

# EYE OF THE CHINOOK

**SERIALIZED**

A NOVEL

By Homer Kizer

---

## Chapter Twenty Three

Picked up like a purse with a link-chain strap, Peggy is carried from the plane, set on damp asphalt in the cold darkness, left there until her mind loses all sense of time, then picked up again. One-handed, the fellow in camo fatigues slings her forward, careful that she doesn't touch his pants, his strength sufficient to hold her short armed, his elbow tucked into the hollow above his right hip. He tosses her onto the floor of a helicopter as he might, again, a purse. And she lies there on her back, her wrists and ankles feeling like they have been cut off. She lies there barely able to breath, smelling like she has died, whimpering. Dignity was lost hours ago. All that remains is fear of again being tortured.

The helicopter lifts into the darkness, falls forward, then beats its way somewhere, the floor vibrated by the throbbing rotor, those vibrations rippling through her as if she were part of the machine. Part of a machine, not a presidential advisor. That's what she has become, an object, not an individual. And she knows she'll do whatever they require of her. She'll do anything just to avoid being touched; she'll do anything to be able to wash herself.

Repeating to herself that she'll do anything, anything, anything, minutes pass into hours without relief. Protest was lost early in the evening. All that remains is gratitude towards whoever will let her wash herself.

With the eastern sky becoming gray when the helicopter finally lands inside the razorwire coils of the detainment center, the same fellow who loaded her aboard deposits her in the hospital shack. Immediately, he returns to the machine that lifts and swings south. It hurries to pickup dissidents from the Kenai Peninsula.

She is at first ignored by the corpsman who worked on Moses through most of the night: he only got into his bunk an hour ago, and he doesn't awaken when the helicopter lands, doesn't realize that she lies on the floor of the shack, praying only that somebody will let her wash herself, let her have water enough to soften the shit puckering the raw lips of her genitals, let her scrape away the plastering of shit down the backs of her thighs, let her scrub away the bile and urine from the front of her.

Though the corpsman sleeps, Phil Sharpe is awake, his wounds swollen red and angry, feverish, their festering the same as that of his spirit. He had been lying awoken thinking about killing the corpsman when the helicopter arrived. And if he would have had the strength, the means, he would've killed the big man who tossed the woman onto the floor with the disdain he might have had for a plateful of tainted scrambled brain and eggs.

Moving causes his wounds to throb. Yet, he is able to pull himself to the side of the woman.

A key to her cuffs is in their lock: he frees her hands, then her feet. She only moans. She doesn't try to move or rise, and he sees the mess she has made of herself. But before he does anything for her, he hides the cuffs and manacles in the tick of his mattress. He will find a better place later, but for the moment, his mattress is all he has.

He can carry neither the water bucket, nor the basin to where she lies; so he wets a couple of towels and sort of slides himself and the towels over to her. He then wipes her face and mouth, using one corner of a towel to wipe out the inside of her mouth. She makes no effort to move. She wears what was once a pale green blouse and darker green skirt. He takes both off her, and he sees how much cleanup is really necessary. And he sees what has been done to her.

There's a shower stall in one corner of the shack.

Ignoring the throbbing of his wounds, he half lifts her to her feet— her legs wouldn't support her weight. They buckle and almost pull him down atop her. But the fire within him that wants to kill causes him to hold her upright; causes him to ignore his wounds, his pain; causes him to open again the umbrella of darkness that had gripped his mind the years he was in the jungle.

Still wearing her bra, she gasps when cold water hits her full in the face. Phil is in the shower with her, his blaze orange smock wet and clinging to him.

The running water and hammering copper pipes awakens the corpsman who checks the shower.

"You're not supposed to be out of bed."

"Somebody has to take care of her, and you were asleep."

Seeing how she spoiled her hose, the corpsman says, "You were married, weren't you?"

Phil glares at the corpsman, who looks away as he says, "Yeah, you were. Well, get her cleaned up. I'll get more towels and some clothes. Just try to keep water off your bandages."

As soon as the corpsman steps away, Peggy turns to face the shower nozzle. She opens her mouth and holds it open and lets water run in and out and down her throat. Then reaching out with her right hand, she leans against the wall of the stall as she spreads her legs. Water splashes against her, runs down her, breasts, belly, hips, thighs, shins, feet, then swirls around the drain and out. Phil watches the water, seeing in it a possibility for getting beyond the razorwire.

Finally taking the bar of soap from him, she begins to scrub herself, rolling off skin cells and filth. With her pantyhose still around one ankle, she scours her genitals, and the insides of her thighs. She's careful of where the clips were attached, but even there, she tries to scrub away what has been done to her. So from the front, she reaches behind her. He watches. Never having seen his wife bathe, not knowing what to expect, he is surprised by her vigor: she seems to be sanding away contamination, her task made all the more difficult by the soap's slipperiness. Her fingernails rake across her thighs, peeling away strips of whiteness, and still she doesn't stop.

The corpsman returns: "That's enough. Save some water for later." He turns the faucet off, then hands her a dry towel and a blaze orange hospital gown, identical to the one Phil wears. "You're gonna have to wear yours dry," he tells Phil. "You don't get another one till tomorrow."

"What happens tomorrow?" Phil asks.

"More guests. My understanding is that we're gonna nab the last of the terrorists. Then we'll know how many we have, and see about how long we keep all of you." The corpsman holds open the bright gown for Peggy. To her, he says, "We have at least one other woman on her way in. When she gets here I expect you'll have a cabin of your own, but till she does, you'll bunk here in the dispensary. Phil, who you've met, and old Moses will keep you company although I don't know how much longer Moses will be with us." To Phil, he says, "I'll have a long night tonight so I'm going out across the wire. There's a button next to the door knob that signals the guard tower. If Moses doesn't make it before I get back, press it. The guards will come and get him. You won't have to sit with the corpse. Understand?"

"What's his chances?"

"One in twenty, maybe not even that good. He lost too much blood. What little he has left won't carry oxygen. His blood gases are in low single digits, but why am I telling you this. Just watch him. He's a tough old man, but— what the hell. There's nothing more I can do."

When the corpsman opens the door to leave, Phil sees that the wind has picked up. It appears that a late-winter storm will arrive before evening, the sort of storm that brings seventeen inches— that seems like the magic number— of fresh snow, winter's last hurrah. The sort of storm that grounds helicopters and hides trails and freezes seven-year-olds who can't get out of the wind and wet drifts. The storm might be his only chance of escaping the camp till late fall, might be Eddie's only chance of reaching maturity and having kids of his own, of telling what happened to his dad and mom, of seeking justice. It's just his wounds haven't healed enough that he can walk far, but he will have to try. So from the broom closet he takes the ash handles of the two push brooms he has soaked since arriving; he hid the handles when the corpsman didn't think he had the strength to move. He hid them in an adrenaline rush of anger that, coupled with the morphine given him, also hid his pain.

The broom handles are long enough that when he splits them and bends the staves, he can make the frame for a pair of short trail-shoes.

The camp's remoteness— there is no road to it, that he already knows— and far north placement will make escape nearly impossible. Everyone wears blaze orange, either coveralls or hospital gowns. No one has boots. An individual in any color of garb will stand out in the dozens and maybe hundreds of miles of moss and scrub willows, none taller than mowed sagebrush, surrounding the camp. Any creature taller than a marmot will be as noticeable as a caribou among lemmings. No, the only chance of escape is a major storm. Then it will be a question of whether the weather will kill an escapee before the escapee can attract the attention of a helicopter to return him to the safety of the compound. Death by exposure or imprisonment, the choice a storm offers. Otherwise, there is no choice.

But with Eddie out there, he has to whittle another choice from a broom handle and whatever else he can find in the shack.

"What are you doing?" Peggy asks.

"They left my kid," he nods towards the south side of the camp. "If I can, I have to get him... he's seven."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean they left him. Shot his mother, me, then took off."

"Is he staying with neighbors?"

"Nearest neighbors are thirty-five miles away, and for all I know, they've been burned out, too."

"Well, where is he staying?"

"Out in the open... I hope he's got sense enough to make him a brush hut. Otherwise," he doesn't finish what he might have said.

"You mean to tell me that you have a child, no, this can't be. I have to be dreaming this. This can't be real."

"This ain't no dream, Lady. A nightmare, maybe." After a long pause, he adds, "Welcome to America under the Democrats."

"I going to go with you. You can hardly walk. You'll need help."

"You don't know what you're saying. You'll slow me down."

"You're making a pair of snowshoes?"

"Yeah?"

"But there's no snow."

"There's a little, and there will plenty tonight, tomorrow, the next day. I don't know how soon before the storm hits."

"There's a storm coming?"

"Lady, you stay here and you let me do what I know best. It's my kid that's out there, not yours. So shut up about what I'm doing. Be thankful you don't have to be out in it."

"I'm going with you. I ski, and I have for many years. I can keep up."

"I'm not making a pair of skis."

"I didn't ask you to, did I?"

"All right, but you'll need something on your feet, leggings, and blanket over you, a sheet over that, something on your head. You're on your own, understand?"

"How do you intend to bend that broom handle?"

He nods towards a pot of water on top of the oil stove, burning on high.

"So that's why it's so hot in here."

Moses groans, then in a faint voice says, "Ah'll help 'er."

\* \* \*