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“Kid you got a golden thumb,” declared Cortis Haire. He had picked up the bright-eyed hippie outside of Los Angeles heading north on his pedal to the metal push towards Seattle. Cortis was an independent big rig driver, bringing up a fifty-pallet load of brake shoes to the Pacific Northwest. He was clean and sober twenty-eight years and an ordained minister of some church his passenger never heard of.

Ian Greengrass, riding shotgun, told tales Bronx-style but also knew when to listen. He was a college kid from New York, heading to Alaska to join his pal Noel to work in the woods and earn a year’s tuition in one summer. He regaled Cortis with stories of his monster hitches. The Bronx to Albuquerque, Albuquerque to L.A., and finally L.A. to Seattle. Cortis admired the boy’s courage and envied his freedom.

Their second day of hauling was coming to a close as they passed the exit to Seattle. The Reverend Haire dropped him off in an industrial yard, shocking Ian when he hugged him goodbye. The young hitchhiker threw his backpack on over both shoulders, looped his arms in the straps and headed for the dock that housed the Alaska Marine Highway System.

The Northern Star was boarding and fortunately they accepted traveler’s checks. Ian took a spot on the top deck, threw down his sleeping bag on his rubber camping mat and closed his eyes for a second.

Three hours later he awoke in the middle of a crowd of longhaired future loggers and fishermen headed for Ketchikan.

“Only forty-one hours to go,” a raspy voice boomed and a blond-haired, blue-eyed Goliath of a hippie handed Ian a pipe with a stream of gray smoke billowing out of it.

“Right on,” Ian mumbled and took a long hit. The summer of ’73 looked promising.

“Dan Carter,” roared the giant and gave Ian’s hand a bone-bruising shake.

As the day and night wore on, Ian listened to the story of Dan Carter from his childhood in Saint Cloud, Minnesota, where he was the son of a cop and a school teacher, to his glory days as a football all-star defensive lineman, to a tour in Vietnam as a grunt humping the Delta, to his return to the Minneapolis area where he was a roadie for Leo Kotke, and on and on until

Ian's eyes fluttered from the combination of verbal assault and righteous Moroccan hashish.

When Ian went into a nod, Dan shook him awake to make another point. The Nordic looking Neanderthal was a mountain man with a motor mouth. But his big baby blue eyes showed his real character: a giant sweetheart.

Like it or not, Ian had a new friend. Given Dan's linebacker size, Ian felt lucky to have a possible guardian, if Alaska proved to be hostile or as his parents feared, virulently anti-Semitic.

Dan was thrilled to find out Ian was Jewish, as was the love of Dan's life, Tandalao Taubenblatt. She was volunteering with Cesar Chavez in Delano, California, and would join Dan in Ketchikan after he got settled.

Dan listed every Jewish deli he and the lovely Miss Taubenblatt had visited across the Midwest.

"Bro, you'd love her," Dan said with a mighty whack on Ian's back. "She eats like a Marine and throws a football like Broadway Joe."

The Northern Star's horn blew two ear-shattering blasts as it maneuvered into the port of Ketchikan.

Ian checked his Bulova, a high school graduation present from his parents, and was shocked that it was 10:30 p.m. and the sun was still shining brightly. He had missed some scenery watching on the trip but his heart beat fast as he looked up at the mountain jutting its majesty over the horizon of the village.

As the passengers of The Northern Star disembarked, Ian noticed a discomfort in Dan's eyes. Big and confident as Dan was, Ian felt the urge to rescue. Descending the gangplank, Ian inquired, "Bro, you need a place to crash?"

"That would be righteous, little brother," said Dan, smiling.

Ian's eyes did their usual crinkle and he instructed the blonde Yeti, "Follow me."

Searching the crowd, Ian heard a loud Bronx "Yo." Noel and a ringlet-haired hippie maiden appeared out of the crowd.

Hugs went down like an Italian wedding as Ian introduced Dan to Noel. Naima introduced herself to Ian with an arm around his neck and a kiss on both furry cheeks. She smelled of patchouli and peppermint. Then she reached up and hugged Dan too.

"I invited Dan to crash, is that cool?" Ian whispered to Noel on the sly.

"No problemski," Noel answered with a crinkle that made him look like Ian's brother.

"More the merrier," Naima chimed in.

"Let's go catch a buzz," said Noel and led the newcomers to the Foc'sle Bar, one of the many local watering holes and renowned dens of depravity.

Noel burst through the doors of the bar like a cowpoke in a John Wayne movie and hooted, "Go ahead on her." Ian was later informed that this was the all-clear signal yelled by the choke setters on the ridge for the crane operator to yank the log up or down hill, as the case may be;

the bell and loop of the cable hopefully tight and secure. There was evidence of errors in the Foc'sle as many young men were missing arms and legs.

The crowd rebel yelled back to Noel, and the bartender, a six-foot-seven Haida Indian named Roy or Running Bear, depending on his mood, poured four shots of Everclear for Noel, his lovely maiden and the two newbies from the lowlands.

As they knocked back the high-octane shots, Noel explained to the new arrivals that no matter how shit faced they got, to never, ever ring the bell behind the bar at the Foc'sle. Then they'd have to buy everyone in the bar a drink and if they were short the dough-ray-me, they'd get tossed in the bay. Twenty minutes in that water, even in summer, could cause a heart to cease pumping.

Naima, who was really Naomi Siegel from Ocean Parkway, was a hot little number and a world-class flirt. Dan and Ian were thrilled to be around her, as was every other male in Ketchikan. Noel seemed to have no jealousy, making Ian suspect that this hippie angel was just a chick he had fun with, not the love of his life.

Her braless breasts bounced around in her peasant blouse, nipples prominent and visible, bringing happiness to the Pacific Northwest. Summer in The Shadows, the hidden rock beaches bordering the island under steep pine covered inclines, seemed to be lit up by her glowing presence.

Naima took her name from the wife of John Coltrane and gave it new definition. Both men and women in the bar leered at the ringlet-haired curvy imp, and she had yet to pay for a drink since she hit town six months earlier.

The party was loud and rancorous at the Foc'sle. Some shoving matches and fistfights exploded. Running Bear's towering six-foot-seven frame moved rapidly around the bar as he grabbed the brawlers by the scruff of their necks and tossed them like lawn darts out onto Front Street.

"Let's chow down," Noel announced and Dan picked up the tab with a healthy tip. Running Bear nodded his appreciation and the hippie quartet headed out into the night.

It was 11:30 p.m. and still not totally dark, but a light rain misted upon the island. Naima linked arms with Noel and Ian. Dan planted a massive paw on Ian's shoulder and together they resembled a trippy crew heading to Oz.

They ascended a hill, which ran out of pavement and became a steep wooden staircase. Bawden Street was a wooden structure that wrapped up a steep incline thick with foliage and pine-covered chasms. A ray of moonlight peeked through the newly formed clouds and illuminated home – a rented cabin in the sky officially recorded by the postal service as 619 Bawden Street.

Huffing and puffing with Everclear heads spinning, they made it to the front door of the cabin. Noel lifted a board on the porch where the key was stashed and they fell through the door laughing.

Ian and Dan removed their backpacks as Naima started a fire in the potbelly cast-iron stove. Noel lit a joint and put on an album. The E Street Band and their Boss filled the cabin with a distinctive east coast sound.

The cabin was a one bedroom with a small bathroom, kitchen and living room with shag carpeting. There were feminine touches everywhere from sketches to extra floor pillows to macramé wall hangings. The large outside deck off the kitchen revealed a panoramic view of

Deer Mountain.

Dan and Noel went out on the deck to star gaze. Naima went into the kitchen to start chopping vegetables for the wok. Ian offered to help in the kitchen and Naima handed him a knife and he took over the veggie dissection duty.

Ian prided himself on his dexterous mushroom slicing and in about thirty minutes the new family sat down to a dinner of stir fried vegetables, brown rice, some reheated Red Dog Salmon and Olympia beers.

The fire in the potbelly heated the cabin, and after many conversations, stories and gut wrenching laughter, everybody cleaned up and got ready for sleep. Ian and Dan put their sleeping bags on the carpet near the stove and Naima and Noel headed off to their bedroom.

Naima left the door open a crack. Ian and Dan's eyes were drawn to the opening as Naima lifted her blouse, removed her peasant skirt and panties, and then shut off the light. They barely breathed.

Moments later Dan was snoring like a Kodiak bear in hibernation. Ian tried to sleep but sex sounds drifted in from the bedroom. Ian put on his hooded sweatshirt and tied the drawstring of the hood tight to block out the competing sounds. Soon he drifted off.

Running Bear closed the Foc'sle at 4 a.m., pushing the drunk laggards out the door. He was coming off working a double and after putting the cash receipts in the safety deposit shoot at the bank, he headed to a party on the dock with some crew from the Haida Girl. The fisherman told fishing stories, hunting stories, and ancestor stories which Running Bear had heard a million times, so he drifted from the party to his hotel room to get some shut eye.

There was an envelope taped to the door. He recognized the perfect handwriting and felt a panic building in his chest. He opened the envelope.

Dear Roy:

We have had enough. I am taking Quahu and leaving. When we get settled, I'll contact you.

I hope you stop drinking and find the Lord.

Christine

Running Bear winced and almost laughed at his wife's new American name. Kind-A-Wuss was her Haida name and she caught a longboat full of shit over it growing up, so he was not surprised at that development.

His rage began to rise like clouds across the moon and he raised his left fist and slammed it clear through the door.

Terrified neighbors cracked their doors and peered out, but nobody said a thing. They feared Running Bear for good cause. His temper had put fellow tribes people and whites alike in the Ketchikan Emergency Ward. Even the local police were scared of him and never answered domestic calls if he was involved.

His woman's recent conversion as an evangelical really lit his fuse, and rereading the simple

note, he trembled.

He strode out of the hotel with a glazed look in his eyes, and a bloody left hand full of splinters. With a totem pole grimace as a facial expression, he headed out of town up the hill towards Deer Mountain.

Noel's alarm went off at 5:30 a.m. and he was up and making coffee, showering and smoking a Camel, not in any particular order. He had a job at the spruce mill since leaving the logging camp at Thorne Bay and he liked the five-minute downhill commute.

Naima had a morning counter shift at the Short Stop Diner and she was looking particularly fetching in a too tight tank top, jeans and clogs. Her ringlets were tied up on her head and ethnic earrings dangled alongside her slim neck.

Noel kissed Naima and bid the boys "Later," then he bounded down the mossy staircase known as Bawden Street.

Dan checked the phone book for the local VA to seek employment help and Ian hustled through a shower and put on work clothes.

Naima invited the boys to a discount breakfast at the diner, so they hid the key under the board and made their descent to civilization.

The town was experiencing its morning rush. Hippies and rednecks rushed to one job or another. Drunks woke up in doorways and headed back to the bar. A tourist boat navigated towards the docks. The seiners, trawlers and gill netters headed out to sea to fish the many species of salmon and halibut to put food on tables and green paper with dead presidents in wallets.

The sky was gray and a mist hung low. It was breezy out and the air was sweet with pine. They hit Front Street, hung a right, and in a few short blocks Dan and Ian were at the counter gulping hot cups of joe and scarfing eggs, bacon and toast.

Lena and Katie were two other waitresses at the Short Stop; Katie's mom owned the joint. They cheerfully handled the boisterous crowd of dockworkers, fishermen, cold storage guys and anything and everything in a hard hat. The girls were pretty and got a lot of attention. Men outnumbered women about seven to one on the island so they got hit on day and night. All three were expert at soft rejection with a response of "Thanks bud, but I got a honey."

Breakfast in their bellies, Dan headed to the VA and Ian lingered a moment to talk to Lena. She gave him the name of the foreman at Phillip's Cold Storage as a job possibility, and when Ian paid his reduced bill, he left her a large tip.

As he headed out the door, Lena called him back, palmed his tip into his hand and in a low Lauren Bacall voice uttered, "Save your money, sugar, buy me an Oly Beer sometime instead." She gave his cherubic face a little pat. Ian watched her ample hips sway as she sashayed back into the Short Stop. He knew that her departure was for his benefit and he was excited about the prospect of getting to know Lena.

Ian hotfooted down Front Street determined to gain employment.

Phillip's Cold Storage was a fish cleaning and freezing establishment with an ex-Army Colonel foreman name Phil, no relation to the owner. Phil prided himself on recognizing talent and graduated Ian from cleaning guts to shovel detail in the ice room. A promotion day one.

A gill-netter had docked and needed ice. Ian shoveled like a madman onto a rotary belt that

pulled the ice into the hull of the boat.

“Let gravity do it,” Phil barked over the din of the whirring machine turning the ice transportation belt. Phil had already instructed Ian to line his boots with newspaper because that’s how he had survived frostbite on Arctic duty.

The red-faced Colonel charged up the mountain of ice like Teddy Roosevelt mounting San Juan Hill. Phil grabbed the shovel from Ian and demonstrated how to create an indoor ice avalanche. Physics and old-fashioned common sense were the lessons of the day. Ian caught on fast and Phil rebel yelled like a Friday night at the Foc’sle at the young man’s success. Ian joined in; two happy lunatics howling like timber wolves in a giant freezer.

Phil spent three wars turning boys into men. Phil had heart. His men followed him and trusted him, and today he taught a boy and gave him a tool.

Phil’s eyes twinkled watching this east coast Jewish kid turn an ice mountain into a cold puddle.

At the end of his shift Phil gave Ian an “Attaboy” with a slap on the back and a sock-eye salmon to take home.

Ian walked Front Street with a workingman’s pride in his stride.

The Ketchikan VA consisted of a Tlingit veteran from Korea who had survived Pork Chop Hill. He gave Dan the blow by blow of the battle till Dan was cross-eyed. Dan knew he was getting some of his own medicine in a long-winded soliloquy from Sergeant Joe Little Wolf and made a mental note to shorten his own storytelling.

After going through the multitude of jobs around town, Joe suggested Dan take the post office exam. Dan loved to walk and talk and be outside, so he thanked the sarge and headed to the postal hut to pick up the necessary forms.

As he headed down the street, an immense figure bumped his shoulder. Dan turned to take up the challenge but then recognized the bartender from last night.

“Hey Roy,” Dan called. “The street ain’t wide enough?”

Roy continued to head uphill and never turned around. Dan figured the big man had been nipping at his own watering hole and being new in town he decided to let it go. He was not in the mood to brawl.

Lena, Naima and Katie were marrying the ketchups before locking up the Short Stop. As they consolidated the viscous red liquid, the radio was playing the OJ’s new hit, “Money, Money, Money,” and Naima shook her curves as her two sisters in food service hooted and egged on her impromptu go-go routine.

Ian passed by and peered through the mist-fogged window. He blushed, then broke into a wide grin as Naima strutted around with a ketchup bottle.

Catching him gawking, Lena went through the kitchen, out the back, snuck around the front and grabbed his ear like a schoolboy.

“Gottcha!” Lena brayed. She pulled Ian into the diner announcing, “This boy is a peeping Tom!!!” The girls laughed loudly.

Naima pulled him into the middle of the diner and started dancing with him. Ian blushed through his peach fuzz beard, but started some of his better Motown dance steps from high school. The girls urged him on.

He still had his bag with the fish and pulled the sock-eye out and danced with it. The girls doubled over laughing hysterically. He did Tango and dips with the fish and when the song ended, he bowed to wild applause from the ladies.

Ian presented the sock-eye to Naima like a bouquet and Katie cracked, "She was hoping for a trouser trout." Lena and Katie slapped five.

"Noel's department," Ian quipped.

Lena sang out the soul song "Too Many Fish in the Sea," and her girlfriends laughed again.

"There's enough salmon to feed us all," Ian said.

"You got guests for dinner," Lena shouted.

Ian helped them put the chairs on the tables and lock up.

As Ian escorted the three ladies outside and uphill, he sensed that he might get lucky soon.

Noel punched the clock at five on the dot and was the first out the door of the spruce mill. Earlier his foreman had caught him napping behind a machine and called him "Sleeping Jesus." His coworkers got a laugh and he got a new nickname.

Passing the dock on the way to get a quick cocktail at the Rainbird, Noel saw Dan sitting near a pylon. He placed two fingers in his mouth for a Bronx schoolyard whistle.

Dan looked up and Noel mimed drinking. Dan folded up his paperwork and his postcard to Tandalao and jogged up a plank to meet Noel.

As Dan approached, Noel hollered, "Ready to toss back a few?"

Dan answered like a Thorne Bay choke setter "Go ahead on 'er."

They shared a soul handshake, then headed to the watering hole.

It would have been sunset down in the lowlands, but over the island of Ketchikan, a gray mist of light shimmered.

Running Bear sat by a waterfall just trying to catch his breath. He had caught many Dolly Varton in this stream and usually cleaned and cooked them on the spot. Once in a while a black bear would peek out of the shrubbery, but there were no grizzly on this island.

Alone and distraught, his heart pounded. Despite his attempt to keep calm, the anxiety and sadness gave way and tears fell from his big brown eyes.

Kind-A-Wuss and Quahu were his whole world and now they were gone. Running Bear knew they had to be in Seattle staying with his wife's sister.

Quahu had just turned two and he and his father had a deep bond. Since his birth, Kind-A-Wuss had shot down Running Bear's amorous attempts on a regular basis. He was drinking more, and more often. His lack of interest in Christianity severed the connection to his wife

completely.

Now she had abandoned The Shadows, the island's nickname from the old timers.

Running Bear picked up a small boulder and threw it like a shot put into the stream. He released it with a howl that echoed down the mountain. As the sound bellowed through the woods, animals and afternoon hikers froze in their tracks, trying to assess what they had heard.

"A man should not have his son taken from him," Running Bear uttered in his native language to his reflection in the stream.

He hated the mainland and its inhabitants, but he knew he has to get his son and bring him home. The descendant of Haida chiefs stood up tall, dried his face with his sleeve and headed down the trail to town.

There are one hundred and two steps up the slippery moss staircase known as Bawden Street. The girls were panting as they ascended. Ian stopped, took the fish out of the bag again and used it as a puppet, hiding behind the sock-eye and speaking in a Bela Lugosi Hungarian accent. "The children of the night. Vot a strange song dey sing." The girls laughed through their heaving breaths.

He continued, the sock-eye speaking in a far east accent like a Himalayan sherpa urging the girls to "Stay on dee path." They begged him to stop because it hurt to climb and laugh.

Lena pinched Ian's behind several times on the way up. It was becoming clear who his dance partner would be.

They completed their upward journey, found the hidden key and entered their mountain cabin in the mist.

Noel and Dan were shit-faced. Face down in the ant races.

Some redneck crew-members from a trawler out of Craig did not like hippies getting too happy in their favorite bar. The Rainbird was a white boy watering hole. Indians and hippies favored the Foc'sle.

One of the crew tossed a shot glass and it hit Dan in the head. Big mistake. The former linebacker from Minnesota was up like the ball had just been snapped into play. Despite his inebriation, he picked the guy up by his neck like a rag doll.

His compadres tried to pull Dan off to no avail.

Suddenly the tussle was interrupted by a shrieking "Wooo," the kind heard at rodeos and rock concerts.

Noel was up on the bar in just work boots and socks, his clothes in a pile on the barstool.

Mary Bigmouth, a Haida crossing guard from the public school, had wagered Noel a fifty to streak the bar. Streaking was a new fad in the lowlands and Noel took that action like a bookie from the Bronx.

As Noel howled, Mary punched B13 on the juke and "Satisfaction" roared in the tavern.

The crowd of men and some appreciative local women cheered Noel on. He shimmied,

bumped and grinded up and down the bar like a pro.

Dan's jaw dropped in amazement as he dropped the shot glass assailant on the floor.

The Rainbird regs has seen some shit in their joint before, but nothing like this. The place went wild with a standing ovation at the finale. Dollars were thrown and Mary Bigmouth planted a big mouth kiss on Noel's lips.

As Mary helped Noel dress, the crowd yelled shit like "Way to go, Gypsy Rose Lee" and "Thanks for sharing your shortcomings."

The crew from Craig apologized to Dan and offered him a job on their tub.

"Naw, thanks, but much appreciated," Dan said, not wanting to be outnumbered at sea. Waving and thanking everyone again, Dan dragged Noel out of the Rainbird with Mary's help.

Running Bear's rep at the Foc'sle was solid. He was trustworthy and kept the bar safe. He had never asked for an advance in seven years, so his boss didn't even ask what it was for, but Running Bear suspected word of his wife and son's departure had made it through the rumor mill.

The jetport at Ketchikan was on the water and was simply a tower and a tarmac. The big silver bird lifted off for a two-hour jump to Sea Tac Airport.

Kind-A-Wuss's sister had an apartment off Pioneer Square in Seattle. Running Bear had saved one of her postcards with a return address. His hunting instincts could work in this city as well as the mountains.

The shower at 619 Bawden Street was large enough to serve as a small steam room and the occupants of it were in varying states of ecstasy.

Lena was straddling Ian and Ian could not believe his quick luck.

"God Bless Alaska," he moaned.

The ladies responded with three different laughs.

Naima and Katie were entwined in mutual masturbation. They writhed like serpents in the mist of the makeshift sauna while Ian watched from the corner of his eye.

They worked each other like possessed demons, the energy that electrified the wet room connecting their rhythms. When their chorus of moans reached a crescendo, they hooted and chortled in a group orgasm. Had there been enough room, they would have collapsed.

Ian thought if he died right now he would die a happy man.

Then they tumbled out of the shower like the guests in a steamship stateroom in a Marx Brothers movie and all fell apart laughing. Their laughter was now tinged with a shared secret.

Towelng off, the nymphs and one young Satyr realized that they had worked up an appetite. They got dressed and headed to the kitchen to turn mister sock-eye into a hearty mountain meal.

"These are a lot of Goddamn steps," Dan complained as he and Noel made their ascent up

the slippery slopes of the staircase boulevard.

“Fuckin-A,” Noel responded, huffing.

They put their heads down and continued climbing and bitching. As they reached the summit, the aroma of a good meal reached their air grabbing snouts.

“Something smells awful good,” Dan said with a grin.

“Time to strap on a feed bag,” Noel responded.

They entered the communal chateau where candles and a table with mismatched plates and cutlery were set.

“Hi, honey, I’m home,” Noel hollered, doing his best Ward Cleaver.

Naima threw her arms around Noel’s neck and kissed him long and hard.

“That’s what I call sugar,” Dan said and Naima welcomed him with a hug.

Lena and Katie greeted the boys with a couple of cold Oly’s and Ian gave his bro a hug and soul handshake to Dan.

The new family gathered for another salmon, vegetable and brown rice dinner.

Ian got the vibe from his female playmates that the erotic games should remain their secret. He wasn’t sure if Noel knew of Naima’s taste for women, and didn’t want to be the messenger in a Greek play.

The Bawden Street mob ate, drank and talked late into the moonlit evening.

Skid Row in Seattle had junk stores with anything and everything money could buy. Running Bear wandered around them and managed to pick up a Bible and a bottle of ether. The junk shop had a Haida clerk who asked in his tribal tongue why Running Bear wanted ether. The giant from Ketchikan explained that he had to put down his aging dog. The clerk squinted an affirmation and rung up the sale.

The orange sun began its descent into the horizon on the Pacific as Running Bear passed a half dozen trailers double-parked off Pioneer Square. He saw klieg lights and camera equipment. Passing one of the trailers, a door popped open and out stepped that famous actor he remembered from his childhood trips to town.

The matinee idol didn’t look so big and bad in real life. He was pale and haggard, wearing a cheap squirrel gray toupee.

His eyes met with Running Bear’s. He looked up at the huge Indian and inquired in a friendly tone, “Who you playing, son?”

“I ain’t playing,” Running Bear answered with a huge grin. “Just passing through.”

“I know the feeling, kid,” the old man answered.

A short bespectacled girl with a walkie-talkie and a clipboard ran to the actor and squeaked, “I

finally found you. They need you in this shot, Duke, uh, Sir.”

“Don’t get your panties in a bunch, Myrtle. I’m coming.”

He nodded to Running Bear and as he did in so many reels, he departed into the sunset.

Running Bear remembered booing that cowboy in the movies and cheering for his brother Comanches.

The island man checked the address and trudged across the square.

Days and nights were a blend of gray sky and permanent mist. Ian’s biological clock was on the blink and despite hard work, good food and great sex, he sported gray baggage under both eyes and he was becoming concerned about his alcohol consumption. He made a pledge to himself to spend less time tossing back a glass and look for overtime at the cold storage.

Lena had become less available as the days wore on. The more Ian showed feelings for her, the more she retreated. He reminded himself that his goal was to earn green paper with dead presidents to pay for school. He set his mind on his task of becoming a working class hero.

Dan was booking day jobs, writing to his girl and waiting for his test date at the post office.

Noel and Naima and the crew at the Foc’sle seemed to be settled in their blue-collar routines of working hard and playing hard.

Ian sensed tedium in their lifestyle and knew this was a place to make a score and then get going.

Sitting under a raven headed totem pole just south of town, Running Bear held his boy in his arms. He had just gotten off the silver bird from Sea Tac with his napping son.

The Seattle police were slow on domestic violence calls, especially if it involved natives. Running Bear had brought Christine the bible. When she opened it to read the inscription, he pounced on her and held an ether soaked bandana to her mouth and nose. She went down fast. Her sister entered the apartment and started screaming. Running Bear was on her in seconds with the dowsed cloth and soon she was on the linoleum and unconscious too.

Running Bear hotfooted it to the back bedroom. Quahu was in front of the TV watching Hecke and Jeckle reruns. The TV’s volume had drowned out the screaming. When Quahu saw his father, he reached his little arms up for a hug. Running Bear grabbed his son, burying his face into his barrel chest, and hurried out of the apartment through the rear fire escape.

Within an hour he was in the air with Quahu headed back to his island.

Joe Little Wolf’s second son Jesse was a desk sergeant with the Ketchikan police. They were a small force but had a lot of heart and had to deal with many belligerent drunks on the job.

Jesse took the call from Detective Bill Constantine of the Seattle Police. One of his units had reported an attempted double murder of two native women in Downtown Seattle, and one woman and her son were now missing. The other woman gave a full report of her estranged brother-in-law’s attack. Constantine wanted the authorities in Ketchikan to be on the alert.

Jesse hung up the phone and shook his head in disgust. Jesse grew up with Roy and knew how troubled his childhood friend had been these last few years. He motioned to his white

partner Rick Everett, a transplant from Coos Bay, Oregon, and the new rookie on the force.

They grabbed their holsters and headed for one of the two squad cars. Rick had learned to read Jesse's expressions and watched with concern as his partner's jaw tightened with tension. They reported to their captain via radio and the crackling voice of Captain Red Barry 10-4'ed their call. The cap was busy at the other end of town with a fender bender.

Jesse pulled out of the gravel lot with his low beams illuminating the light rainfall.

Thursday paydays meant full crowds at the bars Thursday nights. The Bawden Street crew was cash heavy and amped to party.

They caught the early show of "Sometimes a Great Notion" at the movie house, then King Crabs and beer at a fish joint. By nine p.m. they were at the curve of the bar at the Foc'sle getting loaded.

Dan was winning arm wrestling matches as Noel, Naima and Katie cheered him on. They won bets on the Nordic Yeti boy bout after bout.

Lena was being sweet to Ian after a few days of estrangement. As they drank she got friendlier and her life story babbled out of her mouth. She had a kid who was with her mother in Sitka. The kid's father had been killed in a fire in the village of Pleiku in Vietnam. "I'm trying to heal," she put it bluntly, her hand caressing Ian's thigh under the bar.

The Foc'sle was like a saloon in a wild west movie. Hooting and hollering and frontier type characters. Flirtations and fistfights. American alcohol induced chaos at hand.

Running Bear was pouring double shots with a twisted grin that gave him a maniacal expression.

Quahu was fast asleep in Mary Bigmouth's arms at the end of the bar. The child was oblivious to the life exploding around him. Mary guarded him like a mama bear with a cub. She had raised five boys and her hugs were known as the best on the island.

The Foc'sle started vibrating as "The Way You Do The Things You Do" by the Temptations blared out of the jukebox speakers. Madness was alive and well at the Foc'sle. The many summer visitors from the mainland were living what they thought was the Alaska dream. Blue-collar jobs, money in their pockets and hopes of getting a gig on the new pipeline.

As the bar rocked on, several hours south Kind-A-Wuss white knuckled the rail on the top deck of the Northern Star. She peered at the horizon, never blinking. She calculated her itinerary in her head. She was no longer Christine. She only closed her eyes to summon the images of her ancestors to buoy her soul.

Sergeant Jesse Little Wolf and Patrolman Rick Everett had checked the hotel and then went up to the waterfalls with flashlights to see if Running Bear was hiding out in the woods.

Jesse squinted into the darkness and listened for stirring or snapping branches.

The great grandson of a Tlingit chief turned to town and saw a few lights still burning in the bars downhill. He grunted and Rick knew their next move.

Four a.m. was closing time for Ketchikan saloons. The watering holes reopened at seven a.m. and the hard-core cases huddled in the doorways for three hours of snoring on the sidewalk. There were no public intoxication laws and no laws against prostitution, so all urges could be

satisfied with only a few greenbacks.

The Bawden Street crew stumbled out at closing and began their uphill ascent via street and wet wooden staircase.

Locking the door of the Foc'sle, Running Bear was startled by a loud "Blooping" sound. Jesse Little Wolf turned on the driver side searchlight and the siren with two more bleeps and announced over his loudspeaker, "Roy, don't move."

Quahu awoke from the eerie siren sound and started crying.

Sergeant Jesse and Patrolman Everett exited the squad car and slowly approached. Running Bear moved backwards and away from the two officers.

Out of the corner of his eye, Running Bear saw a short figure move towards him and make a grab for the child. He backhanded the attacker and his eyes bulged as he saw Kind-A-Wuss flying towards the police. Her mouth and nose gushed blood from the blow.

Running Bear turned in a state of panic, put the boy under one arm like a football and sprinted into the shadows. He made an immediate right and began running uphill.

Sergeant Jesse was pacing behind him, pleading with him to stop. The white boy officer was helping Kind-A-Wuss up, but she broke away from him and followed Sergeant Jesse and her fleeing husband.

Rick Everett freaked out and froze for a second, then gathered himself and joined the chase.

Running Bear lowered his head and compensated for the angle of the hill to gain momentum and speed. All four runners fought the hill's incline, breathing in pants and puffs.

Running Bear hit the staircase just as a large cloud cleared the moon and lit up the entire town, turning night into day.

Bawden Street is a staircase with one hundred and two steps and Running Bear took them two at a time.

Sergeant Jesse and Patrolman Everett drew their weapons but the presence of the little boy made them cautious. There was no way they wanted to fire on Roy. Everett had never used his gun except on the firing range.

Ian and Lena were at the top of the staircase street when they heard pounding and felt vibration in the wooden slats. The rest of the crew came out on the front porch to see who was yelling and why. Ian saw the bartender running up towards him with the child crying and kicking.

Kind-A-Wuss turned and tripped Everett, grabbing his revolver. Her daddy had taught her to swim, fight and how to use a firearm for hunting and protection. She aimed the weapon with two hands and dropped to one knee on the staircase to steady herself. Jesse's figure bobbed in and out of her target.

Running Bear's heart was beating hard and fast. Just a few more steps to the top. Jesse cleared the target for a few seconds and Kind-A-Wuss did what her daddy had taught her to do. She squeezed the trigger and let two bursts go just as Roy touched the last step.

Roy was losing his balance and handed the boy to Ian for fear of dropping him. The big man

regained his equilibrium and reached for the child as one bullet flew into his back and the second into the rear of his skull.

Running Bear stood in shock, staring at Ian. The light in his eyes dimmed and his pupils went still, reminding Ian of all the dead fish he had cleaned in the past month.

The large six-foot-seven man started falling backwards.

“Gravity...Gravity...No, God, no,” Ian screamed.

Noel and Dan tried to reach out and stop him but the big man began tumbling fast, head over heels, accompanied by loud thumping sounds as he hit each step. Running Bear’s body knocked Sergeant Jesse to one side and picked up speed like a human avalanche. Everyone was screaming but the big Haida man kept tumbling.

The Bawden Street crew howled like a nightmarish cadre of banshees. Running Bear flew past Kind-A-Wuss and Everett and slammed onto the road at the bottom of the staircase. The bone crunching final thump was the worst of all.

In one move, Sergeant Jesse grabbed Kind-A-Wuss and cuffed her as he took her weapon.

Everett approached the big man who now resembled a broken doll. He checked the pulse, a ridiculous action, then stepped away and threw up.

Lena took the crying boy into the house. Katie called the station and got Captain Red Barry on the horn. Ian, Dan and Noel just looked at each other in shock.

Within seven minutes Captain Barry, an EMS crew and a crowd of townies were at the bottom of the staircase. Kind-A-Wuss was in cuffs in the back of the squad car as Red talked to his two officers in hushed tones.

Red saw Mary Bigmouth in the crowd and summoned her over. She solemnly climbed the staircase and fetched little Quahu.

The night was becoming dawn as the moon and sun passed one another in the same sky.

There was a week of inquiries and interviews with the Bawden Street crew. Eventually they were left alone, but the devastation was still omnipresent in Ketchikan. The town was in mourning.

Ian could not sleep nor lose the image of Running Bear’s last moment. He quit his job at the cold storage. Shook hands with Phil. Hugged and kissed Lena and the girls. Bid Dan best wishes. Noel walked him down to the dock.

“I’m leaving soon too, bro,” Noel told him. “I told Naima I got some bros in Puerto Escondido I should go see. Change of scenery, you know.”

As Ian boarded the ferry he turned to Noel and even though it was falling out of vogue, they threw each other the peace sign

Forty-four hours later the ferry docked in Seattle. Within an hour Ian’s thumb stopped a microbus. He was welcomed in by a vacationing schoolteacher named Sandy Pitler and his blonde wife who were headed back home to the Bronx. His golden thumb was not tarnished one bit. As Sandy told Ian stories of teaching in the Bronx, Ian’s eyes fluttered. Slipping into a

nod, the last thing he heard was Phil's voice in his head hollering, "Let gravity do it."

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Allan Wasserman is a Bronx-born writer, actor and musician. His short story "Finkelstein the Bear" won second place in the 2005 Glimmer Train Short Story Award for New Writers. His screenplay "Toughest Cat in the Bronx" received the Moondance Film Festival 2005 Columbine Award, and "Bozza" was a 2006 Nicholl Fellowship Screenwriting Competition quarter finalist. His acting credits include recurring roles on *The Sopranos* and *Curb Your Enthusiasm*; he has also appeared on *The Office*, *ER*, *Seinfeld*, Todd Haynes' *Safe*, this year's *Funny People* with Adam Sandler and others.