

moved her a little. It would make the registration of the expected responses that much easier.

She looked at Beryl as she prepared to speak and saw that from the smiling, hard mask tears were swelling.

Keith took off his glasses and studied the papers spread before him on the table. At last some photocopies he'd ordered from the county library twenty miles away had come, and he had all the relevant books from the 'local' shelf stacked in a tower to one side.

It had been a struggle. The first assistant had refused to get the copies. We en allowed to photocopy anything over a hundred years old, she said frostily, bureaucratically. The next assistant had said the same, though unfrostily and after a pause had said that she'd see what she could do.

So before him were copies of pages from an account book and a letter from Samuel Moonlow to his wife recording the day of the lighting of the first furnace. Of course the letter had been published in journals, but to see that handwriting was to taste something of the day.

The *D of Dearest* was inflated taut as a full sail. It pushed your eye positively along through the letter.

The content was disappointing, giving little detail of the furnace work, but it did mention the weather.

The snow has not been so heavy as to impede our progress badly and none falls at the Moment — There is Wind but I do not Mind this as it prevents the freezing Mists unpleasant and frequent here.

Keith remembered the words from journals. Frosty and bureaucratic. One thing the journals had not shown was a crossing-out after *The snow has been*. There was a c with a swift stroke through it. What had he decided not to write? Catastrophic. Calamitous. Causing problems. Cast in drifts. Perhaps it was an unwelcome truth he decided to water down or cut altogether. He might have been avoiding a lie or choosing one. The moment of choice caught on the page. All the time from all the possibilities running through his head he had been selecting, shaping, rejecting. The quick stroke trimmed the sail suddenly so that the letter cut logically through all the choices to the

signature at the end. For an instant you heard the machine working, the rigging creak.

There had been terrific snow. The books showed the hire of extra men to clear it. Keith imagined it flung against gable ends, against the backs of men and the flanks of animals. And the trees. Snow etching the bare trees black and white like oriental script. It was hardest to imagine Moonlow. Leave your wife and family, move to a remote frozen place at the beginning of a new century and put all your money into lighting a fire. There were others already there in neighbouring valleys of course. Having a vision or being a pioneer didn't quite ring true. Greed then. That wouldn't do, though for Moonlow's son and grandson it might. Madness might come closer. A kind of fever. A random infection with the preoccupations of a new age. Except that when you looked at the letter Moonlow called it *our Business* in a way that cooled all thought of burning fevers. It was not a cosy *our Business* nor had it much exclusive hint. *Our Business proceeds quite well*. *Our* could include the labourers and the mules. It was hard to see what Moonlow meant, let alone see his character. He would live in the big house, even have his own money minted. Perhaps he just didn't get on with his wife. The letter was formal enough for Keith to believe that. There was such an ocean to chart, even in one day in one man's life, that Keith was amazed that historians would try to grasp and explain whole civilizations. It was hard to imagine anyone with that much nerve. Or perhaps they were greedy or mad.

He thought of the mules with snow on their flanks. Surely for a moment Moonlow must have sat in his room and had no more idea what he was doing there than the animals. No more understanding than Keith had of himself sitting in the library reference room poring over the letter. The snow must have made him doubt.

The snow. Keith looked up, remembered, put his glasses on and looked up again. The wall facing him was all window. And no snow. The weather was disappointingly mild. A freeze might help him to work. That was why he wanted to get as much done as he could before the spring. Drizzle, mist. Unpleasant and frequent. Dim in the mist he could see the hill curving away. It was an old tip, landscaped and grassed, the old Number Seven, but you'd never guess it, looking through the huge picture