

Aleutian Rogue

WITH

The Amanat

SERIALIZED

Chapter Nine

1.

Beyond the Trinities, the *Coyote* encounters fog thick enough to hide her bow and stern from her wheelhouse. Jay frets. Rummy tired, in the same clothes he has worn since Friday, knowing he will shortly start seeing ghost images (usually red balls of light streaking horizontally across in the front of him, right to left), Jay presses his face close to his radar screen—it is his eyes as he searches for once familiar headlands and capes, bays and bights, none of which yet appear. From the feel of the tides, he knows they are in Shelikof Strait. He knows they will encounter more floating wood than in their open run well east of the Alaska Peninsula; knows his radar doesn't have the resolution needed to pick up floating logs, or rafts of kelp, or small rocks, or even skiffs. He has to reduce rpms until, finally, they lose headway when the tide ebbs. So wind and tide push them around, but he dares not increase speed. Although he has charts of Kodiak, they are pre-quake; they don't show rocks that have appeared since the Good Friday earthquake. And he is no longer as familiar with Kodiak waters as he is with the waters around the Fox Islands. So feeling as helpless as a glass float, he plots a course for Kempff Bay, then creeps slowly into the bay where he drops anchor and shuts down the Jimmie.

The bay is suddenly eerie silent, the lap of the surge lost in the fog. Catherine sleeps, her head resting on the chart table. He's almost too tired to sleep, almost too wired on adrenaline to close his eyes, a feeling he has experienced before, one of which he had to beware when sniping; for the adrenaline produces little muscle tremors, more so than caffeine—tremors that mean the difference between a kill and a near miss at six hundred, eight hundred yards.

But his systems are starting to shut down on him. He won't be able to stay awake much longer. So thinking the anchor is holding, hoping it is, he lies on his bunk behind the galley, and he stares at the overhead bunk, seeing in his mind a white pickup with *Oregon State Police* stenciled to its door parked in front of the wood gate leading to nowhere. He lies there, his eyes open, staring, and he wonders if he really isn't Rogue, still at war in a war he cannot possibly win. He feels a connection, like a strand of monofilament line, pulling him towards a destiny he didn't choose, nor one he would have chosen. The edge of this two-sided world is thin—he feels like he has fallen off.

After a few hours of sleep, sleep that stole his conscious thoughts, sleep that has only made him more tired than he was before, sleep that brought the outside fog deep into his mind, he stumbles from his bunk wondering what happened to the Jimmie, why is it shut down? Only after bumping into the hatch, knocking himself a step backwards, does he remember where he is and why he is here.

More slowly now, still feeling that monofilament connection to an inherited war, he eases behind his radar scope and checks their location, checks that they are still alone in the bay, the borrowed technology remaining his eyes in this war that came to him when he drove his pickup off the edge of their two-sided world, technology that isn't Rogue or even American.

His thoughts are jumbled, but everything seems so clear now, almost as if he has had a vision—and he wishes he knew the old ways. Unfortunately, his wild roots were grubbed out two generations ago, the land replanted with Chandlers and Keipers. All that remains are the genetics. Rogue genetics.

Catherine stirs when he begins checking fluids. The keelcooler is full; engine oil is fine. He adds a little hydraulic fluid, and checks the aft fuel tank. It's nearly empty. But both small midship tanks are still full, enough for another sixty hours of running. He should topoff before heading for the mainland, but where? He can't very well stop at a fuel dock, not with state troopers watching every dock between Adak and Haines.

Gulls and murrelets float past in silence. Not even the surf can be heard as he returns to the wheel, his mind clear but his body groggy. He is in an inherited war. Why hasn't he realized this before? Maybe, having been hustled out of 'Nam, it took this long for his spirit to find him, suppose? He doesn't know as he begins inventing reasons for staying anchored in the bay. All valid. But all excuses. The real reason, he knows, that he sits on the hook and doesn't grope northward in the fog is that he can't win this war. It has already been fought, and he, like on that SOG strike into Laos, has been left to fight a rearguard action, with no rescue possible. No surrender, no support, no relief. Here, in the fog, he can hide, but only for awhile. He can spend time with Catherine, which he really wants to do. Although they have talked as travel allowed, her shoulder still painful—she has more secrets than he has—much hasn't been said, like how she fits into his inherited war. How has Fate, or maybe, Coyote used her?

When Witches, according to his grandmother, buried the world because the People no longer thought their spells had any power, Coyote retrieved the world as if it were an old bone—and when he did, he howled and howled and howled so the People would know not to fear the Witches. But the Witches became very angry, and they sang the white people into existence just so they would make war on the People until the time of restoration, many Long Moons from now. So he is, according to his grandmother, part curse and part cursed, destined to forever fight in a war between himself and himself.

Sitting up straight, Catherine rubs her eyes, both swollen and with dark bags under them: "Where are we? I don't hear the motor."

"Off the south end of Kodiak, anchored." His spirit has returned; he hasn't felt this much like fighting since he left for 'Nam. "Been here a couple hours. I was gonna fix something to eat, then we'll head north...how's your shoulder?"

"Hurts—but not too bad if I don't move it." She scoots to the edge of the bench, stands, looks through the near port, says, "I can't see anything. What are we, in the belly of a whale?"

"What sounds good to you, anything? I was gonna open some battery acid soup, stuff some crackers in it—"

"What kind of soup is that?" She peers through each wheelhouse window, sees the same heavy fog standing close outside, then says, "Surely you're jesting about that soup."

"It's not too bad with crackers and milk—"

"Same milk as you gave me before? That milk was flat, thin, and generally awful." Then indicating the fog, she says, "We could be in the belly of a whale." She can't see anything, and not being able to see now begins to frighten her as much as the rough seas had.

"I can catch fish, but they don't give much milk so I take what I can get...it's guaranteed not to spoil." The saucepan he sets on the stove is bent to fit alongside the keel; it is used more often to dip bilge water than for cooking.

Forcing herself not to look outside, Catherine examines the can of *Campbell's Tomato Soup* he left beside the stove as he searches for the misplaced can opener: "So battery acid soup is tomato soup, Andy Warhol's cultural icon. Did you ever see his painting?"

"The one of a soup can, who hasn't?" The can opener is where he dropped it in the freezer when he was getting out a package of caribou steaks, what, three weeks ago. No wonder he couldn't find it. He almost didn't remember dropping it.

"Just wondered."

"Why? What am I supposed to think of it? The soup is cheap, three cans for a dollar, sometimes four. It's quick to fix, and I suppose a fellow can stay alive on it. In 'Nam, I ate it cold from the can, just opened a can and ate it. It was better than our rations. So what am I supposed to think?"

"Do you think his painting works, talks to you, makes some kind of a statement?" She wonders how the subject came up—her head hurts as well as her shoulder. She's hungry, tired, could be bitchy, and too out of it to care about much.

"What difference does it make if his painting works for me? I wouldn't buy it, not when I can get the real thing with soup inside. So there's your answer." The soup seems to take forever to heat. "I have a book someplace about art...bought it on a clearance table for fifty cents in an Anchorage bookstore. Used to keep it in the head and read it while sitting there contemplating whether I should use three sheets or four. The book was worth what I paid for it."

"I always wanted a bookstore." She actually saw the book: it's in his small, but unusual library. A four volume set of Herodotus. *The Odyssey*. *Don Quixote*. A couple of shoot-em-ups: *The First Fast Draw* and Ken Follet's *Triple*, plus, *The Coastal Pilot*. The art book is dog-eared as are all of his books. There's something about him that doesn't quite make sense to her. "It was my dream as a girl."

"So you dream—what happened? besides the Shriner."

"Shriner? Did I say something to you about a Shriner or is this more of—" She pauses as she remembers that he apparently knows her from before the sky fell in. "How do you know me? From where?"

"I don't know you. What makes you think I do?"

"You knew about—"

"I don't know anything. I made a couple of lucky guesses." The soup is finally warm enough to dissolve its lumps. "So I came onto you...but," he has a war to fight, "you're outta my league."

Sitting, she rolls her fingertip around the rim of her coffee cup, empty but for its dregs. "Don't flatter me. It makes me want to—"

"What? Threaten me with the things of this world, things that can be sung to sleep so that they can be broken by toothless grandparents...you were a little girl when the witches woke you up with their evil, but the witches have no power beyond the edges of the world. So what else did you used to dream about?" He divides the soup between the pan and a bowl.

"If I had a dream, it'd turn out to be a nightmare."

Nightmares, daymares, visions—subjects he knows about, and he wonders since a fellow trusts a woman with his life every time he makes love to her, why is it so hard to trust one with secrets.

"A long time ago," he pauses. Eight years of silence—she won't understand. There is too broad a gulf between her world and his, especially now as he understands it.

"You were going to tell me a story. About you?"

"Yes." That bench-leg had his nose under that doe's tail. Big mistake. He never would have had the chance to kill that bench-leg otherwise. And he is fixing to make the same mistake.

"And now you're not?"

"Don't know if I should."

"I'm a good listener, and worth the risk."

"You'll laugh at all the right places, cry when you should?"

"Men have paid me a lot—"

"To listen to fantasies?...I don't want anything from you that you don't want to give. Don't want a smile unless you feel like smiling. Don't even want your trust unless you want to give it, and you

have compelling reasons not to trust anyone. I don't have those same reasons. Mine are different." But are they, he wonders. Both of their reasons related to their birth. "Maybe what I said just then isn't right."

"No?...milk loses its identity in soup." She holds her spoon as if it were a wand. "Takes the edge off the acidity of the tomatoes. Together, they're okay. What do you think?"

"I forgot to get you down the crackers...I put a package of steaks in the sink to thaw. We have a twelve or so hour run north. When we get to Blue Fox, we can fry some potatoes, can have some real food."

"You didn't answer my question."

"Your shoulder hurts too much for me to answer."

"Meaning?"

"Do you know the poem, *There's a race of men that don't fit in, A race that can't stay still. So they break the hearts of kith and kin, And they roam the world at will?* That's what I am, a man that doesn't fit it, a little renegade Umatilla, a quarter Rogue Indian, some English, more Dutch, a bad combination. Bad seed for everyone."

"I can match yours. *Ride through the doors of our unentered house. Exiled in us we arouse the soft, Uncleaned, armless, silk and rough love that breaks all rocks.* Can you do that? Silk and rough love." With her right arm, she reaches for his suspenders to slip them from his shoulders. She doesn't want to think of what either the Organization or the Soviets' GRU will do to him. The Organization is in every port. Every law enforcement agency has been alerted. He doesn't, they don't stand a chance, but she thought they would be dead before now.

This feels like war, like 'Nam, the feel of her hands, professional—he doesn't want the type of sex that sustained his company over there, the sex he avoided because he didn't want to bring anything home to Judy. But his thoughts really aren't of Judy or the boys, not today, not right now. And he worries a little about touching her shoulder

She lightly slides the fingertips of her right hand over his hard muscles, knowing she would like to show him off at Rio. What a couple they'd make...he doesn't look like someone who'd shoot two federal agents. A big child. Innocent. Really is. Oh, he's been cut. Has scars. But he's not ugly inside. Her catty acquaintances would be envious—but there won't be any more holidays in Rio or anywhere else. All that is over. She has had a good ride, has shone for a season. Materialism over poverty. But wealth, like life, is temporal.

If he's to stand any chance at all, she will have to leave him. Is that love? She wishes she knew, the word one she has used without assigning to it any meaning, just sound, like the whisper of the sea, soft, seductive, soothing, cold here near the end of the world. Maybe he'll remember her, she hopes.

He is, she's certain, *One of the Legion lost*. Yes, that's him, and she doesn't know if she likes the idea of him caring for her. He does care. That is the hell of it. Perhaps, she hopes, he is merely trying to atone for things that aren't his fault. She would hate to think he has a death wish, but that is how he comes across to her.

Her life, though, evidently means something to him, and she has no other way to return his concern than this . . .

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She was dry and her shoulder hurt; she wishes she felt better and that she cared, wishes she were attractive. The moment lasted longer than she intended: for most of an hour, they laid together without speaking, rocking gently in the fog that confused everything. Now, she is confused. It all seemed routine, the practiced touch, what follows. She didn't intend this confusion, hasn't felt it for a long time, hasn't felt anything for years. But what he left in her is growing. She feels it beginning to take over her body, her mind. If she could, she would flush it from her, but it has steamed up her

thoughts and she can't see anything clearly. Everything is lost in the heavy fog he pumped into her, filling her, the fog overflowing her and the bunk and the boat and the bay.

Everything seemed so clear . . .

2.

Eric Pettersen wants Shoulders to resist arrest so badly that he can't accept the possibility of the fisherman's derelict boat sinking; he absolutely refuses to accept that possibility. Of course, Chief Closa and the Alaska State Troopers have accepted the report of the *American Pride*, its crew a stoned bunch of potheads as far as he's concerned, completely unreliable. The Coast Guard looked around Egg Island for a day, but didn't find anything, didn't even find a trace of the other boat, the *Hellion*. Nevertheless, both vessels are now, two days later, officially listed as lost at sea. If he doesn't do it, no one will ever apprehend the fisherman. He will be laughing stock—

The anger he feels, the hate—he will not be laughed at.

"You'll get him, I know you will." Donna, who supplements her wages by being nice, lays her heavy arm across his shoulders. "And if you're to make your charter to Kodiak this morning, you need to be going."

Pettersen feels the weight of the black-haired desk clerk's arm, twists his shoulders as they lie together in her bed, its sheets smelling of her perfume. Skin slides over skin, the friction almost more than he can bear.

"What did you find out last night?" He again asks since they have nothing else to talk about.

"I told you, McPhearson took the *Northford* to Kodiak, then got off, didn't go wherever Jay wanted her to. She caught a boat to Seward. That's all I know."

He picks up his watch from her nightstand. She is right. He has to hurry. The chartered Cessna 440 will fly directly to Kodiak from Unalaska, but its pilot will not wait long for him. So hastily showering, washing from him the scent of her and of this black end of hell, he dresses and starts for the ferry dock, his steps quick but betraying the impotency of his office here, so far from Washington and the White House. With the wind pressing his trouser legs smooth, flattening the permanent pressed creases; with the mud of the graveled street slick under his leather soles, the leather spongy from days of freezing and thawing; with his muddy footprints crumbling in the wind—he hurries without dignity, without respect, an empty suit at which local fishermen laugh as he passes the Post Office, the Cop Shop, the Church.

3.

Jay, very careful of how he touches her, sits holding Catherine as he listens to a tape of "Bridge Over Troubled Waters," a tape he hasn't played for a long time—and for a long time, neither of them say anything. Instead they listen to the tapedeck and to the fog, which has no real sound, and she leans her head against his shoulder as she shivers a little.

He was feeling Native until she, well, changed the subject, sex being the great equalizer, the place where men die but live again, the dominance of being on top, then the leveling afterwards of lying together as if dead, two becoming one, Judy and guilt forgotten. Not really knowing how to proceed, he says in words almost too soft for even him to hear, "I used to log, would look at a patch of timber, figure how long it'd take me to fall all of it, then see how close I came, the trees just there to be cut, no connections between me and them other than my saw." And he tells about schoolmarms, widowmakers, barberchairs, and the snag that killed his dad. "Mom wasn't making it so I joined the Army right out of high school. Graduated from Siletz Tuesday night and was in Fort Ord for basic training Thursday morning. I could shoot so they made me a sniper, and the 'Cong were like trees, there to be killed, always another one, some a tougher shot than others, but the shot was important, not the target. Targets were just there to be hit." He tells about the seven weeks fighting his way out

of Laos, then being sent home, discharged and listed as missing in action for two years, and the problem of even renewing his driver's license when he didn't exist. "Then I came up here, started fishing, halibut at first, and catching lots of cod, incidental catch, some as big as forty pounds but lots of five, seven pounders, but with no market for them. I'd toss them on the deck till the deck was covered, then kick them off, no connections to me. I was separated from everything around me—the threads that connect the world together were severed by so much death, mostly justified." He pauses to see if she wants to speak, but she says nothing. "Then it came to me just a little while ago, my spirit, and I understood the problem, understood that I have to splice those threads." As an afterthought, he adds, "It's a Native thing I suppose—mend the tear I've made by a lack of respect...I have some money, enough to buy you another dress, a gray silk one, but you have to tell me about yourself—if you want to."

"I'm not much of a patriot, not like you."

"So that's what I am. A patriot?...Do you get tired of controlling your destiny when you have no good choices of what that destiny will be?"

"I'm not that complicated. I just supply kicks. Drugs. Room keys. Parties. That's all, just kicks." She talks about her parents, mentions the scandal and working her way through college, describes the swallows' return to Capistrano, and asks if he's seen Old Tucson, if he's visited Squaw Valley, seen Harrah's automobiles.

"Naa, but I've held twenty pounds of gold in my hands, cut slabs from a jade nodule larger than a car...do you know what an uranium blossom is?" She shakes her head, and he describes the blossom he found on the headwaters of the Goodpaster River, a blossom for which Alaskan Separatists had unsuccessfully hunted until a year ago. "They want to build a bomb, but I don't think any of them know how. At least I hope they don't."

"Survivalists with an atomic bomb, that's a scary story." And she tells him about the boys diving from the cliffs of Acapulco, about Mardi Gras in New Orleans, about the form and surface of beauty. "Beauty has always been a mask like an Indian putting a wolf skin over his back so he could get close enough to kill a buffalo. But you'd probably know more about that than I do."

"Killing buffalo? No. A bear, maybe. One shot from a long ways off, take out the ball of the near shoulder, then wait." He waits for a moment, then continues: "White men see Indians putting on wolf skins to sneak close—with the skin, you become a wolf, a shape-shifter, partly hidden, partly visible, like beauty, yes." And after a long pause, he goes on to tell her about the five fingers of the Yukon River where he had once killed a grizzly; he warns her about the rapids below Lake LaBarge. "But you're probably not going to canoe the Yukon so why am I telling you this?"

"Don't know why you are, but if I am ever again up here, I'll know which finger to take...I might be able to square things for you with the Organization. Don't know about GRU."

After a long pause, she adds, "The ivory was stolen before it could be loaded onto a Soviet factory ship...GRU is Soviet Military Intelligence. They are also involved, or will be."

"The enemy?"

"The enemy is us. Pogo? Is that right? I think it is." She now wants to do protect him from himself. But warning him about who he's up against doesn't seem like enough.

"And what is this organization? A bunch of dope dealers and their muscle?"

"I don't know many nice guys, Jay, but I think you're one. The less you know, the better." She looks away. Then in a very small voice, she says, "It's a bunch of fucking pimps and cowboys, a Cartel connection, some of the Beautiful People, names you might have heard, but none of them anybody you'd want to know."

"What's your connection to—"

"Don't ask."

"It sounds like I have the government after me, plus the organized arm of society and maybe the Russians. Not bad for a Siletz Indian, huh? My great-grandfather might actually be proud—if he was ever sober long enough for anybody to tell him."

"That's sad, but I hear my bitterness in you."

"I doubt that's what you hear...he drank 'cause there wasn't much else to do on that postage stamp size reservation at Siletz before a local market for logs developed—and we need to be going. I'd like to sit here with you and wait out this fog to lift, but we actually need its cover since we are likely to meet another boat and certainly planes as we get close to Karluk, then Kupreanof Strait."

"Rough water ahead?"

"Naa, shouldn't be. Should be as slick as roe on kelp."

She has no idea how slick that is although her imagination produces some slimy images; she assumes slick means smooth like his use of short water means shallow, short for needing only a short buoy line to reach the bottom.

Finally separating, he asks, "Where would you go if you were to disappear?"

"Don't know. Never thought about disappearing. My dreams have always turned out to be nightmares."

"I don't remember mine—"

"Nightmares or dreams?"

Instead of answering, he starts the Jimmie as he again checks his radar scope. Nothing but the beach and headlands. They haven't moved, but remain where they were before she kissed him. He thought they might have drifted out into deep water. But then, even after the whispering, the teasing with words and tongue, the secrets, his, hers, also remain as solidly stratified as the craggy headlands that cast long shadows across his radar, headlands lost in the fog.

"I have to get the anchor. One more day, and then we sleep."

The *Coyote* rides the ebbing tide out of the bay. They reach Shelikof as the tide turns and the fog darkens with the setting of the sun far to the west. For six hours, the rising tide pushes them northward, but even with the current, they are only off Seven Mile Beach when the tide turns again. They are still fourteen, fifteen hours away from Blue Fox Bay.

Hours stretch into more hours. Sandwiches would again be the order of the day if they weren't out of bread; so food and cooking is forgotten as the night wears away, its cold edges dulled by the fog.

The drone of the Jimmie prevents conversation as another day's run is neither welcomed nor dreaded, just long and wearisome. But Catherine, still favoring her left shoulder, leans against his shoulder, and makes the hours seem shorter.

They are approaching Kupreanof Strait as daybreak catches them. Although the sun lightens the gray sky, only a lone porpoise crossing and recrossing beneath the *Coyote's* bow breaks the monotony of the day for him; he has been here before. And his main concern remains being spotted from the air if the fog were to lift. He doesn't really want anything to break the monotony.

But in the thinning fog the day is anything but monotonous for Catherine, who sees her first sea otter pup asleep on its mother's stomach, then a couple of hundred otters as they pass by the west side of Raspberry Island, then a raft of otters in the kelp south of Steep Cape, then, near Ban Island, a spouting whale that she can't identify even though they are almost on top of it. The s'oish of the bow, the cries of gulls, the barking of sea lions—all excite her. She points to puffins, running on the waves, too heavy to fly after feeding, and to seals the color of rocks, and to the channel light on Alligator Island as only whiffs of fog remain.

They round the island, and turn towards the entrance to Shuyak Strait. Blue Fox Bay is in sight as the sun drops below the southern horizon, the fog behind them and still thick over the lower portion of Shelikof.

Entering the Bay leaves him empty, without any sense of accomplishment. Head rummy, mind free-spooling, he picks their way through the rocks. He's been awake so many hours since his vision he doesn't feel like seeing Little John as they glide past the old saltery and partially lit lab. So he runs the Coyote to the upper end of the bay and anchors, half under overhanging timber, in the mouth of a stream in its southeast corner. And after shutting down the 6-71, he kicks off his boots and stretches out on his bunk while Catherine fixes pancakes from the box of mix she found in his stores. He has syrup if he can remember where.

"Are we here first?" she asks, while waiting for the griddle to heat.

He hears her, but can't seem to answer. The fog.

She listens to him snore as she eats alone at the table.

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