

## 4. Chance Encounter

IT WAS LIKE I WAS SWALLOWING THE WIND, AND ALL THE WHILE LISTENING TO THE JOKER from an old deck of cards clacking faster and faster against the spokes of my CCM bicycle. Riel, Mokey, and me were charging down the steep and long, half-mile hill to the bridge that crossed the river. We had already taken a spin around the mental hospital grounds on our two-wheeled steeds, and yet it was only mid-morning.

The day after Easter Monday marked the beginning of we three musketeers' week of freedom away from school and the Red Witch. Because Mokey was a good church-goer, he couldn't hang out with Riel and me until the many church services over Easter Weekend had finished. That was okay, though, as it gave his dad's car mechanic time to tune up his bike. Me and Riel had had to get our own wheels ready for summer.

Servicing my bike, as Gramp used to call it, was something him and me used to do at that time every spring. Lucky for me, I had watched each chore he took on, and now I could do it on my own. With him gone, I had no choice. It was another tug at my heart to not feel him by my side, but I tried to think instead of how well he had taught me.

For a couple of hours each day during the long Easter Weekend, two of us three musketeers worked on our bikes. With rags and oilcans, and spit and polish, we made them shine like new pennies. We tightened chains, scouring them with old toothbrushes,

and adding oil where we thought it was needed. I also scrubbed off what little dirt might have gathered on my balloon-tired, burgundy beauty while it was stored in the garage for the winter. Gramp had insisted the bike should also be serviced before it was put away for the winter, so it really didn't need all that much work in the spring. It was the same way he felt about his shotgun.

Still fairly new, my two year-old CCM, along with the girls' tricycles, a couple of rows of what were once cords of stacked firewood—now almost gone, thanks to the cold winter—and a few other boxes of stuff took up very little space in the otherwise empty garage. We had never owned a car.

Riel's bike was a bit of a clunker that his older brothers had pretty much worn out. But, even though he usually had to patch the tires a couple of times every summer, he was able to keep it on the road. Mokey's parents had bought him a brand new Schwinn the previous year. It had all the extras that were available, including white-walled tires, fancy fenders, and even a basket on the front.

Being without Mokey gave Riel and me a chance to gab about stuff that Mokey wasn't interested in. The two of us talked about girls, Army and the Red Witch, our families and other friends, and the upcoming baseball season. Both our little league teams and our heroes, the Beavers, were due to start playing soon.

Buffalo Crossing's semi-professional baseball team had won the Triple A Club Championship for the last two years. We wondered whether the crew made up of a few local guys, a mix of college kids from all over the States, and Negro players from the Deep South would be able to make it three in a row. That would kind of make it three strikes in a row against the other teams in the league.

Besides the great weather, our yakking while working on our bikes was made even more fun because of my Aunt Bud. As soon as she woke up from working the graveyard shift at the mental hospital, Aunt Bud would put on a stack of records made up of hits she enjoyed. Then she'd turn up the volume on the record player, throw open the kitchen windows and sing along like a really happy canary. Sometimes old favourites, such as *Secret Love* by Doris Day, would be mixed in with more recent songs. *Cross Over The Bridge* by Patti Page had just finished, and now we were listening to Ray Price wailing through *Release Me*. I liked Aunt Bud's latest favourite, *Sh-Boom* by the Crew Cuts. I often found myself singing along with my aunt until Riel would make a smart remark, like "Are you tryin' to break the record?" or "Jeez, Buddy, you sound like a scalded cat!"

Before we had started out on our first bike-riding adventure of the spring, we had to choose from a bunch of different things we could do. I liked the idea of riding out to

Mama and Papa Jankowski's farm, maybe taking our BB guns and exploring down along the river below their old log house. It was where the guys and I had got to spend a day with Aunt Tootsie and Uncle Dan over winter, skating and playing Shinny on the river ice.

I figured it wouldn't be fair to just drop in on the old couple without warning, though. Mama Jan loved to feed her guests, but I thought she might like a bit of notice first. I also didn't want to get dumped on by Uncle Dan for not checking ahead, anymore that I wanted to catch it from Nan and Mom for riding our bikes on the main highway. The highway didn't actually get a lot of traffic and was safer than Nan and Mom thought it was, but there was no telling them.

One of the other choices we had was to take our BB guns and join some of the older guys from school. Word was they planned to hunt gophers over the holiday, which meant they would likely catch the little beggars by laying a spring-loaded trap at the mouth of their hole and then drowning them out of their burrow. For that they'd lug pail after pail of water from either the pond way down the hill, or from whatever water was still lying around after the flood.

The only other way to collect the nickel-a-tail bounty on gophers was to shoot the critters with a twenty-two. The rodents would stick their heads out of their burrows and get popped off. But, with the cost of shells as expensive as they were, the boys would be lucky to break even if they used rifles. The bounty had been put on gophers after farmers and ranchers complained there was a plague of them and that they were spoiling crops and causing horses to shatter leg bones when they accidentally stepped into gopher holes.

I wasn't too keen on the gopher-hunting option for a few reasons. First, the older guys made the younger ones lug the pails of water. Also, there was no way Nan would let me take Gramp's .22 repeater to join other kids in shooting dangerous weapons. Actually, I knew she wouldn't let me anywhere near where guns were involved unless I was with what she called a "responsible adult". Finally, I mostly wasn't interested in going because Charlie Hawkes would likely be part of the gopher-hunting group.

Charlie was a real bad kid, in many ways an older, meaner version of Randy Forrester. The son of Mrs. Hawkes, who ran the little grocery store along with her father on the south side, Charlie also grew up without a dad. His father was another "casualty of war," as Gramp used to say. Charlie was now at the collegiate, in grade eleven.

It was Uncle Dan who said one day that Charlie had a "sadistic streak." That was after what had happened two summers earlier made it into the local paper. Apparently four guys, including Charlie and his older cousin, Willy Hansen, had gone hunting gophers with a single shot .22, their knives, and some wire for making snares. They also took a

pail with them.

At some point during the day, the group drowned a gopher out of its hole and caught it alive. But, instead of killing it right away and taking its tail, Charlie managed to somehow spread-eagle the little animal on its back over an ant hill, and then set about using it as target practice with his hunting knife. Although it was a sick thing to do, that wasn't even what made the paper. That ugly part of the story only got passed around the neighbourhood. What was in the newspaper was that Charlie had almost accidentally killed his cousin.

It was Willy's rifle they had taken along, and by the end of the day, he was almost out of shells. They were already plodding up through a coulee and heading for home, when Charlie asked to shoot at something he spotted. But, Willy didn't want to let his cousin waste a bullet. The two got into an argument, which got bigger and bigger, to the point where they began wrestling over the gun. It eventually went off, shooting Willy below the knee, behind the big bones of the lower leg. The bullet went through his pants, into one part of Willy's leg and just out the other, but didn't quite have enough *oomph* left to also get through the other pant leg.

None of the kids in the group told their parents. It wasn't until Willy passed out at the supper table that night that his family found out. As could be expected, the gun was taken away, and both guys got a talking to by the Mounties. The police had found out when Willy's parents took him to the hospital and the doctor reported what happened, like the law said he had to.

Those were just a couple of the hijinks Charlie was well known for, so as far as a day's gopher-hunt with him went, I not only knew Nan and Mom wouldn't let me go, but I also wouldn't be the least bit interested.

Besides hunting on the prairie, there was also the forest of trees between the flats and the river to explore, but these were still swampy from the flood, and mosquitoes were letting everyone know they were back for the season. The banks on the far side of the river were higher up, away from the water, and the land was dry, making it a better place for a hike. In the end, it was my idea of tromping around on the other side of the bridge and along the riverbank that was easily the best. And the guys agreed with me.

So, by 9:00 a.m. on Tuesday morning, the day after Easter Monday, we were already on our way. Too early in the year to wear cut-offs, we had on regular pants, with clips around our ankles to guard our cuffs from our bike chains. Runners, T-shirts and ball caps rounded out the rest of our outfits. Our jackets and lunches were tucked into Mokey's bike basket. It had taken us less than a half-an-hour to make it to the mental hospital

grounds, pedalling from the south side to the highway that headed over the river. The hospital was a half-mile away from that road.

I always liked taking a spin around the hospital grounds. Employees of the place—male nurses and maintenance staff—worked outside, alongside patients who weren't too far gone. They made the grounds a real showstopper. I could see why Aunt Bud said that physical therapy in the outdoors was one of the ways to help take disturbed people out of their bad way of thinking. Who wouldn't feel better after walking around all day in such a beautiful place?

On this day, the lawns were already mowed and trimmed and shining a Kelly-green colour. The way the grounds were so excellently taken care of, the lawns had probably looked that way by the time St. Patrick's Day had rolled around—even before the snow had melted. Now the miles of flowerbeds that rimmed the three-storey brick buildings and the many hip-high stone walls that lined a bunch of driveways were being tended to. The beds had already been dug and planted. I could see hundreds of daffodils and crocuses already coming up, which weren't quite the same as the crocuses that grew wild and were almost blooming on the prairie.

After a tour of the hospital grounds, we had agreed we were ready to hit the hill. Coming out, a left turn took us in the right direction. We weren't interested in seeing the old fort on the other side of the river, and we didn't feel like riding past the couple of dozen houses on large chunks of land spread around there. Mostly, we wanted to feel the rush of zooming down the hill to the bridge.

The breakneck speed that our wheels took us down the long hill caused my blood to boil with fear. I could only imagine what it was doing to Mokey's, although I had some idea because of the screeching going on behind Riel and me. Mokey screamed his lungs out all the way, deciding to give up on using his brakes less than half the way. Fortunately, the edge of the road was paved and in good shape. It was nice and smooth, and there were no rocks to cause us to crash.

"Good thing we checked out our bikes before trying that," said Riel, after we reached the bridge over the river.

"Good thing none of us had a blowout," I added.

"There was *absotivelylutely* nothing good about any of that!" complained Mokey. "I thought I was going to die. And now I have to worry about pedalling back up that stupid hill. There's no way that I'll be able to pedal all the way."

First I had to correct the way he always messed up words. "There's no such word as *absotivelylutely*, Moke. *Absolutely* would have been enough." Then I did my best to make him feel better. "We'll walk back up with you, if that'll make you feel better."

"We'll see," Riel said, sounding like he didn't want to waste time pushing his bike back up the hill, when he could probably manage to pump it the whole way. "Maybe I'll just wait for you guys at the top."

"Wouldn't it be great," I asked, "if they made bikes that had gears, like a car has?"

"They do," answered Mokey. "My dad says three-speeds will be out next year. He thought twice about buying me this one, thinking I could have one with gears then."

"No kiddin'," said Riel. "You'll probably end up with a new one next summer anyway." It was obviously a dig at the way Mokey got a lot of things, stuff that I might wish for but that Riel wouldn't waste his time even dreaming about.

It was somewhere around noon, so we decided to eat lunch before exploring downriver. Ditching our bikes under the bridge, we grabbed our lunches and wandered onto the bridge deck. Made of steel girders and beams, the people who had designed it made sure there was lots of room on the shoulder to stand and walk on, so we didn't have to worry about being whacked by a car when crossing over or standing there watching the river below.

Looking downriver, I knew that a half-hour hike along the south bank would lead to a spot right across from Mama and Papa Jankowski's farm, but on the opposite side of the river. It would be interesting to see what their place looked like from that side, or whether we could see the house and barn at all.

As we munched on our sandwiches, we watched the ugly muddy river slip below us and head east. To the south, there was a jumble of bushes and trees on the high bank that we planned to wander through later. Above that flat, treed area, the prairie stretched up the hills and away from the big brown rope of water. Just in time, I saw a hawk swoop down and pounce on an unsuspecting gopher.

"Did you see that?" I blurted out. "Did you see that hawk snag that gopher?" I pointed toward where the big bird was now pumping its wings and heading to some place up over the hill, the gopher dangling in its talons. I thought of Joe Starblanket feeding fish to his "friend," the Golden Eagle.

"Nope, I didn't see anything," answered Mokey, still focused on his lunch.

"Ya," said Riel. "No big deal."

"What say we hike around the prairie over there first?" I suggested, nodding to the area where the hawk had been.

"Sure, okay," Mokey agreed quickly. He didn't like bushwhacking where there could be bugs and snakes and other things he might be afraid of.

Riel didn't say anything. Instead, he just started walking the way I had suggested.

Mokey and I packed up and followed.

Within ten minutes of breaking out onto the prairie hillside, I found a clutch of eight Hungarian partridge eggs snuggled in a tight little nest at the edge of a bush. The mother had flushed when we got near, giving away the nest's hiding spot.

Farther along and below us, I could hear a chorus of frog song coming from a tiny pond on a flat nearer to the river. Around the pond was a patch of willows. Already the pussies had dropped off, with new green leaves bursting out in place of the fuzzy grey nubs. Green grass was also poking up through the thatch of last year's crop, and all over the hillside small and dusty, purple-green stalks were holding up buds of soon-to-be-beautiful lavender crocus flowers. I saw a flock of robins flitting ahead. I had only seen a few since the snow disappeared. The familiar call of a meadowlark let me know that spring had really arrived.

It was the middle of the afternoon when the three of us trudged back to the bridge, slipped down the slope of the highway and entered a stand of poplars above the river's bank. Being so high above the water level, the forest floor was bone dry, but that didn't stop the grasses and shrubs from thriving under the spring sunshine. I could tell from the look of the leaves that tiger lilies were also starting to peek through. In another couple of months, their gorgeous orange blooms, dotted with black, would blanket the area.

We got lost in our wandering and quietly picked our way along a game trail. There was nothing spectacular enough to chat about, so we let our feet do the talking—as well as the walking. The strong fragrant smell of all the plants coming to life in the great warm weather was something I wished could be bought as perfume in the drugstore. I liked Mom's Tweed cologne, but I would have definitely bought her a bottle of this "Spring Rush" for any special occasion.

All at once, like dominoes bumping into and knocking over each other, I thumped into Riel, and Mokey into me. We had all heard the same sound, but couldn't stop quickly enough to figure out what it was. Before we had a chance to ask each other about it, the sound came from in front of us again.

It sounded like a mix of a baby crying and a dog barking, but it was short and muffled. At the same time it was also unfamiliar and a bit scary.

Then came another. This one was followed by a grunt, almost like a snuffle.

"What the heck was that?" Mokey asked, just about too quietly to hear. I guessed he had sensed it was important to whisper.

"I dunno," answered Riel, also in a whisper. "But I'm sure gonna find out." Then he added, "Stay behind me and don't say a word."

I grabbed his arm. "Not a chance, Riel. That sounded like something that could hurt us, and it came from close to the river. We're supposed to stay away from there." I had tried to whisper, but while my words came out quietly, there was also a growly rasp to them.

"*You're* not supposed to go near the river," accused Riel. His face was now really close to mine. "Nobody but you has told me not to go, so I'm checking out that noise."

I came back with, "Army told all of us to stay away from it until the water was low enough to see sandbars again. Remember?"

"Yeah, well, we're not in school now, are we?" Riel asked, not waiting for an answer. He turned and moved quickly and quietly in the direction the sound had come from. Except for what he was wearing, he looked like an Indian sneaking up on a settler's cabin in a Western movie.

Mokey and I glanced at each other. I shook my head and gave him what I hoped seemed like a look of disgust.

"I'll stay with you if you don't feel like going." Mokey said. I knew he was pleading with me not to go.

"Naw," I answered, continuing to whisper. "The dumbo might need us." We moved to catch up to Riel just as another batch of noises floated through the bush at us.

The game trail we were on twisted back and forth, winding through heavy undergrowth made up of thorny rose bushes and Saskatoon and chokecherry shrubs that were sheltered mostly by poplar trees. Moving with a bit of speed now, and with Mokey tight behind me, we took a left turn around a tree and almost bumped into Riel again. He was standing behind yet another poplar, but this time a much bigger one, peeking around into a small opening not fifteen yards ahead.

"What's going on?" I whispered into his ear.

Turning only slightly in my direction, he put a finger to his mouth, but didn't add the "Shhh!" that I thought would go with it.

I glanced at Mokey behind me. He was so scared that he was squatting and looking down at the ground. His legs were locked together, his arms were tight around his upper body, and he was trembling. All this and he hadn't seen anything yet. But, then, I was kind of scared too, and I hadn't seen anything yet either.

I looked back in time to see Riel hold a fist beside his face, and with just a single finger poking from it, he bobbed his fist back and forth, pointing ahead. Thinking he was telling me to take a look, I sniggered in front of him and moved carefully to his right so that I could see around the other side of the big poplar. I sensed—more than saw—Mokey

move forward and crouch down to look around me. Then I felt both guys' hands on my back.

The black bear was crunching on one of the bigger bones scattered around a clearing not more than twenty yards by twenty yards. The bones were almost hidden under a layer of thick white cottonwood fluff, like a blanket of dust motes beneath a bed. The fluff was actually made up of dead flowers pollinated by the wind every spring and then let go just before the leaves on the tree sprang to life. Throwing a match onto the fuzzy mess would probably turn it into an instant inferno.

This natural stage could easily have been the same one where Riel and I had seen a coyote and a flock of crows feast on a dead deer carcass that past winter. Except here there was no body of a dead deer, no fur, no meat and no blood. There were only the bones left of whatever had died, and the bear was picking them over. Though I could tell there was no meat left, there must have been marrow still inside the bones for the big mammal to be feeding off them. I had heard that when they first left the den in the spring, bears were famished and would eat almost anything—including kids.

Considering the time of year, the slim sow had probably just come out of her den, and when she did, she brought two cubs with her. One of the two tiny, black-as-night, cute-as-a-button bundles of fur was trying to suckle from a teat while its mother fed off the bones. She pushed the insistent small bear away with her front foot and offered a gruff grunt, I guessed to make her point. That caused the cub to let out another “Waaa,” which explained the sounds that had first pulled us to where we were now watching.

The second cub was close by and seemed more interested in rolling on its back and playing with its paws than worrying about food.

“Holy cow!” whispered Mokey behind and below me. His curiosity had apparently won over his fear. But, his whisper was obviously too loud, because the female bear looked up in our direction. She sniffed the air a bit and then rose up onto her hind legs.

She was huge!

Gramp had been almost six feet tall, and this black monster was easily one or two heads taller than him. The light was pretty shaded, but her coat still glistened, its long fur looking downright silky. Her body shimmered as she stood and swayed, shifting her weight from one foot to the other. I could make out three pairs of teats on her chest, just below her front legs. Those two limbs were bent at the elbows, and her paws dangled from lower arms at the end of those elbows. She looked sleek, powerful, and amazing!

I took all this in over what must have been only seconds.

The bear then moved her head slightly, as if to get a clearer picture of us. Her nose twitched constantly, and it was easy to hear her sniffing the air. The sow gave a short

“woof!” and then let go with a growl that caused my bones to shiver. It was at that moment that I became petrified.

Smacking her lips and grunting came from her next. The threatening sounds could have been a warning directed at us, but it also made the two cubs scurry into action. Her signal caused them to bolt, and in a heartbeat they scrambled up a large cottonweed tree behind their mother, faster than I could slide down a flagpole.

The massive mammal mother didn't have to look over her bulging shoulder to know her babies were climbing to safety. She could hear their claws scrabbling at the tree's bark, all the while making soft, pleading yelps, like a dog makes in its sleep when it might be having a bad dream. In no time at all, the cubs were dozens of feet high into the branches, which allowed their brute of a mother to keep her focus on us.

I was now keeping my attention on her too, because I had learned a bunch about bears from a science project I had done for Miss Ploor a year earlier. I found out that a mature sow could give birth to up to three cubs at a time, usually every other year in the den during winter. The cubs were born blind and as bald as billiard balls, and they'd be so small that they could fit in a teaspoon. Immediately, they would crawl up their mother's belly and lock onto a teat and suckle and grow throughout the rest of the winter until the family finally came out together in the spring. I also knew that a mother bear was most dangerous when she was with her cubs or when you interrupted her when she was feeding. That meant that what we were faced with was dangerous times two!

I was trying to remember what else I might know, like what to actually do if you came upon a sow and cubs, when Mokey's fearful whisper brought me back to the problem at hand.

“I'm scared!” It was as much a whine as a whisper. “What are we gonna do?”

“Be quiet to start with,” Riel ordered through clenched teeth. “And don't move!”

“And don't run!” I was whispering so quietly that I could hardly hear my own voice. “She'll attack us for sure if we run.”

“Ohhh,” moaned Mokey.

“If you make one more sound, Moke, the bear won't have to kill you, 'cause I will,” Riel spit out. “Just shut up!” It was the quietest order I had ever heard Riel give.

For some reason, that caused Mokey to turn slowly and start sneaking baby steps away from us. I sensed him leaving over my shoulder and peeked behind me. Like a snake, I hissed, “Mokey, stop!”

He did, but unfortunately it was too late to stop the bear from charging. I looked back from Mokey in time to see the sow drop down on all fours. With a powerful thrust from her back legs, her front paws lifted off the ground as she lunged forward. In that one

effort and a short second hop, she had closed the distance between us by half. I realized deep down that at any second, one or all of us might be mauled to death. The sow's teeth, her claws and all that power in her killer body could easily slash and tear each of us to shreds within minutes. She'd then have enough fresh meat to feed her cubs and herself for a week.

I stood absolutely still, not out of any thought I had in my head that told me it was the right thing to do. I was simply frozen on the spot out of fear. I didn't look behind to see what Mokey was up to, nor did I glance beside me to see if Riel had stayed or ran. I just froze.

The lack of sounds around me over maybe the next minute told me my two friends had also stayed as still as forgotten statues in a park. The bear seemed confused, but continued to snort, snuffle and shuffle on the spot. Her beady eyes glinted whenever light caught them. As she smacked her mouth and snapped her jaws, drool slathered down. Her teeth, when I saw them, looked very white, very long and very sharp. Then I caught a whiff of her smell, which reeked of something both sweet and sickening at the same time. She smelled like rotten meat, maybe like death—at least what I had heard a dead body smelled like.

After the second hop, the bear had stopped coming toward us. She now swayed from side to side, hopping from one front foot to the other. And she growled and snarled with a menacing sound that made me almost vomit with fright.

Then I remembered another thing I had found out: bears don't go out of their way to pick a fight with humans! The writer of the book I had read about bears believed that these creatures mostly wanted to be left alone. He wrote that if they did feel threatened, their first charge would often be a bluff.

Sure enough, the sow gave up her challenge, turned her back to us and closed in on the tree that held her cubs. She seemed satisfied we were no longer a threat for the time being, but we sure didn't want to stay around to see if that would change.

"Now," I whispered. "Step back quietly, but quickly."

"And don't make one damn noise," Riel quietly chimed in.

Mokey was already headed in the direction we wanted to go, but I poked him in the bum anyway to get him to move faster. We managed to tip-toe for probably the distance from home plate around first base, and then we ran like the blazes. We all knew that doubles wouldn't be enough, so we went for inside-the-park home runs.

Clearing the poplar forest, we broke out into an open area below the bridge. It took us no time at all to hump our bikes from under the bridge and up onto the highway, where we stopped to catch our breath. What we hadn't realized by wandering amongst the trees

was that the weather had changed. Big black clouds, almost as dark as the fur on the hide of the bear, were barreling in on us. We would be lucky to make it home before it rained.

"Great planning, you guys," Mokey complained, swinging his leg over his seat. "You don't get me killed by a bear, so now you want me to drown in a rainstorm."

"Nothing gets said about that bear and her cubs, eh?" I asked, expecting them to agree. "If any of our parents find out, we'll never get to go exploring again."

"Fine by me," answered Riel. "Nobody at my house would believe it anyway."

Mokey was quiet.

"Mokey, did you hear what I just said?" I asked him.

"Yeah, I heard you," he said. "But you do that all the time. You and Riel get me into some things that are so unbelievable that I want to tell the world. But then you force us to make a pact to not tell. It's...well, there are some things, like what just happened, that are so *fantabulous* I really want to... No, I really *need* to tell someone, ya know?"

"First off, Mokey, you've crucified another word," I said. "You probably meant either *fantastic* or *fabulous*, but *fantabulous* is not a real word."

"So what?" he came back with. "Who cares? You know what I meant."

"I'm just trying to be helpful," I said.

"But you didn't hear what I said," he almost shouted. "What happened to us back there was so, so..." He was obviously looking for the right word. Then he let go with, "It was so *super* that I don't know how you can expect me to keep it a secret."

"Just let him," Riel said to me. "Let him tell whoever he wants. Probably the only one who might believe him would be his mother, and if you think she keeps him close to her apron now, wait till she hears her little baby almost got attacked by a bear."

I couldn't help but nod in agreement.

Riel then turned to face Mokey straight on. "If you don't want to hang around with us anymore, ya dope, go ahead and tell whoever ya want." He sneered and shook his head.

Lightning took to jumping furiously in the clouds, breaking up our jabbering. A spring storm could be a bad storm, so we pumped our pedals like crazy to help us cross the bridge and get as close to home as we could before it hit.

I knew Riel wouldn't be walking up the hill with Mokey. I wasn't sure I would be either.