



A GRAVE DENIED

DANA

A KATE SHUGAK NOVEL

STABENOW

A GRAVE

DENIED

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A GRAVE DENIED

Dana Stabenow



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**For
Glenn Winklebleck,
Virginia Parks,
Ken Cash,
and
Tom Sexton,
teachers all,
and for all teachers everywhere.
You make the difference.**

Acknowledgments

My thanks to the Danamaniacs, who will know why by the end.

What the grave says,
The nest denies.

—Theodore Roethke

A GRAVE

DENIED

Friday, May 2

Ms. Doogan wants us to keep a journal this summer for freshman English next fall. What we write about is up to us. Great, no pressure there. She says she wants a page a day from each of us. Glad I don't have to read them all.

I didn't know what to write at first, I mean I'm just not that interesting. But I was over at Ruth's cabin the other afternoon, looking through all the pictures she has of animals in the Park. I told her about the journal and she gave me a copy of *My Family and Other Animals* by Gerald Durrell, this kid who lived on an island off the coast of Greece way back before World War II. This kid never met a bug he didn't like, plus animals and birds. Plus his family was crazy. I can relate. It's kind of fun, or at least it would be if every time I put it down Kate didn't pick it up and start reading it. I don't mind living with her but I wish she'd keep her hands off my books. At least till I've finished reading them.

So anyway, this journal. I'm starting it even before school is out, that ought to get me extra points. I'm going to be like Gerry, I'm going to write about the birds and animals I see every day on the homestead. Like today I watched a moose calf in the willows out back of the cabin. Talk about disgusting, he sort of oozed out in this gooey sack and then his mom licked it off him. The calf is so tiny, I've never seen a moose so small. He was totally gross at first, all bloody and icky from being born. The cow kept licking him until he was clean and his hair was standing up in cowlicks (no, I know what that word means) all over his body and finally she nudged him to his feet. His legs were so skinny they looked like pick-up sticks. He couldn't stand up straight on them, one always kept bending out from under him and down he'd go on his nose. I couldn't tell if he was a boy or a girl. At first, I had to go get the binoculars to see if he had a penis. He did.

Kate keeps warning me not to get too close to the animals already, she'd probably freak if she knew I was going to write a whole journal about them. Vanessa says Kate's probably afraid a bear is going to rip my head off. If one smells that calf it could happen I guess. I'll be careful.

Van and I are looking for jobs for the summer. We both want to make some money, Van doesn't even get an allowance. I was thinking maybe we could find someone who lives in the Park who fishes in Prince William Sound who needs help picking fish. There's an old woman named Mary who's some kind of relative of Kate's who has a setnet site on Alaganik Bay. That would be cool.

Yuck!” The pool of slush covered the road from snow berm to snow berm and thirteen-year-old Andrea Kvasnikof had just stepped in it up to her ankle and over the tops of her brand-new, white and white Nike Kajs. “Ms. Doogan! Ms. Doogan, my shoe’s all wet!”

“This is where the leading edge of Grant Glacier was in 1778,” Ms. Doogan said, standing in front of a signpost surrounded by the seventeen students of the seventh and eighth grade classes of Niniltnah Public School. “Who can tell me what else happened in Alaska that year?”

“The Civil War started!” cried Laurie Manning, a redheaded virago who seemed always to be on the verge of declaring war herself.

“No, the Revolutionary War!” yelled Roger Corley, a dark-browed eighth-grader who wasn’t going to let some little old seventh-grade baby go unchallenged.

“Not a war, stupids,” Betty Freedman said calmly. Betty always spoke calmly, an unnerving quality in an adolescent. She didn’t peer over the tops of her glasses only because she had twenty-twenty vision and didn’t need them, but it was impossible not to imagine two round lenses perched on her nose, magnifying her big blue eyes and increasing her resemblance to an owl. With all that fine white blond hair, a great snowy owl. She even blinked slowly. “That was the year Captain Cook sailed Alaska, wasn’t it, Ms. Doogan.”

It wasn’t a question, it was a statement of fact. “Yes, it was, Betty,” Ms. Doogan said.

“He anchored in Turnagain Arm on June first,” Betty said.

Ms. Doogan made a praiseworthy attempt not to grit her teeth. It didn’t help that Betty knew much history as her teacher did, and sometimes more. Ms. Doogan glanced back to see Moira Lindbeck, the one parent she’d managed to coerce along on this field trip, roll her eyes. She faced forward quickly—it would never do to laugh—and continued up the trail, moving to the gravel shoulder to miss an ice overflow rapidly liquifying in this warm spring morning. Bare green stalks of wild rice clustered together in the ditch, loitering with intent, waiting for the temperature to get high enough to burst into bud. She paused next to another signpost and waited for the class to catch up. “This is where the leading edge of the glacier was in 1867. What happened that year?”

They all knew this and they said so in chorus. “The United States bought Alaska from Russia!” Somebody turned a cartwheel, kicking muddy water all over Andrea Kvasnikof’s lime green down jacket. Andrea did not suffer this in silence.

Betty Freedman waited for the furor to die down. “For seven point two million dollars.”

Ms. Doogan, the breeze soft on her cheek and the heat of the sun on her hair, felt suddenly more charity with the world and smiled down at Betty. Besides, she knew that behind her back Moira Lindbeck was rolling her eyes again. “Yes.”

“Seven cents an acre.”

Ms. Doogan transferred the smile to Johnny Morgan. The tallest boy in the class, with a serious brow beneath an untidy thatch of dark brown hair that fell into deep-set blue eyes, Johnny seldom volunteered information. He seemed older than the other students, and every now and then Ms. Doogan caught an expression on his face that she thought might indicate something between tolerance and scorn. She had the feeling that he was only putting up with her until the end of the school year. Indeed, he seemed merely to be marking time until the day he turned sixteen, when he could legally quit school. Which would be a pity, as Johnny Morgan was one of the brightest students she’d ever

had the privilege of teaching. She'd tried to reach him all year, but while he was unfailingly polite, he remained aloof. He did his work well and got it in on time in more or less readable shape, or as readable as you could expect from a kid living in a log cabin with no electricity. He was attentive and respectful, but she was always conscious of the shield he had erected around himself, high and wide and, by her, impenetrable.

"Seward's Folly," a small voice said. Ms. Doogan looked down in some surprise. Vanessa Coe was short, slight, dressed year round in Carhartt's bib overalls with a turtleneck beneath in winter and a t-shirt in summer. It was economical, Ms. Doogan supposed, and even a practical solution to dressing a child to go out in any weather in the Alaska Bush, but every time she saw the girl she had to repress an urge to break out the crinolines, or even just a lipstick. If it weren't for the delicate features of her face and the braid of thick fine dark hair that hung to below her waist, it would have been hard to tell that Vanessa was a girl. "That's right, Vanessa," she said, smiling. "Alaska proved them wrong on that, though."

Vanessa, rarely seen to smile, gave a solemn nod. She exchanged a glance with Johnny Morgan. Here, it seemed, was one person who had managed to reach through the shield. Good for both of them, Ms. Doogan thought. Johnny Morgan was only fourteen, but if her instincts were right, here was a young man with the ability to remind any young woman, no matter how deliberately neutered by his foster parents, just how female she was. And anyone as young as Johnny was all the better for a friend. Especially given that his father had been murdered a year and half before, and that he was estranged from his mother.

Ms. Doogan moved up the trail about ten feet. It was starting to get steep and the snow on either side of the trail to get higher. At the same time they could hear the sound of running water. "The glacier was here in 1898. What happened in 1898?"

Betty opened her mouth but Vanessa beat her to it. "The Klondike gold rush."

"Very good, Vanessa," Ms. Doogan said. "Have you been reading ahead in your history book?"

Vanessa gave her solemn nod.

"And you're remembering what you read. Good job."

Betty was much too mindful of the might and right of authority to do anything so *lèse-majesté* as pout, but Moira Lindbeck was close to dancing in the street. Ms. Doogan fixed her with a quelling eye and led the way to the next signpost. "In 1914, the glacier was—"

"World War One!" shouted Laurie Manning, capering up and down in excitement. Laurie had yet to master middle-school cool. "World War One! World War One!"

There was a soldier or soldiers in Laurie's future, Ms. Doogan thought with an inner sigh, but she smiled and said, "Yes, Laurie, World War One. Eric Kizzia, if you pinch Mary Lindbeck one more time, I'm going to pinch you myself, in the same place and just as hard. Knock it off."

Eric tucked prudent hands into the pockets of his corduroy jacket and did his best to look as pure as the driven snow. His grin was impudent and dimpled and it was hard not to grin back. He'd had a crush on Mary Lindbeck since the second grade, only temporarily sidetracked by luscious upperclassman Tracy Drus-sell last year. Eric's plan had been for Tracy to flunk until Eric made it into her class, but Tracy's family had moved to Anchorage instead, and in the interim Mary had grown breasts, which had effectively cut short Eric's mourning for Tracy. It also made it difficult to keep his hands to himself. If he'd tried to hold her hand, Mary would have shoved him into the ditch with the wild rice. Ignoring her was not an option. A pinch had seemed a safe compromise.

Mary, whose awareness of the male sex had undergone a sea of change in the last year, left her nose in the air but let the corners of her mouth indent in a tiny smile. Eric saw it and it was enough. Moira

Lindbeck saw it, too, and was struck dumb with terror.

~~Teenage hormones were bad enough, Ms. Doogan thought, as she led the class around a corner hopping from dry spot to dry spot on the trail as they went. Teenage hormones and spring was a lethal combination. Add in a parent who had just been made aware of her child's burgeoning sexuality and Ms. Doogan thought she felt the earth tremble a little beneath her feet, in either anticipation or apprehension, she could never decide. On the whole, she thought she might skip the planned lesson on the Romantic poets. They could do with rather less talk of young men and spring at Niniltna Public School at this time of year.~~

The trees opened up and the snow berms melted away and a small lake filled with icebergs dissolved into weird and wonderful shapes spread out before them. Between the bergs the lake was like a mirror reflecting the bank and the trees and the bergs and the Quilak Mountains and the sky above. She dropped a curtsy. "My class, meet Grant Glacier. Grant Glacier, allow me to introduce the seventh and eighth grade classes of Niniltna Public School."

This time the whole class rolled its eyes. She'd made them walk all the way up here, that was bad enough, but curtsying to glaciers? What next? Ms. Doogan was always doing weird stuff like that.

But she was kinda cool weird, Vanessa Cox thought. At least Ms. Doogan cared enough to get excited about what she was teaching. Vanessa shrugged out of her daypack to pull out her lunch. She sighed a little over the PB&J. Sometimes she thought it was the only sandwich Aunt Telma knew how to make. But there was also a cranberry-raspberry Snapple and a Ziploc bag full of Thin Mints, so her lunch wasn't a total loss.

Ms. Doogan paced up and down at the edge of the water, talking and gesturing with what looked like a tuna fish sandwich. Her students were sprawled on the bank facing her and the lake, eating and trying to look interested. Her light olive skin was already starting to tan in the spring sun, and her short bob of fine dark hair was beginning to frizz from proximity to the glacial lake. She looked like a poodle, Vanessa decided. Moriah, her best friend back in Ohio, had had a standard poodle, a huge black dog named Matisse. Matisse was interested in and excited about everything, especially after he'd eaten a sixty-ounce bag of Nestle's semi-sweet chocolate chips Moriah's mother had bought for Christmas fudge. Vanessa wondered if Ms. Doogan ate a lot of chocolate.

"Grant Glacier descends from what ice field?" Mrs. Doogan said. "Come on, guys, we talked about this in geology."

Vanessa knew the answer, but her teeth were a prisoner of peanut butter and she couldn't suck them clean in time to beat Betty Freedman to reply. "The Grant Ice Field."

"Correct. The Grant Ice Field, like the largest glacier descending from it, also named for Ulysses Grant, the nineteenth president of the United States."

"The eighteenth president," Betty said.

"The eighteenth, then," Ms. Doogan said amiably, "you got me, Betty. It was so named by a couple of Army lieutenants on a survey mission back in, oh, 1880, I guess it was, after the purchase anyway. They had served under Grant in the Civil War and they were probably hoping that if they named an ice field this big after their commander-in-chief that they'd get promoted."

Betty looked suspicious. She hadn't read that anywhere, and she doubted any information she had not seen laid out in columns in a textbook.

Grant Glacier was a wide ribbon of ice winding out of the Quilak Mountains, white higher up and black lower down with a blue layer sandwiched between the two. "Why's it black lower down?" Peter Mike said.

"Who remembers what happened on March twenty-seventh, 1964?" Ms. Doogan said.

There was a blank silence.

“Come on,” she said, and sang, “‘Rock and roll is here to stay, it will never die’—come on, you guys, you know this. Unless you’ve been propping your eyes open with toothpicks in class.”

Johnny Morgan finally opened his mouth. “Earthquake.” Anything to keep Ms. Doogan from singing again. Sheryl Crow she wasn’t.

“That’s right, Johnny,” Ms. Doogan said, beaming, “the Good Friday Earthquake of 1964. Ninety point-two on the Richter scale. One hundred and twenty-five people were killed, some by the resulting tsunami as far away as Oregon and even Hawaii. The biggest earthquake ever felt in the United States in recorded history. And, by the way, eight of the top ten biggest quakes in U.S. history have had their epicenters in Alaska. Little bit of trivia there for you.”

They knew better. Ms. Doogan’s trivia had a way of showing up on tests. Once more Johnny threw himself into the breach. “How’s that make the glacier black on the bottom?”

“That same quake caused the mountain right next to it to shake into pieces.”

“There is no mountain next to it,” Alan Totemoff said.

“Exactly,” Ms. Doogan said. “The resulting debris fell onto Grant Glacier, in a layer that was three feet thick.” She demonstrated with a hand at midhigh.

Even Betty Freedman was impressed.

Like any good performer, Ms. Doogan had them from that moment and she was quick to press her advantage. “The edge of a glacier is a case study in giving birth.”

Johnny thought of the baby moose and cringed inwardly.

“During the last ice age, glaciers advanced over much of the known land masses of the earth. They are now in recession. Look,” she said, pointing. “Glaciers leave rocks behind, every size from sand to boulder. What’s easiest to grow on rocks? Come on, we were talking about this on the hike up.”

“Lichens,” Betty said.

“Mosses,” Vanessa said thickly, wrestling the peanut butter into submission.

“Very good. Yes, mosses and lichens, which begin the process of breaking down the rocks to form soil. Not much, at first, but some, enough for—what, to take root?”

“Flowers!” cried Andrea Kvasnikof.

“And grasses,” Johnny Morgan said.

“Like lupine,” said Andrea, who had her eye on Johnny Morgan, if only Vanessa Had-no-right-to-exist Cox would get out of her way.

“Yes, like lupine,” Ms. Doogan said. “Talk to me about lupine. Anybody.”

“They’re purple,” Andrea said after a brief pause.

“They’re members of the legume family,” Vanessa said.

“Which means?”

“Legumes fix nitrogen in the soil.”

“And?”

“Nitrogen makes the soil more habitable for more complex plants,” Betty said.

“Like?”

“Like shrubs.”

“Give me an example of shrubs.”

“Willows.”

“Alders.”

“Cottonwoods!”

“Cottonwoods are trees, doofus.”

“And after the shrubs, what?”

“Trees!”

“Spruce trees!”

“Hemlocks!”

“Birches!”

“Christmas trees!”

Ms. Doogan waited for the laughter to die down. “Think about this, boys and girls,” she said, waving a hand at the glacier. “Seventy-five years ago? This little strip of beach we’re picnicking on was under the glacier. That’s right, under a big slab of ice just like that one. Your grandmas and grandpas couldn’t have had a school picnic here.” Eyes widened, measured the distance between the face of the glacier, a wall of ice a hundred feet high, and their beachfront picnic site. “Mother Nature doesn’t waste time in the Kanuyaq River basin. How many of you remember last summer, when Grant Glacier thrust forward right over the lake?”

Blank looks all around. Ms. Doogan tried not to let her exasperation show. These kids were living in the middle of a geological experiment in progress. If only she could get some of them to notice, they could go on to make a living from it one day.

They finished lunch and set out to explore. Ms. Doogan insisted that they go in groups of two or larger and stay in sight of her at all times, but beyond that they were free to wander as they chose, which added to the sense of it being more like a day off. Eric Kizzia ripped pages from his notebook and made paper sailboats to float in the lake, gathering other students to make a regatta out of it. Maria Lindbeck sat with her hands clasped around her knees and her face turned up to the sun. Others stretched out, some making notes, some napping.

“Hey, look, here’s a trail,” Johnny said. “It looks like it goes around the lake to the mouth of the glacier. Want to go?”

“Sure,” Vanessa said.

“I’ll go, too,” Andrea said.

“And me,” Betty said.

Andrea scowled.

Betty blinked.

Johnny and Vanessa exchanged martyred looks. Johnny led off, with Vanessa behind. Somewhere along the route Andrea elbowed Vanessa to the rear. She tried to walk next to Johnny but the trail was too narrow, so instead she relied on tripping and slipping a lot. “Thanks,” she said, the third time it happened. She smiled up at him as she used his hand to pull herself upright. “Sorry to be so clumsy.” She turned the smile on Vanessa, who looked more than usually wooden of face.

The next time Andrea tripped, Johnny stepped nimbly out of reach and Andrea went down on both knees. She didn’t mind bleeding as much as she minded getting blood on her brand-new Gap khakis. Her language was unladylike.

“Sorry about that,” Johnny said, only he didn’t sound sorry at all. “Hey, Van, look at this. Is this lupine?”

Betty shoved past both of them and peered at the slender green shoots, comparing them to the copy of Pratt’s *Field Guide to Alaskan Wildflowers* she held open before her on the palms of both hands like a priest consulting a sacred scroll. “*Lupinus arcticus*,” she announced in the manner of one handing down a prophecy. “Of the pea or *Fabacae* family. A perennial, which means it comes back every year.”

They gazed at her, stunned into silence by an oblivious self-assurance that allowed Betty to

convinced that they were as spellbound by the subject as she was. “The arctic lupine grows ten to sixteen inches tall, prefers dry slopes, fields, and roadsides, and is not to be confused with the Nootka lupine, which grows in Southeastern, Southcentral, and on the Chain.” She frowned down at the plant. “I can’t tell which this is. The pictures only show them in bloom.” She displayed the book accusingly.

“Yup, that’s lupine,” Johnny said, and Vanessa quickly followed his lead. “Lupine, definitely.”

Once more Andrea brushed ineffectually at the knees of her khakis and muttered dire imprecations to the fashion gods. Johnny watched her for a moment, and said, “Want to get closer to the glacier?”

“Sure,” Vanessa said, measuring the distance. “Can we?”

“Sure, the trail looks like it goes right up to it.”

“It could fall on us,” Andrea said.

“We won’t get that close,” Johnny said. Andrea hesitated, and he shrugged and turned, saying over his shoulder, “Stay behind if you want.”

Vanessa and Betty swung out onto the path behind him. Andrea bit her lip, and followed.

It was rough and rocky going, with treacherous bits of ice cleverly hidden by glacial silt on the surface, revealing themselves when trodden upon. A faint, translucent fog seemed to be rising up out of the face of the glacier, looming large and blue in front of them.

They heard a faint cry, and looked around to see Ms. Doogan waving at them from the beach. “Do you hear her?” Johnny said.

“Hear who?” Vanessa said.

“We’d better go back, we could get in trouble,” Andrea said.

Betty, caught between a natural inclination to succumb to authority and a congenital compulsion to amass scientific data, wavered.

“Come on,” Johnny said. “We’re almost there.”

In the end the four of them approached the foot of the glacier together. Where the moraine ended, the leading edge of ice had eroded into a yawning black cave, shallow, dark from the silt and debris embedded in it, an enormous, engulfing shadow in ominous contrast to the bright, sunny day a few feet away. It was melting so fast that the runoff sounded like rain. The gravel beneath, rounded smooth by millennia of glacial erosion, was wet and shiny. The cold and the moisture hit their faces like a slap.

“It’s like standing in front of an open refrigerator,” Andrea said.

Johnny didn’t look at Vanessa, the same way she didn’t look at him. Andrea lived in Niniltna, where they had electricity coming out of every wall plug. She didn’t live on a homestead, like he did, or on a defunct roadhouse site like Vanessa, or in the middle of a bison farm like Betty. Townies just had no clue.

Johnny peered into the interior. “Whoa,” Betty said. “You don’t want to get too close.” She pointed. “The face is calving all the time. Look at all that fallen stuff. Some of those pieces are pretty big. You don’t want to get hit.”

“Darn right we don’t,” Andrea said tartly. “Okay, we’ve been here, done that, let’s go back.”

“There’s someone in there,” Johnny said.

“Oh, come on,” Andrea said with a playful slap at his shoulder. “Stop kidding around.”

“I’m not kidding,” Johnny said, “there’s somebody inside, under the glacier.”

“What?” Betty and Vanessa crowded next to him, peering into the gloom. “Where?”

“Right there.”

They followed the direction indicated by his pointing finger, and out of the dim a figure coalesced, a dark outline, vaguely human, sitting bolt upright with its back to the ice where the ice curved in

meet the gravel. The figure appeared to be clothed. At least no flesh was gleaming whitely at them.

It also wasn't moving. "Um, hello?" Johnny said.

It didn't move. "Hello, you there inside the glacier," Betty said in an unconscious imitation of Mr. Doogan's authoritarian accents. "You need to come out from under the glacier. It could fall on you."

At that moment a shard of ice roughly the size of a brontosaurus calved from the face of the glacier and smashed to the earth outside in a thousand pieces, one of which narrowly missed Andrea, which after her own heart settled down, Vanessa thought was a darn shame. They all jumped and bumped into each other. Johnny swore. Andrea, of course, screamed. "You guys are nuts, you're all going to get squished! There's no one in there, no one would be crazy enough to go in there! I'm going back to the lake!"

The other three heard the sound of rapidly receding feet. The opening into the ice was still fresh. "Hello?" Johnny repeated. "You need to come out of there, whoever you are."

There was no response.

"Maybe they're dead," Vanessa said, articulating the thought uppermost in all their minds. "We should check." She stepped inside the open mouth of the cave. After a momentary hesitation, Johnny and Betty followed.

As they approached the sitting figure, their eyes adjusted to the darkness. It was a man, dressed in worn jeans and a Carhartt's jacket. His face was the blue-white of the face of the glacier, veined and mottled.

The hole in his chest was the size of a basketball.

You were idiots to go inside the mouth of the glacier in the first place,” the trooper told them in stern voice.

“That’s what I said,” Andrea said. She was fully aware of Jim Chopin’s many and manifest charms and she smiled up at him, using all of her own fledgling ones.

“But you did good when you didn’t touch anything, in getting Ms. Doogan to make sure no one else went inside, and in getting Mrs. Lindbeck to come for me.”

“It was Johnny,” Vanessa said. “Johnny did it all.”

Johnny’s shoulders had slumped beneath the trooper’s stern words. Now they straightened.

Jim grinned at him. “You must have picked up some crime scene smarts from your dad.”

They had to step to one side when Billy Mike and his son, Dandy, shuffled by with the body. The nervous titter that must have been equal parts amusement and horror was quickly suppressed. The body was frozen into a sitting position. Billy and Dandy had draped a tarp over the body but the shape itself looked lumpen and grotesque. It didn’t help that the tarp kept slipping, and that the face of the corpse kept peeping out at them, like a child playing hide-and-seek.

“Do you know who it is?” Johnny said. “Was.”

“It’s Mr. Dreyer,” Vanessa said.

Jim looked at her. “What?”

“It’s Mr. Dreyer, the handyman,” Vanessa said. She was pale but resolute. “He came last spring to rototill our garden.”

“You’re sure?”

She nodded. “His face wasn’t . . . I could see his face. It’s Mr. Dreyer. He helped Uncle Virgil build our new greenhouse, too, so I really do recognize him, sir.”

Billy Mike slammed the door of his Eddie Bauer Ford Explorer, new the year before and now looking as if it had been driven through the eruption of Mt. St. Helens, and walked back up the trail in time to hear Vanessa’s words. “Yeah, it’s Len Dreyer all right,” he said.

“Len Dreyer,” Jim said, writing it down in his notebook. “Vanessa says he’s a handyman?”

“Oh yeah,” Billy said. He pulled out a bright blue bandanna and mopped his forehead. “He does everything. Did everything. Wasn’t a machine he couldn’t run, from a Skil saw to a D-6. Or fix, if it was broken. He cleared my land so I could build my house, and then he installed the kitchen cabinets and appliances for me.” Billy shuddered. “I don’t mess with any kind of gas, not even propane. He did some work on the Association offices, too.”

“So, mostly construction work?”

“No, I said everything and I meant everything. He worked the sluice a while back for Mac Devlin out at the Nabesna Mine. He did some guiding for Demetri, or at least some packing, and Demetri said he was a hell of a cook. He fished when somebody needed a deckhand for a period. He installed the new bleachers in the school gymnasium, and did the electrical for the Native Association’s building. He was all over the Park.”

“Was he married?”

“Don’t think so.”

“Girlfriend?”

“Don’t think so.”

“Kids?”

“Don’t think so.”

“Where did he live?”

Billy brightened, glad to have a question he could answer definitively. “Got a snug little cabin up the Step road, about two miles north of the village.”

“How long had he lived in the Park?”

Billy shrugged. “Twenty years? Thirty? Like I said, he’s been around a while.” He gave Jim instructions on how to get to Dreyer’s cabin. “So?”

“So, take the body into town and get it on the first plane to Anchorage. Tell George the state is buying.”

Billy grinned. “He’ll like the sound of that. Especially when he can probably strap this body into a seat.”

Jim became aware of Ms. Doogan standing at his elbow. “Sergeant Chopin?”

“It’s Jim,” he told her.

“Jim,” she said, “I’d like to get my kids back to town.” She indicated the huddle of students halfway up the slope from the beach. They looked subdued. “You know the way the Bush telegraph works. The parents will start showing up any minute now.”

Ms. Doogan was right, and if the news had reached Bobby Clark, chances were it had probably already gone out over Park Air. The last thing Jim wanted was an exercise in crowd control, especially a crowd consisting of anxious parents, who were by definition never on their best behavior. He looked at Johnny. “Only you,”—he consulted his notes—“Vanessa, Andrea, and Betty went anywhere near the ice cave, is that right?”

Johnny and Vanessa both nodded solemnly.

The rest of the class sat huddled together. Jim closed his notebook and raised his voice. “Okay, kids, listen up. Most of you already know me, but for those of you who don’t, I’m Sergeant Jim Chopin with the Alaska state troopers. As you all know, the body of a man was found inside the mouth of the glacier. It looks like he’s been murdered.” He kept his voice matter-of-fact, and waited for the ripple of shock to settle. Andrea had broadcast the news in full voice, according to Johnny, so it wasn’t new to them but it was still a shock to hear the words out loud. “He was probably killed somewhere else and brought here, which means his killer could have dropped something that might give us a clue as to who he or she is. Did any of you find anything while you were wandering around?”

Jim waited long enough for the following silence to get a little uncomfortable. “Okay, the Alaska troopers are deputized for the duration. Anybody who remembers anything later on, doesn’t matter how small or insignificant or downright silly it seems, doesn’t matter when, I want to hear about it. You’re all deputized for the duration, okay?”

“Lame,” somebody muttered.

Jim ignored it. The effective practice of law enforcement required an aptitude for selective hearing. “I’ll go over the ground, but twenty pairs of eyes are always going to be better than one. Chief Bill knows how to get in touch with me.” He stepped back and nodded at Ms. Doogan, and she shepherded her charges to the trail and into a fast clip down the hill.

Jim sat on a convenient boulder, facing into the sun, and went over his notes. Len—Leonard?—Dreyer was a white male in his mid to late fifties. He hadn’t had a wallet but that wasn’t unusual in the Park, where there weren’t any ATMs requiring cash cards and where barter was the major method of exchange of goods and services anyway. A driver’s license might be needed once you hit Ahtna and the Glenn Highway, so you wouldn’t necessarily carry it around in your pocket unless you were

making a special trip outside the Park. Some Bush rats didn't bother getting a license at all because they didn't drive anything bigger than a four-wheeler or a snow machine.

There was a roll of bills totaling \$783 and sixty-seven cents in loose change—bet Dreyer didn't have a bank account, either—a moly bolt, three Sheetrock screws, one metal washer, half a roll of Wintergreen Lifesavers, and one of those miniature screwdrivers with interchangeable heads. There was a well-used Leatherman clipped to his belt.

Whoever had killed him hadn't gone through his pockets, or the money would have been gone. Or they didn't care, which made the crime personal. But then when was it ever anything else in the Park? Sometimes Jim thought he'd sell his soul for just one random, faceless welfare mugging, instead of the intermittent internecine warfare practiced by the denizens of the Park. With varying levels of enthusiasm and at different levels of intensity, true, but it was there in every clique, group, and gang, nonetheless, white, Native, old, young, male, female, subsistence, sport, or commercial.

Except Bobby. Good old Bobby Clark, a minority of one, a majority of mouth.

And Kate Shugak, a photograph of whom could be found in Webster's after the word "loner."

He didn't envy the medical examiner the task of determining how long Dreyer had been dead. The body had been cold and stiff, but then it had been sitting under a glacier for who knew how long. Rigor set in after twelve hours, held on for another twelve, and passed off in the next twelve, and Jim had the feeling that the body had been there longer than thirty-six hours. He hoped the medical examiner who drew Dreyer liked mysteries, because he was pretty sure finding a time of death wasn't going to be easy.

Well, if Dreyer was a handyman, he had to make appointments. Jim just hoped Dreyer's memo was bad enough that he'd had to write them down, and that an appointment book was to be found in his cabin.

"Len Dreyer?" Kate said.

Johnny nodded. "Did you know him?"

To the educated eye Kate would appear to have drooped a little in her chair. "He was the guy."

"Which guy?"

"*The* guy. The go-to guy. The guy everybody calls when they need help with a job."

"What kind of job?"

"Any job. Construction, mechanics, fishing, farming, mining, guiding. He could turn his hand to anything." She sighed heavily. "I was going to get him to help us build your cabin."

Johnny's voice was stern. "Somebody killed him, Kate."

She pulled herself together. "Yes, of course. Horrible thing to have happen. Awful. Shot, you said?"

"With a shotgun," Johnny said, not without relish. "In the chest. At point-blank range," Jim said.

"Jim was there?"

Johnny nodded. "I wouldn't let anyone else go into the ice cave until he came."

"Good for you," Kate said.

"That's what Jim said. He said I must have picked up some stuff from Dad."

She looked up to see a smile tucked in at the corners of his mouth, and felt an answering smile cross her face. "He's right about that," she said. If nothing else.

He opened a notebook. "I have to write in my journal now."

"Okay," she said. "Moose burgers for dinner?"

"Sounds good."

“Good, because it’s your turn.”

“Kate!”

She laughed but shook her head. “We agreed we’d trade off on the cooking. I cooked last night.” She nodded at the package of ground meat wrapped in butcher paper on the counter. “I got it out of the cache this morning, it’s thawed. But finish your journal first. I’ve got some stuff to do in the yard.”

He made a token grumble, but his head was bent over the journal before she had her jacket on. Mu had all one hundred and forty pounds pressed up against the cabin door, and she exploded outside as she had been shot out of a cannon, arrowing across the yard with her nose to the ground, tail straight out behind her like the needle of a compass. She vanished into the brush at the edge of the clearing like wood smoke into a blue sky.

The weather had hit the big five-oh two weeks before and it had stayed warm ever since. Kate stood for a moment in the center of the yard, face raised to a sun that wouldn’t set for another six hours. She loved spring. The May tree her father had planted was now thirty feet high and the dark green branches of the spruce trees were tipped with new, lighter green growth. A lilac and a honeysuckle were budding even as she watched, and a tamarack, the only evergreen to shed its leaves in the fall, was preparing to put forth new needles and cones. Her father had been a lover of trees, and she was still discovering species not indigenous to the Park that he had planted all over the 160-acre homestead. So were the moose, of course, but Stephan Shugak had planted enough trees to keep a step ahead even of their big bark-stripping teeth.

Forget-me-nots and chocolate lilies and western columbine and shooting stars and Jacob’s ladder and monkshood clustered thickly at the edge of the clearing and around the walls of the semicircle buildings—cabin, cache, garage, workshop, outhouse—fat with the promise of a colorful month to come. It was going to be one of those summers, she could feel it, a lot of sunshine, just enough rain to keep the garden watered, just warm enough for the wildflowers to run riot, just hot enough to get skinny-dipping in the creek out back.

She’d felt that way during previous springs and been proven wrong. Not this year, though, she was sure of it. She walked around behind the cabin, pausing to tap each of the six fifty-five-gallon drums stacked in a pyramid on a raised stand, connected to the oil stove of the cabin by a thin length of insulated copper tubing. They were all low, but it was coming up on warmer weather and it wouldn’t matter until fall, when the fuel truck made its last runs to Park cabins, businesses, and homesteads. The stand was getting a little rickety with age, and she added replacing it to the mental to-do list that had gotten longer and longer at this time of year.

A trail behind the drums led to a rock perched at the top of the steep path. The path climbed down to the creek below and the swimming hole the creek had carved in the bank. The rock was an erratic dumped there by some itinerant glacier and instead of putting it into orbit with a stick of dynamite, her father had left it where it was, a four-by-six-by-eight-foot misshapen lump of weathered granite. It was streaked here and there with the odd vein of white, glittering quartz that sparkled when the sun got high enough in the sky. The top of the rock was worn smooth from three generations of Shugak butting into which groove Kate’s fit comfortably. Due to a judicious thinning of trees and the precipitous nature of the cliff, the sun made a comfortable pool of golden warmth in which to sit and contemplate one’s navel, a pastime to which Kate was addicted.

The thinning of trees around the stone seat had been done by Len Dreyer. He’d done a good job of it. He had taken just enough trees to let the sun through, not so many as to look as if someone had come through with the blade of a Caterpillar tractor. Stumps had been cut to the ground, drilled and filled with an organic stump-rotting powder, with the result that they were already being overgrown by

raspberry and blueberry bushes and wild roses and of course the inevitable fireweed, with horsetail, forget-me-nots, and lupine fighting over what ground was left. Usually the trees and the brush formed a dark undergrowth impenetrable by eye or foot, close, confining, to some even claustrophobic; when Len Dreyer was done, the sun dappled a landscape of trees, shrubs, and flowers that, if it hadn't been tamed, was at least open to be admired.

That was the last big job Len had done for her. She'd been able to tend to other chores as they cropped up on her own, until Johnny Morgan had appeared on her doorstep and indicated his intention to embrace permanent Park rathood. Her one-room cabin with its sleeping loft was roomy enough for one person. With Johnny, it was getting a little crowded. They'd made it through the winter amicably more or less, and now it was spring with summer hard on spring's heels. They'd be spending most of their time out of doors, but autumn would come, when they would be driven back inside, first by rain and then by snow and then by the bitter cold of the long Arctic winter night.

And the Park was rife with stories of lifelong friends, entire families, and couples married and unmarried splitting the blanket over the effects of that long night on the psyche. Kate wasn't about to let that happen to her and Johnny.

Initially, the plan was to have added a room on to her cabin. The winter together had changed her mind. Or, truthfully, Johnny's. "Why not my own cabin?"

She didn't have a lot of experience raising kids, so she said unwisely, "Because I said so."

"That's not good enough," he told her, and, impressed by the lack of temper in the statement, she shut up and listened. They had been sitting across the table from one another, Kate sprawled back with her hand wrapped around a mug of cocoa, Johnny sitting up straight, torso precisely perpendicular to the edge. Kate was beginning to recognize Johnny's body language. This posture meant business.

"You're kind of solitary," he said. "You like living alone or you wouldn't be here on your dad's homestead in the middle of twenty million acres of national park, with the nearest village twenty-five miles down an unpaved, unmaintained road." He wasn't being confrontational or accusatory, exactly. It was more like he'd adopted the impartial air of the scholar. A sociologist, perhaps, come to the Park to examine non-mainstream socio-economic systems, about which he would then write his thesis, which would then earn him a doctorate, followed by a publishing contract, followed by a visiting chair at UC Berkeley, a college in a state which celebrated alternative lifestyles.

Johnny had continued to tick off items on his list, and Kate had reined in her imagination. "Even if Dad only visited, or you visited him in Anchorage, you never lived together. Right?"

"Right so far," she said obediently.

"I want to stay here with you. I'm not going back to Anchorage to live with her, and I'm sure as hell not going back to Arizona to live with my grandmother. I don't want to be anywhere else but here, and if I'm smart I'm going to annoy you as little as possible."

She couldn't help laughing a little. "You don't annoy me, Johnny."

He grinned. "Thanks, Kate. That's so sweet of you," and then had to duck when she'd thrown her spatula at him. "To tell you the truth, Kate, I'm feeling a little cramped myself."

Amused, she said, "Oh, you are, are you?"

"Yes. It's why I couldn't stand Arizona, too many people. Which is why I think I need a cabin of my own."

She raised an eyebrow.

"It doesn't have to be as big as this one," he said quickly. "No loft. Just room enough for a chair, woodstove, a sink, and a bed. Maybe a desk where I can study. Look," he said, and pulled out his notebook. "Like this."

He'd drawn a floor plan that bore a strong resemblance to the cabins at Camp Teddy, and showed signs of having been influenced by Ruthe Bauman, the camp's owner. Kate had to admit they had done a good job of it.

He took that as an opening. "It'd be a lot easier, a lot less labor-intensive to build a new, separate cabin than to add on to this one," he said.

"It'll cost more in materials," she said, more to test him than to contradict him.

"Not really," he said. "Look, I found a book on construction in the school library," and he hauled it out. "You add on, you gotta mess with stuff like the foundation, and then there's the roof." He slapped the book shut. "And think about having to live in the mess while the construction's going on. If we build me my own cabin, we can just live here until it's done, like we are now. I figure we could get it done this summer, and I could move in in the fall, when school starts."

He made a good argument. Still. "Johnny, I don't like this idea of a fourteen-year-old boy living by himself."

"I'll only be thirty feet away. I measured it last night, come on, take a look," and he dragged her into the yard. He'd been busy with strings and pegs, laying out a neat square on the other side of the outhouse, and had taken advantage of the mud to draw in the floor plan.

He watched her as she paced it out. She looked up to see the determined expression on his face, the sun slanting across it, making his blue eyes narrow, highlighting the untidy thatch of thick dark hair falling over his forehead, the stubborn chin. The strong resemblance to his father didn't hurt anymore. Well. Not as much.

Snow was melting inside the tops of her tennis shoes. "Let's go back inside."

They sat down at the kitchen table over new cups of cocoa. "I don't know," she said. "Kids are supposed to live with their parents."

"Not this kid," Johnny said.

"Yeah, yeah," she said, "let's not go there, okay?"

"I'm not living with her, I don't care what she does or says."

"I know, I know, calm down." Her was Jane Morgan, Jack's ex-wife, Johnny's mother and Kate's sworn enemy. Jane had placed Johnny with his grandmother in Arizona when his father had died, and he had liked it so much that he had hitchhiked all the way back to Alaska the previous fall. Kate, who had worked as a public investigator specializing in sex crimes for five and a half of the longest years of her life, knew exactly and precisely every awful thing that could have happened to a young boy on that journey. She still couldn't think of it without a chill running down her spine. He'd shown up in August with Jane hot on his heels. Somehow Jane had learned the location of Kate's homestead, so Kate had tucked Johnny away with Ethan Int-Hout, but Ethan's wife had returned with their two daughters and had returned Johnny to Kate with more haste than grace, citing a wholly imaginary lack of space. Johnny would have had hurt feelings had not the antipathy been wholly mutual.

Kate, deciding that running from Jane was not the answer, had settled him in on her homestead and prepared for a probably legal and undoubtedly expensive siege. Unskilled at saving money nevertheless she had made an obscene salary the previous year working security for an election campaign. She was prepared to spend it all if necessary to get and keep custody of Johnny. "Look out for Johnny for me, okay?" his father, her lover, had asked her the day he had died in her arms. It never occurred to her to do anything else.

In this, she had the tacit approval of the law in the Park, in the person of state trooper Jim Chopin who was currently involved in a building project of his own. Yes, the troopers were opening a post office in Niniltna, staffed by the aforesaid Chopper Jim, an event that in Kate's eyes drastically shortened the

twenty-five miles of road between the village and the homestead. It seemed to have a distinct effect on the regularity of her heartbeat and respiration, too, so she tried not to dwell on it.

“Okay,” she had said. “We’ll build you your own cabin.”

Johnny had been prepared for everything but capitulation. “What?”

She grinned. “But,” she said, and she leveled a forefinger for emphasis, “you eat here, you hang out mostly here, and I’m consulted if and when there are any overnight guests.”

“That works both ways,” he replied smartly.

She got up to rinse out her mug in the sink. “Dream on,” she said to the window, and had hoped that she hadn’t noticed the flush beneath the brown of her skin. The only downside to Johnny living with her was that now she had a witness when she embarrassed herself.

She was recalled to the present by the sun going behind the tops of the trees. The stone seat had gone cold, and she slid to her feet and walked back to the cabin. With Len Dreyer dead, she was going to have to put Johnny’s cabin up herself. This would require a rearrangement of her summer to-do list, some of which might have to be put off until the following year. She’d like to catch whoever killed Len Dreyer herself, and roast him—or her—over a slow fire.

She was on the doorstep, kicking the mud from her shoes, when a movement caught the corner of her eye. She looked up and saw a tall man enter the clearing. “Oh shit,” she said beneath her breath.

Mutt burst from the clearing and launched a joyful assault. The man laughed, trying to dodge out of the way of an enthusiastic tongue. When Mutt liked, she *liked*.

“What?” Johnny said, appearing in the doorway, a pen behind his ear, one finger marking his place in his journal.

“We’ve got company,” she said, and opened the door wide.

The far-too-familiar shark’s grin flashed out at her. “Hey, Kate.”

“Jim,” she said.

The grin, if anything, widened. “Your lack of enthusiasm is duly noted,” he told her. “Hey, Johnny.”

“Hey, Jim.”

Kate, noticing the answering smile on Johnny’s face, thought sourly that Johnny was still young enough to be impressed by the crisp blue and gold of the state trooper uniform, not to mention the Smokey the Bear hat. Although, come to think of it, she hadn’t seen Jim in his Smokey hat since before . . . well, since before last summer in Bering. He was wearing a dark blue ball cap with the trooper insignia on the crown and a noticeable lack of gold braid. And while he wore the uniform shirt, it was tucked into a pair of faded blue jeans, and the shiny half boots had given way to shoepacks, scuffed and muddy.

She looked up and saw him watching her. One dark blond eyebrow raised ever so slightly. She couldn’t help it, the flush crept right up her neck, over the thin white roped scar stretching almost from ear to ear, and into her face.

For some reason, it didn’t amuse him. The smile faded from his face and he said briskly, “I’ve got a job for you, if you’ve got the want ads out.”

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