

# 1

*May 1923*

Disaster lived by its own rules. Most times it crept up from behind, wiping out everything with a single blow, a bully and a coward. Lightning strikes. Train wrecks. Someone shoots an archduke and starts a bloody war. But disaster had veered from its sneaky, obliterating path with the Schuler family. It had taken them down one finger flick at a time. First baby Marie. Then Ma. Then Peter. Finally, Pa. For the past five years, Henry had been the last Schuler standing.

And now disaster had come for him. For the second time its ugly hands had shoved Henry out of his own life. At least it hadn't taken him down. Not yet. At least this time he wasn't a powerless boy. He was an eighteen-year-old man. He could choose. Running was wrong, a coward's way. And maybe he was—as much of a coward as that bully disaster. But it was either run or die.

Since he'd been orphaned, Henry had been living on a farm with Anders Dahlgren, his wife, and seven daughters. During those years the second eldest, Emmaline, had convinced many folks he was a deceitful, untrustworthy boy. If he had stayed, all anyone would see was his aggressive, hateful *German-ness*. All anyone would hear were the echoes of Emmaline's claims. Justice might be blind, but it heard plenty.

The fresh scratches and bruises were even more damning than his heritage or his reputation.

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Even Mr. Dahlgren couldn't save him now. Wouldn't even try. Not when Henry had betrayed him in the worst way imaginable. That thought just about tore out Henry's heart.

He walked along the river in step with a heavy-booted chant in his mind: *Kill 'im. Kill 'im. Kill Heinrich the Hun*—words his schoolmates had hurled like stones at his back during the Great War. Unlike the taunting of grade school, this time the threat was as real as the dirt under his feet. The only thing behind him was a noose.

After a day and a half on deer trails and farm paths, he'd probably traveled far enough no one would recognize him. He crawled out of the bramble beside a covered bridge, crouching like the animal he felt himself becoming—dirty, hungry, desperate—and looked to make sure no one was in sight before he stepped onto the road. The second his feet hit the packed, rutted dirt, he felt naked and defenseless. *All animals have to come out sooner or later or they'll starve to death.* Every hunter knew that. Probably every lawman, too.

By midmorning, Henry hadn't seen a single solitary soul on that road. Maybe his luck was changing. He breathed some easier. The past was done. Finished. Gone. From here on, he'd only look toward the future. Toward Chicago. The Cubs. Yeah, he'd think about the Cubs. Peter, his older brother, had been crazy about the Cubs. He and Henry used to huddle over the weekly paper Pa splurged on, memorizing players and statistics. At first Henry had only done it to be with Peter. Before long, he, too, was standing on the front porch waiting for Pa to arrive with the paper.

He spent some time thinking about what Cubs Park—it had been called Weeghman Park when he and Peter had started following the Cubs—would look like. It could seat fifteen thousand people. He'd never been in a *town* with fifteen thousand souls all totaled. He was trying to imagine that many people all in one place at one time—the jostle of bodies packed shoulder to shoulder, the swirl of smells coming off that many different sorts of folks, the noise—when he heard the clatter of tack and the roll of a wagon behind him.

As the plodding hooves and rumbling wheels got closer, Henry's skin drew up prickly and his privates tried to crawl up into his belly. His feet wanted to light out. A new chant filled his head. *Steady. Steady. They don't know me... don't know me... don't know me... don't know me.*

The road was barely wide enough for a pair of mules to walk side by side, so he moved to the weeds for the wagon to pass. Three steps in, he flushed out a rabbit, sending it skittering across the road and his heart nearly shooting out of his mouth.

As the mule team pulled past, he moved his lips into a strawboard smile. A little boy with red hair under a beat-up straw hat looked down, smiled, and waved. He was missing his two front teeth. Something in that kid's earnest smile made Henry feel as if he'd lost something he'd never get back. What, exactly, he couldn't say since he'd lost most everything that meant anything by the time he was twelve.

He raised a hand and kept that mock smile on his face, thinking innocent thoughts, hoping they'd shine through his eyes.

He braced for recognition; waited for the man to look at him, stand, and glare down, pointing a damning finger of accusation. But the boy's pa stayed put on that creaky wagon bench, slump-shouldered with his hat pulled low. He didn't even glance Henry's way. Every line of the man's posture reminded Henry of his pa, completely used up by life. Henry felt a stab of pity for the kid and hoped to high heaven his life took an easier road than Henry's had. He continued to put one shaky foot in front of the other until the wagon and the dust it kicked up rolled out of sight. Then the dry heaves grabbed him. He bent over and braced his hands on his knees until they passed.

How was he going to live a life on the run if he threw up every time a stranger approached? He had to convince himself of his innocence before he could convince anyone else.

After a while he came to a little town that either didn't matter enough to name, or nobody had bothered to post a sign to let folks know what it was. It sat on a straight shot of road and had about a dozen houses, most of them peeling and tired. T's of utility poles ran down the right side of the unpaved street, draping lines to the build-

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ings like Chautauqua banners. The brick sidewalk started at a two-room school that reminded him of the one he and Peter had gone to, with tall windows and a bell tower over the double front door (damn few happy memories there). After that was a feedstore, a white-painted church (services at nine o'clock and six thirty on Sunday, seven o'clock on Wednesday evenings), Castetter's Grocery and Variety, a brick-and-limestone bank, and a grain elevator.

Best to just walk right through, not too fast. Meet people's eyes. The visible bruise at his temple would probably draw attention. His fingers went there, prodded the soreness. If asked, he'd just pile on another lie.

Back when disaster ended his first life, Henry had picked a fake name to dodge those mealymouthed, do-gooder welfare folks who would have sent him to the County Home—a hulking brick place filled with orphans, kids whose families couldn't afford to feed them, and thrown-away old people. A nice patriotic-sounding *American* name that wouldn't draw the suspicious looks his German name did: Henry Jefferson. But Anders Dahlgren had come to take him in, fully aware that Henry was a Schuler. Now that the law was after him, Henry Jefferson was who he would be.

There weren't many people around this nameless town. A couple of kids played marbles in the dirt. A horse-drawn delivery wagon sat in front of Castetter's. A woman rocked on a front porch, shelling early peas into the apron on her lap. Two babies crawled around her feet. She looked as tired as Henry felt and didn't give him a second glance. When he passed the feedstore, an old guy wearing overalls was leaning in the doorway. He eyed Henry long enough that the urge to run washed over him, but he put one foot steadily in front of the other. He even managed an I've-got-nothing-to-hide wave. At first the man only stared. Then he gave a slow nod. Henry kept going, counting his steps until the sidewalk stopped as abruptly as it began.

The scenery rolled back into farmland and the town disappeared. The hours came and went, step after step, thirst, hunger. He welcomed the exhaustion and numbness, it made it easier to forget the horror of

what he'd left behind. He kept himself going by listening to the regular rhythm of his pants legs rubbing against each other.

The sun had slipped into late afternoon when his feet decided to stop. He blinked, somewhat surprised to find himself in the middle of a crossroad. A crow cawed overhead, a harsh, unwelcoming sound. A single dove sat on the wire strung from pole to pole alongside the road, its mournful *hoo-ah hoo-hoo-hoo* making him feel more alone than he ever had in his life.

He wished he knew how far he'd gone. But this Indiana road was the same as all of the others he'd crossed, marked by more horse hooves and wagon wheels than automobile tires, passing through a rotating kaleidoscope of woods tangled with grapevine, fields sprouting green shoots of corn, and grassy pastures dotted with spring clover and livestock. This was the only landscape he'd ever known. From the newspapers he knew Chicago was crowded and noisy, full of mobsters and speakeasies. He reckoned he'd just have to get used to the idea of a world filled with brick and stone, noise and people. He was really going to miss green meeting blue on every horizon.

As he stood there sluggishly debating whether to continue west or turn north, a muted buzz vibrated the air. A *mechanical* buzz. And it was approaching. Too deep for an automobile. Closing in too fast to be a tractor. His curiosity kept him from diving for the weeds and hiding.

It got louder, stealing deep into Henry's bones. When he set eyes on the airplane overhead, something fluttered to life in his chest. It was a beauty for sure; stacked wings and throaty roar against the blue sky. He'd only seen airplanes in pictures, and those pictures hadn't been able to fill his heart with the raw power of that thrumming motor.

His mechanic's hands itched to tinker with those valves and pistons.

Suddenly, the plane rolled to its right and made a U-turn, heading back the way it had come. He stood there wishing it would turn around again.

And then it did.

*Well, if I'd known there was a wish to be granted, I'd have made better use.*

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The plane skimmed low over the far side of the broad cow pasture on Henry's right.

Then he noticed something else. Below the plane. Matching its speed.

He shaded his eyes and squinted.

A motorcycle tore along at breakneck speed, bouncing on the rough ground, looking as if it were bucking to throw off the rider, who was leaning forward over the handlebars.

A tree row stood about two hundred yards ahead of the motorcycle and the plane. Who would blink first?

The plane stayed lower than the treetops, edging just ahead of the motorcycle.

The motorcycle did not let up.

Even if the plane pulled up now, it looked to be too late.

"No, no, no, no, no!" Henry jumped over the water-filled ditch, vaulted over the wire fence. He felt caught in a dream, his body moving unnaturally slowly, the pasture growing wider as he ran.

Just when he thought the plane was going to hit the trees, it pulled up with a mighty roar, nose nearly straight up in the air.

The motorcycle disappeared into the tree line. The crashing sound rolled across the field. The engine whined high, as if the wheels had left the ground.

The plane's drone moved away.

Henry ran faster. He ducked and swatted through trees and scrub where the motorcycle had left a trail of broken branches and flattened weeds. It was on its side, front wheel bent, handlebar plowed deep in the mud beside a large pond.

The rider?

There! Facedown in the water.

Henry splashed into the pond, praying it wasn't deep; he could keep himself from drowning, but that was about it. The water dragged on his clothes. Each step in the muddy bottom was harder to pull free than the last. Once chest deep, he stretched his reach, but fell short.

The rider's head jerked up. Sputtering, he flailed.

Henry lunged forward to grab the collar of the leather jacket, but missed.

“Hold still!” He took another step and slipped under as the bottom fell away under his feet. When he bobbed back up, an elbow caught him in the eye. A foot landed a kick on his right thigh.

“Stop moving! I’ll ggg—” Water splashed into Henry’s open mouth and shot down his gullet. He coughed and grabbed blindly for the rider.

He dodged an arm and managed to get one of his own wrapped around the man’s waist and half swam, half drowned, back to where he could set his feet on the bottom. The body beneath the leather jacket felt more like a fourteen-year-old than a man.

Now that he was towing a thrashing body, Henry’s feet sank deeper into the bottom.

The choking, gasping kid kept fighting and Henry almost lost his grip.

“I have you!” Henry pulled one foot from the mud and nearly went under again.

He shifted his grip to the collar of the leather jacket. His chances of staying on his feet were better dragging a floating body, even if it was flopping like a banked bass. He leaned away and pulled the boy behind him, one sucking step at a time.

By the time they reached the edge of the pond, the floundering stopped. The boy gasped for air. Henry’s legs were lead. He let go of the jacket and fell to the ground himself, muscles burning, heart ready to explode. He lay on his back sucking air into his starved lungs, listening to the kid cough and wheeze.

A couple of minutes later, Henry was still getting his breath when a curious cow stepped close and looked down at him. A long string of drool hung from her lips. Henry put up a hand and swatted her away, realizing too late that if he startled her, her next step could be in the center of his chest.

The cow didn’t move, but the drool let go and landed in a slimy *plop* on Henry’s forehead. He swiped at it, but the snotty stuff just smeared.

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The cow blinked her huge brown eyes and moored. Henry was pretty sure she was laughing at him.

“Oh, shut up, Tilda.” The rider’s voice was gaspy and graveled from coughing.

Henry took the kid’s ability to speak—and his sense of humor—as good news. “You know this cow?”

“She’s a”—he coughed and spat—“a troublemaker.” The boy pushed himself to sitting.

“Careful! Something might be broken.”

“Nah.” The boy was still breathing hard as he rotated wrists and bent elbows and knees to make sure. “Just got the wind knocked out.” He pulled off his gloves and swiped some of the mud from his cheek before reaching for the buckle on his leather helmet.

“Sure you’re okay?” Henry’s own eye throbbed. He figured it for a shiner.

The cow walked between them and stepped into the pond. Henry dodged, but her flitting tail caught his cheek. “You’ve got a real sassy attitude there, Tilda.”

The kid laughed, then started coughing again.

There was a whir as the plane, now on the ground, bumped along the rough pasture coming toward them. The propeller and engine sounded different from when it was airborne. Henry looked through the trees, eyes and heart drawn to the machine. The plane swung sideways before the engine shut off. It took a second for the propeller to come to a jerky stop.

Henry got up and went to get a better look. He might never see an airplane again. A clump of green leaves stuck in the tail skid. That pilot couldn’t have cut it any closer.

“Dear God, is he okay?” the pilot shouted. He was out of the plane by the time Henry reached the wingtip. The man’s leather helmet was in one hand and his goggles hung around his neck. His face was sooty. He looked like a reverse raccoon.

“Says he is.” Henry heard the pilot thrash through the trees behind him, but kept his eyes on the plane, listening to the pops and clicks as



it began to cool. The upper wing had a wider span than the lower; the two were tied together with wood poles and a whole lot of wires and turnbuckles. The entire plane looked as if it were held together by wires running in all sorts of angles, above the wing, between the wings, between the body and the tail. The purpose of the half-circle hoops under the tips of the bottom wings was a mystery.

He reached out slowly, laying his fingertips reverently on the gray fabric of the wing.

“Damned idiot!” the pilot shouted. “You could have gotten yourself killed!”

“Pretty smart talk from a fella who’d rather crash his plane than lose a race!”

That voice sounded even younger than Henry had thought.

“*You’re the one* who crashed—” The pilot’s words cut off. “Ho-ly hell.”

Henry turned. The kid had pulled off the leather helmet and was standing with hands on hips. Not a kid. A *girl* . . . with a long, brown braid . . . wearing *trousers* and lace-up knee boots . . . racing like the devil on a motorcycle.

“What?” she asked, raising her chin. “Embarrassed to be beaten by a woman?”

“The one whose machine ends up mangled after a tie is the loser,” the pilot said. “And a fool to boot.”

“You both look like idiots to me,” Henry said as he walked toward them, wringing the water out of the hem of his shirt, his shoes squishing. “If I had either one of those machines, I sure wouldn’t treat them like that.”

They both turned to Henry and said, “Well, you *don’t*.”

Henry stopped short.

“Sure you’re not hurt?” The pilot sounded more disrespectful than worried, which rubbed Henry the wrong way.

“Yes, I’m sure! Too bad the motorcycle didn’t fare as well.” Her voice slid down a steep hill from defensive to sad. “My brother wouldn’t like it.”

“You have a brother who lets you get out on that thing and do dangerous stunts like this?” The pilot had a point.

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“I said he *wouldn’t* like it. He’s dead.”

“If his judgment was anything like yours, he was probably killed on that motorbike.”

Henry cringed. *Who talks to a girl like that?*

“His was worse actually.” A whole lot of I-dare-you was in her voice. “Signed up and got killed by German mustard gas.”

*German.* Familiar guilty dread crept over Henry. Would the stink from that word ever leave him?

The pilot sucked in a breath as if he’d been gut-punched. After a few seconds he said, “Sorry. I’m an ass.”

“Obviously.”

It got quiet again.

While those two stood and stared at one another, Henry went to check the motorcycle.

HENDERSON was written in gold letters across the rectangular gas tank. He wasn’t familiar enough with motorcycles to tell if it was an expensive model. The front fork looked okay, hard as that was to believe. The front wheel was tweaked too far to rotate, its fender twisted. The chain drive remained in place, even though the guard had been ripped half off and would flap like a broken wing once the motorcycle got moving.

He reached down and grabbed the handlebars. When he pulled to right the cycle, his feet slipped in the mud and he landed on his backside.

Tilda moaned loudly, making sure the pilot and the girl looked Henry’s way. That cow was really itching to turn into a side of beef.

“Now who looks like an idiot?” the girl said.

The pilot walked toward Henry and gave him a hand up. “Charles Gilchrist. Call me Gil.”

“Henry S—Jefferson.”

“What’s the S stand for?”

*Stupid.* “Sam-uel.” All the way with the red, white, and blue.

Gil turned toward the girl, his voice sounding the slightest bit apologetic. “And you?”

“Cora Haviland—of the New York Havilands.” The way she said her name made Henry think he should have heard of her family—as if she were a Carnegie, Ford, or Rockefeller. Henry didn’t know anything about society, so he glanced at Gil. He didn’t look as if her name meant anything to him either.

She nodded toward the cow. “You’ve met Tilda.”

Henry swiped his forehead again and felt the slime. “Unfortunately.”

He and Gil got the motorcycle up on its wheels. It was like wrestling a boar hog. No wonder he’d fallen on his ass.

Cora took it out of gear. Gil lifted the bent wheel and they rolled the cycle on its rear tire to the tree line and leaned it up against a trunk. That’s when Henry realized the flat-bottomed, U-shaped piece of metal on the ground near the tree row must have been a stand that could be rolled under the rear wheel to hold the cycle upright. He went over and picked it up. He didn’t see how it could be repaired, but hooked it under the seat anyway, so it stayed with the motorcycle.

“Not sure how you’re going to get it home,” Gil said.

“Is it far?” Henry asked.

“A mile or so. But we can’t just go dragging it up the lane.” She shot a challenging look at them, as if she was daring them to argue about the *we* part. “Mother thinks it’s long gone.”

If her mother didn’t know about the motorcycle, how did Cora explain dressing like that?

Gil didn’t look confused at all. He just raised a brow. “Quite the rebel, are you?”

“Flyboy, you have no idea.”

Cora insisted that taking the motorcycle home by way of the road was out of the question. Only an approach from the back of the barn wouldn’t risk being seen. Whatever way they went, Henry figured it was going to be a whole lot easier to move the cycle if that front wheel turned. He tugged on the fender and straightened it enough to allow the wheel to pass through. Then he picked up a thick, downed tree limb

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and tried to lever the rim until it was true enough to spin. Gil stood off to the side with his arms crossed, telling Henry it was a waste of time. Which turned out to be right.

“Do you have any ideas?” he asked Gil.

“Too heavy for the three of us to carry any distance.” He glanced at the sky, impatience on his face. Then he looked at Cora. “If you keep this thing in the barn, your father must know you have it. Maybe he could bring a wagon and the three of us men could lift it in.”

“He’s dead, too.”

Henry couldn’t believe how matter-of-fact she was when she talked about her war-killed brother and her dead father. Maybe the crash had knocked her head and she didn’t know what she was saying. She was a girl, after all. The Dahlgren girls cried over everything: baby birds fallen from the nest, moths trapped in spiderwebs, mud on their dresses. They even got weepy when anyone mentioned the name of a barn cat that had been trampled by a mule years before. From his first day on that farm, Mrs. Dahlgren had preached to Henry that girls had delicate sensibilities and it was every male’s duty to protect them. One of Henry’s jobs had been to scout the chicken yard and henhouse before the girls went to fetch the eggs in the morning, just to make sure no foxes had raided and left a bloody trail of chicken guts.

He was starting to think chicken guts wouldn’t even make Cora blink.

“Well, then,” Gil said, “I say we park it in this tree row for tonight, out of sight. Miss Daredevil here can get some help and haul it home tomorrow.”

“Hey!” Henry said. “She’s just a girl. We have to help. Besides *you’re* the reason she wrecked.”

“Just a girl!” Both Cora and Gil said. Henry wondered how two people who’d barely met could chime in with the exact same words twice in less than fifteen minutes.

Cora’s mouth snapped closed, as if she realized she was starting to argue against what she wanted to happen.

Gil looked to be gritting his teeth. “Look.” He jabbed a finger in her direction. “She wrecked because she used poor judgment. Women and machines don’t mix. Who would have thought a *girl* would be out here tearing around a farm field on a motorcycle? This”—he shifted his finger to the motorcycle—“is *not* my fault. And in about forty minutes, I’m going to lose the light and be stuck in this pasture until sunrise tomorrow. Which will be *her* fault.”

“Ducky, then.” Cora sounded as if she were agreeing with good news. “You’ll have all night to help us get this back to the barn.”

Henry looked at the sinking sun. “Where were you heading? You from around here?”

“I’m not *from* anywhere, but I need to get to the next sizable town sooner rather than later.”

“Why?” Cora asked. “The day’s almost over anyway.”

“I need people in a number greater than the two of you and gasoline for what I do. County seats are the best bet.”

Cora looked puzzled. “A business that requires people and hooch; now there I can see lots of possibilities. But people and *gasoline*? What exactly *do* you do?”

“Barnstorming.”

Henry didn’t want to show his ignorance, so he kept quiet.

“What in the Sam Hill is that?” Cora asked. “Got anything to do with bootleg?”

Even out in the country, enough people ignored the Volstead Act that it barely seemed like a crime.

“No.” Gil gave her a scowl—Henry was beginning to think that was the man’s normal face. A weary, angry tension steadily vibrated under his skin.

“So what is it?” Cora asked.

“I buzz over a town, do a few stunts to get people’s attention, then find a field to land in. The curious always come.”

“For what?” Henry felt bolder now that Cora had admitted she didn’t know what barnstorming was, but one look at her face said she’d already figured it out.

“Rides,” Gil said. “Five dollars for ten minutes. If they want a loop or a barrel roll, it’s extra.”

*Five dollars!* No wonder he needed a town full of people—bankers and lawyers and the like. Henry’d give his right arm to fly in that thing, but five dollars was something he couldn’t imagine ever having to spare.

Cora tilted her head. “You make enough kale to live on just by selling a few rides?”

Gil made a face that wasn’t quite a smile. “I make enough to keep my plane in the air. That’s all I need.”

“So where do you plan to sleep tonight?” she asked.

“Camp, like always.”

“Well, Aunt Gladys’s arthritis says it’s going to rain. If you help me get this motorbike back to the barn, you can sleep there.” Cora raised a brow. “*And* you can come in for dinner. I’m sure I can talk my uncle into letting you use the field for your barnstorming, too.”

The thought of a hot meal nearly made Henry cry like the Dahlgren girls.

Gil looked at the sky.

“Sounds like a good deal, Gil.” Henry tried to keep the needy hope out of his voice. “You won’t get far before dark anyway.”

Gil stood there looking stubborn. “Not enough people around here to make this pasture worthwhile,” he finally said.

“But you’re already here,” Cora said. “Why not cash in before you move on? I know *I’d* like a ride, so you have your first customer already.”

“What about you?” Gil asked Henry. “Don’t you have somewhere to be?”

“I’m on my way to Chicago. Got a job waiting. I could use a place to sleep tonight.” *Inside. Where no one will find me.* “Your uncle’s name is Haviland?” Not one Henry was familiar with, but what if it wasn’t Haviland and Cora’s uncle knew Anders Dahlgren?

“No. It’s Fessler. Aunt Gladys is Father’s older sister.”

Henry nodded. Fessler was just as unfamiliar as Haviland.

Gil looked at Cora. “You’re sure your uncle will go along?”

“Ab-so-lute-ly.”

“All right. Deal.”

Henry’s mouth started to water. But his hopes for a quick meal were squashed when Gil said they had to tie down the plane before they could leave it. He retrieved a cross-peen hammer, three lengths of rope, and a couple of stakes from the plane.

Cora watched them with her hands on her hips. “Afraid it’ll take off without you?”

The thing was designed to ride on the wind. *She* said weather was coming in. Gil was right, women and machines didn’t mix.

Gil gave a head shake and went on about his business. Henry didn’t feel it was his place to explain.

Gil finished tying the tail rope to the trunk of a nearby tree. Then he wiped his hands on his thighs. “That should do it.”

Cora nudged Henry’s shoulder. “Let’s go, Kid.”

Kid? She looked eighteen, nineteen at most. But he kept his mouth shut. Right now, the less said, the less likely questions would be asked.

He focused on supper. During his time on the Dahlgren farm he’d forgotten how to live hungry.

**G**il carried the front of the motorcycle by the bent wheel while Henry pushed from the rear, feeling as if he were herding a reluctant donkey. Cora walked alongside, steadying the balance. Tilda followed them all the way across the pasture to a back gate that led to a cornfield. When Cora closed the gate behind them, the cow bellowed like an abandoned kid.

Before they started moving again, Cora took off her jacket and threw it over the handlebars, where Gil’s already hung. Henry’s mouth went dry at the sight of her. Her white blouse was stuck to her skin and wet enough to show more than a hint of what was underneath. No matter how many times Henry forced his eyes elsewhere, his curious gaze slid right back to Cora. Gil proved a gentleman, which was a surprise after the way he’d talked to her, turning his back the second she’d slipped the jacket off her shoulders.

Henry was torn between relief and regret when they started moving again and all he could see was her back.

It was almost dark when they went through another gate. Henry's nose told him they were in the pig lot. The barn was a hulking, dark shadow on the far side.

Cora scouted the open stretch between the row of hedge apple trees and the barn. When she was satisfied the coast was clear, they rolled the motorcycle across the final, sour-smelling stretch. By then Henry's eye was throbbing and his back felt as if he'd been lifting hay bales every day for a week.

Directing them to a lean-to on the back side of the barn, she said, "Here."

She opened a door barely wide enough for the handlebars to pass through. It was pitch-black inside. Stepping around Gil, she disappeared in the darkness. After a second, a light flared and she reappeared in the glow of a small oil lantern. Shameful as it was, Henry was disappointed to see her blouse had dried.

The inside of the lean-to wasn't packed with stuff the way Henry expected it to be. Against the back wall was a stack of wooden crates covered with about a hundred years of dust, a chair with a missing leg, and a rusty scythe. Nearer the door was a tarp-covered pile about two feet by three feet and a red, two-gallon gas can.

"Nobody ever comes in here. Uncle Clyde thinks the door is still stuck."

Henry noticed the ground beneath the door swing had been dug down. He wondered if Cora had shoveled it herself. He'd never seen a girl lift a tool of any kind, so he doubted it.

"*Nobody* knows you've got this thing?" Gil asked.

"After Jonathan was killed, it sat in our garage at the country house under a tarp. Everyone forgot about it . . . except me. When we packed up and moved here, a couple of sawbucks got the men to crate it up without a word to Mother. And here it is."

"Where'd you live before?" Henry asked.

"I told you, New York City. But Mother preferred that dreadfully



boring Hudson Valley house most of the time. We wintered on Jekyll Island. It was all very . . . you know”—she gave a flip of her head and lifted her nose in the air—“high-hat.”

Gil whistled through his teeth.

Henry had no idea where Hudson Valley or Jekyll Island were. Anybody with more than one house was rich, that much he *did* know.

“If you gentlemen will wait outside, I need to change my clothes.”

Henry hurried out, the image of her body under that wet blouse burning in his brain. Gil followed more slowly, then leaned against the barn, putting one foot on the wall behind him, and pulled out a pack of Chesterfields from his shirt pocket. He held the pack out to Henry, who waved off the offer. Gil shook one out, struck a match, and lit it.

“Been flying long?” Henry asked.

Gil pulled a long drag on the cigarette, then blew out the smoke. “A while.” He kept his eyes on the sky. It was dark enough that a few stars had peeked out.

All of the questions that came ready to Henry’s mind could easily lead to questions asked back. Keep to the machine. That was safe. And he was curious about it. He’d always liked figuring out ways to make something useful out of scraps and discards. Early on he discovered his knack for patching the irreparable back together—necessity had been a good teacher. During the past five years he’d earned his keep by coaxing Mr. Dahlgren’s finicky Fordson tractor into good behavior, finally silencing the man’s threats to return to mule power. Henry’s ability to decipher the code that smoothed out an engine’s running had been a bitter pill; he blamed tractors for stealing his pa’s job and the last of his will to live. But once his love for the hum of pumping pistons, the clatter of a crankshaft, became useful to Mr. Dahlgren, it felt a little less like betrayal.

“How fast will it go?” Henry asked.

“She ain’t fast and she ain’t agile. She ain’t reliable, either. Tops out at around seventy-five. Lucky to get sixty.”

“Seventy-five!”

“That’s *not* fast. And speed burns too much fuel.”

“Eight cylinder?”

“Yeah. Water-cooled Curtiss OX-5.”

“I read about Glenn Curtiss in *Scientific American*.”

Gil finally looked at him. “Most folks only know about the Wright brothers, Eddie Rickenbacker, and the Red Baron when it comes to planes.”

“Yeah, well, I know about them, too. Love machines. What’s the horsepower?”

“When she’s working good, ninety. She’s usually not working good.”

“Maybe I could take a look at it. I’m pretty good with engines.”

Gil picked a piece of tobacco off his tongue and flipped it onto the ground. “Nobody touches her but me.” He said it as if the plane were his woman.

Cora came back out of the lean-to. Her hair was pinned up proper and she had on a dress with a low sash and short, sheer-ruffled sleeves—far too short for decency according to Mrs. Dahlgren; the loud arguments between her and her older daughters came up like clockwork, right after the arrival of *Harper’s Bazaar* magazine or the new Sears, Roebuck catalog. Other than that, she looked like the well-dressed Dahlgren girls. Her wide-brimmed straw hat had a ribbon band that matched the green stripe in her dress, and she wore tan stockings and strap shoes. Over one arm she held a basket holding a book and some pencils. You’d never guess she’d just crashed a speeding motorcycle.

“Oooh.” She reached her palm out and flicked her fingers at Gil. “Give me a puff of that ciggy.”

He passed it to her as if women smoked all of the time. The tip glowed orange as she drew on it. She handed it back and waved a hand to shoo the smoke away when she exhaled.

As they walked toward the house, she said, “I must warn you, everyone here is quite serious and old-fashioned. I’m losing my mind stuck out here with nobody but the three Victorians. But”—she changed to a high voice that Henry took to be mimicking her mother’s—“*we must do our best until our circumstances improve.*” She sighed. “Mother’s spent the past four months eating humble pie—and looking for a way

to change her daily diet. Which means looking for a rich husband for me.” The last words were said with a detached flatness that said Cora wasn’t all that happy with that solution.

They reached the back door of a regular farmhouse, a nice place, but not a rich man’s house. Cora stopped. “You two are welcome to concoct any story you like to explain why you’re both stranded here at nightfall. *I* came upon you both in the pasture as I was returning from my nature walk—all civilized young ladies of breeding take nature walks. I’m quite enthralled with them. Sometimes I completely lose track of time.” She turned and stepped through the door.

Gil raised a brow to Henry and shrugged.

As they followed her into the house, Henry thought Tilda probably wasn’t the only troublemaker on this farm.