

Chapter 7

Heat is everywhere now. I can't ignore it anymore. The air is like a furnace blast so hot that my eyes under the goggles feel cool compared to the rest of my face. My hands are cool but the gloves have big black spots from perspiration on the back surrounded by white streaks of dried salt.

On the road ahead a crow tugs on some carrion and flies up slowly as we approach. It looks like a lizard on the road, dry and stuck to the tar.

On the horizon appears an image of buildings, shimmering slightly. I look down at the map and it must be Bowman. I think about ice water and air conditioning.

On the street and sidewalks of Bowman we see almost no one, even though plenty of parked cars show they're here. All inside. We swing the machines into an angled parking place with a tight turn that points them outward, for when we're ready to go. A lone, elderly person wearing a broad-brimmed hat watches us put the cycles on their stands and remove helmets and goggles.

"Hot enough for you?" he asks. His expression is blank. John shakes his head and says, "Gawd!"

The expression, shaded by the hat, becomes almost a smile.

"What is the temperature?" John asks.

"Hundred and two," he says, "last I saw. Should go to hundred and four."

He asks us how far we have come and we tell him and he nods with a kind of approval. "That's a long way," he says. Then he asks about the machines.