

Aleutian Rogue

WITH

The Amanat

SERIALIZED

Chapter Five

1.

Before the crowd disperses from Catherine Alden's room, long distance phone calls spread the news of the shootings to the outside world. Hank makes the first call.

Although aware that the outside world has been notified of the shootings, Chief Closa of Unalaska's police department feels no undue pressure as he goes about his job, questioning everyone in the Inn, learning how the Alden woman, who only arrived this afternoon, was beaten, gagged and probably raped. He saw her himself. She should have known better than to wear a sexy dress here, where plenty of laws are broken everyday so fellows can get between the legs of biological females, often the kindest possible description of the island's cannery rats. But he finds it curious that Shoulders fled with the Alden woman—he wouldn't have minded fleeing with her himself, that is if Minnie would've let him, the possibility of which being a little less than zero. That Alden woman was quite the looker, but why Shoulders is involved is a little puzzling, especially so considering he was waiting for her down in the restaurant. He had a drink with her. And it appears Shoulders expected trouble, came prepared, took care of the state's business without the expense of a trial and years of prison-time. So his interest in the case wanes: if Jay had to accidentally shoot a couple of armed intruders trying to rape her, then that's the way it goes. He needs, of course, to talk to the Alden woman. Oh, there'll be a thorough investigation and appropriate conclusions drawn, but what happened seems obvious. Would-be rapists got what was coming to them. Justice has been served. He can't, though, allow people to go around shooting others. He'll have to say something to Jay, might even have to find some minor offense with which to charge him. But Jay really doesn't have much to be concerned about; he's been one of the good guys. And while it'll be tough explaining how that thug managed to fire a shot through the wall from the wrong side, he'll have an explanation by morning; so he calls off the search. Jay will be in soon enough.

2.

Alone in her bedroom, Louise Toski sits angry, depressed and generally miserable. Her flight from Anchorage to Portland, the drive to Salem, the artificial welcome, the belated Thanksgiving dinner, hollow as the party games played with pornographic cards, the patent bourgeois materialism—she can't stand her mother; can't talk to her father. She has no one who will listen to her, and she has important things to say. Nestle is killing babies in Africa by giving their mothers a few cans of formula. Georgia-Pacific has clearcut all of the stream buffer strips they left. And the whales, and the rainforests—there are big issues that need attention, that need to be heard, discussion, condemned. And all her mother can think about is feather boas and Victorian corsets. How embarrassing. How could she have come from that womb: it doesn't seem plausible.

No one will listen to her. Even Jay only pretended to listen, but he is the most real person in her life right now, which doesn't say much for her life. If she asked him, he might take her on as crew:

he has plenty of room on his boat, and he makes enough money he could afford to hire her. She knows fish—maybe not how to catch them, but everything else.

But returning to Dutch Harbor to crab fish would be a big commitment on her part, and before making any commitment to anyone ever again, she wants to know all about the guy she is committing to, which means she wants to know what he isn't telling her about himself. She's certain he is a Native American with great spiritual power, maybe even a medicine man, and that is a little scary because she has never been around a medicine man, and she doesn't know exactly what a medicine man does besides dance to make people well when they should be taking real medicine. But he did make the wind calm down enough she got out; so he might know real medicine, like herbalists.

Then again, he might still be married.

She isn't sure where that thought came from, but that is something she can check; she can check on the accident. She knows where the Siletz River is. Coast newspapers would've featured the story, a pickup in the river. Probably front page. Newport and Toledo. She has nothing else to do until the school term starts. She might as well dig through old newspapers. Then he won't have to tell her the gory details.

She would call Jay if he had a phone, write him if she had an address. He would think she was nuts, but he helped her out when he didn't even know her, and now that he does know her, she is certain he would listen better than he did before. But because he doesn't have a phone and she doesn't have his address, there isn't anything she can do until Monday when she can check on what he told her—and because there isn't anything she can do, she mopes alone in her bedroom, behind a locked door.

Still alone with her thoughts as she heads south on I-5 a few minutes before six Monday, she speeds through thin traffic, stays on the freeway until she reaches Albany, then follows the river towards Corvallis, OSU's campus and her ex-roommate. How could she be taken in by such a bastard? Lovers are as plentiful as the geese feeding in the fields of wheat and corn to either side of the road, and she picked such a loser.

She watches small bands of honkers call to each other as they break away from large flights bound for the refuge. Geese mate for life, or so her textbook said. That is what she thought she was doing, mating for life. Well, next time, head, not heart. She will love tougher, smarter. She won't fall for a rose and a bottle of California wine. Turned out, he didn't want to listen to her. He was arrogant, mostly concerned with his penis, and without even the loyalty of a goose. And from beneath naked oaks, mixed flocks of Dusties and Greater Canadas stare back at her, as if judging her.

She feels bitchy this morning.

Through Philomath before seven, heavy fog wets her windshield, and forces her to turn her wipers on, then off, then on again repeatedly. She passes Blodgett and Burnt Woods, and notes that except for an apple or two hanging with a few twisted yellow leaves from the topmost branches of long-neglected trees, the hardwoods are bare. Droplets of fog, though, seem to inflate the fir needles, and lend them the strength the hardwoods lost. In the orchard beside the highway at Salmon Creek, two does and a fawn nose through fallen leaves. The once-red-painted boards of the covered bridge at Chitwood have faded dusty brown, and oncoming log trucks force her to follow a school bus over Pioneer Mountain and into Toledo, where the fog becomes rain and the traffic is heavy. Mill workers mostly.

Her stomach alternates between fluttering and knotting as she asks directions at Gas-For-Less, returns up the hill, and enters the newspaper's office just after it opens. Jay didn't tell her much; they didn't have time to really talk with that other woman coming by all beat up, then him taking off with her, getting her a ride on that crab boat. But she did listen to him. She remembers what he said. So

approaching the woman at the counter, she says, "Hi, I'm doing a story about fourwheel drive safety, and I'm interested in a particular accident and fatality your paper covered a few years ago."

"Records are downstairs. Ask for Mrs. Knight. She can provide you with library copies of past editions."

Louise descends the stairs, and repeats her lie, adding, "I believe the deceased was named Shoulders."

Perplexed, Mrs. Knight says, "I've worked on this paper for twenty-eight years and have lived in Lincoln County all my life," as she unlocks the records room. "And I recall only one accident where something went wrong with the fourwheel drive. It was Judy Keipers who died, not anyone named Shoulders."

Maybe Judy Keipers didn't take his name, but kept her own. She will do that when she marries, keep her name, and she instantly likes her.

"Yes, Keipers is the name you want. Dutch, her husband, received a sizeable insurance settlement before he disappeared."

Wait a minute, she doesn't like this. Wrong name. Insurance settlement. Disappearance. Jay didn't tell her everything.

"We're very modern here. Everything's on microfilm. You'll have to use the viewer there on the table."

She lets Mrs. Knight show her how to operate an ancient viewer. The first edition of February, 1971, contains nothing of interest though she reads in disbelief a pro-war article about Vietnam, and wonders how anyone could write such crap. But the second edition of the month features a front-page picture of a pickup upside-down in a river. The caption identifies the driver as Mrs. Judy Keipers, and refers the reader to a brief front-page article giving little more than the names of victims and next of kin. Evidently the accident was a late-breaking story for there are no references to it elsewhere in the paper. The third edition devotes two full pages to the accident. Pictures of the victims (his boys were cute) are interspersed among pictures of the accident. Page six has a statement by the investigating officers, a statement from the locking hub's manufacturer attesting to the safety of the hub's design, a brief statement from the coroner, and eulogies for Mrs. Keipers. Without doubt, this is the accident. But was this Judy Keipers Jay's wife? Jay isn't even his name. It's Peter, an awful name.

The fourth edition contains two articles about the accident, and a gossipy story in the Rock Creek Community News section about a get-together planned for the grieving widower. Reading between lines, she realizes the social club was even then, two weeks after the accident, already looking for a new Mrs. Keipers. How bourgeois can they be? No wonder he disappeared.

From the accumulated articles, she feels she knows Judy Keipers, but little is said about her husband. The fuzzy picture of him could be of almost anyone. His age is given (Jay is the right age), but no physical description. Jay is Peter, she knows he is, just knows it...or at least she wants him to be.

When Mrs. Knight returns to check on her, Louise asks, "What about the disappearance? I should interview Mr. Keipers."

"That's a tough one. Not much is known. One of our unsolved mysteries. There was an active police investigation at the time, mostly, I think, because a state policeman also disappeared. The officer's last radio transmission was garbled, but FBI investigators filtered the tape and believe he said he was stopping at the Keiper's farm. The officer was some sort of a distant cousin of Judy's and had just gotten transferred to Newport. Speculation is that Dutch—he fell timber and was always in the woods—saw something illegal. There was rustling going on at the time. And together, he and the officer...the rustlers were probably from the Valley. They were coming over in semis and

butchering anyone's cows. That's really the only way to explain both disappearances. At least that's what most people believe. But no one knows for sure.

"There are also some speculation that the officer might have thought—the whole idea was preposterous."

"Thought what?" Louise tingles all over. She is onto something bigger than the traffic accident, she just knows it.

"Oh, there was some talk that Mr. Keipers might have had something to do with the accident. That speculation never had any merit and was thoroughly discredited by the hub's manufacturer, which is why they paid the settlement without going to trial."

"Did the officer think that Jay, excuse me, Peter was responsible for his wife's death?"

"A fellow officer thought that might have been the case."

"In other words, this was all pretty complicated?"

"Not really... well, maybe. I'll get you the editions in which we ran the story."

Louise looks at the third edition of May, '71, and reads the lengthy article reviewing the accident that accompanies the legal notice of the filing in Circuit Court. But it is the May, '77, first edition that interests her most. Whereas the articles in the November, '71, editions are extremely brief, indicating the case was being kept under wraps by the police, the May, '77, issue features an article reviewing everything that had surfaced pertaining to both disappearances, a sort of five-years-after-the-fact article. There was, though, still almost nothing known. There were no charges, no suspects, no bodies, nothing but questions.

Calling Mrs. Knight to the viewer, she asks, "Does the paper have a better picture of Mr. Keipers?"

"Not better than that one." Mrs. Knight points to a reel of microfilm Louise has already reviewed. "At the time of his disappearance we tried to find a usable picture of him—and we had to reuse that picture."

An idea flares: "Is Mr. Keipers Native American?"

"I dunno. Not so that you'd know. He had a little reservation blood in him, but so does most everyone else from Siletz. Why?"

"I thought maybe he might." Nodding towards the reel of May, '77, editions, she asks, "How current is this last article?"

Quickly scanning the article, the elderly woman says: "A little more is known. Dutch has a brother living in Ketchikan. Jon Keipers. Had an interesting battle with the IRS. Dutch received a good settlement from the hub manufacturer. I don't know how much. Big. For a bad casting. He invested, some in Tandy Leather, so while the settlement wasn't taxable, its earnings are. The IRS attempted to seize his farm, but Jon took them to court, and won, at least till Dutch's tax liability can be determined. Both sides are at an impasse until Dutch is declared legally dead."

Now she understands, yes. "Will the IRS get his farm if he doesn't show up soon?"

"His brother probably will...but they'll try. You can be sure of that."

"Do you think he's alive?"

"Wouldn't know, wouldn't want to know. People will always wonder."

"About the police officer?"

"Yes."

Trying not to show her excitement, she thanks Mrs. Knight.

Late afternoon. She thinks she has read the complete history of Lincoln County. She knows she has read most of what happened this decade. Jay is, she's certain, Peter Keipers. He is rich, and not from fishing. That might be what he was trying to hide from her, and she can understand why. She didn't like being a meal ticket.

Well, she read of no reason that should prevent him from hiring her, or for that matter, prevent him from returning to his farm here, and she thinks he ought to do that. Sure, he will have to answer a few questions, settle with the IRS, but he won't be charged with tax evasion if she understands what his brother has done.

For some reason, though, she doesn't want him to be Peter—she can understand why he would change his name, and he ought to shave his ridiculous beard.

She must tell him, right away, about his tax liability. That he needs to take care of, even if bureau'rats will use the money to kill more civilians in Central America. But she still is undecided about going up there. Returning to Dutch Harbor would be a big gamble, would mean quitting school while needing only one term for her degree, would mean a commitment to making a relationship work, and she doesn't know how she feels about him. They have just met. And his wife has been dead almost nine years. He should have gotten over her long ago.

3.

While Hank's call is beamed to New York from a pay phone in Vita's barracks, a long distance call to a LEIU's automatic recording station in Seattle is placed from Pearl's office. Tomorrow, a LEIU's agent will inform Eric Pettersen that his specials were shot. Pettersen, assigned to the Federal Attorney General's office in Anchorage, currently works on western Alaska's cocaine-for-ivory problem. Since Narcotics agents seem too busy hijacking marijuana entering Florida to worry about cocaine sales to Eskimos, the Attorney General's office is attempting to stem Alaskan drug sales. Pettersen is doing the best he can with too few resources and too much territory.

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