

# ***Aleutian Rogue***

WITH

## ***The Amanat***

**SERIALIZED**

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### **Chapter Thirteen**

1.

Not able to remember when she last tried to bake a pie (she couldn't have been more than nine, ten at the oldest), Catherine wonders what possessed her to even attempt domesticity. Perhaps Don Quixote's Moorish enchanter cast a spell on her. Must have. Why else would she behave so foolishly? Her shoulder still hurts far too much to properly roll out pie dough, and she couldn't really remember how to make the dough. She remembers that it's simple and very peasant—she should have quit then, when she could safely admire her domestic intentions from a distance. But there is so little to do aboard this boat, and she doesn't think she can stand to read one more page of that Greek historian. Overall, she feels better so she gave it a try...she hates failures, especially hers.

She is cold despite having turned the stove up so she could bake, and she wishes the cherries would've turned out better. They were picked before they were ripe. Like hers. She shivers thinking about the journey. She still resents being dragged from her room.

Her bruises have mostly yellowed, but even without the bruising her looks aren't what they were. Every window in the wheelhouse acts like a mirror, none of them friendly. There is no room in the Family for bitchy old ladies once appearances begin to fade. Some marry well, become respectable. Not her. She has been too successful. They won't, they can't let her leave. A bullet most likely. Burns a lot, they say. Maybe OD. Better? She can't say.

Cold, stiff, dead. Lying in a satin-lined casket fifty, a hundred, a thousand years. She shudders. Doesn't think she'd like that. Not much to do. She's slept between satin sheets with men, who, after thirty seconds, might as well have been dead. Thought a couple might have been. She swallows hard. Wouldn't like hell, she knows that, but the damned, that's her—maybe she had better learn to like it.

She thinks about the casket lid being lowered over her, watching it come down, knowing she can't get out. Glass jewelry. Her dress might not even have a back. Her mother's didn't. And what kind of job will they do on her makeup? Garish, like the proverbial scarlet woman...or pale as a ghost.

A wave of nauseating fear beginning low within her washes through her: she doesn't stand much chance of not burning forever. One good deed, will that spare her? If there's a God. An afterlife. She hopes there isn't one, not a Christian one. Heaven up. Hell down. Turn hard to port, a person's doomed. Hard to starboard, everything's wonderful. Straight ahead and fall off the edge of the world. She doesn't believe any of it, but what else is there to believe? that she never pays? that none of them do? Then there is no justice.

Tomorrow, the next day, the day after that. It'll be all over. Somebody is already waiting wherever they arrive. No port will be safe. It is foolishness to pursue their wayward dealer, who, if she is still alive, also won't be alive for long. And she wishes the pie would have turned out better, but it is like her life, its crust overly tough, its filling thin.

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In a continuous motion, Jay again surveys the destruction of Little John's kitchen, cradles the Ruger, slips through the backdoor in a crouch, and crosses the garden. He slides between twisted spruce trunks and has the pram in the water and the kicker running in less time than it takes to drink a cup of coffee. And with the pram pounding as it skims over the choppy outer bay, he heads for the *Coyote*.

Even planing, it takes twenty minutes to run to the head of Blue Fox. Spray drenches him, and the cold wind drives the chill deep. And as he pulls alongside the *Coyote*, Catherine, with his Smith in her hand, leans over the bulwarks and asks, "Where is she?"

"On her way to Seward." He tells what he has learned, and in the reflected light from the cabin, sees fear in her eyes. "What's a matter?"

"The person from the U.N., she will be GRU."

"Oh, come on. It's one thing for Birchers to believe there's Russians behind every bush, but another thing for any to be there." *Oh, shit. I've pissed her off.* "Hey, I believe you." But how is he to believe a story that doesn't seem part of what has been happening?

Turning just before stepping into the wheelhouse, Catherine says firmly and coldly, "No you don't."

"I smell cherry pie. Any left?"

"You wouldn't believe me if I told you." Catherine has heard this all before: someone from the U.N., the favorite cover of Soviet nationals working abroad. Tunlaw Road in action. The shadowy world of spooks. They want the ivory; they need the hard currency it will bring. The Organization was to have already delivered the nine thousand kilos; so she doesn't blame them for becoming impatient. But they, like Jay, will have to be careful they aren't detected.

Jay will die soon unless she separates from him. For his sake, she has to go. Alone, he might have a chance. Besides, she still has some of her earlier looks so she can get by.

"We have about enough time to eat a piece so how about you dish me up while I batten down everything that came loose on our run up here. Once we clear Marmot Island, we'll again be in open water till we get close to the Peninsula."

"You don't have to eat it. It's not very good."

"I'll be the judge of that."

Jay doesn't get to the pie for another twenty minutes, not until he pulls the pram aboard, checks fluids, starts the 6-71 main, then weighs anchor and changes clothes. He then eats the pie that really isn't very good as Catherine, having the wheel, feels the slow power of control as the *Coyote* quietly circles the rock piles along the bay's east side. She hears him scrape his plate, then take a third piece. And she wonders if she misjudged the quality of her baking or if he will eat anything.

Once in the open inner bay, Jay relieves her: "Can you see the islands ahead?"

"No, it's all dark."

"Check the scope and you'll see them...there's more obstacles out there than your eye can see, or even what that scope will pick up. You just have to know they're there, then steer around them." He can see Bear Island loom dark in the darkness. He sees it because he knows it is there.

"And how do you know what's out there?"

"It's all in the blood—you have to listen to the spirits...been thinking while I was getting drenched—how about if you and I pull off the perfect disappearing act? I know how it can be done, figured it out."

"The perfect disappearing act is concrete overshoes."

"You're close. The only way to duck the heat is to die, but I'm not ready to be dead yet. I want to set us up in British Columbia with some money to spend. Quite a bit of it. Enough to attract attention. Think you could help me do that?"

"How much money?" Her question is pure response like a cat snatching a finch that has escaped its cage.

"Quarter of a million. In a month. No real estate."

"You must be kidding."

"I know it'll be dangerous—"

"No, no. I can wear that much. And more...I have."

"Good. This will be dangerous, really. High profile. I want to set us up as an easy mark."

"Then what?" Why is she asking? He doesn't understand, truly doesn't.

"That's my part. I worked out the timing between chops while coming back around the outer island ahead." Jay lines up on darkness to the right of the reflected light from John's lab, that light floating on the water as if it were an oil slick, polluting the wilderness. "Other than bruising your crust, your pie was good. And nobody can bake in that oven. You worked wonders just getting it done."

"I couldn't find a recipe and didn't remember how to make crust. I had to improvise."

"Take your flour, half as much shortening as you took flour, and half or a little less as much cold water as shortening. A pinch of salt. Cut the shortening in the flour. That's all there's to pie crust."

"How do you happen to remember that?"

"One of those things that sticks in part of my mind, the part that's all filled up with how to live when you haven't a choice." He peers hard into the darkness to see the tip of the sand spit on Hog Island. "You can't image half of what's rattling around in there."

"Where?" Again, her response is automatic.

"My mind...if you will trust me, I'll get us into Canada." All he needs is the fuel, and while two hours aren't up, he jogs the wheel to duck starboard-side around the end of the spit as he backs down the throttle, nosing the bow of the *Coyote* alongside a piling of the barn-like former herring saltery. "Take the wheel. I'll grab a line."

Stepping outside, he quickly wraps the *Coyote's* bowline around the piling before they drift away. Then to Catherine, he says, "Stay here. I'll be right back. Five minutes, not one moment more."

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"No! Dammit, John, I can't go to the cops to solve all of life's little problems." Little John is his friend. He made a mistake in involving him, and now he needs his help in extricating him. "Do you want to see her hurt? I don't imagine the next bunch looking for Sarah will leave witnesses, not out here. You're gambling with her life as well as your own."

"This isn't a little problem, you know that." John offers Jay a cup of coffee. His kitchen is mostly put back together; his open Bible lies in the middle of the kitchen table. "All right, you're probably correct about what might happen. I'll go when Louise returns, but not sooner. I'll have the watchman from Port Williams feed the chickens often enough they won't starve."

"How about the fuel? Can I get some at Port Williams?"

"They had seven thousand gallons when the cannery shut down. It's a couple of years old, but I think it will still go through your injectors if it doesn't plug your filters. The watchman thinks it will. He's waiting for you." John pauses while he refills his own cup. "He'll let you have up to a thousand gallons, and will give you the address of where to send the check. He remembers you, said to bring him a piece of meat someday."

"I'd better be going. This affair ought to blow over in a month or two. A semester's about the right length of time to stay away."

"Oregon State's on that screwy term system."

"Then I'll see you in April."

"Remember to duck. Take care."

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Like a falling tear, the *Coyote* slips from the bay without a wake. Her bow wave is a ripple. Her semi-canoe stern leaves only disturbed water behind her. Jay is pleased. He notices wakes. Wasted power. So while he pisses over the stern, he wonders if his new boat, the motorsailer he is having built in Halifax, a long-distance cruiser, will be as easy in the water. A year ago when he ordered the vessel, he thought he would have to truck it across continent, had budgeted thirty-five hundred for trucking, but maybe he can take delivery there, then sail where? wherever he damn well pleases. Too bad it won't be completed for another year.

Crossing over seventy fathom water where Shuyak Strait joins Shelikof, they catch up to the traveling rip, bounce through it, and approach Port Williams. He backs the *Coyote* down as he coaxes the ex-troller against the pilings of the dock. The watchman does, indeed, expect him. Catherine winches as she throws lines while trying not to twist her injured shoulder; she doesn't throw far, but doesn't need to. And he shuts down the main. Suddenly, the night seems silent though it isn't. The rhythmic thumpings of a muffled diesel generator carry across the cove. The wash of the surge beneath the pilings. Tumbling stones on the gravel beach. Echoes quietly sneak between the white-painted buildings and the dark timber. The bump of the *Coyote's* gunwale against the pilings, the dull ring of the watchman's steps on the dock, the rustling of spruce bough—all now seem loud. Even the faint squeal of the aft fuel tank cap seems loud once the Jimmie is stilled.

The watchman passes down a weathered fuel hose, and says, "The pressure's set way down so she pumps real slow."

Aided by the dim light cast from a couple of jerry-rigged bulbs on the dock, he inserts the nozzle into the throat of the aft tank. Diesel trickles from the hose. He might complain if he had another option. He doesn't. He needs the fuel; so he latches the nozzle open, returns to the wheelhouse, and finishes the pie.

"Where to now? Seward?" asks Catherine.

"Afraid so...you can make another pie anytime."

## 2.

Minutes blend together in an unhurried stew. Another hour passes, and people begin to come and go as Anchorage again comes to life. But for Eric Pettersen, who has spent the night in his office, another hour means he is just that much farther from apprehending the murdering fisherman. Perhaps the fisherman and his trophy catch did go down off Egg Island, something he doesn't want to believe, a possibility that leaves him without his specials and with Catherine Alden ensnared in the octopus-like tentacles of Satan himself this Sunday morning.

The State troopers who searched the remote Blue Fox Bay laboratory convinced him that the biologist there knew nothing of Shoulders or either woman. The McPhearson woman, he knows, arrived on the Kenai Peninsula aboard the crab boat *F/V Dawn* sometime before he returned to Anchorage...when he arrived last night, the airport terminal seemed deserted. The only sign of life was a black janitor pushing a broom wrapped in a towel.

His cab dropped him at the Federal fortress, where, on his way to his office, he again paused in front of the stuffed American eagle, and admired how well suited its talons are for snatching spawning salmon. He only wished he were as well suited for his job here, where he is perceived as the enemy. That, he doesn't understand. He is, truly, one of the good guys.

So now most of the night later, he still doesn't understand where this Alaskan distrust of the Federal government comes from, still doesn't understand why D-2 is such a hot issue, still doesn't understand why he is being pulled off his Western Alaska drug investigation and assigned to penetrate and prosecute cells of crazed survivalists calling themselves *Patriots in Action*, a *disorganization*. It seems someone has deliberately hamstrung his investigation just as it begins producing fruit. Considering his experience with Alden in Miami and San Diego, he wonders whom

she has compromised. He answers directly to the Attorney General; so the traitor must be in the White House, an uncomfortable realization.

He has waited till daylight before starting for Seward. Nothing has to be done about the *Patriots in Action* until Monday. That gives him all of today to justify keeping his investigation going—he will never give up his attempt to locate Shoulders. He will not allow anyone to laugh at him.

Anchorage streets are bare, but the highway out of town is icy. By the time he reaches the curves around Turnagain Arm, he knows for certain his car has too much power: it handles like a pig driven across a frozen lake, each wheel a cloven hoof sliding in a different direction. He slows to thirty-five and worries about how long it will take to reach Seward. Not before ten o'clock at his present speed.

The few hours of daylight will pass much too quickly.

Where he can see it between the mountains, the southern sunrise is spectacular, the peculiarity of Alaskan winters being that the sun rises and sets in the South. He can see all the way to Columbia, or so it seems. And he wonders what the Columbians are doing, and why he hasn't stumbled over them trying to retrieve Alden. Do they believe the lost-at-sea story? Evidently. Surely he can't be days either ahead or behind them.

Perhaps the Columbians don't know that their little dealer fled to the Peninsula. He wouldn't have known if he hadn't flown to Kodiak and personally interviewed that cannery's plant manager...he needs a badge, some visual manifestation of his authority that even Alaskans can't ignore. The Pacific Pearl manager didn't want to level with him until checking with the company's attorneys, one of whom he had met at a party. If not for a social drink six months ago, he would still be on Kodiak.

The Seward harbormaster's office is closed, the harbormaster in church. He has to wait until God finishes inspiring a sermon before he can ask about the *Dawn*, and this additional period of waiting irritates him. He has been waiting all night. He is running out of time. But there is nothing he can do but fume as the little dealer's trail grows cold.

Finally, God releases the harbormaster—from where he meets the harbormaster in Seward Fisheries' parking lot, Pettersen can see the *Dawn* moored alongside the cannery's off-loading dock. It appears deserted. Or asleep. Is all of Alaska asleep? It is after noon. Actually, it's almost one o'clock. But atop dock pilings and utility poles, gulls stand, their heads tucked beneath wings as if asleep.

An ice film covers water puddles in the paved lot. A thirty-mile-an-hour breeze blows off Resurrection Bay, and blows right through his polyester pants. He regrets leaving his overcoat in the car. He ought to return for it, but this visit to the boat won't take long.

To reach the boat, he has to climb down a bent steel ladder that hangs loosely from the dock. The ladder bends inward, beneath the dock like a reverse cliff face; its rusty rungs are slick from skim ice.

When he reaches the level of the Dawn, he is too far under the dock to step from the ladder to the bulwarks—six feet separate him from the boat's pipe railing. So shivering, legs tired (they lack spring), he twists around, turning his back to the rungs, and catching his breath, he pushes off.

In that moment between the ladder and the railing, his thoughts are of not having eaten today, of the knot in his stomach from being assigned to the *Patriots in Action* affair, of helplessness and of being laughed at if he doesn't make it. The moment seems not to pass. He hangs by nothing, has no safety net under him, and feels like he is falling down an abyss...until his right foot lands on the pipe. For an instant he balances on the slippery bulwarks, then his momentum carries him forward onto the slatted studding covering the steel deck. And he lands with a thud on hands and knees. His feet fit between the studs; his knees hit hard on the boards. But he only exhales a sigh. Anything is better than a swim and being laughed at.

Hobbling towards the open fo'c'sle, Pettersen pauses only long enough to check the cylinder of his Colt before entering. Without a badge to engender respect, he might have to use his weapon, a prospect from which he won't shirk.

In the belly of the boat, a diesel generator beats like a racing heart. The vessel is tanked. Its circulating pumps run, flooding the hold. Lights burn more brightly than the sun. And he follows the low sound of taped music.

The music comes from the first cabin forward of the galley, and apparently, the only one occupied. Its door is ajar. He knocks lightly, then enters the cabin that is as luxurious as a beach condo. Color TV. VCR. Stereo. Easy chair. In his book, this much luxury means drugs are being trafficked aboard this vessel.

The lone occupant lies on his bunk, smoking a joint. He motions Pettersen in, but doesn't rise. And Pettersen wants to arrest the fellow on the spot, will if he doesn't get exactly what he wants.

"I'm looking for a friend of mine. Sarah. Where is she?"

The fellow on the bunk stares at him through dilated pupils. He tries to ignore the obvious violation of Law as he again asks, "Where's Sarah?"

"She's with Jerr... wherever he is." Reaching for a bottle of tequila alongside his bunk, the fellow mumbles, "Wanta meet Jose?"

"Jerr? Jerr who?"

"Jerr, yuh know. Jerr...Jerry, our cook...you sure yuh don't wanta meet Jose?" As if it were a Herculean feat, the fellow raises the bottle.

He suspects the fellow will pass out if he arrests him here, leaving him to wrestle the fellow as dead weight up the ladder by himself. So he collects sufficient evidence to seize the vessel as he softly asks, "Where does Jerry live? Tell me. Be a good guy. You want to, don't you?"

"Ahh—ah dunno...ask the skip."

"Where's the skip? Your skipper? What's his name?" A name always makes obtaining a seizure order easier.

"Yeah...in Ballard."

"Ballard?"

"Yuh know, where all the skippers live."

The drug smoke irritates his nose as Pettersen becomes increasingly irritated with the crewman. "Is there anyone else here?"

"Nobody but me and Jose."

"Does anyone in town know your skipper, or where Jerry lives?"

"Ah—ah'm watchin'—the boat." He offers Pettersen a drag. "Good stuff. All tops."

Head already woozy, eyes watering, hungry, tired. A couple of drags and he would be as stoned as the crewman is. "I'll have someone check on you in the morning. Okay?"

"Stay—here." Motioning towards his bunk, he adds, "Yuh ain't in no hurry."

Pettersen wants to kill the fellow right here. One shot. Who would know? If he hadn't asked the harbor master for help, no one. But he did ask; so in brittle words, he says, "You stay here—I have to go," as he returns to the picking deck where he gulps mouthfuls of fresh air as the breeze again cuts through his polyester pants. He breathes deeply: he doesn't want to be high. Too much is at stake.

Seeing the ladder, looking for another way up to the dock, knowing the risk in jumping, he doesn't see any way off the boat other than sprouting wings. And he stands there, hating the fisherman who murdered his specials. He wouldn't have to be here if they weren't on their way to a stateside funeral parlor.

Staring at the ladder won't get him back onto the dock—

His knees hurting, he grasps the hydraulic sheave pot hauler, and using it to balance, he climbs onto the pipe railing. Although balancing on the icy rail rivals walking a high wire without a beam, he slides his slick soles along the railing until he is opposite the ladder, then turning, he bends stiff knees, and launches.

Fingers grasp a cold rung as his feet frantically search for support. Toes bang the steel strakes. Fingers slip. He lets go for a moment and seems suspended in space, then wraps his right arm around the ladder and hangs on, hugging the cold steel. His feet find a rung. And in a minute, out of breath, he climbs onto the dock. He climbs over the edge of the creosoted timber resolving to own this boat by tomorrow night—and if there are drugs aboard any other vessel, he will also, on behalf of the United States of America, own it, even if that means seizing the entire fleet.

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From the wheelhouse of the *Dawn*, Stuart Bartholomew watches the attorney climb the bent ladder. He came aboard at high tide. Stepped from the dock onto the roof of the wheelhouse. Although he doesn't know this athletic attorney, he knows the attorney has been ordered away from this drugs-for-ivory case so he wonders why the attorney is still involved. Perhaps he, as NIA area chief, will have to again contact Washington.

When the attorney clammers onto the dock and disappears, Bartholomew returns to the crew member's cabin, produces another fifth from his coat pocket, and says, "Joe, here, wants to talk to you." He will wait for high tide to leave.

The crew member struggles to sit. Can't. Stuart sits on the edge of his bunk and hands him the fifth as the fellow rolls onto his side, and has another long conversation with Jose before turning to Stuart and slurring, "Yuh'rre allright."

Stuart knows the attorney didn't get anything useful from the crew member. He intends to make sure the situation doesn't change tomorrow.

3.

For Jay and Catherine, entrance into Resurrection Bay is a welcome relief. Since leaving the protection of Shuyak Island, the seas have been heavy. Being in a hurry, they ran with poles up, stabilizer plates on deck. And with her soft chine, the *Coyote* snap-rolled for hours in the cross-seas between the Barrens and Chugachs. Still, the voyage took longer than either wanted.

The mountains are rosy pink when they drop anchor in the hook of the deserted point near the Old Army Dock. The bottom is rocky so Jay tows the anchor until it sets. He doesn't want anything to happen to the *Coyote*. The ex-troller is their ticket to Southeast and Canada if he can't reach Edna.

They are still miles from town and Seward's small boat harbor, where, he imagines, the *Dawn* lies moored. Their way into town is the pram, which really isn't large enough for two people. Nevertheless, with Catherine sitting in its bow, concerned, she tells him, about how she looks—"You look terrific, you really do, and I don't mind telling you so a dozen times"—and with the pram's square bow plowing water, Jay, looking back at the ex-troller, its full daytank enough to run the stove for three days and with that breast feather closed in the door for a tattletale, wonders if he shouldn't have kept on going, crossing the Gulf in the heavy weather. He is certain they could have made it undetected. But he needs to contact Edna if they are to disappear, needs her help. And he should try to contact Sarah; should try to convince her to turn herself in. After the mess made of Little John's kitchen, he should at least warn Sarah that all of the players in this little drama are closing in on her.

If he never returns to the *Coyote*...he will miss the old girl, the life he had aboard her, the time he spent at Dutch. Yes, he will even miss coffee in UniSea.

If he doesn't return, maybe Edna can get a hold of his crewman, Walt. Walter Barnabus Kasatkin, reared an Old Believer, matured a what? nonBeliever isn't accurate. More like an

all-Believer, the only person he has ever met who read all four volumes of Herodotus a second time. Walt could use the boat, would work it, take care of it, and he does owe something to the ex-troller.

The bay is calm, without either chop or a running ground swell. A light breeze to their stern aids them. Still, it takes an hour to reach the small boat harbor, and a second hour of slowly cruising among the moored vessels to locate the *Dawn*.

Off by itself like it is, the *Dawn* has about it the feel of a baited cubby set. He doesn't like that feel, doesn't like it at all. Hairs on his neck bristle. He has trapped too many animals not to recognize a trap. So instead of pulling alongside the crabber, he swings wide and slowly circles.

The harbor is green, stagnate, oily, and stinks of diesel fuel, fish gurry and rotting kelp. Dock pilings reek of creosote. A seagull swoops low over them, and vents a long, white string that goes splat when it hits the water. Other gulls, with feathers fluffed, walk the dock. Still others sail high overhead. But no gull sits on the crabber's bulwarks.

An otter surfaces beside them, stands in the water, and seems to wave.

"He's cute," Catherine says.

"Wait till you see them this summer." He sees her shiver, and wonders if she is cold as he motors towards the grid where new zincs are being welded on a shrimper.

"Darling, there's a cafe. Can we stop?"

He hears her use of *darling*, knows the words has little meaning to her, knows it is a sound she can safely utter in whomever's company she finds herself, and he wishes she weren't as cold inside as he is. He is healing. This trip has let him see the severed connections that used to keep the world centered; has let him gather two ends and begin rolling in a splice as if those connections were guylines steadying the world. He doesn't yet know what to do with the visions, but that knowledge will come. Right now, he is still sticky white clay awaiting his turn at the wheel. He will always be a little white, but never again will he ignore the old ways that bound the world together. Yes, he is healing. His wounds have scabs. He will be okay if he can keep from scratching.

He points the pram towards the grid's ladder, and once out of sight of the *Dawn*, relaxes a little. Plans have to be altered a bit.

Wolves are the toughest animals to trap. They are far too wary to come into cubby sets. But they have the habit of walking in their own footsteps in deep snow...he has caught plenty of them by setting traps in their footprints. That means all predictably will have to be eliminated from his plans—he cannot retrace his steps or go where he has before.

Foot high letters declare Seward the *Dawn's* home port.

Having fished for long enough to know how things work, he knows the *Dawn* should have local accounts where he can obtain the names of her crew. One of them will know where Sarah is. But first, he must feed Catherine.

He rounds the bow of the shrimper, the *F/V Newcastle*, kills the kicker, and silently glides past the welder, also in a dinghy. The welder flips up his hood, and stares at them. Jay hollers, "Be all right if I leave the skiff here for a while?"

Pointing to the *Newcastle*, the welder says, "She ain't comin' off today."

"Be all right, then?"

"I reckon."

He has an idea: "I heard there was an engineer's job open on the *Dawn*. Who would I see?"

"Ain't there nobody aboard?"

Knowing whoever was left to watch the crabber is likely drunk or stoned, Jay says, "He doesn't know anything."

"Sudden Sam's been her engineer for the past couple years. I ain't heard nothin' about him quittin'."

"I should ask him, huh? Where does he live?"

"End of 6th. By the ferry dock. Dunno the number."

Alaska isn't where anyone should come to hide: "I'll find him. What's his name?"

"Sam Slocum. Sudden Sam, the way his wife tells it."

Jay isn't sure he would like that tag applied to him, but he had been alone for long enough, his plumbing hasn't had the staying power it once possessed. "Be gone awhile. Appreciate your keeping an eye on the skiff."

"Sure."

With the pram tied to the grid ladder and with the bulge of the Smith conspicuous in his right front jeans pocket, Jay follows Catherine up the ladder. It has been years since he was last here, but little has changed. He points her towards the cafe on the dock side of Seward Fisheries new plant, guides her around ice-rimmed puddles, past a dumpster in which six gulls and one raven scavenge, and holds the door for her. They take a booth against the side wall. She sees a discarded edition of an Anchorage paper, and as excited as a child with a new toy, she helps herself to the newspaper and checks the DOW.

While she reads the financial page, he notices a small, front page story about a man murdered in an Anchorage hotel. Fred Hughes. He knows a Fred Hughes; met him at Edna's. The fellow bought the wreck Piper parked alongside her garage. If his memory serves him, the fellow paid for the plane by giving Billy flying lessons.

Thinking about Edna again reminds him that he needs to call her. He will have to sell some bullion.

"What's the price of gold?" he asks Catherine.

"New York or London?" A little surprised, she looks up at him. He continues to surprise her; she didn't think she would live to ever stand on dry land again.

"Toronto, but either of the others will be close enough."

"Four-O-two and change."

The price seems insane: "If I live long enough, with those prices, I'll be okay."

"You have gold stock?"

"You might say that...Mr. Carter's gonna make me rich, even though I can't stomach his politics."

"Neither can the Iatola. What do you think? Will they kill the hostages?" She points to the headlines.

"Dunno. My guess is they're zealots, not stupid." He turns to the waitress and orders breakfast for both of them.

Catherine reads while she eats. Three old men wearing rubber boots and wool shirts talk fishing in the adjoining booth. A pair of young men wearing yellow rainpants and with their long hair in ponytails huddle at a table. He hears a forklift operating in back of the cafe, and the cry of gulls. It is Monday morning, and cannery rats are at work.

"What are you staring at?" she asks.

"You. Thinking that I've fallen for you."

"Infatuation, not love...you're not the first to think that, but thanks anyway." She pats his hand as she adds, "I'm glad that you feel as you do."

"Don't be so quick to dismiss love."

"It isn't. Believe me." She folds the paper as she finishes her oatmeal. All he is doing is making it easier for her to leave him—he still means little more to her than the newspaper she lays on the table as she stands to go. "Ours will be a story without a pleasant ending."

"A reservation story, huh?"

"What do you mean by that?"

"You wouldn't understand." As Jay waits for his change from paying their bill, he asks the waitress, "Ferry dock still the other end of town?"

"Follow the highway until you run out of road."

Catherine glances through the cafe window as she realizes the other end of Seward is a mile away. She turns towards him, but before she can speak, he escorts her outside, saying as they leave the building. "I know you can't walk in those boots. We'll take the pram...and a reservation story is one about how something valuable is lost, the loss having occurred before the story takes place, meaning the end is a foregone conclusion."

"You have that right—it's all predictable."

"Like me falling for you?"

"Exactly."

"When you've seen yourself in a mirror, have you ever turned your head real quick so that you can see the little threads that connect you to everyone else? Strings, really. As if you're a puppet...they're there. Hard to see, though. People don't want to think they're being manipulated, but we are. Most of us anyway."

"You?"

"Maybe...without those strings, we can't find our way home. We get separated from our spirits. Then we're really lost, like you, me—until a vision while coming here."

"What did you see? No, don't tell me. Let me guess."

"You laugh, but I see our son—"

Catherine chokes as if his words just punched her in the stomach, knocking her breath out of her. Finally, she's able to stammer, "Surely you joke?"

The morning feels more like spring than winter. Thin cloud cover almost blots out the sun, but then, he has never seen the sun at Seward. So today seems exceptionally fine. A good day for dying. His stomach sours: he wants to believe his dream was a vision, but how is he to know? Even if it all comes to pass, can he be certain that this isn't a reservation story?

His hand trembles as he grips the kicker's starting rope. He is at a crossroad, and how does that poem go, the road not taken. He doesn't remember. Something about it makes all the difference. He suspects it does. Logic says that they should go directly to Williams Lake. No detours, side trips, nor magnanimous gestures. This is, after all, war. But whatever route he follows will be paved with coarse gravel, or more likely, Columbia boulders, making the highway impassible. So maybe a quick detour won't hurt.

It won't take much time to warn Sarah by phone, wherever she is, that she can't repair the bridge she has burned. That is all he will do. That's enough...he is kind of glad he laid awake all those nights for all of those years thinking about where he would go if he had to disappear again.

As they slowly motor past the boats moored in the harbor, he tells Catherine nothing more about his vision. Rather, he tells her about this vessel and that one, shows her the difference between a ketch and a yawl, a seiner and a gillnetter, a shrimper and a crabber. He explains how a line-hauler works, what trawl doors are for, how a seine is pursed, anything to avoid mentioning his vision, or the subject of what's next, where do they go from here. And they arrive at the beach beside the ferry dock none too soon, his vision apparently forgotten.

"Stay here," he says as he drags the pram out of the water. "I won't be long."

"I've heard that before."

"Don't believe it this time either. Just hang onto the bowline if the tide comes in." As an afterthought to dull the nip of her fear, he adds, "Try not to look too pretty. There are lots of horny fishermen in this town."

"There are," she looks at him honestly, "lots everywhere."

He knocks on doors until he locates, "Sam Slocum?"

"Yes?" The fellow looks as if he has just arisen.

"Where's Sarah? I need to warn her that the feds are about to bust her."

From behind Sam, a lady dressed only in an open robe asks, "For sellin' grass?"

"Who are you?" Sam asks.

"Name won't mean anything to you. I'm the one who stuck her on the *Northford*. The feds were looking for her in Kodiak Saturday. They know she was coming here."

"You tellin' this straight?"

"Afraid so. Look, I've come a long ways—"

"How do we know," the lady interrupts him, "you are who you say you are?"

"You don't...I'd like nothing better than outta this. She came to me beatup, asked for help. I got her outta town, outta Dutch Harbor."

Motioning for him to come in, Sam says, "You look okay, like you know hanging bait when you see it. I'll tell you what I know."

The house stinks of dog shit and mold. Clothing is strewn around the living room. Windows are streaked with dirt. A stack of dirty dishes sets on the floor in front of the couch. The carpet probably can't remember when it was last vacuumed.

Sam opens the refrigerator, and produces three cans of Olympia. Holding one up, he asks, "Wanta beer?"

"Too early for me."

Sam pops open a can, hands it to the woman, and says, "Anytime is a good time for me." He opens a second can, takes a sip, then continues: "Sarah's with Jerry Reibeck. Lives out the East Road. Out of Homer. End of the road. Very last place. They got pretty friendly on the ride up from Kodiak. She should still be there."

"He got a phone?"

"Naa, not Jerr. His place is really isolated. That's why his last old lady left him." Sam draws a map to Jerry's cabin in the cold grease on a dirty plate. "Just follow this line right here." He points to a streak in the fat. "That'll get you close."

"I need to make a collect call to Soldotna."

"Go ahead." Sam untangles the phone's long cord.

Gingerly sitting on the edge of the couch, he lifts the receiver, dial 0, and gives the operator his name...he realizes his blunder as soon as his name is out of his mouth, and before he can repair the damage, Edna answers and says she will accept charges.

"I blew it, Edna, just gave myself away. I'm in Seward, and need to go to the bank. Right away. Can you come get me?" He hopes she remembers the code. He can't believe he was so stupid as to give his name to the operator.

"Are you hurt?"

"No, but I have to move fast."

"I'll send Billy."

"Have him meet me where we looked at that D-8."

"The one belonging to the fellow logging cottonwood?"

"That's the place."

"I'll make the arrangements so you can go to the bank. Good luck...if I don't see you." She hangs up.

He pulls the receiver away from his ear, and stares at it. Good luck? John also wished him luck, but he'll need more than luck if he repeats so stupid a mistake.

He thanks Sam for the use of the phone, then hurries across the street and down the beach to where Catherine waits.

"That didn't take long. Did you find him?"

"Got what I needed. We gotta shake a leg." He tells her about his call to Edna. "Billy will be flying over."

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Edna dials her son's number as soon as she hangs up. She has always expected this call, but she expected it years ago...so many years have passed since escape plans were made that she has forgotten much of what she once intended to do. Prosperity has sung its lullaby. She is lucky: Billy is home with his wife, due any hour. And she hopes she haven't forgotten anything really important.

She has known about Jay's dark side since she met him. Intuition maybe. Later, a private investigator. A thousand a day to learn he has no past. She shudders thinking about the investigator. Jay trusted her. His money fed her kids. And she checked up on him, learned nothing other than he probably sprang from his own head.

"Hello, Mom. What do you need?"

Surprised, she asks, "How did you know it was me?"

"You've called every half hour all day."

"Nothing since that spot this morning?"

"Nothing. Not even a cramp."

"This time I called about Jay. He's in Seward." She explains about going to the bank. "Can you get him? I'll come stay with Jill."

"He's at the airport, then?"

"Yes, where Del Branson was logging with his D-8."

"Mom, Branson's Cat was a 7, not an 8."

"Whatever. The floats are off the Tern?"

"Yeah, I put wheel-skis on a week ago. I can land okay."

"You're sure?" She worries about her son, about Jay, about her daughter-in-law and the baby, due a week ago.

"Mom, I'm a good pilot. Don't worry."

"Hurry." She hears the click of the broken connection.

As she hangs the receiver on its fork, she tries not to worry. She mustn't speculate on why he has to flee to Canada—he will need a new identity, one with a past this time, and she knows how to give it to him. Yes, she knows how.

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