

These two segments are from the book, *Touching the Ancient One – A True Story of Tragedy and Reunion* by Rupert Pratt
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Eli LaDuke's Torn Trousers

From Chapter Eight:

LaDuke shucked his parachute with rapidly numbing hands. He still had his mittens. They hadn't been on during the descent, but luckily, the strap holding them together had remained around his neck. He was chilled throughout his body. His right leg and backside felt especially cold. Feeling back there, he was horrified to discover that his pants had been torn and a large flap of material hung down his leg. Since his undamaged parka covered most of his hip, he speculated that something, probably jagged metal, had grabbed the cloth and ripped its way up toward his pocket. Even in his present plight, he couldn't help being amazed that his skin had no apparent cuts. However, his early-morning decision not to wear long johns loomed large. His body still ached from hitting the ground, but he knew he had to muster the energy to assist the two men around the slope.

Looking back in the other direction, he saw, for the first time, part of the wreckage. It appeared to be a large section of the fuselage. The silver skin had freakishly reflected an errant ray of light that caught LaDuke's attention. A section of cabin had apparently slammed into the little valley two hundred yards away. His dazed mind tried to take in the enormity of all that had happened as the wind whipped his face without mercy.

From Chapter Ten:

The other three men trying to reach the wreckage were finding it tough going. They had stopped to rest and stood close together with their backs to the wind.

LaDuke had an urgent matter to address.

"I need to get this covered up," he said, indicating the rip in his pants. "I'm going to be in trouble soon if I don't."

"There's a duffel bag back there in the snow," Montgomery said. "It's open. We might get something out of it. I need gloves."

"Show me!"

Montgomery led him back a few yards along their trail. The bag was split and the contents were scattered, most of it covered by new and blowing snow. There were still a few articles of clothing in the bag. Montgomery tried to dig something out, but his hands were practically useless.

"Here, Huey, let me," LaDuke said. There were no gloves, but he soon found what he needed for himself, a pair of dress blue trousers.

"They look like they might fit," he said.

It was a clumsy exchange, taking several minutes. He had to remove his boots in order to pull the borrowed trousers over his own. It was with relief that he finally got the laces and buckles of his boots refastened. Then they trudged back to Sallis.

“We need to get to the wreckage,” Sallis said. “There’s survival gear there. Knickerbocker showed it to me when we boarded.”

They resumed their trek down the little valley. The snow had let up and they could see more of the scattered airplane parts. One large dark shape, the one LaDuke had seen earlier, was probably the fuselage. Farther away, a flatter shape might be a wing. All around them were baggage items, some intact, some broken open with their contents scattered. Without doubt, there were things they could use, but now wasn’t the time.