

CHRYSALIS

A Tribal Tale

By Gary R. Moor

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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 sev-

eral 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 uncurled 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.

