

Chapter 1

The Killing Field



John Diefenbaker couldn't have known that his neighbour had only twenty-two more seconds to live.

His younger brother, Elmer, had finally stopped his nearly-endless chitchat about a quarter of a mile back. As they rode their horses along the well-worn prairie trail, John knew that this wouldn't necessarily last, so he enjoyed the silence while he could. A full moon shone across the endless Saskatchewan prairie, while green Northern Lights danced ablaze in the summer darkness. It was a night to remember.

Sixteen seconds.

The Diefenbaker family had run out of water unexpectedly after a small fire erupted in the kitchen. With their well not working properly, getting water meant going to the river a few miles away or bartering with a neighbour. The boys' father, William, sent them to the Petersen farm a mile and a half up the road. Old bachelor Petersen was always willing to trade his water for some of Mary Diefenbaker's home cooking.

John and Elmer had bundled up a supply of breads, butter, and a large tub of rabbit stew to trade for the water. They had tied it to Elmer's bronco, old Blue, for the journey to Karl's and now the same horse carried containers of water tied to saddlebags for the trip back home. John's horse didn't have a saddle, since the Diefenbakers could only afford one and John was a strong enough rider to ride bareback. Soon they would be past the Schneider farm and nearly home.

"John?"

"Yes, Elmer?" John knew the silence couldn't have lasted much longer.

"Remember that time we built the wooden wagon and tied Mother's parasol to the back, thinking we could fly it off the second floor of the barn, like the Wright brothers?"

Eleven seconds.

"Of course I do. Remember how we almost killed Tip by making him the pilot? It was foolish, Elmer. We almost killed our dog! I'm twelve and you're ten now. Anyway, that was two years ago. We were just kids."

Four seconds.

"Yes, but do you think it would have worked if the dog had been smaller?" Elmer asked, as if that had been the single flaw in the plan.

John sighed.

"Elmer, it never ..."

BANG! The sound of a gunshot shattered the stillness and was followed by a rasping scream. John's horse jerked up onto its hind legs and tossed him from its back like a rag doll. He still held onto the reins but hit the ground hard with a grunt. At the same time Elmer's horse bolted, aiming its nose toward home with Elmer gasping and holding on for dear life.

John looked up just in time to see a shadowy figure scurry into a dense grove of poplar trees far off in the distance behind the Schneider farm. The Northern Lights continued their dance as John achingly got up, his heart racing. He wanted to shout out toward his younger brother who appeared smaller and smaller as Blue carried him down the road at breakneck pace. But it was obvious that Elmer was long gone, thanks to the survival instincts of Blue. John only hoped that his brother was able to hold on until he got home—and that the water got there, too.

John, his heart still pounding, climbed back onto Skipper now that the horse had calmed down. He wasn't sure whether to head in the direction of the gunshot or his house. After pausing briefly, John decided to proceed toward the sound, convincing himself that Mr. Schneider had shot at a coyote, which was going after his chickens. But then why did he hear someone cry out? Wasn't it the sound of a man in pain? As his mind raced to make sense of what had just happened, he saw a figure on foot fleeing the tiny farm house and racing toward the

fence line. A woman's scream pierced his ears, which was followed by a sustained whimpering as John bolted toward the sounds.

"Oh my Lord! Hans! Hans!"

Mrs. Schneider was now in view as John rushed his horse to the scene. He found her cradling her husband in her arms, sobbing uncontrollably. There was blood on her hands and clothing as she hugged Hans Schneider close to her.

He wasn't moving.

"Mrs. Schneider...is Mr. Schneider...is he..." John began.

She looked up briefly and stared mournfully into John's eyes and then the sound of her cries carried across the prairie fields.

It was a night John would never, ever forget.

Chapter 2

The Rebellion



"About how far away were you from the place where Mr. Schneider was shot, son?"

John looked away from the Royal North West Mounted Police officer's eyes as he searched for the right measurement in his mind.

"I'd say we were about five hundred feet away, sir, Elmer and me," said John quietly. Elmer nodded affirmatively, though he was unsure of his brother's estimation skills.

In the background, John's mother, Mary, busied herself in the tiny, three-room homestead. She was making coffee for the two officers, who were clad in their trademark red uniforms. They had arrived early to piece together the events of the night before. John's father, William, sat near the officers. Elmer and John were both on the floor, cross legged. John's uncle, Ed

Diefenbaker, stood in the home's single doorway, his lean frame half in and half out. There just wasn't room in the cramped, tiny kitchen for so many people. Like many settlers in the area, the Diefenbakers earned enough to get by but not much more, and their home's size reflected this.

"And Gertrude Schneider tells us that you saw something," Sergeant English continued. He was the lead investigator, a man William and Ed had gotten to know somewhat, and he looked every bit his forty-five years. The heavy lines around his forehead suggested someone who had seen all sides of prairie life.

"She thinks maybe you got a look at who did this?"

John swallowed. Normally he was excited when officers from Borden, the closest town to the Diefenbaker homestead, stopped by to chat while on their patrols. But this was anything but normal. This was the day after their neighbour, Mr. Schneider, had been shot.

"It was dark, Sergeant. I didn't see anything except a shape running off. Everything happened so fast."

"What kind of shape?" Constable Wood joined in. At twenty-four, the constable was obviously the junior partner. He was tall and athletic looking, with short reddish hair.

"It was the shape of a man, sir," said John haltingly. "I fell off my horse when he reared up and as I sat up and looked in the direction of the gun shot, all I could see was a figure. It

looked like a man, but I couldn't tell you more than that."

John wished he could. He prided himself on his excellent memory and attention to detail. Even in school his Uncle Ed, who was also his teacher, marveled at John's ability to recall facts and dates, especially when he had to defend a point he was making.

"Wasn't there a full moon last night?" pressed Sergeant English in his deep voice. "And I remember seeing the Northern Lights fired up when I stood outside the station. Are you sure you couldn't make out anything else, with all that extra light?"

John felt like he was letting them down. "There were a lot of shadows, sir. Maybe he was tall, but I couldn't tell anything else. He moved pretty fast."

"Tall," repeated Sergeant English while he wrote it down in his notebook.

"Tall and moved fast." Then he looked over at his partner. "That could have been you out there, Constable Wood," he said with a wry look.

"Except for the fact that I was trying to get some sleep," said the young officer, who looked slightly irked at his partner's attempt at a joke.

Ignoring this, Sergeant English took his coffee from Mary with thanks, his large hands smothering the hot mug. Constable Wood did the same.

"Well, we know old Hans was outside working in the moon-

light," said Sergeant English. "That man wouldn't have known how to slow down if you paid him to. But what were you two young pups doing out that late anyway, if I might ask?"

John's father, who was a thin and hollow-cheeked man, very much like his brother Ed, cleared his throat.

"I sent them to fetch water from the Petersen farm. The well's been acting up again and we ran out after we had a small kitchen fire. I knew the boys could handle it. They're both good riders. Of course, who would have thought anything terrible like this was going on?" William asked.

Sensing his discomfort, Mary placed her hand on his shoulder. The sergeant nodded.

"I'm sure they're fine riders," he said, nodding to the boys, as John and Elmer sat up straighter. "It's not every day horses hear gun shots around here, let alone at night," Sergeant English added. "It's normal they'd get spooked."

"Tell me," said Sergeant English, continuing, "what do you know about River's Voice?"

William looked puzzled.

"He's a member of the Cree Indians, the band just west of here. We've known him for three years, ever since we've been in the Borden area. He stops in from time to time to do some trades and he usually leaves his daughter, Summer Storm, with us while he travels around. She's almost like a sister to the boys. I'd consider him a good friend."

"What does he like to trade?" asked Constable Wood.

"Usually rabbit and venison. In return he likes milk, eggs, and butter for his family," said William. "Always fair trades, if you ask me. We also throw in some apples from time to time, since my brother in Ontario, Duncan, often sends a few barrels of them," he said, gesturing to the corner of the cramped homestead where they stood.

"Apparently you aren't the only one he tries to trade with," said Constable Wood.

"Oh?" said William.

"He's also paid a couple of visits to your neighbour, Hans, in the past."

William shifted uncomfortably. "Well, like I said, he makes his rounds. It makes sense. There are quite a few farms around here that might be interested in what he has. It's not always easy for farmers to get meat, especially when most of us are working dairy cows."

John and Elmer glanced at each other, wondering what the sergeant was getting at.

"Well, Hans Schneider wasn't interested. Apparently they were having words," said Constable Wood.

William stared at the officers.

"Surely you don't think River's Voice had anything..." began William.

"We're not thinking anything at all at this point," Sergeant

English interrupted. "In fact, everyone knows Hans Schneider had words with pretty much everybody. He was a heavy drinker. Easy to set him off. It seemed to be the nature of the man to make enemies, that's for sure."

He smoothed his thick, sandy moustache.

"You know, this area has been pretty quiet around here in the last few years and that's the way we like it. We've thrown a couple of whisky smugglers out of town before, and rumour has it there's another one or two pushing his luck. Like I said, it's no secret Hans himself wasn't above hoarding a few bottles."

Mary shook her head. "Land sakes," she muttered under her breath. If there was one thing Mary Diefenbaker didn't appreciate, it was alcohol.

"So, other than a couple of suspected whisky smugglers in the area," Sergeant English went on, "it's been pretty quiet. Of course, it wasn't that long ago when we used to hear gun shots all the time. And we don't want those times to return."

"What gun shots? What times?" Elmer piped up.

His father looked irritated. "He means the rebellion. And I hope you remember at least some of this, considering we covered it last year."

William was Elmer's teacher, although school was out for the summer. John went to school in a different district with his Uncle Ed each day. With two teachers in the family, there was

always a heavy expectation on learning.

Ed was nodding in agreement. "Both of you should have at least some idea what the sergeant is talking about."

"We know about the rebellion," said John, taking care to defend his brother, too. "It was in 1885."

The sergeant nodded and looked thoughtful. "That's right. And this being 1908, I guess I was... what?... about twenty-two or twenty-three years old? Pretty much the same age as Constable Wood over here," he said, nodding to his younger partner. "And I was one of about five hundred men sent to Battleford, once things began. We had already lost three good officers. We didn't want to lose any more."

"You were in the rebellion?" asked John excitedly.

"Tell us more!" said Elmer eagerly.

"Elmer Diefenbaker!" said his mother, embarrassed by his request.

"It's fine, it's fine," said Sergeant English, who was as close to smiling as ever today. "Kids love to hear a good story and this one's as true as the day is long. It's one thing to learn about it in school and another to hear about it from someone who was really there."

He took a sip of his coffee before he continued.

"Well, you know how it all started. This area was all part of the Northwest Territories just three years ago, not Saskatchewan as it is now. The Métis leader, Louis Riel and his military

general, Gabriel Dumont, led a revolt against the federal government for all kinds of reasons."

John had studied a great deal about the challenges of the Indians and Métis, who were half Indian and half European, mostly French. They weren't treated fairly by the federal government. Their land was handed out to settlers from the east. Worse, commercial hunters hunted their main source of food, the buffalo, almost to extinction. The federal government's response was to encourage the Indians and Métis to switch to farming. But the change was too hard and they were still living near starvation.

The Northwest Rebellion happened because the Indians and Métis grew more desperate. Riel and Dumont had a list of demands that they wanted answered for their people.

Ed spoke up to prod John's memory.

"You'll recall Riel tried to form alliances with the Cree Indians and even the white settlers," said Ed. "Many of the settlers were ticked off that the railroad was built so far south from where they were living. He brought anyone on board who would help him take on the federal government."

Sergeant English nodded his agreement.

"My uncle says Gabriel Dumont was one of the best fighters in the West," said John. "We've met him, you know."

Ed gave an awkward smile.

"Is that so?" said Sergeant English, raising an eyebrow

dramatically. "I think your uncle's right. Mr. Dumont was indeed an exceptional soldier for the Métis. I thought I had heard he visited you from time to time, back when you lived in Carlton."

There was a slight accusatory tone in the sergeant's voice.

William bristled. "Yes, and the Royal North West Mounted Police would visit us too. We've always opened our doors to everyone," said William defensively. "You know that."

"Yes. Too bad Dumont was on the wrong side of the law," the sergeant said.

There was a tense silence before the sergeant continued.

"Like I said, there were about five hundred of us and we marched up from Swift Current to Battleford to try and stop the raids. First we got the news from Duck Lake that nine civilians and three officers had been killed in March by Dumont and Indian rebels. Then we got word Chief Poundmaker had a bunch of his men on the move, ready to attack.

"But Chief Poundmaker just wanted to talk, didn't he?" pressed John. "He even sent a message ahead of him to say so. His tribe was hungry and they were angry that the government wasn't helping them, like they had promised," said John, always ready to defend the underdog.

John's mother looked like she was about to say something, but the sergeant caught her eye as if to say "Let it go."

"I can't say things were perfect for the Indians," replied Ser-

geant English, "but everyone was struggling. Most everyone's still struggling." He paused, as if attempting to figure out how to best tell his story.

"You see, some of the Indians had begun to break into farm houses. They carted away supplies from the general stores, killed cattle and took folks' horses. Now I have to admit, the Cree pretty much returned to their reservation. They had left Battleford before our force arrived. But some of them weren't innocent and they continued to loot the towns. A few days later, we marched west up the Battle River in pursuit of the Cree, near their own camp."

"The battle of Cut Knife Hill," said William quietly.

"Exactly. I have to admit, they counter-attacked fairly well. We were ordered out of there."

John squirmed in his seat and looked at his father, who seemed to read his son's mind.

"And Chief Poundmaker gave the order not to give chase to the officers," William added calmly. "Isn't that right, Sergeant?"

The sergeant looked annoyed, while John felt proud that his father had spoken up. From what John had understood Chief Poundmaker had never wanted to fight.

"Anyway," said Sergeant English. "Poundmaker's dead now. So is Dumont. Or at least I thought he was."

Ed scrunched his forehead. "Dumont is dead. He died two years ago. Everyone knows that."

Sergeant English frowned and nodded. "I know it. But there's a new problem, and it's one that's bringing back a lot of bad memories for me. There's someone new in town, a young man who apparently just stepped off the train two weeks ago from Winnipeg. He's been stirring up the Métis and some of the Indian tribes. Even some of the settlers around Borden. He's got a powerful way with words and he's already starting to gain a following.

"What does that have to do with Gabriel Dumont?" asked William.

"He's André Dumont, Gabriel Dumont's nephew," the sergeant revealed. "And I've got a feeling he wants to finish off what his uncle started."

Chapter 3

The Rawleigh's Man



There was nothing but moon and stars, layered by a blanket of darkness. A man paced back and forth beside a small tent.

"He's dead? What do you mean he's dead?" the man asked in anger and disbelief.

Another man, sitting on a large rock, looked sullen.

"He surprised me. I didn't expect him there, out in the fields like that. It just kind of... went off," the sitting man answered. "When he already saw me, I didn't want to let him see my face."

The man stopped his pacing for a moment and thought, listening for any noises above the sound of crickets. He removed his hat and ran his fingers through his hair, something he always did during times of high stress.

"So you shot him. Now are there children in this family left behind? Will there be any children left alone because of what you've done?"

The man on the rock shook his head. "No, he was old, remember? And they didn't have kids. What's gotten into you?"

The other man hesitated, and drew a deep breath. "You were there for one simple reason," he stated, stopping to stare at the man who sat still on a large rock. "And now everything has gotten out of control."

"I didn't mean to. Look, what's wrong with you?" the man on the rock demanded.

The standing man glared. "I have an important path, one I should have taken long ago. Now tell me, did you at least finish what you started to do?"

The man on the rock nodded.

"Good."

And with that the standing man swung his leg over his horse and looked down. He was about to say something else but instead simply nodded and rode down the trail, leaving the other man to brood under the waning moon.

William stood after milking the family's two cows and stretched his stiff back. He walked to the barn doorway with Tip, the black and white family dog. Morning had just started to break across the Saskatchewan sky and it was a time of day he rarely missed seeing.

It felt good to be healthy, William decided, which only someone who had been terribly ill could understand. After

serious bouts of tuberculosis in Ontario, a doctor recommended the dry air of the prairies to calm his respiratory problems down. Once he got to Saskatchewan, all those breathing problems had gone away. He was a different man here.

John, who was piling wood in preparation for winter, now three months away, and Elmer, who was feeding the chickens, both stopped to watch the morning unfold, too. Soft daylight began to flood across the prairie, turning light bronze wheat fields into blankets of golden crimson. In a few weeks, the swaying wheat would be harvested. Selling the crop would make the months of hard work pay off—at least, if they could get a good price.

"Elmer Diefenbaker!" Mary was standing in the doorway. She had obviously been admiring the sunrise, too, but was also watching the way Elmer—his face turned up to the sky—was absent-mindedly pouring chicken grain all over his feet.

"If you can't watch what you're doing, I can find another job for you. And I can guarantee that it won't be as pleasant as this one," she warned sternly, implying that an extra turn cleaning out the cow paddocks was on Elmer's horizon if he wasn't careful.

"Sorry, Mother," Elmer replied, doing his best to spread the small mountain of chicken grain more evenly around the yard. The chickens swarmed around him, their heads jerking forward and back.

"And when you're done with that," she called out again, "you can help your brother stack wood. If we work on it a little bit each day we might just survive the winter."

Mary Diefenbaker liked to make everything a high stakes game. Life was all about surviving and it certainly wasn't a game of chance or a game for fools. Life was about being prepared and it was as simple as that.

William, on the other hand, had a bit of the dreamer in him. It was the other part of the reason that had led them to board the train west to Saskatchewan in the first place, aside from drier air for his lungs. This was far from the civilized roads and tall buildings of Ontario and into the empty nothingness the Canadian government liked to call 'The Last Best West.' It was where idealists, like William, believed small paradises might be found. Mind you, because of the terrible conditions of the train ride, half way there he wanted to turn around and go back.

But Mary wouldn't hear of it. You don't start something and then not finish it, no matter how hard things get.

People like William Diefenbaker had the courage to go west. People like Mary Diefenbaker had the courage to stay. Somewhere in between, couples like this completed each other across the empty stretches of land and made the West what it was—a dream that could only unfold one field at a time.

As Ed returned from the north field, where he had just finished mending a hole in the fence, John saw him disappear into

his tiny one-room house built on an adjoining quarter section of land south of his brother's. Uncle Ed had his own place but everyone generally ate supper together. It was at his uncle's house where John slept, too, since the three-room homestead was so cramped with the rest of the family. In fact, Elmer had to sleep in the kitchen each night. Although there was no doubt that the Diefenbakers were poor, they worked the two quarter sections of land as a team and survived by sticking together.

William joined his boys at the woodpile, taking in the work that had so far been done. The high puff of dark hair on his head moved up and down as he walked. John noticed his father looked like he was lost in thought.

"Do you remember when we first found this land?" William asked them.

"Hard to believe," he continued, "that it was three years ago. At one point, all we had was a stake in the ground. Section Eight, Township 418. That's what was printed on it, remember? That's all we had. And now look what we've done," he declared proudly, his hand sweeping across the sprawling landscape.

John scratched his thick, wavy black hair and looked at the small thatched-roof barn where a handful of pigs snuffled the ground outside. The chicken coop, where Elmer had busied himself earlier, was alive with the sounds of clucking and grain-eating hens. He saw their own modest house, which was the centre of their lives, especially in winter. And then there

was the land itself. The fields, once torn as the rich dark earth was overturned, were now bursting with wheat that would soon be ready to harvest. John knew his father was hoping for fairer wheat prices this year from the big grain companies. The family worked so hard for the money they earned.

All across the Canadian prairies, the stories of homesteaders were stories of the countries of the world. For instance, although the Diefenbakers were originally German, they had been in Canada for a while. But the Schneiders next door only arrived from Germany six years ago. Other homesteaders in the province arrived from Norway, Sweden, the Ukraine, Russia, Poland, England, France, and Italy. And some were from other Canadian provinces and the United States where both white and black settlers had moved to take advantage of free land from the government.

"We've done a lot of work, Father," John had to admit. "We're lucky, aren't we?"

"We sure are," his father agreed quietly, and then he immediately looked wistful.

"You know, I don't know if I said this to you boys earlier, what with everything going on, but I'm real happy you're both safe. John, that was a lot for you to see...a lot for you to deal with. But Mrs. Schneider was sure thankful you were there with Skipper."

John nodded. He was glad that he and Elmer had taught

themselves to ride bareback. Their father had never gotten the hang of it and their mother was never interested. John and Elmer were both lean, which the horses probably appreciated, although John was a bit stockier than his younger brother. John's dark, tight wavy hair contrasted with Elmer's brown, straight hair.

John had to admit the image of Hans Schneider just lying there, dead, was not something he could shake from his mind. He stacked four logs of wood neatly onto the pile as his mind raced backward to the events after he had found Gertrude Schneider cradling her dying husband in her arms. John had stayed only an extra moment and then rode Skipper as hard and fast as he could back home to let his father, mother, and uncle know, as Mrs. Schneider had asked. William left Mary with a loaded shotgun, and then ran to be with Gertrude. Mary barricaded the only door to the homestead with the wooden hutch just in case the shooter came to the Diefenbaker farm. Meanwhile, Uncle Ed quickly hitched up the horse team and travelled straight to the police station to report the tragedy.

Now two days later, it was time to bury Hans Schneider on his farm, in a hole that neighbours, including William, had earlier helped dig. Gertrude Schneider was now a widow, with no children to help her.

"Who do you think did it, Father?" asked John. "Who would do such a thing to Mr. Schneider?"

William shook his head and watched the sun inch higher in its daily pact with the sky.

"I don't know, son. If I knew, I would have told Sergeant English yesterday. It doesn't make any sense to me," he added.

"But you don't think it was Summer's father, right?" John pressed.

"Of course not. That doesn't make any sense either," his father answered quickly, reaching over to straighten a corner of the wood pile.

John was happy to hear that his father still believed in the innocence of River's Voice. It was a special day whenever he visited and brought Summer with him, who was eleven, just a year younger than John. It felt like they had grown up together, even though it had only been about three years. Summer would often help John do his chores. This provided an endless source of fascination for her, seeing what was involved in feeding pigs, cows, and chickens. Although her family had done some farming on the reservation where she lived, it had not been very successful. Instead, her father did a great deal of trapping in neighbouring woods in order to provide for them.

"What do you think River's Voice and Mr. Schneider were arguing about, Father?" asked John.

"That's not for us to worry about, John. It's not our concern."

John wanted to say maybe it was because Mr. Schneider just didn't like Indians, but he kept his mouth quiet. But the fact was

John had overheard things. Like, when Mr. Schneider was complaining about other people to Uncle Ed or his father, especially about the Plains Cree Indians who lived in the area. He noticed his father would deflect any comments and just try to stick with topics that they could agree on. On the other hand, Mr. Schneider had been such a good neighbour to the Diefenbakers—helping them with the farm, being there if they needed anything. To John, it was strange that Mr. Schneider, an immigrant himself from Germany, had not been more tolerant of peoples' differences.

William took another glance at the work his boys were doing and then began to walk back to the house.

"You boys finish your chores and then go get cleaned up. The service is at eleven this morning."

The short journey to the Schneider house was a silent affair in the Diefenbaker Schooner. That's how everyone referred to their carriage. William and Ed's brother Henry, a mechanic now living in Waukegan, Illinois, had modified their wagon by adding a canvas roof and two coal heaters inside. Then he had installed stovepipes rising several inches above the roof of the wagons. Winters were especially dangerous on the prairies. After John and his Uncle Ed nearly froze to death in a blizzard

last winter, the family didn't want to take any chances.

Of course, it's not as if the heaters needed to be on right now.

William and Mary, dressed in their only church clothes, were already starting to break out into a sweat as the hot morning sun, so strong in August, beat down. It was only ten o'clock and the temperature was already eighty degrees Fahrenheit. They all stared straight ahead, lost in the circumstances that had brought them to their neighbour's home.

"There's a storm brewing," Mary stated, breaking the silence. Pointing to the western horizon she added, "It'll hit tomorrow."

"That works out well. I'm going into Borden today to get supplies," William commented.

Although William couldn't see anything himself, he trusted his wife's instincts. She had always been the best weather vane he had ever laid eyes on.

In the back of the covered wagon, Ed was quiet, staring off at the wisps of clouds scattered about the sky. John and Elmer relived the evening of two nights ago in their minds, although Elmer's memory was of an awfully fast horse ride. Blue sure could go when the spirit moved him. John's mind kept flashing to the shadowy outline that had scurried into the forest and to poor Mr. Schneider, still as can be, in the arms of his distraught wife. He wondered if he should have given chase to the mysterious figure.

"No one deserved what happened to Hans Schneider,"

thought John. "It's just not fair."

As the Diefenbaker wagon pulled up onto the long Schneider laneway, John fixed his intense, dark eyes on those who had already arrived. He saw about twelve people standing near Mrs. Schneider and recognized mostly everyone, including Pastor Mackenzie, who would be conducting the service. The boys frowned as they noticed the rectangular hole in the ground a few yards away with a mound of dirt beside it. John held his breath momentarily as he looked for signs of the body. He was certain that it must be in the wooden box under the large tarp he could see sitting on wooden slats.

As the Diefenbakers got out of the carriage and began solemnly shaking hands with the others, John noticed that many pairs of eyes were fixated on him. He felt self-conscious but tried not to show it, staying in step with his parents and uncle who were making the rounds of saying hello to everyone. He could feel a trickle of sweat beading up on his scalp.

Elmer nudged him. "Everyone's staring at you, John," he whispered. "You're famous."

John hit him back, in the way brothers do. "I am not famous, Elmer. They're just curious about what happened," he countered, feeling very awkward.

A few of the conversations seemed to be focused on Hans Schneider's love of "the bottle," as most of them called it. John knew that this meant whisky and alcohol in general. He didn't

know why some adults drank alcohol, but his mother believed that it was a serious sin.

When another wagon, very different from the others, turned off the main trail and onto the lane that led to the farm house, it drew everyone's gaze. The boys felt their stomachs flip in excitement. *Mr. Wright!*

The carriage, drawn by two large quarter horses, was spacious and canary yellow. It had fancy black and gold script writing on both sides of the wagon, which read:

Earl T. Wright

The Rawleigh's Man

Quality Products

Kitchen needs, spices, medicines and miscellaneous

"I didn't know Earl would be here today," murmured someone, smiling.

"But it makes sense," voiced another. "Gertrude likely bought half the man's liniment stock, as much as old Hans used to complain about his back."

Earl T. Wright was probably the most welcome man in the Saskatoon-Borden-Battleford corridor. It wasn't that he was well known—he had only been on the job for a few months. But the Rawleigh name carried a great deal of weight when it came to getting quality products delivered right to your door.

As the area salesman for the respected company, Earl Wright was treated like an old friend, almost everywhere he went. A Rawleigh's man was a peddler who had anything one needed—salves for colds and cuts, spices for cooking from exotic places like China and the West Indies, and even beauty creams for those rich city women who had time and money for such luxuries. Not to mention, he was the best source of news one could ask for, since he travelled so much.

He had moved up from Montana a short time ago, carving out a new life for himself on the Canadian prairies where there was less competition and more elbow room. Almost everyone who came into contact with Earl walked away believing that he had just put their needs ahead of his own. But there were a few folks who didn't like him because he would never take anything in trade, just money.

As he stepped off the carriage, his prominent silver hair glinted from below his black formal hat. He had an equally-silver moustache. It twitched slightly as he surveyed the people in front of him with the perfect mix of concern and seriousness.

His deep-set blue eyes, although grim as the occasion called for, still contained his trademark twinkle.

John and Elmer started to run toward him. The slightly crushing hands on their shoulders belonging to their father and mother reminded them to slow their pace to a more dignified brisk walk.

"Mr. Wright! We didn't know you would be here," called John, with Elmer right on his heels. John and Elmer would often keep the Rawleigh's man in conversation for as long as the salesman would let them, or, more likely, until their mother told them to quit talking his ear off.

Mr. Wright smiled warmly as the boys approached.

"It's good to see you boys. I wish it were under different circumstances. That's what we always say at funerals, isn't it?"

"We don't know," responded Elmer truthfully. "We've never been to one before."

Earl patted Elmer and John on their shoulders understandingly as he made the rounds greeting the other adults. When one woman suggested making a purchase from him, he admitted that he didn't really feel comfortable engaging in sales before Hans Schneider was even buried.

"Let's meet after he's buried," he whispered. Neither the living nor the dead prevented Earl T. Wright from making a sale, and today would be no different.

After he conveyed his condolences to Gertrude, Earl walked over to where the Diefenbakers were standing and greeted William, Mary, and Ed. He liked the Diefenbakers for many reasons. More than once, Mary Diefenbaker had ordered some of Earl's home remedies for the cuts and bruises that unavoidably happen during farm life. They weren't his highest paying customers, but they were good ones. After all, times were tough

for travelling salesmen, too. Earl always appreciated how the Diefenbakers exercised hospitality during his travels in their vicinity. The fact that William and Ed were both school teachers was appealing for Earl, too. It gave him a chance to talk about politics and the general state of the world with people who shared those interests.

"I heard how your boys got mixed up in all of this," said Earl to William and Mary. "I was sure glad to hear that they were alright. I don't know what's happening to this place anymore," he added, shaking his head. "I like the Schneiders. Like them a lot."

John and Elmer strained to hear the conversations from the grown-ups.

"The boys were fortunate, that's for sure," agreed William. "We all were, except for Hans."

After a somber silence, William continued. "They'll catch him, you know. They always do."

Earl nodded. "You bet they will. Probably some drifter, looking for a few dollars or something to steal."

"Nothing was stolen though, from what we've heard," countered Ed.

"Maybe he didn't get the chance," Earl suggested. "With old Hans out there working at night, well, who would have expected that?"

William looked slightly surprised. "How did you know he

was outside working?"

Earl brushed the comment aside. "Oh, heard from someone in Borden. You know how these things get around."

William nodded. "Doesn't take long, does it? Say, Earl, do you happen to know anything about Gabriel Dumont's nephew being in town? Sergeant English was telling us about him. I never heard of him before."

Earl leaned toward the adults, lowering his voice. John and Elmer leaned slightly, too, although they tried not to be obvious about it.

"I've seen him. And I don't like this fellow one bit," Earl admitted. "He's much too smooth, too charming, if you ask me. You get the feeling that he'd sell his mother if the price was right."

The Diefenbakers couldn't help but chuckle at Earl's description of the man. John wondered if Earl had any idea that people might think the same thing about Earl himself.

"What's he up to?" asked Ed. "Is he looking to farm?"

Earl snorted. "Farm! That boy knows as much about farming as I do. Together we wouldn't know a plough from a cow, I can tell you that much."

Everyone laughed quietly.

"No, he's just an agitator," Earl concluded.

"In what way?" asked Mary.

"He's trying to stir things up, like the old days here, from

what the locals tell me. I saw him in Borden a few days ago. He's maybe all of twenty-four or twenty-five years old, standing on the back of a wagon like he was something. He was talking to five or six Métis men about how terrible the Canadian government is to them. They seemed to agree with Dumont's reasoning, standing there in awe, nodding their heads in agreement like trained dogs."

"Well, I have to say Earl, I wish the government would do more for the Métis and the Indians," said William. "The West has been flooded in the last ten years with homesteaders just like us from all over the world and it's changed everything for the Indians and Métis."

"True enough, and right you are. But putting the anger in people like this, getting them all fired up, well, that's just asking for trouble," Earl reasoned.

William thought about this for a moment. "Sounds to me like he may be related to Dumont but he talks more like Louis Riel," he said, "organizing his people and others across the West to stand up to the federal government and demand their rights."

"Could be a dangerous combination," stated Ed.

John and Elmer looked at each other and didn't say anything.

The boys tried to picture a man who was a blood relative of the military commander Gabriel Dumont yet who had the magnetic personality of Louis Riel whom they had read about. Dumont had evaded capture by fleeing to the United States

once the 1885 Northwest Rebellion had been crushed by the Royal North West Mounted Police. He returned only when the government offered him amnesty, which means he was pardoned for leading the rebellion. Then, he led a quiet life until he died of heart failure at age sixty-nine. But Louis Riel didn't have that kind of luck. He was hanged in the same year of the rebellion for treason.

"My dear friends, I invite you to gather round," Pastor Mackenzie announced from beside the hole in the ground. He first talked quietly with the six men who had agreed to help lower Hans Schneider's body into the grave, to make sure that they were ready when the time came for their participation.

As people were taking their places, a red-eyed Gertrude Schneider thanked the Diefenbakers for coming in her thick, German accent. She had not learned a great deal of English while she had been in Canada, mainly because she was isolated on the sprawling, prairie farm. Not to mention, she wasn't a highly social person and this had made it difficult for Gertrude to learn the language.

"Hans always enjoyed you as neighbours," Gertrude shared with the Diefenbaker family. "And thank you, Earl," she added to the salesman, as he removed his hat and once again wore his extremely serious look.

"I should tell you the police came by this morning," she continued in an almost whisper. "They are going to make an arrest,

you know. This news, you may not like it, but it's the truth," Gertrude uttered cryptically.

"Who are they going to arrest?" asked William.

Gertrude was just about to reply when the pastor began the funeral service.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you for joining me here today on this sad occasion, to honour the passing of Hans Schneider,"

Pastor Mackenzie spoke in the same type of voice John was used to hearing in church.

"I can speak to you after," whispered Gertrude, quickly moving to her place beside the pastor. She wiped both sides of her face with her hands, bracing herself for the grief that would wash over her at any moment.

John and Elmer, who had overheard, wondered about this news. The police sure had done their job quickly.

"Please join me in the singing of *All in Jesus*," invited the pastor.

The group began singing as one somber voice, the notes hanging in the brilliant cloudless blue sky. As John's eyes glazed over, he imagined that he could see a moving shape in the open fields on the horizon. The eyes sometimes play tricks on the open prairies, even during the day. However, as the seconds went by, John realized that the shape really was growing. He bumped Elmer who nodded, having also noticed the dark-coloured dot increasing in size. John soon realized it was a

human figure on horseback coming towards them. Given the angle and where they were standing, no one else could see or at least seemed to notice the movement in the fields.

John focused in and soon figured out it was the shape of someone young on the horse—a girl. Her long braided hair bounced up and down on the shoulders of her deerskin jacket as she rode toward them. John realized it had to be Summer Storm!