

The Isle of Alaska Mystery

by

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Chapter 2 All Together Again

The limousine that pulled up to the antebellum-style mansion in Seattle's Capitol Hill neighborhood had a hard time trying to park. The long, black automobile sat in the traffic lane for several minutes while the driver consulted with his passenger. The American flags on the front fenders fluttered in the breeze made by passing cars.

The limo was not the first of its kind to arrive. A long line of similar cars were parked on the side streets surrounding the Harvard Avenue house. Chauffeurs lounged against their vehicles, smoking or chatting with each other. They watched with practiced indifference as the new arrival circled the block.

The four-lane street in front was heavily posted with "No Parking" signs. The curb directly before the large house was painted red. In a city where even the fire hydrants are not marked, a red curb really means something. A tilted sign said this was where the #23 bus stopped.

These restrictive signs increased the driver's difficulty in finding a place to put the limousine. In the first place, parking is found at a premium on the Hill. When there are a dozen limos parked already, finding room for one more becomes an exercise in futility.

The car turned right on Lynn Street. No luck. Finally, it returned to rest in front of the house, impeding the outside lane of traffic. After all, when there are two lanes, and you are an important person, traffic can afford to be blocked.

A large, African-american man got out. He was middle-aged but still in good enough shape to be mistaken for an ex-football player. An expensive, well-tailored suit hid his expanding waistline and the flabbiness developing around his neck. His short, military-style haircut looked chiseled from his head. He

was greying at the temples and this helped accentuate his military bearing.

Normally he may have waited for his chauffeur to open the door but tonight he was impatient. A delay with his arrival meant things weren't going his way. Someone should have saved him a spot.

He muttered something under his breath. The driver knew this mood. It would be an excellent idea to stay out of his way.

"Hamilton..."

"I'll wait for you right here, Sir."

During the next two hours, while the meeting inside was in progress, Hamilton fended off two motorcycle cops who wanted him to move. They had a problem with large cars blocking arterial streets and parking in a bus stop. The chauffeur waved his wallet under their noses so they could see how important this car was.

The cops departed grumbling about "special privileges" but Hamilton didn't care. This was Seattle, and these kinds of things were done all the time. In a concession to the cars flashing their lights and honking their horns at the limousine, Hamilton turned on his emergency flashers. When it was quiet enough, he listened to the radio. He stretched out on the comfortable full-grain leather seats.

A few of the other drivers came around to chat and smoke but Hamilton ignored them. He could afford to. That was what

position and prestige were all about. Instead, he played with the radio and watched the fluttering flags. The sun was dipping below the Olympic Mountains coloring the sky a pretty, pastel pink.

Inside the mansion the meeting was progressing slowly. There were two schools of thought on the subject at hand and neither agreed with the other. The forces of one, though, seemed to be mastering the other.

A short, squat man with a florid face kept punctuating the discussion to contribute, "No decision is a decision, gentlemen. No decision is a decision." He repeated it like a mantra until no one bothered to pay him any attention. This made him increase the frequency of his interruptions as well as the volume of his protestations.

Finally, a thin man with large, shiny diamonds in his cuff-links turned to him and softly said, "Shut up, you twit."

Florid Face sat there, his mouth working but no sound coming out. He was dumbfounded by the indignity.

Diamonds pulled out a cigarette holder. It had his characteristic stones imbedded in the handle. He was acutely aware of the silence his soft remark had engendered. Regally, he inserted a cigarette, thinly rolled with brown paper, into the holder. After striking a match, he turned his attention to the dozen men in the room and said, "Now. Where were we?"

A bald-headed man with bushy eyebrows and pencil-thin mustache spoke up. "I suggest we take care of any opposition before they have a chance to find out about our plans."

"What do you mean by that?" objected another of the men. He was dressed in a tuxedo. After this meeting he was going to the symphony with the young woman seated behind him. She was the only one of her sex present at the meeting.

The Bald-headed man didn't reply except to shrug his shoulders. He tugged at a loose hair in his mustache. When he had removed the offending whisker, he flicked it onto the carpet.

Another voice spoke up. It came from a young, athletic looking man. "I agree. I say it's time for action." He emphasized his comments by striking his left fist into his right palm. "Those politicians in their ivory towers have pushed us around once too often. They're good enough to take our campaign contributions but the moment we ask for something in return, they plead it isn't good for the city. What they mean is, it isn't good for them. I'm tired of all these environmental regulations. They aren't good for business."

"We should have made a greater effort to get our mayoral candidate elected," contributed another voice. He was young; young enough to be the son of Tuxedo. Though he wasn't, Tuxedo treated him as if he were. The Young Man was Tuxedo's only remaining ally in the room.

"Should have? What's this 'should have' garbage?" retorted the Athlete. "We should have done a lot of things except for idiots like you and the old geezer you work for," here he indicated Tuxedo. "And, we should have never let his Bimbo know everything about what the Commission does." Tuxedo bore the insults with silence. He had heard worse.

It registered with the young woman though. She was allowed in the meeting because of her companionship with Tuxedo. That association didn't make her popular with all the Commission members, particularly the Athlete. She had proven herself on various jobs and it annoyed her to be thought of as only "window dressing."

"The people of this Commission have tried to accomplish something. Every step of the way our hands have been tied by the city council on one side and you people on the other."

"I don't think..." began the Young Man.

"That's right," finished the Athlete. "You don't."

"I don't think," the Young Man started again, "that you're being fair." He went on, even though the faces in the room wore the look of tolerance. "We are only trying to let the legally elected members of the council do what they were elected to do. It isn't up to us to circumvent the laws for our own profit, unless there is some benefit for the people."

The Young Man looked at his colleagues gathered in the room. He noted Tuxedo's nod of affirmation and the Athlete's look of

disgust. The Young Woman behind his mentor was staring at the ceiling, lightly drumming her nails on an end table. "Our duty is to exercise our influence in a positive and constructive manner."

The Young Man surveyed the room to weigh the affects of his short speech. There was coughing in one corner, disapproval in another, and a long uninterrupted stream of smoke from Diamonds. Bleating in the corner was Florid Face with, "I want to remind everyone, no decision is a decision." But everyone ignored him.

"Yes. Well said." Tuxedo beamed his approval to the Young Man.

"But hardly relevant," said the Athlete.

Baldy added, "If they expect us to sit back and take this lying down, then they're fools. And if we do, then we're the fools."

"But what did you mean by taking care of people?" asked Tuxedo again. "What people do you have in mind?" He looked at his young associate. The look he got in return registered defeat. If the whole group was going to turn against him, Tuxedo may as well go along with them. As long as they understood his reluctance to do anything overtly illegal or violent.

The Bald Man addressed the group. "There are bound to be people, aware of our actions, who will stand in the way. Remember the problems we had with that group of "fern strokers" who opposed our tunnel project?"

"What he means," continued the Athlete, "is neutralizing any opposition in any way we can. And doing it sooner, not later." He emphasized his remark by unconsciously pressing his thumb into the table in front of him.

"I won't support violence."

Diamonds rolled his eyes and in the same quiet voice he used to silence the room, said, "Gentlemen." The noise in the room died down. "I suggest we resemble a pack of snapping dogs more than the business leaders of our community." He waited, puffing on his cigarette and let his words sink in. "Let me ask you a question. Answer me, yes or no. I'm tired of all this quibbling."

When Diamonds was sure everyone was looking at him, he continued. "Will we, or will we not, allow the city to force these new regulations on toxic waste disposal upon us?"

"Now, see here!" said Tuxedo. "I won't be part of anything violent or illegal."

The Athlete chuckled. "How do you think your old man made his fortune, buddy boy? That sanitized story on his statue downtown is for the suckers. Let's be real, for God's sake."

"And I'm tired of you belittling me. I was an important man in this city when you were still in diapers!"

The room broke out into an uproar of voices. Some were angry and others tried to reason with them. Above it all,

repeating over and over was, "No decision is a decision. No decision is a decision."

Diamonds quietly puffed on his cigarette and looked up at the ceiling. He had tried to talk sense to this crowd and they behaved like bad boys in the locker room. He caught the Young Woman's eye and smiled at her. She returned his gaze with a haughty look. "Too bad," he muttered under his breath.

The African-american man, the last one to arrive, had been silent throughout the proceedings. His voice carried all the annoyance that had been building in him since his arrival. He despised waiting and was intolerant of indecision. He was accustomed to authority; of giving, not taking, orders. Democratic rules of parliamentary procedure were not in his mein. "Enough!" he shouted.

The room quieted down again. Even the Florid Faced Twit was silent. His little black eyes shifted from person to person in the room.

"Enough," he repeated, this time in a normal tone of voice. "I have made a decision. You may either choose to come along with me or not. If you're with me, fine. If you're not," and he looked at the Athlete, "then we have ways to deal with you. You can sink with the rats on the ship of state. I want the plans and time tables drawn up and presented at the Commission's offices by Monday, June One. By June Fifteen, I want implementation."