



June 21, 1924  
Biddeford, Maine

## 1. *In Which Our Fortunes Change*

ASIDE FROM THE priest and the gravediggers, me and my sister, Jo, are the only ones to witness our dear mother, Eva Morin Michaud, being lowered into her grave. Papa having perished in a mill accident some years previously, the hard, hard loss of our mama makes us orphans.

When I begin to cuss the lung ailment that so cruelly took her from us, Jo hushes me.

“Wait until the priest is out of earshot,” she says, hugging me tight. “Then I shall join you, and we’ll cuss like pirates. We’ll turn the air blue, Davy, I promise.”

I won’t put down what we said, exactly, for fear it’ll set this page on fire. First, I cussed the illness, then I cussed the cotton dust that gave her the illness, then I cussed the mill foreman for not letting our mother’s many friends attend her burial, it being a workday. I vowed that he

should fall through the floor of a stinking outhouse, and be buried up to his neck until his odor improved, if ever it did. Then Jo took to cussing the run of bad luck that has got the best of us, and may end with me in a home for little wanderers, which I dread more than anything.

We cuss like sailors, but no, we do not take our Lord's name in vain. Mama, who never missed Mass, would not approve of such a thing. When, finally, we run out of steam, Jo has tears in her eyes and I'm blubbering like a baby.

"Don't worry, little brother," Jo says. "I have a plan. I will quit school and apply for Mama's job, or one like it."

"You'll do no such thing! You must go on to teachers' college, like you always wanted. It's me who'll quit school. The nuns would have me sent to what they call a boarding school for boys, but that's just another name for a Sisters of Mercy orphanage. No way! I'll take a factory job instead. They'll have me as a mill monkey, on account of my size."

Mill monkeys are what some call the children who work in and around the belts and spinners that power the great looms. It is dangerous work, and Jo does not approve of any child laboring, let alone me. Her face gets stony and her tears dry up. She's about to point a finger in my face and tell me off when at that very moment a horn honks twice, as if to get our attention.

A grand, gleaming red automobile makes a turn onto the graveyard road. It's a Cadillac V-63, which I've been mooning over in the advertisements. The beautiful machine comes to a stop not ten feet from us, and out leaps an athletic young woman dressed in formal black, carrying flowers.

"Oh dear! Have I missed it?"

We've never met, but I recognize her from the newspapers and magazines. Those high cheekbones and wide-apart eyes. It is Ruthie Reynard, our mother's famous cousin. Record-setting aviatrix, and star of her very own flying circus.

"Come here, children," Ruthie says, striding to the grave. "We have much to discuss."

I gulp and reach for my sister's hand.