

For Marissa, Danny, and Jonathan

—А. С.



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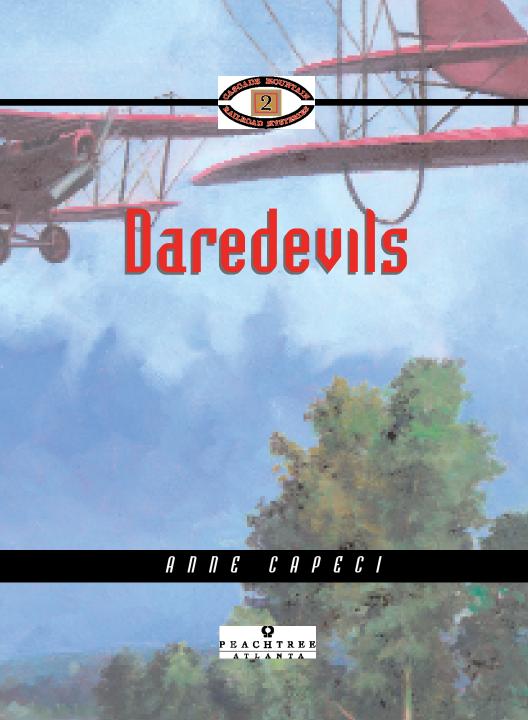
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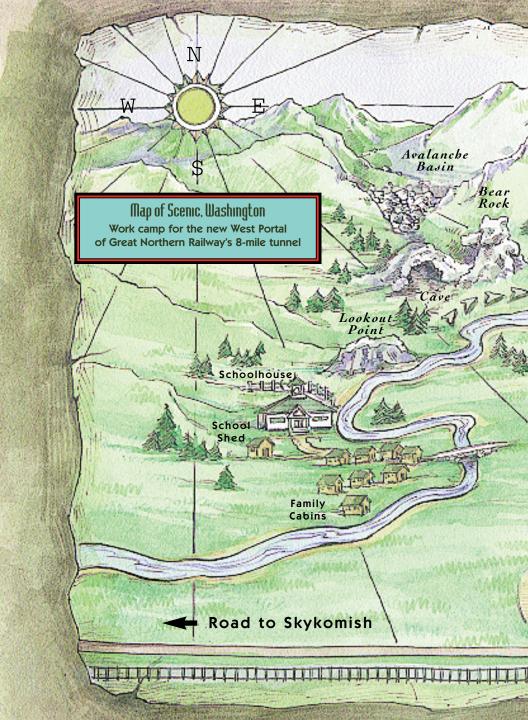
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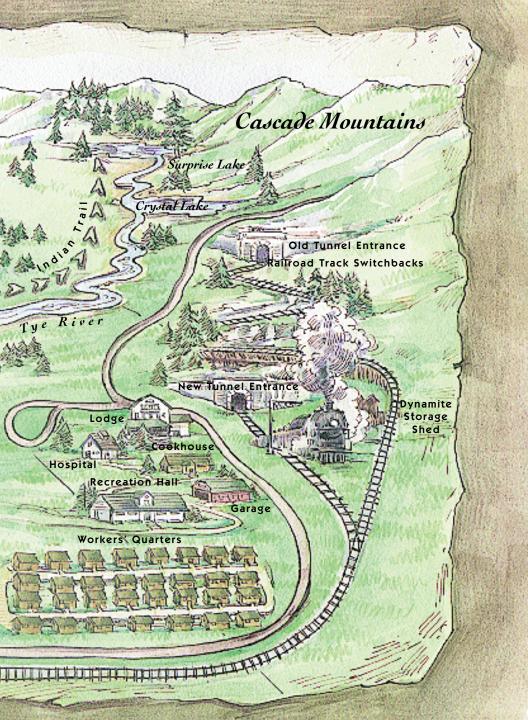
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CHAPTER ONE SOMETHING IN THE AIR

Scenic, Washington 1926

B illy Cole had a knack for spitballs. No doubt about it. There wasn't a boy in Miss Wrigley's class who could make as fine a spitball as he could.

Of course, Billy and the other fourth graders were *supposed* to be studying their twelve times tables. But Miss Wrigley was clear across the room, working sums with the first-grade students. Sharp-eyed as she was, she didn't seem to notice when Billy pulled a piece of newspaper from his desk.

Billy had torn the scrap from his father's Wenatchee *Daily World* that morning. A headline caught his eye: "Crime Ring Smuggles Illegal Liquor into Washington State from Canada." No big news there.

The year was 1926. Buying, selling, making, and transporting liquor had been outlawed throughout the country by the National Prohibition Act. Many people were not happy about the new law. And many of them tried to break it.

Billy gazed at the piece of paper in his hand. It showed grainy photographs of two men in the crime ring. One of them had a wide face and a crooked nose. The other had sunken cheeks. And the beadiest eyes Billy had ever seen.

With a shiver, Billy tore off a corner of the paper and crumpled it. Then he put it in his mouth, and began to chew. Before long, it was soft and slimy. Just right. Billy rolled it into a pea-sized ball and slipped it into his shooter.

He was glad he sat in the back of the room. Just two seats behind his target, Alice Ann Lockhart. She, of course, was studying as hard as ever. Her head was bent over her math book. Billy aimed the shooter at the middle of her neat blond head.

"Careful," a voice whispered.

Billy glanced over his shoulder at the freckled face of his best pal, Finn Mackenzie. Finn's wild hair was so red it almost glowed. He nodded toward a dark-haired girl who shared the front desk with Alice Ann.

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"Hit Dannie by mistake, and you'll be sorry," Finn said.

That was for sure, thought Billy. Dannie Renwick was the least girlish girl in all of Scenic. She could run and fish as well as any boy. And fight. She was smart, too. When a crate of dynamite had gone missing from camp a few weeks ago, Dannie had helped Billy and Finn find the thief. She'd also helped them find a hidden treasure of gold coins that had been stolen in a train robbery almost fifty years before. The three of them had been friends ever since.

Still, Billy had learned the hard way that it was best not to make Dannie mad. He took careful aim with his peashooter before blowing into it.

Thwipp!

The spitball hit the seat back just below Alice Ann's shoulder. Alice Ann didn't even notice, but Dannie did. When she saw the wad of paper, she flashed a wide smile at Billy.

"Class!" Miss Wrigley said, so suddenly that Billy jumped in his seat. He thrust his peashooter into the pocket of his knickers. He, Finn, and Dannie whirled guiltily to face front.

"I have an announcement to make," their teacher went on. "A new boy will be joining our class." Phew! thought Billy. For once, he wasn't in hot water. Anyhow, he already knew about Philip Mackey.

Billy's father was the general manager of the Scenic camp. He was in charge of the crews that worked around the clock to blast a new railroad tunnel through the Cascade Mountains. If anyone important from the railroad company came to Scenic, Billy's dad was the first to know.

"Mr. Mackey will be here in camp for a few months," Miss Wrigley said. "And while he performs his duties for the Great Northern Railway, his son Philip will attend classes here."

"They're coming in on the train today," Dannie whispered over her shoulder to Billy and Finn. "That's what Mike said, and he ought to know." Dannie's older brother was working camp security.

Just then, Mr. Farnam stepped into the coatroom. He taught the older children in the schoolhouse's only other classroom. In his hand was the bell he rang at the beginning and end of school each day.

"Ready?" Mr. Farnam asked. He smiled at Miss Wrigley.

Alice Ann and a few of the other girls giggled. Billy rolled his eyes. Those girls were always whispering about Miss Wrigley and Mr. Farnam. They were sure

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the teachers were sweet on each other. Billy really didn't care.

Mr. Farnam swung the bell. Both classrooms erupted in a clatter of books and voices and banging desktops. Billy dropped his arithmetic book in his desk and ran for the coatroom. He was just putting on his cap when Alice Ann tapped him on the back.

"You think you're so smart, Billy Cole," she said. "Well, you won't after I tell Miss Wrigley I found *this* on the back of my seat."

Smirking, Alice Ann held out Billy's spitball between two fingers. Then she turned back toward the classroom—and stopped.

"What's that?" she said, tilting her head.

Billy heard it, too. A strange, buzzing noise outside. "Sounds like an engine," he said. "And I think it's coming from the sky!"

Billy moved like lightning toward the door. Elbowing his way past two older boys, he burst outside and ran down the wooden steps. Boys and girls crowded out behind him, shouting excitedly.

Dannie's big red dog Buster was already in the yard. The dog kept barking and jumping into the air. It looked as if he were trying to catch whatever was making the noise.

DAREDEVILS

Billy gazed up, shading his eyes. The craggy peaks of the Cascade Mountains and the towering Douglas fir trees hid much of the sky.

But the buzzing sound grew louder, until the air seemed to shake. Even Miss Wrigley and Mr. Farnam came out of the schoolhouse to see what was causing the racket.

"What in the world...?" said Miss Wrigley.

"It's an airplane!" Finn told her eagerly.

Billy had never seen a real airplane before. Now, like an enormous dragonfly, one came swooping over the mountains. It had two sets of wings and the propeller on its nose spun so fast it looked like a shadow.

The sight of the amazing flying machine dipping and turning in the clear blue sky left Billy breathless. As he watched, Billy saw the pilot reach out an arm.

"He's dropping something!" said Dannie.

A cloud of shiny white specks blew out beneath the plane. They fluttered and twirled in the breeze, sparkling like diamonds.