

EYE OF THE CHINOOK

SERIALIZED

A NOVEL

(c) Homer Kizer

Chapter Six The Eye of the Storm

He must have dozed off. When he opens his eyes, nurses serve breakfast. The one who brings his tray is cheery, excessively so considering that he doesn't feel like eating or doing anything else. He waves the tray away without looking to see what it holds, but his hand seems too heavy for him to lift so the motion he makes is more a feeble attempt to throw his bed sheet off than a rejection of the tray.

His hands are bandaged. An IV is attached to the inside of his left forearm. Probes are taped to his chest. His face feels like it would crack if he smiled. His feet stink, smell like sun-dried road killed rabbits and rats that sought the retained warmth of black asphalt, fearing oncoming cars less than they feared the cold night through which he seems to still stagger. And he wonders what horrible thing has he done that caused so much death.

His thoughts are as fuzzy as his eyesight, that fuzziness beginning to seem normal as it becomes harder for him to remember when he could see clearly, that memory small but still gnawing within his empty belly, his mind too confused to hold it. Yet, despite their fuzziness, despite the confusion, his thoughts seem mostly coherent. Only their edges are blurred.

Actually, his thoughts seem to float about, not connected to each other, nor tethered to events he can remember. He knows stuff he cannot remember— it's as if the knowledge is behind a locked door and he cannot find the right key to fit the lock. He has a ring full of keys, but none of them are slotted correctly to even enter the lock, let alone turn the tumblers.

"Dad, you have to eat— here, let me feed you."

His daughter holds a spoonful of soggy oatmeal to his lips, their splits scabbed and hardened, the scabs feeling like wood splinters. He tries to shake, *No*, from between his lips. But in doing so, some of the oatmeal enters, burning his tongue, constricting his throat, causing him to choke, his breath lost in trachea contortions.

"He can eat later," says a gray man, thin, smoking a pipe, carrying a leather-bound book.

He can now smell the pipe smoke, which somewhat masks the stench of his feet.

"Mr. Jones, my name is Hans Grewe. Doctor Grewe." The thin man produces a tiny flashlight— its beam, probing first his right eye then his left, feels like a hot wire. He tries to turn his head, but the thin man says, "That didn't hurt, did it?"

"It burns." Producing the two words are the limit of his strength.

Picking up his chart, the thin man quickly scans it; and apparently not finding what he searches for, he, motioning to a nurse who has accompanied him into the room, says, "I want another complete workup on this man— and I want him in isolation."

He hears his daughter ask, "What are you saying?"

"Ms. Jones? Erika, I believe?"

"Yes. But I don't understand. Why isolation?"

"Dr. Meier told me that you have been with your father since his rescue."

"Yes, I have been. Look, I have the right to know what's going on."

"You do. Dr. Meier has asked that I direct the team caring for your father, and presently, his needs aren't being met in this room." The thin man motions for the nurse to draw closed the curtain surrounding his bed. "I sorry, but I must ask that you leave for the time being. Your father needs complete rest."

"I don't understand."

"Dr. Meier will explain. Right now, I have work to do, so please leave."

Everything in her wants to scream, *NO!* However, she can't blow her cover. This is a situation (an unexpected complication) about which she'll have to contact Potomac. So gathering her things, she hesitantly takes one step towards the door before she turns: "Where will you be taking him?"

"To the third floor for the time being. He can rest there without the distraction of foot traffic in and out of his room."

"I think he needs to be with people, not off by himself. I need to be with him. He's my father, for gosh sakes."

"Get some rest. We'll talk after you do."

He hears what has been said, but he can't assign meaning to more than a few of the words. They are sound, like the banging of trays, that carries very limited information. Yet, he knows something was right with his eyes. The doctor saw something that wasn't supposed to be there. But what could be in his eyes?

"Nurse, see to it that he's not disturb— and administer no medication to him for the next two hours."

Hans Grewe's expertise is the mind. His interest is primitive languages and their construction. As he lectures in his classes, a mind communicates with itself in a language that is, for the most part, unknown. It then translates from its own language to a person's first language, thereby raising the scientific question of, *why language?* Why doesn't the mind create thought and by extension speech in the language it communicates with itself? The concept of *language* is contrary to evolution as *language* asks the mind to make an unnecessary and inefficient translation from perfect communication to the person's verbal language. Within the past year, his research into deciphering the grammar, vocabulary and syntax of that perfect communication which occurs within a mind has shifted from transcribing the grammars of primitive languages to studying the effects trauma has on a person's ability to retain and relearn language when memory fails. This case might be his best chance so far at unlocking what occurs within the chemical interchanges that produce translation and thought since Dr. Meier (his father a practicing Jew) believes he heard the fisherman ask in Hebrew where he was. The words were uttered before English was spoken around the fisherman. Since then, Jones, in what little he has spoken, has used English.

Since Les Jones' history is known, and since even his daughter confirms that Jones knows no foreign languages, Dr. Meier invited him onto the case. The idea is to isolate Jones from English speakers, then see if he can communicate in Hebrew or in any other primitive language. If he can, then perhaps another piece of the language puzzle will be confirmed, that piece being that language arrives fully developed, that there is some form of a linguistic template within the mind itself.

Unfortunately, Jones is apparently experiencing additional trauma from a drug interaction. Two hours should be long enough for the fisherman's body to metabolize all but the steroids. He'll just have to wait to see how much of Jones' mental facilities return. Memory loss can be expected, but not the continued rupturing of capillaries in the eyes, an

indicator of what is occurring in the fisherman's mind. Without immediate intervention, the fisherman will suffer a stroke.

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Darkness. That's all he sees eyes open or shut. He could see light, and even people, but now he sees nothing.

Doesn't know who he is. Can't move. Can't see. Can barely think. Now alone. Can't even hear another person. He has to, if he can, get out of here. Find—

He can't focus his thoughts for long enough to—

What's happening? has happened? Why can't he remember—

He closes his eyes and feels tears puddle over his blindness. But that's as far as his thoughts get before he loses focus and can't remember what he was thinking.

Seconds, that's as long as he can maintain a thought—

Seconds are what?

His mind is blank.

Why is he crying? His feet hurt, but not enough to make him cry. So why the tears?

He's hot. Feels like a fire burns behind his eyes.

Something's happening. Can feel it.

Light! Dark and light, shadows. Above his feet, a little streak like a "t" where the curtains gap apart.

Gone. Nothing but darkness.

Light is out there— he saw it. He shuts his eyes and tries to remember what he saw. He can. He remembers a streak, sees it in his mind. Opens his eyes and there it is. Now he doesn't know if he's seeing it or remembering it, but it's there and it doesn't matter if he's only remembering it. Either way, he—

What was it that he was thinking? He can't—

He feels like he's floating, like—

What's happening?

He hears, what? he doesn't recognize the sound, small, almost imperceptible. Then the whispered, "Hello, Uncle Les. You were hard to find."

Who is this? A woman's whispering?

"I'm supposed to get yuh outta here, but I dunno if I can, not with where they got yuh."

He opens his eyes and strains to see... but only sees darkness, some parts darker than others. "I can't see— "

"They got yuh in total darkness, why?... I'll bet yuh got snowblinded, and they wanta rest your eyes. Tell yuh what, you keep your eyes shut and I'll see what I can do. Be back in a minute."

Zoe Gunnarson knows why her father is eager to get Uncle Les out of the hospital even though she hadn't attended the secret meeting held a couple of weeks ago. She knows the drugs, the techniques, the therapies that can be applied to extract information from someone, and she wouldn't condemn anyone to taking capsules of monkey pus or swine's blood or whatever other *nasty* the drug companies have devised. So when her father asked her to sneak in here and do what she could, she willingly accepted. However, what she can do doesn't seem like much, not with the tacit security of this third floor. If Uncle Les were on the first floor, getting him out would be difficult but not impossible. On this third floor, though, a person needs authorization even to be here. She got up her when no one was looking, but she can't count on that happening again, not with nurses and doctors and staff coming and going on the elevators, and not with having to use an elevator to get him downstairs.

When she opens the door to the corridor, she sees that nurses have brought a small cart of food trays onto the floor and are beginning to distribute the meals to the few patients warehoused on this side of the recovery rooms. She must hurry if she's to avoid detection.

His mind plays tricks on him— he thought someone spoke to him, but where is she now? He didn't hear her go, but he doesn't sense her presence, which he did a moment ago. Her words—

He can't remember.

But remembering is something he should be able to do; he senses that. He senses that he has lost something, but—

What was he thinking about?

She said something about the room being dark. Is that why he can't see? Snow—

The thought dissolved as if—

My mind's functioning a little better, but—

How come every time I try to change directions—

He tells himself to pull back a little, don't strain so to think. Relax. Let thoughts come as they want to. Stay relaxed. Don't strain, don't work at thinking. Just let it happen. Think about peace, calm water, the ocean. There, that's it. Easy does it. Don't fight. Stay calm, relax, no effort, no exertion, just float like drifting a river, peaceful, sun shining, the glare off the water blinding—

"Dr. Grewe said you'd probably be hungry." On a swinging table, a nurse places a tray holding a cube of Jello no more than the thickness of his thumb on a side, a small bowl of some sort of chowder, an even smaller bowl of buttered peas & carrots, and two dry rye crackers. And two waxed cardboard cups containing two pink capsules. The nurse seems all smiles as she rolls the head of his bed higher— he sees her though her edges are blurry. She fluffs his pillow, then offers to feed him.

It's all he can do to raise his hand in protest.

"All right, but I'll be back in a little bit to pick up the tray. If you haven't eaten, I'll have to feed you."

He's hungry, but—

Something's not right, but he doesn't know what he senses. Feels something. What? Can't find the thought to define what he, what? *I can't focus, damn it! What's wrong?*

He needs to get out of here, away from this confusion, the fuzziness, blurred vision, everything.

"They don't feed yuh very well, do they? Clam chowder. Looks like they made it from dead clams. And why are they giving yuh pills? They got yuh on an IV."

Now that there is light, he sees that the woman who had entered his room before is young, perhaps no older than a teen. Light colored hair. She wears a sweatshirt reading, *When Guns are Outlawed Only Outlaws Will Have Guns*, the wording visible where she hasn't buttoned a green uniform, and she pushes a wheelchair against the side of his bed. She then grasps his left arm, and examines the IV— his urge to jerk his arm away is overpowering, but he hasn't the strength to resist. She pulls the needle from the heparin lock, then pulls the IV itself, saying as she does, "A sixteen gauge needle. That's pretty big. They wanted to get stuff in you in a hurry."

He struggles to sit, his woozy head almost exploding in fuzziness as he sees the room swimming in figure-eight shaped loops.

"Here, Uncle Les, let me help you."

Slipping a pair of pants over his bandaged feet, the trousers large enough that another person could join him in them, his niece giggles as she pulls them onto his hips. Then

wrapping an equally oversized suit jacket around his stooped shoulders, she supports most of his weight as she pulls him into the wheelchair. She tries to straighten his hair with her fingers, but laughs as she says, "It looks like each hair marches to a different drummer."

Then her countenance changing suddenly, her face now as grim as those of the on-duty nurses, her uniform buttoned, she wheels him into the hallway and past an assortment of preoccupied aides and technicians, past the food cart, past an intersecting corridor and on to where two elevators wait to betray them. The door to one of the elevators has a clipboard preventing it from closing completely. His niece slips her fingers into the gap, strains, and the door opens. She has him into the elevator and on his way down before he can wonder why they haven't been noticed.

But that question of why they weren't noticed does occur to him as he seems to fall as if he jumped from a bridge. Has he jumped from a bridge? Why would his mind make that comparison if he hasn't. He suspects he has, and he's thinking about jumping when the elevator door opens.

A dozen or more school children wait in front of the elevator; none of the children are more than ten or eleven. And surrounding his wheelchair, some of them helping to push, they chatter and laugh as the whole entourage pushes past Admissions and out the entrance by the bus stop. No one challenges them, questions them, even seems to notice him although several nurses smile at the kids.

Once outside, cold pierces the suit jacket and baggy trousers, and he shivers as his niece pushes him across the parking lot, the kids staying right with them. When his niece stops in front of a fourwheeldrive Chevy pickup, she says, "Okay everybody, listen up. Your Uncle Les can't come to Jenny's birthday party, so say Goodbye to him now. Mom will take you all to Chucky Cheese just like I promised."

The children, almost as one, slap some part of him or the wheelchair as they mumble goodbye, then race toward a van two cars away. All of them fit, somehow, into the van.

His niece, stronger than she looks, lifts him onto the pickup's passenger seat, then locks and closes the door. She collapses the chair and swings it into the bed of the truck.

"Let's get yuh something to eat, real food, not dead clams only fit for gulls and ravens." She guns the Chevy's engine, its V-8 roaring to life, transferring torque to rear tires that spin. The pickup's frontend rocks and its rearend fishtails as his niece pulls from the parking lot and onto Providence Drive. "McDonald's be all right, or yuh wanta go somewhere else?"

Although the street is sanded, its surface remains slick— and the Chevy nearly swaps ends as she romps on the gas. But she is young; her reflexes are quick. She steers out of the slide, then turns down this street, then that street. He doesn't know where he was, nor where she's going, nor even who she is. But he's glad to be away from the darkness, glad to see the even the dim sun, glad his mind works a little better. Maybe seeing sunlight is all he needed.

His niece crosses a four-lane highway, turns twice more, then pulls into a McDonald's parking lot where she stops, but leaves the engine running and the heater on. She hurries inside. In moments, she returns, toting a matched pair of white sacks.

From one sack she withdraws two plastic boxes, each containing a *Quarter Pounder*. She passes him one box, which he manages to pry open with his bandaged hands. But his fingers are too tender to stand touching anything so all he can do is look into the box where a pale gray patty of ground meat lies wedged between two halves of a lifeless bun, complete with sesame seeds. He stares at the hamburger. Unable to lift it from its bed in the box, all he can do is stare at it, his mind somehow able to comprehend that he stares helpless.

Eating a *Quarter Pounder* identical to his and speaking while chewing, his niece asks, "What's a matter, Uncle Les? Want something else?"

"This is fine— "

"Need some help?"

"My hands, they're useless."

"Want me to feed yuh?"

"As you would a child?"

"Don't be putting yurself down, Uncle Les. What yuh did was truly amazing, crossing those mountains in a week with neither snowshoes, nor supplies. Yuh ought to be proud of yurself— and yuh're damn lucky to be alive. Damn lucky."

"Lucky? I don't know who you are. I have a daughter I don't remember, and now you, a niece— "

"Mom said they'd mess with your mind if we left yuh in there. They got Mr. Blossom yesterday. Traffic accident, but it wasn't no accident. That's why we had to take the chance and get yuh out." She places his hamburger in his left hand. "Mr. Johnson last Friday, then Uncle Hugh Saturday, then Mr. Blossom yesterday. Dad thinks they got papers off yuh and are using them to take us out. Did they?"

"Papers?" He knows that something horrible happened, something for which he is responsible. But he remembers nothing about any papers. "I don't know... ," his voice trails away.

"Well, this morning Jabe talked to the Outside shrink they brought up." She pauses, looks at him while a raven watches them from the top of the dumpster. Finally, she asks, "Do yuh understand any of what I'm telling yuh?"

All he can do is slowly shake his head as he stares at the hamburger in his hand, his arm not strong enough to lift it to his mouth.

"Then you really don't remember me?"

She must be referring to the thin man when she said *shrink*— it takes him a while before he connects *shrink* and psychiatrist. So there is something wrong with his mind. The feeling that his confusion isn't right has been correct.

The sunshine has burned, as it does fog, much of his confusion away. *So who am I? what have I done?*

"Let me help you with that. You just bite. I'll hold it." Zoe lifts the hamburger to his mouth, then waits while he struggles to pinch off a mouthful. "Dad said I was to take yuh to Fairbanks, but as yuh know, there's only two roads North so it'd be easy for the troopers to stop us. Are yuh up to a flight? There's icing conditions low so we're gonna have to stay above seven thousand feet. I don't think that's so high it'll affect whatever drugs they gave yuh, but it might."

In his mouth, the warmth of the sandwich feels comforting despite him not being able to taste the meat or bread. For a moment, he revels in that warmth. Then he feels the constriction of his throat that resists him swallowing the warmth. All he can do is roll the moistened lump around his tongue, that lump having now cooled into a thick, lukewarm paste he wants to spew out but can't. What's he to do? He can't swallow, can't spit it out. All he can do is keep chewing the lump, hoping that it will dissolve, praying that it passes directly into his bloodstream without going through his stomach, thereby bypassing natural processes, becoming energy without its proteins being broken into sugars and oxidized within cells— and he wonders where that thought came from. How much does he know that he can't presently remember?

Is there any way to know what can't be remembered? Where is his history recorded? Who he is? Where did he come from? What is this thing he has done which has caused the death of so many? And how many died because of him? Who really knows who he is? Yes,

he accepts that he is Les Jones, a commercial fisherman; that he has a daughter, and now a niece. But he knows himself as he would know the popcorn vendor at a movie theater. Everyone's attention is on the movie, and he, before entering the theater, forgot to look at the marquee to see what is playing. He neither knows the person behind the concessions counter, nor what he will see when he takes his seat. He feels like he's standing in the lobby of his life, able only to follow the crowd along a darkened aisle where nothing seems familiar or makes sense, where he bumps seats and into feet and against the person in front of him.

Yet he knows that time is a fluid, and history is an object revealed through stories

"Uncle Les, I'll be your memory if yuh want." Her voice is soft and grave. "Everything will come back to yuh— and to make sure it will, let me lay hands on yuh."

He doesn't move when she touches his forehead with the fingers of her right hand, the lump of bread and meat in his mouth now mostly dissolved and swallowed as excess saliva. And he listens as she prays in the name of Jesus to a holy Father for a divine healing, for a restoration of all of his mental faculties, for success in restoring the liberty promised by the Constitution. Her prayer stirs something inside him, provokes his spirit, thereby causing him to remember more than he does.

"I have faith, Uncle Les, that yuh'll be healed. After all, whatever we ask in His name— it'll be done. I've asked. Now all we have to do is wait for it to happen."

"What if it doesn't?"

"Then you didn't ask in faith."

He wants to object, but not as much as he wants his memories. They are his. He's entitled to them, or at least he should be. And if he loses them, do the events they represent cease to exist? Can he not have gone to school because he doesn't remember where he went. Can he undo the deaths of his crew because he doesn't remember what happened? If he doesn't remember what happened, who does? If no one else survived. Then how can anyone know what happened?

For the sake of his sanity, he needs for someone to remember what happen, for someone to remember who he is— and he wants to scream, *PLEASE HELP ME!* But who will hear?

Nausea suddenly sweeps through his mind, scattering his thoughts, then whisking them away as if they were sand to be scattered on the slick pavement, giving traction to slick tires, all manufactured far from here, all products of heat and pressure and tar pools that turned living dinosaurs into museum exhibits assembled incorrectly— how can he know if his memories will be correctly assembled and will not be the fabrication of someone else's imagination?

The connections within his mind seem overheated, seem as if too-low voltage has been required to do too much work.

Realizing that in this period of time since he has been away from the hospital he has regained some ability to think and to retain thoughts even if he can't remember the past, he feels stronger, feels like some healing has occurred, and he hears himself echoing the prayer of his niece. Either the hamburger or her laying on of hands has helped his mind clear itself, recycling what it is to be alive.

"What do yuh think about flying? Think yuh'll be okay?"

"We'll know soon enough, huh?" The words come from his mouth effortlessly. He neither thinks about them, nor rehearses them. But when he wants to take another bite of the hamburger, he finds that he still hasn't the strength to fully lift the sandwich to his mouth. He has to bend his head down to take that second bite.

Zoe, shoving the last of her hamburger into her mouth, checks the pickup's mirrors, then backs out of the parking space. Pulling into thin traffic, she hurries North, turns left, then right, then right again as minutes become distance, the city changing as it seems to open into a plain where fields have been replaced by car dealerships to his left and an airstrip on his right. She turns her Chevy right, wanders between planes, then stops alongside a blue & white, taildragger Cessna. "Welcome to Merrill Field. Your flight today will be bumpy, cold and generally uncomfortable, and we do not serve peanuts."

"Are you also the pilot?"

"No. This is as far as I go. Dad will fly yuh north. I think he wants to show yuh that uranium blossom they found— keep yuh outta sight for awhile up where the blossom is."

"I thought you were to be my memory?"

"Ahh, you're healed enough. I know yuh'll be fine, I have faith." She pauses, then adds, "Yuh still need that wheelchair, don't yuh?"

"I don't think my feet are ready for much walking."

"Try 'em and see."

He doesn't want to try walking, doesn't want to know for certain that he can't. He has smelled his feet: they stunk like dead meat. He's a little surprised that they weren't amputated. So for them to suddenly be useable, well, he doesn't believe they are. But to humor her, he waits until she opens his sidedoor, then carefully, he slides his right foot around the seat-corner, and tries putting a little weight on the foot—

His foot feels fine.

So does his left foot.

He stands on his own, takes a step, then a second step. While he has some pain in his ankles and considerable stiffness, he can walk, and that surprises him.

"See, you've been healed. Praise God. And here comes Dad now." She points to an older Ford pickup that parks alongside several other pickups; it appears indistinguishable from the other trucks, each apparently belonging to someone out flying. "I'm gonna leave yuh with him. The Feds are keeping him under surveillance so he won't come over till after I leave. Yuh're gonna be on yur own for a minute or two."

As he stands there in the baggy trousers and oversize sports jacket, he feels free although the word doesn't come immediately to mind. Rather, he feels like he has begun breathing on his own for the first time; feels like he's floating, like his feet don't quite reach the ground, like he's weightless; feels like he could fly if he stretched out his arms. And he fears spreading his arms and opening his hands in case he can really lift himself into the heavens.

He notices a raven, its wings set, slowly circle ever lower over the line of parked pickups. For some reason, he feels as if he, too, is a raven.

The airstrip is busy. One small plane comes or goes nearly every minute. Most are Cessnas or Pipers. Taildraggers and tricycle gear. Many with balloon tires. A few with wheelskis. As he watches the traffic, a thought— maybe a memory that he can't quite formulate— worms through his recording of sight and sound; it devours his feeling of being able to fly. The thought wiggles in his subconscious as a hookworm might before festering to the surface where it will take wing, breed and begin another cycle of life within life. Only his thought lacks the strength needed to burst out. His conscious mind picks at it, but the thought remains buried deep under stratified layers of unrecalled memories, each layer dead as fossilized sediment of a lake bed.

"My daughter tells me she laid hands on you— as you know, she has the gift of healing. But maybe you don't yet remember that." The words are stiff as if their speaker is

uncomfortable uttering them; they are as wooden as lines delivered on the first day of rehearsals for a high school play.

"I don't."

"Then I don't imagine you remember me?"

"No—"

"Lars Gunnarson. We've been friends for more than twenty years."

He hears a chill in his friend's words, a chill probably stemming from what troubles him: how does a person relate to a mind that doesn't function as it should? How does a person not fear the loss of self, the loss of identity; not grieve for someone now dead? It is as if he has ceased to exist.

"I don't know what's wrong with my memory. All I know is that it seems like I was born all over again, arriving full grown, but without a past, without knowing who I am or what I have done. I seem to know certain things." Indicating the plane with his right arm, he says, "Like that's a Cessna, with probably a hundred horse Continental engine in it—"

"Actually, that engine has been changed. You helped me change it. It has a one-forty in it now."

"That's what I'm trying to say— I don't remember the plane or working on it. But I seem to know something about it." He notices that the raven has landed in the roadway and won't move for a white sedan that's trying to drive closer. Without knowing why, he knows the sedan is the surveillance that his niece mentioned. "Until your daughter got me out of the hospital, I couldn't string two thoughts together without losing the first one. And I think it's time to go." He nods in the direction of the sedan.

Lars glances over his shoulder: "It is. Get in right now. They don't need a good look at you. Besides, you must be cold dressed the way you."

His feet work, but not like they should. He hobbles to the side of the Cessna, grasps the door latch, and with discomfort, he climbs aboard. Without thinking about why or how, he buckles his seatbelt, glances at the white sedan, then looks straight ahead at the mountains that glow like hot gold.

As Lars settles into his seat, he says, "We have a lot more problems than your memory. And they tell me in cases of amnesia that the best thing is not to fret too much over what you don't remember. Those memories will come back to you someday." Lars starts the engine. "At least your instincts still work even if your memory doesn't."

As the Cessna taxis onto the strip, he wonders what those problems are that his friend mentioned: do they have anything to with what he has done, with the deaths for which he is responsible? And he notices that his friend doesn't contact the tower before taking off—their flight is unauthorized, a detail he should find troubling but doesn't.

He doesn't know why he should find an unauthorized takeoff troubling. Something within his subconscious argues right and wrong, those values inscribed by the chemical stew that simmers in the bony cauldrons of a culture, this culture, based on law and decency, itself defined by those values, thereby creating a wheel within a wheel that like a gyrocompass keeps this culture on course. How does he know what a gyrocompass is? and how does he know how to build one? and why are these thoughts pushing against the glow of the mountains, that image also being recorded somewhere in his mind.

He doesn't know if he has forgotten how loud the engine noise is in a Cessna 180, or if he ever knew. Either way, once airborne he has to yell if he wants to be heard over it, and he really doesn't have the strength to even raise his voice as he watches the sun wrestle with the far horizon. Just hearing his thoughts seems to be enough for now. Yes, he's grateful he can hear them, can remember them, manipulate them, adding one to another until a structure

like the framework of a building is constructed within his mind, a framework on which he hammers siding and shingles, hangs doors, a ceiling, even adding a ceiling fan that whirls his thoughts, bringing in fresh air complete with pollen and dust particles.

Stands of birches and spruce pass beneath his feet as the Cessna climbs. Mud flats, a gray river, more mud flats— they pass above the folding and unfolding wings of a white swan as shadows drain away color, leaving the land lonely and lost in the spreading darkness, the feathers of which settle like those of a ground-roosting bird in the swales and hollows behind the far hills.

He seems to be seeing this land for the first time: it's a good land of lakes and rivers, plains and hills, mountains in the distance, needing only the light that comes with farms and fields, crossroads and cattle. But he sees no lights other than a blinking beacon on a distant knob. Darkness has welded together hunger and happiness. To tell where one starts and the other ends is impossible until the sun rises tomorrow, making then the day of separation. For now, birch and spruce, baneberries and cranberries grow together, will be harvested together, used together to build houses in which the red mingled jelly is served on toasted white bread and wheat, the darkness concealing the deaths of everyone.

His mind seems to be working, but how can he judge whether it works as it should? What gauge can he use to measure himself now that he has lost his memories? What gauge would he have used before? How can anyone know if his or her mind computes properly? Is it enough to know how to eat a hamburger? Should he be satisfied with what he has? Can he ever again be satisfied with how his mind performs, or will he always seek to recover what he might not have had? And he suspects his questioning of his mind indicates that he has lost a considerable amount of its potential.

Darkness probes his mind, causing his thoughts to float as his eyelids become too heavy for him to keep open. He sees two bushes growing together— blueberry bushes. A bear nuzzles one bush, its tongue wrapping itself around one berry at a time, stripping the berry from its stem, devouring it, then going on to the next one, and next one. But the other bush remains unpicked even though its berries are plump and glisten with dew. He starts to reach for a ripe berry on that second bush, but the bear growls at him so he backs away. All he can do is watch. And he is still watching as the plane descends through the darkness... the moon has risen, and by its colorless light, the Cessna lands on a snow-covered strip.

"We're here. As soon as we get the plane outta sight, we can see how much you remember."

He doesn't know where *here* is so he twists his head to see the sky. The constellations appear all wrong—

But why do they appear wrong? And why did he know to look at the stars to determine where he is? Apparently there are aspects of himself that he can only discover by observing what he does. Evidently he's had some training in astronomy, that he isn't from wherever they now are, that he has flown before. What else? That he has been at least partially healed by a prayer, his initial response to that prayer a skepticism suggesting he doesn't pray regularly and perhaps that he doesn't believe in a deity, a position he might have to reevaluate although just being away from the hospital might have something to do with his getting better, a thought that implies a latent distrust of medical professionals, which in turn indicates that he has had one or more negative experiences— and all of this evaluation of his thoughts isn't what he would have expected of himself this morning when he couldn't recall the beginning of the sentence he was mentally concluding. His recovery, even to him, seems miraculous. *The product of a prayer of faith? I don't know.*

Two men in a track vehicle hurry towards the Cessna. One fellow gets off the open rig that looks like a miniature crawler tractor, homebuilt, its sides plank boards, its drive wheels car tires running inside a loop of rubber belting with lengths of angle iron for grousers. The fellow hooks a tow bar to the underside of the plane's fuselage just behind the engine, then standing on the Cessna's axle, he motions for the other fellow to start forward.

The moonlight is bright enough for him to see that where they have landed in a placer mining site— *I know the word "placer" so I must also know something about mining. I know a little about stars and a little about mining. Now I'm getting somewhere.*

Realizing this world he has reentered is more familiar to him than he initially feared boasters his confidence. That has been his greatest worry, that he would know nothing. But his amnesia appears selective: he seems to know everything except who he is and how he got here.

A faintly lighted opening, like the mouth of a bass, swallows both tow-rig and plane: they enter a timber-framed hanger hidden beneath the pile of gravel tail screenings. And as soon as they are inside, the siding doors shut, and the interior of the hanger is flooded with harsh white light as banks of bulbs are turned on. Four more men surround the Cessna. One opens his door. "Mr. Jones, let me help you down. That was some feat, crossing the Alaska Peninsula."

He lets the helping hands assist him out of the plane. Once he stands on the concrete floor, he stretches his back, arching backwards, his shoulders pulled back, his arms straight behind him.

"It looks like," the fellow assisting him says, "you lost weight. A full twenty pounds or a bit more."

From in front of the plane, a man says to the fellow assisting him, "You'd lose weight too if you were eating raven." Then to him, the man asks, "How many did you kill? just the one they found you with?"

He doesn't recall anything about a raven: "I don't know. Did I kill a raven?"

"Yeah, yuh did. You had two wings and a gnawed neck inside the front of your survival suit when the kid found yuh." After a pause, the man adds, "You really messed with the kid's head. First he thought he found Santa Claus, then he couldn't decide if Raven was Santa Claus or if Santa had killed Raven— and yuh didn't bring him any presents— so he doesn't know what to believe now. Last I heard, his dad was having to reschedule Christmas."

From the other side of the Cessna, a third fellow hollers, "You'll have to change your CB handle. From now on, you're Raven. That ought to torque the spearchuckers— "

"That's enough." Lars holds up his right hand. "I don't want to hear that term again. We need Native support. And right now, their political leaders think the Federal government is more receptive to their needs than we are."

"Why should we give them a bunch of special privileges?" asks the man inspecting the prop.

"Because their ancestors were here fleeing cannibals when yours were sacking Rome," says Lars.

"I don't think the Pope's gonna do me any favors just 'cause somebody way back there stuck a spear in a castrated priest."

Les can't resist: "You say your ancestors were also spearchuckers?"

"Oh, comeon. Jim didn't mean nothing by that, you know us. Hell, Mary would use me for martin bait if she thought we was here making fun of her grandmother."

Problem is that I don't know you or Jim.

Lars says to him, "The boys fixed you up a bunk. In the back. Cleaned out your condo. And I included some of your writing, letters to editors, your article that was published in the *Times*, even that puff piece you wrote about Paxton Lake." Then loud enough everyone to hear, Lars adds, "All of you listen up. The Feds are onto both Les and myself. We'll have a briefing in the morning. Nine o'clock." Everyone nods or in some manner acknowledges hearing the message. And now in a very soft voice, Lars tells him, "Feds shipped up two more rail car loads of razorwire so it looks like they're going ahead with their plans for an internment camp. I don't think they're planning any habeas corpus releases."

He needs his memory to know what has happened and is happening. But maybe seeing the contents of his condo will bring back what he has lost; he can hope.

His ankles painful, he follows Lars past tool boxes, and racked oil barrels, each labeled for a different petroleum distillate; past an open arms locker where six assault rifles stand vertically, ready to be used— an idea suddenly launches itself into his conscious mind: this site isn't defensible. What did he see that would cause him to come to such a conclusion? The site is on a gravel bench that slopes towards a large valley floor. It's against the hillside. There's no backdoor, or at least none apparent. It's like a castled king behind a line of unmoved pawns. The fight has to be fought in the center of the board until a timing move allows the rook pawn to advance. Even a rifle squad with one mortar could keep everyone in here pinned down until supplies ran out. This site is too isolated. Plus, its very isolation makes it determinable.

The room is the size of a cell. Along one wall is a cot and a rolled sleeping bag. Along the other is a small writing desk and two unpainted wood bookcases. Against the back wall is a well-worn recliner and a floor lamp, a stack of books beside the chair, a pair of glasses on top of the stack.

"Familiar?" Lars asks.

"I don't know." The cell appears homey enough. "Might be. Seems so. But... " His voice fades. *These things are mine? I don't really recognize any of them, but the things here aren't unfamiliar either.* "Let me look around, get some sleep. I'll tell you where I am in the morning. How's that?" He sits and reaches for the glasses. Reading glasses that seem a little too strong for his eyes— he pulls them down his nose so he can see over the top of them.

"We need you. The movement. The Committee. With the Feds going after us one at a time, well, we can't afford to lose anyone else." Then as if an afterthought, Lars adds, "Here's a bottle of Wild Turkey, a present from Erika. She wanted to come, but right now we're all in danger. I didn't think it was a good idea that she is anywhere near you. Having Zoe get you out was more risk than I really wanted to take, but as you know, she has a way of not being seen. I don't know how she does it. She could walk out of a burning building with firefighters all around, and nobody would see her. At times, she seems absolutely invisible."

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