

EYE OF THE CHINOOK

SERIALIZED

A NOVEL

By Homer Kizer

Chapter Seven

When Caroline, accompanied by Dr. Grewe, walked into her pretend father's third floor room and found it empty and his dinner scattered across his bed, her first impulse was to flee straight to the airport and escape this land of frost where even the sun is reluctant to shine. Her second urge was to cry for she wanted this, her first field assignment, to be successful. Her appearance got her this assignment, but her looks haven't been enough to assure her success.

But few tears are actually shed.

Hospital security arrives, an older uniformed man with a can of mace and a VHF radio on which he calls the city police. She looks around while the three of them wait—the security officer, Dr. Grewe, and herself. If Jones' amnesia is real (both Dr. Meier and Dr. Grewe believe it is), then he wouldn't have recognized Committee members. He probably didn't go willingly. They probably had to abduct him. One of several details she can't share with either the doctor or the security officer. She's certain now that Mr. Estes and the whole taskforce screwed up when they didn't order a round-the-clock guard be placed on Jones. Yes, a guard would've tipped their hand, but they are presently empty-handed.

She watches Dr. Grewe, who seems even more upset about Jones' disappearance than Mr. Estes will be. Something about Watson's *One Hundred Monkeys*. Half under his breath, the doctor mutters something about taking Jones to Seattle, and she wonders if the fisherman's disappear has been staged for her benefit. This is a possibility she will have to explore.

A beefy man with a badge arrives and identifies himself as Robert Gentleman, Bob, an Anchorage detective. He takes notes as she and Dr. Grewe relate what they found when they arrived.

"Will," the detective asks, "both of you be able to come downtown to give a statement later this afternoon?"

Dr. Grewe nods so she does likewise.

"Good. As soon as you can. And thank you." Turning to a new page of his notebook, he also turns to the duty nurses who have been waiting in the corridor.

There is nothing more for her to do here. She needs to hurry back to Erika's apartment, call Mr. Estes, then see if she can't contact Jabe McCarver, who should be back from Fairbanks by now: he had gone up there, he told her, to deliver a ton of fish meal to a dog musher.

Jabe seems nice enough; he doesn't seem like a terrorist. She knows he will eventually be prosecuted and will have to serve a long prison term. She can't let her feelings prevent her from helping enforce justice, but the person who lead him astray should be the one serving his time. And that person, his brother Hugh, was killed in a traffic accident last week so there isn't an acceptable substitute. Jabe will have to stand trial, then serve eighty-five percent or more of a lifetime sentence.

Inside Erika's apartment seems colder than it is outside. When she enters, she shivers. She would turn up the thermostat a little more, but she has already raised the setting seven degrees higher than Erika kept the temperature. *The real Erika Jones must have antifreeze in her veins like ice worms have.* She fears being labeled a "cheechako," so she shivers like a cheechako.

She returned hungry to the empty apartment with its bare cupboards, and only a light bulb and a bottle of catsup in the refrigerator. Since arriving, she hasn't purchased groceries, prices here being absolutely scary. Rather, thanks to a generous expense account, she has eaten out, a luxury she could never have afforded on her regular salary.

Here, she is a pawn able to maneuver between the overlapping margins of her orders and their interpretations. She is a patriot in the truest sense of the word, not in its perverted application, how these terrorists identify themselves. And yes, she did give that bottle of *Wild Turkey* to Jabe to give to Lars Gunnarson. Yes, she suspects that it contains more than blended bourbon. Yes, she feels guilty about giving it to him. Yes, she wishes she hadn't done it, but, no, she didn't have the option of not giving it to him. The space between her overlapping crescents isn't large enough for her to have poured the contents of the bottle down the toilet—that space between her crescent and the government's seems even smaller tonight than when she first arrived North. She knows what she will have to do whenever Jabe arrives. She isn't resentful, but she isn't happy about it either. Why is it, though, that being penetrated is always expected of a woman? that penetration is always with a penis?

She doesn't usually drink, but she feels like getting drunk to escape this cold landscape and what she must do. She only recalls being drunk once. The night she lost her virginity. And she dials the number of the secured line that connects Mr. Estes to the rest of humanity. She's late reporting in, and she doesn't want to explain why that fisherman isn't securely deranged in the hospital.

Three hours and two phone calls to Mr. Estes later, she is well on her way to getting drunk. She pours into a water glass the last of the decanted scotch Erika kept in her china hutch, then retires to the bathroom where she draws a tubful of straight hot water.

She takes her time stripping, and until the steam fogs the medicine cabinet's mirror, she watches herself, pleased with what she sees. Finally, she eases her feet into the tub, waits until they can stand the heat, then she slowly lowers herself into the hot water. She reclines against the angled tub end, spreads her legs, and she plunges bathwater in and out of her as if she were trying to purify herself as her mind fogs from the scotch and steam. She truly intends to forget tonight, and she lies in the tub until the water is cold.

Wrapping a blue towel around her wet hair, her head feeling about as large as a car tire, she stands unsteadily on wobbly legs. Her head begins spinning, and despite grasping it with both hands, she can't hold it still. She slows its spin a little, but not enough to apply her makeup. And she locates a bottle of generic aspirin in the medicine cabinet, takes three without water—they stick in her throat. Twisting on the cold faucet, she fills the glass from the toothbrush holder, but she's unable to gag down either the aspirin or the water. Rather, she vomits, barely turning her head in time to get most of it in the toilet. Another heave starts low in her bowels and pushes its way upward, spewing out watery bile. Then her heaves become dry as she kneels beside the toilet, both hands gripping the slick rim of the cold bowel.

Tears and bile mingle at the corners of her mouth, seep onto her lower lip, and drip into the water-filled bowl, an American Standard, or so the pale blue lettering claims. But all she wants is for her headache to go away.

Despite taking three more aspirin, her headache doesn't go away although her head quits spinning enough that she's able to blow dry her hair, use her curling iron to set it, then apply

her makeup. Feeling generally miserable, she nevertheless dresses in a white satin blouse and pale pink satin pants.

Seduction isn't something she does well. She dated little in high school, even less in college. She had hardly been married long enough to say that she has been...nothing about her marriage worked. They had one week of bliss before the hell began. Her mother-in-law moved in the very day they returned from their honeymoon. After sharing their house and her kitchen with his mother for twelve weeks, she gave her husband the ultimatum: either his mother goes or she does. Her ex had the gall to ask, *What's wrong with my mother?*

Those thirteen weeks of marriage are almost the entire story of her love life.

She is still in the bathroom when the doorbell rings.

Jabe stands taller than the doorway: he has to duck to enter the apartment. "You look nice."

"Thank you. You don't look bad yourself." He doesn't. In fact, he's rather handsome in his plaid wool shirt and jeans, Sorrels. "There isn't anything in here to eat or drink. You wanta go out?"

"We can order pizza for right now—get some groceries later. I need to talk to your dad. How is he?"

"Gone."

"What do yuh mean, *gone?*"

"Gone. He isn't in the hospital. I don't know where he is, who took him, or what would someone want to do with him."

"Those fucking Feds... You say it looks like somebody took him?"

She doesn't immediately answer him: she's one of *those fucking feds*, and she doesn't like the implications that go with the explicative. So when she does speak, she answers only, "Yes."

"I'd better get you out of here. They'll be coming by here next. They don't intend for any of us to stand trial."

"What do you mean?"

Jabe tells her about the barbwire as he presses her to quickly pack her clothes. Luckily, she hasn't unpacked.

"I'll take you up where you'll be safe, at least for the time being. There's enough groundcover that we can still get into the mine site by snow-go. Don't have to fly and give the Feds a chance to pick us up on radar. The site is pretty remote. And so far the Feds don't know what we have there."

She stops him: "Let me a few things from my other case." One of those things she wants is a locator beacon.

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