

# **CHRYSALIS**

A Tribal Tale

**By Gary R. Moor**

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Printed in the United States of America  
First Edition

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ISBN: 000-0-000-00000-0  
Lulu ID: 8544747

Book design and cover art by Gary R. Moor

Portland OR 97211  
7 8 9 0

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# CHAPTER ONE

## How We Ended up Out There

### 1

#### The Mystery of Transporting Books and Family into Eternity

July 16, 1969, 120 air miles SW of Norman Wells,  
Northwest Territories, Canada

*They stalked a herd of elk down a river valley. The river covered the sound of their movements. Faint but distinct, the odor of a calf trailing its mother arose from the rocks and sand. It urged them forward. They sensed rain, adding urgency to the hunt before it washed away their prey's spore.*

*Having the most sensitive ears, the father wolf caught the airplane's noise first. He froze in fear as did the other four wolves, survivors of a winter helicopter and machine gun murder spree. His mate remained at the den with their sole remaining pup. A cousin, his sister and brother with their grown daughter waited, strung out in a rough line as the noise got louder. They had escaped death that winter by not running in panic.*

*The two-engine, red and white aircraft flew along the valley's center, appearing small at its altitude. It passed from sight around a bend. The wolves pressed on, hearing the engine noise fade into the roaring of the river. Their sensitive noses caught the faint pungency of aircraft exhaust carried on the wind.*

"You don't know where we are, do you?" Rhea Aubrey said over the engine noise and air rushing over the aircraft's fuselage.

"Now she talks," said her husband, Stewart. "Course I know where we are. Between Whitehorse and Norman Wells, over the Selwyn Mountains."

"I know that Stew. But you don't know where we *are*, though."

Her grip tightened on the huge black leather purse on her lap and she said, "Dammit you know what I mean."

Trapped beneath her purse, the brightly colored flight chart crinkled, as she glared at Stewart.

A tall, slender man, he had thick brown hair curling around his shoulders, it was twice as long as Rhea's blond, bobbed haircut. His bold aquiline nose, firm chin and cold green eyes contrasted with Rhea's small nose, round face and dark brown eyes.

Out the window on her husband's side she watched the rugged green bulk of mountain flanks moving past. An overcast of rain-swollen gray capped the peaks. She leaned forward to see the ceiling of solid gray pressing down on them. Evaporating as they hit, spots of rain dotted the windshield's Plexiglas.

Ahead, the river valley misted out of view. Stewart's reference to the ground shortened to directly below.

He pulled back the throttles, quieting the two 260 horsepower Continentals. The blurred disk of the propellers shifted.

"You're not going lower?" said Rhea.

"Yes dear. I'm not IFR rated. You know that. Got no oxygen. Can't go up through and can't go over."

Rhea shoved the purse off her lap, sliding it down her legs to rest at her feet. She glared at the chart.

"Lookit, our course doesn't even show a river valley, not to fly down, we're supposed to cross at an angle," she said.

"It's okay, *dear*, I know what I'm doing. All the rivers here flow into the Mackenzie. Rivers flow downhill. Ground's getting lower. Can't miss."

She lowered her head, concentrating on the chart.

With a frown she said quietly, "You asked me to navigate, but you won't let me navigate."

He glanced at her as he lifted a small metal flask from the left side of his seat. Releasing the control yoke, he unscrewed the cap. After another glance to make sure she wasn't looking, he took a quick hit.

Rhea noticed the movement.

She closed her eyes and shook her head as Stewart hid the flask again.

"No, no, **no!**" said Rhea.

With practiced nonchalance, Stewart put his left hand on the control yoke, right hand on the throttle levers. He pushed the right throttle up a little, concentrating a moment on the engine gauges.

"You've been drinking the whole way," she said quietly.

"Three hours with you. Only way," he said.

Rhea leaned forward, grabbed her purse and with a grunt dug it up on her lap, crushing the chart against her belly. She curled a little, drawing the purse tightly against her.

She said more quietly, "God help you...kill us all."

She looked over her left shoulder at her sleeping son, Spencer, strapped to the left rear seat in a red custom-made, five-point harness. The three-year old's head lolled against a harness strap. With his thick brown hair and similar facial structure he could have been his dad's toddler-twin. She watched him a few

seconds, her expression blank. Daisy, Stewart's Australian Shepherd, lay curled on the right seat next to Spencer. Something had awakened her. Her tail remained curled around her. Her and Rhea's gazes met.

The two seats behind the front seats were removed to make space for several boxes of books. Each box had a brightly colored cover taped to the top: *The Guide to Wilderness Survival, by Stewart Gordon Aubrey*. One box had an invoice made out to the Arcadia Bookstore and Fishing Emporium in Norman Wells, Northwest Territories, Canada. Another had an invoice made out to the Fort Providence General Store, also Northwest Territories, Canada. The cargo compartment at the rear was half-full of camping gear tied under a net and topped with a rifle in a heavy leather bag. The smell of canvas, freshly printed paper and the odor of a new aircraft's upholstery filled the cockpit.

With a huff of annoyance Rhea faced forward. Ground detail had become sharper, moving faster. The white caps of rapids had resolved on the river's surface. Ahead the view of the river valley opened for miles—grayish green, brown; with blue fading in the distance. Far ahead a wall of mist and rain obscured the left half. Under the overcast the valley had become a broad, flat tunnel.

Rhea noticed the view slowly tipping upward.

"Jesus God, Stew! Are you going to level off?"

Stewart failed to hide his startled expression. He pushed the throttles up. The aircraft leveled off only a couple hundred feet above the river's surface. He reset the throttles to a higher power setting and adjusted each of the two trim wheels beneath the throttle quadrant. He checked his instruments, then stared straight ahead.

He cleared his throat and grimaced.

Abruptly he pulled a little t-handle on the control yoke arm. The Beech Baron B55 had one control yoke which a pilot could move to either side. He swung the yoke over to his wife, locked it in place, brushed the hair off his face, then folded his arms.

"That's it, dammit, you fly the fucking thing," he said.

Rhea's arms tightened around her purse. The chart crinkled. She pulled tighter and tighter, her eyes shut.

The plane flew on, engines droning with a little rising and falling harmonic thrum.

With a sigh, she released her purse, pulled the t-handle and swung the control yoke over to Stewart. He ignored it.

Rhea said, "You are such a child."

Slowly, Stewart turned to his wife and nodded his head dramatically saying, "You bet, I'd rather be a child, having adventures than a stuck-up old bitch like you."

He slurred his s's.

He cringed at her sudden expression of pain and anger. Hunching down he faced forward.

Rhea said slowly, "I'm twenty four years old married to a twenty five year old child."

He sat rigidly staring out the windscreen, his arms remaining tightly folded across his chest.

Rhea gestured at the boxes of books and said, "You really think this is going to work, don't you? You really think your going to get rich writing survival books."

She gestured around the plane, glancing at the camping gear in the back, and said, "We'll be lucky to pay for the rental. We can't afford a motel. If Bob hadn't loaned you that money...damn him, damn him for believing in you who hasn't finished a thing in his life. You'll change your mind and just go do something else and never pay a dime back to Bob. You said you wanted to be an astronaut when we got married. You didn't even get in the military, so you changed your mind. Now here we are in a rented plane we can't afford—*lost* I might add—flying books to your buddy's stores who won't sell any because you won't market them...you won't do anything. I know what's going to happen. It's just going to keep happening, over and over and over and we're not going to get anywhere. If I didn't work, we'd be out in the street. If I hadn't paid for the car, we'd be walking."

"My car," Stewart murmured.

"No! No, Stewart. I have the title. I paid for it. I take care of it. You didn't do anything. You just drove it off the lot—that's all you did. You just drove it off the lot. You said you'd pay for it, but you didn't"

The purse creaked in her grip.

With head bowed she said, "We still owe money for your flight training and you still haven't got your instrument rating, you still haven't even got your commercial. You can't earn any of it back...how much did it cost to print those books?"

Rhea glared at her husband. He hunched down more, eyes unfocused.

"How much?"

Stewart no longer moved. He held his breath.

"How much," she said, her voice barely rising above the aircraft's noise.

"Seven," he said, his voice barely rising above the aircraft's noise.

"Seven what?"

He said nothing.

"Seven...oh my god, not hundred, is it? Not seven hundred, but seven thousand. Seven *thousand* dollars?"

A nearly imperceptible nod.

Rhea no longer moved. She held her breath.

A sound came from behind. Stewart twisted around in his seat. He grinned. His son had awakened and smiled at him with his bright green eyes. Daisy un-



curled and wagged her tail. Stewart reached back with his right hand, Spencer lifted his right foot, stretching it forward. They could not reach each other. Spencer giggled. Daisy leaned forward to sniff Stewart's hand.

"Hey kiddo," said Stewart.

"Dad," said Spencer.

Stewart laughed. Spencer's grin broadened and he kicked his feet up and down.

With an angry glance at his wife Stewart took the controls again, correcting a developing bank to the right.

Rhea twisted around in her seat. Spencer grinned at her. The dog stared at her. Her expression did not change. She faced forward. Spencer frowned, then focused on his father and continued kicking his feet up and down.

"Hey Spence," said Stewart.

"Dad," said Spencer.

Stewart chuckled, then said, "Apollo eleven launched today, you know. Going to the moon. Neil Armstrong's gonna walk on the moon. 'member?"

Spencer bobbed his head in time with his feet, smiling enthusiastically as if listening to some inner music.

Stewart said, "Yeah. Four days, we'll be home. Your daddy's gonna be a self-published author selling books all over Canada and Alaska. Hey, Bob'll let us watch the moon landing on the air base TV. Like that, kiddo?"

Spencer moved with more enthusiasm.

Stewart said, "*You'll* make it in the military—sure to. Fly jets like John Glen, or Gordo Cooper. Dad'll be proud."

In a loud dramatic voice Stewart said, "I believe that this nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the Moon and returning...dammit."

Rhea bestirred herself from glaring at the control panel. Rain had obscured the end of the valley, blocking their way.

Stewart made a shallow left bank toward the wall of mountains rolling past.

He said, "Now see...that rain squall is moving east across the valley. I can see an opening to the west. See it?"

Rhea shook her head.

Stewart looked left, then right. He tilted his head thoughtfully.

He said, "Don't think we'll make the turn back."

He rubbed his eyes and took a deep breath. The plane rolled into a steeper bank. He abruptly over-corrected to the right.

"Regretting the drinking, huh?" said Rhea.

"Shut up. I've gotta concentrate."

"*Now* you concentrate."

"Shut up."

She said, "That story you told me about the tanker crew out of Kirtland. They were dead when they took off."

"Shut up."

Rigid, Spencer looked from one parent to the other. Daisy slunk off the seat and forced herself behind the book boxes, hiding most of her body under the seat. She rested her head atop a box, eyes moving nervously.

Rhea said, "Coming out of Albuquerque they couldn't turn in the valley, 'cause they were too heavy and had to fly into the hills to the north."

"Shut up."

The wall of rain rapidly approached.

Stewart pulled back the throttles, he trimmed out the elevators, then lowered some flaps, trimmed again and pushed in more power. Sweat beaded his forehead.

"They all died," said Rhea

"Shut up."

"We died when you dropped into this valley."

Stewart said nothing. He concentrated fiercely on his flight instruments as the outside world vanished into gray. Rain made vertical upward streaks on the Plexiglas. Rhea caught glimpses to their left of tree-studded ground tilting upward. Stewart noticed too and made a careful bank to the right.

"Stewart," said Rhea.

"Dad," said Spencer, his voice shaking.

Rhea said, "Leave daddy alone, he's got to concentrate, honey."

Stewart glared at her a split second.

Rhea said, her face alight, "For God's sake Stew, climb. Why don't you just climb? Climb now!"

He said under his breath, "Oh shit, yeah, yeah. What am I thinking?"

He flipped up the flaps switch and the plane settled before he put in more throttle. He pulled on the yoke and the plane slowed before beginning to climb. An alarm buzzer sounded intermittently.

Stewart made a quick twist around to look at his son, saying, "Sorry kiddo."

At the terror on Spencer's face Stewart spun around and screamed, "Momma!"

Rhea muttered, "Shit."

Tree trunks and limbs rushed at them the instant before impact.

## Mom's Quantum of Solace

July 16, 1969, 125 air miles SW of Norman Wells  
Northwest Territories, Canada

The Baron's cabin finally stopped sliding and tumbling as it bumped against a small tree trunk on Rhea's side. Stunned and silent, her throat felt raw from screaming. At first she heard nothing. She smelled the sweet, biting odor of aviation fuel, aluminum and something else that made her stomach give a little twist. The book boxes had bent her seat forward. The purse, jammed against the dash, pinned her with her arms across her chest. She had a brief second of gratitude at insisting they strap the book boxes down as solidly as they had, despite Stewart's reassurances to the contrary. For the first time in her life she hadn't even argued with him.

She turned to Stewart. Her neck hurt. Her head ached, the pain coming to a point on her right temple.

Bent over, partially facing her, Stewart gazed at her with one remaining eye.

She tried to say his name, but nothing came out.

She freed her arms. The massive purse slipped to her lap. Stewart's hand had come to rest on her thigh. Some blood stained the sleeve of his gray checkered shirt. That's when she noticed something wrong with Stewart's jaw.

Rhea touched her husband's arm. His head moved, making a quiet sound she did not like.

A distant thought came, *Betcha anything it was the propeller blade.*

She glanced at the windshield. Something long and narrow had gone through it from the inside. Cold rain water fell on the dash, dripping on her purse and soaking her jeans.

A sound from the rear of the cabin reminded her of Spencer, then of the dog.

"Momma?" came a barely audible voice.

Galvanized, she heard in a rush the rain pattering the cabin's aluminum roof and the windshield, the dripping on her purse, the clicking of cooling metal. She slammed her shoulder against the door as her hands scrabbled to release her seat belt. The tree jammed the door. Her head bounced off the side window, making the spot on her temple hurt more. Now she had a raging headache.

She hit the door three more times, unable to get the seat belt to release. In the middle of the fourth cycle, this time with her pulling on the belt release in concert with a slackening of the belt, the buckle popped open. But the purse

still had her trapped. Silently enraged, she pushed and twisted, sliding up the seat until her head hit the roof. The world had become red, particularly to her right. She jammed the purse up over the dash and against the windshield. Forcing her legs up against her chest she got her feet against the purse and growling, pushed with all her strength. The Plexiglas cracked, then popped. Rhea pushed harder, squeezing part of the purse through the enlarged hole in the windshield. The huge black leather purse finally stuck there. The boxes behind her seat had given way a little. Now she had room.

Still curled she jackknifed between the seats, heedless of Stewart. She felt his blood on her arm as she squeezed past. Something had changed about him, but she couldn't think about that. Caught in the claustrophobic space behind the seats and above the boxes she got her head twisted so she could see Spencer. His harness hung empty in the seat.

She noticed the small cargo hatch broken open. Through it she saw a patch of wet, green and muddy ground. The dog had gone.

"Daddy?"

She pulled herself around to face forward. There was Spencer curled on his father's blood-soaked lap.

*Clever little thing*, she thought disjointedly, *escaped while momma was busy*.

Spencer appeared unhurt. He looked up at his dad's face, one hand raised tentatively. His fingertips brushed his dad's chin as if he could put it into place. Rhea thrust her head between the seats and grabbed Spencer's boot.

He kicked her hand with his free foot.

Then she noticed Stewart's hand resting on Spencer's side, his fingers moving gently. She had thought Stewart was dead. She twisted so she could see her husband's face. The propeller blade fragment had neatly removed his left eye, severed the side of his jaw and left it hanging awry with his tongue lolling out. Blood dripped steadily from the tip. Some teeth remained on the right side. Matted strings of his long hair clung to the ruined skin of his face.

Finally she heard his breathing. She'd heard it all along, but couldn't bring herself to register it. He made a slow, laborious sucking gurgle. Each exhale formed pink bubbles around the undamaged corner of his mouth. His chest barely moved.

Pushing herself farther forward to get a better grip on Spencer, she saw a thin stream of blood pump against the left side of the cockpit. The propeller fragment had also severed most of Stewart's left arm and punctured the side of his chest where another froth of pink gathered around the torn cloth of his shirt.

Rhea's world reddened more. The useless man she had married wasn't even beautiful anymore. She yanked Spencer's legs into her chest. He screamed. Her forehead touched Stewart's. For a split second her eye stared into his. Nothing there in that green, glassy eye. It blinked. Her left elbow came up in a vicious

arc and hit Stewart in the side of the head. He made a sharp hiss, blood flew from his ruined mouth. His head bounced into the broken side window and stuck.

Rhea gathered Spencer to her with no regard to his struggling and pulled him into the rear of the plane. She wrestled him toward the broken cargo hatch, both screaming now, Spencer slapping and punching. In seconds she shoved him outside onto the wet, torn and muddy ground. More screaming and she got herself to the hatch and thrust her head out. The cold air outside came as a shock and a relief. She sucked in a deep breath, smelling the mud, tree sap, aviation fuel, hot metal.

Her rage gathering more and more, she pushed with her legs forcing herself out the small opening. She felt sharp metal tear at her shoulder, caught, cloth ripped, she twisted free. Arms outside she pushed against the cold metal of the plane. Growling deep in her throat, she slid out, kicking at the plane. Spencer scrambled out of her way as she got to her feet.

Her breath coming in rapid-fire, ragged sobs, she stood over her son as he lay in the mud at her feet. The rain wetted them.

She looked downslope along the torn path of the plane. Both engines and fragments of wing lay nearby. Partially buried in the mud and broken tree boughs, the battered masses of the Continentals clicked and steamed. The fuselage had slipped between trees, shearing off the wings and engines, absorbing the crash impact. She knew it had saved her and Spencer. She did not think Stewart had managed it. Sheer accident.

Then she gathered in the rain-hazed vista stretching out before her. It opened out over the river and lengthwise along the valley to the solid gray of mountain peaks far in the distance. There the sun still shown through broken clouds. Nothing moved in that vastness.

Fear coupled with her rage. A smooth, grapefruit-shaped rock lay near Spencer's head. She studied it a moment, interested that it nearly matched the sized of her son's skull.

With an abruptness that had him roll away in fear, she squatted and dug the rock out of the mud. Hefting it briefly, she glanced at Spencer. He scooted backwards up against a tree trunk. She whirled on the wrecked plane and stepped to the side window where Stewart's head lay pressed against the broken Plexiglas. A shard had stabbed into the flesh above his ear. No blood flowed from the wound.

Rhea paused, holding the rock in both hands near her belly. Her breath still came in heaving sobs, making her shoulders move up and down. The rock pulled at the front of her shirt.

She felt certain Stewart had finally died.

Glaring at her husband she rasped, the pace of her speech accelerating as she spoke, "You fucking bastard...you never ever for once in your fucking

life'd listen to me! You killed us. You left us here to die. You god damned, cocksucking, sonufabitching motherfucker!"

The ruined head moved slightly, trying to face her. She heard a gurgling murmur.

Her shoulders slumped. The rock lowered to her crotch. Her mouth hung open in astonishment.

She took a step back and said under her breath, "Unbefuckinglievable, you're like a cockroach."

She swung the rock up over her head, stepped forward in a crouch, and with all her strength smashed it through the side window into Stewart's head.

### 3

#### Kids, If Only They Came With An Owner's Manual

Rhea did not know how long she had stood over her son as he remained with his back against the tree trunk.

Aware once again, Rhea noticed she still held the rock. She dropped it, just missing the toe of her right boot. She had thought her hiking boots too expensive when Stew had bought them for her a few weeks ago, one of the few items he'd ever bought with his own money.

It had stopped raining.

She tilted her face to the sky and let large drops hit as they released and fell from the tree limbs. Everything smelled of resin.

With her attention on Spencer again, she said absently, "Now whaddawe do?"

Fearful, he stared at her with those green eyes she had just come to think of as a little weird. Even with his thick brown hair matted to his skull he looked too much like his father. Angry again, she wondered if his fear made her angry or if her anger frightened him, or was it he did look too much like his now-dead daddy.

If only she knew what to do.

If only she ever knew what to do.

If only she knew why she had done any of the things she had ever done in her life.

She picked the rock up again, confusion hid her real intention.

She said, putting absolute conviction in her voice, "You're not going to remember any of this. You're only three."

"I'm four...week. In a week momma," he whined.

Perhaps for the last time, the clarity of his language surprised her. She feared he might remember. She hefted the rock to her chest and took a step toward him. He cringed.

At last the adrenaline in her system spent itself. She felt tired, more tired than she'd ever felt, except after she'd given birth to Spencer. She remembered how tired the wedding had made her. Why did she ever get married? She dropped the rock. It thudded wetly, again barely missing the toe of her right boot.

"You know, sweetie, it'd be a shame to waste these boots your daddy bought," she said.

She walked away downslope. The ground made for easy going and she quickly passed the effects of the plane crash. A steepening of the slope had her pass from sight of the wreck and Spencer. She checked behind her to make sure.

In the distance, within the silence of the wilderness, she heard her son say, "Daisy."

The dog had come back. *Let her take care of the little bastard*, Rhea thought.

For some time she felt a freedom she'd never felt before in her entire life. The slope was just right, the underbrush sparse, ground wet, but firm. Her still-young, twenty-four-year-old body felt strong and supple. She made good time and found herself on the valley floor before dark.





