

EYE OF THE CHINOOK

SERIALIZED

A NOVEL

By Homer Kizer

Chapter Twenty Five

Ben circles around the side of the Captain Cook, and enters the mid-building door coming from the parking garage. He keeps himself small and mostly out of sight. Unless he were directly looking out that entrance, the person wouldn't see him step into the elevator that takes him to his Tower One room where Caroline waits.

"Well, was that him? Did you get a good look at him?"

"No, that wasn't him. My mistake."

"You killed him, didn't you?"

"You don't need to know."

"You did, didn't you?"

"Check with your marshals and see if they have located Les Jones."

Not wishing to farther press Ben about the murder of the agent, Caroline dials the inside number of the Federal fortress, uses her security PIN, and gets the watch commander. For the briefest of an instant, she thinks about turning Ben in. She knows what will happen to her if she does, but it isn't her fear of what will happen that stops her. She's sorry about the agent, but a nuclear bomb? The Israeli lookalike has to be stopped. She has to stop him. Ben has to. And she is more certain now than before that Ben will kill him as coldly as if he were slicing tomatoes. Same goes for her if she gets in his way. But he might need her as cover to get back out of the country, about her only chance. She understands that politically, he can't afford to be caught here in Alaska. He will need someone to take the blame or credit for killing the scientist, who, by becoming Les Jones, has made it easier for them to erase him without creating an international incident.

The watch commander says, "We weren't able to locate McCarver, and a storm north of the Yukon has everything above Fairbanks shut down. Not much will happen tonight. Check with me after Zero Hundred hours. We might have more by then."

"Keep me informed." She hangs up. Then to Ben, she says, "McCarver and the girl got away. He'll come to my place, Erika's apartment, and want to get me to go with him."

"Does he know where Itzak is?"

"He did, but I don't think he does now."

"We shall wait for him there."

"Did you kill Calkins?"

"No."

"Don't lie to me."

"Then don't ask questions you don't want answered."

"I want to know."

"Don't you already know?"

She has felt his tongue all over her body, a lying tongue that although delivering what it promised, was as false as a full chest on a transvestite. "Answer me just this one question, are the police after you?"

"No, they're not."

"You're sure? There are security cameras in the liquor store."

"I know my business. You tend to yours, and at the moment, yours is locating Itzak before your people do and before he can build a device that'll blow international relations apart."

"How did you do it?"

"One question will never be enough, will it?"

"I'll get my coat. Erika's car is next door in the garage."

"Bring it around. I'll meet you at the side entrance."

"I'll be five, maybe ten minutes."

"You wouldn't want to be longer than ten minutes."

She resents the implication of his statement, and she knows she could run for the Fortress. The watch commander would send a SWAT team after him, but, she fears, he would escape them. She suspects the Israelis sent him because he is very good. Certainly, he isn't a drunk who beats his wife, then holds the local police at bay with a hunting rifle. She saw a submachine gun inside the one briefcase. She imagines the other holds explosives. He wouldn't surrender. They'd have to kill him, and that wouldn't be easy. So whether she likes the idea, she has to help him.

It's as if today were their wedding day. *For better or worse.* Hopefully, nothing worse happens.

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Zoe had gone to the office of Kenai's Sheffield House to get ice when the marshals came: they didn't notice her as she eased back out the door and sprinted for the stairs. She grabbed Jabe by his hand and said, "We gotta get outta here." He had started to protest, but before he could object, he heard the boots climbing the stairs. Leaving everything, even his shoes, he followed Zoe into the corridor where she grabbed him, pushed his back against the door of an adjoining room, and kissed him, tongue against tongue as newlyweds might, leaving him feeling completely engulfed by her.

It seemed as if they were momentarily invisible as five marshals brushed past and entered their room. Then in that moment between when all of the marshals stepped inside and two of them returned to the corridor to check up, then down its length, they virtually flew down the stairs and across the parking lot to where her red Chevy truck was parked.

"Which way?" she asked.

"Anchorage, and quick before they set up a roadblock at the junction."

"Which junction? Spur Highway? Sterling? Silvertip?"

"Any of them."

Now, one hundred fifty-nine miles and two hours twelve minutes later, Zoe points her pickup towards Rabbit Creek, damn thankful to leave the Sterling Highway. She knew her pickup could run, but she didn't know how much quicker it was scared than when she was merely in a hurry.

Saying for the fortieth time if he has said it once, Jabe muses, "They were after us. They knew exactly where we were."

And for her fortieth time, she asks, "Who did yuh tell?"

"Nobody, absolutely nobody— other than Erika."

Stopping in the middle of the street, Zoe asks, "Yuh've been telling me nobody, now you're telling me Erika?"

"She's all right. She wouldn't tell anyone. Hell, she was even up at Gravel Creek to see her dad, who slept through her visit. You were there."

A car behind her honks. Checking her rearview mirror, Zoe sees the car and pulls to the side of the road. The car pulls alongside her, and its driver rolls down the passenger-side window and asks, "Everythin' all right?"

Zoe answers, "Yeah, I just saw a malix run across the road."

The driver nods to her, then continues on up the hill, rolling up his window as he goes.

"What," Jabe asks, "is a malix?"

"I don't know, but there goes another one," she says, pointing in front of them, moving her index finger as if she were following a running animal.

"You're nuts, there's nothing there."

"How can yuh be sure?"

"I can see— "

"Then what do your eyes tell yuh about Erika? Yuh were sleeping with her."

"How do you know?"

"It's a woman thing." She turns her radio back on (she'd turned it off when she lost Anchorage stations while going over Silvertip), and she hears the announcer break into the triple-spin with news that, *A man was pronounced dead at the scene in Captain Cook's lobby. No details have been released, but police are looking for Les Jones, a commercial fisherman from Kodiak, to question him as a material witness. If anyone knows the whereabouts of Mr. Jones, they are asked to contact the Anchorage Police Department.*

"Shit!"

"What the hell is all of that about?" Jabe reaches to turn the volume up in case more is said.

"They're gonna have the whole state looking for Uncle Les. Someone is sure to recognize him and turn him in."

"We'd better get to Erika before the police do."

"I think they have already got to her."

"How do you know? What do you mean?"

Checking her rearview mirror, seeing no one coming, Zoe steps on her brake as she romps the gas and cramps the steering wheel hard left. Her pickup slides in a quarter circle in its own lane, letting her complete a U-turn without swinging wide. "I'm not goin near her place. I don't think she can be trusted, and if yuh weren't stickin her, yuh wouldn't either."

"Where are you going?"

"I dunno, any place but there."

"I think you're jealous."

"Of her? you? comeon, get real. I may never have worked as a stripper, but— "

"Wait a minute, she has never worked as a dancer."

"What do yuh think she was doing in Vegas?"

"Yeah, I know, but now that I think about it, she has never danced. She doesn't have the legs of a dancer. She's too soft."

Zoe again pulls to the side of the street and stops. After a stretched moment that seems two hours long, she asks, "What do yuh know about dancers?"

Rather than answering her, Jabe asks no one in particular, "How come I never realized this before? A woman who's been dancing for as long as Erika has will have a hard body. There's no softness to them. They lose their femininity, become like guys. Oh, they still have tits, but their bodies change."

"How do you know this?"

"And Erika— I don't think she's who she claims to be."

"How DO YOU KNOW?"

"That change not only effects their bodies, but it also effects their minds, causes lots of them to become lesbos... and I don't think Erika has ever been with a woman."

"I'm gonna leave yuh right here if yuh don't ANSWER me— how do you know?"

After another stretched moment of silence, Jabe very softly says, "The Army sent me to Germany, you know that. There wasn't much to do except go to clubs."

"And yuh've been checked for diseases?"

"I didn't have as much money as a lot of the fellas had."

"Meaning?"

"I did some touching, but sampling— I pretty much left that to the fellas with fatter wallets."

"You're telling me that, what, yuh didn't..." her voice trails away as her anger dissolves into disgust, revulsion.

"Look," his voice still very soft, "the important thing is that we know for certain Erika isn't who she claims to be."

"No, that's not what's important. How dare yuh touch me?"

"Look, this isn't the time or the place... I'm sorry I mentioned any of this, sorry that I didn't realize the truth about Erika before, sorry you feel the way you do."

"How am I supposed to feel? Just 'cause Uncle Les is out there building a bomb, that doesn't mean yuh can— Just forget it. You're right, this isn't the place."

"Maybe we'd better settle this."

"There's nothin to settle."

The Inlet and mouth of Turnagain Arm stretches before them, with the flares of two oil platforms pricking the darkness. Against the moonlit backdrop of Mt. Spur and the Alaska Range, the flares seem more insignificant than the flames of two Bic cigarette lighters seen from across a deserted football stadium, the crowd gone as if it had never been there, leaving only remembered echoes and the litter of excitement.

"Zoe, I need to apologize. Maybe my priorities have been a little messed up or maybe a whole lot messed up, but I never thought this would come to what it has. I mean, I never thought that you might be arrested, or that we'd be building a bomb to blow the shit out of Washington, or that, hell, those girls didn't mean anything to me. They were just a way to kill time, and some of them weren't even girls. They just looked like girls. Buy them a drink, talk dirty, cop a feel. That's about all. I had forgot about most of them. They weren't like you, and neither is Erika. She wanted to be friendly. I suppose I should've ignored her, but, well, a fellow is a fellow."

"Stop right there. I had a dog, JohnF, you remember him, that raped anything in heat. You're not JohnF. You eat in the house at a table. You sit on the pot to crap. So don't give me this *a fellow is a fellow* business. That's saying you're like JohnF, and if you remember right, Dad finally got tired of him not staying home and cut his balls off. He showed me how."

He remembers JohnF, a part Lab, part Airedale scrapper that killed two Pit Bull males in order to screw up that Funny River breeder's bloodlines. JohnF left little JohnFs in half or more of the kennels on the Kenai Peninsula. It came down to Lars cutting JohnF, or either the troopers or one of fifty mushers shooting the dog. JohnF's pups wouldn't pull the food they ate, but all of them would fight. They were great coyote dogs, and probably would have acquitted themselves well against a young wolf. But how did they get on this subject? She seems to be warning him that she'd take a knife to him if he were ever to fool around on her. But this entire subject seems irrelevant to the seriousness of their situation. So where's the connection? There has to be one or she wouldn't be bringing this up.

Across the Inlet, Mt. Spur, snow covered and blunted by forces buried deep under its base, darkens as clouds pass between it and the moon. Most of the city lies north and west of where her Chevy sits parked, half on Rabbit Creek Road, half in the ditch, exactly where her feelings for him are.

"What backup plan do yuh have in case everyone gets arrested?"

"Evidently not a very good one. The Committee was supposed to be the backup in case the Feds arrested the more visible Patriots... the world has changed a lot since Valley Forge. Not much of anywhere left to hide."

"It's gonna get worse. Think about not accepting the mark of the Beast."

"Zoe, I dunno what's goin on with you, but you're bouncing all over. We have to concentrate on the problem at hand, and that problem is keeping ourselves from being arrested." Jabe notices that without the moon, the platform flares seem much brighter. "As long as the Feds don't get Les, we're small potatoes. So let's dump this truck and try to get up to Peters Creek. I know a cabin we can stay in. Its owner is in Colorado, and there should be some groceries in it."

"I like my truck."

"Yeah, well, it's a cop magnet."

"I have a girl friend in Spenard— "

"No. I'm thinking about right here."

Once again the announcer interrupts the music to ask listeners to, *assist the Anchorage Police department in locating Les Jones, a Kodiak commercial fisherman*. A driver license description of Jones is given. Then the music resumes.

"Jabe, listen, I can take Dowling through town. They won't be looking for us. They won't see us. And it will be a lot less risky going right now in the Chevy than waiting, or trying to hotwire a rig. Believe me, no one will see us."

He doesn't want to go ride any farther in her bright red truck, but she has a reputation of getting away with what no one else can. Even this evening, he never thought those thugs would stomp right past them. Wouldn't have thought such a thing possible. But that's exactly what happened. So maybe it will be all right. *I hope so. The Feds won't cut me any slack, I know that. Expected as much when I signed on. It's just, I never thought we'd have to go all the way.*

In a way, my job is to keep the Feds off Les till he has a chance to build whatever God has shown him. It isn't to hole up and hope this blows over. It won't, not now.

"Drop me off a couple blocks from Erika's apartment."

"You're not goin to see her, not after— " she doesn't finish her sentence. Rather, she pulls onto the pavement and heads towards the Highway. After a minute, she asks, "I don't mean that much to yuh?"

"Right now, this isn't about you and me. It's about callin off the search for Les."

"And seeing Erika will stop the search? That's not why you're goin there."

"If she can lie to me, I can lie to her." Now that they have turned onto the four-lane, he nervously checks the oncoming traffic to make sure none of the approaching vehicles are patrol cars. "I'm goin to tell her where to find Les. I think she can shut up that radio announcer."

"Do you need me to go with you?"

"And what, have a cat fight? No thanks."

"We used to be good friends."

"Before or after she became a dancer?" He ducks as she swings a hard backhand at him. "Cool it. I shouldn't have said that. It's just I never thought of you as the jealous type."

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