks, but they ended far back from where the binder sat. He wouldn't allow her to stook for him, having some prejudice about what a woman of her sort could and could not be asked to do that he refused to relax even in the face of their need. Hadn't she helped build their house? Hadn't she carried sods to him? Hadn't she delivered Charles with only Madame Beausoleil to help? Didn't she dig the soil of her garden

herself, waiting for a spring rain to soften the ground, and planting seeds his mother saved and sent West with her? She could be stooking behind the binder, speeding up the harvest. This, their best crop yet: the first year, only five acres plowed, there were so many other things needing doing: the second year twenty, the third year nearly double that, and now, sixty acres seeded to crop, and where was he? She was terrified a storm might come and they would lose it all, even thought of getting on the binder herself and cutting more crop, or stooking what hadn't been done yet, even though he would be angry. And what to do with Charles if she did? Tie him beside her to the binder seat? What was it Pierre wanted from her, besides a child, besides a home, besides her unbounded love for him? She watched the sky, cloudless and distant, and the land, flattened now by the high, clear light, without seeing them.

She was thinking of her first summer here. She had been fearless, riding Tonerre by herself to search for berry patches – had picked pails of Saskatoons and chokecherries, once near the creek a mile to the north where Saskatoon bushes grew abundantly on the banks among the wild roses and wolf willow, beside a group of native women, not even knowing they were there, until they came through the bushes to pick side by side with her. Sophie, unsure what to do, until one of them reached silently in front of her, pulled down a fruit-laden branch she couldn't reach, and held it for her as Sophie stripped its fruit.

"Merci," she had said, smiling, but the Indian woman did not speak or smile, and slipped away through the bushes. Sometimes she thought that perhaps she had dreamt that strange, silent encounter, for it was rare these days to see even one lone Indian, much less a group of them. Bees buzzing by, flies whispering around them, the air rich with the scent of the

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roses and grasses, the sun bronzing all their skins with its relentless heat, the sky pale and far away. Why was she then so unafraid? Her first taste of freedom, her soul free at last and spreading out as far as the plains allowed – forever – there being no end to them. Or, it might have been the wind; sometimes she was sure it was the wind, what it carried, heat from the sun, glinting particles of sun-matter, scents she had never before smelled, the very distance the wind had covered to reach her.

She thought of the plagues of mosquitoes, the never-ending swarms of flies, of the thunder and lightning storms followed by rains so heavy and intense that it would be days before they could leave the homestead, even this blazing heat, and in winter its opposite, so cold sometimes that they had had to wear all their clothes in bed to keep warm. This past one had been the very worst of all their winters here, with snow several feet deep on the level, except when a hurricane force wind blew it into ten foot drifts, and bitterly cold day following bitterly cold day, and day after day Pierre shovelling the snow down from the roof and away from the door. She and Pierre had survived only because they had a good supply of food and fuel. But it was a life of their own, a thing they could never have had in the comfortable, God-loving village from which they had come. It was *la grande aventure*; it had shown her what it meant to be alive.

Behind her, Charles murmured to himself and struck his spoon against his bowl gently to listen to the sound the glass made. Still no trace of anything moving far out over the prairie, only a pair of hunting hawks circling above, their shrieks reaching faintly down through layers of blue to where she stood alone in the cabin doorway, puzzling over her husband's absence. Two nights now, and soon three days.

She knew before she knew; maybe she had always known it,

the sudden weight of her knowing buckling her knees, so that she slumped against the door frame, clinging to it so as not to fall, terror at what would become of her and her child seizing her before a single clear image of perils ahead emerged. She made her way, staggering, to the wooden table in front of the stove where her babe played with his porridge and sang to himself, fell into the first chair, the one in which Pierre always sat. A roaring was in her ears; her breath came quickly: *Pierre wasn't coming back. Pierre had left them.*

The room's shadows had taken on a strange, bruise-like colour. She held the tabletop with both hands as if the cabin were a ship at sea tilting to the left and to the right; bile rose into her throat and she swallowed, forcing herself to breathe evenly through her nose until her stomach quieted and the room stopped its crazed pitching. Charles was carefully putting a fingertip into his porridge, lifting a tiny dollop, then placing it on the table top, pausing to consider it, then reaching for another and placing it beside the first. She watched the care with which he did this, even in her fear and shock marvelling at the precision a three-year-old could muster.

Tears sprang into her eyes. She wept copiously for less than a minute before fear returned, lifting her to her feet so abruptly she knocked over the chair and Charles looked up and would have wept had she not leaned over him quickly, kissing his dark hair, briefly caressing his face.

Back to the door, opening it again, this time with hands that shook. He hated the hard labour of plowing virgin soil from sunrise to sundown; it troubled him deeply to see what the sun and constant wind were doing to his handsome face, how his hands were thickened and scarred. *Voyez!* he had shouted at her, lifting them to her face. She had gazed silently at her own,

pleading, "It is honest labour. Soon we will have a crop." He had turned away, pushed open the door and gone out onto the prairie. She should have known then that they would be leaving their homestead, for town, she supposed, where there were people, real houses, a community, where he would find some sort of work to do. Or perhaps he'd been planning to return to Québec. But if so, wouldn't he have taken them? How could he make such a decision and never once ask her? When they had vowed to be one, to think as one, to work together as one? Was he not the only possible man for her life?

Wherever he had gone, it was not back to Québec where he would be shamed and worse if she and Charles weren't with him. Where then? North to the Métis communities near Prince Albert? Farther West to the French villages near Fort Edmonton? No, that would only be more of the same. More likely he had gone south to cross the border into the United States. The border had barely been established there, there were no guards nearby; crossing it would be easy. Or – he could have had trouble getting his broken part fixed. Maybe he had to go on to Swift Current or even to Garden City where – but no. Even if he had gone on, he would have been back by now. He would have sent a messenger. Wouldn't he have?

Wait! Why did he take the wagon and team if he knew he was leaving forever? Why didn't he just saddle the horse he loved so much and gallop away across the prairie as he had done more than once before? But she had been washing clothes the day he left and had noticed nothing missing from his meagre wardrobe. He hadn't loaded the wagon with any of his belongings, so why did he not take Tonerre?

Charles had grown tired of his porridge game, climbed down from the table and was once again pursuing an ant. She said

aloud, "Pierre has left with a woman." Charles looked up from where he squatted in his pursuit and asked, "*Maman?*"

"He has taken a woman with him." Her child came clumsily toward her, one hand out as if to offer comfort. That is why he took the team and wagon and not his beloved saddle horse. How long has he been seeing a woman? Who is she? But he has no money – how could he – unless she has money – but, wait, I have no money, I have only this farm, this half-done harvest, this one horse and few cows he has left me, an aging milk cow. He has left our child!

She clutched her head to stop her brain's skittering, then released it, began to pace, fists clenched, feet thudding on the rough wooden floor. Back and forth she went until she noticed that Charles, laughing uncertainly, had begun to toddle after her. This halted her and she lifted him again, burying her face in his silky hair – Pierre's hair – clutching him tightly to her. *I am abandoned!*

A wave of shame engulfed her, melding before she could stop it into longing: His smooth skin, golden beside her whiteness, his black hair, blacker even than hers, and gleaming black eyes, his muscled torso, arms, and thighs – for a second, she couldn't breathe. But – he loves me so! She could feel by the weight of her child, his warm body molded to hers, that he had fallen asleep. He would sleep an hour, two hours, and she would think. She would find out what to do. She carried him into the bedroom and carefully placed him on the bed, pushing a chair against its edge so that he wouldn't roll off onto the floor. She returned to the kitchen and began to clean the porridge from the table, and then to sweep the floor. She worked slowly, with extreme care, missing not a particle of food or dirt, as if important guests were coming.

The crop! She paused in her careful sweeping. She couldn't farm without him. Would she have to sell the farm to get money to buy train tickets to return to Québec? She faltered, because returning to Québec struck no chord of joy, the opposite, rather, and fear and disgust, all that she had escaped coming back to her as well as the fact that she could never return, tail between her legs, and no one to take her in. Then the image appeared involuntarily behind her eyelids of the plain spreading endlessly in every direction, glowing as if with its own light.

She thought of the few French women in town – the pretty ones – there was only Madame Clothilde Le Fèbvre, but wait, hadn't they moved on? Or...the unmarried daughter of those newcomers, Marguerite – she could not recall the family name. Or – maybe the woman had left behind an angry husband. Maybe *he* would go after them and bring them both back. Or the father. And the loss of her own poor dead father, of whom she hadn't thought much for years, loomed before her now, and she felt she would weep forever over him even though he had been dead since her early childhood, as had her mother, and – if only my brothers were here! Guillaume would go after Pierre, or Hector. Even in her turmoil she turned her mind from Hector as quickly as she thought of him.

Stop such foolishness, she told herself, because her brothers wouldn't come running to save her. They might not even send money so she could go home, Guillaume angry already, Hector uncaring. Banished. He was banished too, but the faceless woman with whom Pierre had run away blotted out random thoughts of her brothers. She imagined the slender curving line that ran from the woman's girlish bosom to the swell of her hip, the waist as narrow as hers had been before Charles, bent and retched, tasting the bile of her husband's hatred of her that she

had never even seen. But he hid it from me – he knew he was wrong! Yet, he left anyway. She despised him, she told herself, but she didn't, she yearned for him; she even dared to hope this was all her own foolish mistake, that he would come across the plains with the new part for his machine, he would laugh at her terror, he would hold her...

She went to the door one last time to stare out across the prairie. Far in the distance, shimmering through the waves of heat rising off the land, someone approached. She waited, her hands pressed against her chest. The black spot drew closer, it was a team of horses – no, a single horse pulling – what? She waited again, saw that it was a buggy, not a wagon, that another horse was tied to the back of the buggy. Not Pierre then, but maybe – yes, it would be news of him.