

# The General

By CAROL EMSHWILLER

*They had conquered his people, then raised him  
as one of their own. How far would they be willing  
to go to destroy their own creation?*

One of the enemy has escaped into the mountains. An important general. He knows our language, he knows our ways, but we don't know his nor where his men are, nor even if there are any of his men left at all. We were holding him in our maximum-security facilities and we had thought to torture him until he told us what he knew of his own army. We had called in others to torture him because we don't believe in torture, but he escaped before they arrived.

There's a large reward for his capture. For a sum like this, even his own men would turn him in. He can't count on anybody. There's no way that he can survive very long anyway. It's too cold and everybody is on our side around here. Most likely they'll fight among themselves over the reward. There'll be a few more of us dead.

We had dressed him in orange. He'll have to steal some clothes. We hope he won't kill any of us to get them. He must be very stupid to try to escape in a place like this and at this season. The weather can only get worse. But perhaps death is better than our (deliberately) rat-infested, latrineless cells. He has been trained by us in our own schools to laugh at death. Most likely his body is already out there somewhere. We've sent local children to search the rocks and bushes. They know the area better even than our experts. We'll give them pennies and salt for any clues they pick up. We warned them if they find him and he's not dead, they should run, as he is extremely dangerous and has probably obtained or made a weapon.

I'm on a trail now. At first I just headed out, not following any road or path, but there's no way to cross these mountain passes and not be on one. Every now and then there's a hut. This time of year they're all empty. I don't dare spend the night in any. I stole clothes from one, long underwear, and a worn-out sheepskin jacket. I found a knit cap. They shaved my head so I needed a good hat. Everything I took was worn out and smelled bad, but I wear them anyway. I stole food and a blanket. I was wearing leg irons. At the hut I found tools to break them off. I'll be able to go a little faster now. I stole a sickle but dropped it later. I don't want to be tempted to lash out at anyone, especially not with a sickle.

I sleep several yards from the trail in any handy sheltered spot. Or if there are scattered boulders I cover myself with the blanket and lie along them as if I were just another stone. I haven't met a single person up here, but I don't dare relax.

I sleep the sleep of exhaustion. I'll think to myself: This is a good spot, and that's all I know until I wake up.

I'm aware that I'm walking through great beauty but if I sit down to appreciate it for a minute I fall asleep. Sometimes the moon has risen and I lie back and think to look at the sky and take some time to realize I'm in a wondrous place and this is a luminous moment, but no sooner do I have that thought than I'm asleep.

Notices have been put up on every corner:

WANTED REWARD. Wild and dangerous man. Medium height, shaved head, dark eyes. He'd as soon kill you as look at you. By now he may have weapons. If you harbor him or give him food, you'll be considered as guilty as he is. There's a microchip imbedded in his shoulder where he can neither see it or reach it. Anyone who has removed it will be considered as traitorous as he is. The sentence for helping him is death.

The irony is, we brought him up ourselves in our own military schools. We thought contact with us would civilize him, but he's no more civilized than he was at the age of nine when we took him in. At that time he said he'd kill us all and, in spite of all these years in our care, that's what he still wants to do.

We thought he would soon see that life with us was preferable to the primitive ways of his own people. We had thought he would realize our superiority. Anybody with any sense, we thought, even a child with any sense at all, could see we had the science, the money, the schools, the workforce, the wealth. . . . And we were ready to share our wealth with him. He was, after all, at the top of his graduating class. The top! We were surprised that a savage child had beaten out our own. We took it as a sign we could mold the wild ones to our civilized ways if we caught them in time. We were glad to have him on our side. Until he defected, we suspected nothing.

I wake with a child looking down on me—so bundled up I wonder how she can move at all. A dirty child but I'm dirtier. At first I think a boy, but then I think, girl. I see her skirt and coarse hand-knit wooly petticoat hanging below it. I'm not a good judge of the ages of children, but I'd guess about nine or ten years old. Beside her there's a bundle of sticks she's been gathering.

I distrust everybody. I wake up in a rage as usual, ready to strike out. I think, Here's one of them, but then she

smiles and I smile back.

I can't help groaning as I try to sit up. I'm always so stiff, waking after a day of climbing. (When I was younger I never had this problem. I suppose it'll only get worse.) I ask her, "What are you doing way up here this time of year?" and she asks, "What are you?"

Her name is Loo. I tell her I'm Sang. Not too much of a lie, especially if you take it to mean blood and pronounce it "sans," and now I am sans everything. (For a long time I was called rubbish.)

It's been three days and we still haven't captured him, therefore sweeping changes from the top on down. Higher-ups have been brought in. Those in charge are no longer in charge. How can one half-starved man, possibly wearing orange, and with a microchip, have escaped us all? We have the know-how and the wherewithal.

Loo won't go home without more sticks. I help her. She's all smiles when she sees how much I get. I shoulder a dead log, too. I think to chop it up when we get . . . wherever. First we climb on the main trail and then turn off on a smaller path, so small you have to know it's there to follow it.

We come to a hut of stone and weathered wood. It looks like part of the mountain. It's a hut as if out of a painting of a troll's house in a book of fairy tales. The roof slopes almost to the ground. I remember fairy tales from before I was taken, otherwise I'd not know about them.

Loo's grandma greets us at the door. I look past her and see it's like a troll's hut inside, too. Heavy handmade furniture, a worn-down board floor, a squat black stove, a squat black kettle steaming . . .

Loo and her grandma must have gotten marooned up here somehow. I don't ask how. The grandma has a hard time walking from the stove to the doorway. Perhaps she could no longer climb down. Yet to leave her here alone with just a child for help . . . I don't see how they get by. They don't look in good shape.

I don't go in. I stand in the doorway. I say, "I am your enemy. I'm a fugitive. You risk your life if you take me in. I have a chip imbedded in my shoulder." I tell the grandma about the reward though I don't say how much. I hardly dare. It's a sum hard to resist. It would make anyone rich for life.

For answer the old woman motions me in, motions me to sit down, motions me to take off my jacket and mittens, and then hands me a cup of strong strange tea. It tastes of pine needles. They have two rooms. Two nanny goats stay in with them.

I say, "You don't realize."

The grandma says, "I realize." Her voice is a breathy growl.

She shows me men's clothes hanging behind the door, but she won't talk about them. In fact she'll hardly talk at all. Just gives me stew full of tiny bones. Then she gets out a paring knife and motions me to lean over the table. I do. It'll give her a chance to cut my throat if she feels like it.

(I had covered my shoulder first thing with pieces of foil from the dump on the outskirts of town so they couldn't home in on me.)

Afterward she makes me a different sort of tea for the pain. The way I'm slurping down every odd-tasting thing she hands me, she could poison me in a minute, and I'll bet she has whatever it takes to do it.

She wraps the chip back in my foil and puts it by the door. She says, "Take this out on the trail tomorrow. Throw it over the cliff."

They make me a bed under the table I just bled on. I think to thank them but, warm and full of hot food, I fall asleep before I can get the words out.

We've sent out six units. We've commandeered the first huts along several trails as base camps. One unit has discovered a place where someone spent the night. No one is on the mountain at this time of year so who but the general could have slept there? We moved all our units to this one mountain trail.

An early snow falls all night and is still going on in the morning. I go out in it. I'll not do as the grandma said. I'll get rid of that chip at the top of one of the peaks. I'll unwrap it so as to give them a false clue. Useless and foolish, I know, but I want to do it anyway. Perhaps if it's so hard to get to they'll not bother. They'll think I'm already dead up there and let me be. They'll say it's just like me to die at the top of something. I wish I'd saved my orange suit to use as a flag.

I say I may not be back tonight, but I'll be back soon. I'm thinking it'll take all day to climb a mountain even if I'm more than halfway up right here.

The grandma bundles me in hand-knit scarves. She winds them around me under my stolen jacket. I don't know if I can climb in all this. She wants to give me dried acorn cakes but I don't let her. I don't believe they have much food any more than they have much firewood. Soon as I get back I'll chop up more.

The grandma lends me her staffs. She uses two. I'll need two also. "Bring them back," she says.

We've found the chip, brown from his blood. One unit climbed to the top of the mountain thinking what the General can do, they can do. Thinking he would be there laughing down at them. Or dead, but with a smile at having forced them to climb there. He was no doubt laughing, but he wasn't there. One member of the unit fell on the rocks near the top and broke his ankle. One got altitude sickness. They have been flown out. We appointed new squad leaders.

There's fish. I caught some myself on the way up when the trail dipped down beside a creek. I ate them raw. Now I catch more on the way back to the cabin.

When I get there, Loo says she saw a group of men in white suits filing up the trail. They're two days' climb away. Loo takes me yet farther up into a cave, well off the path. Rattlesnakes sleep there. If I make a fire they'll wake up.

There's already a bed of old rotten hay. Loo gives me a bundle of food. She insists. I say I'll eat rattlesnake. She says, "Yes, but this, too." Then she chops off the heads of several big ones to take back to the grandma. They're so cold they don't come to. "In the morning I'll bring some back fried," she says. She leaves me the ax and goes.

There's a little sort of porch in front of the cave. I watch her till she's out of sight, lumpy little figure, accepting everything that comes along—though what else can children ever do?

I sit down on a rock and look out at the mountains—for once without falling asleep. A long time ago these peaks used to be the border—a no-man's-land several miles long between my country and theirs. But no need for any borders now. It's all theirs. The beauty is still as it was and will be no matter who owns it. Does it matter? Grandma and Loo? Why do I even wonder what side they're on?

The search parties below have already camped for the night. I see their smoke.

I start to chant to myself as I did when I was a child locked in solitary. I rock back and forth. I remember the cell, too small for a man, but big enough for me. I remember my classmates called me Rubbish all the time and I called myself that to myself. If I slipped I'd look at my feet and call them Rubbish. If I dropped something I'd call my hands Rubbish. Rubbish, I said about myself.

My parents were murdered before my eyes and I, taken to an enemy school to be educated as one of them. I didn't even know their language. Even when I began to understand, I refused to speak it. I didn't know their food. I finally got hungry enough to eat it. I profited by that education. I got to know them as I used to know my own. Better in fact. I almost forgot my own language. I almost forgot our ways. I was told my people were a lower order of civilization, but I couldn't see much difference.

In the beginning of military school I ran away a lot. Escaping wasn't hard; it was not being found afterward that I never managed. The enemy was everywhere. After four or five times it seemed useless. The punishment was solitary confinement. (They don't believe in hitting children. Besides, we were not to be marked in any way.) I burned my uniform three times, but there were plenty more. After a while I obeyed. It seemed a waste to go to all that trouble of running away for nothing.

I tested myself every chance I got. Heat, cold, fire, hunger, thirst . . . On our matches, I stood out in storms and let icy rain trickle down the back of my neck while the others took shelter in a shed. I wondered how high a ledge I could jump from. (I found out by breaking my ankle.) I tested myself in the cold until I almost lost my toes. After that I realized I might go too far, cripple myself and defeat my own purposes.

Being in solitary . . . that was a test, too, and I passed it to my own satisfaction. How I managed was through chants and songs. I chanted myself up into the trees I used to climb. I chanted to make myself into a cat. I practiced stalking the mice in my cell. When I finally caught one I made it into a pet. First I named it Sang, and then I named it Sans.

I never cried. Crying was a waste of valuable energy that I needed to fulfill my promises. My father would have told me that.

But then I realized there was a better way than all this escaping. (My father would have said that, too.) I did as I was told. I spoke their language when called upon, I excelled at everything, and became, at the age of twenty-eight, their youngest general ever. Years later, I fled and became one of ours.

They trapped us in our caves. Killed us except for me. I was saved for worse things than mere death.

We had learned to laugh at death. (They taught us that.) Death holds no terror, but we didn't learn to laugh at the torture of our loved ones, therefore I have no loved ones, neither wife nor children. After they killed my parents, my aunts, and my grandmother, I made sure there was nobody else, ever, to take from me.

In those early days I fell in love so often I thought to change my plans and be their general after all. I would marry and live on the hills above the towns, but I stayed true to the vows I made when I was nine.

At our graduation from military school, a eulogy full of kindness and humor so that we not only laughed at death, but laughed along with the dead. Their dead were to be my dead, and yet I thought only of my own. Even though I could hardly remember them alive, I thought only of their deaths.

It was hard keeping to my resolutions when I got to know the enemy. I began to care for them—those who treated me well, though many didn't, but I had knelt by my parents, covered with their blood, and swore . . . not to any God, but to myself—to the man I would become. I said, "You! You, as a man. You will remember this right here and now. No other thing will ever be as clear as this." And that has turned out to be true. I've remembered nothing more clearly than the blood, and the gurgling and coughing and the jerking back and forth of dying.

I ran, and thought to hide in a closet full of my father's uniforms as if they might save me, but they guessed where I was. I bit them, so then they put me in a dusty bag that smelled bad. I remember the taste of their sweaty, salty wrists.

Loo and Grandma? I wonder if they even know which side they're on. This side of the mountain . . . no one was sure who it belonged to, but the other side used to belong to the scattered armies of my childhood. My home was over there somewhere. I wonder if I would recognize it? I wonder if it still stands?

Ever since I was taken away, I haven't had much to do with any but military people. Even my women were soldiers. I don't know what civilians are like. And I've never had anything to do with children, though I guess we all

remember how it was to be one. Except I doubt if my memories pertain to many other children. I hope they don't. Loo is ten, the age I was when I first escaped and was recaptured and put in solitary as punishment.

I look out from the porch of my cave. I can hear the stream rushing down. I can see it sparkling below if I lean over the cliff. The sound will soothe me as I sleep. I begin to chant. I chant, You, and Loo, and owl. *Owl* meant *ouch* in my childhood language, and *row, row, row*, meant *remember, remember*. I chant You, you, you, as I used to chant it to my grown-up self. But I also chant, But, but, but. . . .

But . . . There were no buts in my chant language back then. But . . . I've seen plenty of blood on both sides. But . . . Isn't it best to look forward? See to it that children, and this one child, Loo, never see such things as I did? But . . . She already has. Those men's clothes behind the door. Next time she comes up I'll ask her about herself. I Wonder if she'd like a doll. I have a kitchen knife. I look around for some wood.

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She comes the next morning, bringing fried rattlesnake and dried crawdads. She sneaks in. I had my eyes shut, my face to the rising sun. I was chanting, Jolly, jolly, joll, joll. My secret words for my aunt June Harvest. When I open my eyes, there's Loo, watching. She's not surprised. Not wondering that I'm sitting cross-legged, nodding, muttering to myself.

I show her the doll. She receives it as though she's never known about dolls before. Perhaps she hasn't. She doesn't say a word, but I see her pleasure on her face. How nice to give something and have it so well received.

I sit on my porch stone. There's room for two. "Come, sit with me. Eat some yourself."

"I've had."

She examines the doll as I eat.

I had made it a dress out of pieces of the clothes I'd stolen. I hooked the arms and legs on with threads. "When I get some fishing line I'll put the arms and legs on in a stronger way. I'll find better cloth for a nice dress." (Too bad I hadn't saved a little piece of my orange suit.)

"I like this cloth," she says, even though it's a piece from the leg of my long underwear.

We sit quietly for a while; she turns the doll this way and that. I did a good job carving the face. It has a nice smiling look. I was always good at such things.

And then I ask what I've been waiting to ask. "Your father? Are those his clothes hanging behind the door? Is he all right?"

She starts to cry but turns away and stops herself.

I say, "I know. I know." And I do know. I wonder if, as I did, she had to watch it as it happened. I wonder if I dare reach out to her. I'm not used to touching people. My awkwardness would show all the more clearly to a child.

But she comes to me of her own accord, leans against me, still not crying. We hold each other. All I can think to say is, "I know, I know, I know," though I wonder, What good does that do? It's like another of my chants. So I chant, I know, and rock her.

I can feel there's not much to her. Skin and bones. Take off all these clothes and she'd look like a wet cat inside there. Grandma is probably about the same under her wooly petticoats and shawls. I could easily see to it that they got enough to eat. If I'd be let, I could live up here for the rest of my life. Wood gatherer, gatherer of acorns and pine nuts, trap setter, fisherman . . . I could make a bigger, better doll. I'd look out at mountains. I never knew . . . or never let myself know how much I'd like a quiet life.

Then I see the search and capture squads on the path below, three groups of three. They've passed the cottage. I'm afraid for Grandma. I don't think they would hurt an old woman, but Grandma might have said something, or there may have been some sign that I'd been there. Even a larger woodpile might be suspicious. She'd be in as much trouble as I am.

Loo feels my fear. I must have suddenly held her tighter without knowing it. She turns around and looks, too. Then looks back at me as if I'd know what to do. "Loo, is there a back way?"

But she should stay up here, safe. She wouldn't. She should lead me. "I'll go down with you, but first I have something that needs doing."

At least they'll have a harder time coming beyond this point. Why didn't I think of this before?

We had brought him up as one of our own. Spared no expense. And now look. He has worn us out. Fooled us. Played tricks. As if climbing a mountain peak were a game and he won. They say, Once a savage, always a savage. And now yet another game. He has rolled boulders down and started a landslide. Our second team had to rescue our first team out from under gravel and dust. It could have been worse; they only received a few bruises. But that slide shut off the upper part of the trail. That will be proof he's gone on higher. We'll drop our squads off above the slide area.

There's no trail as Loo leads me down a back way, so it's hard. We scramble over rocks. Loo tears her skirt and unravels her knit petticoats. She's upset by it. She says Grandma can't see well enough to sew or knit anymore. I say I'll repair them for her. She says, "Men don't sew," and I say, "Many's the time I've repaired my clothes myself. I'd have made the doll clothes better if I'd had a needle."

When we get almost to the hut it's beginning to be twilight. We curve around to the side and see a guard. He's across from the door partly hidden by a currant bush. Had we come straight in by the path he might have shot us.

Loo wants to run right out but I hold her back. I clamp my hand over her mouth just in time to stop her yell. "Wait. One of us should stay a secret. I'll find out if Grandma's all right. You stay here." I find her a good spot farther back. "We may need you later. You may have to rescue both of us."

I take off my cap so the guard will know it's me. I give it to Loo. I was thinking she needed something to take care of, but all this time she's been holding the doll, tight in her mitten. I had forgotten about it, but she hadn't. I say, "Find it a name." But she's a child like I was a child so not a child at all, yet she hung on to the doll through all this scrabbling over rocks. Makes me think of my pet mouse. This last time in solitary I had not made a pet of any of the rats. I had not chanted and still I had escaped. Is that proof of the uselessness of chanting?

I walk straight in from the path with no hat. By now it's starting to get dark. The guard recognizes me with delight. He points the automatic straight at me.

I say, "Hold it. Not as much of a reward for me dead. Where's Grandma?"

I don't think any of his men are nearby. Why would they need more than one man to guard Grandma? Earlier we heard their copters dropping men off above my landslide. "You know all your teams are busy elsewhere."

He looks uncertain. He's very young.

Then we see rockets lighting up the sky far below us. I think: But there are no more armies. And then I think: Loo! Will she be frightened? By now it's almost dark.

The guard and I turn to look out at the sky, but I turn back before he does. I grab the automatic and use it to knock him down. I hold the butt against his throat. He chokes. I let up some. He gags.

"Grandma!"

When he tries to talk his voice is hoarse. I leaned too hard. Another little bit and his Adam's apple would have pierced his esophagus.

We are celebrating Victory Day with the usual cannon volleys, fireworks, and flag waving. Even though a most important enemy is still at large, no need not to celebrate. We are unlikely to be harmed by this single escaped general. We have taken down the wanted notices. To us he is no more than a gnat, though vexatious. Some are laughing, enjoying the fact that one man has eluded us all this time. They are traitors. We are putting up new notices that say: no longer wanted.

Winter is coming. The weather will worsen. We've postponed our search, perhaps until spring, perhaps forever.

I had forgotten about Victory Day . . . Victory over us day. Not forgotten about it, but I'd lost track of time. I've had to celebrate it ever since military school. At least now I'm not forced to cheer and dance or wave a hated flag. I can yell my rage if I want to. I do. The soldier looks up at me terrified. I yell louder. I've not let myself do that ever before. I yell and then here's Grandma hobbling out. I fall on the young man, the automatic hard between us. He doesn't dare move. Then here's Loo, holding my head. Still I yell. I roll away from the soldier and the gun. I have to stop yelling because I can't breathe. Grandma has picked up the automatic. It's clear she knows how to use it. She's going to shoot. I'd try to stop her but I'm breathless. My first thought is: I'll take the blame. I'm already blamed for many more things than I've done, anyway. One more won't make a difference. I'm considered a killer though I've never even pointed a gun at anyone. When I was on their side I shot to miss and when I was on our side I was a general and didn't have to shoot.

The gun seems too heavy for her. Her aim wavers. It makes her look all the more dangerous. "Go home," she says. Her old-crow voice is scary. "Home. I mean it."

It's dark now but he goes—stumbling, tripping.

I'm still panting—groaning at every breath as though I were in pain. Something has been let loose inside me.

I never chanted except secretly to myself. I believe Loo is the only person who ever heard me. I've always wondered if chanting had anything to do with anything. As a child I thought it did. Escape always seemed so easy. I thought I'd done it with my songs. And sometimes after a good chant I thought, Any minute, people will come to rescue me. Even Aunt June Harvest would come, and she was dead with the rest. She's the one started my chanting. I remember standing in her doorway listening. We were a family that didn't believe in any of the old superstitions, but Aunt June Harvest believed things the rest of us didn't or weren't supposed to.

As a child in solitary, I usually chanted up my father. I thought of him opening the door, letting in sunlight—Pada, in full dress uniform, bringing our kind of food. I shouted, "Pada!" Often, after chanting I knew all that I'd seen with my own eyes was false; there had been no deaths and my father was come to rescue me.

I can't breathe. Loo sits beside me, says, "Sang, Sang." At first I think she must mean my pet mouse and then I remember I am Sang. She puts the doll in my hand, giving it back. I take it. I turn over onto my hands and knees, then hunker down. Even though I easily escaped this last time, I no longer think chanting has any effect on anything except for my own need to chant, yet I do it now. Though breathless, I chant. How, how, and, And. And, Row, Row. And *Row* begins to mean *raw* indeed, instead of *remember*, *remember*, and I'm as if in our old flat-bottom boat on our pond with my little sister. My sister leans to pull at a water lily. Oarlocks creak. A red-winged blackbird clings to a reed. I hear the bird's song. At first so sweet and then loud and then much too loud. And then I must have passed out. That's never happened before.

I come to with Grandma rubbing snow on my face. Then she helps me turn over, raises my head, and holds tea to my lips. Loo and

Grandma help me into my sleeping spot under the table. I shiver. They pile quilts on me. Loo puts the doll beside my pillow. I try to give it back but she won't let me. I say, "I made it for you." But then I let her. I sleep a sick sleep.

Whenever I wake myself up with my yelling, they are there, Grandma in the rocking chair and Loo and the goats on the floor beside me.

The celebration of Victory Day was a success. We had temporarily removed all the WANTED! DANGEROUS MAN AT LARGE posters. The mood was as it should be. We have made them forget that the General still eludes us. We shot into the air, but, as far as we know, all the bullets came down safely. We are pleased. We have toasted ourselves. "Long live and forever," we said to each other, and "Victory Day throughout eternity."

Next I know good smells wake me. Grandma is baking an elderberry pie. I don't wake up angry as I usually do even though at first I think Grandma is celebrating Victory Day, but she says it's not to celebrate any victories; it's for me. She says they haven't had pie in a long time.

"Which side?" I say, thinking to find out at last what side they're on.

"Just us," she says, and then, "No sides. Lupine, snakeweed, fire-weed people. Asters and rock fringe people."

The General is to be presumed dead. We'll not waste any more resources hunting him. He's no longer of any meaning. What army could he be the general of anymore? We'll celebrate his death with another night of cannon volleys. The reward set aside for his capture is withdrawn and will revert back to the army, though, just in case, we'll not publicize that it no longer exists. All the better if people think it's still on.

I make a little outdoor oven so I can smoke fish for them. I chop more wood. There's already dried kinnikinnick here. In the evenings I carve myself a pipe to smoke it. Loo and I together repair her wooly petticoats. I start to make her a bigger better doll but she says she just wants the old small one with my underwear for a dress, so I strengthen the arms and legs with fishing line. I carve a little goat. I make Loo guess what it's going to be as I go along. I wear the men's clothes that were hanging behind the door. I sit by the stove of an evening smoking or sewing more dresses for the doll. I still sleep under the table. I keep the fire burning all night. The stovepipe curls through to the other room so they stay warm. All my life since I was nine, I have awakened every morning in a rage, renewing my promises. All my life I have distrusted people, but not now.

Loo is teaching me how to be a child. Or perhaps we're teaching each other. I make the doll dance, and then she does it. Suppertimes, I wave a tidbit ... a dried crawdad or some such, in front of her and let her snap at it. I throw a walnut up and catch it in my mouth. She tries but she can't do it. I make pancakes and flip them almost to the ceiling when I turn them. I remember the peasant dances my men used to do and, though I've never tried to do one, I try now. I take Loo's hand and make her dance with me. I growl out a song. We even make Grandma smile. We even make her sing.

They're both getting fatter. I'll leave in the spring. In the spring Loo can gather all sorts of sprouts, fiddlehead ferns, mushrooms. . . . She's gotten good at fishing. I'll cross the pass and go home—if I can find it—if anything remains. I haven't thought of home for a long time. I hadn't thought I had one, nor did I want one. Perhaps I should look for the remains of my army. Though ... I'd like to be finished with that sort of life. Perhaps I'll live the rest of my life home, if it still exists. Or here.

A group of our people hoping for the reward found him on the trail. (They thought the reward was still operative. All the better then, if people do.) Or perhaps he found them. It might have been him, but could he grow that much hair and that much beard in this length of time? There might be other fugitives on the mountain. However that may be, this man jumped them at the perfect spot and pushed them over, all three. None died but all slid down and were found at the bot-

tom, scratched and bruised. Harassing us is just the sort of thing he would do. We had thought he was much higher up by now. Perhaps even over on the other side. But then again, we aren't sure this man was him. Perhaps it wasn't the General at all but some other man with something else against us. How many wild men roam the mountains looking for their chances at us? The mountains could be full of them. We'll not waste any more time on him—or them.

But then Loo wakes me in the middle of the night. Grandma is trying to talk but can't. The whole right side of her face is lopsided. I recognize right away she's had a stroke. I'll need to get help. No, they'll arrest me before I have a chance to bring up a doctor. I'll have to get her down to town. It will be the quickest anyway. I've already made a skid for hauling logs. I wrap Grandma in all our quilts and blankets and tie her to it. There's still quite a bit of snow here on the upper slopes; that'll make the first part easier. I feed Loo cold smoked fish and goat's milk, grab whatever food is handy to bring along, wrap Loo up in scarves, and start out. I see to it she doesn't forget her doll and she sees to it I don't forget my pipe. (At the last minute I throw in Grandma's scissors and Loo's father's razor.) Though it's still hardly dawn, I grab the rope and we start out. I won't be careful this time; I'll just be fast.

The farther down we get the warmer it'll be. We'll hit true spring in a day.

We spend the first night in an empty cabin. We burn their wood, not worried who sees the smoke. We use their barley to make gruel. There's a small mirror. I shave my beard and I have Loo help me shave my head. I don't tell her why and she doesn't ask. (Afterward she says she liked me better hairy.) Until the time comes, I'll keep my cap on.

Farther down there are no more snowy patches so it's harder. At one point the skid gets going down a scree slope. I get a bump on my head trying to stop it. That fits with my plans.

After we leave Grandma at the clinic, I tell Loo, "Tie me up and lead me to the prison. There's a big reward for my

capture. Turn me in and request it. Make them set up the money in a bank account for Grandma, to dole out little by little. It's a lot of money." (I still don't dare tell her how much even though I'm sure she'd not be able to understand it anyway.)

But even as I speak I realize they won't do it for a child. Perhaps I should turn myself in for my own reward. Have an account in my own and Grandma's name. Will they let me do that? What if Grandma dies or never recovers her senses? Loo's name then. They won't, but they might. It would change their life. I may as well try.

I show Loo how to tie me up.

"The bruise on my head . . . tell them you did that."

She starts to cry. "I won't."

"You'll see. You'll be a hero. Everything will be better this way."

"It won't be."

"I'll be fine. I have my chants and I can think about you."

She tries to give me her doll.

"They'll not let me keep anything. You keep the pipe, too. I can only take unreal things like remembering."

But we're too late. There's been no reward since winter. I can't believe it. I'm no longer of any importance. At first I feel a great relief. My stomach lurches. I almost throw up. It's over. This is better than any reward no matter how large. Loo and I can walk away.

But they grab me anyway. I struggle though I know it's useless. In half a minute I'm shackled again. I yell at Loo to go to the clinic, but when I look back, they've got her, too. I can't think why. I suppose she's guilty of helping me. I never should have let them help. I wonder what they'll do to Grandma. They know I have loved ones now. I wonder if Loo has the sense to chant.

We put up new posters: **THE GENERAL IS IN OUR CUSTODY**. Finding him and capturing him was difficult but we prevailed. Congratulations to all our Search and Capture teams. They will be rewarded. Prepare your flags and trumpets; tomorrow there will be another day of celebrating.