

Chapter 11

Monday, November 11, 1963: Sokroshera Cove cannery docks

Monday was a national holiday, so Mr. Hansen closed the school. Judson was actually glad, because this gave him a chance to visit the cannery without skipping school. His dad thought that learning about the town's big enterprise would be good for him, "As long as you don't get yourself in the way," but his tone of voice indicated that he gave Judson more credit than that. "You might want to check with Jake Pedersen, though—a foreman is like the captain of a ship, so he's in charge." So Judson walked past the store and the mess hall they were using as a schoolroom to the face of the dock to watch the action. To his left, the long retort building was a beehive of activity, and he resolved to check that out next. When he got to the front dock, he heard a voice behind him.

"Big difference around here once this place started working again!" Sandy Ann had followed him down the dock, but he might not have noticed right away above the noise had she not announced herself. "I'll say," Judson remarked, adding, "And it seems like a happier place now that it's doing what it's supposed to." "The *whole village* is a happier place," Sandy Ann agreed, then said a little more quietly, close to his ear, "But we all wish Mr. Rezoff was here to see, haw?" He nodded. They stood at the front dock for some time, watching the bucket go down, the men in the hold of the boat feverishly throwing crab into the bucket, and the crane lifting the bucket to dockside. This was followed by a careful weighing and recording of the contents, and then the bucket was disconnected, wheeled toward the retort building, and an empty one was hooked up in its place. Every now and then, somebody would throw a crab into the water.

Danny came out and saw them watching, and Judson decided to ask about the ones getting the heave-ho. "Why are they throwing some of the crabs into the cove?" Danny's eyes twinkled. "We tend to call 'em *crab* whether it's one or a hundred, kind of like fish and sheep. Dunno why." This was a *good* topic for a change, after the seriousness of the past few days. He finally got around to answering Judson's question. "Well, if you see one with a rounded tail and a row of eggs, that's a female, and we can't legally process those. The guys on the boats usually spot 'em and throw 'em back. The males have a triangular tail and that tells us to grab 'em and make some money!" Danny laughed, his usual course of action in almost any conversation. But laughter had been in short supply recently. "Uh... What about that one right there?" Judson pointed to a saggy looking crab that seemed to have lost some of its color as well. "That one's dead. If they're dead, they quickly turn to poison. Their insides rot almost immediately, because their stomachs break open and they eat themselves up. It's pretty sickening if you've had to handle or smell one." Sandy Ann had experienced rotted crab before, and provided her semi-retired Vomit Face at this. She waved her hand in front of Judson's face and said, "Let's not talk about that anymore!" Danny laughed again and nudged his niece, finally deciding not to give any more details.

Watching the unloading, Danny had an unusually big smile on his face, because the dock crew was unloading the *Salmonchanted Eve*, and he and his crew had made a great haul. His boat and the *Marla S.* had been fitted with the proper equipment for crab operations, although only the *Marla S.* was properly set up for full-time crabbing. A smaller boat just couldn't hold as much crab, or keep its tanks full enough with salt water to make money except from quick, short, local runs. It was more dangerous for the smaller boats to go out with stacks of crab pots on the deck when they were seeking new locations to place them. The heavy pots made for very unstable boats, and it was hard to get anywhere if you added enough water to the tanks to provide ballast. Still, Danny smiled, because the local Marmot Bay waters had given his crew a full load, and his crab pots were already set out for more. He and Danny watched until the crew signaled to him that they were done. Danny had to move the boat for other "crabbers" to unload. Danny scurried aboard, fired up the engine, the crew cast off, and the boat headed out of the cove for another run. Nobody got much rest during the season, but nobody minded, either. Sokroshera Cove was making up for lost time.

The next boat in was the *Marla S.*, and from the first bucket, there was trouble. More than half of the crab were listless and the others were limp and dead. Mr. Lindseth, from his vantage point up in the crane, shook his head at the first bucket, and Billy, Jr. approached him. "What's all this? What the hell happened to you?" Billy, Jr. appeared casual and unconcerned. "Oh, we had trouble with the saltwater pump for the tanks on the way back in. We rigged up the bilge pump to drain it so we could unload, but we couldn't very well switch the bilge pump to keep it filled." He looked for all the world like little Jake after making a lame excuse. "Dunno if you're gonna like your take on this load, Billy," Mr. Lindseth said, "And you'd best take a run to town to get that salt water pump looked after. I don't think we have any spare parts here." Billy nodded, but made a dismissive gesture, and went to stand dockside and watch his crew unload. Judson noticed that Marty Pankoff was now working with Billy, Jr. That made perfect sense, because the *Kashka Cyerry* was still rigged only as a salmon seiner, and Ward Bazaroff was now in school (and still recuperating). Another bucket worth of dead crab had been thrown into the cove, to the delight of the waiting seagulls. Judson decided to check out the rest of the operations. So he walked around behind the crane, far from the dockside drama, followed closely by Sandy Ann. They were about to check out the crab butchering station.

The large building that held the boilers and generators on the landward end and the retorts in the middle now sported a sparkling new dockside butchering operation. In a little shed on a part of the dock that extended out into the water, past where they had been watching the crane operations, a couple of younger men were busy butchering the crab. He didn't know the first one, but the one closest to the dockside was Windy Bazaroff. The job required skill, speed, strength, and endurance, as well as being one of the messiest jobs. Judson was sure that Mr. Faltrip was paying him accordingly. Lil' Carla, here comes the rest of that new house!

Wearing thick belts made of old conveyor material, the butchers grabbed each crab by the back legs, tail forward, and ran him into a stomach-high metal blade, pulling out and up as they did. They threw the back and the tail, left on the blade, into a hopper for disposal, and the two leg sections went onto a conveyor belt and into the main building. Over and over, hour after hour, they did this, and Judson was a bit envious at how buff they would be by the end of the season, if they didn't throw their elbows out first. Some of those king crab weighed in at over fifteen pounds apiece! He turned to Sandy Ann and asked, "So why aren't you making faces at this part? It looks pretty gross to me!" Sandy Ann merely mentioned that fresh crab blood was clear, and had no smell to speak of, and just didn't seem so bad. Judson guessed that common tasks like gutting a freshly caught salmon didn't really bother her either.

Judson and Sandy Ann peeked inside, and Jakob Pedersen, the newly chosen foreman, asked if they wanted a tour. Judson nodded; butchering was an eerily silent activity, but inside, the machinery was almost deafening. A pair of high speed rollers with bumpy edges were staffed by a couple of women who grabbed the crab leg sections from a hopper where the conveyor had dumped them, ground off the gills, and threw them up into a steaming stainless steel tub that looked like a huge paint tray. The milky white water foamed and churned as the leg sections were cooked and removed by a continuously moving, wide belt at the other end. Foreman Jake informed Judson as briefly as he could amid the noise that the belt cooker was better suited to a cold storage operation processing packaged, frozen crab legs, but that they'd modified the stages beyond it for a canning operation. "Gonna switch it to cold storage later?" asked Judson, and the elder Jake had just shrugged. One challenge at a time, thought Judson.

Further down the line, steaming white crab meat with bright red highlights was being removed from shells in big rollers that squeezed out the meat, which was then sprayed with a salt solution, cut to fit, and stuffed expertly into cans, the last part requiring the most intense human labor. A dozen or more people were working inside so far. Sandy Ann interrupted her uncle's narration to say that she wouldn't mind having that job, and Jakob Pedersen had just laughed and told her it would happen soon enough. At the next station, the swiftly moving cans were fed into an automatic lidding machine and then stacked in neat rows into the retort racks. Judson recognized them immediately as former parts of the fort built by the "Holy Terrors." Several people were involved in sliding the racks into the retorts, closing the doors, turning on the steam, removing racks, cooling them, and then sending them on to be labeled, stuffed into boxes, sealed, and stored.

The odd setup inherited from the herring plant meant that the station for labeling the cans, building boxes, and filling them was on the far side of the wide front dock. That operation filled the closer end of the oddly angled long red building that had the fire truck garage on the near end and the net loft at the other. It was highly inefficient, because the flow of cans was limited by how many of those racks the forklifts could carry all the way across the wide "front dock" to the other facility. Judson guessed that the original process for herring had not needed this step for some reason. The racks of cans were transported from the cooling room next to the

retorts thanks to noisy old forklifts left over from the salmon operation. And at the helm of the nearest heavy and cumbersome contraption was none other than Gail Pankoff. She'd done that job for years at a cannery at the South End, and fit right in here. She could plug a pallet full of boxes into a rack over her head as easily as she could put her hands in her pockets. Judson could already imagine the stars in Danny's eyes upon observing the most gorgeous forklift operator in the North Pacific!

The various machinery and conveyor belts for labeling the cans, building boxes, and then filling, sealing, and storing the cases filled most of the middle and shore end of the long red "net building." They'd already seen the fire truck garage on the shore end and played in the net loft at the other. The two kids followed Gail's forklift across the dock, and ducked inside. Judson noticed that the cans were built on one side of the dock, transported to the other to be filled, cooked and sealed, and then carted back to be labeled and put into cases. The station for constructing and soldering the cans was quiet; the "seaman" was now monitoring the lidding machine across the dock until his huge stack of empty cans ran low again.

The work in the "net building" was less noisy, cooler, and way less smelly than the other stages of the operation, but the tasks were no less demanding. The labeling machine clattered, and conveyors scraped and squeaked below what seemed like miles of overhead belts and whining electric motors. Several workers were stacking cans into cases at what seemed to be a furious pace. They never missed a step the whole time Judson was watching. Even the simplest tasks required dexterity, coordination, and speed. Two men at the end of one conveyor were hefting sealed cases onto pallets in an interlocking pattern; they'd be as toned as trained Olympians by the end of the season!

Judson did a quick accounting of the number of people he had seen at work. The village could supply no more than a handful of workers, and some of them were out on the crab boats. So where had all the other ones come from? Then he remembered the old bunkhouse at the far end of the shoreline road. "It's pretty close to full," Sandy Ann said when he mentioned this. "I don't hang around there when I might bother someone. Can you imagine me falling through the ceiling into someone's shower? *Ewww!*" People had arrived by boat and plane as soon as word got out that Pacific Endeavor Seafoods was operating again. He realized that although he knew most of the people in the village by now, there were at least twice as many new adults in the village thanks to the cannery. And the workers kept mostly to themselves: in an intense cycle of working, eating, sleeping, and then repeating until the season was over. He likely would not have much opportunity to meet any of them except as bodies in yellow slickers doing various cannery tasks.

Since cannery workers occupied the bunkhouse, Sandy Ann had admittedly not dared to go back to her attic "Thought Spot." Judson realized with a shock that, full bunkhouse or no, she was now more likely to come and talk to *him* than to run away to be alone and think. It gave him a warm sense of belonging and a vague sense of responsibility, the way she had included him in her life and thoughts. It

shocked him to realize that Sandy Ann and Herman were his first real friends. Judson looked at Sandy Ann, a wisp of dark red hair obscuring one of her eyes. He *must* be good to his new best friend, he promised himself. But that was too serious a thought for a day off from school. So he just watched the activity on the dock.

Jakob the foreman had been called away just as Gail took that load of cans to be put into the cases. Judson and Sandy Ann turned toward the store. It was common practice to keep the store open while the cannery was operating, so that tired workers could grab some supplies on the way home, so the radio would be available for incoming boats, and if assistance was needed after an accident such as had happened with Will Rezoff. As they approached the store, Mr. Faltrip and Billy, Jr. were emerging from the office's side door. The two could hear the men arguing from across the dock. "But you gave me less than half of what I was expecting," grouched Billy, Jr., and he looked like his next move would be to stamp his foot and scream. Mr. Faltrip's tone and body language would indicate extreme exasperation to anyone who had bothered to get to know him. Sandy Ann and Judson recognized it, and glanced at each other. They turned to listen to Mr. Faltrip's voice, "Well, I gave you more than I should have. Half of those crab were dead, and the rest were in sorry shape. We're gonna have to test your entire run to be sure the crab is food grade. I'm sorry, but as soon as your saltwater pump gave out, you should have headed straight here, full hold or no. And why did you go to all that trouble to *drain* the tank? You know a king crab's lifespan out of the water as well as I do, maybe better."

From his tone of voice, Judson could tell that Mr. Faltrip was trying hard to sound reasonable, but Judson got the impression that he'd already given this speech to Billy, Jr. at least once. "Let's get that pump replaced, and get back to better loads, ok?" Mr. Selivanoff stomped off. No one was about to tell him anything, least of all Mr. Faltrip. Still, Judson could bet that before Billy, Jr. looked at his pots again, he'd have a fully functioning pump system. At least any reasonable person would choose that course of action. They watched the *Marla S.* tie up further down, past the oil shed on the long dock. Soon after, Billy, Jr. and Marty Pankoff walked off together toward the Selivanoff home, in apparently animated conversation.

When the men had passed them, Sandy Ann and Judson walked over to "The Place" to watch the boats. Their inspection tour was over, and it was a slow day for all the non-cannery workers in the cove. Sandy Ann didn't say anything about it before, but somehow that new girl Rinny being the same grade as Judson had bothered her. Finally, she was ready to tell him. "I should be in seventh grade too, y' know." She looked at him as though this news would somehow diminish her in his eyes. "I had worse trouble than Jake in fourth grade—couldn't pay attention, got mad when I had to do homework. I caused so much trouble, and I got sent home a lot. The teacher gave up and just held me back. I'm gonna be thirteen in February." "That makes you a month older than me," said Judson, with a bit of surprise. "What day?" "February 8," she said, still waiting for Judson to comment on her being held back. "Mine's March 21, the day I become a teenager. Bet Dad can't wait for that! Is Sokroshera Cove really ready for two more teenagers?"

Her news about being held back still lingered in her earnest face. Judson did something he'd never done before. Carefully, and from the side, he put his arm around her, brother style, but leaned his face around to look into hers. "Serafina, you are the smartest girl I know," he said, emphasizing his words by using her real first name. "You thought every thought right when I did, and sometimes before, almost since I met you. And the only reason you didn't guess out ol' Fat Lip was that I got to see the old record and the note, and you didn't." She nodded, oblivious to the arm around her. "And you *do* know, like Faltrip said," Judson added, "the only reason I didn't tell you was that I promised I wouldn't. Any other secret I come up with, I swear I'll tell you!"

Suddenly she became aware of his arm. He realized that he had just crossed some invisible, secret line between them. They both rather abruptly turned away, and her next sentences came out a little scrambled. "Thank you, Jay-Jay, I mean Judson. You are the best friend I ever... It was so scary when I saw... saw you carried out from the school..." Suddenly she burst out crying; all the pent up sadness from being held back, from the day of the fire, from Will Rezoff's death, and who knows what else burst out of her. Surprised herself, but powerless to stop the tears, she put her head on his shoulder and sobbed. Surely, this is somehow even more *different* than putting his arm around her, he thought, but shoved the thought aside. He put his hand lightly on her back, right below her neck, patted her once or twice, but then froze there a bit awkwardly until she composed herself. She suddenly took a deep breath and shook herself a little; Judson took that as a signal to move his hand. Without ever saying so, both decided to walk back toward the village.

As Sandy Ann and Judson came around the far side of the mess hall, within sight of the store, they saw Billy Jr. and Marty Pankoff staggering from the village road up toward the office door. Mr. Faltrip had stepped out of the office, heading toward the processing line, but when he saw the two men approaching, stood facing them. The kids ducked down behind the mess hall, their heads peeking out. Anyone looking right at them would see them, but with the cannery running and people coming and going on the dock behind them, no one probably would think much about kids looking like they were playing some kind of game. But the noise made it hard to hear anything except in snatches.

The two drunks must have seriously fortified themselves in the short time since Judson watched their boat being unloaded and the argument that followed. The voices floated across the planks: "...cheated us... keep treating us like shit... worth more... want us to work for nothing..." – Mr. Selivanoff. "...another rich American prick trying to work us over... not our fault the saltwater pump gave out... trying to get even..." – Marty. That last part was a fine piece of backwards thinking, noted Judson. *They* were the ones constantly looking at ways of getting even with Mr. Faltrip.

There was a lull, and then Owen Faltrip's voice came through loud and clear. The two eavesdropping kids could tell that this meant he was getting angry. "I kept trying to raise you on the radio on 25-12. I was about to try calling you on 24-50,

but just for the hell of it I turned to 21-82. There you were, calling Westerbrook cannery, offering the crab to *them*. And *that's* why your tanks were bone dry when you got here. You drained 'em before you even heard back from them. Well, Lloyd Westerbrook is my friend, and he knew you were contracted to *us*, so NOTHING DOING! The fact that any of those crab survived is a miracle, and the fact that I paid you what I did, and then had to listen to you *complain* about it makes *me* feel like a chump. Shut up, stop bellyaching, go get your pump fixed, and get out there and earn your money, *honestly!*" Judson thought for a moment that Owen Faltrip was quoting Norm Smith's favorite expression, but he just wanted the two men to stop double-dealing and get back to work.

The next few seconds were a blur, but both Sandy Ann and Judson, after much consulting, and trying hard not to embellish, agreed to this much: as Owen's last word passed his lips, Billy Jr. took a swing at him. Billy Jr. was a good fifty pounds heavier than, and at least as tall as the medium-sized, wiry Owen. The fist connected below Owen's collarbone. Owen stepped back, but only to aim. Marty had also taken a swing, but being thinner than Billy Jr. and having unwisely tried to match him drink for drink, he was more unsteady.

Owen's backward step had caused Marty to stumble right into harm's way. So Owen aimed twice. One fist hit Billy Jr. squarely in the nose—and the man turned, fell, and hit his head with a bang on the corrugated tin siding of the store. The other swing, at almost the same instant, was a swift uppercut with Owen's left fist aimed at Marty's head, still staggering conveniently in near-perfect position. The blow landed on Marty's jaw, and the man collapsed like a dandelion in a campfire. It was Pa-Pow! And over. Sandy Ann and Judson barely had a chance to take in what had happened.

Upon seeing his would-be attackers sprawled below him, Owen spread his legs wide and tilted his chin up, as though about to receive his championship belt. "You bastards just met 'Second Round Fat Lip,'" he said, loud enough for the whole dock to hear. Owen couldn't help slipping into announcer mode, his New Jersey accent suddenly much more prominent: "Except this time it was two against one, Ladies and Gentlemen, and down they went after the first blow!"

He was still standing over the two, checking his knuckles, and rubbing a spot below his collarbone where Billy, Jr. had connected, when out of the store and around the corner emerged Anya Bazaroff. It took her all of two seconds to appraise the situation. And her face took on the look of fierce determination, as though she were about to do something she'd contemplated for a long time. She stepped closer and stood over Mr. Selivanoff. As she put down the bag she was carrying, it tipped over, revealing a jar of Pine Sol, rubber gloves, and some large sponges. The kids looked at each other, surprised.

Anya ignored Owen and her overturned bag, squared back her shoulders, and said in a rather loud, almost screechy soprano, "Y' know, I feel like doing some housecleaning *right now!* I've been dyin' to get this outta me for a long time. Ever wonder why my boy we call 'Eagle' is named William? Anybody else wonder why

you used to beat a path to my door with a jug, but leave tuckin' your shirt back in? Ever wonder why your own sweet, patient Alice—" this was the first time Judson had actually heard anyone mention Mrs. Selivanoff's first name—"took to drinkin' so hard after my William was born, and it hurt your twins?"

She turned and addressed the barely conscious 'Smarty Pants' Pankoff, lying in a heap near Billy Jr. If possible, her voice went up another half-octave. "So Martin, is it ok to follow this guy around like his pet puppy dog, when he did that to Alice Pankoff Selivanoff, *Your... Own... Sister?*"

Anya swung back to Billy Jr. on the ground. "...So, ever wonder why the world still tolerates a worthless piece a' shit like you?" Anya kicked him, and it connected in his round, exposed belly as he sat against the store wall, dazed and holding his hand over his still bleeding nose. William Selivanoff, Jr., the proudest man in town, looked sideways up at her and puked all over his lap. Anya straightened her coat, pulled a blue scarf over her amber blonde hair, collected the items from her shopping bag, and headed toward the bridge and the road home. Owen Faltrip stared after her and slowly shook his head in amazement.

Judson and Sandy Ann could not help it; the scene was awful, but they could *not* help it. Great minds think alike. "Anya the Avenger," said Sandy Ann, with a triumphant nod of her head, and Judson repeated it, fist high in the air. They both burst out laughing, and abruptly fell from behind their hiding place. Mr. Faltrip, shaking his head and watching Anya leave, turned toward the commotion. He slapped his knee and burst out laughing himself as the two kids sheepishly walked up to him. "You two, *again?* You keep tracking me like a pair of bloodhounds."

He composed himself and looked at Judson, "Now don't get any ideas about how adults solve their problems, Jay-Jay. I've heard how you can handle yourself. Hopefully I knocked a little sense into these two, and nothing further will be necessary." He looked out across the front dock to the cove, suddenly serious. "I have hard decisions to make, and I *have* to have people around me I can trust." He addressed this to no one in particular, or to the universe, or to himself. He then looked straight at Judson and said, "Judson, would you please go and tell Mrs. Carla Bazaroff that she and her husband are requested in my office at 0-800 sharp tomorrow morning. I'll get Mrs. Lindseth to babysit, and I'll have someone else handle the crab butcher spot."

He couldn't resist a little preview: "Tell 'Lil' Carla' that we need to talk about Wendell getting a bigger boat to run!" Sandy Ann clapped her hands, and Judson spontaneously shook Mr. Owen Faltrip's. "I am pleased to meet you, 'Second Round Fat Lip.' And I'll get right on that message, sir!" And he saluted. As they left, Mr. Faltrip was laughing again, as he stepped over Billy Jr. and Marty and went back into his office.

When word got around about what the two drunks had done, due largely to the fact that Anya lived with "Tongue Number One" Anicia Novikoff, the general consensus was that Mr. Faltrip had done the town a favor. Over the next few days, Billy, Jr.

took to sleeping more often on the boat, and Alice Selivanoff held her head high, minus the famous Selivanoff cockiness, for the first time in ages.

A rumor soon went around that Anya and Alice had a long talk over tea in Anicia's kitchen, and hugged each other when they said goodbye. Not that Judson was ready to set foot in that house just yet, but again, rumor had it that the place was clean, the clothes were washed, Anya apparently had found the rest of hers, and Anicia was getting to take longer naps now. The buzz about the activities that had happened on their day away from school almost overshadowed the enrollment of Rinny on Tuesday morning. Almost, but not quite.

November 12, 1963: Sokroshera Cove School in the Mess Hall

On Tuesday, Gail Pankoff brought Rinny to class about an hour after the school day had begun, spoke briefly to Mr. Hansen, and left to run the forklift. She'd be literally right outside—the windows rattled and they could hear the planks clattering whenever the forklifts passed the mess hall—and Mr. Hansen could wave her down if she was needed. But, as Gail noted, "My little girl is almost grown up now, and can certainly take care of herself."

That she could. Mr. Hansen, suddenly needed by Barbara, was at the far end of the next table, back to them, and what happened next took only a few moments. Teachers just can't be everywhere. Yes, Rinny looked a lot like Gail, Judson agreed on the second view of the young lady. The physical appearances of mother and daughter were remarkably similar, with long brown hair and big eyes, but that's where it ended. Rinny had some kind of haughty, sultry air about her that Judson hadn't noticed when she got off the plane. She didn't walk, she slinked. She slid into her new seat next to Judson like butter melting on a griddle. She gave out a little sigh, and swung her hair off her shoulders and back between her shoulder blades, looking like a Clairol commercial, thought Judson. Then she asked Judson what they were studying, gave two little blinks, and a small smile, waiting with a tilt of her head for a reply. Judson mumbled something about getting her a book, while Sandy Ann, seated at the next table but facing him, was turning beet red and slowly turning herself into a pretzel.

Judson jumped up to get the book, forgot about the picnic-style legs of the long table, and tripped a bit as he headed toward the shelf. The "Holy Terrors" erupted in laughter, and Marla shook her head and said, rather too loudly, "Oh, *brother!*" Judson had mostly regrouped when he returned with the book, but his head was spinning. This girl is like a new Anya, at a time when not even Anya is acting like Anya, he thought, wondering if he was making sense even to his own brain. In the back of his mind, he knew he was supposed to be careful about not hurting Sandy Ann, and suddenly his mind knew he agreed with that course of action. He sat, took a deep breath, and let the new girl have it.

"Listen, Rinny, glad you're here, but you're acting like some kind of actress or model or something. Could you turn it down a little? Watch and see how we do things here." This was not delivered unkindly, nor even loudly, and except for a

little downward sweep with his hand, his body language probably gave little away either. Nobody, not even Sandy Ann who was breaking her eardrums trying to hear, made it out except Rinny. Blink, blink, tilt, smile, went Rinny. "Oh, but I *am* a model," she cooed. "I was in the paper. I did some ads for a clothing store in Anchorage, and a store in Homer used pictures of me, too." She let out the slightest little giggle, and then purred, "Can I show you my photos sometime?"

Marla was sitting a little ways down the bench seat on the other side of Judson, and had heard about enough. She suddenly determined that if anybody was going to show attitude here, it would be her. She deeply resented this intruder already. Marla, who wanted desperately to leave the Cove, resented Rinny's distant world of cars and TV and telephones and photo shoots, even if it was only Homer on the Kenai Peninsula, and not Hollywood she was talking about. Besides, Marla not only was on (recent) good terms with the teacher, she suddenly didn't like what blatant troublemaking and flirting looked like coming from someone else. And *especially* besides, she actually liked the balance of power the way it was.

She quietly stood behind Judson's place at the table and stared the new girl down like a sheriff who's just drawn his pistol on a suspect. "Listen, *sabaguk*, I don't care if you *are* my long lost cousin. Behave yourself around here or I'm goin' to kick your... tiny ass... right back... to Homer!" A little gasp from Sandy Ann registered the native word for *dog*, which in this context was no more complimentary than it would have been in English. Rinny never took her eyes off Judson. Then, turning slowly in her seat (like a cobra, thought Judson), she looked Marla straight in the eyes and said, "They named the *Marla S.* after you because she leaks, just like YOU!" Marla had her by her collar, and had lifted her out of her seat before Mr. Hansen, late to the party, could shout for them to stop.

A guy fight is a predictable affair, slug here, slug there, until somebody can't stand up or somebody quits and leaves. However, a girl fight is like winning the lottery on the excitement scale. Pulling hair, slapping, scratching, biting, kicking—nothing is off limits. Judson tried to rise out of his seat, but his father, by some superhuman feat, was faster. He dove between the girls, getting a few knocks himself in the process. He finally got them at arms length. Judson thought both were squirming like alligator lizards pinned beneath a stick, something only he had seen or done.

"Go home, Marla. I'll talk to your mother later." She had excuses and reasons at the ready, but Mr. Hansen was uncharacteristically rude. "Not now. *Go home!* We'll work this out, but not now." Then as Marla stomped off, he turned to Rinny and said, "Young lady, I don't know what you were expecting, but here we help and support each other. We have to, with all eight grades in one room. If any one of us causes trouble, we all suffer. I will talk with your mother, but in the meantime, SIT... DOWN!" He then turned rather fiercely to Judson and said, "Show her what we're doing in chapter five. Have her read it to you." Judson could forgive his father for his tone, but was more than willing to comply. This girl had somehow shattered the little community Mr. Hansen had tried so hard to create, and Judson, for one, was willing to fight for its return.

Mr. Hansen turned to the younger students' table, to a scene of multiple crises. Barbara was crying softly, the twins had their hands over their ears and were staring blankly at their artwork, moaning, and Alexander had run to Sandy Ann and had buried his head in her arms. Mrs. Lindseth, who never disturbed the class, stuck her head through the swinging doors to the kitchen, and asked, "Got some troubles out here today?"

"Understatement of the year," said Mr. Hansen, shaking his head. "Could we have our snack *before* you take it to the workers today, please?" Mrs. Lindseth watched the class while Mr. Hansen went to find Jake Pedersen to ask him to delay "mug up" for twenty minutes and to flag down Gail Pankoff for the shortest time between enrollment and parent conference in his teaching career. The food settled the kids quite a bit, and Mrs. Lindseth was the picture of authority while managing to finish the soothing of nerves that Mr. Hansen had tried to start. When he got back with Gail, he sent all of the students (including Rinny) out to the gravel playground. He sent up a silent thank you that it was reasonably sunny today, and pointed Gail to a seat at the table.

Sandy Ann kindly persuaded Alexander to go play somewhere else, and swooped over to Judson's side. "What the *hell* was that?" she said, fiercely, both the language and the intensity highly uncommon for the girl he knew. "That's what *I* wanna know," said Judson, hoping she wouldn't blame him for what had transpired. "What did you tell her just before the fight?" asked Sandy Ann, evenly, but he could tell she was clenching her teeth. Judson knew a loaded question when he heard one, and realized his future life on this planet, in all likelihood, depended on his next words. Luckily, the exact truth was also precisely what Sandy Ann was hoping he'd said. "So you told her to turn it down a little, like she's a *stove*." Sandy Ann sniffed. "A model! *No jokes!*" and she clapped her hands, not as a little girl, but slower and deliberately in a move that said sarcastically, "How *nice* for you!"

Judson had already been exposed to enough female drama, and said, "Well, we don't have to gang up on her now, do we? What did you mean when you said, *no jokes?*" She was almost unwilling to change the subject, but she explained, "It's like saying *really, no kidding, or you don't say!* Don't you ever say that?" Judson shook his head. Judson filed away the latest village language lesson. But Sandy Ann was not distracted for long, and dove into their earlier topic: "So where *is* she?" They looked around. A tiny little corner of Rinny's shoulder was visible above the gunwales of the jitney boat used as a play area. It was the only place to sit down and the only place to hide in the whole playground, Judson realized. They walked over to the jitney, climbed the ladder, and abruptly sat on either side of her, forcing her to sit up. She was sobbing.

Before either Judson or Sandy Ann could say a word or even plot a course of action, Rinny burst like a dam. She wasn't a model, she wasn't a good student, she wasn't pretty, she wasn't smart, she wasn't good, she wasn't wanted back in Homer, and she wasn't welcome here. She wanted to wander off into the woods, and never be found. Judson immediately took it upon himself to set her right, to ride in on his noble steed and save the day, which in light of previous events would have been

too dangerous to attempt. But before he could do a thing, Sandy Ann had taken Rinny in her arms in a big hug, and was starting to cry herself.

"Aw, I know better. I heard Gail talking after you got here, talking to Laura in the store. She just got here, too, ya know. She is so happy to have you with her. Says that here she'll be able to have a real family—with you. That's the God honest truth, no jokes." Sandy Ann pulled back and made an X over her heart, reflexively guaranteeing her statement's veracity. Then she added a tiny bit of village gossip, Sandy Ann-style. "And I think she already likes Danny. I know he likes *her*."

Rinny looked up all shiny-faced, took a deep breath, and said, also a bit off topic, "Ooh, he's so handsome!" Sandy Ann frowned. "My uncle? Yes, I suppose he is," she responded, as if thinking a new thought. Rinny continued, "He arrived just in time. My aunt in Homer was going to send me to the orphanage in Seward or down here to the Mission, and when Danny told her about Mom and her job, they... *just gave me away!* 'Pack your stuff—bye!' Aw, *hell!*" Somehow, Rinny's train of thought had momentarily derailed, and she had resumed weeping. But Judson could see that she had put on her Oscar-worthy performance this morning as a way of desperately finding somewhere, anywhere, to fit in, and she had been willing to pretend anything to make that happen. Judson secretly admired her potent (if desperate) skill, and hoped he never had to be on the receiving end again. In the next drama, Sandy Ann would take the role of Marla, *no jokes*.

When Mr. Hansen called them in after Gail had gone back to work, he quickly checked the status of young Rinny, and was assured by Sandy Ann and Judson that all was well. Apparently, their story meshed with the problems Gail had already noticed, so he instructed the three of them to go with Mrs. Lindseth, now that mug up was over, to the Selivanoffs and talk this out. Soon, spread out on all the front steps of the Selivanoff's house, Alice, Betty, Marla, Sandy Ann and Judson heard Rinny's story again, and of all things, Marla was the first to break down. "It reminds me of when I almost lost Ward," she sniffed, "except you felt you were losing *yourself*. I'm sorry I was so hard on you, cousin!" I just can't get used to the fact that they are actually cousins, thought Judson. Sometimes this place is like a minefield. You gotta watch where you step or *somebody's* relative will get offended. Yikes! Marla turned again to Rinny, "Listen, this is a good school now, and I like it. Mr. Hansen is smart, and keeps us going. He didn't let me ruin everything the way I wanted to before the fire..." Marla began to sob again. Rinny has a lot of history to catch up on, and it's only November, observed Judson.

Just then, Billy Jr. decided to go down to the dock. Alice looked up and said, "William, just *wait* until we're done here!" He turned meekly and went back inside, exiting out the back door and around another way to avoid confrontation. As far as Billy Jr. was concerned, Alice was becoming an authoritative woman, Judson observed, and Marla seemed to be picking up some of that as well. But Judson suddenly thought of the fire at the school, and the funeral for Will. "This place can pull together like no other place on the planet, I swear," said Judson in amazement, and Alice Selivanoff countered, "That's because we also fall apart so well." Betty Lindseth just reached out and put her arm around her. "Awwwright, enough of this

mushy lady stuff. Can I go now?" said Judson, and all the ladies laughed. "Poor man Jay-Jay, stuck in our tea party. Boys don't *like* all that crying!" said Sandy Ann, and glared at him in fake irritation through dark red bangs. But he left just the same, followed soon after by the others.

Back at school, Mr. Hansen was spending quality time with the lower grades, and Herman was assisting admirably, happy to be far from the female drama. Yet when they all traipsed back in, Judson noticed that Herman's eyes were stuck on Rinny like glue, and his face was not as enigmatic as he might have thought. The imperturbable Herman could be falling for an older woman. Hmmm.

Thursday, November 14, 1963: Pacific Endeavor Seafoods cannery store

Kirk Thorsen, the able machinist and seafood processing expert, was a blessing to the operation. But his personality and opinions were not. The next time Kirk Thorsen's version of deep thinking came to the forefront again was when Judson and his dad came into the store and noticed "Quirky" talking with Laura. Thinking this would be interesting, Judson grabbed something and pretended to be buying it so he could "stand in line" and hear the proceedings. Jeffrey did something equally sneaky, pretending to look at a stack of navigational charts while listening in as well. "Yes, there's a lot of evil out there, and Judgment is coming," Kirk Thorsen was saying, "My pastor always says, 'Be sure your sin will find you out,' 'God is not mocked,' things like that." Laura, nearly a saint even at a time like this, just smiled and said, "'His grace is sufficient,' that's all I can really say," and smiled at him. Kirk ignored her words, continuing with his impromptu sermon. "Yes, but don't you see the evil everywhere, all the drinking, all the carousing and sleeping around?"

Kirk seemed on the verge of climbing on the counter and waving his arms like some wannabe Billy Sunday tent evangelist. Laura nodded, but said, "Well, Norm says 'You can't clean a fish before you catch it,' and I agree with that. You don't change so you *can* come to God; you change after, *because* you came to God." Kirk shook his head. "That's all very nice, but aren't we supposed to resist evil?" Laura's eyes shone, as though the challenge to her beliefs had ignited some fire in her. "I read somewhere, 'Do not be overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good.' So, Mr. Thorsen, we aren't here to attack. We are here to help restore, heal, and repair. That's what I learned from Norm." The unspoken question hanging in three people's minds was this: have you ever changed anyone's mind by attacking them? Didn't think so. But nobody said it.

Laura looked ready to end the conversation, turning to glance as serenely as possible at Judson as though inviting him to the counter. Kirk had actually listened to part of what she had said. "Oh, you mean *Reverend* Norman Smith? He's a terrible witness, just terrible. He never preaches against sin, he just *loves* people and thinks that's gonna be enough." He then gave himself a pretend hug, laughed, and continued his lecture. "I don't go in for his style at all. Way too weak and wishy-washy."

Laura got a firm look in her eyes that only appeared when her own kids were about to be sent to their rooms. "Love covers a multitude of sins, even yours, Mr. Thorsen. Now I'm afraid I have other customers, if you don't mind." He paid his bill and left, confident that he had just rid the store of all falsehood. Judson waited until he heard the door close, and abruptly burst out laughing. "Does that guy have any idea how much we like Norm Smith around here?" Then when he settled down, he said, "Hard to imagine they supposedly believe the same stuff." He then put back the box of licorice bits he had randomly picked up and pretended to be buying. Laura eyed his sly move, and finally laughed herself. "And thank you, Jay-Jay, for trying to interrupt that *enlightening* conversation for me!"

Mr. Hansen stepped over to the counter and told Laura, "I admire your patience. I'm afraid I don't suffer fools gladly, and the last time he laid into me, I was of the inclination to throw him right off the dock!" Then he added, more gently, "Well, I didn't know what to make of Norm when I first met him. But I'm starting to think that the only people who really believe the Bible are the ones brave enough to do what it says. Can't argue with what he does, that's certain." *No jokes!* said Judson to himself.

Jeffrey turned toward Mrs. Rezoff and sighed, then said, "Laura, I'm sorry Mr. Thorsen said those things about folks who helped you so much, and I'm sorry he goes around judging everyone. Dunno what to do about that," said Mr. Hansen, and put his hand on her arm. It was to his dad's credit that he didn't bring up the "little brown urchins" thing Kirk had said to him earlier, or Laura might have retroactively thrown Quirky into the cove herself, thought Judson.

Laura had a look of firm conviction on her face when she replied, "Mr. Thorsen is right about one thing, 'God is not mocked.' If Kirk is saying stupid stuff as though it's *God* talking, I have a feeling God will set him straight one way or another—or at least try. The man talks a lot of *shit*—sorry guys, I mean *nonsense*—in God's name. I don't get it; those verses he quoted were all true, yet in his mouth, they seemed false. He seems to have missed a lot of the meaning."

The Hanson guys were suppressing giggles, and Laura was smiling at something else she was thinking. "I was reading in the Bible, in the book of Job, right after Will died, about Job going through really hard times. His friends would come and say insensitive things to him, thinking they were helping. He turned toward his supposed friends and said, 'Surely you are wisdom personified, and all knowledge shall die with you!' When I read that, I burst out laughing in spite of everything. So I think the Bible gives us permission to point out silliness. Jesus did it all the time—and it was mostly with *religious* people!" Judson nodded at Laura, then turned toward his dad, "You do it mostly with *pupil* people, Dad." Laura reached across the counter and mussed up his hair a bit. Judson looked at her without saying anything. Laura was every bit the intellectual equal of Kirk Thorsen or even his dad. I'm just glad she's on our side, he thought.

Laura suddenly had one of her remembrances. "Oh, Jeffrey, where's my brain? This came for you, and I meant to give it to you earlier." She handed him a letter. From

the Office of Senator Ernest Gruening, Washington, D. C., it read. The long envelope was addressed to the schoolmaster of Sokroshera Cove, Alaska. Jeffrey Hansen opened it with the eagerness of a kid expecting birthday cash from grandma. He scanned it quickly. His voice steadily rose in volume as he read. "Says here that Alaska's delegation has procured funding from the Department of Health, Education and Welfare and the Bureau of Indian Affairs and so—we're going to get a brand-new two-classroom school, a multipurpose room, and a two-apartment teacher's quarters. They expect to begin construction by late April or early May, and finish before Labor Day!" It was all Mr. Hansen could do to keep from jumping up and down. Laura and Judson smiled until their faces hurt.

November 22, 1963

"Jud, go get the portable radio, please. And hurry." Mr. Hansen stopped his lesson about an hour into the school day when Laura Rezoff came in and whispered something in his ear. Tuned to the adults' facial expressions, Judson knew this had to be big. As Laura was heading back to the store, Judson asked his dad, "What's going on?" His father was near tears as he told the class, "President Kennedy has been shot. The news is saying he is dead." Judson ran to the superintendent's house and grabbed their portable radio, and rushed back to the mess hall.

When he entered, Mr. Hansen was doing his best to explain what all this meant. Rinny was angry. She had written a report on John F. Kennedy in fifth grade, right after he had been inaugurated, an assignment called "What do these words mean to you?" based on JFK's inaugural address. And now she fully understood that the man who had inspired all the students in her class was gone. "Who could do something so *awful*?" she asked, and pounded the long table so hard that the twins jumped, and stared at her awhile. "Are they going to kill anyone else? Is there a war?" asked Marla. Barbara looked pensive and said, "The president is going to meet my Dad now." At that, Mr. Hansen had nodded, and patted her on the shoulder.

"Is it the Communists? Did they do this? Mr. Thornsen says everything is because of the Communists," said Ward, in class to get help with an English assignment. Judson, seated by this time, said, "Mr. Thornsen doesn't know *sh...* uh... what he's talking about half the time. Just ignore him." Mr. Hansen calmly replied, "Ward, I sure hope not. Things have been tense since that Cuba missiles thing. Listen, class, we are going to turn on the radio to the AFRTS station and see what the Navy's national news feed has." He took the radio, plugged it into the wall, and stretched it to the nearest table. Sandy Ann moved to accommodate, then came to sit on the other side of Judson. Mr. Hansen did not seem to mind.

A child in a remote village in the ages before satellite television had only words to help draw the mental pictures, and the kids speculated wildly based on their level of understanding. "The President was taken to Parkland Memorial Hospital..." the announcer was saying. "The hospital! Then he'll be all right," said the twins, emphatically. To them, going to the hospital meant getting better, especially compared with the level of care available in the village. "The doctors announced

that the president has died..." Now the twins were confused. Did the doctors forget to do something? Barbara thought for a moment and said, "It's like when Truck Brother Jake tried to help my Dad. They did their best." "Yes, it is like that, Barbara. Everybody is trying to do their best right now." "Did the doctors cry when it didn't work, like Truck Brother Jake did?" asked Barbara, and Mr. Hansen said he was sure they had.

Judson wondered aloud whether the country could pull together like Sokroshera Cove had been able to do, and nobody said anything, unable to provide an answer. Mr. Hansen dismissed school at lunch, knowing that everyone across the village was busy listening to the voices of a nation in shock. Mr. Pedersen and Mr. Thorsen had closed down the cannery as soon as the last crab was processed. The cannery did not yet have proper holding tanks for unprocessed crab, so Jake Pedersen called on the radio and asked the two boats still heading in if their crab would be ok if they just kept their pumps going until morning. They agreed, and because the weather was mostly calm, anchored overnight southeast of the cove entrance, not far from east beach, where the water was cleaner. Everyone wanted to be close to their radios, their lifelines.

Thanksgiving Week, 1963: Sokroshera Cove, Marmot Bay, and Prokoda Island

The cannery worked on Saturday just long enough to process the boats that had been waiting, and the village kept quiet and to itself until Monday morning. It would be a short week due to the Thanksgiving holiday on Thursday and Friday. Back at school on Monday, Rinny told Mr. Hansen about her old writing assignment, and he had the upper grades do a similar one. "Why We Will Remember His Words" was the theme. Eagle volunteered that his aunt Anicia had saved a lot of the president's speeches, and produced a scrapbook full of yellowing newspaper articles the following day.

As carefully as they could, the students copied lines from various speeches, returning the scrapbook to Anicia the next day. Then the students wrote a short response to read to the class. Mr. Hansen walked between the students, making comments, asking questions, and clarifying words for the students. In keeping with the mood of the whole nation, they pondered, reflected, and then wrote down their thoughts on the loss of their inspiring and visionary president.

Monday evening through early Tuesday afternoon, there was a blustery, wet windstorm that rattled windows and gave everything a soggy, slushy blanket of gray. At noon, heading home for lunch, Judson couldn't see the superintendent's house from the bridge, and looking back, could barely see the outline of the store and nearest cannery buildings. In spite of a good raincoat, he still decided to change pants for the afternoon, because he was soaked from mid-thigh to mid-calf by the sideways rain and sleet. The water was running down his legs inside his pants, and even his socks were getting wet inside his rain boots from the leg runoff. Days like this he missed the toasty "fry an egg on the sidewalk" weather he had left in Arizona.

By the time school let out, the rain and the wind had dropped, and although it was still cloudy, the visibility was good. Judson went out to the front dock to look around, an almost reflexive village habit. He noticed that half the people who went to the store on any given day also walked out to the face of the dock first to check out the harbor; it was the equivalent of reading the local paper—that and talking to Laura in the store or Mr. Lindseth after he'd met the mail plane. At the dock, Judson noticed the *Kolodka II* untying, Petey Kurt on the flying bridge in his beat-up hat, and Windy Bazaroff acting as deck hand. Laura told him later they were headed to town to run various errands, and on the way back, they would bring the Thanksgiving turkeys and produce for the store.

On Wednesday, the students were ready, just before lunch, with their tribute to President Kennedy. Mr. Hansen told them that school would be let out after their program. They invited any parents that wanted to come, and Alice Selivanoff, Gail Pankoff, Laura Rezoff, and Howell Lindseth came and stood at the back of the room. Betty Lindseth watched the store and the marine radio so that Mr. Faltrip could come along, too. Herman chose the speech promising to send Americans to the moon. "I think we are better people if we have something big to dream about," he explained. Rinny chose a speech about Civil Rights. "I think President Kennedy wanted all Americans to feel like they belong," she explained. Marla was impressed with JFK's speech in West Berlin. When she learned that West Berlin was a city surrounded by enemies, but part of a country that was free, she said, "The president was brave to go there, and brave to tell those people he was one of them. He stood up for what he believed in." Sandy Ann chose some well-known words from the inaugural address, "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country." To her these words meant, "We all have things we can do to help each other, and when we do, we help our country, too." Judson was drawn to some words in Kennedy's inaugural address that he hadn't caught before, JFK's belief "...that the rights of man come not from the generosity of the state, but from the hand of God." Judson concluded, "If our rights come from something bigger than the government, then no government will be able to take them away."

Judson's Voice of Music stereo was set up at the end of one of the tables. The night before, Judson remembered one of his dad's albums that they had brought with them: the Kingston Trio's "New Frontier." The title song was based on words from JFK's speeches, so at the end of the presentations, he played that song. The last verse said,

"Let us begin, for it shall take long,
Let every man sing a freedom song,
Not for ourselves do we take this stand,
Now it's the world and the freedom of Man,
This is the New Frontier, this is the New Frontier!"

When the little program was over, the adults clapped, and both Mr. Faltrip and Laura Rezoff had to dab away a tear or two. The students felt, in the words of Sandy Ann, "Close to my country today. They are sad, and we are sad, too." The students left school to celebrate Thanksgiving break in a serious mood; this was a somber occasion. But Mr. Hansen praised his students, and then told them to go home, enjoy their families, and have some fun now. Two things seemed to make that less likely: the sad mood of everyone at the death of the president, and the fact that a rare high-pressure storm, clear and windy, was picking up outside. Just hours after the end of a soggy windstorm, the weather had completely flipped and provided a clear and dry windstorm. It would be uncomfortable to do anything in that wind. The bright sunshine on the cove showed whitecaps and even a hint of spray, as wind out of the east-southeast was blowing, pushing twenty-five knots and increasing.

When Mr. Faltrip returned to his office, he found Kirk Thorsen waiting for him. "Can I use the *Penny Earned* for a couple of days? I need to make a run into Kodiak on personal business." Owen was slightly irritated, because had the weather been good, he had planned on taking his boat out on a little cruise, one of the infrequent luxuries he afforded himself, while the cannery was down for the holiday. It was already off its mooring buoy and at the long dock, ready to go at the first break in the weather. "Well, you can see it's starting to form whitecaps out there, and who knows what it'll be like by the time you pass Spruce..."

Kirk cut him off, "Aw, it's a little windy, but you can't ask for clearer visibility!" "Kirk, it won't take long for the wind to develop a lot of swell out there, plus whatever's left from the last storm, and I just wouldn't recommend it. I really wouldn't." Mr. Thorsen waved the words away. "The *Penny Earned's* a good sea boat by all accounts, and I'll take the route past the Ouzinkie Narrows and along Spruce Island. It'll be more sheltered. Besides, I'll be in good hands!" He pointed skyward and grinned. Mr. Faltrip reluctantly agreed, and told him to be sure to go to the running lines and take the *Penny Earned's* skiff, called the *Got No Cents*, along with him. Owen's parting warning was to turn around if it got too rough.

No sooner had Kirk Thorsen left the harbor when Mr. Lindseth walked into the office and asked, "Who's taking the *Penny Earned* out in weather like this?" When Mr. Faltrip explained, Howell nearly shouted, "Owen, what the *hell!* Why didn't you stop him? If he's taking the Spruce Island route, he's gonna hit the channel between Cat Island and the Kodiak side right when the tide will be running like a river *against* the wind. He'll be bounced around like he's in a pinball machine."

"Well," said Owen, "It sure as hell looks like a williwaw out there to me." A *williwaw* was the military term for a sudden, gusty windstorm, coined in Alaska during the War. The name stuck with most people in Alaska because at times the average storm with average sustained winds could suddenly erupt into extreme gusts worthy of a hurricane or even a tornado somewhere else. Mr. Faltrip snorted with disgust and said, "You know Kirk. He said he'd be in 'good hands.'" Faltrip imitated Kirk's parting gesture.

"I dunno," Howie shook his head, "Maybe he'll have enough sense to turn around when he sees that channel. I'm just glad *I* didn't hear his little saintly speech, 'cause I doubt if I could have stayed polite. Besides, I don't think the Good Lord's insurance policy covers *just plain stupid!*" With that, he left, still shaking his head, swearing under his breath. Taking on weather like this was a challenge best left to more seasoned boatmen, and for more pressing reasons than just running a few personal errands. Besides being constantly in each other's business over everything concerning their boats, village folk were also constant worriers about the weather, with plenty of experience to fuel their concern.

It was a choppy ride for Kirk Thorsen down Marmot Bay to the Ouzinkie Narrows; however, the *Penny Earned* was a good sea boat, as the Rezoffs had discovered when they took it down to Karluk to see the kids' relatives. So far, so good, thought Thorsen as he passed the Triplets. But when he turned the little seiner past Sourdough's Flats, around the point and into the narrows, he found the sun shining on a nearly continuous wall of spray. Protected part of the way by Spruce Island, he hadn't noticed that the wind had picked up considerably, or seen the whitecaps further out in Marmot Bay beyond the shelter of the island. He hadn't even registered the danger when the low-lying Sourdough's Flats revealed a glimpse of the boiling mess beyond.

When he came out into the clear past the point and turned southeast, he found himself clutching the wheel for dear life. The mountains on the Kodiak side were acting like a wind tunnel. He hadn't felt such a buffeting since last summer, when he'd gone through Whale Pass a little too early, and the whirlpools had nearly thrown him into a reef. He hadn't learned any respect for wind and tide from that experience. But he was about to now. He gave the engine a little more power, and tried to steer past the rockpile at the end of what his chart called Prokoda Island. In the narrow channel, the tide was pushing him forward at nearly twice his little seiner's normal speed, and he needed all the rpm's the *Penny Earned's* engine could provide to help maneuver in it. The winds had increased since he rounded the point, and Kirk was in a sudden williwaw, made more intense by the funnel effect of the small island to his left and the mountains to his right. Just as he passed the rockpile, a sustained gust pushing sixty hit him across the bows, roaring down from the mountains on Kodiak Island to the starboard.

The fierce williwaw canceled all other plans he may have had. He was pushed into the rockpile, just a glancing blow, before his desperate, hard over turn of the wheel pulled him away. But the rocks had slammed into the hull outside the hold, hard enough to crack a rib and several planks. Then the wind let up just for a few seconds. Kirk clawed his way out into the main channel, away from the rocks, and switched on the battery bilge pump. He could sense from the change in the boat's response that he was taking on water, perhaps a lot. But he was far too busy to try starting the 'light plant' that powered the boat's much larger AC bilge pump, and he could tell that the battery-powered pump was not nearly keeping up.

As the wind and spray picked back up, he slowly made progress past the reef, and the first edge of the small island the charts called Prokoda passed him on the port

side. The tide was creating whirlpools and the headwind was fierce, and for a long moment, the boat was actually pushed backwards. In between rapid turns of the wheel, he grabbed his radio microphone, made sure he was on "25-12," and called for help. "Hello Ouzinkie, Ouzinkie, this is the *Penny Earned* out in the Narrows. I'm taking on water. Requesting assistance."

Within a few seconds, the storekeeper, just a couple of miles away in Ouzinkie harbor, radioed back. "This is KWA26 Ouzinkie. What are you doing out there, Owen?" Kirk responded, "Ah this is Kirk Thorsen in Faltrip's boat. I'm behind Prokoda Island and taking on water. Over." There was a puzzled pause from the storekeeper. "Ok, Kirk, Prokoda—oh, you mean '*Cat Island*.' Listen, there's a sandy beach up ahead on your left. Make for that if you can. I'll see if I can get somebody out to help you." Kirk spoke quickly, needing to get both hands on the helm. "Roger, thank you. Out."

During their brief conversation, Kirk had spotted the short bit of sandy shoreline to his left, and was aiming for it as best he could. Water was already ankle deep in the cabin. A little longer and the gasoline engine would start having trouble, or the waves would start coming over the side. But the engine was still strong, and Kirk found the current again and moved forward. In the meantime, Owen, in the radio room in Sokroshera Cove's store, looked at the radio and swore a blue streak that only a good soldier could muster. Mr. Lindseth, having stepped into the office in the middle of Faltrip's soliloquy, asked, "What's 'Quirky' up to now?" Owen just raised his hand for silence and looked at the radio.

The *Sally G.* at the Ouzinkie Packing Company's dock cut in. "Hey KWA26, This is the *Sally G.* – We can go check on him. Tell Sally we'll be late for dinner." She was listening in, he was certain. A couple of men on the dock were called on board to help out. With that, the crew fired up the big diesel engine of the salmon tender turned crabber and barreled out of the bay, opting to join the roller coaster ride at the narrow end of the channel, where the *Penny Earned* had entered, rather than buck the tide from the far end of Cat Island and risk being too late. Sam Gelsen, captain of the *Sally G.*, sent two of his men to the skiff before the waves got too choppy. They were having a wild ride, but already had the "kicker" started and idling in neutral.

Sam shook his head; the spray was literally covering Cat Island whenever a strong gust kicked up. At the stern, another crewmember, little Teddy Gelsen, barely eleven, stood by ready to cast off the towline when the skiff got to position. In only a few minutes, they were approaching the *Penny Earned's* last reported location, and Sam and the two volunteers were scanning the shoreline of Cat Island, trying to see anything through that wall of shining spray. Sam Gelsen finally spotted the other boat at the far end of the sandy beach, settled on the shallow bottom, heeled over in a landward direction. The bow was now mostly facing the shore, but the stern was pointing down the channel, with only a few feet of the flying bridge still above water. The *Penny Earned* had hit the shoreline almost dead on, but the tide had swung her around sideways, down the shoreline, until the other side of the damaged boat slammed into a submerged rock at the far end of the beach. Out of

power and luck, Kirk Thorsen clung to his three feet of semi-dry flying bridge deck, too busy holding on to even wave.

There is nothing more horrible for a fisherman to witness than the foundering of another boat, and everyone who came out on the *Sally G.* had the same thoughts: this could be us someday – be careful *now*, or the next time will *be* now. Teddy Gelsen untied the skiff, threw the line to one of the men in the skiff, and watched as they eased over toward the stricken seiner. Meanwhile, Sam Gelsen told Owen and the listening world that they'd spotted the *Penny Earned* and were attempting a rescue. He was immediately kept too busy holding the *Sally G.* in position to broadcast anything further. But he kept one eye on his crew in the skiff. The man at the outboard stuck the skiff's bow against the flying bridge of the seiner and gunned the "kicker" to hold it there. The man at the bow reached up, grabbed Kirk by the arm, and helped him swing himself into the skiff. The instant they were safely aboard, the guy at the "kicker" slammed it into reverse just long enough to clear the sunken boat and roared back to the *Sally G.*, still struggling to hold its position in the relative safety of the middle of the channel.



Once Kirk was safely aboard and they'd broken out past Cat Island and into the bay, they called to let everyone know what had happened. "KMZW-48 Sokroshera Cove, 48 Sokroshera Cove, this is the *Sally G.* You listening in, Owen?" The responding voice revealed its tension even through the low-fi screech of the marine band radio. "Roger Sam, this is Howie Lindseth, but Owen's right here. Please give us status." Sam Gelsen's voice revealed his own sense of relief, "We've got Kirk Thorsen aboard and trying to get dry." News safely out, Sam cut the tension with a bit of gallows humor. "Guess he wanted a tour of Cat Island, but tell Owen he's turned the *Penny Earned* into a submarine!"

In the radio room, Mr. Lindseth stomped his foot in disgust and looked at Owen. "Not s'posta swear on the air, so maybe you could'a just left him there for a day or two until he loved that boat as much as Owen does!" Mr. Gelsen's voice revealed a trace of irritation, now that the tension had been broken. "Ha! Roger, Sokroshera

Cove. We'll send him back all dried out and *wised up* for ya, Owen. *Sally G.* Out!" Kirk was, of course, standing within feet of Sam Gelsen when this was spoken.

Even (especially) in bad weather, the citizens of the Kodiak Island archipelago were avid listeners to the marine band radio, and rarely had they heard such a nail-biting drama played out in real time, or such a verbal spanking. Kirk Thorsen would be a local joke for a long time to come. And thoughtful people like Laura, Judson, and Jeffrey were left shaking their heads at how the "Good Lord" deals with the foolish folks that He, for some reason, decides to keep.

Kirk Thorsen spent a warm, dry Thanksgiving as the guest of Norman and Joyce Smith, with enough splendid 'home cooking' to feed an army. What they talked about, Norm never said. "Now *there's* God's kind of revenge if I've ever heard of it!" said Laura with a big smile when she heard who had hosted him. The weather calmed right out about midday on Thanksgiving, and early Friday morning, Kirk caught the outbound mail plane back to Sokroshera Cove. When Owen and Howie left the store after hearing the news, they glanced out at the running lines, and sure enough, there was Faltrip's skiff, the *Got No Cents*, still bobbing in the bay. It was stupidity compounded for Thorsen not to have taken it. Lindseth took a turn swearing this time, and Faltrip began, "Of all the idiotic..." before losing steam and throwing up his hands in a gesture of disgust. The following afternoon, when the bay was nearly calm, Howard Lindseth grabbed a couple of paint cans, pulled the skiff in, and rechristened it. There, peacefully attached to its running lines, with gleaming new paint, was Faltrip's skiff, its new name shining for all to see. *Quirky*.