

Aleutian Rogue

WITH

The Amanat

SERIALIZED

Chapter Twelve

1.

Hearing the circling Cub, Jay bails out of his bunk and bounds onto the stern deck, searching for the plane. Not finding it immediately, he stands there in the chill predawn breeze, somewhat paralyzed by memories of those first years he trapped foxes here along the bay, memories of continual fear of detection, fear of being trapped on the island and hunted down as if he were a fox, fear of being spotted, the same fear he felt those weeks in Laos as he killed every living being that might turn him in, soldiers, women, children, dogs, geese, living off what he killed, his stomach revolting against the raw meat as he hid from even his spirit.

When fully awake, he realizes it is normal for planes to fly to and from John's lab. He spent two winters here. There was hardly a day when a plane didn't fly over. But since the shooting in Dutch, he hasn't had a plane pass so near.

Catherine covers her mouth and laughs.

He doesn't understand what's so funny. Not at first. Then he sees himself as she sees him, naked except for the shellbelt draped over his shoulder and the singleshot rifle in his hands. He probably does look foolish enough for both of them.

He'll wait till dark to visit Little John. That'll be safest. Besides, she's still laughing, a situation he will have to address. And what can he really expect to do with a Ruger Number One and a handful of cartridges? Defend himself? Her? Their only chance, only real chance is not using the Ruger.

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Jay spends the day dozing, not really able to recover his lost sleep but needing to try. Periodically he awakens enough to realize Catherine either sits on the bunk beside him, reading, or lies close, dozing. He wishes her presence meant something to her, and he falls back to sleep dreaming that it does as the cries of gulls pierce his dreams.

He awakens knowing about her father's indictment, trial, and the poverty that followed, but he doesn't remember her telling him anything. Knowledge seems to be coming to him in visions, in dreams, and he rolls over to feel her naked beside him. His hand rests on her chest, and in dream he feels life developing inside her, life growing, struggling, getting stronger and stronger as if it, too, were Rogue.

He walks in his dreams as if he were an old man, his son beside him, and his dreams make no sense to him as he wonders if he isn't really seeing his great-grandfather as the proud warrior he should have been if he hadn't been trapped on Depoe Charlie's little reservation, tucked neatly behind the first row of coastal hills, the jaws of the trap a BIA check and the moonshine the Federal marshal traded for the poached deer and gillnetted salmon needed to feed loggers and railroad crews

wrestling old-grow fir and spruce to the Yaquina railhead where the logs were loaded onto steamers and sent south to San Francisco.

Sometime during the day, he awakens long enough to hear Catherine say, "Woman's intuition, maybe," as she kisses his beard. "You must love her a lot, your wife."

"Used to think I did. A damn accident. A long story. We were coming back from town. Had gone for a loaf of bread." And he thinks he tells her about the failed hub, and of his sons, and of the newspaper getting the story wrong.

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Sound carries the length of the still bay...the coming and going of the helicopter violates the quietness of the late afternoon, that violation enough to force Jay back into his jeans and halibut shirt, his suspenders faded red, their elastic edges wavy from being stretched too many times. Curiosity vies with apprehension as he asks himself, *Who was that?* And he keeps glancing towards Hog Island as he slips the pram into the water as the obscured sun slips behind Devil's Paw as if the mountain were placed where it stands for the sole purpose of creating darkness. He pays little attention to Catherine, who ponders what to do with a can of cherries she found in his stores. His concern is John.

The pram seems tippy as he twists the outboard's throttle wide open; so he backs off and runs the kicker at 3,000 RPMs or so. In the dwindling twilight, he recognizes the shoreline he trapped seven winters ago, sees where he caught his first cross fox, the point on which he snared nine otter one week. It doesn't seem as if he ever left, and he misses the timber. He is a born stumpjumper, weaned on sawdust and pitch, schooled in second growth hemlock, falling wedges for books, a chainsaw for a slide rule. He graduated to old growth, earned an advance degree in snagging, and he feels an urge to cut every tree on the island. He tries to remember when he last sharpened chisel chain. It's been a while.

Darkness overtakes him before he reaches Bear Island. Wind blown salt spray stings his face, and he drops another thousand RPMs. There's no hurry, not now.

Deciding not to take unnecessary chances, he circles the small islands and approaches Hog Island from the northwest. Except for one spot of sand, the north side, if he remembers right, of the island is a rock face so where he will put ashore isn't a tough decision. He catches a small swell and rides its backside onto the beach, drags the pram above the high tide line, and ties its bowline on a driftwood log. Then with his thumb on his Ruger's safety and his right index finger resting on the side of the trigger, he carefully picks his way through thick, wind sculptured spruce. He almost sees the stobs, the dead branches and green boughs; he makes almost no noise.

He moves slow, trying not to think about what will happen if he doesn't get to Sarah before those she double-crossed do. Ten tons of ivory, three tons still missing. An inconceivable amount. Catherine said the three tons represents a quarter million dollars. It might well be worth that. And he hopes John is okay.

When he reaches the chicken house he built for John so many winters ago, he notices the deer, a doe and her fawn, their heads down, ready to bolt. And as he eases past them, he knows there is no one in the shadows. He hurries across the garden, knocks once lightly, then lets himself in—and sees the mess. "What in hell."

Chairs are tipped over, broken. The door of the refrigerator stands open, revealing broken shelf brackets, the shelves tipped, their contents on the floor where mayonnaise and pickle relish jars lie broken. The oven door has dropped. Coffee has splattered the wall, and the pot lies in the corner by the door. The tablecloth has been jerked off, and teapot shards lie mingled with pots and pans that have bounced off pegs. Plates have slid out of open dish hutch doors.

John jumps, but recovers quickly. "Somehow, I knew you were coming. Good to see you." Indicating the mess with a sweep of his left arm, he adds, "A guest said you were on your way."

"Looks like there was a severe difference of opinion."

"Not in the end." John again surveys the mess, then shakes his head as he repeats himself: "Not in the end."

"Where's Sarah?"

"The magic question." He tells Jay what the U.N. woman said about Sarah going to Seward on the *Dawn*—

"Hold it, not so fast. What U.N. woman?" Evidently there is a player in this affair about whom Catherine has said nothing, perhaps even knows nothing.

"She arrived by helicopter a little bit ago...seemed awfully angry about something." He picks up the lump of mayonnaise still in the bottom portion of its jar. "She was only the latest. There were four state troopers here at daybreak looking for you and the women...tell me, is the one woman really a terrorist?"

"Who?" Righting another chair and straightening a bent shelf, Jay wonders if he didn't wake up in a parallel world. U.N. and terrorists? This affair has a shadow, one he doesn't like, one that wouldn't seem plausible if he weren't seeing Little John's kitchen completely trashed. "John, sorry about this. I didn't know you'd become this involved."

"That U.N. woman was a sore loser. Pulled a gun, some kind of an automatic that you'd probably recognize." John slides a spatula under much of the remaining mayonnaise. "She wasn't American. Might have been from TransCarpathia."

"I'm sorry—"

"You didn't do this...Louise told me about the shooting in Dutch. She said a little more, said she did a little checking on you in Oregon, said your wife was killed in an accident, said her name was Judy Keipers." John scrapes the mayonnaise into a metal pail. "Chickens don't need the glass."

"Louise?"

"You know, your friend." John lifts from the debris a jar of kelp pickles that somehow survived.

"The girl from the Korean boat, the one going to Oregon State?" Jay picks up the kraut cutter and sets it on the drainboard. "She's a wacko. I wouldn't exactly call her a friend, and what prompted her to ah..." he doesn't finish his thought as reason and fear suddenly tangle as if they were old roosters, neither ever defeated.

When reason finally gains the upper hand, he asks, "How did she know—"

"To come here? Figured it out. She has a good mind—and yeah, she might be a little bit of a goof, but a fellow has to admire her work ethic."

"You sound smitten. Where is she?" He will have to deal with her or his cover will dissolve as if it were salt left out in the rain.

"Jeb flew her back Thursday so she is probably in Juneau as we speak." John brushes a whole clove off a pickle, then takes a bite. "She has a message for you. Something about there being no one after you. But if there isn't, I'd like to see when there is." He offers Jay a pickle from the jar.

"What's she doing in Juneau?"

"Tending business for me...I didn't know you were ever married." John sets the pickle jar on the counter as he examines the refrigerator shelf brackets: "What do you think? Will wire hold it?"

There was an afternoon in Laos when he thought the game was over, when he couldn't kill a girl as pretty as any woman he has ever seen. She looked into the muzzle of his rifle; she knew what he had to do, and she seemed to accept her fate, but her eyes spoke to him. They pleaded for her life, but they made no promises. She would turn him in; she had to.

If Louise knows the whole story, then others will shortly.

"I got you into a mess, John. You have to listen to me." He sighs, then tells John what he knows about the affair at Dutch Harbor. "Sarah got light fingered. Skipped. And evidently all the parties involve know she was headed here so even if she isn't here, they might think the ivory is." Indicating

the remaining mess, Jay adds, "This is pretty serious business. I want you, Louise outta here. Don't worry about money. I'll cover that. I don't want to see anything happen to you."

"I can't leave here. You know that." John fills the coffee pot, and sets it on the stove. "I'm afraid I'm already involved."

"Join Louise in Juneau. At least for a while."

"Too much here to do...and the chickens have to be fed."

"For your own good—"

"No. Somebody has to be here all the time."

"You're not hearing me."

"Yes, I am. Just not believing you."

"You'd better. You should." Jays lays a chunk of the broken teapot on the table. "That was your mother's, all you had to remember her by if I remember right."

"Yeah. I'm not very happy about it getting broken."

Pointing to the shard, Jay adds, "That could well be your head."

"I don't scare that easy. You of all people know that."

He has to get John away from the lab: "How about if I stay here while you're gone? You know I can keep everything going." He really can't return, but he feels he needs to say whatever it takes to get John somewhere safe.

"Troopers are looking for you."

"They've been here. I doubt they'll come back." In the dark creases of his mind, a plan has been developing all day.

"I dunno—"

"There's nothing to know." With Louise unraveling events in Oregon, he needs her thinking about someone other than him. He doesn't need the alternative. "Take Louise somewhere. Vegas, maybe."

"No, I'm not the type—and I don't think Louise is either. She is concerned about the substance density of things, not the appearance of surface thinginess."

"John, you need to get away from here more than you know. And believe me, Louise will go with you. You are maybe more like her than I imagined." He knows John well enough to add, "She's not a virgin."

"I didn't expect she was. Besides, what's that got to do with anything?"

"Are you in love with her?"

"I've only known her a couple of days."

"You can't tell me you haven't thought about her."

"No, but I don't have any idea of what she thinks about me, and right now, feelings aren't the issue. Don't be making a two day acquaintance into anything more than that." John sits in the one chair that doesn't wobble. "My experience is that I'm not someone who interests women."

"Too busy thinking about how much brown adipose fat an eight month otter should have, right? than to give a woman more than a passing glance, I know you. But what is she doing right now—she's in Juneau for you. Do you think she had to go to Juneau? No. She's there for you."

"Let me think about this. Are you going to be around?"

"Catherine is not a terrorist...I'll be around for a few hours. I need to catch Sarah if I can before someone else does. You said she didn't come out here at all, that she caught a ride to Seward on the *Dawn*?"

"That's what Dave Woodhart, Pearl's manager, said when I radioed town after the troopers were here this morning."

"I need fuel—"

"Give me a couple hours. Let me clean up this mess a little more." Standing, bending over to retrieve more broken glass, John adds, "The cannery at Port Williams closed down, but there used to be fuel in the tank there. The watchmen went to visit Roy Randell this afternoon, took a skiff across. He should be back in another hour or so."

"Well, for obvious reasons I want to stay off the radio so I'll have to check back. I'll be running without lights so kinda watch the channel. I'll drop anchor out there in say, what, two hours?"

"Sure. Till then."

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