

# ***Aleutian Rogue***

WITH

## ***The Amanat***

**SERIALIZED**

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### **Chapter Seventeen**

1.

Bouncing along at 2,500 feet, bouncing along for a half hour, then an hour, the Tern's cabin chilly, their ears assaulted by the drone of its engine, the turbulence tossing them around—bouncing along for a second hour, the turbulence even greater, their drops enough to make the Tern's wings flap as hard as the plane's namesake, they fly directly to Sitka where they refuel from two barrels left for them (Edna had telephoned ahead to make sure av-gas would be available, that they wouldn't have to buy the junk fuel gas stations sell). And while emptying the barrels with a handpump, Catherine asks, "Do we have to go on? Can't we stay here until the weather is better?"

Billy says, "It doesn't get better till it's lots colder."

Besides, all three of them know they have a plane to meet in Ketchikan in the morning. So after a half hour on the ground, they are again in the sky, pushed high when they cross over land, dropped till it seems the wings will be snapped off when crossing back over water as they watch darkened mountains pass below, above and beside them until Ketchikan's lights show.

Tired, a little rummy, Billy, receiving permission from the tower, sets the Tern down on the strip across the Narrows from town. According to his watch, it is few minutes before ten. Eleven o'clock Ketchikan time, whatever they call it. Pacific Standard maybe. His mind is starting to play tricks. It is, he knows, a good thing they don't have to fly further tonight.

"Where are we supposed to park this pisspot?" Jay asks.

"I imagine there," Billy indicates a half dozen Cessnas, 172s and 180s, all with cowls off and blue tarps over their engines. "Ought to be tiedowns there in case the wind comes up."

"A pisspot boneyard."

"I doubt anyone will mind for tonight." Billy taxis the Tern just past the last Cessna, finds the concrete-embedded eyebolts, and ties down the port side wing; Jay, the starboard side. Catherine walks around, stretching stiff legs. With hands on the small of her back, she arches backwards, and asks, "How do we get over there?" indicating the lights of town across the channel.

"Dunno," Billy says. "This looks like a real airport so there's gotta be a way."

Giving Billy a well done slap on his back, Jay says, "I'll buy dinner if you figure out how to get us across there," pointing to the lights across the dark water.

"It looks like," Catherine jokes, "you're elected to call the cab."

"A cab!" Billy mocks incredulity. "Hell, we'll walk."

"You'll get wet." Jay would curl up in a tarp and sleep under the plane if he were alone. Maybe it's instinct, maybe another vision, but he senses danger in those lights, not the type of danger an incoming mortar round represents, but different. Just as threatening. Maybe more so. And he thinks he made a mistake offering to buy dinner.

"I'm getting wet now," Catherine reminds them. "It's dark, raining. There's no traffic, so hitchhiking is out. I don't see a bridge. Nor a telephone. How can we even call a cab? I don't think we're supposed to go over there."

"Ahh, there has to be a way. Let me see what I can scrounge up." Billy calls the tower on the Tern's radio. "We're in luck. FAA shift change. I got us a ride...and you gotta take a ferry to get over there."

Hunkering down behind the cab of the pickup to get out of the wind and rain—an older fellow and his Rotweiler sit in the cab—Jay pulls Catherine close while Billy sits on the fender well. Outwardly, he ribs Billy about the ride, but his sense of doom remains. The image that keeps reoccurring is that of him lifting a rotting gunnysack off the ground and picking up the worms underneath, then using those worms to fish for steelhead. When he lived along the Siletz, he caught a few steelhead on nightcrawlers, but he doesn't understand the connections between those fish he caught and his present apprehensions. And not understanding worries him.

They get on the ferry without hitch as the rain intensifies, sweeping up and down at seemingly the same time as drops are driven sideways, making it unclear in the darkness if the pickup is driving across the channel along the bottom or floating on the ferry. But in a half hour or so, they reach, they think, Ketchikan's waterfront.

The pickup pulls to the curb of Tongass Avenue across from the cruise ships' dock. Jay and Billy jump out. Then he helps Catherine over the side of the bed. She is drenched. Nevertheless, she giggles, and links arms with both of them. And they enter..."What did you say the name of this place is?"

"I think it said Foscle Bar, but," Jay says, "I won't swear to it. That could've been the place next door."

"It doesn't look like we'll get much to eat here," Billy says as they take a corner table.

The waitress apologizes for not being able to take their dinner order; they quit serving sandwiches at ten. So Billy settles for a beer. Catherine, a Bloody Mary. But Jay says, "See you two later. I'm gonna walk off that ride." His sense of doom is too great to remain seated. He has to move, stay moving.

Catherine starts to rise.

"No. Stay here and keep Billy company. I won't be long." He flips her a crumpled twenty. "Don't let him drink it up by himself."

He stops on the sidewalk outside. A hard drizzle, tree growing weather. A bit cold, though. Degree or two above freezing. He scans the darkness as if searching for a target. Involuntarily, he's hunting, looking to kill, feeling the need to respond to whatever's threatening him. It's out here somewhere. He feels its presence, feels its tug as if it threatens to possess him, feels it crawl onto his hands, cheeks, striking like the drizzle, like fog squatting on it, settling wet and heavy into him, pressing him into fear, cold, fluid, like the wind.

Except for harbor lights, bar windows and streetlights that are too far apart, the night is dark and dreary. Deserted sidewalks. Not even a stray dog barks at him. The only appearance of life is a blinking neon sign. *Olympia--It's the Water.*

So Ketchikan is just another harbor town, three blocks wide and miles long, with not enough dirt to bury your dog.

The absence of life concerns him: his feet seem to walk by themselves. He passes an alley and listens to the dripping eaves. A stiff breeze blows off the harbor, sweeping the drizzle horizontally under the streetlight on the corner ahead.

The blinking beer sign seems to draw him towards the tavern, into it. Ducking the cloud of cigarette smoke that escapes into the night when he opens the door, he stands just inside the door until his eyes adjust. He feels a connection, but not the one that threatens him. The connection is

like a yoyo string, twisted tight, the yoyo missing. Only the string remains looped around his finger. He feels invisible, a force more than a presence.

A woman, short, middle-aged, drunk, slips off her stool and sidles up to him. She tilts her broad, brown face towards him, and in a voice loud enough for everyone in the bar to hear, says: "Gif me OLY I gif you LOVE."

But he isn't invisible, isn't even a force, and he tries not to notice the woman as he scans the room.

The woman continues to stand in front of him—she catches a hold of his sleeve and repeats herself, "Gif me OLY—"

"Forget it, sister." He tries to pull away, but she won't let go. He catches her wrists, drags her back to her stool, and throws a five-dollar bill on the bar. "Give her whatever she wants," he tells the bartender as he involuntarily looks down the front of the bartender's low cut, hot pink mini-dress. The bartender might outweigh him, probably does, but her dress was cut from less material than his T-shirt.

He turns to go...and sees him.

Alone at a table overlooking the harbor. Huge. Jay sees only the back and side of the fellow's head, but recognizes his brother. *Jon, you sonofabitch.* He feels panic mingled with subdued glee. This is what he has been dreading for years, this face to face meeting with his past.

He wants to run, but his feet refuse to move. Tries to tell himself he's mistaken. Knows he's not. *Jon, you're too damn big to be mistaken for anybody else.* Jon is his half-brother. After his dad was killed snagging, his mom had an affair with a retired wrestler, turned real estate speculator, a nice enough fellow twenty-five years her senior, not a fellow looking to marry again. So he and Jon share a name, but because of their age difference, they weren't close growing up. He was in 'Nam when Jon started school—Jon as a first grader was bigger than all of the third graders and most of the fourth graders. By fifth grade, Jon was the biggest person in grade school, larger than all of the teachers. So when Jay returned from 'Nam, he, Jay, was the only person who could discipline Jon. Their relationship was one of mutual respect for the other's ability to fight.

Three empty cans of Black Label sit on the table between his brother's massive forearms. Orange suspenders reading STIHL. Hickory shirt covered with black grease and fines. Sleeves torn off at the elbows. Staggered black Frisco jeans. Wool socks bunched up around his ankles. Jon is a logger the size of a bear, and Jay knows from experience, as mean when irritated.

An urge to act irresponsible comes over him. Before he knows it, he stands in the middle of the floor, and calls to Jon. "Hey, you big bastard. Stihl ain't a saw. It's a disease."

A hush falls over the tavern. Bar stools turn in unison to stare at him. And the bartender attempts to intercept; her mini-dress ripples in waves as she charges around the bar.

He steps within arm's reach of the seated hulk of a man. "You just gonna sit there like a conk knot?"

Pressing massive amounts of uncovered flesh against his stomach, the bartender shoves herself between them as the seated giant awakens, and rises with a smirk on his face. "I ain't whipped you yet, Dutch, but I can now. Damn, it's good to see you."

The bartender spins around to face Jon. Her breasts and the rolls of fat beneath them jiggle like perpetual motion machines. And in a raspy voice, asks, "You know him?"

"Used ta...he's just as ugly now as then. Even with that fuckin' beard." He brushes the bartender aside. "I thought you were dead."

Extending right hands, their handshake becomes a finger crunching contest.

He isn't as strong as he was eight years ago, although still, few are stronger. He has hold of one who is. They squeeze, twist, jerk, trying to break the other's grip. Then Jon puts an end to the

contest: the tendons in his neck flare, and both feel the bones in Jay's fingers slip together as if there were no meat on them.

Jay's arm turns to rubber. His hand is like a limp glove. Yet the tavern's patrons treat him as if he had won. Even the *gif-me-love* woman wants to buy him a beer.

Making himself heard over the commotion, Jon asks, "When did you get in and where the fuck are you staying?"

"Let's get outta here. Get where it's quiet."

"Gotta show you to Peg." Jon pushes their way to the door. "She ain't gonna believe this. Specially not after that little girl from Oregon State come up and asked about you."

"Hey, slow down. What girl?" Jay's ears have just heard something he doesn't like. There is only one person he knows who might qualify, and she should be in Juneau, which isn't all that far away. "Her name Louise?"

"Could be. I was workin, didn't talk to her. Peg did. Now comeon, let's get home."

"I've ah, wife and friend in a bar up the street."

"We'll get em." Jon bulls through the drizzle on the street outside. "Here I thought I was fucked tonight. Cat's busted down. Final's out. Log market's so poor I can't hire a mechanic. I'm the fuckin' mechanic. I ain't never seen things so bad. That fuckin' peanut farmer is jackin' around the whole country. And the only one with enough sense to tell him to go fuck himself is that damn Iranian."

"The people's choice—"

"Fuck the people. Some asshole sits in a New York office fingerin' his secretary's cunt while he dreams up *Mom 'n Apple Pie* political ads. That fuckin' peanut farmer's no more the choice of the people than you are...man, it's good to see you. Where the fuck have you been hidin'?"

"Funny you should say that, hiding. That's exactly what I've been doing. Been in the Aleutians the past six years. How long have you been here?"

"Now, almost eight fuckin' years...you remember Peg, don't you? Her brother was gypoing outta town, here. I bought his outfit when he got tired of the fuckin' rain."

"I vaguely remember you getting married...don't remember a lot of what happened after the accident." Jon married in June following the accident, married right out of high school. Jay has known Peg since she sold Judy Girl Scout cookies...he doesn't remember how long ago.

"Yeah, you were kinda out of it that spring after Judy got it. Can't say I fuckin' blame you any. But you remarried?"

"Actually, we're on our way to. Got a plane meeting us in the morning."

"Damn, it's good to see you...you et?"

"Bar had quit serving."

"Peg'll rustle up some grub."

"I don't wanta impose—"

"Nonsense!" Jon thumps his shoulders, and roars, "Won't fuckin' have it no other way."

"Hold it, Jon. I wasn't kidding about hiding."

"I know a bit about your business. Got the IRS backed off. Those cock-suckers wanted a piece of your ass, but I found a judge with balls enough to rule what's right. And I paid the fuckin' taxes on your place."

"My troubles aren't with the IRS." He pauses as he remembers what Little John said about there being no reason why he couldn't return to Oregon. If Louise has talked to him, then Jon will also know he can return. "You remember anything about a cop being killed about the time I split?"

"That girl from Oregon State was sayin' some fuckin' thing about a state cop. You know what happened to that fucker?"

"Yeah, I do." He can't—no, he can't tell even his brother what happened. "I saw it go down, and because I did, I almost didn't say hello tonight."

"Don't blame you for splittin'. Things were comin' down heavy on you for a while there."

"Changed my name. Introductions are gonna be awkward."

"What the fuck you call yourself these days?"

"Jay Shoulders." His investment in his name seems horribly small at the moment. He does feel invisible.

"Well, Mr. Jay Shoulders. Meet Jon Shoulders."

"That won't work, but would make explanations easier."

"Let's not keep Peg waitin' longer."

Billy and Catherine still nurse the drinks they ordered before he left, and both appeared awed by Jon's size. Six-six. A now not-so-lean three-ninety. He used to weigh three-sixty without an overhang—Jay knows how big Jon is. Little brothers don't let older brothers forget that kind of thing.

Both Billy and Catherine seem pleased to meet Jon who tells one off-color story after another loud enough for everyone in the bar to hear. Finally, though, after perhaps the tenth story, Jon herds everyone out to his pickup. To make room for them, he balances his thermos on the dash, stows his lunch pail and raingear behind the seat, and shoves the sledge hammer handle he broke driving out Cat track pins beneath the seat. Still, Catherine has to sit on Jay's lap while Billy is squashed in the middle.

Peg has Jon's dinner in the oven, waiting, when the four of them enter. She recognizes Jay as soon as he steps into her kitchen, doesn't wait for an introduction, but races across the kitchen to hug him. With tears and breaking voice, she mumbles, "Knew you were alive, just knew it. Then she came by, and I knew it was you."

The affection makes him feel guilty. Maybe he should've gotten in touch with his brother years ago, but having family makes an outlaw vulnerable, slowed Joseph's escape, stopped the chief forty miles short of the border. And here he is thinking about how to keep Catherine with him when that isn't possible. But he has felt her spirit, and the spirit of what grows inside her links them. He would like that growth to also be love, and tears well up in his eyes as Peg hangs on, not letting go.

Jon's kids are supposed to be in bed, but they charge into the kitchen to see their Uncle Dutch. They climb all over him, forcing their mother to let go. Although young, they're not small. So Jay and Jon retire to the living room where there is more room for roughhousing. Billy sits on the couch, watching the kids, knowing it won't be long before his solos if it hasn't already. He needs to call Jill, but he doesn't know if he can stay awake long enough. The flying required concentration. Its after-effect is his need to crash.

Catherine helps Peg open cans of corned beef hash and to prepare a dessert for everyone, including the kids, who aren't a bit interested in returning to bed.

Minutes pass as Jay feels, despite his nephews crawling all over him, that sense of impending doom spread like fog. He can sort of understand the link between steelhead and Siletz and Jon, but why worms and the rotting gunny sack? He usually fished eggs or crawdad tails; he wasn't a fly fisherman or a purist. He was catching steelhead to eat. So this whole premonition thing is like fog.

Food comes, lots of it, especially for so late an hour. Jon virtually inhales a large plate of hash and eggs, followed by a piece of blueberry cobbler, then settles down in an overstuffed chair and drowsily nods off. His snoring rocks the room. Morning comes early when logging.

Billy dozes after eating. So motioning for his nephews to leave the frontroom, Jay joins Catherine and Peg in the kitchen. Even though the hour is late, he isn't sleepy. That feeling of doom has alerted his senses.

"You do pretty good to put up with him," Jay tells Peg.

"He works awful hard."

"Would you like that place in Oregon?" There are reasons he can't return. Perhaps those worms are the remains of the officer, whose body evidently hasn't been found. He doesn't expect that it will ever be.

"It's worth a lot of money."

"I'll never go there, not again." He yawns. The kids are standing as close to him as they can get. "It's Jon's. I'll sign whatever has to be signed in the morning."

"Let me put everyone to bed. There's a hideabed in my sewing room."

"Go ahead, Jay. I want to sit up for a while," Catherine says. "And talk to your sister-in-law. Find out about you."

"Gonna learn all the dirt, huh?"

Both women say, "No," almost in unison.

So after rousing Jon and Billy, the three of them stumble off to bed while Peg and Catherine wash dishes, and talk, not something Jay would've expected of Catherine.

Catherine hasn't felt like herself since Jay sprung his Indian-magic on her. She has never been a mother, has never felt like being a mother, has never wanted to be a mother; yet, he claims to have seen their son in a vision. This is so different. Simple. Cooking. Dishes. Obviously, Billy's mother does it well. So does Peg. Almost as if they were born into their roles... *why wasn't I? I can't even bake a pie.*

*Will never, not now, find out if I would like their role. Been cheated? I don't know. Probably not.*

*What was it that I started to write so long ago:*

*The road I followed had no fork,  
no detour; it should have been  
the way of love  
leading to peace  
but when I quit  
running, they were gone.  
I backtracked to a stile  
over a rubble stone fence*

*Don't remember the rest of it. What happened to the music? Haven't heard it for . . . can't remember. Too much water.*

*This is not me. What's happening?*

*It's almost as if every road has been wrong, including this one. . . he's a nice guy. Deserves what I'm not.*

*Guess that means what I think it does.*

*I don't feel very much a part of events. As if merely a spectator. . . no control, no glory, is that it?*

*Something happened those days at sea. . . yes, I was seasick to the point I didn't care whether I lived.*

*Don't feel very good yet.*

*Went to war with raw nature, and nurture lost. . . and the war isn't even over. . . life's a very thin veneer.*

*backtracked to a stile  
over a rubble stone fence  
and found muddy footprints  
crumbling in the wind.*

*I think that was the next line, lines. Schoolgirl prattle.*

*Am I starting to believe we might make it? believe his magic? Well, we can't make it. Especially not me. So, girl, don't start getting your hopes up. This is the road you chose to follow. You, me. Meaningless.*

*Something—I can feel it—has taken over my body, something alien. Growing stronger.*

*Have to get some sleep, some control—*

Eric Pettersen knew that murdering fisherman escaped Unalaska and that this *Patriots in Action* assignment was given to divert his attention from what is really important. Indeed, Catherine Alden has compromised someone on that Peanut Farmer's inner staff, someone who was laughing at him yesterday. But whoever that someone is, he or she wouldn't laugh tomorrow. No way. He is just thankful he still has friends inside Justice, and that Alascom alerted Justice when that murderer made his collect telephone call. Alascom had keyed their computers to retain the recording of telephone calls in which the name of either Shoulders or Alden was mentioned. The technology is still experimental, but it has already produced results.

Setting up the phone tap on the number Shoulders called was routine. Striking pay dirt so soon wasn't: after Shoulders' collect call from Seward, the operator transmitted both originating and charged numbers to Justice. Forty minutes later, he had both numbers. And while he, on the behalf of Justice, was still seeking a court order for the two taps, he directed his little unit of specials to make the taps immediately, and their first recording was Mrs. Lundstrom's call to that bank in British Columbia...that call told him when and where that murdering fisherman would be. He will eventually arrest all of Shoulders' co-conspirators, but for this morning, the Alden woman and the fisherman will be enough. Besides, he has to hurry back to Anchorage. Yesterday afternoon, the McPhearson woman called his office, wanting to turn herself in, wanting to negotiate a deal. But the only deal he will make is one putting her away for life; however, he can't very well say that until she is in custody.

He hadn't expected a British Columbia connection, nor that the murdering fisherman could travel so far so fast without using commercial airlines. Alden will dump the fisherman as soon as they reach civilization. Then, with her way of making men believe anything, she will, like the cat she is, land on her feet. Her friends might not trust her for a while, but she will smile and they will succumb. He hates everything she represents.

He hasn't had time to go through channels; plus, he doesn't want to tip his hand so it is free-lance or lose this opportunity. The arrest will have to be made here in Ketchikan before Alden and that murdering fisherman cross the border.

Nursing a cup of nearly cold coffee, Pettersen sits in the FAA tower, watching the aviation weather come across the wire. Hundred knot winds out of the southeast at 9,000 feet. Forty knots out of the west at 3,000 feet. After he arrests Alden and the fisherman, he and his specials will have to fly over water at under three thousand feet as far as Vancouver Island. Turbulence will make the flight a rough one.

He doesn't intend to chance losing Shoulders to a trumped up *good guy* charge from the Unalaska Police department. No way. They will find the weather better this time of year in a California prison—both Alden and the fisherman will be tried in Federal Court for conspiracy to traffic.

He personally answered the phone when the caller inquired about a plane arriving from Canada. Shoulders? Perhaps his young pilot. Co-conspirators. He doubts that murdering fisherman suspects a thing.

It took a little doing to assemble his team on no notice, then to get them here while requisitioning a plane. Hell, the paint on the logo isn't even dry. What he saw were real patriots in action last night.

Because the fisherman is trigger-happy, he brought enough men and has positioned them such that they will subdue Shoulders before he can draw his gun. If the boy pilot doesn't give his specials too much of a problem, he will also arrest him and try him in California, but it will too bad for the pilot if he chooses to resist.

The plane Alden and the fisherman expects has been delayed. The twin Beech sitting by itself, away from other planes, is an interagency dummy. He has parked a fuel truck alongside it, in hopes

the presence of gas will make the fisherman hesitant to introduce a weapon. But with murderers, thinking that clearly might be too much to expect. It is his extra specials that he counts on.

## 3.

The whole house shakes when Jon's feet make contact with the floor as he answers the ringing alarm clock. It is 5:15, and time for everyone to get up.

In various stages of undress, Jon's boys stagger bleary-eyed into the kitchen. His daughter comes in wearing a flannel nightgown on which she embroidered flowers with yarn. Jay notices and thinks, *Pretty good work for a six year old*. And Peg, looking like she hasn't been to bed, fries a pan of hashbrowns and another pan of eggs. She toasts a whole loaf of homemade bread, and begins feeding breakfast.

Jon eats first, then says he'll be back after he lines out his crew. He leaves his thermos with Peg, tells her he'll pick it up later, says to serve that first pot of coffee.

Billy is the last one up, and has to vie with the kids for a second pan of hashbrowns. He tries to call the tower to see if a plane arrived from Canada, but no one answers at six. "Strange, I know they're over there. I think there's a jet due in pretty shortly."

When he tries at seven, the tower answers, and he is told that a Beechcraft cleared Customs shortly after midnight and is presently waiting to be refueled. "Your plane's here, Jay. And I gotta call Jill."

He tells his mom that everything is okay, that he will be starting back in a little while, then speaks to Jill for a few minutes before hanging up. "Sticky hangar doors, I guess," he tells everybody waiting to congratulate him.

Jon returns at 7:30, and the four of them again crowd into his pickup's cab. It is still dark, still raining. And Peg and the kids stand in the rain to wave goodbye.

A short chop runs in the Narrows, making the ferry ride like driving on washboarded road, and in the near-freezing rain (the sort of rain that quickly builds ice on planes' wings), both the ferry and pickup seem to shrink. The cab becomes even more crowded. And for Jay, the cab is also filled with something else, an inner mist that seems to smell like rotting earthworms. The doom has settled like dew. In its place is this mist, which lacks the fog's sense of fatalism. He wishes he had experience in understanding visions. Seeing what will happen doesn't help when the vision still doesn't make sense. Wishes he could talk to Ivan Chickenof right about now.

Billy worries aloud about the rain all the way to the airport. Jon asks about icing as he turns the pickup onto a taxiway, and steers meanderingly between Pipers and Cessnas to eventually park beside the Tern, where, leaving Catherine in the heated cab, Jon, Jay, and Billy converge on the updated Interstate to admire its classic lines. While Billy stands in the rain to show Jon how it differs from a Super Cub, Jay retrieves his half-filled dufflebag. Finally ready to go, Billy, claiming he's tired of being squished, announces, "I'm gonna ride in back," and sits on the dufflebag atop the wet steel clutter of a logging show. Tools. Cat parts. Chokers. Blocks. A handyman jack. He hunkers down in the corner between the cab and spare tire, out of the rain as much as possible, and in the dark, he is nearly impossible to see.

"This airport grew during the night? It looks a shitpot bigger this morning. I didn't think there was this much to it when we came in last night."

"We been getting fuckin' jets since I been here," Jon says.

"I actually expected a lot less."

"It's all those fuckin' tourists in the summer. Hurry up here, look at a fuckin' totem pole, then hurry the fuck home where they tell all their fuckin' friends 'bout how important it is to save the fuckin' wolves in Alaska. They dunno any more 'bout wolves or Alaska than their fuckin' friends do."



They locate the twin-engine Beechcraft, marked *Caribou Lake Air*. The plane and a fuel truck are silhouetted by runway lights.

Jon stops as soon as he sees the fuel truck. "That fuckin' plane doesn't burn diesel, does it? The fuckin' bulk plant's got a new GMC they use for av-gas, and JP5 is over where the jets land."

"You sure?" Asks Jay. He doesn't want to hear what Jon says, but doesn't doubt him.

"You fuckin' right I'm sure. That truck filled my skid tank yesterday. Ninety-four fuckin' cents a gallon."

Jay doesn't know what to do. If it is a setup, it could be anybody. Law. Russians. Columbians. "What do you think, Catherine?"

"Does what I think make any difference?"

"Of course."

"Do whatever you intend," she says as she glances back towards the Tern. "Billy's plane is low on gas, and with what he said about icing, we would have to fly over water. We couldn't go across the mountains."

"Are they Russians? or Columbians?" Jay wouldn't expect the State Troopers to do anything but walk up to him and tell him he was under arrest. The Troopers play it pretty straight with everybody.

"No. I don't think so. Wrong style for GRU, and as for the Organization, no, I don't think so either. They are more likely to plant a bomb."

Jon interrupts, "Russians! You a spy?"

Before he can answer, Catherine says, "He isn't. I am. And there's a contract out on me. Your brother's trying to keep me alive."

"I thought you two were on your way to get married."

"We are. Don't try to figure it out. Like I said, I've been hiding the past few years." Jay pauses, then adds, "Go ahead, circle. Try not to look too suspicious, but like you're checking to see if we got the right plane."

As Jon rolls the pickup forward, he says, "So this is why you ain't been around."

"Yeah." *What else can I say.* "This could be dangerous."

Jon merely snorts. "That's the chance those fuckers take."

"Let's play it by ear. See what we're up against."

Jon circles the plane a second time. Jay counts five men near the plane: the fuel truck driver and his assistant, pilot and copilot, and a Customs officer with a clipboard. There is also an idling FAA pickup, with three men in the cab, parked beside the nearest hangar. And three mechanics working in the open hangar. This is a trap. The tower told Billy the plane cleared Customs last night. But nobody knows he will be here other than Edna and Mackean. Edna, he trusts, and he has never trusted bankers. But it isn't likely a B.C. banker would know what happened in Dutch Harbor. Where, then, is the leak? The telephone. That damn collect call. They've tapped Edna's line.

Jon passes close to the idling FAA pickup. Nobody in the pickup looks at them. "They're part of it, Jon."

"What the fuck do you think?"

"Remember Munich. Olympic Games. I don't like that plane being by itself." He wishes Billy was in the cab; he needs to ask him if maybe they could fly the Tern across the border, under radar, land someplace near Prince Rupert, then worry about getting to Williams Lake if they can't cross the mountains today. "One more circle, Jon, then," pointing to the space between the fuel truck and the plane's wing, "get in as close as you can. No sense making this easy for anyone."

\*

Eric Pettersen watches the late model, fourwheeldrive Ford pickup approach and slowly circle the bait. He readjusts his binoculars though they don't need it, then readjusts them again. He sees the

silhouettes of only three people in the cab. That'll be Shoulders, Alden and the boy pilot. And he wonders where they got the truck. Probably stole it. He can't quite make out its muddy license.

The driver of the pickup appears cautious, but there is no way for the fisherman to know the plane isn't legitimate. So picking up his radio, he tells everyone, "Remember, no guns unless he starts shooting."

\*

"It's definitely," Catherine says, "not GRU. Too many players. Why don't you get out of here, Jay. Let me talk to them."

"No, not an option. This is my doing. I'll take care of it."

"If," Catherine pleads, "this isn't on the up and up, we're dealing with Feds here."

"Stay in the truck. It'll be all right. You'll see."

Jon grins, "If that fuckin' plane will fly, we'll get you on it."

For a moment, they say nothing more as the pickup rolls towards the gap between the fuel truck and the plane. Jon brakes. The grille of the pickup touches the wing. Both Jay and Jon hop out. And Billy screams, "Look OUT!"

The Customs officer grabs Jay from behind, pinning his arms to his sides. But Jay drops, frees his right arm, and grasps the phony officer's throat. More to push him away than choke him. The two of them wrestle in a space too small for one person. Wedge themselves between truck and wing. Don't notice the fuel truck driver's assistant when he joins the fray.

Despite their jaunty uniforms, the pilot and copilot rush Jon while the fuel truck driver goes after Billy. And the FAA pickup rolls up with the three mechanics in its bed.

Jon pulls the broken sledge hammer handle from under the pickup seat. His first swing breaks the copilot's arm. Second swing breaks the pilot's collarbone and ribs on his left side. He hears bones crunch, then laughs when all six fuckers from the pickup rush him. He taunts them, then wades into them swinging the broken handle.

The handle becomes bloody and slips from his hand; so he hammers bodies with his fists. Results are the same. Nothing pretty. None of his attackers escape; no room to escape. They have to face him. And in a minute, he's knee deep in bodies.

Billy grabs the barrel pump underfoot as soon as he realizes there'll be a fight. Gripping its pipe end and using it like a baseball bat, the fuel truck driver's ribs as the ball, he hits a home run, knocking the driver out of the pickup's bed with one swing.

His fingers around the Custom officer's windpipe, Jay tries to tear it out—won't come as the officer claws at his hand as does the driver's assistant, who pounds his arm. The Customs officer cocks his hand for a karate chop, but there's no room to deliver a blow as the three of them wrestle under the pickup.

Jay fights to get his left hand through the Custom officer's defenses so he can hold the officer's head still long enough to crush the man's windpipe. The assistant pulls on his fingers, on his arm, but his fingers have separated the tendons and are behind the officer's windpipe.

The extra strain is enough: Jay feels the officer's esophagus collapse, and kink. He releases his hold, grabs the driver's assistant, rolls out from under the pickup, catches his attacker's chin, and slams the fellow's head to the pavement, once, twice, three times. The driver's assistant lies still. The fight is over. A minute. Maybe a lot less. Maybe more.

Feeling like puking as he stands on wobbly legs, Jay looks around, sees Billy sitting half on his dufflebag, half on the barrel pump. Jon has started a story about how it used to be in the logging camps "when fuckers could really fight." Catherine is white. Still seated in the cab, she stares at him. He can't read her stare. But he knows the cops will be here in a minute.

"Jon, shut up! Billy, can you fly this crate?" He nods to the Beechcraft.

"I ain't been checked out on one."

"What are you waiting for? The cops? We gotta go."

Billy climbs into the Beech while Jon drags bodies away from the back of his pickup. The left engine starts, then the right. Catherine bounces out of the cab, grabs his dufflebag, and clammers aboard. Jay pauses only long enough to say, "Sorry about this, Jon. Didn't mean to get you involved. Cops will want to know what happened."

"These fuckers never identified themselves. You just be careful."

"Always am."

"Like hell. You loved leavin' those fuckin' Russian couplin's. I'm surprised you lived this long."

"They happen when you buck timber over draws. I could use a good cutting job right now."

"Wouldn't be excitin' enough. Get outta here."

\*

As he watches the Beechcraft's props turn it's still too damn dark—*why doesn't anyone answer*—to tell what happened, Eric Pettersen adjusts his binoculars in disbelief. He saw his man grab Shoulders before the amateur could draw a gun. Then all hell broke loose. At first he hadn't understood why so many of his men jumped the pickup's driver. The guy is big as the fuel truck. Why did Shoulders bring that fellow? Tipped and expecting trouble? Damn double dealing Justice. They somehow got word of what he was up to. Had to have. But how? *That I'll find out.*

The big fellow is who? Someone in Justice Alden has compromised? Has to be. No other explanation. *So Justice intends to stand between me and arresting Alden and that murdering fisherman. We'll see about that.*

He has called the city and state police dispatcher, reported a federal agent down, and has requested assistance. And through readjusted binoculars, he sees the Beechcraft shudder, then begin rolling. The Ford pickup backs away. *And I can only watch. And feel sick to his stomach. How can three men take eleven trained agents? Doesn't compute. Can't happen. Can't.*

Maybe he should've had them use their guns.

The Beechcraft jogs from side to side. The boy pilot isn't familiar with its control. Maybe that damn fisherman's luck just ran out.

Why is the pickup stopping? He doesn't believe it: he watches the driver get out, take a shirt from the bed of the truck, tear it in two and cover both front and rear license plates. The numbers weren't readable before, but now the truck is identifiable. *I got him.*

What Pettersen doesn't see as he relays the information about the covered license plates to the city dispatcher is that the pieces of shirt blow off when the stiff breeze following the Narrows catches exposed edges.

Jay sees speeding red and blue strobes as the twin engine plane barely clears the fence at the end of the runway: Billy misjudged how much runway the Beech needs. But they are airborne and climbing. The strobes look like crawling worms.

He hopes the kid doesn't get charged with theft. But as he thinks about what happened, about how fast everything occurred, he is overcome with the feeling that none of this is on the up & up, that they won't charge Billy or Jon or anyone else, won't make any of this public unless they catch him and Catherine. Then charges will be just a negotiating position. He could be wrong. Hopes not. For the kid's sake. So sitting in the copilot's seat, he asks, "How long to Prince Rupert?"

"Dunno. It ain't far."

"Can you set this plane down on a highway?"

"Dunno if I can get this beast down. I was sorta thinking about ditching. Going for a swim."

"Let's not if we can help it. I think there's some long stretches of wide pavement on the east side of Prince Rupert." He pauses, then adds, "I remember seeing some pictures of white black bears. In the background were some straight stretches of two-lane."

"White black bears? I thought the only white bears were polar bears."

"Naa, these are black bears and they're snow white...when I was a kid, there was something about a white moose being shot in the same area, so maybe it's the area."

"I'd like to see a black bear that's all white. You know, I got a blue one a year ago."

"Glacial bear?"

"I guess that's what they call them....There's a heap of mountains here. I dunno about setting down."

"I want you to try, then return to your pisspot and get it and its phony numbers back home. I doubt anyone will be looking for you to return to Ketchikan."

"I don't wanta miss all the action."

"That kid of yours will give you all the action you want."

"Ain't the same. Besides, there ain't fuel enough in the Tern to fly to Wrangel."

"Stop at a gas station and buy some. Hell, even the gas the station at Dutch sells has enough octane to keep a little pisspot like yours airborne."

"Suppose I could see if your brother would bring me ten gallons. That ought to be enough."

"Don't tell anyone about him. But I would appreciate it if your mom would see to it that he got title to that place at Siletz. He needs to get off the island...for Peg's sake."

"I'll tell Mom."

\*

As he watches the Beech's navigational lights disappear into the rain, Eric Pettersen hates with a purity requiring no further distillation. He will not be laughed at, and if any of this gets out before he arrests that murdering fisherman, that's what he will be, laughing stock. He knows where the fisherman is headed; knows if he contacts the Mounties, everything will become known. And he feels like a hooked fish: he can't turn loose of his hatred, but until he gets Shoulders back in Alaska, all he can do is sulk. Oh, he can run here or run there and wear himself out, but he can't win, and he can't tell anybody about what has happened. He will have to keep his mouth shut and wait.

He has a feeling the fisherman will return. Alden will wash her hands of him, then where will Shoulders go? His guess is right back to Alaska, giving him another chance. And that is all he needs, one more chance. It will be shoot first and ask questions later next time.

\*

By flying the Beech down rather than setting it down, Billy gets them on the ground. But the plane seems to roll forever on the slick, very slick highway—it rolls the length of the straight stretch, then over a ridge and down the other side. It rolls and rolls as if it has no brakes. It rolls along at thirty miles an hour, then maybe twenty as it passes electrical poles and side roads and a school bus stop. It rolls down into a dip and half way up the other side before its momentum fades to a stop.

"Guess this road doesn't get much traffic in the winter," Billy says, with sweat beads on his forehead.

"All the better for hitchhiking, huh," Jay adds as he quickly leaves the plane, only to fall when he steps onto the ice. Although the road has been plowed and the ice scarified, falling rain mixed with snow runs from the roadway.

Catherine asks, "Are you okay?" as she carefully slips to the edge of the road where a little gravel gives her oversized boots some traction.

The day, despite the sun being up, remains dark gray.

"One thing about it, I don't need much help turning you around," Jay hollers to Billy as he and Catherine twist the Beech around by hand, center it as best they can over the ice-covered yellow line, then slap its fuselage. "You're gonna be all right with the wind?" Jay asks.

"I can't tell what direction it's coming from, can you?"

"No, not really."

"Then I guess it isn't anything to worry about."

Catherine insists upon hugging Billy, who leans out of the plane so she can. Then whispering to him as she hugs him, she says, "Be careful, and tell your mother thanks. She's a lucky woman." And as the Beech climbs over the Skeena, disappearing into the high river mist, she turns to Jay and says, "It's time we had a talk."

Except for a log truck going the wrong way that now appears on the straight stretch, there still isn't any traffic on this new highway outside Terrace.

Cold rain soaks Catherine's shirt, runs down her cheeks like streams of tears, plasters her hair to her scalp, chills her.

"What is it that you want to talk about?"

"Can people change?" She has her own opinion; she wants his.

"People do, yes. Characters in books don't. They just discover something about themselves that was already there. Why do you ask?"

"Peg told me about Judy. She knows a lot about you, especially now that the student from Oregon State spent a day with her. She likes you." Catherine always has wanted a book store. It wouldn't have to be much of a money maker. More somewhere for her to hideout than anything else. "How did we get away? It doesn't make sense."

"Indian magic, maybe. Suppose?" Something happened to him Thanksgiving when he was in UniSea waiting for the turkeys to finish roasting, then again while fighting to stay awake on their run from Dutch to Kodiak. He started seeing things like he hasn't since 'Nam. Dreams, visions, he doesn't know what they are although they are as vivid as what the acid-heads describe seeing during their trips. Most of them are memories of things that have happened, but some of them, like being with Joseph and Looking Glass, are odd in their reality. He never had heard the name Looking Glass before he was with him in a vision. "I told we would."

But as soon as the words are out of his mouth, he knows they won't. And a wave of paralysis locks his jaw, preventing him from saying anything more.

"How did the accident change you? It had to have."

He can't answer. All he can do is motion for her to follow him as a battered pickup full of Indians passes going the wrong direction.

#### 4.

Stuart Bartholomew has spent his life waiting. He believes good things will come to those who wait. They have in the past. Today is no different. The Air Force's flying radar planes watched the interagency Beechcraft take off from Ketchikan, then land a few miles east of Prince Rupert, British Columbia. The plane landed on Highway 16, not on any strip. It landed, then took off immediately and returned towards Ketchikan as if it were transporting contraband, which is what brought it to the Air Force captain's attention.

It took him nearly an hour to slip through channels to learn what the Beechcraft was doing in Ketchikan this morning: the attorney who flew-with-ease when getting off the *Dawn* might have done him a favor. Alden and the amateur would have slipped into British Columbia unnoticed if the attorney hadn't risked his career to arrest them. This affair will cost the attorney his career, not that the attorney will be promptly terminated. No, it will a matter of no more promotions until the attorney realizes he has been consigned to the end of the world permanently. Resignation usually follows. Either that or the attorney will drink himself to death. In this case, Pettersen will be laughed into resignation. Yes, the agency knows everyone's flaw.

Alden's luck won't hold much longer. He really doesn't care about the amateur, but the boy pilot intrigues him. The young man wears that Levi jacket sporting its back patch reading, *Save Cuddles the Cod – Kill a Harp Seal*. Who is *Cuddles* the cod? And is the juxtaposition the logo for some anti-environmental group. Probably, and probably doesn't matter. *Cuddles* is just another fish. But he

ought to hire the pilot, train him to be an agent even though he doubts the kid has a degree. The kid has the kind of audacity counterespionage needs, something sadly lacking in the recruits the agency has been trying to turn into agents.

He will make him an offer...if Justice will stay out of the way.

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