

EYE OF THE CHINOOK

SERIALIZED

A NOVEL

By Homer Kizer

Chapter Twenty One

Leaving the placer claim at Gravel Creek in the darkness behind them, Lars, alone with Les in the Nodwell that crawls without headlights through a widening valley, worries a little about a word of knowledge he received from the Holy Spirit last night. He's certain the word was from God.

Why would Satan warn true patriots about a Judas in their inner circle, about someone who has been to the mine site within that past few days?

Lars wishes the word of knowledge had identified the Judas, but maybe the person isn't as important as knowing for certain that they have a spy in their midst. Regardless, all plans have to be changed. He has to improvise as best he can. He can trust no one, except Les, here, to whom God has given annointed knowledge.

The Nodwell groans through the darkness as the Northern Lights arch overhead, then expand southward, falling off to the west when they fill the entire sky. The Nodwell doesn't travel anywhere fast, maybe seven, eight miles an hour; so they are still within thirty miles of the claim when twilight melts eastern darkness. And as a moth drawn to the light, they hurry eastward as fast as a Nodwell can.

They follow a blazed trail through occasional islands of stick-like black spruce as the valley widens yet farther and the sun lazily creeps onto the horizon. They wallow across a gravel feeder creek where the warming sun has cut deep into last October's drifts leaving the snow rotten and stratified and the water high and swift, the sky now bright blue and without a cloud or a plane. Willow buds are swollen red above crumbling wolf tracks that meander from willow clump to clump. On a rabbit run between willows, the snow is stained red.

Pointing to the blood, Lars says, "Don't trust anyone. The Feds have infiltrated the Committee. I don't know who they got to or how, but one of us is a Judas. So you and I are really on our own.

"I don't understand?"

"I don't even trust Bob."

"What about Bob?"

"Normally, I'd trust him completely, but the Holy Spirit spoke to me."

"About him?"

"No, but about somebody... so we can't enrich the ore we have stockpiled. We can't go near it. It's too likely to have become trap bait."

He has to ask: "Am I the Judas?"

"No. Indeed not... we'll use Bob only as we need him. Right now, we can do without him."

"I don't know myself, not really. I think I remember who I am, then I'm not sure."

"If you were the Judas, your amnesia would be an act. Zoe would have picked up on it being an act right away. You might not remember, but she has spiritual powers that are unusual. If she weren't a Christian, I'd say that she is a shaman."

"A Christian can't be a shaman?"

"That's odd that you'd ask, but no."

"Then the men were joking about me being a raven?"

"Yeah, they joked about you eatin' a raven and becomin' one. Harmless fun, that's all."

"There's something that isn't harmless in all of this. I really do know how to build a device— and how to deliver it. There's nothing harmless in leveling a city."

"I expect there isn't... while I don't expect building a bomb is a one person job, we have to be careful of what you share with anyone. You might well be building this by yourself."

The Nodwell's six-cylinder engine, a five-main-bearing Ford that has been rebuilt twice this winter and still doesn't run quite right, grunts as it spins one track while pulling out of the creek and up the overhanging face of the deteriorating drift. Nevertheless, the Nodwell twists to the top of the drift, from which they can survey the valley that stretches without a human footprint for miles to the east. "How many bulldozers do you see?" asks Lars.

Les sees neither smoke from a chimney or any other sign of human occupation. Instead, he sees rocks and snow and bushy willows and something dark maybe a mile away. He points to the spot.

"A moose, I imagine," says Lars. "You don't think Mr. Carter lied to the nation, do you? when he signed his D-2 legislation. There aren't bulldozers poised to rip up the wilderness. There probably aren't enough bulldozers west of the Mississippi to even dent the enormity of Alaska's Bush."

The valley stretches over the horizon where it flows into an even larger valley, and that valley merges with another as streams swell into a river. In the third valley downstream, three Athabaskan families trap during the cold months. After the river ice goes out, they move even farther downstream where they have two fishwheels. They sell salmon eggs to Japanese buyers, and dry the salmon carcasses for their dogs. And they return to their cabins in that third valley before the caribou migrate through. They homeschool seven children, with the first to have completed twelfth grade now attending University of Alaska Fairbanks where she studies Alaskan Native culture from a white man from the Lower Forty-Eight. She wants to write a paper about a wild man, a big-foot, who stole a rifle, but she doesn't think her story will be believed. She knows it's true, but her professor insists that she only write about those things he believes are true, like how much better off the People were before they got outboards and snow-goes, Coleman lanterns and Christ. She has already written about trapping martin and how to make a wheel-set for wolves and how to boil dinner in a caribou stomach, but those are things everybody knows. She wants to write about things unique to her valley, like the family of wild men that live in holes along the river, or the pack of white wolves that hunts them, those wolves much bigger than the dark wolves that follow the caribou herds. Once, she even saw a wild man, a woman with a baby clinging to her back, the baby's hands just like her own, pink and brown and without visible hair. The woman looked at her, then walked very fast towards their holes. She ran after the woman, but couldn't keep up. She never saw the woman again, and when she told her dad about the woman, her dad said he would pile brush over the wild men's hole and burn them all out if she ever went down there again. And she knew her dad would because her grandma told stories about the wild men being cannibals and about the old people killing them until there weren't many left, about how People were supposed to kill them whenever possible and not leave any of them alive. But they have a family, maybe several families in their valley. Her dad won't kill them as long as they stay near their holes, where the wolves stalk them, trying to catch them in the willows where they get water. But usually they aren't so far away from their holes that they can't escape from the wolves. That's why the one wild man stole a rifle, to kill the wolves, but he didn't know how to aim. Even her dad stayed away from the holes until they heard the wild man shoot the seventh shot. Her dad didn't want to be hit accidentally.

Lars turns the Nodwell sideways so Les can see up the side the mountains to their south. He says, "I thought Mr. Carter was born again, but if he has been, he wasn't born from above but from

Democratic politicians having affairs with treehuggers. He has proved himself to be a liar like every other Democrat has." Then after a minute, he adds, "We're gonna be here for awhile."

"What's here?" Les asks, indicating the hillside all the way to the top of the nearest peak.

"Another blossom. Small one."

"How far up?"

"Not far... half a mile. There's hand drills and hammers in back," Les points to the Nodwell's bed, "if you want to go with me and take a look."

"I don't know how far I can walk."

"I can get the rig, here, up within thirty, forty feet of it." Lars turns the Nodwell towards the slope that rises abruptly from the broken benchland paralleling the main stream that twists through the middle of the valley, that stream fed by dozens if not hundreds of lateral springtime creeks.

Again the little 223 cubic inch Ford engine grunts as it delivers power to the Nodwell's wide rubber tracks that seem to float over willows and snow and half-buried boulders. But they spin out when the slope becomes nearly vertical.

"I thought I could get you a little closer. It's about a hundred twenty yards from here. Think you can make it that far?"

He looks up at slides of broken rock wedged between sheer cliff faces, with snow still hiding in the shadows.

"The reason I wanted to bring you here is that I think we can get enough ore from this blossom for our purposes. Just as God has given you the nuclear know-how we need, He has given me the wisdom to use the ore we have as decoy material. If we move our ore from one location to another, split it up, put some here, some there, we can buy the time you need. We can keep the Feds busy chasing their tail, guessing which mouse hole you're hiding in. They'll be ready to pounce on you whenever they reach inside the right hole. But with this blossom, you won't be in any of them, but off by yourself, playing a whole different game." Lars opens his door and steps out onto the track. "Even hand drilling, it shouldn't take more than a day or two to get all of the ore you need. And that big canvas tent in back is to hide the rig. There's still enough snow that under the tent we'll look like another drift if a plane flies over."

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