

Aleutian Rogue

WITH

The Amanat

SERIALIZED

Chapter Fourteen

1.

Since her actions now require decisions, she will not murder the pilot who witnessed her humiliation upon their return to Kodiak as she would do if they were in the Motherland; she doesn't have the authority to erase the pilot so she must be careful. She must think about the consequences of her response. But she will not let this situation stand; she cannot.

She notices the sidelong glances he casts at her, glances that suggest he would like to play rough with her. Despising him all the more, she makes a calculated decision after weighing the possibilities...the decadence of the West is well known. Before coming to New York, she was compelled to watch so-called adult movies and filmed sex shows. Upon arriving, she was taken to a nightclub where sexually exploited women groveled before leering men. She saw how animalistic this bourgeois culture has become, its moral rot a stench on the planet, too foul for even Fundamentalists to purify. She'll make the pilot rue the day he was born, and his mother, the day of his conception.

Unbuckling her seatbelt, she spreads her legs, and begins caressing her genital region, stroking the outside of her jeans in a vulgar display of arousal. Pants. Rocks her pelvis. Notices that his glances linger. Tilts her head back. Closes her eyes. Seems to innocently let slip loud moans. Then slowly reverses her behavior, she again buckles her seat belt moments before the pilot sets the helicopter down on the apron to the west side of the airport terminal.

Remaining seated while the pilot flips switches to shutdown the machine's turbine, she feels nothing but contempt for the pilot; believes he is a slave to his passions with no right to live. So when everything is quiet, she mouths an apology, "I'm sorry about...not...being able to control myself. Being slapped around. A turn on."

"You had me fooled, the way you acted."

"Acts cover weakness." She rests her hand on his thigh. "My weakness is liking men to force themselves on me."

Grinning stupidly, the pilot says, "If I wasn't on my way to Anchorage, I'd oblige you," as he turns enough for her to feel his hardened bulge.

"Would you," she coos. "I need it."

"I'd like to, sister," he shakes his head, "but you'd have to come to Anchorage. My fiancée waits."

She slides her hand onto the bulge. "Are you man enough for two?"

He first timidly places his hand on her cheek, then cocks his hand, and slaps her playfully hard.

She catches her breath, throws her chest forward, and moans, "More, more," as she exhales.

He slaps her harder, once, twice, three times, snarls, "You bitch," and slaps her again.

Her cheeks sting. With all of her being, she wants to murder this bastard right here. But in a weak voice, she moans, "Yes, yes, more," as she tears at her shirt, careful though, not to rip it.

Grinning broadly, the pilot slaps her again.

She throws herself on him, aggressively kisses his open mouth, bites his ear lobes between kisses, moans, pants, "Take me with you."

He paws her, fondles her breasts, bruises both nipples, tries to force his hand into her panties. She cringes at his touch, but presses herself against him so tightly he can't insert his callused finger. Finally, he pushes her back. "I'll get yuh a room. Give yuh somethin' to remember."

Pulling away, she moans, "Yes, yes," and hates him.

The pilot slides out of his seat, and disappears into the night. She suppresses an urge to vomit as she runs her fingers through her hair, and straightens her shirt. This disgusts her. She would rather hunt men openly than trap them. Although killing excites her, she doesn't care much for it. She is good at it, she reminds herself. Better than classmates. More ruthless. Without remorse. Would do whatever was necessary to accomplish the mission. She was told she would go far with GRU sponsorship. She has. But always, her sex has been against her. Although she has had to accomplish twice as much for half the credit, she isn't allowed a mistake. One error and the foreign travel will end. The special privileges will disappear, and she will be assigned to some remote Arctic outpost.

But her sex can be an advantage. The pilot will never suspect what she plans for him.

She must return to her room for her bag. Taking a gun through airport security is difficult thanks to freedom fighters trained at Lumumba. She also needs to go to Seward. So she reluctantly leaves the helicopter, reluctant in the sense that if Viktor had better coordinated the arrival of men and machines she wouldn't have to buy a ticket or kill the pilot or leave a trail Justice might someday untangle.

The airstrip's apron, dark and bathed in the feel of an impending storm, seems to shiver as the cold wind blusters. She wonders if the pilot will return. The helicopter must be secured. It is now her responsibility.

The pilot meets her halfway between the building and the machine. "To show you what kinda take-charge guy I am, everything is arranged. The FAA will keep an eye on the beater right where she sits, and you have a room in the Cook. First class, huh?...Here's your ticket. Same flight as me." He pauses, caresses her cheek, then adds, "This night's costing five hundred bucks so expect to get roughed up plenty." He pinches her neck.

It is contempt that gives her voice its alluring hoarseness: "Yumm, wet panties."

"Bitch." He again slaps her, hard.

The hinge of her jaw seems to pop. She squeezes the grip of her PPK and is glad it isn't a HK—she ought to kill him right here anyway. Instead, she weakly says, "No bruises, please, not until later."

He nods. "All right."

She opens the ticket folder. One way to Anchorage. For Jane Hughes. "Are you Mr. Hughes?"

"Never introduced myself, did I? Fred Hughes. And that room at the Cook, just ask at the desk for the key."

"You're not coming?"

"I'll be along, don't worry."

"How'll you get in?"

"Surprise yuh."

"Am I to leave the door unlocked?"

"Naa." He pulls his wallet from his hip pocket, withdraws his Master Charge card, and says, "I can get in anywhere."

She smiles. Vladimir Illich would approve.

She has her ticket, and has only to doublecheck the arrangement made with the FAA. In the tower, a very nice man tells her it'll cost a thousand dollars a day to leave the helicopter parked unattended on the apron. The amount staggers her, but she agrees to the arrangement, and gives the official the address of the leasing company. He thanks her as the Wien flight lands. There isn't time to return to her hotel room. She will have to check the PPK as baggage, and from the dumpster to the side of the terminal, she fishes a cardboard box and enough debris to cushion the gun. A flight attendant helps seal her luggage with tape. Its claim is stapled to her ticket folder. And she is among the first to climb the rollaway stairs when Wien finally boards passengers for its evening flight to the mainland.

Assigned seating places the pilot across the aisle and back three rows—she feels his eyes crawl over her, eyes like scalp lice, and she itches as if some sort of open fungal sores were growing on her. She needs a bath, scrubbed with lye soap, ointment rubbed all over. And the glare off the corner icon cuts through her as if she were fog.

The turbines spool up, and the stubby jet slowly rolls towards the beach. When it reaches the end of the strip, it turns, shudders, then roars back along the runway with the grace of a runaway locomotive. Once airborne, the 737 banks hard starboard and climbs. And the added Gs cause her sinuses to ache.

When the plane levels off, coffee, soft drinks and packets of smoked almonds are served, then the cabin lights are dimmed and nothing can be seen as they fly over dark water. But she feels his eyes. Always there. She is glad when they descend over Fire Island, glad to see city lights stretch far to the North.

With flaps down, deflectors lift from hidden slots and hydraulically arc over the jet engines. Tires squeal despite the runway being icy. The 737 slows rapidly, turns, then rolls through the darkness. And wanting to go home, she, still feeling the pilot's eyes and knowing he intends to rape her, watches an out-bound SAS 747 lift off.

Her decision to erase the pilot was made from habit: erasure is a hard habit to break, the excitement never as great as the first time, the guilt never again as deep, hell never closer if a person were to believe the old superstitions. Each time becomes an attempt to get back the feeling of being truly alive, and with each erasure, the emotions die a little more until a person becomes a machine without a conscience, that threshold the one she crossed before coming to America, that the threshold of the livingroom bathed in the glare of the corner icon.

Leaving her seat, she steps into the crowded aisle, and hurries up the jetway, through the terminal, and to baggage claims. Thankfully, the pilot doesn't follow her.

She tells the cabbie, "Take me to a department store."

"Penny's?"

Recognizing the name, she nods.

As the taxi pulls away from the terminal, the driver asks, "You're in to do your Christmas shopping?"

After riding a while in silence, she answers, "Christmas, yes."

The night is cold. Minus thirty, she guesses. And twenty centimetres or so of dirty snow blanket the city. Metre high berms line both sides of streets. Heavy frost clings to naked birches. Slabs of snow bow spruce boughs, and strings of colored lights adorn porches and windows.

The J.C. Penny's store is huge, and will be closing in minutes. She rushes to the women's section, grabs two bras, a package of panties, and three containers of pantyhose. Needing felt boots but lacking the time to look around, she must grab and run in the manner of the holiday shoppers. She does, though, buy dark glasses, gloves, and a scarf before the store closes.

Departing through the 5th Avenue entrance, she locates the Captain Cook Hotel across the street and half a kilometre away, and she decides to walk. The exercise will help her relax: she is

always tense before a kill. There is always risk—it is the risk that excites her. Like the wolf, once she tasted blood there was no turning back.

It is a popular myth that wolves only kill for food: does a cat kill only for food? She once had a Persian tom that brought her a vole everyday to show his affection. No, wolves, cats kill for sport perhaps more frequently than for food. Bloodlust, that's what it is. Killing the prey because the prey is weak.

The sidewalk has been salted, but remains slick. The cold causes her nose to run; ice clings to her nostrils. Her breath freezes on her cheeks. She wraps the scarf around her neck, and covers half of her face. Slips her hands into the gloves. Puts on the dark glasses just before entering the K-street entrance to the block square hotel. She signs in as Mrs. Fred Hughes. Takes the key, locates Tower Two, and rides the elevator to the fifth floor. She doubts the desk clerk will remember much about her. Still, thinking about being recognized makes her shivering hot.

In the room, she removes the dark glasses and scarf, and examines the Penny's bag. It will do. She opens the package of panties and the egg-shaped containers of pantyhose, straightens and lays the hose on the eggs, then checks the chamber of her PPK. She is ready.

Still wearing the gloves, she turns on the TV, then turns the set off. After a minute, she turns it on again. Flips channels. Turns it off. The crabs again, she sees them. Picking flesh from bones. Pincerfuls. She feels arms around her, arms like pincers. Walt hugging her. What is he doing tonight? Did he get his eggs? Get them home? A person can't help but like him.

Shaking her head, shaking out sentimentalities and Bourgeois considerations of self...the proletarian struggle for international justice requires the suppression of individuality—she hears the sound of her thoughts, but her words have no objects, no interpretations. If she were to supply meaning to their sound, then there would be no justification for killing the pilot? Is it necessary? No. She'll kill him because of Bourgeois considerations of *self*, of herself—and she's nearly blinded by the glare that bathes the room, and causes static on the television set.

The conflict between self and theory: she resolved that conflict the day she crossed the Amur without authorization to capture a hooligan. A calculated risk rewarded by the acclaim of her superiors. But it was the exhilaration of doing what was clearly prohibited that was her greatest reward.

She again turns on the TV. A color test pattern fills the screen; so she flips channels until she locates a black and white movie, watches for a moment, then turns the set off in disgust. And the room would again be dark if not for the glare.

Waiting is the hardest part of her profession...will the pilot really show? If the night is costing him five hundred dollars, he probably will. Paying to die. Yes, yes.

Finally, she hears the door knob rattle.

Off the bed. PPK drawn. She crouches beside the door.

She sees the corner of the plastic card wiggling above the door latch. The door opens, and an angled column of light pours through the doorway revealing the pantyhose on the dresser.

The bed remains in shadows.

The pilot hesitates a moment before quietly slipping into the room. When he closes the door, the room is again dark until she flips on the overhead light, twists the door's deadbolt, and hooks the chain.

Five feet and the raised PPK separate them.

Eyes wide, mouth open, the pilot stammers nothing.

"Strip," she commands seductively.

Apparently sensing that everything is really all right, he unbuckles his belt, lets his jeans drop, unbuttons his shirt and kicks off his boots as he continues to stare at the muzzle of the PPK.

"Onto the bed, and do exactly as I tell you. Any hesitation will bring punishment. Understand?"

For the first time, he smiles as he obligingly pulls back the bed covers and lies on the sheet.

She tosses him the opened package of panties. "Stuff a pair in your mouth." He does. "Now lie on your stomach and put your hands behind you."

Again, he does as commanded.

Holding the PPK to his head, she caresses his buttocks, then reaches between his legs to feel him. Large. Hard. Very hard. And as she fondles him, she begins to feel excited.

Although confident that fondling is enough to hold him still, she nevertheless moans softly as she ties his hands together with the pantyhose. She then draws both of his legs near to his hands and ties them. Still, he doesn't struggle.

Lingering over him, savoring the moment of bloodlust, yes, she checks the knots—they are tight—then rolls him onto his side. His penis isn't as hard as it was. Maybe he is becoming aware. Too bad. She wedges the crotch of the second pair of pantyhose in his mouth, then wraps the legs around his head and mouth twice before tying the toes together in a square knot in back of his head.

Finally, he struggles. She suspects the panties are down his throat far enough to choke him. And she caresses his limp penis before holding him still long enough to slip the plastic Penny's bag over his head—she gathers the bag around his neck, and uses the third pair of hose as an elastic band to snugly tie it closed, then rolls him onto his back and pulls the bedcovers over him.

He tries to kick, to rub the bag from his head, to roll off the bed. Throws himself from side to side. And only succeeds in becoming entangled in blankets, bedspread and top sheet.

The Penny's bag is opaque white. She wishes it were clear so she could see his eyes. Oh well. She turns on the TV and watches the climax of the black and white movie. Shots are fired. A man is hit. A car rolls down a dimly lit street; its headlights pierce the foggy darkness as a woman steps from the shadows. The movie bores her.

The pilot finally ceases to fight the bedcovers, but she waits until he loses control of his bowels before she checks for a pulse.

Where will she spend what is left of tonight? Maybe she should return to the airport and rent a car. It is 7:53 New York time, 2:53 Alaska Standard time. She is still half a day behind Eric of Justice; she still hasn't located either McPhearson or Alden, let alone the ivory. She needs to call Viktor, but her scrambler is in her bag at Kodiak. Perhaps what she needs to do most is return to the island. If she leaves for the airport now, she will lose little more than the night's sleep. She can stash the PPK and her purchases from Penny's in an airport locker. And it will take only a minute to straighten the bed and gather her things.

When she removes the bag, she grimaces. Vomit plugs the pilot's nose, and seems to weep from bulging eyes. She washes both the inside of the bag and the pantyhose, then with a gloved finger, hooks the pair of panties he has mostly swallowed and pulls. Pulls hard. She would as soon leave the panties, but she bought them to wear. Plus, they are evidence. So she places a knee on his chest and pulls yet harder. Ribs crack. And the feel of the undergarment being pulled up his trachea is akin to pushing a wood rasp across raw meat.

The panties snap free, and the remaining contents of his stomach follow. She will have to rinse off the bile before it permanently stains them.

Exactly fifteen minutes after the movie ends, she has everything in the Penny's bag, the scarf around her neck, and the *Do Not Disturb* sign on the door. She hurries down the hall to the elevators, presses the DOWN button, and waits. Forever. With mounting exhilaration. She is above the clouds and never wants to come down.

Self-preservation instincts, though, compel her to glance over her shoulder when the elevator finally arrives. No one. She sees no one. No one sees her. Yet her euphoria collapses as fast as the elevator descends. She has experienced these mood swings before; so before the depression takes over, she forces herself to dwell on pleasant thoughts. Endless kilometres of wavering wheat. A

golden sea of straight stalks and bent heads. Shocks of wheat piled on a wagon. Horses. Villagers dancing in the street. Something is wrong. She doesn't know these people. They are strangers wearing the colorful tunics of Old Believers. Panic bathes her. Until she recognizes a face. *Walter, I'm here!* She waves, but he doesn't see her. Instead, he dances with a child of thirteen or so. Dances around and around. A blur. Spinning color.

Stopping on the corner of 6th and J, she sees a pay phone a ways ahead of her. Her thoughts are still jumbled as she calls a cab—and as she rides through the city, she slowly turns and shoves the breached image of Walter back inside her mind. She wishes she hadn't slept with him; he ensnared her with octopus-like tentacles as if he were Satan himself.

There seems to be no right, nor wrong. No serpent. No tree. No garden. Just a fire that starts small and begins to burn straw and wheat, houses, villages, mountain sides, her beloved Altai Mountains ablaze until the whole earth burns, consuming every living being. She watches her feet burn, her legs, the skin blistering, crackling, melting, becoming grease that fuels the fire. She has no soul. So as she watches herself being devoured, she realizes there won't be torture forever. Just nothingness. No existence. It will be as if she were never conceived, never learned to speak or read or kill, never saw the corner icon, its glaze lost in the intensity of the flames that are melting rocks, freeing atoms, changing matter to energy, the earth still appearing round though nothing physical remains.

She closes her eyes and shakes her head and seems to feel her brain slosh from one side to the other, the glare from the corner icon a physical thing that cushions her brain, preventing bruising, a stroke.

When she opens her eyes, she has arrived: the airport terminal seems deserted. The only sign of life is a black janitor pushing a broom wrapped in a towel.

Locating the lockers, she inserts the necessary coins, leaves the Penny's bag and the PPK, then returns to Wien's ticket counter where a sleepy attendant now inspects a dog cage. She says, "I need a round trip ticket to Kodiak."

The attendant pushes the dog cage aside and begins writing.

She has just enough cash to pay for the ticket. Actually, she is twelve cents short, but the attendant makes up the shortfall. Now having neither money for a phone call or a cup of coffee, she wanders aimlessly through the empty terminal, pauses in front of the stuffed American eagle, notices how well suited its talons are for snatching spawning salmon, and wonders if Walter thinks of her. Her footsteps echo between the closed doors of the lounge and the glass front of the building as she commits the layout of the terminal to memory. The knowledge will earn a few extra points with Tunlaw Road. But most importantly, the memorization keeps her from thinking about Walter, the icon, the all-consuming fire; almost does, anyway.

Minutes blend together in an unhurried stew as her mind relives the melting of her flesh, the flames of the fire scorching her face, the fire breathed in, filling her lungs, consuming her from both within and without. An hour passes. And she burns again and again, each time more painful than before.

People begin to come and go. A flight departs for Prudoe Bay. One arrives from Fairbanks. The terminal awakens. And before she knows it, she is aboard a small prop jet bound for Kodiak...if not for the glare of the icon, it would have been dark when she left, dark when she returns. It is as if she hasn't been gone at all as the glare turns darkness into day.

Her return flight to the Mainland isn't until noon. She has time to get her things and for a shower, but she must hitchhike into town—she catches a ride in a rusty pickup truck with a fisherman smelling of beer and wanting to know where she is staying. "I'm not staying." And from her room, she calls Viktor, and complains that she is a full day behind Justice due to his failing to send helicopter pilots.

"Again I remind you, Agent Grinenko, you will restrain yourself. This proval will be successfully concluded if procedures are strictly followed."

She has said nothing about the pilot, nor will she. Instead, she says, "I know my job."

"A car will be awaiting your arrival in Anchorage. You should still have sufficient money. So we will not speak again until the mobile squad arrives—and permit them to do the wet work. You will be relieved once Alden is located."

What has she done wrong? or enough wrong to get her sent home? She easily obtained information that had eluded their svois. She knows she could have already intercepted the woman drug dealer if she would've been able to immediately fly on to Seward from Kodiak. But no, she has been held hostage by the weather until now there is no desire to ransom her. Her career is expendable, even as a daughter of the Revolution.

The rental car for which Viktor had arranged awaits her return to Anchorage, but she remains broke and having not eaten since yesterday noon—she is at least thankful that the car has a full tank of petrol.

Anchorage streets are bare, but the highway out of town is icy. By the time she reaches the curves around Turnagain Arm, she knows for certain that the 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. She slows to 50 kilometres, and worries about how long it will take her to reach Seward. Not before five o'clock at her present speed.

The few hours of daylight pass much too quickly, but where she can see it between the mountains, the southern sunset is spectacular. All the way to Columbia. She wonders what the Columbians are doing, and why she hasn't stumbled over them. Do they believe the lost-at-sea story? Or have they already located the ivory? Surely she can't be days ahead of them; so their absence troubles her. And she begins considering what she will do to Littlehaus—at least as much as she did to the pilot who witnessed her humiliation.

The Seward harbormaster tells her that the *Dawn* arrived only last evening as she tries not to dwell on the ifs: if she would have come here instead of visiting Littlehaus (who will get what's coming to him) she could have greeted McPhearson; if she hadn't gone to the Cook. Now, she must pick up the trail. At least, it is not as cold as it was.

From Seward Fisheries' parking lot, she sees the *Dawn* moored alongside the cannery's off-loading dock. It appears deserted. Or asleep. Is all of Alaska asleep? The gulls are. Atop pilings and utility poles, they sleep with heads tucked beneath wings.

An ice film covers water puddles in the paved lot. A thirty kilometre breeze blows off Resurrection Bay, and blows right through her nylon blouse. She regrets leaving her coat in the car. She ought to return for it, but this visit to the boat won't take long.

To reach the boat, she 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 she reaches the level of the *Dawn*, she is too far under the dock to step from the ladder to the bulwarks—two metres separate her from the boat's pipe railing. So shivering, legs tired (they lack spring), she twists around, turning her back to the rungs, and catching her breath, pushes off.

For the moment between the ladder and the railing, her thoughts are of not having eaten today, of the knot in her stomach, of helplessness, of the glare of the icon...until her right foot lands on the pipe. For an instant she balances on the slippery bulwarks, then her momentum carries her forward onto the slatted studding covering the steel deck. And she lands with a thud on her hands and knees. Her feet fit between the studs; her knees hit hard on the boards. But she only exhales a sigh. Anything is better than a swim.

Hobbling towards the open fo'c'sle, she pauses long enough to check the chamber of her PPK before entering. She has no intentions of wrestling anyone tonight.

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. And she 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. She knocks lightly, then enters the cabin that is as luxurious as a dacha. Color TV. VCR. Stereo. Easy chair. In the Motherland, only party officials and other very important people are allowed so much.

The lone occupant lies on his bunk, smoking a joint. He motions her in, but doesn't rise. "I was to meet a friend of mine. Sarah. Where is she?"

The fellow on the bunk stares at her through dilated pupils. She tries to ignore the feel of his eyes stripping her as she again asks, "Where's Sarah?"

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

"Jerr? Jerr who?"

"Jerr, yuh know. Jerr...Jerry, our cook...you sure yuh don't wanta meet Jose?" He raises the bottle, a task he performed not long ago for his other two visitors.

She suspects he will pass out if she gets rough. So softly she says, "Where does Jerry live? Tell me. Be a sweety."

"Ahh—ah dunno. Ask the skip."

"Where's your skipper?"

"Yeah...in Ballard."

"Ballard?"

"Yuh know, where all the skippers live."

He would know that this is what he told his other guests if he were capable of remembering that he said the same words to a federal attorney not one tide-change ago, and to the fellow in the wheelhouse not an hour before that.

The smoke irritates her nose, and she becomes increasingly irritated with him. "Is there anyone else here?"

"Nobody but me and Jose."

"Anyone in town know where Jerry lives?"

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

Her head's already woozy; her eyes water. Hungry, tired—she knows that a couple of drags and she will be as stoned as he is. "I'll check with you in the morning. Okay?"

"Stay—here." Motioning towards his bunk, he adds, "You're a good lookin cunt."

She douses his offer with a brittle, "No thanks," and returns to the picking deck where she gulps mouthfuls of fresh air. The breeze chills her. Still, she breathes deeply. She doesn't want to be high. Too much is at stake.

Looking for another way up to the dock, she doesn't see any other than sprouting wings. Balancing on the icy rail, she turns, bends stiff knees, and launches.

Fingers grasp a cold rung as feet frantically search for support. Toes bang the steel strakes. Fingers slip. She lets go for a moment and seems suspended in space, then wraps her right arm around the ladder and hangs on, hugging the cold steel, performing exactly the same act in the same sequence as had the federal attorney. Her feet find a rung. And in a minute, out of breath, she climbs onto the dock.

To the side of the cannery, she sees a lighted telephone booth next to a small cafe. She has to call Viktor although she has been told not to. She must call, must. It would be wrong to not call—and the glare from the corner icon washes her reasons for not calling from her memory.

Tanya closes the door of the phone booth, and speaks to the operator. When the Glen Cove house answers, she gives her contact name, attaches the scrambler, and tells Viktor what she has learned, then is told:

"Listen, Sweetheart, you have new instructions from Moscow Center. We must cooperate with our ugly sister. The mobile squad isn't coming. Instead, you are getting two squads of elite troops from the insurgency brigade at Nahodka. English speakers. Good soldiers. And I don't have to tell you, no one is to learn of their deployment."

She says nothing as she wishes that she had never come to Seward, to Alaska, to America. She can't believe what she heard. Even scrambled, the call is over an open line. Justice eavesdrops on calls made to the Glen Cove house. Plus, she doesn't understand the change from wet squad to regular army. The difference in risk is enormous. Their ugly sister must have learned of the ivory, and of Alden's defection; they must want a piece of the action. Sometimes the KGB are Chekists.

When she finally speaks, she asks, "Am I still to receive the helicopter pilots?"

"Yes, but no second helicopter right now. Every available craft is under lease to an oil company, and the one we were promised has been sent to the firm attempting to reopen the gold mine on Unga Island. I was told their request and need is more urgent than ours. So you will have to wait for a craft to be sent from the United States."

"What am I to tell the pilots?"

"That they are engaged in a revolutionary action against reactionary forces. They have the highest security clearance."

Mobile squads are familiar with travel in the West, but regular army? Even squads from the insurgency brigade know little of American customs. They usually speak with unmistakable accents. She fears they will need tour guides, and suddenly she fears Viktor. Why did he tell her so much over the telephone? Has she been set up? There is no love between them and their sister, and with Andropov having the Premier's ear, she wonders if she and GRU haven't been lured into a demoniacal gambit to create an international incident. If so, she is the gambit pawn.

"They left Nahodka three days—"

"Why wasn't I told three days ago?"

"Moscow Center's wishes. Complete instructions will be at your dubok tomorrow. Good hunting." And his scrambler breaks the connection.

Is she to be burned? She and two squads of Red Army? Seems so. And if so, who is being protected? Who is so important? Who warrants the burning of two special squads by their ugly sister?

Yes, she, they are to be betrayed, captured, embarrassed, put on trial. What was it that Walter said about not coming back if she went after the fisherman? How did he know? how? just how?

Hungry, tired, woozy, with stiff knees and blinded by icon glare, she has just been dropped into a pressure cooker—she should have guessed something was up when first told she would receive two helicopters. A mobile squad would have had no need for the second machine.

Is this it, the incident that precipitates the final proletarian struggle for world peace? Will she be remembered for starting World War Three? She becomes afraid to breathe.

No, this cannot begin the final struggle. The nations aren't yet properly aligned.

How will headlines read? A warmongering rogue officer? She suspects even TASS will condemn her. There is no glory in being the sacrificial lamb.

If she is to be burned, there is nothing she can do to save herself. Going to the Americans won't save her. When she has to account for her time, they will learn of the Cook incident. But even if

zhopas help Justice, she can beat the Americans. That might be her best chance. She would then be too valuable to burn. But who is she fooling? No woman agent will ever become too valuable to burn.

If she is to win, she must foil the zhopas: she must not contact Viktor again until she possesses the ivory. Then she has negotiating power. So she is on her own until the two squads arrive.

Her breath fogs the phone booth. She opens its door, and smells hamburgers frying. Her mouth waters, stomach growls.

Leaving the glass booth, she stands looking through the cafe window; she sees a waitress clearing tables, dumping a half eaten hamburger into the garbage. Instinctively, she knows where she will find something to eat.

*

Hurting head and lungs seemingly still full of cigarette smoke, Tanya rises from the bunk of a cabin cruiser sitting on a trailer in the small boat harbor's parking lot. She broke in last night, and must leave before either the harbormaster or city police catch her aboard.

With a pocketful of money—she sold several grams of powdered coffee creamer to drunk fishermen in two different bars (fisherman wanted hanging bait, they said, for broads)—she now has Jerry's last name, Reibeck, and she knows where he lives. So she must leave for Homer immediately, and she is unsure of the exact distance: the road map only gives distances in miles. The journey will take roughly four hours, she figures. And she regrets not having the use of the helicopter and a pilot.

That reminds her, without contacting Viktor, she must get hold of the pilots he is sending. She needs them to take the one helicopter and scout the Shelikof side of the Kodiak Island group for sites where the two special squads can be bivouacked.

* * *