

Chapter One **Night Dreams**

What's the difference between snow peas and green peas?" Abby Finlay put the question to her Aunt Jo O'Neil, as they sat shelling peas on the porch of the Finlay's Saint Louis mansion. A large kitchen bowl, lodged precariously between her legs, was already half full of peas.

"What'd you say?" Abby's startled aunt leaned forward in her rocker.

Abby leaned forward, too, and picked at the paint, peeling from the base of the nearest porch column. "What's the difference between green peas and black-eyed peas?" Abby's dry, monotonous tone never varied. She pulled tight the silk scarf that kept her ponytail in place.

"Child, where is this coming from?"

"What's the difference between black-eyed peas and chick peas?" Abby purposely withheld all energy from her words and leaned over the bowl of peas to roll up the bottom of her denim jeans. "Do you think rolled up jeans are cool?"

"Abigail Finlay, what's wrong with you?"

"I'm bored. Bored to death." Her hands slowly sifted through the peas piled in her bowl, and her eyes wandered to the front walk. "Wait—who's that?"

"That? Where?"

"There!"

The two of them had been sitting on the porch for hours, shucking corn and shelling peas. Neither had noticed the uniformed, young man who stepped out of a black sedan just outside the gate and was fast approaching along the serpentine brick walk.

"Special Delivery! Anyone here named ...uh, Abigail Finlay?"

2 || Roland McElroy

“Yes! Right here!” The peas that had been in Abby’s lap spilled all over the porch as she jumped up and leap frogged down the steps, two at a time, hands outstretched to accept the Special Delivery missive.

“Sign here. I have to have a signature,” he said, straightening his tie.

Abby grabbed his pen and dashed off her name.

Who could have sent this? Who . . . ? She felt the blood drain from her face as her eyes caught the postmark for the first time. “Aunt Jo, it’s from Robert!” Her voice was suddenly very much alive.

“Now Abby, don’t do this.” Jo shook a long, thin finger at Abby.

“No, no, look, it *is* from Robert.”

Jo stood with hands on both hips. “Abby, it’s been ten years since Robert was killed at Normandy; don’t be foolish.”

“It’s a letter, not a body, Aunt Jo. I always knew he’d return to me. I suspect Robert is not far behind his letter.”

“And all I see is a woman who won’t move on with her life.” Jo’s tone was deadly serious as she glared at Abby.

Abby sighed. She’d seen it before. “Not again, Aunt Jo, not again.” Abby couldn’t tell the many nay-sayers why she remained faithful to her Lt. Robert O’Donnell. She vowed to hold that announcement until he came home.

For the first few months after the war ended, she sat on the front porch of the family home, waiting for some word from Robert. When none came, she watched for the man himself to appear. She convinced herself it was just a matter of time. She would be patient. But when the months became a year, she reluctantly accepted her father’s persistent invitation to assist in his medical practice. “Just for a short time,” he had said. “You can be my apprentice.”

Abby had agreed, certain that her wait would end soon. But the years rolled by and neither letter nor man appeared—until this day.

“Look—in the upper corner of the envelope—I can still make out the three dots he put there,” Abby said. “Those three dots always mean ‘I love you’ and—don’t you see?”

“I see them,” Jo said, “and . . . and what’s that brown stain?”

“I don’t know.” Abby rubbed the stain with her finger.

“Looks like dried blood to me,” the courier said.

“You’ve done your duty, young man.” Jo jumped in and waved the man off. “Haven’t you any more letters to deliver today?”

The courier tipped his hat and made a quick about face. The two women ignored him as he pulled the gate shut, with a loud screech of its rusty hinges.

Abby tore into the letter like a five-year-old opening gifts at a birthday party. Water stains made the words barely legible to Abby’s eyes. Her tears didn’t help. She wiped them away frequently and whispered over and over, “Robert, Robert, my dear Robert.”

Suddenly, she stopped. “Aunt Jo, listen to this.” Slowly, to absorb every word, Abby began to read.

*“Dearest One,
I love you so much it hurts. Your love is all I feel this day. It is the reason I draw my next breath. Your love gives me strength for each day and soon will carry me back to your arms again. Please keep the enclosed piece of paper for me. I’ll see you soon...and explain. It’s a clue that’s supposed to lead us to a cache of gold hidden by Beaver Island’s King Strang before he died in 1856. You remember those old stories, don’t you? I always thought they were crazy, but another soldier – he said he is a descendant of ole Strang – gave it to me. It may be a hoax, but then again, maybe it’ll help start our new life together, that is, if the gold is hidden as I’ve been told. I must go, but believe me when I say, I love you now more than when I started this letter a few minutes ago. Remember, “I’ll be seeing you in all the old familiar places,” especially those familiar places around the Pine Lake Club. Look for me there soon.*

4 || Roland McElroy

*One more thing: on the other side is a speech General Eisenhower delivered. You might want to share it with your folks.
Robert ...”*

As Abby folded the letter, a yellowed piece of paper fell to the ground.

“What’s this?” Jo bent over to retrieve the scrap of paper. “The clue?”

“It must be,” Abby said. “The clue to King Strang’s hiding place.”

Jo opened the yellowed paper and began reading.

*“Day follows night, Old Pine, thy gate to open wide,
The Kingdom awaits all when the rocks begin to slide.
Whoso shall publish peace, to him it shall be seen,
Our lives pass away quickly, as unto us a dream.”*

She scanned the note again before giving it a dismissive wave with the back of her hand. “Gibberish,” Jo said, and gave the note to Abby. “Just who was this direct Strang descendant, I’d like to know. That gold was never more than a rumor. No one ever proved that old goat buried any gold before he was murdered. Anyway, all that took place a century ago. A tall tale, if you ask me, like the ones your brother used to tell about the fish he caught.” She spread her hands as far apart as she could stretch.

“Robert is nobody’s fool,” Abby said. “If he is convinced the gold exists, it does! Imagine what we could do with that treasure.”

“Abby, James Strang was nothing more than a delusional egomaniac.” She flicked her fingers into the air as if removing an imaginary pest.

Abby sniffed. “I don’t care; I’m taking the Resort Special to Michigan—to Charlevoix.”

“What? Now?” Jo stared at Abby in disbelief. “Abby, what do you *really* expect to find there?” Her voice was heavy with desperation. “If Robert was alive, if he was coming home to you, wouldn’t he come here, to your home in Saint Louis? Why do you think you’ll find him in Charlevoix, at the Pine Lake Club?”

Abby became very quiet as she recalled the glorious days she enjoyed with Robert on the grounds of the Pine Lake Club. And there was that one afternoon under the pines, an afternoon of “precious, unadulterated joy,” Robert had said.

“If Robert is struggling to find me this many years since the war ended, there must be a reason, and I know he’ll find his way to Charlevoix and the Pine Lake Club.” There was a note of sadness in her voice.

“But Abby—” Jo grabbed her niece by the shoulders, and turned her around until they were face to face.

Abby knew that look and wanted none of it. “Aunt Jo, I can’t sit here on this porch shelling peas the rest of my life. You said yourself, I should move on.” Abby lowered her voice as she turned toward the gate. “I should have made the trip long before now. Robert and I were never happier than when we were together on our...our...Park Island.”

“Abby, your brother is not there, remember? He had to sell the cottage to pay debts your father left behind, and he told you he would never return to Pine Lake. If you go, you’ll be alone.”

“Not if Robert meets me there.”

“But what if he isn’t there? What will you do?”

“Robert is always with me. He’s never left me alone.” She turned to Jo in time to see her eyes close and her mouth open. “Don’t try to stop me, dear auntie. And, if he’s not there, maybe someone will have heard from him. I don’t know why I didn’t think of that. Besides, Pine Lake is the only place I *haven’t* looked for him.”

Jo pursed her lips and shook her head.

6 || Roland McElroy

“Don’t look at me that way. I’m not a child anymore.” With that, Abby raced into the house in search of her purse. She wanted to make sure she had enough money for a train ticket to Charlevoix. A moment later, the door opened, and Abby bolted for the gate, her ponytail swinging wildly.

“To Union Station,” a jubilant Abby shouted over her shoulder, “for a ticket to Charlevoix.” She held her fist high in the air as if it already held her ticket.

“Wait! Abby, I think you should slow down and—”
But Abby had made up her mind.

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At Union Station, the agent told her the resort train had been reduced to a single weekly run and wouldn’t depart for another three days. “I’ve waited ten years; I can wait three more days,” she told the agent, as she grabbed her ticket and put it in her purse. She thought the inconvenience only minor, considering whom she expected to find at Pine Lake Depot.

But the wait turned out to be the longest three days of her life.

“Christmas comes faster,” she told her aunt, as she began packing her steamer trunk with an end-of-season wardrobe. “Late August, early September, I might need everything from a light wind breaker, for sailing days, to a heavy wool coat for chilly nights.” She twirled around the room and stopped in front of her armoire, with eyelashes bouncing up and down. “Of course, Robert will expect me to have a bikini for the beach, and an evening gown for a night at the Club’s casino.” She threw a bikini toward Jo, who caught it in mid-air.

“Scandalous thing,” Jo said. “Where is your mother—your father, too? That damn ice storm—took ‘em both that night. You wouldn’t be doing this if they were—”

“Now, don’t try that guilt thing, auntie. It won’t work. Not this time.”

Jo threw the bikini back to Abby, who grabbed it in mid-air and winked.

Three days later, Abby sat at her upstairs bedroom window, overnight valise in her lap, hoping to be the first to spot the taxi coming down the street. “There he is!” Abby shouted to Aunt Jo. “Why is he driving so slowly?” Valise in hand, Abby ran from the room and bounded down the stairs just in time to hear the door’s first chime.

Jo grabbed the handrail and followed. While the driver struggled with Abby’s trunk, Jo put her arms around her niece and whispered, “Be careful. I don’t have a good feeling about this. Be very careful.”

“Don’t be silly.” Abby pulled the door tight behind her. A second later, the door opened again, just a crack, and Abby’s face peeked around it. “I *will* be careful, auntie, I promise.”

And she was off.

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A tall gentleman, in a black fedora and light brown trench coat, got out of a Victory cab and made his way toward the ear crushing noise emanating from Union Station’s Great Hall.

“What *is* that?” He cupped a hand around his ear. “God save the Queen! It’s an assault on the sensibilities of all good men.” A facial tic caused his left eye to twitch at the sound.

A band of street musicians were gathered directly ahead of him, and as he approached, they launched into their version of one of 1954’s biggest summer hits.

*“I believe to my soul you’re the devil, and now I know
Well, the more I work, the faster my money goes...”*

8 || Roland McElroy

The gentleman hurried by, ignoring the baseball caps the musicians had spread before them to collect change from passers-by. He stopped just long enough to hail a porter.

*“I said shake, rattle and roll, shake, rattle, and roll
Well, you won’t do right to save your doggone soul...”*

“Quit listening to that doolally music, my dear man. Grab my grip, and follow me.” One of the porters picked up his “grip” and followed as closely as his short legs would permit. The British accent caused the other porters to roll their eyes and nod to each other. When the porter reached for his leather briefcase, the gentleman pulled it close, shoved it under his arm, and gave it a firm pat. “I’ll keep this one with me.”

“All Abo-o-o-a-r-d!” The conductor’s voice cut through the cacophony of sound in the hall.

Three giant strides more, and the gentleman leapt aboard the *Spirit of St. Louis* bound for Chicago, followed by the porter who quickly handed him his “grip.” In exchange, the passenger placed a fifty cent piece in the porter’s palm.

“A Walkin’ Miss Liberty!” The porter didn’t get a fifty cent piece every day. “Thank you, Mister, uh . . . ?”

“You don’t need to know, dear chap.” With that, the gentleman turned on his heels.

Two blasts from the engine’s whistle rattled every window in the Pullman. The gentleman stopped, set his “grip” on the floor of the Pullman’s vestibule, and leaned out to watch others boarding. He searched every face, looking for just one. “She’ll make it,” he said. “The reward on the other end is too compelling.” Both eyes twitched as he waited. A few moments later, he caught a glimpse of a young lady with long, golden tresses. “Ah, yes, and lovely she is,” he said, as she came more clearly into view. “Just like her photograph. Miss Abigail Finlay.”

Abby glanced down the line of rail cars just in time to see a black fedora disappear onto the train. *Don't see many of those around here.*

“Board!” The conductor’s booming voice echoed to the end of the platform. The clock at the end of the platform showed three o’clock exactly.

“Sounds like he means business,” Abby said to the approaching porter. “It won’t leave for another two minutes but the way that locomotive is hissing and clanking, you’d think it was already moving.”

A crack in the wooden platform caught Abby’s left heel and held it. One step more and she left the satin pump behind and tottered forward, trying not to fall. She grabbed the porter’s shoulder, steadied herself, and squeezed her toes back into the shoe.

“Is this yours, Miss?” The porter picked up the ticket Abby dropped when the platform caught her shoe. “I found it right here.”

Abby looked at her hand as though it had betrayed her. “Yes, that’s mine! What would I have done? Thank you.”

The porter flipped it over and checked her reservation. “Miss Finlay, you’ll be in roomette sixteen.” He placed the step stool next to the Pullman entrance and offered Abby his hand. She missed the stool entirely on her first attempt to step up to the Pullman. “Slow down, miss, this old train won’t leave without you,” the porter said. “I don’t know who’s waiting for you on the other end, but he’ll wait—if he has any sense at all.”

Abby smiled and wondered if her excitement was that obvious. *But why shouldn't I be excited?* She was on her way to her family’s summer retreat—the place where she met the love of her life, Lt. Robert O’Donnell. Along came the war, and Robert left with the others, promising to return soon and pick up their lives. His letters came regularly until the Allied assault at Normandy. After that day, there were no more letters.

“God’s ways are not our ways,” her father told her.

10 || Roland McElroy

“If that was supposed to make me feel better, it didn’t work,” she remembered telling him. Abby switched her overnight valise to her left hand and began searching for roomette sixteen. From the corner of her eye, she spied the approaching conductor who had just pulled out his watch.

“Last call! *Spirit of St. Louis* to Chicago. Last call! ’Bo-aard!”

He squeezed by her, and she continued searching. Thin strips of light leaked from around the doors of occupied roomettes. “These grand old cars now look quite a bit the worse for wear,” she said. “Time has taken its toll.” She smiled as she thought of the many times she made this journey with her mother—and why. *I got motion sickness when we came by car. The train was more civilized, anyway.*

A second porter in a starched, white jacket appeared and reached for her valise. “Excuse me, Miss Finlay, but your berth is ready.” He motioned for her to follow.

“Thank you, but I’ve decided to go to the parlor car to read awhile. Take my valise, if you will, to my roomette, and come for me in about half an hour.”

“Yes ma’am,” the porter said, nodding.

“And, oh yes, please ask someone to bring me a cup of hot tea with lemon. I do need to unwind a bit.”

The porter nodded again and disappeared down the aisle.

As soon as she settled in the first vacant chair, out came Robert’s letter for the umpteenth time in the last three days. Every word reminded her of a time when they were making plans for their future. *But that was before that June night in ‘44.* She remembered Ed Murrow’s radio report from London as if it were yesterday. She squeezed her eyes shut, the better to recall Murrow’s exact words.

“I’m standing on a rooftop looking out over London. At the moment, everything is quiet. For reasons of national, as well as personal security, I am unable to tell you the exact location from which I am speaking . . .”

Abby leaned toward the loudspeaker to hear more clearly the voice of the famous war correspondent, but Murrow's voice faded into the ether, replaced by loud, popping static.

Her father jumped up and pinched the aerial, with a thumb and index finger, to improve reception.

“ . . . [b]ut the guns are so far away that it is impossible to hear them from this location. About five minutes ago, the guns in the immediate vicinity were not working.”

Again, the signal faded away. Abby sat frozen, staring at the loudspeaker, but she heard nothing but static. “What guns? Where? Father, can't you do something?”

When her father shook his head, Abby ran from the room.

She pulled out Robert's letters and read them all—again. This was her habit when she could not sleep because holding his letters kept her close to him. Finally, she crawled into bed, pulled up the covers, and prayed sleep would come quickly. But it never did.

Abby was never told the exact whereabouts of her fiancé. She knew only that his Missouri National Guard unit was in England, training for the day when the allies would make their assault on the European continent.

Finally, after tossing in bed a few hours, Abby tiptoed into the living room and once again turned on the radio.

“Leo Diamond and His Harmonaires” were entertaining, when suddenly, the music stopped.

“We interrupt our program to bring you a special broadcast. The German News Agency, Transocean, said today on a broadcast, that the allied invasion had begun. I repeat.

12 || Roland McElroy

The German News Agency, Transocean, said today in a broadcast the allied invasion had begun. There was no immediate allied confirmation.”

In the blackness of the early morning hours, Allied forces had already made the brief sail from Weymouth, England to Normandy, France.

My heart aches. I feel physically sick.

Trembling fingers reached for the knob on the radio and turned it counterclockwise until it clicked off. She climbed back into her bed where exhaustion finally saved her, at least for the remainder of that night.

The house was dark.

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A sudden bump on the rails and the jostle of a teacup brought Abby back to the parlor car. She folded Robert’s letter as a waiter arrived with the tea she had ordered. “Just place it on the table, please.” She squeezed a few drops of fresh lemon juice into the tea, and as she sipped, she pondered again the hand written verse Robert had included with his letter.

*“Day follows night, Old Pine, thy gate to open wide,
The Kingdom awaits all when the rocks begin to slide.
Whoso shall publish peace, to him it shall be seen,
Our lives pass away quickly, as unto us a dream.”*

Abby shut her eyes and had another one of her imaginary conversations with Robert. Such conversations, she found, always brought her a measure of comfort. At times, she thought she even heard his voice. *Oh, Robert, I want to help, but I don’t even know what it means. I spent a whole day in the Saint Louis Public Library reading everything its archives held on James Jesse Strang. The buried gold is*

mentioned as a rumor in virtually every book or newspaper account of his years on Beaver. She was quiet for a few minutes, then whispered aloud, "I'll be there soon, dear Robert, very soon."

The porter tapped her on the shoulder. "Excuse me, Miss Abby, it's been more than half an hour, far more."

"I'll be right there." As she held Robert's clue, she examined both sides again. *Where has it been all these years?* Slowly, she folded the clue and returned it to the worn, brown envelope. She examined both sides, then waved it at the porter. "Where has it been all these years?" He didn't answer, but she didn't expect one. She followed the porter to roomette sixteen, closed the door, and began unbuttoning her blouse. Undressing in such cramped quarters, however, proved to be a challenge. *There used to be more room in here.* She smiled, twisted her torso, and with some effort, unzipped her corselette. *You almost have to be a contortionist to make this work.*

A few minutes later, she was snuggled under the Pullman's salmon-colored, wool blanket. The back and forth, constant swaying of the old Pullman, soon lulled her to sleep—a fitful sleep.

In the restlessness that followed, she relived a dream she had dreamt nearly every night for the past decade. *I'll never forget that Sunday, that summer.*

**

"Come on Abby, we're going to Park Island."

"Be right there!" Abby picked up her swimsuit and grabbed a towel. "Mother, don't hold dinner!"

"Dinner will be at seven." The edge in Frances Finlay's voice said, "Seven p.m. sharp."

"Sure, sure." Abby was out the door.

With Abby sitting in the bow of his little canoe, Robert was soon paddling the shallow waters of Old River, up the little

channel behind Park Island, and away from any prying eyes on the Pine Lake shore.

“C’mon,” Abby said. “Hurry!”

“I’m paddling as fast as I can.”

Under the pines of Park Island, their first kiss had set off a chemical reaction that produced all the ingredients for cementing their relationship. “It was magical,” Abby had told her mother, “and wonderful.”

But I didn’t tell her that Robert has the best hands. With only a touch, he brings every nerve ending in my body to attention, and I don’t want him to stop—ever.

Abby knew she couldn’t go “all the way,” as the other kids referred to the act of having sex. She always called a halt before things got completely out of hand.

“I’m a virgin, Robert.”

“So am I.”

“We’re Presbyterians for heaven’s sakes, what would John Calvin say?”

“Quite a bit, I suspect.” Robert smiled. “In my family, sex before marriage is strictly taboo.”

“My mother wants us to wait until you come home.” Abby gently traced her finger along his chin, a bit rough with whiskers, and smiled. “I don’t want to wait, but she does, and I guess that’s that.”

“But that’s too long.” Robert looked straight up. “God can be witness to our love, to our promises to each other.” Pulling Abby close to him, he whispered, “Can you think of a better witness?”

Abby shook her head. “I . . . guess not.”

“No, of course not.” Robert spun around 360 degrees. With arms outstretched, he asked, “Have you ever seen a more natural cathedral?”

Abby blushed. Robert grabbed her hands and pulled her to him once more. “We’re surrounded by gorgeous white

birches, a wedding gift from Mother Nature herself for the commitment we're about to make, and she took the time to arrange the birches against a backdrop of the tallest pines you've ever seen. And here—look at the bridal bier—a bed of pink and white wild flowers. They probably have a name.”

“Lady’s Slipper, silly.”

“Oh, of course. And the music, we need some music. There’s no orchestra, so I’ll try to sing something, uh, accompanied by the breeze in these pines. There’s only one song appropriate for this occasion. Are you ready?”

Abby shook her head. “No, but I don’t dare stop you. This should be good.”

Robert cleared his throat and began to sing his version of a tune they’d heard many times on the radio.

*“I’ll be seeing you,
In all the old familiar places—”*

Then, he forgot the words. After a moment of hesitation, he picked up the tune, inserting lyrics he made up as he went along, forcing a squeeze into each line.

*“In Schroeder’s café,
Park Isle across the way,
In maple trees,
A summer’s breeze,
The rustic bridge,
The terrace ridge.”*

Abby laughed. “I don’t think it goes that way.”

“Wait, I’m not through.”

*“At Pine Lake Beach,
My lovely peach,
Come what may,
I’ll always think of you that way,
And I’ll be seeing you—every day.”*

And with that, they melted into each other’s arms for the rest of the afternoon.

“Oh, how I wish I could make the earth stand still for one more day,” Abby finally managed to say, as the sun fell behind the trees.

“As do I, my love, as do I,” Robert whispered in her ear.

Long shadows covered the little island before their bodies finally separated. Robert pulled Abby to her feet. “But we have to go. Didn’t you tell me your mother expected you at seven for dinner?”

“Oh, my gosh!” Abby grabbed her blouse and slipped into her penny loafers. “Our parents are already suspicious. We’ve gotta’ go!”

Another surprise awaited them, as they reached the beach and began removing branches that hid Robert’s canoe.

“Who’s that?” Robert pointed to a large group of children walking along the beach. One adult chaperone was trying, unsuccessfully, to keep them together.

“Pine Lake brats! Probably looking for wild things—deer, muskrat. You know, plenty here.” Abby looked about her nervously, hoping no one else was there.

“Do you think they spied two love birds?” Robert winked. “The pines aren’t thick enough to hide everything. God may not have been our only witness.” He gave his canoe a push into the water.

“I hope not, but if they did, they likely just giggled and ran away to tell their chaperone.” Abby jumped aboard, trying to keep her feet dry, but in her hurry, failing.

A beaver slapped his tail against the water as their little canoe pulled out onto Old River.

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Without warning, the Pullman lurched to one side, took two sudden jerks forward, and another backward.

“Screeech! Schliipissssh! Plang! Plang!”

Sounds of steel scraping steel, coupling and uncoupling—Abby knew the sounds well. The Pullman was being pushed along a siding by a switcher locomotive. *Unwillingly, I’d say.* She covered her ears. *They’re moving the Pullman cars to the C&O Resort Special for the final leg.* Abby dropped her hands and cocked her head to one side. *Did I hear someone?* The next moment, the Pullman stopped with a sudden burst of steam.

“Robert, is that you?” She was surprised to hear a noise that sounded like a voice. “Are you there?” She heard only the sound of her own breathing. “Robert, I have something to say, something I haven’t shared with you but should’ve long ago.” Abby took a deep breath. “Ten years ago . . .” She swallowed hard, but couldn’t hold back the tears. “No, no I can’t; it’s just too awful. I’m sorry, but I can’t speak the words. I want to tell you. I do, but I’m ashamed to speak the words—and afraid you won’t understand—and worse, afraid you won’t speak to me again.” In the stillness, with the Pullman now parked on the siding, she pulled the blanket over her head and held it tight, as she retreated from the pain of her private thoughts.

Finally, the Pullman began moving again, jerking and swinging back and forth as it picked up speed.

After a long while, she peeked through the window curtains and tried to identify images on the passing landscape. The blackness of the night hid the monotonous sameness of the row houses, lit here and there by naked bulbs on front stoops, little flecks of light not much brighter

18 || Roland McElroy

than fireflies. Soon, the row houses gave way to endless miles of barbed wire fencing, guarding field after field of late summer corn.

“Please come home,” she whispered to the night. “I am so alone . . . so alone.”

The regular rhythm of the Pullman registered the passing of each rail, and soon brought her back to the present. She loved railroad tracks; they always kept their promise. Railroad tracks didn’t go tearing off through the woods for no reason at all. And they certainly didn’t run off to war, never to return. “We were so happy,” she whispered.

Abby turned out the light and pulled the blanket up tight. Around the edges of her window curtains, she caught the occasional snap of lightning in the distance and could hear the rumble of thunder that accompanied each strike. *Sleep will be difficult tonight.*

In the roomette next to hers, the gentleman with the brown trench coat prepared for what he hoped would be a good night’s sleep. He had watched Abby’s every move since boarding, from parlor car to Pullman berth. He made certain she did not change her mind and disembark before the train pulled out of Saint Louis. As he closed the doors to his own roomette, he noticed Abby’s light already out. “The bait has been taken,” he said aloud. “Now, James Strang, King of Beaver Island, you, sir, will help me reel it in slowly.”