

Summer Reading!

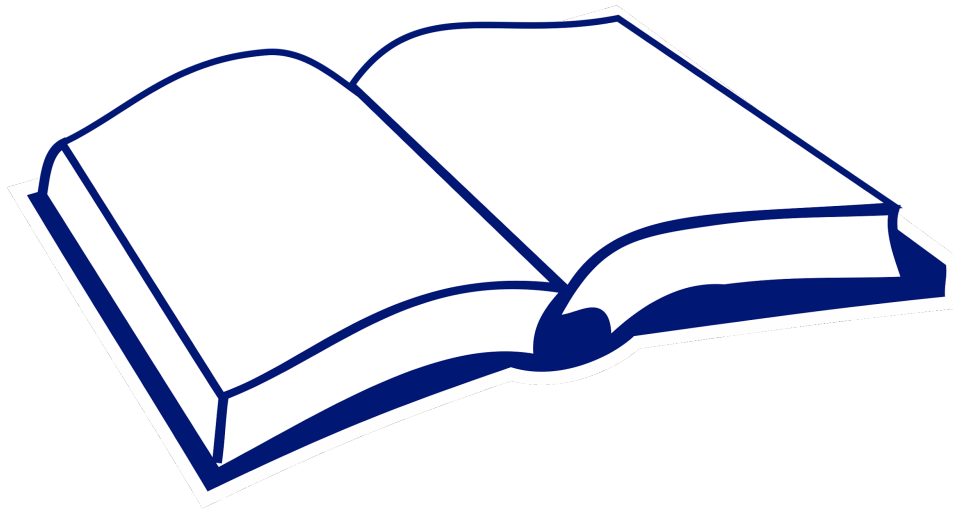
Hello future 8th graders!

This summer, your assigned reading will stray from the traditional book. Instead, you will be reading two short stories: "To Build a Fire" by Jack London and "Bride Price" by Linda Crew.

Both of which are provided in this packet.

In other words: put this somewhere you will see it, remember to complete it, and not lose it!

It is our expectation that you come back to school in September with both stories read and annotated.



Have a stellar summer! We can't wait to get to know y'all in September.

-The Grade 8 English Teachers



In order to help you with this, we have provided you with instructions on how to and what to annotate.

In the text:

→ **Circle unknown words Highlight new characters or settings**

→ **Underline and label any figurative language and techniques:**


- ◆ Simile: compares two things using like or as
- ◆ Metaphor: a direct replacement; saying something is something else; compares two things without using like or as
- ◆ Personification: gives human-like qualities or actions to an inanimate object
- ◆ Irony: the use of words to convey a meaning that is the opposite of its literal meaning
- ◆ Dramatic irony: the reader knows more than the characters in the story
- ◆ Foreshadowing: indication of what is going to happen in the future
- ◆ Allusion: reference to history, the bible, or popular culture
- ◆ Conflict: man vs. man, man vs. nature, man vs. self, man vs. society
- ◆ Flashback: a sudden change in which the reader is taken back in time to before the main events of a story
- ◆ Imagery: visually descriptive; typically uses sensory language
- ◆ Symbol: an object, character, or mark that represents something other than itself
- ◆ Tone: the general attitude or sound writing conveys
- ◆ Mood: the general atmosphere of a narrative

In the margins:

- Define any unknown words
- Identify the theme or themes (a universal main idea or lesson). Remember, a theme is not just one word and should not include any character's names or references to the story's specific plot.
- Ask questions
- Keep track of events that progress the plot



To Build a Fire

AY HAD DAWNED COLD AND GRAY WHEN the man turned aside from the main Yukon trail. He climbed the high earth-bank where a little-traveled trail led east through the pine forest. It was a high bank, and he paused to breathe at the top. He excused the act to himself by looking at his watch. It was nine o'clock in the morning. There was no sun or promise of sun, although there was not a cloud in the sky. It was a clear day. However, there seemed to be an indescribable darkness over the face of things. That was because the sun was absent from the sky. This fact did not worry the man. He was not alarmed by the lack of sun. It had been days since he had seen the sun.

The man looked along the way he had come. The Yukon lay a mile wide and hidden under three feet of ice. On top of this ice were as many feet of snow. It was all pure white. North and south, as far as

his eye could see, it was unbroken white. The one thing that relieved the whiteness was a thin dark line that curved from the pine-covered island to the south. It curved into the north, where it disappeared behind another pine-covered island. This dark line was the trail—the main trail. It led south 500 miles to the Chilcoot Pass, and salt water. It led north 75 miles to Dawson, and still farther on to the north a thousand miles to Nulato, and finally to St. Michael, on Bering Sea, a thousand miles and half a thousand more.

But all this—the distant trail, no sun in the sky, the great cold, and the strangeness of it all—had no effect on the man. It was not because he was long familiar with it. He was a newcomer in the land, and this was his first winter.

The trouble with him was that he was not able to imagine. He was quick and ready in the things of life, but only in the things, and not in their meanings. Fifty **degrees** below **zero** meant 80 degrees of frost. Such facts told him that it was cold and uncomfortable, and that was all. It did not lead him to consider his weaknesses as a creature affected by temperature. Nor did he think about man's general weakness, able to live only within narrow limits of heat and cold. From there, it did not lead him to thoughts of heaven and the meaning of a man's life. 50 degrees below zero meant a bite of frost that hurt and that must be guarded against by the use of mittens, ear coverings, warm moccasins, and thick socks. 50 degrees below zero was to him nothing more than 50 degrees below zero. That it should be more important than that was a thought that never entered his head.

As he turned to go, he forced some water from his mouth as an experiment. There was a sudden noise that surprised him. He tried it again. And again, in the air, before they could fall to the snow, the drops of water became ice that broke with a noise. He knew that at 50 below zero water from the mouth made a noise when it hit the snow. But this had done that in the air. Undoubtedly it was colder than 50 below. But exactly how much colder he did not know. But the temperature did not matter.

He was headed for the old camp on Henderson Creek, where the

boys were already. They had come across the mountain from the Indian Creek country. He had taken the long trail to look at the possibility of floating logs from the islands in the Yukon down the river when the ice melted. He would be in camp by six o'clock that evening. It would be a little after dark, but the boys would be there, a fire would be burning, and a hot supper would be ready. As he thought of lunch, he pressed his hand against the package under his jacket. It was also under his shirt, wrapped in a handkerchief, and lying for warmth against the naked skin. Otherwise, the bread would freeze. He smiled contentedly to himself as he thought of those pieces of bread, each of which enclosed a generous portion of cooked meat.

He plunged among the big pine trees. The trail was not well marked here. Several inches of snow had fallen since the last sled had passed. He was glad he was without a sled. Actually, he carried nothing but the lunch wrapped in the handkerchief. He was surprised, however, at the cold. It certainly was cold, he decided, as he rubbed his nose and face with his mittened hand. He had a good growth of hair on his face, but that did not protect his nose or the upper part of his face from the frosty air.

Following at the man's heels was a big native dog. It was a wolf dog, gray-coated and not noticeably different from its brother, the wild wolf. The animal was worried by the great cold. It knew that this was no time for traveling. Its own feeling was closer to the truth than the man's judgment. In reality, it was not merely colder than 50 below zero; it was colder than 60 below, than 70 below. It was 75 below zero. Because the freezing point is 32 above zero, it meant that there were 107 degrees of frost.

The dog did not know anything about temperatures. Possibly in its brain there was no understanding of a condition of very cold, such as was in the man's brain. But the animal sensed the danger. Its fear made it question eagerly every movement of the man as if expecting him to go into camp or to seek shelter somewhere and build a fire. The dog had learned about fire, and it wanted fire. Otherwise, it would dig itself into the snow and find shelter from the cold air.

The frozen moistness of its breathing had settled on its fur in a fine powder of frost. The hair on the man's face was similarly frosted, but more solidly. It took the form of ice and increased with every warm, moist breath from his mouth. Also, the man had tobacco in his mouth. The ice held his lips so tightly together that he could not empty the juice from his mouth. The result was a long piece of yellow ice hanging from his lips. If he fell down it would break, like glass, into many pieces. He expected the ice formed by the tobacco juice, having been out twice before when it was very cold. But it had not been as cold as this, he knew.

He continued through the level forest for several miles. Then he went down a bank to the frozen path of a small stream. This was Henderson Creek and he knew he was ten miles from where the stream divided. He looked at his watch. It was ten o'clock. He was traveling at the rate of four miles an hour. Thus, he figured that he would arrive where the stream divided at half-past twelve. He decided he would eat his lunch when he arrived there.

The dog followed again at his heels, with its tail hanging low, as the man started to walk along the frozen stream. The old sled trail could be seen, but a dozen inches of snow covered the marks of the last sleds. In a month no man had traveled up or down that silent creek. The man went steadily ahead. He was not much of a thinker. At that moment he had nothing to think about except that he would eat lunch at the stream's divide and that at six o'clock he would be in camp with the boys. There was nobody to talk to; and, had there been, speech would not have been possible because of the ice around his mouth.

Once in a while the thought repeated itself that it was very cold and that he had never experienced such cold. As he walked along he rubbed his face and nose with the back of his mittened hand. He did this without thinking, frequently changing hands. But, with all his rubbing, the instant he stopped, his face and nose became **numb**. His face would surely be frozen. He knew that and he was sorry that he had not worn the sort of nose guard Bud wore when it was cold. Such a guard passed across the nose and covered the entire face. But it did not

matter much, he decided. What was a little frost? A bit painful, that was all. It was never serious.

Empty as the man's mind was of thoughts, he was most observant. He noticed the changes in the creek, the curves and the bends. And always he noted where he placed his feet. Once, coming around a bend, he moved suddenly to the side, like a frightened horse. He curved away from the place where he had been walking and retraced his steps several feet along the trail. He knew the creek was frozen to the bottom. No creek could contain water in that winter. But he knew also that there were streams of water that came out from the hillsides and ran along under the snow and on top of the ice of the creek. He knew that even in the coldest weather these streams were never frozen, and he also knew their danger. They hid pools of water under the snow that might be three inches deep, or three feet. Sometimes a skin of ice half an inch thick covered them, and in turn was covered by the snow. Sometimes there was both water and thin ice, and when a man broke through he could get very wet.

That was why he had jumped away so suddenly. He had felt the ice move under his feet. He had also heard the noise of the snow-covered ice skin breaking. And to get his feet wet in such a temperature meant trouble and danger. At the very least it meant delay, because he would be forced to stop and build a fire. Only under its protection could he bare his feet while he dried his socks and moccasins.

He stood and studied the creek bottom and its banks. He decided that the flowing stream of water came from the right side. He thought a while, rubbing his nose and face. Then he walked to the left. He stepped carefully and tested the ice at each step. Once away from the danger, he continued at his four-mile pace.

During the next two hours he came to several similar dangers. Usually the snow above the pools had a sunken appearance. However, once again he came near to falling through the ice. Once, sensing danger, he made the dog go ahead. The dog did not want to go. It hesitated until the man pushed it forward. Then it went quickly across the white, unbroken surface. Suddenly it fell through the ice, but climbed out on

the other side, which was firm. It had wet its feet and legs. Almost immediately the water on them turned to ice. The dog made quick efforts to get the ice off its legs. Then it lay down in the snow and began to bite out the ice that had formed between the toes. The animal knew enough to do this. To permit the ice to remain would mean sore feet. It did not know this. It merely obeyed the commands that arose from the deepest part of its being.

But the man knew these things, having learned them from experience. He removed the mitten from his right hand and helped the dog tear out the pieces of ice. He did not bare his fingers more than a minute, and was surprised to find that they were numb. It certainly was cold. He pulled on the mitten quickly and beat the hand across his breast.

At twelve o'clock the day was at its brightest. Yet the sun did not appear in the sky. At half-past twelve, on the minute, he arrived at the divide of the creek. He was pleased at his rate of speed. If he continued, he would certainly be with the boys by six o'clock that evening.

He unbuttoned his jacket and shirt and pulled forth his lunch. The action took no more than a quarter of a minute, yet in that brief moment the numbness touched his bare fingers. He did not put the mitten on, but instead, struck the fingers against his leg. Then he sat down on a snow-covered log to eat. The pain that followed the striking of his fingers against his leg ceased so quickly that he was frightened. He had not had time to take a bite of his lunch. He struck the fingers repeatedly and returned them to the mitten. Then he bared the other hand for the purpose of eating. He tried to take a mouthful, but the ice around his mouth prevented him.

Then he knew what was wrong. He had forgotten to build a fire and warm himself. He laughed at his own foolishness. As he laughed, he noted the numbness in his bare fingers. Also, he noted that the feeling which had first come to his toes when he sat down was already passing away. He wondered whether the toes were warm or whether they were numb. He moved them inside the moccasins and decided that they were numb.

He pulled the mitten on hurriedly and stood up. He was some-

what frightened. He stamped forcefully until the feeling returned to his feet. It certainly was cold, was his thought. That man from Sulphur Creek had spoken the truth when telling how cold it sometimes got in this country. And he had laughed at him at the time! That showed one must not be too sure of things. There was no mistake about it, it was cold. He walked a few steps, stamping his feet and waving his arms, until reassured by the returning warmth. Then he took some matches and proceeded to make a fire. In the bushes, the high water had left a supply of sticks. From here he got wood for his fire. Working carefully from a small beginning, he soon had a roaring fire.

Bending over the fire, he first melted the ice from his face. With the protection of the fire's warmth he ate his lunch. For the moment, the cold had been forced away. The dog took comfort in the fire, lying at full length close enough for warmth and far enough away to escape being burned. When the man had finished eating, he filled his pipe with tobacco and had a comfortable time with a smoke. Then he pulled on his mittens, settled his cap firmly about his ears, and started along the creek trail toward the left.

The dog was sorry to leave and looked toward the fire. This man did not know cold. Possibly none of his ancestors had known cold, real cold. But the dog knew and all of its family knew. And it knew that it was not good to walk outside in such fearful cold. It was the time to lie in a hole in the snow and to wait for this awful cold to stop. There was no real bond between the dog and the man. The one was the slave of the other. The dog made no effort to indicate its fears to the man. It was not concerned with the well-being of the man. It was for its own sake that it looked toward the fire. But the man whistled, and spoke to it with the sound of the whip in his voice. So the dog started walking close to the man's heels and followed him along the trail.

The man put more tobacco in his mouth and started a new growth of yellow ice on his face. Again his moist breath quickly powdered the hair on his face with white. He looked around him. There did not seem to be so many pools of water under the snow on the left side of Henderson Creek, and for half an hour the man saw no signs of any.

And then it happened. At a place where there were no signs, the man broke through. It was not deep. He was wet to the knees before he got out of the water to the firm snow.

He was angry and cursed his luck aloud. He had hoped to get into camp with the boys at six o'clock, and this would delay him an hour. Now he would have to build a fire and dry his moccasins and socks. This was most important at that low temperature. He knew that much.

So he turned aside to the bank, which he climbed. On top, under several small pine trees, he found some firewood which had been carried there by the high water of last year. There were some sticks, but also larger branches, and some dry grasses. He threw several large branches on top of the snow. This served for a foundation and prevented the young flame from dying in the wet snow. He made a flame by touching a match to a small piece of tree bark that he took from his pocket. This burned even better than paper. Placing it on the foundation, he fed the young flame with pieces of dry grass and with the smallest dry sticks.

He worked slowly and carefully, realizing his danger. Gradually, as the flame grew stronger, he increased the size of the sticks with which he fed it. He sat in the snow, pulling the sticks from the bushes under the trees and feeding them directly to the flame. He knew he must not fail. When it is 75 below zero, a man must not fail in his first attempt to build a fire. This is especially true if his feet are wet. If his feet are dry, and he fails, he can run along the trail for half a mile to keep his blood moving. But the blood in wet and freezing feet cannot be kept moving by running when it is 75 degrees below. No matter how fast he runs, the wet feet will freeze even harder.

All this the man knew. The old man on Sulphur Creek had told him about it, and now he was grateful for the advice. Already all feeling had gone from his feet. To build the fire he had been forced to remove his mittens, and the fingers had quickly become numb. His pace of four miles an hour had kept his heart pushing the blood to all parts of his body. But the instant he stopped, the action of the heart slowed down. He now received the full force of the cold. The blood of

his body drew back from it. The blood was alive, like the dog. Like the dog, it wanted to hide and seek cover, away from the fearful cold. As long as he walked four miles an hour, the blood rose to the surface. But now it sank down into the lowest depths of his body. His feet and hands were the first to feel its absence. His wet feet froze first. His bare fingers were numb, although they had not yet begun to freeze. Nose and face were already freezing, while the skin of all his body became cold as it lost its blood.

But he was safe. Toes and nose and face would be only touched by the frost, because the fire was beginning to burn with strength. He was feeding it with sticks the size of his finger. In another minute he would be able to feed it with larger branches. Then he could remove his wet moccasins and socks. While they dried, he could keep his naked feet warm by the fire, rubbing them first with snow. The fire was a success. He was safe.

He remembered the advice of the old man on Sulphur Creek, and smiled. The man had been very serious when he said that no man should travel alone in that country after 50 below zero. Well, here he was; he had had the accident; he was alone; and he had saved himself. Those old men were rather womanish, he thought. All a man must do was to keep his head, and he was all right. Any man who was a man could travel alone. But it was surprising, the rapidity with which his face and nose were freezing. And he had not thought his fingers could lose their feeling in so short a time. Without feeling they were, because he found it very difficult to make them move together to grasp a stick. They seemed far from his body and from him. When he touched a stick, he had to look to see whether or not he was holding it.

All of which mattered little. There was the fire, promising life with every dancing flame. He started to untie his moccasins. They were coated with ice. The thick socks were like iron almost to the knees. The moccasin's strings were like ropes of steel. For a moment he pulled them with his unfeeling fingers. Then, realizing the foolishness of it, he grasped his knife.

But before he could cut the strings, it happened. It was his own

fault, or instead, his mistake. He should not have built the fire under the pine tree. He should have built it in an open space. But it had been easier to pull the sticks from the bushes and drop them directly on the fire.

Now the tree under which he had done this carried a weight of snow on its branches. No wind had been blowing for weeks and each branch was heavy with snow. Each time he pulled a stick he shook the tree slightly. There had been just enough movement to cause the awful thing to happen. High up in the tree one branch dropped its load of snow. This fell on the branches beneath. This process continued, spreading through the whole tree. The snow fell without warning upon the man and the fire, and the fire was dead. Where it had burned was a pile of fresh snow.

The man was shocked. It was like hearing his own judgment of death. For a moment he sat and stared at the spot where the fire had been. Then he grew very calm. Perhaps the old man on Sulphur Creek was right. If he had a companion on the trail he would be in no danger now. The companion could have built the fire. Now, he must build the fire again, and this second time he must not fail. Even if he succeeded, he would be likely to lose some toes. His feet must be badly frozen by now, and there would be some time before the second fire was ready.

Such were his thoughts, but he did not sit and think them. He was busy all the time they were passing through his mind. He made a new foundation for a fire, this time in the open space, where no tree would be above it. Next, he gathered dry grasses and tiny sticks. He could not bring his fingers together to pull them out of the ground, but he was able to gather them by the handful. In this way he also got many pieces that were undesirable, but it was the best he could do. He worked carefully, even collecting an armful of the larger branches to be used later when the fire gathered strength. And all the while the dog sat and watched him. There was an anxious look in its eyes, because it depended upon him as the fire provider, and the fire was slow in coming.

When all was ready, the man reached in his pocket for the second piece of tree bark. He knew the bark was there, although he could not feel it with his fingers. He tried again and again, but he could not

grasp it. And all the time, in his mind, he knew that each instant his feet were freezing. This thought alarmed him, but he fought against it and kept calm.

He pulled on his mittens with his teeth, and began swinging his arms. Then he beat his hands with all his strength against his sides. He did this while he was sitting down. Then he stood up to do it. All the while the dog sat in the snow, its tail curled warmly over its feet and its sharp wolf ears bent forward as it looked at the man. And the man, as he waved his arms and hands, looked with longing at the creature that was warm and secure in the covering provided by nature.

After a time, he began to notice some feeling in his beaten fingers. The feeling grew stronger until it became very painful, but the man welcomed the pain. He pulled the mitten from his right hand and grasped the tree bark from his pocket. The bare fingers were quickly numb again. Next, he brought out his pack of matches. But the awful cold had already driven the life out of his fingers. In his effort to separate one match from the others, the whole pack fell in the snow. He tried to pick it out of the snow, but failed. The dead fingers could neither touch nor hold.

Now he was very careful. He drove the thought of his freezing feet, and nose, and face, from his mind. He devoted his whole soul to picking up the matches. He followed the movement of his fingers with his eyes, using his sense of sight instead of that of touch. When he saw his fingers on each side of the pack, he closed them. That is, he willed to close them, because the fingers did not obey. He put the mitten on the right hand again, and beat it fiercely against his knee. Then, with both mittened hands, he lifted up the pack of matches, along with much snow, to the front of his jacket. But he had gained nothing.

After some struggling he managed to get the pack between his mittened hands. In this manner he carried it to his mouth. The ice broke as he opened his mouth with a fierce effort. He used his upper teeth to rub across the pack in order to separate a single match. He succeeded in getting one, which he dropped on his jacket. His condition was no better. He could not pick up the match. Then he thought how he might

do it. He picked up the match in his teeth and drew it across his leg. Twenty times he did this before he succeeded in lighting it. As it flamed he held it with his teeth to the tree bark. But the burning smell went up his nose, causing him to cough. The match fell into the snow and the flame died.

The old man on Sulphur Creek was right, he thought in the moment of controlled despair that followed. After 50 below zero, a man should travel with a companion. He beat his hands, but failed to produce any feeling in them. Suddenly he bared both hands, removing the mittens with his teeth. He caught the whole pack of matches between his hands. His arm muscles were not frozen and he was able to press the hands tightly against the matches. Then he drew the whole pack along his leg. It burst into flame, 70 matches at once!

There was no wind to blow them out. He kept his head to one side to escape the burning smell, and held the flaming pack to the tree bark. As he so held it, he noticed some feeling in his hand. His flesh was burning. He could smell it. The feeling developed into pain. He continued to endure it. He held the flame of the matches to the bark that would not light readily because his own burning hands were taking most of the flame.

Finally, when he could endure no more, he pulled his hands apart. The flaming matches fell into the snow, but the tree bark was burning. He began laying dry grasses and the tiniest sticks on the flame. He could not choose carefully because they must be pieces that could be lifted between his hands. Small pieces of green grass stayed on the sticks, and he bit them off as well as he could with his teeth. He treated the flame carefully. It meant life, and it must not cease.

The blood had left the surface of his body and he now began to shake from the cold. A large piece of a wet plant fell on the little fire. He tried to push it out with his fingers. His shaking body made him push it too far and he scattered the little fire over a wide space. He tried to push the burning grasses and sticks together again. Even with the strong effort that he made, his trembling fingers would not obey and the sticks were hopelessly scattered. Each stick smoked a little and died. The fire

provider had failed. As he looked about him, his eyes noticed the dog sitting across the ruins of the fire from him. It was making uneasy movements, slightly lifting one foot and then the other.

The sight of the dog put a wild idea into his head. He remembered the story of the man, caught in a storm, who killed an animal and sheltered himself inside the dead body and thus was saved. He would kill the dog and bury his hands in the warm body until feeling returned to them. Then he could build another fire.

He spoke to the dog, calling it to him. But in his voice was a strange note of fear that frightened the animal. It had never known the man to speak in such a tone before. Something was wrong and it sensed danger. It knew not what danger, but somewhere in its brain arose a fear of the man. It flattened its ears at the sound of the man's voice; its uneasy movements and the liftings of its feet became more noticeable. But it would not come to the man. He got down on his hands and knees and went toward the dog. But this unusual position again excited fear and the animal moved away.

The man sat in the snow for a moment and struggled for calmness. Then he pulled on his mittens, using his teeth, and then stood on his feet. He glanced down to assure himself that he was really standing, because lack of feeling in his feet gave him no relation to the earth. His position, however, removed the fear from the dog's mind.

When he commanded the dog with his usual voice, the dog obeyed and came to him. As it came within his reach, the man lost control. His arms stretched out to hold the dog and he experienced real surprise when he discovered that his hands could not grasp. There was neither bend nor feeling in the fingers. He had forgotten for the moment that they were frozen and that they were freezing more and more. All this happened quickly and before the animal could escape, he encircled its body with his arms. He sat down in the snow, and in this fashion held the dog, while it barked and struggled.

But it was all he could do: hold its body encircled in his arms and sit there. He realized that he could not kill the dog. There was no way to do it. With his frozen hands he could neither draw nor hold his

knife. Nor could he grasp the dog around the throat. He freed it and it dashed wildly away, still barking. It stopped 40 feet away and observed him curiously, with ears sharply bent forward.

The man looked down at his hands to locate them and found them hanging on the ends of his arms. He thought it curious that it was necessary to use his eyes to discover where his hands were. He began waving his arms, beating the mittened hands against his sides. He did this for five minutes. His heart produced enough blood to stop his shaking. But no feeling was created in his hands.

A certain fear of death came upon him. He realized that it was no longer a mere problem of freezing his fingers and toes, or of losing his hands and feet. Now it was a problem of life and death with the circumstances against him. The fear made him lose control of himself and he turned and ran along the creek bed on the old trail. The dog joined him and followed closely behind. The man ran blindly in fear such as he had never known in his life. Slowly, as he struggled through the snow, he began to see things again—the banks of the creek, the bare trees, and the sky.

The running made him feel better. He did not shake any more. Maybe, if he continued to run, his feet would stop freezing. Maybe if he ran far enough, he would find the camp and the boys. Without doubt, he would lose some fingers and toes and some of his face. But the boys would take care of him and save the rest of him when he got there. And at the same time, there was another thought in his mind that said he would never get to the camp and the boys. It told him that it was too many miles away, that the freezing had too great a start and that he would soon be dead. He pushed this thought to the back of his mind and refused to consider it. Sometimes it came forward and demanded to be heard. But he pushed it away and tried to think of other things.

It seemed strange to him that he could run on feet so frozen that he could not feel them when they struck the earth and took the weight of his body. He seemed to be flying along above the surface and to have no connection with the earth.

His idea of running until he arrived at the camp and the boys pre-

sented one problem: he lacked the endurance. Several times he caught himself as he was falling. Finally, he dropped to the ground, unable to stop his fall. When he tried to rise, he failed. He must sit and rest, he decided. Next time he would merely walk and keep going.

As he sat and regained his breath, he noted that he was feeling warm and comfortable. He was not shaking, and it even seemed that a warm glow had come to his body. And yet, when he touched his nose or face, there was no feeling. Running would not bring life to them. Nor would it help his hands and feet. Then the thought came to him that the frozen portions of his body must be increasing. He tried to keep this thought out of his mind and to forget it. He knew that such thoughts caused a feeling of fright in him and he was afraid of such feelings. But the thought returned and continued, until he could picture his body totally frozen. This was too much, and again he ran wildly along the trail. Once he slowed to a walk, but the thought that the freezing of his body was increasing made him run again.

And all the time the dog ran with him, at his heels. When he fell a second time, the dog curled its tail over its feet and sat in front of him, facing him, curiously eager. The warmth and security of the animal angered him. He cursed it until it flattened its ears. This time the shaking because of the cold began more quickly. He was losing his battle with the frost. It was moving into his body from all sides. This thought drove him forward. But he ran no more than 100 feet, when he fell head first.

It was his last moment of fear. When he had recovered his breath and his control, he sat and thought about meeting death with dignity. However, the idea did not come to him in exactly this manner. His idea was that he had been acting like a fool. He had been running around like a chicken with its head cut off. He was certain to freeze in his present circumstances, and he should accept it calmly. With this newfound peace of mind came the first sleepiness. A good idea, he thought, to sleep his way to death. Freezing was not as bad as people thought. There were many worse ways to die.

He pictured the boys finding his body the next day. Suddenly he


saw himself with them, coming along the trail and looking for himself. And, still with them, he came around a turn in the trail and found himself lying in the snow. He did not belong with himself any more. Even then he was outside of himself, standing with the boys and looking at himself in the snow. It certainly was cold, was his thought. When he returned to the United States he could tell the folks what real cold was.

His mind went from this to the thought of the old man of Sulphur Creek. He could see him quite clearly, warm and comfortable, and smoking a pipe.

"You were right, old fellow. You were right," he murmured to the old man of Sulphur Creek.

Then the man dropped into what seemed to him the most comfortable and satisfying sleep he had ever known. The dog sat facing him and waiting. The brief day ended in a long evening. There were no signs of a fire to be made. Never in the dog's experience had it known a man to sit like that in the snow and make no fire. As the evening grew darker, its eager longing for the fire mastered it. With much lifting of its feet, it cried softly. Then it flattened its ears, expecting the man's curse. But the man remained silent. Later, the dog howled loudly. And still later it moved close to the man and caught the smell of death. This made the animal back away. A little longer it delayed, howling under the stars that leaped and danced and shone brightly in the cold sky. Then it turned and ran along the trail toward the camp it knew, where there were the other food providers and fire providers.

In Cambodia, Sundara's family would have chosen her husband and established the price his family would have to pay to marry her. But American customs are different. How Americanized will Sundara's family allow her to be?



BRIDE PRICE

Linda Crew

"Even if your aunt is mean to you," Moni said, "I still think you are lucky to have a family."

Sundara glanced across the field at her Aunt Soka, who squatted between the strawberry rows, snatching berries from the leafy green plants with her usual furious intensity. Sundara had not been feeling particularly lucky recently, but now, after an hour of working alongside this other Cambodian girl, she had to agree that, in comparison, she was fortunate. Living with her aunt and uncle was not the same as being with her own parents, but it was better than living with American sponsors as Moni, newly arrived and alone in Oregon, was forced to do.

"At least you will have someone to arrange your marriage," Moni went on.

"Oh, I don't even want to think about that," Sundara said. Somehow her Aunt Soka's matchmaking talk always made her feel more uneasy than secure, as if she were merely a token in a game Soka was determined to win—a game called Bride Price. "You are a pretty girl," Soka would say. "We will hold out for a high price on you." She talked about Sundara's long black hair

and smooth skin as if these were lucky cards that had been dealt not to Sundara but to her, Soka.

"I think about marriage a lot," Moni said, "ever since they took Srey to southern California to be married. Even in the short time we knew each other here, we had become like sisters. I miss her."

Sundara remembered Srey as a ghost of a girl who would have been pretty had her dark eyes not lost all life. Clearly her spirit had been killed by the Khmer Rouge Communists long before her stick-thin legs carried her over the mountains into a Thai refugee camp.

Sundara pushed her low, single-wheeled berry cart a few feet down the row. "She seemed like a child. It's hard to imagine her married."

"Sixteen, though. Many of my village friends were married at that age." Moni herself had married young and was now, at twenty-one, already a widow.

"Maybe I've gotten used to the way things are here," Sundara said. "Somehow, Srey being married seems . . . shocking."

"Does it? Well, to be honest, I don't think she was happy about it. But then, after what she's been through, she probably cannot be happy about anything."

Could any of them? Sundara wasn't sure herself what happiness was anymore, and she'd been one of the so-called lucky ones. She had been visiting her aunt and uncle's fishing village on the gulf three years before when the Communists overran Cambodia. She and her aunt's family had been able to flee to a crowded freighter and escape, but her parents, her brother, and her little sister had been in Phnom Penh. Later, she heard the Khmer Rouge had marched the entire populace out into the countryside to work as slaves. She had no idea now if anyone in her family was even alive anymore. Would it be right to feel happiness for herself, not knowing about them?

Moni popped another strawberry into her mouth. "How do you keep from eating these? I want to just eat and eat."

"Oh, they're good, I know," Sundara said, "but I'd rather take them home to wash first."

"Oiee! When you've been eating insects and leaves to stay alive, these berries would seem like food for kings even if I dipped them in mud."

A berry flew past Sundara. A squeal from a girl a couple of rows over, a bark of laughter from the boy who'd thrown it.

"Okay, Gabe!" It was Mr. Bonner, the farmer boss. "Any more berry throwing, and you're outta here."

"They throw the berries?" Moni whispered.

"Yes. The mushy, rotten ones. But Moni, you don't have to whisper. They don't understand Khmer."

Moni shook her head. "These American children . . ."

"Some of them work hard," Sundara said. "But others—their parents drop them off in big fancy cars."

"They put their children to work in the fields even though they're rich? Why?"

Sundara laughed. "They call it 'learning work ethic.'"

Another flying berry. More laughter.

"I don't think they're learning," Moni said.

A berry arced over them in the other direction.

Alarmed, Moni looked toward Mr. Bonner's truck. "He's going to be mad now."

Sundara squinted. "No, he didn't even see."

Moni let out her breath. "It's hard to get used to it here. The Khmer Rouge . . ." Her voice trailed off.

Sundara's stomach clenched. The name alone made her shiver, and she could guess what Moni was thinking. The Khmer Rouge probably dragged people from the fields and killed them for less.

She forced herself to speak lightly. "I've heard Mr. Bonner's wife threaten to charge these kids' parents for baby-sitting."

Moni's mouth fell open. "Can this be true?"

Sundara smiled. "It's a joke, Moni. But it makes sense. That boy throwing the berries? I heard that yesterday, for the whole morning, he picked only one flat."

"Now you *must* be joking!" Moni laughed. "I'm not that dumb. What do you think? I eat out of a coconut shell instead of from a plate? It's not possible to pick berries that slowly, even when you eat half of them like I do!"

Sundara shrugged. "Look around. No white parents to make sure they work."

"One flat? You're serious? Well, they'll all have plenty to eat tonight, whether they earn any money or not."

"That's right," Sundara said. "Maybe it's hard to work when you know it really doesn't matter."

"They don't know what hunger is," Moni said. "You should have seen me before—just bones, no meat. And so sick. The Khmer Rouge made me work anyway. I had to crawl down the row of potato plants, picking the bugs off the leaves."

Sundara listened, although she'd heard it all before. Lately stories like this were everywhere. People were escaping the Khmer Rouge regime and whispering of the horrors in tales that traveled across the ocean to friends already in America, in lines of a letter someone in Portland had received from a relative in a refugee camp, in a newspaper story passed on by somebody's cousin. Nothing Sundara heard ever gave reason for hope. Each story of starvation and senseless killing only made clear to Sundara that her previous worst imaginings had not been bad enough.

"Well, we're here now," Moni said. "I have new worries. As I was saying before, with no one to arrange it for me, I don't see how I'll ever be able to get married again."

Sundara let out her breath. Talk of marriage was an improvement, at least, over talk of killing. "Maybe you can be like an American and marry whoever you want."

"How you talk! You sound like an American yourself!"

Did she? At school, moving among the whites, she felt dark and foreign. But since she had been here three years, spoke English, wore jeans, and drove a car, she probably would seem American compared to Moni or her friend Srey.

"I wonder if I'll start to be American, too," Moni went on. "I cannot believe how my life has changed already. And do you know what seems so odd? I think of all the times I went to the fortune-teller—never once did he warn me that I would be such a young widow."

Sundara kept picking. Surely a fortune-teller with any wit at all could have watched all the men going off to war and predicted a legion of young widows.

Sundara no longer believed in fortune-tellers. Maybe Moni, too, would find herself giving up old superstitions here in the new land. How could you cling to old rules that no one else bothered following? *Never point at a rainbow*, Sundara had always been warned, *or you will cut your finger*. But you only had to risk it once, as a test. Then when nothing bad happened, you could boldly point at rainbows forever after. Maybe superstitions lasted longest when everyone agreed to fear the same thing and no one dared defy the rules.

Of course, the Americans had their own foolish ideas—never walking under ladders or stepping on sidewalk cracks. But she'd stepped on sidewalk cracks every time they'd gone shopping in Phnom Penh. Nothing bad had happened. Or more accurately, what had happened was so bad that only a fool would blame it all on sidewalk cracks.

Once, during an eclipse of the moon here, Soka had made them all stay awake all night, just to be safe. But when Sundara had nodded over her desk at school the next morning, noticing that her classmates seemed wide awake and none the worse for having enjoyed a good night's sleep, she vowed she'd never again sit up like that, no matter what her aunt said.

If only it were all this easy to figure out. But testing a silly superstition was one thing; testing a way of life was another. As far as finding which was the best way to marry, that would take years to prove. If you chose wrong, it might be too late to try the other. Maybe that's why the stories about other refugees seemed so important. The Khmers were always listening for patterns, clues about how to get along in America. Some people wanted to know how that Khmer family in Salem managed to buy a house, others how so-and-so got a job or filed income taxes. What Sundara always wanted to know was how the newest marriages were faring.

"Have you heard anything from Srey?" she asked Moni.

"Not a word," Moni said. "But then, I don't really know how to write letters myself." After a moment she said, "So. Is your aunt looking for a husband for you?"

"Oh, I think it's just talk right now. They want me to get a good education. They want me to be a doctor."

"A doctor! You, a girl?"

"Women can be doctors in America."

"Yes, I've heard of that, but—Cambodian women?"

"Why not?" This was said with more conviction than Sundara actually felt. "Once you're a citizen, it's not supposed to matter where you're from."

"Well," Moni said. "If your aunt thinks nothing of women becoming doctors, I would say she, too, is turning American."

"Maybe so. I think she doesn't know whether to be Khmer or American, either." One minute she'd be telling Grandmother she must learn English, the next she'd offer Sundara's little cousin Ravy a dollar if he'd speak Khmer all day long. She talked of Sundara being a doctor almost as often as she talked about the foolishness of spending money on education for girls. "I don't know what she wants," Sundara told Moni. "First she says I have to be matched with a Cambodian boy, then she turns around and warns me what scoundrels they all are. 'Take three Khmer men,'

she says. 'One will be a gambler who loses all your gold, the next will spend it all on smoking and drinking, and the third will pay it out to sleep with strange women.' "

"But your uncle isn't like that, is he?"

"Ah, but Soka says that's because she knows how to make him behave." Guiltily she glanced toward Soka and lowered her voice. "I'm not joking about her fierce temper. One time I heard my parents saying she'd caught Uncle Naro with a young girl and got so mad, she attacked his motorcycle with an ax."

"Oiee! That takes a brave spirit. My husband would have beaten me."

"Yes, well, that's one thing Soka will admit to liking about America. Men don't beat their wives here."

"They don't?"

"Well, actually, some do. But the difference is, they're not supposed to, so you can complain about it. You can tell it to the police."

"Oh." Moni picked a berry with a rotten spot from her flat and tossed it aside. "Well, my husband didn't hit me very often. Only when I talked too sassy."

"Here they're not supposed to hit no matter how you talk."

"Really?"

"Yes. Don't hit. If they don't like you anymore, they get a divorce instead."

"They divorce a lot here, I think."

Sundara nodded. Neither system seemed quite right to her. She didn't like the Cambodian way, where a man could have as many wives as he could afford, but the American way of divorcing a wife when she got old so the man could have a new, younger wife didn't seem much better. At least with the Cambodian way, the first wife still had a place, a home. Here she'd heard stories of women working hard jobs so their husbands could become educated, only to find themselves thrown out when their paychecks were no longer needed. The man got

richer and the woman was left to care for the children without any money.

So it wasn't as if one way were clearly better. Wasn't there something in between?

Sundara hardly ever dared argue any of this with her aunt, but once, when they'd been studying the American Civil War and slavery in school, she'd pointed out to Soka that buying and selling people was illegal in America. "So how can you sell a girl for a bride?"

"Selling as a bride is not the same as selling for a slave," Soka had replied.

Now *that* depended on the husband, Sundara thought. If your husband felt entitled to beat you, you might as well be a slave.

"Besides," Soka said, "we don't actually sell girls."

Sundara hesitated. "When you say 'bride price,' it sounds like it."

"Ah, but you must understand that the money the man gives is a show of respect for the girl's family. If they make him pay a lot, that shows they value her. And it's best for the girl, too, because the more he can pay, the better the man is."

Sundara pressed her lips tight, thinking, *No, the more he can pay, the richer he is.*

Not long after this, on the Sunday the Americans called Mother's Day, they'd been dutifully sitting in the back pew at the First Presbyterian Church when the minister read this passage: "*Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies.*"

Soka had turned her eyes on Sundara as if to say, *There, you see? Even the Christian Bible understands about this.* She brought it up while they were driving home, smugly reminding Naro that a ruby or two had actually been included in her own bride price.

"Yes," Naro said. "Some days, I wish I had those rubies back."

"Oh, you!" Soka swatted him playfully. Everyone knew he was only joking.

Later, Sundara studied those passages in the Bible that the church people had given them. Maybe Soka had misunderstood. Maybe the old-fashioned English words meant that a truly valuable, virtuous woman could not be purchased with money or jewels at all.

"Smashing the motorcycle is not the only story about my aunt," Sundara told Moni now. "She's also very stubborn. One time when she got mad at my grandmother, she stopped talking and never said a word to anyone for a month!"

"Ah! So maybe being on my own is not so bad—is that what you're saying?"

Sundara only smiled. She had probably gone far enough with these disrespectful complaints.

When they carried their next full flats up to the truck, they saw a new Asian family gathered. Mr. Bonner was trying to show them that some of their berries weren't ripe enough. The mother didn't seem to understand. She spoke crossly to her daughters.

"Sundara," Mr. Bonner said, "could you explain it to them? I can't have these green spots, and the flats have got to be fuller."

Sundara put on the ever-useful smile of apology and spoke in English. "They speak Chinese, I think. Sorry, I'm not understanding."

"Oh." Mr. Bonner was taken aback.

These Americans! Where did they get the idea that all black-haired people spoke the same language? It bothered Sundara, too, the way the Americans seemed to assume that the dozen or so refugee families in Willamette Grove would of course be close friends. Did these whites imagine that if they were dropped into a town like Kompong Som, for example, with a few other white families, they would automatically get along? No matter that their backgrounds might be radically different? Didn't they un-

derstand that there was so much more to friendship than skin color?

Sundara and Moni weighed in their berries. Then, back at the end of their rows, they placed pint boxes in new flats. Behind them, even at a distance, the Chinese woman's voice was as annoying as whining mosquitoes. *Her poor daughters*, Sundara thought.

Again Sundara glanced toward Soka. How she hated it, always worrying about her aunt watching her. Had she noticed that Sundara had gone up with only one flat instead of waiting to carry a stack of two or three, the way Soka always said they should?

It hadn't always been quite this bad. At first, Soka had seemed proud of Sundara, bragging to people how she'd looked after them all when they'd been seasick during the escape, how she'd run around trading useless Cambodian riels for Malaysian money when they'd landed there, how she'd washed everyone's clothes in a bucket and brought them their rationed scoops of tuna and rice on banana leaves. But after they'd been here a year or so, Soka had decided that Sundara was turning into an American brat.

"Oh, that daughter of Pok Sary!" she would start in. "They say her parents talk to her, and it's like pouring water on a duck's back. She is becoming far too American." Then she would stare at Sundara with her black eyes, and Sundara would know they weren't really discussing the daughter of Pok Sary at all.

But here in the strawberry field, Soka wasn't paying any attention to Sundara at the moment. Surprisingly, she wasn't crouched over her row, either. Instead she stood in conversation with another Khmer woman, Vuthy. *It must be an interesting story*, Sundara thought, *if it could keep Soka from her work, from earning money.*

Sundara and Moni bent back to their picking.

"Do you want to get married the American way?" Moni asked.

Sundara shrugged. Did Moni mean an American-style ceremony or an American-style marriage? No matter. Sundara wasn't sure about either.

Once, in the supermarket, she had stealthily thumbed through a thick, glossy magazine about being a bride. Imagine! A whole magazine about making a wedding party! As if being a bride would fill up the rest of your life. She marveled at the big, puffy skirts the ladies wore, a style that could not have been farther from the narrow Khmer skirts, wrapped tightly and cut short enough to reveal ankles bangled in gold. And all the white! How strange, to be married not in the golds and rich colors of celebration but in the white of mourning, the paleness of ghosts. The American brides did not always smile sweetly, either. Many of them seemed haughty; a few actually glared from the pages.

Back in Cambodia, she might have been married already, but here, people her age didn't seem to think of marriage at all. Even that girl in her class who'd had a baby. And she didn't seem one bit ashamed, either. Sundara had seen her in front of the 7-Eleven with her friends. She was turned away from the baby in the stroller, laughing, smoking a cigarette.

But Sundara *did* find herself thinking about being married, in spite of what she told Moni. Not that she was so anxious to have a husband to bicker with the way Aunt Soka bickered with Uncle Naro. But being a wife might be better than this role of dutiful niece where she was stuck now.

She let a handful of berries roll into her boxes. "The truth is, Moni, I don't know whether to keep to Khmer ways or try to be more American. Or maybe find something in between."

Moni didn't speak for a moment. Then she said shyly, "I'm very glad to have found another Khmer girl who can understand about this."

Sundara smiled.

When someone called lunch break, most of the pickers stood from their crouches and headed for the tree shade at the edge of the field.

"Didn't you bring food?" Moni said, seeing that Sundara was continuing to pick.

Sundara shook her head. "I'd like to, but my aunt thinks we should just keep working. She doesn't like the idea of eating in the fields. Besides, we only work until one o'clock or so. After that it gets too hot for the Americans."

"Too hot! I'll never be too hot here. I have been cold from the moment I stepped off that airplane, even when the sun shines."

"I know, but you'll get used to it."

They each picked a flat while the others ate, two more flats after that, and then Mr. Bonner was motioning everyone to stop and bring up what they had. It was time for him to make his deliveries.

At the truck, Sundara lingered in the fragrance of the harvested berries. The Chinese family straggled up, the mother still snapping at her daughters as if she had never stopped. Sundara noticed Soka giving the woman a respectful nod, almost as if she might have bowed, were they not surrounded by a lot of sassy white teenagers.

Moni unlocked her bicycle, which she'd parked behind Mr. Bonner's fruit stand.

"It's a long way on a bike," Sundara said. "Tomorrow we could give you a ride."

"Oh, I don't want to be any trouble."

"It's no trouble. I'll call you. You say your sponsors are the Millers?"

"Yes, on Sycamore Street."

"Niece!" Soka's voice was sharp. "Come now!"

Sundara slipped into the driver's seat of their new, American-made station wagon. Soka had insisted she get her license the

day she turned sixteen. It was important to be able to drive cars in America.

"You seemed very friendly with that Moni."

"She's nice."

Soka made a little noise. "I hear her people were peasants."

Sundara held back, then blurted it out: "Does that mean I'm not supposed to talk to her?"

"I didn't say that. Just be careful you don't get pulled down to her level and start talking like a peasant yourself, that's all. I don't want to hear you rattling on with the know-nothing clank of an empty bucket."

Sundara clamped her jaw tight to keep from answering. When it suited her, Soka loved to point out that social class didn't matter in America. At times when the family of Pok Sary tried to act superior to them, for instance. "They cannot bear to let anyone forget they were so high up back home," she would say. "They've got to learn we are all equal here."

Soka seemed to forget this, however, when they met refugees with less affluent, less educated backgrounds. She would probably get worse, Sundara thought, now that Naro had his new job as an accountant and didn't have to wash dishes at the restaurant anymore.

"Did you see those new ones?" Soka said. "They're Chinese, from Vietnam. Just arrived."

"Yes," Sundara said. "Mr. Bonner is having trouble explaining things to them."

"Very rich before, I hear. They have a son who would be just right for you, Niece."

Heaven protect her! Sundara was thinking not of this unseen son as her husband but of the woman at the truck as her mother-in-law. Oiee! Better to put up with Soka's bossing than to be chained for life to a dragon lady like that!

"But, Younger Aunt," she said, "we don't even speak the same language."

"He's learning English, though. Every day he studies, they say. He's their only son, so while his sisters work in the fields, he must be the first to become educated."

Sundara stared straight ahead at the road over the bridge into town. Sons. Always the sons were so important. Would this have bothered her back home? Maybe she *was* becoming American.

Soka went on to the latest gossip about the family of Pok Sary. "I don't care how big their brick house in Phnom Penh was, they will never get a husband for that daughter of theirs if they cannot raise her right." She recounted with relish the recent sins of this daughter—wearing tight jeans, failing a school test.

But when Sundara thought of her, what came to mind was the way she sat in class, elegantly erect, serene. Unconsciously, it seemed, lost in a dream of dancing, she would continually force her fingers back, pushing them into the positions of the Cambodian Royal Ballet. This was a terrible American brat of a daughter?

"Oh, and here's another story for you," Soka went on. "Vuthy just told me. It's so shameful, I only repeat it because it's a good warning for you."

Sundara sighed. Was there any story that *wasn't* a warning for her?

Soka lowered her voice, as if whispered gossip might be more forgivable. "That foolish girl, Srey? Here she is, newly married to a very fine man with excellent prospects. Her parents went to a great deal of trouble to arrange that for her, and what does the silly girl do? Tries to kill herself."

Sundara sucked in her breath. Her eyes blurred. *Red light.* She slammed the car brakes.

Soka lurched forward. "Niece! What is this jerking of the car? Is this all the better they taught you in those driving classes?"

"Sorry," Sundara breathed, easing the car through the intersection on the green light.

Flustered, Soka settled herself again. After a moment, she once more lowered her voice. "About Srey? They say she tried to hang herself. Fortunately her poor husband found her right away. It was simply the hand of fate. He happened to come right back to their apartment."

"But . . . *why?*"

"He must have forgotten something."

"Yes, but I meant why would she do that?"

"Oh, I don't know. Clearly she's unhappy. But who *isn't*? Oh, what an awful thing! Now they say her mother cries all night long, every night." She shook her head. "Well, we won't speak of it again."

But stopping the talk about it couldn't clear Sundara's mind. She was thinking about being so unhappy that you would want to die. She was thinking about the dark mystery of surviving torture and starvation, only to want to kill yourself when you were finally safe. Or was Srey safe?

Soka was right: Srey's story was a good warning for her, but not in the way her aunt thought.

She would probably never know Srey's secrets, the torment that had brought her to such a place, but at this moment, driving home to their apartment, Sundara did realize something about her own fate.

Whatever choices the future held, she wanted to do the choosing.

She glanced at her aunt's profile, set and hard. Soka would not be pleased. But Sundara could be stubborn, too. She came by it honestly, as the Americans like to say. After all, was she not the niece of a woman who told her husband she didn't care what the custom was, he could forget the idea of a second wife? And then destroyed his motorcycle to prove she meant it?

For now, Sundara would pay her aunt the silence of a good Cambodian girl. No need to raise Soka's wrath when so much

was still unclear. But to herself Sundara made a promise. For whatever happiness or misery came into her life, she would take the responsibility. When the time came, she would set her own bride price.

She did not think she would care to count it in rubies.