

EYE OF THE CHINOOK

SERIALIZED

A NOVEL

By Homer Kizer

Chapter Thirteen

Lars touches his left forearm— and he feels her hands, pulling him under, down, down, deeper, farther under water, spiraling towards hell. He jerks his arm away while flailing at her with his fist, kicking with his feet.

"Hold it! Les, hold it! STOP! It's me, Lars."

What's happening? Where am I— and is he still here?

"Les— it's time to get up. You've been dead to the world four days."

He opens his eyes, but his mind registers nothing but water and wind, darkness, waves, scud and weeds swirling around his head, pulling him downward. Closing his eyes, he sinks deeper till his feet stand at the base of mountains, snowcapped, spearing the moon as if it were a fat fish, he the fisherman, catching but unable to eat, the fish slick and scaleless.

He feels Lars gently shake him, and he again opens his eyes. Zoe sits in the chair; the thin, gray man stands beside her, a notebook open. He recognizes her and seems to remember her thirteenth birthday party, a hunting trip to Kodiak. She took her first spring bear. Pictures were taken. Its hide was made into a rug. There's a picture of the rug in her bedroom. Yes, now he remembers. He packed the bear's hide down to the beach there at Terror Bay. It's all coming back to him. The hunt, everything. And he closes his eyes and seems to drift: he's counting his steps, watching where he steps, and the raven talks to him, tells him how the world was formed by calling it into existence, how men came to be, how they fought with sea-serpents but couldn't prevail, how they waited for the water to recede, how the land was divided between men when the world was like a wet wood ball swollen large till it cracked.

Again Lars shakes him: "You okay?"

He opens his eyes. The gray man now sits in the chair.

"Mr. Jones, do you remember me?"

He does, but words won't leave his mouth. They seem trapped on his tongue as if his mouth were coated with flypaper and the words were flies.

"I'm Doctor Grewe."

I know you are, I remember you. My memory's coming back. But I don't want to talk right now. You woke me. I want to go back to sleep so leave me alone, please.

"How do you feel?"

Sleepy... hungry, thirsty.

"Is there anything we can get you?"

Yes, there is... but I don't want to trouble you. I've been too much trouble already.

"A cup of coffee perhaps?"

No, not coffee. "Water."

"Here, Uncle Les." Zoe holds his head as she tilts a glass to his lips. "Tell me if I'm going too fast."

He feels the wet coldness fill his mouth and pass down his throat, but it seems not to wash away the salt brine he swallowed while fighting the whirlpool that sucked him deep into oblivion.

When the glass is empty, Zoe asks, "Enough?"

He nods as his memory begins recalling parents, a brother, school, a wife, Erika— all people he knows, remembers. Grandparents. Boats he's owned, fished. It has all come back to him, or at least most of it has. And he smiles at Zoe as he remembers a little of her helping him escape the hospital.

Zoe says, "Dr. Grewe said we should try to get some broth in yuh. Yuh want it hot, or cold, or somewhere in between?"

He nods in agreement without specifying temperature. But Zoe takes his nod to mean that he wants it hot, and it almost scalds him when he sips a little from the spoon Zoe holds.

"Erika," Lars says, "was here. Jabe brought her. But she couldn't stay. Something about business in Anchorage. Think she'll be up again next week if Jabe doesn't get photos of the concentration camp the Feds are building."

Dr. Grewe looks at Lars, but doesn't say anything.

He sees the look, and he imagines that the shrink assumes that Lars refers to the new national monuments created by Executive Order. But his memory works well enough that he understands that a concentration camp is just that, a camp surrounded by barbwire and landmines, with armed guards primed to shoot. He knows why he is here. Washington D.C. has violated its governing compact with the people of Alaska. Its administration of land policies has become oppressive. A miner cannot legally dip a bucket of water from a stream, then throw that water back into the stream. That act of throwing the water in has been ruled, by Federal administrators, pollution. The miner has to first remove all particulates before the water can be returned; the miner has to remove the glacial silt. So yes, his memory does function. He knows who he is, what he's done and what still needs to be done. The Feds have to be put back into the bag that contained the central government when it was created. The determination of what is law and lawful cannot remain with bureaucratic judges. The citizens have to take that power back.

Everything has come back to him as she, Zoe, prayed that it would. Yes, he still has mental blank spots, but he's positive those spots will fill in before long, perhaps in the next few minutes, certainly within another day or two. And he says, "I can feed myself."

"Well, the only things yuh're gonna get is broth or French onion soup till tomorrow. So don't complain. Doctor's orders." Zoe relinquishes the spoon.

The weight of the spoon astonishes him: it's nearly more than he can heft. He sets it on his chest, and by curling forward as far as he can, he can almost see it in focus.

"Are you sure, Uncles Les, that yuh're ready to feed yourself?"

"Help me sit up, please."

Hands reach under his arms and hoist him upright, turn him and lean his back against the wall.

"How do you feel?"

He thinks about the question as he sort of rolls it around in his mind as if it were an agate in a rock-tumbler; he finds neither a fracture nor a fault in the stone, then says, "Better."

"Mr. Jones, while you're waiting for your broth to cool would you humor me with some word associations?" Dr. Grewe has again sat in the one chair in the room. Zoe half sits on the cot. Lars stands.

For some reason, this question causes him to think about the word *petra*, the word cut from a mountain side with jack hammers and drills, the overburden scraped away and crushed and mixed with pitch, spread like butter the length of a highway over which rumble heavy trucks carrying the Carthaginian wares of American commerce, with merchants and middlemen lighting candles to keep customers happy long past sunset on the Sabbath, one day the same as another at Wal-Mart— the word he was thinking about has been lost from his thoughts about repeating numbers and what they represent.

"Les, are you okay?" Lars reaches for his left shoulder.

He waves his friend's hand away: "I'm all right."

"You went blank there for a minute."

"A thought," his voice fades when he can't think of a way to relate what doesn't make much sense to him, but seems like it should, like it divides two of three into a system of bits of seven bytes, a binary system for *you can buy*, and *you can't*.

"All of your blood rush down to your feet, Uncle Les? Yuh did it again."

"Huh?"

"Yuh went blank, like Dad said."

Dr. Grewe motions for Zoe to be quiet as he says, "Thoughts are fragile. They must be held carefully or they will crack or melt or dissolve.... Your mind is curious in that the more you struggle to hold a thought, the more difficult it is to hold."

Holding a thought isn't his problem this morning. Organizing them, filing them, making sense of them— these are his problems.

"Are you ready for some associations?"

He nods. For some reason he mentally sees cards of ink blobs, and someone asking him what each blob represents. They look like nothing but ink blobs, and he says to the man standing beside him, *I see two men discussing spilt ink*. And there, memory ends and sound comes from his lips. But what he says, he doesn't hear.

What happened? Did his answer stop the questions before someone unraveled his life as if it were a hank of yarn? He doesn't know as he realizes that the doctor just sits staring at him.

Finally, the doctor speaks: "I would like you to associate an animal with the following words. *Tall*. What animal do you think of when I say *tall*?"

"Lots of animals are tall. Giraffes. Dinosaurs."

While Dr. Grewe notes his answer, silence squats above the room as if it were a hen setting a clutch of eggs.

"*Fat*. What animal do you think of when I say *fat*?"

"Hippos. Manatee."

"*Crawl*. What animal do you think of when I say *crawl*?"

"Adders. Cobras. Any snake."

"Your knowledge seems accessible. Would you agree that you can recall facts?"

Again he nods. He's thirsty, and he looks to see if there's something to drink besides the salty broth.

"What do yuh want, Uncle Les?"

"More water."

Zoe stands to go.

When she does, Dr. Grewe says, "While she gets more water, why don't you give me a letter, the letter following the one I say. For example, if I say *A*, you say *B*. All right?"

Once more, he nods.

"*M*?"

"*N*." He remembers the alphabet.

"*G*?"

"*H*."

"Very good... let's try *S*?"

"*T*."

"Excellent... *Beth*?"

"*Gimel*."

"*Mem*?"

"*Nun*."

"What does the word *ayzer* mean?"

"Help."

"When did you learn Hebrew?"

The question astonishes him: "Do I know Hebrew?"

Zoe has returned with a pink plastic pitcher of water. "Your hike over the mountain must've been some kind of a visionquest, Uncle Les. Yuh know out there," she points with her thumb towards the open portion of the hangar, "they're calling yuh Raven as if yuh've become a shaman or something."

Lars holds up his hand as if to squelch talk of shamanism: "Aaa, it's all those years of Bible study coming out, nothing more."

"Dad, yuh just don't wanta admit Uncle Les has been touched by God. No telling what all he knows. I'll bet now he can even beat you at chess."

"When all of this is over, we might have time to find out. But for now, you're gonna have to get the doctor back to Kenai so go check that the fabric 170 has been serviced. Take it south. Leave us

the 206. We're gonna have to haul some of those Clearwater rocks outta here. In the past few days, there's been too much traffic into here for us not to have been noticed."

When she has again left the cell-sized room, Dr. Grewe says, "I would like to continue working with you, Mr. Jones. Your amnesia is the most interesting case I have investigated so far."

"You investigate amnesia?"

"Not really. I'm interested in language, in how you think, in how you hear or see your memories."

"I have some this morning, more than I can say for whenever— you said," turning towards Lars, "I've been asleep four days?"

"Absolutely dead to the world."

"Don't remember any of it." Then to the psychiatrist, he asks, "How will talking to you help?"

"It certainly won't hurt." Dr. Grewe explains, in generalities, about his research and what he suspects happens within the chemical brew that transfers phenomena into tiny defiles where all that has ever happened is weathered away by streams of peptides ebbing into the abyss of death. "I believe I can help you retrieve your memories. They are still there."

Lars interjects, "Maybe he can work with you after everything returns to normal?"

"I won't need help when everything has returned to normal."

"What I mean is— "

"I know what you mean... I woke with my head feeling half full instead of nearly empty. Getting back what I have— "

Completing his sentence for him, Lars says, "Is a blessing, I know. But we have this little difficulty," he doesn't say what that difficulty is.

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