

Aleutian Rogue

WITH

The Amanat

SERIALIZED

Chapter Four

The wind pushes a short sea hard against the bow as it buffets the wheelhouse when, late afternoon, Jay rises from the lipped chart table, his memories safely tucked away in dark crevices of his mind. He isn't sure whether the storm has picked up: he hasn't been paying attention, and Muskushin Bay funnels wind over the low pass separating the bays, making the head of Captain's Bay a virtual test tunnel. So when he steps onto the hatch to relieve himself into the bay, Mount Mushushin rising high to block the low sun, he lets the wind whip his T-shirt as he stands, a man in the shadow of the mountain, grasping the wind, clutching it, capturing its strength in his hands, that strength flowing through him and passing on, bending grass stalks on the nearest of the Rat Islands, pushing a chop across the bay, smacking dock pilings of Pacific Pearl's Captains Bay plant, then rolling on towards the new bridge and Pan Alaska, Summers Bay, Priest Rock and Akutan, connecting him to things and spirits and natural forces. On the beach under a willow sits a fox, watching him. He sees the fox; their eyes meet. And for a moment, he is that fox. Then spreading his arms, extending them, his hands full of wind, he begins to shiver. Goosebumps form as the storm chill settles deep within him, freezing emotions, reason, pain.

When he feels completely numb, he releases the wind and ducks inside where he again fries potatoes and cod as the sun drops behind Muskushin. Listening to the diced potatoes sizzle, he works on the tangled hank of yarn Sarah gave him, most of which was never stated. Whatever she has that those two yahoos want, she still has it. He doubts what she has is drugs—her business is selling them. She has no emotional attachment to them, certainly not enough to take a beating. And she left the island with only what she wore, which wasn't much, so what she has is either still here, hidden on or around the island, or in her mind. If those two yahoos are narcs, they have an unusual way of representing the government, and a not very persuasive method of soliciting cooperation. It would seem to him if they wanted her to testify, they would have offered different incentives; so he suspects what they were after is a tangible thing she hid. But her business really isn't his. It might have been Davy Godell's, but even Davy's drowning isn't his business. After all, meddling is the business of kings and Indian agents.

He has time to kill, a whole winter. He has pots out, but only fifteen of them, all down the channel from Pearl's Dutch Harbor plant to their Captains Bay plant—they take him all of four hours to pull every third day, and that is adding the extra two hours necessary to run around Amaknak Island now that he can't get under the bridge. And he takes a computer chess set from a drawer. Avoiding his usual queen pawn opening, he moves pawn to king-four. The computer plays pawn to king-three.

He is, he knows, crazy to even think about trespassing in the king's domain, but, then, he acquired a taste for venison a long time ago. He hasn't had much lately, just the one caribou

he shot in Inner Canoe Bay and spring-time caribou tastes like burnt bones. The closest deer are on Kodiak, where the season doesn't close for another five, almost six weeks. He could actually hunt in season, not that dates on a Roman sun calendar mean much to seasons that follow the march of moons.

Pawn to queen-four. Pawn to queen-four. Knight to queen-bishop-three. Bishop to knight-five.

The *Coyote* rocks as short seas continue to slap its bow. The shadow of Mushuskin has darkened; twilight has faded into night, leaving the lights of the few houses along the bay road, like Christians on a hill, standing lonely in the darkness.

He would like to see John, drink coffee with him, talk about something other than who made which cannery rat and how much bait it took to get her panties off...why are those two yahoos so damn interested in Sarah? Did she score on them instead of them on her? She must have pinched someone heavy.

P-QR3; BxNch. PxB; PxP. What to do? Play it safe? Q-N4; N-KB3. If they want a fight, sobeit. QxNP; R-N1. Q-R6; QN-Q2. He pushes the chess set aside, pulls on a clean, heavy wool halibut shirt and a clean pair of black Frisco jeans, then does something he hasn't in years: instead of threading a belt through the loops, he digs his faded red suspenders from his footlocker and attaches them. *LOGGERS' WORLD*. The lettering can still be read. He stuffs the little Smith in his right front pocket and extra cartridges in his left. He doesn't expect trouble, but he intends to be ready for it. Plus, the Smith is intimation insurance.

With a Navy watch cap pulled low over his ears and his dark green raincoat around him, he unlashes the pram from the wheelhouse roof, and slides it over the stern rail, starting its kicker before he turns loose its bowline.

The sea catches the pram, tosses it backwards. As if a car on a roller-coaster, the pram dips and dives: its bow points up, down, up, down, up, down as barrels of spray drench him, stinging his eyes, soaking shirt and jeans, T-shirt and shorts. Wind snaps his coat, slaps him. He can't see where he's going; he keeps the pram pointed into the wind until he runs aground. He tilts the kicker, and is pushed back to sea and half way to the *Coyote* before the outboard starts again on the second pull. Gripping the tiller handle with one hand, he bails with the other as the bow goes up, down, up, down.

When he beaches the second time, he tilts the pram as he jumps out, dumping the loose water, then pulls the boat above the high-tide line and ties its bowline to a willow clump. Five miles to town: he hasn't walked that far in years, not since he started wearing a belt.

Once past Pearl's Captain's Bay plant and Crowley's dock, he skirts the bridge construction camp and pauses on the knoll above the old herring saltery. Across the bay, the lights of UniSea's Inn fall from its windows and lie on the grass and gravel like garbage overflowing cans. The shadows of the subbarn, open down the middle of its length; the mostly darkened Liberty ship, converted to house crab killing lines and cannery rats; the crabbers, picking lights constantly on; the shrimpers tied to East Point's slender dock—all of the play between lights and shadows that comprises this place he has called home feels strange this evening. Something has changed during this day spent with memories in his hands. Yes, he has an interest in what happens here, a fairly substantial interest, but he doesn't belong here, probably doesn't belong anywhere, a Rogue lost on an aborted spirit quest somewhere in Laos.

The Army didn't need to teach him to kill, but they never taught him how to stop. They turned him loose with his spirit still half a world away, with him stuck between worlds. They told him not to tell anyone where he was, and they left him listed as missing in action for another two years. And therein lies the conflict: he doesn't know the stories needed to make

him Rogue or Umatilla, stories about how to recapture his wandering spirit, itself all confused about who it is and where it should be. The only stories he knows come from the Chandlers, early Methodists who came by covered wagon to settle the Willamette Valley, bringing with them axes and saws and books about martyrs. Sure, it would be easy to lay up in Beaver Inlet for a month. Eat halibut. Get caught up on sleep. Easy & smart. But he doesn't know those stories, the ones that tell him how to make his mind go to sleep so he won't see the bruising of Sarah's ribs. No, the stories he knows are about acting without thinking, about crossing a bridge because he doesn't know what will happen when he does.

Bridges connect worlds, and life would be easier if, on all entrances and exits, there were guards who only let across those ready to go. Judy wasn't ready to go; Kurt, Kent weren't ready. But maybe he is.

If he knew a Rogue death song, he would sing it. But there is no one here, where the world ends, to teach one to him. The death songs he knows are for a world blown apart by cluster bombs—they all begin with calls for peace.

Satisfied he's alone in the wind, he returns to the road and crosses the officially unopened bridge, hikes past the subbarn, past the crab pots and on to the Inn, where, again slipping in the kitchen's back door, he asks the cook, "Do you have a flashlight I could use for an hour?"

The cook, *Hold On There's* baby sister, understands English better than she speaks it. Instead of answering with words, she steps over to the line of five gallon plastic buckets containing what appears like garbage but what he knows are pickling something or the other (fish, seal, octopus, village dog), and she picks up a 6-volt hand lantern and offers it to him.

"Thanks. I'll get this back to you right away." His intention is to have a look at Sarah's bunker, see what needs to be packed, and make arrangements with, probably, *Hold On There* to forward her things to Pearl's Kodiak plant, where John or Sarah or someone else can claim them.

But after cautiously approaching the dank, concrete cave where Sarah lived for the past two years, drawing the Smith without thinking as he approaches, pausing alongside the door, checking the knoll and the hill, seeing no one yet feeling he's being watched; after easing the door open, again scanning the hill, seeing nothing (nothing shows); after stepping inside and pushing on the lantern and letting his eyes adjust to the brightness of the beam and his nose to become accustomed to the smell of rat dung, he sees that everything is rubble. Ripped. Cut apart. Piled in the middle of the floor. Furnishings beaten into kindling wood. Books and papers scattered across the wet floor. There is nothing to pack and send her. Someone, indeed, wants something she has, and he is certain that someone didn't find it.

Returning the lantern, crossing through the kitchen, entering the restaurant hopefully unnoticed, ignoring his usual table, he descends the three steps to the lower level and takes the booth nearest the kitchen. But he again feels the eyes, the averted stares, the lingering gazes, fugitive glances—all like arrows piercing his back. He is a star everyone watches, or is he just suffering from an overly active imagination? Wouldn't hurt for him to be as cautious as a fox among wolves. So he sits in the corner, half hidden by the philodendron, wondering if the plant cells of philodendrons really feel pain, something John told him years ago.

Glancing around—*well, whoever you are, I'm here*. If they want him, they better come by right away. He won't be here tomorrow, and probably not much longer tonight.

When Peggy finally notices him, she brings his usual pot of coffee, and asks, "Trying to hide?"

"Expecting company." He isn't hungry: his stomach still struggles with the greasy potatoes and cod.

"I hope they have better manners today than yesterday."

"Sorry about them. Do you know who they were?" The thing he will miss about Dutch, about Unalaska is coffee here at the Inn, not that the coffee itself is exceptional.

"No. The tall one's been on the island for, maybe, three weeks. The other one, I dunno. Don't think he's been here very long." She pours a cup of coffee from the pot. "The tall one, he's been asking the type of questions a snitch would." Using the towel she brought from the kitchen, she takes a swipe at the opposite side of the table. "Holler when you're ready to order."

An uneventful half-hour passes as he drips seawater onto the booth seat and floor. He needs to piss, but fears the arrows, the eye-beams, fetched with rumors. So he sits, sipping coffee, wondering what those two yahoos thought when the *Coyote* drifted away, wondering why he doesn't stand up, march straight to the head, then keep right on going. He owes Sarah nothing more, owes fifty bucks or so to the Inn here, and owes the cannery one survival suit. The cannery owes him maybe twelve thousand, all of which he can collect at Kodiak. The *Coyote's* tanks are full: he keeps them topped off during cold weather to cut down on condensation.

"May I join you?" The woman's eyes appear tired though they smile professionally. Gray eyes. The woman is old enough to be attractive and to wear fur, her red hair having already darkened to auburn, thereby complimenting the fox collar of her coat, open, revealing a diamond necklace with matching pin and earrings. Jay seldom sees a woman wearing a skirt in Dutch Harbor, let alone a gray silk dress, showing cleavage, the dress plain but elegant. "You're a celebrity today."

"I feel like one, my fifteen minutes of fame, huh?" He hadn't expected her, who obviously must have arrived on today's flight. If she had been on the island yesterday, he would've known; he would have heard the rumors...he assumes Louise got off okay. She isn't here telling him that he doesn't listen so she is probably in Anchorage by now. The city deserves her, maybe even a few more like her. Its officials don't listen to its residents. But if this woman (her smile is intoxicating) wants to talk to him, she will have to wait. "Excuse me for a moment. I'll be right back."

Her puzzled eyes watch him rise, then follow him across the lower level, up the steps and out of the dining room. He feels her eyes, other eyes, and his about-to-burst bladder. His ears burn, and he wonders what is next. He doesn't expect, while ridding himself of coffee, the teenage infatuation he feels, which is ridiculous, about the dumbest case of being smitten he has ever heard about. He certainly wouldn't have expected it of himself, who usually, until yesterday, has a throttle-hold on his emotions.

Shaking the last reluctant drops into the urinal, he mutters, "You're a damn fool." But there's something about her that is hard to dismiss. A spirit, perhaps. Certainly something beyond the visible spectrum of light, beyond sensory perception.

Yes, a spirit. Maybe she's a spirit woman who will bridge dimensions.

He needs the return of his spirit, needs the songs or stories to call it home. Then maybe he could, like Ivan Chickenof, hear or see these spirits whose presence he feels.

Returning to the booth, before sitting, he lifts the coffee pot to pour a cup, hesitates. That fox in him causes aroused suspicions, which in turn causes him to catch Peggy's attention: "How about a fresh pot?"

She exchanges pots, then asks his guest, "A drink before you order?"

"Whiskey-sour." The woman angles her chair slightly, not a lot but enough that her face will be in profile, the harshness of her high cheek bones masked by angle, lighting, makeup. "You were, I'm told, the last person to see Sarah McPhearson."

Wind presses against windows, bows panes, bangs the *Resolution* against the *Galaxy*, crabber against floating processor, then hurriedly passes on, leaving dancing lights on the choppy sea.

When Peggy returns with the drink, Jay says, "Peggy, I'd like you to meet ahh..."

"Catherine." She scowls as if belittled by his means of introduction

Peggy, being her usual smiling self, says, "Jay said he was expecting you when I asked if he was hiding."

He could kiss Peggy as Catherine's scowl fades to disapproving bewilderment. He will, in time, know what her connection is to Sarah, but right now he enjoys bathing in her aura, which radiates from her despite the wear that shows around her edges.

When Peggy is beyond earshot, Catherine bristles: "You—expecting me? I don't believe it."

Holding up his open right hand as if to catch her aura, his fingers like the threads of a spirit catcher, he says, "Lucky hunch, suppose?"

"I didn't know I'd be here until a few minutes ago. You couldn't have known, either."

"God knew." What else can he say? That he did the Indian thing and put his ear to the ground and heard her coming. That is even less believable and would be a whole lot less truthful.

"Maybe in another life." She sips her drink. Coming here wasn't her idea. She didn't expect much when she boarded the Reeves flight in Seattle. One time before she had landed at Cold Bay, a refueling stop on a G-2 flight to Tokyo, but she hadn't gotten out, hadn't seen the lovely facilities there, corrugated steel and wind, where she waited for the flight to Dutch Harbor. And then this, a drink with a fisherman she is supposed to impress. If she makes nice with him, will he tell her where McPhearson hid three tons of ivory, their Western Alaska profits for the past two years? She doubts he knows. The ivory probably never got loaded onto his boat—he wouldn't still be alive if it had. And she repeats herself, "In another life."

"We only get one—"

"That's how little you know." She wishes she hadn't said that. She does need to play patty-cake with him. "I'm sorry. It's been a long day. We were hours getting out of Cold Bay."

"Then we need to spend more time together."

"Maybe in that other life." She sips her drink, about which she can say, what? The glass appears clean. "I'm sorry. It really has been a long day."

"You can be more original than that." He stares into her eyes until she drops them.

She sips her drink, shakes her hair, and avoids his eyes when she tilts her head to look at the ceiling. Her smile returns. "Yes, in another life maybe I could be more original."

He hears what he thinks is Boston in her voice, his SOG lieutenant being from there. "Your mother still in DAR?"

Catherine hesitates. Her scowl returns, and in a low voice, she says, "She withdrew."

He feels lucky. Should he try again? "Mayflower Society?"

"Have we met before?" She wants to set her glass down, but she doesn't know where. The table appears downright unsanitary.

"Not that," Jay senses her discomfort—*yes, there is something about you besides your looks, something I feel, an attraction, something you seem unaware of it, but something resembling telepathy*, "you'd remember."

"I'm at the disadvantage." She was going to inquire about his parents, but she knows, and can't explain why she knows, that he is Indian. His coloring is indeterminate, but his face

looks Apache, or some Southwest tribe like that. And she wonders if he deals peyote. The Organization could supply him if he does.

She doesn't have time for twenty questions or a lot of what-ifs: "Let's cut this bullshit—did Sarah make a deal with you? If she did, I want to make the same deal."

"How was your flight from Seattle?"

"The Electras—" She meets his eyes. "Whoever you are, you don't understand your predicament. I'm your only hope. If I can't find Sarah and recover what is ours, this situation will become ugly very quickly...and you'll be a loser. Do you want that?"

"Your eyes have tremendous depth when you're scared."

She is now sure he knows nothing. "I'll be in my room if you have anything to tell me. I'm sure you already know its number." She stands.

"Stick around."

She smiles, and leaves.

He hears the rustle of her dress long after she's gone, and he wonders if he is in love with that dress. He can't imagine the two of them ever hooking up, mental telepathy being a weak force. He would like to be in love with her, but she will never give him the time to get to know her. He wonders if anyone really can know her. Her mind has secrets.

Two lucky guesses. That's all it took to run her off.

She doesn't, he is certain, want him to walk away. She wants him in her room where she intends to promise much more than she will deliver...he does know now more than before: Sarah intended to make a deal with him. Evidently the two yahoos interrupted whatever she planned. But how, he wonders, did Davy fit into all of this? In whatever is happening, there is some heavy hitting, or Davy was plain unlucky.

He asks for her room number at the desk.

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Truly tired, on quaking ground professionally, about to lose everything, she has tomorrow to learn where their shitass dealer hid their ivory. The fisherman is their only lead—he knows nothing. All he wanted to talk about was her family. At least the crab legs she had for dinner earlier were excellent.

From where does he know her? Society page? University? After her father was indicted...thinking harms the mind, and hers is already beyond repair.

What a hole! This town rates high on a lengthy list of armpits...that fisherman might present an additional problem, but Hank will take care of him if she doesn't tell Hank otherwise. Them or us. It's always the same. She will dislike, maybe even hate seeing him get it: he probably is an innocent.

She fumbles her key, and doesn't feel their presence until her hand's pinned on the doorknob. Her left arm, jerked into a half-Nelson. Stretched ligaments. Tuned in pain. A hand clamps her mouth shut before she can scream.

"We just wanta talk to you."

Shoved into her room, she stumbles as she reaches for the gun on her thigh—

When she comes to, her skirt is around her waist, her head throbs, and she hears someone say, "Quick, he's comin'," as she is lifted onto her bed. She hears footsteps that seem to explode inside her head.

"What happened?"

She opens her eyes. *You came, bless you.* And she closes her eyes as she mumbles, "Give me a minute."

"I'll call the cops."

"No, please don't. I'm okay."

"Were you—"

"No." She feels him cradle her; she wants to drift off.

"Did you see who they were?"

"No." *I can't, can't talk. It's hurts too much.* Drifting, drifting. Dizziness. *I want to tell him. What do I want to tell him?* "Let me out..."

"I'll get a doctor."

"No, no."

"Yes."

She feels his arm go, reaches for it, can't find it, feels panic, blackness.

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At the front desk, Jay hollers, "Give me your phone." He should've been with her, he knows he should've been, and he suppresses the continuation of his thought, that he should have been with her as he should have been with Judy those last few minutes. Why did they try to rape her? That was stupid on their part.

"You know," the black-haired desk clerk reminds him, "there's no doctor, only a nurse at the clinic, and some EMT's here."

"I KNOW. Here," handing the phone back to the clerk, "call Chief Closa." That minute or two it took him to ask for her room, that would've made the difference.

"What do you want me to tell him?" The desk clerk is genuinely concerned as she dials.

"To get over here."

Behind him, he hears her ask, "Why?" as he takes stairs two at a time.

When he nears the door to her room, he notices that it's ajar. He closed that door, he knows he did. So he doesn't stop until he reaches the end of the hall where he opens the door to the outside stairs.

Nothing. No one. Did she leave? Or did they come back?

Slowly, softly, he steals back along the carpeted hallway. With the Smith in his right hand, he approaches her door, stops to its hinge side, and waits, unsure of what to do, his ear against the wall.

Damn, it's quiet in there.

Minutes made tense. No voices. Thoughts. A bead of sweat runs across his cheek like a tear. The drop lands on his nose.

A muffled thud. From the other side of the wall, behind the door, the sound someone makes when they bump plasterboard. He cocks the Smith, holding its trigger back.

Again, the dull thud. Someone shifted positions, someone waiting behind the door for him. So she is bait for their trap. They roughed her up pretty good just to make her bait.

What now? TV cops kick doors down, but this one isn't even latched. They're inviting him in.

Clumps, thumps from across the room. A scuffle. A slap. Another. Flesh hard against flesh. They're raping her.

Although his hand is steady, he quivers: if he could reach through the wall...it is the wall that frustrates him. Always the wall.

Through the plasterboard, he hears a man say, "He ain't comin'."

They are, they're raping her to get at him. He'll pinch their fucking heads off.

Fainter, from farther in the room, a snapped, "Shut up."

Bedsprings squeak. Another slap followed quickly by two more. A muffled cry. He remembers Sarah's ribs, and wants to shoot through the wall.

More thuds of flesh striking flesh. An urge to charge through the door. Fear of the trap. He's stymied. Cold angry, he sees Catherine's face on Judy's maimed body. He's responsible, and it is the wall that stops him.

Get back, get outta my way—and wipe that blood off her.

He wants to hold her, to bring her back to life. The body bag. Flashing lights. Blocked traffic. They tried to stop him from seeing her, or seeing his boys till later. Ed, Dennis, George, Howard—they brought Judy up the hill in a stretcher, and they tried to keep him away, to keep him behind a wall.

Always the wall.

But two half-inch sheets of plasterboard will hardly slow the Smith's jacketed hollowpoint if it doesn't hit a stud.

His hand stretched, he spans the distance between studs, then calculates where the fellow behind the door stands. Catches his breath and tightens his finger. The shot sounds like every door in the Inn slammed at once. Then floundering! thrashing.

He shoves the door open with the muzzle of the Smith. The fellow beside the bed, pistol in hand. He shoots before the fellow does. Shoots him through the left temple. Head snaps back. Brains, bone fragments splatter the far wall, steam. The splotch on the wall steams.

Her mouth taped shut, the side of her face reddened, gown torn, necklace gone, hands tied behind her back with her string belt, Catherine struggles, her head hanging over the edge of the bed. Shoving the Smith inside his shirt, he crosses the room as running footsteps pound along the hallway.

A head pops into the doorway.

"Quick, he's getting away," Jay points towards the outside stairs. Heartbeats like slaps, thoughts splattered on the wall—he doesn't recognize Walt until later.

Running steps. Towards the outside door. He unties her hands, and barks, "Call the cops," to the next two arrivals as he pulls the tape from her mouth. To the fourth person, he yells, "They raped her." Suddenly, the doorway fills with faces, and he hollers, "Who saw that happened?"

The gathering crowd murmurs as someone reports, "Closa's on his way."

He grabs Catherine by one arm, and roughly drags her through the new arrivals and towards the outside steps. The surprised crowd parts so they can pass. He sees Walt standing on the upper landing—what, he wonders, is Walt doing in town—and brushes past him as he half carries, half drags Catherine down the stairs and towards the king crab pots.

She's barefoot. Can't run. But he's running. Hard, fast. Far, fast. With an arm around her waist, he carries her, and runs like a halfback, swinging her over obstacles, as he cuts across the rows of stacked pots. Pursuit. Shouts. Sirens. Steps. Footsteps. Running footsteps. And he hurdles bundles of tanner boards and coils of line, wood line spools and broken chunks of concrete.

Breaking from the pots, he skirts the subbarn, where weeds and grass entangle his feet, hindering him. But pursuing footsteps flush him across the road and up the knob. Red and blue strobes flash through the darkness. Howling sirens vie with the wind. Yellow shafts probe between the pots. Pinkish orange picking lights cast long, eerie shadows over roadblocks stopping bright, white headlights and fiery red taillights. A kaleidoscope, colors twirling like pinwheel sparks.

Catherine shakes. Yes, he would like to stop, to hold her, comfort her, but they have to get off this island. Although Amaknak Island is honeycombed with bunkers, the island is a trap; it's too small to avoid detection. They have to cross the bridge. But on the far approach, a cop car, engine running, headlights shining to the middle of the bridge's arched

deck, sits parked, waiting for him. From the top of the knoll, he sees no way across the open deck.

But there is a way, yes. While the *Coyote* was moored next to the *Judi B*, he watched the construction crew use a catwalk beneath the deck before planking was laid. The catwalk isn't visible from above. He doubts its existence is known to anyone but the construction crew. And himself.

Conscious, but groggy, Catherine whispers, "Go back. I need to go back."

Slipping his heavy halibut shirt over her shredded gown (her breasts press against his T-shirt), he pauses. For a moment, he'd do anything for her, frail, firm. But the moment passes.

Lugging her as if she were a sack of flour, he pushes heavy feet through tangled grass and stubby salmonberries. He steps quickly across the roadway of windrowed base rock, and ducks under the end of the bridge. The cop car's headlights shine harmlessly overhead.

Moaning wind whistles through the gridwork of steel girders, and drowns the ring of his running footsteps. It's a tight squeeze getting off the catwalk on the Unalaska side, but clutching her, he slips past the piles of debris, and drops six feet or so to the ground. Together, they roll down the embankment towards the old herring saltery. They made it, they're off Amaknak, even if they're on the wrong side of the road and five miles from the boat.

They lie on wet grass and bent fireweed stalks in the depression above the saltery. And again Catherine mumbles, "I must go back."

He cuddles her as he whispers, "I can't, never."

"You shot." Her words die on her lips.

"Sorry about the dress. I liked it."

As she tries to push away, she says, "Take me back." But she lacks the strength to move herself, and the wind makes hearing her faint words difficult.

"Time to go." He stands, lifts her as he had Judy on their wedding night, and carries her up the hill, across the road by the Sky Hi Gas station, and about half way to the old Pearl plant before he stops to rest. He stops a second time before Pearl; the third time, just after. Catherine tries to walk when they're beyond the cannery, but weak, dazed, and without shoes, her feet bruise after a few steps. So she clings to him as he supports her, but she passes out before he stops a fourth time.

Sarah, you did it, eight years down the tube, and what the hell are you into anyhow?

He needs to get Little John out of this quagmire before John is in over his head—and that means a trip to Kodiak before anything else, right where he wanted to go. Only now, he can't pull his pots first. Instead, he will give those pots to Hold On There, and let the double agent prosper from his immigration to America. Everyone else has.

Nearly midnight. The few houses along the road are dark. Not even a dog barks at them so he stays on the road until it ends at the head of the bay, where he carries Catherine across the thigh-deep river and through the willows. Although she is limp, he handles her as if she were china, and doesn't set her down until he reaches the pram.

The wind wants to sail the pram seaward as if it were a paper carton. With its bowline in hand, he shoves off, and passes the *Coyote* before the kicker starts.

The wind eddy behind the *Coyote's* stern sucks the pram into its vortex and holds the little skiff long enough for him to get its bowline around a cleat. He slides Catherine onto the stern, then climbs aboard. The warmth of the wheelhouse, like the blast of a smelter, staggers him. He manages, though, to lay her on his bunk and cover her with a sleeping bag.

The 6-71 rattles as he waits for the engine temperature to rise. While he waits, he pulls the pram aboard, lashes it to his levelwind reel, then returns inside where he pours himself a cup of muddy coffee. He casts fugitive glances at Catherine, face swollen, discolored. Arms and legs bruised. Her left foot was bleeding when he tucked her in.

Oil pressure and temperature are up. He leaves the wheelhouse, ducks under the stays, and steps onto the bow, where he engages the hydraulic anchor winch. He's crazy for putting out to sea on a night like this. This morning's lull lasted four, maybe five hours, about the length of an ebb tide. Peggy was off a bit with her forecast this morning. There are probably forty footers in front of Ballyhoo. The wind howls forty, fifty, sixty knots out of the southwest.

The *Coyote* shudders as its prop bites the sea. Slowly, the ex-troller comes around, as does Catherine who hoarsely moans something he doesn't understand. She rolls from his bunk, falls, but he has his hands full negotiating the narrow channel separating the small islands so he can't go to her. She pulls herself to her feet, lunges towards him, but the roll of the boat throws her against the table.

When the *Coyote* emerges from behind the tiny, rock islands, the five foot sea running inside protected Captains Bay lifts the boat's stern quarter and imparts a loping pitch to the vessel. Jay feels a hand grasp his forearm a moment before the vomiting starts, but he can't leave the wheel. All he can do is draw her to him and ignore the bile on his jeans. So with his arm around her shoulders, her face against his shirt, they leave Captains Bay, hug Amaknak, letting first Hog Island, then Ballyhoo knock down the wind.

The full fury of the southwester doesn't strike them till they are nearly across the outer portion of Unalaska Bay: as they approach Priest Rock, swell after swell overruns them, lifts them, flings them forward, again and again and again. Twenty-five footers. Thirty footers. Thirty-five footers. The top five feet of each swell ripped off, blown away. Finally, forty footers.

Lost in the smoking sea, the *Coyote* skis wildly down breaker after breaker, one after another after still another again and again. They flash past Priest Rock, and are swept into the Pass which sucks them forward even faster. But in the Pass, the seas are smaller, steeper, sharper. He runs more rpms than he ever has to hold steerage, and he spins the wheel starboard and cuts diagonally across the face of the breakers, and puts the rocky head at the mouth of Kalecta Bay between then and the southwester's fury.

The *Coyote* bucks through steep, little twelve footers at the mouth of English Bay. They stay close to the bay's west wall, almost kiss the wall, and where the bay doglegs south, he drops anchor. Five, six foot swells. Enough sea that he sets out the stabilizers. And the *Coyote*, caught between the wind blowing out of the bay and the seas rolling in, rocks easy.

He waits until he's certain the anchor has snagged a rock before he shuts down the main...the wheelhouse is suddenly quiet. The wind, the seas against the rocks, the creaks of the vessel—nothing compared to the drone of the Jimmie.

Yellow froth clings to Catherine's lips. He washes her face, already purple where she was hit. Dry-heaves wrack her, double her over. He carries her to his bunk, and sits beside her. He'll spend the night waiting on her. Tomorrow too.

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