

The Inheritor (The Alford Saga Book 8)

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Praise for Paul Almond's, *The Inheritor*

"This memoir provides a fascinating journey of a young artist as he achieves success in early Canadian television and film. A prolific writer ... Paul's *Inheritor* is a must read for all those interested in Canadian Culture."

â€" Norman Jewison

"Eons ago, I had a dear friend named Paul Almond. Our careers went in different paths and I lost touch with him. The Alford Saga reminds me of the beauty and the creative energy and the turmoil that existed in Canada during the time I spent in Canada with Paul. This is a book that should be read by everybody, not just hot-blooded Canadians."

â€" William Shatner

"Paul Almond is on my list of great Canadians."

â€" Senator Colin Kenny

"I've always admired Paul's productions, so I'm quite sure that dancers and balletomanes everywhere will enjoy reading Paul's personal take on the early years of our National Ballet when he was married to one of our principal dancers, Angela Leigh."

â€" Karen Kain, CC, past Chair of the Canada Council, Artist Director of the National Ballet

"The Alford Saga scores! If the author's careful and captivating treatment of our military and chaplaincy history can be the measure, then his recounting of the explosion of Canadian culture is certainly sure to satisfy."

â€" Brigadier General Fletcher, Chaplain General of the Canadian Military

"Paul Almond, one of the leading lights of Canadian film in the sixties and seventies, draws on his own experiences in this mesmerizing story of twists and turns, highs and lows, love and heartbreak."

“ Piers Handling, Executive Director of TIFF

“I love it when you start reading a book and you just can’t put it down... And this is just what happened to me. When I started reading *The Deserter*, the first book of the Alford Saga by Paul Almond, I fell under the spell: The writing, the story telling, the characters... everything is so captivating! And the best of it all? The emotions and the charm can be found in all the books of the series. Paul Almond is a words magician and I hope he’ll continue to write and entertain us for a long time.”

“ Carolle Brabant, Head of Telefilm Canada

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THE ALFORD SAGA

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[The Chaplain: book five](#)

[The Gunner: book six](#)

[The Hero: book seven](#)

THE

INHERITOR

Paul Almond

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DEDICATION

How very sad, and yet tender, is the thought of so many richly enchanted people described herein who have now left this earth. I sometimes wonder why I, rather than they, have been chosen to tell their story. How I wish I could bring them all back!

I write that they may live again, if only in our imaginations.

One of the privileges accruing to us who remain is that we are able to recount such glorious times, so frequently forgotten. To these "hale dead and deathless" as Dylan Thomas said — their lives once flaming across Canada's cultural landscape — I dedicate this book.

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[PREAMBLE 1952-53](#)

“Eric dead. Please come home,” the telegram said. Eric, the father he had never known, a Gunner, a veteran from the Canadian Field Artillery, locked up for years in Ste. Anne de Bellevue Military Hospital with shell shock. So Paul Alford, having spent three years at Balliol College in the University of Oxford, a few months playing hockey in Italy, and another year in England, came back on a steamship to Montreal.

At the Old Homestead in Shigawake on the shores of Quebec’s Gaspé Coast, he was pecking away with two fingers on the battered Underwood portable typewriter his mother had given him as a child, working at a novel, *The Farmer*. He’d sell it (he hoped) to support his one — some said hopeless — overwhelming desire to become a poet.

Arriving back in Montreal with no money or prospects, Paul had decided to return to the Old Homestead, built by his great-grand father one hundred and fifty years before. His Uncle Earle, the farmer, had recently passed away; only his Aunts, Wyn and Lilian, remained. Lonely? Oh yes. The life at Balliol had been ever so full: he had directed Ronald Duncan's *This Way to the Tomb*, and later gone on to act in productions of the University's two dramatic societies, the OUDS and directing, writing, becoming president of the O.U. Poetry Society, and then, miracle of miracles, being appointed editor of *The Isis*, the university magazine. Winters playing hockey with the combined Oxford and Cambridge team all over the Continent, summers travelling in Ireland and elsewhere with his friend Michael Ballantyne. But now, after those flurries of activity, the life of a lonely poet with two elderly aunts in Shigawake.

"Auntie Wyn," Paul asked, "why did Mummy never take me out to see my father? Every weekend she went by train."

Auntie Wyn, a distinguished nurse and thus a harsh disciplinarian as they were in those days, had taken care of several Governors-General. Now retired, with piercing black eyes, a craggy face, wispy white hair, and a big heart, she'd come back to live at the Old Homestead with her sister Lillian. She avoided his eyes. "Eric wasn't well, you see. We thought it best you didn't see him in that... state."

"But Dad and I had started to write each other, my last year in Balliol," Paul insisted. "His letters were quite sane and sensible."

"I don't know, dear." Auntie Wyn's eyes misted over. He had been the baby of the Alford family and her favourite brother. "He was a very handsome man, your father."

By his wood stove in the Old Homestead, Paul opened one of the letters he'd written to Harry Boyd from Ronald Duncan's farm in Devonshire. Harry, former Captain of Toronto Varsity, had encouraged Paul to play professional hockey in the chic Dolomite resort of Cortina d'Ampezzo. They had cemented their friendship then, for Harry had been a disciple of Northrop Frye, and both hockey players loved poetry.

"Welcombe sits on the border between Devon and Cornwall, on the coast of the Bristol Channel. To the south lies Bodmin Moor, the bleakest moor in England, and to the east Dartmoor... The land, the grass, the people, are tough, weathered like the hedges. The sun almost never shines, though it has today!"

"We are twenty miles from the nearest railway station; Welcombe itself is just four or five farm houses; a combe is a local term for a valley (Wel-combe). One feels the power of nature here very strongly. So we are, as you can see, gloriously cut off. Thus I spend all my time reading and writing, and I'm determined to translate La Divina Commedia for CBC to earn good money."

Read no more, he told himself and sat back, warming his hands. Hard times in Devon, really. He'd been lucky to get a room in an old Victorian mansion run by two wispy spinsters, the Misses Oke. Having settled in, Paul had worked under Bailiff Bob, when at last the Duncan's invitation to dinner arrived, drawing him down to their low, thatch-roofed farmhouse, dated 1629. The playwright and poet Ronald Duncan, small, with thick black hair combed straight back, had a swarthy skin that suggested his Celtic ancestry.

Stepping down into the low ceilinged room with its peat fire, Paul caught a welcome sight — Antonia, wild brown hair, big, rawboned, in a man's loose farmer's trousers and a rough blue shirt. A real farm girl, he supposed, but soon he realized she was a great deal more.

She gathered her things and unwound her six feet. "Ronnie, I'll be back tomorrow afternoon with

the letters typed." Ah, so she's his secretary? "It's going to be such an exciting festival this summer."

Paul pricked up his ears. "What festival?"

"The Taw and Torridge, of course. Ronnie started it last summer, with Queen Mary's son, Lord Harewood, and Ben Britten. Surely you read about it?"

"I'm afraid I was off touring with my company," Paul answered meekly. "I didn't have much time to look at the papers." The company he had formed, The Oxford and Cambridge Players, now the Elizabethan Theatre Company, was still touring England; they'd like to know of such a festival where they might play. "What's being planned for next summer?"

"Ronnie wants Martin Brown, the great director, to do productions of Tom Eliot's *The Cocktail Party* and his own play, *The Death of Satan*. We're trying to involve Oscar Lowenstein —"

"The London impresario?"

Antonia nodded. "We're founding a new company for the Royal Court Theatre, too. We're going to call it the English Stage Company."

She sure is taking credit for herself, thought Paul. "I'd love to be here for all that! Might I meet some of these guys when they come, Ronnie?"

Ronnie looked up and half smiled at the show of enthusiasm. Not many boisterous hockey players in North Devon, that's for sure.

"See you tomorrow, Ronnie." Antonia came by close, very close, as she went out, and Paul felt his heart flip flop. Was she aware of this as she passed?

Ronnie indicated a seat opposite him by the fire, and began to unsheathe Paul's few poems, but Rose Marie called them to dinner. Mrs. Duncan was more vivacious than he remembered from his earlier trips to discuss *This Way to the Tomb*. Her shock of wild blonde hair topped a lined, lived-in face with broad features and bold, protruding blue eyes sending out a strong "come-hither." Paul found her full of *double entendres*, quick wit and fun.

"I'd forgotten what he looked like," Rose Marie remarked as her husband ushered Paul to a chair. "Thank you, Ronnie, for bringing this delicious hockey-playing Canuck to the wilds of Devon."

Ronnie hardly acknowledged her; he sat at the head of the table and began to serve the vegetables and carve the mutton Rose Marie had roasted.

"Now," Ronnie began, "I told you about the warp and the woof of a poem." He handed the plate of meat, mashed potatoes, carrots and turnips to Paul.

"I don't think so, Ronnie." Paul quickened. Just what he'd come for!

"A poem is like cloth: strands like words run in both directions, sometimes at cross purposes, but that's how they strengthen the verse, just as the threads run perpendicular in cloth, giving it strength."

Rose Marie leaned across and gave Paul's hand a squeeze. "You can't learn from a better master!" Her warm, glistening eyes fastened on him.

Ronnie paid no attention. "Sprung rhythm, that's the key. Like Hopkins, one of my masters."

Well, if I want to learn about writing, thought Paul, I've come to the right place. Farm work mornings on the windy moors, and afternoons by my little fire writing, with hope of catching that wild and wonderful Antonia.

Wonderful? All too soon, Paul found that Antonia had eyes only for Ronnie. No room for any newly-hatched Oxford graduate.

Then the inevitable moment arrived as the Misses Oke laid out his evening's dinner at one end of their long oak table. Old portraits on the wall seemed to frown — did they know what was to come? "I'm sorry, Mr. Alford," one Miss Oke lit his lamp, "but in June the visitors start arriving. They did book a year ago. So I'm afraid you'll have to leave..."

Thrown out. Well, what now?

Look on the bright side... A new beginning, perhaps? But heavens, how long could a young poet keep pretending to himself?

In desperation, Paul wrote to his best friend Tom Espie in the London suburb of Croydon. Stocky, with a poor complexion, rigidly combed hair in the manner of the day, Tom had been a student playwright while studying PPE, too. So Paul set off on his motorbike, a dear old war surplus Royal Enfield (top speed 45 mph) and got to Tom's in Croydon around midnight, waking everyone, though Mr. and Mrs. Espie seemed glad to see him.

Monday afternoon, he and Tom went up to London to find it already crowded with people settling in for the night. The next day, June 2, 1953, was the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth. Edmund Hillary had just climbed Mount Everest the week before.

They got together with their best friend from Balliol, Stanley Myers, who – unlike Paul and Tom — had achieved first class honours in Modern Greats (Philosophy Politics and Economics, or PPE.) Stanley was a pianist and composer, having written many of the Oxford musical reviews. That night they repaired to Stanley's flat, a tiny servants' quarters on the sixth floor of a once-elegant town house in Mayfair, so convenient for the coming events. Unfortunately, Stanley's landlady had warned she would charge any guest five pounds for that pre-coronation night. As Paul had paid only three pounds fifteen for a full week's board and lodging in Devon, they found this outrageous. But still, they sneaked upstairs, tiptoed past the landlady's flat and fell asleep on the floor.

Stanley set his alarm for six and they sneaked out. The lift was noisy, so they started walking down the six flights of stairs. But they heard above them the lift gate clang shut. They raced down, round and round, and just escaped out the door and around the corner before the landlady appeared. They had made it!

At this hour, Oxford Street was already full of spectators, three deep. But Tom with amazing foresight had arranged a temp job teaching at some fly-by-night academy whose second floor premises overlooked the very route of the procession. From ten that morning, Tom, now a staff member, and his two guests sat snacking and drinking, and then went out onto the balcony with other teachers to watch the grand and colourful parade pass by.

After the procession had passed, they watched on TV as the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh came out on the Buckingham Palace balcony. Paul was delighted to be a part of this momentous celebration, having arrived in London almost by accident. On they went to Shirley Catlin's (later Baroness Williams) flat in Whitehall Court on the embankment to enjoy the fireworks across the

river, and listen to the Queen and Winston Churchill. At Oxford, Paul had been keen on Shirley and was hoping to meet her mother, the famous Vera Brittain, author of *Testament of Youth*, the definitive memoir on WWI, but she wasn't home.

After Stanley left, Tom and Paul continued drinking till they caught the last train back to Croydon. But falling dead asleep, they snored four stations past Croydon.

Off they got and faced a rather sobering ten-mile walk — at three in the morning.

The next day, hanging around the Mall, they got a curbside view of the Queen and the Duke passing on their first carriage ride around the city. Golly, thought Paul, he sure is good looking and the Queen, too, she's beautiful.

But he could not stay in Croydon indefinitely. So again, Paul had to face another move. Don't be downhearted — buoy yourself up! He thought. And fortunately, Tom had offered their tiny family cottage in North Wales: unfurnished, but it might do as a place to write.

Off Paul went again, motoring along the Conwy River with Great Orme on his right, through Betws-y-Coed, a lovely green valley, and stopped for an evening pint to get directions to the small market town centred on Conwy Castle, whose red crumbling walls enclosed grassy courtyards. He was directed to Tom's isolated cottage: a table, two chairs, a bed (thank heaven) and a stove that worked on gas from a tank behind. No electricity. Oh well, all a future poet needed, he told himself.

Not long afterwards, Tom Espie came up by train. Later, over a simple meal, Tom asked how it was all going.

"I keep spending what money I have on sending out stories. They need return postage, too, damn it."

"And they're being returned?"

Paul nodded meekly. "Every one. But off to Canada they go again: Montreal's *Weekend Magazine*, *Liberty*, *Family Herald*, *Ma-cleans*... I even tried the top in America — *The Saturday Evening Post*." He caught Tom's look. "Once you crack that, a real Niagara of cash will flow. I've written thirty-eight stories so far. Enough to keep me for ages."

"Once they sell?"

"Yeah, once they sell. But you, Tom, are you planning another play? You were the best playwright at Oxford."

Tom made a face. "Mum and Dad don't like the idea. They wanted their boy to earn a good weekly wage." He went on to confess: "Did I tell you? I got laid off in April. But Dad still insists I leave on the 8.10 every morning. I go to a library — well, where else? I do get a lot of reading done. Then back I come on the same commuter train in the evening. The neighbours never guess."

"Oh my heavens!" Paul shook his head. "At least my mum lets me do whatever I want. And that is... to be a poet."

Which is how Paul Alford ended up that winter at the Old Homestead on the Gaspé Coast, banging away on his trusty typewriter.

But now, Paul wondered, was this writing a novel in Shigawake actually getting him anywhere? Would anyone publish it? In fact, were there any Canadian publishers? All he knew was a branch office of the British Macmillans run by John Gray, the Ryerson Press, headed by Lorne Pierce, and McClelland & Stewart, now under a young Jack McClelland. That seemed to be all. So, why not put his learning into something profitable! Recitals? Yes, farmers — they loved poetry, didn't they? Packed halls, applause, money flowing...

Before he knew it, Paul was standing nervously behind the stage curtain in nearby Port Daniel's Community Hall. Having donned his dinner jacket, he adjusted his black tie. He had helped cousin Elton arrange the chairs beforehand and now imagined the applause when he would step out on stage. Hearing chairs scrape and the conversation drop, he realized his time had come.

He strode to the lectern in front of his audience. Oh dear, not even a dozen!

The first part seemed to go well enough. The novelty of it, perhaps? But when he began Robert Browning's dramatic monologue, *My Last Duchess*:

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,

Looking as if she were alive. I call

That piece a wonder, now: Frà Pandolf's hands

Worked busily a day, and there she stands.

Will 't please you sit and look at her...

He hesitated. Several had left their seats and were moving to the exit. Cousin Elton, craggy, bold, tough as barbed wire, had been selling tickets. Quickly he pushed the table against the door and stood against it, arms crossed. No one dared challenge him. They returned to their seats.

Afterwards, Elton said reassuringly, "Me son, ya did terble!" Which meant, in Gaspesian, he'd been a hit. But thinking of the next few recitals he'd give to half a dozen people in large village halls, admissions not even covering his modest costs, Paul wished the whole process over.

Back in the Old Homestead, Aunt Lil popped in, braided hair crowning her head like a tiara, her face harrowed from harsh farm life. "Elton's mother brought this round. An article on you!"

Amazing! He'd actually made a Montreal newspaper! Eagerly, he sat down and read every word, his first mention in the big time.

Shigawake Boy Entertains Gaspesians with Recitals.

Paul Alford, a Shigawake boy and graduate of Oxford University, has returned to give recitals along the Gaspe coast. For farmers and others it is a return to Tennyson and Shakespeare — and The Shooting of Dan McGrew. Wearing a dinner jacket for the classics, then changing into a black sweater and yellow scarf for The Shooting, Mr. Alford acts out some sections. Particularly appreciative was the mayor of Shigawake. He was in fact a relative of the young poet's.

"You're a smart fellow," one farmer explained. "You will never have to work for a living." That day, the poet had rehearsed all morning, copied by hand six posters for the next town, visited the Mayor, had a quick

lunch, carried chairs and benches from another hall for the evening performance, returned to his lodgings to work on a story, stoked the fire in the hall, dressed, gave the recital, and was about to return all the benches and chairs when the farmer spoke. "Maybe not with a pitchfork," the poet replied, "but I sure work, never doubt it."

Now, time to take up his next challenge: a big city.

PART ONE — ANGELA

Angela Leigh with Family

CHAPTER ONE

DEC 1953 — JAN 1954

In his tiny cottage near Montreal, Paul came out onto the landing, and stared down. There, on the heating grate in a teal blue overcoat stood a tall, blonde, blue-eyed, and quite striking woman with flawless features, who glanced up. They both froze. The moment stretched on and on, "like a patient etherised upon a table..."

She was among the dozen merrymakers downing rough cider and attacking bread, cold meats, lettuce and tomatoes arranged by his pretty friend, Gloria. An almost doll-like blonde, Gloria's slim figure gave no hint of the powerful determination that had gotten her a job sewing costumes for the nascent National Ballet of Canada. "Paul, they're coming to Her Majesty's Theatre? Why don't we give them a party after the performance?" Why not? Life out on Mont Saint-Hilaire was actually rather dull, with Gloria visiting only on weekends. She now worked at the CBC weekdays, where Paul had met her.

Twenty-five miles outside Montreal on the slopes of Mont SaintHilaire, two miles from the nearest market, Paul's mother's cottage had once been a shed to store apples, the area being covered with orchards. Somewhat bowed rafters spanned the low ceiling between walls of rough boards painted a perky yellow. Against the low partition for the open kitchen sat an old sofa draped with Maori shawls from Australia and New Zealand, where his mother and Aunt Hilda had taught dancing. Just the sort of ivory tower a poet needed, Paul had told himself. Here, he could finish his novel and if need be, drive his Aunt's old Austin in to the CBC or even to Montreal theatres. But his short stories kept coming back, one after another.

Gloria knew that dancers were starving after performances. Of course, none had been warned that his cottage lay forty-five minutes away on a freezing winter night. Now, with music on the radio, their superb bodies lounged happily in front of the flaming fireplace having just danced *Coppelia* and *Dark of the Moon*. Myrna Aaron, an exotic-looking dancer with eyebrows that streaked across her brow like Cupid's arrows was holding forth on the sofa, keeping others in gales of laughter, when Colleen Kenney, a trim dancer with wild and abundant black hair intercepted Paul. "Lovely cottage you have."

"Was it a terrible drive getting here?"

Colleen hesitated. "Gloria didn't tell us it was so far out of town. But once we saw this..." She shrugged. "I think it's cozy." She eyed him.

"Oh, thanks." My, she's pretty! Paul thought. "Tomorrow can you sleep in, maybe?"

She shook her head. "We have class every morning."

"Philosophy and calculus?" Paul grinned, but thought, how stupid! He still longed to talk to the blonde on the heating grate.

Colleen finished her sandwich. "Every day we have to do class — and you know very well it's not reading and writing. First we do a barre, mostly leg exercises..."

"Then?"

"Then we move into the centre and do *enchaînments* — sequences of steps that the ballet mistress gives. Limbers up our bodies for the evening performance. Tomorrow I think class is late, eleven o'clock."

"So every day, you have to do a class, as well as perform?"

Colleen nodded. "Hour and a half, six days a week." She gave him a sweet smile. "And no alternate casts or understudies when we're performing. If you're dying, you go on anyway!"

Rigorous life, Paul thought. Terrific of Gloria to have gotten so many of them to come.

A scholarly-looking dancer came up, smoking a pipe. Colleen introduced him: "Grant Strate is now doing choreography. He's one of our character dancers." Grant began chatting to him as Colleen excused herself to fetch more food. Paul couldn't keep his eyes from straying to the stunning blonde who had by now moved off the heating grate to crouch by the fireplace. Another dancer, he noticed, had made her a sandwich. As she began to eat, she had the bearing of someone a little older, perhaps more experienced.

"Angela Leigh, from England," Grant explained. "One of our principal dancers."

"She's the lead?"

"No, Lois Smith and Irene Apiné, they're the ballerinas who lead the company. Then comes principal dancers, soloists, then corps de ballet. I'm corps." Grant smiled and relit his pipe.

"But Colleen said you'd begun choreographing?"

"We'll see."

As soon as he could, Paul went over to Angela by her fire. "Still cold?"

"I'm just getting used to your Canadian winters."

"So why on earth come?"

"I got carried away by a uniform. My ex-husband, he was in the Royal Canadian Air Force, so handsome then. He's from Orillia, not far from Toronto." She paused. "Very dashing back in the Old Country. But in Orillia, I found that a wife's place is in the home..."

"You are still dancing..."

She shrugged. "I couldn't give it up. So we separated."

"Oh?" Paul absorbed that, and then went on, "My mother used to be a dancer. A woman should have her own career. At Oxford, none of the girls I've known ever intended to be relegated to a kitchen. In fact, I doubt any even knew how to cook!"

Angela smiled. "So you were at Oxford?"

"I guess so. But I sure didn't learn anything. PPE. You know, those female students did nothing to catch a man — even a comb might have helped!" She smiled. "Every one of them so focussed on brain work..." Now, with all these gorgeous creatures surrounding him, accomplished, attractive, pursuing careers that involved bodies, not minds, Paul felt on top of the world.

"So what do you do now?" Angela asked.

"I'm a writer." Then Paul realized he had absolutely no basis for saying that. "Well, I'm trying," he added. "In fact, I'm getting nowhere." An admission he was not used to making. But somehow, he knew Angela's sharp mind would puncture any bravado. His innate confidence had momentarily deserted him.

"You'll have to come and watch us dance," she said. "Saturday matinee, I'm taking over Black Swan in Swan Lake because Lois Smith is dancing the role that night."

"I'd love to!" Oh yes, would he not! If his mother got them tickets, he and Gloria would go. But he didn't say that — his modesty didn't go quite that far.

Sunday, Paul drove Angela Leigh out in his Aunt's little Austin. Imagine! Taking a principal dancer of Canada's National Ballet for Sunday lunch at his cottage and a walk on the slopes of Mont Saint-Hilaire.

"Wonderful performance at yesterday's matinee, Angela. Mother couldn't stop talking about it. She and Auntie Hilda made Gloria and me a nice little dinner afterwards at her apartment on Chomedey Street near the Forum."

"So where is Gloria this afternoon?"

Paul turned to glance at her. She was watching the snow-covered farms of Mont St. Bruno on their way to Beloeil, and thence to Mont Saint-Hilaire. "Friends invited her for skiing up in the Laurentians, so she left early. But she loved your performance."

"Your mother mentioned that she had been a dancer, but I had no idea that she ran her own school in Australia. She's even danced with the great Pavlova. She gave me useful tips."

Paul glowed with delight. He had been mesmerized at the matinee. So proud of his new friend! And of her extraordinary physique, trained over the years to be effortlessly graceful. "You're a terrific actress in your dancing, Angela. We were all impressed."

"Thanks, old bean." She flashed a smile.

"We didn't have enough time to talk at the party," Paul said. "Grant told me you'd trained at Sadler's Wells?"

“Under Ninette de Valois, yes. When I came here with Buzz, my husband, I even opened a small school of dancing in Orillia, where we lived. But I didn’t like teaching.”

“You’re older than most of the corps?” Paul asked

She looked quickly at him. “Yes. Does it matter?”

“No, of course not. And you’ve been married. So much more mature than the others. I find that rather compelling.”

Angela said nothing.

“I have some beans soaking, so we can whip up a bit of a chili. I bought some ground beef.” He didn’t say that it was the cheapest meat he could find.

“I meant to ask you last night,” Angela persisted, “why do I hear a bit of an English accent? Surely it’s not just Oxford. Your British mother, perhaps? Or were you over there for a longer time?”

“Well, I was at Balliol for three years. Then I stayed in Europe. I played professional hockey.” Why had he said that, dummy? Hoping to impress her? But he noticed her eyes flash with momentary admiration. “And then, well, I worked on a farm and things...”

“Oxford scholar AND athlete?” She seemed duly impressed.

“Hardly. But anyway, when my father passed on, Mother wanted me home. I’m just as glad. So many opportunities here. Though when I arrived, I found no professional theatre in Montreal, hardly much of anything, actually.” What could he add? That he wanted to get work but found none? That he wanted to be a poet, a writer, but every story rejected? On he went, regardless: “I’ve heard that last July a pretty good theatre opened in Stratford, Ontario, with *Richard III* and *All’s Well That Ends Well*.”

“Oh yes, Tony Guthrie started it — he’s a terrific director. Scottish.”

Paul nodded. “Yes, I’ve seen his productions in the West End. I used to go down to London every couple of weeks. I loved the Sadler’s Wells, and I went to the Edinburgh Festival every year and watched ballets there.” Why hadn’t he added that he’d brought his own theatre company there himself, twice? For some reason, he wasn’t able to blow his own horn in her presence.

She looked at him. “An accomplished young man!”

Paul shrugged. “No, no... I just keep trying.”

They arrived at the little cottage and Angela, cold as usual, headed for the fireplace, which Paul hastily lit. He poured them both a sherry, then went round into the kitchen. Angela came beside. “Let me help.”

“Help? You’re a principal dancer.”

“Paul! I’m also a woman... I hope.”

He let that sit. As Uncle Earle would say: “Some woman, fer shore!”

They prepared a simple lunch and, with Paul’s prodding, Angela talked more about herself. “I was

born, in Kampala, Uganda, where my father was a British bank manager.”

“Ah, that’s why you’re always cold!”

“I was lucky in my childhood, with black nurses and cooks. Mother loved being a white settler’s wife. But when I was six, back we came to England.”

“And you always wanted to dance?”

“Oh yes. We had a water tower at the foot of the garden, and I believed that fairies lived up there. One used to come down to our garden and lead me in dance steps. ‘Hightop’ I called her. We’d dance all afternoon together, me on the tips of my toes trying to get up into the sky with Hightop.”

“Have you been back since?”

“Oh no. But I’d love to one day...” If he got going somehow, he’d take her. That would be a coup!

They sat opposite each other at the rustic table with its two benches. Paul was growing more and more attracted to this rather imperious, but at the same time curiously vulnerable, British dancer with her tiny hands, tall sapling-like body, magnificent legs he hadn’t failed to notice, and her dry wit.

For his part, he told her about the poets he’d known, and eventually the poetry he was writing, and his beloved Shigawake where he’d just been giving recitals, careful of course, not to be too specific about the numbers attending.

“And now you’re here in Montreal?” she asked. “To stay?”

“Well, maybe, but there doesn’t seem to be a lot of work.” That’s putting it mildly, he thought. “I’m wondering about New York. From what I’ve heard, that’s where I might have a chance.”

“No, Toronto first!” Angela announced. “We need new young writers and creators like you.”

Paul looked up.

“Ten hours by bus. Not expensive.” Was that the hint of an invitation?

He suggested a walk on the mountain. “It’s not too cold today.”

Angela agreed, and they both set off through the orchard on a track Paul had beaten down during his daily forays into wolf country — local papers spoke of a wolf pack down from the north. With lots of small animals, even a muskrat or two in the lake, they seemed to be staying. But he didn’t mention that.

The whole mountain had been bought by Brig. Hamilton Gault, founder of the Princess Patricia’s Light Infantry Regiment. He had equipped his regiment with uniforms and rifles for WWI, when the Canadian Armed Forces were developing as a separate entity from the British. Paul had first gone with his mother to tea with Mrs. Gault, a striking white-haired lady who loved poetry. Hammy, as he was known, was an old school gentleman, tremendously polite, hale and hearty despite having lost a leg in the war. Paul often dropped in, and they’d discuss the most famous French-Canadian artist, Ozias Leduc, who lived by the Richelieu River in Saint-Hilaire, as did his renowned pupil,

Paul-Emile Borduas. But much as Paul wanted to impress Hammy with this new ballet friend, he thought it a bit early to do that.

"This mountain is an untouched haven: they've found fauna from the ice age," Paul began, as they entered the mountain road between stone pillars. "I've seen lots of tracks here, snowshoe hares, fox and even porcupine. I saw one the other day."

Angela seemed suitably impressed. "Go on..."

"Well, it emerged from a melting ice sheet some twelve thousand or more years ago. It was once an island in the Champlain Sea. This road I live on was built around 1770."

"Do you have nice neighbours?"

Paul assented. "Back there across the orchard, the Guerins live in an old stone house, once the seigneurial mill of Hertel de Rouville. Two lovely daughters."

Angela glanced sharply at him, and he realized he'd forgotten himself. Did that mean she was getting interested?

During the walk, which ended at the mountain lake in front of the Gault house, they talked on and on, becoming closer.

Finally, back to warm themselves by the fire, Paul realized he had to take Angela back to a Montreal reception before the troupe left on tour: eighteen cities and sixty-four performances, all over the United States and Canada. Angela made him promise to write. He quickly agreed. Was he actually falling in love?

On with the writing. On with the dreaming. On with forays into Montreal to meet the important radio producer Rupert Caplan, who had given occasional roles to Paul's mother.

Before too long, he heard that Guthrie's new Stratford Theatre begun by Tom Patterson was holding auditions. Full of excitement, Paul decided to go. Perhaps he'd play Hamlet, or some other major role — the whole summer taken care of! On weekends he could come from Stratford to see Angela in Toronto. Yes, a great idea.

He made his way to the suite in the Queen Elizabeth Hotel — only to find it packed with a dozen other would-be actors, sprawled about.

When Guthrie's assistant arrived, everyone quickened. From his clipboard, he read out their names and went around, making a pretense, Paul saw, of talking to each one. Nonetheless, Paul still did his best, outlining the many things he had done at Oxford. But the assistant spent most of his time talking to another young actor Paul had known at McGill: Bill Shatner. In fact, he spent more time on Bill than on everyone else. When it was over, Paul headed in his little Austin back to the lonely cottage, reflecting that if they chose anyone, it would not be him. It would be William Shatner.

And choose William they did.

CHAPTER TWO

SPRING SUMMER 1954

The phone call announced: "W.H. Auden arrives tonight." The McGill University student went on to say, "We've been delegated to pick him up after breakfast tomorrow morning and we don't know what to do. Peter Scott claims you knew him. Do you? If so, shall we bring him out to your cottage?"

"Splendid idea," Paul had replied. "I do, and you can."

Late the next morning, the great poet arrived in a car with Peter Dale Scott and Ian Clark, an editor of *Forge*, McGill's literary magazine that had published both Peter and Paul.

"Awfully good of you to receive us!" Wystan Hugh Auden shook Paul's hand, and they all took off their coats and got closer to the fireplace. The group was animated, for the great poet was a major celebrity and no one had met him before, except Paul. The poet's face was exactly as he remembered it from Balliol: battered and lined, wise, and genuinely warm. Paul asked him about John Bryson, the English tutor at Balliol who had introduced them.

"We corresponded about six weeks ago, and he seems very well, thank you."

Paul dished out soup he'd made the previous night, with bread, butter and a block of cheese. He apologized: all he had was rough cider, and they shared a glass.

"Made locally?" Auden asked. "And sold at your Liquor Commission?"

"Oh no, we get this illegally just up the road at M. Auclair's. If you'd like to see his basement, it's packed with barrels; we can go after lunch."

The poet agreed and they trooped up the gentle slope to the corner where M. Auclair had his cellar of large round casks burping rhythmically like noisy frogs.

What a time they had of it! M. Auclair spoke no English, so Paul explained in French who their distinguished visitor was, and how much he loved the cider. They tasted various stocks of the aging powerful liquid and, by the time they chose which to buy, they were soused. Paul bought a gallon and Auden graciously bought another, two dollars and fifty cents each.

Back at the cottage they continued drinking, discussing the poetry scene in England.

"And what's happening with my old friend, John Lehmann?" Paul asked about the premier literary publisher in all England.

"He's just begun his autobiography, *Whispering Gallery*," Auden told them. "Should prove an interesting read."

In the midst of the revelry, Wystan turned to Paul. "You and Peter must take my villa on Ischia. I've been looking for a couple of writers to rent it for the summer. Ten dollars a month, complete with maid service."

Paul and Peter looked at each other. The chance of a lifetime!

They thanked the great man profusely, and promised to get back to him in the morning at his hotel before he left. But in the end Peter said no, claiming he was not yet a good enough poet to throw up working on his Ph.D. at McGill. Paul had no such qualms, never one to allow verdicts on his

writing to ruin his plans. But the cost of a flight to Italy made it impossible. Anyway, the invitation had been made and was often recalled in future conversations.

The next day, Gloria called. "I don't know what you fellows did with your guest yesterday, but Auden could hardly stand at the lectern. His reading was superb, but I watched him sway, waiting for him to topple over at any minute."

"Oh dear," replied Paul. "I did send him back with a fair amount of cider... But Gloria, you know, Peter told me his father has invited us to his weekly salon tomorrow night. Can you make it?"

"Of course!" Peter's father, F.R., was the son of the famous chaplain Frederick George Scott, whose book *The Great War as I Knew It* had been widely read. Frank would become justly known as the great constitutional lawyer who represented Frank Roncarelli, a wealthy owner of Quaff's Café and a practising Jehovah's Witness, who kept bailing out other Witnesses whom Duplessis persecuted. The Premier of Quebec was an ardent, though politically convenient, Catholic. So he'd had Roncarelli's liquor licence revoked — in perpetuity. Frank would take the case all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada and in 1958 would win, as he would on five other occasions. Duplessis died in 1959 shortly after the verdict.

But Frank really preferred to be known as a poet; he would gather salons of young poetesses at his home at 451 Clarke Avenue, just at the bottom of the steep hill. He gracefully introduced Paul and Gloria when they arrived. Aside from having had Auden as a guest, Paul had published four poems in Canada's foremost literary journal, *Northern Review*, edited by John Sutherland.

"This is Irving Layton..." Frank began. "And Louis Dudek." — an important local poet, teaching at McGill. And on Frank went: Phyllis Webb, more Paul's age, and British-born P.K. Page, as well as many younger poetesses.

Wine flowed as they sat around at the feet of Frank, who took the great armchair. Irving sat on another and on a third, Louis, as befitting their pecking order. A young Leonard Cohen also turned up a few times later on. The words that fell from published poets' lips were ingested as would openmouthed chicks accept delicious worms. Paul became somewhat of a regular but, as his relationship with Gloria disintegrated, she came less and less.

On one occasion, Paul found himself in intense discussion with an attractive, round-faced psychologist Stephanie Zuperko, an expert in the Rorschach ink-blot, a means of testing patients. She offered Paul a test for free. Overhearing her make that offer, several other poets laughed. "She's done all of us."

"No kidding? Why, Stephanie?" Paul asked.

"I'm doing a paper on the M factor, which tests the imagination. I ask poets, artists, writers; I don't charge them for the testing and they don't charge me for being my subjects. It's all confidential, of course. But I'm hoping to find parallels that will contrast them with the businesspeople I test."

Paul invited her to Apple Barrel, where she dutifully gave him a Rorschach test. All he got out of her was that he had rather too vivid an imagination. After an extended tea and then dinner, Stephanie actually went so far as to suggest he come to New York, where she had an apartment. Recently separated, she was making a go as a psychiatrist south of the border.

Well, it didn't take Paul long to solicit a bus ticket from his mother and head south. At last, he would make a name for himself in the most important theatre city in America.

Paul hardly slept that first night on Stephanie's uncomfortable sofa, his second time in New York. He had visited briefly with Zeke Cleveland in 1949, when they drove across the country to find Christopher Isherwood, a top British writer who had come before the war to live in America. That time, he had stayed at the Zete house at New York University. But here he was, on West 22nd Street in Chelsea, and ready to take on the world. After all, an Oxford acquaintance, Roger Bannister, had just broken the four minute mile in May, why wouldn't Paul conquer the Great White Way?

The first play they went to see the next evening was an all-black version *Of Mice and Men*, presented off-Broadway in cabaret style. Nothing in England compared, he realized, so theatre here must be thriving. Next, the two of them went off to see Chekhov's *The Seagull* at the Phoenix Theatre, Stephanie again paying for the tickets. As a psycho-diagnostician, she earned good money, and Paul felt quite at ease with this, for was he not a poet? — and as such he expected to be looked after. He'd soon make a go of it, no doubt. And before too long was moved from the sofa to Stephanie's more comfortable double bed.

The next morning at breakfast, Stephanie went to a bookshelf and handed him a copy of Reich's *The Function of the Orgasm*.

Oh dear!

She waxed on about Wilhelm Reich and his "orgone energy accumulator" in which patients sat and absorbed the energy circling the earth being thrust into their bodies. But now, what was being expected of him? The more he looked into Reich's book, the more nervous he became. What on earth would they do that night?

Stephanie, whose parents hailed from a central European country, was slightly plump with a round cheerful face and motherly eyes. As part of her research, she soon planned to visit Ezra Pound, incarcerated in Queen Elizabeth Hospital for his anti-American broadcasts during wwii.

"Ezra Pound! But he's the most famous poet in America!"

"Apart from Dylan Thomas," Stephanie prompted, "when he's here on tour."

"May I come?"

"Of course." She looked down. "If you're... still here."

Oh-oh. What was she saying? More pressure. Should he read that book again? Focus? Goodness! Paul was growing more nervous by the minute. But he'd do almost anything to meet the author of *The Cantos*, and the poet Eliot named in *The Waste Land* as "*il miglior fabbro*", the better tailor.

That afternoon an important interview helped divert his mind. Norris Houghton ran the Phoenix Theater, a leading off-Broadway group he had founded with Edward Hamilton. Excited at getting an impromptu meeting, Paul hurried off to have tea with "Norrie" and used every trick he'd learned in the hallowed halls of Oxford to make sure they hit it off.

But the night ahead loomed larger and larger. How could he perform up to the exacting standards of Prof. Reich? For the first time in his life, he dreaded what might come. He drank rather too much wine at dinner and, as feared, the night was not a success.

But she forgave him and they agreed that he would try harder next time.

Another diversion ahead, thank heaven! He went to see the director of the well-known Players Theater. The lead actor in their next play had left for three weeks to do television in Denmark. Paul read for the part and delivered a couple of Shakespeare monologues he knew by heart, and lo! They offered him the lead. His first New York job! He was so excited that he managed a slightly better night with Stephanie.

Then off again to meet a businessman who wanted to mount *Romeo and Juliet* at the Cherry Lane Theater later in the autumn. Paul had developed an extensive knowledge of Shakespeare and the Elizabethan theatre, as well as Jacobean tragedies. At Oxford, most of the twenty-nine colleges put on plays and usually chose the most *récherché* of historical dramas. What American university could mount so many different classics every year? And Paul had made sure to see even more plays on his frequent forays to London and the Edinburgh Festival. So having learned during Oxford tutorials how to use — when knowledge failed (as it usually did) — a good supply of bullshit, he ended up being chosen as director.

His fortunes gradually improved, as did nights with Stephanie. He met the directors of the prestigious Theatre Guild, and was offered small upstate engagements with a well-known actress at the Westport Repertory Theater in Connecticut, and at four different schools, always unpaid, of course.

Oddly enough, in spite of these improvements, Stephanie gave him to understand that his summer idyll could not last for ever. But find an apartment in New York, with off-Broadway rehearsal rates of five dollars a week? Twenty-five during the play's run? No hope. So no acting with the Players Theater. No visit to Ezra Pound. No more New York.

Thrown out again!

However, the memories of the lithe and beautiful Angela Leigh, now back from tour, kept haunting him. Get to Angela, oh yes, but how? With no money for bus fare? Hitch-hike? Rob a bank? Luckily at an audition, another actor told him that Lynn Riggs, a playwright, was in hospital with stomach cancer and needed transfusions. He was paying fifteen dollars a pint.

Paul had a horror of blood. But Toronto was his only option now. Eyes clenched, teeth gritted, off he went to be bled for bus fare.

At a barely functional donor clinic, he was ordered into an unoccupied room. A nurse came in with a needle — which immediately threw Paul into a fit. Hold yourself steady, he demanded of his quaking body. As he lay on the unadorned bed, she plunged the needle into his arm. He managed to stifle the wild cry that threatened to wake the entire clinic. Finally, when he did open his eyes, Paul saw that she had gone. But the tube in his arm now led to a bottle on the floor beside him.

What if she forgot to come back? My blood, he gasped, it will just keep running into the bottle. And then, overflow... They'll find a white, bloodless corpse, my life spread all over the linoleum.

Wild images sprang into his mind — how would they tell his mother? What about Angela? Aah, but the headlines would be superb:

Canadian Poet of Great Promise Expires

while giving life's blood

to save a playwright

CHAPTER THREE

AUG 1954

Late in the evening after Paul's bus arrived in Toronto, he carried his suitcase over to Bathurst Street to catch a streetcar up the hill, better and shorter, he thought, than by the brand new subway on Yonge Street. Angela was expecting him. He'd given blood, said goodbye to dear Stephanie, and paid the bus fare. And now, this new challenge, a city he did not know: Toronto.

As Paul headed toward Vaughan Road, he thought back to a conversation that wonderful Sunday afternoon on the mountain behind Apple Barrel. He had noticed that Angela seemed tense. Finally, she had broached the subject: "I told you I was married, didn't I?"

"Oh yes, to an airman who was farming. But now you said he's moving into real estate?"

"Yes, but what I didn't tell you..." She stared ahead, and then went on, "is we have a daughter." She turned anxiously.

"A daughter! How old? Does she live with you?"

"Of course. When we separated, Buzz moved out and left us the apartment — which he still pays for. Stephanie has her own bedroom. She's five now and going to nursery school."

Angela had looked at him, anxiously. Was she nervous about having a child? No, of course not; they'd only just met. But for Paul, this relationship had become pretty intense. Could it be that way for her, too? Or was she, as a principal dancer, simply out of his league?

"Gosh," he said, "that's terrific. I'd love to see her sometime. Will she want to be a dancer, too?"

"I hope not. It's a pretty hard life, old bean."

"How many in the company now?"

"About twenty-nine. We know each other so well — being together for months at a time. This last winter after I left, we played eighteen cities, nineteen including Toronto, travelling every day by bus, out to Victoria, B.C., and through the United States: endless bus rides, hard classes, then a performance, six days a week." Paul shook his head. Exhausting, he thought.

"What did you do with Stephanie?"

"She stays with her grandmother in Orillia. The family life is so good for her." She paused. "But once she starts school, I'll have to find some other arrangement."

Paul crossed St. Clair Avenue and continued up Vaughan Road. The night was warm and, in his Harris Tweed jacket and raincoat, he was hot and sweaty. He found number 163, the dry cleaner above which Angela lived, and rang the bell.

Through the glass door, he watched a blonde, slender dancer in a pale jacket and loose slacks swoop down and open the door. She gave him a rather intense kiss on his lips.

"Well, I'm sure glad to be here at last, Angela!" Paul followed her up, along a narrow hallway, past her bedroom into the living room, where he took off his coat and loosened his tie.

"How was the trip?"

"I'm not really a fan of bus travel," he said. "I prefer trains, but they're so expensive." She offered him a glass of wine, and he told her how he'd literally given his blood to buy the ticket. But as soon as the story came out, he wondered if he'd revealed rather too much about his financial state. "So Angela, where is this daughter of yours?"

She led him back down the corridor, opened Stephanie's door and in they went. Paul studied the sleeping face, the blonde braided hair, the tiny mouth; she looked to him like a pretty doll. He took Angela's hand and squeezed; then they tiptoed out.

"I have a babysitter every morning; she stays till lunch so that after the morning class I can get my errands done. But now that you're here, you can help carry the groceries up from the corner store." She smiled.

Over more wine, they dwelt on their backgrounds, Paul's at Oxford and playing on the Oxford and Cambridge hockey team, mainly in Germany and Austria, but also against the *Racing Club de Paris*. "We used to sing songs and party with *Glühwein*, you know, hot mulled wine... But I want to know about you, Angela. How did you get started?"

"When we moved from East Africa to London, I went right on to study with Lydia Kyasht." Paul frowned. "She danced with the Bolshoi and the Diaghilev, what a divine teacher! Encouraging, warm, just a wonderful woman. I remember the audition I did for her — in a studio with balconies at either end. I had always danced on my toes. After my little dance, she told mother, 'We'll have to take her off her toes!'"

"After a while she started giving me extra classes: I must have had something... Another great inspiration was Margot Fonteyn, who used to take Saturday classes with Kyasht." Paul's eyes widened. "She was about 16 at the time and I will always remember standing behind her at the barre."

"How exciting!"

"Yes. But first, my parents had sent me to boarding school in southern England. That lasted until I was 14." Paul was shocked. A new country, and then off to a strange school. But that's how it was done in those days. "When I got back to London, I auditioned at Sadler's Wells, the present Royal Ballet School. We had to carry gas masks to classes because we often had to hide in air raid shelters. Nikolai Sergeev, Vera Volkova, and sometimes even Ninette de Valois, would give classes — between bombs."

Paul drank it all in. His first contact with a ballet dancer — and star, it seemed. "At the school, the Sadler's Wells company would come in and rehearse, dancers like June Brae, Michael Soames, Robert Helpmann, very exciting!"

"I bet! But how did you get to our National Ballet?"

Angela shrugged. "Buzz hoped I'd be the little wife with an apron! I still wanted to dance but," she paused, "nothing much was doing. When we moved to Orillia, I started a ballet school. And another in Barrie. Then in 1949, Stephanie was born."

Paul nodded. Such a sweet little thing, sound asleep next door.

"In 1951, Celia Franca, whom I knew of in England, had come over and was teaching Sundays at Boris Volkoff's studio. So I drove down from Orillia. I even remember at the end of my first class going up and saying, 'I would like to join your company, Celia.' I don't think she was quite ready for that one!"

"Damn good, Angela."

"Yes, but I hadn't danced for several years! She did accept me, though."

"Good for you!"

"So as soon as the National Ballet Company was formed in September, I got Buzz to move here to Toronto."

"You were in it from the beginning?"

Angela leaned back against the sofa, sipping her wine. "I remember that first public performance, a really rainy night, November 12th, three years ago, 1951, the Eaton Auditorium. We started out, just a small bunch of us: Myrna Aaron, whom I room with on tour, Judie Colpman, Colleen you've met, Nat Butko, Grant and Earl (Kraul) and of course David and Lois. Two dozen, I think. We did *Les Sylphides*, a few *pas de deux* and Borodin's *Polovtsian Dances*."

"Lois Smith, the ballerina, she's married to her partner, David Adams, isn't she?"

Angela nodded; they both led the Company. But, Paul thought, Angela's still a principal dancer. Finally, she made him a bed on the sofa and he fell asleep, feeling at peace and yes, even at home.

Within a few days Angela brought news from the St. Lawrence Hall, where they took class and rehearsed, that a businessman connected with the Ballet Guild had offered a few dancers a job for three weeks. "I asked him if I could bring a friend, and he said yes."

Paul was delighted. Money at last! He was further buoyed up by the news that one of his stories, *A Sheaf of Wheat*, had been accepted by *The Family Herald and Weekly Star*, only a farm newspaper, but at last the big start to his surely bountiful career.

On the appointed day, he and Angela set off by streetcar down Bathurst to sell programs for the Coronation Robes of Queen Elizabeth I at the Ex, the Canadian National Exhibition, on a large fairground near Lake Ontario.

"You'll be selling programs at the door," their employer had told them, "but between ourselves, the Ex is not allowed to charge. So try and make it appear that they gotta buy a program to get in."

Rather hard to swallow, Paul thought, and traded looks with Angela. But what choice did they have? They needed the money. Angela and the company lived all summer off Unemployment Insurance, supplemented in Angela's case by child support from her husband. But Paul was still penniless. "We'll do our best, sir."

“Good. Because you’ll be working on commission. No sales, no money! But several hundred should turn up daily, making you a small fortune. And if you do, I will, too. So let’s just hope for the best.”

But the best did not always happen, as Paul had been discovering — over and over again! What with the other CNE exhibits: the fat lady, the shooting galleries, the tattooed man, the jugglers, the food booths, not too many visitors wanted to see the Royal Robes. And those that did were smart enough to ask, “Do we *have* to buy a program?”

And the answer had to be, “Well no, but you can’t really get the full benefit without one.” Most of the visitors opted for less benefit.

At the end of the first day, Paul and Angela sat glumly as the streetcar rumbled its way up towards St Clair. “Look, it’s a start,” Paul said brightly. But his principal dancer did not reply.

Later, they sat down to eat dinner with Stephanie, so well behaved, Paul thought, but perhaps a bit withdrawn. She handled her knife and fork beautifully for her age, and chatted happily about her day. When she had gone to bed, Angela asked if she would like Paul to read her a story. “Is he staying here again?” Stephanie asked.

“Yes darling, he sleeps on the sofa while he looks for an apartment. He’s just new in Toronto. We’re lucky to have him as a guest for a few days.”

“No, I want *you* to read to me, Mummy,” Stephanie said firmly.

That “sweet little girl” was not overly pleased with this interloper, Paul noted. Her mother was away too much. What did that presage?

They sold so few programs that the job soon ended. But Paul had managed to get an interview as an actor with a new professional theatre, the Crest, up on Mount Pleasant Road. The recent Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences (chaired by Vincent Massey), which examined Canada’s cultural sovereignty, had recommended the creation of cultural institutions such as the National Library of Canada, the Canada Council and other grant-giving government agencies. Paul wondered if that had given impetus to the Crest.

That night at dinner he told Angela about it. “It’s run by the Davis Brothers, Murray and Donald; I met Donald, actually. His sister, Barbara Chilcott, is involved, but she’s just back from England where she’d been appearing on stage. Donald was awfully nice, and even liked what I told him about my background.”

“They started the Straw Hat Players, didn’t they?”

“Yes, 1947 in Muskoka, Donald told me. Finally, they got this lease on the Crest, which used to be a vaudeville house and then a movie theatre. They have to build their sets out in the east end, and make their costumes in a store they rented just south of the theatre. A new play every two weeks. Imagine! Last January they opened with *Richard of Bordeaux*.”

“After the tour last spring,” Angela told him, “I went with a friend to see *Haste to the Wedding*, by Tyrone Guthrie. Patrick Macnee was in it, I remember, and your friend Donald Davis. I think Barbara Chilcott, too.”

"They plan on presenting Graham Greene's *The Living Room*. Nothing for me in that, but afterwards, they're doing *Charlie's Aunt* and maybe I could land something there. Later, they're doing Eliot's *Confidential Clerk*, all terrific plays, Angela."

"Where do they get their money?"

"Some must be their own," Paul surmised. "And they raise it. Their family's in leather tanning, believe it or not. You know, tanning leather has been around since the dawn of mankind! Just think, cavemen, they wore skins, in other words, leather. Early civilizations all dressed in leather. It's a big business, even today. Donald told me they had the biggest tanning factory in all Ontario."

"Sounds as if he liked you, Paul." Angela was eating hungrily.

"Donald's acted in England," Paul went on. "He worked with Peter Potter over there, after he did Eliot's *Cocktail Party* here at the Straw Hat. He's also appeared with the Glasgow Citizens."

"So Murray and Donald are both managers? As well as actors?"

"It's a great tradition, actor managers — goes back to James Burbridge, David Garrick, and the great Henry Irving. And Donald Wolfitt — I saw him at His Majesty's in *Tamburlaine*. Wonderful old ham."

Certainly this was the life, Paul thought, no rent, fed by a beautiful dancer, and talking shop. But watch out, he told himself.

"So who did you go to the Crest with?" Paul asked casually, to disguise his jealousy. "I guess nice young beaus often ask you out?"

She smiled, seeing through him at once. "Not many 'nice young beaus' around, Paul. We're such a tightknit group, the company, we tend to just go out with each other." She looked down, and focussed on the last bit of her pork chop. "And I don't 'go out' with just any Tom Dick and Harry... unless they are making at least one hundred dollars a week!"

Paul coughed. So, this was his target price? "Poets don't count though, do they?"

Angela raised her eyes and looked across the table. "Poets do count. From what I hear, poets write in the evenings or when they have time, but they take other jobs."

What a traitorous thought, Paul decided. Yes, she's a traitor! I never thought she would be. "So you think being a poet is just a spare time occupation? Like dancing, I suppose?" Tense, he threw this out as a clear challenge.

Angela went on eating. "You know very well what I mean."

Paul should have let it go. But no one had challenged him quite so brazenly. "Angela, let me tell you, being a poet is just as full-time as dancing. I don't *ever* intend to get a job behind a desk. You had better realize that right here and now." Throw caution to the winds! If that's how she thought, he'd better move out in the morning!

He gulped a large mouthful of wine. Be careful, he told himself, but he was still seething at her betrayal. Still, where else could he go? Back to Mont Saint-Hilaire? Why, oh why, had he blurted that out?

Angela looked pained. After a time, she spoke. "You know very well, Paul, that you don't intend to spend the rest of your life sitting on sofas writing poems. You know that as well as I do. Let's not get ourselves all fussed over a few remarks. I know you're having a hard time. Don't let that get between us. I think we have..." she paused, and looked up, almost anxiously, "so much going for us, don't you?"

Dammit, he had been such an idiot. Wasn't she wonderful, making it easy for him to back down? He reached out across the table and took her hand. "Angela, I'm sorry. I make a fool of myself sometimes. It's just... I guess I really am scared. I hate admitting it. But you see, I've got nothing..." He looked back at his plate and continued eating in silence. "Nothing at all, if the truth were known."

"Don't be ridiculous, Paul. You have a great deal. And something will come along, don't worry."

But worry he did...

CHAPTER FOUR

SEPT 1954

And worry he should. The next Sunday, after she got back from class and errands, Angela poured Paul a glass of wine and began, for it must have been much on her mind, "You know Buzz picked up Stephanie yesterday..." Paul nodded. "Well, he phoned this morning. Apparently she told him that you're staying here. He was not pleased." *

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