“The grim tragedy of the first US terrorist bombing in 1955 that killed the narrator’s parents hovers over this powerful story.” — JIM HEYNEN
“Cuppy and Stew is completely natural, poignant, and riveting from the first page to the last. An easy read in the best sense of that phrase, and a major work of fiction.”
—RON HANSEN, author of Atticus and A Wild Surge of Guilty Passion

“Eric Goodman’s Cuppy & Stew: The Bombing of Flight 629, A Love Story reads like a fairy tale—until some pretty remarkable darkness sets in, as the title tells us it will. Part novel, part memoir (the author writes in the voice of his wife), part journalistic inquiry, the dark forests of this tale lead down to the far more treacherous and psychological underworld of the hero’s journey—and a gritty, hard-earned climb back to the light. A most compelling read.” —SANDS HALL, author of Reclaiming My Decade Lost in Scientology

“The grim tragedy of the first US terrorist bombing in 1955 that killed the narrator’s parents hovers over this powerful story. Readers are given the complicated love story of the two who die on United Flight 629 and the moving struggle of the daughters who are orphaned by the tragedy: ‘It was me and my sissy against the world.’ Cuppy and Stew brilliantly blends the known and the imagined and will stand as a model for new possibilities in historical fiction.” —JIM HEYNEN, author of The One-Room Schoolhouse and Ordinary Sins

In November, 1955, a young man in Denver, Colorado, hid twenty-five sticks of dynamite and a crude timer in his mother’s suitcase. In what the FBI would term the first example of American air piracy, United Flight 629 blew up twelve minutes after taking off, killing everyone aboard. Part historical novel, part memoir, Cuppy and Stew tells one family’s story before and after the bomb went off. Narrated by a young girl whose parents died on Flight 629, Cuppy and Stew evokes the not-so-innocent 1950s, and the struggles of Cuppy and Stew’s daughters to survive their parents’ deaths. Prize-winning novelist Eric Goodman’s sixth novel is not only his most moving but also his most personal. His wife’s parents perished on United 629.

ERIC GOODMAN is the author of five previous novels including Twelfth and Race, Child of My Right Hand, and In Days of Awe. For many years, he directed the creative writing program at Miami University. He lives with his wife in Mecklenburg, NY, and Sonoma County, California. Find him @erickgoodman.com.

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CUPPY
AND
STEW
CUPPY AND STEW

The Bombing of Flight 629 A Love Story

A Novel by

ERIC GOODMAN
For my mother, Dorothy Goodman.

And for my wife’s lost family,
Stewart, Anne and Sherry Morgan.
In memoria.
Also By Eric Goodman

High on the Energy Bridge
The First Time I Saw Jenny Hall
In Days of Awe
Child of My Right Hand
Twelfth and Race
When lofty thought
Lifts a young heart above its mortal lair
And love and life contend in it, for what
Shall be its earthly doom, the dead live there
And move like winds of light on dark and stormy air.
—Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Adonais*

In words, like weeds, I'll wrap me o'er,
Like coarsest clothes against the cold;
But that large grief which these enfold
Is given in outline and no more.
—Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *In Memoriam*
ON NOVEMBER 1, 1955, a young husband and father accompanied his mother to Denver’s Stapleton Airfield. He had packed her suitcase, adding twenty-five sticks of dynamite to the clothes she had selected but would never wear. At Stapleton, the young man purchased flight insurance in his mother’s name, Daisie King, then waved goodbye as she boarded United 629, a nonstop from Denver to Seattle. Twelve minutes after taking off the plane exploded.

This is the story of a family whose lives were transformed by that murderous young man. There are, no doubt, other stories, perhaps with circumstances even more extreme than ours; United 629 was a full flight. But those stories and those families would require a different author. This is the only one I know.
Part One

Cuppy and Stew
Enter That Man

His eyes, my mother thought, were smoky sunlight.

He was older. The spring of 1937, everyone was older and to Anne, not long removed from Medicine Hat, and not even Medicine Hat, but Redcliff, Alberta, a black-haired, blue-eyed beauty from nowhere, my father appeared impossibly sophisticated in his brimmed hat and double-breasted suit. The boys she had dated in Redcliff wore denim and flannel.

Anne had started her grand new job on the first of the month, promoted from the steno pool. With the promotion to private secretary came a two-dollar raise so on that May morning in 1937, just a few days after her twentieth birthday, things were coming up daisies, daisies, for Suzanne Faulds Kerr. She earned the unlikely sum of ten dollars a week. Half she gave Mum for room and board; a dollar twenty-five plumped her trousseau. The rest she parsed in nickels and pennies for lunch and bus fare, Saturday outings with her best friend, Dotty, shoes, purses, hats, belts, and lipstick to match the dresses and skirt suits she sewed on the Singer treadle Mum kept in the front room. She had a heart-shaped face surrounding blue eyes those Redcliff boys insisted were the color of the sea. But what did they know, really, so far from any coast?

She looked good in hats, Anne knew she did. I’ve studied pictures of my mother at this age although, of course, I couldn’t have known her then. She was lovely, far lovelier than either of her daughters would grow up to be. I also don’t know exactly what she or my father was thinking at many of the moments I describe. But I knew them; I knew the truth of them,
enough to claim that Anne had been saving herself for something or someone. If asked, she couldn’t have said for whom or for what; but when my father approached her desk, Anne likely thought, *Maybe he’s the one.*

Anne was short for Suzanne, which was also her mother’s name, though the waitresses Mum worked with called her Annie. There had been a Susan or Suzanne in the family reaching back four generations to Glasgow, where Mum was born but which Anne had neither seen nor hoped to see because nothing Mum had said made it sound like a place she’d want to visit. Just drear and cold, sadness and damnation, not all that different from Redcliff, another place she’d xx’ed from her heart.

Anne loved Vancouver: Stanley Park; the ocean and ferries; the swank shops on South Granville. Most of all she loved the sea light on sunny days. During the long Alberta winters she thought she’d drown in the darkness which was everywhere and in all things and made her want to put a damp cloth over her eyes and never move again, though what she was sad about she could never explain, least of all to herself. Mum suffered from that same darkness except for Mum, doom and penury lurked around every corner, dark days and bright ones, too.

After they moved to Vancouver in the summer of 1935, Anne’s darkness lifted. She started in the steno pool at Manley in the Stock Exchange Building on Fourth Street. Under its tiled ceilings where brokers barked orders, she felt removed from Mum’s shabby world in South Van. She didn’t belong there; she knew she didn’t. On her twentieth birthday as Anne stood over a cake in their basement apartment, she promised herself she’d find a way out. Then she blew out the candles.

*He* didn’t work at the Stock Exchange, but his friends did, including her employer, Mr. Stanley Tillinghast, who drove a new six-hole Buick and had three boys, and a wife named Polly. Mr. Tillinghast had encouraged her to use his first name, but she didn’t care to presume so the second time *he* walked up and inquired, “Is Stan here?” she was flummoxed.

“Oh,” she said, blood flaming her cheeks. “Mr. Tillinghast.”

“You’re the new girl.”
“Three weeks new.”

“Stewart Morgan. “ He extended a hand to which she surrendered her own. “Old friend of Stan’s.”

“Anne Kerr.”

His gray eyes twinkled. “Friends call me Stew, I’m hoping you will, too.”

Mr. Tillinghast’s door opened out and he pushed towards them, chest forward. “Stew, I see you’ve met Anne.”

My father dropped her hand.

“She turned towards her employer though her eyes kept stealing towards his friend.

“I’ll be back in an hour.”

My father and Mr. Tillinghast ate or drank together every week. Stew was an engineer and worked downtown. Anne wasn’t sure what engineers did—except the ones on trains—but she knew enough to know he wasn’t that kind. Stew and Mr. Tillinghast had attended UBC, Class of 1926, the first college men she’d known personally. My father was thirty-two that first summer when he’d stop by to chat or maybe to flirt. He looked older than Anne, but not by much. His blue-gray eyes were flirty and wise. And there was that cleft on his chin and the light brown hair with just a touch of curl that made him look younger than Mr. Tillinghast, whose cheeks were plump as a squirrel’s.

Although Stew looked young, he felt older and more sophisticated, not only older than Anne and the mailroom clerk she knew was sweet on her, but also older and wiser than Mr. Tillinghast, who seemed to her a larger and hairier (though not for long) version of the three little Tillinghasts at home.

Stew Morgan didn’t wear a wedding band. He never mentioned a wife or kids when he stopped to chat and maybe to flirt before he left with Mr. Tillinghast. But she couldn’t really expect him to, now could she? That’s what Dotty, whom she rode the bus with, was always saying.

“If he’s married, he’s not going to wear a sign, now is he?”

“I don’t think he’s married.”

“What do you know, Miss Innocent?”
Last summer Dotty had dated and, Anne believed, slept with a married man. “I know what I know.”

“He’s turned your head.” Dotty tossed her blonde hair styled like Clau-dette Colbert’s in *It Happened One Night*. “You don’t know if you’re coming or going.”

*I know I don’t care*, Anne thought.

By October, she knew which days Stew was likeliest to stop for Mr. Tillinghast, and she just happened to wear her most becoming dresses, or a skirt and sweater set that showed off her curves, and maybe the hat with the little black veil that had cost four dollars. Maybe she applied an extra drop of the perfume on which she had spent her September savings. Maybe it would have gone no further. Maybe she would have started saying yes to weekend outings with mailroom Walter, if my father hadn’t arrived just before five o’clock on the first Thursday in November, November 5, Guy Fawkes Day.

Anne was packing her things, head bent to peer in her handbag. When she straightened up, her face becomingly flushed, Stew Morgan stood in front of her, gray hat in hand.

“Is Stan ready?”

“I’m sorry, Mr. Tillinghast left early. His boys are sick.”

Disappointment danced in my daddy’s eyes.

*Ask me*, she thought.

As if hearing her, Stew asked, “I don’t suppose you’d have time for cof-fee? Or a fountain drink? Whatever you want.”

*A fountain drink? How old does he think I am?* “Just let me collect my things.”

She walked to the secretaries’ closet, feeling his eyes on her bum. The ribbing in her stockings traced the center of her trim calves, just as they had when she left home that morning. If she wasn’t at the bus Dotty would know something had come up. Anne slipped into her car coat and placed her black crepe hat over her hair, adjusting the brim so it stopped just above her brows. When she turned, Stew’s eyes offered, *You look lovely.*

And she did.
In November 1937, in the port city of Vancouver, which had been badly damaged by the Depression because its provincial forests and mines supplied raw materials the world no longer required, there remained enough pride in the Commonwealth that despite the grip of hard times, the bars that Thursday evening were more than usually festive. Stew had been invited to several Guy Fawkes parties in the big houses facing the Promenade in Shaughnessy Heights, with bonfires, effigies and fireworks among the attractions. He’d been looking forward to his weekly outing with Stan, which was his best hope of letting off steam: drinks with Stan; hockey Tuesday nights and Saturday afternoons. The rest such a cock-up he didn’t know how he survived his days, and the nights were worse. Knowing the cock-up was his own doing didn’t help. Stew’s father, who took equally seriously his roles as patriarch and senior partner of Charlton and Morgan, the men’s clothing store on Granville—Haberdasher to Society—liked to say, and not once but rather often, “You make your own luck.”

Father and his brother-in-law had started the business from nothing thirty-four years ago, and look at it now. He also liked to say, “You change what you can, and what you can’t, you stand. That’s what a man does, Stewart, he stands.” Stew distrusted his father’s generation, their self-denial and stoicism, their pious certainties.

Frederick Winchester Morgan had carried his world view in a satchel from Saint John, New Brunswick, where the Morgans had eeked out a meager town living for generations. Family legend had it the Morgans were Loyalists who’d fled Massachusetts after the American Revolution. Father applied his unyielding morality, absorbed in church on an unforgiving coast, to the life of his eldest son, the first Morgan reared in comfort and the first to graduate university. No real engineering work in Vancouver because of the Depression? You stand it, Son. You married Bride on a whim, an Irish girl wooed during your gallivanting years, when you played hockey for a living? You stand it.

When her sisters returned to Galway, Stew and Bride moved to Van-
couver, his hockey career behind him. His parents were thrilled. Then two years ago, following her mother’s death and Bride’s crushing guilt for not attending her bedside, young and pregnant Mrs. Morgan turned so completely to God her earthly existence became a trudge to the next life in which she could again see her mum.

Motherless, Bride regarded her wifely duties as a Christ-commanded Thou Shalt to be borne in the dark, lips clenched, humming—Stew swore this was true though none would believe it—“Nearer My God to Thee.”

Her given name, after Saint Bride, was another odd detail. Maybe the family had been Catholic at one time, she didn’t know. In her part of the Auld Sod, girls of both faiths were often named for the saint. She was tall and angular, and when they’d met Bride wore her blond hair long and unpinned. After she embraced God, however, she confined her hair in braids she rarely let down, and Stew began to think her true and secret name was Bride of Christ, not because her family was Catholic, but because she wanted nothing to do with him except to bear his children and to do as he wished, so mild and full of grace was she.

Stew despised himself for what he felt and wanted, which at first was to have boisterous relations with Bride such as they’d enjoyed in New York. But that was when she still drank and acted like a woman her age, not a gray-browed widow, grieving not for a husband but her mum. And failing wild sex, failing love and affection, failing a true heart’s connection, his hope was to get away, even though she’d borne a son they’d named following the family tradition: Frederick John.

So that was what he had to stand, according to Father: a life void of joy and love. You change what you can, and what you can’t, you stand. That’s what a man does, Stewart. He stands.

And then he’d met Anne.

That first summer and into the fall, he kept away. To be fair, he didn’t need to stop at Stan’s before they went out, but it had seemed so innocent, and the two minutes with Anne were the brightest of his week. She was round and soft where Bride was unyielding. Young, surely innocent, always smiling. Before they left the Stock Exchange Building, she freshened her bright red lipstick and the perfume he’d noticed she’d started
wearing that fall. She couldn’t be more than a year or two past high school and as they departed the Exchange, he wondered where he could take her where they wouldn’t be seen. Stew, he thought, as she glanced at him, black brows lifting, lips parted, you’re in trouble. If anyone sees how she looks at you, There, like that, and how you look at her, as if she were a cupcake you’d like to peel the wrapper from, they’ll know. And there’s not yet anything to know.

My father was careful, as they walked towards Gastown, to maintain a polite distance. He recalled high school dances, lifetimes ago, although maybe just last year for Anne; how white-haired Miss Murray enforced the twelve-inch rule with a yardstick though some of the “boys” had fought in the Great War.

“How about here?” he asked, stopping in front of McGann’s.

“Why not?” My mother tossed her head, though she must have been surprised he’d taken her to a bar and grill, not a restaurant or soda fountain.

He held the door and followed her in, ordered a rye and soda for himself and one for Anne, which she insisted she had drunk many times before, then coughed herself red in the face.

Oh hell, he thought, she’s a girl playing grown-up.

“How do you like working for Stan?”

“He’s awfully nice.” She took a second, shallower swallow. “But not very organized.”

“I suppose you are?”

“And so I’ve been my entire life.”

“How many years is that?”

“From when I was little, I lined up my dolls and pins and clothes. I like a tidy house.”

“You don’t seem the type.” He finished his drink and raised his hand for the waitress.

“Don’t I?” Seeing Stew’s empty glass she hurried with her own. “What type do I seem?”

“The type to dance with all the boys, but never long with one.”

“That just shows you don’t know me at all.”

“I guess I don’t.”
Stop it, he thought.
The ginger-freckled waitress whose brogue reminded Stew of Bride’s sisters arrived beside them.
“What can I get ye?”
“Another rye and soda.”
“And one for me.” Anne raised her chin to look straight at him. “I’m twenty,” she added after the waitress sailed off. “You’re thirty-three.”
*And married. I have a son.* “I’m too old for you.”
“I like older men.”
“Have you dated any?”
She opened her mouth, that deep red rosebud. “Not yet,” she admitted, her honesty as fetching as her lips.
Their second round arrived.
“Happy Guy Fawkes Day,” he said.
“Come again?”
“Guy Fawkes, an Irishman, also known as Guido, tried to blow up the British Parliament in 1605. It’s been a holiday in England ever since.”
“Mum’s Scottish.”
“What’s that got to do with the price of tea?”
“She doesn’t like the English.”
“And your dad?”
“She didn’t like him, either. Lucky for Mum, he’s passed.”
“Oh,” my father said. “That’s rough.”
“It’s not so bad.” Anne sipped her drink. “Or I might still be in Medicine Hat, freezing my bum off eight months a year.”
Who knew she could be so bold and funny? “What time,” he asked, “must you be home?”
“Mum’s expecting me now, but I can call the neighbor.”
“Would a Guy Fawkes party interest you?”
“You ask a lot of questions.”
“Would it?”
A blush rose on her unblemished cheek. “I want to go if you want to take me.”
At the party, hosted by the friend of a friend on the semi-pro hockey squad he captained, they kept to themselves and he spoke to no one except the teammate who'd invited him, who'd never met Bride or knew Stew was married or anything else about him except he was a bit of a toff and a damn good center, hard to get off his feet, and not afraid to mix it up when challenged. He held Anne's hand in the dark while Guy Fawkes was hanged in effigy. A bonfire clawed at the sky and when the first fireworks exploded, she pressed his hand and looked up, her blue eyes reflecting red and gold. If his life had been different than it was, he would have kissed her, bam on the rosebud mouth; instead, he pressed her palm to show he felt it, too, whatever this was. When the fireworks ended he said, “I better take you home.”

“There’s no need, I’ll ride the bus.”

“Not a chance.”

They walked to his Buick, past mansions fronting the Esplanade, which even now, with the Depression so bad, blazed with light, though one or two had recently changed hands, Stew knew, dimes on the dollar. Anne gazed out the passenger window, her face turned away, then scooted closer. He might have kissed her then; he felt certain she wanted to be kissed. But still he resisted, clutching a last shred of decency. Anne rested her cheek on my father’s shoulder and there it remained, very lovey-dovey, while he drove her home, south on Granville then east on Kingsway until my mother, moving her lips towards his ear, whispered low and breathily, “At the corner of East Boulevard, let me out.”

“I’ll walk you to your door.”

“No. It’s just around back, and I don’t want Mum to see you.”

“Am I so bad to look at?”

“No, Stew,” she replied. “But then she’ll know.”

He almost asked, Know what? But there were so many things and so many questions he wasn’t prepared to answer. He wondered how much Anne knew. That he was half in love with her? That he was married? That
if he were any decent sort of chap he wouldn’t be alone in his car with a lovely girl wishing he could drive all night with her head on his shoulder?

“She always suspicions dark motives, Mum does,” Anne said. “That’s how she is.”

“Anne,” he said, “there’s something I should tell you.”

“Please, don’t.”

A moment later, they reached East Boulevard and my father pulled over. He hadn’t told her about Bride, but at least he hadn’t kissed her.

“I had a wonderful time,” she said.

“So did I.”

“Whatever you wanted to tell me, it would have spoiled things, don’t you see?”

She slipped out the door. Belting her coat she waved, her hand a small white flag. The house he’d let her out in front of was rather nice: a Tudor, its front door accessed through a stone arch. She shared the basement flat with her mother. It’s not much, she’d said, but so much nicer than the rooms we let.

When she disappeared through the gate, Stew shifted into first then second, turned left at the corner and drove down what he believed was the alley behind her house. It was nearly eleven, a cool dark night, without moon or stars. All around Vancouver Guy Fawkes effigies smoldered, as did Stew Morgan driving towards the house where his wife slept the sleep of the blessed.
Sunday Dinners

The first Sunday in December 1937, the Morgans gathered as they did every first Sunday, at the big house on Nanton. Stew, Bride and little Fred, sixteen months old. Donald and his wife, Lillian. Robert, the baby of the family, nine years younger than my father, brought his fiancée. My father’s mother, Jenny, had prepared a rib roast and Yorkshire pudding, English peas, dinner rolls and green beans, the same meal, with minor variations, she offered every first Sunday. She used the good china and second-best silver, each polished spoon, fork, and knife embossed with an ornate M.

My grandmother had an aristocratic nose, kind face and somber smile. Stew believed he was her favorite, although she would never admit to such an un-maternal failing. Being so much older than his brothers, Stew remembered life before Father had made his fortune, back when they lived in the West End, before servants and money, before his mother’s brown eyes often looked so surprisingly sad. Because Father worked long hours running Charleton and Morgan and managing his rental properties, Stew had had the young and girlish Jenny to himself. She was sweet-tempered, with the same bloom on her cheeks, the same perfect skin, Stew thought with an inward flush, Anne now possessed. Certainly, she was his favorite and no doubt she had spoiled him; at least that’s what Father believed. To this day he could talk to Jenny in ways he couldn’t to Father, who tolerated only those ideas which reflected the light of his own.
Jenny had swept and pinned her silver hair off her neck with the
tortoise-shell combs she’d used for as long as Stew could remember. A
cameo, once belonging to grandmother Stewart, hung between her
breasts. She’d met and married Fred Morgan in St. John’s, where they’d
grown up, and moved across Canada with him, but had remained very
much an Easterner and, in speech and dress, more at ease in the nine-
teenth than the twentieth century. She favored pleated skirts and silk
blouses with pearl button collars. She called her husband Daddy and
defferred to him publicly in every way imaginable.

“Stew,” she said, passing the platter of Yorkshire, while at the other end
of the table, Father carved the roast. “How have you been?”

“Just ducky.” He glanced at Bride. “Haven’t we?”

Bride smiled then resumed slicing little Fred’s meat, a smile which
announced at a frequency only he could hear, See? I’m lying for you, that’s
how good a wife I am.

In fact, the month since Guy Fawkes, had been hell. There was no
denying Stew was smitten with my mother, though he hadn’t said a word
to anyone. Not to Anne, certainly not to Bride, and the silence was killing
him. At UBC, he’d played four years of hockey and golf, drank too much,
drove his roadster way the hell too fast. Despite it all, he graduated with
honors in engineering. Men wanted to be his friend; women sought his
attention. And now? The three evenings he’d stayed home this week,
after the baby was in bed, they hadn’t spoken. Not a goddamn word.

Smiling at her father-in-law, whom Stew knew adored her—they
shared a passion for self-denial—Bride said, “Now that little Fred has
learned to run, there’s no sitting, I can tell you that.”

Donald’s wife, Lillian, just twenty-one, said, “Little Fred’s so cute.”

Stew met his brother’s eyes. Growing up, though there was six years
between them, he and Don were unusually close. Stew taught him to
drive and the little he knew about girls. They were together at the club
the day Don first broke ninety, and six months later, eighty-five. After
UBC, when Stew left for the States to play hockey, everything changed.
Two months after he returned with Bride, Don accepted a job in Toronto.
Somehow, without intending to, they’d barely seen each other for eight
years. Now that Don was back, it felt to Stew as if they remained apart. He wanted to change that, but wasn’t sure how. What he did know was he missed his kid brother.

Father stood at the head of the table, carving and transferring dark slices of beef to the serving platter Agnes, the cook’s girl, held in front of him. “Tell Cook,” he said, “the roast is overdone. Again.”

“But still lovely,” my grandmother added.

“And ask her to send out the horseradish sauce,” Father said, his salt and slate eyebrows lifting, “if it’s not too much trouble.”

“Now, Daddy,” Jenny Morgan said softly as Agnes pushed through the swinging door to the kitchen. “You know Cook’s had a terrible week.”

Father’s eyes glittered. “There’s no need to take it out on the roast!”

Stew, Don and Robert grinned into their fists. Father had been complaining about one cook or another for twenty years.

“Let us give thanks,” he began, “for this overdone beef, when all around us, families go hungry. Bride, will you say grace? It’s so lovely when you do.”

Bride folded her hands. “Let us ask the Lord’s blessing for all we have been given.”

Save me, my father thought, from so much goodness.

On East Boulevard, in the apartment down the basement stairs, my mother was preparing Sunday supper. Jimmy, her middle brother, and Mary, his new wife, were expected any time (Dave, the eldest and Anne’s favorite, had stayed back in Medicine Hat). She and Jimmy, who was five years older but rarely acted his age, had the same pale skin and dark hair. Like Anne, Jimmy was short. Unlike her, he was bull-necked with a wrestler’s biceps. Although jobs were scarce when they arrived in ’35, he soon found work repairing small engines. A year later, he found Mary, or perhaps she found him. Taller than Jimmy, with a father who dug ditches or hired out as a gardener, always something in dirt, Mary dressed well and spoke with an accent that made Anne smile. She nagged Jimmy not to say Ain’t and to scrub under his nails before he touched anything in the house, especially, Anne suspected, Mary herself.
Anne turned the gas key, struck a long match, opened the oven and lit the pilot. She rotated the dial to 375, heard the satisfying whoosh of ignition and closed the oven door. What Mary saw in Peanut, as he'd been known in Medicine Hat—he stood five-four or so, no more—she didn't know. She would have thought a girl like Mary, who read Harper's Bazaar and knew the price of hats at the smart shops on South Granville, would have wanted someone with pretensions, or aspirations, yes, that was the word, closer to her own. Until he dropped out of tenth grade, Peanut was the class clown. Dave liked to say the only thing clever about Jimmy were his dumb faces. One in particular, cheeks puffed, eyes all googily and crossed, used to get her in trouble when she was trying to be good in church. And if Jimmy's muscles had muscles and he spoke with his mouth full, well, that was Jimmy. Not what Anne was looking for, but fine for some, just not what she would have guessed Mary wanted. Which was why, when they announced their engagement after only three months, Anne suspected Mary had a bun in the oven. Two years later, they were childless.

Anne had just placed her shepherd’s pie on the middle rack and finished filling halved hard-boiled whites with deviled yolks, when she heard her family. Mum's voice, Jimmy's laugh, Mary's querulous reply. Anne tossed a pinch of salt at the eggs and hung her apron on its hook. In their tiny apartment, which at least had a kitchen—unlike the furnished downtown rooms—everything had its place. Mum the bedroom, Anne a foldout in the front room; her hanging clothes in Mum's closet. It was like living aboard ship, but it suited Anne, it did. She'd hated the furnished rooms and the stumblebums outside. Hey, Gorgeous, they'd holler. Hey, Gorgeous! Anne checked her face in the Home Sweet Home mirror on the wall. Mary always looked just so, but Anne knew she was prettier. Her whole life she'd been prettier; it was the one advantage she could count on. She tucked her black hair behind her ears, pinched her cheeks and stepped through the swinging door into the front room.

“Why, Anne,” Mary exclaimed, kissing her once on each cheek. “You're looking lovely.”

“Thank you,” my mother said. “I love your hair.”
“Really?”
“Hey, Sis.” Jimmy wrapped her in a bear hug. “What’s that I’m scenting?”
“What do you think?”
“If I didn’t know better”—Jimmy grinned—“I’d say shepherd’s pie.”
She nodded.
“Hot damn.”
“Now, Jimmy,” said their mother, because it was Sunday.
“You spoil him,” Mary said, her smile tight. “You do.”
And you don’t?
“Hey, Sis, any ice in the box? I brought a wee bottle.”
“Now, Jimmy,” Mum repeated. “It’s Sunday.”
“Just a wee one, to ask the Lord’s blessing.”
He pushed through the swinging door. Anne watched her sister-in-law’s lips curl down. From the kitchen, Jimmy exclaimed, “Damn, Sis, look at these eggs!”

After they’d eaten and everyone except Mum shared Jimmy’s pint, they set out for a walk. Not much light found the basement windows even on a bright afternoon like this one. No wonder Mum, who struggled with the darkness, seemed half crazy. She was much better days she worked at O’Doul’s, the tavern on Fairview. When she had a few days off Anne never knew what dark path Mum’s mind would follow. Medicine Hat and the endless winters, or all the way back to Glasgow where she made, she liked to say, the Great mistake of me life, which was marrying yer Da.

They came up the stairs, Jimmy laughing loudly. The weather was fine for December, no rain, and mild enough. Anne hoped Mr. Bishop, who lived in the front of the house with his wife and kids didn’t hear. Mrs. Bishop—Anne didn’t know her given name—couldn’t be more than thirty, yet she’d lost her figure: two boys, two girls. Many a time Anne had heard her swear at the children, and from the sound of her voice, brassy and vulgar, Anne wondered how she’d married a husband successful enough to buy such a fine home.

Jimmy unlatched the gate that led into the alley. There was perhaps an
hour to dusk, her favorite time of day. Some of the neighbor houses, not five minutes away, were honest-to-God mansions. Gables, multiple patios, high fences or hedges to shield prying eyes, like Anne’s, from a view of the grounds. When Anne walked home from the bus with the buoyant, dying but not yet dead light in the trees, she would let her mind go and fantasize about living in one of the big houses with a man who loved her and their babies. What lavish meals she’d prepare, and how she’d love him! Her heart would pound so hard she could barely stand it. When my mother allowed features to form on her husband’s face, it was always Stew Morgan: gray eyes, cleft chin.

Mary asked, “What happened to that boy you were seeing at work?”
“I was never seeing any boy.”
“Oh, yes you were. Jimmy told me.”
“And who told him, I wonder?”
Mary glanced over her shoulder at Jimmy and Mum; Anne followed her gaze. They had the same face, those two, doughy and round.
Mary said, “I guess Mum did.”
“That would be the blind leading the blind.”
Mary patted my mother’s hand. “More like the blind leading the dumb.”
Anne laughed. There were times she almost liked Mary, who had a sharp, funny tongue, though she probably oughtn’t say such things about her husband.
“So there’s no one?” Mary asked. “A pretty girl like you?”
Anne remembered how Stew Morgan’s eyes had devoured her on Guy Fawkes’ Night. “No,” she replied. “Not really.”
“So you wouldn’t mind,” Mary asked, “if we fixed you up with Jimmy’s friend Tom from work, the cute one? Jimmy says he’s been asking.”
Twice in Medicine Hat, she’d dated Jimmy’s friends. Like her brother, total meatheads.
“No, thank you.”
“So there is someone.”
“It’s just.” She met Mary’s eyes as they reached the corner of Mayfield. “I dated Jimmy’s friends in high school.”
“No, there is someone, I can tell.” Mary patted Anne’s hand again. “You’re just not saying.”

In the street, to Anne’s left, a silver-gray Buick much like Stew Morgan’s sped past. There must be many such cars, Anne assured herself, because this one not only transported a man, but a woman holding an infant.

“Don’t tell me if you don’t want to.” Mary’s fingers tightened around my mother’s wrist. “Just don’t think I don’t know what I know.”
ON THE TUESDAY before Christmas, my father waited in the elevator alcove of 404 4th Street, the Vancouver Stock Exchange Building. He’d left work early, ostensibly to meet a client, but in fact he’d needed to retrieve a purchase at Harksen’s Jewelers. He fingered the black velvet box in his jacket pocket then glanced up at the brass arrow. After lingering on VI for a wickedly long interval, it was tracing a counter-clockwise descent, V, IV, III, II, headed towards L. For days, Stew had been rehearsing what to say and how to say it. And for just as long, he’d imagined Anne’s response.

_I’d love to have a Christmas drink. And no, I don’t mind that you’re married._

For sixteen days, since he’d driven past her with Bride and little Fred, the fantasy would fall apart at this moment. Everything he knew about Anne suggested she would very much care that he was married. She was just a kid, a beautiful sweet girl from Medicine Hat.

The brass arrow settled at L, and the door slid open. The ancient operator, garbed in a gold-button, pigeon gray uniform and matching cap, pulled back the grille. Three traders flowed around Stew, buttoning overcoats. The weather had turned nasty last night: thirty-eight degrees, sideways rain and a twenty-mile per hour blow. Nothing compared to New York, but cold enough fresh snow capped the mountains east of downtown. Headed to Harksen’s, my father had spied more than one dowager wrapped in fur.
The operator slid shut the grille and pushed the lever right. The elevator groaned and rose.

“Four, please.”

“Yes, Sir, I know.”

At IV, the operator brought the car smoothly to a halt, slid back the grille then the door. Two inches too high.

“Sorry, Sir.” He closed the grille but with the door open, dropped down.

“Watch your step, Sir.”

“Thank you.” Stew stepped off. “Merry Christmas.”

It was such a graceful machine, an elevator, rising through its dedicated shaft. My father squared his square shoulders and set off towards Stan’s office. It was freakish how much he was drawn to a girl he barely knew, and freakish, too, that the operator knew his floor. Had he really been here that often, or was the man’s memory keen? He supposed an elevator operator didn’t have much else to occupy his mind. And then all thoughts of the operator dissipated because ten feet away my mother looked up and smiled.

When Stew Morgan stopped in front of her desk and asked if she would come out with him, she’d answered Yes, yes, of course. But she had a letter to finish. Mr. Tillinghast, who was out of the office with a client, had asked her to be certain it went out today, and to sign it for him.

My father descended to the lobby alone while she typed the letter not once but twice, having discovered an error in the second paragraph while proofing. Instead of hurt, she’d typed heart. It certainly wouldn’t hurt Stew to wait; her heart had been hurting these two long weeks, and really, since Guy Fawkes, and before that since he first stopped at her desk. So she re-typed and signed Mr. Tillinghast’s name, placed the sealed envelope and the rest of the day’s correspondence in the wire Outgoing basket where the mailroom boys would find them. Stew would expect her to complete her task, not just because Mr. Tillinghast was his friend, but because to do so was right and proper, just as he was. Then she touched up her lipstick and redrew her eyebrows—she used no powder
or rouge, nothing to cover her skin, which was as close to perfect as skin could be—pinched her cheeks and rode the packed elevator to the lobby where she had the pleasure, for the second time that afternoon, of seeing Stew Morgan smile when his eyes met hers.

And now in the early dark on the second shortest day of the year, he’d dared to take her hand in his, and the sensation of his warm fingers laced through hers thrilled my mother as they walked beneath the spluttering lamps towards Gastown, past warehouses and rough bars, the same direction they’d walked on Guy Fawkes. She understood they were walking away from the financial district because he didn’t want anyone to see them. She’d feared as much the first time; she might be young, but she was no fool, nor either a baby, although she had convinced herself that first night her suspicions were wrong. Hadn’t he taken her to a mansion in Shaughnessy Heights?

But now in the cold and dreary dark, there was no fooling herself about the direction they were taking, and though she told herself A good girl would be offended, she held his hand, thrilled down to her toes.

“Anne,” he said and tugged her closer.

“Yes?”

He stopped and turned, the brim of his hat so low it hid his eyes. “I can’t stop thinking about you.”

“I can’t either.”

They stepped into the shadow of a warehouse door. When their lips touched she didn’t know whether to sigh or to whisper, Thank you! Imagine thanking a fellow for kissing you! My poor lovesick mother closed her eyes and kissed my father, his lips gentle, then hungry, and she surprised herself, and probably Stew, by parting her lips and then his tongue fell on hers and she thought she’d die of it.

They found a noisy pub with shells on the floor and sailors at the bar. A waitress with a face craggy as the rocks in English Bay brought a basket of peanuts then two tall whiskeys.

“Two Sundays ago,” she said. “I saw you.”

“Not the first time I’d driven Mayfield, hoping to see you.”

My mother sipped her whiskey and fingered the scarred wooden top of
their corner booth. She raised her eyes from the initials, V+W, which someone had carved inside a heart, to my father’s face. “Why didn’t you stop if you saw me?”

Stew covered her hand with his. “I think you saw into the car.” His eyes were not only gray and implacable, but bright with hope. “In fact, I know you did.”

“Was that your wife?” If he wasn’t going to look away, she wouldn’t either. “She seemed to be holding a child.”

“My son will be two in March.”

“If your wife and your son”—Oh my god, he has a son!—“were with you, why were you hoping to see me?”

“The same reason we’re here now.” He sipped his drink but did not move his eyes, which gazed directly into hers. “I think you know what that is.”

“Tell me,” she whispered.

“You’re going to make me say it.”

“I am.”

“I’m in love with you, Anne.”

My mother’s eyes filled with tears and suddenly she was crying, softly, without sound.

“I must say, Anne, that’s not the response I hoped for.”

“I love you, too.” There, she’d said it.

“Do you think I’m a cad?”


“I have something for you.”

He reached into his pocket, grinning and grunting a little as he tugged the something free. He set a small black velvet box on the tabletop. Inside, she found a heart-shaped locket on a braided chain.

“Oh, Stew,” she said. “It’s beautiful.”

“Merry Christmas.”

“Thank you.” She felt as if she would never stop smiling. “Help me put it on.”

“Open it first.”
Inside, there was a picture of him taken, she thought, some time ago. His hair was different, parted closer to the center. “You look very handsome.” He rolled his eyes as if to say, *Stop being silly.* “I thought,” he said, “you could put your picture on the other side.”

“No, a picture of the two of us.”

“We’ll have to get one taken.”

“Of course. Now, help me put it on.” She swept the hair from her neck and pivoted, so her back faced the open mouth of the booth. My father stood behind her and slipped the locket over her head. It landed between her breasts with a slight percussive thump. She felt his fingers on her neck and tried not to hear the raucous voices at the bar, tried not to wonder what came next and concentrated on her wonderful gift, light in weight but fraught with meaning. Stew sat opposite her again.

“It looks beautiful on you.” When she didn’t answer, he added, “Why don’t we go someplace?”

Her heart thrummed and blood rushed to her cheeks. Did he think she would go to bed with him, was that what he thought? That’s what his wife did. *She* went to bed with him, yet he was here with her.

“Where do you want to go?” she asked, lowering her eyes. “I’ll go wherever you want.”

“Someplace nice,” he said. “For Christmas dinner.” My father grinned and signaled the waitress. “I was talking about dinner.”

“So was I.” My mother looked down so my father couldn’t see her face. Then she placed her hand over the locket and pressed it to her heart.
ERIC GOODMAN is the author of five previous novels including *Twelfth and Race*, *Child of My Right Hand*, and *In Days of Awe*. For many years, he directed the creative writing program at Miami University. He lives with his wife in Mecklenburg, NY, and Sonoma County, California. Find him @erickgoodman.com

SUSAN MORGAN the person, as distinct from Susan Morgan the narrator of this novel, is a well-known literary critic and feminist scholar, best known for her work on Jane Austen, the convention of the heroine, and Victorian women travelers in Southeast Asia. Her most recent book was *Bombay Anna*, a biography of Anna Leonowens, the governess in *The King and I*.

Here they are, pictured together, at the beginning of their shared life’s great adventure, living in and writing about Southeast Asia.