

BY THE PRIZE-WINNING AUTHOR OF *THE SENTIMENTALISTS*

QUARTET
for the
END OF
TIME



A Novel

Johanna Skibsrud

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ABOUT THE BOOK

The year is 1932, and America is roiling with unrest. Angry World War One veterans, embittered by the ruinous poverty inflicted by the Great Depression, join forces and, calling themselves the Bonus Army, march on Washington to demand payment of the wartime bonus promised them for their service during the war.

Arthur and Douglas Sinclair, an impoverished veteran and his son, make the arduous journey from Kansas to join the march. Alden and Sutton Kelly, the rebellious children of a powerful Washington judge, become involved with the veterans' struggle, causing an irreparable rift in the Kelly family. When the Bonus march explodes in a violent clash between government and veteran forces, Arthur is falsely accused of conspiracy and disappears. The lives of Douglas, Alden, and Sutton are forever changed - linked inextricably by the absence of Arthur Sinclair.

As these three lives unfold, we are taken to unexpected places - from the underground world of a Soviet spy to Hemingway's Florida and the hard labour camps of Roosevelt's New Deal Projects in the Keys; from occultist circles in London to occupied Paris and the eventual fall of Berlin; and finally, to the German prison camp where French composer Olivier Messiaen originally wrote and performed his famous *Quartet for the End of Time*. Taking us on an unforgettable journey through individual experience and memory against the backdrop of seismic historical events, *Quartet for the End of Time* is both a profound meditation on human nature and an astonishing

literary accomplishment from one of the most original voices to have emerged in recent years.

ABOUT
THE AUTHOR

Johanna Skibsrud is the author of two collections of poetry. *The Sentimentalists*, her first novel, won the 2010 Scotiabank Giller Prize, Canada's most prestigious literary award. She is also the author of a collection of short stories *This Will Be Difficult To Explain*. She lives in Tucson, Arizona.

ALSO BY
JOHANNA SKIBSRUD

—

This Will Be Difficult to Explain

The Sentimentalists

QUARTET
for the
END OF
TIME

Johanna Skibsrud



WILLIAM HEINEMANN: LONDON

As a musician I studied rhythm. Rhythm is, in essence, alteration and division. To study alteration and division is to study Time. Time—measured, relative, physiological, psychological—is divided in a thousand ways, of which the most immediate for us is a perpetual conversion of the future into the past. In eternity, these things no longer exist. So many questions! I have posed these questions in my *Quartet for the End of Time*.

—OLIVIER MESSIAEN

Ex. 32



I.

Sutton

RIOT ON THE MALL. THE JUDGE'S HOUSE, DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
COURTHOUSE, CAMP MARKS, WASHINGTON, D.C., JUNE-JULY, 1932—
WITH A BRIEF DETOUR TO THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
COURTHOUSE, 1928.

IT WAS HER mother who accompanied Sutton to her father's door. Who stood beside her, hand raised and trembling, before she finally brought it down: knocking, sharply, twice. Who, in response to her husband's voice, which echoed from inside, touched her daughter lightly on the shoulder, as though in sympathy for something that she couldn't name, then stepped aside to let her pass.

It was the afternoon following the riots; Alden had not yet returned, and the household had been thrown into turmoil of a rare sort—her mother's incursion beyond the limit of her own quarters was certain evidence of this. And now, inexplicably, the Judge wished to speak to *her*. She was to listen very carefully, her mother warned, and do as she was told. This was counsel that could, in itself, have hardly been deemed unusual—except that it went without saying in the Kelly house. When the Judge spoke, there was never any choice but to listen. Of all people, it was her mother who should have known that. Sutton had, therefore, no idea what sort of man to expect in her father's room, now that the remarkable idea had been introduced—if in the

negative—that her father was a man whom she conceivably *might not* listen to or obey.

What drew her attention immediately, however, upon first entering, was not anything out of the ordinary with her father himself (he appeared very much as he always had, sitting upright behind his desk in his straight-backed chair), but a hat. A man's hat. Rather sad and misshapen-looking, it sat, incongruously, on her father's desk. A hat on the table, as the Judge himself had taught her, was a very definite sign of bad luck. It was an old cowboy code, a tradition the Judge prided himself in having inherited—though, truth be told, the Kellys themselves had never been actual cowboys. They were wheat farmers from Indiana. The Judge kept an old riding whip anyway as proof of his midwestern pedigree. It lay coiled in his desk's thin middle drawer, and from time to time he would take it out and flick it back and forth with a repetitive twist of his wrist, making, as he did so, a swishing sound that could be heard through the house. They always knew when the Judge was in a meditative mood because of it. It never failed, he said—that particular rhythm, and the accompanying sound the whip made as it cut through the air—to soothe him, and help him to think. Perhaps, as he reflected on more than one occasion, it was due to being reminded through the object's weight and the steady rhythm of it in his hand, of its great and complicated history—which, by extension, was also his own. As a child, Sutton had marveled over the multitude of various conflicting details that surrounded the object, and it had taken her many years to realize what it meant that—on the subject of the whip—her father never told the same story twice.

NOW, HOWEVER, THOUGH the Judge had taken the whip from its drawer, he merely fingered its rough leather absently. Only occasionally did he allow it to twitch, restlessly, as if more or less of its own accord, in his hand.

In any case, it was not her father's whip, but the hat, which held Sutton's attention as she entered her father's room.

Why on earth, she wondered, had he not only let it remain on the table, but seemed to have deliberately placed it there? It seemed quite pointless, she reflected (and she could only assume that, on this count, the Judge himself would agree—it was only according to his “code,” after all, that she considered the matter), to go about knowingly courting ill fortune in this or any other way—even if one was (as the Judge himself, despite any Romantic allusions, surely was) the very opposite of a superstitious man. Things *don't just happen*, he had told her and Alden on she didn't know how many countless occasions. *You make them happen.*

BEHIND HIS DESK, Judge Kelly was sitting very upright, indeed. It was the same posture he assumed while marching in the parade every Fourth of July. (A former colonel, the Judge had been heavily decorated for his service—particularly during the Banana Wars, where he had helped to quell the March riots back in 1911.) As Sutton entered, he cleared his throat and sat more upright still.

He hoped—he said quickly, waving her toward the empty chair opposite his large, low desk, where she was to sit—she had not been too much disturbed by recent events.

Sutton sat. She shook her head.

No, she had not.

But the Judge had hardly paused long enough for a reply.

Now, look, he was saying. Your brother. He's gone ahead and gotten himself tangled up with all of this somehow. As usual with him, it's just a case of having found himself in the wrong place at the wrong time—something that's become almost like a habit with him. But see now, if we aren't careful in this particular case ...

Here the Judge paused. He cleared his throat, and—distracted suddenly—looked up to where an empty chandelier hook, upon which nothing, as far as Sutton was aware, had ever hung, marked the exact center of the high ceiling. Almost absently, as he did so, he extended a hand toward the hat. Then his eyes descended, meeting—for the briefest of moments—Sutton’s own.

A great many things, he said, his eyes fixed firmly now on the hat between them (as though, indeed, it were to the hat, and not to his daughter, he spoke), are held in balance by a very few. This is something that may be difficult for someone of your age to understand—but that is not the most important thing. The more important thing now, he said (still as though to the hat), is to establish that you and I both have in this case ... a certain ... *responsibility*.

He looked up now, flickeringly, this time without meeting his daughter’s eye.

Let’s go back, he said. To just around this time yesterday afternoon—

But Sutton’s heart had begun to beat here so unnaturally fast that—though it was a very simple one—the Judge was forced to repeat his question twice before she heard.

Sutton, the Judge said again. I’m asking you. Where were you? Yesterday afternoon?

It was only according to a tremendous effort that she was able to reply.

Here, she said, finally. In a small voice, hardly her own.

IT WAS TRUE. As the noise had drifted from the Mall, Sutton had remained with her mother indoors—only once venturing out to the yard, where she heard the scream of sirens and exchanged a few words with the neighbor, who was just at that moment passing in front of their house to his own. Everything had just “gone wild,” Mr. Heller had said—taking unconcealed pleasure in being able to pass on the news. The veterans had stormed the White House, and

he—Mr. Heller—would not be surprised if a Communist flag was flying there now. Anyone could have seen it coming, he concluded dolefully, shaking his head and continuing past.

Shortly after, the Judge telephoned. They shouldn't wait dinner, he said. But, no, no—everything was all right.

Sutton could hear his voice through the receiver, which her mother held at an angle, away from her ear. Everything would be cleared up in no time now, he said. Look at it this way. This may be just the break we need. They've called in the Army. Now the whole thing is certain to be over and done with—and soon.

A pause, then: Where's Alden? With you?

Alden had not been seen since late morning, when, after rising late as usual, he had eaten breakfast alone, then—giving his mother a kiss on the forehead—headed for the door. He hadn't said where he was going; he never did.

No, Alden was not with them, Mary Kelly said, her voice rising. They hadn't seen him, she said, but here she paused. She could hardly think. Her eyes flitted nervously about the room. Since—when?

Sometime just before noon, Sutton said. Mary repeated the information. Stephen's voice came back sounding flat and mechanical through the line.

Well, not to worry, he said. The Mall's almost clear. Even if he made it down that far, he'll be home before long.

Then, without signing off, as was his habit, the Judge hung up the phone.

SUTTON WATCHED AS her mother set the receiver down.

Well, that's all right, then, Mary Kelly said loudly, as though someone might disagree. Then she went into the kitchen and fixed herself a pot of tea. By that time it had become very still and quiet. There was no noise to be heard from the direction of the Mall or anywhere else. All the houses in the neighborhood, including the Hellers' next door, were shut tight.

As they waited, the hours lengthened. Now and then—in order to interrupt what seemed their interminable flow—her mother would get up and turn in a slow circle. Was Sutton quite comfortable? she would ask. Did she need anything? When Sutton replied that she was quite all right, as she did every time, her mother would press a hand to her head. Oh, the *headache* of it, she would say. The very multipurposeness of this expression—which, for as long as Sutton could remember, had been employed by her mother just as readily in the most innocuous of circumstances as in the most acute—served to comfort them both. Once or twice its effect was augmented by something of a more material nature when Mary Kelly slipped away to the medicine cabinet at the back of the house, within which she kept a cure for just about anything you could think to complain of—and even some mysterious conditions you didn't know, until you were cured of them, you actually had. The bedroom, and its cabinet, was a further extension of her quarter of the house. It had been known as the “guest bedroom” until gradually Mary herself became its permanent “guest.” Now they called it the “back room.” Never “Mary's,” or “Mother's” room—though she not only slept there nightly, but also spent most of the late afternoons there, up to four hours at a time, the door shut tight.

Now, after each disappearance, she would return, looking momentarily refreshed, and say, Well, that might be some help. Are you sure you're doing all right?

Each time, Sutton assured her she was. But not an hour would go by before her mother would disappear once more—to fix tea, though neither one of them required it, or to go look up in the telephone directory the number of the police dispatcher, or the family doctor, just to have them “on hand.”

FINALLY, THE TELEPHONE rang again. It was the Judge. Both Sutton and her mother got up and listened into the heavy handle of the phone, which the older woman once again held away from her ear.

Now—the Judge hesitated—I don't want you worrying over nothing, but, see, there's been some—slight—trouble, which I'll need to look into. Alden—now, look, he's *all right*. It's taken care of, see. Now, you just turn in—don't wait up. Alden's here. With me. Like I told you—everything's *all right*.

WELL, THE JUDGE said after Sutton had recounted all of this to him—her heart still beating wildly for some reason, though there was nothing in it the Judge would not have already known—that's good, very good. Because—he gave her a quick, decisive nod—it's the truth. I've no doubt of it.

Sutton's cheeks were cooling now, her heart beginning to slow to its more regular pace.

It is best—the Judge went on—as I have always maintained, to tell the honest truth, whenever it is possible to do so.

There was something new, now, Sutton noticed, in her father's voice. At first she found it difficult to place, but then—she remembered. It was the same voice she had heard him use on the one occasion she had seen him preside in a court of law. Both Alden and she had been in attendance, accompanied by their mother. She herself could have been no more than ten—Alden, twelve or thirteen. They had sat at the back, and left as soon as the proceedings were over—their mother's hand ushering them out the door before anyone else had yet risen.

It had been a simple open-and-shut case, the Judge had told them—they knew even before it was over what the verdict would be. What else could it have been? A Negro, in the process of holding up a hardware store, had fired a gun and mortally wounded the wife of the store's proprietor. He

had confessed to the deed without hesitation—pleading only that the crime had been unmeditated, resulting from the confusion of the holdup. The prosecution had argued, to the contrary, that the crime had been malicious in intent: that the young man in question was of “underdeveloped” character and would continue to prove a certain and perpetual danger to society.

Are these the sorts of “accidents” to which we would like our city streets prone? Accidents, ladies and gentlemen! the prosecutor had shouted. Nothing happens out of the blue—on its own, and for *no reason!*

Then an exhausted-looking woman, in whose house the young man had once been employed, testified that on several occasions she had feared for her virtue in the company of the young man. At the time, the word *virtue*, used in this particular context, had confused Sutton, but she knew enough not to ask her mother about it—that it was something that had, for good reason, been left undefined.

In the end, the maximum penalty was served: death by hanging. Sutton felt her blood thrill suddenly in her veins as the verdict was read. A murmur rippled through the crowd. There was no time to observe the reaction more closely, however—or assess her own. Her mother was already pulling her up by the hood of her spring coat and ushering her out the door. What was it within her that had thrilled at the mention of the accused man’s demise? Now, as she listened to her father speak—that same note ringing out in his voice as the one she had heard all those many years before—she tried to recall it: the particular dimensions of the sensation she had felt at that moment as the verdict was read. It seemed it was almost possible—that it was a thing that might, after all, prove measurable. But still she could not ascertain the slightest thing about it—where it had come from, and what it meant to have found it so suddenly within her own body.

Later that evening she overheard her mother speaking sharply to her father.

That was *hardly* a suitable case for children, Stephen, her mother had said. If I'd known—But Sutton never was to find out what it was her mother might have, but had not known, because her father ended the conversation abruptly.

Mary, he had said. Justice is justice! There's never a time where that is not observable, even—or especially—by the very young.

SOMEHOW, THAT PHRASE —her father's voice, and those words, beginning with her mother's name—became inseparable for Sutton from the memory of the accused man's face, as he had stood quavering on the stand. It was perhaps the first time she had looked, for any extended period of time, into the face of a black man. She was fascinated by the way the whites of his eyes stood out in such sharp contrast against his dark skin. Even from that distance, in the back row, wedged between her mother and brother, she could see the way his eyes, when the verdict was read out loud in her father's voice, darkened slightly. They did not flash in alarm, or in fact move at all, but somehow there was a change—and she had witnessed it. It was that change to which the words her father spoke later, beginning with her mother's name, seemed, afterward, to cohere. An almost unseen darkening of a stranger's eye. And it was that which was somehow evoked for her again as her father pronounced those words—*the honest truth*—so many years later.

Never again after that was she to see her father preside in court. Not only because of her mother's sense that the case they'd observed had not been "suitable," but because, shortly afterward, her father was elected to Congress. From then on, he was a government man—the work that he did even more mysterious and difficult to understand.

THERE ARE, OF course, her father was saying, exceptions to every rule. Times when it simply *is not possible* to tell the truth in the way we ordinarily would be expected—would, that is, expect *ourselves* to do. Times when, indeed, telling what might at first appear to be a *stretch* of the truth actually corresponds more accurately with the truth than the truth itself.

The Judge paused—only very slightly. Into this pause Sutton nodded slowly, her lips pressed into a tight line. She fixed her gaze, not on her father's face as he spoke, but again on the space between them—occupied by the hat.

The nod, though slight, sufficed; the Judge answered it with his own.

Sometimes, he continued, following her gaze and touching the hat gently, as if almost by accident, it is in fact the *exceptions* to the rule that constitute the strength of the rule itself. Because it is against these—but here, again, he paused. Abruptly, he withdrew his hand from the hat.

Is this something, he interrupted himself, you think you can understand? Because it is very important, he went on, that you do. Important for your brother, yes, but more ... particularly ... for your mother. You know—again he hesitated, peering at his daughter over his spectacles, which he had only recently begun to wear. She isn't always in the most ... perfect health.

It was on account of certain—sensitive—*materials*, the Judge informed Sutton, a small but (here he cleared his throat and, once more, his fingers grazed absently over the brim of the hat on the table between them) rather powerful bomb found in Alden's position, that they now found themselves in the difficult position they did. Certainly it could be a lot worse, the Judge admitted. Had the explosive actually *reached* its intended target they would, all of them, be dealing with one hell of a bigger mess than they already were. Alden—the Judge explained—had failed to cooperate. Indeed—the Judge was sure—he had never *intended* to

cooperate with those *rightful* proprietors of the explosive in question, and its devastating goal. And so you see the matter is indeed—the Judge concluded—a question (depending on which way you looked at it) of being at precisely the *wrong*, or precisely the *right* place—and at either precisely the wrong, or precisely the right time. But that did not, he added quickly, prevent all of it, no matter which way you looked at it, from appearing, from the outside, very bad indeed.

Now, look, he said. We know some of the fellows involved in this business already. Communists, all of them. With nothing—as this incident convincingly attests—but the destruction of this country and everything it stands for in view. I hope that is clear to you. I have no doubt it is to your brother, now! It's just a matter of ... wrapping things up. Putting the fellows we *know* are behind all this away—and for good this time. That's how it is with the law, see—it's not always as literal as one might wish it to be, or suppose. Even sometimes when you *know* something, without a shadow of a doubt—you still might not have all the right cards in hand, so to speak, to shut the case. Or to make sure that the truth itself (which is not, perhaps, though it be quite certain, necessarily held in hand) does not just ... slip away. I know you don't want—the Judge said—any more than I do, for the men guilty of this particular crime to slip away. Especially (here he coughed drily into a cupped hand) at your brother's expense.

Now, what this means—he continued, after only the briefest pause, in which Sutton only stared across the distance between them marked by the hat—is that both your brother and I are going to be counting on your help in identifying the man *truly* guilty of this crime, which will (here he laid his hands down flat and looked straight at Sutton—for the first time, without a doubt, meeting her eye) require, he said, a slight ... *stretching* ... of the truth. Not a lie, see, because it is quite certain who the guilty

party is. If I tell you the earth is round, but you have not yet circumnavigated it yourself, does it stand that if you also should announce, *The earth is round*, that it is a lie? To punctuate his question, he reached out and once again laid a hand on the hat—this time squashing it slightly in the middle. In another moment, however, when he had lifted his hand again, the hat quickly regained its original form.

Hardly, the Judge said, in answer to his own question.

SEVERAL HOURS LATER, Sutton found herself following her father down the long empty courthouse corridor, their footsteps—his low and hollow-sounding, her own sharp and high—ringing in her ears. At the end of the corridor, when the Judge drew up short, she—a pace behind—drew up, too. From that perspective, she could see only the Judge's set jaw, and beyond that a perfect rectangle of gray hair, where it had been cut above the ear with astonishing exactitude. A heavysset guard was seated behind a low table. Behind him, a long panel of glass reflected darkly. It was possible, therefore, from where Sutton stood, to observe her father undetected in the glass, as first he shook hands brusquely with the guard, then leaned down, and—with a furious gesture—signed his name in a book, which lay open between them. He turned, then, as if noticing Sutton for the first time, and motioned her to join them. The guard peered curiously at her as she approached—but when, a moment later, he saw her looking back, he blinked quickly and glanced away. She was handed the same heavy pen with which her father had signed his name, then asked to sign her own.

Beneath the illegible loop her father had made on the page, her own name appeared naïvely discernible.

Shortly after, the heavysset guard disappeared, only to reappear a moment later through an identical door into another room, separated by the dark wall of glass. It was only, indeed, after he had entered it that Sutton realized it

was a room at all—and not just the reflection of the one they were in. Behind the guard, a long line of men—their hands fastened behind their backs, faces pointed straight ahead—followed slowly. Though she could see them very well, her father informed her then, they could neither see nor hear *her*.

It was difficult, however, to keep this in mind.

When the guard reached the far end of the room, and the men stood, twelve or fourteen in all, across the length of it, he stopped and pressed the short stick he carried against the first man's chest so that he stopped, and then all the men behind him, one after the other, stopped, too.

It was only then that she saw him. Toward the end of the line: Alden. And then, next to him—and now she wondered how she had failed to notice either one of them before—Arthur. His lip was cracked, she could see now, and there was a line of blood that ran from it to his chin, then splattered in a spray of lines across his torn white shirt. She looked around now for Douglas. For Chet, and John—imagining briefly that she might only have overlooked them somehow as she had, at first, overlooked both Arthur and Alden. But she did not see them there, and after all it would have been very difficult to miss the boy; let alone tall Chet, or the big Indian. That was good, she reminded herself. That they were not there meant, necessarily, they were somewhere else. But then, almost at once, the possibilities of where they might be if not immediately before her overwhelmed her, and she felt a sudden panic at all the possibilities that existed, both for them and everyone else. But that they existed, she reminded herself, was better than that they did not.

While she was lost in these thoughts, they had been joined by another man, who looked—she was struck by the resemblance almost immediately—very much like her father. They both had the same tall foreheads, closely cropped dark hair, gray at the edges, and were dressed

smartly in dark suits, which fit snugly in exactly the same places. Perhaps because she was busy reflecting on this remarkable resemblance, it took several seconds before Sutton realized her father had been speaking to her—his voice followed by the nearly identical low bass of the second man.

Can you identify—the second man, who looked and sounded so very much like the first, was saying (and it was only then, with the sound of the second voice, that she recognized that the words had already been spoken). Now she heard what had been said not only once, but twice, and remembered the hat, which had lain, unluckily, between herself and her father earlier that day.

At first, though, she did not see the hat. She looked up and down the line again, her eye obstinately refusing to settle. But after several more moments, sensing the growing tension as her father, and the man who looked like her father, waited for her reply, she had no other choice, and saw that the hat that had perched incongruously on her father's desk that afternoon was now perched, just as incongruously, on the head of Arthur Sinclair.

It had, after all, been a very simple thing she'd agreed to. To point at a guilty man, wearing a hat, was not a lie, her father had said. And, after all, had she not taken everything she so far believed to be true on simple faith? How was this, then, any different? It had not occurred to Sutton, until that moment, to doubt that what her father had said was true.

Now her father had moved nearer; he had placed his hand firmly on her shoulder.

This was all a terrible mistake. Sutton looked at her father, about to speak—to alert him. She had never in her life seen Arthur wearing a hat, let alone this one. She was about to tell her father that—but then she stopped, realizing that she would then be required to inform her father, if not then, at some later point, how it was she had

come to know this, or anything about the man at all. Detecting her alarm, the Judge looked at her sharply.

Is, he said (and again, with the word, she realized that it was being spoken for the second time), the man you *saw*—yesterday afternoon—any of these men that you *see now, before you*?

Sutton stared first at her father, then back at the line of men. Something shifted. The edges of the room seemed to dissolve, giving way to blankness. Her father had not let go of her shoulder and now his grip began to tighten.

Tell the truth, he warned, gritting the words between his teeth.

She shook her head. Not exactly in answer, but because she could think of nothing else to do. Her father's grip tightened reflexively. I will repeat the question a final time, he said. The man. You saw. And on which the report *you filed* is based. Is he among the men you see now, before you?

Look carefully, now, the man who looked like her father warned.

Look once more—carefully, her father said, his grip tightening still further on her arm.

Can you identify the man? the man who looked like her father said.

A further blankness descended. And in that blankness Sutton lifted her one free hand and pointed at the hat that had lain on the table, between herself and her father, earlier that day.

There, she said. In a voice hardly more than a whisper. There.

—

THE FIRST DAY Sutton accompanied Alden to the camps, it had been pouring rain. They had got soaked through before they were even halfway there, and Alden bought a

newspaper and gave Sutton half and took half for himself and they continued with half a newspaper each over their heads. By the time the camps came into view, the newspaper was soaked through and had bled black ink all over their hands. They walked down a rutted path that had sprung up between two rows of tents. The mud was so thick that, after a while, it was difficult for Sutton to keep pace. She had to hop a little in order to keep up with her brother whenever she slipped and lost a step.

Finally, they drew up in front of one of the tents, and—after giving her a quick glance so that she would know to follow—Alden ducked inside.

THE TENT WAS larger than she had expected it to be. It was in fact, she saw now, two tents, which had been joined as one—the center marked by a makeshift table, constructed out of a slab door and two half barrels. Around this table, three men and a girl of roughly Sutton's own age were seated on overturned crates. One of the men, very tall, with a long sad face, waved them over. Another shifted in his seat, indicating a space on the bench where Sutton could join them. She sat down and only then realized that it wasn't a man at all she sat next to, but a boy—two or three years younger than herself, she guessed. His eyes, even in the dim tent, appeared very blue, and his light brown hair, which needed cutting, was thin and soft-looking, like a child's. It fell a little in front of his eyes when he turned to look at her.

Douglas, he said.

Sutton nodded, and the boy looked away. It was not until then that she realized—when it seemed, suddenly, too late—she should have responded with her own name.

In the meantime, Alden had fallen into a heated discussion with the tall man with the long face, and another man Sutton understood at once to be Douglas's father. He had the same eyes and light brown hair—though the older

man's had thinned, slightly, at the top. From time to time the girl joined in the conversation, but the boy—Douglas—did not. Several minutes passed this way before Alden paused, and—remembering himself—introduced Sutton to the rest. The man with the long face, whose name was Chet, nodded solemnly. Douglas's father's name was Arthur.

Pleased to meet you, he said.

The girl, Aida, leaned around to look at her.

Didn't you get her good and soaked, she said to Alden. Now Sutton could see she held a child in her arms. The girl saw her looking, and grinned.

Felicity, she said, indicating the child.

By then Alden had placed his heavy canvas bag in the middle of the table, and was extracting from it the remains of their own family's recent Sunday meal. Some fresh rolls, only a little squashed on top, a quarter of a roast, and some stewed potatoes, which he had left in their pot. The juice from the stew had leaked a little at the edges, and as Alden set it down it got on his fingers, which he licked clean. There was a jug of milk, too, and another loaf of bread and a thick slab of butter. All of this Alden took out, one item at a time—not slowly, exactly, but allowing time for a low murmur of approval to swell between each. When the bag had been emptied, everyone began at once to eat. Even the child, who had woken by then, eagerly accepted the little bites of bread and potato Aida offered her. Sutton saw now that the baby was dark like a Chinese, with slanted eyes.

Remember to save some for John, Arthur said, and everyone nodded and kept eating, but after a while they slowed down and there was still a portion left in every bowl, and Chet nodded in approval and said, Good, there's more than enough, and Arthur put his hands contentedly on his sides. Then he reached for the jug of milk and took a long swallow of it before he passed it on to Douglas. Then Douglas took a swallow, and passed it to Aida, who passed

it to Chet, and so on, and when there were only a few swallows left, it was placed in the middle of the table for the absent guest. Then everyone was quiet, and the rain, which had tapered to a drizzle during the meal, stopped, too, so that the only sounds from outside were of people talking and shouting in the near distance, and after a while even that began to seem far away.

Aida asked Sutton if she liked babies very much. Felicity didn't mind strangers, she said, if she'd like to take a turn and hold her. Sutton said yes, she liked babies, so Aida passed her over. The child was surprisingly heavy, but Sutton found she liked the weight, and felt proud to be holding her. Her slanted eyes were as black as Douglas's eyes were blue and the child regarded her with them steadily but did not cry, and after a while settled herself just as she had in Aida's arms, and Aida said, Sure, she likes you.

Then Alden and Chet and Arthur began to talk among themselves again. Arthur was hopeful an agreement between the self-proclaimed leader of the Bonus Army, Walter Waters, and the government, could still be reached. But Chet shook his head.

Naw, he said. Even Glassford's keeping his mouth shut now.

The city's police chief, Pelham Glassford, was a known sympathizer to the Bonus cause, and Sutton noticed that everyone—Arthur in particular—looked uncomfortable now, hearing him slighted.

It's true, Chet said. I don't believe when it comes down to it he'll have anything more than his own best interest in mind—and, well, why should he? You can't trust the one's already got what he needs to do the work for the ones who don't.

Arthur shook his head. Glassford knows he's got to play nice, sure, he said. That's just the way it *is*, Chet—and he

knows it. We start playing rough—we're sure to lose. But if we're careful, see, play fair—

Chet slapped a hand on the table. Fair! he said.

Again, Arthur shook his head. For a moment he seemed about to say more—but then he didn't. Chet and Alden carried on without him, and no one interrupted for a while.

There simply isn't any more time, Alden was saying. If we don't get things settled and every man's bonus in hand by July, there won't be any way to get things moving again for six months or more. And wouldn't it—he paused slightly, looking around him at the assembled company, all of whom, he was pleased to notice, were listening intently—be a shame, he said, to waste the efforts of everyone, like yourselves, who've come so far, and from every state in the Union!

Washington's poised—he continued, his voice rising now, gaining confidence with every word—on the very brink, see. And that's not something you can just ... set aside. Something you can pick up later. If something's going to change—he concluded, scanning the small company; meeting and, if briefly, each in turn, holding their eyes—*it's got to change now.*

In his big overcoat, and in the company of full-grown men, Alden looked even smaller and slighter of frame than he was—almost like a child. His dark hair—which fell, like Douglas's, a little long in front—made his face, especially in the dim light, appear exceptionally pale. Their mother had often lamented the fact that it had been Alden, not Sutton, to inherit her own delicate skin, her slight frame. By contrast, Sutton had always been what her mother called "big-boned." Her features, too, had been inherited, rather unfortunately, from her father rather than her mother's side: a pronounced chin, a broad nose, and a high forehead—unsuccessfully shortened by a thick fringe of practical, nearly colorless, hair. Though she was more than two full years younger than Alden, she had always been, or very

nearly, his equal in size; growing up they had often been mistaken for the same age. Now, however—despite Alden's youthful appearance—she felt the difference in their ages acutely. His voice, Sutton realized with some surprise—as she listened, along with the Chet and Arthur and the rest, and Alden continued to speak—was a man's.

She had just been thinking this—Alden had just paused, taken a deep breath, evidently aware of the impact his words had made—when the tent door was rolled back and an Indian stood framed in the entrance. An Indian so large that he blocked any light that might have otherwise entered, and made everything else—even Arthur and Chet, who a moment ago had seemed overlarge in their makeshift chairs—seem small by comparison. A shout went up, and everything else—Alden, and Alden's words, which had held them riveted only a short time before—were forgotten. But the Indian, oblivious, did not retreat.

Instead, he ducked inside and began to make his way (no, there could be no doubt about it now, Sutton realized, a choking panic growing in her throat) directly toward her.

Before she could think of anything to do or to say, or find some way of protecting either herself or the child she still held in her arms, the Indian had knelt in front of her, smiled crookedly, and lifted the child from her grasp. And still, though a general commotion had erupted in the tent since the arrival of the Indian, no one said anything to him directly, or tried to stop him. The men, and Aida along with them, only continued to sit—chatting casually now among themselves—as the Indian, laughing, swung the child at a dangerous angle above his head.

Perhaps it was not such a long time as it seemed before Sutton understood. The Indian was the man, John, whose company they had for some time been anticipating, and whose dinner still remained on the table, in discrete portions. It was he who was the father of the child, and husband to small, pale Aida. It might have only been a few

moments—just the span of time it took for John to settle at the table, and begin to scoop the portions of the meal, and scrape the meat that remained—still clinging to its bone—from her mother’s flowered serving bowl. It was so incongruous a sight that, as Sutton’s alarm diminished, she nearly laughed out loud. To think of what her mother or her father might say if they knew! She felt a distinct pleasure at the thought of it. There was nothing to be afraid of! She was sharing a table with an Indian whose child she had held just moments before in her own arms—whose plate she had eaten from on countless occasions, and would (if it managed to return itself to her mother’s kitchen) eat from on countless occasions again. What was there in that to be frightened of? What in the world could, after this, remain extraordinary or unknown?

All of this over the course of mere seconds, during which time John settled himself, chewing thoughtfully. From time to time, he presented a small morsel to the child, whom he still held crookedly in one arm.

Only after he had finished his meal did he begin to speak.

It was true what they’d heard about Waters, the Indian told them. He’d disappeared again. Third time that month.

Chet raised his arms toward the ceiling in an unreadable gesture, and looked pointedly at Arthur, who sat across from him.

IT HAD BEEN Waters who had rallied the first “troops” in Portland, Oregon, nearly six months before. His countless adventures between there and the Capitol—both rumored and true—had been regular currency for some time in the camp. Everyone traded in stories—their own and others’—and if you ever ran into the same one twice, it would be a wonder if you recognized it. An especially popular one was how the Waters gang had got hung up in Illinois, where the rail companies had been forbidden by law to give any more “free rides.” Trying to strike a deal to suit everyone, an