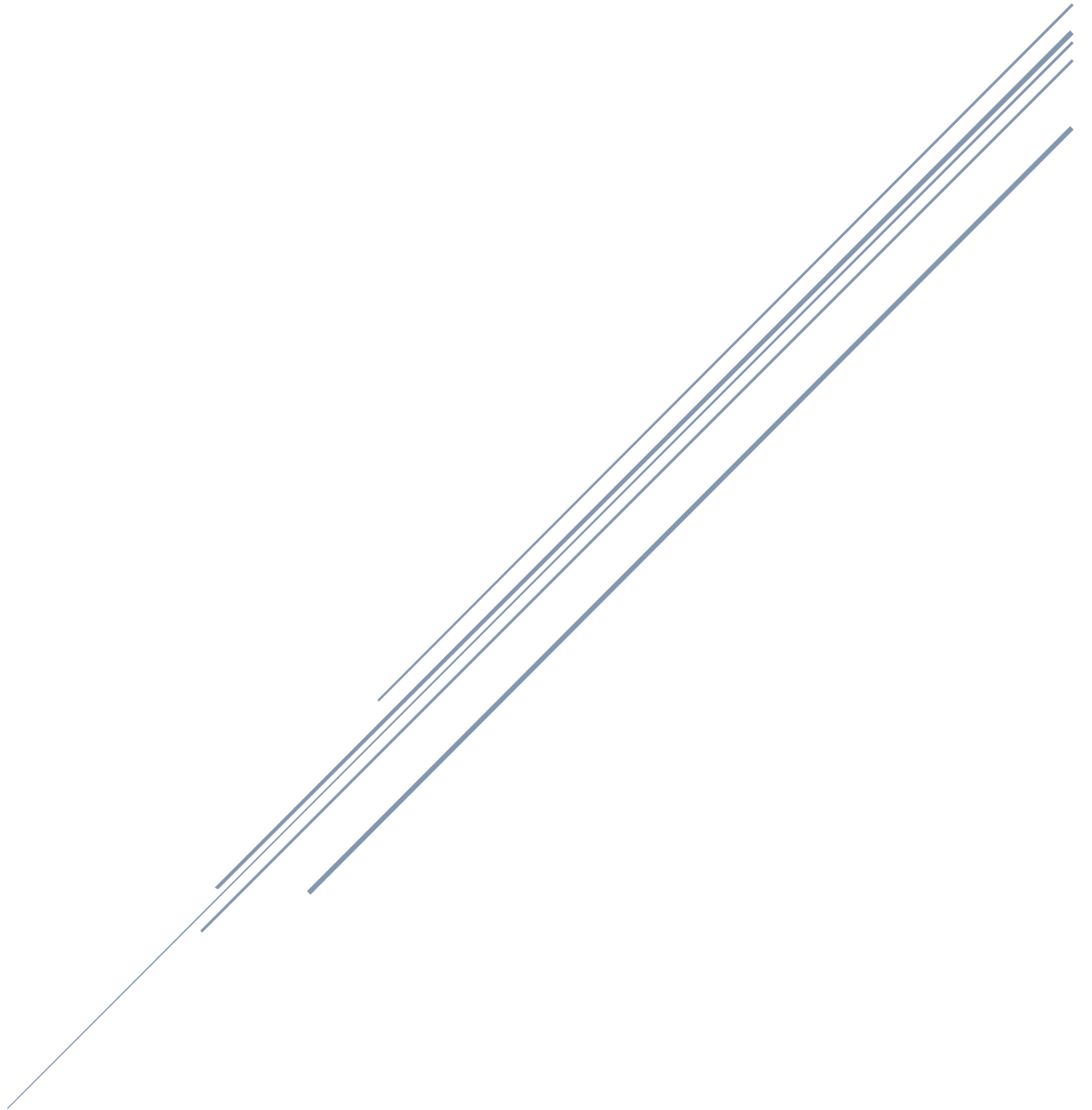


# The Forbidden Shore

CP Baudelaire



# Prologue

It's October 14th and the eagles are here. It's just now getting cool enough that you can see your breath when the sun slips behind the Takhinsha Range. There are still a few patches of residual seasonal greenery and flashes of explosive deciduous color left in the landscape, but everything is now slipping inexorably into the sere, muted palate of oncoming winter.

We've been living near Haines now for the better part of ten years and I still am awestruck by the arrival of those magnificent raptors, numbering in the hundreds, if not thousands. They're all over the shifting, complex, watery web of the Chilkat delta, perched in every available tree branch, on the rough gravel bars of the waterway and in amongst the deadfalls lining the banks of the river. The few Grizzlies which have not already slipped into hibernation are with us as well, their hulking, shaggy company a constant reminder of how truly wild this place is.

The eagles, the bears and I, we're all here for the same reason. It's the last salmon run of the year and the final chance to fill bellies and larders before the long winter. The Chum salmon are here for spawning, the final silvery visitors to the river this year. Serious snow could begin any day now and that means you have to hustle if you're going to be ready for the next cold, snowy six months.

I like coming out to the riverbank near dinnertime. Looking southwest, the Cathedral Peaks are backlit in brilliant orange and yellow as the sun drops below the ridge of the *Takhinshas*

and if I turn around, I can see the early snow cover on the peaks of Mount *Ripinski*, extending along the ridge of the *Takshanuk* Range northwards to *Tukgahgo* Mountain. In the late afternoon, those newly born snowfields appear almost molten in the failing, late fall sun.

I doubt I'll ever tire of those sights, nor of the rhythm that the change of seasons and the pulsing flux of salmon in the river imposes on our lives. Such are the simple things I take the most pleasure from. I have everything I ever wanted or needed, right here in this unspoiled glacial valley.

It's at these times I often reflect on my journey to this place and count my blessings, being where I am and whom I'm with. I also often turn my thoughts to the dark times of my youth and how those shaped everything that followed.

I'm not terribly introspective by nature, enjoying the cycle of my simple, day-to-day life most of the time. But I do occasionally wonder how I can distill what's happened in my past into some coherent picture. It's probably a wasted effort, for as the saying goes, "Man plans and God laughs." If there is one underlying theme in my life, though, I think it is secrets.

I believe that it's our secrets that make us who we are. Secrets of our own and those others withhold from us as well. How can you know who you are if those around conceal the past from you, even for the most compassionate of reasons?

This story is about secrets and the power that they have, for good or ill. It's also about how sometimes, against all obstacles, the heart finds its way to the truth and how those secrets are then banished into darkness, rather than causing it.

My life began with dark mystery and was surrounded by unspeakable deception, but along the way, those black ramparts were broken down and I found myself.

I also found someone else, someone who I thought I knew, but that was only partly true. In that discovery though, the circle closed again and what started with secrets ended with one all over again.

But for me, the ending secret is a great goodness. Most would never understand it, but that is not my concern. In telling my tale, I will share with you my most carefully hidden confidence and you can judge for yourself if it should have stayed buried within my heart.

So, let us begin with the genealogy of concealment and deception...

# Chapter 1

My name is Peter. Peter Heimdahl. Actually, It's Lars Peter Heimdahl, after my late, unlamented paternal grandfather. It was my Dad's idea and Lord knows, Dad always gets his way. Peter was the one concession to my Mom, Magda. That's the name of her late father, who she lost as a child. Magda Christine Heimdahl, nee Stenstrom, that's Mom.

Like me, she doesn't really like her first name, preferring to go by Chris. Dad also must not like it, because he's never used it to my knowledge. Come to think of it, I don't really recall him ever calling her by her middle name, either. I think he believes her name is "Get me another god damn beer!" Well, enough of that.

My so-called family has been living in or around Homer, Alaska since bestefar (grandfather) Lars' time, back in the late 40's and early 50's. While he was alive, he used to tell us about the times when there was no Highway 1 and what passed for the Seward Highway was a dirt track. This was back when Homer was a booming metropolis of around 350 souls.

My grandfather had a brother, Olaf, who came with him from the old country, but he perished in the Good Friday earthquake in '64, swept off the Homer Spit and out to sea by a tsunami. His body was never recovered.

My father's mother is a void, a complete cipher. Her memory is as insubstantial as blown snow, dispersed into swirling

nothingness. Dad never, ever talks about her. Depending on how you read the family tealeaves, either she ran away from my grandfather when Dad was around 6 or 7 years old, or she just...vanished.

What I do remember from my own childhood is that while Dad simply refused to discuss her, the mere mention of her name was enough to send my grandfather into a towering rage, followed by the blackest, bleakest moods imaginable. In those states, I think even Ingmar Bergman would have found bestefar Lars too depressing to be around.

Knowing my father's side of the clan the way I do, I don't envision my grandmother's happy escape from this family. I suspect her unremarked absence conceals a dark secret, a terrible mystery. Whatever her fate was, I hope my bestemor sees from on high that her grandchildren are not like the man she married or the beast her son has become.

For that, she would have my mother to thank.

Since all I can offer her is this mental cenotaph, my monument for my grandmother is to simply remember her name, so she is not forever erased from memory. Rest easy wherever you are, Ulla Marie Henriksen.

Beyond my paternal grandfather, I know next to nothing about my father's side of the family. Grandfather Lars and his brother, Olaf Heimdahl seemed to materialize in Alaska out of the arctic mist sometime after World War II and eventually

found their way to Homer, of all places. It's been described in the past as "As far as you can go without a passport."

I don't think I'll ever know the full story of how they came to be here, but I have a suspicion that the choice of the brothers Heimdahl to settle here was by design rather than chance. I've spent more than my fair share of time trying to understand my roots, but all I can say with even a modicum of certainty is that the Heimdahls, well, they simply aren't.

I believe that the two brothers took the name of a town near their old stomping grounds as a surname of convenience. I suspect that, as the town of Heimdahl is slightly south of Trondheim near my mother's birthplace, that this is where the connection to her side of the family lies and where my name comes from.

My grandfather and great uncle must have left Trondheim for good reason, though. There have been a few disquieting, cryptic clues among my bestefar's belongings. There's the old Luger, which by itself isn't particularly damning. But then there are the daggers, black-handled, with the Nazi eagle on the grip and the inscriptions etched on the still-sharp, cruel blades. One says "Blut und Ehre," or "Blood and Honor." The second is more disturbing: "in herzlicher Freundschaft, H. Himmler."

I may only be a high school graduate, but between my rough translation and a basic knowledge of history, I have to wonder why my grandfather has a knife inscribed with, "In Cordial Friendship," from one of the most evil men to ever walk the

earth. Then there's the scrap of an old uniform, with the sui generis skull and crossbones shoulder patch.

No, you don't have to be a genius to figure out that my grandfather was not a nice man. He was a man of secrets, secrets of surpassing darkness.

Just on this basis, I can see where my grandfather and granduncle would have needed to make themselves scarce when the war ended, but I have an inkling, a vague intuition that there's even more to this story, something even blacker than what can already be deduced. It's a notion that has troubled me in days gone by, but I have never felt compelled to look any further into those shadows of my ancestor's past.

The remainder of our family on my mother's side seems to be mostly living honestly as fishermen. It appears as though many relations of my mother have been making their living on the water of the North Atlantic from Stavanger to Trondheim for at least six generations. Although I've never been, I been told we have a whole flotilla of cousins, aunts and uncles once and twice removed still in that area of the Norwegian coast.

As far as the rest of my father's family is concerned, ignorance is bliss. I don't want, never want to know more about them. I value my sanity and self-respect too much to follow that bloodline any further.

So, maybe not so much of a family, but definitely fishermen to the bone, for better or worse. Speaking for myself, I really don't

have any deep affection for the sea, but fishing is what I know, like it or not. For reasons I'll explain later, I'm compelled to work with my father, and one way or the other, father always gets his way.

Mom doesn't talk much about her past. It makes me sad sometimes, that she won't share any of that with me, but I have deduced over time that her childhood was not a happy one. From what little I have been able to uncover on my own, I know that my mother's people were Sami, from near Trondheim, probably fisherman and trappers. She was raised by her maternal grandfather from the age of 13, after her parents died.

She's never told me what happened to them. The memory is too painful, I suppose. I've always had a suspicion though, that somehow my father's side of the family was connected in some strange fashion with what happened. It's just a feeling I have, but I can't shake it.

I suppose the feeling of things being not quite right also comes from not understanding how Dad's side of the family reached out all the way back to Norway from the then-tiny backwater of Homer and somehow plucked Mom up and brought her to the United States. It just feels...off somehow.

I've never had the courage or desire to push Mom to find out more. I desperately want to understand, but I long ago decided that it would have to be Mom who would make the decision to tell me.

I do know that she grew up poor and that it is likely that her marriage was somehow an arranged one. I don't know exactly how Mom and Dad ended up together, but she found herself married at the age of eighteen. About two years later, my brother Sig was born. Tack on another four years and you've got me. There was then another long gap and my baby sister Astrid appeared on the scene.

Mom became a naturalized citizen while she was carrying me. Her English is very good, but she still speaks with that wonderful, slightly musical Scandinavian lilt, her conversations still interspersed with Norsk vocabulary and expressions. Her sound of her voice is absolutely captivating. She could read from a phonebook and it would sound lovely.

Although her accent and some colloquial expressions she uses betray her origins, she has adapted remarkably well to the U.S. of A. If not for her beautiful accent, there are times when you'd be hard pressed to tell she's not a typical suburban Mom. She's even picked up a lot of American slang. I don't know where she dug it up, but she seems to delight in calling me her "big lug."

When you live in the shadow of Gunnar Heimdahl, my father, there's not much in the way of room for anyone else on the stage of life. We're all bit part characters and walk-ons in a play totally centered around dad's life on the water, whether it's summer charter work, the odd run of halibut or cod fishing or crabbing through the winter. For him, it would be inconceivable and completely unacceptable for any of us not

to totally dedicate our lives to supporting his work. That's how he is, intolerant, dictatorial, overbearing and just plain mean. I'm ashamed to call him blood.

My father is a big bear of a man in his fifties, about 6'4", with an impressive beer gut, long, lanky black and gray hair and a fearsome-looking beard. Powerfully built, he is still strong as an angry grizzly, but gradually going to fat. He has the coldest, deadest, pale blue eyes you'll ever have the misfortune to stare into. There's not much that's recognizable behind them, except when he's mad, which is pretty often.

Then you can see the devil himself.

I've been working as a deckhand on Dad's boat, the Anna Katarina, since I was 18. I graduated from Kenai Peninsula High School on a beautiful, sunny June 9th day and on June 11th, found myself 50 miles southeast of Sitkinak Island on the Albatross Bank, nosing through fifteen foot swells and dense fog while fishing for cod.

With the exception of breaks for maintenance, inter-seasonal downtime and the odd holiday, I've been on board ever since. I don't think that Dad really cares if he's back in Homer or not. He lives to be on the sea. I'd be surprised if he's actually in our house for more than twenty or thirty days out of the year, and then usually no more than five or six days at a time.

Me, I get homesick sometimes. I'm always looking forward to getting back to our small place, even if only for a couple of days.

Mostly, it's because I miss Mom.

Why would a twenty four year old man, hardened by the better part of six years on the Gulf of Alaska and the Bering Sea feel this way? I'm no Mama's boy, but this woman has been the center of my life for as long as I can remember.

She's the one person in the world I feel safe in showing myself to. I can and do tell her everything in those brief times we can be together. If I wasn't able to do that, I'd go mad; mad with frustration, anger and despair at the course of my life and the trap I feel myself to be in.

God forbid that I would ever let Dad have an inkling of who I really am, or what I truly think. My father is a hard, uncaring man. He drives all of us to the limits of endurance every day we're on deck, with no thanks or acknowledgment for work well done.

He's crude, cruel and heartless, but also crafty and manipulative. He has a sixth sense for a person's emotional Achilles' heel and never fails to press home any advantage he gains from that knowledge. Even so, he knows me only a little better than any other member of the crew, except for one bit of extra knowledge. He uses that to keep me on the boat.

Dad knows how close Mom and I are.

How could he not, even in the short times he is on shore in our home? He has never said or done anything directly or obviously, but through many veiled comments, innuendos and clever, half-finished remarks, he has managed to imply a clear, chilling threat to me.

The events surrounding the departure of my older brother from the family still sting him, so the unspoken subtext is clear - stay with the Anna and everything will be fine. Leave if you dare, but then you'll have to "worry" about your mother's health.

So, I stay.

I stay through forty-hour stretches of hauling and setting pots, storms that would make Davy Jones himself puke his guts out and bitter, bone cracking cold. I stay, because I know my father is not a man to make idle threats. Once a warning is issued, he won't talk again - he'll act, and act with a cold ruthlessness that would take the breath away from a Mexican Cartel chieftain.

I've often wondered how it was that Mom ever came to be married to this brute. Knowing her as I do, her quiet strength, her determined optimism and carefully concealed, but fierce, courageous spirit, I can't even begin to comprehend what

horrible twist of fate must have brought them together in the first place. Mom would no more willingly marry a man like that than she would cut her own throat.

When it comes down to it, I'm left with the forlorn hope that at some point in the past, Dad was a different person. If I'm going to be completely honest though, I think that's a fool's dream. The reality is more likely that for the Heimdahl men, the apple doesn't fall far from the tree.

At this stage, I have no real clue what keeps them together. It could be as simple as the fact that Mom could force the sale of the Anna Katarina in the event of a divorce. Given father's obsessive control of the family finances and his legendary iron-fist, I think this must be part of the explanation, but my gut tells me there's more, much more.

In any event, when I think about Mom and Dad splitting up, I get a chill up my spine. I think that my father would never sit still for such a blow to his ego. And then, I inevitably think about the unacknowledged absence of my paternal grandmother. Beyond that point, I dare not let my thoughts continue.

It's a bitter thought that it is fear alone that keeps Mom tied to my father. I sometimes fantasize that Mom must have a hold of her own on Dad, something that gives her some of her own leverage, something that keeps her relatively safe from the worst of Dad's temper and sadism.

Whatever it is, I speculate that it must be a deep, black secret of the worst sort; the kind of hidden rot that a man like Dad would do anything to keep from seeing the light of day. Knowing Dad as I do though, I can't see him sitting still in the face of a threat of any kind - he'd much more likely take matters into his own punishing hands than sit still for any kind of blackmail.

So, I guess when it comes down to it, I really do believe that Mom has some way of protecting herself, which gives me a little comfort. Even so, I still wonder if Dad is just biding his time, weighing all of the variables and risks on the scale of his ice-cold heart.

When I lie in my berth on the Anna, tossed in my clammy, soggy bedding by rough winter swells, my mind often turns to this question. I worry that the marital cold war between my parents is inherently unpredictable, wherein the only stabilizing influence is that of mutually assured destruction.

The detente Mom shares with him must be grounded in the mutual knowledge of some truly horrible secret, and I fret endlessly that if that secret exists, the threat of its use will eventually take its toll on her, dragging her down to his Stygian level.

Worse yet is the idea that perhaps Dad has more to hurt Mom with than just his words and fists. Does she have some secret of her own, something terrible in her own past?

I can't bear that thought.

## Chapter 2

Dad makes the lion's share of his money crabbing, but like most everyone else here in these parts, he does other stuff in the off season to keep his cash coming in. So, in the summer we use a smaller boat Dad owns to ferry "sports" fishermen from the lower 48 out to the halibut and keep busy. Relatively speaking, it's a good break.

At just under 90 feet, the Anna Katarina is one of the smaller boats that crab in the winter. I don't need to tell you what that's like. Everyone's seen those reality shows, but they don't even come close to describing what it's like working for Dad in the Bering Sea in January.

We go through a lot of crew, pretty much turning everyone over every couple of years. Dad works his men to death and underpays them to boot. In the six years I've been working on the Anna Katarina, I've been bullied, coerced and shoved into the role of Dad's deck boss, simply because we can't get anyone else of experience.

So, we have more than our share of greenhorns, slackers, malcontents and men on the run. It makes for poor performance, poor catches and a barely decent living in what should otherwise be a prosperous business. We've been doing okay the last 18 months since I became deck boss, not because I'm that great at it, but because I'm able to be a little bit of a

buffer between Dad and the deckhands. That means I get most of the abuse, but I can deal with it.

There were times when I was younger, working summers on the Anna, where I would come home sore all over, covered with more cuts, bruises and scrapes than I could count. When Mom patched me up, I'd just tell her that I'd fallen, or some other BS. But she knew, oh yes, she knew, even though she never said anything.

She didn't have to. I might infer it from her carefully neutral expression, but she could never hide the sadness and unspoken apology in her eyes.

The one time she ever confronted my father about it, he got nose to nose with her and casually pushed her onto the sofa, saying, "Mind your fucking house, woman. Boy's gotta be made into a man. Kid's damn near useless anyway, needs to grow a pair and learn how it's done. That's my job and none of your goddamn business how I go about it. Cross me again and you'll regret it," he'd hissed, the devil in his eyes once more.

I never blamed Mom for not standing up to him, though. She's only about 5'8" or so and slender as a reed. Dad could have killed her outright with just one punch and he was certainly mean enough that I could see it happening. So Mom kept her peace and I kept mine too.

In point of fact, Dad is just the kind of guy who would use a loved one to get back at anybody who dared to stand up to

him, so the last thing I wanted was for Dad to take out any anger he might have had at me, on her. Even so, Mom was always there for me and I adored her for it, for her unconditional love and quiet courage and her belief in me, that I was a decent guy and wasn't going to turn out like my feared father.

One day, when I was fourteen, I found Mom crying in the bathroom, head in her hands. Unusually, Dad was home, a stripped turbine having forced him ashore. As usual, he took his frustration out on her. He was a master of verbal abuse and in actuality, had rarely ever raised a hand against Mom, but he had the harshest tongue I ever saw in a man. He knew just how to cow a gentle soul like Mom and flay her with cruel insults.

I hugged Mom and just sat with her until she was able to compose herself. When her tears stopped, I asked, "Why is Dad so mean to you, Mom?"

I can still remember every word of her reply. It was the first time she had ever spoken to me as an adult, without any hollow reassurances or feeble excuses for Dad's behavior or his long absences.

Harking back to the beloved Norse mythology she used to teach me when I was little, she said, "Your father has a black, angry heart. He's like a ravener, a berserker of Ragnarok. He lives for the pain he gives others and loves arguments and confusion. He feels chained to his existence, just as Loki was chained."

"But I am no Sigyn," she'd added coldly. "I do not collect the serpent's venom in a cup to protect him. I do not shield him from the anger and hate that the world reflects back on him. Some day, a curse will fall on him, just as it did to Loki. Then where will he be?"

"I wish I had Mjolnir, Mom. Then I could be like Thor and teach him a lesson," I said bravely.

Mom startled at my reply and then grabbed me roughly by the arms, staring at me intently, fear in her face.

"Never, ever cross your father, Peter. He is a dangerous, cruel man and will not care one bit you are his son, if you anger him. It might even be worse because you are his family. Promise me," she pleaded, looking away, tears of worry in her eyes.

"Promise me never to confront him. I couldn't bear it if he hurt you. It would break my heart, kjaereste sonn," she pleaded, hugging me to her breast with a shudder.

Now, I suppose most guys at that age would have been embarrassed to be held like that by their mothers, but it didn't bother me. Mom and I were close because of Dad. We relied on each other for comfort and support.

At that time, my older brother, Sig, was already six months gone. Dad was expecting him on board the Anna the day after his graduation from high school. That didn't happen. After he walked off the auditorium stage with his diploma, he gave Mom a hug and kiss, clapped me on the shoulder, gave me a suffocating bear hug and told me to watch out for her.

Then he took a suitcase out from under a tarp in the pickup bed and walked straight to a waiting taxi.

"The airport," I'd heard him tell the driver. Less than an hour later he was in the air, bound for Anchorage. A month later he wrote Mom, telling her he had enlisted in the Coast Guard. He progressed quickly up to E-3, working the station at the Columbia River Section, down in Warrenton, Oregon. He writes to Mom fairly regularly, but we haven't seen him now for over ten years. Mom misses him a lot, but understands. She says he swore to her that he wouldn't set foot in Homer again as long as Dad was alive.

Of course, from that point forward, Sig was dead to my father as well. Predictably, he took out his anger at my brother's perceived treachery on Mom and me. To this day, Mom still has to hide his letters to her.

We don't talk about my baby sister, Astrid, at all. She died at the age of four, almost seventeen years ago, from acute lymphoblastic leukemia. She passed in the middle of King Crab season, while Dad was fishing for Blues up near St. Matthew's Island. Needless to say, he didn't make the funeral. It was just me, Mom and Sig. I guess he didn't have much use

for females, beyond creating more sons for him to work to death. When little Astrid departed this world, she took a good chunk of Mom's heart with her.

Anyway, I never begrudged Mom's need to hold me or be close. If I'm going to be totally honest, I think I would have to admit that it was after that bathroom conversation with Mom that I began the slow, inexorable process of falling in love with her, even though I didn't recognize it at the time.

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Once aboard the Anna, I quickly learned to read Dad's moods, recognizing when his temper was most frayed, how to dodge the worst and make myself scarce when I could. I learned my assigned jobs, not because I was afraid of the beatings, but because it was what I had to do. I never figured that I'd do anything different than what most everyone else in the family had done. Mostly though, I stuck around because of Mom. I didn't want to leave her alone with Dad.

I was afraid for her.

Looking back on it, I guess I learned a lot in the time leading up to my 24th birthday, because the funny thing is, Dad's a hell of a seaman. In the wheelhouse, riding 30-foot seas and fighting 60-knot gales, he's in his element. The black-hearted SOB knows where all the fish and crabs are, too. He's forgotten more tricks on finding his catch than most guys remember from a lifetime on the water.

But in spite of his skills, he never does truly well, since his crews are usually the dregs. I do what I can to keep things going smoothly, but my real priorities are elsewhere. That's not to say I'm not careful with my job, though.

As deck boss, I'm responsible for the safety of all the hands when we're hauling catch. If they don't get taught their jobs properly, if there's not enough supervision, people can get seriously hurt or killed.

In the fifteen years leading up to my eighteenth birthday, Dad had lost three crew overboard and had some half dozen or so medical evacuations by helicopter. I'm proud to say that since I've taken over the deck, we haven't had one incident. I've recommended firing a few layabouts and dangerous idiots but strangely, Dad has backed me on those decisions. He may be a malign thug, but he's nobody's fool. Fewer accidents mean more crab in the hold. It's that simple for him. Nothing else matters.

## Chapter 3

Unbeknownst to Dad, since I turned eighteen, I had been writing in my spare time, something that grew out of Mom's longstanding encouragement. Probably as an escape, I was a voracious reader growing up and I had discovered an aptitude for storytelling during my English classes as a sophomore. My teacher, Miss Hester, had let Mom know. With their support, I worked on my writing skills, showing them my work. Needless

to say, we concealed all this from Dad. God forbid that one of his sons would not make a living on the water, worse yet, using his head.

Almost five years ago, I had started a novel, semi-autobiographical in content. It was a pretty conceit, a modestly educated high school graduate thinking he had lived enough to justify such a story, let alone write about it, but a little less than six months ago, it was finally done. I had written it for myself, a dark outlet for my worries and frustrations and growing despair over my future.

I had shown it to no one.

Looking back on things, I can see that I unconsciously buried some dark confessions and longings in that story, things that in real life, I kept even from myself, lest I hurt and alienate the one person in my life that mattered more than any other. When I typed the last page of my self-therapy, I put a printed copy in a box, taped it closed and put it in the back of my closet.

The writing gave me a temporary surcease from my unhappiness and my barely acknowledged and poorly understood desires. Once finished, I then moved on, or so I thought.

What I didn't know at the time was that Mom was secretly reading it as I finished the project. She put a copy of the manuscript in Miss Hester's hands. In turn, she had passed it onto a classmate living in Seattle, who had an in-law who

worked for a major publisher. Some time around the end of September, the story found its way to the desk of an assistant editor who was looking for new talent. The editor then began the process of backtracking to find the unknown author and subsequently, as we were hauling in the last pots of the Red Crab season, a letter I was unaware of began making its way towards Homer.

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Dad had actually hit his quota that December, for the first time in quite a while, and we found ourselves steaming through sporadic, ferocious snow squalls into Dutch Harbor five days shy of Christmas. As you might imagine, in our family, the holidays were a custom more honored in the breach than the actual celebration, Dad usually struggling right up to the end of the King Crab season to get what he could in his holds.

This time though, I was going to go home to spend it with Mom, crabs be damned. I had stayed on for a day and a half at Dutch, supervising the setup of the Opie pots as usual, making sure that they were prepped and ready to be loaded on board and then hopped a flight back to Homer, by way of Anchorage. I was damned lucky with the weather. At that time of the year, the airport can be closed for days at a time. Dad was unusually magnanimous, only haranguing me for a half hour or so when I told him my plans.

I think the only reason he didn't completely blow a gasket was because he felt like celebrating and was going to have a bit of a bender while I was gone. This represented a new low, as he

was avoiding going home fully for the first time I could remember. In the past, Yuletide would usually find him home for five or six days, not that things would be happy and cheerful in the bosom of his family.

I knew that any binge he embarked on was likely to be a long, solitary and angry epic, because I couldn't think of a single fellow captain who would drink with him. Anticipating a bad outcome, I had my taxi stop at the police station on the way out and I gave the good folks there a heads up. Dad's legendary temper had gotten him in enough trouble in the past when sober, so I felt obligated to do my part to protect life and property in the Harbor vicinity.

What with the imminent arrival of all of the TV idiots for the start of Opie season, I was sure Dad would be spoiling for a confrontation, especially if he was in his cups. I gave the local LEO's our phone number in Homer and told the deputy on duty that I'd be back in four days to bail him out if anything untoward occurred.

Conscience clear, I made my way to the airstrip, calling Mom just before I boarded. Seven long and boring hours later, I found myself on the tarmac at home, eyes watering from a steady 30-knot wind blowing across Kachemak Bay. By Alaskan standards, it really wasn't that uncomfortable, around 25 degrees, but between the 4 pm sunset, a few swirling flurries, a heavy, scudding overcast and the marine humidity, the cold found its way into my bones with disconcerting ease. I was soon sorry I had left my heavy parka back at Dutch.

Surprisingly, Mom was there, waiting for me, in the company of our nearest neighbor, Hilda Halstrom. A few quick steps had her in my embrace and I gleefully swung her feet off the ground, raising her to eye level as I kissed her forehead.

"Jesus, it's good to see you Mom! I've missed you so much!"

Serving up a kiss that seemed to accidentally glance off the corner of my mouth, Mom blushed like a schoolgirl and sighed happily.

"I've been counting the days, Peter. I honestly didn't expect to see you so soon, you know," she confessed, putting her arms around my neck. We just stood there, grinning like fools for a full minute, just drinking in the sight of each other while Hilda looked on, smiling warmly.

After a five plus seasons working the pots, Mom felt like a dainty paperweight in my arms. It seemed like I was hardly holding anything, until she kissed my cheek one more time to get my attention.

"Peter," she said quietly, "You can put me down now."

"Peter!"

"Wha... hunh, Mom?" I stuttered, lost in her eyes.

"I said you can put me down now, you big lug," she scolded affectionately.

"Ooops, sorry Mom," I apologized sheepishly. "I forgot. You're so light, I hardly notice when I hold you."

"Besides," I added gallantly, "Why would I want to put down the prettiest girl between Juneau and Anchorage?"

Slipping her arm around my torso, Mom leaned into me, propelling us towards the terminal, our hips bumping as I reflexively put my arm around her waist.

"You should be ashamed of yourself, Peter," she scolded me, "Flirting with your own mother like that."

Nodding good-naturedly at her admonishment, I said, "When have I ever NOT flirted with you, Mom?" Grinning, I turned to Hilda for confirmation and support.

"Peter has always been the sweetest talking young man in Homer, Chris, and well you should know it," Hilda laughed. "He's started making goo-goo eyes at you when he was four years old, and he hasn't stopped since."

"If he spread around one tenth of those honeyed words elsewhere in town, he'd have been, uhm, loved to within an

inch of his life by all the women who want to jump his handsome bones," Hilda chuckled, giving me a surreptitious wink and batting her own eyelashes theatrically.

"Hilda!" Mom exclaimed, scandalized. "This is my son we're talking about! This is Petey!"

"More's the pity, Chris, more's the pity."

"Jesus Kristus," Mom muttered. "My best friend is trying to seduce my own son, right under my nose!"

Desperate to redirect the conversation in a less embarrassing direction, I broke in, "What brings you down here, Hilda? Are you expecting someone as well?"

Mom quickly replied before Hilda could say anything, speaking in low, tight tones.

"The truck broke down last Monday and there's not enough money in the account to pay for it."

"What's the problem, Mom? Won't Bert let you pay on installment like last time?"

"Bert's done with that, Peter," she said flatly, letting out a gusty sigh. "You know he charges a little bit of interest for the

favor, which I've always been happy to pay, but last time around, your father found out about it. He nearly got into a fight with Bert over a lousy extra twenty dollars, he was so upset. It took three people to keep Gunnar off him and even then, I had to rush down to the shop in person to persuade Bert not to file charges."

"So, that's not an option any more," she concluded somberly. "Hilda was kind enough to give me a lift so I could welcome you home properly."

"Thanks, Hilda," I said appreciatively. "That was above and beyond. It was great to be able to see Mom getting right off the plane."

"Nonsense, Peter," she said dismissively. "It's the least I could do for my best friend and her handsome son."

While we walked through the terminal and to the parking lot, I kept my arm around Mom. She seemed happy to stay close, leaning her head against my shoulder as we made our way to Hilda's SUV.

Squeezing me tightly, Mom spoke apologetically, "I'm sorry that you couldn't give me any more warning you were coming, Petey. I hadn't planned to do anything fancy, since I didn't know if or when you'd be coming home. The cupboard's a little bare," she concluded mournfully.

Reading between the lines, my face tightened in a grimace of disappointment and anger, but I squeezed Mom back reassuringly, after carefully blanking my expression. Dad was as tight-fisted with his money as he was generous with hurtful words and insults. He doled dollars out to Mom from his business accounts as he saw fit, and if Mom went without new clothes, grocery money or emergency funds for things like the car, well, tough shit.

I knew that some time in the next few weeks, some of the King Crab payout would trickle down to Mom, but exactly when was solely on Dad's whim. This time, I figured it might be longer than usual. He'd still probably be pissed at me for taking a few days off, and since I was seeing Mom in those begrudged days, he'd likely take his anger out on her.

Fortunately, I had anticipated such an occurrence and was prepared. Sitting in my jacket pocket was my share of the Red Crab money, a cashier's check for close to twenty five thousand dollars. It's customary for crab money to change hands as quickly as practical once the catch has been offloaded and weighed.

Dad hated it, but he had to play and pay by those rules. He might occasionally get away with jerking the crew around for an extra day or two, but if word got around that he was shorting his own son and erstwhile partner, he'd be permanently crew-less in short order. So, I had my check in hand and was prepared to put it to good use.

Long ago, I had gotten a belly full of the short leash Dad had placed on Mom and this time around, I was finally going to do something about it. After I threw my duffel in the back of Hilda's beat up Xterra, I slid into the back seat next to Mom, saying, "Hilda, do you mind if we make a couple of quick stops on the way back? I need to get to the bank before it closes and I want to speak to Bert."

Hilda nodded her assent cheerily, flashing me a big smile.

"You're a good son, Peter. Your Mom needs a man she can count on to take care of her, and you fill the bill nicely."

I reddened and ducked my head and Mom took the opportunity to kiss my cheek again, making me blush even more.

"My knight in shining oilskins," she teased, squeezing my thigh with a slight caress.

Suddenly, I had reason to be even more embarrassed - I started to get an erection, my cock slowly expanding and burrowing down my pants leg! I was initially mortified that Mom's touch had provoked such a reaction, and at first I dismissed the discomfiture out of hand, reasoning that six weeks on the high seas can do that to a fella.

That helped me cope somewhat, but somewhere else, in a particularly deep and dark corner of my subconscious, I could

hear another small voice whispering. That whisper floated just above the mental flotsam and jetsam created by my arousal, but for all of the softness of that little voice, its message ended up echoing in my head as loudly as a shout.

I welcomed Mom's touch. It made me feel good.

It made me want to touch her too, in ways no son should ever contemplate.

I could be as consciously and appropriately upset as I wanted, that those thoughts were there, but the real truth was finally rearing its monstrous head, rising to the front of my mind for the first time after close to a decade of lurking. Those thoughts were proving difficult to deny, very difficult indeed.

I didn't love my Mom, I was starting to love her. Like a man, like an ardent suitor. And suddenly, I wanted her, wanted her with a heated passion and desperate desire that threatened to sear away my entire conscience in a flash, leaving behind the scorched remnant of my soul, like the charred silhouette of a Hiroshima body shadow.

I was in trouble; deep, dark, no-shit trouble and I knew that these new feelings that had surfaced could not be tucked away and forgotten again. Worse yet, I had to admit that a growing part of me didn't want those feelings to go away. It was as though I had taken a seed long-kept in storage and put it in warm, welcoming earth. It was going to germinate, going to

sprout and grow, and there was nothing I could do to stop that from happening...no.

"No it's not!" I thought, gritting mental teeth. "This is my Mom. Not going to happen. Can't happen. Out of the question. Slam that idea in a trunk, triple lock it and throw it in the darkest, deepest hole in my brain. Never again. No thoughts like that ever again," I ordered myself silently.

While those ideas ricocheted around my head like a stray bullet, I had a more immediate problem.

Mom's hand was still on my thigh, lightly sliding over the rough fabric of my Levis. With the pattern her fingers were tracing, it wouldn't be long before she encountered my twitching divining rod. I'd be busted for good, my trip home over before it even started. I held my breath, praying that she'd stop soon, like anytime, like right now, like ten seconds ago...

Dear God, it's happened, fingertips right over my glans, my hardness so obviously there, with undeniable, lead-pipe certainty. But wait, no pause, no apparent recognition on her part. Maybe the slightest, barest slowing in her movements, but maybe not?

She didn't notice?

Impossible!

I'm no porn star, sporting a gigantic, throbbing Kielbasa, but I've been told by more than one lady that my Maker was generous to me, providing that which would give any lover undeniable pleasure. There is no way that Mom could not recognize the obvious pulsatile contour in my pants leg, no way!

There, now, finally! She's stopped, simply resting her hand on my leg. No pulling back as though scalded, no sharp, shocked intake of breath, praise God. Fearfully, I darted a quick look to her face. Thank you Jesus, she's not looking at me, no embarrassed blush on her cheeks.

I heaved a sigh of relief and hazarded one more glance on her features. It was then I saw an expression on her face that I'd never encountered before. Her eyelids were slightly drooped and hooded, staring as though not seeing what was in front of her. And her lips, her moist lips. Where did that enigmatic, subtle, half-smile come from?

Of course, I actually had seen that expression before, but never on my mother's face. I simply didn't recognize it for what it was.

It was the look a woman has, just before she closes her eyes to receive a lover's kiss.

That look lasted for perhaps five seconds and was then gone, dispersed like an evanescent morning mist.

I shook my head to clear my thoughts, but I couldn't escape the surreal feeling of what had just happened. I'd fallen down some twisted rabbit hole of longing and lust, ending up not in Wonderland, but some strange, steaming realm ruled by desperate, taboo desires and forbidden longings -a place my mind had never traveled to ever before, a place which I simply didn't comprehend.

I was snatched back to the here and now with a jolt, as Hilda pulled into the parking lot at First National, announcing, "Stop number one, Peter."

Mumbling a semi-coherent thanks, I half stumbled from the car, trying to surreptitiously adjust myself as I made my way to the entrance. Once inside, it took me a full two minutes to get my thoughts back on track. I found the bank manager, explaining that I wanted close out my old account and open a new joint account, one in my name and Mom's.

My explanation was that Dad was so busy that he often forgot to send money to Mom, being out so much. I'm not sure if he bought my story, but he did as I asked, after lecturing how it might complicate our family's tax situation. I nodded politely and thanked him for his advice, but remained firm. I transferred over my old balance and took out about three thousand in cash. That left about thirty three thousand in the new checking. Well satisfied, I took a signature card from the teller, stating that I'd be back the next day with Mom's

autograph. Grabbing up my complimentary counter checks, I hit the door.

As we headed back up Seward Highway, traffic was light, so we found ourselves at Alyeska Auto Salvage and Repair in just a few minutes. I tracked Bert down in the back of the shop and explained the situation to him.

Bert's a fair man, truly one of the good guys. He didn't hold Dad's previous outburst against Mom or me, but he was kindly firm, stating that the repair would be a cash-only deal, with a hundred dollar deposit.

I took him aside and peeled three Ben Franklins off my bankroll, explaining that I'd take it as a personal favor if he'd send someone up to the house and tow Mom's beat up F-150 down to the shop today. I told him to give the old truck a thorough going-over and let me know what was needed to get it ticking properly and that any bills were to come directly to me before I went back to Dutch Harbor.

Bert gripped my arm and shook my hand, saying, "Chris is a nice lady and deserves better. It's good that her son is stepping up to take care of her."

Little did he know how I was now starting to think of other ways to "take care" of her, how willing I was to truly be the man she could trust and rely on for all things, for everything.

Back in the car, I put my arm around Mom's shoulders and kissed the top of her head. She smiled and snuggled up against me, saying, "I'm so glad you're home, Petey. I've missed my handsome young man, missed him so much."

"I wish I could stay longer, Mom, I really do," I sighed.

For the remaining ten minutes we spent on the highway, I mentally composed the speech I was going to give her when we got home, explaining how the new household finances were going to work. I gamed out several different ways of saying what needed to be said, but in the end, I decided to be direct and simple. By then, we had arrived at Chez Heimdahl.

Our house is a no-frills, pre-fab log home, done in the faux-alpine, rustic style that is quite prevalent in this area. For all its austere simplicity, you wouldn't think it belonged to a man who owned his own fishing vessels, but that's how Dad operates. Most of the money goes back into the Anna Katarina or his own accounts.

Sure, running a crab boat is a high overhead proposition, but I know how much fuel costs, how much we spend on insurance, harbor fees, provisioning and maintenance. I have a pretty damn good idea how much money Dad has in his business accounts. There's plenty after operating expenses but even so it still only finds its way to Mom in miserly dribs and drabs.

The house is a well insulated, but small split-level, with only three bedrooms and a detached garage. We heat primarily with a wood stove, just occasionally using an oil furnace during the coldest days of winter. The kitchen is rather cramped, with the necessity of keeping the washer and dryer there, but it feels cozy and simple. The appliances are base-model stuff from Sears, but do the job. That's a sore point with me, because I know how much Mom loves cooking and I know for a fact that Dad could afford something better for her if he wanted to. For all that, it's still my favorite room in the house, simply because Mom is usually there.

It was at the kitchen table where she put my Band-Aids on, helped me with every subject from spelling to trigonometry, where she commiserated with me over bad dates and romances gone awry and where she shared with me her passion for Norse history and mythology. It was there, at five years old, in Mom's lap, that I learned of Midgard Serpent, Yggdrasil, the Bifrost Bridge and the worlds of the Aesir, Vanir and Jotnar, among others. She even taught me a little of the prose and poetic Eddas.

While I was getting settled into my room, I heard Mom call to me from the front door. When I got there, she was looking at me severely, hands on hips.

"What's all this, Petey? Dave from Bert's shop is here to tow the pickup. Did you go and do something behind my back? Did you?" she demanded.

"Guilty as charged, Mom," I smiled easily. "But before you go off the deep end, just hear me out. I don't want to be back out on the water next week, wondering about how you're doing. You need a working car. Hilda's not going to always be around to help out, bless her heart. What if there's an emergency? I can't do my job well if I'm worrying about you being stuck up here, so yes, I worked out an arrangement with Bert."

"You know how I feel about you spending your money on things that Gunnar should take care of, Peter. I won't have it, I just won't. I have my pride, you know. I'm not going to be supported by my own son at my age, dammit." Her words snapped as she voiced her displeasure, but I could tell her heart wasn't in it.

Tossing the keys for the Ford around Mom and through the doorway to Dave, I soothed, "I'm flush, Mom. Anyway, it's a done deal. You can pay me back later if you want. My interest rates are reasonable," I gently teased.

"You're terrible, Peter. I didn't raise you to be throwing away your money like that," she scolded, trying to be severe, but ultimately failing, a gentle smile eventually blooming on her lips.

I closed the front door and watched Dave from the living room window as he hooked the truck up for towing. In a couple minutes he was gone and the first of my tasks was well on its way to completion. Mom came to my side and hugged me again.

"Thank you for looking after your old Mom, Petey," she whispered softly.

"Whoa, just hold on a second there, lady. Who are you saying is old? You're what, twenty-nine, right?"

"You are so bad, Peter! You know exactly how old I am! But thanks anyway," she laughed easily, arm encircling my waist. "Shameless flattery will almost always get you in my good books."

"Almost always?" I quipped. "Guess I'll have to work on my delivery, then."

"Shut up, you store dirittung," Mom retorted.

My norsk vocabulary was pretty limited, but I recognized the term. "Big brat?" I asked incredulously. "Now you've gone and hurt my feelings, kjare mor," I pretended to sniff.

"Oh, just shut up, you big lug."

"Ja, mamma."

## Chapter 4

On that day, at forty-five years of age, she was and remained gorgeous in my eyes. Still lithe and trim, I doubted she weighed more than a hundred fifteen pounds. Of course, being my mother she had always been beautiful, but as I regarded her in the cool, fading dregs of daylight in the living room, I took stock of her looks in way I never had before.

For the first time I could consciously remember, I stepped outside myself and saw her as a woman, a sensation that was at once exhilarating and extremely disturbing. Here I was, checking my Mom out, eyes gliding over her whole body, taking everything in, from her hair to her toes and in between. It was especially my appreciation of the "in between" that was truly unsettling.

As I said before, she is slender. Her facial features are regular, with high, gorgeously sculpted cheekbones and an aquiline nose bracketed by deep, widely spaced gray eyes. Her hair is lustrous and thick, raven black in color, shot through with a few random threads of gray, cascading with slight curling to the top of her shoulders.

There were a few very fine crow's feet around her eyes and a couple of worry lines in her forehead. She looks at least five years younger than her age, and in the soft, wan light of advancing twilight, those characteristics were further softened, making her seem even younger. I always thought that if you set a head and shoulder picture of Mom side by side

with Cate Blanchett, you'd think you had found that actress' dark, elder sister. But that's just my very biased opinion.

As I appraised her figure, it seemed to me that her breasts were probably perfect, generous single handfuls and rode proudly on her chest, without any evident sag. Her stomach had the slightest of gentle swellings as it smoothly coursed down to the juncture of her thighs, an inevitable consequence of childbearing. Her hips appeared surprisingly slender, but not boyish, gently curving and just prominent enough in the right places to let you know that you were looking at a real woman, someone who had brought three children into the world. As I stared at the juncture of her thighs, I actually began to salivate, God help me.

While I took in these newly appreciated sights, I struggled within myself to contain the rising tide of desire I was feeling for this very attractive woman. I was holding on for dear life to the last shreds of my filial affection, when I considered her bottom. At that moment, it was all over - I was a goner.

Magda Christine, my confidant, my nurse, my loyal supporter, my friend, my muse, my beloved mother, had a marvelous, simply stunning ass. It was iconic, sculpted by the gods, a true monument. It filled out her jeans superbly, full and womanly, but without any obvious sag. It was mobile, perfectly contoured, wondrously pear-shaped. It was magnificent and suddenly, I was now lost, irrevocably set adrift on a sea of love and lust.

I was rudderless and the compass of my conscience had broken.

Have you ever seen how a fault line moves? It creeps along, millimeter by millimeter, year after mundane year. Small cracks appear in the roadways, walls and buildings that are astride it, but things look only subtly different and then only to the trained eye.

Then one day, it ruptures without warning, seemingly for no clear reason. Suddenly, it lurches feet or yards instead of fractions of inches, shearing, rising or falling, and with that displacement, all those familiar, ordinary structures, those comforting, secure landmarks of our daily existence which were laid across its path are turned into so much rubble, the landscape altered forever.

That's what I felt like in that moment in the living room. In the space of a few minutes, I went from having a vague, moderately inappropriate crush on my mother to mad, irredeemable obsession.

I wanted her, wanted her more than anything in my entire life. Not just to bed, but to have, to hold and to comfort.

I finally realized, in a seemingly sudden fashion, that I was undeniably and completely head over heels in love with the one woman in the whole world I could not possibly have.

Mom spoke then, breaking the thrall of my revelation. She must have mistaken my vacant, poleaxed expression as fatigue, because she drew me to her.

Slipping her arm around my waist, she pulled me towards the kitchen. "Come with me, Petey. Let your mom get you a nice, hot cup of coffee. You look like you could use it."

Tightening her arm further, she firmly steered me into the kitchen and sat me down at the table, her hand briefly caressing the back of my neck before she turned to the counter. I barely suppressed a shiver at her brief contact. Suddenly the room felt stiflingly hot and my heart was racing uncontrollably.

Turning from the coffee pot, a mug in each hand, she gave me the Mother Look, exclaiming, "Peter! You look flushed! Are you coming down with something?"

Setting our drinks down hurriedly on the table, she put her hand on my forehead, murmuring, "You seem a bit warm, honey. I'll get you some Tylenol."

As she started to leave, I reached out and put my hand on her hip, halting her rush to the medicine cabinet. "I'm okay, Mom, really. I just need to peel off a layer or two here."

"You can't fool your Mother, Peter," she scolded. "You're definitely running warm. You better not be trying to sneak a case of the flu by me! And right before Christmas, too!"

"Honest, Mom, I feel just fine," I protested.

"Anyhow, if I'm running hot, it's from being around you," I teased.

"Peter! There you go flirting with me again, you bad young man!" Mom blushed, eyes downcast. "You're embarrassing me," she said quietly.

Sensing I'd gone a bit too far, I stood up and drew her in for a hug, kissing the top of her head. She smelled of strawberry shampoo and Dove soap. "Sorry, Mom. Just having a little fun, that's all."

She relaxed, snuggling in against me, a small sigh escaping her lips. Without any conscious thought, my hands seemed to drift from her back down to her hips, pulling her closer. I found my face slowly dropping past the top of her head. It seemed as though I was powerless to prevent the very inappropriate kiss I was about to deliver to the nape of her neck.

I was no longer in control of my actions.

It didn't help in the least that Mom also seemed to be losing herself in the moment as well. While my lips were inexorably dropping towards her neck, she seemed to be molding herself against me and I sensed the light pressure of her pelvis against mine. I was about a second and a half from *The Kiss That Must Not Happen* when Mom seemed to come to herself. With a slight shudder, she sighed and pulled away.

I thought I sensed the merest trace of reluctance on her part.

At that moment, the microwave dinged, Mom's coffee now reheated. When she sat down with me, I decided now was as good a time as any to explain my earlier business at the bank. I reached into the pocket of my fleece vest and put the counter checks on the table, sliding them over to Mom.

"What's all this, Peter?" she asked, eyes narrowing with suspicion.

"It's our new bank account, Mom," I replied, holding her eyes with mine.

"What do you mean, OUR account?" she exclaimed.

"Just that, kjaere mor," I soothed. I always used my limited vocabulary of Norsk when I needed to sweet talk her.

"Peter, you are so full of dritt!" she spat, slapping her hand on the table. "Why did you do this?" Even then, I could tell her sharpness was more in exasperation than real anger.

I took her hand in mine, gently running my thumb over her knuckles. "Because I don't want to worry about you, Mom," I explained, softly. "I'm fed up with the way Dad treats you and I'm not going to let it happen any more. Period."

"You can pay me back whenever you want. When Dad sends money, just transfer it over - remember it's OUR account. I'm so damn busy I don't have time to spend it right now anyway. This way you can get necessary things when you need them, not on Dad's BS say-so."

Squeezing her hand tightly, I said seriously, "Look Mom, when I'm running the deck on the Anna, I need to be on top of my game. If I'm worried about what's going on back here, I can't concentrate. That's not safe, either for the deckhands or me. Doing this gives me one less big thing to worry about. Besides, I also like the idea of you having a little folding money, being able to do stuff like taking Hilda to lunch at Amy's Tavern or going into Anchorage for a girl's day out."

Mustering my most persuasive tone, I pleaded, "Look, if you like, think of it as my Christmas present to you, okay?"

Abruptly, Mom burst into tears and pushed her chair back, rushing to sit in my lap, hugging me fiercely.

"Oh, Petey, you're so good to me, I can't stand it! What did I do to deserve such a wonderful son?" she snuffled into the crook of my neck.

I simply sat there and held her, savoring our contact, waiting for Mom to turn off the waterworks. I was well pleased with myself, my mission an unqualified success. Of course, holding this lovely woman in my lap inevitably led to certain...results. As I became hard beneath the weight of her shapely ass, I knew that my little secret wouldn't be so little or so secret in a matter of moments, but Mom showed no signs of vacating my lap.

I was nearly certain that she could feel my erection pressing on her behind, but she still made no sign and gave no indication of wanting to get up. Just when I thought I was going to have some very embarrassing 'splainin' to do, my stomach growled. Mom chuckled and wiped her tears with the heel of her palm, giving me a radiant smile that just about put me into fibrillation. Then she tweaked my nose with a laugh and got up, her hands lingering slightly on my thighs as she pushed off.

"Men and their appetites!" she teased with a twinkle in her eye. "Something always needs fed!"

"Appetites?" I thought to myself. "Plural?" Was Mom really playing that game with me? I asked myself.

Smoothing her pants as she stood, she reached for the coat hook and her parka.

"Are we going somewhere, Mom?" I asked in confusion.

"Well, my wonderful boy, there's not much in the cupboard. I figured we'd borrow Hilda's car and get something to eat in town, pick up a few things for the rest of the week."

I stood and perused the near-empty pantry and checked the refrigerator, smiling to myself as I tallied the inventory. "No need tonight, Mom," I grinned, taking her hand again. It seemed I was looking for any excuse to touch her and be close.

"We've got Campbell's, bread and cheese. Would you make me a TCS and tomato soup?" I gave her my best smile and Winsome Little Boy look. "I'd rather just stay here with you and sit by the fire."

Mom smiled and got a little misty. "My boy wants his favorite lunch, does he? Well, I suppose I could make that happen."

"Takk, mamma," I said, leaving a lingering kiss on her cheek. "Elsker deg."

"Love you too, you big lug. Now, when was the last time you had anything to eat?" she asked severely.

"I had a bacon sandwich and some coffee about 6 this morning."

"And nothing since?" Mom was scandalized. "Jesus, Peter, you need to take better care of yourself than that," she scolded.

"Ja, mamma," I said contritely.

A full can of soup, liberally dosed with butter and three TCS later, I sat back from the kitchen table, replete and very content. Mom joined me with her own sandwich and we shared a couple of sliced apples with the last of the cheese. Life was just about perfect.

Later, when we snuggled on the sofa, in front of the fire, Mom squeezed me affectionately and said, "Just because I fed you doesn't mean you're out of the doghouse, young man. You've been a very irritating person today, first with the car and then with the checking, but I suppose I'm going to have to forgive you...eventually. But I do want to set up some ground rules with you tomorrow about the money," she said firmly.

"Mom, you know I trust you completely. There's no need for that."

"I'm dead serious, Peter. I know you trust me. That's not the point."

"Then what is?" I asked, puzzled.

"What you did, Peter, it makes me feel...funny. Really good, but funny and a little uncomfortable, too. I just feel like I want to talk it out, so there are no misunderstandings."

I decided a light touch was called for. "What, don't you like being a kept woman?"

"Peter Heimdahl!" she gasped, color rising in her cheeks. "You are such an absolute brat!" she fumed, slapping my shoulder.

"Ow!" I bellowed, pretending agony. "My Mom is beating me! Help! Help!"

We both dissolved in laughter at that point. I rolled off the sofa, pulling her down with me. I landed on my back, her full length laid out on top of me. Greatly daring, I hugged her close and gave her a brief kiss on the lips. For the merest fraction of a second, it seemed like her lips slightly opened to me and then she rolled off me and stood, offering up a hand.

When we both sat back down on the sofa, Mom snuggled under my arm and put my hands around her waist and then put her arms over mine, saying, "Hold me, Peter. Hold me please."

I let my head loll to one side, ear resting on the top of her head, savoring the moment. We both nodded off in short order.

Some unknown time later, we were awakened by one of the burned through logs in the fireplace collapsing, a shower of sparks rushing up the chimney. I got up to stir the embers and put some more wood on the glowing coals, Mom stretching luxuriously. When I rejoined her, she snuggled back down with me, slightly startling me with her own light kiss on my lips. She prolonged it for a brief moment, just enough to set me flushing once more.

"I wish we could stay here all night," she sighed.

"Who's stopping us?" I asked, my heart accelerating again.

Sighing again, Mom touched my cheek and placed a finger on my lips, preventing me from talking. "It's not a good idea, sweetheart," she said softly. "I might forget who I'm with."

I began to speak, but Mom shushed me with more pressure from her finger and I subsided back into the cushions, ten thousand questions and impulses rushing around in my head. She sat up and regarded me with a strange stare, at once equal parts of motherly affection and...longing?

Removing her finger from my lips, she gave me another kiss, but this time very definitely lingering beyond any "proper" duration. Her lips parted oh, so slightly and I was stunned to

feel the tip of her tongue on my lips for an indescribably wonderful moment.

Then she stood fairly abruptly, saying, "I need time to think, Peter. See you in the morning."

She walked quickly to her bedroom, casting one more inscrutable look at me over her shoulder, leaving me poleaxed on the couch. I heard her door close and then, most unusually, the lock being set.

## Chapter 5

I got up from the couch and squatted in front of the fire, morosely stirring the glowing embers in front of me. I was so hard in my jeans it was quite difficult to hunker down and tend to the blaze. My balls felt like leaden cantaloupes, aching in the confines of the tight denim. I couldn't ever remember such feelings.

While the warmth of the hearth washed over me, I thought, "What does the locked door mean? Is it a simple need for privacy? Could Mom be doing something naughty in her room? Was it that she didn't trust me not to try and slip into her bed tonight?"

That thought rankled. I would never do anything Mom didn't want or ask for, never. Didn't she trust me?

For a moment I toyed with the notion that it was because she couldn't trust herself, and then I got a grip.

"Don't be an idiot, Peter," I thought. "Your little brain is making you big-time stupid."

Still, I had felt that our simple dinner and evening together was magical. There was something in the air between us and I had a steadily growing feeling that whatever "it" was, "it" went in both directions.

My mind ran in aimless, dithering circles, bouncing between poles of horny optimism and abject despair. Now with Mom's abrupt retirement to bed, I had the feeling of sand running through my fingers, escaping my grasp forever.

I put the fireplace tools away quietly, taking care not to rattle them and disturb Mom. I took myself to bed, wearily collapsing in beneath the covers, still wearing my long underwear.

As tired as I was, no amount of sheep counting or mantra chanting could bring me the welcome oblivion I needed so acutely. The memory of Mom's last kiss replayed itself over and over again in my head with high definition clarity and before long, I had a problem that demanded an immediate solution. I was so wound up, once wasn't even close to enough. I innundated the inside of both of my socks, my orgasms absolutely tectonic in intensity. Even then, I slept poorly.

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I awoke with a start the next morning, flat gray light anemically and barely illuminating my old room. Mom had kept things pretty much the way they had always been since I graduated high school. It was familiar and comforting on one level, but also depressing on another. I took little solace from the memories evoked by all of the poorly seen, but clearly remembered childhood artifacts and memorabilia lining the darkened shelves.

Glancing outside, I could see light flurries dusting the fir trees beyond my window. The air seemed heavily silent, hushed and vaguely tense. I felt an ill-defined apprehension, a feeling of expectancy that mixed equal parts of dread and groin-tightening excitement. A great weight seemed to press on the entire world around me. Suppressing my anxiety with a sigh, I heaved myself up and headed to the bathroom for my shower.

As I woke beneath the hot spray, I relived the previous evening's events and before long, my erection clamored for relief. My memories morphed to long-suppressed wishes and desires and after just a few minutes, I painted the shower curtain, my climax corresponding with the recollection of the last kiss of the evening. I came so hard I practically saw stars, my legs buckling as I slid to the floor of the shower.

"Oh, Mom!" I cried softly, watching the gobs of my spend swirl around the drain and into blackness, lost it seemed, for good.

Struggling back to my feet, I thought I heard a floorboard creak in the hallway, but I couldn't be sure. A few minutes later, I entered the kitchen; fresh sweats on, wet hair slicked back. I was already sporting a half-woodie as I saw Mom for the first time that day.

She looked...just like Mom. Wearing man pajamas and a worn, quilted red housecoat, it seemed like any other morning at home I could remember from the previous twenty-odd years of my life.

"Good morning, lazybones!" she called cheerfully, favoring me with a dazzling smile. "I'm glad you're up early. We've got a lot to do today!" My spirits lifted immediately. Mom took the skillet off the stove and divided a batch of scrambled eggs between us, along with toast made from the last of the bread and big, steaming mugs of black coffee. We both dug in immediately and were soon engaged in our usual early morning banter.

Part of me was upset that there seemed to be no acknowledgment of our previous evening together, but another part was very relieved that we seemed to be back to "normal," whatever that was for us these days. In any event, I was very glad that Mom didn't seem upset.

While Mom rinsed the dishes and I put them in the dishwasher, the phone rang. Mom answered, and then handed it to me, simply saying, "It's Bert."

We spoke for about two minutes, Bert saying that he had replaced the solenoid and starter on the Ford and done a full tune up and alignment. Bless him, he'd stayed late the previous evening, getting it all done. We arranged for Dave to pick me up, and a half hour later, I was heading back up to the house, about \$450 poorer. The money was well spent though. The old pickup was now running like a top.

I found mom (where else) in the kitchen, making a list for shopping, a frown furrowing her brow as she wrote on a piece of scrap paper.

"Oh, Peter!" she exclaimed disconsolately, "What are we going to do for our holiday dinner? The markets are going to be all picked over. I so much wanted to cook something nice!" It had long been Mom's tradition to do the big holiday meal the day before Christmas, so that we could be lazy on the holiday and eat delicious leftovers.

Unknown to Mom, I already had a plan in place. Sitting next to her, I squeezed her hand and said, "We'll talk about it as we shop for the rest of the stuff, okay?"

True to Mom's prediction, the Safeway was pretty well decimated of holiday fare. There were still a fair number of frozen turkeys, but there was no way we'd be able to thaw one in time to cook for tonight for our traditional Christmas Eve dinner. We did pick up a lot of basic stuff to restock the larder, but Mom was disappointed. I let her buy a small beef roast, knowing that we'd be freezing it later, rather than using it, and this seemed to satisfy her need for a holiday entree.

We finished in about a half hour. By then it was lightly snowing and the parking lot was getting slushy. We decided to leave the cart at the front of the store and load up there. Mom surprised me as we walked back to the car, taking my hand in hers.

Very surprised, but happy, I turned to look at her. She was already staring back at me. She smiled shyly and blushed a little, but said nothing. I was used to walking with her with my arm around her shoulders, which I had done for forever, but this was different. I felt like I was fourteen all over again, holding Angela Lepowski's sweaty hand in mine on my first real date.

The difference was not that my heart was pumping fit to burst, which it was, nor that I was nervous. Nervous doesn't even come close to what I was feeling. That instant when her fingers intertwined with mine was so terrifyingly perfect, it felt like simply breathing would cause the moment to shatter like the most delicate of crystals.

I couldn't have inhaled anyway. I had that feeling in my chest like the first time I had ever had the wind knocked out of me. I was ten years old and playing in my first Pop Warner football game. I had tried to make a tackle against a sweep and got flattened by the pulling guard, a kid 2 years older and a good fifteen pounds heavier than me.

As I lay on the ground then, gasping like a beached codfish, I thought for sure I was dying. Right at the instant Mom's hand found mine, I felt the same way. Only this time, if I was expiring, it was from pure happiness.

Of course, it all ended too quickly. I handed her into the car, brushed the snow off the windows and drove to the store exit, where we packed up. Mom's hand found mine again on the ride home, to my everlasting delight and then we were back, time resuming its normal frenetic pace.

Once we got everything unpacked, I told Mom that I had one more errand to run and would be back before noon, saying that we would tackle everything together when I got back.

As I headed out the door, I fixed her with a mock-serious glare, saying, "I mean it, Mom. Don't go burying yourself in the cooking until I'm back. I want to be there and do it with you, okay? I'm looking forward to it."

We shared one more kiss that hung right on the edge of something more and she swatted me. "Daylight's burning, you big lug. Get your stuff done and don't keep me waiting," she teased.

More seriously, she added "And, Peter, drive carefully, all right?" ever my mother.

I found myself in the old Ford, grinning like an idiot. I didn't remember putting my coat back on or walking out to the truck. Shaking my head, I actually looked out the window to confirm my footprints leading to the door of the F150. I had to convince myself that I hadn't floated out of the house, feet never reaching the ground.

## Chapter 6

I cranked the key in the ignition and the old truck fired up with a smooth purr. I sat for a minute while the defroster did its work and contemplated my strategy for the morning. The first thing I did after Mom's truck was towed the day before had been to call an old friend in Anchorage who owed me a favor or two.

Tony, my best buddy from high school, was working as a physician's assistant at Providence Hospital there and doing pretty well for himself. I explained what I wanted to do for Mom for our holiday meal and he was on board immediately, being well acquainted with my father's past antics.

Not only did Tony shop for the fresh turkey, fixings and wine I asked him to track down, he suggested meeting me halfway, saving me the rather long round trip into Anchorage. He handed the goodies off to me in Stirling and I wished him and his new wife happy holidays. I was a little ticked at the amount of pleading I had to do to get him to take the two Ben Franklins I had earmarked for his troubles, but that's the kind of guy he is, one of my best friends.

I did not tell Mom what I was up to, other than that I had an errand to run and would be gone a couple hours. When I showed up just before noon with the care package, she was overwhelmed. Tears in her eyes, she scolded me furiously about it, until I silenced her with a hug, saying, "I just want a nice, normal Christmas with my favorite girl. I don't know when we'll be able to do this again and I want it to be special."

Wiping her tears, Mom hugged me fiercely once more and jolted me with a firm, closed kiss on the lips that lingered again just long enough to set my heart going like a trip hammer. After a short discussion, we unpacked all the goodies, agreeing that we would invoke our old tradition and have our holiday meal today, on Christmas Eve, then lazing about Christmas Day and enjoying leftovers.

We had a wonderful time fixing our dinner. When I unpacked the box, I found out that Tony had slipped me a double mickey, the sneaky bastard. I had asked him to pick up a decent Rhine wine for the dinner, as it's one of Mom's favorites, but instead I found two bottles, a French white burgundy and a Trockenbeerenauslese Riesling that must have cost at least eighty or a hundred bucks all on its own. There was a small card attached to that one, saying, "Merry Christmas to Peter and his Mom with love from Tony and Amanda."

I showed it to Mom and she welled up all over again, saying, "You have a good friend in Tony. Be sure to thank him for me the next time you see him."

In the end, the temptation of the Poilly Fume was too great and we started imbibing during our prep of dinner. I made the candied yams, roasted carrots and mashed potatoes and helped chop up the onions, mushrooms and celery for the cornbread stuffing. Per our longstanding, but often-unperformed, tradition, Mom took charge of the bird. We had everything done within an hour and by then, both of us were already two glasses of wine across the yarm. We joked and teased throughout the whole morning and early afternoon, our slight tipsiness making us behave like a couple of kids.

Mom started it by depositing some wet potato peels down my neck. As I squawked indignantly while the cold water ran down my back, she grinned wickedly and said, "That's for spending too much on your Mom's car and for the meal, you big spoiler!"

As I danced and squirmed to extract the peels from under my shirt, I retorted, "Just remember this, you minx, revenge is a dish best served cold. You'll never know when I will extract my vengeance!"

Sticking her tongue out, Mom shot back, "Do your worst, you big brute!"

I smiled back in the most sinister fashion I could muster, saying, "Disrespectful and now insolent to boot. I'm going to enjoy putting you in your place, you bad girl!"

"No worries," Mom replied smugly. "I'm your Mom and I can read you like a book. I'll see it coming from a mile away."

"We'll see about that," I grumbled, returning to my chopping duties, planning my retaliation.

As we progressed through our preparations, we chatted about nothing and everything. By mutual, silent consent, we said nothing about Dad or the Anna Katarina. Mom caught me up on local gossip and news and shared Sig's latest letter.

He was doing very well for himself, having recently been promoted from E-3 to Petty Officer Second Class, skipping a whole grade. That came along with a bravery commendation for a particularly difficult rescue on the Columbia Bar. We were both thrilled, but at the same time, Mom confessed that she worried about him a lot. I reassured her, saying that I thought he'd be doing less of the dangerous grunt work with his new promotion.

A bit later, I had my opportunity. Mom was turned away from me, attending to the mushrooms she was sauteing. I took the opportunity to dip a spatula into the mashed potatoes I had just finished and when she turned around, I bent the handle back and let fly.

The gob of potatoes arced gracefully across the kitchen, landing with ICBM precision on the exposed skin of her upper chest, just above the last button of her plain, white blouse. The big, sticky white blob immediately slipped beneath the fabric and into her cleavage.

I couldn't have planned it better if I had walked up to her and placed my starchy payload by hand. Mom stared at me, her eyes wide with the shock of my sneak attack.

She was beside herself, sputtering with indignation and embarrassment, as the white goo flowed down her chest.

"Oooo, you are so dead, Peter!" she squealed. "I'm gonna skin you alive, den lille dritt!"

"Tsk, tsk," I teased. "Such language from my sainted mother! My sensitive ears are bruised and burning, I tell you. Bruised and burning!"

"Du er dod kjott, buster, dod kjott!" she muttered.

"Dead meat?" I feigned shock. "You'd call your own flesh and blood dead meat?"

"After that little stunt, very definitely!" Mom scolded furiously.

"Did I ever tell you how sexy you are when you talk dirty, Mom?"

"Ooooh, that's it!" she exclaimed, throwing her hands up in disgust and resignation. "I'm getting changed. It's all inside my bra now!"

With that, she turned on her heel and strode from the kitchen.

"Lucky potatoes," I muttered to myself.

"What's that?" Mom shot back over her shoulder. "I didn't hear you, Peter. What did you say?"

"I said, 'Sorry about the potatoes,' Mom."

"In a pig's eye, young man!" she snorted, disappearing up the stairs to her bedroom.

Five minutes later, she returned, wearing a thick, evergreen turtleneck.

Taking in her new top at a glance, I quipped, "Taking no chances this time, I see."

"That's enough, Peter," she said firmly, but with a twinkle in her eye. "Enough horsing around. We've got a dinner to finish cooking."

"Yes, ma'am, right away, ma'am," I replied, saluting her for good measure and coming to attention.

Mom glared at me for a moment and then her features softened. She came forward and wrapped her arms around me in a big hug, burying her face in my chest, inhaling deeply.

"It's good to have my son home for Christmas. I've missed you so much, Peter!"

I hugged her back, careful to keep a small distance between us. It seemed that now any touch from her was enough to light the fuse to my trouser rocket and I didn't want her to feel how erect I was.

"Me too, Mom. I wouldn't miss this for anything."

Completely unexpectedly, she gave me light kiss on the lips and returned to the counter. I hastily turned away to conceal my raging boner and got back to work as well, my cheeks flushed and color high. My pulse was off the charts.

Throughout the rest of the morning and early afternoon, we continued, working in a silence that was not exactly tense, but somehow anticipatory. We shared few words as we worked, but both found reasons to pass close to one another, an occasional lingering touch to arm or waist occurring with increasing frequency as we prepared our feast.

Finishing our cleanup, we found ourselves at the sink, hips touching. Without thinking, I put my arm around Mom's waist and pulled her against me. She sighed and drew closer,

slipping in front of me. I surged within my pants and was preparing to separate from her, when she sort of molded herself against me, back to front, relaxing completely. She placed her hands over mine, which were now locked around her waist, fingers interlaced over her abdomen. It felt soft, smooth and sensuous.

There was absolutely no way she could be unaware of the baseball bat I was poking against her lower back, but she said nothing, her hands lightly resting on my own, squeezing slightly. With a sigh, she turned and gave me another light kiss on the lips. I felt like I was floating three feet above the ground, when she broke the spell and my embrace, turning to me.

"What do you say to a game of cribbage, Petey? Loser does the dinner dishes, okay?"

"I hope you've got some gloves in the kitchen," I teased. "I wouldn't want you to get dishpan hands."

"So that's how it is, eh?" Mom shot back. "'We'll just have to see about that, min fin sonn."

"So I'm your fine son again, then, am I?"

"Don't let it go to your head, you big lug. I'm still going to beat your pants off."

"And if I beat yours off?"

"Not bloody likely, Peter."

Before I could censor my thoughts, it slipped out. "That would be quite a sight."

"Peter Hemidahl! Watch your mouth! I'm your mother!" she gasped, blushing furiously.

I was mentally slapping myself instantly for the slip.

"Sorry, Mom, it just sort of slipped out. I didn't mean to be a smart-ass, honest. I'm sorry," I said contritely, crimson from embarrassment and from revealing my inner thoughts.

"Just you watch yourself, young man. I suppose your old Mom should be flattered, but that comment is over the mark. A girl might get the wrong idea around you."

"Now, behave yourself and get the cards," she said smiling, lightly slapping my arm. "I'm going to show you who's the boss around here."

In the space of those few words, I went from chagrined and mortified to confused and a little bit elated. There had been

times in the past when I flirted fairly outrageously with Mom, seeing how much I could embarrass her, but I had never made such an overtly suggestive remark to her before. As much as I was kicking myself moments ago, I now also felt somehow excited. For some reason, I sensed her reaction seemed less outraged and more... pleased, somehow.

I steeled myself mentally to guard my tongue as we sat down to play. I was doing pretty well for the first few hands and seemed well on my way to avoiding cleanup duty, when I happened to glance up. Mom was frowning, concentrating on her cards, absently pulling at her lower lip in the cute way that's always driven me crazy. Unable to help myself, my eyes flowed over her form again.

Then it hit me. I did a double take, frankly staring this time, as I confirmed my suspicion. I was certain now. Mom wasn't wearing a bra under her turtleneck!

I could see the faint outline of her nipples through the fabric of her top and they seemed to become more prominent as I stared. I became aware that I had been staring at her breasts for some time and broke my gaze, flushed and apprehensive. I quickly glanced up at Mom to see if my ogling had been noticed. I wasn't sure, but it seemed like I caught a slight suggestion of Mom's own eyes quickly moving to concentrate again on her cards.

Then I saw that same enigmatic half smile and lowered eyelids from the car and my cock surged like a fighter jet on afterburner, going from slight chubster to throbbing and

leaking in about one minute. I did my best to concentrate again on my own cards, but failed miserably.

Carefully sneaking one more glance, I caught Mom looking at my bulge again. She bit her lower lip and then her eyes quickly returned to her hand, but I could see a flush on her cheeks and forehead. She licked her lips, unconsciously, it seemed.

Well, from that point forward, I was toast. I was so turned on I couldn't add 2 plus 2 and I was afraid if Mom so much as looked at me again, I'd spurt in my pants. I felt like a fourteen-year-old dumbass, completely flummoxed and tongue-tied. Needless to say, she mopped the floor with me.

"What's the matter, Peter?" she teased. "I expected a better challenge out of you. You're off your game tonight."

"My beautiful opponent kept on distracting me. I couldn't concentrate."

"Sweet talking your Mom is not going to get you out of this one, sonnen min."

"You cheated."

"Me, cheat? I did no such thing!" she squawked indignantly. "How could you say such a terrible thing about your mother?"

"You used your feminine charms to distract me. I was helpless against them."

"You're incorrigible."

"I'm also hungry. Shall we see if the turkey is ready?"

"Yes, let's do that. Cheater, indeed!" she snorted as she got to her feet. I stood and she slipped her arm around my waist, pulling me close. We walked to the kitchen, hip to hip. It was the most natural, wonderful feeling I ever experienced, two pieces of a long-separated puzzle finally put together. I was as happy as I could ever remember.

I was also hard. Oh God, I was so damn hard.

I didn't know what was going to happen between us, but my level of anticipation was beyond describing. When Mom's arm came away from my waist and briefly but clearly deliberately brushed across my ass, I just about lost it then and there. I could barely resist the temptation to sweep her into my arms and run to the bedroom.

## Chapter 7

Our Christmas Eve dinner was just about perfect. I couldn't remember a time where I enjoyed a holiday meal more. Without the overbearing storm cloud of my father's presence,

we spoke as we hadn't for... well... almost forever. Our conversation was wide-ranging, hugely entertaining and entirely adult. I gained a new appreciation for my mother as a well read, intellectually vibrant and spirited woman. I suppose I had imbibed from that stream of appreciation subconsciously in the past, but now, with it laid openly before me, it was revelatory.

Underneath all that was a...something. Something that hung in the air between us, like a live wire, a sense of shiver-making anxiety, of waiting and expectancy that made me tingle from head to toe. I could feel it with granite certainty. Somehow I knew that things were changing between us and that soon, very soon, things would never be the same again.

Apprehension and all, I wished I could bottle the moment, preserving it forever.

It was at this point that I came to a decision.

Having already crossed the Rubicon in finally acknowledging to myself that I wanted my mother, it wasn't that big a stretch to say to myself, "I don't just desire her. She belongs to me and I'm going to have her. And I'm going to keep her."

We conversed and mildly flirted long into the evening. When the candles on our small table began to gutter, I made to get up and clear the table. Mom stopped me, placing her hand on mine, saying, "It can wait, sweetheart. There's something I've

been meaning to talk with you about. Let's go sit in the living room."

We sat on the sofa and Mom took my hands in hers, looking at me intently. Taking a deep breath, she looked at me somewhat apprehensively, saying, "I've something important to show you, Peter. I hope you won't be angry with me, but I need to do this."

"Mom, there's nothing you could possibly do that would make me angry," I protested.

"Well, I guess we're about to find out, " she said resolutely. "Wait here, Peter. I'll be right back."

Mom got up and went to her bedroom. Mystified, I sat back and waited for her to return. After a few minutes, she was back, handing me a letter. I did not recognize the return address or the sender. I gave Mom a quizzical glance and extracted the single sheet of stationary, scanning it quickly. It was from a big publisher, one I'd known of for many years. When I began reading, my world shook down to its foundations.

"Dear Mr. Heimdahl," it began, "I am in receipt of your manuscript entitled 'Inside Heart, Inside Passage.' First, let me congratulate you on what is undoubtedly one of the best novels I have read in the past five years. It goes almost without saying that we at McDowell House would be delighted and thrilled to publish this work. I am given to understand that

you have onerous work obligations related to your family business and that reaching you may be difficult, so I have taken the liberty of sending this letter to you in the care of your mother. Abigail Hester, an old classmate of mine, has assured me that this will be the best way to reach you at this time."

"Of course, there is considerable preparation still necessary for the manuscript and we must find a suitable editor for you to work with as well. We are prepared to offer the sum of \$75,000 for the rights to this work and hope that you will seriously consider our offer of publication. I can be reached at the numbers listed on the letterhead and look forward to your prompt reply."

"Again, let me offer our congratulations for an outstanding creative effort. It is a rare pleasure indeed, to read such a polished work from such a young talent."

Sincerely,

Belinda Thornburg-Hall, editor in chief.

"Mom?" I croaked, throat tight. "When...how...why?"

Her hands gripped mine tightly, her lower lip trembling with barely suppressed anxiety. "Is it okay, Peter? Are you angry? I feel so guilty that I did this without asking you."

I sat silently for several minutes, torn by indecision and doubt. The idea of Mom having read about all of my veiled, secret longings, fears and guilt, it was overwhelming. But then I thought, after the past three days, she probably already knew how I felt about her, so what was there to hide any more? Taking in a deep breath, I squeezed her hands back and swallowed with difficulty.

"It's okay, Mom. When did you know about it?"

"It was entirely an accident," she explained, a quaver still evident in her voice. "It must have been two and a half or three years ago, a little while after you bought that old laptop. You had been using over Christmas and when you went back out for the start of Opie season, you left it behind."

"I didn't think much of it at the time, but you left it out on your desk and eventually the battery ran down. When you called to say you were coming back for a visit, I went to straighten up your room and change the linens. I noticed the laptop, unplugged on your desk. I thought I would do you a favor and recharge it so you'd be able to use it when you got home."

Taking a deep breath, she continued, "So, I went scrounging around your pig sty and eventually found the power cord and plugged it in. When it rebooted, there was a message from the word processor, saying that it had auto-saved your document because of low battery power."

"I snooped, Peter," she said, eyes downcast. "I know I shouldn't have, but I wanted to know what it was you were writing that made a file that was almost 2 megabytes."

"So I opened it. And I started reading and then I couldn't stop! It just sucked me right in and grabbed me by the heart and throat. It was so good, Peter, I couldn't believe it was my own son writing this incredible story!"

"I was so proud of you, Peter, so proud! I think that overrode my common sense. I started peeking regularly as you worked through it. Then when you were done and just threw it in the closet, I was heartbroken. Such talent and you just tossed it aside and went back out on that shitty little boat!" she hissed venomously, startling me with her profanity.

"I felt certain that this was good enough to be made into a book, but I had no idea how to go about that. So, I looked up Miss Hester and showed it to her. It absolutely astonished her, Peter. She agreed that it HAD to be published, it was that good. She said she had a sorority sister from college who worked at McDowell and asked if she could send it to her, so I said yes!" Mom concluded somewhat defiantly, daring me to disapprove.

"So here we are," I said softly. "What happens now?"

"I want you to publish it, Peter," she all but ordered. Her tone brooked absolutely no argument. "I've been in touch with a literary agency in Seattle and they're dying to represent you. I want you to let them negotiate a deal with McDowell. When

that's done, I want you off that boat. Whatever you get for the deal, it should be enough for you to stop fishing while you write your next novel!"

"But Dad..."

"Screw your father and that piece of shit boat!" she said fiercely. "This is your chance for a real life, Peter. You'll never get a better one. If you throw this away...well, you deserve what you get, working with Gunnar."

"But Mom!" I practically shouted. "What about you? Who knows what Dad might do if I leave? I won't let anything happen to you! I couldn't stand that!"

Mom put her hands on my shoulders, peering deep into my eyes.

"Look at me, Peter. Look at me," she commanded. "As soon as I know you're free and clear of that man, I'm filing for a divorce. I'm no fool, son. I know him better than you do. I'll be long gone before he's even served with the papers."

"But where will you go? What will you do?"

She reached up to stroke my cheek, speaking quietly. I shivered at her gentle, sensuous touch. "That's for me to

decide, darling son. Don't fret about it. I'll make it work so you won't have to worry about me anymore."

"So do we have an agreement, Peter?" she asked seriously. "If you get a publishing deal, you quit the boat, become a full-time writer, okay?"

"You have to absolutely promise me that you'll make arrangements to get out of Homer, the minute I make the deal though, okay Mom?" I insisted. "In fact, I want you to start getting your ducks lined up right after New Year's, all right? I'm sure you can count on Hilda for some help, too."

I got up from the sofa and began to nervously pace the living room. So much had changed, so quickly, that I couldn't take it all in. The possibility of a life away from Dad, my finally acknowledged feelings for Mom, the uncertainty of what her plans might be, it was all too much to process, especially stuffed full of holiday food and the better part of a full bottle of wine. I simply couldn't make heads or tails of what I could or should do.

I think Mom sensed my growing disorientation, because she stood and took my hand, leading me to the foyer closet, saying, "Lets get a little fresh air outside Peter, clear our heads a bit and then we'll talk some more."

## Chapter 8

Nodding dumbly, I put on my parka and helped Mom into hers and we exited through the sliding glass doors onto the back yard deck.

Standing in the lee of the house, I could hear the wind rushing through the fir and pine trees surrounding our lot, not a whisper, but not a roar, either. As the wind coursed over the roof, it swept a galaxy of tiny ice crystals into the air in front of us, making it scintillate faintly with the reflected light spilling through the doors and windows. The air was cold, but its bite was mild out of the direct path of the wind. As we stood next to each other, clouds of our breath condensing around us, I looked up.

The sky was moonless and dark, the stars indistinct as a shroud of high cirrus clouds scudded from west to east. Gradually, the clouds dispersed before the wind, revealing the broad, nacreous swath of the Milky Way and the diamond-hard stars of Orion, Cassiopeia, the Big Dipper and the Pleiades. Between the razor-sharp celestial backdrop and the swirling ice crystals in the air, it was hard to know where the sky began and ended. It felt as though we were suspended, frozen in space and time.

Then, almost miraculously, the sky changed. A green, silvery and purple glow slowly appeared above us, gradually and gracefully coalescing into a dancing, shimmering curtain of light. It played directly overhead, slowly and inexorably

expanding, lengthening and flowing to stretch nearly across the entire horizon to the north of us.

Mom's hand found mine and soon my heartbeat was dancing in time with the aurora above us.

"It's strange," she said, gazing upwards and quietly musing. "But there is very little in the legends or the Eddas about the nororljós, or their significance. There's one explanation though, which I always liked. This legend says that the northern lights are reflections. Reflections of the glow of the armor the Valkyries shining as they gallop across the sky..."

"That's beautiful," I whispered back, pulling her closer.

Mom turned her head up to me, the boreal light dancing in her eyes.

"Kiss me, darling," she whispered hoarsely. "Please kiss me, Peter."

That look was there again on her face; the same moist lips, far away gaze and hooded eyes I saw in the car on the way back from the airport. That look was there.

It was there for me.

I felt like I had simultaneously grabbed a high voltage electrical wire and been struck in the head with a baseball bat. My mind and body vibrated like an overstretched guitar string.

"Mom?" I croaked, unable to fathom my great good fortune.

Placing her arms around my neck, she crossed her wrists behind my head and drew me down, whispering, "We both want this, my love. Don't keep your mother waiting. Don't be shy, son. Kiss your momma."

As I surrendered to the long-desired inevitable, I licked my lips. They cooled immediately in the frigid night air, but a moment later, they were warm again, oh so warm. Our lips seemed to part in unison and our tongues found each other in a blink, coiling like amorous serpents. She tasted faintly of dinner and the last dregs of Riesling, hot, wet and unaccountably sweet.

We continued for an indefinable time, lips gliding and pressing, tongues twining with increasing urgency as I drew her to me in a ferocious embrace. Time passed us by. Our first lover's kiss was over a minute (or was it a decade?) later. We pulled apart, our breaths exploding from our chests into condensed clouds of desire, shot through with the windswept ice crystals floating around us. It seemed that we had both held our breaths for our entire lives, until we finally found each other for that first real kiss.

"Jesus..." I whispered.

Mom smiled and cupped my cheek in her hand, drawing me down again to her lips. As our tongues dueled once again, she moaned into my mouth and her hands slid down from my shoulders to my butt, pulling me against her.

Taking my own cue from her actions, I brought my own hands to cup her cheeks, pulling her even more tightly to me. Her ass was marvelously taut and supple against my grasping fingers, wonderfully warm and firm. My head spun and I felt dizzy as the sensation of caressing my own mother's perfect ass overloaded my senses.

I was holding a firm, fleshy miracle in the palms of my hands.

Her limbs slightly parted and surrounded my leg. Instinctively, I flexed my knee, pushing my thigh into her crotch. She began slowly rocking against me, a small whimper escaping her mouth.

She moaned again into my lips and then tore hers away from mine. Her color was high and her eyes were feverishly bright as she looked at me.

"Inside! Oh God, Peter! Inside!" she gasped.

Without conscious thought, our lips joined again, Mom's mashing into mine so hard she almost bruised me. Arms

around one another, we half-stumbled to the sliding glass doors and I fumbled for the handle blindly. My heart thudded heavily in my chest as we nearly fell back into the living room.

We practically tore our parkas off one another and in seconds our lips were again fused together, at the same time my hands found her breasts and hers glided over my hardness, scrabbling desperately at my length through the rough fabric of my Levis.

When her fingers began searching for the buttons of my fly, I groaned into her mouth. The whole universe collapsed into a singularity of lust, encompassed entirely by the sensation of her hands working into my pants, her tongue intertwined with mine, the heft of her breasts and hardening of her nipples beneath my grasping fingers.

My pulse roared and thundered in my ears like Victoria Falls and suddenly, there wasn't enough air in the entire house to fill my gasping lungs.

Eventually, Mom succeeded in opening the front of my jeans. As she slid them down to my ankles, she dropped to her knees in front of me and I was totally paralyzed with expectancy and incredulity, finally understanding what was about to take place.

My boxers bulged out luridly in front of Mom's face. When she ever-so-lightly ran her hand across my hardness, I shuddered with anticipation. When she pulled the front of my underwear

down, I bounced into full view like an obscene Jack-In-the-Box, pulsing and dripping.

Even though she knew what was coming, I think she was still taken aback by the sudden appearance of my hardness and its size.

In that moment, Mom looked up at me, an expression of startled wonder and burning lust on her face.

"Faen!" she exclaimed.

When her bare hand closed around my cock for the first time, my knees nearly gave way as I reflexively bucked against her smooth, warm grasp.

As I stood there with my pants around my ankles, cock bobbing in time with my pulse, Mom took me gently in hand. Her warm, soft touch was nearly unbearable. She cupped my balls with one hand and traced her fingers along my shaft, carefully inspecting my length by eye and braille. When her thumb passed over my slick glans, I almost lost it, wracked by a deep shudder of pleasure.

"My God, Peter. It's absolutely magnificent," she sighed dreamily. Almost as an afterthought, she murmured as though to herself, "And hard. Jesus, so hard. So hard and so BIG, so big for, for... me!" Her voice took on a rising note of wonder mingled with triumph.

Then she chuckled throatily and added, "I named you well, boy."

I was struck dumb, the intensity of my pleasure and emotions carrying me far beyond the capacity to think or speak. I could barely nod in acknowledgment of her praise.

Turning her attention back to my groin, Mom gently pulled my steel into a vertical position and gave the underside of my shaft a long, lingering and languorous lick, from base to crown. Again, my legs almost gave way and I moaned.

"Ahhh, Mom! So good!"

"Lovely," she murmured. "Jeg elsker din kuk." Kisses rained down on my entire length and then another amazing, long lick that ended with her tongue swirling over my glans.

The moment I felt her moist suction on my head, I was gone, blown completely beyond the horizon of lust and into the abyss of pure pleasure. I went over the edge so quickly no warning was possible.

"Ohhh, God! Mom!" I practically screamed.

To say I came is...inadequate. My eruption was like the transcontinental Super Chief, bursting from a tunnel in a

cloud of superheated steam, whistle screeching like the damned. It was a liquid broadside from a 100 cannon ship of the line, all smoke, fire and deafening thunder. It was more pleasure than a mortal frame could endure and remain sane.

My first fusillade caught her completely by surprise, spraying hotly across her cheek and the bridge of her nose, several pearly droplets also landing in her bangs as she jerked slightly and blinked in surprise. Just as quickly though, she clamped her mouth over the head of my cock, sucking and swallowing furiously as I spewed molten lust, her cheeks alternately collapsing and ballooning as I spent myself utterly.

The world went away for a while, my existence contracting down to the incredible spasms of pleasure wracking my body and feel of her mouth on me as she murmured wordless encouragements around my throbbing shaft. From a continent away, I could faintly hear somebody crying out piteously, "Mom! Mom! Oh Jesus, Mom! Oh, Mooommmmm!"

At some point, time resumed its normal course and I felt one final suck on my now exquisitely sensitive head. With that last jolt of pleasure bordering on pain, my legs finally did give way and I collapsed onto my knees in front of her.

I'll never forget the look she gave me at that moment. I could see the flash of unquenched lust in her eyes, but at the same time her face composed itself into a look of serene happiness and satisfaction, mixed with motherly pride.

"Jesus, Peter. I had no idea I was exciting you THAT much," she chuckled, half-scolding me.

Wiping my milkiness from her cheek and forehead with her finger, she sucked it off her digit with relish, finally pulling it from her mouth with an audible pop.

"Dee-lish," she said, laughing wickedly at my pole-axed expression.

"The most and best cum I've ever tasted," she stated matter-of-factly, adding further to my astonishment.

Along with the return of my ability to speak came embarrassment at my lack of control. I sat heavily on the floor.

"Sorry, Mom," I croaked, cheeks red. "It felt so good, I couldn't help myself."

Lowering herself into my lap, Mom put her arms around my neck and kissed me gently but thoroughly. I could taste my saltiness.

"That's the idea, lover boy. You're supposed to lose it when momma sucks that wonderful cock of yours. I take your lack of control as a very, very big compliment."

"Thanks, Mom," I said, giving her a big hug. "It was amazing. I've never, uhm, lost it like that before."

"Ooof! Watch it there, you big lug. Don't squeeze so hard!"

"Sorry again," I mumbled. Then it all hit me all at once, the enormity of what had just happened between us. Yet again, I seemed robbed of any ability to express myself.

"Mom..." I began awkwardly.

"Shhh, my darling boy," Mom said gently, putting a finger to my lips. "I know. I've known for a long time, maybe even longer than you knew yourself."

"I love you too," she said quietly.

We shared another lingering kiss Mom's fingers looping around the back of neck, eventually finding their way into my hair. Our kiss intensified further and then we were apart, gasping for breath. Mom then stood abruptly, pulling me to my feet. Another kiss and her hands found my balls, cupping them gently.

"Take me to bed, Peter," she whispered urgently. "Take me now," she pleaded, her fingers again finding my resurgent hardness.

Stepping fully out of my pants, I quickly pulled my shoes and socks off and grabbed her hand, leading her up the stairs to the master bedroom. At the threshold, I swept her into my arms and carried her giggling to the bed, her arms around my neck.

Setting her on her feet, I kissed her again. When we broke apart, gasping, Mom anchored her fingers in the hair on the back of my head, drawing me close.

"Do you want to undress your mother, Peter?" She asked throatily.

I was beyond all words, beyond any ability to think. All I could do was nod like a demented bobble-head.

"Well then, what are you waiting for?"

I didn't know. What I did know was what I wanted now, so badly it burned like molten iron in my groin and brain. I was consumed by my need and Mom could see the want in my eyes.

What I wasn't prepared for though, was how much my hands shook as I reached to the front of her pants. I wasn't all thumbs, I was all toes. Nothing worked. My fingers trembled and were nearly useless. After a century or two of painfully humiliating fumbling, I was able to finally release the button and get down to business.

The raspy buzz of her zipper coming down suddenly seemed as loud as a chainsaw and I realized that we were both holding our breaths.

Pulling them over her hips, I moved with near-frantic haste, only to be stymied when I realized her shoes were still on.

"Fuckitall," I muttered under my breath. Mom balanced on one leg as I tried in vain to jerk the pants leg over her shoe, nearly toppling her in the process. By now I was nearly catatonic with desire, my fine motor skills deteriorating by the second as my brain burned.

Eventually, I solved the mysteries of shoelaces and successfully consigned Mom's jeans to the far corner of the room, crumpled in a heap. As I disposed of her Levis, Mom pulled off her turtleneck smoothly and stood before me, wearing only a pair of very modest, high-cut cotton briefs. Her dark thatch showed through the panties as a vague, smoky shadow and I could see an enormous spot of dampness in her gusset.

Those plain fabric panties with a huge wet spot were and remain to this day the most exciting, incredibly sexy thing I've ever seen.

As she stood before me, her nipples hardening from the cool air and her excitement, I could only gape. Her eyes held mine

briefly and then she dropped her gaze, blushing deeply at my lustful, intense scrutiny.

My breath caught in my throat and it felt like there was a python wrapped around my chest. "God, you are so beautiful," I finally husked.

"Really?" Mom asked, suddenly looking vulnerable, uncertain and absolutely adorable.

"More than you could possibly know," I gasped, finally remembering to breathe.

Taking her shoulders, I gently pushed her back to the edge of the bed until she sat on the edge. Kneeling in front of her, I grasped the sides of her panties and slowly pulled them over her hips, revealing her magnificent, unruly bush. Placing my palms on the inside of her thighs, I gently parted her legs. Her skin was smooth, hot and flawless.

At first, she blushingly resisted the pressure of my hands, but I was not to be denied. Finally, she relaxed, reclining onto her back, with her legs dangling over the edge of the bed. It was then that her prize finally came into full view.

Her labia were thick, prominent and slick, her inner petals slowly blooming into view, deep, almost purple-pink in color. It was the most exotic, enticing and alluring she-orchid I had ever seen, and I was drawn to it irresistibly.

As my lips found the junction of her thigh and pelvis, moving to her center, she gasped and tensed for a moment, flinging her forearm across her closed eyes.

"Oh my God," she sighed. "Oh my God, Peter...nobody...ever..."

Her words cut off with an indescribable moan as my tongue centered itself in her divine groove and licked, slowly and firmly from perineum to nubbin. When I found her small pearl of pleasure with my lips and flicked it, ever so lightly, I drew another sharp gasp from her and then her hands were anchored in my hair, urging me onward.

"Yesssss," she hissed, "Oh yes, baby. Please. Oh God, please, yes! More! Please, please, more!"

As I lapped her juices, inwardly I was dumbfounded. Nobody had ever eaten Mom? Never? It seemed incomprehensible that no man had ever sampled her.

The only thing I knew as my tongue delved within her for the first time was that I now was savoring the nectar of Elysium. Nothing in all my previous experience came even close to my mother's honey and at that instant, I knew two truths.

I knew that I would never, ever tire of her taste. Never. I also knew that I was going to give her my all. I would stay between

her thighs until I had her screaming for mercy. One, two, ten orgasms, it didn't matter. I wasn't going to stop until she bodily forced me away from her magnificent cunt.

In that moment, I was completely addicted. Cocaine? A slap and a tickle. Heroin? A fucking after-dinner mint. What I felt, what I now desperately wanted was as far beyond simple desire as a hawk soaring above a buzzing gnat. In that moment, I knew, knew that my need was carved into the marrow of my bones, a novel part of myself that was as a new vital organ, which I would now die without.

I was riding a wave of the most intense, intimate pleasure ever known, mainlining the concentrated essence of absolute love and total lust. The fire that was now coursing through my veins would remain there burning until the last breath of my life.

I was now in a place where time had no meaning. There was only her wetness, smell and taste. My entire existence began and ended between the soft, smooth creases of her thighs and pelvis. I was vaguely aware of the spasm of her thighs around my head and the crescendo of moans and shrieks of pleasure as she came on my tongue, but that was the background to the overwhelming overload of her scent, wetness and slickness.

Eventually, she pushed me away, almost roughly. It could have been a few minutes later, or sometime next week. She grabbed my hair and pulled my face away from her slippery

lips. I was coated with her essence from eyebrows to chin and it was the best feeling in the world.

"Jesus Kristus," she exhaled, her voice hoarse. "What the fuck did you just do to me, Peter?"

Hearing Mom swear like that made me shiver with delight. In all my years, I had never heard my beloved mother drop an F-bomb. Somehow, it didn't seem coarse or cheap. It wasn't crude or rude. It was...strangely intimate, like she shared something secret with me. It made me feel even closer to her.

I lifted my head up and crawled on top of her, my cock trapped between our bellies, throbbing like an obscene missile.

"I just loved you the way you deserve to be loved, Mom. I wanted you to feel special, the way you made me feel special," I murmured.

Running her fingers through my hair, Mom kissed me softly but thoroughly, a gentle, satisfied smile on her lips.

"You made me feel like a queen, sweetheart," she sighed contentedly.

"MY queen," I corrected with a grin.

"Your queen," she echoed, nodding her head happily.

Reaching between us, she found my shaft, her eyes widening slightly as she felt my resurgent steel again.

"My goodness, Peter. How did it get so hard again, so fast?"

"It's the company I'm keeping. I'm with the sexiest girl on the planet," I said softly.

"You're very sweet, but you need your vision checked, darling."

"My hard-on, my call, Mom," I grinned, grinding myself on her belly.

"You're impossible, but I love you, Peter," she sighed.

I slid down her abdomen, my cock finding the small valley between her thighs.

"I want you so much, Mom," I whispered back.

"Then take me, Peter. Please, honey, take me now," she pleaded, her eyes now hooded with lust. "Be inside me, son. Pul mora di," she pleaded.

She opened her thighs and I rose up on my elbows, watching her face intently. I slowly thrust my hips forward. As my helmet touched her lips for the first time, her breath caught in her throat and her arms tightened around my shoulders. Slowly, as I pressed home, I slid down the groove between her nether lips to the opening of her portal, at last ready to go where no son should ever be.

For a brief beat, I stayed poised at her gates of paradise. Our eyes locked, recognizing the enormity of the moment and time stretched, a month passing between heartbeats. Then Mom smiled, her hands sliding down to my ass, pulling me forward and into heaven.

As I sank into the center of her slickness, I was astounded by her tightness and heat. It felt like I was entrapped in a buttery, superheated vise, and when I slowly pressed forward, Mom's eyes went wider and wider, her mouth opening in a silent "O" of incredulous pleasure.

Then, I could go no farther. Mom looked at me, her face feral, eyes as big as saucers.

"Oh my God, Peter," she whispered. "Oh God. So fucking big, son. Pikken din er sa stor, so good..." her voice trailed off, her lower lip trembling.

I could spend a year trying to find the words to describe how I felt at that instant, buried to the hilt in the most forbidden

place in the world. I'm an erstwhile writer, but I'll be damned if I know how to find the language to describe the feelings.

There simply isn't a vocabulary for it. There are no adjectives, no superlatives, no paeans, no poems, not even whole novels that could encompass the feelings that come along with returning to the place of your birth as a full man.

My world changed irrevocably, one moment as expansive as the sky and then contracted and ultimately distilled to just us. Armageddon could have been occurring just beyond the edge of our bed and I would have been oblivious.

Then I began to move. With the first stroke, Mom's legs came up and wrapped around the back of my thighs. With the second stroke, her arms tightened around me with more strength than I thought she possessed. With the third stroke, her lips parted and an inarticulate groan escaped. With the fourth stroke, her fingers hooked into my skin. With the fifth stroke, she met me with her own, vigorous counterthrust, her legs coming up to wrap around my hips.

As we settled into the rhythm of our incestuous waltz, Mom began a litany of sighs and exhortations, in time with my thrusts.

"Oh God, Peter, Oh God! Yes! Oh God!"

Much, much sooner than I wanted, our lover's canter morphed into a full-fledged gallop and I could see the end looming. It was at once something I wanted more than my next breath and at the same time, wanted to hold at arms length, prolonging our moment together forever.

Mom was now almost chanting beneath me, alternating "Oh God!" with "Oh, Peter!" as our thighs slapped together loudly and wetly. By now my own control was reduced to tatters and I slammed and thrust into Mom with all my strength, making her grunt beneath me.

"Knull meg, knull meg! Fuck me, Peter, fuck me!" she began repeating in time to my thrusts, over and over.

Abruptly, her eyes opened wide and she began shrieking at the top of her lungs, "Peter! Peter! Oh God, Peter- I'm cumming, I'm cumming! Peeeeeeter!"

Then I felt her clamp around me and her eyes rolled back into her head. At that moment, I was beyond all control and I began spraying myself into my Mom, my lover.

I came with a force like I had never experienced before in my entire life. My cum seemed to burst from me like a column of water hitting a hydroelectric turbine and it felt as though I had gallons to give her. My detonation was so intense that it seemed as though I should be smelling burned hair and gunsmoke.

Then I was suddenly limp as a flatworm, totally spent, nerveless and boneless. Lifting a pencil would have been beyond my strength, as I collapsed onto Mom.

I came to my senses at some point, the universe reassembling itself into something resembling actual existence. For a while, time wasn't measurable, but then reality asserted itself in the form of Mom kissing me tenderly and passionately, her breath labored.

"That was wonderful, Peter, but if you don't get off me soon, I'm going to suffocate," she chided me in a strained voice.

"Oh, God, I'm sorry, Mom!" I apologized, hastening to move to her side.

Mom immediately snuggled beneath my arm, her head resting on my chest.

"Your heart is beating so fast, darling, so strong..." she whispered.

Still stunned by the intensity of our lovemaking, it took a few moments for me to engage my brain and make a response. Even then, as lucidity returned to me, I had great difficulty expressing myself.

"Mom," I began, my voice no better than a croak, "That was...that was...just...amazing," I concluded lamely.

Sighing dreamily in assent, Mom said, "It was the best, Peter. The best ever."

"I knew I wanted to be with you, Peter, but I had no idea, darling, no idea at all that it could be so good with my own son," she said, her voice full of wonder.

"How do you feel?" I asked, suddenly taken with the irrational fear that we wouldn't be together again.

"Well loved and VERY well fucked," Mom said with a warm smile.

"And you're okay with this?" I asked uncertainly, "With...us?"

"Jesus, Peter, what do you think?" she asked with a note of affectionate exasperation. "I just committed one of the biggest no-no's in western civilization. I've sucked my son off and let him eat my pussy. I just fucked him, and cheated on a psychopathic husband for God's sake. Don't be an idiot."

I smiled a little uncertainly at her sarcastic rebuke and then Mom seemed to see something more in my question.

"What's on your mind Peter? What's worrying you?"

Finally giving voice to my insecurities and uncertainties, I blurted it out in a tumbled rush, "It can't be anyone else now, Mom. Being with anybody else...it wouldn't be the same. It couldn't possibly be as good as what we just did, and it wouldn't be, well, it wouldn't be... you."

"I want to be with you always, Mom," I said softly. "Nobody else. Just you and me."

Mom smiled gently and touched my cheek, a tear running down her own. "You're my sweet boy, Peter. You're also my sweet man now. Do you really think this was just a horny roll in the hay for me?"

"I've been falling in love with you for quite a while now, just like you have with me. We wouldn't be where we are now if I didn't feel...that way about you too," she said, taking my hand in hers.

"Good!" I said with great relief. Some uncertainty crept back into my voice when I asked, "What's next?"

"First we get some rest and then you need to put that wonderful pulse back inside your momma. It's been so long," she sighed, grinning wickedly at the same time. "It's been so long since your Mom has been properly fucked. You need to do right by her and show her how much you love her."

Doubts and fears now behind me, I grinned back, saying, "I'm a good son. I always do what Mom asks me. Because I love her."

Mom heaved a happy sigh and snuggled in close and I put my arms around her. She was asleep in moments, a small smile on her lips. Soon enough, the sandman threw the big switch in my head and there was warm, comforting blackness. If I dreamed, I don't recall what.

## Chapter 9

Somehow, sometime, I made the transition from dreamless sleep to waking dream, as I awoke the exquisite sensation of moist lips gliding over the head of my penis. It was as near to pitch black as possible outside, the stars obscured by heavy scudding clouds and the air disturbed by a steady wind that whistled shrilly as it knifed through the trees surrounding the house and swirled in the eaves. Had I been alone in bed, the sound alone would have been enough to chill me to the bone, but I was warm, oh so warm as my mother wrapped her mouth around my cock, licking and sucking with abandon.

For someone who seemed to have been largely celibate for an unconscionably long time, Mom's ministrations were artful and incredibly arousing. As if reading my thoughts, Mom paused in her tasks, lifting her head to regard me affectionately. She then spoke for the first time, her eyes bright.

"Hello, love. Is Mommy's boy all awake now?" she asked throatily. "I hope you like having your cock sucked. I've been missing this for so long and yours is just so...perfect. I just can't resist it," she whispered, blushing endearingly.

All too quickly, she had me bucking my hips involuntarily and she ended up spitting me out, choking slightly.

"Whoa, easy there, cowboy!" she coughed. "I don't want you going off prematurely."

"Sorry, Mom," I apologized sheepishly. "You're just too good at that."

"Thanks, honey. That's a real compliment. Now that I have your attention," she giggled, "It's time to put that nice stor kuk of yours to good use."

With that, Mom swung her legs over me, grasping my cock at the same time. She settled onto my lap and set herself on my hardness, taking me inside in one long, continuous, exquisite impalement.

With a satisfied groan, she settled her weight on me fully, eyes twinkling.

"You got to pound your momma earlier, Peter. Now it's time for me to return the favor," she said gleefully, an impish gleam in her eyes.

As she began her ride, she rose languorously, tightening her muscles as she ascended, pausing at the apex of her motion to just hold the head of my cock inside her. She then lowered herself again with agonizing slowness, clearly savoring every inch of my penetration.

The sensations were a beautiful torment to me. "All yours," I moaned. "I'm all yours, Mom. Fuck me."

"That's right, Peter. I'm going to fuck you now. You just lay back and let

Mom do all the work, beautiful boy. Let Mom fuck her sweet boy."

When you're out in the real world, chasing girls (and hopefully catching a few), you get a sense sometimes for what a particular lady might be like in bed. Some women have an in-your-face "x" factor, something about their bearing, speech or attitude that immediately speaks to a voracious appetite for sex. You just know somehow that they will be dynamite in the sack.

I've had a few of those kinds of girls in my bed and it can be incredible. But that's not what I like best. What I like is finding

the gal that surprises the heck out of you when she finally lets her hair down, the quiet one that lets all restraint and inhibition fly out the window of propriety once they get naked with you.

It struck me as I watched Mom ride me, completely abandoning herself to our lovemaking, that my beloved mother had that latter quality in spades. I think some of it was our already close mother-son relationship and a healthy dash of the forbidden, but I could just tell by watching her that Mom loved to fuck. Her wanton gyrations on my cock, her little gasps and yips of pleasure and most of all, the lustful stare she fixed on me as she rode told me in no uncertain terms that I was with a very sensual woman who took no prisoners in bed.

It felt like I had won all of the lotteries in the world at one time.

These thoughts flashed through my mind in a matter of seconds and then I was back in the moment, captivated by the bouncing of her breasts and the sheen of her juices on my cock, as she rose and fell on me.

I couldn't stop touching her everywhere. I palmed her still pert and firm breasts and she smiled and sighed. When I flicked her erect, pebble hard nipples, she crooned with pleasure. When I slid my hands to her flanks, sliding them down to her silky ass, she moaned. When I gripped her cheeks tightly and pulled them apart, she growled and ground down on me so hard, I thought for a moment I'd snap off inside her.

Then, greatly daring, I did something I had never done before with any woman. It wasn't anything that I had consciously thought about in the past, but it seemed somehow right with Mom, to be able to touch her everywhere.

Sliding my right hand over the smooth globe of her left buttock, I scraped my fingertip across her little brown asterisk.

The effect was immediate. Mom's eyes opened wide and she groaned, "Oh my God. OhmigodPeterwhat'reyoudoingtome?"

Taking that as an invitation to further exploration of her most secret place, I wormed my index finger into her rubbery tightness.

"Peter!" she cried. "Oh God honey! Peter! Oh, FUCK, yeah! Yes! Yes, baby! Do it! Dooo it! Dooo meeeee!"

As I began pistoning her back channel, she suddenly crushed herself down onto my cock, grinding her pubis against me in a furious attempt to stimulate her clit. I felt her telltale tightening around my shaft and my invading finger and she began shrieking out her climax.

"Ahh! Ahhh, Peter! Yes! Yes! Oh God, my ass, yes! Yesss, babeeeee!"

Then she was flooding me with her juices and I couldn't hold out any longer. I pulsed inside her once, twice, three, four times, the pleasure so intense that it was almost cramp-like in its intensity.

Mom then collapsed on me, breathing like a spent triathlete, her face and chest flushed deep crimson. I simply held her to me as her breathing gradually slowed and I slowly slipped out of her clasp, our combined releases completely saturating my groin.

It felt heavenly.

We lay just like that, close and silent for maybe ten minutes before Mom finally stirred, whispering in my ear.

"You are a very nasty little dritt, Peter, touching your mother that way. A very dirty boy, you are."

"I had no idea you liked having something up your ass, dear mother," I teased back, lightly caressing her pucker again with my fingertip.

"You bring out the worst in me, you perverted young man."

Daring hugely once again, I held my breath and asked, "Would you like me to fuck you there some time?"

I could almost feel Mom blush as she burrowed her head in my shoulder, embarrassed by my extremely intimate question.

Almost inaudibly, she whispered in my ear, "Yes. Dear God, I must be mad, but I think...yes."

"You tell me when, Mom. I'd love to do that with you, but only if you're really sure."

"I think I really do, Peter, but I'm scared. You're so damn big, I'm afraid you'll split me in two, but I still think...God, I KNOW I'm mad to want this, but it seems somehow right to be with you, uhm, that way," she said with a blush.

In a voice that was barely detectable, she confessed, "I've never done that, you know."

I was dumbfounded. Mom was so uninhibited in bed with me and she so clearly enjoyed my frisky finger, that I assumed she was, well, experienced that way. With me, she seemed so genuinely adventurous that it never occurred to me that she was, in fact, still a virgin in one respect.

It was then that the enormity of my suggestion, what I was asking of her, hit home. I hugged her close.

"No worries, Mom," I said gently. "We'll talk about it again some other time. You can tell me when you're ready. I won't do ANYTHING that you don't truly want."

"You're my queen, Mom," I added softly. "I'll only ever do what pleases you and makes you feel good."

"And if I completely lose my mind and decide I want that monster up my rasshol?" she whispered in my ear.

"I'll be very, very gentle, but you don't need to decide a single thing right now, pretty lady. We'll put it on the "backside burner" for now."

"You are a very nasty son and your puns are horrible. But I still love you anyway."

"And I love you too, Mom," I replied, rubbing my finger across her pucker one more time. "Every square inch."

"Brat," she murmured again, her eyes drooping with fatigue.

"Time for your beauty rest, Mom," I whispered, kissing her forehead. I pulled her to my side and put her under my arm again. She curled up with a contented sigh and was fast asleep in moments. I followed her quickly into dreamland.

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Christmas day announced itself with a howling gale and driving snow, the creaking of the house waking me with a start. For a moment, I couldn't figure out where I was, my disorientation total. In a flash, all of the memories came flooding back and I sat up with a gasp, finally recognizing where I was. The light in Mom's bedroom was strangely attenuated and softened. As I looked around, I could see that an enormous snow drift had extended halfway over the window next to the headboard. Knowing the window placement, it seemed that the drift was probably at least eight or nine feet high.

It made me feel as though our house was completely entombed as I watched tendrils of blown snow streaming from the tip of the drift that was slowly building itself. It looked like a Himalayan peak in miniature, summit thrust into the jet stream.

Shivering slightly, I settled back into the bed, the enormity of the previous evening's events finally sinking in. Mom was already awake, lying on her side with her head propped on her hand. Her hair was a mare's nest, tousled by our night of passion, but she was smiling serenely as she looked me over.

"Good morning, lover," she whispered.

"Morning, Mom," I whispered back. "Merry Christmas."

Mom's smile broadened. Her eyes glistening, she reached out to touch my cheek. "I've been waiting for you to wake up," she said, still whispering.

"How do you feel?" she asked.

"Like I've died and gone to heaven," I answered.

"Me too, darling."

"Mom, why are we still whispering?" I asked, also murmuring quietly.

"Because we're safe in our little refuge, with a storm all around us," she replied in hushed tones. "Because now we have a secret, the biggest of secrets. Something only for us, something that the world can never know about."

"Yes," I agreed. "Something only for us."

"What do we do now, Peter?" she asked, whispering again. "What about your fath..."

"No," I answered quickly, cutting her off. "No talking about that, Mom. Not now, especially not today. Today is for us, our first real Christmas."

"You're right, yes, my love," she said contritely. "I'm sorry. Lystig Jul, elskling sonn. "

I reached out to pull her to me. "Merry Christmas to you too, pen jente. Don't be sorry, Mom. We'll talk later."

I slid my hand along her flank, over the curve of her hip to cup her ass, pulling her close, so my waking hardon poked her belly. She giggled.

"Oh my. Did Santa leave some morgenbrod for me?" she husked.

"Want your stocking stuffed, pretty lady?" I leered wickedly.

Breaking my embrace, Mom pulled back and threw off the duvet, standing with a slight stagger. "Give me a moment, my randy boy. If I don't get up right this minute, I'm going to pee the bed."

"Can't have that," I agreed. "Unless you have some secret proclivities you haven't shared with me?"

Sticking out her tongue, she blew a raspberry at me. "Brat. Nasty, perverted lille drit."

Turning away, she walked to the en suite, plopping onto the toilet in plain view, leaving the door open. A moment later, I could hear the hissing, almost musical tinkle as she let go, her face visibly relaxing as she relieved herself. "Ahhh, that's much better," she sighed.

My shock at her casual actions must have shown, because when she opened her eyes to look at me, she laughed.

"What's the matter, son? Too intimate? Surely you're not embarrassed? After all, you're the one who put his finger up my ass last night."

Well and truly hoist on my own petard, I had to admit defeat and laughed myself. "I know, Mom. No, I'm not embarrassed. I guess I actually kind of like it, sharing everything. It's weird, I guess, but it somehow makes me feel closer to you."

"Brat. Little pervert. Naughty boy."

"Hey, you're the one who left the bathroom door open, Ms. Watersports," I said, getting up and moving towards her.

Walking into the bathroom and standing directly in front of the toilet, I grabbed my cock and pointed it at her, waving it menacingly. "My turn. Finish your business and clear out, woman," I growled brusquely. "Get out of my way or get wet."

"Brute!" she squawked, scrambling to wipe herself, stand and flush.

Mimicking her earlier words, I said, "Ahh, that's much, much better," as I let go.

Mom swatted my ass as she squeezed by me, saying, "Men are all such barbarians." While I finished, she brushed her teeth quickly and went back to the bed, hips rolling.

"Don't keep me waiting, young man," she called over her shoulder. "Momma needs her good son again."

As quickly as I could, I brushed my teeth as well and hurried back to bed. Mom was sprawled casually on her back, idly running a finger up and down her slit. Her inner petals were already blooming and I could see the sheen of her excitement on her finger and labia.

"About time," she husked, eyes hooded. "Get your cute ass over here and do what needs doing."

Laying down beside her, I ran my hand along her hip and bent to take one of her nipples in my mouth. As I licked the hardening nubbin, she gasped, saying, "Stop messing around and put it in, darling. Momma needs to be fucked!"

Never one to contradict my mother, I moved quickly between her outstretched legs. As I lowered to her, she reached out and grasped me firmly, guiding me to her opening. I sank into her very wet heat in one long stroke, her arms looping tightly around my shoulders as I bottomed out. Letting out an ecstatic groan, she crooned, "God, yes, Peter. So good. Ohhh, so damn good."

I slightly shifted my position in her divine saddle and began making long, slow and even strokes, savoring every millimeter of my movement in her sheath, still gobsmacked at my great good fortune. After a minute or so, Mom wrapped her legs around my hips and canted her pelvis upwards, staring at me intently, lust blazing in her eyes.

"Fuck me, Peter," she said simply. "Fuck me hard and make me cum, baby boy. Knulla din moder."

The previous evening, our coupling had a very emotional, almost sacramental feel, as we finally expressed our love for each other fully and completely. Now, having claimed one another, pure, undiluted lust made its first, full-fledged appearance. I set to my task with a will, quickly increasing my tempo and force until our thighs were crashing together with loud slaps.

"Oh, yes, baby. Like that, yes, like that!" Mom moaned as I pounded her. The more forcefully I thrust into her wetness, the more she seemed to need. I gradually became consumed with the idea of penetrating her as deeply as I possibly could,

as if the depth of my fucking would somehow make her more fully and completely mine.

Pausing for a moment, I placed her legs over my shoulders and resumed my stroking. This seemed to afford some more depth, Mom murmuring wordless approval as her hands gripped my shoulders. As I increased the tempo and ferocity of my attack, I began to sense a blunt resistance to my deepest strokes and Mom's eyes flew open, staring wildly at me.

"My God, Peter! Yes! Yes! So deep! Sooo goood!" she wailed as I hammered her.

Abruptly, her eyes rolled back into her head and she shot her legs straight out into a quivering, shaking V. I could feel her fingernails clawing furrows in the skin of my back. Sweat stood out on her brow and a crimson flush suffused her face, shoulders and upper chest, an almost savage grimace distorting her features as she crested.

"Ahh! Peter! Ahhh! Ahhh! Ahhhh! Bay-beeee!" she wailed, as her climax wracked her.

I was so captivated by her unrestrained passion that I forgot to cum myself. I gradually slowed my tempo and Mom's legs fell limply to the bed, completely flaccid, her breath labored. I stopped my thrusts, still hard within her.

Mom lay completely inert beneath me for several minutes, her breathing gradually returning to normal. Finally, her eyelids fluttered and opened, her face a mask of amazement as she focused on me.

"Fuck," she exhaled. "Holy dritt, Peter. That was unbelievable, you big, bad stud."

"You were amazing, Mom, just amazing. So sexy."

"If I was amazing, it's because I was being fucked within an inch of my life by my wonderful son."

"You're so beautiful when you cum, Mom," I murmured. "It's the most beautiful sight in the world."

Grasping my face with her hands, Mom pulled me down and gave me a tender, lingering kiss. "You're a hopeless romantic, darling. I love you very much for that. But I also love that you can fuck like a demon when I want it," she added giggling.

"I have lots of inspiration," I said simply.

Mom blushed and turned her head. "I'm a very lucky woman," she said quietly. Turning back to look at me, she smiled and said, "I think we have unfinished business, young man. Momma needs to feel her son's cum inside her. What are you going to do about it?"

"Be a good son," I replied, beginning to move within her again.

"That's my boy. Oh yes, just that way, Peter, just like that, lover."

We soon settled into an easy rhythm, Mom holding me close, whispering encouragements and Norsk endearments into my ear as we loped along. Strangely, I was in no hurry, totally in the moment, savoring every cycle of our waltz of thrusts and grinds. I wanted it to last forever, but soon I began to feel the telltale tightening in my groin and my pace quickened.

Mom immediately sensed my impending climax and began whispering to me. "That's right baby, let it go. Give your cum to me. Put it all inside me. Fuck me, baby. Cum for me, son. Cum for your momma."

Those words pushed me right over the edge and I was suddenly in a free fall of ecstasy. I felt like I was delivering a river of sperm into my mother. With each contraction, each, spasm of pleasure, my whole body tightened and cords stood out in my neck.

I was only able to gasp a word at a time, each syllable corresponding to a blistering rope of cum inside my mother's pussy.

"Ohhh - God - Mom - Mom - I - Love - You - Mom!" I cried, flooding her with my seed.

For a moment I blacked out and then I was kissing her, deeply, ferociously, possessively.

As a bead of sweat dripped from my forehead to land on her cheek, I finally breathed again. "You're mine now, Mom," I said fiercely. "Only mine. Always mine. Always."

Hugging me tightly, a tear rolling down her cheek, Mom nodded once. "Yes. Just you, Peter. Only for my son, my only lover."

We lay together for a while, casually touching, not with intent to excite again, but just to feel close to one another. The only sound came from the wind swirling outside the house. Even that was somewhat dampened by the heavily falling snow, hushing everything towards stillness. After a bit, the silence was broken rudely by the growling of my stomach.

Mom laughed and ran her fingers through my hair. "Men! You're all so...basic."

I brushed her hair back from her forehead and kissed her.

"I thought I already sang for my supper," I protested lightly.

"Mmmm, that you did, big guy. I suppose I could cut you a little slack..."

"Thanks," I said drily. "Nice to know I'm in your good graces."

"Brat. Let me clean up a little and I'll get some breakfast for us."

She wrinkled her nose and grimaced. "Smells like a cathouse in here."

"And how would my sainted mother recognize the odor of a cathouse?" I teased.

"Not very sainted anymore, you double brat. I'd paddle you if you weren't such a big lug."

"I'll get the sheets in the washer," I offered, standing up.

"Not so fast, there, buster," she interrupted, grabbing my hand. "Sheets can wait for a bit. If you're doing the laundry, who's going to scrub my back?"

Grinning, I pulled her to her feet and into my embrace. "Your body slave awaits your pleasure, Mistress Christine."

"That's more like it, Mr. Smartmouth."

I took her hand and led her into the en suite. Soon, the shower was billowing steam and the mirrors fogged completely. When we stepped in together, Mom took charge, proceeding to scrub me, lovingly and sensuously from head to toe. Of course, one or two areas got a bit more attention than others and by the time she handed the soap to me, I was at full, bobbing and throbbing staff.

Leaning back against me, my cock resting on the flare of her back and buttocks, she sighed and closed her eyes. She looked radiant and alive, her skin blushing rosily from the heat of the steam, her hair slicked back into a dark, faux pony tail by the running water. Grabbing a bottle of shampoo, I poured out a handful and began massaging it into her scalp. She sighed happily and relaxed further against me.

"Mmmmm. That's lovely, sweetheart. You're spoiling me rotten."

"Nothing is too good for my special girl. She deserves all the spoiling she can get," I said seriously.

I proceeded to shampoo her thoroughly, massaging her scalp to the point she was practically purring. After rinsing and conditioning her hair, I turned my attention to other areas of interest, drawing a gasp or two when I briefly sucked her soapy nipples into my mouth. I licked, fingered and probed every millimeter of her I could touch and soon we were locked in

another fierce embrace, her hand grasping my cock and rubbing it through her slit.

I turned her around, bent my knees slightly and tilted my pelvis, bringing my cock to her opening, rubbing, teasing with my tip, making her moan in frustration. Mom was beside herself with excitement, pushing and rubbing her buttocks against me, rising up onto the balls of her feet and thrusting back, trying to capture my hardness, but I was having none of it, enjoying my teasing session.

Finally, I decided that I'd made her wait long enough. I grabbed her hips and angled myself to take her...

and the hot water ran out.

"Oh SHIT!" Mom shrieked, taking the brunt of the shower's stream. Spinning away from the cold and out of my grasp, I was left exposed to the full output of fifty-degree water, with predictable results.

"FUCK!" I bellowed, backpedalling quickly. I slipped on the dropped bar of soap, landing heavily on my ass, now taking the jet of cold water full in the face. "GODDAMMIT!"

Mom reached into the shower stall and rescued me, turning the tap off. Dripping wet herself, her nipples hard as cherrystones from the combination of previous excitement and cold, she laughed so hard she could barely stand up.

Grumbling, I got to my feet and grabbed a towel. Mom did the same and we began chaffing each other vigorously to restore circulation. Mom was still laughing so hard she could barely catch her breath and her jag gradually tapered into giggles interrupted with hiccups as we dried ourselves.

Finally, she caught her breath enough to speak. "The wages of sin, Peter, the wages of sin."

Still cold, I had shrunken quickly and painfully and it felt as though my balls had retracted into my armpits. I didn't see much humor in the situation and grumbled as such to Mom, which set her off on another round of giggles and snorts.

Eventually, I was able to find the sense of humor I had temporarily misplaced and laughed along with her.

"And what if I catch pee-new-moanya?" I asked, play-acting petulance.

Mom wasn't having any of it, giving me a zinger right back.

"Just as long as you don't get pee-nis-moanya," she riposted.

"You'd fuck your son on his deathbed, just for your own pleasure?" I asked incredulously, pretending to be deeply hurt.

"Damn right, sonny-boy," Mom riposted briskly. "Stor harde kuker like yours don't just grow on trees, you know. Once a girl gets one, she needs to use it as much as possible while she can."

Stepping close to me, she ran her hands over my once-proud penis and gave it a gentle squeeze. "I'll make it up to you a little later, sweetheart," she said, bussing my cheek tenderly. "Right now, I want to make my son-lover a delicious Julefrokost. How about pancakes, maple syrup and some nice, crisp bacon?"

I suddenly realized how hungry I was. I picked Mom up and gave her a big hug.

"There's nothing I'd like better, Mom. Let's get dressed and I'll make some coffee too."

## Chapter 10

Christmas breakfast was, quite simply, the finest meal of my entire life. We were both ravenous after our night of passion and discovery, but even so it took an hour to eat the thick-sliced rashers and blueberry studded hotcakes. With Mom in my lap, there were about three or four stolen kisses or caresses for every bite of food we took.

By the time we did finish our meal, I was hard enough to split kindling and Mom was dripping. That turned into the first time I took her on the kitchen table. We were in such an inflamed state of impatience that I simply pulled her panties to one side and buried myself to the hilt without ceremony, accompanied by Mom's groaning approval. It was a miracle we didn't break every single dish as well as the legs of the table.

It was only after I pulled out from her, leaving a gobby trail of spend on the floor and tablecloth, that it occurred to me the window curtains were drawn fully back. Mom seemed to have the same thought as me, but a brief look of worry flashed across her face.

"Not to worry, Mom," I tried to reassure her. "Nobody can see anything. They'd have to come all the way around to the back of the house to get an eyeful."

"I know, Peter, but I forgot to tell you that Hilda said she might drop by this morning on her way out with some of her Christmas kuchen. "

"I see," I said slowly, the significance of our risky position coolly dispersing the last of my pleasant post-orgasmic haze. "Do you think she could have seen us?"

"I don't know, darling. I think we could trust her, in any event."

"Well," I sighed. "It's a little late to worry now."

"Anyway," I added, "I don't think I could have waited to get you into bed. I needed to have you right then."

"You really think Hilda would keep quiet about us?"

"She and I share everything, Peter," Mom said seriously. "We're very close - no secrets between us. She knows me so well, I don't think I could hide anything from her, anyway."

"You know, she's had the hots for you for years," she added with a smirk.

Not to be outdone, I teased right back, "Planning on loaning me out, Mom?"

Mom snorted a laugh. "Not bloody likely, darling. I love Hilda, but your stor kukk is all mine."

"So, no sharing the wealth then?" I pretended disappointment.

"Mine and only mine," she repeated, eyes narrowing dangerously.

"All yours," I agreed hastily, pulling her close for a lingering kiss.

"Mmmm," she hummed, melting against me.

At that moment, we heard knocking at the back door.

"Shit!" Mom exclaimed, breaking away from me. "That's probably Hilda!"

She frantically grabbed her panties and quickly adjusted the twisted and wet fabric, grimacing as my messy gift leaked around the gusset. I pulled my sweatpants up with a jerk and grabbed some paper towels and began quickly cleaning up the mess on the floor and tablecloth. Mom took one from me and stuffed it hastily in her panties, wincing slightly as the rough material contacted her sensitive lips. Then she quickly did up her robe and ran her hands through her hair, bustling to the door.

A goose-bump inducing draft announced Hilda's arrival and I heard them greet each other enthusiastically with wishes of Merry Christmas. Sitting down at the kitchen table, I waited for Hilda's entrance, trying to appear as nonchalant as possible.

Hilda gave me a hug and peck on the cheek and sat at the table across from me. Mom bustled around for a few moments, getting her a cup of coffee. We all sat at the table, Mom next to me, her hand finding mine surreptitiously under the table. We exchanged pleasantries and best holiday wishes for a few

minutes, but it seemed somehow perfunctory, at least from Hilda's side.

Her eyes constantly shifted back and forth between Mom and me, appearing to probe and measure. Her look was at some moments so penetrating, that I thought we were undergoing some sort of nonverbal interrogation.

After a minute or two, the silence between the three of us became both embarrassing and intensely uncomfortable. I began to wonder just how much Hilda knew, or was surmising and I started to worry, wondering if Mom was correct in her assessment of Hilda's friendship and discretion.

I shifted uncomfortably in my seat, looking away. Somehow taking this as some sort of acknowledgment, Hilda finally broke the silence.

She spoke only one word, asking "When?" with an ironically arched eyebrow.

"When what, Hilda?" I asked innocently.

"Last night, or the night before?" she inquired with some impatience, her eyes boring into mine.

Again, I played stupid. "I don't understand, Hilda."

"Jesus," she said in exasperation. "It's a good thing you guys don't play poker. You can't hide anything for shit."

Measuring her words slowly, as though speaking to a child, she continued, "I. Said. When. Did. You. Guys. Start. Sleeping. Together?"

Mom blushed and shot me an "I told you so" look.

Hilda immediately clapped her hands together delightedly, crowing triumphantly, "I knew it! I just knew it! It's about damn time!"

She took Mom's hand in hers and squeezed it, her eyes glistening. "I'm so happy for you Chris, so happy."

"Hilda, you're okay with this?" I asked incredulously.

"Well, Peter my boy, it's not really any of my business to begin with, but your mom and I have been best friends forever. I think she deserves to be happy," she said flatly. "So, yes. You can trust me. Absolutely."

"And the fact that I'm her son...?" I asked.

"Don't mean squat," she riposted, almost defiantly. "I've known for a long time you two are right for each other - ever since you

were about sixteen, if you must know Peter. I've seen the way you both are together. I think you two are meant to be with one another. Okay, I'll admit that it's very exciting that you're her son, but I think the naughty factor is just the cherry on the sundae - breaking all those rules and conventions."

"Besides," she said with a grin, "What woman wouldn't want to be with a hunk like you, Peter?"

I blushed, with nothing to say. Mom squeezed my hand tightly and then got up. She bent to whisper something in Hilda's ear. Hilda's eyes went wide and she covered her hand with her mouth, blushing.

"Oh my goodness," she whispered, looking at me furtively out of the corner of her eye, "That big?"

Mom nodded her head, looking at me with love and pride the whole time. I was so embarrassed that I couldn't meet Hilda's eyes.

"Ohmigod, Chris, I'm sooooo jealous!" Hilda exclaimed. "Handsome, strong and hung to boot! You are so totally fucking lucky, girl!"

"Shit, Mom!" I spluttered, incandescent with embarrassment.

Laughing, she came back to my side of the table and sat on my lap, her arms around my shoulders.

"I told you, now didn't I Peter? I told you Hilda and I had no secrets from each other and I told you that I didn't think we'd be able to hide things from her anyway. Didn't I?" She asked, settling back down to sit in my lap.

"You did," I acknowledged grudgingly. "But Jesus, telling her about my...my..." I ran out of words, too mortified to continue.

"Your enorm pikk?" Mom asked, clearly delighting in my discomfiture.

"Well, yes," I sulked.

"I'm very proud of my son," Mom said simply, amusement still dancing in her eyes. "I want Hilda to know how proud I am of him and how happy his big dick makes me, especially when he fucks me."

At this point, I gave up. I would have thrown my hands up in resignation, but I was still busy holding onto Mom. I couldn't understand how my quiet, reserved and proper mor could be in such a crazy, elated and nonchalant mood about fucking her son. I sensed that what she was saying would go no further as far as Hilda was concerned, but it still was shocking to hear her speak so openly about our secret.

Sensing my unease, Hilda reached across the table and squeezed my hand.

"I'd die before I told anyone about the two of you," she said seriously, holding me in a steady gaze. "Chris is as much the sister I never had as she is my best friend."

"I want her to be happy," she added. "She deserves so much to be happy, Peter, and I'm so glad it's you she's with. You'll look after her the way she needs."

"I'll do my best, Hilda," I agreed quietly. "Mom means the world to me."

Hilda stood abruptly, clearing her throat. "Well, I guess I better be moving along, Chris. I promised to help out at the church after services today and you guys need to, uhm, have some more holiday cheer," she chuckled.

"Just one bit of advice," she said, giving a parting shot over her shoulder. "Beds are generally more comfortable than kitchen tables."

Her laugh followed her out the door, lost in a blast of cold air as she let herself out into the swirling snow.

I looked at Mom, still blushing. "Busted," I said, shrugging my shoulders.

"I told you, Peter. She knows me. She knows me."

"Well," I said, "Shall we follow your best friend's advice?"

"Mmmm, I don't know Peter. Momma's kind of sore. You've been beating me with that big piece of meat all night. I think I need a little break," she apologized a little sheepishly.

"How about I draw you a hot bath?" I asked.

"Ah, that would be wonderful, darling. After that, we can open presents. And then..."

"And then?" I prompted.

"Well...I've always wanted to make love in front of a roaring fire," Mom said, kissing my cheek. "Do you know someone who can help me with that later tonight?"

"Hmmm. Could be, pretty lady. Let's get you your bath first."

"Yes, let's."

I drew her water and let her soak for about a half hour, when I came back in and sat on the side of the tube and washed her all over. Of course, some things got extra clean. I found out quickly enough that she wasn't kidding about being sore. Even one finger in her honeypot was difficult to tolerate.

Sighing, she pushed my hand away with reluctance. "I'm sorry honey. I love how you touch me, but it's going to take some practice getting used to that huge slab of meat you're packing. You're the biggest I've ever had."

I kissed the top of her head. "Don't apologize, Mom. I couldn't be happier. I got the best Christmas present in the whole world. I'm not greedy. Anyway, there are other ways to make you feel good," I said slyly.

"Is that so, you dirty boy?"

"My beautiful, sexy mom should have all the orgasms she can get. She deserves every single one of them," I replied seriously. "You're so beautiful when you cum, Mom. I just love watching you," I said, slowly slipping a finger down the crack of her ass.

"You're very naughty, Peter," Mom murmured, relaxing against me. "What're you up to back there?"

"Making my mom-lover feel good," I replied, my fingertip finding her tight little pucker.

"Ooh!" Mom squeaked, "You are SO nasty, Peter. Why do you like Momma's rasshol so much?"

"I love every bit of my Mom. Every bit," I replied, whispering in her ear. She groaned as my fingertip found its way into her rubbery tightness.

"Ohhh, God, Peter. Why does that feel so good? I love it when you play with my ass, you naughty lille dritt."

Mom rose up onto her hands and knees, moving herself back against my nasty finger. I took the opportunity to slide my other hand beneath her, gently rubbing her nubbin with my thumb.

"Mmmm," Mom hummed. "You're bound and determined to make Mommy cum, aren't you?"

"Always, Mom," I breathed into her ear, both hands busy. "That's what I was put here for - to make you feel good, sexy and loved."

"Oh yes, sweetheart, I do," she moaned. "I do."

Pushing back against my stink finger more forcefully, she whispered hoarsely.

"Put another finger in me, honey. Put another finger in Mommy's rasshol."

Slowly pushing my index finger in alongside its neighbor, I gently increased pressure until it sank inside my mother's dark hole. She groaned again.

"Oh God. Oh God, Peter. You're touching my asshole. I can't believe it. You're inside Mommy's ass. Oh GOD!"

Slowly, she began to rock back against my pressure again, small snorts and squeaks of passion escaping her lips as I pistoned my fingers in and out of her back passage. The sight of my fingers sliding in and out of Mom's most secret place was almost too much to stand. The forbidden exploration had me as hard as I've ever been. I was so wound up, the least touch would have caused a massive, gooey explosion.

Soon enough, my manipulation of Mom's ass and clit had her on the edge, her head hanging down, perspiration and condensed moisture from the bath water dripping from her forehead and the tips of her nipples. She was totally focused on the forbidden sensations emanating from her sexy ass, thrusting herself back against my fingers, grunting hoarsely with each cycle of penetration.

Without warning, her legs stiffened and I could feel her sphincter tightening around my fingers. She craned her neck back and screeched as her orgasm overwhelmed her.

"Peter! Oh God! Peeeterrrr! Cumming! CUMMING!"

Mom quivered with multiple seismic shocks as she rode out the waves of her orgasm and I slowly pulled my fingers from her lovingly abused backside. She slowly turned over onto her back, slipping back beneath the now-tepid water in the tub, a huge contented sigh escaping her lips as she closed her eyes.

I sat quietly for some minutes, drinking in the sight of her simply breathing, enjoying the small smile on her lips. After a short while, she opened her eyes. I was overwhelmed by the love I saw there.

"My God. You nasty, nasty man. Who the hell are you and what did you do to my lovely, sweet little boy?"

"He grew up and fell in love with the most beautiful woman in the world," I smiled back, well satisfied with the result of my ministrations to my sexy mom.

She smiled and then stared at my crotch. The outline of my erection was clearly visible against the clinging wetness of my sweatpants, which had become soaked as Mom thrashed her way through her first anal orgasm.

"Looks like he's still growing," she smiled wickedly.

Her eyes shrouded over with lust, she whispered hoarsely, "Take it out, Peter. Take it out and show Momma how much her boy has grown. Show Momma your beautiful, big cock."

I didn't think I could possibly get any harder than I was, but hearing my own mother talking to me like that brought me right to the edge, without the slightest touch. Swallowing hard, I stood and pushed my sweats over my hips, springing into view.

"Mmmm, that's lovely, honey," Mom cooed. "Why don't you show Momma what you can do with that. Stroke it, Peter. Stroke your enorm pikk for your mor."

"Ohh, God, Mom," I groaned. My hand found its way to my cock without any thought. Even the first touch was almost too much. The thought of jerking myself off in front of my Mom with her encouragement had my head spinning. I bit my lip, trying to maintain control.

I think Mom sensed how wound up I was, how quickly I was going to explode. She sat up and moved to the edge of the tub, looking up at me.

Opening her mouth, she hissed, "Yesssss, Peter, touch yourself for Mom. Cum for me baby. Cum for me and put it in my mouth. Momma wants to taste you again."

I stood on wobbly legs and directed my cock towards her lips, trying to force myself into her mouth. I was beyond all reason, all control.

Mom shook her head fractionally, pulling back with a teasing smile. She put a hand on my thigh, holding me in place, again coming close and opening her mouth expectantly.

"Stroke it, Peter," she whispered again. "Cum for Momma."

I began to pump myself again and after only a couple of strokes, I could feel my balls tightening. I knew an epic load was on its way.

"Moommmm..." I grunted through gritted teeth.

I was millimeters from her mouth and I could feel her hot breath on my glans as she waited for her son-load. Then she did it.

One small lick, just one, along the underside of my head and I was gone. I flat out screamed.

"OH GOD! MOM! MOM!"

As my eruption began, Mom gently grasped my shaft and placed my head on her lower lip, mouth still open. My first rope, shot over her upper lip and streaked across her cheek, landing in her bangs. The second splattered around her mouth as she partially blocked its trajectory with her tongue. The third and fourth were less powerful and she captured those, her mouth partially open, sucking as though through a straw.

Those emissions briefly wet the tip of my cock and then were gone, sucked into her eagerly waiting mouth, her lower lip just barely touching me. Watching the streamers of my love disappearing past her lips as she kept her eyes locked on me was one of the most amazing sights I've ever beheld, perhaps only surpassed by the first time I gazed upon her own sex.

Then, after one last spurt, I was done and Mom swirled her tongue over my helmet, cleaning me. She opened her mouth so I could see my essence on her tongue and then swallowed, following with an absolutely radiant smile.

"Wow, you taste so good, sweetie. I can't seem to get enough of that delicious son cum," she chuckled. "That was wonderful."

"My God, Mom. My God," I exhaled. "Do you have any idea what you do to me? Jesus."

"I think I'm starting to get an idea, my beautiful boy. You make me feel so sexy, so desirable," she sighed happily.

"Because you are, pretty lady, because you are."

I grabbed a washcloth and gently cleaned the rest of my eruption off her face and hair, then handing her up out of the tub, where I toweled her dry. Then I picked her up, still wrapped in the towel and carried her to our bed (our bed!)

We spent the rest of the day cuddling under the down comforter, talking about my book and our plans. We decided that we would visit a local lawyer on Boxing Day and I would give Mom power of attorney to work with the agent she found for me in Seattle. She would also start the divorce proceedings as well. She would leave for Seattle herself when I had to fly back to Dutch Harbor and stay there until we had a deal. We also decided to pick up a pair of new cell phones so we could communicate privately.

Mom was very worried about what Gunnar (I would never call him father again, I vowed) would do when I told him, but I assured her that I had no intention of doing that. I would collect my Opie payout and that would be it. I was simply going to walk away and disappear, taking Mom with me. We'd work out the details as the next few days progressed.

Getting POA signed over to Mom was a snap, but getting the divorce proceedings started turned out to be a huge pain. Normally, you serve papers at the other party's home address.

Mom and I had no clue when Dad might be home and in any event, we both wanted to be over the horizon when he got the papers. That left the very expensive option of hiring a process server and paying for their flight out to Dutch Harbor.

We didn't want that to happen just as I was about to go out on the boat with him, so that meant we would need to coordinate things so that he got the papers after arriving back in Dutch and after the payouts for the Opie catch had already been made.

Mom started to fret about the logistical problems ahead of us and I had to remind her that what mattered was where we were when all that happened. Frankly, as far as I was concerned, we could take a month or a year to get Gunnar served. In fact, if there was a delay, it would give us all the more time to get to ground somewhere else.

At the moment, that somewhere else felt like it would most likely be near Seattle, but I wasn't sure how comfortable I felt about being in a big city. I liked my wide-open spaces, expansive vistas and few neighbors. Still, I was ready to do anything necessary to keep Mom safe and happy.

In the end, we decided that we would set things in motion when I got back to port. The minute we were in cellphone range, I'd text her and we'd get the server on a flight to Dutch. We'd put him or her up at a motel until the checks were cut and then lower the boom after I got on a flight back to the mainland.

Our forbidden union was more than I could have ever dreamed of a few short days ago, an idyll beyond any sane expectation. I was in a state of ecstatic euphoria nearly every hour I was awake and Mom seemed so happy when we were with one another. But...but there was something that gnawed at the back of my mind as our days together dwindled down to hours and then minutes.

When we weren't together, I would often see Mom staring somberly off into space, her face seemingly clouded with vague anxiety. In those unguarded moments of hers, I had the impression that something was weighing on her, something that shouldn't be there. Once or twice, I asked her what was on her mind and she quickly cheered up, saying it was nothing, or passing it off as simple anxiety about me going back on the boat. But still, the impression lingered and I developed a vague disquiet about what was bothering her.

At one point, when I saw her looking particularly downcast, I asked her flat out if she was still okay with us being together, or if she had doubts or guilt about what had happened.

She seemed to let her guard down for a moment, saying, "I don't know what I did to deserve being so happy, Peter, I just don't," she'd replied dubiously.

"If there's one person in the whole world who deserves to be happy, it's you," I answered firmly. "Now what's really bugging you Mom? It's not like you to be this way."

"I guess I'm just being foolish and emotional, Peter," she tried smiling reassuringly. "I still have a hard time believing what's happened."

"It's a waking dream, isn't it?" I said.

With that, she seemed to cheer up and we seemed to banish her moodiness.

Once we had the strategy for the divorce details settled, we got back to what was important - just being together and making love at every opportunity. My last few days with her flew by with cruel speed and before I could catch my breath, I was on my way back to the airport, Hilda again driving us. Neither of us wanted to give up one minute of togetherness. The thought of one of us having to drive the short distance to the airport was too much time not being able to hold one another.

On the way to my flight, Mom clutched my hand tightly, her cheeks wet. As we pulled into the departure area, she stared at me bleakly and intently. I felt a knot growing in my stomach.

"What's wrong, Mom?" I asked quietly.

"I'm going to miss you, Peter. Please be careful out there. Gunnar's a madman."

"I will be, Mom," I promised. "But I know that's not what you're really worried about. Something's been bothering you since Christmas and it's not about the divorce and not about me going back to the Anna. Please let me know what's on your mind, please?" I pleaded.

Biting her lip, Mom appeared to vacillate between resolution and fear. "We'll talk when you get back, Peter. Now's not the time. There are lots of things you don't know about me, things I need to tell you, but I'm afraid of what you'll think of me. There are so many secrets in this family, so many..." her voice trailed off.

"Mom, there's nothing you could tell me that will make me feel any differently," I responded firmly. "I. Love. You." I said with utter conviction.

"We'll sort it out when I get back, okay, pen jente?" I cupped her cheek reassuringly. That seemed to brighten her mood somewhat and then I had to go.

I gave Mom one last fervent lover's kiss in Hilda's SUV and quickly boarded my flight. I didn't want to have to think too much about what I was leaving behind. Even so, I found my eyes stinging as I boarded my flight to Anchorage, a vague premonition of wrongness lodged in the back of my mind. I did my best to ignore it and concentrate on getting my game face on for my return to the Anna.

My layover at Anchorage International was mercifully brief, but I still felt a tremendous sense of disorientation. On one hand, I knew for the first time in my life what I was doing with myself. I had a plan and a real future with the woman of my dreams. On the other, it felt as though part of my soul had been amputated. Even though I knew our separation was temporary, I swore to myself that Mom would never be more than an arm's length away from me for the rest of our days.

## Chapter 11

My return trip to Dutch Harbor was surreal. In the aftermath of our coupling and the promises we made to one another, everything previous in my life seemed like it belonged to someone else, a totally different person, a complete stranger. In the few short days since I arrived home for the holidays, my life had been forever altered and I was barely able to come to grips with those changes.

I didn't feel any guilt, quite the opposite. There was a feeling of rightness about taking Mom as my woman. It felt as natural as breathing and as comfortable as a porch swing on a verandah. Our status as lovers seemed to fit us like doeskin gloves - soft, close and warm. It felt like I had pulled back a curtain, letting light flood into the room of my life for the very first time. I felt liberated, but also firmly grounded: For the first time, I could see a path into my future that I welcomed and embraced.

And yet, there was still that small disturbing impression, a subliminal feeling that even though Mom and I had found our future together, there was something off. Something that deeply troubled her, a possible wall growing between us, threatening our newly minted, seemingly perfect status as lovers. I tried to put it out of my mind, unwilling to even consider the possibility that things were not all well in my new paradise.

As I stared out of the window of the Saab turboprop, the drone of the propellers threatened to lull me to sleep. Lord knew I was tired. Mom and I had gotten precious little sleep after Christmas day, as we voraciously discovered and claimed one another. Surprisingly, it was a particularly rare and relatively clear day for the time of year, with a scattering of broken cloud cover and unusually good visibility. I decided to take it as an omen.

As the plane headed down Cook Inlet and over Fire Island, I did my best to stay awake and get my thoughts in order and my game face on. I had no idea what to expect when I would see my father again, but I was damn sure I had to be totally focused when I got back to Dutch.

Have you heard the expression, "Paranoia is its own reward?" Well, that phrase could have been personally minted for Dad. His suspicions about other people knew no bounds.

He truly believed that other captains shadowed him to gain access to his favorite crabbing sites. Marine suppliers in town had it in for him, charging more for work on the Anna Katarina

than other boats. Bartenders watered his drinks down. Deck hands did the absolute bare minimum of work to get their money from him.

His son, well his son was probably plotting constantly behind his back to take the Anna away from him (he couldn't have been more wrong on that score, of course.) God knows what he thought about Mom, left alone back in Homer.

While I had every intention of keeping the lowest possible profile when we went back out for the Opies, in my heart I knew how changed I was by the past few days. I hoped to God that it wouldn't show in my actions back on board, but I had my worries.

When I was still in school, Father had made nasty remarks about how close Mom and I were, but these were usually crude gibes intended to get under my skin, typically calling my masculinity into question. I never got the feeling that he actually thought we were intimate, but with his limitless paranoia, who could know for sure what he actually thought?

The problem was, I knew if I couldn't hide that anything was different, dear old Dad would pick up on it immediately. This time, given our past closeness, he might correctly (for once) assume the worst about his wife and son.

I didn't want to think about what would happen if I inadvertently gave anything away in the coming weeks.

So, as we flew by Mt. Douglas, Fourpeaked Mountain and Katmai, I resolved to put everything out of my mind before we landed. I concentrated on planning the loading of the pots as we went feet wet again over Bristol Bay, near Egegik. Next, I worked out my roster assignments for the deck crew (assuming that no one had quit in the past weeks) as we soared by the massive, glacier-cloaked bulk of Mt. Veniaminof, a small plume of steam emanating from its broad summit.

By the time we reached the western end of Unimak Island, the clouds had begun to close in again, only the near perfect, Fujiyama-like symmetry of the summit of Mt. Shishaldin and the double tips of Mt. Westdahl showing above the cotton blanket below us. I never saw the Akutan Island group and could barely see the outline of Makushin Volcano as we circled down under the overcast and over Broad Bay, on instruments for the final approach to Unalaska Island.

As we lined up on the runway and Hog Island flashed into visibility on our right, I was surprised to find myself gripping the armrests of my seat very tightly. Coming in and out of Dutch had never been much of a deal for me in the past, but now I was unaccountably nervous.

Perhaps I should explain what it's like to land at Dutch Harbor, as most people will never have that experience.

The single runway is located in the lee of Amaknak Island, running from northwest to southeast. Depending on the

prevailing winds, one can land from either end of the airstrip. The cute thing about landing from Broad Bay side, from the northwest, is that the far end of the runway is open, forming an honest to God, "T" intersection with Ballyhoo Rd. right there.

You can literally collide with a passing car or truck if you go all the way to the end of the runway. For that reason, the tradition is to park a vehicle like a small truck at the end of the strip, so that you don't pick off a passing local or end up overshooting and taking a very cold bath in Iliuliuk Bay, on the other side.

Native Alaskans take weird, rough airstrips, open field and floatplane landings as a matter of course - if you want to get around, you have to be willing to fly in smaller aircraft. I was no different than most in this regard, but today, with a wicked crosswind and icy conditions, I had somehow misplaced my usual aplomb. I could clearly imagine skidding down the runway and smashing into the airport pickup parked at the far end.

It was then that I realized why I was nervous.

For the first time in my life, I had something to look forward to, something that mattered to me and made me happy.

With that realization, all of the incredible memories of the past week came rushing back, crashing over the carefully constructed mental levee I had put into place during the last

five or six hours. In the blink of an eye, I was no better off than when I took off from Homer, tears of parting in my eyes.

"Fuck," I muttered under my breath. "Goddammit!"

Well, there was nothing for it. Once I got off the plane, I shouldered my bag and flagged a taxi. I got over to the Anna's berth and found the boat locked up tight. Sighing, I doubled back against the biting wind and hunkered down in my parka, heading for the harbor master's building. Usually, when Dad is off attending to business on shore, he leaves a copy of the key for the bridge in the master's office, so I resigned myself to the ten minute trudge back from the jetty.

When I got there, the office was closed, with a sign on the glass door saying, "7 pm. Dinner break. Back in an hour." I looked at my watch. 8:45. Shit. Likely as not, whoever was staffing the office this evening was probably off drinking somewhere.

What to do? God knew when or even if the person manning the office would be back this evening and it was getting too damn cold and windy to wait. With the entire fleet back in port, along with all the TV people and assorted hangers on, crab groupies and grifters, the chances of getting a room for the night at the Grand Aleutian were slim to none. Besides, when it was booked up before the start of the next season, it was more like a frat house than a hotel, with a good night's sleep a real challenge.

There was an off chance that Dad might be found in one of the bars, but these days the Unisea and Latitudes were generally packed with the film people and their assorted subjects. Dad absolutely loathed the whole lot of them, but with limited intoxication options since the infamous Bayview had closed a couple years back, there was a chance that he might be in one of them. I could borrow his key and then crash in my regular berth and get a decent amount of sleep.

The old Bayview Bar was Dad's haunt of choice in the past. Even by the very relaxed, frontier town standards of Dutch Harbor, it was a mean, dangerous place. I had read somewhere once where it was supposedly the second most dangerous watering hole in the U.S., but who knows how one measures that sort of thing? I did know that Dad fit in there perfectly. Perhaps more to the point, his reputation was such that even in that shithole, nobody dared fuck with him. He could drink in peace and brawl when HE felt like it, not at some other lowlife's instigation.

Eventually, I got another cab and started making the rounds. I had no luck at the Unisea, which was wall to wall with film crews and production types, so I made my way on to my next and last stop.

I paid off my cab and trudged through the parking lot slush, taking note of a couple of decidedly disgruntled-looking bald eagles perched on a telephone pole near the entrance. Taking a deep breath, I opened the door and entered bedlam.

By some random quirk, the crowd tonight was nearly all locals and crews from boats not affiliated with That Show. There was serious, heavy duty drinking underway (there's really no other kind at Dutch) and the raucous sounds of almost desperate partying fueled by barely suppressed alcoholic rage hit me like a ballpeen hammer in the forehead.

"Yo! Peter! Yo! Pete! Hey!!!! Heimdahl - get your sorry ass over here and have a drink!"

I turned around, trying to triangulate the voice embedded within the swirling cacophony around me. Whoever it was, they had to have one damn powerful set of lungs, because it was noisy as fuck in the bar. Finally, I saw the owner of the yell, seated at one of the back tables, his arms around a couple of local working girls.

His height was difficult to determine in the chair, but it was clear that he was built like a fireplug, his ink-black hair, flat nose and broad forehead speaking to significant native heritage. Unusual though, were his piercing blue eyes, as out of place in his face as a fart at high tea.

A broad grin split his face as we made eye contact and he lifted one arm from the shoulder of the skinny blonde to his left and gesticulated madly for me to join him. I grinned myself as I saw his other hand firmly cupping the heavy breast of the girl under his opposite shoulder, a pneumatic brunette with pasty-white love handles spilling over the sides of her jeans.

Sliding into a chair opposite, I smiled and shook his hand, inquiring, "What's up, Hig?"

Mike "Hig" Higgenbotham was the most senior deckhand on the Anna after our engineer and the closest thing I had to a friend in these parts. His personal genetic cocktail was about 50% of 200 proof Aleut, with a dash of Scotch-Irish, Portuguese and Russian to round out the drink. He was stocky, almost to the point of wider than tall, but it was all muscle. I had once seen him lift up half of an 800-pound red crab pot that had pinned the leg of a crew member, all by himself. He was an incredibly hard worker, but had what might be politely called "authority issues." He was actually pretty darned smart, but opinionated and independent to a fault. And he loved his drink, oh yes he did.

You'd think that someone like that would mix with my father like oil and water, but Hig and I had hit it off from the start and I had managed to extract a promise from him after we hired him on, that he would always arrive sober for his first work day and would stay sober for the duration of each outing. So far, it had worked and I was happy to note that he seemed to be sticking to lite beer this evening.

"Getcha anything, junior?" he asked with a wicked gleam in his eyes. "Junior" was Hig's way of teasing me. In his eyes, my dad and I were so different that Hig couldn't credit our blood ties and he would often tease me, saying that, "There must be a goddam New Age yoga-meister in the woodpile."

Hence, tongue very firmly in cheek, "Junior."

"Nah, Hig, thanks, I'm good."

"C'mon, Pete. You at least have to allow me to be the host once. Gimme a break."

"Okay. One beer. Only one."

"You got it, semi-jefe." Another one of his jokes. On shore, Hig could and would joke about my relative youth for my position as deck boss, but he was all business when we were at sea.

Soon enough, he had flagged down a waitress and a Bud long neck materialized at my elbow shortly thereafter. Lifting the bottle in acknowledgment, I nodded and said, "Cheers."

We settled into a brief, comfortable silence while Hig did some more ambidextrous titty exploration amidst giggles and then he asked, "What brings you to these here parts, stranger?"

"Looking for Dad," I explained after a long swallow. "The Anna's all locked up and the harbormaster seems to have taken a powder."

"Shit," Hig commiserated. "I was hoping I could bunk there tonight myself. Hotel's full up with all the television types."

"Have you seen him at all? D'you think he might have gone across the bridge looking for somewhere else to drink?"

"Dunno. I heard a rumor, though," he added somewhat reluctantly.

"What's that?"

"Couple nights back, I heard Lenny Yakolev saying he saw Gunnar over at the Grand Aleutian..." his voice trailed off uncertainly.

"And?" I prompted, suddenly interested. The thought of Dad over at Dutch's only real hotel was as likely as seeing a Samoan in Saudi Arabia.

"Well, you know how Lenny can be. When he gets toasted, you can't separate fact from fiction, plus he gossips like an old babushka."

Hig was inspecting the inside of his glass studiously as he spoke, not making eye contact.

"C'mon, Hig. Out with it. What did he see?"

"You really don't want to know, Pete. I'm serious."

"Hig, this is me you're talking to. Since when do you figure I care about what Gunnar gets up to?"

He gave me a look that said, "You asked for it," and took a deep breath.

"Lenny said he saw Gunnar in a back stairwell, kissing and groping a blonde, young man. You know, some Hollywood type's sissy rent boy."

I choked immediately on the swig of beer in my mouth, spraying it all over Hig and his girls in the process as I coughed and spluttered, much to their dismay.

"Jesus, Hig! What the fuck?"

He shrugged his shoulders apologetically. "You wanted to know, man. That's the gospel according to Lenny."

"Hard to believe, you know?"

"I hear ya, Pete, but it seemed to me like Len was likely sober at the time. He said he had stopped to book a room for a couple nights before he flew out to Valdez. I'm fairly sure he hadn't been boozing, 'cause I know he hadn't cashed his red crab check yet. He also had a couple of ladies he was lining up for partying also. It could be he saw what he saw," Hig concluded quietly.

"Damn."

"That's exactly what I said."

"This is serious shit, Hig. Like as not, Lenny probably has already told half of Dutch about it. If Dad catches up to him, he'll kill him. Plain and simple."

"I think I managed to get Lenny to understand that he knew a deadly secret. He knows Gunnar's reputation," Hig acknowledged.

"Good. Better pray that he was too busy fucking to run his mouth off before he went home."

Hig sighed again, looking at me carefully, as if weighing further revelations. "There's more, Pete," he added seriously.

"There's a reason I'm leaning towards believing Lenny about what happened late the night before last. Cops found a young guy in one of the Aleutian's rooms, beat half to death. They got him over to the clinic, unconscious. He got airlifted out to Anchorage yesterday morning. He fits the general description of the boy Lenny says he saw with your father, you know, slim, a bit girly, andri, uh, andorg, uhm..."

"Androgynous," I supplied.

"Yeah. That's the word. Can't tell if it's a girl or a boy, y'know?"

"Un-fucking-believable," I muttered.

"Tell me about it, Pete. There's a couple of State Troopers from CBI who flew in yesterday afternoon. They've been asking around for your dad. Since Lenny, nobody, and I mean nobody seems to know where he's at."

Shaking my head in amazement, I could barely comprehend the latest twists and turns in my suddenly very complex life. As I contemplated the implications of Hig's tale, I began to smile.

Hig watched me in growing disbelief as my smile turned into a chuckle and then into gales of laughter. After I settled down, wiping the tears of mirth from my eyes, I asked, "Lenny going to be back before Opies?"

"I think so. After I convinced him to go back to the mainland and lay low, he said he'd call, try to get a fix on where Gunnar was, before he came back out."

"Probably a good idea," I agreed. "If he contacts you, let me know. I'd like to talk with him. I think my mother might be able to put that information to good use."

Catching my drift, Hig smiled and said, "Will do. Karma's a cast-iron fuckin' bitch, ain't it?"

"Doesn't look like I'll be borrowing his key tonight, does it?" I concluded.

"Say, Pete, why don't we just call the Harbormaster's office again? Give it one more try, y'know? I've got the number."

I did and we lucked out. I told Hig that he was welcome to bunk aboard if he wanted and he accepted, saying, "Probably come by a bit later," nodding at his two companions.

"I'm going to start stacking pots on the deck no later than 8 am," I warned. "You show up pussy-whipped and useless and I'll feed you to the seals, you hear me, you worthless half breed?"

"Yes, massah. I be there."

I bid Hig and the ladies a good evening and called a cab. I spent a couple hours in the engine room, going over checklists and checking our fuel levels, leaving the rest for our engineer in the morning. I fell into bed about 11 and slept dreamlessly.

## Chapter 12

I woke up at six am to a pitch-black morning, a heavy, unbroken overcast obscuring the sky. I got my clothes back on and shuffled, bleary eyed to the galley. Predictably, there was next to nothing to eat. I eventually found some instant oatmeal, but the only milk in the fridge was closer to cottage cheese than liquid, so I had my oatmeal naked and my coffee black.

Glancing out the galley porthole, I could see flurries intermittently swirling in the clammy morning air, but mercifully, there didn't seem to be much wind. Thanking the sea gods for small blessings, I began to plan the morning. First light wouldn't be for another two hours and we could only count on about six or seven hours of usable light before twilight, which would be around 3 pm. I wanted to get as much of the pot loading done as possible before then.

Hig had promised he would round up the rest of the crew and have them dockside by eight, so I was hoping for a timely start to our efforts. After last night's revelations, I had no idea when, or even if I could expect my father's arrival. This was no small worry, for although I was qualified to operate the Anna, I did not have a master's certificate, nor any official exemption which might allow me to take the Anna to sea myself in Dad's absence. If he didn't show up, we were stuck at the dock.

I figured that if he wasn't aboard by tomorrow, the crew would probably scatter, looking to pick up any other work they could. For some, that might mean working the processing plant, or if

they were lucky, filling any unexpected vacancies on the other crab boats. Either way though, if my father was still MIA tomorrow, it was over. It would be nearly impossible to get any other qualified crew on short notice and that would be the end of the matter, as far as the Opie season was concerned.

I figured it was my job to get the Anna as close to sailing-ready as possible and then wait to see if the shit would hit the fan or not.

Hig showed up on time with the rest of our crew in tow and we got started. After his usual greeting harassment, I riposted quickly, standing toe to toe with him, theatrically sniffing the air.

"Jesus Christ, Hig," I dug in, "I don't know what's worse, stale beer or day-old pussy. You'd smell better after a bait meal shower, I swear to God."

That provoked raucous laughter and helped set the tone for our morning's work. We got down to it, with me supervising from the bridge, Hig operating the crane and the rest of the crew securing the pots as we stacked. I made several trips on to the stack to check on the work, making sure our load was as secure as possible. I knew my father would probably check again himself, but it seemed to me that if we could save any time getting out to sea, it would be all to the good.

It was a grueling, all-day job to get all the pots on board and stacked. To break up the tedium, I gave everyone a lunch

break and we all went into town for a provisioning run, me cursing under my breath the whole way. I hated having to use my own money to get things done, but there was nothing for it. I knew it would be a serious aggravation getting my father to reimburse me and I wasn't looking forward to that in the slightest.

Two hours and more thousands of dollars than I care to remember later, we were back, with our food stored. I probably spent more money than Gunnar would have, getting a number of things he would have considered luxuries, but fuck him, I thought. The crew really appreciated it and since he left the chore to me by default, he'd have to live with the cost. I hoped he would choke on it.

We finished the stacking under darkening skies and swirling flurries, a stiff, uncaring onshore breeze kicking in during the late afternoon. The last two hours were a clammy, frigid misery.

Everyone turned in quickly, as I was anticipating an early start tomorrow, assuming my father was going to show up. By lights out time, I didn't know what to think anymore. Dad had never been away like this before and I was beginning to worry that there would be no Opie season at all.

Up until bedtime, I had been in pretty good shape mentally, the demands of preparation for our departure keeping me fully occupied. Once rolled in my blankets, though, memories of the preceding days flooded my head and swamped my hard-won

emotional equilibrium. Sleep came hard and my slumber was filled with visions and strange portents...

...There came a knock on my cabin door. It was nearly pitch black and my eyes were momentarily dazzled as the door swung slowly and silently open. Mom slipped in quickly and closed the door behind her carefully. I fumbled for small reading lamp at the side of my bunk. As the room illuminated once again, the first sight to greet my eyes was Mom pushing her jeans and panties off her hips, her eyes fixed on mine, burning with want.

"I can't help it, Peter. I need you so badly, my love," she whispered hoarsely.

Naked below the waist, she threw my covers back, straddling my hips. Grasping my now painfully erect cock, she ran its head through her wet furrow, back to front, front to back, all the time watching me intently. Then without ceremony, she impaled herself, taking my full length in one downward plunge, grunting as she bottomed out.

"Ah, that's better," she sighed. "Now, it's time to make love to your mother, sweetheart. Fuck me and make me cum, baby."

With those words, she began a slow rocking motion, gradually increasing our tempo until the whole bunk was shaking like an antique jalopy. Our coupling quickly escalated and I started to say, "Oh Mom, Im..."

...and I felt someone roughly grabbing my shoulder, shaking me harshly. My eyes snapped open and then I was staring into the icy blue eyes of father.

"Wake the fuck up, you lazy bastard," he hissed, eyes boring into me. "I want to be out of here in ten minutes. Make it happen, Momma's boy, " he added, sneering.

I felt myself flush and a slow boil began. I took a couple deep breaths and composed myself, nodding silently and sliding into my deck boots. Without a word, I left my cabin and headed forward to my station. I felt my father's eyes boring into my back as I headed up the gangway by the galley and out onto the deck. Soon enough, the rest of the crew made their way out. I saw Mike rubbing his jaw, a thousand yard stare on his face. Without a glance to anyone, he went to the sorting table, checking to make sure it was secure.

I was immediately worried. Mike was usually the glue that held the deck crew together and I could recognize all the signs of him being seriously pissed off. I began to wonder exactly how Dad went about rousing everyone from bed. The last thing I needed was for my most reliable hand to not have his head on straight.

I stopped showing the new greenhorn how to grind the fish bait and walked over to Mike.

Not making eye contact, I looked out to the horizon and asked quietly, "You okay, Hig?"

Mike was silent for a long moment and then said, "No worries, Pete. But I may as well tell you - this'll be my last turn on the Anna."

"What happened?"

"Worthless motherfucker kicked me out of bed. Kicked me. Kicked ME," he said again, color starting to rise in his cheeks. "Nobody does that to Dolly Higgenbotham's boy," he whispered hoarsely. "No fucking body."

"Try to relax, Hig," I said, putting a hand on his arm. "Don't give him the satisfaction."

Then, throwing caution to the wind, I confessed, "Don't tell anybody, Mike, but this is my last cruise as well. After this, I'm done too. I've reached my limit."

"Have you told him yet?" Hig asked out of the side of his mouth, coiling a line as he spoke.

"I'm waiting till we're back in Dutch," I replied. "God knows what Dad would do if he knew now. So, anyway, keep your damn nose clean and remember, he can't stop the clock," I

advised with a nod towards the bridge. "For God's sake keep your fuckin' head down. We'll get through this."

Nodding, Mike visibly gathered himself and flashed me a grin and gave me a thumb's up. "We watch each other's back, Pete."

"You got it, Mike. Low and slow from here on out."

Looking over the deck, everything seemed to be stowed well. The only question was when we were going to start dropping pots. That meant I would have to talk with Dad, so I could anticipate when we needed to start prepping them.

Squaring my shoulders, I climbed up the outside ladder to the wheelhouse. Poking my head reluctantly into my father's sanctum, I asked, "What's the plan for our first stop?"

At first, I thought he was just being surly and usually antisocial when he ignored me, and I was about to ask him again, when I noticed his clenched jaw and fixed stare. He was pissed, pissed in a major way. I knew then that any additional questions might set off an explosion, so I simply waited. After several minutes, he seemed to settle a bit and then he grunted, still not looking at me.

"Heading for Bower's Bank, then maybe over to Rude Canyon. We'll set a few test pots and wait. If that doesn't work, then St. Georges."

I nodded once and went back down to the deck. Looking around for Mike, I saw him near the stern, binoculars in hand. When I joined him, he said nothing just handing me the binoculars, gesturing back towards the port. We weren't much more than a mile gone, so the powerful Nikons gave me a good view. I counted at least three police vehicles at our berth, lights flashing. A half dozen State Troopers were milling around on the jetty.

"Ya think they'll sic the Coasties on your Dad?" Mike asked.

I thought for a bit, recalling the few times we had crew with outstanding warrants on board.

"Depends on how bad they want to talk to him," I decided. "Lot of work to send a boat after us. Got nowhere to go once the pots are full. I'd have worried more if it was still King season. If that were the case, Dad could offload on St. Paul and go just about anywhere once the hold was empty."

"No, he's pretty much stuck going back to Dutch," I concluded. "Pack ice is too chancy to plan on offloading at St. Paul this time of year. I think they'll wait, try to talk to him when we offload. Anyway, I think the CG would want to stay ready for SAR, rather than commit resources to chasing Dad down. It'll sort itself out soon enough."

"I almost wish they'd come out after his sorry ass," Mike said quietly.

"Not sure that it's a good idea, Mike," I said seriously. "Gunnar seems pissed even more than usual right now. I don't know how he would react to being boarded. Any road, you'd be out a pretty decent payday if they hauled him off the boat. Best if we just keep going in the usual way," I said.

I left Hig at the railing and made my way back amidships. We had a few more hours before I'd have to start getting the pots teed up, so I wanted to take some time going over safety procedures with the greenhorn and to make sure that he was going to be able to get into his survival suit properly, God forbid.

After I finished, I noticed our engineer, Sean. He was standing in an open hatchway in the superstructure, taking care to stay out of the line of sight of the bridge. Usually a man of few words, he caught my eye and jerked his head, indicating me to come inside.

Normally, Sean keeps to himself and does his job. He's the best paid of the lot of us, Dad grudgingly awarding him market value for his skills. Dad may grind his crew to fish meal every time out, but he has always babied the Anna. I know for damn sure that he cares more about the boat than he does about his family, so it's actually not too much of a surprise that he's actually willing to part with some scratch to keep her running properly.

For that reason, Sean is the only crew member he doesn't fuck with. Taciturn doesn't begin to describe Sean. He likes his work and he likes not being bothered. If he's said more than a dozen words to me in the past two trips out, I'd be surprised. He knows full well what Dad is like and how he treats us, but he pretty much stays in the engine room and out of the fray. I'd say about two times out of three, he'll grab his meal and take it back into the hold with him, rather than sit with any of us.

So it was surprising to see him come up to the deck and even more surprising that he would seek me out for a conversation. Somewhat apprehensively, I followed him inside. Sean dogged the hatch and looked at me guardedly, as if he was undergoing some kind of internal struggle. After a moment, he sighed and spoke without preamble.

"Something's not right, Pete."

"Not right?"

"Yeah, not right. I mean, with your Dad. Something's wrong with him. I don't know what, but it's not good."

"How so?" I asked, my voice carefully neutral.

"When he came on board this morning, first thing he did was tell me to run the Anna flat out till we got to Bower's Bank. I reminded him that we were a couple hundred hours from needing a refit on the starboard drive shaft, but he said to follow his damn orders or I'd find myself on shore with a broken leg."

"No shit."

"Yeah, no shit, Pete. Never had a captain threaten me for doin' my job, y'know. Pretty damn disturbing. Do you know what's up with him? Can't say as though I like what's happenin' here. Makes me worry. I don't like worrying."

I was dumbfounded. I couldn't have been more surprised if Sean had started spouting off Hamlet's soliloquy. Shaking my head to clear the mental fog I found myself in, I chose my words cautiously.

"There are some rumors about trouble a couple days ago over at the Grand Aleutian, but I'm not sure if there's any truth to them."

"I ain't stupid, Pete. I saw those po-lice on the dock just like you did. Something's up and the rumors, whatever they are, well they're likely true based on what I saw."

"What about that starboard shaft?" I asked. "Will it hold up?"

Sean allowed himself a slight smile. "If we really were goin' at max revs, I'd say we'd be in trouble inside a day and a half. But we're only running at about 85%. I figure the shaft'll hold up indefinitely at that output."

"He'll see the revs from the bridge gauges, Sean. What will you do when he figures out you're holding back?"

"Well, if the gauges on the bridge were, uhm, accurate, that might be so, but I took the liberty of doin' a little bit of recalibration, so that shouldn't be a problem."

Sean put his hand on my shoulder and looked at me intently. "Like I said, somethin's not right, what with your dad willing to drive the Anna to breakdown. I haven't figured it out, but I'm going to do my damn best to make sure that crazy sumbitch doesn't do anything stupid. "

"But there's one more thing, Pete. I heard him mutterin' to himself after he chewed on my ass. I couldn't make all of it out, but I reckon that he's mostly mad at you for some reason. Don't know why, but that's what I figure."

"You be real careful, you hear?" he said forcefully, eyes boring into me. "Don't need another Art Swenson on this boat."

"Art Swenson? Never heard about him."

"Oh you probably did, Pete, just not by name. Right now, I don't have any more time to talk. Come see me after supper and I'll tell you about it. In the meantime, watch your step, son. Watch your step."

I went back out to the deck, my thoughts whirling. I knew that rationally, there was no way Dad could possibly know about Mom and me, but I was sure that he was always thinking the worst about the both of us separately. Would it be that much of a paranoid, delusional leap for him to just decide that something was amiss?

I felt sure that I had given nothing away, but now I was developing my own paranoia. As I thought it through, it seemed to me that if Sean observed this behavior of Dad's, it must have been when he boarded the Anna, since it looked as though Sean was the first person Dad sought out when he got on board.

So, whatever it was that was on Dad's mind, he brought it with him. I felt sure that it wasn't anything I gave away myself. On one hand, that relieved me slightly, but my more rational self knew that it didn't matter a damn.

Whatever Dad was thinking, it was something I couldn't control. He'd act on his own thoughts and that was the problem. What he believed was his reality. It didn't matter if his suspicions were on the mark or not. What mattered was that he would likely do something about them.

The rest of the day absolutely dragged. I had to bring all of my concentration to bear, keeping things running properly. At supper, I didn't taste a bite of my food. Dad took his meal in the wheelhouse, delegating the greenhorn to bring him his meal. I went to my cabin after the meal and waited for about twenty minutes, then I quietly made my way to the engine room.

As soon as I showed up, Sean dogged the hatch. He began without a pause, speaking in low tones.

"What I'm going to tell you, I've never told anyone else. I'm the only one on the boat who knows this. Everybody else who sailed with us on that trip is either out of the business or on other boats now. I can't actually prove anything about what happened and it's been well on towards twenty years since Art died."

"This fellow, Swenson, he died on the Anna?"

"That's correct as a statement of fact, but doesn't cover what really happened."

Sean paused, looking at me closely before he spoke again.

"Art Swenson was a friend, a good one. He was a good crab man and he ended up working with your Dad through no fault of his own."

Sean took in a deep breath and shook my world. "Art was murdered. Your Dad was responsible."

"Dad killed him?" I asked incredulously. "How?"

"Very cleverly, Pete, very cleverly. It looked like an accident, but it wasn't."

"How?" I asked again, numbed by the thought.

"Gunnar sent him up on the stack during a storm, said a pot was coming loose. Then he steered the boat into a trough between two waves. We nearly pitch poled and Art was thrown overboard. We never found his body."

"Why would he do that, Sean?"

Sean sat on the edge of an access ladder, head down, with his hands folded in his lap. His voice dropped even further.

"Well, you see, Art was a natural lady's man. Not a player, mind you. Just one of those lucky SOBs who have that combination of looks, charm and confidence that makes any

woman wet and willing, y'know? He never lacked for feminine company and to my knowledge, he never failed to bed a gal he set his sights on, single or married."

"You're probably too young to remember, but back in those days, your Mom (a lovely, true lady, by the way, just a wonderful person) still was taking her duties as the Captain's wife seriously. She made it a point to know all of your Dad's crew and would come down to Dutch and give them a send-off dinner before the Red Crab season started."

"Now, Art was a footloose and devil-may-care sort of fella, but he was nobody's fool. He was quite taken with your beautiful mother, but knew that even so much as a glance in her direction would have Gunnar on his neck like a guillotine. So, he kept his infatuation to himself. By the by, as near as I could see, your Mom was never anything but correct and proper in how she behaved. None of us ever saw Art getting any special attention from her. None at all."

"Don't ask me how, but for some crazy reason, Gunnar took it into his head that Art had managed to have his way with your mom. There was an ugly scene at the end of the dinner, but the rest of the crew broke it up. Being as we were set to sail in less than eight hours, there was no way that Gunnar could find a replacement for Art. Say what you like, but Art maybe was the best deckhand your Dad ever had."

"I guess in the end, it seemed like dollar signs overrode jealousy and Gunnar seemed to make up his mind to tolerate

Art for this one last trip and that's where things stood when we went out."

"Gunnar didn't raise his voice once or even look sideways at Art for the first two weeks of the trip. Of course, Art kept a low profile, eating in his cabin and staying there pretty much the whole time he wasn't on deck. We all assumed that business was business and that was the end of things."

Sean paused for a moment, looking at me in a searching fashion. He seemed to be debating how much more to tell me.

"When we got caught up in that storm, there was no question that someone had to secure that loose pot. If that had torn loose, God knows how much damage it might have caused, let alone hurting or killing someone on the deck."

"Nobody was more surefooted or comfortable on the stack than Art. Nobody else could have done it better or safer than he could, so we didn't think twice when Gunnar sent him up."

"But - I'll tell you this. When we got caught in that trough, I've never seen such ham fisted piloting. Gunnar claimed that there was some following sea that may have affected the rudder, but I'm not so sure. And there's one other thing."

Sean got up stiffly and walked over to his toolbox. He fished around in the bottom for a moment and brought out a small object wrapped in an old, greasy bandana. He handed to me

to unwrap, saying, "I went up on the stack later that night and retrieved this from the pot that was loose."

I gingerly opened the parcel. It felt heavy in my hand, out of proportion to its size. Inside was a short length of old chain. I recognized it as the same type we used to secure our pots. I ran the links through my fingers, inspecting them. What I saw chilled me to the bone.

It wasn't subtle. It wasn't equivocal. A link was disrupted, with the unmistakable signs of the use of a bolt cutter. Although the chain was distorted by the beating it took when the pot came undone, the cut marks were clear.

As we got ready to leave for the airport the preceding morning, Mom made one more effort to convince me to stay home with her. Because I felt responsible for the crew, I didn't want to be the cause of them missing a big payday. Now, holding the cut chain in my hand, I had the sickening feeling that I had zigged when I should have zagged.

Now, instead of simply worrying about keeping to myself and away from Dad in the usual way of trips past, I had a knot of anxiety in my gut that wouldn't go away. Alarm bells were going off in my head and I suddenly had the premonition that I might not make it back to port.

The hairs on my arms stood up and an icy finger ran down my spine. There was real danger here. My blood ties to my father were like as not to be of no protective value at all.

If there were any blood ties? The germ of a most disquieting thought began to grow and for the first time in my life, I asked myself, "Who is my father?" Was this Mom's terrible secret? Was this the deception at the heart of my twisted family, the lurking black shadow that threatened to consume all of us?

I had never considered even remotely the possibility that Mom had been unfaithful to my father, but when I looked at it objectively, I had to admit to myself that Mom was only human, a lonely, unappreciated woman of considerable beauty who had been left to die on the vine by a beastly husband - a man who might not even like women to begin with. It was as though I had opened the door to my house and instead of finding a room filled with expected furniture and the mundane artifacts of middle class life, I had stumbled into a steaming pit, crawling with rot, disease and disgusting vermin.

For a moment, it seemed that my entire life was built on a foundation of shifting sand, everything a lie. Nothing was what it seemed and nobody, even my beloved mother, was who they appeared to be. Hell, I didn't even know who I was. Those feelings rose up in me like choking black smoke and for a moment, they nearly strangled my sanity. My hands clutched the chain I was holding convulsively.

Then I thought of Mom and the past few days we spent together as lovers. I clung to that like a drowning man clutching at the flotsam of a shipwreck. If I knew nothing else, I knew that was real. I knew what I felt in my heart and what Mom felt for me. There was where truth lay. Everything else

that led up to us being together was of no importance, background noise arising from the disintegration of our dysfunctional family. I had questions for Mom, but I felt that we would work things out, no matter what the answers were.

Taking a deep, steadying breath, I handed the chain back to Sean. Our engineer continued to watch me, measuring and assessing my reaction. Once he saw I was holding it together, he gave me wintry smile and clapped my shoulder.

"We'll be keeping an eye on you, son. We have your back. Just don't be alone with him. I'm serious, okay?"

"Thanks, Sean," I said somewhat embarrassed by his concern. "But I figure I can look after myself. I'll steer clear of him as best I can."

Sean's eyes narrowed and he spoke sternly. "Don't be an idiot, boy. You father is nobody to play games with. He's off his nut now for some reason, which makes him ten times more dangerous. If it were up to me, I'd turn around and put you on shore right this minute."

"Any road," he sighed, "You can't stop us from keeping an eye on you. You may not realize this Pete, but you're well liked and respected. You're probably not the best deck boss in the fleet, but nobody looks after his shipmates better. Working with Captain Bligh up there," he said, nodding towards the bridge, "We tend to notice stuff like that. If you were master of this boat, there'd be folks lining up to work with you."

"So just relax," he finished. "We'll all get through this trip together, okay?"

I nodded, "Thanks Sean. Appreciate it. Guess we all better get back to work."

## Chapter 13

As I made my way back to the deck, I noticed everyone except the greenhorn made a point to make eye contact and give me a nod. Interesting, I thought to myself. Clearly Sean had planned our little chat out rather carefully. I wasn't sure how all this was going to be affecting how I ran the deck, but I reasoned what was done was done so I'd just have to ride things out.

I found my thoughts drifting back to Mom and had to ruthlessly suppress them. My gut was now telling me that I was in no-shit danger and I had to devote all of my energy to making it back into port in one piece.

People who watch That Show see a bunch of roughneck, redneck types doing heavy physical labor under really shitty working conditions, more often than not with some bastard in the wheelhouse breathing down their necks for thirty or forty hours at a stretch. It's a hard life that requires a hard attitude, but for their part, the captains are mostly showing tough love. Some are "nicer" than others and some are middlin' SOB's in

real life, but in the end, everyone pulls together to get the job done. It's about feeding families and making mortgages.

The job is complex. Not brain surgery or rocket science, but a lot of moving parts and pieces that have to mesh properly under wildly random conditions to pull those tasty crustaceans off the ocean bottom. Small mistakes can cost you or one of your crewmates skin, bone, limb or even life if even one little thing goes wrong. Sometimes, you avoid disaster out of sheer luck, and this is when everyone is focused on being safe and helping each other out.

If only one cog in that fuel, metal and flesh machine isn't up to the task, everything becomes exponentially more dangerous. Imagine then, if someone is actively engaged in making things unsafe and that person is the master of the vessel.

At that moment, I had no idea if I was going to make it home.

Given that bone-chilling epiphany, I was definitely not prepared for the course our voyage subsequently took.

At first, things went well, so well in fact, that I could hardly believe our luck. The weather was as clement as it ever gets in the Bering Sea in January. The deck hands were working well together, the equipment was running smoothly and there were crabs.

My God, there were crabs. I had never seen anything like it. With the size pots we use, I've seen occasions when we might get three or four hundred Opies in a pot and I had seen logs from other boats where once in a while, a few five-hundred-ers were pulled, but the run we experienced was beyond all reason and accounting. Six hundred in a pot, then seven hundred, a couple with near 800, but steadily averaging between five and six hundred.

We filled our hold in record time, the most crab I'd ever seen in the Anna, nearly a hundred forty thousand pounds. To top it off, the pack ice was obliging us, with St. Paul's still open, a full sixteen hours closer than Dutch.

So, we were on a beeline to offload after thirty-four hours of the most incredible fishing I'd seen in my young life. We were all stumbling around like zombies, too tired to even eat. As I staggered back to my cabin, I was intercepted by Sean. He handed me a four and a half foot long, six inch wide, milled aluminum board, scalloped at one end, with a rubberized pad on the opposite pole.

I stared at it like it was an alien artifact, absolutely no understanding of what I was holding. Sean took pity on me and explained, "Under the door knob, Peter, at an angle. No one can get in."

Nodding dumbly, I stumbled to my quarters. Only after I closed the door behind me, did Sean's words register. I had been so focused on the task at hand that I nearly forgot my predicament. On top of that, our hauls were so incredibly

good, we heard hardly a peep from the wheelhouse loudspeaker. We settled into a routine very quickly and the hours flew by.

Now though, I was holding concrete evidence of my situation in my hands and suddenly, it felt like the whole world was firmly settled on my shoulders. More than anything, I wanted to go up to the bridge and get on the radiophone to Mom, just to hear her voice, but that wasn't going to happen. Dad hadn't left his chair since we left port and showed no signs budging, so I wasn't going to be able to ease my worried mind.

I was suddenly ten times more tired than I was three minutes ago. I set the contraption Sean gave me under the door handle and collapsed into my bunk. I think I actually fell asleep in mid-flop.

I woke up to father snarling over the loudspeaker as St. Paul's was heaving into sight. I splashed cold water on my face and ran a comb through my bed-head, stumbling out to the galley. I was the last one there, but not by much. We ate like the starving wolf pack we were, roaring through three dozen eggs, a two pounds of bacon, three pounds of sausage and two loaves worth of French toast. An F5 Kansas tornado had nothing on us. We devoured every morsel in sight.

Dad was nowhere to be seen, presumably still in the wheelhouse. Our greenhorn again ferried his food up to the bridge. I was wondering if I was going to see him again before the trip was over, Sean's warnings notwithstanding.

Soon enough, we made the dockside at Warehouse St. and offloaded without incident. Dad finally surfaced for the weigh out and collected the earnings - nearly \$320K. We got absolute top dollar.

Then we turned around and went out to do it again. And again. Each time, we rolled in crab. It seemed like every pot was canned corn, mostly males, nearly all keepers, again averaging damn near five hundred per pot. We did even better than the first time, our second haul bringing \$330K and our third outing closing out our quota and netting nearly \$340K.

We were all relieved to be done, relieved that my father hadn't blown a gasket, looking forward to a prosperous start to the New Year. I was even thinking about what I was going to get Mom. It seemed like high time she had a better car, something nicer to drive around when we left for Seattle.

I had relaxed to the point where it seemed like things were going to work out okay. I was figuring my share in my head and the numbers were heady. My share for the Opies was likely to be over 100K! That was more money than I had ever seen in my life and more than I was going to get for my novel on top of that. I had visions of Mom and I buying a house with cash money.

I was stupid.

I was so totally stupid.

I should never have forgotten how ruthlessly cunning my father was. Of course, nothing would occur while there was money to be made. If something happened after we hit our quota though, well that would be an entirely different kettle of fish, if you'll pardon a tired old saying. Dad could exact his revenge for whatever he suspected and reclaim a share of the payout for himself, as my next of kin. Perfect for him.

Like I said, stupid. Totally brain-dead-don't-deserve-to-live stupid. I let the crafty son of a bitch lull me half to sleep. I should have known he'd be spending all that alone time in the bridge plotting and planning, making sure that he had his contingencies worked out and his ass fully covered.

The first day heading back to Dutch was pure routine. All of the usual work had to be done, getting the deck in shape again. The pots had been stacked and were secure. I was looking forward to some sack time when I heard his voice over the loudspeaker.

"Alright, listen up assholes. We got a squall coming in. I want the pots checked one more time. Let's get to it. Stop wasting my time and get your sorry asses in gear, ladies. Move it!"

There's a peculiarity to the deck layout of the Anna. About twenty feet from the bow is an old, slightly raised hatch with a bit of relief from its coaming. It's not a big deal, but it's something we have to work around and it produces a slight

distortion of the rows of stacked pots, one row jutting out slightly more to the starboard. The rest of the pots stack flush to one another and we need a bit of extra rigging to stabilize that slight offset of the one row.

It also produces a blind spot for'ard of the offset row. It's just enough that you can't see it from the bridge, or elsewhere on the deck. It's big enough to conceal a couple people, but not much more.

As Gunnar spoke over the loudspeaker, I glanced to see Sean in the hatchway to engineering. He was looking at Hig and glancing up to the top of the stack. Hig nodded once and vaulted up to the high point without waiting and began checking the chains, clearly trying to keep me on the deck. Remembering Sean's advice and the story of Art Swenson, I suppressed a shudder and waved my thanks to Hig. He nodded, sketching off a casual salute and got back to work.

At that point, the loudspeaker crackled back to life.

"Peter - get your useless mamma's boy butt for'ard and check the offset row. Now!"

Figuring out of sight was out of mind, I carefully made my way towards the bow. The wind was already beginning to screech in the rigging and the Anna had taken on a decided pitch and yaw, beginning to corkscrew through the waves. The footing became treacherous and I was glad we would soon be finished.

I rounded the corner to the offset row and into the blind spot.

Father was there, waiting for me.

He carefully put a walkie talkie down, and it was clear that he had somehow tapped it into the PA system.

He hadn't even been on the bridge. He was waiting for me and suddenly I knew that I was likely a dead man.

He stood in front of me with his feet planted wide on the heaving deck. A gaffing hook was in one hand and he was smiling. Oh yes, how he was smiling. He looked smug, satisfied and absolutely insane. Then his face closed down like a granite battlement.

"Well, well, well. If it isn't my son, the motherfucker," he said cheerily. The contrast between his happy voice and black, stony visage raised the hair on my neck.

"How nice to see you at last," he said, his voice oozing deceitful bonhomie and false fellowship. "We haven't had a chance to chat since you started screwing that whore, my wife. Anyway, I do so hope you've been enjoying the maternal pussy, because you'll never see it again."

I just stood there like an idiot, with my mouth hanging open. His smile returned, the maniacal grin growing wider as he took in my surprise. But his eyes were frozen pools of blue at absolute zero, totally devoid of emotion and humanity, infinite in depth.

Looking into them, I knew then with total certainty that Hell wasn't hot.

It was in fact cold, so very, very cold.

"Well, Peter," he drawled with relish. "You should be happy. Things are going to be over for you soon and it'll be quick. It's nothing like what I have planned for your whore mother."

I was speechless with surprise and total shock.

"What's the matter, sonny-boy?" he asked with a leer. "Leave your tongue behind in that slut's twat?" he sneered.

"Come on now," he said jovially, "Speak up and tell your dear papa what its like to screw a worthless, cheating cunt. Was it good? WAS IT?"

He suddenly lashed out with his boot, catching the inside of my thigh, just above the knee. I'm sure if I had been planted firmly, it would have blown out, crippling me. But just as his foot made contact, the deck pitched and I was slightly lifted.

His blow hurt like hell and knocked me off my feet, but my knee held together. Still, I landed hard on my back, my wind knocked from me. I struggled to get air back into my lungs, instinctively curling and rolling, another blow from his boot striking my back.

"Did you think I didn't know what you and the whore were up to, shitbag?" He'd hissed. "I've seen how you look at her, you sick little fuck. The best part of you ran down her hore leg after I made you, you piece of kukkost!"

He laughed cruelly and mirthlessly. "Didn't think I knew you were running home to mommy to get your dick wet, now did you? Well, you worthless kukk suger, I followed your pathetic little ass back home on the next flight!"

"I saw you two! You disgusting, perverted little dritt!" His voice took on a rising note of hysteria, his laugh becoming nearly a shriek. "Now it's time to say good bye, fuckhead. You'll never see you sweet whore-mother again. She'll go the way of your bestemor! I'll cut off her tits and stuff them up her cunt before I strangle her! How's that suit you, you forraedersk hund? "

He prepared another kick.

I rolled again, this time catching him in the act of raising his arm, gaffing hook held high. I knew that one well-landed blow with it would leave me gutted like a fish, which was no doubt his intent. I fetched up against the edge of one of the pots and knew at that moment that I was trapped.

In desperation, I lashed out with my legs, still gasping for breath and hunched against the pot and arched my back. This caused my body to shoot towards his legs, sliding uncontrollably across the ice-slicked deck. I figured it was preferable to go over the side rather than face the hook. If I went in the drink, it would be over in just a few minutes.

As I slid across the deck towards its edge, I took father down like a bowling pin. He crashed to the deck heavily as I slid across the tilting, slippery surface towards annihilation. The blue-gray, foamy water looked almost inviting and for a brief moment, I imagined that I could see Mom, walking on the stormy waves, garbed as an angel of death, beckoning me towards the welcoming oblivion the sea promised.

Then the deck pitched again, miraculously slowing my progress. I was able to grab a stanchion of the deck railing, my legs and hips dangling over the edge as I hung on desperately. There was another pitch and corkscrew yaw and suddenly, my hips were flipped around back onto the deck.

Still slightly dazed, I scrambled to my feet, my boots performing a tarantella on the now-icy surface. When my father fell, the gaffing hook went over the side. We now faced each other, barehanded. I had no illusions. I knew if he was able to close with me, that I was dead.

Desperately, I threw a quick left jab, catching him on the chin. I was barely holding my balance on the tilt-a-whirl the deck

had become, the gale-force wind of the storm now upon us, screaming in the rigging. There wasn't much force behind the blow, but it briefly surprised him, keeping him at arm's length for a few more precious moments.

I followed with another quick swing, setting him back slightly on his heels. With his ape-like arms, he still had a couple inches of reach on me, though.

It wasn't looking very good.

I managed to land one more blow, opening a cut over his left eye, but the deck betrayed me and I over balanced. Dad made the most of his opportunity, landing a heavy blow on the back of my neck, grabbing my rain gear and accelerating me headfirst towards the pots.

"This is it," was all I had time to think and then the world went away.

## Chapter 14

To my considerable surprise, I awoke some time later. I could tell from the motion of the boat that we were still in the grips of the storm, but I couldn't tell if it was the waves or my head making my cabin spin around me. I made a half-hearted attempt to throw up and then blackness claimed me again. I wondered briefly if I would be seeing my father in it.

The next time I woke up, I could tell we weren't moving. I had no idea how much time had passed, but we were obviously docked somewhere. Groaning in the darkness, I rolled out of bed with a thump and landed on the floor. It hurt like hell. Mentally, I added probable cracked ribs as well as a concussion to my injury inventory.

Falling out of bed must have alerted someone outside my door, because it flew open. The gangway light seemed intolerably bright, making me feel like I had been stabbed between the eyes with an icepick, but it outlined Hig's unmistakable silhouette. He kindly but firmly put me back into bed, saying, "Rest up, Pete. Coasties are sending a Jayhawk from Dutch for you. It should be here any time."

"Gunnar?" I asked hoarsely.

"No problemo, semi-jefe. It's the circle of life," he laughed grimly. "We'll be recycling his sorry-ass molecules next Red Crab season."

I sagged back into bed, my relief so profound I felt like a jellyfish. Then it hit me; I was in charge now. I had to get off my ass and start making arrangements to get the Anna back to Dutch. I struggled to get up again, but Hig pushed me back down.

Reading my mind, he said, "Not to worry, bud. The Mary Caroline was only eight miles away when we sent out the mayday. Both Sam and Ed Hansson were on board. Sammy's gonna lend us Ed to get back to port. Ed got his Master's certificate last year, if you remember. Everything's nice and legal," he soothed. "Eddie'll get us home in one piece, for sure."

"Thanks for everything, Hig. I owe you."

"You owe me fuck-all, junior. Just be sure to buy me a Bud the next time you're back in Dutch."

Finally getting my brain fully in gear, I asked the question.

"What happened?"

Looking at me without expression, he said evenly, "Pot came loose and took him over the side. Poof. Just like that. Gone. Lucky it didn't nail you too."

Sighing, I laid back into bed. Well, my secret wasn't so secret after all. But now the only person who could hurt me or Mom was gone. I knew in my gut that there was more to my hated father's demise than Hig was letting on, but that was a new secret I could live without knowing.

A short while later, they carefully bundled me on deck and we got into a Snowcat that took us to the airstrip. The helo was

waiting. The last person I saw before they loaded my sorry carcass on board was Sean.

His last words to me were, "Art Swenson is resting easy now, Pete."

It wasn't until we were halfway back to Dutch that his appearance registered in my scrambled memory. His right hand had been bandaged and there was a fresh bruise on his left cheek. As I was bundled into the chopper, he had given me the slightest of nods and a flicker of a smile briefly crossed his face.

We made it back without further adventures and I got checked out by what passes for local health care on Unalaska Island. My cracked ribs were confirmed, but the doc there didn't like my headaches and wobbly gait, so it was off to Anchorage on a Medivac flight for a CT scan.

Provisionally, I ended up at Providence Medical Center. The loss of a crab boat's captain at sea was news of regional import, of course, but I didn't count on the TV cameras when the ambulance brought me into the ER. Minor celebrity that I was, I could have used a lot less attention. God knows what Mom would think if she saw me on the news. At this point, I wasn't sure if or what Mom might know about what was going on.

The only good thing that happened was that Tony and Amanda came by to see me after I hit the ER. I was whisked off to get

my scan and even more x-rays. Apparently the radiologist said all the right things about the condition of my squash, because I was admitted overnight for observation only. Tony called Mom after the results of my scan came back and told me that Hilda was driving her over as we spoke. Eventually, I was released from the clutches of the emergency docs and put in a private room.

I worked hard to stay awake, trying to figure out what I would do with the Anna and her crew, also trying to figure out what would happen with Dad's estate, but it was a losing battle. Concussed brains are recalcitrant beasts and mine was no exception. Everything slipped sideways and out focus and I slept, the last thing I remember being the snowflakes swirling outside of my window in the harsh orange glare of the sodium vapor streetlights below.

When I awoke, it was full daylight. It still hurt to breathe but my headache was tolerable. What made me feel even better though, was the vision I beheld sitting at my bedside.

She was staring pensively out the window. There were dark shadows under her eyes and her hair hadn't been washed or brushed. She was wearing what must have been yesterday's rumpled clothes and her eye shadow was smudged.

She looked absolutely beautiful.

"Hi, pretty lady," I said softly.

Mom jumped in her chair and was at my side in a flash, hugging me fiercely.

"You are in soooo much trouble, you lille drit," she murmured in my ear. "How dare you scare me to death like that, you big, miserable lug! I just about died of fright when Tony called me! I TOLD you not to go back to that boat, but you wouldn't listen, would you, you stubborn idiot? Look what it's gotten you, gotten us!" she scolded, eyes welling.

"Free and clear," I said quietly.

"Pardon?"

"Free and clear, Mom, free and clear. He's gone. We're still here, still together, with everything in front of us now. Free and clear."

Mom was silent for a long, quiet moment and then a she ventured a small smile.

"Free and clear," she said tenderly, running her hand along my cheek. I shuddered slightly at her touch. She leaned over to give me a gentle, deliciously prolonged kiss and then stood, brushing her hair out of her eyes.

"I'm going to find out when that neurologist is going to come by. I need to get my boy home. I'll be at the nurses station for a few minutes, if that's okay darling."

"I'm not going anywhere. I think I can survive without you for two minutes, but not one second more," I teased.

"Brat," she tossed over her shoulder, sweeping from the room.

About three hours later, I was given the Good Housekeeping Seal of Not Going to Die Anytime Soon and we were off. Once again, we sat in the back of Hilda's Xterra. After only about a half hour of driving, I nodded off. When I awoke again, we were already cruising through Soldotna, well on our way home. Mom was asleep, her head on my shoulder.

Every breath hurt and my headache was a nuisance, but life was good.

I put my arm around Mom and pulled her close. She murmured in her sleep and burrowed against me. I saw Hilda looking at us from the rear view mirror, smiling warmly. I sat quietly for the rest of the seventy-odd miles back to the house, letting Mom rest. When we left for home, Hilda had told me that Mom didn't sleep at all once she got to my bedside.

Our arrival home was anticlimactic. We got out of the car stiffly and trudged through about a foot of new snow and let ourselves in the side door. Boots, parkas and gloves came off

mechanically and we found ourselves sitting across the kitchen table from one another.

The transition from deadly struggle to unhoped-for survival to hospital and now home was almost overwhelming. I found that I couldn't hold a thought in my head to save my life. I think my disorientation and confusion was evident to Mom, because she got up and sat in my lap hugging me.

"I'm sorry, Mom. It's all messed up inside my head. I feel like someone's been busy in there with an eggbeater."

"The neurologist said the next few days are going to be difficult, sweetheart. What you're feeling is normal."

"There's not a damn thing that's normal about it," I grumbled. I pointed a finger at my crotch. "Not even a twitch. Normally all you have to do is look at me sideways and I'm hard as a rock."

"Dr. Lanza also said that you might be out of commission for a few days that way also."

"Mom!" I spluttered. "You didn't..."

She cut me off gently. "You really did get things in tangle, didn't you? Of course I asked him, 'My son and I fuck like bunnies. When can I start doing him again?'"

"Jesus Kristus, Peter, get a grip," she said, smiling to take the edge off. "I said you had a girlfriend and knowing you, it would probably come up (pardon the expression) before too long."

"And it will," she said, kissing me again. "You should expect a few days at least before you can making your Momma the happiest woman in the state again. Now be hush and relax. I'm going to go lay a fire and we're going to sit in front of it and do nothing."

That's what we did. We got under a blanket and snuggled, both of us dozing. We both woke up around nine that evening. We were hungry, but I didn't want Mom to cook a meal, so we settled on fried bologna sandwiches and tater tots. I don't think it was what either of us envisioned as my gourmet homecoming meal, but it filled the void.

After that we went to bed and I got to do something that I thought was never going to do, ever again. I held Mom in my arms and fell asleep in our bed.

## Chapter 15

For the next five or six days, I think I just about drove Mom insane. I was so happy to be home, with our future open in front of us, but with nothing stirring in the south forty, I was also impatient and short-tempered.

Intellectually, I knew that time would fix everything, but my less rational self (that part of us that makes us scared of the boogeyman as children) was afraid. Afraid that after all Mom and I had been through, that my father would get his revenge in the form of an impotent son.

No surprise, Mom read me like a book, or maybe more like a comic book, given my male insecurities. She met all of my bad tempered anxieties and frustrations with gentle humor and just the right amount of commiseration and teasing. After all, she was my Mom.

On the morning of my seventh day home, I woke up with Mom spooned against me. I felt great, but it took me a minute to realize why.

Morning wood! The game was afoot and Peter's peter was ready for play! I wanted to shout. I wanted to turn handsprings. But mostly, I wanted to give my Mom the son-loving she so richly deserved. It was time to show her just exactly how glad I was to be home.

Snuggling up close, I kissed the nape of Mom's neck. She stirred slightly and pushed back into me, mumbling in her sleep, a small smile on her lips. I kissed her again and she stirred more purposefully, slowly opening her eyes. A smile bloomed, at once tender and just a bit wicked.

"It's so nice to feel my son's hard cock pushing on my ass," she murmured. "I've been missing that stor kukk for a while."

"Well, he's back now," I whispered, licking her ear.

"Your son wants to come home now, Mom," I rasped in her ear, rubbing at her firm ass more insistently.

"I'd like that," she whispered back, pushing sinuously against me. "Momma would like that very, very much."

She reached between her thighs to grasp me, sighing happily as she rubbed me up and down her furrow, centering me for penetration.

"Unh-unh," I half-moaned, pulling away. "I want to be able to see you when I'm back inside you."

"So, it's missionary Mommy, then is it?" she asked, teasing me just a little.

Grasping her hip, I gently pulled her onto her back, rolling between her thighs as she spread her legs for me. She quickly pulled her nightgown up to her waist, as I ground against her mound, still encased in her usual white cotton panties. I could already feel her wetness spreading as I pushed my length up and down the soft fabric covering her rapidly-moistening slit.

"Oh God, what you do to me, Peter," she groaned, bucking against me. "What you do to your momma, you nasty boy!"

Mom's words were gasoline on the fire of my desire and I growled inarticulately, suddenly impatient. I couldn't get back inside my mother fast enough. Hooking my finger in the gusset of her panties, I roughly pulled them to one side and placed myself at her weeping portal, burying myself in one slow, insistent thrust. She was so wet, my hardness penetrated her depths with almost no effort.

She cried out hoarsely the moment the head of my cock separated her inner lips.

"Oh GOD! Peter! Oh God, so good!"

As my length slid fully back to its home, her eyes half closed and fluttered and her arms looped around my shoulders. When I bottomed out, she bit her lower lip, fingernails raking my skin.

We both exhaled at the same moment, "Aaahhhh!"

I stayed in her, not moving for almost a minute, savoring the exquisite, moist tightness of my mother surrounding me with her clasping cunt. Mom opened her eyes fully, staring at me intently, a small smile blooming.

"Well, are you going to lie there all day, you big, lazy lug, or are you going to get busy and fuck your Mom?" she mock-scolded. "I think I've been more than patient."

"Yes ma'am," I whispered, kissing the tip of her nose.

I withdrew from her nearly fully and began making long, even strokes, as slowly as I could stand. Part of me wanted to immediately blast Mom into orbit with a huge geyser of cum, but another part didn't want what I was feeling to end, ever.

"Oh, yes baby boy, that's it, yes, that's it, give it all to you momma," she crooned. "That's my baby."

Increasing my pace and forcefulness, I buried my head in the crook of her shoulder. One of her arms found its way around the back of my neck, running slowly through my hair, the other remaining on my back, moving up and down, stroking me. I could feel her tenderness and love flowing through her fingertips and into me, at the same time she was wrapping her legs around my hips, meeting me lustily thrust for thrust, our bodies slapping together wetly.

The combination of feelings and sensations was beyond all comprehension and description. It was tender. It was amazingly arousing, this woman bucking beneath me, giving as good as she got. It was uplifting, knowing how much she loved me. It was incredibly, ineffably nasty, being in the single most forbidden place in a son's universe, being there with an unconditional, never ending invitation.

It was sublime.

To this day it still remains completely beyond my ability to explain to anyone else other than Mom, my lover.

Time ceased to have meaning as I pumped in and out of my mother's amazing tightness. There was only her hoarse, panting exhalations in my ear, her fingers scrabbling on my skin, and the plaintive moans and jumbled endearments escaping her lips as we pleased each other.

"Oh, Peter, oh God, so big!"

"Ja, kjaere sonn, knulle din mor, knulle din mor!"

"Yes, baby, that's it! That's it! Harder, you bad motherfucker, HARDER!"

"Knulle din mor, baby, knulle din mor!"

It was difficult enough maintaining any control inside my mother's incredible pussy after a week of involuntary abstinence, but as her cries and pleas became coarser and more and more passionate, I lost it completely.

My orgasm overran me like a runaway freight train and took me completely by surprise. At the same time I began to erupt within her, Mom must have felt my cock swelling, because her eyes flew open and she clutched me with all her strength, her voice bursting from her lips in a series of breathless, agonized shrieks.

"Peter! PETER! PEETERRRRR! Yes! YES! YESSSS!"

At the same time, I was bellowing, "Mom! Oh God, Mom! Cumming! CUMMING! MOM! MOM! MOM!"

My cock felt like a sizzling stick of meaty dynamite as I detonated. My semen seemed to flow out of me like a cataract of molten lead, a dense, viscous and scalding torrent that turned me inside out. It seemed that everything that was me was spurting from the tip of my cock in a flaming cascade and into my mother's forbidden depths, down to my very soul, leaving an empty husk behind.

As I filled her to overflowing, Mom seemed to almost be undergoing some kind of seizure, her eyes rolling up into her head, her limbs vibrating and face contorted in incomprehensible pleasure.

As I watched her writhe beneath me, I was outside of myself for the briefest of moments, taking in her pleasure. "You did this Peter," I thought to myself. "You did this. You made her feel this way, like no other man. You gave this to your mother, your lover."

As quickly as those thoughts flashed through my head, I fell back into the maelstrom of our mutual climaxes and surrendered to it completely, letting its waves wash over me.

When I came to myself, we were still locked together, bodies slick with the sweat of our passion. Mom's eyes opened and overflowed with tears as she hugged me fiercely. I was a little damp myself, that way.

After a moment, she laid back, letting out an incredulous exhalation.

"My God, Peter, my God. That was...that was..." her eyes welled again and she squeezed me so tightly I couldn't breathe.

"That was the best," I said quietly. "The best ever, in the entire history of making love, of all the people in the world who've ever fucked."

"Pretty much," Mom whispered, nodding in assent. "Welcome home, son. You mamma is so happy and thankful to have you back."

"It's good to be back where I belong," I agreed, giving her a tender kiss. "Nobody loves a guy better than his Mom."

"And nobody can love a woman any better than her own son," she affirmed.

I suddenly realized my arms were trembling, as I held myself above Mom. I felt like I had done a couple thousand pushups. With the greatest of effort, I rolled off her and collapsed onto my back, Mom snuggling under my arm, her hand stroking my chest.

"All better now?" Mom teased, as though speaking to a child who had skinned his knee.

I snorted in laughter. "Do ya think?"

We settled into a delightfully comfortable, relaxed silence. It was absolute paradise, just lying there, my arm around her, feeling her breathe in and out, her own hand resting lightly over my still-pounding heart. We both nodded off, completely blissed out.

When I awoke, I had no idea what time it was. The flat, gray light that came with heavy cloud cover and snow flurries gave no indication of the hour. I could have been out for weeks, for all I knew. Mom was still asleep next to me, her features serene and composed. I had never seen her more beautiful.

I arose slowly, careful not to disturb her repose. I slipped on a pair of sweat pants, a ratty t-shirt and a well-worn pullover sweater. The kitchen floor was cold to my bare feet when I

entered, but I didn't want to go back for my slippers. I set a pot of coffee going and made my way to the living room and the wood stove.

The embers from the previous day's fire were still glowing dully, so I had no problem starting a new blaze in short order. By the time the fire was going full blast, I could smell the coffee, so I made my way back to the kitchen.

Smiling to myself, I knew what I wanted to do next. I quickly scrambled some eggs, made a few slices of sourdough toast and put them on a tray, along with a mug of steaming black coffee. I made my way back to our bedroom and sat on the edge of the bed, lightly shaking her.

"Wake up, pretty lady. Breakfast is served," I announced.

Mom slowly stretched beneath the covers and rubbed her eyes, absently puffing a few stray hairs off her forehead.

"Mmmm. Spoiling me rotten, are you?" she purred.

"Get used to it, mother mine. I'm going to continue until you absolutely putrefy."

"How romantic," she quipped, helping herself to a piece of toast, nibbling daintily at its corner. "Thank you, Peter."

"You're very welcome," I said simply.

Mom dug in with relish, cleaning her plate in short order. She proceeded to then deliver a most un-ladylike belch after draining her mug, making me laugh.

"What's the problem?" she asked. "I was hungry. Fucking my horse-cock son is hard work. I need to replenish my battered body."

"Well, then maybe I'd better get you seconds," I leered, wiggling my eyebrows suggestively. "I have plans for you, sexy girl."

"Do your worst, you big brute." She pretended surrender, theatrically throwing her arm across her face. "Go ahead and ravish your poor, innocent, helpless, sweet mor with that enorm pikk of yours."

"Who was it who was crying out, 'Fuck me, Peter, fuck me!' earlier this morning?" I asked tartly.

"I have no idea what you're talking about," Mom said primly. "You must have snuck some scarlet harlot in here behind my back, you horny animal."

As Mom was sparring with me, she shifted in the bed to get more comfortable. Her eyes suddenly widened and she shrieked, "Oh SHIT! God damn that's COLD!"

Bolting out of bed, she wrapped the comforter around her, shivering.

"Jesus H. Christ, Peter!" she gesticulated at the bed, pointing to a gigantic wet spot. "Just how much stuff did you put up me?"

"Everything I had," I replied, pulling her to me for a kiss. "Every last bit I could give my Mom-lover."

"Damn, your spunk is everywhere," she complained, suddenly clamping her hand to her crotch and scuttling to the bathroom.

"Most of it is exactly where it belongs," I said matter-of-factly, trailing behind her.

By now, Mom was on the toilet, looking between her thighs as the remains of my last visit trickled from between her puffy labia.

"If it's too messy, I can always use a rubber," I suggested.

Mom looked up at me sharply. "Don't you dare, Peter Heimdahl! Don't you dare!"

I handed Mom a warm, damp washcloth. "I love feeling your cum inside me," she said dreamily, absently wiping herself. "I even like it when it runs down my legs - it makes me feel very, very sexy," she confessed.

"So, then where's the problem?"

"None, I guess," she replied a little sheepishly. "I was just upset because that wet spot just about froze my tush off."

"Can't have that," I agreed, pulling her into my arms and grasping her sweet cheeks. "I love this tush, just love it. I would be devastated if anything happened to it."

"Now you're just being silly," she said, giving my cheek an affectionate, light slap.

## Chapter 16

Later that day we sat and discussed our plans. With Gunnar gone on to his reward, things were so wide open, it was actually difficult to figure out what to do.

As far as we were both concerned, my feet would never trod the deck of the Anna ever again. We debated at length whether we should sell her, but in the end we decided that with the right captain on board, the Anna could provide a steady supplemental income for us, after expenses. I put in calls to

Hig and Sean, explaining our intentions and assuring them that they had jobs as long as they wanted them.

I got them to put out the word that we were looking for a skipper and then let nature take its course. I hoped that we could probably have everything squared away in several months. I knew that it would take a while, as the estate would have to go through probate in the absence of any will. Leave it to Gunnar to be a pain in the ass beyond the grave. The son of a bitch didn't have anything remotely resembling a will.

With the fate of the Anna Katerina decided, we turned our thoughts closer to home.

I didn't want to alarm Mom, so when she asked, I kept my summary of events from the boat as spare as possible. I didn't see any reason to tell her about Gunnar trailing me home, or his knowledge of our relationship. I just said we had a fight and his rage just boiled over in usual fashion.

I think she sensed that I might be holding some things back, but in the end she seemed to be willing to accept my explanations. I had my own questions for Mom as well, but I was biding my time. It didn't feel quite right at that particular moment and to be frank, I was of two minds.

It would have been easy to leave well enough alone, but in my heart, I knew that we had to exorcise the last of Mom's demons if we were going to have a future. As wonderful and perfect as

everything seemed, I knew deep down that Mom's good humor and apparent happiness was partially a facade.

Around a week or so later, I decided that I couldn't wait any longer and I brought things up in as roundabout a fashion as I could think of. We were in the kitchen preparing dinner, Mom trimming a chuck steak and me chopping veggies for a pot roast, when I decided to jump in.

"I got to know Sean McCallister little bit on this last trip, Mom," I ventured tentatively.

"He said that you used to feed the crew before they went out, back in the old days."

Mom smiled slightly as she remembered. "It was the one nice thing I can say Gunnar did, back in those days. It seemed like a good thing to do, sending the boys off like that. I remember Sean also. He seemed so shy, so awkward and tongue-tied around girls back then..."

"Yeah, he's still very much a fella of few words," I agreed. "But he's a good man. Dad didn't deserve him as an engineer. As much as he was attached to that boat, it was really Sean who kept things humming."

"I guess Sean is the last of the old guard, too. He remembers you fondly, Mom, thinks you're a classy lady."

"Sean is a sweet guy," Mom agreed.

"Yeah, he told me a little about the old crew when we talked. Do you remember Art Swenson?"

I jumped at the sound of shattering glass.

Mom had dropped a Pyrex bowl she had been cleaning on the floor. She was white as a sheet and trembling. My heart went into free fall when I saw her face. She looked terrified and nauseated at the same time.

"What's the matter, Mom?" I asked, heart palpitating. I had been completely unprepared for the intensity of her reaction. "What's the problem?" I asked, pulling her towards me. She resisted, her eyes wide with fear.

"Let me go, Peter!" she shrieked. "Let me go!"

Genuinely frightened, I tried to bring her to my arms for a hug, but she broke free with surprising strength and ran weeping from the room, leaving me dumbfounded in the middle of the kitchen. I heard the door to her bedroom slam.

I couldn't understand why she would have such a strong reaction to an innocent question, but I guess subconsciously,

I knew something was up. I made my way to the bedroom, as quickly as I could.

Knocking lightly on the locked door, I asked, "Mom can you open the door? We need to talk. Please open the door." There was no response. I thought I heard quiet sobbing.

More concerned than ever, I knocked again, more sharply this time. "Mom, please open up. Why are you upset? Just open the door and talk to me," I pleaded.

I thought I heard her crying increase. My mind was up now, big time. I rattled the door knob and shouted, "Open it Mom - please talk to me, please!"

No response. I was now starting to get angry, as well as terribly worried.

Eventually, I heard her sobbing stop, but she never responded to my entreaties. Heaving a painful sigh, I went back to the living room and stared morosely at the fire, a large knot in my stomach.

I simply couldn't understand how everything had come apart in the space of a few minutes, but I had an increasingly dark suspicion about what Sean had told me about Art Swenson.

I knew what had happened in the past was never going to be a barrier between me and Mom, but clearly she didn't know it. I was determined to make it apparent to her, in the clearest possible terms, that it didn't matter one whit to me.

Marching upstairs with grim purpose, I knocked on her door again. "Mom!" I called out. "We need to talk. Right now, please! Please open the door. There's nothing to hide or be ashamed of, okay? Please, open the door!"

Silence.

Then I felt it - a cold draft blowing under her door, chilling my bare feet. Now I was truly alarmed.

"Mom, if you don't open this door, I'm going to break it down. This is crazy!" I shouted, more in fear than anger.

Silence.

I took a step back and lowered my shoulder, rushing forward. My first impact bulged the door, but it held. The second rush produced the desired effect, the jamb splintering as I tumbled into the room.

Mom was gone and the window by her vanity open, snow swirling in and landing in a fine white dusting on her dresser, the curtains billowing.

My heart went into free fall.

Just at that moment, I heard the pickup start with a roar. I ran to the front of the house and dashed out the front door, heedless of the snow on my bare feet, but she was already gone. I felt like throwing up.

By now, I was nearly frantic. The only thing I could think to do was to get hold of Hilda. I went back into the house, bundling up for the five minute walk to Hilda's cabin.

When I arrived, I was essentially incoherent with anxiety. I took five minutes and three fingers of brandy to bring me to my senses. When I finally got the whole story out, including my suspicions and fears, Hilda shook her head throughout the narrative, sighing heavily at its conclusion.

"Jesus, Peter, I hardly know what to say," she spoke softly. "This is so far out of left field, I haven't the faintest idea about what's going on." She refused to look at me.

"But you're her closest friend!" I exclaimed, almost indignantly.

At this point I badly needed some reassurance, some insight into why my world had just blown up in my face. I guess I was counting on Hilda to provide me some kind of an anchor,

something that would allow me to make sense of what had happened and how to fix it.

Clearly though, that wasn't going to happen. I was on my own. In desperation, I asked, "How much do you know about this Art Swenson? I need some answers, Hilda. I know you're holding something back, now out with it!"

She shook her head, still not meeting my eyes.

I lost it.

"Damn it, Hilda!" I shouted. "I need answers, you hear me, answers! I know something's going on here and I know you're not telling me everything you know. I swear to God, if you don't help me here and if anything happens to Mom..." I let my voice fade off into threatening silence.

Hilda looked at me incredulously. In all my years of knowing her, I had never raised my voice to her, so I'm sure she was shocked. She held up her hands placatingly.

"I'm sorry Peter. I promised Chris. I promised on our friendship and everything we hold dear that I would keep her secret. Gunnar thought I knew something about it and he threatened me, but I told him no."

"Of course I told him no on my front porch, with a shotgun pointed at him," she smiled thinly, "But I said no, and I meant it."

I half smiled, the mental picture in my head, but after that brief moment, my fear rose up to clutch at me once again.

Drawing a deep breath, I asked one more time. "Hilda, we both agree that Mom's reaction was totally out of character. Do you think for one minute I care the least bit about her past? If you any guesses about what she might be doing now, I need to know. Right this minute. I don't think she's in her right mind."

Taking in a deep breath, Hilda looked at me steadily. "I have a few ideas about where she might be right now. Let's go check them out. If we don't find her, I...I guess I'll have to tell you what I know."

We bundled up and headed out into the swirling snow. We drove relentlessly for hours, visiting every possible place we could think of.

We drove up and down nearly every road we could find and as time passed, I became more and more worried. By the time darkness was falling, I was verging on the edge of a full blown panic attack.

We had just wandered more or less aimlessly onto a spur road by the Bridge Creek Reservoir, driving through drifted snow amongst the scattered conifers, when Hilda clutched my arm.

"Look Peter! Over there!"

At first, I didn't see it. Then my eyes adjusted to the fading light and I saw the left rear fender and tail light of the pickup, mostly buried in snow and canted at a sharp angle. It looked as though Mom had driven it into a ditch covered by a large snowdrift.

I leaped from the car, half running, slipping and sliding to Mom's truck. I basically dove into the snowdrift, burrowing frantically to uncover the driver's side door, heedless of the numbing cold on my bare hands.

After an agonizing five minutes, I uncovered enough of the door to be able to open it. The window was frosted from the inside with crystallized breath and I couldn't see a thing in the darkened interior.

I opened the door and found Mom slumped over the steering wheel, a bruise on her forehead.

She was still, so very still.

I felt the beginnings of incredible pain deep within me, an awful sense of utter and total loss, an emptiness so encompassing that I knew I would never be whole or complete again.

## Chapter 17

Just as an anguished scream was about to rip from my throat, I saw the faintest flicker of motion along the appalling, blanched white curve of her neck near the collarbone. I looked again, hardly daring to hope, and it was there again.

A pulse. Thank God, a pulse.

"She's alive!" I yelled to Hilda. "Help me get her out!"

We pulled Mom from behind the steering wheel and each took an arm, dragging her unresponsive weight to Hilda's Xterra. Folding down the rear seats frantically, we got her into the back and Hilda took charge.

"Take her jacket off, Peter. Yours too. I've got a blanket . Hold her close and I'll wrap you both up. Hold her tight, Peter. For the love of God, hold her tight."

We got bundled up and Hilda threw the SUV into reverse and slewed us into a perfectly executed bootlegger turn and shot down the road. Under other circumstances, I would have been

impressed, but all I could notice was how cold Mom felt against me and how shallow and sporadic her breathing was.

Dialing the car heater to full blast, Hilda spoke quickly and firmly, her eyes glued to the road as we rocketed back towards town.

"I don't know if we have time to get her to the hospital, Peter. I don't think we can waste even one minute. We're going back to your house. It's at least ten minutes closer than the ER."

"Do it," I replied tersely. I concentrated on holding Mom close, rubbing my hands over her back to generate friction.

A few minutes (or was it years?) later, we rocketed into the driveway, snow and mud flying as the Xterra bottomed briefly out at the curb. We slid to a stop directly in front of the porch and Hilda was out in a flash, throwing the doormat to one side to get the hidden key.

I scooped Mom up and rushed up the stairs to our room, Hilda following close behind.

"Get your clothes off and get under the covers," Hilda commanded.

I stripped us down without ceremony and hauled Mom's limp form under the covers. Hilda found a second and then a third comforter, piling them on us.

Then she walked quickly from the room, calling over her shoulder, "Going to need warm blankets. I'll keep cycling them. Thank God the wood stove is still hot."

For the next hour, Hilda shuttled in and out of the bedroom with blankets heated by the wood stove, some literally singed and smoking from being thrown over it. I didn't care that the house reeked of scorched wool. I didn't care that Mom and I smelled like smoked kippers.

The only thing I cared about was that Mom's pulse seemed to be getting stronger and her breathing more regular. Her cheeks, which looked at first like the whitest porcelain and equally lifeless, now had gained some color. I was starting to finally emerge from full on panic mode, the sweat pouring off my body against the still-distressing coolness of Mom's torso.

I didn't even want to think about her hands and feet. I had no idea how long she had been in the snowdrift, but I was terrified about the possibility of frostbite. I wanted to start warming her arms and legs, but Hilda, old Alaska hand that she was, set me straight.

"No, Peter," she'd said firmly. "Not until she wakes up. Heat the limbs too soon and she'll go into shock, maybe even fibrillation. Be patient. Please be patient."

Eventually, I don't know how long later, Mom stirred against me and burrowed her head in my shoulder. At that moment, I wanted to shout with joy. I wanted to cry with relief and collapse in a gibbering heap. Instead, I called to Hilda and she started wrapping warm towels around Mom's arms and legs. When I saw all her fingers and toes pinking up, I finally relaxed, tremors not from cold, but in tremendous release of tension.

As she began to come around, the shivering began. In spite of hot blankets, my body heat and three comforters, she shook. She shook hard enough to rattle the bedframe, but it was all good. She was coming back.

I held on for dear life.

After a good half hour, her eyelids fluttered for the first time and she moaned, arms reflexively tightening around my shoulders. Then they opened. At first, she didn't seem to be able to focus and she stared at me uncomprehendingly. Abruptly, she teared up and the waterworks began in earnest. She trembled and sobbed in my arms for fifteen minutes, not saying a word.

Gradually, the tears and cries transitioned to sniffles and hiccups and she stared at my chest, darting glances at my face out of the corners of her eyes.

Taking her chin gently, I tilted her head so she had to look at me directly.

"I'm glad you're all right," I said softly. "You had me very worried for a while. Please, don't do that again. I know you've been living alone with awful secrets for a long time, but you shouldn't have overreacted. You should have had more faith in me, how I feel about you, about us," I chastised gently.

That started her tears afresh and I had to hold her tightly all over again until she calmed down.

Taking a deep, shuddering breath, she said, "I'm a horrible person Peter. I've kept the truth from you for so long, so many things you should have been told, that you deserved to know, but I was afraid. Selfish and afraid, taking what I wanted without opening my heart to you, like you deserved. I don't see how you can possibly love me."

"Mom, I don't care if you're a serial killing, pet torturing, child abuser. It doesn't matter. I. Love. You," I stated emphatically. "There's nothing you could tell me that's going to change how I feel. It's as simple as that."

"You have no idea," she objected. "None at all. So many secrets, so many things to hide..."

Taking her hands in mine, I replied gently, "So tell me, Mom. I'm here to listen. And I'm not going to judge you, not now, not ever. Just talk, okay?"

Hilda materialized at the bedside then, a mug of hot tea in her hands.

"Drink this, Chris, drink up honey. You still need to warm up. I'll be downstairs if you need me."

Nodding her thanks, Mom took a sip and clutched the cup in both hands, close to her chest. For a long time, she stared into space, avoiding looking at me. Letting out a resigned sigh, she finally turned to look me in the eyes. Her voice was low and hesitant.

"Peter, I'm going to tell you everything I know. How I came to be married to your father and the story of our family as well. I guess I always knew that some day there would be an accounting, but I had hoped that it wouldn't be so soon...because, because...because when I tell you everything, you're probably going to be disgusted and we'll be done, done for good."

"Not going to happen, pen jente, just not going to happen," I replied firmly. "If you think that I didn't figure out a long time ago that our family was...different, then you're nuts. I've known since I was little that there are secrets and I also figured out that there was some sort of lurking ugliness that you were shielding me from."

"It was perfectly right to hide that from me when I was six, but still, I knew that something was up with you and father. But that was then. I'm grown now and I can handle whatever you care to tell me. Remember this though, Mom - that was then. Now is only about us and our future. Everything else is background noise."

Nodding skeptically, Mom began without preamble.

"Everything begins with your great grandfather on Gunnar's side. That family has been rotten to the core for generations. Your great grandfather was a Nazi sympathizer who made a fortune while collaborating with the Germans. His sons, including bestefar Lars, well they were even worse. Your great grandfather was a greedy, amoral man, but his sons, they were truly evil."

"Lars and Olaf weren't content with helping their father run his 'business,'" Mom said darkly. "They joined an anti-resistance Waffen SS regiment for fun. For fun and excitement. It seems they couldn't pass up the opportunity to rape and murder with impunity."

"In any event, your great grandfather committed suicide rather than face trial at the end of the war, but his sons carried on, oh yes they did."

"Although great grandfather didn't survive, his empire did. It not only survived, but grew like a cancer when Lars and his brothers took the helm, coming out of hiding after deserting their SS regiment when the writing was on the wall. Where your great grandfather used Wehrmacht troops to impose his will and extract his tributes, his sons just used local thugs and escaped common criminals as their enforcers."

"That was all fine and dandy for a year or two, while the government got itself reorganized and reestablished its authority. Lars and Olaf were ruthlessly clever and managed to stay under the radar, taking advantage of all the postwar chaos as best they could."

"Eventually though, their little mafia came under scrutiny and it was established that both Lars and Olaf were enthusiastic participants in the anti-partisan sections of the Waffen SS. Most of their "work" was done in and around Oslo, so nobody local made the connection at first."

"Somehow though, they were tipped off that the net was closing in around them and they disappeared. I don't know how they ended up in Homer, but they picked it for some reason, likely its isolation."

"And bestemor Ulla?" I asked.

"I don't know, Peter," Mom answered softly. "I know very little about her. I think she was a cabaret singer in Oslo and Lars

brought her back to Trondheim after the war. Beyond that...I have no idea."

"I think Grandfather Lars killed her," I said softly, putting voice to my suspicions for the first time. "I think father knew this or maybe even saw it when he was young."

"It would explain a lot," Mom agreed. "I've long suspected that there's an unmarked grave somewhere..."

"This all makes some sort of sad, twisted sense, Mom, but it's only half the story," I interrupted. "I've never understood how it happened that you married a man like Gunnar."

Mom nodded and closed her eyes, a long, drawn out sigh escaping her lips. She was silent for a long time, clearly gathering her thoughts and memories together.

"I grew up in a small Sami village outside of Trondheim. I'm not even sure that it exists any more. It was near another small place called Vikhammer, right on the shores of Trondheimsfjord. My people were poor, very poor. "

"At the end of the Second World War, many Sami lost everything as the Germans withdrew, looting and burning as they went. In those days, we were very much second class citizens, so reparations and rebuilding were very slow to find us, if at all."

"My maternal grandfather had stayed true to many of the old ways and was an unusually talented hunter and fisherman. There wasn't much money, but he, his wife and children survived. My father wasn't so lucky. He was orphaned in 1944 and nearly starved to death. Relatives eventually found him and he was raised communally by a group of various aunts and uncles"

"In any event, Grandfather passed much of his skills on to my mother and father and they carried on with fishing and trapping. In those days, as Norway and Europe became more prosperous, a demand for luxury trade developed and my mother and father used their skills to become fur providers of note."

"They became particularly adept at catching Lynx and the income from this helped them get by, but they had to spend much time in the mountains tending their traps."

"When I was six, they were killed in an avalanche. We couldn't recover their bodies for 4 months, until the snows melted." A tear trickled down her cheek as she remembered.

"I was sent to live with my relatives. I split time between an aunt and uncle and grandfather. He was already seventy-two and was no longer as active as he once was. He supported himself with odd jobs and a miniscule pension he got for his military service. I loved him dearly. I was also very close to my cousins."

"As I got older, in my early teens, I helped him when I could, but his health was failing. He was working as a janitor at a wharfside warehouse in Trondheim and was finding it harder and harder to do the work, so after school I would help him."

"One day when I was seventeen, I was seen by your great-uncle Olaf. He had snuck back into the country on a false passport to check on the family's criminal enterprises in the docks. He was very taken with me and made my grandfather very afraid. Grandfather sent me back to my aunt and uncle's place near Ostersund, hoping that Olaf would forget about me, but that wasn't to be."

"I guess he told Lars about me when he got back to Homer. Somehow, they decided that I should be brought to Alaska as a wife for Gunnar, who was in his mid-twenties at the time. I came to understand that this was how those "Heimdahls" did everything. If they saw something they wanted, they took it. Straight theft was preferable, especially if they thought no one would see what they were up to, but a young woman was a different matter," she stated matter-of-factly.

"Three weeks after my eighteenth birthday, Olaf was back in Ostersund. Grandfather was with him, terrified. He gave him, my aunt and my uncle a choice. They would accept five thousand kroner as a bride price and give me to him, or they would blow out grandfather's kneecaps and cut my two cousin's throats."

"I suppose they thought that the money was a fair exchange, under the circumstances. So...I came to America as chattel."

It was almost too much to believe. "But Mom!" I objected. "How could that happen? It was..."

"Yes, Peter," she said quietly. "It was the tail end of the twentieth century. Things were supposed to be civilized," she said bitterly.

"Well, you know now as well as I that all it takes for evil to flourish is for people to not see what's going on around them and for the victims to be afraid."

"After I arrived in Alaska, I was initially treated fairly well. No beatings, no threats of violence against me and none of them laid a finger on me. I'm sure they felt magnanimous, putting a proper veneer on their behavior, but we all knew what was keeping me in line."

"Lars and Olaf made sure that every few months, that I knew that they knew exactly where my cousins were and what they doing, as well as my aunt and uncle."

"It also turned out that Grandfather passed away a few weeks after I was taken, but I didn't know about it for eighteen months."

"I was treated slightly better than a servant, but not much. I got 'married' about three months after we got to Homer and Gunnar wasted no time in making me 'his,'" Mom whispered. "I was terrified and it was a bloody, traumatic experience, but two months later I knew for sure I was pregnant. When it became clear I was carrying a boy, things actually got to be decent up to my delivery, Lars and Olaf actually treating me with something less than disregard and contempt."

"Gunnar only occasionally touched me after we knew I was carrying a child, mostly I think as a way of marking his property, nothing more. He usually was drunk when he took me. I already had some suspicions, even then, that his...interests lay elsewhere, but that suited me fine."

"In the early stages of my pregnancy, I thought about suicide a lot, but in the end, I couldn't do that to the life I was carrying inside me. And then a strange thing happened after Sigurd was born," she said, raising her head to look at me.

"I held the boy in my arms and I realized I loved that child and that come what may, I was going to be a good mother to him. I shifted the center of my whole universe to your brother and then four years later to you as well."

She smiled and stroked my cheek. "You and your brother were gifts to me that allowed me to keep my sanity and I raised you both to put you outside of your father's influence as best I could. Raising you both into fine young men was both my revenge and salvation. By doing that, I could manage to get up and face every day. The fact that your father was gone most of

the time only made my job that much easier," she smiled thinly.

"So Gunnar is, I mean was my father after all?" I asked, disappointed.

"Yes Peter, he is, but there is none of his blackness inside of you, min fin sonn," she smiled tenderly, taking my hand.

She sat there cross-legged on the bed, comforter wrapped around her shoulders, smiling sadly. I had a feeling now where her story was going and I felt a chill run down my back and the hairs rising on my arms.

## Chapter 18

"Astrid..." I whispered.

"Yes, Astrid. Your half-sister," she said, squeezing my hands.

"I should have told you long ago, sweetheart, I'm sorry," she said, eyes downcast.

"It's okay, Mom. I think I understand, at least a little bit," I said, squeezing her back.

"I just want to know how it happened. Art Swenson was her father, wasn't he?"

"Yes," she murmured hoarsely, her cheeks wet again.

"Take your time, Mom. If you need a break, we can finish another time. It doesn't even have to be today," I comforted.

"No Peter," she replied resolutely. "Now is the time to clear the air, so we can have our new beginning together. No more secrets, ever."

"Sounds good, my *kjare mor*," I encouraged. "There's nothing you can't tell me, Mom, nothing."

Nodding in assent, she began again.

"It was your father's tradition to make me feed the crew before the start of Red Crab season for quite a few years. He got to show off his property and pretend for a couple of hours to be an actual human being, but he never fooled anyone," Mom said drily.

"Your father was always all about dominance and control, Peter. I think that the only reason he was able to get it up with me was because it was the imposition of his will and the demonstration of his power over me that got him excited enough to perform."

"In any event, there was one particular time when he thought that I let Art Swenson flirt with me, which he of course then took to the usual extreme and convinced himself I was fucking him."

"He threw out my diaphragm and raped me, to show me who was boss," she said calmly. "And then something snapped inside me. Even though I knew if Gunnar caught me for real, he'd kill me, I knew then that I would have my revenge."

"The next day, I basically seduced poor Art. He never knew what hit him. Best of all, though, Gunnar had no idea. He always thought that anything that had happened was based on his earlier suspicions, which were totally off-base."

"I knew it was my fertile time and I had a feeling, an intuition, that if I slept with Art, I'd be pregnant after that. It would be my revenge. Gunnar wouldn't know if the baby had been his or not. Raising another child to love, knowing that he or she shared nothing with Gunnar was a dark, sweet thought."

"When Astrid was born, I knew she was Art's child. I was torn in two, then. Art was 8 months gone by that time, taken by the sea. I cried for a week when I heard he was lost. At the same time, I felt that I had carved out a victory of sorts against Gunnar. My two beautiful boys were turning out to be nothing like their father and I had a third child who wasn't even his."

"How did you know for sure, Mom?" I asked, puzzled.

"A simple blood test, Peter. They took a sample of cord blood when she was born, a routine thing. Astrid was B+."

"You'll have to explain more, Mom, biology wasn't my strong suit."

"I don't know all the details either, but what I was told was that it's not possible for an A+ father and an O- mother to have a child with a B blood type."

"And Dad never found out?" I asked incredulously.

"I don't think he wanted to know, or even cared, Peter, especially when it turned out I was carrying a girl. He never had much use for women, let alone little girls," Mom declared flatly. "In any event, when Art got washed overboard from the Anna, I think your father felt that book was closed. God knows what would have happened if I'd been pregnant with another son."

Listening to Mom talk, it was becoming clear that she didn't have any idea about what actually happened when Art died. I was completely torn. Wanting her to know what the truth was, but not wanting to add to her pain. But when she began speaking again, the problem solved itself.

"I never believed the official explanation of events surrounding Art's death," she said softly. " I always felt in my heart that somehow, Gunnar had to be responsible."

"You're right, Mom," I agreed. "Sean told me what really happened that day. Dad set it up." I went on to recount all the little details and inconsistencies that added up to cold-blooded murder.

Mom sat through my exposition, nodding her head from time to time as I laid out the facts, as though she was checking off these new pieces of intelligence against some kind of mental checklist. At the end, she sighed once and shook her head.

"So many secrets, Peter. So many lies, deceptions, violence and death. Your father and his family were like a foul black hole, sucking in everything around them and warping it to their own evil and selfish purposes. I don't know how I survived it all."

"You're the bravest, best person I know, Mom," I reassured her. "By rights, Sig and I should have followed in Dad and bestefar Lars' footsteps. But we didn't . Because of you. Only because of you. You were strong. You were so incredibly strong," I said with a note of wonder in my voice. "I can't imagine how you managed. I think anyone else would have gone insane, run away or killed themselves. It's amazing," I concluded.

"I survived because my children needed me and because I was protecting what little was left of my real family," she said self-deprecatingly. "It's what I had to do."

I grasped her hands firmly in mine, squeezing hard. "I don't want to hear any more of that talk, Mom," I scolded. "Don't ever sell yourself short like that, ever again!"

"You're the most amazing, loving person I know. Hilda's absolutely right. You so deserve to be happy," I said fiercely, eyes boring into hers.

I held her gaze until she began to smile, just a little.

"And I'm just the guy for the job," I concluded, cupping her chin gently. "It's going to be a lot of work, though, because your good times account is seriously in arrears."

"I estimate it's going to take, oh say, about a lifetime to bring the books into balance."

"Oh, Peter!" she cried, flinging herself into my arms. "Do you truly mean that?"

I nodded and smiled, teasing back, "Actually, I just need a maid with benefits. Somebody who'll cook my meals, scrub my toilet and bend over when I get an itch that needs scratched."

"Lille dritt," Mom sighed, leaning her head against my shoulder.

"Vakre mor," I murmured into her hair.

Hilda returned to the room some time later and saw us snuggled under the comforters, Mom asleep in my arms. She smiled and mouthed, "Later," letting herself out of the house quietly. I was soon asleep myself.

I awoke the next morning with morning wood that would have put a concrete drill to shame, but Mom wasn't in the bed. For a moment, I panicked, but then my nose told me there was fresh coffee brewing and my ears discerned the distinctive sizzle of sausage in a frying pan. Reassured, I hopped out of bed, drained the snake and put on some fleece pants and a turtleneck.

When I entered, the kitchen Mom's back was to me. She was dressed in her usual morning uniform of old man-pajamas and a quilted, slightly threadbare red robe. Her hips were swaying ever-so-slightly as she stirred scrambled eggs in a cast iron skillet.

Although I awoke with one thought (well, lets be honest, what I had in mind didn't really count as thinking, more of an animal impulse and hunger), I somehow forgot that hormonal imperative as I watched Mom, because it hit me then.

I thought, "Jesus, Peter, just how much better can things get? This is your life now. You get to wake up every morning to this incredible woman. For the rest of your days, you lucky sod!"

I realized that right at that moment, I had everything I needed out of life. Everything else after this was just gravy. I felt like a buoyant cork, bobbing in an ocean of perfect contentment. "Remember this," I told myself, almost sternly. "This is one of those moments, the kind of thing you can remember clearly for decades. Savor it, boy, just savor it."

I found myself at her back, my arms wrapped around her, nuzzling her neck.

"Morning, kjare mor," I murmured.

"Good morning, sweet lazybones," she replied, leaning back into my embrace.

"Thanks for cooking, Mom," I said, my hand finding its way underneath the lapels of her robe. As I cupped the soft heft of her breast through the flannel of the PJs, I could feel her nipple harden against my palm. When I traced the slightly bumpy outline of her areola with my fingertip, she moaned and put her hand over mine, moving it away with slight reluctance.

"So you think that you can just sashay in here while I'm hard at work, say a few sweet nothings and cop a feel, eh?" she mock-scolded me, smiling gently.

"That's about the size of it," I agreed smugly.

"You need to learn how to treat your mother with more respect, you insolent young man," she riposted, her smile widening.

I resurrected the best little boy pout I could muster, whining, "Awww, but Ma...I need to get laid. Puh-lease? Pretty puh-lease with sprinkles on top?"

At that point we both lost it, dissolving in laughter. I pulled Mom away from the stove, ignoring her squawks of protest and sat in one of the kitchen chairs, pulling her into my lap.

Arms encircling her waist, I asked, "So what's the plan today, Mom?"

"In fifteen minutes, Hilda's arriving. She'll take you down to Bert's and you'll go with him to pull the truck out of the ditch. After that, the day's pretty much wide open. Now, let me up before the sausage burns, unless you want to go hungry this morning."

"I'm always hungry," I growled, my hand sliding up the inside of her thigh to cup the divine junction of her thighs.

Shrieking with indignation, she slapped my hand and struggled out my grasp, gathering her robe around her defensively, her color high.

"Beast!" she admonished accusingly. "I do NOT need for Hilda to see you bending me over the table again. She'll think we're a couple of exhibitionist pervos!"

"Besides," she said more softly, "I don't want a quickie. I want a couple of solid hours of good son fucking. So eat your breakfast and take care of the truck. Your reward will be waiting, I can promise you."

Heaving a theatrical sigh, I said, "Well, okay, but only because you're my Mom and I love you. You get a pass this time. But don't expect me to be so understanding in the future, being dressed as sexy as you are."

Snorting a single laugh, Mom shot back sarcastically, "Sexy? You're out of your one-track mind, you nasty boy! If you don't watch your mouth, I'll start wearing a union suit around the house!"

"Mmmm, sounds even better, Mom. I love the idea of an 'easy access' flap," I countered.

"Impossible man!" she grumped, setting a plate down in front of me.

"Irresistible mother," I replied.

She sat back in my lap with her arms around my neck. I fed us both from the one plate as we ate in comfortable silence. All too soon, we heard Hilda's SUV in the driveway.

I got my mukluks on and Mom helped me into my coat. Adjusting my scarf, slightly, she pulled me forward into a kiss. "Don't keep me waiting, Peter," she said, licking her lips. "I need my son back where he belongs."

I had to ask one more time, to be sure. "And you're okay now, Mom? I need to know you're all right, that you know what's happened before doesn't matter to me."

She squeezed both my hands, looking straight into my eyes. Her own were guileless and clear. "Every day with you, I get better and heal a little more, Peter. Every day. I used to survive taking things one day at a time. Now I'm going to savor them, one at a time."

"That's my girl," I smiled.

I gave her a son's peck on the cheek. I think she was surprised that I didn't kiss her on the lips, but somehow it seemed the right thing to do, letting her know I was still her son, as well as lover. I think she somehow understood what I was letting

her know, even though it wasn't spoken. I could see it buoying her spirits, knowing that as we went forward together, I wasn't going to lose sight of the good parts of our past.

"See you soon, Mom. Love ya."

"Hurry back, son-lover."

Two hours later, by the clock and two months later in lover's time, I found myself back home. Half-running up the stairs, I could hear Mom in the shower. "Perfect," I thought, beginning to strip off my clothes quickly.

Mom must have heard me, because she spoke quickly, her tone brooking no argument.

"Please wait outside, Peter. I'm almost done."

Grumbling just a little bit to myself, I finished stripping down and got under the covers, looking expectantly towards the door. A few long minutes later, Mom came out in a terrycloth robe, her hair in a towel. She looked dewy, fresh and delectable.

She smiled at me sweetly and then proceeded to get dressed, studiously ignoring my surprised expression. In a matter of moments she was fully clothed in her long silk underwear, jeans, a lumberjack shirt and pullover fisherman's sweater.

Still not quite ready to believe she was leaving me hanging, I finally spluttered to life, saying, "But Mom! I thought you said..."

She came over and kissed me, her hand slowly stroking my thigh through the sheets tented over me and my alter ego.

"I have a couple errands to run, sweetheart son. Please be patient. I'm not deliberately trying to tease you," she laughed. "Well, maybe just a leetle bit," she finally admitted.

"Anyway, my errand is for your benefit, so just suck it up and don't whine," she teased. "I promise you'll be glad you exercised some restraint."

"You're a terrible tease, you know, leaving your poor boy hanging like this," I sulked.

"All good things to those who wait, min fin sonn, all very good things," her voice lowered seductively and I shivered at its implied promise.

"Okay, okay," I sighed in defeat. "I can take a hint. Go do your thing."

"And Mom," I added to her departing back, "Stay out of snowdrifts and ditches, please."

I heard her voice faintly before the door to the carport opened.

"Brat!"

I could hardly hold a coherent thought in my head for the first fifteen minutes or so after Mom left. It was a major effort to redirect my thoughts and blood flow to the big head, but I eventually succeeded. I got online and began looking at appliances. I had decided that the first thing I was going to do for Mom was to re-equip her kitchen and get her some of the things she always wanted, so I started doing research.

I got into things surprisingly quickly and before too long, I heard Mom reenter the kitchen. "Hello, Peter! I'm back, my love," she called cheerfully. A few moments later, she came into the room, several shopping bags in her hands.

She set the bags down and gave me a most promising kiss, which had me raised fully and throbbing in less than a minute. Then she broke the kiss and pulled away, to my considerable dismay.

Gathering the bags back up, she broke away with an apologetic smile, saying, "I'm going to get your surprise ready now, Peter. I need a little time to get ready, so please hang on just a little bit more, okay?"

I nodded in agreement, giving her a smile.

That got me another quick kiss and then she got up. Looking as stern as she could, she said, "Now, NO PEEKING while I get ready, alright? If I catch you stealing a look, I'll cut you off for a month, d'you hear me, you big lug?"

Laughing, I nodded in assent. "Yes ma'am, absolutely, ma'am. Understood, ma'am."

"Good, now that we've got that settled, try and relax for a bit. Just think that you're only a few minutes away from Momma knocking your socks off."

"Sadist," I groaned.

"Lille dritt."

When Mom finally emerged from the bathroom a half hour later, I practically had a stroke. She was wearing an astounding white satin and lace bustier that left most of the tops of her breasts uncovered, lifting them into an incredible cantilevered position, her areolae barely covered by lace.

The middle portion was almost corset-like in construction, accentuating her waistline and flowing sensuously over her hips, incorporating garter straps that held up suntan colored

nylon stockings that were an absolutely perfect compliment to her skin and hair.

Then there were her panties. My God, her panties. They were shimmery satin with a semi-transparent front panel that showed the smoky outline of her raven bush. I could see that she had trimmed around her nether lips, which were just on the edge of visibility above the gusset, already looking moist and succulent.

Clearly savoring my silent, but awestruck response, she smiled just a bit uncertainly and asked, "Do you like, Peter? I've never worn anything like this before. I hope I got it right."

"Holy shit, Mom!" I exclaimed, finally finding my voice.

"I ordered them the day after Christmas," she explained, "And they didn't arrive until late yesterday."

Pulling her to me, I gave her the best kiss I could muster and she relaxed against me, giving out a small moan.

"It's perfect, Mom. You're perfect. You didn't need to do this for me. I'm...I'm just blown away."

"Mmmmm, I'm glad my son likes his Momma's sexy clothes," she purred. "I thought quite a bit about what outfit you might enjoy. I'm so happy you like it. This is a first for me, having

racy underthings. It makes me feel very naughty and sexy that they're for my son to enjoy."

"I'm glad I waited for this, Mom. It's worth it a hundred times over. What an amazing surprise."

"Who says the surprises are over, Peter? This is going to be a day of firsts," she explained. "Close your eyes now and hold out your hand, I have something else for you."

I complied immediately and felt her press a medium-sized cylinder into my hand. When I opened my eyes, it took a moment for things to sink in through my thick skull. "Pjur," I said aloud, still not fully connecting the dots.

"I've officially lost my mind, sweet boy," Mom explained. "I've decided it's time. I want you, uhm, you know, back there."

"Oh my God!" I exclaimed, thunderstruck. "Are you sure Mom, really sure? I'd love to do that with you, but there's no way I'm going to hurt you, no way."

She smiled tenderly and ran a finger along my cheek. "I know how much my son loves me. I know I can trust him. I also know he wants Momma's ass so much."

Reaching into one of her shopping bags, she said, "Soooo, Momma's been doing her homework. I think I have everything I need here."

In short order, she produced a small, slim vibrator, an "average" looking purple dildo and an enormous, shiny pink monstrosity with a raised tracery of exaggerated veins along the entire shaft.

I think I must have looked a bit bug-eyed as Mom brought out her new toys, because she laughed at my expression. "What's the matter, big boy? Now that your Mom has gotten her expert advice, she knows what she needs to do. Preparation is everything when you want your big dick son to fuck your ass."

"We'll work through the progression slowly, lover. I'll let you know when I'm ready for each step, okay?"

I swallowed hard, reality hitting home for the first time. Mom laid herself down next to me and put her arms around my neck, giving me a thorough, soft and loving kiss. "Take your time and do what comes naturally, son. We're not following a recipe. This is all supposed to be fun and feel good."

Nodding, I moved between her thighs, kissing the insides softly. I found her wet center and delved deeply, then splitting her flower as my tongue traveled upwards to caress her already prominent nubbin of pleasure. Her hands anchored themselves in my hair and she canted her hips forward,

questing to meet my tongue. A small croon of approval escaped her lips.

I lashed her clit gently until her hands tightened around my ears and she began moving her hips in short jerks. Backing off to a tiny, disappointed moan, I let my tongue trail down to her perineum, eliciting a slight gasp as I laved the area between her two treasures.

Grasping her firm cheeks with both hands, I lifted her up and spread her legs wide, my tongue circling around her brown asterisk, but never touching. While doing this, I slipped a finger into her moist portal, slowly sawing it back and forth. The effect was immediate.

"Oh Jesus, Peter! What are you doing to me? It's so good!" she groaned. I circled my tongue closer to her most secret place, nearly dipping into it.

"God, you're so nasty, licking Momma there! Don't stop, please, don't stop!"

Sensing her closeness to the edge, I paused for a moment, then I dove in fully, stiffening my tongue and breaching the barrier of her rosebud. At the same time, I curled my fingers upward within her vagina, vibrating them rapidly. Mom's legs stiffened straight out and she shook violently with her release, chanting, "Oh my God, OH MY GOD!" over and over again.

As her aftershocks subsided, I looked up the valley of her thighs and over the soft hill of her belly to see her smiling beatifically. "You are very, very naughty, Peter Heimdahl. You are the nastiest boy I've ever known and I love the way you eat Momma's ass."

"Now, let's have some real fun," she said, taking the lube from the bedside table and tossing it to me. Never one to disappoint my mother, I applied some of the Pjur to my fingers and began teasing her bung gently, slowly working one and then two fingers into her virgin tightness.

Within a few minutes, I had her clawing the bedsheets, begging for more. I replaced my fingers with the vibrator, slowly moving it in and out of her pucker to her moans of approval. I gradually added a stretching, rotating motion to my ministrations and she began to meet my invasion with her own small, return thrusts.

"Bigger, Peter!" she gasped. "The purple one now, please. God, it's so good!"

I gently moved the rubbery phallus all around her backdoor, adding extra lube, slowly exerting forward pressure. Mom seemed to be totally lost in a world of forbidden sensations as I applied myself to the task and then it was inside her, a small yip announcing the invader's full entry into her darkest secret.

Her hand found mine, steadying it, showing me how slowly she wanted it to move, gradually increasing the speed and depth

until it was moving freely within her. A small orgasm shook her, causing her eyes to open wide in surprise. After several minutes and another small orgasm, she rolled over onto her stomach and stuck her gorgeous derriere into the air.

"I'm ready, sweetheart. The big one now. Please be gentle."

"Always, Mom. Promise to tell me if it hurts too much, okay?"

Looking over her shoulder at me, she nodded once and then put her head down, waiting.

Picking up The Monster, as I now thought of it, I slowly rubbed it around her anus, applying pressure like before, but there was more resistance this time. I paused with concern as the head began to stretch past Mom's backdoor and she let out a gasp.

"Mom? You okay"

"Yes honey, keep on going, just be slow," she quavered, her voice muffled by a pillow she had buried her head in.

As I oh-so-carefully eased the huge dildo ahead, I could see beads of sweat on Mom's shoulders. I kept on adding more lube and then, with a palpable pop, the head passed into Mom's ass.

"Ahhnnhh!" she cried, raising her head. I halted immediately.

"Don't you dare stop, Peter," I heard her say through gritted teeth. "We're almost there. Just go slow."

Moving by fractions of inches and using copious amounts of lube, I gradually buried The Monster in Mom's ass. After almost five minutes of extremely careful maneuvering, it was all the way in, and what an amazing sight it was. Ever so slowly, by mere millimeters, I began to slowly move the huge invader.

It took three or four minutes of gentle manipulation and then I felt the first small counterthrust from Mom, then another. Then another. Then I heard the words I never thought would be possible.

"Harder, Peter. Stretch Mommy's asshole. Fuck me with that fucker."

Gradually, I began to lengthen the strokes, until I was moving nearly the full length in and out of Mom. In a low voice, she began grunting, "Yes, yes, yes," to each stroke. I was hard enough to tunnel through solid rock.

Then, Mom raised her head up from the pillow and looked at me, her eyes blazing.

"Fuck mommy's ass, darling. Fuck me now, baby."

Needing no further encouragement, I slathered my steel with lube and placed myself at my mother's most secret, forbidden place. Slowly I pushed forward, sliding in nearly effortlessly, the tightness and heat absolutely overwhelming.

"Oh God!" we cried out at the same time.

As I reached maximum depth, the sight of my pubes mashed up against Mom's silky globes was enough to drive me over the brink of insanity. If that wasn't enough, as I began to stroke in her, Mom started making noises.

Sounds that I never had heard ANY woman make before began emanating from my mother's sweet lips. Strange, animal ululations, grunts and gasps interspersed with the "Oh Gods," and "Fuck me baby." Soon I was stroking my full length in and out and Mom was meeting me with her own vigorous thrusts, her hips gyrating wantonly.

As my thighs collided with her sweet cheeks with each cycle, I was hypnotized by the fleshy shock-wave that rippled through her buttocks and into her back. The loud, lewd slap of flesh on flesh reverberated in my brain like the devil's snare drum and soon I found myself on the brink of a titanic release.

"Gonna cum, Mom," I grunted through clenched teeth.

"Yesssss, baby, cum for Momma. Cum in my ass, baby boy!" she hissed.

Then I was there. The intensity was beyond description. I felt like I was on the verge of leaving my body, my entire soul spurting out of the head of my cock along with the molten cascade of my semen, filling my mother's bowels to overflowing with my incandescent essence.

I howled in forbidden, animal triumph, taking and claiming the one place my mother had saved for her son as my very own.

As I spurted, Mom's head jerked up like a puppet and her back arched into incredible tension. She thrust back at me with a desire that spoke to taking my entire body into herself. A banshee wail announced her own implosion of ecstasy and a torrent of fluid shot from her cunt, bathing my thighs and soaking the sheets beneath her.

She screamed, "Peter, Peter, PEEETERRRR!" over and over and then collapsed completely. As she fell away from me, I briefly saw the obscene, silver dollar gape of her ass, rimmed with my cream.

I collapsed beside her, too stunned to move, barely able to breathe. My brain sizzled like it was in a white-hot skillet, the glowing metal an unspeakable alloy of lust, consummation,

desire and forbidden love. After I lost my mind and slowly reclaimed it, I turned to Mom's insensate form.

Her breathing was slow and regular, her face beaded with perspiration, but her brow smooth and relaxed. For a long time, I just watched her, hypnotized by the rise and fall of her chest, the flare of her nostrils and the small smile on her lips.

As my post orgasmic fog dispersed, she slowly stirred, opening her eyes. She blinked once, twice, appearing disoriented at first and then she focused on my face. Her face broke into smile, at once elated and slightly embarrassed.

"Wow," she croaked.

"Yeah, wow," I affirmed.

"Peter, that was the most incredible, sexy, nasty, beautiful..." Her vocabulary failed her and she snatched my head with both hands, delivering a blistering kiss that just about blew the top of my head off.

"I love you so much, son," she whispered.

"I love you too, wife-mom."

"Wife-mom. Hmmm, I like the sound of that, Peter."

"It's the truth. You're stuck with me now, kjare mor."

"I can live with that, son-lover."

"Good."

She stretched sinuously and her eyes opened wide in panic at the same time a bubbling fart escaped her well-used derriere. "Oh my God!" she cried, burying her face in her pillow, completely mortified. "What did you do to me, you nasty man?" she wailed, looking frantically for something to stuff between her legs.

I hopped off the bed and brought back a bath towel, answering her question as I handed it to her.

"What did I do to you? Well, let's see, Mom. I seem to remember something about toying your ass with some of the biggest dildos I've ever seen and then there was something else, let's see...Oh yes, I remember now. I fucked your ass and filled you with the biggest cum of my entire life. Yeah, I think that about covers it."

"Sarcasm does NOT suit you, Peter," Mom said acidly, hugging the towel to her crotch.

"Was it worth it all, in the end, Mom?" I asked, smirking at my clever play on words.

"You're incorrigible, you know that? Here I am, doing my best to rest battered and bruised body, after you so thoroughly abused my tender, virgin ass and all you can do is spout bad puns. Show your mother some respect, for God's sake."

"I'd rather show her how much I love her," I said, pulling her close.

"That's acceptable, too," she smiled.

"How about I draw you a nice, hot bath?" I asked.

"Thank you sweetheart, that would be heavenly."

I drew her water, added some bath oil and carried her, giggling, to the tub. Setting her on her feet, I handed her into the aromatic water and watched her slide in down to her chin, her hair spreading around her like a dark nimbus. She sighed contentedly and opened her eyes, favoring me with one of her patented dazzling smiles.

"Any other plans, Peter?"

"Nothing immediate Mom, but if you can spare the time, I've got a few ideas about how to spend the next forty or fifty years."

"I'll clear my calendar, darling."

And so she did.

## Epilogue

My books have done well, including a couple that made women's TV show reading lists. My fourth and fifth novels had been made into movies - selling those rights on top of our share of my father's assets and insurance made us financially independent. We're not really wealthy by any measure, but between my royalties and the residual of Dad's estate, we have more than enough to travel at will and comfortably maintain our deliberately simple lifestyle.

About 6 years back, Sig came out of the coast guard. I sold him the Anna Katarina for one dollar, now renamed (by mutual agreement) the Magda Christine. He's taken over the duties as skipper of the chase boat for that long-running TV show and is doing well. He says he may try his own hand at crabbing eventually, but that remains to be seen. I do know he's got the family grit and determination to make it happen if he chooses to do so.

When he finally came back to Homer, we decided that come what may, we didn't want any more secrets. We told him the

truth about us. It took him over two months to get over the shock and he wouldn't even speak to us for at least five or six weeks, but he eventually came around to understanding, after I explained how everything happened. The big, lazy sod is actually a hell of a guy, still loving us after all that. We're a family again, more so now than any time when Dad was still alive.

We've done a lot of traveling the past ten years. I've found that getting away is often the lubrication I need to break the bind of occasional writer's block. I don't really care too much where we go, as long as she's with me.

When I get that need and she asks where, I just say, "Wherever your heart desires." And when she asks where my heart's desire is, I just slip my arm around her waist and say, "Right here, right now."

We had maintained the old house in Homer for a few months, toying with the idea of remodeling it, but in the end, the weight of dark memories from my father were too heavy, too oppressive, even for the joy we had found in each other there, in that preceding Christmas. We did live for a while in a far suburb of Seattle, but in the end, we had to admit that we just weren't city folk. The high peaks, blue glaciers and limitless vistas of our real home constantly called to us.

Sig had his own family by then and also wanted easier access to education and amenities for his wife and two boys, so they set up quarters in Anchorage. My kjaere mor continues in her passion for all things Norse, having gone back to school

for a masters degree in Scandinavian history. She has begun writing and illustrating on her own now, mostly children books rooted in the myths and legends she loves so well. Reviews have been good, her latest effort becoming a Caldecott Award finalist.

Eventually, we found our little slice of paradise off the Lynn Canal, down in Haines, building our home near the banks of the Chilkat River. Our house is a fairly small, simple affair, but its warm, beating heart remains the kitchen, where Mom and I still spend much of our time together. She cooks and I tell her of the research I'm doing for my various writing projects, and she continues to enlighten me about the history of our people and the roots of the legends of Asgard and Midgard.

Our day-to-day life is simple and uncomplicated, just the way we like it, raising vegetables in our garden during the long days of the northern high summer and smoking salmon that we catch in the river. The constantly changing, silvery mare's nest of the Chilkat River delta and the awesome backdrop of the Takshanuk Mountains provide us with an unrivaled backyard. I must confess to also preferring grizzlies, eagles and moose as neighbors over Pacific Northwest hipsters.

My books are coming slower now than before, but better, I think. I've also started to compose poetry. It's much harder than I imagined, but I have so much to write about, that I think it will keep me going for years.

Other than the gourmet kitchen we designed and built together, the only real luxury in our lives right now is the solarium with a sauna and hot tub, which I added to the back of our bedroom a couple years ago. It's really not terribly practical and we have to use an oversized, separate wood stove to keep it usable in winter, but it's worth the trouble.

That room is our favorite place, with our best memories. It's where Mom and I still make love every Christmas, under the shimmering curtain of the Aurora Borealis, the snow falling all around us as our bodies are bathed in the reflected glow of the armor of the Valkyries.

**THE END**