

Aleutian Rogue

WITH

The Amanat

SERIALIZED

Chapter Seven

1.

Eric Pettersen pops little blue pills as he stares gloomily at the typed message received an hour ago. Something big is going down, and now he doesn't have any way of finding out what without going there himself. A visit to the end of the world. And he rolls the message as he rereads it for the twelfth time.

He sent two agents to Unalaska, one a former pusher they turned around a year ago, the other a burned-out city cop from Bellingham. Both men knew their business; both were instrumental in cracking the Cuban-Columbian connection that has been funneling cocaine into the fishing fleet through a network of small-time dealers in the Puget Sound area. But this morning, they both have been murdered, shot in the head, execution style, one in back of his head, the other between his eyes. And he intends that someone pay for their murders, that someone being the fisherman and criminal Henry Jay Shoulders, an alias if he ever encountered one—he has already run the name through NCIC computers and came up with nothing when, according to the information the Unalaska Police Department supplied him, Shoulders is a Vietnam veteran. That doesn't square, not in his office. All veterans are in the data base; so if Shoulders isn't, then Shoulders isn't a veteran. More likely, Shoulders is a draft-dodging, pinko war protestor, who has only recently returned to the United States from Canada, where he fled when his lottery number came up.

Pettersen suspects that Shoulders is involved in drug trafficking. How, he doesn't yet know, a short-term problem, one he will solve as soon as the weather clears enough for him to fly to Dutch Harbor.

Until recently, the scope of the western Alaska drug problem wasn't fully appreciated. However, when the Soviets began complaining about walrus carcasses, minus their tusks and penises, washing up on Kamchatka beaches, the Attorney General's office took notice. Even the President became personally involved; for the political ramifications of walrus poaching are too great to ignore, especially when Democratic Alaskan Native leaders complain to the Interior Secretary about the devastating effect drugs are having on village life, with the less than subtle warning that either something gets done or they will reconsider party loyalty.

Since that ivory wasn't showing up in American markets, the Attorney General's assumption was that an International pipeline has been set up at Dutch Harbor to funnel raw ivory into the Asian market, probably in containers of fish bound for Hong Kong or Malaysia. Thus, he has been given the task of plugging that pipeline and rerouting that ivory. His funding is sufficient. He has enough manpower except now at Dutch. But the weather stymies everything he attempts.

His murdered agents' report, due yesterday, hasn't yet arrived. His newest information is a week old, which might as well as be a year old, so volatile is the situation in Western Alaska right now. And Chief Closa of the Unalaska Police Department wasn't helpful. On the contrary, that yokel claims my agents raped Catherine Alden, a name he came to despise when he was in Miami during

the Arab-Israeli War. It is much more likely she seduced his specials...he knows her, oh yes, he does. He almost relieved himself right here while talking on the phone when the chief mentioned the name Catherine Alden, whose past addresses read like a travel log of America's beautiful cities. Her photo could be on the cover of *Vogue*. Now a top executive for a West Coast drug smuggling operation, an operation DEA agents have yet to infiltrate, she is utterly without principles, having seduced two of his colleagues, one in Miami, the other in San Diego (both were compromised and later dismissed) before she deliberately destroyed his colleagues' families. She had no cause to do that. His colleagues were broken men before she moved against their wives and children.

Pettersen was quick to explain to Chief Closa that his agents weren't involved in any illegalities, that the chief was misreading the evidence. He ordered the chief to arrest Shoulders. And the yokel laughed at him. Laughed at him! It's obvious he'll get no cooperation in Unalaska.

Who is this fisherman, anyhow? Shoulders never registered for the draft, never filed a tax return prior to 1973, has never applied for credit anywhere, and has never requested any special government favors or services. Except for his Alaska Limited Entry permits and drivers license, Henry Jay Shoulders seems not to exist, which is reason enough to arrest him. Even legends of foreign agents are more complete than Shoulders' file.

If he hopes to recruit undercover specials in the future, he has to make an example of both Shoulders and Alden, something he is already relishing. But he can't even get down there today. No flights. And that bastard fisherman is probably laughing at him. That's the one thing he can't stand, to be laughed at.

2.

The *Coyote's* nine knots steadily devours the miles separating the ex-troller from Kodiak as the day wears into night, the troughs between swells like river valleys where a person plants roots and rears a family, only the roots he plants are overrun by one swell after another as he watches course and radar screen, empty as his life was until Thanksgiving, when he offered to help a virtual stranger who had once done a good deed for his crewman. The *Coyote* runs a little heavy, which he hadn't noticed in yesterday's excitement, but which he appreciates now. He fishes crab dry, a day boat; the *Coyote* is not tanked. So unlike the *Northford* that will run with her tanks full and her pumps running, the weight of her filled tanks keeping her center of gravity low, the *Coyote* has to run with hard ballast, usually ice. He should have taken on ten, twelve tons before he sailed, but he doubts if anyone would have waited for him to load; he doubts if Hold On even has that much ice in Pearl's icehouse. He probably would have had to wait for the cannery to make more, and that certainly would have gone over well after he had just shot those two yahoos. So as long as the *Coyote's* heaviness isn't loose water in the engine room, he appreciates the weight although he will have to trace down the reason for its heaviness whenever he sets a sea anchor. He doubts that Catherine will feel well enough to relieve him tonight—she sits asleep, her head on her right arm, slumped over the chart table, the bunk yellow with drying bile foam.

He watches the dark surface of one swell do what the previous one did as the ancient autopilot holds their northeasterly heading. Disturbed phosphorescence glow as fluorescent green sparks. He thought it might be too cold for phosphorescence so he has learned something as he struggles to stay sharp, playing the same mental games with himself that he played in 'Nam, the reason he took up chess, not exactly a game a Rogue from Siletz would normally play.

He can't remember what the old folks played when he was a boy. Dominoes. Cribbage, another likely "real" Indian game. If he were to play Bones, who would understand the rules? Maybe everyone would, and on the surface of a dark swell, he thinks he sees the figure who emerged from behind that set of triple drums, the figure's head spun crazily to one side; he consciously sees only the person shudder, then twist backwards, fall and lie still in the mud.

His shot surprised him nearly as much as the shotgun blast had; yet, he levered another round into the Winchester's chamber.

Ten seconds passed. Then twenty.

Still, he waited.

He struggled to comprehend exactly what had occurred as he searched the brush for someone else; he saw nothing. Nothing. Nothing moved anywhere except for a cock bluejay that drifted in from across the pond. The jay landed on the tin roof of the shack covering the set of triple drums.

With the jay's arrival, he felt secure enough to stir. He retrieved the casing he levered out, a habit he began even before 'Nam. His hand was steady as the years of training took over as if he had never stopped fighting a war he couldn't win, no matter how many hits he recorded in his kill book.

The jay bounced along the shack's roofline until it reached the end of the tin; it then opened its wings and flew to the nearest alder.

He suppressed a sour burp as he pushed the bench-leg's neck off his shoulders. His stomach always acted up a little bit when he was in combat, which saved a lot on the amount of rations he had to carry in the field and let him not worry about food those weeks he was fighting his way out of Laos.

A second minute passed.

He drew his feet under him, surveyed the surrounding area again, saw nothing, stood and sprinted for the far end of the log skids supporting the set of triple drums. Nothing. No one was there. Not even glancing at the downed form, he headed for the gate. The mud in front of the gate would tell how many have come that way that morning.

Shaking his head, shaking himself awake, Jay looks around to see where they are. Ahead, cloud bottoms are tinged pink. To the southeast, the sun, a red fireball, peeks over the horizon, ignites advancing clouds, burning them pink, orange, yellow. Exploding color. Fading into the grayness that will be the day. But no land is in sight—and he jumps when Catherine bumps against him from behind as she stumbles forward, her left hand clutching the front of the oversized gray sweatshirt, her arm still in the T-shirt sling.

He turns to her. "Feeling better?"

"Want me to take over?" She stifles a belch, grimaces afterwards. "Check my pulse and tell me what you feel."

"I can tell you without checking that you're alive, interesting and very attractive." He is pleased to see that she can at least stagger about. She will get her sealegs shortly, of that he is certain.

"You need sleep in the worst kind of way, but thank you for the flattery. I wish I could believe you."

"Trust me."

"Why, because you shot two cowboys—"

"No. Because trust is life. Without trust, there can be no stories, and if there are no stories, then there is no life."

"I'm not alive?"

"Is your body you, or is there someone inside? Someone who feels nothing when raped, beaten? Someone without a story?" He carefully avoids eye contact with her. "It will seem naive on my part, but let me help. I don't need anything from you...except your trust."

"That's all you need from me, trust?" If it is, then that is probably the one thing she cannot give him. Too many wildernesses ago she trusted men, but she hasn't trusted one for a long, long time. She isn't about to start now.

"What else can you offer me that I can't buy?" He lingers a little longer on his last word than he would normally. Certain that she will understand his inference, he adds, "I need you alive, I felt your spirit, got to know it—and I have what you need. Somebody to care about you." He pauses, then

adds, "You don't need sex, not now, but you need to be loved, corny as that sounds. Your spirit, she's lonely, lost, scared, wants to find peace. We know each other. She knows I can help you. Then maybe you'll start caring about yourself."

"What kind of—"

"You need to believe." He wants to tell her about himself, but she is, he's certain, much too sophisticated to even notice a mixed blood like himself, a poacher who lives on the edges of a two-sided world. Even his mention of the word *love* leaves a bad taste in his mouth. He is naive, and really inexperienced at everything except killing, which is a hard habit to break and one that knows no season and few boundaries.

Words form in her mouth, angry words that tell him to mind his own business, but she doesn't open her lips so that they can breathe on their own; so they die in the flood of emotions that well up within her. And after a few minutes, she hugs him with her right arm, a half hug, all that she can give as she realizes she has nothing now, nor in the recent past that she could have offered him which would have tempted him to return her to Dutch Harbor, and the Organization.

3.

The sleek, white Lear jet—its turbines roar, nose dips, tail lifts as its tires scrunch stones—touches down, and taxis the length of Unalaska's short gravel strip, rolling to a stop on the apron to the side of Reeves terminal. It is the first plane to land this morning, and Don, the station manager, silently fumes. The strip will only support four, maybe five landings at the most today. The Lear's arrival means one YS-11A he was counting-on probably won't be able to set down. And he already has more passengers wanting off the island than available seats if he received five flights every day for the next four days.

During the Lear's flight from Anchorage, Eric Pettersen reviewed the reports, filed by his murdered specials Thanksgiving day and the following afternoon, their reports lost somewhere in the coded transmissions of Naval wires sent from Adak to submarine commanders off the Siberian coast, those encrypted messages received by Kodiak's big ear, then sent to Seattle rather than Anchorage. Why, he doesn't yet know; for they contain only the usual details of small time drug activity, while mentioning Shoulders as the possible source of the foil wrapped bales of hash that washed up on an Unalaska beach a month ago. That mention of Shoulders was enough for an after-hours court order allowing the Attorney General's office to seize Shoulders' vessel, a wood boat described by his specials as being barely seaworthy and having little real value, just the type of vessel he would expect a drug smuggler hoping to avoid detection to have. So now, Shoulders' ass is his whenever he catches up with the murdering fisherman.

In his specials' reports one other name is mentioned: Sarah Jane McPhearson, twenty-three, with better than average grades from a Seattle high school, a dealer since junior high. The reports suggest McPhearson is the key to what went down Friday night. Evidently she is responsible for the accidental drowning of a cannery worker, a David Godell, a resident of Unalaska and of the same age and a possible boyfriend. She had incorporated Shoulders in her attempt to flee Dutch Harbor, thereby drawing him out, linking him to the island's drug activity. The evidence of Shoulders' participation in the drug trade seems overwhelming, especially in light of the name being an alias. His only regret, as he rereads his specials' reports, is that they had yet to make any progress in cracking the ivory-for-coke connection.

A bright wind cuts through his polyester suit and thermal knit underwear, slicing cold deep into muscles strengthened by two hours of daily gym-time, as Pettersen steps from the Lear, parked on the runway's apron, its captain already seeking permission to return to Anchorage where it will pick up three Japanese businessmen bound for Nome and meetings with Canadian mining investors. So with his briefcase and suitcase in hand, Pettersen enters the Unalaska terminal.

"Take your bag outside." Pointing towards the door, the Reeves' attendant growls at Pettersen, "If you ain't flying with us, we don't need your fucking ass adding to the confusion."

At first miffed but now explosively angry as he considers the counterman's words, Pettersen only becomes even angrier when the counterman refuses to let him use their telephone—

Pointing to the back corner of the terminal, the counterman says, "Use the fucking CB. That's what it's there for. Then do your waiting outside."

The CB's designated purpose is that of calling the island's single cab--the sign hanging on it says so...after making the call Pettersen waits outside in the wind, still sharp in the lee of the low, wood-framed terminal, itself appearing to shiver as it bristles with antennae. And ten cold minutes after the refueled Lear takes off, the cab finally arrives.

Apparently unmindful of the mud through which his fare must tiptoe, the cabbie parks on the side of the gravel road.

"Pull forward," Pettersen orders. "I just polished my shoes." The cabbie drives off as Pettersen, waving his briefcase, hollers, "You sonofabitch, where the hell are you going?"

A quarter of a mile down the road, the cab turns around in a wide spot, then returns, stopping in the middle of the graveled road. "If you want a fucking ride then don't be telling me my fucking business."

Glaring at the cabbie, a fellow his own age with a scraggily beard that half conceals deep acne pitting and what looks like a knife scar, Pettersen, ready for a physical confrontation, approaches the driver's door. But when the cabbie starts to roll up his window as if to leave, Pettersen says, "I need a ride to UniSea Inn."

"You fucking ain't gonna tell me how to fucking drive, are yuh?" When receiving no answer after several seconds, the cabbie, leaving the vintage orange Checker idling in the middle of the road, gets out and opens its trunk.

Pettersen gingerly lays his suitcase in the trunk, then sits scowling in the backseat as he hangs onto his briefcase. The driver, watching him in the mirror, rockets the mud-covered wreck around the deepest potholes, and jostles him across the grungy interior. The crumpled fender squawks each time the tire bounces up and rubs it. By the time he reaches UniSea Inn, he's heard, many times, every note the fender can play. And he, Pettersen, knows how far he has flown: Anchorage is twenty-five years into the future. Bumped and bruised, he feels like he has gone three rounds with his judo instructor.

Arriving at UniSea, saying, "I need to see Chief Closa," he asks the driver to wait while he checks in.

"Can't take you to Unalaska. The fucking bridge ain't open yet." Hank has a long-cultured dislike for men wearing suits.

Hefting his suitcase, Petersen asks, "How do I get there?" He can almost see the dome of Unalaska's classic Orthodox Church not three hundred yards away, or so it appears as the wind shoves reflected images of buildings, docks and crabbers around as if it could tip them over.

"Ferry or fucking walk across."

"How far can you take me?"

"Right up to the bridge. It's on my way home."

Nodding okay, he checks in, leaves his suitcase behind the Inn's desk, then returns to the cab and rides past stacked king crab pots, around the weathered WWII submarine repair shed, and on to the bridge approach, where he gets out, pays, then stares incredulously as the cab proceeds across the bridge, up the hill, and out of sight. Determined to have the driver's ass for this trick, he sprints after the cab. But after a hundred yards, his legs tire. His suit restricts his movement, and his leather soles slip on the muddy gravel. So he stops, catches his breath which he shouldn't have lost so easily,

and he stands in the wind; he's cold, feels like he has been laughed at, like he will be the butt of everyone's jokes tonight. And if there is one thing he hates—

He is almost there, almost across the knoll separating the bridge from the old part of town; so he continues on, with each step causing his anger to fester like a sliver pricking his conscience, each step of his hike to and through the village like another laugh directed at him, cruel and cold. He looks for but doesn't locate the cabbie. However, he finds City Hall and the police department, meets Chief Closa, and sours his already rotten mood.

"You've arrested no one?" asks Pettersen in disbelief.

"I might just arrest you," says the chief, not liking arrogance, "if I can figure out what part in that rape you played."

The Chief is in Unalaska because he tired of departmental and jurisdictional politics in Gray's Harbor, Washington, thirty years ago. He is ready to retire to the Long Beach Peninsula, where two of his kids still live, one an oysterman, the other a Realtor who has promised to find her father a lot with a view for under twelve thousand. And the last person he needs to screw up his time in the Aleutians is a smart-ass Federal prosecutor, especially when justice isn't suffering.

Pettersen, not used to anything other than total cooperation from local authorities (the chief's attitude suggests he has something to hide), opts to ignore the hostility for the moment although he'll request an IRS audit of the whole Unalaska police department when he returns. So forcing an edge of conciliation unto his whetted words, he asks, "Is Shoulders' apprehension eminent?"

"You askin' if I'm gonna catch 'im, hell yes I am when he needs grub an' fuel." The chief knew, before Pettersen arrived, the direction this interview would take, which is why he has been silently praying for more wind, enough to have kept flights grounded in Cold Bay.

"A search has been organized?" To Pettersen, that seems like a minimum expectation of even an inept local police department when a murder suspect is at large in a remote area.

"They cost money. There ain't no need for one."

What he feared based on his telephone consultations with the chief: Pettersen now knows for certain what will happen. Apparently satisfied with the outcome of the shooting, the chief will take a token statement from the fisherman, then close the case. The murders will become an incident, and six months from now, or maybe six years, the case file will disappear. Memories are short. His specials will become more story than real, flesh-and-blood human beings engaged in the government's war against drugs, a noble cause, worthy of perpetual remembrance.

But he will not allow this case to ever be closed, nor his specials forgotten, no, no indeed. He will not be laughed at, will not allow himself to be mocked.

"I want Shoulders. I want him arrested. Now."

Having been tilting his chair, the chief leans forward, slamming the chair's front legs down hard on the concrete. "Listen here, college boy, an' listen good. You can't throw your weight around here, an' I'll tell you what happened Saturday night. Two thievin' rapists got themselves shot by party or parties unknown. Both were armed, an' when witnesses got on the scene, both were dead like they shot themselves." Changing positions and tone, the chief withdraws a handful of forms from a folder and flips them towards Petersen, one at a time, dismissing each as insignificant. "Statements from the first eight witnesses. All the same. Alden's hands bound. Jay with no gun evident was attempting to free her hands." Tossing an envelope to Petersen, the chief adds, "Those bullet fragments got pretty scraped up being dug outta the wall Too bad about them. Now we'll never know what gun did the actual shootin'."

"Just who the hell do you think murdered my agents?"

"Murder, that's an awfully strong word."

"Who else here can I speak to, a deputy?" Surely there is some one in this forsaken end of society who will listen to reason. "I ask that you excuse yourself from this case."

"You ain't dealin' with nobody in my department." Again switching tone, the chief drawls, "I'm puttin' Jay in for a reward for stoppin' a crime in progress. I'll notify the press so you won't have to."

"You sonofabitch. I'll conduct an investigation with or without your fat ass help. I don't need you. You need me."

Behind him, a snort as he stomps from the chief's office. He has to get back to the Inn, and he doesn't have time to tromp over that hill again. The cabbie said he could either walk or take the ferry. Where, he wonders, does he catch the ferry? And it galls him to have to ask directions, but he's without choice: "How do I find the ferry?"

Indicating the general direction of the airstrip with a jerk of her thumb, the dispatcher says, "Follow the yellow brick road."

Realizing that she has overheard everything said in the chief's office, Pettersen senses that his investigation will be hamstrung by gossip tomorrow. He'll have to move quick, and it's already Sunday. He can't believe his bad luck.

Bad luck, that's all he has, Pettersen mutters to himself as he walks, more slowly now than before, toward the Pan Alaska plant, the end of the only road going the direction the dispatcher indicated. Sure enough, he arrives at what might be where the ferry docks, the ferry being really a glorified skiff that probably doesn't even have a six-pack license.

Damn this ride is expensive: Pettersen is reluctant to pay six dollars for a three-minute ride across the channel. But once he has his receipt in hand, which the ferry operator was even more reluctant to give him than he was to pay, he starts for UniSea, where entering behind two well-dressed Japanese fish buyers and several scruffy cannery workers, he stops at the front desk. A heavy-set woman with black dyed hair and about his own age checks the Inn's reservations calendar to see if, indeed, the Japanese buyers have reservation. Deciding they do even though she can't find their names, she hands them their key.

Seeing him, the woman asks, "Well, did Hank leave you standing on the edge of the bridge?"

Her question sounds as if she is laughing at him, and that doubly upsets him: "You knew he would do that?"

"He legally can't take you across, so, yeah, we all knew. Wondered how you'd take being left standing there in the wind. Some guys get mad as hell at him." She has already checked him in though she hasn't yet given him his key. His bag, along with a half dozen others, are still behind the desk.

He believes he detects a desire on the clerk's part to break the day's tedium by talking: "Were you on duty Friday night?"

The clerk, bubbling, raises blackened eyebrows and bats blackened lashes. "I sure was. Right here."

"Good. As you know from my reservation, I'm with the government, and this is a Federal case—what happened Friday?" He pauses, smiles, and knows that merely mentioning the Federal government will start rumors. "And I'm here to investigate the shootings." Then adding almost as an afterthought, he says, "You do know that Catherine Alden is an IRA terrorist and extremely dangerous. You're all very lucky to be alive." He is under no obligation to tell the truth when investigating a double murder.

"Oh, I know." With eyes aglow, the blackened woman adds, "We are all thankful to be alive."

Now not sure he can trust anything she says, especially not after she so quickly agreed to the Irish terrorist story which sort of popped from his tongue without much thought, Pettersen withdraws a slim notebook from his inside jacket pocket as he says, "Tell me exactly what happened, what you saw, what you know." He will have to wait to see what sort of effect the terrorist story has although he understands and regularly uses rumors.

Her eyes still aglow—he suspects the clerk drinks too much—the clerk launches, telling everything she knows and probably much more, ascribing to Shoulders the best characteristics of Robin Hood, William Tell, Captain Cook, and Prince Valiant. If he were to believe the clerk, about the only thing Shoulders isn't is a Decemberist, and probably only because the clerk hasn't heard of them. He doubts if any of what the clerk tells him will add useful information to their sketchy, computer-generated personality profile of the fisherman. But he listens and jots notes that are actually more doodles than decipherable as she lays her hands on his left forearm: she is a very friendly woman, too much so for his tastes.

He loves starting rumors. Climbing the stairs to his room, knowing that with each step he takes the story of Alden being an IRA terrorist will spread, multiplying geometrically, two, eight, five hundred twelve times, he intends that his specials are never forgotten. And once in his room, taking his Colt from its inside holster, he points at the second pillow on the double bed. He couldn't kill the rumors now if he wanted. In a little while, he will return downstairs and begin questioning everyone. *Chief Cosa, get out of my way before I run your fat ass all the way back to Anchorage.*

When he figures the island buzzes with his IRA story, Pettersen returns to the lobby and reengages the desk clerk. "Now that I have had a moment to think about what you said, I have more questions. Where do you think Shoulders might have taken this terrorist?"

"You haven't heard yet, his boat sunk. The *American Pride*, they saw it. They were tryin' to get to town Friday night. Said they spotted the *Coyote* enterin' Akutan Pass and that the Pass was really wild, too wild for even them, and they're big. A hundred and ten feet."

He doesn't like this: "When was this reported?"

"Oh, they didn't report it until a little while ago. Said they would've come forward sooner if they'd known no one was searchin' for survivors. But they are blowin' smoke to coverup gettin' stoned as soon as they offloaded. They really got stoned, kinda shocked them seein' a boat go down and all."

The blackened woman seems confident in the truthfulness of what she tells him, but he doesn't know what to think: "They saw his boat sink?"

"On their radar screen. Just disappeared, vanished. There one minute, then gone, just like that, how life is." She catches her breath, then adds, "There're five other boats down that I know of. The *Hellion* is also missing. Same area. Same time. About the same size as Jay's boat."

Still uncertain as to what he should do with this unexpected news—unless Shoulder's and Alden's bodies are recovered, an unlikely feat when the ocean floor is covered with crabs, there will always remain doubts about whether they are actually lost at sea—he makes notes to himself as he considers his next move. He wonders if this is another Battle of the Pips, or disinformation spread by Chief Closa. He was victimized by black data in Miami two years ago. So while he wants to believe Shoulders and Alden drowned, he asks, "If his boat didn't go down, as you say, how long would it take him to reach Seattle?" He assumes Alden would rather go to Seattle than Anchorage, and returning here will put Shoulders on death row.

"He wouldn't go to Seattle, not Jay. Maybe Sand Point, or Chignik, but probably Kodiak. He used to fish up that way."

His first bit of real information. "How long to reach Kodiak?" While he had waited at Cold Bay, he studied a chart, used for wallpaper, of the Alaska Peninsula. There is nothing west of Unalaska but the naval base at Adak and multiple miles of emptiness, everywhere to hide but nowhere to get out of sight. The storm would have beaten the fisherman's boat to pieces if he had crossed into Bristol Bay. So if Shoulders isn't holed up on the island, he had to go north along the east side of the Alaska Peninsula, towards Kodiak, past Egg Island.

He misses hearing part of the clerk's answer so he asks the clerk to repeat herself.

"Jay couldn't make it to Kodiak, not this time of year. His boat is only forty some feet long." The clerk accents her words by shaking her head.

"How long if he did? A week?"

"With the crappy weather, I dunno. Four days maybe. He'd have the wind behind him. So yeah, a week, or a little less."

He thanks the clerk: "You've been most helpful. Perhaps we will talk again when you are not on duty." And he gives her a half wink that is more suggestive than the actual motion.

The fisherman's boat too small to reach Kodiak this time of year, he finds the idea ridiculous. Desperate men, he has learned, accomplish the impossible. Consider the case of the Russian couple, who, without food or water, crossed the Sea of Okhotsk in a sixteen-foot-long open dory before eventually being picked up by a freighter—the woman still operates the store in old town Ninilchik. So the story of Shoulders' boat sinking seems too pat although he has no reason not to believe it other than he doesn't want denied the opportunity to put Shoulders in a Federal prison where something might just happen to him.

Did Shoulders overestimate his ability? The capabilities of his craft? Or underestimate the sea? Shoulders' vessel, according to his agents, was barely above being a derelict. Even the blackened desk clerk didn't think the vessel would make the journey to Kodiak although the clerk believes Shoulders is a mortal superman when he's really a pinko murderer.

One foot on the stair step as he starts to return to his room, Pettersen turns and asks the clerk, "How long will the Coast Guard search for Shoulders?"

"Oh, maybe today...seeing that the Hellion is also missin'." She smiles coyly, her intentions as obvious as a heifer in heat. "But I doubt they'll find anythin'."

"What grids, quadrants have they concentrated on, do you know?" He needs to get that Lear back down here; needs to reach Kodiak tonight.

"Just around Egg Island, and through the Pass." Her face turning sad, the clerk adds, "It really is too bad about his boat going down. I thought he had better sense than to get caught in the Pass in weather like it was Friday night."

Pettersen finds himself wondering what she would be like in bed as he asks, "Nowhere else? Not closer to Kodiak?" She would, he fears, be sexually experienced to the point of being infectious.

"I wouldn't know, but Chief Cosa mentioned somethin' about Jay makin' a phone call to Kodiak Friday mornin'—but not from here. You'll have to get the details from him."

People don't disappear, Alden and Shoulders being no exceptions. They go somewhere. He knows that, believes that, trusts that premise. "How many vessels, fishing boats and others, have left since Friday, or maybe Thursday?"

"I don't know. *Northford* Friday mornin' early." Shaking her head, she continues, "Don't know how many. The weather has been really bad so probably not very many."

"I need to use your phone—"

"You have to use the pay phones in the entryway. Rules."

He turns to look at the two telephones in the entryway, a fisherman at each phone, another fellow waiting for either to finish talking or to run out of quarters. "I need a secure line."

"Don't think we have one. Most of the time," she indicates the phones in the entryway, "you can hear what's being said on the other phone—and then the wind blows real hard, the signals get bumped around and you get little blips. I think it's the microwaves gettin' blown around, but Jay told me one time that it had to be the antenna."

So Shoulders is also some kind of an engineer? What else is known about the fisherman? Pettersen glances at his watch: it is not too late to catch Reeves' flight back to the mainland since he doubts he can get the Lear to return this afternoon. And he asks the clerk, "Can you call the airport for me, get me a seat on this afternoon's flight?"

"You must be jokin'. Because you're government, you might get a confirmed reservation on tomorrow's Standby List, but you'll have to go out there and do that yourself."

Returning to the desk, stepping behind it, patting her hefty rump, he reaches for her telephone—and he learns just what she told him. What damn good is having the best safety record if their planes are always grounded? He didn't know there were places in America so hard to reach, and still harder to leave.

4.

Stuart Bartholomew quietly boards Reeves' Sunday afternoon flight to Anchorage. He has completed his job in Unalaska.

As regional NIA officer, he received the LEIU report of the shooting of the two Federal specials. Recognizing Alden's name, he understood that her disappearance would be construed as having taken the high jump. Turning Alden would be the capstone of his career. So unannounced, he flew here to clear the field of competing agencies.

With the official search for Alden suspended, the remaining players will all be spooks. He must make the snatch before a hit can be made.

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