

With the help of an Alaska Native grandmother suffering from dementia, Chukchi police chief Nathan Active hunts down the killer who hid a woman's expertly dismembered body in the ice cellar of an abandoned Inupiat fish camp. The investigation pulls Active into a dark tangle of love and jealousy, even as he struggles with the PTSD that has haunted him since being wounded in a shootout in an earlier case.

The case starts when Tommie Leokuk's husband brings her into Nathan's office to show him what she's found in her latest midnight ramble around the Arctic hamlet of Chukchi. From the pouch of her atiqluk--the traditional overshirt of the indigenous Inupiat--she pulls a human jawbone with a single molar still in place.

Tommie's dementia means she can't explain where she found it. As her doting husband explains, "She lost her brain."

At first, Chief Active doesn't know whether she's found a murder victim or an old grave opened by erosion or scavengers.

He soon discovers it's very much a murder case, one of the most tangled he's encountered. The victim had two lovers, one male, one female, and both become suspects as the investigation proceeds.

At the same time, Active grapples with PTSD from being shot in a prior case. When he starts to wonder how his gun would taste, he realizes it's time to consult Chukchi's traditional healer, Nelda Qivits, who believes that anything can be cured by a cup of bitter sourdock tea in her little cabin on a back street of Chukchi.