

EYE OF THE CHINOOK

SERIALIZED

A NOVEL

(c) Homer Kizer

Chapter Thirty One

1.

Shivering, shivering! Shaking! Not remembering where he is, cold, oh so very cold, he can't stop shivering. His jaw shakes. Numb hands shake. And the more he shivers the colder he feels.

He lies awake shivering, unable to get warm; the wet blankets cold. He can't stretch out, can't move, not with her on him, and for a moment, he can't imagine where he is or who she is. A bad night barhopping? No! not even in Saigon did he get himself this fucked up. He tries to roll over, can't, and he hears water sloshing beside his head, otherwise, no sound at all as he now smells the stench of sour musk.

Beaver—

Awareness comes quickly. He cants his head. Twisting upward as far as he can, he listens for the beating rotor of a helicopter. He listens, straining to hear what cannot be heard, knowing that the chopper has to be out there, knowing that it will come for them, knowing that it would find them if he were flying the machine.

But other than the flowing water gurgling in the open holes and the shallow breathing of the woman who has crowded him against the frozen side of the lodge, there is nothing to hear.

He can't scoot away in any direction, can't clamber over her; he's stuck, wedged between frozen sticks and wet mud. He's stuck shivering, shaking, sometimes violently, sometimes quietly, but also shaking, shivering, as if he were having seizures. And he tries to lie his head back down. But a wave of pain sweeps upward from behind his left eye, passing through sight and memories and expectations, curling over, then ebbing back through memories of being taken out, the stun grenade and bursts of weapons fire and the long flight north, the camp and escape, the race through the storm. Yes, his head hurts. The air is bad, and it occurs to him that it's been snowing. He has to punch through an air hole. That's what woke him. His headache is caused from the bad air. And he wonders if she sleeps because of the same bad air.

Finding against the opposite outer edge a gnawed limb the size of his thumb and— in the dark he can't tell exactly— maybe three feet long, he begins to probe the underside of the dome, trying to locate a gap through which he can push the stick upward. He has probed most of the top before the limb slips into an opening in the felted sticks and mud. Wiggling the limb upward into and through four or so inches of icy snow, he encounters soft, wet new snow. A foot. More. The snowfall appears still to be occurring and already fourteen or fifteen inches deep.

The fresh air and his squirming around has awaken her: "What's the matter?"

"Making sure we have air." He tells her what he thinks is happening outside.

"Should we be going?"

"No. As wet as we are, we'd end up with hypothermia." She has pulled away from him. By keeping his knees bent, he can now lie on his back and stretch a little bit. And after working knotted shoulder muscles until they flex more easily, he adds, "We need to stay right here as long as we can."

They will eventually overfly our position. If they don't find any sign of us, they won't return. They'll give up on us about when breakup washes us outta here."

"I thought you were worried about your son."

"I am... but by now, if he's still alive he either has found shelter and something to eat, or they have rescued him to use him to get me to surrender. That's why escaping was crucial. To make them go get him. The question is whether he survived those first couple of nights."

"How could they leave him behind? That I don't understand."

"They'll pay for that."

"Help me get back to Washington, and I'll make sure they get what they deserve."

"What's in Washington?"

"The President. Mr. Carter will be very interested in what's been happening."

"Don't kid yourself, he already knows."

"NO! he doesn't. I'm the one who's supposed to tell him."

"You told him to lock up Alaska? to make the whole damn state into a park of one kind or another?"

"No, that was his decision— "

"Like giving away the Panama Canal?"

"That was his decision."

"He makes bad decisions. He isn't gonna help you." He pauses while he rolls onto his side so he can face her even if he can't see her in the darkness. He still shivers; he shakes violently every so often. But he doesn't feel s cold as before.

"He's a good man— "

"Good? How? All he wants is to keep this away from the *Washington Post*. He isn't gonna win Alaska anyhow come this next election. He'll get more votes that count by pandering to treehuggers in California and Colorado than he will by doing what's right up here."

"Really, he's a good man. Decent. Moral. Honest— "

"And a liar."

"No, he's not."

"How many Cats have you seen ready to rip up the wilderness?"

"I haven't seen much— "

"That's right, you haven't. Yet you're gonna advise him about what he should do? Who are you kidding?"

"I advise him about human rights, not Caterpillar tractors or California voters or Colorado treehuggers. And about the camp, he will listen to me. Human rights are being violated."

"I suspect they are."

"Will you help me? I'll help you however I can."

"What do I need from you?"

"I don't know, but you have a son— "

"What he needs is his mother... they cut her head off, a burst of 9 millimeter rounds from about a foot away.... No reason to do that."

"I'm sorry— "

"I'm mad— that's nowhere nearly a strong enough word. I'm gonna to kill the bastards, every damn one of them.... They made a bad mistake when they didn't kill me. I'll hunt those sonnabitches down, and I'll take them out... I thought that was all behind me, but— "

"Can you do that alone?... You need help."

"So are you're gonna help me? Be my kid's mother? That's the help I need."

"If you don't make it back, yes, I'll be his mother."

"You? You're blind."

"I'm a realist— "

"No, you're blind."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that you can't see."

"I see just find."

"I'm not gonna argue with you. Somethin happened to your vision. You're gonna need medical help when you get outta here, serious help."

"I don't understand. I saw your fire."

"Yeah, that's a little odd. It wasn't a big fire. You couldn't have seen it very far away, and I had just built a few minutes before you got there."

"Now I really don't understand. I saw it away far off."

"Yeah, you saw somethin, but it wasn't my fire."

"I saw your fire— "

"I don't doubt that you saw a fire, but it wasn't mine. It was in your mind.... You were supposed to find me— and evidently, you're supposed to make it out of here."

"You're becoming spooky."

"Maybe... maybe.... Tell you what, no... I won't say what I'm thinkin."

"Why not?"

"What if I do make it outta here? You're gonna mother my kid?"

"If you make it out of here, you won't need my help... I'm freezing."

"There isn't any starting a fire so it's cuddle and shiver."

"How long before we freeze to death— hypothermia?"

"If you start getting real sleepy and can't stay awake, then you need to worry about it."

"Would we be warmer if we put all of our blankets together, got out of our wet clothes and just huddle under the blankets?"

"Yeah, probably would... we'd know soon enough."

"Let's do that."

He breathes deeply. He hadn't really thought about lying with her naked under their shared blankets, especially not after feeling what he had when she lay on top of him. But they probably don't have a choice. They are likely to be in this lodge for days, the way the snow seems to have laid in.

"Okay... but understand— " No, he's not going to say anything more.

"You killed that baby. Can we eat it raw?"

"It's either that or go without."

"You still have that fox?"

"Yeah. It's mostly raw. Front shoulders are half cooked."

"We won't starve."

"You're gonna be pretty hungry before you eat that fox."

"I intend on getting out of here, of taking this whole thing to the President, and of seeing heads roll in the Fortress."

"I'll help you get to civilization. You won't make it without my help. After that, we'll talk about where we go from there."

"Fair. . . . Can we pool our blankets, cuddle? I'm really cold."

Lifting and pushing away the wet mixed wool and orlon blankets, he draws her close, feeling finally her icy breasts against his chest, her cold arms under his, her clammy hands clutching his back— and he feels her begin to thaw, and he wants to roll atop of her, kiss her, enter her, the touching a tripping of an instinctual response. His urge to forcibly take her is nearly overwhelming. Sex as release. Damp, dark primordial bonding. Two becoming one without love or lust or even

light afterwards, the tension dissipating like their breath, quick and frosty and hidden from helicopters and satellites high overhead and a helio-centered world, from the first heaven and the second, but not the third where a man watches to see if he will surrender to instincts stronger than any except his need to breathe, the man assigned to record the play of tensions as if they were strings on which frets strum praise, rhythmic or discordant, the man's recordings examined from above and eventually from below. He feels her breasts warm until they seem hot, and still, he doesn't take her despite his erection pressing hard against her loins. He wants to, oh how he wants to forget everything except their closeness and the darkness of the moment and the power of the musk. He has to have her, has to, has to, but she seems unaware of what the feel of her body is doing to him until finally, he ejaculates against her thigh. Only then does she realize what has been happening to him, and she kisses him before she turns away, his semen dripping onto the hard packed mud platform. She rolls until her back is against him, and she says, "I'm sorry."

He doesn't how to answer her or even if he should so he lies there, unable to see anything, hidden as it were in a womb, fraternal twins who will, after passage through a watery canal, eventually emerge into a new white world. They will be born not from above but from rebellion and anger, each a new creation of that great land where nature has always been the determining base for a mortal superstructure. Each began as a separate egg impregnated by frozen sperm stored since Seward agreed that the Federal government would make *a just & equitable settlement with the land's aboriginal inhabitants*, that settlement delayed until Alaskan Native and native Alaskan became a mostly reversible description of everyone residing north of Seattle and west of Vancouver. But a common placenta nourishes them as sister and brother, and places between them the taboo of incest. He now pulls her close to him, the feel of her warm flesh the feel of his sister, his feelings protective of her and murderous towards anyone who would harm her.

2.

"There's the chopper, hear it?" Phil, instantly awake, reaches with his feet for the edge of the hole by which he had entered the lodge. But before he can wiggle backwards, the helicopter passes on, taking with it its muffled rotor beatings, leaving the outside world white-silent. All that can be heard is the gurgling of the rising water, now flowing onto the low edge of the raised platform.

"Snow must have stopped," he says, more thinking aloud than said to convey information.

The blankets are clammy but drier than they were. As a result, he is somewhat warm and not eager to force his way through the canal and into the cold landscape of willows and stunted cottonwoods, white spruce and helicopter pursuit.

"Is it day or night?"

"I imagine day or they wouldn't be out looking for us."

"You're certain that was them?"

"Can't be absolutely sure, but, yeah, I think so."

"Then is it safe to leave?"

He doesn't want to go. Nevertheless, he says, "Probably."

"Why don't we wait for awhile and see if they return?"

He lies on his side, his knees bent, cramped and mostly uncomfortable. It has, he knows, come time for them to go even though he doesn't want to leave the security of the lodge. So he says, "Only for a little while," as he tries to scoot forward and away from the rising water.

Then it occurs to him: "We gotta go now. There's a chinook outside. This snow's gonna melt fast, and this creek's gonna flood. Flash flood type of flooding. So roll those blankets up and follow me out, and hold your breath. It's gonna be a long, cold ways to the surface."

With the still uneaten kit in one hand— the entrance canal seems smaller than when he slipped into the lodge— he slides into the water feet first, grabs a last breath, then pushes himself downward,

turns around in the canal, and pops up, breaking through skim ice and snow six, maybe seven feet from the lodge. She pops up beside him a minute later.

Instantly blinded by brightness, he involuntarily closes his eyes and ducks away from the sun, almost directly overhead. But she seems not to notice the brightness. He notices, though, that she isn't blinded by the sun.

Their shivering seems to stop as blood flow to arms and legs diminishes when capillaries constrict. However, instead of shivering, tremors begin in their chests, tremors too strong for either of them to control muscles.

Her headache intensifies as waves of pain smash through an imaginary line behind her eyes, causing pain to surge to the back of her skull, then ebb away to splash against temples and crown before reforming as waves circling back upon themselves, curling over but going nowhere, repeating over and over again the hammering that threatens the very integrity of the bone, that threatens to explode within her mind, blowing her thoughts into chards of living pottery, each a fragment of the person who once advised a President, none now able to determine what she should do or where she should go. She's helpless, feels too weak to even climb ashore, wants only to sleep and never wake up.

But he doesn't let her sleep. Kicking, paddling with one hand so as to not splash and not turn loose of the beaver kit, he breaks through the thin ice that's pulled away from the shoreline by the rising water.

The snow piled around the cottonwood snags is deep but very mushy as the air temperature rises even faster than does the creek. He crawls ashore on his belly, his legs not working as if he hasn't yet learned to walk. But after a minute of lying half on, half off a sun-whitened log protruding above the snow, he draws his feet under him and pushes himself upright.

Blood rushes from his head, leaving him woozy, wobbly, tottering. He thinks he's going to fall, and he takes a step to catch himself, then a second step and a third. Then bending down, he extends his hand and pulls her ashore and stands her beside him. "You're all wet."

"Tell me what I don't know... I don't see any stars. Is it cloudy?"

"Stick your hand out from you and tell me what you feel."

She does as he tells her, then after a couple of minutes, she exclaims, "It's warm."

"Yeah, the sun's shinin— and a different type of front's comin through, a chinook. And as warm as this chinook is, snow'll be mostly gone by tomorrow."

"You're not teasing me about the sun shining?"

"No, I told you— you're blind. In the lodge it didn't matter. Now that we're outta there, it's gonna matter a lot."

"I'm going to slow you down, aren't I?"

"Probably... yeah, you'll slow me down, will make getting outta here more difficult. But— I'm not gonna leave you."

"You think the snow will melt, even as deep as it is?"

"I said I wasn't gonna leave you—"

"I heard you." She reaches toward him to squeeze whatever part of him she touches.

"About that snow, it's springtime rotten... so, yeah, it should be gone in a day." He looks downstream as the water now visibly rises while he watches. "We're about as conspicuous as beaver on ice so we need to get into that timber," he instinctively points to a stand of mixed white spruce and cottonwoods. "Those spruce don't like wet roots so it shouldn't flood up into them."

"What about your snowshoes?"

"They're not worth getting drowned for, and as fast as the water comin up— we won't need them."

"I'm cold, let's go."

Air temperature has risen into the fifties; so even though they are dripping wet, within a few steps blood flows to all parts of them. Except for his feet, he feels warm. But tremors continue to wrack her for most of the half mile to the timber. There, snow still hasn't melted between trees. And he jumps a little moose, last summer's calf.

Suspecting the cow is close, he draws Peggy to him as he circles wide around the calf that seems not to have seen a person before. Contending instincts of fear and of curiosity cause the calf to watch them, but not to move. And they are nearly past the calf when he sees why it doesn't leave: the cow has been half devoured by birds and wolves. They frighten away a pair of ravens almost too heavy to fly. "Wolf kill. Let's get up under a tree and see if we can get a fire started. There's enough left of her that we can eat for days, and we can use her hide for mocs for you. We've a long ways to go and your rags won't last today."

A spruce with limbs draped to the ground on its uphill side stands between clumps of feltleaf willow and three cottonwoods— if he remembers correctly, they are actually balsam poplars. Beaver have gnawed the trunks of all three poplars and have snipped off half of each willow clump, but the real damage to the trees has come from moose that have browsed the willows back to stubby stems larger than his thumb, and have trimmed the bottom branches of the cottonwoods, and have walked down young saplings. Using their chests to push over trees up to four inches in diameter, moose have thinned what should have been a thick stand of timber. The swell of trees where the creek drops into a steep ravine seems more a skeleton than part of a healthy taiga.

Under the spruce, he finds tiny twigs, mostly dry, and a few of last year's cottonwood leaves caught by the entwined boughs, and tall moss, more dead than alive. He doesn't have many matches in the pill bottle so he carefully arranges the twigs and moss. A soggy match sputters, catches, and a tiny flame feels its way along the edge of the piled twigs. It feels for an opening as it sears leaves and moss. It walks to and fro seeking what it can devour, and what it can is the whole pile, along with thumb-size limbs. Soon, the fire quietly burns cottonwood limbs as large as his arm as its diffused smoke climbs through the spruce boughs as if the smoke were a covey of fool hens, ready to rocket away but unsure of when to launch. Smoke sits on the higher boughs; smoke sits as lumps for long enough he could have killed them with a stone if they were grouse before these lumps wing their way downstream into the ravine.

The cow had been hamstrung. One wolf had grabbed her nose while others had torn out her throat. And the ravens have hollowed her insides.

"Won't they come back?" Peggy asks.

"Wolves? You have to be kiddin. The pack will make a new kill every other night, eat what they want, then leave the rest to the birds— foxes— coyotes, if there are any around."

"I thought they ate everything."

"Why should they? There's more where this one came from. Besides, they're off on their round. They'll be back in a couple of weeks. If they can't find anything to kill, they'll check out this site and see if there's anything left. Mostly likely, they'll kill the calf."

"Why didn't they take him first? I thought they only took weak animals— or young animals."

"Yeah, well, judge for yourself. There's a lot of bullshit put out about wolves.... Maybe she stayed to defend her calf." Using the scalpel he has been carrying, he begins skinning what's left of the cow, the ravens probably having eaten more than the pack. "Go huddle around that fire, but keep it small. That chopper might still return."

The cow has been dead long enough that her hide doesn't want to slip, but must be sliced off, each half an inch requiring the scalpel to separate the cold membranes. But he works quickly with the much-too-small blade. He works with the ravens watching him from the safety of two poplar snags. He works with the creek continuing to rise as the afternoon warms until it's downright pleasant in the grove. He works with the calf, not thirty yards away, making little bawling grunts.

Other than her tongue and where the wolves ripped out the cow's throat, the neck meat is untouched as is most of the cow's backstrap. Her front shoulders are mostly there. But her heart, lungs and liver are gone as is the insides of her hindquarters from her pelvis to her knees.

In half an hour, he has her hide lying hair-side down over a log— and the ravens pick what meat scraps he missed from it. He has piled under the spruce two hundred pounds of meat, not counting the bones, and he doesn't worry about the beaver kit, which a short-tailed weasel still in its ermine color-phase claims and tries to drag away even though the kit weighs ten times what the weasel does. The weasel growls in a hiss at either himself or Peggy when they get too close. It darts forward like a striking snake, its movements almost too quick to see. Then when its bluffs don't work, it retreats under a log and waits until they have moved away before resuming its task of stealing the kit.

"Anybody ever tell you that you only need three ounces of red meat a day?" Peggy asks, gleeful to have the bounty.

"What happens if you eat more other than you aren't hungry?"

"Heart attack, I guess."

"Yeah, well, eat up. I saw a bumper sticker in Montana that said Eat More Lamb, 10 Million Coyotes Can't Be Wrong. I don't expect that 10,000 wolves are either."

"Wolves have heart attacks?"

"Actually, they do. I found one I'm certain had a heart attack chasin caribou, died jumpin a creek— and he'd been eatin all right. He wasn't a light-weight."

Now that she's warm and has eaten a small piece of meat, hot and smoky tasting, she smiles as she says, "No salads for him." She doesn't want to think about her loss of sight; it's too depressing.

"Not unless pika taste like lettuce."

She shakes her head: "I don't know what they are."

"A little varmint like a brush bunny. Tourists love to take pictures of them."

"You haven't always trapped, have you?"

He waits awhile before he answers. "No, but I don't remember much of what I did before." His tone changes to deathly serious: "I left a bunch of Chinese hangin out to dry, all good guys, and I didn't want to remember much after that."

"This was in Vietnam?"

"Yeah."

"Were you Special Forces?"

"I was an early advisor. I was mostly in Laos. I was there before—" he doesn't finish his sentence. Rather, his voice soft, he says, "Forget the subject. I have."

"No, you haven't. And you really meant it when you told the medic that you were going to kill all of them."

"That was stupid talk."

"But you meant it."

"We have a lot of meat to smoke. You gonna help or not?"

"I don't know how much I can. I feel pretty useless... but tell me what to do. This is all new to me. I've never been around this much meat before. I'm a city girl— and now a blind one."

"You lie good, too. I didn't expect you to make it that first night."

"I didn't expect not to."

"Is that enough compliment— or do I need to say more. Your promise to Moses kept you alive."

"How did your wife get along with you?"

"She lit a lot of candles the first couple of years."

"I'll bet she did."

Looking but not seeing him, not seeing him weave springy willow branches together, then tepee four of the woven racks over the fire, Peggy doesn't understand what he wants to do. Nevertheless,

she holds a long limb against the spruce trunk while he ties it in place with another willow whip. A second limb completes the frame for a leanto roof of bark that will keep the weather off the meat. What she doesn't understand, though, is how will they carry so many pounds. And as if he has read her mind, he says, "When it's dried, it won't be so heavy."

The ravens, brave enough to sneak in close, peck at the meat remaining on the carcass, their beaks more efficient than the scalpel at stripping ribs and femurs. And the calf drifts away as the flooding creek becomes a raging torrent of slush, rumbling, roaring, snapping limbs, tumbling logs, carrying away rootwads and winter and their trail from the beaver lodge.

Bolder still, the ravens hop close to the meat waiting to be spread on the rack he builds, the sixth so far. She senses their presence and moves to shoo them away, but he stops her: "Leave 'em. Let them have some. They'll be nesting soon, and the hen needs the protein."

"Which one's the hen?"

"Dunno. Guess they both get to eat."

"You are just going to let them have our meat?"

"It wasn't ours till I took it from them."

"I guess we have enough."

"First lesson, share, 'cause when you're hungry enough birds will feed you." He throws the ravens a strip of meat the size of his index finger, throws the strip towards the carcass, and it draws them away from the pile. "Second lesson, don't share very much. We have a long trip ahead of us."

"Where are we going to go, and how will we get there?"

"We're goin south till we hit the Yukon. Sooner or later we will. Then depending on where we hit it, we'll head for Nome or for Fairbanks. Eventually we'll end up at North Pole... I know a fellow there, has a glass eye— he once cleaned out a bar by goin in looking like he'd been speared through his eye by an icicle. Wasn't nobody stayin to help."

"I'm not getting the picture."

"He'd been runnin a piece of equipment down the road at twenty-five below without goggles. His breath froze on his beard, eyebrows, and on that eye. Frost built up on that glass eye until he couldn't blink, then kept on building straight out till it looked like the fat end of an icicle."

"What happened after everybody left?"

"Dunno. He doesn't remember and nobody stayed."

"You mean people left when they thought he had an icicle in his brain, just left him?"

"As fast as they could. Think about what would've happened when it thawed. Would you have wanted to be there when brains fell out?"

"That's disgusting— "

"Also Alaskan. He helped me dig a car out of a berm that packed snow around the engine. Got to know him. He's a good guy, will help us, loan whatever he's got... and he knows a lot about not being able to see."

"Why did he go into the bar?"

"To warm up. I imagine the cold was givin him a migraine. When it gets real cold, that blood vessel across your forehead freezes. Your head hurts like hell. There isn't much thinkin. I suspect that's what was happenin to him... and I suspect that's what has happened to you."

"Not like in Jack London's story about a fire?"

"Don't know the story."

"A guy steps in water and takes his clothes off— "

"Why would he do that? The outside of his pants would freeze immediately. The inside would then warm up like being in a wetsuit. There's no reason to take his clothes off. That'd just get him killed."

"It did."

"Well, why would he do it? Nobody's that stupid."

"Jack London was in the Yukon— "

"He wasn't there long enough to stop being a cheechako. Hell, when it's really cold everythin freeze dries. There isn't any moisture around."

"What about the guy's eye?"

"Twenty-five below isn't real cold. Natives will still work out in that. Now when you get fifty below, sixty below, then only Texans work out in it. Okies maybe. Even fellas from Minnesota are inside complaining about the temperature."

"What about you?"

"What about me? I'll work out in it till the dogs won't go. When they quit, so do I."

"When is that?"

"Snow's pretty hard on their feet much more than twenty-five, thirty below."

"So you're like a Native?"

"You might say that."

"Well, how, Mr. Native, are you getting us out of here?"

"Walk— "

"That's what I was afraid you'd say. Isn't that going to take months?"

"You'll be surprised how much you can cover in a week. Two weeks, who knows."

"Hurry up with your cooking. My stomach has finally figured out I'm hungry." She reaches for where she heard him set the sharpened willow on which he'd skewered the first piece of moose she'd eaten. "Is the fire hot enough to cook anything?"

"I wanta keep it small. Less smoke, heat. Less chance of detection." He motions for her to stand, but she doesn't see his motioning so he says, "I need to trace around your right foot if that's your biggest foot so how about standin up." And he has her step onto a piece of bark he has peeled from the spruce.

Giving a generous seam allowance, he scribes the shape of her foot onto the bark. Then setting the pattern aside, he takes the damaged hide and begins shaving off its hair. "I'd use ashes to slake the hair if I was home— actually, I wouldn't be doing this at all. Mary did all of the tannin... Those bastards have a lot— " his voice fails before he finishes his thought, leaving whatever he intended to say to show in the polished hardness of his eyes, each with the glow of a star sapphire.

"Do you have enough chemical to tan?"

"I'll roast the skull and use the brains. You need somethin more on your feet than rags. I'll see if I can make you a pair of moccasins. Biggest problem will be that I've never tried sewin with actual sinew. I've always used linen and nylon thread and that artificial sinew— I might end up unraveling a blanket edge."

"You don't seem all that troubled about being out here, but how the hell did I get here?"

"Go ahead, tell me. I'll believe you."

"If I won't believe it, you won't either even if I told you." She sits down, her back again leaning against the spruce trunk, another little piece of meat skewered on the sharpened willow branch. "I go to work, then— it all seems too implausible. The camp. Terrorists. To stop anything like this from ever happening is why we have laws."

"Old Moses said the king needed land for pyramids."

"He was trying to be clever— "

"Then why else would the Feds show up to boot me off Becharof if they aren't buildin pyramids? I was there years and Mary's family has been in the same area for centuries. We weren't hurtin nothin. Just livin. Taking a little fur, a moose and few caribou a year. Maybe two tons of fish, mostly for the dogs. A few trees. Shit, I saved more damn lives than I took."

"I don't have those answers.... Maybe there aren't any."

"Then Old Moses was right." Phil looks up from the hide. "He took one of them with him. I'm gonna take a lot more."

"You would do more good if you went to Washington."

"In time. You're forgettin about my kid."

"I thought you were."

"Just 'cause I don't talk about him doesn't mean I'm not thinkin about him. Problem is, there isn't much I can do from here. Eventually, I'll get there. Hope they went lookin for him again."

"Are we going any farther today?" When she doesn't hear him shake his head, she adds, "If we're not, then I'm going to get some sleep." Curling half around the spruce trunk, she begins to snore lightly almost as soon as her head touches the tree, the willow branch still propped over the coals, gray and smoky, that smoke whiffing upward through the doubled racks of meat, drying and curing life as if in the darkening meat is the cycle of birth and death that links man and wolf to moose and mice, a link forgotten where no campfires burn.

He retrieves the skewered meat, wipes off the ash, and relishes each chew, all the while knowing that the land will provide for Eddie if his son doesn't panic. His son is young, but he has a knife and a rifle, and he knows how to shoot. He probably doesn't have matches, and he has yet to master a fire-bow. He had neither char cloth, nor flint and steel. But he might have his magnifying glass with him. He had it the day before— took it with him to look at hoarfrost feathers.

He roofs the cottonwood bark covering the drying racks with a foot of spruce branches, thereby further diffusing the smoke that seems now not to rise at all.

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