

EYE OF THE CHINOOK

SERIALIZED

A NOVEL

(c) Homer Kizer

Chapter Thirty Remembrance

1.

Lars feels the wind shift directions as the snow changes from the small, biting ice crystals of yesterday's blow to heavy, wet flakes that stifle sound and pile up quickly and mark the end of winter. From a lifetime of experience, he knows that a warm wind will follow this storm, not a true chinook although that's usually what the weather change is called, but a Pacific front that overpowers the high pressure ridge built over the Interior by the months of bitter cold. This marine front will melt the heavy accumulation, will cause flooding, thereby taking the ice out. Rivers, swollen by the runoff, will become impassible. If they are to get out of the Bush before the middle of May, they will have to risk whiteouts, risk getting lost and bogging down in the fresh fall and a host of mechanical problems as this wet snow packs around boggies and threatens to roll the rubber tracks off the drive wheels.

Yesterday's blow halted work on the bloom: they had planned to shoot six charges today, but the wind had been too bitter to stay out in it and pack the holes. So he had sat with his friend, the vastness of the valley and immensity of the mountains dwarfing even what they planned.

This land, this *great land* with its natural wealth and fragile skin, is home; he is part of it. His bones are made from salmon and moose, Swede potatoes and salted cabbage. His lungs have breathed no other air; he has drunk no other water. He has shivered in temperatures cold enough that a paperbag can be popped like a balloon, and he has felt the land tremble, sink and rise, and he has seen it changed by the boom & bust cycles that bring North those who will stay and those who leave. Even those who leave extoll the wonders, the raw beauty, the fishing and hunting. After spending a winter, they leave changed.

His grandfather came from the old country to make his fortune fishing cod and herring, but he never made that fortune so he never returned home. Rather, he married a mission girl, a creole who refused to become Lutheran, and his father was born the year his grandfather left for the gold fields at Ofir.

His father grew up on Unga Island in a house with shuttered windows and a boat tram, wood-framed, two stories and painted white. His father grew up with icons and without his grandfather ever returning from the Interior — his grandfather died when a steam boiler exploded, its twisted governor was all that was returned to the island.

His grandmother was a shrewd woman. Somehow, she acquired an interest in the store. She became respectable, and would sail to Seattle once every couple of years. She bought stock in shipping companies, in Hawaiian plantations, in a Mormon mercantile company. She subscribed to Outside newspapers and to literary magazines. Her holdings prospered, and she became more respectable. And she gave all she owned to the Metro a month before she died.

His father could read before he started school, could solve quadratic equations when he was nine, but when he was twelve, he was bitten by the gold bug. For the rest of his life, he prospected in the Brooks Range, staking one hardrock claim after another. Each claim failed to be a motherlode. He would then sluice enough placer gold to put another stake together, and he would return to the mountains from which he would emerge a winter or two later, destitute.

His mother's father was a Klondiker who stayed on after the fields' heyday. He impregnated a village girl at Holy Cross, promised to marry her, but never got around to fulfilling that promise although he came close the winter they spent together at Nome. His mother never went to school, but she learned to roll cigarettes before she was six and would make a few cents rolling smokes for the boarding house gentlemen who made sure she and her mother had enough to eat.

His parents met in Galena. There was never any formal courtship. Rather, she was cooking in the roadhouse. He ordered waffles, said they were so damn good that he'd marry the cook, and did that same evening, the priest on his monthly round just happening to be in the village that day.

The priest had assured his father that his mother was a good woman: his father believed the priest, respected his mother, and he never remembers either of them ever saying a harsh word to the other. There on the Yukon where he was born, she kept their cabin, chopped wood, and put up salmon all summer while his father was in the mountains. His father would return with the snow, bringing with him flour and beans, bacon and bolts of fabric. Whatever their relationship was, it seemed to satisfy both of them.

His mother died a year ago in a Pioneers' Home; his father, ten years ago in an avalanche. They lived long enough to see oil change Alaska in a way gold never did although the environmental damage done by the dredges exceeds anything the oil companies have done. His father prospected until the end; his mother knitted, her needles clicking away as rapidly the last year of her life as he remembers growing up there in the cabin along the Yukon.

He married a year out of high school, the daughter of the family with whom he had boarded while attending high school, this long before statehood and the Molly Hooch decision. Everything went well with him and Louise initially. He missed the call-up for Korea, got a good job with the mine there at Healy, settled in rearing two daughters who looked like him but both with their mother's green eyes— and voting in his first election, he approved statehood, a decision he has come to regret.

The snow continues to fall silently, the depth of the fresh fall building rapidly. They will have to go out in it, pack and shoot those holes in a little while, maybe another pot of coffee later. For the moment, he's content to let it snow.

He made a mistake; he's made a couple of them. But the one that cost him his marriage was letting her sister come live with them

Louise's sister was wild and not bad looking. He really didn't do anything with her. Joked around a little. Patted her butt once. Louise didn't have cause for moving out, then taking up with her sister's ex-husband. Maybe she expected him to hold himself to an impossibly high standard. Maybe he should have raised himself above even what he expected from himself.

He should never have let his sister-in-law move in. That was stupid on his part. At any rate, his sister-in-law shacked up with her boss at the Interior Department, where she worked. He said probably more than he should've about the relationship. All true. But most of it striking below the belt. Her shack-up, who already hated men— that's right, her shack-up hated men and everything men stand for— began to go out of her way to harass miners, or anyone who reminded her of him. First thing he knew, his mining patents were challenged. DEQ determined that his settling ponds weren't adequate. He couldn't take water out of the creek he had been using since he quit the coal mine there at Healy a decade earlier. He was out of business, charged with criminal trespass, being

sued by both state and Federal officials, and he was reading about Samuel Adams, patriot and smuggler, the uncle of John Adams.

It would be comforting to think that political change didn't begin with a few individuals' pettiness, but that hasn't been the case since Lucifer rebelled. Iniquity or lawlessness was found in this anointed cherub. He, as Eve did in Eden, determined right from wrong; he took upon himself the business of judging God, of determining whether he would obey laws, his decisions based upon his intellect, his experience, upon what seemed right to him. As long as he agreed with God, no rebellion was apparent. But his rebellion began when he began to judge the law. It spread when he told others that they could think for themselves, that they were created by God with intellect, that they needed to employ their intellect, not let it molder unused.

The American founders wrestled with the question of whether it was morally right to rebel against the king. Were they not doing what Lucifer had done, determining for themselves right and wrong; were they not judging the king? And they answered their fears from the Apostle Paul: rulers appointed by God are not a terror to good conduct but to bad. When rulers become a terror to good conduct, they have usurped the authority of another. They need to be removed. So the judging isn't of the law or of the ruler, but a determination of whether the ruler has become a terror to good conduct, a terror to a person living morally upright before man and God, a terror to a person who lives within the laws of God.

That determination was attempted— and made. In Alaska, and in many Western states, the Federal government has become a terror to too many individuals who live within the laws of God. Petty bureau'rats were implementing regulations contrary to the good of the citizens. It had, as from 1764 on, become time to change rulers, removing those who were now terrors to good works and replace them with leaders who would be terrors to evil doers, the determination of good and evil based upon the Word.

But it isn't big issues that start revolutions, but comments like, *Let them eat cake*. Big issues sustain revolutions that have been kindled into existence by sparks generated when one personality strikes another like flint on steel. This one would never have flared larger than a smoking bush if that Mom & Apple Pie Peanut Farmer were half as wise as he is smart.

He's forty-four; has a twenty-three year old daughter who inherited her great-grandmother's craftiness; has a twenty-one year old daughter who's Outside finding herself somewhere on a California beach; has a girlfriend who won't marry him because of an abusive first marriage; has a kennel of dogs his girlfriend mushes; has two acres at Anchor Point, a house in Mountain View, another on the Chena River; and Federal marshals trying to arrest him. He also has a friend who has been anointed by God for a very difficult task, that of building a nuclear devise which will work without it's design being tested beforehand.

"How are you feeling?" he asks Les.

"My feet are still numb. They feel warm to touch so I don't know what's wrong."

He motions by flicking his finger that Les should show him his feet

He has known Les since high school. Les's father was a carpenter, a bartender, a pretty good amateur boxer, and one helleva liar. Les's mother's family fished traps at Karluk and on the East Side of Cook Inlet. While Les looks like his father, he took after his mother. He spent his summers as a kid fishing with his grandparents. It was said of him in high school that he could talk fish into a trap. Maybe he was even then of Raven's seed. He wouldn't have been surprised if someone had told him that Les conned a salmon into jumping from hole to hole until the salmon was so far up the beach that it couldn't escape back into the river. That would've squared with expectations.

But a year after high school, Les was bounced out of a skiff and tossed against the rocky bluff at Igvik. Another skiffman brought his snagskiff in close to the rocks and snatched Les from certain death. The incident changed Les. While he was worrying about where he would take Louise for

weekend get-together, Les began to worry about Salvation. He has never been super-religious, but Les started to witness to the fishermen who frequented bars in Kodiak, Seward, Cordova. Les had learned enough about boxing from his father that drunks listened to him preach Christ; they listened or he knocked them on their asses. And for two, maybe three years, Les annoyed the hell out of a great many fishermen. Then, one day for no apparent reason, Les quit preaching and started fishing with a vengeance, becoming a highliner. He has been a highliner ever since. Oh, Les would deliver a sermon here and there, speak to Chamber meetings once in a while, address Auxiliary gatherings, but he left the bars and other fishermen alone.

He never expected Les to be spiritually anointed in the way he has been. But why not Les? Most everyone in the North has faced death at one time or another, but not many have spent as long in the water as Les has now done twice. After the first time, Les became a zealot. The Holy Spirit must have spoken to him then, if his anointing since this last baptism is any indication. So it isn't a large leap to imagine the Holy Spirit speaking to him again, giving him what they need to curb Federal oppression. He can't imagine God being pleased with how Washington bureau rats have abused their authority to govern.

"How far down do you have feeling?"

"My left leg, inside of the ankle. Not quite that far down on my right."

"You think it's a pinched nerve?"

"Both feet are numb—"

"Could be in your back. You've been swinging that hammer hard enough to get blisters under your gloves. And beating rocks isn't like skipping a boat."

"If we shoot the holes we have, we should have enough."

"That's what I was thinking. I want to get outta here tonight while everything is froze up. We can run with lights if we have to, but if this storm breaks, the moon should be bright enough to see where we have to go."

"How far—"

"Twelve hours, maybe thirteen if we don't get stuck. Then we'll hit a road... might have someone waiting for us."

"Feds?"

"Could be. You give any thought to where you can build whatever it is that you'll need to enrich this ore?"

"My geography hasn't come back yet. I don't seem to remember where anything is."

"It'll come. You already got most of your memory back."

"Some things aren't there, and I wish I knew why I remember one thing and not something else."

"How about a boat? We could get a hundred kilowatts pretty easy. That's not a megawatt, I know, but would that be enough? And you'd be mobile, hard to track."

When Les doesn't immediately answer, Lars asks, "Would a steel hull be a problem?"

"I think so. I think the hull's magnetism would make—"

"How about wood? I know where there's an old halibut schooner we could get. Heavy wood. 1908 vintage, if I remember right. I think there is a lathe and a shaper in its engine room, probably a drill press, maybe a vertical mill. I know they machined some parts for their old Atlas engine when they broke down outside of Sand Point... Hugh was thinking about buying it before the Feds pushed through their D-2 legislation. That put everything on hold except getting them outta the State. And they got to him, I know they did. Too coincidental."

"I'm worried about how long it'll take to enrich enough ore. I'd be happy with two years. Two months, I don't know."

"How about two weeks?"

"Enough for one devise? It'd be a dirty bomb and suicide. Whoever builds it will be exposed to enough radiation he might as well carry the devise to where he sets it off."

"That bad?"

"Biggest danger will be the mass going critical beforehand."

"Any way to prevent it?"

"Take the time to shield it."

"Meaning longer than two weeks, right?"

"My thinking on this is that we're really a year out. I hate to say it, but we should've started when Carter was first elected.... Why didn't we?"

"No anointing. We started selling gold, but you know that. And the Feds aren't gonna give us much more time."

"All day yesterday I was thinking about this, about stalling for more time.... I'll write out what it takes to separate isotopes with modified spectrometry, write it out as I understand it. If you take what I write and distribute it— you said there were groups in Nevada like us, and they should have access to ore— the government will intercept the instructions somewhere along the line. They will have to come after us, but they will do so methodically and quietly and maybe give us the time we need. They won't swoop down on us."

"They already have swooped down.... Coded message. Tundra tom-tom. From Moses' wife. Said he'd been picked up, shot, got a couple of them. They didn't bring him into the hospital either at Anchorage or Fairbanks so he's probably dead. She's in hiding."

"A.M. radio this morning?"

"Two messages about visiting her sister, yeah, that was it. Clever, huh? Everybody can hear, but without understanding, the words mean nothing. Like biblical parables."

"A woman was going to visit her sister— "

"Yeah, one sister stands for Anchorage, one for Fairbanks. *Mom* is Moses. *Flying in* is shooting, or shots fired. Simple code. I don't think anybody ever told you seeing how you were outta Kodiak and didn't get Bush radio."

"Nothing is as it seems."

"You've never said truer words. If a chariot swung down and carried you off to heaven, I'd want to believe, but with D-2 being passed, I'd always wonder if it wasn't really a black helicopter." Lars sees nothing wrong with his friend's feet other than they are very pink from new skin replacing the frostbite scabbing. "Can you climb?"

"Probably, but I won't feel what I'm stepping on."

"It's not too cold out there, but the snow is already deep enough you'd be floundering around... if you want to stay here, I'll pack the holes and shoot them."

"I need to help."

"No, I can get them. Get everything ready to go. We'll leave the tent here, cut our way out. It's edges are buried too deep to pull, and we won't want the extra weight, not if we bust out as much ore as I think we'll get."

"I want half a ton."

"We'll have that and that much more."

2.

Heavy with ore, its engine straining, wet snow packed around finals and boggies and threatening to roll tracks off drive sprockets, the Nodwell groans as it wallows in whiteness, snow falling hard even as the temperature climbs to, and are by now, a little above freezing, the heavy fall packing under its belly, highcentering the hybrid breast that's neither pickup truck nor Cat, but a northern creation engineered for roadless winters by mechanics who desired perpetual employment. It lumbers in and

out of drifts buried under a foot and a half of fresh fall, each quarter mile a victory of sorts when nothing more breaks as torque stretches the skin of gear teeth, flame hardened and brittle. Torque twists drivelines and threatens to snap axles bogged down in deep snow. Torque twists time into distance as if it were a stamping mill grinding ore into powder to be fired in the smelter, ingots of gold or silver becoming today uranium as a Geiger counter squeals, its pegged needles torqued till snapped. The Nodwell should be floating over the pack, hurrying northeast towards Wiseman, where a truck was to have met them. But this snowfall closed the Haulroad in the area dubbed Wally's Ditch. So Lars has turned the hybrid breast south along a sleddog trail that will eventually lead to the new bridge over the Yukon and into Livengood where their truck awaits them, a trip in length beyond perhaps any ever before attempted in a Nodwell, Livengood more than three hundred miles away. But the snow— the rigidity of its crystalline structure soggy this late in the winter— collapses under the Nodwell's tracks, leaving the beast to labor through what should have been easy going. Each half mile consumes much more time and fuel than expected. The question becomes which will come first, mechanical failure or empty fuel tanks? Or will they be spotted from the air, their presence in the newly decreed park challenged, a gauntlet thrown from a high-wing plane, with an ensuing duel fought: highpower rifles at three hundred yards or more, the seconds obliged to shoot at will once the first round has been fired.

Each mile surrenders grudgingly, each valley more so. With enough speed, rivers can still be crossed even though their ice sags under the weight of overflow and the new snow. Night comes, then morning, and still the breast groans and strains and wallows through soft snow as it chews up time and distance, swallowing their last barrel of fuel, the handpump again tossed atop the ore, making it as hot as the new snowfall is cold. But when the sun again dips to the horizon somewhere far to the west, the snowfall lessens and temperatures turn and begin to drop. And with full darkness, the Nodwell churns rapidly across the remaining valleys and river drainages and the emptiness of Arctic mountain passes. It crawls onto the Haulroad fifty miles or so north of the Yukon, its headlights lonely shafts bobbing up and down as the tracks race each other as to which will come off first, both arching high over idlers, then reaching out to grab ice and gravel, pulling itself forward in a continuous clamor of grousers grating distance into sparks and sparkles. And in predawn grayness, the Nodwell crosses the Yukon as one on-coming truck after another approaches, their drivers reluctant to leave the middle of the road, preferring instead to crowd the Nodwell into the freshly plowed berm.

Lars moves over whenever a truck approaches. He's close enough to pulling off what he thought was truly impossible that he doesn't want a fluke accident to spoil an otherwise miraculous recovery of what God has given them to enforce the covenant relationship between governed and government that Adams and Jefferson and Franklin and others brought into existence two centuries ago. But then, when God is for you, who can be against you? and he has never seen the presence of God so manifest in anything as it is in this, their beginning construction of a nuclear device. Yes, many will die, some innocent of any wrongdoing towards Alaskans. But their deaths won't be on his conscience. They willingly choose to become clogs in an ever expanding bureaucracy that like a lump of leaven hidden in a flour barrel, grows larger and larger until the whole barrel becomes sin during the Passover, when Israel left Egypt and spiritual Israel was freed from bondage to the Law. Once again, a beginning must be made that requires eating in haste, with feet shod, leaving behind pyramids and leeks and slavery to a court system that limits when a man can kill the wolf threatening his dogs, or whether he can land a plane on the lake where his father spent ten winters trapping wolves. The Pharaoh seems drunk on brewed smut. He sends forth his minions to explain the rules of his latest land grab, and he doesn't know that the Death Angel is about to slaughter his firstborn. He won't believe until it's too late. Then there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth for the Pharaoh also is a firstborn.

There's enough traffic south of the Yukon the Nodwell doesn't seem all that conspicuous: it is merely one of many rigs hurrying somewhere. It has no visible markings, but it needs none as it turns off the Hiway and into the waiting shop of a Patriot. They have made it. There can be, for the moment, no question of whether God is for them.

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Upon learning how many Patriots have disappeared from homes and jobs while they beat their rock drills into the blossom, both Lars and Les expect to be arrested at any moment as they transfer the highgrade ore from bed to bed. The truck is a 1960 F-600, its engine an industrial 292. It's an engine that might run forever, but it doesn't run anywhere fast and the prospect of crossing scales seems unnerving. They had planned to get a night's sleep at Livengood. Now, they hurry to get away from anyone whom Federal authorities might have identified as a Patriot. They suspect they will have to dump the truck when they reach Fairbanks, assuming they get that far without being stopped—they're certain authorities have their names, that APBs have been broadcast for them, that getting the ore out of the Interior has become exceedingly difficult.

"We might as well decide one thing before we get underway," Lars says. "Do we build it here, or on the coast?"

For the past three days, Les, even to himself, has seemed more befuddled than anytime since his rescue. There is so much that he should remember, but doesn't. So much missing from his mind. His memory lapses seem less gaps in what he should know than what he does remember are glimpses into the dark void of what he doesn't recall. His few memories seem alien. He can't accurately locate them as to where they occurred or when. They seem like travel postcards of places he has visited; they exist isolated from habits and regular haunts; they are incomplete, like sterile sex for procreation. Starving dogs slinking among empty garbage cans, eager to gnaw even the galvanizing where a bone once laid—that's what his memories are. Gaunt shadows of whom he once was.

Nor does his body work as it should. His feet still have no feeling in them. He walks and seems not to touch the ground. He leaves footprints that he sees, but that seem to be another person's. He seems divided from himself, and he worries that he will somehow foul up for everybody the procuring of a nuclear device. God help him if he does. There won't be help from anywhere else. Even he will cast stones at himself.

"We need time—"

"A year you said. So now that the Feds have responded seriously, let's look for that year. We will need that long to regroup and reorganize." Lars listens to the idling engine, its cam lobes pushing up its solid lifters, opening valves, closing them with manmade precision. Cast iron, machined steel, aluminum, the things of industry and commerce and the free flow of ideas. He understands all of these things, but he doesn't know where to find additional time when the tentacles of an overreaching bureaucracy seek to strangle freedom. Nevertheless, he says, "One thing I know about the Feds is that they lack patience. They'll round up their list of names, pat themselves on their backs, tell each other what a good job they've done, then lose interest in the state. Unfortunately, we're probably on that list."

"Where will we attract the least amount of attention?... I've lost my knowledge of state geography."

Snow starts falling. At first a few flakes out of a blue sky sift down, but within minutes, the sky turns light gray and heavy, wet flakes fall like inverted parachutes two inches across. Flakes melt on their hands, arms, shoulders, but where the old snow remains, they build up quickly, becoming a half inch, an inch, two inches in twenty minutes.

When the wet flakes first start, Lars makes one quick comment, "God erased what you knew so there'd be room for equations," as he motions for Les to get in. "We'll attract the fewest stares on the Kenai."

The ore wouldn't normally come close to exceeding axle weights, but before these latest storms, breakup had begun. The weight restriction to Fox is 75%; from Nenana to Clear the restriction is 50%, as it is from Cantwell to Wasilla, and then from Girdwood to Sterling. And once underway, their problem becomes more of staying awake than icy roads or weigh stations.

Alaskan truckers driving rigs Outside complain about the state only issuing one category of driver's license— the license on which Lars now drives was originally issued to him the winter he trapped near Minto. It was issued to *John Daily*, the name springing from his head as if he were Zeus, the name coming to him one morning while he was shaving. It is *Valid Without Photo*, a blue background under the validation. So with it, he shouldn't be a name on that suspected list of Patriots. Yes, the license, the truck's registration and its liability insurance policy— all issued to John Daily— will withstand scrutiny. And the beauty is that either of them can drive on the same license.

More miles blur as the storm, coming in from the southwest, floats inverted parachutes across the white landscape, making up appear as down and spring as winter, suspending the appearance of natural law, leaving only the abstracts of attorneys to support a Federal bureaucracy mooning citizen soldiers asleep till salmon seasons are shortened due to sunken shackles of monofilament webbing catching their fish and others, that catch negotiated away for human rights concessions in Poland and Korea, Spain and Russia. The clear strands of webbing entangle cormorants and catch quotas, drowning both. It lets half of its kill drop out, but it holds tight obligations made to foreign ministers. It wraps around the two-hundred mile doughnut, and it becomes too heavy to haul aboard so it's cut loose to continue fishing unpicked and untended; it's out there killing sea birds and gilling salmon.

Nearing Fairbanks, Lars turns onto Farmers' Loop, bypasses the city and Ft. Wainwright, circles around the college, and emerges onto the new Parks Highway with the storm still dumping wet flakes that seem to fall upward. The state laid off its winter plowing crew at the first of the month— they do every year— so the heavy flakes have accumulated on the asphalt, becoming slush in the ruts and ice outside of the four tracks, two coming and two going, each lane lost under the dirty mixture of water, snow and ice that will become very slick when the sun sets in another two hours.

The day passes without them eating or sleeping; it passes with them having depleted adrenaline reserves— they continue south through Nenana as balls of red light flash across the road, right to left. The red flashes appear in the willows as if they were hunting owls flying low. Then nearly level, they shoot sometimes, dart at other times, even glide once in a while over to the other side of the road and disappear in the willows or Cuetip black spruce. Sometimes they cross perpendicular to the roadway, sometimes at an angle. Lars sees them, Les does. Once, they saw a flash at the same time as they keep the truck pointed south, the miles groaning away.

Forty-five, fifty miles an hour, slowing when the snow falls hard enough that windshield wipers are needed, Lars sings to himself about *where angels fear to tread* as he rocks in rhythm to the rolling pitch of the roadway, potholes being the scored bass. He wonders where the years have gone since what is now the Richardson Highway was washboarded gravel— the truck he first drove north was a '32 Ford two ton that still had Indiana plates. He was delivering an engine lathe pilfered from a Liberty ship to a Northpole machine shop. He still doesn't know how those fellows got that lathe off the ship. It must have weighed five tons; it was more load than that ancient Ford should have hauled. As a result, he fought that truck the whole way, arriving in Delta on tires that had boots on their boots, their tubes with patches on patches. He had become good at breaking down tires alongside the road, but the broken axle was more than he could fix. A Rex six-by towed him

backwards the last eighty miles. He'd never seen a Rex before, nor has he seen one since, but if there was ever an overbuilt truck, that was it.

He returned to Seward on the train three months later.

He returned after he spent a little time on the college campus where Russian pilots bunked while waiting for planes to ferry across the strait to Siberia, one of those pilots fascinated by the fact that he didn't then shave. Security around the dorm was tight; so when she asked him to take her to Ninilchik, he got scared and left in the middle of the middle, riding the outside of a boxcar as far as Healey before he fell asleep and fell off, nearly killing himself as he rolled down the side of the raised grade.

Since then, he has devised every means imaginable and a few he shouldn't have imagined to keep himself awake.

The road becomes so slick that when he stops to piss— there's no traffic so he stops in the road— his feet slide out from under him, sending him half under the truck. He then can't stand and ends up pulling himself back into the cab. He still needs to go, but he holds it as again the miles slip away, now at thirty-five miles an hour.

And the red balls appear more frequently, sometimes as often as one every quarter of a mile, sometimes three or more of them in a row as if they were chasing each other.

"You need me to drive?" Les asks.

"This clutch is awfully stout if you don't have feeling in your feet."

"I don't... I'm feeling pretty useless."

"Give yourself a chance. Your body hasn't recovered from your little hike across the mountains. Take more time."

"I'm not holding up my end of things."

"You'll be doing plenty when we get where we're going."

"How much longer?"

"If this storm would ease up, we're four hours outta Anchorage, then another three, maybe three and a half to K-Beach Road and around to the old cannery. But with this snowfall— that's something you can do, pray for the snow to stop."

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