CHAPTER 3: Which one is the Enemy?

While Mrs. Harmony confronted Mr. Cannon, Robbie was out selling newspapers on the street. People were interested in the short piece that Kate wrote about Bigwood and the pro-American group. He sold all of his papers and came back to the newspaper office to get more.

When he was in the office Kate drew him aside. She was upset. “I’m a failure, Robbie,” she whispered so she couldn’t be heard by Mr. Cannon. “I want to be a reporter but Mr. Bigwood won’t let me into their meetings, and Mrs. Harmony laid down the law with Mr. Cannon. She says it is too dangerous for me to go down to Johnson Street by myself. If I can’t go to Johnson Street to get the news, I’m finished as a reporter.”

Robbie didn’t understand what she was concerned about. “I go down to Johnson Street all the time. I sell a lot of newspapers there.”

“But you’re a boy. You can go anywhere. I’m a girl and Mrs. Harmony says I need protection. I don’t know what to do.”

“Why do you have to listen to Mrs. Harmony? Mr. Cannon is your boss.”

“Oh Robbie, you just don’t understand anything. I really want to do this story. It’s important. Mr. Bigwood and the others are a threat to Canada and I want to write about it.”

“What can I do? I don’t know anything about politics. I don’t even like politics.”

“Can you keep your ears open when you go down there and tell me what’s going on. That’s all. Find out what’s happening and tell me about it.”

It all seemed nonsense to Robbie but Kate was his sister and this was important to her. “I’ll see what I can do.”

There seemed to be a lot of interest about Johnson Street and so Robbie went there to sell more newspapers. He walked the street shouting out the headline that interested everyone. “Americans Advocate Annexation!” Again people flocked to buy the newspaper.

A big man in a smart tan suit with blond-orangey hair came along with his side-kick, a cowboy in jeans, plaid shirt and hat. “That must be the article written by that there girl who was at the meeting last night, boss,” said the cowboy.

“You must be right, Shooter.”

The big man bought a newspaper from Robbie and quickly read the article.

“Whatcha think, boss?” The man called Shooter asked.

“It’s not so bad. It lets people know that we are in town talkin’ about British Columbia joinin’ America. That’s good. It will attract others to our cause.” He laughed. “We’re gonna steam-roller this thing past the B.C. people so fast that they don’t know what happened to them, Shooter.”

A workingman in rough clothing had been listening. “Are you the Mr. Bigwood person talked about in today’s newspaper,” he asked? Robbie had sold this man a newspaper not long before.

“I certainly am, sir. Colonel Donald Bigwood is my name, and I come from the fine state of California, and I advocate that the good people of British Columbia abandon this backward country of Canada and join up with the United States of America.”

In a moment a group of men were circling Colonel Bigwood and were peppering him with questions about the United States, Canada, railways and timber. The Colonel laughed as he answered them as best he could. Robbie wondered if being mentioned in the newspaper made him important.

Another man asked about the railway connection to Canada and Bigwood gave this answer. “That railway is never gonna get up that Fraser Canyon. She’s gonna die in the mountains and there will be nothin’ left but scrap iron and money wasted.”

Railways were something that Robbie knew about and he joined the conversation. “I worked for the railroad sir, and it’s already past Hell’s Gate. By summer the tracks will be laid to the town of Lytton or maybe all the way to Kamloops.”

“Don’t you know nothin’, kid? That railroad is as dead as a doornail. She’ll fall off the tracks and she’ll be a shambles and desolation. Ain’t that a fact now, Shooter.”

“You tell ‘em, boss.”

“No siree, bob. She’s not gonna get across them mountains. What we need here is that this here British Columbia province should join up with the United States of America and become a real country. The U.S. already has a railway across the mountains. Make B.C. Great Again. That’s what I say and the way to do that is by joining up with the United States of America. I’m a Colonel in the California Militia and I should know.”

Bigwood went on like this talking about railways and timber and fish and all sorts of other things. In his opinion everything done in Canada was a hopeless shambles, bound to fail and everything done in the United States was a success and made everyone money. British Columbia would be great again if it joined the United States.

After making these pronouncements Bigwood went on to tell the crowd that he and the pro-American Annexation Group would be holding a public meeting at City Hall the next night.

“We’re gonna talk about these things and you will see that B.C. will be much better off joining the United States of America before the disaster of this railway overwhelms the whole province

of British Columbia. Come and listen to the arguments cause Colonel Donald Bigwood always tells the truth."

Never to let an opportunity to sell a newspaper to pass him by, Robbie shouted out the headline, "Americans Advocate Annexation! Read all about it in the *Victorian News*." Within a minute he had sold all of the newspapers he was carrying.

The crowd melted away leaving Bigwood, Shooter and Robbie on the street. Bigwood was feeling good. His message was getting through to the people of Victoria, or so he thought. All he had to do was push a little and the whole country of Canada would disintegrate and the U.S. would gobble it up.

"We've got work to do, Shooter."

"I'm with you, boss."

"And you boy," Bigwood said to Robbie. "You seem to be a pretty smart kid. We need somebody like you to be our runner."

"Runner?" Robbie didn't know what he meant.

"Run messages, things like that. You want to make a little extra money, don't you?"

"Yes sir."

"Be back at our headquarters in the Pacific Hotel this afternoon. If you carry out this little task for me, you'll make a silver dollar and there might be more running about you can do for us and you will make even more silver dollars."

"I'll be there." This sounded like a good deal to Robbie. A silver dollar was more than many working men made in a day. This could be lucrative.

Robbie headed back to the newspaper office to turn in the money he made selling the papers that morning. When he got there, he told Kate his good news.

"I've got a job delivering stuff for the Bigwood guy," he announced.

Kate was alarmed. "Bigwood! Do you mean Colonel Bigwood from California?"

"Yeah, big guy with orange hair."

"You can't do that, Robbie. He wants to destroy Canada!"

"Why not? He's going to give me a silver dollar."

"But Bigwood is the enemy!"