

Excerpt from *The Box Garden*

Chapter 1

What was it that brother Adam wrote me last week? That there are no certainties in life. That we change hourly or even from one minute to the next, our entire cycle of being altered, our whole selves shaken with the violence of change.

Ah, but Brother Adam has never actually laid eyes on me. And could never guess at the single certainty which swamps my life and which can be summed up in the simplest of phrases: I will never be brave. Never. I don't know what it was—something in my childhood probably—but I was robbed of my courage.

Even dealing with the post-adolescent teller in my branch bank is too much for me some days. She punches in my credits, my tiny salary from the *Journal*, the monthly child support money (I receive no alimony), and the occasional small, miniscule really, cheque from some magazine or other which has agreed to publish one of my poems.

And the debits. I see her faint frown; a hundred and fifty for rent. Perhaps she thinks that's too much for a woman in my circumstances. So do I, but I do have a child and can't, for his sake, live in a slum. Though the street is beginning to look like one. Almost every house on the block is subdivided now, cut up into two or three apartments; sometimes even a half-finished basement room with plywood walls and a concrete floor rented out for an extra sixty-five a month.

Oh yes, and a cheque for thirty dollars made out to Woodward's. A new dress for me. On sale. I have to have something to wear on the train. If I turn up in Toronto in one of my old falling-apart skirts, my sister Judith will shrink away in pity, try to press money into my hands, force me with terrible, strenuous gaiety on a girlish shopping trip insisting she missed my birthday last year. Or the year before that.