

LIKE RAIN ON
KUPREANOF

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Homer Kizer

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who will translate paint spills
to unborn generations
who will argue for leaning
sheets of steel
who will preserve an “I” box
or my words
when our sterility makes our art
forgettable for even us

CHAPTER ONE

-1-

Wind blows, smoking waves, bowing power poles, snapping lines and rigging and spruce tops and the airport's wind gauge. Rain hard as hail hammers ripped apart waves and beats their crests almost flat as if the sea were beginning anew the creation process from which Port Adams will emerge tomorrow. But tonight, wind and rain forge black headlands into hidden hells for the few ships battered but not yet broken. Seas crush against capes, ripping tides and time into froth. They churn broil into briny graveyards as they grate gravel into sand and toy with life. They crash through kelp beds, killing the silence of otters and urchins, tearing roots loose from hidden anchorages and casting ashore tumbled mounds of tubes and shells and stiff poly line.

Jacob Chickenof stands behind doubled panes and stares into the fury that swirls rain uphill. Feeling the blow, the low pressure, he sees nothing; there's nothing to see. He just stands and stares as marbles of rain strike the window and bounce upwards like lead shot ricocheting, scattering, bouncing, still lethal.

Even behind the window, the wind seems to bend him, tip him backwards, and he stands with his left leg ahead of his right as if having to step into the storm to stay balanced. He can't sleep, and the whistler moans without letup, its mournful cry a bad reminder he has two boats on their way in. Both boats were off the Triads an hour ago. Both with deck loads of seven-by pots. Both top heavy and trying to get around Pillar Point. Both now not answering his radio hails.

Behind him, a coffee pot smells fresh, and glass doors in Mary's china hutch vibrate slowly, and a creak crawls from the bathroom floor as if someone entered the room. A tree cracks nearby, and he sees a limb snapped from the spruce in his yard. Like a twirling boomerang, it strikes his pickup. He can't see the damage, but he hears, even above the wind, the crunch of sheet metal, brief and ugly.

In his knees, he feels the seas, feels their power, their timing; he should be out there. That's where he belongs. Not here in town.

J. Junior, his oldest boy, skips the newer of his boats, the 105 foot crabber *M/V Iskai*. His younger brother Ivan skips his 79 foot crabber, the *F/V St. Paul*. Both vessels left Kodiak yesterday morning. Both will be, God willing, he tells himself, laying pots on the shelf for Wednesday's tanner opening. But tonight, they, along with a half dozen other crabbers, are beating their way towards the scant protection offered by Pillar Point, a craggy rock that juts into the Gulf of Alaska off the south end of Cook's Island, the twenty mile wide, thirty mile long top of a volcanic sea mount, a godly mistake stuck between the Barrens Islands and Dixon Entrance, a navigational hazard that seems to mysteriously appear on radar screens where least expected.

Jacob stands and stares, knowing the pummeling his boats and their crews are receiving. For thirty-five years, he was out there; he was the one with his hand on the controls, timing the seas, powering up as his bow rose, cutting power as the sea fell away, keeping his bow into the next wave, letting its fullness lift him, praying he wouldn't broach, won't miss-time a sea, wouldn't cause his and his crew's death. For thirty-five years, it was Mary who fretted while he was too busy staying alive to worry. For thirty years, it has been his boats that twisted in storms, that fought with pumps running and scuppers full the force of the North Pacific. And always he won.

Another limb snaps and crashes into the front of the house as lights dim, blink, then go out—the night darkens as harbor lights and street lights disappear. His mood darkens; yet still he stands and stares, seeing little but knowing exactly what both vessels suffer.

Mary isn't here. For that he's thankful. She flew to Anchorage yesterday to do her annual Christmas shopping, to buy candles and say prayers that Father Gregory won't hear. She will stay with Debbie, their youngest daughter, and her husband, the only one of his sons-in-law he will not hire again.

They have seven children, two boys and five girls. J Jr. is out there, in the blow, the worst of this season. His brother John is in Juneau, an attorney of some reputation who seems embarrassed by the Russian and Norwegian portions of his heritage. Being Aleut is good, but they aren't Aleut, at least not according to anthropologists. They're Pacific Eskimos. But for political purposes, John is a six-foot four-inch Aleut with shoulder-length black hair, fine European features and degrees from Washington and Willamette and who only returns to Port Adams when trying to impress Outside corporate clients. A tour of his Native roots doubles his fee..

The five girls are in order: Catherine, Elizabeth, Mary, Sarah, Deborah. Cathy and Beth are both married to fishermen, and both live on Russian Hill, that area of Port Adams above the bulk plant. But he doesn't have to worry tonight about them. Both of their husbands fish only salmon and halibut, and are, or now were, probably, welding aluminum seine skiffs in his warehouse out Fish Hook Road, their off season business.

Mary has never married, and works for the Post Office. He worries about her all the time: she shoulders other people's burdens to the point of making herself sick. She knows everyone's business, and she still has a crush on the Blossom boy who went down off Akutan three seasons ago. They would've married by now and probably would've given him more grandchildren, but that wasn't the will of God, what every fisherman has to accept when living with the sea.

Sarah lives in Ballard, where she has four little squareheads he seldom gets to see. His grandchildren grow without his permission, perhaps the price he pays for having wished his own children would hurry up and leave home.

Right now, he wishes this storm would hurry across the Gulf, would blow itself out against Sitka or Prince Rupert or Port Angeles, anywhere but here. He wishes the power would come back on and that he could raise the *Iskai*. He wishes J Junior had left Kodiak six hours earlier, wishes that J hadn't waited for those new spools of line, that J wouldn't deckload pots six high, that Mary were here to remind him everything will turn out fine. He doesn't wish, really, that he was still skippering even though he should be—he should be glad he's safely ashore, watching the blow from his house three-quarters of the way up Kupreanof, the darkened channel open before him. But inside him, he still feels the wind, the seas, their spacing, their strength, their height, how long he needs to wait for the bow to lift, to get over the top, to freefall before again lifting. All that is part of him as is the scent of a stream for a salmon.

He ducks instinctively as a plastic garbage can lid hits the window, cracking its outer pane, then bounces away to disappear in the darkness. He hears rather than sees Aimee, Mary's poodle, squeak as she cringes under their dining room table, and he knows he should go to bed where he can worry and wonder until sleep overwhelms him. But a sense of warped perversity keeps him at the window, watching, waiting. Some instinct as strong as a salmon's need to spawn compels him to pray silently, as if hearing his words said aloud might cause them to lose power or him to lose face despite being alone with a frightened dog.

Words are like the wind: they are power, and they must be used carefully, especially when shaped into stories or prayers. They were a gift to people when the world was called into existence, and he has always been careful to use them respectfully, never in anger or for greed and personal gain. Maybe that's what troubles him about John, who wrestles words into weapons to be hurled in courtrooms filled with hate.

His children heard the stories that were told to him, but they were educated by Outside school teachers, hired by officials like himself who thought students needed math and science to succeed,

not stories and prayers. So numbers became more important than words, not what any of the officials intended. Nonetheless, he told the old stories, the ones with real power; and his children, after listening to these sacred stories, would say, "That's nice, Dad," then they would spread out their homework on the kitchen table and talk about sines and cosines.

Now, the first generation of village children educated by Outside teachers have control of the schoolboard, his Beth being one of them. A few of them, like Beth, have degrees earned with their knowledge of numbers; so they introduce more math and more science every year into the curriculum. The school operates a salmon hatchery on Mill Creek. It teaches Differential Calculus to Juniors, and it is proud of how it keeps the traditional lifestyle of Cook's Island Natives alive and vibrant, their words, not his, by bringing in storytellers who address school assemblies where students giggle and visit and drink Coke.

Maybe this is how Grandma Mutukin felt when he wouldn't sit still. She was the appointed storyteller for their family, and through the winters when Port Adams used to be cut off from the rest of Alaska, she would bake, usually, cookies, during the day. For him or his cousins to get any of them, they would have to sit and listen to her stories about a long time ago. Isaac was always the best listener; so while Isaac listened, he would cast his string top across the floor, being then more interested in how long he could keep it spinning than in stories of magic bidarkas. But that changed after Isaac went down in Bristol Bay. It then became his task to remember and to understand the old stories, a duty that was his from the beginning, his and his second son's.

In his knees, he feels the tide change at midnight. He has never needed a tidebook. He has always been able to feel when the ebb begins, a feeling of him being pulled south. And the wind seems to lessen. Still forty, maybe fifty knots, the wind at the center of the low pressure cell pass over the island.

Lights come back on all over town. He sees harbor lights wink, then brighten. Same for street lights along Kupreanof—his house

is on the uphill side of the street. And the radio begins talking, skippers checking on skippers, their words skipping around the world, but heard with most interest in Port Adams: “This is the *Provider* calling the *Mad Dog*, do you copy? *Provider* to *Mad Dog*, come in.” “*Mad Dog* here, go to 63.” “*American Rose* here, calling *American Beauty*.” “This is the *Silver Fox* calling—” The signal breaks into static.

Numbers are needed to make radios work; so while he now waits beside the radio, knowing that at any minute J will try to raise him, he remembers why, when he was on the schoolboard, they hired a math teacher from Iowa, who didn’t know that Aleuts don’t have totem poles. The teacher didn’t stay long (couldn’t handle the rain), but while he was in Port Adams, he installed ham radio equipment in the school, equipment on which Morse code messages have been sent and received literally worldwide. Bright students and their parents were suddenly more interested in what the weather was like in Capetown or in Christchurch than in trying to puzzle through what Grandma’s stories mean, if they mean anything at all.

The wind continues to lean against the house, pushing against windows, banging screen doors and broken whirligigs and the loose flower planter he was supposed to fix last August when silvers were schooling in short water and he was more interested in harvesting winter’s fish. Wind whips spruce boughs and power lines and even his raingear inside his Arctic entry—it might even fly an anchor if he were to run one up the post office’s flag pole, a stunt Ivan pulled twenty-five years ago, a stunt that cost Ivan six months in Juneau’s jail.

Although Ivan is as experienced as anyone in the fleet and has a better feel for fish than even he does, Ivan manages to set a seine around hard luck every summer, losing whatever he made the previous winter. Mary lights candles for his brother, and he makes sure Ivan has a boat to fish. And every fall, usually, Ivan finds himself another middle-aged cannery rat to help him through the despair of winter darkness. So his brother gets by.

He would've sold the *St. Paul* last summer if Ivan hadn't lost his 42 foot Delta while holding a pick off Gull Point. While most of Port Adams' fishermen set Kodiak-style, with the seiner holding off the skiff, Ivan has always set Chignik-style with the skiff holding off the seiner: Ivan's skiffman was Debbie's husband, who was so high on coke that opening he, Jacob, would have shot him just as he would a sea lion in a seine—his son-in-law let go of the seine lead, letting the seine foul Ivan's prop, leaving the seiner helpless against the rocks. And Ivan shrugged off the loss of his boat, which wasn't insured, as he would a bait knife dropped overboard.

Debbie claimed Bob really wasn't high, that he was just sick. Nevertheless, right after that opening the two of them left the island with only Father Gregory sorry to see them go.

The radio catches his attention: "This is *St. Paul* calling the *Iskai*, come in. . . . *St. Paul* to the *Iskai*, come in" Then static as wind whips around even microwaves.

He feels a little better. Ivan should be behind Pillar Point by now. J, in the larger *Iskai*, should also be behind the point. He'll stay up a while longer before turning in, but his mind is much more at ease.

Ivan had just finished paying for his Delta or it would've been insured.

His insurance for the *Ishai* and the *St. Paul* costs him a million-five a year, approximately thirty percent of the vessels' value. It is tempting to fish bare. But his two crabbers catch enough to cover their costs. Plus, he still owes a half million on the *Ishai*, originally a five million dollar vessel. He doesn't dare run bare. His creditors would never let him, nor would he want to.

He has been lucky. Sure he has worked hard. But so have a lot of other fishermen, including his father and grandfather, both of whom caught cod for the former saltery at Herring Cove, both of whom never made enough to buy a boat of their own. But he, right out of high school, got a job with the Painters from Oregon's Depoe Bay. Deckhand to be sure, but the job got him away from Port Adams, and away from thinking salmon. He built a few crab

pots, albeit four-bys, for himself. So when Kodiak's shrimp fishery collapsed, thereby fueling a king crab explosion, he had gear in the water in those magical 1960s, when canneries were eager to finance new vessels. Yes, he was lucky. The timing of crabbing's prominence made him financially secure: house, new pickups, boats, gear, even a couple of businesses because his accountant said he needed to shelter income.

Unfortunately, Ivan spent two tours in Vietnam while he, Jacob, was making money. The Army wouldn't take him; said he was too heavy, too muscular from shoveling shrimp. He was then, as he is now, five feet six and two hundred fifteen pounds, and the Army couldn't fit him onto their weight to height chart. So when his brother returned to Port Adams, all that was open to Ivan was a beach seine site, complete with skiff and a quarter seine, for which he lent Ivan the money: \$2,000.

If Limited Entry hadn't passed in 1974, and then if the State hadn't wanted those beach seine permits back, Ivan never would have gone to sea as anything other than a deckhand, what even Ivan admits when a few too many beers make him weepy (otherwise, Ivan thinks the State is out to screw him).

The wind picks up as the storm's eye passes. But the winds of the cell's backside, chilled by the colder waters entering the Gulf from Cook Inlet and Prince William Sound, aren't as strong, and probably don't exceed eighty knots. And by now, his vessels will have the protection of the point so he might as well turn in and salvage some of the night.

Not having Mary home seems odd. All the nights he spent at sea, he could count on her being here waiting, and when he would arrive home, she would be here, giving him a hard time about something he hadn't fixed, missing him without ever saying so, using instead unspoken words that come as naturally as silent prayers. And he would, in those same unspoken words, tell her how much he loves her. Only on two occasions in all their years together have they quarreled, and on both occasions, it was in silent words. And both times, he was wrong: he had let his tongue

cause another person pain. He had spoken not in anger, but without thinking. Once was when he hurt Ivan's woman friend many years ago. The other time was when he rebuked Father Gregory for teaching doctrines of demons, judging the priest as if the priest were accountable to him rather than to Christ. He later apologized to the priest, but he never saw again Ivan's woman friend.

Without Mary beside him, his sleep is troubled. He has too much on his mind. Unrelated things like radio frequencies and ravens tumbling above headlands, soaring high, then folding their wings and freefalling through turbulence. When he closes his eyes, he sees Grandma Mutukin sitting by the stove in the old house, the white teakettle steaming, the oil lamp burning on the table, its wick trimmed and its flame steady despite puffs of wind pushing from the stove. She sits on her bench with her sewing bag beside her, a ball of rough gray wool on her lap, her knitting needles quick as her daughter's. He sees himself with a length of string looped around his middle finger as he carefully winds the string around a top he doesn't recognize. It isn't one his dad turned for him on the old wood lathe in the gear shed. Rather, it's painted red, white and blue as if it were store bought, its point not the end of a nail. And he wonders where and when he had that top as Grandma Mutukin begins a story about two brothers who lived in the village over at St. Peters before the men who brought rice came.

He rolls over in bed, thinking he's awake and wondering why he doesn't remember the top or Grandma ever before using that story date: "before the men who brought rice." He wonders if this is a story he knows or has heard, but when he opens his eyes, he hears only wind and the moans of the whistler buoy.

For a long while, he lies in bed with his eyes open, wondering about the men who brought rice. She probably meant Russians, but why not just say so? Normally she would have for a recent story; so what does rice mean? He'll have to think about this, and he again rolls over in bed, Aimee asleep at his knees, not knowing for certain if he has been dreaming or remembering.

The old house burned down when he was nine so her telling of the story takes place a long time ago, when he was not yet old enough that he had to bring in firewood after dark, which means the top was one he should remember unless he lost it as soon as he got it. He tries to remember hearing a story about two brothers who lived in the village where St. Peters is now, but that's like trying to remember if he entered a room before, he's heard so many stories.

At some point, he realizes he has quit remembering, quit winding the top, and he just listens as Grandma Mutukin says, "In those days, there lived together two brothers, neither one with a wife, who hunted seals together, and the older brother killed many seals, but the younger brother never got any. One day, both brothers went to the rookery near the rocks north of Five Mile Beach, and when the older brother saw a bunch of bidarkas approach them, he paddled far out to sea, leaving his brother. The bidarkas went far out after him but couldn't catch him because he was a very strong man. And when he couldn't see them anymore, he returned to his village where St. Peters is now, and he found his younger brother had landed much earlier. And he asked his younger brother, 'Who were those men hunting our seals?' But his younger brother said he didn't see any men.

"So they went out again the next morning because they hadn't brought home any seals, and the older brother killed enough seals to fill both of the brothers' bidarkas, and when they landed the older brother cut up the seals and gave meat to all of the women who didn't have a man to hunt for them.

"Then the next day the older brother removed the covering from his bidarka and began to make a new one, but the younger brother did nothing, and the two brothers ate the seals until they had no more food. Then the younger brother said he would go hunting, and he went to the rookery where those outlaws living south of Five Mile Beach seized him and took him to their village where their headman asked him, 'That strong man with you, is he your relative?' 'He is my brother,' said the younger brother. Then

the outlaw headman told the younger brother to tell his brother that seals are like sea urchins on the reef below Five Mile Beach and he should hunt there. The headman then took seals his hunters killed and loaded the younger brother's bidarka full and sent him back to his village there at St. Peters.

"When the younger brother returned, his older brother was proud and unloaded the seals and gave meat to all the women who didn't have anyone to hunt for them like he always did when he returned with seals he killed. Then he started to eat with his younger brother, who said, 'Seals are like sea urchins on the reef south of Five Mile Beach, and you should go hunting there tomorrow.'

"Later that night, the older brother questioned his younger brother: 'How many seals did you see?' 'I saw as many seals as there where sea urchins,' said his younger brother. So the next day they went out to hunt seals, and after paddling far, they landed on the reef below Five Mile Beach, and the older brother set off with his spears.

"Approaching the seals, the older brother saw they were men pretending to be seals on the reef, so he turned and ran towards his bidarka. The men took off after him, but whenever a man almost caught him, he turned and killed him with his spear, then started running again until he reached his bidarka and paddled far out to sea.

"When he looked behind him, the older brother saw some bidarkas were almost catching him, so he spun his bidarka around and killed the men close to him, one after another until he killed them all. And he knew that his brother had tried to get him killed so when he caught up to his younger brother, he asked, 'Should I kill you, too?'

"His younger brother just kept paddling back towards their village. He doesn't say a word. And the older brother paddles beside him until they are home, where the older brother takes a woman with a son for a wife. And he lives with his wife in her house while his younger brother lives in their house, and when he returns from

hunting with his bidarka full of seals, he cuts them up and gives meat to every house in the village.”

The red, white, and blue top seems heavy in his hand, and he looks for somewhere to set it down while Grandma waits for him to ask, What does the story mean? But he can't find anywhere to set it down and instead of asking what the story means like Isaac always does, he casts the top across the floor, snapping the string, spinning the top so fast it becomes a white blur as it stands perfectly upright in the middle of the kitchen floor like a little person humming a tune he almost recognizes.

It spins and spins and spins and doesn't seem to wobble as it keeps going, upright as a little person who doesn't know who cast it across the floor. He watches it, and forgets about the story until he wakes and rolls over, wadding up his pillow. Then still not remembering having heard the story before, he again closes his eyes and again sees Grandma Mutukin sitting on her bench beside the stove, a ball of course gray yarn on her lap, a stocking mostly done on her knitting needles. But now he remembers the story she tells about two brothers who lived together without wives as his mind drifts into darkness.

Morning doesn't exactly bring sunshine. Rather, it brings gray skies and a hollowness that seems false. A heavy surf still pounds gravel beaches, and still sends swells down the channel and into the small boat harbor where floats rock as tethered seiners bang against tires and buoys. The crabber *F/V Pavalof* was on the grid when the storm hit—now, additional lines are strung to keep it from swinging as the storm tide lifts it. And across Marine Way from the grid, the building supplies manager at the True Value hardware store calls in an order for another fifty squares of asphalt shingles. It seems the high school lost part of its roof which pleases most everyone except the basketball coach who will now have to hold practices in Jacob Chickenof's warehouse, the only building not already stuffed with gear with room enough to scrimmage, even if that means scuffed knees and elbows for the players when they slide on its rough concrete floor.

Jacob's phone rings.

In bed but awake, Jacob has tried for an hour to listen to the radio traffic coming from the south end of the island. Something happened around two a.m. A rock slide into the storm surge, maybe. None of the boats seem sure how the wave formed. But a tsunami type wave swung around Cape Igvik and swept south, swamping the *Slow Boy*, a converted LCM, near Pillar Point. A single freak wave, magnified by the blow. At night. Unexpected. He can't imagine anything worse. So still trying to piece together what happened, he reaches across the bed and picks up the receiver.

"Jacob, Larry Andersen here. The basketball team needs to use your warehouse. Will that be a problem? The roof came off that new section of the school."

"No. I'll have the boys clear you enough room. . . . Say, isn't your wife a Suvorov?"

"Yes, why do you ask?" Larry has been on the island for twelve years, married to Martha Suvorov for ten of those years, and he still hasn't gotten used to the indirectness of the island's long time residents, including that of his wife. "What should I know about what?"

"It's her brother that has the *Slow Boy*, isn't it?" Jacob knows it is, but it's his custom to ask for confirmation.

"Did something happen? She'll want to know." The coach realizes Jacob wouldn't mention the *Slow Boy* if the vessel wasn't missing or worse.

"It's a little early, but you might have her stay with her sister-in-law. . . . I'll have Father Gregory swing by this morning. It might not be good."

This isn't what his Martha needs right now, not after they lost the baby last March, but all the coach can say is: "I'll tell her. Where did it happen?"

"Off Pillar Point. A bad wave."

"That *Slow Boy* has never been much of a boat . . . but it made Aaron regular paydays, and you know how expensive new boats are, even fuel."

“Tell your sister-in-law not to worry. I’ll help.” Thirty years ago someone asked him what it meant to be Christian, and he didn’t then answer the question very well. He determined that he would never again be in the position where the words he knew to say contradicted his deeds; for it isn’t the amount of Scripture or history he knows that counts but whether he fed the ones who couldn’t feed themselves.

“Thanks, Jacob. . . . We can always hope for the best.”

Saying goodbye, hanging up, Jacob knows the best when a boat goes down is to live. But in last night’s blow, a freak wave, no time to get in survival suits—no, the best will probably be to recover the bodies.

Every family in Port Adams has lost someone to the sea. Just part of fishing. His older brother Isaac went down in Bristol Bay when the gillnet fleet there was still sail only; got caught in a rip, sprung a plank with a full load of fish. Jacob was seven then, and he still remembers how devastated his dad was, how his dad took to drinking during the day until the only job he could get was with the government as a night janitor. His mom seemed to accept it as God’s will, but he knew she cried when no one was looking, especially each spring when she mended the gillnet they used for subsistence fishing.

Ivan was born the following year, the only one in the family without a Biblical name.

So Port Adams, like all fishing villages, blesses the fleet every spring, then prays that the blessing means something, then hopes that their prayers are heard, then begins making apologies for why their prayers weren’t answered. Figuring Father Gregory’s blessing couldn’t hurt, he has always been part of that parading fleet, since being there kept peace in the family and satisfied community expectations. But prayer without faith is like imposed morality. It soothes the soul until people are alone, then it loses its power.

He needs to be about his business: when he quit skippering one of his boats, he became a businessman, with apartment houses here and in Kodiak, with his warehouse here and one in both

Seldovia and Kodiak, with a gas station in Homer, and with the liquor store here. Yes, for him the blessing of the fleet has worked because he is never alone.

Still alert to any mention of the *Ishai* or *St. Paul* in the radio traffic but unable to raise either one from here in town (he suspects the wind dislocated his roof antenna as if it were a shoulder, the antenna bars being fingers grasping faint signals, clutching them, squeezing them until they cry for help), he calls Father Gregory.

“Have you heard anything about the *Slow Boy*?”

“Jacob, may God’s mercy be with you, and may your Aleut tongue spare us unnecessary grief. I will check on Aaron’s wife, but I won’t be able to stay long. This will be a busy day.”

“Make whatever arrangements are needed. I’ll cover them.”

“Bless you.”

With the words of the priest still in his ears as if their sound can’t penetrate wax-plugged canals, he next calls Island Liquors: “Ralph, this is Jacob. How does the store look this morning?” He listens to his manager’s list of damage. “Well, that’s not too bad. Call Winesap over at Kodiak, my insurance agent. Tell him I told you to have the window replaced, that if he wants to look at it first, he’ll have to fly over this morning, and see if you can’t be open for business by eleven.”

His manager asks, “Any sales other than the advertised ones? A storm damage one, perhaps?”

“Sure, why not. Any bottle with a wet label, fifty percent off—and keep track of those sales separately. Use a different code. They will be deductible.” The liquor store has been an excellent money maker for him, not exactly what he expected when he purchased it to shelter a good season on pinks in Area M. Jack Edwards had owned it, but when he bought Guennie’s, he had to, to satisfy the Liquor Commission, sell the store. The price was high, but no one had expected five million pinks to be caught in forty-eight hours by four limit seiners, his *Queen Catherine* being one of them, the boat Cathy’s husband now owns and fishes.

So two calls down.

He is a little worried in that he hasn't heard from J, who is usually very good about reporting in. But J might be heading for the fishing grounds where gear can be, when Fish & Game is busy elsewhere as they will be with the *Slow Boy*, laid a little early, making for a little more productive first turn, not something he approves of but what it takes to become a highliner. And his son has been a highliner since becoming a skipper.

No damage in Homer where the blow wasn't strong enough to even delay yesterday's flights; so the gas station is having a good though seasonally slow morning.

But not so on Kodiak: "How bad is it, Ted?"

"Jacob, you're not gonna wanta hear this, but they're saying welding sparks started it, then the wind blew it all out of control. There's alotta damage. You oughta come over."

"Maybe I better. It's too late for me to catch the morning flight, so I won't be there till dark. Get me a room at the Star. We'll look it over tomorrow morning. Until then, salvage what you can."

He didn't need a warehouse fire, really didn't. Although the building is heavily insured, the gear inside isn't. There was, he knows, two full seines in there and who knows how many levelwind reels and tubs of snap-on gear. He rented space to a dozen fishermen, and he doubts if any of them were insured (for the same reason Ivan ran bare, the cost of premiums). Even though he doesn't imagine he's legally responsible for their loses, he will have to make it right with them, which means money out of his pocket most likely.

A couple more calls: his apartments are fine. No problems, not even a broken window, which reminds him, he needs to call about his picture window. He also needs to call about the damage to his pickup, which, looking out the window at it, appears minor, hardly worth reporting. But the truck is leased (those trucks built like stones seem to, in Port Adams, melt into a trail of rust before they are ever owned); so he will have to report the dented door and

quarter panel. And he can't reach anyone at the warehouse in Seldovia, which might or might not be a good sign.

He knows, now, what he will be doing at two—getting on the plane for Anchorage, and from there catching a flight to Kodiak; so he calls for reservations. Port Adams remains one of those places a person can't get to from here without going through Anchorage. So what about till then? He imagines he should call his insurance agent.

His agent's line is busy.

It's still busy ten minutes later.

Before he can try again, Father Gregory parks his black Buick in front of his pickup.

"Hello, Father. Mary isn't home—"

"Sit down, Jacob. I just came from the Suvorovs'." The priest's boots are muddy. His shoulders sag. He's older than Jacob. Originally from Unalaska, he was a boy when he and his parents were interned in Southeast Alaska because they looked too Japanese although the reason given for their relocation sounded much more noble: they were being moved for their protection, which might have been true for he was protected from three years of Army occupation with all that the soldiers brought to the Aleutians. The Japanese did treat the few Aleuts they captured on Attu with great contempt. So like his parents and his uncles, he harbors no bitterness towards the Army. Instead, he went to seminary at Kodiak, then spent seven years painting icons in Nebraska before returning to Alaska where he served first in Kenai, then at Port Adams ever since.

"How is Anna? I imagine she will have a hard time if Aaron isn't lucky."

"I'm certain she will, but she is a woman of faith . . . which is why I'm here, Jacob. How are you doing?"

Not liking the tone of Father Gregory's words and always knowing a little more than what is said, he asks, "What has happened?"

"Sit down."

“No. Just say what you have to.”

“Then let us kneel—”

“Ivan lost the *St. Paul* last night? The same wave?” He has a very bad feeling about this.

“Yes, but I insist you sit down.”

He has known Father Gregory for long enough that he pulls a chair from under the dining room table, turns it around, and sits. Father Gregory takes a chair and sits next to him, both positioned where they can look down the channel, the crack in the window pane appearing like a line drawn across Kupreanof Street, which runs diagonally from the top of St. Peters Hill to the small boat harbor. In January, the street is as icy as a bobsled run. But right now, as the rain begins again, it looks like a black spillway for dammed emotions, where one more tear will cause a flood.

“Jacob, you’re a good man. You’re known for that. You make sure no family of a fisherman who works hard goes without food or a place to live. I know you don’t make any money on your apartments, that they’re your way of giving back a portion of your blessings. I know you have stored up a great reward in the Kingdom of Heaven, so count yourself blessed. You are a blessed man where it counts most.”

“I know you, Father Gregory, to be a man who gives praise where none is deserved so that the black news you bear appears a little brighter. Spare me the praise.”

“That wave sent five boats to the bottom. That’s what the troopers know of right now. There may be more. But two of them were your *Iskai* and *St. Paul*.”

Jacob sits in the chair, his legs too weak to stand, his arms too heavy to lift, his breath shallow. He wants to protest, but he feels too numb to open his mouth. So he just sits there, slightly stooped shouldered, his mind not really thinking about anything, his hands looking like they belong to someone else.

“Jacob, your son washed up on the point about an hour ago. Ivan hasn’t been found yet.” This is the part of his ordination Father Gregory finds most difficult, but death for him remains a

beginning. So the priest lays his hand on Jacob's forearm before continuing: "The crew, two of them have been found near your son. The other three, well, there's not much hope for them, not with twenty foot seas still running on the south end."

He sits there, hearing the priest, feeling like a gant hook has just ripped out his guts. "There will be one more. Four on each boat."

"Don't blame God, Jacob." Father Gregory wants to say what's expected of him, but he knows his words are not adequate for the situation. They have no real power. So he sits beside Jacob, sits hunched forward, his arms on his thighs, his hands together. He sits without speaking for minutes that seem like hours.

Finally, Jacob says, "I'll tell Mary. I'll fly over this afternoon. I was going anyway."

"Yes, that will be best. . . . The troopers have your son aboard their boat. I'll take care of arrangements when they dock if you aren't back."

"I'll be back. We'll be here. . . . Mary will want that."

"I cannot apologize for God. I can only say that His will is sometimes mysterious."

"Tell Floyd I'll take care of the funeral expenses for the crew, however many they find." Now hollow inside, he leans forward until his head is between his knees. Then to the floor, he says, "I don't blame you, Father. Not you." And for the first time that he can remember, he feels alone.

-2-

Alvin Winesap is a man to whom things happen. For example, when he was still in high school at Ninilchik, a brown bear, trying to get at the salmon his older brother had left in its trunk, ripped his car apart, its claws hooking seams and joints, its strength crushing sheet steel as he might a Coke can if he were of a huskier build. When he was in the Army, his buddy dropped a live grenade. Eleven surgeries later, he still complains about back pain, knowing,

though, he's lucky to be alive. Anchorage Community College lost his admission records; so while he sat out a semester, he took the test for a securities license, passed, then went to work for his uncle in Kodiak, who died six months later, leaving him his business. So now, he is an independent insurance agent, representing both marine and inland marine underwriters. He sells, without leaving his office, whole life and casualty policies to three generations of residents from Sand Point to Port Adams. And it is said of him that he knows his business.

But as the wind picks up again, driving rain in vertical columns along streets and past the ferry office, grounding ravens and eagles, flooding gutters, he folds wings into the blank policy forms lying on his desk, and when the policies will fly, he sails them across his office where most of them slam against the glass door through which he sees gulls walking freely along the sidewalk. He has never had a morning like this one, and if he could, he would turn the sign around on his office door and disappear.

The storm last night, while severe, certainly wasn't unusual. Around the islands, damage is rather minor: missing shingles, a broken window or two, a trailer house in Bell Flats tipped over, another one out Chiniak, then the Chickenof warehouse fire. It is, however, what happened off the south end of Cook's Island that most concerns him. Five boats down, maybe more, all insured by the same underwriter: Portland Casualty, Shipping and Liability, now (since new corporate offices were build two years ago) of Gig Harbor, Washington. The firm has been around for 104 years. It has never failed to pay a claim, but, he has a bad feeling about this—they told him a few minutes ago to hold claims until an internal audit was completed sometime later this week.

Why an audit now? Why hold claims that won't be paid for a month at the earliest? Why hold up advance settlement checks just as tanners are about to open in the eastern districts? He doesn't like the message being sent today, and how, he wonders, is he to stall fishermen whose lives depend upon another opening? How many boats are out there with minor claims? Where else have boats

gone down besides on the south end of Cook's Island? He heard something about the *Amatuli* and Egg Island, but he hopes what he heard is just rumors.

Another storm is due to hit Compass Rose today. He doesn't know how many vessels are in the Bering, or if there will be more claims; doesn't know his personal liability if legitimate claims are denied; doesn't want to think about a worst case scenario.

But things happen to him though no fault of his own. How can he explain having a target painted on his back, one he can't see but one at which everyone aims? He feels like the straw backstop at an archery tournament, and he has to get out of the office, has to get away from town before Jacob Chickenof calls, and with both the warehouse fire and his boats going down, Jacob will call, and with a word or two, will cut through all excuses.

But as he sits, his chair pushed back ready to go, a folded policy form in his right hand, he doesn't know if he should leave. Maybe he ought to stay. Maybe he can persuade Portland Casualty to reconsider the timing of their internal audit.

Who does he think he is? And why would they listen to him? He is just one of a dozen agents north of Seattle, and he didn't score many points with the Prudential representative here last week, an aggressive woman who seemed unusually interested in Jacob Chickenof. Her visit and the internal audit and Jacob's fire and boats going down—all seem too coincidental, seem like conspiracy or divine providence, and he doesn't want to believe in either one even though Prudential has, he believes, financial interest in Portland Casualty. But he isn't privy to the inner workings of the underwriters for whom he writes policies. He hears rumors, but those rumors are usually more wind than substantial.

He looks through his glass office door, sees the rain bounce off 1st Street, sees the spray from the tires of a passing Toyota, sees a gull walk in circles as if trying to entice him outside. A raven perched on the corner powerpole leans low and cocks its head as if trying to see what he will decide. But he doesn't know what he will do even though he wants to get away until this all

blows over. And he tosses the paper airplane at the door—it lifts, then dives left, striking the wall a foot from the copier, bouncing back, its nose bent.

Can coincidences mean nothing? Do things just happen to other people like they do to him? Are some people just born lucky or unlucky? He doesn't know what to think or do, and unconsciously, he begins folding another airplane.

Kathy, his secretary, her coattails snapping in the rain, hurries across 1st Street, her kerchief wrapped around a box of fudge brownies from the sweets-shop behind N.B.A., National Bank of Alaska. She, with the help of the wind, bursts into the office, with raindrops exploding in all directions like shrapnel.

“I got something for you, will perk you up.” After taking one for herself, she hands him the box of brownies.

She does this to him all too often: she knows he can't resist the brownies, that he will eat all of them if left alone, that Sharon thinks he's getting fat. “Sharon will have your head or mine if I gain another pound.”

“Oh, tell your wife you're still the most handsome fellow in Kodiak, if not in all of Alaska.”

“Shitty weather . . .” His voice drifts away before saying what he was thinking.

“When I was in the bank, some fellow I've never seen before, looked like one of those ecology gurus, asked if it rains here all the time. . . . Said I didn't know, I'm only thirty-two. He laughed. But I think he believed me.”

“What? that you didn't know.”

“No . . . that I'm thirty-two.”

He feels trapped, like he has been set up, like a compliment is required. Yes, she is a very nice looking woman, but he's married and this is the office where what is acceptable behavior between employer and employee seems to change monthly.

Trapped, that's what he is. Between an internal audit at Portland and claims he'll receive before the week is out, between a marriage that hasn't gone anywhere since vows were said (he finds himself

resenting Sharon and her social pretensions) and Kathy who's just an ordinary person wanting to be ordinary, he is cornered, with no discernible way out.

-3-

When John Chichikov—while at college, John changed the spelling of his last name to, hopefully, put an end to the “chicken-off” jokes, not that that was how his name should have been pronounced (besides, his name change made him sound even more Aleut, an identity that today works to his advantage)—learns of his brother's drowning, he calls his paralegal: “Randy, I'm going home until after the funeral. Take care of things here in Juneau. You know what needs done.”

“Sure. I'll draft interrogatories for the case against *the Sisters*. You want me to call that fellow in Sitka to see if he's available to do some legwork?”

“He's too screwed up. See if you can get Robin Karnes to come up for this case. He works cheap. Who knows, maybe he could use the press—and there will be plenty.”

“And if not Robin, then who?”

“I'll think of somebody, I gotta go. See you when I get back.” Randy has worked for him as a paralegal for a decade. Originally a conscientious objector who forgot to register as one, he emerged from jail as a felon, which put an end to his career as a schoolteacher. He then tried his hand at being a building contractor, a vocation for which he wasn't well suited. So while defending himself from the numerous lawsuits resulting from his construction projects, he acquired a working knowledge of the civil litigation process. He worked for a decade in Anchorage for various attorneys before relocating to Juneau.

“One more thing, John. Do we accept the case against that Angoon fisherman?”

“What do you think? Want to try and collect from a fellow with nine kids and two Ruger Mini-14s?”

“You know if you don’t take the case they’ll say it’s because he’s Native.”

“That’s another good reason not to take it. . . . Send the Collection Bureau a very nice letter saying although we appreciate their regular counsel recommending us for this case, our schedule is too full at the present time to accept additional work, that we will advise them when we can accept another client. That should quiet them down.”

“Yeah, I suspect they only wanted you so it would be Native going after Native.”

“Call up the fellow, don’t identify yourself, but tell him if he needs legal representation he should contact us. We will, on occasion, do pro bono work.”

“That’ll make you real popular—”

“I got to go. I’ll call you tomorrow.”

Port Adams is, indeed, one of those places a person can’t get there from here. He takes Alaska’s flight from Juneau to Anchorage, arriving too late for the afternoon jet flight into Port Adams. So he waits an hour for Northern’s freight run to St. Peters, across the island from Port Adams, and while waiting on the mainland, not knowing that both of his parents are with Debbie and Bob out on Dowling, he calls Cook Air and makes arrangements to get picked up at St. Peters. Therefore, after being banged around in Northern’s ancient DC-3 for what seems like two hours, when he finally lands at St. Peters one of Cook’s floaters, a stripped 207, awaits him, its pilot eager to take off before it gets any darker or the storm gets any stronger.

St. Peters is a tenth the size of Port Adams, meaning it’s really a cannery with a few houses, like crabs on a sea lion carcass, surrounding it. But during the seasons, its cannery fresh packs enough fish to make it worth Northern’s while to fly in a DC-3 once a day and sometimes twice. Northern hauls passengers and whatever other business it can steal away from Alaska Airlines, but it’s fresh and fresh-frozen salmon and king crab that keeps the carrier operating.

John hasn't been in St. Peters since leaving for college—the town doesn't seem to have changed any in the intervening years. It still has two miles of gravel road, a half mile of which he has to walk in the rain. It still has its boardwalk from the boat harbor to the cannery, then on to the company store, then up the hill to the Native corporation's satellite office. It still has its single, silver-painted fuel tank on the knoll above the cannery, the knoll on which Russians shelled and killed most of the island's inhabitants a year after they landed and enslaved the village. Russians forced Aleut hunters to harvest otter pelts while they slept with the hunters' wives. The hunters were paid with the gift of Christianity, a tithe of which was owed to the priests.

Sometimes John thinks he might be more Russian than Aleut as he negotiates for dead assets with the great corporations of America. However, he doesn't wait for things to happen; he makes things happen. That is his gift, his ability to get things done, to determine his own fate.

In the air, the 207 bounces along as it stays low and flies around the end of the island. At times, John can't tell whether it's salt spray or rain that strikes the windshield nearly straight on. The plane hits an air pocket and falls two hundred feet as they round buoy four—he looks up at the spruce trunks on the point above them, and to the side of him, kelp heads appear close enough that leaning over, he could snag one. But before he becomes really concerned about how low they fly, the Cessna lands, its floats plowing through a two foot chop next to the canneries' dock. It taxis back to the small boat harbor, where, with his single bag, he climbs out onto its float and hops onto the dock that dips under his weight, nearly causing him to lose his balance, nearly dumping him into the bay, reminding him he has been away too long.

He's an important attorney everyplace but here; so when he crosses the street to the cafe opposite the Harbormaster's, he enters unnoticed except for the rain he lets in.

“Close that damn door. What do you think this is, a barn?”

“It looks a little like one—”

“You can go home right now.” The waitress glares at him, her eyes as cold as beach pebbles.

“I’ll take a cup of coffee if it’s fresh. Put another pot on if it isn’t.”

“Go to hell.” Nevertheless, the waitress, ignoring that half pot already made, starts another pot. “It’s a crappy night, what are you doing out?”

Two fisherman sit talking at a table near the back of the narrow room, with its long counter and grill. A young fellow cooks. Otherwise, the waitress, any age but young, and himself are the only ones in the cafe.

“I came . . .” He doesn’t say why. It’s none of her business why he’s here. “Are you using halibut for your fish ‘n chips, or cod?”

The waitress turns towards the kid cooking, who says, “I can make them with halibut.”

“Do that then.” John slips his arm out of one jacket sleeve, turning towards the door as he does, and he sees her: Peggy Sue. He doesn’t know what her married name is—she married while he was in college.

She is almost past the cafe’s windows before she glances inside. When she does, she stops, takes a step back and enters, letting in more rain.

“John, I’m so sorry. I didn’t hear till just a little bit ago. It’s terrible.”

The waitress, appearing puzzled, looks from Peggy to John, then back.

“I just got in. Sis called me. She wasn’t making much sense, but I came as soon as I could.”

“How’s your mom and dad?”

“Haven’t been up to see Dad yet. Thought I’d get something to eat first. Don’t imagine anybody up there will want to cook.”

“Give your parents my condolences—and take care of yourself. You look like you have been.”

He smiles, forgetting for a moment why he's here, remembering instead an evening after a basketball game when she wanted to run her fingers through his hair.

Her face reddens as if she, too, remembers the same evening.

"I'll be in town for a few days. Maybe I'll see you again."

"Maybe." She reaches for the back of a chair with her left hand, reaches out as if to steady herself, as if to show him that she wears no ring. Then she quickly turns and disappears into the rain.

-4-

Feeling trapped, feeling as if he has become a chocolate frosted brownie from which every fisherman in the fleet will take a bite, Alvin Winesap says, "Kathy, I was just thinking about knocking off early today, about getting out of here."

"Well, if you want to take a look at that trailer at Chiniak, I'll hold down the fort." Kathy begins gathering the paper airplanes that lie scattered across the front of the office. "Who won?" she asks, holding up one in each hand.

"That's the Millers' trailer. Do I really need to see it? I think I told them I didn't." He wonders who did win. Surely he didn't, but who was he battling? Sharon, with all of her expectations? Or himself with his determined personality, determined by everyone around him from his kids to his customers as if an organic conspiracy dictates his every step? "Besides, I can't go out there. Miller Motors is servicing my pickup and my wife has the car so that'll have to wait." It angers him that Sharon thinks her social calendar is more important than his business. If it weren't for his business, she would be helping put together an updated Kodiak Wives' Salmon Recipe Cookbook instead of sitting on the board of trustees for the community college and the public radio station and who-knows-what-all-else.

"I can run you out . . . won't take more than a couple of hours. You can probably get away with leaving the message machine on for that long."

The idea is appealing, leaving the phone off its hook. He doesn't want to talk to, above everyone else, Jacob Chickenof. The old fisherman has been a good customer who'll not want to wait. If what he heard is true, that his boy was skippering the *Iskai*, then maybe Jacob will be too preoccupied to call until the underwriter's home office gets squared away later in the week.

But he doesn't like borrowing her car; he has before.

"I don't think your car likes me. I think it's determined to make me walk home regardless of the weather, regardless of where I go, regardless of who is with me."

"Oh, it's just a car."

"No way. It's like a lazy employee who wants to take a smoke break every few miles, and always at my expense."

"Naa. It might, you know, get tired once in a while, but it isn't personal." She files the paper airplanes in the wastebasket, and makes a mental note to order more policy forms.

"It isn't? How come I'm the only one who ever has to walk home? You never have to walk. Walt never walked. But I've been in your car twice and I've walked home both times."

"It's been working fine since Walt did whatever he did last summer. And as far as Walt walking, well . . ."

She doesn't finish her thought as she doesn't want to speak evil of the emotionally dead.

"Do you hear anything from him?" Her former boyfriend is in a Federal prison Outside, sentenced to twenty years for shooting a sea lion, presumably the same sea lion that bit his buddy Dave in the ass, then took Dave under, trying to drown him.

"No and I won't. He was always doing stupid things, but once he started drinking again, that was it for us."

The chocolate picks up his spirits, and makes sitting behind his desk even more difficult.

"Kathy, why don't you put a message on the recorder saying we are both out of the office surveying storm damage for the rest of the day, that we'll get back to them as soon as we can. Then call my wife and tell her I'm out looking at the Millers' trailer." Now

he feels better. He won't have to take another call today, won't have to explain about internal audits or lie about working on a claim. To a fisherman with a million dollar boat who should be grossing ten thousand or more a day, any excuse is unacceptable; lame ones will likely get a fellow's head pinched off. Figuratively, certainly. Literally, perhaps.

Kathy drives a 1975, Ford nine passenger station wagon with only 108,537 miles on it—he notices and remembers mileage when he gets behind a wheel. But her blue Ford has been on Kodiak long enough that where the rear spring hangers bolt to the body there is only rust. The body is gone. A wood four-by-four wedged lengthwise supports the back of her rear spring on the passenger side. On the driver's side, her former boyfriend's makeshift repair using a piece of channel iron seems to work well. And a three foot long length of barbwire serves as her radio antenna.

"I need to give you a pay raise so you can buy less of a gashog. What does it take to fill this tank? Thirty-five dollars?" He can hardly borrow her car and not fill it.

"Pretty close. . . . But this beater is enough car for on the island here. Besides, it handles really well on the ice."

He tries to imagine Sharon riding in the Ford, and can't. She wouldn't. No, not Sharon. They met after he acquired the agency. Her father had a history of some sort before arriving in Kodiak, but once here he worked his way up from the docks to managing the Pacific Pearl cannery before dying suddenly from lung cancer—a month after the cancer was detected, he was dead.

Sharon was in college when her father died. She returned from Seattle for his funeral, then returned to Kodiak to stay at the end of that semester. She is a year older than he. They were introduced at the Crab Festival, where both of them served on the committee to make sure everything goes right. That was seven years ago. Seven years and two children he-doesn't-know-what-to-do-with ago. Both kids have been in the best daycare on the island, have had everything they want. But nothing seems good enough for Jeremy, and Jenifer

already has her mother's temperament. He imagines that's to be expected; he feels sorry for whomever she marries.

Windshield wipers flap, and tires sing as rain falls at a forty-five degree angle. They pass the Buskin River and the airport, Woman's Bay and Salmonie Creek without the rain easing up. The Ford rattles enough that conversation is impractical. Besides, what is he to say to his secretary? She really could've stayed and kept the office open. When he borrowed her car last May, there was something wrong with the carburetor: the float stuck, letting gas pour out the carburetor's top vents and over the top of the hot engine. The situation seemed horribly dangerous. He thinks Walt changed carbs, but he tries to stay out of his employees' affairs.

Until a month ago, he also had a receptionist, Barbara Collins. But Sharon never liked her; finally insisted that he let her go, leaving him shorthanded and making the situation at home no better. Sharon, he thinks, suspected him of having an affair with Barbara. Well, he wasn't. No love life at home doesn't mean he is having sex with someone else. He just isn't interested in sex right now. Hasn't been for quite awhile.

A fox stands drenched in the middle of the road before they reach Middle Bay. It doesn't move until he almost hits it, and he wonders aloud what's wrong with it.

"Suppose it's rabid?" Kathy asks, staying as far on her side of the front seat as is practical.

He doesn't answer. He's trying to picture Sharon riding with him out to Chiniak Bay, and he can't visualize her riding anywhere with him. She thinks pickups are too utilitarian, and he doesn't smoke, doesn't like riding in her car, which reeks of smoke. So whether it's to the store or wherever else, they waste fuel and effort by each having his and her own vehicle. They even take separate vehicles to church when they go, which doesn't seem all that often any more. He doesn't know if he can stand to hear one more sermon about being prepared for Y2K, which will be here and gone before

he ever gets around to buying a twenty-five pound bag of rice, let alone everything else he's supposed to have.

A doe dives across the road a little after they cross the American River. He dogs the brakes, but she is in front of them and gone before he can stop.

He finishes stopping. No traffic is in sight, not that he can see far in the rain, so he sits there in the middle of the road as if reorientating himself. Finally, turning to look at where the doe disappeared, he says, "That was close."

"The brakes work."

As he looks across Kathy at where the doe entered the alders, he wonders how he got pushed into marrying Sharon. He would be a lot happier, maybe, if they'd never met. He knows he would be, has known that from the beginning, has stayed because leaving takes too much effort. Then there are Jeremy and Jenifer, his responsibilities; he is nothing if not responsibilities personified. And he wishes he had a choice.

Wind whips around alders, their bare branches like grasping fingers, never quite able to clutch a handful of rain that hits them, then bounces away to gather in rivulets that run along the edges and down the middle of the road, braiding and unbraiding themselves until they fall into ditches, already flooding.

The Ford climbs the headland between Middle Bay and Kalsin Bay, where the road is washboarded, potholed, then almost muddy in spots. The rearend chatters as it bounces over the roughness. Fenders rattle, their vibrations somewhat muffled by the hardness of the rain that pounds.

The surf below booms.

Then just as they start down towards the Inn, the rearend seems to jump up three feet. "What the—" He looks behind them in time to see the spare tire roll off the edge of the road and over the bank and down, out of sight.

Stopping, getting out, checking the back of the wagon, he sees that the bottom under where the spare should be has been eaten by rust, has given way, letting the tire drop out.

Kathy, beside him, says, "Looks like it has cancer."

Stepping across the road, Alvin, now soaked, the rain running off him as if he were in a cold shower, looks over the side and down at the surf three hundred feet below. "I think you need another spare."

As she opens her door to get back in, Kathy yells across at him, "It looks pretty gone, doesn't it?"

He stands looking at the surf, doubting that he can get much wetter, sure now that her car has it out for him. The wind pushes against him, causing him to spread his legs, bracing himself. A fawn, about halfway down the cliff face, stands with its back to the wind. He wonders how it got to the outcropping on which it stands, a patch of dirt and rock the size of a pizza pan; he wonders how it will get off without killing itself. And he realizes that it won't. He shudders, and the wind tips him forward, almost toppling him over the face.

When he opens the Ford's door, the wind grabs it and wrestles him for control. He wins, but not before gallons of rain soak his seat and dash.

The windshield has fogged, and the starter hesitates for longer than usual before spinning its Bendix. And while he waits for the defroster to clear the fog, he wonders about the harshness of nature, a harshness that will slay the fawn without remorse, without pity, without thought. If he were a different person, he would try to rescue the fawn, but he is who he is and nature is what it is and there's nothing he can do no matter how much he wishes that weren't so. He can only feel sorry for the fawn, and he does; he feels awful. But what if it were Jeremy over the edge? What would he do? Call the Coast Guard, the troopers. What else could he do? But they won't come out for a deer.

He would tell Kathy about the fawn, but she would want them to do something, or at least he thinks she would. So he says nothing, the fawn becoming another one of his little secrets, each eating away at him like rust.

He thinks about stopping at the Inn for a cup of coffee. Anything warm actually. But he doesn't. And they are across the

Olds River and past the Pasagshak Bay turnoff before he stops thinking about stopping.

The trailer isn't all the way out to the old radar site. It's about a mile before, and they're almost past the driveway into where it was parked before he knows it.

The policyholder has already righted it.

He sees the extent of the damage, dollarwise probably more than it's worth. But the Millers family has little money and nowhere else to live. And again, that organic conspiracy forces him into inaction.

"Well," Kathy asks, "what will you tell them?"

"I should total out the trailer, and let the policyholder find something else. That would be best dollarwise for everyone."

"And make Barbara live in the trailer just the way it is for the next five years, you know that'll be what happens. She won't get any of the damage fixed up. The money will get spent on bills, and she'll just have to make do. No, you aren't going to do that to her."

"Who am I supposed to be representing, the underwriter or the client or his wife?"

"Don't give me that. Barbara had a pretty nice place here."

"You're right, she did." No one is around. So after he makes a few notes, he leaves his card closed in the door, his okay to proceed with repairs written on its back. "Well, does that satisfy you, Kathy?"

"Yes." She pats his knee. "It's nice out here. Trees and the bay. Real pretty. If it wasn't so far to drive, I'd like to live out here."

"I made a deal with Omar a few years ago. Got a piece of property back towards his ranch."

"I bet Sharon would like living out here."

"You don't know her." The windshield is fogged and the defroster doesn't seem strong enough to clear more than a spot the size of a dinner plate. "She doesn't even know I have the place—would make me get rid of it if she knew."

"Why? It's so pretty out here."

"Not to her. She'd rather be in Anchorage."

“Los Anchorage, the zoo. Not me. I like this. The wind, the rain, the branches all whipping around. There’s power here, real power, the kind that makes me feel alive.”

“Think we should stay until someone shows up. I imagine the policyholder will be back before long.”

“Bob and Barbara are not just policyholders, they’re people. You know that. . . . I know your wife calls all of our clients policyholders. She never uses anyone’s name. But they all have names. Around me, use them, please.”

She’s right. He should use their names, and they should turn around and go. But he says nothing; he doesn’t move as he waits for the defroster to do a better job. Outside, the wind picks up. Even over the engine and the defroster, he hears spruce groan as they bend. Whistling, snapping, the wind twists branches and rocks the Ford, rattling rusted fenders.

“You know, Kathy, you’re a pretty smart woman. I’m glad I hired you.”

“Good. I’d like to believe I’m useful.”

A creak they both hear, loud, almost like a sticky door—he turns to look at her, and sees her looking at him just as a spruce topples over, across the driveway. For a moment, its limbs support its weight, but only for a moment. They break, letting its three-foot trunk settle into the gravel drive, blocking their return to the Chiniak Road.

“I suppose,” Kathy asks, “that’s the only way out?”

It is. He knows it is. “I don’t believe this. We’re stuck here until somebody comes with a saw.”

“How far is it to walk? Where’s the nearest place?”

“I’m not walking, and you aren’t either. Somebody will be along in a little while.” He tries the radio, hoping for a weather report, but gets nothing. Not sure whether it’s her antenna or their location, he turns off the static, listens to the wind for a minute, then says, “We’ll sit here until somebody comes along.”

“You’re sure somebody will?”

“Sure enough not to walk in this weather.”

-5-

Watching the hole in the rain into which Peggy disappeared fill with darkness, John wonders if fate has again brought them together. But before he has the chance to dwell on the role of fate in human affairs, one of the fishermen at the back table asks, "You're Jacob's other boy, John?"

"I am." He thinks he might recognize one of the fishermen, both older than himself by a decade or more.

"Your dad flew out to get your mother. I'll give you a ride up the hill when you're ready."

"You don't have to—"

"I wanta." And the fisherman leaves it at that.

Now that he has been identified, the waitress no longer acts as if she's the daughter of the woman who married Bear.

He receives a platter full of chunked halibut and French fries, the amount obviously an appeasement offering. So he eats what he can, then asks for a box to take the rest with him. And as he pays, the fisherman rises to go with him.

Outside, the fisherman says, "I don't imagine you remember me. I crewed for your dad when you first went away."

"Teddy, ah, I don't remember—"

"Rudin. Didn't expect that you would." The fisherman points to a pickup in the Harbormaster's lot, and says, "Get in. There's something you need to know."

They hurry through the rain, and both wet, beneath the eerie light cast from the harbor, they get in an older Datsun pickup, the passenger side really too small for John, who sits with his knees almost against his chin.

"Nobody's home up at your old man's house. You wanta go out to the Mecca?" The pickup starts, its engine sounding tinny, like one of those metal crickets he, John, had as a boy, each one *Made in Japan*, none of them worth a tinker's dam.

"What do you want to tell me?"

“It be easier out at the Mecca.” The fisherman has already turned onto Fishhook Road.

“All right. But I need to let Sis know I made it in.”

“You can call her from out there.”

He rides, waiting for what he suspects will have some importance. He rides, wondering why his dad hadn’t called him to tell him about his brother’s death; he knows why. But what can he do about losing faith, about giving up on the Church with its many holidays, about living how he wants, not shackled by taboos and superstitions. So he rides thinking about Peggy Sue, remembering youthful passions and a rubber that slipped off. She got scared, and that ended what would otherwise have been a wonderful though meaningless relationship.

He told Uncle Ivan what happened, but he never dared tell his dad. If he had, there wouldn’t have been any college, wouldn’t have been any getting off the island. He would’ve married her. His dad would’ve seen to that. And he would’ve been just another fisherman, spending his off-seasons in the Mecca or Guennie’s, maybe the Ships, no different than J other than he would have been a fisherman who spent his seasons seasick, living with bile in his mouth and nothing in his stomach, an Aleut anomaly, and able to tell no one.

The wind always seems to blow harder out Fishhook Road than in town. Tonight is no exception.

Wind tugs against the Datsun’s doors as he ducks as much rain as possible. Once inside—he knows his way around in all of the island’s bars—he heads for the end of the bar where second beers are occasionally forgotten. And claiming a stool, he asks the fisherman, “Now, as you were saying?”

“My wife’s cousin was on your brother’s boat.”

He doesn’t understand the significance of the statement other than Teddy’s extended family has also suffered loss.

“I’m sorry to hear that. I take it, he’s also missing? Or was he found?”

“He’s missing.” Teddy drains his bottle as if it were water and he was dying of thirst. “His wife gotta call this mornin from an Anchorage lawyer. She’s gonna sue your dad, says your dad can afford it. . . . Wrongful death. . . . This here lawyer says she can win.”

He knows of a few ambulance chasers, but this one is quicker than most: “I wouldn’t know if she can, but you can tell her I’ll defend my dad. You know that, though?”

“I think some of the others are gonna sue.” The fisherman avoids looking at John as he talks, instead, to the mirror behind the bar. He seems to disapprove of suing, but apparently feels he has to support his family. “Thought I’d tell yeah.”

“I can’t tell them not to, but you know Dad will take care of them if he’s given a chance.” He doesn’t know if he should tell his dad in advance—he certainly won’t tell him before the funerals. “Who’s the attorney? Maybe I know him.”

It isn’t usual for crewmembers to file lawsuits unless there has been obvious wrongdoing since the vessel’s insurance company usually offers fair compensation; plus, the state will be involved. All of this might be the pain of losing a loved one talking. But talk of a lawsuit the day the vessels go down, he is surprised any attorney would take a case this soon after an event. But Anchorage has its share of sharks.

“Dunno who they are. Armstrong, maybe. I heard but don’t ‘member.” Teddy lifts his second beer and chugs half of it without taking a breath.

John’s face shows no emotion, but if the firm is Armstrong & Armstrong, then something serious is afoot. Armstrong & Armstrong are heavy hitters who take few contingency cases so someone with money has an interest in who drowned, which seems odd concerning both his brother and Uncle Ivan hired locally in Port Adams. He knows the Anchorage firm only by reputation. They once represented the Sisters in a Cook Inlet oil spill case, but, he will have to check the details, something happened that caused them to dump the whole thing. The Coast Guard took over clean up

efforts, and in-house counsel represented each of the Sisters in the ensuing court action.

“Thanks for the tip—and the lift. I need to call Sis, and I’m sure she’ll want me to go home with her. So I’ll see you around.” John stands to go.

“Your uncle, he’s out there. He’s alive. . . . You need to be findin him.”

That his Uncle Ivan was also missing had sort of slipped his mind. He has been only been thinking about his brother, J Jr.

“You need to be looking for your uncle—he’s like a bad knife you can’t lose. He’s out there, waitin for yuh.”

“You sound pretty sure—”

“He’s singin. I can hear ‘im, been hearin ‘im all afternoon. That’s what me ‘n Ed was talkin about when you came in the cafe. Ed can hear ‘im, too. Just as plain as I hear you.” The fisherman, laying a twenty dollar bill on the bar, adds, “I don’t wanta hear ‘im. That’s why I’m gonna get drunk.”

He hears nothing besides Teddy, the din of the bar, a pan bang in the kitchen, the wind, rain—and he suspects the fisherman is already a little drunk. “All right, Teddy. I give up. What are you hearing?” He’s sure his dad has relied on the Coast Guard to search for missing crewmembers, that his dad hasn’t been out himself. But the Coast Guard does a good job. If there’s anything or anybody to find, they will find them.

“Hear ‘im singin . . . his spirit song.”

Certain now that Teddy is drunk, he wonders about the accuracy of a lawsuit. Nevertheless, he feels like he should ask out of politeness: “I don’t hear anything so you will have to describe what you’re hearing.”

As seriously as if saying that his wife had served salmon fritters for dinner, the fisherman answers, “His spirit song, a whalesong, maybe, like the recordins they play over there in Sitka at the Whale Festival. Yuhno, you’ve heard ‘em. Only different. Maybe more like what yuh hear when yuh hear a raven a long ways off, like he’s callin for help. Spooky, real spooky. Kinda gets yuh right here,”

Teddy pushes the flat side of his fist against his sternum. "I don't like it. . . . Your uncle, he's singin his spirit song 'n I shouldn't be hearin it. He was always a little different, but he never done nothin like this before. . . . Yuh gotta find him."

John exhales a long breath as he wonders if a new designer drug is making itself known on the island, or if it is the same old one Father Gregory peddles. Sometimes it's hard for an observer to tell the difference.

"I have to go. I'll tell Dad what you said."

"Yuh gotta find 'im, Kid. Yuh gotta go look for 'im."

"Coasties are looking for him—"

"No they ain't. They give up. . . . That was about when your uncle started singin. He wants your dad to come, 'n your dad ain't here so yuh gotta do it, Kid." Teddy finishes his fourth beer. "He's too fuckin spooky to listen to. Yuh gotta go after 'im."

If the Coast Guard has called off its search for survivors, he will have to take over that search, but tonight, it's too late and too dark to do anything. "All right, Teddy, I'll do that. Just don't drink yourself to death tonight. Uncle Ivan can't be that spooky."

"You ain't hearin 'im."

"You're right, I'm not hearing what you are." Silently, he adds, "Nor am I drunk or crazy either."

From the pay phone just inside the Mecca's door, he calls his sister, who hurries over to pick him up.

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Never the outdoor type, Alvin Winesap no more wants to walk from his office to his pickup in the rain than he wants to pick jellyfish from a shackle of gillnet. However, he does walk to his pickup because he really hasn't any choice, and he hasn't any choice now either: for two hours, he and Kathy have discussed everything but walking. They agree that G. Gordon Liddy has a better show than Rush has, but they listen to Rush when Liddy and Rush go head to head. They both think that Vince Foster's body was moved,

that there are too many unexplainable deaths surrounding the Clintons, that Hillary should have left Bill years ago. They like country music, particularly Garth Brooks. They both root for the Atlanta Braves when their games are televised on the Super Station; they both have, in the past, rooted against the Chicago Bulls, regardless of who they played, because of Dennis Rodman. They both think Alaskans were screwed by D-2, that Jimmy Carter was an idiot, but moral, and that Bill Clinton is the most corrupt president this nation has ever elected. Neither of them know anyone who will admit voting for Clinton, nor do either know anyone who doesn't think Alaska would be better off as an independent country, not that either of them expect to see that happen any time soon. They differ, that they found, only on the relative merits of Green Peace—Kathy thinks the organization does some good while he would like to see the green weanies harpooned.

He hasn't been able, because of his business, to freely express his opinions for years; so the chance to talk, sitting here together in her station wagon, the rain sweeping through in waves, touching everything, is perhaps the first time he has ever addressed aloud most of these subjects. The experience is exhilarating, and a little unnerving. Sharon leaves the house if he happens to turn Rush on at home.

But they can't sit here forever. Besides, they have run the engine enough keeping warm that the gas gauge is already down aways; so saying, "Stay here," as if she had anywhere to go, he climbs across the spruce and starts back towards town, twenty-four miles away, little knowing that he'll have to walk as far as Omar's before finding help.

His shoes are intended for use in an office. Chinese wingtips he bought from some catalogue. They hurt his feet, raise blisters and let him feel every pebble. After a hundred yards, every step is agony, and he has six more miles to go before he even reaches Omar's.

He counts his steps, reaches ten, wants to cry, and starts counting over again as rain slices across Kalsin Bay. His jacket is

already soaked; his pants are wet, as is his shirt, T-shirt and shorts. So before he has gone a half mile, he couldn't be wetter if he went swimming with his clothes on.

He would turn around and spend the night or however long it takes for someone to find him in the car if it weren't for Kathy. He reminds himself that her car hates him, that he always has to walk when he takes it, and that he really likes her, but that he is married and for the sake of his kids needs to stay married although he wishes he had never met Sharon, let alone had relations with her prior to marriage; wishes he had met Kathy when they were both free to be who they both are. Now, they both have to conceal who they are to get along in this world. He wishes the rain would end and that his feet wouldn't hurt and that a car would come along, or maybe the Coast Guard, for he wouldn't mind being rescued right about now, and he still has five more miles to walk to even reach Omar's.

The second mile is the first mile made worse, times ten. Already the sky is dark and he is chilled to the point he has to keep moving to stay warm, and he hasn't had enough to eat so he's running out of blood sugar, which causes a headache; and coupled with his feet that are boil-tender and a groin pull from overexercising a muscle that hasn't seen this much use cumulatively in the past five years, he doesn't think he will make it and he would stop if it weren't for Kathy back there expecting him to return with help. His life is a runon sentence and there doesn't seem to be anything he can do about it, at least not until he gets help for Kathy.

By the time he is in his fourth mile walking, he is certain he won't make it, and he has to stop, which as soon as he sits he realizes is a mistake as he can't get back up.

He sits in the rain, numb as a rock that groans in travail, an expression that has always interested him. He sits absolutely motionless for ten minutes, maybe more. Realizing that if he sits there long enough he will die from exposure and that he might already be dead, he tries to stand—he hurts too much to be dead. Stiffly, he takes a step, then another.

Now he stops every little bit, the stops becoming more frequent as the night darkens. If it weren't for Kathy, he would give up, here, where he can see the lights from Omar's house. He would sit in the middle of the road until, well—he isn't suicidal, but he hurts too much to continue and he doesn't care if he lives, not any more, not for the last three miles.

Omar's hired hand pulls him through the door and seats him beside an oilstove and strips his clothes, and he is too stiff to help or to resist. "Good grief, man, how far have you walked?"

He can think his answer, but he can't make his mouth work.

The hired man rubs his arms and legs, forces warm tea down his throat, and keeps him near the stove. After five minutes, perhaps a few more, his voice returns and he says, "A tree fell across the Millers' driveway. We were stuck behind it."

"We? You have someone with you? Still there?"

"Yes." And he hears the hired man raise the Inn on his CB radio, then a couple minutes later hears a vehicle race past, heading for Chiniak.

"They're," the hired man says, "taking a saw out. . . . In those shoes, dressed the way you are, you're damn lucky to make it in this weather, damn lucky."

"Believe me, I feel anything but lucky." All of him hurts, some spots too much to touch, some places too much to think about. He won't be wearing shoes for awhile, not with his blisters, raw and ulcerated across the backs of both heels and on the ball of his left foot.

It's after midnight by the time Kathy pulls into Omar's circle drive. His clothes are still wet so he carries them while wearing a pair of the hired man's jeans and a gray mackinaw, worn thin by a generation of users.

The trip back into town seems a blur. When Kathy—he hurts too much to drive a car that has it in for him—pulls into his driveway, he is surprised to see two of his suitcases sitting in the rain on his front step. Walking barefoot while Kathy backs out of

his driveway to turn around, he steps around the suitcase as he reaches for the door, which is locked.

The house is dark as if nobody is home—and nobody answers the doorbell when he rings it, twice.

His key is in his trousers' pocket. He finds it as Kathy pulls away, and he finds that it doesn't fit in the lock. The lock is even of a different manufacturer.

He stands in the rain, shivering, still a little numb, emotionally dead, and he hasn't a thought. His eyes see, but the impressions they register make no meaning. And all he hears is the wind and rain.

The headlights of Kathy's Ford pull back into his driveway and pass across him as if he were one of the bushes along the walk. He feels the light strike him, feels paralyzed, then feels terribly hurt, the weight of the headlights like that of sandbags hung inside his chest.

"You might as well," Kathy hollers, "grab your bags and get in. You know what's going on."

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Jacob draws his wife close as she cries, his own eyes wet. All of those years he bucked into blows, took chances that really didn't seem like chances at the time, he knew, has always known she would take his death hard, but he never thought about how a mishap to J or John might effect her. He has always thought of J being his son, of J following in his steps. He supposes he always thought of J being an extension of himself; yet, J might have always been hers.

He sits, his back as stiff as if it were his plunging pole, his face as rigid as stone. He seems as immovable as a bronze sculpture. Yet inside him, he quivers like a mountain about to erupt.

He feels Mary's sobs, hears her muttered, why, why, and for now twenty hours, he has had no answers. Maybe there isn't a reason, there isn't anyone to blame, isn't fault that can be assigned.

Then why does he feel like he's at fault? Why can't he say it was time-and-chance? Why is he so angry at himself?

This is one of those times when words cannot comfort, when being numb inside is a blessing, but he's not numb inside. Anger hangs from his heart like an anchor poised to drop, ready to fall and bring life to a halt. He feels that anger, handles it, strokes it, but he doesn't release it. He is to be strong. He has been so far, and he will be tomorrow. But he wants to erupt, explode, hurl things around; he wants to kill this thing that hurts so bad. Instead, inner tears fall like rain on Kupreanof, a trickle becoming a torrent until only the sea can hold them.

He should be working, should be getting something done, should be staying busy. That should be the balm which soothes his anger, raw as a January blow. This spending the day doing nothing gives the hollowness time to multiply, gives him time to think, and right now, the last thing he wants to do is think; yet his thoughts keep returning to that red, white and blue string top, and casting it across Grandma Mutukin's floor and seeing it stand upright as if it were a person. He is like that top, upright as long as he stays spinning. And he worries about what happens if he drops his anger and lets it catch ahold of the bottom as if his anger were an anchor. No, he can't drop his anger; he has to hold it, has to hold it in as he wonders if he knows a story about letting go of his anger, but he can't think of any so he sits here, still as bronze sculpture, holding his anger in.

He's taken a lot of life: salmon, halibut, shrimp, crabs, sea lions, seals, deer, a couple of bears, even a stray dog or two. One minute they're alive, looking you in the eye, defiant, trusting, scared. The next, they're meat. Where did that life go? He once caught and held a hummingbird; felt its heart beat as fast as his first Evinrude idled. Where is it now? As much as he would like to believe J Jr. is somewhere other than dead, he can't. Hearts are hearts. Lies are lies, even if told with the best of intentions. Father Gregory's passport to heaven will make Mary feel better, but it's

just another lie. If not, then God mocks us all by promising resurrection at His Second Coming.

He has lived as he believes he should so why does he hurt so much? Why does he feel betrayed?

He knows the easy answers, has even tossed them out himself, like throwing taffy during the Salmon Festival parade. Chewy. Tasty. Not very nourishing. He's empty inside, absolutely empty—except for the anger, which, like the whirlpool behind Iskai Island, sucks faith from him until he believes only what he sees. And what he sees is rage, inherited from generations of hunters deceived into exchanging a lie for their birthright.

But he sits passively, his arm around Mary, as they await the announced departure time. An old Aleut couple, that's what the passengers see who hurry past them. Two Aleuts, with sadness written on their faces. Two faces, wrinkled, with tears and secrets. Two lives, timeless, ageless, historic, but not heroic.

Their departure is announced.

Jacob helps his wife up, then takes her bags and shepherds her outside where cold dives through his layers of clothing. The planes flown to Port Adams are always too small to use a jetway.

Once in the air, he shrinks into his seat back, smiles at the stewardess who offers nuts and juice, but otherwise, he looks straight ahead. He has, since he left the wheelhouse for the office desk, made this trip hundreds of time. Before, he has always looked forward to returning to his island. This evening, in the early darkness, it doesn't seem to matter if he ever returns. Nothing seems very important. Not even Mary.

The plane bounces a little as it passes over the icefields before leaving the Mainland behind. Wind pitches it around some. Then it begins descending, slips sideways, touches down and rolls a long, long, long ways. He doesn't remember the airstrip being so long; he barely remembers leaving for Anchorage yesterday.

John and young Mary, Sis to everyone in the family, await their arrival. Sis hugs her mother, not turning loose her embrace, while he nods to John, who extends his hand and won't let him

pass until they shake. He had wished that both of his sons would follow him to sea. But once John became a teenager, John began to dislike fish gurry on his raingear; would make off-color remarks revealing knowledge he shouldn't yet have; would belittle the old ways he now wears like oilskins. This son who mangles words, like his brother Ivan, is never who he seems to be. Unlike Ivan, though, John has become successful in the Outside world; John has become a very good attorney. For that he should feel pride. But how does he admit his son is a shark who eats other sharks.

"Dad, Teddy Rudin believes Uncle Ivan is still alive. Coast Guard has written him off, but I've been out most of the day flying coastline. I need your knowledge of tides and currents."

Jacob scowls. "Why does Teddy—"

"He claims he can hear Uncle Ivan singing. I know that doesn't make sense, but he believes it . . . and I'm willing to look." John senses more than he perhaps realizes that this visit home will shape his relationship with his father. Everything is in his hands, and he will determine how it all turns out. "What do you think? Is Teddy with it? . . . He also said you would be sued. Wrongful death. An Anchorage firm, big name. So don't say anything to anybody. Let me talk. This is what I know."

Jacob nods, rocking slowly, very slowly fore and aft from his mid-chest upwards, moving as if he isn't moving at all. Finally, he asks, "Where is Teddy? I need to talk to him."

"I left him last night in the Mecca. Getting drunk. He might still be there . . . if he's still hearing Uncle Ivan singing. Claimed what Uncle Ivan was singing was real spooky."

Turning to Sis, Jacob says, "Take your mother home. John and I, we will be along. We have things to do."

Sis takes her mother's bags, then the two of them find a bench where they sit, her mother's face against her breasts, and they cry. John worries a little because he doesn't feel J's loss that strongly. In fact, his brother seems almost like just another fisherman. The loss of life troubles him, but less so than he would've expected. It's his Uncle Ivan whom he now misses.

Following his dad outside to the parking lot, he sees his dad's pickup: "What happened?"

"Limb." Jacob adds nothing; nothing more needs to be said.

The passenger-side door hangs for the briefest moment before swinging free. "You'll have to get that pounded out, or the rust worms will eat up your truck."

Jacob doesn't acknowledge his son's observation. It sounds too much like his brother reminding him that he had to grease his boat's bearings or the grease worms would eat them up. The grease worms had to be fed, but Ivan never owned a grease gun. His brother is too typical of how the Outside world perceives, who? himself? Who is Aleut? Native? His son, with his long hair and corporate life? Himself, a businessman, a fisherman, whose father was a cod fisherman, part Russian, part Aleut. His mother was part Russian, part Norwegian, part Eskimo. Her mother was one of *the people*. That's a long ways back. How much of that blood is in him? Ivan inherited the stereotype. They both received the feel for catching fish, but he got the Norwegian hearing difficulty: he doesn't believe what he's told; he has to go see. If the marine weather forecast calls for a storm, instead of staying in port he has to go see if it's rough too fish; then on the grounds, he'll fish for awhile to see just how rough it is. Pretty quick, he's a highliner, one of those boats others envy. That's the difference between himself and Ivan. Yes, they look like brothers, both look like old Aleut fishermen, short, heavy shoulders, strong arms and hands, but they don't think alike. They're as different as the Bering and the Pacific.

It must have been the milk Mary fed his sons that gave them their height—he grew up on fish, salmon mostly because there was a market for cod and herring. He didn't eat milk or cheese, Outside food. They ate beach greens in the spring because his mother said the greens cleaned out all of the old fish in them. Then they ate seals because they needed the new fat. Then salmon—fresh, smoked, dried, salted—until the following spring when the cycle started over again. He was never much of a mussel eater, and now, they taste like diesel fuel. Never ate many clams or

crabs or octopus. Once in a great while, they got a little whale meat, usually from one that drifted ashore. They ate some halibut, but all of the big ones, like cod, had to be sold. And most years all they could catch were big ones.

Is he Aleut because he ate traditional food? So did Ron Johnson, the Methodist missionary's boy. Ron's not Native now. But J and John ate pizza and hamburgers, and they are Aleut. And Ron's boy has hair as long as John's. They look like a couple of tall girls from behind.

Rain bounces off the pavement as wind whips around dead fireweed stalks and the heavy stems of wild rhubarb. His headlights catch a crossfox in the road, and without thinking, he tells John, "You could catch him easy."

"How? The way you did, nail a can of sardines to a log?"

"That works. Rain doesn't wash the scent away, and a fox stays till he gets his toes pinched." He wishes now he had not mentioned the fox. His son always thinks his ways are too simple even when they work better than more complicated ways.

"I told what you said about trapping foxes to a kid in Juneau. He paid a year's tuition at Southeast Alaska on what he caught just around the city dump. So I guess your sardines work."

He hears but doesn't hear what he son says. He's thinking about the old ways, which only go back to when the priests arrived. Before then, nobody remembers how things were done. Nothing could be written down. So if a story was forgotten, then the story never happened. Like life.

Remembered are rosy finches, magic, and the killing of fathers and sons—throw a sealion gut across a strait, then walk across on a path of horsetail grass. Little wonder elders believed priests.

He turns from Marine Way onto Fishhook, and as if driven by the wind, sails passed the new cannery the Moonies build. Another market, another set of stories. Old Believers from the Peninsula are building still another cannery. Who's next? The Mormons?

Actually, Old Believers are rebuilding the dock and saltery at Herring Cove; they are trying to escape pizza and hamburgers,

evolution and abortion. He can't blame them. Once their kids try pizza, their battle is lost. Even he, who believes in eating salmon, would take a slice of pizza over a potlucked humpy.

"That Teddy's pickup there?" John points to a rusted Datsun as they turn into the Mecca's parking lot.

Wind snaps slender willows in the ditch as he might a length of crabline. It presses rain and darkness against them. They push back, lean forward, and fight their way into the bar, where Teddy sits at a far table, his back against the wall, his pants wet from where he has peed. Teddy hasn't shaved, hasn't changed clothes since John left him yesterday.

Jacob, leaning forward from his hips, keeping his back straight, marches towards Teddy as if he, Jacob, were wading into the surf to retrieve his skiff. John knows his dad's strength so he isn't surprised when Jacob lifts Teddy from his chair. What surprises him, though, is his dad half dragging, half carrying Teddy towards the door as if moving a length of driftwood.

Before Teddy can protest, he is outside and in the bed of Jacob's pickup. Tossing John his keys, Jacob climbs into the bed and pushes Teddy farther towards the cab, then says, "Drive home. We have work to do."

As John starts the pickup, he grimaces as he remembers that his dad would've rescued him in the same manner if his dad knew the half of what he'd done. Both his dad and Uncle Ivan can lift full barrels of diesel. He might be a lot taller and in very good shape, but he can't imagine provoking his dad or his uncle. He would lose. Most other strong men would. Now fishing is enough mechanized that over in Kodiak there is even a boat with an all woman crew. But when his dad and his uncle were young men, pulling gear was by arm strength, especially if fellows were too impatient to let the sea work for them—and young men always are, or so he's been told. He's almost old enough to believe that's so.

Sis's car blocks the driveway.

It appears as if every light in the house is on. Light pours through the windows and wars with the rain until it lies stunned

in the yard and on the driveway, but it the bushes alongside the sidewalk, it stands on limbs and stretches as it amasses strength to forge across the wet concrete where it's beaten flat and left unconscious.

Jacob pulls Teddy's arm around his shoulders, and taking his weight, drags the fisherman's stumbling feet up the steps, through the back door, and into the kitchen, where Teddy is slung into a captain's chair, its arms keeping the fisherman from landing on the floor. To his son, Jacob says, "He probably hasn't eaten. You fix him a couple of eggs. I'll make coffee."

Sis enters the kitchen, and takes the egg carton from her brother. She says, "Mom's taking this real bad. Worse than I expected . . . but I dunno what I expected." She breaks three eggs in a bowl, then looks up, and asks, "Anybody else want some? Now's the time to speak up."

"You fix," Jacob says, "those for him. We'll eat later." Then to Teddy, he says, "John, here, tells me you hear my brother. Maybe you hear the wind, I don't know. But you will help find Ivan. . . . You should give up drinking. You're a bad drunk. Your wife should fillet you with a bait knife."

Teddy hangs his head between his knees as if trying to keep from passing out.

John finally notices that his dad is soaked: "Go get dry clothes on, Dad. I'll sit with Teddy, will make sure he's fine."

Jacob nods, then steps from the kitchen.

"What do you think, Sis? Think Uncle Ivan has a chance?"

Hoarsely, Teddy whispers, "He's still singing, but not very loud. Not gonna make it to mornin'."

John pulls a chair close to Teddy's while Sis folds the omelet over: "What exactly to you hear?"

Returning after only changing his shirt, Jacob says, "There's things the old folks talked about when they didn't think us kids were listening. Stuff about shamans, Raven, Rosyfinch. Stuff you don't know about, John, nor you Sis. Stuff you shouldn't know

about. Stuff Ivan knows. Stuff I know about but don't practice so I don't hear it. But Teddy, here, he believes the old stuff, huh?"

Teddy just shakes his head as if trying to shake Ivan's song from his mind. Mostly limp, he can barely stay in the chair.

"Teddy, you're gonna help us find him, tonight. So you gotta sober up." Jacob grasps the fisherman shoulder and levers him upright. "You shoulda been helping John look for him, hear."

"Dad, what are you telling me? What's this old stuff?"

Jacob turns towards his son, and his voice like the roll of the surge splashes over John's head as he says, "You think being in a corporation makes you Aleut, or maybe that long hair makes you Aleut. You're no more Aleut than a sanddollar, maybe less—"

"Dad, no!" Sis places her hand over John's mouth so he can't answer. "If we don't know the old ways, it's 'cause you didn't teach them to us. It's your fault, not John's."

Turning his back to them, Jacob says to no one in particular, "The old ways are no good, they're evil. Your mother never wanted you to know them. She's Christian, a Believer."

"So are you, aren't you, Dad?" asks Sis.

"Not like your mother. She's believes Father Gregory."

"So Teddy could actually be hearing Uncle Ivan in some mystic way?" asks John.

"My brother . . . he has a spirit helper, a demon that comes to him as a whale. . . . I've known for a long time." Using Teddy's arm, Jacob again levers him upright. "That demon, he is very powerful, but he is afraid of me. . . . We have met."

"You sound, Dad," John says, "serious." Puzzled, he feels betrayed never having seen this side of his father, nor even imagining it. "What do we do?"

Jacob, with both hands now on Teddy's shoulders, says, "We get him sobered up. . . . I have a different spirit. Demons won't come to me any more so we need him." He shakes Teddy.

Backing away until the drainboard stops him, John says, "This is a little too spooky for me, Dad."

Still with one hand on Teddy's shoulder, Jacob now steadies his former crewmember's hand around a cup of coffee. So he talks to his son without looking at him: "You get a lot of business telling clients you're Aleut. It makes good sense for them to hire you. They're paying you protection money to keep the government off their backs, and you're real smart so they're happy, but you're smart like an Outsider. If you were really Aleut, you would be ashamed." Then to Teddy, Jacob asks, "Why do you not help my brother? How have I wronged you?"

Beginning to cry, Teddy slobbers, his mouth seemingly too weak to form consonants. He sobs words in and out, rendering them utterly unintelligible.

"That's it, my old friend. Get a hold of yourself." Jacob continues to steady Teddy's hand with his own. "Get a hold of yourself. You have to sober up. You have to help us."

Having dished up the eggs, Sis leaves the kitchen to check on her mother. She returns a minute later to say, "Mom's asleep."

Still steadying Teddy hand, Jacob says, "It's very important to your mother that you never tell her about Ivan. . . . If you never tell her, she can continue to pretend she doesn't know. She wouldn't want him in the house if she knew."

"I'm sorry, Jacob, sorr . . . " Teddy squares his shoulders some by himself. "Sorry, Jacob, sorry."

Jacob now stands straight himself, but he keeps one hand on Teddy's shoulder as he asks, "What do you hear now?"

"Nothin . . . not now. When yuh put 'hand on me . . . it goes away. . . . I hear you."

"Dad," John, still against the drainboard, asks, "what are you going to do? How do we use him?"

To Teddy, Jacob asks, "What was in the song, what did you hear? . . . Did you hear my brother or only his helper?"

The fisherman shakes his head as if he remembers nothing.

Letting go of his shoulder, stepping away, Jacob nods to Sis as he points to the coffee pot, indicating that he wants a cup. Then to Teddy, he asks, "How do you know you're hearing Ivan?"

Teddy now slumps backwards in the chair, his face towards the ceiling, as he continues to shake his head.

“This looks pretty hopeless, Dad.” John, cautiously, like a kitten approaching a mirror, steps closer to the fisherman. “Is he going to be any help . . . other than letting us know Uncle Ivan is out there, somewhere?”

“Jacob, I hear ‘im, but maybe I only remember hearin’ im, I can’t tell. It’s not loud anymore . . . and the birds are gone.”

“Birds?” This interests him: Jacob asks, “What kind of birds? Murres? Gulls? Eider ducks? This is important?”

His head on the top of the chair back, his arms limp as if he were lying prostrate, Teddy continues to shake his head as if he can’t remember or can’t identify the sound.

John interjects, “Last night he said he heard ravens calling for help from a long ways off. I thought he was drunk.”

Nodding his approval, Jacob says, “That’s good. When you deal with spirits, they don’t want you to remember if they’re not yours. You forget a lot of things . . . like I forget which bird goes with which cape. Some of them the old folks used for names, those are easy to remember. But for some of the capes, other names stuck.”

“You talk like . . .” John doesn’t finish his thought. Realism doesn’t allow for any supernatural elements, but his dad seems to believe that demons and spirit helpers, of which he has always had some awareness, are as real as his parents. But he has an idea: “All we have to do is search capes without bird names?”

“You say, like far away.” Jacob begins to nod as if he alone has solved a puzzle. “My brother, he’s on Five Mile Beach. I know where he is. Let’s go.” Drinking his hot coffee as if it were cold water, Jacob turns to his daughter: “Mary, make a couple pots of coffee, fills a couple of thermoses.” Almost smiling, he adds, “We gonna get wet. We’ll take the Whaler around so we’ll be there before daylight.”

“Dad, wait a minute. What do you know? And how do you make the leap to Five Mile Beach. I don’t get it.”

“I just know. Don’t ask how. I just do.”

"I believe you, but you're not making sense. Help me out here, Dad."

"We go now. . . . You neither Christian nor Aleut so you can't understand, but we gotta go now."

"What about him?" Sis points to Teddy.

"When we go, take him home. Make sure he's okay. And go through the panty here. Take his wife some groceries so she has something to feed him. When he gets like this, he drinks up their grocery money, he always has."

"What about Mom? Will you be back before I have to go to work tomorrow? Five Mile Beach is across the island."

"Have Father Gregory stay with her if you don't think she'll be all right. You're a smart girl, you decide."

John knows that far away weren't his words, but if that's what his father heard, he won't argue. But as he gathers raingear and survival suits, he wonders why they don't wait till morning and fly. Getting pounded and drenched in the skiff isn't much fun, and even with catching the tide through Narrow Pass, they can't possibly get Uncle Ivan back here to the clinic any earlier than if they flew—he hates the taste of bile, its taste more awful each time he goes to sea, making setting out on each trip more difficult, more of an ordeal. Flying is bad enough: because he was airborne, seaching for his uncle, he hasn't eaten all day, and even without anything in his stomach, he spitted, swallowed bile foam for hours. And now his dad wants him along as they run the Whaler around the island.

But his dad evidently knows things he doesn't. He won't argue although it's a stretch to use one phrase to locate his uncle, a huge stretch. Besides, he overflowed Five Mile Beach about ten this morning. He didn't see anything. And all of this is really too spooky for him.

By the time the second pot of coffee and a bag full of sandwiches are made, the survival suits, extra kicker cans full of fuel, and a rifle are loaded in the pickup. . . . John had forgotten how fast his dad, for a short fellow, can move. He works out in a gym four days a

week, runs, and can't keep up. He feels like he is again a kid trying to catch baby ducks, and wondering how the hell can they run so fast on their short little legs and webbed feet.

Unlike Kodiak, Cook's Island isn't on the back side of squalls blown across the Gulf of Alaska. Instead, it stands in the gap. Over the open Gulf the little low pressure cells that formed in the Aleutians grow into true storms, their counterclockwise rotation spiraling their winds low over hundreds of miles of water, then up along Southeast Alaska where they dump feet of rain before twirling their winds over the chilled Mainland and then sweeping them down across the seamount, bringing freezing rain and much more snow, which usually doesn't stick, to Cook's Island. Again, unlike Kodiak where there's usually a break in the weather every third day, rain (and in a couple of weeks from now, snow) can fall without letup for months.

The cold, hard rain shows no sign of letting up as John and his dad park in the Harbormaster's lot, then get out, the tails of their raingear snapping in the wind. His dad wears Helly Hansen green (he has for as long as John can remember), but his gear is the more pliable blaze orange Erikson, which doesn't stop the cold from being pushed through nearly as well.

A surge runs even in the small boat harbor; it rocks hulls, bumping them against pilings and floats. The cleated ramp creaks while down the channel, the whistler moans as wind spills over its throat, calling men home. Wind whistles through the rigging of tethered seiners, whistles over cannery roofs, over the breakwater, over Near Island and around Baranof Rock, marked every eleven seconds by a green light, which John used to confuse for the light on Buoy Seven.

Two automatic bilge pumps keep the Whaler mostly empty of loose water so Jacob has only a few canfulls of rain to bail. During the winter, he keeps a stretched tarp over most of his Whaler, and tonight, instead of removing that tarp, he checks the little cleats to which it's attached, tightening the gangions keeping it snug. The

tarp will be like the deck of a bidarka. Only instead of a paddle for power, he has a two hundred horse Evinrude.

It's not late: fishermen still eat in the cafe. Someone cleans the Harbormaster's office. And if they could see up the hill, they would notice that work continues in the mortuary.

The outboard slobbers as it clears stabilized gas from its cylinders. But after a few minutes its idle cleans up. John casts the Whaler's bow and stern lines aboard, steps aboard, and stows the already wet rifle farther under the tarp. His dad will stand behind the centered console. He takes the seat half under the tarp, just as he did twenty years ago when, in a smaller Whaler and with J beside him, they ran clear to the Mainland. He doesn't even remember the reason why. All he can remember are the Northern Lights that flared above the Chugach Islands as they got close to English Bay—the lights looked like a white sawblade sprung west that seemed to sing as the teeth, one by one, flared like the gas flames of the drilling platforms there in the Inlet. The flares bent west and arched south and eventually filled the night sky, turning the darkness into twilight, giving them light enough to see where they were running as the sea became real confused, confusing his dad, then in his second night without sleep. They had to slow down as waves hit from three directions. But with the twilight, they floundered through, staying wide of rips, and obviously, making it. . . . They came back on a tender, the skiff on its deck, with him and J eating spudnuts in the tender's galley the whole way. They both had belly aches.

Jacob backs the Whaler from its stall, then pointing its bow towards the breakwater, he idles from the harbor. However, once in the channel, where the driven rain smears the tops of the chop, he pushes the throttle forward. The Whaler bounces onto step, its splashed spray catching the dim light and appearing white in an otherwise dark world.

John would prefer being elsewhere, anywhere else like in his Juneau condominium, in bed with a pair of long legs. The legislature attracts a new crop each season: secretaries run like hooligan once

the gavel falls, opening the House and Senate for business. His dad wouldn't approve, wouldn't understand. This is what his dad knows: the sea, tides, currents, the power and the darkness of nature. So as he stifles a sour burp, the taste of bile already in his mouth, he hangs on, knowing what he will have to survive whether they find Uncle Ivan or not.

They are barely past Near Island when the wind rolls their bow spray up, over and around him, drenching him, the salt stinging his eyes, eyes that can't see far in the darkness, that would never try to navigate the inner shortcut through the rocks. He knows these waters, grew up on them, and he would never try what his dad does, is now doing, holding the Whaler on step through the kelp and the rocks, not able to see more than a few feet ahead of them, the rain making the night even darker than it would be usually. It almost seems the inner shortcut is imprinted in his dad's mind as if it were instinct, like how a salmon knows where to go, or an Arctic tern.

J might have tried this. Might have. Uncle Ivan would. In fact, his uncle once said running like this at night was like a pilot flying time and course. Only the times and the courses are all mental. What Uncle Ivan didn't say, though, was that airborne, there are few logs and fewer obstacles to avoid.

This is worse than flying into Juneau in the fog, without radar or radio. This isn't the way he wants to go out. So he has to trust his dad, something that's a little easier tonight than yesterday, that trust carrying with it the taste of bile. But he really isn't someone who trusts people, even his father. He trusts himself, his ability to get things done, his words, the power of which sway juries as if they were molded lime Jello, refrigerated and ready to serve. Only tonight, he is the one who's cold.

What did his dad mean saying he was neither Christian nor Aleut, as if the two labels were poles of a bar magnet, held apart by an steel bridge of nonbelief? Of course he's both. And spray curls over him, washing away his question before objections pattern themselves like iron filings around either pole.

As Jacob steers far inside of Buoy Four, he, Jacob, strains to see the outline of Little Kupreanof Island. Beyond it lies Big Kupreanof and the Narrows—by cutting through the Narrows, he can save an hour's run.

Cook's Island is the largest of a small archipelago: nine islands, all forming the top of one seamount. The Triads are to the south. The two Kupreanofs and Ivanof are to the north. Iskai Bay cuts Cook's Island nearly in two diagonally, making the island, for practical purposes, two separate islands, with St. Peters dominating its smaller western half, and with Port Adams with its road system controlling its eastern half. The Narrows is the passageway between Cook's Island and Big Kupreanof. At low tide, it's too shallow for even seiners; it has always been considered a skiff passage, letting small craft avoid the heavy seas that pound in from the north during winter storms. But when the seas are out of the southwest, it is a waterchute, exploding spray upwards two hundred feet on its west end. Getting out of the Narrows when the seas are from the southwest takes guts and the timing of a magician.

Through the inner shortcut and again in open water, Jacob feels the seas lift the Whaler so he slows to where they're barely on step. The seas steepen, twisting the Whaler sideways, before passing on, rumbling against rocks, large and small, in the darkness off their port side. He listens, waiting to hear the dragging of gravel, knowing that when he does they'll be off Atka beach and not far from the eastern entrance to the Narrows.

The seas steepen more yet, and Jacob has to turn into each wave, keeping the Whaler's bow into the wave's face, slowing their western progress as he doesn't dare mistime a sea. The Evinrude labors as its rpms stagger far below its powerband.

John hears, to his surprise, his dad singing under his breath. He can't make out the words, and he only hears snippets of its tune, but he thinks it is a Russian hymn. And he swallows a mouthful of frothy bile.

Wishing he had learned more of the language—Father Gregory would have taught him, and now it's even taught in Port Adam's

high school, the teacher a Moslem poet from Uzbekistan who looks as Aleut as his dad and uncle—John swallows the bitterness that pushes into his mouth and creeps from the corner of his lips. When he was in high school, the language and that aspect of his heritage were unimportant, or at least certainly much less important than long-legged hooligan, ready to spawn.

John hears the rolling pound of the surf on Atka Beach so he expects the hard turn to port. Still, when his dad twists the wheel and gives the Evinrude power, he is almost thrown from his seat. And for one long minute, he isn't sure they won't be rolled into the breakers.

But after that minute, in suddenly flat water, John realizes that dark stone walls rise like the fronts of buildings mere feet off both their port and starboard sides. The Narrows, on its eastern entrance, feels like entering an ally between skyscrapers. It is a magical place, a spiritual place to the old people—and what's he to make of the spiritualism he didn't even know existed in his family? Sure, he knew his parents believed in life after death and a crucified Christ, but he found Father Gregory's brand of spiritualism, complete with angels and resurrections, much easier to dismiss after anthropologists thoroughly debunked superstitions about spirit helpers and trickster figures, making having no belief in anything supernatural the only intellectually honest position; for belief requires action whether lighting candles or chanting prayers, neither of which can possibly do anything more than make a person feel good, and when he isn't choking down bile, he feels fine without the aid of burning beeswax or smoking incense.

Since it couldn't be darker in Jonah's whale than in the Narrows, Jacob slows to an idle. In two places the channel is less than twelve feet wide, and even on a small tide, the current runs seven or eight knots. Tonight the tide is up, but falling, and the current is faster, pulling them through—rising tides push northward through the Gulf; falling tides drag debris and ships southward. The Narrows lies roughly northeast to southwest although it serpentine through

what was probably a eastside river valley during the last ice age. So a falling tide draws skiffs westward.

Jacob pulls the Evinrude into reverse so he has some ability to steer—idling backwards, they are swept forward as if they were mindless jellyfish. He, Jacob Chickenof, a man who believes God, used to, before he became a Christian, hear the voices of the old people in the Narrows. He didn't hear much during the day: the voices were faint as if their words dissolved in sunlight. It was mostly at night when the old people sang their stories that he heard them loud and clear. He used to have a heavy, plank snag skiff that he would take through here on summer evenings when it never gets really dark, and in the twilight, he would listen to the stories of the old people, very few of which he now remembers. He once heard a Russian voice. But only the one time. It was telling someone where the gold was. He listened in hopes he could find it, but then felt guilty and never went to see if it really cropped up on that cape. Someday somebody will find it. Then he will know if the demon was telling the truth or lying.

Five Mile Beach lies most of an hour's skiff run south of St. Peters—they will come out about three miles north of the cannery town, its harbor a narrow J-hooked fjord a couple of miles long, with copper nuggets on its beaches, some as large as his thermos, green and old.

He hears the *boom* of the surf on the Narrows western end, hears the rain on his hood, hears the chop where wind fights tide, hears his son fidgeting, hears the lapping of the surge on the rocks beside him, hears the bark of a seal. He steers with his ears; eyes aren't to be trusted. Maybe that's what he never got across to his sons: their eyes will lie to them.

Five Mile Beach isn't five miles long. It's closer to three and a half miles of gray sand and white volcanic ash along the western side of Mt. Iskai, a low volcanic cone that still steams and three years before Katmai erupted, sent streams of magma into the sea along the southern end of the beach, shortening the beach and forming Lava Point, where, during WWII, a Japanese submarine

hit a rock, its hull now rusting peacefully in the surf against the point. The sub's crew were never found despite the Navy searching for them the rest of that winter.

Open to seas from the west, Five Mile Beach usually has a rolling surf that during the late 1960s was discovered by two Californians, who were going to make it a mecca for surfers seeking the hottest pipelines. Unfortunately, both of the young Californians drowned under mysterious circumstances after the daughter of a St. Peters fisherman became pregnant. Since then, only Crazy Dick from Sitka has brought a surfboard to the beach.

The surf worries Jacob. He hasn't put ashore on Five Mile for thirty years; there really isn't a safe spot to beach a skiff as heavy as the Whaler.

As they approach the end of the Narrows, the rain seems to intensify, now striking him from below as if sweeps in and up. It's also raining hard enough that the rip inside and the bar across the mouth of the Narrows quiver like vibrated Jello as the water tries to absorb all of the energy from below, behind and above. The sea seems paralyzed, and the Whaler pounds through and into the open water, its prop wash breaking the tension and letting the surge smash against hidden rocks behind them.

Jacob doesn't run nights like he used to, doesn't get out in a skiff like he did before Limited Entry and the big money from king crabbing upgraded the fleets, forcing him and other boat owners into the Bering. The past few years, he has been more accountant than fisherman. But he hasn't forgotten the feel of the sea, and the lyrics to *By the Rivers of Babylon* form on his lips—there's no willow tree close, but his right hand remembers.

That was the song J played over and over the summer the three of them fished pinks in Area M. Enough thinking.

Storm swells top twenty feet. Jacob has to idle back the Whaler till they do maybe eight knots so it takes awhile to pass the lights marking the entrance to St. Peters.

There is a small creek that drains hot springs on Mt. Iskai's north side. The creek's mouth, too shallow to enter even at high

tide, forms a protruding tit that breaks the run of the swells. Ivan, a long time ago, had a dory they would nose ashore there and again launch there. They used to camp along the creek, which, a quarter mile uphill, runs hot enough to cook small fish, maybe large ones if a person were patient. The creek steams enough that even in the dark, they could locate it. He imagines it still does, and if his brother is on this beach—he knows Ivan is, but exactly how he knows he can't explain even to himself—then Ivan will head for the creek where he can at least stay warm until someone comes along, the someone being himself.

The problem is how to get ashore through the storm swells, and in the dark at that: he might be able to back into the breakers and have John jump over the stern in a survival suit. He hasn't many other options. The seas are out of the northwest; they're to the Whaler's stern quarter right now.

The real problem will be how to get John and Ivan off the beach. There's a rock pile north of Five Mile. If it were daylight, he would nose in behind the rocks and let John and Ivan swim the few dozen yards through the kelp out to him. But at night, that's tricky business, even in a survival suit.

Jacob slows as he reaches forward to tap John on the shoulder. Then, to make himself heard about the wind, he yells: "Your uncle will be on that hot water creek if he's still alive. I'll get you in close, but you'll have to swim ashore. Take the rifle. When you find him, one shot if he's dead. Two if alive. Then I'll try to pick you up."

John understands how difficult getting on and off the beach will be. He doesn't know how his dad intends to pick him up, but he understands swimming ashore; so he dons a survival suit while they are still north of Five Mile. Staggering, clutching console and gunwale, he wonders what happened to his sea legs. His dad doesn't appear to have lost his.

Peering into the darkness, straining to see anything, John has no idea where they are when his dad backs off the throttle, keeping just enough to turn the bow partially into the swells that lift them,

then run on past to boom ashore—and he realizes, hearing the *boom* that they are just behind the breakers, and for a moment, he feels terror at the idea of being rolled up into a breaker and sucked back out in its undertow. He takes a deep breath, and another, and waits.

The survival suit is tight on him, intended as it is for a person a couple of inches shorter. It also makes him feel clumsy. And he lifts his right arm as he tries an overhead stroke. He tries the stroke with his left arm. One thing is certain, he'll be short-arming his strokes, and he hopes he won't have to swim far, wishes he wouldn't have to swim at all.

He feels the Whaler lift higher than what seems right, then drop suddenly as the swell breaks under them. His dad hollers, "Next one, bail out. You're fifty yards off."

Breathing deeply, feeling fear, swallowing more bile foam, knowing he has to jump, he waits, poised on the starboard side of the outboard, his left hand on the stern cleat—and again he feels the lift, higher, higher, higher, higher, then seeing the curl pass beside him before the drop, he jumps as the Whaler falls, the water falling away as he begins his stroke before landing, letting him go under, catching him by surprise. But the suit doesn't let him stay down. He pops up and stretching his stroke farther than he thought possible, he finds himself grasping sand before he knows he's ashore. He rolls over in time for a wash of surge to smack him in the face as he crabs backwards, up the inclined beach, the rifle still slung over his back.

"You look pretty funny."

The words, coming from above the surge, take him unawares. He falls backwards as his heart skips. He has to piss, and he's suddenly too weak to hold it back.

"Uncle Ivan? Is that you?"

The next breaker sends a surge up, over him, then ebbs away.

"Is that Jacob in the skiff?" asks the voice that seems to come from everywhere above him.

"Yeah, that's Dad? Where are you?"

About then, he feels strong fingers grip his arm and drag him to his knees and up the beach. He tries to stand, but steps over the edge of the creek's cutbank and falls sideways into the warm water, which is only inches deep, not deep enough to break his fall and he hits its bottom hard. The warm water piles up against him, splashing into his mouth and eyes. He stands, feeling as he does the sand wash out from under his feet, and down he goes again, this time head first. But he's to his knees immediately, and lunging for the cutbank, he crawls up and out.

"You put on a pretty good show, Kid."

"How the hell can you see anything?"

Mary worries about her mother, who took a sleeping pill to help her forget. She sat with her mother until her mother fell asleep; so now, tired, she would like to go home. She needs some sleep. She really didn't get any last night. John and her dad won't, she suspects, be back before daylight, and she does have to work tomorrow. During the winter only she and the postmaster run the Post Office. Everybody in town expects their mail on time: it's supposed to be out by 10:30. Too many people have too little to do. Their lives are centered around their midmorning visit to the Post Office; so no reason short of another Flood will be accepted for being one minute late. Alaska Airlines has even received more than three hundred calls at their corporate headquarters when weather delayed planes a second day.

She would lie down here if there were a bed in her old room.

She left home when Sarah and Debbie wanted separate bedrooms, her sisters believing that as highschoolers they needed more privacy. Growing up, Beth and Cathy had shared one room while she, Sarah and Debbie had shared another. When Beth married, she had moved in with Cathy. Then she had the room by herself after Cathy married.

But satellite TV came to the island before Sarah and Debbie started highschool. Whereas she, Beth and Cathy shared everything, Sarah and Debbie seemed to pattern themselves after

young actresses. Both of her younger sisters demanded more “stuff,” her dad’s word for the trappings of glamorous femininity. Both had more boyfriends than she, Beth and Cathy—and boyfriends of a different type. And both couldn’t wait to get off the island.

Debbie had inherited her room, and when she and Bob married, they had no bed of any kind so they took hers, even though it was only three-quarters size. Her dad was disgusted enough with Bob that he didn’t replace the bed just so they wouldn’t come visit.

Maybe it’d be all right if she reclined on the couch, closed her eyes for a minute or two. The couch isn’t comfortable enough to really sleep on, but it’s not as bad as sleeping in a skiff.

“Well, John, haven’t seen you in a long time. Where’s J?”

“You don’t know, then. . . . The *Iskai* rolled. He didn’t make it. Neither did any of others.” John still can’t see his uncle even though he senses him standing near. The rain and wind make him shout. He seems to hear his words swept up and away.

“He was still on the scope when we went under.”

“Let me signal Dad.” John unwraps himself from the rifle, bangs its receiver with the heel of his hand to knock sand off, works its bolt, points the 30.06 skyward and touches its trigger. A column of flame lights the beach and hillside, and he sees his uncle who doesn’t look at all like himself. But the light is gone before he can identify what his uncle looks like, the imagine that remains in his memory eerie. So again, he chambers a cartridge. Again, the column of light. But this time his uncle looks like himself, which scares him a little. He doesn’t know what he saw before; doesn’t like the feeling of not knowing how to describe the memory despite having as many words available to him as anyone has. It’s as if no words exist to him to even begin.

“Now what, Kid? Do we wait?”

“I don’t know, and don’t like not knowing. But Dad usually thinks of something.” However, at the moment he’s less worried about how they’ll get off the beach than he is in what he saw, and

he doesn't know what he saw, if anything. He certainly can't describe what he saw, and that troubles him as much as anything.

He hears the Whaler work in close, the muffled sound of its outboard whispered on the wind. Then he sees a pinprick of light, enough light for the curl of the breakers to pick up and roll around, enough light to see the Whaler bob way high then disappear, the light caught in spray and foam.

Then a buoy: a buoy and the second survival suit ride a breaker, then float ashore, pushed by the surge. Uncle Ivan also sees them, and wades out to grab the buoy, snapped to halibut groundline. "It looks like we're goin swimmin, Kid."

He sees what his dad has done. They've always kept enough halibut gear in the skiff so that they could catch a fish or two if they had-to (he can't imagine his dad using a rod and reel), usually fifty or sixty hooks on snapon gangions, enough for the half skate of groundline, nine hundred feet or so, that's also kept stowed in the bow. Now that half skate of groundline is their lifeline to the skiff. "Lead, Kid. I'll be right behind yuh, 'n just hangon when that curler rolls over yuh. You'll be back up in a minute."

Wading into the surf, his suit wants to float him. Before he's waist deep, he feels himself being lifted. He pulls on the thin line, and immediately feels a problem. His mittened hand can't grip the line tight, and he has to take a half twist each reach in order to pull himself forward. And the first breaker nearly sends him back shore.

Behind the breaker, he feels himself being pulled out to sea and he chambers along the line as if he were crawling to escape Grandma Mutukin's fermented seal oil goodies, which only old folks really ever liked . . . strange how a snippet of memory will pop into mind at a time like this, and he wonders why he suddenly thought of Grandma Mutukin, who died before he started school. Fermented seal oil has to be an acquired taste, one his whole generation hasn't acquired. And he hangson as the breaker crashes over him.

He thought he had acquired a taste for bile, but he hasn't.

Now, he feels the line being pulled, and he is suddenly against the stern of the Whaler, which rises white before him. And he feels his dad's strength hauling him aboard—he collapses, coughing, forward, half over the tarp.

The Whaler lifts, its bow tips up, up, up until the skiff is nearly vertical, then it punches through the next swell, and Uncle Ivan is aboard, and they are underway, powering into the swells, spray splashing far to either side.

He hears his dad and Uncle Ivan talking, but in Russian. He can't tell what's being said. But all he wants to do is sleep. And in what seems like a minute, the Whaler slows. He looks up and sees the lights of St. Peters. Uncle Ivan has bowline in hand. It looks like they'll be tying up to the cannery dock.

“Comeon, Kid, grab the other line. We're gonna get somethin to eat, even if we have to cook it ourselves.”

Still wearing the survival suit, Ivan climbs the ladder to the dock above. John slips his suit off, and immediately feels chilled as the wind slams through his soaked jacket and jeans.

Jacob understands his brother wanting to surround himself in light. And doing something, fighting seas and surge, has lessened his anger. Yes, J is gone. He will, however, see his son in that Great Resurrection the last day when all of humanity has its chance to compare Satan's versus the Father's rule and chose righteous when they haven't previously had the chance. Still, he is angry in an unfocused sort of way, angry enough to wrestle with God . . . he remembers being a boy, a young man, and the chances he and Ivan took, chances that frightened their mother, especially after Isaac's drowning. He knows the sea, the upswelling of life that currents and seasons bring. He is part of that cycle of spawner and predator, a cycle forgotten in corporate boardrooms, where an artificial business cycle disrupts the rhythms of time and tides. And wrestling with, now, himself, he thanks, while climbing the ladder to the dock above, his God for sparing the life of someone as unrepentant as his brother.

-8-

On Kodiak, Alvin Winesap pokes around Kathy's kitchen before either she or her kids are up. He feels like he's trespassing, like he should be home and in bed with Sharon, her green face mask just daring him to touch her. His heels hurt bad; his feet hurt. He wonders where Kathy keeps her aspirin, and he wonders why he's here. Surely he could've stayed somewhere else. The Star Motel isn't terribly expensive, at least not for a night or two while he irons out whatever problems Sharon presently has. But Kathy brought him here. They talked for awhile about what might be going on with Sharon, then he took the couch. Nothing has gone on between Kathy and himself. Sharon, as far as he's concerned, has no reason for complaint. If she would've let him take her car yesterday, then he wouldn't have had to borrow Kathy's and he wouldn't have had to walk, which he always has to do when he borrows Kathy's car, and he wouldn't have missed last night's dinner party, about which he had forgotten anyhow. He knew how much the party meant to her. He certainly intended to make it. It's just that he has never liked her left-wing friends, especially those from public radio, so he doesn't think about them and he just forgot. If it weren't for this internal audit of Portland Casualty, he would've remembered that he couldn't leave town yesterday. But he didn't remember, and then he had to walk, and his bags were in his driveway, his bad luck.

He feels the eyes before he turns to see who's watching him: it's Rorianne, Kathy's second grader. "What are you doing up? Do you normally get up this early?"

"Momma doesn't want me talking to strangers."

"Am I a stranger? I'm your mother's boss. What does that make me?" He can't find any aspirin or anything else for pain.

"You're a stranger 'cause you don't live here."

"If I lived here, would I be a stranger?" He supposes he will have to wait till Kathy gets up.

“Yes, ‘cause I don’t know you.”

“What would it take for me not to be a stranger?”

“For you to be my daddy . . . but you’re not my daddy. He’s not here right now.”

“Rorianne, go back to bed.” Stepping into the kitchen in her purple nightgown, Kathy says, “I’m sorry if she woke you. I thought I heard talking out here.”

“No, she didn’t wake me. I was up looking for aspirin. Blisters hurt. I probably woke her.”

“I don’t have any. You can’t buy them on Food Stamps.”

“You’re working full time and you’re on Food Stamps?” He is surprised. He pays her the prevailing wage for clerical help.

“Yeah, they’re available, and money doesn’t go far, not by the time you pay rent, buy a tank of gas and pay for the dam at Terror Bay, then give the phone company a little bit. We’re just barely making it. You know what I make.”

“Yes, I do.” Nodding towards her cupboards, he says, “I can see that there isn’t any extra. But at least you cook. Sharon doesn’t, so she doesn’t keep anything in her cupboards except dishes and wine glasses.”

“We wouldn’t eat if I didn’t. We’d eat better if I had more time. Everything is a compromise, a negotiation between what has to get done and what ought to be done.”

He sees a flick of movement and glances towards the door where Rorianne and her sister peek in, then duck away when seen.

He is, himself, careful not to get caught looking, but he can’t help noticing that in Kathy’s averageness, she is physically appealing. She’s soft where she should be, round where it’s important, modest enough to be modest. Without makeup, with her hair flattened from sleep, she’s sexy and ordinary and practical and available, and that availability is what’s scary. He can’t afford a divorce. Sharon will end up with everything, possibly even the agency.

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Cpl. Tom Matthews and Sgt. Randy Plankov represent the Alaska State Troopers on Cook's Island. Both are Fish & Game officers; both are stationed in Port Adams; and both want to talk to Ivan Chickenof, especially so after they heard Ivan had been found on Five Mile Beach, and especially now after the ruckus, the word not adequately describing the squabble between a Russian and his Aleut nephew over how to grille a hamburger in the St. Peters' tavern two hours after the cook had gone home for the night, a squabble that left two fishermen with dislocated fingers and old Samuel Younger with a heart attack that required a predawn flight on an Island Air 207 by a pilot who really thought the weather was too ugly to takeoff but whose wife was Samuel's granddaughter. So both officers wait in the rain for Jacob's Whaler to make the turn into the small boat harbor. They watch and wait, both officers a little in awe of old Jacob's skill or luck in a skiff. The stories of Jacob's feats aren't told as often as they once were, but both officers have been on the island long enough to have heard many stories.

"Ivan, Jacob, you too, John, come on into the Harbormaster's office. We need to take a couple of statements. Shouldn't take but a minute." Hollers Tom, in uniform, as Ivan secures the Whaler's bowline, and John, its stern line.

Ivan still wears the survival suit, but Jacob and John are in their dripping raingear as they enter the office, its warmth hitting them as physical force, pushing John onto a chair. He notices a clock: six-fifteen. "No wonder it isn't light out. You see the time, Dad? If we wouldn't have stopped, we would've been home by three-thirty, maybe four."

Randy Plankov is near retirement. He was born on Unga Island, across from Sand Point, spent years in Bristol Bay, a few years at Chignik, a couple at Kodiak, and the last decade here. He bought a place in Arizona before property prices skyrocketed, and now thinks about selling it instead of going there. So he begins as if he

seeks advice: “Jacob, if I were in need of an attorney, who would you recommend?”

“You’re not in need of one, so why would you ask?” Jacob hears the indirect way of how his and Randy’s folks spoke to one another, and he realizes he is being warned about him, Jacob, having legal problems.

“Ivan, what happened off Pillar Point? You’re an experienced fisherman. What happened?”

“Dunno for sure. We were getting beat pretty bad, but not nothin we couldn’t handle. All a sudden, the radio went nuts. I had the Johnson boy take the wheel while I looked at it. Didn’t see nothin that looked wrong, so I looked at the scope. It was fine, saw the *Iskai* and the *Ivanof*, then felt our stern start to lift just as we stuck our bow into a sea . . . it shouldn’t have lifted. Weren’t no sea back there. Next thing I knew, we were under and I was tryin to get out. Things got pretty confused. Dream like. . . . Woke up on the beach. Weren’t there long before this guy,” Ivan points to John, “washes up beside me.”

Tom has taped everything Ivan said. Now he turns to Jacob and asks, “How did you know to look for him on Five Mile?”

“Teddy Rudin told me—”

“No he didn’t, Dad. You got that from what Teddy said, but that’s not what Teddy said.”

“Oh, yeah, that’s what he said.”

“No, Dad. I was there. That’s what you heard, but not what he said.” John is, even here, an officer of the court and wants to make sure the record accurately reflects what happened.

“Okay, okay.” Randy holds up his hand, signaling them to halt. “So you, Jacob, inferred from what Ted Rudin said that your brother was alive and on Five Mile. Is that correct?”

Jacob nods yes, then says, “That’s what Teddy said.”

“Well, I’m confused,” Tom looks at his partner who watches Jacob as a cat might a vole. “How would Ted Rudin know anything about where your brother was?”

“He just knew.”

“Let me say something here,” John folds his rainpants that he slipped off. “Teddy claimed he could hear Uncle Ivan singing, said that I should be out looking for him. I chartered Island Air’s Turbo Beaver, and we flew the whole west side yesterday. We didn’t see a thing. So I thought Teddy was just hearing things, but Dad, here, when he came home, went and got Teddy, brought him home and then said some weird Native stuff, and we took off for the other side of the island. . . . Uncle Ivan was exactly where Dad said he would be.”

“Were both of your boats insured, Jacob?”

“Certainly, why?”

“Just want to get that in our report. . . . Now, about last night. What is this about fifteen hundred dollars worth of damage?” Tom doesn’t see that Randy hasn’t taken his eyes off Jacob, that his partner isn’t quick to dismiss what’s been said.

“I’ll take care of that,” says John. “It was a misunderstanding about whether our family is Russian or Native. We ended up with a little help deciding.”

“Well, what are you?” asks Randy Plankov, himself of the same mixed ancestry.

“Smart enough not to again call Uncle Ivan an Aleut.” Taking his card from his soggy wallet, John adds, “Here, have them send a bill. My secretary will send them a check as long as the amount is reasonable.”

“And what’s your side of this, Ivan?” asks Randy.

“I got no side. The Kid, he just make a mistake. And he needs to get himself a haircut. Even Jacob thinks that, huh?”

“That’s one of those generational things, Ivan,” says Randy. “My grandsons look like little girls. Their mom thinks they look cute . . . maybe they do. But they don’t look like boys.”

Randy looks at Tom, and asks, “Anything more you need?”

“No. It ah, looks awfully convenient that Jacob knew right where and when to meet Ivan. Maybe it’s a good thing for you, Jacob, that three other vessels went down the same night in the same area. Otherwise, . . .” Tom doesn’t finish his thought.

“You believe what you want. I have to see how Mary is doing. She doesn’t believe there’s any good thing in this.” Jacob turns to go. He’ll return later in the day to secure the Whaler. Right now, he needs to get home, get dry clothes on, and check on his wife now that some of his anger has been expended bucking the wind and rain; he couldn’t talk to her before.

Ivan, who had been living aboard the *St. Paul*, says, “I’ll go home with you, Jacob. I’ll get another place to live tomorrow. Okay?”

Jacob nods, knowing though that Mary won’t be happy having Ivan as a house guest for even one night. But she won’t say anything. He’ll just know. So the three of them pile into Jacob’s pickup, the bent quarter panel again catching the passenger door.

His house is near the top of Kupreanof Street. At the bottom of the hill is a cannery bunkhouse and a couple of old stores Ishi Binyamin has converted into apartments for transit fishermen and cannery workers. Above them are several blocks of older homes, some built prior to the War, some prior to the Earthquake. Most of these houses are occupied by crewmembers and cannery mechanics—Mary has a house a block off Kupreanof and about a fourth of the way up the hill. Then there are two professional buildings, one of which houses the clinic, the other a dentist and a wildlife photographer who moved down from Anchorage after Kell Harder left for parts unknown. Then there is the Church, above which is the house where Father Gregory raises eight sons, four daughters, and six foster kids, his answer to God’s command to go forth and multiply (it’s also his way of taking advantage of the used clothing donated to the Church every spring, clothing that would otherwise be torn into rags).

Above Father Gregory’s are the new homes, the places built since some skippers started making a little money. Jacob built a place up there because it was expected of him, because his accountant said he should, and living up there has made securing loans easier, has opened many doors. He enjoys being able to see down the channel and over Near Island, but the house was really

built for Mary. It has everything she always wanted—she was happy until the kids started moving out. Since then, it's been too big. He had been thinking about giving it to J Jr. and building another place for himself at Herring Cove. But he hasn't talked Mary into living so far out. He doubts that he ever will.

Sis's beater is still in his driveway so he motions for Ivan and John to keep their voices low when they enter. It is still early. The southeastern horizon remains dark.

Jacob leads the way. Ivan sheds the survival suit in the garage that has yet to ever have a vehicle parked in it. Under it, he wears only a T-shirt and jeans, probably exactly what he had on in *St. Paul's* wheelhouse, and John wonders how he kept from dying of hypothermia. Evidently, it wasn't his time.

They gather in the kitchen, and despite their care, they awaken Sis. "Glad to see you made it back, Uncle Ivan." Yawning, she adds, "I got a call sometime during the night saying you were on your way. Something about an Aleut cafe?" Again, she yawns as she now stretches her back, stiff from the couch.

"That's it, Kid. It was an Aleut cafe."

"Fifteen hundred dollars worth. . . . It had to be Native to cost so much."

Jacob goes to check on Mary. After a few minutes, he returns, the color gone from his face.

"What's wrong, Dad?" Sis asks, before bolting for her parent's room.

"John, call the troopers, then Father Gregory. . . . I'm going for a walk."

"Dad, wait," Sis hurries into the kitchen. "I'm sorry—"

"Take care of your sister, John. I'll be back." And he leaves the kitchen without raingear or jacket, without any emotion revealed in his voice. He leaves as his relatives would have before Russians arrived.

The phone receiver in hand, John asks, "What is it Sis?"

"Mom. . . . It looks like she got up in the night and took more sleeping pills."

“Will she be all right?”

“No. She’s . . . oh, John, why? Dad doesn’t deserve this, not this.” And she can’t hold back her tears. She collapses besides the door, and, sitting on the floor, she bawls without being able to stop herself.

“Take care of her, Kid. I’ll call.” Ivan takes the phone.

Father Gregory arrives a few minutes before the troopers, who had left the Harbor master’s office but weren’t yet home. He enters Jacob and Mary’s bedroom, then returns sobered: “It looks like while still sleepy, she accidently took more than she intended. Her death is accidental. She has not sinned.”

When the Fish & Game officers arrive, they nod to Ivan, then go with Father Gregory into the bedroom while John sits on the floor with his sister. When they return, Tom talks into his handheld VHF radio while Randy quietly asks Ivan, “Where’s your brother? I’ll need to talk to him.”

Ivan points in the general direction of the harbor: “He went to talk to his god.”

Randy indicates that he understands, then asks, “You’re taking care of things here?”

“Guess I am. . . . Jacob, he’ll be okay.”

“It’s been a rough three days for him.”

“Three days? Only if you count the way Father Gregory does. The way I count, he’s got another day to go.”

Randy says, “Tomorrow will be fine—if he can come by. My condolences to your family. I’m sure that other matter will take care of itself. You shouldn’t hear any more about it.”

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After his mother’s body is removed—his dad hasn’t returned and he’s begun worrying about him—John and Uncle Ivan straighten the house as much as two men can. His uncle then opens a folding cot and spreads out a sleeping bag in the garage; “I’m gonna get

some sleep, Kid. Entertain yourself for a little while. Your dad will be back when he's ready. . . . He's got quite a bit to say."

John is used to being in charge, and being with his dad and uncle has raised, for him, unintended dynamics. No question is ever asked in court that he doesn't know its answer. The scope of his interrogatories, requests for production and requests for admissions often makes him the most lied-to as well as the most disliked Native in Juneau since William Paul, an identifier he openly admires. But here on the Rock, he remains Jacob's second son, the one who doesn't fish. His father remains unimpressed with his accomplishments. When he's home, he is, as far as he's concerned, the son that doesn't measure up. He can't negotiate with his dad; he isn't like J Jr, nor can he be like J. It's called, as he understands it, *second son syndrome*. His dad, however, isn't likely to read any pop-psych articles, nor would he be likely to believe them if he somehow absorbed their contents by osmosis. No, his dad is J Jr.'s dad—and even though, on lonely nights in Juneau, he sometimes thinks about returning to fishing, thinks about accepting being seasick as a fact of life, he doesn't dare now. He can never be as good as a memory. His fate has been sealed by his brother, and is as sealed as his brother's. And for the first time in several years, he feels utterly powerless, a feeling he will overcome by tomorrow, hopefully.

He can't be too hard on his dad, not right now. Hell, his dad is as good of a man as any he has ever heard about. His dad's word is good, delivering more than promised, giving until it hurts. But his dad has been a stern father, expecting, always, rigid adherence to rules that at times seem arbitrary. J Jr. accepted the rules, was that good son, but he, well, has hair on his shoulders.

That reminds him, thinking about his hair, Peggy Sue acted interested in possibly getting together. If nothing else, they can remember what might have happened. . . . Memory is, as he has learned in testimony, how stories become reality.

Sis should know Peggy Sue's whereabouts, the advantage of having relatives working in the Post Office. He'll have to head downtown. He will just as soon as he combs his hair.

“Why, John, do you want to know where she is?” Mary feels a little protective of Peggy. She knows her brother’s motives.

“I saw her just for a minute when I first arrived. She told me to look her up. . . . Are you going to help or not?”

“When Jack Edwards bought Guennie’s, Peggy bought the newspaper. Dad loaned her the money, but nobody is supposed to know. I don’t think many do. And you aren’t to take advantage of that fact, understand.” She sees a customer approaching her mail window so she motions for John to go.

“Sis, I never—”

“This is important to me, John. You watch yourself.” She turns towards her customer: “Next.”

Any newspaper with the unattractive name of *The Port Adams’ Weekly Herald and Fish Wrapper* asks not to be taken for its journalistic merits: it is a gossip sheet of usually sixteen pages, meaning that every story is milked for twice its worth. He once had a poem published in it. His mom bought at least ten copies. And Jack Edwards, being the good businessman, published poems every week for a couple of years. There are, he is certain, yellowing copies of back issues stashed in a dresser drawer of every mother on the island.

The weekly’s office is up the hill and hidden in a spruce grove that scatters rain this time of year, literally broadcasting the drops through moss and ferns where they are collected and stored so the office will be in perpetual drizzle all summer. The newspaper is actually printed in Seattle and flown in, a practice that used to grieve the paper’s former photographer. But where it’s printed and how it gets here doesn’t seem to matter to residents as long as the newsprint is of sufficient strength to really wrap fish, a practice begun before the island’s collective memory recalls.

He is afoot, and it is raining, hardly a revelation. He could call the cab, but perhaps the dramatics will be better with wet hair and shirt, something he thinks about in the court room where performance is as important as substance. . . . Why is he thinking

about it here? Is he, at some Freudian level, wanting to solicit a ride home with Peggy Sue? Sure he is.

Sis is correct: he needs to watch himself.

He has a difficult time imagining Peggy Sue with the paper. He can see her as a school teacher, or even buying Sandy's Boutique. But where did she learn editing skills? Or where did she acquire the assertiveness to express her opinion in print. He's glad she has, just surprised. It seems every island kid either lives up to, or down to community expectations for him or her. He was expected, as Jacob Chickenof's son, to succeed, as was J Jr. But not much was expected of Peggy Sue, the daughter of a diesel mechanic known for his shoddy work. His dad took quite a chance investing in her, but then, that is like his dad.

He will walk.

But as he looks through the glass door and sees the rain, drifting in under street lights, still glowing despite it being nearly noon—the mercury bulbs are turned on and off by a meter reading available light—he returns to the service window: “Are you going to work all day, Sis?”

“No, not with— . . . When I take lunch, I'm calling it a day. I just had to work this morning.” Mary glances at the clock over her shoulder, ten minutes. Windows close normally from twelve to one. George can handle the afternoon by himself.

“I need to use your car. How about if I take you home, or up to dad's? Uncle Ivan is in the garage.”

“Doing what?” She has inherited her mother's disapproval of her uncle, a disapproval that was never expressed aloud.

“Sleeping.”

“If you fill it, you can use it. You make a lot more than I do. You might be able to afford our gas prices.”

“It's all a conspiracy, Sis, designed to keep you in your place, and to make me a lot of money. It's called Capitalism.”

“Yeah, well, I don't like it. You oughta see how hard they hit me on taxes. I might get ahead otherwise.” She again glances at the

clock. A minute early. That's close enough, and she turns her sign around. "I'll meet you in back."

He leaves the lobby as Sis locks its doors behind him. Then catching his breath as if he were diving into a pool, he ducks outside, around the corner of the building and jumps up onto the loading dock where he waits, half out of the rain.

Sis emerges, and together they dash for her car, a rusty, blue Toyota brought to the island a dozen years ago by a school teacher who thought island kids would be eager to learn; she left a year later, disillusioned. He had her for English. She was from Colorado, had taught a year on the Bering Coast, had a degree from Fairbanks, and thought herself an expert on Alaskan Natives even though she didn't know the difference between a Koniag and an Aleut. Also, she didn't eat meat, which made her stay on the island difficult for the three grocery stores' produce managers. Nobody was sorry to see her leave.

Although Sis lives only a couple of blocks away, it takes them several minutes to reach her place as they get caught by the dash of cannery workers rushing home for lunch. But once there, he changes places with her: "Do you want me to take you up to Dad's in a little bit?"

"No, I can walk when I'm ready." She lingers beside the car, acting as if there is something more she wants to say. But whatever is on her mind, remains there. She turns for her house.

He expected her to say something more. Perhaps she intended to again warn him to watch his behavior around Peggy Sue, who is alone in the paper's office when he enters. She looks up, and he notices that her eyes are red—she's been crying.

Nodding towards her, he says, "You look like I feel."

"How's your dad? Is he taking this okay?"

"No, I don't think so. He's off by himself somewhere. Uncle Ivan told me not to go looking for him, that he would be all right. But I don't know."

"I heard," she sits up straight and makes an effort to straighten her desk, "you found your uncle. Five Mile Beach, I heard. Then the excitement in the cafe."

“That was nothing. . . . I made a mistake. Not the first one.” Indicating the contents of the office with a sweep of his hand, he adds, “I misjudged you. I still get the paper from here—it gets read even in Juneau. I never noticed any change, which might not be a compliment. Forgive me if it isn’t.”

“I’ll accept it as one.” She can’t seem to get the papers on her desk in exactly the right piles. “I didn’t know— . . . I thought you knew.”

A moment of awkward silence settles, like a sunken gillnet, in the room. Words are his life, but right now, he doesn’t know how to continue. Every direction seems dangerous. But chances have to be taken: “Sis told me specifically that I wasn’t to charm you into a compromising situation. I promised her I wouldn’t. But it is lunchtime. How about getting something to eat?”

“Thanks, but I have work to do here.”

“I see the kind of work you have to do—you need to get out of here. Doctor’s orders. Besides, you need to interview Uncle Ivan for his story.” He reaches to take her hand.

“I suppose I should talk to your uncle. Let me get my coat. I wear one now. You remember what I used to say—”

“I didn’t believe you then. I knew.” He doesn’t say he knew she lied, while in high school, about not being cold when she went everywhere without a coat. He knew she lied because she didn’t want to press her parents for what they couldn’t afford. Probably only her father believed her.

“I still have your Letterman jacket. It’s packed away in a trunk with a few other things.” She pushes her desk chair in after she stands. “Things that used to mean something to me.”

“One question, I won’t ask it again. What happened while I was in college?” He knows, but he needs to hear it from her.

“Not a damn thing. The truth, not a damn thing.”

Truth is perception. Perhaps what he knows and her words can both be right.

“When I left the house, food was already showing up. So I hope you’re hungry.” He opens the door for her.

“No, I can’t. Those dishes will be for your dad, are arriving to help him get through this period.” She’s aghast that he would suggest eating some of what neighbor women started bringing yesterday.

“Dad will never be able to eat a tenth of what has already arrived. Not even Uncle Ivan can eat what has been brought.” John knows that when the town learns of his mother’s death the number of salmon casseroles that will mysteriously appear will stagger imaginations. “Believe me, Dad will do just fine. He can cook, he’s not helpless. He cooked all the time I was home.”

“I dunno—”

“Come on. It’s your duty to help Dad out. Besides, you don’t want to see Uncle Ivan get fat.”

“That’s right, I am supposed to be interviewing him.” She pauses. “I suppose I could report on what has been brought, publicly acknowledge everyone’s contributions.”

“Good idea. Get your coat.”

As if gathering herself for a race, she dashes for Mary’s Toyota, trying to get no wetter than necessary, staying ahead of John, staying, though, close enough to him that she can feel his presence behind her.

The Toyota squawks as its rusted fenders flap as if it were a flightless bird doomed for extinction. It really doesn’t have many miles on it: 78,402. But in another winter or two, there won’t be anything for the engine to pull up Kupreanof except for a few flaky feathers of rust.

There are two vehicles he doesn’t recognize in his dad’s driveway when he pulls in. One, a late model Buick without rust. The other a red and white Dodge Ram. He parks behind the pickup and hopes its driver isn’t in a hurry to leave.

Inside, two fellows who look a lot like his dad and Uncle Ivan sit in the kitchen with his uncle. Peggy Sue, when she sees them, says, “Hello, Paul, Samuel. Am I missing something important?” She takes a chair from behind the table and turns it around. “It is

important or you two wouldn't be here. So will what you tell me on the record or off?"

Nearly toothless now, Paul Bob, the great-grandson of a Kolosh toion who despite being ordained a deacon in the Orthodox church fled New Archangel after the disappearance of an Imperial Naval officer, used to fish the *Slow Boy*, and is generally believed to still be the vessel's owner although usually no one will admit having anything to do with the converted LCM, one of the five boats lost. Samuel Golovin owns MARK-IT FOODS, has an interest in the cannery at St. Peters, and has invested in several boats, one of which is the *Ivanof*, another of the five.

"I imagine," Peggy says, "that besides expressing your condolences, you two are here to talk to Jacob about vessels lost. Has Ivan been any help?"

Paul Bob turns towards Samuel and says, "Jacob knows, she a smart woman. What do you think? . . . Tell her?"

Samuel looks at John as he says, "The insurance company, they're not gonna pay. I know. I talk to Portland. I listen real good. I know about these things. They think I just another dumb Aleut. They talk real nice. But they're not gonna pay."

Alarmed, Peggy asks John, "What can you do about that?"

John, knowing this whole discussion is premature but also knowing that Samuel is an astute businessman, says, "This is way early to say what an insurance will do, but if you think there will be problems, get your files together. I'll help you, represent you, just send me a copy of everything you have, especially logs of your telephone calls. When you called, who you talked to, what was said. . . . If we have to sue, it'll be two, three years before anybody sees any money—and considering the dollars involved, it's likely to be five to ten years. So you really want them to settle. You don't even want to talk suit to them at this point, understand."

Paul Bob's eyes look as if they could launch arrows: "Can they not pay, after what they charge us?"

"They should have enough assets to cover any loss, but yes, it's possible that they might have difficulty covering a loss, particularly

one so large.” John looks from Paul Bob to Samuel. He feels some difficulty in knowing how to address men his father’s age, men he grew up calling Uncle Paul and Uncle Samuel even though they are no relation. “How many of those boats were covered by Dad’s carrier?”

“All of them. I checked.” Samuel pauses when the doorbell rings. Peggy excuses herself and gets the door, returning in a moment with another salmon casserole: “Mrs. Hermonn offers her condolences. She said not to worry about returning the dish.”

“The paper,” John says, “should sponsor a salmon casserole recipe contest. That has to be the fourteenth or fifteenth salmon dish so far, and none of them look the same.”

“That’s a good idea,” Peggy says. “Might lead to another cookbook. . . . Now, Samuel, you were saying?”

“Jacob, he, ah, told me to trust you. This might not be good if too many people know.” He looks at her but seems to see right through her, as if she were a vapor.

“How about if I don’t do anything, write anything without checking with John first? Will that help?” She understands, but doesn’t necessarily like her position as a younger woman in a male world. If she were as old as Grandma Mutukin, then her opinions would be respected, and she would be wise enough not to offer them. At the edge of the sea, culture changes with evolutionary speed. “John, you’ll keep me in the loop?”

Making eye contact with her, he nods. Then to Paul Bob, he says, “Dad used to tell me that you . . . might, ah . . . make a person crab bait the first time they raided your pots. . . . The crabs are eating pretty good right now. They don’t need fed.”

Although Paul Bob’s face is stony, his eyes sparkle.

Ivan says, “If they don’t pay, we’ll find hungry crabs.”

“No, you won’t. That’s not Dad’s way.” He understands Paul Bob and Uncle Ivan wanting to exact justice if it is denied or even delayed. That is what he does with the Law. But he has never understood his dad’s willingness to suffer loss without

compensation if the other party refuses to pay, a trait in his dad that goes against common sense.

Peggy glances at her watch: “John, I need to be getting back. I have an issue I need to put to bed. . . . I’ll talk,” she looks at Ivan, “to you later, if it’s okay?”

- 1 1 -

Jacob wears wool pants, and under his heavier halibut shirt, a lighter wool shirt. So it isn’t long before rain soaks his shirts, and his shoulders steam. He walks and steams, walks and thinks and steams, walks and thinks and prays, nothing formal, nothing fancy, just words that mean something to him as steam rises from his shoulders and back. He is, at first, surprised he isn’t angry. He hurts, each step painful. He’s sad. He feels empty as he walks and steams and prays. But he isn’t angry. Actually, he feels a tiny sense of relief. Mary won’t have to remember their son. Despite his tears—it seems even God cries—he can handle the loss as his back steams as far down as his waist.

He isn’t angry as a hungry bear isn’t angry in the heat of a late July afternoon.

He walks along the rocky beach fronting the channel. This is where he came when Isaac went down how many years ago. He doesn’t remember, not right now. It seems like no time has passed.

Gulls hover above him, circle a time or two, then sail on, leaving him alone for a minute before returning for another pass.

His shoulders continue to steam as the storm surge laps at the kelp-covered rocks on which he balances for a moment before stepping to another, equally slick, what he did as a boy, seeing how far he could go before he falls, each step precarious, each step risking disaster, each step forcing him to take another as his foot begins to slip as soon as weight is transferred to it, but his boot clings long enough to continue forward, always one foot first, then sometimes both feet on a rock, this rock higher than that one,

then on to another one, all slick, all jagged, always more beyond the one on which he will fall.

What he misses most right now are the rosy finches, which will be back in the spring.

He closes his eyes as he steps onto the next rock, its edge ragged and slippery. He balances for a moment as he gathers himself for the next step, but he has to stop. With his eyes closed, he doesn't know where to go—he hears nothing but the whistler, its moans long and low. And he leans forward with his arms spread wide to keep from falling.

When he opens his eyes, he sees the deepening gray of clouds and sea, and of a world without form. Rain and wind, Aleut colors, twirl in his mental void. And he wonders why he misses rosy finches.

There is nowhere to kneel and he doesn't feel like it anyway. He's had his say. He's just an old man, born of the sea and destined to return. He is like the hermit crab that exchanges one shell for another, and he remembers putting hermits in a bucket till they ran out of oxygen and abandoned their shells to save their lives . . . his breath comes heavy as if he is running out of oxygen.

* * * * *

CHAPTER TWO

-1-

In Seattle, with a travel voucher to anywhere Alaska Airlines flies, Heidi Maria Harte would venture beyond the end of the world if that's how far she has to go to find a real life shaman. She has interviewed imposters and shaman wantabes from Fargo to El Paso, from Tulsa to Victoria. She has visited reservations, nursing homes, a VFW hall, even one Bingo Parlor outside of Pocatello, Idaho. She has heard stories about legendary shamans, about how to become a shaman, about diving into the earth and emerging miles away. But she has not met anyone with real power, let alone with a spirit that would withstand an introduction. She has met magicians, charlatans, mixed blood and Native Americans. And she has about come to the conclusion that shamans were smart men with, usually, a gift for acquiring other languages and a disdain for everyday work, and that no shamans exist today.

Her credentials are sometimes impressive: she has a degree in Anthropology from Wyoming, a graduate degree in Canadian Studies, a second graduate degree in Native American Studies and additional post graduate work at University of Washington in Northwest Coast Art, but she has yet to take her doctorate, mainly because of an article she co-authored with her ex-husband, Dr. Robert Anderson, an article about finding Ogam inscriptions along Idaho's Snake River, an article that has stigmatized her candidacy. She has written two books, neither of which anybody reads; has served as director of a regional museum at Sequim; has married twice and divorced twice; has a pre-school age son who used to

travel with her before her recent divorce; and she generally finds her life unsatisfying although somewhat interesting.

Always, she asks only to be judged on the quality of her work. But she has found her gender and her political opinions matter more than the work she does, thereby tainting her accomplishments and cheapening her professionalism, leaving her the token female that gets trotted out whenever funding requests are presented. She has never been a person; she has always been an object, or so she feels at least once every month.

Therefore, Heidi-Marie, as she usually identifies herself, would, she assures everyone who will listen, make an excellent model for a female detective who never solves a case, but who takes the bad guys' best shots. She actually could be an investigator. That is really what an anthropologist is.

There is almost nothing she doesn't know something about. She sometimes thinks she ought to be a call-in, radio talk show host. Her curiosity exceeds a cat's, and she has at least three lives; she'll have to wait to see if she has nine.

She is five feet nine inches, and weighs, she admits proudly, two hundred and nine pounds, down from two-thirty a year ago. She's thirty-eight years old, and if it weren't for her preschool-age son, Peter, she could pass, as she tells her occasional dates, for twenty years older, such has been the effects of wind and weather during too many field school sessions. She is, she tells everyone, a working anthropologist, not that she is currently employed. She used to hand out a card reading, *REDHEAD FOR HIRE*, and not once was she propositioned, such, she tells friends, are her looks. Her card did get her a few jobs, one of which lead to a study of the origin of Hell in Western thought.

As an anthropologist, she is an observer and an interpreter of events, of cultures. Right now, she is particularly interested in Aleutian Island Natives as, according to Lydia Black, Father Veniaminov was asked by a toion if he wanted to meet a shaman's spirit helper. Veniaminov wrote the Holy Synod requesting permission to meet the spirit, but permission was denied. She

figures that conversion to the Orthodox church has never been so complete as to preclude another shaman, if any exist, from making a similar offer as was made to Father Veniaminov. Her main problem, though, is that Alaska Airlines doesn't fly into the Aleutians.

Money is the cross on which anthropologists are crucified: so much more good work could get done if money weren't everybody's continual bugaboo. She doesn't have enough to fly to Unalaska, or better Atka. And despite one detective writer's fanciful imaginations, there aren't Aleuts living along the Copper River. The closest she can get to a remnant Aleut population is Port Adams, where, she suspects, the old ways were lost a century ago when a large number of Scandinavian fishermen nearly wiped out the Pacific cod that followed herring and the upswelling nutrients into shallow bays. Most of those Northern European fishermen never made enough to go home. Again, that money problem.

So sitting in Sea-Tac, with no one waiting for her, with no place to stay and nearly no money, she wonders if she isn't as messed up as John Straley's fictional hero, she can't remember his name, not that it matters. His stories are all over-the-top Alaskacana. And she wonders if anyone would be interested in a historical novel, say one about the exploits of Hieromonk Afanasii on Kodiak, who almost singlehandedly unconverted the whole island.

There are so many good stories out there that it seems a shame to her those aren't the ones being told. She thinks her books are interesting, but only she, one editor and about three hundred scholars read them. Shows you, she giggles, her taste in stories. And she wonders what awaits her.

This trip makes her question whether she, as a practical anthropologist, can be ever again taken seriously. In one aspect, this trip seems like one enormous joke. In another, this is the most frightening thing she has ever attempted.

She probably has Peter's father to blame for her undertaking the trip: for no apparent reason that she can discern (other than he is descended from someone who accompanied Brigham Young to

Utah) her ex-husband decided to return to being a Mormon, and to bring their son up Mormon.

She is still not able to dispassionately discuss the issue.

But if Joseph Smith can talk to a spirit, she should be able to although she's not certain she really wants to. This whole idea is stupid. All of it. However, she has been at this for a year now. She can't seem to give it up.

-2-

Orthodox Christmas comes in January. After it, winter seems dreary as storms intensify, with sustained winds of sixty, seventy, eighty miles an hour, winds that lean against buildings until squashing them, winds that uproot trees and smoke seas and suspend life, bringing even routine activities like shopping and barhopping to nearly a halt. Mail is regularly delayed as weather cancels flights. Nothing happens unless weather permits it, and the wind pushes cars around and tips over delivery trucks and roars as it rips away the Moonies' partially completed cannery, sending pieces of tin flying across the Gulf.

A few boats that list Port Adams as home fish tanners in the Dutch Harbor district, a few more have been delivering Pacific cod to Ketchikan, and the *Brave Susan* has been fishing hair crabs around the Islands of the Four Mountains (its skipper contracted with a Japanese supermarket for live delivery of hair crabs through 2002). But around town, canneries are manned by skeleton crews that spend most of their time battening down what the wind threatens to steal. Once every few days a boat fishing black cod will return, but most of that fishery is centered in Sitka. So Ed Nelson continues to fish octopus, sneaking out to check his pots whenever the wind pauses to take a breath, and Jim Jahnes fishes for yellow-eyed rock fish in the lee of Near Island, and not much else has happened since tanners closed, except that Heidi-Marie has made everybody a little uncomfortable as she, with her recorder,

tries to interview residents, her questions always about ancestral beliefs.

Heidi-Marie arrived with four dollars and two tea bags and no small amount of gall. She walked from the airport to town, her bag over her shoulder and her ego temporarily in her pocket. She started asking for work at the cafe across from the Harbormaster, and kept asking all the way out Fishhook Road. When she reached Guennie's, Jack Edwards hired her, saying he was impressed with her credentials, and he seemed to take some satisfaction in having someone with two graduate degrees washing breakfast dishes. But she rented a room by the month, had its cost withheld from her wages, and never complained about anything other than she gained back five of the pounds she had spent a year losing.

She purchased a video camera in time to record Father Gregory leading a Christmas procession along Marine Way, his prayer wheel lit before him, all of the grade school behind him. The wind let up for long enough that candles weren't blown out. She was impressed, and she tried to interview the priest, hounding him for a week, before he promised to pray for her but told her nothing else. Michael, the priest's youngest son, tugged on her pantleg until he got her attention. Then he asked if she was really *the question lady*.

So now, ready to leave Port Adams if she had anywhere to go, she sits across from Ivan Chickenof at a breakfast table in Guennie's, and she asks, "Teddy Rudin said he heard you calling for help when you lost your boat, is that possible?" Her recorder sits on the table between them, its tiny red eye watching the proceedings.

"Teddy's an Aleut. He's not Russian. He's different." Ivan tries to remember if he has ever fooled around with a redhead. He thinks he has. The woman with real white skin there in Seldovia might have had red hair, but he can't remember the exact color of her hair, color not being important at the time. She was living on a scow, but that was decades ago. So as he slowly eats, he wonders what a *question lady* would be like once lights were out. Would she continue to ask questions? He thinks she might, thinks that she

probably wouldn't be much fun. "Teddy, he's not like you and me. He's Aleut."

"What do you mean?" She checks the recorder, making sure its tape is running. "What do you mean when you say he's an Aleut?" She has heard this said before of various men when she is certain the men were more northern European than aboriginal Amerindian. It is as if they don't know their own heritage.

"He thinks Aleut. That's what being Aleut means." He came for the free breakfast she offered in exchange for recording their conversation. She is, he thinks, a nosy broad; but even if she wouldn't be much fun, she seems harmless enough, not like that schoolteacher who bugged out years ago, leaving her car running there in the airport parking lot. "If a fella thinks Aleut, then he gets strange, like Teddy."

"How is Teddy strange, other than he heard you?" This is the type of reasoning she has encountered for a couple of months now. She has yet to figure out how to deconstruct it.

"He's strange 'cause he's Aleut. That's why he's strange."

Yes, this is exactly what she has encountered. She knows now she will get nowhere with Ivan. She has two strikes against her: she's a woman, and she's from Outside. What an awful but appropriate naming of location. She can't help either, and neither seem forgivable by older fishermen. Their wives would, logically, be the ones with whom she would most closely relate, but almost to a woman, wives are so wrapped up in the Church that she has little in common with them. She has tried to talk to different ones, but they don't seem to understand English and her Russian isn't very good. In fact, she only knows a few phrases that none of them seemed to recognize. So, yes, this morning, she really feels like an outsider.

"I'd like to talk to your brother sometime if I could."

"Jacob, he's not doing so good. Bad, bad season for him."

"I heard he was gonna lose his house. What's going on with that? More of the same insurance problem?" In Guennie's, she hears everybody's business. She also hears a lot more than she wants,

especially coming from rooms rented by the hour. “How did he know where to find you?”

“He just know. He think about it, then he know.”

“What, do you two have mental telepathy?” She read about Siberian shaman who, after eating hallucinogenic birch shelves, have great telepathic powers, but she has always associated those stories with the recipes of Jonathan Swift’s American.

“Why do you ask these questions? You ask everybody things, and the old people call you *the question lady*. Why?”

“I want to know things . . . it’s my job.”

“No, you wash dishes. That’s your job. Dishes. Not questions.” He wouldn’t mind answering if he thought she might be fun, but he knows she’ll never shut up, never understand, never turn off the lights. Any answer will spawn more questions.

“I also wash my hair, my clothes, my face. Those are things I do, they’re not my job . . . do you understand the difference.”

“I think you *a question lady*, yup.” After Christmas, he left Jacob’s and started staying on Ed Nelson’s scow, the one moored next to Alaska Packers. Jacob did all of the cooking when they were growing up, then fishing together. As a result, now that he is on his own he opens cans of chili. Beyond that, he eats wherever he can, like a raven. So the hot breakfast was good bait to get him here, but he is more wary than a three-toed fox. “But maybe I come back and answer more questions another time. I think I’d like that.”

“Sure, why not. Tell me, how can I get a hold of your brother? I really want to talk to him.”

“I tell ‘im, *the question lady*, she want to talk to you.”

“If you would, please.” She notices that he has slipped into dumb-Native-speak, the point at which it enters the conversation is when she knows she’s being humored or put-on. “Where can I find him? I’ll ask him myself.”

“I tell ‘im, *the question lady*—”

“That’s all right. I’ll go up and see him. . . . We’ll get together again. Soon. So thanks for coming by.” He’s another one down. Her task seems hopeless.

She has been promoted, so to speak: she now washes dishes from six to two a.m., meaning that from ten on, she pretty much has glasses only, making her life easier, her reward for not complaining. She could go see Jacob Chickenof right now if she had any wheels. She steps into the kitchen: "Liz, could I use your car to go up Kupreanof? I need to ask more questions."

The cook smiles as she says, "If questions were raindrops, you'd cause the Flood all by yourself."

"I am officially *the question lady*."

"That's a name you'll never shake. . . . Sure, you can use it, but there isn't much gas in it."

Liz's car is a green Datsun B-210, one of many on the island. Heidi-Marie stops at Two-Hi-Gas, puts two dollars worth in, then heads up uphill, into the high rent district, which the unfortunate fisherman will soon be leaving. She heard he will live with his daughter, the one who works at the Post Office. That seems a shame, but that is Capitalism in its ugliness.

She isn't certain which house is his—the rain seems to blur street signs and addresses. Jacob's home isn't a landmark, but its location is widely known to residents. Unfortunately, she's not really a resident. This street will get her, she believes, close; so she stops in a driveway. She'll ask for directions if this isn't the right place.

The fellow who opens the door looks as if he's been beaten with sledge hammers, not that she knows exactly how a person would look after such a beating:

"Jacob Chickenof?"

"Yes. . . . And you are?" He isn't expecting anyone, and as of late, unexpected visitors haven't brought good news.

"Heidi-Marie. May I come in?"

"Oh, *the question lady*. Ivan called me."

Although it's still early—Rush isn't on yet—Jacob's tired, and he doesn't really feel like talking, nor packing, what he has been doing. He doesn't feel like much of anything. If he didn't, in the mirror on the back of the bedroom door, see himself rise in the

mornings, he wouldn't know for sure he's up, but the mirror shows him pulling his pants on and pushing his hair back, about the extent of his grooming. He has never grown much of a beard; didn't shave at all before he was thirty. While fishing, running nights, fighting off sleep, he had gotten into the habit of pulling out a whisker every now & then to stay awake. Now, they don't grow except around his mouth, and even those don't grow long.

But lately, he has been losing his battle against sleep. He loses days, doesn't know if he's gotten up or not. If Little Mary didn't come by every afternoon, he might not get up, mirror or no mirror.

Ivan called not more than five minutes ago. He told Ivan that he wasn't interested in talking to her. But here she is. He is not really surprised to see her, just surprised to see her so soon. "I was packing—"

"Would another time be better?" She doesn't expect much to come of this visit, but before she leaves the island, he is someone with whom she should speak.

Inviting her in seems easier than telling her to go away: "No. Come in. I don't have many visitors any more so forgive the mess." He lifts a pile of books from one of the kitchen chairs, then offers it to her. "Mary used to have someone by every day, several times a day, but not so many people want to see me."

"You sold the liquor store?" She makes her statement a question since she knows he has, but she doesn't know exactly where to open the conversation. She knows he lost his son and wife, and the two boats. That ought to be enough for anyone, but now he's being sued. That seems a little excessive.

"Yes. It was necessary." He was never really comfortable selling liquor, knowing, as he does, that he was profiting from not bringing to the island happiness but the suspension of reality. The store was a business venture, recommended by his accountant, but perhaps he shouldn't be involved in every opportunity that comes along, not that his accountant or even Mary agrees with him—he still thinks of her as just visiting off-island; still has a difficult time accepting that she won't return.

His accountant will not go to the grave or beyond for him. That journey is his to make alone, as it was for Mary. And he clears off a second chair as he forces his mind to think other thoughts: he wonders how long it will take this question lady to ask about Teddy and Ivan.

“I heard the money went to pay for the funerals of your crews?” She realizes, even when trying to make small talk, that she asks questions. At the moment, she wishes she didn’t as a feeling of death seems to hang like curtains in this kitchen. But she really can’t help herself: “Couldn’t the funeral home have waited?”

“The money did more than that. . . . You know I’m being sued.” Ivan told him that she asks lots of questions. He thinks Samuel told him the same thing—he has seen Samuel several times lately, but their meetings blur together and seem fuzzy. So he might as well answer what hasn’t yet been asked. He suspects she’ll ask the question before long anyway.

“Isn’t getting sued so soon awfully quick?” Despite the mood of the room, her questions just come.

“My son tells me it’s not so unusual any more. Besides, I have the obligation to support the families of my crew regardless of how their suit eventually turns out.”

“I understand that Aleuts were very generous people, that when a hunter returned, his kill belonged to the village.”

“Possibly so, I wouldn’t know.” He would offer her coffee except he’s out. “If I made a pot of tea, would you like a cup?”

“Please.” This kitchen seems so dark despite being mostly white. “My understanding is that a hunter let everybody in the village take what they wanted of his kill, then if somebody didn’t come down and get any meat, he was obligated to take them some. Is that true?”

She waits for him to answer, which he doesn’t seem to be in any hurry to do, and she realizes he is not at all like his brother and he’s not like her: he’s patient, a trait she has worked to develop for its professional necessity, but not one bestowed on her by heritage.

“You are, I believe, an anthropologist, so you can teach me about my ancestors. Were they open to strangers?”

She starts to speak, but realizes she doesn't know the answer. Russians never gave them the option. Everything she knows comes from the European perspective.

A little uncomfortable as she feels trap jaws against her throat, she looks around and sees the six wood hats and two visors lined up on a buffet. Two hats are short billed, like those of Pacific Eskimos. Three have the long bills of Fox Island Aleuts. One has the longest bill she has ever seen: it's twice the length of the others, and its volutes are shaped like whales. All of the hats have exquisitely carved ivory volutes and figures. Even the short hats have long sealion whiskers, some of the longest she has seen. But all of the hats are painted in patterns she hasn't seen before: bands of purple, red, yellow, green and black. These are hats of peoples who haven't been studied before—the red paint is the color that interests her most. It isn't the brownish red of ocher, nor the brilliant red of Chinese vermilion. It's a different red, a new red, just as the patterns are new to her. And all of the hats and the visors are, from what she can see, museum quality.

Her tongue locks up as if brakes were applied.

If he were a few years younger, he could be the hunter Captain Cook's illustrator painted—she notes his mongoloid heritage, evident in the shape of his head and angle of his pelvis. He is not an attractive man, nor is he unattractive either. He appears intelligent, which she knows he is, and to be quite a bit older than herself. But that might be because he still looks like he has been beatup internally.

When she is again ready to speak, she considers her words carefully: “If I were to tell you about your ancestors, I would be as presumptuous as some of my professors, the ones I found bores. So if you can help me understand what books teach, then perhaps we both will benefit.” There, she feels she has ducked his clever trap.

Rain batters the picture window, sheets on it and runs in rivulets from its sill. The window will be about all he'll miss of this

house. Wind whips spruce boughs, and the whistler moans. And he feels a tiny spark of interest ignite in his chest, a spark as small as smoke from a bit of mouse nest heated by a fire bow. He mentally picks up the bit of smoking nest, cups his hands around it and softly blows as if coaxing life into the fireweed fluff and grass stubble, life that will consume it.

“Ivan tells me you want to know about Teddy.” The water seems to take forever to heat. “He said you asked questions he didn’t want to answer.”

“I hope he enjoyed his breakfast. I didn’t get much from him. He was circular in his answers.” She is a little surprised that Ivan would have told Jacob she asked questions he didn’t want to answer. That would indicate she was closer to getting what she came after than anytime so far. “Actually I was curious about what Mr. Rudin heard. The story the rumor mill spreads is that Mr. Rudin heard your brother’s spirit helper. But your brother gave me his dumb-Native-routine, which, I suspect, works well for tourists, but doesn’t help me much.” There, she played all of her cards. If she is honest with him, she suspects he will be with her.

“My daughter Beth went to college at Fairbanks. We were stretched thin, I was having the *Iskai* built but didn’t have any financing for it. So she had to work . . . one day, this Outside woman in a big tour group asked Beth if the store accepted American money. She asked it real loud as if my daughter didn’t speak English very well.”

“That’s funny. What did you daughter do?”

“Beth gets mad. I don’t know what she said. She talks like a fisherman sometimes so she wouldn’t tell me. But I told her she should have said, Yes we take it at a discount. Twenty percent maybe. . . . I probably would’ve gotten in trouble.” The memory feels pleasant. He hasn’t smiled much lately.

“Does everybody here make sport of tourists and cheechakos?”

“We don’t see many tourists here. Nothing to look at. Too expensive to get here.” He used to tell Mary that it was taboo to

speaking ill of the mentally challenged, and all of the tourists he has meet behave as if they are mentally deficient.

"I think there's plenty to look at. Those hats, for example—"

"You're not supposed to see them. Families have their old things. They're not for other people to see . . . except maybe at a potlatch, and Aleuts didn't potlatch till kids from all over got together in the B.I.A. school in Sitka." His mother attended the B.I.A. boarding school for a couple of years before dropping out, then hiding out when the truancy man came.

"You mean every family has hats like those?"

"No. Some families have more, some are poorer and might have only a stone lamp. But the old things are kept."

"And there's no way for those hats to go to a museum?"

"I am dividing them up. They go to my daughters who live here on the island." He's uncomfortable with her seeing the hats, and especially uncomfortable knowing he will have to answer her next question.

"But not to your children who don't live here?" She has heard from older colleagues about family treasures, but she never imagined anything like this. "Do you know what those hats are worth, especially the one?"

"Varies. From sixty to a hundred thousand apiece—if they were ever to be sold, which is why they don't leave the island."

"If you would've sold one of the visors, you wouldn't have had to sell your liquor store—and the visor would've been protected. It would then be out where it could be studied and appreciated by the public." The pieces cry out to her for display. Their patterns alone are new grounds for cultural interpretation, and certainly a potential dissertation subject.

"Why do you think the liquor store should be more valuable to me than one of the visors?"

"Well, it shouldn't be. It's just a busin—"

"Then you think I did right to sell it and keep the visor?"

"Well, no . . . yes . . . I don't know. That was your decision to make."

“You should stick to asking questions. You don’t answer them very well.” She is, he figures, a smart lady so she should understand him. “Nobody needs to see the hats. The hats live longer when only my family’s eyes touch them.”

“I also think you are undervaluing those hats.” She doesn’t understand him not wanting for everyone to see the talent, the sophistication of his ancestors. The workmanship, evident from six feet away, is outstanding. “You might think about building a museum here at Port Adams. Then tourists would have a reason to come. And if other families have things, wow.”

“Think about what you have just said. . . . Why would my family want tourists to see what’s ours? And why would anyone want tourists cluttering up streets.”

“Tourists do more than clutter up streets. They bring dollars. Sometimes lots of them.”

“The liquor store made me lots of dollars . . . so they’re each like a little liquor store?” Because she has seen the hats, he needs to repair the damage rather than just dismiss her. She will start rumors if he doesn’t bridge the gap between them, and theft remains a culturally approved means of obtaining treasures, especially for someone like Samuel Golovin, who would steal from even him. Friendship would not interfere with cultural expectations. “Think about what Jesus said. A man shouldn’t cast his pearls before swine. They won’t be appreciated, nor valued. So every culture has its secrets. These are my families’.”

“You’re wrong, and if that’s what Jesus said, he’s wrong too. They ought to be shared.” She feels so strongly about the hats being in a museum that—

She pauses for a moment as she realizes she is trying to impose her culture on him, a man who talks like her and makes her forget the differences between them. She has lost her professionalism, her objectiveness. “I’m sorry, you’re right. Your family’s secrets are yours, and I have been thinking about what’s best for the objects, not for you.”

“You come from Outside, where too often objects are more important than people, so I forgive you.” His question for himself

is can he believe her. “My son tells me that in court, a man’s life has to be reduced to paper or it has no meaning. Right now, with the lawsuit, I am being recreated as words on paper. God uses better material.”

“Wait a minute, why would you need to forgive me for wanting to do what’s best for your treasures? Huh?” She can ignore his repeated use of *man*, but she hasn’t done anything that needs forgiven, cultural differences be damned.

The water has about boiled away. He stands, refills the tea kettle, then leaning against the stove, he remembers his father being angry at his mother and her family, calling them Indians and names he’s forgotten. His dad never understood his mom. They had kids together, but knew only the surface of the other. They had their immediate geography in common, not much else. But his dad cared for his mom, cared a lot. But sometimes, he thinks his dad cared for his mom like a person cares for a dog.

His arms are folded across his chest. He reaches up with his left hand and scratches his ear. He needs to answer her, but silence seems stronger. Still, she won’t understand if he doesn’t say something, and right now, getting her to understand is crucial: “Why shouldn’t I forgive you?”

“I don’t need forgiveness—”

“Everybody needs forgiveness.”

“That’s bullshit, the type of crap you hear in church.” She can’t help herself, not at the moment. “I came here because I was interested in shamanism, not in . . .” She doesn’t finish her thought. She doesn’t want to blow her best chance yet of penetrating Aleut culture. She wonders if he’ll slip into dumb-Native-speak, or if he will continue to treat her with respect.

He feels very old, and more than a little tired. He has seen his share of cannery workers caught up in the teaching of Buddha, has seen village kids get caught up, like John, in wanting to be more Native than their parents. Everybody wants to be something. There is too much emptiness in a person’s chest, and too much time to think about that emptiness.

She needs, he thinks, to talk to Father Gregory. She doesn't understand the danger of what she does, but few people do. Outside people live with their eyes. If they can't see something, it doesn't exist. The scientific method. They have to see even that elusive W particle before they'll believe.

Making her understand will be difficult, but then, understanding of any kind is always difficult.

His family has one treasure that has never been shared, something worth far more than the hats. A story, one that when heard a generation ago would have made her a relative or got her killed. It doesn't seem quite as important since Mary left him. Except for Little Mary, their kids just aren't interested in the story, not even John whose Nativeness is a poorly sewn kamleika.

"There is a story that goes with Whale Hat," he points to the longest billed hat, "a story about how rosy finches and whales are related."

"I've not heard this story. Can I record it?"

Dilemma. He doesn't believe the story has power like his mother did even though she, too, was a Christian. But it is a possession, part of his inheritance, part of his wealth. How much poorer will he be if he shares it . . . an Aleut hunter shares his meat. Always has. And he knows those stories. Can he afford to give this piece of meat away, or will he be casting his pearls to swine. This is a hard decision.

Will he ever tell this story again? He might not, especially if he gives Whale Hat to Little Mary. Then will the story be lost if the question lady, here, doesn't record it? Possibly. Either that or Little Mary will have to write it down so their relative doesn't die after all these generations.

He slowly starts to nod his head, just a thought at first, then a little bit of movement, then more, finally he says, "Go ahead and record it. I give it to you, my gift."

She fumbles her recorder, dropping it on the table, almost dropping it to the floor, and she says, "I'm as nervous as if I were getting married."

“I’ll wait. Go ahead and get set up.” And he tries to remember if he has been nervous when receiving a gift. Perhaps.

Taking a breath, her recorder ready, she says, “Yes.”

“A long time ago, when the old people still hunted whales, my mother’s great-great-great-grandfather was the best hunter in the village of Samalgan. He killed very many sealions, but mostly he killed whales. Many whales. That is why he wore Whale Hat, because he killed more whales than anyone else ever. And he told a story about when he was a boy and the people lived on what is now Five Mile Beach, where they always had hot water and plenty to eat. Then one night a great wave destroyed all the bidarkas while the people slept. The wave flooded the houses closest to the beach and either washed them away or drowned everyone inside, and in the morning, there were a lot of questions about why the wave happened and who had done wrong and what taboo was broken. Everybody had questions, and the people who were left couldn’t agree on whose fault it was so the people who were left gathered all their belongings and started walking. They walked and walked and walked until they crossed over Mt. Iskai and came to that village behind Gull Point, where house pits and shellmounds can still be found. In that village was a famous shaman whose name was too sacred to ever speak, for to speak a name is to have power over that name.

“All of the people gathered together. Even the children sat along the outside of the circle around the shaman, and they asked the shaman how much it would take for the shaman to tell them what taboos they broke that caused the wave to killed their relatives. The shaman, he didn’t think these people were very rich so he didn’t want to help them. But they insisted, begging him, offering everything they had until they offered their children to him as slaves. Finally, he relented and said that they could keep all of their children except for my mother’s great-great-great-grandfather and one girl who was about ready to enter her seclusion. But he took all of their things so that they didn’t have anything to eat. He even took their snares with which they caught rosy finch.

“Then the shaman went into his house and pretended to be sick. The people waited outside in their circle for all that day and then the next day and then the day after that. Finally the people were faint with hunger and since they had no food, they went down to the beach where they ate seaweed and drank seawater. Then their stomachs hurt and they get very sick, and the people from that village came out and killed them and had a big feast.

“My mother’s relative was very ashamed of how his relatives died and he thought about how they died and he thought about it and thought about it for all summer and into the fall, and he was still thinking about it the next spring. But he was still small, and the shaman was very powerful and people came from all over to hear what he said, and everytime he takes everything they have, but he let them go home after he tells them what they want to hear. Sometimes, though, it takes him a long time to figure out what they want to hear, and then the people have to wait, and wait, always offering him more things until he has a vision and tells them what is so.

“The girl entered her time, and the shaman went into her and she became pregnant, but she remembered her people and she went up to the top of Mt. Iskai and jumped in and has never been seen again except when the mountain smokes after a heavy sea.

“Now, my mother’s relative is all alone and he gets real lonely, and he has no one to talk to but the shaman because he is supposed to become a shaman too. But one day, he takes the shaman’s spear and his bidarka and paddles out into the bay, where a whale swims beside him. He throws his spear at the whale and kills it. But while it is dying, it asks him why he killed it. He tells the whale that he killed it because it was there and because he could, which is what the shaman had been teaching him. But the whale forgave my relative, and said that it forgave him because he didn’t know better, that he hadn’t been taught the right way.

“When the whale washed ashore, the whole village celebrated, and the shaman said the whale was a great blessing, and that he was very proud of my relative. But my relative felt bad and wouldn’t

eat any of the whale while everyone else feasted and danced and knew each other.

“That night, everyone in the village, including the shaman gets very sick and dies, but not my relative who didn’t eat any of that whale. He just feels sad because he killed that whale.

“My relative went on to kill very many whales, but before he ever again threw his dart he would ask the whale for forgiveness, and he would explain to the whale why it was necessary for him to kill it, and he would promise to use all of it, even the loose strands of baleen which were used for rosy finch snares. So that is how rosy finches became related to whales.

“Since then, whales have been my family’s spirit helpers until we became Christian. Now, we don’t need intercessory spirits. Only my brother keeps the old ways, and only because he has no faith.”

Jacob leans back against the stove. Again the water has boiled away, so once again he fills the tea kettle.

She turns the recorder off, sits for a minute looking puzzled, then asks, “I still don’t understand how rosy finches are related to whales?”

He had wondered what she would do with the story. Now he knows. Nothing. She doesn’t understand it at all. And it probably can’t be explained to her. Here, he has given her his family’s greatest source of wealth, the story, and she can’t hear what he said. He feels sorry for her.

“Listen very carefully. The shaman had to kill my relatives because they didn’t know the answer to their question.”

“Wow. I wouldn’t have ever gotten that out of your story.” She has heard and read lots of aboriginal Amerindian stories, but most of them have been those that sort of belong to the public domain, those that have been deconstructed and dissolved into meaningful bytes of structure and repetition. “I think I understand now. The story is about me. I need to answer my own questions.”

“Good stories are never about one thing or one person.” She is, he has to conclude, smarter than a tourist but even more naive.

To her, what seems most surprising is that he seems to believe the story as if it were factual history like the United States buying Alaska from Russia. And without conscious thought, words fall from her mouth: “To think, I was hoping to meet a shaman—”

“There isn’t,” he interrupts her as he pours the tea while the wind seems to suck its steam through the window, “a shaman on the island, so you need to let that go.” Maybe she isn’t as smart as he thought and much more naive.

“What about your brother? Do you think I could meet his spirit helper?” She is certain a spirit helper is a paranormal manifestation of the human psyche, just as she is certain Joseph Smith’s angel was con-man magic. But she can’t express her disbelief when her purpose is to debunk a mythical spirit world.

“You have probably done some stupid things in your life, perhaps some real stupid things, but what you ask exceeds your previous best.” Ivan has already given her all he will. Besides, Ivan has no control over his demon. “Without a protecting spirit, what you ask is true folly.”

“And you have a protecting spirit?” She had hoped for better. She hadn’t expected this stall. “Your brother was living here, wasn’t he?”

“I am a Christian.”

“So am I—”

“No, you are not.” He must be careful not to judge, but he has the ability to discern spirits. Her human spirit is the only spirit she has.

“Sure I am.” *No, I’m not Orthodox, but he seems enlightened enough to accept other faiths.* “Just because I missed spending Christmas with my son doesn’t mean I’m not Christian.”

“You have a son?” He has said enough; he needs to change subjects. She is as ignorant as Beth’s professors in Fairbanks, where everybody seems to suffer from frostbite of the brain.

“I miss him terribly, but his father has him. Somehow I don’t measure up as a mother, especially not in Utah where wives better worship the ground their husbands walk on.” That is, she knows,

only partially true. It is, however, true enough for her to say and to defend if need be.

The wind has picked up; it again whips spruce boughs around. He can see far down the channel where six, maybe seven foot seas rock Buoy Seven. A three foot sea rolls into the harbor and around the breakwater. It rocks dock floats as the gray day becomes leaden, the barometric pressure falling.

“That, question lady, is prejudicial. They need reasons even in Utah to leave a child with its father.”

“Well, there were reasons that I’m not going into.”

“The judge, he said that you have a bad attitude, that you don’t like authority, that your son needs a more structured environment—and your husband, he’s a nice guy that goes to work everyday, who you married because you thought you wanted stability in your life, but you really didn’t want stability.”

“I’m impressed. That’s half right. My ex-husband is a nice guy, and I lack structure in my life, but there’s more, was more.” She looks at her cup which is still half full and cold. She should be going although she really doesn’t have anything else to do till evening. However, she needs to get Liz’s car back to her. “There’s so much more to the story.”

“There always is.” He senses her desire to leave.

“What will you do until your insurance comes through?”

“Naked we come into this world, naked we go out. We try to stay clothed in between. That’s what I will do, try to stay clothed. . . . That has never been easy.”

“Agreed. If I can be of help, let me know. I have contacts in Seattle.” She doesn’t know how she can help, but making the offer seems important. “I’ll transcribe that story, will bring you a copy you can check for accuracy. I think it’s an important story, culturally speaking.”

“Don’t bother. I told you, the story is my gift to you. You keep it. I don’t need it back.” She won’t understand, he’s certain, that the story is told for its audience. It’s a living story that changes to fit whomever hears it. And he says, “The great problem for Russians

when they brought us Christ was how to balance an individual religion with their need for an organized society. They never could keep their stories straight.”

“I don’t understand.” She has been having a difficult time staying with him, his reasoning so distant from hers. And again, he hasn’t given her enough clues.

“I have said enough. I need to work. This house has sold. I have only till the end of the month to have everything gone.”

She crossed a line she shouldn’t have. What was it? What has she missed?.

He would be, she believes, a difficult man to live with. She would never know where this imaginary line is that she just crossed. She suspects it shifts around, like a sand dune, formidable and solid today, then gone tomorrow or the day after or whenever the wind blows, and on the island here the wind blows all the time.

Perhaps she can start over: “What can I do? I’m pretty good at packing. I’ve had lots of experience.”

“I need to go through everything, so thanks, but—”

“You go through stuff, and I’ll pack. . . . I just have to get Liz’s car back to her pretty quick.” Maybe she should give this all up, this spiritual quest. After all, she missed Christmas with Peter. Sure, she called him several times over the holiday, but that wasn’t like being there. She just didn’t have the money to fly out. Besides, the weather delayed flights so she would’ve had to go standby. She has better things to do with her time than sit in the airport.

Jacob opens a cupboard door, sees the already empty shelves, and feels a little flame, smaller than the pilot light of the propane cookstove. He doesn’t know where it burns, nor why. He has never been like Ivan, who takes a woman upstairs at Guennie’s every so often. No, he married right out of high school. So he never came home to an empty house, never was without family, never was lonely. This has all been new for him, this feeling like he’s being torn apart, this wanting to sleep so he won’t have to think, this hearing nothing but the wind and rain, this wanting revenge.

This question lady, an anthropologist handicapped by her heritage, won't bring him another salmon casserole in the pretext of checking on him when the intention is to endear herself. He hurts too much to even want his brother in the house, much less a friend. She wouldn't, in a lifetime, remind him of Mary. So maybe it would be all right if she helps pack. The house wouldn't seem quite so empty.

"Drink your tea." He closes the cupboard door. "Then you can help pack some whaling darts. Old ones. From my mother's family. From my relative."

Since Ivan left, the house has been too quiet, so quiet he gets thinking he hears Mary in the other room.

-3-

Alvin Winesap isn't used to seeing his name on the police page, but there it is, in black and white for everyone to see. And he feels stigmatized even though he still doesn't think he has done anything wrong; he's certain he hasn't. All he has ever wanted to do was help people. That's why he sold insurance, so he would be there to help people when catastrophes struck—and one has certainly struck now, but he's as much a victim as everyone else.

He checks his watch. The plane is now very late. John Chichikov should've landed an hour ago, and then he could've been away from here, where people recognize him, talk about him, wonder what happened to him, why he cheated on his wife when he never cheated on her, not once, ever.

But Sharon thinks he did, accused him of it, even insisted that he fire Kathy.

He really shouldn't have fired her when nothing happened between them. That wasn't right. It was unfair to Kathy although he made sure she could draw unemployment.

But firing Kathy didn't make any difference anyway. Sharon still filed for divorce, which, in some kind of a record for Kodiak courts, was granted, with her getting their house, his business and

custody of the kids. He wishes now he hadn't encouraged her to get her licenses. But she has them, and she had him arrested when he tried to get the papers he needs pertaining to the bankruptcy of Portland Casualty. Her position is that it is just too bad for the boat owners who lost vessels. They aren't her problem, and if they want to make trouble for her, then they will have to deal with her Anchorage attorneys, Armstrong & Armstrong, who are truly ruthless. He knows. They are the big name, big fee firm that directed the oil spill cleanup efforts in Cook Inlet a few years ago, and they almost got away with letting the oil sink, then wash up on shore as tar balls, with no one paying for red salmon burned because of oil specks in their gills or paying for the contaminated fishing gear or lost openings. They care about nothing except their clients' interests, which means they didn't mind leaving him penniless and open to heavy civil liabilities and possibly more jail time.

The papers he needs, that John needs, that Jacob Chickenof, Samuel Golovin, Paul Bob and Red ne'Torry need were shredded. No other copies exist that he knows of. None. So for the boat owners, he feels bad, but what can he do? He has already spent one night in jail because of them, and that is enough.

He doesn't know why the plane is so late. Weather seems fine; the day couldn't be better. It's one of those bright sunny days of false spring the island experiences every year in February. A bright breeze blows, certainly. But it's forty-three degrees, with a few high white clouds. Nothing here to delay a plane, and a Coast Guard's C-130 has come and gone several times, practicing touch & goes.

What will he tell Chichikov? He can't comply with Chichikov's request for documents—Sharon won't although he would if he could, but he can't. It would be easier for Chichikov to collect dead souls than for him to retrieve the shredded documents in which the financial lives of the vessel owners live. He tried to tell the Juneau attorney this over the phone, but nothing has gone right; he couldn't make himself understood.

He hears jet engines roar against deflector plates as a 737 brakes as it rolls past the terminal. The jet turns around, and taxis back to the building. And he'd rather be anywhere else. No, that's not true: he doesn't want anything to do with jail or with Sharon, but he doesn't see how he can avoid either.

The Juneau attorney is easy to spot: his height and his braid gives him away.

Alvin's knees feel like they're filled with jelly and he needs to piss, but he takes a hesitant step forward and cautiously extends his hand.

"Mr. Winesap, I presume. I am pleased to finally meet you. My father has mentioned you often, usually favorably."

Alvin's eyes moisten without him wanting them to. He wishes Chichikov hadn't mentioned Jacob, who has been nice as can be through all of this, not like Red ne'Torry who made a special trip to Kodiak to assault him in the Post Office—she didn't really hurt him, but the incident was terribly embarrassing.

"I told you over the phone, I can't help you. Not now."

"Is there somewhere private we can go?" Once before, in the Malina Cove case, John faced the deliberate destruction of records. He was lucky then. A creative writer from Fairbanks, a faculty member who tried writing a book in the voice of a teenage girl, helped him fabricate records, which he challenged the mining consortium to prove were wrong. The corporation did lots of squealing, a little legal wrestling and all kinds of foot stomping. But, of course, they couldn't show the records were reproductions since they really had destroyed the proof they, too, needed.

"Yeah, we can go up towards the lake. A nice day like today, it'll be good to get out."

"Your weather is much better than Juneau's. It was gray and rainy when I left. Has been all winter." He never used to mind the rain, but this winter has seemed different, has seemed longer and darker, more depressing, with more madness of all sorts. Even the dogs that run the streets at night seem wilder, a generation closer to their wolf ancestors. There's more dope in Juneau, and more

people using, even in the statehouse. There has been a desperation as the millennium bug became real. Perhaps some of the insanity can be attributed to millennia fever, still a couple of years away.

The sun is bright enough to hurt. John shades his eyes as he looks over the parking lot before following the insurance agent to his pickup. He doesn't know what he expects to see, a nondescript gray man in a gray car, carefully ignoring him. Around Juneau, he has been tailed for the past month, perhaps a reason why this winter seems so dark.

John knows by reputation the established Anchorage firm, Armstrong & Armstrong, that now represents the insurance agency, the agency a defendant in his action to recover damages for his dad and the other boat owners. Samuel Golovin told him to screw the bastards any way he could, and Paul Bob suggested planting a couple of bombs, a comment he made a point of not hearing even though he wasn't three feet from his Uncle Paul, who knows enough about nitrates to make a substantial bang. Red ne'Torry, right now, doesn't want to talk to any male although she, too, has agreed to join his dad in this action. John wishes she would let him represent her in the criminal action against her; he is certain he could get her out of jail, something her appointed attorney hasn't seemed able to do.

Paul Bob's suggestion reminded him of what he dad said about Old Believers on the Kenai Peninsula three decades ago: after Fish & Game closed the Kasilof River before the run hit because their sonar fish counters didn't work, his dad and several Old Believers, who were then new immigrants to Alaska, were seated in Seward Fisheries' office at Ninilchik when one of the Old Believers suggested bombing Fish & Game. Another one seconded the idea, then they turned to his dad and asked if he didn't think that was a good idea. Well, his dad thought it was a wonderful idea but knew if he said so that when the Old Believers were caught they would say just that, that his dad thought it was a good idea. So his dad talked for hours before he convinced the Russians to give up their

hasty plan to bomb Fish & Game. To this day, his dad says he might have made a mistake. A jest, he thinks.

Alvin turns to see why the attorney isn't following him.

John motions for Alvin to go on, that he will be along, and he takes one last look around the parking lot, then steps off the curb into the sunshine that seems part of an alien world. Anchorage was cold and dark. He called Debbie from the airport. She has been terribly worried about Dad. He told her that everything would be all right, but she knew he was lying. Nothing is all right. Except the sunshine here. He has never seen a case in which so much of what should happen doesn't. It is as if his dad has suddenly been cursed, and his dad hasn't done anything wrong to anybody.

Alvin's pickup is a late model Chevrolet—"like a rock," which must, considering the metal thickness of its quarterpanels, refer to how it floats. Blisters of rust have already developed along the bottom of the passenger side window.

Leaving the parking lot, they cross the Buskin River, then turn left and follow the river towards Buskin Lake, where the Coast Guard's antenna field eavesdrops on radio traffic around the North Pacific. Alvin turns onto a gravel trail. A soggy cardboard sign proclaims it the shooting range for the local muzzleloading club. He stops, and leaving the Chevy idling, its heater running, he says, "Seems strange not having an office."

"Actually what happened? I heard you were arrested."

"I had a key. . . . I let myself in the office and was copying files to protect myself. I know what I wrote, and you're right, the actual policies aren't identical. Your dad has different riders, and because he was insuring two vessels, different pay out amounts and dates than, say, Red, whose policy was straight slab." Alvin pauses as he watches a raven that lands in a bare cottonwoods, leans forwards and caws. "Well, that new city officer we have saw the lights on, called Sharon, then with a way more force than necessary, hauled me over to the cop shop. Hell, who did he think I am, Jesse James? I wasn't fighting him. He didn't need to get that rough."

With the recorder in his pocket running, John asks, “Was ne’Torry’s the only straight form policy, where you just filled in the numbers?”

“Yes, and that’s what the woman from Prudential asked just the day before that storm.” Alvin and the raven exchange glances, then the raven opens its wings and swoops low, banking, landing beside a yellow McDonald’s hamburger wrapper.

“Alvin, what did you just say?” John didn’t think Portland Casualty was large enough to afford having him tailed, or to bring in Anchorage heavyweights, but if—why he hasn’t thought of this earlier he doesn’t know—the underwriter has in turn been underwritten by Lloyd’s, or better, Prudential, a player of that size, a player who wouldn’t mind spending a few hundred thousand to delay or avoid paying out claims, then he can understand from where the money comes to have him tailed.

His dad’s claims coupled with Samuel’s and Paul’s amount to 18.1 million, not counting loss of catch, which right now is a throwaway. Certainly Portland Casualty was insured against paying out that kind of money. He should have thought of this earlier, but evidently he has been bogged down in details and hasn’t been seeing the larger picture. Perhaps he needed the sunshine; perhaps Juneau’s fogs have finally gotten to him.

He wonders what Portland’s deductible is, now was. Probably the price of one vessel. Maybe 5 million, considering how boat prices have escalated.

Alvin says, “She wanted to know who had slab policies, value of them, that type of stuff, nothing really unusual other than she wasn’t from Portland Casualty, and I didn’t get a headsup about her visit.” He sees the raven launch with a half-eaten hamburger. “Actually, I think she came more to see your uncle than to check out policies—you know, one of those social trips a person writes off by doing a little business while you’re there.”

“Uncle Ivan?”

“Yeah, she knew him from a long time ago.” Alvin stares at the brown grass, brown ferns, brown leaves under brown tree trunks

as he wonders if he should pickup the yellow hamburger wrapper, discarded, probably, by someone on his or her way over to Anton Larsen Bay. The wrapper is almost the only spot of color in an otherwise brown valley.

John will have to ask his uncle who the woman was. Right now, though, he needs to ask, "Exactly what was destroyed? Who did it and when?"

"All of the memoranda of understanding, you know, where specific points of the policies were explained. Plus, all of the old policies that were in the files, which in your dad's case and in Samuel Golovin's might have been important." There were many more records shredded, but he doesn't remember what they were. It was those memoranda that set out when claims would be paid, how much when, especially during fishing seasons, which matters most here. "Then there were my notes of phone conversations with Portland, including the one when they told me to hold off paying claims."

"Without your notes, it'll be their word against yours. Figures." Portland Casualty, he suspects, knew they were in financial trouble before that freak wave hit. Maybe his dad and the others are innocent victims of Portland's mismanagement rather than under some kind of a curse, the reasonable explanation of events.

"Alvin, you don't mind if I call you Alvin, do you?"

"Not at all." He really should step out of his truck and pickup that hamburger wrapper.

"First thing, right now, Alvin, we need to get you out of here. I wouldn't want anything more happening to you." Nor does he want anything to happen to himself.

"I don't want anything more happening to me either." It will, Alvin decides, only take a moment to pickup that wrapper if he goes and does it right now.

"Good." John glances at his watch. "Twenty minutes. I'm scheduled on that 737's return flight to Anchorage. I just came down here to meet you, and I'm glad I did because I want you to take my ticket and seat. My sister or her husband will pick you up

in Anchorage.” He doesn’t expect anything to happen to Winesap, but from now on, he doesn’t want his moves telegraphed. He needs to spend more time in Port Adams where someone tailing him will be more conspicuous than an Orca would be walking along 1st Street. It’s time for the other side to do a little guessing, time for an element of mystery.

“But I can’t just leave.” He didn’t expect this.

Needing to relieve himself of the now filtered airline coffee, John asks, “Where are you staying since your separation?” as he opens his door to step out into the still chilly breeze flowing off the snow fields above them.

“Divorce you mean. . . . At the Star.”

“The motel?” That, John suspects, must be costing Alvin a bundle. He steps over to the scattered cottonwoods, faces a single trunk two feet or so in diameter, then when he is finished, he loops back to the pickup, bending down, without breaking stride, to retrieve a square of yellow waxpaper on his way. Crumpling the paper, sticking it in his pocket, John resumes: “There probably isn’t time to get into town and back so give me your room key and I’ll check you out. I will be up on the evening flight if I can get a seat.”

“But—”

“But what? What’s keeping you here? What can’t you come back in a month and clear up?”

“I dunno. . . . I suppose there isn’t anything—”

“Good. I’m going to send you to Port Adams. Both Dad and Samuel have apartment houses. I’m sure there’ll be a vacancy where we can get you set up. . . . Are you seeing anyone?”

Alvin wants to say yes, but he isn’t sure Kathy will even give him the time of day. Having left Kodiak to escape the rumors, she’s somewhere on the Mainland.

“I’ll take your hesitation as a yes. I’ll make the necessary arrangements so let’s go back and get you on that plane.”

“No, I’m not seeing anyone.” Nothing else is the truth.

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Mary—she has finally inherited her name. She suspects, though, she will always be Sis to Beth and John, and Little Mary to her dad and Cathy. But to everyone else, she is finally Mary, just Mary, without qualifiers or explanatory clauses.

Working for the Post Office is a job with one major problem: a person knows a lot more than he or she can reveal. For example, she knows that Martin Keyser neither sends nor receives Christmas cards, that he hasn't celebrated Christmas since he arrived in Port Adams six years ago. She knows that Dick Jones gets pornographic videos every other week and that John Ramsy is looking for a South American bride whereas Robert Johnson has been writing to three different Russian women for more than a year. She knows that Randy Johnson, Robert's nephew, has a Federal Firearms License and receives at least six guns a week, which he sells to somebody or somebodies on the island. She knows that Teddy Rudin receives art supply catalogues and packages from one or another of the supplyhouses every few months so he must be secretly drawing or painting. She knows that Samuel Golovin wrote a major New York museum a few weeks ago; she suspects he is having to sell an old piece, that possibility something she did tell Heidi-Marie. She knows the Moslem Russian teacher is taking a Bible correspondence course from the United Church of God, that Peggy has been sending a newspaper each week to John's Juneau office, that Beth writes to three women prisoners, two in California and one in Texas. And she knows that her dad now receives duns from everybody, and she doesn't know what she can do about them. He won't talk to her about his finances.

Her dad still hasn't completely moved in with her even though he was supposed to be out of his house by February 1st, and she can't tell him that Peggy is negotiating for his house. She wants to tell him to let go of Mom and start living his life for himself, but that seems much too disrespectful to say so she says nothing as she watches him grieve, his assets tied up by the court, even the little

bit of income he receives from the school district for use of his warehouse.

She'll be off in a few minutes. Then another day behind her—she's still employed, still single, still less concerned about her marital status than are her sisters. She wishes they would leave her alone. When the right person comes along, everything will take care of itself. She just doesn't want to be married to a fisherman. She knows what that life is like, and she isn't about to stay up nights worrying about where her husband is, or if he's all right, or will he make a catch. She watched her mom worry year after year, and her mom never said much but didn't want her children on the water. The reason her dad finally let J skipper the *Iskai* was probably because of her mom. Her dad would never have stayed home if he hadn't been trying to please her mom, and she's certain he blames himself for her brother going down. J, nor anyone else in town, has the experience of her dad. He thinks, she's sure, he could have ridden out that bad wave. In truth, from what the Coast Guard said, no boat closer to shore than a mile could have. All of those boats were hiding behind Pillar Point. She doubts if any of them were more than a quarter of a mile off the rocks, most probably less than a hundred yards.

Her dad's heart, she knows, has always been out there on the water, which was why he kept the radios in the kitchen: he could keep in touch with the boats. It had nothing to do with business. He just wanted to stay a part of what has always been his life. And she feels terrible for him since now he might even lose his Whaler if the insurance company doesn't pay something pretty soon; they should have already paid by now. If they would have, then this all would still be a tragedy, but not one that seems so horribly unjust. Things do happen at sea.

Speak of the devil: Martin Keyser is heading for her window.

"Hello, Martin. What will it be today?"

"Your brother called me, asked me to give you a message. He said not to say anything over your phone you wouldn't want out in open court. I guess this has to do with your dad's case."

She knows that John wouldn't have asked Martin, who isn't a family friend, to convey a message unless that message was extremely important. So she doesn't know what to say. But, "Is that all?" stumbles from her tongue.

"He asked me to meet a fella at the airport for him. Said I would. That's about all. Think he's worried." Martin came to Port Adams as a school teacher, but stayed to become the Yamaha outboard dealer, devouring in the past year both OMC dealerships and the Mariner dealership.

"Nothing else?" Now she's worried.

"No. . . . He was on Kodiak when he called me." Martin would like to become better acquainted with Mary Chickenof. Only the differences in their ages stands in his way. So he enjoys asking, "Was thinking, you know who owns that piece of property on top of the hill between here and Herring Cove, you know, where the Army had a rope tow when they were training ski troops during the War?"

"I think Jack Edwards does now. Think he bought it about three years ago. He had big plans but nothing came of them."

"Yeah, he's pretty full of shit . . . just thought I'd ask."

"Don't be doing this to me, Martin. You asked so you have to tell me why you wanted to know." She doesn't really care, but the quid pro quo, like spending dollars, keeps information flowing.

"Now, Mary, I just needed something to keep you wondering. Take care." He winks at her, then drifts away as a limb might in a river, there but moving, pulled inevitably downstream.

She watches him go, not knowing what she should believe. Was he just messing with her mind, or is he planning something that she should know about? He has deliberately messed with her mind before almost as if he were flirting with her.

The clock tells her it's time to close up shop.

She is supposed to meet with *the question lady*, who has been helping her dad move. If she hurries, she can get to Guennie's before Heidi-Marie's shift starts.

She had to buy another car last week: a 4-door Honda Civic that has only been on the island for three years. Her Toyota finally

dissolved in the rain even though its engine still ran fine. She kept it. Maybe she'll find one with a good body and runout engine. A long shot.

Cars never leave the island once they arrive. Most of them drive around on expired tags and with major pieces of them missing. When they get where they can't go, someone tows them to Windy Johnson's wrecking yard, where they sit until they become an oily spot of soil. Windy did lease the yard—ten acres—from the city, but his lease expired two years ago. The city wants him to bring in a crusher and clean up the derelicts, but he won't do that until the city extends his lease for another thirty years, which none of the city fathers want to do. As of right now, the city doesn't want the yard back until it's cleaned up and Windy isn't about to bring in a crusher. So he keeps operating the yard and the city keeps pestering him. More cars keep showing up to quietly rust away. And Windy serves clam chowder every Friday to whomever drops by for a visit. Right now, if he ran for city council he would probably win.

Her dad said he would tow her Toyota out to Windy's. She suspects that will eventually be it's fate. She's just not yet ready to give up on an old friend.

Going out Fishhook seems strange. She doesn't frequent the bars. No one in her family does that she knows of. Not even Uncle Ivan. But a lot of the fishermen do, another reason she's not interested in a fisherman.

More windy than rainy this evening, days are already noticeably longer. The island should be seeing some decent weather before too long. Everybody will be glad. There is, with the suit against her dad going forward, tension thick enough, like rubblestone fill, to build on. Maybe that is what the town needs, more land on which to build another cannery, the cannery supported by some church somewhere as part of that church's outreach program, giving residents here something to talk about besides whether her dad ought to settle the suit or fight it. Right now, she would welcome another fight about tax exempt status for a spot of riprap not large enough to bury the protestors.

It is hard for town residents, when not much is going on, to stay focused on their own affairs. Talking about everybody else's business seems a whole lot more exciting than whatever is occurring in their own homes. She understands that, and she might even be guilty of a little gossip. But just a little bit. Nothing at all like what Mrs. Golovin does, nor like what her daughter Cindy, Randy Johnson's wife, with whom she went to school, does. Cindy had, even before highschool, a reputation for gossiping. She didn't get hers until she started working at the Post Office.

The ditch willows in front of Guennie's have been cut down.

She notices they are gone, but since she doesn't see them lying around, she assumes they have been gone for quite a while. The newspaper published a photo of their catkins last spring. Roger's photographs aren't as magical as Kell's were, but they are pretty good. He shoots a lot more animals, especially ermine and sea otters. Not many harbor shots, though.

She thought for awhile that Roger and Peggy were going to get together. But Peggy still has her twelve year crush on John, who could hurt Peggy real bad if her brother plays with Peggy's affections.

If she could delay longer going in, she would. But she really does have business with Heidi-Marie.

Wind catches the Honda's door, which seems tinnier than her Toyota's that had moss growing inside it. No wonder it dissolved. It never dried out.

At a table near the kitchen, Heidi waits for her.

"I'm sorry that I'm late. Had a last minute customer."

"I was just sitting here thinking about your dad. . . . Will he be okay? I'm worried about him. A couple of weeks ago, he didn't seem as down as he does now." Heidi-Marie feels like she should be mothering Jacob, a feeling she recognizes for what it is, but one she seems unable to do anything about.

"Bills might be getting to him. He's taken to not opening them. He's never done that before, at least not that I know of." Heidi-Marie is, she knows, a nice lady for someone from Outside.

They have started talking since they both have been helping her dad move. She thinks her dad likes Heidi, but she doubts her dad will ever say so. If anything did ever happen, she would accept Heidi into the family, red hair and questions and all.

“I have a little bit of gossip I need to get to your brother about the suit. Ivan wasn’t on board when the crabpots were loaded on the *St. Paul*. When he saw the load, I guess he had a fit. Wanted them off his boat right then. But your brother J got him to leave them aboard. I guess Ivan thought they were too high and too far over the back of his boat. At any rate the rumor mill has it that your brother insisted on traveling with an unsafe load rather than making two trips. The word is the plaintiff’s attorney’s are figuring on using your uncle against your dad.” Heidi-Marie doesn’t like the injustice that is occurring, but she suspects Jacob’s son was really pushing too hard to please his father. “I didn’t want to say anything where your father might overhear me. Understand? I don’t want to worry him more than he already is.”

This is, to her anyway, a new twist. The other side will need more than her uncle, though. Her uncle will lie for her dad even if her dad doesn’t want him to.

“I’ll tell John. He’s been pretty busy with everything else, especially his case against the Seven Sisters, but I’m sure this is something he needs to hear even if he doesn’t want to.”

Heidi-Marie has been thinking about what Mary told her about Samuel Golovin writing to a New York gallery: “I have to get to work in a few minutes, but I wanted to tell you—and to thank you for what you said about Uncle Sam. The island really needs a museum to protect all of the old pieces so they don’t end up in somebody’s private collection, hidden away.”

“You know, they are going to be building a new bank here pretty shortly. You might check what’s going to happen with their old building.” She doesn’t know what to do with the hats her dad wants her to keep. She is afraid they will be damaged if she just leaves them in a box in her hall closet, where they are now. And Beth doesn’t know what to do with hers, either.

“I’ll do that, thanks.” Heidi-Marie notices that the cook has looked her direction a couple of times now. “I have to go, and I don’t hear as much as the bar tenders do, but I have them keeping their ears open for me.”

“John thinks my telephone might be tapped, or so I was told just before I came out here. My late customer . . . say, have you heard anything about what Jack might be doing with his property out towards Herring Cove, the old ski slope?” Her curiosity requires her to ask.

“Didn’t know he had any, had one. . . . I really don’t see him—can’t stand him, he’s such a horse’s hindend.” Heidi-Marie takes a deep breathe, then standing, she asks, “I imagine that the tap is illegal?”

“I don’t know, don’t know if there is even one. The message was don’t say anything I don’t want to hear in court, so it probably has to do with one case or the other.” She smiles, then adds, “And you’re right about Jack.”

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John waits with Alvin until he is safely airborne before he calls first Debbie, then Port Adams. This isn’t the wild west: he doesn’t expect an unexplained accident to befall the insurance agent. More likely, the agent, a Gilligan in a world of Thurston Howes, will forget crucial bits of information with very little additional internally or externally applied pressure. If he can get him to Port Adams where all the pressure will be for remembering, who knows what might come of this, perhaps even shades of his creative reproduction of records.

If his dad still had his warehouse here on Kodiak, he would leave the agent’s pickup there. But after the fire, the warehouse was an albatross, and one of the first things his dad let go. It will make one terrific tax writeoff. Otherwise, it was a helleva loss. He suspects his dad got as much for the land as what his actual investment, dollarwise, was in the warehouse—since the Navy

started coming around, real estate prices have skyrocketed. A fisherman can't afford a house, let alone a gear shed, to say nothing of a warehouse. There isn't enough island. And to think, right after the Earthquake, Aleutian Homes were five hundred apiece. A whole block of homes could be purchased for fifteen hundred. Perhaps another earthquake is needed.

Alvin doesn't have enough stuff to hardly fill his two suitcases.

John looks around the motel room. So this is what it's like after divorce. A room without a view, a bed that's too hard and a TV chained to a bar. Cigarette smoke clings to drapes. Dishes are a plastic water glass. Towels laundered too many times sit neatly folded on a chromed rack.

He has never married for many reasons. Him and Sis. He has never found the right woman. There aren't many women in Juneau like his mom. Most are too white, or too environmentally aware, or too politically savvy. They might be fun for a weekend, but even J's long time shackup, Sylvia Jochelson, has sense enough to own a set of raingear . . . Sylvia has gotten lost in this ongoing catastrophe. She is just out. With nothing. His dad never approved of her because she and J hadn't married. His mom would have kept her in the loop (*Mom actually liked her*). Cathy and Beth have their own families, and are without time or energy to do more than they have. And he doesn't really know her. That leaves Sis who has her hands full right now with Dad. So Sylvia has taken a job at Guennie's to make ends meet, a helleva price, as far as he's concerned, for not having married.

If he marries, he has a fifty percent chance of ending up right here. No thanks. And no fellow marries thinking this is where he will wind up, a shabby motel room from where you can see the end of the world. He has to get out of here.

He leaves Alvin's pickup at T.T. Fuller's boatyard; gives the kid there fifty bucks to put it on the ferry when the *Tustamena* resumes its regular service in March. Then, he calls a cab, a yellow vehicle without shocks in which he bounces along, all the way out to the airport, where he has a three hour wait for the evening jet.

An uneventful flight to Anchorage, just the way he likes them—Debbie waits for him. Alvin is with her. “John, you need to call Mary at work.”

“The Post Office would’ve closed hours ago.”

“No. She’s waiting for you to call. Here’s the number.” Debbie hands him a pink stickem notepad on which, on its top sheet, is written a Port Adams telephone number.

This seems rather extreme. He wonders if something has happened to Dad as he punches in his calling card number. Sis answers on its first ring.

“John, I just heard that Uncle Ivan threw a fit about how the *St. Paul* was loaded before it sailed from Kodiak.” And she tells him what Heidi-Marie told her.

He silently curses his uncle, who probably didn’t think what happened in Kodiak was worth mentioning or even remembering. No words seem entirely appropriate as he continues to silently curse his uncle, who has more experience than his brother. His uncle will make the plaintiff’s one helleva an expert witness. And of course the crabpots were loaded too high to be safe. Every boat does that. Industry standard. But for his uncle to say something, that’s bad. That was an acknowledgement of an unsafe condition existing prior to when the *St. Paul* sailed.

“You’re right, Sis, thanks, This is something I needed to deal with yesterday, wish I would’ve known earlier.” At least, this won’t change his plans too much. “I was coming over anyway so I’ll be there tomorrow, weather permitting. I’ll be bringing a fellow with me. He needs a place to live. If you haven’t anything better to do this evening, why don’t you see what you can find. . . . Call Samuel. See if he has an empty apartment.”

“How bad is what Uncle Ivan said?”

“On a scale of one to ten, it’s about a fifteen.” The triteness of what he said bothers him for some reason, a random thought, inserted by his mind to maybe trivialize the gravity of this additional piece of bad news. It seems, when he thinks about it, that he and

everyone else speaks in cliches, and he wonders why that is as he says, "Dad wants to settle. We should probably open negotiations."

"Dad's gonna lose everything, isn't he?"

"Don't even hint that to him."

"John, he knows, and he doesn't act like he really cares anymore. He's looking old."

"I'll be over tomorrow. See if you can hold everything together till then. Take care."

He hangs up. He's too personally involved in both of these cases, but they are his to win or lose. He can win every other case in Alaska, but if he loses these two, his reputation will be crab gurry in Port Adams. It all a question of whether he can go home again, and if he really ever wants to.

Turning to his sister and the former insurance agent, he asks, "Well, have you two eaten?"

"Bob's home. He should have something ready by the time we get there. . . . John, is there anything Bob and I can do to help? Bob's doing real good now. He's getting work. You know, we bought that thawing business, and he has work everyday for the steam truck, he's doing the work." Debbie is glad they left the island. Dope is hardly a problem anymore. Bob seldom uses now that he's away from his friends on the island.

John looks through the polarized windows at the darkness and the dirty snow. Icicles hang from the eaves of the overhang; they catch the reflected light and appear ready to fall like blades of guillotines, dulled by orange rust. The pilot, on approach, said it was five above zero outside—and this after the very spring-like day on Kodiak.

"I'm glad Bob's doing better, but I don't think there's really much you can do. Dad needs lots of money, but that's not what's bothering him. He needs a lot more money than any of us can help him with, and whatever is bothering him—" John doesn't finish his sentence as he wonders how many dollars his dad has lost. Millions. But that money really had little meaning to his dad. "He doesn't have a purpose now. No boat to worry about.

He's supposed to be out of the house. Tell me, what's he to do? Get a job? Dad? No, he's just drifting. Killing time—and that's going to kill him."

"That's terribly fatalistic." Debbie wishes she could fix things up between her dad and Bob, but she knows she can't. And she doesn't want anything to happen to either one of them until they make peace.

"Deb, don't be surprized if he doesn't make it through this. I think he's suicidal, but I don't think he knows it yet. When he figures it out . . . that's when the problems will come."

"Not Dad."

"Look, Dad lives to fish, to help others out. What else? Mom's gone. We're all gone. And right now, he can't help himself. Can't fish. He's never been in this position before."

"But Dad, no, no. Not Dad."

"Let's get going. Alvin, here, has his own problems. He doesn't need to hear ours." John lays his hand on Debbie's shoulder and starts walking towards the outer doors. "Alvin, I contacted a fellow in Port Adams who might be able to help you reconstruct those memoranda of understanding. I want you to work with him. He's pretty good at recreating historical documents."

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Peggy awaits John's arrival at Port Adams, where the high pressure over Kodiak yesterday has pushed away the rain but hasn't brought clear skies. Nevertheless, the weather is the best it's been since October.

"Hello there, Stranger," Peggy says. "Mary couldn't get away so she asked me to pick you up. I hope we all will fit." She brought the newspaper's white Toyota pickup.

John's bag and Alvin's two cases are collected and set in the truck's bed. Then John, wanting to sit next to Peggy but knowing his long legs won't fit in the middle, motions for Alvin to wedge himself around the gear shift while John leans hard against him

while pulling the passenger sidedoor shut. Peggy has more room, but hardly enough to drive. And off they head, thankful they haven't far to go.

Their first stop is at MARK-IT FOODS, where Samuel, knowing Alvin and not at all pleased with him right now, meets them in the parking lot. "There's an apartment above the store. I've been using it as extra office space, but he can use it. I want him where I can keep an eye on him."

"Easy Uncle Samuel. He's helping me out. He's not our problem. So you make sure he has what he needs, including wheels. I know you have an extra beater or two."

Samuel nods, but he isn't happy. After all, he's out, until he receives an insurance settlement, a little over two million dollars. He was paying Portland Casualty six hundred seventy three thousand a year, and like Jacob's *Iskai*, his boat wasn't paid for. He still has quarterly payments on it.

Leaving Alvin, John tells Peggy, "I need to find Uncle Ivan."

"Mary told me about what happened in Kodiak—"

"She needs to keep her mouth shut."

"I don't gossip. I keep sources confidential."

"You aren't the problem, she is." He rides downhill without saying anything more until they reach Marine Way: "Why don't you pull into the Harbormaster's parking lot. I'll buy you some fish 'n chips. You know they're using dogfish around Juneau now. I have to come here to get halibut."

"Sure, why not. Celebrate seeing you again."

He wishes he hadn't packed Alvin's cases yesterday, hadn't entered that room, hadn't looked divorce in the face, smelled its breath. Then maybe he would be more eager to celebrate. As it is, well, it is the way it is, a sort of fatalism of his own as if there isn't anything he can do about how he would like to feel towards her, but doesn't, not right now. He has too many other things on his mind, and those things will probably always be in their way. For attorneys, there is no offseason like there is for fishermen.

Although earlier in the afternoon than when he was here before, the same waitress works the counter. She recognizes him, but he doesn't know if recognition causes her to be any friendlier.

"Still using halibut in your fish 'n chips?"

She looks at the cook who nods yes.

"Two orders, and double the fish on mine. We'll be at the table." He points to the table at which Teddy sat when he was last here. "And make some fresh coffee." Then to Peggy, he says, "Pleasant surprise to see you at the airport."

"You hide well what you are feeling."

Holding a chair for her, he says, "Must be the Aleut in me."

"Yeah, well—"

"I have too much going through my head, too much happening, getting pulled too many ways." Why, he wonders, is he making excuses. "But we're here now . . . with my divided attention."

"You should visit us more often. Your dad holds onto his stoicism very tightly. He needs you—in other ways besides as his attorney." Peggy wishes she could go back a dozen years, start over with him, start when she was probably the only person who knew he fished seasick every summer.

"I've been worried about him."

"He's actually a lot tougher than he might seem right now—but I talk to him often enough to know he's having problems."

"Yeah, he's been asking himself why questions, and he isn't coming up with answers, at least not yet." She, John realizes, is like Sis in that neither of them will cut him slack. Yes, he should visit more often, but he feels like a visitor when here. "Work really does keep me in Juneau, where I'm being tailed. Coming here lets me get away from the microscope I've been under."

The white sky of earlier darkens as the high pressure cell passes eastward, leaving heavy dark clouds. Somewhere beyond those clouds the sun dips towards the southwestern horizon while in Port Adams street lights and harbor lights automatically come on as rain begins to dampen the pavement. A raven perches on Roger Johnson's pickup, its mute white on the red cab.

Pointing towards the raven, John asks, “Where’s your photographer?”

She turns on her chair to where she can see out the cafe’s windows: “Don’t know where he is. Probably in his kayak on the outside of Near Island, as nice a day as this was.”

“If he isn’t already back, he’ll need rescued.”

“I should check ‘n see if he got back safely. He doesn’t have anybody to worry about him.”

“You mean he’s not married and not seeing anyone.”

“And,” Peggy adds, “all of his family is somewhere Outside, I think Minnesota. He has a degree in Mass Communications, and one in Biology, so I don’t know how long he’ll stay on the Rock. I’m surprised he has stayed this long.”

“Interested in you?”

“No. . . . If anything other than otters interests him, it’s something Kell photographed. But he doesn’t talk to me about it. We’re not that close.” She is pleased that John is testing the water, sticking in his foot, even if it is in his mouth.

“You should call, make definitely sure he’s okay.” John resists an urge to reach for her hand—he shouldn’t stay longer than it takes them to eat. “Have you seen much of Uncle Ivan this winter?”

“No—and as far as that goes, I haven’t seen much of your dad either. Father Gregory was with him one time I stopped by, the anthropologist was there a couple of other times so I haven’t really been able to talk to him alone. But I know he’s suffering.” She stays turned so she can see Johnson’s pickup. “I wonder why Roger’s pickup is still there. He shouldn’t still be around the outside of Near Island, not as dark as it is.”

The riggings of docked seiners sway as a surge pushes into the small boat harbor. Harbor lights seem to twinkle. Rain slides diagonally under them as if slicing the light into sandwich meat, each slice deli thin and falling away. The raven has flown.

“Is that him?” John half-points towards a dark figure ascending the ramp, an even darker bag over his shoulder.

"If he sees my truck, he'll come over." Peggy turns so she now faces John, and she reaches, with her right hand, for an imaginary sugar bowl in the middle of the table. "You say your dad's been having questions?"

"Why questions. Why Mary? Why J? Why the money problems? Why me, meaning myself? I'm not who he would like me to be. You know, he had kids so he would have grandkids, keep the family going. I changed my name, don't fish, haven't married, have long hair. I'm a disaster as far as he's concerned . . . and who is he left with? me and a bunch of daughters. That has to be tough on him. His name will be lost—and Uncle Ivan is as much of a disaster as I am. We're a reflection not only on himself, but on his parents. This is a generational thing. He still tells the old kiddie stories, like," nodding towards the raven now on a light pole, "how Raven went from being white to black."

"He's proud of you, don't think he isn't. And did you learn anything from those stories?"

"I learned not to fly through smokeholes, not to bring home seaweed. No, I didn't learn much." John stares at the raven, settled in for the night. "I didn't learn enough to remember the stories, and that bothers him." He continues to stare at the raven that doesn't know it is the subject of John's anger at his dad. Ravens might be smart birds, but they are still birds. They sit out in the weather yearround, scavenge garbage, squabble with eagles and gulls and each other, and if possible, they would vote Democratic so everyone shares their misery. And the trickster Raven is about as corrupt as the President, who also is without morals or conscience. "I have a case against the Seven Sisters that drags on, requiring more of my attention than I can give it because of these lawsuits, Dad's against Portland and the families of his crew against him. The Seven Sisters are hooked in with the Federal bureaucrats." He can't emphasize what he feels strongly enough: "Plus, the way things stand right now we are headed for having an *Exxon Valdez* type spill in the Bering. That'll be a disaster unimaginable. Most of the Bering is less than twenty fathoms deep. There'll be nowhere for

that oil to go, and the water is too cold for the microbes that work in the Pacific.”

“I thought you only represented the polluters.”

“Careful there. Some corporations are good citizens.”

“Which ones? How can I tell at a glance if one is good or bad?”

She knows he needs to think about something other than the case against Portland.

Before he can answer, Roger enters the cafe, sees Peggy and is about to turn around and leave when John motions for him to join them: “Pull up a chair. I’m Jacob’s Chickenof’s other son, and I’d like to talk to you for a few minutes.”

Approaching, Roger says, “You’re the Juneau attorney.”

“I understand you have Kell Harder’s photo library.” Drawing a third chair from under the edge of the table, John motions for Roger to sit. “Have you eaten?”

“No, but there’s stuff waiting for me at home.”

“Then coffee?”

“Sure.” Roger swings his waterproof camera bag off his shoulder as he sits. “What’s this about Kell’s photos?”

“He took a lot of harbor shots. I would like to see any of decked loaded crab pots. Local boats mainly. I’m willing to pay you for your time if you’ll look through his archives.”

“I might be able to do that.” Roger glances towards Peggy to see if there will be a conflict between working for the newspaper and for the attorney. Peggy’s eyes meet his, but no message is conveyed. “How soon will you need them?”

“Not much will happen with either of Dad’s cases for the next month, so, say, the middle of March. But no later.” He would like to have them tomorrow, patience not yet being his strongest character trait, but he will have to wait, he realizes.

“How will I get in touch with you?”

“Peggy has my number. And it might be better if I get in touch with you. I’ll check with you in a couple of weeks.”

Standing, Roger, his coffee untouched, lifts his bag onto his shoulder as he says, “I have to get home and change clothes. I’ll see

if I can have something for you in two weeks. I need to replace an enlarger.”

When the photographer returns to the rain and wind and darkness of the street, Peggy asks, “What will you hope to find in those photos?”

Not used to sharing with anyone other than Randy his thoughts about a case, John finds no words ready to sprout wings and fly like ravens, black or white. How much can he trust her, he wonders. His dad trusted her, and advanced her money to buy the newspaper so she could turn her thoughts into words, each as ordinary as life here, where tides lift spirits twice each day. He knows, senses, without that knowledge being more discerned than a rolling rip that if he shares with her his planned defense, they will be forever linked as if engaged to be married. He isn't ready to commit, isn't ready to defend his dad's expectations for him. But he can't lie to her, something that would be so easy to do in Juneau where lying is as expected as gray skies. So instead of answering her question, he asks, “What do you think I should have learned from Dad's stories?”

Recognizing the change of subjects and disappointed by it, Peggy nevertheless smiles as she says, “Why do you want to be Native if you don't learn from the old stories?”

“I am Native. It's a genetic thing. Like having blue eyes.”

“You ever look at your uncle's eyes. One of them is brown like yours, but the other is almost blue. His eyes are like a husky's.” She's a little worried about the change of subject. She had hoped they, well, you know. “Your uncle doesn't think he's Native.”

“Tell me. Fifteen hundred dollars worth of lesson I got. But he is, he just won't admit it.” Nor will he, John, admit that he isn't about to get into another finger pulling contest with his uncle. “But I wouldn't go telling him that he is. He says he's Russian so he's Russian.”

“You know how Aleuts finally defeated the Russians—”

“Yes, Native Claims, ANCSA. I used to hear that all the time. Not so much any more. Except for Uncle Ivan, nobody remembers claiming to be Russian.”

His cup being empty, John reaches over and drinks from the photographer's coffee cup as he notices that the raven still looks in at him though the channel and bay are very dark. Except for under the harbor lights and occasional street light, night has come. And he wonders why the raven is still awake.

"So what is it to be Native? Did ANCSA suddenly give everyone an infusion of Aleut blood?"

"I think we were talking about Dad having why questions." He has offended her by not answering her earlier question. Well, as far as he's concerned she will just have to be offended for right now. "What do you know about this anthropologist?"

"The question lady . . . she likes your dad, but probably not in a romantic sort of way. I think your dad is the only one who will talk to her, the only one who is always a little bit ahead of her. She's bright."

"Attractive?"

"I wouldn't say so. But does that matter?"

"You don't think she is someone the insurance company planted to get close to Dad?"

"Definitely not. She's . . . I'm surprised, John, you'd ask that. Your dad is the best judge of character you know. If she were phoney, how long do you think it would have taken your dad to find out. What? Ten minutes? Less maybe?" Peggy catches her breath just as her voice begins to rise. When she resumes, she asks, "Now, what were we talking about? Your dad asking why questions."

The waitress brings fresh coffee and their fish 'n chips, a squeeze bottle of tartar sauce and their bill. She says nothing, asks nothing, just sets their food in front of them, then returns to behind the counter.

Loud enough for the waitress to hear, John says, "That's service with a smile," his voice pleasant, his words barbed.

"John, you can be nasty—"

"That's why I'm an attorney and not fishing." He pauses as he considers how much he should tell her about his dad. He has

always been able to talk to her. Any subject. So why now can't he tell her his plans for how he will defend the lawsuit?

Maybe he doesn't have any plans.

"That smile comment wasn't worthy of you. No creativity in it. You can and should do better." She wishes John were more like his father.

"No, I shouldn't have said anything at all. Dad wouldn't have." John sometimes envies his father's ability not to respond to phenomena. "He's dealing with the fatalism inherent with Christianity, what modern Believers tend to dismiss, that whole subject of predestination. If a person is called to become one of the Elect and if Christ is in charge of your salvation, then what is your role? what do you have to do? Feed the hungry? What else? And then comes the question why are you one of the Elect and, in Dad's case, your son is not called, actually, neither of them. In other words, why will he go to heaven or wherever he's going and J and I go to hell. His problem is really that simple. None of us kids believe like he does. Too much education, I suppose." He shakes his head as he spears a halibut chunk with his fork. "It bothers Dad that I'm not him, and sometimes it even bothers me. . . . I really think the problem is too much education." Then remembering Uncle Ivan's spirit helper, he adds, "Either that or not enough."

"And what did you tell him?" She wonders if sometimes she doesn't think of John as more of a brother or friend than as anything else.

"What am I supposed to tell him? I thought all of what he believed was so much huey until the Teddy, Uncle Ivan deal. Now I don't know, just don't know." That day and those two nights still seem too spooky for him to think about. "I don't remember the Shakespeare line, *there's more on heaven and earth*, or whatever it is. You've heard it, I'm sure. Well, maybe there is more."

"This fish is fresh," she says, changing the subject. "Somebody supplies them out of season, probably incidental catch."

"Well, don't tell Fish & Game. I wouldn't want to lose my reason for coming here." He wonders how old fish would have to

be before he now tastes its deterioration. He used to be able to tell when it had been left overnight. But his taste buds aren't that sensitive anymore. Age? Or too many other experiences? Even though Juneau is on the Coast, he's losing his roots.

"I wouldn't worry about losing your reason for returning. Your dad's cases will—"

"Listen and don't say anything. If I can find photos of unsafe deck loaded pots on vessels of those family members or on boats on which they have crewed, then I will have something, and one reason I will keep returning is to check on you. When these cases are all over, Dad's investment in you might be all he has left—and I'm not talking about dollars." He suspects his dad would be happier having Peggy as a daughter-in-law than his dad is having him as his son.

"I think I have just been propositioned." She looks around the cafe to avoid eye contact with him. "I'll have to come in here more often. This place hasn't been one of my hangouts."

"Where are your hangouts?"

"The office." Now looking at her plate, she decides that the halibut is, indeed, fresh. "The paper is more than a fulltime job. This is the first afternoon I've taken off since the last time I saw you." She finally lifts her eyes and meets his stare. "You really do need to come home more often."

He feels her eyes probe his as their tongues might probe the other; he feels naked and vulnerable and strangely happy, a silly sort of happiness he doesn't feel with his various dates in Juneau. He can't imagine mentioning predestination to any of them. Most would think him terribly naive. The New Agers use the language differently. And while Peggy might not understand—he doesn't either which is why he can't help his dad—she handles the subject as she would if he told her about camshafts. For his dad, both are equally real.

"You're right, Peggy Sue, I should come more often, if for no other reason than to see you. You're right, you have been propositioned." He sort of wishes he could take back what he just

said. Neither of them need anything to happen too quickly. “Since here last, I’ve been reading the paper with a critical eye. You’re doing good work, considering everything. As usual, Dad backed a winner.”

“I do my best, and I would like it if you came by—often.”

She seems embarrassed, which surprises him considering everything, including that she was married for a short while.

“I will . . . but I have to go right now, have to find Uncle Ivan and I have to—” he interrupts himself as an idea matures, “do you still have any of your printing presses?” Portland Casualty’s destruction of evidence gives him, as far as he is concerned, moral license to use extralegal means. “I need a little printing done.”

“The big press is in storage in the warehouse across from Alaska Packers, there on Marine Way. There’s still a small press in the office. It’s all covered up with stuff, but I kept it around ‘cause I thought I might want to print a volume of poetry.” She has, so far, been afraid to show her work, let alone print her planned edition.

“I’ll get back to you. Promise. Tomorrow at the latest.” Sure, he’d like to sleep in her bed, but both Sis and his dad would have too much to say about that. This might be the end of the second millennia since the Magi annointed a new king, but among the old families of Port Adams every woman still is somebody’s daughter and somebody else’s sister. Teddy Roosevelt’s moralistic essays can still be found in family libraries, right next to Dr. Laura’s *Ten Stupid Things Women Do*. Times might have changed, but in changing, they have circled back upon themselves.

He opens his wallet, takes a five out, excessive for a tip here in Port Adams, but maybe enough to prime a pump: he expects to return for more halibut. The bill he puts on his credit card, another business lunch. He did talk business, didn’t he? Sure he did: they talked about his dad, and brought up Uncle Ivan, and he asked for those photos.

“Any idea where I might find my uncle?”

“No, but why don’t you drop me off at the paper. You can take the pickup and go look for him.” She hands him the keys.

He looks at them in his hand. On the ring is a house key. Hers, he imagines. Why, he wonders, is life so complicated. He used to think it was simple. He remembers Uncle Ivan talking about his season Outside when sex was simple—his uncle took five thousand dollars south with him to buy a Calkins designed troller, moored in Astoria. He was expected back in a couple of weeks. He arrived back in Port Adams nine months later, with a young Indian *wantabe* hanging all over him. She had long braids, grassy eyes and thought everything was cool, especially the outhouse at his uncle's fish site. He doesn't remember her very well; he couldn't have been more than five, maybe only four. He remembers the stories, none of which Dad told. Most of them came from either his uncle or Samuel.

The *wantabe* had clap, gave it to half the town before the other half gave her a plane ticket to Seattle. This was when only freighters flew into Port Adams, and he remembers her complaining about the DC-3's fishy smell. Remembers his dad telling her he didn't notice the smell when she was around. His mom wouldn't talk to Dad for, maybe, a day, then she said he was right, and nothing more was ever said about the *wantabe*. Of course, the *wantabe* got madder than can be at Dad, called him names that made Uncle Samuel blush. But Dad just smiled at her the way old folks do when they know they have trapped you.

Relationships are never simple, nor are they easy. And sex was only simple for that one season. Even in Juneau, it's never what it seems.

"Are you all right, John?"

"I was wondering," he won't tell her what he's thinking, "if I'm supposed to pick you up to take you home?"

"No. I can walk. I don't live far from the office."

"Well, thanks, but if I want to return the truck this evening?" He knows at some level where this evening will lead, but he still has to talk himself into doing what he wants to do.

"Mary knows where I live. So let's go."

The white Toyota, a few years old but with very few miles, is already rusty, the cancer spreading rapidly, quickly eating away door panels and safety posts, the bed and both bumpers. Its headlights blink when they bounce over a pothole on Kupreanof, the pothole already filled with water, the rain hard enough to require windshield wipers, the wiperblades worn enough they merely smear the rain around.

When he stops in the newspaper's dark parking lot, he asks, "Are you sure you'll be all right?"

"Positive."

"But I may never be again . . . get in there and dream. You have something to dream about."

"Oh, I do? We'll see." She pushes her door shut, but it pops back open as if the latch closed before the door did.

Already backing away, he reaches across and pulls her door shut. It latches for him. And despite wanting to think about what life might be with her, his mind immediately shifts gears and his thoughts are of his uncle.

Not all of his thoughts, though, are about Uncle Ivan. He thinks about what he said concerning his dad's problems. He had never, not even to himself, put the problem so succinctly. Within Christian theology is an inherent fatalism, which gets dismissed with some proverbial *God's ways aren't our ways, or God's ways are so much higher than our ways*. What is the one he heard last year, the explanation for why some people are bound for hell from birth, meaning their fates are determined from, what, conception; he doesn't remember. But he knows injustice when he encounters it, and injustice is injustice whether human or divine. If one person is destined from birth to be forever tortured in hell while another plays a harp in heaven, then Christianity has an injustice problem, especially if he is the one being tortured. And that concept of a person being a vessel *created to dishonor* isn't a good translation. *Ordinary use* is the better translation. So a person falls into one of two categories, honored or ordinary. The implied sense of the language suggests there are many more ordinary than honored

vessels, meaning the injustice problem is either much larger than contemplated, or the language says something different than is usually believed. And the use of language and the application of law is his area of expertise.

But these are problems for Father Gregory. He doesn't have to concern himself about heaven or hell, especially not if fate has already bought him a ticket either up or down. He only has to worry about what can be taken into court, and at the moment that means his uncle.

Why, John wonders, did his uncle meet with the woman from Prudential? What is the connection? If he knew, he might unravel Portland's financial problems. Did Prudential come up to look at the vessels Portland had insured? Possibly.

His uncle Ivan is, where? he doesn't know. What he needs right now is for Teddy to again hear his uncle sing, but he has no idea where Teddy is so that isn't really what he needs. His dad found his uncle from across the island, but he, with his uncle in town, doesn't know where to start looking. He hates to ask his dad for help and he certainly can't tell his dad why he needs to see Uncle Ivan, but he can't waste any more time.

Sis told him she had another car. Now that he has seen it, what (as he parks the newspaper's Toyota next to it) can he say: it's not exactly what someone on the Mainland would be proud of, but it doesn't look too bad for a beater. It's a different world off-island, another world yet Outside. He wonders if Peggy will want to leave here. He doubts she will, an obstacle that might stop things before they ever get started.

"I just got home, John. There's a bag of groceries in the backseat of my car. Will you bring it in? And I hope you haven't eaten. Dad's been cooking."

"Then why couldn't Dad have met us at the airport?"

She gives him one of those sisterly stares that says he should know better than to even ask.

"I'll get the bag." He remains glad he spent time with Peggy, but he wishes now he hadn't eaten as much as he did. He's full,

but it will insult his dad if he doesn't stay for dinner. So why not admit he just had dinner with Peggy? No, if he does that, he might as well announce their engagement, such would be expectations. And he wishes he were like Raven, a little skinny fellow who can eat and eat. Uncle Ivan is like that although he really isn't skinny.

He told Peggy he never learned anything from his dad's stories. The truth is he never even understood them until he took an undergraduate Native American literature class at Washington. The class at least taught him that Raven, as a trickster figure, represents the solution to orality's dilemma of how to discuss the hypothetical when all action has to be assigned to a referent. That's easy enough to understand, but the stories seemed more fun before he took that class.

Now the stories are all mixed up. He doesn't remember which ones his dad tells, which ones are Tlingit or Nez Perce or Hudson Bay Athabaskan. Coyote stories are definitely Lower Forty-Eight. Uncle Ivan doesn't tell folk stories: all of his stories are about getting drunk and various women, most of whom are white and blonde. And he has heard a few stories from Samuel, but those were always about outsmarting Russians so he doubts they count as Native storytelling.

Most of the students in that class were from Southeast; most took the course for a Mickie, and it really was. Everything the professor knew, he gave in his first day's lecture—what was given were probably the prof's notes from a graduate class. And what he, John, really gained from the class was knowing that if he ever lives along the Yukon River, he should never, never invite a skinny little fellow home for dinner. Otherwise, the class was wasted time.

His dad has fixed a salmon loaf with rice, hard boiled eggs and dill in a pastry crust, baked on sheet, what at one time was his favorite dinner (he has since developed an appreciation for continental cuisine), and a dish his mom used to make a lot every fall before her hens went on stike sometime around Thanksgiving, before his parents had to get rid of the hens when they moved onto upper Kupreanof, one price of perceived affluence. So first

Peggy, then this. Something is afoot. He has known his dad too long not to be suspicious. “Ahh, a conspiracy to keep me here. Smells good, Dad, and I need to get ahold of Uncle Ivan.”

“About what happened in Kodiak?” Jacob avoids looking at his son as he considers whether he should really use the knowledge he has. He has known for several weeks about the war between the spirits; he has waited for the outcome, waited as he has for salmon to return. Ivan, his brother told him about the woman whom his words offended long ago, she now a spirit woman. “Your brother made a mistake, not the one that killed him, but still a mistake. The *St. Paul* was Ivan’s boat to fish.”

“Who told you?” John looks at Sis, his eyes as hard as his dad’s or his uncle’s when they are angry.

“I knew before they set sail. I talked to both J and Ivan so maybe I’m at fault.”

“I told him, John.” Sis takes the bag from him. “But like he said, he already knew.”

“What else do you know that I should?”

“What will it take to settle?” Jacob sets the table as he avoids his son’s eyes.

“They are, as you know, asking for two and a half million apiece. They might get that Outside, but in Kodiak, something closer to a half a million apiece. That’s what I’m figuring for them as we go after Portland.” John doesn’t know if a settlement is even possible. So far, the possibility hasn’t existed.

His dad seems not to hear him as preparations continue for sitting at the table. John starts to dish up, but stops when he sees Sis waiting for their dad to say a blessing, always simple and short. So he waits, really too full to eat but in trouble if he doesn’t. Food and hospitality were entwined in Aleut culture even before the Russians messed things up.

“There’s a blueberry cobbler for dessert. So save some room.” Jacob says, before indicating that they should bow. “Father in Heaven, we come before you as great creator and sustainer of life to give thanks for the abundance from which we take this food. Bless

this meal that we may live. In your Son's name, Amen." Then starting the loaf around the table, he tells John, "There is a problem with the idea of a Trinity. Maybe sometime we wrestle with the language. Words don't say what they're supposed to, but you understand language so maybe you can help me read the parts that are wrong."

"Sure, but I don't have much time, Dad. You need to get Father Gregory to help you." He has even less interest than time, but he isn't about to tell his dad that. At times, it seems his father was drafted into a spiritual army that neither accepts volunteers nor paramilitary forces fighting on its behalf. He couldn't join if he wanted, and he certainly doesn't want to.

He understands his dad having a crisis of faith, what with J drowning and Mom overdosing and then going from being well-off financially to broke, if lucky. But the rest of the family—him, Sis, Beth, Cathy, even Debbie—aren't interested in his faith crisis. He, John, has real problems and doesn't need distracted by abstractions.

His dad eats without talking, and he wonders how badly he hurt his dad's feelings. Who, he wonders, does his dad talk to now that Mom isn't around? Should he make the time and find the interest he doesn't have? No, his dad will know, will see through him; his dad always has.

"I want you to do something for me, John. I want to know why *the question lady's* son was left with his father. I sent the details to your office so maybe you can get your crewman on it. The case was in court at Logan, Utah. I think both parents worked at the college there." Jacob knows he will have to talk to *the question lady's* husband, convince him that the child should be with his mother. He knows she cares for her son and grieves their separation.

"Dad," Sis says, "call her Heidi or Heidi-Marie. I don't like that 'question lady' stuff. That's not worthy of you."

"What type of priority is this, Dad?" Randy, John knows, has plenty to do now with the Seven Sisters case. Plus, he needs Randy to find who carries Portland's policy although he already knows.

“High. They have spring vacations there, I imagine. Maybe we can get her son up here for a few days.”

“You, Dad, can’t afford to help her out. You’re already broke. You’re going to have to sell the warehouse here . . . I’ve been working with Beth and Cathy to see if they can get enough financing that they can buy it.” To himself, he adds, *but I don’t see how they can find the money.*

“I’ll give it to them—”

“You can’t do that, Dad. The court will take it back. It has to be sold for a fair price. I’ve been thinking that if they could come up with a downpayment, then you carry the note. You can lose the note if this case goes against you, but as long as they make payments, they keep the warehouse.”

“Do it. What do they need down?” Jacob motions for Sis to dish up the cobbler. “Twenty percent?”

“They can’t get their hands on a hundred thousand, let alone two hundred.” If, he knows, the sale isn’t exactly market value with market terms, it will be reversed by the court. “They might find seventy-five, and only then if I help them. And that will make their payments too high even if we balloon the contract so they pay only interest.”

“Write it up for two hundred thousand, five year balloon, seven percent.” His sons-in-law’s business might never make the payments, but they should be able to pay the interest. Plus, five years gives them time to become established.

“Dad, they really can’t get that kind of money, really.” The cobbler smells good, but he is past stuffed. He shouldn’t and really can’t eat more. Indicating the cobbler, he says, “Save mine. I had a bite with Peggy, and the fish was good enough I couldn’t turn it down, but dessert will have to wait.”

To his surprise, he hears his dad say, “I’ll advance it to them.”

“But you don’t have it, not with your assets tied up by the action against you.” This is new: his dad might have lost a little of his sharpness when the sky fell.

Outside, the rain begins in earnest: it taps window panes with the intensity of eggs ejected from ripe coho.

"I'm allowed to pay you so I pay you. You loan them the money, and they can give it back to me to cover what I paid you, a check kite, like we all used to do before banks had electronic transfers."

"I don't believe it. Are you sure you're feeling all right?" He has never before even heard his father mention actually doing something illegal. "And you'll leave me paying income taxes on what I don't receive."

"And collecting interest on what you don't have . . . I'd give it to them for three percent, what the Feds get when they give money to cover loss." Although Jacob doesn't like the deception that's morally repugnant, none of this would be necessary if he wasn't being screwed. He tries very hard not to think about what has been happening to him. At first he hurt too much to think, but he doesn't hurt so much any more. He's again angry. The insurance company is screwing over a couple of Aleuts, a displaced Tlingit and an Irish woman, all of whom live too far away to hurt them. Paul Bob says the reason they are getting screwed is they're not white guys, not part of the Ballard mafia. Samuel sees the problem as one of distance. He doesn't know, but he needs to protect what remains of his family and to take care of his crews' families, despite them suing him; he has the moral obligation to take care of his family and crew, especially when he won't be around to protect them.

"Bad idea, Dad. As your attorney I can't advise this action. Court won't like it." He wonders, though, if he might not be able to get the court to accept the sale if financial arrangements weren't known until after the sale went through. With his brothers-in-law making payments, the sale would be difficult to negate.

"Will you do it?" Jacob used to trap foxes during winters before a market developed for tanners. He has an idea, has had one for several days, an idea that requires him to leave Port Adams, the island, Alaska.

“If you insist. . . . I think we can win this action, regardless of what Uncle Ivan has said. I do need to find him.”

“He’s staying on Nelson’s scow. . . . Find a buyer for the apartments. It’s time they go. I never made any money on them, barely broke even.” He will miss his daughters, their children, his grandchildren. But he must make it right with the woman he offended with his words. The war of spirits has made the world, his world, heavy like a skiff filled with loose water. He must help bail.

“Sure, but the court will wonder what you’re doing, selling both the warehouse and the apartments. You have already sold your house, the property in Kodiak, the liquor store. . . . What are you doing?” His dad is full of surprises tonight.

“If you turn everything I have to cash, what kind of an offer can we make the families? I think one point one, maybe one point three.” His son will do a good job in caring for everyone when he leaves. Maybe that is what his son needs, the heaviness of responsibilities. Then his son will become a good man.

“When I get back to Juneau, I’ll get an accountant on it. You might be able to go as high as one point five. But that would be it. And that would be optimistic.” John doesn’t like thinking about his dad selling assets, but his dad is correct. The apartments have never made money. Really, the only asset that has made money other than the boats was the liquor store, and that was the first to go.

His dad leans back, rocks back, nods: “Do it. Make the offer. Tell them we fight and win otherwise. They get nothing. Tell them I promise that.”

“You want to give those people who are suing you everything you have accumulated during your whole life . . . are you sure?”

“Listen real good, then you tell their attorney what I say. You always have that little recorder with you, you make sure you get this right. Okay.” Jacob pours himself a cup of coffee.

The recorder is in John’s pocket, but its tape is full so he’ll have to trust his memory . . . this is classic Dad.

“A long time ago, when the old people still carved masks and had lots of celebrations with lots of dancing, a man called Iskai liked to dance so much he told everyone that even when he was dead, he shall have celebrations, and he told the people that when he died they should lay him in the cave near the top of the mountain with his drum and his paints, purple, red, white, yellow, black and green. So when he died, his men did that. They carried him up the mountain and laid him in the cave with his drum and his paints.

“The next day, two of the men were out in their bidarkas hunting seals, and they paddled near the mountain and one of the men said to the other one that they should see if what Iskai said is so, that he would celebrate even when he was dead. So they called to the mountain and said, ‘Iskai, remember how you said that even when you are dead you will celebrate. If you can hear us, then show us how you celebrate even when you are dead.’ And then they saw him. Way up there on the top of the mountain, they saw Iskai with his face painted those colors, beating his drum and dancing and singing. He danced and sang and danced, but after a while he went back into his cave.

“The two men were very surprised and they hurriedly paddled back to their village where they told everyone that it was so, Iskai still celebrated after he was dead. And the people all wanted to see, and they could talk about nothing else, and instead of going hunting the next day, they made plans to go see Iskai dance and sing.

“The next day all of the people got in a baidar and paddled down the coast to the tall mountain with the cave where Iskai lay, and they again called to him and said, “Iskai, remember how you said you would celebrate even after you were dead. Well, if you can hear us, show how you celebrate when you are dead.’ And Iskai came out on top of the mountain, with his face painted, and he was singing and dancing and playing his drum, and he danced and danced until the mountain started to shiver. And when he felt the mountain move, he beat his drum harder and harder, and he sang louder and louder, and he stomped his feet, and the mountain

fell down on all of the people and killed them, and it caused a great wave that swept around the mountain and washed away the land bridge to the Triads, leaving Pillar Point naked and lonely.

“So having killed all of the people of his village, Iskai came down from what was left of his mountain and walked and walked until he came to Pillar Point where he started living alone.”

Jacob picks up his coffee cup and leans back, signaling he is through.

“Is that,” Sis asks, “it? He just kills the people of his village just like that? No remorse? No warning? No nothing?”

“I’m not going to tell their attorney that. Sorry, Dad.” John has no idea why his father told them the story, but it certainly isn’t repeatable.

“No, you tell their attorney what I said, and you have him tell those families exactly what I said.”

“Dad, what did you say? Is the story a threat? It sounds like it might be.” His dad’s eyes are more intense than he has ever seen them; his dad is a hard man, who seems to have become harder. “Explain the story to me, and I’ll relay it. Otherwise, no. As an officer of the court, I can’t.”

“Never mind, I’ll tell them myself—”

“Don’t. . . . Let’s talk about this in the morning. I still need to find Uncle Ivan.”

Still wondering what his dad’s story means if it means anything, and knowing it’s late but also knowing Uncle Ivan keeps odd hours—when not fishing, his uncle is more likely to be in bed at three in the afternoon than three in the morning—John parks the newspaper’s pickup on Alaska Packer’s dock and climbs down the steel ladder bent back under the dock, slick with now-freezing rain. The ladder, bumped too many times by boats waiting to unload, might at high tide reach to the deck of Ed Nelson’s scow, a wood tub with the lines of an LCM (canneries used to lease the scow and use it as a tender to pick up salmon from beach fishermen—recently, on the rare occasions when it’s leased, it’s

used to haul garbage or gurry offshore, making it the largest garbage can in Port Adams and perhaps in the Gulf). But the tide is mostly out, baring pilings gnawed by generations of worms and borers, and leaving the scow's deck feet below the bottom rung of the ladder, and now many feet away. He will have to jump seven, perhaps eight feet.

He turns around on the ladder to face the scow, dark and foreboding, its deck slippery and slanted, the bay waiting. He leans forward, his arms behind him, his hands hanging onto the ladder rails, and he bends his knees and launches himself through the rain, flying and falling, his left foot touching first, sliding, then catching a line and sending him headlong across the deck, his hands breaking his fall, his knees hitting down hard. And he remembers another reason he gave up fishing as he lies a moment on the slimy, icy deck, his knees hurting.

Lights of the small boat harbor seem dim and far away. Red and green channel lights huddle on buoys that stand black against the dark water. A sea lion barks off somewhere in the night—the canneries have changed the traditional migration patterns of sea lions. They now live yearround in the bay, feeding on fish that have grown fat on gurry. And a rat crossing the scow stops inches from his face. He'd try to kill it if he had anything but his bare hands.

The deck dips under his weight, meaning the scow is heavy with loose water, and he wonders if his uncle has been running its pumps or if its leaks exceed its pumps' capacity. And the rat stands on its hindfeet and seems to challenge him as he stands.

He kicks at it, but it scurries off before his foot moves an inch. He feels stupid kicking at a shadow when his knees still hurt. . . . Under his raincoat, his shirt clings to his back and his armpits are wet, and he feels sweat mingled with rain run along his hairline and down beside his eye, and he wonders how many years at sea would it take before he quit feeling sick. He spent summers—gradeschool, highschool, college—working with his mouth full of bile, the fronts of his shirts yellow with it. One year he spent seven

months at sea with his dad, and he found a person acquires a taste for bile like one does for beer, but his tolerance for bile only lasted until he was again ashore.

The wheelhouse with its crewquarters looks like a doghouse added to the scow's deck as an afterthought. Even in the rainy, icy shadows its square lines are enough to make a fellow puke without needing nasal stimulation, or any other kind of which there is plenty. The carpenter who built the wheelhouse should have his framing square shoved up his ass, his uncle's expression for all structures built square on boats. In this case, the carpenter was Ed Nelson's grandfather, who built half of the houses on Russian Hill, none of which have a square corner in them or a toilet that flushes properly.

In case his uncle is asleep with a 9mm under his pillow, now a common practice in the harbor, a practice begun when things started disappearing off boats after the island got jet service to the Mainland, he bangs on the door, hollering, "Uncle Ivan, it's me, John," as he does.

It used to be that nothing was ever stolen in Port Adams. On occasion, an item might be borrowed without first asking permission, but stolen, no. Then kids from Outside started showing up, asking for crewmember jobs. Not many of them were hired, but more and more of them arrived each year, most with a one way ticket. Then tools and gear started going south. At first it was things like kedge anchors or a skate of groundline. Then, about when cocaine arrived, it became everything that wasn't bolted down. Big money was being made, especially fishing king crab, and to stay awake days at a time, coke became the answer on too many boats and with too many crewmen, whose use continued into offseasons. Its use has divided the town into those who know Father Gregory and those who have never heard of him. If there had been a middle group, they caught a jet to the mainland years ago, he possibly being one of them. It might be that he should have stayed.

"I hear yuh, Kid, come on in."

Seems awkward calling a door a hatch—whatever he opens slides on a warped track. “I was afraid you might shoot.”

“Ahh, don’t need a gun. They get in the way when something happens.”

The interior of the wheelhouse is dimly lit. An oil lamp burns, its chimney sooty from diesel. The warmth of the wheelhouse pushes against him as it pushes past him to escape into the darkness and rain. He can’t see much other than in the midst of organized disarray are pizza bones on top of a frozen pizza box. But the interior of the wheelhouse is dry, its Neptune stove burning continuously.

His uncle wears jeans over his gray wool unionsuit, gray wool socks, and cutdown rubber boots.

“Dad told me where you were. I need to talk to you about what happened in Kodiak. Rumor has it that you thought the *St. Paul’s* load was unsafe. Any truth in that?” He doesn’t see anywhere to sit. Every flat surface is occupied by something, charts, clothes, magazines, even the disassembled lower unit of an outboard. “What can I touch?”

Scooping up an armful of assorted paper, Ivan points to the bench behind the chart table. He piles his clutter on top of already high piles of clutter, then swirls the grounds in the warm coffee pot atop the oil stove. “Want a cup, Kid?”

“No thanks, not right now. Dad fed me after I took Peggy to get a bite. He told me a story. Maybe you can decipher it.” John squeezes behind the table, its lip hard against his diaphragm. “But first, about Kodiak?”

Ivan dips mud from the pot into a cup, looks at it, then dilutes it water from a saucepan he’s been using for some other purpose. He smells his cup (from five feet away, John smells the coffee’s bitterness), then adds a little more water and bourbon or Scotch—John can’t tell which as the bottle is stashed as quickly as it was produced.

“I didn’t like the way the pots were loaded, but the load didn’t have nothing to do with going down.” Ivan sips whatever the cup holds, then scowls as he looks into the cup as if the brew somehow

betrayed him. He adds another shot from the stashed bottle, samples the brew, seems satisfied that it's drinkable, and continues, "We got caught with our stern quarter to a wave we should've been bow to. It broke over us, shoved our stern under, stood us up, almost straight up, then we rolled off to port and were down. Happened about that fast. Never saw it. Didn't have much chance. A fluke thing." Ivan shoves gears from an outboard's lower unit into a pile and sits beside them: in the shadows; the gears look like a cat with kittens.

This isn't the first time he has heard the story, but the first time he has heard it from his uncle, the only person to survive the disaster. Before, Ivan has always insisted he didn't remember the last few minutes before the *St. Paul* went down, understandable under the circumstances and in keeping with psychological observations of how individuals react in traumatic situations.

"Same thing happened to J and the *Iskat*?"

"Maybe he make a mistake. Dunno for sure, but I think he tried to run." Ivan sips his concoction. "I was in the water so I don't see much."

It'd be surprising if his uncle saw anything. Nighttime, big seas, turbulence from the *St. Paul* going under. Then it is surprising that his uncle is alive—that night still seems fantastic, and he tries not to think about the implications of Teddy Rudin hearing a whalesong, his uncle's song. He hasn't wanted to think about that night on Five Mile, but the image of what he saw when he fired that first shot keeps breaking into his thoughts, like a kid goat wanting more milk, butting the bag to make the nanny drop her milk. He has dropped about everything else to defend his dad, to try to get Portland to pay. But everything keeps coming back to that image, grotesque in that it is undescrivable, no words able to convey what he saw as if it doesn't exist in the realm of words.

"Dad wants to settle." Eventually, of course, the immediate families of the crews will receive compensation, the principle of compensation for lost life well developed along Alaska's coast prior to the arrival of Russians. The violation of that principle, because

the life was Tlingit and not white, in a San Francisco court eventually produced the shelling of Angoon a century ago. "But until the insurance comes through, he shouldn't settle. He should hold off."

Fishing has always required accepting risk. Boats go down. Even the Noah's Ark ran aground, as his dad is fond of saying. So the families of crews need patience. His dad was covering their needs until the suit was filed and his assets were frozen, preventing him from dispersing any amount greater than fifty dollars without the court's approval. He wanted to fight the order, but his dad told him not to.

"You think I shouldn't tell about saying the *St. Paul* was loaded bad?"

"What was wrong with the load?" As pots have gotten larger and strings of laid pots longer and boats bigger, pots are deckloaded higher and higher until boats look like haytrucks moving whole stacks of bales. The difference is when trucks dump a load, nobody drowns. Plus, the trucks aren't tossed around by heavy seas and freak waves.

"The cannery added one row too many, and I wasn't there to stop them. You know, on the *St. Paul* you had to be able to get into the lazeret. So I tell the cannery to take the row off, and they squawked like fooled gulls. They wanted me to offload them."

"Where were you?" This doesn't seem as bad as when Sis called him about the rumor, but that is the nature of rumors.

"With the mother of my crewman." Ivan cocks his head as he listens to the rain. "I know her a long time ago."

Wait a minute, John thought his uncle was with—

His thoughts interrupt themselves. There is a connection here that he only dimly comprehends: the woman who represents Prudential was also the mother of his uncle's crewman? and she had also known his uncle for many years? He doesn't like the coincidence, the implications of even a perceived connection.

But his next question relates directly to the matter at hand: "Then you had the extra row of pots removed?"

“Nah. J, he say they looked okay to him. We talk about it a little bit, maybe say things pretty loud, but he couldn’t take the pots, we couldn’t come back for them so okay, I take them.”

When, John wonders, did they talk to his dad, and what was said during that call, hopefully a telephone call and not a radio transmission the big-ear at Kodiak would have overheard?

“They didn’t endanger the *St. Paul*, not in any way, did they?” He likes this a little less than he did a minute ago. If they go to a jury trial, he will have to show compliance to industry standards for all questions of safety. By the cannery loading the pots, then the dock crane operator thought the load reasonable, something he will have to verify. But for a skipper to be talked into taking a load he or she had called unsafe is not good, especially so when that skipper deferred to the owner’s son’s judgement, the implied pressure is obvious. “And Uncle Ivan, if this goes to court and it is likely, don’t ever speculate. You testify to only what happened, not to what you think happened, understand? Don’t think that just a little bit of extra story will help. It never does.”

“I would’ve dumped them, those pots, if there would’ve been a problem in the lazeret. Pots are easy to come by.” Ivan smiles. Jacob won’t fish stolen pots, but they catch crab just fine for him. “So they added a little danger but not too much.”

Rain pecks at the round port above the chart table, already icy, and the scows’ port side lifts a few inches, then settles as its starboard side lifts.

John knows his uncle will steal pots, will even pick another boat’s string of pots if the occasion warrents. His uncle once went halibut fishing without any gear and came back in twenty-four hours with a deck load of fish and fifty skates on his reel. His uncle will be a terrible witness. Neither he, nor the plaintiff’s counsel will know for sure what his uncle will say or how it will come across. As far as he is concerned, his dad’s rescue of Uncle Ivan on Five Mile Beach was a financial mistake, a thought he doesn’t like regardless of its truth. And he wonders why he used to be

emotionally closer to his uncle than to his dad . . . maybe because he is more like his uncle.

His uncle seems eccentric, but is really pretty ordinary, while his dad seems normal and is anything but, which reminds him, he needs to ask: "You ever hear Dad tell a story about Iskai celebrating after he dies? He wants me to relay the story, but it sounds threatening."

"Yeah, Grandpa Mutukin tell a story about how Iskai flattened the top of the mountain. He tell it often."

"Dad didn't say anything about flattening the mountain, but that's probably the same story. What does it mean?"

"You have to hear a story to know what it means. You should know this, you been to college. Meaning is always in the hearing so you tell me what you hear and maybe I help you."

Warmth from the oil stove, the cold rain outside, the dim light, John feels sleepy, and the wheelhouse doesn't seem so bad although as heavy as the scow is, it's likely to roll over at any time, trapping them both inside.

He can't lean back; he's wedged in. So twisting a little on the bench, he relates the story his dad told as best he remembers it, realizing as he retells it that he hadn't listened as carefully as he should have. Nevertheless, he gets in all of the elements and most of the language, and then as the wind picks up some, rocking the scow more and more, he has to wait for his uncle to reconstruct the story.

"My brother surprises me. This is a hard story."

"Difficult to understand?"

"No, easy to understand, why he tell it . . . he say his grief has been disturbed, that because they disturbed his grief when they should have been minding their own business, that's what hunting means, he will destroy them, then start over again without their help, they will be to him as dead, meaning he won't know them, won't hire them or their relatives." Ivan scowls. The story is usually told to explain how the top of the mountain blew off, then filled its crater. His brother has used the story as a threat, but a threat

that includes himself. Iskai dwells alone, without family. His brother plans to go somewhere. “My brother, he plans to go away, go far alone. No family. He will start over. You are included in this story.”

“All right, how did you get that out of the story?” This is what his lit class didn’t teach. “And would the families suing Dad get that from the story?” Uncle Ivan’s scowl deepens, his face appearing chiseled, more like a Lakota than an Aleut. Then his uncle slowly nods his head in exactly the same way his dad does, and he wonders if he also nods in the same way. Is the movement genetic or an example of mimicking?

“Yeah, they will know they take on a very powerful toion, but my brother is Christian. He won’t use his power to harm them, only to protect himself when he has nothing else.”

“Might that be the reason he wants me to liquidate all of his assets? So he has nothing?” He doesn’t understand the reasoning, but evidently his uncle does. “You and Dad are sometimes totally opposite, but at other times. Hell, I don’t understand either one of you. I’m the odd one out. But you’ve always leveled with me, so help me out here.”

“Your dad, my brother, he plans to live alone, away from here, far away, but he not done grieving. He wants left alone.”

Why, he wonders, would his dad leave Port Adams? Beth, Cathy, Sis are here. Even he has been, this evening, toying with the idea of returning. Peggy will never leave here.

His dad is a fisherman, from generations of fishermen, Aleut, Norwegian, whatever other blood they have flowing through their veins. His dad won’t be happy away from the sea, nor far from his kids, nor from Samuel or Paul or Smokey or any of his generation, the boys who watched for Japanese submarines, then mounted surplus 37mm artillery pieces to their bows to keep Russian trawlers out of the Gulf. His dad won’t fit in Outside—his dad grew up on sea cabbage and salmon, matured with salt spray encrusted in every crease of his face, would as soon shoot a pot thief as pray for him, but who now might leave this beach between heaven and hell. No,

his dad won't leave. Uncle Ivan is mistaken. "I don't think Dad will ever go anywhere. This place is him, makes him who he is."

His uncle now slowly shakes his head before asking, "What do you want to know, what, why they sue?"

"Dad will take care of them so it makes no sense. It's like they're trying to destroy Dad. They know they could sue a year and a half from now and get more money. And even if they win a judgement, I don't think their claims will withstand appeal."

"Kid, I tell you how it happen, then you will know why." Ivan takes the coffee pot, and stepping out of the wheelhouse, he fills the pot from a hose hanging off the dock without dumping the grounds. Then setting the pot on the hottest part of the oil stove, he again cuddles up to the gears and says, "Last year, I meet a woman I know along time ago. She remembers me, and she says we have a son. I thought she was crazy, then I see the boy. Sure enough, he looks like a Mutukin, and he wants to be a fisherman so I say okay, I hire him, and I hired him, and he worked the deck, but I don't think you ever meet him. Anyway, he a good kid, and he work real hard, and I like him."

This is what he feared a few minutes ago: "Does Dad know about this?" The problem with having his dad as his client is nothing gets shared. "Know you have a son?"

His uncle nods, and he sees in his uncle's face that *had* would have been the correct verb. He wonders why his uncle never said anything before . . . this is far more of a tragedy than he has known, which might be why his uncle stayed with his dad through December. He had no idea. "I'm sorry, I didn't know. I wish I had—and why didn't you say something before now?"

Ivan continues his story without answering the question of whether Jacob knew: "His mother came up to see him in Kodiak, and we talked a lot. She's who I was talkin to, and she's done real good. Now she works for a big company in New York, right downtown, and she has real nice clothes and lots of money 'cause she has done real good, and she wanted to know how I've been doing. I tell her the boat she knew was lost and I got another one

and it go down too. She don't say anything, but I can tell that she gets real mad at Jacob 'cause she thinks he screws me, but I tell her that's not so, we get along real good, but she still think bad of Jacob."

"I take it Dad knows her?" Wind pushes down the channel a surge that spreads out into ripples which rock the scow now in quick little jerks that start the queasiness. "Do I know her?"

"Nah, you were just a little guy when she was here. I see her again a few years later. She have a little business in Seattle then, and we had a good time." His uncle seems pleased with himself so the relationship must have been special.

"So she's from here in Port Adams?" Why, he wonders, is getting the information he needs like gathering abalone, where a person needs a tire iron to pry even little ones loose.

"No, she come up with me one summer. She thought I was Indian so I be one and she was happy. . . . Anyway, after all those boats go down, she gets all the families together in one big meeting and she introduces her attorneys and they promise the families that if they all stick together they will all be rich. Well, Ol' Man Yachmeneff, he likes your dad and he won't agree, but they talk at him and talk at him and talk at him and finally he say okay, but he still don't like it and he has been down talkin to me just like you are and we agree about what is fair and he won't take no more than what is fair so now he talks to the other families about what they think is fair 'cause your dad take care of all them when there weren't no fish, and they know your dad, my brother is a good man who treats everybody fair.

"But the attorneys, they don't want what is fair 'cause they get a percentage and they think your dad, my brother has stuff hidden that nobody knows about so even if the other families settle for what is fair, the woman, she's not gonna. She don't need money so there ain't nothin Jacob can do but fight her 'cause her attorneys will go after Jacob till they gant him."

The water in the pot boils, and Ivan drops in a big pinch of coffee grounds, then waits for the pot to boil over. He told his

brother that the woman, she had to be fought, so now his brother go after her. Yes, his brother will go fight her, go find her, then kill her. His brother has to do that even though his brother said he wouldn't, but he has to. There can be no other way.

"Does Dad know what you just told me, including about your son, and that he's dealing with a vendetta?"

"Yeah, he knows. That why he tell the story of Iskai. The woman, she figure it out. She will understand . . . and then they will fight, spirit fight."

"You aren't making sense." Pausing, thinking about the story, John asks, "How will she know what dancing on a mountain means when I didn't?"

"She thinks Indian. You just look a little bit Native." Ivan pours a cup of whatever-it-is, then holds the pot up, offering some to him.

What does it mean to think Indian? Obviously, he doesn't. If he didn't already know he didn't, Uncle Ivan just told him he doesn't think like his ancestors. Somewhere along the course of his history, in a household as traditional as any that isn't in abject poverty, he didn't learn what it was to be Native. Why? Because of his parents' Christianity? Or their prosperity? Or because of a school system that belittles superstitions of all kinds? Somewhere, he lost what both his dad and his uncle have although neither of them will often admit possessing the songs, stories, knowledge of the old people. Maybe it was their parents' fault, his grandparents, that he now has only one culture: contemporary Alaskan, which is part of an American melting pot that traces its roots all the way back to Parthia, another melting pot. He knows about the Beatles, Prometheus, Jonah, Lincoln, Zen; he knows where to shoot a brown bear, how to dress a moose, how a semiconductor works, and how to build a nuclear bomb. Yes, he knows how. But he doesn't know how to extract meaning from his dad's stories. What's going on? Gaining the world, he's lost his house. He's become an intellectual nomad.

"That's it, I just look a little Native? Growing up here doesn't count? Eating salmon until I prayed for roast beef doesn't count?"

Nothing I have done counts? I just look a little Native while she thinks Native. Come on, Uncle Ivan. You can do better than that.”

“Relax, Kid. You’re Russian, just like me. The last Aleut died when the last bidarka turned over. Old ways are gone. Nobody wants them back.” Ivan looks into his cup as if in it are the answers to what happened, and perhaps it does hold the answer: Inca silver, looted by Spaniards, fueled a devaluation of land, a democratization of wealth, the creation of a determining base class, and cultures dependent upon international trade, cultures devoted to chocolate and coffee, potatoes and ICBMs.

Webs that connect one human being to another are thin as spider threads. They are like the sea paths the old people followed. They are the forgotten migrations routes—their traces remain in the collective subconscious that will someday remember where the old people came from. Until then, the people will sleep while their little ones tug at loose ends of knotted threads.

“Seems to me we had this discussion in St. Peters—”

“You’re a smart kid, but you are hard headed, like a squared headed Norski. Like your grandpa.”

“Wish I could’ve known him. . . . Dad took after Grandma, didn’t he?” There is, he knows, some thinking that says all humanity descended from a common Eve, that the tapestry of human genetics is really a Gordian Knot pressed flat by the weight of spiritual oppression.

“Your grandmother was a strong woman. She wouldn’t let her children look Norski. She tell us, no tobacco, no alcohol, no being Lutheran.” Ivan pours into his coffee another shot from his stashed bottle. “I never was Lutheran.”

“Will Dad fight the mother of your son? That seems to be where the problem lies.” His visit here has opened up the action of the crewmembers’ families, which, heretofore, had seemed rather mysterious, like a movie going on in another theater where only a bit of laughter or a gunshot every now and then is heard.

“My son’s mother doesn’t have power like your dad. She doesn’t even have a spirit helper. She’s just an Outsider. But she wants to hurt my brother, your father. Pay back, she call it.”

John has heard this bit about his dad having power many times, so many times it seems trite, and considering the current situation, he doesn’t know how the statement can have any credibility even though he knows someone will repeat some variation of it to him before he returns to Juneau. “I don’t see where Dad has all that much power. Things are tough for him right now. Money will be a big problem if the insurance settlement is delayed much longer, and at the moment, it doesn’t look like there will be a settlement any time soon.”

“Your dad, my brother, he has power.” Ivan refills his cup with coffee. “I tell you a story, not a story about around here, but far from here, down around the Grand Canyon. A man lived there, about your age, a man who listened to stories of the old ones and who learned everything he could from them. But he wasn’t one of the old ones. He was a young man who never traveled far from his village.

“Then one day another man comes to the village. He collects stories, writes them down, but he doesn’t believe the stories have power. He thinks them fiction, you know, like what you buy in grocery stores. But the old ones, they go ahead and tell him their stories. They tell him about going to the four corners of the earth, and they tell him how they keep count, where they write it all down.

“He wants proof. He’s a scientific man, and he asks the old ones to show him where they write down their count. But the old ones are too tired to travel so they ask the young man to go with him. Well, the young man, he protests, says he doesn’t know the old language good enough. But they talk him into going so he does.

“The scientific man takes the young man to the canyon of cliff houses that the government protects, and a government man goes with them as they look for old writing. And they find old writing that the government says has no meaning. But the young man

reads the writing and says that an altar is up on the cliff behind them. The government man says, noway, says they have been all over every inch of the cliffs and that there isn't no altar up there. But the young man, he follows what the writing says and finds the altar, walks right to it, and the scientific man and the government man are surprised. But the young man isn't 'cause he can read the writing so he has power over the writing.

"Your dad, my brother, he is like that. He can read writings that scientific men and government men think have no meaning. He has power over the writing.

"His power isn't little like Father Gregory's. Your dad, my brother, he is like Iskai. He can make the mountain dance with him."

The movements of the scow are much sharper now, and John feels the little belches begin, the ones that will become heaves, then dry heaves, and he knows he should be going. His uncle knows he gets sick, but probably no one in the family knows just how bad.

"Thanks, Uncle Ivan. I see that I'll have to get with Dad and get some straighter answers out of him. He can be evasive when he want to be." He slides out from behind the table. "It must be the damn Aleut in him."

His uncle laughs, then says, "Watch out for that first step. It's a lulu."

He assumes his uncle means the step up to the bottom rung of the ladder . . .

-7-

It's late and she's tired, and she certainly doesn't expect to see Jacob when she finishes her shift at two, but there he is, sitting at the table next to the kitchen, with a cup of coffee and about the only person in the bar.

"Hello there, stranger. I take it it didn't go well with your son?"

He has yet to figure out what color her eyes are. Sometimes they look brown, sometimes green, sometimes yellow like a wolf's.

“He’s with my brother.” He thinks her eyes are like her mind. “I asked him to look into bringing your son here for a visit. Thought I’d tell you in case his father asks what’s going on.”

“Thanks for warning me.” She gets herself a coffee cup and sits beside him, her cup just barely on the table. “There isn’t one chance in hell that his father will go for it.”

“We’ll see.” Her eyes look sort of marbled gray tonight.

“You came by for something else, what? Don’t make me guess. Eight hours of dishes puts my mind to sleep. It won’t wake up till morning.”

He watches how she sits on her chair, and he wonders if body language can really be read, if it’s universal, or if it’s another example of where eyes shouldn’t be trusted. He scoots his chair around, then says, “A fellow told me a story about a woman in Kodiak who wanted to commit suicide, so she went to the bar and told everybody she was going to drown herself, then she went down to the beach. Everyone in the bar followed her to the beach where she laid down right at the water’s edge and put a rock on her chest. People stood around and watched, but it was raining so after a few minutes they went back to the bar. In a half hour, she stomps into the bar and demands, ‘Why didn’t somebody tell me the tide was going out.’”

“Tell me, why do you suppose she told people in the bar what she intended to do?”

She smiles as she says, “I told you, my brain is asleep. You’re asking me to think.” That’s the problem, thinking. A poem might simply *be*, but a good story requires her to engage her brain, not at all what she wants to do at two a.m. “Did you see Peggy’s poem in the paper? I think she put it in just for John.”

“I haven’t looked at the paper lately. Don’t seem to have time.” He has plenty of time; he doesn’t have the desire to know what goes on in town, or for that matter, in Alaska.

“Here, let me,” she stands and grabs a paper from a near table, “show it to you.” She opens the front section and folds it into fourths. “Read this and don’t ask me what it means.”

He takes the section, and has to hold it at armslength to read the smaller print:

THE PEOPLE THINK

we're not connected
to timber & totems
that maybe we're here
by witchery—
they see our cities
our plaster christs
our clearcuts—
they hear our talk
of justice & judgement
of mercy & money
of grace & greed
but they don't see
don't hear real love—
they see us all the same
sticky white clay
tracked over the land
& they're waiting
for the north wind
& the south wind
& the east wind
& the west wind
to blow our dust away—
we have failed to show
how connected we are
to the One who formed
this land from himself
maybe as a people
we forgot our faith
then our stories
& are now likely to bring
their expected destruction
upon a creation
we should've remembered.

“You think she put that in here for him?” He doesn’t know whether it’s good poetry or not, but it’s about stories. That much he likes.

“She likes your son, and if he is as smart as you say, then he will see that.” She really is tired, and after her meeting this afternoon with the bank’s trustees, she doesn’t want to talk to anyone, especially not to him for fear she will let something slip. If she can get university backing, any credible university with an interest in Alaskan antiquity, she thinks the trustees will go for the idea of a museum.

“I don’t know how smart he is. I told him a story tonight, and neither he nor Little Mary understood it. They don’t learn from stories. They don’t want to exercise their brains.”

“Aren’t you being a little hard on them tonight? Besides, was the story true?” To her whether a story is fiction or nonfiction makes a difference. Nonfiction, she’ll believe. Fiction, well, she suspects it fulfills some function in a culture, satisfies or titillates some aspect of the human psyche, but as far as she is concerned, life is too interesting to waste her time reading fiction.

“All stories are true, even ones that never happened.”

“Did this one happen?”

“Which one, the one I tell you or the one I told them?”

“The one you told me?”

“I think so. The fellow who told it to me believed it. He was the Boy Scout troop leader on Kodiak when Port Adams got its first Boy Scout troop, so you judge.”

“As a Scout leader, you don’t think he’d lie?” She knows the problem with learning from stories is an old and ongoing one. The Puritan minister Stephen Gosson wrote four hundred years ago the problem with stories is that they were lies. Sir Philip Sidney argued back that stories teach better than histories or sermons because they were more interesting. He should’ve argued the Bible has fiction in it, even if its account of events is assumed true. The parable of Dives and Lazarus was populist moral teaching of the 1st Century C.E., or in others words, a fiction, which today forms the basis for the concept of hell in historical exegesis. Yes, the story

of Lazarus and the rich man is fiction that too many today accept as nonfiction just because of its context; so it does matter whether a story is true or not. And she intends to challenge every story, intends to never believe any fiction.

Her brain is a little more awake. He does that to her. So did Peter's father, and look where that lead. And she wonders if he would know what the word *exegetis* means if she used it. Probably not. But what the heck, she doesn't know what his stories mean, so perhaps they're even.

What would it be like, she wonders, to relate to the world through stories? There would be no exactness. She might have to read something by Stanley Fish, heaven help her.

She'd like to see Peter, but there is less chance of that than of understanding why the woman put the rock on her chest when she could get up at any time . . . did he tell her the story because there some message she was suppose to get from it? Now she'll be awake all night thinking about it. Is she that woman? Is she wanting attention? Why else would the woman tell the bar she intended to commit suicide? Then why did everyone go down to watch? No, it's too late at night to play games with him. "Jacob, go home, go to bed, and call me in the morning. I'd love to have breakfast with you. But I have to get some sleep right now."

"That's what I came by to tell you. I won't be around for awhile. I have to take care of some things. I thought I wanted you to know." He stands, lays his hand on her shoulder, then turns and goes, his anger safely stored in a small space below and behind his lungs.

* * * * *

CHAPTER THREE

-1-

Disappointed that neither his son nor Little Mary understood the story he told, Jacob nevertheless says nothing more to either of them as, in his room, he quietly packs a duffle bag, the money he received for his rifles heavy in his wallet. He sold to the young fellow on Russian Hill who fixes guns the four .30-06s he has acquired over the years. He kept only the .222 he uses for seals when fishing. Three of the rifles he sold were old Winchesters; the fourth was an English gun, a Rigby, a fancy gun he never used because he didn't want saltwater on its engraving.

Jacob knows what his son will learn. Yatee, what his brother called her and all the name he knew her by, had his brother's child, a quiet boy who was also lost at sea when the *St. Paul* went down. He and his brother, the two of them alone in the house up Kupreanof, talked a lot about the boy, about what kind of man he would have been. One night they talked till tears fell like rain on Kupreanof. Then his brother was embarrassed and moved out, and he was ashamed that his brother had not told him before about his nephew. He knew the house on Kupreanof had separated him from his brother and the old ways, ways that are themselves no good but ways he should have taught to his sons. If he had, John would have understood his story tonight. But he has been like the Tlingit toion who sold his family's old things to an important museum to protect them. The toion's responsibility wasn't to the old things but to his family, his house, his clan; his responsibility was to keep those old things secret.

Mary didn't want any of their children to know the old ways. Her prayers were for the old ways to die with her generation; her Christianity demanded of her those prayers. And he went along with her because he knew the better way, knew its power, used that power every day he fished, some days at home. But most days at home he forgot about his Christianity and accepted Mary's; became like her. Life was easier that way. No heavy seas at home. But what he did wasn't right. He thought too much about peace and neglected a responsibility, and for that, he is also ashamed.

Since their births, Jacob told stories to all of his children, but Mary didn't; her Christianity didn't let her. And that is what he still doesn't understand, the idea of many paths but only one way. He thought he understood: each path like a river channel, each a little different but all going the same direction, coming together at times, then dividing again, each with different depths, different rapids, riffles, but all eroding away unbelief as a river will cut a canyon through hard rock, the flint foreheads of spiritual Israelites. But now he doesn't know. He doesn't think that is right. It is the analogy of Christians being the salt of the earth he finds most disturbing. A little salt makes food taste better, enhances flavors, but salt makes a very bad supper. Too much salt and only sea gulls can eat the casserole. If the water isn't changed enough times, salt cod or salted salmon isn't edible. If everyone were a Christian, then maybe he couldn't stomach them. So those many paths are not really going the same place. There can be but one path that only a few travel.

He let slip his responsibility to teach the old ways first and why those old ways have power. Then he could have taught the way that has even more power. But he let Mary and Father Gregory and the school teach his children, and now his children neither know the old ways nor the power of the better way. They believe silly things and say they believe nothing, and that is his fault, and he is again ashamed.

The danger of the old ways isn't in knowing about them, but in believing no better way has been given. What has occurred in

Port Adams is what happened in the Garden: Adam did not tell Eve exactly what he had been told. He didn't trust her. He added to what he had been told so she would not even touch the Tree. He set her up to fail when the Serpent came; for the Serpent knew nothing had been said about touching, a subtle point, but one a storyteller understands. When Eve reached for that fruit, the first scientific experiment, she reached fearing she would die although she really didn't know what that meant, only that to die was bad. She reached carefully, only almost touching the fruit that she saw was pleasant, just like scientists do when examining a new thing. The tip of one finger brushed against the fruit and nothing happened. Then she touched it harder, and still nothing happened. She took hold of it, and nothing happened. Now she didn't believe her husband, who didn't trust her and told her she would die if she even touched the fruit. She didn't believe God any more; for there was no trust. She didn't believe she would die. After all, didn't her husband tell her what God said? And she didn't die when she touched the fruit so she had no fear of eating the fruit. And she ate when she believed nothing. It wasn't that she believed Satan. No, that's not how to deceive people. She only believed what she could prove, which seems horribly amusing when today nearly everyone believes what can't be proved, believes in a soul that lives after death which is the lie Satan told Eve. Yet to Eve, it was as if belief were concepts that could be taught like algebraic story problems until today so much has been added and subtracted that the children here in Port Adams believe nothing. Since Adam magnified what he was told, then began to till the salted earth because of that magnification, the children of Adam have lived with the eyes open and their ears stopped; they have heard nothing. If they could hear what their deafness has caused to reject, their hearts would be heavy. As it is too many boys wear baggy pants that look like they shit in them; they listen to ghetto signifying turned up real loud; they dishonor their parents and the old ways, dishonor even Father Gregory, who, usually, alone resists the changes

technology brings to Port Adams. And he, Jacob, is again ashamed for giving to others his responsibility.

But before he can breech his shame as if it were a gunbarrel from which he will fire bullets at his children's unbelief, at the disbelief of others as a toion should, he must find Yatee, whom he offended with thoughtless words. He must make things right with her, must ask her forgiveness so that his gift will be accepted. He must use the power given to him for more than calming seas and finding fish. The power of the old ways can do those things just as the staffs of the pharaoh's magicians could also become snakes. And he continues to pack if he were leaving for salmon season.

Four a.m., very dark, with seven foot seas and twenty-knot wind gusts, Jacob Chickenof carefully closes Little Mary's frontdoor. Roy Green's blue-eyed husky barks once, then apparently satisfied Jacob also belongs on the street, the dog continues along Forelands Way, his head up and nose working, as rain quiets rustling willows and weights down the tarp over Charlie Rohmer's skiff. Rain slides off metal roofs, splatters in cratered drip lines, then drains away, running down concrete gutters and around the street corner to Kupreanof, then straight downhill to the harbor. And Jacob, shouldering his dufflebag, follows the rain downhill all the way to the transit float where, for the past fifteen minutes, the ninety-eight foot *M/V Ous'fford* waits with neither stern nor bow line attached to the dock. It waits more in the channel than out as it jogs its screw to maintain position, ready to head back out the channel without notice.

When Folke Larsen, the *Ous'fford's* skipper, sees Jacob on the transit float, he noses the crabber against the dock, and as soon as Jacob boards, he maneuvers into the channel and quickly slips past Near Island, then the Black Can and Buoy Seven as the crabber's bow rises from the long swells of open sea, its length spanning the trough between the swells as it pushes southward through sea and rain, pushes southward towards where the old spirit lines run near the surface.

Jacob has realized for many days that he must use the old spirit lines: without Yatee's name, finding her to make things right will mean calling her to him. His brother said she has become a spirit woman. If she has, then she will hear him singing his song as whales heard his relative sing his relative's whaling song—and she will come. They will, if she insists, indeed fight a spiritual war. That is not his desire. He would rather have her accept his apology, but he suspects she won't. They have different spirits.

The crabber is bound for Tacoma where it will be cut in two, then have twelve feet added to its crab tank and ten feet to its stern. It left Kodiak yesterday morning, and there aren't three people in Port Adams who saw it arrive, and no one who saw Jacob board or the crabber depart. Neither John nor Sis knew he planned to leave, or were awake when he slipped out the door.

Folke Larsen has known Jacob ever since both of them played with starfish and sand dollars while their fathers skinned sea lion pups, the pups born with thick black fur that was sought by German buyers fifty years ago. Although Folke has always lived on Kodiak, their fathers made annual spring pilgrimages together into the Aleutians until they were both in fourth grade. Jacob is a year older than Folke, but they started school the same year, graduated the same year, married the same year, and they fished together in their early, lean years. Even now, they share codes and locations and catch figures. So when Jacob called Folke about a lift south, the only thing Jacob had to say was that he didn't want to be seen leaving town.

When Jacob steps into the wheelhouse, Folke says, "Make yourself at home. You know where everything is and what it is so I'll put you to work. It's good to see you, Old Man."

The *Ous'fjord* sails with just Folke and its engineer, Percy Nilsson. Its open water crossing to Puget Sound is scheduled to take four days. The weather looks good. For at least a day, they will ride the back side of the high pressure cell that passed over the island just before John arrived with Alvin Winesap in tow. If Jacob

and Folke are lucky, the crabber will stay with the front all the way south.

“Thanks, Folke. I’m glad you could pick me up on short notice.” Jacob had only radioed Folke when Little Mary, Heidi-Marie, and his son learned that his brother had protested the way the *St. Paul* was loaded in Kodiak. Everything will soon be known. Leaving had become necessary so certain questions would remain unanswered, especially the question of whether he approved the way the crab pots were loaded. No, he didn’t approve, but the *Iskai* was his son’s to fish, and the *St. Paul* his brother’s. It wasn’t his place to make decisions from a couple of hundred miles away. He has to trust whomever he hires to skipper his boat. Maybe that is not the way of every owner, but he has to treat others the way he would want treated, and he wouldn’t like to skipper when the owner says to drop pots here or drop pots there when he knows there are no crab in either place. So he talked to J and listened to his brother, then told them to decide for themselves what to do. Maybe a mistake. But the loading of the pots would have been his son’s mistake. His brother’s, too, maybe. However, from what the Coast Guard tells him, the way the boats were loaded made no difference. The mistake was his, Jacob Chickenof’s, for offending a spirit woman who would kill her own seed, her own son when the boy wanted to change his name to Chickenof and be Russian Aleut like Ivan, his father.

He had worried about how he could answer, without deceit, those questions the Anchorage sharks would ask. He has thought about how he could say one thing but mean something else, like the President, whose nose grows larger with each lie, but he knows the story Jehu, who slew the prophets of Baal by gathering them together through deceitfulness. The king did a good work that wasn’t pleasing to the God of Abraham and Jacob. He also has worried about doing good work that isn’t pleasing.

He wishes his brother had told him a year ago about his nephew—the boy, Michael, would’ve been welcomed into the family. He would have been pleased if the boy had changed his

name to Chickenof, a name is own son rejected. The way things are now, his name, his brother's name will die with them, which is what Yatee wants. The name that humiliated her will cease to exist.

Many nights he has lain awake thinking about how he can repair his offense against Yatee: all of the pieces sort of came together suddenly. He is the cause of his troubles, the reason why Portland Casualty had to seek bankruptcy protection. He is to blame for Paul's and Samuel's and Red's problems. No one else. Just him and words he said when he wasn't careful, and for that he is ashamed. But what it will take to undo his shame, that he doesn't know. He doubts if anything will be enough. He is sure that will be the case.

John is extremely capable, and might actually be more like him than was Jacob Junior, who showed more emotions and less ability to forget those things that should be forgotten. John can certainly work with the court in disposing of his property as well as, or better than he can. John can perhaps make even better deals than he is presently able to do. So he's not needed on-island. For the first time since Mary became pregnant with Cathy, he is free to go where he wants. He is as free as Ivan has always been—Ivan used to head south offseasons. Now it is his turn; for only where the soil is thin do the spirit lines run near the surface.

Money will be a problem, but he has enough to get him where he must go.

"If you want, Folke, I'll take this watch. I'm not sleepy, and the course numbers are in your autopilot so there's not much to do but stay awake."

"That'd be good. Can you handle it till noon? If you can, I'll have Percy relieve you then."

"Sure. We'll be there soon." He's glad to have the time alone . . . so much of his life has been spent alone, him with his thoughts as he watched the sea, watched for seabirds circling baitfish driven to the surface, watched for balls of spawning herring, schooling salmon, Loran coordinates and crabpot buoys, strings of buoys

twelve seconds, twenty seconds apart, his responsibility to drop the pots on crab, then to find those pots three days and three nights later. But since Mary's death, no one has wanted him to be alone apparently in fear the rock of his grief would be rolled away, and he would return-to from where he came, sea unto sea. Yes, there will be rumors, but he has told the story they need to hear. The old people will understand.

He watches Folke take one last look around the wheelhouse before disappearing down a companionway, and he thinks about how much has changed since they watched their dads skin newborn sea lion pups. Camp was a series of dugouts, with roofs of flattened oil drums and fronts built from whatever drift was found. His mom had a gasoline powered Maytag washing machine they had to haul from one dugout to the next. Fishhead stew was the main fare most every night, with floating eyeballs that were for the quick. Folke's dad made sure both he and Folke got one everytime, the highlight of the evening, an eyeball being something to savor and something not to be chewed and swallowed hastily. Those were good years, especially the ones before Isaac went down. After that, his dad lost interest in going to sea, or going sealing or furring or anything else but drinking.

His dad's drinking is probably why he, Jacob Chickenof, a proud man who is now ashamed, has never drunk and become a drunk and ashamed of peeing in his pants, the example of his dad, an awkward thought that can't be expressed very well, one in which what should have come first came last, like groceries and rent and school clothes and pride. So what advantage is there in not becoming a drunk if he is now also ashamed, his pride in not being like his dad being the cause of his offense, of his thoughtless words to Yatee, the woman his brother loved? He held himself up to a high standard: maybe that is why he has always kept an eye on the families of fishermen who have gone down, and now, as reward for all of those years of good work, he is being sued. He should be angry, and he was for awhile, and none of this makes much sense. But he hasn't said anything stupid like what Job said about coming

before his Creator as a prince; plus, helping out a little bit here and a little bit there has its own reward. And he wonders how tired is he when his thoughts make so little sense to him . . . he is away from the island, and this is a new season, a new run, a new fishery. He is still learning where the stream markers are hid. Once he knows the rules, he will do fine as long as he has his health.

The Cat engine whispers behind and below him. Seas push against steel plating, then split with soft whooshes. The deck rises rhythmically, and he wonders if he will ever return. Port Adams has been his home, but the community no longer needs him. He should have never left skippering. He should have made J Jr. start with a skiff the way he had:

The War had been over for a decade and Ed Nelson had been home from Korea for a couple of years when Jacob found a snag skiff washed up on the beach, a hole the size of his head punched through its plywood bottom. He helped himself to a piece of plywood from Alaska Packers, fitted a patch over the hole, clinched the nails he attached it with, then poled out to Near Island on the falling tide: the snag skiff was too heavy to row. This was before the channel was dredged and deepened.

He spent a while poking around on the island, found a fox den and a brass shell casing for a Navy gun. He had taken a lard bucket along to bail with, and he picked it full of berries, and when he was ready to come home, he sat on the skiff's bow while he waited for the tide to rise and refloat the skiff. He sat there thinking, planning, watching the gulls and a lone raven. He couldn't hurry the tide, couldn't cause his dad to return from across Iskai Bay where the family had their fish camp at Danger Arm, couldn't cause his mom not to whip him when he recrossed the channel. All he could do was sit there and wait; so he sat there thinking about pirates and Long John Silver and Treasure Island. How come, he wondered, nothing like that ever happened here. Not much of anything happened in Port Adams. Father Hermon blessed the fleet in May. Then they canned salmon and dried salmon and

smoked salmon until no more bright fish entered creeks. Then his dad would shoot a couple of seals. Their oil would be rendered. That would be their grease for the winter, and if they ran short of kerosene like what happened in 1957, they would cook over seal oil like Grandma Mutukin did till she came to live with them. His parents didn't get rid of that kerosene cook stove until 1961, when electricity finally reached Milk Bay, where they lived at the time, the bay being named for its color when the herring spawned in it. They lived as squatters on cannery land, his dad having built their cabin from salvaged lumber and drift. For those years, he lost track of Folke, whose dad was doing okay.

Statehood in 1959 brought change in the fisheries. Federal managers were replaced by the State. Neither Feds nor State seemed to care, though, about Port Adams. It was too far away, too small, and without decent freight service. So the canneries on Cook's Island shipped their pack directly to Seattle at the end of each season. He doubts anybody ever kept track of how many millions of cans of pink salmon left the dock. Certainly the official pack each fall was less than the number of cans shipped north the previous spring. But nobody seemed to care—didn't care until transplanted shrimpers established a double beam trawl fishery out of Kodiak, the high shrimp numbers due to the collapse of the cod fishery in the early 1950s.

The waters around Cook's Island support a fixed tonnage of catch each year. Nature doesn't seem to care whether it grows cod or crab, halibut or herring. As one fish stock is depleted another blooms. First herring numbers fell, then cod, then shrimp and halibut, then king crab. Now, cod have come back as have halibut, but the explosion has been in pollock, hardly worth the fuel to go get. And until they knock those schools of pollock in the head, there won't be big catches of shrimp or crab as the pollock feed on the larval stage of both.

Perhaps it is time for him to take a break from fishing. The money is mostly out of it. He has been here for the good times; it's been quite a ride. He was trying to diversify before the sky fell in.

Now he can start over, if he knew where to start. Maybe gold mining if he knew anything about it. He found gold near Pillar Point what, now thirty years ago when he was hunting, if it can be called that, sea lion pups for their fur, completing the cycle begun in a dugout housing a Maytag washing machine. He never told anyone about finding gold. He doesn't know why he never said anything; finding gold just didn't seem very important at the time.

The whoosh of one swell after another split by the bow as they crawl south is almost hypnotic. The wheelhouse is warm. Coffee's fresh. Pretty cozy. Far different from the wet schooners, especially the 64 footers, he fished those years when he missed the salmon, usually because Fish & Game had him shut down when the run hit. That's a problem every salmon fisherman faces: missing the run. Lose an engine, a boat, a seine, miss a week for any number of reasons, and if that is the week the fish hit, then it's just too bad. A fellow misses the season, and there isn't any crop insurance like there is with farming. All that remains is to fish the next season however a fellow can.

He'll have four days to think. How about after that?

His life as he thinks about it seems dull. Tomorrows have been like yesterdays. No problems till the sky fell in. No bad habits to get him in trouble. Everything went along pretty good for him. He has good friends, has paid his tithes, has given offerings on the holy days, has even supported a couple of town boys attending University of Washington. He cast his bread on many waters, and much of it came back multiplied many times over. Then the sky fell in. But he isn't the only one suffering. Red faces jailtime. Paul is bankrupt. Samuel will have to sell some of his old things.

Perhaps he hasn't suffered enough. But suffering is for learning so what has he to learn? Why has this happened if all things work for good? Surely his offense against Yatee shouldn't also effect Red, Paul, Samuel. Are they victims, is he a victim of time and chance?

This is a hard one that he hasn't wanted to think about, but he has four days and little else to do.

All life is the same breath, but some people hold it too long. It comes out stale and depleted, like old garden soil.

A little streak of lightness lies on the water ahead. Pretty quick it'll be morning, then tomorrow, then the day after, and he won't have accomplished anything. He has become like the old ones, just living, thinking, trying to make sense of things, trying to make sense of why he was drafted by God. Why not Ivan, or Samuel, or one of those people he sees on TV who really want the spirit? They stand up and say they accept Christ, then they go off feeling good about themselves, but they go off the same as they were before. No magic happened.

He wonders if he can think like Heidi-Marie; he doesn't think so. He likes her, but she is so different than Mary. She can't cook. Oh, she thinks she can. She makes some fancy things that taste bad, but she can't make stew, or a fishhead soup, or even spaghetti. She doesn't flour meat when she fries it, doesn't know what to do with a can of salmon besides make a salad. She will even eat moldy humpies and not know better.

Pinkness creeps into the horizon, spreading slowly north like spilled rhubarb sauce . . . and Heidi-Marie doesn't add enough sugar to anything.

It has to be difficult for her not having her son with her; he can't imagine that. As soon as Mary said it was okay, he took his kids, even the girls, with him on the boat. Mary taught them at home most years. Even John didn't go to school until he was in seventh grade. What were the Outside teachers who came to Port Adams going to teach J or John, how to get in touch with nature, what the woman from Colorado thought she should teach his sons? Were they going to teach about the purple people in Australia? Beth came home with a whole lesson about purple people tracking bugs as if the purple people were dogs. The lesson made him mad. Whoever wrote the book was as dense as a downrigger weight. They have no idea about what they wrote. They just wrote things

so they would feel good about themselves. Maybe that's why he ran for the schoolboard job, so there was somebody on the board who wasn't afraid of the Outside teachers. But the Outside teachers wrote the rules about what could be taught. They said they wanted to preserve Native culture when they did everything they could to destroy it. No wonder Old Believer priests glue the Outside textbooks shut, or at least glue enough pages together that the books can't do so much harm.

He'll have to stop in Sitka and see Myron Wheeler on his way back. Myron knows how dense those books writers are; Myron spent time carving ivory for the university there at Fairbanks. Maybe they can laugh together. That would be good.

"Hey, Old Man, you want some breakfast?"

He turns around and sees Folke with a big plate of potatoes and fish; the potatoes have the yellow color of fingerlings.

"Sure. Everything is real quiet."

"I was listening to the weather down below. We should miss everything, slip right in between fronts. The weather can't get more perfect than it will be."

Taking the plate, he asks, "Did you get some sleep?"

"Maybe an hour, enough. I'm excited about next season. Should be a good year. And too bad about the *Iskai*. That was a helleva boat."

Jacob nods. Folke's right. A person doesn't talk about the dead, doesn't disturb them as they sleep. "Yeah, I'll miss it. Miss it a whole lot." After a moment he adds, "Maybe I don't get another *Iskai*."

"Hey, Jacob, if you're available you can skipper for me anytime. I can get another boat with a phone call."

Jacob likes Folke, and he knows Folke is right about only needing to make a call to get another boat, but it makes him a little mad that he, Samuel, Paul can't even get what is theirs without filing a lawsuit when bankers are eager to bankroll Folke or any other squarehead owner. But he won't think about this subject. Right now, the pain is too great.

-2-

When Sis can't find Dad, John becomes concerned—he can't, he refuses to accept what Uncle Ivan said about him leaving. Dad was here last night. His pickup is still here; he can't have gone anywhere. Besides, all Sis sees missing is their father and his rain gear. Nevertheless, he calls the airport. Dad's not there, hasn't been there. And the Whaler is still in the harbor. So at first he and Sis figure their dad has gone for a walk along the beach like he did the day Mom died, but when noon comes and Dad still hasn't returned, John calls Fish & Game.

Arriving in a rumpled uniform and with herring scales clinging to his forearms from baiting sampling pots, Sargent Randy Plankov enters Sis's house and in one long glance scans its interior. "Where do you think Jacob might be?"

John wants to skip the formalities and tell the story, but he says, "I don't know. I thought he went for a walk this morning, but he should've been back by now."

"He hasn't gone anywhere?" Asks Randy, noticing details and seeing the empty hooks of the gun rack that hung in the living room of the house up Kupreanof. "Your dad's fancy rifle is gone."

Both John and Sis turn to look at the rack as John says, "Harbormaster said Dad's skiff is still tied in its slip. His pickup is here. Where could he have gone?"

"That rifle was there," Mary feels shock strike her as if the sensation were the great wave in a heavy surf, "when I," she can't finish her sentence.

"Has he been depressed lately?" Randy was sure Jacob also had a couple of older Model 70s, one a pre-War all original, ninety percent finish, a rifle for which a collector like himself would pay good money. The rifle Jacob used, almost to the exclusion of the others, was a Springfield .30-06 of Winchester manufacture, a rifle about which they once argued whether it was really a Winchester or a Springfield.

“Yeah. I thought he might be suicidal, but he told a story last night that I’m supposed to repeat to opposing counsel. I didn’t want to do that so I asked Uncle Ivan what the story meant. He said it meant Dad was going to live alone for awhile.” And John relates the story to the older trooper while Randy examines the remaining .222, a light coating of rust growing on its exposed steel surfaces.

“Did your Russian uncle tell you what the story meant?”

“I don’t know how Uncle Ivan pulled out of it what he did.” John repeats what Ivan said as closely as he remembers the explanation.

Randy has always respected Jacob, has always helped in ways he could. And while he hears the story a little differently than Ivan heard it, it is a story he recognizes: “The story is an old one, and what your Russian uncle said is so. Your dad is tired of performing for everyone else. Think of him as dead. When he is ready, he will reappear if you are here, going about your business as you should be doing.” Randy returns the .222 to the gunrack: “Get some oil on that rifle. Jacob hasn’t been taking very good care of it. . . . I’ll file a missing person’s report, but unless his body washes up on the beach, figure he is alive someplace. However, the word will get out that he has committed suicide. Just tell that story to who all will listen. Those who will understand will. The rest won’t matter. This story isn’t for everybody. No story is, especially not the old stories.”

-3-

Tacoma is dirtier and uglier than when he was here twenty years ago. Houses are larger, roads wider. More traffic, lots more traffic. All new cars that get out of his way as he changes lanes on the freeway. He is sleepy, rummy actually. But it almost seems like spring. Daffodils hang their yellow heads in apparent disgust as they stand imprisoned under barred windows of the suburbs he cruises while looking for an old address. The most car he could

afford was a 1969 Ford LTD with one headlight that winks when he least expects it. The Ford, despite its age, has low mileage, and there isn't anything on it he can't fix with twenty dollars spent at Wal-Mart. It looks tough, but it runs fine. However, it brings stares as he slows at corner street signs. Kids point. Dogs bark. And he proceeds on, searching for a northwest passage, not knowing what's ahead other than somewhere to the west lies the Pacific.

Washington can take its sales tax, though, and stick it where the governor has hemorrhoids.

He has the address of Portland Casualty's offices, but he first has to find how to get off Ruston Way and across the Narrows that loom in front of him. He wonders if he will ever see Folke again, if he will return to Point Adams, a question he has repeatedly asked himself as if there's safety in a multitude of inquiries. And he feels a little like Don Quixote setting out to joust with windmills. He read most of that story when he was waiting to set picks off Gull Point thirty-five years ago. He wonders why he never finished it. He doesn't remember. Eventually the book got wet and the story lost.

Finally, as if it were a feeder stream, he finds Pearl Street and turns south, paralleling the Narrows. He seems to own the road so far away from him do the new cars stay.

Once on the freeway, he turns towards Bremerton, Gig Harbor and the bridge over the Narrows . . . it's far enough down to the water he's hesitant to look over the side of that bridge. He feels like he could fall even in the midst of traffic, and knowing this bridge collapsed once before just adds to his apprehension.

The Gig Harbor offices of Portland Casualty are locked. Blinds are closed. Even the grass in the sidewalk border strip needs mowed.

Jacob walks around the front of the white stucco building, looks along each side, sees nothing he knew he wouldn't see, then returns to the front door and tries to see inside. It doesn't appear like anyone has been around for a while, a worrisome appearance that doesn't bode well for Red, Paul or Samuel collecting on their insurance policies.

A fellow in a white Taurus parked across the street watches him while pretending to be reading a newspaper. Somebody appears to be keeping tabs on the offices. He wonders who, then wonders if the elements of a mystery are here. Perhaps. But more likely he's being noticed because of what he drives, a thirty year old beater. Well, he is as poor as he looks, thanks somewhat to Portland not paying off, but mostly because he offended a spirit woman who called down a mountain.

He will have to come back here to confront these agents of Yatee, who will acknowledge no fault, nor accept responsibility for the damage they have done to Red or Paul.

Jacob came down to the Lower Forty-Eight to take care of three tasks: Heidi-Marie won't talk about what happened between her and her former husband, and he can't help her unless he knows what he's up against; so his first task lies a thousand miles from here. He must locate and talk to her former husband, the easiest of his tasks.

Then, because he doesn't know where all of the threads are that connect Yatee to Portland Casualty, he must locate her and make things right with his brother's *wantabe* Indian, who evidently has done well for herself since Port Adams bought her a ticket out of town. He wishes his brother would have bought a stronger belt when his brother went Outside to buy a boat, a belt that could have kept his pants up. Instead, Ivan's belt was like the President's, unbuckled around his ankles and unashamed of its poor character.

Lastly, he has business with Portland Casualty he has to take care of. Those agents who took his money, Red's money, Paul's, Samuel's, money that should go to heal the families of Port Adams, need to tell him face to face they won't pay. They won't be able to do that, the reason for him having power.

Jacob never had much desire to see Outside, where catch 'n release tourism has replaced seiners and gillnetters along the Columbia. He reads *National Fisherman* so he knows about dam breaching. However, he doesn't know enough to have an opinion, not that saying stupid things at public meetings has much to do

with knowing anything about a subject. Then again, what does he know? He has come down from Port Adams, where people wouldn't kill spawning fish, something bears and eagles do. Down here, though, people even have their pictures taken with salmon caught after hormones have turned those fish bronze or black. He would be ashamed of killing a fish so near its time to spawn.

He follows the signs: 16 to I-5, then south for two hours, then I-205 across the River, then east towards The Dalles, Pendleton and Idaho. John brought a story home from college about a green knight who rode off with his head under his arm. He thought the story pretty good, and with each passing mile, he feels more like he carries his head under his arm, his body not connected to his mind. A lifetime of pressure to do better has been cut off his shoulders. He is free of worries about payments and insurance and making sure everybody eats today. He can lean back in the seat of his Ford and just cruise. And people get out of his way as if he's really important. There's a lot to be said for driving a big car, and it doesn't do too bad on gas: 19.7 miles per gallon on his first full tank.

He would've stopped for gas at Troutdale, but he couldn't figure out how to get off the freeway until he was across the Sandy River and into the Gorge, surprisingly green for so early in the spring. Miles flow by as he heads upriver as if he is the salmon for whom dams will be breached—he follows the fishladder of construction around Bonneville Dam, and notices the windsurfers about where the desert begins.

Leaving the fourlane at the second exit into The Dalles, he stops at a station where a car full of what he assumes are migrant workers sits at the outside pumps as if too embarrassed to pull close to the convenience storefront. A V-flight of cormorants pass overhead, and he wonders what the seabirds are doing so far inland as he gets out to pump his gas. "You can't do that," a girl hollers, wrestling the pump nozzle from him. "Not in Oregon."

Not in Oregon. What else can't he do in Oregon? He stands as if holding his head while he watches her as she watches numbers spin on the pump, neither of them doing anything productive.

From the stationwagon at the outside pump, a boy of maybe five runs over to a juniper twice his height at the side of the C-store, and starts to piss. An emerging customer, a cowboy, sees the boy and hollers, "You can't do that, what the—" The cowboy says more, something about damn fruitpickers, then opens the door of a pickup parked diagonally directly in front of the store. "Get the hell back where you came from, Kid."

A girl who might be either an older sister or the boy's young mother hurries to intercept the child, who stands, his penis in his hand, wide eyed, staring at the man in his thirties, the cowboy wearing manure-flected jeans and boots dirty from more than one day's work, the cowboy's hat sweat stained.

Then turning towards Jacob, the man says, "What the—are you gawkin at, Chief? You can go back ta wherever you came from too. This country doesn't need anymore trash."

All of his life Jacob has hoarded his words as if each word were a fish needed to sustain life through good times and famine. He calculates the heaviness of each word, then uses only the number needed to tip the beam of an imaginary balance that weighs men by their deeds. He made a mistake and spoke too quickly to Yatee, and for that he is ashamed. So he stands there by the gas pump, still feeling as useless as if he were holding his head under his arm; he stands there thinking about the cowboy's words and wondering if words so thin and gaunt should not be killed to end their suffering as he would kill an old dog, crippled with arthritis, blinded by cataracts, its teeth abscessed. Though a fool needs no answer, the cowboy is less a fool than he is a hatful of starving words, each of which is a violation of all decent values. He, Jacob Chickenof, is as angry at the cowboy as he was with Yatee when she broke taboos and caused fishermen to break their vows because the men were weak and she was strong and on her way to becoming the spirit woman she is today. But this cowboy is weak, his spirit shriveled.

Jacob smiles as the shriveled spirit within the dirty jeans and boots disgustedly shakes his head and says, "What's this—country comin to?" The cowboy then gets into his pickup and backs away,

backing parallel to the first island of pumps. Romping on his gas peddle—the pickup’s rear tires squeal, spin, smoke—the cowboy would have hit the kid, his pants still unzipped, if he hadn’t turned his head to look at Jacob, whose reflection seems to appear in front of the cowboy’s pickup. That backwards glance of the cowboy causes him to pull his steeringwheel left, and that little left turn is enough for the pickup to miss the boy and his sister, who jumps back out of the way.

When the pickup’s spinning rear tires cross onto the shoulder of the street, they spray gravel collected from having sanded the road all winter, the little stones shooting back towards the C-store, peppering the stationwagon and gas pumps and clumps of sage that struggle against encroaching slabs of broken concrete in the adjoining lot. As if hit by buckshot, the glass of a pump shatters and the woman pumping Jacob’s gas, says, “That sonnofabitch,” as she quickly writes down a number he doesn’t see.

The older sister (Jacob decides that’s who she must be) now with the boy in hand looks over at him and says, “Thanks,” though he has done nothing but stand there, feeling useless while waiting for his gas to be pumped. She shoos the boy back into the stationwagon, which pulls onto the same track the pickup has disappeared down, leaving without filing a complaint or waiting to answer the questions of the police officer who arrives before Jacob can pay for his gas.

Gas is almost as expensive here as in Port Adams, where there is an excuse for the price.

The police officer asks the woman who pumped his gas what happened, then takes the number she wrote down and leaves, heading east, the same direction the pickup went. The offense of the cowboy seems to be his breaking the glass window of the gas pump.

Again on the freeway, with headlights on though they are not yet needed, he follows the Columbia upriver, worried a little about whether John and Little Mary have reported him missing. Probably. That means he will have to be careful about giving out his name—

to have a name is to have power over the person. As long as he remains unknown, he will remain free to travel as he wishes, answering to no person as he calls Yatee out from hiding. If he had her name, he would know who she is and he could find her, thereby giving him power over her.

Following the river upstream as if he were a salmon, Jacob feels in himself the strengthening of an old urge to again spawn. What would it be like to once more have a child around, a boy like the one who used the bush instead of an inside bathroom? Since Debbie left home, his life really hasn't had much meaning. He has helped a few people out, has made a little money, has eaten a salmon casserole from nearly every woman in Port Adams, but he has been no more needed than he was to fill his gas tank.

That story John brought home about the green knight really wasn't about the knight who wasn't important once he lost his head. It was about a quest for honor. It was about the other guy, the knight called Sir Gawain.

Across the Columbia, apple orchards, like timid deer, sneak down to the river for a drink, staying behind lines of poplars that provide protecting cover against the wind. The poplars bear no edible fruit, but they are needed just as is the river if the apples are to develop marketable fruit. Looking across the river, seeing the bare branches, Jacob, still thinking about the green knight, understands the story of the red, white and blue string top that stood upright like a man.

He has been feeling useless because he is: he has become like a sea lion herd bull past his prime. He can still catch a few fish, but they won't matter. He will bark a little about this or that, but his voice won't be heard far or for long. Then he will die. Maybe his teeth will be found by anthropologists trying to answer questions about the effects of sugar on traditional seafood cultures. The molar he had filled by the Russian dentist will puzzle them. Otherwise, his bones will become bones labeled with an identifying number like the number written by the woman who pumped his gas. No name. No power over him. The dig site, the number of the find.

These numbers form the code used by anthropologists like Heidi-Marie to identify the traces of life that remain when the spinning stops.

His bones will turn yellow, then brown as minerals leach into them. They will look like the bones of the old bachelor bulls. As one dies so dies the other. If there is no resurrection, then there is no reasoning, no logic, no right or wrong, no reason not to shoot that fellow back there at the gas station who spoke such thin words.

Some people keep Father Gregory awake nights with their doubts about whether their lives have a purpose; their vanity won't let them think themselves sea lions. They never are sure. When they set a pick, they hold it too long. They're afraid to purse their seine for fear they might miss a fish so they lose the school they have. What they don't understand is that string top will wobble, then wobble in circles, then finally tip over when it slows down. To stand, it has to stay spinning fast.

Some of the women who brought him casseroles were fishing for a husband. They were Mary's friends. Nice ladies. Pleasant. He could sit with one of them and watch the channel, watch boats come it, watch it rain, listen to the whistler, the wind, the ravens. He could be an old man with one of them. He could wait for God, his change, the Resurrection, or maybe the Tribulation if one of those germs gets free that scientists make. He could be happy for a little while.

But not really happy. It would be like standing beside the gas pump back there with nothing to do, his head under his arm. She—one of Mary's friends, the one whose casseroles he likes best—would have something to do: keep house, cook, what she has been doing for as long as she remembers, which is maybe why wives outlive husbands. But what would he do? Especially now when his businesses are gone. Putter around? Cut a little firewood? Mend a seine, a gillnet? What's left for him in Port Adams?

The freeway starts to climb now that it is dark enough he can't see far even though the land opens up: the trees are gone, but so is the light. Something always stops him from seeing over the next

ridge. Across the river are lights and scattered houses where children are taught how to eat in their backyards and piss inside their homes when the natural inclination is the other way around . . . being called *Chief* surprised him, angered him some. He isn't used to the disrespect, a word that has even made it to Port Adams. An ugly word. He worries a little about what the kids call trash talk as they listen to ghetto signifying turned up real loud. They spar with words as if their words were swords of grass; they dribble words, pass them around, shoot them at hoops as if they were playing basketball; they use so many words that none of them have meaning like they used to. If they did, a boy would have to fight. Stories would be understood. The old ways would be remembered.

But this misuse of words is not a new problem: the woman who married Bear talked disrespect after she stepped in bear shit. She called the bear a basket-butt as she wiped off her foot, but she couldn't wipe off her two cubs.

Maybe that's the problem: stories have always been for who hears them, but words used to have meaning. If Grandma Mutukin said *people*, he knew who she meant. But when he told stories to his kids, he had to say *the people*. It took two words to do what one used to. Now, it takes three, maybe four words to mean the same thing. Words are like dollars: it takes so many of them today to buy understanding that if one falls on the ground, nobody notices, especially the kids who have too many.

He probably won't stop tonight; he can't afford to if he doesn't sleep in the Ford, which isn't all that uncomfortable. But he should keep driving since he feels he should be in a hurry now that he understands the story of the spinning top. John will dispose of what holdings he has left in Port Adams. He won't be around to answer additional interrogatives, which will worry John but will slow down those fancy talking sharks from Anchorage. He needs to put them on Native time, a derogatory term he used to hate, used not to understand. Time was time. Things take however long they take to get done. But since he has been down here, he sees time being squeezed as if jelly were to be made from it. People

spread time around until there isn't enough to cover everything they want to do. Then instead of scraping the charring from their lives like Mary used to do with toast over the sink, they smear a little more time around until they can choke everything down as if leaving a crust uneaten were a sin.

He could watch the tide flood in, then ebb away, while gathering enough to eat today, not thinking about tomorrow; he could be like the gulls. He knows those words that say to let today take care of itself, words without the meanings they used to have. Each of those words used to be a little story. Now, together, they don't make one story.

It used to take a long time to tell a story because each word had to be explained. *Grandma, why do you use that word?* And she would tell him, using another story to explain why. But today, it's hardly worth telling stories so little meaning is left in words. Not even John and Little Mary understood the story he told before he left. He had expected more of them than he had of Heidi-Marie, but he didn't teach them right, and for that he is ashamed.

Through Pendleton, a town he's heard about—its Roundup—he sees signs warning about the hill ahead, which is steeper than he expected and longer. He feels the power left in the old Ford. He's a little afraid to stay with the traffic (not that he can't) that zooms up the seven percent grade as if the road were flat. But just as with beats of a heart, there are only so many strokes in an engine. Work an engine too hard and some of those strokes are lost; so he backs off a little as he imagines how hard his heart would work sprinting up this mountain.

He isn't ready to sit on a porch and watch the tide ebb. The thought suddenly occurs to him that prison is really a horrible punishment. To take purpose away from a man is the crime. That's what has always troubled him about Father Gregory. The priest identifies everything that happens as divine will being done. Was it divine will for Russians to line up Aleuts and shoot the end man to see how many Aleuts it takes to stop a musket ball? Nine, he believes. Nine Aleuts died because of whose divine will? Not his

God's. No. Satan is the old dragon who is still trying to win his war by showing how unfit people are to replace him.

People aren't divine thralls, what too many teachers without power broadcast with their pleas for money. He has heard those pleas. Late at night, fishing in the Gulf, he would pick up AM radio programs. He could turn the radio on right now and find one. They are out there, saying they are instruments of their god, and they are. But their god is not his. Theirs lacks true power to save those who aren't listening today. His doesn't.

He passes a rest stop when he reaches the top of the mountain, and he thinks about stopping. But again, he's by it before he can. He needs to stop, to take a break, but all he sees are trees far off the side of the road. And he wonders about the boy: did the boy have to go so bad he couldn't have waited to use the restroom inside the store, or was he afraid he couldn't find a toilet among the aisles of Coke and potato chips?

The landscape has again changed: no more open wheat fields and sage. It's higher, colder, and it has again closed in on him, not that he has been able to see far since the sun set—his headlights catch two deer in his lane ahead of him, and he slows as the truck behind him flashes its headlights, then starts around . . .

The doe stood no chance.

He stops because he doesn't know what else to do.

In his rearview mirror he sees nothing as he parks far over onto the shoulder of the road. Then for a while he sits there, not moving. A few deer were illegally transplanted on Cook's Island in the 1930s, but he doesn't see deer often even though he has killed quite a few on Kodiak. He has never before seen one become a steaming smear on frosty asphalt.

Finally, again checking his rearview mirror, he opens his door, gets out, and after stretching his back and legs, stiffly walks back the fifty yard to where what's left of the doe lies against the center guard rail, still steaming. The night seems very dark, and the head of the doe very warm as he looks into her open eyes that seem to gather what little light there is and reflect it back at him. A fly he

might have swatted couldn't be more smashed; yet her eyes look into his as if pleading with him.

He can't even hear the truck in the distance—it didn't slow down. The doe could've been a rabbit, a skunk, a mosquito. She made no more difference to the truck than a pothole, the truck no different than the wave that wrapped around Pillar Point, killing so many, a wave created by the spirit woman, who cared nothing about the lives she took getting back at him for words he spoke in haste, careless words.

The eyes of the doe continue to plead for life, a gift he would ask for her if he thought it might fulfill divine will.

For a moment, the life of the doe mattered to him. She was frightened, confused, and he slowed down so she could get off the road. But as he watched, her life disappeared like warmth from the still wet smear of blood and organs on the pavement; disappeared as quickly as an exploded stick of powder disappears, her breath sucked into the turbulence following the truck.

All the years he has fished he has always had time to think, especially about getting drafted into belief. But some days he has too much time. As he holds the head of the doe, her eyes still pleading, he knows this is one of those times. The temptation to ask for her life back is great, very great. No one will know. But is this how power should be used? He doesn't know; so he hesitates until reason overcomes the pleading eyes.

A truck's lights rise like demons over the ridge behind him, press against him, then like the wind that follows them, pass on, leaving him alone in the darkness, hardly able to see.

He takes what's left of the doe and pushes her under the center guard rail until she lies on mixed dirt and gravel. Her spirit can now return to the soil in peace. Perhaps that is all her eyes were asking of him.

Again underway, he realizes he is hungry, but he doesn't want to stop; he'd rather keep on going, not stopping till he reaches Utah. But he isn't in a hurry, not really. He knows John and Little Mary will wonder what happened to him, will even worry, but if

they don't know where he is they won't be tempted to lie. And he doesn't feel like cooperating right now. Maybe later, after he has battled with Yatee, the spirit woman.

Miles pass more quickly than his thoughts. Do salmon know they return to die, or do their urgency to spawn mask other thoughts? They do have thoughts. They are big fish finding themselves in suddenly small and clear water so they hide where they can; they know where they are, the smell, everything. They eat despite their digestive systems shutting down. They get grumpy, angry. They pair up—they're not like herring that turn a bay milky with milt. But do they feel deceived like people do?

People die but don't want to. Forgetting words that say the soul that sins shall die, people tell children about a heaven more like a Christmas tree than any place he'd want to live; they add words like Adam did for Eve. So when a person looks like that doe back there, people say the person is not really dead but in heaven. Then neither is that doe dead. For if the person isn't really dead, then there isn't need for a resurrection.

Those words the serpent told Eve were powerful. She believed them and now they will not die. They live all around the globe, but they were and they still are a lie.

LaGrande is mostly dark, but he sees one of those burger places a moment before he has to turn, and he dives off the freeway, which passes over the crossroad. And pulling into the drivethrough lane, he sees, parked by the restaurant's side door, the stationwagon from The Dalles.

His Ford is recognized, and the driver gets out of the stationwagon and hurries towards him. "If you need work, there is some ahead at Vale. Onions."

He doesn't know anything about onions other than he likes them; they go good with salmon. So saying, "Thanks, but I'm going to Utah," he nods towards the father in appreciation.

"Okay, Chief. My daughter wanted me to tell you." And the father turns to go just as Jacob has to pull forward to order.

Funny how—he hands a five to the girl in the window—the same word works differently. Until today, he has never been called *Chief*. Now he has been called that twice. Same word. Meaning the same thing. Different meanings. Like *die*.

He stops for gas at Baker City, and he again feels useless as it's pumped for him. An hour later, he crosses into Idaho about two Mountain Time. He's through Boise before three, to Twin Falls by four-thirty, Burley by five-thirty. Tired, finally feeling alone, he stops at a cafe on a turnoff to Rupert, and orders pancakes, which cost less than half of what they do in Kodiak or Port Adams. And the order is a plateful, not a couple of little ones the size of bread slices.

He feels the doe's spirit . . . maybe he only remembers her eyes.

Two men his age enter and take the table next to where he sits. One of them asks the waitress, "Can you believe the wind out there this morning?"

The waitress smiles as she brings them coffee: "Yeah, it feels like all of Twin Falls will be in Wyoming by noon."

He hadn't noticed any wind, but as he twists around to look, he sees that the grass stalks protruding from snow berms are bent parallel to the snow, which he also hadn't noticed. In the eerie orange glow cast by the parking lot lights, tractor-trailer rigs rock as they idle, their drivers asleep inside their sleeper cabs. Wind pushes against them, then passes on, across fences and fields and the faint morning. There appears to be little life outside, with only an occasional car passing, with blowing snow caught in its headlight and swirling snow behind it. The road and the rail track beyond appear very cold and very dead.

One of the fellows, both apparently regulars, asks the other, "Where did you catch the seven pounder?"

"Off the rocks above the Marina. Got three Browns there."

He listens for a moment more. They are fishermen, like himself. And he returns to his thoughts, tired thoughts, some of which are about death, probably his death, and he wonders why he has been

thinking about dying. The story of the string top, spinning, going nowhere, just standing there turning around and around. He can't imagine dying, but why else is he thinking about being dead, asleep in the grave forever. He noticed when he entered the cafe how alone he felt: no ocean, no familiar mountains or islands or faces or voices, other than the wind, which he wasn't hearing till a minute ago. It was as if power had left him when he didn't use it back there with the doe.

Maybe power did leave him: there are things he has been taking for granted, things he needs to do.

He finishes the pancakes, three of them as large as his dinner plate, feels stuffed, and leans back with his coffee, which smells a little like coffee but that's all. It's too weak to be real coffee. He can see the bottom of the cup. But this is a good place: there are fishermen here.

The wind finds a plastic bag, lifts it, twists it around as a pitcher might a baseball, then hurls it across the parking lot, a little more gray as a light ribbon widens where clouds and fields meet. He should be going; he will be in a minute. Right now, he will sit here thinking about the interrogatives and requests for admissions John's Juneau office received. Without him, even John cannot answer many of the questions asked by the Anchorage attorneys. They will have to wait. Their case will be delayed. Yes, *Native time*, that name he always hated will work for him. He knows how frustrating it can be, has been for him in the past, his squarehead heritage coming out. But down here, he must look Native, and if he does here then he will to those Anchorage attorneys, all sharks from somewhere Outside.

He has always gotten by being a simple fisherman. Bankers sort of patted him on the shoulder as if he were their favorite hunting dog. They would loan him what he needed, and he had been rather quietly doing pretty good for himself. But when he left Alaska to do business, he felt it, he knew, he wasn't considered the same as a boat owner from Ballard. That hunting dog feeling came through strong. It wasn't they didn't want to do business with him, no, not

at all. Rather, it was social, like they were afraid he'd pull a scalp or scalping knife out of his briefcase at any moment—just once he should have so he could have seen their mouths drop.

He wouldn't even know where to get a fake scalp lock. He'll find out where, though. One might be a good thing to fall out of his briefcase when negotiating with those Anchorage attorneys.

Counting the dollar for a tip, he leaves four dollars on the table and forces the door open against the wind. The old Ford starts, and he's off, his mood brighter as the eastern sky continues to lighten. With the wind, he feels power flow through him. Yes, power is there for him to use if he uses it wisely.

Stopping to consult a map where I-86 departs from I-84, he sees where he has to go. Wind continues to drift snow, but the freeway isn't too slick so he heads for Tremonton, where at nine o'clock, he turns north for a couple of miles, then takes the road to Logan, one of those cities like Port Adams that a person can't-get-to-from-here, which might partially account for its residents' long life expectancy, a subject that greatly interested Heidi-Marie.

Heidi-Marie said her ex-husband's name is Robert Anderson—there are many Andersons in the phone book, but no Robert B. L. He still doesn't know why her former husband needs a fourth name.

He feels like he's again fishing. Short on sleep. No real clue of where to go from here. Just spinning like that top. But over the years, he has been through enough that he knows answers will come to questions not yet contemplated, the essence of having available real power.

Leaning against the side of the pay phone inside the Fred Meyer entrance, the temperature outside cool enough to remind him that it's still winter here, he starts dialing, asking, when someone answers, if they know Robert Bruce Lamek Anderson, the former husband of Heidi-Marie Harte.

"Bob isn't here right now. Why don't you try his mother's place? He should be there." Says a male voice at the fourth Anderson that answers.

"Thanks, but I don't know his mother."

“Then I can’t help you.” And the line clicks dead.

How, he wonders, does he find out who Anderson’s mother is? Is her name also Anderson, or has she remarried? All he can do is continue down through the list of Andersons. Only now, he knows to ask for Bob.

“Bob, here. What can I do for you?”

The right Anderson: “Name’s Jacob Chickenof. I’d like to talk to you about Heidi-Marie if you can spare me a few minutes.”

“What about her?” The question is terse, the words edged.

Jacob doesn’t know this man who Heidi-Marie described as, *A nice guy, for a Mormon*. He must weigh his words carefully. “She has been in Port Adams this winter helping me catalogue artifacts.” That’s mostly true, or at least true enough he doesn’t believe he has lied, or been deceitful like Jehu. But what he will say next pushes his limits pretty far: “Before I hire someone full time, I check them out, do a little looking into their background. The artifacts are valuable so I want to know the person who handles them. I think you would, too.”

“I thought she was up there being a bar maid.”

“She took a dishwashing job—”

“It sounds like you know her, so okay, how can I help you?”

He hears the tone of *Fournames’* voice change: “I’m in Logan. Maybe we can get together?”

“You came here to check on her.”

“Actually, I came just to talk to you.”

“Really? All the way down here? . . . Should I be concerned?”

“Yes and no. If you will, you can tell me everything I need to know.” Jacob feels horribly exposed as he stands in the store’s entryway with the telephone receiver to his ear while numerous customers enter, talking into cell-phones. He feels as if he’s on an alien planet where people almost look like him, but not quite. Is this how his Mutukin ancestors felt when they met Russians? A little inferior. There’s just something in the way people here walk that puts him down. Maybe, being tired, he imagines an attitude that seems to elevate those who pass by him.

“Seeing how you’ve come this far, you might as well swing by the house. And you’ll need directions. Where are you?”

“Fred Meyers—”

“Freddies, okay. Head north, towards Smithfield. You’ll see White Pine Nursery on your left. Just past it, turn left. First real road. This is an industrial area, but keep heading west a half mile. We’re the only house. Fields all around us. Can’t miss us. Okay? I don’t teach till three.”

“I’ll be there in a few minutes.” Eager to be away from the store’s entryway where everybody shops for everything, Jacob quickly hangs up. Still morning, he wonders if he should get something to eat, if the drivethrough restaurants are serving hamburgers. He wouldn’t waste his money on their breakfasts. But what he really needs is a couple of hours sleep, but that will have to wait.

The Anderson home is easy to find: a white, two story farm house built around the turn of the century, with a row of bare lilacs running along its west side, two hardwood shade trees in the front yard, and a newer Toyota car and two late model Dodge pickups blocking each other on a graveled driveway. He wonders which vehicle will have to move first so the others can get out. They look as tangled as a hank of cheap poly line.

“I don’t remember your name,” says the professor who looks a little like his son John, but without a gray ponytail.

“Jacob Chickenof.”

“A Russian name, and your ancestry is?”

The question seems innocent enough: “Alaskan. And you teach anthropology?”

“No. That was all Heidi-Marie. I’m a folklorist. I look at myths, take them apart, look at their structural elements, compare elements between cultures. That type of stuff, all very dull to the average alum so the department is underfunded and under appreciated. But if you’re an Alaskan Native, you already know about myths.”

“My son took a course about myths at University of Washington. . . . He didn’t learn much.”

“That’s too bad. But if you have stories, I’d would like to hear them.”

Robert *Fournames* seems genuinely enthused about his chosen field, but he rather doubts that *Fournames* has learned much from analyzing structural elements. Maybe that’s why John doesn’t understand stories. Maybe he doesn’t understand because of how stories are taught in universities. “The old people, they tell stories. When I was little, I listen to them.”

“Do you remember any of them?”

“You tell me what I want, I tell you a story, maybe one you haven’t heard.” He hears what Heidi-Marie calls dumb-Native-speak enter his voice. He can’t remember the last time he heard himself use the creole (a word Heidi-Marie taught him) language of Port Adams’ old folks.

“Deal, but I doubt there are any stories I haven’t heard. I’ve been collecting myths since I was a teen.”

“Okay, but first, Heidi-Marie, she handles old Aleut hunting hats worth a hundred thousand apiece. I need to know a part of her background that she has avoided. You understand.” He has always tried to be absolutely truthful with everyone so this bit of deception seems wrong, seems like words the President would use to avoid speaking the truth. “The collection wouldn’t want to come up short a hat.”

“You don’t have to worry about that. Heidi-Marie probably hasn’t, in her life, taken a penny that doesn’t belong to her.”

“Why won’t she reveal why you have custody of your son?”

“So that’s the problem.” Anderson leans back in his recliner. “Well, I can see that would look bad, reflect badly upon her. But this will cost you several stories.” Then turning towards the kitchen, he hollers, “Mom, could I prevail upon you to bring the two of us some lunch?” Turning back to face him, he asks, “You haven’t eaten, yet, have you? I know it’s a little early for lunch, but my class schedule has my eating schedule confused, has me confused. Half the time I don’t know if I’m supposed to be leaving for class or going home.”

Jacob shakes his head no as he says, "I drove all night, ate somewhere in Idaho. Big pancakes but no potatoes." His words seem silly to him; yet, they are out of his mouth before he can take them back.

Anderson asks, "You are sure you need to know the reasons?"

Fournames' question seems odd, but then, he isn't making as much sense to himself as he thinks he should: "Everything will eventually be known. And as the Preacher said, There is nothing new under the sun. So regardless of what happened, it will be known and it won't be a first." There, he's glad he got rid of the village-speak from his voice. Now he sounds more like the businessman he has become.

"You know your Scripture, good. Perhaps the most powerful of all myths. . . . Well, while Mom is busy let me say that I regret what happened, but Heidi-Marie, H-M, Her Majesty as she was called by her students, didn't give the family much choice." Anderson glances towards the kitchen before resuming. "I don't know how familiar you are with LDS doctrines, but children are spirits whose destiny is to become members of the God family as Christ's younger brothers and sisters. Her Majesty isn't a Believer, and didn't want our son raised in the faith. She intended to raise Peter without any religious training so the family fought her. . . . My great grandfathers pushed handcarts over the Mormon Trail, both sides of the family."

He waits for *Fournames* to continue, and when he doesn't, Jacob asks, "I would have thought it took more than that for a mother to lose custody?"

"It does. She had a run in with a student, who accused her of making sexual advances. The student's story checked out. She'll never teach in another university."

Hearing something that doesn't seem quite right, Jacob says, "You don't sound like you believe the story."

"I don't know whether it was true. Didn't matter too much at the time. We weren't getting along. And Peter is better off here. She can't provide for him, not on bar maid's tips, and what kind of

a life would that be for him, huh? Her in and out of a bar.” Anderson sees his mother returning so adds nothing more although his intention was to ask about her.

The senior Mrs. Anderson brings into the living room a tray of sandwiches sliced diagonally in half, and a pitcher of water with two glasses. Jacob thanks her, and helping himself to what looks like Velveeta on Wonder bread, he looks over at *Fournames* and says, “If you don’t mind, I’ll say the blessing.” Normally, he would defer to the host, but he has a point he needs to make, which he makes as he concludes with, “. . . in humility and truth, without regard to the name they call themselves. Thank you. In Christ’s holy name. Amen.”

“How,” asks Anderson, “are you involved with her? While you were praying, I had the feeling that you were.”

“Truthfully, my interest is in exploring the possibility of her having her son come for a visit.” Jacob helps himself to half a sandwich. “My interest is in what is best for everyone without necessarily prejudging the matter.”

“This, then, really has nothing to do with her employment?”

“If I didn’t believe her to be honest, I wouldn’t be here. She handles very valuable artifacts for me.” There, that makes him feel better. Telling the truth might not be an exact science, but lies are heard as lies regardless of who tells them. The ear is more discerning than the eye.

“I’m glad to hear she’s doing something other than being a bar maid. She worked hard for her degrees.” Anderson takes a bite from a half sandwich, chews, swallows, then continues, “We met in graduate school, University of Oregon. Our fields are a little related so we had somewhat common professional interests. We shouldn’t have married, though. Should’ve just stayed friends.”

“Let’s go back to that sexual advance—”

“I can’t say for certain, but I think the charge was crap. But the student got a couple of his friends to back him up, and Her Majesty became very bitter towards all men, myself included. She lived with another woman for awhile. That coupled with the sexual

assault charge was all the court needed, was all my family needed to make sure she would never again be near Peter.”

Jacob doesn't know quite how to proceed. He understands more now, which just further complicates what he has to do. “It is not right to raise a child without belief, a problem I face, something I regret. I didn't do what you are doing, but let their—” No, he will not speak bad about Mary. The responsibility was his, and remains his.

“Then we understand each other.” Anderson offers Jacob the plate of sandwiches: “Here, help yourself. Don't stand on ceremony. . . . Did you say she works for you up there in where did you say, Port Adams?”

“I fish. I have a few other interests, but mostly I fish.” He pauses to choose his words. “But my family was there before the Russians came, before Boston men came. And we have kept a few possessions for generations, kept them hid, only to be shown on feasts. Heidi-Marie has been,” he searches for the word she used, “cataloguing these old things.”

“Fish salmon? I always wanted to do that.”

“Yes, and crab, herring, halibut. My father and grandfather fished cod, but until the last decade or so, there hasn't been much of a market for Pacific cod. Now things are a little better, and there are buyers for pollock.”

“How do your Native artifacts fit in other than Her Majesty cataloguing them?”

“The young people don't appreciate them, haven't learned the old ways, don't know the stories. I worry that they will sell these things that are supposed to be kept hid. Heidi-Marie, she wants to protect them.” Jacob knows his own daughters think the old things quaint, nice, but not very important.

“I see. . . . I got a map out once to show Peter where his mother is. You're a long ways from anywhere.”

“My mother's people used to paddle their bidarkas over to Kodiak every summer to make war, then paddle back just before the fall storms hit. I thought I'd make the trip in a skiff. Ended up

riding a tender back. So you're right, Cook's Island is a long ways from anywhere, but that never seemed to stop people from coming and going." As he eats the processed cheese on white bread while thinking about paddling bidarkas, he senses how far away Port Adams really is.

"I'll bet you've had some close calls."

"Things have always worked out for me since I became Christian a long time ago, the corruption of the Western Church never hindering the work of the Holy Spirit in the East, that work well established as early as the 2nd-Century." *Fournames* doesn't need to know about his present troubles. Besides, things will somehow again work out; he has faith. But he can already see he didn't need tax shelters so he doesn't have them anymore. He misses J and Mary; he doesn't miss a gas station in Homer or the liquor store in Port Adams or even the warehouse in Kodiak.

Anderson doesn't miss the reference to the Restored Church, and he has never thought in terms of a Western and an Eastern Church. The assumption has always been that there was only one church coming out of the 2nd-Century, the split not occurring until much later, the 10th-Century he thought. He will have to check a little history: "I have to do a little prep for my class this afternoon. You owe me a couple of stories, would you like to tell them to the class—if you will be around? . . . It's an upper division Native American Literature class. Fifteen students, most more familiar with the Books of Nephi than with a story such as *How Sturgeon Lost His Bones*, more familiar with the wars of the Lamanites than with *How Raven Stole the Sun*."

"Okay, I tell them a couple of Aleut stories, then maybe tell them how story works." He again hears villagespeak enter his voice, and he wishes he could kick himself.

Remembering that Polycarp came from Asia Minor and disputed customs with Western bishops in the middle of the 2nd-Century, Anderson wonders what other reference material still exists for that time period. Certainly not much. And without thinking, he says, "That would be good. I'm sure they will like that. But if

you have been driving all night, you're probably tired so why don't you go upstairs with Mom. She'll find you an extra bed. There are lots of them. She raised eleven of us in this house."

"I don't want to impose—"

"Nonsense. Besides, I'm already more inclined to let Peter visit with you in Port Adams than I am with Her Majesty." Anderson figures he should also call Port Adams and learn what he can about this fisherman who his ex-wife has been seeing. "I'll want Peter to have a say in this so he will have to get to know you, though, before there is any discussion of him visiting his mother, I hope you understand. His mother doesn't have any standing in court here, not any more." He was fairly certain Heidi-Marie wasn't lesbian, but in this age, it's hard to know who has succumbed to Satan's asexual broadcast, Satan being the prince of the power of the air, broadcasting in feelings and emotions just as KVNU, NewsTalk 61, broadcasts in AM radiowaves, spewing forth the rightwing radicalism of Republican talkshow hosts. "Is there anyone in particular you would have me call to inquire about you?"

A problem: John will have contacted the troopers by now. He will have been reported as missing. But will John have told the story to anyone who will understand it? Randy will understand if he hears the story. Whom else might John have told? Ivan has no phone. "You're free to call anyone in town. I'm well known, very well known. All of the canneries, the mayor, Father Gregory the Russian Orthodox priest all know me. But your best bet might be the State Trooper Randy Plankov. Ask for him. Only, I'm down here on a buying trip so I would appreciate your not revealing my whereabouts."

"Agreed. Now, get some rest. It won't be much, but I'm sure any little bit would help."

The senior Mrs. Anderson magically appears to escort him up the stairs around which the lower portion of the house seems to have been built. The bed he's offered is soft, much softer than his at home. And he's probably asleep before he has fully settled into the mattress.

Quarter after two, Robert Anderson gently shakes his shoulder: "I'll be leaving in a few minutes. Are you up to telling a couple of stories?"

Awake as quickly as if being called to the helm, Jacob rolls unto his feet, feels a faint rush of blood from his head and a bit of fatigue headache as he nods: "Give me a minute and I'll be ready." He needs to relieve himself and to splash a little water onto his face. His clothes have that slept-in appearance. He should change his underwear, and he has no idea as to what stories he should tell. Maybe he'll make one up just for them.

He has time to get his dufflebag from the Ford—besides, he has to move it so *Fournames'* Toyota can be untangled—so he changes clothes. His clean shirt, though, is equally wrinkled as the one he takes off. But he is certain it doesn't smell and he can live with wrinkles, has lived with them most of his adult life (Mary never liked ironing). And once in the Toyota with Anderson, he is surprised when the professor says, "You didn't tell me you're having problems of your own right now."

"A few."

"I would think so. You are well known, and you're missing."

"Yeah, well. You have no idea how many salmon casseroles I've eaten since Mary passed away."

"Your wife?"

"Yes. A son one night, and my wife two days later."

"Now I understand what I was told. I only knew about your fishing boats. I see why you need time away, but Her Majesty is worried. She is the only person I called, and you should let her and let your children know where you are."

"My son is the attorney handling the case. As an officer of the court, it is best that he doesn't know where I am until I contact a certain person down here." John would try to prevent him from contacting Yatee if his son knew what he intended.

"You know your business, but Her Majesty really cares about you. I wish she would have cared half as much about me."

This surprises him: "Who? Heidi-Marie? I think you're mistaken." His unstated intention is, if possible, to reunite the

two of them. He understands the difficulties, but who knows what will happen? Anything can if he thinks it into existence.

“No, I know her.”

He follows Anderson into a classroom that looks much like those in the new wing of Port Adams’ high school, the wing with the roof that still leaks despite the best efforts of every contractor on the island. He doubts the leaks can be fixed until summer temperatures cause the roofing tar to flow more freely.

He quietly takes a seat at the back of the room. Sitting in the desk, he feels like he had when he was a student, not always as eager to learn as he expected his kids to be.

Students, most eating or drinking something, take seats in front of him. All glance his direction as they check him out, but nothing is said. With two exceptions, the students are young. He can’t tell how old, but certainly younger than Debbie.

Exactly on the hour, Anderson stands at the lectern, motions for him to come forward, and says, “Write your name on the board.” Then to the class, now Professor Anderson says, “Your attention, please. A treat today. Jacob is an Aleut storyteller who happened to stop by on another matter. I have prevailed upon him to tell a couple of stories and to talk about story telling.” Then turning to Jacob, he says, “The class is all yours.”

Jacob finds a piece of chalk, then reaching high on the board, writes, J A C O B C H I C K E N O F. And before anyone has the chance to mispronounce his last name, he says loud enough for even the two fellows with earrings in both ears to hear: “That’s pronounced ‘Chich-kin-nof.’ My son changed his name because he grew to hate chicken-off jokes. When I grew up, most everyone still spoke Russian so pronunciation wasn’t a problem.

“Is this a good thing, being first? I didn’t think it was when I was in school.” Finding a tall stool at the side of the chalkboard, he places it a little to the side of, and in front of the lectern, then sits on the stool so he can see students, who are still getting out paper and pens. “My son took a class like this. Now he doesn’t understand the stories I tell him. Maybe I confuse you, too.

“Before I start, stories are like pebbles a fisherman puts in his mouth so he doesn’t get so thirsty at sea where there is no water to drink. Those pebbles don’t give him the water that he needs to live, but they make his spit run and his spit keeps him from being so thirsty that he drinks saltwater and dies. So stories don’t usually have meaning like you think of meaning. Telling about how to mend a seine or change a tire isn’t a story. In stories meaning is always in the hearing, like spit in you. You give stories meaning when you understand them. Okay?” He waits a minute for the notes to be scribbled before beginning his story. He waits for a response, but gets none. Nevertheless, he begins: “Today I will tell you how whales lost their legs. You should know that, don’t you think? This way, when evolutionists tell you they evolved no legs because they were too big to walk on land, you can tell ‘not true,’ okay?” The class is absolutely silent now so he adds, “When I say ‘okay,’ you are supposed to let me know you are still listening, okay?” And beginning on his left side, a murmur of *okay* passes through the students as if it were the ebbing surge. “Then I will begin . . . a long, long time ago, a very strong man named Sea Lion walked and walked and walked and walked and walked but couldn’t find the corners of the world no matter how hard he searched. He couldn’t find anything at all. The world was smooth as a kelp head, and he became very lonely so he scooped up a handful of mud and squeezed it real hard and sang to it and made a little cairn that he spit into, then he set the little cairn right in the middle of all that roundness and he sang to it again. He sang, ‘Dance little one, dance. Dance little one, dance.’ And the little cairn started to dance all around, so he sang, ‘Live little one, live. Live little one, live.’ And the little cairn started to live in the place we call Islands of the Four Mountains because the little cairn had four little bumps on its head, okay?”

Again absolute silence, and he motions with his hands for them to respond. After a moment, they do, with the murmured *okay* again beginning to his left side and spreading across the room.

“Sea Lion was still very lonely so he took more mud and squeezed it real hard and sang to it and made another mountain that he caused to live. Then he made another mountain and another until there were many mountains all talking at the same time and all trying to dance to different songs. The mountains of Sea Lion behaved like children. They burped and belched and puked and passed gas. Their breaths steamed on cold mornings, and they crawled around on their bellies and they threw tantrums and they fought with one another, and Sea Lion told them that if they would sit still and watch, he would make them toys, and they agreed to sit and watch, so Sea Lion took a limb buried in the mud and he started to carve it with his knife and he made a whale that he sang to and caused to live, and then he carved another one that he also sang to and caused to live and the two whales lived in a house on the side of Mt. Iskai, and all of the mountains watched them as they played together and made for themselves little whales that grew and grew and made more little whales until there were many, many whales. And the mountains asked Sea Lion why the whales could make little whales when the mountains were just expected to sit and watch, and the mountains said that Sea Lion wasn’t fair, that they hadn’t done anything wrong, and they blamed Sea Lion for not caring about them. And Sea Lion told them to be quiet, but they didn’t want to be quiet so they bawled and again threw tantrums, causing great waves that washed far up on their sides, waves that slammed into one another, waves that troubled the whale people who were often swept out to sea or tumbled in the surf, breaking arms and legs.

“The mountains said they wanted to make little mountains just like the whale people made little whales, and the mountains grew bigger and stronger, and their tantrums lasted longer and longer, sometimes for weeks at a time, and they would become so angry they would quiver before hurling fire or ice or great waves at one another, but they didn’t know the song to make little mountains so they just kept getting bigger and stronger and more angry, and the whale people became very afraid of them. The whale people

never knew when another wave would wash them off their feet and send them tumbling out to the sea, or when the mountains' hot breath would burn them, or when the mountains would hurl another wall of snow at them. So they became afraid to leave their houses, and they started to sing about their troubles, and they wailed and wailed, and the wind carried their song of wailings to the Islands of the Four Mountains where Sea Lion now lived with Rosy Finch.

“When Sea Lion heard the song of the whale people, it grieved him that he had made the mountains, and while he knew many stories about when bad things happen to good people, he didn't know what he should do about the mountains who he sang into existence, so he sat down to think how he could help the whale people, and he thought and thought and thought. While he was thinking, he twisted Willow around his fingers, winding Willow tight, then letting her straighten out before winding her around his fingers again.

“Willow's head hurt and her back hurt and she groaned in pain and she began to cry and she swallowed her tears and her tears made her feel better, and Sea Lion saw what he was doing and he had an idea and he called all of the mountain giants together, large and small. And he said that if they would again hold very still and watch, he would show them how they should live. But again some of the mountain giants said they hadn't done anything wrong, and with red eyes they said this wasn't fair and they blamed Sea Lion for not caring about them. And Sea Lion said that if they would listen to his story, he would sing the song they needed so they could make little mountains but only if they would listen to his story and watch what he was going to show them. Well, the mountain giants very much wanted to make little mountains so they agreed, okay?”

Again, absolute silence as if the class had never heard anything like this before. So again, he motions for response that this time starts at the front of the room and flows to the back row where the

two fellows with earrings in both ears scan through books apparently searching for something.

“Well, once the mountain giants settled down, Sea Lion said, ‘A long time ago there were giants bigger than yourselves who were given the task of forging the stars, and they hammered hot metal and made many, many sparks that flew very high, but a third of the giants thought they were working too hard so instead of forging stars, they forged spears and knives and when each of those giants was armed with a spear and a knife, they waged war that rattled the foundations of the world. But the other giants threw stars at them and hurt them and drove them into a dark hole where, because their spears and knives give off no light, they couldn’t see where they were so they had to stay in their dark hole.’

“Then Sea Lion said, ‘Then the other giants wondered if maybe they were working too hard. They didn’t know and they couldn’t decide so their toion said that if they would watch just like you are doing right now, he would show them what they needed to know, and he took little pinches of muddy clay and he shaped them into little tiny people who walked all around with their chests puffed out like grouse. And the toion told the giants to just watch and they would see everything they needed to know about work and about how to live, and he let the giants in the darkness sing to the little tiny people and the little tiny people began to forge spears and knives and make war on one another until they were all killed. So the giants who were watching were surprised by how fast all the little tiny people killed themselves and they agreed with the toion that they should get back to work and they continued to forge stars until there are so many stars they can’t all be seen in a lifetime.’

“But the mountain giants said Sea Lion’s story didn’t pertain to them because they had no work to do, and they began to squirm around because they had sat still as long as they could, but Sea Lion reminded them that they had also agreed to watch what he would show them so they settled down again and began to watch. And Sea Lion gave some of Willow’s tears to the whale people, then broke off whatever arms and legs they still had and Sea Lion

sang to them and they swam away, no longer afraid of the mountain giants. Then Sea Lion took the most flexible new shoots of willow and sang to them and caused them to become little people who walked upright like sticks. Then he took two of those stick people and planted them on each mountain, and he told the mountain giants that they should watch very carefully what the stick people did, and while the mountain giants were all bent very low to watch the stick people, the stick people began to dance, and their sharpened heads jabbed the mountain giants in their eyes and blinded them, and the mountain giants realized they had been deceived by Sea Lion, that they were now blind as the giants who had rebelled and were in the dark hole and the mountain giants roared and bellowed and hurled fire and ice, but they couldn't see the stick people or Sea Lion, and they couldn't hurt the stick people because they were made out of willow so after awhile the mountain giants got tired and settled down and because they couldn't see, they became afraid, as the stick people continued to sing and dance on their sides like sea lice on Salmon. And the stick people built houses and bidarkas and they made spears and they even hunted Sea Lion who, when he wanted to, could hide among the stick people by walking upright."

Jacob pauses to see what type of response the story will receive. He waits as once again the class is absolutely silent.

The silence becomes awkward as if the students aren't aware that the story has concluded, as if they expect a *they lived happily ever after* ending.

Finally, one girl in the front row raises her hand as she says, "That story really isn't about how whales lost their legs."

"What," Jacob asks, "is it about?"

"I don't know. It isn't in our book."

Jacob, forcing puzzlement onto his face, says, "It isn't? It should be."

Braver now, a fellow near the back of the class speaks without moving his hand, "I think the story is about why there are volcanoes, earthquakes, tidal waves, etc."

Professor Anderson joins Jacob in front of the class and takes control, pointing to this student, then to that one as each say what they think the story is about, with most of them agreeing with the first fellow that the story is about why volcanoes erupt. Anderson asks what kind of a story it is. One student says a Creation story. Another, taking an entirely different tack, says it's double voiced discourse. A third says it's children's entertainment. Anderson asks it if might be a moral tale, but his suggestion doesn't have legs, so to speak, so within moments students begin breaking the story apart and looking at its elements: where did Sea Lion come from when there was nothing else on the world? How does song work in the story? Why is Sea Lion more concerned about whales than about mountains, both of whom he creates? Why do the stick people hunt Sea Lion, and why can't Sea Lion destroy them? Why does Sea Lion hide from the stick people? And so goes the discussion for a full twenty minutes.

Jacob listens without speaking, not as much surprised by what he hears as he is disappointed. He wishes he could remember more of what John said about his class at Washington.

One girl who has only spoken once, addressing him, asks: "Mr. Chickenof, could you tell us another one that's easier to understand?"

Jacob turns towards Anderson who nods that he should. "Okay, but I don't want you to think that all of the stories have been written down. Many have only been heard like this one."

"What," asks the girl, "do you mean by that? Do you mean that there are still stories that need to be inscribed so they won't be lost?"

Ignoring her questions, Jacob says, "See if you recognize this story, a short one. A long time ago, two brothers who lived on a real tall mountain built things. All kinds of things, large and small, they built things. They liked to build things so they built lots more things than they needed so they said, one to the other, 'We need somebody to have these things we built so we can build more things,' and they agreed, and they took driftwood and their adzes

and their crooked knives and they started carving and they made little mice who could live in the things they built.

“But the mice couldn’t see the two brothers because the brothers were so big compared to the mice, so the mice thought that the things the two brothers built have always been, and they claimed the things the two brother built as their own and they set about gathering and storing in their holes more and more of the things the two brothers built.

“The two brothers didn’t mind because they were busy building more things so they let the mice scurry around gathering up the things the two brothers built as mice do grass seed during the summer. But the mice had babies very fast, and while the two brothers were busy on the other side of the mountain making things, the little mice grew and had more little mice and all of the mice claimed everything the two brothers had made on this side of the mountain, even things too large for them to move. And the mice began to fight over all of those things, even the ones too large for them to move.

“The two brothers heard the mice fighting over the things they had made, and they came back to this side of the mountain and they saw that many of the mice had hurt each other, but their teeth weren’t sharp enough to kill each other so none of them were dead, but they were bleeding a lot, so the two brothers caught all of the mice and put them into a round ball that they had made and they hung the ball down the shaft in the center of the mountain, and they asked, one to the other, ‘What should we do with them,’ and the other said, ‘Let us make for them knives,’ and it was agreed. So the two brothers made two knives that they put into the round ball with the mice, and they watched as the mice fought over who should have the knives until they were all dead. Then the two brothers again took driftwood and their adzes and their crooked knives and they began to carve, and they carved two people, who they made bigger so the people could see the two brothers, and they put the people among the things they had built and they gave the two people a knife each

and they said one to the other, 'Let us watch and see if people are like mice.' So the two brothers sat down and started to watch the people, and they watched and watched and watched. Even today, they are watching."

Once again, the classroom is absolutely silent. The only thing that can be heard is a lawnmower outside, and very faintly, the traffic noise of staff and faculty heading home.

Anderson asks the girl who wanted the second story: "Is this story easier to understand?"

"I don't know. We aren't lab mice, are we? That's what I get from this story."

Anderson turns to Jacob, and softly asks, "How old is this story?" "Old enough that your students should have heard it before." "That's what I was thinking. It's a morality story, like a Medieval morality play." Then to the class, he says, "Break into your groups, and discuss these stories among yourselves for about fifteen minutes. Then each of you, write me a couple of pages on what you think one or the other of stories means. A graded assignment. So hand them in on your way out. We'll discuss what you have written the next time we meet."

"Is that all you're going to tell us? You're not going to tell us what the stories mean?" asks an older student in nearly the exact middle of the room. "How are we supposed to know what they mean if you don't tell us?"

Maybe he hasn't had enough sleep—Jacob doesn't believe she said what she just did. If he made a story any more obvious, it would probably choke him. This class is certainly a tough audience, but how can they so quickly forget what he said at the beginning. And as a storyteller, he feels he has been a failure. Maybe he should have stuck to something like how Hermit Crab lost his shell, or how Hair Crab grew her bright red coat, but this class probably wouldn't have understood those stories either.

Anderson, again softly, says, "Thanks for the stories. I had heard neither of them before."

"I didn't exactly connect with your students."

“Didn’t think you would. I tried to warn you, they are used to being told how to interpret text, oral or written. . . . Let’s step into the hall.” Anderson motions for Jacob to follow him. And once in the hallway, he adds, “I don’t want a custody fight with Her Majesty . . . we aren’t going to have a custody fight, are we?”

Jacob as the professor’s guest and needing his permission for Peter to visit Heidi-Marie doesn’t want to say that he has already directed John to look into the matter. Nevertheless, he can’t lie: “It doesn’t have to be ugly.”

“Thanks for your candor. When Her Majesty is in a different situation than she is presently, I would consider revisiting the custody order.” Anderson, turning his back to him, says, as if talking to the wall, “You need a wife, marry her.”

Jacob doesn’t know whether he should say anything or just not hear what the professor last said. Mary hasn’t been gone long enough for him to really want another woman permanently around the house. Besides, right now he has neither a house nor the means to support a wife although he expects that to change. He expects he will buy another boat whenever the insurance company settles. He might, though, be like his sons-in-law and only fish salmon.

“I need to be going whenever your class is over. There is a someone out to cause me harm who I need to locate.” Yatee will also be a tough audience.

“Yes, well, you want to go back in and answer questions? I’m sure my students have many—and you’re welcome to stay the night, like I said. Peter will want to meet you. Besides, there is a story I want to tell you.”

“You’ve been teaching this class for a long time?”

“Every other spring.”

“Every year the same?” Jacob can’t imagine teaching the same thing over and over when there is so much that needs taught.

“No. Sometimes we have a Navaho student or two. They groan a lot during the semester.”

“I bet they do.”

Back at the Anderson home, Peter stares at Jacob as he follows the professor through the farmhouse door. Jacob pauses beside the boy, bends down and says, "Hello, young man. I'll bet your name is Peter." And he extends his hand to the boy, who cautiously reaches up and allows his hand to be shaken, then asks, "Are you Chinese?"

"Do I look Chinese?" asks Jacob.

"I don't know," Peter says as he loses confidence and turns towards his grandmother, as if she should rescue him.

"Well, Peter, my dad was Norwegian, and my Grandmother was Aleut, so what would that make me? Maybe Alaskan? You think?"

But the boy isn't listening. Rather, Peter hides half behind his dad's leg while still staring at his grandmother.

Robert, placing his hand on his son's head, says, "Go sit down. Mr. Chickenof told my class a story. He might tell you a story if you ask him."

Turning back towards Jacob, the boy asks, "Do you know a story?"

"I do. Do you want to hear one?"

"Auhuh."

Sitting in a recliner in front of the livingroom's southside picture window, Jacob asks, "Do you have a favorite animal?"

Peter shrugs as he stands now in front of Jacob, just out of reach. "I like horses."

"There aren't many horses where I grew up, but there are bears. Do you know what a bear looks like? They're big like horses, and they eat grass in the spring like horses do."

"They have big teeth and they eat people."

"Do you know anyone who has been eaten by a bear?"

Peter hesitates as if unsure about his facts. Finally, he says, "No, but I think they have big teeth."

"They do, and once in a while they will hurt a person who doesn't respect them, and get out of their way. Would that make them bad?"

Peter's thinking process shows on his face as he works to process what Jacob just told him. He scowls, unsure of how to handle, probably, the word *respect*. His face shows a mixture of puzzlement and wonder and disbelief as if he isn't sure about talking to Jacob, isn't sure about bears not eating him even if he gets out of their way. But after a minute that seems more like fifteen, he says, "Yes."

"Yes what?" Jacob asks, wondering if he isn't showing the boy more patience that he showed his own sons. Once he started crab fishing, he never had any time. He was gone most of the spring and summer, fishing herring, halibut, salmon. Yes, his children were with him, but they also underfoot when they were on the deck so they stayed in the galley. Then beginning in September, he fished first king crab, then tanners until it became time to get ready for herring. His kids were again with him on the boat, and when they were older he showed them how to bait hooks, mend webbing, rig gear, and he would talk to them, tell them stories, but he doesn't know if he ever asked what they thought. He can't remember doing so, and he wonders why he hadn't. Maybe because he never had time to wait for them to figure out what they were thinking when he knew what they should be thinking.

"I think that would be bad."

"If a horse kicks you, is that bad?" He doesn't have an Aleutian story in mind that will convey what he wants the boy to remember as well as will the Tlingit story of the woman who marries Bear.

"Yes."

"Well, then eating you would be bad. But bears don't always eat people." And he tells the Tlingit story though he feels guilty doing so for he has no right to tell the story, no ownership of the story. He wouldn't think of telling the story in Port Adams or anywhere a Tlingit might be present or might even hear of him telling the story, and he wonders if being Outside has somehow broken the taboo as if here at the edge of one way of life and on the edge of another the rules that govern storytelling have to be reinvented . . . *the rules that govern storytelling*, yes, there are rules that govern when a story is told, to whom a story is told, and why

a story is told. They aren't rules that are written down like Fish & Game regulations, but they are more like when the Commandments of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are written on a person's heart. The person is no longer under the letter of the Law, for letters and rulebooks are outside the person, but the person is still under the dictates of the Law because that man or woman and the Law together have become a new person, who would no more think of committing adultery than they would of actually doing the act of committing adultery against their spouse. So it is likewise with storytelling. That is why telling about the woman who marries Bear feels like adultery even though here in Utah he feels as mentally widowed as he is physically. He would like to be able to tell any Native story, whether that story comes from Port Adams or the Aleutians or is Athabaskan, and he knows he should tell all stories so these people in Utah will hear the ancient voices of whom they call Lamonites, but he feels like he needs permission; for stories are owned. They are property, and to tell them is like borrowing someone's bulldozer. Without knowing how to run the machine and without permission to use it, much damage can be done. He feels like he knows how to tell stories, but he hasn't asked for the authority to tell ones other than those that belong to his family. What he is doing is as presumptive as baptizing a person without first being ordained to do so. He would no more think of standing in a pulpit and preaching by his own authority than he would of committing adultery against Mary; for preaching is a form of storytelling reserved for whom the God of Abraham has called. When others try to preach it is like listening to anthropologists, Heidi-Marie being no exception, tell stories. They get them all wrong, saying silly things like the story about Raven bringing the sun explains for Tlingits where the sun comes from, or like the Law having been done away-with when, in fact, the Law is more binding when written on a person's heart than when it exists as letters. So much ignorance in the world comes from the unauthorized telling of stories, all of which have power, that it

really does feel like he has committed adultery telling this one which he has no authority to tell.

“Did,” Peter asks, “she know he was a bear?”

“No, she didn’t.”

“How come she didn’t see his fur and teeth?” Peter’s practical mind, like those of Alaskans who hear a song about taking a train to Nome, doesn’t let him, Peter, suspend disbelief. He might have heard the whole story, but from the moment the woman didn’t recognize Bear as a bear, he lost interest as he puzzled over why she didn’t recognize what should be obvious.

Jacob says, “Because she called the bear a bad name, she did something that blinded her to the truth so she couldn’t see his teeth. Calling the bear a bad name was a bad thing. . . . What would happened if you called someone a bad name?” He can’t think of an example—he’s just too tired for his brain to function as it should—of when Peter might be blind to the obvious.

“Grandma makes me take a bite from a bar of her soap. I don’t like that. It tastes awful.” His face is absolutely serious. “Mama didn’t make me do that.”

“Have you ever, young man, looked at a car tire or a truck tire when they were going real fast and thought the tire was turning backwards?”

“No, but train wheels turn backwards all the time.”

Good, he has his example: “How can that be? If they were turning backwards, the train would be going backwards, wouldn’t it?” Peter doesn’t answer. Rather, he seems to think he might have said something he should not have. “Well, young man, the wheels just look like they’re turning backwards. It’s called an optical illusion, and it means you can’t trust your eyes. Your eyes aren’t telling you the truth. And that’s what happened to the woman when she didn’t see his teeth.”

“The bear was going real fast?”

“No. She called the bear a bad name.”

“Saying a bad name is like going real fast?”

“No. Calling someone a bad name blinds you to who the person is. You can’t see the person the way they really are when you call them a bad name. Does that make sense to you?”

“Auhuh.” Peter thinks about his answer for a moment, then adds, “But I think I would see his teeth.”

“You probably would because you wouldn’t have called the bear a bad name, right? You already learned not to when your grandmother washed your mouth out with soap.”

“No, she only made me take a bite.”

“You still learned, right?”

Peter nods. And his dad says, “Head for bed, now. It’s past your bedtime. Mr. Chickenof will be here in the morning for a few minutes.”

Jacob glances at the clock on the kitchen wall that he can see by leaning back a bit. Seven-thirty. An early bedtime. He can’t imagine Heidi-Marie sending Peter to bed this early, and he suspects there was considerable tension between Heidi-Marie and her mother-in-law.

Peter is a little slow heading upstairs, but he goes without fussing. And after he is out of sight, Anderson asks, “Are you hungry? I usually have only a snack after class, but Mom has fixed a full meal for us so if you want to come into the kitchen, she’ll fix you up. You’ll have to eat enough for both of us. I’m still trying to lose a few pounds.”

Jacob stands, feeling now his lack of decent sleep. He wonders whether the boy will remember the story, or if experience has replaced words and letters and narratives as the chief means by which the younger generation acquires its morality. He doesn’t know a lot of big words. He thinks in simple words, tells stories in simple words, and lives his life in simple words. So for him, while he has fished a lot and has seen a lot of weather, experience hasn’t been his teacher. He never even thought about committing adultery all the years he was with Mary. The subject has entered his mind now since Anderson said something about him getting together with Heidi-Marie. It wasn’t in his thoughts before. There wasn’t

any temptation. Even if there would've been opportunities—he doesn't know if he would have recognized an opportunity if one had occurred—the thought wasn't there so he has no experience with other women, with another relationship, with dealing with temptation. But now even thinking about another woman seems wrong and right and sort of silly. Why would anyone be interested in him? And if they weren't interested, then why all the salmon casseroles? Everything seems all screwed up. And he is beginning to think that there had been a protective bubble around him till last fall. What happened to cause that bubble to burst? Something must have. What has he done different than what he did before? Why was Yatee suddenly successful in harming him? Those questions are the ones he can't answer. It is as if time and chance caught him all at once when he knows there is more happening.

Set on the table are a platter of sliced roast beef, a bowl of mashed potatoes, a bowl of gravy, whole corn, and green Jello. There's water to drink. Simple food, but different than salmon and potatoes, or cod or halibut. He would like a thick, fish chowder tonight. The Norwegian part of him must be coming out. Maybe he should tell a story about Loki. His dad didn't tell many stories. Usually just one. About Loki and a tree, and he can't remember it. He really can't remember it. That's the problem with storytelling. If one generation doesn't tell its stories, the stories are lost forever, and this story of Loki is one he has never told.

As he stares at the food in front of him while he waits for Anderson to say the blessing, he wonders how much has been lost because someone didn't have time to tell the story, because someone forgot a story. What happens then? Another generation tells their stories until someone writes the stories down. Earlier stories are just gone, and then comes the problem of who reads the stories and who finds meaning in them when written stories are like the dead letters of the Law, lifeless without performance. He knows. When stories are written down they become things that can be taken apart like houses that are torn down when they are old and

have no people living in them, when no adultery can be committed in them.

He says, "Amen," then wonders about these people who seem nice, but who believe another book. Samuel had a Mormon crewmember years ago. The fellow tried to give all of them copies of the Book of Mormon. He opened a copy, read a page and decided he didn't believe it: the resurrection of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob hasn't occurred yet so there is only one glorified resurrected being who was once human.

"What are you thinking about, Jacob? Peter?"

"Heidi-Marie told me she wasn't a believer. She said that caused problems between you two. Same thing you said."

"That was the source of the problems between us. Eat up, and I'll tell you the story." Anderson waits while Jacob dishes up, then he starts: "I don't know how much you know about our belief, but American anthropologists believe it's racist to believe in the distribution of people from a single progenitor. The process of peer review doesn't allow anyone to stick their head up and say that Israelites came to the Americas long before Columbus arrived even though all kinds of evidence exists to prove they were here. And Her Majesty wasn't one to shoot down her career by admitting even to herself what she knew was true although, once, and only once, she co-authored a paper with me that discussed Ogam inscriptions along the Snake River.

"Now, you know your Bible so I won't have to explain much. A generation before Israel went into captivity, Israel and Judah fielded an army of a million and a half men, approximately. You'll have to check the figures to get them exact. But when Israel was defeated by the Assyrians, the Assyrians captured twenty-seven thousand. That's all. They kept good records. So what happened to all of those other Israelites? Nobody thinks to ask. But some of them went north and east and into the steppes, but most of them went with their maritime ally, the Phoenicians, and ended up in places like Carthage, the Tin Isles, or even farther west, the Americas. Now these Israelites weren't commandment keepers for the most

part like you might think. No, they worshipped Baal and Molech. They burned their first born, and they were as pagan as the Canaanites their ancestors drove out of Palestine seven hundred years earlier.

“Read the history of Carthage and you’ll see their migration, their building the city from being a settlement of a few traders to a great agricultural region as well as trading center, but the Phoenician and Israelite ships were large enough for some of them to keep right on migrating west. Then there was a second migration of Israelites a generation prior to when the House of Judah went into captivity, and those Israelites are identified in the Book of Mormon as the Nephites and Lamanites. But Her Majesty refused to even consider the possibility of Israelites in the new world. Even mentioning that possibility would set her off, would start the accusations of racism, as if parallel development is a religion, not an explanation that doesn’t hold up to scrutiny.

“Carthagians never minted their own money. They always used someone else’s coins, and their wars with Rome and their expansion of trade caused a currency crisis just like this country went through at the end of the last century when there wasn’t enough gold to conduct business and the bimetal argument raged. So they started using beads, particularly blue beads as substitutes for coins in all of their outposts, which probably explains why the descendants of their colonies here would accept beads when trade between the old and new worlds resumed.

“It all fits. The massive amount of copper missing from the Great Lakes region that’s never been accounted for. The mounds of whomever built them. Ancient Hebrew in Zuni chants. The Micmac language. Sac Indians, from Isaac, the name the Israelites used as their identifier. It goes on and on, but peer review keeps everyone’s head down. No one dares speak up if they want a job in academia. And it got where Her Majesty and I couldn’t talk about anything when we used to talk about everything. That was the worst part. She was seeing the evidence, but after the one paper, she had to go along with Ogam inscriptions being labeled as Indian doodling,

even when she could read the message written by how the antlers of deer were painted. All kinds of nonsense like that. It was all so crazy until at the end, we weren't talking. All we were doing was fighting. Then came the incident. Things became messy, ugly. I didn't fight for her. Maybe I should have, but it was easier to let her go. We were going to divorce anyway. I can't accept a lie, personally or professionally, and her life had become one big lie."

Jacob doesn't know much about *peer review* except what the name implies, but he doesn't think he cares for it. He wouldn't like it if someone told him how to fish. It's bad enough having Fish & Game telling him how he can't fish—a seagull in a crabpot doubles its catch, a cormorant triples the catch.

But he can't imagine fighting with Mary. What would be the use of fighting with himself? He didn't agree with her playing Bingo, but she did every week. Spent about five dollars. He strongly believes gambling is coveting that which hasn't been rightly earned, but then, he believes the dead sleep in their graves until resurrected. Mary didn't: she believed what Father Gregory taught about heaven. So some subjects are just best avoided, especially when nothing can be gained by fighting over them. Who has gone and returned without being resurrected?

However, he can't resist asking, "So the reason the two of you broke up is that you lied to her when you married her? You didn't love her as much as you thought you did? Not enough to accept her lack of faith?"

Silent for more than a minute, Anderson finally smiles as he says, "I was just starting to like you."

"If there's a chance of the two of you getting back together again—for Peter's sake you should." He has never been much for giving advice, but he likes the boy and sees in him fear that has, most likely, come from his parents' separation . . . the roast beef is tasteless as is everything else. Maybe his taste buds are asleep. "Maybe I shouldn't say nothing, but a friend doesn't lie to his friend. Your son's hurting. You know that if you'll admit it. He's missing his mother."

“I suppose, but getting back together—I don’t think so. No chance. Too much went under the bridge besides water. If I marry again, it will be in the Church. Temple wedding, and all that. Understand?” Anderson pushes his plate towards the center of the table despite having eaten hardly anything. “But about her seeing Peter, I’ll consider revisiting the subject.”

“You should know, her feelings are strong. She will play with spirits to prove you wrong, and that is very dangerous, especially for a person with no belief.”

The professor scowls: “You said you think I’m wrong—”

Interrupting, Jacob says, “Yes, you are wrong for marrying her when you wanted, from the beginning, a wife of faith. You were impatient.”

“A friend, huh? You’re not my conscience talking to me, are you? If you aren’t, you’re brave speaking so freely.”

“I am a storyteller. I know stories. I tell stories. I know what stories feel like, their power. I know the story of David, its feel, its spirit, what happens when Saul was delivered into David’s hand.” He has always been careful about what he says concerning stories and their telling, but maybe because he’s tired, maybe because of the stories he has told tonight, maybe because the professor has an interest in stories, he feels he can say more than he might otherwise. “A different spirit tells the story of Nephi slaying Laban, not the same one that tells about David not killing Saul when he had the same chance. You judge for yourself, and you tell yourself whether I’m right or wrong. You decide, but don’t be so hard on Heidi-Marie. Spirits aren’t things to be messed around with. They’re here with us, maybe here,” he points to the empty chairs around the table, “and they’re like people, some helpful, some not, but they all believe a lie, been deceived, so you be careful.” He has said more than he should, but he has to add: “The great dragon deceives the whole world, that’s what it says, not the whole world except for Believers. So we are all deceived at least a little bit.”

Anderson looks at his water glass, his thoughts still masked behind his half-scowl. “Her Majesty is playing with spirits—”

“I tried to talk her out of messing with them,” Jacob pauses as he chooses which direction he wants to go. “But she has very red hair. Maybe you can talk to her sometime.”

“Ahh, the individual versus the stereotype. In her case, yes, there probably is a correspondence between her hair and her personality. But more importantly,” he pauses as if trying to think of what is more important, “I should never have married an anthropologist. Perhaps my priorities were askew.”

“And I should?” Jacob would take back his question if he could.

“Sure. She’ll listen to you because of your ancestry whereas she will never listen to me because I’m LDS. Strange world, but that’s the way it is. I once told her that saints will wear white robes, and she argued with me, first denying that there are saints or will be saints, then saying that white isn’t a color but a condition or state of purity.”

“How did you answer her?”

“I didn’t. It wasn’t any use arguing with her. She won’t give in even when she knows she’s wrong.”

“I’ll remember that.” A wave of sleepiness flows up, over, and through him and nearly washes him off his chair. He hangs on to the edge of the table until the wave ebbs away, then says, “I think Heidi-Marie would abide by whatever conditions you set if you let Peter visit her over this coming spring break.”

“She probably would, but I’ll have to talk it over with Mom.” Twirling his spoon, still clean, he finally says, “You know, if Her Majesty were supervised, I think the Court would consent to a visit.”

“Supervised? To see her own son? She doesn’t need that.”

“The Court will, though.” Spearling one kernel of corn from his plate, Anderson holds the tines of fork close in front of his eyes, then slowly twists his fork so he can see the kernel from every angle. “Ever notice how they all look the same from a distance, like people?”

“I’d like to see the boy visit her—”

“I know. That’s why you’re here. I’ve been thinking about that. You’ve come a long ways for what? To get me to let Peter visit his

mother? Yes, but why put out the effort to come here? You could have hired an attorney, a professional gunslinger. But you are in love with her. I thought so earlier, why I said you should marry her. And you don't yet know that you are. You still believe you are doing this for her, but this is how you show love. Not cards nor flowers, but doing things. Things she won't even recognize." He pauses long enough to eat the corn kernel. "She doesn't understand indirectness, what you Natives specialize in. Orality and Indirectness. Nothing is as it seems. A story is never just a story. You knew my students wouldn't understand your stories, so who did you tell them for? Me? I was your audience? And what were you trying to tell me? I'll have to think about this all summer. You got me. You did."

"What about Peter," Jacob asks in a very soft voice.

"Get Her Majesty to tell you about Parthia and that empire's wars with Rome. When she does, you'll be able to piece together the story she needs to hear. You'll know how to tell it. I could never quite get it to work even though I knew it was there, could feel it, feel its spirit like you said."

"Peter?" He feels another wave of sleepiness crash into his consciousness, leaving thoughts wallowing through foamy scud.

"A problem." As if he doesn't know why he holds it, Anderson looks at the fork in his hand before laying it on his plate. He glances at the clock, then at a picture of whom he identifies as Christ. "There's a piece of the puzzle about how we got here and what we're doing here that's been lost. The great minds of this world have, through the ages, tried to craft that missing piece from their intellect, their experience, their observations. But so far no one has quite figured out what the puzzle looks like when it's all put together so the missing piece remains as elusive as a W-particle."

"A W-particle?" If it stood for *wakeup*, he would need one. The warmth of the room, the food, relaxing a bit after being concerned about finding and meeting Anderson, his lack of sleep—all combine against his staying awake for much longer.

“A fragment of subatomic energy that you can’t quite pin down. Doesn’t last very long. Leaves a trace, or a trail. Anyway, listening to your stories tonight, I realized you know what that missing piece looks like, but I’m not sure if you’re aware of how much you know. I haven’t heard it so much in other Native stories, but it’s in yours.”

“My daughter, Beth, she ahh tell me about W-particles and quarks and other things. She got a degree from Fairbanks, and she a smart mother. Her kids, my grandchildren, they will know about those things—but the only thing I know is I accept your offer of a bed for tonight. I’m not very good company right now. Falling asleep.”

“I’m sorry I’m keeping you up. You have to be about dead. I don’t know how you do it.” Anderson rises from the table, then adds, “I’d like to spend time with you, would like to listen to your stories. But I don’t know if that’s possible. So will you record the stories you tell, all of them? I’ll fix you up with the equipment.

“That’s the first thing Heidi-Marie wanted to do. Record stories. Doesn’t work. A story is for who hears it at the time, not later. Maybe they are like that W-particle. They exist for the moment, then they are gone. Like a fox. A recording is its tracks, maybe in snow, maybe on a sand beach. With a recording, all you know is that a story had been there . . . you hear its footsteps, but you don’t see any fur.”

“I better let you get some rest. As far as Peter is concerned, if I can’t hear your stories, teach them to him. Make him believe it. You can do that . . . and if you will, I’ll ask the Court to let Peter visit as long as you or a state social worker is present. The Court won’t go for Her Majesty alone with Peter.”

“That’s screwy. We’ve hardly met, but you’ll let your son be with me, but not with his mother.”

“I talked to Her Majesty, and on some things I still respect her opinion, so I think I know a little about you, and the court will call around, will do some investigating, and will conclude the same thing I have. You’re okay. Grandfather type. Well known in the

community. Has successfully reared one family. So, yes, I'll let Peter visit his mother as long as you are there, and I'll instruct my attorney to send both her and the Court a letter setting these conditions in legalese, with the appropriate number of *hereuntos* and *hereofs*." Anderson pushes the chair under the table. "Mom showed you which bed was yours, so I'll see you in the morning. I teach early classes tomorrow. Have to be out of here by seven."

"Make sure I'm up. I need to be on the road as soon as practical." Jacob is almost too sleepy to make it up the stairs, but once his head settles into the unfamiliar pillow, he finds sleep is as elusive as mysterious W-particles. He knows about fishing and a little about people, but he barely knows the word *subatomic*, and he can't visualize what something subatomic would look like. That world isn't part of his vocabulary; it wasn't called into existence by him; and even knowing about it makes him feel, what, dumb. That's not quite the right word. He feels maybe a little inferior, like he is not quite as smart as he would need to be to live here Outside. Maybe just being Outside does that: makes a person feel superior. Maybe that's why they have so many problems with Outside school teachers in Port Adams. Those teachers arrive knowing words like *subatomic*, but not knowing how to call that world into existence. Those teacher can't tell a dog salmon from a silver, but because they know the things colleges teach (but not how to use those things), they look at the residents of the island as if everyone were a dumb Native. He feels that here right now. The professor didn't do anything to deliberately make him feel this way, but it's as if something is in the air. A spirit, haughty and angry. This spirit mocks him for not being able to call into existence those things he doesn't know. He knows other things, but apparently not the things that are widely known down here. However, it seems these Outside people have forgotten the songs that called their world into existence.

Still thinking about those things he doesn't know and the songs for the things he does know, he hears an alarm clock ringing somewhere. Hearing someone rise from bed in another room, then

the toilet flush, he realizes it must be morning though it is still very dark outside. But not dark like Port Adams. Through the lace curtain covering the window, he sees more and brighter stars than he has any place other than in the Yukon where only the Northern Lights hamper vision. Apparently he slept without being aware he had dozed off.

Rummy, he swings his legs from under the comforter, and he again feels old and a little alone. This feeling alone is a new experience for him, and one he doesn't like. Yes, he is far from home, and far from anyone who can help him if he needs it. He feels as if he has journeyed to some distant planet, like in the movies, where the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is just another name for some undefined higher power that might well be equally undefined by words.

-4-

Ivan's Indian *wantabe*, what was her full name? He never knew, but now he remembers her first name: Barbara. Her last was, then, Goldphine or Goldstein, or Goldine. That was it Goldine. Barbara Sue Goldine. But she has since married three times, each time taking her husband's name. Ivan said he didn't know what she was calling herself, that he had called her Yatee like he did before, that she is now a very classy lady. So as Jacob drives north through Smithfield and into Idaho, he is not sure how he will find her other than calling her to him. She took her degree in something and turned it into a career after he put her on that flight out of Port Adams, every wife in town silently cheering. But his words to her as she was about to board that flight made an enemy who has become powerful enough to hurt him by hurting those around him. Paul and Samuel, even Red, deserve better as do the families of his crews. But it is perhaps best that Mary doesn't know what has happened. She might have blamed God for losing her house. All he will miss is the picture window that overlooked the channel

and the comings and goings of the fleet, each trip out a sailing he should have been making.

Mary is sealed. She can't now be tempted to say things she really doesn't mean; she is forever protected from committing sin with her words. She will miss this time of testing, and for that he is thankful.

Words have brought all of this upon him, and it will be through words that he will prevail. And as the Ford noses eastward out of Preston like a skiff seeking the calm waters to the side of a rip, his hand on the tiller but his mind on the fish he has to catch—he should look at a map to see where he heads—he tries to form with his mouth the words he will say to her, Yatee, the imitator, the Indian *wantabe* who came from an important family somewhere, and who went to college, Stanford, if he remembers right, and who read in a book for one of her classes about Native American marriages. But whoever wrote the book wrote words that could be taken apart like beaver dams on spawner creeks, with chewed sticks tossed aside and the dislodged mud dirtying the downstream flow until not even a salamander could see where she was going. The bookwriter's words were not spoken so they would live like little people to tell stories of their own, but they were hammered onto paper where they lay like old beaver chew, blackened by mold and utterly lifeless.

The Ford runs like the horses in the fields off to his right as he follows the road to see where it goes, follows a spirit line that leads to a crossing of lines, all the while trying to shape with his mouth the words he will say to Yatee. But his mouth seems dry. He still tastes the pancakes Robert's mother served for breakfast. Maybe he didn't drink enough water with them. He is not in the habit of drinking much water. He walks in water. He catches fish in water. He sweeps water off his porch. He tars his roof to keep water out of his house. But he doesn't drink water. Nor does anyone he has ever fished with, at least not since Russians brought them tea and rice.

Angry Russians brought his ancestors things they had to buy with script, then used whips to make his ancestors take those new

things. Hunters had to hunt for that hated script while the angry men slept with their wives, what that bookwriter didn't understand. The hunters, his ancestors, had taboos the Russians didn't understand. That bookwriter maybe read what the Russians wrote in their dead words about marriages between his ancestors, marriages those angry men violated with their whips and guns. Before the Russians came, his ancestors drank water and didn't work for someone else; didn't know they needed script or tea.

The Ford runs upstream alongside the Bear River all the way to Soda Springs, a little town covered in frost, as his mouth refuses to find the words he will need when he confronts Yatee. It seems his mind wars with his tongue as he notices gas prices at the discount station, prices much lower than in Port Adams and even lower than in Oregon, but still high enough for him to realize he has only money for a few more fillups.

He should stop for gas. He might if he weren't already past the station, but he sees a station up ahead, a name brand. Somehow, though, he knows the station ahead will have a higher price and he feels compelled to turn around, a maneuver that requires turning onto a side street and looping around a park which advertizes Hooper Spring. What's special, he wonders, about a mineral spring? He would like to stop, but that feeling which caused him to turn around now urges him to hurry as he glances at his fuel gauge and realizes it's below empty; he thought he had a quarter tank when he entered town.

He crosses the four-lane at the signal light, and pulls into the discount station where, when he stops and gets out to pump his gas, he sees through the window still decorated for Christmas that the cashier is surrounded by four, maybe five fellows. The fellow behind the faded Santa painted in front of a sleigh pulled by four flying caribou pushes the clerk, a young woman with bleached hair. The fellows look a little like younger versions of himself. They look like they belong to a black TransAm, its engine idling, that sits parked in front of the convenience store's door.

Jacob knows what's happening inside without really seeing the events. The knowledge is just there in his mind as is what he should do. Leaving the pump, he hurries inside, his short legs a blur.

"You guys, get out of here right now. You leave her alone. I call the cops."

One of the fellows swings himself over the counter and thrusts a knife at Jacob, who, his hand as quick as if unhooking a wolf eel, catches the fellow's wrist and snaps it, the knife twisting free and bouncing against a plastic jar of jerky before spinning downward and sliding to a stop between stacked twelvepacks of Pepsi and a display of Lay's potato chips.

Maybe the youngest of the four fellows still behind the counter yells, "You think you can take all of us, Old man." But the others clamber over the counter and push towards the door, each pushing the other to be first outside as Jacob steps aside.

The fellow with the broken wrist joins the rush, leaving only the one fellow standing beside the open cash drawer. "You'll get yours," the fellow says as he starts around the counter, his knife now pointed towards Jacob, who doesn't move. The fellow backs towards the door, all the while keeping his knife pointed towards Jacob. He pushes the door open with his butt just as a deputy sheriff brakes and, his gun pointed at the fellow's back, hollers, "Don't move."

Another deputy arrives in a car along with a third deputy in a pickup—their vehicles block the black TransAm with Arizona plates in which the other four stuffed themselves. The TransAm tries to ram the pickup, but its driver stops when he sees the deputy's cocked automatic aimed at his head.

More deputies arrive, two in their own cars. One in a patrol car. And Jacob wonders how all five of those fellows fit in the TransAm as he watches the deputies almost casually, with their black rubber clubs, beat the five, each blow possibly necessary to get the five to lie face down on the frozen asphalt of the parking lot.

Now he doesn't know what he should do. He has done nothing so he should be going as everyone around him seems not to notice him. Lots of people have come. He wonders who called all of them as they ask lots of questions of each other and gradually piece together a story of what transpired.

An ambulance arrives and EMTs examine the clerk, all the while Jacob stands a little behind the stacked twelvepacks of Pepsi, no one noticing him.

The five are handcuffed where they lie on the pavement, then one by one, they are jerked to their feet and forced into the bed of the pickup where they sit in the cold as a breeze pushes across the frozen reservoir and along Highway 30, sweeping softdrink cups and plastic straws ahead of stinging ice particles—all swirl in an eddy beside the pickup.

Time passes as the officers continue to question each other as to what happened. The five remain seated facing into the wind as the officers establish their story, then as if casting it against a concrete bridge abutment, one of them talks to a television reporter for News Channel 6 from somewhere—the reporter and her cameraman arrived in a little white pickup with a satellite dish bolted in its bed. The other deputies all write the same story down despite none of them having yet noticed Jacob, nor having questioned him.

The convenience store's manager arrives to relieve the clerk so she can go with the EMT's. He asks, "Who called the police?"

His clerk points to Jacob and says, "He did."

The manager extends his hand to shake Jacob's as he says, "Thanks for doing the right thing. They probably would've killed her if you hadn't called."

Still not knowing what to say, Jacob stammers something that sounds a little like, "I just stopped for gas."

The manager looks at the pumps: "That's your car on pump 5?"

Jacob says, "The Ford—"

"That was \$27.50, and here is your credit card back." The manager removes a mostly blue card from the authorization reader

and printer. Then turning the printout around, the manager says, “Sign here, and again thanks. . . . And why don’t you grab one of those twelvepacks and take it with you. My personal thanks.”

Jacob starts to object, but he weighs his words before he speaks them—and before all of their weight can be calculated, he sees the VISA card has his name on it. It is the card he used to keep under the telephone for ordering Outside things mailorder.

His hands trembles as he takes the manager’s pen and signs his name. This should not be. A miracle has happened, but not one like a great healing. No life has been restored. Rather, a card he left in Alaska has suddenly appeared here, Outside, when he was nearly broke. His gas was pumped when he didn’t do it—unless he did it and just doesn’t remember, like not remembering that he brought the credit card. Could that be? That he just doesn’t remember. And he silently argues with himself, pitting the reality of the situation against his memories. They both can’t be unless a miracle truly occurred.

A twelvepack of Pepsi under his arm, Jacob steps past two deputies who have been photographing the area around the cash drawer. He wonders if, indeed, he had a memory lapse for his gas gauge reads *full*. He tries to remember pumping the fuel, but just can’t. He must have when he thought he was just standing there unnoticed. His mind is playing tricks on him. The credit card is certainly his. He wonders if he has gone crazy like old Albert Amason, Port Adam’s resident house painter who has inhaled too many lead fumes from his more than thirty years of painting, and who now paints without knowing what he does.

The five thieves are still seated in the bed of the pickup as they face into the icy wind, their breath now white frost clinging to their nostrils and upper lips despite them hanging their heads.

The Ford starts, and Jacob backs away from the pumps and pulls onto Highway 30. But afraid he might yet be stopped and questioned, instead of continuing on the main highway he turns left at the next and last traffic signal. He crosses the overpass above the railtracks, then turns right and hurries out State Highway 34

towards the mines, Blackfoot Reservoir, Grays Lake and Freedom, Wyoming.

He is on a spirit line, can feel the thinnest of the earth's crust under his tires, but he wonders if he is truly crazy. He has to find Yatee: if she were a whale, his mother's relative would have sung to her until she came close enough his relative could have killed her. His relative would have paddled his bidarka out to where the big whales swim through the passes between the islands, and there his relative would have sung his whale song. His relative would have sung and sung and sung and waited and waited. His relative would have sung his most powerful song. Then his relative would have talked to the whale and would have asked its permission to kill it before his relative threw his dart, poisoned with beach hellebore. Then his relative would have paddled home and climbed into his bed where he pretended to be sick until the whale washed up on a beach, dead. He, Jacob Chickenof, a proud toion who is now ashamed, will do the same thing. Although his relative's whale song was very powerful, it was not as powerful as is his song for justice.

He will go to where the spirit lines cross, will go to where the whales migrate, and he will wait in those passes while he sings his song as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob sang theirs. Indeed, he shall call Yatee to him. He will ask her forgiveness, and then he will fight with her, his song against hers.

Leaving Freedom behind, Jacob turns onto Highway 89 and heads north towards Alpine, Hoback Junction and Jackson, where wealthy skiers pass like whales between islands. Even though *Fournames* wants him to be present when Heidi-Marie sees her son, he must find Yatee and talk with her. He must go to those places where she might pass so that he can ask for her forgiveness. Perhaps in one of those paperback mysteries that Ivan reads the bookwriter would have the detective hero search school and marriage records, but sifting through dead words as if those words were beach gravel is not his way, nor the way of his mother's relative. When John was little, John and J Jr. used to hunt for agates. They

would bring home buckets full of red, brown, or green jasper; they would save the opals and some of the polished pieces of chert; but it was the nuggets of pure copper they found in narrow traces across the black gravel beaches that most interested him.

His relatives, his ancestors didn't use copper knives as far as he knows. Tlingits did. Tahltans did as did Yupiks and Inuits. So why not his relatives? They might have, but there are no stories about metal. Were these stories lost? Copper was certainly available to his relatives. So was iron.

At Alpine he turns the Ford east and is immediately stopped by a woman with a sign. She wants him to roll down his window.

"There'll be about a twenty minute delay. But the crews will stop at five-thirty so this should be your only delay. Thanks for your patience." And she turns her back to him as she lifts her sign so the car coming up fast behind him will stop. She then approaches its driver.

Five-thirty is a long time from now, and he wonders if he is supposed to spend the day watching others work when he should be calling Yatee, his work. And he again feels as useless as that green knight, holding his head under his arm like a gull asleep.

When the Russians came with their guns and their priests, his relatives were dependent upon the sea and their bidarkas. His relatives had nowhere to hide. Some of his relatives tried fleeing inland, but then the Russians chopped holes in their bidarkas. In those times, there were no deer, no gardens, no Alaska Commercial stores. There were rosy finches, and in the spring, sea bird eggs. Otherwise, there was nothing to eat away from the sea. And his relatives that fled became very hungry and eventually returned to the beach where the hunters became serfs to angry Russians.

The iron of the Russian guns made slaves of his relatives; yet his relatives had both copper and iron available to them. But they didn't use it to make weapons because both are dead things, not live like whalebone or ivory. Nor did they use dead words. They used only ones that lived. But now the dead words of the Russians remain while the live ones of his relatives are made to hunt like

slaves, their meat stolen by television and video games. His sons listened to his stories, but they didn't want to hear live words. They wanted cap guns and .22 rifles and outboards and stuff made from the dead things of this world, stuff that can be seen with the eyes. He should have paid more attention to what was happening. He, too, got caught watching them only with his eyes. Now John needs to hear with his heart those things eyes can not see; for dead things can be seen with eyes but they have no voice. They can not be heard.

The woman finally turns the sign around. *Slow.* Okay, he will go slow. If he knew where to find Yatee, he would proceed quickly. But he only knows that she is now important, and important people pass through Jackson. So if she is there with the important people, she should hear his song. It might take her a while to come seeking him after she hears his song, but she will come just as whales came to his mother's relative.

The skiing season is about over. Already, the sides of the road are bare.

Why, he wonders, does he think that she skis? If he were to tell this story, he would want to know. Details like that are the parents of stories. They have to be known before the teller will understand why the story is shaped as it is. Stories can be fat or skinny, just like people. They can move real slow like Karl Tygon when his arthritis acts up, or they can run like the Johnson girl who won two ribbons at the track meet in Fairbanks. Parts of them can be missing like Jack Edwards' foot. But their parents must be known or they can't be properly sent off to do their work in another person's mind.

What details would cause him to think Yatee skis?

When Ivan met her, she was a hippie who wanted to be at one with grass and flowers. She believed she was spawned from the earth—and she tried to spawn with every man in Port Adams as if she believed the mingling of their seed in her womb would not produce weeds but would become plaster investment so she could be cast as an earth mother. Ivan used to tell him the screwy things

she said, but he didn't listen as well as he should have. However, he thinks her interest in being an earth mother won't have faded into unbelief. As she matured so did her belief, he believes, the reason why she is now a power spirit woman. She will now feel those places where the old spirit lines cross. He didn't start feeling those lines again until he began to feel alone. When he became Christian he started hearing more powerful spirits that muted the old voices, but here Outside, he can again hear the demons. He knew he would be able to before he left Port Adams. That is just a thing he knew—there were just things that toions needed to know so the people could catch enough fish to carry them through months of stormy seas before Russians brought rice and Alaska Commercial started selling canned chili and iceberg lettuce. Salmon follow spirit lines. Whales migrate along them. And this is why biologists don't do a very good job of explaining the ways of salmon or of whales. Too many biologists don't believe in anything but atoms and valence electrons and space dust, the things about which *Fournames* knows.

Something Mary noticed years ago was that the important people of this world, like salmon, congregate where spirit lines cross. They might not know that is why they come to places like Las Vegas or Hollywood or New York City or Babylon. But they come or came as if drawn by magnets. And those important people who feel compelled to be part of their mother earth go to the wild places where spirit lines cross. They go on pilgrimages just like their ancestors did without knowing why. They walk to and fro across the earth, like giants. They pause here and there like hungry Orcas, ever eager to devour each other. They pause only long enough to feel the spirit, then they go on with no more understanding of why they feel restless than lemmings. They lost their stories so they don't know how manipulated they are. They think they have power because they are important, but it is real power that they seek at those places where spirit lines cross.

Jackson Hole is, indeed, a crossing. Even elk know to come there when heavy snows weigh down the mountains and cause

power to be pushed up through the old spirit lines. The People of long ago felt that escaping power as did mountain men. They knew the place for what it is. But people come now to get *Rocky Mountain highs*. Yes, he heard that song played even in Port Adams. It was sung with no understanding of the stories that teach how to use the effect.

Yatee, though, will have some understanding of how the earth is divided along spirit lines. She has become a powerful adversary, a spirit woman who has set seine web around buried demons, her cork line looped around his neck, her leadline tangled around the families of his crew, threatening to drown them any minute now if he continues to struggle.

He doesn't know how long she has waited for this day. Maybe for years. She has been out there, like a spider, spinning and gathering strength all of the years when he only worried about catching fish. John can fight about things. He trusts his son with all those things that eyes can see. But he must contend with Yatee, the spirit woman, in those places where she won't expect to find him. This is what he couldn't tell John or Little Mary or even *Fournames*. He must buy back words he spoke when he put her aboard that flight out of Port Adams. She will not want to sell those words. They have become dear to her; for they gave her reason to live, to work hard and to succeed when doors were closed to her. She holds them close to her heart, and she will fight to keep them. But for her sake, he must have them back.

He doesn't know quite what to do when he reaches Hoback Junction. Is he supposed to stop? Who has the right of way? And he slows down as he rolls through the three-way intersection, passing just in front of a Honda Accord that brakes to keep from hitting his Ford.

He has, as if he were a salmon, followed the Snake River to its headwater—now he crosses over the river near its source. Jackson is, perhaps, the most powerful intersection of spirit lines. But for the moment, most of what he feels is hunger. He has eaten only those pancakes this morning. They aren't fuel enough for the work

he has been doing; for he has wrestled with heavy thoughts that might lie lifeless on paper but when spoken even silently have the strength of sea lions.

He stops where the road widens as it overlooks the braided channels of the Snake's headwaters. He stops with the sun already below southwestern mountain peaks. He stops to begin his whale song, the song that will call Yatee.

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CHAPTER FOUR

-1-

New leaves come in May to the cottonwoods of Cook's Island. Eagles nest, their ramshackle aeries perched atop tall cottonwoods in every cove, every bight, where salmonberries tender their pink blossoms and pale blue violets push up around the gnarled trunks of blacktag alders from which hang long yellow catkins among last year's cones. Bears have emerged; new cubs, like school kids at recess, slide down the few remaining patches of snow. They squeal and run and tumble and slide on either their bellies or their backs, not knowing that all too soon they, too, will be mad at the world stolen from them by stone and steel. In small dens, fox kits, their eyes open, gnaw and grow while momma spends portions of her day hunting eggs of auks and murre. Puffins nest on the faces of capes, their orange and white beaks appearing like spring flower blossoms, and in the gravel of creeks, salmon alvins wiggle to life. Dolly Varden mop up newly emerged humpy fry as the fry begin their short downstream migration. And in Port Adams, Mary Chickenof mops the post office floor, an additional job she has taken on since her dad disappeared almost two months earlier, a job she took on to prevent her thinking about the past six months, but a job that gives her nothing but time to think.

Heidi-Marie tells her not to worry, but how can she not worry. Her dad isn't a young man. He has no money. And whatever he's up to, it's a fool's errand. She never thought she would ever link her dad and being a fool in the same thought. How else, though, can she explain him just taking off? Most people still think he has committed suicide and that she just can't accept reality. Everyone,

even Uncle Samuel, talks about her dad in the past tense. That is the hardest aspect of his disappearance for her to handle.

She leans on her mop handle and looks through the one window that gives a partial view of the harbor. Herring seiners and longliners are rafted together on the transit float, their gunwales bristling with pink buoys. For the past couple of weeks it has felt like spring; it looks like spring. Her sisters and their husbands are getting ready for salmon. Both of her brothers-in-law did okay in the one day opening for halibut. The whole family—even John, Peggy, and Heidi-Marie joined in—did very well on the two hour herring roe opening. But it wasn't the same without her dad there barking orders; not the same without her mom's fresh baked bread and chowder afterwards.

She doesn't think that much about J Jr. Her brother had been to sea so much the past few years that the natural separation process had already occurred. Her mom's death was tragic, but dealing with her anger at herself, which keeps coming back at odd times, has let her have some degree of closure. Someday she will again see her mother. If she didn't believe that, she doesn't know how she could go on. What would be the point? Life for her would have no meaning.

But more difficult for her to handle than even her mom's death has been what her dad did: she doesn't understand how he could just take off like that. She can't grieve him; he's somewhere. She can't tap into his strength at a time when she needs it. She can't talk to him. All she can do is worry, and that's worse than anything. There can't ever be closure.

As she stands there not really noticing the gulls or cormorants, the fleet or the freighter awaiting high tide, she wants to throw something at her uncle Ivan. She blames him for her dad taking off. And the worst part is that her uncle keeps reminding her to remember the story Dad told before he disappeared. The story means nothing to her. She has no clue why it means so much to her uncle or to Ol' Man Yachmeneff, who, when he heard the story, immediately withdrew from the lawsuit against Dad and

asked John to name him as an additional Plaintiff against Portland Casualty.

Ol' Man Yachmeneff's withdrawal from the suit against her dad started an avalanche of withdrawals. As the families of crewmembers repeated the story among themselves, first one, then another, then four, five, eight, ten, fifteen of the plaintiffs suing Dad wanted to join Dad's and Uncle Samuel's suit against the insurance carrier. Now, only a couple of the original plaintiffs remain, the most important one being the mother of Uncle Ivan's son, Michael . . . she wishes she would have had the chance to get to know her cousin, but it was all so secretive, Uncle Ivan saying nothing, not even mentioning Michael who had been part of his crew for almost a year. She originally thought Michael was merely a new addition to her uncle's crew, but that wasn't the case. Michael had been living aboard the *St. Paul* same as her uncle while the boat was moored to the small boat harbor last April and May, then again in August and late October. She feels betrayed by her uncle—and a little betrayed by Dad for him not telling her about her cousin when he found out. She still wouldn't know about Michael if John hadn't asked their uncle what Dad's story meant.

She feels left out of a community secret: the story her dad told means something to apparently everyone but herself. Even John claims he understands it, but she doubts that. She isn't sure anyone understands the story. How can they? It doesn't make sense. She suspects everyone is assigning their own meaning to it, thereby crediting the story with power it doesn't have. It's just a bunch of words. How can somebody dance after death? That's crazy. She's certain the story is nothing more than Ol' Man Yachmeneff's excuse for doing what he wanted to do, just like Father Gregory's little homilies used to provide her mother with justification for doing what she intended to do from the beginning. And because one person, in this case Ol' Man Yachmeneff, gave the story a meaning, everyone else goes along with him 'cause they don't want to feel left out.

How, then, does she explain Uncle Ivan and Ol' Man Yachmeneff coming up with the story meaning the same thing?

She returns to mopping, deciding that she doesn't want to even think about that story. It just makes her miss her dad more. But she can't stop thinking about it. It has become part of Port Adams in the past two months. She suspects everybody has heard the story either in its long or short form—it makes even less sense in its short form. And everybody has heard some version of what Ol' Man Yachmeneff says the story means. Now, that is what the story means even though she can't see how he gets what he does from it. She never understood how her high school English teachers could get what they did from assigned novels. She feels as dense about Dad's story. *For crying out loud, it's just a story. Why does it have to mean all of these other things?*

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Another one. Another credit card charge from his dad. Still unable to explain how this account was reactivated (it was closed by court order), John holds the statement, the numbers small and rather inconspicuous, like the ant that crawls across his writing mat, an import from Outside that came on somebody's boat and stayed, figuratively finding fields ripe for harvesting. He doesn't know his insects well enough to know what kind of ant crawls there on the felted mat. A little one that he could squash as easily as he can let it live. Perhaps he should squash it so it doesn't bring others to the remains of a doughnut that soaks up coffee spilled in his saucer, his cup now empty and needing refilled but the credit card statement holding his attention and preventing him from rising, Sis in the kitchen making more doughnuts and feeling lonely this evening, his reason for staying here and not having dinner with Peggy. The statement appears innocent enough at first glance: a charge from an Amoco station in Jackson, Wyoming (what his dad is doing there, he has no idea), and a second charge from a Sinclair station in Evanston two weeks later. His dad is moving around. Why?

What is he looking for? And again he hears within his mind a thought he can't quite decipher.

Waiting for the ant to cross the blue writing mat which is for it as far across as the skiff ride was for him the night they rescued Uncle Ivan, John doesn't like the foggy thought that seems to say his dad is searching for a face to go with (this is the part that's not clear) a soul or a spirit, which makes no sense to him. But after his experience with Teddy Rudin he isn't as quick to dismiss the thought as nonsense as he would have been. If someone would have told him a year ago that spirit helpers and intervening spirits were real, he would have laughed till he cried. Now, he doesn't know. Many scientists believe humanity is not alone in the universe. If evolution is factual, then the odds of not being alone are high. Space alien invaders are acceptable movie fare. Angels on television seem the latest craze. As a culture, America has become as superstitious as Athens. But fire usually accompanies smoke. With fire comes heat, a little of which he felt last winter. He doesn't know how to categorize what he saw when he fired that first shot there on Five Mile Beach. He saw something that wasn't his uncle, something he would like to forget but can't. The image won't let him stop thinking about it.

His dad seems to have it all figured out: Christ is the answer to every question. For his dad, it is all so simple. No nagging philosophical questions. No conflicts with science. No epistemological crisis. Nothing but tested faith as if what has happened in the past six months was for his dad's good. But maybe that's not fair to his dad, who, while Outside, has at least broken the impasse between Heidi-Marie and her ex-husband, something that might qualify for a miracle if he didn't know how persuasive Dad can be. So who knows what all else his dad has been doing.

Here, where the inaction has been, he has been trying to stay atop his cases in Juneau and still win an equitable settlement against a big-name Anchorage firm that plays loose with the rules, a firm with resources and an apparently unlimited supply of gall which they are quick to serve. Armstrong & Armstrong expects him to

fold, or to come to them for whatever crumbs they might offer. But Uncle Samuel, bless his thieving old ways, had every form Portland Casualty used for the past forty years—Uncle Samuel would, as a matter of principle, help himself to a little extra paper whenever he went to Kodiak. Petty thievery. Samuel's continuation of his father's and grandfather's and probably great-grandfather's habit of taking a little something from the company store. Their revenge for being shafted by first Russians, then San Francisco salmon packers, then Seattle fish buyers. Usually what is taken has little or no value. A ballpoint pen when a check is written, or an orange eaten in a supermarket even though Uncle Samuel owns a grocery store. It is the active face of their passive resistance to a cultural invasion that destroyed the old ways a century before the Russian-American Company sold its assets to the United States government for more than they were worth. And judging from how Portland Casualty is trying to bankrupt his dad, Uncle Samuel, Uncle Paul and Red ne'Torry, John suspects it is a tradition that will be handed down to Uncle Samuel's grandsons.

Because of Samuel Golovin's petty thievery and Alvin Winesap's memory and Peggy's little printing press warehoused there on Marine Way, he will eventually be able to reproduce every document destroyed by Portland Casualty and their agents in Kodiak and Gig Harbor. All he needs is time and one copy of a signature. Right now, the signature he needs belongs to Mark Edwards Roth, an investor who has recently been quietly buying up the outstanding preferred shares of Portland Casualty. Roth is, John knows, more deeply involved in this whole affair than he presently understands. But time has a way of revealing secrets.

As he continues to stare at the credit card statement, not noticing that the ant has long crawled away, he again hears a thought about his dad finding a face for a lost soul. He doesn't usually hear thoughts; he usually sees them in images, how, he believes, most people receive thoughts. The only person he knows who claims to only hear thoughts and to never see them is Randy, his legal assistant

in Juneau, and he doesn't know if that is correct. Randy could be merely putting him on.

Once his dad left, everyone in Port Adams seems alone. Even when he helped gather herring roe, there seemed no interaction between himself and his sisters and their families. Everyone did his or her thing as if all sense of family was as missing as Dad. But then, he suspects he is as much to blame for that as anyone. For years he has spent far more time in Juneau than in Port Adams. He's almost a stranger here, where his roots are supposed to be. Living in Juneau has cost him the identity he sought to cultivate.

"Sis," standing, the credit statement still in hand, John backs away from his dad's writing desk, a walnut reminder of the Tsar's rule in Alaska, as he says, "you'll want to see this."

Her hands dusted white with powdered sugar, Little Mary asks, "Is that what I thought, more charges on Dad's card?"

"He was still in Wyoming at the end of March, but it looks like he's on the move. What's near Evanston? Do you have a map?" If he can figure out *why* their dad is going *where*, John thinks he might be able to intercept him even though Uncle Ivan said to leave him be. Answering questions about the radio exchange between his dad and J can't be delayed much longer. Besides, his dad knows fish, knows boats, but traveling around without money, his dad is a figurative lamb looking to be slaughtered. "I wish there wasn't such a long time lag between when the charge are made and when they are billed. You'd think with electronic transfers and accounting their billing wouldn't be a month behind."

"Utah, that's what Evanston is near." Little Mary opens a travel atlas at least as old as she is. "It doesn't look like he can get to Logan from there so Dad is probably not going back to see Heidi-Marie's husband. You know, Bob and little Peter will be here again in a week."

"Who?" John studies the atlas that is so old it's almost useless.

"Her ex-husband and son. He seems like a nice guy, and little Peter is adorable. Well behaved and smart. I hope they can get back together. . . . You ought to talk to Bob. He got to know Dad

at least a little bit.” Little Mary checks her second batch of dough. It has risen enough.

“Why,” John turns pages to find the map of Idaho, “didn’t I meet him then?”

“You were in Juneau when they came in March. What are you looking for?” She checks her oil—it’s still hot enough—so careful not to cause a splash, she slides a risen spudnut in, then another and another and another before taking her first one out and placing it on a flattened brown paper sack.

“I don’t have any clue what Dad’s doing. All I know is that he doesn’t do things without a reason. Never has. When he lays gear, he already knows fish are there. So he went to Jackson for a reason and was there for almost a month.” John reaches for a cooled doughnut that has already been glazed.

“No you don’t. You can have a hot one or one that hasn’t been glazed, but I need those finished ones for tomorrow.”

“No goopy ones, huh. Not even for your brother?”

“Especially not for you. . . . There should be extras when I get my three dozen set aside.” She gives him a misshaped one with a little glazing on it. “Now what about Jackson?”

“Dad only used that card a couple of times and only for gas. What’s he been eating? And where? McDonald’s? I don’t even know if they have one, but Kodiak got theirs nearly twenty years ago so I imagine there are some cheap hamburger joints there. But even living on Big Macs costs money.” John almost chews his first bite of the still very warm doughnut. “Pretty good, Sis. How come you don’t do this more often?”

“Was thinking about Mom today. She always made them. I never—” Little Mary turns back to her cooking without saying that she never had to before.

“Randy says Dad sold those rifles, but he couldn’t have gotten much for them, not even for the fancy Rigby.”

“Bob, Heidi-Marie’s ex, said Dad was driving an old Ford sedan that probably cost less than seven hundred, a gas guzzler. I asked, I wanted to know.”

“Whatever he’s driving, he’s driving without insurance.” John waits until his sister’s back is turned before reaching for one of the cooled, glazed spudnuts. “Dad must be making a few dollars doing something, but what does he know besides boats and fishing? I doubt he went to Jackson for the skiing.”

“Isn’t Park City where the next winter Olympics are going to be?” Little Mary leaves her doughnuts for long enough to flip atlas pages back to Utah where she locates Park City and places her index finger atop the resort community. “That’s where he’s going—not far from Evanston. Dad’s taken up skiing.”

Although not believing for a moment that his dad has taken up skiing, John studies the map: Park City is a possible destination, but why? By now, slopes will be closed for the season. “Anybody in town here sell an updated atlas? This is the one Uncle Ivan brought back when I was what, four years old.”

“The T-shirt shop can probably order one, but I don’t imagine anybody would have one in stock. Why should they? Who needs a map to find the road to Iskai Bay?” Then with pure disgust in her voice, she adds, “Besides, half the time they stick the Aleutians in the middle of the Gulf and usually right on top of us as if we don’t mind disappearing under a little geographic rearranging.”

“Where is Uncle Ivan?” John senses that time will reveal a pattern to his Dad’s travels, but he wants to shortcut that process. “I need to talk to him. If anybody can help, he can.”

After removing two high floaters from her hot oil, she says, “He’s fishing Joseph Shayadzoo’s beach seine permit so I suspect he’s already down on the south side. But you might check the harbor to see if he is still in town.” Then as an afterthought, she adds, “Somebody was asking for him at the Post Office this afternoon.”

John doesn’t know how his uncle does it: “A couple of skiffs is a comedown from the *St. Paul*, but he seems to always land something, like that proverbial cat on its feet.”

“You know why, he’s still one of the best. He knows what it takes to bring home a catch.” She takes a couple of the cold spudnuts,

wraps them in waxpaper, and adds, "Here, if you're going to look for him, take these to Uncle Ivan, and don't you eat them—and don't think I didn't see you sneak that one. If you can't find him, bring them back."

"I wasn't going right this minute."

"Yes, you are . . . if I'm to get my three dozen."

"Well, I need to find him, but why would you want these two spudnuts back? They are likely to be squashed."

"Not unless you squash them. Now, go on, get out of here."

Grabbing another doughnut for good luck, John hurries towards the door. He has been driving his dad's pickup, even used it to tow his dad's trailered Whaler up from the boat harbor to Little Mary's front yard, where it sits parked beside an aluminum skiff he, John, bought from Cathy's and Beth's husbands—Red ne'Torry had ordered the new snag skiff from them, but for obvious reasons she couldn't afford to pay for it so he bought it. Now all he has to do is pick up a kicker for it. Outboards, though, have gotten expensive since he bought a Yamaha 55 when he was seventeen. Besides, he ought to put enough horsepower on the skiff to make it go. The big, new four cycles, though, are really expensive.

Port Adams translates its high latitude location into nights of twilight by early May, with a sharp divide overhead. The edge of night. Everything to the south is dark, to the north light. It was already late when he arrived on Alaska's delayed flight from Anchorage, but along the length of the small boat harbor's floats, fishermen were still tying gillnet web to corklines and leadlines in a last minute frenzy to be ready for that first sockeye opening. A small run of a very early sockeye enters Lake Iskai nearly two months before the main run hits. Some years the fishery on the run is as short as the herring fishery, but most years, fishermen get a couple of six hour openings on the run, their catch the first anywhere for the season, their price per pound twice what the main run will bring.

But even the most desperate of these setnetters have given up for the night when John arrives in the Harbormaster's parking lot. The harbor appears deserted, and the night is nearly as dark as it

will get when John descends the long, inclined ramp to the floats. The tide is low. The floats appear to have sunk as he walks them, not really knowing for what he searches. Levelwind reels have been removed from most of the seiners. Snapon gear has been stored till the September halibut opening. Limit seiners, the 58-foot whaleback vessels that will fish the capes and intercept sockeye salmon bound for an arc of rivers stretching from the Copper to the Stikine, have their full seines aboard. So too do the boats fishing half seines, boats that will set picks in Iskai Bay, around Big and Little Kupreanof Islands and along the west side of Ivanof Island, all the while making excuses for why they don't fish the Triads, also an intercept fishery, but one open to the weather.

As a beach seiner, his uncle will be fishing a quarter seine, but his uncle will take as many dogs and silvers with it as any of the limit seiners. Those are the high priced fish. Pinks have never been worth much. A boat has to catch a hundred thousand of them to do more than break even. That's a lot of tonnage to pull aboard a skiff. But he suspects Uncle Ivan will take his share although a high percentage of his fish will be watermarked, coming as they will from inside creek markers. His uncle is an outlaw. His brother was one, too. *I guess I come by it honestly.*

As he makes the second turn along the outside float, he notices ahead of him, a fellow hopping from deck to deck across rafted seiners tied to the transit float. The fellow glances behind him as he seems to run across the boat decks.

Not knowing where his uncle might be, John could use anyone's help so he hurries to intercept the fellow: "Hey you, is Ivan Chickenof still in the harbor?"

At the mention of his uncle's name, the fellow pauses, then turns, and stepping close to John, says, "Wouldn't know. I'm new in town."

The hairs raise on John's neck. His biceps tense involuntarily. His fingers stiffen as cascading alarm suddenly sweeps though him, the feeling as intense as a tub of dumped, iced Gatorade. John jumps to the side, jumps off the float and onto the deck of Painter's

seiner as he sees the haft of a knife in the fellow's right hand, its blade concealed by the fellow's forearm. And just as John anticipates an attack, an Orca surfaces beside them in the boat harbor, its fin at least six feet high. The Orca seems to momentarily suspend its downward arc as if time stands still.

The fellow sees the Orca. His cheeks immediately sag and as if distracted by something else, he pivots on his right foot and runs towards the Harbormaster office, his footsteps pounding loud on the floats, bouncing them, causing waves that rock skiffs and seiners and even the high school's converted power troller.

Even in the dim twilight, John saw the panic on the fellow's face when the Orca surfaced beside them . . . John watches him go. While not knowing if real danger existed, he nevertheless feels tremendous relief. But what, he wonders, is an Orca doing in the oily water of the small boat harbor? Hunting sea lions in the dark? Perhaps. But he has never heard of anyone seeing one in the harbor. It's an extremely rare occurrence when one is seen in the channel.

Where is his uncle?

John doesn't like the thought that pushes through the questions and clutter within his mind. He won't voice it, not even to himself. No, he won't.

Although John is certain his uncle is somewhere in the harbor, finding him doesn't seem as important as it did a moment ago. It was a wild idea anyway, flying to Salt Lake or wherever, renting a car and trying to find his dad. He thought Uncle Ivan might know the reason for his dad's apparent interest in ski resort towns. But the idea of flying south really wasn't feasible. He has work to do in Juneau as well as here, where the other boat owners insured by Portland Casualty are counting on him as are most of the families of the twenty-five crew members lost on those five boats. The idea of flying south was more along the lines of what his uncle would have done, not his dad who is south behaving like his uncle.

As he walks more than a little concerned about the fellow with the knife, he wonders if that is the real reason his dad took off. Is, was his dad trying to force him to return to Port Adams, force him

to become part of the community, force him to become like his dad? With the old folks, nothing is ever as it seems. With them, it is as if he never left. They have made it easy for him to return. But what is here for him? Peggy? Maybe.

“Did you find Uncle Ivan?” Sis asks when he returns to her place, which seems more his home than his Juneau condo.

“No . . . I saw an Orca in the boat harbor.” He tells her about the chance encounter with the fellow on the floats. “I suppose I should call the troopers, you think?”

“You’re the expert in this area, but I’d call Randy just in case something happens in the future . . . and did you bring those spudnuts back?”

“They’re in the truck. . . . Dial for me. I want to make notes of what I saw in case anything ever comes of this.” John returns to their dad’s writing desk while Little Mary first retrieves the two doughnuts from their dad’s pickup.

“Randy, I guess Sis told you why the call. It could all be innocent, but I don’t usually feel I’m in danger when someone has a knife. Fishermen always have knives. But this time things were different. I felt strange vibes. My gut says you should check this fellow out.” He isn’t about to mention the whale just yet. That would be way too coincidental.

“Tell Mary to lock her doors, then you come on down to the harbor. We have an incident. We’re checking on it right now. Might be your fellow. But don’t say anything to your sister just yet.” When John doesn’t verbally respond, Randy adds, “I’ll see you in a few minutes.”

“Sis, what time do you have to be at work in the morning?”

“Eight, why?”

“You’d better get some sleep, turn the lights off. I have to go back down to the harbor. Lock your doors. I’ll let myself in when I return.” John doesn’t want to alarm his sister, but Randy wouldn’t have suggested locking doors without a reason.

“All right,” she knows something is wrong. “But I want to know everything in the morning.”

“Deal.” John pats his sister on her shoulder as he reaches over and snitches another doughnut. “It’s all probably nothing.”

The night is now as dark as it can get when John parks behind Fish & Game’s pickup. Five, six men stand around a body lying on a stretcher. Two of the men are Cpl. Tom Matthews and Sgt. Randy Plankov. Another is the Harbormaster. John recognizes another one as a fisherman who once visited his dad.

When John approaches, Randy asks, “Is this the fellow you saw with a knife?”

The beam of Randy’s flashlight flattens the lifeless face, or rather, partial face that John kneels to examine. Nodding his head *yes*, John hears himself ask, “What happened?”

“Philemon, here, found him floating in the harbor just before you called. How long between when you saw him and when you called?”

“I don’t know exactly. Maybe twenty minutes tops. I don’t think more than that.” Standing, pointing to the far float, John says, “I saw him down there. He ran this way. I stood there for a minute, then came up and checked out the pickup. Went on up to Sis’s, told her to call you. I was down here looking for Uncle Ivan, had a couple of doughnuts for him that I left in the truck. Sis went out and got them first, then called you. How long does that take?” John bends back down and pulls the gray blanket back. “Maybe I’ve seen too many movies, but this looks like a shark attack.”

Tom Matthews says, “Tooth marks are wrong. Not triangular. Judging from the spacing and the roundness of the puncture wounds where he was first grabbed, I’d say a killer whale.”

The others snort, but John feels his shoulders fall into his chest and his legs melt. He is barely able to stand.

Randy sees John’s distress: “Cover him up. He’s getting to the kid.”

“No,” John protests. “I thought the fellow was going to attack me, but an Orca surfaced just to the outside of Painter’s seiner—”

“Inside the harbor?” Randy asks in disbelief.

“Yeah . . . and when he saw that Orca, the fellow took off running like he was running for his life.”

“Tom,” Randy says, his voice grave, “Ivan Chickenof is living under a tarp on that refurbished Bristol Bay the girl and her dad left here a year ago. You know the one. Go check and make sure he’s okay. Just holler before you step aboard.” Then to John, Randy says, “Let’s go for a walk. You need to get away from here, and I need everything that fellow said to you.”

As soon as they are out of earshot of the Harbormaster, Randy asks, “Your dad told you about your uncle being a shaman?”

“All he said was that Uncle Ivan has a spirit helper.” They are a block from where he parked. John glances back at the Harbormaster’s parking lot.

“I’d say that.” Randy walks like Jacob and that whole older generation who grew up on salmon and seal oil instead of milk and pizza, their gait peculiar but one that covers distance in a hurry. “There’s things I don’t report because they pertain to the old ways. Do you understand that?”

“Dad never talked about any of this till last winter. Then I found out a lot about him I didn’t know. Both Dad and Uncle Ivan. And for that matter, Teddy Rudin.”

“There are others. Good men. But not fellows you’d ever want to cross. Your dad was the only one who could.”

“You just did it, talked about Dad in the past tense as if he’s dead. The whole damn town does it. Bugs Sis bad.” John again glances towards the Harbormaster’s parking lot. “Dad was in Evanston, Wyoming, a month ago. I was coming down to ask Uncle Ivan if he knew why Dad was going to ski resorts. I had an idea about flying south and trying to intercept him.”

Before Randy can answer, Tom Matthews hurries towards them, yelling as he comes: “He’s wounded. Cut in the arm. He bandaged it himself, but I’m having him taken up to the clinic. I’m going with him.”

“We’ll meet you there. And keep him there,” Randy says. When the other trooper returns to the parking lot, the Sargent adds, “I

suspect what happened here is that fellow tried to kill your uncle for unknown reasons and probably surprised your uncle, probably cut him before your uncle could react. Your uncle's spirit helper is very powerful, a killer whale. I suspect the fellow was doomed from the moment he attacked. But none of this will appear in a report, understand? He died accidentally." The trooper quickens his steps. "Now let's see what kind of a lie your uncle will tell us."

Despite his long legs and at least appearing to be in shape, John can barely keep up with the older trooper. And rather than taking his dad's truck up to the clinic, he rides with Randy, a racked shotgun between his knees. A shiver of pale blue appears on the eastern horizon; the dark twilight has already begun to lighten. And as John sees the running lights of an inbound seiner round Buoy Four and start down the channel, he asks Randy, "Why mention having Sis lock her doors?"

"A feeling. You had one tonight so you know what they are." Randy inhales, then adds, "Besides, you will one day be a shaman if you don't become a Christian like your dad. Second son. Your right by birth. Just the way it always has been."

"Always thought having premonitions was the prerogative of Mom. Never thought about having one myself." John watches darkened houses pass quickly by as if they were sliding into the harbor and he, sitting still. "You're not serious, are you, about that shaman stuff—and you're not saying that you think someone might have wanted to kill Ivan?"

"I am saying that. Both things. So yes, that's exactly what I'm saying. Your seeing your uncle's spirit helper looks like it might have been a chance meeting, but I don't think so. My gut tells me you were supposed to see him." He pauses as he turns into the clinic's lot where his partner's pickup sits, its driver's side door open. "So tell me, how are your cases proceeding?"

"We're at kind of a touchy point right now. Alvin is proving to be very helpful, but the other side destroyed almost all of the records. Makes our job a little tougher."

Stopping beside Tom Matthew's pickup, Randy sits without moving for a moment: "You'd better win both suits. Paul Bob intends to murder a fellow named Roth."

John is quick to say, "That's idle talk, and how do you know that name?"

"No, not coming from Paul Bob." Randy pauses to pick with the tip of his tongue a piece of roast caribou wedged between his left eye-tooth and molar behind it. "No, he's serious. . . . If he does it here, I'll let him get away with it. This Roth fellow, I guess, is screwing all of you, most of the town."

John doesn't know what to say though knowing that some words are expected: "Uncle Paul needs something to do. Without a boat to fish," he hesitates, then asks, "doesn't the trooper boat need a skipper for one season?"

"Might could arrange that." Randy sits leaned over his steeringwheel for a full minute before adding, "Yeah, that's actually a good idea. Our skipper, Ben Guile, has been needing back surgery for several years. We could hire locally a temporary replacement. Give Ben the time he needs to recover without him worrying about losing his job."

"That'll be a change, Uncle Paul on the other side of the law. Fish stocks are likely to recover."

"Not with Ivan fishing a beach seine permit. You know he'll be inside the markers all summer."

John chuckles. "Isn't that what those white stream markers mean, *only Ivan Chickenof can fish here*. I think he told me that when I was about six, when I was old enough to tell him that Dad said he couldn't fish inside them."

"Aah, what the hell—let's see if he is all right."

As he opens the passenger-side door, John asks, "So you think there's something to the old ways?"

"There's not many people who believe like your dad, not many who can rebuke a shaman, or would want to. Pattern yourself after your dad. There's no future in the old ways. It's all here and now." Randy turns to look at the harbor, its lights and the spreading

dawn. "I wouldn't be talking to you if I didn't know the war that's been going on inside you. I, too, am a second son. . . . Don't know why I'm thinking about going anywhere else. In a damn month after I leave I'll want to be back here."

"I don't understand," John pauses as he shuts both his door and Tom Matthew's, "how a person can have the kind of simple faith Dad has. It ignores too much of the world."

"That's why it's called faith." Randy holds the clinic's door. "I remember when you were about that same six years old. You came to the Salmon Festival with a list of five questions. You remember that?"

"Vaguely." John sees his uncle, his shirt stripped from him, the skin of his chest appearing much younger than his years, the wound to his shoulder and upper arm angry red and deep. "It was something Father Hermon had all of us kids do."

"Go back and find that list. Ask yourself those questions. Then tell me how much of this world your dad ignores, or is ignorant of."

"Hello, Kid," Ivan hollers. "Tom, here, tells me you were trying to find me."

"I was, but I never would've looked in Sharon Caine's gillnetter for you." He has been retained by her father to dispose of the former Bristol Bay boat.

"I think I buy that boat. It a good one."

"You can't afford it, and shouldn't be living on it."

The older trooper asks, "Ivan, you going to tell me the truth or are you going to tell me the same lies you told my partner?"

"I don't lie. That fellow, I don't know him. He come by looking for a job. When I say I don't know him, he come at me with a knife, but I still a strong man. I throw him off my boat." Ivan grins as if he has been telling a joke. "I bet he sorry now though, huh?"

Randy confers with Tom, their voices low. Tom then turns to Ivan and says, "I'll write it up just that way. We'll see if we can't get you some victims' money to pay for this clinic visit."

"Are you going to be okay?" John asks his uncle.

“I feel blood bumping into it . . . it hurts more now than before.”

“It looks like,” John stands as close as he can without his presence interfering with the nurse practitioner’s swabbing of the wound, “it will take a couple of hundred stitches to close that. Why didn’t you get help immediately? You could have bled to death.”

The nurse practitioner glances at John, and with his eyes, nods in agreement.

Ivan cranes his neck to see what the nurse does, then looking back at John, he says, “You come get me in maybe an hour. We be all done here by then.”

Randy says, “Well, I have to get back down to the harbor. There’s a body that needs prepared for the morning’s flight to Anchorage. Maybe they can ID him since he didn’t give you,” Randy looks directly at John, “his name.”

“I’m coming,” John says. “I need a ride down to Dad’s pickup.”

John helps Randy and the Harbormaster slide the fellow into a black, rubberized bodybag. He had been bitten twice. Once low, near his waist. The other time in his face and shoulder. He had stood less chance than a fat seal.

After the bag had been zipped closed, Randy says, “Must be true what they say about people, we taste bad. Like Monarch butterflies.”

The sun is strong on the horizon. Gulls cry as they circle light poles and cannery roofs, the boat harbor and Near Island where cormorants sit like black bowling pins on kelp-covered rocks beneath which crabs hunker, awaiting the returning tide. Robins hop on the ten foot square of new grass where the old Liberty ship anchor rests, one flute buried, the other upright.

“Almost,” John says, “seems like a non event. A death, but with no shots fired, no murder weapon, no crime to investigate. Nothing . . . but it was a homicide. Strange.”

Randy says, “You’re lucky it wasn’t yours. Damn lucky.”

“You think it might be lawsuit related?”

“I told you what I think. . . . Go get your uncle. See if you can keep him out of trouble. Tom and I will be watching him this summer. Let him know.”

John starts his dad’s pickup and lets its engine idle before attempting to move it. The worst thing about island vehicles is their oil never gets warm before the person gets where he or she is going, never gets rid of the condensation, never lubricates as it should. And he wonders why he’s thinking about cold engine oil when he probably came within a fin-rise of being knifed tonight.

He saw his uncle’s spirit helper. That’s twice now, the first time when he fired that shot on Five Mile Beach. He didn’t much like what he saw then. At least he could stand to look at the Orca.

Him becoming a shaman—that seems like so much nonsense. But—

The muscles of his hands and forearms involuntarily tremble. As he turns to check the Harbormaster’s parking lot—the body has been loaded onto the island’s almost ambulance and is now on its way to the airport—he sees things: cars, boats, one raven, gulls, the anchor, buildings, water hoses. But apparently there is also life he can’t see here. Maybe not space aliens, but life that dwells in other dimensions. That thought frightens him, its ramifications enormous. He wants to believe he has seen too many episodes of *Star Trek* reruns on the cable channel there in Juneau, but those bite marks weren’t special effects. They were as real as Mount Iskai, more real than the boat harbor or Marine Way or the canneries.

He tries to imagine a fifth or sixth dimension by going back to a two dimensioned plane on which a column appears as a circle that a line must skirt. A chessboard. He can’t wrap his mind around another dimension, but it’s here with him right now. Both his dad and his uncle have dealings with spirits in that dimension.

This is all too freakish for him to seriously contemplate. He wishes he hadn’t seen whatever he did on Five Mile Beach. The blessing of being a lab mouse is its lack of self-awareness. Where is his uncle’s spirit helper right now? Watching him. Evidently it was out there on the floats. And suddenly, he feels eyes watching

him, eyes he can't see, eyes he knows are there. This must be what it's like in prison. No privacy. Someone always watching. Not a thing he can do about it. He feels absolutely powerless. He feels like complaining, but to whom?

The engine stalls, dies, when he shifts into gear without giving the engine any throttle. He feels like that has happened to him, like he has stalled out. How can he run with what he knows without fuel? And he doesn't even know where this paranormal throttle is hid.

The key turns almost by itself. The ignition fires. The engine catches, gains RPMs, settles into its idle. John exhales a long breath as he looks straight ahead, his eyes not focused on anything yet taking in all of the street, Russian Hill, and the spruce timber beyond. It almost seems he can see through the hill to Little Kupreanof and Ivanof Islands and across the Gulf to the Mainland where a continent sleeps not knowing that they are being observed as if they were lab mice in a round cage.

He doesn't check behind him when he pulls out. He doesn't know why he doesn't look. He has always looked before, but his senses somehow seem heightened to where he just knows no vehicle is coming. He passes still-dark houses and seems to know what is going on in each as he drives up Kupreanof, seeing Port Adams as if this were his first visit.

But by the time he reaches the clinic, his senses have returned. He not only looks both ways, but he doubles checks what he sees before he turns across the downhill lane. And he wonders if he got squirted by some kind of a hallucinogenic drug. Maybe something the troopers used on the corpse, or maybe something on the corpse. Whatever it was, it caused quite a trip, one he hopes not to repeat. Pulling into traffic without looking, even this early in the morning, was really stupid on his part. He's lucky, that's all he can conclude.

His uncle has his shirt on and a bottle of pain pills in his left hand when John enters the clinic. "Hello, Kid." Then pointing to the nurse, Ivan adds, "He sews real good. I bring him my pants to mend."

“I don’t think you can afford his rates. . . . Are you ready to go? I’m taking you to Sis’s.”

Once his Uncle Ivan is seated in the pickup, John asks, “Did Tom Matthews tell you I saw an Orca in the harbor?”

“Naa, but I know you did.”

John waits for more. But when more doesn’t come, he asks, “Is that all you have to say?”

“Your dad, my brother, I hear him singing our relative’s whale song. He is calling for Yatee to come to him. If she comes, he will take her spirit with all of her anger and he will carry it close to his heart till it melts.” Ivan slumps in his seat as much as the stitches in his arm allow.

“You’re not making sense. Who or what is Yatee?”

“My son’s mother.”

John pulls over and stops even though they are less than a half block from Little Mary’s. “Wait a minute. Dad is trying to contact Barbara Roth? Tell me that’s not what you just said.”

“Yatee, she all confused inside. You better watch out. She send that guy tonight. Maybe she send more of them. I dono. She real mad, maybe too mad to hear my brother singing our relative’s song, maybe too mad to know what she do.”

“Uncle Ivan—please—say something that makes sense.”

“Your dad, my brother, he move around, go to the spirit places, sing there.” Then motioning towards the street, Ivan adds, “Go. We need to go.”

John glances over his shoulder, then turns, and turns again into Little Mary’s driveway. He unlocks her back door. A plateful of doughnuts sets on her kitchen table. The ones she will take to the Post Office are in a cutdown apple box in her cupboard. “It looks like these are for us. You want some coffee, Uncle Ivan?”

“That’d be good.” Ivan helps himself to a spudnut, takes a bite, then says, “Your mother’s recipe, the one she got Outside.”

“How can you tell?” John sets the coffee pot on a burner.

“It come from a little place in Oregon, Twenty Miracle Miles, place right next to Morris Kaufman’s truck shop. Your dad, he have some problem with a boat engine, put in at Depoe Bay, but

nobody help him till Kaufman see what he needs. Kaufman, he help your dad. Sometimes, not so much any more, your dad sends him smoked fish. I know. Your mother and me, we were there. J Jr., he was real little, but he travel good.”

“What’s happening, Uncle Ivan? Tell me. You know and I don’t. I need to know. . . . If I can’t win this case, a fourth of this town suffers, not counting Dad, Paul and Samuel, even Red.” Even though the water isn’t yet boiling, John adds coffee grounds, watches them float for a moment, then continues, “And now you tell me that dad is singing some ancestral song in the spirit places. Where in hell are the spirit places?”

“They not in hell, they here.” Pushing almost half a five inch doughnut into his mouth, Ivan says, with his mouth full, “All those pain pills make my mind fuzzy.”

“Don’t give me that. If they’re doing anything, they’re combining with the alcohol in your system and killing you.”

“Okay, the boy, he growing up. You okay. Your dad, my brother, he real proud of you. Me too.”

“But you’re not going to tell me anything?” John hopes the plateful of doughnuts are for them. “You still think I shouldn’t huntup Dad?”

“Did the story he tell change?”

“Of course not.”

“Then why you try to change it?” Ivan grabs two more doughnuts, then says, “I go to bed now. You tell Little Mary not to worry, your dad is good. He knows what he is doing.”

“Are you able to fish with that arm? That insurance agent, Alvin, would work with you for the experience. He can talk about fishing, but he doesn’t know much. He’s a good man, though.”

“I know him, okay.”

“Now one thing, I’m going to bring his former secretary over from Anchorage. There might be some strange dynamics for awhile.” John opens a closet and takes from it a sleeping bag. “The couch all right?”

His uncle, his mouth too full to speak, nods yes.

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Heidi-Marie found the raven hatchling within a few seconds of when it fell, its nest destroyed by a troupe of marauding gulls, its parents driven off and apparently uninterested in returning to survey the destruction. She didn't expect it to live; baby birds seldom do. But she picked it up, put it inside her blouse, took it to her room at Guennie's and smeared Bacitracin on the wounds made by the gulls. She fed it a little bit of minced bologna, some artificial coffee creamer and a spoonful of clam chowder. It seemed to like the creamer and the chowder, so she fed it more, all the while expecting it to die at any moment. But cuddled against her breast, it lived through one night, then a second and a third. After a week, tiny feathers sprouted from its shoulders as its diet shifted to soft poached eggs and bits of halibut. Now, a month later, it tries to imitate her every action even to when she brushes her teeth. She's surprised by how well it does.

The last thing, she knows, that she needs is a baby bird, or for that matter, an adult bird. She isn't supposed to keep a raven, but what was she to do? just let it die? She could no more do that than let something happen to Peter, who will again be here in a couple of weeks. She hopes it goes even better this time than during his spring break—Bob escorted Peter up and back, and stayed with Peter so she never got to see him alone. But they talked, Bob and her. He was impressed with Jacob; so she felt it necessary to show him the hats and visors. When she did, she laid out her plans for a museum, what Jacob won't be happy seeing, but what she knows for certain is best for the hats. Bob seemed supportive, even enthusiastic about the plan. And they have talked since. A couple of times. Actually, more than that. And she wonders why it is so much easier for them to be friends when not married to each other. What got in the way of their friendship? It wasn't the sex, which was fine. His family? Perhaps, but only because of what they believe. That's it, she knows it is. Differing beliefs. She refuses to believe the story they believe. So it really comes down to a story. One

long story stands between them. How come it means so damn much?

She studies ancient *things* for their *thinginess*, their length, breadth, height, specific gravity. *Things* have substance; they are something. They don't lie although lies are told about them. They just exist. And that's all she asks of them. She'll make up her own stories about them, thank you. She doesn't need to accept someone else's stories on faith.

That brings her to the present: having heard about last night's killer whale attack, she sits in her room, the raven on her lap. It's almost as large as a pigeon, meaning that its mute has become a problem; she keeps a towel between it and her jeans.

The stories about what happened last night exude an aura of the fantastic. A killer whale on 1st Street? She hardly thinks so. The next thing she expects to hear is that Ivan Chickenof's spirit helper stalks the streets of Port Adams. How can any sane person believe such nonsense? She suspects being drunk helps. Two of the fishermen who were in Guennie's when she went down for breakfast were already tipsy at six-thirty; they had been drinking since they left the Harbormaster, been drinking since midnight. That's hardcore. And makes for being such reliable witnesses. But they will be whom the fishermen of Port Adams believe. What makes people so gullible?

Her little friend—she pats the raven—knows what it's like to be gulled.

When Little Mary told her that Samuel Golovin shipped a package to a New York art dealer, she did a little gulling of her own even though the plans for her museum aren't finalized, nor has all of the funding been secured. She talked to the old grocer, assured him that Jacob's old pieces would be in the museum, and on the strength of that assurance, she secured the display of his things for a small percentage of the museum's gross. She just hopes that no one else asks for the same deal.

She talked to Ol' Man Yachmeneff yesterday. Actually, she addressed a clan gathering, meaning that nothing was decided.

It'll be weeks before everyone finishes having his or her say. But she is hopeful that the family will also agree to display their old things once she gets the museum operating.

Her problem is what to think about Bob: he called again last night, late, after Peter was in bed. Said when he brought Peter up that he would also be interviewing for a folklorist position at University of Alaska Fairbanks. She congratulated him for being in the running for the position; she suspects he'll get it. His qualifications are impressive (if the search committee doesn't object to most of his degrees being from Mormon schools).

She hears the ugliness of her thought. Can she set her bias aside for Peter's sake, or should she have to? She closes her eyes as she strokes the raven. Her mind drifts, her thoughts float like scud. Not much consciousness. Just vacant meditation. For the moment she enjoys being just a *thing*.

-4-

A rooster crows, then another though it's hours before dawn, the light in their chickenhouses deceiving them into believing a lie, while Southern Pacific's three a.m. express blows its airhorn as it approaches rural crossroads. Bob Anderson listens as he lies awake, the train whistle long and fading as time becomes distance. Perhaps that is what they needed, distance away from each other. Or away from his mother.

How much compromising can he do, or should he do? Any? If his position is correct, then any compromise is an acceptance of error. A dogmatic and uncompromising position, just what Her Majesty accused him of being. Well, he is guilty as charged. The only thing that bothers him is what Jacob said about *Nephi* being told with a wrong spirit. He went back and read the accounts of Saul being delivered into the hand of David. The difference is that Saul was the Lord's annointed; Nephi's slaying of Laban is a different story. Laban was standing in the Lord's way whereas the Lord was still working with Saul. But he can see how Jacob might find a

different spirit telling the two stories. It does seem that way. But when the Church was restored, the Lord's spirit rested just on that restoration. That's what he was taught and what he believes. So why doesn't that end his questions? Why are Jacob and others like him troubling? Why does he find himself wanting to accept them as Believers when they are not part of the restored Church? Why is he lying awake in the middle of the night, alone in a double bed, wondering about salvation as if by his many thoughts he can somehow fashion the singular experience of accepting Christ as personal savior into a community project?

Because he was married to an unBeliever he is free to remarry, but is that best for Peter, who is uncontainably excited about again seeing his mother? The answer is contained within the question; the truth is he hasn't wanted that answer. He has wanted, what? he knows but is unwilling to even confess his wants to himself. What chance did Her Majesty have in becoming that vague white goddess? Not much. He really never gave her a chance, never gave her space for mistakes, and is that how Christ treats the Church? Not even a revelation of what he wants. In treating her as a Gentile, he has acted like a Gentile himself. Now it's probably too late to try again. So he listens as another train passes by, its whistle loud and long as it crosses side roads in the night, each road leading to farms and fields and tabernacles of faith, snuggled together for another hour or so before morning chores begin the world anew.

He should get up and study. Roosters are awake. But he knows of nothing in particular he wants he study . . . so he should read for inspiration, but by reading he further convicts himself of failing to measure up as a father, a husband, a disciple. For petesake, he's a university professor with two graduate degrees and post graduate work. What more is expected of him?

He stares at the ceiling, thinking that this night after night of solitary thoughts with virtually no human interaction borders on the absurd. His life has become a framed portrait, mimetic and grotesque. He is a caricature of a Christian, and it is his belief that stands between Peter and Her Majesty. If he can't get it right, then

maybe he ought to get out of the way. Maybe he ought to accept that Fairbanks posting. The job is his if he claims it by tomorrow afternoon. He interviewed in March; he just didn't want to tell Her Majesty. It was easier to say something that wasn't quite true. Everything is easier than doing what he knows to do. And it is that weakness in himself that he actually loathes. How can he be a faithful Believer and still hate himself? Where does that hate come from? Certainly not from the Lord. And why is he the only one who wrestles with it? If there are others, they hide it much better than he can.

He won't get up; he's too likely to awaken Peter or his mother. No, he'll just lie here listening to the crowing and the passing trains. He'll lie here with a decision he has delayed making until the last day. He'll lie here wide awake, wondering about himself, worrying about Peter.

-5-

Peggy sits at her keyboard, her screen blank, her notes about the killer whale attack in front of her. Unfortunately, Roger wasn't able to get a picture of the orca. Evidently it disappeared before dawn—he patrolled the channel from daybreak on. So all she has are vague eyewitness accounts and the troopers' report, which they promised to release this afternoon. The story should be a lead, but without photos and with no more to write about than she presently has, the story won't run past three column inches. That irritates her, her inability to make a newsworthy story into news.

"You want to go to lunch," John says as he opens her office door. "I've eaten so many of Sis's doughnuts, I need some real food. And I have Uncle Ivan in tow. Thought you might want to talk to him about last night's excitement."

She doesn't immediately answer. Not because she doesn't want to interview Ivan Chickenof, but because of how John has set about to win the two lawsuits for his dad, who wouldn't approve of his

son's tactics, nor does she approve of them. Actually, she feels betrayed by him.

"What's the matter?" Taking the chair across from her desk, John sits, his long legs crossed and his dark hair lying loosely on his shoulders.

She turns so she doesn't have to look at him as she begins to rummage through papers atop her desk, looking for nothing but not knowing what else to do.

"You can stop anytime."

"I can't talk right now. I have work I have to get out, a story I have to write." She wishes someone would call or stop by with an ad right now or anything. Now isn't the time to confront her doubts about marriage and morality.

"That's not really true. For some reason you are angry at me, and I have no clue as to what I have done . . . or failed to do . . . so you don't want to talk." He tells himself that he's making a mistake in not taking her cue and leaving, but he knows the thought is a lie. That much insight remains from last night. Everything else has become blurry with a little sunshine on it.

"We don't have anything to say to each other. I'll talk to your uncle this afternoon. Where can I find him then?"

"Where he is now. In the parking lot, waiting for me to bring you out." A stirring of anger pushes, as if it were wind blowing against an empty line spool, forward the idea of returning immediately to Juneau where, yes, he can cast another twenty-five little gold fish, engrave them, then melt them back down, his art of persuasion displayed only for himself in downtown bars where another run of legislative aides and interns mill about like sockeyes in river eddies. "If I were to hazard a guess, I'd say you don't like my using your printing press."

"It's not the press, it's the tactics you use. . . . Your father would be ashamed of what you're doing. He's cut from better cloth."

"I don't have his faith that God will intervene so I have to make things happen. My conscience is clear. . . . Besides, Dad left

me to win both cases. If he wanted to invoke God, he could've stayed in town. He left so he couldn't be deposed."

"I know your conscience is clear. That's what I find most troubling." She looks at the papers atop her desk as she listens to the wind and rain, the spruce boughs creaking as aging joints do, the salmonberry cane rattling like snakes she has never seen.

"Of whom have I taken advantage? After boat costs are deducted, every family of a crew member will get as much as Dad does when Portland settles. That's fair, don't you think?"

"I suppose, but—"

"But nothing. A settlement is either fair or it isn't."

"It's how you got it that's impo—"

"The *how* is not important."

"No, no, not true. . . . What's important about money? Will that bring life back? No, right? So why are dollars a gauge for whether a settlement is fair? Doing what's right all the time is what matters. I would've hoped your dad would have taught you that." Hard rain suddenly pelts the windows of the newspaper's office as a dark cloud passes over the island. The rain slides down the side of the building and flows under the rhodies that Peggy worked so hard keeping alive last winter, then over the bleeding hearts still asleep under cold bark mulch. Water runs across the gray parking lot, then downhill under the single heavy gray cloud all the way to the now-gray bay, where gray seiners without radar reflectors in the rigging await another gray day when they can fish just a little inside markers for gray salmon. On the radio is a discussion of Impeachment in which gray statements about what is sex and what are campaign contributions shrivel like heat-shrink tape under camera lights until black becomes white and the telling of a lie the position of courage. She used to be that way, gray. But not anymore. She now expects better of herself and of John.

"Dad's been gone three months. Think he will return?"

"Your uncle insists he will if we just leave him be, but I don't know. We might be making a mistake in not having the police look for him." She was willing to let Jacob—he almost seems like

her father—grieve alone, but that was last month. Lots could have happened to him since then. He isn't a young man, and what has he been doing for money, that yuck word. She can't seem to get away from it.

"He's probably running around like a knight errant, a Don Quixote out to right wrongs. You're right about him, he is cut from different cloth." John still isn't sure how he should handle what his uncle said about his dad's activities. "Dad is trying to get in touch with Barbara Roth, a legal no-no."

"How do you know? . . . I think he is probably too embarrassed by what you and Alvin have been doing to show up here."

"Let me tell you a story about Dad. He was over at Kodiak one winter, the year San Francisco won their first Super Bowl, that weekend, when he saw an eagle on the ice of Lake Rose Tead there out at Pasagshak Bay. The eagle had caught a big Dolly Varden from an open lead in the lake, and had gotten its tail wet. And its tail feathers had frozen to the ice of the lake. That eagle couldn't fly, couldn't move much. It was keeping ahold of the Dolly with one talon and trying to balance on the other while two ravens were flying in and pecking at its breast, pulling feathers out and drawing a little blood each time, enough blood that the ice was red. The eagle was in serious trouble. Those ravens were intent upon killing that eagle.

"I wanted to go out on the ice and chase those ravens away, but Dad said the ice was too thin, not safe. Then he took out his .30-06. I expected him to shoot those two ravens, or maybe the ice and bust it up. Instead, he shot the eagle.

"I didn't say anything, and neither did he. . . . After a minute or so, he rolled up his window, and we kept on going out to Burton's ranch where he bought a couple of cows that we butchered and split between four families. Mom never knew about those two cows. She would have been mad at him if she knew he had given away all of that beef without keeping any for us. He said we didn't need any, we had enough salmon." John turns to look out the window as the cloud passes on, leaving a blue sky and on swollen

twigs, small globes bright as morning stars, each gilled by buds or blossoms.

“What’s the point of the story, that your dad stopped an eagle from further suffering?” Peggy stops messing with the papers on her desk.

“He broke the law and could have gotten himself in real trouble. He did what he thought was right even if no one agreed with him. Hell, it was controversial then to shoot an eagle. That’s why he never told anyone. This was a couple of decades after the bounty on eagles had been done away with so he had no right to shoot it.”

“He probably shouldn’t have—and I wouldn’t go around telling that story if I were you. That’s killing the symbol of this country. That won’t make him many friends.” She hears another sudden slamming of rain against the windows, and involuntarily, she looks out the window. “Alvin seemed like a nice enough guy when he came. But you have manipulated him into perjuring himself while elevating perjury so high that it almost seems as noble as evangelical preaching. I wouldn’t have believed that of you if I hadn’t been party to it, and for that I’m sorry.”

“You’re telling me, maybe not yet in words, that you aren’t going to lunch with me because of how I will win these two cases.” He still doesn’t know why his dad shot that eagle when his dad could have busted up the ice with a couple of shots. It was like, for a moment, his dad was his Uncle Ivan. Maybe he will ask why if he ever sees his dad again.

“You’re just like every other lawy—”

“No. I have a heart, and maybe even a conscience if I can remember where I put it after I passed the bar exam. Look, I fight to win. If that means I don’t fight fair, then that’s the way it is. When someone convinces me that there is virtue in losing, then maybe I will believe like Dad does. It isn’t his virtue that will win this case. It’s that little printing press you have in your warehouse.”

“Is winning that important?”

“In Dad’s case it will make the difference between him starting over with another boat and a few dollars or whether he joins Heidi-Marie washing dishes.”

“And you don’t think he would want to wash dishes?”

“Why should he have to?” John now glances at the windows as the second cloud passes on, again leaving bright skies.

“John, I do like you, and over the past months, I have come to look forward to spending time with you. But—”

He raises his hand to stop her: “You want me to go back to Juneau. Maybe I have been away too long.”

“Go over there and swim around in that cesspool and see if you can’t find your conscience. Maybe you’ll bump into it, impregnate it with your zeal for winning. If you do, call me. I’ll be here.”

“You need to talk to Uncle Ivan, and you need to get away from here. Everybody I know, Alvin being the exception, is sitting around feeling sorry for themselves. Sis, Beth, Cathy, Heidi, Samuel, Paul, even Edwards, yourself, I have never seen such hanging lips as the people here on the island have. It’s like all of you live in last night’s twilight. And the worst part is I was thinking about moving back.”

“Don’t think about it on my account.” Peggy wishes she could have this whole conversation back, wishes it hadn’t taken place. Today, obviously, wasn’t a good time to bring up the subject of legal ethics or moral codes. But she means every word she has said so she isn’t taking any of it back. There are principles involved. She ignored differing mores in her first marriage for as long as she could; thank god for condoms! She doesn’t intend to let hormones and hastiness ruin her second chance. So at the moment, a relationship between them is impossible. Time and distance and competing interests are against their getting together. “I was serious about what I said concerning how you win cases. You see nothing wrong with meandering back and forth across morality. The end justifies the transgressions along the way. But not with me, not with me.”

“I think you’re making a mistake.”

“So do I.” She looks directly into his eyes. “So do I, but I’d rather err by staying on my side of the fence.” She smiles almost

unwillingly. "When I accepted your dad's trust, I also accepted his way of doing things. You know what that way is."

John nods. "I do . . . and it worked for a long time for him, but not in the end. My way is what will win these cases."

Almost as if seeing him for the first time, she now clearly understands why Mary worried about her getting together with John. His sister has him sized up perfectly. Someday their getting together might happen, but certainly not now. They're not compatible.

Besides, she hasn't considered leaving Port Adams or the newspaper. Logistical problems really prevent a relationship: his business is in Juneau, not someplace a person can't get to from here. One of them would have to give up a business. And how much does the paper mean to her? Almost everything.

She looks through the window and sees a raven perched on a spruce bough, swaying in the wind. That particular raven talks to her on these spring mornings. She doesn't know what it says although she's sure the subject is of considerable importance.

"Peggy, you have to eat and I'm buying. Let's leave this whole subject up in the air for now."

"I like it here, John. I doubt I'll ever leave."

"Peggy, I ah," his words are gone. This doesn't happen often. Words, speech, stories are what he forges and smiths into legal victories. He hammers them, peens them, stretches them, twists them, all the while sculpting possibility, probability, doubt, each with a final of his own composition. He has never been limited to the old stories like his dad is. Words for his dad have restrictive markers, meaning they can't be tampered with. But now he is without the words he needs to say that he wants her with him. He can't say, I love you. He has used those words so many times, has formed them into so many things that they are laden with slag, brittle and weak. They won't take another forging. And he feels, because he lacks the necessary words to utter, the reason why his dad has always condemned his lovelife.

Out the window he sees the small white cloud passing over the bay has a dark bottom as if it has a black sole, the cloud a slipper fragile as Cinderella's.

"You're right, I am hungry . . . and maybe I want to leave this hanging to see what you will do." She stands, wonders if she'll need her coat, decides she won't, and one last time, straightens the papers on her desk. "Will Alvin go to Juneau with you?"

"Not right away, but eventually, I imagine. Guess I'm in the business of collecting retreads. Randy does good work for me. So will Alvin if he wants to go. I will have to take on enough insurance cases for him to feel useful until he gets up to speed in other areas. He's smart enough."

"What about right away?"

"Uncle Ivan got cut pretty bad. I thought Alvin might be able to help him."

"John, don't do that to either of them. When you and he are finished with your press project, have him come up and see me. He'll make a much better reporter than poacher."

"He's only a poacher if he gets caught inside the markers."

She smiles as she shakes her head: "I don't know about you. I'm sure Tom Matthews uses the word differently."

-6-

Things just happen to him, and this latest thing is only an example: John hired his former secretary, Kathy Johnson, to manage the two cases of John's father. John then moved her onto the island without consulting him, without asking if he could still work with her, without anything other than a sack of doughnuts and the offhand instruction that John expected him to meet with her this morning, in about ten minutes to be exact.

What's he supposed to say to her? When he fired her to appease Sharon, he ruined her financially. He offered to help, but she refused to even talk to him. Then he couldn't even help himself—Sharon divorced him anyway and sicced her attack attorneys on him, but

he'll have the last laugh when it comes to them. He and John still need just the one signature, that of Mark Edwards Roth, before they can close the lid on that box of iceworms Sharon opened with his office shredder. He can't wait to see the expression on their faces when they realize an extra digit has been added here and there to all five boat policies. If any copies of the original policies exist, Armstrong & Armstrong will produce them, their teeth still dripping his blood, when they examine the documents they have requested and about which a hearing has been scheduled for October 5th, so jammed up is the district court calender. Their trial date isn't until February 21st, 2000. Maybe the Y2K bug will sting everyone to death before then.

"Congratulations on the job," Kathy now stands across the gray steel desk from him. Her tone is neutral, her words—he is learning the lingo of language—have no *signifieds*. He has no job so her words have no meaning. Sure John has been paying him a few dollars, but he would do what he has been doing for nothing, that is how much he wants to get back at Sharon's attack dogs. Jobs have parameters, scheduled paydays, scheduled times to show up and go home. What he has been doing with John has none of those boundaries or obligations. He and John might be working together, but he certainly wouldn't identify their relationship as that of employer and employee.

He looks directly into her eyes: "I'm very sorry about what happened. I dono how—"

"You did what you thought was right, so just shutup about it. It's yesterday's tide. But if you would've asked me, I would've told you she intended to divorce you anyway. I knew she intended to, had known for more than two years." Kathy takes off her jacket, a pink flowered nylon windbreaker from, probably, the Kathy Lee Collection. "Is there another chair in here?"

Alvin glances around the warehouse as he realizes that John always sits on the corner of the desk. "I don't know, but if there

isn't, True Value Hardware is right across the street. We can charge whatever they have."

"Go over and get me something that's comfortable. We have a couple of cases to win, then Mr. Reporter, you're not going to get rid of me so easily."

"What is this about Mr. Reporter?" He's afraid to ask her about what else she said.

"Your job with the newspaper—"

"What job?"

Puzzled, Kathy says, "John told me that Peggy intended to hire you as a reporter. I don't imagine the pay will be much, but John said a house on some place called Russian Hill went with the job. He was going to move me in there, but I ah, said," her words, if spoken, are too soft for him to hear.

He wants to protest, to stand up and holler that he can decide his own fate. But what, really, will he protest? He wouldn't have contacted Kathy on his own, no matter how much he wanted to. He likes it here on the island; it's *Kodiak Lite*. Yesterday, he even caught a jack king salmon casting a green Pixie spoon off the boatyard's breakwater. Previously, he caught many sea bass. They have sort of become the staple of his diet as he saved the money John has given him. He needs a skiff to get around. He might even take up deer hunting—Beth's husband gave him a couple of frozen packages of backstrap, and he probably hasn't ever eaten finer meat. So while he wants to protest, all he can object to is being born someone to whom things happen.

"Where are you staying now?"

"With Mary Chickenof. She insisted it was okay, but I feel like I'm imposing."

"I'll be a little longer than just going across the street." Alvin stands and offers Kathy his chair: "It isn't very comfortable, but it's off the floor. And the right hand drawers," he indicates the drawers of the desk, "hold the files of our case against Portland Casualty. Look them over. See what I have missed, what's missing. You know what to look for. This is almost like the office over at Kodiak."

“Even to the smell of the bay. It’s good to be back on the ocean. I missed hearing the whistler. Kids missed popping kelp bladders, missed the starfish, even the rain.”

“How are your daughters?”

“They’ve grown. Now go on, do whatever you’re going to. I have work to do. This is, for me, a job. And I want to get back at those SOB’s as much as you do, SOB standing for Sharon’s—”

“You don’t have to explain. I’m just real sorry about what I put you through.”

“All of us are tougher than we think.” Kathy examines the metal chair that looks like military surplus. “So things were a little rough for awhile. We handled it. Did what was necessary. I’m just hoping that it’s behind us, hope that the kids can settle into a school without gangs or gangbanger wannabes.”

“Mary Chickenof told me on the island here there are two categories of families, ones that know Father Gregory and ones that don’t. I’ll introduce you to him this evening.”

“Are you going to stand there all day and talk? Go on, get. I’ll be fine until you get back.” She opens the top drawer and cautiously lifts a handful of typed and printed papers. “You never could file your paperwork without help.”

He steps onto the cracked sidewalk, a concrete remnant of wartime construction. Although it has been a week since the killer whale attack, the furor the attack caused has, if anything, intensified. Green Peace observers from Seattle flew in two days ago to make sure there wasn’t any indiscriminate killing of orcas. NOAA sent in an investigative team as has Fish and Wildlife. He can still see where the body was lying in the Harbormaster’s parking lot. Nobody has thought to hose off the asphalt. It usually rains enough that nature takes care of cleanup, but they’ve only had the one day of showers since the incident, which neither John nor Ivan Chickenof will talk about.

He was a little concerned about standing on the boatyard’s breakwater and casting for cruising salmon, but John insisted he had nothing to worry about, even offered to go down with him, an

offer he obviously declined. Still, he felt a little queasy standing on the riprap, looking like a big seal.

There goes two of the Green Peace team right now, motoring down the channel in a red inflatable, looking as out of place as a Christmas tree ornament hung on a candelabra. How, he wonders, would he report their mission here? If he becomes a reporter, that is something with which he'll have to wrestle. The organization's missions are forms of counterculture terrorism. Can he say that? Can he tell the truth as he sees it, or will he be expected to tow the liberal media's partyline. He wishes he was a better writer. Maybe then he could hide what he really wants to say within a lot of other words.

John had his pickup brought over from Kodiak so he can get around even if he can't make its payments. Someday he expects a representative from GMAC to show up; eventually the lender will figure out where he went when he left Kodiak. Sharon will tell them. He knows she will. If he weren't upsidedown in the truck, he'd try to catch up its payments. Right now, he needs to renegotiate the loan. Maybe he can do that if he has a regular job—contacting the lender today would just lose him the truck before the weekend. Besides, he needs John to contact them from Juneau. Confuse them as to his whereabouts for a little longer. He likes the way John works. A regular David facing down Goliath. The other side has no idea of what they are up against until they get a rock in the forehead. His job is to keep the stones coming. John's the real thing, a lefthanded slinger with uncanny aim. And he really ought to thank John for bringing Kathy over.

Tears form in the corner of his eyes, tears that hang but don't fall, tears that blur his vision but don't stop him from seeing more clearly than he ever has. He knows what he has to do, and he feels the reluctance to proceed for fear he might be misreading why Kathy came to Port Adams, but he decides he can't be like the President, guilty of overanalyzing a situation until he's paralyzed. He has to be more like Jacob and John, has to confront Peggy about this supposed job and house.

“Yes,” Peggy says, “I told John I was interested in trying you out as a reporter.” She looks up from her computer. “The job also entails selling advertisement to the various businesses. That’s the down side of it, but you have selling experience. And you’ll get to know all of the businesses. It won’t be like selling cold. It’ll be more a matter of getting the different businesses to do what they know they need to do. Does that make sense?” She saves, then turns her chair so she can see out the window where the raven that talks to her waits on a spruce bough. “There will be a house that goes with the job, my old place on Russian Hill. I’m buying Jacob’s house. Jack Edwards is loaning me the down. I could use you to look over the insurance policies. I’d ask John, but you probably know more about what I need than he does.”

He doesn’t know what he should do next. Does he just stand here and wait for her to finish? He knows she has more on her mind; he can see that she does. Or should he ask about salary, benefits, both questions seeming inappropriate?

“How long before you and John are done with your printing project? You can go to work for me as soon as you’re done. I just don’t want anything to do with what you two are now doing.”

“I understand, it might come back on the newspaper.” He collects his thoughts as if they were salmon fry scattered by the shadow of a seal. “I can be done today since John hired my former secretary, Kathy Johnson.”

“The house won’t be available for a week. Maybe I can put you to work in the morning moving stuff, you have a fullsize pickup.” She wishes she could speak *ravenese* so she knew what is said every morning. How much thought goes on in that brain the size of her little finger tip? How much more should go on in hers? Looking at the raven sitting there, she doesn’t feel like she uses much of her potential. There is so much more to her brain than to that raven’s that in the differential of brainmass alone, she doesn’t perform as she should. It’s like there’s a block on her brain that prevents her from accessing her potential. “Oh, one more thing, John and I had

a fight. Don't tell him I'm buying his dad's house. It'll just cause more misunderstanding."

Again, he isn't sure what to say. He's flattered she would ask him to examine policies, but that is his area of expertise. But John said nothing about having a fight with her. They are, he believes, a well matched couple, John being one of Alaska's most eligible bachelors according to some Outside woman's magazine—he saw the layout, but was embarrassed to be reading the magazine so he didn't pay attention to its title—and Peggy having the ties John needs to his family and roots. They will, like so many young professional couples, have to work out the details of where they will live, who commutes where, etc., but he can't imagine them not getting together eventually.

"Aren't you going to ask what I will pay you? I suspect you will have a family to support before—"

"My next stop is Father Gregory."

"You're not Orthodox so he won't marry you in the Church, but he will perform what he calls a civil ceremony at your house, or anywhere not too public."

"He will?"

"You'll have to get your license, then, yeah. Give him a week's notice. He'll want to counsel the two of you at least once, civil ceremony or not. And he'll be pretty tough on the two of you, which is why there are so many shackups in town."

His marrying Kathy seems a foregone conclusion, not that he objects. He just wishes somebody would let him make a decision about his life. It's probably already been predetermined whether he'll spend eternity in heaven or hell. If he's lucky, he won't get stuck half way between.

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His arm itches, itches fierce, itches like mosquitoes are trapped under the bandage. He rubs the outside of the bandage real easy as he watches cormorants sway like hula dancers on the black can

marking the channel where it rounds the breakwater for the small boat harbor. He wishes Yatee would answer his brother, who continues to sing their relative's song. He knows she hears the song, just knows, like he knows his arm is healing and that he should be setting his seine in Frost Bay . . . Frosty Lake has a little run of reds that doesn't get set-on much. Most everybody thinks the run was wiped out when the rock slide blocked the river, and it nearly was. His dad was just a little guy then, no bigger than John was when Yatee left. Gold miners blew off more of Mt. Malina than they intended just like his brother said more to Yatee than he intended. They couldn't put those rocks back on the mountain; all they could do was blow a little channel through them. The slide left a big waterfalls. Reds couldn't get back to spawn. Pretty quick, no more run.

But a few fish found some good gravel and calm water in the pool under the falls. They kept coming back, year after year. Just a few fish. Not enough that anybody noticed. Then when the Good Friday earthquake happened, the river, it stand up like a man and clear away all those rocks. Now the fish get back into the lake okay, but nobody come see what the river do. He did, he looked, but only his brother knew what he saw. The lake, her spirit was again alive. She was mother to a run.

That's where he should be, Frost Bay, not here in town. But he needs help picking fish. Needs a skiff man. He sets with two skiffs. He can't do much with one good arm but run his anchor skiff. This other arm, it just itches.

John bought the Bristol Bay gillnetter so he can stay on it, no problem now. His nephew, he starting to be like his brother, Jacob. Help people like in old days.

His brother, Jacob, sings real loud. All of the spirit men can hear his brother's singing their relative's song. They are afraid. None of them will stand against his brother, ever. None believe his brother is really Christian, not any more.

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Heidi-Marie wonders if Jacob Chickenof will undo her plan for a cultural museum before that plan, like the brown color on a chicken egg, dries fast. If she can get the museum started, get pieces in the museum, get it open to the public for even one day, then her museum, like that color on a brown egg, will seem like it always existed. The public doesn't know the difference between a white egg and a brown egg is the presence of a dye gland in a hen's butt; they won't know the difference between their seeing the cultural artifacts of Cook's Island and not is her breaking an implied trust with Jacob Chickenof. She feels like an ass, but she knows what she plans is best for everyone. She wishes, though, she didn't have to behave like last century's missionaries. But there is no other way. The artifacts must be preserved. Their health is more important than cultural taboos that are actually harmful to the preservation of the culture.

Considering herself very lucky—*the crab bank's* new building will be completed almost a month ahead of schedule, just a sign that shows how right her museum plan is—Heidi-Marie accepted the offer of their old downtown building there across from *the bear bank*, an identifying designation she wouldn't want if she were a banker. For that matter, she wouldn't want to be known as *the crab bank* either. The names are for their displays, a standing mount of a brown bear and a wall panel of lacquered red, blue, brown and golden king crabs; she knows that. Still, she would do something about both images if she were a branch manager.

The crab bank's new building is between the newspaper and the radio station, and she hopes the bank is very successful that far up the hill from the small boat harbor. Her concern, though, is this museum project, which will require her summers be spent here in Port Adams where not much happens except that it rains a lot. Ever so often a boat is lost, and now that she knows some of the families their tragedies become hers. But the island is, for practical purposes, the end of the world, and a quiet end at that.

Hardly a whimper. She has met several fishermen who would put her in a wheelhouse watching their radar screen if that was what she wanted. A couple of them have even asked if she wanted to cook for them. But each time when she added up the number of bunks aboard the boat, then subtracted the number of crewmembers, she came up with herself in someone else's bunk. That doesn't work for her.

But once the museum closes for the season, she would be almost free to go anywhere. The really valuable pieces would be secured in the former bank's vault. Someone would check on the rest of the stuff when heat and lights are checked each day, and she has already asked different family members of her potential donors to stop in weekly. If she gets donations from five families, somebody would be stopping in every day. She wants them to feel like the pieces still belong to the families. She truly wants what she knows is best for both the pieces and the Aleut culture.

After all, Jacob did give his hats to his three daughters who live on the island here. The hats are technically theirs, and they can do with them what they think best for them. She realizes, boy does she, that she has broken his implied trust, but when she learned that Samuel Golovin, Uncle Sam to the younger generations of Port Adams, shipped something to a New York art collector, she went to him and asked if he would be interested in putting his things on display and charging admission for the public to see them. If there is one thing she has learned about Samuel Golovin that one thing would be he doesn't miss a chance to make money. With his backing and vested interest, the museum can't help being successful. Now, all of the ingredients to make her museum (well, actually, it's their museum) successful have come together. The word is out. She heard the museum discussed in Guennie's last night, and the best part was nobody badmouthed it.

With Uncle Sam's pieces and with Jacob's hats, enough pieces have been promised for the museum to open with a fine collection, which the University of Washington will underwrite. Five years of operating expenses for permission to study the collection and the

culture—she sent University of Washington’s Burke Museum photos of Jacob’s Whale Hat with her tape of him telling the story. They were excited. In fact, two summer internships were offered so she will have some trained help cataloging the collection and building sealed display boxes that will preserve the paint pigments from further oxidation and the wood from further deterioration. So, yes, the museum seems like a violation of trust, but it will be for the good of the pieces. The culture has changed. Even Jacob’s daughters don’t value the old things. They didn’t even know their parents had them. They would have, as kids, played with them if they would have known.

It is this other thing, though, that really troubles her. When Bob was up over spring break, he suggested they try getting together again. She misses Peter, and he, her.

Peter will be here in an hour. She should get ready to meet the plane. She had the cook at Guennie’s bake cookies last night, which both customers and staff liked. They suggested cookies become a Monday night regular feature, but the cook wasn’t so sure.

At the moment all she has for Peter is a sack of oatmeal cookies made from Bob’s favorite recipe. Bob is likely to think they are for him . . . won’t their old problems still be there, hers and Bob’s? Won’t their fights still be about one micron of disagreement under the surface. She is not about to concede that Joseph Smith talked to an angel, or even that angels exist. Despite her best efforts, she never has met a demon or a spirit helper or anything else that might be classified as paranormal. Jacob was her best hope to meet one, but he took off and she hasn’t heard from him since although she sometimes thinks the raven that hangs around Mary’s house has some connection to him, but not really. Such an idea, she knows, can be ascribed to her fantasies.

Peter will like meeting Molly, her raven (its name will be Molly regardless of whether it’s male or female). She wonders what Bob will think.

She loves her son, and he needs her. If for no other reason than what’s best for Peter, she will get back together with Bob: their

relationship needs a lot of mending and some structural rethinking. Has she been dishonest about what she taught? She doesn't think so, but she can see how he might. They will never agree on some subjects, but how important are those subjects, really? More important than Peter's well-being. Not really. Well, they are important. But, she doesn't know . . . what has to end is her and Bob's fighting.

When Bob was up in March, he told her what he said to Jacob about him marrying her. The idea shocked her. She hadn't thought about the possibility, really. She imagines Jacob could have if he would've pursued the prospect, then. But thankfully, he was savvy enough not to have.

So in a little over six months, where is she? Certainly no closer to a spiritual experience than she was before. She's still washing dishes, but she has a museum past the planning stage. Peter came up for his spring break, and should be over the Gulf now. Bob was with him in March. Allegedly, Bob's returning because he claims to have found Ogam in cave petroglyphs across Iskai Bay, but then, he claims he finds Ogam wherever he goes. Just because aboriginal artists didn't paint realistic deer antlers doesn't mean those antlers can be read as text. She just hopes he doesn't tell anyone what he claims to have found; he'll be laughed out of his profession. Except in Utah. Maybe Alaska.

Doesn't seem like an hour has passed—the plane is late, again. Actually, it's late so often Alaska Airlines probably doesn't even acknowledge flying out here when they figure their on-time flight percentages. But she sees people hurrying around to get ready for a landing so the plane's arrival must be close.

“Hello there. Jack said I could find you out here.”

Heidi-Marie turns to see John Chichikov standing a step behind her and a little to her right: “Are you headed back to Juneau?” John had his assistant in Juneau prepare the museum's tax-exempt filings, gratis. She could never have afforded an attorney otherwise.

“No, I’m actually here to invite you and your ex to Alvin’s wedding this evening. Sis’s place. Seven-thirty. And there’ll be plenty of food so come hungry.”

Standing there, tall, his dark hair on his shoulders, exuding confidence, his facial features more refined than she would have expected on an Aleut, she sees why John is considered one of Alaska’s most eligible bachelors. “You came all the way out her to tell me that?”

“And to speak to your ex. Uncle Ivan needs help fishing and your ex collects stories. I think I can broker a deal. You ex will even make a few dollars in the exchange.”

“What about Peter?” She is horrified at the prospect of Peter falling out of a skiff, or getting caught in a line, or cutting himself (all of the fishermen carry knives to cut lines, even the kids).

“You don’t think you could care for him by yourself for a couple of weeks?”

She feels her jaw sag a little as her cheek muscles slouch. She stares at him, happy, surprised, fearful that Bob might dash her hopes . . . this is the type of thing she has heard about Jacob doing, making little things happen and acting innocent as can be about what he does. Her eyes are wet, her vision blurry. She wants to thank him, but she has no words.

“There’s the plane,” John says, pointing at a speck emerging from clouds. “One of its pilots has an eagle photograph that Kell Harder took—Kell used to be the staff photographer for the newspaper here. I want to see if he will sell the print so I’ll see you in awhile.”

The 737 roars as its deflectors deploy. Tires squeal. Gulls squawk as the plane rumbles from one end of the strip to the other where it spins in a quarter circle and comes to a stop. Then slowly, like an old man climbing out of bed, it turns another quarter circle. Its engines spool up as it gains a little speed, then more speed until it rolls, like a seagull on a tricycle, in front of the terminal where it brakes to a stop.

Heidi-Marie feels excitement mingled with apprehension, like honey and gall, which she wants to swallow but fears will poison

her relationship with Peter, her feelings a sweet syrup promising all things will be okay, but hiding, like flowery sentences written to mask superstition or beautify ignorance, an infection chilling her spirit; her feelings not considering her longterm mental health but rather the immediate stirring in her groin. And she wonders why does she do this, beat herself up this way, as if she can take something she read long ago and use it against herself, thereby holding herself to a standard higher than her surrounding culture, making cultural criticism a mockery of itself and her own profession, anthropology, the practice of old boy foolishness, perpetrated by the penetration of peer review. Damn it, she just did it again.

She has a choice, a decision that needs to be made before Bob descends the ramp and climbs the stairs into the terminal—when she arrived, there was a jetway. She wonders what happened to it, why it isn't being used. It at least kept passengers from getting wet, not that it is raining right now. Is it only used when it rains?

That's right, she doesn't want to make this decision about whether she can meet Bob somewhere other than halfway (she'd be happy to do that), that somewhere being where he is and how he intends to rear Peter. She can't stop him from doing anything he wants; he doesn't have to bring Peter here. She is powerless; she has no say in how her son will be reared. She thought this was what the Women's Movement was all about, empowering women, not about giving fathers additional parental rights. So what happened? Who hijacked the movement? Or was there ever a movement to begin with? Wasn't sexual liberation just another male plot to wipe out prostitution? men could get a little nooky and not have to pay for it. That's how it looks to her. She can't see where her sisters have benefited much. Now women can come home from working all day and still have to do the damn dishes.

Yes, she's angry. Why shouldn't she be? He has Peter, and she has Molly. He's under no obligation to her other than what he wants to make, and if she gets back together with him that situation won't change. Her choice is how badly does she want to be with her son. Enough to accept total surrender? And she has about

another minute to decide since passengers have started down the ramp.

One minute. Not much time to decide a person's fate.

Accepting surrender would be easy: he has already defeated her; he has that whole Utah court system on his side, all of the legal system being merely an extension of male dominance. Laws proscribe behaviors, proscribe penalties for violations of those behaviors, leaving little room for a free spirit or dissension or Bacchanalian revelry. She was hoping to—No, she doesn't want to go there. It wouldn't be good for Peter.

Peter pauses at the top of the ramp. He has grown—she can see that he has. Not being with him, she misses seeing the little every day things that he does, and she feels something akin to letting air out of a balloon. She feels a sudden loss of will to resist the patriarchal dominance that begins with a story about a rib. One story. Hardly believable. But possessing more power than she has, than all of her sisters together can muster, Euripides's play be damned.

Bob steps onto the ramp and starts down. Peter follows, almost skipping as he descends. Heidi-Marie feels her lingering tears slide part way down her cheeks, then stop as if blocked by seineleads, heartshaped sets sure to trap her, one to either side, the corkline of each appearing as innocent as a reversed carving on a birch trunk, the tree hardly damaged by the parings of a sharp knife that has already carved initials, her initials and Bob's, into its bark.

When they married, she never thought about losing herself. That wasn't supposed to happen, not now at the end of the 20th-Century. Two becomes one, the one being Peter. But the two should remain two, right? Wrong. And this is what she protests, this loss of herself. She wasn't going to be like her mother; yet here she is, about another twenty seconds from accepting her mother's decision. She wishes there were another way, oh how she wishes that. But every other way leaves her separated from Peter—and she means every other way. She has considered then all, even kidnapping her son, even sending Bob to his heaven where he can have whatever

woman he wants for a wife. The missionaries don't tell you that, do they? They don't tell you that as a woman, you are still property who will have to have your husband call you forth from the grave if you want into heaven. No thanks. An eternity of being someone's red heifer, sacrificed on an altar of male ego. She can do without that, thank you. Really, she can do without that. If there is a heaven, what happened to Christ or Yahweh or Allah that they need Bob to call her from the grave? She knows better than that.

"Mama," Peter runs towards her, hooking her with one arm and spinning half around her before hugging her waist. "Daddy said you would be waiting."

She struggles a little to pick him up and not crush the sack of cookies. Her arms around him, she squeezes him, not ever wanting to let go. Never. Never ever. And her tears flow freely onto his knit shirt, dark green with a tiny red fox embroidered above its pocket.

"Hello, Heidi. Here, for you." Bob extends towards her a single red rose bud in a transparent plastic sleeve. "How has your spring been?" He gently places his right hand on her shoulder, the bud still in his hand.

"Jacob's son, John, is somewhere in the airport. He wants to talk to you . . . so do I." She resumes nuzzling Peter's chest, so much larger now than just two months ago. Freedom has such a high price. Is it worth it? She doesn't think so. Not at the moment.

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Father Gregory sits his children, all of them, in a row along one wall of Mary's living room, each with instructions to remain seated until after the wedding cake is cut. They can then get in line for a piece, which he is sure will spoil their dinner, but perhaps they will snack on enough spiced meat, smoked fish, cheese, broccoli and carrots from the hors d'oeuvres table that the evening won't be a total nutritional bust.

He is always pleased when a couple chooses marriage over fornication, particularly when the couple has children who will

emulate their example. Alvin Winesap and Katherine Ann Johnson seem well suited to each other, both being mature enough to appreciate this, perhaps last, chance for martial happiness as the Lord intended. His desire is that both become Believers. But the will of the Heavenly Father being dominant in all things, their souls are at the moment of less concern to him than their example before the community. All things take time, even coming to the knowledge of our Lord's saving grace.

"Hello, Father," John says as he passes close to the priest. "We should be ready in another ten minutes. I guess there are problems with the dress. Sis and Peggy are with her."

"Have you heard from your father?"

"No, but he was in Evanston, Wyoming, a month or so ago. I guess he'll show when he's ready."

"I pray for him daily, as I do for you, my son." He knows some trouble prevents John from marrying and remaining on the island. "How are Jacob's cases going? I hope well."

"They need more prayers than I do."

"Not so. They are things without souls. You are infinitely more important. Don't sacrifice yourself for them. The people here will go on regardless of how they turn out."

"I don't intend to lose them."

"You won't. You can only lose yourself."

John knows where this conversation will go if he doesn't end it now: "Father, I don't buy saints and icons, incense, a prayer wheel. You're an educated man. How can you?"

"Come by my office and we will talk about what is important. True faith is visiting the fatherless and the widow, what your father always did. I have heard that you are beginning to follow in your father's footsteps. They are very large steps, but you are a very tall man. Come by. I must now get ready." He steps into what was Jacob's room, and he kneels. He will ask for the Holy Spirit to descend upon all who are gathered here this evening.

John watches the priest go as murmurs, like cross currents at the mouth of the Narrows, ebb and flow within the room, rolling

up walls, then sliding down to wash across the floor, including the older kids in discussions of fish and finances, the younger kids sharing a sack of cookies Heidi-Marie brought when she came with Peter, Bob Anderson and Uncle Ivan, the two men remaining outside discussing their departure for Frost Bay at dawn. John hopes they catch some fish; he's sure his uncle will. His worry is his uncle will expect too much from someone who has never been to sea, let alone handled a seine when setting on a thousand dollar school of reds or a ten thousand dollar school of chums.

The room buzzes. Anticipation has settled like dense fog, and that's what he thinks it is, fog, fog so thick neither of them can see what's ahead of them which is perhaps a good thing.

Peggy enters the living room first. She glances around, then asks, "Are we ready?"

John suddenly finds that fog blurring his vision: he wishes he could convince Peggy to come to Juneau with him. But that will never happen. She belongs here, like the spotted Kamchata orchids that grow on Mount Iskai—he heard someone found one on Kodiak. Maybe in time, she, too, could adapt to somewhere else. But for now, a relationship with her is only possible if he returns to the island, and he wonders what love is. Does it require that he set up practice here? Could he make enough to support himself, let alone a family? Well, it's his task to make things happen, but he can't see himself remaining on the island.

Heidi-Marie pokes her head into Jacob's room and says, "Father, I think she's ready."

Father Gregory rises and emerges into the murmurs and din, lights and excitement. He nods to John who steps into the kitchen where Alvin sits, his knees weak. "Let's go. I'm hungry so let's get this over with."

Alvin follows John across the living room. Then with Father Gregory facing the kitchen and with John standing to his outside shoulder, Alvin turns his head so he, too, can see into the kitchen. John has the ring, a simple silver band that he ought to be giving to Peggy. Love is hard; sex, easy. But it is love that gives meaning to

the sex (in Juneau, sex minus love awaits him as a new run of long-legged hooligan has already begun surfacing in waters chummed with summer internships).

Looking around his sister's living room, John realizes that on this last trip back to the island he crossed a figurative bar like those across river mouths where sand threatens to choke the flow, thereby piling up the seas, making crossing at even high tide risky. When he arrived here, he left behind the chummed estuaries and the safety of sheltered waters. So now on this side of that bar, where open seas should lie, he feels more at home than when in Juneau although he again feels motion sickness, the reason he didn't take up fishing like J or his dad or uncle or every fellow he went to school with. But he doesn't want to take the beating necessary to return and recross that bar, behind which lies a bay-full of tension. Awaiting his return to Juneau and to long-legged hooligan and to being one of Alaska's most eligible bachelors is success determined by the number of corporate scalps he takes, that number ever growing, each scalp hung from a counting stick that establishes his fees. What he needs is to put in at another port, one with a deep water dock, a safe harbor; one at which he can take root and grow. That is neither here, nor Juneau.

An aisle of sorts is formed down the center of the living room. Kathy's youngest daughter, with a bouquet of three local orchids (maroon with small black spots) and in a lacy white dress, starts down the aisle as a tape recorder begins playing a cassette of *Here Comes The Bride*. John looks out the window where the evening remains as bright as the afternoon, the sun still high in the sky. Twilight won't come until eleven; it'll be light again by three-thirty. He suspects Uncle Ivan will want to clear the boat harbor by four, which means a short night for Bob Anderson.

Kathy, following her daughter who has stopped across from Alvin, comes down the aisle by herself. No one gives her away. She said she wasn't beholding to anyone so she didn't need to be given away. Her dad had done that years ago, and her marriage hadn't turned out so good; this was her chance to make her own mistake,

and if she had to live with a mistake, she wanted it to be hers. Mary agreed as did Peggy even though Alvin thought Uncle Ivan should give her away. But she asked Alvin who he thought was getting married. He dropped the subject and spent the last couple of days getting Peggy's old house ready for them, which was a formidable task considering neither of them had moved any furniture onto the island.

Father Gregory asks everyone present to kneel, adding the caveat that the kids should remain sitting. His prayer rambles on for a few minutes and seems more evangelical than catholic. Bob and Uncle Ivan enter the kitchen and wait to close the door until the prayer is over.

After the prayer, the service is as short as if conducted by a village magistrate. The couple kiss, and turning her back to the room, Kathy throws her bouquet of orchids and dwarf fireweed over her head. It bounces off the ceiling, bounces straight down and hits Heidi-Marie in her hands. Startled, she drops it and Father Gregory's fifteen year old daughter picks it up and offers it to Heidi-Marie. "No, you keep it. It's yours."

Together, Kathy and Alvin cut the first slice of cake as Roger snaps his flash unit, nearly blinding John, who hadn't realized that every bit of the ceremony was being videotaped or photographed. But then, he should have expected as much.

A feeling of intense loneliness overtakes him as he takes a handful of nuts. John tries to dismiss the feeling—he takes a paper plate, cuts a generous wedge from the salmon ball, adds a couple of small pieces of hard smoked sockeye and three slices of caribou sausage from an old fellow in St. Peters, then adds cheese, white, yellow and with jalepenos. But he can't shake the wave of loneliness. When the evening's festivities are over, he will curl up with the papers Randy faxed over from Juneau. Their case against the Seven Sisters drags on. He will read until sleepy, then get up in the morning and finish. What else has he to do? And he wonders how Peggy handles the loneliness. Maybe she likes her own company.

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Still feeling alone, Jacob drives his old Ford hard towards the spirit line where the earth tucks into itself. He has heard Yatee. Yes, last night he heard her crying for her son, calling to him, not understanding that his spirit sleeps. She was far away, far west of him, but he heard her, faint at first, then louder as the night stretched westward, crossing the old lines that divide the world.

Although she would not answer him—maybe her spirit isn't strong enough for her to hear his song, or maybe she didn't recognize his song as belonging to his family—but after the full moon rose, he listened to her spirit wail until those westward voices became garbled. Confusion set in like being in a campground with everyone having their radio turned up loud to different channels. Too many voices, too much chaos, all talking at once, making white noise like the Northern Lights that are there all the time but can't be seen when the sun shines. So when he couldn't hear her anymore, he stretched out across the front seat of the old Ford to watch the stars. He wasn't uncomfortable as he counted galaxies, many more than he ever imagined when he saw them on winter nights in the Gulf or on the Bering. Mary should have been there to see them.

He can now think about Mary. At first, he couldn't. But as he has traveled around, meeting people, doing things, he has sort of forgotten the sharp edge of his hurt, which, like an old baitknife left stuck in bulwarks, rusts quietly away. Someday, he will tell stories about those things he has seen and done, but they are different stories than Yatee's. Hers is the story he must finish. The others can wait to be told until he returns.

He traveled west all day; he will need a boat to go farther. So tonight, parked in a state campground, hearing the surf for the first time in months, he stretches his legs, his back, shoulders among stunted coastal pines, tall salal and rhododendrons, their bloom, like his, long passed.

Now that he has heard Yatee, his journey will end soon, perhaps here among the rhodies, where he can't be seen by day visitors.

He listens: spirits whisper as the twilight darkens. Taking a deep breath, suspecting tonight he will finally fight her spirit, he starts singing his relative's song, the words in that universal language of thoughts, the language that connects the world regardless of how reality is measured.

He feels the wind, feels it pass through him as if he were a rhododendron, each cell a rustled leaf, and he hears Yatee, her anger baked hard as adobe. She accuses him of not letting the soul of her son come forth from the grave; she swears he will pay, and she vows evil towards him as many spirits echo her oaths, the spirit line becoming cluttered with angry voices, all directed towards him for disturbing their slumber.

She laughs at his apology when he offers it again. She calls him weak, an old woman with no teeth, a dog whose growl is merely snoring. Her words are echoed along the spirit line. The spirits say he should be shamed for the evil he has caused, and they mock him by repeating Yatee's words until it sounds as if all the world is against him.

Listening for a long time as he taps his drum, the skin of a roadkilled doe stretched over a truck tire rim, he feels the contortions of Yatee's spirit as she tries to silence his song which below the clutter of oaths and the mocking reverberates through the spirit line. Without speaking, he now challenges Yatee to silence his song, which is about forgiveness. And the many spirits try to shout him silent when he says nothing. Many rise all around him like dark moths, some large, some thin, all angry, but none dare touch him as he again starts his song, this time singing about his own death—

His song causes the many spirits to become sleepy as his song becomes a prayer for mercy and protection from dark spirits, demons, who would kidnap him if ever allowed; his song causes drowsiness to settle like fog over all who hear it. And the spirit line becomes as quiet as a pail of water. Even Yatee's anger sleeps as the fog becomes so dense it smothers consciousness. And he, as if crawling on his hands and knees through fog much too dense to

see his feet, worries a little about losing the power that flows from the Eternal through him and out, dividing and subdividing into praise and deeds and gifts, like so many channels through a river delta, each arriving at the same destination. Without that power, his only to use for good, he would have no promise of life, a promise more certain than tomorrow's sunrise. He never used to worry even a little bit about losing that power; he never felt alone. He stayed far away from dark spirits and those things these spirits do, as a Christian should, as Saul should have—if Saul would have avoided that witch, lots of confusion about dead folks would have been prevented. Even Father Gregory doesn't know much about shapeshifting demons. Shamans know, though. His brother uses one, such is Ivan's spirit helper. He knows about them, could have been a shaman, had the training, but he was called to another way, this way. And he gropes for the edges of his song about his death so that he can awaken from its spell. He feels a edge, but he cannot pull himself to it. He has no strength of his own; his song has taken his strength from him. And he wants to sleep.

When the tide changes, the breeze picks up, cold and raw despite it being midsummer. Now, only a couple of cars remain in the day visitors' parking lot although the overnight campground is full.

He feels himself being pushed across the edge of his song—he emerges from slumber, and though tired, he knows he must quickly leave this place. His song is as a dam across the Yukon. Spirits will come to tear apart his song, to again let their voices flow through the earth. Their anger will be great.

But for now only silence flows in this spirit line where the earth tucks into itself. His song is holding longer than he expected; his song is even stronger than he anticipated. And he wants to stay to hear whether Yatee will ever awaken from hearing his song. She will be able to function for awhile with her spirit asleep, but when she needs her spirit, it won't be there for her.

Standing in the rhododendrons, all he hears is the surf and a booming bass, a radio that grows loud—headlights sweep across

the parking lot as the noise that kids call music beats like wind the leaves of bushes surrounding him. He slowly shakes his head. They shouldn't be here, not right now; they don't know what they do.

The car stops, but the noise continues as loud as before, the syncopation almost that of a spirit song.

A window is rolled down, a beer bottle thrown onto the paved parking lot, breaking, sending glass slivers flying. Then a door opens, and someone gets out and leans over his Ford.

Although knowing he must leave this place despite wanting to remain to hear whether Yatee sleeps, Jacob would have waited till the car left before leaving the rhodies. Now he must go, must say something to these fellows who have opened the door of his Ford.

"If you find something, ask, maybe I give it to you."

The fellow on the car's passenger side swings his door open. and from behind it, fires a shot, then another, both bullets passing just over Jacob's head, as the two fellows beginning to rifle his Ford jump back in their car. Tires squeal as the car backs away, spinning in a quarter circle, the open passenger door knocking down the fellow who fired, his one leg still inside for a moment, his other leg run over. He falls out as the car takes off, the passenger door slamming shut, leaving him with his pistol still in hand, lying in the darkened parking lot.

It all happened so fast that Jacob stands there a little stunned. But lights all over the campground start towards the creek separating it from the day lot. These lights come fast and converge at the single wood bridge crossing the creek.

"I heard gunshots," an older fellow says as he reaches where Jacob stands. "Are you all right?"

Hearing moaning, Jacob points to the darkness ahead of him: "Shine your light over there."

Four shafts of light pierce the darkness, then a fifth and a sixth. "I called the cops," says the voice behind the sixth shaft of light.

The beam of one lantern crosses the fellow who shot at Jacob: he lies on his side, his pistol still in his hand, his arms around his

bent right knee. The other light shafts zero in on the teenager, who doesn't appear to be more than fifteen.

Without warning, the kid points his pistol towards the fan of flashlights and hand lanterns, and he fires repeatedly as Jacob and the others dive for the pavement.

Jacob hears a bullet strike flesh, a sound he knows well, a sound different from near misses or hitting trees or rocks or things.

A shuffle, the sounds of a struggle, then, "I got him." One of the fellows had dropped his lantern and had circled around the kid, then had tackled him. A hero. He now holds the kid down while others hurry towards him.

But not the older fellow who first reached Jacob: he lies beside Jacob, his eyes already glassy, a small red hole in the upper left side of his chest, his flashlight still on and still beside him.

Headlights slowly descend the inclined entrance to the unlit parking lot, their beams flooding the roadway with light, pushing back the darkness. When those beams reach the fellows holding down the kid, blue strobes appear above them. The officer opens his door, and Jacob hears his radio, his dispatcher asking something Jacob can't quite hear well enough to understand.

The arrival of the officer seems to signal a dozen more campers to cross the bridge, one of whom holds his flashlight on the older man who had arrived first. Jacob kneels beside the fellow, his head bowed, his hand on the older fellow's forehead.

One of the newly arrived onlookers checks the older fellow for a pulse, doesn't find one, and says, "That's too bad."

The State Police officer approaches, says, "An ambulance is on its way."

Jacob doesn't know the right words to say, or even if the right words are available. He continues to kneel, his head bowed, his spirit heavy as the stones lining the creek, stones placed there to make the creek appear natural while keeping it inside its banks.

The onlooker who had checked for a pulse tells the officer, "You'd better have a look, but I think he's dead."

Jacob hears sobbing: almost uncontrollable and unconsolable sobbing begins behind him as a woman pushes forward and literally throws herself across her husband's chest, her palms catching her weight, her heart screaming, "No, no, no, no," between sobs.

She is the older fellow's wife. Jacob knows that, and he looks up towards the dark crowns of pines and spruces, saying softly as he does, "Father, so they will understand."

The officer gently reaches around the woman and lifts her. Other arms reach for her, hug her, hold her up.

On one knee, the officer kneels across the fellow from Jacob. He checks for a pulse, orders, "Everybody get back. He's still with us."

The ambulance arrives. Two EMTs and a nurse hurry towards the older fellow as Jacob stands and steps back. They start IVs as they cut away his shirt and T-shirt, all the while sliding him forward onto a collapsed gurney.

The onlooker who had initially checked the older fellow's pulse says, "That's a miracle." A murmur among the onlookers seems to confirm the statement as the officer escorts the woman, still sobbing but not as heavily, to the back of the ambulance where the driver says, "We're not supposed to, but yeah, she can ride there," and the driver points to a jump seat.

One EMT stays to tend the foot of the shooter as the ambulance starts for Newport and the hospital there. The kid is handcuffed, his arms and uninjured leg bent and manacled to a chain around his waist. The officer has started taking names as a deputy sheriff arrives, then another officer who had been patrolling north of Depoe Bay.

While no one seems to notice, Jacob steps back into the rhododendrons, then turning his back to the pines and salal, he pushes against the thick darkness as he backs even farther into the night so he can again kneel and speak without being interrupted. He has many things he wants to say, but foremost is his request that good be returned for good.

More people come and go from the parking lot than from Portland's downtown bus station, where he was three nights ago.

He can't see all that happens, but he hears words, some spoken in anger, some from fear, some with curiosity. He hears footsteps, the sound of a tape measure, of a tape recorder, of a dropped flashlight. He hears the kid being hauled away when another ambulance arrives, the EMT going with the second ambulance, the deputy sheriff following that ambulance uphill and onto Highway 101. A television news crew arrives for a few seconds of on-the-spot footage for tomorrow's broadcast, their lights sweeping the parking lot with enough candlepower that even the shadows have color. Interviews are conducted. Then the reporter tells the camera that a real miracle occurred in this state park, the miracle being that more people weren't hurt in the hail of gunfire from the fourteen year old student, whose identity hasn't yet been released. The reporter concludes her story by asking how so young a child obtained possession of a 9 millimeter handgun; what more can be done to keep our children safe.

When the television crew turns off their lights, night returns. Darkness overpowers even the headlights of the police officer who disperses the onlookers, shepherding most of them back onto the bridge to the campground.

The officer returns to his car, speaks to his dispatcher, then, his strobes still flashing, he sprays loose gravel onto the rhodies as he turns and takes off in pursuit of someone or something. The parking lot is now quiet, completely dark; it is as still as death, as cold, as unfeeling, as unable to sing praises or thanks. That is for the living, and some did. Some gave thanks for what seemed to them like a miracle.

Knowing he can't spend the night here, Jacob pushes through the leaves and darkness, reaches his Ford, and seeing by its dome light that the contents of its glove box are scattered across the floorboards, he checks what he quickly can, finds little if anything missing, then starts its engine and careful to avoid the broken beer bottle, backs around, pulls forward and out onto 101, the highway's binary designation assigned long before the road was straightened, giving to travelers on and off views of the Pacific, itself on and off

the sand beaches where winter driftwood logs lie bucked into firewood-length blocks like lines of deconstructed code, awaiting further splitting, then stacking, drying, being burnt to drive back the chill of winds which once bowed the same trees.

He won't be able to listen for Yatee tonight, won't be able to hear if she awakens. He has searched for her, has called her, has now heard her just like in the old days before the Russians came—the past is not told right. *Fournames* knows that, knows some things, but the story of the old people, their story, is not the story anthropologists tell.

In the old days, dark spirits thought maybe things would turn out okay even though they lost their war; they told each other they would be okay, that the people would prove them right, that the people would make war for them, and they helped the people, becoming their guides on long journeys, their protectors in battles. They gave the people songs, powerful songs, songs that would call things into existence. But the people made war on each other. Sons killed stepfathers, brothers killed brothers, uncles killed nephews. Then the Russians came with different stories, with priests to teach those stories and with muskets for when they forgot their stories. The people listened to the story about war between the spirits and knew this thing were so. They wanted to join the winning side and they became Christians, but they kept their old ways just like the Russians kept their old ways when they first heard the story of this war.

The old people talked among themselves. They shared the things they knew, and they decided who would carry on the old ways, who would be taught how to find spirit lines, how to see visions, to dive into the earth, to talk to ravens, gulls. Yes, he was chosen long before even Grandma Mutukin was born. He was to remember the stories, to teach them to his second son.

But his first vision was his last: he saw a man, an ordinary man, one a little taller than himself, who beckoned to him. They sat down together on the banks of a little stream full of spawning fish, some white, some black, some white and black. He asked

what kind of fish were they, and the man said he would know if he ate one of them. But he had no way to catch one. So he sat there watching the fish, trying to figure out what kind they were without getting his feet wet. And as he watched, the white fish flashed like salmon, rolling onto their sides, rubbing against the gravel, but the black fish settled down to the bottom and dug in a little bit like halibut do, only they swam upright. The white and black fish didn't do anything; he wasn't even sure they were alive.

He sat on the stream bank all afternoon, watching, but not able to catch a fish. He could see that each color fish was different; so how, he wondered, could he know what kind they were by eating one of them? That didn't make sense, but the man sitting beside him said nothing.

As evening approached, the eastern sky became dark. Then the northern and southern skies darkened. Then the sky to their west grew dark. But right where they were, it remained light and the fish continued to spawn.

Finally, he insisted the man tell him what kind of fish they were, and the man reached into the water and picked one up, a white and black one. Then on the stones beside the stream, the man piled up sticks, mostly old beaver chew, then rubbed his hands together until he had a little ball of fire that he hid under the sticks, which turned into coals just right for cooking. The man then split the fish in half and laid each half skin-side-down on the coals, the flesh of one half white, the other half red. The coals were very hot so the halves cooked quickly, and the man took a piece of the fish and gave him a piece. They ate and were full, but the halves looked the same as before they ate.

The man then spit in his hands, took the two halves and held them together, then returned the fish to the stream. It swam off, swam out to the middle and rested there, finning in the current to pump water through its gills.

He still didn't know what kind of fish it was or they were. It tasted a little like salmon, but was different. So he said, "I heard you say I would know what kind of fish they are."

“You do know.” And the man stood up and motioned for him to follow.

He followed, but he didn't know what kind of fish they were. That troubled him and he thought about what the fish tasted like as they walked along the stream bank, it being light where they were. The man seemed to want nothing from him but for him to follow, and he did, and they walked and walked until they came to a path. There, the man said, “My way is this way,” and he pointed to a steep uphill trail through blown down birches, each lying just a little higher than a person can easily step.

The other direction was mostly downhill into a dark valley, the trail widening out in just a little bit.

Before he knew which way he chose, his vision changed and he was on the back of a raven, being carried over a bay like the one where St. Peters sits. Then his vision ended, and he was in a sweat house with the older men, who asked without words what he saw, and he told them. No one said anything for a long time. He thought maybe he had done something wrong, but finally Old Yachmeneff, at that time a few years younger than he is now, said he should tell his vision to Father Herman. He did, and Father Herman gave him books to read. Some about saints, some about history, but one about grace. And he understood his vision of the man who didn't seem to want anything but for him to follow.

Even though the Russians made the people hunt otters and seals for them, brought diseases that decimated villages, the worst thing they did was to tell stories they didn't understand, stories about this war between spirits, a war about how to live and who is a liar, a war with its outcome never in doubt. The old people were connected to the earth, the dark spirits, their relatives, connections the priests pried loose as if gathering abalone, the shells of these connections sawn small and mounted as the eyes and teeth of ceremonial masks displayed in Vancouver art galleries. But the stories told by priests who lacked understanding were without spirit; they had no power. They had to be propped up with muskets and bags of rice.

He drives north, away from the hospital at Newport, away from questions and conjectures, away from where he thinks Yatee is. He didn't think he needed a sign, but perhaps he did. Perhaps the miracle was for him, an answer to his prayer: leave her alone. He has to think about this.

Alone with his thoughts, without Mary or Grandma Mutukin or his daughters, in the silence of distance; alone as if he were at sea, his connections to relatives weak as faint radio signals, he again understands that Christianity is a solitary life, a light on a headland, a one to one relationship, him and his Creator. He feels like throwing away a rusty bait knife, its blade thin from whetting and neglect. The miracle reminds him that Mary is protected, and that he has grieved her for long enough. Like life, belief, faith, death must be allowed, the answer to an oft-asked question. Nothing happens unless it is allowed, those allowances sometimes broad and deep, like Hell's Canyon on the Snake, a place where the spirit lines have stretched like the lines on Mary's stomach just before giving birth to John, his son being the one designated from conception to remember the old stories, stories he has been reluctant to teach because of what the priests taught. The old stories are hard to reconcile with the new stories if the person lacks wisdom—wisdom is necessary to understand that the old ways of Canaan were kept by the people when the new stories were first told.

For him who was chosen first to understand the ways of birds and fish, of the past and of dark spirits, what does his Christianity mean other than he has life? Again hearing the whistle of the two bullets pass close over his head, he knows he could now be dead, his spirit gone, his flesh awaiting his resurrection and change. His wisdom says he still has work to do before he sleeps. And he has been working, helping where he could as he searched for Yatee. Maybe his work is reconciling the old and the new stories.

Those two bullets were close—the kid couldn't get into his sights, didn't know he had to hold low when the light is poor. And what, he wonders, made the kid think he ought to shoot? But he doesn't have to wonder: the new stories aren't propped up with

bags of rice any more. They have lost their power. He knows, he listens to his radio. Having a passion for collecting dead souls isn't enough. That's not true belief. The old stories teach better than that. If Raven brings home seaweed to his family, he's no good. His wife's relatives get together and drive him away. Then they take care of her until a man who hunts every day takes her for his wife. That was the old way. People take care of each other, not the government that says a woman has to buy one onion with a dollar food stamp so she can get enough change to buy her kids shoelaces. That's not right. That's not what the new stories teach.

The dark spirits talked among themselves just like the old people did when the Russians brought the new stories; they all talked at once and their voices became babble that flowed across the spirit lines. A few men, smart men, laid down on the ground where the spirit lines joined, and they held their ears very close to the ground, and they heard this babble, and they tried to figure out what they heard. They reasoned among themselves about visible things and invisible things. They heard what dark spirits said about the new stories and they repeated without understanding what they heard. Then because they were smart men, other men repeated the same things.

The new stories were told by men who chose themselves to be their teachers; they were told wrong, but maybe they had to be so the people would survive. If they had been told right, the people would have made war against the dark spirits before it was time, that time not too far away. And the people would have lost. Instead, the people just make foolish art like that of Susie Q's.

Those bullets, their whistles were loud.

He never taught his son to listen as he would have if he had been teaching him to be a shaman: he saw that in the Narrows. He has kept things from John. Maybe the work he still has to do before he sleeps is to teach John those things, the old stories and the new stories, the things he has kept to himself.

He can sing praises to his Eternal father anytime, but to use the old spirit lines, he must wait for that little bit of darkness just

before morning, that false dawn when the babble of many voices fades like the night. His connections to the earth and to the sea and to the old ways have always been strong. The test of his faith has been from the beginning which source of power would he use when both are available to him. Maybe tonight that man in his vision just gave him a little nudge to get him to step over another couple of blowdowns, ones he didn't expect.

Certainly someone gave him a push when he couldn't help himself.

On the midnight news (the radio station now distant and faint) the shooting in the park is reported, the story worth, maybe, twenty-five words before the reporter reads sports, his lead story about Sammy Sosa having another good year. Disgusted, Jacob drives north, knowing he won't stop tonight or tomorrow unless the old Ford quits. He feels free, finally; and he wonders why everyone doesn't drive such a comfortable car.

Those bullets knocked off a spirit that had been riding on his back; they hit their mark.

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"About time, Dad, where the hell have you been?" John doesn't know whether to hug his dad or shake his hand, physical contact being culturally awkward, so he does nothing though his eyes glisten. "If it hadn't been for that credit card, we wouldn't have known whether you were alive or dead."

"I told I would be back." It is good to see his son. He clasps John's forearm. "Tell me, how is Little Mary? Beth? Cathy?"

"Fine. Beth and Cathy are ah, both pregnant, both due in October, don't remember the dates. Sis is busy acting like mother to Kathy's daughters—you probably don't know that Alvin, your insurance agent, married his former secretary, Kathy Johnson, and now works for Peggy as a reporter. Well, Sis has sort of taken over the educations of Kathy's two daughters. But this can all wait. First, how are you, and what are you doing in Juneau?"

Jacob looks around John's office, the walls decorated with Tlingit and Kodiak masks, new ones, good ones, the Kodiak masks copies of ones pictured in Lydia Black's book. A Formline carved setee faces John's desk, the setee apparently for visitors. The desk has a Formline painted and carved back panel, Raven with fire in his beak. A five foot high, four inch thick carved cedar panel divides the room, three stories on the panel, Bear Woman, Younger Brother with Killer Whale, when Russians arrived.

This is the first time he has been in John's office: "Somebody might think you're Tlingit."

"I did a little job for a fellow in Angoon, a carver. He did the work on the desk, made the panel. And the masks have come over the years although the one behind you was carved by Uncle Samuel's son. But this is off the subject—you look like you have been eating okay. Otherwise, how are you?"

"I'm good, no worries. No boat payments, no checking the markets, no laying awake at night. . . . I still miss your mother, but not like before." He picks up a carved bowl, checks its bottom to see if a hole has been knocked in it, what a spiritual man would have done if it were an old one, and sees instead a signature, the name being its hole. "Thought maybe I stay with you for awhile."

"Sis will want you to stay with her, but you're welcome here. I'm shuttling back and forth, about half a week here and there." John doesn't know where he'll put his Dad, who would make permanent the temporary lull in the hooligan run through his condo if he brings him home. "The weather is better in Port Adams."

"Are you expecting anybody?" As Jacob handles the halibut bowl, he feels the spirit of the carver, a man with strong hands.

"If you want to talk, let's go to lunch?"

"No, here is better. . . . Two nights ago, I had a vision, only my second one. Normally things just come to me, or I hear things."

"Are you talking about a visionquest? that type of a vision?" Whereas he would have dismissed talk of a vision before the killer whale incident, now he's more interested. "I saw Uncle Ivan's spirit helper, think I've seen it twice."

“You were, before birth, chosen to remember the old ways, but I haven’t taught them to you. I tried to teach you to be a Christian like your mother wanted, but you didn’t listen very good. I tried to teach you like other kids are taught, and you turned out like them. Maybe we teach disrespect, suppose?”

“I never intended any. I didn’t think I measured up, that’s all.” He wouldn’t have expected this conversation on his dad’s return. Rather, he would have thought they would be talking about where all his dad has been, or maybe about the lawsuits.

“You don’t measure up, but then, none of us do. We do the best we can. That’s all that’s expected. And when you do all you can, then you get help . . . if your heart is right . . . even when you screw things all up.”

“You sound like Peggy, or better, she sounds like you. So what are you here for? to lecture me?”

“No. . . . In my vision, I see you, we are together. You are ready to learn the old ways and I teach them to you, then teach you another way, but one that you must decide for yourself whether to accept. And to your second son, you are to teach the old stories. They are not to be lost. So you have much to learn before I go again.” Jacob understands the story about the store-bought top: he must keep moving to stay upright.

“I’m afraid there isn’t even a first son in the works. Peggy and I aren’t getting along, a difference of opinion on how to win your lawsuits . . . and what’s this about going again?” John knew his dad walked in his Juneau office unannounced for a reason. Logic would have had him returning to Port Adams if he intended to settle down.

“I saw your second son. He doesn’t look like you. He’ll have his mother’s narrow face and red hair. He will be very smart, a leader, but not Aleut.” Jacob questions the wisdom of saying what else he saw. Finally, leaving unsaid most of his vision, he adds, “In my vision, your son does not know me.”

Seeing visions himself of Heidi-Marie and not at all excited about the prospect, John says, “This, Dad, is getting a little too

spooky. . . . Come on, let's get lunch. There's a place on Franklin Street that's decent. I'll show you around town." Then standing, he asks, "What did you see in your vision about your lawsuits?"

"They are won."

"Is that all?"

"That is enough."

* * * * *

CHAPTER FIVE

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Another book about Jackie O, its author's fantasy about the woman after which the men of her generation lusted—she catches only glimpses of the interview as she hurries past seated passengers not watching little television screens activated by coins John F. wouldn't recognize, her cellphone in hand, her luggage following, her husband probably now on his way back from Culiacan. She wonders what he will bring home besides his skinny, little dick: she hopes nothing too lethal. But she won't be home. She is needed this afternoon in Anchorage where her hamstrung attorneys flail about like dying chickens, their heads squawking about needing more money to continue her fight for justice. She doesn't mind spending the fortune of her third husband, may he rest in hell, but her attorneys are being systematically butchered by Jacob Chickenof's long-haired son. She knows with absolute certainty that all memoranda of understanding were destroyed; she was there when they were shredded. So how did they magically appear in discovery?

She boards, temporarily thankful she can slip her phone into her purse and escape questions about liability and accruable tables. For a few minutes she can think about the two cases that Jacob's long-haired son has almost succeeded in linking. After hearing a story her attorneys said made no sense at all, something about a man dancing on top of a mountain, the other plaintiffs in her lawsuit dropped out, settling for nothing, to become additional plaintiffs in the boat owners' suit against Portland Casualty. And in that suit, how did memos between the underwriters surface, memos none of the responsible parties remember writing but that

they have all admitted could be theirs? Damaging memos. How did her personal history become at issue? Vern Armstrong and his staff assured her that wouldn't happen, that she would remain only one plaintiff among many. But that story Jacob wanted told undid that assurance, one story she wishes she would have heard, one story that relayed a message her attorneys couldn't decode despite their so-called Alaskan expertise.

Candlestick Park protrudes above the ground fog as the Alaska Airlines' 737 climbs over the Bay and Bay Bridge and her childhood home in San Rafael. In addition to her character, her childhood is likely to become a subject of her lawsuit if her attorneys don't stop Jacob's son tomorrow. Her affair with her high school gym teacher has been "discovered," such is how John What-ever-he-calls-himself has distorted this case. Stopping him is paramount. Her son is dead, and for that she wants justice, not excuses, nor compensation. Jacob humiliated her once. She won't be humiliated by him or his son again. No, never. She will make sure of that.

Ruining him financially was relatively easy and not very satisfying. She intends to destroy Jacob. He deserves nothing less. The death of one son apparently wasn't enough; his wife was a bonus. And now that he has resurfaced—and exactly when did he resurface? why has she only recently learned that he has been in Juneau since August? Six months! That's inexcusable.

She knows the tactic John has employed: delay and keep the spending going. Eventually both sides will run out of money and settle, only that long-haired Aleut won't charge his father so she can't outlast him even though she can afford to continue this fight for years. Long before then, though, John will have prevailed against Portland. But let him win a hollow victory. She intends to make sure Chickenof's policies are voided because of compliance violations. Let Portland pay the others' claims. They aren't of any importance to her.

What angers her most is how that long-haired Aleut accomplished the miracle of making her character, not the death of her son, the subject of this suit. He has learned details of affairs

no one else knows. It's as if he has a computer patch into her memories and is using her memories against her. That is the largest part of the reason why she has to hurry north today.

Seattle is gray and rainy, but when isn't it? Anchorage, though, looks cold and gray, with snow clouds squatting heavy on foothill subdivisions while completely hiding all of upper Rabbit Creek. And as she enters the jetway, she wonders if, perchance, she might get in a day of skiing at Girdwood before she has to return to glass-eyed skyscrapers, phallicentric board meetings, and a skinny little dick that has probably been dipped in hot sauce. Her annual urge to ski has not been placated so far this winter, and if anything, it's stronger than in any year she remembers. Between work and this trial, though, she hasn't had an opportunity to get away yet. She doubts she will this trip either, especially with the amount of snow she heard the Anchorage basin has received this winter.

A car awaits her arrival, and takes her directly to the reservation desk at the Captain Cook. Her room is in Tower Three. Good. Last time she was here there were little kids in the elevators for Towers One and Two: the hotel was hosting a religious revival or something. The kids were polite, but very much out of place. With their bad haircuts and lack of fashion sense, she was embarrassed for them since they didn't seem to have enough sense to be themselves embarrassed.

Her flight was seven minutes late, which puts her behind schedule checking in to the Cook, and one minute late for her luncheon meeting in the Crow's Nest.

"Ah, Barbara, right on time." Vern Armstrong stands as he lays his napkin on the table. "I believe you know everyone. My partner, Sam. Dennis English. Jon Grewe. Virginia Carlton. Joel will be along shortly. He called and said he was stuck in traffic on Dowling. Something about a Korean driver turning in front of a Kenworth while taking his driver's test."

Smiling at the only female partner, Barbara almost purrs, "Ginny, would you tell me why I'm here. I thought this case would have been over by now. Wasn't there a trial date set for last week?"

“Mrs. Roth,” Vern interjects, “I assure you this will all be over with soon.”

Turning to face the lead partner, her voice now icy, Barbara Smith-Roth says, “Oh, and John Chickenshit won’t crap all over you again. You want me to believe that?”

“He is manufacturing evidence, and we don’t know if he will use it at trial. We have to assume he will. Therefore, we have had to proceed very cautiously.”

“And you can prove he has been manufacturing evidence?” Her words crack when warmed to room temperature.

“Not yet, but—”

“What? Don’t tell me you destroyed the proof you needed. But that is what you brought me here to tell me, isn’t it?”

“Sit down, please. We need to solve a few problems, not eat each other.” Vern pulls a chair out for her. “I’m glad you could make it up on such short notice.”

Dennis English says, “Mrs. Roth, we don’t yet understand this latest line of defense Mr. Chichikov has apparently taken. We need your help. We need for you to fill in details about ah, how shall I ask this, your reasons for pursuing this case.”

She hates him for the implications of his request, truly hates him. She looks from face to face. All but Dennis avert their eyes. So he is the designated heavy, and she asks, “Have all of you ordered?” She intends to delay supplying those details for as long as practical.

Vern raises his arm as he points towards their waiter, who comes with two menus, discreet in size and with raised print in two colors, black and the red her cheeks will be as soon as he takes her order to the kitchen. Details aren’t what will cause the rush of blood—she has no regrets about anything she has done; she wasn’t reared with guilt. Rather, she should have told Vern that, “Ivan Chickenof is the father of my son.”

A collective inhaling of breaths like a stadium wave circles the table. And again in brittle words, she says, “Why do you think he was on his father’s vessel? You don’t think he needed the money,

do you? He was getting to know his father . . . who was teaching him to be a shaman.”

Another collective, except for Virginia Carlton, inhaling of breaths sweeps around the table.

Dennis is the first to recover: “Is there a possibility Ivan Chickenof could be persuaded into becoming a plaintiff?”

“I intend to talk with him before I return South, but, no, no possibility. He won’t go against his brother, especially not now. He’s afraid of Jacob.”

“Are you certain?” Virginia suddenly likes their chances, especially considering Ivan’s objection to how the *St. Paul* was loaded before leaving Kodiak. “If he could be persuaded—”

“Don’t even go there.” Barbara knows how deep Ivan’s bond was with his brother when Ivan wouldn’t stand up for her, wouldn’t go against Jacob when she was being booted from Port Adams, wouldn’t even come to the airport to see her off. And this was before Jacob systematically rescued Ivan from a series of disasters, only the last of which was from Five Mile Beach. “Ivan Chickenof wouldn’t hesitate to stick any one of you into a crabpot. I know with absolute certainty he killed a Green Beret in a Port Hueneme knife fight a number of years ago. He probably isn’t afraid of another person in the world other than his brother.”

Sam Armstrong says, “You have, then, had previous dealings with Jacob Chickenof . . . dealings about which we should have been advised.”

“Before Michael was born, he escorted me out of Port Adams, so yes, I have.” The arrival of her salad momentarily delays her saying more. She resents being placed in this spot. “Who was it that assured me I would only be one plaintiff among many? And if I were still only one of many, my previous dealings with Jacob wouldn’t be at issue, would they be?”

“Perhaps,” Vern offers, “we have all underestimated the active defense that Mr. Chichikov would mount. He usually works as a corporate attorney in Juneau, not an arena that values creative defenses. And truthfully, we were unprepared for the effect of the

story he told. Nothing we said could undo the damage. Money suddenly had no meaning.”

The hotel manager approaches their table, his recognizable face somber, his steps respectful. He pauses beside Barbara, bends low and says softly, “Alaska Airlines are asking that family members of their flight 261 from Puerta Villarta contact them immediately.”

“Has something happened?”

“You are welcome to use my office.”

“Excuse me.” Barbara stands, leaving her salad as untouched as how she plans to deal with the Chickenofs. “Apparently something has happened. If my husband missed his morning flight, he also had reservations for an afternoon flight.”

“We’ll wait for you.”

“If I’m more than a few minutes, don’t wait. I’ll get back in touch with all of you.” She needs a chance to work her magic on Ivan before she again meets with her attorneys.

The elevator seems terribly slow, the distance between towers terribly far, her wait for the other elevator terribly long. She can’t imagine what has happened. A heart attack, perhaps. A traffic accident, maybe. Or a jealous husband taking exception to the attention Harold bestowed upon his wife. Most likely. His philandering is the price she pays for marrying an Alpha male. But then, their marriage has never been about sexual faithfulness. Neither have asked that of the other.

She cares about Harold in, perhaps, the way she would for a dog or a horse. Years ago she realized she wasn’t capable of the intense affection for another person that, say, Jacob Chickenof felt for his wife—it was her good fortune that his wife overdosed on sleeping pills. She couldn’t have hurt him as much, and she takes some comfort in knowing she isn’t as vulnerable as Jacob was.

She would reach out and touch him again if she knew how she could—he proved he doesn’t care anything about his children when he took off like that. If he did care, she would make arrangements to leave him without heirs; she can do that. She has only to write the check.

She thought Jacob had done the Indian-thing of going off by himself to die, but she should have known he was playing games with her. Otherwise, Chickenshit John would have seemed more concerned about his father if Jacob's disappearance hadn't been a game, and she suspects she should quit throwing good money after bad on this lawsuit; she suspects John fights to secure his inheritance, and if that's the case, her lawsuit is hopeless.

She closes the door to the manager's office where a call from Alaska Airlines awaits her.

"Mrs. Roth, we are sorry to disturb you, but do you know if your husband kept his reservation for our flight 261, originating in Puerta Villarta?"

"I'm sorry, but I don't. Why? Has something happened to that flight?"

"Will you be where we can reach you through this evening?"

She starts to say *no*, but she feels a strange loss of power, the feeling as strong as if her dress were torn off her. No words form in her mouth so she says nothing as she feels naked and weak and not all here.

"Mrs. Roth, are you still there?"

"I am. . . . My husband also had reservations for your morning flight." She wonders what it was that she felt as she glances at herself in the mirror hung on the office door. The face staring back at her is hard, that impression accentuated by her hair, cut short to rid herself of its color, then teased and stiffened with mousse to stand up like a crown. But the impression of sculpted anger heavy as stone comes from her eyes, which appear to have seen too much from too close. They appear almost as lifeless as if they were blinded by welding flashes, the molten metal puddled within her memories.

"We are checking to see if your husband checked-in for our morning flight, and this will take a few minutes. If he did, how might we be able to contact him?"

"You have that information at your fingertips, whether he checked in or not. Tell me, what does your computer say?" She doesn't need a runaround.

“Flight 261 has gone down off Los Angeles. . . . Are you where we could send a grief counselor to contact you? We have members of our CARE team in the city. We would like one of them to be with you. We would also like for you to return as quickly as possible.”

“Down in the Pacific? . . . survivors?”

“We don’t know. It is much too early, but everything is already being done that can be. This is why we would like to have somebody with you while you return.”

Not wanting to return but knowing how it will look if she doesn’t, she silently curses her bad luck. She had intended to meet with Ivan and see if he has been calling her, mental telepathy. For a long time she has felt he has been trying to get in touch with her. That feeling was very strong when she was channeling, trying to reach Michael. So strong it blocked her efforts. But her meeting with Ivan will now have to wait however long her return to the Lower Forty-Eight takes. And she finds herself still staring at herself in the mirror. Her face seems to belong to someone else, to a woman who was once beautiful but now looks more old than anything else—her lack of life in her eyes is what most troubles her. She doesn’t remember previously noticing its absence.

Her sudden sense of loss and the absence of active life in her eyes must somehow be linked, but that doesn’t make sense unless Harold’s death is what she felt. That’s a frightening thought, that she has somehow been feeding off Harold’s spirit. But there has definitely been, within the last few minutes, a change in her appearance. What else has happened? Her admittance of prior involvement with Ivan and Port Adams.

“Mrs. Roth, are you still there?”

“I’m sorry. I’m suddenly not with it.”

“That is certainly understandable. If you would please put Mr. Hinkel on the line, we will have someone with you within a few minutes.”

As if having heard what the airline’s spokesperson said, the hotel manager steps into his office and takes the receiver from her: “Yes, I

will stay with her until your people arrive. And please extend my personal condolences to the families of all crewmembers. All of them have stayed with us and are part of the hotel's extended family here.”

She doesn't need a grievance counselor, but a second fortune is at stake so displaying the proper amount of grief will be essential. She certainly doesn't need a babysitter. What she needs is to redo her makeup, hide whatever is absent from her eyes, get over this moment of the blahs.

The face in the mirror displays shock, but no life, no grief. She purses her mouth, but the face continues to stare at her with dead eyes, its expression one she doesn't recognize. It is as if her spirit fell into a fault line and disappeared into the earth. What is left is bone and blood, meat and memories, but no life—and she hears a beckoning as loud as if she were being paged in an airport, the beckoning defined loosely in emotions and not words and apparently coming from everywhere all at once. She wants to scream, and in the eyes of the mirror she sees fear, her first indication that the face is truly alive.

-2-

After a long five days in Juneau during which attorneys for the Seven Sisters met his dad, who entertained them with stories of the various places where petroleum seeps on the sea floor have been found—they actually wanted to hire his dad to work with their geologists—John Chichikov returns to Port Adams and his sister's house to find a telephone call awaiting his return. The call is from Armstrong & Armstrong.

“I'm surprized and a little flattered. You usually send me nasty memoranda through the court, accusing me of some sort of wrongdoing bordering on censurable conduct.”

“Yes, I fear that has been the case Mr. Chichikov. John?”

“John will do.”

“You have put up a spirited defense, which is a reason we wished to speak with you directly. . . . We have just learned that

Ivan Chickenof is the natural father of Michael Smith.” Sam Armstrong pauses to hear how John will respond.

“Yeah, we know that, have known that from the beginning.”

“Why haven’t you brought this to our attention?”

“I thought you knew. I thought you knew why Barbara is so mad at Dad.” John smiles at Little Mary. “Uncle Ivan brought her up here, and Dad sent her packing. Said something about her smelling like a fishhauler. I was real little at the time, but I remember Mom getting mad at Dad for what he said. Guess this was during her hippy period. She might not have bathed as often as she does now. At any rate, she has been mad at Dad ever since.”

“I see.”

John listens to the silence, wondering if he is supposed to add more. Finally, he says, “Dad has offered the others a portion of his settlement with Portland Casualty, but then, you know where that case stands. If Michael’s mother wants to join and split with Uncle Ivan, I’m sure that can be arranged.”

“I don’t believe she would be interested.”

“The offer is on the table. . . . She’ll split with Uncle Ivan anyway. You know that.”

“We don’t know that, but we will relay the offer.”

“Don’t wait too long.” John looks through Sis’s front window and sees the same raven that has sort of followed him around for the past year. The raven sits on the bow of his dad’s now-trailerred Whaler, one foot holding down a fish, the raven pecking at its eyes. “For the next few months,” John pauses as he tries to identify the fish, a species he doesn’t readily recognize, before he resumes, “I’ll be in the business of collecting for dead souls.”

“Aptly said.” Sam readjusts how he holds the receiver. “On our other case . . . it’s sometimes hard to remember whether we’re the plaintiffs or defendants—”

“You seem to have a problem there, but on this other case, you’re shooting blanks and you know that. I’m going to stick it to you—and that you also know.”

“I wouldn’t be too confident.” Sam finished, yesterday, reading the latest bundle of perjured documents received from John Chichikov’s Port Adams’ office. He would like to shove them down the young Aleut’s throat they are so blatantly of new manufacture, but he can’t disprove one of them.

“Tell you what, you have a potential conflict of interest. If you back away from the Portland case, then advise Michael’s mom however you will, I won’t hold you personally liable for the damage she has caused Dad. Otherwise I will file an additional suit against you that will keep your whole staff busy for the next five years.” John debates about the wisdom of saying, “And you know I’ll find the documents to prove my case,” but loses his debate with himself as the words flow.

“Can you afford that?”

“The proper question is can you afford that. You know it won’t hurt my reputation. Aleut attorney humbles another big firm of good old boys, David versus Goliath.” John can see the fish the raven pecks is mottled black and white, like an old chum that forgot to turn red. “Besides cutting off your head, I should end up with a rather decent office building there in Anchorage.”

“I don’t think you will get that chance.”

“You can’t afford that kind of press.”

“Mrs. Roth is presently on her way back to her home in the Bay Area. Her husband might have been a passenger on Alaska’s flight 261. So it will be awhile before we can speak to her again, I’m sure you will appreciate that.”

The fish isn’t one he has seen around the island before. Even though it’s marked like a chum, it almost looks like a barracuda, John decides as he asks, “How much time will you need to contact her?”

“Where will you be?”

“Depends. As you are aware, my case against the Seven Sisters requires that I also spend time in Juneau as well as here.” He isn’t sure if he should help these sharks out of their predicament. “I’ll give you one day this week. Pick the day.”

“Yes, your case against the Sisters, we have followed that case from a distance. If you ever desire to consult about that case, we might be able to offer you some insight. Off the record, of course.”

“I see. Tit for tat.” He knows the firm once represented four of the Sisters in a spill settlement. They might know where those Sisters buried their figurative skeletons.

“We don’t have to be enemies. We are always seeking to assist promising young attorneys.” Sam wonders if he might not actually like the young Aleut if they weren’t locked into their present difficulties. None of his partners and no one on staff can produce an odd triplicate form, obsolete seven years ago, then on that form inscribe an insurance policy which probably never existed, the policy complete with the signature of Portland Casualty’s only now-deceased corporate officer from that earlier time period, plus receipts for ten years of premium payments received at Gig Harbor. An audit of the insurer shows their corporate office never recorded receiving those premiums, which is why he knows the policy is fraudulent. But a jury might well conclude someone associated with the insurer had simply pocketed those premiums, the argument he would make if he were in John’s position, a believable argument when so many of the corporate papers are missing and presumably destroyed. “As a matter of fact, there is available space in our building if you were to ever desire having an Anchorage office.”

“Double tit for tat. Well, someday I might be interested, but right now, why don’t we wait to see how our case against Portland turns out.” Where, John wonders, did that raven find a black and white barracuda, its eyes now completely gone as the raven drives its beak into the fish’s skull. “You know, Sam, hope you don’t mind if I call you that, Alvin’s ex-wife crossed the line when she shredded those Kodiak files. It’s lucky for you that other copies existed.”

“Not nearly as lucky for us as for yourself. We will be dropping our objection to their authenticity.”

“I thought you might. If your office stipulates that they are true and correct copies of the originals, we’ll talk about a settlement that Portland and Prudential can afford.”

“Structured?”

“Possibly.”

“I’ll get back to you in the morning.”

“Now, why is it that I don’t believe you will need that much time? I have a couple of armloads of firewood to pack in for Sis. Shouldn’t take more than fifteen minutes. Why don’t you call me back then.” John winks at Little Mary, who only hears the one side of the conversation and who would freeze if she waited for her brother to pack in any wood. John adds, “And before I forget, Dad will expect a full value settlement for the fire damage to his Kodiak warehouse. I’m having a bill introduced in the Legislature that will bar any underwriter from writing property and casualty policies under their own name if the carrier fails or has failed to pay an underwritten policy.”

“We know about the bill.”

“In the Senate, it now has thirteen sponsors.”

“We also know that.” Sam waits an appropriate length of time before he adds, “We would like to meet with you tomorrow and end all of this unpleasantness—if that is possible.”

“I’ll bring Sam and Paul with me, maybe Alvin, seeing he wrote those policies. Besides, he might want to negotiate a little on his divorce settlement, a matter about which I have been advising him as of late. You really stuck it to him.”

“We were merely representing our client—”

“You’re good at that . . . but remember, that is also what I do.”

John marvels at how quickly the raven dismantles the toothy fish, whatever species it is, beginning with its eyes and brain, then continuing down along its spine, slicing hunks of meat off with every peck. The raven doesn’t rip like an eagle, tearing skin and flesh loose. Rather, the speed of its peck and the straight edge of its beak cuts through flesh as a baitknife would, no baitknife ever as sharp as they should be but all sharp enough to slice frozen herring

or octopus. “We’ll be there at eleven, and I know Paul Bob will be in no mood to wait. It’s a good thing you and your brother are bald. He’s likely to be in more of a mood to scalp you than talk to you.”

“I wondered when you would say that, the ‘s’ word as it’s known here in the office. I would’ve thought before now. I’ll have to tell Ginny that her prognostication was most astute.” Sam’s tone lightens now that he knows they can work with this Juneau attorney to whom they will pay a retainer to represent their clients in the Capitol; a retainer will be a small price for not again facing him as adversarial counsel. If the ‘s’ word hadn’t entered their conversation, he would have thought they were dealing with a true zealot, not someone schooled in pragmatism.

-3-

With the hum of engines behind and dark water below her, Mrs. Barbara Helen Smith-Roth periodically checks the mirror of her compact on her flight South. Except for that brief display of fear, her eyes have appeared dead since she felt the loss of her soul. She feels paralyzed by their opaqueness; those eyes can’t possibly be hers. She feels her pulse, feels her fingers touch her wrist, feels her legs touch as they cross, but she feels no pain. She sees her hands move, pick up things, set things down, but her hands are themselves robotic things unrelated to the dead eyes of her mirror’s image, each of those eyes staring back at her through bluegray blankness. And she can’t stop staring into those eyes, blind and dead.

She might have escaped the eyes of Alaska Airlines’ counselor, a woman her age and with eyes nearly as blind, for long enough to have contacted Ivan if she could have quit checking her mirror image for signs of life. But she couldn’t so she did nothing but stare at her changed self. Of course the counselor has told her that feeling numb is to be expected, and the counselor claims to understand her pain, but she feels no pain, no additional loss, no anything but worry about life that slipped into the earth as if

returning to energy bound into electrons and gluons. And she wonders how she can determine if she's alive or dead; she wonders if she isn't now a ghost wandering, searching for her soul and what else? she doesn't know.

Orange bellies on clouds over the Inlet registered nothing while she waited to board—she saw them, but they were just there. She remembered when watching sunsets over the Inlet and Mount Spur were a bonus for flying North, but as color faded so did her memories until, even now, she can't recall why she ever noticed the clouds that are just there, like buildings or planes. What was it that she used to see? And she checks the eyes of her mirror image to see if they have changed. They haven't.

Her back suddenly stiff, she squirms in her seat as she tries to remember why she flew North. This trip doesn't make sense, but then, nothing makes sense. Is she dead? And she again takes out her compact and checks the eyes. They look as if she is, but she can't be. She is in a seat on a plane, bound for, where? she doesn't remember.

The eyes of her mirror image again show fear, deep intense fear, but only for a moment. Then they slip back into blankness and she wonders why she checked her makeup. It seems all right. And she returns the compact to her purse as she stares straight ahead, waiting until, what? she doesn't know.

-4-

John glances through the thick glass windows of the former *crab bank*, where he had his first saving account which he thinks still has ten dollars in it, as he hurries up Kupreanof, eager to catch Peggy before she closes the newspaper's office for the day. He really can't imagine getting together with Heidi-Marie, who has become a semi-permanent fixture in Port Adams. Besides, Bob Anderson, after making thirty thousand dollars fishing a skiff with Uncle Ivan, has the salmon bug. They might never again live together, but he wouldn't put much money on that bet. Bob Anderson is looking

to buy a permit, probably will, and Uncle Ivan will probably crew for him, at least until Anderson learns not to fish inside the markers. Heidi-Marie seems happy with her museum, which takes much more attention than she initially anticipated, but then, his dad could have told her that. She still worries about what his dad will say when they meet. Actually, she believes she is the reason Dad hasn't returned to Port Adams.

The one time they talked, John assured Heidi-Marie that his dad doesn't carry grudges and had long ago forgiven her, but she isn't the forgiving sort and can't understand someone else forgiving her, something he understands a whole lot better after spending twenty-four hours a day with Dad four, sometimes five days a week.

John helped Heidi-Marie arrange financing for a two bedroom cabana on Russian Hill. The place isn't much: post and beam construction, the posts being beach salvage. Built during the War from mostly pilfered plywood and institutional green paint, the place has had several owners since he was in high school. But it is enough of a house to get her away from Guennie's, and to give her someplace for Little Peter to stay. Living upstairs at the bar should have provided quite the education, and not one he would want for his son.

His father's vision? a red-haired second son? John can't imagine him and Peggy having a red-haired child. In fact, since her little lecture, he can't imagine them ever having a child together. If she has a son, the child is more likely to be his step brother than his son. He's certain that is why his dad has stayed away; he's certain his dad will not do anything to queer what he and Peggy might have together. But for quite a while now, they haven't had much other than friendship.

As of late, he has thought a little about the possibility of having a step brother or sister. It'd be different, but okay.

He understands his dad more now than he ever imagined, understands a lot more than he ever imagined, even understands why they were never close before. How will he be able to explain—

He can't even completely think the thoughts. There isn't any way he can explain the paranormal unless he is in a situation where he has to use those forces. Even then they are likely to be misunderstood. There are no referents in the modern world that adequately convey a concept as simple as the convergence of force vectors between the plates forming the earth's crust. Actually, he has quite a job ahead of him, that of translating rather simple realities into an evolving language, devalued through overuse. And it has all been there all along, plain as can be. Textual criticism be damned.

What is needed, John knows, is a new language, one able to incorporate multi-dimensional referents into daily conversation, one in which the equivalent of the English icon angel isn't dwarfed by the connotative size of the interpretant, thereby separating the icon from its object—and if that makes sense to anybody, the person needs to spend his or her vacation in the bar at St. Peters, where Ph.D.s come to get fishing jobs for the summer, one of those quirky things that spontaneously developed, the tradition going back to when Nixon froze prices in 1969, about when he was born.

From the newspaper's parking lot, now that Peggy has had the trees trimmed, he sees that the boat harbor is jammed with empty vessels of all sizes, huddled together against the rain that gathers at his feet, then runs down Kupreanof and into the harbor, adding to the oily sheen to its dark waters. For more than a year, he has spent nearly as much time on the island as off. That might be ending. Everything depends on how his meeting with Armstrong & Armstrong goes tomorrow—the lawsuits might be won. If they are, then he can quit supporting Alaska Airlines: he has spent a small fortune just in airfare in the past fourteen months.

"How is your father?" Peggy asks as he pulls open the door, hinged on the bay side, the side from which the prevailing wind sculpts impressionable young spruce trees into gnarled grotesques.

"That's what I came to talk to you about." John steps through the door, letting in as little rain as possible. Still, the marbled rose colored carpeting shows dark spots where drops linger, trapped by

the stainguards and waterproofing chemicals that now connect Port Adams with East Coast industrial complexes. "Dad asks about you. Actually, I think he keeps track of you."

"I'm flattered." A little color shows in her cheeks. "Any reason he hasn't returned? Mary really misses him."

"Obvious answer, yes, but I'm not sure what all of those reasons are. Her Majesty thinks Dad is mad at her for betraying his trust, but I tried to assure her that wasn't the case. Don't think she believed me."

"You knew Bob Anderson accepted that position in Fairbanks."

"Sis told me. Part of her official duties as Postmistress, make sure everyone is up to speed on the latest gossip although that bit of information is what, six months old." John pulls a chair close to the window so he can watch the rain as they talk. "Bob only thought he knew what winters were like. By now, he should really know."

"They'll be fine. They can have happiness." There's more she wants to say, something about how seldom do events work out in favor of the residents of Port Adams. But this occasion would contradict her words if she weren't questioning her decision not to support how conducts his business. "Why do you think your dad hasn't returned?"

"You . . . actually, you and me." He looks her directly into her gray eyes. "Do you have a crush on him? The truth. We're adults of some intelligence, and hopefully friends."

"John, that's not a question you ask a woman." Her whole face is flushed.

"But it is a question I'd ask a sister." Rain sheets on the window, blurring his view of Near Island. "Or—" He stops himself. His feeling for her are similar to those he has for Sis, or Beth. He really doesn't know Cathy or Debbie that well, and he's too close in age to Sarah; he knows her too well. "May-December romances sometimes do work, and Dad isn't exactly a December. More like a late October, just about when the Blacktails start rutting."

"You are crude! crass." Peggy hasn't thought about Jacob in a romantic context, but the idea isn't repulsive. It's actually quite

attractive in some ways. But it isn't a realistic possibility, never has been, and won't be anytime in the future.

"Said like a sister."

"I told you before why we couldn't get together, and now, I'm a sister to you, well, that does it." Indeed, there are no truly happy endings here, just compromises, and stoic acceptance—*maybe I have finally become Native*. "I take it you have finally decided we should just be friends."

"Not my first choice, but a pragmatic acceptance to reality." John listens to the rain, and can now see with his ears that Ed Nelson's delivery van just passed downhill on Kupreanof, its left front fender still dented. He can hear the truth when he can't see it. "The truth is I still don't see anything wrong in how we will win Dad's lawsuits, even though I now truly understand where Dad comes from."

"Mary called this morning, said it appears the other side has folded. I guess she was performing her official duties." The money, however much, won't be just compensation of the loss of life or for the loss of a way of life. The money will be like the tribe settlements given to Klamaths or any of the Outside tribes: it will be spent quickly, and everyone on the island will be a little poorer. *How much is a person's soul truly worth?* She laughs hollowly at the ridiculousness of the question.

They both laugh, John at the idea of gossiping being *official duties* and she at the idea a Native could possibly not lose her soul when dealing with Outsiders.

John says, "We were supposed to meet with them this morning, but no planes today. Guess Alaska Airlines can only afford one plane down at a time, weren't going to take any chances on today's weather."

"Don't even joke about that. They get in and out of here when weather is pretty crappy and usually without many passengers, and they have done it for years without any mishaps." *Yes, Jacob and Ivan are correct, John isn't Aleut.*

"Hey, I bought those pictures of a king salmon drowning an eagle. Roger never found Kell's negatives so if he wants to print

from those prints, have him get a hold of me.” He would have avoided this meeting if it would have been possible, but loose ends have to be tied up.

“What did you have to pay for them?”

“You don’t want to know . . . complicated deal, a little money, some legal work, and a carved feast dish I had of an eagle on a salmon.”

“That sounds like a rather hefty amount—”

“Ahh, the dish came for some legal work. I sometimes think I have become like a country doctor—”

Interrupting, Peggy says, “Hardly. What will you make from your case against the Seven Sisters? Isn’t that lifetime support?”

“That’s really the reason I need to spend more time in Juneau.” This he has to say: “One time, limited time offer, no hard feelings if not accepted . . . come with me to Juneau. Leave the paper. We’ll buy a house, raise kids, grow old and fat and watch the ferry pass down the channel.”

“You know, I didn’t hear anything in there about marriage.”

“Implied.”

“Well, you don’t mean it.” Refusing is easier than she anticipated. “Tell you what, I’ll make you a better deal. When you fly to Anchorage for your meeting with those sharks, I’ll fly on to Juneau and keep your father company until you get there. How’s that?”

“About what I expected.” John smiles. He’s actually relieved. He does think of her more as a sister than as a lover although the potential had been there. If she becomes his step-mother, he will wish her well. “I’ll let you surprise Dad.”

In the overcast twilight that lingers long into Wednesday morning, John watches the raven, its wind-ruffled tailfeathers flared, pushed out like a fan. The bird hangs around as if asking to be his spirit helper. He’s afraid to talk to it for fear that it would answer him intelligently, the world of spooks and superstition a lot more real now than before his dad returned North, the old songs and

stories now worthy of remembering and passing on. He has an obligation, one that was his from the beginning of time, one that was never J Jr.'s. His only remaining question is whether he will receive the same spirit his dad has, the one necessary to have faith in a simple story. Without that spirit, intellectual acceptance of the story is possible, but that acceptance is belief without faith. Right now, he doesn't know if he even wants to believe. He can be a shaman and no one will doubt him or laugh at him. Being a shaman will be good for business. Anything else about being a shaman carries so damn much cultural baggage, perhaps unjustified baggage but still a load that has to be shouldered.

But everything is his choice: he can become a toion, a headman. He can become a Native political leader; he can truly become another William Paul . He can live either here, in Juneau, even in Anchorage. He understands the power of a story, of a ceremony, even that of baptism. And Father Gregory makes it sound so easy, a few drops on a baby's forehead, getting the infant about as wet as if carried across a rainy parking lot while going grocery shopping, and about as meaningful.

He cannot believe like his dad does—he might now be able to understand Dad's faith, but he doesn't have it, can't manifest it, maybe could fake it but he has had too much *education* to believe, or not enough.

Tuesday's blow has mostly blown itself out, and if the sun ever breaks through the overcast, the day promises almost spring-like weather. Birds will sing and the ground will steam and what will seem like half of Port Adams will board Alaska's flight to Anchorage while another storm, one that will block the Sterling Highway and leave the Kenai Peninsula without electricity, gathers strength in its shirts like Grandma Mutukin used to gather puffin eggs, climbing over rocks and down cliffs and not spilling any of her precious spoils until she arrived on her porch, its boards heavy with rain and sagging under the additional weight of nieces and nephews, each there to participate in an annual ritual that had less

to do with the gathered eggs than with the stories told about what those eggs represented.

What this trip to Anchorage represents for the seven of them—Samuel Golovin, Paul Bob, Alvin Winesap, Kathy, Peggy, Heidi-Marie and himself—is the importance of binding the present with adjoiners that defined past obligations and relationships, those adjoiners enforceable by the orders and decrees of state and federal courts. If an agreement can be reached today or tomorrow (time will be needed to counsel with Portland Casualty's corporate receiver and with underwriters) perhaps a trial can be avoided, trials often being messy affairs with unpredictable juries. What John needs is for the underwriters to fear losing more than the face value of the insurance binders.

Arriving in Anchorage, where snow clouds drag themselves over Mt. Spur and tumble nearly down to the Inlet, leaving a flight ceiling of nine hundred feet, the weather is a mild twenty-one degrees. John doesn't need a coat. Nevertheless, he wears his wolf parka, its hood down, his dark hair windblown across the hood's white ruff. He says good-bye to Peggy and *Her Majesty*: "I'll buy you both dinner in Juneau if I get in tomorrow night." And he gives Peggy both the address of his condo and of his law office. His dad will be at one or the other of them if he hasn't shipped off to parts unknown.

The law offices of Armstrong & Armstrong occupy two and a half floors of the new Penga Building that overlooks the mud flats of Cook Inlet where Ship Creek enters. Below it and to its east is the old railroad depot. To its southwest is a view of the roofs of old houses, each slated to become the someday offices of yet unlicensed attorneys, all needing to be near the sea to keep their shark-like instincts honed. Beyond them is the Inlet and Mt. Spur, visible when the snow clouds are less threatening.

A second floor meeting room has been readied for them. And out of the corner of his eye, John notices that Paul Bob now wears "Likaats," the Bob family's named knife, its polished steel hilt forged into a dogfish, its sixteen inch long double-edged and fluted blade

secure inside its carved wood sheath, both knife and sheath, suspended from a cord around his Uncle Paul's neck, hang down the center of Paul Bob's chest, making the displaced Tlingit look like his ancestral toion ready for war.

John intends to collect for dead souls, not to make more of them, but he has wondered what would happen if a scalp fell from his briefcase, a possibility suggested by his dad. Maybe he will find out today. So as he holds the door open for Samuel and Paul, he asks, "Uncle Paul, do you have some ritual to say or song you might want to sing before we convene this meeting? Something . . . very Native."

His Uncle Sam turns to look at him, then to Paul Bob before he says, in Russian, "A slave-killer song."

John can't really remember ever before seeing his Uncle Paul smile. But for one brief instant a smile cracked the displaced Tlingit's stoic features.

The meeting room is larger than most houses in Juneau, and more attorneys are seated around its large walnut-veneered table than usually assemble in Juneau the mornings when civil litigation is heard. But color leaves the assembled faces when they see Paul Bob's knife hanging from around his neck—and his Uncle Paul makes the most of his entrance by beginning an irregular chant that sounds eerie even to his, John's, ears despite all of the songs his dad has recently taught him. But when Paul Bob pulls Likaats and begins waving it over his head as he slowly dances with his eyes shut, John suspects the performance is a bit too much. However, the polished steel of Likaats catches the reflected light and sends flashes across certain faces, shadows across others.

After four, maybe five minutes, Paul Bob seems to return to the 21st-Century. He lays Likaats on the table in front of him, and almost as if he were water, he flows down onto a chair he doesn't pull away from the table, the effect of the maneuver as electrifying as the waving of Likaats.

John notices the fluidity of his Uncle Paul and suspects the displaced Tlingit just evoked the assistance of a spirit helper. He

wonders how many spirits are present in the room. Where are they? Sitting beside him? On the table? And he wishes his dad were here to rebuke the whole lot of them; he's afraid to call upon a name he really doesn't know. Many people aren't, but few of those folks understand the real power involved.

John begins: "Introductions are in order. I don't believe any of you have previously met me in person. I'm counsel of record, John Chichikov."

From across the table, Virginia Carlton says, "You probably don't remember me, but I was in several of your classes at Washington before you went to Willamette. I took the bar exam at the same time you did." She waits for him to respond, her cheeks becoming as red as her hair.

John doesn't remember her . . . well, maybe he sort of remembers her as being one of the nerdy girls who always did everything perfect. She, he decides, has blossomed considerably since their days in Seattle. "I'm sorry, but you have the advantage."

Now truly embarrassed that she brought up a shared but evidently unmemorable past, she says, "Virginia Carlton, Native Land Claims and Native Rights my specialty." Then pointing to the Armstrong brothers, Ginny says, "Our senior partners, Sam and Vern, and I believe you have spoken with Sam."

"I have." Then nodding towards the two boat owners, John says, "Sam Golovin and Paul Bob, and of the two, Uncle Samuel is more dangerous. He has been known to eat a seal heart while it was still beating at Port Adam's Salmon Festival. I think," John turns towards his Uncle Samuel, "you did that four or five years in a row, didn't you?"

After a lengthy glare at John, Samuel says, "Seven years."

"I never did ask, Uncle Samuel, what does heart taste like when it's that fresh. Mom always pickled them in seal urine before we had them at home. A couple months minimum. I never liked them. They always seemed like old folks food."

Virginia almost laughs, but the others on her side of the table look as if they will lose their breakfasts at any moment.

Then almost as an afterthought, John says, pointing with his open hand, "And this is Alvin Winesap, who I do, as of this morning, now represent. Beside him is his former secretary, Kathy Johnson, whose memory is remarkable." He doubts the wisdom of revealing that Alvin and Kathy have married.

Vern Armstrong, his face still lacking all color, introduces the remainder of the attorneys present, but their names mean little to John, who now knows he will be dealing with only one person, Virginia Carlton. She is who he won't be able to bluff, the attorney who will have to sign off on whatever settlement is made. He sees a ring on her left ring finger, but for some reason, he knows it's there for show. And as he thinks about asking her out, he remembers what his dad saw in that second vision, a red-haired grandson. And he wonders when visions, prophesies become self-fulfilling.

John says, "As you know, Red ne'Torry is still in jail, but I'm sure any settlement satisfactory to the rest of us will also be satisfactory with her. So who opens the bidding?"

"You do," says Sam Armstrong. "What will it take to make your clients whole?"

"The full value of their vessels, plus interest on those amounts for a year, plus a half million a crewmember. We won't worry about fish catch unless you start splitting hairs." John leads with his bottomline. From now on, every amount for which he will ask will be higher. They will work hard to get him back to his bottomline.

As if a cold breeze had sneaked through a closed window, a stirring circles the table, sending shivers into attorneys, and seems to settle on the senior partner. "John," Vern Armstrong says, his voice and smile confident even though he squirms on his chair, "let's start with your father's boat, the *St. Paul*. You know that boat wasn't worth what it was insured for. How many seasons did your dad fish that boat? Eighteen, nineteen? Why, it probably wasn't worth sixty percent of its insured value."

"Uncle Ivan caught three hundred and sixty thousand pounds of Red kings with it in '98, making it one of the better fishing boats in the fleet and certainly producing more than any other

vessel its size. It was a real fishing machine. And even with crab prices a little depressed, its yearling catch potential—”

“So that’s the game,” Vern Armstrong says, now understanding the rules. He isn’t used to opposing counsel setting the rules, but this isn’t a case he presently wants to take to trial. “Full value, no interest, fifty thousand a crewmember, and that’s more than I’m authorized to offer.”

John sees Uncle Samuel almost blink; he also sees that Virginia noticed Samuel’s tacit acceptance of the offer. He should accept the offer right now and not waste any more time; he should collect his fees and return to Juneau. His reputation will be secure as a giant killer.

He turns towards Uncle Samuel, whose eyes now convey nothing. He doesn’t want to accept. What he told Peggy last spring was correct: he has a heart. The families of the crewmembers deserve better. “Full value, expenses, fees and interest, plus a half million a crewmember.”

Vern almost snorts as if choking on John’s counter proposal. His eyes meet John’s, and the two of them stare at each other like two old tom cats vying for who sits in a spot of morning sunshine. Finally Vern says, “Six percent, and fifty thousand each.”

“Twelve. What the law allows. And you have to do a lot better for the families of crewmembers. What were you trying to get for them from Dad? Two and a half million each.”

“No Alaskan jury would have given us that.”

“Didn’t stop you from going after that amount.”

“Six percent, fourteen months.”

“Nine percent, fourteen months, plus my expenses and fees capped at two hundred fifty thousand.”

“A hundred thousand capped and a hundred thousand a crewmember.” Virginia says in a very soft voice.

Now he recognizes her: she has had her teeth straightened, an overbite corrected. She was a girl who always got everything correct. In a prelaw class, she once offered to help him research a case involving maritime salvage, an assignment that interfered with his

returning to Port Adams for a herring opening on which he made enough to pay tuition for another year. He could have used her help, but he said something stupid in declining her offer. He doesn't remember what he said, only that he hurt her feelings.

Almost as if the words aren't his but rather his dad's or Peggy's, John says, "I owe you an apology from years ago, a youthful, crass remark."

Blushing, Virginia says, "I had forgotten about that—"

"No, you hadn't. If you stay with," John points to Vern, "the firm long enough, you'll learn to lie better."

"Was that," Virginia asks, "called for?"

Standing, his brow furled, John says, "I think we should just see each other in court."

"Wait a minute," Vern protests. "I thought we were almost at a deal."

"Bottom line is a half million a crewmember or I'll take this to trial. We'll even agree to six percent and my fees capped at a hundred thousand, but there is no wiggle room on what the families of crewmembers are to receive. Dad was absolutely firm on that point."

Vern turns to Sam, then to Virginia and speaks softly to each before he turns back towards John. "How many crewmembers?"

"Twenty-five. You can do the math as well as I can. Between boats and compensation for lost crew, this will be about a twenty-two million settlement. Portland has a five million exposure. We can work something out concerning structured pay for that five million. We're not looking to kill the firm."

"I don't personally," Sam Armstrong says, "believe you can get that much from an Anchorage jury."

"There we have a disagreement. Why don't you," John says, still standing, but with his briefcase now in hand, "talk it over among yourselves and your clients. My calculations are that I can get thirty-five from a jury and maybe that much more in punitive damages, for which I would take twenty-nine percent. So it is not in my interest to settle."

“You’d put,” Virginia asks, “your fees ahead of your clients’ good?” Quickly turning to Samuel, who still sits rigid, his face expressionless, she asks, “Don’t you want full value for your boat now so that you can fish this coming season? A trial will delay any settlement until next fall, then we’ll appeal and it’ll be five years before you receive anything if you’re lucky.”

It isn’t Samuel who answers, but Paul Bob: “You settle good, you make it good. Then maybe things don’t happen to you.” He picks up Likaats and deliberately sheaths it, each slow movement of his hand and arm a threat.

Beads of sweat form on Vern’s florid face as Sam Armstrong asks, “Where will you be staying?”

“Since you will eventually pay for tonight, we’ll be at the Cook. Send Virginia over if you have more to say. I owe her a dinner from a long time ago.”

“What time?” Virginia asks.

“Seven. Ask for me at the desk. I’ll be around.” John starts for the door.

But Uncle Samuel still hasn’t stood.

Vern, his voice hopeful, asks, “Is there something you want to say?”

For a moment, Samuel continues to stare at the senior partner; he sits, saying nothing. Finally, though, as he stands, Samuel says, “Twelve percent, that cheap. And twenty thousand for every day my boat could have worked gear, you smoke that.”

From the doorway, John says, “It looks like our bottomline just went up. Add twenty thousand a boat for every day of an opening. If Uncle Samuel won’t take less, I certainly can’t ask Red ne’Torry or Dad to.”

“That’s an additional hundred thousand a day,” Vern protests.

“It is, isn’t it. . . . What can I say?” John smiles as he turns and heads for the stairs. Behind him, he hears Vern ask no one in particular, “How many bullets does he think he can pump into a dead horse?”

That didn't take long: outside, with those dark snow clouds appearing to sit on the top of the hotels Cook and Hilton, the height of the hotels serving as their supporting columns, John asks, "Suggestions?"

"Do you think," Alvin asks, "you can get thirty-five million from a jury?"

Waiting for a pickup with a dogbox in back to pass, John says, "Truthfully, no. But twenty-two, yeah, I think so." Then starting across the street, John adds, "I'll buy everyone lunch down here at the 4th Avenue Deli, and we can get inside and see what everybody thinks. It looks like they want to deal—and thanks, Uncle Samuel, for the support. For a moment, I thought you might accept their offer."

"So did the skinny woman. But I know what my accountants tell me, I know what I should get."

What John didn't know ahead of time was that Alvin wouldn't go anywhere without Kathy; Sis babysits their girls. He hadn't anticipated having to get them a separate room, which would have been another credit card expense if Peggy hadn't invited Heidi-Marie along, and if their evening flight to Juneau hadn't been overbooked, and if both of them hadn't declined an earlier flight—the airline decided to put them up in Anchorage for the night. Now, they share a room while Alvin and Kathy occupy the other room the airline provided, an arrangement that doesn't seem to bother Peggy despite the apparent wrongdoing on her part in giving her room to Alvin, in actuality, her employee.

John notes the ethical inconsistency, but says nothing—she saves him money—as he gets ready for his dinner meeting with Ms Virginia Carlton, attorney at law, Alaskan Native law specialist. He wonders what her reaction would be if he were to tell her about his dad's vision. For that matter, what has been his? An acceptance of sorts. A reevaluation of red-haired women he knows. A little different reaction to red-haired women he meets. At a subconscious level, it does seem as if he has been working to make

the vision a reality, something he doesn't need to do tonight when millions rest on open but discreet communication.

Virginia Carlton hasn't felt as nervous since the days before her high school prom when she waited to see if she would be asked out all the while knowing she wouldn't be. Hope battled reality. Fought it a good fight for three days. Finally, though, with a clothespin that had once been part of a hollyhock doll, she pinned hope to a closet hanger and concentrated on reading Eliot's *Middlemarch* for an extra credit book report. There in her closet, pretty as the pink blossom that had once adorned the clothespin, her dress hung from the crossarms of that hanger until her cousin's wedding the following year.

John Chichikov has no interest in her, she knows that. This meeting is strictly professional. He might qualify as Alaska's most eligible bachelor, a Juneau attorney with intelligence and looks and money. She is surprised no girl has yet landed him, not that some haven't tried. She knows for certain he sampled their wares, then chose to look elsewhere. What was it that he didn't find in them? Wasn't looks or friction. She's sure some of the legislative aides who graced his arm at official dinners were intelligent; so what have they all lacked? Even JJ, John Jr. eventually married—she doesn't know if she wants to fly anywhere, Martha's Vineyard or San Clemente. Seems excessively risky the past year or so.

While Chichikov is very attractive, he isn't John Jr. even though he is probably the better attorney. His persona is more Native than he is and perhaps too Native for him to be named Alaska's most eligible bachelor by *Playgirl*—she doesn't even know if that magazine is still in print. She is out of it socially; never ever in the running for *bimbo of the year*. She can't imagine having the kind of press Monica had. She'd die. Having those things written about her, no way.

As the warm air of the Cook's entry pushes against her skirt, her knees wobble just a little. She checks her watch. Three minutes after. Appropriately late. She glances at the standing

bear as she hurries towards the desk from the Fourth Street entrance. She sees but doesn't notice John standing beside the bear.

"Are you meeting someone else?" John feels a little underdressed—her light green suit seems too stiff for a dinner date, but it compliments her almost complete lack of makeup and tightly knotted hair. He suspects she doesn't date much; she didn't as an undergraduate.

She recognizes his voice, and is surprised to hear it coming from behind her. Turning, she sees him seem to emerge from the bear and hurry to close the distance between them. "I'm sorry," she says. "I was thinking about being late."

"Have you ever been late in your life?" John extends his hand, which, as if by magic, cups her left elbow as he guides her towards the elevator of Tower Two. "I don't yet see your name on the door. Are you a partner?"

"No, afraid not. I'm still hired help." She was just in the Crow's Nest for the firm's meeting with Mrs. Roth, but she wouldn't mind dining there again. "That was quite a display you staged this morning."

"Absolutely spontaneous. I had nothing to do with what you witnessed, and for that matter, I'm still not sure what we saw." He presses the button for the elevator. "Paul Bob is likely to do something rash."

"I didn't know he had a right to sing a Whale House song. I knew he was Tlingit, but apparently he doesn't keep the old ways." Her expertise is in knowing his culture better than he does, or for that matter, in knowing any Alaskan Native culture better than those who still live it or are trying to restore it.

"An eye for an eye . . . Father Gregory has added an additional element to Aleut beliefs, or in Uncle Paul's case, Tlingit belief. The old ways have become older." He didn't recognize the song, but then, only for the past six months has he heard the songs of Cook's Island, his home. He barely remembers the phonetic sequences, let alone the meanings of those sequences.

“It was a shame what 19th-Century missionaries did to Alaska’s Native cultures. Can you forgive them?” Her knees still feel a little weak, but so far, so good. They are addressing familiar subjects. “I don’t mean you personally, but the community of Port Adams.”

“A writer I know once asked some of the people who were interned during the Second World War if they had forgiven the Army. When that writer asked old Issy, I thought Issy might kill him right there. Issy had spent War in Japan. He would’ve liked to have been interned. So it’s only Uncle Ivan’s generation and younger who hold a grudge against the Army. The old folks made do in whatever situation they found themselves. The *Native* way. They did then. They do now. And as far as conversion to Christianity goes, it is, for them, a fact of life. They can forgive the Army, the captains, the generals, FDR. They don’t have to paddle their bidarkas all the way to Washington D.C., and spear a bunch of officials. Life is lots easier under Christianity, lots healthier.”

“Who was the writer?” She wants to keep him talking. The one thing she knows about male dates, business or otherwise, is that they like to talk, usually, about themselves.

“University type from Fairbanks. He was twenty years writing a book in the voice of a fourteen year old girl” Then lying, John adds,. “Don’t remember his name.”

John, from habit, holds the elevator door open as Virginia steps out.

The city is buried under fresh snow. The streets are mostly deserted. Broken slabs of thick sheet ice jam the Inlet as the moon hides above dark clouds. What is it doing up there? He can only speculate about the question unless he accepts a spirit helper . . . he understands her position concerning 19th-Century evangelism, which has left long lasting scars in Alaskan villages. The Russians were bad enough, but they at least translated the Gospels into the language of the Fox Islanders. They didn’t ban kids from speaking their parents’ language. But neither Orthodox priests nor Protestant missionaries understood Native culture; they didn’t even understand much of what they were trying to teach, certainly didn’t

understand being a light as opposed to being gale-force wind that uprooted people, leaving them to flounder like beach logs tossed around in the storm surge.

“Don’t be too hard on those missionaries, or even on the Japanese. For both of them, it was war, a spiritual war underwritten by economic necessity as most are. Raising money to keep missionaries in the field kept churches afloat, kept interest in them high, kept complacency at bay. You know the history of the Great Revival. It had sort of run out of steam by the time we Natives needed converted. If a person needs a dissertation subject, a good one might be to trace the money, Midwest farmer to collection plate to regional headquarters to a missionary in Bethel or Galena—see how many dollars dissipated along the way, each disappearing dollar supporting someone of truly pure motives but not a lot of wisdom.”

“You sound cynical.” She doesn’t know much about him other than what was commonly known in their shared pre-law class, that he was liberal and intelligent.

“I’m not. Missionaries were front line soldiers fighting spiritual ignorance in a cultural war between competing spirits. But ignorance was never the real issue. Conquest was, grass roots conquest of the simplest sort.”

They are shown to their window table. He holds her chair, never really sure if he should. He does because his mother expected it, but it is probably a sexist thing to do, something that will eventually result in a harassment lawsuit.

Each time he passes through Anchorage, the city seems busier, larger, dirtier.

“Your settlement proposal was twice what we anticipated.”

“And half of what I should have asked. If this goes to trial, I intend to hammer you. No mercy.”

“More surprises in store for us?”

“Don’t know yet. Depends upon what we can salvage from all of your shredded papers—”

“We, I assure you, are not responsible for that. I regret it was done.” She doesn’t know what to order. Everything sounds good,

and she is hungry, but should she be? That she doesn't know. "Your recovery of documents has been greater than expected."

"I bet," he wonders if she drinks, if she expects a before-dinner drink. "Hope you don't mind me saying this, but I'd be more comfortable talking to you around a kitchen table than here. I feel like I'm fishing inside the markers. I want to keep looking over my shoulder to see if ADF&G's is flying."

"I understand perfectly. And if I had something in the frigerator besides sprouts, I'd invite you home." She wishes she could take back that almost invitation, but she does understand being more comfortable elsewhere.

"Make you a deal, dinner here and we'll pick up something from Carr's—"

"They're out of business."

"That shows you how much time I spend here. Deal still stands, though. Dessert at your place and we'll talk about the case there. My impression is whatever you say will go. Am I correct?"

"Before I agree to let you inside my door, I want to know why did you not accept my offer of help on that admiralty case."

Their waiter has been coming and going, bringing water, menus and a wine list. Now he has returned to see if they are ready to order. John says, "I'll take the prime rib."

Virginia agrees, "That sounds good."

When they are again alone, the city spread out below them, the snow becoming heavy, traffic virtually nonexistent, John begins, "I get seasick, never have gotten over it. Always made me dread going fishing . . . and what kind of an Aleut gets seasick? Not the good son who should be ready to paddle his bidarka anywhere. So I was always a little uncomfortable taking money from Dad when I should have been out there earning it. Just one of those misperceptions that happens.

"That week there was a herring opening, a one hour frenzy during which I made enough I didn't have to ask Dad for money. And even I can put up with puking for a few hours . . . I knew where the fish would be, just knew. Just one of things I didn't

understand then, but know a lot more about now. So I couldn't defend the case the way it was expected of us. I had to get back to Port Adams. I had to find a loophole, think of a trick."

"And you did."

"Cost me a reprimand, would have cost a lot more if I hadn't made that herring set. A hundred and six tons. One set."

She understands the stigma that could be attached to suffering from motion sickness in a fishing community, even understands not wanting to ask for monetary help, but, "Why didn't you let me help you?"

"I really don't want to answer that."

"The price of getting through my door is an answer."

"Might be better that I don't cross your threshold than answer." How can he say he didn't want rumors of them being an item to circulate? "I'd like us to be friends."

"I promise we will be regardless of what you say."

He will have to think about this for awhile. The snow clouds have descended low enough that all he can now see is fog. And what is he to think of his answer to her. He would be mad. Might not show it. But he would always remember what he said.

"Well, Ms Carlton—"

"John, don't. Please. . . . You don't have to answer. That was unfair of me. I know I had a geeky reputation, that I'm homely, but I am a fine attorney. You know that." Her cheeks are flushed.

"I do, indeed." She backed down, giving him the chance to save face—he needs to give her something in exchange: "Dad is a Christian, the salt of the earth who you're glad we don't have too many of or all you'd taste is salt."

Interrupting, she protests, "That wasn't nice."

"Think about the analogy. A little salt enhances flavors, but by itself, salt is a terrible main dish. The analogy isn't mine, but from Scripture."

"I know, but you should be more respectful—"

"Wait a moment before you say that. Dad was taught the old ways, how to be a shaman, has been teaching them to me." He

pauses as he fiddles with his napkin. “He wouldn’t teach them to me before, thought as a Christian he shouldn’t. But after I saw Uncle Ivan’s spirit helper a second time he changed his mind. Guess he figured I ought to hear them from him rather than from someone else—and I’m glad he did change his mind. I understand him a lot better, even find myself being a little more like him.”

“You’re serious when you say this . . . your uncle has a spirit helper, and your father could be a shaman?” She isn’t superstitious, but she understands better why people were afraid of the story Jacob told.

“There is a spiritual war being waged between your firm and Dad, and you will lose. Maybe not tomorrow, but eventually. He’s on the right side, your firm isn’t.”

“On the right side of newly manufactured documents—”

“They really don’t make any difference in the long run, what I had to learn . . . I have a tendency to cheat a little, but you know that from when we were together at Washington. That’s something I will have to overcome.” Those words surprise him. He hadn’t expected to say that, to admit to creating evidence, but her smile is disarming, and cheating is a problem for him. *Dad, you stuck it to me. My conscience was just fine before you returned.*

“Can we agree,” Virginia asks, “to an actual loss settlement? I have read that junk we received from Port Adams. It looks good and I can’t disprove any of it, but I know the numbers are inflated. Digits cuddled up next to each other and added little digits, most of them zeros. It must be very romantic on the island there for those original digits to have produced so many offspring.”

“You have my best offer to avoid a trial.” He knows why she accepted dinner. Even a few thousand saved will seem like a victory to Sam Armstrong. Vern, he doesn’t know about. “But what I was starting to tell you, Dad had a vision not too long ago. Said I was to teach the old ways to my second son so the old stories wouldn’t be lost. Guess there is a second son thing within the family. Anyway, he said he saw my second son—”

“Oh, John, I’m glad for you . . . you believe him, don’t you?” She knows the importance of sons within the Native culture, and while, picking up her water glass, she has briefly fantasized about John, she shouldn’t have. He will, she believes, become an important Native leader. “If you are learning the old ways, will I have to make a deal with another shaman, you?”

“Don’t know.” He hesitates, then adds, “Dad said my second son would have red hair.”

She chokes on her sip of water, half spewing it out, splattering the linen tablecloth, with some droplets reaching all the way across the table.

“You all right?” John is as surprised by her reaction as she evidently was to what he said about red hair.

Tears in her eyes, she tilts her head back as she says, “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to do that.” Regaining her breath, she continues, “Don’t tell me you were teasing.”

“No, serious.” He sees the waiter bringing their dinners so he waits for them to be served before finishing his thought: “I had an interest in the new owner of the newspaper in Port Adams, but she doesn’t have red hair, and I don’t have any red haired genes in my ancestry that I know of although Uncle Ivan keeps claiming he is Russian, not Aleut—and I know there are some Norwegian weeds sprinkled in the mix.”

“John, did you hear yourself? Sounds like you are trying to make your father’s vision happen.” This is a conversation turn she hadn’t expected.

“Maybe I am . . . and do you object to that?”

“No—but I’ll have to think about it.” She will definitely have to think about what he said. “What else did your father see in his vision?”

“My son won’t look Aleut.”

“I should hope not if he has red hair.” She can’t taste the prime rib as flustered as she is inside, and the worst part is he seems so calm and matter-of-fact about what he just said. “Am I to infer that we will be seeing each other socially after the trial?”

He really hoped they could avoid going to trial: "I would like that. Top notch attorneys, especially ones with Alaskan Native expertise, are hard to come by. I'm certainly not above marrying my business partner."

She sets her fork down, adjusts where it sits on the side of her plate, and doesn't look up. She can't believe he can be so unromantic or romantic, she can't decide which.

She shouldn't be negotiating with him, not after that last remark. Her judgement has been impaired by his mention of marriage. She has been compromised, and he is, she decides, either very slick or absolutely sincere. She won't know until after this case is settled.

"I am withdrawing from this case. You will have to negotiate with Sam in the morning. I won't be there, and I will not be making any recommendation to him."

"I'll tell you what, Sam is much easier than you are. If you withdraw, you will be doing me a favor, and you will hurt yourself and your career." Why, he wonders, is he objecting to her withdrawal? Of course she is doing him a favor. He needs to accept the favor and get on with things.

"I can't continue, absolutely cannot knowing what you just told me."

"Yes, you can. You are a professional."

"No, I'll insist the case goes to trial so I can't say to myself that I compromised principles, and trial probably isn't best. You'll win too much."

Business first, then romance: "All right, say you withdraw, what do you think of the offer I left on the table?"

"You want too much for each crewmember, but you might get that at trial. What about structuring the whole settlement except for the replacement value of the vessels?"

"Five years?" If she will sign off on this deal, he thinks he can sell it to Uncle Samuel.

"Fifteen."

"Absolutely no. . . . Seven?"

“Possibly.” She takes a cellphone from her bag and dials an unknown number. Into the tiny receiver, she says, “Structured in seven, can we do that?”

After a minute, she looks up and says, “Seven percent.”

“Have them draw it up. No absolute promises, but I’ll see what I can do to get everybody to sign off on it.” The deal is probably fair, and with his dad involved, he won’t receive more than what is fair. “I’ll bring Paul and Samuel by in the morning, and why don’t you see what your firm can do about getting charges dropped against Red ne’Torry.”

“She has red hair—”

“So does Heidi-Marie Anderson, the woman who started the museum in Port Adams, but I am neither inclined to swallow dynamite, nor be perpetually interviewed.” He smiles as he adds, “Besides, luring you away from Armstrong & Armstrong will be the ultimate price your firm pays for attacking Dad. Who knows, maybe that’s why you attacked in the first place. Otherwise, it might have been years before I ran into you.”

“Do I have a say in this?”

“I don’t think so . . . if I would have accepted your offer of help on that admiralty case, we would have gotten together when too young for me to fully appreciate your talents.”

Almost laughing because of how true his words are, she points with her fork at him: “I think I do have a say in this matter, and if you want that son, I had better see plenty of romance, beginning right now.”

-5-

“Mrs. Roth, please, let us help.” The CARE staffer for Alaska Airlines understands grieving and she has seen cases in which bereaved spouses have withdrawn into themselves. But in her thirteen years, she has never seen the effects of dramatic trauma have such physical manifestations: Mrs. Roth no longer seems able to speak or even care for herself. When she was admitted into the

hospital last evening, her examining doctors found no apparent cause for her paralysis. Her loss of motor functions is evidently psychosomatic.

Holding her hand, the CARE staffer says, “Mrs. Roth, please, if you are able to hear me, squeeze my hand.”

Nothing. No movement, no attempt to tighten muscles, nothing at all.

“Mrs. Roth, please, help me reach you. Try to touch me.”

Again, nothing.

“She’s not hearing you. No brain activity other than what’s necessary to sustain life.” The technician removes the electrodes from Mrs. Roth’s forehead. “Orders are to move her to the south wing. We’ll hook her back up after she’s settled in.”

“What do you think is wrong?”

“I’m paid to not have opinions.” The tech surveys the gurney to make sure he hasn’t forgotten anything. “Her case is different. Who did you say she is?”

“The wife of a possible passenger on Flight 261. We have questions about where her husband might be that we need answered. We didn’t need her to slip off into dreamland. We don’t think he was on that plane.”

“She isn’t even in dreamland. More like suspended stasis.” The tech records the time on his log, then adds, “She should be thankful if he didn’t go splat.”

“You’re sure she can’t hear you—because if she can, that was tactless and probably hurtful and perhaps harmful.”

“She isn’t hearing anything. She couldn’t be more out of it if she quit breathing.”

-6-

Juneau is dark, the sky overcast, the channel gray and choppy. The tires of their taxi sing as they sling slush that pounds the floorboards and fenders with a steady barrage. Rain and snow, the storm unable to decide which it wants to hurl into the sea and onto the

potholed streets. Heidi-Marie has plans to visit galleries to see how Native pieces are displayed, but Peggy thinks coming here is a mistake. She has cold feet and would have turned around in Anchorage if *Her Majesty* (she can't avoid using Bob's nickname for his wife) weren't along, and nothing seems to deter Heidi-Marie, not even rejection. Everything is, for *Her Majesty*, a challenge that must be overcome.

Jacob is in John's condo, and he doesn't expect them: "Hello there, I am surprised—"

Heidi-Marie takes charge. "Don't get mad, but both of us need to talk to you. I think you know why. So which one of us do you want to hear first?" She enters the condo, slips off her coat, wet from just the little ways she walked since getting out of the cab, and she sits on the front edge of John's leather couch.

Peggy stands just inside the door, her coat still around her as if she remains ready to make a hasty getaway. Jacob offers to take her coat, but she shakes her head, saying as she does, "We really can't stay."

"You came all the way here to see me and you can't stay, I don't believe that." He again offers to take her coat, which this time she surrenders to him.

"I want to know," Heidi-Marie says, "if the reason you haven't returned to Port Adams is because," her voice and her resolve falters.

"Go on," Jacob urges. "You think you might be the reason I have not returned, is that what you want to say?"

Peggy, still standing by the door, says, "That's what we both want to know . . . if we are the reason." She looks at something on the floor as she adds, "Mary would have come if she could have gotten away from the Post Office."

"Three of you? Each of you thinking too much. . . . No," Jacob says, smiling. "I forgive you," he looks directly at Heidi-Marie, "for making a spectacle of the old things. I read about what you have done. I don't like it, but it is too late to hide the old things now. They lost their power when their stories were forgotten. So we can be friends."

Then turning to Peggy, he says, "When Christ comes, He won't ask how much Scripture you know, or if you were Orthodox or Roman or Baptist. He won't ask how many souls you saved, or what you did every Sabbath. Those things matter a little bit. What He will know is if you fed Him when he knocked, gave Him water when He asked, if you did these things to the little ones who you didn't think were important. . . . This is what I have to teach John so he will know how to handle the old stories that must not be lost." His eyes moisten as he thinks about what he has just said. "I make a mistake and not teach him before. I come here to fix that mistake."

"Couldn't you have done that in Port Adams?" Peggy stammers.

"No," he shakes his head as if to emphasize his response. "If I am here, there are things I can not know, things nobody tells me. I can give my son time to fix those things. In Port Adams, I'm toion. Here, I'm his father. If I were to have returned early, I would have had to fix those things he needs to take care of himself so he will learn how to use real power."

Peggy asks as she sits on the couch beside Heidi-Marie, "Then it isn't because you were worried about getting between John and me, because we broke it off?"

Again, he shakes his head, "No. If I weren't an old man, I would marry you myself, but I am an old man and you need a young man. Be patient. One will come along. I know, I know about these things." He pauses to again think about his words. "John, my son, is not the man for you. I see in a vision who he is supposed to marry."

"Was I," Peggy asks, "in your vision?"

"Yes," Jacob doubts he should explain.

Almost incredulous, she asks, "Yes?"

"I see everybody, all alive, happy, a long time from now." Jacob fills the coffee pot. He has a story to tell, one they haven't heard.

* * * * *

[“of making many books there is no end”]