

designer crate, never will." He snickered. "Adam Adcock used to call my plane a bunch of spare parts flyin' in formation. Yeah, it's old, but dependable." Grimby glanced at Clark again. "First time out? Relax, you'll get there just fine." He grinned back at me. "Yep. Adam's the one used to intercept my radio calls for a pick-up. He'd beat me there then tell my customer I smeared up at Nulato. One far back night he even moved the flare pots so's I'd land on the worst of the muskeg, maybe turn turtle, and lose me the mail contract. I disappointed him, but when I hit them hare holes it dang near did bust the seat of my pants. Could've been bad, that's what I flew by. Still do."

The Grimby grin was contagious. Despite Clark's misery, I couldn't resist conversing, asking questions.

"Oh, I've got some real smart gadgets now, even LORAN," replied Grimby. "But up here where you can't believe magnetic north, here where you get six hours of light and sixty-below-zero, your gut is still your best instrument."

"Bet you could write a book about your adventures," I ventured.

"Maybe I will. Bush pilots ain't bad folk, just hungry. Always lackin' fifteen cents of havin' a dime. Weren't enough runs for all of us so we used to compete on the dirty side. Things're more polite now. Got my own little company. Jets ain't worth a damn for pipeline inspections, gettin' equipment to a leak, airliftin' an injury off a Bering Sea pressure ridge. Hey, we even ferry Dove Bars to one-lung villages and cognac to Denali climbers. —You okay, Mr. Clark? I'll shut up if you wanta hear a cassette."

(cont.)