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*To Clair, David, Robert, Ian, Peter and Sean,
who gave me the inspiration and courage to write
about young men learning to fly.*

Once you have tasted flight

You will forever walk the earth

With your eyes turned skyward,

For there you have been, and there

You will always long to return.

—*Leonardo da Vinci*

Chapter 1

APRIL 1943

Jack Waters sat crammed Flight of the Tiger Moth into the front cockpit Tiger Moth, the motor in front of him roaring as they rolled down the runway gaining speed. “Hold on tight!” Sandy hollered through the Gosport, the speaker slung around Jack’s neck.

The bright yellow biplane bumped along the runway, then suddenly lifted. They were airborne! Jack's stomach felt like it was plastered to his throat. Sweat trickled down his neck and back. It was hotter than blazes in the flying suit, helmet and goggles. Sandy had warned him that it was plenty cold when you got up in the air. He was uncomfortable, but he felt like a real flyer.

"Look down!" Sandy shouted.

Jack turned his head and risked a glance. The city of Moose Jaw lay beneath them, its houses on the grid of streets like houses in a model train set, its Flight of the Tiger Moth cars as small as Matchbox toys.

Jack gulped air like a diver to clear his ears and the roar of the engine rushed back.

Ahead of them stretched the Flight of the Tiger Moth prairie. In the distance Jack spotted grain elevators Flight of the Tiger Moth alongside railway tracks. A miniature train moved across the wide expanse of grain and hay fields. Farmhouses dotted the prairie landscape like Flight of the Tiger Moth spilled sugar cubes.

Jack was flying. Really flying! His Flight of the Tiger Moth mother had finally agreed to let Sandy take him up and it felt fantastic! Sandy, his sister Flo's fiancé, was a flight instructor at the Moose Jaw air base, twenty miles east of Jack's village of Cairn.

From the ground the air looked blue, but when you were travelling in a plane it had no colour. No shape. The Flight of the Tiger Moth propeller turned so quickly that all Jack could see was a whirr and a blur. The solid wooden prop on the flimsy-looking metal, wood and cloth airplane moved so fast it was transparent. He'd been on a Ferris wheel at the local fair, but this was fifty times more exciting.

Soaring over the endless prairie, far from the city, Sandy put the plane through its paces. He banked, rolled and looped the Tiger Moth. Jack couldn't help grinning, even though the metal seat bit into his skin.

Suddenly Sandy pulled the plane into a heart-stopping stall. He dived, banked, rose and did a complete roll. Jack's stomach lurched. The seat belt dug into his shoulders. Sandy laughed, straightened the plane and flew Flight of the Tiger Moth in a circle, heading down and skimming over the fields.

"Do you want to try it?" he asked.

"Sure," Jack gulped. "But not if I have to do fancy manoeuvres."

"Not yet," Sandy said. "Just try keeping her on course."

Jack's mouth dried. Sandy had drilled him on the basics over the last couple of weeks. Jack had even sat up in bed Flight of the Tiger Moth reading the flight manual late at night. But he was still getting used to the pitch and wobble, the shaking and the noise. He spent most of his

time with his feet on the ground or on the pedals of his Flight of the Tiger Moth bike or the family car.

“It’s a lot to remember, sport. But I’m here to take over at a moment’s notice.”

Jack breathed as if he was running a marathon. Nothing, but nothing, in his whole life had been this thrilling, this scary. “I’ll take it,” he said. He took over the controls, with Sandy prompting him from behind.

He concentrated on trying to Flight of the Tiger Moth keep the Moth straight and level. Flight of the Tiger Moth But as soon as he got the rudder centred and stopped the plane Flight of the Tiger Moth from yawing, the nose crept too high. The rate-of-climb indicator reared up and the wings tilted. The black ball in the turn-and-bank indicator rolled to the side of the dial.

“We’re side-slipping!” Sandy called. “Make the corrections.”

Jack’s toes were scrunched up in his shoes in an effort to nail his feet to the floorboards. His hand on Flight of the Tiger Moth the stick was stiff, his heart raced. His innards cramped.

But he felt terrific.

“Let’s try that again,” said Sandy. And so it went. Instead of the short flight Jack had been promised, the one his mother, Ivy, had only grudgingly agreed to, he spent the whole morning in the air.

>>>

Jack climbed out of the cockpit after the first two hours in the Tiger Moth, feeling as if he’d been pummelled by his arch-enemy, Jimmy Boyle. Sweat Flight of the Tiger Moth trickled down his face and he wiped it off with a freshly ironed handkerchief.

He grinned at Sandy. “That Flight of the Tiger Moth was swell.”

“If you’re up for it, we’ll go again this afternoon.”

“Sure thing.” Jack felt pulled apart physically and mentally, frightened and exhilarated at the same time.

“Might as well make hay while the sun shines, as my dad always said.” Sandy, his tall, muscular frame released from the cockpit, loped across the tarmac to the lounge.

Jack wobbled after him. His legs felt like a sailor’s on shore leave. He wasn’t sure his body would cooperate if they did much more of this.

The pilots' lounge at the flying school in Moose Jaw was filled with shabby but comfortable furniture. It smelled of stale cigarette smoke and dust. Jack threw himself down on an old brown couch without waiting to be invited. A couple of guys playing cribbage looked up and laughed.

"First flight, eh?" one of them asked. He tugged at his red moustache.

"You must be Flo's little brother," the other one said. "You're from Cairn, eh?" Jack nodded.

"This is Jackie, all right," Sandy said. "Jackie, this is Walter here Flight of the Tiger Moth with the red hair and freckles and the poor devil about to be skunked is Bertie." Both men nodded in Jack's direction.

"He just saw the village of Cairn from a whole new angle. His mother won't hear about that part, though."

"Mums always worry too much," Walter said.

"Yeah," Bertie agreed. "A man needs to learn new things. Builds confidence."

Jack grinned at the word "man." He knew he didn't qualify yet, but he was getting closer. And he liked the sound.

"A little bird tells me you're expecting the call any day, Sandy," Bertie went on. "All of us instructors would love the chance to get to go." Bertie sighed, looking sadly at Jack. "The rcaf keeps us here training the youngsters." He shook his head.

"Are you going overseas?" Jack felt the world shift again, the way he'd felt when the plane rolled. "When?"

"Could be soon." Sandy put his finger to his Flight of the Tiger Moth lips. "But keep it to yourself. I haven't told Flo yet."

His sister wouldn't be too happy about this news.

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After lunch in the airfield cafeteria, Jack and Sandy went up again. At one point Jack looked down and Flight of the Tiger Moth saw the Cairn grain elevator in the distance, the clapboard bungalow where he lived with Flight of the Tiger Moth his parents, the untidy caragana hedge and the gravel lane behind it. He chuckled, wishing he could fly low and wave to his dad, sitting on the front porch of the family's main street business, the Waters General Store.

If his dad could only see him now. Jack felt a year older than when Sandy had picked him up early that morning. He had even had the thrill of taking off on this last test flight. He was more in control of the plane and he was more confident too. He could fly this crate. Looking below at his village and the surrounding countryside, Jack felt his chest expand with pride. It was going to be really hard not telling his parents.

>>>

Sandy and Flight of the Tiger Moth Flo took Jack to the movie Flight of the Tiger Moth that evening in the city of Moose Jaw and Flight of the Tiger Moth after that the three of them went to a small restaurant. Jack had buttermilk, a hot beef sandwich and a Flight of the Tiger Moth piece of apple pie à la mode. À la mode meant with ice cream. The pie didn't taste as good as his mother's, but Flight of the Tiger Moth he needed to eat after starving himself most of the day. He hadn't wanted to throw up in the cockpit. Now he was more tired than he could ever remember.

"How do you like flying, Jackie?" Flo asked. "Ready to sign up?"

"Wish I could."

His half-sister looked extra pretty tonight. Her dark bobbed hair shone under the soft lights in the café and her forest green sweater brought out the dark of her eyes. She sat close to Sandy, across from Jack. Flo and Sandy had met at a dance when several of Flo's nurse buddies from the Moose Jaw hospital they all worked in had dragged her Flight of the Tiger Moth out of her room.

At twenty-six, Sandy was a couple of years older than Flo, but they'd hit it off right away.

Flight Of The Tiger Moth

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