

EYE OF THE CHINOOK

SERIALIZED

A NOVEL

By Homer Kizer

Chapter Twelve

Who am I? Jones stares into the darkened cubicle, his mind actually in pain as it wrestles thoughts as large as blocks of marble, each block to be set upon by hammers and chisels, transforming each into sculptures of life, frozen poses classically stiff. *What happened? What have I done that's caused so much death, that's left me a hermit crab, alive within a shell, life I can observe but don't recognize, don't know?* Lying more asleep than awake, Jones seems to see his mind separate itself from his mostly dead body. He still sees himself on the pages of the photo albums, still sees himself as a child, born as a child of the man he has become. He feels as if he is his own father, feels as if he has entered a timeless realm, where everything that was must coexist with everything that is and everything that will be. He knows his past through the album pages, his life unfolding with each photo examined. But *who am I?* He still doesn't know himself, doesn't recognize what it is that causes him to be here at this moment in this particular place. All he knows is that he must conform to the expectations of the man he has become. He must push his thoughts around, must shape them, must make them into something they presently are not. He must make his thoughts work for him. He must preach a sermon because it is expected of him.

How can I preach what I don't know and don't understand. The idea is insanity. But that is the expectation. Logically present what cannot be explained. *How does a person do that? How do I offer words that even now barely cling together— words of hope, of encouragement, of defiance.* And in his mind, he stands and begins to search for the words that have been misplaced. He opens cupboard doors and shakes books by their bindings. He wanders around the hanger, looking in toolboxes and under oil barrels. He knows that the words have to be here somewhere. They cannot have migrated south as if they were birds hunted along their flyways, shot from grain field blinds along the Columbia, shot along the refuge boundary at Tule Lake, shot on their winter range in California's Central Valley. Words cannot be killed that easily. They live outside their context. They live like the man that he has become, a life within a living organism. The words that he needs are here somewhere, buried in uncertainty, entombed by walls of doubt. He knows they are here, if he can just find them. They have to be here, for where could they have gone?

There's another person in his mind, someone who looks like him but who has his back to him, whose face remains in shadows regardless of how he tries to corner this person. The fellow is his height, his age, and as fast as he is. But the fellow isn't him, has never been him, doesn't even like him. And intuitively, he knows that one of them will kill the other.

The other fellow has, he's certain, hidden the words that he needs to bring hope and defiance to the men. But there is no means of him catching the other fellow, no means for him to force the other fellow to confess, no means of finding those hidden words that, for all he knows, might be on the other fellow who alludes him when he lunges at him.

He dare not go to sleep, dare not lie back down. He has to be alert, on guard, ready for a surprise attack. And he needs a weapon, but all he has are his hands.

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She is now Erika. Her former self has ceased to exist as she has accommodated Jabe in every way that she knew how— and in ways she hadn't even imagined. He now wants to show her everything, to tell her everything, to take her everywhere. In his penetration of her, she has penetrated the

entirety of the *Patriots in Action* movement. What she couldn't penetrate was the drug-induced stupor in which her father lay.

Jones is not really her father. She is not really who she has become. Or is either true? She didn't plant the locator beacon at the terrorists' Arctic Circle camp even though she had the chance. She didn't report everything she learned to Estes. He used to be Mr. Estes. But when she learned about the recent traffic accidents that have killed so many of the patriots— or terrorists— she has a hard time thinking of them as real terrorists— they are people like everyone else she has known, except they want what is right— and want left alone. At any rate— she doesn't know what to think.

When she returned from the Arctic Circle camp, a cipher from Estes awaited her. She was officially to accommodate Jabe and other Committee members in every possible way, and to aid that accommodation, Estes authorized her to spend funds from a special National Security Council account. So the cupboards of her apartment are now stocked; her refrigerator has been filled as has the liquor cabinet. She has clothes to wear, jewelry, and a foul taste in her mouth. Toothpaste only whitens her teeth.

Wondering whether she can return to a typewriter when this assignment is over, she watches herself in her vanity's mirror. She isn't doing anything that hasn't been done since the beginning of recorded history, but she has been asked, for reasons of national security, to perform a role for which society has only partially prepared her. Her mother would be horrified if her mother knew what she was doing, but it was her mother who reared her to pray daily for the government and for our national leaders. It was her mother who locked her bedroom door whenever her uncles visited.

The god of the world into which she was born places women below men, then uses women to transform men into swine: she is a realist, living in a world run by men who can be seduced. It isn't a perfect world, nor is it getting any better, but it is the only one she lives in. So she gave up praying when her first marriage failed, when there wasn't enough money to even buy scratchy, grocery store pantyhose. She knows the god of this world for what he is, greedy.

Even now she can hear her mother yelling, *I'm not raising a two-bit hussy*, the expression which prefaced her mother's preferred expletive when her mother thought her shirts were too short, or her makeup too garish. She was never allowed to go braless once she started developing, nor was she allowed to date until she was seventeen; the Pill was forbidden. So how has she ended up in this role of sensuous puppet? How could she remain herself when she likes who she has become.

That is really the truth. She likes what Jabe does to her, and for her. Yesterday she purchased her first ever pair of silk stockings, and she isn't about to return to cheap pantyhose. She understands why guys prefer garters.

Checking to see if her seams are straight, she feels like a little girl playing dress-up in her mother's old nylons--her mother was the National Security Council, and the game wasn't dress-up but exposing treason, and she wasn't playing a little girl. Somehow, though, who her mother is and what game is being played— all of this still seems like a game— changed as she got to know the players.

Her eye shadow is much too dark for this early in the morning. She applies lipstick with a brush and isn't quite satisfied with how it goes on. She also bought her earrings yesterday. Hammered Alaskan gold. The necklace she chooses feels heavy around her neck. Like a slave collar. There's a price attached to the gold that makes returning to any secretarial pool impossible.

As she leaves the bathroom, she again checks her seams, and she feels a fugitive excitement, a little tingling in her vagina. Yes, she has seduced herself. And turning her head, she feels the weight of her earrings swing toward her bedroom— if gold could become as tainted as an egg-salad sandwich left overnight in a warm room, hers is. It harbors the toxic waste of glittering bacteria.

In the livingroom, on every channel she sees the televised role she has been asked to mirror. The beautiful people. Vain. Egotistical. Murderous. She feels their embraces. And she fights her urge to bite her nails as she waits and watches.

What would it be like to be a real lady? She has met some in the Capital. She has always admired their poise, elegance, the gowns and the jewelry they wear so unobtrusively. Here in Anchorage, she had a hard time even finding stockings let alone somewhere to wear them.

Jabe took her to see Jones, who looked more dead than alive as he lay on that narrow cot. He never woke. He was supposed to preach the day she was there, but nobody had the heart to wake him. They left him comatose in that little room, no threat to anybody but himself.

She would've stayed, used the beacon, gotten more names, but Zoe Gunnarson was on her way north with Dr. Grewe. Zoe knows Erika and would've have exposed her as an imposter. Her instructions are specific: she is not to meet Zoe. Estes also directed her to stay away from the FBI. One of their agents is Jones's ex-wife, Erika's stepmother. Although they never got along, they would recognize the other.

She can never really be Erika Jones, who Jabe thinks she is. She can never really be the woman he wants— what he wants is an illusion. He wants what Hollywood, not God, created. He wants sex personified, sex with a smile, perhaps even with a brain. He wants her exactly as she has become, naively accommodating. And he should be by shortly... he is short. How can any man his size be so poorly endowed, that she doesn't understand. That doesn't seem fair.

He's to be detained as soon as Estes has the names of all Committee members. How soon will that be? She has those names now, so how soon does she want this dream to end? In another day or two? Then this will be all over. Arrests. Trials. She will have to stay in Alaska to testify, but six months, a year, what then? An election campaign next year. Who knows? She will make herself useful somewhere.

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