

EYE OF THE CHINOOK

SERIALIZED

A NOVEL

By Homer Kizer

Chapter Twenty Six

Caroline sits waiting in Erika's sterile livingroom. What has been the most important day in her life might well become the last day of her life— Ben will kill without hesitation. If he has any remorse for what he does, he doesn't let it show.

Lying on her bed, Ben watches her through the wall; it is as if he has x-ray vision. He seems to know what she will do, what she will attempt, even what she will think.

She remains certain that Jabe will want to get her away from the apartment, especially so if he hears the APB out for her pretend father. But she expected him an hour ago.

Maybe Jabe is on the Kenai, holed up somewhere no one knows to look. He couldn't have gotten past the roadblocks on the Sterling Highway. If he escaped from the Kenai Peninsula, he will have flown north— or south— or west— or even east. It seems as if everyone of the frostfaeries have wings. They fly around the state without filing flight plans, or having pilot licenses, or having insurance. They fly planes that haven't been annualled in years, if ever. They fly rebuilt planes, mismarked planes. They fly in planes that have been groundlooped and had their props straightened, that have gray tape over tears in wing fabric, that have aluminum sauce pans hammered flat and pop-riveted over holes in fuselages. They seem to think the air as well as the land and water belong to them. They are utterly rebellious, and disrespectful to all authority. They couldn't organize a church potluck. Everyone does whatever he or she wants. And she knows what she's talking about concerning potlucks: she went to one. Everyone brought either a salmon dish or a dessert or both. She had salmon casserole prepared a dozen different ways, and peach pie made from canned fruit. She could have had any of a dozen varieties of cookies, lemon creme pie, chocolate cream pie, German chocolate cake (which actually looked good), or strawberry-rhubarb pie. But there were no vegetables, no salads, no spaghetti, no chili, no beef stew, no any of the other dishes she has come to expect at potlucks. Salmon and dessert. There has to be more to life than rice, fish, dill, hard boiled eggs, and pie crust, not that the combination isn't good.

She saw the late news, and the request by Anchorage Police for information concerning Jones. Ben has, in the short while he has been here, all of Alaska searching for the fisherman. And though she feels guilty about the death of Calkins, she has to admire Ben's efficiency. She wouldn't have known how to get that kind of support without ordering it.

Mr. Estes hasn't returned any of her calls. That can't be a good sign, and she wants to find the fisherman maybe even more than Ben does; she must find him.

She just realized that she wasn't supposed to know about Calkins. Maybe his arrival has something to do with why Mr. Estes hasn't returned her calls. Ben seems to know more about what is going on than she does, and she glances at the kitchen clock that she can see by leaning a little to her left. It's almost midnight. That's five a.m. in Washington. No wonder Mr. Estes hasn't called for a while. He's probably home asleep, probably doesn't know about Calkins, won't know for another three or four hours.

She can't report Calkins' death. All she can do is what she has been doing, rounding up Committee members and other dissidents.

She doesn't hear Jabe opening her door until he closes it behind himself: "How did you get in?"

He holds up a plastic Master Charge card. "I can't stay. I heard the broadcast about Les. You have to go to him, get him out of where he is, get him across the border."

"Where is Dad?"

"The last place anybody would expect to find him— "

"Don't keep me waiting."

"Wainwright, Fort Wainwright. He's on the base. They have everything there that he needs... I have to be goin. Take care of yourself, and get hold of your dad. He'll need you."

"How do I do that?"

"You know how, I don't. He left you instructions years ago in case this ever happened. Told me he did, said you'd know." Jabe, fearing a trap, hasn't let go of the doorknob. He now pulls the door back open, turns and almost sprints across the corridor and out her building's Arctic entry.

Stepping into the livingroom, Ben says, "He's a rabbit who's felt the shadow of an eagle."

"He's more scared than I thought he'd be."

"We may know where Itzak is— how do we get him?"

"I don't know. Guess we have to question the real Erika Jones. Guess we have the marshals bring her up from Vegas." She would pour herself a drink if she had a beer to chase it. As it is, the only alcohol remaining in the apartment is a bottle of cooking sherry. She drank most everything else the night Jones was spirited out of the hospital with no one seeing him leave. She would've restocked Erika's liquor cabinet if she'd thought she would still be here. But after the detainment of Phil Sharpe— that's when she really emptied bottles. She wanted to forget the smile on his wife's face. She thought she'd be on her way back to Washington in a day or two. *But it only has been a day.* This day, though, has seemed like a lifetime, with hours seeming longer than whole days usually are. After all, it was this afternoon that she was lunching with Ben in the Crow's Nest. *That's impossible, it has to be longer ago than that.* But it hasn't been: he has compromised her, and now virtually owns her body, blood and breath in one afternoon. He could prostitute her if he wanted. Yes, he could.

How has this happened? How could I have lost control so quickly, so easily? He hasn't beaten me, tortured me. He hasn't done anything physical— well, not really. He touched me when I was afraid to say no. Yes, his touch was gentle, but it was nevertheless ruthlessness. I didn't want touched. Yet I couldn't stop him— and because I couldn't stop him, all of this has happened.

He knew I couldn't stop him— that's what makes all of this so evil.

I'm intelligent, reasonably well educated, not from a deprived background. I've had a good job, but I wanted something more than I had. But this? I don't think so, no way. So what went wrong? She knows. It was the combination of him showing her the photo of the scientist and her knowing he would kill her, had to kill her.

The certainty of her murder is what caused her to compromise her principles, she thinks. Life is fragile. She isn't looking to die, wasn't looking to die this afternoon. Anything is better than death. As long as she's breathing, she has a chance.

What chance does she really have? Calkins was dead within a half dozen heartbeats. Five seconds, maybe. Not even long enough to scream. And Ben would do that to her if she doesn't cooperate with him. Every bit as coldly. No compassion, no feelings— it's like he's a different species. She has never met anyone like him. Life doesn't, for him, have the same value as it does for her and for everyone she knows. Oh, he can be tender as he was with her not an hour before he killed Calkins, but she sensed that his tenderness was false. It was like a person biting a dog on the nose to show the dog who's boss. His tenderness was him getting down on her level to communicate his dominance. It wasn't love, or even lust. It was simple interspecies communication.

Maybe she isn't cut out for undercover work. Maybe she doesn't want to be that divorced from everything that makes her human.

She says, "We'll need to get the real Erika here 'cause that damn Committee might well have sympathizers in the Army. With how poorly President Carter is perceived by the military— it was their vote even though they weren't residents in 1958 that made Alaska a state and not a Commonwealth— I wouldn't be surprised if a few of them didn't think it was payback time."

"Can you get on the base?"

"I don't know. Where is Ft. Wainwright?"

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