

GLACIER WORLD

A Novel

by Fredrick Cooper

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CHAPTER 1

Icy Strait, Alaska

He had done it hundreds of times—on calm days when the water surface of Icy Strait was like a mirror reflecting the snow-capped peaks of the Chilkat Range or during fog so thick, it streamed from his face and soaked the front of his jacket. Then there were unpleasant days, like today, when the windblown salt spray made his eyes sting and the chop was so bad his teeth hurt with every slam of his boat into an oncoming wave.

Icy Strait was the gateway to Glacier Bay National Park and ran east west some thirty miles. Six miles directly across from Glacier Bay was the Tlingit village of Hoonah, where Erasmus Hunt started his crossing, and was home of the Hunt family for five generations. He was one of the Hunt brothers, and for some damn reason, his mother had named him Erasmus, thankfully shortened to Raz by the residents of the village. He and his younger brother, Pete, were fishermen during the short summer season and ran trap lines in the winter. Their father, uncles, and grandfathers did the same before them. Trapping mink, martins, and foxes provided a nice income during the months when they could not find other work. If you didn't fish, you worked at the restored cannery that the village corporation operated as a tourist attraction, or whatever you could find in pick up work—boat or fishing net repair, or possibly logging, if you were lucky enough to get hired on. But these were seasonal jobs and once the cruise ships left and the fishing season was over, the few jobs remaining were tribal government positions.

With a lousy fishing season now over, Raz Hunt desperately needed money. He decided to start trapping a bit early, well before the first snow. He had cleaned up and boiled his traps and there were two sacks of them tucked into the bow of his small, aluminum skiff.

The monotonous pounding of the skiff during the crossing of the strait let Raz ponder his conversation with his brother earlier that morning. Raz had finished readying the skiff and walked up the café to meet Pete. At the café, his brother sat drinking coffee, dressed in his going-to-town clothes.

“Hey, Raz!” said Pete. He raised his coffee cup as a greeting as his older brother entered the café.

Raz rubbed his hands together to warm them as he walked over to the table. He threw his jacket over a chair and sat down without as much as a good morning then poured a cup of coffee for himself from a carafe already on the table.

“What’s eatin’ you this morning?” Pete asked.

“You see that article in the Juneau paper on that damn Glacier World? Said they’re tightening up the access to the inlet. We’re not supposed to be doing no trappin’ or nothin’ around that place this winter. Damn, where are our sovereign rights these days?”

“The state legislature passed a law giving them full, private access. I guess they can enforce their rights,” answered Pete.

“I don’t give a hoot!” Raz went on saying. “We got rights too, and we were here first. That’s our homelands where we got hunting, fishing, and trappin’ rights.” Raz stirred a pack of sugar into his cup of coffee. He suddenly realized that his brother was not dressed for a day in the woods. He had on a clean, freshly pressed shirt and slacks. “This your way of showin’ me you’re chickening out? You afraid one of those little patrol boats will run us over and sink our skiff or somethin’?”

“Sorry I didn’t let you know earlier, Raz, but Liz woke up last night with some abdominal pain. She’s worried about the baby. I gotta take her in to the pediatrician’s office in Juneau. We’ll be back late this afternoon. Can you move things back a day?”

“Hell, I’ve got the boat all gassed up and loaded. With the temperature droppin’ we could get a foot of snow in the next few days. I want to get those damn traps set.”

“Yeah, but I gotta go into Juneau. Liz is in a panic.”

Raz took a sip of his coffee and nodded his head just slightly. “Well, I know Liz can be concerned about a thing like that bein’ it’s her first one.”

“Really sorry I can’t be with you, Raz,” said Pete, trying to be apologetic but knowing his brother had been counting on him to go along.

“Well, I’m goin’ over without you. I need the money.” Raz finished his coffee, stood, and put on his jacket as he stomped towards the door. “At least you can pay for my damn coffee.”

A drifting log dead ahead of the skiff suddenly caught Raz’s attention and he jerked the tiller over to avoid hitting it. He let out a sigh and gazed at the shoreline just off to his right. It was a stretch of beach that the locals referred to as Home Shore. In the lee of the shore, the wind chop subsided and he was able to increase his speed as he entered Excursion Inlet. Up ahead on the east side of the inlet was an enormous tourism complex under construction on the site of an old fish processing plant. It annoyed the elder Hunt that the construction of yet another tourist resort near Glacier Bay National Park would not be such a great deal for the economy and definitely not for him or others from his village. From the tone of several Juneau newspaper articles, it seemed like everyone else in Southeast Alaska welcomed the construction project. There would be lots of jobs and more cruise ships when it was completed—so the state economists said—but the construction jobs they predicted had mostly been filled with imported laborers. The Juneau newspaper referred to the place as Glacier World. Raz laughed aloud at the thought. There were no real glaciers in Excursion Inlet. The nearest one was over seventy miles away at the far end of Glacier Bay.

As Raz got closer to the complex, he stared at the tall building near its center—five stories, all clad in reflective green glass. In his mind, it just didn't fit and had to be some crazy designer's idea. According to the newspapers, the resort would not require accommodations or restaurants; visitors would have everything provided onboard their cruise ship, which would moor at a huge new dock that stretched from one end of the complex to the other. A large ocean trawler was docked next to the old cannery and there were several new warehouses at the south end of the complex. Raz hated large fishing vessels, too; they haul in everything off the bottom of the Gulf wasting much of what they scoop up.

Along the rest of the dock, there was a long row of buildings resembling a Klondike boomtown from the Alaskan gold rush era of the 1800s. There was storefront after storefront. Some were all fancy to resemble a saloon. Others bore signs like mercantile, assay office, and mining supplies. It went on and on. At the far end of the storefronts, a water park was under construction that was supposed to be bigger than the one at Sea World in Southern California. There had been a picture of it in the newspaper.

Raz opened up the throttle on his outboard motor and hugged the western shore of the inlet. He watched for one of the sleek, blue-hulled patrol boats to come out to intercept him but they remained tied to the dock. The security guards had to have seen him.

He was furious the day he first learned that Excursion Inlet would be off limits for trapping as well as hunting and fishing. It didn't take more than a couple of shots of whiskey for him to begin ranting about Glacier World and the special privileges that were handed out to its owners by the state legislature. He told Pete and anyone else who would listen, that those sons of bitches developing the resort were not stopping him from setting his traps. That he would shoot the bastards if anyone touched his traps or prevented him from beaching his boat at the end of the bay. Raz Hunt always carried a rifle or a shotgun because of the risk of a run-in with a brown

bear or a wolverine and, by God, he would blow a few holes in the hull of one of the resort's pretty blue patrol boats if they tried to stop him.

The editor of the Juneau newspaper had recently interviewed the new operations manager about the restrictions and the progress of the construction. Raz would never forget the manager's name and the face that stared at him from the front page of the newspaper. The eyes and the shape of Raul Rahman's mouth reminded Raz of the cunning face of a wolf. He had met men like Rahman before. He once dealt with a Russian fur buyer who had those eyes. The Russian man lied, tricked him into selling his fur pelts too cheaply, and laughed when Raz left his store.

Raul bin Rahman was from Singapore and represented a Singaporean company called Global Resorts International. Rahman proudly proclaimed to the newspaper reporter that the park was one of several that GRI was developing worldwide and the park here in Alaska would entertain over 150,000 Southeast Asian tourists each year. The Arctic and Alaska had wide appeal for international tourists, according to Rahman, and the park would offer everything in one destination resort. Rahman was excited to describe its most curious feature: a transportation system using driverless golf carts that wound through a labyrinth of large diameter tunnels. These tunnels, complete with strategically placed Plexiglas viewing windows, led to huge open enclosures containing all of the major wildlife of Alaska, which would be the star attraction of Glacier World. The resort, when it opened early next summer, would offer other choices from whale watching to glacier tours into the national park just next door, but according to Rahman, the chance to see wild animals up close in a natural setting was what visitors wanted to experience. The elder Hunt scoffed at the idea that the tunnels with their big windows were supposed to put the tourists right amongst exhibits of some of the deadliest mammals of North America—the huge Alaskan Brown Bears, Arctic wolves, and smaller mammals that were almost as deadly, such as wolverines and otters.

To the unfamiliar, otters excited people with their playfulness, but the local natives, like Raz, knew better. An otter in the wild would just as soon as maul you as play with you. Raz hated land otters—they played with his traps so that he wouldn't catch anything. Sometimes they stole his traps or dragged them into thick brush where they were hard to locate.

The thought of an exhibit of land otters somewhere in this complex sent a shudder down his spine. Not only did he hate them for messing around with his traps, but, like many of the Tlingit, he grew up with stories about land otters—the Kushtaka or land otter people. They could change form at will, sometimes appearing to look like a deceased friend, family member, or other ghostly figure. They could move from place to place in an instant. Many believed, including Raz, that they were telepathic and tried to trick you—wanting to bring you harm or even death. They were evil and not the lithe, playful, furry critters that many people took them to be.

Raz still vividly recalled a story told during the winter potlatch by an old man who had narrowly escaped being killed by the Kushtaka when he was a boy. His parents and siblings had drowned when their canoe overturned on Icy Strait, but the boy was rescued by several men who he later learned were actually Kushtaka. Their canoe traveled southward for days and was getting farther and farther from his home when it finally arrived at a large village—a place called the Bay of Death. There were many land otter living there but there were also people. At first, no one would talk to the boy. They appeared to be slaves to the land otters. Then one day an old woman approached the boy. He was surprised when he recognized her as an aunt who supposedly drowned many years before.

“You must leave this place, my nephew,” she whispered to him with tears in her eyes. “The ravens have told me that my oldest brother and another man from our village have been searching for you. Come see me this evening and I will take you to them. I can no longer leave as

the Kushtaka took my soul. I am now a land otter.” Then she shape-shifted into an otter, chirped, and scampered away into a hole under a large cedar tree.

As his aunt instructed, the boy came to her den late that night and waited. Soon she appeared and again looked like his aunt. “You must not stay here or the land otter people will steal your soul and make you a slave or worse—tear you to pieces with their sharp claws and teeth.” After seeing that all of the land otters were sleeping, she led him down to the canoes where his uncle and the other man from his village were waiting. The boy thanked his aunt and bid her farewell.

For two days, they paddled northward without stopping. On the third day, they saw a canoe of land otters giving chase. As they neared their village, the canoe of land otters closed in and several leapt on the back of the man behind the boy. They snarled, hissed, bit and scratched him with such ferocity that he fell into the ocean where he was torn to bits by sea otters. Then the land otters turned on the young boy and began scratching at his back, head, and face. Fearing the same fate, the boy and his uncle fought back. The uncle used his shaman stick to push them back. When men from the village saw them, they immediately set out in canoes to drive the land and sea otters away. Though the boy lived, he lost his sight and bore terrible scars on his face and body. Raz’s mind pictured the old blind man with the ravaged body as he sped up the inlet towards a stream and tide flats at the far end of Excursion Inlet.

The inlet had a serene setting with the dark green forest, touched with an early frost, reflecting in the glassy, gray surface of the bay. While shrouded in low hanging clouds, rugged, snow covered mountains ringed the inlet. On the easterly side, several peaks of the Chilkat Range rose over five thousand feet. There were hanging valleys, sheer granite cliffs, and ice fields—places no one in their right mind would venture. It was true wilderness with no roads or easy access.

A group of Black Scoters and tiny Marbled Murrelets repeatedly dove and bobbed back to the surface in front of Raz's skiff easily avoiding the bow as it cut through the frigid water. Near the mouth of the river, Raz could see a light frost on the beach and marsh grass. Below the beach the rusty brown, slick kelp and bone-white barnacle covered rocks of a broad tide flat were being quickly inundated by the rising tide.

He turned his boat toward the shoreline short of the river mouth where the water would remain deeper. Here the exposed beach was narrow and rocky and jutted up to a low bank beyond which was a secondary growth forest of alder and spruce. Raz shut off the engine and let the boat drift into the shallows. The silence of the place engulfed him. When the metal hull scrunched on the barnacle covered rocks, he carefully stepped over the side and pulled a long line with him to tie to a branch of a tree that had fallen onto the beach. He grabbed one of his sacks of traps, stuffed it into a backpack, then picked up his shotgun and started to trek up the beach towards the flats. The brown kelp created quiet popping sounds as the small heads of the kelp were crushed under his knee-high, black rubber boots.

A blaze on a tree trunk amongst the thick line of trees above the bank caught his eye and he smiled as he turned towards it. The mark was old, made by his father years ago; it marked the path to the family trap line along a small stream that lay hidden in the forest. Raz looked around him, took a moment to sling the shotgun over his shoulder, and then, grabbing several roots with his free hands, climbed up the low bank. At the top of the bank, he was careful not to grab the yellow, woody branches of Devil's Club plants that partially blocked his route. The branches, covered with nasty thorns, left painful wounds if touched by bare skin.

The silence was broken by the welcoming sounds in the forest beyond the beach. Somewhere in the deep woods two ravens called to each other as if they were announcing his arrival. A squirrel chattered from a nest above his head and a Belted Kingfisher chirped as it flew

from its hidden perch and swooped over the water, only to land on a protruding dead tree further up the beach. Raz shifted the knapsack into a comfortable position and struck out for the family trap line; it started a few hundred yards ahead on a stream that made its way to the river at the end of the bay and extended a mile or so up to a waterfall. He planned to set out twenty traps where there were signs of small mammal crossings.

As he approached the stream and his first trap location, Raz noticed that the woods around him had turned dead quiet. Under the thick canopy of tall trees, less light penetrated and, coupled with the dark shadows, created a sense of confinement. The friendly sounds were gone and an uneasy feeling crept up his spine. *Was there a bear somewhere along the stream searching for something to eat? This late in the year, they should be asleep in their caves high up on the slopes of the mountain.* He tried to rid his mind of the strange feeling and get to his work. Then he heard a distinct sound like a lone bird chirping coming from an area of thick brush just beyond the stream. The single chirps changed to angry coughs joined by several more sources. An even louder, caterwaul-like scream came from further up the stream to his left.

Raz's feeling of uneasiness changed to panic as he recognized the sounds—land otters. The sounds grew louder and louder in his ears—'hah, hiss, hah.' He quickly shucked his knapsack, turned, and fled back the way he came. The beach and his boat—there he would be safe. The angry sounds followed him as if unseen forms were giving chase and grabbing his clothes. Branches of Devil's Club slapped at his arms and legs like creatures trying to entrap him. He stumbled in the black muck of a patch of skunk cabbage, dropping his shotgun. One of his boots was sucked off as he struggled to rise. Ahead of him, through an opening in the trees, he saw the bay and the hull of a boat— only to realize it was not his own boat. This boat was icy blue in color. Startled, he tripped on a root and took a tumble down the bank onto the beach. There was a sharp pain above his right eye and as Raz lost consciousness, the last things he

remembered were the salty taste of the kelp against his face and the chill of the rising tidewater that soaked into his clothes.

Hours later, Raz Hunt opened his left eye. He was surprised to find total darkness around him and that he was not lying on a beach. Instead of barnacled covered rock and decaying kelp, the surface under his body was smooth and hard. He could smell cement as though the surface was a concrete floor or pad. Struggling to a sitting position, he again heard the chilling sounds—the snarling ‘hah’ and hissing sounds of the land otters, only different this time. It was a cacophony of excited chirps, yowls, and hissing, and it seemed to come from a dark, encircling wall not more than ten or twenty feet from where he was sitting. Raz ignored the aches in his limbs, leapt up and turned in a circle, trying to determine which way to run. He saw a small red light not far away and, with a glimmer of the possibility of safety, ran towards it—only to run smack into a glass wall. Stunned, he staggered backward and stared at the light. *Was it a light or the glow of a lit cigarette?* Raz wondered. *No, it was too large.* It was the glow of a cigar, and as he watched it, the red glow became brighter, revealing a man's face just inches from his own. The facial features shone red except for the eye sockets, which were like black pits. The face did not move but brightened and darkened with the intensity of the glowing end of the cigar.

“Help me!” Raz hollered as he pounded on the thick glass surface. There was no movement or response from the man beyond the glass. Raz screamed as something hit his back, dug its sharp claws into his jacket and flannel shirt, and began biting the back of his neck and head. Raz twisted his body, trying to shake the creature off as several more attached themselves to his legs, shredding his pants and biting his flesh. A large, dark form jumped onto Raz's chest and began tearing at his throat with its razor sharp teeth. He grabbed it with both hands, ripped it away and flung it against the glass wall. Raz touched the front of his shirt, which suddenly was wet and warm. His hands were slick with his own blood that spewed from the bites to his neck.

Raz turned once more to face the glass surface and pleaded to the red glowing face beyond. His voice faltered as he recognized the face—he had seen it before on the front page of the Juneau newspaper. A pair of metallic sunglasses were placed over the ice-cold eyes and the face turned away and faded into the darkness. Raz pounded a bloody hand on the glass and croaked again, “Help me!”

He struggled vainly to detach the squirming dark forms as he slipped to his knees. Then, as if a switch had been thrown, the crazed land otters withdrew and the screaming and hissing sounds went silent as Erasmus Hunt slumped to the floor of the enclosure. The smooth concrete floor felt warm and peaceful against his ravaged body.

CHAPTER 2

Olympic National Park

In the stillness of the early morning hours, something woke the young boy. He pushed the top of his down sleeping bag away, rolled on his side, and listened. It sounded like scratching just outside of his tent. The boy's father remained asleep beside him as he unzipped the nylon fly of their small backpacking tent and pulled it open. He watched and listened for a few minutes with the crisp night air gently brushing his face and reminding him that he, his father, and a friend of his father, were camped at six thousand feet on the slopes of Mount Olympus in Olympic National Park. It was one of the most remote wilderness areas in the lower United States. Once more, he heard the faint scratching on the rocky ground somewhere close by. The slick rock surface of Camp Pan glistened in the luminous light of a waning moon and a carpet of stars in the Milky Way that were beginning to give way to an approaching dawn. To his left, he could make out the bundled form of Leon Pence, his dad's friend, who was sleeping on the open ground. Drawn to his right by the faint sound again, the boy grinned as he recognized a small, dark form scurry from under a ledge and perch on a boulder just a few feet away. It was one of the bold little marmots that had entertained them while they ate their dinner the evening before. The boy stretched and rolled onto his stomach to gaze at a sliver of light along the eastern horizon. He lost track of time as the ridgeline of the Olympic Mountains gradually became silhouetted like a gigantic shadow box stretching to the ends of the earth. The marmot stood motionless on his rock, also watching as the band of light took on red and orange tinges of the dawn.

The boy was Bernie Armstrong and recently celebrated his fifteenth birthday. His dad, Earl, said their backpacking trip was a birthday present, but Bernie knew that his dad really wanted to make this trip himself. His dad was always trying to prove he could do challenging things. It was his Indian blood, his Dad would say. Bernie knew he was only part Indian, even though he was an enrolled member of one of the coastal tribes. At least when Earl got the bug to strike out and explore Bernie knew that there would never be a dull moment. The whole family was generally involved, but not on this trip because it was truly dangerous.

Earl had convinced his friend to guide them on a seven-day trek. Leon was a full blood Indian and belonged to the Quileute Tribe. The Olympics were part of his ancestral lands and Leon had spent many summers guiding people over its wilderness trails. He was also a former Marine assigned to a Special Forces unit that had served in Iraq during the first Gulf War. His Native instincts had saved himself and his buddies several times while out on patrols. Leon Pence had become a good friend of Earl when he saved the lives of Earl's wife, Sally, and their two children, Bernie and Christine, several years ago when they were kidnapped on the Washington Coast by a mad man seeking a valuable artifact Earl had discovered. Earl and Leon had been good friends ever since.

While Earl had proposed a difficult hiking trip, the scenery was incredible and the challenge to their alpine climbing skills was exhilarating. Each morning they reviewed what lie ahead while sipping a cup of camp coffee. Each evening they pitched their tent amongst patches of snow on slate-grey rock and watched the mountain ridges become awash in hues of red from the setting sun. After each evening's meal, Leon would tell stories of the early mountain men of the Olympics. Bernie was most impressed with the adventures of Herb Crisler, an adventurer and wildlife photographer who was challenged back in the 1930s by the *Seattle Times* newspaper to survive in the Olympic wilderness for thirty days with just what he carried on his back. Crisler

succeeded, but only by catching and eating marmots and what berries he could find. Bernie's dad chose the same arduous route as Crisler—the Baily Range Traverse.

The hardest part of the trek was behind them as they would reach the overlook for the Blue Glacier sometime today and then pick up the Hoh River Trail for an easy downward hike through one of the most beautiful rainforests in the Pacific Northwest. Tomorrow or the next day, all this would be just a memory of what had been a terrific birthday present. Bernie's thoughts and pure enjoyment of the scene were interrupted as his Dad pulled the tent flaps further apart to see the sunrise himself.

“It's gorgeous beyond belief isn't it, son?”

“Yeah. Thanks for bringing me, Dad,” replied Bernie.

By mid-morning, the three climbers were well into the seventh day of their trek along the Baily Range Traverse. The Baily Range isn't a highly technical route as much as it was considered to be physically demanding. Nor is the route considered a trail, for it is not much more than a mountain goat path connecting a series of major peaks—all over 7,000 feet. The climbers spent most of the first six days of their trip scrambling up and down steep rocky slopes rather than trekking across alpine meadows—from the terrifying start on the rocky spine of the Cat Walk where they were exposed to drops of hundreds of feet on both sides of the narrow trail to the numerous steep side slopes. One slip on the gravel could send a hiker, carrying a forty-pound pack, tumbling and resulting in a broken arm or leg or even death. The three climbed through broad snowfields so encrusted with ice they had to use their ice axes and wear their crampons. In addition, there was Crisler's Ladder, a 30-foot vertical cliff climb using roots and clefts in the rocks for handholds.

The sun had begun its own steady climb over the crest of Hurricane Ridge into a cloudless sky warming the three climbers. They had trekked across yet another snowfield and

were approaching the Hoh Glacier. They traveled in single file with the boy's father normally in the last position. Leon, who had made the trek several times before, usually took the lead. As a safety precaution for the young boy, they roped themselves together whenever traversing a difficult area—one of which lay just ahead of them with an ascent to Blizzard Pass from under the Hoh Glacier. Below the glacier was another steep side slope to cross just above a cliff that dropped into a basin with a blue green lake. With their course of travel obvious, Earl took the lead position for a change. While he was not quite a neophyte to mountaineering, having accomplished several difficult hikes in the Park such as the Third Beach Trail along the Pacific Ocean beaches, the rock scrambling and side slope areas had taken a toll on his leg muscles. Bernie was as spry as their first day.

Earl had selected the longer route for trekking the Baily. They could have dropped down into the Elwa valley or the Queets River drainage and shortened their trip, but the weather for early October had remained sunny and dry and this might be his only opportunity to experience it. They could have included a climb to the top of Mount Olympus, considered a "rite of passage" for beginning climbers, but Mount Olympus was not on Earl's bucket list. He and Leon selected a route to skirt around the flanks of the group of peaks that made up this famous feature of the Pacific Northwest. Blizzard Pass, which he could now see up ahead, would be their last challenge and the highest point of the trek before their final descent.

Wildlife viewing was one of the pleasures of wilderness backpacking in the Olympics. On their third day, while hiking from Mount Carrie to Stephen Peak, they saw a herd of mountain goats from a distance. The shaggy white beasts were grazing in a meadow and ran up a near vertical ridge as easy as can be at the sound of their approach. A young coyote attempted to steal Bernie's breakfast one morning. Large herds of elk were common in the Park and they expected to see them at the lower elevations after the Blue Glacier. A black bear ambled close to

their camp one evening before becoming startled by their yells. Bears were not a serious problem in the Olympics because of the rigid rules for all backcountry hikers to use bear-proof containers for their food. Mountain goats were another story. They craved the salt residue left behind by hikers urinating along the trails and were known to become aggressive and charge into unwary hikers.

Up ahead of Bernie, Earl stopped to take in the beauty of the azure lake and a stand of timber in the valley hundreds of feet below them. One of the three peaks of Mount Olympus rose gracefully above it with its snowfields glistening against a deep blue sky. The ground around them was a stark contrast of barren hard rock and gravel scree with pockets of wild flowers adding splashes of color. The steep slope below the faint trail ended in a nearly sheer cliff in fifty or sixty feet before it fell away into the valley. Earl was attempting to remove a small camera from his shirt pocket when he heard a frantic yell behind him.

“Dad!” Bernie screamed. “Watch out! There’s a mountain goat coming your way.”

Earl responded to Bernie’s yell by looking his way then turned to look up the trail and all he could see was a huge, hairy white object with two short horns hurtling down the trail directly at him. Before he could dive out of the way, it butted him in the stomach and lifted him off his feet. When Earl hit the ground, he was on his side sliding off the trail. He grabbed for rocks and tufts of vegetation, trying to stop his slide toward the precipice. Then the rope tied to Bernie started to tighten and Earl looked up, fearing his son had been pulled off the trail.

On the trail, Bernie and Leon had time to throw themselves against the uphill slope as the goat ran by. Leon scrambled to his feet and ran towards Bernie yelling to him.

“Don’t get up. Roll onto to your back and plant your feet on that rock outcropping on the edge of the trail. It will brace you against his weight.”

Leon reached beyond Bernie and grabbed for the section of rope that tied the boy to Earl. The rope raked across the slope like a slow motion pendulum until it was directly below the two of them. Bernie, flat on his back, could not see if his dad had slid over the edge of the cliff but could feel the force of the rope where it was tied around his waist. It was slipping down to his hips and all he could think of was it slipping off his body and pulling Leon over too. Leon wrapped the rope around his back and then around his right arm and with his gloved hands he took a strain. His feet slid a bit towards the edge of the trail as he took Earl's full weight plus his pack.

"Bernie, take my ice axe and jam it into the rocks behind me and pound it in as hard as you can. Then take a couple of wraps of the rope on it." Bernie rolled on his side, pulled the tool out of the loops on Leon's pack and did what he asked. "Okay, Earl!" hollered Leon as he strained and leaned back. "Try to get on your feet and use the rope to climb to us as I do a slow belay. We have the rope anchored."

Leon's arm was burning from the tightened rope but he held his grip. He watched as Earl followed his instructions. Earl struggled to get his legs turned and began climbing. His feet slipped several times on loose scree but he was coming up foot by foot. Glancing over his shoulder, the edge of the cliff, where the slope fell away, looked like an abyss into space. He gulped, averted his eyes and climbed upward in response to Leon's instructions.

Leon could count the beads of sweat on Earl's forehead as he grunted and struggled upwards. When Earl was just a few feet away, Leon asked Bernie for assistance.

"He's just below us, Bernie. You need to reach over and grab the top of his pack to lessen the weight as I lift."

Bernie got on his belly and looked down at his dad who now had a slight grin on his face. He reached down and found a strap on the top his dad's large backpack. Together, Leon and

Bernie pulled Earl back onto the trail. Leon undid the rope around his reddening arm. There were signs of pain in his eyes but neither Earl nor Bernie took notice. They were gripping each other tightly. Leon slumped down beside them and the three men were motionless for several minutes. Finally, Earl struggled into a sitting position and peered down at the edge of the cliff. He was shaking.

“You know, I didn’t have time to be scared,” said Earl. “I am now. I should have kept my eyes on the trail. That was my responsibility as the lead person. I put all of us in danger.”

“That is why we rope ourselves together,” Leon replied. “We have a chance if we work as a team and we did.”

“Well, next time we encounter a mountain goat or a bear the size of a Mack truck I want you in the lead, Leon. That was too much excitement for me.”

Leon laughed at Earl’s words. “Myself, I would rather come face to face with an insurgent carrying an AK-47 and armed with just my tactical knife than come up on a grizzly bear on a narrow trail. You don’t have many options.”

“A grizzly?” Earl asked. “Thank goodness they don’t inhabit the Olympics. In any event, I will be very glad to let you lead us out of here. It has been a great trip until now and our last day can still be enjoyable. I’ve had enough of this view and am looking forward to the rainforest with some tall trees and flat ground on all sides of me. How about you, Bernie?”

“I’m just glad you’re safe, Dad.” Bernie said. “I was really scared. I’ve learned a lot about wilderness survival on this trip; maybe a little bit more than you expected.”

“Well, this was one lesson I wasn’t expecting to offer,” replied Earl still shuddering a bit as he glanced over the cliff. For the rest of the day until the trio was safely in the Hoh River valley, Earl’s senses were wired to every rolling rock and shifting sound of the wind.

CHAPTER 3

Hoonah, Alaska

Pete Hunt shucked off his jacket and took his usual seat near the big window of the only café in the small Native town of Hoonah. From the window, one could see across the harbor all the way to the rugged Fairweather Range on a clear day and watch boats entering and leaving the marina. He looked at his watch and pulled out his cell phone for the fourth time since waking up at five a.m. His brother's number was the last one called and he punched it again. Moments later he got Raz's very unsociable recorded greeting. He didn't bother to leave a message. Pete waved a hand at Flo Whiting, the waitress, to bring his usual order of eggs over easy and first cup of coffee.

Pete had spent his entire life in Hoonah. Like many other native residents, going to college had not been an option. Families struggled to make a living in a harsh land depending on seasonal blue-collar jobs and government subsidies. Many young men accepted this fact or they became alcoholics, like his brother Raz, with some even committing suicide. What made things worse for Pete and Raz was losing their parents and being left to care for themselves.

Two years ago, Pete began taking a few natural resource courses at the community college in Juneau. Pete was different from his older brother. Raz had drawn himself inward. Pete was more outward going and worked hard at improving his social skills. He wanted a better education and started studying to be a guide. His dream was to one day apply for a Park Ranger position at Glacier Bay National Park. Pete had married his high school girlfriend and their first child would be born in a few months. Looking out for his brother and taking care of his wife and soon a child, tied him to Hoonah whether he liked it or not.

Pete added some milk to his steaming black coffee, stirred it for a moment, and thought about his brother. He had been trying to reach Raz for three days—ever since returning from Juneau. Pete hadn't liked leaving his brother to lay out the trap line for the first time all by himself. Raz had expressed his disappointment when he walked out that morning. His older brother could be bullheaded and even threatening to other people—always lashing out spontaneously without rationalizing a situation. Pete knew different. Raz was like a kid trying to find his way in the world. Change frightened him and he covered up his fear by making preposterous statements and claims.

The café was busy and a half dozen or so men had walked in since Pete arrived. They nodded his way but didn't come over even though there were two empty chairs across from him. He had asked each one of them since getting back from Juneau whether or not they had seen Raz anywhere. No one had seen Raz or his boat, or really cared, for that matter.

At first, Pete wasn't that concerned. His brother was known for binge drinking and disappearing or sleeping it off at his house or somewhere in town and not showing up for days. Then there was the weather conditions. There had been rain and four-foot seas out in Icy Strait for two days. Four footers didn't make it impossible to cross in a skiff but a wise person generally didn't try and just waited a day or two. Raz had the sense not to try it and could have found a place to hold up over in Excursion Inlet or at the fish camp that the family used on Pleasant Island.

There were other possibilities for his brother being missing that nagged at him. Raz could have had mechanical problems with the boat's outboard motor or he could have suffered an accident in the woods while setting his traps. If Raz didn't show up by late morning, Pete was going to have to contact the Alaska State Troopers and see if they would investigate.

The door to the café banged open again as a young girl entered. She lingered near the door for a few seconds like she was checking on who was present and who was not. She glanced at Flo, who had her back to the door and was taking several breakfast plates from the pass through window to the kitchen, then saw Pete, smiled, and turned towards his table. She wore an oversized army jacket embroidered with bright flower designs and a pair of laddered jeans. Her long black hair fell past her shoulders and parted to partially fall over her left eye. The hair was streaked with red and yellow coloring matching her red sneakers with bright yellow laces. Despite her casual appearance, she moved gracefully like a dancer and when she sat down across from Pete, she didn't slouch like a typical teenager.

Pete set his coffee cup down, put his elbows on the table and crossed his arms. He smiled back as he shook his head. "Morning, Brook!" Pete said. "You trying to make a fashion statement around here?"

"It's Brooklyn!" The girl replied. "Why do you insist on calling me Brook? That's a stream not a person."

Pete chuckled. "I don't know. It just seems more appropriate. More feminine like your mother over there."

Brooklyn glanced at her mother, wearing a well-worn plain dress and dirty white apron, and rolled her eyes like a typical seventeen-year-old teenager. She was a pretty girl, with a round face and small mouth that always seemed to bear a smile like her mother—unlike most of the native Hoonah females who almost never smiled. Then there were her eyes, which had a sparkle. She had a darker complexion than her mother, who was one of the few Caucasians living in a town that was largely Alaskan Native. It was no secret that Flo Whiting had fallen in love with a young native man who left her for some unknown reason after she was pregnant. She was raising

Brooklyn as a single parent in a tough town with little prospect for the future. That was something Pete had a lot of respect for.

Flo brought over a bowl of hot cereal and glass of orange juice and set them in front of the girl without lingering to talk. There were plenty of customers needing attention.

“Mom works too hard,” Brooklyn stated in a firm voice as she pushed her hair back with both hands. “I wish she could have an easier job than working in this place. I’ve tried to convince her to learn how to use a computer but she won’t even try. She says they’re for young people like myself.” She took a sip of her orange juice. “How’s Liz doing?” She added.

“She’s doing all right,” Pete answered, unfolding his arms and leaning back in his chair to stretch. “The doc in Juneau said that the baby is just getting more active and kicks a lot. That it is normal. He told her to drink chamomile tea before going to bed, it would relax her, and then the baby would relax. She’s too tense about things.”

The girl removed a pair of fingerless gloves and slipped out of her jacket. Under the jacket, she wore an oversized, maroon sweatshirt with a hood and the word BRAVES emblazoned across the front. The Hoonah Braves were the high school basketball team, the primary competitive sport in Southeast Alaska. She was also wearing a large silver pendent in a Native American design of an eagle feather and a turquoise stone. Pete admired the things that represented her roots, living in a small Native village in spite of the fact she had no clan like himself. He and his brother belonged to the raven clan.

Brooklyn poured a small amount of the remaining milk Pete used for his coffee onto her bowl of cereal and picked up a spoon, studying it for a moment like it was a science class specimen.

“Did Raz show up last night?” she asked finally.

“No. He didn’t,” Pete answered with a shake of his head, “and I appreciate your concern. No one else in town seems to care.”

“Well, he’s not exactly the friendliest guy in the world. He sure scared me when I was a little kid,” said Brooklyn.

“Yeah. For a long time I tried to cover for him, but no one listens to a younger brother. His reputation as a troublemaker and bad mouthing people kind of put him on the outs around here. It’s just too small a community. But he’s the only brother I’ve got and with Mom and Dad drowned in a boat accident, my only living relative.”

“A boat accident?” asked Brooklyn. “You never told me about that.”

“I guess it’s been eight or ten years now since they disappeared coming back from our family’s fish camp. That tragedy hit Raz pretty hard. He’s convinced the Kushtaka took them.”

“I don’t believe in those old Tlingit legends,” the girl answered firmly. She blew on a spoonful of hot cereal.

Pete didn’t pursue her statement and Flo’s delivery of his own breakfast gave him an opportunity to change the subject. “I heard you’ve been helping Lewis Teebottom with some project over at the job training center.”

“Uh huh,” Brooklyn replied. Her eyes seemed to sparkle even more. “Mr. Tee has got to be the weirdest guy in Hoonah, but he’s a great teacher and an absolute genius with computers. You know, he is having a team of high school students build an ROV. That’s a robotic underwater vehicle. It has two cameras and a robotic arm that can pick up things. We tried it out down at the docks last week. We even had to develop, with Mr. Tee’s guidance of course, the computer programs to control it.”

“Hey,” said Pete nodding his head slowly, “that’s pretty cool. Lewis is doing something this community has needed for a long time—showing you kids there’s a future.”

“I guess so. We’re entering a competition in Juneau early next summer. It’s the Ranger Class MATE competition.”

“MATE?” asked Pete. “Never heard of it.”

“MATE stands for Marine Advanced Technical Education. There are regional events all over the country where college and high school teams have to demonstrate technical, science and math skills with their ROVs. Mr. Tee decided to start a robotics team here in Hoonah and thinks we have a chance to win the state competition. If we do, we get to go to the Pacific Northwest Regional competition in Anchorage. Teams will have to compete by operating their ROVs under ice.”

“You’re part of this robotics team?”

“Officially, I’m an alternate and help with the computer programming. Mr. Tee has another interesting project that me and a couple of other students help with. It’s a fisheries research project that gathers data using nanosats.”

“Nanosats?” Pete asked. “What the heck are they?” He took another bite of his fried eggs.

“They’re super small satellites—not much bigger than a Rubik’s Cube. NASA has a program that allows scientists to put them in one of their rockets instead of ballast and then they get released at low altitudes. Hundreds can be launched at one time. They only last a few months before being pulled back into the upper atmosphere and burning up but they are a neat way to study the Earth. Mr. Tee worked with this professor at the University of Alaska while getting his Masters in computer science and helped write a NOAA grant to use nanosats to study fishing activities in the Gulf of Alaska.”

“Wow, I’m impressed. ROVs and Nanosats—I had no idea all this was happening with you kids here in Hoonah,” replied Pete.

“The NOAA grant is pretty boring stuff and really quite straight forward. Using the nanosats we gather data on AIS transmissions from the fishing boats and monitor their movement. Mr. Tee is having us make graphical plots for thousands of—”

Pete’s raised a hand as his attention was drawn to the café window facing the bay. One of the state’s 32-foot patrol boats was moving fast and coming close to the shore. It turned broadside and slowed its speed as if it was going to go around the breakwater and enter the boat harbor. “Just a second, Brooklyn. I’ve got an uneasy feeling about this,” Pete said.

Brooklyn looked out the window and spotted the boat too. “Oh my God!” She exclaimed. “They’re towing Raz’s skiff!”

Pete’s cell phone rang and he quickly pulled it out of his pocket and answered. “Hello? Yeah, this is Pete Hunt.” Brooklyn could see the worried frown grow on Pete’s face as he listened to whoever was on the phone. “Okay,” Pete said, “I’ll be there in a minute.” He looked at Brooklyn as he jumped up and grabbed his coat. “That was the State Troopers. They asked me to meet them at the transient dock as soon as I can.”

Pete’s anxiety had his heart pounding as he leapt down the steps of the cafe and ran towards the boat basin. Brooklyn was running right behind him, not wanting to miss for a second what was going on. In a few minutes half of the town, having had a full view of Raz’s skiff being pulled by the troopers, would be down at the basin. By the time Pete reached the patrol boat tied up at the transient dock, a crowd of fishermen and other curious folks from the docks had already gathered and stared at him like a flock of sparrows on a wire. Yellow ribbon stretched between two pilings to keep people at a distance. Pete glanced back toward the shore and noticed another dozen or so people were coming down the ramp from the parking lot and another twenty or so standing or sitting along the top of the breakwater watching. Pete walked up to the two troopers

standing on the dock. They were still wearing their life jackets and the smell of the forest and bay mud on their boots and clothes told him where they had been before they even said anything.

Pete ducked under the yellow tape and stood near the bow of the aluminum hull vessel. There was an all-terrain vehicle tied down in the open cargo area in front of a small pilothouse.

“Pete Hunt?” One of the troopers said. “I’m Dave Williams. I’m afraid I have some bad news. We got a report late last night from the security office over at Glacier World concerning a boat that was beached up near the end of Excursion Inlet. They sent one of their patrol boats over to check it out since the area is closed to public entry. They contacted us and reported seeing what appeared to be a man’s body on the bank near the boat. We were asked to come in and investigate and we arrived at daylight this morning. Identification on the body was that of Erasmus Hunt.”

“My brother is dead? What happened?”

“Did you know that he was going into a restricted area?” asked Williams. “Excursion Inlet has this exclusion zone—no hunting or fishing, and is totally closed to the general public.”

“Yeah,” answered Pete, stumbling for the right words. “I..I knew he was going there. I meant...I mean... I was supposed to go with him to set up a trap line but I had to take my wife into Juneau to see her doctor.”

Pete watched Williams unbuckle his life jacket, pat several of the pockets of his vest, and then take out a cell phone. It was like watching the man move in slow motion. Pete gasped a deep breath and glanced at the crowd of people gathered at both ends of the dock—all friends and people he'd known his entire life—now just a wall of nameless faces standing there watching him and no one uttering a word that he could hear. He picked out Brooklyn who was staring at the patrol boat’s cargo area. He slowly turned his head following her gaze. On the deck of the boat behind the muddy ATV were two black body bags.

“Mr. Hunt. I need you to take a look at a few pictures,” said Williams. “Mr. Hunt?”

Pete stared at the body bags. The trooper’s voice faded and when he refocused on the officer, it was as if he had experienced a loud concussion. He saw the man’s lips moving but couldn’t hear him speak. Pete had a confused look on his face.

“Mr. Hunt,” Williams said again more loudly. “I’m sure you have a lot of questions but until we can conduct an investigation there are not many answers we can provide.” Williams held up the cell phone for Pete to look at a photographic image. “Can you identify the person in this photo?” He moved closer to Pete and spoke more quietly. “I don’t want to uncover the body right now—too many onlookers. Ah...I’m sorry if the image is disturbing to you. He was in pretty bad shape.”

Pete looked at the image, closed his eyes and shook his head. “That’s Raz. He has an old scar above his right eye. I did that when I accidentally hit him with a gaff hook when we were kids. Gees, what happened to him? He’s all scratched up.”

“We’re not sure. We backtracked from the beach near his boat and found a sack of traps and a shotgun. It was loaded but with no round in the chamber. We found one of his boots stuck in some mud. Apparently, he was running and didn’t stop to retrieve it. As to the condition of the body, it had too many bites and scratches for us to count. What caused them is unknown as we did not find any animal tracks. We have to leave that to the coroner to determine.”

Someone standing next to Brooklyn heard the officer’s description and whispered loud enough for a number of people to hear. “Kushtaka...the Land Otter People got him.” There were murmurs in the crowd and the words spread up the dock like a fast moving flame.

Pete took a moment to rub the back of his neck and sighed. “But I’m still confused,” he said. “You had me identify one body but it looks like you have two bodies on board.”

“Sure do,” replied Williams. “Two bodies from the same place—Glacier World. A contractor was killed by a couple of wolves in one of their predator exhibits. I’m afraid he looks a lot worse than your brother.”

Pete’s knees felt weak and with William’s assistance sat down on the edge of the dock. The image of Raz shook him to the core. He stared at his hand and then at the boat feeling helpless and lost. Even the birth of his baby boy months later couldn’t replace the loss of his brother.

Just two blocks from the Senate Office Building in Juneau, Senator William ‘Mac’ MacDonald sat at a table in a restaurant noted for fine dining. It was his favorite place to enjoy a quiet lunch away from the tourist hangouts further down on Front Street and Marine Way. He ordered a Bijou cocktail and waited for one of his key re-election campaign supporters to join him. Mac was pleased with how the campaign was proceeding even though he was experiencing more opposition than the last three times he ran for state office. His inner circle of supporters included some powerful business owners, several gold mine executives, and the President of the Alaska Native Brotherhood. Jobs for Southeast Alaska was number one in his platform, which proved to be popular amongst those with money, though it did result in a vocal opposition amongst environmental advocates. Tony Walsh, the editor for the *Juneau Empire*, was still sitting on the fence and had not yet endorsed any candidate, and Mac needed that endorsement. To help influence Walsh’s decision, Mac’s campaign advisor suggested he come out stronger in his support for Glacier World, an international theme park about to open near Glacier Bay National Park. Construction of the park had been underway for two years and was a \$500 million investment by Global Resorts International. Senator MacDonald used his political persuasion to get the State Legislature to offer GRI some very lucrative incentives to build the park, including

fast tracking much of the permitting process which had angered environmental groups and fishermen.

To kick off this new strategy for supporting the Glacier World development, Mac needed to know more about it and therefore his luncheon guest today was the new General Manager, Raul bin Rahman. He'd met Mr. Rahman only once at a fundraiser nearly two years ago. The man wrote a \$10,000 check for his campaign and asked how else he might extend the appreciation of GRI for his assistance. Mac jumped at the offer and a month later, he was the owner of a new 35-foot Beneteau sailboat, which he guessed had cost GRI nearly \$200,000. He sailed the boat to Juneau from Seattle and didn't give it a second thought that it had not cost him anything except to register it in Alaska. He was not a particularly adept sailor, but he loved that boat.

Mac saw Raul Rahman enter the restaurant and he stood to welcome the man.

"Mr. Rahman, it is indeed a pleasure to see you again. How are things at Glacier World?"

"Very busy," said Rahman with a gracious smile. "The park is within a few months of receiving its very first cruise ship. GRI is quite excited that day is finally arriving."

"That's wonderful news," replied Mac. "Please, take a chair. What do you want to drink?" Mac waved to his waiter to come over to the table.

"I drink Dewar's Scotch, if they have it. Thank you." Rahman removed a light jacket. He was wearing a Club Monaco denim shirt with a scarf tucked inside the collar. Mac knew that Rahman was a native of Malaysia and it was obvious from his darker skin, round eyes, and short stature. Rahman's carefully groomed, black hair was slightly long and he had a mustache, but it was his eyebrows that were his most striking facial feature. Their fullness and black color added darkness to his eyes. While his outward mannerisms were friendly, his eyes were just the opposite.

Mac tried not to focus on the man's eyes. While they waited for Rahman's drink to arrive, he started with his questions about the opening of Glacier World.

"What do you find is most exciting about Glacier World?"

Rahman smiled and answered, "Well, first you must come and see for yourself. We are planning a special pre-opening day for citizens of Juneau. If you can come, there would be an opportunity to say a few words at a special ceremony. We have invited the mayor and, of course, the press. I think your friend Tony Walsh plans to attend."

"That would be an honor," replied Mac. "I'll pass that invitation on to my campaign manager and he can talk to your PR people. As a matter of fact, I might bring my wife. She gets pretty excited when she sees one of Alaska's fiercer predators."

Rahman chuckled as he responded, "She will definitely have that chance. The park will be getting delivery soon of a Kodiak brown bear and two polar bears. The Kodiak is a very fine specimen despite the fact that he is a man-eater. My general curator assures me these bears can be accommodated and will be key attractions. Can you imagine riding in an aerial gondola across a river and over an open meadow full of such predators? That's what our Tundra Sky Ride has to offer. There will be many more exhibits where visitors can be quite close to the wildlife. Then there's our replica of a Gold Rush Town complete with theatrical drama of Alaska's early gold rush era."

"Marvelous!" exclaimed Mac. "I can't wait to take your Sky Ride and tour the rest of the park. Let's order and then you can tell me more about Glacier World. It does sound fascinating."

Rahman smiled, but like his eyes, it was cold and as though something was being held back.