

**the serialized presentation
of
Aleutian Rogue & The Amanat
together again**

ALEUTIAN ROGUE

with

The Amanat

two novels by Homer Kizer

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Chapter One

1.

Dutch Harbor, 1979

Yarder whistles, squeals of rusty sheaves, chainsaws echoing— he shuts his eyes and hears treetops snap, then crash beside him. He hears slack lines tightening, logs lifting, flying to landings, sticks of old-growth he fell. And he stops his ears with his thumbs when he hears the thuds of bullets striking soft flesh. He shudders, shakes, lies to himself, telling himself nothing matters, especially not the march of death rattles that disturbs the drama of distance.

When he opens his eyes, he hasn't gone anywhere. He is still here at the end of the world, still in UniSea, still sober and somewhat sane. The jukebox still blares. Wind still blows. Outside, it's still dark. He looks out the window at the sagging subdock where crab lights... sputtering flares, flashing lights, state police questions— he closes his eyes and sees brush flying, limbs breaking, trees and rocks and the river. Screams, screams, faint screams, then silence, and he stops his ears as he runs, legs pumping, choking, tears, tears, his tears.

The accident wasn't his fault, not really. A hub seized, flew apart, sending his pickup over Klamath Grade, two hundred feet down. But he should've been able to hold the wheel. He twisted it into a figure eight, but he couldn't hold it, couldn't stop them from going over, couldn't stop himself from being thrown out. Not in the middle of that curve.

If he'd been stronger or going slower or if he hadn't cursed God— he doesn't know what it would've taken. Something. And he sees Judy's and the boys' mangled bodies, hears their gasps, and can't do anything. Again helpless. Like when he was eleven. After seeing his dad killed by a falling snag, he ran until he collapsed in a fern clump where he shivered for a night, where he cursed God and that tree and vowed never to kill anything. But hunger caught him, toyed with him. He still sees the sights of his dad's .22 aligned between that first fawn's frightened eyes, and sees the fawn collapsing like a rag doll falling from his sister's bed. The fawn became many, and then a gook, then another and another, always one more in the crosshairs until he became like God, but without love. A sniper hiding in the margins between life and death.

He returned from that distant land to take chances, lots of them. He has earned big money falling snags, high climbing, dropping aged giants in beds to be ravished by little men with power saws, little men like him who hear the squeaks, moans, groans of death. And he shivers, wondering if he is sane, wondering what the *old people* would think, wondering if there is a collective conscience.

He again opens his eyes, and sees coffee served and carrot salad and a burger basket. Waitresses in crisp blue aprons hurry past him, no one apparently mindful of whether sanity lingers with him, no one aware of who he is or what he has done, no one apparently interested.

Although quieter than usual, UniSea beats hard rock rhythms as young men left to watch moored vessels, left with too little to do and too many dollars, huddle like gulls around baiting tables along UniSea's Bar. From where he sits in the restaurant, he sees them, their backs bent as if bowing towards Mecca.

Outside, frozen pellets of snow, tinged orange by the picking lights of rafted crab boats shoot horizontally across Unalaska Bay as the storm whistles at diners. The big crabbers rock wildly as the snowrounds ricochet off superstructures.

Here, where the world ends, he is just another pair of rubber boots darkened by distance, just another number assigned by ADF&G. Usually, even he forgets who he is.

Peggy brings another pot of coffee, pours the first cup, then sets the pot beside him. "Turkey?"

He forgot— despite having heard the Armed Forces broadcast of the Lions beating the Bears— today is Thanksgiving. He looks around. The Inn remains nearly deserted. Construction crews are still working, their overtime being their reward for falling behind schedule on both the A.P.L. dock and the bridge between Amaknak and Unalaska Islands. Crabbers are between openings, their crews in Seattle or Ballard or Timbuktu. Canneries are manned by maintenance mechanics. And he would like to be in a stand of old-growth fir. Three hundred footers. Twelve hundred years old. Fourteen, sixteen feet across. Here, the twenty-seven trees that are old-growth are less than twenty-seven feet tall. If he fell them, he'd run himself out of town.

"Jay, are you ready for turkey dinner?... Turkeys are now ready. Today's special."

"Sure, that'll be fine... white meat... and Peggy, you're still the prettiest girl in Unalaska." He arrived an hour ago, summoned as it were by Little Sarah, who called on the CB, asking him to meet her here. She lives in an abandoned bunker and survives, he's been told, on the barest essentials. He knows her only by reputation: she claims to sell the finest coke on the island. He's never been one of her customers, and he doesn't know why she called, but she did his crewmember a favor last summer, maybe saved Walt's life.

Peggy blushes for longer than he would've expected before hurrying to get his salad. Beckie, the waitress working the lower level, watches her last two customers leave before coming upstairs to sit in the chair Peggy vacated. She smiles businesslike at Jay, lights a cigarette, and seems to forget he's there, one table behind the employees'.

Peggy serves his salad, joins Becky, and also seems to forget him as she and Becky talk about their boyfriends.

Customers enter the lower level, and Becky hurries to attend them. Peggy steps into the kitchen. And as if a whiff of smoke, Little Sarah drifts in from the bar and lingers across the table from him. Her protection, necessary in her business, is her chameleon-like personality; her strongest weapon is the meek smile she shows him.

Her appearance surprises him: he finds himself staring not at her zit-covered face, nor at her stringy hair, but at the space that had been empty. And not knowing what else to do, he asks, "How's your Thanksgiving been?"

"Not good." She stuffs crackers into her pockets. "Can you loan me fifty bucks. I'll pay you back tomorrow. Davy will give me fifty tonight."

"Sure, but— " Considering the nature of her business, he's surprised a second time. "Have you eaten?"

She says nothing, but when Peggy returns from the kitchen, he orders another turkey dinner. Sarah smiles at Peggy, and says, "And a pot of tea."

He doesn't know drug etiquette so he asks, "Business slow?"

"There's a narc in town who knows I deal." She stuffs the last package of crackers from his table's basket into her pockets. "I need to get outta town."

He pulls three twenties from his wallet, tosses them across the table, then says, "Pay me when you can. I'm still catching a few crabs." It takes too much effort for him to tell her that when the big boats fishing blue kingcrab near the Pribilofs offload, their accidental catch of large red kingcrabs are thrown overboard alive. Although the Bering is closed for reds, the Dutch Harbor district remains open, and those large reds, after being tanked for a week, tend to climb in the first baited pot they come to— his— making them now legally caught.

She palms the bills as Peggy brings her salad, then eats hastily. But she hasn't finished when the APL dock crew enters. Whooping, whistling at Peggy and Becky, welders and laborers, crane operators and foremen jostle past each other and fan out, two or three to a table. Figuring this will be his last chance to talk, he leans over his plate and says, "Thought there might be a narc on the island. The other night in the can here, a fellow asked me for speed. Locals would know better."

Sarah waits until Peggy picks up her empty plate before replying: "He grilled me. Told him I didn't know nothing. That only pissed him off." She pauses as a pair of laborers approach. Both exchange whispered banter with her.

He has seen the laborers around, and he resents the one asking to see Sarah alone. But before he can say anything, he hears Sarah saying, "I can't supply tonight." Her words are like throwing cold water on a dog fight. The banter stops. And he sees the contempt they have for her as the pair withdraw to a table on the lower level.

She nods to him, then seems to melt into the room.

He again catches himself staring at empty space. What did she really want? He knows it had to be more than the money. Was it his help getting off the island? His boat is small, but large enough he could make a trip north this time of year; he wouldn't want to. Besides, he is still making a thousand dollars a day for about four hours of work. Subtracting his overhead, he makes two hundred an hour, not bad for an investment of forty thousand. And he doesn't mind what he's doing.

He orders a piece of pumpkin pie, which ought to come with the dinner but doesn't, and he pecks at it as he wonders if she really expected him to take her north. He certainly has no intention of volunteering to get the shit beat out of him and his boat for a week. What did she think she could offer that might induce him to make a trip North? He has no idea. He doesn't need anything that badly.

Whenever he tries to think about anything other than what did she really want, his mind seems stuck in neutral, jammed between gears. At least that's better than remembering. So he continues to peck at his pie, which doesn't compare with Judy's or his mom's. The pie tastes like pumpkin, but it isn't right. There's an imitation under-taste or aftertaste that denies it homemade status.

He's still pecking at the pie when he hears a throat cleared. He looks up to see a new female face, wanting attention.

"My friend in the bar said you might be able to help me."

He doesn't recognize her. Another cannery rat, he imagines, fresh in from Spokane or wherever the companies find them. He looks past her at the gale that rocks the crabbers, and he hears heated arguments in both Norwegian and English expelled from the bar. Punches are rarely ever thrown, but city police are always near by. It's the boats that take the beatings.

"Excuse me, but can you help?"

She is pretty in a cute sense. Pert nose. Gray eyes. Twin ponytails. Freckles. Definitely not from here. Dutch Harbor hasn't seen enough sun this fall and early winter for even a redhead to maintain freckles.

"I don't know if I can." He wonders who her friend is. It had better not be Sarah. "What am I supposed to do for you?"

She pulls out the chair where Sarah had sat, notices the pot of tea, and asks, "May I?" as she pours without waiting for a response.

If he had any interest in her, he just lost it as he returns his attention to the storm. Wind howls and drives snow-rounds past the windows as it pushes against the building. Little

whistling whiffs of wind sneak through the door and linger in the entryway until the inner doors open, then they rush inside where they rustle papers and open menus.

"Excuse me, but you aren't listening. How can you help me if you won't listen to me?"

He looks at her: "Don't know that I can."

"Is that all you can say?" She has finished her tea and now fills her cup with coffee from the insulated pot left on his table. "I really need your help. They promised me. Some arrangements. Reeves wouldn't even sell me a ticket. The most they offered was a place on tomorrow's Standby List. And for that the Coast Guard ferried me here. That doesn't make sense."

"You're right, it doesn't." And he goes back to looking at the storm and wondering why she has him confused with someone else.

A dozen crabbers, each with their pumps running, are moored to the rotted subdock. Their picking lights burn, coloring the boats, the dock, the smoking bay and the snow-rounds an eerie orange-pink. A surreal seascape. The dock is the last glowing reminder of America's fiery war against Japan. And he, like each of the crabbers, is dependent upon Japanese buyers.

"You need to learn to listen to people. You haven't heard a word I've said."

Again he looks at her, not knowing what is expected from him and really not much caring: "Have you had dinner? It's Thanksgiving. You ought to at least have some turkey."

"Are you for real? I'm trying to tell you my life's story, and you think I want a piece of turkey. I don't think you can help me at all." She starts to push her chair away, then seems to see his piece of pie for the first time. She hesitates before saying, "Yes, you can buy me dinner. I'll accept that."

He catches Peggy's attention, points to his guest and says, "Another turkey plate." And while he looks Peggy's direction, he sees flashlights probing the darkness at water's edge. More lights are brought. Six, seven big lights. Then a pickup maneuvers around the edge of the building, and its headlights flood the area between the restaurant and bay. What's happening, he wonders. He's curious, but right now he has his own problems.

To his uninvited guest, he says, "I'm listening, go ahead."

"Well, no room for me is an all too familiar refrain. I took this observer job to escape my apartment, and its ghosts. Boy, escape I did. Even from hearing English spoken. Other than the captain, no one aboard the trawler understood English. You know what that's like, being around people who have no idea what you're saying. I could hardly stand it—"

Interrupting, he says, "I bet it was tough." He tries to see what's happening outside without being too obvious.

"Well, maybe I needed that 'cause that bastard used me, and the bad part is I knew it all the time. That's what really ticks me off. Hell, my grades are down a point. I should've graduated this year, but I had to get away. And now I'm stuck here, and can't even get home." She should know this: "Are you married?"

He wonders who in the bar dislikes him; who told her that he might be able to help. If he knew, he'd make sure he or she received just rewards. "How long have you been stuck here?"

"You really don't listen. I told you, since two o'clock."

He thought she might have a real problem... well, she does, but it isn't being stuck in Dutch Harbor.

"What is it, you need a place to stay for the night? And no, I'm not married. Should I be?"

"Yes... is that too much to ask? someplace for the night. A fellow in the bar said I could spend the night in a crab pot, but... have you ever been married? You look like you have been."

"And the Inn here is full?" Now things are making a little more sense. He just wishes he could see what's happening outside. Maybe he ought to get his coat and go look.

"I've told you that three times. I wish you'd pay more attention when you listen— and answer me when I ask a question."

A Fish & Game trooper and a Unalaska City policeman push through the cluster of flashlights. Something is up, something he needs to stay out of. And when the flashlights part he sees a body, minus its shirt, lying on the beach— a white arm is raised, then dropped as if the person is unconscious. Or dead. He wonders if a drunk fell through the subdock. But why no shirt?

She sets most of the turkey aside and eats the dressing and gravy, cranberry sauce and sweet potatoes.

He notices and asks, "Something wrong with the meat?"

"No. It's dry, and I'm really not a meat eater. I was vegetarian until I took the observer job. But I don't like rotten cabbage and that was about the only thing vegetable on the menu so I started eating a little meat again, but I can't eat this, not a pen raised bird that has been shot full of chemicals." She pauses to catch her breath, then again asks, "What happened to your wife?"

Reaching across with his fork, he says, "Then I'll eat it. I haven't had my daily quota of fake food yet." With his mouth partially full, between chews, almost as if the words unconsciously fall from his mouth as crumbs, he adds, "A front hub locked up, sent the pickup over the bank, into the Siletz River," his voice fading a little more with each word as if denying what he says.

"Oh, how horrible and how can you eat that?" Horror passes across her face. But she quickly recovers, and says, "I suppose it won't hurt you if you're used to eating it. Now, like I was saying, that bastard at Reeves was going to let my samples freeze, and then you should have seen the airport manager when the postal inspector came. Boy did the inspector ever get after him, and do you know what happened?" She waits for him to ask.

He knows both Don, Reeves manager, and Chief, the airport manager, an Aleut the age his dad would've been. Everybody in town is mad at Don because of Reeves restricted schedule, sneaking a plane in whenever weather allows, causing a backup of passengers trying to get out. But he doesn't really care what the postal inspector said— the post office has delivered wet mail since he has been here so its relevancy in his life isn't great. Nevertheless, if he doesn't respond she'll again accuse him of not listening, not that he really cares what she says.

"No, what happened?" There, he officially bit, which should make her happy. He's listening.

"Well, they threw a mail bag out onto the wet pavement, and the inspector became very angry. He found the station manager and insisted he go look at the bag lying in the rain. So the manager, he went and looked. And the inspector really got after him, and all he could do was look up into the sky, right into the rain, then say, 'It's raining, an act of God.' Then he went back inside. Can you imagine that? He didn't even pickup the mail bag. He just walked off."

That, to him, sounds like Chief— and good for Chief. The reason they receive wet mail is the split bow in the skiff the Post Office uses to ferry mail bags across the channel. The skiff

barely floats; it's always half full of water. And the bags of mail float around in the skiff during their crossing. But the bridge, whenever its done, should solve that problem.

"So you have some sort of samples?" He really hates to ask a question that might encourage her to talk; he really does want to know who sicced her on him.

"I told you that— and I'm sorry about your wife... I've been working as an observer, you know, where foreign boats fishing in American waters have somebody on board to make sure they catch the right species."

"Yeah, I know the program. That's where the foreign boat pays and we think we can't afford one on every boat."

She sits up straight, and now smiling as if she just won a jackpot, she says, "You sound like you have strong feelings about the program."

"I suppose. We're afraid of angering a bunch of cheats so we won't put observers aboard every foreign boat."

Interested in what he says, she asks, "Do you know about underlogging?" as if underlogging is not common knowledge.

"Yeah, and the logging of cod for pollock and of juvenile halibut as flounder. I've seen it."

"Have you reported it?" She seems as eager as a puppy.

He was convinced quite a while ago that she was a fruitcake. What he doesn't know right now is whether she's harmless.

"No, I haven't."

"Well, why don't you become an observer. We really need them, and it pays a thousand bucks for a two month tour."

"I make that every day I fish— "

"Really, that much? How big is your boat?"

The one thing he's certain is that she isn't the narc on the island. Nobody can fake what she does, and he isn't real sure what it is that she does. "I have a little boat."

"How little? I should know this if I'm going to spend the night on it."

"Forty-three feet." And he's thinking about spending the night in the Elbow Room, across the channel.

"You make more than a thousand a day on a boat that small?"

"I do much better when I longline, but I don't want to try and impress you. You might think that I'm trying to come onto you, and neither of us wants that, right?"

A wave of surprise passes over her as if she hadn't considered what might happen. And he wonders how she made it into college, let alone being nearly ready to graduate. He suspects she is bright enough in her field, possibly even brilliant, but outside of her field, he isn't certain she possesses the intelligence of a seventh grader. And he knows why she was sent his way. He won't take advantage of her, not that he shouldn't for her sake.

After apparently weighing possibilities, she asks, "Where's your boat?"

Pointing to the end of the submarine dock, he says, "On the far side of that green crabber."

She looks where he points, but sees only blowing snow and bouncing crabbers, their picking lights rolling back and forth in inverted arcs. Then looking back at him, she asks, "Have you ever noticed how, at the edges, society sort of breaks down? All of the rules are off."

This he doesn't expect from her. He thought he had her figured out. "Like in taboos?"

She swirls her coffee in her cup, then says, "You see where two cultures meet, Tlingit-Aleut, European-Native, even Allies-Axis in World War Two, a frontier forms where tradition no longer matters... you are Native, aren't you?"

He has to think about that. Windows rattle as a particularly strong gust blasts them with snow pellets.

There aren't any full-blooded Rogues left, at least not at Siletz. After Phil Sheridan worked his magic there on the Sixes River, it was only a matter of time before Rogues were rounded up and planted, like corn, on some reservation. The War Against Slavery delayed things a bit, as did Sioux bullets. But eventually, his grandparents were encouraged to settle with renegade Umatillas on Depot Charlie's holdings at Siletz.

He doesn't know what he is. In him, there's some Chandler, English pioneers who came to Oregon by covered wagon, then took a timber lease on Little Euchre Mountain. There's Keipers, from a Dutch log buyer from San Francisco. There's Catfish, from a Umatilla grandmother. There might still be twenty-five percent Rogue. Only, when he was growing up a boy was encouraged to forget his "wild" ancestry. He was, like seedling rootstock grafted over to a known apple variety, expected to take his identity from whatever European blood he might have. Now she's asking about his roots, and he doesn't have an answer. His roots have yet to bear fruit... maybe they have, the reason he's here at the end of the world.

"Did you," he asks, "see what happened out there?" He points to the flashlights that still probe the water's edge. He assumes the person has been taken to the clinic— Dutch Harbor doesn't have a hospital— and that the rumor mill will identify whomever before morning. "It looks like somebody fell in."

She twists to look, asking over her shoulder, "What happened?" She now turns completely around in her chair. "Where did you say your boat is?"

"You can just see her mast on the other side of the *Judi B*, that green crabber" He waits to catch Peggy's attention, then motions for the waitress to come over. When she does, he asks, "Do you know what happened outside?"

She shakes her head no, then says, "Let me go ask the cook. He was out there a little bit ago, the reason why orders are backed up."

Peggy steps into the kitchen. When she does, his fruitcake guest again asks her question, "Well, are you Native?"

"What does it look like to you?"

"I think you are— because of the way you won't listen to anybody— and you won't give me a straight answer."

He finds himself wishing she would've fallen in instead of whomever: "Is that a Native trait, not giving straight answers to people whose word is good for about as long as you can see their breath? Huh?"

"No, of course not, and that's not what I meant."

"But that is what you said. You see the problem. You utter sound without meaning. To me, words have meaning."

Peggy returns: "Looks like something happened to Davy Godell. He must have fallen through the dock and hit his head. At any rate, he's no more." Her words are as matter-of-fact as is her removal of his guest's dinner plate.

Horror again appears on his guest's face as she seems to take Davy's drowning personally. His concern, though, is that Sarah was to meet Davy tonight. He's not worried about the money— one good crab. Rather, he wonders how she is involved, and will his meeting with her somehow involve him? Davy, who lived on Strawberry Hill, had no business being out on the subdock. But if it looks like he accidentally drowned, there probably

won't be too many questions asked. For some reason, a little gnawing inside, like knowing when eyes are looking at him, he knows the death wasn't accidental.

It's becoming awkward for him to think of whatever-her-name-is as his guest when she really isn't. He doesn't know how to refer to her so he asks, "Your name? What should I call you?"

"Louise... my name is actually Anna, but I prefer Louise, which was my grandmother's name, and I think it's a pretty name, don't you?"

No, she hasn't changed, despite her observation about traditions breaking down; she's still a fruitcake albeit an apparently harmless one.

"Lake Louise is a pretty lake."

"There, see I knew you would agree." She stands and again looks out the window. "I still don't see your boat— but I'll get my parka."

Watching her leave as the waitresses clear adjoining tables, he picks up her bill, fishes a couple of dollars from his jeans pocket for a tip, then adds another dollar. He signs the bill and leaves it for Peggy. He really isn't ready to leave, but evidently she is— she seems to expect him to do her bidding.

In the entryway, Louise snaps the chinstrap of her military surplus cap. Snow-rounds shot inside from previous fannings of the door lie scattered across the floor. The wind mourns the trampled pellets as it leans against the glass. He doesn't look forward to facing its fury. Nevertheless, he takes her arm, pushes open the door, and is peppered by stinging pellets. Using his body to break the wind, he leads her towards the dry-stored king crab pots, each tipped on edge. Seven-bys, meaning the pots are seven feet by seven feet by three feet and weigh six hundred pounds apiece. Between the pots, drifts of spent pellets collect behind bundles of tanner boards. He pushes through the drifts, all the while sheltering her, all the while wondering what Davy was doing out in this blow. Why would Davy even be near the subdock? Why was Little Sarah expecting money from Davy? Her calling him coupled to her mentioning Davy seems too coincidental, and he again wonders why, exactly, did she ask him to meet her in UniSea.

His back to the blow, he points out a path across partial sheets of plywood and loose planks bridging holes in the subdock's decking. Snow-rounds slide across the sagging planking, polishing high spots, filling gullies. Swirled collections of rounds amass in eddies. Discarded pot bridles and short lengths of crab line, shoved along by the barrage, creep across the dock. And he steadies her as she leans backwards.

Davy must have washed up on shore, must have been seen by someone in the bar. He doubts anyone would have found him tangled in the dock's piling if he had fallen through tonight. He doubts anyone besides himself would be out in this blow.

Wind pushes him, and he slides along, hardly moving his feet, and everything seems fine until Louise sees the suspension bridge, such as it is.

He knows the jerry-rigged rope bridge spanning the thirty-foot gap doesn't look safe, but only two people have fallen from it. So though she screams, "I'm not crossing that," he tightens his arm around her shoulders and repeatedly says, "Everything'll be all right," as he urges her feet to feel their way along the bottom lines. The bridge is five lengths of three-quarters inch nylon line, three to walk on and one on each side; so as he coaxes and the wind pushes, she stumbles but doesn't slip.

Along with wood line spools, an empty oil drum rolls over the planking. It rolls in a half circle, then hides behind its end. But it is soon overpowered and sent spinning again, only to roll in another half circle, and another, and another until it falls off the end of the dock.

He feels the wind push her as he, knees bent, his side to the blow, grabs the *Judi B's* fo'c'sle deck railing to keep from being blown into the bay. Helping her over the railing and down the ladder to the crabber's picking deck, where, as if alive, a drift of snow pellets crawls around and up the king hauler, he breathes easier. If Davy had tried to visit one of the crabbers tied to the subdock, it's certainly likely he was blown into the bay— and it would be hard to fall through the dock without bumping his head... he wonders if Davy had already fallen over before Sarah called him. Did she need an alibi? Possibly.

His boat, the *F/V Coyote*, tied to the outside of the *Judi B*, snaps her lines as he swings Louise onto her bow, then ducks under the stays and opens the aft wheelhouse door. A blast of warmth greets them, staggers her.

Bulwarks bang bulwarks. Good thing, he tells himself, he got here when he did. *Coyote* is no match for the *Judi B* in a belly bumping contest, and he quickly steps back outside, grabs a sixty inch buoy and drops it over the rail before the boats bang again. Three more buoys hold his stern off the *Judi B's* as he, shivering, reties the lines.

When he returns inside, he sees that she, making herself at home, has found the coffee pot, which has been warm far too long for him to drink the mud it holds. But she has poured herself a cup and offers one to him.

"No thanks. I'll make fresh." In his red rubber boots his feet are numb, but he still feels the dampened pitching of the moored longliner; he hears the muffled howling of the blow.

"Have you always fished?"

Why, he wonders, does she ask these questions that he can't answer. He remembers when he had a past, but he can't trust his memories, not any more. And he reaches to turn on the radio— Armed Forces' radio news, mostly about Iran, causes him to turn the radio back off. He can't resist: "Do you know why the people of Georgia ate ham today?"

"I've heard that twenty times today if I have heard it once, and I don't like it. I don't, don't like it. He's a good man, a fine man, and he's trying to do good, and what are you trying to do? You're not being helpful."

That's about all he can stand: "There's a couple bunks down there." He points to a cramped stairwell. "Take your choice. I'm going back to the Inn."

"What? You're not leaving me here alone!... I don't like tricks." She starts to pull her parka back on.

"You'll be fine, and I'll be back in an hour or so. I want to know a little more about what happened this evening." Not returning is tempting, but with this blow as hard as it is, he should be aboard.

"Okay— as long as you promise."

He isn't sure he should trust her not to touch things, but unless she unties a line, there isn't much damage she can do. And while a boat or a fishermen turns up missing ever so often, a dead body next to the subdock isn't a common occurrence and is certainly something worth investigating. "There's a bottle of salmonberry wine under the seat you're on. I don't think it has turned into vinegar yet."

"If it has, I'll use it to rinse my hair. Vinegar cuts soap scum really well."

Trying not to be too obvious, he shakes his head in continued disbelief: "There's shampoo in the shower— down in the head. Look around down there you'll find a towel that isn't too dirty. There's a clothes washer and dryer in the engine room, but let me use them. Okay?"

"I'd be happy to do your wash for you."

"Not necessary." He hopes her quirkiness isn't contagious. If he were like her, he'd hope somebody would drown him.

"Do Natives not like help?" She cants her head as a sparrow might. "You never really said if you are Native— you are, aren't you?"

"I thought we settled that." He feels the wind pick up intensity: it's probably blowing one-sixty in front of Ballyhoo, a hundred knots here in the bay. Decks groan softly under the strain of lines tied to cleats as wind sucks sound from the bangs and thuds of rafted crabbers bumping, then bouncing apart.

"You still won't listen to me so how can we have settled anything. You don't respect my ideas, I can tell. I'm good at that, telling when someone doesn't respect me, and there is too much disrespect in the world. Everybody has to do something about disrespecting other people, you know what I mean?" Suddenly sitting up straight, she asks, "What was that?" when someone jumps from the *Judi B's* bulwarks onto the *Coyote's* forward deck, then loses balance and lands hard, probably face down.

"I better check." But before he does anything, he slides his hand along the edge of his bench seat, and grasps his stainless steel Smith as a diminutive knock keeps his attention on the starboard side wheelhouse door. "It's open."

Sarah slips in, explaining, "I can't go back to my bunker." She takes a deep breath, watches his face, then pulls her sweatshirt over her shoulders, baring her braless chest. Black and blue marks, now turning yellow, extend from her waist to her shoulders, around her ribs, across her back and down her upper arms. "They got Davy tonight, killed him, so I need a place to stay." Then tucking her sweatshirt back into her jeans, she speaks with more strength than he imagined she possessed, "My thighs look the same. They were waiting for me in my bunker right after I pissed the narc off."

"Go slow." Motioning towards Louise, who sits behind his chart table with her mouth open as if she has just suffered a stroke, he says, "She tells me I don't listen very good so you will have to take this step by step, and give me all of the details."

"Have you been to a doctor? You need to go because you could have a ruptured intestine and that will kill you," Louise says, miraculously recovering from whatever was wrong.

"Who did that?" he indicates Sarah's ribs. "The narc?"

"Or someone afraid I'd talk to him." A couple of steps inside the wheelhouse, she squats as if relieving herself even though there is a jump seat beside the radar screen as well as the swiveling seat behind the wheel where she could sit. "Didn't go to the clinic, but don't think there're any broken ribs. They wanted to hurt me and they did."

"I have two bunks below. Louise, here," he motions towards her, "already has claim on one. The other is still open for tonight." The weather is barely fit for a seal. He wouldn't send anyone away despite his concern about her being a dealer.

"I need a gun," Sarah says as she notices the little, stainless steel Smith he still holds.

"How about a plane ticket instead?"

"The airport's being watched. I was hoping you might..." her voice again fades silent.

What he feared, she wants him to ferry her to probably anywhere off the island, which means risking the *Coyote* for what, to attract the attention of a narc, the last thing he needs. "Do they have a warrant?"

"Maybe by now... no." Her eyes lowered; she seems to study a blemish in the deck. "This really isn't about..." again her voice fades away.

"You have to help her. You can't let them get her." Standing, Louise appears unsure of whether to go to Sarah. "She needs medical attention and if she can't get it here then you have to take her where she can get it 'cause she has to have it."

He knows Sarah is not telling him everything, or even what's most important, especially considering Davy will by now be lying in a body bag at the airport, probably in the cooler with the waxed cardboard boxes of frozen, blue king crab waiting to be shipped to finer restaurants throughout the Lower Forty-Eight, their legs two feet and more in length. "*Northford's* leaving for Kodiak in the morning. You should be able to catch a ride on the crabber. They're a lot bigger boat than the *Coyote*."

"Who do I see?" Sarah, still squatting, looks up. Her eyes meet his. "I really need off this island."

"I'll take you over, introduce you." If the storm were any less fierce, he would run the *Coyote* around to the fuel dock rather than walk over Strawberry Hill, where the wind will be strong enough that if he holds the tails of his raincoat, he will likely become a human hang-glider.

"I don't know anybody in Kodiak."

"You know how to read a gram scale— there's a lab, does contract research, a friend of mine. He can put you to work, keep you outta sight for a while. I'll have him meet you in town." Spending time at Blue Fox Bay will keep her out of trouble: she will have no customers there unless she addicts otters and sea lions, foxes or the occasional bear.

"The sooner I'm gone... " once again her voice fails.

Although he doesn't worry about anyone jumping her while he's alone, he nevertheless pockets the Smith before slipping on a second, wool halibut shirt. "If I'm not back in a little bit, Louise, don't worry. It takes awhile to get across the island, then I want to stop at the Inn for a few minutes. So I figure I'll see you in the morning." He isn't sure how much of her he can handle tonight... the weight of the Model 60 in his pocket seems strangely comforting. He quit carrying the gun a couple of years ago, and when he did, he quit remembering why he carried it. But the drug scene is quickly burning away the fog that has hidden these islands most of this century. Like a sea lion in the presence of a killer whale, he must silently tread water, making no waves, if he is to remain invisible in the harsh light of drug enforcement agents and newspaper stories.

If anything, the storm is worse than before. He leans low into the wind as he feels his boots soles slip, sliding backwards, if he stands for even a moment. The wind pushes its chill through his Helly Hansen coat, through both heavy shirts and through him as if he were only space between quarks, the remains of atoms split by the wind and destroyed by the barrage of pithy snow pellets of antimatter as steel hulled crabbers bang against one another, their eerie orange picking lights rocking in wild arcs that form little domes of light unable to escape the blackness of the storm.

Sarah hangs on to his waist as he presses into the wind, his pants legs stretched tight against muscles bowed large as if upholding the world, numb from the cold. She hangs onto him as he inches across the gap bridged by the nylon lines, the wind making balancing nearly impossible— he understands how Davy could have fallen. It's all he can do to keep from being blown off as snow rounds pelt him, stinging cheeks, fingers, even his thighs. But he refuses to fall, becoming instead like a willow that bends but doesn't break as he sees himself in his mind bending but remaining firmly rooted, the image in his mind becoming reality as he now hurries towards UniSea and Margaret's Bay.

It takes forty minutes to hike over Strawberry Hill and to the Standard Oil dock where the *Northford* lies moored, awaiting the tide and for the wind to subside a little.

"Sure, we could use her in the galley," says Ted Childs, the crabber's skipper. "Our cook flew back to the old country yesterday, wanted to be there for the birth of his granddaughter. Said he'd be back for tanners."

"Thanks, Ted. Probably wouldn't hurt not advertising where she went. She's been roughed up pretty bad." He should tell Ted about Davy, but he doubts the skipper knows Godell, one of the cannery rats that stayed on to work maintenance for Pacific Pearl, just a face to most everyone on the island. He talked to Godell once when he had Pearl's millwright do some welding for him. The kid seemed decent enough. Young. Healthy. Maybe a little greedy. Another human being. Like Sarah. "Someone is out to do her serious harm."

"How come you're involved?" Ted offers him a coffee mug. "This is a little different role for you, isn't it? I know she deals." Ted pours himself another mugful as the wind rocks the crabber despite its size, pressing the crabber against groaning pilings, bending even farther under the dock the steel ladders hanging down, the crabber's steel bulwarks squawking like fenders rubbing against tires.

"Yeah, but she took Walt in when he tried to drink himself to death last year. Sat with him, talked to him, kept him from killing himself until he got his head straightened out.... You know Walt. He hears things in his head. It got too much for him last year. He heard stuff he didn't want to hear. So I guess I owe her something. Besides, I have that root-for-the-underdog mentality that sometimes gets me in trouble."

Scowling when he sips the mud in his mug, Ted says, "We'll take good care of her. After all, with my last year's crew, she was almost family though this is the first time I've been formally introduced to her... she made a helluva lot of money off them— they couldn't stay awake if they weren't high."

"I heard that's why you hired in Ballard for this season."

"Some truth in that."

There is nothing more he needs to say as he listens to the wind sort of swallow hard as if about to deliver a puff stronger than it has been blowing. He nods to Ted, then pulling his raincoat tight around him, he steps onto the lee-side companionway, grasps the cold rungs of the steel ladder and climbs, almost upside-down, back onto the fuel dock, feeling all the while like he should be the one going. Although there are no footsteps behind him, there are memories, still raw despite the weathering of the wind here, at the end of the world. And then there is Louise whatever-her-name-is aboard the *Coyote*, who is by herself more than enough reason to flee town.

Not wanting to return the way he came in case his meeting Sarah in UniSea attracted someone's attention, he leans into the wind and starts towards the airport, the wind purging the wheelhouse's used air from his lungs as he sees himself as a fox. In his mind, he is again a fox. Snow rounds sting his eyes as he hunts, head down, his senses fully alert. He skirts the puddles in front of Reeves terminal and gets pushed back by the wind that bends power poles as if they were fishing rods, wind that whistles through empty pillboxes, concrete domes where machine-gunners practiced repelling Japanese soldiers who practiced storming the pillboxes that guarded the wartime hospital complex, itself now dead windows and vacant skeletons of life that once ebbed and flowed like the tide, pushed high by the storm against the gravel beach, the surf booming as he slips around the point and towards the spur road to the dump where despite the fury, rats scurry from garbage pile to garbage pile. He sees the Cat parked in the weeds that will, tomorrow, push the piles into the surf, its white curl visible through the blackness.

Wind flows through him, wind and an urge to kill.

He is a fox; he feels the wind in his ruff. Tastes the blood. Hears the death rattles.

A rat scurries across the road. Then another. Another. Dozens. Everywhere. And he feels his boot squish a rat, then a second. He kicks a squirming trash bag. Rats and beer cans

scatter as the wind wrestles the black plastic sack up and over the road and off into the night as if returning it to Kansas.

Waves of rats flee to dens across the road. He stands still, waiting, listening to the surf tumble the trash, tossing tin cans, broken crab pot frames, junked cannery equipment around as if trying to puke back the debris pushed into the bay.

A rat darts towards a sack of cans. He goes after the rat, but doesn't get it.

Again, everything is quiet except for the surf and the wind that slams against the trash and the headland, atop which the Armed Forces' radio transmitter hunkers down while it continues to mumble inanely about hostages in Iran.

It has been a while since he has seen himself as a fox; he's no longer used to the feeling of fur. And he surveys the bags of trash, knowing the rats will return in a minute despite the storm. Feeling an almost overpowering need to kill, a bloodlust that begins above and a little behind his stomach, he welcomes the lust that flows upward through his shoulders, his arms, hands, jowls. His jaw is set hard against the wind and cold, his cheeks stinging from the snow-rounds, driven by sustained eighty, ninety knot winds, making standing upright impossible.

In the darkness beyond him lies Sarah's bunker, wedged in the saddle between the knob above the dump and the hill on which sits the Armed Forces' hundred-watt repeater. He's never been there, but everyone knows where everyone else lives.

Why, he wonders, was she afraid to return there? What didn't she tell him? And he again hears the squeaks, moans, groans of ancient firs, his saw chain pulling chips as shivers ripple through him, killing shivers needing no season, with nails protruding from his soles.

Hardly realizing he has moved, he slips past Shelikof Net's leased warehouse and approaches her bunker with the caution of a fox inspecting a baited trap. He circles high above the knob, sees nothing, then makes a second circle, closer this time.

Off to his side and below him, something, someone moves. He freezes. Although now seeing nothing, he trusts instincts long neglected. Again the hunter, this is his game, the closing in for the kill, the long range shot, the spreading pink mist of death rising like a tiny cloud, warm but emotionless, and he shivers, his memories alive and crying, his tears for Judy, his sons, the accident, sputtering flares, red lights, stretchers and body bags— and suddenly he's getting ready to go hunting behind his house despite deer season being closed for a week; the rut is only now beginning. After yesterday's storm, big bucks will run roadways all day.... Five-thirty, the same time he'd be getting ready for work, he, Dutch Keipers, alone in a cold house, crosses the kitchen, the nails of his caulk boots puncturing the linoleum and sticking in the floor; Judy used to give him hell for wearing his boots in her kitchen, and the wind rips away his tears, tearing them from his cheeks, slinging them like rain against the crumpled grass and ferns, mingling them with the round snow pellets until they freeze.

Another fox or a village dog, is that what he saw? He'll soon know. So, hidden in the wind, waiting, watching, he crouches as if to pounce, tasting the blood, the saltiness of life, its life. It's on the go again. Looking like a paint run on a dark canvas, the movement eases towards Sarah's bunker.

He hooks his thumb over the Smith's hammer spur. Then staying low, bent over like a fox, he creeps close to the bunker, and he feels the presence of another being, feels its life, its aura. Settling on his haunches, he holds the Smith's trigger back, cocking the revolver without a click.

The bunker has no backdoor. Whoever, whatever, is between him and the bunker, and it will have to pass near to leave, near enough for him to kill and he feels the coldness of those

years of picking off gooks as if they were ground squirrels, of figuring kills per rounds fired, of sniper team awards for being the best.

His haunches cramp; yet, still, he waits with memories of Judy giving him hell for not taking off his boots. He remembers hearing her, teasing her, ignoring her complaints when, eight months after the accident, from the corner beside the back door, he took the Winchester, cradled its long octagon barrel across his left forearm, and slipped into the night. He didn't need to see to know where he was going as he climbed over the wood gate across the end of the haulroad leading to Georgia-Pacific's holdings.

A stirring alongside the bunker's door. From the shadows a figure with empty hands moves towards him.

He has the bastard now; could kill him if he wanted; probably should. But maybe he ought to first find out who the bastard is. So when the figure is a dozen steps past him, he softly says, "Don't move."

The figure halts in midstep.

He says nothing more, nor does he move. And his silence comes alive, horrible in absence. Breaths shallow. Heartbeats loud. In his mind, he hears the beads of sweat roll along the figure's hairline; he smells the fear.

The dark figure finally breaks the silence: "I'm putting my foot down." But the wind sweeps away the figure's words, carrying them up hill, mingling them with the signal from the military repeater, sending them far out into the stormy Pacific.

Is this fellow the reason Sarah couldn't return to her bunker? He suspects so. Thus, still not entirely convinced he shouldn't pull the trigger of his Smith, he says nothing.

The figure slowly turns to face the shadows. Fear-amplified heartbeats rumble like mountain thunder. Unspoken words heard in the mind... he smells fresh urine, but still, he says nothing, his finger firm around the Smith's trigger.

The figure suddenly spins, and runs. Weeds entangle his feet, trip him, send him sprawling. The figure bounces up, falls again, scrambles to his feet, takes a step, and again falls. Then half up, half down, the fellow zig-zags through the grass and weeds until disappearing as if never there.

Although his lips smile, he stays in the shadows, stays low, seeing in his mind a fox slinking through bent grass, staying in the dips and gulleys until he reaches the stacked crab pots, the subbarn on the opposite side of the dry-stored pots. He ought to get some sleep, but he would like to know what's being said about Davy Godell. The coffee in UniSea's bar won't be any good this late at night, but then, his aboard the *Coyote* is likely to be worse. And right now, he could use a cup to warm up if nothing else; could use a cup while he considers how easily he can return to those years of seeing everybody as targets, a frightening aspect of himself he thought had gone away permanently.

The warmth of the Inn's lobby surrounds him, tugs at his jeans, softens his raincoat, hangs on his cheeks and ears. For eight years almost to the day, he has kept his nose clean; he has been careful never to give either friend or foe cause to check his past. He has run hard, fast, hasn't looked back, but tonight, he decided to play Sir Galahad. He hopes the clank of his armor doesn't give him away; it never did fit very well.

The restaurant side has turned up the lights and has quit serving food, but will still bring him coffee till the bar closes. He again claims the table behind the employees... is it because today is Thanksgiving that he can't stop thinking about Judy and the boys? As he sits, the table seems to whisper, "Kurt, Kent."

It's okay, boys. Be good kids. Take care of your mother. I'll be there soon enough.

Still on duty, Peggy brings him an insulated pot of coffee without him asking— he doesn't know if he could have ordered, if his voice will work as he tightens throat muscles to hold back sobs that begin deep within him and push upwards. On the still damp surface of the table, he sees images of the past play as a B-movie, complete with technical flaws. He closes his eyes, but he still sees them. Unable to escape them, he remembers mistakes. Learning to run is as painful as learning to walk, with the first steps being the hardest and most traumatic.

That first winter was spent in Hart Canyon, in a cabin just below the rim. He left in the spring with a couple hundred bobcat and coyote pelts— how did he ever get away with trapping in a game refuge? Wonders what they thought when they found the carcasses.

He sold the pelts to that Seattle furrier, then stopped at a Shakey's Pizza Parlor in Renton to splurge. Heard talk of construction beginning on a haulroad for the Alaska Pipeline.

But why did he go to the Kenai? Probably because of that film shown in the Taft High School gym about moose hunting on the Peninsula. He thinks he heard that fellow who made the film went down in a plane a couple of years ago. It happens to everybody, someday to him; his time will be up.

Tears seep from the edges of his eyes as he sits at the damp table, holding his head in his hands, feeling his memories, losing the passage of time that separates him from them. It's as if the past and the present are the same here, where the world ends, where judgment will come.

He boarded a plane in Seattle with \$3,700. Gold had only recently been cut free from the dollar; so he went panning. He had known nothing of placer gold. If he had known anything, he would have chosen somewhere other than the Kenai. But he had done well. The summer was one of shoveling, panning and swatting mosquitoes once he found a bench showing color. His hands blistered, cracked, calloused as they never had when he'd logged. His skin had become like leather and his muscles, tough and sinewy like a mule's. His sweat attracted no-see-ums that crawled into his eyes. One tear duct became infected, and he nearly lost the eye. Whitesoxs attacked him, taking little bits of meat each bite. He lived on spruce hens and ptarmigan, eating them cold for breakfast and hot (roasted over a campfire) for supper. He fell asleep too tired to think, and rose the next morning to shovel more gravel as if he were on a chain gang in hell.

Oh, Judy, you've gotta believe me... I'm sorry.

When the mountain willows turned yellow there on the Kenai, he left the high country with nearly two hundred ounces of flakes and small nuggets and without an answer to why that cop shot at him.

For a moment his mind sits vacant, causing the entire Inn to appear deserted. But the moment doesn't last: two men, both hard-lookers, sit down beside him. One slides along the padded bench next to him. The other takes the chair across the table. Their mannerisms, their presence feels threatening, and he wonders if he has been recognized.

Peggy brings two more cups. Looking past the fellow across from him, he tells her, "These two have bad breath so keep the cups." But smiling as if what he said were a joke, she leaves the heavy restaurant ware cups before withdrawing to the kitchen.

"You're comin' with us," growls the fellow in the chair as soon as Peggy disappears into the kitchen.

"Don't think so." He shifts positions slightly so the butt of the Smith is accessible.

The fellow tight beside him snarls, "You don't understand, you're coming with us."

"Neither of you seem to comprehend, I'm not going anywhere."

"You comin' peacefully— or we'll drag you outta here," says the fellow in the chair.

"Don't provoke me." He reaches for the coffeepot to refill his nearly full cup, his hand steady. "It's hard on digestion."

Leaning forward, his elbows on the table, the fellow opposite him says, "Tough guy, huh?" And the fellow pours salt in his coffee.

He flips his coffee across the table. The scalding brew soaks the fellow's shirt, and the fellow scoots backwards, stands, pulling his steaming shirt away from his chest. Meanwhile, Jay drives his left elbow into the ribs of the yahoo next to him.

The fellow partially blocks his elbow, but now Jay has room to twist on the bench as he raises a knee, banging the table. Cups and saucers rattle. The coffeepot spills. With the edge of his hand, he slings hot coffee into the yahoo's eyes.

The fellow standing barks, "Hold it! We'll talk here."

Coming on a run, Peggy sees the spilled coffee, grabs a towel, and wipes up what hasn't already run onto the floor. When she leaves to get a mop, the fellow across the table again sits.

"Where's Sarah?"

"She's none of your business." The Smith is cocked though still out of sight under the table.

"You're wrong, buddy."

"Then you tell me where she is." He smells urine and recognizes the yahoo beside him as the fellow who had been at her bunker.

"I'm askin' the questions."

"Not any more."

"Buddy, you've been watchin' too much TV." The fellow rests his palms on the far edge of the table as he leans his face forward, keeping his wet shirt off his chest.

"If you're the two assholes who worked her over, you'll be lucky if you can get on a plane tomorrow and get yourselves off the island, damn lucky."

Before either of them can answer, Peggy brings a fresh pot of coffee and one mug.

When she leaves, the fellow next to him says, "Just tell us where she is."

"Whatever your beef with Sarah was, it's over. Got it? It's over." He notices the yahoo next to him now realizes he has been keeping his right hand under the table; he suspects the yahoo knows why. "And a bit of advice to you two, same advice I gave her. I'll be the first to turn your asses in if I even think you're involved with drugs." If these assholes are narcs, he needs to plant that bit of clarity about where he stands.

"We'll be in touch," says the yahoo next to him. Pushing himself away from the table and standing, the yahoo motions to the fellow across the table to follow him.

He won't be staying now either, won't give them a chance to set up for him. So stepping into the kitchen, he tells Peggy, "Keep the ticket open, I'll be in to sign it tomorrow," and he continues through the kitchen and out the backdoor, his raincoat still lying where he set it beside the table.

The wind drives cold through his doubled wool halibut shirts as snow-rounds pelt him, stinging exposed skin, but he is onto the subdock and across the gap in seconds as he lets the wind push him along as if he were flying. In his mind, he sees the old one-legged gray gull, wings outstretched, hopping along the dock, hurrying to reach the *Coyote's* railing before younger gulls, whiter gulls devour all of the bits of cod he scatters each morning as he chums for crab bait— one gull in a pot is worth a full pot of kings, an illegal practice but something that's done all the time, like something a President would do. But a poached gull or two doesn't equal a B-52 load of cluster bombs dropped on civilians, the secret plan to end the

war, and he remembers the killing rage that got him rotated home; even its memory seems as lethal now as it was in the hole where the sun sunk.

The Smith in his pocket feels good, and waiting is his game. If those assholes think he is as easy of a mark as Sarah, well, they have never danced with a pissed logger.

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