

Aleutian Rogue

WITH

The Amanat

SERIALIZED

Chapter Eighteen

1.

The hurt deep within Catherine's shoulder causes her to clutch the front of the gray sweatshirt she wears over the blouse Peg gave her. She shivers, shivers hard, the cold as deep within her as the pain. Her teeth chatter too much to talk; yet she tries to if for no other reason than to take her mind of her misery.

"Change is natural, it's evolution. Everything changes. The mountains, rivers, whole species of animals, like those white bears you were talking about. So people can change, don't you think? I think they can, again like those black bears that are white. That isn't natural is it? I always thought black bears were black, possibly sometimes a little brownish, but white isn't the color black bears are supposed to be." She pauses as a particularly fierce wave of shivering passes through her.

"What do you think? Those white black bears are still bears, still have claws, still dangerous. Their change is only skin deep, if that far, so have they really changed or are they the same as they were, only a different color, like dying your hair which affects how other people see you?" Again she pauses as her teeth chatter too hard for words to escape. "Maybe a better example would be trees. The Holy Land used to be covered by trees. Romans taxed them, and Crusaders logged them for whatever reasons, and we have desert, the Israel of a few years ago before they started replanting trees and turning all of that desert into farms. The Great Plains used to be barren, just grass. Then people killed the buffalo and plowed the grass under and planted wheat. Now we have houses and towns and the wheat farmers are in trouble, but the land is still the land, just with more or less top soil, depending upon the amount of trees. So nature changed the land, but it's still land just as people are still people, still needing to eat, to get out of the weather, to make art if they have enough time. What changes about them is how much topsoil they build, and since you'll know people by their fruit, and every year there's a new harvest, you can see their change by their fruit. Does that make any sense to you?"

Without breaking the slow strides he takes so he won't get too far ahead of her, Jay picks up a stone lying on top of the icy shoulder, and he tosses it at a tree across the road. He still can't really speak. For a moment there, he glimpsed the future, but his vision closed down when he rejected it. Turned off just as if he shutdown the Jimmie by shutting off its air. Now he doesn't know whether he really saw what he thinks he did.

Yes, he has changed, hopefully for the better. But she isn't talking about him, but about herself.

A car approaches, slows, stops, offers them a ride. It's an older Pontiac stationwagon with an engine that uses oil and has noisy lifters. Not a car government agents would use. It looks safe enough. Besides, he needs to get her out of the rain.

As Jay bends over to speak to the driver, Catherine says softly, not loud enough for him to hear, "Well, I have changed, but I doubt there'll be time enough for even seed to be planted, let alone a crop to ripen."

Handfuls of hay lie scattered on the floorboards of the Pontiac. Its frontseat is muddy. The driver, seventeen or so, belongs, according to his sweatshirt design, to the Dogfish clan. He asks, "How far?"

Jay says, "Nearest place we can charter a plane."

The Pontiac's heater is as worn out as the rest of the car. But inside the car is warmer than outside. However, Catherine doesn't stop shivering. Jay pulls her tight as he makes small talk with the driver. Learns that the driver is from Old Hazelton and has been black cod fishing on a longliner out of Prince Rupert. He and the driver talk fishing, exchanging green water stories.

They follow the Skeena upstream to Guy's Air Taxi Service, Ltd.

"We have to get out again?" Catherine asks, expressing regret at having to leave the mostly imagined warmth of the Pontiac.

Under the circumstances, Jay doesn't know what else to do but what he has been doing. That little bit of a vision had him alone and returning to Alaska, Catherine—

He doesn't want to think about what he almost saw. Not another accident. It doesn't seem fair. Not again. He feels powerless, feels expendable, like he doesn't exist. Worse than last night.

The office door of the air taxi is locked, with a *CLOSED FOR THE SEASON* sign attached to its knob. He nevertheless bangs on the door to see if the sign really means closed. It apparently does.

But as they turn to go, a fellow in grease-stained Carhartt coveralls emerges from the building behind the office.

"Possible," Jay hollers, "to charter a plane?"

"Guy's in Florida. We're shut for the winter."

"You his mechanic—or just the caretaker?"

"Chief mechanic, chief pilot, chief caretaker, chief asshole, that's me. We ain't flying this time of year."

"Planes down?"

"No. They're in good shape."

Leery of revealing their destination, Jay says, "Need to get to 100 Mile House. You have a plane that'll fly there?"

"A 206, but you ain't worth the fuss of calling Guy."

"That's about as plain as you can say it." Hearing the pilot-mechanic speak, Jay asks, "You from Oregon?"

"Idaho. Potlatch."

"I fell timber for an outfit outta Princeton one fall. Logging outta Clarkia. Up the St. Maries."

"My old stompin' grounds."

"Californians run you out? They more or less did me."

"Those cocksuckers are everywhere, even here."

"Yeah. They were all gonna move to Oregon and raise horses, all gonna get rich. Hell, if there would've been any money in horses, I'd been raising them rather than stump jumping."

"They went to Idaho to live off the land, get close to nature, fly fish for put 'n take trout." The fellow shakes his head as he remembers.

"How do you like B.C.? I ended up in Alaska."

"Like it pretty good. Oh, they got some funny laws—"

"No handguns."

"That's a bad one."

"You run into the need for one since you been here?"

"Hell yes. Especially in the plane. But I got rid of mine before I come."

"Getting back to business, I can make the flight worth your time, and Guy's. If I have to, I'll buy the plane."

"Money all goes to Guy. I'll get the same whether I stay here by the fire or fly down. . . . Say, what the hell are you two doin' walkin' anyway?"

"Plane broke down. They took it to Rupert. Probably a new engine. We caught a ride." As if suddenly distracted by a troubling thought, Jay asks, "By the way, where's your local Mountie?"

"Don't got one local."

"I need to talk to one before we're stopped while hitchhiking...you mentioned handguns, and I just remembered I have one. Need to turn it in. Don't wanta get stopped with it."

Looking and sounding skeptical, the fellow says, "There's a Fish Warden right up the road...or you could throw it in the Skeena."

"Don't know about throwing it in the river." Jay pulls the Smith from his jeans, ejects the loaded rounds, and hands the gun to the fellow. "It's stainless steel. Won't rust. You say that warden lives close by?"

"Right up the road."

"Could you give that to him? We're in a hurry."

Tucking the Smith into his belt, the fellow seems to notice Catherine for the first time. "We can't be having a lady hitchhiking. Let me call Guy and see what he says."

The pilot-mechanic returns in a few minutes, and motions for them to get in a battered Mercury pickup. At least the heater in the pickup works.

They drive to a private strip where a variety of single engine and two fore-and-aft propped Cessnas are tied down. One of the twin Cessnas is posh; its interior carpeted and polished. But the other 336 has been used as a fish packer. Its interior has been stripped. What is left smells of salmon gurry. "I called Guy. He said take this one. We just bought it. Got to take it to Vancouver to get worked over. Guy said just charge you for fuel."

"What kinda work?" asks Jay.

"It's got a bad oil seal. Makes Californians nervous."

The Cessna's fore and aft engines scream, more so than the Coyote's 6-71. They climb, feel the heaviness of acceleration, the lightness of altitude. And oil from the leaking seal splatters the windshield faster than the wipers can smear it around. It doesn't appear there'll be enough oil in the engine for them to even make it to Burns Lake as the Cessna shimmies as they pass through low-hanging, gray clouds, which don't break until Vanderhoof.

"You don't want to go all the way to 100 Mile House?" the pilot-mechanic asks when Jay tells the fellow to drop them off at Williams Lake. "It ain't much farther down the road."

"Need to do some business in Williams Lake, and you're right, 100 Mile House isn't far. We'll get a ride."

"All right, as long as you're not turning Californian."

"Dressed like this?"

Their appearance does hamper their getting a ride when they land in Williams Lake. Still, within an hour of arriving they enter the bank.

"Mr. Shoulders, I must apologize about being unable to meet your plane." Andrew Mackean worries about not personally greeting *Caribou Air's* flight. His experience is that it doesn't take much for accounts to be moved.

"Don't. We took a different flight." Jay doesn't trust the banker, and as long as he doesn't trust him, he can't be terribly disappointed by him.

"Wasn't *Caribou Air* there to meet you?"

"*Caribou Lake Air*," says Catherine soberly, "has been nationalized."

"I don't understand."

"Call them. See what they have to say." Jay adds. "Their excuse should make good fiction."

"And see if they have our baggage. We were separated from it at Ketchikan." Catherine says.

Mackean has what can be described as a ruddy complexion—as the banker listens to the flight service explain what happened he turns redder and redder until his face seems on fire. Jay leans close to Catherine and whispers, "Traveling light are we, huh?"

"What do you mean?" she asks, also in a whisper.

"What do you have on under—"

"Shh, not now...and more than yesterday."

Returning the receiver to its cradle, Mackean says: "I must indeed apologize. It seems they experienced a ruptured fuel line and didn't arrive in Ketchikan until nine o'clock. They have just returned." He rubs his thumbs against his index fingers, and avoids looking directly at Jay. "That went rather badly. Please accept my humblest apology."

"We made it," Catherine says. "That's what counts. And we do appreciate your thoughtfulness. But I think we will be continuing on to Vancouver."

Jay scowls, but she moves to stop him from saying anything.

"Please let the bank make this up to you."

"Who," asks Jay, "knew you were sending a plane?"

"Why, no one."

"None of your staff?"

"Is something wrong? Shall I notify RCMP?"

"No," Catherine says. "After this morning, we need to go shopping if your plane didn't return with our baggage."

"Edna said you could possibly help with a vehicle," Jay adds.

"By all means. Allow me to introduce you to the city." Mackean rises, and with his coat over his arm, hustles them to his auto.

*

In a Land Rover a block away, Stuart Bartholomew watches the bank manager emerge from a side entrance with Alden and Shoulders. How, he wonders, are they traveling so far so fast? This he doesn't understand. He just arrived on a direct flight. And he wouldn't have known to come here if the agency hadn't solved the mystery of the mismarked plane, an Arctic Tern manufactured in Anchorage. There are so few of them in existence that locating its owner wasn't difficult. A tap had already been placed on her phone line. A little promised laughter was all it took for him to receive tapes of her tapped calls—that Anchorage attorney wants to be a player so damn badly. This case has become a true obsession for the attorney, so much so that this meddling fisherman might have to be given to him as a person might give a round steak bone to a dog, the bone swallowed whole and eventually lodging in the intestine where it will kill the dog.

That fisherman must be receiving VIP treatment because of Alden. Little about her surprises him.

He knows, from being outside the world of wealth, that a wall of money is more exclusionary than walls of brick or stone.

Watching the three of them leave in a dark green Jaguar sedan that he wouldn't mind owning—he wants no repeat of the Justice Department's morning fiasco that won't be easy for even Justice to sweep under their very large rug—he will wait until that amateur isn't around. Alden can be counted upon to act in her self-interest. That amateur isn't as predictable.

He has time.

*

After introduction to a select group of store owners, Jay and Catherine retire to an apartment overlooking the lake. Just somewhere to stay, according to Mackean, until they locate a place

befitting them. Jay laughs to himself. Everywhere they shopped, they were told their purchases would be charged to their account. And Catherine spent seventeen thousand dollars, Canadian; she wears most of it, including a two carat, seven stone wedding ring set.

"Oh, Darling, if I thought it wouldn't end tomorrow, I could like this. A pretty lake. Town is small, but very nice." She reaches for his hand. "And now there isn't time enough."

"Yeah, that little affair at Ketchikan caught me by surprise. Whoever that was is after us. Not after Sarah, or the ivory. So one or both of us is worth their taking one helluva risk."

"I'm sure they're already here...I will make a deal with them if they'll protect you."

What kind of a promise was made to the Mezzanger kid? Some promise must have been made or he wouldn't have surrendered his rifle. But then, what kind of promises were made to how many tribes? any that were kept?

If promises had been kept, there would be no reservation stories.

"A deal, huh?...The government doesn't keep deals made with even mixed-bloods, let alone with a Rogue. They stick them in jail, claim they murdered FBI agents, then leave them there forever. So, no, I don't trust the government, don't believe anything they say, don't want anything to do with the Feds, not even with Jay Hammond, who I might have trusted at one time."

"I'll still make a deal...if I don't, neither of us has any chance."

Remembering the glimpse of his vision about returning to Alaska alone tells him not to argue with her, and he wonders when will it happen. How much time do they have? What can he do? How can he possibly be nice enough to her to make what time they have together worth a lifetime?

And when does a vision become self-fulfilling? Is a person's destiny settled from birth? All Rogues bound for hell. A two-sided world with only the good guys going up. That's not the story his grandfather told.

"Do you think Billy reached home all right?"

"Dunno. I think Edna's phone is tapped so I won't call, just assume he did."

"We don't know very much, do we?" She leans against him, careful not to put weight on her injured shoulder. "It would be so nice if I could believe." She doesn't say what.

2.

Billy's return fight to Ketchikan goes without mishap. That is, almost without mishap. Since he came in under the tower's radar, and since the tide was out when he returned, he tried to land on a thin strip of gravel along the Narrows. But he overshot the strip, smacked the strait hard, and watched the Beech sink as he splashed out of the water, not as cold as he thought he would be. Unfortunately, his right shoulder feels as if he dislocated it, feels like a toilet being flushed, and he wonders if some kind of a virus follows Jay around that causes shoulder separations.

"Hold still," Jon says. "I'm gonna pull that fucker just a little bit. It'll go back in."

"Ouch, easy, easy."

"How's that?...City police damn near got me." Jon smiles as if this morning's affair were a Saturday night Grange brawl at Rose Lodge.

"I don't think I can fly. Not in rough weather where I gotta fight to keep control."

"Have a couple beers. You'll be all right in the mornin'. A little stiff. Sore. But good enough to put in a day of loggin'." Jon's fingers probe the joint. "I pumped a barrel of fuckin' gas in that, what did Dutch call it, pisspot, that was it, of yours."

*

"Why," Edna asks, "didn't you go to a doctor? You were hurt, still hurt as far as I'm concern."

"I'm all right, Mom. Really am. He took care of it. Mom, you've never seen anybody as big as he is. He's huge. His fingers are the size of bananas."

"And he let you fly this way? That's criminal."

"Mom, come off it. I'm all right." Although his shoulder still hurts, he has the full range of movement.

"I want you to promise, will you? that you'll see a doctor in the morning."

"Sure, but I got home in good shape." He had returned to Soldotna's towerless field thirty and a half hours after he left. "There's nothing wrong with me, now....What do you suppose a logger would do if he dislocated a shoulder?"

"Be stupid."

"Right, Mom...I'm gonna go see Jill." He is a father. Ashley Lynn Lundstrom. Eight pounds, fifteen ounces. Twenty-two inches.

After listening to her son's account of what happened at Ketchikan, Edna knows she has no real choice. She is glad Billy made it home safely, but she is also glad he's not a logger.

Stay calm, she tells herself. Everything will be fine. Just stay calm. So leaving her car at the Kenai airport, she boards an AAI commuter flight to Anchorage, and takes a cab to Pierre's apartment, telling herself minute by minute to stay calm. It's early Wednesday morning. He'll be home. *Just stay calm.*

Pierre's appearance jolts her. She attempts, though, to cover her shock. "You didn't answer your phone. Thought I'd better look in on you." She enters without an invitation, and lays her gloves and bag on the coffee table. "I was wrong to let you exclude me from your life. It'll be easier for you, for me to face what's ahead together." And the damn tears come.

Blubbered apologies. Hugs. Kisses. And they sit together on the couch for most of an hour.

3.

Eric Pettersen allows himself a fourth drink; he is celebrating, well, almost celebrating. After two days of negotiations, the McPhearson girl is coming in. He will meet her tomorrow. Western's ticket counter. International airport. Took a bit of coaxing. She's paranoid about a hit. But I got her.

She's expensive. Agents to meet her at the airport. Immunity. Long-term protection. But she's important. Two reasons. The damage she'll do to Western Alaska's drug trade. More importantly, other than the phone tap that told me the murdering fisherman was headed for Canada, *she's my only link to H.J. Shoulders, who will return to Alaska if I don't get him first, if the NIC agent doesn't nab him in Canada. Nobody gets away with killing my specials, then making a fool of me. Nobody laughs at me. Nobody. Especially not some pinko fisherman.*

A border won't stop me from making sure a murderer gets what's coming to him. I already made sure of that. Sent Special delivery. Hand carried. So maybe I am celebrating. Certainly am. And I'm going to keep right on celebrating.

He had to give too much information to the NIA officer to keep the affair at Ketchikan quiet. Books will have to be juggled. The Beechcraft will have to be written off...those *Patriots in Action* have cells all over Alaska. How was he to know they would hijack that plane, then destroy it by taxiing it into the channel? That is what happened, isn't it? Seems plausible to him right now although it might not when he isn't on his way to getting drunk.

*

Jerry Reibeck rolls the scrap of notepaper between his fingers. Sarah's friend asked him to call when arrangements were made for her to turn herself in, but he doesn't know if he should. What if our phone contact in the Attorney General's office is right? Jay might be a hitman working for the Syndicate. He did kill those two narcs—he might have killed them in cold blood. He might now have a contract to kill Sarah. Didn't have the contract before.

But if he's a hitman, why did he tell Sarah to turn herself in?

He can't make heads or tails of what's going on. First this, then that. Confusing. Especially with Tom returning to the cabin and finding Nukky dead, shot through his blue eye.

He rotates the scrap of paper between his thumb and index finger. *Who's telling the truth? Sarah wants me to call. Thinks Jay's okay, and it is her neck. But our contact said not to, not to under any circumstances.*

Since he and Sarah fled the cabin, they have been on the move, but it'll be all over day after tomorrow...*Sarah really wants me to call. Maybe I should.*

4.

Jay lies still, Catherine lies beside him, her body perfect, her mind not yet at peace. He didn't have this chance with Judy, this chance to say good-bye. It seems as if everything that has happened since Thanksgiving has occurred to get him here, where he is really saying good-bye to Judy. The visions, the return of his spirit, his leaving the end of the world—all seem to have only one common link, that of saying good-bye, of teaching him how to say good-bye. Perhaps when this is all over, he can begin over without the memories. It was actually easy to transfer the love he felt for Judy to Catherine, who can be what every male wants. She seems to sense what she needs to be; she is an emotional chameleon, becoming a dream regardless of what that dream is. She deserves better.

He wishes he hadn't rejected that last vision. He really would like to know how long they have together. Maybe that is the one thing that can never be known. So all he can do is try to make her as happy as he can for as long as he can. To say good-bye with sincere love. She hasn't known much love and Judy left without giving him the chance to say good-bye. So both of them are receiving what they need even if only for hours or days.

A day can equal a lifetime: he felt that in 'Nam, really felt that in Laos, where days dragged on seemingly forever. No sleep. Didn't dare. Every nerve awake. They stayed awake the first year back stateside. A door opened, slammed, he was behind the couch. Judy was very careful not to touch him when he was asleep. He about killed her the first time she did.

But he can love Catherine now without qualifiers, can express that love, can be with her, knowing all the while that it will end suddenly. He has been given a gift. His to accept, to enjoy, to pass on when the time comes. He has prepared himself for what he couldn't before. No regrets this time, no sadness.

His spirit returned, he felt it. Felt hers. And felt the spirit of his son, growing inside her, taking control of her.

He hasn't thought much about saying good-bye to his boys, those being thoughts he has rejected. Now, he must confront a vision of him being with his son. But how? where?

If, indeed, he returns to Alaska alone, he'll hunt-up Ivan Chickenof, see if Ivan will teach him how to enter his visions, walk in them, live in those other dimensions beyond the end of the world...the Army pushed him off the edge of this two-sided world, told him he had to live in the margins between good and evil, then forgot about him even when Judy drove his pickup into the abyss. But he hasn't been about to forget. Maybe that is just the Rogue in him.

He feels her stir as he lies awake, staring at the cathedral ceiling. Tomorrow will bring another day of physical closeness, another day of enjoying the sunshine, the brightness of the snow, so different from Dutch Harbor, or Kodiak, or even Siletz, where gray skies and rain will again dominate. This condo is excessively comfortable, so different from the wheelhouse of the Coyote or even the yellow house at Twin Bridges. There is something to eat other than fried potatoes and cod. His money has never before meant anything to him. Now it means he can give her what she has been accustomed to. For a little while, she can forget what she has had to do to live like this. In the end, that might be enough...if one of them can forget.

Canada became the promised land for Joseph and Looking Glass, neither of whom crossed into it. The Rogue side of him had no promised land other than a postage stamp size reservation in a bend of the Siletz River, but they received it. It wasn't much of a promise, but maybe it was better than seeing one from forty miles or forty years away.

Catherine's body has promised everything Judy's had. Maybe it's better receiving those promises...there is much this morning, as he waits for the sun, for which he is thankful. And in her body grows another son, one he will walk with in a vision.

*

Daylight comes too quickly Friday morning. He promised Mackean that they would look at property west of town. There isn't anything he can't afford—except to become part of the community. But they have to at least pretend to be interested in the high-end real estate where nationally-known hockey players retire.

"Catherine, you don't have to go out there if you don't want. I'm not going to buy anything, but looking will keep the banker happy. Wouldn't be surprised if he doesn't also have a real estate license." Jay looks at himself in the mirror. He looks a little more like a Rogue. His eyes have changed. He sees distance in them, not a far away look but actual distance as if in them a person can see over the horizon. "Do you want anything special for breakfast?"

"No, the fruit in here will be fine." Catherine doesn't feel like rising. She feels lazy. "How long will you be gone?"

"How long would you like me to be gone?" He tugs on the edge of his moustache, almost the color of a red fox, and he has the strange sensation of seeing a fox in the mirror. But the image vanishes as soon as it appears. He wonders if the image wasn't telling him to replace the fox skin she wore when he first met her. He suspects that is the case and he decides he will take her to a furrier this afternoon. She should like that.

"No longer than necessary, but I'll be fine here, so take as much time as you want."

Mackean's ring pulls his attention back to getting ready. The banker is efficient. Six-thirty. To the minute. How many bankers are up at this hour? He has to get the one who is.

Pressing the button on the squawk box, he tells Mackean to wait, that he will be right down, but he takes long enough for a quick shower. He doesn't want to leave her, but nothing should happen this early in the morning. A condo fire possibly, but unlikely. He suspects the accident will be another traffic catastrophe, maybe even a repeat of the hub coming apart. He shouldn't let her drive, but how can he stop her being herself? He can't. Nor does he really want to. What will happen will, a bit of fatalism that seems to arise from his returned spirit. All he can do is be prepared for that day, something he has done. Mackean assured him that he can get a charter anytime back to Alaska. Day or night. No delays, no problems with Customs. So he can only hope for days, or weeks. But events occurred very quickly after his previous vision about fishing worms for steelhead. He still doesn't understand all of what he saw. Maybe he'll have to become a shaman to really understand, but he wouldn't even know how to begin. Ivan knows, though. But he's not sure he wants to find out.

"Hey, look, Good Looking. If something ever happens to me—contact is broken, say—try to get a message to Jon. I'll do the same." Because that last vision was interrupted, it might have ended differently than he expects so an alternative plan is wise. That is what he's becoming, wise.

"I like your brother, Peg. They're decent people."

"I'd better go. Kept him waiting long enough. Promise me one thing, you'll think about spending lots of money today."

She feigns anger, kisses him, then suddenly sober, says: "Don't let me die alone. I don't want to end like Judy."

A surge of panic sweeps through him. He hangs on to his memory of his vision as if it were a rock bearing the onslaught of a tidal wave. Then holding her hand, kissing her again but unable to promise anything, he says, "You're not like Judy—no more than I'm still that logger."

She hugs him, still mostly with one arm. But her left arm tries to reach around him. She wants to hug him with both arms.

Cold morning. A skiff of new snow blankets the Caribou. The lake has thin ice far out into it. Shining ice even under the layered smoke from wigwam burners, the air heavy with the scent of fresh sawn pine, the sawmills already working—he realizes again that he actually likes Williams Lake. He misses the smell of pitch, of needles and cones, the feel of caulks on moss, bleeding hearts and trilliums, their heads heavy as they turn from white to purple, the change she couldn't quit talking about. The springiness of viney maple; he used to hate them, and now he misses pushing his way through them. The world, even a two-sided world, circles around on itself, all things connected, the missing yoyo. He wonders where he put its string.

The Jag sits idling. And he doesn't want to go; he ought to tell Mackean to go back to bed, but he doubts the banker would. Mackean is probably up early every morning to follow the Toronto or New York markets. It might actually be easier to sluice gold than to make it by buying and selling it.

As he rides through mostly deserted streets, he stares mostly at his hands. Loyalty. How to promise he won't let her die alone when he has glimpsed the future. Can't be done. Die alone, her words. His hands look mostly the same. If he had to choose between them—

His thoughts aren't making much sense to him. They seem stratified like the snow clouds, each strata thinner than the strata below, with the topmost strata blurring a fuzzy heaven.

"I have, Mr. Shoulders, taken the liberty to arrange for you to see a modest place overlooking the lake, and I'm sorry Mrs. Shoulders couldn't make it. I am quite certain she would have found this first place exactly to her specifications. It has a great room that lends itself beautifully to entertaining."

"Do you believe in premonitions?"

The banker doesn't immediately answer. When he does, he asks, "Should we return to your suite?"

"No. Let's look at this place...but I have a feeling I'll be making that flight back to Soldotna today." As he watches the smoke rise from wigwam burners, then seem to hit a ceiling and bend hard south towards 100 Mile House, he wonders if he hasn't also hit his ceiling. There is really nothing more to him than a memory. Sure, he would like to spend time here with Catherine, become respectable, but is that really possible for a Rogue from Siletz? Won't he always be that wild seed, tolerated, but never truly accepted, especially here where the Queen is still on their currency? Maybe he is like a trillium, a flower that doesn't do well in gardens, white when first blooming, then changing to red, darkening with age until purple.

Again he stares at his outstretched hands, his right index finger, his trigger finger, permanently crooked. When his great-grandfather sat on the reservation with nothing to do but chop kindling and drink, Rogues were said to be the Devil's seed. What has changed since then besides their blood having been diluted with domestic varieties, English and Dutch, each as ruthless as any Rogue while wearing spirit masks painted to look like morning glories and hollyhocks.

If the accident doesn't happen in the next few days, he and Catherine will have to escape, a burglary gone awry probably. His previous intention. Them being the target of burglary. Then where? East to the Maritimes. His motorsailer. A world cruise. It would have been easier before he met her. Saying good-bye isn't easy even when a fellow knows it's coming.

"Turn around. Something's wrong. I gotta go back."

"Shall I call the Mounties?"

"I hate to bother them on a feeling, but, yeah, maybe you better." The accident either is happening, or about to.

*

When the doorbell rings, Catherine still isn't up...Stuart Bartholomew, exhausted, a long two and a half weeks, possibly too old for this type of excitement, waits outside her door. He is pleased. His hunch bore fruit: this is the first time since he arrived that the amateur has separated from her. He

knew that separation would only occur early morning, when a fisherman would be awake but not a party-goer like Alden.

He has a female agent with him, Linda Darling, whom he has used before. She looks enough like Alden that she will detract suspicions by appearing in stores, shops, markets long enough for him to spirit Alden out of the country. The amateur will miss her, will wonder where she went, but so have lots of other men. The snatch will be clean, as sanitary as an across-the-border pickup should be. No protests, possibly not even a missing persons report filed. After all, the amateur does have that little matter in Unalaska for which he must answer if he makes noise.

Justice was busy, last he knew, using all of their considerable influence to kill the AP story about Ketchikan. Although he feels bad for the families of the men killed, he isn't unhappy about the flying attorney being already shackled to fisherman jokes—the attorney will be shackled to those jokes for the rest of his short career. How many special investigators does it take to change a fisherman's mind? Answer, unknown. The fisherman didn't change his mind, but rather his bait.

"Ms Alden, Catherine Alden, you're under arrest. Linda, cuff her, quick." Then again to Catherine, Stuart says, "We're all professionals here. Let's not make this difficult."

"Don't touch that arm, please!" A wave of pain sweeps consciousness from her as she feels herself collapse.

"Let's get her down to the car. We'll have a doctor check her as soon as we're airborne." Seeing Catherine's car keys laying on the polished oak table, Stuart says, "I'll get her. You grab her keys and her coat and start driving around town. She won't give me any trouble."

"When should I start for the border?" Linda asks.

"It's seven-fifteen right now. Give me forty minutes, then head south, pickup the other car at Clinton. You'll have a couple of hours before he starts getting worried. I'll meet you in Bellingham tonight, as planned. You know where."

Stuart slips his arm under Alden's shoulders and hurries her towards his rented Leyland. She groans, but he has her propped in the car and is backing away from the lot when Linda emerges from the building, wearing Alden's gray wool coat. He doubts he has been seen, but with Linda looking for all the world like Alden, no one will know exactly what he or she saw.

He is in the street and starting uphill for the airport when the Lincoln that Alden and the amateur has been driving explodes, the explosion seemingly small at first, then building, pushing up and out, tearing away fenders and tires, breaking windows, its shockwave striking the Leyland with enough force to send tremors through the rented car. His first reaction is to press the accelerator to the floorboards, and in his rearview mirror, he sees fire and turmoil, commotion and onlookers rushing towards the condo's parking lot. But his look is brief. The Leyland is through the traffic light and uphill, leaving the lake and downtown behind. He can't go back to check on Linda. No one could have survived the blast. Plus, Alden is more important than a messy cleanup.

Now he worries about having been seen. The description of the Leyland will be circulated in five minutes, perhaps ten. Can they clear the tower that quickly? They will have to. While he can use agency privileges, he knows it's always best if knowledge of operations stays within the agency.

*

Fire trucks and city police prevent Mackean and Shoulders from returning to the condo. Mackean checks his watch: seven thirty-five. They have already waited seven minutes.

"Andrew, I don't like the looks of this. Bad, bad feeling. Can you tell what has happened?"

The banker is stuck between vehicles. The street ahead is blocked. Cars behind them prevent him from turning the Jag around. But the cars behind are beginning to themselves turn around and seek alternate routes. When he can finally jockey the Jag around, he says, "I believe I should take you to the airport."

Jay saw the same thing the banker did when Mackean was jockeying the Jag back and forth. The Lincoln he and Catherine had been driving...its smoldering remains are less than a foot high. "Cops will have questions. Maybe I ought to stay and question them." And he wonders whatever possessed his mouth to say anything so foolish.

"I'm certain the police will have questions, but I spoke at some length yesterday with Mrs. Lundstrom. She warned me about the danger your wife was in—and she believes your life is also at risk."

If the banker knows anything more, he doesn't reveal the knowledge. Instead, he follows traffic away from the lake, going first by the bank, letting himself in, then returning after a few minutes, turning north and starting uphill. He hands Jay an envelope larger than a #10, its paper of pale linen. "You will find, Mr. Shoulders, two bank drafts, one in Pounds Sterling, one in U.S. Dollars. We will hold open your third account with us in case you wish to return."

"If what I think happened, make the funeral arrangements, would you? Put her where she can see the lake. Whatever it costs. She doesn't have any other family." Jay pauses as the finality of the car bombing sinks farther in. "I'll come back in the spring, plant the flowers myself." He can't hold back the tears, wants to, but just can't.

A chartered, white Cessna 440 with no logo awaits them, its pilot and co-pilot somber as if they know what has happened. The plane, sleek, fast, seems awfully small inside; is so much smaller than the condo, than even the *Coyote's* wheelhouse. He wonders how the ex-troller is doing, if it has been located yet. He misses it, strange as that might be. Misses the freedom of not having to stay on roads or sidewalks. Maybe his wild roots again surfacing.

Mackean said there wouldn't be a problem with Customs. Obviously there wasn't a problem getting into Canada, not with the Beech setting down on the Yellowhead Highway the way they did. But returning with the bank drafts, enough money to more than attract attention, he hopes the banker appreciates the problems that could result.

By crossing the Gulf, the flight direct to Soldotna's towerless field takes only three hours fifty minutes, two hours of which disappear in the time change. The stop at Soldotna is only long enough to let him off before the Cessna continues on to Anchorage where it will go through Customs and answer questions about its route, questions that will cast suspicions on the charter service, the pilot and co-pilot. But those suspicions won't be enough to prevent the plane from returning to Vancouver after a thorough search that produces only the torn corner flap of the linen paper envelope.

Alone in the cold, the sky gray overcast with snow clouds sitting on the Kenai Mountains, Jay feels hollow. He doesn't hurt the way he did after Judy was killed, doesn't miss Judy as much as he did, seems somewhat comfortable thinking about her. He misses Catherine, but feels no deep pain. His time with her was a gift. Yes, a gift. That's what he decided last night. He wonders if he still believes that. Or if he believes he will walk in a vision with his son. Doesn't know. Just doesn't know what he believes.

He needs a ride: Billy is already up and about to visit Jill when he calls.

"Oh, your friend called," says Billy. "Guess they made a deal." Billy relays everything Jerry told him.

"Is that all?" He doesn't really want to know anything about Sarah; she's none of his business. But after the explosion this morning, he suspects she will be next. He couldn't save Catherine, couldn't prevent her from dying alone; there is nothing he can do to save Sarah's miserable life.

"Yeah, gets protection when she arrives in Anchorage."

"What time?" Jay's concerned. Edna's line is tapped. "Can you pick me up? You know where."

"Well, maybe. I guess Jill will understand."

"Ten minutes, then."

"Yeah, I'll be there in ten."

He has nothing to do, with no time to go anywhere, and with Catherine on his mind. He wanted to promise her that he won't let her die like Judy. He couldn't. And he was right not to.

In his mind, almost as if he is having another vision, he hears Catherine say, *Don't be surprised by what happens to Sarah. It'll probably look like an accident. The Organization won't let her inform, and don't think GRU has given up on her.* Then she, her voice, is gone. No image. Just the voice as if the words were spoken inside his head, not traveling through his ears.

She's alive. Catherine is alive—

That's crazy. He saw their Lincoln, a car he intended to buy; he liked the room inside. It was, as the banker informed him, a product of Canada.

Here comes Billy in his '56 Nomad...Jay doesn't know what to think. Hearing her voice—

There's an Eskimo story about a shaman who dived into the ground and would surface somewhere far away. Another shaman chased him. Don't remember the details, but guess I'm gonna have to become a shaman. But how does a fellow swim through the ground? Tunnels, I expect.

5.

The agency provided a G-2 for the flight from Williams Lake to Vancouver, where landing, Stuart hurries the sedated Catherine Alden to a clinic just south of Pearson Hospital. The clinic discreetly exists for clients who elect not to wait for socialized care.

After nearly an hour, the doctor emerges and says, "Whatever you have given her, don't do it again. Her shoulder is inflamed, but she has conceived. She will have to endure the pain if the embryo is to stand any chance of developing normally."

Stuart doesn't know what to say. After how badly affairs went earlier this morning, this is a development he had not anticipated...everyone is given a physical after a snatch. Cavities are found. Tumors occasionally. Bones that didn't heal right. Routine stuff mainly. But pregnancy. Her? This might be a first.

"How far along is she?"

"Early. Two weeks. Less than a month. We ran the test four times before we were certain." The doctor removes his latex gloves. "A closed reduction was attempted on her left shoulder. A heavy handed affair. She has considerable muscle tearing, and will be three months or more healing."

"Any restrictions as far as travel?" Stuart asks.

"Be careful of how she moves her arm. She should be fine otherwise...she has a lot of old bruising that looks like injuries deliberately inflicted. Do you know anything about those bruises? I have to report them."

Stuart takes a deep breath, exhales slowly, then removing a card from his wallet, he says, "Before you report them, call this number. Her husband beat her up. Domestic battery. My office has removed her from the situation and are trying to unite her with her family in the States." The number is of a NIA operative who will answer as the B.C. Ministry of Protective Services until a different cover is needed.

6.

She feels better, much better. After her long chat with Mackean yesterday, then her even longer and much more intense conversation with Pierre last evening and well into the night, Edna believes she has accomplished what she came to do. So as she helps Pierre dress this morning—he will be returning to the Peninsula with her; she has already packed his clothes, and has booked them on AAI's noon flight—she doesn't know what more she can do for Jay, or Dutch, or whatever his real name is. He might not even have a name, but he will have.

She had explained to Pierre last evening what she wanted, and what he, Pierre, had to offer, and he had agreed to her scheme, as improvable as it seemed when she first brought it up. Pierre had arranged for his associates to serve his few remaining clients, and he told her that for the first time since he was diagnosed terminal, he felt a sense of purpose, felt like he could help, could make a difference. He has known of Jay for five years and longer. He has handled her legal affairs during all of that period. And he has come to respect her judgment of a person's character. His only concern is whether Shoulders, after he is gone, will be able to properly represent clients. The Law isn't something that can be learned overnight. And clients will come to him looking for legal advice.

7.

Seven of seven: what follows after is the Jubilee—where, Jay wonders, did that thought come from. But he hasn't time to think about where as he directs Billy's red & white Nomad to a parking spot between two frost-covered fourwheeldrive pickups.

"What's up?" asks Billy.

"We're going flying." And he points towards the tied-down Tern as he explains what he has in mind, finishing by asking, "Now, exactly what did Jerry say?"

"He said, 'A deal's been made,' no, he said, 'struck.' 'A deal's been struck. Sarah's gettin' protection as soon as she lands in Anchorage tomorrow morning.' Definitely said, 'lands.'" Billy pauses, then adds, "That was last night. Sounds like she's flying into Anchorage, from Homer probably."

"No time stated?"

"I asked when, but he hung up—like he was scared of you."

"Let's hope we can get there in time."

"She'll probably fly Wobble-A-I. Land at Anchorage International, where the Greenies will meet her. She could be there by now. They have a flight up from the Peninsula every hour or so."

"Possible, but nobody ever saw her in Dutch much before noon so I don't think she likes to get out of bed in the morning."

"Not everybody gets up like you do."

"I need to see her before she turns herself in. Stop her if I can...and we may well be on a wild goose chase."

"I gotta be back in time to see Jill."

"Yeah, I wanta see that kid of yours, too."

Billy, despite some discomfort in his shoulder, has the Tern untied, warmed up and airborne in minutes. Jay knows he's acting irresponsibly. On another day, any other day, he wouldn't do this. But today isn't any other day, not considering what was left of their Lincoln. His romantic concept of right & wrong might be getting in the way of reason, but today, he can't die, can't even get caught. Just something he feels. Maybe Indian-magic.

But reason causes him to ask, "What kind of cannon are you packing, Billy?"

Proudly pulling a Model 29 Smith from the holster under his left arm, Billy says, as he passes Jay the .44 Mag, "In case we're jumped, I'm ready."

"You'd think that daughter of yours would have a smarter father."

"That ain't fair. You carry a .38 in your pocket."

"Not any more...and the cops are after me for using it. Get rid of this," Jay holds up the magnum.

"It's protection."

"I'm gonna protect you from yourself. Take that holster off, now." He sees Billy hesitate. *He's not the teenager I used to boss around.* "I'll buy the gun off you seeing how I need one. And all it's gonna do is get you in trouble. Probably from some pissed off Brownie. Take a bite outta your ass."

"You need the gun, it's yours." Billy unzips his parka and unbuckles the shoulder holster.

Jay examines the big Smith. Its action is stiff. "Still on your first box of shells?"

"How'd you know?"

"Tell your mom to give you a check. Whatever you paid."

They fly low over the Moose Range, then drop even lower as they cross Turnagain Arm. Incoming tide. Cake ice strewn about mud flats. Sheet ice covers the high tide line, and a foot-high wall of muddy water rushes towards the head of the Arm. Whirlpools, riffles, ice cakes, and more gray-brown glacial silt-laden water follow the initial wall.

The Tern climbs into Merrill Field's busy landing pattern after they pass Potter Flats. They will take a cab across town.

Jay adjusts the straps of the shoulder holster until it fits him, all the while trying to make its bulge as inconspicuous as possible. In consideration of airport security. His insulated Levi jacket, though, isn't sufficiently bulky to entirely hide the bulge. So when the cab lets them off on the International terminal's upper deck (in front of Northwest's ticket counter), he tells Billy: "Circulate. Keep your eyes open. I'm gonna plant myself before a rent-a-cop sees this damn gun."

"Dunno who we're looking for."

"You'll know them when you see them. Like deer hunting. Report back and we'll go from there." He has confused Billy. "Look for anyone trying not to look obvious. A stakeout."

Truth is, I don't know what I'm looking for. But he takes a seat near AAI's unmanned ticket counter while Billy strolls towards Gate 37.

Slumped in his seat, Jay notices oil workers clustered around seats with coin operated TVs. *Wished I'd worn a Stetson, shitkickers, down vest. Would look like them, snow birds migrating south, chirping about money and women, wrists banded with gold nugget watches, bright in their plumage of blue jeans and plaid Pendleton shirts, beer bellies, saucer-size belt buckles, braided leather bolos of Alaskan jade. They glitter as they strut like tom turkeys, gobbling about direct flights to Dallas-Fort Worth. How many of them are phony? Are they the protection awaiting Sarah?*

A uniformed janitor pushes a broom wrapped in a towel. Stops to sweep cigarette butts into a covered dustpan. Goes again. A woman fights the assembly of a dog cage in front of Wien's counter. A tall, short-haired blonde Moonie pins red carnations on the lapels of all male passengers passing in front of the snack bar. And except for Reeves' and AAI's, all ticket counters are manned and have lines in front.

Two Wien flight attendants try to coax a husky into the cage the woman assembled. An E-4 in uniform has trouble getting Northwest to verify his travel voucher. An older fellow with a neatly trimmed beard and cased flyrod (in December?) waits behind the E-4. No one hurries. *Yet I'm the only one with nothing to do.*

Billy moseys past, and gives a negative headshake as he continues on towards Western's ticket counter.

It was ten-thirty when they arrived. Eleven o'clock takes its time arriving. And a little over five hours ago I was kissing Catherine good-bye. This damn world sure has shrunk. Even the edges have shrunk.

She probably got here early this morning. There are too many people in the terminal to effectively protect anyone now...but seven, eight o'clock would be too early. Too many local flights arriving and departing. Same problem at nine with Outside flights. All of the newly arriving passengers couldn't be screened. So she could still be coming.

His reason and intuition are joined like two harnessed teams to pull in opposite directions, first one way, then the other. The time of least activity is noon, and noon hasn't yet arrived. *I'll stay at least that long.*

To his left, in front of Western's counter, a small bitch Siberian Husky is forced into a large, white, fibreglas cage. To his right, a smartly attired flight attendant pushes a suitcase on a chrome-plated walker towards the Air France counter. In front of him, the blonde Moonie continues to panhandle male passengers. She seems especially attracted to roughnecks; singles them out, gets real close, and gives a pitch to buy free literature. And one oil worker after another slips her money apparently to get her to leave them alone. None seem interested in the literature.

He hears the blonde Moonie's accent, but can't quite place it. The woman is not from the Lower Forty-Eight.

The elderly black custodian empties ash cans into a small, portable dumpster.

Billy passes again. Again shakes his head no.

He doesn't know exactly what he's looking for. As he told Billy, it is like deer hunting. He trusts his intuition to know when the time comes.

He leans back, bored, as two airport security police walk slowly past. One glances at him, but seems not to see him. And as soon as they are out of sight, a big-butted policewoman hurries after them.

Taxicabs continue to discharge an antagonistic mix of oil workers and backpackers, kids with lofty ideals stuffed in rucksacks topped by rolled foam mattresses. Neither mingles with the double-knit blazer-and-slacks set that scurry between the cocktail lounge and restaurant. Intelligent, glib, goal-oriented and sexless. Corporate eunuchs. And that Moonie, with her free literature and endless supply of carnations, tirelessly smiles as she panhandles. Nearly every male, including Billy, wears one of her carnations.

Eleven o'clock becomes eleven-thirty.

This is it: The three well-dressed men who have just entered through the door nearest Western's ticket counter have fed written all over them. One stations himself in front of Western's baggage scales. One enters the gift shop and picks up a copy of *High Society*, and reads from the middle of the magazine. The third man steps behind Western's ticket counter and commences shuffling papers... the two Western employees appear to have been expecting him.

No, this isn't right. This is stupid. Why Western's counter? If she arrives from Homer on AAI, she'll have to walk the length of the building. The feds have set her up for a hit, that's it.

According to AAI's posted schedule, which, he knows, has little to do with anything, the commuter airline has three planes arriving within the next forty-five minutes. She'll be on one of those flights... *she's been sold out, the fucking bastards! I don't believe this.*

Where will the hit take place? How? The guy with the flyrod, I'll bet. Where is he?

Billy drifts towards him. He motions for him to sit down.

Innocently enough, Billy sits two seats away and doesn't look at him, but in lowered voice, asks, "What do you see?"

"Where's the fisherman?"

Billy nods towards the restaurant.

"I think she's on her way. Fellow in the gift shop—"

"Yeah."

"Spill a cup of coffee down the front of his shirt. I wanta see what he does."

"All right, but why?"

"He's trying awfully hard not to look outta place."

"Anybody with him?"

"The guy in front of Western's scales—"

Rising to go before he finishes, Billy says, "I'll take care of them."

I'd better find that fisherman, have a look at his rod.

Billy, watching the fellow in front of the baggage scales, not where he is going, almost knocks the blonde Moonie off her feet. But in an amazing display of balance, the Moonie checks her fall and bounces into a karate stance, holds the stance for a heartbeat, then seems to realize what she is doing. By the time Billy turns and says, "Excuse me," she has regained her pacifist composure, and is straightening her literature. Jay is impressed. If he hadn't been watching Billy, he would've missed seeing her balancing act and defensive stance. *Do not suppose I have come to bring peace to the world. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword*—the words of Christ. He smiles. She's ready to defend herself against Christ's return.

At the snack bar, Billy pays for an oversize coffee, snaps a lid on the cup and beelines for the gift shop. He passes between Wien's and Northwest's passenger service islands, and is briefly out of Jay's sight. When he reappears, he is in the gift shop, and in the middle of tripping over some unseen obstacle. The hot coffee disappears behind the girlie magazine. Not a drop seems to spill on the floor until after it scalds the victim's chest.

The fellow curses Billy as he jerks his shirt away from his chest. His magazine falls. And while appearing to apologize, Billy backs into a floor display of postcards, that topples, sending postcards flying.

The sales lady charges into the mess, and hovers over it like a hen over newly hatched chicks. She clucks and cackles, and Billy knocks over a display of stuffed Alaskan bears. The fellow from in front of the scales hurries to the gift shop, and in Billy's effort to avoid the sales lady and not bump into his earlier victim, he backs into the fellow, knocking both of them to the floor. Somehow, their legs become tangled. Billy, apparently trying to pull himself to his feet, grabs a hold of another display and pulls it over, then shouting, "My shoulder, my shoulder," bounces to his feet and yells, "I'm gonna sue!"

The commotion draws a crowd. An Alaska Airlines flight has just arrived, and the crowd detains them as they file through the security doors like cattle herded down a loading chute to mill in the area around the gift shop.

Jay misses seeing some of the faces. Hope I didn't miss her.

An AAI flight has also arrived. Its passengers are just now reaching the area of the snack bar, and among its passengers are Jerry and Sarah.

Almost missed her. He stands, but waits while the Moonie gives them her free-literature pitch.

While pinning a carnation on Sarah's sweater, the Moonie clumsily sticks Sarah with the pin. Apologizing profusely, the Moonie makes no further attempt to panhandle Jerry. Instead, she turns and departs down the escalator. And it registers, but not quite, somewhere in Jay's mind that Sarah is the first female to receive a carnation.

As soon as Jerry and Sarah are clear of the Moonie, he hurries to intercept them. Catching hold of Sarah's free arm, he says, "Hold it, gotta talk to you."

Jerry can't take his eyes off the bulge under Jay's arm. *Kid's afraid of me.* To Jerry, he says, "Just want to warn her than Catherine doesn't think the feds can protect her."

Before he can say more, he feels Sarah's arm go limp. He turns towards her. She seems out of it, unable to hear what is said. He shakes her arm. "You all right?"

"I'd like to sit down," she says weakly.

Jerry takes hold of her shoulders. They steady her, guide her towards a chair. But her knees wobble, then buckle. A dazed expression spreads across her face. Her eyes begin to glaze. Slumping against Jerry, she moans, "help me."

Pushing Jerry away, Jay orders, "Get a doctor, quick, and call the cops."

Jerry takes off running as Jay lays Sarah on the floor, peels off his jacket, rolls it up and slips it under her head.

A crowd forms around them.

Tilting her face, he asks, "Can you hear me? What's happening to you? Do you know?"

She tries to nod. And in words softer than a whisper, words so soft he has to place his ear to her mouth to hear them, she mumbles, "ivory's in your boat, more in pots ten pots wet stored ten pots Akun akun ivory black bags akun ivory trident—"

She dies.

He stands. The crowd is two, three people deep and growing. Jerry is returning with a cop. Billy attempts to push through the bodies. And he sees people passing by the congestion, trying hard not to look.

He backs into the crowd, and with a jerk of his head, indicates to Billy that it is time to split. But the cop spots the big Smith, points and hollers, "Hold it."

*

Early Friday, Louise, fired with enthusiasm for the project she is bringing back, boards Alaska Airline's flight from Juneau to Anchorage. It has been a good week for her. She got to meet Jay's brother and his wife, who were very nice to her, when she flew down to Ketchikan on Monday. John's report was debated through the weekend and for the first part of the week: it wasn't accepted as definitive until last night. So despite being asked to remain in the capital until the Advisory Board finishes their winter meeting, which would mean \$150 a day to her, she would rather be with John, give him the good news; and as she sits in her comfortable seat above the clouds, she hopes he has missed her.

Landing gear lowered, the captain announces that the local time is 11:50 AST, the temperature plus seventeen degrees Fahrenheit.

She doesn't care what it is in Anchorage, only a stop on her way to Kodiak. She hurries along the jetway, passes quickly through the security area, runs into the congestion behind Wien's service island, tries to push her way through, can't, and becomes part of the crowd. That is when she sees Jay.

*

Pettersen stops sorting the meaningless forms, and calls airport security when his agent leaves his post. Something is wrong. First in the gift shop. Then behind Wien's island. And he fights through the crowd to investigate, reaches the stricken woman, looks around for a doctor, and there, in front of him is the face his composite artist has given him: H.J. Shoulders.

An instant, a beat of his heart, he stares, speechless, unable to believe his eyes, unsure of what to do. Bumped by an airport security officer, he looks away, breaking the spell. And he hollers, "Grab that man," as he points back to Shoulders.

Edna helps Pierre from the cab, takes his bag, and steadying him, watching his steps, pushes the glass terminal door open with her back and nearly bumps into the man standing in the middle of the floor. Glancing around and up, she sees the back of Jay's head. But before she can speak, he moves to intercept one of the arriving passengers.

"Are you acquainted?" asks Pierre, nodding towards Jay.

"Yes, that's— " she never finishes her answer. Before she can, the passenger Jay intercepted begins to collapse.

*

The officer kneels to check Sarah. Realizing he must draw the officer's attention away from Jay, not knowing how, Billy does nothing until the fellow in the business suit hollers. No time now. He shoves an elderly woman of considerable girth between Jay and the cop. The woman isn't easily moved, and apparently doesn't appreciate being pushed. She turns, hollering unintelligibly towards the crowd where Billy hides, as she brandishes a full shopping bag.

The officer tries to push the woman out of his way, but she turns her wrath on him, verbally vilifying him.

Billy grabs a little girl of five or six, and with her still clutching her mother's hand, tosses her across the kneeling cop's back.

Jay turns to face the person who yelled, *Grab that man.*

Pettersen's in the process of drawing his snubnose .38 when he sees the big Smith in the shoulder holster. Remembering procedural policy concerning bystanders and that his dead specials had been firearms experts, knowing he is not, he melts into the crowd, hearing in his mind their laughing voices.

Sensing the difficulty Jay's in, seeing the arriving army of airport police, Louise tackles one of the male passengers next to her, and screams, "I GOT HIM! I GOT HIM!"

Several men near her also grab the man she tackled as the police converge on the mass of bodies thrashing on the floor. Jay backs even farther into the crowd, turns around, and is face to face with Edna. She shoves a set of car keys in his hand, stuffs Pierre's ticket into his shirt pocket, and says, "Five minutes, gate 37."

Pierre drapes his topcoat around Jay's shoulders, and says, "Your name's Pierre Lamont, Pierre Lamont."

Edna speaks at the same time: "Brown Grenada. My name's on the plates. We'll ride with Billy."

Jay grabs the Bavarian-style sports hat from Pierre's hairless head, slips his arms into the sleeves of the topcoat, and walks briskly towards where AAI's flight has already begun boarding.

A young lady with a clipboard asks his name. He reads it from the ticket: "Pierre Lamont." And she waves him through the double doors, and points to the idling Twin Otter. There is no security check.

8.

Breakfast is still being served while Jay stands in the hall and stares at the babies in the nursery. Billy and Edna are with Jill, who will come home today.

The babies, each of them, are so tiny. Helpless. Parents as gods. The continuation of life, our form of immortality. He had his opportunity. Twice. Almost a third time.

A long time ago, he stood in front of the nursery in the Newport hospital. Each of them, healthy, pink, alive. Buried now in the family plot alongside Mom and Dad, Rosie Catfish, her husband, and his grandfather and great-grandfather.

He turns to go. He has four hundred rounds of .44 Mag ammo to shoot. But before he takes a step, Billy approaches, stands beside him, and nodding towards the babies behind the glass wall, says, "Didn't think they'd change so much."

"They all grow up."

"No...you wouldn't understand how much they change everything, make me think about life, what I want from life, even if there is anything after life."

"Might understand more than you'd think. Give me your car keys. I'll be back before dark."

Billy hands him the Nomad's keys. "Brakes pull."

He takes the keys, crosses the Kenai River, turns left, and follows the Funny River Road past the Soldotna airport and into the Moose Range. Parks at the end of the horse trail. Hikes through mixed birch and spruce a quarter of a mile. A skiff of new snow covers the broken ground. Nippy. A small sun. Today, he is like the shadows, black and one dimensional.

In a grove of black birch suffering from heart rot, supporting a host of parasites, surrounded by marketable white spruce, he selects a tree good only for moose browse, carves a two-inch square head-high in its bark, then steps off twenty-five paces, turns and fires deliberate, aimed shots.

Two, three, four, five, six—the jacketed slugs tear chunks from the back of the foot-thick birch. The six-shot group can be covered with a half dollar.

He reloads, steps off a hundred paces, and fires six more aimed shots, holding the big Smith with both hands.

His second shot is high, cuts the edge of the trunk. The other five are centered and just below the blemish.

He repeats the six shot groups, three, four, ten times, and believes he has the feel of the Smith. So he turns, draws, and fires a cylinder load double-action. Scatters shots all over. A man at a hundred paces would've been safe. He is disgusted he wasted the ammo.

Like when practicing before shipping out for 'Nam, he shoots as a person in a trance. Shoots until he is out of ammo. Then hefts the big Smith in his open hand, weighing it. He intends to avenge Catherine. Sarah, too. Especially now that he knows where the ivory is.

* * *