

EYE OF THE CHINOOK

SERIALIZED

A NOVEL

(c) Homer Kizer

Chapter Eleven

"I couldn't get the tape out, but I listened to it." Peggy looks across the parking lot. Ben has waited in the car for her to return from the TAPT's meeting inside the gray fortress, with its crown of thorns. "Will you promise me no killing?" She waits for him to answer, and when he doesn't she says, "No, you can't do that, can you?"

The rain has returned. Rivulets from the roof run along the edges of the windshield, cracked from a stone that would have killed Goliath. They splash down fenders and onto the asphalt where they merge into a sheet of water flowing towards a storm drain that will eventually return them to the sea where a new cycle of evaporation and condensation will begin, causing even more rain to fall like the tears of God because of what's done here, where He gave the Adversary six millennia to prove competition spawns life, not that it does nor ever will; but a third believed and the other two-thirds are unsure so He allowed the demonstration, reserving only the long Sabbath day to prove to both observers and participants that it is Love which leads to life.

Love requires honesty. Peggy knows this. Yet she asks, "Why can't you lie to me just this one time?"

"It gets easier each time."

"I know, but I can't be party to murder. I can't." She starts the Chevrolet's engine. "You were wrong. They don't know where your friend is. But they're going to send an agent to Alaska to find him."

"The agent's name?"

"Jim Calkins. He'll be leaving today, this evening I imagine." Pulling into traffic, she adds, "I really don't believe what I heard today... they— we plan to detain dissidents. Lock them up and throw away the key."

"Why am I not surprised?"

"Shit, we're assholes.... I can't believe we'd throw away two hundred years of history for, what? Some ice fields with oil under them. I'm ashamed to be part of this government."

"You're being tailed."

"I am?" She checks her rearview mirror, sees nothing unusual, then asks, "How do you know?"

"A white Ford just dropped us. That green Dodge three cars behind you picked us up. Turn left all the way around a couple of blocks and see how far they stay with us. Signal. You don't want to lose them just yet."

The green Dodge Dart makes three of the four turns, but lets the white, 1969 LTD again pick them up off the fourth turn.

"I see the Ford.... How did you know?"

"You need a new car. This," he pats the dash, "will make your down payment."

"I don't need the payments."

"Then don't buy anything too expensive." He takes from his wallet a hundred dollar bill and sticks it in her purse. "There's a gas station ahead. Pull in there and go to the bathroom. Call a cab to take you home. I'll drive off while you're inside. They're not prepared to follow both of us. The embassy will make arrangements with a local dealer for the financing of your next car."

"I like this car. Where are you going with it?"

"Maybe we can get it back to you in a few weeks."

"No, you're not telling me what to do with my car, understand. You just settle back and we'll go for a drive. I take it you're going to Alaska."

"I wasn't leaving—"

"Yes, you are... from however far it takes to lose our tail. You watch them and I'll watch the road."

He sees her check her rearview mirror before she eases her speed higher, first five miles, then ten miles over the artificially low speed limit. She runs slightly faster than the flow of traffic as minutes and miles blur, both taking them farther and farther west into hills, then low mountains, past bare forests, fields of corn stubble and three dead deer, the first two identifiable as does. Alongside the road every half mile or so is a squashed raccoon or a skunk, once a beaver, another time a mink, several times opossums, an old black dog with an all-white muzzle, and outside of Keyser, a cat without a tail. They begin a game of guessing what species will they next find dead. He guesses *raccoon* each time, for there seems to be more of them. But by the time they parallel the River, she is ahead of him. It is very dark, late, and they are nearly out of gas for the second time.

"Anyone behind us?" she asks as she turns her Chevrolet into the only station they have found open for more than an hour.

"Not close."

"If my calculations are correct, they're forty miles behind us, out of gas and in the mountains far enough that their radio doesn't work. I suspect they'll spend the rest of tonight sleeping in their car."

"Where are we?"

"Louisville is that way," she points westward. "But I'm thinking about crossing the river at Cincinnati, dropping you off there, then looping back to Washington on the toll road. I won't quite make work on time, but I'll come close."

"You'll have explaining to do."

"Not if I get to the President first. We can't be interning citizens, not again."

"What if he has approved the camp?"

"Then he'll have my resignation on his desk before I leave his office, and the Press Corp will have something to write about. The Washington buzz will sound like Fourth of July fireworks. Watergate will be nothing compared to this."

"You'll find yourself in that camp."

"No way. They wouldn't dare. I'm far too well known."

"You don't understand, the first instinct of every entity is self-preservation. A cornered democracy is no different than a cornered skunk," he points at a flattened skunk on the road's graveled shoulder. "It might not attack you like a rabid animal will, but it'll do whatever is necessary to preserve itself."

"Are you talking about the United States or about Israel?"

"If your Abraham Lincoln would've had a nuclear warhead in 1861, he would've used it. We are no different."

"Who? The U.S. or Israel?"

"They're the same."

"A first strike launch?"

"In distance, how many of my nation Israel have we driven through so far tonight? Dozens or hundreds?"

"Are you implying that Israel will launch on threat?"

"We are not a large country that can use distance as your Abraham did."

"Are we talking about Alaska?"

"Your Abraham suspended your Constitution because doing so was necessary to preserve the Union. We will also do whatever is necessary."

"A preemptive strike?"

"If it were necessary."

She watches him without speaking, her Visa card in hand to pay for her gas. Yes, official U.S. policy since the Yom Kippur war has been to give Israel whatever aid necessary to ensure the country's survival so a nuclear exchange isn't threatened, but never before has Israel threatened a first strike launch. Admittedly, he isn't a spokesperson for their government. However, he is privy to what their security establishment is actually thinking. So what is she to make of a *cornered democracy*? And of her own government suspending constitutional protections as it is alleged to have done during the Civil War? Well, actually did. And she begins to slowly shake her head as if she truly cannot believe any of what has happened in the past two days. When she began her day yesterday, she never anticipated standing in the cool darkness of a Kentucky night with an Israeli agent. She couldn't have even conceived the thought. But here she is, wondering about nuclear security as cold-hardy gnats cloud around overhead lights.

The gas is almost a dollar a gallon. No wonder the station can afford to stay open all night.

Somewhere to the south of them Cormac McCarthy writes about the humanity of derelicts, but the survival of humanity is really at issue. If Israel launches weapons at Baghdad, Tehran, Damascus, Cairo— even one kiloton devices— then what? Russia will have to react, as will the President, Germany, France. Skies will be filled with missiles. The biggest player remaining will be China with its army of two hundred million, the Biblical number given for Armageddon. Neither derelicts nor the rich will be able to quench their thirst as they fry in hellish flames that devour the accumulated garbage of a historical record proving people are unable to govern themselves. Gehenna isn't a mystical place, but Old Jerusalem's garbage dump where worms never died but were changed into flies to blow newly arrived carcasses of dogs and derelicts and dissident Democrats who voted to cut Defense spending.

Is the answer then to send in the United Nations, thereby surrounding Jerusalem with armies, turning Israel into one large interment camp? That makes sense. Convert moderates into zealots. Then how many Zionist scientists would be building bombs to free Israel? All they would need is enriched uranium, and that can be stolen, the danger posed by the Alaskan terrorists.

As long as security is tight and those Alaskan terrorists remain poorly organized, they present no serious threat to the country or to the world. But if they were to make a deal, raw uranium for a device, the proliferation lid would be off. Every terrorist of every nationality would feel undressed without his or her own bomb. Every Zionist would demand a bomb. A worldwide holocaust would be assured. How does that song go about staying serene and calm when Alabama gets the bomb? Why not Alabama if Alaska has one?

She understands Estes' and Florchiner's position: the terrorists have to be ruthlessly stopped before the situation gets completely out of control. She should be supporting that

position even though it means interring dissidents and terrorists. But a conflict rages within her that he, Ben, hasn't helped. He was in a camp. She would die if she had to go through even a tenth of what he experienced. So how can she support an illegal camp? She can't. She must expose the camp's existence. There is always the moral position even in Chaos.

What happens then when the camp's existence and everything else is denied? Her career will be over, and the camp will likely still exist. Alaskans might believe her, but if they do, they will be even more eager to obtain a bomb, thereby setting every terrorist on personal bomb building campaigns. It's all a mess, all complicated, none of it making sense.

She pays for her gas. "Cincinnati? I'll tell your embassy where I dropped you off."

"They already know--"

"Huh?"

"I already have my ticket to leave from Cincinnati, but you'll have to hurry if I'm to make my flight."

"I don't understand."

"I intended to leave your car there, but I wasn't planning a side trip into the mountains."

"What else have you planned?"

"You don't want to know."

"Maybe I don't."

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