

EYE OF THE CHINOOK

SERIALIZED

A NOVEL

By Homer Kizer

Chapter Twenty Two

Today has been the most important day in her life. Everything hasn't been wonderful, though. She couldn't help the woman with the snags for teeth— and they had to leave her son to freeze to death. She regrets that they had to do that; she wishes they could have gotten the boy. Imagine, only seven years old and out there all by himself. She doesn't expect him to last through the night. But the marshal told her that when freezing, a person just gets sleepy and doesn't wake up. He assured her that the boy won't feel any pain.

Otherwise, everything has gone very well, indeed. She doesn't want to be away from her telephone for even a minute. Although she still hasn't been able to reach Estes, she has left messages for him so he'll know the arrests are proceeding smoothly. She wants to personally thank him for the trust he has placed in her.

She is extremely flattered to think that the President has sent one of his closest personal advisors to see her; she has been noticed by the people who matter. So, despite being overdressed for this afternoon coffee chat, despite wanting to remain by the telephone in case Estes— well, okay, Mr. Estes— calls, she leaves Erika's apartment feeling like she walks on bubbles as she heads for her rendezvous with Benjamin.

"I believe the Whale's Tail atop Tower Three would be more appropriate than here with the hamburgers," Ben says when he meets Caroline in *The Pantry*. And with his thin briefcase in his left hand, one of two received earlier in the afternoon, he directs Caroline towards the elevator to the side of the standing mount of a Kodiak brown bear... the size of the bear impresses even him.

Anchorage lies to one side of Tower Three; dark mud flats and dirty floe ice lie to the west side. Mountains extend upwards on all sides, with Mt. Illiana across the Inlet steaming from near its summit. He notices the steam. Under the snow, the mountain brews rage. Galled by the continual drift of stumbling stones slipping westward toward tomorrow, the mountain's rage smelts gold and uranium, heating and melting, reheating and remelting the mingled lump received from Creation, each heating separating impurities from impurities, metal from metal, building pressure behind sealed vents until everything will erupt next week or next year or the year after. The gold will buy terrorist arms; the uranium will buy time, that most precious of all commodities.

He notices that before arriving for their coffee meeting she had paid particular attention to her makeup. He notices that she recently had her hair frosted, that without the frosting and makeup her face would be neither plain nor attractive, that her most distinguishing feature is her matching lipstick and nail polish, both a deep red. She could trade places with either the few afternoon diners or with the women bussing tables. She has the primary physical attribute necessary for an undercover operative: anonymity. Perhaps he can remove her anonymity before the evening ends for her.

He orders a bottle of a Pradikat grade, Kayser white wine, and the fish hors d'oeuvre platter, and he asks, "What am I to tell Mr. Carter about last night, tonight?"

"Only good news, I hope. There was one incident with the first arrests. The marshals didn't anticipate Moses Johns sleeping with a .375 H&H under his covers. He got off one shot."

"And?"

"His bullet went through Jim Tucker and into Bob Charley, through his stomach and into the leg of a Pete Ballard."

"Three with one shot?"

"Well, the bullet went through the wall, deflected upward, and almost hit Bob Harper. So he came real close to getting four. But only Jim died. Bob is expected to be out of ICU by this evening. Pete was released this morning, and should be in Denver by now."

"The President won't be happy."

"I've been trying to get hold of Mr. Estes and explain what happened, but he hasn't returned my calls."

"Is that because he has sent north a replacement for you? He believes you have become too personally involved."

"A replacement? Personally involved? Jabe is an oaf. I don't care anything about him. I've only been doing what Mr. Estes ordered."

"I'm curious, what happened to Moses?"

"He was delivered directly to the detention center.... He took a burst of 9 millimeter rounds in his shoulder. Five or six hits. It was pretty ugly. But he seems to be doing all right, good enough to stand trial anyway."

"Who hasn't been arrested?"

"Jabe, of course. But he will be tonight or tomorrow morning. He didn't give me the names of all of the Committee members until after their meeting day before yesterday when they decided to go ahead and actually build a bomb." She pauses, takes in a deep breath as she realizes that everything hasn't gone well, not if Estes is sending in a replacement for her. "And then Clay Attla, Bob Bell, Lars Gunnarson and my pretend father, Les Jones are all still at large. We think we know where Lars is, and we know where Clay is. But Bob Bell and Jones disappeared, and they're the ones who'll be building the bomb. I don't think they can, and neither do any of the analysts or any of the marshals, but Jabe isn't sure. He came back muttering something about dad being touched by God, whatever that means. He didn't stay, and I thought he would've. He went on down to Kenai to see Zoe, who'll also be arrested when we pickup Jabe."

"How many dissidents have been sent to the detention center?"

"I don't know exactly how many. Some of the first ones sent up there have been in prison a long time, two of them since Kent State."

He recalls reading about a shooting at Kent State shortly after his trial in Moscow— the KGB didn't need to do much to prove his guilt so no charade of justice was deemed necessary. A woman judge listened to the prosecution present evidence against him. Then without hearing a defense argument, she sentenced him to five years of hard labor. Five years for murder. Not even a life sentence. Or a 58's Quarter: twenty-five years. Is that how, he wonders, there can still be dissidents from Kent State in American jails? The Free World version of the Supreme Soviet's Quarter. And since curiosity is a terrible burden, he asks, "Who are we holding from that long ago?"

"I don't know, a couple of SDS activists who were never charged with anything so they never came to trial. They have just been hanging around, I guess, the prosecutors waiting till the time's right to release them." She reaches for another piece of kippered sockeye salmon. "Isn't it amusing that with this camp north of the Yukon River, all of the dissidents in the country will be in cold storage, finally."

No, Honey, it isn't amusing for I know about camps that pervert Justice, and to pervert Justice leads to moral decay which causes fear to grip an entire nation or a people, causing your people, and before them, my people to become

afraid to die. You say, Better Red than Dead. My ancestors said, Let's us return to Egypt. So afraid to die, you become bread for your enemies till the land swallows the dust of your bones, leaving only sand and wind and foxes in the Sinai.

He looks out the window and sees the cold sun reflecting off the snow-covered Alaska Range, and he remembers the Urals, afternoon sunsets, fur on the moon, plumes of radiation making eunuchs of even party officials, thereby rendering the political apparatus impotent, transforming civil rights into the sterile soil of winter window boxes. Poets emerged from their paper cocoons as inch worms, each measuring the breadth and height of oppression while swallowing those radioactive plumes, taking into themselves wells of octopus ink, spewing out spreading blackness that hides the eight legs of death. Along each leg suckers clutch hope and faith, said with prayers of incense and wax, their wicks trimmed but snuffed by a march of professors.

"What's a matter, Ben? Is something not right?"

"I was wondering if the President is aware there're still dissidents being held from the 1960s. If the Soviets were to learn of them, the President's human rights campaign would be irreparably damaged."

"Other than what Mr. Estes told me, I don't know much about them."

"Perhaps neither of us should know anything of them."

"I understand."

"What about the Israeli national Jones was to meet? The President is very interested in this aspect of the case."

"I don't know. He hasn't surfaced anywhere so I don't think he exists. If he ever existed I suspect he was the Jew the FBI and Customs officials in Fairbanks turned around and sent back to London. Have you seen that report?"

"Yes, I have... the Israeli was a boy, not someone President Carter would have sent on such a delicate mission."

"Well, we haven't had much help from the FBI, haven't had much to do with them for a while. Jones' ex-wife is an agent. Mr. Estes believes she might have been tipping the Committee as to our moves. I don't know. I know we have been successful since we started keeping them out of the loop."

"I see... the President was advised that two Israeli citizens tried to enter and that one was admitted, the other denied—"

Interrupting, she says, "That's not the report we received, or at least not the report I received." Obviously troubled by this discrepancy, she asks, "Did the President receive the security photo of the Jew who entered?"

"I do not know if he did, probably not. I am, however, surprised that you don't have that photo." *Well, Magician, somewhere there is a photo of you, who have become interference in the affairs of nations. But with a photo, you, like radio static, will be tuned out. The demons who rule the affairs of men already know where you hide. They will lead me to you. Yes, they will.*

Answer me, Magician, if you can. Do you think you will intimidate the demons who are to deliver you into my hands? Are you more powerful than even one of them? More cunning? Can you deceived them? If not, then who will grant you victory?

What, no victory? Then why continue? Give up. Surface. Let me get this thing I hate behind me.

"Did I miss hearing you say something? or were you only talking to yourself?"

"I was angry with myself for saying too much, and possibly placing you in a compromising situation." He considers his words carefully: "The briefing I received before leaving Washington—well, I don't agree with it. Too much emphasis was placed on your allowing Les Jones to escape. Much was made of your inexperience. The impression I left with was that you should have remained a secretary."

"Who briefed you?"

"Bob— Bob Estes."

"That sonabitch. He calls me at work in the middle of the afternoon, tells me to be in his office in half an hour. He gives me this file." Reaching into her purse, she removes a folded file that has pictures of members and suspected members of that infamous committee. "Then he gave me a plane ticket to Vegas, and told me to read the file on the plane. I suffer from motion sickness. I can't read in a car, or on a plane, but I read this damn file." She tosses what she holds onto the table. Photos slide out. "And with a week of firearms training and play acting, I became Erika Jones. I've done the job."

Casually reaching across the table, he opens the folder and scans the photos. He isn't particularly interested in any of the pictures until he comes across a Xeroxed copy of a black & white newspaper article with an accompanying photograph: "Who is this?"

Glancing at the copy, she says, "Les Jones, the terrorist leader— that is, their leader until he was shipwrecked and nearly died of frostbite and lost his mind."

"You are not mistaken?"

"No. Here, let me show you." She points to the caption beneath the photograph which identifies the man in front of the Decca Electronics booth as Les Jones. "See, the article is about *Fish Expo '76*. The paper identifies him as our man, Les Jones, a fisherman from Kodiak, Alaska." She studies the picture for a minute. "He lost weight in his face on his hike through hell, but this is who we're looking for."

From his wallet, Ben withdraws a dog-eared photo of himself and Itzak Salmon sitting in lawn chairs behind Salmon's home in Jerusalem. He places the photos together. The one is the image of the other.

When Caroline sees the comparison, she turns white despite her makeup. "Why are you in that picture? Who are you?" She starts to push her chair back, then sees the muzzle of the silenced pistol pointed at her. Freezing in mid-motion, her weight half off her chairseat, she says, "You didn't have to show me that picture."

"Do not make a scene. I will kill you right here if I have to." He waggles the muzzle ever so slightly. "Sit down. Don't let this spoil your afternoon."

"How can it not?... Who are you? You don't advise the President, do you?"

"I'm here about the man in the picture. Where is he?"

"We don't know."

"Is he who's building the patriots' bomb."

"He doesn't know how— "

"Is he the one?"

"That's what Jabe said. Him and Bob Bell, a former scientist teacher."

"Eat, please." With his left hand, he picks up a piece of the kippered salmon. Then between chews, he says, "He knows how."

"You're sure? 'cause I don't think so. I held his hand, listened to him rave about some raven, and slipped him enough hallucinates to fry his brain."

"You what?"

"Gave him what Mr. Estes told me to. He doesn't know who he is or where he was, didn't recognize me, babbled something nobody could understand but Dr. Meier, who called in an expert from University of Washington. Mr. Estes wanted to use his mental instability as the reason for his confinement."

"What are you trying to tell me?"

"He had amnesia. But Jabe said Zoe Gunnarson prayed for his healing, and he has gotten all of his memory back, or at least most of it, and he's Les Jones— only now he knows how to build a bomb, knows how to enrich uranium, everything. But none of our specialists think that's possible."

"He knows how. He knew how before he came here."

"A prayer can do that? Come on."

"I tell you, he knows how— and you didn't listen to what I said. The picture of us was taken in Israel."

"I can't accept that. No prayer gets that kind of results, nor does a pilgrimage to the Holy Land."

"I don't know if prayer had anything to do with anything other than to confuse the issue. The man in the picture with me is Itzak Salmon, a former nuclear physicist. He has built many devices."

"That can't be. He's Les Jones, a commercial fisherman."

"Then that's how the prayer was answered. Maybe they're brothers, or cousins." He reaches for another piece of the smoked fish. "For the moment, we have a common goal, the elimination of him," he points to the pictures.

"It would seem so, but after that?"

"You have potential, and I have only one assignment. You help me find him, you can have the credit."

"Why should I help you?"

"To preserve your potential."

"Meaning?"

"You might suddenly choke of a piece of salmon, but if you leave cooperating fully with me, you will probably not have any problems swallowing tomorrow. Is that clear enough?"

"What if I screamed for help?"

"You won't."

"Can you be certain?"

"Without me, you will never find the Magician. He will make his bomb, and people will die. The United States will make war on its citizens. With the U.S. busy with its domestic problems, the Arab League will attack Israeli. Germany will send troops to protect Jerusalem. And Armageddon will be upon the world."

"Magician, huh?"

"Don't you think so? He disappeared from your hand?"

"He had help."

"Of course. And he will need help making his bomb."

"How will he get bomb-grade uranium?"

"You will never catch him because you look at the impossibility of what he intends, not at what happens after he accomplishes the impossible."

"Meaning?"

"If my father needs enriched uranium, then he will enrich what he needs. I don't know how. But he will know how. That is his gift."

"Your father?"

"He took me in off the street, fed, clothed me, educated me. I know him better than anyone else, the reason I'm here."

"So he's not your real father?"

"No, this would be easier if he were... I don't like what I have to do, don't have much patience with anyone who stands in my way, and I no mercy for that person. If I didn't think he could build a bomb, I wouldn't be here. But he can, he has before."

She sucks him her breath, holds it as if it were a caught butterfly, then softly opens her hand. "He has done this before? A bomb? Built one for terrorists?"

"Those details aren't important. What I need to know is his location."

"Two days ago...," her voice fades as she pauses. After a moment, she asks, "Where, then, is Les Jones?"

"I imagine drowned, or hiding."

"Then he might have faked his amnesia?"

"Let's hope he did. If he really believes he's your fisherman, I won't be able to reason with him. I will have to kill him."

"You'd do that?"

"Why not? I might be the only one who can."

"The marshals will arrest—"

"Don't be silly. Your people might locate him, negotiate with him, but if your people learn that he has built a bomb, you will not risk the explosion. The negotiations will make world news. Questions of how he built a bomb will be asked, will be debated on television and on campuses. Fingers will be pointed in every direction. The Soviets won't believe anything you say and another arms race will be triggered. Japan will have to arm. Every indigent country will insist on having a bomb as if bombs were hockey trophies. Itzak will win even if your people overwhelm him." He pauses, takes another piece of salmon, then adds, "If he survives, what kind of a trial can he have—and you dare not let him go free. If he is killed, then he is a martyr for all patriots worldwide. Everyone will know that a bomb can be built by someone other than a superpower. And what Itzak wants as much as anything is to force the Messiah to intervene. He wants the God of Abraham to stop the killing in the mud of this planet even if that means destroying all life now here. He doesn't care—so only a dead man can stop him."

"That doesn't make sense."

"I have nothing to lose. I am already dead... he can neither threaten me, nor appeal to my ego. And I don't care about you or about how the survivors will write the history. I'll kill you right here if I thought you were a problem."

"Thanks for such a comforting vote of confidence, but you have plenty to lose. You're alive, not dead."

"I have plutonium in my lungs. With every breath, I am more dead than alive."

"I can say that, too. Not about the plutonium, but about being closer to death with each breath. Still, you have to go on living for as long as you have."

"Isn't this living? Wine and salmon. Overlooking the city."

"This isn't exactly what I meant."

"You are mouthing words that you think you should say, but words you haven't really thought through."

"You sound like you have given up on life."

"I am fruit without seed, a lie told with art and skill, but nevertheless a lie."

"So what am I?"

"What are you, the overlap between having Erika dictate your actions and you interpreting your orders... this isn't getting Itzak located."

"We don't know where he went. Alaska's a big place, but there aren't very many places to go. Of course none of the marshals take seriously the idea of him and Bob Bell," she pauses midthought, looks at him, then out the window. Finally, she asks, "How can you be so certain? I know, the pictures, but couldn't Jones be Jones?"

"Itzak lived undercover in Syria for seven years. He was finally betrayed by his son's affair with a local woman. Otherwise, he would still be there helping make sure that Syrian and Iraqi nuclear projects failed." He picks up the last piece of smoked fish. "Itzak worked magic in front of everyone."

He was willing to consult on the smallest details. Explain theory. Set up equipment. And someone usually far removed paid for the failures, always."

"What makes you think he won't do that here?"

"We're talking too much. This won't help you, believe me."

"Tell me, why not here? Why won't he make sure the terrorists' bomb making project fails?"

"He won't."

"Why? Tell me this one thing and I'll let this go."

"No."

"If you intend to kill me, I deserve to know."

"All right. Because Itzak believes, prior to when the Messiah comes, that the House of Israel is in captivity because it was allied against the House of Judah, that captivity being what Christian apologists have labeled the Tribulation. He doesn't see that the House of Israel in captivity when the Messiah comes has been taken captive by Death, the cross-shaped fourth beast that the prophet Daniel saw."

"Is that it? Because Israel won't be free? That his religious beliefs have gotten everything all screwed around."

"No, you don't understand. Israel is Judea, the House of Judah. The United States is the dominant nation of the House of Israel. The United States, Itzak believes, will betray us, and he believes that if you do not collapse as a nation, you would send an army to surround Jerusalem prior to when the Messiah comes."

"Never."

"Shall I crow like a cock?"

"Huh? I don't get it."

"Itzak would. He'll build a bomb these patriots can use to weaken your nation. He'll think he's doing right, but world affairs cannot be conducted on the scribblings of ancient sages. He must be stopped. You had him, but let him escape. But don't feel bad. He's a magician, one clever enough to deceive demons."

"Will you let me report this and get as much help up here as necessary to find him? We have a common goal. We're on the same side. You don't need the pistol. I'll help you find him."

"I know you will."

"I mean it, I'll help. I won't doublecross you."

"I know that, too."

"Now you're scaring me."

"You should be scared."

"Tell me what to do, I'll do it."

"Do you have a gun?"

"Yes, in my purse."

"I want you to kill Jim Calkins, the agent sent up to hunt Itzak."

"I don't know if I can... I've never—" She can't finish what she started to say.

"Suit yourself."

"Meaning?"

"If I have to remove him, I have no need for you."

Swallowing hard, she sees her hands tremble, feels all of her shake. *This is not right. I can't murder, can't! But if I don't, he'll break my neck or crush my windpipe or simply shoot while being so very polite.* Her trembling intensifies until she has to hold one hand with her other to keep both from jerking in what would appear like an epileptic fit.

He's an assassin. He isn't going to leave witnesses.

Her stomach wants to throw the wine and kippered salmon back at him. *But he didn't show me that picture to kill me. He didn't need to that. He's here by himself. I'll bet he needs my assistance 'cause if he doesn't I'm as good as dead right now.*

Her voice low and hoarse, quaking, she asks, "How do you want me to do it?"

"I'll tell you when and how when you need to know. Till then, I shall leave to you the price of our hors d'oeuvres. You look lovely. Our date has been a delight." Ben rises to leave.

"When will I see you again?"

"I'll be around."

"Where?"

"If you do exactly what I tell you, if what must be done gets accomplished, we'll get along fine."

"Where will you be?" She hears the panic in her voice, wishes it weren't there, but is afraid that he intends to kill her as soon as she leaves the restaurant. "Please, don't leave me here."

"I'm not going far."

"Take me with you. I'll help you. Please."

Standing and now a step away from their table, he looks down at her, considers whether to even momentarily trust her, then says, "May you never see the muzzleflash that ends it for you."

"What kinda... what is that about?"

"Knowing when your time is up is worse than not knowing so savor each breath. One will be your last... if you want to come, here's a key to my room." Handing her his key, he knows that in an hour she will do whatever he demands. "Don't go anywhere else."

"Will you be there?"

"You'll become like me. Is that what you want?"

She doesn't answer.

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