

WENDY LILL

THE OCCUPATION OF HEATHER ROSE

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Act One

Heather Rose enters room wearing a light jacket over a nurse's uniform, carrying a brown paper bag. There is a table and chair in the room, a blackboard, promotional posters for Northern Medical Services, Indian Affairs, Ministry of Natural Resources, Northern Affairs etc. on the walls. Heather looks around at the posters, puts down her paper bag, and looks at her watch.

HEATHER ROSE: *To herself.* I wonder if I still look the same.

I asked her to meet me at nine o'clock.

But I'm always early.

Oh, I'm not ready for this.

Turns towards audience.

I have always been an optimistic cheery type of person. I take after...both my parents on this score. On Saturday mornings, the three of us competed to see who could be the most bubbly, the most cheerful at the breakfast table. That's probably why my sister left home so young. She just couldn't stand the pressure.

It began nine months ago. No, of course it didn't. It began long before that.

My mother had been a nurse in the slums of London. And my dad was a high school principal, the kind everyone visits years later with things like plastic ice cubes with bugs inside.

Every Christmas, we had refugees from the International

Centre sent over for turkey dinner.

So when I told my parents I was going to work on an Indian reserve, they were positively bubbly. I guess they thought I was...following in their footsteps.

I remember that first day barreling through space in that hollow hairspray can of a plane, the sound of a thousand mosquitoes approaching my pillow in the dark, the hard cold metal wing vibrating against my thigh, long pink and purple tubes of land forming then breaking off into water, then land, more water, more wing...and in front of me, Ray, the pilot, lighting one Player's after another, blowing lazy circles of smoke back towards my waiting nostrils.

Did he know how sexy I thought he was?

"What's it like being king of the skies, Ray?" Carrying the Royal Mail and life-giving medicines, on the lookout for red handkerchiefs and downed planes and forest fires and horny...living out one's dreams?

"You must really love your work, Ray. No speed limits, no parking tickets, no Sunday drivers." What a flirt.

"Who me? What brings me here? Oh, I've always been attracted to the north...like a firefly to light. No...never this far before. Mainly the Barrie area, but it's a lot like this. One-sided trees, fiery sunsets, loons...You've heard of Camp Cocano?"

The bugger didn't answer me. Just laughed. And turned the nose of the plane down. Suddenly I was on the Salt And Pepper Shaker at the CNE, giggling and holding onto my pockets so my money wouldn't fall out!

I was going down, down, downward into another place, another time, falling through a rabbit hole into a green and silver world below. I was Alice in Wonderland. Shall I fall right through the earth? Splashing into a shower of diamonds and purple morning mist and water...bobbing up and down in a plane which had miraculously become a boat.

“No Ray, I didn’t mind. Rough? Was that rough? Hey! I love *rough*. Excitement, danger. Makes me feel like I’ve really arrived! Really alive!”

And I had.

Arrived.

Nurse Rose had arrived. The metal door swung open and the sun blasted in. And there below me, on the dock, was a sea of brown faces all looking up at me, in my slingback pumps and my seer-sucker dress. What made me suddenly feel that my heart would fall out, that I would die on the spot? And also, that I was... the Queen?

Heather gives a regal smile, even a wave.

But not for long.

