

Aleutian Rogue

WITH

The Amanat

SERIALIZED

Chapter Fifteen

1.

In a four-wheel-drive Subaru wagon, the first one he has driven and a pretty good car, Stuart Bartholomew, with the Subaru's engine running and heater on high, sits waiting. He can't see Reibeck's cabin, but he can see both sides of the draw in which it lies. He also has an excellent view of the lane and turnout where Reibeck parks his pickup.

Stuart is alone and likes it that way. He checked this morning: the Anchorage attorney who can-fly-with-ease began work on the survivalist cells that have been arming throughout rural Alaska. The attorney's assignment to investigating *Patriots In Action* clears the field of all known players, leaving Alden, the meddling fisherman and this little druggy to himself. The Columbians will remain on the sidelines until Alden surfaces; so his lone concern is what will those who fly the green hammer & sickle do. He suspects nothing, their influence weak on this side of the Bering.

He now knows what this whole affair is about, a bit of knowledge that cost NIA much more than it was worth. This little druggy made off with a shipment of walrus ivory, cached a couple of tons in the hold of the fisherman's boat before she and her accomplice were rudely interrupted. The two of them were roughed up, but they wouldn't tell where they had cached the partial shipment. Her accomplice was then drowned while she was forced to watch, but even that wasn't enough to loosen her tongue. She is cold, but that's to be expected of a dealer peddling in the void between the ends of the earth.

He is still sorting who works for whom, the two fellows the fisherman took care-of coming to mind first. They were, he believes, freelancers while being tacitly employed by the Anchorage attorney. Regardless, they are now history. They served their purpose, that being to get Alden away from the Organization for long enough that a snatch can be made.

Although he expects Alden to manipulate the fisherman into bringing her here—the little druggy isn't very good at concealing her trail—he isn't yet ready to snatch Alden. He wants to better assess the fisherman before he makes the grab; he hopes he won't have to erase the fisherman. Too many bodies make for messy operations, thereby creating needless risks.

Alden, he knows. She is a professional, who'll ante when she should, fold when she should. But amateurs are unpredictable. He doesn't like dealing with them.

The NIA is a shadowy part of the Federal bureaucracy that just sort of exists because it is needed. It doesn't like attention, nor does he. It's better when the agency suddenly appears, then disappears as if it doesn't exist. That will be the case in this affair. Alden has obvious information about Columbian drug activity, but he wants to spend time with her discussing the Soviet need for hard currency, a known need but one presently underappreciated by the current Administration.

Yes, he knows her. Too well, perhaps. He glances at his watch. Eight-thirty, Monday, December 3rd. He adjusts his binoculars and waits. It is still early. He doesn't expect her for another four hours at the earliest.

2.

With Catherine again seated in the bow of the pram, Jay slowly motors back towards the small boat harbor. But rather than turning into the harbor, he motors past Louisiana-Pacific's sawmill, past the cold-decked logs, and beaches the pram at the end of the airport. He has always liked Resurrection Bay. Too bad the sun never shines here.

He doesn't know what he feels. Tired, maybe. A little rummy from the odd hours which aren't much different than if he were fishing...he feels something else, one of those things he is reluctant to admit. An effect of post stress syndrome, maybe—he feels as if he is with Joseph and Looking Glass and pursued by the cavalry, an irrational feeling. Reality doesn't seem real. Time seems jumbled as it did in 'Nam. A two-sided world with a hole in the middle as if a hole has been drilled in the coin, and the dollar suspended from his neck as if were a medal of honor. He seems to be having another vision while wide awake, and his need to hurry doesn't let him think about the images that push through his mind as if his memories are rocks past which sweeps a strong tide carrying future events lost in nearly blinding surface glare.

When he finishes caching both the dinghy and the kicker under the debris above the high tide line, making both disappear, his vision has also disappeared. He feels weak and small, but he still has to hurry. He wraps his arm around Catherine's shoulders, and he leads her through the frost-covered weeds separating them from the end of the gravel strip. They have gone less than a hundred yards when a blue and white Interstate circles low overhead, drops its flaps, and lands.

The Interstate turns around and taxis towards them.

Watching the tail-dragger roll towards them, he remembers Billy writing that the consortium had purchased an Arctic Tern, the newly manufactured Bush version of the old Interstate. He squeezes Catherine's shoulders. "This is it," he says.

"What?" His squeeze hurts her shoulder.

"Our ride outta here."

When abreast of them, the plane again turns. And Billy is out its door and pumping Jay's hand before the prop quits spinning. "Mom said something about you needing to go to the bank which is code I guess for you needing a ride over the border. Is that right?"

The kid has filled out. Looks pretty good. "Married life must be agreeing with you."

"I got one in the hangar ready to solo. She spotted this morning." Billy hasn't seen Jay since his wedding, for which Jay flew up from Dutch Harbor. "Yeah, I'd say I like being married."

"Congratulations." Then glancing at the sun, Jay asks, "Can you fly straight to Homer?"

Checking his wristwatch, Billy shrugs, says: "Suppose. It's one-twenty. Be dusk in an hour, but we can be there by then if we go over the ice field."

"Risky?"

"Nah." Nodding to Catherine, Billy asks, "How'd you get hooked up with this outlaw?"

She smiles. Jay says, "Bill, Catherine. She'll be going with me."

"What are we waiting on?" Billy stows Jay's half-filled dufflebag, then seeing the makeshift sling, he helps Catherine aboard and into the back, points to her seatbelt, fastens his own seatbelt and restarts the engine. With Jay beside him, Billy taxis the Tern down the strip, lifts off, makes a 360° climbing turn above the bay, then powers the plane over the top of the Kenai Mountains.

3.

Stuart Bartholomew waits until two p.m. before he unwraps the sandwich the cafe in Seward made last night. He has already emptied one thermos of coffee, nearly emptied a second, but still has one he hasn't opened. And the Subaru has nearly idled away half a tank of fuel.

The bread is stale, the edges of the cheese dry, the meat warm. How much food poisoning has he eaten in the past twenty years? certainly enough to kill a human being. But his stomach seems tolerant of the extra bacteria. They might actually be what sustains him.

How many hours has he spent waiting for something to happen? Someone to arrive. Or depart. He'd hesitate even to guess. Counterespionage is much waiting mixed with lots of watching, stirred with the staff of paranoia, baked with the heat of an idling engine.

This Subaru is fairly comfortable although his back still hurts. And in all of his years, he has yet to have a seductive siren ask for a piece of that counterespionage cake. No, what he does is a lonely form of spook-against-spook chess. It is perhaps the most mentally demanding field of intelligence, and usually without rewards. Oh, there are jock strap medals. He even has one. But the capture of Alden, that will be quite a feather. Might even produce a little interagency notoriety.

Still eating when a light plane circles above the field, he stuffs the remains of the sandwich in his mouth, hurriedly focuses binoculars, and from the fuselage, jots down its FAA and ADF&G numbers.

4.

As they circle the end of the East Road, Jay notices the idling car, its exhaust spewing downhill and dissipating in the below freezing air. "Billy, make another pass over the lane, the one leading towards Kachamak from the turnaround."

Billy also sees the exhaust, and at not much above stall speed, again circles the field.

The sun, already low on the southern horizon, tinges everything yellow. But there is enough light to see the vehicle parked in a stand of hybrid spruce on the knoll overlooking the draw supposedly holding Jerry's cabin. Jay rests his hand on the little Smith. John had been visited before he got there, and someone is here, waiting. Have they got Sarah? No way to know without landing. Tapping Billy on the shoulder, he points to the field and asks, "Enough snow to set down on?"

Billy tips the Tern, and surveys the uneven ground and snow just deep enough to cover most of the grass seedheads. The field looks like a rumpled white comforter with brown quilting. "Might be bouncy getting down, but it will be, rest assured, bumpier than hell getting up."

"Want to try?" Normally, he knows from flying with Billy on earlier occasions, the kid would set down on the road, but with the idling stationwagon there, the risk of capture is too great.

"Why not."

Pointing to the stationwagon, Jay says: "That may be a cop so when you set this bird down, watch the timber. If anybody comes out, get Catherine outta here. Don't wait for me. I'll take care of myself."

"I hear you, loud and clear."

"Do we have to land?" Catherine asks, tugging on Jay's shoulder.

He doesn't want to answer her; yet he says, "Don't worry. Everything'll be all right."

"Why NOW?"

"Because we're here, and I wanta be done with Sarah."

Grabbing Billy's arm and causing the plane to wobble as they circle low, she asks, "You won't really leave him?"

Jay doesn't allow Billy to answer: "Just hang on. And whatever happens, stay in the plane."

Billy levels the Tern off a few feet above the tussocks, pulls up its nose, drops flaps, cuts power. And like a mallard landing on a pond, the plane, at stall speed, slips in the air and settles onto the snow.

Tussocks grab at the skis, threatening to groundloop the Tern as they jerk it to a halt.

A foot and a half of dry, crusted snow is suspended above the two and three foot high mat of grass. So when Jay bails out, the snow comes to his waist. He steps away from the skis, and wallows

in the tangled grass and snow. Sometimes beating the snow down, sometimes just bulling his way through, he labors towards a packed snowmachine trail, leading from the turnout to the draw. And despite the temperature, sweat runs along his brow and slides down his cheeks.

Snow has drifted over all but the sagging top strand of a barbwire fence at the edge of the timbered draw. From where the trail crosses the fence, he hears the muffled throbings of a diesel generator coming from the two lighted cabins he sees. She had better be here. For her sake. If she isn't, he isn't coming back. They'll be on our way to Williams Lake before morning.

He listens to the cold. Neither the generator nor the Tern's idling engine seem as loud as the squeak of the snow underfoot.

It is dark under the trees.

Concerned about walking into an ambush, he feels vulnerable hurrying across the opening on the packed trail. Stepping across the barbwire—

Barking, growling, a huge black and white husky charges from the shadowy timber, hurling itself up the trail, barring Jay's path. Its one blue eye wild-looking. Its brown eye friendly.

Although certain the husky, too big to ignore, is bluffing, Jay isn't certain the dog knows that it is bluffing as he talks to it, telling it that it's a "good boy," but drawing the Smith from his pocket just in case.

Its muzzle held high, the husky, bouncing on heavy feet, prances in front of Jay as it barks and barks and barks.

Jay edges forward as he continues to talk to the husky.

The dog stops barking long enough to sniff his hand, the hand tightly wrapped around the cocked Smith, the revolver's muzzle also held high.

One more sniff seems to satisfy the husky. The dog backs away and resumes barking as it wags its tail. He crowds the husky into the soft snow, and they exchange positions on the trail. And with the husky barking behind him, he hurries towards the cabins, no longer worrying about an ambush. No one planning to waylay him would let that dog run loose.

The first cabin is unoccupied or at least no one answers his knock, but his knock on the door of the second cabin produces an instant response. With a roll of toilet paper in his hand and his mouth open, the young fellow neither speaks nor moves, but stands transfixed in the doorway. Of course, the cocked Smith pointed at his head probably has a little to do with how the fellow stands.

Jay breaks the silence: "Jerry Reibeck?"

The motionless figure finally moves—he turns his head, and softly calls, "Jerr, you're wanted."

As if expecting to be summoned, a pimply-faced fellow of about twenty or so steps into the kitchen area of the two-room cabin. Seeing the gun, his eyes grow large as he asks, "What do you want?"

The two fellows look like brothers. With his left hand, Jay pushes the transfixed sibling out of the way, steps into the cabin, and nonchalantly palms the cocked revolver. He doesn't want to unduly frighten these two.

"You know why I'm here."

"Fuck no. Don't even know who you are."

The half loft is the only possible hiding spot in the cabin. He points to its blanketed doorway and asks, "Is she up there?"

"Who?"

Sarah jerks the blanket aside. "Hi. Didn't take you long to find me. Fly up?"

"No." He exhales a long breath, and feels his hand shake. Her jerking the blanket aside took him by surprise. He has become too slow. Way too slow. Was caught flat-footed. He couldn't have protected himself if she had been hostile. "No. I ran the *Coyote* up."

"This time of year?" Her amusement becomes something more closely resembling fear. "Where is it?"

"Came especially to see you, to make sure you're all right."

"Jay, where's your boat? I need to know." She masks her expression of fear as her face recovers its nondescriptive pall.

"The *Coyote's* fine, but you may not be for long."

"Jerr can take care of me."

She is, he's certain, a fool: "You didn't level with me."

"If I had, would you have helped?"

"Probably not—"

"There you go." Her eyes can't hold their blankness. Again, her fear shows as she asks, "Is your boat where cops will find it?"

Again ignoring her question, Jay says, "I saw your bunker. Came by to tell you to split. Both the Law and your ah, former associates were in Kodiak looking for you Saturday. Need I say more?"

"I'm hip." Again, her fear shows. It can also be heard in her voice: "You didn't come here to tell me that?"

"No, suppose I didn't. Someone's across the field right now."

"Fuzz?"

"I didn't ask for ID. I've problems of my own...I took care of the two that roughed you up. Permanently took care of them."

"I see. Thanks. They deserved whatever they got...they drowned Hank. Held his head in the toilet after they worked me over. Didn't think I..." she doesn't finish her thought. "I didn't have a choice about calling you. It was either that or..." Again her voice fades.

"I know about the ivory." He sees the fear in her eyes harden till it is as rigid as a tusk. "You better get outta here and forget about it."

"It's mine—"

"They'll kill you for it."

Both Jerry and his brother have been staring at her. Now, mumbling, Jerry asks, "There're people really trying to kill her?"

"If you want to get her outta this alive, and I'm not exaggerating, Jerry, you'd better convince her to fly straight for a while."

"I don't see where sellin' grass is all that bad...but what's this about ivory?"

"You never heard nothing about my ivory. Got it?" Sarah snaps at Jerry.

"That's it, Sarah. Level with him just like you did with me. Let your friends kill him, too. Let them hold his head under in a toilet—I was told your associates were always successful."

"Most of the time."

"I was told always."

"You seem to know a lot."

"I've had quite an education since you left Dutch."

"You dunno squat—"

"Careful there. I've been sleeping with Catherine Alden."

If there had been any color in her face, it's gone. After a moment, she says, "Not the Catherine Alden?"

"Is there another?" Jay doesn't like the taste of the brag that worms its way onto his tongue; he chokes it back down. "Red hair. Mid to late thirties. Bright. A looker."

"Oh shit."

"She's running for her life, too...they knew Saturday that you were on your way to Seward." He sees the fight leave her. "I can't help you. Just here to warn you."

"Hell, man, yuh gotta do somethin'," pleads Jerry.

"It's up to you, Sarah. What do you want to do?"

She asks meekly, "Where should I go?"

"I'm sure the Feds would like to bust your associates."

Still meekly, she asks, "Do you think I know enough to get immunity, no charges, protection?"

"I think that's your only chance."

Silence fills the cabin as if it were a noxious gas. He knows the same thing could be said of Catherine. He would hate to lose her, but he sure doesn't want her killed. And if the Feds are as efficient as everyone thinks, they could better protect her than he can.

Again in her meek voice, she says, "I'll trust your judgement."

"I'm not God. Do what you think is right. You're the one who'll live or die from your decision." Then to Jerry, he adds: "Get me something to write on. I want her to give me a call. But if anything happens to her, I don't want this number found with her. Memorize it. Then get rid of the paper."

Visibly frightened, Jerry asks, "Nothin'll happen, will it?" as he fetches a notepad.

Jay tears a sheet from the pad, saying as he does: "I'd like to know that she's safe. Especially after all the trouble I've gone through because of her." He scribbles Edna's phone number on the sheet, careful to rest the sheet on the cover of a paperback novel so no imprint will remain on the pad. He can't afford another mistake. "Call this number whenever arrangements are made."

As he watches Jerry poke the sheet into his shirt pocket, he realizes he is not ending his involvement with her, but continuing it. What kind of a fool is he? This is exactly what he has been telling myself he's not going to do.

"Will you be at this number?" Jerry asks.

This he needs to answer carefully: "No, I'm never at that number. That's a message phone I occasionally call...the Feds might try to con that number out of you. Don't give it to them. They don't know at that number where I am or where I'll be, so giving it to the Feds will only make needless trouble." Seemingly in mid-thought, he changes the subject. "I suggest you guys split before you receive company. I've got to be going."

Jerry's brother still holds the roll of toilet paper. Sarah still clutches the blanket. Jerry has his hand in his shirt pocket. All appear frozen in time. And looking to each, Jay nods, then backs out of the cabin, closing the door behind him. He hasn't heard the Tern take off so he assumes that whoever waits in the idling car is still waiting. So eager to be away from here, he forgets caution as he hurries through the darkened timber with the husky barking and wagging his tail and following to the edge of the field.

5.

In the failing twilight and through his 500mm lens, Stuart Bartholomew watches the returning figure emerge from the timber. He snaps one exposure after another of whom he believes is Shoulders. But there isn't sufficient light to guarantee an image at 1/60 second. He is already pushing the Tri-X two stops; he's hesitant to go a third.

If he is indeed photographing Shoulders, these will be the first pictures anywhere of that mysterious fisherman for whom there is more proof he doesn't exist than does. He has already photographed the plane and pilot, and the person in back. Despite the mannish attire of that third person, he thinks she's Alden, but won't know for sure till he develops film.

It wasn't his intention to intercept a plane when he originated this stakeout; so there isn't much he can do but photograph and evaluate. He had been three days behind Alden and without firm knowledge that she had escaped from Unalaska. But, he has caught up, *huh, pretty lady*. He is pleased, though, to see that she wasn't far off his estimation of when she would arrive. But with her now having a plane, he will have to move quickly.

As Stuart Bartholomew pulls the Subaru's transmission into gear, he sees two snowmachines blast out of the draw and race across the far field. The lead machine pulls a sled. Two riders on the second machine. The two Reibeck brothers and sweet Sarah. He smiles. If there is still any competition out there, they won't find anyone home. Evidently Shoulders accomplished what he came to do, but then, so has he.

He has time now to notice the Russian names on mailboxes, the cultural bones of the Amur treaty and the Tsar's fear of British encirclement. Russian-America, Bolshaya Zemlya, might today be a Soviet state, the Democratic Socialist Republic of America. That has an unpleasant ring about it, and he almost hits a Ford sedan in the middle of a blind corner. Both cars dive for their own side. The other car slides.

6.

The takeoff is rough, but one exceptionally large tussock bounces them into the air. Once airborne, Billy throws power to the prop. The Tern sails upwards, over the descending slopes, and climbs to a thousand feet. Billy banks left. And they again circle the snow-covered field. Jay checks for exhaust, sees it. A white cloud of condensate slowly drifting up and away from the stationwagon. Pointing to it, he says, "They're gonna have your numbers, Billy."

To his surprise, Billy dives towards the idling car, and tips his wings as he passes over the spruce at twice treetop height, then laughs and laughs. "You think there's a Greenie in that car, Jay. Huh?"

"I think you're gonna have some explaining to do." He can't help, though, smiling. The kid's a hardhead. Would've made a good logger, maybe even a Rogue.

Still laughing, Billy asks, "What do you suppose? Suppose they got our numbers?"

"They'd have to be blind not to."

Between laughs hard enough to rock the Tern, Billy manages: "Just before I pulled the floats off, we went goat hunting in that area the Greenies locked up east of Nuke Island. You know, where you and me hunted before. Where it's always been open. Well, didn't want a hassle so our numbers belong to a Super Cub that crashed in the Brooks Range two years ago. You're aboard the Phantom."

"The Phantom, huh?" Jay smiles as does Catherine.

"Yup," says Billy as he heads for Soldotna. He takes the Tern to three thousand feet, and they cruise in silence punctuated by occasional bursts of laughter from Billy.

*

Edna frets while she waits for Billy to return. Begins one project, then another, quickly loses interest in each, and completes none. More nervous than Jill...

She brought Jill, with her bag packed, over to her house. Since Billy will be gone until sometime tomorrow, she thought it best if they both spend the night by her telephone.

Ever since Jay's call, an idea has been forming, an idea that hasn't matured sufficiently for her to express. It has to do with a new identity. She knows how to get him one, but isn't quite sure how to proceed. It's not enough to possess only the birth certificate of someone who died as an infant. Been done too many times. Even the authorities eventually wise up. For the FBI or CIA, items such as credit ratings, school records, past driving records and matured insurance policies are easily fabricated, but such items are nearly impossible to produce overnight for the general public. What she needs is a real identity, one he can assume. Even then, there will be the problem of past acquaintances. A new name doesn't produce a new person. Or does it? She thinks not.

Other than Billy, only one person knows anything about Jay. Pierre established Jay's unusual accounts with the Williams Lake branch of the Bank of Trois-Rivieres.

Involving Pierre won't be easy.

Edna and Pierre spent many hours together, hours during which they grew close, close enough they were to have been married. But that was more than six months ago; that was before Pierre learned of his prostate cancer. He said he wouldn't be either an emotional or a financial burden to her. Broke off their engagement. She couldn't change his mind, then. Calling him now, she doesn't know. What does she tell him?

She has to call him, has to.

What will he say? Will he agree to help Jay? agree to having his name live on? Physically, he's a little smaller than Jay, a little darker complexion. But he has an aura about him that makes him seem larger than he is. And they both look like Indians even though Pierre was born near Lyons, the fruit of rape, his father a Nazi officer, the reason his family sent him to live with relatives in Quebec after the war.

In one way, calling Pierre is inevitable. She will need his help to get Jay set up in Canada. If his health were better, Pierre would shuttle back and forth until any tracks leading to Jay were so confused the trail could never be deciphered. Plus, she will ask Pierre to be Jay if the occasion should ever become necessary.

Summoning all of the courage she can muster, she places the inevitable call.

One of the secretaries from his law firm's office pool answers Pierre's phone, tells her that Pierre isn't at work today, and asks if she can take a message.

"I think not," Edna says, before hanging up. And before her courage fails, she dials his home.

After a dozen rings, she returns the receiver to its hook, and tries to make herself believe that Pierre is with a client. She knows he's not, but she doesn't want to think of him hospitalized, or worse, home but unable to answer his phone.

In a living room recliner, Jill dozes as comfortably as a woman can be when due. Edna busies herself with a joke book titled BLM Mining Regulations, but can't concentrate. There has to be more she can do...there is. She dials the area code for Williams Lake, and as her mind wanders, her call crosses the international border without even a bleep.

Andrew Mackean excuses himself from the conference he chairs to personally answer the ringing telly in his office. Only the banking commissioner and a few privileged customers have his private number.

His surprise is genuine when he learns that the bank's largest private depositor will, at last, pay them a visit. He inquires as to Mr. Shoulders' itinerary: "Perhaps we could assist with travel and Customs? We're here to serve."

When told that Mr. Shoulders will be flying by private aircraft, he asks, "A Lear? or Gulfstream?"

"No. Our plane. My son's flying him. At least to Ketchikan."

"I believe we can be of assistance, Mrs. Lundstrom. The bank would be honored to meet Mr. Shoulders in Ketchikan."

"Time would be a problem."

"I don't believe so. He is currently enroute?"

"They have several stops—"

"He should arrive in Ketchikan during the night?"

"I expect so. He's supposed to call—"

"Very fine, Mrs. Lundstrom. A charter from Caribou Lake Air will await Mr. Shoulders' arrival. The plane will be there by eight o'clock tomorrow morning, should be easily recognized, and will be at his disposal for however long he needs it."

"That settles that, then."

"I'm delighted. Now, can we assist in any other way?"

"Jay has been in the Aleutians for the past six years and will need to add to his wardrobe. I believe British Columbia's better merchants are in Vancouver?"

"By no means. We have many fine retailers here in Williams Lake. I'm certain Mr. Shoulders will find our selection meets his requirements." The bank has no Vancouver accounts. "I will personally acquaint Mr. Shoulders with local retailers."

"Jay will need a vehicle."

"We have some exceptional Leylands available in addition to what he would expect to find."

Edna thanks the branch manager. The charter will avoid problems with Canadian Customs. That was the big thing.

Billy has been gone an hour. Jill is asleep. And she stands beside her kitchen phone, looking out the window above the dinette set, receiver in hand. It seems so peaceful. Shadows lengthening. Snow piled high on white spruce boughs, golden in the setting sun. A magpie on the fence around the compost pile. She watches it fly to the spruce. Spreading shadows. Fading colors. She needs to try Pierre again. Still with the receiver in hand, she feels fear...the sky is now gun blue. Black. What does she say to someone who has been told the date of his death?

She still stands there, receiver in hand, when Billy throws open the backdoor. "That little guy still in the hangar?"

"Ssh, you'll wake her."

"I'm awake. Everything all right?"

"Sure is," says Billy as he brushes past his mom on his way to see Jill.

First impressions are important: her gaze lingers on the red-haired woman with Jay. Edna feels herself blushing, ashamed of her plain appearance. Even Jay's clothes fail to hide the red-head's striking natural beauty. So with pluck, she extends her hand. "Hi. I'm Billy's mother."

"Your son is a wonderful pilot, and Jay has told me how much you mean to him. I'm very pleased to meet you."

Edna fears her smile looks as forced as it feels. "Jay was there for our family when there wasn't anyone else. He means a lot to all of us."

Right now, Catherine wants to believe her words: "I'll take very good care of him." She knows the desire is naive. She has been a big girl far too long, but something happened on the boat, something besides seeing herself ugly and seasick, something besides his Indian-magic pronouncement about them having a child together. She doesn't want to force what happened into a thought, not yet, but she wants to believe in something if not in her words. She wants to believe in magic even if it isn't real.

Edna turns to Jay, and says, "Mackean's sending a plane to meet you in Ketchikan. A Caribou Air charter. So you have to hurry." Then hollering into the living room, she says, "Say goodbye, Billy."

"Goodbye Billy," says Billy. "Head out to the car. I'll be there in a second." He squeezes Jill's hand as softly he adds, "I really gotta go."

Jill whispers, "I know...I'll be all right."

"Now, Billy," hollers Edna. "I'll make sure she gets to the hospital."

"That pisspot got enough range to fly to Ketchikan?" asks Jay as he checks Edna's kitchen clock. 4:57. "Or are we gonna have to stop along the way for fuel?"

Coming into the kitchen, Billy says, "Yeah, once. Sitka maybe."

7.

Stuart Bartholomew holds the contact prints overhead, as if doing so would somehow make everything clear. What plane is that? Profile's familiar. Certainly from an American manufacturer, but not common. Not a Piper although the numbers belong to one reported missing a couple of years ago.

He doesn't like games. Hates games where the rules are fuzzy. It's not too bad to play with the Uncles or Mossad, or when the occasion warrants, his Cousins. Even dealing with the Special Branch has humorous moments, but amateurs are unpredictable. They are, in his experience, dangerous to themselves and everyone involved. Shoulders use of that particular plane marks the fisherman as an amateur, perhaps even one of those Alaskan patriots who would like to see independence and national sovereignty for the state.

Of course, he has suspected from the beginning that the fisherman was an amateur, but he hates amateurs who think themselves clever. Most of all, he hates amateurs who elude him. And at the moment, he has no idea where Alden and the fisherman are bound. He would have expected the fisherman to return to his boat, had expected Alden and the fisherman to arrive at the little druggy's hideaway by automobile, but with the introduction of the mismarked airplane, one equipped with wheelskis, geographic limitations have dissolved. He should have set up to snatch Alden at the druggy's. He made a mistake. The fisherman had a connection he hadn't anticipated—and the connection had to be the fisherman's. Alden hasn't previously been to Alaska. The mismarked plane is a local production. It wouldn't be found in, how do they say it up here, the Lower Forty-Eight. So Shoulders has local connections and support.

Shoulders displays some intelligence potential. If he were a few years younger, he might make a good recruit. Not now. Shoulders is much too willing to shoot first, almost as if he—

A revelation interrupted his thought: he will have to do that, will have to check Berets who spent time in-country. A check might just give him Shoulders' birth name. As it is, Shoulders' is a candidate for the sandman.

He examines the contact prints with a loupe. For the next few hours, he hasn't anything else to do. He has alerted military radar. An RC-7 has been scrambled. Not even a seagull will be airborne that he won't know about by morning; so it'll merely be a matter of crossing off flights until he has the right one...isn't it written somewhere that all things are known. Well, he has confidence in that text.

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