# EDGES

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the aerie—

following crossing trails
I climb
through breezes
that lift me to the ledge
the hen launches
circles
sails guttural screams
at me
as she swoops low overhead
her downdraft strong
I would join her
if she'd let me

atop her spire, two gray eaglets
with pin feathers pushing through down

her tiercel joins the circle
both now dive low
as I lie
in trampled grass footprints
twice the size of mine
I feel the dung
fresh
but cold
make certain a cartridge is chambered
then stand
feeling taller than I am
pushing the pair higher
till they're specks
against the sun

Bent stalks of wild rye waver in the island's everpresent breeze as kittiwakes circle low over the bay. Occasionally larger gulls splash into the green waters of Port Adams' harbor. Puffin, already too heavy to fly, paddle aimlessly about. Gorged on salmon fry, the puffin warily watch two sea lions swim lazily among the weathered pilings supporting cannery row. Beyond the puffin, a seal stands upright in the water near the channel buoy; its dog face is turned towards the city dock where a dozen or more crows pace back and forth. Tethered to the dock is the Soviet trawler *Nevezmozhno Liubliu*. And from the top of the knoll beyond the city dock, Kell Harder kneels behind his tripod steadied Nikon.

The six hundred millimetre lens mounted to the front of his Nikon compresses the ship against the dock and causes the shadows of her protruding ribs to appear as continuations of the dock's creosoted pilings.

Rust streaked and battered and with the steel skin of her bow beat concave between her ribs, the once white *Nevezmozhno Liubliu* wrestles with her mooring lines. The Soviet trawler has been to sea continuously for two years. Storms and salt have taken their toll. Unpainted patches tacked to her port side betray the minimum specification to which she was built, and sparks and welding flashes coming from the base of her stern gantry

reveal still needed repairs. Kell imagines the vessel has serious structural flaws: bulkheads weakened by metal fatigue, broken welds of ribs to keel. He learned from his editor that the trawler will enter drydock when she returns to Nakhodka, but he suspects she will sail with a new crew before her inner defects are detected. What Kell can't know is the trawler will break up in a storm when she sails next. She will go down with all hands aboard. He can only feel a premonition that's just there in his mind.

He shudders as he thinks about the trawler. Will her new crew volunteer? Will they be like the ship's present crew?

The trawler's arrival has been somewhat of a media event since Soviet ships seldom receive permission to visit rural Alaskan ports. Thus, the trawler has been the object of considerable curiosity, and members of her crew have become minor celebrities.

While Kell kneels on the knoll, waiting for the sun to lengthen the shadows, the trawler's crew roam the streets and prowl the shops of Port Adams. Three crewmembers, each dressed in a dark brown suit and kelly-green shirt with a wide brown tie, take turns photographing each other—standing beside the Liberty ship anchor in the Harbormaster's parking lot, with the small boat harbor in the background, one of the three takes a picture of the other two. Their poses are stiff. And their twin lens reflex camera transforms them into rigid figures with frozen smiles and arms on each other's shoulders.

The ship's captain, first mate, and a gray-suited interpreter are in the True-Value hardware store at the corner of Marine Way and 1st Street. They have already purchased all of the black plastic electrical tape and marine bottom paint the store stocks, and presently, marveling at how firmly the bristles are anchored, they paw through dozens of paint brushes, tugging on the bristles of each.

Two of the crew are in Sandy's Boutique buying ruffled panties, nightgowns, and T-shirts for sweethearts still thousands of kilometres away. Four of the crew, each with a cellophane wrapped magazine tucked under his left arm, buy vodka in the

liquor store across the street from the Harbormaster's. Their steps are already unsteady. Their voices are loud, their language coarse and understandable by devout members of the local Orthodox church begun here by that famous Metro of Moscow.

A half dozen of the crew stroll three abreast down the middle of Marine Way, between King Crab's cannery and Alaska Pacific Seafoods. They seem to delight in causing lift truck drivers with pallet loads of canned salmon to pause until they pass. And one crew member, sitting on the railing above the small boat harbor's grid, reads a newspaper and enjoys the rare, early June sun.

Again, Kell wonders how he knows what each crewmember does. Sure he followed them around before climbing the knoll, but hours have passed since he photographed the crew cavorting through the businesses fronting Marine Way. As staff photographer for Port Adams' weekly newspaper, a title bearing more prestige than pay, he exposed a half dozen rolls of black and white Pan-X. His job is to record what happens in town and around the island, and he does his job well, sometimes too well. For example, the photo of the baby: he wishes now he hadn't taken that photo. He never should have submitted it for publication. He should've known better, but he was young then. He was filled with zeal, and it was a damn good picture.

The newspaper will buy one, two, maybe three pictures from him and will pay him about what he spends for film today; so he hopes to sell some prints of the Soviet trawler locally. Perhaps some of the Russians will buy an enlargement of their trawler if he can develop the prints before the ship sails in the morning. He needs the sales, needs grocery money.

Except for the welding flashes, the trawler appears deserted on the ground glass of his Nikon's viewfinder. Its rust stained hull and battered bow seem part of a ghost ship bound to the city dock, tethered by awe and suspicion . . . he feels as restrained as the Soviet ship. Thousands of kilometres from home, he, too, is a stranger among a peculiar people, a Dane in America. Perhaps

this is why he wants to arrest time and motion and forever freeze the ship to the dock.

Carefully, he rewinds the roll of Kodachrome. His motor drive is broken—he really doesn't need one. When he concentrates on his subject, frame after frame seemingly advance by themselves; so he shoots no less film without his drive.

To blur the town and the hill beyond the dock, he opens the aperture of his long lens, and he focuses on the trawler's portside, nearside, bulwarks. He brackets the recommended exposure, one f-stop under and two over, then changes camera bodies and shoots the remainder of a roll of Pan-X.

No more film. He's done.

The rolls of Kodachrome he'll drop in this evening's mail. He will develop and print the Pan-X tonight, and if he's lucky, the ship's crew won't have spent all of their money today; he doesn't feel lucky, though. So reluctantly, he packs his gear and leaves the knoll, leaving only bent stalks of wild rye and flattened fireweed to mark where he spent the afternoon.

Mosquitoes rise from the grass to annoy him. With his tripod shouldered and his excessively heavy bag in hand, he ignores the insects as best he can. His lenses seem to weigh a ton, and he wonders why the strap doesn't tear from the bag.

Parked alone on the turnout halfway between town and the airport, his VolksWagon is as he left it—its driver's side window is rolled down, and its left front tire is half flat. He'll have to stop for air at the station on the corner of 1st and Baranof. Air there doesn't cost a quarter.

He loads his gear, and he drives the three kilometres to town. After two brief stops, for air and at the Post Office to mail the slide film, he arrives at his one-bedroom apartment, enters his makedo darkroom that doubles as his bathroom, and he routinely processes the rolls of negative film he exposed today.

His actions are automatic: he knows the time and temperatures as he knows his own name. So when the seven film strips are washed and clipped onto a line stretched above the tub, he draws

aside the heavy, black curtain covering the door. He flips-on the naked bulb above the sink as he turns off the red safelight, and in the glare of the harsh lighting, he checks the strips for water droplets before leaving the room.

From an otherwise empty refrigerator in the kitchen/living room portion of his tiny apartment, he takes a bottle of dark, stout, Australian beer, the only luxury he permits himself in this land of lite beer drinkers. He then collapses onto the sagging springs of the couch that came with the apartment. He props his feet on the coffee table, and he savors the brew that ought to have come from his native Danmark . . .

In a way, immigrating to Alaska was inevitable from the day he received his first camera. His first pictures were of a sparrow's nest in a back yard boxwood tree, and that first year, he sold a picture of the neighbor's cat with a fledged sparrow in its mouth. By the time he turned nineteen, he had sold more than a thousand photos, and he was considered among Danmark's most promising nature photographers. His specialty was, and remains, birds of prey, and he displayed a dozen photos of feeding eagles in a Copenhagen show the year he was twenty. But eagles are scarce in Europe; so he borrowed money from his parents, and he toured South America the year he was twenty-one. He toured western America the year he was twenty-two. Downunder the year he was twenty-three. Turkey, twenty-four. He spent his springs and summers and one winter photographing soaring hens and spiraling tiercels. He captured strong talons squeezing life from prey. And each year, he published his photos of the area's great birds. Five books in all. And to get into the Middle East, he took a job with an Ålberg newspaper, for whom he took a few too many pictures in Syria. Bloody photos. He doesn't like thinking about what he witnessed and photographed. So now, a decade and a hundred thousand unpublished photographs later, he again has a title though for practical purposes, his title means nothing, and he still photographs ravens and eagles.

He feels the beer—

He must have dozed off. When he stirs, the early morning sun pours through the apartment's only window.

He leans forward. Resting his elbows on his knees, he holds his woozy head in his hands. His shoulders ache. He has a catch in the small of his back. A thousand tiny needles prick his left leg as he stands. His mouth tastes of stale beer. He needs to piss, and he hopes the Soviet trawler isn't in any hurry to clear port this morning.

As he aims the yellow stream at the bubbles floating in the toilet bowl, he suspects there isn't time to dry prints of each crew member before the trawler sails; he knows there isn't time. And he angrily chides himself for wasting film.

He twists the lever to flush, and he watches the water in the bowl swirl downwards. He yearns to return to the prosperous, whirlwind years of his early twenties. Those years left an acquired appetite for success, and he hungers for its fruits.

But all he can do is be hungry—he knows without looking that his cupboards are bare. He needs to sell a print.

If he hurries he has time to print and dry an 8X glossy of the trawler against the dock; so he checks the ends of the hanging strips to locate the last negatives he took.

When he finds them, he snips four frames from the strip's end, and he holds the frames to the naked bulb above the sink to see what he has . . . the bulb is hot, but even the brief look reveals a spot on each frame. Not a water spot. But a spot in the emulsion that appears like someone standing on the trawler's deck.

He takes a magnifying glass from the medicine cabinet, carefully studies the negatives, and finds it difficult to believe what he so clearly sees. The spot is a person, a girl leaning over the gunwale railing. Shielding her eyes with her left hand, the girl stares at him, and he wonders how he failed to see her. She is obvious, as obvious as the ship itself, and her presence in the negative ruins the effect he sought.

Silently cursing his blindness, he shakes his head in disbelief. How did he miss seeing her? Doesn't seem possible. Yet there she

is. And his urge to toss the film clip is nearly overpowering. He's pitched thousands of negatives with smaller blemishes—some, now, he wishes he had.

The image of the girl is too large to remove without adversely affecting the quality of his print, and since he cannot duplicate the photos once the ship sails, he swallows his anger as he resigns himself to printing the negative, spot and all. He doubts the girl's appearance will hinder his chances of selling prints of the trawler. In Port Adams, people buy photographs because they like them. Artistic merit is an intangible that can neither be sold nor explained. And he tries to convince himself the sun addled his vision for him to have missed seeing her.

Deciding to give his editor a choice between the first two images of the four exposure clip, he cuts the clip in half, and he places exposure number 33A and 34A in an envelope he slips into his shirt pocket. He enlarges number 35A—projecting its reversed image onto the easel board until he's satisfied with the board's positioning, he contemplates the photo's strength without the blemish. It might have been an award winner. But he can only print what he has; so he turns off the light, opens his paper safe, removes a sheet of RC, places it on the easel, and begins timing his exposure.

As he watches the enlarged image of the girl burn herself onto the paper, he convinces himself, somewhat unwillingly, that she was, indeed, staring at him last evening. In fact, even as he prints the negative, he seems to feel her eyes watching him. He tries to dismiss the feeling as absurd, but he can't. And he catches himself subconsciously avoiding her gaze as he slips the sheet of exposed paper into the tray of fixer.

He prints a second eight-by-ten while he waits for the rinse water to drip from the first—and for the second time, he feels the girl's gaze, strong, direct, and he wilts a little. He wonders how a few grains of silver halide can so effect him. The girl seems alive. He wishes all of his prints captured the souls of his subjects as this one has.

Since nothing ever dries quickly along the coast, he resorts to the not recommended trick of using his microwave oven as he has done countless times to speed the process. And when the first print is sufficiently dry, he places it between two sheets of tagboard, then sticks the second print in the oven, sets the timer, and hurries to catch the soon to be departing trawler.

Although his wristwatch claims the hour to be only 5:45, the sun is already high in the northern sky. He knows from working for the newspaper that the trawler sails at six o'clock, and he isn't happy with himself for falling asleep last night. He left himself too little time. He needs a sale, truly needs one.

His VolksWagon starts reluctantly, and he again glances at his watch—5:49. Where, he wonders, did the minutes go. And he hopes the city officer on duty sleeps soundly.

From the top of the hill by the high school, he sees the trawler still tied to the dock, but he also sees thin, black smoke coming from its main stack. Ignoring the 25 mph speed limit, he dives his VolksWagon over the hill and down Kupreanof, his tires squealing as he turns onto Marine Way and flies by cannery row, nearly hitting a raven pecking a squashed can of salmon.

At the city dock, he brakes, jumps out and hurries towards a cluster of men standing in the shadow of the warehouse.

Approaching, he sees that two of them, both in baggy brown suits, are the captain and first mate. Nevertheless, he addresses the cluster when he says, "I'd like to speak to the captain."

Five sets of eyes turn to stare at him. For a moment, he wishes he were elsewhere.

After a dozen seconds, seconds that seem like minutes, one of the taller men who wears a well-cut conservative gray business suit, asks, "Why do you want to speak to the captain?"

"I'm a photographer—with the local newspaper here—and I took some photos of his ship yesterday. I thought, perhaps, the captain would like a print as a souvenir."

Motioning for Kell to reveal the picture, the gray-suited man says, "Let's see what you have."

Carefully, Kell lifts the tagboard protecting the print as he says, "I usually get fifteen dollars for an eight-by-ten like this." And he angles the print so everyone can see.

Something in the print immediately piques the interest of the captain and first mate. Withdrawing a pair of black plastic framed eyeglasses from an inside jacket pocket, the captain, the shorter of the two Russians, steps closer as he leans forward to study the print. The veins in his neck swell as his face reddens. Then stepping back a pace so his first mate can better see, the captain, in terse Russian, demands to know who the woman is and what is she doing abroad his ship.

The man in the gray suit answers, but only seems to infuriate the captain.

Kell listens to the exchange. He wasn't much of a language student in school, but he's able to comprehend what's said. But even a non-Russian speaker understands the captain's snapped words and waving hands.

When the heated exchange cools, the gray suited man almost innocently asks Kell, "Who's the girl?"

"Don't know. Don't have any idea."

"You don't know her?"

"No. Never have seen her before. . . . Thought she was one of the crew who didn't go to town."

"She isn't a model posing for you?"

"No. Definitely not. Wish she wasn't there. The photos would be stronger, more stark if she wasn't standing there."

The first mate steps back, and in English, asks Kell directly, "This woman was aboard?"

"Would imagine so. Didn't see her when I took the photo, but she's in every one of my photos—the ones shot late in the afternoon."

The captain, his voice chewing his words, tells the cluster he must immediately search his ship. And still speaking rapid, terse Russian, he adds that he must have the print, the picture of the girl.

Casually and apparently unaware Kell understands Russian, the man in the gray suit tells him, "The captain likes the picture and would like you to donate it to his ship and crew in the cause of detante. Your gift will, of course, be tax deductible."

"Tax deductions don't buy film, paper, groceries. I need the money." Kell sadly shakes his head as he replaces the tagboard.

The gray man pulls a wad of folded money from his pocket, and pulling off a twenty dollar bill, he says: "I'll buy the print, but I need the negative. You'll receive photo credit, but it'll belong to the government."

"Don't sell my negatives."

"You will this one."

"Don't think so."

"How many pictures did you say you took?"

"Four. . . . Printed what I thought was the best, and I don't have change for that twenty."

"Take the twenty. You're getting some of your tax money back. I'll just need a receipt with your name, address and telephone number in case the expense is questioned."

Eagerly accepting the twenty, Kell says, "Sure," as he quickly scribbles the requested information on the back of a model release.

The gray man glances at Kell's name and address, then says, "You don't live in a post office box, do you? I need your physical address."

Taking his model release back, Kell adds the street address of his apartment below his phone number, then returns the release as he mentally leaps for joy. He'll have no trouble spending the twenty on groceries.

As Kell hands the print to the first mate, the gray-suited man asks, "Are the negatives the property of the newspaper or yours?"

"Right now, they're mine. But my editor will buy one." Then remembering how poorly his editor pays, he adds, "If you're serious about the negative, I suppose I could sell it. The price will be steep."

"I want all four."

Briefly, he considers selling all four. He's not satisfied with any of them. He'll end up pitching the ones he keeps in a year or two. Plus, he has negatives of the ship that he took earlier in the day.

But even with the girl leaning over the railing, the afternoon photos are better than anything he took earlier. There's no shadowing in the earlier photos. And since he takes considerable pride in the pictures the newspaper prints, he says, "Selling all four is out of the question." He then nods to the three remaining fellows as he adds, "Pleasure doing business with you." He hears no cynicism in his voice, but he almost chokes on *pleasure*. So, angry at the audacity of the gray man, he retreats to his VolksWagon. He would've sold one negative for another twenty, but for the fellow to insist on having all four was too much. Normally he wouldn't consider selling a negative for less than two hundred, but these aren't normal times.

As he pulls onto Marine Way, he notices the canneries are already working though it will be two hours before either grocery store opens, and three hours before Alaska Commercial opens—Alaska Commercial, or AC as it's locally known, seems to sell groceries only as a sideline. Since he has time to kill, he might as well stop by the newspaper's office; he has a key. If he leaves the negatives now, he won't be tempted to sell them later.

Small kittiwakes and large gray gulls circle above the canneries, the docks, and the harbor. A bald eagle perches on the crown of the lone tree on Near Island while its mate chases crows the length of the channel. He smiles. He never tires of watching eagles chase crows. All winter long, the crows torment the eagles. So all summer long, eagles chase crows. He must have a thousand slides of this long-standing conflict.

That reminds him, the eagle fledgings he has photographed since they hatched in early May have assumed the proportions of fat bowling pins. Besides needing to leave his editor the two negatives, he needs to check the newspaper's current events

schedule. He again needs to take a couple of days off to expose more film of the fledgings.

The newspaper's office, nestled in a stand of tall Sitka spruce next to the old Orthodox graveyard, exists in perpetual shade. Even now, heavy dew wets its parking lot, and scores of small slugs crawl across the sidewalk leading to its front door.

He unlocks the door and steps into the deserted office, and this time like every other time he enters the building, he notices the absence of the smell of ink: for the past year, the paper has been printed in Seattle and flown to Port Adams every Wednesday. Except for the art boards, the office could belong to any business in town. Computers talk to computers over telephone lines. Local stories are reduced to electronic bytes as the efficiency of America garbles individual lives. The office is lite beer all over again. *Tastes great. Less filling.* To him a newspaper doesn't seem like a newspaper when the printing is done fifteen hundred kilometres away.

Jack Edwards edits the weekly, more often used to wrap fish than read—Kell scribbles a note on Jack's memo pad, then lays the envelope containing the negatives on top of the clutter covering his editor's desk. He checks the calender to the side of the computer station that poses as the composing room, and he sees no event listed for the next three days that will require his presence in town. He should be able to take the days off without unduly provoking Jack, Mr. Edwards to everyone on salary. But he isn't on salary. So after helping himself to a couple rolls of film from Jack's personal cache, he leaves the office, relocking the door.

It will still be awhile before either grocery store opens—he briefly considers ordering breakfast at the cafe diagonally across the street from the Harbormaster. Neither a short stack nor hashbrowns and eggs cost much. But right now, a meal in a restaurant is an extravagance he can't justify.

So when he leaves the newspaper's parking lot, he drives towards Pillar Cape. Perhaps he'll find a picture waiting to be

taken. He often does; he sees things, sometimes interesting, sometimes ironic, sometimes worth investigating. Perhaps he'll forget the hunger that continually gnaws away inside him.

Leaving town behind, he notices that the tide is mostly out, the sea calm. Gentle groundswells cause the Gulf of Alaska to appear as a rumpled, blue comforter spread across the bed of a frost giant. Where is the Rainbow Bridge when he needs it? How did his ancestors ever believe in stories so fatalistic as those of Odin, Loki, Valhalla.

The morning sun reflects from the rounded lumps of the groundswells, and the surrounding barrier rocks shine like many faceted mirrors as ten thousand bull kelp heads peacefully nod approval. A blue seiner pushes white bow wakes, like tiny paint rolls on a seascape, past Buoy Four. An inbound seiner, gray with black trim, tows its gray skiff through the inner shortcut, and a reflected flash on the horizon, far out across Malina Bay, marks another seiner, either working or traveling.

Built by the Army during the Second World War, the road to the cape sneaks between rows of long-abandoned, grass-covered concrete bunkers, the innards of which are covered with spray painted graffiti. The road has been chiseled from the cape's rocky cliffs, and its narrowness remains as a remainder of the age when nothing was impossible.

Kell parks on the turnout for a gun emplacement of the forgotten shore batteries. The falling tide, he notices, has exposed the barrel of the gun that once swiveled where he parks. The barrel is eight metres in length, tapered, a metre to about a half metre in diameter. Its bore appears to be fifteen centimetres. Beside the barrel lies the rusty frame of a king crab pot—the sea apparently rolled the heavy steel frame of the lost crab pot into the shallows as if purging itself of evil.

With the blown breech of the gun barrel in the background, the rusty rectangular bars of the crab pot form an interesting pattern of lines and colors. He reaches behind the driver's seat to where his camera bag lies. Withdrawing a Nikon body and a two

hundred millimetre lens, he loads one of the rolls of Fujichrome he picked up this morning. While some magazines won't yet buy Fujichrome slides, his editor buys the Japanese film because of its price. He shoots it because of its coloring; plus, he is able to process it himself. But when he uses it, he worries about having a photo rejected because of the film. That was what happened in Syria with the photo of the baby.

He brackets his exposures around one aperture setting: f-8.

The surf laps at the end of the barrel, and a seagull searches the beach gravel for snails and mussels, upside-down sea urchins and hermit crabs left high and dry by the falling tide. And in one exposure, he captures forever the seagull peering into the gun barrel as its white mute splatters a half-buried, rusted bar of the seven-by pot.

Stomach growling, he wishes, as he stares through the lens at the rusty bars and blown barrel, his hunger would go away, wishes he could eat by choice rather than of necessity. He glances at his Timex—the stores are open. So he shoots one more exposure, then collapses the legs of his tripod.

By jockeying back and forth, he turns his VolksWagon around and retreats along the narrow, rock road while watching the world around him reveal itself. The world, though, shows him nothing he hasn't photographed before.

He feels the hollowness of the mostly empty store when he enters MARK-IT FOODS. A girl with neon blue eyelids stifles a bored yawn as she dumps rolls of change into the till. A pale-faced youth of possibly sixteen waves a feather duster at jars of pickles and bottles of ketchup across the aisle from the produce section where an identically pale man in his forties tosses slimy, brown lettuce leaves into a box half filled with rotten grapefruit and mushy tomatoes. The only customer visible is a willowly girl in her twenties. The girl wears black rubber cannery boots and has a red bandana loosely tied around her neck, and she busily sorts through the oranges, laying aside green ones while the older grocer frowns.

As he watches the two of them, the older grocer and the girl, Kell wishes he would've brought his camera into the store. While blindly groping for a grease pen in the green plastic bucket suspended above the jammed-together shopping carts, he wonders if he shouldn't get one from his VolksWagon. But suspecting the girl will have pawed all of the oranges before he can return, he rejects the idea of photographing this silent confrontation. Instead, he picks up a basket and starts down the produce aisle himself.

Tri-X, f-4, 125th—yeah, he tells himself, there's enough light if there were time enough to get his camera . . . time, for him, is measured in milliseconds. Either too much or not enough. Time, light, their balance, focus. His life is an eighteen percent gray card to which he daily adds depth of field, morality. Shutter, aperture, film—the elemental elements of photography. He takes the same pictures over again, each time hoping for better lighting, better composition, a sale. One photo will suffice for an amateur. A hundred isn't enough for a professional. This silent confrontation will occur again. Perhaps then, he will have the time to record it.

The thin girl still paws oranges when he approaches. In passing, he says loud enough for both her and the grocer to hear: "You know those oranges are a special, early ripening, far northern green variety grown right here on the island. They're *Aleutian valencia*."

Ignoring him, the girl selects an orange she had previously rejected, then hurries past him as the corners of the grocer's eyes smile.

Although not deliberately, he follows the girl through the store. He picks up a loaf of rye bread and a brick of sharp cheddar cheese, both of which he knows he can't afford; he can afford potatoes and eggs, nothing else. Nevertheless, wincing as he scribbles the price of each on their plastic wrappers, he heads to the checkout counter, where he waits for the girl to fish three faded and worn one dollar bills from her right front jeans pocket

to pay for her one apple, one orange, single head of Chinese cabbage and packet of low calorie salad dressing mix.

After hastily pocketing the nickel and two pennies she receives as change, the girl stomps from the store. And despite being only a couple of minutes behind her, he doesn't see her when he steps outside. He is mildly curious as to where she went. His VolksWagon is the only vehicle parked either in front or to the side of the store, and as he opens its door, he briefly wonders who she is. Probably another cannery rat sent to Alaska by the hiring halls in Seattle and Spokane. He hasn't seen her around, and being unattached, he does notice the yearly crop of female cannery workers. Unfortunately, he's too poor to be of interest to them. Besides, most of them have fallen in love with the idea of loving a fisherman. How is he, a photographer, supposed to compete with the image of daring men braving the elements as they risk life and limb at sea with fortunes awaiting their next voyage? Or is it that only fishermen are rich enough to use a gram of cocaine as hanging bait?

He often wonders if he shouldn't hire out on a boat. There is money to be made fishing. Lots of it. But money hasn't the appeal he imagined when he was younger. The glitter of green paper, the shine of columns of black numerals, the clink of credit cards—worth more to him are his photos of golden eagles, silver salmon and copper foxes. Sure, he has needs. He needs more of everything, but he needs money only so he can work. He works because he hungers for what he once had, and he wonders where fame goes when it disappears. He wonders why money means nothing to him when it means so much. He wonders why the Immigration official wanted all four negatives, wonders who the girl is he photographed aboard the ship, wonders if the captain found who brought her aboard, wonders why the crewmember would risk incurring the captain's wrath. Surely a tumble in the sack isn't worth chancing a tour in the Gulag. He imagines a crewmember was impressing one of the local ladies by showing

her around the ship. No other explanation for the girl's presence seems plausible.

He opens the loaf of bread. Then using the dull filet knife he keeps under the driver's seat, he slabs chunks of cheese from the brick. He balances the bread on the dash, lays cheese between two slices, reseals the loaf, and is about to stuff half of the sandwich into his mouth when he notices the black cannery boots protruding upside-down from the dumpster.

Momentarily forgetting his sandwich, he eases open his door and withdraws a loaded Nikon body and a wideangle lens from the bag he keeps behind the seat. Certain the boots are those of the girl who bought the orange, he wonders what she is doing in the dumpster. Maybe she is still searching for a ripe orange.

The boots kick frantically, then disappear.

He wonders if she is trapped, or stuck—and if she is, why she isn't hollering for help.

Cautiously peering over the side of the dumpster, quickly focusing on her face, he sees the girl, on her hands and knees, pick through a discarded flat of overripe strawberries. Beside her is a nearly full crate of lettuce and plums she has already salvaged.

When he trips the shutter, the flopping mirror startles her.

Advancing film, he snaps the shutter again, capturing her expression of surprise and fear, part of his record of Port Adams. He'll make her a celebrity—he snaps another exposure.

Her face reddens.

Again he snaps the Nikon's shutter.

The three gold studs and three gold hoops she wears through her right ear glow as her embarrassment becomes anger.

In an effort to deflect the tirade he knows is coming, he says, "A friend of mine claims he only buys fruit from the stores here in town so his kids will know what fruit looks like."

"Get fucked!"

"Hey, I'm not looking to go to war."

"Why did you take my picture?"

"Taking pictures is what I do for a living."

"Being a sneak is more like it."

"I'm a photographer."

"That doesn't give you the right to take my picture."

"Hey, I didn't mean to scare you. It's just when I saw you in there, I saw a story."

"Like hell you saw a story!"

His own face has become flush, hot. Certain there really is a story here, he changes tactics: "Look, I don't know your name, but I'd like to find out. Is there someplace other than here?"

"You're an asshole."

"I've been told that before."

"You're a bastard!"

"I'll have to talk to my mother about that." He needs her to sign a model release, but right now, he doubts she will sign anything but his death warrant. "Meanwhile, I'd like to invite you to dinner. Okay?"

"Go to hell."

"Hey, I'm only trying to be friendly. Inside there," he nods towards the concrete front of the store, "the money you pulled from your pocket looked pretty lonesome. Maybe we could pool our resources and—"

"I'm doing fine."

"Is doing fine kneeling in a dumpster?"

She starts to say something, seems to change her mind, then starts to say something else, again pauses, then just glares at him. He doesn't know what to say. And before either of them speaks again, the older grocer approaches the dumpster with a handcart full of boxes.

When he sees the girl, the grocer hollers, "Get the hell outta there!"

Figuring the grocer owes him for hurrying her along inside the store, Kell intercedes: "Wait a minute. She's not hurting anything. Let her pick through your trash. You've already thrown it away."

Glowering at the girl as he mutters something beneath his breath about *not buyin' a damn thing yet they expect me to feed*

*'em, how the hell do they expect me to do it*, the older grocer jerks the handcart from under the stack of boxes. Turning to Kell, the grocer says plenty loud, "When she gets outta there, you throw these boxes in." The grocer then resumes muttering to himself as he returns to the store's side entrance.

Swallowing a strawberry, the girl says, "Thanks, but you didn't have to do that. I can take care of myself."

"I'm sure you can, but wasn't it easier to let me do it?"

"You're not just a bastard, but an egotistical bastard."

"We could discuss my lineage over dinner?"

"I don't think so."

"I'm likely to be too poor myself to invite you out tomorrow." He wouldn't invite her out now if he didn't need a model release signed, and he doesn't think it possible for him to be poorer tomorrow than he is today. So halfheartedly, he adds, "You know how it is with photographers."

"No, I don't know how it is with photographers, and I don't care to find out so just let it go."

"I can't. I have too much of my father in me."

"What do you mean by—" She catches herself, and her eyes narrow as she glares at him.

He smiles. And his smile seems infectious. Within a few seconds, the corners of her mouth begin to smile. Her glare passes. Her eyes widen. And she mumbles, "Touche."

"What about a portrait? I really am a photographer, a damn good one. Plus, it's less sinister to invite you to my studio than to my apartment—"

"For a romp in the sack. No thanks to either one."

"Hey look, I'm a nice guy. I didn't mean to startle you, and because I did, I'd like to make it up to you. Buy you dinner. That's all . . . and I really am a photographer."

"You don't give up, do you?"

"There are times I do, but you don't really want me to. Admit it. You're curious now, aren't you. You don't know whether I'm

for real or just bullshitting you. . . . I'll show you some of my work if you'd like."

"No, I don't think so."

"You're making this difficult."

"I certainly hope so."

"How about me giving you a lift home? That's the least I can do for startling you."

She stares at him as if she were a child and he, a stranger offering candy. But after several seconds, she begins to slowly nod her head as she says, "Okay. A lift downtown. That'll save me carrying these crates to the boat harbor."

"Sure. . . . I don't have much room in the boot, but I have some in the backseat."

"*Boot*? You're a fucking foreigner. That figures."

"Hey, what's with you? . . . Didn't you mother teach you how to accept an apology?"

"You gonna help me pack these crates downtown, or not?"

She hands him a full crate of overripe fruit, then the partially filled crate plus a waxed cardboard box, and she refuses his offer of assistance when she jumps over the side.

He stacks the two crates and the waxed box on the back seat. Immediately, the inside of his Bug reeks of bruised and fermenting fruit as juice seeps between the thin wood slats of the crates and onto the cloth upholstery. Juice also drips from the corners of the waxed box—thick, syrupy juice trickles down onto his rug floorboards.

By nature, he is inclined to do a slow burn rather than allow his anger to show. As he slowly drives towards the boat harbor which is, he figures, about a litre of seeped juice away, he feels the heat from his lit fuse. He suspects the crates are dripping onto his camera bag, and his cameras are all he has and all he cares about.

Swallowing anger for the sake of maybe getting a release signed, he ignores the sticky juice as best he can. But by the time he parks behind the Harbormaster's office, he, too, wishes he had never taken her picture.

He sets the waxed box and one of the crates on the planked dock. Then carrying the other crate—he doesn't worry about leaving his VolksWagon unlocked; nothing is ever stolen in Port Adams—he follows her as she hurries down the ramp and along the floats, passing first the motley assortment of full-time longliners awaiting the next halibut opening, then the empty berths of salmon seiners. They pass the ex-troller the high school uses as a research ship, then turn onto the third of four fingers floats.

The girl lives beneath a tarp draped over the boom of a refurbished, twenty-nine foot Bristol Bay gillnetter. The original puke yellow cannery paint has been burned, scraped, and sanded away, and the bare wood hull varnished. The ancient fir planking has been refastened, and ice sheathing has been added to its bow. The rudder has been replaced as has been the tiller, and the original galvanized steel fittings have been traded for bronze. The blocks and the sails appear new, and a short bowsprint has been added.

After setting the crate on the float to which the still open sailboat is moored, he asks, "You do the work on her?" as he motions to the former gillnetter.

"A little of it."

"Is she yours?"

"It is now."

"She looks good. Can you sail her?"

"It's setup to sail singlehanded. Topping lifts and lazy jacks have been added so I can control the booms and yards myself, but I've never taken it out alone."

"What do you do with her if you don't sail her?"

"I didn't say I didn't sail it. I said I've never taken it out alone."

"Who do you take with you?"

"That's none of your business." Her words are as brittle as hoarfrost.

The heat from that burning fuse scorches his patience. So she has a boyfriend. So what. He expected as much. What right,

he asks himself, does she have to be angry, especially after the mess her rotten fruit has made of his car.

More determined than ever to have her sign a release and be done with her, he spins on the ball of one foot and heads for the parking lot. He stops, however, at the top of the ramp to see if the girl is coming for her crate and box—when he turns to look, he sees her talking to a fellow with a white beard and graying ponytail reaching to the middle of his back. He stares disgustedly at the fellow before returning his attention to his VolksWagon and to cleaning up the juice.

The fellow with the ponytail approaches him from behind, and pointing to the box and crate, he asks, "These Sharon's?"

"Is that her name?"

"Sharon Caine. . . . She made a mess of your car. I'll get her to clean it up."

"I can get it, but if you want to do something, take this pad of model release forms and have her sign one so I can use her picture in the newspaper."

"Will her picture be in the newspaper?"

"Not if I don't get a release signed."

"Have you asked her?"

"No. She's madder than a Finn at me for taking her picture." Kell sees that he'll have to wait to use a dock hose. Both of them are being used to wash fish gurry off raingear. "The photos I took are of her filling these crates. That makes the photos human interest rather than news."

"I think that would make a good story, showing how much grocery stores throw away. I'll ask her for you." And he takes both the box and the crate and descends the ramp.

He watches the older fellow step aboard the gillnetter and duck under the tarp. Sharon emerges, glances his direction, then drops her eyes, jumps onto the finger float, and briskly walks towards him. She climbs the ramp as he sets his camera bag on the roof of the VolksWagon. When she approaches within a couple

of metres, she somewhat awkwardly says, "Dad said I made a mess of your car. I'm sorry."

"I'll hit it with a water hose and it'll be all right."

"He said you want a release signed so you can use my picture in the newspaper."

"I'd like for you to sign one."

"I don't want you to use my picture—not those pictures."

"Look, I'd like to use those shots as part of a photo essay about a cannery town. . . . If you don't want, I won't give them to the paper, but I'd really like them in the essay."

"What do you do with the paper?"

"Staff photographer." He is thankful for the honorable and prestigious sounding position.

"I should've guessed."

"I don't mean to embarrass you. I'll present them tastefully."

"Have you ever sold a photo essay before?"

"Yes—and no. I've had five books of bird pictures published, all quite awhile ago." He's hesitant to brag too much, but he does add, "There are two books in the city library. I think the other three are out of print."

"What are their titles?"

"The one that'll probably interest you most is called *The Great Raptors*. It's of different eagles I've photographed from around the world."

"That sounds interesting. I'll check it out. If I like it, I'll sign your release."

"That's it?"

"If you're bullshitting me, I'll find out."

"Look, it'll be a few days before I'm back in town."

"It'll be a few days before I check out your book."

He notices fishermen noticing him, the turned head, the slightest nod of approval, sometimes just a glance—he feels conspicuous standing here on the dock talking to her. But it's the smell of the fermenting juice that urges him to conclude this conversation. He's anxious to wash the seat and floor rug as best

he can; so he's relieved when she extends her hand and says, "Thanks for the lift."

"Yeah . . . I guess I'll see you in a few days."

"I guess so."

They shake hands. And she immediately returns to her gillnetter. He watches her go though he has work to do, and despite the cheese sandwich still awaiting his attention. But as he watches her disappear under the tarp, it isn't for food that he hungers. He wants the acclaim another book will bring. His books make him somebody. So all he can do is take more photos and hope for one print around which he can rebuild his reputation.

He really does have work to do. The newspaper won't need him until Friday at the earliest: Friday is when coaches pick the All-Star Babe Ruth team to be sent to the mainland for state playoffs. That leaves him three days he can spend across Iskai Bay photographing the fledgling eaglets. Prints of the *Nevezmozhno Liubliu* can wait. The eaglets are more important and more interesting than anything town offers. So he places the loaf of bread alongside his camera bag on the roof of his Super Beetle as he uses the dock hose to wash the sticky juice off the backseat upholstery. He floods the floorboards, knowing full well the backseat won't dry for days, maybe weeks. He realizes the most the water will do is dilute the syrupy juices, but he doesn't care for fruit wines, particularly strawberry, so he certainly doesn't want his car smelling like them. He has no choice but to douse the backseat—and water flows from the backseat forward, passing beneath both the driver's and the passenger's seats. He wonders what he can use to bail the water, and he wishes for the strength to tip his VolksWagon on its side and pour the water from the car as he would drain the syrup from a can of peaches. But he doesn't have that kind of strength. He supposes there are men who do. He has met a few fishermen who might. But he has to be content bailing the water with a Styrofoam cup he finds in the dumpster.

His sandwich still awaits him. All he had yesterday was the beer—and he promises himself he'll eat as he drives. He tells himself he's glad to be rid of *Miss Spoiled Fruit*, but he lies. Chiding himself for even offering her a lift, he reminds himself his camera bag belongs on his passenger seat; he has no business thinking about girls. Nevertheless, he coils the dock hose, something almost nobody does, just in case she's watching, and when he climbs into the Beetle, starts its engine and leaves, he finds himself wishing his Bug was a Porche.

What passes for the business district of Port Adams hugs the small boat harbor and the transit floats along the edge of the channel. To the southwest of the harbor, cannery row fronts the channel; to the northwest, the merchants, banks and restaurants snuggle next to one another on a jutting point three city blocks long and two blocks deep. Fishhook Road parallels the channel northeastward to the base of the cape. The remainder of town, blocks of residential housing peppered with scores of mom-and-pop businesses, wraps itself around the hill above cannery row and up the timbered valley behind the point.

He lives in the cheap housing near the head of the valley. And as he leaves the dock behind and follows the streets to his apartment, he truly hungers for the acclaim he had once taken for granted. One photo, that's all it would take to turn his life around. One special photo. It's out there waiting to be taken. He knows it is; he feels it. One photo. But of what? That he doesn't know. He has no choice but to trust his instincts, to take pictures of whatever he sees until that one special photo appears. He'll know it when he sees it. It will stand alone above all of his other exposures.

When he arrives at his apartment, he sets a cardboard box in the middle of the living room floor, into which he throws a change of clothes, his raingear, a single burner gasoline stove and a sealed pint jar of matches, a coffee pot with a bag of grounds inside, an enamelware pie plate and a spoon, a frying pan, and about everything else he owns. He lays his sleeping bag on top of

the box, and he breaks into his cache of Kodachrome. He tosses a dozen boxes of the English-made slide film into his pouch, and pretends he doesn't notice how few rolls he has left. He will have to make another order to New York shortly. That means, simply, he needs another big sale, another photo in *Alaska Magazine*, perhaps.

He places the cardboard box and his sleeping bag onto the wet backseat, but stuffs the film pouch into his already overloaded camera bag. He now has two more stops before he can leave town. The first is again MARK-IT FOODS, one of the few stores of importance located away from the business district.

The boxes of spoiled produce remain stacked where the grocer left them—the sight of them pricks him; so before entering the store, he throws them into the dumpster.

He leaves the store feeling robbed. His purchases seem scarcely heavier than the change he'd received earlier from the twenty dollar bill. Again, the urge to quit photography gnaws his innards. He ought to get a job like everyone else.

What, though, is he qualified to do but take pictures?

He has no other trade, nor does he want another trade. He is a photographer, a damn good one. That is all he has been, all he has ever wanted to be. And he is only one photo away from success, both financial and personal.

Angrily tossing his purchases onto the wet backseat, next to the cardboard box, its bottom becoming soggier by the minute, he asks himself, Why success when so young, why couldn't it have come later, like now, when it could be savored? He can't answer himself. So he drives, thinking nothing in particular.

His last stop is Jacob Chickenof's gear shed where he keeps his outboard motor and ZED inflatable runabout. The outboard he wedges across the back seat, but he lashes the ZED to the roof.

The sun has warmed the day and dried the dew everywhere now. And as he passes cannery row on his way out of town, his thoughts return to the thin girl in the dumpster. Sharon. Sharon

Caine. He wonders who she is; her name means nothing to him. He hasn't seen the refurbished gillnetter in town before—the boat is striking enough to notice—so he suspects she is from one of the outlying villages. It isn't likely she sailed the open gillnetter over from the mainland. At best, the gillnetter will do five, five and a half knots. For her to have sailed from either Valdez or Seward would have taken a week, a long time in an open boat. And visiting Port Adams is hardly worth that sort of a risk.

His thoughts are still of the thin girl as he leaves Port Adams and the paved road behind, and he barely notices the dust. Although it rained only last week, dust rises from beneath and behind the VolksWagon. It creeps around rolled up windows and seeps in through unsealed cracks and settles on the cowling and cover of the fourteen horsepower outboard lying on the still wet backseat, where it becomes mud. Dust fills his nose and tickles the inside of his nostrils. He sneezes. He sneezes a second time, then a third. He presses one nostril shut, then the other as his throat becomes dry. His tongue thickens—and he drives with headlights on and windshield wipers running as the dust becomes mud on the floorboards. The road up the hill is washboarded. And both the frontend and rearend of his Bug bounce like chattering lathe tools as he threads his way towards the summit of the mountain pass.

As he rounds a curve, he startles a covey of ptarmigan in their summer brown plumage, gray with dust. Scattering like a flung deck of playing cards, some of the ptarmigan dive into roadside weeds while some sprint up the road and some launch themselves, then set wings and glide over the canyon side.

The canyon sides are sheer. Only grass and an occasional fern are able to cling to their steep, rock walls. And the stream that once flowed freely through the canyon has been dammed and redammed and dammed again by beaver. The dams have converted the stream into a series of silted pools, and the beaver have stripped the willows from along its banks.

When he first arrived in Port Adams, he spent day after rainy day photographing a dozen plus pair of bald eagles plucking spawning coho salmon from the stream. He exposed hundreds of rolls of film, and he has hundreds of slides of bloody eagles tearing flesh from the flanks of flopping spawners. He has thousands of slides of eagles standing erect beside the stream, and he has thousands more slides of eagles guarding their prey while gulls circle a respectful distance away.

But beaver moved onto the steam the second year he was here, and the large rodents turned the stream's briskly flowing lower reaches into a lazy creek meandering through grassy meadows. Even in the stream's once cascading upper reaches, the beds of spawning gravel lie beneath many centimetres of mud. The salmon runs dwindled until the late run of cohos failed to materialize for the past three years. The eagles have spent their Novembers and Decembers perched in the scrub cottonwoods on the knoll above the canneries. They have spent their winters pestered by crows while they wait their turn to pluck filleted cod or pollock carcasses from the harbor. The eagles have become beggars.

He reaches the summit of the pass, and from the summit, he sees Herring Cove on this side of the bay and Seagull Point at the mouth of the bay on the far side, the south side.

At its mouth, Iskai Bay is thirteen kilometres wide. It was once an important bay. The village of Herring Cove was a thriving community, but the village no longer exists. The tidal wave following the Good Friday earthquake of 1964, wiped out the old military dock, leveled the cannery, and drove villagers from their homes. The military dock had reached into the bay as a finger pointing at Japan. But after the earthquake, there was neither the money, nor the need to replace the dock. The cannery which had relied upon the dock wasn't rebuilt. And the villagers didn't return from Port Adams. So other than as a bight along the bay's north shore, Herring Cove is merely a name for what once was.

The gravel road spirals down the back side of the pass with eighteen curves in one two-kilometre stretch—he counted them last year. The curves bring the road to a tumbling stream in a ravine filled with stately cottonwoods among stands of stunted Sitka spruce. As the road passes through the timber, there is less dust so he turns off headlights and wipers. He rolls down his side window, and smells the salt breeze.

Shortly, he reaches the Alaska Department of Fish & Game's boat ramp, which lies around the bend from where the old military dock had been. The ramp is deserted though there are a half dozen pickups with skiff trailers parked in the graveled lot.

He, too, parks in the graveled lot.

The sun is bright, and the cove reflects its glare, the brightness of which nearly blinds him. Still, as he unlashes his deflated runabout, he notices the swirl of gulls across the cove. He wonders whether pinks, cohos, kings, or possibly cod have forced the school of baitfish to the surface. He imagines at least one of the many pairs of eagles nesting around the bay will join the gulls and prey upon the predators while the gulls forage on the fry. If he hurries, he can steal another photo of an eagle fishing, an action scene he never tires of taking and one of which he can never have too many slides. He plans to someday publish a book devoted entirely to photographs of eagles fishing.

The fledgling eaglets he has been photographing are in an aerie on top of a rock pinnacle a few metres off the coast from the cliff face at Seagull Point. The pinnacle is seventy metres tall, and he has been photographing the aerie from a small, grass covered ledge near the top of the cliff, which is over a hundred metres high. At times, when the wind is just right, the cliff seems far higher; it seems a little above purgatory and a little below the clouds.

The eaglets' parents are young birds themselves. This year's nest is probably their first clutch; thus, they are skittish. So despite the ledge being thirty metres above their aerie, he must still work from a blind.

With the sun enhancing their whiteness, the swirl of gulls drifts farther away. Beyond the gulls, he sees a jitney holding its pick on the far side, the legal side, of the white ADF&G stream marker. The jitney appears to be fishing half a seine. And he remembers that on Monday, the Department announced a continuous seventy-two hour, commercial salmon fishing opening from the island's central district.

The thought occurs to him that he knows what the eaglets' parents don't. While both setnetters and seiners alike are presently catching pink salmon by the millions (canneries in Port Adams are plugged with pinks), in another week, possibly, two weeks, chums will begin showing in fishable numbers. And when the chums arrive, the seiners will line up to take turns setting on the outside of the cape at Seagull Point. The parent birds will either learn to live with people, boats and traffic, or the birds will abandon their offspring if the fledglings are still unable to fly.

He doesn't know the strength of the parent birds' natural love for their offspring. He has seen several hens and one tiercel risk their lives in defense of their aerie, but he has also seen hens leave near full-term clutches during heavy rain storms. The eggs became chilled, and the eaglets inside the eggs died. So he doesn't know how much stress the nesting pair will tolerate.

He flops the deflated ZED onto the gravel beach at the water's edge, unrolls it, inserts its wooden floorboards, pumps it up, bolts the kicker to its transom, loads its bow and shoves off. He glances at his watch. In order for him to make the flood tide which he needs to enter the mouth of the stream draining the valley behind Seagull Point, he must head directly across. Iskai Bay is nearly fifty kilometres long. Only once has he been to the very head of the bay. That was in May, three years ago when he was scouting for paired eagles.

The kicker starts the second pull, and the inflatable seems to bounce into step and planes across the bight. But he slows as he nears the undefined mouth of Herring Cove. Several crabbers from Port Adams use the cove's shallow waters to wet-store their

king crab pots—and he must weave the inflatable through rows of numbered, once-brilliant pink buoys. Soon though, he is in the bay proper and over deeper water, where splashed salt sprays wash the dust from the runabout's tubes as the ZED climbs the rolling groundswells sweeping in from Japan.

Ten minutes become twenty. He sees the spouts of a cow and calf gray whale near Iskai Island, a slab of striped rock that serves as a navigational hazard in the mouth of the bay. The island splits the rolling groundswell and forms a pair of traveling tide rips that encircle the island twice daily. The rips keep most skiffs, including his, away from the island.

As he approaches the cove behind the cape at Seagull Point, he passes within a dozen metres of a basking sea otter with her pup on her chest—he slows so his wake won't disturb mother and baby. He slows the inflatable again as he picks his way between kelp heads surrounding rocks to the outside, the Pacific side of the cove, and he passes near other otters, including one who appears to wave at him. He tells himself he will have to assemble his otter slides and see if he has enough for a book, and he promises himself that he will do just that as soon as he exhausts his ideas for eagle books.

The sides of the valley behind the cape are steep. Rock slides mar the western wall though for the most part, both sides are grassy. On the east side of the valley, one clump of short, limby spruce timber stands atop a knoll. Otherwise, only small stands of scrub cottonwoods, patches of dwarf willows and knots of viny Sitka alder dot the valley floor.

For the previous eight years, he photographed an aerie in the crown of the tallest snarled cottonwood. He has many slides of eaglets poking their down-covered heads over the side of the massive tangle of entwined sticks. He has slides of eaglets being fed, and of parent birds threatening him. He has even greater numbers of slides of fledglings and adult birds perched beside, below, and on the aerie, and of parents launching from the aerie, returning to it, and circling above it. He has photos of the tiercel

doing rollovers around the hen, and of the tiercel passing bright humpies and calico-sided chums to the hen in midair. In short, he has (because he can't get above the aerie) taken every possible photograph of that nesting pair.

He wonders if the pair's younger hatchling survived its Cain-Abel battle. He hasn't checked yet this year. Perhaps he will do that this trip.

Both fledglings in the aerie on top of the rock pinnacle have, obviously, survived their battle, thanks largely to a squabble between the hen and tiercel that destroyed the nest cup the day after the younger eaglet hatched.

Little affects him like watching the younger eaglet driven from its nest, then starved by its older sibling. It's a cruelty he has finally come to accept, but—

The cove behind the cape, exposed as it is to easterly and northeasterly storms, has the island's only white sand beach. It's a kilometre long and littered with flotsam—driftwood, dried rafts of bull kelp, tangled hanks of stiff yellow poly crabline, twisted orange seine lead, hard plastic trawl floats with broken ears, punctured buoys with torn eyes, and the brightest of all, plastic *Joy* dish detergent bottles.

Although the tide is near its height, he circles away from the stream's mouth until the great wave of the series arrives. Holding the ZED on the back side of its curl, he rides the wave as far up the stream as he can, then kills the kicker and hops out, bowline in hand. He tows the inflatable through the riffles where the stream runs shallow and swift across the beach—the stream has washed the sand from the underlying gravel, and the current's swiftness sweeps away the gravel that rolls from beneath his feet. The stream's depth is only to his shins, but its swiftness piles its icy waters to his thighs. Splashing upstream, his jeans become soaked to his crotch. But after a dozen metres, he reaches the protected waters of the lagoon. The current slackens, and he ties the runabout's bowline to an abandoned beaver lodge on the stream's east side.

Years ago, he built a tiny cabin at the edge of the spruce stand—the cabin is little more than a plywood tent with a stove made from a five gallon grease bucket. But along the coast, a stove is a stove. If necessary, a fire can be built that will warm the cabin and dry jeans.

The cabin is as he left it; it always is in the summer. However, once bear season opens, the cabin gets lots of use. Coasties mostly. From their base in Nervous Bay. They rent a skiff and kicker from their BX, then with a sack of pilfered MREs, their rifles, and cases of beer, they sit in the cabin rainy day after rainy day, complaining about the rain and shooting at everything within sight of the cabin door until the weather allows them to recross Iskai, and return to the road system where they begin planning for their next hunting trip.

It takes ten minutes for him to stow his groceries and the contents of the now, very soggy cardboard box. Then armed only with his camera bag, he shuts the door and begins climbing to the ledge, which lies on the north side of the hill that forms the cape and serves as the valley's east wall. He pushes through shoulder-high grass interlaced with green fireweed stems. He imagines the grass appears as a rug to eagles, but to him the grass forms a woven green wall wet with dew and loaded with tiny slugs the length and size of the last joint of his little finger. But it isn't far before he crosses a faint game trail, a mere parting of the grass, going somewhat the direction he's heading; so he follows it. He imagines his ascent, seen from above, seems like that of an ant crawling through a fertilized lawn before scaling the side of a flower box—his boots crush fireweed stems, and sweat pours from him, and whitesoxs nip his eyes and attack his hairline, his ears.

Higher and higher he climbs, and the hill gets steeper and steeper. Grass yields to indomitable alders. But by using their trailing, viny trunks as climbing ropes, by pulling himself up the hill, his ascent becomes easier.

The whitesoxs—vicious black & white striped biting flies—raise cratered welts along his hairline before they drown in his sweat.

He has climbed this hill many, many times before, but even two weeks ago, there were fewer bugs. The grass was shorter and the deer trails wider. The alders hadn't yet leafed out. Still within another fifteen minutes, he reaches the crest, which resembles the nicked edge of a dull knife and where a breeze sweeps the whitesoxs away.

The top of the ridge is carpeted with moss and ankle-high hair grass, stubby blue lupine spikes, cerise colored dwarf fireweed blooms and bright yellow, ground-hugging tundra roses. But he isn't interested in flowers today. He saw the tiercel launch from the young eagle's resting station atop the end of the cape as soon as he, Kell, poked his head over the crest. He wonders where the hen is; he imagines she is on their aerie which can't be seen from the ridge. The rock pinnacle stands in the shadow of the cape, close to the face of the cliff, too close to be seen until one looks over the cliff.

The tiercel flaps a half dozen times before he sets his wings and spirals above the cape, riding the updraft as the breeze wraps itself around and over the ridge.

Knowing the tiercel is watching him and feeling the wind, he realizes he must hurry. The tiercel will remain aloft until he either retreats or enters the blind on the ledge, which is crescent shaped, thirty metres long and five wide, and can only be reached by following a narrow game trail across a nearly vertical rock slide around the end of the cape

As he stands on the ridge, feeling the wind eddy behind him, he is reminded that to have entered the domain of eagles he has scaled many rocks, climbed many peaks, taken many chances. He has often stood atop the world. He has walked upon the wind. He has hung onto the edges of space. But always, regardless of how he wished otherwise, his feet have remained riveted to the ground beneath him. In town, though, he feels heavy—heavy

like he has swallowed rocks, like he's made a glutton of himself at a spaghetti feed. He feels he is seeing only half of the world, living only half a life; he feels like his wings have been severed and their stumps are still bleeding. So he envies the freedom of the eagles who neither buy gasoline for engines, nor have editors to please. Nor do eagles regularly receive rejection slips for their best work.

The tiercel spirals until he becomes a speck in the sky, but even then, the tiercel's white head and tail, like whitecaps on a windy sea, reflect the sun.

As he watches the spiraling tiercel, he feels cheated that he can only join the eagle through photography.

Chiding himself, telling himself if he doesn't get moving the fledglings will also have bald heads, mates, and aeries of their own, he takes a step, then a second. And by his third step, the trance again fades into memory. So he hurries—the ridgetop is easy walking.

He skirts the tiercel's resting station when he reaches the top of the cape. Below him is the world . . . the wind whistles as it tugs on his wet jeans.

He tries not to look down at the surf that laps at the kelp covered rocks nearly two hundred metres below. Instead, he keeps his eyes on the trail. Like floating a river flowing vertically through a delta, he follows one of many game trails that dip low through the rock slide. He climbs lower and lower until he's below the ledge as he circles around the end of the cape—the aerie atop the pinnacle becomes visible.

The hen launches as soon as she sees him. With screams and clucking, she protests his presence as she spirals only metres above him.

He now hugs the cliff face as he stands upright and grasps the rocks of the slide above him . . . the lichen covered rocks are cold, and the single trail is narrow, a hand's breadth of packed dirt wedged between the rocks of the ancient slide, and the wind continues to whistle. He would tell the hen that he doesn't intend

to harm her babies, that he only wants to photograph them, but the hen is no more able to understand words than he is able to fly. He would trade with her sometimes.

Still, the wind continues to whistle as it wraps itself around the cape.

The trail across the rock slide appears well worn. Maybe, he wonders, someone else has visited the ledge. But who, other than he, is crazy enough to cross this slide? Besides, the cabin was untouched. So he resumes his climb as his camera bag flops against his back and the broken cliff face.

The hen buzzes him as he crawls onto the ledge. He feels the power of her wings as she flaps to regain elevation to make another pass, and he worries about her abandoning her babies when the whole salmon fleet arrives and carries on like maniacs.

His blind has been shredded.

He stands, staring at the depression where his blind had been, hearing the sea wash against the base of the cliff, feeling the rush of wind as the hen again buzzes him. What happened to his cleverly concealed blind? Did the wind, the tiercel, the hen destroy his handiwork?

But neither eagle nor wind eats chickenwire, nor do either leave piles of dung neatly arrayed around the depression like stones along the edge of a path. The mounds of dung are twice, three times the size of cow piles.

The bear is gone.

But for how long?

Standing on suddenly rubbery legs, feeling every muscle in him quiver—even his heart flutters—he isn't certain he won't leave spore of his own.

A brown bear has been on the ledge, probably here to get away from the bugs.

His stomach revolts, his mouth tastes of bile, and he needs to piss. . . . He has been repeatedly warned by everyone in Port Adams to pack a rifle for protection, but he was born with only two hands and two shoulders so there is a limit to what he can

carry. Besides, a person smells different to animals when the person carries a gun; a person can't get as close. So since he doesn't intend to kill anything, he has opted to carry nothing other than his cameras.

However, he isn't the fool some of Port Adams' fishermen think him. He knows to fear brownies and to stay clear of them, and he isn't comfortable with the idea of climbing into a brownie's bed even if the depression had been his blind; it's a stupid idea.

But reason quarrels with his momentary rush of fear. The bear is gone, and he doubts it will be moving about during the day. It's probably bedded somewhere else, and the age of its dung is difficult to determine. Along the coast, dung of any kind appears fresh for months.

He knows it isn't old. He was here two weeks ago.

Nevertheless, he swings his camera bag off his shoulder as he approaches his shredded blind. He is here to photograph fledglings. He's here and the bear isn't. Still, as he lies in the depression, he smells the dung and his whole chest seems to tighten. His breath comes his quick gulps. His hands shake. But he crawls forward: he crawls as cautiously as he had on the battlefields of Syria.

He remembers Ol' Man Floyd telling about his mauling, about feeling the bear's tongue lick his bald head, about losing the use of his left hand when the bear nipped at it. And he mentally feels an imaginary bear mauling him as he pulls at the grass until he worries a slot through the sod to the lip of the edge.

Angry at his lack of concentration, he, as he had in Syria, forces fear into a mental closet while he eases his tripod mounted, six hundred millimetre lens into the slot. He removes the protective caps from each end, then wiggles the stretched legs of his tripod into tangled roots. He mounts one of the three Nikon bodies with him to the back of the lens, then after locating the aerie through its pentaprism, he locks the many adjustments of his tripod.

He sees both fledglings staring at the lens's glass eye, and he wonders if the fledglings see him as a Cyclops, a one-eyed Titan

forging thunderbolts to hurl at them. Or do they worry that he'll somehow steal their souls.

The hen screams as she sweeps low over the ledge.

Twisting his head to look, he suspects the hen will capture more souls than he can possibly steal.

Through the lens, he sees that both fledglings have grown nearly as large as their parents. Both have the mottled brown plumage of immature birds. Both have the slick, finished appearance of young tiercels. And he studies both fledglings for distinguishing marks or features so he'll be able to tell one from the other.

The fledgling to his left looks away from the lens, hops to the edge of the aerie and begins preening and oiling his feathers. The fledgling to his right, though, continues to stare at the glass-eyed Cyclops.

When the left fledgling becomes satisfied with his workmanship, the young tiercel opens his wings—and the wind holds his wings weightless as the tiercel twists his wrists, changing his wings' leading edge. But the tiercel makes no attempt to flap or fly.

Kell focuses his long lens on the left tiercel and snaps exposures as the mood strikes him. He is certain the fledgling's wingspan is already greater than his father's, and he watches the fledgling alternately deploy his feather spoilers, then retract them and extend the short feathers along the leading edges of his wings, inboard of his wrists.

The right tiercel continues to stare at the glass eye.

Again and again, the hen swoops low, but now she doesn't scream. Rather, after each pass, she dips below the ledge and sails over her aerie, apparently checking her babies, before she flaps upward to make another pass. Finally, she flaps away to spiral with her mate as another speck in the sky.

With envy, he watches the fledgling tiercels, and as he occasionally snaps exposures, he wonders why men never evolved wings. Flying light aircraft, ultralites, even gliders isn't the same.

His is an age-old yearning so why not even the sprout of a wing, why not at least a membrane like a bat or a squirrel.

Time passes. He loads and reloads two of his three camera bodies as he shoots roll after roll. Although he is aware that the sun has circled far to the northwest, he doesn't think about the day having passed. He doesn't think about anything except the eagles until he hears the "*WOOF*"—

The *WOOF* is low, not much louder than the initial bark of a small dog, but the hair of his neck stands on end as his heart climbs into his throat. And without thinking, he raises to one knee.

At the edge of the ledge, the bear angrily shakes its massive head.

He reaches into his camera bag. His hands tremble and his heart pounds and he fumbles his wide angle lens—he has no idea what he should do, nor where he can go. . . . He has nowhere to go. No back door. No escape route. He's here and so is the bear, all four or five hundred kilos of him.

The brownie clicks its teeth as it snaps at the air.

His hands shake so hard he's barely able to twist the Nikon body off his long lens and onto the wide angle lens. Beads of sweat pour down his cheeks like tears. He seems heavy, like he's all stone, and it takes all of his strength to raise the camera to eye level.

Through the lens, he sees the brownie's pig-like, bloodshot eyes and yellow stained teeth. He hears the clicking teeth and deep throat growl—the bear's breath smells of fish, rotting fish. His mind tells him to backup as he cocks the camera, but he can't. There's only an edge and the wind behind him.

He can't focus his hands shake so much; he shoots zone instead as the bear pops its teeth.

Snarling and shaking its head from side to side and snapping at the wind, the bear lunges forward in a false charge.

Falling backwards—the bear is close, three, maybe four metres away—he feels, almost feels teeth biting into him, almost feels

its rough tongue, his arms being torn off. He's resigned to being mauled, to being eaten, and as his fatalism matures, he relaxes. He focuses on the snapping teeth while he lies on his back, awaiting death. He takes picture after picture until the film won't advance. Perhaps someday his camera will be found.

Repeated charges, false charges—each time the bear stops short as it snaps at the wind and tears sod from the ledge.

How painful, he wonders, will it be? Will he passout first? He hopes so. Before stained teeth and long claws disembowel him, and he sees again the baby girl he photographed in Syria.

Rewinding, he continues to think about being eaten, and for a heartbeat, he considers stepping over the edge, over the cliff, sure suicide, as he opens the camera's back, removes the film and inserts another roll, fumbling, though, its leader. So quickly, he switches bodies, and wonders how long it'll take natural selection to cause him to sprout wings, a strange thought.

Although his hands are now steady, he shakes inside as the bears continues to snap at the wind.

Relentless in its false charges, the brownie stops each charge a metre and a half from him, almost as if a Plexiglas wall stands between them, almost as if edges of a chasm separates them.

Wild with rage, the bear attacks the wind, lunges at the wind, snapping at nothing.

Again, he rewinds and unloads, but this time he doesn't fumble the leader. He reloads with practiced fingers. Yet he feels the bear's breath sort of fall down the front of his sweat drenched shirt.

Suddenly, as if shot, the brownie wheels and snaps at its own flank—

A seizure, a cramp, whatever's wrong, he continues to take photos as the bear wheels in a circle like a dog chasing its tail, all the while snapping at its hind quarters. Fur flies as does flora until finally, the bears straightens and dives over the lip of the ledge and charges across the slide, disappearing.

Shaking and shaken and lacking strength to move, he lies staring at where the bear had been, amazed at what he just witnessed, surprised he's still alive, maybe a little disappointed he hasn't grown wings. He tells himself he isn't dead, wasn't eaten, and he really does have to relieve himself.

All of him trembles as he rises to his knees. Just to be doing something with his hands, he puts exposed film canisters in their snaptop containers; he straightens the contents of his bag. Every fisherman in Port Adams will tell him he ought to be dead. A berserk bear, but no attack. Maybe his luck has changed, luck that went sour with the cursing . . .

The photo of that Syrian baby: her mother, a nun, never got to hold her. An Israeli reconnaissance plane set off the air raid warning. He, along with a reporter for the *Manchester Guardian*, took shelter in the basement of the convent. They ducked into the basement just as the nun was delivering, and he captured the black-robed priest's knife cutting the baby from pelvis to sternum.

The priest tried to kill him.

He had avoided the bloody knife, but not the priest's words.

The reporter knocked the priest down. But from the ground, by the power of that holy ground, the priest cursed both of them. In Arabic, the priest cursed his seed, the work of his hands, and his eternal soul. . . . The reporter was killed three days later when his Land Rover hit a mine.

The photo, if it would've been accepted for publication, would've made him famous, would have insured his position among this century's leading photographers. It would've overshadowed the picture of the Vietnamese police officer shooting that Viet Cong in the head. Yes, it would have cast his reputation in silver. But the photo was rejected. Not on merit, though. Even his editor complimented his timing and his craftsmanship.

The reason given for the photo's rejection was the film used: Ektachrome. He didn't believe the reason given then, nor does he now. An internegative could have been made, and the photo

printed in black 'n white. He printed what he showed his editor directly from the positive, and yes, it was a little contrasty. But it shouldn't have been rejected.

He heard secondhand that the editor's wife, a practicing Christian, was horrified by the photo and had lobbied against its publication. She apparently convinced her husband that no good could come from the newspaper's readership seeing a priest with a knife. She pleaded with her husband in the name of all Christians. She appealed to his sense of decorum. And he, Kell, believes she destroyed the photo some months later.

He still has the positive, but he never made a second print, has never submitted that photo for publication a second time.

Until moments ago, he hasn't thought much about the photo lately—he used to think about it all the time, used to lie awake at night wishing he'd used different film. The baby, the knife, the blood, the cursing. None of them mean much when the picture isn't saleable. He doesn't believe in curses. No educated, intelligent person does. He hates superstitions. He is disgusted by people who believe in them. Yet he finds himself wanting to attribute some of his failure to being cursed. In a way, he hasn't sold a photo since then: he has been giving them away, often selling his work for less than a tenth of what he received prior to being cursed. And he fails to understand how, in the last half of the 20th Century, people can subjugate themselves to any god whose representatives place themselves above reproach. He is just not a Believer.

Thinking about the baby, about having the photo rejected brings on the depression that has plagued him the past nine years. Forcing his thoughts away from the photo, glancing at his watch—10:52—he tries to imagine why the bear didn't attack; he can think of no good reason. He exposed a lot of film of it. Combined with what he shot of the fledglings, he ought to return to town. But he doesn't really have the desire. Despite days being long and nights short, he can't do without sleep.

He dreads sleeping alone.

The sun drops from sight, but the twilight lingers as the night remains light over the mainland to the north. To the south lies darkness.

With the leading edge of darkness directly overhead, he descends the hill. The alders yield to the woven mat of wet, shoulder-high grass, and instead of mosquitoes and whitesoxs, clouds of no-see-ums attack—he wishes the wind of the cape would reach into the valley and blow the swarms of bugs away.

He will return to town in the morning, mail the rolls of Kodachrome, develop the roll of Fujichrome, and maybe, he will have a saleable photo, perhaps that one magic photo. He doubts that, though. With his luck, the background rocks of the slide will appear like the concrete walls of a zoo moat.

He is alive. For that, he imagines he ought to be thankful. He wonders where the bear went—and thinking about the bear makes him cautious as he pushes through the tall grass.

The trail downhill is always shorter than the trail uphill. Within a couple dozen steps and a thousand inhaled no-see-ums, he arrives at the cabin on the knoll. He lights the stub of a candle before pulling the door shut behind him. Shedding his soaked jeans, he notices the little tremors that ripple through muscles; his body is running out of sugar.

Dry clothes help as he steps back outside to fill the coffee pot at the spring . . . over the mainland, the night sky remains light as the sun circles just below the northern horizon. The island remains under the edge of darkness. But beneath the spruce timber, the dug-out spring is always in perpetual gloom. He doesn't see how much debris floats in his coffee pot until he returns inside the cabin where, by flickering candlelight, he fishes spoonfuls of needles and twigs from the pot.

He pumps up and lights the gas stove, puts the pot on its single burner eye, then waits. After a while, bubbles rise lazily through the water just as his thoughts rise slowly. Will Sharon Caine really check out his books? He wonders what she's doing

this evening and what she did with her salvaged produce, and he wonders why he cares. She isn't interested in him.

He has been alone a long time. Wildlife photography is a lonely vocation—he knew that when he began. He has pursued nothing else since early childhood. His only relationships have been with birds and his cameras. Both have been good to him. But this evening, especially this evening, they aren't enough. He needs to be with someone. If he were in town, well, he'd go barhopping along Fishhook Road. And considering his mood, he'd likely take someone upstairs at Guennie's.

He shudders at the thought of Guennie's upstairs.

Finally, the water comes to a rolling boil. Now he waits for the grounds to steep.

Why, he wonders, didn't that bear maul him?

That bear scared him enough for him to consider buying a rifle.

But carrying a rifle and a camera seems inconceivable, unless, of course, a person wants pictures of dead animals. The fishermen of Port Adams who would argue otherwise pose for pictures beside heads of dead bears with their rifles across the bears' backs. They trust in the quickness of their reflexes, the steadiness of their aim, and in the stopping power of their bullets. They might or might not have killed that bear before they were mauled—brownies seldom die immediately. If they would've killed the bear, the killing would be justified in the eyes of the Law. If some fisherman would've been mauled, then his name would be added to the reasons for other fishermen to carry their rifles everywhere.

He sets the coffee pot aside, places the frying pan on the stove, dumps in a can of chili, and wonders what Sharon Caine is having for dinner. Now, probably, *had* for dinner. He suspects she ate hours ago; he wonders if she is alone. He hopes so, secretly. He would like to be beside her, but he would also like to fly. And he is quite certain he will never do either.

Despite how curt she was, he would like to see her again.

The heat from the stove warms the cabin. Outside, spruce boughs rustle as the surf gently laps at the sand beach and salmon splash in the creek—in the quietness of the valley, sounds carry. He notices the absence of the cries of gulls, the caws of ravens and the screams of eagles. He hears instead a breeze sneaking warily through the spruce crowns on its way from one side of the valley to the other. And without either hearing or seeing it, he knows an owl flaps silently above the tidal marsh as it listens for the squeaks of lemmings and voles.

Inside the cabin, the hiss of the gasoline stove seems as loud as the cannery whistles.

The rim of his tin cup burns his lip—coffee won't keep him awake tonight. He will sleep a fitful sleep, a sleep filled with visions of the bear attacking the wind. He suspects his visions will roar like gales through his mind. He will toss and turn and get no rest at all as he sleeps, and he will hear nothing but the clicking of the bear's teeth as the brownie snaps at nothing.

Sure enough, after wolfing down his chili and unrolling his sleeping bag, he closes his eyes and sees the bear. But this bear is red and a lumbering beast. Tossing its head from side to side, this snarling bear retreats from him as he tries to photograph it. He has a slung rifle over his left shoulder—the rifle slides off his shoulder, down his arm, and hangs from his elbow, pulling his steadied camera off target. The bear seems to focus on the rifle that swings hypnotically back and forth. And he wonders why the bear doesn't attack, where the rifle came from, and why is the bear red.

The color worries him as he tosses on the bunk, narrow as the ledge. He can't decide if the bear really has red fur, or if the color results from paint or dye. And the bear continues to retreat until it fades as a sunset does, a sliver of twilight lingering long on the northern horizon, stretching far to the east and to the west.

He hears scratching at the door while his mind drifts.

Dreaming the bear has returned, he sits up, grabs his camera, and steals the bear's bloody soul, causing its red coat to fade white, causing the bear to become as difficult to locate as a polar bear on snow-covered tundra, the bear now equally dangerous, its head held low, quartering, its black eye appearing as a hammerhead within a sickle-shaped crescent of urine-stained fur.

The scratching persists.

The scratching is that of an ermine. The door is no longer in the same position it was—the hole the ermine has gnawed is now partially blocked by the jamb; it has to be enlarged. And after a few minutes, the ermine scurries across the floor towards Kell, sees him, stands on its hind feet and growls, but flees when Kell rolls over in his sleep.

Narrow and foggy like a fjord in which trolls forge rifle barrels, the sparks of their smithing flying far into the heavens, the dark valley through which Kell's mind has wandered after losing sight of that white bear begins to lighten as the sun climbs above the northeastern horizon. Color returns to his dreams. Although he hasn't slept for long, he awakens, alert but tired, his dream now mostly lost to him. He stretches his back while staring at the bare plywood ceiling of the tiny cabin. The sun peeks through the cracks around the door and streaks across the floor. A tiny beam of sunlight probes his right eye. The morning breeze rustle spruce boughs. Gulls cry and sparrows sing. He is no longer eager to return to town; he has a nagging feeling that a bear awaits him there.

Reluctantly, he rolls from his bunk, and wearing just socks, steps outside to breathe the spruce scented salt air . . . the dampness of the moss wets the soles of his socks, and he accidently steps on the rusty remains of a Blazo can left by hunters two winters ago. The can collapses. Dull flakes of rust crumple, and the remains of the can returns to earth. Ashes to ashes, rust to rust. He recalls the filth and clutter of the cities of his native Danmark and of all Europe. The choking, burning stench of industrial smog, especially in Minsk and Moscow.

He notices wild roses at the edge of the timber, their pink petals paler, but larger than the salmonberry blossoms, now ripening into orange berries the size of commercial raspberries. The rose blossoms are still partially furled. And he knows he can't return to Danmark. He made his choice, made it years ago. He can't return a failure.

He also has no intention of returning to the ledge this morning. Not enough film and no desire for another bear encounter. He suspects he ought to spend the day searching for another aerie he can photograph from above without building a tower. He knows where the aeries are of most every nesting pair. He can't think of how to get above any of them without an elaborate structure. The ledge has been perfect, its overhung edge letting his shoot the aerie from almost directly above. Apparently the bear agrees that the ledge is perfect.

He might as well return to town and mail the rolls of Kodachrome. He could visit the library to see if his books have been checked out. He doesn't know what else to do.

The tide is ebbing. The creek is shallow. Still, newly arriving humpies, like silver tinsel, splash through the inclined riffles across the beach. In schools of a dozen or more fish, the salmon brush against his legs as he loads the inflatable.

When his gear is stowed, he unties the bowline and lets the current wash the runabout from the lagoon, down the riffles and into the knee-high surf. Then using an oar, he poles the ZED into water deep enough he can start the outboard. And as a cork bobbing across a wading pool, the inflatable rides the lazy groundswells across Iskai Bay and to the beach at Herring Cove.

Other than for his VolksWagon, the boat ramp's parking lot is deserted. The pickups with the boat trailers are gone. Left in their wake is an overflowing trash barrel. And as he pulls the ZED out of the water, he watches a lone, gray gull peck at the beer cans surrounding the barrel.

Again lashing his deflated ZED to his VolksWagon's roof, he follows the road to town. Dust rises from beneath his tires and

hangs suspended behind him like a contrail. The road, though, seems like a treadmill. The photos he took of the eagles are the same as other photographers have published. In fact, for the past eight years, the sights he has seen and the rituals he has observed have been seen and recorded by earlier photographers. Although he yearns for the freedom of the eagles, yearns to fly on wings of his own, to soar on air currents to where no trails exist, he knows eagles are not truly free. There are trails through the sky that eagles must follow; there are pathways and territories that must be skirted. Eagles are subject to a fisherman's bullet, or to entanglement in high voltage lines. They are pestered by crows. They are mocked by gulls. And they are photographed by armies of one-eyed, three-legged men.

As he approaches Port Adams, he sees steam pouring from hundreds of pipes protruding above the roofs of cannery row. Forklifts ferry iced totes of salmon from one end of the docks to the other, and a dozen seiners are rafted together in front of the bulk plant where a tender is tied—it takes aboard tens of thousands of litres of diesel fuel. He sees one of the tender's crewmembers unscrew bungs from oil barrels lashed to the bulwarks of the tender's foredeck while the owner of the bulk plant drags a second, heavy hose from barrel to barrel, filling each. An air whistle blows—it's noon—and the fire whistle downtown screams loud enough to be heard above both the cannery whistles and the hiss of discharged steam. The owner of the bulk plant will work the fuel dock alone for the next hour as his employees eat their lunches. He thinks about stopping and photographing the owner working, but rejects the idea. The scene is one he can record another time.

Other than by the doughnut shop where 1st Street intersects Marine Way, the traffic is light. He is past the library before he remembers he wants to stop—he doesn't turn around; he doesn't want to find the books on the shelf.

As he pulls into his apartment's allotted parking space, he notices that his front door is open . . .

Seeing the open door breaks the seal on his bottled emotions. Involuntary tears form. Fists clench. Quiver. He's certain he locked that door; he knows he locked it. And for a moment he feels his heart rise into his throat before the whole of him collapses.

He just sits, staring at the open door, imagining the worst. He doesn't feel the tears. He just feels like giving up, quitting. He doesn't have money enough for film, let alone money to replace stolen equipment. He has no insurance. *Why the hell don't I work at the cannery, trade days for wages, spend nights stoned like so damn many others in this shithead town?*

Life and career seemed so easy before he took that photograph of the baby. Since then, he has been spinning his wheels. He is stuck on the beach with an in-coming tide, and he will drown as surely as night will come.

A spark of optimism causes him to wonder if, perhaps, he hadn't closed the door tightly shut. But he douses the spark with a barrel full of water. He knows he closed the door. He tried it before he left yesterday.

As he stares at the open door, realizing that sooner or later he must go in, he reluctantly opens his car door. Its hinges squeal. A new noise. Something else. Just something new needing fixed. And he feels like he has been gutted as he swings leaden legs from under the steeringwheel.

With heavy steps, he approaches his apartment's front door—the doorknob is still locked though the door stands wide open. The door doesn't appear to have been forced. Rather, the door appears not to have latched when shut last. But he knows it was latched yesterday. He tried the door. He always does. Although theft is rare here in Port Adams, it's not unheard of as it was when he first arrived—and there is always the first time. Stolen camera equipment is too easily pawned on the Mainland.

He stares at the door, not knowing whether he should touch it, not knowing if he should call the cops. He wonders if he could have forgotten to check it yesterday. He doesn't think so, but he was in a hurry. *What's missing? Anything? I might not have*

*closed the damn thing. The wind might have blown it open. No, don't think so.* He just doesn't know. He is no longer sure about anything.

Cautiously, he enters, leaving the door untouched and open behind him. And he stares at the bare interior of his spartan apartment. "What's here for anyone to steal?"

The drawers to the file cabinets where he stores his slides are closed—that's not right. He always leaves the top drawer of the cabinet on his left open a couple of centimetres for air circulation. Has to. So he's certain someone has gone through his files. Otherwise, the livingroom/kitchen appears untouched. He has no lamps on no end tables, no TV, no stereo. And he knows without looking that his refrigerator is empty.

He checks the bathroom: his enlarger is there as are his chemicals and paper safe. Except for his enlarger, all of his camera equipment in good repair is in his bag, and it doesn't matter so much if someone steals what he can't afford to have fixed. So the only evidence he sees of someone having been in his apartment is the open door and closed drawer—and he might have inadvertently closed the drawer.

Scanning slides, finding nothing that appears touched, he opens each drawer of all four file cabinets. As far as he can tell, whoever entered his apartment was merely curious. Puzzled, he returns to his VolksWagon and grabs his camera bag.

The telephone is ringing when he reenters his apartment.

His urge is not to answer. The only person who ever calls is his editor, and right now, he's in no mood to be home.

He needs an assignment, though: "Hello."

"Kell, I've been trying to get ahold of you since noon yesterday. Where have you been?"

"Getting the shit scared out of me across Iskai Bay."

"A bear, huh? And you were over there again without a rifle, I'll bet?"

"Yeah, a bear—but you know how I feel about guns."

"You'll either get over it or get yourself mauled."

"I almost did—"

"You've been asking for it for years. . . . Hey, why I called—I got your note when I came in yesterday. I glanced at the two negatives, set them aside, then when I returned for lunch, I couldn't find them. Haven't been able to since. . . . Did you stop by and pick them up?"

"No. Why would I pick them up?"

"I'll be damned. I turned his office upside down and haven't been able to find them."

"I left them on your desk."

"I know you did. I looked at them. Both of them were good shots. . . . I need to send a photo to Seattle in today's mail. Kell, I hate to ask this, but do you have another negative of that Russian boat? I'll, ah, pay you for a second negative."

"Yeah, I have another negative, but—"

"It doesn't have to be all that good, Kell, just so long as the Russian boat is discernible."

"All right . . . but besides costing you the price of a second negative, this will cost you another thirty-three metre roll of Tri-X."

"Twenty bucks? I suppose the paper can stand the expense, and it's a hundred foot roll, Kell. I wish you'd use feet and inches like everyone else in America."

"America is changing—"

"The whole damn world is changing. . . . That reminds me, I intend to run your article about Remembering Pearl Harbor in our special Salmon Festival issue. I'm going to make a few little changes that might cause some readers to think about the IRS. So can you get me a picture to go with the article? I'll leave the subject up to you."

Smiling as he glances at the ceiling, Kell says, "I'll have to think about what will fit. . . . I'll bring you a negative of the Soviet trawler in a half hour or so."

"Hurry, the mail leaves in two hours."

"I'll see you before then."

"Hurry."

"Okay." He returns the receiver to its hook. He hasn't taken the two negatives from his enlarger's film holder—and considering the likeliness of selling another print of the trawler, he might as well give one or both to his editor. Although he would like to keep the negative he printed, he needs the money and the film, and his editor will pay him today if he pleads his cause.

He checks his enlarger's film holder.

The negatives are gone.

He stares at his enlarger, then says to nobody, "That can't be." There is, he knows there is, a connection between his editor misplacing the two negatives and his two negatives disappearing. Remembering the gray man on the dock wanting all four negatives, he wonders if the fellow would stoop to stealing them. So as he scans the bathroom, he turns in circles, neither seeing nor remembering exactly what he is looking for.

What he sees are the film strips still hanging above the bathtub. His film reels and developing trays are where he left them. His paper safe is closed. Even the wet washrag he used to wipe his face yesterday morning still lies untouched in the sink. Everything is as he left it except the negatives are gone.

Returning to the livingroom, he plops onto the couch while still clutching the enlarger's film holder. "What the hell is going on?" The girl—that girl in the photo—there is something about her he doesn't understand. Her eyes haunt him. And the Soviet captain was awfully concerned about her.

He remembers telling the gray man there were four negatives, two of which he would be leaving at the newspaper's office.

Time is slipping away. The mail plane will leave in an hour and a half.

Jack is less particular about artistic merit than he is; so he rises from the couch, returns to the bathroom, selects a strip of six negatives he shot in the morning, and heads for the newspaper's office after checking and double checking that his apartment's

door is latched behind him. If it's open when he returns, he'll call the police before he enters.

Mr. Edwards only glances at the strip of six negatives before saying, "These will do fine, Kell, and that girl who Immigration was so interested in isn't in any of these. That's good."

"There was someone here from Immigration?" DIN officials make him nervous even though he has resident alien status.

"It was nothing about you, Kell. . . . They wanted to buy your negatives. Something about the girl. . . . Do you know her?"

"No . . . but was the fellow, I presume—a fellow in a gray suit—here before the negatives disappeared?"

"The guy was waiting for me when I arrived. . . . What aren't you telling me, Kell?"

Jack knows he, Kell, sells prints of negatives similar to those he supplies to the paper, but it isn't something he admits. So he says, "Nothing," as he wonders why the negatives are important to the gray man. Is the girl someone Immigration is looking for?

"Are you feeling all right, Kell?"

"I've got a headache, that's all. I haven't eaten much lately."

"If you need a check—"

"I do. I'm asking."

"I'll have one drawn up for you. Swing by in an hour." Jack lifts the film strip to the light. So taking his cue to leave, Kell pushes open the office door, steps outside, and notices the dark clouds being pushed around the island by a strong breeze. The weather changes every third day regardless of whether the change is needed or even appreciated.

He returns to his apartment. To his relief, the door is shut. He unlocks it, enters, flops onto the couch, and wonders why Immigration is interested in the girl. He knows more than before, but he still knows nothing, and there's no way of him learning more. He assumes the gray man returned to the mainland yesterday—nobody from Outside stays in Port Adams longer than he or she must. If he weren't starving, he, too, would leave. And unconsciously, he rises and ritualistically opens empty

cupboard doors, checks the refrigerator, bread box, his microwave oven—

He sees the second eight-by-ten print he made yesterday morning.

Although seeing the print lifts his spirits, his sense of relief is tempered by the nagging question of what happened to its negative. The Coast Guard probably has photos of the Soviet trawler. He has other negatives of it; they're still hanging over the tub. So it can't be the trawler that interests the gray man. It has to be the girl. And as he stares at the print, he wonders why all the fuss about her.

As he stares at the eyes of the girl in the print, he notices that, even now, her eyes seem to be watching him.

He wonders why having all four negatives was so important to the gray man. The Soviet captain only wanted the print. If they needed a photo for identification, one picture would be enough, especially so considering that the four negatives differ only in exposure. He wonders if he wasn't suppose to see her.

The eyes of the girl—there's something unusual about them.

As he studies the print, he sees that the girl is rather ordinary. Her face is full, nearly round and pleasant appearing. Her lips are large, but acceptably proportioned to her face. Her nose and ears are the same, large but proportioned. She appears to be of Slavic origin. His first impression seems correct: she appears to be part of the Russian crew. But the captain definitely didn't recognize her. And he believes the gray man didn't either.

He is both pleased with himself and frightened by how alive her eyes appear. The shadowing he waited for did produce the three dimensional effect he anticipated; it almost looks as if there are more dimensions present. The image of the ship is everything he hoped for. The bow's waterline appears as indented as the waverly edge of a bread knife. The ship's ribs appear as prison bars. The dock doesn't seem as much behind the ship as surrounding it. The gull in the air when he took the picture seems to be flying through the stern gantry. But it is the life he captured

in the girl's eyes that pleases him most. As he moves his head from side to side, she seems to move her eyes. Living holograms. He wonders exactly how he achieved the effect.

He has taken a number of photographs that have surprised him, but none more so than this one. First, the girl appears where he doesn't remember seeing her. Now, her eyes appear alive. The rest of her face doesn't. Only her eyes. And he doesn't know what to think of the effect. He likes what he has accomplished, but he is also haunted by it.

A thought occurs to him: he knows how to draw the gray man back to Port Adams. He has a score to even with him, and the gray man obviously doesn't want the picture of the girl published. He wonders what is so special about her. Is she some sort of a secret agent?

A wild thought flashes through his mind: what if she is invisible to the naked eye? Considering how advanced American military intelligence is, can either the Army or CIA render a person invisible for a period of time? He recalls a short story about two chemical concoctions that turned two people invisible. One concoction absorbed all light; the other reflected all light. The story was written years ago. And the Americans seem to have limitless technology. To him, it is certainly conceivable that the military establishment possesses the means of rendering a person invisible.

He continues to stare at the print. He wonders who the girl is, and he wonders if she is a secret agent the Americans sneaked aboard the Soviet trawler. In taking her photograph, he might have stumbled upon a glitch in America's technology.

The eyes of the girl are unlike the eyes of anyone or any creature he has photographed. He wonders if some split particle beam technology is involved in rendering her invisible; he is certain now she wasn't visible as she leaned over that gunwale railing. And that makes him feel a little better.

Suddenly, his heart skips. She might be a Soviet agent here in the room with him right now, and he wouldn't know it. His

hands tremble; he shivers as he develops and dwells on the possibility that she might be near. Little ripples of terror build into an overwhelming urge to photograph his whole apartment. But what if she is here? What will he do then? Talk to her?

He interrupts his imagination, and wonders what he is thinking. Spies! Russian, American secret agents? Invisible beings? He's thinking insane thoughts. "What do I really know for sure? . . . I know I didn't see her when I took her picture. Well, what about that? I've overlooked objects when composing pictures before. I try not to, but I have. . . . I just overlooked her. That's all."

*So what about the negatives disappearing?*

*Jack could lose the Constitution of the United States on his desk as cluttered as it is. For an envelope with two negatives to disappear, to be misplaced, yes, Jack could do that. And I wouldn't put it past him to have sold the negatives if the price was right. . . . So that brings me to the negatives missing from the film holder. Someone broke in here, and that someone was the gray man. He owes me, and I intend to get paid.*

He glances at his watch, sees that the mail plane should already be on the ground, and wishes for a few more minutes. If the gray man doesn't want the picture of the girl published, the fellow shouldn't have stolen his negatives. Anchorage's *Alaska News Miner* will publish a picture of the ship and the girl. So taking another two sheets of tagboard from the filing cabinet nearest the door, he sandwiches the print. He has a plane to meet, a call to make, and a score to settle.

He doublechecks that his apartment's door latches before sprinting to his VolksWagon. The sky is entirely gray now. Tiny droplets wet his windshield. The ZED is still lashed to the roof and the outboard lies on the backseat. Thus, he drives carefully though hurriedly through town, past cannery row and the city dock, up the hill, around the curves and to the airport.

Wien's 737 is being serviced.

As he approaches the airport, he sees the plane and suspects its pilot is in the employee's lounge having coffee. He knows

most of the pilots, has sold prints of eagles to many of them. And he usually has no problems gaining admittance to the restricted lounge.

He doesn't have problems this afternoon either: the flight attendant guarding the door sees the print he carries, opens the locked door and lets him into the domain of fliers—flight crews, flight attendants, and pilots.

The pilot of the mail plane is seated at a heavy, mahogany table. His copilot sits across from him and diligently answers, in triplicate, the questions on a preprinted form. Both are drinking coffee and chatting with a giggling flight attendant. And when the pilot sees him, the pilot waves him over.

"I need a favor from you." Kell hands the print to the pilot. "I need that taken to Anchorage tonight. It's for the *News Miner*. . . . I don't know if they'll have someone at the airport waiting for you, but if they don't can you make sure they get the print anyway?"

"For you. Kell, I'll deliver it myself."

"Again, I don't know if there'll be anybody waiting for you. I'll try to get somebody there."

"If there isn't, you'll owe me a favor, a print, say of an eagle with a broken wing. One of the guys flying the Southeast run broke his arm last night when a king salmon took his rod away from him. I'd kinda like to give him something to remember the event by."

"I have slides of an eagle with a broken wing. I think I even have one where the eagle is trying to subdue a soreback coho."

"Perfect."

"I also have a series of slides where an eagle buries her talons in the back of a seventy-pound king salmon, and the king salmon drowns the eagle."

"Even better. What would you want for the series?"

"I'm a little short of paper for printing positives—"

"Tell you what I'll do, will make you a whizz bang deal. You call an order into Seattle for paper, whatever you need, and I'll

pick it up. I'll make sure this print gets to the paper in Anchorage, and I'll give you a portrait of Grant for a big," he holds his hands about a foot apart, "print of that eagle with the broken wing and for a collage of that drowning series, same size."

"You got it. I just want to make sure the newspaper gets this print tonight."

"Here," the pilot reaches into his wallet, "is that fifty now. That should get you started."

"How soon? I don't think I can get them done by tomorrow."

"A couple of days. I won't be back till Friday."

"Until Friday then." He waves as he backs away, the bill almost too heavy for him to hold. "I gotta run—and I hope your friend gets better."

He will have to make internegatives to print a collage, which reminds him he must mail the Kodachrome he shot across Iskai Bay yesterday. But he forgets both thoughts as he inwardly grins: there'll be more pictures of that girl circulated than the fellow in the gray suit imagined possible.

He doesn't forget to stop at the newspaper for his check, doesn't forget mainly because he knows one of the photographers for the Anchorage daily, with whom he is certain he has enough business to discuss to justify letting Jack pay for the call.

If the *News Miner* runs the print of the ship and the girl in its morning edition, he expects he could see the gray man as early as tomorrow afternoon. Then what? He doesn't know. He will have to ad-lib.

The needle of his fuel gauge is twice its width below empty when he pulls into the newspaper's parking lot. He stops beside a Datsun B-210, and behind a diesel Rabbit. And as he enters the office, he tells Kathy, "I should have check."

The receptionist smiles sweetly as she takes a sealed envelope from her top desk drawer.

"I also need to use the phone to call Anchorage." He tears open the envelope, sealed, he suspects so no one will know how little Jack pays him. "Business reasons."

"You don't have to tell me, Kell. Go use the phone on Jack's's desk, if you can find it."

"His desk? or the phone?"

"Be nice. He cleaned up the mess around his desk. You should have seen him yesterday. After that government man was here, Jack was looking for the negatives you left, and he couldn't find them. He was turning over the papers on his desk like he was folding-in eggswhites in an angel food cake."

"Angel food? More likely a Devil's food cake."

"Oh, be nice to him. He plans to put you on salary next month . . . but I'm not supposed to tell you that."

"Then don't. By next month he'll have changed his mind so don't be surprised if it doesn't happen." The amount of the check, when he finally looks at it, startles him. Expecting a check for fifty dollars, he sees that it is made out for two hundred fifty dollars: "This can't be right—the amount's wrong."

Concerned she has made a mistake, Kathy looks at the check, then looks puzzled at him. "Two negatives at twenty-five apiece, then six more at thirty—you got a pay raise—and a roll of film at twenty. That's two-fifty. The amount is right."

"A pay raise, huh?"

"Yes. Jack said from now on you were to get thirty for all of your negatives . . . and I'm to pay you for the second negative you leave."

"Why the sudden generosity?"

"You'll have to ask him."

"Where is he?"

"He didn't say where he was going, but he went to the Mecca. My sister tends bar there, and he comes in every afternoon to say hello to her."

"I need to make that call." He smiles at Kathy as he steps past her desk and to Jack's still cluttered desk. He dials the number of the Anchorage daily, and after their switchboard routes his call to the camera room, and the camera room to the local news desk,

the local desk to sports, and sports to research, he at last gets to talk to his photographer friend.

"What are you sending me this time, Kell, another eagle picture?"

"Don't complain, Roger. You won an award on the last one."

"I'm not complaining. I was just gonna hard time you a little."

"I'm sending you a print of the Soviet fishing trawler *Nevezmozhno Liubliu*, I'll spell that for you if you want. Anyhow, she visited Port Adams this week—a call to the Harbormaster's office will get you the particulars."

"No negative?"

"I was getting around to explaining about the negative. There's a girl in the picture. Someone from Immigration didn't want her picture published. They stole all my negatives. Broke in and even took the two in my enlarger's film holder."

"This print is hot, then?"

"You could say that. It was in the microwave when they searched my place. Otherwise, I wouldn't have it."

"That's a story in itself. Do you want me to put a reporter on the line?"

"I don't have a story yet, only bits and pieces." He tells Roger what he knows, beginning with not seeing the girl leaning over the railing and ending with giving the print to the pilot.

"I hear you about bits and pieces, but I think you got the makings of a story. . . . Tell you what, I'll try to get the editors to run the print as a cultural exchange interest piece. And keep us advised as to what's happening. I'll have the front desk set you up with an editor so you can call in collect any time, day or night."

"Thanks—"

"Think nothing of it. Besides, I owe you—for the award."

"I'm glad you received it. They wouldn't have given me anything."

"Change your name, then they would. Call yourself something that sounds Native, say, Jacob Ugak. Sounds good."

"Yeah, well, I'll call you when I have more." He returns the receiver to its cradle. He has a check to cash, and banks will be closing shortly; so he hurries outside into a hard rain. The wind has picked up. And he hears the moaning of the whistler buoy as he climbs into his VolksWagon.

Worried about running out of gas as he drives the kilometre or so to where Port Adams' two banks face each other across 2nd Street, he coasts most of the way downtown. His account is with the *crab bank*—residents refer to both banks by their lobby displays: a mounted brown bear, hence the *bear bank*, and an impressive display of mounted king crab, reds, blues, browns and goldens. The banks have proper names, but he doesn't remember them. And even if he did, he wouldn't use them.

He has an account with no money in it, but the bank keeps it open because its manager is an amateur ornithologist of some note. The inexperienced teller, though, doesn't understand an account without a balance, and has to confer with the manager before she will cash the newspaper's check. The manager wants to talk about eagles. Kell, somewhat from orneriness, somewhat from concern about the fledglings (the manager has Fish & Game's ear and might get an opening delayed to protect the nest), tells the manager about the aerie on the pinnacle, and tells him how to reach the ledge.

"Thanks, Kell. This is the first time you've ever taken me into your confidence. I'll see if I can get away."

He doesn't tell the manager about the bear.

The manager is called away to deal with some sort of computer emergency; so returning his attention to the teller, Kell notices the glitter of her diamond ring as her nimble fingers flash across her terminal's keyboard. She is young, polite, but extremely cool. The diamond she wears is over a carat. And he wonders if she was once a cannery rat.

His stop at the bank takes ten times longer than it should so he feels rushed as he turns onto Fishhook Road. But he takes

time to photograph the Kodiak based crabber, *M/V Provider*, as it slips through the channel with no stern wake.

He stops at the most honestly named gas station in town, Two 'Hi' Gas, gets out, and standing in the rain, fills up. Over the years, he has incorporated the station's logo in hundreds of photos. Even now, he thinks about how to frame the logo differently than he has before.

As he pays for the gas, he feels good about having money, even if isn't all of the money in the world. He then pulls back onto Fishhook and heads for The Mecca.

The bars along Fishhook Road are about as far apart as a drunk man can stagger on a cold night. Good-Time Sally's, The Lighthouse, The Ship's, The Mecca, Hannah Rocks, Guinevere's—their names are easy to remember even if their order isn't. Their differences are less than their similarities. The Ship's is located inside a beached, concrete Liberty ship. The Lighthouse looks like a lighthouse. Good-Time Sally's, built after the earthquake in 1964, is the newest of the bars. Each of the bars is dark inside all day long. Each smells of beer and cigarette smoke, fish gurry and perfume. Each has a three hour long happy hour. The Ship's and The Mecca have seldom used dance floors. All have pool tables and friendly waitresses, girls who came North to work in the canneries but found the money better in the bars. And he wonders how a town of so few people can support so many bars, all serving lite beer and none serving *Toothsheath Stout*.

The newspaper's white Toyota pickup is parked in front of The Mecca. He parks alongside, enters, and waits for his eyes to adjust to the gloom. With a beer in front of him, Jack sits on a bar stool, talking to the bartender, a voluptuous bleached blonde wearing a tight sweater and a leather mini-skirt; she is half Jack's age. From a distance, Kell is unable to determine if she is genuinely interested in what Jack says or if her interest is professional. Obviously, Jack thinks her interest is genuine.

His editor doesn't hear his approach or know he is there until Kell taps his shoulder: "I want to see you outside, right now."

His face already flush, Jack says, "It's raining. Anything we need to say, we can say right here."

Kell is angry with himself for not being fully appreciative of his improved status; he hasn't any reason to be short with Jack. Well, yes, he has. And he glances towards the well-endowed bartender, who takes her cue and a damp towel, steps from behind the bar and begins wiping tables.

His voice as calm as he can make it, Kell says, "Jack, don't lie to me. I want to know what's going on with Immigration. And why the sudden generosity? It's out of character for you."

"You ungrateful bastard. You're starving to death, and you wonder why I'm helping you out?"

"I am grateful, very much so. But you didn't answer my question. What's going on with Immigration."

"You have a funny way of showing it."

"Jack, don't bullshit me, don't put me off." An edge has returned to his voice. "The last time you felt generous, you gave Spanish Fly to a co-ed in college. I know you. So what's going on?"

"Have I ever lied to you, Kell?"

"You know damn good n' well you have."

"I also got you the sale of a book. You ought to be damn appreciative about that."

"You never said anything about a book."

"A publisher in Eagle River wants you to submit about fifty of your best Alaska slides, don't have to be just eagles, and a short text, twenty-five, thirty thousand words about how Alaska has changed. You know, the earthquake, the pipeline, all that stuff. So congra'ulations. You've sold another book."

"I don't understand—"

"There's nothing to understand. I pitched you a book deal when I went to Anchorage last month. Besides, with another book in print, your pictures are worth more to the paper. You're worth to more the paper."

"When were you going to tell me about this book deal?"

"I should have this afternoon. It just slipped my mind."

"What has slipped your mind about Immigration? What did the fellow say to you?"

"That you were uncooperative."

"Did he mention anything about the girl?"

"No. . . . Are you in trouble, Kell?"

"I think the girl is."

"Don't worry about her"

"I want to know who she is."

"Ahh, the reporter is coming out in you. . . . I'm putting you on staff. Cheri is quitting the end of the month. Says she has to escape *the Rock* for awhile. She's going to live with her dad in Anchorage, going to write a mystery novel. Perhaps that's where her talents lie. She's not much of a writer, not much between sheets."

As usual, he resents Jack's crassness. He likes Cheri: she's a nice girl. He has lain awake many night thinking about her so he will be sorry to see her leave, and he doesn't know where her talents lie. He doubts, though, they are as a novelist.

He sees now that he won't get anywhere asking Jack about the fellow from Immigration. He knows he's being lied to; he would like to twist the truth out of him, but he suspects if he wrung him out like a dishrag all he'd get is grease.

Small town editors are supposed to know everybody and everything that happens in town, which reminds him, Jack might know something about Sharon Caine: "There's a girl and her hippie dad living in the harbor in an open sailboat, a reworked Bristol Bay gillnetter. What do you know about them?"

"Is she the girl in the picture?"

"No, not at all. . . . Just answer my question."

"Kell, you act like you don't appreciate what I have done for you. What is it with you?"

"Do you know who I'm talking about? Her name is Caine, Sharon Caine."

"Just tell me, Kell, you want the job or not?"

"Yes, I want the job. Now, what do you know?"

"I've seen the boat. . . . Cheri interviewed them about a month ago. She can tell you more than I can."

"Where is she?"

"I sent her downtown to make the round of advertisers this afternoon. She's probably still making the round."

"You never did answer me about Immigration?"

"There's nothing to tell—"

"You know that girl was invisible."

Jack pushes back away from the bar as he looks at his beer, then at Kell. "Invisible? . . . Now, you're not making any sense. . . . Whatever you're drinking or smoking, you'd better get rid of it."

There is, Kell's certain, a spirit in Jack that's absolutely incompatible with his. He can order a beer in seven languages, but he doesn't know of words in any of those languages to adequately convey his dislike for his boss. It's as if Jack's a caricature of a human being.

"I'll see you later." Kell turns to leave. Despite the check for the negatives being five times what he expected, he doesn't like Jack. In particular, he doesn't like his comments about Cheri.

"Hey," Jack hollers to his back, "is that all you're going to tell me? She was invisible? Come on, now."

Kell turns back around: "That's all I know."

"Like hell it is!"

"Maybe Cheri knows more." Cheri, he knows, will think he's had a bad trip, but maybe Jack will have to sweet talk her a little to pry from her what she doesn't know. "She interviewed the captain."

He is out the door and into the rain before Jack replies.

The girls born and raised (there hasn't been a child *reared* in Port Adams for two generations) on the island all want to leave. They either become pregnant and married while still in high school—before their minds are dazzled by tales of big city life and high prestige jobs though they would make more money staying in Port Adams and working in the canneries—or they

flee *the Rock* immediately upon graduation from high school. He knows. He has met them in Anchorage and Seattle. And few of them ever express an interest in returning.

His observations of the girls hired in Seattle and Spokane to come North to work in the canneries are, for the most part, unkind. He has seen their greed. They are, as Madonna sings, material girls in a material world.

Perhaps his assessment of them is unduly harsh. They, like pika, must make hay while the sun shines. Their innocence lasts no longer than an Arctic summer. Too many of them end up as cocaine whores. He has no use for anyone who will trade life for a few lines of coke. It has been his job to take the pictures the troopers file with the incident reports when their bodies wash up on the beach. He has tried to view their deaths passively; he cannot.

Where was he at their age? Interested only in good times? Perhaps. The girl was a tall, blonde Swede with large breasts and a penchant for smelling earthy. She had been in her mid-twenties and ready to settle down, but she was flattered by his attention. A fellow photographer introduced them. She called herself a model and so she was. And he and Elka remained together through the years of his success.

He wonders where she is now, ten years after they split up. She is probably fat, with two kids, and married to a coal miner, perhaps even to an union official. Maybe she is happy; he doubts she is. More likely, she too is reaping a harvest of bitter fruit from the seeds they sowed.

Ten years. Not much time. The child that wasn't would be as old as he was when he sold his first photograph.

He stands now only a step outside the door of The Mecca as he watches the wind sweep the rain in from the sea. He wants to find Cheri to ask about Sharon Caine. Cheri, he knows, detests visiting the newspaper's regular advertizers and begging ads from them, but it's like Jack to make her do it, make her humble herself before the town's merchants. He knows he doesn't have the right temperament to be a salesman. A true salesman would

view begging ads as selling a service to the local businessmen. He can hear the pitch now: *Let me, as a representative of your local newspaper, help you tell the public about what you have to offer*. That's bullshit. After all, who reads advertizing? He suspects only the people who are the advertizers' competitors.

Perhaps he's just upset about Jack's comments about Cheri. He knows that as far as Jack is concerned, any woman who rejects his amorous advances is a lesbian, any woman who accepts is a slut, and any woman who strings him along is only after his money. And he really doesn't want to work for Jack Edwards.

Heavy clouds obscure the sun, and the wind bows newly leafed willow shoots lining the ditch separating The Mecca from Hannah Rocks. Last winter, a fisherman from Ballard drowned in the ditch. The police department called him to take the photographs. The weekly printed a story about the fisherman drowning at sea. The story was deliberately incorrect—Jack's reasoning was that the people of Ballard didn't want to read about a favorite son drowning while barhopping.

As he watches the rain pelt the bowed willows, he fears he made a mistake in hastily accepting the reporter's job. He isn't getting rich, but he is getting by as a free-lance photographer. Plus, if Jack is telling the truth, he has a book assignment. A small press in Eagle River isn't a big house in New York or London, but a book is a book. And today, he doesn't really care who publishes him as long as somebody does.

Money in his pocket, he feels like celebrating—and to be with someone tonight. Tomorrow, he can worry about his integrity, the print he sent to the *News Miner*, and the gray suited American from Immigration. Right now, he feels like buying Cheri a beer. She will like hearing about the print he sent to Anchorage. The statewide daily will scoop the weekly's feature story by three days. And Jack will be furious, mad enough to fire him before his integrity can be stolen.

He figures that if Cheri has been on the advertizer run for a while, she should have already visited the island's two Realtors, the hardware store, the Doughnut Hole, Sandy's, The Gun Store, Island Liquors, Jake's Supper Club, both banks, and probably, The Ebb Tide Room. Since both grocery stores and Alaska Commercial have begun personally delivering their following week's ads to the newspaper themselves, Jack has been handling them. Cheri, then, he reasons, should be visiting the bars along Fishhook Road about now.

The grocery stores' obsession with secrecy amuses him. Only Jack sees their ads before the weekly goes to print, probably for fear one of the other stores will see their following week's specials in time to undercut their prices. And he suspects that in the interest of fairness to the community, the newspaper should show the stores their competitors' ads a week in advance, Perhaps then, groceries would become affordable.

If he waits here, Cheri will be along shortly. But Jack's presence will spoil his fun. He should intercept her, and he dashes through the rain to his VolksWagon.

She'll probably be driving her own car since Jack has the newspaper's pickup—she has, he believes, a green Datsun B-210, one of thirty or so in town. He isn't sure he can distinguish hers from the others.

He pulls onto Fishhook Road, turns left, passes Hannah Rocks, then sees a green Datsun in front of Guennie's.

Guinevere's Bath, Bar & Parlor House as Guennie's is officially known is located inside the old Alaska Packers' bunkhouse. The cannery here at Port Adams is now defunct: it choked on its fish traps. When it did, their cook, Guinevere Dionne, a heavy set woman of French peasant stock, purchased their former bunkhouse and opened a bar and restaurant and rooming house during the Second World War. Two red-haired sisters from Seattle rented two rooms for the duration of the war, and Guennie's became a popular hangout for the servicemen

who were building and then manning Port Adams' coastal defenses.

Some of the town's older residents claim that Guin still hasn't spent all of the money she made during the War. He wouldn't know. Regardless, Guin's granddaughter now runs the bar which still rents rooms by the month, week, day and hour.

He parks beside the Datsun, and pauses a step inside the bar's front door. Cheri sits at the table nearest the kitchen entrance as she talks to Guin's granddaughter, a hard-looker of about his own age. He approaches the table with caution and considerable apprehension. What he has to fear, he doesn't know. Perhaps he's experiencing a rush of schoolboy intimidation as he senses that within the bar's dim interior he's out of his element.

"Excuse me, Cheri. Our friendly editor told me I would find you here."

"Friendly editor, Jack? Whatever you're smoking, Kell, how about sharing?"

"You won't like it."

Guin's granddaughter reaches over and pulls out a chair. "Join us."

Cheri asks, "Kell, have you met Rachel?"

"Briefly, once." He pulls the chair farther away from the table and sits, folding his arms across the chest. "Salmon Festival a few years ago."

To Rachel, Cheri says, "Kell is the photographer who takes all of those harbor shots in each week's paper. He has also published a number of eagle photos."

With a tired smile, Rachel says, "I've seen your work in *National Geographic* five, six, seven years ago—I don't recall exactly how long ago. Every day is the same around here. . . . If it wasn't for your pictures in the paper, I wouldn't know what the harbor looks like in the daylight anymore."

"I'd forgotten about those photos—that was a long time ago. I'm surprised anybody still remembers them."

Rachel lifts her smoldering cigarette from the ashtray. "I used to lay awake dreaming of soaring with those eagles you photographed—and I'd get up in the afternoon and serve beer to a flock of old crows. I remember those pictures." She pauses to draw on her cigarette. After exhaling a column of smoke into the bar's dingy atmosphere, she continues, "I never forgot them. Your pictures are alive. You're good at what you do."

"Thanks for the compliment, but there aren't many photo editors who think they are alive enough."

Again exhaling a column of smoke, Rachel smiles. "Your pictures are alive inside of me."

Cheri, wanting to remain part of the conversation, asks, "Is this the first time you've been in here, Kell?"

"Actually, no. But this is the first time I've been in since Guin more or less retired." Then to Rachel, he adds, "I believe you were stateside when I was here."

"I haven't been Outside for five years. . . . You ought to come in more often." She pauses to again draw on her cigarette and lend substance to her invitation. "I'd like to talk to you about eagles sometime."

"Sure. I spend my days thinking about them, but right now, I need to ask Cheri, here, what she knows about an old hippie and his daughter living in a boat in the harbor."

"You mean John and Sharon?" Rachel blurts. "They come in every once in a while."

Cheri asks, "Is your interest professional or personal?"

He hesitates; he isn't about to say personal here. "Professional. I need her to sign a model release. She's thinking about it. . . . I sort of wanted to know what it would take to encourage her to say yes."

"You're on your own there, Kell." Cheri then adds, "I'll leave you two to talk about eagles. I have work to do for an old vulture."

"Pickup a copy of tomorrow's *News Miner*, Cheri. You might find a picture in it that'll fry an old buzzard."

As she stands and latches her briefcase, Cheri asks, "What did you do, Kell?"

"You know about the missing negatives?"

"Did you find them?"

"No, they were stolen. Someone broke into my place, and I don't know what happened to the two I left Jack. But I made a print that whoever broke-in didn't find. I sent it to Anchorage."

"And Jack gets scooped." Cheri grins, then turns serious. "If there's a story here, I want it. Okay, Kell?"

"Then you'll have to help me with it when that fellow from Immigration returns."

"I love it. Feds steal pictures of Russian ship. . . . Who gets killed?"

"Well, I hope not me."

"Eah, probably won't be much of a story then." Turning to Rachel, she adds, "Don't keep him up all night talking. I have an assignment for him tomorrow afternoon. So goodbye, both of you." With briefcase in hand, she turns and leaves the bar.

He looks at the bar's scattered patrons being served drinks by the latest edition of Guennie's infamous hostesses, and he tells himself he might as well go home and sleep alone. But he doesn't rise from his chair. Instead, he turns to Rachel and asks, "When do you get off?"

Tired, she says, "I don't ever get off. I'm here from one in the afternoon till five in the morning."

Almost absentmindedly, he says, "Sounds like you need a change of scenery as bad as I do." He again looks around the bar. He'd go crazy if this were his world. He wonders how she manages. "That's a long day—and you know it. Perhaps you'd like to see how the outside world lives sometime?"

"Yeah, sometime I would . . . but it's raining out there right now. I can hear it hitting the windows. . . . And the wind's blowing." She again pauses to draw on her cigarette. After exhaling, she asks, "Would you like a beer? It's on the house."

"I'm not too fond of beer I can see through."

"You want me to put a scoop of ice cream in it, then?"

He laughs. "Where did you ever get that idea? And no, no thanks."

"What do you drink?"

Drumming his fingertips on the tabletop, he says, "I spent a year Downunder. I acquired a taste for Aussie beer."

"If I get you a bottle, will you stay and drink it?"

He is uncomfortable in the bar, and uncomfortable with her directness which, actually, is no more direct than him asking when she gets off.

Nothing awaits him in his apartment other than him having to make and print the internegatives for the pilot's collage. Otherwise, he has nothing to do at home except process that roll of Fujichrome with the bear shots on it. So after an appropriately long pause, he says, "Yeah, I'll stay—but I haven't eaten."

Rachel, fiddling with her cigarette, looking at the table rather than him, says, "I serve as good of food as anybody in town."

"Okay—but if we're to have dinner, I'd like it where you're not working, where we can talk without being interrupted."

"Sit right there. I'll get you that beer."

She rises, steps out of sight, then returns with a telephone receiver pressed to her ear. After a minute, she hangsup, again steps into the kitchen, but this time, she doesn't immediately return.

He squirms as he waits. He never before considered asking her out, never considered even coming in here. And for that matter, he isn't sure he should be here now. During the eight, almost nine years he has been in Port Adams, he has avoided frequenting Fishhook Road after dark. He saw enough flesh in Copenhagen to forever sour him on meatmarkets where daughters are hourly paraded, displayed, figuratively butchered and sold as if they were livestock.

Rachel returns. Her tired smile is still as tired, but her eyes sparkle as she says, "Your beer will be here in a few minutes. *Fosters*, I hope you don't mind. And I hope you like steak. I

ordered for you. . . . Our meal will be served upstairs, so if you'd like to follow me."

His legs again seem heavy and his feet not fully under his control as he rises from his chair and follows her. She leads him through the kitchen and up a set of private stairs to her two room flat. Her quarters are separated from the rooms the bar rents by a studded wall. But both the rented rooms and her flat have windows overlooking the channel.

She has even less space than he has in his apartment, but at least she has furnishings . . . one of her rooms is a bedroom. The other is a parlor with a round oak table pushed into one corner. Both rooms smell of perfume and cigarette smoke.

Apologetically, she says, "They aren't much, but we won't be interrupted here," pauses, then adds, "I called in one of the girls to take my place this evening so I won't have to go down again."

Not knowing what to say, he feels tired, as if he were a suddenly deflated balloon.

"If you want to take your boots off, it's all right. Your beer will be here in a little while. Dinner will be in about half an hour."

"This is nice . . . more than I expected." But then, what did he expect? He, she are adults.

How is he to read her expectations? At what point does language fail to convey intentions?

His ears burn as his cheeks redden, and he feels the presence of someone else in the room. But there isn't anyone else here. He is only imagining the whitesoxs he feels crawling on his neck, the biting flies threatening to devour him alive as if he were meat on display.

"I don't take a night off very often—about as seldom as you come in."

"Does that mean I should come in more often?" The words are out of his mouth before he thinks about them, or the message they convey.

"I don't know."

He has to change the subject before his ears ignite into flames: "I learned this afternoon that I'll have another book published. Alaska photos, not just eagle pictures. For this one, though, I have write a text of thirty thousand words or so."

"I write," she says, motioning for him to sit. "That's what Cheri and I were discussing. I hope she makes it." She lights another cigarette, then asks, "Do you smoke?"

"No. . . . What do you write?"

"Romances that don't get published. . . . Would you rather I didn't?"

"What? Write?"

"No. Smoke."

"It's your place."

"It's a filthy habit. I've been trying to quit."

After several puffs on her cigarette, she crushes it and joins him on the love seat. He feels her warm thigh and hip press against his leg—and his own stirring. *How far am I suppose to go? should I go? want to go? And why do I feel like I'm on stage, an audience watching, knowing what's coming, waiting for intermission so they can get refreshments, smoke in the lobby, do anything but applaud.*

With or without a conscious thought—he can't decide—he lays his arms around her shoulders and draws her to him. He wonders why today, tonight. He has money in his pocket, a book sale, a salaried job offer. Dinner will be served shortly. Yet he questions his luck, and wonders who's watching him? Where is the camera? And as he gently squeezes Rachel's shoulders, he knows there is a catch somewhere.

There is a catch. Has to be. Nothing, since he was cursed, has really worked out—and he doesn't expect tonight to be any different. He just knows it won't be. But he says, again almost absentmindedly, "Why don't you come with me across Iskai Bay sometime and look at the eagles up close?"

"I'd like that."

"Maybe you could even help me write, you know, about

Alaska. You ought to be an expert on the State . . . more so than I am."

"Maybe. . . . Okay."

Now he doesn't know what to say, so he asks, "Why do you write?"

"Why do you take pictures of the harbor? . . . You don't ever show the oil slicks or the garbage floating between boats. You never take a picture of a fisherman pissing over the stern or of them drinking or partying. . . . You only take pictures of the harbor how you want to see it."

He feels his ears grow even hotter. *That's not true! I've taken plenty of trash shots, but . . .* He reins in his frustration, and as quietly as he can, he says, "I never thought about that."

"It's true. Your pictures show a dream world, not reality."

"Guess you're right—but what is real?"

"What do you want to be real?"

*How am I to answer that?* Long ago, he lost his dreams, lost faith, lost everything but a little hope. So, yes, he would like tonight to be real. Maybe.

"So I take fearyland pictures and you write romances how you'd like them to turn out?"

"No, I don't—and that's probably why I don't get them published. I write romances the way they are."

"Quite calling them romances. Call them tragedies."

"No one ever gets killed in them."

"You can't kill an already dead generation." He pauses, then adds, "What's wrong with taking fearyland photos? No one gets killed in them, either. . . . I photographed murder once. Cost me a helleva lot of grief."

"I don't doubt it—but you didn't do anything about it, did you? Just took the picture, right? Accepted what happened?"

"No. . . . There wasn't anything I could do."

"So you have been hiding out up here ever since?" She stands, finds a cigarette, says, "I sorry. I shouldn't have said that. I take it back."

"Maybe you shouldn't—you might be right." He looks out her window at the darkened channel. "Write a romance about tonight, how you'd like it to be. Make me handsome and rich, maybe a world famous wildlife cinematographer. Transport us to the south of France. Serve chilled champagne. Dim the lights and change into a flowing gown of satin, lace. Light candles. Say prayers. Make tonight special. Even if it happens only in your imagination, it's better than never having occurred at all."

"'Kell Harder,' can I use your name?"

"Sure. . . . That'll be the only way I'll ever have any money."

"That's the only way I'll ever see the south of France."

"How about the rest of it?"

"How about it? . . . Who would you like me to be? Who do you fantasize about?"

"I don't—"

"Come on, tell me."

"The only thing I fantasize about is flying, joining eagles, being free, really free, no bills, no boss, nobody watching what I do, no having to be somewhere tomorrow afternoon."

"Then I shall be a young, beautiful heiress extraordinaire, and I'm extending you an invitation to call upon me aboard my yacht as it bobs in a sea of molten glass." She stops, lights her cigarette, then says, "Let's not pretend this is more than it is. . . . Your beer will be here in a minute." And she steps into her bedroom and closes the door.

He shifts his weight, and feels a string pop inside the love seat. His butt sinks until it touches the floor. His hopes fall even farther. Alone, he wonders what he should've said. Evidently he shouldn't have mentioned anything about romance.

*Fearyland or no fearyland, my photos don't represent all there is to see individually but taken collectively, they freeze the world so it can examine itself.* He thinks about leaving. Obviously both he and she have the same thoughts, ask the same questions, but get different answers. Maybe he ought to find Cheri and spend the evening with her. And he is about to stand when he hears someone

on the stairs . . . the bartender seems to levitate into the hallway with an opened bottle of Fosters and a chilled glass on a tray. He would rather have Toothsheath, but the bartender smiles all too knowingly for him to leave.

It is crazy what a person's mind thinks when the person is lonely: here he is in Rachel's room, and he's thinking about leaving, about finding Cheri. He stands about as much chance of reaching first base with Cheri as he does hitting against Nolan Ryan in the Astrodome—and he has never played baseball.

He feels depression return with each sip of beer. He wonders where he lost his confidence, lost his soul. He knows his photos are good, very good, but they aren't selling. There seems to be an asterisk beside his name whenever he submits photos to national magazines, an asterisk directing the photo editor to reject his work summarily. Why? He knows why. He has been cursed for taking the photo of that damn baby.

A teenage girl wearing a white apron and with red hands climbs the stairs, and ignores him while she covers the round table with a white linen cloth. The girl then disappears only to return in a minute with two place settings. The plates and cups are heavy restaurant ware. The flatware is cheap stainless steel. The napkins are paper. And when the girl is satisfied with the table's appearance, she again turns to go.

But he stops her: "Hey—in the ditch along the road, the wild roses are blooming. Why don't you cut some, put them in a vase and bring them up."

She stares at him as if he's crazy. She seems incredulous that someone would want flowers from the ditch on a dining table. But after a moment or two, she nods her head, and returns with two wild rose cuttings in a washed ketchup bottle. Her face, hair and shoulders are wet. And she says, "It's raining too hard to get more."

"Those look fine. Just set them on the table. . . . And do you have any candles and candlesticks in the kitchen?

"We have a couple boxes of Plummer candles we keep for emergencies."

"This is an emergency. See if you can put one in another ketchup bottle or whatever and bring it up."

She nods again, and minutes later, a stubby white candle, its base twisted into the neck of a second ketchup bottle, lights the table. "There," she says.

"How long before you serve?"

"Another five minutes."

"I'll see you then."

By the candle's flickering light, the rain droplets clinging to the rose petals glisten like living jewels as the sparkling droplets chase each other across the petals, then gather at the tips and fall like balls of fire to the sepals, the leaves, and finally, onto the linen tablecloth. The tablecloth appears to be fine French linen and quite old. He imagines it belongs to Guinevere Dionne herself. But the plates, cups, and flatware are what the bar uses. He lifts a fork, turns it over, and reads the small lettering: *Made In Japan*. He returns the fork to its setting, and wonders what the bar will use for serving dishes.

He wishes he had his camera here.

He remembers his VolksWagon—he worries whether it will be all right parked in front of the bar. After his apartment was entered, he isn't as trusting as he was. Port Adams has become more like the rest of the world. The last thing he needs is to lose either his camera gear or the ZED.

The flickering candle trickles melted wax down its side and onto the neck of the bottle. He tilts it slightly. Its flame steadies, burns higher and brighter, and the wax stops dripping from the molten pool.

He looks through the window to check if he can see his VolksWagon. He can't. And he wonders if he should move it. Perhaps he should just go. The evening obviously isn't developing as either of them anticipated.

Rain pelts the window pane. Wind pushes against the glass. Although the sun hasn't set, the sky is as dark as the middle of the night.

He best move his VolksWagon.

Before he can, though, the girl from the kitchen climbs the stairs with a wood platter holding two steaks. Behind her comes the cook carrying a covered tray. The bartender follows with the stems of two wine glasses between the fingers of her left hand and a bottle of a California red in her right hand.

The platter is placed to the left of the candle; the tray, to the right. The wine is opened and allowed to breathe. Then the three of them close the door on their way out.

The aroma of grilled meat fills the room. He is hungry, but he is also lonely. And he knocks lightly on Rachel's closed bedroom door.

Unsure, he sits at the table, almost overcome by the aroma of the steaks—he's been hungry for days. But to eat without her seems terribly improper. So once again, he knocks.

Nothing. No response. No stirring in the room. She is in there, but apparently wants nothing to do with him. He suspects he should've left when she first entered her room.

So, she changed her mind. Her prerogative. He just disagrees with how she's telling him.

As much as he wants to, he just can't eat without her. And his hand is on the doorknob to leave when he hears whispered, "Don't go."

Her door is ajar. He sees that her eyes are red, but she has also changed clothes into what is either a dress or a nightgown; he isn't sure which. It's satin, with a flowing skirt and lacy top. White. Seductive.

"Don't let the meat go to waste on my account."

"Join me, please."

"In a minute . . . begin without me. I'll be out. Soon."

Still feeling guilty as he longingly eyes the steaks—it has been awhile since he has eaten real meat—he nevertheless sits down

and uncovers the tray. He takes one of the two foil-wrapped baked potatoes, half of the succotash, one of the rolls, and from the platter, the larger of the two steaks. But he can't eat. He just stares at his plate as if bars separate him from the food.

"Do you say a blessing?" Rachel's eyes aren't as red, and her makeup seems perfect. She is stunning, radiantly beautiful.

"I never have."

"Grandmama insisted that we all do. Mass every Sunday and nevermind what goes on upstairs. She is quite a lady."

"That's what I've heard."

"Forgive me. You got too close."

"I'm sorry."

"Don't be. . . . I've just been edgy for awhile." She inhales deeply and seems to smell the steaks for the first time. "The table looks very nice."

What can he say? What can he talk about? Fearyland? He doesn't know; so he says nothing as he slides the other steak onto her plate.

"Kell, do you speak French?"

"Some. I took it in school, have used it a little since."

"Can you teach me? . . . Grandmama bought the ancestral farm, if you can call it that, five acres, where she was born, where her father farmed using glass jars, like little minigreenhouses. Have you ever heard of that?"

"I think they're called cloches."

"Anyway, she bought it last year. I thought I'd go for a visit."

"To France?"

"Normandy."

"Ahh, that part of France settled by Danes." He wants to tell her about Charles the Simple being held upsidedown when his foot was kissed in the swearing of Danish allegiance to the French crown, but he can't remember the name of the Dane who picked the French king up. So instead, he says, "If you weren't to live in Alaska, that's a nice part of the world."

"That's what Grandmama tells me. I think she wants me to get out of here, and let her sell the bar. She thinks I need the change. But she doesn't need the money—and I need the job."

"Would you go there, to Normandy?"

"I might . . . but probably only for a visit. Right now, the fields are leased out, but what kind of fields can you have when the whole farm is five acres?"

"Small ones."

She chuckles. "Well, will you teach me French?"

"Sure. I'd like that."

"Your dinner is getting cold."

"Look, this whole evening so far has been a surprise. I'm probably as taken back by it as you are . . . but I like what's happening right now."

"So do I. . . . Eat."

They exchange mostly small talk, some of it perhaps a little gossipy, during dinner. She asks if he wants desert. He says he's too full to eat anything more, that his stomach has shrunk; so they sit next to each other on the loveseat and talk more, now mostly Kell telling her about eagles he has photographed. He tells her about the bear, and about the girl on the trawler, and about the salaried job for the paper. She seems happy for him, but he feels that she is really sad.

He asks, "You're going to go, aren't you?"

"Where?"

"To Normandy."

"I'm thinking about it. . . . I need the change." The tiredness returns to her eyes, tiredness that no makeup can hide.

"Then we had better get your lessons started right away."

"You don't have to."

"Yes, I do."

Kell leaves at five, when the bars have to close for their one hour a day. He leaves knowing he'll be back in the evening for at least a few minutes. And she makes a note to order Toothsheath Stout as part of the bar's liquor inventory.

He deposits the rolls of Kodachrome shot, now, day before yesterday in the Port Office's dropbox. He hopes that one magic image is on one of them. He'll know in a couple of weeks. So as he pulls away, behind him, whitecaps race down the channel. Ahead, wind whips the spruce boughs as he follows Baranof Street uphill, through the residential district where stormdoors stand open as the wind leans against houses. Wind and rain buffet his VolksWagon, which seems hardly heavy enough to withstand the pounding. But he barely notices. His thoughts are of Rachel; he never imagined her as a romance writer. Never thought about her at all. Certainly never thought she might be interested in his work.

He parks in his assigned slot, then just sits in his VolksWagon, rocked by wind gusts of fifty, sixty kilometres. The sky would be light if not for the clouds.

For once, all of the pieces of his life seem to be coming together. He has work to do, a couple of prints to make, film to develop, an assignment this afternoon. This isn't such a bad world after all.

His telephone is ringing. Who, he wonders as he hurries to unlock his apartment's door, would be calling him now. Pushing the door out of his way, he runs to the phone.

"Kell, is that you?"

"Yeah, who am I talking to?"

"We've been up all night trying to dupe that damn print you sent us. What the hell did you do to it? That girl won't reproduce. She doesn't copy."

"What do you mean? What are you guys trying to do? Just shoot the picture. Make a negative of it."

"Kell, who do you think you're talking to? This is our business, too. And I've already wasted five rolls of film. That damn girl will not, and I can't say that too strongly, will not reproduce. She just isn't there."

"Wait a minute. Let's start over again. I don't know if I'm hearing you or if I'm dreaming. . . . What you mean, she won't reproduce?"

The voice on the other end of the line changes: "Kell, this is Roger. I want to see the negative of that print you sent me."

"I don't have it. I told you, it was stolen."

"You're not bullshitting a bullshitter are you?"

"No, seriously . . . I'm leveling with you. The fellow from Immigration stole all four I had. I was short on film. I didn't shoot as much as I would've liked. But I suspect he would've stole whatever I shot. And he was interested in the girl, not in the ship. And like I said before, he wanted to buy the negatives but I wouldn't sell."

"You're not shitting me, Kell?"

"NO! . . . Now what's this about the girl not copying?"

"I don't know what you did to this print. I can see her. I can see her through the pentaprism. I can see her under the microscope, can see the edges of every particle of silver. I can focus on her. But when I develop the negative, she isn't there. And not just for me, but for everyone I could get outta bed and into the studio."

"Now, I don't understand."

"Neither does anyone in the lab. . . . Hell, you have five of us scratching our heads. So I'm asking you, what did you do to the print?"

"I didn't do a thing. Everything about it was normal. Film, paper, times, chemicals. . . . The girl was on my negative although I didn't see her on the ship."

"Don't ask us to believe that. You did something—and it's a damn fine trick, a damn fine one . . . but what did you do?"

"I didn't do a thing. . . . wait a minute, is this some kind of a joke on me?"

"Kell, I'm telling you. She doesn't copy."

"And it's not something you're doing? Your flash isn't washing her out, maybe?"

"Kell, let me repeat myself, she isn't there."

"Yeah, she is. . . . Do you need me to come there and take the negative?"

"You're welcome to."

"I would if I had the time and money."

"You're onto something, Kell, something really big. Whatever chemicals you're experimenting with, you've made magic."

"It isn't the chemicals—"

"You need to write your work up in a technical article for us dunces."

Sighing, Kell mutters, "You wouldn't believe it if I wrote it up."

"You're definitely onto something. . . . Do you mind if we keep the print for awhile . . . run some tests on it?"

"Go ahead."

"If we sprung for that ticket can you come to the mainland for a day or two, and bring your chemicals?"

Knowing the processing of the print was entirely normal, Kell says, "Why don't you come over here. You've been wanting to go through my slides. And I now know a great place to get a beer."

"Maybe I will. . . . Kell, you're a sonnabitch, giving us a cock 'n bull story the way you did. You're got everybody in the lab scratching their heads. I think you owe us five nights of sleep."

"Yeah, I suppose so. . . . Come over, right away."

"Tomorrow soon enough? I want you to show me what you've done, if you will."

"I don't know that I can. . . . See you tomorrow." And he hangsup, not knowing what to think, not really wanting to think about photography.

He sits on the couch, props his feet on the coffee table, and wonders about an image that won't produce. How is that possible? He used silver paper and film. There was nothing special about anything he did. The girl appeared in his negatives and on his prints. He hadn't seen her leaning over the bulwarks when he took the picture, but she had to be there. Had to be. Maybe what he needs is a change.

Again the phone rings.

He stares at it, unsure of whether to answer. But on its second ring he reaches for its receiver.

"Who were you talking to?"

"Fellows in Anchorage. They're having some problems duplicating the print I sent them. I think they must be standing it on its edge when they try to copy it—either that or they're putting me on."

"I was just wondering. . . . What are you doing?"

"I have a roll of Fujichrome to process before I catch a little sleep. Why?"

"I talked to Grandmama, took advantage of the two hour time difference between here and Arizona."

"What did she have to say?"

"Oh, not much. . . . She remembers you. I think she even likes you."

"How's she doing?"

"She said you wouldn't have any problems finding her farm, that I should take you with me, that I'd probably get lost."

"Oh, I probably could find it all right, but I imagine you can, too."

"Perhaps."

"When are you thinking about going?"

"She said she's had an offer on the bar here for quite awhile. From your boss, Jack Edwards. Seems he wants to buy it for a woman friend. He has been pestering Grandmama quite a bit lately. Has offered a lot of money, a lot of money."

He thinks about slamming Jack, saying something about not even trusting the color of his money, but says instead, "He'd make a good bar owner, maybe an even better owner than editor."

"I told Grandmama to call him, to make the deal."

"That's quick. He'll want to take over as soon as possible."

"Yes, he'll need to."

"This sounds awful sudden." He asks her in French if she's sure she wants to go.

"What did you say? You weren't asking me my name . . ." Her voice softens till he can't hear her.

"No—I wasn't. . . . Do you want me to go along? Is that where all of this is going?"

"Can you leave by two, on Wien's afternoon flight? Grandmama is buying the tickets."

"I don't know." A little taken back—actually, he is a lot taken back but pleasantly so. He thinks about everything he has to do, even to meeting Roger who will be flying over tomorrow.

*I need to answer her. Every moment of delay is killing something that could be, but this is too quick.*

*Change takes time . . . or does it?*

He wants to think about a print that won't reproduce. In those bear shots, he might have taken the picture of a lifetime. And he feels himself slipping off an edge. He has to lunge one way or the other. He can't do nothing. A decision has to be made, and made right now.

He wishes he had the negative of that print. Then maybe he could explain why the girl won't copy. But what he has are thoughts of her, Rachel, the smell of her still on him.

He doesn't really know her, not in the sense of having a long time relationship. But in a way he has known her all his life.

"You don't have to go. I shouldn't ask."

Just when things are beginning to work for him, he has to choose which change will occur—he wonders what will happen to those four negatives of the girl. Will somebody try to print them? And why won't that girl reproduce? That makes no sense at all.

He can't ask to call her back: their relationship will never be the same if he does. His decision has to be now, this minute, this very moment. And what is more important to him, resolving why that girl won't duplicate or going with her, leaving behind a mystery that won't be his to unravel.

How much longer can he delay that decision?

What is love? And how often does it come around?

"I'm sorry—"

"No. I want to go, really." He senses that it's not too late to add a caveat, that for another moment or two he can get out of going without hurting her feelings terribly. *Why now? before I sees what all I have? what I shot on that ledge, that bear . . . Why not tomorrow? Will one day make that much difference? . . . There won't be any decision to make tomorrow if I don't jump now*. "I have two prints to make. They'll probably take me all morning. Then, well, two o'clock, huh. I'd have to be traveling awfully light."

"Do you have a lot of stuff?"

He glances around his apartment. No, he has nothing beyond his camera bag. Not really. If Roger comes down, Roger can take his file cabinets of slides back to Anchorage. Same for his supplies and enlarger. Jack can pick up his mail, and the returned slides of the bear attack.

A thought sort of pops into his mind—he ought to go before he processes that roll of Fujichrome and finds that invisible girl standing between him and the bear. A crazy thought. Insane. A thought that's over the edge, but a thought that seems real, that sends chills through him, that actually frightens the hell out of him as if he really sees her stopping that bear from mauling him.

What if that girl really is invisible? What if she really was on that ledge with him? What if she's following him around, watching him? What if only he is supposed to see her . . . no, he doesn't want to go there, doesn't want that thought, doesn't want any part of anything he can't photograph. But he did photograph her. No, he's not going there.

What if he really photographed a dream?

What kind of trick is his mind playing on him? It almost seems that his long lens reached into Feary—No! no Loki, no trolls, no magic, none of that stuff. It's time for him to get out of here, get off this Rock. It's time—

"Two o'clock, the airport. I'll be there."

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