

## Chapter 1

### Monday, August 5, 1963: Southeast of Tuba City, Arizona

Judson tried to keep his expression impassive, but his heart was pounding with dread as he sat at the kitchen table where his father had summoned him. He struggled to sit still, and resisted the impulse to run away. If the last few months were any prediction, this couldn't be good. His father, Jeffrey Hansen, had been alternately angry and weepy, and occasionally violent almost every night for what seemed like forever. Whenever Judson heard the clink of bottles, he knew he was in for another horrible night stuck in the small apartment with his dad. It had once been a good place to grow up, living on the grounds of a Bureau of Indian Affairs school where his father was a Junior High teacher. But that was before his mother had died of cancer. In spite of all their prayers and the best efforts of the doctors, Kayah Hansen, Jeffrey's wife of fourteen years, had succumbed to cancer two years earlier. And his father was getting worse, not better.

Jeffrey and Kayah had met each other while in college, when he had left his native Minnesota, ignoring his degree in business administration, and had moved to Arizona to train to become a teacher. He had wanted a change of scenery, and had ended up changing his life. He was drawn to the calm and deep woman with the kind eyes, the woman named Kayah. She was the daughter of a Minnesota Lutheran pastor of Norwegian stock and a full-blooded Hopi woman, who had met in the little Arizona church where her father was the pastor. Kayah and Jeffrey became friends, and soon fell hard for each other.

Kayah was a far cry from the women Jeffrey Hansen had previously considered his "type," a string of outgoing, athletic, self-absorbed girlfriends. She became the center of his universe, his Kayah, the beautiful wife and mother whose name means "wise child" or "little but wise." They had married after college, and two years later, their son Judson was born. "Jud" was more like her than like his father. He already seemed to soak up details around him, and was especially good at reading people, a precocious child better at conversing with adults than mixing with children his own age. Perhaps he reminded his father too much of Kayah, because his father's drinking bouts were now more frequent. The school officials were becoming concerned.

Now, in the aftermath of his mother's death, Judson couldn't help but notice the slow unraveling of his father's soul. In March, the day after Judson's birthday, his father had smashed his carefully painted model of a World War II minesweeper, and proceeded to knock Judson halfway across the room over some minor misunderstanding that neither of them could recall. That wasn't the only time, just one of the worst, and the one that popped into his head at that moment.

So Judson sat at the kitchen table with plenty of reasons to worry. But in the back of his mind, Judson held onto one thread of hope: he was pretty sure that his father had not done any drinking today. In fact, there had been no clinking bottles since before yesterday morning, when for some reason, his dad had taken them to

church for the first time since the funeral. The church Jeffrey Hansen chose was a small congregation made up mostly of American Indians. The young Navajo pastor and his wife had been welcoming and pleasant, and had not pried into their affairs. But it was something that the pastor had said, a throwaway line that was not even the main thrust of his sermon, which had puzzled both of the Hansen men, although they didn't discuss it at the time. It was something to the effect that peace comes when you find God's path for your life, and then follow it.

So now, the father and son sat across from each other on a sunny Monday morning and the elder Hansen laid out a plan. According to the letter in his hand, a small village in Alaska had a BIA-run school that needed a teacher. The place was so small that until a few weeks ago, it might not have had enough students to reopen the school. One family with two kids had recently opted to stay in the village. And by adding Judson to the enrollment, there would be more than enough students. Mr. Hansen couldn't identify the place on a map, but told his son it was on an island called Sokroshera, in the middle of a place called Marmot Bay in the Gulf of Alaska, famous for great salmon fishing. The island was the home, according to the man from the cannery who had sent the letter, of the famous "Morning Mountain" brand of canned salmon. Neither of them had heard of it.

"This might be good for us. It'll be a chance to get away, change our scenery, and get a fresh start," Mr. Hansen explained, holding up the letter. "I'm not running away—I feel like we may be running *to* something really good—" his father scratched his head, as though that might stir up the necessary words—"I want to leave here, the... *problems* I've caused, the..." Jeffrey Hansen could say no more. Judson could easily tell his father was getting choked up. He heard a promise in his father's halting words: never again to allow himself to fall down to that other level, the one he couldn't even talk about. And Judson, desperate for hope, believed him.

His father's last uprooting had brought him from Minnesota to Arizona, and to Kayah. His father had made his last great move out of an adventurous desire to make a change, and not out of desperation. Judson hoped that was the motivation now. But he would have even agreed with deciding out of desperation, an emotion they had both recently experienced in abundance.

These insights swirled in Judson's head not as completed sentences, but as strong impressions. His father seemed to know that it was best to wait until the wheels stopped turning to expect an answer. Judson's thoughts now were not exactly on his father's plans. He was thinking of his grandma on his dad's side. And he could imagine what she would say in this situation: "What the hell? Can't just sit around, can we? *Go, man, go!*" Judson abruptly straightened his shoulders and gave his dad a big hug, partly to keep from showing his own tears. Once he could find his voice, he said, "Ok, let's try it!"

## **Thursday, August 15, 1963: City of Kodiak**

Judson and his dad spent their first night in Alaska in a hotel not much bigger than a good-sized house, across the street from a bank and down the hill from a large white church. Judson hadn't done anything except sit in a Lockheed Constellation for ten hours on the flight from Seattle, yet he was almost too tired to notice anything about Kodiak. He had barely glanced at the huge fiberglass bear outside the hotel. The place was vaguely reminiscent of various roadside inns they'd visited along Route 66 in Arizona when they'd gone traveling during summer break back when his mom was alive. Wonder what she'd think of this adventure, he mused, and realized that he didn't yet have much of an opinion of it himself. Judson just sat in the tiny lobby of the hotel and leafed through a stack of shabby old magazines while his dad got some last minute supplies.

Mr. Hansen had decided to move to Alaska several weeks early, to give Judson a bit of summer vacation in their new home. Truth be told, neither Hansen wanted to spend one minute longer in their old quarters at the Arizona school, where the walls of their apartment constantly reminded them of the grief, desperation and despair that had closed in on them. Judson was glad to set aside those old troubles in the hustle of packing, moving, and settling in. Time for a big change in the scenery! And if their experiences of plane flight and hotel were any indication, the Hansen men had just made as big a change in scenery as they could have imagined.

Judson's dad returned after an hour or so, in a taxi with a trunk stuffed full of large cardboard boxes. They tossed their suitcases onto the seats next to them, and headed toward the seaplane ramp in the Near Island Channel. After a trip that seemed to last only a few seconds, the taxi made a stop out on the dock, where several men loaded the large boxes onto one of the fishing boats. Then the taxi drove up a small hill, past some large oil tanks and an exotic-looking white church with sky blue domes, and a long, low building on the side of the cliff that the taxi driver identified as the hospital. Suddenly the taxi plunged down a narrow gash of a gravel road cut into the side of the cliff, bounced over a few potholes as they passed a large building that seemed to be full of fishing boats, and stopped abruptly in a cloud of dust in front of the Kodiak Airways hangar beside the channel.

A man in a crew cut and a leather flight jacket led them over to their plane, carrying suitcases as he went. Judson caught his first glimpse of their transportation, a gleaming white and red seaplane called a Grumman Goose, its bulbous aluminum fuselage studded with hundreds of tiny rivets. Two huge radial engines that looked like they belonged on a Lockheed Constellation protruded out of what seemed like far too stubby wings. Each wing had tiny, boat-like pontoons on spindly posts, tied down by wires. Judson was by no means sure he wanted to climb into that thing. Then he noticed the front of the plane. Above the huge round nose were two tiny half-moon shaped windows that appeared far too small for the pilot to see anything out of. The boat-shaped hull beneath the nose sported a bright silver-colored patch of new aluminum. Judson walked over to look at it.

A voice behind him told him the plane had hit a small log recently and that as soon as it was painted, nobody would notice the patch. He turned to see a thin, short man with a dashing goatee smiling at him. From the grubby overalls the man was wearing, Judson realized that he was probably the mechanic who had repaired the plane. Judson smiled and nodded, hoping that his curiosity had not been rude. The man turned and walked back toward the open door of the hangar, where a smaller seaplane waited, the cowling removed from one of its engines. The pilot said something quietly to Judson's dad, who nodded and looked at the departing mechanic.

It was time to board the plane; Judson climbed up a short ladder and stepped in, finding a seat behind a short bulkhead that was open to the cockpit. The pilot motioned to Jeffrey Hansen, and passed him, strapping in and looking over some papers in a thick aluminum clipboard. His dad would get to sit in the cockpit. As his dad passed Judson, he leaned down and said, "The Kodiak Airways mechanic is Benny Benson. The pilot wanted you to know that Benny designed the Alaskan flag when he was about your age." Then Jeffrey Hansen clambered into the cockpit and strapped himself into the co-pilot's seat.

Judson had only one fellow passenger in the cabin, a scruffy, bearded man in faded jeans who took a seat in the opposite row. The rest of the plane was filled with various boxes and cases that the man was bringing with him, explaining why Judson's dad had to send their freight by boat. The scruffy man flashed Judson a crooked grin, pointed to the freight behind them, and indicated he was headed "up to Shuyak Island," which of course meant nothing at all to Judson. When Judson tried to explain their destination, the man let out a hearty laugh. "I 'spose you're gonna have to learn how to say it if you're gonna live there!" Rather than correcting his pronunciation, the man just laughed again and punched Judson playfully in the arm.

Then with a whine and a sudden roar, the old radial engines spun to life, enveloping the loading ramp with blue smoke. Within moments, the big plane jostled its way down the gravel ramp and suddenly was afloat. The pilot touched a button, and a whine and a clunk indicated the wheels had retracted. Just to be sure, the pilot turned a hand crank and checked an indicator light. After a short glance down the channel, the pilot gunned the engines, and Judson was slammed back into his seat. The heavy plane seemed to sit there for a few moments, surrounded by angry spray; then he felt the plane lift, scrape a bit, and leap into the air. Moments later, the pilot adjusted his trim and the Grumman Goose seemed to pivot and tilt for a while before settling into its trajectory. The plane occasionally dipped and plunged as if negotiating enormous potholes in the sky. Judson relaxed as best he could and tried to enjoy the view, wondering once again what his mother might think of all of this. No turning back now, obviously, he thought as blue bays and green mountains sped past his little window.

## **Thursday, August 15, 1963: Sokroshera Island and Sokroshera Cove**

The Kodiak Airways Grumman Goose bounced around again for a few moments as it passed over the north end of Spruce Island and headed out across Marmot Bay. The sunlight revealed small whitecaps in the dark blue water. Straight ahead about ten miles out was the rounded stone top of Mount Sokroshera on Sokroshera Island, covered almost to the rocky summit with spruce trees of various sizes. It was less than a thousand feet high, a little more than half the height of Mount Herman on Spruce Island. Its curves descended to sharp cliffs on the far side, but on the end facing them, it gradually smoothed out into smaller hills with several lakes in the valleys. The southern end of the island, where the plane seemed to be heading, was much flatter, and within minutes, the mound of Selivanoff Point, with its tiny young spruce trees, and the cove itself beyond passed below them. Some of the buildings of the village of Sokroshera Cove stood out against the bright green and yellow of the late summer foliage. In a matter of seconds, the seaplane began its descent, entering into a lazy circle that took it close to the northeastern hills and over Lake Stephanie, the largest of the lakes, and the only one on the map that had a name, most likely that of some lonely soldier's distant sweetheart. A grassy road curved around the eastern end of the lake, passed above a short, rocky beach and disappeared into the trees. It was the first easily visible sign of the large World War II fort that had once dominated the island, with most of the remains clustered along the cliffs on the far side of the mountain and out of sight.

Judson strained to see out the Plexiglas windows of the old Grumman Goose seaplane as it banked sharply above the World War II airfield that angled between the dunes near the western beach and the southeastern tip of Lake Stephanie. The overgrown runway was barely recognizable from the air, and obviously unused. Judson's window now pointed up at the sky. This plane was heading for a water landing, Judson's first, as the pilot positioned it for an approach that would line it up with the fine gravel of Stepan's Beach. The miscellaneous structures that made up the Pacific Endeavor Seafoods cannery were laid out mostly in a row along the edge of Stepan's Beach toward the northeastern end of the cove. The long dock stretched almost to the middle of the cove, and stuck out at an odd angle from the buildings and the beach grass-covered shoreline. The same road he'd seen earlier seemed to wind its way out of the hills, past a little spruce-covered knoll, and between houses, until it crossed a creek. Then it headed northwest, and seemed to fade away into weeds north of the cannery complex. Judson saw all of this vaguely as a momentary flash, but did notice that the creek seemed to have only one bridge, and that beyond, a larger white building stood out from the other structures nearby. He guessed that this was the school. I will be a seventh grader in that school, he thought, before the building passed out of view. Now that the sudden plan to come here was actually coming to pass, Judson was not sure how he felt. He suppressed a sudden pang of panic, deciding to see what would happen and not worry so much.

Judson couldn't see his father up behind a bulkhead in the co-pilot's seat, but knew he was probably checking out the school as well. Suddenly the plane made an even sharper bank and he could see only the sparkling water of Unuak Channel to the

left and bright sky to the right. Judson was pressed into the cushions. The plane abruptly leveled off, they passed low over the dune-rimmed western edge of the cove, the pilot cut power, and within moments, the roar of the radial engines was replaced by the sharp rhythmic scrape of aluminum airframe against the choppy waves. Almost as suddenly, the plane sunk into the chop with a splash that sent a few cupfuls of salt water around the closed cockpit window and into his father's lap. "It always looks like my passengers wet themselves when they sit up there!" the pilot said later, once the plane had roared up onto Stepan's beach and turned around. The pilot had skillfully threaded his way through a small cluster of anchored salmon seiners, most of which were painted the cheery royal blue and goldenrod of the Pacific Endeavor Seafoods cannery's fleet, like the colors of the Alaska Flag. He stood a bit unsteadily on the sandy beach and looked out at the bay and the boats for the first time.

Judson's thoughts were cut short by the noisy arrival of an old jeep, with a trailer that used to be part of a Ford pickup. The driver was officially here to collect the sacks of mail, although as a common courtesy, he usually delivered baggage and freight for whoever needed it. Out jumped a man about the same age as Judson's father, and a young lady about Judson's age. She was wearing a pair of jeans with a plain pink and white cotton dress over them, a fashion trend that made perfect sense in a place where even on sunny days the wind could whip up quite a chill. Already, Judson was grateful for the long sleeved shirt and undershirt under his gray sweatshirt. This was a cold breeze blowing, and fall would be a good two months earlier here than in Arizona where he had spent most of his life.

Mr. Howell Lindseth introduced himself and his daughter Sandy Ann, before tossing the suitcases into the trailer. Their features, dark brown almond eyes beneath dark reddish hair, spoke to their family heritage. The original Lindseth, a Norwegian fisherman, had fallen for a native woman and started the family line here in the village two generations earlier. "You're the new schoolteacher," he said, rather than asked. "We sure are glad to have you. If the Rezoff family had moved to town, there wouldn't have been enough students for a teacher. We might 'a moved, too. Things have been rough here since the cannery closed down."

As the small talk continued, Judson wondered if Mr. Lindseth was more talkative than most of the other adults in the village. This made him ideal for his job of meeting the mail plane, and the perfect source of news about who was coming and going. Judson remembered his dad talking about a family that decided to stay, which had opened up this teaching position. With Judson's automatic enrollment in the school by moving to the village with his dad, the student population had swelled to eleven kids, just one more than the minimum for keeping a village school open. The village had been bustling and the school had once boasted thirty-two students and two full-time teachers just five years ago when the cannery was in full operation and the community had been at its highest population. Sokroshera Cove was a village on the edge of either extinction or rebirth; it couldn't stay as it was. The arrival of a schoolteacher when they almost didn't get one had given the village a collective shot in the arm. All of them seemed to be curious about their new residents, no doubt cautiously hoping for an improvement over last year's teacher.

Mr. Lindseth sealed his role as tour guide by looking at the Hansens, one at a time, and giving them the local pronunciation guide: "They call this place Sokroshera Cove – I think it's from some Russian word. It's *Soak-Row-SHARE-Uh*, *Soak-Row-SHARE-Uh*, not *Sock-RAW-Sher-Uh*, or whatever they try to say. It got its spelling from the military in the War needing a mailing address. Same kind of thing happened to Ouzinkie. They say if you can pronounce it, ya been there, and if you can spell it, ya *live* there! And the name's bigger than the town!" He laughed at his local jokes, undoubtedly told for the zillionth time, and to every visitor that stepped ashore. "Funny to listen to the BIA boys or the nurses from the Public Health Service, trying to say it right!" Judson, and undoubtedly his father too, mentally made a promise to pronounce the name right. Judson was happy that no one here had heard his exchange with the scruffy guy in the plane.

Mr. Hansen took the shotgun seat in the jeep while Sandy Ann and Judson piled in the trailer with the baggage. The trailer also seemed to be the permanent home to all of Howie Lindseth's tool collection, and a thick roll of some kind of plastic sheeting, kept from rolling by a pile of some of the heavier tools, most of which Judson didn't recognize. From the collection underfoot, Judson assumed that Mr. Lindseth prided himself on being ready for anything, and took all his gear wherever he went just in case. That meant the village was a pretty secure place, because the man didn't seem worried that someone would steal his stuff.



When the trailer bounced over a rock in the road, Judson looked up at the new world he was riding through. They were on a road alright, but grassy on the edges with a grassy ridge down the middle. From this, he guessed correctly that there were only a handful of vehicles in this town, and that traffic was a problem for some other part of the world. As they crossed over the creek on a one-lane wooden

bridge, Sandy Ann identified an intersecting jeep trail as the road that went to the old airstrip. A few years after the War a retaining wall had broken when the lake level rose. The escaping lake water badly eroded the runway near its middle, where it was built over the creek, so it no longer worked as an airstrip. There had been talk of repairing it, but once the cannery closed, all plans for improvements evaporated as the village began a fight for its very survival.

Sandy Ann pointed to a small hill just beyond the school, and an impressive-looking red-roofed house painted dark gray with white trim, with a covered porch that ran along one whole side of what seemed to be an almost continuous wall of windows. Along the front of the house, almost touching the long porch, a row of six large cottonwood trees gave Judson the vague impression of some Southern mansion. "The cannery superintendent's house," she said. "The cannery watchman, Mr. Fat Lip – I mean Faltrip, has lived here since after the war, I think. He watches the cannery and the store. He lives alone there now, in the storekeeper's apartment, since there's no superintendent to live in the rest of the house anymore." Judson pondered this, and focused on the nickname. "Faltrip... Why don't you call him 'trip – fall' like someone who's a klutz?" Suddenly hundreds of cartoon pratfalls danced in his head, and he suppressed a laugh.

She paused only a split second before replying, "Oh, that's no good. That really doesn't fit. He's actually very... uh, *coordinated* for an old guy. Anyway, Daddy tells me not to give people nicknames, but we *all* do it. Faltrip—that's an old German name, but Dad says he's originally from New Jersey. I guess Faltrip doesn't really fit his nickname 'Fat Lip'—but I can't help it. Maybe you'll get a nickname, too. My real name is Serafina, after my grandma, but there was this one day when I was three, and I fell out of a skiff and landed in the wet sand, and when I came up, you couldn't see my face for the sand. So my grandma took a picture, and showed everybody her 'Sandy' granddaughter. My grandma's dead now. But anyway... so I guess I'll always be Sandy Ann. My whole name is Serafina Ann Lindseth and nobody 'cept Mom and Dad call me that and only when they're mad. I'd really like to be called Sera, short for Serafina, but to everybody around here I'm just Sandy Ann. What do your friends call *you*?" The young lady seemed to have said most of this without ever taking a breath, a skill, Judson guessed, born of much talking. Mr. Lindseth glanced over his shoulder at them and said something to his passenger, and both men laughed.

He gazed at Sandy Ann's earnest face and realized almost too late that she was expecting a reply. He shook off his thoughts and blurted, "My name is Judson Jeffrey Hansen," nodding curtly, attempting to match her level of forthrightness. "My dad and grandma just call me Jud." Sandy Ann stifled a giggle. "Judson Hansen... Isn't that like 'Mary Quite Contrary' or... 'Willard Dillard' or somethin'?" Judson had never had an occasion to be embarrassed by his name before, and hoped he wasn't turning red. "Judson is an old family name," he stammered, looking away.

"Well...," said Sandy Ann, scrunching up her nose just a bit, "Judson Jeffrey Hansen... I could call you Judrey—*Ewwww!*" The wrinkle in her nose became more

pronounced. "No, I've decided on Jay-Jay," she said, with a quick nod. "Hanson... Better 'n calling you *Handsome!*" At this, she giggled, and the newly christened Jay-Jay detected a slight blush. She put a hand over her mouth as if suddenly shocked at herself. "Stick with *Hansen,*" he said, a bit too firmly. He might not mind hanging around with this girl if she'd only stop talking sometimes, and if she never called him "handsome" again. He added quickly, "Jay-Jay is just fine, Sandy Ann," defusing her discomfort with a laugh of his own. Sandy Ann seemed to have decided to be quiet for a bit, but no longer looked embarrassed. It was good to feel welcome. If his dad had continued his downward spiral, things might have gotten a lot less friendly at the school in Arizona. And his dad seemed to be really enjoying this new adventure. So this might turn out to be a good move for them after all; he'd have to wait and see.

No sooner had those serious thoughts passed his mind than the old jeep stopped with a squeal at the far end of the school, where there was a teacher's apartment. Judson eyed the building with disappointment. The staff quarters where his dad had taught in Arizona were new and modern, as was the school. This rickety-looking building with fading paint clearly was not. He wasn't sure he wanted to live in the same building as the classrooms. The building's design was like the schools in Ouzinkie and Afognak, and like them, it was built in the 1930s, but this one had only two classrooms. Sokroshera Cove had been smaller than its neighbor villages for some time. The jeep had stopped at the end of the building, where there was a two-bedroom apartment.

A thin and wiry man in his early fifties stood at the top of the stairs waiting for them. "I heard the plane, and knew you were coming," he said. Mr. Owen Faltrip came down the steps to introduce himself to Mr. Hansen and Judson. "Lindseth and I got your oil stove running and made sure the toilet still works. You won't have hot water until tonight, because I'll have to bring up a spare propane tank from the cannery. Other than being a little musty..." Mr. Faltrip led them inside. "You'll have to wash out the fridge, I'm afraid. Last people here shut it off with the door shut, and it's moldy in there." Mr. Faltrip changed the subject. "You should come down to the store and call in to town. You'll need the BIA folks to let you order some propane and a few more barrels of fuel oil. Looks like they were not expecting to use the school this year, and if you don't stay on them, they'll forget you're here likely as not. The power goes off about 10 p.m., and comes on about 7 a.m., or as soon as Will or I can get down there. Hope you don't have a plug-in alarm clock." Mr. Faltrip chuckled, and abruptly left. Mr. Lindseth followed suit, and the old jeep roared to life and lurched back down the old road toward the center of town. Sandy Ann stayed behind to show them around the school.

Apparently deciding to wait on the unpleasant chore of cleaning a moldy refrigerator, Mr. Hansen and his son took a quick tour of the schoolhouse, Sandy Ann providing an almost constant narration. The creaky floors seemed a bit uneven, and the dim light that filtered around the yellowed window shades cast long, dusty trails through the stuffy air. Judson could see that the dark linoleum floor was cracked and chipped in many places. The room was filthy. Desks were stacked in various directions, some even on top of each other, and piles of books and papers

seemed to peer at them from every corner. The previous teacher had left with no thought for her successor. Against the nearest wall, a rickety oil space heater gave scant promise of warmth on those cold, windy winter days to come. It was hard to believe that any government entity would allow a school to descend to such condition; Sokroshera Island was a long way out of town, and out of mind.

"I went through *all* my grades here," said Sandy Ann. She pointed to a carved wooden paddle on a hook, hung above a battered oak teacher's desk. "Last year Mrs. Marrone was our teacher, and we kept her busy. We called her Mrs. *Moron*." She had lowered her voice for the last sentence, and her face was serious. Then she smiled innocently at Judson, but he was more than ready to doubt that innocence. She abruptly turned toward the far end of the room. Through a narrow doorway, a short hall that occupied the space beneath the attic stairs led to another classroom. This one looked like it had been used only as a library, storage, and workspace for years. The dim space was considerably darker than the other classroom, since the windows faced away from the morning sun, and all but two of the six tall windows were boarded up. "Wouldn't this be a great room to play in? I got paddled once when I tried. Mrs. Marrone *never* let us come in here!" Mr. Hansen just diplomatically mentioned that the first room would probably work out fine for their eleven students. The darker classroom had a small mudroom on the side opposite its windows. The mudroom seemed to house the original front door for the school. Mr. Hansen walked over to it. After a bit of fiddling, shoving, creaking, and rattling, the old door opened out to a small and sagging covered porch.

Outside, a group of people had just collected at the base of the stairs. Mr. Lindseth stood with what looked to Judson like the entire school-going population and a few parents as well. "Thought I'd round up the ruffians for you to inspect, Mr. Hansen," he said with a laugh, as Sandy Ann ran down the stairs to stand by his side. Judson looked out at the assembled group of kids and felt a slight pang in his chest. Apparently, he was more nervous than he originally thought about moving to a new place. "This is your teacher, so introduce yourselves," said Mr. Lindseth, who gave a boy nearly as tall as Judson a playful pat on the shoulder.

"I'm going into sixth grade, and I'm Herman Rezoff," said a quiet voice, and Judson couldn't figure out what Herman was thinking behind those dark eyes and dark brown hair that fell nearly to his eyelids. But it was followed by the flash of a smile, as Herman gestured to a much younger girl with almost black hair and the same serious eyes, which softened as her mouth slid into a shy smile. "This is my sister Barbara, going into third grade," he continued, and turned to look over his shoulder at a woman standing behind him, "This is my Mom." The woman, dressed in a shabby jeans jacket with oversized chest pockets, had dark hair pulled back in a ponytail, and an expression as soft and warm as any Judson had ever seen. She offered her hand to Mr. Hansen with an apology: "I was picking salmonberries and I'm a mess," she said. "I'm glad the school has a teacher." Judson noticed the musical quality of the local voices the unique emphasis on almost random syllables, similar in many ways to the speech of his old Arizona neighbors. He turned with surprise when his dad looked right at Mrs. Rezoff and said, "Well, you're the reason

I'm here—I mean, if you had moved away, they wouldn't have let me come here to teach!" Mr. Hansen stooped to shake Barbara's hand and then gave Herman's a strong grasp before turning to the other children. "I'm looking forward to teaching such polite young people!"

One by one, the other kids came forward to introduce themselves, and in each case, Mr. Hansen focused on them, talked to them, and elicited shy smiles. Judson wasn't quite sure how his dad did it. Even though the school had only eleven students, meeting everyone at once was giving him a headache. Mr. Lindseth introduced the next family. The Bazaroffs had a baby at home, two school-aged kids, plus an older son Ward, who would be boarding with a family in Kodiak while attending high school. A fourth-grader called "Eagle" was actually named William Bazaroff. His younger sister called "April" was born Amy. "But my birthday is in April, and I will be eight, and I'm going into second grade!" she explained softly, and Mr. Hansen nodded. There didn't seem to be a parent around to go with those two. At the end, Mrs. Selivanoff brought her four children and introduced them. Alexander, the youngest, would be Mr. Hansen's only first grader. Paris and Sonya, the twins, would be third-graders.

Then a much taller girl Judson had not noticed stepped out from behind Mr. Lindseth. He stopped himself from staring at her, for here was the first person in the village that he had seen wearing makeup. Her hair was up and puffy like a magazine cover, she had a week's worth of powder and blush on her cheeks, and she strutted rather than walked over to her mother's side. She was attempting to replicate the 1963 fashions of a world far from her own. "I'm Marla and I hate it here," she nearly snarled, her dark eyes made almost mask-like by the bright blue eye shadow and dark eyeliner. "I hate school. I'll be your whole eighth grade class." Then she almost smiled when Mr. Hansen asked her with a chuckle if she was wearing Revlon or Maybelline or Max Factor. "Oh, Mr. Hansen, I'm sorry about Marla. She thinks she's Elizabeth Taylor, and can't wait to get off this island." Mr. Hansen grinned. "I taught Junior High for nine years down on the Hopi Nation in Arizona," he glanced at Marla, still smiling. "They taught me everything I know about eighth grade attitude."

"Judson," Mr. Hansen glanced at his son, "Say hello to your classmates." Judson shook off his lingering headache as best he could. He took a breath and decided it would be better to try to fit in as much as possible. He took a step forward and said, "I'm going into seventh grade, and Sandy Ann has already named me Jay-Jay." He finally looked down in shyness as the group chuckled, amused at how quickly one of their own had christened their newest neighbor. Then he recovered and looked up, making sure to glance at Marla, Herman, and Sandy Ann. "I'm... *glad* to meet you."

Mr. Lindseth broke in. "Here's the last one—my boy Jake. He was out fishing with his uncle Danny. He brought you a 'silver'." Up walked a gap-toothed kid with light brown hair, who cheerily declared in a rather hoarse voice, "We caught nothin' off Sokroshera Cape. We were off Teplov Point and this one was a fighter! The more they try, the better they fry!" He held up a large salmon, which seemed almost too

heavy for his little arms to lift. This caused a round of laughter, and even Marla stifled a grin. Judson noticed; for all her bluff and bravado, this girl knows practically nothing of the outside world. Yet she is better at this one than I will ever be, he realized. The young fisherman continued, "Oh, and I'm going into fourth grade, with Eagle. He and I could destroy the world!" Jake croaked. Another round of laughter, and Eagle put a mock finger to his lips as though swearing Jake to secrecy. Eagle had by this time sidled over to Jake, and turned to look at Mr. Hansen. "We're the 'Holy Terrors,' that's what the last year teacher named us!" said Eagle, and stuck out his chin proudly. Jake used his free hand to slap his backsides a couple of times, and giggled. The two turned toward each other and seemed in animated conversation. Judson heard Eagle mention "Mrs. Moron," interrupted by Jake, who said something about "The new teacher wouldn't like that!" Mr. Hansen seemed not to have noticed.

Mr. Lindseth, again taking on the role of the master of ceremonies for the village, abruptly invited everyone to leave and "Give the new teacher and his boy some *room!*" Mrs. Rezoff leaned over and whispered something in Marla's ear, who glanced back at Judson and her new teacher, then gave a curt nod in Mrs. Rezoff's direction. She walked toward a young man dressed as though he had just got off a fishing boat, and they walked away arm in arm. That's probably the kid they called Ward Bazaroff, thought Judson. Ward sported the same belligerent strut that Marla used. Wonder how long they'd last at my old school, Judson mused, and shook his head in answer.

As everyone filed away, Sandy Ann and Jake came running back to them. "Bring that salmon and we'll show you how to eat it!" Jake croaked, with an ending sound that might have been a giggle. "Jake! What we mean to *say* is, could you come to our house for dinner?" Sandy Ann seemed almost quiet, and looked intently at Judson through a wisp of reddish hair. "We know all your stuff hasn't arrived yet, and I bet you're hungry!" She was wrinkling her nose again. Mr. Hansen and the freshly christened "Jay-Jay" said yes, and the wrinkle disappeared. Judson decided to risk asking questions. Sandy Ann smiled broadly. "Why did you call it a 'silver' salmon? Is it because of the outside color or is it silver inside, too?" "Silver inside? *Ewww!* Some of them do get their names from the inside. There's one we call 'red salmon,' because the meat inside is more red than other kinds of salmon, 'specially before it's cooked. There's another kind we call 'pinks' for the same reason." Judson thanked her, and she added, "I like telling people stuff, so don't be shy." At this, she looked almost shy herself. Judson noticed that she'd inherited the tour guide gene from her dad. "OK, later," Judson said, turning toward their apartment.

After going inside, trying out the plumbing, and remembering what a comb was, the Hansen men stepped out of the school and down the road toward the rest of the village and the promise of a good dinner. As they passed an old shed that had a loading porch on the side facing the road, they saw Ward Bazaroff, the young man who was going to be attending high school in Kodiak, sitting with his back to the shed's door, smoking a cigarette. Yup, trying to prove his manhood, Judson thought, trying not to prejudice the guy on the first day here. But he sure looked and acted like the "toughs" who spent a lot of time in the principal's office back at

Judson's old school. Mr. Hansen just said "humph" to himself, enough to tell his son that he was thinking the same sorts of things. Ward looked directly at them as they passed just feet away on the grassy road. "Hey *Americans*, why don't you go back where you belong? We don't need no stupid teachers, and we don't need no little *boys* checking out our girls." He laughed, a little too loudly and then said, "Aw hell, teach, I'm just kiddin' with ya!"

Surprisingly, Mr. Hansen stopped, looked straight at him, and said, "No, I don't think you are kidding. And you are not representing your family or your village very well on our first day here." He kept walking, and motioned Judson to do the same. "There's always one or two in every town," said Mr. Hansen. "Listen, Jud, most of the people here are unbelievably nice, and those parents were very glad we came. Let's just think about that. But as I told you at the other school, if you get into trouble with guys like that, just make sure *you* aren't the one that provoked it. Don't back down, either, but please don't be the cause of anything!"

Judson had no intention of causing trouble. And after so many years of living around the sometimes-difficult students at his father's school in Arizona, he had no intention of backing down either. "So, same rules as back home, then." said Judson, mostly to himself. "*Menso*," he said mentally to Ward, using the Spanish word for stupid he'd learned back home. Last year, his father had enrolled him in self-defense classes after school when some of the students developed a nasty habit of taking out the pain of their home life on anyone nearby who looked weaker. It had been an opportunity to take out some of his own anger and frustration in a harmless manner, while learning moves on nice thick blue mats. He put the whole incident with Ward out of his mind, determined to enjoy a nice meal and conversation on their first night here.

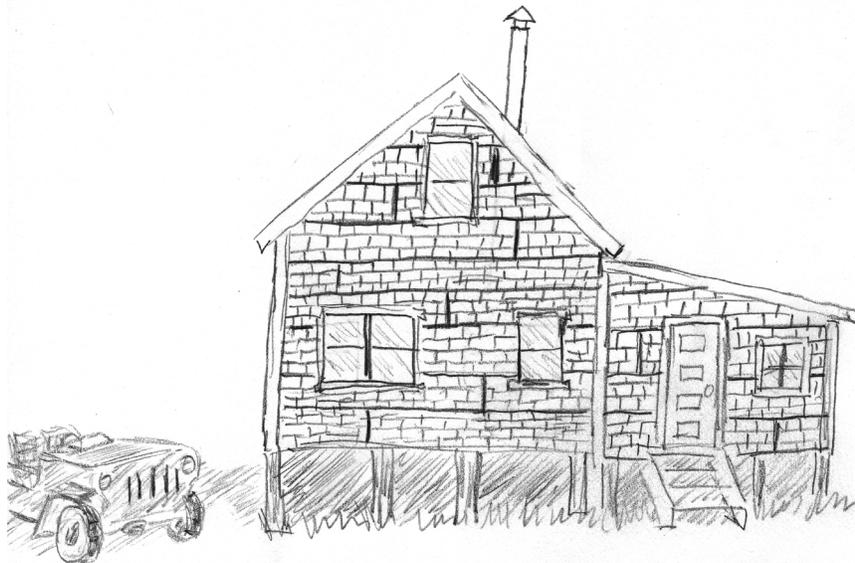
The Lindseths lived in what Judson later realized was a typical village house, featuring a peaked roof and attic rooms, and an attached single-story addition that stretched the length of one side with a roof that slanted up to meet the eaves of the peaked portion. The single-level part was where most of the front doors were located in homes such as this. The home had tarpaper siding that had been textured to look like brown brick with black mortar. Like other buildings that used it, the long strips of siding never quite matched up, and always looked like tarpaper. This home featured corrugated tin roof panels, unlike some of the homes that only had plain tarpaper on the roof. Only the roofs of the very oldest houses seemed to have wood shingles.

The Lindseth home was on the far side of the creek that led to the lake, on a stretch of meadowland that ran parallel to the shore of the cove. This is where most of the homes were. The Lindseth house stood midway between the seaplane landing spot and the post office, which was in the cannery store. Mrs. Lindseth was surely the anchor of the family, pleasant and friendly, more soft-spoken than the rest of her household. She was more likely to think before talking than the loud and blunt but well-meaning husband and daughter, or the unpredictable clown her son usually was. But she was as opinionated as the rest of her family, just tempered with a bit more tact. Her command of English and her ability to turn a colorful

phrase was at least as good as her husband, and Judson could see how neatly Sandy Ann had melded her parents' talents into her own.

Judson took to Mrs. Lindseth immediately, and was pleased and surprised by her insightful questions. She got him talking far more than he expected to, especially on a first visit. When Judson talked about how his mother had lost her battle with cancer two years before, Mr. Lindseth shot Jake a paralyzing glance when he started to fidget. At Judson's story, Sandy Ann seemed to blink a lot, and briefly turned away. So she *can* be quiet, Judson thought, before changing the subject.

Between large bites of a splendid salmon dinner, Judson quietly took in the Lindseth home. The long, covered side porch he had entered by had once served as a "dry sink" kitchen in the days before the military and the cannery brought running water to the village, but it now held the family's two freezers, their canned goods storage, their camping gear, and a sizeable collection of rubber boots, snow shovels, and the like. The locals called it a "kellydoor," which may have been a corruption of *corridor*, and it was closest in function to the mudrooms he had seen in his relatives' houses in Minnesota. The "kellydoor"/mudroom opened into the kitchen. Unlike "Stateside" homes, the kitchen of this home was also the living room, and although there was a couch against the wall, it seemed mostly for throwing coats on. A gleaming white oil stove with a thick, solid steel cooktop radiated continuous warmth. Counters on either side of the stove, one of which held a sink, handled the kitchen duties. But "living" was done around the kitchen table.



The Lindseth house with "kelly door" entrance  
and brown "brick" tarpaper siding. (and jeep)

You didn't come to a village home like the Lindseth's to sit in the parlor and read coffee table magazines. You sat at the kitchen table, for hours on end, telling tales, collecting news, and consuming continual quantities of homemade and hearty food.

This was simply being polite. An afternoon chat over tea could easily lapse over into a full-on meal. From time out of mind, someone at tables like the Lindseths' would declare, "You can't leave *now*; it's almost supper time! I'll put the kettle on!" Soon thereafter, steaming hot mugs would appear, filled with coffee or perhaps *chai* (the local Russian word for hot black tea). Judson had an aching sensation that he was home, or almost home, with people he had barely met. It had been quite a while since he and his father had felt so comfortable.

Mr. Howell Lindseth was a wealth of information about the town and its history. He wasn't a bit stingy in his appraisal of its current inhabitants. If he was holding back any secrets about anyone, it sure didn't seem like it, as he laid out the local scandals and rumors. These tidbits of information were sometimes couched in polite terms, but usually delivered in a blunt and colorful style that Judson was already beginning to find quite entertaining. Conversation in the village of Sokroshera Cove seemed to be a real art form. Maybe there was an up side to living life without TV sitcoms and laugh tracks. Frequently during her husband's orations, however, Betty Lindseth would break in with a quiet, "Now, Howie!" or "Try not to use such language around the children, dear," and he would rephrase something to her satisfaction.

At dinner, the loquacious Howie Lindseth schooled the Hansens. Stepan's beach and Selivanoff Point on its eastern end were named for the Selivanoff's great grandfather. Teplov Point, past the place they called east beach, was named for one Evgeni Teplov, who attempted to lead a revolt against the ruling Russian Empire in the decades before the United States bought Alaska.

"We even have a mysterious missing Monk," Howie chuckled, amused at his inadvertent alliteration. "Father Zakhar, a Monk sent from Russia to start some church project here on the island, disappeared when the rebels did. Everybody wonders if there was some kind of foul play, but nobody knows." Mr. Hansen said what Judson was also thinking, "That Monk story must be pretty important for it to survive all these years. Has anyone tried to solve the mystery?" Mr. Lindseth waved his arm dramatically, and replied, "If anyone can find out any secrets, I'll bet Will Rezoff can uncover 'em. He keeps poking around Mount Sokroshera and Teplov Point. You should see the stuff he brings home. Just walk past his yard sometime—it's all junk he *pagooked* from old Fort Sheplen." Judson came to learn that a "*pagook*" was a scrounge and a packrat in the local language, and in its verb form, someone who *pagooked* would poke around and pry until uncovering something interesting, useful, or perhaps valuable.

Howell Lindseth told a few juicy tales about past scandals and controversies, many of which seemed to involve genetics or parentage. These clearly irritated Betty, and she said so with increasing forcefulness. Yet Judson found the give and take between them to be amusing, and not troubling as any real conflict would have been. At last, Mr. Lindseth started on a topic that Judson found fascinating, even through his post-dinner sleepiness. Mr. Lindseth explained that the whole north end of the island, beyond Lake Stephanie, was riddled with army installations that were once part of Fort Rufus Cumming Sheplen. The fort had been named for a major

general in Grant's army who had a minor role in the siege of some place or another—Judson was getting very tired and didn't catch the details. Among other unusual details about this fort was that it was the fourth and last of Kodiak's coastal batteries to be constructed, and was abruptly abandoned, unfinished, when the Army determined that the Japanese were no longer a threat to Alaska and moved most of their forces south.

Like its namesake, Fort Shepley had been a minor player in its war. Most of the dock was built of Army lumber, rebuilt on the site of the old herring plant's original 1915 facilities. Many of the homes and outbuildings of the village owed their lumber to dismantled buildings from the fort. Likewise, the newer buildings of the cannery were constructed or reassembled using materials salvaged from the fort. However, the three largest buildings still remained from the original 1915 herring plant. The odd angle of the dock, which veered right to left at about sixty-degrees to the shoreline, was designed to bypass a major rockpile that would have damaged any freighter that came that close to shore. The military had used the dock during the War... Mr. Lindseth's stories were beginning to drag on, seemingly for hours. Judson was distracted by his own thoughts. All at once, the idea of exploring the old fort on the other side of the lake was beginning to materialize in Judson's imagination. And he could see Sandy Ann, Jake, and maybe Herman taking up the challenge of giving him a tour. What secrets did Will Rezoff know? Should he ask? Was Howie Lindseth even giving them accurate information? He resolved to take a polite look at Will Rezoff's yard as soon as possible.

A gentle shake on the shoulder told Judson that he had dozed off. He jerked awake, embarrassed, and mumbled an apology. Mrs. Lindseth's tone was scolding, but not at him. "Look at us! These two must be exhausted! And we've been cramming 'em like there'll be a test tomorrow! Mr. Hansen, so good to have you—now take Jay-Jay—I mean Judson, home to bed. Mr. Faltrip has agreed to leave the generator on until midnight so you can unpack with some lights on!" Mr. Lindseth, briefly humbled by his wife's blunt practicality, mumbled a polite goodbye, but his grin was as wide as ever as the Hansens reached the door, and he had a strange smile for his wife, who looked at the clock, then seemed to nod triumphantly as they left.

What would their life be like in a town where the power goes off at 10 p.m. and comes back on at 7 a.m.? Judson's mind was flooded with new details from this tiny, remote place. He thought briefly that it would surely take some time to absorb it all. But he had no energy to think about any of it now. The warm glow of welcome they'd felt in the Lindseth kitchen faded before the prospect of having to unpack just to get ready for bed. His father uttered a short grunt as they walked together, apparently thinking similar thoughts.

Long before Judson and his father entered the side door of the schoolhouse and turned right to enter the apartment, they noticed all the lights seemed to be on. When they got into the kitchen, they found that someone had carefully stashed all the food they'd bought in Kodiak. The pantry shelves were neatly organized. The boat that had agreed to bring their freight must have arrived around sunset. Now the Lindseth's smiles and knowing looks as the Hansens left their house suddenly

made sense. Howie had gotten someone else to deliver all their freight while they were eating dinner.

Mr. Hansen went wearily to the moldy refrigerator, and opened it to find it sparkling clean, with the few fresh things they'd managed to ship all safely stashed on the shelves. On the middle rack was a lovely pie. A note was lying on it: "We just had to clean up this fridge for you. Hope you like the pie – it's from the salmonberries I picked today. By the way, Marla helped us clean the fridge." It was signed, "Laura Rezoff, with Herman and Barbara." With beds made up already, and even some of their clothes placed neatly in the dressers, neither Hansen was conscious when the lights flickered off at ten minutes past midnight.