

# PART 1 THE TIGER ON THE MOUNTAIN

**World War 2, Postwar, Pre-Tish (1942–1957)**

**1942 . . .**

*There's a broad low mountain just south of Abbotsford in British Columbia that in winter displays on its north side a snowfall pattern shaped like a prowling animal. Only people in Abbotsford can see it. Some think it might be a lamb, and others that it is a tiger. Some even call the mountain "Tiger Mountain," although it is in the U.S., and mapped there as Sumas Mountain, just northwest of a Black Mountain, and a bit more northwest of Mount Baker, which, at 11,340 feet, towers its white volcanic glamour over Abbotsford and much of the surrounding Fraser Valley. In 1942 I have seen Mount Baker and seen the tiger but I have never thought about the U.S. or maps or about the real names of mountains . . .*

**December 1942 . . .**

A war is going on somewhere to the east, and also somewhere to the west. My bath toys are all small grey plastic warships. For Christmas I have got a colouring book. It is blue, with a close-up of the prow of a battleship on its cover. Each of its 100 pages has the outline of a

different tank, jeep, ship or airplane. Sometimes the guns are firing. When I start colouring, I imagine I am helping to win the wars.

### May 1943 . . .

Each Friday night on his walk home from work my father buys a “brick” of Palm ice cream and a copy of the *Star Weekly*. It’s the weekly magazine of the *Toronto Star*, although I don’t know this. I haven’t yet heard of Toronto. Each issue of the *Star Weekly* contains a full novel on tabloid newsprint, which my maternal grandmother, who lives with us, reads and saves to mail, once the war is over, to one of her sisters in England. If it’s a Zane Grey or Erle Stanley Gardner, my father will read it too. My grandma is the most educated person in the house, although as far as I know she owns only two books—a Victorian paperback about a young woman who drowned herself after losing her boyfriend, and a Victorian digest of the geography and economies of the English counties—the book she had to study in England when training around 1898 to become a telegrapher. She is teaching me the Morse code.

### July 1943 . . .

My dad is growing potatoes on the road allowance between our lawn and the gravel road we live on. “Netted Gems” he calls them. It took him a whole day back in the spring to dig and level the dirt. Now he has a rake and is “hilling” the potato plants. If there is no blight we will have enough potatoes for the winter, he says. Blight is when the leaves turn white and the potatoes are no good. He is also growing onions and carrots and beets in our back garden because they too will keep all winter. We need them because of the war, because food is scarce and some things like butter are rationed. The more things we grow the more food there will be for our soldiers and our friends in England, my grandma says. To the south the snow has melted and the tiger or lamb has disappeared.

October 1943 . . .

A big console radio stands in the living room just outside the doors to my bedroom and my parents' bedroom. In the evenings my father sometimes listens to "Gangbusters" or "The Whistler" and the sirens and gunshots keep me from sleeping. In the morning after my father leaves for work, my mother turns it on so she can lie in bed and listen to "Breakfast with Brown" on CJOR. I go and lie on the bed beside her and wait for her to get up and make a real breakfast. "Brown" is Billy Brown, who has an English accent and plays mostly English music, although I don't know for sure that there are other kinds of music. He begins and ends the show with a rooster crowing—"Reddy Rooster." He plays a lot of Harry Lauder and George Formby, and Gracie Fields and Vera Lynn. "Knees up Mother Brown," George Formby sings to his ukulele, but about a different Brown family I think. My mother's old name was Brown. There are a lot of Browns. Gracie Fields sings "The Lord's Prayer" a whole lot, and when she does, my grandma Brown comes down from upstairs to listen. My mother enrolls me in the Billy Brown Birthday Club. I get a membership card with my name and a large red rooster on it.

In the evenings my grandma has been teaching me prayers. At bedtime she sits me on her knee on the sofa to recite them. The first one was easy: "God bless mommy and daddy, grandmas and grandpas, uncle and aunts, and all kind friends, and make me a good boy, amen." It seems like an okay thing that they be blessed. And if God wants to make me a good boy, maybe it'll be partly his fault when I'm not. The second was also pretty easy, because it rhymed—"Gentle Jesus meek and mild, look upon a little child, pity my simplicity, suffer me to come to thee, amen." I think I know what it means and I don't like it. But I want to please my grandma. Sometimes she says she wishes she'd been "taken" when my grandpa died. Now we are working on the one Gracie sings, the Lord's Prayer. Why isn't God's will already done on earth, I wonder. Maybe he can't make me good. But grandma doesn't know and just shakes her head.

**August 1944 . . .**

My mother and father are taking me for a week-long vacation by the seaside in White Rock. We take suitcases onto a bus that takes us to Langley where we transfer to a smaller bus that goes to White



My father and I at White Rock, 1944.

Rock. It is crowded, and my dad has to sit beside the driver on the box that covers the engine. Mr. Marshall who owns the White Rock Hotel comes in his little Austin 7 to meet us. My mother hangs a grey flannel blanket on string across the hotel room between my bed and theirs. We play some slot machines that are in a pavilion at the end of the pier. They take nickels—then a little crane inside sometimes picks up prizes or coins and dumps them down a chute for us. There are a lot of navy sailors. I catch small

fish—my dad calls them “shiners”—off the end of the pier. I ride floating logs in the water. There are a lot of cars in White Rock parked behind buildings with sacks wrapped around their tires. I don’t understand why. The hotel dining room serves wonderful slices of deep raspberry pie. On some days we walk down the railway tracks through Peace Arch Park to Blaine in the U.S. We have to walk carefully across a long trestle that has wide gaps between its boards. My dad listens for approaching trains. There’s no railing on the edges. In Blaine there are more sailors, ones who wear the same blue uniform except it has a star in both corners of the back collar. They put the stars there so people can know they aren’t Canadians.

**September 1944 . . .**

I am lying on my back on the front lawn watching squadrons of Liberators practise flying in close formation at various altitudes

overhead. They are from our new airport, and are practising for bombing runs, my father says over a place in Germany called the Ruhr. Or over Berlin or Leipzig or Dresden. I can tell them apart—the graceful Liberators, the hunched-together twin-tail Lancasters and the smaller two-engine Mitchells. I have a little grey model of a Lancaster and also one of a Wellington. One afternoon in the 1980s on my way to Grainau to give a paper about *Tish* and *SwiftCurrent*, I sat down in the sunlight for lunch in Augsburg and complimented the waiter on the handsome triangular “square” we were facing. “Yes,” he said. “We call it RAF Square. But it’s okay.” He smiled. “There was a big Messerschmidt factory nearby.” “In Haunstetten?” I said, “Six km?” “Close enough,” he said. Oops, I don’t know about this in 1944, do I. I’m supposed to hate Germans. I’m supposed to think like a little kid. Sorry.

#### December 1944 . . .

It’s almost Christmas. The tiger shines brightly in the snow on the mountain. I’m going to Vancouver with my mother and grandma on the interurban tram to see Santa. The tram is like a wooden streetcar only bigger and heavier and made up of two or three cars. It has woven straw seats that are worn on the edges and scratch the backs of my knees. The tram cars are thirty years old my father tells me. He gets free tickets for us because he works for the BC Electric Company which operates them. The tram takes us through Matsqui Prairie and Langley Prairie and under the amazing arch of the Pattullo Bridge across the Fraser River to the Carrall Street station in Vancouver—a two-hour trip.

I was born here in Vancouver, even though I have always lived in Abbotsford. My father was born in Vancouver too, in 1910. My mother arrived in Vancouver in 1913 with her mother and father, after crossing the Atlantic on one of the last trips of the *Empress of Ireland*. She was four years old. They met in Vancouver in the early 1920s, and married there in 1938. They wanted to marry earlier but couldn’t because of the Depression. In 1939 my father was

transferred by the BC Electric to Abbotsford. My mother didn't want to come. She came, but then insisted on having me in Vancouver with her old family doctor, Dr. Gillespie. They had bought a house in Vancouver when they got married. They have kept it, and rented it, even though they have bought another one in Abbotsford, in case they can go back. Houses are still cheap for people with jobs, because of the Depression. They have a bank account in Abbotsford, but also ones in Vancouver, in case they go back. Every few months my mother and grandma take me on the tram to visit these banks—carved stone buildings on Hastings Street and Granville Street that are larger than churches, and have lots of orange and brass lamps—to have their bank books “made up,” they say.

I like the tram because it runs through fields and woods but stops every few minutes at crossroads to pick up passengers and there are new things outside the window. In Vancouver there are a lot of streetcars, some made of wood and some of metal. Their trolleys make huge sparks as they rumble around corners. My mother and grandma shop for Christmas things at Woodward's, which is near the station, and then go farther along Hastings to Spencer's for dresses and gloves. My father won't let us shop at Army and Navy, which is beside Woodward's, because it's blacklisted by his union. Each time we pass it I worry because there are bad people inside.

At Christmas Spencer's has a big window with people-sized toys that move. We go inside to an elevator. The young woman who runs it calls out “Going up!” We join a long lineup to see Santa. We go for lunch in Spencer's fifth-floor restaurant. There is a purple rope across the entrance that makes us wait. We get a table where I can see the boats in the harbour. We stop at Woolworth's and buy two goldfish which my mother suggests we call Jack & Jill. In the tram back to Abbotsford they sit in a carton beside me on the wooden windowsill.

**June 1945 . . .**

My mother thinks that one of the Liberators has crashed. In the mountains. That's what people are saying, she says. Maybe ten or

eleven men. I bet they'll never find them, she says. The bears or the mountain lions will get them. I look out the window and wonder whether it crashed on Tiger Mountain.

### August 1945 . . .

The war has ended. Mr. Truman has dropped big bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. "I was in Nagasaki," my father says, "in



My father sails for Nagasaki, 1924.

1924." It was his first job, after he left school—he was a messenger boy on Canadian Pacific's *Empress of Asia*. Abbotsford however looks unchanged. It is still about three blocks square. But my mother has started sending me downtown alone to get small things that she needs. Some of the sidewalks are made of wood, like the trams are. Most people walk to work or to shop. You buy your vegetables and canned goods from the grocers at Modern Market, who pass

the things you ask for from behind long wooden counters. You buy your eggs at the egg candlery in the alley behind the Glacier Café, your meat at the "Cold Storage" building where farmers and hunters bring dead animals to be cut up, frozen and stored. Many of these arrive on horse-drawn wagons. I watch out for both cars and parked wagons, because often the unattended horses can lurch—onto the sidewalk.

Besides the farms, the main places where people work are the Clayburn brick plant, the Canadian customs offices at the U.S. border two miles south, and the BC Electric Co., which runs both the electricity supply and the electric tram line from Vancouver through Abbotsford to Chilliwack, twenty miles east. Children close to my age often walk along the side streets leading single cows to nearby farms to be bred. I have to watch out for cows. There are farms on three sides of the block our house is in—Tuck's farm

behind us, Aish's to the east and Conway's to the west. Our next-door neighbour is Reverend Tench, of the United Church—he has two lots and keeps twenty or thirty chickens under the fruit trees on the one beside us. A small pickup truck from Conway's farm delivers bottled milk, unpasteurized, every morning. My father is a “ground man” on the BC Electric's local line maintenance crew. That is better than being a “digger” but not as good as being a driver or lineman or a farmer.

Now the war is over, my mother says, we don't need to close your blackout curtain. It's a black flannel drape that my mother has sewed so that it runs on a drawstring across my window close to the glass. But at night the setting sun shines through the curtains, and car lights flash briefly from the alley. I want the blackout curtain closed. The next week she takes down the other blackout curtains from all around the house but leaves mine.

### **September 1945 . . .**

My mother has decided that I should have piano lessons—maybe because when I am bored I sometimes play with the keys on our piano and already know middle C. Grandma doesn't play but my mother can play hymns like “Jesus Bids Us Shine” and “Work for the Night Is Coming,” which Grandma has wanted me to learn to sing. And sometimes a song called “Down the River of Golden Dreams,” which my mother sings to herself. I can tell however that the playing for her is hard. My teacher will be Frieda Nelson, from the Nelson family our road is named after. She and her sister have the original Nelson farm and still tend a dairy herd. My mother and I walk down the trail through the woods from our road to the highway, then up McCallum Road to the farm. My mother is carrying her childhood music case—a black leatherette one that rolls up and buckles. We open and close the farm gate because there are cows in the field, and walk up the long curving lane to the farmhouse.

**November 1945 . . .**

My father's mother, Minnie, and her husband, Uncle Charlie, arrive on the morning tram from Vancouver with my father's older brother, Uncle Orrie, for Sunday dinner. This seems like the first time I have seen them. My mother and grandmother have been saying bad things about them for the past week, including that they don't think Minnie and Charlie are really married. Minnie wants me to call her "Nana." She's tall and wears a large showy hat. She's brought Christmas presents and also brought my father a .303 Lee-Enfield rifle that belonged to her father, who has recently died. It was made for the Boer War, my father says. It has Queen Victoria's crest on it. He lies down on the living room rug like a soldier and aims it into the legs of our dining-room table. She says she's given Orrie her father's double-barrelled shotgun. I play "Dolly Dear" for them on the piano—the first piece I have learned. At dinner Uncle Charlie knocks over his teacup and makes a large stain on the white damask table cloth, and on the "silence cloth" underneath. My mother and grandmother nod to each other as if they knew this would happen. Then we all walk down the hill with them through the darkness to the evening tram. My father carries a metal flashlight. To get to the tram station we have to walk between some trees and some parked rail cars and a caboose. A stream of liquid spurts from the caboose as we pass, nearly hitting Nana. She's so startled that she stumbles. "That's a rude caboose," says Orrie.

**December 1945 . . .**

My mother and grandma and I take the tram to Vancouver once again to see Santa and do Christmas shopping. At Spencer's Santa gives me a toy gun, a black .45 automatic. My mother is unhappy and says I can't keep it. We go to the store's fifth-floor restaurant, where again I get to look at the CPR and Union Steamship boats in the harbour. I have my favourite restaurant meal, poached salmon.

At home that night I don't feel well and pick at my supper. Then in bed I throw up all the poached salmon. I've never thrown up before and so don't have words for it. I call out, "Grandma, I've spilled on the bed." I probably call my grandma because I think she knows more. "You've vomited, dear," she tells me. After that night I don't like eating salmon, but I have a new word.

### March 1946 . . .

A quiet struggle among things American, British and Canadian simmers within our house. My grandma has grown up in a small vil-



My dad's mother Minnie (second from left), her brother Lester (far left), mother Betsy de Bois and father Robert Parkin on their farm outside of Lindsay, Ontario, around 1898.

lage in County Durham while my father says his family in Canada goes back to 1798 on his father's side and to a Métis "De Bois" in Thunder Bay in 1802 on his mother's. My grandma—who recounts growing up the youngest child of a village innkeeper—views herself as better than anyone not born in Britain.

Her brother Sim was chief engineer on a steamship that sailed to Rangoon and Vladivostok. Her brother Jack managed a tea plantation in Darjeeling. She likes to tell people she has always voted Conservative. My father, who completed only Grade 8, campaigned for the CCF before the war, and is sometimes shop steward for his union. On election day they unhappily joke about going out to cancel each other's vote. None of us knows how my mother votes. In 2003 I drop into my great-grandfather's inn, the Cross Keys, in Hamsterley, for lunch, and there on the walls are nineteenth-century photos of my grandmother and her family, all of them looking very solemn and conservative. She had lived here as a child, in the second-floor rooms. I find a photo on the wall of the inn from the time her father had retired and she was working as a telegra-

pher—around 1900. Her sister Alice, five years older, and her husband Tom Stephenson were running it. I photograph the photo.



My greatgrandfather Kirkup's inn, the Cross Keys, in Hamsterley, County Durham, around 1899–1900. That's my great-aunt Alice, her husband and two of my cousins in the doorway.

Damn—I've done it again, pretended to know the future. Put that photo back on the wall!

I like my grandma. She is full of amusing stories about “the old country” and about her and her brother Jack climbing down an apple tree to sneak from their rooms above the inn, about riding a bicycle to her job at the telegraph office in Newcastle. As well as the Morse code she is now teaching me rhymes such as “tuppence and twopence, a groat and three 'appence, a penny and a penny and an odd boar bee.” You say “twopence” as if the first part were “twop,” and “'appence” as if it were “'oppence.” But when I begin school she expects me to wear short pants in good weather, and riding breeches in bad. I have to wheedle her into visiting the school grounds before she can be convinced that in Abbotsford real boys wear jeans. In just a few years Daphne Buckle will have a similar problem with her mother in North Vancouver. Oh shoot!—my editor will hate me.

### June 1946 . . .

Even before I begin school, Frieda Nelson sends me to perform at the Fraser Valley Music Festival. I play “The Blue Bells of Scotland” and forget that I am on stage and “count out loud” to the music like she has told me to do when practising. The adjudicator tells the audience how valuable counting out loud can be and ranks me second in a “novice” class of seven. His name is Burton Kurth and my mother says he is famous. She says this as if his name could help make me famous.

The festival is held over several days in the Legion Hall in Mission City, seven miles north of Abbotsford across the Fraser River, and draws its competitors from places like New Westminster, Langley, Mission, Abbotsford and Chilliwack. The hall seems to hold several hundred people, and is usually full. It has a wide deep stage with a dramatic mural of the Vimy monument on its back wall. My grandpa Brown was at Vimy—large pictures of him in his uniform hang in my room. That's Vimy, my mother whispers.

The adjudicators sit at a table near the front centre, wait for you to make your way onto the stage toward the monument, and ring a bell when they want you to begin. There is a very long silence as I sit at the grand piano waiting for the bell.

#### **October 1946 . . .**

I am in Grade 1 in a one-classroom school just south of the big elementary school. It's really the ground floor of a small wooden Masonic Hall but has a cloakroom and desks on runners and an oiled board floor just like the big school. And a pot-belly stove at the back. All of us children are strangers to each other. Our teacher, Miss Chappell, is very old and has silvery grey hair. She uses flash cards. I am the only one who can read "morning." If one of us is bad, Miss Chappell goes across the field at lunchtime to the big school to get the strap. She straps Rennie Harm forever because he refuses to cry. We are all watching—fearing her, admiring him. One recess I get really mad at Perry Long for pushing me off the stump that we pretend is a truck, and throw a piece of broken china at him and cut him over the eye. I will probably get the strap. I race inside and tell Miss Chappell, "I hit Perry and he's bleeding" and she rushes off to help him. Later nothing happens to me.

#### **June 1947 . . .**

I compete at the music festival in Mission again, playing "English Country Garden," and again in 1948, playing the march "In Rank

and File.” I win the class both times. The music is set for the classes by the festival board so that each of us plays the same piece, including Bill Walker who is also taking lessons from Frieda Nelson and will later major in music at UBC and be the official tape recorder of *Tish* poetry readings. But Bill goes to a school on Sumas Prairie and so I don’t know him—except through my mother who wants me to dislike him.

On some festival days my schoolroom class competes as a choir, and often wins too. I have a boy-soprano voice and sing descant. There are individual singing competitions at the festival, and so one day I ask my mother if I can take singing lessons too, and she sends me to my godmother, Marie Lobban, who teaches singing. I compete at the festival, singing Shakespeare’s “Hark, Hark the Lark,” and place second—behind Bill Walker. It is very different to perform facing the audience than to sit at a piano unable to see whether people are sleeping or giggling. It is my first poetry reading. The next year I sing a Cavalier song “Boot, Saddle, to Horse and Away” and again place second behind Bill Walker. It’s another poem. Maybe I am going to be a lyric poet.

### September 1947 . . .

I am puzzled about Frieda Nelson—wondering why she wants to live in Abbotsford. She seems tall, dramatic, confident, even glamorous, and a lot younger than my mother. Occasionally she will play for me, something complicated by Bach or Chopin or Rachmaninoff, or other composers from big far-away cities. She makes the music seem rich—and very playable. Her farmhouse seems also from faraway. It was once lighted by gas—you can see the stubs of old tubing poking from the walls. From the high ceilings hang two tarnished brass chandeliers, now electrified, with one or two of the little white glass shades missing. There’s vertical tongue-and-groove panelling partway up the walls. Just outside close to the house is a tennis court that is now overgrown with small trees. In the south window close to the piano is an old mahogany table with

only two things on it, a crocheted cloth and a framed photo of a young Canadian sailor. Who is it, I ask my mother one day. Her boyfriend, my mother says, a Conway I think, they never married. What happened, I ask. The war, says my mother.

### October 1947 . . .

Snow has started to fall in the surrounding mountains. The dim outline of the tiger on the mountain to the south of us has reappeared. My mother is listening on the radio to some American hearings about traitors who make movies. There is a lot of talk about something called a “Fifth Amendment.” If someone at the hearings uses this Fifth Amendment, this proves they are communists or traitors. My mother says to my grandma that she doesn’t know what to think. My grandma says what can you expect from Americans.



Old King Cole Junior.

### November 1947 . . .

Sometime in the fall of Grade 2 I am called out by the principal, Miss Stennessen. There are people from the village theatre club with her. They want a small boy to play “Old King Cole Junior” in their Christmas pageant. They give me a large ditto-printed script. On my way home I meet two high school boys, Kenny Turnbull and Ron Arnold, who notice the unusual piece of paper and grab it, rip it up and toss the pieces into the creek that runs beside Hazel Street. I go home and tell my mother, and she comes with me to the creek and helps me retrieve the pieces. She lets them dry and then tapes them back together. She was forelady of the Keystone Press bookbindery in Vancouver before she married my dad. She has a box of stuff for making books. I like this box. Ron and Kenny

are usually okay, but are known to be uneasy about pages with writing on them. After the play is staged I pose for a photo, calling for my fiddlers three.

Why have I been asked to be in the play? Maybe because my teachers know I am used to being on stage? Or used to memorizing music and songs? I just think it's because I'm good—talented—and



Me as young Johann Sebastian Bach.

as far as I can tell the rehearsals and performance are fine. The next year the high school puts on a play supposedly based on the childhood of Johann Sebastian Bach—some painful orphan years he spends with a mean uncle and a kindly Tante Anna. Miss Stenersen and my

teachers again volunteer me for the role. Again all seems to go very well. And the following year the theatre group asks me to play Santa Claus Junior in another Christmas pageant. A year or two later there is a second high school play that needs a boy—and I expect to be asked. But instead my school sends the son of someone who has a senior position in the district school administration. I decide I must be no good at acting, and I never take part in a play again.

There is of course a class structure in Abbotsford, one more real than the one that my grandma imagines separates herself and my father. I don't have words for the concept but I know the concept. The doctors, the bank manager, the BC Electric manager, the teachers, business owners don't much socialize with people like my mother and father except on very special occasions when it would be rude to stay away. Maybe I've been lucky that none of them have had children in my classes. My father however would like to move up. He was "Chancellor Commander" my mother says, of a Knights of Pythias lodge in Vancouver and still owns the tux he had to wear there. It's the one in his wedding picture. He would like to join the Masons, but is starting by joining a newly founded "aerie" of

the Fraternal Order of Eagles. His line-gang foreman, Lyle Lobban, is the founder and first president. My father is vice-president.



The line gang's 1947 Christmas Eve party, my god-father Lyle Lobban under the '24,' my father seated fifth from the right, and visitors from the business office standing.

He has also become store-keeper for the line gang, keeping track of its cross arms, wire and insulators, and ordering what is needed. He now goes to work half an hour early to "do the stores" before working his regular hours as a ground man.

**December 1947 . . .**

Whatever thoughts I have about words and books and reading have come mostly from my parents, my grandma, my father's brother, Uncle Orrie, who has visited with Nana and Charlie at least twice more, and from Jimmy Webster who lives up the street. "Kindergarten" is a word that people know but have no need to use in Abbotsford. But my father in early 1945 did build me a small wooden table and chair, and framed and painted a sheet-metal blackboard so I could spend mornings with my grandma learning to print letters and numbers and short words. When the war ended, she got me a subscription to a British children's magazine, *Wee Wisdom*. Now she has replaced it with one called *Open Roads for Boys*. I haven't liked either of them—they seem written by adults who think children like me are lucky to have adults think about them. "Pity my simplicity." This week, however, badgered by my grandmother, from one of these magazines I memorize a Kiplingesque poem called "How to Succeed"—"Drive the nail aright, boys!" it begins—and recite it at the annual elementary school talent contest, a contest that I win by also playing on the piano "The Evening Star" from Wagner's opera *Tannhauser*. On the day of the talent contest I am in Grade 2 in a school with grades from 1 to 8. I don't have any special aspirations. Memorizing poems

and playing the piano from memory are now among various things I happen to be able to do like running or batting a ball while playing “scrub.” My classmates think I am unusual but don’t blame me for it. They think I can’t help it. I encourage this. I work a lot at making myself up for them. Or changing how my parents are making me up.

I walk to school, and back and forth as well to home for lunch, using a wooded path across the three rail tracks that interrupt Hazel Street, the road that would otherwise run directly from my house to the school. Often I have to scramble between parked box-cars, climbing onto and down from the couplings. It is safest to climb up rather than crawl under—and to remember to listen for whether there’s an engine attached. Jimmy Webster, the son of the owner of the village’s new Ford dealership, lives about a half-mile past my house, and climbs the couplings with me. Most days his dad is waiting for him just past the tracks in a bulbous ’48 Ford sedan, and gives me a ride up the hill. Jimmy is enviably precocious—full of exotic information that he regularly volunteers in class. From him I learn that there is a Roy Rogers and a Gene Autry and a horse named Trigger. He has been by car with his parents to Yellowstone and the Grand Canyon. Mine do not yet own a car. Worse, he owns a set of the *Book of Knowledge*, which he seems to pour through daily. That’s just an American book, my grandma says when I finally complain, and shortly after I am bought a set of the *Britannica*.

The Ford dealership will catch fire and burn one morning just after the astoundingly sleek 1949 models are released. Okay okay, I know I’m not supposed to know this yet, but I’ll forget if I don’t tell you right now. The dealership will be rebuilt but Jimmy’s dad will lose the business, he’ll be rumoured to have a drug addiction, he and his wife, a nurse at the village hospital, will separate, and around 1951 she and Jimmy move away to Greenwood, in the western Kootenays. The next I’ll hear of Greenwood is a decade later when George Bowering tells me he once lived there. I’ll forget to ask him about Jimmy.